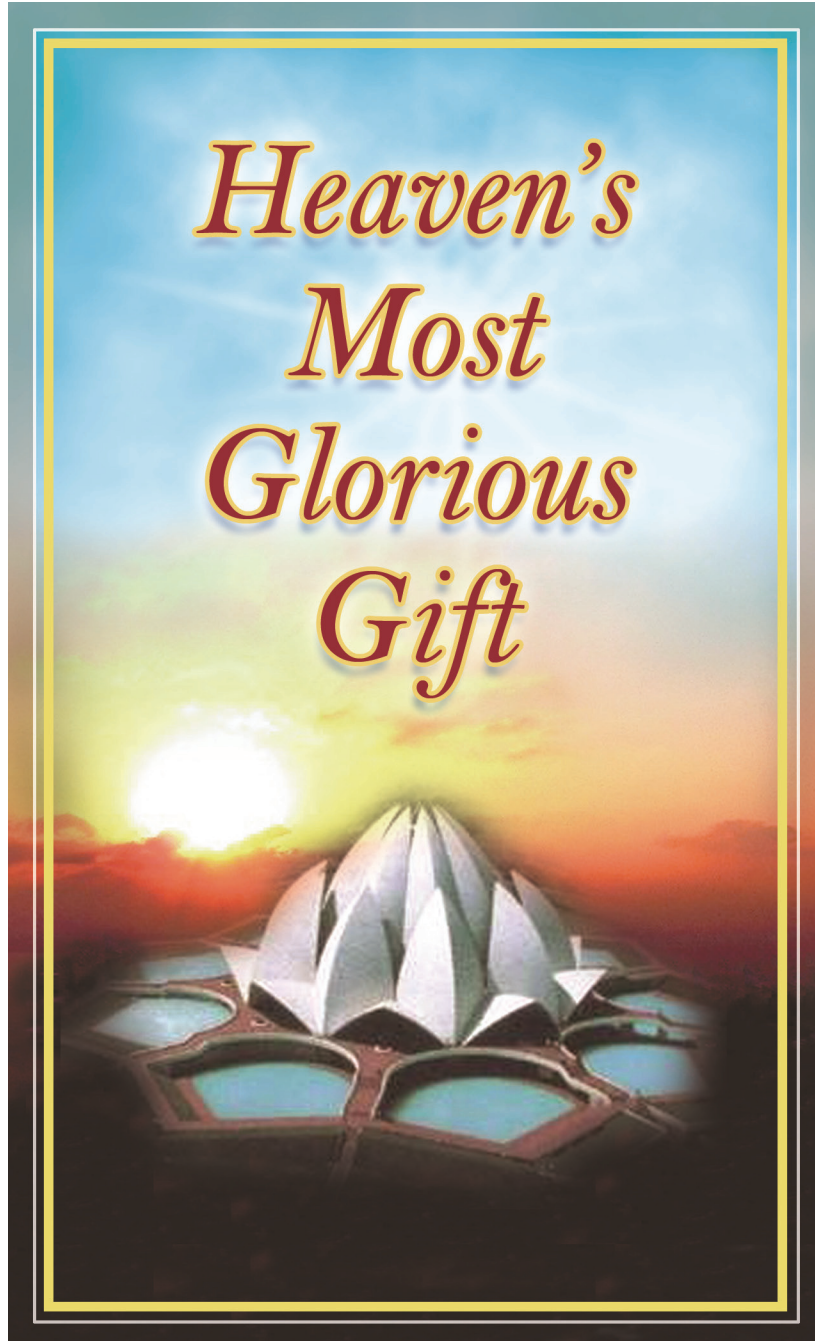


*Heaven's  
Most  
Glorious  
Gift*



# Heaven's Most Glorious Gift

*Volume II*

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## ***Heaven's Most Glorious Gift***

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## **Other Works by This Author**

*One God, Many Faiths;  
One Garden, Many Flowers  
Choosing Your Destiny  
The Evidence for Bahá'u'lláh  
Come Now, Let Us Reason Together  
Bahá'u'lláh:  
The One Promised in All Scriptures  
The Greatest News  
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God's 19 Great Little Tranquilizers  
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### **Compilations**

*Bahá'í Prayers  
Prayers from the Báb  
The Glorious Journey to God  
Unto God Shall We Return  
The Magnet of Divine Blessings*

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**Part I**

**Questions and Answers**  
**About the Bahá'í Faith**

*My People perish for want of knowledge. Hosea 4:6*

*Through knowledge shall the just be delivered.*

*Proverbs 11:9*

## Why Investigate the Bahá'í Faith?

This is the second in a two-volume series about the Bahá'í Faith. This volume, like the first—*One God, Many Faiths; One Garden, Many Flowers*—presents the Message and Mission of Bahá'u'lláh to all seekers and lovers of truth. It invites everyone who is interested in his or her eternal destiny to “**Watch!**” (Matt. 24:42), to take notice and pay attention to the greatest and most joyous news in human history. It invites everyone to reach out for the most glorious gift Heaven may bestow on humans: the gift of loving God and living in the paradise of His peace and knowledge.

Either we choose our destiny or we leave it to the winds of chance. “Whoever has resigned himself to fate will find that fate accepts his resignation.”

We are here for one fundamental purpose. We have a supreme mission that stands far above eating, sleeping, working, vacationing, worrying, aging, and dying. The Bahá'í Faith has come to renew that purpose and to remind us of that mission—a mission that will endure for eternity. It is easy to slide downward. If we fail to remind ourselves of our purpose for being here, if we fail to recognize our spiritual mission, we will descend to the level of physical survival and pleasure—a purpose suitable for animals.

Life on earth ends for all, and the next one begins. What will happen then depends on what we do now. If we plant sincere desire, we will harvest eternal joy and peace. If we plant apathy, avoidance, fear, and ignorance, we will reap eternal grief and gloom. What can a farmer expect from seeds not planted, fields not plowed, or crops not watered? The law of cause and effect works as well in the spiritual realm as in the physical.

To succeed at any task we need to study, analyze, and understand it. One task few people examine is the process of decision making. Understanding this process ranks among the most essential skills for successful living. As noted motivational author and speaker Anthony Robbins observes, “***It is in your moments of decision that your destiny is shaped.***”<sup>1</sup>

Have you ever analyzed how you make decisions? In his book, *Awaken the Giant Within*, Anthony Robbins explains the process and the common components of decision making:

Although you may never have even thought about it, your brain has already constructed an internal system for making decisions. This system acts like an invisible force, directing all of your thoughts, actions, and feelings, both good and bad, every moment that you live. It controls how you evaluate everything in your life, and it's largely driven by your subconscious mind. The scary thing is that most people never consciously set this system up. Instead, it's been installed through the years by sources as diverse as parents, peers, teachers, television, advertisers, and the culture at large. This system consists of five components:

- Your core beliefs and unconscious rules
- Your life values



- Your references
- The habitual questions that you ask yourself, and
- The emotional states you experience in each moment

The synergistic relationship of these five elements exerts a force that's responsible for prompting you to or stopping you from taking action, causing you to anticipate or worry about the future, making you feel loved or rejected, and dictating your level of success and happiness. It determines why you do what you do and why you don't do some things that you know you need to do.<sup>2</sup>

“Men, as well as women, are much oftener led by their hearts than by their understandings.” Though we'd like to deny it, the fact remains that what drives our behavior is instinctive reaction to pain and pleasure, not intellectual calculation. Intellectually, we may believe that eating chocolate is bad for us, but we'll still reach for it. Why? Because we're not driven so much by what we intellectually know, but rather by what we've learned to link pain and pleasure to in our nervous systems. It's our neuro-associations—the associations we've established in our nervous systems—that determine what we'll do. Although we'd like to believe it's our intellect that really drives us, in most cases our emotions—the sensations that we link to our thoughts—are what truly drive us.<sup>3</sup>

To what demands or consequences do our feelings respond readily? They respond to immediate rather than long-term demands and consequences. What happens when we do not make conscious and rational choices? Our emotions prevail. What happens when we do not think of long-term consequences? Short-term whims and desires rise to victory. As the example of chocolate demonstrates, the joy of tasting it for a few seconds in our mouths overcomes the pain of carrying it for a lifetime on our waists!

Basically the same principle governs every other aspect of our lives. Which of the following two sets of motivators draws more attention and time? Those in the left column or those in the right?

***Instant Needs  
and Pleasures***

- Shopping for one hour
- Watching your favorite show for two hours
- Reading your favorite magazine for one hour
- Going to restaurant for one hour
- Going to a bar for two hours
- Working 15 extra hours a week to gain triple pay
- Going on vacation for two weeks

***Distant Needs  
and Pleasures***

- Devoting 15 minutes a day to a book on spirituality
- Praying and meditating 20 minutes a day
- Devoting 15 minutes a day to the study of the new Faith—a Faith that makes the most incredible claim: that the One for whom the world has been waiting for thousands of years has come, and that the evidence for His advent is overwhelming

Deep in your heart you know that you should become more spiritual, that you should look into this Faith, that the news of the advent of such a great religion is too important to be ignored, that the consequences of investigating or ignoring it are enormous. And yet, if you are an average person, you won't take the news seriously. You will brush it aside with, "I am too busy at this time" or "How would I know? I am not an expert!"

What happens when you follow your natural tendencies, when you tend to your immediate needs and desires? You allow something as trivial as your desire to watch a favorite show to control your everlasting destiny. What is the consequence of *not* making conscious, rational choices based on your long-term interests? The consequence is this: Though you may not realize it, you allow random thoughts, impulses, past conditioning, immediate needs and interests, other people, tradition, or the public media rather than your own inner wisdom decide what matters most in your life.

The knowledge of how we make decisions should make everyone humble. It should teach us this most critical of all lessons: Because of the overwhelming powers of emotions, habits, traditions, conformity, and convenience in our lives, we should make a supreme effort to remain vigilant, watchful, curious, and open-minded at all times and under all conditions. Failing to follow this most fundamental principle lies at the root of much suffering in our lives.

When we close our hearts and minds to new ideas, we also close them to God. Knowledge is the light of heaven. Can we connect to the sun by hiding in a closet? Seeking safety in the comfort of one's ancestral beliefs and traditions without testing and discovering what lies beyond them is as illusive and irrational as any belief can be. And yet most people pursue it without pondering its perilous consequences.

Closed minds have always stifled the advancement of knowledge. It was at the command of closed minds that the church persecuted Galileo. It was by the power of closed minds that people rejected the gift of divine knowledge from every great Messenger and Redeemer. Today that same power commands the minds of the masses, preventing them from seeing the one universal truth that underlies all great faiths.

Our beliefs are like unquestioned commands, telling us how things are, what's possible and what's impossible. They shape every action, every thought, and every feeling we experience.<sup>4</sup> If beliefs exert such powers, should we not examine them? Should we not investigate their consequences?

May God awaken this awareness in our souls: We are in control of our lives. We can choose to be spiritual or worldly. We can choose to live by apathy or by ecstasy. We can choose to be active or passive. We can choose to see or not to see, to seek the knowledge of God or to ignore that knowledge, to be open-minded or closed-minded. Taking the first step—making a rational rather than an emotional or random choice—requires some effort, but it is well within the power of every human being. Is it not because of our freedom of choice—our ability to put the spiritual first—that we stand accountable for our actions?

I will call you to account for your doings.

Ezekiel 7:3

Every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

Romans 14:12

Claim the most precious right God has given you: the power of choice, before you have lost the chance. Do not abandon that right or give it to anything or anyone—not to convenience, not to your parents, not to your spouse, not to your priest, not to your pastor. Trust only your own rational soul, the true captain of your spiritual destiny. No one can answer for your choices except you. You can blame no one else for your shortcomings, for putting your short-term interests above long-term consequences. A decision must be followed by action. If there is no action, there is no decision.

Within the last two centuries our way of life has been altered by a massive scientific and technological revolution. To balance this, we desperately need a spiritual revolution of the same magnitude.

No matter how far the material world advances, it cannot establish the happiness of mankind. Only when material and spiritual civilization are linked and coordinated will happiness be assured.<sup>5</sup> Bahá'í Scriptures

Noted psychologist and author Dr. Wayne Dyer also points to this imbalance:

Science and technology have brought us forward into a grand new world with greater possibilities than ever. But...our attitudes and feelings have not evolved equally.<sup>6</sup>

Albert Einstein said that the advent of the nuclear age changed everything except the way people think. Our age requires a paradigm shift in thinking as profound as growing from childhood to adulthood.

The world's greatest need is unity, its gravest disease is separation and a lack of harmony and true love among individuals, nations, races, religions, and cultures. If we work together, we can solve any problem, overcome any obstacle. The old social order required competition; the new order requires cooperation, interdependence, and unity. The time has come to see the human race as the "fruits of one tree and as leaves of one branch." Only with this perspective can we create peace and prosperity for all.

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...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.<sup>7</sup> Bahá'í Scriptures

On that day the Lord shall be one Lord and his name the one name. Zechariah 14:9

And I...am about to come and gather all nations and tongues, and they will come and see my glory. Isaiah 66:18

Soon will the present-day order be rolled up, and a new one spread out in its stead.<sup>8</sup> Bahá'í Scriptures

...all nations and kindreds...will become a single nation. Religious and sectarian antagonism, the hostility of races and peoples, and differences among nations, will be eliminated.<sup>9</sup> Bahá'í Scriptures

In that day the boundary shall be far extended. Micah 7:11

Does the source of all love withhold His love?

Has His unfailing love vanished forever? Has His promise failed for all time? Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has He in anger withheld His compassion? Psalms 77:8-9

God never fails to send help. Suffering comes to us when *we* fail to seek and receive His love. Perhaps you have heard this story: “Henry lived in a valley near a river, which had reached flood stage. Everybody was being evacuated to higher ground, except Henry. God would take care of him, he firmly believed. Soon the water rose to his porch. His friends paddled by in a row boat. Henry was sitting on his windowsill. ‘We have come to save you,’ they said. Henry would not budge. ‘God will save me.’ he said. It was not long before the flood waters rose several feet. Henry was now stranded on the second floor. A rescue team came by in a motorboat. As he waved to the people from the window, they shouted to him, ‘We’ve come to save you.’ They heard him say, ‘Don’t worry about me. God will save me.’ Finally, Henry was sitting on top of his roof. A helicopter hovered overhead and someone shouted, ‘Henry, grab the rope before it’s too late.’ But he would not budge. The waters rose higher. Henry drowned. As he entered the gates of heaven the Lord met him. ‘Lord,’ said Henry, ‘I’m glad to meet you, but frankly, I am very disappointed. I counted on you to save me, but you let me down.’ ‘Henry,’ said the Lord, shaking his head and smiling with understanding, ‘I sent a row boat, a motor boat, and even a helicopter to save you. What more did you want me to do?’<sup>10</sup> God never abandons humanity. His help is always within an arm’s reach. All we need is to extend our hands.

Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands...

Isaiah 49:15–16

God always sends help at the precise moment that we need it, but He never forces us to accept His help. He simply asks us to be open to it, to appreciate it, and to apply it. It is His to offer solutions, it is ours to find them; it is His to offer wisdom, it is ours to accept it. He wants us to have the honor of being participants in His plan. If He did everything, what role would we have?

May I invite you to open your heart and soul to the most glorious gift Heaven bestows on humans: the gift of living in the light of God and sharing that light with others. May I invite you to become a participant in building the most magnificent civilization, the like of which the world has never seen. May I invite you to embark on a spiritual journey filled with excitement and ecstasy. May I invite you to claim your share of the blessings in store for you before you hear the song of departure.

### ***Does Bahá’u’lláh Say Anything About the Future of Human Life on This Planet?***

Bahá’u’lláh made two types of predictions, one about the near future, and the other about the distant future. He declared that world conditions will continue to get worse before getting better—in fact, so much worse that it is indescribable. At present we are somewhere in the midst of a terrible storm that is raging and gaining momentum every day. It is the meeting of an old but indescribably gigantic structure with a tornado of grave powers and proportions. This giant structure is now shaking; it has cracked at the seams. When the end comes, it will crumble with such awesome intensity that words cannot describe and the imagination cannot conceive. Bahá’u’lláh declares:

Witness how the world is being afflicted with a fresh calamity every day. Its tribulation is continually deepening.<sup>11</sup>

The winds of despair are, alas, blowing from every direction, and the strife that divideth and afflicteth the human race is daily increasing. The signs of impending convulsions and chaos can now be discerned, inasmuch as the prevailing order appeareth to be lamentably defective...Such shall be its plight, that to disclose it now would not be meet and seemly.<sup>12</sup>

Oppression will envelop the world. And following a universal convulsion, the sun of justice will rise from the horizon of the unseen realm.<sup>13</sup>

Chaos and confusion are daily increasing in the world. They will attain such intensity as to render the frame of mankind unable to bear them. Then will men be awakened and become aware that religion is the impregnable stronghold and the manifest light of the world, and its laws, exhortations and teachings the source of life on earth.<sup>14</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Bahá

The Book of Revelation predicts in graphic terms the fall of this Babylon of glamour, this giant city without Spirit, this gigantic civilization without civility:

Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come...Fallen!

Fallen is Babylon the Great...

Revelation 14:7-8

Then I heard another voice from heaven say: “Come out of her [Babylon], my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes...Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her...Woe! Woe, O great city, O Babylon, city of power! In one hour your doom has come!...Rejoice over her, O heaven! Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets! God has judged her for the way she treated you.”

Revelation 18:4-20

The gloomy state of the world is also predicted by Isaiah:

The new wine dries up and the vine withers; all the merry-makers groan. The gaiety of the tambourines is stilled, the noise of the revelers has stopped, the joyful harp is silent...all gaiety is banished from the earth. The city is left in ruins, its gate is battered to pieces. So will it be on the earth and among the nations, as when an olive tree is beaten, or as when gleanings are left after the grape harvest. Isaiah 24:7-8, 11-13

In this prophecy, Daniel refers both to the spread of knowledge and the severe trials of our time:

There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then...Many will go here and there to increase knowledge. Daniel 12:1, 4

Many political leaders recognize the world’s dramatic changes but have no clear vision of the future. Former U.S. president George Bush recognized the coming of a New World Order, but he could not see where it is heading. He said: “There are no maps to lead us where we are going, to this new world of our own making.”<sup>15</sup>

This story demonstrates the difference between the divine and human wisdom. It dramatizes how short-sighted human beings can be:

I'm sitting in a quiet room...among the pine trees...listening to the desperate sounds of a life-or-death struggle going on a few feet away.

There's a small fly burning out the last of its short life's energies in a futile attempt to fly through the glass of the windowpane. His whining wings tell the poignant story of the fly's strategy: Try harder.

But it's not working. The frenzied effort offers no hope for survival. Ironically, the struggle is part of the trap. It is impossible for the fly to try hard enough to succeed at breaking through the glass. Nevertheless, this little insect has staked its life on reaching its goal through raw effort and determination.

This fly is doomed. It will die there on the windowsill.

Across the room, ten steps away, the door is open. Ten seconds of flying time and this small creature could reach the outside world it seeks. With only a fraction of the effort now being wasted, it could be free of its self-imposed trap. The breakthrough possibility is there. It would be so easy.

Why doesn't the fly try another approach, something dramatically different? How did it get so locked in on the idea that this particular route and determined effort offer the most promise for success? What logic is there in continuing until death to seek a breakthrough with more of the same?<sup>16</sup>

A clock hangs on a wall in the University of Chicago. The position of its hands tells how close the world stands to danger. At given intervals, a group of eminent scientists meet to decide the time. After the collapse of communism in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, its hands were set at 17 minutes to midnight—the beginning of doomsday. In December 1995, the scientists set the time at 14 minutes to midnight. They declared that in recent years we have been moving perilously closer to danger. One main reason is a prevailing sense of complacency among the peoples of the world. Communism has, for the most part, collapsed, but all is not right with the world. The scientists met again in July of 1998. They moved the clock perilously close to midnight—they set it at 11:51 p.m.

***Now the good news:***

The whole earth is now in a state of pregnancy. The day is approaching when it will have yielded its noblest fruits, when from it will have sprung forth the loftiest trees, the most enchanting blossoms, the most heavenly blessings.<sup>17</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

These fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the "Most Great Peace" shall come.<sup>18</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

The Day is approaching when God will render the hosts of Truth victorious, and He will purge the whole earth in such wise that within the compass of His knowledge not a single soul shall remain unless he truly believeth in God.<sup>19</sup> The Báb

All nations and kindreds will become a single nation. Religious and sectarian antagonism, the hostility of races and peoples, and differences among nations, will be eliminated.<sup>20</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

The old building must be razed before a new one can rise. Of course, the process is gradual. Bahá’u’lláh has disclosed a blueprint for a “new earth and a new heaven” (Rev. 21:1), for a new social and spiritual order. From that blueprint a model has already come into being. All seekers of truth, all skeptics are invited to come and see it actually working. It is nothing short of miracle; it *is* a miracle.

When Edison invented the light bulb, he first made a model. From that single bulb the world changed forever. Bahá’u’lláh has also offered the world a new light bulb as bright as the sun. This one gets both its power and its design from the Mind of the Creator. Bahá’ís have not only a perfect blueprint but a perfect model for a planet in unity, peace, and prosperity. If you are a doubter, please come on board for a beautiful sightseeing excursion.

This shall be your sign from the Lord that he will do what he has promised. Isaiah 38:22

Bahá’u’lláh lived in the 19th Century in one of the most primitive cultures, yet He introduced a New World Order so advanced that it is praised by the great thinkers of this century. Dr. Ervin Laszlo is one of the foremost authorities on a new discipline called “systems sciences.” It is the science of learning how to keep the planet and its people in perfect order and balance. Dr. Laszlo is not a Bahá’í, but a scientist interested in the genius of the Bahá’í plan and its transforming powers; this is what he says about the Bahá’í Faith:

In our times we can only survive, and our civilization can only flower, if we reorient the conventional wisdom and achieve the new insights...proclaimed by the Bahá’í Faith and...now also supported by the latest discoveries of the empirical sciences...

Your example could be a very important factor in the development of a global society at large because you show that it is possible. And today we live in turbulent times when the effect of one example like this, a living example, could spread. Why? Because we have all the means of communication at our disposal. Your example could become known all over the world, and it is already becoming known.<sup>21</sup>

Like Jesus of Nazareth, and the other great Messengers and Redeemers of the past, Bahá’u’lláh has established a spiritual empire that kings can envy.

Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne and I myself have founded empires; but upon what do these creations of our genius depend? Upon force. Jesus alone founded His empire upon love; and to this very day millions would die for Him. Napoleon Bonaparte

Jesus prophesied that at the end of the age a new City will descend from heaven. Bahá’ís believe that “the City” is a new civilization, and that only *the blueprint* of that city comes from heaven, not the city itself.

Many Christians think that when Christ comes, He will lift them to heaven to save them from “the great tribulation.” But He will leave all non-Christians and bad people behind to suffer and die in great agony and disgrace. Bahá’ís believe that no one can receive a passport for such a quick and easy exit. What they believe is this: By becoming Bahá’ís

or the builders of the new City—instead of just being observers—they can gain *some* protection. First, they know and expect what is coming, so they are not scared. Second, Bahá'u'lláh gives them the spiritual strength to withstand the pressure. Third, they are so busy building, they have little time for worrying.

The old world order, like a Titanic in distress, is fast sinking. The passengers are totally unaware of the ship's destiny. Some of them are reposing in their cubicles, others are singing and dancing, and still others are putting a final coating on the decaying parts. They don't know that the time of resting, painting, and dancing will soon be over.

The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order. Mankind's ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System—the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed.<sup>22</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

Those attached to the sinking ship will finally awaken to mourn the loss of their comfort zone. But they need not mourn, for a new ship is already waiting for the rescue. It is the Ark of God. The passengers will make life easier for themselves and for others if they abandon the sinking ship before they are forced to.

Here are a few references from sacred scriptures that point both to the bad news, the sinking of the old order, and to the good, the arrival of a new order. First the bad news:

How awful that day will be! None will be like it. Jeremiah 30:7

See, the Name of the Lord comes from afar, with burning anger and dense clouds of smoke; his lips are full of wrath, and his tongue is a consuming fire. His breath is like a rushing torrent, rising up to the neck. He shakes the nations in the sieve of destruction... Isaiah 30:27–28

The good news is in direct contrast to the bad:

The Lord their God will save them on that day...They will sparkle...like jewels in a crown. How attractive and beautiful they will be! Zechariah 9:16–17

Here is the Lord God coming in might, coming to rule with his right arm. Isaiah 40:10

It takes a while before those who have lived in the dark can risk opening their eyes to the bright light of the new day. Truth is often eclipsed at the beginning, but it triumphs at the end. Adlai Stevenson said that some people must be dragged, kicking and screaming, into the 20th Century. The futurist Alvin Toffler confirms what Bahá'u'lláh predicted a century ago:

There are powerful reasons for long-range optimism, even if the transitional years immediately ahead are likely to be stormy and crisis-ridden.<sup>23</sup> ...the decades immediately ahead are likely to be filled with upheavals, turbulence, perhaps even widespread violence, we will not totally destroy ourselves...the jolting changes we are now experiencing are not chaotic or random but in fact, they form a sharp, clearly discernible pattern...what is happening now is nothing less than a global revolution, a quantum jump in history.<sup>24</sup>

Ours is the most splendid age in human history. We are approaching a day when “The earth shall be full of knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9).



On the surface we see gloomy and threatening clouds of vast dimensions, but behind the clouds, the sun shines with blazing brilliance. In the midst of grief and gloom, there is reason for rejoicing:

The desert and *the parched land will be glad*; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy...*they will see the glory of the Lord*, the splendor of our God.\*  
Isaiah 35:1–2

Verily this is the Day in which *both land and sea rejoice*.<sup>25</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

Sinai calleth aloud and saith: "...the ecstasies of my joy have seized the pebbles of the earth and the dust thereof."<sup>26</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

*Let the heavens rejoice*, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it; let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy; they will sing before the Lord, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth.  
Psalms 96:11–13  
See also Psalms 97:1; 10–12; 98:1–9

In this Day a great festival is taking place in the Realm above; for whatsoever was promised in the sacred Scriptures hath been fulfilled. *This is the Day of great rejoicing*. It behoveth everyone to hasten towards the court of His nearness with exceeding joy, gladness, exultation and delight and to deliver himself from the fire of remoteness.<sup>27</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death *a light has dawned*.  
Isaiah 9:2

## ***Did Bahá'u'lláh Make Any Specific Predictions?***

Some people have dreams and visions that come true, but generally, our predictive powers are as good as those of the fortune teller who was asked if he could predict the score of a football game before it starts. And he said, "Before the game starts, the score will be nothing to nothing!"

Only God's supreme Messengers and Redeemers have knowledge of the future. Bahá'u'lláh made many predictions. Some of them are expressed in veiled language. As time goes on, their meanings gradually become evident. Others are expressed in open language. Many of Bahá'u'lláh's predictions have already been fulfilled; the others pertain to the future.

Probably the most dramatic evidence of Bahá'u'lláh's knowledge of the future appears in His Tablets (Epistles) to the ruling monarchs and the religious leaders of His day. These Epistles contain not only undeniable proof of Bahá'u'lláh's knowledge of the future but also His most emphatic words on His Mission as the supreme Savior and Redeemer of the world. Sent from behind prison walls by a Prisoner to the kings of the world, these Epistles contain counsels, pleas, and warnings. The monarchs are asked to heed the cause

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\* Emphasis added to sacred Scriptures throughout the book by this author.

of justice and to investigate the claims of the new Manifestation. They are further warned of the consequences of their denial of the divine Call. Here is a passage containing Bahá'u'lláh's warning to the kings in general:

If ye pay no heed unto the counsels which, in peerless and unequivocal language, We have revealed in this Tablet, Divine chastisement shall assail you from every direction, and the sentence of His justice shall be pronounced against you. On that day ye shall have no power to resist Him, and shall recognize your own impotence. Have mercy on yourselves and on those beneath you. Judge ye between them according to the precepts prescribed by God in His most holy and exalted Tablet.<sup>28</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh also sent specific Epistles to significant leaders of His time. For the sake of brevity, let us consider only one of them. Among recipients of Bahá'u'lláh's Epistles was Napoleon III, the "foremost monarch of his day." Consider the following passages from the Tablet addressed to him. Note Bahá'u'lláh's language, the supreme authority with which He speaks:

Know of a truth that your subjects are God's trust amongst you. Watch ye, therefore, over them as ye watch over your own selves. Beware that ye allow not wolves to become the shepherds of the fold, or pride and conceit to deter you from turning unto the poor and the desolate. Arise thou, in My name...and set, then, thy face towards the Kingdom, at the bidding of thy Lord, the Lord of strength and of might.

...Adorn the body of Thy kingdom with the raiment of My name, and arise, then, to teach My Cause. Better is this for thee than that which thou possessest. God will, thereby, exalt thy name among all the kings. Potent is He over all things. Walk thou amongst men in the name of God, and by the power of His might, that thou mayest show forth His signs amidst the peoples of the earth...

Exultest thou over the treasures thou dost possess, knowing they shall perish? Rejoicest thou in that thou rulest a span of earth, when the whole world, in the estimation of the people of Bahá, is worth as much as the black in the eye of a dead ant? Abandon it unto such as have set their affections upon it, and turn thou unto Him Who is the Desire of the world. Whither are gone the proud and their palaces? Gaze thou into their tombs, that thou mayest profit by this example, inasmuch as We made it a lesson unto every beholder. Were the breezes of Revelation to seize thee, thou wouldst flee the world, and turn unto the Kingdom, and wouldst expend all thou possessest, that thou mayest draw nigh unto this sublime Vision.<sup>29</sup>

Like other despotic sovereigns, Napoleon preferred to ignore the divine Call. He is "reported to have contemptuously flung down the Tablet sent to him." The sentence of justice pronounced against him for his disdainful pride was swift and severe. Bahá'u'lláh sent him a second Tablet that predicted his downfall in these dire and portentous Words. Once again observe the supreme authority and certainty with which Bahá'u'lláh speaks. Can anyone except he Spirit of God speak in this language?

For what thou hast done, thy kingdom shall be thrown into confusion, and thine empire shall pass from thine hands, as a punishment for that which thou hast wrought. Then wilt thou know how thou hast plainly erred. Commotions shall seize all the people in that land, unless thou arisest to help this Cause, and followest Him Who is

the Spirit of God (Jesus Christ) in this, the Straight Path. Hath thy pomp made thee proud? By My Life! It shall not endure; nay, it shall soon pass away, unless thou holdest fast by this firm Cord. We see abasement hastening after thee, whilst thou art of the heedless. It behoveth thee when thou hearest His Voice calling from the seat of glory to cast away all that thou possessest, and cry out: ‘Here am I, O Lord of all that is in heaven and all that is on earth!’<sup>30</sup>

Napoleon’s reign quickly came to an abrupt end when, contrary to all expectations, he was defeated by William I of Germany at the battle of Sedan, stripped of his power, and exiled for the rest of his days. Napoleon’s defeat is regarded as one of the most astonishing encounters in the whole history of warfare.

For the story of other leaders addressed by Bahá’u’lláh, see *The Prisoner and the King* by William Sears and a forthcoming book by this author: *By My Fruits Ye Shall Know Me*. Many of Bahá’u’lláh’s predictions are explored in *The Challenge of Bahá’u’lláh* by Gary Matthews.

### ***What Is “the Great Tribulation” Prophesied in the Bible?***

Many Christians expect that at the time of “the great tribulation,” cataclysmic disasters will destroy the world and all its inhabitants, except the good or “born again” Christians, who will be lifted (raptured) to the safety of heaven. But according to Bahá’u’lláh, “the great tribulation” points to the spiritual confusion of our own time.<sup>31</sup> The masses of people today live in spiritual distress; they don’t know where to go, who or what to believe. There are thousands of cults, denominations, and religions with many contradictory claims. It seems that the supply of “truth” far exceeds the demand. Now suppose you are an open-minded and sincere person truly in search of the truth. Where would you start? Whom would you trust? Faced with such confusion, what would you do? Nothing!

Our world has become extremely complex. We are bombarded with an infinite array of messages, each of them asking us to buy a special product; and each of them is supposed to be the best. A grocery store in our town boasts that it carries 135 kinds of cereals and 185 kinds of salad dressings! Religion presents a more serious dilemma than a choice of salad dressings. *Christianity Today* estimates the number of Christian denominations at 25,000. We are surrounded by so much noise and so many competing voices that we cannot hear the voice of God.

The world has been waiting for thousands of years for the One promised to bring the Good News of the Kingdom—by far the most glorious news the world has ever known. Suppose you hear about this News but do nothing. Can you imagine a tribulation or tragedy that comes even close by comparison? Its tragic aftermath would far exceed a fatal or paralyzing accident. The consequences of physical death and suffering are temporary, but the consequences of spiritual death and poverty are everlasting. To be near the heavenly garden but fail to taste its divine fruits is a tragedy beyond comprehension; to stand near the mansions of glory but refuse to enter is a loss, a failure of unimagined

consequences. This is how Bahá'u'lláh interprets the word *tribulation*, also translated as “oppression”:

What “oppression” is more grievous than that a soul seeking the truth, and wishing to attain unto the knowledge of God, should know not where to go for it and from whom to seek it? For opinions have sorely differed, and the ways unto the attainment of God have multiplied. This “oppression” is the essential feature of every Revelation. Unless it cometh to pass, the Sun of Truth will not be made manifest.<sup>32</sup>

These prophecies confirm the confusion and distress of our time, as stated by Bahá'u'lláh:

...the day of God visits you. Now is the time of their confusion. Micah 7:4

Men wander about like sheep in distress for lack of a shepherd. My anger is turned against the shepherds [religious leaders]... Zechariah 10:2-3

Ours is the most difficult age in history. This century has witnessed the slaughter of more than 100 million people as a result of war and genocide. One out of five Americans suffers from mental disorders and addiction. Never before have so many experienced pain and suffering as they do in our time. The disturbed take it out on others, and they, in turn, take it out on still others. The chain reaction spreads from all directions. “Some boy scouts were on a camping trip. The mosquitoes were so fierce, the boys had to hide under their blankets. Then one of them saw some lightning bugs and said to his friend, ‘We might as well give up. They’re coming after us with flashlights.’” When the light of God fades, all kinds of “insects” invade the human spirit.

Faith is the sustaining force behind all human joys and pleasures. Without it, life loses its enduring purpose. Jesus predicted the diminishing force of faith in our time:

At that time many will turn away from the faith... Matthew 24:10

...when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth? Luke 18:8

As a humorist once said, this is the age in which many believe that God is dead but Elvis Presley is alive! God made us to experience abundant joy and rapture, but there is an epidemic of spiritual starvation. Houses are full, but the hearts are empty. People laugh, but their laughter is shallow and short-lived. They just go through the motions, and, like actors, play their roles. An older sister was putting her little sister to bed. When they were saying good night, the little sister said, “Mommy and Daddy are entertaining some important people downstairs.” “You’re right. How did you know they were important?” The little girl said, “Just listen. Mommy is laughing at all of Daddy’s jokes!”

Today, religion is on a dangerous course. If it changes or adapts, people threaten to leave; and if it doesn’t change or adapt, they also threaten to leave. Recently pressure was placed on a denomination to accept the ordination of women and homosexuals. After much struggle, the governing board moved to accept the resolution. Many of the church members also moved: to another denomination or simply to non-belief. “An old European monastery was perched high on a 500-foot cliff. Visitors rode up in a big basket, pulled to the top with a ragged old rope. Halfway up, a passenger nervously asked, ‘How often do you change the rope?’ The monk in charge replied, ‘Whenever the

old one breaks.” “When one doctrine wears out, it is replaced by another, until that too fails and falls. Many are bewildered; they do not know which way to turn.

Let us hope and pray that humankind will awaken to the divine Call before “the great tribulation” reaches its gravest climax. In ancient times people turned to God only after disasters (Psalms 78:1–19). Let us learn from the examples of history, and not wait for the climax.

Once upon a time there was a young man who refused to go to church. One day he was bitten by a rattlesnake. His doctor held out no hope for him except in praying. His mother then took him to the priest, who said, “My son, this is a sign from God to get your attention. Your only chance for recovery is to make a commitment to return to the church.” The boy accepted the condition and miraculously recovered.

Some time later, his two older brothers and father lost interest in the church. Again the devoted mother went to the priest for help, and again the priest prayed, and this is what he said: “O Lord, these brothers and their father have lost touch with the church. No admonition, warning, or pleading can get their attention. The only remedy for this family is a rattlesnake. O thou kind Lord! Send a snake to bite Tom, another one to bite his brother Timmy, and a big one to bite their father, Scott. The more time passes, the more poison is needed to get their attention. Please act in haste; perhaps they can recover, repent, and live. Yours in justice and love.”

The longer humanity waits, the greater will be the suffering.

Witness how the world is being afflicted with a fresh calamity every day. Its tribulation is continually deepening...Its sickness is approaching the stage of utter hopelessness, inasmuch as the true Physician is debarred from administering the remedy, whilst unskilled practitioners are regarded with favor, and are accorded full freedom to act...The dust of sedition hath clouded the hearts of men, and blinded their eyes. Erelong, they will perceive the consequences of what their hands have wrought in the Day of God. Thus warneth you He Who is the All-Informed, as bidden by One Who is the Most Powerful, the Almighty.<sup>33</sup> Bahá’u’lláh

### ***Does the Bible Predict the Advent of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh?***

The Bible is filled with specific predictions about the advent of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh. For instance, 16 biblical prophecies point to 1844, the year in which the Báb declared His Mission. The Bible contains more than 1,800 prophecies about the Bahá’í Faith. All of them have been fulfilled in the lives of the Báb, Bahá’u’lláh, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Never before have sacred scriptures provided such specific details about the advent of a Messenger. You will find far more biblical prophecies about Bahá’u’lláh (the second Advent) than about Christ (the first Advent). Although this book presents some proofs and prophecies, these are not its main focus. Its primary purpose is to create an awareness of our supreme mission and destiny and to inspire continued interest in the study of the Bahá’í Faith. If you wish to pursue proofs and prophecies, please read *Thief in the Night* by William Sears; *He Cometh With Clouds*, by Gary Matthews; *I Shall Come Again, Lord*

*of Lords*, and *King of Kings* by the author. You will be astonished by the frequency and clarity of biblical prophecies about the Bahá'í Faith.

Christ repeatedly referred to Hebrew prophecies to prove the truth of His Mission. Christian scholars and leaders have followed suit. They have written thousands of books based on those prophecies to show that Jesus was, indeed, the Messiah expected by the Jews. Christian scholars also have applied the laws of probability to prove that the fulfillment of Hebrew prophecies by Jesus cannot be attributed to chance.

