

## O B E D I E N C E

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May 1995

Through this window from these windows to the past we will examine the subject of obedience. Also, we will see, who do we obey, why should we obey, and how obedience, instead of binding with limitation, will lead us all to true liberty.

This talk was inspired from a speech by Judge James Nelson and many segments of it are directly quoted from The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh by Adib Taherzadeh.

In an attempt to cover the subject adequately it was decided to address it in the following order:

- The Most Great Infallibility, authority and knowledge of Bahá'u'lláh,
- Obedience to Bahá'u'lláh,
- The Covenant of God with humanity,
- Finally the paradox of law being the instrument of liberation and not limitation.

Before talking about the sensitive issue of obedience, let us use the vantage point of this window and view a revealing and remarkable garden laid open before us. In this very vast and lush garden, every beauty and pleasure is available and every desire and appetite could be satisfied. Your imagination can draw the picture.

On the far end of this garden is heaven which is the object and the goal. Imagine two people are standing at the entrance gate. This garden, though breathtaking, is not free of dangers. There are traps of self and ego, vicious serpents of vice, thorny paths of pride and passion, and minefields of lust and desire. Then there are those animals in the thick of the lush and tall grass. Some are tamed and could safely be touched but some are the entertaining animals of backbiting or drugs which will tear you apart and devour your body and soul. Let us not forget that evil one, the creeping monster of alcohol.

It sounds challenging and interesting, but rather scary.

One onlooker is anxious and can't wait to charge in and satisfy his sensuality with every pleasure in sight. The only warning for him is a sign posted at the gate which states: BEWARE / PITFALLS. He is lucky if he could see or read the sign. The other person has a map indicating all the danger zones, traps and pitfalls. Better yet he has faith and trust in the map-maker. Which one has true liberty and feels free? Which one would you rather be?

Well, Friends! The garden of life with all its pleasures and challenges is ours. The choices are ours. We can feel free to go charging through and hope for the best or use the guide map, trusting its Divine Author.

This is a good time to talk about the authority, infallibility and knowledge of the Divine Author, Bahá'u'lláh.

In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh declares the doctrine of the Most Great Infallibility of the Manifestations of God and that no one else can possess it. It is the inherent characteristic of the Manifestation of God, the same way that light and heat are inherent to the sun. The reason that His power is hidden behind the veil of His human temple is that if His naked glory were to be openly revealed, all human beings would instantly recognize Him and by so doing they would lose their free will and become puppets of God. However, Bahá'u'lláh at times revealed a measure of His hidden glory to those who had recognized Him for further certitude and confirmation. There are many stories.

Just one story at this time will suffice.

When the Hand of the Cause and the silver-tongued poet 'Alí-Muhammad Varqá who eventually with his 12 year old son Rúhu'lláh, drank the cup of martyrdom, attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh for the first time in 'Ákká, he found Bahá'u'lláh's face very familiar, as if he had seen Him before. He was losing sleep trying to remember where he had seen Him. In a market place? In the believers' gatherings? He could not remember until after several times

in His presence, Bahá'u'lláh told him, " Varqá, burn away the idols of vain imagining." All of a sudden he remembered his childhood dream. As a child he saw in his dream that he was playing in the courtyard with some dolls when God appeared to him and took his dolls and burned them in a fire. When he woke up, he told his parents about his dream. He was told that no one could ever see God and he must not repeat it, so he forgot all about it.

Yes, that was when he had seen the face of Bahá'u'lláh. Imagine, that was 15 or 20 years earlier when Bahá'u'lláh was in Baghhdád. He appeared in that child's dream, and infused in him such a potentiality that later on made him an Apostle of Bahá'u'lláh and a Hand of the Cause.

Another day when at the presence of Bahá'u'lláh in adoration, a thought occurred to him that of course he recognized Bahá'u'lláh as the Supreme Manifestation, but how grateful he would be if Bahá'u'lláh in the course of His conversation would show him a sign. At that moment, like a flash a sentence from the Qur'an came to his mind. So, his wish was that if Bahá'u'lláh in the course of His conversation would mention that verse. It did not take too long before Bahá'u'lláh mentioned the very same verse. Now listen to this. Varqá was delighted. He was overjoyed but told himself that it may have been a mere coincidence. Abruptly, Bahá'u'lláh turned to him and said, " Ínham káfi nabúd " meaning " Wasn't this sufficient proof to you? " He was dumbfounded, was shaken but assured. No wonder later on, he begged Bahá'u'lláh that he and one of his sons could be accepted as a sacrifice for 'Abdu'l-Bahá when he heard Bahá'u'lláh praising the station

of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. With this glance at the hidden glory of Bahá'u'lláh, he reached the pinnacle of faith and certitude which is difficult for many of us to comprehend.

