

attain and enter the City of Certitude." (KI 197)

It seems to me, maybe, that entry into the City of God is not an event but a process. Tearing free of the physical world, becoming a soul equipped with a body instead of a body with an obscure soul, takes, for some of us, a lot of time and effort. We recognize the godly attributes and practice them. We discover, (one by one, fortunately) our fears and resolve them. It is a matter of giving up our own will for God's will; "... arise to the station of sacrifice ...sacrifice his own station for those of God." (BWF 384) This change is rebirth. (KI 156) Perhaps every step is a new world, a rebirth.

It seems to me we have to know about the physical world to extract ourselves from it. It has a firm grip on us. Just under our skins, ready to leap into action, are the almost reflexive responses necessary to keep us alive in a dog-eat-dog world. Fight, flight and attraction to that which promotes physical life (feeling good, food, reproduction, etc.). All of the misery on earth comes from these once valuable drives. "This matter of the struggle for existence is the fountain-head of all calamities and is the supreme affliction." (SWA 302)

What are these impeding attachments from which we must free ourselves? What causes our misery; what is Satan (KI 257); what is perdition? The things of the animal world, the world without faith, from which we are all coming. Life is faith, death is unbelief (KI 114). The world of nature is breakable. All in it, including our bodies, will be recycled. If we want them to endure, if we depend upon them, we are assured disappointment, loss and misery.

It is a world of survival of the fittest, death of the weak, and all of us weaken as we age. One hundred percent loss, one way or another. At base the impeding attachment is the fear of death, loss, annihilation manifest myriad ways: embarrassment, idle talk(escape) , vain imaginings (fantasy), worldly affections, attachment to things that perish (KI 3); regarding the words and deeds of humans (KI 4); heedlessness and doubt (KI 6); envy ("the heart wherein the least remnant of envy yet lingers, shall never inhale the sweet savors of holiness breathing from My kingdom." (PHW 6), rebellion (KI 10); petty misunderstandings, arrogance, pride, remoteness, following leaders, attitude of opposition, desire to ignore the truth,(KI 13-14); preconceived, unchallenged beliefs, limited understanding; lust of leadership, want of knowledge (KI 15), anger (PUP 89), fear, anxiety, greed (AHW 56), being offended (PUP 448- 49), uncertainty, etc..

We sense impeding attachments with feelings of hesitation, uneasiness, wariness, dread, worry, fear; terror; depression, sadness, anger - any unpleasant feeling warns of an attachment. There are many. An idle fancy (which I think means an incorrect belief or fruitless fantasy), an incorrect teaching of leaders, for example: "God is good and He will burn you in hell forever if you don't believe in Him." They add, "If you doubt

me that is the Devil influencing you." God is good and He's a sadist? The person who has based his religious belief framework on this dares not use his faculty for reason. It is too frightening. It will take a lot of loving patience to help this person even begin to use his own mind. Much of the violence in the world rises out of this terrible, blasphemous concept.

Another example of the destructive power of preconceived ideas is the belief in hell and the immediate terror that it arouses in the mind of someone taught a vivid and horrid envisionment of hell or satan. Fear and love cannot live in the same heart (SVFV 58). Where fear is present, the anticipation (love) that the Writings elicit and the logic that they require are shut off, thereby stalling search. An example is a statement such as, "fall into nethermost fire." (KI 194) In the Faith, nethermost fire is unbelief - the condition that most people are now living in.

The way to avoid nethermost fire, to maintain faith, is to study (reflect and meditate upon, internalize) and then live the truths in the Writings. This requires logical and loving thought and behavior. The loving soul, were it the will of God, would actually chose nethermost fire for himself instead of for someone else. Without fear, the outcome of such a statement is to teach the Faith more vigorously and to study and pray for steadfast faith, that is, firmness in the Covenant.