The Báb and Bahá'u'lláh have also referred to prophecies as evidence of their divine Missions, exactly as Jesus did. The three volumes, *I Shall Come Again*, *Lord of Lords*, and *King of Kings* present hundreds of literal prophecies about the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and certain critical events in the Bahá'í Faith. These books test the prophecies by probability laws to see if chance can account for them, just as Christian scholars have tested prophecies of Hebrew scriptures about Jesus. The probability figure presented in *Lord of Lords* is astronomical in size. It proves that the One who predicted the course of events in the lives of the chief figures of the Bahá'í Faith had full knowledge of the future and gave the clues to help us recognize them with absolute certainty.

What is the probability figure presented in *Lord of Lords* for biblical prophecies? It is  $10^{80}$  (1 followed by 80 zeroes). According to this figure, there is only 1 chance in  $10^{80}$  that the prophecies about the coming of the Bahá'í Faith happened just by chance. How big is  $10^{80}$ ? It equals the estimated number of elementary particles (electrons, protons, and neutrons) in the known universe. Thus the astronomical size of the figure  $10^{80}$  proves beyond any doubt that the prophecies were not uttered by chance, that the One who spoke them could see clearly all the specifics, all the historical events that unfolded in lives of the supreme figures of the Bahá'í Faith, and that He gave us far more evidence than we need to recognize them.

### ***What Time-Prophecies Point to the Advent of the Bahá'í Faith?***

The following is a list of 25 prophecies designating the year 1844 (or 1260) as the time of the Advent of the Redeemer of our age. The two figures, 1844 and 1260, refer to the same year, because 1844 of the Christian calendar corresponds to 1260 of the Islamic calendar. For a detailed explanation of these prophecies, see *I Shall Come Again*.

#### ***From the Old Testament***

- |  |           |                            |
|--|-----------|----------------------------|
| 1. Moses' prophecy of seven times            | 1844 A.D. | Leviticus 26:18, 23–24, 28 |
| 2. Daniel's vision of 2,300 days             | 1844 A.D. | Daniel 8:14                |
| 3. Daniel's vision of three and a half times | 1260 A.H. | Daniel 7:25                |

- |    |  |           |             |
|----|--|-----------|-------------|
| 4. | Daniel's vision of three and a half times  | 1260 A.H. | Daniel 12:7 |
| 5. | Daniel's vision pointing to the completion of the scattering of the holy people, fulfilled by Mordecai Noah's call for the establishment of the State of Israel and by the Edict of Toleration | 1844 A.D. | Daniel 12:7 |

***From the New Testament***

- |     |  |           |                    |
|-----|--|-----------|--------------------|
| 6.  | Christ's confirmation of 2,300 days  | 1844 A.D. | Matthew 24:15      |
| 7.  | Jesus' words on the termination of the times of the Gentiles, fulfilled by the Edict of Toleration | 1844 A.D. | Luke 21:24         |
| 8.  | John's vision of 42 months   | 1260 A.H. | Revelation 11:2    |
| 9.  | John's vision of 1,260 days  | 1260 A.H. | Revelation 11:3    |
| 10. | John's vision of three days and a half   | 1260 A.H. | Revelation 11:9    |
| 11. | John's vision of three days and a half   | 1260 A.H. | Revelation 11:11   |
| 12. | John's vision of 1,260 days  | 1260 A.H. | Revelation 12:6    |
| 13. | John's vision of three and a half times  | 1260 A.H. | Revelation 12:14   |
| 14. | John's vision of 42 months   | 1260 A.H. | Revelation 13:5    |
| 15. | John's vision of the four angels bound at the Euphrates  | 1844 A.D. | Revelation 9:14–15 |
| 16. | Peter's prediction of the length of the Last Day   | 1260 A.H. | II Peter 3:8       |

***From Zoroastrian and American Indian Prophecies***

- |     |  |             |  |
|-----|--|-------------|--|
| 17. | Zoroaster's prophecy pointing to Húshídar  | 1200+ years | <i>Glad Tidings of Sacred Scriptures</i> <sup>34</sup> |
| 18. | Zoroaster's prophecy of 1,260 years from the Arabian Faith                                     | 1260 A.H.   | <i>Glad Tidings of Sacred Scriptures</i> <sup>35</sup> |
| 19. | The American Indian prophecies designating the earliest time of the coming of the Promised One | 1844 A.D.   | <i>Four Remarkable Indian Prophecies</i> <sup>36</sup> |

***From Islamic Prophecies  
(covered in Volume IV:  
The Spirit that Acknowledges Jesus Christ)***

- |  |           |  |
|--|-----------|--|
| 20. Islamic prophecy of a day of a thousand years plus the period of Revelation, which ended in 260 A.H. | 1260 A.H. | Qur'án 32:4  |
| 21. Another prophecy confirming the preceding prophecy of 1000 + 260                                     | 1260 A.H. | <i>Glad Tidings of Sacred Scriptures</i> <sup>37</sup> |
| 22. The prophecy of the numerical value of <b><i>ghars</i></b>   | 1260 A.H. | <i>Glad Tidings of Sacred Scriptures</i> <sup>38</sup> |
| 23. The prophecy giving the last two figures of the date   | 60        | <i>Glad Tidings of Sacred Scriptures</i> <sup>39</sup> |
| 24. The coming of the day of judgment or chastisement after the lapse of a thousand years (260 + 1000)   | 1260 A.H. | Qur'án 34:25–29  |
| 25. The coming of the day of chastisement after the lapse of a thousand years (260 + 1,000)              | 1260 A.H. | Qur'án 22:46, 49, 50                                   |

Has any Redeemer ever appeared with such an overwhelming array of evidence pointing to the exact time of His advent?

I bear witness, O friends! that the favor is complete... the proof manifest and the evidence established.<sup>40</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

This is the time of the greatest jubilation on our planet; all the promises and prophecies have been fulfilled. It is the time of rejoicing and receiving ***Heaven's Most Glorious Gift***:

The world of being shineth, in this Day, with the resplendency of this Divine Revelation. All created things extol its saving grace and sing its praises. The universe is wrapt in an ecstasy of joy and gladness. The Scriptures of past Dispensations celebrate the great Jubilee that must needs greet this most great Day of God. Well is it with him that hath lived to see this Day, and hath recognized its station.<sup>41</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

***What Did Bahá'u'lláh Say  
About Jesus Christ?***

Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God... I John 4:2

Bahá'u'lláh acknowledged, adored, and glorified Christ in the most moving terms:

Know thou that when the Son of Man yielded up His breath to God, the whole creation wept with a great weeping. By sacrificing Himself, however, a fresh capacity was infused into all created things. Its evidences, as witnessed in all the peoples of the earth, are now manifest before thee. The deepest wisdom which the sages have



uttered, the profoundest learning which any mind hath unfolded, the arts which the ablest hands have produced, the influence exerted by the most potent of rulers, are but manifestations of the quickening power released by His transcendent, His all-pervasive, and resplendent Spirit.

We testify that when He came into the world, He shed the splendor of His glory upon all created things, Through Him the leper recovered from the leprosy of perversity and ignorance. Through Him, the unchaste and wayward were healed. Through His power, born of Almighty God, the eyes of the blind were opened, and the soul of the sinner sanctified.<sup>42</sup>

Is Bahá'u'lláh the Spirit of God? Here is one more test by which we can tell:

This is how we may recognize the Spirit of God: every spirit which acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit which does not thus acknowledge Jesus is not from God. I John 4:2-3

These statements from 'Abdu'l-Bahá further clarify Bahá'í beliefs about the exalted station of Jesus Christ and His teachings:

Look at the Gospel of the Lord Christ and see how glorious it is!<sup>43</sup>

Look how...the Lord Christ suffered unto death to bring the light of love and truth into the darkened world...<sup>44</sup>

You must follow the example...of Jesus Christ. Read the Gospels. Jesus Christ was mercy itself, was love itself, He even prayed on behalf of His executioners—for those who crucified Him—saying, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”...Consider how kind Jesus Christ was, that even upon the cross He prayed for His oppressors. We must follow His example.<sup>45</sup>

The appearance of Christ was a divine springtime. Therefore, it caused a great commotion and vibrant movement in the world of humanity. The Sun of Reality dawned, the cloud of mercy poured down its rain, the breezes of providence moved, the world became a new world, mankind reflected an extraordinary radiance, souls were educated, minds were developed, intelligences became acute, and the human world attained a new freshness of life, like unto the advent of spring.<sup>46</sup>

If you reflect upon the essential teachings of Jesus, you will realize that they are the light of the world. Nobody can question their truth. They are the very source of life and the cause of happiness to the human race.<sup>47</sup>

### ***When a Person Becomes a Bahá'í, What Happens to His or Her Previous Beliefs?***

The Bahá'í Faith is the fulfillment of all great religions. When a seed is planted, it grows into a plant with many parts and forms. But all the forms originate in the same seed and are expressions of the same potential. Each part has a different name: branch, leaf, flower, or fruit. But all segments grow from the single seed.

Similarly, each of the great religions, though unique and seemingly different from the others, is an expression of the same Creative Power. By acknowledging other faiths, instead of *losing* our faith, we *expand* it; we gain new knowledge and awareness.

The teachings of the great religions stand as bright candles lit by the hands of the Light Bringers. As we acknowledge each candle, we add to our enlightenment and to our understanding of truth; we see more distinctly the divine purpose, the wondrous path of human destiny.

Since each religion relates to the needs and potentials of the people of its time, the knowledge and guidance offered by the latest revelation transcend those offered by previous ones. They harmonize more intimately with people's potentials, needs, natures, and aspirations.

Here lies the strength of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh: As the latest of the great religions, it relates fully to *our* potentials, *our* needs, *our* time, and *our* temperaments.

The recognition of God's presence and fulfillment of His promises through His twin Redeemers, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, strengthen our faith. Christians who become Bahá'ís begin to love Jesus even more than they did before. The same holds true for the followers of all other faiths. My mother, who was raised in a Jewish family, had only moderate love for the Hebrew prophets. Her spiritual knowledge was confined to their scriptures. When she recognized the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, her spiritual life bloomed and she fell deeply in love not only with Hebrew scriptures but with *all* sacred scriptures and all those who revealed them.

### *What Is the Difference Between a Religion and a Cult?*

Whatever God reveals is absolute perfection. The spiritual teachings of Moses were perfect, yet they were gradually forgotten by the people; they lost their purity and power. As time went on, His social teachings—those that pertained to the needs of His age—also lost their purpose. They were abused, ignored, or turned into empty rituals. Today we see the same conditions in Christian communities.

The spiritual teachings of all faiths are perfect. The law of love never changes, yet it needs renewal. In this century, millions of Christians have been killed by other Christians in world wars. Is this in harmony with the teachings of Jesus? Christianity is divided into thousands of denominations. Is this in harmony with the teachings of Jesus? Many Christian leaders mourn today's state of the church. In his book *Re-entry*, Dr. John Wesley White states:

The Church is currently in a state of decline. No one grieved more than our Lord that the Church would fall into appalling decay prior to His coming. Indeed this is the primary reason for His coming...Our Lord must come again to rectify this state of affairs.<sup>48</sup>

St. Paul made it unmistakably clear that “in the last days” men will “preserve the outward form of religion, but are a standing denial of its reality” (2 Tim. 3:5, NEB)...while the polls reveal that almost everyone—some 94 percent—believes in

God, accepts the doctrine of the virgin birth and life after death, and is convinced of the power of prayer, so few churchgoers seem really to be Christian.<sup>49</sup>

Long ago, Bahá'u'lláh predicted the spiritual decline of our civilization:

The vitality of men's belief in God is dying out in every land; nothing short of His wholesome medicine can ever restore it. The corrosion of ungodliness is eating into the vitals of human society; what else but the Elixir of His potent Revelation can cleanse and revive it?<sup>50</sup>

The world is in travail, and its agitation waxeth day by day. Its face is turned towards waywardness and unbelief. Such shall be its plight, that to disclose it now would not be meet and seemly.<sup>51</sup>

When Jesus came, corruption among the Israelites had dimmed the light of truth. Jesus renewed the message of love and elevated those who turned to Him. Bahá'u'lláh has come to accomplish the same purpose: to elevate the human race to peace and prosperity, to raise ethical standards, and to create a new civilization based on spiritual principles.

Our age provides fertile ground for cults, and many of them have sprouted and spread. Some have achieved notoriety by engaging in destructive acts. They have cast fear and suspicion in the minds of many. Caution and prudence are always essential, but care should be taken not to make sweeping generalizations.

When Jesus came, He cast fear into the hearts of those who espoused the established religion. Some of them opposed Him, while others ignored Him. An early historian termed Christianity "a pernicious cult." Sometimes I listen to *Christian Broadcasting Radio*, which airs a regular feature about cults. Almost always the talk is critical of several unconventional Christian denominations, primarily Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Christian Scientists, Seventh-Day Adventists, Moonies, and those of the Worldwide Church of God. These groups are categorized as cults because of their non-conformist or unorthodox theological beliefs.

Social scientists often apply the term *cult* to groups that brainwash members, isolate them from society, control their wealth and minds, use narcotic drugs and alcohol, accumulate weapons, and engage in immoral or abnormal sexual conduct.

Some ultra-fundamentalist Christians have also called the Bahá'í Faith a cult. Are they right? The Bahá'í Faith stands diametrically opposed to every cultish practice. To get a clear picture of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, let us make a simple comparison. **Table 1** offers the main features of cults in the left column, and in the next two columns the comparable Christian and Bahá'í practices. A simple comparison will remove all fears and concerns and demonstrate to all skeptics the pristine purity and divine nobility of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.

***The purpose of this comparison is not to show the superiority of one faith over the other. All great religions come from God, and none can claim to be superior over another.*** In the Bahá'í terminology, Christ and Bahá'u'lláh are both Manifestations of God. They both manifested the Spirit of God; they revealed the same evolving truth; their Word is the Word of God. Bahá'u'lláh emphasizes, in the strongest terms, the oneness of all God's Redeemers or "Manifestations of His cause:"

Beware, O believers in the Unity of God, lest ye be tempted to make any distinction between any of the Manifestations of His Cause, or to discriminate against the signs that have accompanied and proclaimed their Revelation. This indeed is the true meaning of Divine Unity, if ye be of them that apprehend and believe this truth.<sup>52</sup>

Be ye assured, moreover, that the works and acts of each and every one of these Manifestations of God, nay whatever pertaineth unto them, and whatsoever they may manifest in the future, are all ordained by God, and are a reflection of His Will and Purpose. Whoso maketh the slightest possible difference between their persons, their words, their messages, their acts and manners, hath indeed disbelieved in God, hath repudiated His signs, and betrayed the Cause of His Messengers.<sup>53</sup>

Note the titles by which Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá call Jesus:

<i>The Lord Christ</i>	<i>The Spirit of God</i>
<i>The Lord of all being</i>	<i>The Divine Spirit</i>
<i>The Lord of the visible and invisible</i>	<i>The Spirit</i>
<i>The Essence of detachment</i>	<i>The Essence of Being</i>
<i>The Essence of the Spirit</i>	<i>The Revealer of the unseen Beauty</i>
<i>The Word of God</i>	<i>The Daystar of the heaven of divine Revelation</i>
<i>That Peerless Beauty</i>	

The comparison made between cultic, Christian, and Bahá'í ways of life in Table 1 serves these purposes:

- It clearly shows that the Bahá'í teachings are farther from cultic practices than those of any other living religion in the world.
- It portrays how, as time goes on, the pure teachings of a religion, such as Christianity are altered.
- It proves that, as the world advances, certain *social* teachings of past religions become outdated and impractical.

These principles and laws...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.<sup>54</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. I Corinthians 13:11

- It manifests the absolute purity and richness of the fruits of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. It allows every faithful Christian to apply this most significant standard and to see the result of this most critical counsel from Jesus Christ: "By their fruit you will recognize them" (Matt. 7:20).
- And finally, the comparison demonstrates why *we need a new Revelation from God to restore the purity and splendor of one evolving truth* that is progressively revealed to humankind.

The following comparison could be made with all the great faiths of the past as they are practiced today. In each case the result would be the same: they are all outdated and, for the most part, out of touch with the needs of this age. *My purpose is not to show that Christianity or other great religions are cults—that is contrary to a most fundamental teaching of the Bahá’í Faith—but to point out that after a religion’s “appointed time” has ended, it begins to deviate from God’s Way and to incline towards the human way.*

**Table 1**

**Twenty Three Signs that Separate Religion from a Cult**

<b>The Cultic Way of Life</b>	<b>Today’s Christian Way of Life</b>	<b>The Bahá’í Way of Life</b>
1. Cult members are discouraged from investigating other ways of life. Dr. Walter Martin, a Christian author, who has written extensively about cults offers this insight: “First and foremost, the belief systems of the cults are characterized by closed-mindedness.”	Freedom of choice is accepted but not emphasized. Christians are not encouraged to investigate other faiths. As a rule, the principle of “seek and ye shall find” is not practiced.	Bahá’ís investigate and study all great religions with total freedom. Independent investigation of truth is one of the most fundamental teachings of Bahá’u’lláh. Bahá’ís practice open-mindedness to its fullest.
2. Cult members are isolated from others.	Christians as a rule are encouraged to associate mainly with members of their own church or faith.	Bahá’u’lláh specifically asks His followers to associate with followers of all faiths.
3. Cults accept money from anyone and often force their members to give up their possessions.	Christians accept and sometimes solicit money from non-Christians.	Bahá’í contributions are totally voluntary. Bahá’ís never accept money from others to further their beliefs.

The Cultic Way of Life	Today's Christian Way of Life	The Bahá'í Way of Life
<p>4. Cults are often racist.</p>	<p>Christianity teaches love but has no teaching specifically on racism, because in ancient times racism was not as serious a problem as it is today. Some people are like children; they need specific rules and regulations. It is because of this lack of ability or desire to generalize the principle of love to all people that a few Christian denominations have used the Bible to justify racism.</p> <p>Recently Dr. F. Price, a black pastor from California, spoke on national TV about a white Christian scholar who in his Bible commentary (<i>Dake Annotated Bible</i>) has cited thirty reasons from the Scripture to prove that various races must remain separate. Here is his number two reason: Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds..." (Genesis 1:24). And this is how he interpreted the verse: "<b>Kind</b> means type and color, or God could have made the races alike to begin with."</p> <p>In a recent presidential campaign in the United States, it was revealed that Bob Jones University, a conservative Christian institution, forbids interracial dating. Within a few weeks after the disclosure, because of public criticism by the media, the university lifted the prohibition. In a television interview on CNN (March 3, 2000), the president of the university, Bob Jones III, defended the policy of prohibition by declaring that a "Bible</p>	<p>The Bahá'í Faith condemns racism in the strongest terms. In virtually every culture, Bahá'ís have been the first or among the first to practice integration. In 1912, while traveling in the United States, 'Abdu'l-Bahá strongly encouraged and blessed an interracial marriage.</p> <p>Since unity in diversity is a hallmark of the Bahá'í Faith, Bahá'ís pride themselves in having various races together during their hours of worship. To Bahá'ís, segregation during worship hours or at any other time is unthinkable and is condemned in the strongest words. (See the section entitled "What Is Biological Prejudice?" in the first volume, <i>One God, Many Faiths; One Garden, Many Flowers</i>.)</p>

<b>The Cultic Way of Life</b>	<b>Today's Christian Way of Life</b>	<b>The Bahá'í Way of Life</b>
	<p>believing institution” must practice “Bible principles.” He then added that their opposition to interracial dating was not racism but rather a stance against the spread of an anti-Christian principle: the blending of national, economic, and church differences towards the goal of creating a one world government.</p> <p>According to a documentary by CNN (December 3, 1995), Americans are more segregated on Sunday mornings, during their worship hours, than at any other time in the week. People work together and go to the theater, to sports and musical events together, but they worship separately.</p>	
5. Cults accumulate and use weapons.	No biblical law prevents Christians from accumulating weapons.	Bahá'u'lláh specifically asks Bahá'ís not to carry weapons, except for self-protection, when their lives are in danger.
6. Cult leaders subjugate their followers as if they were slaves.	Christianity does not forbid slavery. In the past, Christians have practiced it.	Bahá'u'lláh specifically forbids slavery.
7. Cults often use sex as a means of attracting and keeping members.	Chastity is among the fundamental teachings of all great religions, yet it is being widely ignored.	Like every other religion, the Bahá'í Faith has come to remind us of this forgotten but everlasting principle. What kind of a world does Bahá'u'lláh plan to create? He says it will be a world in which, if the most beautiful woman walks from the East to the West, she will finish her journey in full safety, to the extent that no one will even turn his face toward her.

<b>The Cultic Way of Life</b>	<b>Today's Christian Way of Life</b>	<b>The Bahá'í Way of Life</b>
8. Cults often depend on narcotic drugs and alcohol.	Christians do not have clear guidelines on narcotic drugs and alcohol. Many of them believe drinking in moderation is okay.	<p>Bahá'ís are clearly forbidden to use alcohol or narcotic drugs of any kind, unless prescribed by a physician. Never in a Bahá'í meeting or home have I seen alcoholic beverages served.</p> <p>Alcohol and drugs are the source of much evil in the world. In the United States, they contribute to 68 percent of manslaughters, 62 percent of assaults, 52 percent of rapes, and 50 percent of spousal abuse.<sup>55</sup> Alcohol kills more than 100,000 U.S. citizens every year. The yearly cost due to lack of productivity, medical fees, and so on, is estimated at over \$100 billion. In the United States, drunk driving is now the number one killer of young people.<sup>56</sup> Every year, about 17,000 people are killed by drunk drivers.</p> <p>What a drastically better world we would have if this one law of Bahá'u'lláh was adopted and practiced by the followers of all faiths.</p>
9. Cults often separate people from their families and put obedience and service to the cult leaders above one's responsibility to one's family.	Christianity teaches respect for one's parents, but has no clear teaching on choosing service between God and one's parents.	<p>Bahá'u'lláh refers specifically to this topic:</p> <p>Should anyone give you a choice between the opportunity to render a service to Me and a service to them [parents], choose ye to serve them, and let such service be a path leading you to Me.<sup>57</sup></p>
10. Some cults give much emphasis to Satan as a powerful figure. The	The topic of Satan as a source of evil influence appears frequently in Christian literature. Some priests try to drive "the devil" out of those who suffer from mental	Bahá'ís believe that Satan is not an active, powerful, and evil figure with his own personality and separate identity, one who roams the world and tries to find



<b>The Cultic Way of Life</b>	<b>Today's Christian Way of Life</b>	<b>The Bahá'í Way of Life</b>
<p>words <i>Satanism</i> and <i>cults</i> often go together.</p>	<p>disorders.</p> <p>Belief in the devil as an active force has lead a pastor to proclaim that “While the Computer Age has ushered in many advances, it has also opened yet another door through which Lucifer and his minions can enter and corrupt men’s souls.” “Any PC built after 1985 has the storage capacity to house an evil spirit.” To prove his point, the pastor has written a book called <i>The Devil and the Machine</i>.</p>	<p>vulnerable and weak people to tempt or mislead. They believe Satan is only a metaphor. It symbolizes the negative tendencies and temptation in all human beings. It originates in the human heart.</p>
<p>11. Cults often engage in various and elaborate rituals.</p>	<p>A few Christians engage in the ritual of handling poisonous snakes to show their faith, others engage in the ritual of speaking in tongues. Note this statement from a Christian church against this ritual:</p> <p>A joint statement by the Fountain Trust and the Church of England Evangelical Council admitted: “We are also aware that a similar phenomenon [speaking in tongues] can occur under occult demonic influence.”...in Haiti “speaking in tongues” is characteristic of both Pentecostal and Voodoo religion.<sup>58</sup></p> <p>Many historians believe that certain features of “Mithraic Cult,” prevalent in Persia, were adopted by the early Church. Some Christian authors have also confirmed this fact.<sup>59</sup></p>	<p>The Bahá'í Faith is totally free from such rituals.</p>
<p>12. Cults encourage or force both public and private confession of</p>	<p>Some Christians are encouraged to confess their sins before a priest.</p>	<p>The Bahá'í Faith specifically prohibits confession of sins before any human being. Bahá'u'lláh teaches that such confession leads to humiliation rather than forgiveness of sins.</p>

<b>The Cultic Way of Life</b>	<b>Today's Christian Way of Life</b>	<b>The Bahá'í Way of Life</b>
sins.		
13. At the center of every cult lies a charismatic leader who manipulates his followers.	In recent years, a number of evangelical charismatic Christian leaders in the United States have manipulated millions of gullible Christians and collected billions of dollars by pretending to be the devoted disciples of Jesus Christ, and then using the offerings for their own selfish interests. In spite of repeated warnings from the news media, the abuse is continuing.	The Bahá'í Administrative System, based on democratic principles, is so cohesive, it destroys instantly such violations at their roots. In the last 150 years, there has not been even a single example of such abuses in the Bahá'í Faith. In this Faith, anyone who dares to take advantage of his authority, will instantly lose that authority!
14. Cults sometimes practice polygamy.	<p>Although Christians at this time do not practice polygamy, there is no rule in the Bible that prevents them from doing so. It is the law of the land, not religion, that has eliminated polygamy in Christian countries.</p> <p>In times past, when life was primitive, polygamy served a useful purpose: It protected women, who would otherwise remain unmarried, from sexual abuse. Times have changed. In the modern world polygamy has no place.</p>	At the earlier stage of the Bahá'í Faith, some of those who became Bahá'ís, especially in Islamic countries, had more than one wife. It took some time for the transition to take place. It arrived during the time of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the authorized Interpreter of Bahá'í teachings. Since then Bahá'ís have strictly practiced the law of monogamy as declared and clarified by 'Abdu'l-Bahá's authoritative Word.
15. Some cults, such as those in India, engage in unnecessary hardships. They deprive themselves of the requirements of the flesh to become spiritual.	Some Christian priests refuse to get married with the hope of serving the Lord. They fail to realize that they can render no greater service to the Lord than to raise spiritual and virtuous children who use their talents to create a better world.	Enduring unnecessary hardships is forbidden in the Bahá'í Faith. The only exception to this rule is fasting, a practice followed by all the Messengers and Prophets of God.

<b>The Cultic Way of Life</b>	<b>Today's Christian Way of Life</b>	<b>The Bahá'í Way of Life</b>
16. Cult leaders engage in sexual abuse of the helpless without fear of punishment.	There have been several documented reports of widespread sexual abuse of children by priests both in Canada and U.S. In recent years the church has paid over 500 million dollars to settle law suits, and the cost continues to rise. The critical point is not the abuse itself, but how the abusers are punished: As a rule they are transferred to another church! <sup>60</sup>	The Bahá'í Faith puts such a high priority on sexual purity and innocence, and it takes sexual abuse so seriously, any Bahá'í leader or teacher who dares to engage in such abhorrent acts will receive instant punishment. The most likely consequence is removal from any position of power for life.
17. Some cults seclude themselves from society.	Monks seclude themselves to engage in constant and excessive praying and worshipping of the Lord.	Bahá'u'lláh specifically forbids Bahá'ís from secluding themselves in any manner. He rather encourages everyone to be a productive member of society and follow the rule of moderation in praying.
18. Cults often use violence as a means to an end.	Although the law of loving the Lord and one's neighbor, as confirmed by Jesus, is God's greatest commandment, many Christian countries have ignored the law. In both world wars, millions of Christians killed each other. In Ireland, militant Catholics and Protestants, for many years, engaged in bitter fights and related to each other as enemies.	Among the fundamental teachings of the Bahá'í Faith is universal peace. For the time being, when drafted, Bahá'ís serve in noncombatant services. When attacked, some Bahá'ís have defended themselves, but they have never engaged in violence of any kind. Bahá'u'lláh teaches specifically that it is better to be killed than to kill.
19. Cults do not hesitate to use physical punishment as a means of controlling children.	Some Christian leaders encourage parents to resort to physical punishment as a means of discipline and they use biblical verses such as "He who spares his rod hates his son" (Proverbs 13:24), and many other references to support their position.	Bahá'í Scriptures encourage gentle means of behavior modification and specifically forbid physical punishment. According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "It is not...permissible to strike a child, or vilify him, for the child's character will be totally perverted if he be subjected to blows or verbal abuse." <sup>61</sup>
20. Cults use pressure and fear tactics to recruit members.	Some Christian churches use pressure and a hell-fire appeal to get and keep converts.	Bahá'ís can encourage and inspire people to investigate the message of Bahá'u'lláh, but they are forbidden to use pressure.

<b>The Cultic Way of Life</b>	<b>Today's Christian Way of Life</b>	<b>The Bahá'í Way of Life</b>
21. Cults strip people of their own sense of identity and uniqueness.	Christian missionaries have often Christianized and westernized ancient cultures and taken away their sense of pride and uniqueness.	Among the basic teachings of Bahá'u'lláh is unity in diversity. Bahá'í pioneers, who go to other countries to spread the message of Bahá'u'lláh, respect the diversity and uniqueness of the natives and strengthen their sense of pride in their culture.
22. Cult leaders use emotionalism and mind control to subdue their followers. They have no respect for scientific facts and reason.	Some churches use emotionalism as a way of preaching and practicing their faith. Many Christians cling to the literal meanings of the Bible, even if their interpretations contradict established scientific facts. In past centuries, many Christians believed that the sun revolved around the earth in spite of evidence against it. In this century, many still insist that the universe is only 6,000 to 10,000 years old, in spite of conclusive evidence that it has existed for billions of years.	Respect for reason and harmony between religion and science are among the most fundamental teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.
23. Cults often attribute miracles to their leaders to prove their divine and supernatural powers.	Many Christians put undue emphasis on Christ's miracles as an evidence of His divine mission.	Bahá'ís acknowledge the Messengers' supernatural powers, but do not use them as evidence. The more emphasis we place on miracles, the closer we get to cultish ways of thinking and believing. <sup>62</sup>

Most Christian, Muslim, and Hindu theologians put undue emphasis on miracles. This practice has moved religion away from reason and testable evidence. Miracles are a breeding ground for cults; they make many claims that gullible people believe.

A Christian radio broadcast offers its listeners a chance to call and ask questions from a famous pastor. One caller said, "I am a new Christian. I have a friend who tells me that great religions have much in common. What makes Christianity special? What do we have that the Jews, Buddhists, and Muslims do not have?" The pastor's immediate response was, "The risen Christ, His power to overcome death. That is what makes Christ special." Then the caller asked another question about the oneness of religion. The pastor finished his remark with, "You have been mixing with the wrong kind of people." What the famous pastor did not acknowledge was that the claim to physical resurrection is made not only by several cults but also by Muslims. They indicate that Muhammad had

not only the power to rise physically to heaven but also the power to defend Himself against His enemies. “Thus,” they claim, “Muhammad displayed more power than Jesus.”

Let me emphasize again that the spiritual teachings of Jesus are and always will be absolutely perfect. To say that He taught anything but absolute truth is to deny God. It is not what He taught but, rather, what is being preached and practiced in His name that is being considered here.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá glorifies the essential or spiritual teachings of Jesus:

If you reflect upon the essential teachings of Jesus, you will realize that they are the light of the world. Nobody can question their truth. They are the very source of life and the cause of happiness to the human race.<sup>63</sup>

As we noted, the Bahá’í way of life is farther away from the cultic way than today’s Christian way of life in relation to the 23 critical standards listed. Why, then, would anyone apply the word **cult** to the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh? The word is used either from a lack of true knowledge or from prejudice. If it is alleged that the Bahá’í Faith is a cult because of its teachings, we should ask which of its teachings qualify it for that label? Oneness of humankind? Oneness of God? Oneness of religion? Universal education? Global peace? Harmony between religion and science? In fact, Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings are so advanced, so progressive, that some of the world’s most eminent scientists, such as Ervin Laszlo (who is not a Bahá’í but has studied the Bahá’í Faith from a scientific perspective), have eulogized Bahá’u’lláh’s Social Order as a perfect model for a world in peace, prosperity, and harmony. Does the fact that Bahá’u’lláh declares Himself to be the Promised Redeemer of all ages and religions, and presents convincing proofs of His Mission, qualify His Faith as a cult? As we noted, people also labeled Jesus Christ a cult leader for similar reasons, for challenging the outmoded traditions, and for calling Himself the Promised Redeemer of the Jews. ***What religion can be found today that stands as far from cultish beliefs and practices as the Bahá’í Faith?***

The absolute purity of Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings is one more evidence of the fulfillment of this critical test given by Christ Himself: that we can tell the difference between a true prophet and a false prophet by the fruits each produces:

You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them. Christ (Matt. 7:16–20)

### ***Where Does Evil Come From?***

The principal reason for the decline and fall of peoples is ignorance.<sup>64</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

God never creates evil. Evil always comes from human beings, from living out of harmony with God, from ignoring or violating the divine laws, from abusing one’s freedom to become a sinner instead of a saint. And what is the root cause of sin?

The root cause of wrongdoing is ignorance...<sup>65</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Lack of knowledge is a universal and epidemic disease that kills and makes life miserable not only for bodies but also for souls:

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge...

Hosea 4:6

It was ignorance that caused people to crucify Jesus. He prayed that His enemies be forgiven, for, He said, they did not know what they were doing. It was ignorance that put the cup of poison in Socrates’ hand. As Socrates said: “There is only one good, knowledge, and one evil, ignorance.”

The people are ignorant, and they stand in need of those who will expound the truth.<sup>66</sup>

Bahá’u’lláh

Ignorance often masquerades as innocence—“I just didn’t know”—and thus escapes the severe censure and condemnation it deserves. We should unmask and disarm this powerful enemy of the human race. We should expose the secrets of this deceitful destroyer of human happiness. We should examine and expose its hidden and heinous powers, just as we examine and expose a cancerous cell or a killer virus under a microscope. Our awareness and insight help us to protect ourselves from its dangers.

Before proceeding with our examination, we should note that only God can judge; we cannot. We must treat all people, even the most ignorant, with the utmost respect and honor. We should condemn ignorance, but never the ignorant:

...some souls are suffering through ignorance, let us hasten to teach them; others are like children needing care and education until they are grown, and some are sick—to these we must carry Divine healing. Whether ignorant, childish or sick, they must be loved and helped, and not disliked because of their imperfection.<sup>67</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Ignorance exists on many levels. In fact, no two cases of it are exactly alike. For a better understanding of this foremost enemy of human happiness, consider the following four levels, presented here in order from the most innocent and least harmful to the worst and vilest:

***Innocent Ignorance.*** In this case, you know that you don’t know and you readily acknowledge your ignorance; you feel uncomfortable about your ignorance and seek to eliminate it. You are as curious, humble, and open-minded as children. This ignorance is not evil, but a blessing. It keeps the soul humble and alive—in a state of constant growth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Christ (Matt. 5:6)

Blessed the ignorant one who seeketh the fountain of My knowledge...<sup>68</sup> Bahá’u’lláh

Innocent Ignorance is not a hard lump, but a soft and restless dough activated by the yeast of curiosity, courage, open-mindedness, and adventure. This is the rarest of all ignorances and is found mostly in children. The innocently ignorant are the best hope of humanity.

***Unknowing Ignorance.*** In this case you don’t know, but you don’t know that you don’t know. You may sense something is missing in your life, but you do not know what it is. If you are exposed to the missing link long enough and in a meaningful way, you will recognize it and add it to your life. Many of those who become Bahá’ís will testify that

had it not been for a friend or their spouse, they would never have become Bahá'ís. Chance seems to play a critical role. Countless millions never know what they are missing. They lose their life before ever experiencing life in its fullest.

Consider those who leave this world without ever realizing the great potentials and honors God had bestowed on them. They die in complete ignorance of who they were and why they lived.

True loss is for him whose days have been spent in utter ignorance of his self.<sup>69</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh

This ignorance is the most common of all ignorances and, because of its prevalence, the most perilous. The unknowingly ignorant are conformers and imitators. They don't raise their voices; they act like an echo. Unknowing Ignorance can be as deadly as nerve gas and equally undetectable to its victims.

Those afflicted with this deadly disease need constant and kindly care, gentle reminders and warnings that are always honey-coated.

Left to themselves, the unknowingly ignorant may live a whole century in the dark without ever seeing the light. Those afflicted with this ignorance are the second best hope of humanity.

***Apathetic Ignorance.*** In this case, you know that you don't know, but you don't care to know. This is the second most common of all ignorances. Those afflicted with Apathetic Ignorance act like the man who was asked, "What is the difference between apathy and ignorance?" He replied, "I don't know, and I don't care."

Apathy is an epidemic and grave disease of our time. Jesus predicted its prevalence. He said, "The love of many will grow cold" (Matt. 24:12). "One of the great old revivalist preachers, Sam Jones, was having one of his 'Quittin' Meetings, during which people confessed their sins and swore off particular ones, like stealing, drinking, and gambling. The meeting had reached an excited pitch when Jones called on one pious woman in the congregation and asked her what she was going to quit. She replied, 'I ain't been doin' nothin', and I'm going to quit that, too.'" The apathetically ignorant are the third best hope of humanity.

In the Book of Revelation (3:14–18), Christ condemns the lukewarm or the apathetically ignorant in the most severe terms. (See the topic "How Does God Motivate Human Beings to Turn to Him?") Bahá'u'lláh also condemns them in terms almost as harsh:

***O ye that are lying as dead on the couch of heedlessness!*** Ages have passed and your precious lives are well-nigh ended, yet not a single breath of purity hath reached Our court of holiness from you. Though immersed in the ocean of misbelief, yet with your lips ye profess the one true faith of God. Him whom I abhor ye have loved, and of My foe ye have made a friend. Notwithstanding, ***ye walk on My earth complacent and self-satisfied,*** heedless that My earth is weary of you and everything within it shunneth you. Were ye but to open your eyes, ye would, in truth, prefer a myriad griefs unto this joy, and would count death itself better than this life. [Emphasis added.]<sup>70</sup>

**Obstinate Ignorance.** In this case you don't know, but you think you know; you refuse to know, and fight against those who invite you to know. "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes" (Prov. 12:15) may apply mostly to this group. The Pharisees who condemned Jesus displayed a classic example of Obstinate Ignorance: If they had stood in utter humility before Jesus saying, "We can't see the true meaning of prophecies," they would have been innocent:

Some Pharisees in His company asked, "Do you mean that we are blind?" "If you were blind," said Jesus, "you would not be guilty, but because you say 'We see,' your guilt remains." John 9:40-41

This is the most evil of all ignorances, because its victims imprison their souls in the dark cells of their own fantasies and lock all doors from within. They refuse to step out of their prison cells, except for one purpose: to wage war against outsiders. Just like a spider, they wrap themselves in their illusions and set traps for their victims.

