

# LIGHTS OF 'IRFÁN



Papers Presented at the 'Irfán  
Colloquia and Seminars

---

Book Seventeen

# Lights of 'Irfán

Studies in the Principal Bahá'í Beliefs

*Papers Presented at the  
'Irfán Colloquia and Seminars*



Book Seventeen



'Asr-i-Jadid Publisher  
Darmstadt, Germany

Papers published in *Lights of 'Irfán* represent the views of their authors. Reproductions from this compilation are permitted provided that the sources and authors are clearly indicated.

'Irfán Colloquia  
Bahá'í National Center  
1233 Central Street  
Evanston, IL 60201  
Phone: (847) 733-3501  
Fax: (847) 733-3527  
E-mail: [contact@irfancolloquia.org](mailto:contact@irfancolloquia.org)  
[www.irfancolloquia.org](http://www.irfancolloquia.org)

General editor Iraj Ayman  
Cover design by Majid Nolley, [majidnolley.com](http://majidnolley.com)  
Typeset and edited by Jonah Winters, [winterswebworks.com](http://winterswebworks.com)

Sponsored by the Haj Mehdi Arjmand Memorial Fund  
and the Nadia Saadat Memorial Scholarship Grant

173 B.E. 2016 C.E.  
ISBN 978-3-942426-29-9

Copyright © 2016, Haj Mehdi Arjmand Memorial Fund

### *Study the Bahá'í Teachings More Deeply*

Shoghi Effendi has for years urged the Bahá'ís (who asked his advice, and in general also) to study history, economics, sociology, etc., in order to be *au courant* with all the progressive movements and thoughts being put forth today, and so that they could correlate these to the Bahá'í teachings. What he wants the Bahá'ís to do is to study more, not to study less. The more general knowledge, scientific and otherwise, they possess, the better. Likewise he is constantly urging them to really study the Bahá'í teachings more deeply.

– From *A Compilation on Scholarship* pp. 17-18



## Table of Contents

Preface .....	3
Addressing the Rising Tide of Globalization and Amorality in the Present World Order and Its Implications on Extremes of Wealth and Poverty Rama Ayman .....	9
Parallels in the Ministries of Táhirih and Paul JoAnn M. Borovicka .....	37
The Language of the Heart: From Dream Language towards Understanding the Language of the Heart Wolfgang Klebel.....	65
Nietzsche and the Bahá'í Writings: A First Look Ian Kluge .....	111
<i>Memorials of the Faithful: Virtues of Inner and Outer Transformation</i> Marlene Koswan .....	179
Memorials of the Faithful: The Democratization of Sainthood Moojan Momen.....	205
The Concept of 'Faithfulness' in the Bahá'í Texts in English Translation Wendi Momen.....	225
An Homage to <i>Memorials of the Faithful</i> Julio Savi .....	277
Significance of some Sites Mentioned in <i>Memorials of the Faithful</i> Foad Seddigh .....	305
Hagiography: The Art of Setting Inspirational Examples for a Religious Community Iscander Micael Tinto .....	325
Elucidations, by the Universal House of Justice Translation of Key Bahá'í Terms .....	347
Suggestions about Changes in the Administrative Order .....	349
In Memoriam Houshang Arjmand (1930-2015) .....	353
Appendices Bibliography of the Bahá'í Writings and Their Abbreviations .....	357
Contents of <i>Lights of 'Irfán</i> Books 1-16 .....	359
Publications and Distributors of the 'Irfán Colloquium .....	372
Vision and Aims of the 'Irfán Colloquium .....	374



## Preface

*Lights of 'Irfán* is an annual publication containing a selection of research papers and texts of the presentations delivered at various sessions of the Irfán Colloquium conducted in English language. The *'Irfán Colloquium* aims at promoting and supporting systematic studies of fundamental principles of the Bahá'í beliefs, the Writings of the Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith, the interface between the Bahá'í Faith and various religions and schools of thought as well as investigating current challenges in human society from the Bahá'í perspective.

In 1915 the fire of the World War was in full blast and traffic to and from Holy Land was practically stopped. 'Abdu'l-Bahá took the initiative of sharing with the friends who were present in the Holy Land, the life stories of a number of believers of all social strata by showing how they had faithfully served the Cause and demonstrated their loyalty and dedication to the best interests of the Bahá'í Faith. Thus a unique collection was produced and soon afterwards published under the title of *Memorials of the Faithful*. In the course of 2015, 'Irfán Colloquium celebrated the centenary of that precious gift by inviting presentations of the studies covering various aspects and contents of that book. Most of the articles in the present volume are a selection of such studies that were produced and delivered in English language.



***Memorials of the Faithful: The Democratization of Sainthood*** starts with a definition and a brief review of hagiography throughout religious history. It is a kind of comparative study of hagiographies and *Memorials of the Faithful*. It examines the manner in which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has used the traditional literary format of hagiographies and used it in an innovative manner to cover all social strata of the believers. It could be considered as democratization of sainthood, in its broad sense. ***Memorials of the Faithful: Hagiography and Models to Set Examples in a Religious Community*** attempts to present examples of life in a religious community, which is that of hagiography: the story of the lives of the saints. In the Christian world, the life of Jesus was the example against which saints were measured, and the lives of saints were the examples against which the general population measured itself. In the Middle Age hagiography became a literary genre par excellence for teaching a largely illiterate audience. This study includes a brief comparison between two examples from ***Memorials of the Faithful***, Mishkín Qalam, and Shams-i-Duhá, and two examples from Persian classical texts of hagiographies in the works of Farídu’d-Din Aṭṭár, and Báyzid Bastámí.

**The Concept of ‘Faithfulness’ in the Bahá’í Texts in English Translation** is a preliminary examination of the concept and various usages of this term, faithfulness, in the Bahá’í texts available in English language. It reviews the behaviours expected from those who are faithful and references to faithfulness such as being faithful as an individual; God being faithful to His people; believers being faithful to the Covenant established by Bahá’u’lláh. As individuals’ behaviour, faithfulness is a spiritual quality that manifests itself in relationships as, for example, loyalty, trustworthiness and reliability.

**Homage to Memorial of the Faithful and to eight of its heroes** is a composition of eight poems on eight of the personages of the book. The features of *Memorials of the*

*Faithful* have led the author to compose these poems. They have not been chosen because they were considered in any way superior to or better than all the others. They were chosen because some of their personal qualities and of the events of their lives raised louder echoes in the author's heart and mind.

**Significance of Some Historical and Holy Places Cited in the *Memorial of the Faithful*** – ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in the course of portraying the life history of some believers, has cited many villages, cities, and sites, some of which are blessed by the foot-steps of the twin manifestations of God for this age, and others are important due to being the scene of significant historical events of the Faith. In this article four such places are selected from among them and their niche in history is further elaborated. These are (1) the Most Great House in Baghdad, (2) the ruins of Madayen, located some thirty kilometers south of Baghdad, on the banks of Tigris, where the Blessed Beauty visited many times, and once graced the palaces of great kings of Sassanid dynasty which were destroyed by the army of Arab invaders and subsequently lost their glory, (3) surroundings of the Sheikh Tabarsí's tomb where Baha'u'llah visited once, and (4) the city of Mosul in the northern Iraq on the banks of River Tigris, which is built on the ruins of the ancient and historical city of Nineveh where a number of believers and the Holy family were kept as captives for several years, and Baha'u'llah's caravan, exiled to the seat of the Ottoman Empire, passed through it.

**The Language of the Heart** claims the Bahá'í Religion could justifiably be called the "Religion of the Heart." The heart in the Bahá'í Writings is given a special meaning; concepts like the city of the heart and the citadel of the heart are emphasizing the importance of the heart. The heart is described as possessing sensory capacities. The question raised in this article is about the form and style of the language of the heart, in what way is this language different from our normal language and thinking as it is developed in the human brain. The faculty of reason, which is an endowment of the spiritual soul, uses

different bodily instruments, i.e., the brain and the heart. They always need to work together, but they have different languages, so that spiritual truth has to be reasonable even in the logical linguistic sense, and the heart has to be pure in a moral sense, otherwise it will contaminate logical reason or even pervert it. Clearly we need both, a pure heart and a clear mind to understand the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh

**Nietzsche and the Bahá'í Writings: An Introductory Exploration** – Though at first glance Nietzsche and the Baha'í Writings appear to be totally contrary, this article is an attempt to show that Bahá'í Writings and Nietzsche's philosophy share a surprising number of features that seem to be in common. It invites a re-vision of Nietzsche from a new perspective. The basis of this re-visioning is the Aristotelian elements in the Writings. Nietzsche calls on man to "become what he is," i.e. to actualize his potential to become an *Uebermensch*. In other words, both the Writings and Nietzsche analyze reality in Aristotelian terms: actuality and potential; essence/substance and attribute; matter and form; essential and accidental as well as causality. Both have a dynamic understanding of reality and both see human life as a process towards a new and superior form of mankind, i.e. as a quest for greater actualization of our potentialities. Viewed from a Bahá'í perspective, being "beyond good and evil" also takes on a new meaning. Interestingly enough, the Bahá'í Writings offer a way to interpret the "will to power" in a way that resolves various contradictory understandings. They also agree on the need for 'superior individuals'—called 'Manifestations' by the Writings—to guide humankind. Of course, there are significant differences between the Writings and Nietzsche, the most obviously being Nietzsche's sometimes hysterical tone in which he reaches rhetorical excesses that seem to lead his thinking into absurdity.

**Parallels in the Ministries of Táhirih (1817-1852) and Paul** (circa 5-64) is a study pointing out ten parallels in the ministries of Táhirih and Paul and a reflection on the value of this knowledge in interfaith application. Táhirih and Paul are

separated by gender, religion, nationality, culture, and eighteen hundred years, yet, when stories of their lives and apostolic ministries are compared, parallels arise—the most significant of which is that both are known for singular initiatives that helped differentiate new Revelation from the old.

**The rise of extreme inequality in wealth: Implications of converging trends in amorality and globalization:** The tremendous strides made in globalization, especially since WWII, have converged with a trend in growing amorality as the fabric of international business conduct in society. This convergence has led to extreme inequality within majority of nations in the world at a time when, on aggregate, wealth inequality between nations actually has been falling at impressive rates. Here, the author discusses the impact that the rise of amorality and globalization have had on wealth inequality and the guidance we observe in the Bahá'í scriptures to alleviate extremes of wealth and poverty in the context of a world that increasingly selects amorality and acting in self-interest as its new ethical foundation and globalization as its tool to optimize wealth concentration.

The section on **Elucidation** contains the messages of the Universal House of Justice providing guidance regarding the following two key issues:

1. Translation of Key Bahá'í Terms
2. Suggestions about Changes in the Administration

**In Memoriam** section in this volume pays tribute to one of the main and steadfast sponsors and supporters of the 'Irfán Colloquium, **Mr. Houshang Arjmand**, who passed away in 2015. Mr. Arjmand was the founder and main supporter of **Haj Mehdi Arjmand Memorial Fund** which has been the major source for financing Irfán Colloquium activities and its publications.

Appendix I is the **Bibliography of Bahá'í Writings and Their Abbreviated Titles** used in the text of the papers

published in this book, to facilitate referring to the sources of the quoted statements.

Appendix II, **Contents of Previous Volumes of *Lights of 'Irfán***, is a listing of the contents of previous volumes also shows the range, types, methodological approaches and scope of the papers that are presented, and are welcome to be presented, at the 'Irfán Colloquia. In addition to the papers presented at the 'Irfán Colloquia, research papers related to the main goals of the 'Irfán Colloquium are welcome to be directly submitted for publication in the *Lights of 'Irfán*.

Starting with Book Six, we have made two changes to the 'Irfán Colloquia's style guide. All "authoritative" publications are cited by an abbreviation, and Words of Prophets/Manifestations, i.e. quotations from Sacred Writings, (not including statements by Shoghi Effendi or the Universal House of Justice), are italicized.

All papers published in this book present the views and understanding of their authors. The texts of the papers are published as provided by the authors. Their writing styles and scholarly approaches are, therefore, different. Articles are published in this volume according to the alphabetical order of the authors' surnames.

Iraj Ayman

# Addressing the Rising Tide of Globalization and Amorality in the Present World Order and Its Implications on Extremes of Wealth and Poverty<sup>1</sup>

Rama Ayman

Over the past few decades, we have witnessed a simultaneous rise in “Globalization” and “amorality” in the world—the combination of these two trends has been the principal contributor to the extreme inequality of wealth distribution we witness in most regions of the world.

Bahá'u'lláh, in one of his Tablets, calls upon us to “*Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and center your deliberations in its exigencies and requirements.*”<sup>2</sup> Although the history of wealth inequality and poverty can be traced back throughout much of human history as witnessed in patterns of colonialism, conquests of nations and oppression of peoples, and dominion of tyrannical governments dating back to the early civilizations that arose in Mesopotamia over 4000 BC and perhaps ever since early societies were formed, near river banks, over 10,000 years ago, we shall focus here on developments in the past few decades as the extreme level of inequality in wealth distribution has now emerged as one of the key concerns of 21<sup>st</sup> century, and it will be our duty to center

our deliberations in understanding its causes and identify potential remedies.

We shall examine the state of globalization and its darker side, the concept of amorality and its hold on our physical reality, the extent of inequality in the world, and the potential remedies that we need to seriously consider in order to eventually eliminate extreme poverty and wealth. These topics, as we shall see, are quite complex and inter-connected, and require a multi-disciplinary approach, including sociology, political and behavioral economics and finance, technology and ethics, to be adequately examined, which render simple conclusions largely erroneous.

Our thesis, explored herein, is that in the absence of a strong moral foundation, globalization, largely driven by profit maximization, could further lead to increased extremes of wealth and poverty regardless of regulatory framework.

This is not an academic research paper, but a practitioner's viewpoint focused on the inter-play between globalization and amorality, and on formulating a thesis based on an understanding of the Bahá'í Writings, which would subsequently require much needed in-depth academic research, and detailed statistical studies to test our thesis and substantiate potential causalities among concepts discussed herein. Moreover, this article does not attempt to provide a formal Bahá'í point of view, but should be considered an attempt to explore some of the manifold layers of a very complex issue based on the author's experience in the fields of international business and economics and his understanding of the writings of the Bahá'í Faith.

## **Globalization**

Globalization, according to the Universal House of Justice (the International governing body of the Bahá'í Faith), "itself is an intrinsic feature of the evolution of human society. It has brought into existence a socio-economic culture that, at the

practical level, constitutes the world in which the aspirations of the human race will be pursued in the century now opening” [CL 134].

Globalization is complex and not easily packaged in one definition, but it encompasses the trend of businesses and technologies to spread beyond national borders and across the time zones—this trend often creates opportunities for further integration and attainment of economies of scale, previously unimaginable, limited only by the extend regulations allow for free flow of trade, labor and capital. This “free” flow of goods and services and labor around the world could be positive for the global economy, but its impact on wealth distribution could be adverse if exploitation of either labor or capital by business enterprises takes hold as a sacrifice for profit maximization as their only objective.

It is no longer possible to compartmentalize globalization outside of our lives, in fact, globalization today impacts most aspects of our life—it is front and center in our lives; from being a fringe topic only 30-40 years ago, it has entered popular discourse on mainstream media and has penetrated our collective psyche.

Globalization has enhanced cross border integration of value added economic activity through increased super-mobility of labor, capital, goods, and services which, in turn, have made them widely accessible. Consequently, globalization has increased our economic interdependence, which in turn, might have helped avert WWII. Global trade is now a necessity for most countries, and for existential reasons, countries have come to rely more on globalization to facilitate their commerce and ensure their economic survival. Nations around the world witnessed the harmful effects of isolationism that had devastating impact on economies of Eastern Europe an Former Soviet Union until 1990s, and continued to destroy the economies North Korea, Iran and Cuba where global sanctions have isolated them from much of global trade until presently



when many of these sanctions are being removed presently in the case of the latter two countries.

The best example of the positive impact of globalization can be clearly seen in terms of physical progress made in China over the past two decades. China's population today is 1.3 billion, which equals the world population of 200 years ago. Since early 1990s, with the help of globalization, China was able to build effectively mega cities (2 of the world's top 10 cities are in China) as well as over 40 cities of over 1 million in population, with related infrastructure, benefiting *inter alia* from iron ore and coking coal imports from Australia and other needed natural resources from Africa and Latin America to build out. Over the past two decades, China has also emerged as number 2 manufacturer in the world with market share of over \$3 trillion. Share of China's global exports grew from 6% to 18%, while during the same period, US's share went from 18% to 9%. China, in December 2014, surpassed the US, as the Number 1 economy in the world on a purchasing power parity basis at \$17.6 trillion versus the US at \$17.4 trillion, and in the process, it brought over 800 million people out of poverty.

Another well-known example of globalization is how the US is financed. The US National Debt is \$19 trillion: \$6 trillion is inter-governmental debt, \$13 trillion is outstanding debt, 50% of which is owned by foreigners. Namely, as a result of globalization, foreign lenders provide funds to the US so it can rebuild its roads, telecom infrastructure, and finance its social security and healthcare. Without Globalization, these funds would likely not be available.

Many tools have helped increase the rate of globalization, including: Internet, travel, communication, technologies, which when considered together, often generate a mood which is one of ebullience and a sense of "shared community", but much of globalization we observe on a daily basis is actually an illusionary material uniformity, especially as promoted by fashion, tourism and entertainment industries that have

encouraged people to wear similar clothes, play with the similar toys (PlayStation or Xbox), drive similar cars, go to similar vacation destinations, enjoy similar foods, utilize similar mobile phones and social networking applications—materially, it certainly appears as though we have emerged united as “consumers of one country”.

## **Amorality**

Although globalization can facilitate equity, global peace and eventually world unity, our thesis is that without strong moral fabric, Globalization can yield global crises and ever increasing inequality. Conversely, globalization can not be sustained if amorality dominates social and commercial relationships.

Here, we have defined “amorality” as acting under strict rules of law but without any moral considerations; acting morally is not the objective as long as legally the act is legally allowed in a given jurisdiction. By extension, acting without moral consideration, or acting amorally, is to act only out of self-interest as long as the act complies with legal framework—the key word here is “only”, i.e. if benefitting the self is the only objective, the associated act could be considered as amoral<sup>3</sup>.

One can distinguish an amoral act from a moral act if the act has been done completely out of self-interest and without any consideration for others (amoral), instead of an act, which has been centered on the interest of others (moral). Defining sole pursuit of self-interest as amoral may go against the grain for many economists who have long held the belief that pursuing self-interest generates economic benefits in the broader context, and in fact, legitimizes selfish behaviour—a theoretical notion which has formulated our economic thought since Adam Smith linked self-interest to economic activity in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Although it is empirically challenging to embark on gathering statistical data to measure the trends of amorality over the course of human history, we can certainly witness its

prominence in global business and finance evidenced by most global companies which hold maximization of shareholder value as their primary objective—an objective that is deemed not only legitimate but thought in business schools as a core virtue, in managing a business, throughout the world. This objective is based on a fundamental belief, prevalent in many societies, that acting in self-interest is a necessity and a sufficient goal, and by extension this belief is applied by executives and businesses alike. The result has been manifold and omnipresent: the spread of tax haven jurisdictions around the world, the movement of capital to jurisdictions that facilitate tax avoidance, the smallness of corporate contributions to social improvement causes, the exploitative rush of global corporations to regions that have cheaper labor force are among a few of the examples that can be considered. While these trends are not necessarily illegal, they are driven largely out of self interest of companies on behalf of their shareholders.

It is over the past century that trends in globalization and amorality, for the first time in history, have coincided and have jointly become so prominent, leading to the disastrous effect on inequality of wealth we witness in most countries. The intriguing moral question remains, if within the current rapid rise of globalization, would acting in “self-interest” for short term gains dissipate as the benefits of longer term global interdependence become apparent.

## **Extreme Inequality**

World population today is 6 times larger than the world population in the middle of 19<sup>th</sup> century; i.e. the past century has seen an unprecedented rise of human population—it took over 3 million years for human population to grow to 1 billion, and in a space of less than 200 years, the world population surpassed 7 billion. However, the fast growth of population, especially since WWII, has now slowed down, and with it the world economic growth rate may continue to be more limited,

contributing further to the severity of wealth inequality in the world in the coming years.

Today, without any exaggeration, we witness extreme inequality of wealth across the world, both in wealthy countries like the US (the richest nation) and in the poorest countries. The numbers are staggering: Top 5% of the population in the US own 63% of national wealth; The top 1% now own over 41 percent of all the wealth in the country<sup>4</sup>—during post WWII years, partly due to rise in population and high rate of economic growth, the top 20% of the population's wealth was 3x the bottom 20% in 1970s; this ratio has risen to 8x today.

1800 individuals in the world have a wealth of \$7 trillion or about 10% of world GDP<sup>5</sup>—this number represents a record 1,826 billionaires with an aggregate net worth of \$7.05 trillion, up from \$6.4 trillion a year ago.

The richest 85 individuals in the world control as much wealth as the lowest 3.5bn people (bottom half of the world population)<sup>6</sup>.

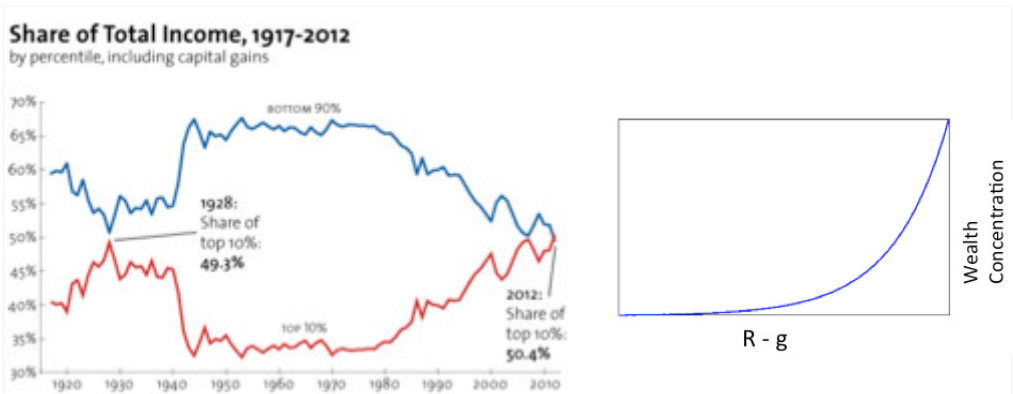
These extremes of wealth and poverty have created unequal societies around the world, with devastating results across a broad range of vital indicators—the link between extremes of wealth inequality and these indicators has been substantiated by many, including research by Richard Wilkinson<sup>7</sup>, who has shown that unequal societies rank lowest on multiple factors that can directly contribute to extreme poverty:

- Life expectancy
- Infant mortality
- Homicide
- Trust
- Imprisonment
- Obesity
- Addiction
- Health issues

- Social mobility
- Intergenerational mobility

Unequal societies rank worse on psycho-social values, and as such will be a threat to globalization itself and in turn to durability of growth in the long term. When these values worsen to alarming degrees<sup>8</sup>, sustaining peace within or without the countries becomes far more challenging, and achieving unity of humankind becomes a distant goal until these great disparities in wealth dissipate.

Since 1980s, free flow of capital, increasing competition between nations to attract investments, declining population growth, technological revolution and increase in productivity have increased concentration of wealth. Thomas Piketty, a well-known French economist, has studied 20 countries, income and wealth distribution in the past 200 years and has demonstrated that when rate of return (“r”) exceeds growth rate (“g”), wealth concentration increases<sup>9</sup>:



Seeking  $r > g$ ; result in accelerated wealth concentration

There has been much debate on how to reduce inequality—current debate revolves around:

- Progressive global wealth tax
- Authoritarian capital controls: expropriation
- Mutlilateral and Bilateral Grants

- Role of multi-lateral financial institutions: World Bank, International Monetary Fund, International Finance Corporation, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, European Investment Bank, Asian Development Bank and numerous others, as well as the newly established Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
- Philanthropic wealth distribution

Although there has been some success in increasing transparency, and reducing inequality through progressive taxation and eliminating tax havens and tax avoidance by the wealthier sections of society, in general, there has been little impact on extreme inequality of wealth we see today in the society. Given the stance of amorality, taxes will be avoided as long as a legal solution can be found, and legal solutions have always been in abundance. As taxes are raised, new financial and tax innovations are developed to assist tax avoidance. As long as taxes are forced on people, tax avoidance can not be prevented. Thomas Picketty's own solution to establish a Global net worth tax will likely end with the same tax avoidance issues.

Jeffrey Sachs, another renowned economist and specialist on poverty, in his book *End of Poverty 2005*, outlined 10 action plans to raise 0.7% of global GDP and reduce poverty; this plan was partially adopted in the UN Millennium Plan whose goal was to reduce extreme poverty by 50% by 2015<sup>10</sup>:

- Improve agriculture
- Improve basic health
- Invest in education
- Bring power
- Provide clean water and sanitation

To achieve these lines of action, the Plan called for:

- Unified plan of action
- Promote sustainable development
- Improve science

- Make personal commitments
- Gain public acceptance
- Strengthen UN and global agencies

However, Sachs is silent on necessity for spiritual and moral education, and without a moral grounding, personal commitments, public acceptance and unified plan of action would not be possible. Nothing short of a moral education that would help the individual combat acting only on self interest, transforming of hearts of men one by one, can adequately address the prerequisites for such global plans to eradicate poverty.

## **The Dark Side of Trends in Globalization and Amorality**

Acting only in self-interest, instead of then striving towards helping others, eradicating poverty, and eventually achieving greater degrees of world unity, promotes actions that only see profit maximization (or “creating shareholder value”), as the only existential goal, which under the framework of globalization effectively means:

- Access to cheaper labor / cheaper sources of raw materials / cheaper feedstocks for their companies to maximize profits
- Access to more markets for their products to maximize profits
- Access to jurisdictions with more favorable tax policies to maximize profits

This is the effect of the convergence of globalization and amorality that allows actions, which are legal but not necessarily always “moral” (as defined by acting in the interest of others), with respect to equity and justice, on a global scale.

The now omnipresent mantra of many businesses “go global” has gained acceptance, because from their respective personal standpoint, “going global” benefits “me”, not because of

embracing some utopian ideology of global unity. In aggregate, acting in self interest (at individual level) or for companies (acting for their shareholders) or for governments (acting in their national interest) lead to a vicious cycle of zero:sum game, creating and perpetuating strategies that are in contradiction towards working for global equity, and instead we are on a downward trajectory that will lead to more inequality and human suffering.

To address the amorality of acting only in self interest, a fundamental transformation, at individual and at collective levels, is required—at the individual level, moral conviction is needed that acting on self interest is wrong, and in turn, this conviction at aggregate would transform shareholders of companies, members of unions, technocrats in governments, leading to policies that would consider interest of others as priority. In such a context, this transformation would lead to:

- Stronger global institutions who are empowered
- More effective global security that can be relied upon

Given the vital importance of this individual conviction and its subsequent implications on world order, globalization brings us face to face with very existential questions about the assumptions we have regarding human nature and whether humans are inherently “Selfish” and “Material”, seeking material accumulation as the ultimate goal in life, or whether humans are inherently “Selfless” and “Spiritual”, seeking higher virtues of love and fellowship and helping humanity as their ultimate goal in life. Depending on which set of assumptions we subscribe, in aggregate, societies are either doomed to be driven towards competition and ultimately mutual destruction if the former set of assumptions prevail, or can learn to work in cooperation if individuals are inherently orientated not towards self but towards helping others.

According to the Bahá’í belief system, human nature is inherently spiritual. Any human has the capacity for turning



towards God or turning away from Him. During this physical life, any human being can acquire spiritual qualities, and this stands in contrast to the perspective that human nature is inherently and essentially selfish. Therefore, human beings have the capacity to be selfless in character, and ultimately be capable of having the conviction to act in others' interests, and subsequently, work towards mutually beneficial goals of the Unity of Humankind and the Most Great Peace.<sup>11</sup> The Bahá'í Faith's principles of a united world order stand in contrast to today's world order where there is:

- No global leadership, no legitimacy for any one country or a small group of countries to lead (failure of G7 or even G20 to act definitively on any global decision regarding security, environment, distribution of resources etc.).
- No global vision regarding how to bring the diverse nations together to solve complex economic and financial issues facing most countries.
- No truly empowered global executive, legislative, or judiciary bodies for implementing authoritatively and with legitimacy equitable global laws (e.g. global welfare tax, standardization of policies, criminality, human rights violations).
- Inadequacy of existing global institutions to effectively confront global challenges facing humankind—World Bank and its affiliates, United Nations, International Monetary Fund, World Court in Hague, though having been major steps in humanity's progress towards global governance, nevertheless, have not yet eradicated poverty.
- No will to unify and coordinate response and adequately address global challenges:
  - environment,
  - resource management,

- Infrastructure demand: \$57 trillion needed by 2030 (energy, water, transport, social projects),
- health,
- immigration,
- poverty,
- corruption

We can clearly witness the lack of fundamental spiritual values of Trust, Truthfulness, Justice in both economic and political circles, in the current global world order, and understand that various forms of adherence to “Game Theory”: if “I” act selflessly, and others don’t, “I” will lose, so “I” have to act selfishly to get a minimum prosperity, is structurally deficient to institute the necessary principles and governing institutions that would eventually bring about the desired world unity, which in turn is a pre-requisite to eliminate extremes of wealth and poverty.

Furthermore, we can also witness that the “Rule of Fear” and a deep sense of insecurity underlie the current global world order, which inherently perpetuates the existing animalistic behavior towards self-preservation, rather than addressing first the needs of others. The effect of this “Fear” has only deepened the darkness of a globalized world, where sovereign self interest would not allow for fiscal and eventually political union in Europe while their monetary union has been inadequate to solve their economic problems, where self interest of nations would not allow for equitable global distribution of natural resources to eradicate poverty; where the search for super profits, as opposed to responsible use of technological and scientific discoveries has diminished positive impact that science could have on society.

Globalization has been in fact moving in a trajectory that is in many ways counter-productive to the realization of a more united world order. Relative absence of moral and spiritual values and lack of any consultative framework has weakened the

efficacy of today's global institutions to adequately address its concerns—a state of existence that has frustrated many political leaders. For example, interestingly, President Putin made the following statement during his speech in Sochi in October 2014:

Sadly there is no guarantee and no certainty that the current system of global and regional security is able to protect us from upheavals. This system has become seriously weakened, fragmented and deformed.

## **The Response of the Bahá'í Faith**

The Bahá'í Faith addresses the issue of extremes of wealth and poverty, in the context of globalization and morality, in a comprehensive fashion with allocated responsibilities for the Wealthy, the Poor, the Society and the Global Institutions. All responsible stakeholders must do their part. Any one stakeholder acting in isolation will not yield satisfactory results. It is the integrated action of all these stakeholders, benefiting from positive global forces, under a moral umbrella, that will ultimately eradicate poverty.

### **1. Transformation of the Individual**

For effects of Globalization to be more equitable in terms of wealth distribution, and lead to the eradication of poverty, the Bahá'í Faith calls for transformation of individuals to act morally (i.e. act in the interest of others) instead of acting amorally (i.e. act in the interest of self)—according to Bahá'u'lláh:

*That one indeed is a man who, today, dedicateth himself to the service of the entire human race. The Great Being saith: Blessed and happy is he that ariseth to promote the best interests of the peoples and kindreds of the earth. In another passage He hath proclaimed: It is not for him to pride himself who loveth his own country, but rather*

*for him who loveth the whole world. The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens. [GWB 249-250]*

The call for service and its importance to derive universal benefits, was again discussed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

*Universal benefits derive from the grace of the Divine religions, for they lead their true followers to sincerity of intent, to high purpose, to purity and spotless honor, to surpassing kindness and compassion, to the keeping of their covenants when they have covenanted, to concern for the rights of others, to liberality, to justice in every aspect of life, to humanity and philanthropy, to valor and to unflagging efforts in the service of mankind. [SDC 98]*

In fact, to pursue one’s own interest ahead of others is likened to the behavior of animals and not worthy of human nature:

*If man were to care for himself only he would be nothing but an animal for only the animals are thus egoistic. If you bring a thousand sheep to a well to kill nine hundred and ninety-nine the one remaining sheep would go on grazing, not thinking of the others and worrying not at all about the lost, never bothering that its own kind had passed away, or had perished or been killed. To look after one's self only is therefore an animal propensity. It is the animal propensity to live solitary and alone. It is the animal proclivity to look after one's own comfort. But man was created to be a man—to be fair, to be just, to be merciful, to be kind to all his species, never to be willing that he himself be well off while others are in misery and distress—this is an attribute of the animal and not of man. Nay, rather, man should be willing to accept hardships for himself in order that others may enjoy wealth; he should*

*enjoy trouble for himself that others may enjoy happiness and well-being.* [FWU 42]

This elevated status of human nature, the purpose of human beings in this life, and in fact the purpose or goal of his creation in general is core to the Bahá'í Faith's theological and existential beliefs and centers squarely around service to humanity.

All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization. [GWB 215]

Given the centrality of placing the individual's conviction in "service to humanity" and considering interests of others above self-interest, as the very purpose/goal of creation, in Bahá'í theology, the transition from self-centeredness towards human society-centeredness is an outcome that is self evident. The implications of this belief system are enormous, and in stark contrast against the belief system prevalent in modern society where the basic assumption about the human nature is in fact that individuals act selfishly, and in this context, individuals in aggregate would feel insecure about their future as they believe no one would consider their interest—this feeling of insecurity about their well-being, leads to self-accumulation of wealth and power as means for safeguarding security, and in turn, on aggregate, such acting in self-interest leads to harmful competition and lack of true cooperation—seeking super returns above economic growth, as discussed previously, would lead to extremes in distribution of wealth and poverty. Thomas Piketty stated that "there is no natural force that would bring inequality under control". As such, concentration of wealth grows till it is unacceptable, but in the meantime such extremes of wealth and poverty shall undermine institutions and democracies around the globe.

On the other hand, under the world view of the Bahá'í Faith, where individuals act out of interest for others, each individual, in turn, becomes a recipient of selfless acts, which on aggregate

shall result of feelings of security rather than insecurity, thus creating a virtuous cycle of everyone behaving selflessly in service of others and enhancing social security at large and eliminating extremes of wealth and poverty.

On the other hand, if we see ourselves as alone and view the world as hostile, we see lack of social security, become fearful, and only consider self-interest. To act selflessly today takes courage and an enormous Faith in spiritual character of humanity and a single-minded purpose to fearlessly act—any slight giving to fear would accelerate our behavior towards acting out of self-interest.

The implication of this core issue regarding morality and amorality in a global context can be realized when Globalization is viewed as an opportunity to help less materially fortunate communities—in the longer term these communities will develop and become significant markets by themselves: 6 countries of Brazil, Nigeria, Indonesia, Pakistan, Ethiopia and Bangladesh, with a total population of 1bn (equaling world population of less than 200 years ago), and incomes of \$500-3000 per year, once empowered, these countries, as we have seen much progress over the past 2 decades, develop businesses and contribute to science and education. The “game” changes from “zero:sum” to “win:win”<sup>12</sup>, and the trend shifts towards having less inequalities in the world.

In order to achieve this “win-win” scenario, we need to achieve a proper balance between material progress and corresponding emphasis on morality. Without observing moral standards of Justice and Equality, globalization can have perverse outcomes—“spiritual” and “moral” forces must play an essential role in achieving solutions to such urgent problems [CL 59].

When morality is compromised or neglected, regardless of the legal framework, the dark side of globalization looms ever larger and in extreme cases globalization, when unchecked, will grow and transfer economic activity out of accountable

institutions into the hands of those with no moral compass. Examples of these situations have been outlined in a recently published book “Deviant Globalization”<sup>13</sup>:

- Illegal smuggling of labor
- Sex trade reaching 10s of millions, creating multi-billion dollar global industry
- Black market for human organs—kidney
- Semi-slave labor
- Waste Trade
- Drug trade—the failed US war on drugs since 1970s has costed \$2.5T
- Weapon Trade
- Global criminal organizations
- Global terrorism

Another major pre-requisite for the transformation of the individual is the leap from nationalism to world-citizenship—a true belief in world citizenship, rather than seeking only national interest, is a core and uncompromising precondition without which a balanced globalization would not be possible. The founding principle of world citizenship is real belief in Oneness of Humankind:

The principle of the Oneness of Mankind—the pivot round which all the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh revolve—is no mere outburst of ignorant emotionalism or an expression of vague and pious hope. Its appeal is not to be merely identified with a reawakening of the spirit of brotherhood and good-will among men, nor does it aim solely at the fostering of harmonious cooperation among individual peoples and nations. Its implications are deeper, its claims greater than any which the Prophets of old were allowed to advance. Its message is applicable not only to the individual, but concerns itself primarily with the nature of those essential relationships that must

bind all the states and nations as members of one human family.... It implies an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not experienced.... It calls for no less than the reconstruction and the demilitarization of the whole civilized world—a world organically unified in all the essential aspects of its life, its political machinery, its spiritual aspiration, its trade and finance, its script and language, and yet infinite in the diversity of the national characteristics of its federated units. [WOB 42-43]

## 2. Responsibility of the Wealthy

Bahá'u'lláh on numerous occasions discusses the status and importance of taking care of the poor “*Bestow wealth upon the poor*”; the “*Poor are My Trust*”. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá also encouraged the wealthy to provide for the poor, exulting them to “*not be intent on your own ease*”; “*expend on philanthropic purposes*” [SDC 24].

This willingness to help those less fortunate should become an innate desire. The wealthy are to expend on the poor out of their own volition, without being pressured legally or forcefully to do so; otherwise, they would spend their wealth trying to find loopholes to avoid giving.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá himself states that one should not imagine that his remarks

*constitute a denunciation of wealth or a commendation of poverty. Wealth is praiseworthy in the highest degree, if it is acquired by an individual's own efforts and the grace of God, in commerce, agriculture, art and industry, and if it be expended for philanthropic purposes. Above all, if a judicious and resourceful individual should initiate measures which would universally enrich the masses of the people, there could be no undertaking greater than this, and it would rank in*



*the sight of God as the supreme achievement, for such a benefactor would supply the needs and insure the comfort and well-being of a great multitude. Wealth is most commendable, provided the entire population is wealthy. If, however, a few have inordinate riches while the rest are impoverished, and no fruit or benefit accrues from that wealth, then it is only a liability... [SDC 24]*

The “giving” of the wealthy would come naturally as the fundamental thesis of society would be transformed from being self centered towards considering the interests of others before self as previously explained. As mentioned before, this requires a spiritual transformation of individuals.

### **3. Responsibility of the Poor**

Within the larger context of the responsibility of society and the wealthy to ensure that all have the opportunity to do useful work, there is a complementary obligation to work and the prohibition of begging in the Bahá’í Writings where it does discuss how we are forbidden to idly “*sit and beg*” [KA 30]. These teachings of the Bahá’í Faith should not be taken out of context, and must be treated as part of the more global solution of eliminating poverty—the obligation to work and the prohibition of begging are not meant to blame the poor for their own fate because they chose to beg (or, in countries with social safety nets, receive welfare) rather consider their responsibility, in relation to their capacity, to be productive members of society. Bahá’u’lláh, thus, proclaims that it is “*incumbent to engage in crafts and profession*”<sup>14</sup>. In fact, in the same paragraph, Bahá’u’lláh further elaborates that work is elevated to the status of worship if done in the spirit of service.

In this regard, society also has direct responsibility for the poor, especially in the case of those who cannot take care of themselves—here, Bahá’u’lláh in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, further

clarifies: “*All have been enjoined to earn a living, and as for those who are incapable of doing so, it is incumbent on the Deputies of God<sup>15</sup> and on the wealthy to make adequate provision for them.*” This is further elaborated upon in note 62 of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*: ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explained that “*The object is to uproot mendicancy altogether. However, if a person is incapable of earning a living, and is stricken by dire poverty or becometh helpless, then it is incumbent on the wealthy or the Deputies to provide him with a monthly allowance for his subsistence....*” The note continues, “The prohibition against giving charity to people who beg does not preclude individuals and Spiritual Assemblies from extending financial assistance to the poor and needy or from providing them with opportunities to acquire such skills as would enable them to earn a livelihood.” Note 56 of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* elaborates further on the duty to engage in a trade or profession, and quotes a letter written on behalf of the Guardian stating: “It is the duty of those who are in charge of the organization of society to give every individual the opportunity of acquiring the necessary talent in some kind of profession, and also the means of utilizing such a talent, both for its own sake and for the sake of earning the means of his livelihood.”

As such, one can study the responsibility of the poor in eradication of poverty is equally important and goes hand in hand with the responsibilities of the wealthy and of the society.

#### 4. Responsibility of the Society

##### *The role of Huqúqu’lláh*

The society, and the wealthy, as ‘Abdul-Bahá advised, should “*initiate measures that would universally enrich the masses*”. One important instrument founded by Bahá’u’lláh exactly to improve distribution of wealth and eradicate poverty is the institution of Huqúqu’lláh,<sup>16</sup> which would be an important source of funds for enriching the masses.

The key distinguishing factor between Huqúqu'lláh and the Global Net Worth Tax suggested by economists and policy makers is the spiritual and voluntary nature of Huqúqu'lláh, unique in the annals of history, and its spiritual obligation on the individual without any one or any institution having the right to police its compliance—although it is calculated as 19% of a person's increase in wealth or assets after necessary expenses are deducted, it is deemed to be a spiritual exercise since what constitutes as “necessary” is left to the consciousness of the individual, and furthermore the very fact that its compliance can not to be imposed or scrutinized by anyone means that avoidance, unlike the case of taxation which is imposed and heavily scrutinized, is a non-issue.

Along with the important institution of Huqúqu'lláh, Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, called for coordination of economic resources of the world: “The economic resources of the world will be organized, its sources of raw materials will be tapped and fully utilized, its markets will be coordinated and developed, and the distribution of its products will be equitably regulated” [WOB 203-204]. Clearly, this would require striking the balance between national ownership and utilization of natural resources globally. However, in the context of the universally accepted principles of world citizenship, striking this balance would not be as challenging.

### *The role of laws, regulations, taxation*

As part of the role of Society and its responsibilities, fundamental changes in laws, regulations and economic structures must take place that would directly address the relationship between capital and labor. In a statement of the Bahá'í International Community, February 12, 1993, “Human Rights and Extreme Poverty” it is noted that the economic system shall evolve to adequately address the issues of wealth distribution: “Although it will resemble the present system in many ways, the evolving economic system which Bahá'ís

envision will have significant points of distinction.” One of the key points of distinction is the Bahá’í view on income distribution, which allows for differences in wealth between individuals, but would also allow for societies to eliminate both extreme wealth and extreme poverty.

The accumulation of excessive fortunes by a small number of individuals, while the masses are in need, is, according to Bahá’í teachings, an inequity and an injustice. Moderation should, therefore, be established by means of laws and regulations that would hinder the accumulation of excessive fortunes by a few individuals and provide for the essential needs of the masses. Among the methods that future societies may adopt in order to achieve this objective is a modification in the taxation system—‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke about an innovative and revolutionary method of taxation to eliminate extremes of wealth and poverty:

*Each person in the community whose need is equal to his individual producing capacity shall be exempt from taxation. But if his income is greater than his needs, he must pay a tax until an adjustment is effected. That is to say, a man’s capacity for production and his needs will be equalized and reconciled through taxation. If his production exceeds, he will pay a tax; if his necessities exceed his production, he shall receive an amount sufficient to equalize or adjust. Therefore, taxation will be proportionate to capacity and production, and there will be no poor in the community. [PUP 217]*

Clearly, future generations of economists, lawyers, tax accountants, and policy makers would have to devise a fair regulatory regime that would consider needs of individuals as well as their capacity for income generation. This is another example of how legal or structural solutions must be developed as part of a society’s responsibility to eliminate extremes of wealth and poverty.

## 5. Role of Global Institutions and their responsibilities

In addition to detailing the responsibilities at the individual and societal levels, Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, called upon the creation of world institutions with powers far surpassing the present day international institutions:

- A world legislature, whose members will, as the trustees of the whole of mankind, ultimately control the entire resources of all the component nations, and will enact such laws as shall be required to regulate the life, satisfy the needs and adjust the relationships of all races and peoples.
- A world executive, backed by an international Force, will carry out the decisions arrived at, and apply the laws enacted by, this world legislature, and will safeguard the organic unity of the whole commonwealth.
- 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....
- Strong globally-empowered world institutions that can coordinate universal ownership of resources and their fair distribution internationally [*Call to Nations*]

It is now universally accepted that the current global institutions do not have the mandate or the resources to be effective in addressing global problems like poverty. Much stronger empowered institutions are needed to adequately address global issues and eradicate arbitrage opportunities. Without adequately empowered global institutions, the economic resources of the world cannot be organized and managed in a manner that shall be conducive to the realization of the unity of human race.

The unity of the human race, as envisaged by Bahá'u'lláh, implies the establishment of a world commonwealth in which all nations, races, creeds and classes are closely and permanently united, and in which the autonomy of its state members and the personal freedom and initiative of the individuals that compose them are definitely and completely safeguarded. [WOB 203]

The economic resources of the world will be organized, its sources of raw materials will be tapped and fully utilized, its markets will be coordinated and developed, and the distribution of its products will be equitably regulated. [WOB 203-204]

According to a statement prepared under the supervision of the Universal House of Justice:

Yet, the unification of humankind under a system of governance that can release the full potentialities latent in human nature, and allow their expression in programs for the benefit of all, is clearly the next stage in the evolution of civilization. The physical unification of the planet in our time and the awakening aspirations of the mass of its inhabitants have at last produced the conditions that permit achievement of the ideal, although in a manner far different from that imagined by imperial dreamers of the past. To this effort the governments of the world have contributed the founding of the United Nations Organization, with all its great blessings, all its regrettable shortcomings....Somewhere ahead lie the further great changes that will eventually impel acceptance of the principle of world government itself. The United Nations does not possess such a mandate, nor is there anything in the current discourse of political leaders that seriously envisions so radical a restructuring of the administration of the affairs of the

planet. That it will come about in due course Bahá'u'lláh has made unmistakably clear. That yet greater suffering and disillusionment will be required to impel humanity to this great leap forward appears, alas, equally clear. Its establishment will require national governments and other centers of power to surrender to international determination, unconditionally and irreversibly, the full measure of overriding authority implicit in the word “government.” [CL 91-92]

Present day attempts by policy makers to address extremes of wealth and poverty lack a coherent approach and have been short on results. It is the integrated holistic approach of the Bahá'í Faith, providing, at once, (i) a robust set of core principles for individuals to transform, (ii) an exacting set of directives for the rich and the poor, (iii) a just allocation of responsibilities at individual and societal levels, and (iv) the creation of empowered global institutions, that collectively can adequately reverse the rise of amorality, and in turn, effectively address the complexities surrounding our trajectory towards extremes of wealth and poverty in a world that is rapidly becoming globalized and in want of equitable distribution of resources.

---

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This presentation is based on my experience and information gained from working in the field of international finance, capital markets, and mergers and acquisitions for the past 25 years.

<sup>2</sup> “*The All-Knowing Physician hath His finger on the pulse of mankind. He perceiveth the disease, and prescribeth, in His unerring wisdom, the remedy. Every age hath its own problem, and every soul its particular aspiration. The remedy the world needeth in its present-day afflictions can never be the same as that which a subsequent age may require. Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements.*” [GWB 213]

- 
- <sup>3</sup> Acting “only out of self-interest as long as the act complies with legal framework” refers mainly to global business and finance and individual actions. For government actions, and even much of individual/corporate action, there is little or no enforceable legal framework, and to the extent it exists it is heavily skewed in favor of the status quo of inequality. Further legal studies are needed to institute remedies within the relevant national and international legal and institutional framework, as the problem lies not just with private actors’ amorality while abiding by the letter of the law. It is beyond the scope of this article to examine these legal aspects within the wider public sector as well.
- <sup>4</sup> Yellen Report at the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston Economic Conference on Inequality of Economic Opportunity, 2015
- <sup>5</sup> Forbes (15.03.15)
- <sup>6</sup> IMF REPORT, April 2015
- <sup>7</sup> Richard Wilkinson, Kate Pickett and Allen Lane, *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better*, March 2009, ISBN 978 1 84614 039 6
- <sup>8</sup> In US alone close to 1% of the population lives in prisons and jails, and if we add the total number of those on probation, it reaches 7 million out of the total population of 319 million or 2.2% of the US population—source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, [www.bjs.gov](http://www.bjs.gov)
- <sup>9</sup> [topincomes.parisschoolofeconomics.eu](http://topincomes.parisschoolofeconomics.eu); Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, 2014, Belknap Press
- <sup>10</sup> Jeffrey D. Sachs, *The End of Poverty*, 2006, Penguin Books; also reported by *Time magazine*, 14 March 2005, p. 36, in an interview with Jeffrey Sachs as Director of the UN Millenium Project
- <sup>11</sup> One of the central beliefs of the Bahá’í Faith is the unity of humankind—that there are no differences among races, colors, sexes, nationalities, ethnicities, and that the ultimate goal of human civilization is to arrive at the Most Great Peace when the world is united as one country and mankind as its citizens. The Bahá’í Writings include details of principal requirements at individual and societal levels to achieve this objective.
- <sup>12</sup> In Game Theory, zero:sum means that if one party wins the other must lose; however, under a win:win scenario, both parties can win.
- <sup>13</sup> *Deviant Globalization: Black Market Economy in the 21st Century*; edited by Nils Gilman, 2011
- <sup>14</sup> Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, paragraph 33: “O people of Bahá! It is incumbent upon each one of you to engage in some occupation—such as a craft, a trade or the like. We have exalted your engagement in such work to the rank of worship of the one true God. Reflect, O people, on the grace and blessings of your Lord, and yield Him thanks at eventide and dawn. Waste not your hours in idleness and sloth, but occupy yourselves



---

*with what will profit you and others. Thus hath it been decreed in this Tablet from whose horizon hath shone the day-star of wisdom and utterance. The most despised of men in the sight of God are they who sit and beg.”*

- <sup>15</sup> Deputies of God are members of Houses of Justice, which are administrative governing bodies of society at local, national and international levels.
- <sup>16</sup> Huqúqu’lláh is an Arabic word meaning the Right of God—it is a law instituted by Bahá’u’lláh (the founder of the Bahá’í Faith) as one of the fundamental spiritual ordinances of the Bahá’í Faith, requiring each Bahá’í to give 19% of the increase in wealth or assets, after deducting “necessary” expenses. The definition of what constitutes as a “necessary” expense is left to the conscious of each individual. Furthermore, no one can police the individuals for calculating and giving of Huqúqu’lláh; abiding this law is left wholly to the individual as a spiritual obligation. Source: *Huqúqu’lláh, The Right of God, compilation of extracts from the Bahá’í writings*, compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, Bahá’í World Center, 1989.

# Parallels in the Ministries of Táhírih and Paul

JoAnn M. Borovicka

Táhírih, a woman born into the Islamic religion in the nineteenth-century Persian Empire, is the most renowned heroine of the earliest days of the Bahá'í Faith.<sup>1</sup> Paul, a man born into the Jewish religion in the first century Roman Empire, is the most prominent apostle in the early history of Christianity.<sup>2</sup> Táhírih and Paul are separated by gender, religion, nationality, culture, and eighteen hundred years. And yet, when stories of their lives and apostolic ministries are compared, parallels arise—the most significant of which is that both are known for singular initiatives that helped differentiate new Revelation from the old: Táhírih played a central role in distinguishing the Bahá'í Revelation<sup>3</sup> from Islam, while Paul played a central role in distinguishing the Christian Revelation from Judaism. This and additional parallels regarding their conversions, the challenges they faced, and some of the circumstances of their ministries are surprisingly harmonic. The purpose of this paper is to point out nine parallels in the ministries of Táhírih and Paul and to reflect on the value of this knowledge in interfaith dialogue.

## Parallel 1: A Vision of the Manifestation of God before Conversion<sup>4</sup>

Both Táhirih and Paul had a vision of the Manifestation of God prior to acceptance of the new Revelation. Táhirih's vision and conversion came shortly after the Báb's Declaration while Paul's came years after Christ was crucified. We will look at Táhirih's story first.

Táhirih ("the Pure One") is a title given by Bahá'u'lláh to Fátimih Baraghání<sup>5</sup> who was born about 1817 in Qazvín, Persia, to a family well placed in traditional Islam: her father was a mujtahid<sup>6</sup> and her paternal uncle was the leader of prayers in the cathedral mosque. Although the culture in which she lived generally denied education to girls, Táhirih's father educated her from childhood. She excelled in Islamic studies and literature and was a master of Arabic and Persian. 'Abdu'l Bahá states: "*Such was the degree of her scholarship and attainments that her father would often express his regret, saying, 'Would that she had been a boy, for he would have shed illumination upon my household, and would have succeeded me!'*" [MF 188]

As a young adult, Táhirih was inspired to investigate the teachings of Shaykh Ahmad-i-Ahsá'í and Siyyid Kázim-i-Rashtí— forerunners of the Báb who taught the imminent coming of the Qá'im in the Shaykhi school of the Shi'ah sect of Islam—even though this greatly agitated her family [MF 189]. In 1844 she set out on a journey to study with Siyyid Kázim in person, but he passed away before she arrived. She continued to follow his last instructions to his disciples to "*Go forth... and seek out your Lord*" [MF 190]. It was in the course of her religious disciplines to this end that she had a vision of the Báb in a dream. 'Abdu'l-Bahá relays her experience:

*In her vision a youth, a Siyyid, wearing a black cloak and a green turban, appeared to her in the heavens; he was standing in the air, reciting verses and praying with his hands upraised. At once, she memorized one of those*

*verses, and wrote it down in her notebook when she awoke. After the Báb had declared His mission, and His first book, "The Best of Stories"<sup>7</sup> was circulated, Táhirih was reading a section of the text one day, and she came upon that same verse, which she had noted down from the dream. Instantly offering thanks, she fell to her knees and bowed her forehead to the ground, convinced that the Báb's message was truth. [MF 190]*

Táhirih sent a letter to the Báb declaring her belief. When it was received the Báb declared her an apostle—one of His Eighteen Letters of the Living. Táhirih was the only woman to achieve that station.

Paul's mystical vision and conversion happened quite differently. Paul, also called Saul, was born around 5 A.D. to a Jewish family in the Hellenistic Diaspora; he describes himself as "circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee."<sup>8</sup> Nothing is known of his early education, but New Testament scholars report that through analysis of his letters it is evident that Paul was educated in Greek rhetoric and philosophy as well as Hebrew and many fields of Jewish teachings—this at a time when most people were illiterate.<sup>9</sup>

As a young adult, Paul believed that the Jesus-movement was a dangerously heretical sect and he participated in the persecution of its followers.<sup>10</sup> Paul's conversion, which took place a few years after the crucifixion, is described in the Book of Acts as a vision of and conversation with Christ that came to him suddenly as he was travelling to Damascus—a vision so powerful that it knocked him off his horse and blinded him for three days.<sup>11</sup> Whether Paul was physically or figuratively knocked off his horse we don't know, but according to his Second Letter to the Corinthians (which is widely believed by biblical scholars to be an authentic letter of Paul's<sup>12</sup>), he did have a vision of Christ and he was transformed.<sup>13</sup> From a

persecutor of the Jesus-movement, Paul became a persecuted follower of Jesus Christ.

Paul's calling as an apostle was surprising. The gospels report that Jesus chose twelve men as apostles in His lifetime: Simon (also called Peter), Andrew, James, John, Phillip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James, Thaddeus, Simon, and Judas Iscariot. Paul never met Jesus in person and Paul was not one of these initial twelve; but, through this and other visions, Paul believed himself commissioned by God as an apostle of Christ and empowered to speak with authority to individuals and communities in the Jesus-movement.<sup>14</sup> Was this legitimate? In a reference to Paul 'Abdu'l-Bahá states:

*Physical nearness or remoteness [to the Manifestation] is of no importance; the essential fact is the spiritual affinity and ideal nearness. Judas Iscariot was for a long time favored in the holy court of His Holiness Christ, yet he was entirely far and remote; while Paul, the apostle, was in close embrace with His Holiness. [TAB 3 719-20]*

Thus, 'Abdu'l-Bahá seems to confirm Paul's inspiration.

It is interesting that Táhirih's vision reinforced the spiritual path that she was investigating, while Paul's vision resulted in a radical reorientation of his beliefs—yet both visions resulted in conversions of prominent apostles in the new Revelations.

## **Parallel 2: Distinguishing New Revelation from the Old**

The most significant parallel between Táhirih and Paul, and the factor that sets them apart from all of the other apostles in the Bahá'í and Christian Dispensations, is that both are recognized for singular initiatives that contributed significantly to distinguishing new Revelation from the old.

In *Memorials of the Faithful*, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá introduces Táhirih as *a burning brand of the love of God, a lamp of His bestowal* [MF 190]. One of the functions of this “lamp” was to be the point from which some of the most challenging features of the Bahá’í Revelation shone the earliest and brightest. The most famous demonstration of Táhirih’s unique role in this regard took place at the Conference of Badasht, a meeting of eighty-one leaders early in the Bábí movement in 1848.<sup>15</sup> One of the primary purposes of this conference was to address the question of the Báb’s precise claim. This was necessary because at that time the Báb’s spiritual station, how His teachings related to Islam, and what the Bábí movement required on a social level was not fully disclosed. In the early years of the Báb’s Dispensation, many people, Muslims and Bábís alike, understood the teachings of the Báb to be a reform movement of Islam—part of the Shaykhi school of the Shiah sect of Islam. At the Conference of Badasht, Bahá’u’lláh, at this time a leader in the Cause of the Báb, revealed a new Tablet every day, gradually educating the Báb’s followers on the distinctiveness of the Báb’s teachings. But it was through Táhirih’s announcement, supported and protected by Bahá’u’lláh and Quddús, that the new Dispensation’s break with the past was unmistakably demonstrated.<sup>16</sup> Speaking of Táhirih’s unique role, the Guardian states:

It was owing to her initiative, while participating in the Conference of Badasht, that the most challenging implications of a revolutionary and as yet but dimly grasped Dispensation were laid bare before her fellow-disciples and the new Order permanently divorced from the laws and institutions of Islam. [GPB 74]

Táhirih is often noted as a champion of the emancipation of women, but here we see that her function in the Bahá’í Revelation was much broader—Táhirih is attributed with publicly proclaiming the emancipation of the Báb’s movement

from Islam and announcing the Advent of a new Day. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá describes the happening:

*Táhirih, with her face unveiled, stepped from her garden, advancing to the pavilion of Bahá’u’lláh; and as she came, she shouted aloud these words: “The Trumpet is sounding! The great Trump is blown! The universal Advent is now proclaimed!” The believers gathered in that tent were panic struck, and each one asked himself, “How can the Law be abrogated? How is it that this woman stands here without her veil?”* [MF 198]

Explaining the magnitude of Táhirih’s action, the Guardian states: On that memorable day the “Bugle” mentioned in the Qur’án was sounded, the “stunning trumpet-blast” was loudly raised... The call she sounded was the death-knell of the twelve hundred year old law of Islam” [GPB 33-34]. The message is unmistakably clear that through her initiative Táhirih contributed significantly to establishing the distinction between the early Bahá’í Revelation and Islám.

Paul carried out a similar role, albeit in a different fashion, in the early days of the Christian Revelation. At the time of Christ there were many sects of Judaism in the Roman Empire. These included the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Zealots, the Essenes, and the Jesus-movement.<sup>17</sup> Just as the early Bábí movement was considered a sect of Islam, so the early Jesus-movement was considered a sect of Judaism. In today’s literature, these early Jewish followers of Jesus are often referred to as ‘Jewish Christians.’<sup>18</sup> The Jewish Christians believed in Jesus as the Messiah (the Christ), believed His teachings confirmed Judaism and the Jewish Law (also called Mosaic Law or the Torah), and followed the traditional Jewish rites and ceremonies of purification such as sacrificial offerings at the Temple, dietary laws, and the law of male circumcision.<sup>19</sup> But the Jews were not the only people attracted to Jesus; Gentiles were also attracted to His teachings.

The word Gentile means clan, tribe, or nations and, as used in the New Testament, it refers to anyone who is not Jewish. Gentiles—the Greeks, Romans, and other nationalities of the Near East—surrounded the Jews who had been a minority religion in that area for several hundred years. Some Gentiles became followers of Jesus Christ and these Gentile Christians differed from the Jewish Christians in that they did not necessarily follow the Jewish ritual and ceremonial laws of purification, particularly the law of male circumcision—a practice which the Greeks and Romans considered a mutilation.<sup>20</sup> Of the early followers in the Jesus-movement, the Jewish Christian community was the great majority and many believers within it believed that all of the followers of Christ should follow Jewish Law. Referring to this dynamic, the *Guardian* states: “How great was the obstinacy with which the Jewish converts among the early Christians adhered to the ceremonies of their ancestors, and how fervent their eagerness to impose them on the Gentiles!” [WOB 57] As the Gentile Christian community increased, conflict about the responsibility of the members to adhere to Jewish rites and ceremonies also increased.<sup>21</sup>

The question confronting the leaders in the Jesus-movement was: Must a Gentile who wants to join a community of followers of Christ first become a Jew? Of particular interest was the question of male circumcision, because at that time the traditional belief was that “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”<sup>22</sup> Paul, who had been ministering to Gentile Christian communities for years, argued against this requirement. Paul taught that the law of circumcision as well as other social laws of Judaism were not obligatory for Gentile followers of the Messiah, that Christ brought a new Covenant, and that the disciples should be “ministers of a new Covenant.”<sup>23</sup> Paul taught that salvation for the Gentiles was possible by spiritual transformation through the love of Christ and that Gentile adherence to the law of circumcision was not necessary. As



stated in his Letter to the Galatians: “Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything!”<sup>24</sup>

Some of the leaders in the Jesus-movement disagreed with Paul’s proactive support of Gentile members living outside of the Jewish laws. The Book of Acts states: “Paul had no small dissension and debate with them.”<sup>25</sup> But eventually Paul and a small group of Jesus-movement leaders (including Peter) met in Jerusalem and came to the agreement that circumcision would not be required of Gentile members, and that only a few Mosaic Laws would be obligatory: three dietary laws and the prohibition against sexual immorality and idolatry.<sup>26</sup> It was understood, however, that the Jewish members of the Jesus-movement would continue with their traditional observance of Jewish law.<sup>27</sup> At this point, Paul assumed a greater leadership role in the Gentile mission. In his Letter to the Galatians he states that the outcome of the meeting was “I had been entrusted with the gospel for the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel for the circumcised.”<sup>28</sup>

But the matter was far from settled. There was no universal agreement concerning the nature of the mission to the Gentiles and contention continued in the Jesus-movement: the large “Jewish Christian conservative wing” on one side and the small “Gentile Christian liberal wing” on the other.<sup>29</sup> Some of the Jewish followers saw the Gentiles as ritually unclean, and there was a tone of Gentile subordination. Meanwhile, Paul preached that these two groups could exist together respectfully in one community.<sup>30</sup> In his Letter to the Galatians he states: “In Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. There is no longer Jew or Greek... for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”<sup>31</sup>

Eventually, Paul, on his own authority, abrogated the three dietary laws that had been made obligatory for Gentile Christians by the leadership in Jerusalem [SAQ 20:2]. He traveled throughout the Roman Empire cultivating Jesus-movement communities open to all, encouraging lovers of Jesus Christ to work together in unity. Over time, the Jewish Christian sect of

Judaism declined and virtually disappeared. It was the Gentile Christian movement championed by Paul that increased to a new, international, and separate religion—Christianity. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá praises this outcome. He states: “*Observe how numerous were the diverse nations, races, clans, and tribes who, after the advent of Christ, gathered through the power of the love of God under the shadow of His Word*” [SAQ 84:5]. Although the distinction of Christianity as a separate religion did not fully evolve until decades after Paul’s martyrdom, it is widely acknowledged in Christian scholarship that Paul is most responsible for this outcome because it was Paul who championed the Gentile mission outside of the laws of the Torah—during his thirty-year ministry as well as through several of his letters that were preserved over centuries.<sup>32</sup>

In Bahá’í history, Táhirih’s role as the ‘trumpet’ of the new Advent is presented as beginning suddenly with her dramatic announcement at the conference of Badasht. She then continued with the same message in her personal teaching until her martyrdom four years later. Conversely, in Christian history, Paul’s role as the champion of the new Advent was not focused on a specific event or dramatic announcement, but was, from the beginning, a slow process of teaching—in various localities over a thirty-year period and over centuries through his letters—what he believed he had been chosen by God to declare: that Gentiles could find salvation in Christ without adhering to Jewish rites and ceremonies. Although achieved in different ways, in their respective religions both Táhirih and Paul are recognized as *the* apostles whose singular initiatives contributed significantly to distinguishing the new Revelation from the old.

### **Parallel 3: Brilliant Communicators**

Táhirih and Paul were both brilliant communicators. Most of Táhirih’s writings were destroyed after her martyrdom; however, the Guardian describes the variety and influence of her communications. He states: “Through her eloquent pleadings,

her fearless denunciations, her dissertations, poems and translations, her commentaries and correspondence, she persisted in firing the imagination, enlisting the allegiance of Arabs and Persians alike to the new Revelation” [GPB 73]. Táhirih was so effective in her teaching that certain religious authorities became alarmed and lodged complaints. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains that when challenged by religious leaders “*she presented them with unanswerable proofs, and when one or another appeared before her she offered him convincing arguments*” [MF 192].

Despite Táhirih’s restricted travel and her short eight-year ministry, some of her writings, particularly her poetry, traveled outside of the Persian Empire. This was made possible in part by nineteenth-century Western interest in Orientalism, new communication technologies, and a lively culture of international journalism. The Guardian states: “The fame of this immortal woman was noised abroad, and traveling with remarkable swiftness as far as the capitals of Western Europe, aroused the enthusiastic admiration and evoked the ardent praise of men and women of divers nationalities, callings and cultures” [GPB 75]. Martha Root, a Bahá’í teacher who made numerous trips around the world in the 1920s and 30s reported: “I have seen the influence of Táhirih in all the five continents I had visited.”<sup>33</sup>

The proof of the effectiveness of Paul’s communications is in the outcome of his ministry. He made numerous travel-teaching trips throughout the Roman Empire where he established several major centers of Christian activity. He nurtured these communities with lengthy visits, but when problems arose and he could not be there in person he wrote letters to advise and encourage. Many of his letters were preserved; seven of the Epistles in the New Testament are considered by most scholars to be authentically Pauline; they may also represent the earliest Christian writings in existence.<sup>34</sup> By virtue of his letters, modern scholars describe Paul as a literary genius, a conveyor of eternal verities, and one of the

most influential figures in the West.<sup>35</sup> His letters, which are still the focus of intense study, are revered as Scripture in the New Testament of the Christian Bible—the most published as well as the most widely distributed book in the history of civilization.

#### **Parallel 4: Vilified from Within**

Both Táhirih and Paul were vilified from within their respective new religious communities. Persecution from those outside of the new Faith was a tragic reality in the Apostolic Age of both the Bahá'í Faith and Christianity, and this was something that Táhirih and Paul endured with most of the early believers. But being vilified by many of one's co-religionists is something that sets Táhirih and Paul apart.

Concerning the vilification that Táhirih suffered, the *Guardian* states: "The trumpeter was a lone woman, the noblest of her sex in that Dispensation, whom even some of her co-religionists pronounced a heretic" [GPB 33-34]. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that Táhirih's outspoken teaching activities so alarmed her more rigid fellow-believers that they complained to the Báb that her behavior was immoral. In the *Dawn-Breakers* it is reported that "The Báb, to whom these complaints had been addressed, replied in the following terms: 'What am I to say regarding her whom the Tongue of Power and Glory has named Táhirih?'" [DB 293] The Báb defended the truth of Táhirih's words and confirmed her station as "the Pure One."

