

Bahá'u'lláh's Teachings on Spiritual Reality

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Preface

What is the purpose of life? What is the nature of a human being? Why do suffering and evil exist? Is there life after death? Such questions have challenged humanity as, throughout history, it has searched for meaning in the universe.

The search for meaning has intensified at the end of the twentieth century, as competing ideologies that have battled one another throughout the century have exhausted themselves. Totalitarianism and communism have been discredited. Liberal democratic thought, despite its great contributions to human freedom, has allowed that freedom to degenerate into license through the onslaught of unrestrained materialism. The offerings of other cultures are subject to their own brand of authoritarianism, and seem, at best, merely to be marshaling a defense against western values.

Religion and philosophy have traditionally fed the human spirit's hunger for meaning. Yet religions now struggle to maintain their credibility in the face of a scientific world view, while philosophy has been seduced by relativism. Natural science, whose achievements and bright prospects fueled the idealism of the early part of the century, has been unable to provide sweeping remedies for society's ills and, indeed, has added new problems even as it resolved others. Humanity stands at the beginning of a new millennium without a clear vision endowed with meaning and purpose or a moral compass to guide it into the uncharted future.

In this context, the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, founder of the Bahá'í Faith, offer a new light. Bahá'u'lláh's voluminous writings address the spiritual, moral, and social issues facing humankind. He renews the profound truths and values found in religion in the past, presenting them in a voice compatible with reason and science that speaks to the needs of humanity poised on the threshold of a global social order.

While science has provided a tool to master material reality, humanity has

become like a bird with only one wing. In the end this bird cannot soar and must sink in the mire of materialism. Bahá'u'lláh asserts the existence of another level of reality—a spiritual reality which adds a second wing which enables humanity to fly. This reality is not immediately accessible to the physical senses. However, the experience of spiritual reality is not left to superstition, blind faith, or irrational belief. Science provides a systematic process of observation and deduction that establishes a means to understand and act on the laws governing material reality. Bahá'u'lláh explains that the laws governing spiritual reality are, similarly, objective. The effects of spiritual forces can be observed through their expression in the material realm; the influence of spiritual principles can also be tested through experience and applied through disciplined action.

Just as science is the source of understanding the laws of physical reality, true religion, based on scientific methods stripped of empty tradition and superstition, is a source of understanding of the laws of spiritual reality. Bahá'u'lláh explains that knowledge about spiritual reality comes to humanity through a series of divine teachers—the Founders of the great world religions.

Spirituality is the process of systematically translating this knowledge into action for personal growth, the ordering of society, and the advancement of civilization. Bahá'u'lláh's teachings on spiritual reality cover a broad range of subjects. These include the nature of the human being, the journey of the soul, the spiritual life, the relationship between the physical and spiritual reality, the progress of the soul and the means for humanity's spiritual education. This volume can only provide a sampling of the many passages from the Bahá'í writings that address these important themes. The aim is to present an introduction to Bahá'u'lláh's teachings on spiritual reality; the interested reader is encouraged to investigate further, through a more detailed study of the Bahá'í writings, Bahá'u'lláh's offering to quench the spiritual thirst of humanity.

For ease of reference, this book is divided into five parts, each divided further into sections. Within each section, extracts from the Bahá'í writings are shared to illustrate the topic. The passages are numbered; references are provided in the back of the book to enable the reader to find the extract in the original text. A brief

commentary introduces each part of the book.

The style of the passages presented varies. This is because the book draws from five sources the writings of

Bahá'u'lláh, the writings of the Báb, His forerunner, and the writings of the successive authorities of the Bahá'í

Faith: 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice.

While the styles differ, the sources

represent an accurate reflection of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings on the topics presented.

"Immerse yourselves in the ocean of My words," is Bahá'u'lláh's invitation to all humanity, "that ye may

unravel its secrets, and discover all the pearls of wisdom that lie hid in its depths." He encourages "every seeker

to bestir himself and strive to attain the shores of this ocean" so that he

may reap the benefits "in proportion to the

eagerness of his search and the efforts he hath exerted." In these teachings

Bahá'u'lláh offers a new and renewed

understanding of self, of society, and human purpose.

The Life and Teachings

of Bahá'u'lláh

As the new millennium approaches, the crucial need of the human race is to find a unifying vision of the nature

of man and society. For the past century humanity's response to this impulse

has driven a succession of

ideological upheavals that have convulsed our world and that appear now to have exhausted themselves. The

passion invested in the struggle, despite its disheartening results, testifies

to the depth of the need. For, without a

common conviction about the course and direction of human history, it is

inconceivable that foundations can be

laid for a global society to which the mass of humankind can commit themselves.

Such a vision unfolds in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the

nineteenth-century prophetic figure whose growing

influence is the most remarkable development of contemporary religious history.

Born in Persia, November 12,

1817, Bahá'u'lláh began at age twenty-seven an undertaking that has

gradually captured the imagination and

loyalty of several million people from virtually every race, culture, class,

and nation on earth. The phenomenon

is one that has no reference points in the contemporary world, but is

associated rather with climactic changes of

direction in the collective past of the human race. For Bahá'u'lláh

claimed to be no less than the Messenger of

God to the age of human maturity, the Bearer of a Divine Revelation that

fulfills the promises made in earlier

religions, and that will generate the spiritual nerves and sinews for the unification of the peoples of the world.

If they were to do nothing else, the effects which Bahá'u'lláh's life and writings have already had should command the earnest attention of anyone who believes that human nature is fundamentally spiritual and that the coming organization of our planet must be informed by this aspect of reality. The phenomenon lies open to general scrutiny. For the first time in history humanity has available a detailed and verifiable record of the birth of an independent religious system and of the life of its Founder. Equally accessible is the record of the response that the new faith has evoked, through the emergence of a global community which can already justly claim to represent a microcosm of the human race.

Bahá'u'lláh's writings cover an enormous range of subjects from social issues such as racial integration, the equality of the sexes, and disarmament, to those questions that affect the innermost life of the human soul. The original texts, many of them in His own hand, and others dictated and affirmed by their author, have been meticulously preserved. For several decades, a systematic program of translation and publication has made selections from Bahá'u'lláh's writings accessible to people everywhere, in over eight hundred languages.

The Birth of Bahá'u'lláh's Mission

Bahá'u'lláh's mission began in a subterranean dungeon in Tihrán (Teheran) in August 1852. Born into a noble family that could trace its ancestry back to the great dynasties of Persia's imperial past, He declined the ministerial career open to Him in government, and chose instead to devote His energies to a range of philanthropies which had, by the early 1840s, earned Him widespread renown as "Father of the Poor." This privileged existence swiftly eroded after 1844, when Bahá'u'lláh became one of the leading advocates of a movement that was to change the course of His country's history.

The early nineteenth century was a period of messianic expectations in many lands. Deeply disturbed by the implications of scientific inquiry and industrialization, earnest believers from many religious backgrounds turned to the scriptures of their faiths for an understanding of the accelerating processes of change. In Europe and America groups like the Templers and the Millerites believed they had found in

the Christian scriptures evidence supporting their conviction that history had ended and the return of Jesus Christ was at hand. A markedly similar ferment developed in the Middle East around the belief that the fulfillment of various prophecies in the Qur'an and Islamic Traditions was imminent. By far the most dramatic of these millennialist movements had been the one in Persia, which had focused on the person and teachings of a young merchant from the city of Shíráz, known to history as the Báb. For nine years, from 1844 to 1853, Persians of all classes had been caught up in a storm of hope and excitement aroused by the Báb's announcement that the Day of God was at hand and that He was Himself the One promised in Islamic scripture. Humanity stood, He said, on the threshold of an era that would witness the restructuring of all aspects of life. New fields of learning, as yet inconceivable, would permit even the children of the new age to surpass the most erudite of contemporary scholars. The human race was called by God to embrace these changes through undertaking a transformation of its moral and spiritual life. His own mission was to prepare humanity for the event that lay at the hearts of these developments, the coming of that universal Messenger of God, "He Whom God will make manifest," awaited by the followers of all religions. The claim had evoked violent hostility from the Muslim clergy, who taught that the process of Divine Revelation had ended with Muhammad, and that any assertion to the contrary represented apostasy, punishable by death. Their denunciation of the Báb had soon enlisted the support of the Persian authorities. Thousands of followers of the new faith had perished in a horrific series of massacres throughout the country, and the Báb had been publicly executed on July 9, 1850. In an age of growing Western involvement in the Orient, these events had aroused interest and compassion in influential European circles. The nobility of the Báb's life and teachings, the heroism of His followers, and the hope for fundamental reform that they had kindled in a darkened land had exerted a powerful attraction for personalities ranging from Ernest Renan and Leo Tolstoy to Sarah Bernhardt and the Comte de Gobineau.

Because of His prominence in the defense of the Bab's cause, Bahá'u'lláh was arrested and brought, in chains and on foot, to Tihrán. Protected in some measure by an impressive personal reputation and the social position of

His family, as well as by protests which the Bábí pogroms had evoked from Western embassies, He was not sentenced to death, as influential figures at the royal court were urging. Instead, He was cast into the notorious Síyáh-Chál, the “Black Pit,” a deep, vermin-infested dungeon which had been created in one of the city’s abandoned reservoirs. No charges were laid but He and some thirty companions were, without appeal, kept immured in the darkness and filth of this pit, surrounded by hardened criminals, many of them under sentence of death. Around Bahá’u’lláh’s neck was clamped a heavy chain, so notorious in penal circles as to have been given its own name. When He did not quickly perish, as had been expected, an attempt was made to poison Him. The marks of the chain were to remain on His body for the rest of His life.

It was in these circumstances, and faced with the prospect of His own imminent death, that Bahá’u’lláh received the first intimation of His mission. The experience of Divine Revelation, touched on only at secondhand in surviving accounts of the lives of the Buddha, Moses, Jesus Christ, and Muhammad, is described graphically in Bahá’u’lláh’s own words: “During the days I lay in the prison of Tíhrán, though the galling weight of the chains and the stench-filled air allowed Me but little sleep, still in those infrequent moments of slumber I felt as if something flowed from the crown of My head over My breast, even as a mighty torrent that precipitateth itself upon the earth from the summit of a lofty mountain. Every limb of My body would, as a result, be set afire. At such moments My tongue recited what no man could bear to hear.”

Bahá’u’lláh’s Exile

Eventually, still without trial or recourse, Bahá’u’lláh was released from prison and immediately banished from His native land to the neighboring territory of ‘Iraq, then under the rule of the Ottoman Empire. This expulsion was the beginning of forty years of exile, imprisonment, and bitter persecution.

By 1863, Bahá’u’lláh concluded that the time had come to begin acquainting some of those around Him with the mission which had been entrusted to Him in the darkness of the Síyáh-Chál. This decision coincided with a new stage in the campaign of opposition to His work, which had been relentlessly pursued by the Shí’ah Muslim clergy and representatives of the Persian government. Fearing that the acclaim which Bahá’u’lláh was beginning

to enjoy among influential Persian visitors to Iraq would reignite popular enthusiasm in Persia, the Shah's government pressed the Ottoman authorities to remove Him far from the borders and into the interior of the empire. Eventually, the Turkish government acceded to these pressures and invited the exile, as its guest, to make His residence in the capital, Constantinople. Despite the courteous terms in which the message was couched, the intention was clearly to require compliance.

In late April 1863, Bahá'u'lláh, on the eve of His departure for Constantinople, called together individuals among His companions, in a garden to which was later given the name Ridván ("Paradise"), and confided the central fact of His mission. Over the next four years, although no open announcement was considered timely, the hearers gradually shared with trusted friends the news that the Báb's promises had been fulfilled and that the "Day of God" had dawned.

The conditions surrounding Bahá'u'lláh's departure from Baghdád provided a dramatic demonstration of the potency of these principles. In only a few years, a band of foreign exiles whose arrival in the area had aroused suspicion and aversion on the part of their neighbors had become one of the most respected and influential segments of the population. They supported themselves through flourishing businesses; as a group they were admired for their generosity and the integrity of their conduct; the lurid allegations of religious fanaticism and violence, sedulously spread by Persian consular officials and members of the Shi'ah Muslim clergy, had ceased to have an effect on the public mind. By May 3, 1863, when He rode out of Baghdád, accompanied by His family and those of His companions and servants who had been chosen to accompany Him to Constantinople, Bahá'u'lláh had become an immensely popular and cherished figure. In the days immediately preceding the leave-taking a stream of notables, including the Governor of the province himself, came to the garden where He had temporarily taken up residence, many of them from great distances, in order to pay their respects. Eyewitnesses to the departure have described in moving terms the acclaim that greeted Him, the tears of many of the onlookers, and the concern of the Ottoman authorities and civil officials to do their visitor honor.

Soon after the exiles' arrival in Constantinople, it became apparent that the

honors showered upon Bahá'u'lláh during His journey from Baghdád had represented only a brief interlude. The Ottoman authorities' decision to move the Him and His companions to the capital of the empire rather than to some remote province deepened the alarm among the representatives of the Persian government. Fearing that the developments in Baghdád would be repeated, the Persian ambassador pressed insistently for the dispatch of the exiles to some more distant part of the empire.

The place chosen for this final banishment was the grim fortress-town of 'Akká (Acre) on the coast of the Holy Land. Notorious throughout the empire for the foulness of its climate and the prevalence of many diseases, 'Akká was a penal colony used by the Ottoman State for the incarceration of dangerous criminals who could be expected not to survive too long their imprisonment there. Arriving in August 1868, Bahá'u'lláh, the members of His family, and a company of His followers who had been exiled with Him were to experience two years of suffering and abuse within the fortress itself, and then be confined under house arrest to a nearby building owned by a local merchant. For a long time the exiles were shunned by the superstitious local populace who had been warned in public sermons against "the God of the Persians," who was depicted as an enemy of public order and the purveyor of blasphemous and immoral ideas. Several members of the small group of exiles died of the privations and other conditions to which they were subjected.

Bahá'u'lláh's Teachings for Humanity

Central to Bahá'u'lláh's writings is an exposition of the great themes which have preoccupied religious thinkers throughout the ages: God, the role of Revelation in history, the relationship of the world's religious systems to one another, the meaning of faith, and the basis of moral authority in the organization of human society. Passages in these texts speak intimately of His own spiritual experience, of His response to the Divine Summons, and of the dialogue with the "Spirit of God" which lay at the heart of His mission. Religious history has never before offered the inquirer the opportunity for so candid an encounter with the phenomenon of Divine Revelation.

In June 1877, Bahá'u'lláh at last emerged from the strict confinement of the prison-city of 'Akká, and moved

with His family to “Mazra’ih,” a small estate a few miles north of the city. After a brief two-year stay at Mazra’ih, Bahá’u’lláh moved to “Bahjí”, a large mansion surrounded by gardens, which His son ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had rented for Him and the members of His extended family. The remaining twelve years of His life were devoted to His writing on a wide range of spiritual and social issues, and to receiving a stream of Bahá’í pilgrims who made their way, with great difficulty, from Persia and other lands.

Throughout the Near and Middle East the nucleus of a community life was beginning to take shape among those who had accepted His message. For its guidance, Bahá’u’lláh had revealed a system of laws and institutions designed to give practical effect to the principles in His writings. Authority was vested in councils democratically elected by the whole community, provisions were made to exclude the possibility of a clerical elite arising, and principles of consultation and group decision making were established.

At the heart of this system was what Bahá’u’lláh termed a new Covenant between God and humankind. The distinguishing feature of humanity’s coming of age is that, for the first time in history, the entire human race is consciously involved, however dimly, in the awareness of its own oneness and of the earth as a single homeland. This awakening opens the way to a new relationship between God and humankind. As the peoples of the world embrace the spiritual authority inherent in the guidance of the Revelation of God for this age, Bahá’u’lláh said, they will find in themselves a moral empowerment which human effort alone has proven incapable of generating.” A new race of men” will emerge as the result of this relationship, and the work of building a global civilization will begin. The mission of the Bahá’í community is to demonstrate the efficacy of this Covenant in healing the ills that divide the human race.

Bahá’u’lláh died at Bahjí on May 29, 1892, in His seventy-fifth year. At the time of His passing, the cause entrusted to Him forty years earlier in the darkness of Tihrán’s Black Pit was poised to break free of the Islamic lands where it had taken shape, and to establish itself first across America and Europe and then throughout the world. In doing so, it would itself become a vindication of the promise of the new Covenant between God and humankind. For alone of all the world’s independent religions, the Bahá’í

Faith and its community of believers were to pass successfully through the critical first century of their existence with their unity firmly intact, undamaged by the age-old blight of schism and faction. Their experience offers compelling evidence for Bahá'u'lláh's assurance that the human race, in all its diversity, can learn to live and work as one people, in a common global homeland.

Part I. The Quest for Spirituality

Sooner or later during the struggle for existence in the physical world, an individual comes to realize that human life consists of more than the sensory experiences of the animal which is constrained by its material requirements. Human beings can step beyond the bounds of nature and master it. They are endowed with capacities that establish learning, culture, and civilization capacities that incline them toward perception of a transcendent, a spiritual realm. It is in perfecting these spiritual qualities and manifesting them in action that the purpose of human life is achieved.

The search for spiritual understanding has lead humanity to seek the knowledge of God. While God, Bahá'u'lláh explains, is an Unknowable Essence which lies beyond the capacity of human understanding, the traces of God are revealed throughout creation and are most particularly reflected in the qualities of the human spirit. The knowledge of God has been revealed through a succession of Spiritual Luminaries, the Founders of the great world religions. The teachings of these Individuals are the basis of human progress. But people have often strayed from the path of true religion to follow the course of their own illusions. Then god is merely an object of the imagination and religion an instrument of superstition and prejudice.

When ignorant of their true spiritual reality, human beings are inclined toward indulgence of their physical needs. Man then falls lower than an animal as the powers and capacities of the mind and spirit become grounded in selfish desires. Bahá'u'lláh has explained that the journey of the soul from the beginning of its existence on earth is a process of growing in the understanding of the human spirit and the manifestation in action of its qualities. This journey involves hardship and struggle, and the desire to satisfy material needs often deflects a person from his true purpose. But perfecting the qualities of the

spirit is the means for realizing the potentialities of one's true self, for achieving happiness and prosperity in this world and for preparing the soul for its continuation in the next. At the moment of death, the soul departs from the body as a bird from a broken cage, and wings its way on an immortal journey through worlds of joy and unending progress.

What It Means to Be Spiritual

Wert thou to attain to but a dewdrop of the crystal waters of divine knowledge, thou wouldst readily realize that true life is not the life of the flesh but the life of the spirit. For the life of the flesh is common to both men and animals, whereas the life of the spirit is possessed only by the pure in heart who have quaffed from the ocean of faith and partaken of the fruit of certitude. This life knoweth no death, and this existence is crowned by immortality. 1.1

All over the world one hears beautiful sayings extolled and noble precepts admired. All men say they love what is good, and hate everything that is evil! Sincerity is to be admired, whilst lying is despicable. Faith is a virtue, and treachery is a disgrace to humanity. It is a blessed thing to gladden the hearts of men, and wrong to be the cause of pain. To be kind and merciful is right, while to hate is sinful. Justice is a noble quality and injustice an iniquity. That it is one's duty to be pitiful and harm no one, and to avoid jealousy and malice at all costs. Wisdom is the glory of man, not ignorance; light, not darkness! ... There are many more examples like unto these.

But all these sayings are but words and we see very few of them carried into the world of action. On the contrary, we perceive that men are carried away by passion and selfishness, each man thinking only of what will benefit himself even if it means the ruin of his brother. They are all anxious to make their fortune and care little or nothing for the welfare of others. They are concerned about their own peace and comfort, while the condition of their fellows troubles them not at all.

Unhappily this is the road most men tread. 1.2

The need is very great, everywhere in the world.... for a true spiritual awareness to pervade and motivate people's lives. No amount of administrative procedure or adherence to rules can take the place of this soul

characteristic, this spirituality which is the essence of man. 1.3

My eternity is My creation, I have created it for thee. Make it the garment of thy temple. My unity is My handiwork; I have wrought it for thee; clothe thyself therewith, that thou mayest be to all eternity the revelation of My everlasting being. 1.4

When the fruit of the tree appears and becomes ripe, then we know that the tree is perfect; if the tree bore no fruit it would be merely a useless growth, serving no purpose.

When a soul has in it the life of the spirit, then does it bring forth good fruit and become a divine tree....

Some men's lives are solely occupied with the things of this world; their minds are so circumscribed by exterior manners and traditional interests that they are blind to any other realm of existence, to the spiritual significance of all things. They think and dream of earthly fame, of material progress. Sensuous delights and comfortable surroundings bound their horizon, their highest ambitions center in successes of worldly conditions and circumstances. They curb not their lower propensities; they eat, drink, and sleep. Like the animal, they have no thought beyond their own physical wellbeing. It is true that these necessities must be dispatched. But the cares of the lower things of life should not be allowed to monopolize all the thoughts and aspirations of a human being. The heart's ambitions should ascend to a more glorious goal, mental activity should rise to higher levels. Men should hold in their souls the vision of celestial perfection, and there prepare a dwelling place for the inexhaustible bounty of the divine spirit.

Let your ambition be the achievement on earth of a heavenly civilization! I ask for you the supreme blessing, that you may be so filled with the vitality of the heavenly spirit that you may be the cause of life to the world.

1.5

Thou art even as a finely tempered sword concealed in the darkness of its sheath and its value hidden from the artificer's knowledge. Wherefore come forth from the sheath of self and desire that thy worth may be made resplendent and manifest unto all the world. 1.6

Be generous in prosperity, and thankful in adversity. Be worthy of the trust of thy neighbor, and look upon him with a bright and friendly face. Be a treasure to the poor, an admonisher to

the rich, an answerer of the cry of the
needy, a preserver of the sanctity of thy pledge. Be fair in thy judgment, and
guarded in thy speech. Be unjust to
no man, and show all meekness to all men. Be as a lamp unto them that walk in
darkness, a joy to the sorrowful,
a sea for the thirsty, a haven for the distressed, an upholder and defender of
the victim of oppression. Let
integrity and uprightness distinguish all thine acts. Be a home for the
stranger, a balm to the suffering, a tower of
strength for the fugitive. Be eyes to the blind, and a guiding light unto the
feet of the erring. Be an ornament to
the countenance of truth, a crown to the brow of fidelity, a pillar of the
temple of righteousness, a breath of life to
the body of mankind, an ensign of the hosts of justice, a luminary above the
horizon of virtue, a dew to the soil of
the human heart, an ark on the ocean of knowledge, a sun in the heaven of
bounty, a gem on the diadem of
wisdom, a shining light in the firmament of thy generation, a fruit upon the
tree of humility. 1.7

Be swift in the path of holiness, and enter the heaven of communion with Me.
Cleansing thy heart with the
burnish of the spirit, and hasten to the court of the Most High. 1.8

Write all that We have revealed unto thee with the ink of light upon the tablet
of thy spirit. Should this not be
in thy power, then make thine ink of the essence of thy heart. If this thou
canst not do, then write with that
crimson ink that hath been shed in My path. Sweeter indeed is this to Me than
all else, that its light may endure
for ever. 1.9

Human Nature

In man there are two natures; his spiritual or higher nature and his material
or lower nature. In one he
approaches God, in the other he lives for the world alone. Signs of both these
natures are to be found in men. In
his material aspect he expresses untruth, cruelty and injustice; all these are
the outcome of his lower nature. The
attributes of his Divine nature are shown forth in love, mercy, kindness, truth
and justice, one and all being
expressions of his higher nature. Every good habit, every noble quality belongs
to man's spiritual nature,
whereas all his imperfections and sinful actions are born of his material
nature. If a man's Divine nature
dominates his human nature, we have a saint.

Man has the power both to do good and to do evil; if his power for good
predominates and his inclinations to

do wrong are conquered, then man in truth may be called a saint. But if, on the contrary, he rejects the things of God and allows his evil passions to conquer him, then he is no better than a mere animal. 2.1

What are the animals' propensities? To eat, drink, wander about and sleep. The thoughts, the minds of the animals are confined to these. They are captives in the bonds of these desires. Man becomes a prisoner and slave to them when his ultimate desire is no higher than his welfare in this world of the senses. Consider how difficult for man is the attainment of pleasures and happiness in this mortal world. How easy it is for the animal. Look upon the fields and flowers, prairies, streams, forests and mountains. The grazing animals, the birds of the air, the fishes neither toil nor undergo hardships; they sow not, nor are they concerned about the reaping; they have no anxiety about business or politics-no trouble or worry whatsoever. All the fields and grasses, all the meadows of fruits and grains, all the mountain slopes and streams of salubrious water belong to them. They do not labor for their livelihood and happiness because everything is provided and made possible for them. If the life of man be confined to this physical, material outlook, the animal's life is a hundred times better, easier and more productive of comfort and contentment. The animal is nobler, more serene and confident because each hour is free from anxiety and worry; but man, restless and dissatisfied, runs from morn till eve, sailing the seas, diving beneath them in submarines, flying aloft on airplanes, delving into the lowest strata of the earth to obtain his livelihood-all with the greatest difficulty, anxiety and unrest. Therefore, in this respect the animal is nobler, more serene, poised and confident. Consider the birds in the forest and jungle: how they build their nests high in the swaying treetops, build them with the utmost skill and beauty-swinging, rocking in the morning breezes, drinking the pure, sweet water, enjoying the most enchanting views as they fly here and there high overhead, singing joyously-all without labor, free from worry, care and forebodings. If man's life be confined to the elemental, physical world of enjoyment, one lark is nobler, more admirable than all humanity because its livelihood is prepared, its condition complete, its accomplishment perfect and natural.

But the life of man is not so restricted; it is divine, eternal, not mortal and sensual. For him a spiritual

existence and livelihood is prepared and ordained in the divine creative plan. His life is intended to be a life of spiritual enjoyment to which the animal can never attain. This enjoyment depends upon the acquisition of heavenly virtues ...

Therefore, consider how base a nature it reveals in man that, notwithstanding the favors showered upon him, he should lower himself into the animal sphere, be wholly occupied with material needs, attached to this mortal realm, imagining that the greatest happiness is to attain wealth in this world. How purposeless!... What an ignorance this is! What a blindness! How glorious the station of man who has partaken of the heavenly food and built the temple of his everlasting residence in the world of heaven!

2.2

In short, man is endowed with two natures: one tendeth towards moral sublimity and intellectual perfection, while the other turneth to bestial degradation and carnal imperfections. If ye travel the countries of the globe ye shall observe on one side the remains of ruin and destruction, while on the other ye shall see the signs of civilization and development. Such desolation and ruin are the result of war, strife and quarrelling, while all development and progress are fruits of the lights of virtue, cooperation and concord. 2.3

Man is in the highest degree of materiality, and at the beginning of spirituality-that is to say, he is the end of imperfection and the beginning of perfection. He is at the last degree of darkness, and at the beginning of light... If the divine power in man, which is his essential perfection, overcomes the satanic power, which is absolute imperfection, he becomes the most excellent among the creatures; but if the satanic power overcomes the divine power, he becomes the lowest of the creatures. That is why he is the end of imperfection and the beginning of perfection. Not in any other of the species in the world of existence is there such a difference, contrast, contradiction and opposition as in the species of man. Thus ... knowledge is a quality of man, and so is ignorance; truthfulness is a quality of man; so is falsehood; trustworthiness and treachery, justice and injustice, are qualities of man, and so forth. Briefly, all the perfections and virtues, and all the vices, are qualities of man.

2.4

When man allows the spirit, through his soul, to enlighten his understanding,

then does he contain all

Creation.... But on the other hand, when man does not open his mind and heart to the blessing of the spirit, but turns his soul towards the material side, towards the bodily part of his nature, then is he fallen from his high place and he becomes inferior to the inhabitants of the lower animal kingdom.

2.5

O Son of Spirit! Noble have I created thee, yet thou hast abased thyself. Rise then unto that for which thou wast created. 2.6

Believing in God

This people, all of them, have pictured a god in the realm of the mind, and worship that image which they have made for themselves. And yet that image is comprehended, the human mind being the comprehender thereof, and certainly the comprehender is greater than that which lieth within its grasp; for imagination is but the branch, while mind is the root; and certainly the root is greater than the branch. Consider then, how all the peoples of the world are bowing the knee to a fancy of their own contriving, how they have created a creator within their own minds, and they call it the Fashioner of all that is-whereas in truth it is but an illusion. Thus are the people worshipping only an error of perception. 3.1

To every discerning and illuminated heart it is evident that God, the unknowable Essence, the Divine Being, is immensely exalted beyond every human attribute, such as corporeal existence, ascent and descent, egress and regress. Far be it from His glory that human tongue should adequately recount His praise, or that human heart comprehend His fathomless mystery. He is, and hath ever been, veiled in the ancient eternity of His Essence, and will remain in His Reality everlastingly hidden from the sight of men.