The apathetically ignorant *withdraw* from the truth; the obstinately ignorant *fight against* the truth.

The souls of the obstinately ignorant are satisfied with superstition, their minds moved by prejudice, and their hearts stirred by fanaticism. They do not hold their beliefs; their beliefs hold them. Instead of living for their principles, they fight for their prejudices. As Winston Churchill said: "A fanatic is one who can't change his mind and won't change the subject."

Isaiah prophesied that the people of our time will be unable to see the light. He pointed to "the covering that covereth all peoples, and the veil that is spread over all nations" (25:7). The Báb confirms:

Behold how great is the Cause, and yet how the people are wrapt in veils.<sup>71</sup>

The most common metaphors used in sacred Scriptures to describe the apathetically and obstinately ignorant are *dead* and *blind*:

Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? Christ (Luke 6:39)

Say: "The True One is come evident as the shining sun; O pity that He should have come into the city of the blind!"<sup>72</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

Woe to you, blind guides! Christ (Matt. 23:16)

They are in this day like unto a blind man who, while moving in the sunshine, demandeth: Where is the sun? Is it shining?<sup>73</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

Leave them; they are blind guides. If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit. Christ (Matt. 15:14)

Since they cannot bear the light of truth, the obstinately ignorant wear blinkers to protect their sight. Gradually they lose not only their sight but their very lives. They allow themselves to be buried and carried in coffins by those in veils of illusion. This drawing may seem an exaggeration, but it truly portrays the spiritual state of the obstinately ignorant:





*Another man, one of his disciples, said to him, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” But Jesus told him, “Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.”*

*Matthew 8:21–22*

Blessed the man who, assured of My Word, hath arisen from among the dead to celebrate My praise.<sup>74</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

How long, O Lord?...How long will You hide Your face from me?...Consider and hear me, O Lord My God; enlighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death... Psalms 13:1, 3

The obstinately ignorant fear facing reality. A man went to the doctor and said, “I am afraid to see myself in the mirror. I always see another person. He has gray hair, a bulging stomach, a wrinkled face, and sagging shoulders. What is wrong with me?” The doctor said, “I don’t know, but I have good news for you: Your eyes are perfect.” Innocent Ignorance is skin deep, but Obstinate Ignorance goes all the way to the heart.

Religious fanaticism and hatred are a world-devouring fire, whose violence none can quench. The Hand of Divine power can, alone, deliver mankind from this desolating affliction.<sup>75</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

The obstinately ignorant come mostly from authoritarian homes and religious environments, where obedience—rather than thinking and reasoning—is strictly enforced. They see everything in black and white rather than in shades of gray. They **cannot** think like the little girl who was asked by the priest, “What would you do if a boy slapped you on the face? Would you turn the other cheek or slap him back?” The little girl asked, “How old is he?”

Obstinate Ignorance is both complex and durable. Like the wheels of a train, the mind of the obstinately ignorant stays rigid, moving in circles on the same track. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá noted, there is a remedy for every disease except for ignorance. Four women took their husbands to a saint for a miracle cure. The saint cured the first three: the blind, the lame, and the deaf. He then asked the fourth woman what was wrong with her husband. She said, “He is blind, but he thinks he sees.” The saint sat down and cried.

Have you ever heard of scientists assembling and plotting to kill another scientist for bringing forward a new theory? Astonishingly, this has been the rule not in science but in religion, faithfully followed by people whose prime purpose is to teach love.

Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, and they plotted to arrest Jesus in some sly way and

kill him. “But not during the Feast,” they said, “or there may be a riot among the people.”

Matthew 26:3–5

The problem is this: Just as a drunk man does not know he is drunk, an egotistical man does not know he is egotistical, and an obstinately ignorant man does not know and refuses to recognize that he is ignorant. As the Báb states, dreamers do not know they are dreaming until they wake up.

Obstinate Ignorance is the worst sickness. It is a sickness that leads to heated and hostile arguments; that divides nations, families, races, religions, and genders; that kills the light of spirit; that banishes love and breeds bigotry; that condemned Socrates and Galileo; and that waged war against the noblest and greatest Beings who walked on this planet.

Jesus saved His harshest words for the Pharisees who lived in the darkness of ignorance, but claimed knowledge and tried to extinguish “the Light of the world.” Seven times Jesus told them “woe to you.” Four of the seven “woes” from His pronouncement against narrow and literal minded Pharisees offer a brief look into the mind of the obstinately ignorant:

**Woe to you**, teachers of the [religious] law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.

**Woe to you**, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill, and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

**Woe to you**, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

**Woe to you**, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. And you say, “If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.”

Matthew 23:13, 23, 27–28, 29–30

We do not need to go back to the time of Jesus or Galileo to see obstinate ignorance in full bloom. The obstinately ignorant are as plentiful and powerful today as ever. As recently as 1995, the citizens of the former Yugoslavia killed thousands of men, women, and children in the name of God! The majority of them were killed by their former neighbors, who had heard “Love your neighbor as yourself” many times in their churches.

When it comes to Obstinate Ignorance, we encounter good and bad news. The good news is that the afflicted are few in number. The bad news is that, because of their zeal, they attract and incite the masses of people, especially from the ranks of the unknowingly ignorant.

In spite of the grave evils they cause, the obstinately ignorant pride themselves on their wisdom.

Each sect hath picked out a way for itself and is clinging to a certain cord. Despite manifest blindness and ignorance they pride themselves on their insight and knowledge.<sup>76</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh

Your wisdom and knowledge mislead you...Keep on, then, with your magic spells [illusions] and with your many sorceries [self-deception], which you have labored at since childhood.

Isaiah 47:10, 12

Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes.

Isaiah 5:21

How can people make themselves look good and wise? They do it with the aid of their highly complex, controlled, and cultivated forces of self-deception. They can succeed by turning off the lights of reason and awareness, and by sleeping in the dark of fear and apathy. They can accomplish this feat by building their faith on magic rather than logic, on imitation rather than inquiry.

For the sake of preserving their security and mass identity, the obstinately ignorant stick together like a cancerous lump; in an attempt to survive, they cling to a dying body. They embrace old and decaying ideas and institutions like a drowning victim clinging to a straw. Their love for truth is as sincere as that of the prize witness for the defense who was called to the stand. "He paid no attention to the swearing-in procedure. 'Young man,' asked the judge sternly, 'are you fully aware of the implications of the oath you have just taken?' Snapping his gum, the young man replied, 'Yeah, sure. It means if I tell a lie, I gotta stick to it.'"

In spite of their brave faces, the obstinately ignorant have fearful hearts. They are terrified of their fiercest enemies: truth, knowledge, and awareness.

Literally, "theology" means the study of the nature and attributes of God. That is the noblest knowledge. But in the hands of humans, that divine gift has become a disease of separation and superiority, prejudice and pride.

Three religious leaders once argued bitterly about some doctrines. Each of them believed that his theological position was superior and felt certain of his own salvation. After much debate and disagreement, each finished his defense by declaring that his opponents would die in sin and end up in hell-fire.

The three leaders argued especially on the topic of sin and salvation. The first believed in total forgiveness. He declared, "Once in grace, always in grace." The second believed that grace could be lost through sin, as well as through the secret plots and craftiness of Satan. The third believed not so much in grace as in the power of positive thinking, which, he confidently declared, could overcome any obstacle.

After some years, the three leaders died. To their utter amazement, they found themselves together again, this time in the midst of the hell-fire. Each leader's prediction about his two opponents had come true. Yet they still could not come to full agreement. The one who had believed in total grace and forgiveness cried out, "I thought I had it, but I didn't. I thought I had it, but I didn't." The one who had believed that grace could be lost mourned, "I thought I had it, but I lost it. I thought I had it, but I lost it." The one who had believed in the power of positive thinking was curled up in a corner with his hands over his eyes shouting, "I am not me! It is not hot! And I am not here!"

When religion is born, it has life and vitality. Then gradually, as it ages, it loses its living powers and at last submits its soul and dies. If its remains are not buried in time, they turn into a perfect breeding ground for viruses and vultures. At the end of each religious cycle, when the spirit of faith has departed, the unknowingly ignorant become a carcass, the obstinately ignorant become vultures, and the apathetically ignorant become passive viewers:

Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather. Christ (Matt. 24:28)

The preceding verse is a prophecy about our time, but it applies to the state of humanity at the end of all ages, when ignorance dominates the lives of the masses. Bahá'u'lláh bemoaned the state of the severely afflicted:

But a myriad times alas for the wayward who are like unto dried-up leaves fallen upon the dust. Ere long mortal blasts shall carry them away to the place ordained for them. Ignorant did they arrive, ignorant did they linger and ignorant did they retire to their abodes.<sup>77</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

Recognition of the powers and prevalence of the forces of ignorance, as presented here, explains why, at the dawning of great religions, so few people wake up to the call and rise to the occasion. It shows that out of four groups of people surrounded by the darkness of unawareness, only one group—the innocently ignorant—who are the smallest minority, wake up and respond with love and courage to God's Call. This is the way it has always been and probably will always be.

Ignorance is the heaviest lump in all the universe. Imagine the burden people carry from self-degradation, prejudice, anxiety, guilt, greed, and grudges. Imagine the burden they carry from an incurable disease called "more!" from buying the things they don't need on the *layaway* and *lay awake* plan!

Emotional and spiritual weight is often heavier than physical. Consider this conversation between two teenagers:

John: You cut your hair.

Jim: Sure did!

John: Lost any weight?

Jim: 450 pounds.

John: That much! How come?

Jim: I got my mom, my dad, and my teacher off my back!

Consider the burden people carry from attachment to the world. In his basement, Fred had a lot of junk to which he was strongly attached. When he moved to a small apartment, he rented a storage space and crammed his collection into that small space. A few months later, thieves visited his collection, leaving a mess and a broken lock behind. But they really offended Fred's feelings in a way he will always remember. "What really hurts," said Fred, "is that they didn't take anything!" Losing our self-pride is often harder than losing our possessions.

Self-knowledge produces the first glimmerings of awareness. As we noted, “True loss is for him whose days have been spent in utter ignorance of his self.”<sup>78</sup> Practice humility, and ask yourself, “To which group do I belong?”

- *Innocently Ignorant*
- *Unknowingly Ignorant*
- *Apathetically Ignorant*
- *Obstinately Ignorant*

Did you make up your mind? There is good news for you. Most likely you do not belong to the last two groups. If you did, you would not have come this far! You would have stopped reading long ago.

It takes profound humility to acknowledge one’s ignorance. Fortunately, we have a perfect Exemplar of humility to follow: God Himself! Imagine that you are a powerful king, and you allow the lowest, the meanest, and the vilest people to surround you, to swear at you, to spit on your face, to imprison you, to torture you, to slap you, to throw stones at you, to kick you, and even to kill you! What is the chance that you would allow any one of these? Yet God, the sublime Ruler of the universe, allows the vilest and most vicious human beings to do all these things to Him, because whatever they do to His Messengers and Redeemers, they have done unto Him. The Messengers are, indeed, God on earth, for they speak only His Word and do only His Will. This example offers the most convincing evidence of God’s infinite humility and love for human beings. And yet we, His infinitely ignorant creatures, exalt ourselves, as if we know it all. We confine our souls in little cubicles and insist that whatever we have learned from fallible people like ourselves is nothing but the truth!

**O SON OF MAN!**

Humble thyself before Me, that I may graciously visit thee. Arise for the triumph of My cause, that while yet on earth thou mayest obtain the victory.<sup>79</sup> Bahá’u’lláh

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.<sup>80</sup> Bahá’u’lláh

Though the Lord is on high, he looks upon the lowly, but the proud he knows from afar. Psalms 138:6

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. I Peter 5:6

Only a cup that is empty can be filled. What can be added to a heart filled with “I” and “ego”? What can enter a mind filled with “me” and “my”? What can enter a cup filled to the brim with iron, lead, and copper?

**O SON OF DUST!**

Blind thine eyes, that thou mayest behold My beauty; stop thine ears, that thou mayest hearken unto the sweet melody of My voice; empty thyself of all learning, that thou mayest partake of My knowledge; and sanctify thyself from riches, that thou mayest obtain a lasting share from the ocean of My eternal wealth. Blind thine eyes, that is, to

all save My beauty; stop thine ears to all save My word; empty thyself of all learning save the knowledge of Me; that with a clear vision, a pure heart and an attentive ear thou mayest enter the court of My holiness.<sup>81</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

Purge thou thine ear that thou mayest hear no mention besides God, and purge thine eye that it behold naught except God, and thy conscience that it perceive naught other than God, and thy tongue that it proclaim nothing but God, and thy hand to write naught but the words of God, and thy knowledge that it comprehend naught except God, and thy heart that it entertain no wish save God...<sup>82</sup> The Báb

No human being can ever imagine the depth of God's patience, humility, and love for human beings. Are you willing to suffer "countless afflictions" for a friend? That is what our Creator has done for us:

**O CHILDREN OF NEGLIGENCE AND PASSION!**

Ye have suffered My enemy to enter My house and have cast out My friend, for ye have enshrined the love of another than Me in your hearts. Give ear to the sayings of the Friend and turn towards His paradise. *Worldly friends, seeking their own goods, appear to love one the other, whereas the true Friend hath loved and doth love you for your own sakes; indeed He hath suffered for your guidance countless afflictions.* Be not disloyal to such a Friend, nay rather hasten unto Him...Open your ears that ye may hearken unto the word of God, the help in peril, the self-existent. [Emphasis added.]<sup>83</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

Our Creator calls Himself our true Friend who has suffered for us, and asks us to be loyal to such a Friend. Such sublime humility comes from the Creator of the universe, for whatever a Messenger utters is the Word of God. How would you feel if you endured torture and imprisonment for a friend and, instead of thanking you, he or she ignored you? We find people all around us who ignore God, who repeatedly reject His invitation. They receive no punishment except the pain of spiritual poverty, except separation from the Source of all joys and pleasures. They remain far from God, and yet He is ever close to them:

**O MOVING FORM OF DUST!**

I desire communion with thee, but thou wouldst put no trust in Me. The sword of thy rebellion hath felled the tree of thy hope. At all times I am near unto thee, but thou art ever far from Me. Imperishable glory I have chosen for thee, yet boundless shame thou hast chosen for thyself. While there is yet time, return, and lose not thy chance.<sup>84</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

## ***What Does It Mean to Fear God?***

Fear God and give him glory for the hour of his judgment has come. Christ (Rev. 14:7)

Divine punishment is a major theme of all sacred scriptures. We are repeatedly told to fear God:

What then, O Israel, does the Lord your God ask of you? Only to fear the Lord your God, to conform to all his ways, to love him and to serve him with all your heart and soul. Deuteronomy 10:12

Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord.

Psalms 112:1

The fear of God hath ever been a sure defence and a safe stronghold for all the peoples of the world. It is the chief cause of the protection of mankind, and the supreme instrument for its preservation.<sup>85</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh

Many people cannot understand why a loving God would motivate by fear. I have known believers who have given up religion for this very reason. Some people simply avoid the question. This is an issue of critical consequences; it requires understanding, not avoidance. One of my students was terrified at going to her fiancé's church, because the minister often talked about hell-fire. My explanations took away all her fears because she understood the symbolism behind the words.

Perhaps no one in history has been as much misunderstood and abused as God. Betty Eadie gives a stark example of spiritual abuse:

My sister Thelma was often beaten with a little hose and was then forced to thank the Sister who had done it or be beaten again. These were God's chosen servants, as I believed, and I began to fear God immensely because of them. Everything I learned about Him intensified this fear. God seemed angry and impatient and very powerful, which meant that He would probably destroy me or send me straight to hell on Judgment Day—or before then if I crossed Him...

When I was eleven I summoned my courage and asked our school matron if she really believed that there was a God. I felt that if anybody really knew, she did. But instead of answering my question, she slapped me and asked how dare I question His existence. She told me to get to my knees and pray for forgiveness, which I did. By then I knew that I was doomed to hell because of my lack of faith—because I had questioned the existence of God. I was sure now that I could never be forgiven.<sup>86</sup>

Hell-fire preachers have always abused the fear of God to move the masses. "Jonathan Edwards's legendary sermon, 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,' was not spoken with fiery passion. Edwards stood motionless as he read his sermon in a monotone from a thick manuscript. But his words electrified his Connecticut congregation. Women screamed aloud; grown men cowered in their pews."<sup>87</sup> In his sermon he said: "The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you and is dreadfully provoked...You hang by a slender thread with the flames of divine wrath flashing about it."<sup>88</sup>

To resolve this question, the first point we should remember is this: Fearing God does not mean that we must *live* in fear; rather we must respect His justice, just as we respect the laws of the land. ***Fear in this sense is not an emotion; it is an awareness of the consequences***; it is an awareness of God's justice. This fear is healthy, indeed essential. Without it, no country could live in peace for even one day! At this very instant, millions of people would love to take hold of all your possessions and more. They would not even hesitate to take your life along with everything else. Only fear of the consequences is keeping those millions away.

Positive fear—a respect for authority—is the life of the world. Negative fear—phobia—is a deadly disease. In positive fear lies the secret of security and peace. In negative fear lies the seed of misery and disease. The same holds true with love. Positive love—detached

and unselfish—is the life of the soul. Negative love—used to control and manipulate—is deadly to the soul.

Positive fear of God liberates us from all fears. Even God’s Messengers experience this fear:

Know ye that I am afraid of none except God. In none but Him have I placed My trust; to none will I cleave but Him, and wish for naught except the thing He hath wished for Me. This, indeed, is My heart’s desire, did ye but know it. I have offered up My soul and My body as a sacrifice for God, the Lord of all worlds. Whoso hath known God shall know none but Him, and he that feareth God shall be afraid of no one except Him, though the powers of the whole earth rise up and be arrayed against him. I speak naught except at His bidding.<sup>89</sup> Bahá’u’lláh

What is hell or hell-fire? Until we have walked through death’s door, we cannot really know what hell is like. These are the biblical descriptions we have:

- Outside into the darkness, or outer darkness (symbolizing spiritual vacuum or darkness—Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30)
- The fiery furnace (symbolizing the pain of remoteness from God, the burning desire to be near the ultimate Source of joys and pleasures—Matt. 13:42)
- Being cut into pieces (symbolizing devastated or shattered souls—Matt. 24:51)
- Being tied hand and foot (symbolizing lack of freedom to roam in the vast universe, being restricted—Matt. 22:13)
- Experiencing shame and everlasting contempt (Daniel 12:2)
- Being shut out from the presence of the Lord (II Thess. 1:9)

In one of His Epistles, Bahá’u’lláh states that when souls enter the next realm and recognize the enormous opportunities they have lost, they begin to mourn and cry.

Sometimes, after describing hell, Jesus adds this special phrase, “He who has ears, let him hear” (Matt. 13:43). He uses that phrase as if He knows most people will not take His threat seriously. He uses the two motivators (the threat of hell-fire and the need for listening) frequently in relation to the people of our time. In His parables, such as the parable of wedding, He shows that some people will accept His invitation, while others will ignore it (Matt. 22:1–13). Sometimes He uses parables to show how people are separated:

Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Matthew 13:47–50

See also Matt. 24:48–51, 25:12, 30, 41, 46; 13:30, 40–43; 22:13–14; II Thess. 1:9; Rev. 14:7.

In sacred Scriptures two reasons are cited for sending a soul to hell: denying God and His Messengers, and breaking God’s laws. Bahá’u’lláh’s Herald, the Báb, declares and confirms the same message:



For the believers of that Day [the time of Bahá'u'lláh] are the inmates of Paradise, while the unbelievers are the inmates of the fire. And know thou of a certainty that by Paradise is meant recognition of and submission unto Him [Bahá'u'lláh].<sup>90</sup>

In the following passage, Bahá'u'lláh shows the extreme contrast between those who have accomplished their lives' purpose and those who have refused to do so:

It is clear and evident that 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.<sup>91</sup>

Christ repeatedly states that those who fail in their duties toward God here will experience two emotions hereafter: grief and anger. The words He uses are “weeping” and “grinding of teeth.” (Matt. 8:12; 13:42; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28.) The Qur'án also repeatedly refers to two emotions: grief and fear. Why these emotions? Those who are remote from God will experience grief for having failed to take advantage of opportunities while on earth, and therefore being unable to gain their heavenly rewards. They will experience anger because they will blame themselves for being negligent, worldly, selfish, short-sighted, stubborn, unconscious, tradition-bound, apathetic, narrow-minded, and complacent. They will experience fear because they will wonder how they can cope with the pain of remoteness from God for ages and eons to come, just as a prisoner fears a long, restricted life in a prison.

Yet there is a vast difference between prison here and “prison” hereafter. If we encounter grief, anger, or fear in this world we know eventually it will end. Because human life on this planet is brief. That may be the only comfort earthly prisoners have. The next kingdom does not offer this comfort. That is our eternal home. There we will realize that, by our own choice, we have selected a prison of grief, anger, and fear, not for decades or centuries, but for all eternity. Surely we will have opportunities in that kingdom to grow, but we will always suffer the consequences of the loss of *earthly* opportunities. From that we can never escape. That is why in both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, the punishment of the next world is compared to an “insatiable worm” (Isaiah 66:18, 22–24; Mark 9:44–48). The four negative emotions (grief, anger, fear, and remorse) will continue to eat away our very souls like a hungry worm for all eternity.

The powerful metaphors God's Messengers have used to portray hell are an evidence of their unconditional love and supreme compassion for us. By these vivid metaphors (fire, worm, and outer darkness) they want to awaken us from our deep apathy, worldliness, and complacency. The depth of apathy and inertia prevailing in this age is beyond anyone's understanding. It seems no motivator is strong enough to awaken or move the masses of slumbering people in our time.

Fear of God says that someone is watching. That awareness is the only motive powerful enough to move many people from deception to honesty, from selfishness to service. “A teacher told her children to share the lone pair of scissors on the table. ‘What does share

mean?’ she heard one little boy ask his neighbor. ‘Share,’ his friend whispered back, ‘is what you do when you have only one of something and the teacher is looking.’”

We have a right to choose the course of our eternal destiny. But in all fairness, we should know how the choices we make here will affect our soul hereafter. No wonder the subjects of hell and heaven are repeated in the Hebrew, Christian, Islamic, and Bahá’í Scriptures so many times.

Would any *wise* person risk the quality of his or her eternal life for anything on this planet?

Sacred Scriptures indicate that there is a close connection between *fearing God’s justice* and *being wise*:

The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. Psalms 111:10

The essence of wisdom is the fear of God, the dread of His scourge and punishment, and the apprehension of His justice and decree.<sup>92</sup> Bahá’u’lláh

God’s purpose in threatening us with hell-fire, outer darkness, and the insatiable worm is to motivate us. He takes no pleasure in threatening or scaring His most distinguished and honored creatures. He wants us to love Him rather than to fear Him. As Bahá’u’lláh declares: “I belong to him that loveth Me.”<sup>93</sup> But what if we are negligent? What if we are deeply asleep or drunk? Only if we fail in our duties towards God do we need to fear Him. Only if we ignore His invitation to His heavenly Banquet do we need to have concerns or apprehensions about being kept in the outer darkness.

For those who take God’s call seriously, for those who live by His law and try to please Him, there is no fear, grief, or anger, but only indescribable joy and unimaginable blessings. In the words of Christ, such individuals “will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Matt. 13:43); and in the words of Daniel, they “will shine like the brightness of the heavens” and “like the stars for ever and ever,” and theirs will be an “everlasting life” (12:2–3). Those who accept the Redeemer of the age and live by His teachings can expect honor and glory:

To him who *overcomes*, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne. Christ (Rev. 3:21)

And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. I Peter 5:4

Overcomes what? Obstacles that keep a believer in the trap of unawareness and denial, such as fear, selfish concerns, prejudice, and spiritual inertia; obstacles that prevent him from acknowledging the Redeemer of the Age. Bahá’u’lláh describes the station of a true believer in these words:

As to those that have tasted of the fruit of man’s earthly existence...their life hereafter is such as We are unable to describe. The knowledge thereof is with God, alone, the Lord of all worlds.<sup>94</sup>

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.<sup>95</sup>

For most people it is not easy to recognize the divine call, to be humble enough to say “I am poor, enrich my soul,” to be open-minded enough to see the light, to be detached enough from the past and from tradition to run to the kingdom of God. Few people fear God and love God with an intensity that would overcome their spiritual inertia.

History testifies that, despite all the threats, despite all the powerful metaphors that have been used, most people continue to cling to their apathy, to ignore the divine Call, to persist in their old ways. Now what would be the consequences if God did not use strong threats? First, the number of people who choose selfishness over service would increase; second, in the next world those who see the grave consequences of their negligence would say, “This is unfair. I didn’t know this would happen to me, I didn’t know the grave consequences.” Thus, by using strong threats, God leaves no excuses for anyone. Our Creator and supreme Lover asks us to fear Him only because He loves us dearly. He wants to protect us from the negative consequences of our apathy and inertia. In this sense, fear is positive. Its fruits are abundant life and everlasting joy and peace in God’s heavenly Kingdom.

What about those with no opportunities to learn about God and His Messengers? It is an essential element of God’s justice to treat and hold us accountable according to our capabilities and opportunities:

From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked. Christ (Luke 12:48)

Obviously, those who hear about the twin Redeemers of our time, the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh, but fail to investigate their claim with courage and detachment must someday answer why. Others do not have such a responsibility.

We should recognize that we are all connected to each other. Our decisions affect not only our lives and destinies but also those of every other human being. When we fail in our duties, we postpone the restoration of justice, peace, and prosperity on this planet for all people. That also adds to our accountability.

Are we all capable of recognizing God’s glory in His supreme Messengers and Redeemers?

...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?<sup>96</sup> Bahá’u’lláh

Whether we like it or not, whether we are atheists or believers, every one of us will someday face ‘the day of judgment’ when our lives will be evaluated and judged by God’s angels, called by Bahá’u’lláh “the assayers of mankind:”

### **O CHILDREN OF ADAM!**

Holy words and pure and goodly deeds ascend unto the heaven of celestial glory. Strive that your deeds may be cleansed from the dust of self and hypocrisy and find favor at the court of glory; for ere long the assayers of mankind shall, in the holy presence of the Adored One, accept naught but absolute virtue and deeds of stainless purity.<sup>97</sup>

“A young preacher just out of seminary was called to pastor a small mountain church. Very excited about his calling and winning everyone on the mountain to God, he went door to door evangelizing. He stopped at one farm house and the farmer greeted him.”

- The preacher: ‘Are you a Christian?’
- The farmer: ‘No, I believe they live a couple miles down the road.’
- The preacher: ‘No! No! I want to know if you are lost.’
- The farmer: ‘Why, no, I’ve lived here for some 30 years.’
- The Preacher: No! No! I want to know if you are ready for the Judgment Day!’
- The farmer: ‘When is it?’
- The preacher: ‘I don’t know, it could be today or tomorrow!’
- The farmer: ‘Well, come back when you find out. My wife will probably want to go both days.’

Consider what motivates most students to study. What would happen if schools suddenly started a policy of no tests and no grades? What would happen if teachers declared, “Dear students: Don’t worry about failing. From now on we will depend only on your love for knowledge and truth. Study for your future, for the sake of a better life.” How many students would stay up all night to write a term paper instead of going to a night-long party of dining, dancing, and drinking? How many would rather hold a book on business, biology, and botany, or a can of beer? How many would rather hear a lecture on the principles of physics and philosophy than have a bag of popcorn? To be effective, principles and rules must always be in harmony with human nature.

Consider the number of people who do not save for old age. How many would live in poverty if there were no Social Security? If so many fail to fear a visible and imminent poverty on earth, how many more would fail to fear a much farther and fully invisible poverty in heaven? According to the U.S. Census Bureau, almost half of all Americans over age 65 have a household income far below their needs. Financial analysts blame the inadequate funds on one thing: insufficient planning.

If it wasn’t for fear of facing the IRS, how many would pay their taxes? If it wasn’t for fear of unpaid bills and collection agencies, how many would show up at work on time? How many would celebrate if there were no courts, judges, lawyers, prisons, and police officers?

Whether we like it or not, fear has a place in human life.

A reverential fear of God is a positive and protective force. If such a fear had prevailed, people would not have crucified Christ, they would not have treated the divine Messengers unjustly. If people truly feared God, they would not ignore His

commandments. If people truly feared God, they would not hesitate to investigate Bahá'u'lláh's call, they would not ignore Christ's repeated warnings that they should have courage, that they should watch, seek, and search. The famous Persian poet Sa'di said it well: "I fear God, and next to God I chiefly fear him who fears Him not."

### ***What Is "Theological Tyranny"?***

They are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Romans 10:2

Many people find religion to be a prime source of prejudice, war, and cruelty. This we cannot deny. But in all fairness the blame falls not on religion but on the abusers of religion: primarily on obstinately ignorant followers who engage in "theological tyranny." They are the ones who wage wars against new ideas, against those who threaten their idols of illusions. They are the ones who have, in all ages, incited opposition to God's supreme Redeemers. As Albert Einstein noted, "Great spirits have always been opposed by mediocre minds." Bahá'u'lláh quotes this passage from the Islamic Scriptures:

Knowledge is one point, which the foolish have multiplied.<sup>98</sup>

The word translated as "the foolish" also means "the ignorant." Let us see how the ignorant can complicate knowledge, how they can turn a single point of truth into a tangle of theological tyranny. Consider this single point of truth: God is love, and He expresses His love for humanity by sending to us a teacher of truth about once in every thousand years. Like mirrors of various sizes and designs, each of these teachers is unique, yet each faces the same sun and reflects the same light:

These principles and laws, these firmly-established and mighty systems, have proceeded from one Source, and are 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.<sup>99</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

All great religions lead us to God. Each of them, *in its own age*, is *the* way to God and truth. See the perfect harmony in these words spoken across many centuries and cultures:

This is the way [to God], walk ye in it. Isaiah 30:21

I am the way, the truth and the light.<sup>100</sup> Zoroaster

I am the way, and the truth, and the life. Christ (John 14:6)

Follow me: this is the right way [to God]. Muhammad (Qur'án 43:61)

Just this path, there is no other.<sup>101</sup> Buddha

Every Messenger, *in His own age*, is *the only* Light Giver. The lamp changes, but never the light. The Guide changes, but not the Way; it always leads to God:

This is *the Way of God* unto all who are in the heavens and all who are on the earth.<sup>102</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

As Bahá'u'lláh declares, *the Way* is one not only for the people of earth, but also for those in heaven. A prayer from Bahá'u'lláh:

I beg of Thee, O my God, by Thy power, and Thy might, and Thy sovereignty, which have embraced all who are in Thy heaven and on Thy earth, to make known unto Thy servants *this luminous Way and this straight Path*, that they may acknowledge Thy unity and Thy oneness...Illumine, O my Lord, the eyes of Thy servants, and brighten their hearts with the splendors of the light of Thy knowledge, that they may apprehend the greatness of this most sublime station, and recognize this most luminous Horizon...<sup>103</sup>

Now let's see how some theologians have twisted, complicated, and multiplied that simple truth, how they have ignored the light of oneness and focused on the mirrors of diversity to divide the members of the world's great religions. Their conversation is more like that of children:

- **My** faith is better than yours. **My** Savior says that **we** are special, that **we** are God's chosen people.
- You are wrong: **My** faith is better. **My** Savior says that **we** are special. No one can be saved except by **my** Savior.
- You are both wrong! **My** faith is the best! **My** Savior says that His is the last and most complete religion. You both suffer from illusions.

This is the theological tyranny practiced by the followers of three great religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—for many centuries. It is an example of religious bigotry that is as deadly as racial bigotry. Consider this passage from a popular Christian author:

Of course Christ's claim, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man comes to the Father except by me" (John 14:6), is the strongest possible rejection of all other religions as Satanic counterfeits.<sup>104</sup>

Astonishing as it may seem, this misinterpretation of the preceding verse from Jesus, which points to His divine authority, has convinced countless Christians to close their hearts and minds to the Founders of all great religions, except Moses, who is seen merely as a forerunner to Jesus. The preceding passage by the Christian theologian does not even acknowledge Judaism as a faith worthy of attention. Emotional conditioning carries awesome powers. If abused, it can generate prejudice, pride, fear, fanaticism, apathy, hostility, avoidance, and war.

As we can see, the simple, beautiful truth of oneness is turned into a complicated maze of separation. If Jesus and Moses lived today, would they be accepted into a doctoral program in theology? And if accepted, could they pass their tests?

Theology today consists of piling up facts, but wisdom lies in their simplification. Prophecies declare that in our time there will be an abundance of knowledge, but a scarcity of wisdom:

...knowledge shall be increased. Daniel 12:4

People will be...always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth. II Timothy 3:2-7

For the wisdom of their wise men shall perish... Isaiah 29:14

To whom do these prophecies apply? Are there some religious leaders humble enough to say, “Perhaps, these predictions are about us; let us be a little more open-minded”?

It is always *wisdom* that discovers the truth, not *book learning*, religious position and power, or a certificate of honor.

...*the wise* shall understand.

Daniel 12:10

Those who are *wise* shall shine like the brightness of the firmament...

Daniel 12:3

Some theologians have diminished even the station of John the Baptist, who was, according to Bahá'u'lláh, a supreme Messenger from God. With that station, John could save all the peoples of the earth. And yet recently, a noted scholar who answers questions on *Christian Broadcasting Radio* stated, “We are in a better position to be saved than was John the Baptist.” This belief follows the assumption that those who lived before Jesus was crucified did not have as good a chance to be redeemed as those who lived after.

Anyone who grows up in a Muslim culture hears again and again that Muhammad is God's *final* Messenger. This idea of finality has done to the hearts and minds of Muslims what the idea of “no other name can save” has done to the hearts and minds of Christians. For the past thousand years, it has captured, conditioned, and closed the hearts of Muhammad's followers to any message that challenges the belief in His finality. It was for the same reason—emotional conditioning—that Jesus was rejected and Christians were persecuted. Every follower of Moses hears from childhood that the expected Messiah must be a powerful military conqueror. Jesus stands far from that image.

Thus we can see that most of the followers of past religions have created comfort zones out of their emotions and desires, based on a personal meaning of a given verse, and have remained locked in those private zones that have separated them from others and made them feel superior in their eyes. Once that superior comfort zone is established, what incentive would its residents have for exchanging it?

What has been the cost of theological tyranny? It is incalculable. Consider the millions who have been killed, orphaned, and widowed. Consider the energies that could have been diverted to the creation of a better life for humankind, but were wasted on war and the promotion of prejudice.

The belief of “My Savior saves better than yours” gives us a glimpse of the destructive powers of prejudice *between* the followers of three great faiths. Once we look *within* each of the world's great religions, we see the tangles multiply profusely. We see hundreds of diverse and conflicting theories about every conceivable issue, from speaking in tongues to handling poisonous snakes, from the marital status of priests to the correct name of God and the true day of rest.

Superstition has moved some theologians to even estimate the number of “qualified” or “true” Christians who will be lifted to heaven at the Second Advent:

...out of an estimated 1.7 billion professing Christians in today's world, it would not seem unreasonable to suggest that 250 million truly know the Lord and would leave in the Rapture...all who are too young to be accountable would also be taken [to heaven]...The fact that missing babies and young children far outnumber adults who vanish gives the event its most ominous tone.<sup>105</sup>

God asks us to reason: “Let us reason together, saith the Lord” (Isaiah 1:18). Let us do exactly that. At what age does a person lose his or her childhood innocence and becomes accountable? Is it at age 12, 13, 14, or 15? If it is 12, at what month, day, hour, minute, or second? What is the dividing line for accountability? Is it fair to take millions of “children” to heaven and leave countless others on earth to face pain and destruction for being late a few days, hours, or even as briefly as one second? The same question can be raised about levels of people’s faith and character. At what point does a person become a “true Christian”? At what point is it fair to send an individual to eternal joy and another to eternal hell?

Another noted theologian sets the standards of being a “true Christian” much higher. That standard reduces significantly the total number of saved believers from the earth:

According to the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, there are 550 million Christians in the world. So if Christ returned today, perhaps one in ten [55 million] would rise from earth to be forever with the Lord.<sup>106</sup>

In 1995, a group of distinguished Catholic and evangelical Protestant theologians gathered to find some common grounds. Their gathering led to divisive arguments. Some Protestant theologians bitterly attacked this simple statement: “Catholics and Protestants are brothers and sisters in Christ.” As incredible as it seems, they argued passionately—in a large conference broadcast by national television—that truth is more important than love and unity, that the statement compromised the basis of Protestant beliefs, that it implied that Protestants agreed with Catholic doctrines—the very doctrines that the Protestant reformers rejected! To prove their point, the dissenting theologians have published a book on this topic.<sup>107</sup>

Consider two more examples of theological tyranny:

- There is an abundance of debate over which of the two sons of Abraham is superior: Isaac, who is believed to have fathered most of the Jews, or Ishmael, who is believed to have fathered most of the Arabs, who are mainly Muslims.
- Many theologians proclaim that the God of Islam, Allah, is not the God of Christianity; that there is a vast difference between the two deities. They claim that the Christian God is personal, loving, and kind, whereas Allah is impersonal, detached, and unfeeling.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Just think of this one example: Praying is one of the most fundamental laws of Islam. Does it make any sense to pray to an impersonal, unfeeling God? No one can find the slightest difference between the attributes of God as recorded in Jewish, Christian, Islamic, and Bahá’í scriptures. Evidence for this is presented in a forthcoming book: *The Spirit That Acknowledges Jesus Christ*.

Our God and your God is one. Muhammad (Qur’án 29:45)

The Lord our God is one Lord. Christ (Mark 12:29)

Truly your God is but one, Lord of the Heavens and the earth. Muhammad (Qur’án 37:4–5)

Is there any God beside me, or any Creator? Isaiah 44:8



From eternity Thou hast been alone, with none to share the majesty of Thy singleness...<sup>108</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh

Religious laymen, for the most part, are unaware of the intensity of the conflict between the interpreters of biblical prophecies. They simply put their trust in their leaders. In *The Last Day Handbook*, Christian author Dr. Robert Lightner, a professor of systematic theology at Dallas Theological Seminary, gives numerous examples of verbal war, not between Catholics and Protestants, or Baptists and Mormons, or Pentecostals and Jehovah's Witnesses, but between evangelical theologians, defined by Dr. Lightner as those "who embrace the historic orthodox faith:"

Christians, members of the same heavenly family, are engaged in a nasty fight with each other over last events, and refusing to admit it will not change things. We may not want the people of the world to know about our struggles and conflicts, but they do anyway. Great shame and disgrace has already been brought to the cause of Christ by us over evangelical eschatologies.