Like Táhirih, Paul suffered attacks from his co-religionists. His doctrine of a new Covenant with God through Christ conflicted with certain Jewish Christians who infiltrated Gentile Christian communities causing confusion and dissension and undermining Paul's authority.<sup>36</sup> Biblical scholar Paul Segal notes: "Almost no Pauline letter forgets to mention Paul's status as an apostle through God, underlining his constant need to establish his credentials."<sup>37</sup> In 2 Corinthians Paul names many of the dangers that he faced in his ministry including "danger from false brothers and sisters"<sup>38</sup>—those being fellow believers early

in the Jesus-movement who tried to sabotage his Torah-free Gentile mission. Acknowledging Paul's constant struggles, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states: "*In Saint Paul's own time no one duly recognized him; nay, rather, he spent his days amidst difficulties and contempt.*"<sup>39</sup> Thus, both Táhirih and Paul were persecuted from without and vilified from within.

## Parallel 5: Appeals to the Government

Another similarity between Táhirih and Paul is that both made successful appeals to governmental authorities. In *Memorials of the Faithful* 'Abdu'l-Bahá mentions three occasions where Táhirih wrote to government officials with requests. In all three cases her correspondence was heard, action was taken, and the outcome was what she desired. First, she wrote to the Governor of Karbilá informing him of her location when she learned that the authorities had arrested Shamsu'd-Duhá, believing Shams was Táhirih. In this case, Shams was released and Táhirih was arrested as she requested [MF 191]. Second, she wrote again to the Governor of Karbilá when the house arrest he had ordered had gone on for months with no confirmation from higher authorities. She requested to go to Baghdad to await an answer there—the governor gave his consent [MF 192-194]. Third, she wrote to the Governor of Kirmánsháh when she and her companions were assaulted and abandoned in the desert by Kirmánsháh officials [MF 194]. The governor commanded that their belongings be returned and they be allowed to continue on their journey.

Traditions recorded in the Book of Acts have Paul successfully appealing to government authorities as well. In Philippi, Paul and a companion, Silas, were thrown in jail without a trial. When an earthquake mysteriously opened the prison and the nervous magistrates ordered that the two prisoners be quietly released, Paul refused to leave and, instead, made a demand for an official governmental apology—which he got.<sup>40</sup> Second, when Paul's teaching in Jerusalem agitated the

people and this accelerated to mob violence, he was arrested by the Roman centurions who were going to take him to the barracks to flog him for disturbing the peace. Paul reportedly asked the rhetorical question: “Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who is uncondemned?”<sup>41</sup> Consequently he was taken to Caesarea in safety to await trial before the governor. And third, after Paul had remained in Caesarea for some time with no trial decision, he appealed to be tried before the Emperor in Rome. The appeal was granted and Paul was transported to Rome where he was able to teach from “his house” while awaiting trial.<sup>42</sup>

Although these stories concerning Paul relayed in the Book of Acts may not have the historical accuracy of Táhirih’s biography, it is noteworthy that these particular stories withstood the test of time: there is something important about the example of religious visionaries making direct appeals to the government for justice.

### **Parallel 6: Rescued by Small Bands of Co-religionists**

In the histories of both faiths there are stories of coordinated efforts by a few of Táhirih’s and Paul’s co-religionists to rescue them from certain death early in their ministries.

Táhirih was rescued in 1847 while she was under house arrest in Qazvín under false charges of being complicit in the murder of her uncle, Mullá Taqí. The Mullá’s heirs were demanding her death. By Bahá’u’lláh’s direction, Táhirih left the house at night in the company of a fellow believer, met another friend who had horses outside of the city gates, and rode with her rescuers to Bahá’u’lláh’s house in Tihrán. Describing this event ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states, “*They managed by a stratagem to free her from that embroilment and got her to Tihrán in the night*” [MF 197]. She went on to teach for another five years.

Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians, as well as the Book of Acts, reports a similar situation. When Paul was teaching in

Damascus his co-religionists learned that the governor intended to have him killed, and that government officials were monitoring the city gates day and night in order to capture him. To rescue Paul from certain death “His disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the city wall, lowering him in a basket.”<sup>43</sup> This enabled Paul to get out of Damascus alive and to continue in his thirty-year ministry.

These stories of coordinated rescues speak to the prominence of Táhirih and Paul’s positions and their importance in these early religious communities.

### **Parallel 7: Never Attained the Physical Presence of Her/His Lord**

It is surprising that neither Táhirih nor Paul attained the physical presence of her/his Lord. Although Táhirih lived during the time of the Báb, communicated with Him in writing, and was one of His specially designated Letters of the Living, she never attained the Báb’s presence in earthly form [MF 188-200]. Similarly, Paul lived during Jesus’ physical lifetime but never met Him in person. Paul became a follower of Christ after the crucifixion, and there is no record of His having met Jesus before his conversion.<sup>44</sup>

### **Parallel 8: Contributed to the Process of Realizing the Equality of Women and Men**

Traditionally, Táhirih and Paul would be seen as polar opposites on the issue of gender equity. Because of Táhirih’s investigation of truth independent from her father and husband, her participation in religious debates, her challenges to religious authority, her teaching of men and women alike, and her overall courageous disregard for cultural gender restrictions, she was the very embodiment of the promotion of a radical gender equity for her day [MF 188-200]. By virtue of her initiatives the Guardian states that she was “the first woman

suffrage martyr” [GPB 75]. Paul, on the other hand, is traditionally associated with biblical verses that uphold a strict patriarchy.<sup>45</sup> However, modern New Testament scholarship has discovered reasons to vindicate Paul to the degree that many now recognize him as a visionary for gender equity.<sup>46</sup>

One key to “liberating Paul”<sup>47</sup> has been the application of textual analysis<sup>48</sup> to the thirteen Pauline Letters,<sup>49</sup> resulting in the discovery of what many scholars believe to be pseudonymous letters in the Pauline collection; that is, letters claiming Pauline authorship that were not written by Paul himself.<sup>50,51</sup> These pseudonymous letters include 1 Timothy, home to this notorious verse: “Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent.”<sup>52</sup> Like this passage, many of the patriarchal messages that were once believed to present Paul’s teachings are found in what, now, are largely believed to be inauthentic or disputed letters.<sup>53</sup>

Another key to the “new Paul”<sup>54</sup> of modern scholarship is the identification of what many scholars believe are interpolated verses in the authentic Pauline Letters; that is, passages added to Paul’s letters by an unknown author or authors some time after his death.<sup>55</sup> One example of a suspected interpolated verse is this passage in First Corinthians that echoes the sentiment cited above in First Timothy: “As in all the churches of the saints, women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.”<sup>56</sup> A widespread claim, and one that is supported by textual criticism, asserts that the above passage was added to First Corinthians decades after Paul’s death. This and other patriarchal teachings attributed to Paul after his martyrdom are seen by Karen Elliott and other scholars as “sad evidence to how quickly the Church retreated from Paul’s more egalitarian practice” in the decades after his martyrdom.<sup>57</sup> While in the Bahá’í Writings there is no commentary on possible



interpolations in or the authenticity of any of the Pauline Letters, it is the personal opinion of this author that the prevailing scholarship on this topic—which supports the identification of certain inauthentic letters as well as interpolated verses—has great integrity. The analysis presented in the rest of this paper is based on that premise.

In addition to scholarship regarding inauthentic letters and interpolations in the Pauline Letters, understanding verses in light of Paul's historical context has assisted in recovering what is widely believed to be Paul's more egalitarian original message. For example, in 1 Corinthians Paul declares that a woman should be veiled in meetings when she prays and prophesies, while a man should remain bareheaded. A conventional interpretation of this instruction is that it was an example of Paul's subjugation of women. However, Sara Ruden, a scholar of ancient literature, believes that Paul's insistence on the veiling of women in his churches was a movement toward egalitarianism. At that time the veil was a sign of purity, honor, and authority<sup>58</sup> that was legally denied less fortunate women such as slaves, prostitutes, or those labeled 'adulteress.' Ruden states:

I think Paul's rule aimed toward an outrageous equality. All Christian women were to cover their heads in church, without distinction of beauty, wealth, [or] respectability... This had never happened in any public gathering before... This, I believe, was Paul's ingenious combination of common sense and radical defiance for dealing with a very touchy set of issues.<sup>59</sup>

It is noteworthy that the rigid roles assigned to women in the verses proven or suspected to be inauthentic contradict Paul's overall egalitarian treatment of women and his authentic teaching that: "There is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."<sup>60</sup> In this verse and others like it, Paul challenges the gender prejudice of his time.<sup>61</sup> There is also evidence that he backed up his teachings in action. Although

surrounded by a religious culture that denied women leadership roles, Paul's authenticated letters demonstrate that he supported the leadership of women. For example, he refers to Priscilla as a "fellow worker in Christ,"<sup>62</sup> Euodia and Syntyche are described as "co-workers" whose names "are recorded in the book of life,"<sup>63</sup> Phoebe is named as a "deacon,"<sup>64</sup> and Junia is praised as an "apostle of Christ."<sup>65</sup> Paul's genuine letters abound with appreciation for the leadership of women in the early Christian communities. In addition, Paul taught a mutual respect for and responsibility between husband and wife that was revolutionary in his day. For example, he states, "In the Lord, woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman."<sup>66</sup> And "The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband."<sup>67</sup> This was radical teaching in Paul's Hellenistic world where women were considered property in marriage.

In short, the arguments supporting the identification of inauthentic letters and interpolations, along with increased consideration of historical context—all of which have resulted in a paradigm shift in modern Pauline studies—present substantial evidence that a "new perspective on Paul"<sup>68</sup> is justified; one that recognizes him as being progressive for his day in the area of social justice, including gender equity. From the point of view of studies on the "new Paul," contributing to the process of the realization of the equality of women and men is something that Táhirih and Paul have in common.

### **Parallel 9: Martyrdom During the Time of Wholesale Massacre of Early Believers**

If tradition faithfully carries the truth of Paul's death, he and Táhirih may share another parallel—martyrdom at a time of wholesale massacre of early believers.

Táhirih was martyred during the time of the slaughter of the followers of the Báb after the attempt on the life of the Sháh in August of 1852. 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains:

*Thus she remained, a helpless captive. Then came the attempt on the life of the Sháh;<sup>69</sup> a farman was issued; she was sentenced to death. Saying she was summoned to the Prime Minister's, they arrived to lead her away from the Kalantar's house. She bathed her face and hands, arrayed herself in a costly dress, and scented with attar of roses she came out of the house.*

*They brought her into a garden, where the headsmen waited; but these wavered and then refused to end her life. A slave was found, far gone in drunkenness; besotted, vicious, black of heart. And he strangled Táhirih. He forced a scarf between her lips and rammed it down her throat. Then they lifted up her unsullied body and flung it in a well, there in the garden, and over it threw down earth and stones. But Táhirih rejoiced; she had heard with a light heart the tidings of her martyrdom; she set her eyes on the supernal Kingdom and offered up her life. [MF 200]*

While the circumstances of Táhirih's martyrdom are known, there is no official record of Paul's passing. However, it is traditionally believed that Paul was martyred around 64 A.D. after the burning of Rome during the slaughter of Christians ordered by Emperor Nero.<sup>70</sup> A passage in *1 Clement*, an early Christian letter written from Rome to the Corinthians, suggests that Paul was killed in Rome. The letter states:

Through jealousy and strife, Paul showed the way to the prize of endurance; seven times he was in bonds, he was exiled, he was stoned, he was a herald both in the East and in the West, he gained the noble fame of his faith, he taught righteousness to all the world, and when he had reached the limits of the West he gave his testimony [*martyrēsas*, or "was martyred"] before the rulers, and thus passed from the world and was taken up into the Holy Place—the greatest example of endurance.<sup>71</sup>

Although not corroborated by numerous sources, it is a common “historical guess” that “Paul, and presumably Peter as well, died among those many Christians martyred by Nero in 64 A.D.”<sup>72</sup> Both Táhirih and Paul suffered for their Cause; Táhirih suffered martyrdom, and it is traditionally believed that Paul suffered martyrdom as well.

In summary, both Táhirih and Paul:

1. Had mystical visions of the Manifestation of God before their conversions.
2. Are recognized for singular initiatives that contributed significantly to distinguishing the new Revelation from the old.
3. Were brilliant communicators.
4. Were vilified from within their respective new religious communities.
5. Made successful appeals to government authorities.
6. Were rescued by small bands of co-religionists early in their ministries.
7. Never attained the physical presence of her/his Lord.
8. Contributed to the process of realizing the equality of women and men.
9. Táhirih suffered martyrdom; tradition holds that Paul was also martyred.

## **Conclusion**

### **A Type of Early Apostle—This Time, a Woman**

The parallels in the ministries of Táhirih and Paul paint a picture of a type of early apostle who bears much of the burden of distinguishing new Revelation from the old: a pure channel with the capacity to envision a new kind of community; a

person of action at once valued by and threatening to his or her co-religionists; a kind of maverick in the new religious order. It is notable that this role—which in the Christian Dispensation was accomplished by a man—was, in the Bahá'í Dispensation, carried out by a woman. Táhirih's ministry is evidence that spiritual qualities and capacities of service know no gender restrictions.

### Knowledge Leads to Unity

In the Persian Bayán the Báb describes the Letters of the Living as the first to have knelt before the throne of God:

*Let there be no doubt that man's glory is in testifying unto God's unity, in recognizing Him, acknowledging His justice, obeying Him and seeking His good pleasure. It is, however, certain that these sacred souls have attained, before anyone else, unto that which is the quintessence of all excellence and glory. Further, there can be no doubt that they were the first Lights who bowed down before God, accepted the verses He hath revealed unto His Báb, and proclaimed them to the world. (Persian Bayán 1:2<sup>73</sup>)*

The spiritual station of the Letters of the Living is unimaginably glorious—they inspire love, admiration, and humility in the Bahá'í community. It is especially interesting, then, that the Báb continues His commentary by stating that the Letters of the Living are the return of the spiritual qualities of the holy souls of *each Dispensation* before them:

*They are the lights which in the past have eternally prostrated themselves and will prostrate themselves eternally in the future, before the celestial throne. In each Dispensation, they are called by different names amongst the people, and in each Revelation, their individual names are also changed. Yet, the names of*

*their inmost realities, which refer unto God, are manifest in their hearts.* [Persian Bayán 1:2<sup>74</sup>]

Although there is no direct comparison of Táhírih and Paul in the Bahá'í Writings, the concept of the Letters of the Living as the return of the spiritual qualities of the first believers of past Dispensations seems to be demonstrated in their ministries. In several ways, Táhírih and Paul carried out similar functions, rose to similar challenges, and, in doing so, demonstrated similar spiritual qualities. The principle of progressive revelation recognizes every Manifestation of God as the spiritual return of the Manifestations of the past [KI 152]; according to the above passages from the Bayán, we might also understand the apostles in any religious history to be the “return” of the spiritual qualities of the apostles before them. To reflect on this point—that the beloved figures in one’s religious history are, in a spiritual sense, the return of the beloved figures of other religious traditions—could be a helpful step toward unity. Because of their affinity in mission, circumstances, and spiritual qualities, to love and revere Táhírih is, in a sense, to love and revere Paul. In the same sense, to love and revere Mulláh Husayn, Quddús, Vahid, and all of the Letters of the Living is to love and revere Peter, Phillip, James, and all of the Apostles of Christ.

When reaching out in goodwill to those of different religious traditions, there is, perhaps, no better strategy than to authentically love and revere the spiritual giants of those traditions. Bahá'u'lláh states: “*Cleave unto that which draweth you together and uniteth you*” [GWB CXI]. Knowledge of the parallels in the ministries of Táhírih and Paul is valuable because these parallels remind us of the shared spiritual ancestry of the Bahá'í Faith and Christianity and prompt us to hold onto that unity.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alexander, Loveday. “Acts” in *The Oxford Bible Commentary*. Barton, John and John Muddiman. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 1028-1061.
- Balyuzi, H. M. *Eminent Bahá'ís in the Time of Bahá'u'lláh*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1985.
- Balyuzi, H. M. *The Báb—The Herald of the Days*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1973.
- Barclay, John. “1 Corinthians” in *The Oxford Bible Commentary*. Ed. John Barton and John Muddiman. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 1108-1133.
- Beker, J. Christaan. *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980.
- Borg, Marcus J. and John Dominic Crossan. *The First Paul: Reclaiming the Radical Visionary Behind the Church's Conservative Icon*. New York: HarperCollins, 2009.
- Bristow, John T. *What Paul Really Said About Women: The Apostle's Liberating Views on Equality in Marriage, Leadership, and Love*. New York: HarperCollins, 1991.
- Cameron, Glenn and Wendi Momen. *A Basic Bahá'í Chronology*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1996; [www.bahai-library.com/chronology](http://www.bahai-library.com/chronology).
- Crossan, John Dominic and Jonathan L. Reed. *In Search of Paul: How Jesus's Apostle Opposed Rome's Empire with God's Kingdom. A New Vision of Paul's Words & World*. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2004.
- Donaldson, Terence L. “Introduction to the Pauline Corpus” in *The Oxford Bible Commentary*. Ed. John Barton and John Muddiman. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 1062-1083.
- Drury, Clare. “The Pastoral Epistles” in *The Oxford Bible Commentary*. Ed. John Barton and John Muddiman. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 1220-1233.
- Dunn, J. D. G. “Ephesians” in *The Oxford Bible Commentary*. Ed. John Barton and John Muddiman. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 1165-1179.
- Elliott, Karen M. *Women in Ministry and the Writings of Paul*. Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2010.
- Elliott, Neil. *Liberating Paul—The Justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994.

- Esler, Philip F. “2 Thessalonians” in *The Oxford Bible Commentary*. Ed. John Barton and John Muddiman. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 11213-1220.
- Gager, John G. *Reinventing Paul*. Oxford: University Press, 2000.
- Gulpaygani, Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl. *The Brilliant Proofs*. Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1997.
- Hill, Craig C. “Romans” in *The Oxford Bible Commentary*. Ed. John Barton and John Muddiman. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 1083-1108.
- Luedemann, Gerd. *Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles: Studies in Chronology*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984.
- MacDonald, Margaret. “2 Corinthians” in *The Oxford Bible Commentary*. Ed. Barton, John and John Muddiman. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 1134-1151.
- Murphy-O’Connor, OP. “Colossians” in *The Oxford Bible Commentary*. Ed. John Barton and John Muddiman. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 1191-1199.
- Nakhjavání, Bahiyyih. *Asking Questions—A Challenge to Fundamentalism*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1990.
- Root, Martha. *Táhirih the Pure*. Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1981.
- Ruden, Sarah. *Paul Among the People: The Apostle Reinterpreted and Reimagined in His Own Time*. New York: Pantheon, 2010.
- Saiedi, Nader. *Gate of the Heart: Understanding the Writings of the Bááb*. Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1995.
- Schnelle, Udo. *Apostle Paul: His Life and Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005.
- Segal, Alan F. *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.
- Taherzadeh, Adib. *The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh*. Vol. 2. Oxford: George Ronald, 1977.
- Taherzadeh, Adib. *The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh*. Vol. 3. Oxford: George Ronald, 1983.
- Taherzadeh, Adib. *The Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1992.
- Universal House of Justice. Memorandum written by the Research Department of the Bahá’í World Centre. “Whether the Apostle Paul was a False Teacher.” 22 February 1998.



Universal House of Justice. Memorandum written by the Research Department of the Bahá'í World Centre. 10 January 1988.

Wills, Garry. *What Paul Meant*. NY: Viking, 2006.

Wyschogrod, Michael. "A Jewish View of Christianity," in *Toward a Theological Encounter—Jewish Understanding of Christianity*, Ed. Leon Klenicki. NY: Paulist Press, 1991.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Describing Táhirih's high spiritual station, the Guardian states that Táhirih is, along with Bahiyyih Khánum, *comparable in rank to those immortal heroines: Sarah, Ásíyih, the Virgin Mary, [and] Fátimah*. [GPB 75; MBW 74]

<sup>2</sup> Paul is mentioned favorably in the Bahá'í Writings: Bahá'u'lláh refers to him as *Saint Paul* [ESW 91]; 'Abdu'l-Bahá states, *One's conduct must be like the conduct of Paul* [SWAB 189.5]; and in a London talk 'Abdu'l-Bahá refers to him as *Saint Paul the Great Apostle* [ABL 23]. In the opinion of biblical scholars John Dominic Crossan and Marcus Borg, "Paul is second only to Jesus as the most important person in the origins of Christianity."<sup>2</sup> [Borg and Crossan, p. 1; See also Donaldson, p. 1062; Hill, p. 1083]

<sup>3</sup> "The Bahá'í community ... has its origins in the Bábí movement, a religion which began in Iran in 1844. Its founder, Sayyid 'Alí Muḥammad Shirazi, who took the title the Báb (1819–1850), was executed in 1850 in the midst of a general persecution of the Bábís that culminated in a general massacre in 1852. In about 1866, Mírzá Husayn 'Alí Nuri (1817–1892), who took the title Bahá'u'lláh, openly claimed to be the religious leader prophesied by the Báb in his writings. Since more than 90% of the surviving Bábís became followers of Bahá'u'lláh, Bahá'ís, at about this time, it is legitimate from the sociological and historical view-point to regard these two movements, the Bábís and the Bahá'ís, as one movement: the Bahá'í Faith" [Momen, p. 221].

<sup>4</sup> In this paper, by "conversion" is meant the recognition and following of the Manifestation of God in a new Revelation, not the denial or rejection of the traditional religion. (Concerning the nature of Paul's conversion, see Segal, p. 117, 129-30; Gager, p. 53)

<sup>5</sup> Táhirih is also known as Qurratu'l-'Ayn ("Solace of the Eyes") and Zarrin-Taj ("Crown of Gold").

<sup>6</sup> Mujtahid: an Islamic religious leader.

<sup>7</sup> The "*Ahsánu'l-Qisás*," the Báb's commentary on the *Súrih of Joseph*, was called the *Qur'án of the Bábís*, and was translated from Arabic into Persian by Táhirih [MF 191].

- 
- <sup>8</sup> Philippians 3:5
- <sup>9</sup> Crossan and Reed, p. 75
- <sup>10</sup> Paul states: “For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God” [1 Corinthians 15:9].
- <sup>11</sup> Acts 9:1-9
- <sup>12</sup> Macdonald, pp. 1134-35.
- <sup>13</sup> 2 Corinthians 12; More visions followed—Paul refers to visions that he received over a fourteen year period [2 Corinthians 12:2].
- <sup>14</sup> Segal, p. 70
- <sup>15</sup> The Conference of Badasht took place from 17 June to 26 July 1848 in the Badasht hamlet in the region of Mazindaran, Persia [GPB 33].
- <sup>16</sup> In the *Dawn-Breakers* Nabíl describes Táhirih’s announcement as it appeared to the group: an unexpected appearance that aggravated Quddús who represented the more conservative of the believers. However, the Guardian explains that this apparent confrontation was planned by Bahá’u’lláh with Táhirih and Quddús in order to educate the followers of the Báb and still safeguard Táhirih. The Guardian states, “*Quddús, regarded as the exponent of the conservative element within it, affected, in pursuance of a pre-conceived plan designed to mitigate the alarm and consternation which such a conference was sure to arouse, to oppose the seemingly extremist views advocated by the impetuous Táhirih*” [GPB 31]. As stated by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “*there was a wisdom in it*” [MF 2000].
- <sup>17</sup> Segal, p. 80
- <sup>18</sup> The terms “Christian” and “Christianity” were not used at the time of Paul. These terms evolved decades after Paul’s ministry [Gager, p. 8].
- <sup>19</sup> Beker, p. 74
- <sup>20</sup> Ruden, p. xvi
- <sup>21</sup> It should be noted that this conflict was within the Jesus-movement itself, not between the Jesus-movement and the Jews. The Jewish communities in the Roman Empire had a history of welcoming Gentile participants (“Gentile synagogue adherents” or “God-fearers”) in services and observances without pressure to convert to Judaism [Borg and Crossan pp. 87-90; also see Gager p. 35].
- <sup>22</sup> Acts 15:1
- <sup>23</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:6
- <sup>24</sup> Galatians 6:15
- <sup>25</sup> Acts 15:2
- <sup>26</sup> SAQ 20:20; Schnelle, p. 123
- <sup>27</sup> Wyschogrod, p. 119
- <sup>28</sup> Galatians 2:7

- 
- <sup>29</sup> Borg & Crossan, p. 217
- <sup>30</sup> Segal, p. 114, 265
- <sup>31</sup> Galatians 3:28
- <sup>32</sup> Schnelle, p. 138; Borg and Crossan, p. 2; Segal, p. 161
- <sup>33</sup> Root, p. 85
- <sup>34</sup> Donaldson, p. 1062
- <sup>35</sup> Beker, pp. 62-63
- <sup>36</sup> Gager, p. 69
- <sup>37</sup> Segal, p. 191
- <sup>38</sup> 2 Corinthians 1
- <sup>39</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá cited in Balyuzi, *‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, pp. 353-354
- <sup>40</sup> Acts 16
- <sup>41</sup> Acts 22:25
- <sup>42</sup> Acts 28:20, 30
- <sup>43</sup> Acts 9:25
- <sup>44</sup> Segal, p. xi, 13, 14
- <sup>45</sup> Wills, p. 1; Gager, p. 3-4; Neil Elliott, pp. 3-24
- <sup>46</sup> See Wills, pp. 89-104; Borg and Crossan, pp. 48-58; Karen Elliott, pp. 41-65; Neil Elliott, pp. 52-54
- <sup>47</sup> Neil Elliot, p. 226; Karen Elliott, pp. 63-65
- <sup>48</sup> Factors that are considered in textual analysis include style, language, vocabulary, theology, and historical indicators [see Borg and Crossan pp. 14-15; Dunn, p. 1166; Drury, p. 1220].
- <sup>49</sup> The Pauline Letters (Epistles), so named because they begin with Paul’s name and therefore appear to claim Pauline authorship, are, in order of appearance in the New Testament: Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon.
- <sup>50</sup> There is wide agreement in New Testament scholarship that 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, and Ephesians are pseudonymous letters [Drury, p. 1220; Dunn, p. 1166], while Colossians and 2 Thessalonians are “hotly debated” [Murphy-O’Connor, p. 1191; Esler, p. 1213].
- <sup>51</sup> J. D. G. Dunn and other scholars describe the pseudonymous letters as understandable considering the accepted tradition of the time of pseudonymously writing in the name of a revered teacher. However, Neil Elliott states that these letters are not typical pseudonymous writings, that is, “transparent fictions”, but are, instead, deliberate forgeries “written to subvert other second-century Christian communities that had preserved elements of Paul’s truth” [Neil Elliott, p. 31].

---

<sup>52</sup> 1 Timothy 2:11-12

<sup>53</sup> Neil Elliott, p. 21

<sup>54</sup> Gager, p. 146

<sup>55</sup> Karen Elliott, pp. 63-64; see also Barclay, p. 1130

<sup>56</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:33-36

<sup>57</sup> Karen Elliott, p. 65. See also Wills, p. 98; Crossan and Reed, p. 69; Borg and Crossan pp. 48-58; Neil Elliott, pp. 52-54

<sup>58</sup> To this point, consider: have you ever seen a portrait or sculpture of the Virgin Mary without a veil on her head?

<sup>59</sup> Ruden, pp. 87-88

<sup>60</sup> Galatians 3:28

<sup>61</sup> Karen Elliott, pp. 41-6

<sup>62</sup> Romans 16:3

<sup>63</sup> Philippians 4:3

<sup>64</sup> Romans 16:1

<sup>65</sup> Romans 16:7

<sup>66</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:11

<sup>67</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:3

<sup>68</sup> Neil Elliott, p. 22

<sup>69</sup> “On August 15, 1852, a half-crazed Bábí youth wounded the Sháh with shot from a pistol. The assailant was instantly killed” [MF 200].

<sup>70</sup> Borg and Crossan, pp. 220-221

<sup>71</sup> 1 Clement 5:5-7 cited in Borg and Crossan, pp. 220-221

<sup>72</sup> Borg and Crossan, p. 222

<sup>73</sup> Cited in *Saiedi*, p. 271-272

<sup>74</sup> Cited in *Saiedi*, p. 272



# The Language of the Heart:

## From Dream Language towards Understanding the Language of the Heart

Wolfgang Klebel

In this paper, an attempt is made to describe a new understanding of the heart and the way it is expressing itself. The assumption is made that what used to be called the human soul, is expressing itself in two different ways, using either the brain or the heart for this self-expression in the physical world. At the present time, usually the only acceptable way to study this is to ignore the heart and only talk about the brain's logical and rational way of expressing itself. That there is more to human self-understanding and self-expression to others is usual not even considered.

What is crucial in this investigation is the fact that we have awareness and self-consciousness only in the brain, i.e., we know that we think and what we think, we are aware of what happens, when we think and then talk or act. While this awareness is limited, and there are things that are happening in the brain, of which we are not aware, like how we balance our bicycle when we ride it; in general, we know when we think. Our thinking always can express itself in words or actions and we can communicate with others in that way.

What happens in the heart is usually not in our awareness. Different from the brain, the heart does not express itself in words, but in feelings only. We get angry, or loving, we feel disgust or annoyance etc. When these feelings become aware in the brain we know about them, but we still do not know what had happened in the heart to create these feeling. It is important that the heart expresses these feelings and they are expressed in body language, even before the brain becomes aware of it.

We all are familiar of the person who gets angry and who shows the anger so that others can see it. When they tell him, you are angry, he would scream back, "I am not angry," because his body shows the anger, but his brain was not yet aware of it. The conclusion of this event is evident, the feelings start in the heart, are expressed in the body first, and only later will the brain become aware of these feelings. Every good actor knows that the bodily expression must happen before the feelings are verbally expressed; otherwise, the acting looks wooden and artificial. Only when the bodily expression is prior to the verbal expression does the acting look natural. The same is true for a singer and we like dancing, because we can feel what the dancer expresses.

Another issue must be stated before the findings of this paper are described and correlated with the Writings of the Bahá'í Faith. When this writer presents his understanding of any statement of the Bahá'í Faith, i.e., of the Writings of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh or of their official interpreters, 'Abdu'l-Bahá or Shoghi Effendi, he only expresses his personal understanding and does not in any way speak for the faith, leaving it always open to every reader to find other or different interpretations of the same Writings. It is hoped that the difference of opinions will find a conclusion, as in any true consultation, which is coming closer to the truth, and can be found helpful to others.

The ability to correlate the Bahá'í Revelation with modern thinking in science and philosophy was encouraged by Shoghi Effendi in several places like the following.

It is useful to review a number of statements written by Shoghi Effendi on this subject. To a believer who had completed advanced academic studies in a subject related to the Teachings the Guardian stated, in a letter written on his behalf:

It is hoped that all the Bahá'í students will follow the noble example you have set before them and will, henceforth, be led to investigate and analyze the principles of the Faith and to correlate them with the modern aspects of philosophy and science. Every intelligent and thoughtful young Bahá'í should always approach the Cause in this way, for therein lies the very essence of the principle of independent investigation of truth.<sup>1</sup>

Returning to the theme of this article, there is a connection between the heart and the word. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that language is opening the box of the heart, which contains the heart's *mysteries and secrets*. Language is unlocking the heart so we can be aware and understand what is in the heart.

*... the function of language is to portray the mysteries and secrets of human hearts. The heart is like a box, and language is the key. Only by using the key can we open the box and observe the gems it contains. [PUP 60]*

Bahá'u'lláh tells us in the *Seven Valleys* that the wayfarer in his mystical travel after having reached the Valley of Unity with the True One, experiences the new mystical life and asserts that this can only be communicated from heart to heart.

*The tongue faileth in describing these three Valleys, and speech falleth short. The pen steppeth not into this*



*region; the ink leaveth only a blot. In these planes, the nightingale of the heart hath other songs and secrets, which make the heart to stir and the soul to clamor, but this mystery of inner meaning may be whispered only from heart to heart, confided only from breast to breast. Only heart to heart can speak the bliss of mystic knowers...* [SVFV 30]

Clearly language is not only connected with the heart, but there is a language of the heart, which is distinct from the regular logical and discursive language we call the language of the brain. In this paper we will look into this difference between the brain language and the heart language and will explore how they work together.

The heart in the Bahá'í Writings is given a special meaning; concepts like the city of the heart and the citadel of the heart are emphasizing the importance of the heart. The heart is described as possessing sensory capacities. Bahá'u'lláh talks about the “*eye of thine heart*” [KI 90], “*ear of his inmost heart*” [SLH 86], “*hearts have been sorely shaken*” [PM 12] and the “*wise and understanding heart*” [ESW 65] and suggests that one “*Ponder this in thine heart*” [ESW 74].

Bahá'u'lláh seems to speak about the senses of the heart, attributing to the heart sensual capacity like it exists in the sense of hearing.

*The senses of hearing, of the heart, and the like, are similarly to be reckoned among the gifts with which the human body is endowed.* [GWB 193]

Bahá'u'lláh's use of the concept of the heart as a metaphor is not scientifically or logically inconsistent with recent research on the heart as a physical organ. There is no necessary conflict between the two so in this paper I will demonstrate how the metaphorical and literal concepts of the heart can work together. In this writer's opinion, there is a new understanding

of the relationship between the material and the spiritual presented in the Bahá'í Writings, which is often expressed in statements about the seen and the unseen, or the manifest and the hidden of reality. Since this affects the understanding of the heart, it will be presented first, before we can talk about the language of the heart.

Based on this understanding, Bahá'u'lláh's statements can be correlated with the findings of modern neurocardiology, which describes the "little brain" of the heart possessing perception, memory and decision making ability.

Recent work in the relatively new field of Neurocardiology has firmly established that the heart is a sensory organ and a sophisticated information encoding and processing center. Its circuitry enables it to learn, remember, and make functional decisions independent of the cranial brain.<sup>2</sup>

Considering the role of the heart, the question raised in this presentation is about the form and style of the language of the heart. Another issue is the question, in what way is this language different from our normal language and thinking as it is developed in the human brain? There are about 2,000 heart transplants made in the USA annually, giving us a sufficiently large number to study what is in the physical heart and how the recipients of these transplants experience the new heart. There is evidence that dreams can be transplanted together with the heart from one person to another. Therefore, it can be concluded that the language of the heart is similar to the language of dreams.

Studying dream language the following distinction needs to be made.

The logic that we miss in the dream work is the syntactical logic of speech—the syntactical logic that is essential for the framing and testing of propositions and reasoning from them.<sup>3</sup>

Consequently, dreams express syntactical logic differently, for example, causality is expressed in terms of continuity, contradictions and conflicts are described by following pictures that are contradictory, as will be exemplified below.

Another conclusion is made by this author from seeing many patients with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Memories heavily loaded with emotions seem to be located in the heart and not in the brain; therefore, they can be transplanted with the heart and are difficult to remove and will disturb the patient for a long time. This sheds some light at some fundamental truth about the heart revealed in the Bahá'í Writings.

It can be stated that the therapy based on this idea was almost always successful in eliminating the disturbing intrusive memories and nightmares of these patients, suffering from Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. When my patients wholeheartedly remembered, or actually re-lived the emotions connected with these disturbing memories, the feelings were released and the memories stopped being intrusive and disturbing. That this process happens in the heart is an assumption this psychologist made, because in regular memories, there is no connection of memory with strong and disturbing feelings, and placing feelings in the heart suggests that these memories need to be placed there too. Additionally, as will be explained below, heart transplants tell us that dreams, especially traumatic dreams, are transplanted with the heart to the recipient patient.

That there is more going on in the heart than previously known, is expressed by the Báb as well, because He has placed the ability to understand the middle way between extremes exclusively into the heart.

*Such conclusive truth hath been revealed through the gaze of the heart, and not that of intellect. For intellect conceives not save limited things. Verily, bound by the realm of limitation, men are unable*

*to gaze upon things simultaneously in their manifold aspects. This it is perplexing for them to comprehend that lofty station. No one can recognize the truth of the Middle Way between the two extreme poles except after attaining unto the gate of the heart and beholding the realities of the worlds, visible and unseen. [Provisional translation by Nader Saiedi]<sup>4</sup>*

When Bahá'u'lláh reveals that the heart is the seat of the Revelation, we need to consider that it is the human heart where this connection between the spiritual message and the physical experience happens and we need to understand the language of the heart to understand the Revelation as it is written in the books and scriptures:

*Unlock, O people, the gates of the hearts of men with the keys of the remembrance of Him Who is the Remembrance of God and the Source of wisdom amongst you. He hath chosen out of the whole world the hearts of His servants, and made them each a seat for the revelation of His glory. [GWB 296]*

In conclusion, it needs to be said that the faculty of reason, which is an endowment of the spiritual soul, uses different bodily instruments, i.e., the brain and the heart. They always need to work together, but they have different languages, so that spiritual truth has to be reasonable even in the logical linguistic sense, and the heart has to be pure in a moral sense. Otherwise, it will contaminate logical reason or even pervert it. Clearly we need both, a pure heart and clear mind to understand the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

The relationship between matter and spirit has occupied philosophers throughout history, from materialisms of Democritus to Hobbes' Leviathan and finally to Karl Marx and the dialectical materialism of Communism, as described by Stalin. There is the dualistic solution as presented by Descartes, which is dominating modern science and modern thinking, and

the conflict between Plato and Aristotle, about what is reality, the eternal ideas of Plato or the concrete reality as presented in the physics and metaphysics of Aristotle, which conflict has never really been resolved.

In recent times, Teilhard de Chardin has attempted a novel solution by stating that matter and spirit are fundamentally connected, are dependent on each other and are in a process of development that has come in our days to a significant solution. Teilhard does not see matter as very different from spirit; like Descartes, he acknowledges an essential connection between matter and spirit.

It [the spirit] in no way represents some entity, which is independent of matter or antagonistic to it, some force locked up in, or floating in, the physical world. By spirit I mean 'the spirit of synthesis and sublimation', in which is painfully concentrated, through endless attempts and setbacks, the potency of unity scattered throughout the universal multiple: spirit, which is born within, and as a function of matter.<sup>5</sup>

Here we have an understanding that matter can be described as diverse and multiple, while spirit presents unity and integration. Both spirit and matter are together born from each other in this description. The Bahá'í concept of Unity in Diversity can be applied to this description of matter and spirit as well. They need to be seen together and not separated. They are different and the same, as Bahá'u'lláh stated when describing the origin of the world.

*That which hath been in existence had existed before,  
but not in the form thou seest today.*

*The world of existence came into being  
through the heat generated from the interaction between  
the active force and that which is its recipient.*

*These two are the same, yet they are different.*

*Thus doth the Great Announcement inform thee about this glorious structure. Such as communicate the generating influence and such as receive its impact are indeed created through the irresistible Word of God which is the Cause of the entire creation, while all else besides His Word are but the creatures and the effects thereof. Verily thy Lord is the Expounder, the All-Wise.*  
[TB 140]

This verse from the Tablet of Wisdom by Bahá'u'lláh was originally one paragraph and is here separated into its meaningful parts for better understanding. I will present here my personal understanding of this verse, Bahá'u'lláh calls a *glorious structure*. This certainly is not the only possible understanding of this verse, nor is it of any authority. Yet, it is the best I can present and it is open to critique. Needless to say, it follows the prompting of my heart and has become for me a guidance into the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh. Here is my understanding as related to the topic of this paper.

The reason, I think that this is an important statement is the fact that it is a change from the Worldview as presented in the Christian tradition towards a new worldview as presented in the Bahá'í Writings. For Christian philosophy, which follows the Platonic tradition, the spirit is good and the matter is bad, or at least less valuable. Dealing with the world is less valuable than going in the monastery and dedicating oneself to the contemplative life. Bahá'u'lláh told monks to leave the monastery and become active in the world. Work in the world is regarded by Him as equal to prayer if it is performed in the right intention. Consequently, both spirit and matter are created by God, are valuable and the difference is only that the heart should be pure and dedicated to God, while it is detached from everything that is worldly. The difference is in the ethic, in the direction of the life towards God not in the matter as such. The main obstacle for this is vain imagination that places our desire into something worldly and false.

Bahá'u'lláh, in this verse, responds to a question about the origin of this world. He speaks of two principles, *the active force and that which is its recipient*, in this description following seemingly the Aristotelian idea of form and primal matter. What differentiates this verse from Aristotle is clearly stated as well. For one, Bahá'u'lláh introduces heat into this understanding, somehow comparable with the idea of modern physics about the role of energy in the creation and in the development of the world.

Then He says something surprising, namely: *These two are the same, yet they are different*. Does that not mean they are different in one aspect and the same in another? When questioning how they are the same, Bahá'u'lláh answers this later when stating, *they are indeed created through the irresistible Word of God which is the Cause of the entire creation*, this means they are the same because they are equally created by God. Their difference is in their function of being polar opposites. Here again we have Unity in Diversity. Two opposite principles exist in Unity of being created.

Then Bahá'u'lláh describes further that all differences of reality are caused by these two principles, created by God's Word when stating *all else besides His Word are but the creatures and the effects thereof*. This understanding fits well into the Bahá'í concept of inwardness versus outwardness, or hidden versus manifest, or seen versus unseen, which describe the external, material aspect of this world and the internal spiritual aspect of reality. The world is always both seen and unseen as in this Verse:

*Glorified be God Who hath vouchsafed this grace that encompasseth all things, whether seen or unseen!* [SLH 25]

Bahá'u'lláh uses these words frequently and is always describing this created world in those terms as seen and unseen, as hidden and manifest. Concluding we must say that spirit and matter in the Bahá'í understanding are not separate, they rather

constitute a unity in their opposition. This understanding needs to be applied to the human person as well, because Bahá'u'lláh has stated

*And thus firstness and lastness, outwardness and inwardness are, in the sense referred to, true of thyself...*  
[SVFV 27]

From this consideration, we should conclude that the heart is constituted in this inwardness and outwardness as well; so that the material heart is the seen aspect and what we may call the spiritual heart, is expressing the inwardness of the human reality. This is much more than a metaphor or an analogy combining the different use of the word heart. Therefore, Bahá'u'lláh stated that the heart *is one and undivided* [PB 52] and the direction of the heart needs to be as well one and undivided towards God and not towards the world.

In the following verse, Bahá'u'lláh describes the world in a specific way as “*the worlds of unity and diversity, of variation and oneness, of limitation and detachment.*” In my personal understanding of this Verse, Bahá'u'lláh appears to explain what He said in the other statement about the two aspects of creation, i.e., “*the active force and its recipient.*” Here as well always both sides are mentioned, the inner and outer side of reality.

*Please God, that we avoid the land of denial, and advance into the ocean of acceptance, so that we may perceive, with an eye purged from all conflicting elements, the worlds of unity and diversity, of variation and oneness, of limitation and detachment, and wing our flight unto the highest and innermost sanctuary of the inner meaning of the Word of God.* [KI 160]

The three statements about ‘Unity and Diversity’, ‘Variation and Oneness’, ‘Limitation and Detachment’ always speak about the same two reality principles in different words. Unity is in



polar opposition to Diversity, as Oneness is to Variation. The dynamic side of this opposition is explained in the next word, when Bahá'u'lláh speaks about Limitation and Detachment. The physical aspect of reality, expressed in variation and multiplicity, is the limited aspect of the world and needs to be treated with detachment, in order that we experience the Divine Unity and Oneness in the spiritual realm. This is indicated by the last sentence that we wing out flight in this process unto “*the highest and innermost sanctuary of the inner meaning of the Word of God.*” This Word of God is the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh that is experienced in our heart.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains this twofold aspect of reality further when He is talking about physical atoms held together by love.

*As we look upon the universe, we observe that all composite beings or existing phenomena are made up primarily of single elements bound together by a power of attraction. Through this power of attraction, cohesion has become manifest between atoms of these composing elements. The resultant being is a phenomenon of the lower contingent type. The power of cohesion expressed in the mineral kingdom is in reality love or affinity manifested in a low degree according to the exigencies of the mineral world. [FWU 88]*

‘Abdu’l-Bahá describes that the power of connection in the physical world is the power of attraction, He leaves no doubt, that this is a spiritual power, when he said that it is actually love of a lower degree that has this effect. In other words, he claims that the universe is held together by a spiritual force, something that can be compared with the unseen aspect in Bahá'u'lláh's description of the world of existence.

Writing in *Star of the West*, an early Bahá'í, Mírzá ‘Abu’l-Faḍl, in a speech given to Mrs. Corinne True, in the summer of 1914, explained it this way and placed the human heart in the middle of this connection between spirit and matter. He

compared the world with the body of man, seeing the world as an organism, as a unity composed of spirit and matter and the heart as being the place where these two aspects connect.

The likeness of the world is like the body of man; the likeness of God is like the spirit in the body. As the spirit pervades and controls the whole body, so likewise God pervades and controls the whole universe. As none of the limbs on the body of man are in communication with the spirit in the body of man and not one of the five senses can ever feel the spirit, therefore, God has created the heart in man to be the central ruler and has endowed it with two phases, spiritual and material. Through its spiritual phase the heart absorbs the commandments of the spirit, and then through its material phase it transmits them to all parts of the body through the agency of the organs, veins, arteries, muscles, etc.<sup>6</sup>

Historically, it needs to be remembered here, that philosophy until recently has never understood this unity in diversity of matter and spirit, in this way. Only in the Bahá'í writings, and much later in the writings of Teilhard Chardin, this rather new and revolutionary idea was presented. Therefore, in this paper we will not make the conventional separation of the heart as a physical concept, and the word "heart" used in a metaphorical sense for the spiritual aspect of man, following the statement quoted above: "God has created the heart in man to be the central ruler and has endowed it with two phases, spiritual and material."

These statements seem to be based on a description of the sympathetic nervous system by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who answered a question about the autonomous nervous system with a brief but interesting statement about this connection in the autonomic nervous system that is connected in the heart.

*The powers of the sympathetic nerve are neither entirely physical nor spiritual, but are between the two. The*

*nerve is connected with both. Its phenomena shall be perfect when its spiritual and physical relations are normal.*

*When the material world and the divine world are well co-related, when the hearts become heavenly and the aspirations grow pure and divine, perfect connection shall take place. Then shall this power produce a perfect manifestation. Physical and spiritual diseases will then receive absolute healing.*

*The exposition is brief. Ponder and thou shalt understand the meaning. Although, on account of lack of time, the answer is short, by close reflection it shall be made long. [TAB 308]<sup>7</sup>*

These and similar statements seem to be based on the following statement of Bahá'u'lláh, Who in my opinion, attributes to the heart all the spiritual qualities, seemingly not distinguishing what we today call the spiritual concept of heart as a metaphor, which is taken from the physical heart. Obviously, when he describes the heart as the seat of His Revelation or when He stated that God regards the human heart as His possession, this can only be attributed to the spiritual aspect of the heart, yet as Bahá'u'lláh said, *the seen and the unseen are the same and are different* which we here apply to the heart as well.

In my opinion this is expressed by Bahá'u'lláh in the following quote, where He states that the spirit, mind, soul, is one single reality which uses the body faculties and senses as its instruments. Does that not mean that the human body, being an instrument of the spirit, is directly connected with this spiritual power, which makes us do and act according to our will?

*Say: Spirit, mind, soul, and the powers of sight and hearing are but one single reality, which hath manifold expressions owing to the diversity of its instruments. As*

*thou dost observe, man's power to comprehend, move, speak, hear, and see all derive from this sign of his Lord within him. It is single in its essence, yet manifold through the diversity of its instruments. This, verily, is a certain truth.* [SLH 235]

Here again Bahá'u'lláh seems to use the concept of unity in diversity, when He said *It is single in its essence, yet manifold through the diversity of its instruments*. What must not be forgotten, in my opinion, is the fact that this unity of the spirit and diversity of the bodily instruments needs to be seen together or better it must be seen one in the other and not artificially separated as modern thinking usually does. When in the following the heart is mentioned we need to look into the instrumentality of the heart as defined by neurocardiology and make the conclusion towards the spirituality, which is using this instrument for its spiritual purpose.

It needs to be explained how the science of quantum physics can contribute to the understanding of Bahá'u'lláh's statement that the spirit or the soul uses the body, in our case the heart and the brain as an instrument. The dualism of Descartes cannot really explain this instrumentality of the body towards the spiritual in the human person.

Descartes suggested that the body works like a machine, that it has material properties. The mind (or soul), on the other hand, was described as a nonmaterial and does not follow the laws of nature. Descartes argued that the mind interacts with the body at the pineal gland. Leibniz introduced the monad, a preprogrammed entity where this interaction occurred more or less by itself. Neither of these solutions really solved the problem.

In the interpretation of quantum mechanics, a new solution to this problem seems to be presented. There, the possibility is described that the nerve connections, the synapses in the brain are so small, that quantum effects are happening. By definition,

quantum effects are not physically determined, but are determined by human consciousness, actually by the instrument that forces one or the other complementary effects to become observable. Since the instruments are manmade, it is the human consciousness that causes these effects. Depending on the instrument, light shows its wave aspect or its particle aspect. This is called complementarity; the two aspects are complementary.

When this is applied to the quantum effects in the nerve endings, in the synapses, than it appears possible that the human consciousness makes the difference and therefor it can be said that the human spirit or will does influence the quantum mechanical effects in the brain and similarly in the little brain of the heart to cause the body to do what the spirit wants. If this idea is carried to its conclusions, then this would be the mechanism by which the mind directs the body. This way, it is explained how the body becomes an instrument of the spirit as stated by Bahá'u'lláh.

This is described by Evan Harris Walker in his book *The Physics of Consciousness, The Quantum Mind and the Meaning of Life*.<sup>8</sup>

Consciousness is the collation of potentialities that develop as these electrons and these structures of the brain interact (as quantum elements). By creating the possibilities, that we experience as consciousness, and by selecting—by willing—which synapse will fire, mind brings into reality each moment's thoughts, experiences and actions.

Correlating this interpretation of quantum mechanics with the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh about the instrumentality of the body gives a deeper understanding to theses scientific findings. On the other hand, it is suggested here, that this explanation can be helpful in understanding what Bahá'u'lláh stated, that the mind uses the body as an instrument. The transition from the

spiritual mind to the physical brain becomes understandable, when we assume that there are quantum effects involved. This makes sense, because quantum effects even in physical experiments, are not physically determined, but are caused by human conscious decisions. In these physical experiments, it is the human consciousness that causes one or the other of the complimentary aspects of reality to become evident.

As I understand this, and this is my personal opinion, without any authority, the following can be stated. An instrument shapes what it does according to the shape of the instrument. The physical shape of an instrument is certainly in relation with its function and use. Therefore, the physical quality of the instrument is important and needs to be related to its use.

Unfortunately, today, people see the spiritual and the material as separated and the connection is only in the fact that the material provides the metaphor to express the spiritual. The following monograph about the heart is based on this outdated understanding.

As the muscle which is the original source of these metaphorical applications brings life to the whole body, so heart refers to the core-force of personality at the center of its life. Because we do not want to limit the self with the name of intellect alone, or will alone, or feeling alone, nor to see these as separate, we have invented the sensibly opaque name of heart for the identifying core of our agency.<sup>9</sup>

A new and fundamentally different understanding of reality is what is guiding me in this and other papers about the heart and I have developed this understanding when trying to understand the Bahá'í Writings. Therefore, the metaphorical use of the concept heart is actually based on more than external similarity; it is based on a real essential connection between the

seen and the unseen, the spiritual and the material as the fundamental principles of reality.

From this very specific point of view, I have tried to understand what the different instrumentality of the heart is, as compared with that of the brain. The following findings are to be understood in this way and the formulation of the language of the heart is based on this difference. This difference between the heart and the brain becomes apparent in the little child and in dreams where the brain does not play an important role, because it is shut down in sleep and yet undeveloped in the child.

The heart does not sleep and is fully functioning when the child is born; so we now turn our attention to the language of the dream and the little child. Michael Robinson, in analyzing Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*, comes to a new understanding of the primary process thinking as it is expressed in dreams. He finds that the primary process thinking is essentially different from the secondary or normal process of reasoning. Freud had developed the understanding that there is a difference between primary process thinking, which is the thinking of the little child and which is present in dreams as well and secondary thinking, which is the logical discursive thinking of the adult.

Beginning with Freud, a number of authors have attempted to articulate the grammatical or syntactic structure of dreaming, and there is general agreement that it is qualitatively distinctive from that of ordinary language. Dream language depicts causality in terms of sequence or contiguity, and contradiction, contrast, or conflict in terms of such things as difference in imagery or pace of action. There seems to be no way to depict time or to distinguish the past and memory from the present. In other words, dream language lacks the abstract, reflective, comparative, multilevel, or parallel-processing quality of ordinary language that enables such

things as conflict, ambivalence, simultaneous conscious and unconscious thought past and present tense, action and contemplation. French and Fromm (1964) summarize this distinctive feature of dream language as follows: “The logic that we miss in the dream work is the syntactical logic of speech—the syntactical logic that is essential for the framing and testing of propositions and reasoning from them.”<sup>10</sup>

Let us follow up on this consideration that primary process thinking is found in dreams and in little children. In both cases, the thinking is concentrated in the heart. The brain of the little child is not much developed before the age of two and the development of higher logical thinking is possible only after the age of twelve, according to Piaget. A similar situation is found in dreams, when the brain is sleeping, but the heart is still working normally.

As stated before, according to modern neurocardiology there is a “little brain” of the heart, which has perception, memory and decision making ability.

Recent work in the relatively new field of Neurocardiology has firmly established that the heart is a sensory organ and a sophisticated information encoding and processing center. Its circuitry enables it to learn, remember, and make functional decisions independent of the cranial brain.<sup>11</sup>

The question we need to ask here is the following: Is this “little brain” of the heart involved in dreaming? We must ask because from evidence gathered from heart transplant patients we know that some of them dream dreams of the previous owner of the heart. This cannot be explained any other way than by assuming that the dream memory was transplanted with the heart. One especially significant case is reported in a book by Paul Pearsall:



## The Heart That Found Its Body's Killer

I recently spoke to an international group of psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers meeting in Houston, Texas. I spoke to them about my ideas about the central role of the heart in our psychological and spiritual life, and following my presentation, a psychiatrist came to the microphone during the question and answer session to ask me about one of her patients whose experience seemed to substantiate my ideas about cellular memories and a thinking heart. The case disturbed her so much that she struggled to speak through her tears.

Sobbing to the point that the audience and I had difficulty understanding her, she said, I have a patient, an eight-year-old little girl who received the heart of a murdered ten-year-old girl. Her mother brought her to me when she started screaming at night about her dreams of the man who had murdered her donor; she said her daughter knew who he was. After several sessions, I just could not deny the reality of what this child was telling me. Her mother and I finally decided to call the police and, using the descriptions from the little girl they found the murderer. He was easily convicted with evidence my patient provided. The time, the weapon, the place, the clothes he wore, what the little girl had said to him... everything the little heart transplant recipient reported was completely accurate.

As the therapist returned to her seat; the audience of scientifically trained and clinically experienced professionals sat in silence.... The very real possibility of a heart that remembers seemed to touch all of us in our own hearts.<sup>12</sup>

The fact that the heart after a transplant can remember dreams, and details of traumatic events, as reported in several other cases of this book as well,<sup>13</sup> seems proof that the memories located in the heart can be remembered as dreams. It is reported in this book that a heart transplant patient had “surprisingly accurate dreams about her donor” together with other changes, such as food tastes, music preferences, and emotional states, which these patients never experienced before.

In contrast to normal memories that are probably located in the brain and can be reached by association, memories which happened under severe emotional stress are located in the heart and remembered in dreams or in intrusive memories, as is known in the Post-traumatic Stress Disorder. Having treated many patients with this disorder, the explanation that traumatic memories are in the heart seems to explain best what could be observed in their treatment. That is what happened to the girl in question. She remembered the traumatic experience of the previous owner of the heart in her dreams, just like this girl would have remembered it if she was not killed. The heart survived and did the same what it would have done in the other girl, i.e., remembering the traumatic experience in recurring nightmares.

If this is the case, then we have to conclude that the dream-work that produces the dream is located in the “little brain of the heart” also or better, that the heart is used by the mind of the dreamer, when she is dreaming. That means that dreams are not made up and remembered by using the brain but the heart, they are following the primary process of thinking, not the normal secondary process. Yet, when dreams are remembered, they are remembered in the brain and translated into the normal language of the brain, which makes it difficult to interpret them. Therefore, the conclusion seems to be convincing that they are originally not in the brain, but in the heart.

An example of this primary process dream thinking can be presented by a communication from a patient to this

psychologist. Here a conditional situation is presented in two opposing dreams following immediately each other. The patient reported several experiences where she had dreamed about the future death of family members, with the details of the time and the circumstances of their death.

Then she reported another situation, where she had dreamed about the death of her son, who was a teenager and involved at the time in gang violence and one time was almost killed. She reported that she had two dreams about him; one was that her son is being killed and in the immediately following dream, her son was being placed in detention. Following this dream message, she reported to the therapist that she called daily the police about her son's illegal activities until the police arrested him and placed him into custody.

She further told this psychologist that her son did well after that and is now a responsible adult with a nice family. Interestingly enough, she reported that her son never forgave her for putting him into prison. She, on the other hand, understood the message of her heart given her in the dream as correct and never regretted what she needed to do.

Another dream told by a Bahá'í friend tells another way how a dream can solve a problem of the dreamer not in logical explanations but in presenting an action, which is solving the problem. This Bahá'í friend reported that as child she was the only Bahá'í in school and could not understand why nobody understood the truth about religion. She blamed Christ who had not educated Christians well enough so they could understand. Many years later, she had the following dream:

First, she was at the sermon of the mount, and tried to get close to Christ and tell him of her concern, but could not get near to him to tell him. This picture depicts her frustration about Christ not having informed Christians well about the fact of progressive revelation.

In the next picture she was at the Garden of Ridván, the place near Bagdad where Bahá'u'lláh announced his prophetic claims to his followers. She was at the entrance wall near a door, hoping to see Bahá'u'lláh in the tent in the midst of the Garden. Suddenly Christ came and walked into the garden and then turned into the Tent where Bahá'u'lláh was.

So she understood that Christ and Bahá'u'lláh in their Divine station, are the same person, like all the other Manifestations of God as Bahá'u'lláh has stated, describing progressive revelation:

*Viewed in this light, they are all but Messengers of that ideal King, that unchangeable Essence. And were they all to proclaim, "I am the Seal of the Prophets," they, verily, utter but the truth, beyond the faintest shadow of doubt. For they all are but one person, one soul, one spirit, one being, one revelation. [GWB 53]*

The unity of all Divine Manifestations is presented in this dream by the fact that wanting to see Bahá'u'lláh she only observed Christ going to where she expected Bahá'u'lláh to be.

These dreams explain that in the primary process thinking, conditional thoughts and complex relationships cannot be expressed directly, except, like in this case, as describing one event or a complex relationship in two opposing or different pictures, following immediately after each other. In the first situation the dreamer decided in her heart that her son needs to be in custody, otherwise, he would be killed, and she followed this extremely difficult decision, as soon she has become aware of it during the remembering of her dream.

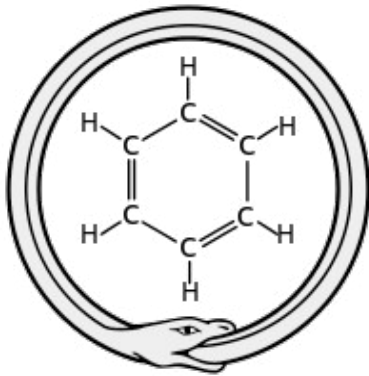
In the dream of the Bahá'í lady, one Manifestation going into the tent of another Manifestation expressed the fact that they are in their divine station one, as is described in the Bahá'í Writings. Both these dreams tell us how dream language expresses thoughts that are difficult to understand in the logical discursive way of thinking, but can also be presented in a

language using pictures and events expressing the same truth. This way of understanding is deeper and afterwards may be expressed and available to the logical mind. The implications of these pictures are that they have a higher degree of understanding and certitude, which logical discursive language and thinking cannot give.

When considering these two ways of thinking as a *Gegensatz* or Polar Opposites, we must realize that in human thinking always both ways are present in a balanced but always changing mixture. This fact gives human thinking a quality that is not only deeper than computer logic, but also able to reach into areas of reality where logic alone cannot go very far, especially into the spiritual realm where the deepest truths about man and reality are considered. Most Westerners are raised in the scientific way of thinking, which generally does not regard the human heart as more than a blood-pump and uses simple deductions and logical structures, unable to go deeper and listen to the heart.

When people first read the Bahá'í Writings, they are difficult to understand until one opens the heart and follows the language of the heart; usually then understanding follows and the Writings become valuable and personally meaningful. The same is true about other religious writings like the Bible or the Qur'an. This issue needs much more investigation and scientific verification, but is here mentioned because it opens up the issue of consciousness and of different ways of thinking that underlie some of the Bahá'í Writings.

Another understanding of this way of thinking and of its importance is the story of scientific inventions being made in dreams, like the following story of the invention of the chemical formula of benzene by Kekulé in the so-called ouroboros dream as described in Wikipedia under the name Kekulé:



The new understanding of benzene, and hence of all aromatic compounds, proved to be so important for both pure and applied chemistry after 1865 that in 1890 the German Chemical Society organized an elaborate appreciation in Kekulé's honor, celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of his first benzene paper. Here Kekulé spoke of the creation of the theory. He said that he had discovered the ring shape of the benzene molecule after having a reverie or day-dream of a snake seizing its own tail (this is an ancient symbol known as the ouroboros.) This vision, he said, came to him after years of studying the nature of carbon-carbon bonds.<sup>14</sup>

In this picture, we can see the heart's way of thinking in the primary process in the picture of the snake swallowing her own tail, which Kekulé then translated into the secondary or logical secondary process of thinking as the solution of a chemical formula organized in a circular way as a ring.

Here we encounter again the issue of the difference between the heart as a biological organ with what is called "the little brain of the heart" and the distinct existence of a mind, in this case using the heart and not the brain to express itself. This different instrument of the mind seems to result in a different kind of language that is called primary process thinking in the psychoanalytic theory. The reason to place this thinking into the heart has to do with findings from heart transplants, where dreams, which could only belong to the original owner of the heart, are dreamt by the person who received the heart transplant.

We need to assume that the memory of dreams is in the heart, so it stands to reason that the actual dream work is done by the

heart as well, but can only become aware in the mind. The mind using the brain then understands the dream that originally is expressed in primary process thinking now in secondary process thinking. In fact, that is the theme of the article of Michael Robins. Placing all of this thinking of the heart as the instrument of primary process thinking, solves this problem and explains how this thinking that happens outside of awareness is eventually translated into the normal thinking and language in using the brain.

In this understanding, we use the mind or consciousness as encompassing two different styles of thinking, i.e. the primary process of dream thinking and the normal secondary process of logical thinking. What makes this understanding so difficult is the fact that consciousness or awareness is only present in the normal or secondary process thinking and we have only indirect access to the primary process thinking if it is translated into secondary process thinking.

Correlating this to the Bahá'í Writings we can make the assumption that the special way of understanding that is placed in the heart has to do with this difference. It further can be assumed that the primary process thinking of the heart, as evident in dreams, might not totally describe all what is happening when the mind uses the heart's way of thinking.

The following statement is the epistemological explanation of why there are different meanings possible of the same statement. The answer is clear: because of the different ways of understanding. In a one-dimensional world, only one meaning is possible, if there are more than one dimensions or levels of understandings of the world then more than one meaning is possible, which relate to the different dimensions of the world and of the understanding of the world.

The German Theologian Romano Guardini at the end of his book *Der Gegensatz*<sup>15</sup> presents another interesting consideration about the way concrete reality is understood. He distinguishes three levels of understanding: rational, trans-rational and super-

rational (in German: “Rational,” “Außer-Rational” and “Über-Rational”).

This consideration is essential to the topic of this paper. It is the self, it is the human consciousness that attempts to understand the reality of this world, the method of this understanding is part and partial of what reality is all about. Strangely enough, most scientific inquiries into the issue about reality do not seem even to consider this question.

When science excludes anything besides materiality from investigation, when the mind is understood as a function of physical nerves and their interaction, then such questions can be avoided totally. This gives us the classical understanding of reality as organized like a machine, no wholeness, no meaning, just efficient cause and effect. This picture is then applied to the mind; the way they understand reality and consciousness becomes an epiphenomenon of the nervous system, but has no reality other than a material, which can then be described as functioning strictly in a causal sense, excluding free will and purpose, meaning and beauty from serious considerations. Man is nothing more than a reacting physical entity, reacting to stimuli like the pigeon in the Skinner box or like a mechanical machine to the forces impinging on it in the environment.

In contrast to this so-called “scientific” understanding and its corresponding epistemology, Guardini describes three ways of understanding reality. The first is the rational understanding forming concepts, which abstracts from the concrete individual reality and forms a general idea. In order to individualize we have to give this thing, this animal or person a name or indicate that we mean this house and not the other house next to it. Fortunately, houses have numbers and people and pets have names, otherwise we could not speak about an individual person without describing some features that are specific to that individual, or pointing to that individual, like in criminal court.

Guardini describes another way of understanding, which he calls intuition. This way of understanding Guardini calls trans-



rational (“Außer-Rational”), which he describes as a clear and normal way of understanding. Additionally, he places these two ways of understanding in polar opposition, so that the conceptual, abstract way of understanding can never be totally separated from the intuitive concrete way of understanding.

Whenever we think of a general abstract concept, like that of “cat”, or felineity, we somehow have the concrete experience and picture of a specific individual cat or cats in mind. Only that makes the abstract thought possible and meaningful.

And whenever we think or talk about an individual cat, for example, the abstract concept of cat is in the horizon of our understanding as well, because we know always both, the focus and concentration may be on the individual or on the abstract concept, but both cannot be thought about without the other side, i.e., its opposite being included and in some way this defines the idea of either a particular animal or person or, on the other hand, the idea of animal-ness, or humanness which is considered. Even if we invent a fictitious animal, like the unicorn, we have to make a picture of it in our mind, and this picture will be concrete of such an animal and not abstract as the concept of unicorn-ness would be.

We can say that these two ways of understanding are complementary. The word intuition is used in the German language and in English in the same way, as defined in dictionaries and as presented here from Wikipedia.

**Intuition**, a phenomenon of the mind, describes the ability to acquire knowledge without inference or the use of reason. The word “intuition” comes from Latin verb ‘intueri’ translated as consider or from late Middle English word intuit, “to contemplate”. Intuition is often interpreted with varied meaning from intuition being glimpses of greater knowledge to only a function of mind; however, processes by which and why they happen

typically remain mostly unknown to the thinker, as opposed to the view of rational thinking.

After that discussion, the third way of understanding is mentioned by Guardini with some caution. He claims that the mystery of the living is not in the intuitive versus the rational understanding, but in this third way of understanding that he calls super-rational. It is a higher understanding than reason or intuition, it is the understanding of the whole, of the unity of reality and it is achieved in the tension between rational and intuitive understanding. It is not a Hegelian synthesis, which abolishes the other ways of understanding; it is an original, a first and essential understanding, which is actually very simple in its complicatedness. Any attempt to define this logically, is bound to fail. The core and the mystery of the concrete reality can only be understood in an act of knowing, that has the same structure as the reality, and this is what Guardini calls vision (*Anschauung*):

To understand the core of the living reality and to approach its mystery is not a nebulous imagination, it rather takes vision (*Anschauung*), which is possible only in the tension, and in respect of the mystery, which requires discipline and self-control.<sup>16</sup>

Guardini describes further this concept and indicates that any one-sidedness destroys this tension of understanding reality; that it leads to erroneous simplifications, and to false explications and failure to understand truthfully. Only the oppositeness of this relationship allows the human mind to grasp the whole and to use rational understanding and intuitive perception in a scientific and philosophically correct way in approaching reality. Rationalism and intellectualism, if used one-sidedly, will be opposed by Intuitionism, or Romanticism and Mysticism and both will fail to understand reality as it really is.