One believer, Áqá Ridá-i-Sa'ádatí, stated that in the gathering of friends if Bahá'u'lláh turned his face to a believer, that person was unable to gaze upon His countenance. (Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, Vol III, p.303)

Therefore, Bahá'u'llah used to look to the right side of the person as he spoke, so the friends might find it easier to look at His face, and if He ever turned His face towards the friends, He would close His eyes and speak.

I can tell you the story of Ismá'il, who looked into Bahá'u'lláh's eyes and saw one hundred thousand sunlight and billowing seas surging upon His countenance. Later, he ended his own life because he had seen a glimpse of the glory of Bahá'u'lláh, and could no longer bear the burden of this life. I wish there was time to tell you in detail.

There are many passages in His Writings about His exalted station; that He is the Supreme Manifestation and the Inaugurator of the Day of God.

Siyid Mihdí Isfahání, an influential person, became a Bahá'í. He corrected many of his bad habits and shortcomings, as all of us try to, but could not overcome his addiction to alcohol. When the believers would smell alcohol on his breath, he would say in defense, " This addiction is very strong. I do it in the privacy of my home and harm no else. Besides, I am too lowly

a servant for Bahá'u'lláh to be concerned about my private life. " Don't many of us think the same way? Finally he was permitted to go for pilgrimage. One day as he and other believers were in the presence of Bahá'u'lláh while Bahá'u'lláh was pacing back and forth, a thought occurred to Siyyid Mihdí that it is true that Bahá'u'lláh is a great prophet, but he wondered what He meant when He stated, "I am the Sender of the Messengers and the Revealer of the Books ?" He had not finished his thought when Bahá'u'lláh walked to him, put His blessed hand on his should and said, " Siyyid<sup>Mihdí</sup>, it is true, We are the Sender of the Messengers and the Revealer of the heavenly Books. " With this he became transformed and accepted Bahá'u'lláh with every fiber of his being. Upon his return, no more smell of alcohol on his breath, and upon inquiry, he told the friends that if Bahá'u'lláh could read his mind, surely He could see his actions. He indeed is Omnipresent and Omniscient.

While Bahá'u'lláh dealt with the believers with kindness and mercy, He did not respond positively to those who did not believe in Him yet demanded a miracle. He dealt with sovereigns and religious leaders with authority. In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas revealed while a prisoner in confines of a small room, He addressed the kings in a language ringing with authority. He states, " O kings of earth! He Who is the sovereign Lord of all is come. The Kingdom is God's... Ye are but vassals, O kings of the earth! He Who is the King of Kings hath appeared, arrayed in His most wondrous glory, and is summoning you unto Himself, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting. " (Kitáb-i-Aqdas, para. 78, 82)

His warning to all religious leaders in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas starts with "Say: O leaders of religion! Weigh not the Book of God with such standards and sciences as are current amongst you, for the Book itself is the unerring Balance established amongst men..." (Kitáb-i-Aqdas, para. 99)

Concerning His ever-present, supernatural knowledge, Bahá'u'lláh addressing Nabil-i-Akbar in the Tablet of Wisdom or Lawh-i-Hikmat reveals the following words "...whenever We desire to quote the saying of the learned and the wise, presently there will appear before the face of thy Lord in the form of a tablet all that which hath appeared in the world and is revealed in the Holy Books and Scriptures. Thus do We set down in writing that which the eye perceiveth. Verily, His knowledge encompasseth the earth and the heavens. This is a Tablet wherein the Pen of the Unseen hath inscribed the knowledge of all that hath been and shall be - a knowledge that none other but my wondrous tongue can interpret. "

No wonder He could reveal the Kitáb-i-Íqán or the Book of Certitude containing over 200 pages within the span of 48 hours without a single reference book.

Now that we trust Bahá'u'lláh's knowledge, wisdom and authority, obedience should follow, but we often confuse the two subjects of obedience and freedom.