3.2

All the Prophets and apostles longed and prayed for nearness to the Creator. How many nights they passed in sleepless yearning for this station; how many days they devoted to supplication for this attainment, seeking ever to draw nigh unto Him! But nearness to God is not an easy accomplishment. ... Nearness to God is dependent upon purity of the heart and exhilaration of the spirit through the glad tidings of the Kingdom. Consider how a pure, well-polished mirror fully reflects the effulgence of the sun, no matter how distant the sun may be. As soon as the mirror is cleaned and purified, the sun will manifest itself. The more

pure and sanctified the heart of man
becomes, the nearer it draws to God, and the light of the Sun of Reality is
revealed within it. ... We must purify
ourselves from the mire and soil of earthly contact until our hearts become as
mirrors in clearness and the light of
the most great guidance reveals itself in them.

Bahá'u'lláh proclaims in The Hidden Words that God inspires His servants
and is revealed through them. He
says, "Thy heart is My home; sanctify it for My descent. Thy spirit is My
place of revelation; cleanse it for My
manifestation." Therefore, we learn that nearness to God is possible through
devotion to Him, through entrance
into the Kingdom and service to humanity; it is attained by unity with mankind
and through loving-kindness to
all; it is dependent upon investigation of truth, acquisition of praiseworthy
virtues, service in the cause of
universal peace and personal sanctification Nearness is likeness. 3.3

The endowments which distinguish the human race from all other forms of life
are summed up in what is
known as the human spirit; the mind is its essential quality. These endowments
have enabled humanity to build
civilizations and to prosper materially. But such accomplishments alone have
never satisfied the human spirit,
whose mysterious nature inclines it towards transcendence, a reaching towards
an invisible realm, towards the
ultimate reality, that unknowable essence of essences called God. 3.4

The spirit that animateth the human heart is the knowledge of God.... .
3.5

Thou art My lamp and My light is in thee. Get thou from it thy radiance and
seek none other than Me. For I
have created thee rich and have bountifully shed My favor upon thee. 3.6

The light hath shone on thee from the horizon of the sacred Mount and the
spirit of enlightenment hath
breathed in the Sinai of thy heart. Wherefore, free thyself from the veils of
idle fancies and enter into My court,
that thou mayest be fit for everlasting life and worthy to meet Me. Thus may
death not come upon thee, neither
weariness nor trouble. 3.7

I have breathed within thee a breath of My own Spirit, that thou mayest be My
lover. Why hast thou forsaken
Me and sought a beloved other than Me? 3.8

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 molded 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. 3.9

Give ear to the sayings of the Friend and turn towards His paradise. Worldly friends, seeking their own good, appear to love one the other, whereas the true Friend hath loved and doth love you for your own sakes.... Be not disloyal to such a Friend, nay rather hasten unto Him. Such is the daystar of the word of truth and faithfulness, that hath dawned above the horizon of the pen of the Lord of all names. Open your ears that ye may hearken unto the word of God, the Help in peril, the Self-existent. 3.10
True Religion

The religions brought to mankind by a succession of spiritual luminaries have been the primary link between humanity and that ultimate reality, and have galvanized and refined mankind's capacity to achieve spiritual success together with social progress. 4.1

It is certain that the greatest of instrumentalities for achieving the advancement and the glory of man, the supreme agency for the enlightenment and the redemption of the world, is love and fellowship and unity among all the members of the human race. Nothing can be effected in the world, not even conceivably, without unity and agreement, and the perfect means for engendering fellowship and union is true religion. 4.2

An essential principle of Bahá'u'lláh's teaching is that religion must be the cause of unity and love amongst men; that it is the supreme effulgence of Divinity, the stimulus of life, the source of honor and productive of eternal existence. Religion is not intended to arouse enmity and hatred nor to become the source of tyranny and injustice. Should it prove to be the cause of hostility, discord and the alienation of mankind, assuredly the absence of religion would be preferable. Religious teachings are like a course of treatment having for its purpose the cure and healing of mankind. If the only outcome of a course of treatment should be mere diagnosis and fruitless discussion of symptoms, it would be better to abandon and abolish it. In this sense the absence of religion would be at least some progress toward unity.

Furthermore, religion must conform to reason and be in accord with the conclusions of science. For religion, reason and science are realities; therefore, these three, being realities, must conform and be reconciled. A question or principle which is religious in its nature must be sanctioned by science. Science must declare it to be valid, and reason must confirm it in order that it may inspire confidence. If religious teaching, however, be at variance with science and reason, it is unquestionably superstition. The Lord of mankind has bestowed upon us the faculty of reason whereby we may discern the realities of things. How then can man rightfully accept any proposition which is not in conformity with the processes of reason and the principles of science? Assuredly such a course cannot inspire man with confidence and real belief. 4.3

Religion is the light of the world, and the progress, achievement, and happiness of man result from obedience to the laws set down in the holy Books. Briefly, it is demonstrable that in this life, both outwardly and inwardly the mightiest of structures, the most solidly established, the most enduring, standing guard over the world, assuring both the spiritual and the material perfections of mankind, and protecting the happiness and the civilization of society-is religion.

It is true that there are foolish individuals who have never properly examined the fundamentals of the Divine religions, who have taken as their criterion the behavior of a few religious hypocrites and measured all religious persons by that yardstick, and have on this account concluded that religions are an obstacle to progress, a divisive factor and a cause of malevolence and enmity among peoples. They have not even observed this much, that the principles of the Divine religions can hardly be evaluated by the acts of those who only claim to follow them.

For every excellent thing, peerless though it may be, can still be diverted to the wrong ends. A lighted lamp in the hands of an ignorant child or of the blind will not dispel the surrounding darkness nor light up the house-it will set both the bearer and the house on fire. Can we, in such an instance, blame the lamp? No, by the Lord God! To the seeing, a lamp is a guide and will show him his path; but it is a disaster to the blind. 4.4

True religion is the source of love and agreement amongst men, the cause of the development of praiseworthy qualities, but the people are holding to the counterfeit and imitation,

negligent of the reality which unifies, so they are bereft and deprived of the radiance of religion. They follow superstitions inherited from their fathers and ancestors. To such an extent has this prevailed that they have taken away the heavenly light of divine truth and sit in the darkness of imitations and imaginations. That which was meant to be conducive to life has become the cause of death; that which should have been an evidence of knowledge is now a proof of ignorance; that which was a factor in the sublimity of human nature has proved to be its degradation. Therefore, the realm of the religionist has gradually narrowed and darkened, and the sphere of the materialist has widened and advanced; for the religionist has held to imitation and counterfeit, neglecting and discarding holiness and the sacred reality of religion. 4.5

Our purpose is to show how true religion promotes the civilization and honor, the prosperity and prestige, the learning and advancement of a people once abject, enslaved and ignorant, and how, when it falls into the hands of religious leaders who are foolish and fanatical, it is diverted to the wrong ends, until this greatest of splendors turns into blackest night. 4.6

The different religions have one truth underlying them; therefore, their reality is one... In brief, every one of the divine religions contains essential ordinances, which are not subject to change, and material ordinances, which are abrogated according to the exigencies of time. But the people of the world have forsaken the divine teachings and followed forms and imitations of the truth. Inasmuch as these human interpretations and superstitions differ, dissensions and bigotry have arisen, and strife and warfare have prevailed. By investigating the truth or foundation of reality underlying their own and other beliefs, all would be united and agreed, for this reality is one; it is not multiple and not divisible. 4.7

The Journey of the Soul

Know, verily, that the soul is a sign of God, a heavenly gem whose reality the most learned of men hath failed to grasp, and whose mystery no mind, however acute, can ever hope to unravel. It is the first among all created things to declare the excellence of its Creator, the first to recognize His glory, to cleave to His truth, and to bow down in adoration before Him. If it be faithful to God, it will reflect His light, and will, eventually, return unto

You have asked why it was necessary for the soul that was from God to make this journey back to God? ...

Man must walk in many paths and be subjected to various processes in his evolution upward. Physically he is not born in full stature but passes through consecutive stages of fetus, infant, childhood, youth, maturity and old age. Suppose he had the power to remain young throughout his life. He then would not understand the meaning of old age and could not believe it existed. If he could not realize the condition of old age, he would not know that he was young. He would not know the difference between young and old without experiencing the old.

Unless you have passed through the state of infancy, how would you know this was an infant beside you? If there were no wrong, how would you recognize the right? If it were not for sin, how would you appreciate virtue? If evil deeds were unknown, how could you commend good actions? ...

Briefly, the journey of the soul is necessary. The pathway of life is the road which leads to divine knowledge and attainment. Without training and guidance the soul could never progress beyond the conditions of its lower nature, which is ignorant and defective. 5.2

In the beginning of his human life man was embryonic in the world of the matrix. There he received capacity and endowment for the reality of human existence. The forces and powers necessary for this world were bestowed upon him in that limited condition. In this world he needed eyes; he received them potentially in the other. He needed ears; he obtained them there in readiness and preparation for his new existence. The powers requisite in this world were conferred upon him in the world of the matrix so that when he entered this realm of real existence he not only possessed all necessary functions and powers but found provision for his material sustenance awaiting him.

Therefore, in this world he must prepare himself for the life beyond. That which he needs in the world of the Kingdom must be obtained here. Just as he prepared himself in the world of the matrix by acquiring forces necessary in this sphere of existence, so, likewise, the indispensable forces of the divine existence must be potentially attained in this world.

What is he in need of in the Kingdom which transcends the life and limitation

of this mortal sphere? That world beyond is a world of sanctity and radiance; therefore, it is necessary that in this world he should acquire these divine attributes. In that world there is need of spirituality, faith, assurance, the knowledge and love of God. These he must attain in this world so that after his ascension from the earthly to the heavenly Kingdom he shall find all that is needful in that eternal life ready for him.

That divine world is manifestly a world of lights; therefore, man has need of illumination here. That is a world of love; the love of God is essential. It is a world of perfections; virtues, or perfections, must be acquired. That world is vivified by the breaths of the Holy Spirit; in this world we must seek them. That is the Kingdom of everlasting life; it must be attained during this vanishing existence.

By what means can man acquire these things? How shall he obtain these merciful gifts and powers? First, through the knowledge of God. Second, through the love of God. Third, through faith. Fourth, through philanthropic deeds. Fifth, through self-sacrifice. Sixth, through severance from this world. Seventh, through sanctity and holiness. 5.3

How long shall we drift on the wings of passion and vain desire; how long shall we spend our days like barbarians in the depths of ignorance and abomination? God has given us eyes, that we may look about us at the world, and lay hold of whatsoever will further civilization and the arts of living. He has given us ears, that we may hear and profit by the wisdom of scholars and philosophers and arise to promote and practice it. Senses and faculties have been bestowed upon us, to be devoted to the service of the general good; so that we, distinguished above all other forms of life for perceptiveness and reason, should labor at all times and along all lines, whether the occasion be great or small, ordinary or extraordinary, until all mankind are safely gathered into the impregnable stronghold of knowledge. We should continually be establishing new bases for human happiness and creating and promoting new instrumentalities toward this end. How excellent, how honorable is man if he arises to fulfil his responsibilities; how wretched and contemptible, if he shuts his eyes to the welfare of society and wastes his precious life in pursuing his own selfish interests and personal advantages. Supreme happiness is man's, and he beholds the signs of God in the world and in the human soul, if

he urges on the steed of high
endeavor in the arena of civilization and justice.” We will surely show them
Our signs in the world and within
themselves.”

And this is man’s uttermost wretchedness: that he should live inert,
apathetic, dull, involved only with his own
base appetites. When he is thus, he has his being in the deepest ignorance and
savagery, sinking lower than the
brute beasts.” They are like the brutes: Yea, they go more astray.... For the
vilest beasts in God’s sight, are the
deaf, the dumb, who understand not.”

We must now highly resolve to arise and lay hold of all those instrumentalities
that promote the peace and
wellbeing and happiness, the knowledge, culture and industry, the dignity,
value and station, of the entire human
race. Thus, through the restoring waters of pure intention and unselfish
effort, the earth of human potentialities
will blossom with its own latent excellence and flower into praiseworthy
qualities..... 5.4

Live then the days of thy life, that are less than a fleeting moment, with thy
mind stainless, thy heart unsullied,
thy thoughts pure, and thy nature sanctified, so that, free and content, thou
mayest put away this mortal frame,
and repair unto the mystic paradise and abide in the eternal kingdom for
evermore. 5.5

The progress of the soul does not come to an end with death. It rather starts
along a new line. Bahá’u’lláh
teaches that great and far-reaching possibilities await the soul in the other
world. Spiritual progress in that realm
is infinite, and no man, while on this earth, can visualize its full power and
extent. 5.6

O My servants! Sorrow not if, in these days and on this earthly plane, things
contrary to your wishes have been
ordained and manifested by God, for days of blissful joy, of heavenly delight,
are assuredly in store for you.
Worlds, holy and spiritually glorious, will be unveiled to your eyes. You are
destined by Him, in this world and
hereafter, to partake of their benefits, to share in their joys, and to obtain
a portion of their sustaining grace. To
each and every one of them you will, no doubt, attain. 5.7

Part II. The Spiritual Life

The Bahá’í teachings explain that the soul of a human being is like a
mirror. The full potentialities latent
within can only be revealed if the mirror is polished and free from stain. It

is also essential that the mirror be properly directed. If it is directed toward the material, animal dimension of human nature it reflects those qualities. The powers of a human being are then centered on self indulgence with a potential for evil. If the mirror is directed toward the higher dimension of human nature, the qualities of the spiritual life are manifested.

What are the characteristics of the spiritual life? And how does one acquire and perfect these qualities?

Among those characteristics described by Bahá'u'lláh are faith, mastery of self, and sanctity and holiness. Love and unity provide basic conditions that promote the cultivation of spiritual qualities. Prayer and meditation, service to humanity, and effort and perseverance are among the keys that unlock the doors to these attainments.

These qualities and the disciplines required for their achievement are not new; Bahá'u'lláh's purpose is to resurrect these concepts, free them from distortions and misinterpretations, and broaden their implications. For example, He explains that faith is not belief in the irrational, but rather conscious knowledge expressed in action. Love and unity are not confined to those of one's group, but to all the people of the earth. Mastery of self and sanctity and holiness are presented by Bahá'u'lláh as fundamental to the expression of spirituality and are not to be confused with a misplaced puritanical ethic or asceticism. Similarly, in the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh prayer and meditation are released from empty ritual, while work done in a spirit of service to humanity is raised to the level of worship of God.

Bahá'u'lláh makes an emphatic promise that "the greater the effort exerted" by each individual to apply him or herself to live the spiritual life, the more they will be empowered to "reflect the glory of the names and attributes of God, and reveal the wonders of His signs and knowledge."
Reflecting Spiritual Qualities

The light of a good character surpasseth the light of the sun and the radiance thereof. Whoso attaineth unto it is accounted as a jewel among men. The glory and the upliftment of the world must needs depend upon it.

6.1

According to the words of the Old Testament God has said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." This indicates that man is of the image and likeness of God-that

is to say, the perfections of God, the divine virtues, are reflected or revealed in the human reality. just as the light and effulgence of the sun when cast upon a polished mirror are reflected fully, gloriously, so, likewise, the qualities and attributes of Divinity are radiated from the depths of a pure human heart....

Therefore, every man imbued with divine qualities, who reflects heavenly moralities and perfections, who is the expression of ideal and praiseworthy attributes, is, verily, in the image and likeness of God. 6.2

Observe how darkness has overspread the world. In every corner of the earth there is strife, discord and warfare of some kind. Mankind is submerged in the sea of materialism and occupied with the affairs of this world. They have no thought beyond earthly possessions and manifest no desire save the passions of this fleeting, mortal existence. Their utmost purpose is the attainment of material livelihood, physical comforts and worldly enjoyments such as constitute the happiness of the animal world rather than the world of man.

... If man is bereft of the divine bestowals and if his enjoyment and happiness are restricted to his material inclinations, what distinction or difference is there between the animal and himself? In fact, the animal's happiness is greater, for its wants are fewer and its means of livelihood easier to acquire. Although it is necessary for man to strive for material needs and comforts, his real need is the acquisition of the bounties of God. If he is bereft of divine bounties, spiritual susceptibilities and heavenly glad tidings, the life of man in this world has not yielded any worthy fruit. While possessing physical life, he should lay hold of the life spiritual, and together with bodily comforts and happiness, he should enjoy divine pleasures and content. Then is man worthy of the title man; then will he be after the image and likeness of God, for the image of the Merciful consists of the attributes of the heavenly Kingdom. If no fruits of the Kingdom appear in the garden of his soul, man is not in the image and likeness of God, but if those fruits are forthcoming, he becomes the recipient of ideal bestowals and is enkindled with the fire of the love of God. If his morals become spiritual in character, his aspirations heavenly and his actions conformable to the will of God, man has attained the image and likeness of his Creator; otherwise, he is the image and likeness of Satan. Therefore, Christ hath said, "Ye shall

know them by their fruits.” What are the fruits of the human world? They are the spiritual attributes which appear in man.... Love for mankind, sincerity toward all, reflecting the oneness of the world of humanity, philanthropy, becoming enkindled with the fire of the love of God, attainment to the knowledge of God and that which is conducive to human welfare.

6.3

The virtues and attributes pertaining unto God are all evident and manifest, and have been mentioned and described in all the heavenly Books. Among them are trustworthiness, truthfulness, purity of heart while communing with God, forbearance, resignation to whatever the Almighty hath decreed, contentment with the things His Will hath provided, patience, nay, thankfulness in the midst of tribulation, and complete reliance, in all circumstances, upon Him. 6.4

The foundation-stone of a life lived in the way of God is the pursuit of moral excellence and the acquisition of a character endowed with qualities that are well-pleasing in His sight. People have grown weary and impatient of rhetoric and discourse, of preaching and sermonizing. In this day, the one thing that can deliver the world from its travail and attract the hearts of its peoples is deeds, not words; example, not precept; saintly virtues, not statements and charters issued by governments and nations on socio-political affairs. In all matters, great or small, word must be the complement of deed, and deed the companion of word: each must supplement, support and reinforce the other. 6.5

Today the most pressing of all tasks is the purification of character, the reforming of morals, the rectification of conduct. It behoveth the loved ones of God to arise among all peoples with such qualities and such acts that the sweet winds which blow over the gardens of holiness will perfume the whole earth, and restore the dead souls to life. The reason for God’s having made Himself manifest, and for this shining forth of infinite lights from the realm of the invisible, is none other than the training of all men’s souls and the refining of the characters of all on earth-so that blessed individuals, who have freed themselves from the murk of the animal world, shall rise up with those qualities which are the adornings of the reality of man. The purpose is that earthlings should turn into the people of Heaven, and those who walk in darkness should come into the

light, and those who are excluded
should join the inner circle of the Kingdom, and those who are as nothing
should become intimates of the
everlasting Glory. It is that the portionless should gain their share of the
boundless sea, and the ignorant drink
their fill from the living fount of knowledge; that those who thirst for blood
should forsake their savagery, and
those who are barbed of claw should turn gentle and forbearing, and those who
love war should seek instead for
true conciliation; it is that the brutal, their talons razor-sharp, should
enjoy the benefits of lasting peace; that the
foul should learn that there is a realm of purity, and the tainted find their
way to the rivers of holiness.

6.6

Every soul that walketh humbly with its God, in this Day, and cleaveth unto
Him, shall find itself invested with
the honor and glory of all goodly names and stations. 6.7

Faith

By faith is meant, first, conscious knowledge, and second, the practice of good
deeds. 7.1

He does not ask us to follow Him blindly.... God has endowed man with a mind to
operate as a torchlight and
guide him to the truth. Read His words, consider His Teachings and measure
their value in the light of
contemporary problems and the truth will surely be revealed to you and you
will appreciate the truth of His
Mission, as well as the true spirit He creates in whosoever follows His ways.

7.2

... Know ye that God has created in man the power of reason, whereby man is
enabled to investigate reality.

God has not intended man to imitate blindly his fathers and ancestors. He has
endowed him with mind, or the
faculty of reasoning, by the exercise of which he is to investigate and
discover the truth, and that which he finds
real and true he must accept. He must not be an imitator or blind follower of
any soul. He must not rely
implicitly upon the opinion of any man without investigation; nay, each soul
must seek intelligently and
independently, arriving at a real conclusion and bound only by that reality.
The greatest cause of bereavement
and disheartening in the world of humanity is ignorance based upon blind
imitation. It is due to this that wars and
battles prevail; from this cause hatred and animosity arise continually among
mankind....

God has given man the eye of investigation by which he may see and recognize truth. He has endowed man with ears that he may hear the message of reality and conferred upon him the gift of reason by which he may discover things for himself. This is his endowment and equipment for the investigation of reality. Man is not intended to see through the eyes of another, hear through another's ears nor comprehend with another's brain. Each human creature has individual endowment, power and responsibility in the creative plan of God. Therefore, depend upon your own reason and judgment and adhere to the outcome of your own investigation; otherwise, you will be utterly submerged in the sea of ignorance and deprived of all the bounties of God. Turn to God, supplicate humbly at His threshold, seeking assistance and confirmation, that God may rend asunder the veils that obscure your vision. Then will your eyes be filled with illumination, face to face you will behold the reality of God and your heart become completely purified from the dross of ignorance, reflecting the glories and bounties of the Kingdom. 7.3

Sanctify your souls from whatsoever is not of God, and taste ye the sweetness of rest within the pale of His vast and mighty Revelation, and beneath the shadow of His supreme and infallible authority. Suffer not yourselves to be wrapt in the dense veils of your selfish desires, inasmuch as I have perfected in every one of you My creation, so that the excellence of My handiwork may be fully revealed unto men. It follows, therefore, that every man hath been, and will continue to be, able of himself to appreciate the Beauty of God, the Glorified. Had he not been endowed with such a capacity, how could he be called to account for his failure? If, in the Day when all the peoples of the earth will be gathered together, any man should, whilst standing in the presence of God, be asked: "Wherefore hast thou disbelieved in My Beauty and turned away from My Self," and if such a man should reply and say: "Inasmuch as all men have erred, and none hath been found willing to turn his face to the Truth, I, too, following their example, have grievously failed to recognize the Beauty of the Eternal," such a plea will, assuredly, be rejected. For the faith of no man can be conditioned by any one except himself. 7.4

If thou wishest the divine knowledge and recognition, purify thy heart from all beside God, be wholly attracted to the ideal, beloved One; search for and choose Him and apply thyself to

rational and authoritative arguments.

For arguments are a guide to the path and by this the heart will be turned unto the Sun of Truth. And when the heart is turned unto the Sun, then the eye will be opened and will recognize the Sun through the Sun itself. Then there will be no need of arguments, for the Sun is altogether independent, and absolute independence is in need of nothing, including proofs. 7.5

For every one of you his paramount duty is to choose for himself that on which no other may infringe and none usurp from him. Such a thing-and to this the Almighty is My witness-is the love of God, could ye but perceive it.

Build ye for yourselves such houses as the rain and floods can never destroy, which shall protect you from the changes and chances of this life. 7.6

The essence of faith is fewness of words and abundance of deeds; he whose words exceed his deeds, know verily his death is better than his life. 7.7

Through the power of faith, obey ye the teachings of God, and let all your actions conform to His laws

Thus may each one of you be even as a candle casting its light, the centre of attraction wherever people come together; and from you, as from a bed of flowers, may sweet scents be shed. 7.8

The cornerstone of the religion of God is the acquisition of the divine perfections and the sharing of His manifold bestowals. The essential purpose of faith and belief is to ennoble the inner being of man with the outpourings of grace from on high. If this be not attained, it is, indeed, deprivation itself. It is the torment of infernal fire.

Wherefore it is incumbent upon all Bahá'ís to ponder this very delicate and vital matter in their hearts.... They should exemplify in every aspect of their lives those attributes and virtues that are born of God and should arise to distinguish themselves by their goodly behavior. They should justify their claim to be Bahá'ís by deeds and not by name. He is a true Bahá'í who strives by day and by night to progress and advance along the path of human endeavor, whose most cherished desire is so to live and act as to enrich and illuminate the world, whose source of inspiration is the essence of divine virtue, whose aim in life is so to conduct himself as to be the cause of infinite progress. Only when he attains unto such perfect gifts can it be

said of him that he is a true Bahá'í.

For in this holy Dispensation, the crowning glory of bygone ages and cycles, true faith is no mere acknowledgment of the unity of God, but rather the living of a life that will manifest all the perfections and virtues implied in such belief . 7.9

Mastery of Self

... Man should know his own self and recognize that which leadeth unto loftiness or lowliness, glory or abasement, wealth or poverty. 8.1

Today, all the peoples of the world are indulging in self-interest and exert the utmost effort and endeavor to promote their own material interest. They are worshipping themselves and not the divine reality, nor the world of mankind. They seek diligently their own benefit and not the common weal. This is because they are captives of the world of nature and unaware of the divine teachings.... 8.2

The mass of the people are occupied with self and worldly desire, are immersed in the ocean of the nether world and are captives of the world of nature, save those souls who have been freed from the chains and fetters of the material world and, like unto swift-flying birds, are soaring in this unbounded realm. They are awake and vigilant, they shun the obscurity of the world of nature, their highest wish centereth on the eradication from among men of the struggle for existence, the shining forth of the spirituality and the love of the realm on high, the exercise of utmost kindness among peoples, the realization of an intimate and close connection between religions and the practice of the ideal of self-sacrifice. Then will the world of humanity be transformed into the Kingdom of God. 8.3

Today the confirmations of the Kingdom of Abhá are with those who renounce themselves, forget their own opinions, cast aside personalities and are thinking of the welfare of others.... Whosoever is occupied with himself is wandering in the desert of heedlessness and regret. The "Master Key" to self-mastery is self-forgetting. The road to the palace of life is through the path of renunciation. 8.4

O My Servant! Free thyself from the fetters of this world, and loose thy soul from the prison of self. Seize thy chance, for it will come to thee no more. 8.5

O My servants! Could ye apprehend with what wonders of My munificence and bounty I have willed to entrust

your souls, ye would, of a truth, rid yourselves of attachment to all created things, and would gain a true knowledge of your own selves—a knowledge which is the same as the comprehension of Mine own Being. Ye would find yourselves independent of all else but Me, and would perceive, with your inner and outer eye, and as manifest as the revelation of My effulgent Name, the seas of My loving-kindness and bounty moving within you. Suffer not your idle fancies, your evil passions, your insincerity and blindness of heart to dim the luster, or stain the sanctity, of so lofty a station. Ye are even as the bird which soareth, with the full force of its mighty wings and with complete and joyous confidence, through the immensity of the heavens, until, impelled to satisfy its hunger, it turneth longingly to the water and clay of the earth below it, and, having been entrapped in the mesh of its desire, findeth itself impotent to resume its flight to the realms whence it came. Powerless to shake off the burden weighing on its sullied wings, that bird, hitherto an inmate of the heavens, is now forced to seek a dwelling-place upon the dust. Wherefore, O My servants, defile not your wings with the clay of waywardness and vain desires, and suffer them not to be stained with the dust of envy and hate, that ye may not be hindered from soaring in the heavens of My divine knowledge.

O My servants! Through the might of God and His power, and out of the treasury of His knowledge and wisdom, I have brought forth and revealed unto you the pearls that lay concealed in the depths of His everlasting ocean. I have summoned the Maids of Heaven to emerge from behind the veil of concealment, and have clothed them with these words of Mine—words of consummate power and wisdom. I have, moreover, with the hand of divine power, unsealed the choice wine of My Revelation, and have wafted its holy, its hidden, and musk laden fragrance upon all created things. Who else but yourselves is to be blamed if ye choose to remain unendowed with so great an outpouring of God's transcendent and all-encompassing grace, with so bright a revelation of His resplendent mercy? 8.6

All that is in heaven and earth I have ordained for thee, except the human heart, which I have made the habitation of My beauty and glory; yet thou didst give My home and dwelling to another than Me; and whenever the manifestation of My holiness sought His own abode, a stranger found He there, and, homeless, hastened unto

the sanctuary of the Beloved. Notwithstanding I have concealed thy secret and desired not thy shame.