The evidence of the fight is overwhelming. I wish I did not have to labor the point, but the purpose in giving these facts is to arouse readers to the reality of the fight so that everyone can be part of easing the tension. The conflict I have exposed here does not thrill me; it saddens me.<sup>109</sup>

Under the title, "Who started the fight?" Dr. Lightner writes:

To ask this question of Christians... is almost like asking two neighborhood boys, "Who started the fight?" that left them both with bloody noses. "He did." "No, he did." The accusations go on and on... The truth that cannot be denied is, there is a fight. We can call it something nicer if we want to, but that will not change the facts. A difference of opinion is one thing, but an angry warfare involving a bitter suspicious attitude with those who hold a different viewpoint is something else.

So what it amounts to is a fight among the top brass. The evangelical leaders cannot agree among themselves... As a result of the popularity of Christianity today; lay people are also becoming involved in the struggle. Families and friends are being divided over differing views of eschatology... As a result, differences erupt and the fight of the professionals becomes a fight among the people in the pews as well.<sup>110</sup>

The way Christian theologians behave today is a replica of how Jewish theologians behaved long ago:

They are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Romans 10:2

True knowledge and humility draw us closer to God; ignorance and ego repel us away from God.

O ye who profess belief in God! Hath your learning deluded you...? Take ye heed then, for verily your God, the Lord of Eternal Truth, is with you and in very truth is watchful over you...<sup>111</sup>

The Báb

As time passes on, theological theories accumulate like dense clouds, to conceal the light of truth. Believers no longer see the sun in all its glory and splendor, but only clashes between restless and drifting clouds. Isn't it astonishing that so many people leave their eternal and glorious destiny—their most precious gift—in the hands of confused

theologians! They simply assume that they need not search or wonder, that the captain—the evangelist, the pastor, the priest, or the rabbi to whom they have entrusted their destiny—somehow will get them to their desired destination!

As Uta Ranke-Heinemann, former professor of Catholic theology, writes:

But we humans deal not so much with God as with his authorized deputies. Since they assure us that it's all for our eternal happiness and salvation, we let them tell us many tales. Believers accept without question what they're taught to believe and do, because when authority comes forward bearing a mandate from God, doubt seems to be a sin...

Thus Christians only get the truth secondhand, if at all. But truth that has passed through alien hands is a censored truth...The truth, or whatever remains of it, has degenerated—thanks to theologically dense Christian pastors—into a mass of misunderstood and incomprehensible teachings; in other words, into pseudofaith and superstition.<sup>112</sup>

The Scriptures predict the prevailing confusion caused by religious leaders:

In that day...O My people, your leaders will cause you to err and confuse the course of your paths...  
Isaiah 3:7, 12

Bahá'u'lláh invites the priests to put aside their superstitions:

O concourse of priests! The Day of Reckoning hath appeared, the Day whereon He Who was in heaven hath come. He, verily, is the One Whom ye were promised in the Books of God, the Holy, the Almighty, the All-Praised. ***How long will ye wander in the wilderness of heedlessness and superstition?*** Turn with your hearts in the direction of your Lord, the Forgiving, the Generous.<sup>113</sup>

O concourse of patriarchs! He Whom ye were promised in the Tablets is come. ***Fear God, and follow not the vain imaginings of the superstitious.*** Lay aside the things ye possess, and take fast hold of the Tablet of God by His sovereign power. Better is this for you than all your possessions. Unto this testifieth every understanding heart, and every man of insight. Pride ye yourselves on My Name and yet shut yourselves out as by a veil from Me? This indeed is a strange thing!<sup>114</sup>

### ***Are the People of Our Time Spiritually Different from Those of Ages Past?***

Both biblical and historical accounts confirm an astonishing similarity. The people of our time can lay no claim to moral or spiritual distinction. Many Christian leaders bemoan the low state to which modern humanity has fallen. Prophecies confirm this:

At that time many will turn away from the faith...the love of most will grow cold...  
Christ (Matt. 24:10–12)

People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money...not lovers of the good...having a form of godliness but denying its power.  
II Timothy 3:2–6

They will turn their ears from the truth and turn aside to myths.  
II Timothy 4:4

If we admit that we are not better than the people of past ages, can we expect to behave differently? How can we claim to be more open-minded or more righteous? Are we not as zealous as they were in guarding our illusions?

Indeed, it is a miracle that so many people (so far about 6 million) have been able to recognize Bahá'u'lláh's station. Only the power of God can perform such a miracle; only **He** can destroy so many ancient illusions.

Dr. James Kennedy—noted Christian scholar and founder of Westminster Academy, whose weekly TV and radio broadcasts reach millions in 3,300 communities in the United States and 21 other countries—has spent 30 years studying historical and rational evidence for Christianity. Few scholars and leaders in the Christian world have given as much time and attention to the rational evidence for the astonishing claim of the Man from Nazareth as has Dr. Kennedy.

Dr. Kennedy has written a passage that is a favorite of mine. It *seems* he wrote it not only about Christ but also about the return of that great Spirit in the supreme Redeemer of our age, Bahá'u'lláh. Notice that Dr. Kennedy uses the phrase “the eternal Creator of cosmos” to refer to Christ. But, instead of saying that He has come from **Palestine**, Dr. Kennedy says that He has come from **Persia**! I have no idea why he has substituted one country (the birthplace of Bahá'u'lláh) for another (the birthplace of Christ). Here are his words:

Suppose that today in the cities of Europe or America missionaries were to appear telling us that just recently some obscure peasant had been put to death **in Persia** and was reputed to have risen from the dead and declared to be the eternal Creator of the cosmos. What chance do you think such missionaries would have in propagating such a religion? **Can you not see that the probabilities against such a faith ever taking hold would be staggering?** But this is precisely what the Apostles did in the Roman Empire, and amazing as it is, they succeeded. They succeeded in overthrowing that pagan empire. **This feat simply demonstrates that there must have been inherent in this [seemingly] absurd and incredible declaration [of Jesus], some supernatural power. It was indeed the very power of the spirit of God** [emphasis added].<sup>115</sup>

Dr. Kennedy is quite accurate in his assessment, whether it is applied to the One who came from **Palestine** (Jesus) or to the One who came from **Persia** (Bahá'u'lláh). The Bahá'í Faith has spread not only to Europe and America but to the farthest reaches of the earth. The following statistics tell the story.

## **Table 2**

### ***The Expansion of the Bahá'í Faith In a Span of 150 Years***

Worldwide Bahá'í population .....	about 6 million
National Spiritual Assemblies .....	175
Countries in which Bahá'ís reside:	
Independent countries .....	188

Significant territories and islands .....	45
Number of localities where Bahá'ís reside .....	more than 116,000
Number of Local Spiritual Assemblies .....	approximately 18,000
Languages into which Bahá'í literature has been translated .....	802
Tribes, racial, and ethnic groups represented in Bahá'í membership .....	2,112
Bahá'í Houses of Worship .....	7
Sites for future Bahá'í Houses of Worship .....	121
Publishing Trusts .....	30
Bahá'í radio stations .....	6
Conservation and environment projects.....	52
Bahá'í schools and educational projects.....	670
Social and economic development projects.....	about 1,350. <sup>116</sup>

Dr. Kennedy speaks of “the cities of Europe or America.” Bahá'u'lláh and His early disciples appeared and lived not in the 20th-century cities of Europe or America, where religious freedom is the rule, but in the 19th-century cities of Persia and the Ottoman Empire, where religious fanaticism would, like a raging fire, instantly engulf and turn to ashes anyone who challenged the established traditions and beliefs. And yet, in spite of such a repressive and cruel environment, Bahá'u'lláh prevailed.

Could such a thing be made manifest except through the power of a divine Revelation, and the potency of God's invincible Will? By the righteousness of God! Were any one to entertain so great a Revelation in his heart, the thought of such a declaration would alone confound him! Were the hearts of all men to be crowded into his heart, he would still hesitate to venture upon so awful an enterprise.<sup>117</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

‘Abdu'l-Bahá spoke about the freedom Bahá'u'lláh enjoyed in the latter part of His life while He was still a prisoner by the order of the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, ‘Abdu'l-Hamíd:

He [Bahá'u'lláh] proclaimed His Cause in prison and hoisted His standard under the menace of the sword. He was a person against whom two reigning monarchs arose in enmity and were bent upon His extermination. These two sovereigns gave orders that the Blessed Beauty [Bahá'u'lláh] should be imprisoned in one room...

Although the policy of Sultán ‘Abdu'l-Hamíd was harsher than ever, although he constantly insisted on his Captive's strict confinement—still, the Blessed Beauty now lived, as everyone knows, with all power and glory...occasionally His tent would be pitched on the heights of Mount Carmel. Friends from everywhere presented

themselves and gained an audience. The people and the government authorities witnessed it all, yet no one so much as breathed a word. And this is one of Bahá'u'lláh's greatest miracles...The prison changed into a palace, the jail itself became a Garden of Eden. Such a thing has not occurred in history before; no former age has seen its like: that a man confined to a prison should move about with authority and might; that one in chains should carry the fame of the Cause of God to the high heavens, should win splendid victories in both East and West, and should, by His almighty pen, subdue the world.<sup>118</sup>

Christ predicted that He would come in the clouds. What do "clouds" symbolize? They symbolize illusions, ignorance, false doctrines, beliefs, assumptions, and unfounded interpretations of the Word of God. The thick clouds of the illusions and fantasies cherished by the people of our time have concealed the radiance of the Sun. Those who rise above the clouds can see the unmatched splendor of the Glory of God. Illusions and fantasies were a favorite theme of Bahá'u'lláh's:

Arise, O people, and, by the power of God's might, resolve to gain the victory over your own selves, ***that haply the whole earth may be freed and sanctified from its servitude to the gods of its idle fancies***—gods that have inflicted such loss upon, and are responsible for the misery of, their wretched worshipers. These idols form the obstacle that impeded man in his efforts to advance in the path of perfection.<sup>119</sup>

***People for the most part delight in superstitions.*** They regard a single drop of the sea of delusion as preferable to an ocean of certitude. By holding fast unto names they deprive themselves of the inner reality...God grant that ye may be graciously aided...to shatter the idols of superstitions...<sup>120</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

Cast away that which ye possess, and, on the wings of detachment, soar beyond all created things. Thus biddeth you the Lord of creation...<sup>121</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

It seems human nature never changes. Krishna, who appeared long before Moses, declared the same message:

The light [of Truth] is covered by darkness. This darkness is delusion. That is why we dream...<sup>122</sup> When you have reached enlightenment, ignorance will delude you no longer.<sup>123</sup> Where is your sword...? Draw it and slash Delusion to pieces.<sup>124</sup>  
*Bhagavad-Gita*

### ***Why Do so Many Fail to Investigate Bahá'u'lláh's Mission?***

Some people do not take their beliefs seriously; their faith simply doesn't matter to them. They pay more attention to what brand of beer they buy than to what they believe. More than half of U.S. citizens can't even name the four evangelists: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

"After filling out an application for employment, the young man handed it to the receptionist. She said, 'You didn't fill out the part about your religious preference.' He said, 'Well, I'm Presbyterian, but I don't know how to spell it.' She replied, 'Well, why

don't you just put a 'P'?' He said, 'Good heavens, I don't want you to think I'm Piscopalian!'"

Christ said that when He came it would be like the days of Noah: "The coming of the Son of Man will repeat what happened in Noah's time" (Matt. 24:37). The coming of Noah did not make the news of the day. People continued to live in the dark of unawareness, busy with their daily chores. They were concerned with earthly bread, but not with heavenly manna.

It is hard to move people out of their comfort zones. We are all busy with our worldly games, exactly as Jesus predicted. "The young children were bored until one of them suggested that they play church. They played for awhile, but were soon bored again. Then, one of the little boys said, 'Hey! I've got it! Let's play Jesus!' The other kids asked, 'How do you do that?' The boy said, 'Well, first you would be mean to me, and tie me up. Then, you would pretend to hit me and spit on me and call me names.' The children decided to try it for a while, but they quickly felt repulsed by their own actions. The boy playing Jesus called the game to a halt, saying, 'Let's not play Jesus anymore; let's go back to playing church. It's a lot easier.'"

What about those who are religious? They have their own stumbling-blocks. They say they love the Lord, but for the most part are authority-bound and literal and traditional minded. They listen to the voice of the majority and the subtle but powerful pressures from parents and priests. Does the following question from Jesus apply to all people? Or are Christians an exception? "But when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (Luke 18:8). What response can we expect from the people who have little or no faith?

Religious leaders give people the impression of confidence and of being certain of knowing the truth. Yet deep in their hearts they harbor doubts. From time to time we find a few who acknowledge their doubts. Consider this statement from a Christian leader:

There are many ways for the message of the church to be misinterpreted. In today's society, there are many versions of "the truth," and each one promises its own rewards or punishments. Whose is right? We'll never know in this lifetime, but in the next some of us may be in for a shock...It must be puzzling to people of other faiths to discover how many different Christian groups there are—each one convinced that theirs is the true way.<sup>125</sup>

Christ gave repeated and urgent warnings to Christians to investigate the news of His Return even as a detective would investigate a thief. The Hebrew and Christian Bibles contain more than 1,800 references to the advents of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. ***All those prophecies have been fulfilled*** (see *I Shall Come Again*). Most Christians have not yet heeded the warnings and directives of the Bible to investigate the station and message of Bahá'u'lláh. Christ said that He would come as a thief and asked for wakefulness:

That is the day when I come like a thief! Happy the man who stays awake...

Revelation 16:15

A thief always hides himself from the householder. Then how can the householder detect the thief? Only by staying awake. What does it mean to stay awake? Investigate! Christ also said: Watch!

It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes.  
Christ (Luke 12:37)

Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is. Christ (Mark 13:33)

Do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: “Watch!”  
Christ (Mark 13:36–37)

What did Jesus mean when He said, “Watch”? He meant, “Be alert!” “Investigate!” “Pay attention” to the news of the return of the Master!

The reason for the warnings is this: The Master knows that at His coming the people will be asleep. They are here in body but not in spirit. “Three little girls were trying to awaken their father early one Saturday morning. They giggled and yelled. They tickled his feet, poked his ribs, and pulled his ears, all to no avail. One of them finally lifted up one of her father’s eyelids. ‘I don’t know why he doesn’t answer,’ the little girl said. ‘He is in there.’” This story illustrates the reaction of many people to the news of the Advent of Bahá’u’lláh, the Promised Redeemer of all ages and religions. When they hear of His coming, they respond as if they had not heard it. They remain asleep. It is like saying to a man “You have won a million dollars,” and in response he simply says, “Yeah,” “Thanks,” or “That is interesting,” but is so jaded by false messages that he never thinks to claim his prize.

To describe the people of our time, prophecies use three analogies: being asleep, blind, and drunk. These are the prophecies about being drunk, as they appear in *I Shall Come Again*:

They are drunken, but not with wine; they stagger, but not with strong drink (Isaiah 29:9). They grope in the darkness without light and are left to wander like a drunkard (Job 12:25). All the nations shall drink continually (Obadiah 1:16). Wake up, you drunkards, and lament your fate...Alas! the day is near, the day of the Lord (Joel 1:5,15). The inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated (Rev. 17:2).

If recognizing Christ at His return would be easy, why are we urged so often to watch and search? “Unto them that **look for him** [Christ] shall he appear the second time” (Heb. 9:28). We don’t look for a car we have in the garage, but we look for a lost jewel.

Jesus said, “Beware of false prophets.” He did not say, “Every prophet is false.” Yet that is the way many people feel and behave. They consider every claim false, every Redeemer an impostor. Then how can we tell the truth from falsehood? Only by investigating. That is what Bahá’u’lláh asks you to do. That is what “seek” means.

In Jesus’ times, the Jews felt they were the chosen people and looked down on Christians. Today many Christians feel the same way. They believe they are the only ones saved and have pity for non-Christians. This attitude prevents them from looking into other faiths. Thus they fulfill Jesus’ prophecy that those who consider themselves the first shall be the last to find Him and know Him.

The Jews of the time of Jesus believed that their Messiah would raise them to power and make them rulers over other nations. Today many Christians believe that when Jesus comes, He will raise them above the earth (the rapture) over non-Christians, who will be

left behind to suffer and die in “the great tribulation” that follows. Few people dare take the risk of investigating another faith, for fear of being left with the “unsaved.”

If all condemn one another, where shall we search for truth?<sup>126</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Investigating a new Faith takes great courage. Some people may even have this unconscious fear: What if the other faith turns out to be true? Recognizing and accepting a new Faith requires courage and detachment. To inspire these attributes, Bahá’u’lláh gave repeated warnings and admonitions:

Great, therefore, is the blessedness of him who hath believed in Thee, and in Thy signs, and hath humbled himself before Thy sovereignty, and hath been honored with meeting Thee, and hath attained the good pleasure of Thy will, and circled around Thee and stood before Thy throne. Woe betide him that hath transgressed against Thee, and hath denied Thee, and repudiated Thy signs, and gainsaid Thy sovereignty, and risen up against Thee, and waxed proud before Thy face, and hath disputed Thy testimonies...<sup>127</sup>

Strict literalism is a grievous disease afflicting the followers of all great religions. As St. Paul declared, “The man without the Spirit...cannot understand them [the things that come from God], because they are spiritually discerned” (I Cor. 2:14).

If everything in the Bible were literal, everyone would have an equal chance to understand everything. But St. Paul states that God’s Words are *spiritually discerned*. Only those who open their hearts and minds to the Spirit can comprehend them, can break through the shell and see the precious pearl.

God sets the rules and gives us the choice of living by them or ignoring them. He admonishes us to follow the rules and attain His presence (heaven), because His love for His creation is supreme. He also warns us of the consequences of ignoring the rules: enduring the agony of remoteness from His presence (hell). We are the architects of our own destiny. Whatever we build here, we will find hereafter.

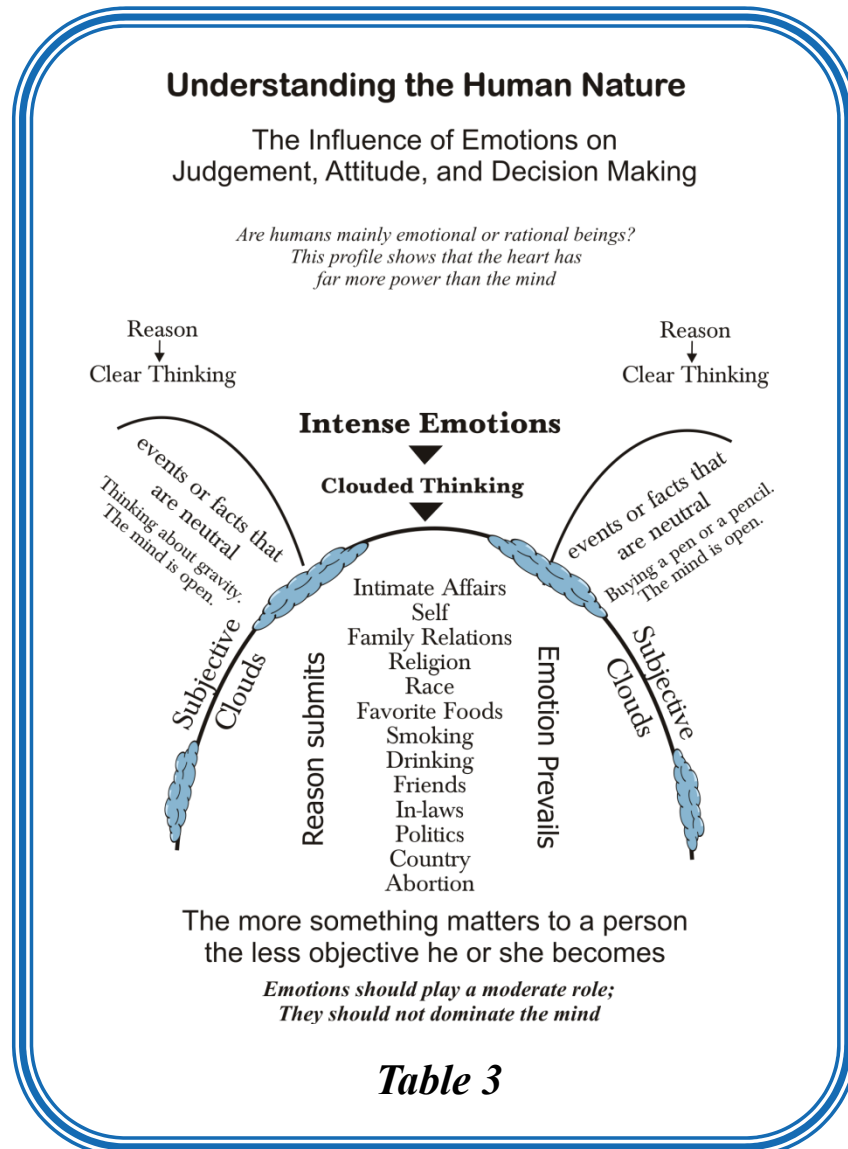
Human beings are primarily emotional beings (see *Table 3*). They are drawn to what feels comfortable, what tastes good. Why should laws make people fasten their seat belts or warn them of drunken or fast driving? Why do people commit crimes? Does violence make any sense? Why do people contaminate their souls with prejudice? Is it dictated by the mind or by the heart? Why do the wealthy, who have resources far beyond their needs, fail to share their wealth with the poor? Does war make any sense? Why political leaders do not work together instead of fighting with each other? Why the religious leaders who claim to live by their sacred Scriptures do not work together instead of against each other? These questions give us a glimpse of the incredible power of emotion over reason.

Can one’s “choice” of religion be an exception? People grow into their religious beliefs mainly or solely by emotional conditioning. As they learn to love their parents, so do they learn to love their religion. Perhaps one in a thousand chooses his or her beliefs by reason and evidence. That is why Christian families raise Christian children and Muslim families raise Muslim children. Cultures keep their religions for thousands of years. This explains why perhaps 90 percent of those who recognize Bahá’u’lláh do so through association with individuals they know, trust, and respect. Proofs, no matter how powerful and



convincing, may touch the mind, but they seldom transform the heart. Mere mental or verbal acknowledgment has no value for and no power on human life.

Attitude is all-powerful. It affects every aspect of our life. What happens when we wear someone else's glasses? We see everything changed, distorted, blurred, and smaller or larger. Attitudes command such enormous powers. As an eminent physician once observed, "It is more critical to know what sort of patient has a disease than what sort of disease a patient has." The same holds true with beliefs. It is more important to know what sort of a believer has a belief than what sort of belief a believer has.



## ***What If a Person Fails to Acknowledge Bahá'u'lláh?***

Because of its everlasting consequences, this question deserves our closest attention.

- Bahá'u'lláh manifests the light of God and His glory. By failing to acknowledge Him, we deny ourselves the most glorious gift and honor that Heaven may bestow on humans; we deprive ourselves of the fruits of celestial wisdom:

How regrettable indeed that man should debar himself from the fruits of the tree of wisdom while his days and hours pass swiftly away.<sup>128</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

- It is both our supreme responsibility and an honor to use our talents to create God's glorious Kingdom upon this troubled planet. The loss of this honor is greater than any other a human being may impose upon himself.
- Only one Sun (God) and one Light (truth) exists. If we attribute darkness to a Mirror (Bahá'u'lláh), we also attribute darkness to the Sun and the Light manifested in the Mirror. This quotation from Bahá'u'lláh clarifies the point:

It is incumbent upon everyone to obey Him [Bahá'u'lláh] in whatsoever God hath ordained; and whosoever denieth Him hath disbelieved in God, in His verses, in His Messengers and in His books.<sup>129</sup>

To those who denied Him, Jesus said:

He who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God. Luke 12:9 NKJ

Our destiny here and hereafter depends on the choices we make. Blame lies in our choices, not in our fates.

A consequence follows every choice as surely as darkness rules the night and light governs the day. The law of cause and effect always prevails. The main reason many people do not take this law seriously is that the effect sometimes comes much too late. We learn timely lessons from immediate reward and punishment, not from delayed reward and punishment.

We may not see the consequences of our choices instantly, but ultimately whatever we do comes back to us—sometimes to delight us, sometimes to destroy us. A smoker may continue his habit for 20 years before seeing the consequences of his disregard for his physical health. The same holds true with spiritual health. In this case, the critical consequences come only after we have departed from the earthly kingdom. No wonder so many people disregard their spiritual health.

People today are pressured, busy, and stressed. They sense a strong need for releasing the pressure, for feeling good, for having “fun.” Unfortunately, they seek relief and fun in short-lived amusements: watching a video, going to a bar, seeking new sexual encounters, or just dreaming and driving but never arriving. They are in no mood to search for the gift of spirituality. Seldom do they find time for this, yet gaining that gift is the very purpose for which they were created.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote that in each stage of life we must acquire whatever we will need for the next stage of life. In the womb we must cultivate a healthy body to live comfortably

here. After arriving here we must cultivate a healthy spirit to live comfortably hereafter. The marvel of God's design is this: We become aware of the consequences of that which we cultivate or fail to cultivate only *after* arriving at the next stage. This is how He protects our freedom of choice. We will realize the value of what we have lost only when we pass away from this kingdom. If we knew now, we would give our very lives to acquire it. If we saw the big picture—the panorama of paradise—we would live lives of perfection, we would readily exchange our ephemeral amusements for everlasting glories and honors.

A little girl readily exchanges a gold bar for a chocolate bar. She is controlled by taste, not thought. Only when her mind matures will she recognize the true worth of gold. Only when people open their hearts and minds will they see the true worth of the spiritual glories within their reach. That is how the Creator planned it. His purpose is to protect our freedom to choose God or gold. This is the mystery around which all mysteries revolve; this is the secret behind all secrets. Recognizing and unraveling this mystery requires the utmost effort and sincerity.

Imagine if Bahá'u'lláh's claims were false and you accepted Him. How grave the consequences! Imagine if Bahá'u'lláh's claims are true and you deny Him. What spiritual treasures you will lose. Imagine if Bahá'u'lláh's claims are true and you accept Him. How indescribable the glories that await you. Then what is the solution? ***The only key to this mystery is investigation and yet more investigation until the mystery is resolved.*** That is what Jesus Himself asked us to do: "Seek and ye shall find." The worst response is to ignore Bahá'u'lláh's claim, to live as if nothing has happened.

Accepting the Redeemer of the Age is our first duty and foremost obligation. Our everlasting destiny and the destiny of humankind depends on believing in the One that God has sent for our guidance:

The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent. Christ (John 6:29)

But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Christ (Matt. 6:33)

### ***If the Bahá'í Faith Is So Great, Why Don't Most People Know About It?***

In the history of the human race, there has never been so much competition for people's attention and time. Everywhere we turn, we find someone ready to sell us a new soup, a special cereal, or salvation at a discount. "Today's media-wise generation is bombarded with an estimated 1,500 slick commercials every day. More than 10,000 magazines are published in the United States alone, complementing the 6,000 radio stations and 400 television stations."<sup>130</sup>

The *Encyclopedia of American Religions* lists 1,600 religious groups. It shows that religion in the last three decades has been multiplying at a rapid pace; the number of denominations has doubled.

What happens in a competition? Those with the greatest resources win. Many Americans have not heard about the Bahá'í Faith. Even if people hear about it, that does not solve

the problem. The next step is to investigate it and read about it. Who has extra time to give to the study of a relatively unknown religion?

One of the greatest illusions many of us cherish is that we know all that really matters, and what we don't know does not really matter. Many of us depend on newscasters to tell us the big news. Unfortunately, only bad news has wings, not good news.

Consider the countless stories of crime and violence in the news media. The exposure celebrities or famous athletes get is phenomenal. In 1992, about 30,000 Bahá'ís from every corner of the globe gathered in New York City to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the passing of Bahá'u'lláh, the Glory of God, the One for whom the world has waited for 6,000 years. None of the three major U.S. networks devoted even a second to this significant event. Some secondary stations carried it, and some major newspapers, such as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, wrote about it, but the event did not take even one millionth of the attention the world gave to the Simpson's trial for murder. As it is said, "If you think no evil, see no evil, and hear no evil, the chances are you'll never produce a newsworthy story or write a best-selling novel."

Another reason the Bahá'í Faith has not been recognized more widely is that the people of our time have been desensitized. Most of the blame for this goes to television, which dims the difference between fantasy and reality. What's more, television exposes people to such an endless array of violent drama—bombings, murders, fires, and wars—that the news of the coming of a Messenger of peace becomes lost. It sinks in the restless sea of wild and weird stories of the day. Further, television shows an endless array of depravity, deception, and fraud. It presents worldly and adulterous religious leaders, dangerous and weird cults, scandalous political leaders, greedy and deceptive business practices, and promises of eternal happiness and salvation from evangelists who reduce religion to money, emotions, and simple confessions. Television also offers promises of happiness from advertisers who appeal to viewers' feelings and baser desires. All these destroy people's trust and create suspicion, apathy, and fear of the unknown.

Of course we cannot simply blame the news media, for it is a business paid to play primarily the popularity game: to tell people not what they *need* to hear but what they *like* to hear. If they fail to play the game, they will lose not only favor and fame but their jobs.

Besides what the news media does, there is another problem: Bahá'ís are nonaggressive in teaching their Faith; they prefer a gentle approach. Their purpose is to refrain from imposing their beliefs on others. They wish to obey Bahá'u'lláh's instructions against pressuring and proselytizing:

**O SON OF DUST!**

The wise are they that speak not unless they obtain a hearing, even as the cup-bearer, who proffereth not his cup till he findeth a seeker...<sup>131</sup>

Talking about a new religion is not part of our everyday conversation. Few people are interested in learning about a new faith. Who wants to take time to venture on a spiritual journey? And how can we find those who are interested and willing to take the time? The fact that you are reading this book is a proof that you are an exception. Perhaps you had a friend who took the courage to tell you about Bahá'u'lláh.

Many obstacles prevent people from investigating the Bahá'í Faith. One is resistance to change: "In 1829, Martin Van Buren, then the governor of New York, wrote this message to president Jackson: 'The canal system of this country is being threatened by the spread of a new form of transportation known as railroads. As you may well know, railroad carriages are pulled at the enormous speed of 15 miles per hour by engines, which in addition to endangering life and limb of passengers, roar and snort their way through the countryside. The Almighty certainly never intended that people should travel at such breakneck speed.'"

"Fear of change causes some persons to be comfortable in their misery, secure in their mediocrity, and paralyzed in their prejudice." As psychologist Eric Blumenthal notes:

New ideas entail a process of transformation, a sort of death and rebirth in that the old must die to make way for the new. But human beings are resistant to the idea of death, and consequently we resist new ideas.<sup>132</sup>

People of our time live under stress. The only remedy they know for releasing the pressure is pleasure. Some of them seek joy from trips to Hawaii or from a five-course dinner at a fine restaurant. Others are in constant search of new romantic encounters. And if they want to read, there are many romantic and escapist novels around, and of course, television is always present and available. Reading a serious book, especially on religion, is the last thing on most people's minds.

What about serious Christians who praise the Lord and confess their sins every day? They, too, have their special way of keeping their hopes high: The angels will suddenly come down, pick them up, and take them to heaven to live with the Lord forever. This theory, called the rapture, has completely destroyed their initiative; it has lulled them into complacency by creating the illusion that they need not do anything except talk about their faith and wait for the angels.

What about religious leaders? Are they open-minded, curious, and watchful? It takes great courage for a pastor to look into another religion. It also requires self-sacrifice to leave a profession for which one has been trained, to exchange financial security for an unknown future. Biblical references that describe religious leaders are almost always negative:

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you [the priest] have rejected knowledge, I will also reject you, that you shall be no priest to Me... Hosea 4:6

Astonishing as it may seem, religious leaders are far less likely to recognize the divine Messengers and Redeemers than the ones they teach, the lay people. This has always been the case:

None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. I Corinthians 2:8

God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important, so that no one can ever boast in the presence of God. I Corinthians 1:28-29

If you went to your pastor and told him that you were investigating the Bahá'í Faith, what would he say? As far as we can go back in history, we find that, with only a few

exceptions, the religious leaders have been among the first to prevent the flow of life-giving waters to the masses of humanity. Can our age be an exception? A pastor was visiting a rich patient in hospital. The patient said, "I have given all my wealth to your church." The pastor was so elated that he lost his balance. He then told the rich patient, "You have done so much for the church. Is there anything I can do for you?" The patient said, "Just take your hand off the oxygen tube!" Sadly, this has been the trend throughout history.

Unfortunately, many people need a disaster to shake them from drunkenness to awareness. "When He struck them, they began to seek Him." (Psalms 78:34). You may have heard of Charles Lamb's Dissertation on Roast Pig. "The hero discovered roast pork—and how delicious it is—when his house burned down with a pig inside it. Being shrewd, he put two and two together. Thereafter, every time he wanted roast pork he burned the house down."

According to Dr. Roof, the 1960s and 1970s deeply affected people's religious convictions. After the 14-year-long Vietnam War, cinched by the long, hot summer of the Watergate hearings, people's perceptions and respect for government and authority had eroded. Institutions of any kind—banks, public schools, the military and organized religion—all became suspect.

In addition, if people already had a bad experience with a church, or even knew a friend or relative who had a bad experience, they often cut all ties with formal religion.

Yet, as Dr. Roof's studies show, even as people left the churches, spiritual yearning and hunger remained. These conflicting interests gave rise to the tension between wanting to belong to a church and fearing commitment to it.<sup>133</sup>

People have lost their trust because there are so many ways to truth and happiness. They do not believe anyone. They do not even believe their eyes. "A young man went to a psychiatrist's office and informed the doctor that he was there against his will and had come only to please his family. The doctor asked the young man why his family wanted him to see a psychiatrist. 'Well, you see, doctor,' he said, 'I'm dead.' The doctor had heard it all, he thought, but this was a new one. 'Really?' he asked. 'How do you know you're dead?' 'How do you know you're alive?' shot back the young man. The psychiatrist decided this tack wouldn't get him anywhere, so he tried another. 'You're intelligent looking,' said the doctor. 'I'm sure you'll agree that dead people don't bleed.' The young man agreed that this was true. The doctor reached quickly into the drawer of his desk, asked the young man to roll up his sleeve, and jabbed a small needle into his arm. A spot of blood appeared, and the doctor pressed a glass slide against the blood, then held it up for the patient to see. 'There!' he said triumphantly. 'It's blood!' 'My God!' said the young man. 'Dead people do bleed, don't they?'"

Most people prefer to do what they have been doing; old habits are hard to break. They would like to go to the same church, read the same Bible, stay with their old friends, and talk about their old theories of how everything should and will be. They would rather stay in their secure comfort zones until an angel with a spaceship arrives suddenly in their church or their home and declares, "Come on board. You belong to heaven." Then they will get into the heavenly craft with unmatched pleasure and ecstasy, look down on the suffering sinners, and shout, "I told you so!"

Surprising as it may seem, some Christians wonder why, after nearly 2,000 years of extensive and continuous missionary work, they have failed to convert most of the people of our planet to their faith. In a book called *Answers*, Josh McDowell, a Christian author and orator who has written several books to validate the station of Jesus, asks, “If Christianity is so great, why are there so few Christians?” It may seem surprising to ask that question. But, as he explains, “Christians are now and have always been in the minority.”<sup>134</sup> Then he offers the main reason why there are “so few Christians:”

One reason...is...ignorance of the facts validating Christian faith. Many times this ignorance is self-imposed...Many people claim they have intellectual problems with the Christian faith, when usually what they have are...emotional excuses.<sup>135</sup>

Then McDowell adds a few other reasons why people reject Jesus:

- The mistaken belief that Christianity “is a religion with a set of negative commandments”
- Self-centeredness or pride
- People’s attachment to their favorite sins, an attachment so strong that many barter the pure joy of paradise for sinful pleasures

He concludes by stating, “This [rejection of truth] has been the case through all of history.” To prove his point, he quotes this prophecy from the Gospel:

Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. Christ (Matt. 7:13–14)

As we can see, the heavenly Thief remains hidden behind many veils and walls; He is concealed by countless covers and clouds, all fashioned by the human mind. Overcoming them requires supreme courage and detachment.

### ***Are Bahá’is Optimists or Pessimists?***

Many people have given up all hope for humanity. Some people love to complain, to “sigh and weep.” They think the world is sick and dying. All it needs is a funeral and burial. “Looking down at the sick woman, the doctor decided to tell her the truth. ‘I think I should tell you, you are a very sick woman. I don’t think you have much time left. Is there anyone you would like to see?’ The doctor heard the patient feebly answer, ‘Yes, another doctor!’”

But our Creator wants us to be happy, to see the positive, not the negative. He reminds us that we are the companions of His throne and gives us the glad tidings of returning to Him in mystic paradise:

**O COMPANION OF MY THRONE!**

Hear no evil, and see no evil, abase not thyself, neither sigh and weep...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.<sup>136</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

Bahá'ís are among the most positive and optimistic people in the world. Two things make us optimistic: what we think of ourselves now, and what we think of our future. What we think of ourselves now has to do with our self-esteem. We often underestimate the role of self-image or self-esteem in determining the quality of our lives. Yet most psychologists believe that it is the very basis of our emotional health, our sense of self-fulfillment, and our happiness. Its powers are enormous, its domain limitless.

Our self-image is the permanent house in which we live. What is the quality of life in a filthy, unstable, and unpleasant house? What is the quality of life in a beautiful, fragrant, spacious mansion? That is the difference between a poor and a positive self-image.

What do we do with something we consider to be worthless? We throw it away. What do we do with something we consider to be precious? We feel proud of cherishing and protecting it. The same is true with our sense of self-worth. It determines if life is worth living.

We always ascend or descend to the level of our self-image. Put a coin at the top of a pool of water and it instantly sinks to the bottom. Put a piece of cork at the bottom of a pool and it instantly rises. That is how human beings function. Every individual settles at the level of his or her self-image. ***Whatever we think, so we will become.***

Bahá'u'lláh draws a picture of human beings so splendid, so marvelous we cannot even imagine it. We know our bodies are made of dust and clay. What about our souls? They are made, Bahá'u'lláh declares, of ***the Essence of God's Light***. Consider another example. Think of God as a perfect rose. He took the essence of that rose and turned it into human beings. We are the attar of His Rose. There was nothing great and noble in Himself that the Creator did not share with His dearest creatures:

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.<sup>137</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh

Bahá'u'lláh draws a splendid image, not only of our beginning, but also of our glorious ending. He gives us a goal—an unspeakably glorious future. The creature that God made out of His essence, He takes back to Himself. He does not allow this most precious being in all the universe to be wasted.

