Hidden Words of Baha'u'llah: A Reflection

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all the ages—the Love of God and Man, of the Creator and His creature. Its theme is God's faithfulness and the unfaithfulness of Man. It tells of the Great Beloved Who separates from Himself His creatures that through the power of the Spirit breathed in them they may of their own will find their way to that reunion with Him which is their paradise and their eternal home. It tells how they turned away to phantoms of their own devising, how He ever with unwearying love sought them and would not leave them to the ruin they invoked but called them back that they might enter yet the unshut gates of heaven. Only the final event of the love-story is lacking. God calls, and when His utterance is complete He pauses that man may answer, and waits—listening.

Love is the cause of creation: it is the Beginning, the End and the Way. God, as yet a Hidden Treasure, knew His love for man, drew him out of the wastes of nothingness, printed on him His Own image and revealed to him His beauty. Apart from God man has nothing and is nothing; but in union with God he possesses all things. God ordained for his training every atom in the universe and the essence of all created things. He is the dominion of God and will not perish: the light of God which will never be put out; the glory of God which fades not, the robe of God which wears not out. Wrought out of the clay of love and of the essence of knowledge he is created rich and noble. He is indeed the lamp of God, and the Light of Lights is in him. He is God's stronghold and God's love is in him. His heart is God's home; his spirit the place of God's revelation. Would he sanctify his soul, he could look back beyond the gates of birth and recall the eternal command and antenatal covenant of God. Would he but look within himself, he would see there God standing powerful, mighty and supreme.

Alas! in the proud illusion of his separateness, man has forgotten whence he came, and what he is, and whither he moves. He has turned away from his True Beloved and given his heart to a stranger and an enemy. Bound fast in the prison of self, dreading that death which might be to him the messenger of joy, he has rejected the immortal wine of wisdom for the poor dregs of an earthly cup and has given up eternal dominion that he might revel for an hour in the lordship of a passing world.

So blinded by arrogance and rebellion have mankind become that they live well content amid these sterile imaginings. They are no longer able to tell Truth from error nor to recognize it when it stands before them in naked purity. Though they enter the presence of the All-Glorious; though the Manifestation of Him Whom they affect to seek is before them and the Face of the Mighty One in all its beauty looks into their face, yet are they blind and see not. Their eyes behold not their Beloved; their hands touch not the hem of His robe. Though every utterance of His contains a thousand and a thousand mysteries, none understands, none heeds. He made the human heart to be His dwelling place; but it is given to another. Among His own on earth He is homeless. Nay more, His own heap on him persecutions. The dove of holiness is imprisoned in the claws of owls. The everlasting candle is beset by the blasts of earth. The world's darkness gathers about the Celestial Youth. The

people of tyranny wrong Love's King of Kings. The angels weep at the spectacle; lamentations fill the heaven of heavens; but men glory in their shame and esteem their impiety a sign of their loyalty to God's cause.

In His mercy and compassion, God leaves them not to self-destruction. Sternly but lovingly He upbraids them, He warns them. He summons them from the couch of heedlessness to the field of endeavor and heroic adventure. He demands of them a faith and courage that will dare the utmost in His service, a fortitude that will endure serenely every calamity, a devotion that will rejoice in tribulation and in death itself for the Beloved's sake.

He gives them counsel upon counsel. With definiteness and force He shows what God expects of His lovers. The toils and perils of the Homeward Way are many and grievous; but true love will overcome them all and be grateful for afflictions through which it can prove its strength. None can set out upon this journey unless his heart is single and his affections are centered without reserve on God. If he would see God's beauty he must be blind to all other beauty. If he would hear God's word, he must stop his ear to all else. If he would attain to the knowledge of God he must put aside all other learning. If he would love God he will turn away from himself; if he would seek God's pleasure he will forget his own. So complete will be his devotion that he will yield up all for the dear sake of God and welcome with longing the martyr's death.

Earth has a thousand ties to bind man from their God: envy, pride, indolence, ambition, covetousness, the habit of detraction, the ascription to others of what one would not like to have ascribed to oneself. Against such things as these He warns all who wish to reach the bourne of Love, bids them keep ever before them the rule of Justice ("the best beloved of all things in God's sight"), and every day to bring themselves to account ere the opportunities given here on earth are snatched from them for ever by the hand of death.

He reminds them of the treasures He has laid up for those who are faithful to the end. Upon the sacred tree of glory He has hung the fairest fruits and has prepared everlasting rest in the garden of eternal delight. Sweet is that holy ecstasy, glorious that domain. Imperishable sovereignty awaits them there, and in the joy of reunion they will mirror forth the beauty of God Himself and become the revelation of His immortal splendor.

Now in this age, He declares, yet greater rewards and ampler powers are vouchsafed to mankind than in times gone by. God's favor is complete, His proof manifest, His evidence established. He has opened in the heavenly heights a new garden, a new degree of nearness to God. Whoso attains thereto, for him the flowers of that garden will breathe the sweet mysteries of love, for him its fruits will yield the secrets of divine and consummate wisdom.

Yet even in this great day of revelation the fulness of God's ultimate being has not been uttered. So much has been said as the will of the Most High permits: and no more. What has been set forth is measured by man's capacity

to understand it. God's true estate and the sweetness of His voice remain undivulged.

How strange and pitiful that in the East the warmth of heart and breadth of mind of him who wrote this little book should have brought on him the relentless hate of the priests of his land. Born the heir of an ancient and noble family of Persia and endowed with vast wealth, he was through priestly envy deprived of all his possessions, driven into exile, chained, tortured and at last consigned to a life-imprisonment in the city of 'Akká, a gaol reserved for the lowest criminals of the Ottoman Empire and reputed so pestilential that the birds of the air fell dead as they flew over it.

Strange, too, that this devotional volume, so beautiful in its thought and also (it is said) in the classic purity of its style, should never have drawn to itself the attention of an English scholar and should remain after seventy years unknown to the religion and the culture of the West.

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