8.7

Ponder awhile. Hast thou ever heard that friend and foe should abide in one heart? Cast out then the stranger,

that the Friend may enter His home. 8.8

O Befriended Stranger! The candle of thine heart is lighted by the hand of My power, quench it not with the

contrary winds of self and passion. The healer of all thine ills is remembrance of Me, forget it not. Make My

love thy treasure and cherish it even as thy very sight and life. 8.9

Sanctity and Holiness

Create in me a pure heart, O my God, and renew a tranquil conscience within me, O my Hope! Through the

spirit of power confirm Thou me in Thy Cause, O my Best-Beloved, and by the light of Thy glory reveal unto me

Thy path, O Thou the Goal of my desire! Through the power of Thy transcendent might lift me up unto the

heaven of Thy holiness, O Source of my being, and by the breezes of Thine eternity gladden me, O Thou Who art

my God! Let Thine everlasting melodies breathe tranquillity on me, O my Companion, and let the riches of Thine

ancient countenance deliver me from all except Thee, O my Master, and let the tidings of the revelation of Thine

incorruptible Essence bring me joy, O Thou Who art the most manifest of the manifest and the most hidden of the

hidden! 9.1

O Son of Spirit! My first counsel is this: Possess a pure, kindly and radiant heart, that thine may be a

sovereignty ancient, imperishable and everlasting. 9.2

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. 9.3

To be pure and holy in all things is an attribute of the consecrated soul and a necessary characteristic of the

unenslaved mind. The best of perfections is immaculacy and the freeing of oneself from every defect. Once the

individual is, in every respect, cleansed and purified, then will he become a focal centre reflecting the Manifest

Light.

First in a human being's way of life must be purity, then freshness,

cleanliness, and independence of spirit.

First must the stream bed be cleansed, then may the sweet river waters be led into it. Chaste eyes enjoy the beatific vision of the Lord and know what this encounter meaneth; a pure sense inhaleth the fragrances that blow from the rose gardens of His grace; a burnished heart will mirror forth the comely face of truth.

This is why, in Holy Scriptures, the counsels of heaven are likened to water, even as the Qur'an saith: "And pure water send We down from Heaven," and the Gospel: "Except a man be baptized of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter in to the Kingdom of God." Thus is it clear that the Teachings which come from God are heavenly outpourings of grace; they are rain-showers of divine mercy, and they cleanse the human heart.

My meaning is this, that in every aspect of life, purity and holiness, cleanliness and refinement, exalt the human condition and further the development of man's inner reality. Even in the physical realm, cleanliness will conduce to spirituality.... 9.4

[They] ... should not look at the depraved condition of the society in which they live, nor at the evidences of moral degradation and frivolous conduct which the people around them display. They should not content themselves merely with relative distinction and excellence. Rather they should fix their gaze upon nobler heights by setting the counsels and exhortations of the Pen of Glory as their supreme goal. Then it will be readily realized how numerous are the stages that still remain to be traversed and how far off the desired goal lies—a goal which is none other than exemplifying heavenly morals and virtues. 9.5

He is My true follower who, if he come to a valley of pure gold, will pass straight through it aloof as a cloud, and will neither turn back, nor pause. Such a man is, assuredly, of Me. From his garment the Concourse on high can inhale the fragrance of sanctity.... And if he met the fairest and most comely of women, he would not feel his heart seduced by the least shadow of desire for her beauty. Such a one, indeed, is the creation of spotless chastity. 9.6

It must be remembered, however, that the maintenance of such a high standard of moral conduct is not to be associated or confused with any form of asceticism, or of excessive and bigoted puritanism. The standard

inculcated by Bahá'u'lláh, seeks, under no circumstances, to deny anyone the legitimate right and privilege to derive the fullest advantage and benefit from the manifold joys, beauties, and pleasures with which the world has been so plentifully enriched by an All-Loving Creator. 9.7

Through the power of the words He hath uttered the whole of the human race can be illumined with the light of unity, and the remembrance of His Name is able to set on fire the hearts of all men, and burn away the veils that intervene between them and His glory. One righteous act is endowed with a potency that can so elevate the dust as to cause it to pass beyond the heaven of heavens. It can tear every bond asunder, and hath the power to restore the force that hath spent itself and vanished

Be pure, O people of God, be pure; be righteous, be righteous.... Say: O people of God! That which can ensure the victory of Him Who is the Eternal Truth, His hosts and helpers on earth, have been set down in the sacred Books and Scriptures, and are as clear and manifest as the sun. These hosts are such righteous deeds, such conduct and character, as are acceptable in His sight. Whoso ariseth, in this Day, to aid Our Cause, and summoneth to his assistance the hosts of a praiseworthy character and upright conduct, the influence flowing from such an action will, most certainly, be diffused throughout the whole world. 9.8

Love and Unity

But there is need of a superior power to overcome human prejudices, a power which nothing in the world of mankind can withstand and which will overshadow the effect of all other forces at work in human conditions.

That irresistible power is the love of God. It is my hope and prayer that it may destroy the prejudice.... between you and unite you all permanently under its hallowed protection. 10.1

How is it possible for men to fight from morning until evening, killing each other, shedding the blood of their fellow-men: And for what object? To gain possession of a part of the earth! Even the animals, when they fight, have an immediate and more reasonable cause for their attacks! How terrible it is that men, who are of the higher kingdom, can descend to slaying and bringing misery to their fellow-beings, for the possession of a tract of land! The highest of created beings fighting to obtain the lowest form of matter, earth! Land belongs not to one people, but to all people. This earth is not man's home, but his tomb. It is for

their tombs these men are fighting.

There is nothing so horrible in this world as the tomb, the abode of the decaying bodies of men....

I charge you all that each one of you concentrate all the thoughts of your heart on love and unity. When a thought of war comes, oppose it by a stronger thought of peace. A thought of hatred must be destroyed by a more powerful thought of love. Thoughts of war bring destruction to all harmony, well-being, restfulness and content. Thoughts of love are constructive of brotherhood, peace, friendship, and happiness....

If you desire with all your heart, friendship with every race on earth, your thought, spiritual and positive, will spread; it will become the desire of others, growing stronger and stronger, until it reaches the minds of all men. Do not despair! Work steadily. Sincerity and love will conquer hate. How many seemingly impossible events are coming to pass in these days! Set your faces steadily towards the Light of the World. Show love to all; "Love is the breath of the Holy Spirit in the heart of Man." Take courage! God never forsakes His children who strive and work and pray! Let your hearts be filled with the strenuous desire that tranquillity and harmony may encircle all this warring world. So will success crown your efforts, and with the universal brotherhood will come the Kingdom of God in peace and good will. 10.2

Throughout the universe the divine power is effulgent in endless images and pictures. The world of creation, the world of humanity may be likened to the earth itself and the divine power to the sun. This Sun has shone upon all mankind. In the endless variety of its reflections the divine Will is manifested. Consider how all are recipients of the bounty of the same Sun. At most the difference between them is that of degree, for the effulgence is one effulgence, the one light emanating from the Sun. This will express the oneness of the world of humanity. The body politic, or the social unity of the human world, may be likened to an ocean, and each member, each individual, a wave upon that same ocean. The light of the sun becomes apparent in each object according to the capacity of that object. The difference is simply one of degree and receptivity. The stone would be a recipient only to a limited extent; another created thing might be as a mirror wherein the sun is fully reflected; but the same light shines upon both.

The most important thing is to polish the mirrors of hearts in order that they may become illumined and receptive of the divine light. One heart may possess the capacity of the polished mirror; another, be covered and obscured by the dust and dross of this world. Although the same Sun is shining upon both, in the mirror which is polished, pure and sanctified you may behold the Sun in all its fullness, glory and power, revealing its majesty and effulgence; but in the mirror which is rusted and obscured there is no capacity for reflection, although so far as the Sun itself is concerned it is shining thereon and is neither lessened nor deprived. Therefore, our duty lies in seeking to polish the mirrors of our hearts in order that we shall become reflectors of that light and recipients of the divine bounties which may be fully revealed through them.

This means the oneness of the world of humanity. That is to say, when this human body politic reaches a state of absolute unity, the effulgence of the eternal Sun will make its fullest light and heat manifest. Therefore, we must not make distinctions between individual members of the human family. We must not consider any soul as barren or deprived. Our duty lies in educating souls so that the Sun of the bestowals of God shall become resplendent in them, and this is possible through the power of the oneness of humanity. The more love is expressed among mankind and the stronger the power of unity, the greater will be this reflection and revelation, for the greatest bestowal of God is love. Love is the source of all the bestowals of God. Until love takes possession of the heart, no other divine bounty can be revealed in it.

10.3

Be in perfect unity. Never become angry with one another. Let your eyes be directed toward the kingdom of truth and not toward the world of creation. Love the creatures for the sake of God and not for themselves. You will never become angry or impatient if you love them for the sake of God. Humanity is not perfect. There are imperfections in every human being, and you will always become unhappy if you look toward the people themselves. But if you look toward God, you will love them and be kind to them, for the world of God is the world of perfection and complete mercy. Therefore, do not look at the shortcomings of anybody; see with the sight of forgiveness. The imperfect eye beholds imperfections. The eye that covers faults looks toward the Creator of souls. He created them, trains and provides for them, endows them

with capacity and life, sight and hearing; therefore, they are the signs of His grandeur. You must love and be kind to everybody, care for the poor, protect the weak, heal the sick, teach and educate the ignorant. 10.4

The utterance of God is a lamp, whose light are these words: Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch. Deal ye one with another with the utmost love and harmony, with friendliness and fellowship. He Who is the Day-Star of Truth beareth Me witness! So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth. The One true God, He Who knoweth all things, Himself testifieth to the truth of these words.

Exert yourselves that ye may attain this transcendent and most sublime station, the station that can insure the protection and security of all mankind. This goal excelleth every other goal, and this aspiration is the monarch of all aspirations. 10.5

Prayer and Meditation

Spirit has influence; prayer has spiritual effect. Therefore, we pray, "O God! Heal this sick one!" Perchance God will answer. Does it matter who prays? God will answer the prayer of every servant if that prayer is urgent. His mercy is vast, illimitable. He answers the prayers of all His servants. He answers the prayer of this plant. The plant prays potentially, "O God! Send me rain!" God answers the prayer, and the plant grows. God will answer anyone. He answers prayers potentially. Before we were born into this world did we not pray, "O God! Give me a mother; give me two fountains of bright milk; purify the air for my breathing; grant me rest and comfort; prepare food for my sustenance and living"? Did we not pray potentially for these needed blessings before we were created? When we came into this world, did we not find our prayers answered? Did we not find mother, father, food, light, home and every other necessity and blessing, although we did not actually ask for them? Therefore, it is natural that God will give to us when we ask Him. His mercy is all-encircling.

But we ask for things which the divine wisdom does not desire for us, and there is no answer to our prayer.

His wisdom does not sanction what we wish. We pray, "O God! Make me wealthy!" If this prayer were universally answered, human affairs would be at a standstill. There would be none left to work in the streets, none to till the soil, none to build, none to run the trains. Therefore, it is

evident that it would not be well for us if
all prayers were answered. The affairs of the world would be interfered with,
energies crippled and progress
hindered. But whatever we ask for which is in accord with divine wisdom, God
will answer. 11.1

Although the reality of Divinity is sanctified and boundless, the aims and
needs of the creatures are restricted.
God's grace is like the rain that cometh down from heaven: the water is not
bounded by the limitations of form,
yet on whatever place it poureth down, it taketh on limitations-dimensions,
appearance, shape-according to the
characteristics of that place. In a square pool, the water, previously
unconfined, becometh a square; in a six-sided
pool it becometh a hexagon, in an eight-sided pool an octagon, and so forth.
The rain itself hath no geometry, no
limits, no form, but it taketh on one form or another, according to the
restrictions of its vessel. In the same way,
the Holy Essence of the Lord God is boundless, immeasurable, but His graces and
splendors become finite in the
creatures, because of their limitations, wherefore the prayers of given persons
will receive favorable answers in
certain cases. 11.2

The true worshiper, while praying, should endeavor not so much to ask God to
fulfill his wishes and desires,
but rather to adjust these and make them conform to the Divine Will. Only
through such an attitude can one
derive that feeling of inner peace and contentment which the power of prayer
alone can confer. 11.3

Remembrance of God is like the rain and dew which bestow freshness and grace on
flowers and hyacinths,
revive them and cause them to acquire fragrance, redolence and renewed
charmooStrive thou, then, to praise and
glorify God by night and by day, that thou mayest attain infinite freshness and
beauty. 11.4

If one friend loves another, is it not natural that he should wish to say so?
Though he knows that that friend is
aware of his love, does he still not wish to tell him of it? It is true
that God knows the wishes of all hearts;
but the impulse to pray is a natural one, springing from man's love to God.
.... Prayer need not be in words, but rather in thought and action. But if this
love and this desire are lacking, it
is useless to try to force them. Words without love mean nothing. If a person
talks to you as an unpleasant duty,
finding neither love nor enjoyment in the meeting, do you wish to converse with

him? 11.5

The reason why privacy hath been enjoined in moments of devotion is this, that thou mayest give thy best attention to the remembrance of God, that thy heart may at all times be animated with His Spirit, and not be shut out as by a veil from thy Best Beloved. Let not thy tongue pay lip service in praise of God while thy heart be not attuned to the exalted summit of Glory, and the Focal Point of communion.

11.6

Bahá'u'lláh says there is a sign (from God) in every phenomenon: the sign of the intellect is contemplation and the sign of contemplation is silence, because it is impossible for a man to do two things at one time-he cannot both speak and meditate.”

It is an axiomatic fact that while you meditate you are speaking with your own spirit. In that state of mind you put certain questions to your spirit and the spirit answers: the light breaks forth and the reality is revealed.

You cannot apply the name ‘man’ to any being void of this faculty of meditation; without it he would be a mere animal, lower than the beasts.

Through the faculty of meditation man attains to eternal life; through it he receives the breath of the Holy Spirit-the bestowal of the Spirit is given in reflection and meditation.

The spirit of man is itself informed and strengthened during meditation; through it affairs of which man knew nothing are unfolded before his view. Through it he receives Divine inspiration, through it he receives heavenly food.

Meditation is the key for opening the doors of mysteries. In that state man abstracts himself: in that state man withdraws himself from all outside objects; in that subjective mood he is immersed in the ocean of spiritual life and can unfold the secrets of things-in-themselves. To illustrate this, think of man as endowed with two kinds of sight; when the power of insight is being used the outward power of vision does not see.

This faculty of meditation frees man from the animal nature, discerns the reality of things, puts man in touch with God.

This faculty brings forth from the invisible plane the sciences and arts. Through the meditative faculty inventions are made. ... 11.7

Intone, O My servant, the verses of God that have been received by thee, as intoned by them who have drawn nigh unto Him, that the sweetness of thy melody may kindle thine own soul, and attract the hearts of all men.

Whoso reciteth, in the privacy of his chamber, the verses revealed by God, the scattering angels of the Almighty shall scatter abroad the fragrance of the words uttered by his mouth, and shall cause the heart of every righteous man to throb. Though he may, at first, remain unaware of its effect, yet the virtue of the grace vouchsafed unto him must needs sooner or later exercise its influence upon his soul. Thus have the mysteries of the Revelation of God been decreed by virtue of the Will of Him Who is the Source of power and wisdom. 11.8

Service to Humanity

Service to humanity is service to God. 12.1

Be kind to all peoples; care for every person; do all ye can to purify the hearts and minds of men; strive ye to gladden every soul. To every meadow be a shower of grace, to every tree the water of life; be as sweet musk to the sense of humankind, and to the ailing be a fresh, restoring breeze. Be pleasing waters to all those who thirst, a careful guide to all who have lost their way; be father and mother to the orphan, be loving sons and daughters to the old, be abundant treasure to the poor. Think ye of love and good fellowship as the delights of heaven, think ye of hostility and hatred as the torments of hell.

Indulge not your bodies with rest, but work with all your souls, and with all your hearts cry out and beg of God to grant you His succor and grace. Thus may ye make this world the Abhá Paradise, and this globe of earth the parade ground of the realm on high. If only ye exert the effort, it is certain that these splendors will shine out, these clouds of mercy will shed down their rain, these life-giving winds will rise and blow, this sweet-smelling musk will be scattered far and wide. 12.2

The betterment of the world can be accomplished through pure and goodly deeds, through commendable and seemly conduct. 12.3

.... Is there any deed in the world that would be nobler than service to the common good? Is there any greater blessing conceivable for a man, than that he should become the cause of the education, the development, the prosperity and honor of his fellow-creatures? No, by the Lord God! The highest

righteousness of all is for blessed
souls to take hold of the hands of the helpless and deliver them out of their
ignorance and abasement and poverty,
and with pure motives, and only for the sake of God, to arise and energetically
devote themselves to the service
of the masses, forgetting their own worldly advantage and working only to serve
the general good.... "The best
of men are those who serve the people; the worst of men are those who harm the
people." 12.4

In the Bahá'í Cause arts, sciences and all crafts are (counted as) worship.
The man who makes a piece of
notepaper to the best of his ability, conscientiously, concentrating all his
forces on perfecting it, is giving praise to
God. Briefly, all effort and exertion put forth by man from the fullness of his
heart is worship, if it is prompted
by the highest motives and the will to do service to humanity. This is worship:
to serve mankind and to minister
to the needs of the people. Service is prayer. A physician ministering to the
sick, gently, tenderly, free from
prejudice and believing in the solidarity of the human race, he is giving
praise. 12.5

It is enjoined upon everyone of you to engage in some form of occupation, such
as crafts, trades and the like.
We have graciously exalted your engagement in such work to the rank of worship
unto God, the True One.
Ponder ye in your hearts the grace and the blessings of God and render thanks
unto Him at eventide and at dawn.
Waste not your time in idleness and sloth. Occupy yourselves with that which
profiteth yourselves and others.
Thus hath it been decreed in this Tablet from whose horizon the daystar of
wisdom and utterance shineth
resplendent.

The most despised of men in the sight of God are those who sit idly and beg.
Hold ye fast unto the cord of
material means, placing your whole trust in God, the Provider of all means.
When anyone occupieth himself in a
craft or trade, such occupation itself is regarded in the estimation of God as
an act of worship; and this is naught
but a token of His infinite and all-pervasive bounty. 12.6

If we review history, we will observe that human advancement has been greatest
in the development of
material virtues. Civilization is the sign and evidence of this progression.
Throughout the world, material
civilization has attained truly wonderful heights and degrees of
efficiency-that is to say, the outward powers and

virtues of man have greatly developed, but the inner and ideal virtues have been correspondingly delayed and neglected. It is now the time in the history of the world for us to strive and give an impetus to the advancement and development of inner forces-that is to say, we must arise to service in the world of morality, for human morals are in need of readjustment. We must also render service to the world of intellectuality in order that the minds of men may increase in power and become keener in perception, assisting the intellect of man to attain its supremacy so that the ideal virtues may appear. 12.7

It is appropriate and befitting that in this illumined age-the age of the progress of the world of humanity we should be self-sacrificing and should serve the human race. Every universal cause is divine and every particular one is temporal. ...

Every imperfect soul is self-centered and thinketh only of his own good. But as his thoughts expand a little he will begin to think of the welfare and comfort of his family. If his ideas still more widen, his concern will be the felicity of his fellow citizens; and if still they widen, he will be thinking of the glory of his land and of his race.

But when ideas and views reach the utmost degree of expansion and attain the stage of perfection, then will he be interested in the exaltation of humankind. He will then be the well-wisher of all men and the seeker of the wealth and prosperity of all lands. This is indicative of perfection....

Love ye all religions and all races with a love that is true and sincere and show that love through deeds and not through the tongue; for the latter hath no importance, as the majority of men are, in speech, well-wishers, while action is the best. 12.8

Effort and Perseverance

From the exalted source, and out of the essence of His favor and bounty He hath entrusted every created thing with a sign of His knowledge, so that none of His creatures may be deprived of its share in expressing, each according to its capacity and rank, this knowledge. This sign is the mirror of His beauty in the world of creation.

The greater the effort exerted for the refinement of this sublime and noble mirror, the more faithfully will it be made to reflect the glory of the names and attributes of God, and reveal the wonders of His signs and knowledge....

There can be no doubt whatever that, in consequence of the efforts which every

man may consciously exert
and as a result of the exertion of his own spiritual faculties, this mirror can
be so cleansed from the dross of
earthly defilements and purged from satanic fancies as to be able to draw nigh
unto the meads of eternal holiness
and attain the courts of everlasting fellowship. 13.1

O ye friends, exert ye an effort! Every expenditure is in need of an income.
This day, in the world of humanity,
men are all the time expending, for war is nothing but the consumption of men
and of wealth. At least engage ye
in a deed of profit to the world of humanity that ye may partially compensate
for that loss. Perchance, through
the divine confirmations, ye may be assisted in promulgating amity and concord
among men, in substituting love
for enmity, in causing universal peace to result from universal war and in
converting loss and rancor into profit
and love. 13.2

... With clear vision we are enabled to struggle onward and upward, ever
progressing in the paths of virtue and
holiness, and becoming the means of light to the world. 13.3

... Speech is not needed. Our actions will help on the world, will spread
civilization, will help the progress of
science, and cause the arts to develop. Without action nothing in the material
world can be accomplished, neither
can words unaided advance a man in the spiritual Kingdom. It is not through
lip-service only that the elect of
God have attained to holiness, but by patient lives of active service they have
brought light into the world.
Therefore strive that your actions day by day may be beautiful prayers.
13.4

Let each morn be better than its eve and each morrow richer than its yesterday.
Man's merit lieth in service
and virtue and not in the pageantry of wealth and riches.... Guard against
idleness and sloth, and cling unto that
which profiteth mankind, whether young or old, whether high or low. 13.5

Make ye a mighty effort till you yourselves betoken this advancement in all
these confirmations, and become
focal centres of God's blessings, daysprings of the light of His unity,
promoters of the gifts and graces of civilized
life. Be ye in that land vanguards of the perfections of humankind; carry
forward the various branches of
knowledge, be active and progressive in the field of inventions and the arts.
Endeavor to rectify the conduct of
men, and seek to excel the whole world in moral character. While the children

are yet in their infancy feed them
from the breast of heavenly grace, foster them in the cradle of all excellence,
rear them in the embrace of bounty.
Give them the advantage of every useful kind of knowledge. Let them share in
every new and rare and wondrous
craft and art. Bring them up to work and strive, and accustom them to hardship.
Teach them to dedicate their
lives to matters of great import, and inspire them to undertake studies that
will benefit mankind. 13.6

Thus shall they learn perseverance in all things, the will to advance, high
mindedness and high resolve, chastity
and purity of life. Thus shall they be enabled to carry to a successful
conclusion whatsoever they undertake.
13.7

We must strive with energies of heart, soul and mind to develop and manifest
the perfections and virtues latent
within the realities of the phenomenal world, for the human reality may be
compared to a seed. If we sow the
seed, a mighty tree appears from it. The virtues of the seed are revealed in
the tree.... Similarly, the merciful God,
our Creator, has deposited within human realities certain latent and potential
virtues. Through education and
culture these virtues deposited by the loving God will become apparent in the
human reality, even as the
unfoldment of the tree from within the germinating seed. 13.8

Part III.

Material and Spiritual Reality

In the modern world, the social, intellectual, and economic concerns of
humanity are rooted in a
preoccupation with material reality. Consideration of a spiritual reality, if
not judged to be overt superstition, is
viewed as a private matter that has nothing to do with the “public”
concerns of work or social order. In such a
perspective, spirituality is to be sought apart from the “real” world of
daily life.

The teachings of Bahá'u'lláh describe a dynamic coherence between
spiritual and material reality. The
material world is a matrix through which spiritual powers and capacities find
expression.

Though immersed in a material environment, and having a physical component to
his nature, man is endowed
with a spirit that gives him abilities that surpass those of a mere animal.
While the animal is the captive of
nature, man dominates nature through his mind and spirit. It is impossible that

man, who demonstrates powers superior to those found in nature, can be merely the product of the physical world. The divine qualities of God are reflected in these human qualities; but an understanding of the reality of God lies far beyond the powers of human comprehension.

The divine spirit which finds expression in man is manifested to a limited degree in all creation. Indeed, according to Bahá'u'lláh, the entire physical world is a reflection of the spiritual one. This physical world is the place where human beings acquire knowledge of God and, through their relationship with Him, learn about their spiritual reality.

The Physical World

The temple of the world hath been fashioned after the image and likeness of the human body. In fact each mirroreth forth the image of the other, wert thou but to observe with discerning eyes. By this is meant that even as the human body in this world which is outwardly composed of different limbs and organs, is in reality a closely integrated, coherent entity, similarly the structure of the physical world is like unto a single being whose limbs and members are inseparably linked together.

Were one to observe with an eye that discovereth the realities of all things, it would become clear that the greatest relationship that bindeth the world of being together lieth in the range of created things themselves, and that cooperation, mutual aid and reciprocity are essential characteristics in the unified body of the world of being, inasmuch as all created things are closely related together and each is influenced by the other or deriveth benefit therefrom, either directly or indirectly. Consider for instance how one group of created things constituteth the vegetable kingdom, and another the animal kingdom. Each of these two maketh use of certain elements in the air on which its own life dependeth, while each increaseth the quantity of such elements as are essential for the life of the other. In other words, the growth and development of the vegetable world is impossible without the existence of the animal kingdom, and the maintenance of animal life is inconceivable without the cooperation of the vegetable kingdom. Of like kind are the relationships that exist among all created things. Hence it was stated that cooperation and reciprocity are essential properties which are inherent in the unified system of the world of

existence, and without which the entire creation would be reduced to nothingness. 14.1

The elemental atoms which constitute all phenomenal existence and being in this illimitable universe are in perpetual motion, undergoing continuous degrees of progression. For instance, let us conceive of an atom in the mineral kingdom progressing upward to the kingdom of the vegetable by entering into the composition and fibre of a tree or plant. From thence it is assimilated and transferred into the kingdom of the animal and finally, by the law and process of composition, becomes a part of the body of man. That is to say, it has traversed the intermediate degrees and stations of phenomenal existence, entering into the composition of various organisms in its journey. This motion or transference is progressive and perpetual, for after disintegration of the human body into which it has entered, it returns to the mineral kingdom whence it came and will continue to traverse the kingdoms of phenomena as before. This is an illustration designed to show that the constituent elemental atoms of phenomena undergo progressive transference and motion throughout the material kingdoms. In its ceaseless progression and journeyings the atom becomes imbued with the virtues and powers of each degree or kingdom it traverses. In the degree of the mineral it possessed mineral affinities; in the kingdom of the vegetable it manifested the augmentative virtue or power of growth; in the animal organism it reflected the intelligence of that degree; and in the kingdom of man it was qualified with human attributes or virtues.

Furthermore, the forms and organisms of phenomenal being and existence in each of the kingdoms of the universe are myriad and numberless. The vegetable plane or kingdom, for instance, has its infinite variety of types and material structures of plant life—each distinct and different within itself, no two exactly alike in composition and detail—for there are no repetitions in nature, and the augmentative virtue cannot be confined to any given image or shape. Each leaf has its own particular identity—so to speak, its own individuality as a leaf. Therefore, each atom of the innumerable elemental atoms, during its ceaseless motion through the kingdoms of existence as a constituent of organic composition, not only becomes imbued with the powers and virtues of the kingdoms it traverses but also reflects the attributes and qualities of the forms and organisms of those kingdoms.

As each of these forms has its individual and particular virtue, therefore, each elemental atom of the universe has the opportunity of expressing an infinite variety of those individual virtues. No atom is bereft or deprived of this opportunity or right of expression. Nor can it be said of any given atom that it is denied equal opportunities with other atoms; nay, all are privileged to possess the virtues existent in these kingdoms and to reflect the attributes of their organisms. In the various transformations or passages from kingdom to kingdom the virtues expressed by the atoms in each degree are peculiar to that degree. For example, in the world of the mineral the atom does not express the vegetable form and organism, and when through the process of transmutation it assumes the virtues of the vegetable degree, it does not reflect the attributes of animal organisms, and so on. 14.2

Know that the order and the perfection of the whole universe require that existence should appear in numberless forms. For existing beings could not be embodied in only one degree, one station, one kind, one species and one class; undoubtedly, the difference of degrees and distinction of forms, and the variety of genus and species, are necessary—that is to say, the degree of mineral, vegetable, animal substances, and of man, are inevitable; for the world could not be arranged, adorned, organized and perfected with man alone. In the same way, with only animals, only plants or only minerals, this world could not show forth beautiful scenery, exact organization and exquisite adornment. Without doubt it is because of the varieties of degrees, stations, species and classes that existence becomes resplendent with utmost perfection. 14.3

Nature is that condition, that reality, which in appearance consists in life and death, or, in other words, in the composition and decomposition of all things.