Three quarters of a century before Guardini described the three ways of understanding reality, Bahá'u'lláh had talked about *three differing planes* of understanding in the *Seven Valleys*. In the following these statements of Bahá'u'lláh and Guardini will be correlated with each other to better understand both, even though these two statements have been made in different centuries.

Here is the statement of Bahá'u'lláh:

*Thus, for that they move on these three differing planes, the understanding and the words of the wayfarers have differed; and hence the sign of conflict doth continually appear on earth.*

*For some there are who dwell upon the plane of oneness and speak of that world, and some inhabit the realms of limitation, and some the grades of self, while others are completely veiled. [SVFV 20]*

This chart shows how the statements of Guardini can be correlated with the Verse from the *Seven Valleys* of Bahá'u'lláh. This correlation actually is seen in the arrangement here, in spite of the fact that

### Epistemological Correlation

Guardini	Bahá'u'lláh
Rational: Logical/Abstract	<i>"Inhabit the Realms of Limitation"</i>
Trans-Rational: Concrete/Intuitional	<i>"Inhabit the Grades of Self"</i>
Super-Rational: Unifying/Transcendent "Anschauung"/Vision	<i>"Dwelt on the Plane of Oneness" "Most Sublime Vision"</i>

the order of description is different and Guardini orders the first two ways of understanding different from Bahá'u'lláh's planes of understanding. Since these two ways of understanding are polar opposites, they can be seen from one side or the other.

The third way of understanding of Guardini, and the first in Bahá'u'lláh's description is described by Bahá'u'lláh as used by

those who *dwell on the Plane of Oneness*. According to the Bahá'í Faith, this oneness or unity is understood as 'Unity in Diversity' [WOB 41] and the better and deeper we understand this concept the more and deeper we are dwelling upon the *plane of oneness*.

Finally, it is described by Bahá'u'lláh what this vision or this way of understanding actually produces, it sees the unity in the polar opposites so that this paragraph concludes in the statement: "*Then what life have words, on such a plane, that 'first' and 'last' or other than these be seen or mentioned! In this realm, the first is the last itself, and the last is but the first.*" This can be correlated with what Guardini's epistemology describes as "Anschauung" or Vision.

The next not transcendent and more limited plane or mode of understanding is, according to Bahá'u'lláh, that "*some inhabit the realms of limitation.*" This is the realm of rational and logical thinking, where understanding is based on abstractions from the concrete. Therefore, this understanding is limited; abstraction meaning limiting the understanding from the concrete to the less concrete and more abstract. Guardini calls this Rational Understanding; it is the rational understanding and the area of discursive logic.

Another plane described by Bahá'u'lláh is by "*some [inhabit] the grades of self*" including those who use concrete intuition of the reality, which is based on the understanding self and is not the full understanding of oneness. In Guardini's epistemology, this grade is similarly called Trans-Rational or Intuitional.

Not much has to be said about those who are "completely veiled." This would include the strict materialists, who ignore anything except the material that can be counted and used in mathematics. They do not see reality-as-it-is—material and spiritual—at all.

It needs to be noted that this text from the *Seven Valleys* by Bahá'u'lláh was written almost hundred years before Guardini independently found a similar understanding in contemplating reality, seen in the light of Catholic Philosophical Theology. Nevertheless, the correlation is astonishing. It is important to consider that Bahá'u'lláh talks about three differing planes of understanding and Guardini calls all of them rational, even though he distinguishes between rational, trans-rational and super-rational, none of these ways of knowing are irrational and the rational faculty of man encompasses all three of these capabilities.

This Vision is necessary to understand the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh; it is the understanding of Spirituality, of Unity and Oneness, as being revealed in the Writings of the Bahá'í Faith. In the following verse, Bahá'u'lláh is praying for his followers to acquire this vision, so they can understand His Revelation.

*I beg of Thee, O my Lord, by Thine eye that sleepeth not, to guard mine eyes from beholding aught beside Thee. Strengthen, then, their vision that they may discern Thy signs, and behold the Horizon of Thy Revelation.*

[PM 263]

This adds a new understanding to these polar opposite concepts of *Inwardness* and *Outwardness*, as presented in the *Seven Valleys* of Bahá'u'lláh, [SVFV 27] an understanding that perceives these concepts from the point of Oneness and brings the Unity of these concepts to light. In this paragraph, more is said about the wayfarers who find this new understanding of reality. In any logical description and graphical presentation of this unity in diversity, this essential unity is not shown and has to be introduced by the observer, because the opposite terms are in and through each other, are in unity and not separated.

The wayfarers observing this situation are described by Bahá'u'lláh as “*those personages who in a single step have passed over the world of the relative and the limited, and dwelt*

*on the fair plane of the Absolute, and pitched their tent in the worlds of authority and command.*” Here the transcendence of this understanding is stressed from the relative and limited, logical and rational understanding to the understanding of the absolute and to an understanding that is based on authority and command. This seems to indicate the authority of the Revelation and the command of the Manifestation.

The process of this endeavor is described by Bahá’u’lláh as having “*burned away these relativities with a single spark, and blotted out these words with a drop of dew*” [SVFV 27]. In fact, this process of violently burning away something is contrasted in the next picture of blotting it out with a drop of dew, a rather quiet and insignificant activity, so we can conclude that Bahá’u’lláh indicates that this process is mild and insignificant as well as violent and drastic, a polar opposite of processes directing our intention into a higher level of action, a level that can be called mystical or spiritual, which transcends the polar oppositeness of burning versus blotting out with a drop of dew.

In this context, it needs to be noted that even Guardini in similar ways mentioned that this vision requires a special effort, when he states that this “is possible only in the tension, and in respect of the mystery, which requires discipline and self-control.”

Bahá’u’lláh further asserts, that “*they swim in the sea of the spirit, and soar in the holy air of light*” [SVFV 27]. This clearly indicates that this approach to knowing is a spiritual effort and presupposes an understanding of the spiritual aspect of reality, which is expressed in the vision of unity of the polar concepts of Inwardness versus Outwardness.

Whenever this concept is mentioned this transcendent understanding, this vision of unity of the modes of understanding, needs to be always kept in mind. When the polar opposite concepts that form this structure are considered in this way, their unity is actually the spiritual understanding of reality.

Depending on how we look at the self, we see different and opposing aspects, which have to be understood as potential aspects of the one reality, or modes of how reality can be perceived. The principal unity of this reality of the self or of the physical reality should never be overlooked and has always to be considered in order to see the whole. In other words, we cannot understand the whole of reality in our rational mind, we have to see these different modes and perceive them as complementary in order to see the whole, to see reality as it actually is. Similarly, Guardini said this vision takes discipline and self-control, and this process is compared by Bahá'u'lláh as burning away the differences and blotting out the oppositeness of created reality.

It needs to be considered that this approach is not irrational; it is super-rational as Guardini called it and it exists in the tension between the rational and trans-rational, i.e., between the abstracting rational mind and the intuitional concrete understanding of reality. It adds a third dimension to the human rationality, a dimension that is open to understanding the super-rational, the ultimate reality, which is the mystery of the world. How the mind and the heart are involved in this process has been described above, so the Bahá'í understanding of the heart can be compared with the new science of neuroradiology and quantum mechanics, where a new correlation between these two understanding of the function of the heart are developed.

Bahá'u'lláh describes this primary process thinking of the heart as the thinking of unity or oneness, or the thinking of those who “*swim in the sea of the spirit, and soar in the holy air of light*” or the thinking of those who “*have passed over the world of the relative and the limited, and dwelt on the fair plane of the Absolute*” [SVFV 27]. Placing this kind of thinking into the heart makes good sense because the Writing of the Báb and of Bahá'u'lláh seem to do just that. In conclusion, it can be stated that the heart has a different way of thinking, as is known from our interpretation of dreams, but that dream thinking is only part of heart thinking, which includes the

thinking of oneness or of the spirit, as the Bahá'í Writings claim.

The two aspects of the spiritual and physical or the seen and unseen is the topic of several of Bahá'u'lláh statements like this.

*I beseech Thee, by Thy Cause that hath encompassed the world of being, and by Thy Name wherewith Thou hast subjected the seen and unseen, to adorn the peoples of the earth with the light of Thy justice, and to illuminate their hearts with the brightness of Thy knowledge. [ESW 37]*

First Bahá'u'lláh seems to state here that His Cause is encompassing *the world of being*, which he then describes as the *seen and the unseen*, and then he states that His believers have to *illuminate their hearts with the brightness of Thy knowledge*. This new knowledge of the Bahá'í Revelation seems to be this very new understanding of the world as *seen and unseen*, as spiritual and material.

As mentioned before, the Báb proposes how such conflicting, yet complementary attributes of the same thing or idea are to be unified only in the heart when He said:

*Such conclusive truth hath been revealed through the gaze of the heart, and not that of intellect. For intellect conceives not save limited things.*

*Verily, bound by the realm of limitation, men are unable to gaze upon things simultaneously in their manifold aspects. This it is perplexing for them to comprehend that lofty station.*

*No one can recognize the truth of the Middle Way between the two extreme poles except after attaining unto the gate of the heart and beholding the realities of the worlds, visible and unseen. (translated by Saiedi, *ibid.*)<sup>17</sup>*



What the Báb calls here the middle way of understanding is called the understanding of oneness by Bahá'u'lláh and this vision of reality needs to be placed in the heart according to the Báb. This is expressed by Bahá'u'lláh as the heart being the seat of the Revelation. In our thinking of the language of the heart we have to add another consideration.

As the rational process in the heart is without awareness, we only know about this process if we become aware of it in the thinking, which is based on the brain. In other words, this vision of the unity of reality is unconscious and has to become conscious in the brain on the level of the rational and intuitional thinking process; therefore, it takes effort and experience to do this, in fact the ongoing reading of the Bahá'í Revelation will produce this effect, as this Revelation needs to be understood in the heart and will eventually become aware in the brain in a logical and discursive manner.

It seems to be the specific ability of the heart to see the unity in any oppositional statements. There is an interesting consequence to all these considerations. The importance of the heart over the brain, which seems to be expressed in the Bahá'í Writings, is based on the fact that both are necessary but emotionally and spiritually the heart—when pure and under the influence of the Divine Spirit—is the seat of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh:

*Unlock, O people, the gates of the hearts of men with the keys of the remembrance of Him Who is the Remembrance of God and the Source of wisdom amongst you. He hath chosen out of the whole world the hearts of His servants, and made them each a seat for the revelation of His glory.* [GWB 296-297]

It must be understood here that the language of the heart is not the same as the language of the brain and needs translation to be understood. This means several things. Poetry, for example, is originated in the heart and then translated into the

brain language, which makes it an art and, therefore, it speaks to the heart of the reader. The same process underlies the poetic aspect of the revelation; hence the special language of any revelation has this poetic style and needs to be understood by the heart. It speaks directly to the heart but needs to be understood by the brain; or rather, it needs to be internally translated to the logical and intuitional ability of the human brain to be fully understood.

This is a process that can be observed in anybody that at first is presented by the Bahá'í Revelation. When I became a Bahá'í at first I could not really understand what it meant, but enjoyed the poetic style and was convinced of its truth. Only when I became more deepened in the Writings, the meaning and structure became apparent, a process that does not end so that new meaning is forthcoming, whenever a text of the Revelation is read again or a new text is approached.

It is not easy to describe this process, but most Bahá'ís go through this development. The fact that Bahá'u'lláh asks us to daily read his Writings is based on this need to practice this process, to learn more and more how to translate from the heart to the mind and ever deeper step into the Ocean of His Revelation.

Interpreting the biblical concept of the New Heaven and New Earth Bahá'u'lláh revealed that here heaven means the Divine Revelation and earth the Understanding of man of this Revelation.

*And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. [Revelation 21:1]*

In the following verse, He speaks of the earth of the heart of the believer, indicating that their hearts understand His Revelation and its *divine knowledge and wisdom*.

*Know thou, that upon whatever hearts the bountiful showers of mercy, raining from the "heaven" of divine Revelation, have fallen, the earth of those hearts hath verily been changed into the earth of divine knowledge and wisdom. [KI 45]*

The process of translating the language of the heart into the language of the brain is used frequently when interpreting dreams. In a letter 'Abdu'l-Bahá gives an example of dream interpretation.

*O thou handmaid of God! In this day, to thank God for His bounties consisteth in possessing a radiant heart, and a soul open to the promptings of the spirit....*

*As for that mighty solar orb which thou didst behold in thy dream, that was the Promised One, and its spreading rays were His bounties, and the translucent surface of the mass of water signifieth hearts that are undefiled and pure, while the surging waves denote the great excitement of those hearts and the fact that they were shaken and deeply moved, that is, the waves are the stirrings of the spirit and holy intimations of the soul. Praise thou God that in the world of the dream thou hast witnessed such disclosures. [SWAB 179]*

In the introduction, he remarks that the writer of the letter to him is a person with a *radiant heart* and a *soul open to the prompting of the spirit*. This is allowing interpreting the dream and finding the mystical meaning of this dream.

We can conclude that what in brain thinking is called opposition, or conditional thinking, is seen by heart as thinking in unity or in spiritual unification. This appears to be a *Gegensatz* in the sense of Guardini, or the specific way of human thinking that always includes sides, the brain-thinking and the heart-thinking, with the emphasis on thinking when awake on the brain, and in dream thinking on the heart, because

the brain is asleep. This seems to be what distinguishes human thinking from the work of the computer, were only the logical thinking of the brain is introduced into the machine. In the human mind, there is always the *Gegensatz*, the polar opposition of brain and heart present, in a more or less intensive connection. Only in the dream, when the brain is excluded by sleep, the heart thinking is present, but, when we wake up, that kind of thinking has to be translated by the brain into the normal style of thinking to become aware and to be possibly understood.

When it is understood that the human rational understanding of reality is a limited understanding, it becomes clear that there must be another understanding that transcends this understanding and is more adequate to understand reality. This higher understanding is described by Bahá'u'lláh as the *Dwelling on the Plane of Oneness and they swim in the sea of the spirit, and soar in the holy air of light*. The correlation of this statement with the idea of vision, as presented by Guardini, seems to expand what Guardini said and helps us to understand the vision of oneness as is presented in the above quoted verse.

These considerations are based on the understanding of the Bahá'í Writings that the mind or the soul, with its rational faculty, is using the body, in this case the brain and the heart, as instruments of their action. When the mind is active, most of the time both, the brain and the heart are used as instruments, yet, not all what is in the mind can be in the brain or heart, like for example a typewriter has all the letters of the writing and brings them to paper, without having any understanding of what the writings communicate.

The fact that in all rational thought both, the primary process thinking of the heart and the logical discursive thinking of the brain are involved makes reason essentially different from computer logic of a machine. Using Guardini's epistemology as correlated with the Bahá'í Writings, we find that the brain thinking consists in a polar opposite between

rational and intuitive thinking. Transcending this way of thinking of the brain is the thinking of the heart, which is expressed in primary process thinking, which we called vision.

Rationalism, therefore, must always be understood as open to the different way of thinking of the heart. Both of these two ways of thinking, the one that uses the brain i.e. rationalism and the other that uses the heart as an instrument, we can call mysticism, must be open and interpreted by the rational brain. The problems involved into this relationship have activated the history of philosophy and it could be conceived that placing the mystical or primary process thinking into the heart, as the Bahá'í Writings seem to do, could be a new and heuristic valuable way of seeing this issue of the human rational faculty, which is usually understood under the concept of the human mind using the brain.

The respective quotes from the Bahá'í Writing will follow here. It is clearly stated that both the heart and the brain must work together to find the truth, especially the truth about religion.

*And among the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh is that religion must be in conformity with science and reason, so that it may influence the hearts of men. The foundation must be solid and must not consist of imitations. [SWAB 299]*

One of the most distinguishing differences between the brain and the heart is the fact that the brain is divided into a right and left hemisphere and how they work together in logical and discursive though is not yet fully understood. In opposition to this is the fact that the little brain of the heart does not have this distinction or separation and seems to be undivided as expressed in this statement by Bahá'u'lláh. This has ethical or moral consequences, which are important to notice especially when considering the understanding of the Divine Revelation.

*And as the human heart, as fashioned by God, is one and undivided, it behoveth thee to take heed that its affections be, also, one and undivided. Cleave thou, therefore, with the whole affection of thine heart, unto His love, and withdraw it from the love of any one besides Him, that He may aid thee to immerse thyself in the ocean of His unity, and enable thee to become a true upholder of His oneness. [PB 52]*

This issue needs much further investigation, but is here mentioned because it opens up the issue of consciousness and of different ways of thinking that underlie some of the understanding of the Bahá'í Revelation.

As mentioned before, the Báb proposes how such conflicting, yet complementary attributes of the same thing or idea are to be unified only in the heart. It seems to be the specific ability of the heart, or better, of the mind using the heart as his instrument of expression to be able to see the unity in any oppositional statements. There is an interesting consequence to all these considerations. The importance of the heart over the brain which seems to be expressed in the Bahá'í Writings is based on the fact that both are necessary but emotionally and spiritually the heart—when pure and under the influence of the Divine Spirit—is what gives peace and certitude to human understanding as stated here by Bahá'u'lláh and as has been found in the study of the heart by the HeartMath Institute.

*God shall bestow upon his heart a divine tranquillity and cause him to be of them that are at peace with themselves. [GDM 23]*

Another conclusion of this paper is the understanding that the revelatory writings of all religions are actually speaking to the heart more than to the brain. Nevertheless, the brain is not neglected either because it must be used in order to make the language of the heart come to awareness in the brain and be interpreted in the logical way of the brain. To approach any

Revelation with this understanding can explain the specific style of all revelatory scriptures and will further explain, why it is difficult to understand these writings in the beginning, until the mind gets used to this approach and learns to use the heart in the process of understanding. It explains further, how these writings can be misunderstood and called irrational and not meaningful by persons, who do not use their heart or by people who have a morally corrupted heart and do not want to understand.

That the heart has an important function in understanding Divine Revelation is stressed by Bahá'u'lláh who insists that to understand revelation the heart must be pure. Further He frequently states that the heart is the seat of revelation and that His words have to be pondered in the heart.

*Do thou ponder these momentous happenings in thy heart, so that thou mayest apprehend the greatness of this Revelation, and perceive its stupendous glory. [KI 236]*

The affinity revelatory writings have with poetry and the fact that some of them even take the form of poetry can be explained by the fact that poetry speaks primarily to the heart and only secondarily can be understood by the brain. This is true also for revelations, they are understood by the heart and only after that are scrutinized and evaluated by the logical mind. It could be said that the language of the heart is not only the language of dreams but also the language of poesy; it is how spiritual values and understandings are expressed. Ultimately, it can be stated that the language of the heart is the language of Divine Revelation.

The difficulty of this way of distinguishing between language of the heart and of the brain is in the fact that we can understand the language of the heart only with the mind, using the logical brain for this process, so we always have to do with a translation from the heart to the brain and have no awareness in

the heart itself, except its feelings, to become aware of what goes on in the heart, we can only use the logical mind.

The awareness of the heart is in its feelings, in other words, when the heart responds, there are responding feelings of which we are aware. That might be the reason why ‘Abdu’l-Bahá often asked Bahá’ís, “are you happy?” which happiness would be indicating the positive response of the heart.

Most Westerners are well trained in using the brain and have little access to their understanding heart. They have to overcome this brain training in order to understand better the writings of revelation. This can only be done when one immerses oneself into these writings and slowly learns to understand them.

In conclusion, the following can be stated:

1. There are three ways of seeing reality, according to Guardini and as revealed more deeply before by Bahá’u’lláh in the *Seven Valleys*.
2. The first is the abstract and limited logical thinking; the second is the intuitive and concrete thinking, which both always are present as polar opposites of thinking.
3. There is a third ways of understanding reality, which was called ‘vision’ (Anschauung) by Guardini and thinking *on the plane of oneness* by Bahá’u’lláh, which can be called the mystical way of understanding reality.
4. This third way of thinking seems to be happening in the “little brain of the heart” and follows the rules of “primary process” thinking as described in psychoanalysis.
5. Since there is no awareness in the heart, heart language must be interpreted by the brain in order to become aware to the self of the person experiencing it, be it in dreams or in vision.
6. The same problem is present in the understanding of revelation. The part of the revelation, which is speaking to



the heart must be interpreted and translated from “heart language” to “brain language”, from primary process thinking to secondary process thinking, in order to become aware to the thinker.

7. All Divine Revelations can only be fully understood when the third way of thinking is used, therefore, they are often written in poetic or mystical language and speak primarily to the heart.
8. This process of translating mystical or heart language into rational or brain language or thinking is needed to understand revelatory writings.
9. Only a pure heart as Bahá'u'lláh stated or as it is said in the Gospel of Matthew [5:8] “*Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God*” is able to understand this, which becomes an issue of the ethical behavior of the reader, and which is a precondition of understanding the Word of God in any revelation.

These conclusions shed light on some issues of revelation and personal communication between people. It is the need to consider the language of the heart and the requirement of the heart to be pure in order to see God and understand His revelation. This ethical requirement for the acceptance of a revelation needs to be further explored, especially as it affects the heart and the ability to develop a vision that can understand revelation.

It appears that one must get seriously involved in the writings of any revelation to understand them; especially modern man who is trained only in the rational understanding and often has lost the ability to understand mystical writings that speak to the heart. The moral condition that the heart must be pure to understand such writings is a prerequisite, which needs to be considered in any deeper understanding of truth, truth that is revealed by a Manifestation of God, or even is revealed between people in fully understanding each other. The

psychological condition of the state of a pure heart could be a special topic for further investigations.

This condition was stated by Bahá'u'lláh in His Arabic Hidden Words:

*1. O SON OF SPIRIT!*

*My first counsel is this: Possess a pure, kindly and radiant heart, that thine may be a sovereignty ancient, imperishable and everlasting. [HW Ar. #1]*

---

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The Universal House of Justice, 1997 July 20, "Scholarship and Related Subjects"

<sup>2</sup> Rollin McCray, Ph.D. and Doc Childre, *The Appreciative Heart, The Psychophysiology of Positive Emotions and Optimal Functioning*, Published by the Institute of HeartMath, Boulder Creek, CA, www.HeartMath.org

<sup>3</sup> Michael Robins, "Another Look at Dreaming: Disentangling Freud's Primary and Secondary Process Theories, in *Journal of American Psychoanalytic Association*, 2004, 52, pp.361-362

<sup>4</sup> Nader Saiedi, provisional translation in *Gate of the Heart, Understanding the Writings of the Báb*, Association for Bahá'í Studies and Wilfrid Laurier University Press, Canada 2008, p. 177

<sup>5</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Christianity and Evolution* A Harvest Book, Harcourt Brace & Company, San Diego, 1969, pp. 107-108

<sup>6</sup> *Star of the West* X:7, 13 July 1919, page 115

<sup>7</sup> This e-text is based on *Tablets of Abdul-Bahá Abbas* (Bahá'í Publishing Committee, New York, 1930), p. 308—a provisional translation.

<sup>8</sup> Evan Harris Walker "The Physics of Consciousness, The Quantum Mind and the Meaning of Life" Basic Books, Perseus Books Group, New York 200 p. 237. Compare Wolfgang A. Klebel, *Revelation of Unity, Unity of Revelation, Bahá'u'lláh's Most Sublime Vision*, 'Irfán Colloquia Publications 2009, where the ideas of Walker are explained more thoroughly.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Taaffe, in *Cross Currents*, Fall 95, Vo. 45, Issue 3, "Education of the Heart" p. 380-392, It needs to be stressed that Taaffe in his article

---

contributes very important aspects to the “Heart”, even if this definition seems to limit him.

- <sup>10</sup> Michael Robins, “Another Look at Dreaming: Disentangling Freud’s Primary and Secondary Process Theories, in *Journal of American Psychoanalytic Association*, 2004, 52, pp. 361-362
- <sup>11</sup> Rollin McCray, Ph.D. and Doc Childre, *The Appreciative Heart, The Psychophysiology of Positive Emotions and Optimal Functioning*, Institute of HeartMath, Boulder Creek, CA, [www.heartmath.org](http://www.heartmath.org).
- <sup>12</sup> Paul Pearsall, Ph.D., *The Heart’s Code, Tapping the Wisdom and Power of Our Heart Energy, The New Findings About Cellular Memories and Their Role in the Mind / Body / Spirit Connection*, Broadway Books, New York 1998, p. 7
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 77, 88
- <sup>14</sup> Retrieved from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/August\\_Kekulé](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/August_Kekulé).
- <sup>15</sup> Romano Guardini *Der Gegensatz, Versuch zu einer Philosophie des Lebendig-Konkreten*, (Polar oppositeness, an attempt towards a philosophy of the living-concrete) Matthias-Grünwald Verlag, Mainz, fourth edition 1998, “page 161-175 While many of the theological and pastoral books of Guardini have been translated into English, this book, unfortunately, has not yet found a translator.
- <sup>16</sup> Guardini *ibid.* p.174 *passim*
- <sup>17</sup> Nader Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart, Understanding the Writings of the Báb*, Wilfrid Laurier University Press (Bahá’í Study Series), 2008, p. 177

# Nietzsche and the Bahá'í Writings:

## A First Look

Ian Kluge

### 1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to identify and evaluate correlations between the Bahá'í Writings and the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, calls on Bahá'ís “to investigate and analyse the principles of the Faith and to *correlate* them with the modern aspects of *philosophy* and science.” He also says

The Cause needs more Bahá'í scholars, people who not only are devoted to it and believe in it and are anxious to tell others about it, but also who have a deep grasp of the Teachings and their significance, and who can *correlate its beliefs* with the current thoughts and problems of the people of the world.

The Guardian adds,

If the Bahá'ís want to be really effective in teaching the Cause they need to be much better informed and able to discuss intelligently, intellectually, the present condition of the world and its problems. We need Bahá'í scholars,

not only people far, far more deeply aware of what our teachings really are, but also well-read and well-educated people, capable of *correlating our teachings* to the current thoughts of the leaders of society.

It is worth noting that the Guardian associates effective Bahá'í teaching with the ability to “correlate” current issues in society with the Bahá'í Teachings. Given the enormous influence of Nietzsche's thought and especially vis-à-vis the “new atheism,” finding correlations and correspondences with the Writings is an effective way of introducing the Writings to new audiences. The Universal House of Justice echoes the Guardian's guideline.

Shoghi Effendi has for years urged the Bahá'ís (who asked his advice, and in general also) to study history, economics, sociology, etc., in order to be *au courant* with all the progressive movements and thoughts being put forth today, and so that they could *correlate these to the Bahá'í teachings*.

In our understanding, the guidance of the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice, to “correlate” means to identify connections between different things. It can also refer to finding correspondences and various degrees of similarity. Finding correspondences or similarities is useful in dialoguing with other beliefs.

While correlations will be our primary focus, we shall, of course, identify and discuss major differences between the Writings and Nietzsche in order to forestall over-identification of the two. After all, the Writings come from Bahá'u'lláh, Who is the Manifestation of God for this age, and, therefore, set the standard for the truth by which to evaluate Nietzsche's work. This difference remains no matter how many correlations we find between the Writings and Nietzsche. Among the most important stumbling blocks contradictions and problems are the master-slave morality, the transvaluation of values, and the

often nasty manner of expression and demeaning tone of Nietzsche's writings. None of these disagreements can be swept away and they will always stand as impediments to an over-identification of the Writings and Nietzsche. However, as we shall explain below, there are different ways of understanding or interpreting these conflicts and how they relate to the correlations.

One of the perennial questions in Nietzsche studies is, 'How can we evaluate and interpret what Nietzsche says?' How can we know, as Robert C Solomon and Kathleen M Higgins put it, "what "Nietzsche *really* said"? Reading him presents a knot of intertwined challenges that are not encountered to nearly the same degree with most other philosophers. The major sources of this problem are, in our view, three-fold. First, as we shall see throughout this paper, are Nietzsche's intellectual self-contradictions, as, for example, the existence or non-existence of a metaphysical substratum to reality. Furthermore, sometimes the *subtext* undermines or flatly contradicts the *apparent* meaning of the text. Second, the foregoing problem is exacerbated by Nietzsche's highly rhetorical and metaphorical style which makes interpretation difficult and easily leads to conflicting views. In addition, Nietzsche's use of exaggeration and bombast which makes it difficult to identify his 'real' position because of the resulting ambiguity. Third, he writes in a mixture of styles and genres, i.e. he does not consistently present his arguments by step-by-step inferences from premises to conclusions. Styles and genre can include serious extended discussions; shorter 'notebook' entries that are often modified or contradicted by later entries; clever aphorisms, provocations, insults, and ad hominem attacks; quasi-biblical works like *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and philosophical myths such as the master-slave morality.

Obviously, reading Nietzsche is a very complicated business. What is central and essential? What is peripheral and accidental? Is there a 'litmus test' for testing his ideas? One well-known group of philosophers and scholars denies that such a test exists

and that we can find ‘meaning’ or coherent philosophy in Nietzsche’s texts. Among these are Jacques Derrida, Sarah Kofman, Karl Jaspers, Alexander Nehamas and Ruediger Safranski. These scholars agree that there is no single ‘meaning’ in Nietzsche waiting to be discovered. Nietzsche’s texts are essentially, an on-going process of discovery in which ideas are suggested and then explored in different contexts and with different issues. Often, they are varied and undermined to lead us to new ideas. Of course, other philosophers and scholars disagree, asserting that to one extent or another, and varying from subject to subject, Nietzsche does, in fact, have a positive philosophy to promulgate. Notable among these are Walter Kaufmann, with his foundational, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*; Robert C Solomon and Kathleen M Higgins, whose book title sums up their position, *What Nietzsche Really Said*; John Richardson who wrote *Nietzsche’s System*; and Arthur C. Danto whose *Nietzsche as Philosopher* is an early but enduring text. As we can see, the range of Nietzsche interpretation is considerable.

Our study of the Bahá’í Writings and Nietzsche is based on Walter Kaufmann’s *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (1950). We do so for three main reasons. First, this is the book that re-introduced Nietzsche to the English-speaking world by studying him as a philosopher with a coherent foundational idea applied to a large number of issues. Second, Kaufmann’s work has withstood almost seventy years of debate and critique and still remains essential in contemporary Nietzsche studies. Kaufmann’s approach to Nietzsche as a serious philosopher with important ideas has left its indelible mark on Nietzsche studies. Kaufmann’s key idea is that “the will to power *is* the core of Nietzsche’s thought but inseparable from his idea of sublimation.” Nietzsche’s concept of “sublimation” entails the necessity for self-overcoming to which Nietzsche returns so frequently. In his book, Kaufmann explores the various applications of Nietzsche’s central insight. Sixty years later, the *Blackwell Dictionary of Western*

*Philosophy* (2009) shows the endurance and pervasive influence of Kaufmann's belief, stating that "the will to power is characterized by self-overcoming and is life-affirming." Third, using the will to power and its concomitant concepts of sublimation and self-overcoming allows Kaufmann to include almost all of Nietzsche's ideas into a reasonably coherent whole. In our view, his book provides unity or at least more unity than other interpretations.

Are the Bahá'í Writings and Nietzsche compatible in regards to their final end, goal or ultimate purpose? There is no simple answer to this question. Shoghi Effendi says that "the supreme and distinguishing function of His Revelation, which is none other than the calling into being of *a new race of men*." Certainly Nietzsche's work can agree with this. A "new race of men" is Zarathustra's goal, and his means, i.e. sublimation and self-overcoming correspond—up to a point—with the Writings. However, whether or not Nietzsche can endorse the concept of spiritual development, depends very much on if we accept Nietzsche's atheism at face value. Our interpretation does not for reasons to be seen below.

The major, unbridgeable difference vis-à-vis ultimate goals appears in the Bahá'í goal of establishing a unified, federal world commonwealth united by "one common faith." In other words, the current world-order needs to be replaced and the means to this end is the transformation or increased spiritualization of human character and the resulting establishment of new institutions. This contrasts with "Nietzsche's lack of a political philosophy." Certainly, he had political opinions but opinions by themselves do not necessarily make a coherent political philosophy. Even his support for rule by a neo-aristocracy does not deal with the issues a genuine political philosophy must deal with—power and power transfers, hierarchies of responsibility, law and so on—thereby leaving his political thought unformed and largely a matter of speculation. In other words, insofar as Nietzsche has a coherent vision of an institutional order, it is completely incompatible with the Bahá'í



goal of a new world order for all of humankind. This topic will be discussed in more detail below.

As so often with Nietzsche, we require a word about Nazism. The idea that Nietzsche was a precursor or proto-Nazi has few if any supporters in modern Nietzsche scholarship. Tracy B Strong in *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche* states, “perhaps no opinion in Nietzsche scholarship is more widely accepted than that the Nazis were wrong and/or ignorant in their appropriation of Nietzsche.” Logically, just because the Nazis thought they understood Nietzsche and (mis)used him, does not mean Nietzsche himself was truly a Nazi or proto-Nazi. A parallel error would be to (mis)use Christ’s statement “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword” to ‘prove’ that He was a warmonger. *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* says Nietzsche has received “considerable attention in the English-speaking world as the shadow cast by the travesty of his appropriation by the Nazis and Fascists has receded.” *The Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* amplifies this point, stating that Nietzsche

gives a large role to the will to power and he proposes to replace the values he attacks with new values and a new idea of the human person (the *Ueberschensch* meaning ‘overhuman’ or ‘superhuman’). Although Nazi theoreticians attempted to associate these ideas with their own cause, responsible interpreters agree that Nietzsche despised and unambiguously rejected both German nationalism and anti-Semitism.

This last point deserves commentary. Extreme German nationalism, imperialism and anti-semitism are three signature doctrines of Nazi theory and rejection of them is absolutely incompatible with being a Nazi or even proto-Nazi. Further evidence for this comes from Nietzsche’s advocacy of cosmopolitanism and interracial intermarriage, and, as we shall see below, his rejection of party politics, socialism and mass

movements of any kind because they destroy individual independence. The idea that Nietzsche (who died in 1900) was a pre-Nazi or proto-Nazi begins with his sister Elizabeth who was also the literary executor of his work. Unlike Nietzsche, she was a staunch German nationalist and imperialist who funded copies of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* for German soldiers heading to the front in 1914. She was also a fanatic anti-semitic married to a prominent anti-semitic, which is why Nietzsche refused to attend her wedding. She was enthralled with National Socialism and Hitler and encouraged the belief that Nietzsche would have been a follower of the 'new superman.' It is difficult to suppress a smile imagining Nietzsche as a follower of anyone.

As Solomon and Higgins note, it makes no sense to blame any thinker for the abuse of his ideas by others after his death. Among other things, that is a dangerous and infeasible practice that would hold all authors responsible for the misapplication of their ideas. For example, we could blame Darwin for significant portions of Nazi ideology vis-à-vis the survival of the fittest and its applications to individuals and societies. The term 'superman' may have come from Nietzsche but the concept of the 'fittest' animal dominating the others has a distinctly Darwinian ring. In fact, Richard Weikart's *Hitler's Ethic: The Nazi Pursuit of Evolutionary Progress* relates Nazism to Darwin. In the case of Nietzsche and Darwin, the Nazis misused other people's ideas but this tells us more about the Nazis than it does about these two thinkers. We do not believe that it is fair to taint the work of an author because others mishandled his or her ideas.

Nonetheless, the fact remains that even without the Nazis, a number of Nietzsche's ideas that can be read as advocating rule by and for the violent. His theory of master-slave morality and the transvaluation of values are clearly of this kind. However, three points should give us pause before reacting against passing judgment on his work as a whole. First, we must not throw out the baby with the bathwater: it is hard to see why our antipathy to some of his ideas should prejudice us against his other ideas.

Second, we should recognize that Nietzsche was not always a consistent thinker and these parts of his philosophy are inconsistencies in his thought at least from vis-à-vis the “core,” i.e. the will to power, sublimation and self-overcoming. Third, because they are not compatible with the “core” of Nietzsche’s thought, these inconsistencies cannot logically undermine those parts that are compatible. They do not work from the same premise, i.e. the “core.”

Finally, as a Bahá’í, I am convinced that as a result of Bahá’u’lláh’s mysterious influence, Nietzsche was one of those individuals who felt—albeit unconsciously or “through a glass darkly”—the necessity of transforming ourselves to prepare for the coming end of European civilization and a new world. Shoghi Effendi refers to “those hidden and transforming influences which, from the source of Bahá’u’lláh’s mystic strength, continue to flow with ever-increasing vitality into the heart of this troubled world.” This, of course, is a matter of personal faith, but even for those who do not share my belief, the fact that there are significant correlations between the widely separated Bahá’í Writings from the Middle East and the European bourgeois Nietzsche is, at the very least, of interest in the history of ideas.

## **2. The Common Foundation Between the Bahá’í Writings and Nietzsche**

First appearances notwithstanding, there are at least three major general foundational elements which the Bahá’í Writings and Nietzsche share: (1) the radical critique of modern society as suffering from irreversible social, intellectual, ethical and spiritual degeneration; (2) the absolute necessity for the establishment of a new kind of society and a re-constitution of humankind, and (3) at the most fundamental level, the Aristotelian substratum of their thought.

## 2.1. The World in Decline

Both Bahá'u'lláh and Nietzsche viewed the modern world as being in a degenerating condition, marked by “selfish disorders, intellectual maladies, spiritual sicknesses, imperfections and vices.” Not surprisingly, such conditions lead to mass despair, i.e. an overwhelming conviction of the loss of all values, the loss of all hope for the future and the loss of all confidence in ourselves or anything else, including God. Bahá'u'lláh writes, “The winds of despair are, alas, blowing from every direction,” and,

*The world is in travail, and its agitation waxeth day by day. Its face is turned towards waywardness and unbelief. Such shall be its plight, that to disclose it now would not be meet and seemly. Its perversity will long continue.*

Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, provides the most comprehensive description of the decaying world order of our time.

No wonder, therefore, that when, as a result of *human perversity*, the light of religion is quenched in men's hearts, and the divinely appointed Robe, designed to adorn the human temple, is deliberately discarded, a deplorable decline in the fortunes of humanity immediately sets in, bringing in its wake all the evils which a wayward soul is capable of revealing. The *perversion of human nature*, the degradation of human conduct, the corruption and dissolution of human institutions, reveal themselves, under such circumstances, in their worst and most revolting aspects. Human character is debased, confidence is shaken, the nerves of discipline are relaxed, the voice of human conscience is stilled, the sense of decency and shame is obscured, conceptions of duty, of solidarity, of

reciprocity and loyalty are distorted, and the very feeling of peacefulness, of joy and of hope is gradually extinguished.

The ultimate cause of this universal decay and loss of direction is the failure of spirituality and religion in the lives modern men and women. The first sign of this inner collapse is the rejection of God's Manifestation for this age, the denial of the "divine physician" Whose task is to renew and revitalize humankind and to help it advance towards its next stage of its psycho-spiritual and social evolution. Another sign of this "perversity" is the inability of humans to recognize their desperate and spiritually impoverished condition. As Bahá'u'lláh says, "*The Hour hath come upon them, while they are disporting themselves. They have been seized by their forelock, and yet know it not.*" The third sign is inability to understand that

*material progress alone does not tend to uplift man. On the contrary, the more he becomes immersed in material progress, the more does his spirituality become obscured.*

We cannot find materialist solutions to spiritual problems. This impossible quest only increases despair—and fuels still more desperate efforts to fill the 'hole in the soul' with more 'stuff.' Similarly, Nietzsche realizes that the "Ultimate Man" cannot find happiness in the quest for more psycho-spiritual comfort because the only way to true well-being is the quest for self-overcoming. It is important to note that for both the Bahá'í Writings and Nietzsche, the origin of the modern crisis is not technological, scientific or political but rather spiritual. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche writes that Europe faces

[t]he peasant rebellion of the spirit—We Europeans confront a world of tremendous ruins ... *The church is this city of destruction: We see ... Christianity shaken to its lowest foundations; the faith in ... God has collapsed.*

Nietzsche identifies nihilism with destruction of values and purpose brought on by the end of the Christian church and Christianity itself. The collapse of religion and spirituality leads to what Nietzsche calls “European nihilism.” In *The Will to Power*, he defines nihilism:

*Nihilism as a psychological state will have to be reached, first, when we have sought a “meaning” in all events that is not there: so the seeker eventually becomes discouraged. Nihilism, then, is the recognition of the long waste of strength, the agony of the “in vain,” insecurity, the lack of any opportunity to recover and to regain composure—being ashamed in front of oneself, as if one had deceived oneself all too long.*

In words reminiscent of the opening of *The Communist Manifesto*, he announces, “Nihilism stands at the door: whence comes this uncanniest of all guests?” This “guest” is characterized by

Skepticism regarding morality ... Buddhistic, yearning for Nothing ... the air of mediocrity, wretchedness, dishonesty, etc. Nationalism, Anarchism, etc. Punishment. The redeeming class and human being are lacking—the justifiers—He adds that moral skepticism is decisive because it leads to nihilism.

Noteworthy among these deficiencies is the lack of a “redeeming class and human being” i.e. an inspirational figure who can re-invigorate and mobilize mankind’s flagging energies. None of these deficiencies can be cured by material possessions comfort or progress. Providing that required spiritual remedy is the major aim of Nietzsche’s philosophy, as seen in Zarathustra’s valiant efforts to regenerate and re-energize the “Ultimate Men,” i.e. the comfort-loving denizens of the valley. In vain, he offers to cure them of their self-contented and materialistic sloth by inner, personal or spiritual transformation

won through painful self-overcoming. This is a significant part of the unavoidable cure for the illnesses of modernity that Bahá'u'lláh offers by “calling into being of a new race of men.” Of course, in the Bahá'í context this self-overcoming requires recognition of God whereas in Nietzsche, this is, as will be shown below, a matter of interpretation.

For Nietzsche, nihilism has two aspects, a “passive nihilism” and an “active nihilism.” “Passive” nihilism is a sign of decreased power, despair, “the weary nihilism that no longer attacks.” By contrast “active” nihilism is a sign of increased power and is a “violent force of destruction,” i.e. a nihilism that clears away all the traditional beliefs and ideas—all the thoughtless and comforting imitations—that prevent us from actualizing our full potentials as conscious beings. “Active” nihilism corresponds to the Bahá'í concept of destroying not the world but rather of “[T]ear[ing] aside the veils that have grievously blinded your vision and ... *scatter* the idols of vain imitation.” In the words of Bahá'u'lláh, “None have believed in Him except them who ... have *shattered the idols of their vain imaginings and corrupt desires* and entered the city of certitude. In both the Bahá'í Writings and Nietzsche we must choose to make a radical break with the past. It is important to notice the strong language used in the Writings—tearing, scattering shattering—to show that spiritual evolution requires great energy and is not always a comfortable process. Nietzsche, of course, uses similar language in this regard.

## 2.2. The Need for Revolutionary Change

**Note:** In order to frame the following discussion, it is imperative to point out that the ultimate aim of the Bahá'í dispensation is the establishment of a new world order, i.e. the unification of humankind in a world-wide federal state united by “one common faith” in which the “spiritual susceptibilities” of humankind are more awake than they are now. Nietzsche, however, has no clear ultimate goal in mind—although some

have inferred such—as we shall discuss below. Therefore, the correspondences between the Writings and Nietzsche are similarities regarding *means* in contrast to differences regarding the ultimate *ends*. It is also important to note that although Bahá'u'lláh's *goal is revolutionary change* in humankind, His *method is evolutionary*, i.e. spiritual, psychological, social development of our “spiritual susceptibilities which are merciful and heavenly characteristics.”

In our view, Bahá'u'lláh does not see Himself as yet another reformer whose purpose is to prolong the existence of the old world order by a patchwork of ‘fixes.’ Rather, His goal is to establish a new world order: “*Soon will the present-day order be rolled up, and a new one spread out in its stead.*” He takes full responsibility for and makes no secret of the momentous changes destabilizing the world as a prelude to establishing a new world order.

*The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order. Mankind's ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System—the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed.*

In *The Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, He describes the Manifestation as “fully capable of *revolutionizing* the world through the power of a single Word” and calls on humanity to

*[c]ast away that which ye possess, and, on the wings of detachment, soar beyond all created things. Thus biddeth you the Lord of creation, the movement of Whose Pen hath revolutionized the soul of mankind.*

Here we see the radical—and spiritual—nature of this Revelation, demanding nothing less than a radical break with the past and a total commitment by divesting ourselves of whatever



attaches us to the old world. Bahá'u'lláh even draws attention to the radical or even traumatic nature of His revelation.

*the whole creation was revolutionized and all that are in the heavens and all that are on earth were stirred to the depths. Through that Word the realities of all created things were shaken, were divided, separated, scattered, combined and reunited, disclosing entities of a new creation.*

It must be remembered that the focal point of Bahá'u'lláh's revolution is spiritual. Unlike revolutionaries in the past, He begins the process of revolution and transformation from within, so that His new world order begins with "a new race of men" who do not simply repeat the errors of the past. Of course the primarily spiritual focus of His revelation does not preclude the daily tasks of mitigating the suffering of individuals or striving for justice in our society. However, these activities are most valuable and reach their fullest potential in the framework of serving the Bahá'í Cause.

One consequence of these tumultuous times is an inevitable struggle with opposing forces. Shoghi Effendi writes,

We have only to refer to the warnings uttered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in order to realize the extent and character of the forces that are *destined to contest* with God's holy Faith peoples, nations, adherents of divers faiths, will jointly and successively arise to shatter its unity, to sap its force, and to degrade its holy name. They will assail not only the spirit which it inculcates, but the administration which is the channel, the instrument, the embodiment of that spirit.

Shoghi Effendi also writes of

the burden of *the impending contest* that must be waged, sooner or later ... between the rising institutions

of Bahá'u'lláh's embryonic divinely appointed Order, and the exponents of obsolescent doctrines and the defenders, both secular and religious, of a corrupt and fast-declining society.

Shoghi Effendi even assigns responsibility for the start of the inexorable conflict on the way to a new world order:

Our *adversaries in the East* have initiated the struggle. Our future *opponents in the West* will, in their turn, arise and carry it a stage further. Ours is the duty, in anticipation of this inevitable contest, to uphold unequivocally and with undivided loyalty the integrity of our Faith.

Given human nature, revolution without contest and conflict is not possible—but the key issue is by what means and towards what end the contest is waged. In the case of the Bahá'í Faith, this “agonistic engagement” is waged not by coups, political opposition, subversion or extra-parliamentary movements but by means of new ideas, revitalized values, good personal examples, energized hope, and appeals to the spiritual elements in human nature. The underlying principle is that by the power of example these transformational activities will gradually encourage people to turn their loyalties and activities away from the old world order and turn towards Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. It is only in this way—a shift of loyalties—that the Bahá'í Faith can be said to be impact negatively on the old world order. In other words, the Bahá'í Faith will not actively work to weaken or bring down the old world order but rather emphasizes spiritual renewal and personal and social transformation that will allow people to build a new world.

Nietzsche appears to suggest somewhat similar action. Through his fictional character Zarathustra as an ideal example and by means of attacking the West's foundational concepts in metaphysics, ethics, logic, religion, science and social organization, he aims at clearing away the out-dated and/or un

supportable concepts that prop up the old world order and hinder the arrival of the Superman. Zarathustra says,

O my brothers, am I then cruel? But I say: *That which is falling should also be pushed!*

Everything of today—it is falling. It is decaying: who would support it? But I—want to push it too!

... I am a prologue to better players, O my brothers! ... Follow my example!

*And him you do not teach to fly, teach—to fall faster!*

The essential message here—the dramatic flare and hyperbole aside—converges with the Bahá'í Writings in rejecting reform and desiring revolution and a future that is not merely a repetition of the past in a different disguise. Their method is similar—up to a point. The shift of loyalties suggested in the Writings is dedicated to building a positive new order, but does not mandate action against the old order as Zarathustra does by encouraging us to push it down.

### 2.3. The Rejection of Politics

Both the Bahá'í Writings and Nietzsche reject partisan political activity as a viable way of changing the world. Shoghi Effendi says,

Bahá'ís should remember that *we stand above politics*. That that field does not interest us; that we attribute importance to things of the spirit, that we await salvation to come from the Faith that burns in our hearts.

Of course, non-participation in partisan politics does not mean Bahá'ís should not engaged in positive works to help individuals or striving for justice but we must be sure that

neither we nor the Faith are being co-opted for partisan purposes. Moreover, non-participation in partisan politics does not mean that the Bahá'í Writings do not have certain principles vis-à-vis governance. They make it clear, among other things, that free, open and democratic government is better for human progress than autocratic government; that elected parliaments are good—if conducted properly; and that undue centralization is a source of ill. However, partisanship is to be avoided because it is 'partial' by nature whereas the Bahá'í focus is on the good of the whole. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá says,

*universality is of God, Bahá'ís in every land are ready, nay anxious, to associate themselves by word and deed with any association of men which, after careful scrutiny, they feel satisfied is free from every tinge of partisanship and politics and is wholly devoted to the interests of all mankind.*

In the words of Shoghi Effendi, "[t]he bonds which hold together the body-politic are not sufficient to unify a nation—or the world. They hold mankind back from its destiny as a global commonwealth.

R. Kevin Hill notes that "Nietzsche rejects all the political ideologies on offer, from left to right as delusions, 'convictions' with no foundation." Politics as practiced in Europe during his time no longer serve any useful purpose: "the time for small politics is gone," a point also emphasized in his disparaging reference to "*the wretched gabble of politics and nationalism and nationalism*" Indeed, his contempt for politics is expressed even more strongly: he describes it as a "*prostitution of the spirit.*" Nietzsche scholar Ted Sadler states,

For Nietzsche as for Heraclitus, politics is one of the most overestimated things in the world, mainly because it caters for the instincts of the common, unphilosophical natures who are always in the majority. *Politics stands in opposition to the radically*

*individualizing character of philosophy* expressed in Heraclitus' statement (Diels-Kranz: Fragment 246) 'I searched out myself.'

Like Bahá'u'lláh, Nietzsche is no mere reformer; he has no confidence in contemporary partisan politics or in political revolutions to solve the problems of nihilism and societal decay. Both insist that we must not confuse and conflate the desire to make revolutionary changes in society by means of individual transformation in goals and values, with the work of political parties, programs and partisan conflicts. In fact, these two will often work at cross purposes. If people are not inwardly transformed, they will inevitably repeat the very behaviors the revolution was supposed to eliminate.

Like Bahá'u'lláh, Nietzsche rejects the partisan politics but most of his political principles not only contradict the Bahá'í Writings but also contradict other aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy as we shall see below. Unlike the Writings, Nietzsche despised democracy as "not only a deterioration, that is to say, the depreciation of a human type, a mediocratizing and lowering of values." Instead, he appears to advocate what Mark Warren calls a "neoribocratic conservatism ... [that looks] forward to a time when similar cultural aristocracies might be established. Bruce Detwiler calls Nietzsche's political views "the politics of aristocratic radicalism" which establishes rule by the most powerful and ruthless. It is not hard to find evidence for such beliefs in Nietzsche who writes,

Every heightening of the type "man" hitherto has been the work of an aristocratic society—and thus it will always be; a society which believes in a long ladder of rank order and value differences in men, which needs slavery in some sense ... To be sure, *we must not yield to humanitarian self-deception* ... Men whose nature was still natural, barbarians in every frightful sense of the word, men of prey ... such men threw themselves upon weaker, better-behaved, more peaceable races ... The

distinguished caste in the beginning was always the barbarian caste; their superiority lay not primarily in their physical but in their psychic power; they were more whole human beings (which on every level also means "more whole as beasts).

Nietzsche approves of the aristocrats for their leadership because they "heighten[ed] "the type of 'man' " In other words, the human race as a whole benefits by their rule. Even if violence is only instrumental at the start of their ascent and their real superiority lay in "their psychic power" the fact remains that they seize and keep power by violence for such is the nature of life itself. Nietzsche writes,

Life is essential assimilation, injury, violation of the foreign and the weaker, suppression, hardness, the forcing of one's own form upon something else, ingestion and—at least in its mildest form—exploitation ... *life is simply will to power* ... "Exploitation" is not a part of a vicious or imperfect or primitive society; it belongs to the nature of living things.

In other words, Nietzsche justifies the aristocrats as realists who accept the conditions of natural life and take advantage of them. This is simply incompatible with the Bahá'í vision of a new world order.

For Nietzsche, the struggle for domination is based on the universally present will to power which is ontologically integral to life. Being ontologically integral to life, it cannot be removed without eliminating life itself. Consequently, for Nietzsche "exploitation" "suppression" or domination i.e. "the forcing of one's own form upon something else" does not necessarily mean a society is "primitive" or "vicious" as most ethical systems would assert. These are natural and necessary activities. In Nietzsche's view, the aristocrats ought to rule precisely because they have attributes listed above and they accept the nature of

reality without any shame and/or guilt, and therefore the aristocrat

feels himself the value-determining; he does not need to be ratified; he judges that “which is harmful to me is harmful as such; he knows that he is the something which gives honor to objects; he creates values ... his morality is self-glorification.

In our view, Nietzsche’s ideas on the will to power in regards to politics have at least two inherent problems which not only conflict with his other teachings but also conflict with the Bahá’í Writings. First, his neo-aristocratic views contradict his doctrine of continuous self-overcoming. A ruling class without interest in self-critique and self-evaluation, i.e. a ruling class which sincerely experiences itself and whatever it does as “the good” is unlikely to engage in self-overcoming since the necessary ‘good’ has already been achieved. The problem is that for Nietzsche the ethics of self-overcoming “distinguish[ ] the moral from the nonmoral [person].” Furthermore, as Kaufmann notes, “self-criticism, i.e. man’s critical reflection on his own intentions and actions—is the core of morality.” The inescapable conclusion is that Nietzsche’s aristocrats are inherently immoral not by Christian standards but the standards set by Zarathustra who is—supposedly—the prime embodiment of Nietzsche’s ethics. The same conclusion follows from Bahá’í ethics in which self-overcoming is also essential to creating “new race of men.”

### *2.3.1 Loyalty to the Earth*

The second problem concerns the relationship between morality and nature, a subject on which Nietzsche is deeply conflicted. On one hand, he justifies the cruelties of his aristocracy by appealing to nature, thereby falling into the Humean fallacy of confusing ‘what is’ with ‘what ought to be,’ i.e. of confusing ‘description’ with ‘prescription’ and ‘knowing what is the case’ with ‘*endorsing* what is the case.’ Describing

and prescribing (endorsing, obligating) are not logically equivalent. Just because Alexis always cooks supper at our house does not mean that Alexis *should* always cook supper at our house. Just because mother rabbits sometimes eat their young in times of danger does not mean that we can justify human mothers doing the same. In other words, Nietzsche wants to base his ethics on nature, on what is 'natural' as part of his philosophy of loyalty to the earth. Nietzsche admonishes us to

*remain true to the earth* and do not believe those who speak to you of superterrestrial hopes! They are poisoners whether they know it or not ... To blaspheme the earth is now the dreadful offence, and to esteem the bowels of the Inscrutable more highly than the meaning of the earth.

There are two problems here. First, self-overcoming is not part of the natural order of things; a crocodile is what it is and does what it does and shows no sign of trying to be 'better' in some way. This loyalty to earth also conflicts with the 'transcendental impulse' we see in his work. Second, it is not necessarily true that belief in the existence of a "superterrestrial" world devalues and degrades the earth and our earthly existence. Why would any believer in God denigrate the Creator's work? That would, in effect, be an attack on the Creator Himself. Nietzsche fails to recognize that there is an essential difference between being excessively attached to the Creator's work and being attached to the Creator. Condemning the undue attachment to nature, i.e. God's work, condemns a faulty response to nature but does not devalue creation itself. Nietzsche's claim that belief in a "superterrestrial" world is in itself a devaluation of the natural world is contradicted by the Bahá'í Writings: "How resplendent the luminaries of knowledge that shine in an atom, and how vast the oceans of wisdom that surge within a drop!" Furthermore, there is Bahá'u'lláh's condemnation of asceticism and monasticism: they impede the full celebration of earthly life and the divine gifts it offers:



*Living in seclusion or practising asceticism is not acceptable in the presence of God. It behoveth them that are endued with insight and understanding to observe that which will cause joy and radiance.*

It is worth noting that Bahá'u'lláh emphasises the “joy and radiance” of earthly life just as Nietzsche does. Moreover, He clearly condemns such practices as originating in “idle fancy” and “superstition” and, thereby, unmasking them as distortions of human existence. Moreover, since the Bahá'í view of human life is a process view, i.e. a character-building journey from earth to the endless spiritual evolution of the Abhá Kingdom, there is no rationale for devaluing the necessary first step of pilgrimage. Without the first step, the others are impossible; indeed, in a process view past steps are implicitly included and even raised to a higher level. Nietzsche's reasoning on this matter does not hold.

However, there is another, in effect, opposing line of thought about nature in Nietzsche. Zarathustra's demand for self-overcoming i.e. self-transcending requires us to tame and transform our natural, animal impulses into something higher. That is why Nietzsche says,

The spiritualization of sensuality is called love: it is a great triumph over Christianity. A further triumph is our spiritualization of enmity. It consists in profoundly grasping the value of having enemies: in brief, in acting and thinking in the reverse of the way in which one formerly acted and thought.

We must transform, or sublimate animal lust into love and spiritualize our conflicts. As Kaufmann notes, Nietzsche “used another word side by side with sublimation: *Vergeisterung*, spiritualization.” We should not view our enemies in the natural way and rise above our impulses to find value in our foes. We must go beyond nature—as is already obvious in Nietzsche's advocacy of self-overcoming to be better humans, not better

animals. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, "*The Prophets come into the world to guide and educate humanity so that the animal nature of man may disappear and the divinity of his powers become awakened.*" It is also noteworthy that Nietzsche's statement about enemies converges with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's admonition:

*Let them see no one as their enemy, or as wishing them ill, but think of all humankind as their friends; regarding the alien as an intimate, the stranger as a companion, staying free of prejudice, drawing no lines.*

### 3. Master and Slave Morality

The issue of Nietzsche's "aristocratic radicalism" brings us to one of the most challenging, controversial and thought-provoking aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy—master and slave morality as presented in *On the Genealogy of Morals* and *Beyond Good and Evil*. This is one of the places where the Bahá'í Writings and Nietzsche can only be reconciled to a limited degree.

In outline, Nietzsche's theory is simple enough. There exist two kinds of morality, i.e. on one hand, the morality of the ruling aristocrats, nobility and masters, and, on the other hand, the morality of the slaves i.e. the subservient classes of people. Nietzsche's description of the masters is provocative: they are hard, proud, intolerant of weakness, self-confident, challenge-seeking, war-like, active and energetic, strong, bluntly truthful about themselves and the world, and focused on law and what is right. In direct contrast, slave morality values the useful i.e. the comfortable and advantageous over the right; it values weakness, kindness and compassion, humility, patience, equality of all things as well denigrating earthly life in favor of a heavenly life after death.

According to Nietzsche, these two moralities clash—although one of them, i.e. slave morality, is the victor in the modern world. Nietzsche links this historical downfall with the rise of

the priestly class in Judaism and Christianity which he identifies with slave morality. However, it is essential to remember that to one degree or another, the struggle between the two kinds of morality continues within us today.

Nietzsche's views on this subject are summarised in the following passage from *On the Genealogy of Morals*:

All the world's efforts against the "aristocrats," the "mighty," the "masters," the "holders of power," are negligible by comparison with what has been accomplished against those classes by the Jews—the Jews, that priestly nation which eventually realized that the one method of effecting satisfaction on its enemies and tyrants was by means of a radical *transvaluation of values*, which was at the same time *an act of the cleverest revenge*. Yet the method was only appropriate to a nation of priests, to a nation of the *most jealously nursed priestly revengefulness*. It was the Jews who, in opposition to the aristocratic equation (good = aristocratic = beautiful = happy = loved by the gods), dared with a terrifying logic to suggest the contrary equation, and indeed to maintain with the teeth of the *most profound hatred (the hatred of weakness)* this contrary equation, namely, "the wretched are alone the good; the poor, the weak, the lowly, are alone the good; the suffering, the needy, the sick, the loathsome, are the only ones who are pious, the only ones who are blessed, for them alone is salvation—but you, on the other hand, you aristocrats, you men of power, you are to all eternity the evil, the horrible, the covetous, the insatiate, the godless; eternally also shall you be the unblessed, the cursed, the damned!"

Before proceeding, we hasten to add that this passage is not an anti-Semitic outburst—Nietzsche openly despised anti-semitism especially in his sister and brother-in-law; rather, it is an observation of a historical turn of events, i.e. the Edict of

Thessalonica in 380 CE by which Christianity and its slave morality became the only authorized religion in the Roman Empire. This event marks the success of the slave revolt and the “transvaluation of values.”

The Bahá'í Writings and Nietzsche's master and slave morality are incompatible for at least one reason: the Writings identify the “slave morality” with the ethical teachings of the Manifestations of God and the “master morality” with the proud and corrupt rulers and leaders of the world to whom Bahá'u'lláh wrote admonitory epistles. In other words, the Bahá'í Writings favor what Nietzsche calls “slave morality”: the morality of the weak, the oppressed, the humble, the compassionate, and the long-suffering as well as the values of dedication to God, unselfishness and service to others. Conversely, the Manifestations have sought to overcome the unself-critical, unreflective self-satisfaction of our animal natures that marks the cruelty and ruthlessness of beasts—and Nietzsche's master class.

Unlike Nietzsche, the Manifestations understood the superiority of the ‘slave’ morals insofar as they maintained the ethics of self-overcoming which “distinguishes the moral [person] from the nonmoral [person].” Kaufmann notes that “self-criticism, i.e. man's critical reflection on his own intentions and actions—is the core of morality.” In contrast, of master morality shows it to be painfully smug, self-satisfied and arrogant even about inflicting violence and, therefore, highly unlikely to lead to the kind of self-critical awareness required for self-overcoming. Ironically, Nietzsche's own standard of self-overcoming means that the aristocracy fails Nietzsche's test for being moral. In sharp contrast, the slave morality with its intense awareness of its own weakness and other deficiencies is far more likely to be open to the process of self-overcoming and, thereby, according to Nietzsche's own standards, becomes more fit to rule.

Once again, we face a division in Nietzsche's philosophy. On one hand we have the "master-and-slave" morality justified by a ruthless vision of life:

What is life?—Life—that is: continually shedding something that wants to die. Life—that is; *being cruel and inexorable* against everything about us that is growing old and weak—and not only about us. Life—that is, then: *being without reverence* for those who are dying, who are wretched, who are ancient? Constantly being a murderer?—And yet old Moses said: "Thou shalt not kill."

The mocking tone of "old Moses"—far more derisive in German than in English—makes clear his contempt for the attributes of slaved morality. On the other hand we have Zarathustra, the exemplar of what humankind should become, i.e. a bridge to the Superman, who engages in constant self-overcoming, who preaches to the "last men" in hopes of awakening the adventure of self-overcoming, who is hard on himself and does not always sing his own praises, who uses the power of words to attain his goals, not violence and who has no real interest in dominating others by force.

Walter Kaufmann tries to avoid this dilemma by suggesting that Nietzsche "would like us to conform to neither [master nor slave morality] and become *autonomous*, i.e. grow beyond both. However, it is difficult to see how being "autonomous" prevents us from having to make choices that either agree more with the stark differences between master and slave morality and their respective consequences. Moreover, it is also difficult to see how one can—or would want to—grow beyond self-overcoming (to what?) and compassion. As soon as we adopt these in any way, we are forced to abandon the master morality. In our view, there is a genuine conflict in Nietzsche's thought on this matter and there is no choice but to recognize one or the other as being consistent with the whole body of Nietzsche's philosophy.

Can the Bahá'í Writings be brought into alignment with Nietzsche's master-slave-morality? In our view, no direct agreements or convergences are evident. However, we find some tenuous parallelism between certain ideas, i.e. we can find ideas that are different in content but fulfill some of the same functions. We might also think of mirror images in which one is the reverse of the other. As we understand the Writings, Nietzsche's concept of 'domination' must be replaced by the concept of 'service,' i.e. the 'leaders' or 'aristocrats' serve humankind. They are 'masters' in the art of promoting spiritual evolution. Thus, both the Writings and Nietzsche have a concept of rank i.e. ways of distinguishing ourselves by special attributes and/or actions but these work in antithetical ways. One obvious difference is that for Nietzsche there is a relationship of enmity and forceful, even violent domination between the masters and slaves. In contrast, in the Bahá'í Writings the 'leaders' neither rule nor dominate nor regard others as foes and inferiors nor are they part of a permanent class. They lead by force of good example and exemplary behavior, by obedience to Bahá'u'lláh's revelation, by constant striving to develop their "spiritual susceptibilities" and in service to others. Among Bahá'ís, the 'masters' themselves are 'slaves' insofar as they ultimately seek to serve God and not themselves. It is, so to speak, a quest to be part of an 'aristocracy of slaves'!

The Bahá'í Writings themselves encourage this sense of spiritual competition to serve. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, "*Happy the soul that shall forget his own good, and like the chosen ones of God, vie with his fellows in service to the good of all.*" Bahá'u'lláh says, "*Vie ye with each other in the service of God.*" The Universal House of Justice tells us that Bahá'u'lláh "encouraged a competitive spirit in its noblest form." In short, the Writings and the guidance from the Universal House of Justice recognize the value of spiritual competition in service.

To the objection that this sounds too combative, we point out that there is an agonistic aspect in the Writings as already

seen in Shoghi Effendi's warnings about future "contests" with opposition to the Faith. Furthermore, lower animal traits can be transformed and transvalued into higher, more spiritual traits. For example, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, reminds us that greed—an animal trait—can become a prized spiritual characteristic.

*greed, which is to ask for something more, is a praiseworthy quality provided that it is used suitably. So if a man is greedy to acquire science and knowledge, or to become compassionate, generous and just, it is most praiseworthy.*

The same principle underlies the use of military imagery in the Writings. For example, in one of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's prayers we read:

*These souls are Thy heavenly army. Assist them and, with the cohorts of the Supreme Concourse, make them victorious, so that each one of them may become like unto a regiment and conquer these countries through the love of God and the illumination of divine teachings.*

In another prayer he says,

*Confirm me in Thy service, assist me with the cohorts of Thy angels, make me victorious in the promotion of Thy Word and suffer me to speak out Thy wisdom amongst Thy creatures.*

In the world-view presented in the Writings—and *Thus Spake Zarathustra*—the many of the qualities of the 'masters' can be spiritualized i.e. transformed and transvalued to achieve higher goals than mere earthly dominion. They continue the never-ending process of self-overcoming by being cruel and relentless to themselves in defeating their stubborn weaknesses and self-deceptions.

Unlike Nietzsche's masters, his exemplary hero Zarathustra could agree with much of what the Writings say on the issue of service as well as with the following by 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

*O people! Ye are the fruits of one tree and the leaves of one branch. At most it is this, that some souls are ignorant, they must be educated; some are sick, they must be healed; some are still of tender age, they must be helped to attain maturity, and the utmost kindness must be shown to them. This is the conduct of the people of Bahá.*

At the beginning of his journey down the mountain, Zarathustra, tells the old man in the forest, "I love mankind" and answers the old man's objections by saying, "I am bringing mankind a gift." His mission is to educate, to heal, to mature and to show his insights with a sincere heart and kindness. In effect, he comes down to serve in agreement with the words of Bahá'u'lláh that "The people are ignorant, and they stand in need of those who will expound the truth." If there is an 'aristocracy' in the Bahá'í Writings, it is an 'aristocracy' of service -certainly not an aristocracy of power, domination and harshness.

