

Seven Cities in the Spiritual Journey to God

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Bahá'u'lláh wrote two books each of which he called The Seven Valleys. They were revealed at the request of an Islamic philosopher, one of the Sufis. This man was attracted to the Cause when Bahá'u'lláh was living at Somereh. He asked Baha'Ullah many questions and many epistles were revealed in reply to these questions. The Persian Seven Valleys has been translated into English. It is the untranslated Arabic one which I will explain to you.

The title of this book is The Seven Cities. It describes the spiritual journey of those who wish to approach God. It begins in this way:

"O thou traveler in the path of justice! O ye who are gazing toward the beauty of God! Your letter has been received. I carefully read your questions and heard the melodies which emanated from the tabernacle of your heart. The clouds of the will of God are rising that the rain of wisdom may shower upon you and wash away that which you have received from others." That is to say, you will be purified from previous ideas and inclinations and prejudices; your attitude will be changed and you will be led to the oneness of the mind of God and guided to the holy law of God in order that you may drink from this eternal river and your soul may become tranquil, your thirst may be quenched, your heart be made ready and you may become one of those who are lighted by the illumination of God.

I. INVESTIGATION

If the traveler wishes to accomplish this journey and attain to the mysteries of God and pass through all these stages of God he must first of all enter into the City of Investigation. When he enters this city of Search or Investigation he must sever himself from everything but God. He must become selfless and lose his will in the will of God, must pass over everything which is in earth and heaven. There must be in his heart no hatred of anyone neither especially attachment to anyone. That is to say, he must love all humanity impartially, not having special love for special people since this love or hatred might prevent him from attaining to reality.

Another thing which is incumbent upon the traveler is that he should purify himself from pride, selfishness and ambition. He must never show any sign of selfishness; he must not be proud of his education, his property or position. When he has characterized himself with these attributes he will then arrive at the City of the Investigation of God. All that he asks[,] God will there make manifest and will show to him His many paths. God will make His illumined path clear to him for He says: "Those who are endeavoring to find us and are searching after Us according to the aforementioned conditions, it will be Our intention to make Ourselves known

to them."

The traveler who starts out upon this journey will see many changes along the way. The wonders of God and the mysteries of creation will become manifest to him and he will be informed concerning the path of God and the path of guidance. This is the first city, the City of Search and Investigation, and the requirement for this city is perfect severance--severance from all save God.

II. LOVE

If we become purified from love and hatred then we enter into the City of Love.

In this place the divine zephyrs of God will waft upon the traveler; his heart will become filled with the love of God to such an extent that he will completely forget his personal self and will know nothing save God. He will entirely forget himself and his own personality. Sometimes he is grieving because of separation and is burning and blazing with the fire of supplication. Sometimes he is joyous and happy. Sometimes he is grieving; sometimes discouraged and restless; sometimes perplexed and agitated. He is anxiously awaiting his especial command from God--waiting with all his heart and soul--that he may sacrifice his soul and body in the path of God. If we greatly persecute him he will take it with utmost joy and happiness. He will live in such a state that he will kiss the hands of his executioners, and is ever ready to sacrifice his life and property in the path of God. If he be thrown headlong into the fire he will be cold; if drowned in the ocean he will be dry. This is the station of the love of God. These are the attributes of the one who has attained to the City of Search and has entered into the City of Love.

Question: "Will not the traveler have a definite object, in the Manifestation of God as the object of his love?"

Answer: Some persons pass rapidly through these seven valleys. He who searches for Truth, who longs to know right from wrong, seeks to find God's Manifestation for he realizes his inability to understand God's Essence. He knows there can be no salvation without the Manifestation of God. He wishes to find the mystery of Manifestation, to grasp the Center of Lights. Then he becomes a lover of Truth.

III. UNITY

The third city is the City of Divine Oneness. When man's heart becomes filled with love then he sees oneness; he does not see differences. He sees that all things and all objects are looking toward one center. He sees unity among mankind. He sees unity among the Manifestations of God. He sees unity and amity among the friends of God and he sees one underlying principle of unity in the teachings of God. He sees nothing but union in union; he does not see differences. He gazes upon everything in existence with respect and homage because he considers all as existing in God, as

signs of Divinity. He sees the rays of the Manifestation of God enveloping all the world of existence. He is never haughty toward anyone. He never magnifies himself. At every instant he feels himself living by the power of the Almighty God. He does not wish for himself what he does not wish for others. He does not say to others what he does not wish said to himself. This is the station of oneness. Such persons are sailing in the ark of guidance. The rays of the beauty of God are manifest in their faces and we can inhale the fragrances of God from their words. These are the characteristics of those who have attained to this city.

IV. AMAZEMENT

After the third valley, the valley of Oneness, there comes the valley of Amazement and Surprise. When man reaches this stage he is filled with wonder at the world of God. He is submerged in the world of God, is unconscious of himself. This is the state of amazement.

There were in Acca a large number of people who were amazed because of the beauty of the Beloved (which Baha'Ullah revealed to them.) They would get up three hours before dawn and would walk around the house of Baha'Ullah many times. Then, when the time for the meeting arrived, Baha'Ullah would call them in and talk with them. They were like lovers who were lost in the beauty of God the Beloved. They were amazed. There are people now who have attained to this station.

V. SELFLESSNESS

After this stage there comes the City of Selflessness. In this city man dies in the will of God. That is, his selfish personality dies away. He forgets himself, forgets his body and soul and swims in the ocean of selflessness. He becomes unconscious of himself, of his personal existence. His Holiness Baha'Ullah states that the mysteries of this city of selflessness are myriad for this is the city of the evanescence of the lover in the Beloved. When we reach the city of selflessness then the beauty of the Beloved becomes manifest to us. Unless we are selfless we cannot see that reality. If self is forgotten then reality will take the place of self.

VI. IMMORTALITY

After this city or valley comes the City of Immortality, where the traveler forgets his will. He wishes only what God wishes. The attributes of God will clearly appear within him. His life will become a divine life.

VII. THE UNSEEN

After the station of Immortality comes the station of the Unseen, or of Invisibility. His Holiness Baha'Ullah says that this invisible city is an unfathomable and limitless ocean. This is the world of the Divine

Attributes. The Sun of the Unseen dawns from this Dawning-Place of Invisibility. Baha'Ullah says that this is a vast city and very few have entered this city; and no one knows anything about this city of the Unseen save the Manifestations of God and God Himself.

SUMMARY

Everyone enters into the valley of Search and Investigation, because if we do not arise for the investigation of God we will never reach God, will know nothing of His attributes. If we do not arise for the search of Divinity we will know nothing about Divinity; unless we are thirsty we will not appreciate water. The more we desire to know Truth the sooner we will arrive at reality. Those who are thirstiest will most appreciate water.

One can easily tell the denizens of each city. One can easily tell that such a man is in the first city; another man has entered the city of love; another is passing into the city of oneness, and one can easily see that some people are confounded and amazed.

Some even travel through the city of Amazement and enter the city of Selflessness. Those people have annihilated their will in the will of the Glory of God. They are martyrs; they are living, and walking about, but they are really martyrs. This is what is called the City of Selflessness, and this can easily be recognized and discerned. Some have traversed this station and have reached the station of immortality.

Baha'Ullah says that the traveler will have a test in each city. If he does not pass that test he must go back to the first stage. It is difficult to overcome these tests which are in our way, yet, in order to progress we must conquer our selfishness and pride. All these cities are very difficult; but the first is the most difficult--to become characterized with the first conditions. The condition for the first city is severance, that is, severance from everything except the love of God.

— Seven Cities in the Spiritual Journey to God (Used by permission of the curator)