Many think that freedom means freedom to disobey or go rampant while Bahá'u'lláh states that this kind of freedom belongs to the animal kingdom. He states in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas " Liberty must, in the end, lead to sedition, whose flames none can quench. Thus warneth you He Who is the Reckoner, the

All Knowing. Know ye that the embodiment of liberty and its symbol is the animal. That which beseemeth man is submission unto such restraints as will protect him from his own ignorance and guard him against the harm of the mischief maker. Liberty causeth man to overstep the bounds of propriety, and to infringe on the dignity of his station. It debaseth him to the level of extreme depravity and wickedness. "

# Who do we obey and where does it stop? The county, state or federal laws? How about Bahá'í laws? All constituted civil laws must be obeyed. You know why? Because Bahá'u'lláh has abolished and forbidden anarchy. He states, " What mankind needeth in this day is obedience unto them that are in authority, and a faithful adherence to the cord of wisdom. The instruments which are essential to the immediate protection, the security and assurance of human race have been entrusted to the hands, and lie in the grasp, of the governors of human society. This is the wish of God and His decree."

(Gleanings, p. 207)

Is there a place that Bahá'u'lláh sanctions disobedience? Yes, there is. The only law which Bahá'ís are required to disobey is wherever they are commanded to recant their Faith, meaning to say " I am not a Bahá'í. "

In this regard, the Universal House of Justice states "...Bahá'ís must live the Bahá'í life, fully and continuously, unless prevented by the authorities. If local, state, or federal authorities actively prohibit Bahá'í life or some aspect of it, the Bahá'ís must submit to these requirements in all cases except where a spiritual principle is involved, such as denial of faith. This, Bahá'ís cannot do under any circumstances. " (Lights of Guidance, 1983, p. 336)

Unfortunately, the believers in Iran have had and still face this cruel requirement, but as Bahá'u'lláh describes them, they would rather lay down a thousand lives than breathe the word desired by their enemies.

We have to become so conscious about obeying our civil laws that we will shine in this society. We must act and live with such integrity that the world notices the transforming power of the words of Bahá'u'lláh.

As for obeying Bahá'í laws, Shoghi Effendi knowing that the Persian believers had been brought up in a society where the significance of religious laws were understood, directed the Spiritual Assemblies to begin to enforce some of the laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. He urged them not to compromise and to uphold the standard of justice and impartiality.

Up to now, only a few laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas have been given to the Western World. Although parts of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas were accessible in the translations by Shoghi Effendi, the first formal exposure of the Western World to the Kitáb-i-Aqdas was the release of the Synopsis and Codification of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas in 1973, one hundred years after its revelation by Bahá'u'lláh. The translation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas into English which became available in 1993, has opened the door for its translation into all other languages except Persian. As you know, originally the Kitáb-i-Aqdas was revealed in Arabic.

Having the translation does not mean that all of the laws are mandatory to the Western believers. Only as the Western believers mature and at the discretion of the Universal House of Justice, more laws will become applicable. Of course, it does not mean that we are prohibited from obeying some laws, such as saying Alláh-u-Abhá 95 times daily.

About obedience to Bahá'u'lláh, at the opening paragraph of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, He states that the first duty of every one is recognition of Himself as the Manifestation of God for today and the second duty is to obey His laws. These two are inseparable and one is not accepted without the other. That is why Bahá'u'lláh has attached such significance to one of the principles of His faith, namely independent investigation of truth. So first we have to recognize His station and then as He also states in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, obey His laws for the love of Him. Therefore we do not obey His laws because of the fear of punishment or for reward in heaven. You know, attachment to reward for our good deeds and obedience is one of the three attachments we must detach ourselves from. The other one is attachment to self and ego which is the worst, and the last one is attachment to the Kingdom of Names, meaning feeling superior or boasting about acquiring various attributes of God, such as generosity, kindness, justice and many others.

The fact that Bahá'u'lláh does not accept recognition of His station alone without obedience to His laws is unique in the Bahá'í Faith. Some Christian sects claim that belief alone is sufficient for salvation.

First we have to know Him, then with trust and love for Him, we obey Him. When He states read His writings twice a day, we must do it. This and the obligatory prayer are the major keys to let Bahá'u'lláh get close to us. Doesn't He state in The Hidden Words, " O Son 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. " The more we read, the more we know and love Him. The more we love Him, the more we obey and so on. This could be called a righteous cycle. The vicious cycle is not obeying and gradually drifting away, and I tell you, those who have become believers and then allow something or someone rob them of their love for Bahá'u'lláh are in deep trouble.