To conclude: the Bahá'í Writings and Nietzsche are reversed mirror images of each other in regards to 'masters' and slaves.' Both embody the concepts of 'rank,' 'contest' and 'leadership' but one does so in the service of self and the other in the service of humankind and God. Furthermore, Nietzsche's aristocrats dominate by force and live in a state of enmity with others. They are also part of a permanent class structure and are centered on themselves as highest form of human existence. Their actions are justified in and of themselves. This stands in sharp contrast to the Bahá'í understanding of leadership in terms of service to humankind with the purpose of helping all develop their highest "spiritual susceptibilities" both as individuals and as members of society. There is no permanent ruling class.



#### 4. The Bahá'í Writings, Nietzsche and Aristotle

The pervasive presence of Aristotelian metaphysics and ontology in both the Bahá'í Writings and Nietzsche identifies another important area of agreement and convergence between the two. Because of this common foundation, the correlations between the Writings and Nietzsche are not serendipitous coincidences but—for the most part—the outcome of working with the same philosophical concepts in analyzing and explaining reality. At this point it must be said that Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá have affirmed the validity of certain Aristotelian concepts—especially in metaphysics and ontology—by using them extensively throughout the Bahá'í Writings. Similarly, in the case of Nietzsche, numerous authors have detected Aristotle's influence, among them Kaufmann, Richardson, Solomon, Hough, Silk and Stern, Emden and Williams. Since Nietzsche was a trained philologist specializing in Greek and Latin supports the belief that he was at least passingly familiar with Aristotle's major principles.

The Bahá'í Writings and Nietzsche use Aristotle's ontology of potentials to analyze, understand and explain reality. Of course, this ontology implicitly includes all the major elements of Aristotelian metaphysics. Let us see how. For Aristotle, potentials are (a) the ability or power of a thing to initiate or stop change in oneself or others or (b) the ability to change into or be changed into something else or be acted upon. Moreover, every single thing or kind of thing is identified and limited by its particular combination of potentials. That is why we cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. It lacks the potentials for such a transformation. Furthermore, the essence of a thing is the collection of potentials that distinguish a particular kind and/or individual from other kinds and/or individuals.

Little reflection is needed to see that the ontology of potentials also implies the concept of 'actuality' or what a thing is at a specific moment as distinct from what it can/will be in the future. This, in turn, implies the distinction between

appearance—what a thing is at any particular moment—and its reality, i.e. its full albeit ‘bundle’ of potentials both actualized and unactualized. Anything that has its own unique ‘bundle’ of potentials is a ‘substance’ i.e. something that stands by itself and is not an attribute of something else. “Silver” the Lone Ranger’s horse, is a substance because he is not a quality of some other thing. The ontology of potentials also implies the existence of ‘force’ or ‘power’—or ‘will’ in Nietzsche’s language—to actualize a potential, i.e. cause change within oneself or in others. Finally, the ontology of potentials requires that all things have a goal, a ‘telos’ i.e. a certain preferred direction or goal towards which things develop. Maple trees never grow into lobsters. The potentials a thing has limit what it can become, i.e. set it towards certain goals. Nietzsche, of course, claims to have rejected these concepts as part of a now irrelevant philosophical past, but numerous passages show that in fact, he consistently made use of them either explicitly or implicitly.

Aristotle’s ontology of potentials—including teleology—is most dramatically illustrated in Zarathustra’s command, “Become what you are!” This command only makes sense on the assumption that we have an essence made up of certain potentials unique to us as members of the human race and as human individuals. It requires the distinction between appearance, i.e. what we are now, and reality, i.e. our unactualized potentials. Furthermore, this command requires free will in order to struggle for a goal within our range of potentials. In addition, this command only makes sense if we have an essence that is stable, i.e. is continuous enough to be given instructions that can be meaningfully followed over a period of time, i.e. has continuity through change. In short, it must have identity or ‘being’ or be a ‘substance.’ Thus it appears that Nietzsche did, albeit implicitly—or perhaps inadvertently—accept the concepts of potential, essence, goals, free will, cause-and-effect, the distinction between appearance and reality and substance since without them, a significant

portion of his philosophy of self-overcoming would lose its logical and ontological foundations.

Another appeal to essences—and implicit to potentials and the ontology of potentials—is what Nietzsche says at the end of *The Will to Power*. He tacitly assumes the reality of essences—and by implication potentials—by saying, “*This world is the will to power—and nothing besides!* And you yourselves are also this will to power and nothing besides! This statement plainly asserts that in their essential natures, the world, all beings in it and all human beings are the will to power. However, the matter does not end here. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche writes,

The world seen *from within*, the world defined and designated according to its “intelligible character”—it would simply be “Will to Power,” and nothing else.

This claim identifies the ‘inner’ essence of the world and its “intelligible character” as the will to power even though it does not appear as the will to power. In other words, it establishes the distinction between appearance and reality. The same Aristotelian ontology of potentials and essence is present in the following:

The victorious concept of “force,” by means of which our physicists have created God and the world, still needs to be completed: *an inner will* must be ascribed to it, *which I designate the “will to power,”* i.e. an insatiable desire to manifest power, or as the employment and exercise of power as a creative drive, etc.

Nietzsche’s objections to the concept of ‘essence’ notwithstanding, this is essentialism, i.e. the view that all things have an inner nature which, in Nietzsche’s view is “will.” Consequently, we can always look ‘though’ the outward appearance of a thing and deduce the reality, the “intelligible character” of a particular thing while observing the will to

power in one of its particular modes. We may see this will to power in a stone or a pike or a baby but in each case the essence operates under the same mandate, to 'become what it is.' In light of the foregoing discussion, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Nietzsche's overt denial of concepts like essence, free will, teleology and the ontology of potentials cannot be taken at face value because he implicitly re-introduces them in the course of his major teachings.

The Bahá'í Writings harmonize with those aspects of Nietzsche that make use of the ontology of potentials, essence and the appearance/reality distinction. The ontology of potentials is one of the foundational philosophical ideas in the Bahá'í Writings as seen in the following:

*Man is the microcosm; and the infinite universe, the macrocosm. The mysteries of the greater world, or macrocosm, are expressed or revealed in the lesser world, the microcosm. The tree, so to speak, is the greater world, and the seed in its relation to the tree is the lesser world. But the whole of the great tree is potentially latent and hidden in the little seed. When this seed is planted and cultivated, the tree is revealed. Likewise, the greater world, the macrocosm, is latent and miniaturized in the lesser world, or microcosm, of man. This constitutes the universality or perfection of virtues potential in mankind.*

In this passage, mankind's relationship to the universe is explained in terms of hidden potentials and actualization or revealing of the hidden. There is the present actuality or appearance and the future actuality after latent potentials have been actualized. Bahá'u'lláh states,

*Consider, moreover, how the fruit, ere it is formed, lieth potentially within the tree. Were the tree to be cut into pieces, no sign nor any part of the fruit, however small, could be detected. When it appeareth, however, it*

*manifesteth itself, as thou hast observed, in its wondrous beauty and glorious perfection.*

Once again we observe the appearance/reality distinction: the actual appearance is the tree but the tree's reservoir of potentials or essence remains hidden until actualized in the fruit. Of course, the Writings apply these ideas to the role of the Manifestations in human history:

*The holy Manifestations of God come into the world to dispel the darkness of the animal, or physical, nature of man, to purify him from his imperfections in order that his heavenly and spiritual nature may become quickened, his divine qualities awakened, his perfections visible, his potential powers revealed and all the virtues of the world of humanity latent within him may come to life.*

From this it follows that the doctrine of progressive revelation also fits into the ontology of potentials. As seen above, humankind contains latent attributes or potentials and as these are actualized under the guidance of various Manifestations, humankind makes spiritual and material progress.

Nietzsche also agrees with the Writings insofar as we should "become what [we] are"—indeed, one might well argue that enabling us to do so is the whole point of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation. Unless we humans become what we really are, instead of living hypocritically by professing one thing and doing another, we hinder our growth personally and collectively. This raises the question, 'Who, really, are we?' and to that, the Bahá'í answer is clear:

*As for the spiritual perfections they are man's birthright and belong to him alone of all creation. Man is, in reality, a spiritual being, and only when he lives in the spirit is he truly happy. This spiritual longing and perception belongs to all men alike, and it is my firm*

*conviction that the Western people possess great spiritual aspiration.*

Because of our essentially spiritual nature, human beings have a spiritual destiny or vocation in this world (and beyond) and our true happiness is fulfilling this nature no matter how hard this may be. How could we be happy if we are, so to speak, living against ourselves by forgetting that our residence in nature, while a necessary part of our development, is only temporary? The task of being a Bahá'í is the task of becoming our spiritual selves.

There is no question that the Bahá'í Writings see all things endowed with an essence (as described by Aristotle as a reservoir of potentials) and, therefore, connect with the implicit recognition of essences in Nietzsche's work. In *The Kitab-i-Iqan* Bahá'u'lláh tells us that "the light of divine knowledge and heavenly grace hath illumined and inspired the *essence of all created things*, in such wise that in each and every thing [is] a door of knowledge." Here is a partial list of things which the Writings identify as having an essence: God; the human soul; humankind; justice; "all created things"; beauty; species of living things; truth; religion; "this new age"; and the spirit. Indeed, references to 'essence' are even more wide-spread once we realize that such phrases as "inmost reality"; "the realities of"; "reality of"; "inner reality"; and "inner realities"; also refer to the essence of things.

It should be noted that the concept of 'essence' does not deny the relational or—as we shall see below—the process nature of things and bestow them with "an intrinsic non-relational character." 'Abdu'l-Bahá states,

*For all beings are connected together like a chain; and reciprocal help, assistance and interaction belonging to the properties of things are the causes of the existence, development and growth of created beings.*

All things, including their essences, are relational, i.e. they exist as part of a complex of relations. However, this does not preclude essences. The essence of a particular thing is made up of a certain set of relations—and not a different set of relations. In other words, the relations that make up a human being are not the same relations as those that make up a horseshoe crab with its blue blood. In short, there is no logical contradiction between relationality and essence.

Aristotle's ontology of potentials—and by extension the Bahá'í Writings' and Nietzsche's—implicitly embodies other Aristotelian concepts such as substance. For Aristotle, a substance is a thing that exists independently of other things, or, a thing that is not an attribute of something else and a thing that continues through change, i.e. a continuant. For example, a horse exists independently—it does not die if the farmer dies—and it is not a quality that something else has nor is it a different horse tomorrow than it is today. Some of its non-essential attributes may have changed but a slight graying of the mane or a thinner belly does not make it a different horse because there is an observable—or filmable—continuity from birth until today. We shall explain the false contradiction between being and becoming below. 'Abdu'l-Bahá uses this definition of substance to prove the immortality of the soul:

*Some think that the body is the substance and exists by itself, and that the spirit is accidental and depends upon the substance of the body, although, on the contrary, the rational soul is the substance, and the body depends upon it. If the accident—that is to say, the body—be destroyed, the substance, the spirit, remains.*

Because the soul is a 'substance' in the Aristotelian sense, it exists independently of the body or, conversely, the body is an accidental attribute of the soul and needs the soul to actually be a body and live. Obviously, the soul-substance is a continuant and because it is not an attribute of the body, can exist without it.

Nietzsche's views on 'substance' are ambiguous, i.e. overtly denying the validity of this concept and covertly using it. He writes,

Insofar, however, as all metaphysics has had principally to do with *sugarystance* and freedom of will, one may designate it the science that treats of the fundamental errors of mankind—but does so as though they were fundamental truths.

His words notwithstanding, the problem is obvious: without the Aristotelian concept of substance, Nietzsche's philosophy encounters fatal obstacles. For example, Nietzsche describes the will to power as the essence of all things, manifesting in everything in the phenomenal world—and, thereby, the will to power that persists through all kinds and all changes is a continuant, i.e. a 'substance' in the Aristotelian sense. Nor is the will to power as such an attribute of anything else, nor does it depend on anything else for its existence. Therefore, one of Nietzsche's key concepts is an example of what he explicitly denies. The same argument can be applied to Zarathustra and the Superman. Once again, we find that the implicit content of his work is in full agreement with the Bahá'í Writings while his explicit statements are not.

## 5. Process Philosophy

Aristotle's ontology of potentials solves the ancient philosophical problem of the apparent conflict between 'being' and 'becoming' and, thereby creates one of the connecting points between the Writings and Nietzsche who seems to deny that the concept of 'being' has any validity: "Heraclitus will always be right in this, that being is an empty fiction." 'Being' refers to the continuity of a thing, to the retention of identity according to Aristotle. In contrast 'becoming' refers to the changes a thing undergoes, i.e. a process of actualizing its potentials and changing from one state or condition to another.



Thus, Aristotle's ontology of potential tells us that the traditional absolute dualism between 'being' and 'becoming' is false. Nothing is ever in just one condition or the other: a sprouting sunflower seed actualizes its particular sunflower potentials and, by doing so, is *being* or *be-ing* a sunflower seed. Or, we could say a plant is being a sunflower by becoming more of a sunflower as more of its various potentials are manifested. In regards to Nietzsche, this means there is no basis to the argument that Aristotle's alleged philosophy of being is intrinsically incompatible with Nietzsche's philosophy of becoming. In more general terms, process philosophies are not necessarily irreconcilable with philosophies of being.

Both the Bahá'í Writings and Nietzsche are based on a process metaphysics, i.e. a philosophy that is based on the principle that reality is fundamentally constituted by change. The Writings explicitly state:

*Know that nothing which exists remains in a state of repose—that is to say, all things are in motion. Everything is either growing or declining; all things are either coming from nonexistence into being, or going from existence into nonexistence ... This state of motion is said to be essential—that is, natural; it cannot be separated from beings because it is their essential requirement, as it is the essential requirement of fire to burn ... ?*

*Thus it is established that this movement is necessary to existence, which is either growing or declining.*

According to the Bahá'í Writings, motion, i.e. change, i.e. the actualization of potentials is an essential attribute of all existing things. Indeed, a dialectical process between the present actual form of something and the potentials that are trying to actualize and to develop new forms is always underway. In fact, these dialectical 'battles' constitute all things as what they are. The moment this process stops, a thing stops existing.

According to Kaufmann, in Nietzsche's "dialectical monism" "will to power ... is always at war with itself." In humankind this might appear as a dialectic between "reason and impulse" or between the drive for self-overcoming and the fear of suffering. Here, too, the Bahá'í Writings and Nietzsche are similar insofar as Nietzsche sees an inner conflict as we have already seen in the doctrine of self-overcoming. He rejects "being" which he identifies with stasis. The "opposition and war" refers to this inward struggle of self-overcoming.

I retained some doubt in the case of Heraclitus in whose proximity I feel altogether warmer and better than anywhere else. The affirmation of passing away *and destroying*, which is the decisive feature of Dionysian philosophy; saying yes to opposition and war; becoming along with a radical repudiation of the very concept of *being*—all this is clearly more closely related to me than anything else ...

### 5.1. Agreement on Teleology

Nietzsche's overt denials of teleology notwithstanding, teleology plays an essential role in his thought. Indeed, because the teleological strain in Nietzsche's philosophy is so clearly evident, Nietzsche scholar R. Kevin Hill says that Nietzsche's work shows "in nature a teleological tendency towards the production of higher human beings: artists, philosophers and saints." John Richardson adds,

I take it to be evident from the expression itself that '*will to power*' is a *potency for something, a directedness towards an end* ... Nietzsche, despite his repeated attacks on (what he calls) teleology really has such a theory himself: the beings or units in the world are crucially *end-directed* and to understand them properly is to grasp how they're directed or aimed.

Above all, it's to grasp how they're aimed at power, an end *essential* to them.

For his part, Nietzsche states:

But all expansion, incorporation, growth means striving against something that resists; motion is essentially tied up with states of displeasure; that which is here the driving force must in any event *desire something else ...* For what do the trees in the jungle fight each other? For “happiness”—For power!

In his view, whatever we do is motivated—consciously or not—by the purpose of increasing power. In *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, we can see the implicit teleological influence at work when he says:

I teach you the Superman. Man is something that should be overcome. What have you done to overcome him?

All creatures hitherto have created something beyond themselves: and do you want to be the ebb of this great tide, and return to the animals rather than overcome man?

“Creating something beyond themselves” is the goal towards which all beings are naturally oriented. Humans are encouraged to mobilize, i.e. actualize their capacities or potentials in order to “overcome” themselves as they presently are to become something better or to clear the way for something better. That is what “all creatures hitherto” have done, and is, by implication, the natural destiny of humankind. Failing in this regard, means we are no longer acting as ‘natural’ beings and have become something ‘unnatural’ by missing our natural teleological destiny.

The Bahá'í Writings and Nietzsche agree on the teleological nature of all things, which is to say, all things are goal-oriented.

'Abdu'l-Bahá states that "*All beings, whether large or small, were created perfect and complete from the first, but their perfections appear in them by degrees.*" This process of actualizing their potentials is, in fact, their being or be-ing (the process remains constant) and shows that they are teleological in nature, i.e. there is a natural progression from potential or latency to actualization. The difference between humans and a seed is that we must strive for our goal consciously whereas the seed does so unconsciously or automatically. Not only are individual lives teleological but so is the collective life of humankind:

*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.*

Here Bahá'u'lláh lists some of the moral potentials humanity should actualize as it fulfills its goal achieving progress. Humans must not "*act like the beasts of the field*" because doing so conflicts with our spiritual nature and is, in effect, a betrayal of ourselves because our essential spiritual nature remains unactualized. Humans—indeed, all beings—can only be happy when they actualize their appropriate potentials—which is precisely their goal. Indeed, actualizing our higher, specifically spiritual potentials is, in effect, the Bahá'í 'definition' of happiness. In the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "*True happiness depends on spiritual good and having the heart ever open to receive the Divine Bounty.*" Opening our hearts to God or awakening our "spiritual susceptibilities" is, of course, our chief spiritual potential.

## 6. Nietzsche's "Alleged Atheism—The Death of God"

Although Nietzsche is probably the world's most famous atheist, we shall demonstrate that his atheism is highly ambiguous. In fact, Roy Jackson aptly characterizes Nietzsche as "a 'sort' of atheist." What he destroys with one hand he restores with the other. We should add that Nietzsche's ambiguity about religion and the transcendent is no surprise. It is already evident in his first major work, *The Birth of Tragedy* in which he uses two Greek gods, Apollo and especially Dionysus, as concrete symbols of transcendental powers of order and exuberance.

Metaphysically speaking, Nietzsche is not an atheist. It is true that he overtly rejects the personal God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob but in *The Will to Power*, he offers a metaphysical description of the will to power in language that effectively re-creates the 'God of the philosophers,' i.e. something with all the ontological attributes of God. The will to power underlies and is present in everything; it is unlimited power; it has no beginning or end; it is mysterious and unknowable; and it is beyond space and time. Moreover, it is absolutely independent of each of the forms in which it manifests itself, i.e. it depends on nothing and, therefore, cannot be constrained by anything. It is super-natural because nothing in nature has any of these attributes. We need not belabor the point that in the Bahá'í Writings, God possess all of these ontological attributes.

At the end of *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche writes,

And do you know what "the world" is to me? Shall I show it to you in my mirror? This world: a monster of energy, without beginning, without end; a firm, iron magnitude of force that does not grow bigger or smaller, that does not expend itself but only transforms itself ... as a becoming that knows no satiety, no disgust, no weariness: this, my Dionysian world of the eternally self-creating, the eternally self-destroying, this mystery world

of the twofold voluptuous delight, my “beyond good and evil,” without goal, unless the joy of the circle is itself a goal; without will, unless a ring feels good will toward itself—do you want a name for this world? A solution for all its riddles? A light for you, too, you best-concealed, strongest, most intrepid, most midnightly men?—This world is the will to power—and nothing besides! And you yourselves are also this will to power—and nothing besides!

In Nietzsche's view, this ground of being is amoral, i.e. beyond good and evil. However, the Bahá'í Writings reveal a convergent idea—namely that God “*doeth what He willeth, and ordaineth that which He pleaseth.*” In other words, God—or the will to power—determines what is good or not and thereby shows Himself to be “beyond good and evil.” This idea is illustrated by Bahá'u'lláh's statement “*Shouldst Thou regard him who hath broken the fast as one who hath observed it, such a man would be reckoned among them who from eternity had been keeping the fast.*” The disagreement between the Writings and Nietzsche arises as a result of giving mere humans, i.e. the aristocrats and nobles, the same power of deciding their own morality on their own intrinsically limited human terms. This is logically unjustifiable because they lack the qualifications i.e. God's absolute independence from all external influence and constraint and His complete knowledge of human nature that entitles them to make decisions for all. Without these qualifications, their moral choices are, in the end, self-serving and arbitrary and will inevitably have to be maintained by force. Moreover, Nietzsche's description of the will to power cannot hide one obvious implication: its creativity and the gift of existence to all things as well as the fact that existence is freely given since we are not there to earn it. This creativity and ontological generosity can easily be the basis of positive moral principles insofar as this super-natural munificence provides a model for human behavior.

Nietzsche's atheism is very tentative. For example, in *The Gay Science*, the Madman says, "God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him"—and then suggests that we must become gods to be worthy of this great act. Even in such a forthright declaration, we can detect signs of what we call the 'transcendental impulse' in Nietzsche's work, an inclination expressed in both ideas and word choice to re-introduce the divine or transcendental into our consciousness and our understanding of life. There is nothing about the death of God, i.e. atheism, which logically demands that we should take God's place by becoming gods.

Here is an example of Nietzsche's ambiguous language from *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, written in the 'chapter and verse' style of the Bible and showing the 'transcendental impulse' in his word choice. Speaking of the "Sublime Men," Zarathustra says,

To be sure, I love in him the neck of the ox; but now I want to see the *eye of an angel*, too.

He must unlearn his heroic will, too: he should be an *exalted* man and not only a *sublime* itself should raise him up, the will-less one!

He has tamed his monsters, he has solved riddles: but he should also *redeem* his monsters and riddles, he should transform them into *heavenly children* ...

Then your *soul* will shudder with *divine* desires; and there will be *worship* in your vanity!

This indeed is the secret of the *soul*: only when the hero has deserted his *soul* does there approach it in dreams—the superhero.

The religious tenor of his word choice is supported by the narrative of the entire *Thus Spake Zarathustra* itself: Zarathustra, a Moses-like prophetic figure descends from his

mountain retreat—like Moses bringing His gifts of new commandments and wisdom—so that humans may continue their evolution to make way for a higher being called the Superman. In the idea of becoming gods, he invokes *Genesis* in which the Serpent promises Eve, “Ye shall be as gods.” In short, the Serpent promises to help Adam and Eve to transcend their human condition. Throughout his work, there are constant references to words such as ‘spirit,’ ‘holy’ and ‘soul’ words whose ambiguous sacred and non-sacred connotations display Nietzsche’s ambiguity in regards to the transcendent. The following statement also his use of religious language even when repudiating Christian morality:

Every act of contempt for sex, every impurification of it by means of the concept of ‘impure’ is the crime par excellence against life—is the *real sin against the holy spirit of life*.

However, the convergences between the Bahá'í Writings and Nietzsche about God go even further than a common belief in a transcendental entity. In our view, Nietzsche missed and loved religion so much he struggled to create, if not a new religion of his own, then at least an adequate substitute world-view. For example, he sees the collapse of religion as the basis of the modern crisis. Nietzsche refers to “the end of Christianity” and the Writings state “as a result of human perversity, the light of religion is quenched in men's hearts” This belief logically implies that religion provides something necessary for the well-being of human beings and without religion (for whatever reason) humankind suffers and degenerates. Paradoxically, Nietzsche seeks a Christ-like ‘redeemer.’ He says of the Superman—whose name alone carries transcendent connotations—“Behold! I teach you the Superman: he is the sea, in him your great contempt can go under.” In this description, the Superman is truly super-human, i.e. the sea into which we can save ourselves from overwhelming self-contempt. Like Christ, he can take our sins on Himself; the Superman can take into himself our contempt



for ourselves and thereby offer us new opportunities for growth. This, too, points to transcendence for no natural human being can do such a thing. In addition, this suggests that the Superman is not entirely natural and somehow beyond nature. Ironically, this implication of the Superman violates Zarathustra's own injunction to be loyal to the earth and to deny the super-natural. Moreover, the need for a 'redeemer' converges with the Bahá'í teaching that Manifestations of God are necessary for humankind to progress. The pervasive presence of this 'transcendent impulse' helps give a religious dimension to a thinker who is—superficially perhaps—anti-religious.

Nor should we overlook that the "eternal return" is itself strongly tinged with religious and transcendental colors. Seen in a religious light, it seems much like a non-Christian version of heaven and hell. R. Kevin Hill states

the doctrine of eternal recurrence is best understood as a replacement for the Christian doctrine of an afterlife of rewards and punishments. Recurrence is like a reward for those who live well and are strong and a punishment for those who live badly and are weak.

Seen as a metaphysical doctrine, i.e. a doctrine about the basic nature of the universe, the eternal return reveals its transcendental nature by imposing on the universe the super-natural attribute of lasting forever. No empirical observation has ever encountered such an object in nature. So much for remaining loyal to the earth! In effect, the eternal return claims that the universe is beyond time since the same results occur again and again. Such timelessness is precisely one of the attributes of God in the Writings. Furthermore, the absolute repetition inherent in the eternal return also means there is no essential change—an attribute which converges with the Bahá'í belief that God is not subject to change. On a strictly empirical basis, Nietzsche was bound to reject these attributes—and the fact that he did not, highlights his ambiguity about religious

beliefs. But this ambiguity deepens. On the basis of scientific knowledge of his time, Nietzsche would have known that the random collision of atoms, i.e. collisions that were causally unconnected to each other, would not necessarily have brought about the eternal return. If the collisions are truly random, i.e. not determined by any preceding event or object, then there is no necessity whatsoever that today's world will ever return in its exact present form. In fact, in a world of genuinely random actions, there is no necessity of any kind at all: things just happen without being conditioned, i.e. limited by foregoing events or other objects. The concept of the "eternal return" only works if we tacitly assume that atoms have been bestowed with suitable nature and that laws of nature exist—which inevitably leads to the issue of how these attributes and laws originated. In other words, Nietzsche slipped into transcendental thinking, i.e. thinking that implicitly includes God. There is nothing in our empirical, earthly experience on which such concepts can be based for which reason we may say the "eternal return" itself is an example of the 'transcendental impulse' in Nietzsche.

Of course, it may be argued that Nietzsche does not mean 'transcendent' in any non-physical way, especially in light of his command to "remain true to the earth." But that is exactly the point; as we have shown above by examining Nietzsche's language and thought, he cannot live up to his own ideal—he is fundamentally conflicted and the Transcendent as Jaspers calls it, is present throughout much of his work. This presence is exactly where the Bahá'í Writings make contact with Nietzsche.

In light of Nietzsche's 'transcendental impulse' it is highly improbable that he was an 'atheist' as usually understood: a person who denies any transcendent powers. It is far more likely that "Nietzsche means the god of transcendental monotheism and Christian morality ... it is the 'God' of Judeo-Christianity who is dead, but the divine is something totally different." From a Bahá'í perspective, this idea poses no difficulties as long as we understand that Nietzsche is not making an ontological

claim about the existence or non-existence of God or a ground of being but rather is making a sociological claim about the role of God in the lives of individuals and societies. In other words, he is saying—among other things—that the concept of God no longer plays any significant role in the modern world, that people have more confidence in themselves, in government and in science and technology than they do in God or in their own faith in God. He is also pointing out that organized religion, its institutions, its hierarchies and theologies have become corrupt and feeble.

The Bahá'í Writings and Nietzsche agree on the 'death of God' if taken as the recognition that genuine religion—as distinct from its superficial outward appearances—is no longer a major force among modern individuals and societies in the modern world. Free thought, i.e. the independent investigation of truth, is imprisoned by the clergy. As already noted, Bahá'u'lláh recognizes that "*The vitality of men's belief in God is dying out in every land.*" Speaking of Islam and Christianity, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that only the "*form has remained in the hands of the clergy.*"

For both the Writings and Nietzsche, the renewal of humankind involves an unavoidable struggle against clergy who seek to retain their power. Both seek to overcome the clergy, but even as Nietzsche clearly aims at the destruction of priesthood, he still feels a certain kinship and pity with them, admitting, "There are heroes even among them; many of them have suffered too much: so they want to make others suffer ... I want to know my blood honoured even in theirs." In a similar attitude of reconciliation, the Writings invite the clergy to join the Bahá'í dispensation.

*Wherefore flee ye? The Incomparable Friend is manifest. He speaketh that wherein lieth salvation. Were ye, O high priests, to discover the perfume of the rose garden of understanding, ye would seek none other but Him,*

*and would recognize, in His new vesture, the All-Wise and Peerless One.*

## 7. Self-overcoming

One of the central concepts of ethical practice in the Bahá'í Writings and Nietzsche is 'self-overcoming,' i.e. taking an active part in actualizing one's own potentials, removing undesirable traits and increasing their powers and capacities. Self-overcoming is Nietzsche's strategy for defeating nihilism which, in his view, is corrupting and destroying modern culture. This converges with the Bahá'í Writings belief that "Man must now become imbued with new virtues and powers, new moralities, new capacities" Obviously, when we gain "new virtues and powers" our powers will be expanded.

Both in the Bahá'í Writings and Nietzsche we see what may be called "ethics of power, i.e. an ethics of the growth of power in the sense of 'capacity.' The ultimate purpose of Bahá'u'lláh's guidance is allow us to expand our power, i.e. to "awaken [our] spiritual susceptibilities" and make possible both spiritual and material progress. This requires conscious self-overcoming and transformation inspired by Bahá'u'lláh's revelation; in the case of Nietzsche, this is achieved by conformity with the will to power. In both cases, humans have to submit to a Power greater than themselves and greater than anything in the natural world.

What Zarathustra wants from the people in the valley, does not contradict what Bahá'u'lláh wants from us.

Self-overcoming is crucial for two reasons. First, it is the only way to become a bridge to the Superman because by overcoming ourselves, we remove an obstacle—the present selves we cling to—so that the Superman may advance. Second, self-overcoming is the only way to free ourselves from our weak and cowardly aspects and, thereby, to grow in our pursuit of the will to power and to become one with our essential selves. In short, self-overcoming is necessary to end our alienation from

our true identity and, thereby, come into possession of our selves. Like the Bahá'í Writings, Nietzsche endorses the paradox that to become our best selves, we must surrender our current identities. In addition, this “true self” becomes “a shining and wonderful reality” because, in Nietzsche’s terms, it has done what is good, i.e. that which “heightens the feeling of power in man, the will to power, power itself.”

The importance of self-overcoming to Nietzsche is evident in his belief that self-overcoming “distinguishes the moral [person] from the nonmoral [person].” This is more evidence that Nietzsche does, in fact, have a moral code including an objective standard by which to evaluate our actions: the willingness and effort to surpass ourselves, the willingness to suffer the inevitable discomfort and pain of simultaneously actualizing our potentials for the future and leaving behind our presently achieved actuality. Zarathustra says that he loves those who “will [their] own downfall,” i.e. he loves those who are willing to sacrifice themselves for something greater than themselves. Later, Zarathustra says,

And life itself told me this secret: ‘Behold,’ it said, ‘I am that which *must overcome itself* again and again ... ‘I would rather perish than renounce this one thing; and truly where there is perishing and the falling of leaves, behold, there life sacrifices itself—for the sake of power.

Nietzsche carries on this theme in *On the Genealogy of Morals*:

All great things bring about their own destruction through an act of self-overcoming: thus the law of life will have it, the law of the necessity of ‘self-overcoming’ in the nature of life

Here we observe the ‘pruning’ or ‘self-pruning’ mentioned in the Writings. For his part, Zarathustra informs us that “only if he [man] turns away from himself will he jump over his own shadow—and jump into truth, into his own sunlight.” In other

words, the current self must be rejected for our better or higher selves which can only be done by embracing transformational change.

Unlikely as it may seem at first, Nietzsche's statements converge strongly with the Bahá'í Writings. In the first place, there is strong convergence if not outright agreement in regards to self-overcoming as a necessary aspect of living ethically and making true progress in self-actualization and living as moral beings. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

*For I have supplicated and beseeched before the Threshold of the Almighty that thy wish may be realized, so thou mayest overcome the self and perform charitable deeds and that human perfections may appear from thee.*

In other words, self-overcoming is needed to "to awaken spiritual susceptibilities in the hearts of mankind" The theme of 'self-overcoming' is also presented in the Writings as 'sacrifice' and 'service' since, in the Bahá'í view, these lead to the kind of self-overcoming we need to make.

Speaking of the higher and lower self, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states:

*The other self is the ego, the dark, animalistic heritage each one of us has, the lower nature that can develop into a monster of selfishness, brutality, lust and so on. It is this self we must struggle against, or this side of our natures, in order to strengthen and free the spirit within us and help it to attain perfection.*

*Self-sacrifice means to subordinate this lower nature and its desires to the more godly and noble side of ourselves. Ultimately, in its highest sense, self-sacrifice means to give our will and our all to God to do with as He pleases. Then He purifies and glorifies our true self until it becomes a shining and wonderful reality."*

This, too, converges with Nietzsche in significant ways. We must “give our will and our all to God” in the same way as Nietzsche expects us to obey the imperative will to power that functions as ‘God’ in his philosophy.

Self-overcoming also requires us to overcome the traditional beliefs—especially ethical beliefs—that we have passively accepted. To the extent that we do not, our self-overcoming is incomplete and, thereby, less effective and gives us less power or capacity. Nietzsche believes that we must create our own ethics and norms—a task that he held as impossible for religious believers. However, the Bahá’í Writings find no difficulty with Nietzsche’s requirements insofar as they unequivocally reject “ancestral imitations” and insist on our obligation to the independent investigation of truth. The independent investigation of truth in ethics does not mean we have to reject the moral guidance of the Manifestations—but rather that we must to the best of our ability consciously understand such guidance since otherwise our acts become blind imitation instead of a rational choice. Investigating and understanding a given moral law, in effect, makes that law ours even if it is a re-discovery. As Goethe says, “What you have inherited from your forefathers, it takes work to make it your own.” In this way, the principle of the independent investigation of truth absolves the acceptance of revealed truth from being a mere “ancestral imitation.” In other words, those who are willing to make the sacrifices of self-overcoming will be blessed with “the quickening of mental capacity and the increase of spiritual susceptibilities.

It may be objected that the Writings proclaim that humans were meant for happiness—which indeed, they are—but happiness for the Writings and Nietzsche consists in the expansion of our powers not in mere ease and comfort be it psycho-spiritual and/or physical. Athletic training illustrates this point: the training itself is inevitably uncomfortable, painful and gruelling—yet the athlete who views this pain in light of his/her goals, is happy because s/he because s/he can

feel the growth of his/her capacity. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states: "*The mind and spirit of man advance when he is tried by suffering.*" In short, the suffering required by self-overcoming is necessary for the happiness that is to come both in this world and the next. As seen in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Nietzsche also recognizes the need to be willing to suffer on the way to becoming a bridge for the Superman or even a Superman himself.

## 8. Perspectivism and Truth

One of the most controversial and influential aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy is perspectivism according to which we can only have perspectives on things but have no true knowledge of anything.

Against positivism, which halts at phenomena—"There are only facts"—I would say: No, *facts is precisely what there is not, only interpretations.* We cannot establish any fact "in itself": perhaps it is folly to want to do such a thing.

"Everything is subjective," you say; but even this is interpretation. *The "subject" is not something given, it is something added and invented and projected behind what there is ...* Finally, is it necessary to posit an interpreter behind the interpretation? Even this is invention, hypothesis ...

*It is our needs that interpret the world;* our drives and their For and Against. Every drive is a kind of lust to rule; each one has its perspective that it would like to compel all the other drives to accept as a norm.

In short, Nietzsche denies the existence of 'facts' or 'truths' and replaces them with "interpretations" or perspectives or, more colloquially, opinions. This is the view described by Hales



and Welshon as “*strong perspectivism [which] is what many think Nietzsche offers ... [and which] is self-refuting.*” This claim that there are no ‘facts’ is self-refuting because it cannot itself be taken as factual. We find “strong perspectivism” exemplified in the following statement by Nietzsche:

The apparent world, i.e., a world viewed according to values; ordered, selected according to values, i.e., in this *case according to the viewpoint of utility* in regard to the preservation and enhancement of the power of a certain species of animal.

The perspective therefore decides the character of the “appearance”! *As if a world would still remain over after one deducted the perspective!* By doing that one would deduct relativity!

*Every center of force adopts a perspective* toward the entire remainder, i.e., its own particular valuation, mode of action, and mode of resistance. The “apparent world,” therefore, is reduced to a specific mode of action on the world, emanating from a center.

In other words, all we have is appearances determined by the perspectives we adopt. There is no “noumenal” or underlying reality or ‘real’ truth existing independently of some perspectives. Moreover, Nietzsche states that all truth-claims are relative since all are the subjective products of a particular perspective. Since all truth-claims or perspectives are relative, we cannot judge between contradictory truth-claims because there is no privileged perspective or viewpoint to function as a standard by which to judge. This leads to the startling conclusion that either there is no truth at all or even if there is a truth, it cannot be known by humankind. Nietzsche writes,

‘Truth’ is therefore not something there, that might be found or discovered—but something that must be created and that gives a name to a process, or rather to a

will to overcome that has in itself no end—introducing truth, as a processus in infinitum, an active determining—not a becoming conscious of something that is in itself firm and determined. It is a word for the “will to power.

Struggles about truth are ultimately struggles about authority and power. The concept of ‘truth’ depends on the will to power insofar as all human activities are shaped by each person’s will to power. He states,

The “*will to truth*” would then have to be investigated psychologically: it is not a moral force, but *a form of the will to power*. This would have to be proved by showing that it employs every immoral means: metaphysicians above all.

In short, there is no such thing as even attempting to seek the truth objectively.

“Strong perspectivism” has at least five major weak points. The first results from self-reference: logical self-refutation (encountered in many postmodern thinkers). If all truth-claims are perspectival, then this view itself is perspectival—and therefore, the opposite view that truth is absolute may well be true at least from some perspectives. But that is exactly what “strong perspectivism” denies. It says that all truth-claims are perspectival, thereby including itself. In short, if strong perspectivism is true, then it may also be false. This is a logically untenable foundation for any attempt at a coherent philosophy because it undermines every additional argument built on this principle.

Second, since perspective determines ‘truth’ there can be no non-perspectival or extra-perspectival standpoint point from which to judge among different or competing ‘truths-claims.’ Consequently, there can be no such things as errors. In effect, all perspectives are true even though we may personally prefer

some to others—but preferences do not constitute truth. Nietzsche's view effectively says that there can be no errors since all perspectives must be accepted as equally valid. This is not only improbable but also impractical: nature is not so malleable and accommodating to our perspectives as to let us think that pencils are genuinely broken in a glass of water—or that the traffic light is green just because we think so. At some point we often discover one perspective or the other is false, i.e. that there is a real, 'noumenal' truth underneath our perceptions that may, in some cases, quite rudely correct our mistaken views. Furthermore, the Bahá'í the Writings plainly contradict such ego-inflating 'infallibilist' views and clearly acknowledge the existence of "error", "idle fancies and vain imagining," "ignorance," "heedlessness and superstition," and ideas that are "absurd." Indeed, Bahá'u'lláh even recognizes that some religions "*are the outcome of human perversity.*" The existence of error harmonizes, as we shall see below, with "weak perspectivism" i.e. the viewpoint that not all perspectives are necessarily true.

Third, there is a category mistake insofar as Nietzsche's conflation of the will to power with the will to truth mistakes God with man. In the case of God, the two are the same: whatever God wills is the truth since God's will determines the nature of reality and all parts of reality. "He doeth whatsoever He willeth, and ordaineth that which He pleaseth." However, this is not the case for humans. Who has not had the experience of interpreting a shadow on a forest walk as a ferocious animal? Obviously, our interpretations do not 'make' facts or reality. Nature will quickly correct us if our perspective lets us mistake a crocodile for a convenient log.

Fourth, if perspectives or standpoints determine the truth, then, there can be no absolute truth that is true in the same way in all perspectives. This is incompatible with the Writings because if the statement 'Bahá'u'lláh is the Manifestation of God for this age' is not objectively true across all perspectives

(though not necessarily recognized as true), then the universality and potency of His revelation is negated.

The problem with Nietzsche, of course, is that on this issue as on so many others, he is conflicted, making it difficult to know which view is really his. After all, there is significant evidence from his work that he is convinced that there are no absolute truths of any kind. Yet, he blatantly violates his own principle. The entire doctrine of the will to power would be negated if its existence were dependent on perspective. Moreover, there would be an easy escape from Nietzsche's philosophy by adopting a different perspective in which the will to power is not true! If truth is strongly or purely perspectival, all of Nietzsche's critiques of European culture, of Christianity (which he loves to hate) and of spirituality are moot. They have no validity for other perspectives. How can he purport to 'unmask' morality in *The Genealogy of Morals* if there is nothing to unmask from Christian morality—except a perspective whose morals are as valid as the morality that emerges from Nietzsche's own perspective? If truth is perspectival, how can Zarathustra condemn the morals of the common man—which are true in their perspective? We need not multiply examples of Nietzsche's obvious logical entanglements caused by the conflict between his overt statements that appear to accept "strong perspectivism" and his actual practice.

Clearly, the Bahá'í Writings reject "strong perspectivism." Nowhere do they suggest that truth is entirely subjective, i.e. wholly dependent on our outlook and perspective. If this were true, there would be no point in teaching the independent investigation of truth. There could only be an exploration of our own perspectives/opinions which are often likely to be mere "vain imaginings." Would God really cease to exist if no one's perspective included Him? Is Bahá'u'lláh's station as the Manifestation for this age or God's existence really dependent on human perspective and subjective opinion? If that were the case, why would Bahá'u'lláh declare,

*Their belief or disbelief in My Cause can neither profit nor harm Me. We summon them wholly for the sake of God. He, verily, can afford to dispense with all creatures.*

In other words, God and the Cause of God are independent of any human perspective or interpretation. These truths are not relative.

Clearly, the Bahá'í Writings suggest that all perspectives are not equally true or valid, and that at least on some issues, truth is not relative. In other words, our own perspectives, which may be based on the false imaginations may lead us to deny the existence of the Manifestation—but this perspective is false even if it is sincerely held. Sincerity itself is not a guarantor of truth or logical validity; sincerely held beliefs can be wrong. Furthermore, Bahá'u'lláh advises us to “meditate profoundly ... so that *light may be distinguished from darkness, truth from falsehood, right from wrong, guidance from error, happiness from misery, and roses from thorns.*” These distinctions demonstrate there is no attempt made to salvage all possible views by attributing them to differing standpoints or perspectives and by declaring them all to be relatively true. At least some perspectives are able to provide truth while others are not.

There is a fifth problem with “strong perspectivism,” viz. it also leads to problems vis-à-vis understanding the Bahá'í Writings. For example, after explaining that the four methods of acquiring truth are flawed 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes, “*there is no standard in the hands of people upon which we can rely.*” This sounds like “strong perspectivism.” However, if we accept this interpretation non-reflectively, i.e. without analysis, a serious problem rapidly arises: Shall we understand 'Abdu'l-Bahá's declaration to mean that we cannot know with certainty even the most 'elemental facts' such as (1) human beings need food or they will starve to death; (2) the seasons progress in a specific and orderly manner; (3) lobsters do not grow up to be maple

trees and (4) the sun appears to move from east to west across the sky? Do the Writings really mean to suggest that there is no certain human knowledge about anything at all including Napoleon's defeat at Moscow, yesterday's sunrise, and the law of gravity? If we take the "strong" view at face value, needless entanglements arise from one of Bahá'u'lláh's statements:

*In pursuance, however, of the principle that for every thing a time hath been fixed, and for every fruit a season hath been ordained, the latent energies of such a bounty can best be released, and the vernal glory of such a gift can only be manifested, in the Days of God.*

The message here would be undermined or even negated if seasonal change were disputed or even disputable. The moment we deny the certainty of our knowledge of seasonal change, the whole point Bahá'u'lláh is trying to make becomes moot. It would cause needless confusion because we would not really 'know' that "for every fruit a season hath been ordained." Bahá'u'lláh knows—but could we know that *our* knowledge of the seasons is what *He* is actually referring to? The same problem would arise if Bahá'u'lláh used other examples, such as the tides or the moon's course around the earth. It is difficult not to conclude that the Writings are not intended to cause such difficulties.

While there is no agreement about "strong perspectivism" in the Bahá'í Writings and Nietzsche, there is far-reaching agreement in regards to "weak perspectivism" which Welshon attributes to Nietzsche. He explains it as follows:

Suppose weak perspectivism is *true for every other statement except itself*. It then turns out that for the thesis of weak perspectivism, absolutism is true. Why? Because truth absolutism claims there is at least one statement that is true in all perspectives. Perhaps the only such statement is the thesis of weak perspectivism. Here, then is a way to rescue Nietzsche's truth

perspectivism without abandoning the spirit behind it ... Perhaps there are *other* statements in addition to the thesis of weak perspectivism that are true across all perspectives.

The possibility of some absolute truths, i.e. truths from all perspectives means that, in effect, some truths are not dependent on perspective, and even opens up the possibility of “extra-perspectival” truths which is how the Bahá’í Writings characterize God’s revelations. Furthermore, this also revives the possibility that there exist some objective standards by which to judge various perspectives. Finally, error is possible; not all perspectives necessarily give us the truth.

A significant agreement between “weak perspectivism” and the Bahá’í Writings emerges when he examine Shoghi Effendi’s statements about progressive revelation. He writes,

The mission of the Founder of their Faith, they conceive it to be to proclaim that *religious truth is not absolute but relative*, that Divine Revelation is continuous and progressive, that the Founders of all past religions, though different in the non-essential aspects of their teachings, “abide in the same Tabernacle, soar in the same heaven, are seated upon the same throne, utter the same speech and proclaim the same Faith.”

Further, he asserts that each Manifestation

restates the eternal verities they enshrine, coordinates their functions, distinguishes the essential and the authentic from the nonessential and spurious in their teachings, separates the God-given truths from the priest-prompted superstitions.

To summarize in Hales’ and Welshon’s language about “weak perspectivism,” the relative truths, i.e. those which were not valid in all perspectives could be changed as historical

conditions alter. Among these were the “spurious” “priest prompted superstitions” and the “non-essential” specific adaptations to geographic and cultural circumstances. They are completely dependent on perspective i.e. the standpoint of a particular culture at a particular time under particular circumstances. However, there are also “*eternal verities*” and “*God-given truths*” that are valid in all perspectives, i.e. they are absolute. Such “verities” are “restat[ed]” in every dispensation—across multiple perspectives—and while they may be expanded or given new form, the essential truths they convey remain true. In other words, the Bahá'í Writings can accept the doctrine that all statements come from a particular perspective—but in “weak perspectivism” that does not mean that some statements cannot be true across all perspectives.

“Weak perspectivism” also allows a robust commitment to the unity of truth. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá affirms, “*No one truth can contradict another truth.*” He supports this by stating, that “*truth or reality is not multiple; it is not divisible*” and “*truth is one, although its manifestations may be very different.*” Differences in the “manifestations” of truth do not necessarily imply *logical* contradictions which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá seeks to avoid. Shoghi Effendi re-affirms this theme, saying, “Truth may, in covering different subjects, appear to be contradictory, and *yet it is all one* if you carry the thought through to the end.” He adds, “Truth is one when it is independently investigated, it does not accept division.” “Weak perspectivism” easily accommodates the Writings on this issue and so does Nietzsche if read in this way.

Our conclusion is clear: if Nietzsche’s perspectivism is understood in Hales’ and Welshon’s sense as “weak perspectivism” and as implicitly practiced by Nietzsche, there is agreement with the Bahá'í Writings. “Weak perspectivism,” provides a more flexible outlook because it recognizes relative, perspectival truths such as seen in the cultural adaptations of the divine teachings and, it recognizes absolute cross-perspectival truths as seen in the “eternal verities” restated by



the Manifestations. It also recognizes that at least some of Nietzsche's teachings must be accepted as absolutely true, viz. self-overcoming, the will to power and the eternal return. If Nietzsche's perspectivism is understood as "strong perspectivism," as overtly stated by Nietzsche—though implicitly contradicted in much of what he writes—then there is no agreement between him and the Writings.

"Weak perspectivism" avoids outlandish consequences that needlessly complicate and impede the quest for knowledge and truth. After all, it is indisputable that Beethoven is physically dead; that tides come in and go out and a broken leg is really broken. What is to be gained by understanding the Bahá'í Writings in a way that opens them to such critiques as have seen above?

"Weak perspectivism" as in the following example from 'Abdu'l-Bahá is immune from the critiques that undermine "strong perspectivism."

*He has bestowed upon [man] the power of intellect so that through the attribute of reason, when fortified by the Holy Spirit, he may penetrate and discover ideal realities and become informed of the mysteries of the world of significances.*

This statement embodies "weak perspectivism" insofar as under some circumstances—the inspiration of the Holy Spirit—reliably true knowledge about the "ideal realities" and the super-natural "world of significances" can be attained. There is no suggestion here that we need to doubt elemental facts such as difference between apples and horse shoe crabs. We should also remember that the inspiration of the Holy Spirit may impart such intellectual virtues as true independence in the investigation of truth; justice in the quest for fair and accurate presentation; humility to accept the truths we find even though they may not be what we hoped or expected; and wisdom in applying what we find in a positive way. There is no reason to limit the Holy

Spirit's inspiration to such theological virtues as faith, hope and charity. When we understand this, we can also see how and why we have true knowledge of the 'elemental facts' because nothing prevents the Holy Spirit from acting in our lives on a continuous basis at least vis-à-vis the basic intellectual virtues.

Elsewhere, 'Abdu'l-Bahá notes,

*the bounty of the Holy Spirit gives the true method of comprehension which is infallible and indubitable. This is through the help of the Holy Spirit which comes to man, and this is the condition in which certainty can alone be attained.*

Under the right circumstances—receiving the bounty of the Holy Spirit—we can know spiritual truths with certainty. The argument that 'truth' is not the same as 'certainty' is weak since that implies the Holy Spirit can give us certainty about untruths. That defeats the purpose of trusting in the Holy Spirit. Speaking about love, 'Abdu'l-Bahá concludes,

*This is a proof perceptible to the senses, acceptable to reason, in accord with traditions and teachings of the Holy Books and verified by the promptings of human hearts themselves. It is a proof upon which we can absolutely rely and declare to be complete*

Here, too, we observe the possibility of attaining reliable knowledge from some perspectives and, thereby, the agreement with "weak perspectivism" not just vis-à-vis elemental facts but also spiritual truths such as the existence of God, which, according to 'Abdu'l-Bahá can be logically proven: "*The existence of the Divine Being hath been clearly established, on the basis of logical proofs.*" "Weak perspectivism" also allows us to accommodate such statements as "Numerous and conclusive proofs exist that go to show that this infinite world cannot end with this human life." Elsewhere, he adds,

*It is my hope that from day to day your gatherings will grow and flourish, and that those who are seeking after truth will hearken therein to reasoned arguments and conclusive proofs.*

And,

*Day and night must you think, strive and investigate, that you may attain to the mysteries of the Kingdom; that you may attain certainty in knowledge; that you may know this world has a Creator, has a Maker, has a Resuscitator, has a Provider, has an Architect—but know this through proofs and evidences, not through susceptibilities; nay rather through decisive proofs, evident arguments and real vision—that is to say, visualizing it just as you visualize the sun. May you with complete certainty behold the signs of God and attain to the knowledge of the holy divine Manifestations.*

Each one of these passages—and there are others to choose from—makes use of the idea of “conclusive” knowledge, or “certainty” or “proofs” and, thereby, show that the Writings are in harmony with “weak perspectivism” and the possibility of at least some statements being true across all perspectives.

## 9. Conclusion

In the foregoing exploration, we have shown that, despite first appearances to the contrary, there are a surprisingly large number of correlations between the Bahá’í Writings and Nietzsche’s philosophy. Among them we find such issues as

1. teleology;
2. perspectivism in Hale’s and Welshon’s sense of “weak perspectivism;”
3. the process nature of reality;
4. Aristotle’s ontology of potentials,

5. the existence of a transcendent power or force manifesting in all things;
6. the importance of the transcendent aspects of existence; the religious impulse in man;
7. the unavoidable agonistic aspects of life, not by political means but by means of new ideas, revitalized values, good personal examples, energized hope, and appeals to the spiritual elements in human nature;
8. the decline of the present world order;
9. the need for revolutionary change (though not change by political revolution);
10. the rejection of partisan politics, nationalism and imperialism;
11. the universal will to power as the self-overcoming and actualization of potentials;
12. the central role of sublimation and self-overcoming;
13. the call for “a new race of men” transcending the current state of human development;
14. life as a agonistic process in various ways;
15. loyalty to the earth;
16. will as present in all things.

Of course, there are also areas of difference and irresolvable disagreement:

1. the master and slave morality;
2. the transvaluation of values and the slave revolt;
3. “violent aristocratic radicalism” (see Detwiler);
4. the often nasty manner of expression and demeaning tone of his writings;
5. the eternal return (unless understood in Hill’s way);

6. perspectivism, if interpreted as “strong perspectivism”;
7. atheism, if taken at face value;
8. the principle of beyond good and evil.
9. lack of an ultimate vision of a future world order;

At this point a question arises: ‘To what degree do the differences undermine the correlations between the Bahá’í Writings and Nietzsche?’ The answer depends on how we choose to read Nietzsche. If we read him in light of Kaufmann’s claim that the will to power and sublimation (which includes self-overcoming) are the “core” of Nietzsche’s philosophy, then the undermining capacity of these differences is limited. As we have shown, the master-slave morality, the transvaluation of values, “the violent aristocratic radicalism,” the atheism if taken at face value and the “strong” interpretation of perspectivism and living beyond good and evil are not compatible with Kaufmann’s understanding of the “core” of Nietzsche’s philosophy. In one way or another, they conflict with the ethic of sublimation and self-overcoming in order to actualize our potentials both individually and socially. Thereby, they frustrate human development which requires us to be more than we are. If we think we are beyond good and evil; that we are aristocrats and masters with a right to rule over ‘slaves’; that there is no truth to know or that can be known; that there is no progress and everything stays as it is or that the material world is all there is, then there will be little or no incentive to pursue a life of self-overcoming and sublimation of our animal natures. In all likelihood, we will find ourselves among the self-satisfied and comfortable. In our view, neither the Writings nor Nietzsche advocate such a life.

From our Kaufmannian perspective, because these points negate or at least avoid the principle of self-overcoming and sublimation, they do not really undermine the correlations we have identified. That is because the differences are based on premises incompatible with Kaufmann’s view. Consequently, we

must conclude that Nietzsche's work is divided by inconsistencies. This fact weakens his philosophy and encourages us to turn to the Bahá'í Writings instead.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Acampora, Christa. *Contesting Nietzsche*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013.
- Allison, David, B. editor. *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation*. New York: Dell Publishing, 1977.
- Aristotle *Metaphysics*. Trans by W.D. Ross. Chicago. Encyclopedia Britannica 1971.
- Chamberlain, Leslie. *Nietzsche in Turin*. New York: Picador, 1996.
- Clark, Maudemarie, Dudrick, David. *The Soul of Nietzsche's 'Beyond Good and Evil'*. New York: Cambridge University press, 2012.
- Danto, Arthur C. *Nietzsche as Philosopher*. New York: Macmillan, 1965.
- Hales, Steven D. and Welshon. *Nietzsche's Perspectivism*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000.
- Hill, R Kevin *Nietzsche: A Guide for the Perplexed*. New York: Continuum, 2007.
- Hollingdale, R.J. *Nietzsche: The Man and His Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Hovey, Craig. *Nietzsche and Theology*. New York: Y & T Clark, 2008.
- Jaspers, Karl. *Nietzsche: An Introduction to the Understanding of His Philosophical Activity*. (Walraff, Schmitz) South Bend, Indiana: Regnery, 1965.
- Kaufmann, Walter. *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*. New York: Meridian Books, 1959.
- Leiter, Brian, Sinhababu, Neil, editors. *Nietzsche and Morality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Nehamas, Alexander. *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil*, (Marianne Cowan), Chicago: Regnery, 1955.
- . *The Birth of Tragedy*, (Francis Golfing). New York: Doubleday, 1956.

- . *Ecce Homo*, (R. J. Hollingdale). Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979.
- . *The Gay Science* (Walter Kaufmann). New York: Vintage Books, 1974. Republished New York: Dover Publications, 2006.
- . *Human, All Too Human*, (Helen Zimmern, Paul Cohen). New York: Dover Publications, 2006.
- . *On the Genealogy of Morals, Ecce Homo*. (Walter Kaufmann), New York: Vintage Books, 1969.
- . *The Will to Power*, (Kaufmann, Hollingdale). New York: Vintage Books, 1968.
- . *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, (R. J. Hollingdale). Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1961.
- . *Twilight of the Gods, The Antichrist*, (R. J. Hollingdale), Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968.
- Bernd Magnus, Kathleen M. Higgins. *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Mueller-Lauter, Wolfgang. *Nietzsche: His Philosophy of Contradictions and the Contradictions of His Philosophy*. (David Parent). Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999.
- Bernard Reginster. *The Affirmation of Life*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006.
- Richardson, John. *Nietzsche's System*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Safranski, Ruediger. *Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*. (Frisch) New York: W.W. Norton, 2000.
- Schacht, Richard. *Making Sense of Nietzsche*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995.
- Stern, J.P. *Nietzsche*. Glasgow: Fontana, 1978.
- Taha, Abir. *Nietzsche's Coming God*. United Kingdom: Arktos Media, 2013.
- Solomon, Robert and Kathleen M Higgins, *What Nietzsche **Really** Said*. New York: Schocken Books, 2000.
- Warren, Mark. *Nietzsche and Political Thought*. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1991.
- Woodward, Ashley. *Interpreting Nietzsche*, New York: Continuum, 2011.

# *Memorials of the Faithful:*

## The Virtues of Inner and Outer Transformation

Marlene Koswan

### 1. Introduction

The appearance of God's Manifestation initiates a twofold process of disintegration of the old world order and integration of the new world order.<sup>1</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá's book *Memorials of the Faithful* provides insights into the integration process associated with the lives of a group, who recognized the new Manifestation of God, and later accepted His eldest son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the appointed Center of the Covenant and sole Interpreter of His Writings. This study was initiated after reading two observations Marzieh Gail included in her Proem to *Memorials of the Faithful*. "...it is a kind of testament of values endorsed and willed to us by the Bahá'í [sic] Exemplar.... These are short and simple accounts, but they constitute a manual of how to live, and how to die" [MF xi]. What values did 'Abdu'l-Bahá identify for these 79 individuals who were closely associated with Bahá'u'lláh during his period of exile from Baghdad to the prison of Akká? Why did 'Abdu'l-Bahá feel it was important to leave a record? Some insight comes from Bahá'u'lláh:



*And yet, is not the object of every Revelation to effect a transformation in the whole character of mankind, a transformation that shall manifest itself both outwardly and inwardly, that shall affect both its inner life and external conditions? For if the character of mankind be not changed, the futility of God's universal Manifestations would be apparent. [K1 240]*

In order to identify the inward and outward transformation of the Faithful<sup>2</sup>, a simple process for analysis was used. Each time a virtue was mentioned for an individual it was recorded. If a virtue was mentioned multiple times for one of the Faithful, it was recorded as a single occurrence. No attempt has been made to interpret any actions as being an example of a virtue. The summary was then reviewed to identify how the internal and external virtues were demonstrated in the character, manners and conduct of the Faithful, and when details were provided by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, how the Faithful achieved the virtue. The Faithful’s conduct was investigated in greater detail using the stages of transformation described in Bahá’u’lláh’s book, *The Seven Valleys*, and will be used as a guide for achieving the goal of recognizing the Manifestation of God.

Before presenting the results of this study it would be useful to summarize the evolution of our understanding of spiritual values in the context of religious history. A brief review of the Judaic, Christian and Islamic teachings related to the development of moral principles will be presented. This is not meant to be a comprehensive study, but provides background to Bahá’u’lláh’s quotation above, that one of the reasons the divine Messengers have been sent is to effect internal and external changes in the life of the faithful that are in accordance with the requirements of the time in which they live.

## 2. Jewish, Christian, and Islamic moral principles

### Judaism

In Judaism, Moses presented the guidance of God to His followers in the form of the Ten Commandments [Exodus 20:2-17]. The first four Commandments focused on mankind's behavior in his relationship to his Creator.

1. *You shall have no other gods before Me.*
2. *You shall not make for yourself a carved image... you shall not bow down to them nor serve them...*
3. *You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain...*
4. *Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy...*

The remaining six Commandments guide the believers' behavior with the rest of mankind and their external conduct.

5. *Honor your father and your mother...*
6. *You shall not murder.*
7. *You shall not commit adultery.*
8. *You shall not steal.*
9. *You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*
10. *You shall not covet your neighbor's house... neighbor's wife, his male... female servant, nor his ox, donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's....*

The limited number of rules makes sense given pen and paper were not available during the time of Moses; most people could not read; and a list of ten rules was easily memorized.

### Christianity

Christians continued to use the Ten Commandments as guidance for their daily conduct, plus they adopted the spiritual

values of Christ. Several examples of these values are summarized in the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes appear in two locations, in Mathew during the Sermon on the Mont eight were identified<sup>3</sup>, and in Luke, four were mentioned. The Beatitudes unique to Matthew include the meek, the merciful, the pure of heart, and the peacemakers. These teachings are spiritually focused, and include guidance for both internal (e.g. “Blessed are the pure in heart”) and external transformation (e.g. “Blessed are the peacemakers”).

The Catholic Church later adopted seven additional virtues—four Cardinal virtues and three Theological Virtues. The number seven is significant because it represents God and divine perfection. The Cardinal virtues were identified by Greek philosophers Aristotle and Plato, who regarded temperance, wisdom, justice, and courage as the four most desirable character traits. The number four refers to the material world (e.g. four seasons, four directions). These virtues were called Cardinal, which means hinge, because all the other virtues hang on them. After the New Testament was written, faith, hope and charity were referred to as the Theological virtues. The number three references the Holy Trinity, and it is believed that these virtues may only be acquired and improved through the Grace of God. The source of these virtues comes from Paul, First Corinthians 13:13: “...and now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love...” The use of the word charity should not be confused with the donation of money or goods to the needy; this virtue is referring to man’s Love of God and love of humanity on behalf of God.

## Islam

In the Quran, Muḥammad provides new guidance for the believer which focuses on their inner and outer behavior. Some of the areas addressed included behavior related to knowledge, spiritual development, speech, and manners and new virtues

such as moderation, honour, courtesy, generosity, and truthfulness.

Muḥammad stresses the importance of truth and knowledge: “*and shun the word that is false*” [al-Hajj 22:30], “*O ye who believe! If a wicked person comes to you with any news, ascertain the truth, lest ye harm people unwittingly, and afterwards become full of repentance for what ye have done*” [Al-Hujurat 49:6], and “*And pursue not that of which thou hast no knowledge...*” [al-Isra' 17:36].

Muḥammad’s guidance for spiritual development includes: “*There is a mosque whose foundation was laid from the first day on piety; it is more worthy of the standing forth (for prayer) therein. In it are men who love to be purified; and Allah loveth those who make themselves pure...*” [at-Taubah 9:108]. “*Most Gracious are those who walk on the earth in humility*” [al-Furqan 25:63], “*eat and drink: But waste not by excess, for Allah loveth not the wasters*” [al-Ar'af 7:31], and “*be moderate in thy pace*” [Luqman 31:19].

The believers received the following guidance related to speech and its use: “*Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious*” [an-Nahl 16:125], “*no burden do We place on any soul, but that which it can bear;- whenever ye speak, speak justly*” [al-An'am 6:152], and “*When a (courteous) greeting is offered to you, meet it with a greeting still more courteous or (at least) of equal courtesy...*” [An Nisa 4:86].

Fellow human beings are to be treated with magnanimity, “*Those who spend (freely), whether in prosperity, or in adversity; who restrain anger, and pardon (all) men;- for Allah loves those who do good*” [al-E Imram 3:134], and “*do good to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, those in need, neighbours who are near, neighbours who are strangers, the companion by your side, the wayfarer (ye meet), and what your right hands possess: For Allah loveth not the arrogant, the vainglorious...*” [An Nisa 4:36].

### 3. Overview of Virtues in *Memorials of the Faithful*

*Memorials of the Faithful* is a gift from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to future generations. In these brief accounts we are provided with “a testament of the values endorsed and willed to us by the Bahá’í Exemplar”. We will now see how the Faithful lived these virtues through the eyes of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. The Faithful includes a group of 79 believers, including some family members, who were exiled and or imprisoned with Bahá’u’lláh, or provided Him some type of service. A list of the 82 virtues ‘Abdu’l-Bahá mentioned in *Memorials of the Faithful* has been summarized in Table 1.

acquiescence	faithfulness	long suffering	self-sacrifice
assurance	fear of God	love	selflessness
bravery	firmness	love of God	sensitivity
calmness	forbearance	love of Manifestation	serenity
candour	freedom	lowliness before God	servitude
certitude	friendliness	loyalty	severance
chastity	generosity	magnanimity	spirituality
cheerfulness	gentleness	meekness	steadfastness
composure	godliness	mildness	strength
constancy	God's love	modesty	submissiveness
contentment	gratitude	nobility	tenderness
courage	happiness	patience	thankfulness
detachment	high-mindedness	peacefulness	tranquility
determination	holiness	perception	trust
devotion	honour	perseverance	trustworthiness
dignity	humility	piety	truthfulness
eloquence	illumination	purity	wisdom
endurance	independence	radiance	wonderment
energy	joy	reliability	zeal
evanescence	kindness	resignation	
faith	knowledge	righteousness	

Table 1: *Memorials of the Faithful* mentions 82 virtues

‘Abdu’l-Bahá found virtue in everyone, from the servant and water carrier to the calligrapher and scholar. When the data was analyzed to determine if certain occupations were identified with the same virtues, no pattern was found. This was a difficult analysis to perform because of the small sample size and the occupation was not identified for everyone in the Memorials (16% were not identified). The individuals with the highest number of different virtues mentioned included a group of people from diverse backgrounds, Ḥájí ‘Alí-‘Askar-i-Tabrízí, a merchant, Mishkín-Qalam, calligrapher, Áqá Ibráhím-i-Işfahání, trader, Ḥájí Muḥammad-Ridáy-i-Shírází, servant, Ismu’lláhu’l-Aşdaq, scholar, Muḥammad-Ibráhím-i-Tabrízí, trader, ‘Azím-i-Tafríshí, water carrier, Ustád Báqir and Ustád Ahmad, carpenter, Ḥájí Mírzá Muḥammad-Taquí, the Afnán, merchant, Ustád Qulám-‘Alíy-i-Najjár, carpenter, and Áqá ‘Alíy-i-Qazvíní, occupation unknown.

The virtues mentioned most frequently were faith (28 individuals), loyalty (28), Love of God (27), love (23), trustworthiness (21), patience (19), contentment (18), joy (17), happiness (16), and detachment (15). Table 1 distinguishes two types of love including: the Faithful’s love of the Manifestation and love of their fellow human beings. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s description of how the Faithful demonstrated the three virtues faith, loyalty and trustworthiness will be presented now.