Verily we are from God, and to Him shall we return.<sup>138</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

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.<sup>139</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

Now, how can anyone recognize such a glorious beginning and ending and still feel worthless, unwanted, unworthy, negative, pessimistic, or cynical? That is as impossible as it is for a cork to sink to the bottom of a pool. If anyone truly believes in God and His Word, then he discards his faulty and distorted image of himself and adopts God's image. He changes from brass into gold, from weed into flower, and from coal into diamond. ***Human beings are made of thoughts. When thoughts change, everything changes. When you truly believe in God's verdict, you replace your judgment of yourself with God's judgment.*** Your old self vanishes and a new one emerges. The helpless caterpillar of your ego turns into a beautiful butterfly. The purpose of religion is to recreate human beings. If it fails, it is not religion, but a mere association, a club. When you recognize Bahá'u'lláh, when you acknowledge the Glory of God in Him, you become a new creation with a new attitude about who you are and where you are going.

### ***Why Do Some Wonderful People Fail to Recognize and Acknowledge the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh?***

This question puzzled me for decades, until I discovered the law of “the weakest ***critical*** link.” According to this law, a system, no matter how perfect, is controlled disproportionately by its weakest critical link. Perhaps the best example for this is the destiny of the spacecraft *Challenger*, which was as perfect as any machine could have been. Billions of dollars and countless hours were devoted to its creation and perfection by the most skilled scientists and craftsmen. Yet because of a small single flaw, it disintegrated in an instant before the astonished eyes of the world. Our entire civilization can come to a sudden end by one miscalculation, by a single broken link in the chain of military communication. This is the awesome power of the weakest critical link. The same holds true in the animal kingdom. The mightiest animal can die from a tiny injury or a microscopic virus.

Examples of this law in human life are abundant. Suppose a man has perfect health except for diseased kidneys. His kidneys will control his life out of proportion and most likely they will lead him to the grave sooner than expected. He will not die from total disintegration, but from the weakest link in his physical health.

The same is true with social, emotional, and spiritual health. Suppose a woman is well-educated, kind, gentle, charitable, and honest, but she has one problem: she loves alcohol and drinks to excess. This weakness can ruin her life, perhaps for all eternity. It may lead to the loss of her job; to poverty, chronic diseases and early death; to an unhappy marriage and divorce; to delinquent or disturbed children; to permanent injury and the deaths of innocent people; to guilt, anger, depression, and suicide. Similar consequences can also afflict an otherwise wonderful man who is unchaste and contracts an untreatable disease. The happiest, most wonderful marriage can end with one incidence of infidelity. A youth may be the best in every sense except for his dislike for spiritual knowledge.

That seemingly insignificant weakness may lead to grave consequences both in this world and in the next.

I know a middle-aged man, highly educated, intelligent, and humanistic. His critical weakness is that he always chooses the wrong spouse, three so far with no end in sight! His life has been controlled by this weakness. I know a woman who has ruined her own and her family's happiness by being narrow-minded and obstinate. These two traits have imprisoned her for life in her closed comfort zone. The weakest critical link is one of the most significant laws in the universe, yet it is one of the least recognized and most widely ignored.

Six-year-old Scott would not eat his spinach. His mother kissed him, coerced him, and threatened him. Nothing seemed to work. In desperation, she said, "If you don't eat your spinach, the angels of wrath will become angry with you. You'd better not let that happen." Scott still refused. Finally, his mother sent him to bed. But as soon as he lay down, a severe thunderstorm struck. In fear, Scott ran to his mother and said, "Mommy, why do the angels of wrath have to make so much fuss over a little spinach?"

The spinach a little boy does not eat may indeed move the angels of wrath and death. Human beings can be as strong as lions, as agile as leopards, and die instantly from lack of a critical nutrient, such as magnesium. The best-known example of this was a famous jogger who could run for many miles and had written a bestseller on the subject. Yet, to the surprise of his millions of admirers, he suddenly dropped dead, seemingly healthy, at the prime of his life.

Compare this strong jogger with a strong believer who suffers from only one critical weakness: fear. Let me cite a real example. Recently I met a young Christian about 30 years old. We traveled together to attend a seminar on racism. We enjoyed talking about many issues of common interest. I could not find a person more congenial and caring, a person more accepting of all people, more dedicated to his beliefs, more inclined to see beauty in diversity. As we traveled, we also talked about the Bahá'í Faith. His comments were all courteous. At the end of the trip, I offered him a copy of *I Shall Come Again*, which he promised to read.

Several months passed. One day, I happened to see him in a store. He was standing a few feet away from me, examining some merchandise. I kept looking toward him to see if I could catch his eyes. To my surprise, I noticed that he was trying to pretend that he had not seen me. I kept watching him, and he kept playing the role. Finally, I lost patience, walked straight toward him, and said, "Hi!" as loudly and warmly as I could. As you see, I gave him no chance to escape. I knew instantly, just by looking at his face, that he did not want to talk about the book. I respected his strong desire to protect his soul against intruders. It was unfair and unseemly to drag him out of his comfort zone.

Why did he act the way he did? He was a wonderful person; he was as strong as the famous and fallen jogger. Yet he lacked one essential, a life-giving nutrient: the courage to step out of his safety zone and look beyond. He was gripped by the fear of losing his spiritual possessions, the fear of being tempted, the fear of becoming one of the "unsaved" about whom he had heard words of pity a hundred times and more from his parents and pastors. He feared being infected by one of the lost souls he knew were doomed to destruction by painful and everlasting fire. He was sure I was one of them.

Why take chances? Why come close to a thief who may take away your most prized possession: your faith and fellowship with God. Avoidance seemed the surest and safest strategy.\*

In the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14–30) Jesus talked about two kinds of Christians: the adventurous and the fearful. He used the parable to instill courage in His faithful followers. He gave His best rewards to His adventurous servants, and His worst punishment to the one gripped with fear. The Master was very angry at His fearful servant. Not only did He *not* give him a new gift, He took away the very gift He had given him earlier. That gift was, of course, Christ Himself. The fearful believer, by his fear alone, fell into the very trap he feared most: losing His Master and Savior.

The danger of the weakest critical link comes from this: The individual is totally unaware of it. It is like breathing carbon monoxide and thinking it is fresh air.

Consider a rich man who feels no need for spiritual riches. He is surrounded by luxuries most people only dream of having; he can buy anything, and go any place. Many people envy him and wish to be in his place; he sees himself at the top of the world and feels proud and self-satisfied. He may even attend a house of worship and glorify God with his lips, without knowing how remote he is from God. He may have the highest esteem for himself. But how does God see him? Here is how:

You say, “I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.” But *you do not realize* that you are *wretched, pitiful, poor...* Christ (Rev. 3:17)

What a difference between the divine and human perception. A person who lives in “hell” may be the last one to know:

On that Day [when Bahá’u’lláh appears] thou [a self-deceiver] wouldst regard thyself as the inmate of Paradise and as a true believer in Him, whereas in reality thou wouldst suffer thyself to be wrapt in veils and thy habitation would be the nethermost fire, *though thou thyself wouldst not be cognizant thereof.*<sup>140</sup> The Báb

One of the most astonishing aspects of human nature is this: Everyone finds a “good” reason for what he or she does, even if it is committing murder! The Báb asked the king who imprisoned Him this question:

Why dost thou burden thy soul with that which is far more abject than the deeds of Pharaoh, and still callest thyself one of the faithful?<sup>141</sup>

The art of self-deception is the favorite hobby of all human beings to one degree or another. Some people play their favorite game all the time, others only on occasions.

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\* About two years after this story was written, this young Christian did read *I Shall Come Again* along with several other books and decided to join the Bahá’í Faith. This was a big surprise to everyone. When asked why he made such a critical decision, he quoted a biblical verse. He said that the following admonition from Jesus, more than any other, moved him to declare his faith in Bahá’u’lláh:

Be like men who wait for their Master’s return from a wedding-party, ready to let him in the moment he arrives and knocks. Luke 12:36

His wife, who was also a devout Christian, followed the same steps. She moved from total skepticism to absolute certainty and faith in Bahá’u’lláh.

Deceive not your own selves that you are being virtuous for the sake of God when you are not.<sup>142</sup>

The Báb

I know where you live—where Satan has his home. Yet you remain true to my name...***He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.***

Christ (Rev. 2:13,17)

Can you find the followers of any church, past or present, who would say, “That verse is about us!”? Certainly Christ did not speak in vain. The verse must relate to some church. Which church? ***Is there anyone who can hear what the Spirit says to the churches?*** No, the church is sound asleep. “As the pastor was leaving church one day, he saw a camper parked by the curb. Thinking the occupants must be lost, he stopped to offer directions. While talking to the family in the camper, he mentioned what a beautiful vehicle it was. The father replied, ‘Yes, we really like it. And would you believe it sleeps eight people! By the way, pastor, how many people can your church hold?’ With a rueful grin, the pastor said, ‘Oh, it sleeps about eighty.’”

Our lack of desire or inability to see our critical weaknesses is our first and foremost enemy. Why is this enemy so dangerous? It remains fully invisible to its victim. It always enters the heart in the dark and with a veil. But as soon as the veil is removed and the light of knowledge is allowed to shine, the enemy departs as swiftly and surely as darkness. The moment the dreamer wakes up, the dreams disappear.

Christ’s purpose in emphasizing that He would come “like a thief” and that everyone should “watch” for Him was to shake us out of the cozy and comforting zone of dreaming, and into the vast valleys of search and adventure.

What a surprise we will all have when we pass away from this world of illusion into the realm of reality: our heavenly home. So often the poor and lowly wish to be in the place of the rich and powerful, without realizing that some day they will be envied by the very people they envied! These words of Christ are quite instructive:

But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets.

Luke 6:24–26

A man may think all his life that his home will be the very heart of heaven, and suddenly find himself in “the nethermost fire” of remoteness from God.

The Báb states that to those who deny the truth, “it will never occur that they might merit the displeasure of God,”<sup>143</sup> and that among those “whose pious deeds will be exemplary unto everyone, there will be many who will become the personification of the nethermost fire itself, when they fail to embrace His Cause; while among the lowly servants whom no one would imagine to be of any merit, how great the number who will be honored with true faith...”<sup>144</sup>

Of the many thousands of residents of a city that considered itself a great center for religious scholars, a city renowned for its seminaries, an ordinary farmer, a sifter of wheat, became a disciple of the Báb. He, too, like St. Peter, a fisherman, rose from the ashes of the educated but spiritually dead segment of society. Success by human

standards often deludes us. Among the veils of illusion is academic success. Both Jesus and the Báb predicted that by God's standards:

...the abased shall be exalted and the exalted shall be abased.<sup>145</sup> The Báb

But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.

Christ (Matt. 19:30)

What kind of believer was St. Paul, the great Apostle of Jesus, before he became a Christian? By his own standards, he was a firm believer in the Hebrew Scriptures, a devoted defender of truth. He described himself as "a Hebrew of the Hebrews" (Phil. 3:5). He was the most devoted and faithful Jew his society could produce, yet he suffered from critical flaws. He was so self-righteous and sure of his biased beliefs that he closed his heart to Christ:

For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

Galatians 1:13–14

Did Paul's knowledge of his faith and his dedication to Hebrew Scriptures help him recognize his Lord? Just the opposite. His knowledge served as a veil between him and Jesus. Only the grace of God, manifested as an incredible and rare vision, saved him from denial.

See if the following descriptions of Paul as a Jew do not also describe some of the most dedicated Christians who go to the best seminaries to serve Jesus Christ and yet, without any investigation, ignore or oppose Bahá'u'lláh:

Paul's parents wanted their son to be well-grounded in the best traditions of Jewish orthodoxy. Paul proved an apt pupil. He outstripped many of his fellow students in his enthusiasm for ancestral traditions and in his zeal for the Jewish law. This zeal found a ready outlet in his assault on the infant church of Jerusalem. The church presented a threat to all that Paul held most dear.<sup>146</sup>

He was never ashamed to acknowledge himself a Jew (Acts 21:39; 22:3), was justly proud of his Jewish background (II Cor. 11:22), and retained a deep and abiding love for his brethren according to the flesh (Rom. 9:1–2)...

Born of purest Jewish blood (Phil. 3:5), the son of a Pharisee (Acts 23:6), Saul [Paul] was cradled in Orthodox Judaism. At the proper age, perhaps 13, he was sent to Jerusalem and completed his studies under the famous Gamaliel (Acts 22:3; 26:4–5), he absorbed not only the teaching of the Old Testament but also the rabbinical learning of the scholars.

At his first appearance in Acts as "a young man" (7:58), probably at least 30 years old, he was already an acknowledged leader in Judaism...He was convinced that Christians were heretics...

The persecution was doubtless repugnant to his finer inner sensitivities, but Saul did not doubt the rightness of his course. The spread of Christians to foreign cities only increased his fury against them, causing him to extend the scope of his activities.<sup>147</sup>

The point is this: We should not use human standards to appear good in our own eyes. None of the following positions, services, or honors guarantees salvation:

- I have been serving the Lord all my life. There is nothing I can do for the Lord that I am not doing. I am in a good spiritual standing.
- I am one of the most faithful and active members of my church. I have been on the board of directors for 20 years. I am confident of an eternal home in heaven.
- I have been a pastor, a priest, or a rabbi for 40 years. All my life I have invited the people to repent and seek the Lord. I can't imagine God would find a more faithful servant.
- I am a famous evangelist. Millions of people listen to me every week. How could God reject me?

Without the grace of God, no act, no position, no service ensures salvation. According to the testimony of all sacred Scriptures, the denial of the Messenger of the Age prevents the grace of God from reaching the deniers.

How did the people who crucified Christ think of themselves? They considered themselves the true servants of the Lord devoted to His service. They wanted to prevent an impostor from taking root. No one could have convinced them otherwise.

What does the law of the weakest critical link teach us? The first lesson is this: We should do everything within our power to discover, acknowledge, and overcome our own weakest critical links. Our happiness, indeed our eternal destiny, will depend on those links.

As a rule, we overrate our strengths and underrate our weaknesses. In a General Electric survey, 76 percent of employees rated themselves above average, and only 2 percent rated themselves below average. In another study by CNN, 75 percent of drivers rated themselves as better than the average! In a recent study of people who were overweight, actual food intake was 50% to 330% greater than that which was reported; actual exercise time was 150% less than that which was reported.

Perhaps the hardest flaw to detect in one's soul is lack of humility. A man was talking about all the blessings God has bestowed on him. He told his audience that any one of them would wish to be in his place. Then he asked, "What more could God give me?" A lady in the audience shouted, "What about a dose of humility?"

Again, think of the millions of wonderful people who work hard, pay their taxes, and love their families. They are wonderful except for a weak or broken link in their spiritual lives. That link may be apathy, distrust, greed, conformity, pride, self-satisfaction, or prejudice against the spiritual and the invisible. Each of these weaknesses by itself is capable of preventing you from discovering the truth, a truth that can transform your life here and ultimately lead you to everlasting reunion with your Creator. This is astonishing, and yet that is how God designed the universe. How can a biased or closed mind inflict so much damage? How can a little apathy or worldliness endanger a person's eternal destiny? It seems hard to believe, yet it is true. The little eyelids, Bahá'u'lláh declares, can conceal the sun.

Aside from teaching us to act like detectives, always in search of our weaknesses, the law of the weakest critical link imparts this lesson: The master key to contentment and happiness is humility. What does humility accomplish? It sends this message:

I may be a wonderful person, but I am not perfect. That little imperfection can make me slip and fall. Therefore to protect myself, I will turn to God and, like a little child, ask for His help. Because I am used to my weaknesses, I may be totally unaware of them. As Jesus said, it is hard to see a mote, or a particle of dust, in one's own eyes. I will do everything within my power to put to use my gift of freedom. I will not allow my life to be controlled by tradition, conformity, or popularity. The path of least resistance, which attracts most people, is not for me. I will not only pray for guidance, I also will apply reason to religion. I will dedicate my life to the pursuit of truth. I will pray, think, and meditate constantly. Certainly the rewards—entrance into God's Kingdom and eternal reunion with Him—justify such efforts.

Angels are believed to be as perfect as beings can be. Yet it is known that a great angel fell simply from pride. We can all learn a lesson in humility from a wise man who was found crying. When asked why, he said, "For 50 years I firmly believed in an idea. I just found I was wrong. I am afraid everything else I know is like that idea."

Humility, like darkness, reveals the heavenly lights. Henry Thoreau

If a little knowledge is dangerous, where is the man who has so much as to be out of danger? Thomas Huxley

Evidently, God does not want those who lack humility to enter His Kingdom. Humility seems to be the key question on His "entrance examination":

I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, ***whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*** Christ (Matt. 18:3)

He [God] shall save the humble person. Job 22:24

He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way. Psalms 25:9

...seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the Lord's anger. Zephaniah 2:3

Humility exalteth man to the heaven of glory and power, whilst pride abaseth him to the depths of wretchedness and degradation.<sup>148</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

Many prophecies identify our day as the day of the Lord's anger. The reason for God's anger is people's apathy toward His glorious Message, the Bahá'í Faith, and His supreme Redeemers of the Age, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. This prophecy points both to favor and revenge: favor for those who accept the divine Call, revenge for those who reject it:

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon me to teach good news [of the Kingdom] to the poor...to proclaim the year of the Lord's ***favor*** and the day of ***revenge*** of our God... Isaiah 61:1-2

What does “revenge” mean? It means God will treat us the way we treat Him. Christ, the Báb, and Bahá’u’lláh have all testified that those who deny the Redeemer of the Age will be denied in the next Kingdom. They will be denied the most marvelous blessings ordained for true believers, for those who remain faithful to their covenant with God. Recall the parable of the banquet of the kingdom (Matt. 25:1–13). Those who slept and missed the bridegroom kept knocking and pleading to be allowed to enter, but the door was not opened unto them. ***The choice of entering the banquet of the Kingdom must be made here.*** You have that choice now and no one can prevent you from entering:

I have opened a door to you that no one can shut.

Christ (Rev. 3:8)

If you had not heard about the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh, you would not be responsible. But once you hear, you become fully accountable. You are no longer among “the innocently ignorant” of this great Revelation. You face this most fundamental principle of justice:

For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required...

Christ (Luke 12:48)

The Creator of the universe, the All-Powerful, honors our choices. He gives us absolute freedom to accept or deny Him and His Messengers. He then tells us in the kindest language the consequence of each choice.

Was it by chance that you heard about Bahá’u’lláh? Is an unseen hand guiding you? Should you pray for that hand to be more visible, or should you ignore it? This is where your choice begins. God is absolute patience, love, and understanding. If you ignore His guiding hand now, it will appear to you again and again, always beckoning you and inviting you to pay attention, to “watch” and investigate. But there is a limit to the time you have here. The sooner you pay attention, the greater your opportunities for service and the rewards and the blessings you will receive.

Jesus predicted that at His return, the last would be first, the first would be last. How can this happen? The same prophecy is found in Islamic scriptures. What can distinguish the last from the first? Humility. Those who see themselves as the first feel self-righteous and self-satisfied. They may even submit to pride. Their weakest critical link controls their eternal spiritual destiny. The opposite is true of those who see themselves as the last. They do not look down on new ideas. They are far more likely to search for truth, and they have a much better chance of finding it.

The Lord gives new heart to the humble...

Psalms 147:6

He crowns his humble folk with victory...

Psalms 149:4

The law of the weakest critical link also works in an opposite way. As a weakness can destroy us, so can a strength preserve us. As a little vice can lead to death, so can a little virtue lead to life. The following brief stories prove the power of the positive:

That night the father [an executive] came home to his 14-year-old son and sat him down. He said, “The most incredible thing happened to me today. I was in my office and one of the junior executives came in and told me he admired me and gave me a blue ribbon for being a creative genius. Imagine. He thinks I’m a creative genius. Then he put this blue ribbon that says ‘Who I Am Makes a Difference’ on my jacket above my heart. He gave me an extra ribbon and asked me to find somebody else to honor.



As I was driving home tonight, I started thinking about whom I would honor with this ribbon, and I thought about you. I want to honor you.

“My days are really hectic and when I come home I don’t pay a lot of attention to you. Sometimes I scream at you for not getting good enough grades in school and for your bedroom being a mess, but somehow tonight, I just wanted to sit here and, well, just let you know that you do make a difference to me. Besides your mother, you are the most important person in my life. You’re a great kid and I love you.”

The startled boy started to sob and sob, and he couldn’t stop crying. His whole body shook. He looked up at his father and said through his tears, “I was thinking of committing suicide tomorrow, Dad, because I didn’t think you loved me. Now I don’t need to.”<sup>149</sup>

Many have read the beautiful story of *The Little Prince*. They may not know the story of its French author, Antoine de Saint-Exupery. During the Spanish civil war he was captured by the enemy and put in prison:

I was sure that I was to be killed. I became terribly nervous and distraught. I fumbled in my pockets to see if there were any cigarettes which had escaped their search. I found one and because of my shaking hands, I could barely get it to my lips. But I had no matches, they had taken those.

I looked through the bars at my jailer. He did not make eye contact with me. After all, one does not make eye contact with a thing, a corpse. I called out to him “Have you got a light, *por favor?*” He looked at me, shrugged and came over to light my cigarette.

As he came close and lit the match, his eyes inadvertently locked with mine. At that moment, I smiled. I don’t know why I did that. Perhaps it was nervousness, perhaps it was because, when you get very close, one to another, it is very hard not to smile. In any case, I smiled. In that instant, it was as though a spark jumped across the gap between our two hearts, our two human souls. I know he didn’t want to, but my smile leaped through the bars and generated a smile on his lips, too. He lit my cigarette but stayed near, looking at me directly in the eyes and continuing to smile.

I kept smiling at him, now aware of him as a person and not just a jailer. And his looking at me seemed to have a new dimension, too. “Do you have kids?” he asked. “Yes, here, here.” I took out my wallet and nervously fumbled for the pictures of my family. He, too, took out the pictures of his *niños* and began to talk about his plans and hopes for them. My eyes filled with tears. I said that I feared that I’d never see my family again, never have the chance to see them grow up. Tears came to his eyes, too.

Suddenly, without another word, he unlocked my cell and silently led me out. Out of the jail, quietly and by back routes, out of the town. There, at the edge of town, he released me. And without another word, he turned back toward the town.

My life was saved by a smile.<sup>150</sup>

The problem most of us have is this: As a rule, we underestimate the potent consequences of our little acts of kindness, and the equally potent consequences of our little acts of

unkindness. The heart is so sensitive that even one “idle word” can contaminate it. This is why Bahá’u’lláh offers this counsel to every seeker and lover of truth:

It behoveth every man to blot out *the trace of every idle word* from the tablet of his heart, and to gaze, with an open and unbiased mind, on the signs of His Revelation, the proofs of His Mission, and the tokens of His glory.<sup>151</sup> Bahá’u’lláh

Christ offers this warning:

But I say to you that for every *idle word* men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. Matthew 12:36

Our strengths often give us so much confidence and shine so brightly that they conceal our little weaknesses. We may also become so absorbed with our most urgent duties, needs and weaknesses (working, vacationing, and worrying) that we forget or lose sight of the awesome power of little acts of kindness.

As a rule, we are far more sensitive to visible consequences than to invisible ones. We mourn the loss of life and wealth. Yet it is the invisible consequences that really matter—they endure for all eternity. We fear death and do everything within our power to postpone it, but we show little fear of spiritual death. If the consequences of spiritual death were made visible, we would be seized with an unbearable fear of its consequences. That may be the reason God conceals it from us.

Some people drive speedily along busy highways in a state of drunkenness. Many more rush through their lives in that same state. Consider these prophecies:

All the nations shall *drink* continually... Obadiah 1:16

Keep a watch on yourselves; do not let your minds be dulled by dissipation and *drunkenness* and worldly cares...Be on the alert, praying at all times. Christ (Luke 21:34–36)

Wake up, you *drunkards*, and lament your fate...Alas! the day is near, the day of the Lord. Joel 1:5, 15

Bahá’u’lláh confirms:

Thou beholdest, O my God, how bewildered in their *drunkenness* are Thy servants who have turned back from Thy beauty and caviled at what hath been sent down from the right hand of the throne of Thy majesty.<sup>152</sup> Bahá’u’lláh

The main difference between drunken driving and drunken living is that those drunk with wine sometimes see the horrible consequences of their acts, but those drunk with worldly cares see little if any consequences until they are awakened by death.

On our highways we have special radars that detect speeders, and police officers who arrest violators. On life’s highways, there are no detectors or officers. Hence it is easy to live in a state of spiritual drunkenness even for a century without being detected. Our inner world is simply invisible to others; often it is invisible even to us, so sophisticated and strong are our strategies of concealment.

Possessions, power, comfort, security, recognition, and popularity—all these can lead to pride, self-satisfaction, spiritual unawareness, and drunkenness. Have you heard the story of a rooster that was the best at everything? “He was better at fighting, flying, pecking,

and jumping than any of the other roosters. Unfortunately, he still lost fights to much weaker birds. The trouble was that, just as he was winning a fight, he would stop to crow.”

What, then, is the solution? We must strive to remain fully conscious and sober, to be keenly aware of both the negative and positive consequences of even our smallest deeds, especially our weakest links. Perhaps the most common and most critical weak link in all human beings is unawareness or drunkenness; ***it is not knowing and not knowing of not knowing!***

The way to avoid all dangers to our spiritual health and well-being is to make perfection the goal of our lives:

Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. Christ (Matt. 5:48)

In all these journeys [toward God or Perfection] the traveler must stray not the breadth of a hair from the “Law” ...<sup>153</sup> Bahá’u’lláh

‘Abdu’l-Bahá once defined a Bahá’í as “one endowed with all the perfections.”<sup>154</sup> Thus, only by being humble and keenly aware of all our weaknesses can we protect ourselves from the sometimes devastating consequences of our weakest links.

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.<sup>155</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

## ***What Was the Letter Sent to Religious Leaders?***

To inform the religious leaders in our community about Bahá’u’lláh, we sent a letter to over 50 pastors and offered each of them a free copy of ***I Shall Come Again***, a book that proves all biblical prophecies about the return of Christ have been fulfilled by the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh. Here is a copy of the letter:

***Dear Reverend:***

In an interview about the return of Christ, noted Christian scholar and leader Dr. James Kennedy made this statement:

The great Princeton theologian of the last century, Dr. Charles Hodge, said...that though the Old Testament is filled with some 333 prophecies concerning the first coming of Christ; in spite of that...they crucified Christ because of a misunderstanding about what the Messiah was really coming to do. And we should because of that be somewhat humbled and modest in our attempts to interpret prophecies concerning the second coming of Christ. It is quite possible that all of us [Christian leaders] are wrong as well.

Has history repeated itself in our time? Is it possible that the masses of people may once again miss their Redeemer “because of a misunderstanding about what He was really coming to do?” Are Christian leaders of our time willing to acknowledge Dr. Kennedy’s message of humility in interpreting biblical prophecy?

He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way. Psalms 25:9

We realize how incredible the news of “the Return” may seem, and how many impostors have made false claims. Nevertheless, we hope you will consider examining *I Shall Come Again*, by Dr. Hugh Motlagh. This is the first of a six-volume series about the prophecies of the second Advent and their fulfillment in Bahá’u’lláh. The six-volume series took over 30 years to complete.

The author’s Jewish ancestors had met many Christians who would say, “The Messiah has come! His name is Jesus!” And now he is saying to the descendants of those same Christians, “The Messiah has come again! His name is Bahá’u’lláh (the Glory of God)!” Many of the author’s close relatives live in Israel; they are still praying for the coming of the Messiah.

The following statement titled “Headlines Tomorrow,” captures perhaps the most important lesson of history:

When a man appears calling himself the Messiah, he does not look as people expect him to look, there is no light around his head—the light is added by painters long after he has died. He eats, walks, talks. He comes from a community where he has been known for years. And when he suddenly announces himself as one with a new message from God, his community laughs at him...

The laughter grows to anger. Why is he so obstinate in his claim? A few listen to him, and bear the hatred of the rest. The laughter stops. The hatred rises. The Messenger is shut away—chained—perhaps killed. But his voice goes on. People far away listen to it. Men and women in countries across the world build temples in his name. This drama is played all over again every once in a while in human history. It has been played again, almost in our time. It did not make the headlines.

Dear friend, *I Shall Come Again* offers convincing proofs that the Lord has come again and “has brought to light what was hidden in darkness” (I Cor. 4:5). We are asked to knock, to seek, to be awake and watchful:

That is the day when I come like a thief! Happy the man who stays *awake*... (Rev. 16:15). It will be good for those servants whose master finds them *watching* when he comes (Luke 12:37). Be always on the *watch*...that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man (Luke 21:36). Don’t let him find you sleeping (Mark 13:36). Unto them that *look for him* shall he appear the second time. (Hebrews 9:28).

*I Shall Come Again* shows clearly that Jesus used the word “*Watch!*” in the same sense that we use the word *investigate!* Can a person be watchful but fail to investigate the news of the Return of his Master? Can a person be awake but remain uninformed about the advent of Bahá’u’lláh, the Glory of God, and proofs of His Mission? Can a

person be watchful but ignore the claim of the only Figure in human history who declares to be King of Kings and Lord of Lords?

We are asked to be open-minded and not to assume that personal or traditional interpretations are always accurate:

*...no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation* (II Peter 1:20).  
*Therefore, judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes.*  
*He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness* (I Corinthians 4:5).

Much wisdom comes from history. “Days should speak, and multitudes of years should teach wisdom” (Job 32:7). Bahá’u’lláh, the Founder of the Bahá’í Faith, invites us to think and ponder why Jesus was rejected. He asks us to learn from the lessons of history. He states that the religious leaders, who had a thorough knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures, prayed day and night for the advent of their Redeemer. Yet when He came, they failed to recognize Him. Why?

Bahá’u’lláh, who spent most of His life a prisoner and exile in the Holy Land, wrote many volumes concerning the social and spiritual needs of humankind. He proclaimed His message in the most definitive terms. Ponder the power and authority with which He speaks:

He, verily, is come with His Kingdom, and all the atoms cry aloud: “Lo! The Lord is come in His great majesty!” Bahá’u’lláh

Lo! He is come in the sheltering shadow of Testimony, invested with conclusive proof...Blessed is the man who turneth towards Him... Bahá’u’lláh

Followers of the Gospel...behold the gates of heaven are flung open. He that had ascended unto it is now come. Give ear to His voice calling aloud over land and sea, announcing to all mankind the advent of this Revelation... Bahá’u’lláh

Behold how He hath come down from the heaven of His grace, girded with power and invested with sovereignty. Is there any doubt concerning His signs? Bahá’u’lláh

By God! This is He Who hath at one time appeared in the name of the Spirit [Christ]... Bahá’u’lláh

The time foreordained unto the peoples and kindreds of the earth is now come. The promises of God, as recorded in the holy Scriptures, have all been fulfilled. Bahá’u’lláh

In His first advent Jesus asked His disciples to proclaim the news of His coming. We are again asked to proclaim that same Message. We are honored to share with you this incredible News and invite you to investigate the overwhelming evidence that supports it. If you would like to receive a complimentary copy of *I Shall Come Again*, please call, or write to: ....

With warmest greetings,

What was the response to this letter? Out of 50 pastors who received it, two called. One of them only wanted to talk. He declined the offer of a free book. The other accepted the book. Later I called him to see if he had any questions. He did not respond to my

recorded message on his answering machine. Out of curiosity I called two other pastors. Both of them declined to receive the free copy of the book. The last one said firmly, “I do not want a copy of such a book in my library.” After this, I felt depressed, discouraged, and stopped calling.



Here is a record of my conversation with the pastor who called, but did not wish to receive the book:

**Pastor:** Did you send the letter about Bahá'í and Bahá'u'lláh?

**Me:** Yes, that is correct.

**Pastor:** I am calling to tell you that you are wrong, that you have been misled, that Jesus is the only name that can save anyone.

**Me:** We are inviting you to investigate. Knowledge harms no one.

**Pastor:** I do not need to investigate. I know the truth.

**Me:** It is good to be open-minded.

**Pastor:** You mean I should accept what Shirley MacLain says?

**Me:** You should first read what she says and then, if it is wrong, reject it. Jesus used the word “Watch!” What did He mean by that word? He meant “Investigate!”

**Pastor:** How many Bahá'ís are there?

**Me:** About 6 million around the world. (He was surprised.)

**Pastor:** I am a Baptist. There are 30 million of us. There are also Presbyterians...and Catholics who number hundreds of millions.

**Me:** How many Christians were there in the first century?

**Pastor:** By the year 50 A.D., there were 1 million.

**Me:** At the beginning there were only a handful of Christians, but numbers alone do not prove anything.

**Pastor:** Do you believe in Jesus Christ?

**Me:** Of course I do. I love Jesus. My parents were of the Jewish Faith; they did not believe in Christ. When they became Bahá'ís, they accepted Him.

**Pastor:** Do you know Greek?

**Me:** No.

**Pastor:** I know Greek. Christ was the Word, the *Logos*.

**Me:** We accept that.

**Pastor:** Is Bahá'u'lláh alive?

**Me:** No, He died in 1892.

**Pastor:** Then He cannot be the One He claims to be. Christ is alive.

**Me:** Bahá'u'lláh is also alive. His Spirit is alive. Do you remember the passage in Deuteronomy that says the body goes to dust and the spirit goes to God? (He was somewhat puzzled. He did not seem to remember the passage, but did not deny my statement.) Let me ask you a question: What would be your religion if you were raised in a Muslim country and a Muslim family?

**Pastor:** I do not know. Many Muslims are accepting Jesus Christ.

**Me:** But what were the chances? Would you give yourself more than a 1 percent chance of being a Christian? (He had never thought about this question; it made him somewhat uncomfortable. I continued.) The only way you can find the truth is by being humble. You must realize that you could be wrong in interpreting the prophecies just as the literal-minded Pharisees were at the time of Jesus. Please remember the quotation by Dr. James Kennedy at the beginning of our letter.

**Pastor:** Where did you find that quotation?

**Me:** In a taped interview. (He was quite surprised, and even disturbed, that Dr. Kennedy, who is highly respected by religious leaders, would make such a statement. He believed that the traditional interpretations are definitely accurate. Dr. Kennedy's statement totally undermines that conviction.)

**Pastor:** Although Dr. Kennedy made that statement, I know he still believes the way I do. I have a meeting to attend. You will hear from other Pastors. We talked about your letter.

**Me:** Thank you for calling.

I waited for those pastors to call, but no calls came.

As I mentioned, after talking to the first pastor, I felt depressed. This time I was jubilant. During the conversation, several times I laughed. The reason was this: I had become used to rejection, and even expected it. It seemed an adventure and a challenge to exchange ideas with someone who held a position so far away from mine.

To be fair, we should acknowledge that some pastors and religious scholars have investigated and accepted Bahá'u'lláh. The same book (*I Shall Come Again*) the religious leaders in our community refused to receive, transformed the life of an Episcopalian priest. Upon reading it, he acknowledged Bahá'u'lláh.

Among the best-known Christian leaders who have recognized Bahá'u'lláh is George Townshend, who has written several books for Christians. Here is a quotation from his last book, *Christ and Bahá'u'lláh*, published shortly before his death:

The Bahá'í Faith today presents the Christian Churches with the most tremendous challenge ever offered them in their long history: a challenge, and an opportunity. It is the plain duty of every earnest Christian in this illumined Age to investigate for himself with an open and fearless mind the purpose and the teachings of this Faith...O, Christian believers! for your own sakes and for the sake of the Churches, for the sake of all mankind, for the sake of the Kingdom, cast away your conflicting dogmas and interpretations, which have cause such disunity and led us to the verge of wholesale self-destruction. Recognize the age of Truth. Recognize Christ in the glory and power of the Father and, heart and soul, throw yourselves into His Cause.<sup>156</sup>

After George Townshend recognized Bahá'u'lláh, he sent a letter to about 10,000 religious leaders in England and Ireland, and another 10,000 to religious leaders in the United States; to his utter amazement, he received only a handful of responses. Similarly, when Bahá'u'lláh sent letters to the Pope and religious leaders of His time, He received no response. (See *The Prisoner and the King* by William Sears, *The Challenge of Bahá'u'lláh*, by Gary Matthews, or *By My Fruits You Shall Know Me*, by this author.)

Apathy and rejection on the part of both the lay people and the clergy to Bahá'u'lláh's Call are repeatedly predicted in many prophecies throughout the Bible. Those prophecies are presented in the course of seven chapters in *King of Kings* by this author.

I was there to be sought by a people who did not ask, to be found by men who did not seek Me. Isaiah 65:1

### ***Why Was the Letter Sent to Religious Leaders, and Why Is It Included Here?***

The letter was sent because of warnings such as this:

That servant who knows his Master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his Master wants will be beaten with many blows...From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked. Christ (Luke 12:47-48)

The preceding passage is seldom quoted, yet it contains the most significant provision of God's justice. The provision states that ***God punishes in proportion to one's knowledge and opportunity***. According to this provision, Bahá'is have the knowledge of the Advent and an opportunity to declare it. If they fail, they stand accountable before God. Bahá'u'lláh asks His followers to announce the news of His coming to all the peoples of the earth with the utmost kindness and wisdom, but without ever pressuring, proselytizing, or arguing with anyone.

The provision that God punishes according to one's knowledge and opportunity places a burden not only on Bahá'is but also on those who hear about Bahá'u'lláh. Who has the best opportunity to make the most difference? The religious leaders who are in charge of the heavenly "household" (Matt. 24:45). Because of this honor, they must assume full responsibility for leading and guiding the Christians who trust them and have put their everlasting destiny in their hands. Every effort should be made to inform the church leaders.

As long as we have not heard about the Advent, we stand outside the equation of accountability. But the knowledge of the Advent changes the equation. Knowledge moves us instantly into a new dimension: that of accountability before God.

Hearing about Bahá'u'lláh presents each person with an opportunity to acquire the crown of everlasting glory and honor. But it also places on him or her the most awesome responsibility. The one who has an opportunity to investigate Bahá'u'lláh, but fails to do so, has no excuse to present to God.



Sacred Scriptures repeatedly remind us that God will treat us the way we treat Him and His people. If we forgive others, He will forgive us; if we turn to God, He will turn to us; if we ignore Him, He will ignore us.