Study is necessary because any belief that does not have a solid framework of logical conclusions supporting it will fall when stressed. "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 ..." (KA 73) "The prime requisite is the eagerness and love of sanctified souls to read the Word of God. (It is the love that allows us to understand the hidden language and causes us to want to live, to come at one with the Writings) To read one verse, or even one word, in a spirit of joy and radiance, is preferable to the perusal of many Books. (KA 126-127)

Fear is an attribute of the world of nature. Certitude is an attribute of God. Obedient effort is the bridge. "And if he feareth not God, God will make him to fear all things; whereas all things fear him who feareth God."(36) (SVFV 58)

"You ask him about the fear of God: perhaps the friends do not realize that the majority of human beings need the element of fear in order to discipline their conduct? Only a relatively very highly evolved soul would always be disciplined by love alone. (LG239) The fear of God, perhaps, means fear of the logical outcome of disobeying Him. There is always a negative outcome - why else would He have made a law? If He says, "Thou shalt not walk off a cliff." and we play brinkmanship, or say we don't believe in gravity, does it make any difference in the outcome? Does He reach down and shove us? Does He vengefully bash us against the rocks at the bottom? No, the punishment is the natural outcome that is built into

the natural system. Everything can be a cause for good or for bad. We need gravity and if we are not heedless, we can live with it.

After all, God made the universe. He knows how it works. He knows what goes well and He knows how bad it can go for us. Once truly believing in God, one would be crazy to not obey. His laws free us from the pain of the world of nature. "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. To this beareth witness that which the Pen of Revelation hath revealed. Meditate upon this, O men of insight!" KA 21) Beside, the more we are living in the City of Certitude, the greater our love and appreciation for Bahá'u'lláh is, and even the thought of disobeying Him would break our hearts.

Bahá'u'lláh has told us life is eternal: the bounty of God provides for all - there is nothing to fear; there is nothing to compete for; and to put our Faith in Him, who is eternal, and not in the physical world, which is transitory. The law of the struggle for existence is abrogated: "... the Collective Center of the Kingdom (the City of Certitude), embodying the institutions and divine teachings, is the eternal Collective Center. It establishes relationship between the East and the West, organizes the oneness of the world of humanity, and destroys the foundation of differences. It overcomes and includes all the other collective centers. Like unto the ray of the sun, it dispels entirely the darkness encompassing all the regions, bestows ideal life, and causes the effulgence of divine illumination. Through the breaths of the Holy Spirit it performs miracles; the Orient and the Occident embrace each other, the North and South become intimates and associates, conflicting and contending opinions disappear, antagonistic aims are brushed aside, the law of the struggle for existence is abrogated, and the canopy of the oneness of the world of humanity is raised on the apex of the globe, casting its shade over all the races of men. (TDP102)

C. Loving understanding service: "The root cause of wrongdoing is ignorance ..." (SW"A 136) While we struggle to grow spiritually and be of service, we must be patient with ourselves and others (even should it take 100,000 years (SVFV 5). "A wide latitude for action must be allowed them, which means that a large margin for errors must also be allowed ... human beings are not perfect." (Universal House of Justice to NSA US, May 19, 94). Any one of them might traverse the Seven Valleys in one breath and be giving us a hand up.

"Wherefore must the loved ones of God associate in affectionate fellowship with stranger and friend alike, showing forth to all the utmost loving-kindness, disregarding the degree of their capacity, never asking whether they deserve to be loved." (SWA 24) Who's work is this? Who has the information the world needs? Who has the responsibility of letting the world know the truth? Loving service is teaching by deeds. Often good and pleasant deeds can make an inroad where words might raise a barrier.

3. Study and think: "The root cause of wrongdoing is ignorance, and we must therefore hold fast to the tools of perception and knowledge." (SWA 136) "One hour's reflection is preferable to seventy years of pious worship" Reflection is how we figure out applications. (KI 238) "Move from heedlessness to Faith and certainty." (KI 6) Ponder with detachment ... Strive to grasp meaning ... Examine wondrous behavior of Manifestations ... Recall denials of negators ... (KI 5)

4. Teach: "... with a resounding voice, with a miraculous power, and with the magnetism of the Love of God, teach thou the Cause of God and rest assured that the Holy Spirit shall confirm thee." (JWTA 18)

5. Fast, pray, take one's self into account each day, read the Writings each morn and eve, give to the Fund, support and serve the Administrative Order of the City of Certitude, i.e.. attend Feast, serve when elected, support Assembly decisions, etc., give to the Fund, avoid backbiting and criticism, strive to increase the love of God, "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." (AHW 5), etc..