## Faith

‘Abdu’l-Bahá describes different aspects of the virtue of faith. In the first group of phrases, “*unsullied in faith*” [MF 63] and “*His faith is unalloyed*” [MF 74], his focus is on purity of faith. The purifying of their faith and leaving their religious traditions behind was a way of expanding their love for their new Faith. As an example, during the early days of Christianity there were two types of Christians—Jewish and Gentile. These two groups did not associate with each other because the Jewish Christians continued their traditions (eating kosher food,

circumcision<sup>4</sup>, etc.) and felt the Gentiles were unclean.<sup>5</sup> Over time, the Gentile Christians, who did not bring their traditions into Christianity, grew in numbers to become the religion we know today. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has highlighted the importance of leaving these traditions behind once one has recognized the newest Manifestation of God.

The second group of adjectives ‘Abdu’l-Bahá uses to describe faith includes “*strong*” [MF 127], “*firm*” [MF 164], “*firmly rooted*” [MF 164], “*and sound in faith*” [MF 141]. This description of faith is not a surprise given the extreme levels of sacrifice the Faithful had made in order to be in such close proximity to Bahá’u’lláh. These descriptions of the Faithful are easy to understand because they use the senses to convey the virtue. Another form used by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to convey faith is the metaphor of light. In two examples, the reality of faith, which has no outward form, is described in a way that the reader must use his inner ears, eyes and heart to understand how it was demonstrated by the Faithful, “*and his brows shone with faith*” [MF 98] and “*he had lit the light of faith in the chapel of his heart*” [MF 131].

‘Abdu’l-Bahá also brings to our attention that faith is not static, and mentions for one of the Faithful, “*his faith and certitude growing stronger with every passing day*” [MF 154]. How did they increase their faith? Guidance is provided by the activities of various individuals who spent their days and nights in “*the remembrance of God and in teaching His Cause*” [MF 180], “*reciting Holy Writ, or expounding the Texts, or unraveling the most complex of spiritual themes*” [MF 181], “*communing with God and chanting prayers*” [MF 42], “*chanting prayers, communing with God and calling upon Him*” [MF 146], and “*remembering and praising God; he chanted prayers, and carefully attended to his religious duties...*” [MF 66].

## Loyalty

When ‘Abdu’l-Bahá mentions the virtue loyalty, he refers to loyalty to the Covenant. This was particularly important following the ascension of Bahá’u’lláh when “*the fires of tests leaped up and a whirlwind of violation battered the edifice down*” [MF 159]. During this time, “*the absence of Bahá’u’lláh was not to be endured*” [MF 107], “*separation consumed us, the once bright days turned black as night, and all those roses of other hours were dust and rubble now*” [MF 23], and “*they were consumed with sorrow, like candles flickering away; they longed for death, and stayed firm in the Covenant and labored hard and well to spread that Daystar’s Faith...*” [MF 41]. It is no surprise that this virtue was second on the list given the critical period of the Faith’s history, when the Bábís were tested by the appearance of Him whom God will make manifest, and later when the early Bahá’ís were tested following the ascension of Bahá’u’lláh with accepting the Will and Testament of Bahá’u’lláh and recognizing ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as the one Center of the Covenant.

## Trustworthiness

Closely related to loyalty, is trustworthiness. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá addresses this virtue by identifying who trusted the Faithful and in what capacity they were trusted. The Faithful were “*trusted companions of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*” [MF 41], and “*Trusted by everyone...*” [MF 55]. Their trustworthiness was demonstrated in several capacities, “*a trustworthy friend*” [MF 57], “*confidant*” [MF 102], “*attendant and companion*” [MF 119], “*helper to every traveler*” [MF 154] and “*a trusted refuge...*” [MF 107]. Further explanation will not be provided here because the history of how both Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá suffered betrayal by their half brothers, Mírzá Yahya and Muḥammad-‘Alí, is well documented elsewhere.



## 4. Character, Manners and Conduct

The study of the virtues mentioned in *Memorials of the Faithful* will be defined within the framework for transformation outlined by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “*The most vital duty, in this day, is to purify your characters, to correct your manners, and improve your conduct*” [SWAB 13].

The Merriam Webster dictionary defines character, manners and conduct as follows:

Character: the way someone thinks, feels, and behaves

Manners: the way that a person normally behaves especially while with other people

Conduct: the way that a person behaves in a particular place or situation

### Bahá’í Character

In order to narrow down the list of 82 virtues for the discussion of character, a search of the Bahá’í writings, which have been translated into English, was conducted. It turned up six virtues used to describe character. These six virtues appeared in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s writings and include happiness<sup>6</sup>, humility<sup>7</sup>, serenity<sup>8</sup>, mercy<sup>9</sup>, nobility<sup>10</sup> and spirituality<sup>11</sup>. All of these virtues were also used to describe individuals in *Memorials of the Faithful*, with the exception of mercy. A brief summary of how the Faithful demonstrated these character virtues follows.

The Faithful were happy under all conditions. One would expect the Faithful would be happy having recognized and attained the presence of their Beloved, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá describes one such person, “*his heart happy in the presence of the Beloved of mankind*” [MF 68]. This happiness was maintained even when the external situation worsened. “*For some time he prospered and was happy*” [MF 76], “*they were perfectly content with their frugal life, supremely happy*” [MF 40], “*Now I am*

*homeless, and happy*” [MF 130], and *“the greater the tyranny of the oppressors, the happier he was...”* [MF 163].

The Faithful expressed humility before God. While they may have been humble people before friends, family and coworkers, this was not the focus of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s comments. *“I turned toward God and, humbly beseeching Him”* [MF 44], *“and humbly practicing her devotions”* [MF 193], *“Humbly entreating Thy heavenly Realm”* [MF 176], *“turning their faces toward Thy Kingdom, humbly supplicating Thy lofty Realms”* [MF 176] and *“spent his time humbly calling upon God, entreating Him, offering praise...”* [MF 79].

The Faithful also experienced serenity in this material plane and the next world. The majority of the statements in *Memorials of the Faithful* were related to the passing of their souls to the Abhá Kingdom. *“...By nature was spiritual and serene”* [MF 55], *“he lived to be eighty years old, at which time, serenely patient, he soared away to the Threshold of God”* [MF 139], *“he hastened away, tranquil, serene, rejoicing in the tidings of the Kingdom, out of this swiftly fading life to the world that does not die”* [MF 155], and *“serene and happy, rejoicing in the tidings of the Kingdom, he soared away to that mysterious land”* [MF 153]. How were they able to achieve this serenity? They were happy based on their rejoicing in receiving the Glad tidings on the Kingdom, and humbled by recognizing the Manifestation of God.

During one of his talks, while visiting the United States, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá commented that people should express their thankfulness for the favors of God through action, and not just verbal thanks. He noted:

*To express his gratitude for the favors of God man must show forth praiseworthy actions. In response to these bestowals he must render good deeds, be self-sacrificing, loving the servants of God, forfeiting even life for them, showing kindness to all the creatures. He must be*

*severed from the world, attracted to the Kingdom of Abhá, the face radiant, the tongue eloquent, the ear attentive, striving day and night to attain the good pleasure of God. Whatsoever he wishes to do must be in harmony with the good pleasure of God. He must observe and see what is the will of God and act accordingly. There can be no doubt that such commendable deeds are thankfulness for the favors of God.* [PUP 236-237]

The virtues of happiness, humility and serenity focus on how the Faithful were feeling on a sustained basis. The remaining two character virtues focus on how the Faithful expressed their gratitude through praiseworthy actions.

Nobility is defined as the quality of being noble in character, and having high moral principles or ideals. Three examples of nobility are summarized here as examples of external transformation of behavior, through showing kindness, goodness, generosity and virtuousness. “*He spent most of his time in showing kindness to friend and stranger alike; he was a magnanimous being, with open hand and heart*” [MF 165], “*This man, noble and high-minded ... Learning that his father was a captive there, he came with all speed to the fortress so that he too might have a share of those dire afflictions*” [MF 140], “*suffering, in his surrender to God’s will he was selflessness itself. He had no personal aims whatever, no feeling of attachment to this fleeting world. His one desire was to please his Lord...*” [MF 117].

The last virtue included in this group is spirituality. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s comments draw attention to the unity of the spiritual and the physical where the life of the spirit must be reflected in the physical world. This state was achieved by “*Persevering in his devotions, known for holy practices and nightly communings and vigils, his heart was illumined, and he was spiritual of mind and soul...*” [MF 84]. Spirituality was thus demonstrated: “*In him the inner and outer perfections,*

*the spiritual and physical, were joined together*" [MF 147], "*spiritual of heart, a man detached from all worldly things*" [MF 78], "*his life spiritual*" [MF 8], and "*high, spiritual aims...*" [MF 119].

### **Bahá'í Manners**

Bahá'u'lláh identifies good deeds which transform virtues into spiritual manners in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. Among the virtues, He identifies in this Holy Book, the Faithful are to be truthful, trustworthy, faithful, righteous, fear God, just and fair, tactful and wise, courteous, hospitable, persevering, detached, hospitable and to be: absolutely submissive to the Will of God. In the synopsis and codification of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, there is also a list of guidelines for how the Faithful should behave in relationship to one another. This list includes, "Not to: stir up mischief, be hypocritical, be proud, be fanatical, prefer one's self to one's neighbor, contend with one's neighbor, indulge one's passions, lament in adversity, contend with those in authority, lose one's temper, anger one's neighbor."

There are not a lot of examples of how the Faithful demonstrated manners in *Memorials of the Faithful*. The reason for the lack of examples is unknown. It may not have been the focus of 'Abdu'l-Bahá recording these accounts or it may reflect the living conditions of the Faithful. They were constantly being persecuted or imprisoned, and the opportunities for interactions were limited. This period represents that point in history where the two fold process of the fall of the old world order and the rise of the new world order was just beginning. Through the conduct of the Faithful, they achieved the objective of recognizing the Manifestation of God, and with His passing accepting His appointed Center of the Covenant. 'Abdu'l-Bahá acknowledged one example of manners related to the virtue of courtesy in the story of Siyyid Muḥammad-Taqí Manshádí.

*He was a treasury of justice and righteousness, entirely free from any attachment to worldly things. He had accustomed himself to a very spare way of life, caring nothing for food or sleep, comfort or peace. He lived all alone in a single room, passed the nights on a couch of palm branches, and slept in a corner. But to the, travelers, he was a spring in the desert; for them, he provided the softest of pillows, and the best table he could afford... [MF 55].*

## **Bahá'í Conduct**

‘Abdu’l-Bahá provided further context for studying the conduct of the Faithful during one of the talks he gave during his visit to the United States.

*Strive with all your power to be free from imperfections. Heedless souls are always seeking faults in others. What can the hypocrite know of others' faults when he is blind to his own? This is the meaning of the words in the Seven Valleys. It is a guide for human conduct. As long as a man does not find his own faults, he can never become perfect. Nothing is more fruitful for man than the knowledge of his own shortcomings. The Blessed Perfection says, "I wonder at the man who does not find his own imperfections." [PUP 244]*

*The Seven Valleys* was written in Baghdad after Bahá'u'lláh returned from the mountains near Sulaymáníyyih. It was written in response to a question from a judge who was a student of Sufi philosophy. The goal of the Sufi was to attain the presence of God through meditation, prayer, contemplation and ecstasy. In *The Seven Valleys* Bahá'u'lláh describes the seven stages of the wayfarer's path with the two goals of recognizing God's Manifestation for the age and breaking attachment with the material world, purifying and preparing the mind and heart. *The Seven Valleys* acts as a guide for conduct, and we will now look

at ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s description of the Faithful as they demonstrate the process of walking through the Valleys. Comments will be limited here to a few examples per Valley, with a brief summary of the virtues needed, or actions needed, to pass through the Valley, followed by one or two examples from *Memorials of the Faithful* which demonstrate the virtue or action.

### Valley of Search

In order to pass through the Valley of Search, Bahá’u’lláh recommends the seeker focus on their inner transformation and spiritual search. Success in passing this Valley is achieved when the Faithful demonstrate, “*The steed of this Valley is patience...*” [SV 5], “*Nor should he be downhearted...*” [SV 5], “*It is incumbent that they cleanse the heart...*” [SV 5], “*...turn away from blind imitation...*” [SV 5], and “*...sacrifice all things...*” [SV 7].

‘Abdu’l-Bahá cites an example of the Faithful demonstrating patience, and freeing themselves of attachment from this world, when he recounts the story of Ismu’lláhu’l-Aşdaq in the battle of Fort Tabarsi. “To begin with, they were far from home, surrounded and cut off by the foe; again, they were starving; and then there were the army’s sudden onslaughts and the bombshells raining down and bursting in the heart of the Fort. Under such circumstances to maintain an unwavering faith and patience is extremely difficult, and to endure such dire afflictions a rare phenomenon.” [DB 395 n. 1]

The story of ‘Abdu’lláh Baghdádí is provided as an example of someone’s inner transformation, and how he demonstrated his purity by cleansing his heart.

*Even among the nonbelievers, people were astonished at the change. What could have come over this youth, they wanted to know; how did it happen that he was suddenly detached from the world, eager and devoted? “He was*

*tainted, corrupted,” they said; “today he is abstemious and chaste. He was sunk in his appetites, but is now the soul of purity, living a righteous life. He has left the world behind him...”* [MF 130]

The words of Táhirih remind us of the importance in turning away from blind imitation.

*Let deeds, not words, testify to thy faith, if thou art a man of true learning. Cease idly repeating the traditions of the past, for the day of service, of steadfast action, is come. Now is the time to show forth the true signs of God, to rend asunder the veils of idle fancy, to promote the Word of God, and to sacrifice ourselves in His path. Let deeds, not words, be our adorning!* [MF 200]

## Valley of Love

In order to pass through the Valley of Love Bahá'u'lláh revealed the Faithful must “*forsake thine outward eyes; thou shalt never open the eye of thine inward being...*” [SV 9], “*A lover feareth nothing and no harm can come nigh unto him...*” [SV 9], and “*...veils of the satanic self be burned away at the fire of love...*” [SV 9].

When describing the Love of God, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá gives physical form to the unseen, by using the metaphor of burning candles, fire and stars. Fire has at least two functions in the Bahá’í writings; it can be used to burn away the veils and illusions which are blocking the seeker, or with increased intensity it acts as a power of attraction and welds together diverse elements. The inner transformation of the Faithful is very clear in the following descriptions of their veils of satanic self being burned away, “*Then his love of God burned away every obstructing veil and idle thought...*” [MF 22], “*...but the love he had for God was past all concealing. It burst from his heart, flamed out and consumed its coverings...*” [MF 2], “*...and they burst into flame with yearning love for God...*” [MF

176], and “...*the love of God sparked a revolution in the country of his inner self...*” [MF 83].

The love the Faithful experienced for the Manifestation of God, transformed them to the point where they were willing to accept pain and endure great hardship for extended periods of time. One example of an individual, who demonstrated this love, feared nothing and no harm came to him, was Mullá ‘Alí - Akbar. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá recounts,

*Things came to such a pass that in the end whenever there was an uproar Mullá ‘Alí would put on his turban, wrap himself in his ‘abá and sit waiting, for his enemies to rouse and the farráshes to break in and the guards to carry him off to prison. But observe the power of God! In spite of all this, he was kept safe. “The sign of a knower and lover is this, that you will find him dry in the sea.” That is how he was. His life hung by a thread from one moment to the next; the malevolent lay in wait for him; he was known everywhere as a Bahá’í—and still he was protected from all harm. He stayed dry in the depths of the sea, cool and safe in the heart of the fire, until the day he died... [MF 11]*

## Valley of Knowledge

In the Valley of Knowledge Bahá’u’lláh explains that the wayfarer is now aiming for higher spiritual goals. These are demonstrated when the Faithful “...*turn to the guiding light of the fear of God...*” [SV 11], “*He beholdeth justice in injustice, and in justice, grace...*” [SV 12], “...*if he meeteth injustice, he shall have patience...*” [SV 13], “...*if he cometh upon wrath he shall manifest love...*” [SV 13], and are “...*freed from turning towards ourselves...*” [SV 16].

‘Abdu’l-Bahá acknowledges how the Faithful “...*longed for knowledge of God...*” [MF 106], and after recognizing Bahá’u’lláh as the new Manifestation “...*drank the red wine*



*of knowledge from the hands of the Cupbearer of grace...*” [MF 49]. He also noted that their education was not limited to religious studies and included the sciences of the material world. For example, one gentleman was “...well versed in many branches of knowledge. For a long time he was in the schools, specializing in the fundamentals of religion and religious jurisprudence, and making researches into philosophy and metaphysics, logic and history, the contemplative and the narrated sciences...” [MF 156]. The importance of educating women is also confirmed with his comments about Táhirih, “...she studied various branches of knowledge and the arts, achieving remarkable ability in literary pursuits. Such was the degree of her scholarship and attainments that her father would often express his regret, saying, “Would that she had been a boy...” [MF 191].

The transformation of the Faithful is once again reflected in their conduct. Living under difficult situations ‘Abdu’l-Bahá records how Mishkín-Qalam turned to the guiding light of the fear of God.

*After the ascension of Bahá’u’lláh, Mishkín-Qalam remained loyal, solidly established in the Covenant. He stood before the violators like a brandished sword. He would never go half way with them; he feared no one but God; not for a moment did he falter, nor ever fail in service...* [MF 100]

The story of the wayfarer in the Valley of Knowledge, who beholds “justice in injustice, and in justice, grace”, shares similarities with the story of Nabíl-i-Akbar.

*Here, his enemies struck at him again. He was pursued by the watchmen; guards looked everywhere for him, asking after him in every street and alley, hunting him down to catch and torture him. Hiding, he would pass by them like the sigh of the oppressed, and rise to the hills; or again, like the tears of the wronged, he would slip*

*down into the valleys. He could no longer wear the turban denoting his rank; he disguised himself, putting on a layman's hat, so that they would fail to recognize him and would let him be. In secret, with all his powers he kept on spreading the Faith and setting forth its proofs, and was a guiding lamp to many souls... [MF 3]*

Mullá 'Alí-Akbar, was an example of one who if he came upon wrath, he manifested love.

*For the sake of God he cast all caution aside, as he hastened along the ways of love. He became as one frenzied, as a vagrant and one known to be mad. Because of his new Faith, he was mocked at in Tíhrán by high and low. When he walked through the streets and bázárs, the people pointed their fingers at him, calling him a Bahá'í... [MF 10]*

## Valley of Unity

In order to pass through the Valley of Unity Bahá'u'lláh revealed the Faithful must “*With the ear of God he heareth, with eye of God he beholdeth the mysteries of divine civilization...*” [SV 17], “*...seeth in himself neither name nor fame nor rank...*” [SV 18], and “*...looketh on all things with eye of oneness...*” [SV 18].

'Abdu'l-Bahá identifies several of the Faithful who “*He seeth in himself neither name nor fame nor rank.*” One of these was Mírzá Mihdíy-i-Káshání. “*This noble personage had been honored among men, but for God's love he lost both name and fame. He bore manifold misfortunes with never a complaint. He was content with God's decrees, and walked the ways of resignation...*” [MF 97]. This level of detachment from personal fame and rank could have been used to describe each of the Faithful, for they had sacrificed their social status and jobs, and the possibility of improving their fame and rank, in order to be close to the Manifestation of God. Being so close to Bahá'u'lláh

they were able to listen as the Revelation was revealed and with their eyes witnessed His behavior under these difficult situations. ‘Abdu’lláh Baghdádí was one whose “...*burning heart broke when he saw how victimized was Bahá’u’lláh, how patiently He suffered. ‘Abdu’lláh yearned to die for Him. And thus it came about that he offered up his life for his tender Companion, and hastened away, out of this dark world to the country of light...*” [MF 130].

### Valley of Contentment

In order to pass through the Valley of Contentment Bahá’u’lláh revealed the Faithful “...*feeletth winds of divine contentment...*” [SV 29], “...*burneth away the veils of want...*” [SV 29], “*From sorrow he turneth to bliss, from anguish to joy...*” [SV 29], and “...*throw thy life down in His path...*” [SV 31]. We can only imagine the joy, happiness and contentment the Faithful must have experienced having recognized the Manifestation of God, and living in such close proximity to Bahá’u’lláh.

One person who felt the winds of divine contentment was Muḥammad-‘Alí Sabbáq of Yazd who ‘Abdu’l-Bahá notes,

*The friends, one and all, were pleased with him, and he was cherished at the Holy Threshold; in this state he soared to abiding glory, leaving his kin to mourn. He was a kind man, an excellent one: content with God’s will for him, thankful, a man of dignity, long-suffering...* [MF 58]

Mírzá Mustafá Naráqí is an example of one who did throw his life down in His path. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá recounts,

*The farráshes hunted them down, and caught Mírzá Mustafá. But then the oppressors said, “Mírzá Mustafá had two long locks of hair. This cannot be the right man.” At once, Mírzá Mustafá took off his hat and*

*down fell the locks of hair. "Behold!" he told them. "I am the one." They arrested him then. They tortured him and Shaykh Ahmad until finally, in Tabríz, those two great men drained the cup of death and, martyred, hastened away to the Supreme Horizon. At the place where they were to be killed, Mírzá Mustafá cried out: "Kill me first, kill me before Shaykh Ahmad, that I may not see them shed his blood!..." [MF 149]*

## Valley of Wonderment

The state of the Faithful in the Valley of Wonderment, is like no other, and appears totally mystical for "*...the traveler is flung into confusion...*" [SV 32], "*...wearied out with his own life...*" [SV 32], and Bahá'u'lláh alludes to "*...how many worlds concealed...*" in dreams [SV 32], and "*...planes and states are folded up and hidden away within him...*" [SV 34].

The world of dreams is provided as proof of a spiritual existence, where people see without eyes, hear without ears, and speak with out mouths. The story of Táhirih provides one example,

*One night when it was getting along toward dawn she laid her head on her pillow, lost all awareness of this earthly life, and dreamed a dream; in her vision a youth, a Siyyid... appeared to her in the heavens; he was standing in the air, reciting verses and praying with his hands upraised. At once, she memorized one of those verses... After the Báb had declared His mission, and His first book, "The Best of Stories,"<sup>6</sup> was circulated, Táhirih was reading a section of the text one day, and she came upon that same verse...she fell to her knees and bowed her forehead to the ground, convinced that the Báb's message was truth... [MF 193]*

Two interesting examples of planes and states folded and hidden away are summarized here as examples of the sudden

appearance of knowledge and what appears to be a miracle. Pahlaván Ridá, brother of Áqá Muḥammad-Báqir and Áqá Muḥammad-Ismá‘íl,

*...was a man to outward seeming untutored, devoid of learning. He was a tradesman, and like the others who came in at the start, he cast everything away out of love for God, attaining in one leap the highest reaches of knowledge. He is of those from the earlier time. So eloquent did he suddenly become that the people of Káshán were astounded... [MF 167]*

Mírzá Ja‘far -i-Yazdí,

*Then the sick man breathed his last. Mírzá Áqá Ján ran to Bahá’u’lláh, with word of the death. Not only had the patient ceased to breathe, but his body was already going limp. His family were gathered about him, mourning him, shedding bitter tears. The Blessed Beauty said, “Go; chant the prayer of Yá Sháfí—O Thou, the Healer—and Mírzá Ja‘far will come alive. Very rapidly, he will be as well as ever.” I reached his bedside. His body was cold and all the signs of death were present. Slowly, he began to stir; soon he could move his limbs, and before an hour had passed he lifted his head, sat up, and proceeded to laugh and tell jokes... [MF 158]*

## Valley of True Poverty and Absolute Nothingness

In order to pass through the Valley of True Poverty and Absolute Nothingness Bahá’u’lláh revealed the Faithful must be, “...poor in the things of the created world, rich in the things of God’s world...” [SV 36], “...burn away all veils and wrappings... outer wealth or personal opinions...” [SV 36], and “...must stray not the breadth of a hair from the law...” [SV 39].

‘Abdu’l-Bahá provides guidance on what the Faithful detached themselves from in order to be rich in the things of

God's world. *"His detachment from the things of this world and his attachment to the life of the spirit are indescribable"* [MF 43], *"...a man who lived free and detached from friend and stranger alike"* [MF 36], *"they freed themselves from friend and stranger alike, escaped from the superstitions that had blinded them before..."* [MF 63], *"He was detached from every selfish thought, averse to every mention..."* [MF 70], and *"...kept free from every unseemly thought, and shunned whatever went contrary to the Covenant of God..."* [MF 56].

One of the Faithful who gave up everything was Ustád Ismá'íl.

*Composed, happy, Ustád gave up his work, closed his eyes to his possessions, and left for Iraq, where he lived in poverty. He had recently taken a bride, and loved her beyond measure. Her mother arrived, and by subterfuge, obtained his permission to conduct the daughter back to Tihrán, supposedly for a visit. As soon as she reached Kirmánsháh, she went to the mujtahid, and told him that because her son-in-law had abandoned his religion, her daughter could not remain his lawful wife. The mujtahid arranged a divorce, and wedded the girl to another man. When word of this reached Baghdad, Ismá'íl, steadfast as ever, only laughed. "God be praised!" he said. "Nothing is left me on this pathway. I have lost everything, including my bride. I have been able to give Him all I possessed..."* [MF 29]

Bahá'ís have a two-fold responsibility: the first is to recognize the Manifestation of God, and the second is to follow His commandments. We will end this section on conduct, with the story of one who did not stray the breadth of a hair from the law, Hájí 'Alí-'Askar-i-Tabrízí.

*Then he took a little merchandise with him from Adrianople, and left for the city of Jum'ih-Bázár, to earn his livelihood. What he had with him was trifling, but still, it was carried off by thieves. When the Persian*

*Consul learned of this he presented a document to the Government, naming an enormous sum as the value of the stolen goods. By chance the thieves were caught and proved to be in possession of considerable funds. It was decided to investigate the case. The Consul called in Hájí 'Alí-'Askar and told him: "These thieves are very rich. In my report to the Government, I wrote that the amount of the theft was great. Therefore you must attend the trial and testify conformably to what I wrote."..."The Hájí only smiled. "Jináb-i-Khán," he said. "I have given up my life for the truth. I have nothing else. You are telling me to lie and bear false witness. Do with me as you please; I will not turn my back on what is right..."*

[MF 162]

## 5. Conclusions

This study was initiated with the objective of answering three questions: What virtues did 'Abdu'l-Bahá highlight for this group of faithful individuals? How did they demonstrate inner and outer transformation in their character, manners and conduct? How did they achieve this transformation?

What were the virtues? 'Abdu'l-Bahá recorded 82 virtues in *Memorials of the Faithful* which we need to "purify our characters, correct our manners and improve our conduct". Faith, loyalty, love of God, love, trustworthiness, patience, contentment, joy, happiness, and detachment were the most frequently mentioned virtues.

How was it demonstrated? The Faithful succeeded in knowing themselves and recognizing that which leads to loftiness. Studying *The Seven Valleys* along with *Memorials of the Faithful* provides a basis for understanding the conduct of the Faithful and a framework for identifying the behavior which led them to recognize the new Manifestation of God and later accept 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the Center of the Covenant.

How was it achieved? ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains virtues are not static, and the Faithful worked on increasing their faith daily by praying, remembering God, calling upon God, communing with God, and teaching His Cause. Tests and obedience to the laws also developed the Faithful’s virtues.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá provides us with the context for the virtues in *Memorials of the Faithful*, and his focus changed depending upon the situation or relationship of the individual he was discussing. Character, manners and conduct will change depending upon the needs of the day: for example, loyalty to the Covenant during the time the Faithful lived referred to following Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, but today this obedience has grown to include obeying and supporting the Universal House of Justice.

---

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Jena Khodadad, “The Phenomenon of Newly Emerging Entities and the Twofold Process” (Irfán Colloquium at Louhelen, 2015)

<sup>2</sup> “Faithful” will be used to refer to the group of early believers ‘Abdu’l Bahá included in his book *Memorials of the Faithful*.

<sup>3</sup> The eight Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12:

*Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven. (5:3)*

*Blessed are those who mourn: for they will be comforted. (5:4)*

*Blessed are the meek: for they will inherit the earth. (5:5)*

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness: for they will be filled. (5:6)*

*Blessed are the merciful: for they will be shown mercy. (5:7)*

*Blessed are the pure in heart: for they will see God. (5:8)*

*Blessed are the peacemakers: for they will be called children of God. (5:9)*

*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (5:10)*

*Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*



<sup>4</sup> “Within the movement, the hotly debated questions were whether Gentile followers of Jesus needed to become Jews, that is, whether male members needed to undergo circumcision. Did Gentile followers need to observe the Torah, the law of Moses? Paul’s answer was unequivocal—Gentiles were not required to adopt circumcision or to follow the Jewish law.” (Gager, John G 26). *Reinventing Paul*. Oxford: University Press, 2000.

The Apostle Paul: “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” (2 Corinthians 5:17)

<sup>5</sup>See JoAnn Borovicka, “Parallels in the Ministries of Táhiriḥ and St. Paul,” Irfán at Louhelen, 2015

<sup>6</sup> Muḥammad-‘Alíy-i-Ardikání: “*He served with a loyal heart. He had a happy nature, a comely face; he was a man believing, seeking, tested and tried ...*” [MF 141]

<sup>7</sup> “*Know thou, verily, submissiveness is the good quality of the maid-servants of God, and humility is the character of the God-fearing leaves who have sprung forth from the Tree of Mercifulness ....*” [TAB 77]

<sup>8</sup> Siyyid Muḥammad-Taḳi Manshádi: “*... for them, he provided the softest of pillows, and the best table he could afford. He had a smiling face and by nature was spiritual and serene ...*” [MF 55]

<sup>9</sup> “*O my friend, it is incumbent upon thee to be severed (from all else save God), to be attracted, to be sincere, and to spend thy life in the path of God. Be thou holy, spiritual, divine, lively, brilliant, godlike, sanctified, pure, with merciful character, firm in the Covenant, fluent and knowing; and gaze toward the Kingdom of El-ABHA with a heart brimming over with the love of God, with tears flowing the commemoration of God, with a face scintillating through the light of God, with a heart sincere to the beloved of God, and with a sword which divides truth from falsehood ....*” [TAB 166]

<sup>10</sup> ‘Abdu’s-Şálih, the Gardener: “*He emigrated to the Most Great Prison and here, at the Riḍván, achieved the honor of being appointed gardener. At this task he was second to none. In his faith, too, he was staunch, loyal, worthy of trust; as to his character, he was an embodiment of the sacred verse, “Of a noble nature art thou.” That is how he won the distinction of being gardener at the Riḍván, and of thus receiving the greatest bounty of all: almost daily, he entered the presence of Bahá’u’lláh ...*” [MF 26]

<sup>11</sup> “*Now amidst all the peoples of the world must the beloved arise, with a heart even as the day-star, a strong inward urge, a shining brow, a musk-scented breath, a tongue speaking ever of God, an exposition crystal-clear, a high resolve, a power born of heaven, a spiritual character, a confirmation nothing short of the divine ....*” [SWAB 241]

# Memorials of the Faithful:

## The Democratization of Sainthood

Moojan Momen

This paper considers the literary genre and literary history behind *Memorials of the Faithful* (*Tadhkiratu'l-Vafá*) as well as examining what is new about the book. The paper will first consider the genre of hagiography in Judaism, Christianity and Islam. It will then look at the specific literary precedent set by Farídu'd-Dín's *Tadhkiratu'l-Awliyá* (Memorials of the Saints), which is the oldest work of this genre in Persian. Next, it looks at the contents of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's book, giving some examples of the manner in which 'Abdu'l-Bahá follows the hagiographic tradition and where he departs from it; in particular where he highlights particular virtues that related to the needs of the Faith. Finally the paper will examine the manner in which 'Abdu'l-Bahá took this traditional literary format and used it in an innovative manner to make a profound statement about a fundamental principle of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

### Hagiography in the World's Religions

Throughout religious history, there has been a desire to portray the holy figures of each religion both as a way of pointing to the power of that religion to transform lives—thus

often the holy person is portrayed as living an evil and immoral life before conversion and then being transformed by their new religion—and also as a way of providing specific examples of the sorts of virtues and lives of detachment and service that are the ideals of that religion. In most religions, there has therefore developed a genre of literature called hagiography—the writing of the lives of holy people (saints).

Hagiography has been one of the main genres of religious literature over many centuries. Hinduism has a vast range of hagiographical literature with each of the numerous religious traditions within Hinduism having its own list of saints. Indeed there are many words that are used across the spectrum of Hinduism to denote what would in English be called a saint, including *sadhu*, *siddha*, *nayanmars*, *bhagat*. There are thus many hagiographies coming from each of the various traditions in Hinduism. A representative title from two of these traditions can be mentioned: from the Tamil Shaiva tradition, there is Sekkhizhar's *Tiruthondar Puranam* (also known as the *Periapuranam*), which portrays the lives of 63 Tamil Shaiva devotees (Nayanmars); from the Varkari Vaishnava tradition, there is the *Bhaktavijay* of Mahipati, which in the course of recounting the life of Namdev, a 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century poet-saint, also recounts the lives of early saints.<sup>1</sup>

Buddhism also has its hagiographic literature with many books written about boddhisatva and siddhas (in the Tibetan tradition). For example, Abhayadatta's lives of 84 Siddhas has been translated into English as *Buddha's Lions* (translated by James Robinson).<sup>2</sup>

In Judaism, medieval Jewish scholars wrote hagiographies both of figures from Biblical times and about contemporary figures. In Christianity, hagiographies were used in the commemoration of saints days in both the Orthodox and Catholic traditions.

In Islam, hagiographic accounts were written of many prophets and of the important figures from early Islamic

history. In Sufism in particular, hagiography was one of the main ways of inculcating the ideal of Sufi sainthood. The word used to convey the sense of saint in Islam is usually *walí* (plural *awliyá*). This word however has a range of meanings, among which are authority, guardianship, patronage, protection, friendship, companionship, spiritual guidance and sanctity. While in Islam, there is a concept, as indeed there is in hagiographic literature in general, of a hierarchy of holiness with the saint at the apex, there are some nuances to this that are of particular interest to a theme that is discussed at the end of this paper. For example, in writings of Ibn ‘Arabí, while he subscribes to the concept of a hierarchy of holiness and indeed he names various levels of saints, there is also the idea in his writings that the most noble and accomplished of these saints, the friends of God, are also unknown, anonymous and inconspicuous.<sup>3</sup>

As would be expected, the hagiography of each religion emphasizes those qualities that are considered to be of particular value in that religious tradition. Thus for example, the saints portrayed in the above-mentioned *Tiruthondar Puranam* of Sekkizhar are portrayed as being completely devoted to the Lord Shiva; the theme of devotion and worship is a strong one in the Bhakti tradition in which this book lies. Some polemical elements also enters these stories since one of the saints in this book is a convert from Buddhism and another a convert from Jainism. Other Hindu accounts emphasize the austerities and self-mortification that the saint has undergone, which is also considered an important marker of devoutness. The Buddhist hagiographies emphasize the theme of compassion which is important to the Buddhist tradition.

Western readers sometimes complain that hagiographies present an idealized and unreal picture of the saint portrayed. But that only betrays a lack of understanding of what hagiography is about. Hagiography is not biography. The details of how the saint ate and drank and slept, details of their home, even their date of birth and death is of no interest to the

hagiographer. What is important to the hagiographer is the inner life of the saint, not the outer details. What is of interest to the hagiographer is the inner struggle that the saints went through, how low they went at first in their moral and spiritual life, the event that caused the change in direction, and the heights that they rose to after this, what moral and spiritual qualities they exhibited in their lives.

One particular feature of hagiographies is that the saints depicted often come from poor and disempowered backgrounds as well as the rich and powerful, they often include women as well as men, and this within societies and religious traditions, which are usually strongly hierarchical and patriarchal, where the formal positions at the head of government and the religion are held by rich and powerful men. Secular histories and biographies and even church histories have all tended to be about powerful men, but hagiographies also include a sprinkling of the poor, the disempowered and women.

Whatever the background of the saints depicted in the hagiographies of the various religious traditions, however debauched or evil their early life may have been, the hagiography describes their rise to spiritual greatness. At the end, one is given the impression that this was no ordinary human being; this was a spiritual giant. Often this point is emphasized by recounting miracles performed by these saints either during their lifetimes or by their graves or relics or by calling upon them after their deaths.

### **‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Authorship of *Memorials of the Faithful***

During the First World War, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was relatively much more cut off from the rest of the world than at other times. This meant that he did not have the mountain of correspondence from Bahá’ís from all parts of the world coming in, that overwhelmed him at other times. One result of this lessening of his correspondence workload was that he produced

the important *Tablets of the Divine Plan* in the latter half of the First World War. Another is *Memorials of the Faithful*. This is not a book that he wrote but rather a collection of discourses of his which, according to the Introduction of the first edition of the work, can be dated to 1915, at the start of the First World War. Just before the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Áqá Muḥammad Husayn ‘Alí Akbaroff, known as Kahruba’i (because he worked on the electrical lighting of the holy shrines in Haifa and Bahji) sought and obtained from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá permission to publish this work. The grief of the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Kahruba’i’s preoccupation with his lighting project, delayed publication until 1924, when it was eventually published with an introduction written by Nuru’d-Din Zayn as secretary of the Haifa Spiritual Assembly and with the seal of that assembly appended, stating that permission for this publication had been sought from and given by Shoghi Effendi. It was published by the Matba‘at al-‘Abbasiyyah in Haifa.

The title of this collection of talks of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tadhkiratu’l-Vafá, Memorials of the Faithful*, places it firmly within the literary genre of hagiography. We can be sure that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was fully aware and deliberate in choosing a title that resonated so strongly with the leading work of Sufi hagiography in the Persian literary tradition, Faridu’d-Dín ‘Aṭṭár’s *Tadhkiratu’l-Awliyá* (Memorials of the Saints). Both works are in prose. ‘Aṭṭár’s work gives short accounts of 38 prominent Sufis from the past; ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s work gives short accounts of some 79 Babís and Bahá’ís, all of whom had died by the time the discourses were given. The accounts bring the individual being memorialized to life by recording anecdotes about them; although ‘Aṭṭár, whose individual accounts are longer than ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s, tends to do this more.

The English translation (by Marzieh Gail) of *Memorials of the Faithful* has a slight difference from the Persian published original (in 1924). The Persian original contains 68 chapters, whereas the English has 69. This is because the Persian original combines the biographies of Abu’l-Qásim of Sultanabad and

Áqá Faraj into one chapter. In addition, the original Persian publication has a prayer or tablet of visitation “*He is God! Thou seest, O my Lord, the assemblage of my loved ones ... the Bestower, the Forgiver, the All-Merciful*” placed after the section on Shams-i-Ḍuhá as indeed does the first edition (1971) of the English translation. However, the prayer is clearly about the previous entry, the “Consort of the King of Martyrs”. The 1997 edition of the English translation of *Memorials of the Faithful* and the online edition of the English translation of *Memorials of the Faithful*<sup>4</sup> have the prayer in the correct place, after the Consort of the King of Martyrs.

### **Continuities and Discontinuities in *Memorials of the Faithful***

In many ways *Memorials of the Faithful* is a continuation of the tradition of hagiography, but there are some important discontinuities also. The continuities will be listed first and then a more detailed consideration of the discontinuities will be undertaken, since it is the discontinuities that are of more interest.

Among the continuities are:

1. That many of the persons chosen for these memorializations are from poor and disempowered backgrounds, indicating that even persons from humble background can aspire to a high spiritual station. Among the 84 Mahasiddhas in Abhayadatta’s Buddhist hagiography are individuals whose backgrounds include being a beggar, washerman and fisherman; and in Islamic hagiographies, there are slaves and even criminals. The 79 people memorialized by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá can be divided into two groups, some five or six individuals who were clearly among the first rank of Bahá’ís and who were honoured with designations such as Letter of the Living (Táhirih), Hands of the Cause (Ḥájí ‘Alí Akbar Sháhmírzádí, Ismu’lláh al-Asdaq, Nabíl-i Akbar), Apostles of Bahá’u’lláh (Áqá Músá Kalím, Mishkín Qalam, Nabíl-i A’zam),

and possibly also the Trustee of the Huqúqu'lláh (Sháh-Muḥammad Amín) and the rest who were ordinary Bahá'ís, some of them in very humble positions of service, including servants and janitors.

2. Among the individuals memorialized in these hagiographies, there are often a handful of women, thus indicating that holiness is even capable of transcending the norms of the patriarchal power structure that prohibited women from becoming Buddhist nuns or Christian priests. Abhayadatta's Buddhist hagiography includes four women among the 85 Mahasiddhas he memorializes. Alban Butler's *Lives of Saints* (published between 1756 and 1759) includes some three or four women saints among the saints allocated for each month of the year; most Islamic hagiographies, including 'Aṭṭár's *Tadhkiratu'l-Awliyá*, include at least one woman Sufi saint, Rábi'ah al-'Adawiyyah. *Memorials of the Faithful* includes three women among the 79 people memorialized.

The discontinuities that can be seen in *Memorials of the Faithful* are of interest:

1. In the standard hagiographical accounts there is a tendency to emphasize a moment of transformation, whether this the Buddhist awakening or the Christian conversion. This is seen as a critical moment in a saint's life; everything before this moment, is secular, unimportant or, in many cases, portrays a life of sin and human weaknesses; everything after this moment is transformed with the saint now a model of that religion's virtues. *Memorials of the Faithful* rarely mentions let alone emphasizes the conversion experience despite the fact that almost all those depicted are converts. Instead, most of the emphasis is on the transformation that occurs after conversion. This is of importance in that the Bahá'í idea of salvation involves not just recognition of the Manifestation of God for one's age (the conversion experience), but rather also following the laws and teachings of that Manifestation. Bahá'u'lláh rejects the idea that one can enter a state of Grace just by affirmation



of one's belief and thus become one of God's elect (the Christian Protestant view); one also has to tread a path of obedience to the law and teachings:

*The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the recognition of Him Who is the Dayspring of His Revelation and the Fountain of His laws, Who representeth the Godhead in both the Kingdom of His Cause and the world of creation. Whoso achieveth this duty hath attained unto all good; and whoso is deprived thereof hath gone astray, though he be the author of every righteous deed. It behoveth every one who reacheth this most sublime station, this summit of transcendent glory, to observe every ordinance of Him Who is the Desire of the world. These twin duties are inseparable. Neither is acceptable without the other. Thus hath it been decreed by Him Who is the Source of Divine inspiration. [KA v. 1]*

2. In the standard works of hagiography, there tends to be an emphasis on miracles performed by the holy person or by the relics of that person as evidence of their high spiritual state. Indeed the assumption is that being able to perform miracles is a function of sainthood. Numerous stories of miracles performed by the saint are told as well as stories of miracles performed by their relics or by praying for their intercession with God. Indeed, the Catholic church makes miracles a condition for sainthood; it requires evidence of two confirmed miracles brought about by praying to a person to intercede with God for that person to be declared a saint.

*Memorials of the Faithful* appears to discount miracles altogether. Miracles do not form the centre-piece of any of the stories of those memorialized. This is in keeping with the attitude towards miracles in other areas of Bahá'í discourse. Bahá'u'lláh constantly argued against miracles being a sign of a Manifestation of God (as many of the people in his time thought); he resisted calls on him to perform evidentiary

miracles (although he did accede to such requests on a few occasions when he knew those making the request would never agree on the miracle to be performed nor on their obligation to recognize him if he succeeded) and he tried to dissuade his followers from recounting his miracles.

## Highlighting Virtues—General

In *Memorials of the Faithful*, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá highlighted a number of virtues that are to be found in hagiographies in general, and some that are more specific to the Bahá’í Faith. He also uses the text to describe the nature of the path towards perfection. Among the virtues that can be found in hagiographies in general, there are:

1. Sacrifice and detachment. Several of the stories in *Memorials of the Faithful* portray this theme. Among these is the story of Ustád Ismá‘íl Banna. When he became a Bahá’í, his employer, Farrukh Khán Amínu’d-Dawlih protected him for a time but when this became impossible, he advised him to leave the country. “*Composed, happy, Ustád gave up his work, closed his eyes to his possessions, and left for Iraq, where he lived in poverty.*” But even that was not the end of the sacrifices he would have to make for the Faith. “*He had recently taken a bride, and loved her beyond measure. Her mother arrived, and by subterfuge, obtained his permission to conduct the daughter back to Ṭíhrán, supposedly for a visit. As soon as she reached Kirmansháh, she went to the mujtahid, and told him that because her son-in-law had abandoned his religion, her daughter could not remain his lawful wife. The mujtahid arranged a divorce, and wedded the girl to another man.*” But, to highlight his detachment, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá reports that “*When word of this reached Baghdad, Ismá‘íl, steadfast as ever, only laughed. ‘God be praised!’ he said. ‘Nothing is left me on this pathway. I have lost everything, including my bride. I have been able to give Him all I possessed.’*” [MF 28-29] See also the story of Pidar Ján of Qazvín.

2. Radiance and certitude. Regarding Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí Afnán, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says:

*What a radiant face he had! He was nothing but light from head to foot. Just to look at that face made one happy; he was so confident, so assured, so rooted in his faith, and his expression so joyous. He was truly a blessed being. He was a man who made progress day by day, who added, every day, to his certitude and faith, his luminous quality, his ardent love. [MF 17]*

3. Thankfulness. Regarding Muḥammad ‘Alí Işfahání, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says:

*Muḥammad-‘Alí would carefully consider every blessing that came his way. “How delicious my tea is today,” he would comment. “What perfume, what color! How lovely this meadow is, and the flowers so bright!” He used to say that everything, even air and water, had its own special fragrance. For him the days passed in indescribable delight. Even kings were not so happy as this old man, the people said. “He is completely free of the world,” they would declare. “He lives in joy.” It also happened that his food was of the very best, and that his home was situated in the very best part of ‘Akká. Gracious God! Here he was, a prisoner, and yet experiencing comfort, peace and joy. [MF 25]*

4. Contentment. In the account about Mírzá Mahmúd Káshání and Áqá Ridá Qannad, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes:

*There was in Baghdad a company of seven leading believers who lived in a single, small room, because they were destitute. They could hardly keep body and soul together, but they were so spiritual, so blissful, that they thought themselves in Heaven. Sometimes they would chant prayers all night long, until the day broke. Days, they would go out to work, and by nightfall one would*

*have earned ten paras, another perhaps twenty paras, others forty or fifty. These sums would be spent for the evening meal. On a certain day one of them made twenty paras, while the rest had nothing at all. The one with the money bought some dates, and shared them with the others; that was dinner, for seven people. They were perfectly content with their frugal life, supremely happy.*  
[MF 40]

5. True seeking. This matter is dealt with in several places. Regarding Mírzá Muḥammad Işfahání, the servant at the Travelers' Hospice in 'Akká, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

*This youth of God was from Işfahán, and from an early age was known to its leading divines for his excellent mind. He was of gentle birth, his family was known and respected, and he was an accomplished scholar. He had profited from philosophy and history alike, from sciences and arts, but he thirsted after the secret of reality, and longed for knowledge of God. His feverish thirst was not allayed by the arts and sciences, however limpid those waters. He kept on seeking, seeking, carrying on debates in gatherings of learned men until at last he discovered the meaning of his longing dream, and the enigma, the inviolable secret, lay open before him. Suddenly he caught the scent of fresh flowers from the gardens of the splendor of God, and his heart was ashine with a ray from the Sun of Truth. Whereas before, he was like a fish taken from the water, now he had come to the wellspring of eternal life; before, he was a questing moth; now he had found the candle flame. A true seeker after truth, he was instantly revived by the supreme Glad Tidings; his heart's eye was brightened by the new dawn of guidance. So blinding was the fire of Divine love that he turned his face away from his life, its peace, its blessings, and set out for the Most Great Prison. [MF 106]*

6. True knowledge. Regarding Hájí Muḥammad Khán Baluch, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says:

*Far and wide, he carried on his search. He would speak to everyone he met. But what he longed for was the sweet scent of the love of God, and this he was unable to detect in anyone, whether Gnostic or philosopher, or member of the Shaykhi sect. All he could see in the dervishes was their tufted beards, and their palms-up religion of beggary. They were “dervish”—poor in all save God—in name only; all they cared about, it seemed to him, was whatever came to hand. Nor did he find illumination among the Illuminati; he heard nothing from them but idle argument. He observed that their grandiloquence was not eloquence and that their subtleties were but windy figures of speech. Truth was not there; the core of inner meaning was absent. For true philosophy is that which produces rewards of excellence, and among these learned men there was no such fruit to be found; at the peak of their accomplishment, they became the slaves of vice, led an unconcerned life and were given over to personal characteristics that were deserving of blame. To him, of all that constitutes the high, distinguishing quality of humankind, they were devoid. [MF 90]*

7. Honesty and trustworthiness. Regarding Hájí ‘Alí-Akbar Tabrízí, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says:

*Then he took a little merchandise with him from Adrianople, and left for the city of Jum‘ih-Bázár, to earn his livelihood. What he had with him was trifling, but still, it was carried off by thieves. When the Persian Consul learned of this he presented a document to the Government, naming an enormous sum as the value of the stolen goods. By chance the thieves were caught and proved to be in possession of considerable funds. It was*

*decided to investigate the case. The Consul called in Ḥájí Alí-'Askar and told him: "These thieves are very rich. In my report to the Government, I wrote that the amount of the theft was great. Therefore you must attend the trial and testify conformably to what I wrote."*

*The Ḥájí replied: "Your Honor, Khán, the stolen goods amounted to very little. How can I report something that is not true? When they question me, I will give the facts exactly as they are. I consider this my duty, and only this."*

*"Ḥájí," said the Consul, "We have a golden opportunity here; you and I can both profit by it. Don't let such a once-in-a-lifetime chance slip through your hands."*

*The Ḥájí answered: "Khán, how would I square it with God? Let me be. I shall tell the truth and nothing but the truth."*

*The Consul was beside himself. He began to threaten and belabor Alí-'Askar. "Do you want to make me out a liar?" he cried. "Do you want to make me a laughingstock? I will jail you; I will have you banished; there is no torment I will spare you. This very instant I will hand you over to the police, and I will tell them that you are an enemy of the state, and that you are to be manacled and taken to the Persian frontier."*

*The Ḥájí only smiled. "Jináb-i-Khán," he said. "I have given up my life for the truth. I have nothing else. You are telling me to lie and bear false witness. Do with me as you please; I will not turn my back on what is right."*

*When the Consul saw that there was no way to make Alí-'Askar testify to a falsehood, he said: "It is better, then, for you to leave this place, so that I can inform the Government that the owner of the merchandise is no*

*longer available and has gone away. Otherwise I shall be disgraced.”*

*The Ḥájí returned to Adrianople, and spoke not a word as to his stolen goods, but the matter became public knowledge and caused considerable surprise. [MF 162]*

## Highlighting Virtues—Specific

Regarding virtues that may be seen as specific to the concerns of the Bahá’í community, the following appear to be key:

1. Teaching and how to teach. There are many examples in *Memorials of the Faithful* of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá extolling Bahá’ís who teach the Bahá’í Faith to others. In a few instances, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá uses the opportunity to also say a little about how to teach. Regarding Ḥájí Muḥammad Taqí Afnán, he says:

*After he had achieved the honor, in Baghdad, of meeting Bahá’u’lláh, he returned to Persia, where he proceeded to teach the Faith with an eloquent tongue. And this is how to teach: with an eloquent tongue, a ready pen, a goodly character, pleasing words, and righteous ways and deeds. Even enemies bore witness to his high-mindedness and his spiritual qualities, and they would say: “There is none to compare with this man for his words and acts, his righteousness, trustworthiness, and strong faith; in all things he is unique; what a pity that he is a Bahá’í!” That is: “What a pity that he is not as we are, perverse, uncaring, committing sins, engrossed in sensuality, the creatures of our passions!” Gracious God! They saw with their own eyes that the moment he learned of the Faith he was transformed, he was severed from the world, he began to emit rays from the Sun of Truth; and still, they failed to profit by the example he set. [MF 127]*

2. Travel teaching. The Bahá'í scriptures also extol the virtue of travelling to teach the Bahá'í Faith. In the following story from *Memorials of the Faithful*, 'Abdu'l-Bahá appears to be saying that even the slightest and least successful effort (and the effort and effectiveness in this case were very slight) to spread the Bahá'í Faith will bring joy to the heart of Bahá'u'lláh:

*The Ilkhání had been a man of unlimited wealth, but he had wasted it all on the desires of the flesh. He was now destitute, to such a point that he did not even dare to step outside his house, because of the creditors waiting there to fall upon him. Bahá'u'lláh directed him to go to Umar Pasha, the Governor of Damascus, and obtain from him a letter of recommendation to Constantinople. The Ilkhání complied, and he received every assistance from the Governor of Baghdad. After utter despair, he began to hope again, and left for Constantinople. When he arrived at Diyarbakr he penned a letter on behalf of two Armenian merchants. "These two are about to leave for Baghdad," his letter said. "They have shown me every courtesy, and have also asked me for an introduction. I had no refuge or shelter except Your bounty; thus I beg of You to show them favor." The superscription, that is, the address he had written on the envelope was: "To His Eminence Bahá'u'lláh, Leader of the Bábís." The merchants presented this letter to Bahá'u'lláh at the head of the bridge, and when He inquired about it their reply was: "In Diyarbakr, the Ilkhání gave us particulars as to this Cause." Then they accompanied Him to His house.*

*When the Blessed Beauty entered the family apartments, Áqáy-i-Kalím was there to meet Him. Bahá'u'lláh cried out, "Kalím, Kalím! The fame of the Cause of God has reached as far as Diyarbakr!" And He was smiling, jubilant. [MF 89]*



3. Faithfulness to the Covenant. Regarding Sayyid Muḥammad Taqí Manshadí, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says:

*After the Daystar of the Supreme Concurrence had set, Siyyid Manshadí remained loyal to the Covenant, a sharp sword confronting the violators. They tried every ruse, every deceit, all their subtlest expedients; it is beyond imagining how they showered favors on him and what honors they paid him, what feasts they prepared, what pleasures they offered, all this to make a breach in his faith. Yet every day he grew stronger than before, continued to be staunch and true, kept free from every unseemly thought, and shunned whatever went contrary to the Covenant of God. When they finally despaired of shaking his resolve, they harassed him in every possible way, and plotted his financial ruin. He remained, however, the quintessence of constancy and trust. [MF 55]*

## The Democratization of Sainthood

What was ‘Abdu’l-Bahá trying to achieve with *Memorials of the Faithful*? Of course, one answer is to say that he wished to memorialize a number of faithful and devoted Bahá’ís who had died. It is also quite correct to affirm that he was highlighting through these biographies some of the virtues that human beings should acquire. But it is possible to speculate that there is a deeper message in this work. The Bahá’ís memorialized in this work do not have the usual characteristics of saints. They are not put up on a pedestal as beings elevated beyond the human level, as occurs in most hagiographies. Miracles and super-human powers are not attributed to them. Indeed, one gets the impression that if we were to have met and known the majority of these people, the seventy or more one who were not distinguished Bahá’ís, we would not have recognized them as being extraordinary in anyway. We would not have picked them out for memorialization.

So in effect, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was seeing in these people something we would not have seen. His message, is then perhaps firstly, that if you try, you can see the heroic in everyone, even the lowly. Much more innovative is that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá appears to be saying that it is possible for all of us to manifest saintly virtues, to achieve the rank of saint. A saint is not some extraordinary creature that is far above us. This can be called the democratization of sainthood. A saint can be just an ordinary person who has striven to acquire one or more of the Divine attributes.

Bahá’u’lláh started this process of the democratization of sainthood. In his writings, he refers to the Bahá’ís by the term “*awliyá*”, which is exactly the same term as is usually used for “saint” in Sufi literature—for example Aṭṭár’s *Tadhkiratu’l-Awliyá*—*Memorials of the Saints*. The following are just a small selection from many examples of Bahá’u’lláh referring to the generality of his followers as *awliyá*:

*We shall herewith cite a few passages from Tablets specifically revealed to this people, so that every one may know of a certainty that this Wronged One hath acted in a manner which hath been pleasing and acceptable unto men endued with insight, and unto such as are the exponents of justice and equity:*

*“O ye friends (awliyá’) of God in His cities and His loved ones in His lands! This Wronged One enjoineeth on you honesty and piety. [ESW 22]*

*[In the Lawh-i-Ra’ís:] Erelong will God raise up from among the kings one who will aid His loved ones (awliyá’ihi). He, verily, encompasseth all things. He will instill in the hearts the love of His loved ones (awliyá’ihi). [Qtd. in PDC 73]*

*[Referring to Tehran:] It behoveth every one that visiteth thee to glory in thee and in them that inhabit*

*thee, that have branched from My Tree, who are the leaves thereof, who are the signs of My glory, who follow Me (awliyá'í) and are My lovers (ahibbá'í), and who, with the most mighty determination, have turned their faces in the direction of My glorious station. [GWB 122]*

*I beseech Thee, O my Lord, by the sighs of Thy lovers throughout the world, and by their lamentation in their remoteness from the court of Thy presence, and by the blood that hath been shed for love of Thee, and by the hearts that have melted in Thy path, to protect Thy loved ones (awliyá'ika) from the cruelty of such as have remained unaware of the mysteries of Thy Name, the Unconstrained. [ESW 35]*

*We have admonished Our loved ones (awliyá'iná) to fear God, a fear which is the fountain-head of all goodly deeds and virtues. [ESW 134]*

*Say: O people of God! Adorn your temples with the adornment of trustworthiness and piety. Help, then, your Lord with the hosts of goodly deeds and a praiseworthy character. We have forbidden you dissension and conflict in My Books, and My Scriptures, and My Scrolls, and My Tablets, and have wished thereby naught else save your exaltation and advancement. Unto this testify the heavens and the stars thereof, and the sun and the radiance thereof, and the trees and the leaves thereof, and the seas and the waves thereof, and the earth and the treasures thereof. We pray God to assist His loved ones (awliyá'ihí), and aid them in that which besemeth them in this blest, this mighty, and wondrous station. [ESW 135]*

Thus Bahá'u'lláh regarded all of his followers as (potentially) saints—they were all capable of manifesting the qualities of sainthood.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá is thus following the precedent set by Bahá'u'lláh when he describes ordinary Bahá'is as saints (*awliyá'*). He is making sainthood applicable to and attainable by all. The condition for achieving sainthood is not an instantaneous transformation (the conversion experience) that elevates the person to a state above the rest of humanity, but rather the willingness to engage upon the task of perfecting oneself, to walk together with others along a path of selflessness and service. It is the fact of being on the path that makes one a saint—not how far along the path one has travelled.

Thus, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá can be said to have redefined a saint for the purposes of the Bahá'í Faith. A saint is not someone who has arrived at a state of perfection but someone who has engaged in the process of self-perfection, one who is prepared to walk a path towards that goal. It is the striving for perfection not the achievement of it that defines a saint. Sainthood is no longer a station but is now a process. The hierarchy of holiness that has saints at the apex and the rest of humanity below it is now transformed into a level playing-field with saints being all those engaged on the path of striving for perfection.

---

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Christian Lee Novetzke, *Religion and Public Memory: A Cultural History of Saint Namdev in India*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Berkeley: Dharma Publishing, 1979.

<sup>3</sup> Todd Lawson “Friendship, Illumination & the Water of Life”, paper presented to the annual meeting of the Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi Society (NA): “A Living Legacy: Ibn ‘Arabi in Today's World”, Columbia University, New York City, 23-24 October 2015.

<sup>4</sup> [www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdul-baha/memorials-faithful](http://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdul-baha/memorials-faithful)—the online edition of the Persian, as at the time of completing this paper (5 November 2015), had not yet been transferred to the new website and reprints the original 1924 edition.

# The Concept of 'Faithfulness' in the Bahá'í Texts in English Translation

Wendi Momen

The Bahá'í texts abound with references to faithfulness: being faithful as an individual; God being faithful to His people; believers being faithful to the Covenant established by Bahá'u'lláh; Bahá'u'lláh calling the believers of a former era to be faithful to the new Manifestation of God. For people, faithfulness is a state of being, an attitude of mind and soul that reflects itself in behaviour and deeds, a spiritual quality that manifests itself in relationships as, for example, loyalty, trustworthiness and reliability.

This is a preliminary examination of the concept of faithfulness in Bahá'í English-language texts and the behaviours expected from those who are faithful.<sup>1</sup>

## Dictionary definitions of faithful

Dictionaries provide a large number of definitions for the word 'faithful':

- strict or thorough in the performance of duty: a faithful worker
- true to one's word, promises, vows, etc.

- steady in allegiance or affection; loyal; constant: faithful friends
- reliable, trusted, or believed
- adhering or true to fact, a standard, or an original; accurate: a faithful account; a faithful copy
- obsolete. full of faith; believing
- the faithful; the believers, the body of loyal members of any party or group

Some of these definitions relate to objects, such as a faithful copy of something, for example, a manuscript or model train; or to the accuracy or truth of an idea. Most, however, can be ascribed to the people. Some also relate to God and His Manifestations and their relationship with people.

Dictionaries also provide synonyms for ‘faithfulness’:

- true, devoted, staunch
- faithful, constant, loyal imply qualities of stability, dependability, and devotion.
- faithful implies long-continued and steadfast fidelity to whatever one is bound to by a pledge, duty, or obligation: a faithful friend
- constant suggests firmness and steadfastness in attachment: a constant affection
- loyal implies unswerving allegiance to a person, organization, cause, or idea: loyal to one’s associates, one’s country
- precise, exact

These definitions and synonyms are helpful when considering the way in which the concept of faithfulness is used in the English translations of Bahá’í texts.

## **Some of the contexts in which 'faithfulness' is used in Bahá'í texts**

The concept of 'faithfulness' is used in a variety of contexts within the Bahá'í writings and texts in English. These largely correspond with the variety of definitions of the term and synonyms found in dictionaries. While any selection of categories in which 'faithfulness' or similar terms are used cannot be exact, nevertheless it is useful for a deeper understanding of the concept to group together those which seem generally to relate to the same ideas. These are my own categories and understandings and I do not wish to suggest that they are anything more than one way to study the concept of faithfulness, which appears so often in the Bahá'í writings. Thus these categories imprecise and fluid and if a particular quotation is categorized in one way and could be categorized in another, this merely demonstrates the limitations of the exercise.

With this caveat in mind, below are the categories of the concept of 'faithfulness' and related ideas, such as loyalty and fidelity, which are I have found most frequently in the available Bahá'í writings and texts in English, along with some examples of each.

The two primary ways in which the concept of 'faithfulness' is used in the Bahá'í writings is in relation to God and His Manifestations, on the one hand, and in relation to people, on the other. Each of these has numerous ways which the term 'faithfulness' or 'faithful' is used and I have selected several of these by way of example. Thus in relation to the faithfulness of God and His Manifestations, we find 'Faithfulness as one of the attributes of God', 'God is faithful to His promises'. 'Manifestations are faithful mirrors of the divine' and other ways in which the writings convey to human beings ideas and realities that are actually beyond their comprehension.



In conveying the idea of faithfulness as it relates to human beings, the writings seem to describe many more forms of faithfulness that take account of the myriad ways in which people think, behave and work with others, or ought to do; and their spiritual condition. Thus we find texts that remind us that ‘people are to be faithful to God’, explain how we can ‘develop the spiritual quality of faithfulness’, describe how we are to relate to others, and outline the implications of being faithful, and unfaithful, for all people in general and for followers of Bahá’u’lláh in particular. Some texts describe particular attitudes that need to be developed to be considered a faithful person, others look at actions and deeds that need to be done. The writings give examples of faithful people who have been spiritual lives and qualities are worthy of emulation; indeed ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has composed a large number of tributes to such individuals, brought together in the book *Memorials of the Faithful*.

A third important way in which the concept of faithfulness is used in the writings is in the context of unfaithfulness, those who are not faithful, those who have broken the Covenant. Further, there are references to faithfulness in some of the mystical writings of Bahá’u’lláh and references to the Faithful Spirit.

### **The Faithfulness of God and His Manifestations**

The concept of the faithfulness of God and His Manifestations appears numerous times in the Bahá’í texts. It is presented as absolute truth, a statement of fact that is foundational to one’s understanding of the nature of religion and of the attributes of God.

#### *Faithfulness as one of the attributes of God*

It is axiomatic in the Bahá’í teachings that God is ‘*the unknowable Essence*’ and is ‘*immensely exalted beyond every*

*human attribute, such as corporeal existence, ascent and descent, egress and regress* [GWB 46]. People come to know about God through His Manifestations, *'those luminous Gems of Holiness'*, who *'appear out of the realm of the spirit, in the noble form of the human temple'* and are *'made manifest unto all men, that they may impart unto the world the mysteries of the unchangeable Being, and tell of the subtleties of His imperishable Essence'* [GWB 47]. It is by *'the revelation of these Gems of Divine virtue'* that *'all the names and attributes of God, such as knowledge and power, sovereignty and dominion, mercy and wisdom, glory, bounty, and grace, are made manifest'* [GWB 48]. God *'chose to confer upon man the unique distinction and capacity to know Him and to love Him'* and upon *'the reality of man'* has *'focused the radiance of all of His names and attributes, and made it a mirror of His own Self'* [GWB 65]. 'Abdu'l-Bahá explained that *'Just as the light and effulgence of the sun when cast upon a polished mirror are reflected fully, gloriously, so, likewise, the qualities and attributes of Divinity are radiated from the depths of a pure human heart'* [PUP 69] and therefore the *'most important thing is to polish the mirrors of hearts in order that they may become illumined and receptive of the divine light'* [PUP 14].

Thus it is that human beings come to 'know' God and His attributes and try to reflect them. Among the attributes of God described in the Bahá'í writings is faithfulness:

*I call on Thee O Exalted One, O Faithful One, O Glorious One! Thou the Sufficing, Thou the Healing, Thou the Abiding, O Thou Abiding One! – Bahá'u'lláh*  
[BP 102]

*Verily thy Lord is the faithful, the perfect. – Bahá'u'lláh*  
[BS 193]

*No God is there save Thee, the Strong and the Faithful.*  
– Bahá'u'lláh [BP 25]

*Verily, Thou art the All-Powerful, the Ever-Faithful, the Omnipotent. — The Báb [SWB 4]*

*God is faithful to His promises*

The keeping of promises is highly valued by many as a sign of a person's trustworthiness and reliability. The promises God are even more significant, as are part of the Greater Covenant 'which every Manifestation of God makes with His followers, promising that in the fullness of time a new Manifestation will be sent, and taking from them the undertaking to accept Him when this occurs'.<sup>2</sup> That promise is often cast in religious scripture as a prophecy of events that will occur in the end time or in thousands of years:

*Verily Thou art God, the Lord of creation, the All-Sufficing. Thou art faithful to Thy promise and doest whatsoever Thou pleasest. — The Báb [SWB 209]*

*When Bahá'u'lláh arrived at this prison in the Holy Land, discerning souls were awakened to the fact that the prophecies which God had voiced through the tongue of His Prophets two or three thousand years before had been realized and that His Promises had been fulfilled... — 'Abdu'l-Bahá [SAQ 37]*

Indeed such a consummation [arrival of Bahá'u'lláh in 'Akká], He assures us, had been actually prophesied 'through the tongue of the Prophets two or three thousand years before.' God, 'faithful to His promise', had, 'to some of the Prophets' 'revealed and given the good news that the "Lord of Hosts should be manifested in the Holy Land".' Isaiah had, in this connection, announced in his Book: 'Get thee up into the high mountain, O Zion that bringest good tidings; lift up thy voice with strength, O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings. Lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of

Judah: “Behold your God! Behold the Lord God will come with strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him.” David, in his Psalms, had predicted: ‘Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in. Who is this King of Glory? The Lord of Hosts, He is the King of Glory.’ ‘Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined. Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence.’ Amos had, likewise, foretold His coming: ‘The Lord will roar from Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem; and the habitations of the shepherds shall mourn, and the top of Carmel shall wither.’ – Shoghi Effendi [GPB 183]

*God’s promises to those who are faithful*

*Blessed the one who hath remained faithful to the Covenant of God... Say: This is the Day of Bounty! Bestir yourselves that I may make you monarchs in the realms of My Kingdom. If ye follow Me, ye shall behold that which ye were promised, and I will make you My companions in the dominion of My majesty and the intimates of My beauty in the heaven of My power forevermore. – Bahá’u’lláh [SLH 64-65]*

*No God is there but Him. All creation and its empire are His. Unto Him return the works of the faithful. – Bahá’u’lláh [SLH 211]*

*For verily I say, the heavenly Father is ever with you and keeps watch over you. If you be faithful to Him, He will assuredly deliver into your hands all the treasures of the earth, and will exalt you above all the rulers and kings of the world. – The Báb [DB 93]*

## Manifestations are faithful mirrors of the divine

As we have seen, God makes Himself known to His people through the Manifestations of God, who have appeared on earth from time to time throughout the whole created history of humankind. They are perfect mirrors of all the attributes of God:

*These Prophets and chosen Ones of God are the recipients and revealers of all the unchangeable attributes and names of God. They are the mirrors that truly and faithfully reflect the light of God. Whatsoever is applicable to them is in reality applicable to God, Himself, Who is both the Visible and the Invisible. — Bahá'u'lláh [KI 141]*

*The face of nature is illumined, the grass, the stones, the hills and valleys shine; but they shine not of themselves, but because they reflect the rays of the sun. It is the sun which shines. In the same way, our minds reflect God. Those who live thinking good thoughts, doing good deeds, and with love in their hearts... A stone reflects but slightly the rays of the sun; but if a mirror be held up, though it be small, the whole of the sun will be reflected in it, because the mirror is clear and bright. Just so it is with the minds of men and the Sun of Reality. The great Masters and Teachers so purified their minds by the love of God and of men that they became like polished mirrors, reflecting faithfully the Glory of God. — 'Abdu'l-Bahá [BS 302-303]*

## People are to be Faithful to God

Faithfulness is a spiritual quality that individuals can develop as they strive to come closer to God and 'polish' the 'mirrors' of their 'hearts' [PUP 14]. While the concept of faithfulness is used to describe a fact about the nature of God and His

Manifestations, when used in relation to human beings it is often set out as an appeal or injunction for them to improve their attitude, behaviour and spiritual character, or as a reminder of the requirements and benefits of spiritual progress.