...with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Christ (Matt. 7:2)

God will verily do unto them that which they themselves are doing, and will forget them even as they have ignored His Presence in His day. Such is His decree unto those that have denied Him, and such will it be unto them that have rejected His signs.<sup>157</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh

Here Christ clearly states the consequences of denying Him:

He who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God. Luke 12:9

You may say, "God is All-Loving. He will forgive me even if I ignore His Call." God is forgiving, but He is also just. Imagine if God forgave every sinner, every murderer and thief, every selfish, cruel manipulator and deceiver. Imagine if He allowed Hitler and Stalin to enter His highest paradise and to be in the presence of His saints or the countless millions of innocent people tortured and killed by their command. What these examples demonstrate is that we can definitely *count* on God's justice, but we can only *hope* for His mercy. Perhaps out of His grace He will punish those who ignore or deny Him less than they deserve. But can they be equal to those who respond to His invitation and even sacrifice their lives to promote His message? Some people object to a punishing God. Yet, if there were no punishment, how could God's justice become manifest?

He Who is the Lord of Lords is come... On His right hand flow the living waters of *grace*, and on His left the choice Wine of *justice*...<sup>158</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

The purpose of speaking about God's justice and His punishment of those who refuse to accept His Redeemers is not to make us judgmental, but to awaken and protect us from undesirable and enduring consequences. We should leave all judgment to God, never look down on anyone, and treat every human being with absolute love and respect.

We are told that ignoring or denying God's Redeemers is the same as denying God Himself:

He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. Christ (John 5:23)

Be thou assured in thyself that verily, he who turns away from this Beauty [Bahá'u'lláh] hath also turned away from the Messengers of the past and showeth pride towards God from all eternity to all eternity.<sup>159</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

The everlasting and grave consequences of denying the divine Messengers is beyond anyone's understanding. If we could even get a glimpse of what it is like to be remote from the glory of God for countless ages and eons, we would feel so disturbed as to be unable to live. This is why God in His infinite Wisdom conceals those consequences.

Set before thine eyes God's unerring Balance and, as one standing in His Presence, weigh in that Balance thine actions every day, every moment of thy life. Bring thyself to account ere thou art summoned to a reckoning, on the Day when no man shall have

strength to stand for fear of God, the Day when the hearts of the heedless ones shall be made to tremble.<sup>160</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

Ye will most certainly be called upon to answer for His trust on the day when the Balance of Justice shall be set, the day when unto every one shall be rendered his due, when the doings of all men, be they rich or poor, shall be weighed.<sup>161</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

Blessed is the man that hath turned his face towards God, and walked steadfastly in His love, until his soul hath winged its flight unto God, the Sovereign Lord of all, the Most Powerful, the Ever-Forgiving, the All-Merciful.

The souls of the infidels, however, shall—and to this I bear witness—when breathing their last be made aware of the good things that have escaped them, and shall bemoan their plight, and shall humble themselves before God.<sup>162</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

In this world, we can wear all kinds of masks. We can even conceal the truth from ourselves. But not in the hereafter. After death, every veil, every mask will be lifted and torn apart. We will stand with our souls totally exposed before God and His assayers. “One girl asked the other, ‘Why is it that doctors wear masks when they do surgery?’ The other girl thought for a moment, then said, ‘So that if they mess up, nobody will know who did it.’” In the life to come there is no place to hide, no mask to wear.

It is absolutely essential that we pay more attention to our spiritual state and eternal destiny than to any other duty or obligation because everything ends except our spiritual life and destiny. Suppose we are facing “the day of judgment” and God asks us this question: “You spent two hours every day watching TV (730 hours each year); you spent eight hours a day to make a living or to go to school; you spent three weeks every year for your vacation. You spent all those hours and more in pursuit of your own needs, comforts, and desires, but none in pursuit of My Will. You did not take time to investigate the news of the One I sent for your sake and for the sake of bringing peace and prosperity to that weary and war-torn planet. What have you done for Me that in exchange I can do for you?” What response could anyone give Him? The time we face God or His angels is the most awesome moment in our lives. Wisdom declares that we should be prepared for that awesome moment, which will come upon every human being. These warnings from Bahá'u'lláh should awaken every seeker and lover of God:

Ye, and all ye possess, shall pass away. Ye shall, most certainly, return to God, and shall be called to account for your doings in the presence of Him Who shall gather together the entire creation...<sup>163</sup>

Say: Rejoice not in the things ye possess; tonight they are yours, tomorrow others will possess them. Thus warneth you He Who is the All-Knowing, the All-Informed. Say: Can ye claim that what ye own is lasting or secure? Nay! By Myself, the All-Merciful, ye cannot, if ye be of them who judge fairly. The days of your life flee away as a breath of wind, and all your pomp and glory shall be folded up as were the pomp and glory of those gone before you. Reflect, O people! What hath become of your bygone days, your lost centuries? Happy the days that have been consecrated to the remembrance of God, and blessed the hours which have been spent in praise of Him Who is the All-Wise. By My life! Neither the pomp of the mighty, nor the wealth of the rich, nor even the ascendancy of the ungodly will endure. All will perish, at a word

from Him. He, verily, is the All-Powerful, the All-Compelling, the Almighty. What advantage is there in the earthly things which men possess? That which shall profit them, they have utterly neglected. Erelong, they will awake from their slumber, and find themselves unable to obtain that which hath escaped them in the days of their Lord, the Almighty, the All-Praised. Did they but know it, they would renounce their all, that their names may be mentioned before His throne. They, verily, are accounted among the dead.<sup>164</sup>

The most important provision of God's justice is that His punishment will be in proportion to our knowledge, our opportunity, and our ability to make a difference. In this case, religious leaders stand out. As Christ declared, from those who are given more, more will be expected. Religious leaders have an enormous responsibility to "watch" for the news of the coming of their Lord and Master, and to investigate His message and His evidence with the utmost diligence. The Scriptures call them "watchmen." They must watch not only for themselves but for others as well. In fact, they are paid for this very purpose. They must find the facts with open minds and hearts as pure as those of little children, and then share their findings with the ones they are paid to watch for.

Unfortunately, instead of watching, inquiring, and awakening their followers, many of them lie asleep, absorbed in their sweet dreams, unmoved by invitations, unimpressed by evidences and proofs. It was mainly because of sleepy and sleeping "watchmen" that Christ came and left unappreciated except by a handful of ordinary, mostly uneducated people.

We must always speak gently with others. We have no right to condemn or look down on anyone, even on the worst of sinners. Only God has the right to warn and chastise. And when He does, it is because of His supreme love for His creatures. He wants to shake them out of their slumber and liberate them from apathy and from the suffocating threads of tradition. Above all, He wants them to enter His heavenly Kingdom. This is what He said about Israel's spiritual leaders:

Israel's watchmen are blind, they all lack knowledge...they lie around and dream, they love to sleep...They are shepherds who lack understanding; they all turn to their own way, each seeks his own gain. Isaiah 56:10-11

Should not the watchmen of our time learn from the example of those who came before them? Suppose someone comes along and tells a watchman that a thief has broken into many houses and carried away precious jewelry. Then he adds, "But I have good news for you. I have a book full of clues about the thief." Should the watchman say, "Forget it!" or should he dance with utter joy because someone has done the detective work for him?

The report of the coming of Bahá'u'lláh is by far the greatest and most joyous news in all of history. No news can ever come close to it. Why, then, are the watchmen of our time so soundly asleep, dreaming, and unresponsive to the call of their Master and Redeemer? How can a householder or a watchman remain loyal to his and other people's possessions if he fails to look for the heavenly Thief?

Be always on the watch. Christ (Luke 21:36)

I shall come upon you like a thief. Christ (Rev. 3:3)

Unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time... Hebrews 9:28

Do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good.

I Thessalonians 5:20–21

“...when you seek Me with all your heart, I will be found by you,” declares the Lord.

Jeremiah 29:13–14

This life is a hide-and-seek game, and we are all detectives. A man made a phone call. A little girl answered. “What is your name?” “I am Dawn.” “How old are you?” “Four.” “Is your Mom home?” “Yes, but she is busy.” “Is your Dad home?” “Yes, he is also busy.” “Who else is there?” “The police.” “May I speak with an adult?” “Everyone is busy.” “What are they doing?” “They are all looking for me!”

## ***What Is the Difference Between God’s Language and Human Language?***

This quotation is as true and timely today as it was at the time of Jesus:

***Why is My language not clear to you?***

Christ (John 8:43)

God’s language differs from ours just as an adult’s language differs from children’s. In both cases, the main difference is in the use of metaphors.

These things I have spoken to you in figurative language.

Christ (John 16:25)

Adults use many metaphors that children misinterpret:

- *Child to her maternal grandmother*: I can’t wait for my dad to come home and see you help him climb the wall.  
*Grandmother*: Where did you get that idea?  
*Child*: My dad said you drive him up the wall!
- *Child to her mother*: Did Job swear and curse when he was one day old?  
*Mother*: Why do you ask?  
*Child*: Because the Bible says, “Job cursed the day he was born.”
- *Sunday school teacher*: What do you think “the land flowing with milk and honey” will be like?  
*Student*: Sticky!

It is said that children are the best recorders, but the worst interpreters. They can think only in literal terms. When adults adopt a literal mind, they descend to the level of children. Literal thinking requires surface thinking; metaphoric thinking requires depth thinking:

- At dinner, two 4-year-olds received potatoes of equal size. One of them mashed his and proudly said to the other, “My potato is bigger than yours.” The other responded, “Wait a minute.” He quickly mashed his potato more thinly than the first child’s and declared, “Now tell me whose potato is bigger?”
- A 4-year-old girl saw a lonely worm crawling along. She was heard saying, “My little worm, you have no friend. With this knife, I will make you one!”

- *Pastor*: When the Lord comes there will be earthquakes, thunders and storms. The mountains shall pass away, and the stars shall fall.

*Little girl to her mother*: Will I get out of school?

- *Teacher*: Adam and Eve were told to go into the world and multiply.

*Child*: Didn't they have a calculator?

Now compare those examples with this one:

- *Christ*: I tell you the truth, if a man keeps my word, he will never see death (John 8:51).
- *Pharisees*: Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that if a man keeps your word, he will never taste death. Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are (John 8:52–53)?

Metaphors have inner meanings. If taken literally, they make little sense. Consider the following examples from the Gospel:

<i>Divine Language Involving Metaphors</i>	<i>Translated into Human Language</i>
1. adulterous generation	1. faithless generation, <i>spiritually</i> adulterous
2. being born again	2. <i>spiritual</i> transformation, <i>spiritual</i> birth
3. life, eternal life	3. <i>spiritual</i> life
4. death	4. <i>spiritual</i> death
5. eye (you are blind, I will help you see)	5. <i>spiritual</i> eye
6. the bread that comes from heaven	6. <i>spiritual</i> food
7. coming from heaven	7. coming from God, from <i>spiritual</i> heaven
8. insatiable worm	8. a disturbed conscience, a <i>spiritual</i> worm
9. fire, hell-fire	9. a burning desire to be near someone, <i>spiritual</i> fire
10. the end of the world	10. the end of an age or era, the end of a <i>spiritual</i> world and the beginning of another
11. king	11. <i>spiritual</i> king
12. liberty	12. <i>spiritual</i> liberty
13. drunkenness	13. <i>spiritual</i> drunkenness

<i>Divine Language Involving Metaphors</i>	<i>Translated into Human Language</i>
14. husband, bridegroom	14. the One sent by God, <i>spiritual</i> Husband
15. bride, adorned bride	15. the Word of God, the divine Revelation, <i>spiritual</i> Wife
16. Holy City	16. <i>spiritual</i> City, celestial City, God's blueprint for a new civilization
17. sword	17. the Word of God, <i>spiritual</i> sword that separates right from wrong and sincere believers from selfish believers
18. poisonous snake	18. <i>spiritual</i> temptations

As we can see, the only word missing in the left column is *spiritual*. If we supply that word, the meanings become clear. Suppose you did not have the preceding key. How would you understand the following verse?

I have come down from heaven...

Christ (John 6:38)

Without the key, you would be puzzled and confused. You might even deny your Lord. That is what happened to the Jews at the time of Jesus. They said:

Surely this is Jesus, son of Joseph; we know his father and mother. How can he now say, "I have come down from heaven"?

John 6:42

Bahá'u'lláh speaks in the same language Jesus spoke:

Whether ye rejoice or whether ye burst for fury, ***the heavens are cleft asunder, and God hath come down***, invested with radiant sovereignty. All created things are heard exclaiming: "The Kingdom is God's, the Almighty, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise."<sup>165</sup>

If Jesus, the One born to Mary, could claim to have come from heaven, could He not make the same claim the second time?

He, verily, hath again come down from heaven, even as He came down from it the first time. Beware lest ye dispute that which He proclaimeth, even as the people before you disputed His utterances.<sup>166</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh

If you went around and told people that you came from the sky, would they not call you crazy? Yet that is what Christ and Bahá'u'lláh claimed. Consider another example:

I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

Revelation 21:2

Is the Holy City that comes down from heaven a spiritual city, or is it made with bricks, iron bars, cement blocks, pipes, light bulbs, and electrical wires? Does the City of God descend from heaven in one grand, glorious piece? No, only ***the direction*** for building it comes from heaven, and even that comes piece by piece.

The Jews failed to adapt and elevate their thinking to that of their Redeemer. Failing to decode even one metaphor can lead to denial. Take the word **liberty**. The Jews were promised liberty. They thought they would be liberated not from ignorance, hypocrisy, worldliness, and spiritual death, but from the Romans. The prophecies did not say **spiritual** liberty; they pointed **only** to liberty:

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me...to proclaim **liberty to the captives**, and **the opening of the prison** to those who are bound. Isaiah 61:1–2

Ponder how the promise of liberty was fulfilled:

*The Promise:* So he promised: age after age he proclaimed by the lips of his holy prophets, that he would **deliver us** [the Jews] from our enemies... Luke 1:70–71

*The Fulfillment:* Praise to the God of Israel! For he has turned to his people, saved them and **set them free**, and has raised up a **deliverer** [Jesus] of victorious **power** from the house of his servant David. Luke 1:68–69

Note that none of the preceding prophecies and promises contains the word **spiritual**. Yet they all contain a spiritual message, because that is how they were fulfilled. Suppose you were the most eminent and honored theologian at the time of Jesus. Would you have known from your own knowledge that the liberty promised to the Jews was **spiritual** liberty? Probably not. In fact, the two greatest and most honored theologians of that time—Annas and Caiaphas—who knew the Hebrew language like the palms of their hands, not only denied their Redeemer and Savior, but insisted that He be crucified! This example alone should make every theologian, every Bible teacher, every pastor and priest humble. It shows how ignorant human beings can be. How they can misinterpret a simple instruction because of only **one missing word!**

God is Spirit, and we can best understand Him through our spirit. The main reason the Jews rejected Jesus was this: They tried to unlock the spiritual language of prophecy with a literal key. As Paul explains, the Word of God must be seen with the eye of the spirit; only **the spirit** has the power to penetrate the veil of words and embrace the pearl of truth:

This is what we speak...expressing **spiritual truths in spiritual words**. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because **they are spiritually discerned**. I Corinthians 2:13–14

There are two branches of knowledge that are independent of each other: One pertains to the earth, the other to heaven. To understand the earthly we need **IQ**; to understand the heavenly we need **SQ** (spiritual quotient):

I have spoken to you of **earthly** things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of **heavenly** things? Christ (John 3:12)

What grade would you expect from your English teacher if you wrote this?

...before Abraham was, I am. Christ (John 8:58)

We can expect the same grade if we insist on literal and narrow human standards, if we fail to elevate our vision and open our hearts and minds.

I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. Christ (John 16:12)

To understand God’s Word, we must think through Him and see through His All-Seeing Vision. What are the prime messages in the following verses? Are they literal or spiritual?

The eternal God is your refuge, and *underneath* are the *everlasting arms*. He will drive out your enemy before you... Deuteronomy 33:27

Surely he will save you from the *Fowler’s snare*...you will tread upon *the lion* and *the cobra*; you will trample *the great lion* and *the serpent*. Psalms 91:3,13

For evil men will be *cut off*, but those who hope in the Lord will inherit *the land*. Psalms 37:9

He sent forth his word and healed them; he rescued them from *the grave*. Psalms 107:20

What “arms”?	Spiritual
What “snare”?	Spiritual
What “lion,” “cobra,” and “serpent”?	Spiritual
What “grave”?	Spiritual
“Cut off” from what?	From the presence of God

Take the following passage by Saint Paul:

And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms... Ephesians 2:6

Observe that the verse is in the past tense. Where was Paul when he made the statement? On earth, in a prison. Then why did he say that he was seated in the heavenly realms? Because he was speaking in a spiritual language. He knew people would understand. In religious language, speaking in spiritual terms is a common practice. If we lose sight of this most fundamental principle, we may even face grave obstacles, we may even deny our Lord, just as the people of past ages did.

Literal-mindedness is so dangerous it can kill not only the soul but also the body. Imagine if someone took this verse literally:

And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell. Christ (Matt. 18:9)

According to the Gospel:

And these signs will accompany those who believe...they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all... Mark 16:17–18

It is known that so far in this century in the United States, at least 74 zealous Christians have given their lives because they took the preceding verses literally. Once I saw a preacher on television who was “playing” with a poisonous snake, apparently without fear. The commentator said that his brother had died from a bite while doing this.

Recently *Dateline NBC* presented a documentary about a church that considers handling poisonous snakes and drinking poison an essential part of their beliefs. Church members were shown speaking in tongues and dancing with dangerous snakes in a state of ecstasy. They showed one man bitten by a deadly snake. His body continued to swell, yet he



refused medical treatment and endured severe pain for 36 hours, until he died. One senior member of the church had the all-time record for being bitten by poisonous snakes: At the time of the broadcast he had been bitten 118 times! Church members also showed their trust in God by drinking diluted poison. Among the drinkers was a pregnant woman. All this presents a lesson about human nature and the incredible power of emotions and lack of rationality in some belief systems.

We may find all this funny and look down on snake handlers. But we should remember that, in God's sight, they may be dearer than conventional but apathetic believers who are "neither hot nor cold." Recall these words of Jesus:

I know your ways; you are neither hot nor cold. How I wish you were either hot or cold!...you are lukewarm... Revelation 3:15

The snake handlers at least firmly believe in something and are willing to die for it. The word *lukewarm* in no way applies to them. Compare them with people who claim to be faithful, yet they show no interest in what Christ told them to do.

The literature abounds with examples of misunderstandings arising from language. Sometimes the results are quite amusing. Some time ago, the leaders of a group interested in promoting appreciation for diversity organized a conference. They addressed their ads and announcements to women, but they encountered what they least expected. This is what happened:

[In their announcement] the leaders used "women of color" as a euphemism covering a broad range of minority-race females. Who did they expect to show up? Upwardly aspiring black, Asian, and Indian women, and people responsible for enforcing anti-discrimination laws—this would be the natural audience.

But as the starting time for the workshop neared, the two women in charge noticed something very unusual about the unexpectedly large numbers of women filing into the room—most were white. Well, the leaders thought, this is odd, but the show must go on. So they welcomed the group, saying how pleased they were that so many non-minority women were interested in the challenges confronting women of color. A confused look spread across the faces of the audience. After a few minutes, someone in the back asked, "When are we going to get our colors done?"

That comment said it all. A popular variety of workshop at women's gatherings that year offered "personal color consultations," a chance to "do your colors." Women would attend these to learn which fabric colors were most complementary to their skin tone and hair color. And this is what these women thought issues for "women of color" would be about.

This comically ironic misunderstanding brought two wildly different classes of women together. To the great credit of all, after the laughter died down most people stayed put. The leaders huddled and reorganized their presentation. Their determination to communicate made their workshop an unlikely success.<sup>167</sup>

Some Christian leaders use their knowledge of Hebrew and Greek as a means of establishing their authority. They claim they know the smallest shades of meanings in Hebrew and Greek, a skill that lay people lack. That knowledge, they claim, helps them understand the Bible at a deeper level. If knowing Hebrew is an advantage, why did

Jewish theologians and scholars—who were masters of Hebrew—deny Jesus? Was any of Christ’s disciples a rabbi, an author, a religious scholar? None. Among the authors and recorders of the Gospel, the one who comes closest to being a scholar is Paul. As we know, at the beginning, he was a zealous and determined enemy of Jesus. He only became a believer when God intervened and inspired him. At the beginning, his knowledge and his brilliance worked against him; it kept him from being humble. Only the grace of God saved him. His brilliant mind was of no benefit to him; his mastery of Hebrew did not help him.

The evidence for the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh is so overwhelming that knowledge of Hebrew and Greek would hardly make any difference. To use one’s knowledge of Hebrew and Greek as an edge over others is like saying, “I have a pair of glasses with which I can see the sun better.” Seeing the sun requires no glasses of any kind.

Besides this, *The Amplified Bible* provides virtually all the critical shades of meanings for original words. I use it frequently.

Is it possible that the literalism that prevented the Jews from recognizing John the Baptist and Jesus is today preventing Christians from recognizing the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh? Is it possible that what happened in 27 A.D. can also happen in 1844, 1863, 2000, or 2027 A.D.? Has human nature changed since 27 A.D.? Are Christians today immune to mistakes and misjudgments any more than the Jews were? Is it possible that history is repeating itself? Should we not be humble enough to say, “Yes, it is possible”? Why, then, should anyone insist that he or she has the correct interpretation? Are we not rewarded for being humble, for being “poor in spirit”?

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven... Christ (Matt. 5:3)

Moreover, take ye good heed not to be reckoned among those of the past who were invested with knowledge, yet by reason of their learning waxed proud before God... on that Day it is He [Bahá’u’lláh] Who is the All-Knowing, the Omniscient, the Source of all knowledge...<sup>168</sup> The Báb

Christian authors repeatedly acknowledge that the confusion that prevailed at the time of Christ is also prevailing today. The confusion persisted not only among the Jews but also among Jesus’ disciples. As a Christian author notes:

Yet neither the rabbis, who studied the Scriptures daily, nor the disciples, to whom Christ had tried to explain these things, comprehended what the prophets had foretold... Today a similar confusion surrounds the Scriptures that pertain to Christ’s return to planet earth. Even among evangelicals there is not only disagreement on the subject but blindness to many of the pertinent prophecies.<sup>169</sup>

That the prophesied Messiah, instead of ruling on David’s throne as expected, would be rejected by His own people and killed was completely alien to the thinking of Christ’s disciples. It was as though they hadn’t even heard His words when He tried to tell them so... Again it was the disciples’ lack of understanding of what the prophets had so clearly declared that created such costly confusion. Ultimately, their lack of discernment would cause them to be unfaithful to Christ at the very time when they should have been most loyal to Him. How could they have been so ignorant of what

their own Hebrew prophets had foretold concerning the messianic kingdom! A similar ignorance prevails today.<sup>170</sup>

If scholars acknowledge widespread confusion about the meaning of prophecies both in the first century and today, how can they claim to know the truth? Should this acknowledgment not lead them to utter humility? The confusion prevails because Christian scholars and leaders ignore this directive:

Therefore ***judge nothing*** before the appointed time; ***wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness*** and will expose the motives of men's hearts.

I Corinthians 4:5

How can you undo a misinterpretation that has endured and established itself as “the truth” for 2,000 years? How can you change an opinion that has been reinforced millions of times over the course of 20 centuries? How can you convince proud and self-assured scholars and teachers to say, “We have been wrong!”?

Instead of judging God's language by *our* standards, we need to judge *His* language by *His* standards. The master key can *only* come from Him and *only* through His Messengers and Redeemers, who speak His Word. In this age, the only true interpretation of the Scriptures comes from the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, both of whom claim to speak only the Word of God, and both of whom fulfill—either literally or symbolically—every prophecy that was ever spoken by the Messengers and Prophets of the past.

### ***What Does It Mean to Be Born Again?***

We are born into the world of nature; our second birth is into the world of spirit.<sup>171</sup>

*Bhagavad Gita*

A current misunderstanding among followers of many religions is the belief that people are either good or evil, either saved or unsaved. This simple and seemingly innocent classification has had enormous consequences for religion. It has simplified and degraded the sublime meaning of faith to a mere confession: “Say ‘I believe’ and you will be saved and forgiven.” The following discussion clarifies the meaning of faith and seeks to undo some of the damage done to its supreme station. The classification offered here is not absolute, nor is it found in the Bahá'í sacred writings. It is simply an attempt to demonstrate the existence of many levels of perfection in human life.

The richness and abundance of human life can be classified into four ascending levels; each of them separated from the others on the basis of the intensity of awareness.

- ***“Mineral” level.*** This is the lowest level of awareness. It indicates mere existence, such as is found in a stone. People who function on this level have no awareness of spiritual life, no conscience, no feelings of shame or remorse. They show no signs of true life. Criminals function on this level. Jesus prayed for those who crucified Him, for He said they did not know what they were doing. His Words testify to their total lack of awareness.

- **“Vegetation” level.** This level of awareness shows some signs of life. Those on this level, may not hurt anyone, but their lives revolve around survival: eating, drinking, and reproducing. Like plants, their well-being depends on food, water, and weather. They can taste and enjoy a fresh cup of coffee or an ice cream cone, but they show no awareness of the cup of everlasting life, or the crown of immortal glory.
- **“Sensual” level.** This level characterizes animal life. Most of the people of our time live at this level. Animals are aware not only of survival needs but also of the need to roam freely, to do what feels good, whatever that may be. Like animals, those on a sensual level extend protection to their own family, and like hungry dogs they may even hoard food.

Further, those on this level act as if they have little or no control over their lives and destinies; as if they are pawns to their genes and their environment; as if they are slaves to traditions, habits, customs, parental attitudes and training, and blind faith.

Many of them attend a house of worship, but their presence in the house has no connection to the state of their hearts.

If they hear a message from their own Scripture contrary to their selfish needs and desires, they ignore or distort its meaning to suit their needs.

Because they present themselves as God’s chosen ones, as the true custodians of His purpose and His plan for salvation, they inflict much harm to the glorious station of believing and having a true faith in God. The Scripture chastises them often, but they are the last to recognize their spiritual poverty:

But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: for men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money...rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. II Timothy 3:1-5

People who live at this level are controlled not from within but from without, not by love but by law, not by a desire for perfection but by a fear of prison. For them relationships are empty rituals, motions without meaning, automated like a machine.

A man put a coin in a vending machine and watched helplessly while the cup failed to appear. One nozzle sent coffee down the drain while another poured cream after it. “Now that’s real automation!” he exclaimed. “It even drinks for you!”

To relieve pain, they depend on pills, not on divine power. “Now they’ve got a tranquilizer atomizer...one spray and it calms you down to the point where you can take a pill.”

- **“Spiritual” level.** This is the summit of the soul; every human being is capable of attaining it. Those who function on this level see themselves not as bodies but as spirits. To them what matters most is invisible: love, faith, truth, service, loyalty, honesty, oneness, humility, detachment, courage, self-sacrifice, forgiveness, charity, purity, and justice.

These are the most critical assets that elevate an individual to the spiritual level:

- An open but critical mind

- An intense desire for knowledge and truth
- Courage to step beyond one's comfort zone
- Total dependence on God as the source of guidance

Those who attain the spiritual level do not see themselves as pawns to their environments and their genes. They rise above the limitations imposed on them by self-interests or by their parents and cultures. They do not submit blindly to the beliefs they were given as children. They search for truth wherever they can find it; they look with their own eyes. Labels (Baptist, Catholic, Jewish, etc.) do not matter to them.

They soon discover that a divine power permeates the whole universe, and that they are a reflection of that power. They learn that by becoming aware of this power, they enter a new world unlike anything they have experienced before. They find perfect harmony in the universe and a purpose in everything that happens. They discover new powers and potentials in themselves. They discern a divine presence and the vast "kingdom of heaven" deep within their souls. And like infants leaving the womb, they leave the womb of the earth and enter the sphere of spiritual life. That is how they are "born again."

It is hard, perhaps impossible, to find a person who always lives on the same level. Most people move back and forth. They may stay some of the time on one level, some of the time on another, but they function mostly on one level.

Unless a person is born again, he or she is not truly alive. Many people die before ever coming to life. In God's sight, true life is the life of the spirit. All great religions apply the word *dead* to those who are not born again. Here Bahá'u'lláh quotes the Gospel as evidence:

Even as Jesus said: "Ye must be born again" (John 3:7).<sup>172</sup> In another passage of the Gospel it is written: "And it came to pass that on a certain day the father of one of the disciples of Jesus had died. That disciple reporting the death of his father unto Jesus, asked for leave to go and bury him. Whereupon, Jesus, that Essence of Detachment, answered and said: "***Let the dead bury their dead***" (Luke 9:60).<sup>173</sup>

In this passage, Jesus asked His disciple to follow Him and let the spiritually dead bury their dead. In His time, Jesus attracted only a few disciples. This has always been the case: When a new age dawns, few people awaken to the light. Christ's message was ignored for three centuries; history is repeating itself once again:

Behold, all the people are imprisoned within the tomb of self, and lie buried beneath the nethermost depths of worldly desire! 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. Even as it hath been said: "He who is a true believer liveth both in this world and in the world to come."<sup>174</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh

The Book of Revelation addresses seven types of people who live at the time of His return. One type is described as *dead*:

I know your deeds; *you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.*

Christ (Rev. 3:1)

Bahá'u'lláh confirms:

Truly they are even as dead, and not living. Leave them unto the dead, then turn thy face towards Him Who is the Life-Giver of the world.<sup>175</sup>

We can be born again and become spiritually alive only with God's help. The awareness and the inspiration to make the journey from the sensual to the spiritual comes directly or indirectly from *His* light, from *His* grace and glory.

Religion is the instrument that provides this light. But as time goes on, the light grows dimmer and dimmer. Then, at a critical point in history, God sends a new light to bring a new life to the world. That is why so many Messengers have come and gone. That is why Bahá'u'lláh (literally *the light and glory of God*) was sent in our time. Without the grace and guidance provided by God's latest Redeemer, a "second birth" is extremely difficult, perhaps impossible.

The birth process itself contains several levels or stages. Here are some of them:

- **Presuming.** You simply presume something is true without knowing why, without having any evidence or reason to support it. For instance, you believe that weightlessness is possible simply because you have been told it is possible. When it comes to beliefs, most people function on this level. They simply believe because they are told by someone to believe. If you ask them why they follow a given religion, they are puzzled. They may quote a verse without being able to prove their point. Those at this level may cling to their faith like fearful children. They go from one set of beliefs to another for no reason except convenience, conformity, or insecurity.
- **Knowing.** If you are functioning on this level, you have reasons for your beliefs. You know weightlessness is possible, but your knowledge is based on scientific evidence. You do not believe out of fear, but out of respect for truth. You do not change your beliefs for convenience or conformity. For instance, you study the evidence that Bahá'u'lláh presents in support of His claim and accept Him only after a thorough search.
- **Seeing.** This level of belief is characterized not only by knowledge but also by insight. Your belief in weightlessness is based not only on scientific evidence but also on seeing astronauts floating in their capsules.

Reaching this stage is not easy: You must investigate the evidence with all your mind, pray with all your heart, and become the recipient of God's grace. All of these (knowledge, a good heart, and God's grace) are essential to bring you to this level. This is the stage at which you see the truth not only with your mind but also with your heart. This is the stage of absolute certainty, the stage at which you can love your enemies without effort. At this stage, you see God and His Messengers and Redeemers as the sun shining in your eyes. All your doubts disappear.

- **Experiencing.** On this level, you become a weightless astronaut, floating in heavenly spheres. You become a brilliant source of light, joy, and happiness to yourself and to every other human being. Your light blends, without obstacles, with the light of God. You experience total oneness: You see yourself as part of everything, and everything as part of everything else. Once on this level, you go even beyond loving your enemies. You simply find no enemies. You see everyone who enters your world as a helper or a friend, serving an essential purpose in your life. You know you need him or her for building your character even as athletes need heavy iron to build their muscles.

To summarize:

- Faith, which is the most precious gift in all the universe, is not cheap. It takes a sincere desire to acquire. It requires an open mind and a pure heart.
- Faith can exist on many levels.
- According to celestial standards, we are spiritually dead, unless we are born again through God's grace, mediated through His latest Messenger and Redeemer.
- We are not pawns to our cultural and parental beliefs.
- We can choose our level of faith. We can live as stones, as plants, as animals, or as angels.

### ***How Does God Motivate Human Beings to Turn to Him?***

The first appeal God uses is this: Do good for its own sake; love people simply because love is the life of the world. From this perspective, every virtue is its own reward.

For every act performed there shall be a recompense according to the estimate of God...However, unto them that are rid of all attachments a deed is, verily, its own reward.<sup>176</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

**O SON OF MAN!**

Neglect not my commandments if thou lovest My beauty, and forget not My counsels if thou wouldst attain My good pleasure.<sup>177</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

The Báb taught that we must be so detached from rewards that, even if our worship caused us to go to hell, we would still continue to glorify God:

Worship thou God in such wise that if thy worship lead thee to the fire, no alteration in thine adoration would be produced, and so likewise if thy recompense should be paradise. Thus and thus alone should be the worship which befitteth the one True God. Shouldst thou worship Him because of fear, this would be unseemly in the sanctified Court of His presence...Or if thy gaze should be on paradise, and thou shouldst worship Him while cherishing such a hope, thou wouldst make God's creation a partner with Him...

Fire and paradise both bow down and prostrate themselves before God. That which is worthy of His Essence is to worship Him for His sake, without fear of fire or hope of paradise.<sup>178</sup>

But only a few souls, who have attained spiritual perfection, will respond to this appeal and act with no concern for rewards. The masses of people are motivated mainly by awareness of immediate and ultimate consequences: reward and punishment.

The Great Being saith: The structure of world stability and order hath been reared upon, and will continue to be sustained by, the twin pillars of reward and punishment.<sup>179</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh

See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse—the blessing if you obey the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the Lord your God and turn from the way that I command you today...

Deuteronomy 11:26–28

Great is the blessedness of the believer who hath directed himself towards Him and hath gained admittance into His presence, and woe betide every disbeliever who hath turned away from God...<sup>180</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh

Why do human beings need to be motivated to seek the spiritual? It is always tempting and easier to fall for instant pleasures. For many, the pleasure of tasting cookies and ice cream for a few seconds in the mouth has priority over carrying them—usually in the wrong place!—for a lifetime! Many people act as maturely as the first grader who, after the first day of school, burst into the house shouting, “I love school, I can write my name and count to 50. Do I have to go back tomorrow?”

Seeking God and heaven requires great maturity, because the promised rewards are not given here, instantly, but later, often as late as the hereafter and eternity.

Long term commitments are becoming harder to make. “A sailor brought his girlfriend to the local minister late on a Friday evening and asked to be married. ‘That’s fine,’ replied the pastor, ‘Do you have a marriage license?’ The sailor hung his head. ‘We arrived at the courthouse too late,’ he replied, ‘it was already closed.’ The minister shook his head. ‘I’m sorry. I can’t perform a marriage ceremony without a license.’ The sailor put on a pleading expression, ‘Couldn’t you just say a few words to get us through this month?’”

In the following passage Bahá'u'lláh asks us not to barter the imperishable joys of heaven with the perishable pleasures of the present. It takes great maturity to heed such warnings.

**O CHILDREN OF VAINGLORY!**

For a fleeting sovereignty ye have abandoned My imperishable dominion, and have adorned yourselves with the gay livery of the world and made of it your boast. By My beauty! All will I gather beneath the one-colored covering of the dust and efface all these diverse colors save them that choose My own, and that is purging from every color.<sup>181</sup>

The tendency to seek the perishable is extremely powerful. That is why few subjects are repeated and emphasized so often in the sacred Scriptures as the promise of heavenly rewards. Ponder the powerful and beautiful imagery Bahá'u'lláh uses to move us to look beyond the grave:



**O CHILDREN OF NEGLIGENCE!**

Set not your affections on mortal sovereignty and rejoice not therein. Ye are even as the unwary bird that with full confidence warbleth upon the bough; till of a sudden the fowler Death throws it upon the dust, and the melody, the form and the color are gone, leaving not a trace. Wherefore take heed, O bondslaves of desire!<sup>182</sup>

The Báb appeals to the same motives: an awareness of the brevity of this life, and everlasting consequences that will follow in the next:

This mortal life is sure to perish; its pleasures are bound to fade away and ere long ye shall return unto God, distressed with pangs of remorse...and will be asked of your doings.

Say, how dare ye flagrantly deny the verses sent down from the heaven of justice, yet ye read the Books of God revealed in the past? How do ye repudiate the meeting with your Lord which was appointed with you aforetime, and fail in this Day to heed His warning? Indeed, by adhering to forms and by following the promptings of your selfish desires, ye have deprived yourselves of the good-pleasure of your Lord, except those whom their Lord hath endowed with knowledge...<sup>183</sup> The Báb

In case you need to remind yourself of God's encouraging Words and the unspeakable glories in store for you, here are a few references from sacred Scriptures:

Happy are they that observe God's precepts; happy are they that have recognized the Truth; happy are they that judge with fairness in all matters and hold fast to the Cord of My irrevocable Justice.<sup>184</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

All the ways of the Lord are loving and faithful for those who keep the demands of his covenant. Psalms 25:10

I tell you the truth, if a man keeps my word, he will never see death...Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. Christ (John 8:51; 13:17)

Believers! Bow down and prostrate yourselves and worship your Lord, and work righteousness that you may fare well. Muhammad (Qur'án 22:76)

...obey them with joy and gladness, for this is best for you, did ye but know.<sup>185</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people. Walk in all the ways I command you, that it may go well with you. Jeremiah 7:23

And he that respecteth the sacred ordinances of God, this will be best for him with his Lord. Muhammad (Qur'án 31:22)

And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life. Christ (Rev. 22:17)

Happy are they that have cast behind their backs all else save God and have held fast unto that which the Lord of strength and power hath enjoined upon them.<sup>186</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

The words of the believers, when called to God and His Messenger...are only to say, "We have heard, and we obey." These are they with whom it shall be well. Muhammad (Qur'án 24:50)

Happy is the man that heedeth My counsel, and keepeth the precepts prescribed by Him Who is the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.<sup>187</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. Christ (Luke 6:23)

He that partaketh of the waters of My Revelation will taste all the incorruptible delights ordained by God from the beginning that hath no beginning to the end that hath no end.<sup>188</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

If thou art a believer, thy faith shall be sufficient for thee above all things that exist on earth, even though thou possess nothing.<sup>189</sup> The Báb

Sacred Scriptures not only motivate us through promises of heavenly rewards and blessings but also through warnings and promises of punishment. Many people respond mainly to this appeal. Think of the number of drivers who observe the speed limit for fear of being caught. God, in His Wisdom, does not ignore those motivated by fear. It seems in our time the majority of people fit into this category. They take heed only when they know there will be punishment.

In God's sight, all of us are asleep and dreaming. Some of us wake up and arise to a gentle call to see the majestic dawn. Others wake up only when there are shouts of "Fire! Fire!" And still others stay asleep until they are scorched by the flames.