This Nature is subjected to an absolute organization, to determined laws, to a complete order and a finished design, from which it will never depart—to such a degree, indeed, that if you look carefully and with keen sight, from the smallest invisible atom up to such large bodies of the world of existence as the globe of the sun or the other great stars and luminous spheres, whether you regard their arrangement, their composition, their form or their movement, you will find that all are in the highest degree of organization and are under one law from which

they will never depart.

But when you look at Nature itself, you see that it has no intelligence, no will. For instance, the nature of fire is to burn; it burns without will or intelligence. The nature of water is fluidity; it flows without will or intelligence... Thus it is clear that the natural movements of all things are compelled; there are no voluntary movements except those of animals and, above all, those of man.... Now, when you behold in existence such organizations, arrangements and laws, can you say that all these are the effect of Nature, though Nature has neither intelligence nor perception? If not, it becomes evident that this Nature, which has neither perception nor intelligence, is in the grasp of Almighty God, Who is the Ruler of the world of Nature; whatever He wishes, He causes Nature to manifest.

One of the things which has appeared in the world of existence, and which is one of the requirements of Nature, is human life. Considered from this point of view man is the branch; nature is the root. Then can the will and the intelligence, and the perfections which exist in the branch, be absent in the root?

It is said that Nature in its own essence is in the grasp of the power of God, Who is the Eternal Almighty One: He holds Nature within accurate regulations and laws, and rules over it.
14.4

Evolution and Human Capacity

... Life on this earth is very ancient. It is not one hundred thousand, or two hundred thousand, or one million or two million years old; it is very ancient, and the ancient records and traces are entirely obliterated. 15.1

Moses taught that the world was brought into existence in the six days of creation. This is an allegory, a symbolic form of the ancient truth that the world evolved gradually We thus have a progressive process of creation, and not a one-time happening. Moses' days of creation represent time spans of millions of years.
15.2

The beginning of the existence of man on the terrestrial globe resembles his formation in the womb of the mother. The embryo in the womb of the mother gradually grows and develops until birth, after which it continues to grow and develop until it reaches the age of discretion and maturity. Though in infancy the signs of the mind

and spirit appear in man, they do not reach the degree of perfection; they are imperfect. Only when man attains maturity do the mind and the spirit appear and become evident in utmost perfection.

So also the formation of man in the matrix of the world was in the beginning like the embryo; then gradually he made progress in perfectness, and grew and developed until he reached the state of maturity, when the mind and spirit became visible in the greatest power. In the beginning of his formation the mind and spirit also existed, but they were hidden; later they were manifested. In the womb of the world mind and spirit also existed in the embryo, but they were concealed; afterward they appeared. So it is that in the seed the tree exists, but it is hidden and concealed; when it develops and grows, the complete tree appears. In the same way the growth and development of all beings is gradual; this is the universal divine organization and the natural system. The seed does not at once become a tree; the embryo does not at once become a man; the mineral does not suddenly become a stone. No, they grow and develop gradually and attain the limit of perfection.

All beings, whether large or small, were created perfect and complete from the first, but their perfections appear in them by degrees. The organization of God is one; the evolution of existence is one; the divine system is one. Whether they be small or great beings, all are subject to one Law and system. Each seed has in it from the first all the vegetable perfections. For example, in the seed all the vegetable perfections exist from the beginning, but not visibly; afterward little by little they appear. So it is first the shoot which appears from the seed, then the branches, leaves, blossoms and fruits; but from the beginning of its existence all these things are in the seed, potentially, though not apparently.

In the same way, the embryo possesses from the first all perfections, such as the spirit, the mind, the sight, the smell, the taste-in one word, all the powers-but they are not visible and become so only by degrees.

Similarly, the terrestrial globe from the beginning was created with all its elements, substances, minerals, atoms and organisms; but these only appeared by degrees: first the mineral, then the plant, afterwards the animal, and finally man. But from the first these kinds and species existed, but were undeveloped in the terrestrial globe,

and then appeared only gradually. For the supreme organization of God, and the universal natural system, surround all beings, and all are subject to this rule. When you consider this universal system, you see that there is not one of the beings which at its coming into existence has reached the limit of perfection. No, they gradually grow and develop, and then attain the degree of perfection. 15.3

In the world of existence man has traversed successive degrees until he has attained the human kingdom. In each degree of his progression he has developed capacity for advancement to the next station and condition.

While in the kingdom of the mineral he was attaining the capacity for promotion into the degree of the vegetable.

In the kingdom of the vegetable he underwent preparation for the world of the animal, and from thence he has come onward to the human degree, or kingdom. Throughout this journey of progression he has ever and always been potentially man. 15.4

... In all physical respects, and where the animal spirit is concerned, the selfsame feelings are shared by animal and man. 15.5

We cannot prove man was always man for this is a fundamental doctrine, but it is based on the assertion that nothing can exceed its own potentialities, that everything, a stone, a tree, an animal and a human being existed in plan, potentially, from the very "beginning" of creation. We don't believe man has always had the form of man, but rather that from the outset he was going to evolve into the human form and species and not be a haphazard branch of the ape family. 15.6

Moreover these members, these elements, this composition, which are found in the organism of man, are an attraction and magnet for the spirit; it is certain that the spirit will appear in it. So a mirror which is clear will certainly attract the rays of the sun. It will become luminous, and wonderful images will appear in it-that is to say when these existing elements are gathered together according to the natural order, and with perfect strength, they become a magnet for the spirit, and the spirit will become manifest in them with all its perfections.

Under these conditions it cannot be said, "What is the necessity for the rays of the sun to descend upon the mirror?" -for the connection which exists between the reality of things, whether they be spiritual or material,

requires that when the mirror is clear and faces the sun, the light of the sun must become apparent in it. In the same way, when the elements are arranged and combined in the most glorious system, organization and manner, the human spirit will appear and be manifest in them. 15.7

... All these endless beings which inhabit the world, whether man, animal, vegetable, mineral-whatever they may be-are surely, each one of them, composed of elements. There is no doubt that this perfection which is in all beings is caused by the creation of God from the composing elements, by their appropriate mingling and proportionate quantities, the mode of their composition, and the influence of other beings. For all beings are connected together like a chain; and reciprocal help, assistance and interaction belonging to the properties of things are the causes of the existence, development and growth of created beings. It is confirmed through evidences and proofs that every being universally acts upon other beings, either absolutely or through association. Finally, the perfection of each individual being-that is to say, the perfection which you now see in man or apart from him, with regard to their atoms, members or powers-is due to the composition of the elements, to their measure, to their balance, to the mode of their combination, and to mutual influence. When all these are gathered together, then man exists.

As the perfection of man is entirely due to the composition of the atoms of the elements, to their measure, to the method of their combination, and to mutual influence and action of the different beings-then, since man was produced ten or a hundred thousand years ago from these earthly elements with the same measure and balance, the same method of combination and mingling, and the same influence of the other beings, exactly the same man existed then as now. This is evident and not worth debating. A thousand million years hence, if these elements of man are gathered together and arranged in this special proportion, and if the elements are combined according to the same method, and if they are affected by the same influence of other beings, exactly the same man will exist. For example, if after a hundred thousand years there is oil, fire, a wick, a lamp and the lighter of the lamp-briefly, if there are all the necessities which now exist, exactly the same lamp will be obtained. 15.8

In the differentiation of life in the world of existence, there are four

degrees or kingdoms: the mineral, vegetable, animal and human. The mineral kingdom is possessed of a certain virtue which we term cohesion. The vegetable kingdom possesses cohesive properties plus the power of growth, or augmentative power. The animal kingdom is possessed of the virtues of the mineral and vegetable plus the powers of the senses. But the animal, although gifted with sensibilities, is utterly bereft of consciousness, absolutely out of touch with the world of consciousness and spirit. The animal possesses no powers by which it can make discoveries which lie beyond the realm of the senses. It has no power of intellectual origination. For example, an animal located in Europe is not capable of discovering the continent of America. It understands only phenomena which come within the range of its senses and instinct. It cannot abstractly reason out anything. The animal cannot conceive of the earth being spherical or revolving upon its axis. It cannot apprehend that the little stars in the heavens are tremendous worlds vastly greater than the earth. The animal cannot abstractly conceive of intellect. Of these powers it is bereft. Therefore, these powers are peculiar to man, and it is made evident that in the human kingdom there is a reality of which the animal is lacking. What is that reality? It is the spirit of man. By it man is distinguished above all the other phenomenal kingdoms. Although he possesses all the virtues of the lower kingdoms, he is further endowed with the spiritual faculty, the heavenly gift of consciousness. 15.9

Man is intelligent, instinctively and consciously intelligent; nature is not. Man is fortified with memory; nature does not possess it. Man is the discoverer of the mysteries of nature; nature is not conscious of those mysteries herself. It is evident, therefore, that man is dual in aspect: as an animal he is subject to nature, but in his spiritual or conscious being he transcends the world of material existence. His spiritual powers, being nobler and higher, possess virtues of which nature intrinsically has no evidence; therefore, they triumph over natural conditions. These ideal virtues or powers in man surpass or surround nature, comprehend natural laws and phenomena, penetrate the mysteries of the unknown and invisible and bring them forth into the realm of the known and visible. 15.10

Body, Mind, and Soul

What the Bahá'ís do believe.... is that we have three aspects of our

humanness, so to speak, a body, a mind and an immortal identity-soul or spirit. We believe the mind forms a link between the soul and the body, and the two interact on each other. 16.1

In the world of existence there is nothing so important as spirit, nothing so essential as the spirit of man. The spirit of man is the most noble of phenomena. The spirit of man is the meeting between man and God. The spirit of man is the animus of human life and the collective center of all human virtues. The spirit of man is the cause of the illumination of this world. 16.2

... It is certain that in man there is a reality which is not the physical body. Sometimes the body becomes weak, but that other reality is in its own normal state. The body goes to sleep, becomes as one dead; but that reality is moving about, comprehending things, expressing them and is even conscious of itself.

This other and inner reality is called the heavenly body, the ethereal form which corresponds to this body. This is the conscious reality which discovers the inner meaning of things, for the outer body of man does not discover anything. The inner ethereal reality grasps the mysteries of existence, discovers scientific truths and indicates their technical application. It discovers electricity, produces the telegraph, the telephone and opens the door to the world of arts. If the outer material body did this, the animal would, likewise, be able to make scientific and wonderful discoveries, for the animal shares with man all physical powers and limitations. What, then, is that power which penetrates the realities of existence and which is not to be found in the animal? It is the inner reality which comprehends things, throws light upon the mysteries of life and being, discovers the heavenly Kingdom, unseals the mysteries of God and differentiates man from the brute. Of this there can be no doubt.

As we have before indicated, this human reality stands between the higher and the lower in man, between the world of the animal and the world of Divinity. When the animal proclivity in man becomes predominant, he sinks even lower than the brute. When the heavenly powers are triumphant in his nature, he becomes the noblest and most superior being in the world of creation. All the imperfections found in the animal are found in man. In him there is antagonism, hatred and selfish struggle for existence; in his nature lurk jealousy, revenge, ferocity,

cunning, hypocrisy, greed, injustice and tyranny. So to speak, the reality of man is clad in the outer garment of the animal, the habiliments of the world of nature, the world of darkness, imperfections and unlimited baseness.

On the other hand, we find in him justice, sincerity, faithfulness, knowledge, wisdom, illumination, mercy and pity, coupled with intellect, comprehension, the power to grasp the realities of things and the ability to penetrate the truths of existence. All these great perfections are to be found in man. Therefore, we say that man is a reality which stands between light and darkness. From this standpoint his nature is threefold: animal, human and divine. The animal nature is darkness; the heavenly is light in light.

16.3

The human spirit which distinguishes man from the animal is the rational soul, and these two names-the human spirit and the rational soul-designate one thing. This spirit, which in the terminology of the philosophers is the rational soul, embraces all beings, and as far as human ability permits discovers the realities of things and becomes cognizant of their peculiarities and effects, and of the qualities and properties of beings. But the human spirit, unless assisted by the spirit of faith, does not become acquainted with the divine secrets and the heavenly realities. It is like a mirror which, although clear, polished and brilliant, is still in need of light. Until a ray of the sun reflects upon it, it cannot discover the heavenly secrets.

But the mind is the power of the human spirit. Spirit is the lamp; mind is the light which shines from the lamp. Spirit is the tree, and the mind is the fruit. Mind is the perfection of the spirit and is its essential quality, as the sun's rays are the essential necessity of the sun.

16.4

The soul or spirit of the individual comes into being with the conception of his physical body.

16.5

Know thou that the soul of man is exalted above, and is independent of all infirmities of body or mind. That a sick person showeth signs of weakness is due to the hindrances that interpose themselves between his soul and his body, for the soul itself remaineth unaffected by any bodily ailments. Consider the light of the lamp. Though an external object may interfere with its radiance, the light itself continueth to shine with undiminished power. In like manner, every malady afflicting the body of man is an impediment that preventeth the soul from manifesting

its inherent might and power. When it leaveth the body, however, it will evince such ascendancy, and reveal such influence as no force on earth can equal. Every pure, every refined and sanctified soul will be endowed with tremendous power, and shall rejoice with exceeding gladness.

Consider the lamp which is hidden under a bushel. Though its light be shining, yet its radiance is concealed from men. Likewise, consider the sun which hath been obscured by the clouds. Observe how its splendor appeareth to have diminished, when in reality the source of that light hath remained unchanged. The soul of man should be likened unto this sun, and all things on earth should be regarded as his body. So long as no external impediment interveneth between them, the body will, in its entirety, continue to reflect the light of the soul, and to be sustained by its power. As soon as, however, a veil interposeth itself between them, the brightness of that light seemeth to lessen.

Consider again the sun when it is completely hidden behind the clouds. Though the earth is still illumined with its light, yet the measure of light which it receiveth is considerably reduced. Not until the clouds have dispersed, can the sun shine again in the plenitude of its glory. Neither the presence of the cloud nor its absence can, in any way, affect the inherent splendor of the sun. The soul of man is the sun by which his body is illumined, and from which it draweth its sustenance, and should be so regarded.

Consider, moreover, how the fruit, ere it is formed lieth potentially within the tree. Were the tree to be cut into pieces, no sign nor any part of the fruit, however small, could be detected. When it appeareth, however, it manifesteth itself, as thou hast observed, in its wondrous beauty and glorious perfection. Certain fruits, indeed, attain their fullest development only after being severed from the tree.

16.6

Some think that the body is the substance and exists by itself, and that the spirit is accidental and depends upon the substance of the body, although, on the contrary, the rational soul is the substance, and the body depends upon it. If the accident-that is to say, the body-be destroyed, the substance, the spirit, remains.

... The rational soul, meaning the human spirit, does not descend into the body-that is to say, it does not enter it, for descent and entrance are characteristics of bodies, and the rational

soul is exempt from this. The spirit never entered this body, so in quitting it, it will not be in need of an abiding-place: no, the spirit is connected with the body, as this light is with this mirror. When the mirror is clear and perfect, the light of the lamp will be apparent in it, and when the mirror becomes covered with dust or breaks, the light will disappear. The rational soul-that is to say, the human spirit has neither entered this body nor existed through it; so after the disintegration of the composition of the body, how should it be in need of a substance through which it may exist? On the contrary, the rational soul is the substance through which the body exists. The personality of the rational soul is from its beginning; it is not due to the instrumentality of the body, but the state and the personality of the rational soul may be strengthened in this world; it will make progress and will attain to the degrees of perfection, or it will remain in the lowest abyss of ignorance, veiled and deprived from beholding the signs of God. 16.7

Verily I say, the human soul is, in its essence, one of the signs of God, a mystery among His mysteries. It is one of the mighty signs of the Almighty, the harbinger that proclaimeth the reality of all the worlds of God. Within it lieth concealed that which the world is now utterly incapable of apprehending. 16.8

The Nature of God

God in His Essence and in His own Self hath ever been unseen, inaccessible, and unknowable. 17.1

Consider the rational faculty with which God hath endowed the essence of man. Examine thine own self, and behold how thy motion and stillness, thy will and purpose, thy sight and hearing, thy sense of smell and power of speech, and whatever else is related to, or transcendeth, thy physical senses or spiritual perceptions, all proceed from, and owe their existence to, this same faculty. So closely are they related unto it, that if in less than the twinkling of an eye its relationship to the human body be severed, each and every one of these senses will cease immediately to exercise its function, and will be deprived of the power to manifest the evidences of its activity. It is indubitably clear and evident that each of these afore-mentioned instruments has depended, and will ever continue to depend, for its proper functioning on this rational faculty, which should be regarded as a sign of the revelation of Him Who is the sovereign Lord of all. Through its manifestation

all these names and attributes have been revealed, and by the suspension of its action they are all destroyed and perish.

It would be wholly untrue to maintain that this faculty is the same as the power of vision, inasmuch as the power of vision is derived from it and acteth in dependence upon it. It would, likewise, be idle to contend that this faculty can be identified with the sense of hearing, as the sense of hearing receiveth from the rational faculty the requisite energy for performing its functions. This same relationship bindeth this faculty with whatsoever hath been the recipient of these names and attributes within the human temple. These diverse names and revealed attributes have been generated through the agency of this sign of God. Immeasurably exalted is this sign, in its essence and reality, above all such names and attributes. Nay, all else besides it will, when compared with its glory, fade into utter nothingness and become a thing forgotten.

Wert thou to ponder in thine heart, from now until the end that hath no end, and with all the concentrated intelligence and understanding which the greatest minds have attained in the past or will attain in the future, this divinely ordained and subtle Reality, this sign of the revelation of the All-Abiding, All-Glorious God, thou wilt fail to comprehend its mystery or to appraise its virtue. Having recognized thy powerlessness to attain to an adequate understanding of that Reality which abideth within thee, thou wilt readily admit the futility of such efforts as may be attempted by thee, or by any of the created things, to fathom the mystery of the Living God, the Day Star of unfading glory, the Ancient of everlasting days. This confession of helplessness which mature contemplation must eventually impel every mind to make is in itself the acme of human understanding, and marketh the culmination of man's development. 17.2

... No lower degree can understand a higher, such comprehension being impossible.

The higher plane, however, understandeth the lower. The animal, for instance, comprehendeth the mineral and vegetable, the human understandeth the planes of the animal, vegetable and mineral. But the mineral cannot possibly understand the realms of man. And notwithstanding the fact that all these entities coexist in the phenomenal world, even so, no lower degree can ever comprehend a higher.

Then how could it be possible for a contingent reality, that is, man, to understand the nature of that preexistent Essence, the Divine Being? The difference in station between man and the Divine Reality is thousands upon thousands of times greater than the difference between vegetable and animal. And that which a human being would conjure up in his mind is but the fanciful image of his human condition, it doth not encompass God's reality but rather is encompassed by it. That is, man graspeth his own illusory conceptions, but the Reality of Divinity can never be grasped.... 17.3

How shall we know God? We know Him by His attributes. We know Him by His signs. We know Him by His names. We know not what the reality of the sun is, but we know the sun by the ray, by the heat, by its efficacy and penetration. We recognize the sun by its bounty and effulgence, but as to what constitutes the reality of the solar energy, that is unknowable to us. The attributes characterizing the sun, however, are knowable. If we wish to come in touch with the reality of Divinity, we do so by recognizing its phenomena, its attributes and traces, which are widespread in the universe. 17.4

... The Reality of the Divinity is hidden from all comprehension, and concealed from the minds of all men. It is absolutely impossible to ascend to that plane... Nevertheless, we speak of the names and attributes of the Divine Reality, and we praise Him by attributing to Him sight, hearing, power, life and knowledge. We affirm these names and attributes, not to prove the perfections of God, but to deny that He is capable of imperfection. When we look at the existing world, we see that ignorance is imperfection and knowledge is perfection; therefore, we say that the sanctified Essence of God is wisdom. Weakness is imperfection, and power is perfection; consequently, we say that the sanctified Essence of God is the acme of power. It is not that we can comprehend His knowledge, His sight, His power and life, for it is beyond our comprehension; for the essential names and attributes of God are identical with His Essence, and His Essence is above all comprehension. 17.5

Praise be to God, the Eternal that perisheth not, the Everlasting that declineth not, the Self-Subsisting that altereth not. He it is Who is transcendent in His sovereignty, Who is manifest through His signs, and is hidden through His mysteries... He it is Who hath revealed His Cause for the guidance

of His creatures, and sent down
His verses to demonstrate His Proof and His Testimony.... 17.6

The door of the knowledge of the Ancient Being hath ever been, and will continue for ever to be, closed in the face of men. No man's understanding shall ever gain access unto His holy court. As a token of His mercy, however, and as a proof of His loving-kindness, He hath manifested unto men the Day Stars of His divine guidance, the Symbols of His divine unity, and hath ordained the knowledge of these sanctified Beings to be identical with the knowledge of His own Self. Whoso recognizeth them hath recognized God. Whoso hearkeneth to their call, hath hearkened to the Voice of God, and whoso testifieth to the truth of their Revelation, hath testified to the truth of God Himself. Whoso turneth away from them, hath turned away from God, and whoso disbelieveth in them, hath disbelieved in God. Every one of them is the Way of God that connecteth this world with the realms above, and the Standard of His Truth unto every one in the kingdoms of earth and heaven. They are the Manifestations of God amidst men, the evidences of His Truth, and the signs of His glory.

17.7

In the Word of God there is still another unity-the oneness of the Manifestations of God, Abraham, Moses, Jesus Christ, Muhammad, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. This is a unity divine, heavenly, radiant, merciful-the one reality appearing in its successive Manifestations. For instance, the sun is one and the same, but its points of dawning are various. During the summer season it rises from the northern point of the ecliptic; in winter it appears from the southern point of rising. Each month between, it appears from a certain zodiacal position. Although these dawning points are different, the sun is the same sun which has appeared from them all.

17.8

[Bahá'u'lláh] proclaims unequivocally the existence and oneness of a personal God, unknowable, inaccessible, the source of all Revelation, eternal, omniscient, omnipresent and almighty....

17.9

... That "innermost Spirit of Spirits" and "eternal Essence of Essences"-that invisible yet rational God Who, however much we extol the divinity of His Manifestations on earth, can in no wise incarnate His infinite, His unknowable, His incorruptible and all-embracing Reality in the concrete and

limited frame of a mortal being.

Indeed, the God Who could so incarnate His own reality would, in the light of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, cease immediately to be God. So crude and fantastic a theory of Divine incarnation is as removed from, and incompatible with, the essentials of Bahá'í belief as are the no less inadmissible pantheistic and anthropomorphic conceptions of God—both of which the utterances of Bahá'u'lláh emphatically repudiate and the fallacy of which they expose. 17.10

What is meant by personal God is a God Who is conscious of His creation, Who has a Mind, a Will, a Purpose, and not, as many scientists and materialists believe, an unconscious and determined force operating in the universe. Such conception of the Divine Being, as the Supreme and ever present Reality in the world, is not anthropomorphic, for it transcends all human limitations and forms, and does by no means attempt to define the essence of Divinity which is obviously beyond any human comprehension. To say that God is a personal Reality does not mean that He has a physical form, or does in any way resemble a human being. 17.11

God, Creation, and Spirit

As to thy question concerning the origin of creation. Know assuredly that God's creation hath existed from eternity, and will continue to exist forever. Its beginning hath had no beginning, and its end knoweth no end. His name, the Creator, presupposeth a creation, even as His title, the Lord of Men, must involve the existence of a servant. 18.1

Know thou of a truth that the worlds of God are countless in their number, and infinite in their range. None can reckon or comprehend them except God, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. 18.2

Know thou that every created thing is a sign of the revelation of God. Each, according to its capacity, is, and will ever remain, a token of the Almighty. Inasmuch as He, the sovereign Lord of all, hath willed to reveal His sovereignty in the kingdom of names and attributes, each and every created thing hath, through the act of the Divine Will, been made a sign of His glory. So pervasive and general is this revelation that nothing whatsoever in the whole universe can be discovered that doth not reflect His splendor.... Were the Hand of Divine power to divest of this high endowment all created things, the entire universe would

become desolate and void.

18.3

As regards thine assertions about the beginning of creation, this is a matter on which conceptions vary by reason of the divergences in men's thoughts and opinions. Wert thou to assert that it hath ever existed and shall continue to exist, it would be true; or wert thou to affirm the same concept as is mentioned in the sacred Scriptures, no doubt would there be about it, for it hath been revealed by God, the Lord of the worlds

That which hath been in existence had existed before, but not in the form thou seest today. The world of existence came into being through the heat generated from the interaction between the active force and that which is its recipient. These two are the same, yet they are different. Thus doth the Great Announcement inform thee about this glorious structure. Such as communicate the generating influence and such as receive its impact are indeed created through the irresistible Word of God which is the Cause of the entire creation, while all else besides His Word are but the creatures and the effects thereof. Verily thy Lord is the Expounder, the All-Wise.

Know thou, moreover, that the Word of God-exalted be His glory-is higher and far superior to that which the senses can perceive, for it is sanctified from any property or substance. It transcendeth the limitations of known elements and is exalted above all the essential and recognized substances. It became manifest without any syllable or sound and is none but the Command of God which pervadeth all created things. It hath never been withheld from the world of being. It is God's all-pervasive grace, from which all grace doth emanate. It is an entity far removed above all that hath been and shall be....

Every thing must needs have an origin and every building a builder. Verily, the Word of God is the cause which hath preceded the contingent world-a world which is adorned with the splendors of the Ancient of Days, yet is being renewed and regenerated at all times. Immeasurably exalted is the God of Wisdom Who hath raised this sublime structure.

Look at the world and ponder a while upon it. It unveileth the book of its own self before thine eyes and revealeth that which the Pen of thy Lord, the Fashioner, the All-Informed, hath inscribed therein. It will acquaint

thee with that which is within it and upon it and will give thee such clear explanations as to make thee independent of every eloquent expounder.

Say: Nature in its essence is the embodiment of My Name, the Maker, the Creator. Its manifestations are diversified by varying causes, and in this diversity there are signs for men of discernment. Nature is God's Will and is its expression in and through the contingent world. It is a dispensation of Providence ordained by the Ordainer, the All-Wise. Were anyone to affirm that it is the Will of God as manifested in the world of being, no one should question this assertion. It is endowed with a power whose reality men of learning fail to grasp. Indeed a man of insight can perceive naught therein save the effulgent splendor of Our Name, the Creator.

18.4

Every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God is endowed with such potency as can instill new life into every human frame, if ye be of them that comprehend this truth. All the wondrous works ye behold in this world have been manifested through the operation of His supreme and most exalted Will, His wondrous and inflexible Purpose. Through the mere revelation of the word "Fashioner," issuing forth from His lips and proclaiming His attribute to mankind, such power is released as can generate, through successive ages, all the manifold arts which the hands of man can produce. This, verily, is a certain truth. No sooner is this resplendent word uttered, than its animating energies, stirring within all created things, give birth to the means and instruments whereby such arts can be produced and perfected. All the wondrous achievements ye now witness are the direct consequences of the Revelation of this Name. In the days to come, ye will, verily, behold things of which ye have never heard before. Thus hath it been decreed in the Tablets of God, and none can comprehend it except them whose sight is sharp. In like manner, the moment the word expressing My attribute "The Omniscient" issueth forth from My mouth, every created thing will, according to its capacity and limitations, be invested with the power to unfold the knowledge of the most marvelous sciences, and will be empowered to manifest them in the course of time at the bidding of Him Who is the Almighty, the All-Knowing. Know thou of a certainty that the Revelation of every other Name is accompanied by a similar manifestation of Divine power. Every single letter proceeding out of the

mouth of God is indeed a mother letter, and every word uttered by Him Who is the Well Spring of Divine Revelation is a mother word, and His Tablet a Mother Tablet. Well is it with them that apprehend this truth.