*O Ye People that Have Minds to Know and Ears to Hear! The first call of the Beloved is this: O mystic nightingale! Abide not but in the rose garden of the spirit. O messenger of the Solomon of love! Seek thou no shelter except in the Sheba of the well beloved, and O immortal phoenix! dwell not save on the mount of faithfulness. Therein is thy habitation, if on the wings of thy soul thou soarest to the realm of the infinite and seekest to attain thy goal. – Bahá'u'lláh [HW Persian #1]*

*Have they not told thee that faithfulness is a duty on those who follow the mystic way, that it is the true guide to His Holy Presence? – Bahá'u'lláh [FVSV 74]*

### **Human progress requires faithfulness**

*All religions teach that we must do good, that we must be generous, sincere, truthful, law-abiding, and faithful; all this is reasonable, and logically the only way in which humanity can progress. – 'Abdu'l-Bahá [PT 141]*

*... the Divine religions enjoin upon and encourage all the faithful to adopt such principles as will conduce to continuous improvements, and to acquire from other peoples sciences and arts. – 'Abdu'l-Bahá [SDC 99]*

### **Faithfulness as one of the spiritual qualities of the human being**

*... human reality stands between the higher and the lower in man, between the world of the animal and the world*

*of divinity... All the imperfections found in the animal are found in man...*

*On the other hand, we find in him justice, sincerity, faithfulness, knowledge, wisdom, illumination, mercy and pity coupled with intellect, comprehension, the power to grasp the realities of things and the ability to penetrate the truths of existence. All these great perfections are to be found in man. — ‘Abdu’l-Bahá [PUP 465]*

*No attribute is more commendable than faithfulness. It is of the greatest of the virtues in the world of humanity. — ‘Abdu’l-Bahá [TAB3 634]*

### *Be faithful*

*He Who is the Eternal Truth, exalted be His glory, hath ever loved faithfulness. Well is it with him who adorneth his temple with its raiment, and is honoured by this greatest of distinctions. — ‘Abdu’l-Bahá [CC2 333]*

### *Give faithful service*

*... for our attention is directed toward the heavenly Kingdom unto which we must render faithful service. — ‘Abdu’l-Bahá [PUP 334]*

*The Guardian sends messages of consolation to you and all the friends in this bereavement, and he says that in this calamitous time all must bow down their heads and be acquiescent, arise in faithful service to His Cause, and model themselves upon that most exalted, sacred and resplendent presence. — Bahiyyih Khánum [BK 82]*

*Benefits of faithfulness to the individual/rewards for the faithful*

*Hadst thou faithfully obeyed the Decree of God, all the inhabitants of thy land would have followed thee, and would have themselves entered into the celestial Paradise, content with the good-pleasure of God for evermore. – The Báb [SWB 32]*

*As to those who have faithfully observed the ordinances in the Bayan from the inception of its revelation until the Day when Him Whom God shall make manifest will appear, these are indeed the companions of the paradise of His good-pleasure who will be glorified in the presence of God and will dwell in the pavilions of His celestial Garden. – The Báb [SWB 138]*

*This is the Day that God hath ordained to be a blessing unto the righteous, a retribution for the wicked, a bounty for the faithful and a fury of His wrath for the faithless and the froward. – Bahá'u'lláh [TB 103]*

*Whoso hath searched the depths of the oceans that lie hid within these exalted words, and fathomed their import, can be said to have discovered a glimmer of the unspeakable glory with which this mighty, this sublime, and most holy Revelation hath been endowed. From the excellence of so great a Revelation the honour with which its faithful followers must needs be invested can be well imagined. By the righteousness of the one true God! The very breath of these souls is in itself richer than all the treasures of the earth. Happy is the man that hath attained thereunto, and woe betide the heedless. – Bahá'u'lláh [GWB 10]*

*Happy is the faithful one who is attired with the vesture of high endeavour and hath arisen to serve this Cause. Such a soul hath truly attained the desired Goal and hath*



*apprehended the Object for which it hath been created.*  
 – Bahá'u'lláh [TB 257]

*... after departing from this world the faithful ones will enter into paradises which have no likeness, and enjoy winning graces which are beyond comprehension: verily those paradises are the fruits of their deeds which they have accomplished in this world.* – Bahá'u'lláh [BS 202]

*Know thou, moreover, that those who faithfully serve the All-Merciful will be enriched by Him out of His heavenly treasury...* – 'Abdu'l-Bahá [CC2 513]

### **Entrance into the Kingdom/The life of the soul after the body's death**

*... O immortal phoenix! dwell not save on the mount of faithfulness. Therein is thy habitation, if on the wings of thy soul thou soarest to the realm of the infinite and seekest to attain thy goal.* – Bahá'u'lláh [HW Persian #1]

*Know, verily, that the soul is a sign of God, a heavenly gem whose reality the most learned of men hath failed to grasp, and whose mystery no mind, however acute, can ever hope to unravel. It is the first among all created things to declare the excellence of its Creator, the first to recognize His glory, to cleave to His truth, and to bow down in adoration before Him. If it be faithful to God, it will reflect His light, and will, eventually, return unto Him.* – Bahá'u'lláh [GWB 158-159]

*Thou hast, moreover, asked Me concerning the state of the soul after its separation from the body. Know thou, of a truth, that if the soul of man hath walked in the ways of God, it will, assuredly, return and be gathered to the glory of the Beloved. By the righteousness of God! It shall attain a station such as no pen can depict, or*

*tongue describe. The soul that hath remained faithful to the Cause of God, and stood unwaveringly firm in His Path shall, after his ascension, be possessed of such power that all the worlds which the Almighty hath created can benefit through him. Such a soul provideth, at the bidding of the Ideal King and Divine Educator, the pure leaven that leaveneth the world of being, and furnisheth the power through which the arts and wonders of the world are made manifest. Consider how meal needeth leaven to be leavened with. Those souls that are the symbols of detachment are the leaven of the world. Meditate on this, and be of the thankful. — Bahá'u'lláh [GWB 161]*

*Entrance into the Kingdom is through the love of God, through detachment, through sanctity and holiness, through truthfulness, purity, through steadfastness and faithfulness and through self-sacrifice. — 'Abdu'l-Bahá [SAQ 281]*

## **Examples of faithfulness**

'Abdu'l-Bahá's book *Memorials of the Faithful* is a tribute to a number of believers who were outstanding examples of faithfulness, courage and spiritual strength in the face of many challenges and difficulties. Below is an example of just one such individual, together with another story told by 'Abdu'l-Bahá describing the faithfulness and selflessness of Christ's disciples:

### *Faithfulness of Christ's disciples*

*The most memorable instance of spiritual consultation was the meeting of the disciples of Jesus Christ upon the mount after His ascension. They said, 'Jesus Christ has been crucified, and we have no longer association and intercourse with Him in His physical body; therefore, we must be loyal and faithful to Him, we must be grateful*

and appreciate Him, for He has raised us from the dead, He made us wise, He has given us eternal life. What shall we do to be faithful to Him?’ And so they held council. One of them said, ‘We must detach ourselves from the chains and fetters of the world; otherwise, we cannot be faithful.’ The others replied, ‘That is so.’ Another said, ‘Either we must be married and faithful to our wives and children or serve our Lord free from these ties. We cannot be occupied with the care and provision for families and at the same time herald the Kingdom in the wilderness. Therefore, let those who are unmarried remain so, and those who have married provide means of sustenance and comfort for their families and then go forth to spread the message of glad tidings.’ There were no dissenting voices; all agreed, saying, ‘That is right.’ A third disciple said, ‘To perform worthy deeds in the Kingdom we must be further self-sacrificing. From now on we should forego ease and bodily comfort, accept every difficulty, forget self and teach the Cause of God.’ This found acceptance and approval by all the others. Finally a fourth disciple said, ‘There is still another aspect to our faith and unity. For Jesus’ sake we shall be beaten, imprisoned and exiled. They may kill us. Let us receive this lesson now. Let us realize and resolve that though we are beaten, banished, cursed, spat upon and led forth to be killed, we shall accept all this joyfully, loving those who hate and wound us.’ All the disciples replied, ‘Surely we will—it is agreed; this is right.’ Then they descended from the summit of the mountain, and each went forth in a different direction upon his divine mission. — ‘Abdu’l-Bahá [PUP 74]

### Zaynu’l-Ábidín Yazdí

One of the emigrants who died along the way to the Holy Land was Zaynu’l-Ábidín Yazdí of Yazd. When, in Manshád, this devoted man first heard the cry of God,

*he was awakened to restless life. A holy passion stirred him, his soul was made new. The light of guidance flamed from the lamp of his heart; the love of God sparked a revolution in the country of his inner self. Carried away by love for the Loved One's beauty, he left the home that was dear to him and set out for the Desired Land.*

*As he travelled along with his two sons, gladdened by hopes of the meeting that would be his, he paused on every hilltop, in every plain, village and hamlet to visit with the friends. But the great distance stretching out before him changed to a sea of troubles, and although his spirit yearned, his body weakened, and at the end he sickened and turned helpless; all this when he was without a home.*

*Sick as he was, he did not renounce the journey, nor fail in his resolve; he had amazing strength of will, and was determined to keep on; but the illness worsened with every passing day, until at last he winged his way to the mercy of God, and yielded up his soul in a longing unfulfilled.*

*Although to outward eyes he never drained the cup of meeting, never gazed upon the beauty of Bahá'u'lláh, still he achieved the very spirit of spiritual communion; he is accounted as one of those who attained the Presence, and for him the reward of those who reached that Presence is fixed and ordained. He was a stainless soul, faithful, devoted and true. He never drew a breath except in righteousness, and his single desire was to worship his Lord. He walked the ways of love; he was known to all for steadfast loyalty and pure intent. May God fill up reunion's cup for him in a fair country, make him to enter the everlasting Kingdom, and console his*

*eyes with beholding the lights of that mysterious Realm.*

— ‘Abdu’l-Bahá [MF 83-84]

## Being a Faithful Person

The Bahá’í texts also describe what a faithful person is like and how one can become faithful. These texts could apply to the generality of humankind, not just to those who have already recognized Bahá’u’lláh and are trying to follow His teachings. These quotations seem to guide such people towards recognition of the Manifestation of God by building on their faithfulness to God:

*Since thou hast faithfully obeyed the true religion of God in the past, it behoveth thee to follow His true religion hereafter, inasmuch as every religion proceedeth from God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting.* — The Báb [SWB 138]

## Who are the faithful?

*... the faithful, they that have believed in God and in His signs, whose hearts witness to His unity, whose tongues proclaim His oneness, and who speak not except by His leave.* — Bahá’u’lláh [SLH 231]

## *The requirements of faithfulness*

*Our requirements of faithfulness is that thou mayest sacrifice thyself and, in the divine path, close thine eye to every pleasure and strive with all thy soul that thou mayest disappear and be lost, like unto a drop, in the ocean of the love of God.* — ‘Abdu’l-Bahá [TAB3 552]

*Developing the spiritual quality of faithfulness*

*Turn with the whole of thy being to God, forget aught else save God, and supplicate God to make thee a sign of guidance in the midst of people who are veiled from God; perchance they may be guided to the Orb of all horizons, enter the kingdom of harmony, drink of the cup of the love of God, rejoice at the manifestation of the Kingdom of God, taste the delight of the mention of God, and shelter themselves in the shadow of the Tree of Life in the midst of the Paradise of God.*

*This beseemeth the believers; this is the qualification of the sincere; this is the path of the knowers, and this is the utmost aim of the faithful.*

*Exert thy utmost power that thou mayest share this great bounty. — ‘Abdu’l-Bahá [JWTA 21]*

*Faithfulness of women*

*Woman has everywhere been commended for her faithfulness. — ‘Abdu’l-Bahá [ABL 105]*

*Consider thou how the faithful women in the time of Christ, and after the departure of His Highness, underwent hardships! What difficulties did they not bear; and what calamities did they not endure! But adversity and trial, misfortune and derision, became the cause of imperishable and deathless glory and rest. — ‘Abdu’l-Bahá [TAB2 264-265]*

*What sustains the faithful*

*The faithful are ever sustained by the presence of the Supreme Concourse. In the Supreme Concourse are*

*Jesus, and Moses, and Elijah, and Bahá'u'lláh, and other supreme Souls. — 'Abdu'l-Bahá [ABL 97]*

## Being a faithful Bahá'í

Many of the verses concerning faithfulness found in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and in the letters and talks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá are directed towards those who have already recognized—or are about to recognize—the Manifestation of God and are striving to be more faithful to His teachings. The guidance found in these passages explains who is considered to be faithful; what faithfulness is; the characteristics of a faithful Bahá'í; the attitudes, qualities, virtues, behaviours and actions that the faithful are to acquire and those they are to avoid or overcome. They outline the requisites for spiritual growth, the need for loyalty to the Cause and steadfastness in the Covenant, the trials and sacrifices that the faithful are to endure. Several of the examples below are taken from Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá written to individual believers in the West, often in response to their letters to Him. Many convey very detailed guidance about how Bahá'ís should conduct themselves, provided to those who were new to the Faith and were learning attitudes and behaviours that were sometimes very different from those they held before becoming Bahá'ís. It is noticeable that 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablets mention a large number of spiritual qualities in addition to faithfulness.

### Who are the faithful?

*Indeed those whose souls have been created through the splendour of the light of thy Lord recognize the Truth and are numbered with such as faithfully obey the One True God and are well assured... — The Báb [SWB 24]*

*... the favoured among the faithful, [are] they that truly uphold the unity of God and are wholly devoted to His Cause. — Bahá'u'lláh [GWB 344]*

*Use of the terms, 'the faithful', 'faithful followers', 'faithful workers', 'faithful servants', 'faithful lovers', 'faithful friends', etc. to mean 'believers' or followers of Bahá'u'lláh*

To live the teachings of the Cause should be the paramount concern of every true believer, and the only way to do so is to commune both in spirit and through actual concrete means with the entire community of the faithful. — From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual, 13 August 1936 [LG 475]

*From the excellence of so great a Revelation the honour with which its faithful followers must needs be invested can be well imagined. By the righteousness of the one true God! The very breath of these souls is in itself richer than all the treasures of the earth. Happy is the man that hath attained thereunto, and woe betide the heedless. — Bahá'u'lláh [GWB 10]*

... it devolves upon the faithful workers in India to follow up the work, to seize every opportunity and to give to her hasty and in many places insufficient services a more permanent and lasting character. — Shoghi Effendi [DND 17]

*If His faithful servants could realize how meritorious are benevolent deeds in these days, they would all arise to do that which is meet and seemly. — Bahá'u'lláh [CC1 488]*

I appeal in particular to those faithful lovers of His Cause in that vast and distant dominion. — Shoghi Effendi [DND 1]

*It is a great pleasure and privilege to me to enter into direct, and I trust, permanent correspondence with those faithful friends of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who though few in number and scattered over that vast and flourishing*



*country, will I trust act as a powerful leaven to the mass of that spiritually-minded people. — ‘Abdu’l-Bahá [MC 3]*

### **Faithfulness as one of a cluster of spiritual qualities of the believer**

*Cleave ye at all times to the cord of trustworthiness and hold fast the hem of the garment of truthfulness: thus biddeth you He Who is the Truthful, the Trusted One. God is my witness, trustworthiness is a light that shineth refulgently from the heavens, and leadeth to the exaltation of the Cause of God, the Omnipotent, the Incomparable, the All-Praised. Whoso hath remained faithful to the Covenant hath been steadfast in his adherence to trustworthiness, whilst those who have repudiated it have erred grievously. — Bahá’u’lláh [CC2 334]*

*We call to remembrance every one of the friends and exhort them to have regard to trustworthiness, which is a charge that God hath entrusted to the safe-keeping of His servants; to righteousness, which He hath made to be a citadel of strength for His well-favoured ones and faithful, humble servants; and to whatever virtues shall conduce to their dignity and honour among all peoples. — Bahá’u’lláh [CC2 330]*

*... ye must conduct yourselves in such a manner that ye may stand out distinguished and brilliant as the sun among other souls. Should any one of you enter a city, he should become a centre of attraction by reason of his sincerity, his faithfulness and love, his honesty and fidelity, his truthfulness and loving-kindness towards all the peoples of the world, so that the people of that city may cry out and say: ‘This man is unquestionably a Bahá’í, for his manners, his behaviour, his conduct, his morals, his nature, and disposition reflect the attributes*

*of the Bahá'ís.' Not until ye attain this station can ye be said to have been faithful to the Covenant and Testament of God. For He hath, through irrefutable Texts, entered into a binding Covenant with us all, requiring us to act in accordance with His sacred instructions and counsels. — 'Abdu'l-Bahá [SWAB 70]*

### **Characteristics of the faithful believer**

*One of the teachings is that love and faithfulness must so prevail in the hearts that men may see the stranger as a friend, the sinner as an intimate fellow, may count enemies as allies, regard foes as loving comrades, call their executioner the giver of life, consider the denier as a believer and the unbeliever as a faithful one—that is, men must behave in such a manner as may befit the believers, the faithful, the friend and the confidant. — 'Abdu'l-Bahá [BWF 413]*

*I desire distinction for you. The Bahá'ís must be distinguished from others of humanity. But this distinction must not depend upon wealth—that they should become more affluent than other people. I do not desire for you financial distinction. It is not an ordinary distinction I desire; not scientific, commercial, industrial distinction. For you I desire spiritual distinction—that is, you must become eminent and distinguished in morals. In the love of God you must become distinguished from all else. You must become distinguished for loving humanity, for unity and accord, for love and justice.*

*In brief, you must become distinguished in all the virtues of the human world—for faithfulness and sincerity, for justice and fidelity, for firmness and steadfastness, for philanthropic deeds and service to the human world, for love toward every human being, for unity and accord with all people, for removing prejudices and promoting*

*international peace. Finally, you must become distinguished for heavenly illumination and for acquiring the bestowals of God. I desire this distinction for you. This must be the point of distinction among you. — ‘Abdu’l-Bahá [PUP 190]*

### *Faithfulness of women believers*

Many of the western believers who corresponded with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá were women. The two excerpts from His Tablets below are a very small example of how He encouraged women to develop their spiritual capacities and strength.

*Convey thou unto the handmaids of the Merciful the message that when a test turneth violent they must stand unmoved, and faithful to their love for Bahá. In winter come the storms, and the great winds blow, but then will follow spring in all its beauty, adorning hill and plain with perfumed plants and red anemones, fair to see. Then will the birds trill out upon the branches their songs of joy, and sermonize in lilting tones from the pulpits of the trees. Erelong shall ye bear witness that the lights are streaming forth, the banners of the realm above are waving, the sweet scents of the All-Merciful are wafted abroad, the hosts of the Kingdom are marching down, the angels of heaven are rushing forward, and the Holy Spirit is breathing upon all those regions. — ‘Abdu’l-Bahá [SWAB 163-164]*

*Be thou a light to every darkness, a dispeller of every sadness, a healer for every sick person, a quencher for every thirst, a shelter for every refugee, a refuge for every captive. If the Pharisees interfere with thee, it is incumbent upon thee to implore God to guide them to the road of salvation! And it is incumbent upon thee to be affable to them under all circumstances, to be patient in afflictions, to be courteous with the enemies and to*

*pray for the hateful sinners! This is the nature of the faithful and convinced women believers whose hearts are dilated with the fragrances of God and who instruct people in the teachings of God! — ‘Abdu’l-Bahá [TAB2 285]*

Through the insults and indignities suffered by the well-assured and faithful maidservants of God, portals of everlasting honour will be flung open before the face of the women in Persia, nay everywhere in the world... — Shoghi Effendi [FL 33]

### *How to recognise the faithful servant*

*The bounties of God are: to love each other, to speak the truth, to sever our hearts from the world, to be reverent, to be humble, to be hospitable. By these things you know the faithful servant of God. How do we know the light? By its rays. So when you see these qualities, you will know that the servant of God has received the regeneration. — ‘Abdu’l-Bahá [BS 501]*

### **How to become faithful/how to develop faithfulness**

*O banished and faithful friend! Quench the thirst of heedlessness with the sanctified waters of My grace, and chase the gloom of remoteness through the morning-light of My Divine presence. Suffer not the habitation wherein dwelleth My undying love for thee to be destroyed through the tyranny of covetous desires, and overcloud not the beauty of the heavenly Youth with the dust of self and passion.*

*Clothe thyself with the essence of righteousness, and let thine heart be afraid of none except God. Obstruct not the luminous spring of thy soul with the thorns and brambles of vain and inordinate affections, and impede*

*not the flow of the living waters that stream from the fountain of thine heart. Set all thy hope in God, and cleave tenaciously to His unfailing mercy. Who else but Him can enrich the destitute, and deliver the fallen from his abasement? – Bahá'u'lláh [GWB 323]*

*It behoveth the loved ones of the Lord to be the signs and tokens of His universal mercy and the embodiments of His own excelling grace. Like the sun, let them cast their rays upon garden and rubbish heap alike, and even as clouds in spring, let them shed down their rain upon flower and thorn. Let them seek but love and faithfulness, let them not follow the ways of unkindness, let their talk be confined to the secrets of friendship and of peace. Such are the attributes of the righteous, such is the distinguishing mark of those who serve His Threshold. – ‘Abdu’l-Bahá [SWAB 257]*

*But we, and the friends of God, should on no account slacken our efforts to be loyal, sincere and men of good will. We should at all times manifest our truthfulness and sincerity, nay rather, we must be constant in our faithfulness and trustworthiness, and occupy ourselves in offering prayers for the good of all.*

*O ye beloved of God, these are days for steadfastness, for firmness and perseverance in the Cause of God. – ‘Abdu’l-Bahá [SWAB 294]*

## **Divine verses evoke love in the faithful**

*... the divinely-revealed verses shine as the sun, whilst all others are as stars. To the peoples of the world they are the abiding testimony, the incontrovertible proof, the shining light of the ideal King. Their excellence is unrivalled, their virtue nothing can surpass. They are the treasury of the divine pearls and the depository of the*

*divine mysteries. They constitute the indissoluble Bond, the firm Cord, the Urvatu'l-Vuthqá, the inextinguishable Light. Through them floweth the river of divine knowledge, and gloweth the fire of His ancient and consummate wisdom. This is the fire which, in one and the same moment, kindleth the flame of love in the breasts of the faithful, and induceth the chill of heedlessness in the heart of the enemy. — Bahá'u'lláh [KI 204]*

### Prayers for faithfulness

Many of the prayers revealed by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá beseech God to assist the believers to remain faithful to the Covenant and to God and to help them remain strong and committed believers during times of tests and trials.

*Entreat thou the one true God to enable His faithful servants to fulfil that which is conducive to the good of this world and the world to come. This is the commandment of God that hath been prescribed in His weighty and inviolable Book. — Bahá'u'lláh [CC1 489]*

*O God, my God! I beg of Thee by the dawning of the light of Thy Beauty that hath illumined all the earth, and by the glance of Thy divine compassion's eye that considereth all things, and by the surging sea of Thy bestowals in which all things are immersed, and by Thy streaming clouds of bounty raining down gifts upon the essences of all created things, and by the splendours of Thy mercy that existed before ever the world was—to help Thy chosen ones to be faithful, and assist Thy loved ones to serve at Thine exalted Threshold, and cause them to gain the victory through the battalions of Thy might that overpowereth all things, and reinforce them with a great fighting host from out of the Concourse on high. — 'Abdu'l-Bahá [SWAB 5]*

*O my Lord and my Hope! Help Thou Thy loved ones to be steadfast in Thy mighty Covenant, to remain faithful to Thy manifest Cause, and to carry out the commandments Thou didst set down for them in Thy Book of Splendours; that they may become banners of guidance and lamps of the Company above, wellsprings of Thine infinite wisdom, and stars that lead aright, as they shine down from the supernal sky. — ‘Abdu’l-Bahá [SWAB 259]*

### **Faithfulness necessary for spiritual growth**

Bahá’u’lláh has stated quite clearly in His Writings the essential requisites for our spiritual growth, and these are stressed again and again by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in His Talks and Tablets. One can summarise them briefly in this way:

1. The recital each day of one of the Obligatory Prayers with pure-hearted devotion.
2. The regular reading of the Sacred Scriptures, specifically at least each morning and evening, with reverence, attention and thought.
3. Prayerful meditation on the teachings, so that we may understand them more deeply, fulfil them more faithfully, and convey them more accurately to others.
4. Striving every day to bring our behaviour more into accordance with the high standard that are set forth in the Teachings.
5. Teaching the Cause of God.
6. Selfless service in the work of the Cause and in the carrying on of our trade or profession. [From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, 1 September 1983]

## Acting faithfully

*O ye beloved of the Lord! Commit not that which defileth the limpid stream of love or destroyeth the sweet fragrance of friendship. By the righteousness of the Lord! Ye were created to show love one to another and not perversity and rancour. Take pride not in love for yourselves but in love for your fellow-creatures. Glory not in love for your country, but in love for all mankind. Let your eye be chaste, your hand faithful, your tongue truthful and your heart enlightened. Abase not the station of the learned in Bahá and belittle not the rank of such rulers as administer justice amidst you. Set your reliance on the army of justice, put on the armour of wisdom, let your adorning be forgiveness and mercy and that which cheereth the hearts of the well-favoured of God. – Bahá'u'lláh [TB 138-139]*

## Faithfulness, trials, tests and sacrifice

*Trials for the faithful believers are like unto divine bestowal and everlasting gifts. – ‘Abdu’l-Bahá [TAB2 277]*

*In the estimation of the loved ones of God abasement is exaltation itself, and affliction leadeth to faithfulness. – ‘Abdu’l-Bahá [FL 29-30]*

Neither the world-wide growth of the Bahá’í community nor the process of learning it was experiencing... tell the whole story of these tumultuous and creative decades. When the history of the period is eventually written, one of its most brilliant chapters will recount the spiritual victories won by Bahá’í communities, in Africa particularly, who survived war, terror, political oppression and extreme privations, and who emerged from these tests with their faith intact, determined to resume the interrupted work of building a viable Bahá’í



collective life. The community in Ethiopia, homeland of one of the world's oldest and richest cultural traditions, succeeded in maintaining both the morale of its members and the coherence of its administrative structures under relentless pressure from a brutal dictatorship. Of the friends in other countries on the continent, it may be truly said that their path of faithfulness to the Cause led through a hell of suffering seldom equalled in modern history. The annals of the Faith possess few more moving testimonies to the sheer power of the spirit than the stories of courage and purity of heart emerging from the inferno that engulfed the friends in what was then Zaire, stories that will inspire generations to come and represent priceless contributions to the creation of a global Bahá'í culture. Such countries as Uganda and Rwanda added unforgettable achievements of their own to this record of heroic struggle. — Universal House of Justice [CL 105-106]

## Be faithful to the Cause/Bahá'u'lláh

*Whatsoever is thy desire is found in the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh. If thou art asking confirmation and assistance, be thou faithful, firm and steadfast. — 'Abdu'l-Bahá [TAB2 246]*

*Bahá'u'lláh endured the greatest hardships. He found neither rest by night nor peace by day. He was constantly under the stress of great calamity—now in prison, now in chains, now threatened by the sword—until finally He broke the cage of captivity, left this mortal world and ascended to the heaven of God. He endured all these tribulations for our sakes and suffered these deprivations that we might attain the bestowals of divine bounty. Therefore, we must be faithful to Him and turn away from our own selfish desires and fancies*

*in order that we may accomplish that which is required of us by our Lord.* — ‘Abdu’l-Bahá [PUP 461]

For such benefits, for such an arresting and majestic vindication of the undefeatable powers inherent in our precious Faith, we can but bow our heads in humility, awe and thanksgiving, renew our pledge of fealty to it, and, each covenanting in his own heart, resolve to prove faithful to that pledge, and persevere to the very end, until our earthly share of servitude to so transcendent and priceless a Cause has been totally and completely fulfilled. — Shoghi Effendi [MA 104]

### Strive to be faithful

*But we, and the friends of God, should on no account slacken our efforts to be loyal, sincere and men of good will. We should at all times manifest our truthfulness and sincerity, nay rather, we must be constant in our faithfulness and trustworthiness, and occupy ourselves in offering prayers for the good of all.*

*O ye beloved of God, these are days for steadfastness, for firmness and perseverance in the Cause of God.* — ‘Abdu’l-Bahá [SWAB 294]

*O saints of God! at the end of Our discourse We enjoin on you once again chastity, faithfulness, godliness, sincerity, and purity. Lay aside the evil and adopt the good. This is that whereunto ye are commanded in the Book of God, the Knowing, the Wise. Well is it with those who practice [this injunction]. At this moment the pen crieth out, saying, ‘O saints of God, regard the horizon of uprightness, and be quit, severed, and free from what is beside this. There is no strength and no power save in God.’* — ‘Abdu’l-Bahá [TN 48]

## How can people demonstrate they are faithful

Oh, friends of God! If ye will trust in the Word of God and be strong; if ye will follow the precepts of Bahá'u'lláh to tend the sick, raise the fallen, care for the poor and needy, give shelter to the destitute, protect the oppressed, comfort the sorrowful and love the world of humanity with all your hearts, then I say unto you that ere long this meeting-place will see a wonderful harvest. Day by day each member will advance and become more and more spiritual. But ye must have a firm foundation and your aims and ambitions must be clearly understood by each member. They shall be as follows:

1. To show compassion and goodwill to all mankind.
2. To render service to humanity.
3. To endeavour to guide and enlighten those in darkness.
4. To be kind to everyone, and show forth affection to every living soul.
5. To be humble in your attitude towards God, to be constant in prayer to Him, so as to grow daily nearer to God.
6. To be so faithful and sincere in all your actions that every member may be known as embodying the qualities of honesty, love, faith, kindness, generosity, and courage.
7. To be detached from all that is not God, attracted by the Heavenly Breath—a divine soul; so that the world may know that a Bahá'í is a perfect being.

*Strive to attain this at these meetings. Then, indeed and in truth will ye, the friends of God, come together with great joy! Render help one to the other, become as one*

*man, having reached perfect unity.* — ‘Abdu’l-Bahá [PT 73-74]

A word or two from Shoghi Effendi [at the commemoration in the Holy Land to mark the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá] made them feel the Master nigh, and made them realise as never before that it was only in following in His steps, and in living the life that He had, that we can prove our faithfulness to our Master’s Cause. It was indeed a night of meditation and prayer... — From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi [UD 18]

### *Faithfully work for the Faith*

Ours is the solemn, the inescapable duty to labour faithfully and unremittingly to ensure that no opportunity is being missed, that no avenues are left unexplored, that might, however indirectly, contribute to the furtherance of those tasks that claim so insistently our immediate attention. That those into whose hands this dynamic Plan has been entrusted are aware of the essential character of their obligations and will discharge worthily their duties no one, viewing the range and quality of their achievements, can entertain the slightest doubt. — Shoghi Effendi [TDH 29]

### **Deeds of the faithful Bahá’í**

*Be ye not seated and silent! Diffuse the glad-tidings of the Kingdom far and wide to the ears, promulgate the Word of God, and put into practice the advices and covenants of God; that is, arise ye with such qualities and attributes that ye may continually bestow life to the body of the world, and nurse the infants of the universe up to the station of maturity and perfection. Enkindle with all your might in every meeting the light of the love of God, gladden and cheer every heart with the utmost*

*loving-kindness, show forth your love to the strangers just as you show forth to your relations. If a soul is seeking to quarrel, ask ye for reconciliation; if he blame you, praise him; if he give you a deadly poison, bestow ye an all-healing antidote; if he createth death, administer ye eternal life; if he becometh a thorn, change ye into roses and hyacinths. Perchance, through such deeds and words, this darkened world will become illuminated, this terrestrial universe will become transformed into a heavenly realm, and this satanic prison become a divine court; warfare and bloodshed be annihilated, and love and faithfulness hoist the tent of unity upon the apex of the world.*

*These are the results of the divine advices and exhortations, and the epitome of the teachings of the Bahá'í Cycle. — ‘Abdu’l-Bahá [BWF 353]*

### *Duties of the faithful Bahá'í*

*The duty of the concourse of the faithful in this day should be but one duty, their purpose but one purpose, their aim but one aim, and the object of their endeavour but one object, and this is none other than to foster the spirit of unity and harmony, to serve and teach His Cause and to promote His Word. Such is the meaning of true faithfulness; and in this lies the good-pleasure of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. — Bahiyyih Khánum [BK 174]*

## **Faithfulness in relationships with others**

### *The faithful are to treat others with joy*

*They that are endued with sincerity and faithfulness should associate with all the peoples and kindreds of the earth with joy and radiance, inasmuch as consorting with people hath promoted and will continue to promote*

*unity and concord, which in turn are conducive to the maintenance of order in the world and to the regeneration of nations. — Bahá'u'lláh [TB 36]*

*Treat people with faithfulness*

*Wherefore, O my loving friends! Consort with all the peoples, kindreds and religions of the world with the utmost truthfulness, uprightness, faithfulness, kindness, good-will and friendliness, that all the world of being may be filled with the holy ecstasy of the grace of Bahá, that ignorance, enmity, hate and rancour may vanish from the world and the darkness of estrangement amidst the peoples and kindreds of the world may give way to the Light of Unity. Should other peoples and nations be unfaithful to you show your fidelity unto them, should they be unjust toward you show justice towards them, should they keep aloof from you attract them to yourselves, should they show their enmity be friendly towards them, should they poison your lives, sweeten their souls, should they inflict a wound upon you, be a salve to their sores. Such are the attributes of the sincere! Such are the attributes of the truthful. — 'Abdu'l-Bahá [WT 14]*

*As to thee, O maid-servant of God! Blessed art thou, for thou hast dealt with people in goodness and good favour. Do not seek from them any reward whatever, but seek all grace and beneficence from thy Lord, and even deal with the people of great oppression in faithfulness, for as much as this is becoming of the people of Bahá. — 'Abdu'l-Bahá [TAB2 356]*

... they view people in the light of the Blessed Beauty's call that the entire human race are servants of the Lord of might and glory, as He hath brought the whole creation under the purview of His gracious utterance,

and hath enjoined upon us to show forth love and affection, wisdom and compassion, faithfulness and unity towards all, without any discrimination. — Universal House of Justice [CL 9]

*Be friendly to all*

*Be fair to yourselves and to others, that the evidences of justice may be revealed, through your deeds, among Our faithful servants. Beware lest ye encroach upon the substance of your neighbour. Prove yourselves worthy of his trust and confidence in you, and withhold not from the poor the gifts which the grace of God hath bestowed upon you. He, verily, shall recompense the charitable, and doubly repay them for what they have bestowed. No God is there but Him. All creation and its empire are His. He bestoweth His gifts on whom He will, and from whom He will He withholdeth them. He is the Great Giver, the Most Generous, the Benevolent. — Bahá'u'lláh [GWB 278]*

*... we, and the friends of God, should on no account slacken our efforts to be loyal, sincere and men of good will. We should at all times manifest our truthfulness and sincerity, nay rather, we must be constant in our faithfulness and trustworthiness, and occupy ourselves in offering prayers for the good of all. — 'Abdu'l-Bahá [SWAB 294]*

*In every dispensation, there hath been the commandment of fellowship and love, but it was a commandment limited to the community of those in mutual agreement, not to the dissident foe. In this wondrous age, however, praised be God, the commandments of God are not delimited, not restricted to any one group of people, rather have all the friends been commanded to show forth fellowship and love, consideration and generosity*

*and loving-kindness to every community on earth. Now must the lovers of God arise to carry out these instructions of His: let them be kindly fathers to the children of the human race, and compassionate brothers to the youth, and self-denying offspring to those bent with years. The meaning of this is that ye must show forth tenderness and love to every human being, even to your enemies, and welcome them all with unalloyed friendship, good cheer, and loving-kindness. When ye meet with cruelty and persecution at another's hands, keep faith with him; when malevolence is directed your way, respond with a friendly heart. To the spears and arrows rained upon you, expose your breasts for a target mirror-bright; and in return for curses, taunts and wounding words, show forth abounding love. Thus will all peoples witness the power of the Most Great Name, and every nation acknowledge the might of the Ancient Beauty, and see how He hath toppled down the walls of discord, and how surely He hath guided all the peoples of the earth to oneness; how He hath lit man's world, and made this earth of dust to send forth streams of light. — 'Abdu'l-Bahá [SWAB 20-21]*

*One of the teachings is that love and faithfulness must prevail in the hearts that men may see the stranger as a friend, the sinner as an intimate fellow, may count enemies as allies, regard foes as loving comrades, call their executioner the giver of life, consider the denier as a believer and the unbeliever as a faithful one—that is, men must behave in such a manner as may befit the believers, the faithful, the friend and the confidant. — 'Abdu'l-Bahá [BWF 414]*

### *Be faithful in marriage*

Chastity implies both before and after marriage an unsullied, chaste sex life. Before marriage absolutely



chaste, after marriage absolutely faithful to one's chosen companion. Faithful in all sexual acts, faithful in word and in deed. — From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual, 28 September 1941 [LG 360]

*Trust only those who are truly faithful*

*Trust no man save him whose breast hath been dilated by God through the light of **faith**, whom God hath confirmed in His religion, and who is severed from all else save God and attracted by His fragrances. — 'Abdu'l-Bahá [BWF 411]*

*Be loyal to government*

Also, Bahá'ís, in accordance with their exalted teachings, are duty bound to be obedient to their government. Elucidating this subject, Shoghi Rabbani says: 'The people of Bahá are required to obey their respective governments, and to demonstrate their truthfulness and good will towards the authorities... Bahá'ís, in every land and without any exception, should... be obedient and bow to the clear instructions and the declared decrees issued by the authorities. They must faithfully carry out such directives.' — Shoghi Effendi [qtd. in MUHJ63 597]

*If a man deal faithlessly with a just government he shall have dealt faithlessly with God; and if he render it faithful service he shall rendered that service to God. — 'Abdu'l-Bahá [Trustworthiness]*

*Government must be loyal and faithful to subjects*

*Governments should fully acquaint themselves with the conditions of those they govern, and confer upon them positions according to desert and merit. It is enjoined upon every ruler and sovereign to consider this matter*

*with the utmost care that the traitor may not usurp the position of the faithful, nor the despoiler rule in the place of the trustworthy. Among the officials who in the past have governed in this Most Great Prison some, praise be to God, were adorned with justice, but as to others, We take refuge with God. We beseech the One true God to guide them one and all, that haply they may not be deprived of the fruit of faith and trustworthiness, nor be withheld from the light of equity and justice. — Bahá'u'lláh [TB 127]*

### **Faithfulness to the Covenant**

*Blessed is he that hath been enraptured by My wondrous melodies and hath rent the veils asunder through the potency of My might. Blessed is he who hath remained faithful to My Covenant, and whom the things of the world have not kept back from attaining My Court of holiness. — Bahá'u'lláh [TB 16]*

*Those who have been faithful to God's Covenant are of the highest ones in the sight of the exalted Lord. — 'Abdu'l-Bahá [BWF 435]*

*Ye must be sincere and faithful, ye must follow the ordinances which refer to the Covenant of God, who is the solid edifice.*

*O ye beloved of God, know that steadfastness and firmness in this new and wonderful Covenant is indeed the spirit that quickeneth the hearts which are overflowing with the love of the Glorious Lord; verily, it is the power which penetrates into the hearts of the people of the world! Your Lord hath assuredly promised His servants who are firm and steadfast to render them victorious at all times, to exalt their word, propagate their power, diffuse their lights, strengthen their hearts,*

*elevate their banners, assist their hosts, brighten their stars, increase the abundance of the showers of mercy upon them, and enable the brave lions or teachers to conquer.*

*Hasten, hasten, O ye firm believers! Hasten, hasten. — ‘Abdu’l-Bahá [TAB2 442]*

*Blessed is that teacher who remaineth faithful to the Covenant of God, and occupieth himself with the education of children. For him hath the Supreme Pen inscribed that reward which is revealed in the Most Holy Book. Blessed, blessed is he! — ‘Abdu’l-Bahá [CC1 251]*

### *Faithful obedience to the teachings and institutions*

*Whenever My laws appear like the sun in the heaven of Mine utterance, they must be faithfully obeyed by all, though My decree be such as to cause the heaven of every religion to be cleft asunder. He doth what He pleaseth. He chooseth; and none may question His choice. Whatsoever He, the Well-Beloved, ordaineth, the same is, verily, beloved. To this He Who is the Lord of all creation beareth Me witness. Whoso hath inhaled the sweet fragrance of the All-Merciful, and recognized the Source of this utterance, will welcome with his own eyes the shafts of the enemy, that he may establish the truth of the laws of God amongst men. Well is it with him that hath turned thereunto, and apprehended the meaning of His decisive decree. — Bahá’u’lláh [KA ¶7]*

There are two main principles which the Guardian wishes the friends to always bear in mind and to conscientiously and faithfully follow... [the second] is the principle of complete, and immediate obedience to the Assemblies, both Local and national. It is the responsibility of these Bahá’ís administrative bodies to enable the community

to acquire, and increasingly deepen in the knowledge and understanding of the Cause. Doctrinal unity and administrative unity, these are the two chief pillars that sustain the edifice of the Cause, and protect it from the storms of opposition which so severely rage against it. — From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a National Spiritual Assembly, 5 September 1936 [DND 61]

*Faithfully guard the Cause of God*

*Let them be a mighty fortress to defend His Faith, an impregnable citadel for the hosts of the Ancient Beauty. Let them faithfully guard the edifice of the Cause of God from every side; let them become the bright stars of His luminous skies. — ‘Abdu’l-Bahá [SWAB 10]*

*Be faithful custodians of God’s trust*

... be faithful custodians of God’s trust, and be assured that such honesty and faithfulness will be richly rewarded from on High. — From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice [LG 257]

**Exhortations to Bahá’ís to be faithful in particular ways**

*Be faithful to the word of God*

There are two main principles which the Guardian wishes the friends to always bear in mind and to conscientiously and faithfully follow... [one] is the principle of unqualified and whole-hearted loyalty to the revealed Word. The believers should be careful not to deviate, even a hair-breadth, from the Teachings. Their supreme consideration should be to safeguard the purity of the principles, tenets and laws of the Faith. It is only by this

means that they can hope to maintain the organic unity of the Cause. There can and should be no liberals or conservatives, no moderates or extremes in the Cause. For they are all subject to the one and the same law which is the Law of God. This law transcends all differences, all personal or local tendencies, moods and aspirations. — From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi [DND 60]

As regards the statement of our own views and explanations of the teachings: Shoghi Effendi believes that we should not restrict the liberty of the individual to express his own views so long as he makes it clear that these views are his own. In fact, such explanations are often helpful and are conducive to a better understanding of the teachings. God has given man a rational power to be used and not killed.

This does not, however, mean that the absolute authority does not remain in the revealed Words. We should try and keep as near to the authority as we can and show that we are faithful to it by quoting from the Works of Bahá'u'lláh in establishing our points. To discard the authority of the revealed Words is heretic and to suppress completely individual interpretation of those Words is also bad. We should try to strike a happy medium between these two extremes. — Shoghi Effendi [PBA 24-25]

*Recite ye the verses of God every morn and eventide. Whoso faileth to recite them hath not been faithful to the Covenant of God and His Testament, and whoso turneth away from these holy verses in this Day is of those who throughout eternity have turned away from God.* — Bahá'u'lláh [KA ¶149]

*Do your job faithfully*

*In the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, it is incumbent upon every soul to acquire a trade and an occupation. For example, I know how to weave or make a mat, and you know some other trade. This, in itself is an act of worship, provided that it is conducted on the basis of utmost honesty and faithfulness. — 'Abdu'l-Bahá [CC1 4]*

*All government employees, whether of high or low rank, should, with perfect integrity, probity and rectitude, content themselves with the modest stipends and allowances that are theirs. They should keep their hands unsullied and preserve their fair name from blemish... If a man deal faithlessly with a just government he shall have dealt faithlessly with God; and if he render it faithful service he shall have rendered that service to God. — 'Abdu'l-Bahá [CC2 344]*

*Faithfully apply yourself to your studies*

Although still young in age, you should endeavour from now, through close association with your fellow-believers, and through your faithful application to your Bahá'í studies, to prepare yourself for that day when you will be called upon, as a grown-up and responsible member of the Community, to take full part in the activities of the Cause, and thus prove yourself worthy of being a member of this world-wide Fellowship created by Bahá'u'lláh. — From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual, 10 April 1939 [CC2 428]

**The secret of faithfulness**

*Teaching the Cause is of utmost importance for it is the head corner-stone of the foundation itself. This wronged*

*servant has spent his days and nights in promoting the Cause and urging the peoples to service. He rested not a moment, till the fame of the Cause of God was noised abroad in the world and the celestial strains from the Abhá Kingdom roused the East and the West. The beloved of God must also follow the same example. This is the secret of faithfulness, this is the requirement of servitude to the Threshold of Bahá! — ‘Abdu’l-Bahá [WT 10]*

## **Faithfulness in the Bahá’í Administration**

### *Faithfulness in the conduct of Bahá’í administration*

I am much impressed and feel deeply gratified to learn of your devoted and unremitting labours, individually and collectively in the field of service to the Cause; of your constant vigilance and watchful care in upholding its fundamental principles and guarding its essential interests; of the efficiency, faithfulness and vigour with which you are conducting the administration of its affairs throughout that land. — Shoghi Effendi [BA 47]

### *Elect faithful Bahá’ís*

The strength and progress of the Bahá’í community depend upon the election of pure, faithful and active souls... — From a letter of Shoghi Effendi to the friends in Persia, 9 April 1932 [CC1 317]

The electors... must prayerfully and devotedly and after meditation and reflection elect faithful, sincere, experienced, capable and competent souls who are worthy of membership... — From a letter of Shoghi Effendi to a National Spiritual Assembly, 1 July 1943 [CC1 317]

*Responsibilities of those elected*

... due emphasis should not be placed only on the concentrated authority, the rights, the privileges and prerogatives enjoyed by the elected national representatives of the believers, but that special stress be laid also on their responsibilities as willing ministers, faithful stewards and loyal trustees to those who have chosen them. — Shoghi Effendi [BA 143]

**Defer to the faithful**

*Beware that ye swell not with pride before God, and disdainfully reject His loved ones. Defer ye humbly to the faithful, they that have believed in God and in His signs, whose hearts witness to His unity, whose tongues proclaim His oneness, and who speak not except by His leave. Thus do We exhort you with justice, and warn you with truth, that perchance ye may be awakened. — Bahá'u'lláh [SLH 231]*

**The faithless/unfaithful**

Today the world is experiencing a frightening and horrible example of the way in which one group of so-called religious fundamentalists is violently enforcing its understanding of how to treat those they consider to be 'faithless' and 'infidels' by torturing and killing them. This is not the place to discuss whether they are right in their understanding of who the 'infidels' are or their misguided actions but their beliefs have in any case been overtaken by the teachings of the Manifestation of God for this day, Bahá'u'lláh. For not only have Bahá'u'lláh's teachings abolished concepts such as jihad, in the dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh the religious division of peoples into those who are faithful and those who are infidels has been abolished. This does not mean, however, that there is no distinction between them or that they have the same spiritual status. From the



writings it seems that whereas in the past those who were not faithful to the religion were considered to be cut off from the bestowals and love of God, in this day they are, like everyone, recipients of His grace and bounty. As Bahá'u'lláh explains, it is not God who fails to love an individual but the individual who fails to love God that creates the appearance that God is not showering His love on that person:

*O Son of Being! Love Me, that I may love thee. If thou lovest Me not, My love can in no wise reach thee. Know this, O servant.* — Bahá'u'lláh [HW Arabic #5]

The attitude other have about such individuals is also to be different in this day. They are not evil but 'asleep', 'ailing' or 'immature' and should be 'awakened', 'healed' or 'trained', treated with kindness and love. Only in extreme cases, now determined by the Universal House of Justice after long investigation and attempts to rehabilitate the individual, will a person be declared a Covenant-breaker, association with whom by Bahá'is is forbidden for their own spiritual health. And even they are still able to receive the bounties of God.

### **The lack of faithfulness in the world**

*We exhort mankind in these days when the countenance of Justice is soiled with dust, when the flames of unbelief are burning high and the robe of wisdom rent asunder, when tranquillity and faithfulness have ebbed away and trials and tribulations have waxed severe, when covenants are broken and ties are severed, when no man knoweth how to discern light and darkness or to distinguish guidance from error.* — Bahá'u'lláh [TB 137-138]

*In the night season the beauty of the immortal Being hath repaired from the emerald height of fidelity unto the Sadratu'l-Muntahá, and wept with such a weeping*

*that the Concourse on high and the dwellers of the realms above wailed at His lamenting. Whereupon there was asked, Why the wailing and weeping? He made reply: As bidden I waited expectant upon the hill of faithfulness, yet inhaled not from them that dwell on earth the fragrance of fidelity. — Bahá'u'lláh [HW Persian #77]*

*Who are the faithless?*

*The faithless... by day and night, openly and privily do their utmost to shake the foundations of the Cause, to root out the Blessed Tree, to deprive this servant of service, to kindle secret sedition and strife and to annihilate 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Outwardly they appear as sheep, yet inwardly they are naught but ravening wolves. Sweet in words, they are but at heart a deadly poison. — 'Abdu'l-Bahá [SWAB 315]*

*Whoso faileth to quaff the choice wine which We have unsealed through the potency of Our Name, the All-Compelling, shall be unable to discern the splendours of the light of divine unity or to grasp the essential purpose underlying the Scriptures of God, the Lord of heaven and earth, the sovereign Ruler of this world and of the world to come. Such a man shall be accounted among the faithless in the Book of God, the All-Knowing, the All-Informed. — Bahá'u'lláh [TB 105]*

*Among the faithless is he who hath imagined that calamities can deter Bahá from fulfilling that which God, the Creator of all things, hath purposed. Say: Nay, by Him Who causeth the rain to fall! Nothing whatsoever can withhold Him from the remembrance of His Lord. — Bahá'u'lláh [SLH 60]*

## Division of humankind into the 'faithful' and the 'infidels', is abolished

*A fundamental teaching of Bahá'u'lláh is the oneness of the world of humanity. Addressing mankind, He says, 'Ye are all leaves of one tree and the fruits of one branch.' By this it is meant that the world of humanity is like a tree, the nations or peoples are the different limbs or branches of that tree, and the individual human creatures are as the fruits and blossoms thereof. In this way Bahá'u'lláh expressed the oneness of humankind, whereas in all religious teachings of the past the human world has been represented as divided into two parts: one known as the people of the Book of God, or the pure tree, and the other the people of infidelity and error, or the evil tree. The former were considered as belonging to the faithful, and the others to the hosts of the irreligious and infidel—one part of humanity the recipients of divine mercy, and the other the object of the wrath of their Creator. Bahá'u'lláh removed this by proclaiming the oneness of the world of humanity, and this principle is specialized in His teachings, for He has submerged all mankind in the sea of divine generosity. Some are asleep; they need to be awakened. Some are ailing; they need to be healed. Some are immature as children; they need to be trained. But all are recipients of the bounty and bestowals of God. — 'Abdu'l-Bahá [PUP 454]*

Among the many complementary Teachings in the Faith which resolve the dilemmas of past societies are those of the unity of mankind on the one hand, and loyalty to the covenant on the other. As already mentioned, no one in this Dispensation is compelled to be a Bahá'í, and the division of humankind into the 'clean' and the 'unclean', the 'faithful' and the 'infidels', is abolished. At the same time, anyone who does choose to be a Bahá'í accepts the

Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh and, while free expression of opinion within the Bahá'í community is encouraged, this cannot ever be permitted to degenerate to the level of undermining the Covenant for this would vitiate the very purpose of the Revelation itself. – Universal House of Justice [from a letter, 27 April 1995]

### **Yet there is a difference between the faithful and the unfaithful**

*The sword He [Jesus] carried was the sword of His tongue, with which He divided the good from the evil, the true from the false, the faithful from the unfaithful, and the light from the darkness. His Word was indeed a sharp sword! – ‘Abdu’l-Bahá [PT 56]*

*The following is an evidence of the sovereignty exercised by Muḥammad, the Day-star of Truth. Hast thou not heard how with one single verse He hath sundered light from darkness, the righteous from the ungodly, and the believing from the infidel? All the signs and allusions concerning the Day of Judgement, which thou hast heard, such as the raising of the dead, the Day of Reckoning, the Last Judgement, and others have been made manifest through the revelation of that verse. These revealed words were a blessing to the righteous who on hearing them exclaimed: ‘O God our Lord, we have heard, and obeyed.’ They were a curse to the people of iniquity who, on hearing them affirmed: ‘We have heard and rebelled.’ Those words, sharp as the sword of God, have separated the faithful from the infidel, and severed father from son. – Bahá'u'lláh [KI 111-112]*

*Be fair: Is the testimony of those acceptable and worthy of attention whose deeds agree with their words, whose outward behaviour conforms with their inner life? The mind is bewildered at their deeds, and the soul*

*marvelleth at their fortitude and bodily endurance. Or is the testimony of these faithless souls who breathe naught but the breath of selfish desire, and who lie imprisoned in the cage of their idle fancies, acceptable? Like the bats of darkness, they lift not their heads from their couch except to pursue the transient things of the world, and find no rest by night except as they labour to advance the aims of their sordid life. Immersed in their selfish schemes, they are oblivious of the Divine decree. In the daytime they strive with all their soul after worldly benefits, and in the night season their sole occupation is to gratify their carnal desires. By what law or standard could men be justified in cleaving to the denials of such petty-minded souls and in ignoring the faith of them that have renounced, for the sake of the good pleasure of God, their life and substance, their fame and renown, their reputation and honour? – Bahá'u'lláh [GWB 181-182]*

*Do not follow the faithless*

*Persevere steadfastly as Thou art bidden and let not the faithless amongst men nor their utterances grieve Thee, since Thy Lord shall, by the righteousness of God, the Most Great, pass judgement upon them on the Day of Resurrection, and surely God witnesseth all things. – The Báb [SWB 71]*

*Fear thou God, thy Lord, and make mention of His Name in the day-time and at eventide. Follow not the promptings of the faithless, lest thou be reckoned among the exponents of idle fancies. Faithfully obey the Primal Point Who is the Lord Himself, and be of the righteous. Let nothing cause thee to be sore shaken, neither let the things which have been destined to take place in this Cause disturb thee. Strive earnestly for the sake of God and walk in the path of righteousness. Shouldst thou encounter the unbelievers, place thy whole*

*trust in God, thy Lord, saying, Sufficient is God unto me in the kingdoms of both this world and the next. — The Báb [SWB 160]*

*The evil doings of the faithless*

*Verily Thou art God; no God is there but Thee. Alone and unaided, Thou art independent of all created things. Neither can the devotion of Thy lovers profit Thee, nor the evil doings of the faithless harm Thee. Verily Thou art my God, He Who will never fail in His promise. — The Báb [SWB 204]*

**Those who are not faithful to the Covenant**

*O My Friends! Call ye to mind that covenant ye have entered into with Me upon Mount Paran, situate within the hallowed precincts of Zaman. I have taken to witness the concourse on high and the dwellers in the city of eternity, yet now none do I find faithful unto the covenant. Of a certainty pride and rebellion have effaced it from the hearts, in such wise that no trace thereof remaineth. Yet knowing this, I waited and disclosed it not. — Bahá'u'lláh [HW Persian #71]*

*Blessed the one who hath remained faithful to the Covenant of God, and woe betide him who hath broken it and disbelieved in Him, the Knower of secrets. Say: This is the Day of Bounty! Bestir yourselves that I may make you monarchs in the realms of My Kingdom. If ye follow Me, ye shall behold that which ye were promised, and I will make you My companions in the dominion of My majesty and the intimates of My beauty in the heaven of My power forevermore. If ye rebel against Me, I will in My clemency endure it patiently, that haply ye may awaken and rise up from the couch of heedlessness. Thus hath My mercy encompassed you.*

*Fear ye God and follow not in the ways of those who have turned away from His face, though they invoke His name in the daytime and in the night season. — Bahá'u'lláh [SLH 64-65]*

*Happy is the faithful one who is attired with the vesture of high endeavour and hath arisen to serve this Cause. Such a soul hath truly attained the desired Goal and hath apprehended the Object for which it hath been created. But a myriad times alas for the wayward who are like unto dried-up leaves fallen upon the dust. Ere long mortal blasts shall carry them away to the place ordained for them. Ignorant did they arrive, ignorant did they linger and ignorant did they retire to their abodes. — Bahá'u'lláh [TB 257-258]*

## **The Faithful Spirit**

In the Bahá'í writings the 'Faithful Spirit' is generally understood to be Gabriel<sup>3</sup>, who appears to be a spiritual entity beyond the understanding of humans. The Faithful Spirit is mentioned at number of times in the texts:

*We have revealed Ourselves unto men, have unveiled the Cause, guided all mankind towards God's Straight Path, promulgated the laws and have enjoined upon everyone that which shall truly profit them both in this world and in the next; yet they have pronounced judgement to shed My blood, whereat the Maid of Heaven hath wept sore, Sinai hath lamented and the Faithful Spirit was made to sigh with grief. — Bahá'u'lláh [TB 251]*

*They ascribed unto Him what caused the Spirit Jesus to lament in His Most Sublime Station, and the Faithful Spirit to cry out. — Bahá'u'lláh [PB 78]*

*They that have forsaken their country for the purpose of teaching Our Cause—these shall the Faithful Spirit strengthen through its power. A company of Our chosen angels shall go forth with them, as bidden by Him Who is the Almighty, the All-Wise. —Bahá'u'lláh [GWB 334]*

## Conclusion

The concept of faithfulness appears throughout the English-language Bahá'í writings in different contexts and is applied to a number of situations and people. The writings provide definitions for the sort of people and actions that are 'faithful', for example '*they that have believed in God and in His signs, whose hearts witness to His unity, whose tongues proclaim His oneness, and who speak not except by His leave*' [SLH 231] and those who are 'unfaithful', including those who '*do their utmost to shake the foundations of the Cause*' [SWAB 315]. As a spiritual quality that can be demonstrated in the individual's attitude, behaviour and relationships with the Bahá'í Faith and its institutions as well as with other people, it presents an opportunity for deepening, reflection, meditation and practice.

As this is but a preliminary sampling of some of the Bahá'í writings, there is very little analysis possible at this stage but the subject is worthy of much deeper study.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abu'l-Faḍl, Mírzá. *Miracles and Metaphors*. Los Angeles: Kalímát Press, 1981.
- Balyuzi, H.M. *Eminent Bahá'ís in the Time of Bahá'u'lláh: with some Historical Background*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1985.
- Trustworthiness: A Compilation of Extracts from the Bahá'í Writings*. London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1987.
- The Universal House of Justice. Letter to an individual, 23 March 1975.
- . Letter, 27 April 1995.



———. Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, 1 September 1983.

---

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Many of the passages by Bahá'u'lláh quoted here have been translated by Shoghi Effendi; those of the Báb were translated by Habib Taherzadeh and a committee at the Bahá'í World Centre. Some of the passages of 'Abdu'l-Bahá have also been translated by a similar committee but most quotations from His talks are translations by various people or from notes taken by individuals listening to the translations. I have made no attempt to search out the Persian or Arabic words that are translated as faithful, faithfulness, loyal and so on, as to do so is not only beyond the scope of this essay but also beyond my own capacity.

<sup>2</sup> From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, 23 March 1975.

<sup>3</sup> See H. M. Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahá'ís in the Time of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 46. and Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl, *Miracles and Metaphors*, p. 21.

# An Homage to *Memorials of the Faithful* and to Eleven of Its Heroes

Julio Savi

## Abstract

*Memorials of the Faithful* is described as an inspiring “book of prototypes,” that not only portrays “all of the archetypes that the various personality theorists have given us in this century” and “all the human dichotomies” that we may find in our lives, but also addresses “us in our time... [and] on our own travels... [in our] tacit dimension, the silent root of human life.” These features of the book have lead the author to compose nine poems on eleven of the personages of the book: Shaykh Salmán, Nabíl-i-Zarandí, Darvish-i-Şidq-‘Alí, Shaykh Şádiq-i-Yazdí, Zaynu’l-‘Ábidín Yazdí, Shaykh ‘Alí Akbar-i-Mazgání, Hájí Ja‘far and his brothers, ‘Abdu’lláh Baghdádí and Jináb-i-Muníb. They have not been chosen because they were considered in any way superior to or better than all the others. They were chosen because some of their personal qualities and of the events in their lives raised louder echoes in the author’s heart and mind. The nine poems are presented, with short explanations of the details that have moved the author to write them.

*Memorials of the Faithful*, first published in Persian in 1924 in Haifa by the publisher Maṭba‘ah al-‘Abbásíyah, under the title of *Tadhkiratu’l-Vafá*, is “the first Bahá’í book to be printed in Haifa under the Guardianship” [Gail xi]. The word *Tadhkirat* is a Persian-Arabic word. It derives from the Arabic root *dhakara*, translated into English as “he preserved it in his memory, he remembered it... he sought, or endeavoured, to remember” [Lane 3:134]. The word *Tadhkirat*, usually translated “memory, remembrance... biographical memory, biography” [Steingass 290], is used in Arabic, Persian and Turkish literature to denote literary works “concerned with the lives of poets... calligraphers... or other categories of memorable persons” [Heinrichs et al.]. One of the most famous of these works is a book written by the well-known Persian poet Faríd ad-Dín ‘Aṭṭár (c.1142–c.1220), *Tadhkirat al-Awliyá*, a collection of hagiographies published in English under the title *Memorial of the Saints* (see *Muslim Saints and Mystics*). Alessandro Bausani (1921–1988) writes that this book “is similar... to our middle age *Little Flowers*” [502]. Western literature is rich in similar books, such as the *Golden Legend* (Latin: *Legenda Aurea*) by Jacobus de Voragine (Italian: Jacopo da Varagine), a collection of lives of the saints in Latin, probably compiled around 1260; *Acts of the Saints* (Latin: *Acta Sanctorum*), an encyclopedic text in 68 volumes examining the lives of Christian saints, organized according to each saint’s feast day, published between 1643 and 1940; and Alban Butler’s (1710–1773) *The Lives of the Fathers, Martyrs and Other Principal Saints*, first published in 1756–1759, a popular compendium of the *Acts of the Saints* in English.

‘Aṭṭár’s work, like the hagiographic literature of the Western world, relates stories of miracles and portents ascribed to the personages whose lives and utterances the author wishes to share with his readers. And as a matter of fact he calls them *Awliyá*, that literally means “Friends (of God),” but is commonly used to denote the “saints” [Steingass 122]. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s work is completely different. He celebrates His personages for their

*vafá*, that is “good faith, fidelity, loyalty, sincerity” [Steingass 1475], a word which Shoghi Effendi has often translated “faithfulness,” as for example in the following sentence from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will and Testament:

*In these days, the most important of all things is the guidance of the nations and peoples of the world. Teaching the Cause is of utmost importance for it is the head corner-stone of the foundation itself. This wronged servant has spent his days and nights in promoting the Cause and urging the peoples to service. He rested not a moment, till the fame of the Cause of God was noised abroad in the world and the celestial strains from the Abhá Kingdom roused the East and the West. The beloved of God must also follow the same example. This is the secret of faithfulness (vafá’), this is the requirement of servitude to the Threshold of Bahá! [WT 10]*

Marzieh Gail (1908–1993), an eminent Bahá’í author and translator, who translated the book into English in 1969 under the title *Memorials of the Faithful*, because she had received this task from the Guardian himself, when she was “on a pilgrimage to the Bahá’í world center in Haifa” [xi], writes that this work “is more than the brief annals of early Bahá’í disciples... it is a kind of testament of values endorsed and willed to us by the Bahá’í Exemplar” [ibid.]. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s descriptions do not point out the charismatic or thaumaturgical powers of His personages. There are only three exceptions, three episodes of persons healed through the intervention of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

Shaykh Şádiq-i-Yazdí recovers from an intestinal disorder after ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has done what Bahá’u’lláh has enjoined Him to do: “Go... Place your hand on the distended area and speak the words: ‘O Thou the Healer! [Yá Sháfi]’”<sup>1</sup> [MF 43]. Muḥammad-Hádíy-i-Şaḥḥáf heals from a long-standing chronic fever after having eaten a special food specifically prescribed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and two years later he dies after having eaten the same food in different circumstances [see MF 68]. Mírzá Ja‘far-i-

Yazdí returns to life right after ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has chanted at his bedside by the command of Bahá’u’lláh “*the prayer of Yá Sháfí—O Thou, the Healer*” [MF 157], while his “*family were gathered about him, mourning him, shedding bitter tears*” [ibid.]. These three episodes are narrated as common episodes of everyday life, without any emphasis on what appears to us as exceptional events. A few years earlier ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had clearly explained the meaning of miracles to the eminent American Bahá’í Laura Clifford Barney (1979–1974). First: “*The Manifestations of God are sources of miraculous deeds and marvelous signs. Any difficult or impossible matter is to Them possible and permitted*” [SAQ 113]. Second: “*in the sight of the Manifestations of God these marvels and miracles are of no importance... they would constitute a clear evidence only for those who were present when they took place, not for those who were absent*” [ibid.]. Third: “*These outward miracles are of no importance to the followers of truth... if a dead body be revived, what is gained thereby, since it must die again? What is important is to bestow true insight and everlasting life—that is, a spiritual and divine life*” [ibid. 115]. Faithful to this position, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá prefers to speak of the spiritual portents performed by His personages: their faithfulness in applying the divine Law to the actions of their daily lives, as difficult as their circumstances may have been. It is their high moral standard that makes of each of the personages of His book an example of life to be recorded for posterity.