Bahá'u'lláh's writings, like all sacred scriptures, contain numerous warnings addressed primarily to hard-to-wake sleepers. For instance, in the following statement Bahá'u'lláh declares that God will treat the receivers of His Message the way they treat the giver of His Message:

God will verily do unto them that which they themselves are doing, and will forget them even as they have ignored His Presence in His day. Such is His decree unto those that have denied Him [Bahá'u'lláh], and such will it be unto them that have rejected His signs.<sup>190</sup>

The same message is found also in earlier Scriptures:

Give, and it will be given to you...For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Christ (Luke 6:38)

If you forsake Him, He will forsake you. II Chronicles 15:2

The good hand of our God is on everyone who looks to Him, but His great anger is against all who forsake Him. Ezra 8:22

Our relationship with God is mutual:

**O SON OF MAN!**

I loved thy creation, hence I created thee. Wherefore, do thou love Me, that I may name thy name and fill thy soul with the spirit of life.<sup>191</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

**O SON OF BEING!**

Love Me, that I may love thee. If thou lovest Me not, My love can in no wise reach thee. Know this, O servant.<sup>192</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh unto you. James 4:8

If we choose to keep ourselves remote from God by ignoring His latest Redeemer, He will keep Himself remote from us.

Whoso hath failed to recognize Him [Bahá'u'lláh] will have condemned himself to the misery of remoteness, a remoteness which is naught but utter nothingness and the essence of the nethermost fire. Such will be his fate, though to outward seeming he may occupy the earth's loftiest seats and be established upon its most exalted throne.<sup>193</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh

Immediately after offering the preceding warning, Bahá'u'lláh indicates that God or each of His supreme Redeemers, whom He calls "the Day Spring of truth," can choose to rescue every obstinate, disobedient, or wayward soul from the fire of remoteness. But He has delegated that choice to each person, to his or her own desire to step from remoteness to nearness, from "the fire" to fellowship:

He Who is the Day Spring of Truth is, no doubt, fully capable of rescuing from such remoteness wayward souls and of causing them to draw nigh unto His court and attain His Presence. "If God had pleased He had surely made all men one people." His purpose, however, is to enable the pure in spirit and the detached in heart to ascend, by virtue of their own innate powers, unto the shores of the Most Great Ocean, that thereby they who seek the Beauty of the All-Glorious may be distinguished and separated from the wayward and perverse. Thus hath it been ordained by the all-glorious and resplendent Pen...<sup>194</sup>

A prophecy from Daniel confirms Bahá'u'lláh's warning. It states that those who are "found written in the book," as a result of acknowledging the truth, shall "awake to everlasting life," others to an awareness of "shame and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:1-2).

Should such warnings be presented to, or kept from, the people who have not yet recognized Bahá'u'lláh, especially those who are motivated mainly by warnings? Most of us do not like warnings. In their absence, we feel more comfortable to follow our selfish desires. Warnings may take a little of our freedom away from us. Bahá'ís, as a rule, avoid referring to *any* warnings. They, too, feel more comfortable avoiding mention of them.

But is it appropriate to deprive a large segment of society from the only appeal by which they can be motivated? Is it fair to keep from them the consequences of their denial, if they choose to do so? The warnings were given for a purpose. That purpose is not to frighten but to awaken the masses, those who do not take their spiritual responsibility to God seriously, who hear the Word of God and ignore it.

Yes, warnings are unpleasant. In spite of that, if you were one of those motivated primarily by fear of punishment, which choice would you prefer: to know, or not to know; to be told, or not to be told? Would you want to be warned, if that warning gave you even a 10 percent chance of surviving an impending accident? Then why should anyone feel uncomfortable with God's warnings? The consequences of denying the Word of God are far more serious than those of dying in an accident, because this life is brief; the next one is everlasting. Should not everyone be eager to know the consequences of his or her response to the Word of God? Do not the grave consequences justify the little shock that warnings are supposed to induce?

God does not punish us; we punish ourselves by our choices. What can we expect when we place a veil over our eyes?

...If ye believe in Me, ye will provide good for your own souls, and if ye believe not in Me...ye will suffer yourselves to be shut out as by a veil.<sup>195</sup> The Báb

The warnings given in sacred Scriptures should never be viewed in a negative light, but rather as *a sign of God's supreme love for His intelligent yet often negligent creatures*.

In the Book of Revelation, Christ criticizes His followers who live at “the end of the age,” the time of His return. He shows His greatest displeasure and addresses His harshest words to those afflicted with *apathy* and *worldliness*. The following is perhaps the strongest rebuke addressed to human beings in the entire Bible:

These are the words of the...ruler of God's creation. I know your deeds, that *you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other!* So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, “I am rich; *I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.*” But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

*Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline.* So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will go in and eat with him, and he with me.

To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Christ (Rev. 3:14–22)

As we can see, Christ first criticizes, then expresses His love, and finally speaks of heavenly rewards. *Of course, if a person is afflicted with apathy, nothing can move him.*

The first step to transformation, and perhaps the hardest, is to awaken the soul from the depths of ignorance, apathy, and despair to the heights of knowledge, hope, and desire. It is to create a hunger for long-suppressed spiritual needs, to raise one's standards of what is acceptable or tolerable. Once germinated, that hunger and awareness set in motion a cycle that leads the soul from the mediocre to the marvelous, and from despair to the divine. Since human beings are motivated by the principles of pain and pleasure, anyone who tastes the joy of unraveling his or her spiritual potential becomes a self-generating and self-accelerating source of contentment and peace, which in turn can initiate a similar cycle of transformation in others.

I have presented the evidence for the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh and explained our responsibilities toward their Call gently but firmly. I have tried to challenge you to continue your investigation beyond this book. I have included only a few warnings, which are intended solely for those who need them. Nevertheless, if at any time you feel uncomfortable with any statement or quotation offered here, please do not see it in a negative light. So far the response of the Western nations to the Advents of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh has been inadequate. I hope the strong appeal made in this book will help to change the prevailing trend of apathy and inaction.

Whatever I have said is inspired by my love for God, for you, and for every other human being on our planet. My purpose is to reach as many people as possible to minimize the grave suffering that will come upon us if we ignore or deny the Word of God. Ponder the authority with which Bahá'u'lláh speaks:

We have a fixed time for you, O peoples. If ye fail, at the appointed hour, to turn towards God, He, verily, will...cause grievous afflictions to assail you from every direction. How severe, indeed, is the chastisement with which your Lord will then chastise you!<sup>196</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

O ye peoples of the world! Know verily that an unforeseen calamity is following you and that grievous retribution awaiteth you. Think not the deeds ye have committed have been blotted from My sight. By My Beauty! All your doings hath My pen graven with open characters upon tablets of chrysolite.<sup>197</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

God's Messengers and Redeemers come at the darkest hours in human history, when people are most complacent. It is hard to get them excited about something spiritual. They would rather lie within their comfort zones and dream about the dawn than arise and see it. Motivating them to take the first step is usually the hardest:

**John:** I always do my hardest work just before breakfast.

**Barb:** What's that?

**John:** Getting up.

Prophecies declare that the people of our time will be asleep. To awaken them, we need to raise the volume of the music without resorting to the annoying buzzer! That is what I have tried to do—to awaken the sleepers without disturbing their dreams. If at any time you feel the volume of the music is too high for you, think not only of yourself but of so many others who need it. Think also of the consequences of not waking up. That will help you hear the message of love written in the beautiful song you keep hearing in this book:

Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it; let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy; they will sing before the Lord, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth.

Psalms 96:11–13

In this Day a great festival is taking place in the Realm above; for whatsoever was promised in the sacred Scriptures hath been fulfilled. This is the Day of great rejoicing. It behoveth everyone to hasten towards the court of His nearness with exceeding joy, gladness, exultation and delight and to deliver himself from the fire of remoteness.<sup>198</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

Haste ye to win your share of God's good grace and mercy in this Day that eclipseth all other created Days. How great the felicity that awaiteth the man that forsaketh all he hath in a desire to obtain the things of God! Such a man, We testify, is among God's blessed ones.<sup>199</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

O friends! It behoveth you to refresh and revive your souls through the gracious favors which in this Divine, this soul-stirring Springtime are being showered upon you. The Day Star of His great glory hath shed its radiance upon you, and the clouds of His

limitless grace have overshadowed you. How high the reward of him that hath not deprived himself of so great a bounty, nor failed to recognize the beauty of his Best-Beloved in this, His new attire.<sup>200</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

If you were aware of what God hath destined for you in the kingdom of His glory, verily ye would rejoice exceedingly and soar with the wings of joy unto the heights of happiness...<sup>201</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

## ***What Is God’s Covenant With Humankind?***

All the ways of the Lord are loving and faithful for those who keep the demands of his **covenant**. Psalms 25:10

**O MY FRIENDS!**

Call ye to mind that **covenant** ye have entered into with Me upon Mount Paran [a symbolic name]...I have taken to witness the concourse on high and the dwellers in the city of eternity, yet now none do I find faithful unto the covenant. Of a certainty pride and rebellion have effaced it from the hearts, in such wise that no trace thereof remaineth. Yet knowing this, I waited and disclosed it not.<sup>202</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

This question is examined in detail in *I Shall Come Again*. Briefly, here are the essential elements of God’s covenant.

### ***God’s side:***

- He gives us the gift of the freedom of choice.
- He gives us the gift of guidance by sending Messengers from time to time.
- He will reward and punish according to our response to His Messengers.
- Reward and punishment will depend on our knowledge of His Messengers and our obedience to their teachings.

### ***Human side:***

- Our responsibility is to accept God’s Messengers and obey their teachings.
- From those who are given more, more shall be expected.
- When we hear someone claiming to be God’s Messenger, we should not ignore the call. We must investigate with all our heart and soul to see if he speaks the truth.
- We have the power to tell the difference between truth and falsehood.
- God’s Messengers enjoy special powers and distinctions that make them stand out. They shine as brightly as the sun.
- To be able to know them, we must follow **His** standards of truth, not our own.
- Our job is easy if we investigate with pure hearts; otherwise we will be unable to know them.

Bahá'u'lláh asks us not to violate our covenant with God:

O My servants! There shineth nothing else in Mine heart except the unfading light of the Morn of Divine guidance, and out of My mouth proceedeth naught but the essence of truth, which the Lord your God hath revealed. Follow not, therefore, your earthly desires, and **violate not the Covenant of God**, nor break your pledge to Him. With firm determination, with the whole affection of your heart, and with the full force of your words, turn ye unto Him, and walk not in the ways of the foolish. The world is but a show, vain and empty, a mere nothing, bearing the semblance of reality. Set not your affections upon it. Break not the bond that uniteth you with your Creator, and be not of those that have erred and strayed from His ways.<sup>203</sup>

Why does God punish those who violate their covenant with Him? The punishment is not imposed by God: It is always self-imposed. We choose His punishment by failing to obey our side of the covenant.

How would you feel if you sent a gift to a loved one and, instead of receiving a thank-you note, you received a rejection note? You would feel deeply hurt and insulted. How does God feel when we reject His gift of guidance?

What is the gift? It is nearness to Him. It is knowing and loving Him through His latest Messenger and Redeemer. It is entering the highest paradise of fellowship with our Creator. Can any honor, or any gift, ever compare with this?

What is the consequence of rejecting His gift? It is choosing to be far away from the highest paradise of fellowship with God. It is preferring to live in darkness. It is saying “No!” to the profoundest and most enduring happiness.

You say, “If this gift is so heavenly, how can I tell it is God’s?” If you wanted to buy some fruit, what would you do? Would you not look for the best? Would you not investigate? The same holds true with distinguishing God’s glorious gift from others, except that your job is much easier. Sometimes it is hard to tell the difference between good fruit and bad fruit. But telling the difference between God-made and man-made is like telling the difference between lightning and a firefly!

For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. Isaiah 55:9

O ye peoples of the earth! Turn yourselves towards Him Who hath turned towards you...He hath come to you with signs which none can produce.<sup>204</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

Thus the only way to find the truth is to search, to study, to look for evidence, and to pray fervently for guidance. Investigation with an open mind and a pure and thirsting spirit is the key that unlocks the gates of heaven, that leads to fellowship with God in His highest paradise. Failing to investigate is abandoning or ignoring God’s covenant with humanity and the imposition of self-punishment. It is choosing to live in the darkness of remoteness from God.

## *What Is the Meaning of the Parable of the Vineyard?*

The parable of the vineyard (Matt. 21:33–41) shows the ingratitude of human beings throughout the ages. It indicates how the greatest Gifts of God—the Ones sent by Him to bring hope and happiness to the world—are rejected, humiliated, tortured, and even killed by ignorant, fanatical, and cruel people. It proves that people act the same way no matter how glorious is the Gift and who are the receivers. Of course, this happens because although time and traditions change, human nature does not.

The Báb uses a parable similar to the one used by Jesus. He calls Himself the Lord of the Orchard in which His workers have planted all kinds of fruits. What happens when He comes to claim His Orchard?

You are like unto the man who layeth out an orchard and planteth all kinds of fruit trees therein. When the time is at hand for him, the lord, to come, ye will have taken possession of the orchard in his name, and when he doth come in person, ye will shut him out from it...

Then when We came to take over that which We had planted, ye pretended not to know Him Who is the Lord thereof.

Be ye not a cause of grief unto Us, nor withhold Us from this Orchard which belongeth unto Us, though independent are We of all that ye possess. Moreover, unto none of you shall We make this property lawful, were it even to the extent of a mustard seed. Verily, the Reckoner are We.<sup>205</sup>

The Báb

Human beings are known for engaging in acts of self-destruction. We hear about people who abuse narcotic drugs and alcohol, engage in dangerous sports, drive recklessly, sniff glue and paint thinners, slash their wrists, and even hang themselves. Human beings also engage in acts of *spiritual* self-destruction on a far more massive scale. The denial and cruel treatment of every great Messenger and Teacher God has sent are the best evidence of this.

To amplify Jesus' parable, consider siblings who have never seen their Father. All their lives, they wish, wonder, hope, and pray to see him, to talk to him, to embrace, and to love him. Their desire for him is so intense that even if they get a glimpse of him in their dreams, they share it with unmatched pride and joy. Then one day a stranger comes to their door and says, "Do you know me?" "No!" they say.

The stranger continues, "I have come with good news, in fact, the most joyous news you may ever know. I am the desire of your hearts. I have lived in heavens beyond and in your dreams. But now I have come to your home, the earthly realm. I have traveled long and endured much pain and suffering for your sake. Only my infinite love for you made me come. Yes, I am the Father you have been waiting for, the Object of your fondest hopes and dreams."

His face glows with love, his eyes radiate with joy and rapture. He stretches his arms to embrace them. But they stand unmoved! Their hearts are cold and aloof. They show no love; extend no kindness. Instead, they respond with suspicion, outrage, anger, and fear.



They exclaim, “You are an intruder! You have come only to disturb our peaceful dreams. You bear no likeness to our expected and adored Father, the one we have seen in beautiful paintings. You are an alien; a plotter like a thief. You have come to steal and destroy.”

The stranger says, “Trust me, I am your beloved. I have come to give you life, to bring you peace and joy, hope and happiness. Let me present my evidence. My words are true. I have come with countless signs and clues to prove my identity. Let me into your homes and hearts for just a few moments. Let us reason together.”

Instead of inviting him in, the siblings get angry: He has disturbed their peace. He has come at an unexpected hour. He is an uninvited guest, perhaps a thief with a plot to take their precious possessions. They curse him, kick him, mock him, spit on him, and shut the door on him. They even plot to arrest and kill him!

Such treatment seems so farfetched, so cruel, so unreasonable, so unlikely—yet it is precisely what has been meted out to the noblest and most precious human beings who have walked on our planet. This is what has been done to a few gentle, loving, humble souls without whom the world would be in utter darkness. Is this not an act of spiritual self-destruction with more devastating consequences than driving while drunk, sniffing glue, or hanging oneself?

Reflect upon the villainous [wicked] behavior of this generation, and witness their astounding ingratitude. Observe how they have closed their eyes to all this glory...<sup>206</sup>  
Bahá’u’lláh

All this generation could offer Us were wounds from its darts, and the only cup it proffered to Our lips was the cup of its venom. On our neck We still bear the scar of chains, and upon Our body are imprinted the evidences of an unyielding cruelty.<sup>207</sup>  
Bahá’u’lláh

So Moses cried out to the Lord, saying, “What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me!”  
Exodus 17:4

How can anyone endowed with wisdom engage in such self-destruction? How can anyone reject God’s most glorious gift? How can anyone persecute such noble Beings? How can anyone fail to see the divine in these humble Servants of God? Who would attempt spiritual suicide? Who would reject the gift of forgiveness of sins and eternal life in God’s many mansions in heaven?

How foolish you are, and how slow of heart that you do not believe all that the prophets have spoken!  
Christ (Luke 24:25)

Witness how this foolish people have treated the Cause of Him Who is the All-Possessing, the Inaccessible, as a play and pastime!<sup>208</sup>  
Bahá’u’lláh

To those who prefer to be waiting than witnessing the fulfillment of God’s promises, Bahá’u’lláh said:

Say, O ye foolish ones! Wait ye even as those before you are waiting!<sup>209</sup>

Twenty centuries have passed since the Advent of Jesus, but the Jews are still waiting for Him to come. People, as a rule, have little patience. But when it comes to waiting for their Promised One, their patience suddenly grows by leaps and bounds! They can go on waiting and hoping for thousands of years!

The Báb spent many nights alone in a remote and dark prison upon a mountain:

...the people stood up at the mention of His [the Báb's] Name and fervently implored His advent night and day, and if they dreamt of Him they gloried in their dreams; yet now that He hath revealed Himself, invested with the mightiest testimony...they are resting comfortably in their homes...while He at this moment is confined in the mountain of Mákú, lonely and forsaken.<sup>210</sup>

The Báb

In His [the Báb's] presence, which is My [God's] Presence, there is not at night even a lighted lamp! And yet, in places [of worship]...unnumbered lamps are shining! All that is on earth hath been created for Him, and all partake with delight of His benefits, and yet they are so veiled from Him as to refuse Him even a lamp!<sup>211</sup>

The Báb

The most beautiful and brilliant sermons about the triumphant return of Christ are delivered in houses of worship. His return has been hailed throughout the centuries as the crowning hope of all faithful followers:

To me the second coming is the perpetual light on the path which makes the present bearable...I never lay my head on the pillow without thinking that perhaps before I awake, the final morning may have dawned. I never begin my work without thinking that He may interrupt it and begin His own.<sup>212</sup>

Campbell Morgan

Now the Master has returned, but not in the way He was expected. How do those who glorify Him in their churches and synagogues treat Him? They simply ignore the news of His coming and go on with their inspiring and brilliant sermons:

Things are getting worse instead of better. And they will continue to get worse and worse until Jesus Christ comes again to institute His program for peace and prosperity on this earth...

Our world is filled with fear, hate, lust, greed, war and utter despair. Surely the second coming of Jesus Christ...is the only hope of replacing these depressing features with trust, love, universal peace and prosperity. For it the world, wittingly or inadvertently, waits.<sup>213</sup>

Reverend Billy Graham

Jesus predicted that on His return people would act just the way they did in the days of Noah. This means that history will repeat itself in our time:

The coming of the Son of Man will repeat what happened in Noah's time.

Christ (Matt. 24:37)

The Báb confirms:

O peoples of the earth! I swear by your Lord! Ye shall act as former generations have acted.<sup>214</sup>

The Bible alone spoke more than 1,800 times about the advent of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. (See *I Shall Come Again, Lord of Lords, and King of Kings.*) Many of those prophecies offer ***specific and literal clues about the lives and destinies of those twin Messengers of our time***; others present symbolic clues. All those clues are given to us for a purpose: to help us recognize the desired One of our hopes and dreams. And that is the purpose of this book: to invite you to seek, to ask questions, and not to close your heart to Bahá'u'lláh and His Herald the Báb. They endured every pain and suffering, every humiliation and abuse to offer you everlasting fellowship with God, to give you eternal

life both in this world and beyond in God's "many mansions" in heaven. Closing your heart to God's Gift of guidance—the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh—is an insult to God. Would you not feel insulted if your gift to a loved one was rejected?

Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. ***I go to prepare a place for you.*** And if I go and prepare a place for you, ***I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.*** Christ (John 14:1–3)

***We, in truth, have opened unto you the gates of the Kingdom. Will ye bar the doors of your houses in My face?***<sup>215</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

The preceding passages, a promise from Jesus and an invitation from Bahá'u'lláh, show God's infinite love for His creatures. God has no need for our love and loyalty. He is the Master of the universe, who can create or destroy countless billions like us in one instant. Yet He pleads with us like a loving parent or a humble friend to open our hearts to Him. Bahá'u'lláh's invitation clearly shows that God wants every human being to enter His heavenly mansions. But He wants us to enter by our own choice. When we fail to respond to His invitation, we are saying, "I am not interested in coming. I am too busy building my own mansions."

Here in the following passages, which pertain to the peoples of our time, Jesus makes the same statement and offers the same glorious gift. In the first passage, He states that there is a door to His Kingdom that no one can shut; in the next passage, He asks us to open the doors of our hearts to Him when He returns:

I know your deeds. See, ***I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut.*** I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. Christ (Rev. 3:8)

I know your deeds...you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold...Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. ***If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will go in and eat with him, and he with me.*** Christ (Rev. 3:15–16,20)

According to His justice, God treats us the way we treat Him and His Messengers. The parable of the banquet of the Kingdom pertains to Christ's second coming. According to that parable, those who refuse to enter God's ***earthly*** banquet will be unable to enter His ***heavenly*** banquet. Those who refuse to open their hearts to His Messengers and Teachers during their ***earthly*** journey will find the doors to His banquet closed during their ***spiritual*** journey. Those who in this world say, "I don't care to know you!" will hear, "I don't know you!" in the next Kingdom.

Later the others also came. "Sir! Sir!" they said. "Open the door for us!" But He replied "I tell you the truth, I don't know you." Therefore keep watch [investigate]... Christ (Matt. 25:11–13)

Most of us like to associate love, compassion, and forgiveness with God. This is how it should be. In the meantime, we should remember that God is also just. To ignore God's justice and remember only His love is a risk no one should take.

## *An Invitation to All Seekers and Lovers of Truth*

People have experienced injustice and prayed for deliverance since the dawn of history:

O Lord...show thyself. Rise up judge of the earth...How long shall the wicked, O Lord,  
how long shall the wicked exult? Psalms 94:1-3

The hour of deliverance has now come, the Lord has appeared, the Judge of the earth has risen:

‘Hath the Hour come?’ ‘Nay, more; it hath passed, by Him Who is the Revealer of  
clear tokens! Verily, the Inevitable is come, and He, the True One, hath appeared with  
proof and testimony.’<sup>216</sup> Bahá’u’lláh

Take heed...lest the things of this world shut you out as by a veil from Him Who is the  
Creator of heaven. Arise, and serve Him Who is the Desire of all nations...<sup>217</sup>  
Bahá’u’lláh

Yes, the One desired by all nations has come. He has unveiled a blueprint for a new and glorious civilization: the City of God, to be built after the One in heaven. It was for this Civilization and this City that Jesus prayed, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Luke 11:2). Bahá’is have already made a model of this sublime City. Please come and see for yourself its wonders; walk through its beautiful mansions and majestic gardens. Smell its fragrant flowers, and taste its sweet fruits.

Each of us is given the responsibility to arise and expand this glorious City to all corners of the earth. Come and take part in building this grand City, participate in the pains and pleasures of creating this new world—a world of justice, prosperity, and peace. It is well within your reach; closer than you can think. The only requirement is to recognize Bahá’u’lláh, the Glory of God, and acknowledge His station.

That acknowledgment empowers us to transform our lives, to gain a new vision about who we are, why we are living, and where we are going. It also gives us a new insight about the world and how it can be truly transformed. If we fail in our duty, we stand accountable before God for all eternity.

I bear witness, O friends! that the favor is complete, the argument fulfilled, the proof manifest and the evidence established. Let it now be seen what your endeavors in the path of detachment will reveal. In this wise hath the divine favor been fully vouchsafed unto you and unto them that are in heaven and on earth. All praise to God, the Lord of all Worlds.<sup>218</sup> Bahá’u’lláh

God expects from everyone according to his or her potential. A man was condemned to three life sentences. When he heard the verdict, he began to cry and complain that the sentence was too long. The judge said, “Don’t worry. Serve as long as you can. When you have finished the first life sentence, I will remove the other two!”

Leaders of thought in all domains, religious leaders, Bible scholars and teachers, theologians, and evangelists have an awesome responsibility to God, to themselves, and to humanity to acknowledge the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh, to arise and spread their life-giving Message to the farthest reaches of the earth. If they fail, they stand accountable.

God never hands us a glass of water, opens our mouths, then pours it down our throats. He offers the glass only to those who ask for it:

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.  
Christ (Matt. 5:6)

Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.  
Christ (Rev. 22:17)

**We** must transform our spiritual state. God will not do it for us. And the first step toward transformation is humility:

Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.  
Christ (Matt. 18:3–4)

Someday each of us will face “the divine Assayers” who will assess and judge the way we lived and behaved on this planet. The most critical judgment will pertain to how we responded to the Ones whom God has sent to lead us from the darkness of unbelief to the light of hope, peace, and happiness. It is best to be ready for that day. If we decide to **ignore** the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh, in effect we are **denying** them. We should have a reason why we denied the Ones who sacrificed everything for our sake and presented far more evidence than we would ever need to recognize them.

God has given us both the capacity and the responsibility to recognize the signs of times. As a Christian author notes:

Jesus indicted Israel’s religious leaders for failing to recognize the signs of the times in which they lived: “Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; but how is it that ye do not discern this time?” (Luke 12:56). Apparently they were responsible to know the signs given in Scripture, to recognize when they were present, and to conduct themselves accordingly. That same accountability is ours today.<sup>219</sup>

It is certain that we will try to find all kinds of excuses, but none will be accepted. God has given each of us the capacity to recognize His divine distinction, His unspeakable Splendor and Beauty in His Messengers and Redeemers. Bahá’u’lláh offers both encouragement and warning to every seeker and denier of truth:

Tear asunder, in My Name, the veils that have grievously blinded your vision, and, through the power born of your belief in the unity of God, scatter the idols of vain imitation. Enter, then, the holy paradise of the good-pleasure of the All-Merciful. 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...

The signs of God shine as manifest and resplendent as the sun amidst the works of His creatures. Whatsoever proceedeth from Him is apart, and will always remain distinguished, from the inventions of men.<sup>220</sup>

Everyone has the capacity to recognize God and discern the divine distinction of those who reflect His infinite light and splendor:

He [God] hath moreover deposited within the realities of all created things the emblem of His recognition, that everyone may know of a certainty that He is the Beginning and the End, the Manifest and the Hidden, the Maker and the Sustainer, the Omnipotent and the All-Knowing, the One Who heareth and perceiveth all things, He Who is invincible in His power and standeth supreme in His Own identity...<sup>221</sup> The Báb

However, such as are conceited will not suffer themselves to be guided. They will be debarred from the Truth, some by reason of their learning, others on account of their glory and power, and still others due to reasons of their own, none of which shall be of any avail at the hour of death.<sup>222</sup> The Báb

For the truth about God is known to them instinctively; God has put this knowledge in their hearts. Romans 1:19

The most common excuse people give for ignoring the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh is this: “I am too busy.” Busy for what? Suppose you accomplished twice as much as you normally do. What if you worked twice as long and made twice as much money? What if you played golf twice a week instead of once, went on vacation every month of the year, read twice as many novels, watched twice the number of TV shows you normally watch? What then? What would happen? What lasting consequences would you gain? People’s claim that they are busy is often an alibi for avoidance. Seldom, if ever, are they too busy to go on vacation or to their favorite restaurant.

Whether we go on vacation once a year or ten times a year or are always on vacation, the consequence is the same. Sooner or later the vacation ends, and the remorse begins. For this planet is not our permanent home. Our prime purpose here is to prepare for a vacation that never ends. If we fail, we have ruined our eternal home and destiny for trivial gains that last no more than a second in the context of eternity.

O the pity! that man should deprive himself of this goodly gift, this imperishable bounty, this everlasting life. It behooveth him to prize this food that cometh from heaven, that perchance, through the wondrous favors of the Sun of Truth, the dead may be brought to life, and withered souls be quickened by the infinite Spirit. Make haste, O my brother, that while there is yet time our lips may taste of the immortal draught, for the breeze of life, now blowing from the city of the Well-Beloved, cannot last, and streaming river of holy utterance must needs be stilled, and the portals of Ridván [paradise] cannot for ever remain open...

Seize the time, therefore, ere the glory of the divine springtime hath spent itself, and the Bird of Eternity ceased to warble its melody, that thy inner hearing may not be deprived of hearkening unto its call. This is My counsel unto thee and unto the beloved of God. Whosoever wisheth, let him turn thereunto; whosoever wisheth, let him turn away. God, verily, is independent of him and of that which he may see and witness.<sup>223</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh

## ***Watch Ye Therefore, and Pray Always***

*Christ (Luke 21:36)*

What were the two most critical words Jesus used to prepare Christians for His return? Those words are ***watch***, and ***pray***:

Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness, and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. ***Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.***

Christ (Luke 21:34–36)

What will happen if a person fails to follow Jesus' instructions? What will happen if he fails to “watch” or investigate, and declines to pray? As Jesus declared, he will fall into the trap of denying the Lord. To make sure everyone would understand His message, Jesus gave examples of the traps in which any unsuspecting person may be caught:

- ***dissipation*** (foolish pleasures)
- ***drunkenness*** (unawareness)
- ***anxieties of life*** (the busy life)

Jesus mentioned only a few traps, but there are others, such as conformity, fear, apathy, fanaticism, self-satisfaction, pride, and lack of faith. The following prophecy from Isaiah also refers to the grave conditions of our time, to the traps of unawareness and denial in which many people fall:

Terror and traps and snares will be your lot, you people of the earth. Those who flee in terror will fall into a trap, and those who escape the trap will step into a snare.

Isaiah 24:17–18

Most people think they have all the wisdom they need to know the truth; they assume they do not need to turn to God for help. That assumption is an evidence of a pride—a weakness or a veil that always prevents divine blessings from reaching us.

What, then, is the solution? It is to follow faithfully Jesus' directives: ***to investigate*** and ***to pray***. Investigation fulfills our side of the covenant; praying fulfills God's side of the covenant. Praying brings God into the picture, we ask Him to intervene. And what will He do?

...whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive. Christ (Matt. 21:22)

Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know. Jeremiah 33:3

Deliver your souls, O people, from the bondage of self, and purify them from all attachment to anything besides Me. Remembrance of Me cleanseth all things from defilement, could ye but perceive it...

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.<sup>224</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh

This is a prophecy for our time:

Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say:  
Here am I...The Lord will guide you always...

Isaiah 58:9, 11

To attain the purpose for which we were created, we must put God first. He should be our fondest and foremost desire:

But seek ye first the kingdom of God...

Christ (Matt. 6:33)

For most people, reading is helpful, but not sufficient. As a rule, information by itself, however convincing, does not change the heart. That is why turning to God is essential. In the path of the search for truth, we must walk with God as perfect partners.

Blessed are they that...seek him with their whole heart.

Psalms 119:2

It is impossible to attain spiritual transformation without an outpouring of God's grace and blessings. Praying lifts our love and devotion to the heavens on high, to the gardens of Grace. The love and the warmth of our hearts, like the glowing sun, make the clouds; then rain comes and washes all the stains away.

Investigating and praying are complementary. To see, you must open your eyes; but can you see without light? Sincere and whole-hearted praying provides the light. If you have a sincere desire to know the truth, do not ignore praying. By praying, your chance of success will increase a thousand times and more. It is absolutely impossible that the One who is the All-Knowing and All-Powerful will ignore sincere requests for help. He will guide you in ways that you will not suspect. It is said that coincidence is God working in secrecy. He will lead you in ways that will astonish you! Spiritual transformation always takes two hands. We must ask God to extend His hand, and then extend our hand to grasp His. Nothing happens unless the two hands come together:

No one can come to Me unless the Father has enabled him.

Christ (John 6:65)

Say: Praise be to God Who graciously enableth whomsoever He willeth to adore Him. Verily no God is there but Him. His are the most excellent titles; it is He Who causeth His Word to be fulfilled as He pleaseth and it is He Who leadeth those who have received illumination and seek the way of righteousness.<sup>225</sup>

The Báb

I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.

I Corinthians 3:6



God be praised for guiding us. We could not possibly be guided, if it were not that God guided us. Muhammad (Qur'án 7:43)

How should we pray? An essential condition for praying is privacy. The purpose of privacy is to create conditions in which you devote all your attention, all your heart to the heavenly Beloved.

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.<sup>226</sup> The Báb

The reason for emphasis on praying is that *it is perhaps the most widely ignored means of transformation, and yet the most essential and consequential.*

Seekers of truth must rely fully on God and ask Him with all their hearts, souls, and minds to aid them in their search. The Bahá'í sacred writings offer many prayers. The following are a few examples. Please consider reciting them frequently in your quiet moments as a means of attracting divine blessings in your spiritual journey.

## *Prayers from the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh*

### *From the Báb:*

O my God, my Lord and my Master! I have detached myself from my kindred and have sought through Thee to become independent of all that dwell on earth and ever ready to receive that which is praiseworthy in Thy sight. Bestow on me such good as will make me independent of aught else but Thee, and grant me an ampler share of Thy boundless favors. Verily, Thou art the Lord of grace abounding.<sup>227</sup>



O Lord!...I place my whole trust in Thee. Grant me then Thy sufficing help so as to make me independent of all things, O Thou Who art unsurpassed in Thy mercy! Bestow upon me my portion, O Lord, as Thou pleasest, and cause me to be satisfied with whatsoever Thou hast ordained for me. Thine is the absolute authority to command.<sup>228</sup>



O my God! O Thou Who art the Maker of the heavens and of the earth, O Lord of the Kingdom!...Vouchsafe unto me, through Thy grace, what will enable me to dispense with all except Thee, and destine for me that which will make me independent of everyone else besides Thee. Grant that I may reap the benefit of my life in this world and in the next. Open to my face the portals of Thy grace, and graciously confer upon me Thy tender mercy and bestowals.

O Thou who art the Lord of grace abounding! Let Thy celestial aid surround those who love Thee, and bestow upon us the gifts and the bounties Thou dost possess. Be Thou sufficient unto us of all things, forgive our sins and have mercy upon us. Thou

art Our Lord and the Lord of all created things. No one else do we invoke but Thee, and naught do we beseech but Thy favors. Thou art the Lord of bounty and grace, invincible in Thy power and the most skillful in Thy designs. No God is there but Thee, the All-Possessing, the Most Exalted.<sup>229</sup>

***From Bahá'u'lláh:***

Naked am I, O my God! Clothe me with the robe of Thy tender mercies. I am sore athirst; give me to drink of the oceans of Thy bountiful favor. I am a stranger; draw me nearer unto the source of Thy gifts. I am sick; sprinkle upon me the healing waters of Thy grace. I am a captive; rid me of my bondage, by the power of Thy might and through the force of Thy will, that I may soar on the wings of detachment towards the loftiest summits of Thy creation. Thou, verily, doest what Thou choosest. There is no God but Thee, the Help in Peril, the All-Glorious, the Unconstrained.<sup>230</sup>



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!<sup>231</sup>



He is the Gracious, the All-Bountiful!

O God, my God! Thy call hath attracted me, and the voice of Thy Pen of Glory awakened me. The stream of Thy holy utterance hath enraptured me, and the wine of Thine inspiration entranced me. Thou seest me, O Lord, detached from all things but Thee, clinging to the cord of Thy bounty and craving the wonders of Thy grace. I ask Thee, by the eternal billows of Thy loving-kindness and the shining lights of Thy tender care and favor, to grant that which shall draw me nigh unto Thee and make me rich in Thy wealth. My tongue, my pen, my whole being, testify to Thy power, Thy might, Thy grace and Thy bounty, that Thou art God and there is none other God but Thee, the Powerful, the Mighty.

I bear witness at this moment, O my God, to my helplessness and Thy sovereignty, my feebleness and Thy power. I know not that which profiteth me or harmeth me; Thou art, verily, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.<sup>232</sup>



O Thou Who art the Lord of all names and the Maker of the heavens! I beseech Thee...to make of my prayer a fire that will burn away the veils which have shut me out from Thy beauty, and a light that will lead me unto the ocean of Thy Presence.

O Thou the Desire of the world and the Beloved of the nations! Thou seest me turning toward Thee, and rid of all attachment to anyone save Thee, and clinging to Thy cord, through whose movement the whole creation hath been stirred up. I am Thy servant, O my Lord, and the son of Thy servant. Behold me standing ready to do Thy will and Thy desire, and wishing naught else except Thy good pleasure. I implore Thee...to do with Thy servant as Thou willest and pleasest. By Thy might which is far above all mention and praise! Whatsoever is revealed by Thee is the desire of my heart and the beloved of my soul. O God, my God! Look not upon my hopes and my doings, nay rather look upon Thy will that hath encompassed the heavens and the earth. By Thy Most Great Name, O Thou Lord of all nations! I have desired only what Thou didst desire, and love only what Thou dost love.

Exalted art Thou above the description of anyone save Thyself, and the comprehension of aught else except Thee.

Make my prayer, O my Lord, a fountain of living waters whereby I may live as long as Thy sovereignty endureth, and may make mention of Thee in every world of Thy worlds.

O Thou in separation from Whom hearts and souls have melted, and by the fire of Whose love the whole world hath been set aflame! I implore Thee...not to withhold from me that which is with Thee, O Thou Who rulest over all men! Thou seest, O my Lord, this stranger hastening to his most exalted home beneath the canopy of Thy majesty and within the precincts of Thy mercy; and this transgressor seeking the ocean of Thy forgiveness; and this lowly one the court of Thy glory; and this poor creature the orient of Thy wealth. Thine is the authority to command whatsoever Thou willest. I bear witness that Thou art to be praised in Thy doings, and to be obeyed in Thy behests, and to remain unconstrained in Thy bidding.<sup>233</sup>



All praise, O my God, be to Thee Who art the Source of all glory and majesty, of greatness and honor, of sovereignty and dominion, of loftiness and grace, of awe and power...

Illumine, O Lord, the faces of Thy servants, that they may behold Thee; and cleanse their hearts that they may turn unto the court of Thy heavenly favors, and recognize Him Who is the Manifestation of Thy Self and the Day-Spring of Thine Essence. Verily, Thou art the Lord of all worlds. There is no God but Thee, the Unconstrained, the All-Subduing.<sup>234</sup>



Glorified, glorified be Thou, O my God! How can I ever hope to ascend into the heaven of Thy most holy will, or gain admittance into the tabernacle of Thy Divine knowledge, knowing as I do that the minds of the wise and learned are impotent to fathom the secrets of Thy handiwork—a handiwork which is itself but a creation of Thy Will?