You might say, Well, this is blind obedience which I and my ancestors have abhorred and is against my individual rights. With spiritual decline of today and abuse of power by corrupt authorities and leaders, you have many sympathizers who look upon the word obedience with suspicion and fear. Upon hearing that word, dictatorship, blind acceptance and religious fanaticism come to their mind. Such fears are well understood and are justifiable. Look at the recent events and abuse by false prophets and corrupt leaders. The voice of religious leaders which in the past inspired people is now heard mostly with indifference or hostility. The reason is that with the coming of Bahá'u'lláh, religious leaders have become fallen stars. Listen to His momentous prophecy while these leaders were at the peak of power and authority, and He was just a prisoner, " From two ranks amongst men power hath been seized: kings and ecclesiastics. "

In Bahá'u'lláh's messages to Christian leaders, He declared "Ye are the stars of the heaven of My knowledge. My mercy desireth not that ye should fall upon the earth. " "When I came unto them, in My majesty, however, they turned aside from Me. They, verily, are of the fallen." (Promised Day is Come, p. 19, 105)

As one studies human behavior, one sees that people wholeheartedly obey any person or institution when it seems to be in their self-interest to do so. The same person who rebels against blind obedience follows the highway signs to get to his destination or a patient who trusts his physician, follows his advice even if it is amputation of a limb to save his life. Likewise, Bahá'ís do not advocate blind obedience, but as we meditate on the all-encompassing scope of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh and attain more mature understanding, we can then see clearly that it is in our self-interest to obey His laws. As in the garden analogy at the start of this presentation, we recognize Bahá'u'lláh's knowing the path and showing us the way. We cannot recognize and accept Him as the skilled Divine Physician for mankind and neglect or ignore His prescription. When He says twice a day reading of His verses, that is it. Just do it. It does you good and the effect is guaranteed. /

Now let us discuss the covenant of God with us. Mankind physically is an animal and bound by the laws of nature, but is also a spiritual being and therefore bound to the Covenant of God with him.

In every covenant there are two parties involved. The mere act of creation brings about the Covenant of God with each individual which has two sides.

God on His part creates us in His own image which means bestowing upon us the capacity to reflect His attributes. He provides us with our physical needs in this life and sends His Messengers to guide us so we may grow closer to God.

The part that we, who have free will, have to play in this covenant is to be conscious of these bounties, to recognize His Manifestations as Divine Teachers and abide by His teachings and laws.

The covenant of God is similar to the terms which a school principal lays down for the students. The moment a child walks into a school, he, without knowing it, enters into a covenant with the principal. Again, this covenant has two sides. The principal provides the educational needs, appoints the teachers and draws up a program. The part that the child plays is to learn the lessons and follow the instructions. Only in this way he acquires knowledge.

The terms of this covenant are drawn up by the principal and the child has no say in it. The principal is strong, knowledgeable and wise.

The purpose of doing our part of the Covenant with God is to become a spiritual being and acquire eternal life. In view of past discussion, we acknowledge the authority, knowledge and wisdom of Bahá'u'lláh; therefore we will observe His commandments for love of His beauty.

Now a few words about reward and punishment. In Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd, which is one of the supplementary tablets to the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh states, " The structure of world stability and order hath been reared upon, and will continue to be sustained by the twin pillars of reward and punishment. "

He has authorized the House of Justice to legislate new laws and modify the punishments He has set for certain crimes such as arson and murder.

Bahá'u'lláh in the same tablet states, " Justice hath a mighty force at its command. It is none other than reward and punishment for the deeds of men. By the power of this force, the tabernacle of order is established throughout the world..."

In the present-day society, justice is not served. The tendency is towards leniency, reduction of sentence, and to try to direct the blame on the society. As we witness, violence and crime have increased at alarming rate. The teachings of Bahá'u'lláh advocate the opposite attitude. Many people today could disagree with Bahá'u'lláh's teaching in this regard. They would rather advocate leniency and forgiveness instead of punishment, because they are mainly concerned about this physical life and are not taking into account the eternal, spiritual life.

To demonstrate the benefits to the soul when a person receives his punishment in this life, Bahá'u'lláh gives the following example. If a man steals the seed of a plant from someone in springtime and returns it soon, he does not owe the owner anything more, but if he waits until summer, he owes the owner a plant with its fruits. Similarly, the burden of sin is much lighter if the sinner receives his punishment in this life.

As for kindness and forgiving an act of crime, the following story will shed some light on the subject. Lawḥ-i-Dunyá (The Tablet of the World) was revealed in honor of Áqá Mirzá Áqá-i-Afnán, titled Núrid'-Dín.

This tablet was revealed after nine days that the pen of Bahá'u'lláh had been stilled due to the martyrdom of seven believers in Yazd in 1891, one

year before His ascension. In that tablet, He stated that He was so overjoyed and grateful to God that His exhortations have had such effect on His followers that the believers interceded on behalf of their enemies. To appreciate this statement, the following explanation will help.