In *Memorials of the Faithful* ‘Abdu’l-Bahá presents 69 biographies, but in reality He speaks of 79 personages, because in two cases He speaks of two believers together and in four cases he speaks about groups of brothers. The believers that He describes in the same biography are: Áqá Mírzá Mahmúd and Áqá Ridá, “*close and trusted companions of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*” [MF 41], who, together, “*devoted their days to all that is best in human life: they had seeing eyes; they were mindful and aware; they had hearing ears, and were fair of speech. Their sole desire was to please Bahá’u’lláh. To them, nothing was a bounty at all,*

except service at *His Holy Threshold*” [MF 40-1]; and Mashhadí Ḥusayn e Mashhadí Muḥammad-i-Adhirbáyjání who, “both from the province of Adhirbáyján” [MF 62], worked as farmers in Bágh-i-Firdaws and died together because of the hot climate of the region, to which “they were not accustomed” [MF 63]. The groups of brothers are: Ustád Báqir and Ustád Ahmad, two carpenters, who “from the time when both became believers each held the other in His embrace” [MF 72]; Áqá Ibráhím-i-Isfáhání and his three brothers, which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá describes together although they lived apart from one another, perhaps not only for their common love for Bahá’u’lláh, but also as a homage to the early days of their earthly lives when “they all lived in the same house, and remained together day and night. Bird-like, they shared the one nest; and they were always fresh and full of grace, like flowers in a bed” [MF 77]; Ḥájí Ja’far-i-Tabrizí and his two brothers, “souls at rest... well-pleased with their Lord and well-pleasing unto Him” [MF 125]; and finally Áqá Muḥammad-Báqir and Áqá Muḥammad-Ismá’íl, who “died on the same night, wrapped in each other’s arms” [MF 169] and their brother Pahlaván Riḍá, who passed away far from them in Káshán. Among these 79 personages there are also three women: the consort of the King of Martyrs [MF 13-5], a Bahá’í beheaded in Isfáhán in 1879, Shamsu’ḍ-Ḍuhá [MF 175-90] and Táhirih [MF 190-203].

Gail describes *Memorials of the Faithful* as “a book of prototypes” [xi]. She advises her readers that they will meet “mystic, feminist, cleric, artisan, merchant and prince... even modern Western youth... for example, in the chapter on Dervishes” [ibid.]. Ronald Frederick Price, a Bahá’í Canadian writer and poet, guides us throughout the book so that we may meet “all of the archetypes that the various personality theorists have given us in this century” and “all the human dichotomies” [Price 3]: “Jung’s introvert and extrovert... the artist, the suffering artist-soul within us all, Mishkín-Qalam... [who] survives in all his seriousness, as we might, with humour” [ibid.]; “the personality constitutionally weighted on the side of cheer,”

as for example Ismu'lláhu'l-Aşdaq, who “*always taught cheerfully and with gaiety, and would respond gently and with good humour*” [MF 6]; or Muḥammad-‘Alí of Işfáhán, “*a boon companion... affable... happy and content*” [MF 24], loved by everyone, who “*spent his days in utter bliss*” [MF 25] despite his straitened circumstances; and the opposite personality “*the sombre, more reflective even melancholic type*” [Price 3], often as a “*result of the many difficulties these lovers of Bahá’u’lláh were subjected to and wore them ‘to the bone’*” [ibid.; see MF 96], like Mírzá Mihdí of Káshán, who “*was ill almost all the time... an outcast, and destitute,*” but always patient and content [MF 96]; or Ḥájí Taqí who after the death of his two brothers, “*weary of this life*” [MF 115-6], threw himself down from the roof of his room, because he wanted to die; or Qulám-‘Alí-i-Najjár, a man “*abstemious and chaste... a mild man, patient quiet, mostly keeping to himself*” [MF 142-3]. “*Restlessness is a dominant theme*” [Price 3] in these biographies: Sháh Muḥammad-Amín, “*a flame of God’s love*” [MF 45], “*never rested for a moment. Not one night did he spend on a bed of ease, never did he lay down his head on comfort’s pillow. He was continuously in flight, soaring as the birds do, running like a deer*” [MF 46]; Nabíl of Qá’in, “*in ecstasy, burning up with love*” [MF 50], “*restless as the waves of the sea*” [MF 51], “*had no caution, no patience, no reserve; he cared nothing for reticence, nothing for dissimulation*” [MF 51]; Mírzá Muḥammad, after Bahá’u’lláh’s ascension, “*could not stay quiet, day or night... [and] wasted away, like a candle burning down*” [MF 107]. There also are quiet personages who, like Mishkín-Qalam, had no match “*for patience and inner calm*” [MF 101]; or who like Mírzá Ja‘far-i-Yazdí, “*a quiet man, sparing of speech*” were “*in all things relying entirely upon God*” [MF 157]. Finally, we meet sociable believers, like Ḥájí ‘Abdu’lláh Najaf-Abádí who “*spent his days in friendly association with the other believers*” [MF 66-7]; and Nabíl of Qá’in, whose society was “*attractive*” [MF 53]. But we also meet people who prefer solitude, like the two brothers Ustád Báqir and Ustád Aḥmad who lived “*keeping to themselves, away from friend and stranger alike*” [MF 72-3]; or

Qulám-‘Alíy-i-Najjár, who “*inclined to solitude, apt to stay apart from friend and stranger alike... much of the time lived by himself*” [MF 144].

Both Gail and Price suggest that “the reader will probably find himself in these pages” [Gail xi], because ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

... is describing not only the lives of these men and women in the nineteenth century, He is describing us in our time. He is addressing us on our own travels. He addresses the restlessness in us all. He speaks to us in our victory and our loss. He speaks about what Michael Polanyi [1891-1976] calls the tacit dimension, the silent root of human life, which is difficult to tap in biographies, the inner person. This private, this inner person, is the person he writes about for the most part. [Price 3]

These are the features of this “series of spiritual portraits” [Kazemzadeh] that have enabled me to write nine poems on eleven personages whose life is described in it. I did not chose them because I considered them in any way superior or better than all the others. I chose them because some of their personal qualities or events in their lives raised louder echoes in my heart and mind.

### Shaykh Salmán

Shaykh Salmán [see MF 13-6; see his photo in Taherzadeh, *Revelation* 1:206, Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahá’ís* 231] is well known by the Bahá’ís because for almost 40 years, “*from the year 69<sup>2</sup> until the Ascension of Bahá’u’lláh*” in 1892 [MF 15], and even later until 1898-1899 when he died in Shíráz, he went back and forth, travelling thousands of miles, mostly on foot, to bring Tablets and letters from the residences of Bahá’u’lláh and later of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to Their lovers in Iran and ‘Iráq and vice versa. For this reason the Blessed Beauty honored him with the title of “*Messenger of the Merciful (Payk-i-Raḥmán)*” [Revelation 1:109,



*Nafahát* 124]. He was admired for “his simple and unsophisticated nature, his clear insight, his wisdom and tact when confronted with dangerous or difficult situations, above all his faith in Bahá’u’lláh,” as well as his “great physical stamina” [*Revelation* 1:110, 111]. Adib Taherzadeh (1921–2000), the author of a four volume study of the life and Writings of the Founder of the Bahá’í Faith, writes about him: “Salmán was pure-hearted and very simple. The believers always enjoyed his company but there were some friends in high positions who were embarrassed and sometimes afraid to meet him because of his simplicity and frankness” [*Revelation* 2:283]. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá describes his services:

*He traveled on foot, as a rule eating nothing but onions and bread; and in all that time, he moved about in such a way that he was never once held up and never once lost a letter or a Tablet. Every letter was safely delivered; every Tablet reached its intended recipient. Over and over again, in Işfahán, he was subjected to severe trials, but he remained patient and thankful under all conditions, and earned from non-Bahá’ís the title of “the Bábís’ Angel Gabriel.”* [MF 15]

These words by the Master resonate in the following poem [see Savi, *Remoteness* 270]:

### SHAYKH SALMÁN

*Bologna, 1 February 1999*

Shaykh Salmán,  
 Gabriel of the Bahá’ís,  
 how many lands  
 did you cross,  
 how many cold  
 nights, or sunned  
 days on dusty  
 roads did you spend.

A precious knapsack  
 on your cane,  
 a load of love  
 within your breast.  
 Smell of onions  
 on your lips,  
 musky perfume  
 in your heart.  
 Departures  
 and arrivals  
 but one joy:  
 from the human Temple  
 of the Beloved One,  
 to the human hearts  
 of His beloved ones.

### Nabíl-i-A‘zam

Muḥammad-i-Zarandí (1831-1892), known as Nabíl-i-A‘zam [see MF 32-6; see his photo in *Revelation* 1:238], has been defined by Shoghi Effendi Bahá’u’lláh’s “Poet-Laureate, His chronicler and His indefatigable disciple” [GPB 130]. His life is so well-known among the Bahá’ís that it is not worth dwelling on it. The episode that inspired my poem [see *Remoteness* 260-1] is described by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as follows: “*And at the end, when the Daystar of the world had set, he could endure no more, and flung himself into the sea. The waters of sacrifice closed over him; he was drowned, and he came, at last, to the Most High*” [MF 35]. His own words about his early days also resonated in my heart and mind:

I was a shepherd by profession, and was given in my early days a most rudimentary education. I longed to devote more time to my studies, but was unable to do so, owing to the exigencies of my situation. I read the Qur’án with eagerness, committed several of its passages

to memory, and chanted them whilst I followed my flock over the fields. I loved solitude, and watched the stars at night with delight and wonder. In the quiet of the wilderness, I recited certain prayers attributed to the Imám 'Alí, the Commander of the Faithful, and, as I turned my face towards the Qiblih, supplicated the Almighty to guide my steps and enable me to find the Truth. [DB 433]

### DROWNED

*Bologna, 25 December 1998*

Toward the meadows  
of His nearness, heaven  
of ecstasy, toward the sea  
of nothingness, the ocean

of His love, the poet  
laureate of Bahá'u'lláh  
advanced that morning  
when he was drowned.

From the meadows  
of Zarand to the ocean  
of the abiding reunion  
with the Friend, he went his way.

His feet on the ground,  
sometimes pierced,  
his heart, by bitter  
stings of remoteness,  
always alive, his spirit,  
to the signs of beauty  
lavished near and far  
by his Best-Beloved.

He is drowned now  
 at last in that surging  
 unbounded Ocean.  
 From there he offers  
 now his hand and says,  
 “Drown yourself,  
 you too, in the Ocean  
 of His Love.”

### **Darvīsh Ṣidq-‘Alī**

Darvīsh Ṣidq-‘Alī [see MF 36-8] is one of the nine individuals described in *Memorials of the Faithful* as “*belonging to the mystic element (‘urafá)*” [TV 63, MF 36]. ‘*Urafá* is the plural of ‘*árif*, ‘the highest grade to which a mystic can attain’ [Steingass 829]. They are: Nabíl-i Akbar, Mullá ‘Alí-Akbar, Muḥammad-‘Alí from Iṣfáhán, Darvīsh Ṣidq-‘Alí, Ḥájí Muḥammad Khán, Mishkín-Qalam, Ḥájí Áqáy-i Tabrizí, Mírzá Muṣṭafá and Shams-i Duḥá.

Nabíl-i Akbar excelled in “*the teachings of the mystics (‘urafá) and of the Shaykhí School*” [TV 5, MF 1]; Mullá ‘Alí-Akbar “*frequented the gatherings of... mystics (‘urafá)... thoughtfully traversing those areas of knowledge (‘ilm),<sup>3</sup> intuitive wisdom (‘irfán),<sup>4</sup> and illumination (ishráq)*”<sup>5</sup> (TV 19, MF 9); Muḥammad-‘Alí from Iṣfáhán “*was one of the mystics (‘urafá); his house was a gathering place for them, and the philosophers*” [TV 43, MF 23-4]; Darvīsh Ṣidq-‘Alí “*belonged to the mystic element (‘urafá)*” [TV 63, MF 36]; Ḥájí Muḥammad Khán “*became a mystic (‘urafá)*” when he was very young [TV 142, MF 91]; Mishkín-Qalam “*was among the most noted of mystics (‘urafá)... [and] a spiritual wayfarer (sálik)*”<sup>6</sup> [TV 152, MF 98]; Ḥájí Áqáy-i Tabrizí was “*a spiritual man (mard-i-rabbání)*” and “*had sensed the mystic knowledge (‘irfán)*” [TV 218, MF 142]; Mírzá Muṣṭafá “*was concerned with the anemones of mystic meanings*” [TV 227, MF 148]; and Shams-i Duḥá, the only woman

among the nine, was “*strongly attracted to the mystical teachings (‘irfán) of... Siyyid Kázim-i Rashtí... [and] became thoroughly informed on subjects relating to Divinity, on the Scriptures and on their inner meanings*” [TV 268; MF 176]. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá does not praise these believers for possible charismas [see Savi, “The Bahá’í Faith and the Perennial Mystical Quest”], but for having escaped the snares of an obsolete form of mysticism, with its emphasis on visionary and illogical elements, and for having become lovers of the Truth as manifested by Bahá’u’lláh and the champions of his Covenant. While speaking of Darvish Şidq-‘Alí He explains that Bahá’u’lláh wrote that the word *darvish*, often used in Persian to mean “mystic,” “*designates those who are completely severed from all but God, who cleave to His laws, are firm in His Faith, loyal to His Covenant, and constant in worship*” [MF 38].

Darvish Şidq-‘Alí recognized very early the Blessed Beauty, perhaps during His residence in Kurdistan. He was the attendant of the Shrine of Pír-Dávar, on mount Balábanú, “the mountain of Sulaymáníyyih, to which Bahá’u’lláh went” [*Eminent Bahá’ís* 316] during His residence in Kurdistan in 1854–1856. There Darvish Şidq-‘Alí met Bahá’u’lláh and “on meeting Him came to see in Him all the signs by which the Promised One was to be recognized” [*Eminent Bahá’ís* 316]. Şidq-‘Alí was one of the believers who were allowed to join the party travelling to Constantinople. He served as groom on the journey. Taherzadeh writes that he “used to walk all day beside the convoy, singing poems which brought joy to the friends, and at night he attended to the horses. From Constantinople he accompanied Bahá’u’lláh on His exile to Adrianople, and then to ‘Akká” [*Revelation* 1:289]. He died in 1880–81 and is buried in ‘Akká [see Balyuzi, *Bahá’u’lláh* 482].

‘Abdu’l-Bahá informs us that:

*While in the barracks, Bahá’u’lláh set apart a special night and He dedicated it to Darvish Şidq-‘Alí. He wrote that every year on that night the dervishes should bedeck*

*a meeting place, which should be in a flower garden, and gather there to make mention of God.* [MF 38]

It has been speculated that Lawḥ-i Laylatu'l-Quds I (Tablet of the Sacred Night I), which may have been revealed in Adrianople and is addressed to Darvīsh Šidq-‘Alī, may be related to this “special night.” And the Iranian Bahá’í scholar ‘Abdu’l-Ḥamíd Ishráq Khávarí (1902-1972) suggested that the Sacred Night of this Tablet is the night of the Báb’s Declaration, 23 or 24 May [see *Raḥíq-i Makhtúm* 2:296]. In 1996 an inquirer asked the Universal House of Justice about the above mentioned words by the Master. On that occasion the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice explained:

there is no further information in *Memorials* about this event, and there is no clear evidence in historical documents so far reviewed as to how and by whom this celebration might have been observed. It also remains a question when it was discontinued. However, in his book *Ganj-i-Shaygan* [*Ganj-i-Sháyigán*], pages 209-210, the well known scholar, Ishraq Khavari states that the ceremonial practices of Bahá’ís from dervish backgrounds were subsequently discouraged by Bahá’u’lláh... with the revelation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas in 1873, the laws and ordinances concerning days to be commemorated were given. Thereafter, other celebrations which had developed to that point were discontinued. [20 August 1996]

That being said, I am aware that this special celebration has been discontinued. However, the fact that the Blessed Beauty had “*set apart a special night*” and that “*He dedicated it to Darvīsh Šidq-‘Alī*” [MF 38] is captivating. And I was thus moved to make it the central theme of the following poem [see *Remoteness* 262], together with the concept that He has encouraged a totally new kind of mysticism:

## THE NIGHT OF ŞİDQ-'ALÍ

*Bologna, 25 December 1998*

O cool night of scents and roses,  
 which Thou, the truest Friend  
 of human hearts, hast dedicated  
 to Thy lover Şidq-'Alí and to all  
 them who tread with him  
 the ways of mystery and beauty,  
 and never stray from the straight  
 path of Thy laws! How will  
 the nightingales of their hearts  
 fail to sing, when face to face  
 with the beauty Thou Thyself  
 hast willed to bestow  
 upon their night! In its scented  
 dark the gates of mysteries  
 are opened. Each sign of Thine  
 is relieved of all weight of sense  
 and intellect and glows  
 with boundless beauty. Thou thus  
 allayest the anguish of their hearts,  
 harassed by Thy veiling signs,  
 by any other beauty that yet  
 defaces Thee. Let others scorn  
 their unappeased pain of love.  
 Thou alone well knowest  
 whence it cometh and where  
 it leadeth. They can only  
 ask Thee: "Make Thou this pain  
 of ours to lead us but to Thee."

**Shaykh Şádiq-i-Yazdí**

Shaykh Şádiq-i-Yazdí [see MF 43-4] was subjected to a very special test, a kind of torment of Tantalus. When Bahá'u'lláh left Baghdad to go to Constantinople, in May 1863, he was among the lucky believers who were allowed to follow Him. But when the caravan was about to leave Judaydah ('Iráq), on the river Tigris, where they had arrived on the seventh day of their march and had stopped for three days, Bahá'u'lláh instructed him and three other friends to return to Baghdad. Balyuzi writes that Shaykh Şádiq "an old man greatly devoted to the person of Bahá'u'lláh... felt so acutely the pangs of separation from Him that he could not rest, and not long after, started, a solitary figure, to walk to Istanbul. But he never finished the journey and died on the way, at Ma'dan-i-Nuqrih [(Silver Mine)]" [*Bahá'u'lláh* 178]. 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains more specifically: "... after the arrival of Bahá'u'lláh at Mosul, he could endure the separation no more. Shoeless, hatless, he ran out alongside the courier going to Mosul; ran and ran until, on that barren plain, with mercy all about him, he fell to his rest" [MF 44]. This specific episode is at the heart of the following unpublished poem:

**SHAYKH ŞÁDIQ-I-YAZDÍ**

*Bologna, 1 February 1999*

Shaykh Şádiq  
 your Beloved  
 did not want  
 you to die on  
 an easy bed.  
 He wanted you  
 to follow Him  
 to Mosul. And  
 then, shoeless,  
 hatless, alone, on



that barren plain,  
 He came toward  
 you, His cup filled  
 with crystal water,  
 tempered at the  
 Camphor fountain.  
 And you quaffed  
 it with joy.

### Zaynu'l-‘Ábidín Yazdí

Zaynu'l-‘Ábidín Yazdí [see MF 83-4] is one of those passionate lovers who did their utmost to reach Bahá'u'lláh while He was confined in ‘Akká, with the prohibition of meeting anyone. Shoghi Effendi describes them as follows:

The few pilgrims who, despite the ban that had been so rigidly imposed, managed to reach the gates of the Prison—some of whom had journeyed the entire distance from Persia on foot—had to content themselves with a fleeting glimpse of the face of the Prisoner, as they stood, beyond the second moat, facing the window of His Prison. The very few who succeeded in penetrating into the city had, to their great distress, to retrace their steps without even beholding His countenance. [GPB 187]

When he began his journey to go and meet his Beloved, he was so sick that he passed away before attaining his destination, an episode which is the leitmotiv of the following poem [see *Remoteness* 271]:

### ZAYNU'L-‘ÁBIDÍN

*Bologna, 1 February 1999*

You did not reach  
 your journey's goal

on earth. You did not reach  
 that sea which roars  
 beneath the walls  
 of the *crimson City*.  
 Your body did not endure  
 that journey's toils.  
 But when you closed  
 your eyes for ever  
 to this life, your Best-  
 Beloved came toward you  
 from behind His veils  
 and the light of reunion  
 dawned upon  
 your loving heart.  
 You never came away  
 from that shining  
 Presence. There,  
 you live now in joy,  
 devoted and true,  
 stainless and faithful.

### Shaykh 'Alí Akbar-i-Mazgání

Shaykh 'Alí Akbar-i-Mazgání [see MF 104-5] "*by disposition and because of the intense love in his heart,... yearned to write poetry, to fashion odes and ghazals, but he lacked both meter and rhyme*" [MF 105]. 'Abdu'l-Bahá numbers in his book other seven believers who wrote poetry. Unlike Shaykh 'Alí Akbar, they were talented poets. These poets are Nabíl-i-Zarandí, Darvish Šidq-'Alí, Áqá Muḥammad-Ibráhím, Mírzá Mihdíy-i-Káshání, Ustád 'Alí-Akbar-i-Najjár, Jináb-i-Muníb and Ṭáhirih. Nabíl-i-Zarandí

*... was a gifted poet, and his tongue most eloquent; a man of mettle, and on fire with passionate love... Day and night he sang the praises of the one Beloved of both*

*worlds and of those about His threshold, writing verses in the pentameter and hexameter forms, lyrics and long odes... His native genius was pure inspiration, his poetic gift like a crystal stream. In particular his ode 'Bahá, Bahá!' was written in sheer ecstasy. [MF 33, 34-35]*<sup>7</sup>

Darvish Šidq-‘Alí, also mentioned above as a mystic,

*had a fine poetic gift and wrote odes to sing the praises of Him Whom the world has wronged and rejected. Among them is a poem written while he was a prisoner in the barracks at ‘Akká, the chief couplet of which reads:*

*A hundred hearts Thy curling locks ensnare,  
And it rains hearts when Thou dost toss Thy hair.*

[MF 36]

Áqá Muḥammad-Ibráhím “*had a fine poetic gift, and he would create verses like stringed pearls*” [MF 81]. Mírzá Mihdíy-i-Káshání “*in early youth, under his father’s tutelage,... had studied sciences and arts, and had become skilled in composing both prose and verse*” [TF 95]. Also Ustád ‘Alí-Akbar-i-Najjár was “*a gifted poet, writing odes in eulogy of Bahá’u’lláh*” [MF 102]. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá also cites Jináb-i-Muníb, who “*was a calligrapher second to none, a poet, and... had as well a remarkable singing voice*” [MF 145]. This man will be mentioned again later on. As to Táhiriḥ, a well-known Iranian poetess,<sup>8</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá only hints at her “*remarkable ability in literary pursuits*” [MF 191]. The auspice that although Shaykh ‘Alí Akbar had no poetic talent in this world, perhaps in the Great Beyond his Beloved may have granted him to become the inspirer of aspiring poet in this nether world is the leitmotiv of the following unpublished poem:

### **SHAYKH ‘ALÍ AKBAR-I-MAZGÁNÍ**

*Bologna, 6 January 1999*

Do not grieve that you lacked  
 both meter and rhyme.  
 Your eyes beheld the face  
 of the Best-Beloved.

Other hearts were granted  
 a poetical vein and denied  
 attaining the presence  
 of the Best-Beloved.

In centuries to come others  
 like you will look after meter  
 and rhyme in their praise  
 of the Best-Beloved.

From your world of love  
 and light will you help them  
 to give wings to their verses  
 for the Best-Beloved?

### **Ḥájí Ja‘far and his brothers**

‘Abdu’l-Bahá relates the incidents of the lives of Ḥájí Ja‘far and his two brothers in a single biography [MF 122-5], because they were related not only by their blood relationship, but also, and especially, by their deep love for Bahá’u’lláh. Ḥájí Ḥasan is so transported by this love that, because of his imprudence in teaching the new Faith in Azerbaijan, is treacherously killed in a garden and his torn body is hidden under-earth. Ḥájí Ja‘far is so bound to Bahá’u’lláh that he sacrifices everything so that he may remain beside Him. When in 1868 in Adrianople he discovers that the authorities did not permit him to follow Bahá’u’lláh in the Holy Land, he is so grieved that he cuts his throat. Bahá’u’lláh later on wrote about him, as well as about another believer who killed himself out of his love for Him:

*Such souls have been influenced by the Word of God,  
 have tasted the sweetness of His remembrance, and are*

*so transported by the breezes of reunion that they have detached themselves from all that dwell on earth and turned unto the Divine Countenance with faces beaming with light. And though they have committed an act which God hath forbidden, He hath nevertheless forgiven them as a token of His mercy. He, verily, is the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Compassionate. So enraptured were these souls by Him Who is the All-Compelling that the reins of volition slipped from their grasp, until at last they ascended to the dwelling of the Unseen and entered the presence of God, the Almighty, the All-Knowing. [SLH 145]*

Having survived to this desperate act, Ḥájí Ja‘far finally manages to attain the presence of Bahá’u’lláh in the Holy Land together with his brother Ḥájí Taqí. There he dies falling from the roof of the caravanserai where he resides, while he paces absorbed in his prayers. After this event Ḥájí Taqí remains alone. He too dies in the same way: he falls from the roof of the caravanserai. This human sequel of events binding these three brothers, three “*eagles soaring... three stars of the Faith, pulsing with the light of the love of God*” [MF 122] is the leitmotiv of the following unpublished poem:

### ḤÁJÍ JA‘FAR AND HIS BROTHERS

*Bologna, 3 February 1999*

You were three brothers of Tabríz  
 young soaring eagles of the Faith  
 pulsing lights of the love of God.  
 Ḥájí Ḥasan, by which insanity  
 of love were you distracted?  
 Why did you dance and sing  
*shahnáz* melodies in Azerbaijan?

Brought to that lonely garden,  
you were tortured, killed and  
your body hidden underground.  
But your soul soared to Heaven  
well-pleased with her Lord  
and well-pleasing unto Him.  
Ḥájí Ja‘far, by which insanity  
of love were you distracted?  
Attempting suicide  
that you might follow an Exile  
in His exile. Love healed your  
wound, your yearning for exile  
was finally fulfilled. Where was  
your heart that night on  
the roof of the caravanserai?  
In the morning your lifeless  
body was discovered lying  
on the ground. Your exile was past.  
Ḥájí Taqí, silence  
personified, now that your  
brothers, companions  
of former days, left you  
alone, always sitting  
lonely in your room. Now,  
you fled away, you too, as  
your brother, from that roof  
toward his embrace and the  
embrace of your Beloved.

## ‘Abdu’lláh Baghdádí

About ‘Abdu’lláh Baghdádí [see MF 129-31] I could not find any historical reference in the Bahá’í literature. The purport of what ‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes about him, and as a matter of fact about all the other believers described in *Memorials of the Faithful*, is clarified by the following remarks by Price:

He [‘Abdu’l-Bahá] describes many pilgrimages and you and I are left to construct our own. We all must shape and define our own life. Is it aesthetically pleasing? Intellectually provocative? Spiritually challenging? ‘Abdu’l-Bahá shapes and defines these lives given the raw-data of their everydayness added up, added up over their lives as He saw them. How would He shape my life? Yours? How would we look in a contemporary anthology of existences with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as the choreographer and the history of our days as the *mise en scène*? [Price 3]

‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes in the beginning of His biography of ‘Abdu’lláh Baghdádí:

*When he was very young, people thought of ‘Abdu’lláh Baghdádí as a libertine, solely devoted to pleasure. He was regarded by all as the sport of inordinate desires, mired down in his physical passions. But the moment he became a believer, he was carried away by the sweet savors of God, and was changed into a new creation. He found himself in a strange rapture, completely transformed. He had been of the world, now he was of Heaven; he had lived by the flesh, now he lived by the spirit; he had walked in darkness; now he walked in light. He had been a slave to his senses, now he was a thrall of God. He had been clay and earthenware before, now he was a dear-bought pearl; a dull and lusterless stone before, now a ruby glowing. [MF 129-30]*

This incipit is the leitmotiv of the following poem [see *Remoteness* 272]:

**'ABDU'LLÁH BAGHDÁDÍ**

*Bologna, 12 February 1999*

O friend of joy  
your thirst for bliss  
is today appeased  
the wine you drink  
today does not make  
you lose your mind  
to make you wise  
it closes your eyes  
to this world  
and opens them  
to the Veilless Beauty.  
Today your feasts  
are celestial agapes.  
The gazelle-eyed  
maids you invite  
today are the virtues  
of your Lord. Broken  
your rusty fetters,  
your heart is bound  
today by the golden  
chains of faithfulness.



## Jináb-i-Muníb

The story of Jináb-i-Muníb [see MF 145-7] is one of the most fascinating and moving biographies of *Memorials of the Faithful*. Friendship occupies a prominent position in human life. And thus this story, revolving around the personal friendship between ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Mírzá Áqá, the given name of Jináb-i-Muníb, is full of inspiring details, comprising: the charming personality of this man; his intimate relation with the Master during their migration from Baghdad to Constantinople; their riding (both of them teen-agers) beside Bahá’u’lláh’s howdah and singing

To our King though we bow the knee,

We are kings of the morning star.

No changeable colors have we—

Red lions, black dragons we are! [MF 145, see Háfiz, Divan 395-6]

and especially his sickness and final death, alone, in that foreign hospital in Smyrna, and the Master’s words about that moment

*Whenever I think of that moment, the tears come; my heart is heavy and I summon up the remembrance of what he was. A great man; infinitely wise, he was, steadfast, modest and grave; and there was no one like him for faith and certitude. In him the inner and outer perfections, the spiritual and physical, were joined together. That is why he could receive endless bounty and grace.* [MF 146]

Bahíyyih Khánum, the Greatest Holy Leaf (1846–1932), told her version of the story of his passing to Sarah Lady Blomfield (1859–1939), the first distinguished Bahá’í of the British Isles and the first Bahá’í of Ireland, adding a small and moving detail:

A dear friend of the family, Jináb-i-Muníb, was taken seriously ill. When the boat stopped at Smyrna, Sarkár-i-Áqá ('Abdu'l-Bahá) and Mírzá Músá carried him ashore, and took him to a hospital. The Master bought a melon and some grapes; returning with the refreshing fruit for him—He found that he had died. Arrangements were made with the director of the hospital for a simple funeral. The Master chanted some prayers, then, heartsore, came back to the boat. [Lady Blomfield 65]

Taherzadeh writes that Bahá'u'lláh, in a Tablet describing Jináb-i-Muníb's passing in Smyrna, "says that when Jináb-i-Muníb's spirit ascended to his abode in the eternal worlds of God, all the angelic souls and the Concourse on high rushed forward to receive him with eagerness and love" [*Revelation* 1 286]. This pregnant story has inspired the following poem [see *Remoteness* 263-4].

### JINÁB-I-MUNÍB

*Bologna, 25 December 1998*

Winsome, charming, refined,  
 delicate, sensitive, a poet  
 and singer, once a lover  
 of worldly pleasures, a companion  
 of the young Áqá, beside Him  
 an escort of the Beloved's *howdah*,  
 a wise messenger of His love,  
 an attendant at His Threshold.

On that hospital bed in Smyrna,  
 your mind never lost the memory  
 of the last touch of His hands  
 as He laid your head on that pillow.

On that hospital bed in Smyrna,

your body never lost the warmth  
of the last loving embrace  
of your youthful Companion.

On that hospital bed in Smyrna,  
your heart never lost the fragrance  
of His last kisses of love,  
as he was forced away from you.

On that hospital bed in Smyrna,  
when, in loneliness, your soul winged  
its flight, the last glance of love  
of the Beloved lifted you into Heaven.

Jináb-i-Muníb, a whole life  
is not worth the love of the Beloved  
and the youthful friendship  
of that Companion of nocturnal rides.

Every tear of love shed  
by His celestial eyes,  
as He would recall  
His last separation from you,  
adds beauty to the radiant form  
the Beloved gave you in Heaven,  
even more beautiful than that  
which He gave you on earth.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *Tadhkiratu’l-Vafá’ fí Tarjumat Hayát Qudamá’ al-Aḥibbá’*. Haifa: Maṭba‘ah al-‘Abbásíyah, 1343 AH (1924).

*Associate. Newsletter of the Association for Bahá’í Studies (English-Speaking Europe)*. London: Association for Bahá’í Studies (English-Speaking Europe), 1991-2004.

*The Bahá’í Encyclopedia Project*. [www.bahai-encyclopedia-project.org](http://www.bahai-encyclopedia-project.org) (accessed 15 March 2015).

- Balyuzi, Hasan M. *Bahá'u'lláh: The King of Glory*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1980.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Eminent Bahá'ís In the Tome of Bahá'u'lláh*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1985.
- Bausani, Alessandro. "La letteratura neopersiana," in Pagliaro and Bausani: *La letteratura Persiana*, pp.133-563.
- Blomfield, Lady (Sara Louise). *The Chosen Highway*. London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1940. RP Oxford: George Ronald, 2007.
- Browne, Edward G. *Materials for the study of the Bábí Religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961.
- Encyclopaedia of Islam*. CD-ROM edition v. 1.0. Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 1999.
- Gail, Marzieh. "Proem," in 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Memorials of the Faithful*, pp. xi-xii.
- Háfiz, Shams ad-Dín. *The Divan of Hafiz*. Teheran: Aban Book Publication, 1387 [2008-2009].
- Heinrichs, Wolfhart P., Johannes Thomas Pieter (Hans) de Bruijn, James Stewart-Robinson, "Tadhkira," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*.
- Ishráq Khávarí, 'Abdu'l-Ḥamíd. *Ganj-i-Sháyigán*. Teheran: Mu'assisa Maṭbu'át Amrí, 123 BE (1967-68).
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Rahíq-i Makhtúm*. 2 vols. Tehran: Mu'assisiy-i-Millí Maṭbu'át-i-Amrí, 103 EB [1947-8].
- Kazemzadeh, Firuz. "'Abdu'l-Bahá 'Abbás (1844-1921)", *The Bahá'í Encyclopedia Project*.
- Lane, Edward William. *An Arabic-English Lexicon*. London and Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1863-93. CD-Rom edition published by Thesaurus Islamicus Foundation. Cairo: Tradigital, 2003.
- Muslim Saints and Mystics: Episodes from the Tadhkirat al-Auliya' ('Memorial of the Saints')*, trans. Arthur John Arberry. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966.
- Pagliaro, Antonino; Alessandro Bausani. *La letteratura persiana*. Florence: Sansoni Accademia, 1968.
- Price, Ronald Frederick. "Memorials of the Faithful: Revisited," in *Associate*, no.35 (Summer 2001), pp. 2-4.
- Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, 20 August 1996, to the Universal House of Justice. "Lawh-i-Laylatu'l-Quds:

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, plus translator's introduction, notes by Sen McGlinn, Juan Cole, Ahang Rabbani," [bahai-library.com/resources/tablets-notes/lawh-laylat-quds/notes.html](http://bahai-library.com/resources/tablets-notes/lawh-laylat-quds/notes.html), retrieved on 15 March 2015.

Savi, Julio. "The Bahá'í Faith and the Perennial Mystical Quest: A Western Perspective," in *The Bahá'í Studies Review*, vol. 14 (2008), pp. 5-22

\_\_\_\_\_. *Remoteness. Selected Poems*. Rome: Casa Editrice Bahá'í, 2002.

Steingass, Francis Joseph. *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary Including the Arabic Words and Phrases to be Met with in Persian Literature*. London and New York: Routledge, 1998.

Taherzadeh, Adib. *Nafaḥat-i-Zuhúr Haḍrat-i-Bahá'u'lláh*. Vol. 1. Dundas, Ontario: Association for Bahá'í Studies in Persian, 1997.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*. 4 vols. Oxford: George Ronald, 1974-1987.

*Táhirih: A Portrait in Poetry. Selected Poems of Qurratu'l-'Ayn*. Translated and edited by Amín Banani, Ph.D., English poems by Jascha Kessler, Ph.D. and Anthony A. Lee. Los Angeles: Kalímát Press, 2005.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The prayer *Yá Sháhí* is known among the Bahá'ís as *Lawh-i-Anta'l-Káfí* or "Long Healing Prayer" (see *Bahá'í Prayers* 91-8).

<sup>2</sup> 1269 AH, or 1853 CE, the year in which Bahá'u'lláh "received the first intimation of His sublime Mission" (Shoghi Effendi, *Messages* 99).

<sup>3</sup> An Arabic word sometimes translated as science.

<sup>4</sup> Among the Sufis this word denotes esoteric knowledge.

<sup>5</sup> In the Muslim world this word denotes the oriental theosophy or philosophy of Suhrawardi (1155-1191).

<sup>6</sup> An Arabic word denoting among the Sufis the initiated on the mystical path.

<sup>7</sup> The first five verses of this ode have been translated into English by the British scholar Edward G. Browne (1862-1926). See *Materials* 353.

<sup>8</sup> See *Táhirih: A Portrait in Poetry*.

# Significance of some Sites Mentioned in *Memorials of the Faithful*

Foad Seddigh

## Abstract

*Memorials of the Faithful* is not merely a book devoted to the hagiography of some believers and to some extent a historical narrative of their lives, it is also a depository of matchless beauty in Persian writing, an exquisite text with profound meaning, and a testimonial to the devotion of believers to the Cause of God and the Covenant. The believers whose stories appear in the book comprised a diverse cross-section of the Bábí and Bahá'í communities including believers that society would consider low in rank as well as high, poor and rich, semi-literate and learned.

In the book *Memorials of the Faithful*, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in the course of portraying the life history of these believers, cited many countries, cities, towns, villages and sites, some of which were blessed by the foot-steps of the Twin Manifestations of God for this age, and others which were important due to their association with significant historical events of the Faith. In this paper three such places were selected from among all the sites mentioned in the book and their niche in the history and the Writings of the Faith were further elaborated. These are: (1) The Most Great House in Baghhdad, (2) The ruins of Mada'in,

located some thirty kilometers south of Baghhdad, on the banks of the River Tigris, a place where the Blessed Beauty visited many times, and which once graced the palaces of great kings of the Sassanid dynasty, and (3) the city of Mosul in northern Iraq on the banks of the River Tigris where a number of believers and the Holy family were kept as captives for several years, a city which Bahá'u'lláh's caravan passed through on His journey to exile in the seat of the Ottoman Empire.

## The Most Great House

Bahá'u'lláh arrived in Baghhdad on April 8, 1853 and stayed a few days in the old quarters of the city then moved to al-Kázimíyyah (Kázimayn),<sup>1</sup> a holy town in the eyes of Shí'ah, Islám [King of Glory p. 106]. Al-Kázimíyyah houses the shrines of two Shí'ah Imáms and therefore is a place of pilgrimage for Shí'ahs. At the time, this place was at a distance of 10 km from Baghhdad, and now is one of the nine administrative districts within the city. Soon after Bahá'u'lláh's arrival, an official from the Iranian consulate paid Him a visit and advised Him, in utmost humility, that this place was not suitable for His residence. Therefore, after staying a month in al-Kázimíyyah, He moved to a house in the Al-Karkh<sup>2</sup> district of Baghhdad, referred to as the House of Hájí 'Alí Madad. Due to the inadequacy of space in this house, the holy Family was not comfortable, and lived in cramped conditions. During the absence of Bahá'u'lláh during his sojourn in the mountains of Kurdistan, the Family moved to a house known by the name of Sulaymán-i-Ghannám, belonging to Musá Javáhirí; this house was also located in the Al-Karkh district (Bahá'u'lláh left Baghhdad for Kurdistan on April 10, 1854 and returned on March 19, 1856 [King of Glory pp. 112-115]). The Guardian describes this residence of Bahá'u'lláh with the following words [GPB 129-130]:

Within a few years after Bahá'u'lláh's return from Sulaymáníyyih the situation had been completely reversed. The house of Sulaymán-i-Ghannám, on which

the official designation of the Bayt-i-'Aẓam (the Most Great House) was later conferred, known, at that time, as the house of Mírzá Músá, the Bábí, an extremely modest residence, situated in the Karkh quarter, in the neighborhood of the western bank of the river, to which Bahá'u'lláh's family had moved prior to His return from Kurdistán, had now become the focal center of a great number of seekers, visitors and pilgrims, including Kurds, Persians, Arabs and Turks, and derived from the Muslim, the Jewish and Christian Faiths. It had, moreover, become a veritable sanctuary to which the victims of the injustice of the official representative of the Persian government were wont to flee, in the hope of securing redress for the wrongs they had suffered.

The exact date of the family's transfer to this house is not known. The house of Sulaymán-i-Ghannám was rented at the beginning and later on became a property of Bahá'u'lláh. This transition is a fascinating story which has been narrated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in one of the chapters from the *Memorials of the Faithful* where the life history of Mírzá Muḥammad-i-Vakíl is narrated. A brief extract from His explanation is given below:

*There was a notable in Baghdád by the name of Ḥájí Mírzá Hádí, the jeweler. He had a distinguished son, Áqá Mírzá Músá,<sup>3</sup> who had received from Bahá'u'lláh the title "Letter of Eternity." This son had become a staunch believer. As for his father, the Ḥájí, he was a princely individual known for his lavish open-handedness not only in Persia and 'Iráq but as far away as India....*

*Toward the close of his life he conceived a remarkable love for Bahá'u'lláh, and most humbly, would enter His presence.... Such was the situation of that illustrious prince when he passed away, leaving as heirs a son and two daughters....*



*Mírzá Músá was a staunch believer; his sisters, however, were from a different mother, and they knew nothing of the Cause. One day the two sisters, accompanied by the son-in-law of the late Mírzá Siyyid Riḍá, came to the house of Bahá'u'lláh. The two sisters entered the family apartments while the son-in-law settled down in the public reception rooms. The two girls then said to Bahá'u'lláh: "The Persian envoy, the judge, and the faithless mujtahids have destroyed us. Toward the close of his life, the late Ḥájí trusted no one but Yourself. We ourselves have been remiss and we should have sought Your protection before; in any case we come now to implore Your pardon and help...." [MF 108 -109]*

The Blessed Beauty refused to become involved in such matters and they insisted and begged him to the extent that they said they would not leave the house until He acceded to their requests. 'Abdu'l-Bahá further explains:

*Finally one day Bahá'u'lláh summoned me to His presence. "These esteemed ladies," He said, "with all their exactions, have put Us to considerable inconvenience. There is no help for it—you will have to see to this case. But you must solve this entire, complicated matter in a single day..." [MF 112]*

The Blessed Beauty accepted to intervene and instructed 'Abdu'l-Bahá to spend only one day to settle the matter. 'Abdu'l-Bahá followed His instructions and resolved all the matters of dispute to the best satisfaction of all. In return, they gave one third of the inheritance to Him which at long last He accepted and donated in its entirety to Mírzá Músá Javáhirí. Then 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains further that:

*Grateful for the bounty he had received, Mírzá Músá offered Bahá'u'lláh everything he possessed: orchards, lands, estates—but it was refused. Then he appointed the 'ulamás of 'Iráq to intercede for him. They hastened to Bahá'u'lláh in a body and begged Him to accept the*

*proffered gifts. He categorically refused. They respectfully told Him: "Unless You accept, in a very short time Mírzá Músá will scatter it all to the winds. For his own good, he should not have access to this wealth."*

*Then in his own hand, Mírzá Músá penned deeds of gift, made out according to each of the five creeds, in Arabic and Persian; two copies he made, and chose the 'ulamás as his witnesses. Through certain 'ulamás of Baghdád, among them the famed scholar 'Abdu's-Salám Effendi, and the erudite and widely known Siyyid Dávúd Effendi, he presented the deed of gift to Bahá'u'lláh. The Blessed Beauty told them: "We are appointing Mírzá Músá himself as Our deputy...." [MF 119]*

This house was later on called the "Most Great House," by Bahá'u'lláh, which is one of the three locations designated for pilgrimage for the Bahá'ís. The Most Great House in Baghdád and the House of the Báb in Shiráz were designated in the Most Holy Book (The *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*) for pilgrimage; 'Abdu'l-Bahá added to this list the third place which is Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh in Akká, but He did not specify any rites for this pilgrimage [KA 191]. In Baghdad, Bahá'u'lláh and His family lived in this house for a longer period than they did elsewhere in Iraq. The Most Great House witnessed many events during the earlier years of Bahá'u'lláh's mission while He had not yet declared. Many Tablets were revealed in this House, many believers attained Bahá'u'lláh's presence in this House, and many dignitaries and men of status and knowledge met Him in this House.

When Bahá'u'lláh was exiled to Istanbul and Edirnih (Adrianople) several believers became custodians of the House among whom were: Gawhar Khánum (His wife from Káshán), Mírzá Mihdí Káshání (Gawhar Khánum's brother) and Mírzá Muḥammad-i-Vakíl. Towards the end of Bahá'u'lláh's stay in Edirnih, nearly seventy believers among whom was Jináb-i-Zaynu'l-Muqarrabín were arrested in Baghdad and sent as

prisoners to the city of Mosul. This deprived the House of lawful custodians and in the interim some individuals looked after the House. This is the earlier period that provided an opportunity for the enemies of the Cause to transgress against this House. It has been reported that a number of believers on their way to 'Akká stayed in this House. This included Badí', the pride of the martyrs.

In the first year of His stay in Edirnih (Adrianople), Bahá'u'lláh revealed two Tablets of pilgrimage (Surih-i-Hajj)<sup>4</sup>, one for the House of the Báb and the other one for the Most Great House and sent them to Nabíl Zarandí (Nabíl A'zam) who was travelling in Iran at the time proclaiming the news of the appearance of the promised one of the Bayán. Bahá'u'lláh instructed Nabíl to perform the pilgrimage according to the instructions given in the Tablets. Nabíl Zarandí proceeded at once and performed the pilgrimage according to the instructions contained in these two Tablets. As far as the history has recorded, Nabíl Zarandí is the only person who has performed the pilgrimage in accordance with all the instructions of the Tablet of Pilgrimage. Sheikh Muḥammad Damirtchi<sup>5</sup> was another person directed by Bahá'u'lláh to visit the House and read a Tablet of Visitation at the House which had been revealed in his honor. He performed the pilgrimage according to the instructions, disregarding the mobs who were throwing stones at him.

### **The Nobility of the Most Great House**

Bahá'u'lláh extols the station of this House in several Tablets, including the one which was revealed in the honor of the aforementioned Sheikh Muḥammad Damirtchi. Some passages from this Tablet appear below:

*When thou art departed out of the court of My presence, O Muḥammad, direct thy steps towards My House (Baghdád House), and visit it on behalf of thy*

*Lord. When thou reachest its door, stand thou before it and say: Whither is the Ancient Beauty gone, O most great House of God, He through Whom God hath made thee the cynosure of an adoring world, and proclaimed thee to be the sign of His remembrance unto all who are in the heavens and all who are on the earth? Oh! for the former days when thou, O House of God, wert made His footstool, the days when in ceaseless strains the melody of the All-Merciful poured forth from thee! What hath become of thy jewel whose glory hath irradiated all creation? Whither are gone the days in which He, the Ancient King, had made thee the throne of His glory, the days in which He had chosen thee alone to be the lamp of salvation between earth and heaven, and caused thee to diffuse, at dawn and at eventide, the sweet fragrance of the All-Glorious?*

*Where, O House of God, is the Sun of majesty and power Who had enveloped thee with the brightness of His presence? Where is He, the Day Spring of the tender mercies of thy Lord, the Unconstrained, Who had established His seat within thy walls? What is it, O throne of God, that hath altered thy countenance, and made thy pillars to tremble? What could have closed thy door to the face of them that eagerly seek thee? What hath made thee so desolate? Couldst thou have been told that the Beloved of the world is pursued by the swords of His enemies? The Lord bless thee, and bless thy fidelity unto Him, inasmuch as thou hast remained His companion through all His sorrows and His sufferings...*

[GWB 111-112]

In relation to the names and titles of this House, The Guardian states:

Most Great House of God," His "Footstool" and the "Throne of His Glory," "the Cynosure of an adoring

world,” the “Lamp of Salvation between earth and heaven,” the “Sign of His remembrance to all who are in heaven and on earth,” enshrining the “Jewel whose glory hath irradiated all creation,” the “Standard” of His Kingdom, the “Shrine round which will circle the concourse of the faithful” was irrevocably founded and permanently consecrated. Upon it, by virtue of its sanctity as Bahá’u’lláh’s “Most Holy Habitation” and “Seat of His transcendent glory,” was conferred the honor of being regarded as a center of pilgrimage second to none except the city of ‘Akká, His “Most Great Prison...” [GPB 110]

It is evident that the high station given to a House is due to its association with the Manifestation of God and not because of the materials, stones, bricks and concrete used to construct the house.

### **Prophecy of the Desecration of the House**

Bahá’u’lláh in some of His Tablets clearly predicted that the House of God (The Most Great House) will be dishonored:

*Grieve not, O House of God, if the veil of thy sanctity be rent asunder by the infidels. God hath, in the world of creation, adorned thee with the jewel of His remembrance. Such an ornament no man can, at any time, profane. Towards thee the eyes of thy Lord shall, under all conditions, remain directed. He, verily, will incline His ear to the prayer of every one that visiteth thee, who will circle around thee, and calleth upon Him in thy name. He, in truth, is the Forgiving, the All-Merciful. [GWB 114]*

Also the Sublime Pen writes in the following terms concerning the future humiliation awaiting the House:

*Call thou to mind that which hath been revealed unto Mihdí, Our servant, in the first year of Our banishment to the Land of Mystery (Adrianople). Unto him have We predicted that which must befall Our House (Baghdád House), in the days to come, lest he grieve over the acts of robbery and violence already perpetrated against it. Verily, the Lord, thy God, knoweth all that is in the heavens and all that is on the earth.*

*To him We have written: This is not the first humiliation inflicted upon My House. In days gone by the hand of the oppressor hath heaped indignities upon it. Verily, it shall be so abased in the days to come as to cause tears to flow from every discerning eye. Thus have We unfolded to thee things hidden beyond the veil, inscrutable to all save God, the Almighty, the All-Praised.... [GWB 114-115]*

Although several attempts were made by the Shí'ah clergy, the ever vigilant enemy of the Cause of God in Baghdad, who tried to wrestle away this House from the hands of its lawful owner, but all their efforts in this regard failed miserably. Towards the end of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Ministry, the condition of the House deteriorated to such an extent that it was in a sorry state. One of the new adherents of the Faith in Baghdad, Ḥájí Maḥmúd-i-Qassábchí,<sup>6</sup> with the permission from 'Abdu'l-Bahá and with his own resources, undertook to repair the House. This period of time coincided with the termination of World War I and the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. As a result, Iraq came under the administration of the League of Nations, a new constitution was adopted and the freedom of religion and belief was announced. The reconstruction of the House and its development produced a steadily widening measure of publicity. This emboldened the Shí'ah clerics to seize possession of the House through the favourable judgement of an obscure Shari'ah Court which made several obvious and possibly deliberate mistakes. This crisis which originated about a year prior to

'Abdu'l-Bahá's ascension eventually precipitated in its seizure by Shí'ah clerics in the summer of 1922. Since this time the House has not been returned to the Bahá'ís. This House had continued to be in the unbroken and undisputed possession of Bahá'u'lláh's followers ever since His departure from Baghdád, a period of more than six decades. As an example of an obvious mistake committed by the court was that it disregarded the rule that fifteen years of lawful possession and occupation of a house disqualifies any dispute attempted at the seizure of the house.

This unjust ruling became the object of the consideration of successive tribunals. First by the local Shí'ah Ja'fariyyih court in Baghdád, second by the Peace court, then the court of First Instance, then by the court of Appeal in Iraq, and finally by the League of Nations, the greatest international body in existence at that time. The League of Nations had been empowered to exercise supervision and control over all Mandated Territories. Though repossession of the House was not resolved due to a combination of causes, religious as well as political, it has already remarkably fulfilled Bahá'u'lláh's own prediction concerning the humiliation it will suffer in the hands of the enemies of the Cause of God.

The appeal of the local Bahá'í community in Iraq, and those of the International Bahá'í community from around the world, as well as the letters of the Guardian written as the Head of the Bahá'í Faith to the highest authorities and to King Faisal<sup>7</sup> produced no results; and the Government of Iraq under the leadership of King Faisal remained adamant in acting in a manner which was just—as he was much afraid of the religious passion of the Shí'ahs. Details regarding these communications are comprehensively documented in the volumes of the *Bahá'í World*: *Bahá'í World* II pp. 33-34, *Bahá'í World* III pp. 198-210, *Bahá'í World* IV pp. 237-248, *Bahá'í World* V pp. 351-359, and *Bahá'í World* VI p. 437.<sup>8</sup> In these volumes, we find the resolutions of various courts, minutes of the council of the League of Nations, as well as some important letters. Among

the various accounts, Arnold Toynbee, the well-respected British historian provides an informed accounting of the situation concerning the House [Survey of International Affairs pp. 116-122]. The American Lawyer, Mountfort Mills, exerted tremendous efforts and dedication towards securing possession of the House for the Faith. In paying tributes to his effort, the Guardian referred to him as “Mr. Mountfort Mills, whose services to the Cause only future generations can estimate” [BA 127]. Other efforts included the audience of Miss Martha Root with King Faisal I<sup>9</sup> in Baghhdad and her request for the intervention by the King. Finally, the Government of Iraq gained complete independence in 1932 and joined the League of Nations in 1933 and all those who were involved with this matter either died or were replaced and the case has remained unresolved until this time despite several fundamental changes of Government in Iraq. The final act was the news released by the Universal House of Justice in a letter dated 17 July, 2013,<sup>10</sup> of razing the House almost to the ground by unknown elements, without any legal permit from the Government, between 24-26 June, 2013, in order to prepare the ground for building a mosque on the spot where the Most Great House was originally standing.

### **Promise of the Rise of the House of God**

Bahá'u'lláh also prophesied that the House will suffer such humiliation which will cause tears of the faithful to flow; after that it will rise again and will find its high station which has been destined for it. The Supreme Pen provides this assurance with these words:

*In the fullness of time, the Lord shall, by the power of truth, exalt it in the eyes of all men. He shall cause it to become the Standard of His Kingdom, the Shrine round which will circle the concourse of the faithful. Thus hath spoken the Lord, thy God...* [GWB 115]



## Al-Mada'in Becomes the Seat of Glory

One of the chapters of *Memorials of the Faithful* is devoted to the life of Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí, the Afnán who was eventually buried in the vicinity of the ancient city of Mada'in. Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí, the Afnán, was a cousin of the Báb and the eldest child of the eldest uncle of the Báb for whom the *Kitab-i-Íqán* was revealed. About a year prior to the departure of Bahá'u'lláh from Baghdád for Istanbul, Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí who was a resident of Shanghai in China, along with his younger brother, attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh and became aware of His high station. For the second time he gained admittance to the presence of Bahá'u'lláh in ‘Akká—this is the visit that ‘Abdu'l-Bahá describes in these terms:

*One day I was up on the roof of the caravanserai. Some of the friends were with me and I was walking up and down. It was sunset. At that moment, glancing at the distant seashore, I observed that a carriage was approaching. "Gentlemen," I said, "I feel that a holy being is in that carriage." It was still far away, hardly within sight." Let us go to the gate," I told them. "Although they will not allow us to pass through, we can stand there till he comes." I took one or two people with me and we left... The gatekeeper stayed outside, the carriage drew up, the gentleman had arrived. What a radiant face he had! He was nothing but light from head to foot. Just to look at that face made one happy; he was so confident, so assured, so rooted in his faith, and his expression so joyous. He was truly a blessed being....*

[MF 17]

During one of his trips from China, Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí Afnán arrived in Bombay and took his flight to the Abhá Kingdom due to an illness. However, the burial of his remains became problematic and one of the believers by the name Áqá Siyyid Asadu'lláh-i-Qumí according to the instructions of

‘Abdu’l-Bahá took the body to Iraq with the intention of finding a burial place in one of the holy cemeteries of Islám. Eventually, according to the instructions of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, he buried the body of Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí in the Salmán Cemetery near Mada’in. Mada’in was once the seat of the Government of the Sassanid dynasty which ruled over Iran for five centuries, and eventually was defeated by the army of the Arab Muslim invaders who plundered the riches of this kingdom. Bahá’u’lláh is a descendant from this line of kings. The city of Mada’in consisted of several smaller fortified cities on both sides of the river Tigris. The city of Ctesiphon was one of the cities and the seat of the government, and it housed sprawling palaces which were the envy of the rulers of the world at that time—as for its location, Mada’in is located nearly thirty kilometers south of Baghdad. Salmán was the first Muslim ruler for the newly opened territories, stationed in Mada’in and after his death he was buried there in a place where it has become a cemetery bearing his name; in this place Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí Afnán was buried. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states that this place is a holy place because the Blessed Beauty walked there and revealed Tablets; moreover He states that in this place a house of worship (Mashriqu’l-Adhkár) should be built. The following is His statement in the Memorials of the Faithful:

*Thus did God’s grace and favor encompass the Persians of an age long gone, in order that their ruined capital should be rebuilt and flourish once again. To this end, with the help of God, events were brought about which led to the Afnán’s being buried here; and there is no doubt that a proud city will rise up on this site.....*

*At last, praised be God, it was laid down in the very spot to which time and again the Blessed Beauty had repaired; in that place honored by His footsteps, where He had revealed Tablets, where the believers of Baghdád had been in His company; that very place where the Most Great Name was wont to stroll. How did this come*

*about? It was due to the Afnán's purity of heart. Lacking this, all those ways and means could never have been brought to bear. Verily, God is the Mover of heaven and earth.*

*I loved the Afnán very much. Because of him, I rejoiced. I wrote a long Visitation Tablet for him and sent it with other papers to Persia. **His burial site is one of the holy places where a magnificent Mashriqu'l-Adhkár must be raised up.** If possible, the actual arch of the royal palace should be restored and become the House of Worship. The auxiliary buildings of the House of Worship should likewise be erected there: the hospital, the schools and university, the elementary school, the refuge for the poor and indigent; also the haven for orphans and the helpless, and the travelers' hospice.... [MF 19-20]*

The Guardian made the transfer of the remains of Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí Afnán one of the goals of the Ten-Year Crusade; the Bahá’ís of Iraq identified his grave, and transferred his remains to the Bahá’í cemetery in Baghdad. The Hands of the Cause of God residing in the Holy Land informed the Bahá’í world community of the achievement of this goal of the plan on June 14, 1959.<sup>11</sup>

## Mosul

Mosul is another place which appears in the stories from *Memorials of the Faithful*. In fact, the city of Mosul has been mentioned twenty eight times in the book—this could be due to a number of reasons, some of which are enumerated as follows:

- Mosul is one of the places where the caravan of Bahá’u’lláh on His way to Istanbul chose to stop and rest for a few days.

- About four to five years after Bahá'u'lláh left Baghdad, some believers of Persian descent were rounded up and were sent to Mosul in captivity including the family of Bahá'u'lláh.
- For some believers who traveled to Edirnih or 'Akká via land, Mosul was one of the cities through which they passed on their way from Baghdad to Syria.
- Mosul is an old city near the ruins of the city of Nineveh and was built on it.
- Mosul and Nineveh is the city of Jonas the prophet which is mentioned in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament, and in the Qur'án.

Now we will offer brief explanation regarding the above topics.

### **Mosul: Bahá'u'lláh's Caravan Passed Through**

Mosul is located some 350 km north of Baghdad and built on the eastern banks of the river Tigris. Bahá'u'lláh's caravan stopped briefly in Mosul on its way to Istanbul. H.M. Balyuzi gives a detailed accounts of this phase of the land travel of Bahá'u'lláh to Istanbul [King of Glory 182]. In addition, the Guardian writes: "In Mosul, where He tarried three days..." [GPB 156]

### **Mosul: Place of Captivity of Believers**

Mosul is also the place of captivity for some Persian believers. Approximately five years after Bahá'u'lláh left Baghdád, through the mischief of the Consul General of Iran in Baghdád, nearly seventy believers were arrested and sent in captivity to Mosul for nearly twenty years. Included in this group was the third wife of Bahá'u'lláh known as Gawhar Khánum. Her marriage took place sometime in Baghdád before the declaration of Bahá'u'lláh's mission. While Navváb and Mahd-i-'Ulya travelled with Him in all His exiles, Gawhar

Khánum remained in Baghdad with her brother, Mírzá Mihdiy-i-Káshání. Bahá'u'lláh writes in the Tablet to the King of Persia: “*O King! The lamps of equity have been extinguished, and the fire of tyranny hath so blazed on every side that My people have been led as captives from Zawra' [Baghdád] to Mosul, known as Hadba.*” In here, by “My people” He means his third wife, Gawhar Khánum.

In this captivity, a believer who rendered unique and valued services to the community was Mulla Zaynu'l-'Abidin, named by Bahá'u'lláh Zaynu'l-Muqarrabín (The Ornament of Those Who are Nigh). He acted as a father in relation to this small band of believers. Under his supervision a ‘charity fund’ was established. His knowledge and learning, his understanding of the Faith, his intelligent and well-balanced personality, together with a delightful sense of humour, endeared him to the believers and made him the focal point of the community. Bahá'u'lláh had also instructed him in His Tablets to gather the friends together, exhort them to unity and love, encourage them to deepen in the Faith, and help them to attain heavenly qualities. He spent most of his time transcribing the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and making them available to the friends. In particular he had to make several copies of those Tablets which were addressed to some or all of the believers in Mosul, and give each one a copy [*Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh* II, p. 335].

The Bahá'ís in Mosul, under the leadership and guidance of Zaynu'l-Muqarrabín, soon became a model Bahá'í community reflecting something of the spirit of the 'Akká community. While in Mosul, it became Zaynu'l-Muqarrabín's task to transcribe the Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh that arrived from 'Akká on their way to Iran. Thus these Tablets could be distributed more widely and each of those to whom a Tablet was addressed could have a copy.

In the course of one of his journeys, Hájí Mírzá Haydar-'Ali, the Angel of Carmel, visited Mosul. He has written his impression about the community in his popular book “Bahjat-us

Sudur”, *Delight of Hearts*. Mr. Taherzadeh has translated and quoted this report:

I attained the presence of Zaynu'l-Muqarrabín and other loved ones of God in Mosul including Áqá Mírzá Muḥammad-i-Vakil. The latter, owing to destitution, had to work as a cobbler in spite of old age... The friends in Mosul, together with the person of Zaynu'l-Muqarrabín, made one remember the days spent in Bahá'u'lláh's holy presence in the holy city of 'Akká. These believers were living in the utmost unity and harmony. They vied with each other in their efforts and their services. They had no desire except first, to gain the good pleasure of the Blessed Beauty, and secondly, to attain His presence... [Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh II, p. 335]

In October 1885 Bahá'u'lláh gave permission for Zaynu'l-Muqarrabín to go to 'Akká where he took up residence in the Khán-i-'Avamíd, continuing to transcribe Tablets and frequently having the honor of being in Bahá'u'lláh's company.

## Conclusion and Acknowledgements

Three locations from among many places mentioned in *Memorials of the Faithful* were selected and their significance elaborated on the basis of events related to the Faith which occurred in these locations. These are The Most Great House, Madai'n, and the city of Mosul.

The author wishes to acknowledge the invaluable assistance of Nabíl Seddigh in preparation of this paper.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Balyuzi, H.M., *Bahá'u'lláh, The King of Glory*, George Ronald Publisher, Oxford, 1980.

- Ishrâq Khávarí, ‘Abdu’l-Hamíd, *Muḥadírát*, Vol. 1 & 2, Mu’asisih Millí Maṭbu’át Amrí, 120 BE, Third print, Hofheim, 150BE.
- Ishrâq Khávarí, ‘Abdu’l-Hamíd, *Tasbíḥ va Tahlíl*, Tehran, Mu’asisih Millí Maṭbu’át Amrí, 129 BE, 1973.
- Mázindarání, Mírzá Asadu’lláh Fáḍil, *Amr va Khalq*, Vol. 4, Tehran, Mu’asisih Millí Maṭbu’át Amrí, 128 BE, 1971.
- Taherzadeh, Adib, *The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh*, Vol. II, George Ronald Publisher, Oxford, 1977.
- Toynbee, Arnold, *Survey of International Affairs—1934*, assisted by V.M. Boulter, Oxford University Press, London, 1935.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Al-Kázimíyyah (Kázimayn), literally “the Two Kázim” or “the Two who swallow their anger”, is regarded a holy city by Shí’ah Islám. It received its name from the two Shí’ah Imáms buried there: Imám Músá, son of Ja’far and his grandson, Imám Muḥammad at-Taquí. A shrine was first built over their tombs, and subsequently the al-Kázimíyyah Mosque. The area that now constitutes al-Kázimíyyah was originally the location of a graveyard reserved for members of the Quraysh tribe (prophet Muḥammad’s tribe). This land was set aside for this purpose by the Abbasid caliph, Harun ar-Rashíd.
- <sup>2</sup> Al-Karkh is a district of Baghdad in western banks of the river Tigris.
- <sup>3</sup> Mírzá Músá Javahirí who received the title of “Letter of Eternity” from Bahá’u’lláh was the recipient of several Tablets from Bahá’u’lláh one of which is known by its Arabic title “Subhána-Rabbíya’l-A’lá” which means “My Exalted Lord is free from Imperfections.” He was very much devoted to Bahá’u’lláh and was one of the firm believers. His father, Ḥájí Mírzá Hádí, formerly a Persian vizier, was highly esteemed by the inhabitants of that city. Towards the end of his life, Ḥájí Mírzá Hádí became attracted to Bahá’u’lláh and was devoted to Him, but not as believer. He would often enter His presence and sit at His feet in humility and self-effacement.
- <sup>4</sup> In Adrianople (Edirnih), Bahá’u’lláh revealed two tablets concerning pilgrimage (hajj) to Bahá’í holy places. Surat al hajj II (Lawh-i-Hajj II, or Surat al-Hajj), addressed to Mírzá Muḥammad Nabíl-i Zarandí, describes the rites of the hajj to The Most Great House. These Tablets are published in: *Amr va Khalq* 4: pp. 109-117 and *Tasbíḥ va Tahlíl* pp. 77-90, 93-113.
- <sup>5</sup> Muḥammad Damirtchi was a staunch believer in Baghdád whose father deprived him of his inheritance due to his faith and belief in Bahá’u’lláh. He set out on foot from Baghdád to ‘Akká. Finally he reached ‘Akká enduring great hardships on the way. Bahá’u’lláh called him to His

presence and he passed through the rows of soldiers and nobody stopped him as though they had not seen him. For the story of his life, see (Muḥaḍirát 1 & 2: p. 120). Also his picture appears in (*Bahá'í World* III: p. 214).

- <sup>6</sup> Hájí Maḥmúd-i-Qassábchí was a newly declared Bahá'í during the time of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He served the cause in Baghḍad during the time of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian. He was the chairman of the Spiritual Assembly of Baghḍad; his picture could be found in the (*Bahá'í World* II: p 68).
- <sup>7</sup> King Faisal of Iraq or Faisal Ibn Husayn Ibn Alí al-Hashimi was the King of Iraq from 23 August 1921 to 1933. He was a member of the Hashemite dynasty. While in power, Faisal tried to diversify his administration by including different ethnic and religious groups in offices. However, Faisal's attempt at pan-Arab nationalism may have contributed to the isolation of certain religious groups. King Faisal supported the forces of the British army and revolted against the ruling Turks towards the end of World War I. In 1921, Britain decided to step back from direct administration and create a monarchy to head Iraq while they maintained the mandate. Faisal agreed to become king. In August 1921 he was made king of Iraq. In 1932, the British mandate ended and Faisal was instrumental in making his country nominally independent. On 3 October, the Kingdom of Iraq joined the League of Nations. King Faisal died on 8 September 1933, at the age of 48. He was succeeded on the throne by his oldest son Ghazi. Soon King Ghazi was killed in a car accident and his son Faisal II who was 3 years old became the successor of his father, but he had to wait for several years until he reached adulthood. Finally he and the royal family and his prime minister were assassinated in a military coup d'état.
- <sup>8</sup> Many of these League of Nations documents can be found online at [bahai-library.com/author/Permanent+Mandates+Commission](http://bahai-library.com/author/Permanent+Mandates+Commission)
- <sup>9</sup> Details of the meeting of Miss Martha Root with King Faisal-I and the question of the Most Great House may be examined in *Bahá'í World* III pp. 198-210.
- <sup>10</sup> Complete letter of the Universal House of Justice dated 17 July 2013. Refer to the web-site: [www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/](http://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/)
- <sup>11</sup> Cable of the Hands of the Cause of God residing in the Holy Land, dated June 14, 1959:

ANNOUNCE WITH PROFOUND GRATITUDE FULFILMENT ONE  
 MOST DIFFICULT GOALS BELOVED GUARDIAN'S WORLD  
 CRUSADE IDENTIFICATION REMAINS COUSIN BAB SUCCESSFUL  
 TRANSFER CEMETERY EVIDENCE UNFAILING GRACE  
 BAHÁ'U'LLAH VOUCHSAFED HIS FAITHFUL FOLLOWERS STOP  
 SHARE JOYFUL NEWS HANDS NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES.