6. Overcome the habit of criticism and complaint. Accept in times pleasant and unpleasant, that "God doeth whatsoever He willeth, and ordaineth whatsoever He pleaseth." (170) "He shall not be asked of His doings." (KI171) 7 Remember "... the assurance which Bahá'u'lláh Himself has given the believers that they will never be called upon to meet a test greater than their capacity to endure." (LG 342)

3. What is the outcome of all this?

"The reality of man is his thought ..." (PT 17) Our thought will come to reflect the City of Certitude so our behavior can manifest it "Then will the manifold favours and outpouring grace of the holy and everlasting Spirit confer such new life upon the seeker that he will find himself endowed with a new eye, a new ear, a new heart, and a new mind. He will contemplate the manifest signs of the universe, and will penetrate the hidden mysteries of the soul. Gazing with the eye of God, he will perceive within every atom a door that leadeth him to the stations of absolute certitude. He will discover in all things the mysteries of divine Revelation and the evidences of an everlasting manifestation. (KI 196)

"The God of Mercy hath ... taught him articulate speech." (ESW 1) Now He is teaching us a new language: "It is evident unto thee that the Birds of Heaven and Doves of Eternity speak a twofold language. One language, the outward language, is devoid of allusions, is unconcealed and unveiled; that it may be a guiding lamp and a beaconing light whereby wayfarers may attain the heights of holiness, and seekers may advance into the realm of eternal reunion. Such are the unveiled traditions and the evident verses already mentioned. The other language is veiled and concealed. ... None apprehendeth the meaning of these utterances except them whose hearts are assured, whose souls have found favour with God, and whose minds are

detached from all else but Him. In such utterances, the literal meaning, as generally understood by the people, is not what hath been intended." (KI 254-255)

"God hath a people beneath the dome of glory, whom He hideth in the clothing of radiant poverty." These are they who see with His eyes, hear with His ears, as it is written in the well-known tradition. (SVFV 62-63)

"O My Servant! Obey Me and I shall make thee like unto Myself. I say `Be,' and it is, and thou shalt say `Be,' and it shall be." (SVFV 63) "... even the servant of His threshold ruleth over all created things! (KI 124)

Many of the Hidden Words have to do with this City: Among them, "O SON OF BEING! Thy heart is My home; sanctify it for My descent. Thy spirit is My place of revelation; cleanse it for My manifestation." (AHW 59), again, "O SON OF MAN! The temple of being is My throne; cleanse it of all things, that there I may be established and there I may abide." (AHW 58), "O SON OF BEING! Thy heart is My home; sanctify it for My descent. Thy spirit is My place of revelation; cleanse it for My manifestation. (AHW 59) O SON OF UTTERANCE! Thou art My stronghold; enter therein that thou mayest abide in safety. My love is in thee, know it, that thou mayest find Me near unto thee. (AHW 10) and "...thou mayest be to all eternity the revelation of My everlasting being." (AHW 64).

"O MY SON! The company of the ungodly increaseth sorrow, whilst fellowship with the righteous cleanseth the rust from off the heart. He that seeketh to commune with God, let him betake himself to the companionship of His loved ones; and he that desireth to hearken unto the word of God, let him give ear to the words of His chosen ones. (PHW 56) "O SON OF WORLDLINESS! Pleasant is the realm of being, wert thou to attain thereto; glorious is the domain of eternity, shouldst thou pass beyond the world of mortality; sweet is the holy ecstasy if thou drinkest of the mystic chalice from the hands of the celestial Youth. Shouldst thou attain this station, thou wouldst be freed from destruction and death, from toil and sin. (PHW 70)

4. Where is the Celestial City, the City of Certitude?

It is right here. "He who is a true believer liveth both in this world and in the world to come." (KI 120) "This most great, this fathomless and surging ocean is near, astonishingly near, unto you. Behold it is closer to you than your life vein!" (PDC 16) In fact, "The holy realities of the Concourse on high," writes Abdu'l-Bahá, "yearn, in this day, in the Most Exalted Paradise, to return unto this world, so that they may be aided to render some service to the threshold of the Abha Beauty, and arise to demonstrate their servitude to His sacred Threshold." (ADJ 47) and "...Enter thou among My servants, And enter thou My paradise." (SVFV 50)

I beseech Thee, O my God, ... to nourish their souls with what Thou hast ordained for Thy loved ones on whom shall come no fear and who shall not be put to grief. (PM 3)

Notes

ADJ Advent of Divine Justice AHW Arabic
Hidden Words BWF Bahá'í World Faith ESW Epistle to the
Son of the Wolf G Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh
JWTA Japan Will Turn Ablaze KA Kitab-i-Aqdas KI
Kitab-i-Iqan LG Lights of Guidance PDC Promised Day is
Come PM Prayers and Meditations PUP Promulgation of
Universal Peace SVFV Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys SWA
Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá TDP Tablets of
the Divine Plan

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