18.5

The greatest power in the realm and range of human existence is spirit—the divine breath which animates and pervades all things. It is manifested throughout creation in different degrees or kingdoms. In the vegetable kingdom it is the augmentative spirit or power of growth, the animus of life and development in plants, trees and organisms of the floral world. In this degree of its manifestation spirit is unconscious of the powers which qualify the kingdom of the animal. The distinctive virtue or plus of the animal is sense perception; it sees, hears, smells, tastes and feels but is incapable, in turn, of conscious ideation or reflection which characterizes and differentiates the human kingdom. The animal neither exercises nor apprehends this distinctive human power and gift. From the visible it cannot draw conclusions regarding the invisible, whereas the human mind from visible and known premises attains knowledge of the unknown and invisible.... The animal spirit cannot penetrate and discover the mysteries of things. It is a captive of the senses. No amount of teaching, for instance, would enable it to grasp the fact that the sun is stationary, and the earth moves around it. Likewise, the human spirit has its limitations. It cannot comprehend the phenomena of the Kingdom transcending the human station, for it is a captive of powers and life forces which have their operation upon its own plane of existence, and it cannot go beyond that boundary.

There is, however, another Spirit, which may be termed the Divine, to which Jesus Christ refers when He declares that man must be born of its quickening and baptized with its living fire. Souls deprived of that Spirit are accounted as dead, though they are possessed of the human spirit. Jesus Christ has pronounced them dead inasmuch as they have no portion of the Divine Spirit. He says, "Let the dead bury their dead." In another instance He declares, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." By this He means that souls, though alive in the human kingdom, are nevertheless dead if devoid of this particular spirit of divine quickening. They have not partaken of the divine life of the higher Kingdom, for the soul which

partakes of the power of the Divine Spirit is, verily, living.

This quickening spirit emanates spontaneously from the Sun of Truth, from the reality of Divinity, and is not a revelation or a manifestation. It is like the rays of the sun.... As long as the sun exists, the heat and light will exist, and inasmuch as eternity is a property of Divinity, this emanation is everlasting. There is no cessation in its outpouring. The more the world of humanity develops, the more the effulgences or emanations of Divinity will become revealed, just as the stone, when it becomes polished and pure as a mirror, will reflect in fuller degree the glory and splendor of the sun. 18.6

How all-encompassing are the wonders of His boundless grace! Behold how they have pervaded the whole of creation. Such is their virtue that not a single atom in the entire universe can be found which doth not declare the evidences of His might, which doth not glorify His holy Name, or is not expressive of the effulgent light of His unity. So perfect and comprehensive is His creation that no mind nor heart, however keen or pure, can ever grasp the nature of the most insignificant of His creatures; much less fathom the mystery of Him Who is the Day Star of Truth, Who is the invisible and unknowable Essence. 18.7

The Relationship Between God and Humanity

Having created the world and all that liveth and moveth therein, He, through the direct operation of His unconstrained and sovereign Will, chose to confer upon man the unique distinction and capacity to know Him and to love Him—a capacity that must needs be regarded as the generating impulse and the primary purpose underlying the whole of creation.... Upon the inmost reality of each and every created thing He hath shed the light of one of His names, and made it a recipient of the glory of one of His attributes. Upon the reality of man, however, He hath focused the radiance of all of His names and attributes, and made it a mirror of His own Self. Alone of all created things man hath been singled out for so great a favor, so enduring a bounty. 19.1

In the Old Testament we read that God said, “Let us make man in Our own image.” In the Gospel, Christ said, “I am in the Father, and the Father in Me.” In the Qur’an, God says, “Man is my Mystery and I am his.” Bahá’u’lláh writes that God says, “Thy heart is My home; purify it for My descent. Thy spirit is My place of revelation; cleanse it for My manifestation.”

All these sacred words show us that man is made in God's image....

19.2

All-praise and glory be to God Who, through the power of His might, hath delivered His creation from the nakedness of nonexistence, and clothed it with the mantle of life. From among all created things He hath singled out for His special favor the pure, the gem-like reality of man, and invested it with a unique capacity of knowing Him and of reflecting the greatness of His glory. This twofold distinction conferred upon him hath cleansed away from his heart the rust of every vain desire, and made him worthy of the vesture with which his Creator hath deigned to clothe him. It hath served to rescue his soul from the wretchedness of ignorance.

This robe with which the body and soul of man hath been adorned is the very foundation of his well-being and development. Oh, how blessed the day when, aided by the grace and might of the one true God, man will have freed himself from the bondage and corruption of the world and all that is therein, and will have attained unto true and abiding rest beneath the shadow of the Tree of Knowledge! 19.3

The one true God, exalted be His glory, hath wished nothing for Himself. The allegiance of mankind profiteth Him not, neither doth its perversity harm Him. 19.4

The tie of servitude established between the worshiper and the adored One, between the creature and the Creator, should in itself be regarded as a token of His gracious favor unto men.... 19.5

Consider the mercy of God and His gifts. He enjoineth upon you that which shall profit you, though He Himself can well dispense with all creatures. Your evil doings can never harm Us, neither can your good works profit Us. We summon you wholly for the sake of God. To this every man of understanding and insight will testify. 19.6

And now, concerning thy question regarding the creation of man. Know thou that all men have been created in the nature made by God, the Guardian, the Self-Subsisting. Unto each one hath been prescribed a preordained measure, as decreed in God's mighty and guarded Tablets. All that which ye potentially possess can, however, be manifested only as a result of your own volition. 19.7

... God has created all earthly things under a Law of progression in material

degrees, but He has created man and endowed him with powers of advancement toward spiritual and transcendental kingdoms. He has not created material phenomena after His own image and likeness, but He has created man after that image and with potential power to attain that likeness. He has distinguished man above all other created things. All created things except man are captives of nature and the sense world, but in man there has been created an ideal power by which he may perceive intellectual or spiritual realities. He has brought forth everything necessary for the life of this world, but man is a creation intended for the reflection of divine virtues.... God has opened the doors of ideal virtues and attainments before the face of man. He has created in his being the mysteries of the divine Kingdom. He has bestowed upon him the power of intellect so that through the attribute of reason, when fortified by the Holy Spirit, he may penetrate and discover ideal realities and become informed of the mysteries of the world of significances. As this power to penetrate the ideal knowledges is superhuman, supernatural, man becomes the collective center of spiritual as well as material forces so that the divine spirit may manifest itself in his being, the effulgences of the Kingdom shine within the sanctuary of his heart, the signs of the attributes and perfections of God reveal themselves in a newness of life, the everlasting glory and eternal existence be attained, the knowledge of God illumine, and the mysteries of the realm of might be unsealed.

19.8

The whole duty of man in this Day is to attain that share of the flood of grace which God poureth forth for him. Let none, therefore, consider the largeness or smallness of the receptacle. The portion of some might lie in the palm of a man's hand, the portion of others might fill a cup, and of others even a gallon-measure. 19.9

The results I expect are these: that the individual soul shall be released from self and desire and freed from the bondage of satanic suggestions. May the mirrors of hearts be cleansed from dust in order that the Sun of Truth may be reflected therein.

Man possesses two kinds of susceptibilities: the natural emotions, which are like dust upon the mirror, and spiritual susceptibilities, which are merciful and heavenly characteristics.

There is a power which purifies the mirror from dust and transforms its reflection into intense brilliancy and

radiance so that spiritual susceptibilities may chasten the hearts and heavenly bestowals sanctify them. What is the dust which obscures the mirror? It is attachment to the world, avarice, envy, love of luxury and comfort, haughtiness and self-desire; this is the dust which prevents reflection of the rays of the Sun of Reality in the mirror. The natural emotions are blameworthy and are like rust which deprives the heart of the bounties of God. But sincerity, justice, humility, severance, and love for the believers of God will purify the mirror and make it radiant with reflected rays from the Sun of Truth. 19.10

O My Brother! A pure heart is as a mirror; cleanse it with the burnish of love and severance from all save God, that the true sun may shine within it and the eternal morning dawn. Then wilt thou clearly see the meaning of “Neither doth My earth nor My heaven contain Me, but the heart of My faithful servant containeth Me.” And thou wilt take up thy life in thine hand, and with infinite longing cast it before the new Beloved One. 19.11

.... It is my hope.... that day by day ye will love God in ever greater measure, and become more tightly bound to the Beauty that abideth forever, to Him Who is the Light of the world. For love of God and spiritual attraction do cleanse and purify the human heart and dress and adorn it with the spotless garment of holiness; and once the heart is entirely attached to the Lord, and bound over to the Blessed Perfection, then will the grace of God be revealed.

This love is not of the body but completely of the soul. And those souls whose inner being is lit by the love of God are even as spreading rays of light, and they shine out like stars of holiness in a pure and crystalline sky. For true love, real love, is the love for God, and this is sanctified beyond the notions and imaginings of men.

Let God's beloved, each and every one, be the essence of purity, the very life of holiness, so that in every country they may become famed for their sanctity, independence of spirit, and meekness. Let them be cheered by draughts from the eternal cup of love for God, and make merry as they drink from the wine vaults of Heaven. Let them behold the Blessed Beauty, and feel the flame and rapture of that meeting, and be struck dumb with awe and wonder. This is the station of the sincere; this is the way of the loyal; this is the brightness that shineth on the

Part IV.

The Progress of the Soul

The dawning point of contemplation about the existence of the human spirit comes upon reflection about death. Why does rationality appear in the physical universe in a human being when nature itself does not manifest this power? Having once appeared, what makes one believe that the rational consciousness of the individual simply comes to an end? And if the human spirit does continue to exist, what are the implications for life in this world?

Bahá'u'lláh explains that human beings are unable to fully comprehend the life after the physical world, nor can words fully describe existence in the next world. His teachings offer a glimpse of the immortality of the soul, of the nature of the world after death, and of the capacity of the soul for advancement in the spiritual realm.

The recognition of the continuation of existence establishes a foundation for human progress and stimulates a desire to develop spiritual qualities. The physical world is a place of composition and decomposition, of progress and decline. But the soul is a non-physical element that suffers no disintegration and no regression. While the material characteristics of a human being cease at death, Bahá'u'lláh explains, his personality, his consciousness, and his qualities remain in the degree of purity to which he attained in the physical realm. His progress in the next realm is infinite.

The purpose of life in the physical world is to prepare the soul for its existence in the next. just as an embryo develops its eyes, ears, and limbs required for life outside the womb, so does an individual prepare in this world by developing spiritual qualities that provide him with capacity for progress after death. The physical world is a world of hardship and suffering. It is by dealing with the difficulties that are an inherent part of material reality that the spiritual qualities are perfected. The great powers of the human spirit can however, through an act of free choice, be abused and directed toward earthly and selfish purposes that are the cause of evil in this world.

The material world, Bahá'u'lláh's teachings indicate, is a learning environment for exploring spiritual reality.

The material realm, being most accessible to human understanding, serves as a

vehicle of metaphor and analogy
to assist in comprehension of principles of spiritual reality. The
understanding of these principles then finds
expression through action in the physical realm: spiritual progress is
dependent and conditioned upon material
means. It is ultimately by sacrificing the material characteristics of human
nature that the individual is able to
polish the mirror of the soul and manifest the true spiritual self.
Immortality

All divine philosophers and men of wisdom and understanding, when observing
these endless beings, have
considered that in this great and infinite universe all things end in the
mineral kingdom, that the outcome of the
mineral kingdom is the vegetable kingdom, the outcome of the vegetable kingdom
is the animal kingdom and the
outcome of the animal kingdom the world of man. The consummation of this
limitless universe with all its
grandeur and glory hath been man himself, who in this world of being toiled
and suffereth for a time, with divers
ills and pains, and ultimately disintegrates, leaving no trace and no fruit
after him. Were it so, there is no doubt
that this infinite universe with all its perfections has ended in sham and
delusion with no result, no fruit, no
permanence and no effect. It would be utterly without meaning. They were thus
convinced that such is not the
case, that this great workshop with all its power, its bewildering magnificence
and endless perfections, cannot
eventually come to naught. That still another life should exist is thus
certain, and, just as the vegetable kingdom
is unaware of the world of man, so we, too, know not of the great life
hereafter that followeth the life of man here
below. Our noncomprehension of that life, however, is no proof of its
nonexistence. The mineral world, for
instance, is utterly unaware of the world of man and cannot comprehend it, but
the ignorance of a thing is no
proof of its nonexistence. 20.1

In the time of sleep this body is as though dead; it does not see nor hear; it
does not feel; it has no
consciousness, no perception—that is to say, the powers of man have become
inactive, but the spirit lives and
subsists. Nay, its penetration is increased, its flight is higher, and its
intelligence is greater. To consider that after
the death of the body the spirit perishes is like imagining that a bird in a
cage will be destroyed if the cage is
broken, though the bird has nothing to fear from the destruction of the cage.
Our body is like the cage, and the

spirit is like the bird. We see that without the cage this bird flies in the world of sleep; therefore, if the cage becomes broken, the bird will continue and exist. Its feelings will be even more powerful, its perceptions greater, and its happiness increased. In truth, from hell it reaches a paradise of delights because for the thankful birds there is no paradise greater than freedom from the cage. 20.2

The death of that beloved youth and his separation from you have caused the utmost sorrow and grief; for he winged his flight in the flower of his age and the bloom of his youth to the heavenly nest. But he hath been freed from this sorrow-stricken shelter and hath turned his face toward the everlasting nest of the Kingdom, and, being delivered from a dark and narrow world, hath hastened to the sanctified realm of light; therein lieth the consolation of our hearts.

The inscrutable divine wisdom underlieth such heart-rending occurrences. It is as if a kind gardener transferreth a fresh and tender shrub from a confined place to a wide open area. This transfer is not the cause of the withering, the lessening or the destruction of that shrub; nay, on the contrary, it maketh it to grow and thrive, acquire freshness and delicacy, become green and bear fruit. This hidden secret is well known to the gardener, but those souls who are unaware of this bounty suppose that the gardener, in his anger and wrath, hath uprooted the shrub. Yet to those who are aware, this concealed fact is manifest, and this predestined decree is considered a bounty. 20.3

The conception of annihilation is a factor in human degradation, a cause of human debasement and lowliness, a source of human fear and abjection. It has been conducive to the dispersion and weakening of human thought, whereas the realization of existence and continuity has upraised man to sublimity of ideals, established the foundations of human progress and stimulated the development of heavenly virtues; therefore, it behooves man to abandon thoughts of nonexistence and death, which are absolutely imaginary, and see himself ever-living, everlasting in the divine purpose of his creation. He must turn away from ideas which degrade the human soul so that day by day and hour by hour he may advance upward and higher to spiritual perception of the continuity of the human reality. If he dwells upon the thought of nonexistence, he will become utterly incompetent; with

weakened willpower his ambition for progress will be lessened and the acquisition of human virtues will cease.

Therefore, you must thank God that He has bestowed upon you the blessing of life and existence in the human kingdom. Strive diligently to acquire virtues befitting your degree and station. Be as lights of the world which cannot be hid and which have no setting in horizons of darkness. Ascend to the zenith of an existence which is never beclouded by the fears and forebodings of nonexistence. When man is not endowed with inner perception, he is not informed of these important mysteries. 20.4

According to Bahá'u'lláh the soul retains its individuality and consciousness after death, and is able to commune with other souls. This communion, however, is purely spiritual in character, and is conditioned upon the disinterested and selfless love of the individuals for each other. 20.5

You will retain your individuality and will not be swallowed up in one vast spirit. Concerning the condition of the human soul after its ascension from the material world: the essence of the human soul is clarified from material substances and purified from the embodiment of physical things. It is exclusively luminous; it has no body; it is a dazzling pencil of light; it is a celestial orb of brightness. 20.6

As to thy question, doth every soul without exception achieve life everlasting? Know thou that immortality belongeth to those souls in whom hath been breathed the spirit of life from God. All save these are lifeless-they are the dead, even as Christ hath explained in the Gospel text. He whose eyes the Lord hath opened will see the souls of men in the stations they will occupy after their release from the body. He will find the living ones thriving within the precincts of their Lord, and the dead sunk down in the lowest abyss of perdition.

Know thou that every soul is fashioned after the nature of God, each being pure and holy at his birth.

Afterwards, however, the individuals will vary according to what they acquire of virtues or vices in this world.

Although all existent beings are in their very nature created in ranks or degrees, for capacities are various, nevertheless every individual is born holy and pure, and only thereafter may he become defiled.

And further, although the degrees of being are various, yet all are good. Observe the human body, its limbs, its

members, the eye, the ear, the organs of smell, of taste, the hands, the fingernails. Notwithstanding the differences among all these parts, each one within the limitations of its own being participateth in a coherent whole. 20.7

To “get to heaven” as you say is dependent on two things-faith in the Manifestation of God in His Day.... and good deeds, in other words living to the best of our ability a noble life and doing unto others as we would be done by. But we must always remember that our existence and everything we have or ever will have is dependent upon the Mercy of God and His Bounty, and therefore He can accept into His heaven, which is really nearness to Him, even the lowliest if He pleases. We always have the hope of receiving His Mercy if we reach out for it. 20.8

It is clear and evident that when the veils that conceal the realities of the manifestations of the Names and Attributes of God, nay of all created things visible or invisible, have been rent asunder, nothing except the Sign of God will remain-a sign which He, Himself, hath placed within these realities. This sign will endure as long as is the wish of the Lord thy God, the Lord of the heavens and of the earth. If such be the blessings conferred on all created things, how superior must be the destiny of the true believer, whose existence and life are to be regarded as the originating purpose of all creation. just as the conception of faith hath existed from the beginning that hath no beginning, and will endure till the end that hath no end, in like manner will the true believer eternally live and endure. His spirit will everlastingly circle round the Will of God. He will last as long as God, Himself, will last. He is revealed through the Revelation of God, and is hidden at His bidding. It is evident that the loftiest mansions in the Realm of Immortality have been ordained as the habitation of them that have truly believed in God and in His signs. Death can never invade that holy seat. Thus have We entrusted thee with the signs of Thy Lord, that thou mayest persevere in thy love for Him, and be of them that comprehend this truth. 20.9

O Son of the Supreme! I have made death a messenger of joy to thee. Wherefore dost thou grieve? I made the light to shed on thee its splendor. Why dost thou veil thyself therefrom? 20.10

The Next World

After death the soul of man permanently departs from the material plane, and enters the world of the spirit, in which it can indefinitely progress and advance. The nature of that spiritual world is essentially different and superior to our earthly life here. 21.1

... The souls of the children of the Kingdom, after their separation from the body, ascend unto the realm of everlasting life. But if ye ask as to the place, know ye that the world of existence is a single world, although its stations are various and distinct. For example, the mineral life occupieth its own plane, but a mineral entity is without any awareness at all of the vegetable kingdom, and indeed, with its inner tongue denieth that there is any such kingdom. In the same way, a vegetable entity knoweth nothing of the animal world, remaining completely heedless and ignorant thereof, for the stage of the animal is higher than that of the vegetable, and the vegetable is veiled from the animal world and inwardly denieth the existence of that world—all this while animal, vegetable and mineral dwell together in the one world. In the same way the animal remaineth totally unaware of that power of the human mind which graspeth universal ideas and layeth bare the secrets of creation so that a man who liveth in the east can make plans and arrangements for the west; can unravel mysteries; although located on the continent of Europe can discover America; although sited on the earth can lay hold of the inner realities of the stars of heaven. Of this power of discovery which belongeth to the human mind, this power which can grasp abstract and universal ideas, the animal remaineth totally ignorant, and indeed denieth its existence.

In the same way, the denizens of this earth are completely unaware of the world of the Kingdom and deny the existence thereof. They ask, for example: "Where is the Kingdom? Where is the Lord of the Kingdom?" These people are even as the mineral and the vegetable, who know nothing whatever of the animal and the human realm; they see it not; they find it not. Yet the mineral and vegetable, the animal and man, are all living here together in this world of existence. 21.2

You question about eternal life and the entrance into the Kingdom. The outer expression used for the Kingdom is heaven; but this is a comparison and similitude, not a reality or fact, for the Kingdom is not a material place; it is sanctified from time and place. It is a spiritual world, a divine world, and

the center of their Sovereignty of God; it is freed from body and that which is corporeal, and it is purified and sanctified from the imaginations of the human world. To be limited to place is a property of bodies and not of spirits. Place and time surround the body, not the mind and spirit. Observe that the body of man is confined to a small place; it covers only two spans of earth. But the spirit and mind of man travel to all countries and regions-even through the limitless space of the heavens-surround all that exists, and make discoveries in the exalted spheres and infinite distances. This is because the spirit has no place; it is placeless; and for the spirit the earth and the heaven are as one since it makes discoveries in both. But the body is limited to a place and does not know that which is beyond it.

For life is of two kinds: that of the body and that of the spirit. The life of the body is material life, but the life of the spirit expresses the existence of the Kingdom, which consists in receiving the Spirit of God and becoming vivified by the breath of the Holy Spirit. Although the material life has existence, it is pure nonexistence and absolute death for the holy saints. So man exists, and this stone also exists, but what a difference between the existence of man and that of the stone! Though the stone exists, in relation to the existence of man it is nonexistent.

The meaning of eternal life is the gift of the Holy Spirit, as the flower receives the gift of the season, the air, and the breezes of spring. Consider: this flower had life in the beginning like the life of the mineral; but by the coming of the season of spring, of the bounty of the clouds of the springtime, and of the heat of the glowing sun, it attained to another life of the utmost freshness, delicacy and fragrance. The first life of the flower, in comparison to the second life, is death.

The meaning is that the life of the Kingdom is the life of the spirit, the eternal life, and that it is purified from place, like the spirit of man which has no place. For if you examine the human body, you will not find a special spot or locality for the spirit, for it has never had a place; it is immaterial. It has a connection with the body like that of the sun with this mirror. The sun is not within the mirror, but it has a connection with the mirror.

In the same way the world of the Kingdom is sanctified from everything that can be perceived by the eye or by

the other senses-hearing, smell, taste or touch. The mind which is in man, the existence of which is recognized where is it in him? If you examine the body with the eye, the ear or the other senses, you will not find it; nevertheless, it exists. Therefore, the mind has no place, but it is connected with the brain. The Kingdom is also like this. In the same way love has no place, but it is connected with the heart; so the Kingdom has no place, but is connected with man.

Entrance into the Kingdom is through the love of God, through detachment, through holiness and chastity, through truthfulness, purity, steadfastness, faithfulness and sacrifice of life. 21.3

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. 21.4

The mysteries of which man is heedless in this earthly world, those will he discover in the heavenly world, and there will he be informed of the secret of truth; how much more will he recognize or discover persons with whom he hath been associated. Undoubtedly, the holy souls who find a pure eye and are favored with insight will, in the kingdom of lights, be acquainted with all mysteries, and will seek the bounty of witnessing the reality of every great soul. Even they will manifestly behold the Beauty of God in that world. Likewise will they find all the friends of God, both those of the former and recent times, present in the heavenly assemblage. 21.5

The difference and distinction will naturally become realized between all men after their departure from this mortal world. But this is not in respect to place, but it is in respect to the soul and conscience. For the Kingdom of God is sanctified from time and place; it is another world and another universe. But the holy souls are promised the gift of intercession. And know thou for a certainty, that in the divine worlds, the spiritual beloved ones will recognize each other, and will seek union, but a spiritual union. Likewise, a love that one may have entertained for any one will not be forgotten in the world of the Kingdom. Likewise, thou wilt not forget the life that thou hast had in the material world. 21.6

We will have experience of God's spirit through His Prophets in the next

world, but God is too great for us to know without this Intermediary. The Prophets know God, but how is more than our human minds can grasp. We believe we may attain in the next world to seeing the Prophets. There is certainly a future life. Heaven and hell are conditions within our own beings. 21.7

These human conditions may be likened to the matrix of the mother from which a child is to be born into the spacious outer world. At first the infant finds it very difficult to reconcile itself to its new existence. It cries as if not wishing to be separated from its narrow abode and imagining that life is restricted to that limited space. It is reluctant to leave its home, but nature forces it into this world. Having come into its new conditions, it finds that it has passed from darkness into a sphere of radiance; from gloomy and restricted surroundings it has been transferred to a spacious and delightful environment. Its nourishment was the blood of the mother; now it finds delicious food to enjoy. Its new life is filled with brightness and beauty; it looks with wonder and delight upon the mountains, meadows and fields of green, the rivers and fountains, the wonderful stars; it breathes the lifequickening atmosphere; and then it praises God for its release from the confinement of its former condition and attainment to the freedom of a new realm. This analogy expresses the relation of the temporal world to the life hereafter-the transition of the soul of man from darkness and uncertainty to the light and reality of the eternal Kingdom. At first it is very difficult to welcome death, but after attaining its new condition the soul is grateful, for it has been released from the bondage of the limited to enjoy the liberties of the unlimited. It has been freed from a world of sorrow, grief and trials to live in a world of unending bliss and joy. The phenomenal and physical have been abandoned in order that it may attain the opportunities of the ideal and spiritual. 21.8

The Progress of the Soul After Death

With regard to the soul of man. According to the Bahá'í Teachings the human soul starts with the formation of the human embryo, and continues to develop and pass through endless stages of existence after its separation from the body. Its progress is thus infinite. 22.1

As to the soul of man after death, it remains in the degree of purity to which it has evolved during life in the physical body, and after it is freed from the body it remains plunged in the ocean of God's Mercy.

From the moment the soul leaves the body and arrives in the Heavenly World, its evolution is spiritual, and that evolution is: The approaching unto God. 22.2

Know that nothing which exists remains in a state of repose-that is to say, all things are in motion. Everything is either growing or declining; all things are either coming from nonexistence into being, or going from existence into nonexistence. So this flower, this hyacinth, during a certain period of time was coming from the world of nonexistence into being, and now it is going from being into nonexistence. This state of motion is said to be essential-that is, natural; it cannot be separated from beings because it is their essential requirement, as it is the essential requirement of fire to burn.

Thus it is established that this movement is necessary to existence, which is either growing or declining. Now, as the spirit continues to exist after death, it necessarily progresses or declines; and in the otherworld to cease to progress is the same as to decline; but it never leaves its own condition, in which it continues to develop. For example, the reality of the spirit of Peter, however far it may progress, will not reach to the condition of the Reality of Christ; it progresses only in its own environment. 22.3

The reason of the mission of the Prophets is to educate men, so that this piece of coal may become a diamond, and this fruitless tree may be engrafted and yield the sweetest, most delicious fruits. When man reaches the noblest state in the world of humanity, then he can make further progress in the conditions of perfection, but not in state; for such states are limited, but the divine perfections are endless.

Both before and after putting off this material form, there is progress in perfection but not in state. So beings are consummated in perfect man. There is no other being higher than a perfect man. But man when he has reached this state can still make progress in perfections but not in state because there is no state higher than that of a perfect man to which he can transfer himself. He only progresses in the state of humanity, for the human perfections are infinite. Thus, however learned a man may be, we can imagine one more learned.

Hence, as the perfections of humanity are endless, man can also make progress in perfections after leaving this world. 22.4

The Prophets and Messengers of God have been sent down for the sole purpose of

guiding mankind to the straight Path of Truth. The purpose underlying their revelation hath been to educate all men, that they may, at the hour of death, ascend, in the utmost purity and sanctity and with absolute detachment, to the throne of the Most High. 22.5

... All men shall, after their physical death, estimate the worth of their deeds, and realize all that their hands have wrought. I swear by the Day Star that shineth above the horizon of Divine power! They that are the followers of the one true God shall, the moment they depart out of this life, experience such joy and gladness as would be impossible to describe, while they that live in error shall be seized with such fear and trembling, and shall be filled with such consternation, as nothing can exceed. Well is it with him that hath quaffed the choice and incorruptible wine of faith through the gracious favor and the manifold bounties of Him Who is the Lord of all Faiths.... 22.6

These explanations show that man is immortal and lives eternally, for those who believe in God, who have love of God, and faith, life is excellent-that is, it is eternal; but to those souls who are veiled from God, although they have life, it is dark, and in comparison with the life of believers it is nonexistence.

For example, the eye and the nail are living; but the life of the nail in relation to the life of the eye is nonexistent. This stone and this man both exist; but the stone in relation to the existence of man is nonexistent; it has no being; for when man dies, and his body is destroyed and annihilated, it becomes like stone and earth.

Therefore, it is clear that although the mineral exists, in relation to man it is nonexistent.

In the same way, the souls who are veiled from God although they exist in this world and in the world after death, are, in comparison with the holy existence of the children of the Kingdom of God, nonexistent and separated from God. 22.7

Question: Through what means will the spirit of man-that is to say, the rational soul -after departing from this mortal world, make progress?