In those days, lived the generation of believers who were previously Bábís and following Islámic tradition used to draw their swords in their defense. Such a transformation, to be martyred without defense and then the relatives interceding on behalf of the murderers is worthy of appreciation.

The story behind this statement is as follows:

Hájí Muḥammad Riḍá attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh in 'Akká.

He begged Bahá'u'lláh to accept him as a martyr. Bahá'u'lláh told him it was not necessary as many souls already had sacrificed their lives, but he was very insistent and to his second request, Bahá'u'lláh remained silent. Hájí took His silence as a sign of consent. Later he asked Bahá'u'lláh to assign him to go to a city. Bahá'u'lláh told him to go to 'Ishqábád.

On July 1, 1889, Hájí had invited all believers of 'Ishqábád to a feast.

On that day, he received a tablet from Bahá'u'lláh honoring and blessing him for his services and assured him that his deeds were manifest before Him. In that tablet, He states that a great upheaval has occurred in that city and described it as an attack of a serpent on a believer who is the recipient of the bounties of his Lord.

This tablet was read to the friends gathered in that feast. Mirzá Abu'l-Faḍl who was present explained that since Bahá'u'lláh used the past tense, it was an absolute and inevitable. Hájí Muḥammad-Riḍá got up and said he believed that he was the one whose martyrdom Bahá'u'lláh foretold.

'Ishqábád was a new city in Russian Turkamanistán close to the border of Iran.

Many persecuted Bahá'ís found it peaceful, but the progress of the Faith aggravated the Muslims in that city, who plotted the assassination of a number of prominent believers. About five weeks after the day that the tablet was read, two Muslims attacked Hájí in the marketplace with daggers and stabbed him 32 times amidst great jubilation of the crowd who watched. They were seen to lick their daggers. Russian police came and took them into custody. On discovering the plots, the believers sent a petition to the government which investigated, and after trial sentenced the two murderers to be killed by hanging and the rest of the plotters to life in Siberia. This was unusual for Muslims who used to be rewarded by Persian authorities for killing Bahá'ís. The family of the murderers and prominent Muslim merchants begged the believers for intercession. A gathering of prominent believers was called and after consultation they told the government their request for reduction of the sentence. This was kept a secret by the government. The day of the execution arrived. The gallows were erected and the graves were dug. The prisoners were led to the scaffolds. When the moment came, the official of the government announced that because of intercession of the honorable Bahá'ís, the sentence was reduced to life in Siberia. This was the act that pleased Bahá'u'lláh and He called it a princely act because the believers obeyed His injunction against the use of sword in retaliation. However, it should be understood that Bahá'ís do not advocate leniency and reduction of punishment for crime. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has made it clear that the victims have no right to forgive the punishment for a crime since suffering from the punishment is negligible compared to the benefits for the protection of society. (Paris Talks, p. 154)

And now the paradox of law as the instrument of liberation.

In this Dispensation, Bahá'u'lláh has changed the meaning of law.

The dictionary describes law as rule of conduct enforced by a controlling authority. Bahá'u'lláh in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas states, " Think not that We have revealed unto you a mere code of laws. Nay, rather, We have unsealed the Choice Wine with the fingers of might and power. "

We might superficially consider this verse as poetic and beautiful but neglect the metaphor. With this sentence, Bahá'u'lláh has opened a new phase in the spiritual evolution and moral transformation of mankind.

What does the Choice Wine have to do with law? In Islám and the Bahá'í Faith drinking of wine is forbidden. Obviously, the metaphor gives the spiritual analogy of a good and strong wine. Instead of binding with limitation the one who drinks it, it eliminates inhibition and gives the feeling of liberation. Similarly, the Choice Wine of Bahá'u'lláh's laws will free and liberate those who obey them.

With transformation of human nature, Bahá'u'lláh's laws will become a part of our conscience, freeing us from our baser nature.

You see, motivation for avoiding wrong-doing and crime is based on spiritual strength and moral value. Protection is built from within and not by erecting walls outside. This is a novel concept of law as the instrument of liberation.

The primary agent for enforcement of Bahá'u'lláh's laws is not fear, but the love of His beauty. And if there is fear, it is not the fear of fire of hell as taught in some other religions, but the fear of displeasing the One we love.

p. 18      OBEDIENCE

In every civilized country there are bounds of constitutional law.

To overstep such bounds brings anarchy. Bahá'u'lláh offers His laws and ordinances which provide ample liberty within its framework.

Friends, as was said at the beginning, the garden of life is ours,  
let us choose <sup>& obey</sup> the Divine Guide.

end.