# Hagiography:

## The Art of Setting Inspirational Examples for a Religious Community

Iscander Micael Tinto

“... to consign to history a drop of brightness, of humanity, of truth.”

*Smisurata preghiera*, Fabrizio de André

### Abstract

Hagiography (the study of the lives of the saints) is a literary genre that originated as a way of proposing to a largely illiterate audience inspirational life histories worthy of emulation.

This paper will present a brief comparison between the foremost example of Muslim hagiography (Aṭṭār’s *Tadhkirat al-Auliya’*) and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s *Memorials of the Faithful* by citing two biographies from Aṭṭār’s work (Rábi‘ah Al-‘Adawiyya and Shaykh Báyzid al-Bistámí) and two from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s book (*Mishkín Qalam*, and *Shams-i-Duhá*), to show how hagiography highlights concrete examples of desirable spiritual virtues.

Hagiography is defined as the writing and critical study of the lives of the saints. This genre of literature first originated in the Roman Empire as stories and legends about Christian martyrs were collected and later presented in a written form.

The dates of their deaths formed the basis of martyriologies. In the 4th century, there were three main types of catalogs of lives of the saints: the Menaion, or biographies of the saints to be read at sermons; the Synaxarion, a short collection of lives of the saints, arranged by date; the Paterikon, the biography of specific saints, chosen by the catalog compiler.

In Western Europe, during the Middle Ages, hagiography became one of the vehicles for the study of inspirational history and a pedagogical tool by which a Christian code of conduct could be taught to a largely uneducated and often illiterate population. The life of Christ was the benchmark against which saints were measured, and the lives of saints were the benchmark against which the general population measured itself. The stories offered clear patterns to emulate.

Hagiography was fundamental in developing the practice of veneration of saints that lay at the heart of the practice of late antique and medieval Christianity. Integral parts of this practice were the veneration of relics (from the Latin *reliquiae* or “remains”: parts of a holy person’s body or possessions, or simply objects might have come in contact with the saint) and icons (holy portraits of saints and prophets), and the commemoration of the day of the saint’s death as a holy day. Prayers, offerings and pious acts performed on such holy days, or at the shrines that contained such relics and icons, the living Christian could seek the help of the saintly dead now residing in Heaven.

From another perspective, hagiography preserved much valuable information about religious beliefs, customs, daily life, institutions, and events over certain historical periods.

Islamic hagiographic literature presents two distinct genres, one concerning individuals of exclusive religious status (“saints” or “holy men”) and one devoted to the biographies of the Prophet Muḥammad and the Shi’ite Imams. The primary purpose of the 11th century works in the Sufi tradition appears to be the defense of mysticism and its adherents stressing that

the conduct and doctrines of eminent Sufis were in accordance with the texts of the Muslim revelation.

The emergence of hagiographic works devoted exclusively to an individual Sufi shaikh<sup>1</sup> seems to correspond to a distinct change in mystical practice and its organizational structures; the authors were often descendants of the shaikhs themselves or one of their close companions.... Such biographies of individual shaikhs served to increase the inner cohesion of this social group and enhance its prestige with outsiders; in fact, their status and livelihood may have depended entirely on their lineage leading back to the shaikh. These works are made up typically of anecdotes that the final “authors” had evidently obtained from the oral tradition, which always remained an important source for hagiographers; once committed to writing, the anecdotes still continued to circulate orally, and while their (oral) narrators may have been conscious of a written tradition this did not prevent them from adapting the material to meet their present needs. Thus the “hagiographic process” could have proceeded from events witnessed by the saint’s followers, to oral transmission, thence to written notes, eventually published as books, while the oral tradition was continually developing all the time....

Hagiography can be seen as a technique for making events meaningful or, conversely, for expressing doctrines in the form of narratives, as a specific sub-genre of historiography. [Jürgen, “Hagiographic Literature”]

The main purpose of the hagiographer is “to transmit to a believing and pious audience matters of practical spiritual value; the specifically ‘human’—the whole stuff of modern biography—is trivial and profoundly uninteresting from a traditional viewpoint” [Algar 134] which makes it extremely

difficult to extract an actual biography (in the modern sense, as Algar points out) of the saint from the information at hand.

Hagiographic works reflect not only the development of Islamic mysticism in its organized form, but also that of popular piety. It can therefore serve as an important source for the study of the history of different levels of Islamic society. However, such literature has usually been considered only a minor source for the history of Islamic society and culture, being judged as less reliable than historiography narrowly defined. Its use has been restricted to the study of mysticism, where theological and philosophical issues have tended to be the focus of scholarly interest. In consequence, hagiography remains a relatively neglected area of study. [“Hagiographic Literature”]

**A Comparison between *Tadhkirat al-Auliya'* (Memorial of the Saints) by Faríd al-Din Aṭṭár and *Tadhkiratu'l-Vafá* (Memorials of the Faithful) by 'Abdu'l-Bahá**

**Faríd al-Din Aṭṭár**

In the words of Arberry, who translated parts of the *Tadhkirat al-Auliya'*, “Faríd al-Din Aṭṭár is accounted amongst the greatest poets of Persia; his dimensions as a literary genius increase with the further investigation of his writings, which are still far from completely explored, though welcome progress has been made of late in their publication” [Arberry, “Introduction” 1].

Born circa 540 AH (1145-46 CE) at Nishapur (where he died in 618 AH/1221 CE) Aṭṭár was not only a poet but also a hagiographer and a theoretician of mysticism. While his

works say little else about his life, they tell us that he practiced the profession of pharmacy and personally

attended to a very large number of customers.... It seems that 'Aṭṭár was not well known as a poet in his own lifetime, except at Nisapúr.... From the second half of the 7th/13th century onward, 'Aṭṭár's prose work, the *Tadkerat al-awliá*', came to be widely read... but his greatness as a mystic, a poet, and a master of narrative was not discovered until the 9th/15th century.... In regard to 'Aṭṭár's general education and culture, no adequate picture can be obtained from his writings. [Reinert]

*Tadhkirat al-Auliya*, Aṭṭár's only prose work,

is a collection of biographies dedicated to exponents and pioneers of classical Sufism... The work gives a sort of hagiographic summary of his career in the ethical and experiential world of the Sufis (see above). It is to be regretted that he hardly ever names his sources. He appears to have relied almost entirely, if not exclusively, on written sources. In his choice and narration of edifying and memorable stories, he shows a distinctive taste of his own. Comparisons with versions of the same material in works by other authors suggest that he presented and interpreted the stories somewhat idiosyncratically.... On the other hand, he translated sayings of his Sufis, which had come down in Arabic, very faithfully into Persian. [Reinert]

Why did Aṭṭár write the *Tadhkirat al-Auliya*? Islamist Arthur J. Arberry cites Reynold A. Nicholson (another translator of Aṭṭár's work) who summarizes as follows some of the possible reasons:

1. He was begged to do so by his religious brethren.
2. He hoped that some of those who read the work would bless the author and thus, possibly, secure his welfare beyond the grave.

3. He believes that the words of the Saints are profitable even to those who cannot put them into practice, inasmuch as they strengthen aspiration and destroy self-conceit.

....

5. According to the Prophet, "Mercy descends at the mention of the pious": peradventure, if one spreads a table on which Mercy falls like rain, he will not be turned away portion less.
6. Aṭṭár trusts that the blessed influence of the Saints may be vouchsafed to him and bring him into happiness before he dies.
7. He busied himself with their sayings in the hope that he might make himself to resemble them.
8. The Koran and the Traditions cannot be understood without knowledge of Arabic, wherefore most people are unable to profit by them; and the Sayings of the Saints, which form a commentary on the Koran and the Traditions, were likewise uttered, for the most part, in Arabic. Consequently the author has translated them into Persian, in order that they may become accessible to all.

....

10. Spiritual words alone appeal to the author. Hence he composed this "daily task" for his contemporaries, hoping to find some persons to share the meal which he has provided.
11. The Imam Yusuf Hamadhani advised some people, who asked him what they should do when the Saints had passed away from the earth, to read eight pages of their Sayings every day. Aṭṭár felt that it was incumbent upon him to supply this desideratum.

....

13. In the present age the best men are bad, and holy men have been forgotten. The Memorial is designed to remedy this state of things.

14. The Sayings of the Saints dispose men to renounce the world, meditate on the future life, love God, and set about preparing for their last journey. "One may say that there does not exist in all creation a better book than this, for their words are a commentary on the Koran and Traditions, which are the best of all words. Anyone who reads it properly will perceive what passion must have been in the souls of those men to bring forth such deeds and words as they have done and said."
15. A further motive was the hope of obtaining their intercession hereafter and of being pardoned, like the dog of the Seven Sleepers which, though it be all skin and bone, will nevertheless be admitted to Paradise. [xxv-xxviii]

### **‘Abdu’l-Bahá**

‘Abbás Effendi, the eldest of three surviving children of Bahá’u’lláh and His wife Ásíyyih Khánum, was born in Tehran, Iran, on 23 May 1844, the day on which the Báb declared His mission in Shiraz. ‘Abbás Effendi—who, after Bahá’u’lláh passed away, added to His given name the title ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (the Servant of the Glory)—was named for His paternal grandfather, ‘Abbás, known as Mírzá Buzurg Núrí, a member of a well established and distinguished family. Mírzá Buzurg had served the government in many capacities and was much admired for his accomplishments as a calligrapher and respected as a high government official....

Bahá’ís see ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in the words of Shoghi Effendi, as “the stainless Mirror” of Bahá’u’lláh’s light, “the perfect Exemplar of His teachings, the unerring Interpreter of His Word, the embodiment of every Bahá’í ideal, the incarnation of every Bahá’í virtue.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is “the ‘Mystery of God’—an expression by which Bahá’u’lláh Himself has chosen to designate Him,



and which... indicates how in the person of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá the incompatible characteristics of a human nature and superhuman knowledge and perfection have been blended and are completely harmonized.”

... ‘Abdu’l-Bahá passed away in Haifa at the age of seventy-seven in the early hours of the morning on 28 November 1921. The funeral, held the next day and attended by thousands of mourners, was a spontaneous tribute to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s person. [Kazemzadeh]

Professor of Islamic Studies Amín Banani writes:

*Memorials of the Faithful*, which has only lately (1971) been translated into English, is a compendium of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s remembrances of some seventy early believers, spoken to gatherings of Bahá’ís in Haifa during the early years of World War I. These were compiled, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s permission for their publication was granted in 1915 but due to the strictures of wartime the book was not published until 1924 when it was again authorized by Shoghi Effendi.

The outward form of *Memorials of the Faithful* is a collection of brief biographical sketches. Its title in the original, *Tadhkiratu’l-Vafá*, places it in a Persian literary tradition some nine centuries old. It brings to mind the *Tadhkiratu’l-Awliyá* (Remembrance of Saints) of the twelfth century mystic poet ‘Aṭṭár. The spiritual and cultural impulses that have given rise to the literary form of *tadhkirib* have little to do with the particular, the personal and the ephemeral aspects of human life. It is the quality of soul, the attributes of spirit, the quintessential humanity and the reflection of the divine in man that is the focus here.

The root word *dhikr* in the title means prayerful mention—reverent remembrance. It implies that it is not

the biographer nor the reader who memorializes a human life, but rather the quality of that life which has earned immemorial lustre and sheds light on all who remember that quality. Quite literally this book is a remembrance of *vafá*—faithfulness—not just memories of individual lives, but remembrance of that essential quality which was the animating force of all those lives.

The people whose “lives” are depicted here all share one thing in common. They are propelled by their love for Bahá’u’lláh. So great is this magnetic force in their lives that they literally travel vast distances and overcome every barrier to be with Him. Some of them arrive virtually with their dying breath, to expire happily after having seen the face of their Beloved; some die on the arduous path. Despite the peculiarities of time and place, it should not take the reader long to recognize a gallery of timeless and universal human types in this book.

The spoken language of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is figurative and almost indistinguishable from His written style. He makes use of a rich fund of literary devices—rhymed phrases, symmetrical forms, alliterations, assonances, metaphors, similes, and allusions—that, far from sounding contrived and artificial, are naturally matched to the subject matter: the essence of faithfulness. With concrete images He describes spiritual states and psychic levels of consciousness, as if to assert the primacy and reality of the realm of spirit. Should the reader experience difficulty with the style, let him savour it slowly, allowing the unfamiliar language to create its own spirit and breathe life into its allusions. Let the words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá trace in his mind the shape of the valley of love and faithfulness.

In His usual self-effacing way ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’ says almost nothing about Himself in this book. But occasional events in the lives of these companions are interwoven with His own. In these passages we have some thrilling glimpses of that essence of humanity and humility that was ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. [Banani, 70-71]

## **The Four Saints Compared in this Paper**

It is not easy to choose only four stories from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s and Aṭṭár’s books, but I have decided to dwell on the following characters because their stories highlight divine intervention in each life. In these stories we can catch a glimpse of both humanity and eternity in the daily actions of the individuals, and in the simplicity with which they turn their hearts to their Creator in prayer and devotion. Just like any of us, these are people who wish to pray, yet can be distracted by the outward world and by inner voices; they are bound by the necessities of material life, yet they can be grateful for both adversity and prosperity, for the fruits of their labors and for Divine providence.

Studying the lives of the saints, we can be struck by the profound spirituality and detachment that characterize them. These qualities define their lives to the point that they become symbol and metaphor of our own constant endeavors toward new heights of comprehension that will open new vistas to our spiritual eyes, just the way climbing up a mountain expands our horizons and affords us, puny creatures, an unprecedented view of the valleys below.

The climb may be arduous and tiring but is the sure path to the goal of our aspirations: nearness to our Creator, the chance to reflect the splendour of His attributes in our person, a keen and crystalline vision of reality.

## Rábi‘ah

She was born into a poor but pious family, the fourth of four daughters. At the time of her birth her family was so desperately poor that there was no cloth in which to wrap her, no lamp to light the house, nor oil to anoint her navel. That night the Prophet appeared to Rábi‘ah’s father in a dream, comforting him with the news that his daughter was a “queen among women” who would be the intercessor for seventy thousand of the Prophet’s community. After a number of years Rábi‘ah’s parents both died and she and her sisters became separated during a famine. She was seized by an evil man and sold as a slave for a small amount of money. Rábi‘ah’s master put her to hard labor. One day she was approached by a stranger. Afraid, she fled, but fell and broke her hand. She cried out to God, not to remove her sufferings, but to know if He was satisfied with her or not. Rábi‘ah was answered by a voice which foretold of her high rank in the hereafter, and she was inspired to intensify her life of devotion. One night her master awoke and saw Rábi‘ah absorbed in prayer with a holy light suspended in midair above her head. Her master was amazed and felt ashamed to keep someone of her spiritual rank as a slave. He freed her and she retired into the desert to devote her life to worship and seeking proximity to God.

It is around this basic outline that ‘Aṭṭár weaves various anecdotes, sayings and supplications attributed to Rábi‘ah in order to fashion and bring to life his image of this remarkable woman saint. ‘Aṭṭár illustrates not only Rábi‘ah’s profound level of spiritual insight and attainment, but also her intense and frequently sharp-witted personality which together commanded the respect of all who encountered her. Although ‘Aṭṭár emphasizes Rábi‘ah’s mystical dimension and particular spiritual characteristics, he does so within a context that

takes into account her relation to orthodox Islamic practice and the significance of her womanhood. [Helms, 14]

### **Rábi‘ah in the Tadhkirat al-Auliya’**

Aṭṭár wrote: if anyone says, “Why have you included Rábi‘ah in the rank of men?” my answer is, that the Prophet himself said, “God does not regard your outward forms.” The root of the matter is not form, but intention, as the Prophet said, “Mankind will be raised up according to their intentions.”

One day Rábi‘ah’s servant girl was making an onion stew; for it was some days since they had cooked any food. Finding that she needed some onions, she said, “I will ask of next door.” “Forty years now,” Rábi‘ah replied, “I have had a covenant with Almighty God not to ask for aught of any but He. Never mind the onions.” Immediately a bird swooped down from the air with peeled onions in its beak and dropped them into the pan. “I am not sure this is not a trick,” Rábi‘ah commented. And she left the onion pulp alone, and ate nothing but bread.

One night Hasan with two or three friends went to visit Rábi‘ah. Rábi‘ah had no lantern. Their hearts yearned for light. Rábi‘ah blew on her finger, and that night till dawn her finger shone like a lantern, and they sat in its radiance. If anyone says, “How could this be?” I answer, “The same as Moses’ hand.” If it is objected, “But Moses was a prophet,” I reply, “Whoever follows in the footsteps of the Prophet can possess a grain of prophethood, as the Prophet says, ‘Whoever rejects a farthing’s worth of unlawful things has attained a degree of prophethood.’ He also said, ‘A true dream is one-fortieth part of prophethood.’” [Arberry 39]

## Báyazid

Abú Yazid al-Bistámí, also known as Báyazid (d.874), was born in Bistám, a very important Iranian town of the Abbasid age (750-1258). One of the most celebrated Sufis, he is the first who pronounced those seemingly blasphemous utterances which imply the mystic's identification with God, such as: 'Glory be to me' or 'I am Thou' or 'I am I'. He may have escaped martyrdom, despite his audacious sayings, because he was thought to be crazy. Báyazid left no writings, but some five hundred of his sayings have been preserved by his biographers.

Bahá'u'lláh quotes in the Four Valleys words which have been ascribed to Báyazid:

*Hence, one of the Prophets of God... hath asked: 'O my Lord, how shall we reach unto Thee And the answer came, 'Leave thyself behind, and then approach Me.' [55]*

Words very similar to these are ascribed to Abu Yazid by 'Aṭṭár in his *Tadhkirat al-Awliyá*. 'Aṭṭár writes that once Báyazid dreamt God Himself, Who told him: 'What do you wish, O Báyazid?' The Highest answered: 'Whatever is Thy wish, O God.' And God answered: 'O Báyazid! I want you, as you want Me.' Then Báyazid asked Him again: 'But which road is leading unto Thee?' And God answered: 'O Báyazid! Whoever renounces his own self will attain unto Me.' Ibn al-'Arabi himself ascribes these words to Báyazid in his *Futúhát*: "The Prophet... said to Abu Yazid, 'Leave aside yourself and come'" [IV. 306.20, quoted in Chittick, *Self-Disclosure* 180].

... If the words 'one of the Prophets of God'... refer to Báyazid, we may think that Bahá'u'lláh considered him as a spiritually advanced seeker. [Savi 514-15]

### Báyazid in the *Tadhkirat al-Auliya'*

Pir Omar reports that when Abu Yazid wished to go into seclusion, in order to worship or to meditate, he would enter his apartment and secure closely every aperture. "I am afraid," he would say, "that some voice or some noise may disturb me." That of course was a pretext.

One night Abu Yazid could find no joy in worship. "Look and see if there is anything of value in the house," he said. His disciples looked, and discovered half a bunch of grapes. "Fetch them and give them away," Abu Yazid commanded. "My house is not a fruiterer's shop." And he rediscovered his composure.

One night Abu Yazid dreamed that the angels of the first heaven descended. "Rise up," they said to him, "let us commemorate God." "I have not the tongue to commemorate Him," he replied.

The angels of the second heaven descended and said the same words, and his answer was the same. So it continued till the angels of the seventh heaven descended; to them he gave the same reply.

"Well, when will you have the tongue to commemorate God?" they asked. "When the inhabitants of Hell are fixed in Hell, and the inhabitants of Paradise take their place in Paradise, and the resurrection is past, then," said he, "Abu Yazid will go around the throne of God and will cry Allah, Allah!" [Arberry 147]

### Mishkín-Qalam

Mishkín-Qalam was born in Shíráz but was a resident of Işfahán, which is where he first heard of the Bahá'í Faith. A few years later he travelled to Baghdad and learned in more detail from Zaynu'l-Muqarrabín and Nabíl-i-

A‘zam. He became a Bahá’í in Adrianople where he met Bahá’u’lláh. Before becoming a Bahá’í, he was a Súfí of the Ni‘matu’lláhí order. He was also a skilled astronomer.

Mishkín-Qalam was sent by Bahá’u’lláh to Constantinople, where he began attracting people through his art and vigorously teaching the Bahá’í Faith. The Persian ambassador began to complain to the Sultan’s vazirs and soon had him arrested. When Bahá’u’lláh was exiled to ‘Akká, Mishkín-Qalam was exiled to Cyprus with the followers of Subh-i-Azal, where he remained a prisoner in Famagusta from 1868 to 1877.

Cyprus eventually left Ottoman control and Mishkín-Qalam was released. He made his way to ‘Akká in 1886, and remained there until Bahá’u’lláh died in 1892, after which he travelled to Egypt, Damascus and India. He remained in India until 1905, and then returned to Haifa until his death in 1912.

Mishkín-Qalam was a renowned calligrapher. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá called him a second Mír ‘Imád, a 16th-century calligrapher of the Safavid dynasty who is perhaps the most celebrated Persian calligrapher.

Mishkín-Qalam enjoyed a special position among the court ministers of Tihrán, and he became widely known for being adept at every calligraphic style.

... When visiting Bahá’u’lláh in Adrianople, he would often write out the phrase Yá Bahá’u’l-Abhá (O Glory of the All-Glorious) in many different forms, some taking the form of a bird, and send them everywhere. One of his renderings of this phrase is now one of the three common symbols of the Bahá’í Faith, known as the Greatest Name. [Wikipedia, “Mishkín-Qalam”]



## Mishkín-Qalam in *Memorials of the Faithful*

*He wielded a musk-black pen, and his brows shone with faith. He was among the most noted of mystics, and had a witty and subtle mind.*

*... This highly accomplished man first heard of the Cause of God in Işfahán, and the result was that he set out to find Bahá'u'lláh. He crossed the great distances, measured out the miles, climbing mountains, passing over deserts and over the sea, until at last he came to Adrianople. Here he reached the heights of faith and assurance; here he drank the wine of certitude. He responded to the summons of God, he attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh, he ascended to that apogee where he was received and accepted.*

*... After the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, Mishkín-Qalam remained loyal, solidly established in the Covenant. He stood before the violators like a brandished sword. He would never go half way with them; he feared no one but God; not for a moment did he falter, nor ever fail in service.*

*... He had amazing verve, intense love. He was a compendium of perfections: believing, confident, serene, detached from the world, a peerless companion, a wit—and his character like a garden in full bloom. For the love of God, he left all good things behind; he closed his eyes to success, he wanted neither comfort nor rest, he sought no wealth, he wished only to be free from the defilement of the world.... For sincerity and loyalty he had no match, nor for patience and inner calm. He was selflessness itself, living on the breaths of the spirit. [MF 98-101]*

## Shams-i-Duhá

Mírzá Hádí, an uncle of the King of Martyrs and the Beloved of Martyrs, became an ardent believer in the early days of the Faith. He was present at the Conference of Badasht, suffered persecutions, was attacked in that vicinity and died there. His wife Shams-i-Duhá, a close companion of Táhirih, was described by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as the ‘eloquent and ardent handmaid of God’. [Tahezadeh 16]

*Khurshíd Begum, who was given the title of Shamsu’d-Duhá, the Morning Sun, was mother-in-law to the King of Martyrs. This eloquent, ardent handmaid of God was the cousin on her father’s side of the famous Muḥammad-Báqir of Isfáhán, widely celebrated as chief of the ‘ulamás in that city. When still a child she lost both her parents, and was reared by her grandmother in the home of that famed and learned mujtahid, and well trained in various branches of knowledge, in theology, sciences and the arts.*

*Once she was grown, she was married to Mírzá Hádíy-i-Nahrí. In Karbilá they attended some classes, imbibing the knowledge of the Siyyid, so that this handmaid became thoroughly informed on subjects relating to Divinity, on the Scriptures and on their inner meanings. The couple had two children, a girl and a boy. They called their son Siyyid ‘Alí and their daughter Fátimih Begum, she being the one who, when she reached adolescence, was married to the King of Martyrs. [MF 180-81]*

## Shams-i-Duhá in Memorials of the Faithful

*From being with Táhirih, Shams profited immeasurably, and was more on fire with the Faith than ever. She spent three years in close association with Táhirih in Karbilá.*

*As Táhirih became celebrated throughout Karbilá, and the Cause of His Supreme Holiness, the Báb, spread all over Persia, the latter-day ‘ulamás arose to deny, to heap scorn upon, and to destroy it. They issued a fatvá or judgment that called for a general massacre. Táhirih was one of those designated by the evil ‘ulamás of the city as an unbeliever, and they mistakenly thought her to be in the home of Shamsu’d-Duhá. They broke into Shams’ house, hemmed her in, abused and vilified her, and inflicted grievous bodily harm. They dragged her out of the house and through the streets to the bázár; they beat her with clubs; they stoned her, they denounced her in foul language, repeatedly assaulting her. While this was going on, Hájí Siyyid Mihdí, the father of her distinguished husband, reached the scene. “This woman is not Táhirih!” he shouted at them. But he had no witness to prove it, and the farráshes, the police and the mob would not let up. Then, through the uproar, a voice screamed out: “They have arrested Qurratu’l-‘Ayn!” At this, the people abandoned Shamsu’d-Duhá.*

*... She spent her days and nights in the remembrance of God and in teaching His Cause to the women of that city. She was gifted with an eloquent tongue; her utterance was wonderful to hear. She was highly honored by the leading women of Isfáhán, celebrated for piety, for godliness, and the purity of her life. She was chastity embodied; all her hours were spent in reciting Holy Writ, or expounding the Texts, or unraveling the most complex of spiritual themes, or spreading abroad the sweet savors of God.*

*... So vehement was the fiery love in her heart that it compelled her to speak out, whenever she found a listening ear. And when it was observed that once again the household of the King of Martyrs was about to be overtaken by calamities, and that they were enduring*

*severe afflictions there in Isfáhán, Bahá'u'lláh desired them to come to the Most Great Prison. Shamsu'd-Duhá, with the widow of the King of Martyrs and the children, arrived in the Holy Land. Here they were joyously spending their days when the son of the King of Martyrs, Mírzá 'Abdu'l-Husayn, as a result of the awful suffering he had been subjected to in Isfáhán, came down with tuberculosis and died in Akká. [MF 182-90]*

## Conclusions

'Abdu'l-Bahá's and Aṭṭár's books differ in one aspect: the individuals portrayed by Aṭṭár have either performed miracles or great heroic acts; in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's work, instead, we meet both people who have distinguished themselves for their heroism and simple people who demonstrate in their daily existence the meaning of living a spiritual life. The reason these latter believers are an example for the reader is their very simplicity: true heroism is living one's life and being steadfast through the tests that give us the opportunity to grow spiritually. Spirituality is a conscious endeavor developed through prayer and meditation but also through the simple acts of daily life: dedication to one's profession, deeds that benefit our neighbor, constant control of our impulses, and fellowship and brotherhood with all people, while remaining confident and contented even during life's hardest times. *"The point is this, that faith compriseth both knowledge and the performance of good works."* ['Abdu'l-Bahá, cited in Research Department Memorandum to the Universal House of Justice]

While some may suffer persecution or even martyrdom because of their beliefs and demonstrate thusly their love for the Faith, for those of us living in countries that enjoy freedom of religion, remaining faithful to certain spiritual values in a society that rejects them is in itself an act of heroism—these two different sacrifices assume the same meaning. Martyrdom, in this case, consists of taking hold of our ego—our lower nature—

and, through constant effort, raise it to the noble station for which it is destined.

In the lives celebrated in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s *Memorials*, we can perceive an exhortation to rethinking the role of the individual in society. If we observe carefully, we will notice how the negative example of a single individual—a corrupt politician, for example, or an employee who is unable to work cooperatively in a group—can become a problem that affects the entire community. At the same time, we are impressed by virtuous individuals who demonstrate in their lives adherence to behaviors oriented toward fellowship to and respect for others, and we hold them up as examples to emulate. We feel a strong attraction for a time and space in which to develop our ideals and our values. The humble yet powerful lesson of the believers remembered in *Memorials* encourages personal discipline in every aspect of life, that by the dynamic force of our example, a healthier and more balanced society may come to life.

## WORKS CITED

- Algar, Hamid. “The Naqshbandi Order: a Preliminary Study of its History and Significance.” *Islamic Studies* 63 (1976): 123–56. Print.
- Arberry, Arthur J. *Muslim Saints and Mystics—Episodes from the Tadhkirat al-Auliya’*. Ames: IA: Omphaloskepsis Press, 2000. Print.
- Banani, Amín. “The Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.” *World Order* 6.1 (Fall 1971): 67–76. Print.
- De André, Fabrizio. “Smisurata preghiera.” *Anime Salve*. 19 Sept. 1996. Fabrizio de André and Piero Milesi. CD.
- Helms, Barbara L. “Rábi‘ah as Mystic, Muslim and Woman.” MA thesis McGill University, 1993. Web. 23 Nov. 2015.
- Jürgen Paul. “Hagiographic Literature.” *Encyclopædia Iranica*. 1 Mar. 2012. Web. 23 Nov. 2015.  
[www.iranicaonline.org/articles/hagiographic-literature](http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/hagiographic-literature)
- Kazemzadeh, Firuz. “‘Abdu’l-Bahá Abbás, 1844-1921.” *Bahá’í Encyclopedia Project*. Web. 23 Nov. 2015. [www.bahai-encyclopedia-project.org](http://www.bahai-encyclopedia-project.org)

“Mishkín-Qalam.” *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., 20 June 2015. Web. 23 Nov. 2015.  
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mishkín-Qalam>

Reinert, Benedikt. “Aṭṭár, Faríd-Al-Dín.” *Encyclopædia Iranica*. 17 Aug. 2011. Web. 23 Nov. 2015.  
[www.iranicaonline.org/articles/attar-farid-al-din-poet](http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/attar-farid-al-din-poet)

Savi, Julio. *Towards the Summit of Reality*. Oxford: George Ronald, 2008. Print.

Taherzadeh, Adib. *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, vol. 4. Oxford: George Ronald, 1988.

Universal House of Justice, Research Department. “Authenticity of “Bahá’í World Faith” and “Foundations of World Unity.” Memorandum dated 28 Mar. 1996. Ocean Bahá’í Library.

---

## NOTE

<sup>1</sup> In Islam, a sheikh is a man respected for his piety or religious learning.



# Elucidations

Universal House of Justice

## 1. Translation of Key Bahá'í Terms

19 May 2015<sup>1</sup>

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

Your email letter of 10 March 2015, asking on behalf of a fellow believer whether it is appropriate to translate the phrase “Alláh-u-Abhá” into another language for purposes of its recitation 95 times a day, has been received at the Bahá'í World Centre and forwarded to our Office for reply. The following has been provided in response to a similar query posed to the Universal House of Justice on a previous occasion:

The Universal House of Justice has received your email letter of 29 December 2008, asking why such terms as “Alláh-u-Abhá” and “Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá” are used by Bahá'ís rather than being translated into their native tongues, and has asked us to respond as follows.

The House of Justice on another occasion has clarified that the Greatest Name is to be used in its original language for the recitation of “Alláh-u-Abhá” 95 times a



day, as well as for its use in the Long Obligatory Prayer and the Prayer for the Dead. It has also clarified that to translate words such as “Alláh-u-Abhá”, “Yá Bahá’u’l-Abhá”, “Mashriqu’l-Adhkár” and “Ḥazíratu’l-Quds” into one’s native language is not acceptable. One exception to this is the alternative use of the words “Right of God” or their equivalent into other languages while the term “Huqúqu’lláh” gradually becomes a part of Bahá’í vocabulary.

In general, one should bear in mind that all translations are, to some degree, inadequate. For instance, the beloved Guardian has pointed out in... *God Passes By* that the word “Bahá” signifies at once the “Glory”, the “Splendour” and the “Light” of God; there is no single word in English which can express all these. It is, of course, desirable that there be no loss of meaning through translation; thus, it is preferable that certain terms directly related to the Manifestation of God remain in their original form. (From a letter dated 22 February 2009 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer.)

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

Office of Correspondence

---

## NOTE

<sup>1</sup> Originally published at [bahai-library.com/uhj\\_translate\\_allah-u-abha](http://bahai-library.com/uhj_translate_allah-u-abha)

## 2. Suggestions about Changes in the Administrative Order

18 May 1995<sup>1</sup>

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has considered your email message of 4 April 1995 and has instructed us to convey to you the following.

The House of Justice appreciates your having shared with it your thoughts and enthusiasm about electronic discussion of the Teachings. The exchange of ideas related to the Cause in electronic discussion groups is indeed a very positive development—one full of great potential for a growing spread and understanding of the Faith—and the House of Justice is pleased you are benefiting from your participation. In all such discussions a sound knowledge of the Bahá'í Teachings is a powerful touchstone, one enabling those so engaged to assess the value of what is being set forth.

Your message suggests that the House of Justice “outline which aspects of current Bahá'í Administration are permanent and which are subject to change”. You have made this suggestion in the light of your concern that some of the ideas you have seen expressed for making the administration work better might be inappropriate. The House of Justice judges that for it to make such a categorization would not be fruitful. The believers' own study of the writings, especially those of Shoghi Effendi and including the Constitution of the Universal House of Justice, should enable them to arrive at an ever greater understanding of the essentials of the Administrative Order. The workings of the community, as you will appreciate, are

organic in nature and so is its growth. As time passes, the community expands, and conditions change, the House of Justice will make such adjustments and developments as are required. In so doing, the House of Justice takes cognizance of the conditions prevailing in the community and any views presented to it, reserving for itself the right of an unfettered decision in the manner described by Shoghi Effendi in *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh*. Its first consideration must always be to remain faithful to the revealed purpose of Bahá'u'lláh, as expounded and interpreted by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian.

Individual believers are entirely free to make their own recommendations for developments which they feel would be desirable, but the manner in which they do so is important, because this relates to fundamental principles of the functioning of Bahá'í society. On the one hand they may present their recommendations at the Nineteen Day Feast, or directly to their Local or National Spiritual Assembly, or even to the Universal House of Justice. On the other hand, they are free to discuss these matters informally among themselves. Any actions, however, which savour of factionalism, of mobilizing pressure, or of stirring up contention among the Bahá'ís would be an inadmissible intrusion of the spirit of partisan politics into Bahá'í community life.

In general the House of Justice advises the friends to be less concerned with correcting what they conceive to be present imperfections in the administrative system, than with thoroughly understanding the principles which underline it, as clearly expounded by the Guardian, and with perfecting the application of those principles in practice.

With regard to your question about review requirements for works related to the Faith written or published by Bahá'ís, no decision has been taken as to when this practice will no longer be needed. Concerning access by individuals to source materials held in the Bahá'í International Archives, incoming requests are

dealt with on a case-by-case basis, as the gradually expanding facilities of the Bahá'í World Centre permit.

The House of Justice wishes us to assure you that it will offer prayers in the Holy Shrines on your behalf and as requested. May your insight and perception of the realities of the Faith be a constant joy and source of development to you.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

For Department of the Secretariat

---

#### **NOTE**

<sup>1</sup> Originally posted at [bahai-library.com/uhj\\_suggestions\\_administrative\\_order](http://bahai-library.com/uhj_suggestions_administrative_order)



# In Memoriam

**Houshang Arjmand**

**1930-2015**



Mr. Houshang Arjmand, the grandson of the illustrious Bahá'í scholar and teacher Haj Mehdi Arjmand and the fourth child of Habibullah Arjmand and Monireh Mobine, was born in Tehran, Iran on March 20, 1930. He finished his high school education in Tehran, and thereafter, pursued a higher education in engineering in Germany, France, and the United States.

Upon his return to Iran, he partnered with his brother-in-law Mr. Yadollah Mahboubian and together they founded the "Iran Electric Company," which became the largest importer,

distributor, and manufacturer of electrical cables and equipment in Iran. After the Iranian revolution in 1979, Houshang's life changed drastically when his partner and brother-in-law, Mr. Mahboubian, was arrested and imprisoned by the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran for his belief in the Bahá'í Faith, and ultimately martyred in the path of the Blessed Beauty. This tragic loss affected Houshang greatly. With unconditional love, he looked after his sister Parvin Mahboubian, the widow of Mr. Mahboubian, and selflessly took on the guardianship of their daughters, Shiva and Nikoo Mahboubian.

Mr. Houshang Arjmand had a commitment and dedication to promote the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. In 1993, through his ardent efforts, he created the Háj Mehdi Arjmand Memorial Fund at the Bahá'í National Treasurer's Office in the United States as a tribute to his grandfather who as part of his scholarly work authored the book *Gulshan Haqayiq*. This book, which was approved by 'Abdul-Bahá through a Tablet addressed to Haj Mehdi, is a study on the fulfillment of the prophecies mentioned in both the Old and New Testaments with the coming of Bahá'u'lláh. The 'Irfán Colloquium was established in 1993 and has been mainly supported by the Haj Mehdi Arjmand Memorial Fund. The aim of this colloquium is to encourage and support scholarly studies of the sacred writings, verities, and fundamental principles and the belief system of the Bahá'í Faith. This Colloquium is also an attempt to encourage and support studies aimed at correlating Bahá'í teachings with intellectual schools of thought, the scientific perspective, various religious traditions and current challenges in human society.

In a message conveyed to Mr. Arjmand's family, the Universal House of Justice states, "His generous support for a wide range of Bahá'í activities bears testimony to his magnanimity and ardent desire to promote the interests of the Cause." Additionally, in a letter of condolence from the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States to Mrs. Mahboubian, the Assembly writes: "As we call to mind

Mr. Arjmand's devoted efforts through the Haj Mehdi Arjmand Memorial Fund to provide needed resources to worthy Bahá'í initiatives and enterprises, our hearts are moved to gratitude and warmest appreciation." The Fund's assistance has enabled the Irfán Colloquium, for one, to carry on with its noble, far-sighted, knowledge-building conferences and publications. The Universal House of Justice welcomed and encourages this initiative and, following the guidance received from the Supreme Body, it became one of the activities affiliated with the Bahá'í National Center of the United States.

During the past twenty-two years Irfán Colloquium has convened one hundred thirty-five times in North America and Europe. At these sessions of the Irfán Colloquium a total of one thousand five hundred research papers were presented in the English, Persian, and German languages by scholars, and fifty volumes containing those research papers have so far been published. All these achievements are due to generous support of Houshang Arjmand, his sister Mrs. Parvin Mahboubian and his brother Mr. Sohrab Arjmand. Houshang Arjmand always insisted that no mention of gratitude and appreciation of himself and his other family members should be made at Irfán Colloquium sessions and in Irfán publications, to avoid giving the impression of any pretensions. This was not the only project that received Mr. Arjmand's munificent care and attention

Well known for his generosity, discretion and humility, Houshang lived his life according to the Bahá'í Principles. He passed away on 20 August 2015 in San Diego, California, He is survived by his sisters Mahin Banayan, Parvin Mahboubian, and Minou Manuchehri; and his brother Sohrab Arjmand. Although he did not have any children of his own, he was undoubtedly a devoted father to all his nieces and nephews, as well as an affectionate grandfather to their children. He will always be remembered as a true humanitarian who selflessly dedicated his life to love, kindness and friendship towards all.





## Appendices

### Bibliography of the Bahá'í Writings and Their Abbreviations used in this book

<b>ABL</b>	'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>'Abdu'l-Bahá in London</i>
<b>ADJ</b>	Shoghi Effendi, <i>Advent of Divine Justice</i>
<b>BA</b>	Shoghi Effendi, <i>Bahá'í Administration</i>
<b>BK</b>	<i>Bahíyyih Khánum, the Greatest Holy Leaf</i>
<b>BP</b>	Compilation, <i>Bahá'í Prayers</i>
<b>BWF</b>	Compilation, <i>Bahá'í World Faith</i>
<b>CC1-2</b>	<i>Compilation of Compilations</i> , volumes 1 and 2
<b>CF</b>	Shoghi Effendi, <i>Citadel of Faith</i>
<b>CL</b>	Universal House of Justice, <i>Century of Light</i>
<b>CN</b>	Shoghi Effendi, <i>Call to the Nations</i>
<b>DB</b>	Nabíl, <i>The Dawn-Breakers</i>
<b>DND</b>	Shoghi Effendi, <i>Dawn of a New Day</i>
<b>ESW</b>	Bahá'u'lláh, <i>Epistle to the Son of the Wolf</i>
<b>FL</b>	Compilation, <i>Fire and Light</i>
<b>FWU</b>	'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>Foundations of World Unity</i>
<b>GDM</b>	Bahá'u'lláh, <i>Gems of Divine Mysteries</i>
<b>GPB</b>	Shoghi Effendi, <i>God Passes By</i>
<b>GWB</b>	Bahá'u'lláh, <i>Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh</i>
<b>HW</b>	Bahá'u'lláh, <i>Hidden Words</i>
<b>JWTA</b>	Compilation, <i>Japan Will Turn Ablaze</i>
<b>KA</b>	Bahá'u'lláh, <i>Kitáb-i-Aqdas</i>
<b>KI</b>	Bahá'u'lláh, <i>Kitáb-i-Íqán</i>
<b>LG</b>	Compilation, <i>Lights of Guidance</i>
<b>MA</b>	Shoghi Effendi, <i>Messages to America. Selected Letters and Cablegrams Addressed to the Bahá'ís of North America 1932-1946</i>
<b>MBW 50-57</b>	Shoghi Effendi, <i>Messages to the Bahá'í World 1950-1957</i>
<b>MC</b>	Shoghi Effendi, <i>Messages to Canada</i>
<b>MF</b>	'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>Memorials of the Faithful</i>

<b>MUH J63</b>	<i>Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1963-1986</i>
<b>PB</b>	Bahá'u'lláh, <i>The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh</i>
<b>PBA</b>	Compilation, <i>Principles of Bahá'í Administration</i>
<b>PDC</b>	Shoghi Effendi, <i>Promised Day is Come</i>
<b>PM</b>	Bahá'u'lláh, <i>Prayers and Meditations</i>
<b>PT</b>	'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>Paris Talks</i>
<b>PUP</b>	'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>Promulgation of Universal Peace</i>
<b>SAQ</b>	'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>Some Answered Questions</i>
<b>SDC</b>	'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>Secret of Divine Civilization</i>
<b>SLH</b>	Bahá'u'lláh, <i>Summons of the Lord of Hosts</i>
<b>SVFV</b>	Bahá'u'lláh, <i>Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys</i>
<b>SWAB</b>	'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá</i>
<b>SWB</b>	The Báb, <i>Selections from the Writings of The Báb</i>
<b>TAB1-3</b>	'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas</i> , volumes 1-3
<b>TAF</b>	'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>Tablet to Auguste Forel</i>
<b>TB</b>	Bahá'u'lláh, <i>Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas</i>
<b>TDH</b>	Shoghi Effendi, <i>This Decisive Hour</i>
<b>TN</b>	'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>Traveler's Narrative</i>
<b>UD</b>	Shoghi Effendi, <i>Unfolding Destiny</i>
<b>WOB</b>	Shoghi Effendi, <i>World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters</i>
<b>WT</b>	'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>Will and Testament</i>

## **Contents of *Lights of 'Irfán* Books 1-16**

### ***Lights of 'Irfán* Book One, © 2000**

Kitáb-i-Aqdas as Described and Glorified by Shoghi Effendi  
Cyrus Alai

The Seven Valleys of Bahá'u'lláh and Faríd ud-Din Aţţár  
Sheila Banani

Common Teachings in Chinese Culture and the Bahá'í Faith: From  
Material Civilization to Spiritual Civilization  
Albert K. Cheung

The Bedrock of Bahá'í Belief: The Doctrine of Progressive Revelation  
Zaid Lundberg

The New Age Phenomenon and the Bahá'í Faith  
Zaid Lundberg

A Study of the Meaning of the Word "Al-Amr" in the Qur'án and in  
the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh  
Moojan Momen

The Book of Revelation Revealed in Glory: A Summary of Glorious  
Revelation  
William Ridgers

The Development of Humankind  
Julio Savi

The Concept of Sacred Justice in Hebrew Eschatology  
Gary Selchert

Some Chronological Issues in the Lawḥ-i-Ḥikmat of Bahá'u'lláh  
Peter Terry

'Abdu'l-Bahá's Explanation of the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh: Tablets  
and Talks Translated into English (1911-1920)  
Peter Terry

### ***Lights of 'Irfán* Book Two, © 2001**

"Point" and "Letter" in the Writings of the Báb  
Muḥammad Afnán

Perception into Faith: A Radical Discontinuity within Unity  
William Barnes

- An Introduction to the Súratu'l-Haykal (Discourse of The Temple)  
Mohamad Ghasem Bayat
- The Firm Cord of Servitude  
Theo Cope
- The Human Intellect: A Bahá'í-inspired Perspective  
Adrian John Davis
- The Perfect Man and the Manifestation of God  
Y.A. Ioannesyan
- The Mystic Cup: The Essential Mystical Nature of the Bahá'í Faith  
LeRoy Jones
- A Short Poem by “Darvish” Muḥammad, Bahá'u'lláh: “Sáqí az ghayb-i-  
baqá' burqa' bar afkan az 'idhár”: Introduction and Three  
Versions of Provisional English Translations  
Franklin D. Lewis
- The Tablet of Unity (Lawḥ-i-Ittiḥád): A Provisional Translation  
Moojan Momen
- 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Commentary on Quránic Verses Concerning the  
Overthrow of the Byzantines: The Stages of the Soul  
Moojan Momen
- “What I Want to Say is Wordless”: Mystical Language, Revelation  
and Scholarship  
Ismael Velasco
- Keys to the Proper Understanding of Islam in The Dispensation of  
Bahá'u'lláh  
Brian A. Wittman

### ***Lights of 'Irfán Book Three, © 2002***

- A Journey through the Seven Valleys  
Ghasem Bayat
- The beginning that has no beginning: Bahá'í Cosmology  
Vahid Brown
- Knowledge, Certitude and the Mystical Heart: The Hidden Essence of  
God's Word  
LeRoy Jones
- The Báb's Epistle on the Spiritual Journey towards God  
Todd Lawson
- From Adam to Bahá'u'lláh: The Idea of a Chain of Prophecy  
Zaid Lundberg

- The Wronged One: Shí'í Narrative Structure in Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of Visitation for Mullá Ḥusayn  
William McCants
- The Mystical Dimensions of the Bahá'í Administrative Order  
Kavian Milani
- Mysticism and the Bahá'í Community  
Moojan Momen
- The Lawḥ-i-Mánikjī Šáḥib: intro and provisional translation  
Ramin Neshati
- The Seven Valleys and the Scientific Method  
Robert Sarracino
- Theological Responses to Modernity in 19th-century Middle East  
Oliver Scharbrodt
- Mysticism in African Traditional Religion and in the Bahá'í Faith: Classification of Concepts and Practices  
Enoch Tanyi
- An Exposition on the Fire Tablet by Bahá'u'lláh  
James Thomas
- Influence of Bábí Teachings on Ming Tang and 19<sup>th</sup>-century China  
Jianping Wang

### ***Lights of 'Irfán Book Four, © 2003***

- An Epistle of Sayyid 'Alí Muḥammad 'the Báb' to Sultan 'Abdulmecid Necati Alkan
- "Thee" and "thee" in the translation of the Súrih of the Temple (Súriy-i-Haykal)  
Khazeh Fananapazir
- The Aristotelian Substratum of the Bahá'í Writings  
Ian Kluge
- The Call into Being: Introduction to a Bahá'í Existentialism  
Ian Kluge
- The Tablet to Hardegg (Lawḥ-i-Hirtík): A Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh to the Templer Leader Georg David Hardegg  
Stephen Lambden
- The Tablet of the Bell (Lawḥ-i-Náqúsi) of Bahá'u'lláh  
Stephen Lambden
- The 'Akká Traditions in the Epistle to the Son of the Wolf  
Moojan Momen

The Tablet of Maqsúd (Lawḥ-i-Maqsúd): Guidance on Human Nature  
and Leadership  
Ramin Neshati

Inmates of the Celestial Pavilion  
Research department of the Bahá'í World Centre

Letters of the Quranic Dispensation  
Research Department of the Bahá'í World Centre

The Uses of Genealogy and Genealogical Information in Select  
Persianate and Bábí/Bahá'í Sources: A Preliminary Survey  
Sholeh A. Quinn

An Exposition of the Tablet of the World (Lawḥ-i-Dunya)  
James B. Thomas

Bahá'u'lláh's First Tablet to Napoleon III  
Ismael Velasco

### ***Lights of 'Irfán Book Five, © 2004***

Number of the Letters of the Living  
Muḥammad Afnán

Images of Christ in the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá  
Maryam Afshar

Letters to Bahá'í princesses: Tablets revealed in honour of the women  
of Ibn-i Asdaq's household  
Dominic Parviz Brookshaw

Textual Resurrection: Book, Imám, and Cosmos in the Qur'án  
Commentaries of the Báb  
Vahid Brown

Chronicles of a Birth: Early References to the Bábí and Bahá'í  
Religions in Spain (1850-1853)  
Amín E. Egea

Unity and Progressive Revelation: Comparing Bahá'í Principles with  
the Basic Concepts of Teilhard de Chardin  
Wolfgang A Klebel

Process Philosophy and the Bahá'í Writings: An Initial Exploration  
Ian Kluge

Kaleidoscope: Some Aspects of Angelology, Light, the Divine Throne  
and Color Mysticism in Bábí and Bahá'í Scripture  
Stephen Lambden

Karím Khán Kirmání and the Kitáb-i-Íqán  
Sholeh A. Quinn

Service, Joy and Sacrifice: An Essay on Commentaries by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

James B. Thomas

The Manifestations of God and Their Function in Human History  
Iscander Micael Tinto

***Lights of ‘Irfán Book Six, © 2005***

The Life and Times of August Forel  
Sheila Banani

Bahá’í Understanding of Reincarnation in Relation to the World’s  
Faiths  
Sateh Bayat and Vafá Bayat

Autobibliography in the Writings of the Báb  
Vahid Brown

Models and Idols: Towards a Philosophy of the Community of Mind  
Sháhbaz Fatheazam

True of Thyself: The Mystical Writings of Bahá’u’lláh and Ken  
Wilber’s System of Integral Philosophy  
Wolfgang A. Klebel

Bahá’í Ontology: An Initial Reconnaissance  
Ian Kluge

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Tablet of the Two Calls: Civilizing Barbarity  
Manuchehr Mofidi

SunWALK: A Bahá’í-inspired Model of Education  
Roger Prentice

Interpretation and the Guardianship  
Ian Semple

The Signs of Prophet-Hood: An Exposition on a Tablet by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá  
James B. Thomas

Infallibility of the Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith  
Research Department of the Universal House of Justice

A Commentary on the Conclusion on True Mysticism  
Enoch Tanyi

***Lights of ‘Irfán Book Seven, © 2006***

Andalusí Theosophy: A Recontextualization  
J. Vahid Brown



Out of Jewish Roots: Studies of Prayer Patterns in Jewish, Christian,  
Muslim and Bahá'í Worship  
Ted Brownstein

Chronicles of a Birth: Early References to the Bábí and Bahá'í  
Religions in Spain (1854-1876)  
Amín E. Egea

The St. Petersburg 19th Century Orientalist Collection of Materials  
on the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths: Primary and Other Sources  
Y.A. Ioannesyan

Origins of the Bahá'í Concept of Unity and Causality: A Brief Survey  
of Greek, Neoplatonic, and Islamic Underpinnings  
B.R. Khadem

Lawḥ-i-Ḥikmat, Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of Wisdom: Towards a  
Progressive Bahá'í Theology  
Wolfgang A. Klebel

Further Explorations in Bahá'í Ontology  
Ian Kluge

“The newly born Babe of that Day”: Mysticism in the Age of the  
Maturity of Humankind  
Julio Savi

Religion and Exclusivism: a Bahá'í Perspective  
Julio Savi

Seeds of Revelation and the Mystic Bond between The Báb and  
Bahá'u'lláh: Excerpts from the Persian Bayán  
James B. Thomas

The Bahá'í Faith in the Arabic Speaking Middle East: Part 1 (1753-  
1863)  
Ramsey Zeine

### ***Lights of 'Irfán Book Eight, © 2007***

Chronicles of a Birth: Early References to the Bábí and Bahá'í  
Religions in Spain (1873-1895)  
Amín E. Egea, translated by Francisco J. Díaz

Baron Rosen's Archive Collection of Bábí and Bahá'í Materials  
Youli Ioannesyan

Mysticism East and West  
Farhang Jahanpour

The Word is the Master Key for the Whole World: The “Teaching and  
Spirit of the Cause” in Dialogical and Personal Thinking  
Wolfgang A. Klebel

Buddhism and the Bahá'í Writings: An Ontological Rapprochement  
Ian Kluge

Why the Bahá'í Faith Is Not Pluralist  
Grant S. Martin

The Art of Rhetoric in the Writings of Shoghi Effendi  
Jack McLean

'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablet on the Functioning of the Universal House of  
Justice: A Provisional Translation and Commentary  
Moojan Momen

The Bahá'í Covenant  
Alí Nakhjavani

Minimalism from a Bahá'í Perspective  
Mahyad Zaerpoor Rahnamaie

Lawḥ-i-Maryam (Tablet to Maryam) Revealed by Bahá'u'lláh: A  
Provisional Translation and Commentary  
Julio Savi and Faezeh Mardani Mazzoli

The Emergence of World Civilization: An Exposition on Excerpts  
from the Writings of Shoghi Effendi  
James B. Thomas

Designation of Mírzá Yahyá Azal in the Writings of the Báb: Will and  
Testament of the Báb; Memorandum from the Research  
Department; Making the Crooked Straight

Letters Written on Behalf of the Guardian  
Daniel's Prophecies

### ***Lights of 'Irfán Book Nine, © 2008***

Emergence, Enchantment, Entanglement and Excellence of the  
Cosmos  
Wolfgang Klebel

Bahá'u'lláh's "Most Sublime Vision"  
Wolfgang Klebel

Postmodernism and the Bahá'í Writings Part One  
Ian Kluge

Postmodernism and the Bahá'í Writings Part Two  
Ian Kluge

Relativism and the Bahá'í Writings  
Ian Kluge

Shoghi Effendi's The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh: A Theology of the  
Word

Jack McLean

Insider and Outsider Scholarship in Bahá'í Studies

Moojan Momen

The Lesser Peace and the Most Great Peace

‘Alí Nakhjavani

The Súrat al-mulk and the Súrat al-mulúk: A Preliminary Comparison

Sholeh A. Quinn

Prophets and Mountains

Moshe Sharon

Prayers and rituals in the Bahá'í Faith: A Tablet to Jináb-i-Mullá ‘Alí-

Akbar fí Ardi'l-Álif

Julio Savi and Faezeh Mardani

Tablet to Jináb-i-Mullá ‘Alí-Akbar fí ardi'l-álif

trans. Julio Savi and Faezeh Mardani

The Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice

Ian Semple

The Rise of Justice in the Spiritual and Secular Life of Man: An

Exposition on excerpts from The Advent of Divine Justice

James B. Thomas

The Resurrection and Return of Jesus

Issues Related to the Study of the Bahá'í Faith

### ***Lights of ‘Irfán Book Ten, © 2009***

Further Comments on a Passage of the Lawh-i-Hikmat

Amín Egea

The Bahá'í Worldview on Unity of Religions: Progressive Revelation:

Principles and Insights from the History of Science

Jena Khadem Khodadad

A Glimpse into the Life of Laura Dreyfus-Barney

Mona Khademi

In the Heart of All That Is: “Heart” in Bahá'í Writings and Science

Wolfgang A. Klebel

In the Pure Soil of Thy Heart: “Heart” in Bahá'í Writings and

Neurocardiology

Wolfgang A. Klebel

Some Answered Questions: A Philosophical Perspective

Ian Kluge

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit: Chapter 31 of Some Answered Questions  
Moojan Momen

Man Is Man: ‘Abdu’l-Bahá on Human Evolution  
Ramin Neshati

Methods and qualities of the seekers of Reality in Some Answered Questions in the light of Bahá’í Scriptures  
Julio Savi

Comments on the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice  
Some Thoughts on the Ministry of the Universal House of Justice  
‘Alí Nakhjávání

Classification of the Bahá’í Sacred Texts

Development of Bahá’í Scholarly Activities

### ***Lights of ‘Irfán Book Eleven, © 2010***

Chronicles of a Birth Part III: Early References to the Bábí and Bahá’í Religions in Spain (1873-1895)  
Amín E. Egea

Reflections on Some Messianic Prophecies in Shaykhi Works  
Y. A. Ioannesyan

Textual Context and Literary Criticism: A Case Study based on a Letter from Shoghi Effendi  
Gerald Keil

The Path of God  
Wolfgang A. Klebel

Neoplatonism and the Bahá’í Writings  
Ian Kluge

Bahá’u’lláh’s Tablet of the Uncompounded Reality (Lawh Basít al-Haqíqa)  
Moojan Momen

Dashavatara and Progressive Revelation  
Anupam Premanand

Towards a Contextualization of Bahá’u’lláh’s Lawh-i Qíná’  
Sholeh A. Quinn

The Indispensability of Consultation for Ordering Human Affairs  
Ian Semple

Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice

Infallibility of the Universal House of Justice

Authority and Centrality of the Universal House of Justice

***Lights of 'Irfán Book Twelve, © 2011***

- The Travels of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and their Impact on the Press  
Amín Egea
- The Essence of Man  
Wolfgang A. Klebel
- Neo-Platonism and the Bahá'í Faith, Part II  
Ian Kluge
- Preparing Bahá'í Communities to Embrace Gender Equality  
Baharieh Rohani Ma'ani
- Perfection and Refinement: Towards an Aesthetics of the Báb  
Moojan Momen
- The Duty of Kindness and Sympathy Towards Strangers  
Julio Savi
- Mayflowers in the Ville Lumière  
Julio Savi
- The Indispensability of Consultation  
Ian Semple
- The Mystery of Divinity  
James B. Thomas
- Speaking on Socio-Political Order
- Teaching the Cause of God: A Two-Edged Sword  
Alí Nakhjavani
- Relativism, A Theological and Cognitive Basis for Bahá'í Ideas about  
God  
Moojan Momen

***Lights of 'Irfán Book Thirteen, © 2012***

- The Fragility of Goodness  
Sháhbaz Fatheazam
- I Know Not How to Sing Thy Praise  
Wolfgang A. Klebel
- The Bahá'í Writings and Kant's 'Perpetual Peace'  
Ian Kluge
- The New Atheism—A Bahá'í Perspective  
Ian Kluge
- The Choice of the West for 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Epoch-making trip  
Baharieh Rohani Ma'ani

Apocalyptic Thinking and Process Thinking  
Moojan Momen

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Encounter with Modernity  
Wendi Momen

Interpretation and Elucidation  
Alí Nakhjavani

Bahá’u’lláh’s Persian Poems Written before 1863  
Julio Savi

Clouds and the Hiding God  
Moshe Sharon

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Visit to North America, 1912  
Robert H. Stockman

Authority and Centrality of the Universal House of Justice  
Whether the Apostle Paul was a “False Teacher”

The Religion of the Sabaeans and African-based Religions in the  
Americas

Supreme Tribunal (Mahkamiy-i-Kubra)  
Alí Nakhjavani

In Memoriam: Ian Semple (1928–2011)

### ***Lights of ‘Irfán Book Fourteen, © 2013***

Yinyáng Cosmology and the Bahá’í Faith  
Phyllis Ghim-Lian Chew

Collective Security: An Indispensable Requisite for a Lasting Peace  
Sovaida Ma’ani Ewing

Celestial Fire: Bahá’u’lláh as the Messianic Theophany of the Divine  
Fire (*átar, áḍar, átaḥ*) in Zoroastrianism  
Farshid Kazemi

“These Four States Conferred Upon Thee”: Tetrarchic Thinking in  
Philosophy—Theology—Psychology  
Wolfgang Klebel

Reason and the Bahá’í Writings  
Ian Kluge

Eyewitness Account of the Massacre of Bahá’ís in Nayriz on the Naw-  
Ruz ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Interred the Remains of The Báb on Mt.  
Carmel  
Baharieh Rouhani Maani

Role of Principles in the Bahá’í Faith: Principles and Fashion

Farjam Majd

Commentary on a Passage in the Epistle to the Son of the Wolf  
Moojan Momen

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Elucidation of the Concept of the Oneness of  
Humanity During His Western Travels  
Wendi Momen

‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Egypt: September 1910–5 December 1913  
Julio Savi

Individual Rights and Freedoms  
Universal House of Justice

***Lights of ‘Irfán Book Fifteen, © 2014***

The Emergence and Organization of Chinese Religions  
Phyllis Ghim Lian Chew

Finding the Trace of the Traceless Friend: Reflection on Bahá’í  
Scholarship as a Journey in the Valley of Search  
Wolfgang A. Klebel

The Bahá’í Writings: A Meta-ethical Excursion  
Part I: Background and a First Dive into the Writings  
Part II: Deeper into the Writings  
Ian Kluge

The Greatest Holy Leaf’s Unparalleled Role in Religious History  
and the Significance of the Arc, the Site of Her Resting Place  
Bahá’ieh Rouhani Ma`ani

Origins of Creation  
Farjam Majd

Bahá’í Consultation and the Transformation of Society  
Moojan Momen

The Inebriation of His Enrapturing Call: (*mast-and bulbulán*)  
Julio Savi

Tablet of Patience: Declaration of Bahá’u’lláh and Selected Topics  
Foad Seddigh

Non-Involvement in Politics  
Universal House of Justice

In Memoriam:

Hushmand Fatheazam (1924-2013)

Amín Banani (1926-2013)

Mahboubeh Arjmand (d. 2013)

***Lights of ‘Irfán* Book Sixteen, © 2015**

The Ten Plagues of the Exodus in Light of the Bahá’í Writings  
JoAnn M. Borovicka

Freud’s Transference and the Four States of Bahá’u’lláh  
Wolfgang A. Klebel

Procrustes’ Bed: The Insufficiency of Secular Humanism  
Ian Kluge

Women and Wisdom in Scripture  
Baharieh Rouhani Ma’ani

On Existence and Qualities of the Human Soul  
Farjam Majd

Shoghi Effendi’s Translation of Terms Related to Law in Bahá’í  
Scripture  
Moojan Momen

Shared Prosperity: How Does That Work?  
Wendi Momen

A Hymn to Love (*Sáqí, bi-dih ábí*)  
Julio Savi

“At Dawn the Friend came to my bed”: An early fruit of the Supreme  
Pen  
Julio Savi

Intellectual Life and the Future of Bahá’í Studies  
Universal House of Justice

In Memoriam  
Kamran Ekbal (1946-2014)



## Publications of the ‘Irfán Colloquium

Moojan Momen (ed.), *Scripture and Revelation* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1997)

Moojan Momen (ed.), *The Bahá’í Faith and the World Religions* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2005)

Iraj Ayman (ed.), *The Lights of ‘Irfán: Compilations of Papers Presented at ‘Irfán Colloquia* (in English), Books One to Sixteen (2000–2015)

Iraj Ayman (ed.), *Safíni-yi ‘Irfán: Compilations of Papers Presented at ‘Irfán Colloquia* (in Persian), Books One to Eighteen (1998–2015)

Farah Dustdar (ed.), *Beiträge des ‘Irfán-Kolloquiums: Compilations of Papers Presented at ‘Irfán Colloquia* (in German), Books One to Five (Hofheim, Germany: Bahá’í Verlag, 2004–2009)

Maryam Afshar, *Images of Christ in the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* (2004)

Wolfgang Klebel, *Revelation of Unity, Unity of Revelation* (Darmsdat, Germany: Reyhani Verlag, 2009)

Vahid Rafati, *Áftab Ámad Dalíl-i Áftáb* (The proof of the Sun is the Sun) (Darmsdat, Germany: Reyhani Verlag, 2010)

Vahid Rafati, *Badáy-i ‘-i-Ma‘ání va Tafsír* (The Wonders of Inner Meanings and Interpretation): *Selected Commentaries of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá on Qur’anic Verses and Islamic Traditions* (Darmsdat, Germany: Reyhani Verlag, 2013)

Shahbaz Fatheazam, *The Last Refuge: Fifty Years of the Universal House of Justice* (Darmsdat, Germany: Reyhani Verlag, 2015)

## Distributors of 'Irfán Publications

### **Bahá'í Distribution Service (BDS)**

415 Linden Ave., Wilmette, IL 60091-2886, USA

Tel.: (847)425-7950 Fax: (847)425-7951

E-mail: [BDS@usbnc.org](mailto:BDS@usbnc.org)

### **Bahá'í Verlag** (for German publications)

Eppsteiner Str. 89, D-65719, Hofheim, Germany

Tel: (49) 6192-22921 Fax: (49)6192-22936

E-mail: [office@bahai-verlag.de](mailto:office@bahai-verlag.de)

### **Reyhani Verlag**

Benzweg 4, 64293, Darmsstadt, Germany

Tel: 49-6151-95170 Fax: 49-6151-9517299

E-Mail: [druck@reyhani.de](mailto:druck@reyhani.de)

## Vision and Aims of the ‘Irfán Colloquium

The ‘Irfán Colloquium aims at promoting and supporting systematic studies of fundamental principles of the Bahá’í beliefs, the Writings of the Central Figures of the Bahá’í Faith, the interface of the Bahá’í Faith with intellectual schools of thought and religious traditions, and looking at current challenges in human society from the Bahá’í perspective. *‘Irfán* is a Persian word referring to mystical, theological and spiritual knowledge. The ‘Irfán Colloquium and its publications are sponsored by Haj Mehdi Memorial Fund and supported by Nadia Saadat Memorial Scholarships grant.

The Haj Mehdi Arjmand Memorial Fund was established by Houshang Arjmand (1930–2015) in 1992 to honor his grandfather, Haj Mehdi Arjmand, and is dedicated to promoting the scholarly study of the Bahá’í Faith. Haj Mehdi Arjmand (1861–1941) was a Persian scholar and teacher of the Bahá’í Faith who became well known in Iran for his profound knowledge of the Bible, Qur’an, and Bahá’í scriptures. The primary activity of the Fund is sponsoring annual sessions of ‘Irfán Colloquium and ‘Irfán publications.

In 2012, benefiting from the guidance received from the Universal House of Justice, a management board was appointed for this fund to function as a Bahá’í agency under the direction of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States. Organizing and holding ‘Irfán Colloquia started in 1993 and are presently held seven times every year in North America and Western Europe in English, Persian and German languages under the auspices of the National Spiritual Assembly of the host country.

As of October 2015 one hundred and thirty five sessions of colloquia have been held. Papers in English presented or received at the ‘Irfán Colloquia are annually published in a series of volumes of the *Lights of ‘Irfán*.