Answer: The progress of man's spirit in the divine world, after the severance of its connection with the body of dust, is through the bounty and grace of the Lord alone, or through the intercession and the sincere prayers of

other human souls, or through the charities and important good works which are performed in its name. 22.8

It is even possible that the condition of those who have died in sin and unbelief may become changed-that is to say, they may become the object of pardon through the bounty of God, not through His justice-for bounty is giving without desert, and justice is giving what is deserved. 22.9

And now concerning thy question regarding the soul of man and its survival after death. Know thou of a truth that the soul, after its separation from the body, will continue to progress until it attaineth the presence of God, in a state and condition which neither the revolution of ages and centuries, nor the changes and chances of this world, can alter. It will endure as long as the Kingdom of God, His sovereignty, His dominion and power will endure. It will manifest the signs of God, and His attributes, and will reveal His loving kindness and bounty. The movement of My Pen is stilled when it attempteth to befittingly describe the loftiness and glory of so exalted a station. The honor with which the Hand of Mercy will invest the soul is such as no tongue can adequately reveal, nor any other earthly agency describe. 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.... 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.... When the soul attaineth the Presence of God, it will assume the form that best befitteeth its immortality and is worthy of its celestial habitation. 22.10

If ye obey Me you will see that which We have promised you, and I will make you the friends of My Soul in the realm of My Greatness and the Companions of My Beauty in the heaven of My Might for ever. 22.11

Free Will, Fate, and Predestination

Thou hadst asked about fate, predestination and will. Fate and predestination consist in the necessary and indispensable relationships which exist in the realities of things. These relationships have been placed in the realities of existent beings through the power of creation and every incident

is a consequence of the necessary relationship. For example, God hath created a relation between the sun and the terrestrial globe that the rays of the sun should shine and the soil should yield. These relationships constitute predestination, and the manifestation thereof in the plane of existence is fate. Will is that active force which controlleth these relationships and these incidents. 23.1

Question: Is man a free agent in all his actions, or is he compelled and constrained?

Answer: This question is one of the most important and abstruse of divine problems.... Some things are subject to the free will of man, such as justice, equity, tyranny and injustice, in other words, good and evil actions; it is evident and clear that these actions are, for the most part, left to the will of man. But there are certain things to which man is forced and compelled, such as sleep, death, sickness, decline of power, injuries and misfortunes; these are not subject to the will of man, and he is not responsible for them, for he is compelled to endure them. But in the choice of good and bad actions he is free, and he commits them according to his own will.

For example, if he wishes, he can pass his time in praising God, or he can be occupied with other thoughts. He can be an enkindled light through the fire of the love of God, and a philanthropist loving the world, or he can be a hater of mankind, and engrossed with material things. He can be just or cruel. These actions and these deeds are subject to the control of will of man himself; consequently, he is responsible for them.

Now another question arises. Man is absolutely helpless and dependent, since might and power belong especially to God. Both exaltation and humiliation depend upon the good pleasure and the will of the Most High.

.... The inaction or the movement of man depend upon the assistance of God. If he is not aided, he is not able to do either good or evil. But when the help of existence comes from the Generous Lord, he is able to do both good and evil; but if the help is cut off, he remains absolutely helpless. This is why in the Holy Books they speak of the help and assistance of God. So this condition is like that of a ship which is moved by the power of the wind or steam; if this power ceases, the ship cannot move at all. Nevertheless, the rudder of the ship turns it to

either side, and the power of the steam moves it in the desired direction. If it is directed to the east, it goes to the east; or if it is directed to the west, it goes to the west. This motion does not come from the ship; no, it comes from the wind or the steam.

In the same way, in all the action or inaction of man, he received power from the help of God; but the choice of good or evil belongs to the man himself. So if a king should appoint someone to be the governor of a city, and should grant him the power of authority, and should show him the paths of justice and injustice according to the laws-if then this governor should commit injustice, although he should act by the authority and power of the king, the latter would be absolved from injustice. But if he should act with justice, he would do it also through the authority of the king, who would be pleased and satisfied.

That is to say, though the choice of good and evil belongs to man, under all circumstances he is dependent upon the sustaining help of life, which comes from the Omnipotent. 23.2

Question: If God has knowledge of an action which will be performed by someone, and it has been written on the Tablet of Fate, is it possible to resist it?

Answer: The foreknowledge of a thing is not the cause of its realization; for the essential knowledge of God surrounds, in the same way, the realities of things, before as well as after their existence, and it does not become the cause of their existence. It is a perfection of God.... The hidden secrets of the future were revealed to the Prophets, and They thus became acquainted with the future events which They announced. This knowledge and these prophecies were not the cause of the occurrences. For example, tonight everyone knows that after seven hours the sun will rise, but this general foreknowledge does not cause the rising and appearance of the sun.... The mathematicians by astronomical calculations know that at a certain time an eclipse of the moon or the sun will occur. Surely this discovery does not cause the eclipse to take place. This is, of course, only an analogy and not an exact image. 23.3

Will ye not comprehend? This same truth hath been revealed in all the Scriptures, if ye be of them that understand. Every act ye meditate is as clear to Him as is that act when already accomplished.... This foreknowledge of God, however, should not be regarded as having caused the

actions of men, just as your own
previous knowledge that a certain event is to occur, or your desire that it
should happen, is not and can never be
the reason for its occurrence. 23.4

Know thou ... that the decrees of the Sovereign Ordainer, as related to fate
and predestination, are of two
kinds. Both are to be obeyed and accepted. The one is irrevocable, the other
is, as termed by men, impending.
To the former all must unreservedly submit, inasmuch as it is fixed and
settled. God, however, is able to alter or
repeal it. As the harm that must result from such a change will be greater than
if the decree had remained
unaltered, all, therefore, should willingly acquiesce in what God hath willed
and confidently abide by the same.

The decree that is impending, however, is such that prayer and entreaty can
succeed in averting it.
23.5

Fate is of two kinds: one is decreed, and the other is conditional or
impending. The decreed fate is that which
cannot change or be altered, and conditional fate is that which may occur. So,
for this lamp, the decreed fate is
that the oil burns and will be consumed; therefore, its eventual extinction is
a decree which it is impossible to
alter or to change because it is a decreed fate. In the same way, in the body
of man a power of life has been
created, and as soon as it is destroyed and ended, the body will certainly be
decomposed, so when the oil in this
lamp is burnt and finished, the lamp will undoubtedly become extinguished.

But conditional fate may be likened to this: while there is still oil, a
violent wind blows on the lamp, which
extinguishes it. This is a conditional fate. It is wise to avoid it, to protect
oneself from it, to be cautious and
circumspect. But the decreed fate, which is like the finishing of the oil in
the lamp cannot be altered, changed or
delayed. It must happen; it is inevitable that the lamp will become
extinguished. 23.6

Suffering

... All the sorrow and the grief that exist come from the world of matter-the
spiritual world bestows only the
joy!

If we suffer it is the outcome of material things, and all the trials and
troubles come from this world of
illusion. 24.1

God alone ordereth all things and is all-powerful. Why then does He send trials to His servants?

The trials of man are of two kinds. (a) The consequences of his own actions. If a man eats too much, he ruins his digestion; if he takes poison he becomes ill or dies. If a person gambles he will lose his money; if he drinks too much he will lose his equilibrium. All these sufferings are caused by the man himself, it is quite clear therefore that certain sorrows are the result of our own deeds.

(b) Other sufferings there are, which come upon the Faithful of God. Consider the great sorrows endured by Christ and by His apostles! 24.2

If people only realized it, the inner life of the spirit is that which counts, but they are so blinded by desires and so misled that they have brought upon themselves all the suffering we see at present in the world.
24.3

We are living in a day of reliance upon material conditions. Men imagine that the great size and strength of a ship, the perfection of machinery or the skill of a navigator will ensure safety, but these disasters sometimes take place that men may know that God is the real Protector. If it be the will of God to protect man, a little ship may escape destruction, whereas the greatest and most perfectly constructed vessel with the best and most skillful navigator may not survive a danger such as was present on the ocean. The purpose is that the people of the world may turn to God, the One Protector; that human souls may rely upon His preservation and know that He is the real safety. These events happen in order that man's faith may be increased and strengthened...

Let no one imagine that these words imply that man should not be thorough and careful in his undertakings.

God has endowed man with intelligence so that he may safeguard and protect himself.... Yet, withal, let him rely upon God and consider God as the one Keeper. 24.4

When thou lookest about thee with a perceptive eye, thou wilt note that on this dusty earth all humankind are suffering. Here no man is at rest as a reward for what he hath performed in former lives; nor is there anyone so blissful as seemingly to pluck the fruit of bygone anguish.

And if a human life, with its spiritual being, were limited to this earthly span, then what would be the harvest

of creation? Indeed, what would be the effects and the outcomes of Divinity
Itself? Were such a notion true, then
all created things, all contingent realities, and thus whole world of being-all
would be meaningless. God forbid
that one should hold to such a fiction and gross error.

For just as the effects and the fruitage of the uterine life are not to be
found in that dark and narrow place, and
only when the child is transferred to this wide earth do the benefits and uses
of growth and development in that
previous world become revealed-so likewise reward and punishment, heaven and
hell, requital and retribution for
actions done in this present life, will stand revealed in that other world
beyond. And just as, if human life in the
womb were limited to that uterine world, existence there would be nonsensical,
irrelevant-so too if the life of this
world, the deeds here done and their fruitage, did not come forth in the world
beyond, the whole process would
be irrational and foolish.

Know then that the Lord God possesseth invisible realms which the human
intellect can never hope to fathom
nor the mind of man conceive. When once thou hast cleansed the channel of thy
spiritual sense from the
pollution of this worldly life, then wilt thou breathe in the sweet scents of
holiness that blow from the blissful
bowers of that heavenly land. 24.5

Physical pain is a necessary accompaniment of all human existence, and as such
is unavoidable. As long as
there will be life on earth, there will be also suffering, in various forms and
degrees. But suffering, although an
inescapable reality, can nevertheless be utilized as a means for the attainment
of happiness. This is the
interpretation given to it by all the prophets and saints who, in the midst of
severe tests and trials, felt happy and
joyous and experienced what is best and holiest in life. Suffering is both a
reminder and a guide. It stimulates us
to better adapt ourselves to our environmental conditions, and thus leads the
way to self-improvement. In every
suffering one can find a meaning and a wisdom. But it is not always easy to
find the secret of that wisdom. It is
sometimes only when all our suffering has passed that we become aware of its
usefulness. What man considers
to be evil turns often to be a cause of infinite blessings. And this is due to
his desire to know more than he can.
God's wisdom is, indeed, inscrutable to us all, and it is no use pushing too
far trying to discover that which shall
always remain a mystery to our mind. 24.6

Man's physical existence on this earth is a period during which the moral exercise of his free will is tried and tested in order to prepare his soul for the other worlds of God, and we must welcome affliction and tribulations as opportunities for improvement in our eternal selves. 24.7

All calamities and afflictions have been created for man so that he may spurn this mortal world—a world to which he is much attached. When he experienceth severe trials and hardships, then his nature will recoil and he will desire the eternal realm—a realm which is sanctified from all afflictions and calamities. 24.8

The mind and spirit of man advance when he is tried by suffering. The more the ground is plowed the better the seed will grow, the better the harvest will be. Just as the plow furrows the earth deeply, purifying it of weeds and thistles, so suffering and tribulation free man from the petty affairs of this worldly life until he arrives at a state of complete detachment....

To attain eternal happiness one must suffer. He who has reached the state of self-sacrifice has true joy. Temporal joy will vanish. 24.9

... God hath never burdened any soul beyond its power. 24.10

Tests are a means by which a soul is measured as to its fitness, and proven out by its own acts. God knows its fitness beforehand, and also his unpreparedness, but man, with an ego, would not believe himself unfit unless proof were given him. Consequently his susceptibility to evil is proven to him when he falls into the tests, and the tests are continued until the soul realizes its own unfitness, then remorse and regret tend to root out the weakness. The same test comes again in greater degree, until it is shown that a former weakness has become a strength, and the power to overcome evil has been established. 24.11

... You seem to complain about the calamities, that have befallen humanity. In the spiritual development of man a stage of purgation is indispensable, for it is while passing through it that the over-rated material needs are made to appear in their proper light. Unless society learns to attribute more importance to spiritual matters, it would never be fit to enter the golden era foretold by Bahá'u'lláh. The present calamities are parts of this process of purgation, through them alone will man learn his lesson. They are to teach the nations, that they have to view things internationally, they are to make the individual attribute more

importance to his moral, than his material
welfare. 24.12

Suffering, of one kind or another, seems to be the portion of man in this world. Even the Beloved ones, the Prophets of God, have never been exempt from the ills that are to be found in our world; poverty, disease, bereavement—they seem to be part of the polish God employs to make us finer, and enable us to reflect more of His attributes! No doubt in the future, when the foundation of society is laid according to the Divine plan, and men become truly spiritualized, a vast amount of our present ills and problems will be remedied. We who toil now are paving the way for a far better world, and this knowledge must uphold and strengthen us through every trial. 24.13
Evil

... The spiritual and divine world is purely good and absolutely luminous, but in the human world light and darkness, good and evil, exist as opposite conditions. 25.1

And now, concerning thy question regarding the creation of man. Know thou that all men have been created in the nature made by God, the Guardian, the Self-Subsisting. Unto each one hath been prescribed a preordained measure, as decreed in God's mighty and guarded Tablets. All that which ye potentially possess can, however, be manifested only as a result of your own volition. Your own acts testify to this truth. Consider, for instance, that which hath been forbidden, in the Bayan, unto men. God hath in that Book, and by His behest, decreed as lawful whatsoever He hath pleased to decree, and hath, through the power of His sovereign might, forbidden whatsoever He elected to forbid. To this testifieth the text of that Book. Will ye not bear witness? Men, however, have wittingly broken His law. Is such a behavior to be attributed to God, or to their proper selves? Be fair in your judgment. Every good thing is of God, and every evil thing is from yourselves. 25.2

Indeed the actions of man himself breed a profusion of satanic power. For were men to abide by and observe the divine teachings, every trace of evil would be banished from the face of the earth. However, the widespread differences that exist among mankind and the prevalence of sedition, contention, conflict and the like are the primary factors which provoke the appearance of the satanic spirit. Yet the Holy Spirit hath ever shunned such

matters. A world in which naught can be perceived save strife, quarrels and corruption is bound to become the seat of the throne, the very metropolis, of Satan. 25.3

The reality underlying this is that the evil spirit, Satan or whatever is interpreted as evil, refers to the lower nature of man. This basic nature is symbolized in various ways. In man there are two expressions: one is the expression of nature, the other the expression of the spiritual realm. The world of nature is defective. Look at it clearly, casting aside all superstition and imagination.... God has never created an evil spirit; all such ideas and nomenclature are symbols expressing the mere human or earthly nature of man. It is an essential condition of the soil of earth that thorns, weeds and fruitless trees may grow from it. Relatively speaking, this is evil; it is simply the lower state and basic product of nature. 25.4

Perhaps someone will say that, since the capacity and worthiness of men differ, therefore, the difference of capacity certainly causes the difference of characters.

But this is not so, for capacity is of two kinds: natural capacity and acquired capacity. The first, which is the creation of God, is purely good -in the creation of God there is no evil; but the acquired capacity has become the cause of the appearance of evil. For example, God has created all men in such a manner and has given them such a constitution and such capacities that they are benefited by sugar and honey and harmed and destroyed by poison. This nature and constitution is innate, and God has given it equally to all mankind. But man begins little by little to accustom himself to poison to taking a small quantity each day, and gradually increasing it, until he reaches such a point that he cannot live without a gram of opium every day. The natural capacities are thus completely perverted. Observe how much the natural capacity and constitution can be changed, until by different habits and training they become entirely perverted. One does not criticize vicious people because of their innate capacities and nature, but rather for their acquired capacities and nature.

In creation there is no evil; all is good. Certain qualities and natures innate in some men and apparently blameworthy are not so in reality. For example, from the beginning of his life you can see in a nursing child the signs of greed, of anger and of temper. Then, it may be said, good and evil are innate in the reality of man, and this is contrary to the pure good ness of nature and creation. The answer to

this is that greed, which is to ask for something more, is a praiseworthy quality provided that it is used suitably. So if a man is greedy to acquire science and knowledge, or to become compassionate, generous and just, it is most praiseworthy. If he exercises his anger and wrath against the bloodthirsty tyrants who are like ferocious beasts, it is very praiseworthy; but if he does not use these qualities in a right way, they are blameworthy.

Then it is evident that in creation and nature evil does not exist at all; but when the natural qualities of man are used in an unlawful way, they are blameworthy. So if a rich and generous person gives a sum of money to a poor man for his own necessities, and if the poor man spends that sum of money on unlawful things, that will be blameworthy. It is the same with all the natural qualities of man, which constitute the capital of life; if they be used and displayed in an unlawful way, they become blameworthy. Therefore, it is clear that creation is purely good. Consider that the worst of qualities and most odious of attributes, which is the foundation of all evil, is lying. No worse or more blameworthy quality than this can be imagined to exist; it is the destroyer of all human perfections and the cause of innumerable vices. There is no worse characteristic than this; it is the foundation of all evils. Notwithstanding all this, if a doctor consoles a sick man by saying, "Thank God you are better, and there is hope of your recovery," though these words are contrary to the truth, yet they may become the consolation of the patient and the turning point of the illness. This is not blameworthy. 25.5

Briefly, the intellectual realities, such as all the qualities and admirable perfections of man, are purely good, and exist. Evil is simply their nonexistence. So ignorance is the want of knowledge; error is the want of guidance; forgetfulness is the want of memory; stupidity is the want of good sense. All these things have no real existence.

In the same way, the sensible realities are absolutely good, and evil is due to their nonexistence—that is to say, blindness is the want of sight, deafness is the want of hearing, poverty is the want of wealth, illness is the want of health, death is the want of life, and weakness is the want of strength.

Nevertheless a doubt occurs to the mind—that is, scorpions and serpents are poisonous. Are they good or evil, for they are existing beings? Yes, a scorpion is evil in relation to man; a

serpent is evil in relation to man; but in relation to themselves they are not evil, for their poison is their weapon, and by their sting they defend themselves. But as the elements of their poison do not agree with our elements—that is to say, as there is antagonism between these different elements, therefore this antagonism is evil; but in reality as regards themselves they are good.

The epitome of this discourse is that it is possible that one thing in relation to another may be evil and at the same time within the limits of its proper being it may not be evil. Then it is proved that there is no evil inexistence; all that God created He created good. This evil is nothingness; so death is the absence of life. When man no longer receives life, he dies. Darkness is the absence of light: when there is no light, there is darkness. Light is an existing thing, but darkness is nonexistent. Wealth is an existing thing, but poverty is nonexistent.

Then it is evident that all evils return to nonexistence. Good exists; evil is nonexistent. 25.6

We must never take one sentence in the Teachings and isolate it from the rest...

We know absence of light is darkness, but no one would assert darkness was not a fact. It exists even though it is only the absence of something else. So evil exists too, and we cannot close our eyes to it, even though it is a negative existence. We must seek to supplant it by good, and if we see an evil person is not influenceable by us, then we should shun his company for it is unhealthy. 25.7

Evil is imperfection. Sin is the state of man in the world of the baser nature, for in nature exist defects such as injustice, tyranny, hatred, hostility, strife: these are characteristics of the lower plane of nature. These are the sins of the world.... Through education we must free ourselves from these imperfections. The Prophets of God have been sent, the Holy Books have been written, so that man may be made free.
25.8

Man is said to be the greatest representative of God, and he is the Book of Creation because all the mysteries of beings exist in him. If he comes under the shadow of the True Educator and is rightly trained, he becomes the essence of essences, the light of lights, the spirit of spirits; he becomes the centre of the divine appearances, the source of spiritual qualities, the rising-place of heavenly lights, and the

receptacle of divine inspirations. If he is deprived of this education, he becomes the manifestation of satanic qualities, the sum of animal vices, and the source of all dark conditions. 25.9

Spiritual Progress and Material Means

What result is forthcoming from material rest, tranquillity, luxury and attachment to this corporeal world! It is evident that the man who pursues these things will in the end become afflicted with regret and loss.

Consequently, one must close his eyes wholly to these thoughts, long for eternal life, the sublimity of the world of humanity, the celestial developments, the Holy Spirit, the promotion of the Word of God, the guidance of the inhabitants of the globe, The Promulgation of Universal Peace and the proclamation of the oneness of the world of humanity! This is the work! Otherwise like unto other animals and birds one must occupy himself with the requirements of this physical life, the satisfaction of which is the highest aspiration of the animal kingdom, and one must stalk across the earth like unto the quadrupeds.

Consider ye! No matter how much man gains wealth, riches and opulence in this world, he will not become as independent as a cow. For these fattened cows roam freely over the vast tableland. All the prairies and meadows are theirs for grazing, and all the springs and rivers are theirs for drinking! No matter how much they graze, the fields will not be exhausted! It is evident that they have earned these material bounties with the utmost facility.

Still more ideal than this life is the life of the bird. A bird, on the summit of a mountain, on the high, waving branches, has built for itself a nest more beautiful than the palaces of the kings! The air is in the utmost purity, the water cool and clear as crystal, the panorama charming and enchanting. In such glorious surroundings, he expends his numbered days. All the harvests of the plain are his possessions, having earned all this wealth without the least labor. Hence, no matter how much man may advance in this world, he shall not attain to the station of this bird! Thus it becomes evident that in the matters of this world, however much man may strive and work to the point of death, he will be unable to earn the abundance, the freedom and the independent life of a small bird. This proves and establishes the fact that man is not created for the life of this ephemeral world-nay, rather, is he created for the acquirement of infinite perfections, for the

attainment to the sublimity of the world of
humanity, to be drawn nigh unto the divine threshold, and to sit on the throne
of everlasting sovereignty!

26.1

Ye are the trees of My garden; ye must give forth goodly and wondrous fruits,
that ye yourselves and others
may profit therefrom. Thus it is incumbent on every one to engage in crafts and
professions, for therein lies the
secret of wealth, O men of understanding! For results depend upon means, and
the grace of God shall be allsufficient unto you. Trees that yield no fruit
have been and will ever be for the fire. 26.2

... He Who is the Eternal Truth-exalted by His glory-hath made the fulfillment
of every undertaking on earth
dependent on material means. 26.3

Thou hast asked about material means and prayer. Prayer is like the spirit and
material means are like the
human hand. The spirit operateth through the instrumentality of the hand.
Although the one True God is the All-
Provider, it is the earth which is the means to supply sustenance.... When man
refuseth to use material means, he
is like a thirsty one who seeketh to quench his thirst through means other than
water or other liquids. The
Almighty Lord is the provider of water, and its maker, and hath decreed that it
be used to quench man's
thirst.... 26.4

Progress is of two kinds: material and spiritual. The former is attained
through observation of the surrounding
existence and constitutes the foundation of civilization. Spiritual progress is
through the breaths of the Holy
Spirit and is the awakening of the conscious soul of man to perceive the
reality of Divinity. Material progress
ensures the happiness of the human world. Spiritual progress ensures the
happiness and eternal continuance of
the soul. The Prophets of God have founded the laws of divine civilization.
They have been the root and
fundamental source of all knowledge. 26.5

Absolute repose does not exist in nature. All things either make progress or
lose ground. Everything moves
forward or backward, nothing is without motion. From his birth, a man
progresses physically until he reaches
maturity, then, having arrived at the prime of his life, he begins to decline,
the strength and powers of his body
decrease, and he gradually arrives at the hour of death. Likewise a plant
progresses from the seed to maturity,

then its life begins to lessen until it fades and dies. A bird soars to a certain height and having reached the highest possible point in its flight, begins its descent to earth. Thus it is evident that movement is essential to all existence. All material things progress to a certain point, then begin to decline. This is the law which governs the whole physical creation.

Now let us consider the soul. We have seen that movement is essential to existence; nothing that has life is without motion. All creation, whether of the mineral, vegetable or animal kingdom, is compelled to obey the law of motion; it must either ascend or descend. But with the human soul, there is no decline. Its only movement is towards perfection; growth and progress alone constitute the motion of the soul.

Divine perfection is infinite, therefore the progress of the soul is also infinite. From the very birth of a human being the soul progresses, the intellect grows and knowledge increases. When the body dies the soul lives on. All the differing degrees of created physical beings are limited, but the soul is limitless!...

In the world of spirit there is no retrogression. The world of mortality is a world of contradictions, of opposites; motion being compulsory everything must, either go forward or retreat. In the realm of spirit there is no retreat possible, all movement is bound to be towards a perfect state. "Progress" is the expression of spirit in the world of matter. The intelligence of man, his reasoning powers, his knowledge, his scientific achievements, all these being manifestations of the spirit, partake of the inevitable law of spiritual progress and are, therefore, of necessity, immortal

My hope for you is that you will progress in the world of spirit, as well as in the world of matter; that your intelligence will develop, your knowledge will augment, and your understanding be widened.

You must ever press forward, never standing still; avoid stagnation, the first step to a backward movement, to decay. 26.6

Disencumber yourselves of all attachment to this world and the vanities thereof. Beware that ye approach them not, inasmuch as they prompt you to walk after your own lusts and covetous desires, and hinder you from entering the straight and glorious Path.

Know ye that by “the world” is meant your unawareness of Him Who is your Maker, and your absorption in aught else but Him. The “life to come,” on the other hand, signifieth the things that give you a safe approach to God, the All-Glorious, the Incomparable. Whatsoever deterreth you, in this Day, from loving God is nothing but the world. Flee it, that ye may be numbered with the blest. Should a man wish to adorn himself with the ornaments of the earth, to wear its apparels, or partake of the benefits it can bestow, no harm can befall him, if he alloweth nothing whatever to intervene between him and God, for God hath ordained every good thing, whether created in the heavens or in the earth, for such of His servants as truly believe in Him. Eat ye, O people, of the good things which God hath allowed you, and deprive not yourselves from His wondrous bounties. Render thanks and praise unto Him, and be of them that are truly thankful.

26.7

Then it is clear that the honor and exaltation of man must be something more than material riches. Material comforts are only a branch, but the root of the exaltation of man is the good attributes and virtues which are the adornments of his reality. These are the divine appearances, the heavenly bounties, the sublime emotions, the love and knowledge of God; universal wisdom, intellectual perception, scientific discoveries, justice, equity, truthfulness, benevolence, natural courage and innate fortitude; the respect for rights and the keeping of agreements and covenants; rectitude in all circumstances; serving the truth under all conditions; the sacrifice of one’s life for the good of all people; kindness and esteem for all nations; obedience to the teachings of God; service in the Divine Kingdom; the guidance of the people, and the education of the nations and races. This is the prosperity of the human world! This is the exaltation of man in the world! This is eternal life and heavenly honor!

26.8

Sacrifice

In order to understand the reality of sacrifice let us consider the crucifixion and death of Jesus Christ. It is true that He sacrificed Himself for our sake. What is the meaning of this? When Christ appeared, He knew that He must proclaim Himself in opposition to all the nations and peoples of the earth. He knew that mankind would arise against Him and inflict upon Him all manner of tribulations. There is no doubt that one who put forth such

a claim as Christ announced would arouse the hostility of the world and be subjected to personal abuse. He realized that His blood would be shed and His body rent by violence. Notwithstanding His knowledge of what would befall Him, He arose to proclaim His message, suffered all tribulation and hardships from the people and finally offered His life as a sacrifice in order to illumine humanity-gave His blood in order to guide the world of mankind. He accepted every calamity and suffering in order to guide men to the truth. Had He desired to save His own life, and were He without wish to offer Himself in sacrifice, He would not have been able to guide a single soul. There was no doubt that His blessed blood would be shed and His body broken. Nevertheless, that Holy Soul accepted calamity and death in His love for mankind. This is one of the meanings of sacrifice.

As to the second meaning: He said, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven." It was not the body of Christ which came from heaven. His body came from the womb of Mary, but the Christly perfections descended from heaven; the reality of Christ came down from heaven. The Spirit of Christ and not the body descended from heaven. The body of Christ was but human. There could be no question that the physical body was born from the womb of Mary. But the reality of Christ, the Spirit of Christ, the perfections of Christ all came from heaven. Consequently, by saying He was the bread which came from heaven He meant that the perfections which He showed forth were divine perfections, that the blessings within Him were heavenly gifts and bestowals, that His light was the light of Reality. He said, "If any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever." That is to say, whosoever assimilates these divine perfections which are within me will never die; whosoever has a share and partakes of these heavenly bounties I embody will find eternal life; he who takes unto himself these divine lights shall find everlasting life. How manifest the meaning is! How evident! For the soul which acquires divine perfections and seeks heavenly illumination from the teachings of Christ will undoubtedly live eternally. This is also one of the mysteries of sacrifice.

