

Psychology

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PSYCHOLOGY AND KNOWLEDGE OF SELF

23 October 1994

Dear Baha'i Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has received your letters dated 9 and 15 March 1994 and was saddened to learn of the severe traumas you have experienced and from which you are still recovering.

You indicate your desire to form a support network for survivors of satanic ritual abuse and you propose to share healing techniques, stories and extracts from the Writings which would assist and encourage these afflicted souls.

Understandably, contacting others who have undergone such abuse may be difficult. We do not know of anyone else who might be interested, as the letters from and yourself are the only ones on this topic that we have been able to locate in the files at the Baha'i World centre.

Regarding your question about methods of healing which involve temporarily re-experiencing or remembering events, these are complex medical matters and as stipulated in the Teachings, believers should seek the best medical advice which is available and follow it. Experience seems to suggest that the healing process can often be a lengthy and stressful one requiring the close guidance and help of trained professionals. Advice given by well-meaning believers to the effect that you should seek to transcend psychological problems does not qualify as competent advice on what is essentially a medical issue.

For your information and possible study, we are enclosing a copy of a compilation prepared at the Baha'i World Centre entitled "Psychology and Knowledge of Self".

Concerning the attitude of some Baha'is, who seem at times to be insensitive and unsupportive, all we can do is to try to follow the patient example of the Master, bearing in mind that each believer is but one of the servants of the Almighty who must strive to learn and grow. The absence of spiritual qualities, like darkness, has no existence in itself. As the light of spirituality penetrates deep into the hearts, this darkness gradually dissipates and is replaced by virtue. Understanding this, and that the believers are encouraged to be loving and patient with one another, it will be clear that you too are called upon to exercise patience with the friends who demonstrate immaturity, and to have faith that the power of the Word of God will gradually effect a transformation in individual believers and in the Baha'i community as a whole. You have asked what to do since psychological problems sometimes make it difficult for you to participate in community events and Assembly meetings. In striving to follow the Teachings and the best medical advice you can obtain, you will want to remember that the healing you do now is an investment that will enable you to better serve in the future. Ideally, you would combine concentrating on healing with avenues of service which do not interfere with it.

You have raised a number of important personal matters in your letter: a) an investigation, presumably by the police, into cult activities and a request from them for your assistance with their research; b) the possibility of investigating the degree of current involvement of your extended family in cult activities, and the possibility of re-establishing relations with your parents, noting that medical professionals have advised you against doing so; c) your intention to work in the area of ritual abuse by doing research, teaching and counselling, and your feeling that it might be better to work in a less controversial area. It is really not possible for the House of Justice to advise you from a distance, without being fully informed of the context and all of the relevant details. The House of Justice advises you to exercise discretion and wisdom in each of these matters, and to consult in a thoughtful and thorough manner with your Assembly and/or with wise and well-informed individuals in whose judgement you have confidence. The House of Justice hopes that your decisions will create for you opportunities to render great services with a joyful and radiant heart. At this time, you may wish to contact your National Assembly with an offer to act as a resource person for individuals recovering from traumatic experiences similar to your own.

You have asked about the need "to make amends for transgressions of a personal nature". As you know, each individual must resolve his own tests according to the promptings of his conscience. However, it sometimes happens that negative feelings about oneself become an obstacle to successfully passing one's spiritual tests by making it difficult to believe in one's own nobility. To this effect, Baha'u'llah assures us:

"Veiled in My immemorial being and in the ancient eternity of My essence, I knew My love for thee; therefore I created thee, have engraved on thee Mine image and revealed to thee My beauty."

You are encouraged to continue to keep in mind the spiritual dimension of your struggles. We are assured by 'Abdu'l-Baha in the following words:

"The more difficulties one sees in the world the more perfect one becomes. The more you plough and dig the ground the more fertile it becomes. The more you cut the branches of a tree the higher and stronger it grows. The more you put the gold in the fire, the purer it becomes. The more you sharpen the steel by grinding the better it cuts. Therefore, the more sorrows one sees the more perfect one becomes. That is why, in all times, the Prophets of God have had tribulations and difficulties to withstand. The more often the captain of a ship is in the tempest and difficult sailing the more greater his knowledge becomes. Therefore I am happy that you have had great tribulations and difficulties... Strange it is that I love you and still I am happy that you have sorrows." ('Abdu'l-Baha, Star of the West, vol. XIV, no. 2, p. 41)

"Tests are benefits from God, for which we should thank Him. Grief and sorrow do not come to us by chance, they are sent to us by the Divine Mercy for our own perfecting." (Paris Talks: Addresses given by 'Abdu'l-Baha in Paris in 1911-1912 (London: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1979) p. 50)

Clearly, the difficult periods in our lives are not without purpose. Among other things, they offer us a prime opportunity to express our love for Baha'u'llah in a meaningful way. It is relatively easy to be a believer when

one is not challenged, when one is happy. However, in times of adversity, we must draw upon our inner, spiritual resources.

The Writings provide some guidance as to how we might nurture our spirits during such times:

"Remember My days during thy days, and My distress and banishment in this remote prison..." (Baha'i Prayers: A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Baha'u'llah, the Bab and 'Abdu'l-Baha, p. 211)

"In times of disappointment, stress and anxiety, which we must inevitably encounter, we should remember the sufferings of our departed Master." (From a letter written by Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 9 July 1926)

In view of these passages, you may wish to focus some of your reading and meditations on the lives and sufferings of the Central Figures of the Faith. Similarly, we are assured by the Guardian that the Tablet of Ahmad, the Healing Prayer and the Fire Tablet each have a special potency, and you will doubtless wish to avail yourself of them, if you are not already doing so. It is interesting to note as well that Shoghi Effendi encouraged the believers to study the Dawn-Breakers, which he described as an "unfailing instrument to allay distress". In a letter dated 20 July 1933 written on his behalf, he outlined a method by which the individual might approach this task: He wishes you to read it with deepest care and to picture for yourself the wonderful scenes of heroism, of devotion and of self-sacrifice so vividly expressed by Nabil in his immortal narrative.

As well, you may wish to reflect on the following statement from a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer who was experiencing difficulties in his personal life:

"We must not only be patient with others, infinitely patient, but also with our own poor selves, remembering that even the Prophets of God sometimes got tired and cried out in despair!..."

"He urges you to persevere and add up your accomplishments, rather than to dwell on the dark side of things. Everyone's life has both a dark and bright side. The Master says: turn your back to the darkness and your face to Me." (From a letter dated 22 October 1949 written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer)

Be assured that, as you have requested, the House of Justice will offer ardent prayers in the Holy Shrines for you and for your parents.

With loving Baha'i greetings,
For Department of the Secretariat

[THE COMPILATION ATTACHED TO THIS LETTER IS IN THE COMPILATIONS SECTION OF ARCHIVE UNDER "PSYCHOLOGY AND KNOWLEDGE OF SELF".]