

Conversation with a Christian

A friend of mine who is a devout Christian once wrote to me and asked me the below questions. He wanted me to answer them based on the Bahai writings. Below are his questions and my comments based on the utterances of Baha'u'llah and The Bab.

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Q1)- Are we judged at the end of our lives? By whom?

Before attempting to answer this question and any questions that relates to life after death, I must admit that our understanding about this subject is very limited. Although there are numerous Tablets and writings from Baha'u'llah and Abdul-Baha about this matter, it is still beyond our comprehension (because of our limited capacity). Consider the below quotation from Baha'u'llah:

“You ask an explanation of what happens to us after we leave this world: This is a question which none of the Prophets have ever answered in detail, for the very simple reason that you cannot convey to a person’s mind something entirely different from everything they have ever experienced.” Baha’u’Allah’s Teachings on Spiritual Reality, p. 110, 21.4

I guess our problem is that we always think the other place is a material place. And because of this, we always think there would be a physical place that we go after we die and there is someone awaiting us to judge us and there are material rewards. If that was the case, then why does Baha'u'llah tells us that if He shows us the world beyond, no one wants to stay in this life? So, we should understand that these are all spiritual states and not material. Baha'u'llah tells us that the soul will progress according to its capacity. Look at the writing below:

“Blessed is the soul which, at the hour of its separation from the body, is sanctified from the vain imaginings of the peoples of the world. Such a soul liveth and moveth in accordance with the Will of its Creator, and entereth the all-highest Paradise. The Maids of Heaven, inmates of the loftiest mansions, will circle around it, and the Prophets of God and His chosen ones will seek its companionship. With them that soul will freely converse, and will recount unto them that which it hath been made to endure in the path of God, the Lord of all worlds. If any man be told that which hath been ordained for such a soul in the worlds of God, the Lord of the throne on high and of earth below, his whole being will instantly blaze out in his great longing to attain that most exalted, that sanctified and resplendent station...” Baha’u’Allah, et al.(1983, p. 346)

As Baha'u'llah pointed out in another tablet there are many other worlds in other realms. And based on the above quotation the soul, based on its capability/capacity, will progress but within its own sphere. Some will occupy a higher station than others.

So to me, based on the writings, there is no material of physical judge. Of course what we do in this life will affect our soul and make it more refined for the next world, but in a spiritual sense/state.

“One must remember that the purpose of this life is to prepare the soul for the next.” Universal House of Justice (n.d., p. 119).

Q2)- By what rules or measure? Behaviour or belief?

All the tools (call it 10 commandments, 12 principals etc...) that are given to us by These Educators (Prophets, Manifestations of God, etc..) are created to educate us and manifest in us what is hidden within us. Belief without action is a mere word, and action without belief is stained with desire (earthly desire, selfish desire).

Look at the below quotation:

“The Great Being saith: Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom....” , Gleanings from the Writings of Baha’u’llah”, Sec. 122, pp. 259–60)

In another Tablet Baha’u’llah says (I am paraphrasing) that there are hidden gems in our inner mine and He only wants to bring them out (or manifest those within us). I would say these are the measurements of God. Again these are not material, rather spiritual. Our actions might look physical but its effect is spiritual. When I answer the next question about hell and heaven this will become more clear.

Q3)- Does Baha’u’llah plays a role in rescuing us from condemnation?

Baha’u’llah and other Manifestations of God are Educators, Gardeners, Farmers (in fact one of the names of God is Alzare, means the one who cultivates). Although we can never comprehend God and He is beyond our imagination, know that these qualities refer to Manifestations of God. Their duty is to educate us and grow that perfect seed within us.

I won’t use the word “condemnation” at all, as God is Merciful and Compassionate. He wants us to reach to our outmost capacity and occupy the loftiest place. And His forgiveness is without border and bonds. Look at some of the writings below from The Hidden Words of Baha’u’llah:

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.

O Dwellers of My Paradise!

With the hands of loving-kindness I have planted in the holy garden of paradise the young tree of your love and friendship, and have watered it with the goodly showers of My tender grace; now that the hour of its fruiting is come, strive that it may be protected, and be not consumed with the flame of desire and passion.

So, Manifestations of God certainly have a big role in our lives, but with conditions that have been set out. As Baha’u’llah stated in Kitab Aqdas, it is not sufficient that we recognise God through His Manifestations but also we should follow and act on Their commandments.

At this point I draw your attention to the Hidden Words of Baha’u’llah below:

O Son of Spirit!

I created thee rich, why dost thou bring thyself down to poverty? Noble I made thee, wherewith dost thou abase thyself? Out of the essence of knowledge I gave thee being, why seekest thou enlightenment from anyone beside Me? Out of the clay of love I moulded thee, how dost thou busy thyself with another? Turn thy sight unto thyself, that thou mayest find Me standing within thee, mighty, powerful and self-subsisting.

Bahais believe in progressive nature of religion. It means that religion is not static rather in motion and not frozen in time. Based on Their mission each of these Manifestations of God at their Own time create a new life powered with Their words. Each time They reveal new things based on human capacity and understanding. Nothing is absolute but God - Even the word Absolute is inadequate to explain His station. Since we are not frozen in time when a new Manifestation comes we should accept Him/Her, based on His/Her character and His/Her revealed verses.

Once the "Word of Muhammad" was heaven, after He Manifested, and upon accepting His mission people would enter this heaven.

Q4)- Does the condemnation, the hell, last forever or is there a relief or rescue?

Baha'u'llah says:

"Where is Paradise, and where is Hell?' Say: 'The one is reunion with Me; the other thine own self."
Baha'u'llah (1988, p. 132)

Q5)- Does ones behaviour, now, prepare some better than others for paradise? In other words, are there levels of enjoyment in paradise?

Everything has its own level and degree. I again quote the word of Universal House of Justice (UHJ). *"One must remember that the purpose of this life is to prepare the soul for the next."* Our actions and developments in this life have consequences in another life in terms of preparing our soul. A baby develops in nine (9) months within the womb's of his/her mother. Most of the things he/she develops might seem useless in his/her sight while in womb but once entered this world he/she will recognise how useful those are. This is a simple example but we can deduce many facts from it.

The other world is not a material world, rather a spiritual state. Ponder how The Bab explains hell and heaven. He says that (I am paraphrasing) everything has its own heaven and hell. He further explains and says look at this stone. This stone has hell and heaven of its own. When this stone is worked on, it will manifest its true and highest quality, that would be the heaven of this stone. He says the paradise of a piece of paper is when this paper is designed with outmost beauty and written on it with outmost penmanship. Then this piece of paper reaches its own paradise.

This applies to us as well - when we manifest our innermost truth and when we reach our highest and loftiest place, this is when we have attained our paradise. So, you can see that based on The Bab theology, hell and heaven are conditions and not a particular place with angels etc..

The soul will progress according to its capacity. Some will attain higher places and some not. But within each sphere they will know about each other. It is like many Worlds of God wrapped over each other like onions but with unlimited spaces within each layer.

Q6)- Do we create our own hell, or does God create it?

It is important to know God has given us free Will and this is what distinguishes us from other creatures. Our will and actions become meaningful when it is for Him. That is, we see revelation/effulgence of God in everything - The word Kulu-Shay (All Things) in the Bab's Writings means this. God wants us to recognise our true values, capacity and sublimity. That is why He appointed His Educators (Manifestations of God) through the ages to educate us. He wants us to reach to our heaven which is our own perfection.