In reality, Abraham sacrificed Himself, for He brought heavenly teachings to the world and conferred heavenly food upon mankind.

As to the third meaning of sacrifice, it is this: If you plant a seed in the

ground, a tree will become manifest from that seed. The seed sacrifices itself to the tree that will come from it. The seed is outwardly lost, destroyed; but the same seed which is sacrificed will be absorbed and embodied in the tree, its blossoms, fruit and branches. If the identity of that seed had not been sacrificed to the tree which became manifest from it, no branches, blossoms or fruits would have been forthcoming. Christ outwardly disappeared. His personal identity became hidden from the eyes, even as the identity of the seed disappeared; but the bounties, divine qualities and perfections of Christ became manifest in the Christian community which Christ founded through sacrificing Himself. When you look at the tree, you will realize that the perfections, blessings, properties and beauty of the seed have become manifest in the branches, twigs, blossoms and fruit; consequently, the seed has sacrificed itself to the tree. Had it not done so, the tree would not have come into existence. Christ, like unto the seed, sacrificed Himself for the tree of Christianity. Therefore, His perfections, bounties, favors, lights and graces became manifest in the Christian community, for the coming of which He sacrificed Himself.

As to the fourth significance of sacrifice: It is the principle that a reality sacrifices its own characteristics. Man must sever himself from the influences of the world of matter, from the world of nature and its laws; for the material world is the world of corruption and death. It is the world of evil and darkness, of animalism and ferocity, bloodthirstiness, ambition and avarice, of self-worship, egotism and passion; it is the world of nature. Man must strip himself of all these imperfections, must sacrifice these tendencies which are peculiar to the outer and material world of existence.

On the other hand, man must acquire heavenly qualities and attain divine attributes. He must become the image and likeness of God. He must seek the bounty of the eternal, become the manifestor of the love of God, the light of guidance, the tree of life and the depository of the bounties of God. That is to say, man must sacrifice the qualities and attributes of the world of nature for the qualities and attributes of the world of God. For instance, consider the substance we call iron. Observe its qualities; it is solid, black, cold. These are the characteristics of iron. When the same iron absorbs heat from the fire, it sacrifices its attribute of solidity for the

attribute of fluidity. It sacrifices its attribute of darkness for the attribute of light, which is a quality of the fire. It sacrifices its attribute of coldness to the quality of heat which the fire possesses so that in the iron there remains no solidity, darkness or cold. It becomes illumined and transformed, having sacrificed its qualities to the qualities and attributes of the fire.

Likewise, man, when separated and severed from the attributes of the world of nature, sacrifices the qualities and exigencies of that mortal realm and manifests the perfections of the Kingdom, just as the qualities of the iron disappeared and the qualities of the fire appeared in their place.

Every man trained through the teachings of God and illumined by the light of His guidance, who becomes a believer in God and His signs and is enkindled with the fire of the love of God, sacrifices the imperfections of nature for the sake of divine perfections. Consequently, every perfect person, every illumined, heavenly individual stands in the station of sacrifice. It is my hope that through the assistance and providence of God and through the bounties of the Kingdom of Abhá you may be entirely severed from the imperfections of the world of nature, purified from selfish, human desires, receiving life from the Kingdom of Abhá and attaining heavenly graces. 27.1

Release yourselves from this world's life, and at every stage long ye for nonexistence; for when the ray returneth to the sun, it is wiped out, and when the drop cometh to the sea, it vanisheth, and when the true lover findeth his Beloved, he yieldeth up his soul.

Until a being setteth his foot in the plane of sacrifice, he is bereft of every favor and grace; and this plane of sacrifice is the realm of dying to the self, that the radiance of the living God may then shine forth. The martyr's field is the place of detachment from self, that the anthems of eternity may be upraised. Do all ye can to become wholly weary of self, and bind yourselves to that Countenance of Splendors; and once ye have reached such heights of servitude, ye will find, gathered within your shadow, all created things. This is boundless grace; this is the highest sovereignty; this is the life that dieth not. All else save this is at the last but manifest perdition and great loss.

Praise be to God, the gate of boundless grace is opened wide, the heavenly

table is set, the servants of the Merciful and His handmaids are present at the feast. Strive ye to receive your share of this eternal food, so that ye shall be loved and cherished in this world and the next. 27.2

Self has really two meanings, or is used in two senses, in the Bahá'í writings; one is self, the identity of the individual created by God. This is the self mentioned in such passages as "he hath known God who hath known himself etc." The other self is the ego, the dark, animalistic heritage each one of us has, the lower nature that can develop into a monster of selfishness, brutality, lust and so on. It is this self we must struggle against, or this side of our natures, in order to strengthen and free the spirit within us and help it to attain perfection.

Self-sacrifice means to subordinate this lower nature and its desires to the more godly and noble side of ourselves. Ultimately, in its highest sense, self-sacrifice means to give our will and our all to God to do with as He pleases. Then He purifies and glorifies our true self until it becomes a shining and wonderful reality. 27.3

Part V.

Humanity's Spiritual Education

Bahá'u'lláh indicates that the revelation of spiritual power comes to humanity in two ways. One is a general revelation which flows to all creation, without which the physical world would cease to exist. A second, specific revelation is accessible to human beings to provide for their spiritual awakening and transformation.

Despite the fact that the nature of spiritual reality is objective, human beings would never be able, unaided, to discover the principles and laws which govern its operation. They would remain as an uncultivated orchard that bears no fruit. It is for this reason that God sends an Intermediary-an Educator whose purpose is the cultivation of the human spirit.

The series of divine Intermediaries are like teachers in one school who contribute to a never-ending process of human development, each building on what came before while further releasing the potentialities latent in the human race. These Educators reveal teachings and laws suited to the current stage of human social progress.

Thus true religion-which is essentially one despite its new manifestation in every age--is not humanity's reaching to God but, rather, God's instructions to guide humanity. Only when human

interpretations have contaminated the original teachings does the perfect instruction in human reality degenerate into superstition. Then does the new Educator appear to renew the pure teachings.

Human beings are called upon to recognize the source of this spiritual education and follow its guidance.

Bahá'u'lláh's teachings are the latest restatement of the divine purpose suited to the current spiritual, social, and material needs of the human race. Through His guidance the stupendous material achievements brought about by scientific mastery of physical reality will be renewed, reinforced, and even overshadowed by the moral and social progress that will transform human civilization through mastery of spiritual reality.

Spiritual Potentialities are Realized Through Education

Now reflect that it is education that brings the East and the West under the authority of man; it is education that produces wonderful industries; it is education that spreads great sciences and arts; it is education that makes manifest new discoveries and institutions. If there were no educator, there would be no such things as comforts, civilization or humanity. If a man be left alone in a wilderness where he sees none of his own kind, he will undoubtedly become a mere brute; it is then clear that an educator is needed.

But education is of three kinds: material, human and spiritual. Material education is concerned with the progress and development of the body, through gaining its sustenance, its material comfort and ease. This education is common to animals and man.

Human education signifies civilization and progress that is to say, government, administration, charitable works, trades, arts and handicrafts, sciences, great inventions and discoveries and elaborate institutions, which are the activities essential to man as distinguished from the animal.

Divine education is that of the Kingdom of God: it consists in acquiring divine perfections, and this is true education; for in this state man becomes the focus of divine blessings, the manifestation of the words, "Let Us make man in Our image, and after Our likeness." This is the goal of the world of humanity. 28.1

The root cause of wrongdoing is ignorance, and we must therefore hold fast to the tools of perception and knowledge. Good character must be taught. Light must be spread afar, so that, in the school of humanity, all may

acquire the heavenly characteristics of the spirit, and see for themselves beyond any doubt that there is no fiercer hell, no more fiery abyss, than to possess a character that is evil and unsound; no more darksome pit nor loathsome torment than to show forth qualities which deserve to be condemned.

The individual must be educated to such a high degree that he would rather have his throat cut than tell a lie, and would think it easier to be slashed with a sword or pierced with a spear than to utter calumny or be carried away by wrath.

Thus will be kindled the sense of human dignity and pride, to burn away the reapings of lustful appetites. 28.2

Training in morals and good conduct is far more important than book learning. A child that is cleanly, agreeable, of good character, well-behaved-even though he be ignorant-is preferable to a child that is rude, unwashed, ill-natured, and yet becoming deeply versed in all the sciences and arts. The reason for this is that the child who conducts himself well, even though he be ignorant, is of benefit to others, while an ill-natured, ill-behaved child is corrupted and harmful to others, even though he be learned. If, however, the child be trained to be both learned and good, the result is light upon light.

Children are even as a branch that is fresh and green; they will grow up in whatever way ye train them. Take the utmost care to give them high ideals and goals, so that once they come of age, they will cast their beams like brilliant candles on the world, and will not be defiled by lusts and passions in the way of animals, heedless and unaware, but instead will set their hearts on achieving everlasting honor and acquiring all the excellences of humankind. 28.3

Man is the supreme Talisman. Lack of a proper education hath, however, deprived him of that which he doth inherently possess. Through a word proceeding out of the mouth of God he was called into being; by one word more he was guided to recognize the Source of his education; by yet another word his station and destiny were safeguarded. 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. 28.4

The mission of the Prophets, the revelation of the Holy Books, the manifestation of the heavenly Teachers and

the purpose of divine philosophy all center in the training of the human realities so that they may become clear and pure as mirrors and reflect the light and love of the Sun of Reality.

28.5

Man is like unto a tree. If he be adorned with fruit, he hath been and will ever be worthy of praise and commendation. Otherwise a fruitless tree is but fit for fire. The fruits of the human tree are exquisite, highly desired and dearly cherished. Among them are upright character, virtuous deeds and a goodly utterance. The springtime for earthly trees occurreth once every year, while the one for human trees appeareth in the Days of God exalted be His glory. Were the trees of men's lives to be adorned in this divine Springtime with the fruits that have been mentioned, the effulgence of the light of Justice would, of a certainty, illumine all the dwellers of the earth and everyone would abide in tranquillity and contentment beneath the sheltering shadow of Him Who is the Object of all mankind. The Water for these trees is the living water of the sacred Words uttered by the Beloved of the world. In one instant are such trees planted and in the next their branches shall, through the outpourings of the showers of divine mercy, have reached the skies. A dried-up tree, however, hath never been nor will be worthy of any mention. 28.6

The Divine Educator

He is God, exalted is He, the Lord of Majesty and Power.... He hath in every age and cycle, in conformity with His transcendent wisdom, sent forth a divine Messenger to revive the dispirited and despondent souls with the living waters of His utterance, One Who is indeed the Expounder, the true Interpreter, inasmuch as man is unable to comprehend that which hath streamed forth from the Pen of Glory and is recorded in His heavenly Books. Men at all times and under all conditions stand in need of one to exhort them, guide them and to instruct and teach them. Therefore He hath sent forth His Messengers, His Prophets and chosen ones that they might acquaint the people with the divine purpose underlying the revelation of Books and the raising up of Messengers, arid that everyone may become aware of the trust of God which is latent in the reality of every soul. 29.1

As to the Holy Manifestations of God, They are the focal points where the signs, tokens and perfections of that sacred, preexistent Reality appear in all their splendor. They are an eternal grace, a heavenly glory, and on Them

dependeth the everlasting life of humankind. To illustrate: the Sun of Truth dwelleth in a sky to which no soul hath ar.ly access, and which no mind can reach, and He is far beyond the comprehension of all creatures. Yet the Holy Manifestations of God are even as a looking glass, burnished and without stain, which gathereth streams of light out of that Sun, and then scattereth the glory over the rest of creation. In that polished surface, the Sun with all Its majesty standeth clearly revealed. Thus, should the mirrored Sun proclaim, "I am the Sun!" this is but truth; and should It cry, "I am not the Sun!," this is the truth as well. And although the Day-Star, with all Its glory, Its beauty, Its perfections, be clearly visible in that mirror without stain, still It hath not come down from Its own lofty station in the realms above, It hath not made Its way into the mirror; rather doth It continue to abide, as It will forever, in the supernal heights of Its own holiness. 29.2

The holy Manifestations Who have been the Sources or Founders of the various religious systems were united and agreed in purpose and teaching. Abraham, Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh are one in spirit and reality. Moreover, each Prophet fulfilled the promise of the One Who came before Him and, likewise, Each announced the One Who would follow. 29.3

Know that the Holy Manifestations, though They have the degrees of endless perfections, yet, speaking generally, have only three stations. The first station is the physical; the second station is the human, which is that of the rational soul; the third is that of the divine appearance and the heavenly splendor.

The physical station is phenomenal; it is composed of elements, and necessarily everything that is composed is subject to decomposition. It is not possible that a composition should not be disintegrated.

The second is the station of the rational soul, which is the human reality. This also is phenomenal, and the Holy Manifestations share it with all mankind....

The third station is that of the divine appearance and heavenly splendor: it is the Word of God, the Eternal Bounty, the Holy Spirit. 29.4

The essence of belief in Divine unity consisteth in regarding Him Who is the Manifestation of God and Him Who is the invisible, the inaccessible, the unknowable Essence as one and the same. By this is meant that

whatever pertaineth to the former, all His acts and doings, whatever He ordaineth or forbiddeth, should be considered, in all their aspects, and under all circumstances, and without any reservation, as identical with the Will of God Himself. This is the loftiest station to which a true believer in the unity of God can ever hope to attain. Blessed is the man that reacheth this station, and is of them that are steadfast in their belief. 29.5

The purpose of the one true God in manifesting Himself is to summon all mankind to truthfulness and sincerity, to piety and trustworthiness, to resignation and submissiveness to the Will of God, to forbearance and kindness, to uprightness and wisdom. His object is to array every man with the mantle of a saintly character, and to adorn him with the ornament of holy and goodly deeds. 29.6

These energies with which the Day Star of Divine bounty and Source of heavenly guidance hath endowed the reality of man lie, however, latent within him, even as the flame is hidden within the candle and the rays of light are potentially present in the lamp. The radiance of these energies may be obscured by worldly desires even as the light of the sun can be concealed beneath the dust and dross which cover the mirror. Neither the candle nor the lamp can be lighted through their own unaided efforts, nor can it ever be possible for the mirror to free itself from its dross. It is clear and evident that until a fire is kindled the lamp will never be ignited, and unless the dross is blotted out from the face of the mirror it can never represent the image of the sun nor reflect its light and glory.

And since there can be no tie of direct intercourse to bind the one true God with His creation, and no resemblance whatever can exist between the transient and the Eternal, the contingent and the Absolute, He hath ordained that in every age and dispensation a pure and stainless Soul be made manifest in the kingdoms of earth and heaven. Unto this subtle, this mysterious and ethereal Being He hath assigned a twofold nature; the physical, pertaining to the world of matter, and the spiritual, which is born of the substance of God Himself. He hath, moreover, conferred upon Him a double station. The first station, which is related to His innermost reality, representeth Him as One Whose voice is the voice of God Himself.... The second station is the human station.... These Essences of Detachment, these resplendent Realities are the channels of

God's all pervasive grace. Led by
the light of unfailing guidance, and invested with supreme sovereignty, They
are commissioned to use the
inspiration of Their words, the effusions of Their infallible grace and the
sanctifying breeze of Their Revelation
for the cleansing of every longing heart and receptive spirit from the dross
and dust of earthly cares and
limitations. Then, and only then, will the Trust of God, latent in the reality
of man, emerge, as resplendent as the
rising Orb of Divine Revelation, from behind the veil of concealment, and
implant the ensign of its revealed glory
upon the summits of men's hearts.

From the foregoing passages and allusions it hath been made indubitably clear
that in the kingdoms of earth
and heaven there must needs be manifested a Being, an Essence Who shall act as
a Manifestation and Vehicle for
the transmission of the grace of the Divinity Itself, the Sovereign Lord of
all. Through the Teachings of this Day
Star of Truth every man will advance and develop until he attaineth the station
at which he can manifest all the
potential forces with which his inmost true self hath been endowed. It is for
this very purpose that in every age
and dispensation the Prophets of God and His chosen Ones have appeared amongst
men, and have evinced such
power as is born of God and such might as only the Eternal can reveal.

29.7

All humankind are as children in a school, and the Dawning-Points of Light, the
Sources of divine revelation,
are the teachers, wondrous and without peer. In the school of realities they
educate these sons and daughters,
according to teachings from God, and foster them in the bosom of grace, so that
they may develop along every
line, show forth the excellent gifts and blessings of the Lord, and combine
human perfections; that they may
advance in all aspects of human endeavor, whether outward or inward, hidden or
visible, material or spiritual,
until they make of this mortal world a widespread mirror, to reflect that other
world which dieth not. 29.8

The Religion of God

The Great Being saith: O ye children of men! The fundamental purpose animating
the Faith of God and His
Religion is to safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the human race,
and to foster the spirit of love and
fellowship amongst men. Suffer it not to become a source of dissension and
discord, of hate and enmity. This is

the straight Path, the fixed and immovable foundation. Whatsoever is raised on this foundation, the changes and chances of the world can never impair its strength, nor will the revolution of countless centuries undermine its structure. 30.1

God has created us all human, and all countries of the world are parts of the same globe. We are all His servants. He is kind and just to all. Why should we be unkind and unjust to each other? He provides for all. Why should we deprive one another? He protects and preserves all. Why should we kill our fellow creatures? If this warfare and strife be for the sake of religion, it is evident that it violates the spirit and basis of all religion. All the divine Manifestations have proclaimed the oneness of God and the unity of mankind. They have taught that men should love and mutually help each other in order that they might progress. Now if this conception of religion be true, its essential principle is the oneness of humanity. The fundamental truth of the Manifestations is peace. This underlies all religion, all justice. The divine purpose is that men should live in unity, concord and agreement and should love one another. Consider the virtues of the human world and realize that the oneness of humanity is the primary foundation of them all. Read the Gospel and the other Holy Books. You will find their fundamentals are one and the same. Therefore, unity is the essential truth of religion and, when so understood, embraces all the virtues of the human world. Praise be to God! This knowledge has been spread, eyes have been opened, and ears have become attentive. Therefore, we must endeavor to promulgate and practice the religion of God which has been founded by all the Prophets. And the religion of God is absolute love and unity. 30.2

All these holy, divine Manifestations are one. They have served one God, promulgated the same truth, founded the same institutions and reflected the same light. Their appearances have been successive and correlated; each One has announced and extolled the One Who was to follow, and all laid the foundation of reality. They summoned and invited the people to love and made the human world a mirror of the Word of God. Therefore, the divine religions They established have one foundation; Their teachings, proofs and evidences are one; in name and form They differ, but in reality They agree and are the same. These holy Manifestations have been as the coming of springtime in the world. Although the springtime of this year is

designated by another name according to the changing calendar, yet as regards its life and quickening it is the same as the springtime of last year. For each spring is the time of a new creation, the effects, bestowals, perfections and life-giving forces of which are the same as those of the former vernal seasons, although the names are many and various. This is 1912, last year was 1911 and so on, but in fundamental reality no difference is apparent. The sun is one, but the dawning points of the sun are numerous and changing. The ocean is one body of water, but different parts of it have particular designations-Atlantic, Pacific, Mediterranean, Antarctic, etc. If we consider the names, there is differentiation; but the water, the ocean itself, is one reality. Likewise, the divine religions of the holy Manifestations of God are in reality one, though in name and nomenclature they differ. Man must be a lover of the light, no matter from what dayspring it may appear. He must be a lover of the rose, no matter in what soil it may be growing. He must be a seeker of the truth, no matter from what source it come. Attachment to the lantern is not loving the light.... The word of truth, no matter which tongue utters it, must be sanctioned.

30.3

The divine religions are like the progression of the seasons of the year. When the earth becomes dead and desolate and because of frost and cold no trace of vanished spring remains, the springtime dawns again and clothes everything with a new garment of life. The meadows become fresh and green, the trees are adorned with verdure and fruits appear upon them. Then the winter comes again, and all the traces of spring disappear. This is the continuous cycle of the seasons-spring, winter, then the return of spring. But though the calendar changes and the years move forward, each springtime that comes is the return of the springtime that has gone; this spring is the renewal of the former spring. Springtime is springtime, no matter when or how often it comes. The divine Prophets are as the coming of spring, each renewing and quickening the teachings of the Prophet Who came before Him. just as all seasons of spring are essentially one as to newness of life, vernal showers and beauty, so the essence of the mission and accomplishment of all the Prophets is one and the same. Now the people of religion have lost sight of the essential reality of the spiritual springtime. They have held tenaciously to ancestral forms and imitations, and because of this there is variance, strife and

altercation among them. 30.4

Religion, moreover, is not a series of beliefs, a set of customs; religion is the teachings of the Lord God, teachings which constitute the very life of humankind, which urge high thoughts upon the mind, refine the character, and lay the groundwork for man's everlasting honor. 30.5

That the divers communions of the earth, and the manifold systems of religious belief, should never be allowed to foster the feelings of animosity among men, is, in this Day, of the essence of the Faith of God and His Religion. These principles and laws, these firmly-established and mighty systems, have proceeded from one Source, and are the rays of one light. That they differ one from another is to be attributed to the varying requirements of the ages in which they were promulgated 30.6

Each of the divine religions embodies two kinds of ordinances. The first is those which concern spiritual susceptibilities, the development of moral principles and the quickening of the conscience of man. These are essential or fundamental, one and the same in all religions, changeless and eternal-reality not subject to transformation. Abraham heralded this reality, Moses promulgated it, and Jesus Christ established it in the world of mankind. All the divine Prophets and Messengers were the instruments and channels of this same eternal, essential truth.

The second kind of ordinances in the divine religions is those which relate to the material affairs of humankind. These are the material or accidental laws which are subject to change in each day of manifestation, according to exigencies of the time, conditions and differing capacities of humanity. For instance, in the day of Moses ten commandments in regard to murder were revealed by Him. These commandments were in accordance with the requirements of that day and time. Other laws embodying drastic punishments were enacted by Mosesan eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. The penalty for theft was amputation of the hand. These laws and penalties were applicable to the degree of the Israelitish people of that period, who dwelt in the wilderness and desert under conditions where severity was necessary and justifiable. But in the time of Jesus Christ this kind of law was not expedient; therefore, Christ abrogated and superseded the commands of Moses.

30.7

The purpose of this is to show that the holy Manifestations of God, the divine Prophets, are the first Teachers

of the human race. They are universal Educators, and the fundamental principles they have laid down are the causes and factors of the advancement of nations. Forms and imitations which creep in afterward are not conducive to that progress. On the contrary, these are destroyers of human foundations established by the heavenly Educators. These are clouds which obscure the Sun of Reality....

Therefore, there is need of turning back to the original foundation. The fundamental principles of the Prophets are correct and true. The imitations and superstitions which have crept in are at wide variance with the original precepts and commands. Bahá'u'lláh has revoked and reestablished the quintessence of the teachings of all the Prophets, setting aside the accessories and purifying religion from human interpretation. 30.8

With the advent of the Prophets of God, their power of creating a real union, one which is both external and of the heart, draws together malevolent peoples who have been thirsting for one another's blood, into the one shelter of the Word of God. Then a hundred thousand souls become as one soul, and unnumbered individuals emerge as one body. 30.9

Progressive Revelation

That which is preeminent above all other gifts, is incorruptible in nature, and pertaineth to God Himself, is the gift of Divine Revelation. Every bounty conferred by the Creator upon man, be it material or spiritual, is subservient unto this. It is, in its essence, and will ever so remain, the Bread which cometh down from Heaven. It is God's supreme testimony, the clearest evidence of His truth, the sign of His consummate bounty, the token of His all-encompassing mercy, the proof of His most loving providence, the symbol of His most perfect grace. He hath, indeed, partaken of this highest gift of God who hath recognized His Manifestation in this Day. 31.1

When we observe the organisms of the material kingdoms, we find that their growth and training are dependent upon the heat and light of the sun. Without this quickening impulse there would be no growth of tree or vegetation; neither would the existence of animal or human being be possible; in fact, no forms of created life would be manifest upon the earth. But if we reflect deeply, we will perceive that the great bestower and giver of life is God; the sun is the intermediary of His will and plan. Without the bounty of the sun, therefore, the world

would be in darkness. All illumination of our planetary system proceeds or emanates from the solar center.

Likewise, in the spiritual realm of intelligence and idealism there must be a center of illumination, and that center is the everlasting, ever-shining Sun, the Word of God. Its lights are the lights of reality which have shone upon humanity, illumining the realm of thought and morals, conferring the bounties of the divine world upon man. These lights are the cause of the education of souls and the source of the enlightenment of hearts, sending forth in effulgent radiance the message of the glad tidings of the Kingdom of God. In brief, the moral and ethical world and the world of spiritual regeneration are dependent for their progressive being upon that heavenly Center of illumination. It gives forth the light of religion and bestows the life of the spirit, imbues humanity with archetypal virtues and confers eternal splendors. This Sun of Reality, this Center of effulgences, is the Prophet or Manifestation of God. Just as the phenomenal sun shines upon the material world producing life and growth, likewise, the spiritual or prophetic Sun confers illumination upon the human world of thought and intelligence, and unless it rose upon the horizon of human existence, the kingdom of man would become dark and extinguished. 31.2

Contemplate with thine inward eye the chain of successive Revelations that hath linked the Manifestation of Adam with that of the Báb. I testify before God that each one of these Manifestations hath been sent down through the operation of the Divine Will and Purpose, that each hath been the bearer of a specific Message, that each hath been entrusted with a divinely-revealed Book and been commissioned to unravel the mysteries of a mighty Tablet. The measure of the Revelation with which every one of them hath been identified had been definitely foreordained. 31.3

Among the bounties of God is revelation. Hence revelation is progressive and continuous. It never ceases. It is necessary that the reality of Divinity with all its perfections and attributes should become resplendent in the human world. The reality of Divinity is like an endless ocean. Revelation may be likened to the rain. Can you imagine the cessation of rain? Ever on the face of the earth somewhere rain is pouring down. Briefly, the world of existence is progressive. It is subject to development and growth. Consider

how great has been the progress in this radiant century. Civilization has unfolded. Nations have developed. Industrialism and jurisprudence have expanded. Sciences, inventions and discoveries have increased. All of these show that the world of existence is continuously progressing and developing; and therefore, assuredly, the virtues characterizing the maturity of man must, likewise, expand and grow.

The greatest bestowal of God to man is the capacity to attain human virtues. Therefore, the teachings of religion must be reformed and renewed because past teachings are not suitable for the present time. For example, the sciences of bygone centuries are not adequate for the present because sciences have undergone reform. The industrialism of the past will not ensure present efficiency because industrialism has advanced. The laws of the past are being superseded because they are not applicable to this time. All material conditions pertaining to the world of humanity have undergone reform, have achieved development, and the institutes of the past are not to be compared with those of this age. The laws and institutes of former governments cannot be current today, for legislation must be in conformity with the needs and requirements of the body politic at this time....

Therefore, Bahá'u'lláh appeared from the horizon of the Orient and reestablished the essential foundation of the religious teachings of the world. The worn-out traditional beliefs current among men were removed. He caused fellowship and agreement to exist between the representatives of varying denominations so that love became manifest among the contending religions. He created a condition of harmony among hostile sects and upheld the banner of the oneness of the world of humanity. 31.4

It should also be borne in mind that, great as is the power manifested by this Revelation and however vast the range of the Dispensation its Author has inaugurated, it emphatically repudiates the claim to be regarded as the final revelation of God's will and purpose for mankind. To hold such a conception of its character and functions would be tantamount to a betrayal of its cause and a denial of its truth. It must necessarily conflict with the fundamental principle which constitutes the bedrock of Bahá'í belief, the principle that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is orderly, continuous and progressive and not spasmodic or final. Indeed, the categorical rejection by the followers of the Faith of

Bahá'u'lláh of the claim to finality which any religious system inaugurated by the Prophets of the past may advance is as clear and emphatic as their own refusal to claim that same finality for the Revelation with which they stand identified. 31.5

Our meaning is this: the religion of God is one, and it is the educator of humankind, but still, it needs must be made new. When thou dost plant a tree, its height increaseth day by day. It putteth forth blossoms and leaves and luscious fruits. But after a long time, it doth grow old, yielding no fruitage any more. Then doth the Husbandman of Truth take up the seed from that same tree, and plant it in a pure soil; and lo, there standeth the first tree, even as it was before.

Note thou carefully that in this world of being, all things must ever be made new. Look at the material world about thee, see how it hath now been renewed. The thoughts have changed, the ways of life have been revised, the sciences and arts show a new vigor, discoveries and inventions are new, perceptions are new. How then could such a vital power as religion-the guarantor of mankind's great advances, the very means of attaining everlasting life, the fosterer of infinite excellence, the light of both worlds-not be made new? This would be incompatible with the grace and loving-kindness of the Lord. 31.6

The Purpose of a New Religious System

When the holy, divine Manifestations or Prophets appear in the world, a cycle of radiance, an age of mercy dawns. Everything is renewed. Minds, hearts and all human forces are reformed, perfections are quickened, sciences, discoveries and investigations are stimulated afresh, and everything appertaining to the virtues of the human world is revitalized....

Consider: If a new springtime failed to appear, what would be the effect upon this globe, the earth?

Undoubtedly it would become desolate and life extinct. The earth has need of an annual coming of spring. It is necessary that a new bounty should be forthcoming. If it comes not, life would be effaced. In the same way the world of spirit needs new life, the world of mind necessitates new animus and development, the world of souls a new bounty, the world of morality a reformation, the world of divine effulgence ever new bestowals. Were it not for this replenishment, the life of the world would become effaced and extinguished. 32.1

God's purpose in sending His Prophets unto men is twofold. The first is to liberate the children of men from the darkness of ignorance, and guide them to the light of true understanding. The second is to ensure the peace and tranquillity of mankind, and provide all the means by which they can be established.

The Prophets of God should be regarded as physicians whose task is to foster the well-being of the world and its peoples, that, through the spirit of oneness, they may heal the sickness of a divided humanity. To none is given the right to question their words or disparage their conduct, for they are the only ones who can claim to have understood the patient and to have correctly diagnosed its ailments. No man, however acute his perception, can ever hope to reach the heights which the wisdom and understanding of the Divine Physician have attained.

Little wonder, then, if the treatment prescribed by the physician in this day should not be found to be identical with that which he prescribed before. How could it be otherwise when the ills affecting the sufferer necessitate at every stage of his sickness a special remedy? In like manner, every time the Prophets of God have illumined the world with the resplendent radiance of the Day Star of Divine knowledge, they have invariably summoned its peoples to embrace the light of God through such means as best befitted the exigencies of the age in which they appeared. They were thus able to scatter the darkness of ignorance, and to shed upon the world the glory of their own knowledge. 32.2

By My life! Not of Mine own volition have I revealed Myself, but God, of His own choosing, hath manifested Me... I was but a man like others, asleep upon My couch, when lo, the breezes of the All-Glorious were wafted over Me, and taught Me the knowledge of all that hath been. This thing is not from Me, but from One Who is Almighty and All-Knowing. And He bade Me lift up My voice between earth and heaven, and forth is there befell Me what hath caused the tears of every man of understanding to flow.... This is but a leaf which the winds of the will of thy Lord, the Almighty, the All-Praised, have stirred. Can it be still when the tempestuous winds are blowing? 32.3

Few will fail to recognize that the Spirit breathed by Bahá'u'lláh upon the world, and which is manifesting itself with varying degrees of intensity through the efforts consciously

displayed by His avowed supporters and indirectly through certain humanitarian organizations, can never permeate and exercise an abiding influence upon mankind unless and until it incarnates itself in a visible Order, which would bear His name, wholly identify itself with His principles, and function in conformity with His laws....

For Bahá'u'lláh, we should readily recognize, has not only imbued mankind with a new and regenerating Spirit. He has not merely enunciated certain universal principles, or propounded a particular philosophy, however potent, sound and universal these may be. In addition to these He, as well as 'Abdu'l-Bahá after Him, has, unlike the Dispensations of the past, clearly and specifically laid down a set of Laws, established definite institutions, and provided for the essentials of a Divine Economy. These are destined to be a pattern for future society, a supreme instrument for the establishment of the Most Great Peace, and the one agency for the unification of the world, and the proclamation of the reign of righteousness and justice upon the earth. Not only have They revealed all the directions required for the practical realization of those ideals which the Prophets of God have visualized, and which from time immemorial have inflamed the imagination of seers and poets in every age. 32.4

The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, whose supreme mission is none other but the achievement of this organic and spiritual unity of the whole body of nations, should, if we be faithful to its implications, be regarded as signaling through its advent the coming of age of the entire human race. It should be viewed not merely as yet another spiritual revival in the ever-changing fortunes of mankind, not only as a further stage in a chain of progressive Revelations, nor even as the culmination of one of a series of recurrent prophetic cycles, but rather as marking the last and highest stage in the stupendous evolution of man's collective life on this planet. The emergence of a world community, the consciousness of world citizenship, the founding of a world civilization and culture—all of which must synchronize with the initial stages in the unfoldment of the Golden Age of the Bahá'í Era—should, by their very nature, be regarded, as far as this planetary life is concerned, as the furthestmost limits in the organization of human society, though man, as an individual, will, nay must indeed as a result of such a consummation, continue indefinitely to progress and develop.

That mystic, all-pervasive, yet undefinable change, which we associate with the stage of maturity inevitable in the life of the individual and the development of the fruit must, if we would correctly apprehend the utterances of Bahá'u'lláh, have its counterpart in the evolution of the organization of human society....

'Abdu'l-Bahá, elucidating this fundamental verity, has written: "All created things have their degree or stage of maturity. The period of maturity in the life of a tree is the time of its fruit-bearing.... The animal attains a stage of full growth and completeness, and in the human kingdom man reaches his maturity when the light of his intelligence attains its greatest power and development.... Similarly there are periods and stages in the collective life of humanity. At one time it was passing through its stage of childhood, at another its period of youth, but now it has entered its long-predicted phase of maturity, the evidences of which are everywhere apparent.... That which was applicable to human needs during the early history of the race can neither meet nor satisfy the demands of this day, this period of newness and consummation. Humanity has emerged from its former state of limitation and preliminary training. Man must now become imbued with new virtues and powers, new moral standards, new capacities. New bounties, perfect bestowals, are awaiting and already descending upon him. The gifts and blessings of the period of youth, although timely and sufficient during the adolescence of mankind, are now incapable of meeting the requirements of its maturity." 32.5

In the contingent world there are many collective centers which are conducive to association and unity between the children of men. For example, patriotism is a collective center; nationalism is a collective center; identity of interests is a collective center; political alliance is a collective center; the union of ideals is a collective center, and the prosperity of the world of humanity is dependent upon the organization and promotion of the collective centers. Nevertheless, all the above institutions are, in reality, the matter and not the substance, accidental and not eternal-temporary and not everlasting. With the appearance of great revolutions and upheavals, all these collective centers are swept away. But the Collective Center of the Kingdom, embodying the Institutes 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.... Consequently, the real Collective Center is the body of the divine teachings, which include all the degrees and embrace all the universal relations and necessary laws of humanity...

Naught but the celestial potency of the Word of God, which ruleth and transcendeth the realities of all things, is capable of harmonizing the divergent thoughts, sentiments, ideas, and convictions of the children of men. 32.6

O ye respected souls! From the continual imitation of ancient and worn-out ways, the world had grown dark as darksome night. The fundamentals of the divine Teachings had passed from memory; their pith and heart had been totally forgotten, and the people were holding on to husks. The nations had, like tattered garments long outworn, fallen into a pitiful condition.

Out of this pitch blackness there dawned the morning splendor of the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. He hath dressed the world with a garment new and fair, and that new garment is the principles which have come down from God.

Now the new age is here and creations reborn. Humanity hath taken on new life. The autumn hath gone by, and the reviving spring is here. All things are now made new. Arts and industries have been reborn, there are new discoveries in science, and there are new inventions; even the details of human affairs, such as dress and personal effects—even weapons—all these have likewise been renewed. The laws and procedures of every government have been revised. Renewal is the order of the day. And all this newness hath its source in the fresh outpourings of wondrous grace and favor from the Lord of the Kingdom, which have renewed the world. The people, therefore, must be set completely free from their old patterns of thought, that all their attention may be focused upon these new principles, for these are the light of this time and the very spirit of this age.

Unless these Teachings are effectively spread among the people, until the old ways, the old concepts, are gone and forgotten, this world of being will find no peace, nor will it reflect the perfections of the Heavenly Kingdom.

32.7

The City of Certitude

There is no paradise more wondrous for any soul than to be exposed to God's Manifestation in His Day, to hear His verses and believe in them, to attain His presence, which is naught but the presence of God, to sail upon the sea of the heavenly kingdom of His good-pleasure, and to partake of the choice fruits of the paradise of His divine Oneness. 33.1

Only when the lamp of search, of earnest striving, of longing desire, of passionate devotion, of fervid love, of rapture, and ecstasy, is kindled within the seeker's heart, and the breeze of His loving-kindness is wafted upon his soul, will the darkness of error be dispelled, the mists of doubts and misgivings be dissipated, and the lights of knowledge and certitude envelop his being. At that hour will the mystic Herald, bearing the joyful tidings of the Spirit, shine forth from the City of God resplendent as the morn, and, through the trumpet-blast of knowledge, will awaken the heart, the soul, and the spirit from the slumber of negligence. Then will the manifold favors 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.

I swear by God! Were he that treadeth the path of guidance and seeketh to scale the heights of righteousness to attain unto this glorious and supreme station, he would inhale at a distance of a thousand leagues the fragrance of God, and would perceive the resplendent morn of a divine Guidance rising above the dayspring of all things. Each and every thing, however small, would be to him a revelation, leading him to his Beloved, the Object of his quest. So great shall be the discernment of this seeker that he will discriminate between truth and falsehood even as he doth distinguish the sun from shadow. If in the uttermost corners of the East the sweet savors of God be wafted, he will assuredly recognize and inhale their fragrance, even though he be dwelling in the uttermost ends of the West. He will likewise clearly distinguish all the signs of God-His

wondrous utterances, His great works,
and mighty deeds—from the doings, words and ways of men, even as the jeweller
who knoweth the gem from the
stone, or the man who distinguisheth the spring from autumn and heat from cold.
When the channel of the
human soul is cleansed of all worldly and impeding attachments, it will
unfailingly perceive the breath of the
Beloved across immeasurable distances, and will, led by its perfume, attain and
enter the City of Certitude.
Therein he will discern the wonders of His ancient wisdom, and will perceive
all the hidden teachings from the
rustling leaves of the Tree—which flourisheth in that City....

They that valiantly labor in quest of God's will, when once they have
renounced all else but Him, will be so
attached and wedded to that City that a moment's separation from it would to
them be unthinkable. They will
hearken unto infallible proofs from the Hyacinth of that assembly, and receive
the surest testimonies from the
beauty of its Rose and the melody of its Nightingale. Once in about a thousand
years shall this City be renewed
and re-adorned.

Wherefore, O my friend, it behooveth Us to exert the highest endeavor to attain
unto that City, and, by the
grace of God and His loving-kindness, rend asunder the "veils of glory"; so
that, with inflexible steadfastness, we
may sacrifice our drooping souls in the path of the New Beloved. We should with
tearful eyes, fervently and
repeatedly, implore Him to grant us the favor of that grace. That city is none
other than the Word of God revealed
in every age and dispensation. In the days of Moses it was the Pentateuch; in
the days of Jesus the Gospel; in the
days of Muhammad the Messenger of God the Qur'an; in this day the Bayán; and
in the dispensation of Him
Whom God will make manifest His own Book the Book unto which all the Books of
former Dispensations must
needs be referred, the Book which standeth amongst them all transcendent and
supreme. In these cities spiritual
sustenance is bountifully provided, and incorruptible delights have been
ordained. The food they bestow is the
bread of heaven, and the Spirit they impart is God's imperishable blessing.
Upon detached souls they bestow the
gift of Unity, enrich the destitute, and offer the cup of knowledge unto them
who wander in the wilderness of
ignorance. All the guidance, the blessings, the learning, the understanding,
the faith, and certitude, conferred
upon all that is in heaven and on earth, are hidden and treasured within these

Cities. 33.2

The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the recognition of Him Who is the Dayspring of His Revelation and the Fountain of His laws, Who representeth the Godhead in both the Kingdom of His Cause and the world of creation. Whoso achieveth this duty hath attained unto all good; and whoso is deprived thereof hath gone astray, though he be the author of every righteous deed. It behoveth every one who reacheth this most sublime station, this summit of transcendent glory, to observe every ordinance of Him Who is the Desire of the world. These twin duties are inseparable. Neither is acceptable without the other. Thus hath it been decreed by Him Who is the Source of Divine inspiration. 33.3

The supreme cause for creating the world and all that is therein is for man to know God. In this Day whosoever is guided by the fragrance of the raiment of His mercy to gain admittance into the pristine Abode, which is the station of recognizing the Source of divine commandments and the Dayspring of His Revelation, hath everlastingly attained unto all good. Having reached this lofty station a twofold obligation resteth upon every soul. One is to be steadfast in the Cause with such steadfastness that were all the peoples of the world to attempt to prevent him from turning to the Source of Revelation, they would be powerless to do so. The other is observance of the divine ordinances which have streamed forth from the wellspring of His heavenly-propelled Pen.

For man's knowledge of God cannot develop fully and adequately save by observing whatsoever hath been ordained by Him and is set forth in His heavenly Book. 33.4

Do thou beseech God to enable thee to remain steadfast in this path, and to aid thee to guide the peoples of the world to Him Who is the manifest and sovereign Ruler, who hath revealed Himself in a distinct attire, Who giveth utterance to a Divine and specific Message. This is the essence of faith and certitude. They that are the worshipers of the idol which their imaginations have carved, and who call it Inner Reality, such men are in truth accounted among the heathen. To this hath the All-Merciful borne witness in His Tablets. He, verily, is the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. 33.5

... O thou who hast surrendered thy will to God! By self-surrender and

perpetual union with God is meant that men should merge their will wholly in the Will of God, and regard their desires as utter nothingness beside His Purpose. Whatsoever the Creator commandeth His creatures to observe, the same must they diligently, and with the utmost joy and eagerness, arise and fulfil. They should in no wise allow their fancy to obscure their judgment, neither should they regard their own imaginings as the voice of the Eternal. In the Prayer of Fasting We have revealed: "Should Thy Will decree that out of Thy mouth these words proceed and be addressed unto them, 'Observe, for My Beauty's sake, the fast, O people, and set no limit to its duration,' I swear by the majesty of Thy glory, that every one of them will faithfully observe it, will abstain from whatsoever will violate Thy law, and will continue to do so until they yield up their souls unto Thee." In this consisteth the complete surrender of one's will to the Will of God. Meditate on this, that thou mayest drink in the waters of everlasting life which flow through the words of the Lord of all mankind.... The station of absolute self-surrender transcendeth, and will ever remain exalted above, every other station.

It behoveth thee to consecrate thyself to the Will of God. Whatsoever hath been revealed in His Tablets is but a reflection of His Will. So complete must be thy consecration, that every trace of worldly desire will be washed from thine heart. This is the meaning of true unity. 33.6
The Law of God

Since the Sanctified Realities, the supreme Manifestations of God, surround the essence and qualities of the creatures, transcend and contain existing realities and understand all things, therefore, Their knowledge is divine knowledge, and not acquired-that is to say, it is a holy bounty; it is a divine revelation.

We will mention an example expressly for the purpose of comprehending this subject... The Prophets of God, the supreme Manifestations, are like skilled physicians, and the contingent world is like the body of man: the divine laws are the remedy and treatment. Consequently, the doctor must be aware of, and know, all the members and parts, as well as the constitution and state of the patient, so that he can prescribe a medicine which will be beneficial against the violent poison of the disease. In reality the doctor deduces from the disease itself the treatment which is suited to the patient, for he diagnoses the malady, and

afterward prescribes the remedy for the illness. Until the malady be discovered, how can the remedy and treatment be prescribed? The doctor then must have a thorough knowledge of the constitution, members, organs and state of the patient, and be acquainted with all diseases and all remedies, in order to prescribe a fitting medicine.

Religion, then, is the necessary connection which emanates from the reality of things; and as the supreme Manifestations of God are aware of the mysteries of beings, therefore, They understand this essential connection, and by this knowledge establish the Law of God. 34.1

They whom God hath endued with insight will readily recognize that the precepts laid down by God constitute the highest means for the maintenance of order in the world and the security of its peoples. He that turneth away from them is accounted among the abject and foolish. We, verily, have commanded you to refuse the dictates of your evil passions and corrupt desires, and not to transgress the bounds which the Pen of the Most High hath fixed, for these are the breath of life unto all created things. The seas of Divine wisdom and Divine utterance have risen under the breath of the breeze of the All-Merciful. Hasten to drink your fill, O men of understanding! They that have violated the Covenant of God by breaking His commandments, and have turned back on their heels, these have erred grievously in the sight of God, the All-Possessing, the Most High.

O ye peoples of the world! Know assuredly that My commandments are the lamps of My loving providence among My servants, and the keys of My mercy for My creatures. Thus hath it been sent down from the heaven of the Will of your Lord, the Lord of Revelation. Were any man to taste the sweetness of the words which the lips of the All-Merciful have willed to utter, he would, though the treasures of the earth be in his possession, renounce them one and all, that he might vindicate the truth of even one of His commandments, shining above the Dayspring of His bountiful care and loving-kindness....

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! 34.2

Well is it with them that have fulfilled that which is prescribed in the Book

of God. It is incumbent upon everyone to observe that which God hath purposed, for whatsoever hath been set forth in the Book by the Pen of Glory is an effective means for the purging, the purification and sanctification of the souls of men and a source of prosperity and blessing. Happy are they that have observed His commandments.

34.3

The Laws of God are not imposition of will, or of power, or pleasure, but the resolutions of truth, reason and justice. 34.4

Just as there are laws governing our physical lives, requiring that we must supply our bodies with certain foods, maintain them within a certain range of temperatures, and so forth, if we wish to avoid physical disabilities, so also there are laws governing our spiritual lives. These laws are revealed to mankind in each age by the Manifestation of God, and obedience to them is of vital importance if each human being, and mankind in general, is to develop properly and harmoniously. Moreover, these various aspects are interdependent. If an individual violates the spiritual laws for his own development he will cause injury not only to himself but to the society in which he lives. Similarly, the condition of society has a direct effect on the individuals who must live within it. 34.5

... The laws and standards of the Faith are meant to free them from untold spiritual and moral difficulties in the same way that a proper appreciation of the laws of nature enables one to live in harmony with the forces of the planet. 34.6

It is neither possible nor desirable ... to set forth a set of rules covering every situation. Rather is it the task of the individual believer to determine, according to his own prayerful understanding of the Writings, precisely what his course of conduct should be in relation to situations which he encounters in his daily life. If he is to fulfil his true mission in life.... he will pattern his life according to the Teachings. The believer cannot attain this objective merely by living according to a set of rigid regulations....

Therefore, every believer must continually study the sacred Writings...., striving always to attain a new and better understanding of their import to him and to his society. He should pray fervently for Divine Guidance, wisdom and strength to do what is pleasing to God, and to serve Him at all times and to the best of his

ability. 34.7

Through His Law, Bahá'u'lláh gradually unveils the significance of the new levels of knowledge and behavior to which the peoples of the world are being called. He embeds His precepts in a setting of spiritual commentary, keeping ever before the mind of the reader the principle that these laws, no matter the subject with which they deal, serve the manifold purposes of bringing tranquillity to human society, raising the standard of human behavior, increasing the range of human understanding, and spiritualizing the life of each and all. Throughout, it is the relationship of the individual soul to God and the fulfillment of its spiritual destiny that is the ultimate aim of the laws of religion.... His Book of Laws is His "weightiest testimony unto all people, and the proof of the All-Merciful unto all who are in heaven and all who are on earth." 34.8

Incline your hearts, O people of God, unto the counsels of your true, your incomparable Friend. The Word of God may be likened unto a sapling, whose roots have been implanted in the hearts of men. It is incumbent upon you to foster its growth through the living waters of wisdom, of sanctified and holy words, so that its root may become firmly fixed and its branches may spread out as high as the heavens and beyond. 34.9

Man often lacks the understanding to fathom the wisdom of some of the ordinances which are not to his liking. It therefore becomes a matter of demonstration of the depth of his faith when he is faced with a divine command the wisdom and rationale of which he cannot at that time understand. 34.10

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. In this most perfect Balance whatsoever the peoples and kindreds of the earth possess must be weighed, while the measure of its weight should be tested according to its own standard, did ye but know it. 34.11

Let us be on our guard lest we measure too strictly the Divine Plan with the standard of men. I am not prepared to state that it agrees in principle or in method with the prevailing notions now uppermost in men's minds, nor that it should conform with those imperfect, precarious, and expedient measures feverishly resorted to by agitated humanity. Are we to doubt that the ways of God are not necessarily

the ways of man? Is not faith but
another word for implicit obedience, wholehearted allegiance, uncompromising
adherence to that which we
believe is the revealed and express will of God, however perplexing it might
first appear, however at variance
with the shadowy views, the impotent doctrines, the crude theories, the idle
imaginings, the fashionable
conceptions of a transient and troublous age? If we are to falter or hesitate,
if our love for Him should fail to
direct us and keep us within His path, if we desert Divine and emphatic
principles, what hope can we any more
cherish for healing the ills and sicknesses of this world? 34.12

... As the supreme Manifestations certainly possess essential infallibility,
therefore whatever emanates from
Them is identical with the truth, and conformable to reality. They are not
under the shadow of the former laws.
Whatever They say is the word of God, and whatever They perform is an upright
action....

If some people do not understand the hidden secret of one of His commands and
actions, they ought not to
oppose it, for the supreme Manifestation does what He wishes. How often it has
occurred, when an act has been
performed by a wise, perfect, intelligent man, that others incapable of
comprehending its wisdom have objected
to it and been amazed that this wise man could say or do such a thing.... In
the same way, the skilled doctor in
treating the patient does what he wishes.... It is certain that the doctor will
use some medicine contrary to the
ideas of other people.... The skill of the doctor must be first ascertained;
but when the skill of the doctor is once
established, he does what he wishes. 34.13

A New Human Race

.... The purpose for which mortal men have, from utter nothingness, stepped
into the realm of being, is that
they may work for the betterment of the world and live together in concord and
harmony 35.1

“To build anew the whole world” is the claim and challenge of
[Bahá’u’lláh’s] Message.... In this Revelation
the concepts of the past are brought to a new level of understanding, and the
social laws, changed to suit the age
now dawning, are designed to carry humanity forward into a world civilization
the splendors of which can as yet
be scarcely imagined. 35.2

A race of men, incomparable in character, shall be raised up which, with the

feet of detachment, will tread
under all who are in heaven and on earth, and will cast the sleeve of holiness
over all that hath been created from
water and clay. 35.3

O peoples of the world! The Sun of Truth hath risen to illumine the whole
earth, and to spiritualize the
community of man. Laudable are the results and the fruits thereof, abundant the
holy evidences deriving from
this grace. This is mercy unalloyed and purest bounty; it is light for the
world and all its peoples; it is harmony
and fellowship, and love and solidarity; indeed it is compassion and unity, and
the end of foreignness; it is the
being at one, in complete dignity and freedom, with all on earth.

The Blessed Beauty saith: "Ye are all the fruits of one tree, the leaves of
one branch." Thus hath He likened
this world of being to a single tree, and all its peoples to the leaves
thereof, and the blossoms and fruits. It is
needful for the bough to blossom, and leaf and fruit to flourish, and upon the
interconnection of all parts of the
world-tree, dependeth the flourishing of leaf and blossom, and the sweetness of
the fruit.

For this reason must all human beings powerfully sustain one another and seek
for everlasting life; and for this
reason must the lovers of God in this contingent world become the mercies and
the blessings sent forth by that
element King of the seen and unseen realms. Let them purify their sight and
behold all humankind as leaves and
blossoms and fruits of the tree of being. Let them at all times concern
themselves with doing a kindly thing for
one of their fellows, offering to someone love, consideration, thoughtful help.
Let them see no one as their
enemy, or as wishing them ill, but think of all humankind as their friends;
regarding the alien as an intimate, the
stranger as a companion, staying free of prejudice, drawing no lines.

In this day, the one favored at the Threshold of the lord is he who handeth
round the cup of faithfulness; who
bestoweth, even upon his enemies, the jewel of bounty, and lendeth, even to his
fallen oppressor, a helping hand;
it is he who will, even to the fiercest of his foes, be a loving friend. These
are the Teachings of the Blessed
Beauty, these the counsels of the Most Great Name.

O ye dear friends! The world is at war and the human race is in-travail and
mortal combat. The dark night of
hate hath taken over, and the light of good faith is blotted out. The peoples

and kindreds of the earth have sharpened their claws, and are hurling themselves one against the other. It is the very foundation of the human race that is being destroyed. It is thousands of households that are vagrant and dispossessed, and every year seeth thousands upon thousands of human beings weltering in their lifeblood on dusty battlefields. The tents of life and joy are down. The generals practise their generalship, boasting of the blood they shed, competing one with the next in inciting to violence. "With this sword," saith one of them, "I beheaded a people!" And another: "I toppled a nation to the ground!" And yet another: "I brought a government down!" On such things do men pride themselves, in such do they glory! Love-righteousness-these are everywhere censured, while despised are harmony, and devotion to the truth.

The Faith of the Blessed Beauty is summoning mankind to safety and love, to amity and peace; it hath raised up its tabernacle on the heights of the earth, and directeth its call to all nations. Wherefore, O ye who are God's lovers, know ye the value of this precious Faith, obey its teachings, walk in this road that is drawn straight, and show ye this way to the people. Lift up your voices and sing out the song of the Kingdom. Spread far and wide the precepts and counsels of the loving Lord, so that this world will change into another world, and this darksome earth will be flooded with light, and the dead body of mankind will arise and live; so that every soul will ask for immortality, through the holy breaths of God. Soon will your swiftly-passing days be over, and the fame and riches, the comforts, the joys provided by this rubbish-heap, the world, will be gone without a trace. Summon ye, then, the people to God, and invite humanity to follow the example of the Company on high. Be ye loving fathers to the orphan, and a refuge to the helpless, and a treasury for the poor, and a cure for the ailing. Be ye the helpers of every victim of oppression, the patrons of the disadvantaged. Think ye at all times of rendering some service to every member of the human race. Pay ye no heed to aversion and rejection, to disdain, hostility, injustice: act ye in the opposite way. Be ye sincerely kind, not in appearance only. Let each one of God's loved ones center his attention on this: to be the Lord's mercy to man; to be the Lord's grace. Let him do some good to every person whose path he crosseth, and be of some benefit to him. Let him improve the character of each and all, and

reorient the minds of men. In this way,
the light of divine guidance will shine forth, and the blessings of God will
cradle all mankind: for love is light, no
matter in what abode it dwelleth; and hate is darkness, no matter where it may
make its nest. O friends of God!

That the hidden Mystery may stand revealed, and the secret essence of all
things may be disclosed, strive ye to
banish that darkness for ever and ever. 35.4

The potentialities inherent in the station of man, the full measure of his
destiny on earth, the innate excellence
of his reality, must all be manifested in this promised Day of God.
35.5

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Notes

[<-1]

This section is an abridgment of the statement, Bahá'u'lláh, produced by the Bahá'í World Centre.

[<-2]

The Bahá'í teachings uphold the scientific concept of evolution, but reject

materialistic assertions that the mechanism of evolution is solely based upon chance. In the Bahá'í view the appearance of life-and particularly human life-is the outcome of a predominantly purposeful rather than accidental process. The idea that “man was always man” should not be understood to require a kind of parallel evolution; when the appropriate conditions emerged on the planet, then human life appeared (see 15.8). For a more detailed explanation see “Human Evolution: By Accident or Design” in Science and Religion by Anjam Khursheed and “Evolution in Bahá'í Perspective” in On the Shoulders of Giants by Craig Loehle. Bahá'u'lláh's teachings indicate that true science and true religion are not in conflict but are complementary knowledge systems for the objective investigation of reality.

[<-3]

A letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi notes: “When studying at present, in English, the available Bahá'í writings on the subject of body, soul and spirit, one is handicapped by a certain lack of clarity because not all were translated by the same person, and also there are, as you know, still many Bahá'í writings untranslated. But there is no doubt that spirit and soul seem to have been interchanged in meaning sometimes; soul and mind have, likewise, been interchanged in meaning, no doubt due to difficulties arising from different translations.”

[<-4]

A consideration of the proofs of God's existence is beyond the scope of this book; see The Eternal Quest for God by Julio Savi and The Law of Love Enshrined by John Hatcher and William Hatcher.

[<-5]

The “rational soul” mentioned here refers to a “veiled” soul, a soul who has not been illumined by the spirit of faith.

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