Praise be to Thee, O Lord, my God, my Master, my Possessor, my King. Now that I have confessed unto Thee my powerlessness and the powerlessness of all created things, and have acknowledged my poverty and the poverty of the entire creation, I

call unto Thee with my tongue and the tongues of all that are in heaven and on earth, and beseech Thee with my heart and the hearts of all that have entered beneath the shadow of Thy names and Thine attributes, not to shut us from the doors of Thy loving-kindness and grace, nor to suffer the breeze of Thy bountiful care and favor to cease from being wafted over our souls, nor to permit that our hearts be occupied with any one except Thee, or our minds to be busied with any remembrance save remembrance of Thy Self.

By the glory of Thy might, O my God! Wert Thou to set me king over Thy realms, and to establish me upon the throne of Thy sovereignty, and to deliver, through Thy power, the reins of the entire creation into my hands, and wert Thou to cause me, though it be for less than a moment, to be occupied with these things and be oblivious of the wondrous memories associated with Thy most mighty, most perfect, and most exalted Name, my soul would still remain unsatisfied, and the pangs of my heart unstilled. Nay, I would, in that very state, recognize myself as the poorest of the poor...<sup>235</sup>



I beseech Thee, O Thou Who art the Lord of all names, to guard Thy loved ones...and to strengthen them in their love for Thee and in fulfilling Thy pleasure. Do Thou protect them, that their footsteps may slip not, that their hearts may not be shut out as by a veil from Thee, and that their eyes may be restrained from beholding anything that is not of Thee. Cause them to be so enraptured by the sweetness of Thy divine melodies that they will rid themselves of all attachment to any one except Thee, and will turn wholly towards Thee, and extol Thee under all conditions, saying: "Praised be Thou, O Lord our God, inasmuch as Thou hast enabled us to recognize Thy most exalted and all-glorious Self. We will, by Thy mercy, cleave to Thee, and will detach ourselves from any one but Thee. We have realized that Thou art the Beloved of the worlds and the Creator of earth and heaven!"

Glorified be God, the Lord of all creation!<sup>236</sup>

## **Part II**

### **An Invitation to Christians**

*He, in truth, hath come unto the world in His most great glory, and all that hath been mentioned in the Gospel hath been fulfilled.<sup>1</sup>* Bahá'u'lláh

*He hath come to you with signs which none can produce.<sup>2</sup>* Bahá'u'lláh

## *A Guide to Self-Examination and Self-Knowledge*

This segment of the book is written especially for Christians who have a deep and unwavering loyalty to Jesus Christ and to the Bible as the Word of God.

Behold how the manifold grace of God, which is being showered from the clouds of Divine glory, hath, in this day, encompassed the world. For whereas in days past every lover besought and searched after his Beloved, ***it is the Beloved Himself Who now is calling His lovers and is inviting them to attain His presence.*** Take heed lest ye forfeit so precious a favor; beware lest ye belittle so remarkable a token of His grace.<sup>3</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh

Behold how great is the Cause, and yet how the people are wrapt in ***veils.***<sup>4</sup>      The Báb

Ponder awhile that ye may not be shut out as by a ***veil*** from Him Who is the Dayspring of Revelation.<sup>5</sup>      The Báb

Prophecies declare that a veil will enfold and obscure the vision of all the peoples of the world:

On this mountain the Lord will swallow up that ***veil*** that shrouds all the peoples...

Isaiah 25:7



As a literal veil can conceal the light of the sun, so can a spiritual veil—such as apathy or attachment to a name or to one's comfort zone—conceal the light of truth.

***The veil “that shrouds all the peoples” of our time is so thick, so dark and deadly, it has prevented humankind from seeing the Glory of God in all its dazzling splendor.***

Say: So great is the glory of the Cause of God that even the blind can perceive it, how much more they whose sight is sharp, whose vision is pure.<sup>6</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh

Our Creator repeatedly asks us to tear the veil that blinds our vision. Notice the supreme authority with which Bahá'u'lláh speaks:

Tear asunder, in My Name, the veils that have grievously blinded your vision, and, through the power born of your belief in the unity of God, scatter the idols of vain imitation. Enter, then, the holy paradise of the good-pleasure of the All-Merciful. 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.<sup>7</sup>

God has the power to remove the veils that conceal His glory:

Were I to remove the veil, all would recognize Me as their Best Beloved, and no one would deny Me.<sup>8</sup> The Báb

Should the greatness of this Day be revealed in its fullness, every man would forsake a myriad lives in his longing to partake, though it be for one moment, of its great glory—how much more this world and its corruptible treasures!<sup>9</sup>

Oh, would that the world could believe Me! Were all the things that lie enshrined within the heart of Bahá, and which the Lord, His God, the Lord of all names, hath taught Him, to be unveiled to mankind, every man on earth would be dumbfounded.<sup>10</sup>

If the veil were lifted, and the full glory of the station of those that have turned wholly towards God, and have, in their love for Him, renounced the world, were made manifest, the entire creation would be dumbfounded.<sup>11</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

But removing the veil would violate God's covenant with humankind: that we are free to choose. The prime responsibility of lifting the veil is ours, not God's. Surely we cannot lift the entire veil, but we can lift it enough to get a glimpse of the hidden glory.

Consider how at the time of the appearance of every Revelation, those who open their hearts to the Author of that Revelation recognize the Truth, while the hearts of those who fail to apprehend the Truth are straitened by reason of their shutting themselves out from Him. However, openness of heart is bestowed by God upon both parties alike. God desireth not to straiten the heart of anyone, be it even an ant, how much less the heart of a superior creature, except when he suffereth himself to be wrapt in veils, for God is the Creator of all things.<sup>12</sup> The Báb

When God sends His Messengers and Redeemers, He removes “the veil of concealment” from His countenance. He manifests Himself through them as a humble human being. He reveals Himself mostly by *His Word and Wisdom*. And that is the limit of disclosure or revelation He allows. Going beyond that—displaying His supreme powers over the laws of nature—is an imposition of His Will on human beings.

Further, God does not want unprepared and undisciplined guests to enter and abide in His heavenly banquet. A full revelation of His glory would attract unqualified and insincere people to His glorious kingdom. This, of course, is undesirable:

And when this process of progressive Revelation culminated in the stage at which His peerless, His most sacred, and exalted Countenance was to be unveiled to men's eyes

[through Bahá'u'lláh], He chose to hide His own Self behind a thousand veils, lest profane and mortal eyes discover His glory...And when the set time of concealment was fulfilled, We sent forth, whilst still wrapt within a myriad veils, an infinitesimal glimmer of the effulgent Glory enveloping the Face of the Youth [Bahá'u'lláh], and lo, the entire company of the dwellers of the Realms above were seized with violent commotion and the favored of God fell down in adoration before Him. He hath, verily, manifested a glory such as none in the whole creation hath witnessed...<sup>13</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

Thus by concealing His glory, God creates the perfect conditions by which He can screen out the insincere, unruly, and selfish guests. He then invites us to tear the veils that prevent us from seeing His glory. He asks us to participate in the great adventure of creating a better self and a better world. The choice between Him and us is always mutual. But how does He choose us? By some arbitrary rules? Of course not. He is impartial to all. He makes His choice by establishing rules, by setting various obstacles before our selfish desires, and then watches us perform. He stands at the end of the obstacles, extends His hands and invites us, in every conceivable way, to arise and run. His love for us is so intense that He even warns us of the consequences of sitting, daydreaming, or sleeping instead of running. That is the way He chooses us. Each of us has the freedom to decide how fast to run and what, if any, obstacles to overcome. Note the phrase “such as God was pleased to guide” in the following quotation:

The allusions made in the Scriptures have been unfolded, and the signs recorded therein have been revealed, and the prophetic cry is continually being raised. And yet all, *except such as God was pleased to guide*, are bewildered in the drunkenness of their heedlessness!<sup>14</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him... Christ (John 6:44)

No soul can believe, except by the Will of God. Qur'an 10:100  
See also 6:111

Who are the ones “God is pleased to guide” and to attract towards the paradise of His presence? Seekers who sincerely try to search for Him. Who are the ones that the Father lifts? Those who overcome the obstacles, those who detach themselves from selfish desires.

Why did Christ declare that He would come in the clouds? Why would He *not* come on a clear day? If every eye is supposed to see His glory, as He promised, then why would He choose a cloudy day? Clouds serve the opposite purpose to that of a visible disclosure.

One purpose the clouds serve is to conceal the glory of the sun. Some people are so busy, they simply don't look up. They feel more comfortable looking at the cement than at the sun. Others look up but see only drifting clouds. A few daring and adventurous souls get into a plane and pass beyond the clouds. These are the ones God wants in His banquet. These are the ones who find Him even if He appears as a homeless, fatherless young man from Nazareth, known as Jesus, or as an unschooled, unknown merchant from Shíráz, known as the Báb.

Bahá'u'lláh teaches that the clouds on which Christ is promised to ride are not made of water vapor, but of ignorance and illusions, of phantoms of human imagination: misunderstandings, misjudgments, personal desires, and unfounded assumptions. These



spiritual vapors do not rise from the earth but from the hearts of humankind. They are the vaporous veils that human beings weave and impose on their own souls. Only “the eyes” that can see are not “clouded.” The following is a prophecy for our time:

Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness and his rulers rule with justice, and a man shall be a refuge from the wind and a shelter from the tempest... *The eyes that can see will not be clouded, and the ears that can hear will listen...* Isaiah 32:1–3

Our first duty is to lift the veil of desire and to *overcome the clouds*:

Lift up the veil that obscureth your vision, and dispel the darkness with which it is enveloped, that ye may gaze on the naked beauty of the Beloved’s face, may behold that which no eye hath beheld, and hear that which no ear hath heard.<sup>15</sup> Bahá’u’lláh

What is the fabric of the veil predicted by Isaiah to enfold and shroud all the peoples of the world?

On this mountain the Lord will swallow up *that veil that shrouds all the peoples...* Isaiah 25:7

Here are some of the elements of that *Global Veil* that covers the hearts of humankind as specified by the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh:

- veils of selfish desires<sup>16</sup>
- veils of names<sup>17</sup>
- veils of human learning<sup>18</sup>
- veils of false imaginings<sup>19</sup>
- veil of the satanic self<sup>20</sup>
- veils of heedlessness<sup>21</sup>
- veils of plurality<sup>22</sup>
- veils of want<sup>23</sup>
- veils of limitation<sup>24</sup>
- veils of obscured minds<sup>25</sup>
- veils of idle learning<sup>26</sup>
- veils of satanic knowledge<sup>27</sup>
- veils of satanic fancy<sup>28</sup>
- veils of light<sup>29</sup>
- veils of glory<sup>30</sup>
- veils of language<sup>31</sup>
- veils of doubt<sup>32</sup>
- veils of ancient splendor<sup>33</sup>
- veils of outward glory<sup>34</sup>
- veils of fancy<sup>35</sup>
- veils of hopes<sup>36</sup>
- veils of self<sup>37</sup>

In *The Hidden Words*, Bahá’u’lláh invites all seekers and lovers of truth to remove their veils:

**O SON OF MAN!**

The light hath shone on thee... *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.<sup>38</sup>

**O FLEETING SHADOW!**

Pass beyond the baser stages of doubt and rise to the exalted heights of certainty. *Open the eye of truth*, that thou mayest behold the veilless Beauty and exclaim: Hallowed be the Lord, the most excellent of all creators!<sup>39</sup>

### O MY FRIEND!

Thou art the day-star of the heavens of My holiness, let not the defilement of the world eclipse thy splendor. *Rend asunder the veil of heedlessness*, that from behind the clouds thou mayest emerge resplendent and array all things with the apparel of life.<sup>40</sup>

The Book of Revelation offers every conceivable reward to those who *overcome*:

I am coming soon...*Him who overcomes* (Rev. 3:11–12):

- Will inherit all things (Rev. 21:7).
- I will be his God and he will be my son (Rev. 21:7).
- I will give the right *to sit with me on my throne* (Rev. 3:21).
- I will give the right to eat from the tree of life which is in the paradise of God (Rev. 2:7).
- I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God (Rev. 3:12).
- I will...give him the morning star (Rev. 2:28).
- I...will acknowledge his name before my Father... (Rev. 3:5).
- I will never erase his name from the book of life... (Rev. 3:5).
- I will write on him the name of my God... (Rev. 3:12).
- I will write on him...the name of the city of my God (Rev. 3:12).
- I will also give him a white stone with a new name... (Rev. 2:17).
- *I will also write on him my new name*. He who has an [spiritual] ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches (Rev. 3:12–13).

What is there to overcome except veils and clouds? What is there to overcome except one's own ego? What is there to overcome except traps of denial? What is there to overcome except fear, apathy, worldliness, ignorance, prejudice, conformity, and negligence? What is there to overcome except veils of separation from God?

Wearing veils of separation is as deadly and depressing as living in the dark. It prevents us from receiving God's grace:

Our grace assuredly pervadeth all that dwell in the kingdoms of earth and heaven...However, *souls that have shut themselves out as by a veil can never partake of the outpourings of the grace of God.*<sup>41</sup>

The Báb

What makes life so rich and exciting is the gift of freedom bestowed on every human being. It is freedom that gives birth to diversity. Without it, human life would be as boring and monotonous as the lives of frogs and fish. But with this freedom we must accept responsibility for our choices. Freedom and responsibility are complementary partners.

### *What Is Your Response to Bahá'u'lláh's Call?*

We are all busy, and many of us can hardly keep up with life's daily demands. In such an atmosphere, how can anyone find time for self-examination and reflection? A

consequence of rushing through life is the sacrifice of our spiritual destiny for the demands of the day.

We take care of this hour's errands, but leave our eternal future to chance. We assume that eternity will somehow take care of itself. We act like passengers on a train who have no idea where it is heading. We assume that as long as we are getting good food and enjoying the scenery, then we are doing fine. We avoid thinking about what lies ahead beyond the impending mountains.

The purpose of this chapter is to invite you to pause and ponder, to get off the train for a moment, to shift your glance further ahead, to look beyond the hills and the mountains. It is a reminder to appreciate the gift of freedom that God has given you, to **choose** a direction for your future before you have no future and no chance to make choices. After passing away from this plane, after crossing the hills and the mountains, you will not have the same freedom again, you will not be able to change your course.

O My servant!...Seize thy chance, for it will come to thee no more.<sup>42</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

While there is yet time, return, and lose not thy chance.<sup>43</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light.  
Christ (John 12:36)

We are all creatures of habit and convenience. We prefer to do what comes easily. We love our comfort zones. Acknowledging and practicing a new faith is not easy. For some it is like lifting a mountain with a spoon, for others like soaring without wings. History offers ample evidence that people have always denied the divine Messengers because of personal-emotional weaknesses—apathy, attachment, convenience, fear, and worldliness—and not because of a scarcity of proofs. Perhaps as much as eighty to ninety percent of what human beings do is motivated or controlled mostly by emotions, habits, traditions, conformity, convenience, and customs. In my estimation, anyone who fails to acknowledge the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh does so on the basis of emotions and convenience, and not because of the scarcity of proofs. ***For the evidence in their favor is overwhelming, far beyond what reason demands, far beyond what anyone can present regarding any of the past Messengers and Redeemers:***

If thou deniest Me, by what proof canst thou vindicate the truth of that which thou dost possess?<sup>44</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

Anyone who hears about Bahá'u'lláh but fails to act, investigate, accept, and promote His Message of peace, hope, and harmony, will someday be asked to give the reasons for his or her negligence and failure:

Ye shall, of a truth, be asked of your doings, shall be called to account for your failure in duty with regard to the Cause of God...<sup>45</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

Your knowledge of the Advents of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh places special responsibility on your soul:

It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their back on the sacred commandment that was passed on to them.  
II Peter 2:21

Wisdom declares, “Be fully prepared for that day—a day that is inescapable.” May I encourage you to make your choices with full awareness of the consequences, to ponder the choices you make and your reasons for making them.

You can respond to Bahá’u’lláh’s call in one of three ways. ***Your first choice is to acknowledge Him on the basis of the evidence presented in this book.*** Does this book present convincing evidence about the station of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh? It all depends on you, on your background and perspective. Consider the example of Stanwood Cobb—founder of the Progressive Education Association—a friend of mine who had the honor of meeting ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. He once said that when he heard the message of Bahá’u’lláh, he accepted it immediately. I said, “How could you do this? You are a graduate of Harvard University. You are such an intelligent and highly educated person. How could you recognize Bahá’u’lláh on the basis of so little evidence?”

He replied, “I knew no one born and raised in a backward country such as Persia and imprisoned and exiled most of His life could, on his own, come up with such progressive teachings as the oneness of religion and oneness of humankind. And no one on his own would have the power to create such a unified society out of the conflicting beliefs and ideologies.” He explained that he needed no other proofs except Bahá’u’lláh’s ***fruits***. The guidance of the Gospel that “ye shall know them by their fruits” (Matt. 7:20) was sufficient for him. Such a quick response does not happen very often, but it happens.

This work presents sufficient evidence on the identity and station of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh. Please compare the evidence presented in these two volumes with the evidence you have about the faith you have already accepted. List any proofs that you believe support your faith, but not the Bahá’í Faith.

If you cannot think of any evidence but you still find yourself incapable of acknowledging the station of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh, the most reasonable explanation is that you are experiencing some emotional blocks. For if one set of evidence proves one Messenger, the same set must prove another. God makes no distinction between His Messengers. He makes them all shine as brightly as the sun. If you find yourself incapable of finding any reason to deny the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh, but you still cannot spiritually relate to them, your best solution is to turn to God, pray to Him day and night with all your powers, and ask Him to guide you in making a choice that conforms to His Will.

Recognizing the station of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh presents you with the most awesome challenge you will ever face in your life. For most people, acknowledging a religion at its advent is extremely difficult. Who has the power to help you?

Is there any Remover of difficulties save God? Say: Praised be God! He is God! All are His servants and all abide by His bidding!<sup>46</sup> The Báb

By praying, you leave your decision and destiny in the hand of the All-Knowing, the All-Loving, and the All-Powerful.

If you do not follow any religion, you can still recognize the divine power in the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh. Look at the following list to see if any human being, unaided, could accomplish these wonders. What is the probability that by chance an individual:

- Is endowed with flawless character

- Possesses supreme wisdom and knowledge; clarifies and reconciles the complexities of sacred Scriptures
- Speaks with divine authority
- Reveals teachings that give life to the world, that are praised by some of the greatest minds of the century
- Shows knowledge of the things to come
- Exposes himself to his vicious enemies without fear
- Makes the most stupendous and awesome claim: to be the Lord, to speak the Word of God
- Shows superhuman powers, yet refrains from using them as evidence
- Gives up earthly gains, powers, and pleasures
- Endures the most severe adversities and praises God for his sufferings
- Attracts millions of followers
- Establishes a unified and cohesive world community that extends to the farthest reaches of the earth
- Loves his enemies and prays for them
- Keeps his teachings unchanged; does not change his mind
- Remains steadfast in his claim under extreme pressure and pain
- Reveals knowledge spontaneously, without prior education or research
- Creates a new and beautiful style in two languages (Persian and Arabic)
- Writes and speaks beautifully in a language (Arabic) he has not studied
- Accomplishes his goals from behind prison walls in spite of watchful enemies, among them several powerful and cruel kings as well as thousands of extremely influential and fanatical religious leaders
- Never asks anyone to help him
- Raises a son endowed with supreme wisdom and knowledge
- Educates a son and a daughter who model his teachings with perfection
- Fulfills some 1,800 prophecies from the Bible alone
- Has a Herald who offers His life as a sacrifice for Him, and manifests the same powers and distinctions

***Thus we have not one but two individuals—the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh—unknown to each other, who work with absolute harmony and cooperation, and each of them shows the same divine powers and distinctions.***

If you follow a given religion, you can use the preceding list for enlightenment. See if you can find any evidence for your faith that is missing in the preceding list. Look at the entire history of the human race. See if you can find one person who has accomplished such wonders.

***The second choice you have is to postpone any judgment on the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh until you have gained more knowledge.*** If this is the option you wish to pursue, then write exactly what you plan to do. For instance, write the names of the books you would like to read from a list provided at the end of this chapter, and a list of the specific questions you would like to resolve.

***Questions about the Bahá'í Faith you wish to resolve:***

***The third and final choice you have is to ignore Bahá'u'lláh's invitation to investigate and embrace His Faith.*** If this is your choice, then take a few minutes and write your reasons. Why should you take time to write? It is said that the longest distance is between the head and the heart. That distance is filled with all kinds of obstacles and pitfalls. It is also said, "Prove it against my will, and I will believe the same still." Writing shortens and paves the rocky road between what the mind understands and how the heart feels. Writing exposes your emotional tendencies, which always hide behind personal preferences and convenience. It throws light on the invisible and evasive clouds of feelings. It may even help you penetrate the clouds and get a glimpse of the Sun. Further, writing always adds to one's clarity of thinking.

When you find yourself unable to write any logical reasons for ignoring or rejecting Bahá'u'lláh's call, you recognize the power of emotions in your beliefs. Your inability to put anything down awakens your heart; it makes you humble.

Now assume that your day of reckoning has come, and you are asked by "the Assayers of mankind" to give your reasons for failing to investigate and accept Bahá'u'lláh and His message of peace and unity. What answer would you give? The few minutes you take to write your answer may be the most critical moments of your life. The little effort it requires may mean the difference between being in the presence of God for all eternity and being far from His presence for all eternity. Is it wise to take chances, to ignore the call of the One who created you and warns you only because of His deep love for you? Can you think of anything in your life that would matter more than making the right decision in your relationship with God? Write your reasons for ignoring or denying Bahá'u'lláh, if that is your choice.

Accepting or rejecting a divine Messenger and Teacher is not only a personal matter. Our choices not only affect our own destiny for all eternity but the destiny of all humankind. If we fail to acknowledge and implement the Word of God, we will all face dire

consequences as occupants of a single planet. Bahá'u'lláh warns us of the grave consequences we will face if we ignore His call to unity and harmony:

We have a fixed time for you, O peoples. If ye fail, at the appointed hour, to turn towards God, He, verily, will...cause grievous afflictions to assail you from every direction. How severe, indeed, is the chastisement with which your Lord will then chastise you!<sup>47</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

The same prophetic warning was given to us long ago:

Gather together, gather together...before the appointed time arrives and that day sweeps on like chaff, before the fierce anger comes upon you, before the day of the Lord's wrath comes upon you. Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, ***seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the Lord's anger.*** Zephaniah 2:1-3

My purpose in writing *Does Your Fish Bowl Need Fresh Water?* was to prove by sheer evidence that there is a God and an afterlife, as confirmed in all sacred Scriptures. My purpose in writing the two-volume series, *One God, Many Faiths; One Garden, Many Flowers*, and *Heaven's Most Glorious Gift*, is to awaken all seekers and lovers of truth and to convince them by evidence that the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh are indeed the Ones promised in all holy books of the past.

My intention has been not only to inform you but to invite you to become a Bahá'í, to arise, to participate and partake of the honor of building a new Kingdom as splendid as the One in heaven.

God has given us His blueprint and has asked us to transform it into reality. Do not underestimate your powers to make a difference if you depend on that blueprint. You are capable of changing the world. This may seem an exaggeration, but it is not. The light of God turns a speck of dust into a star.

I urge you to take your spiritual responsibility to God seriously, to investigate and acknowledge Bahá'u'lláh as the promised Redeemer of our time, for the evidence in His favor is overwhelming. Most people have lost their spiritual sensitivity. Their inner eyes have dimmed. Because of overexposure to an endless array of impostors, liars, and self-deceivers, their souls have become desensitized, their ears have turned deaf. They think everyone is out to mislead them. It is not easy to break through these thick clouds of mistrust, inertia, and apathy, but it is essential.

After studying the evidence for the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh for more than 30 years and writing six volumes on the subject, I am absolutely convinced that they were inspired by God, and not moved by a desire for worldly gains and glories. If you read even one of those six volumes of proofs with an open mind and a humble spirit, I believe, you will become totally convinced that the possibility of deception or chance accounting for the mountains of evidence is an absolute impossibility. It is as likely as a majestic mansion rising suddenly out of a tornado.

May God bless you and aid you in all your endeavors.

Say:<sup>\*</sup> Fear ye God, then observe equity in your judgment...If ye reject Him, by what evidence can ye prove your allegiance to the former Messengers of God or vindicate your belief in that which He hath sent down from His mighty and exalted Kingdom? What benefit do your possessions bestow upon you? What protection can your treasures afford you? None, I swear by the Spirit of God that pervadeth all that are in the heavens and on the earth. Cast away that which ye have put together with the hands of idle fancy and vain imaginings and take fast hold of the Book of God which hath been sent down by virtue of His all-compelling and inviolable authority.<sup>48</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh

Praise be to God that He hath enabled us to become cognizant of Him Whom God shall make manifest [Bahá'u'lláh]...For indeed this is the object of our creation and the sole purpose underlying every virtuous deed we may perform. Such is the bounty which God hath conferred upon us; verily He is the All-Bountiful, the Gracious...On the Day of His manifestation, unless thou truly believest in Him, naught can save thee from the fire, even if thou dost perform every righteous deed. If thou embracest the Truth, everything good and seemly shall be set down for thee in the Book of God, and by virtue of this thou wilt rejoice in the all-highest Paradise...<sup>49</sup>

The Báb

Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, He hath also rejected thee.

I Samuel 15:23

Know ye from what heights your Lord, the All-Glorious, is calling?... Did ye but know it, ye would renounce the world, and would hasten with your whole hearts to the presence of the Well-Beloved... Thus have the showers of My bounty been poured down from the heaven of My loving-kindness, as a token of My grace, that ye may be of the thankful.<sup>50</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh

O friends! It behoveth you to refresh and revive your souls through the gracious favors which in this Divine, this soul-stirring Springtime are being showered upon you. The Day Star of His great glory hath shed its radiance upon you, and the clouds of His limitless grace have overshadowed you. How high the reward of him that hath not deprived himself of so great a bounty, nor failed to recognized the beauty of his Best-Beloved in this, His new attire.<sup>51</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh

I bear witness, O friends! that the favor is complete, the argument fulfilled, the proof manifest and the evidence established. Let it now be seen what your endeavors in the path of detachment will reveal. In this wise hath the divine favor been fully vouchsafed unto you and unto them that are in heaven and on earth. All praise to God, the Lord of all Worlds.<sup>52</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh

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\* The word "Say," in the form of a command, appears frequently in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh. It indicates that the speaker is the Spirit of God. It is equivalent to the biblical expression, "Thus says the Lord."



## *A Few References for Continuing Your Investigation of the Bahá'í Faith*

If you decide to remain watchful and continue your investigation, these are a few books you should definitely read:

- *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*.<sup>53</sup> This is the best compilation of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh. It covers numerous topics and is not a book that you will want to read through speedily. Reading it is essential, for we are asked to know a tree by its fruits. Scriptures of a faith are its first fruits.
- *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh*.<sup>54</sup> This is a small book with beautiful and brief passages that summarize the spiritual teachings of all faiths. It is an inspirational book and shows—as does *Gleanings*—the distinction of divine words.
- *The Kitáb-i-Íqán (The Book of Certitude)*.<sup>55</sup> This book from Bahá'u'lláh is an invitation to all seekers and lovers of truth to overcome the obstacles that prevent them from recognizing the One promised in their Scriptures. It decodes the most significant metaphors used in prophecies of the second Advent.
- *Bahá'í Prayers*.<sup>56</sup> This book contains many beautiful prayers from the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Read it once and mark the prayers that appeal to you or that relate to your personal needs. Then recite the selected prayers every morning and evening. Persistent and whole-hearted praying is the key to the mansions of heaven. Without God's help we stand in the dark, confused and powerless.
- *The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh*.<sup>57</sup> This book contains Bahá'u'lláh's epistles to political and religious leaders of His time. In these epistles, He declares His Mission and invites the rulers of the earth to investigate His Message.
- *Some Answered Questions*.<sup>58</sup> This book by 'Abdu'l-Bahá responds to a variety of questions—theological, philosophical, prophetic, historical, judicial, and spiritual.
- *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*.<sup>59</sup> This book contains letters written by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in response to many questions raised by Bahá'ís.
- *The Divine Art of Living*.<sup>60</sup> This book contains many quotations from Bahá'í Scriptures about the art of cultivating spirituality and happiness.
- *The Glorious Journey to God*.<sup>61</sup> This book contains selections from sacred Scriptures of five great religions on the afterlife. This is an inspirational book on a topic of great concern to all human beings. It is the most comprehensive and reliable source of knowledge about the beyond.
- *Unto God Shall We Return*.<sup>62</sup> This book portrays a most glorious destiny for those who fulfill their lives' purpose during their short stay on this planet. It shows that death is not a voyage to grave, but to God. *Unto God Shall We Return* brings comfort to all those who mourn the loss of their loved ones, and instills hope, peace, and joy by unveiling glimpses of the glories that await anyone who fulfills his mission on earth and joins the host of heaven.

- *The Hour of the Dawn*.<sup>63</sup> A brief history of the Advent of the Báb; you can read this book in a day or two. It is a good beginning.
- *Day of Glory*.<sup>64</sup> A brief and simple account of the Advent of Bahá'u'lláh; this is a sequel to *The Hour of the Dawn*.
- *Release the Sun*.<sup>65</sup> An expanded account of the Advent of the Báb and the dramatic events of His brief and amazing life.
- *Thief in the Night*.<sup>66</sup> This book lists biblical references to the Advents of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh and is written in a simple and stimulating style. Once you start reading, you may be unable to put it down. I have known people who have read it straight through.
- *The Challenge of Bahá'u'lláh*.<sup>67</sup> This volume presents proofs of Bahá'u'lláh's divine distinction. It is the most comprehensive reference on His predictions.
- *I Shall Come Again*,<sup>68</sup> *Lord of Lords*,<sup>69</sup> and *King of Kings*.<sup>70</sup> These are the first three of six volumes I spent over 30 years writing. In these books you will find the most convincing evidence of the stations of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. You will be astonished by the number of detailed prophecies that designate the time of the Advents of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh and much of the history of the Bahá'í Faith.

A few other books by this author:

- *Come Now, Let Us Reason Together*. This book responds to objections raised by a pastor against the Bahá'í Faith. It has a sequel: *Let Us Speak the Truth in Love*.
- *Christ Has Come!* This book is addressed specifically to Christians. It responds to some of the most critical questions Christians may ask, and invites them to arise and investigate the evidence Bahá'u'lláh presents for His divine Mission.
- *The News Every Christian Should Know*. This booklet invites Christians to investigate the Message of Bahá'u'lláh.
- *Knowing God By His Word*. This book is a call to Christians to awaken and investigate the Message of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. It offers many brief quotations from the Hebrew, Christian, and Bahá'í Scriptures to show their similarity, the oneness of their source, and their distinction. It demonstrates that the most conclusive evidence of religion is the miracle of words: its scriptures, for God's Word is supremely distinct and distinguished.
- *One God, Many Faiths; One Garden, Many Flowers*. This book shows that in God's garden there are many fragrant flowers, planted and nourished by the same Gardener. The Bahá'í Faith has come to help us recognize the beauty of the garden, the harmony of the flowers, and the oneness of the Gardener.
- *Choosing Your Destiny*. Most people leave their destiny to "chance." Whatever their parents happen to believe, they believe. This book shows that our "destiny" is God's most precious gift to us. Should we throw this gift to the wind? Should we allow "chance," rather than "choice," determine our destiny?
- *The Evidence for Jesus*. Before knowing the true evidence for another religion, we should know the true evidence for our own—the one on which we base our

everlasting destiny. If we don't know why we believe in our own faith, how can we know why we should believe in another faith? *The Evidence for Jesus* offers a brief summary of all the reasons Jesus gave to substantiate His claim. This is a book every Christian should read. It is also of value to those of Jewish faith who have a desire to know the evidence for the glory of the Son.

- *The Evidence for Bahá'u'lláh*. This is the sequel to *The Evidence for Jesus*. It applies the same standards to Bahá'u'lláh as *The Evidence for Jesus* applies to Jesus Christ.
- *The Spiritual Design of Creation*. This book covers topics that are the backbone of religion and faith, such as scientific evidence for the existence of God, the soul, and the afterlife. It portrays the design of creation (Why did God create the world the way it is?) and explains the purpose of suffering. As its title implies, it contains many humorous stories.
- *The Knowledge of God*. This small book rests on this premise: We are spiritual beings created and designed in the most splendid Image, for a profound purpose—to grow and advance spiritually by remaining in touch with our Designer. Our welfare and our destiny depend on harmonizing our life with what He has planned and has in store for us. Unless we accept and submit to His plan, we cannot manifest our full potential, nor can we enjoy the blessings in store for us. Instead of blooming into a beautiful flower, we will live and die as a seed, without fulfilling our mission—the very reason we came into this world.
- *A Messenger of Joy*. This is a book of poetry on the afterlife. It shows the supreme honors and joys destined for those who follow, during their earthly life, what God has planned for them. It removes the fear of dying and shows that death is a blessing for those who have pleased God.

## **Part III**

### **Quotations from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh**

***Brief Quotations from Bahá'u'lláh's  
Epistle to the Pope and  
Religious Leaders of His Time***

Bahá'u'lláh, in His time, sent letters to religious leaders in general and to Pope Pius IX in particular. None of them responded to His call. Here are a few messages from His Epistles:

O leaders of religion! 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.

The eye of My loving-kindness weepeth sore over you, inasmuch as ye have failed to recognize the One upon Whom ye have been calling in the daytime and in the night season, at even and at morn...

We have decreed, O people, that the highest and last end of all learning be the recognition of Him Who is the Object of all knowledge; and yet, behold how ye have allowed your learning to shut you out, as by a veil, from Him Who is the Dayspring of this Light, through Whom every hidden thing hath been revealed.<sup>1</sup>

O Pope! Rend the veils asunder. He Who is the Lord of Lords is come overshadowed with clouds, and the decree hath been fulfilled by God, the Almighty, the Unrestrained...He, verily, hath again come down from Heaven even as He came down from it the first time. Beware that thou dispute not with Him even as the Pharisees disputed with Him (Jesus) without a clear token or proof. On His right hand flow the living waters of grace, and on His left the choice Wine of justice, whilst before Him march the angels of Paradise, bearing the banners of His signs. Beware lest any name debar thee from God, the Creator of earth and heaven. Leave thou the world behind thee, and turn towards thy Lord, through Whom the whole earth hath been illumined...

Dwellest thou in palaces whilst He Who is the King of Revelation liveth in the most desolate of abodes? Leave them unto such as desire them, and set thy face with joy and delight towards the Kingdom...Arise in the name of thy Lord, the God of Mercy, amidst the peoples of the earth, and seize thou the Cup of Life with the hands of confidence, and first drink thou therefrom, and proffer it then to such as turn towards it amongst the peoples of all faiths...

Call thou to remembrance Him Who was the Spirit (Jesus), Who when He came, the most learned of His age pronounced judgment against Him in His own country, whilst he who was only a fisherman believed in Him. Take heed, then, ye men of understanding heart! Thou, in truth, art one of the suns of the heaven of His names. Guard thyself, lest darkness spread its veils over thee, and fold thee away from His light...Consider those who opposed the Son (Jesus), when He came unto them with sovereignty and power. How many the Pharisees who were waiting to behold Him,

and were lamenting over their separation from Him! And yet, when the fragrance of His coming was wafted over them, and His beauty was unveiled, they turned aside from Him and disputed with Him...None save a very few, who were destitute of any power amongst men, turned towards His face...

The Word which the Son concealed is made manifest. It hath been sent down in the form of the human temple in this day. Blessed be the Lord Who is the Father! He, verily, is come unto the nations in His most great majesty. Turn your faces towards Him, O concourse of the righteous...Lo! The Father is come, and that which ye were promised in the Kingdom is fulfilled!...My body longeth for the cross, and Mine head waiteth the thrust of the spear, in the path of the All-Merciful, that the world may be purged from its transgressions...<sup>2</sup>

***Brief Quotations from  
Bahá'u'lláh's Epistles Addressed to  
Political Leaders of the Earth***

O kings of the earth! He Who is the sovereign Lord of all is come. The Kingdom is God's, the omnipotent Protector, the Self-Subsisting. Worship none but God, and, with radiant hearts, lift up your faces unto your Lord, the Lord of all names. This is a Revelation to which whatever ye possess can never be compared, could ye but know it.<sup>3</sup>

Lo! The Lord is come in His great majesty! He Who is the Father is come, and the Son (Jesus), in the holy vale, crieth out: "Here am I, here am I, O Lord, My God!" whilst Sinai circleth round the House, and the Burning Bush calleth aloud: "The All-Bounteous is come mounted upon the clouds! Blessed is he that draweth nigh unto Him, and woe betide them that are far away."

Arise thou amongst men in the name of this all-compelling Cause, and summon, then, the nations unto God, the Exalted, the Great. Be thou not of them who called upon God by one of His names, but who, when He Who is the Object of all names appeared, denied Him and turned aside from Him, and, in the end, pronounced sentence against Him with manifest injustice. Consider and call thou to mind the days whereon the Spirit of God (Jesus) appeared, and Herod gave judgment against Him. God, however, aided Him with the hosts of the unseen, and protected Him with truth, and sent Him down unto another land, according to His promise. He, verily, ordaineth what He pleaseth. Thy Lord truly preserveth whom He willeth, be he in the midst of the seas, or in the maw of the serpent, or beneath the sword of the oppressor...<sup>4</sup>

Know thou that though My body be beneath the swords of My foes, and My limbs be beset with incalculable afflictions, yet My spirit is filled with a gladness with which all the joys of the earth can never compare.<sup>5</sup>

I am the One Whom the tongue of Isaiah hath extolled, the One with Whose name both the Torah and the Evangel were adorned...Blessed be the king whose sovereignty hath withheld him not from his Sovereign, and who hath turned unto God with his

heart... Ere long will such a one find himself numbered with the monarchs of the realms of the Kingdom. Thy Lord is, in truth, potent over all things.<sup>6</sup>

He Who is the Unconditioned is come, in the clouds of light, that He may quicken all created things with the breezes of His Name, the Most Merciful, and unify the world, and gather all men around this Table which hath been sent down from heaven. Beware that ye deny not the favor of God after it hath been sent down unto you. Better is this for you than that which ye possess; for that which is yours perisheth, whilst that which is with God endureth. He, in truth, ordaineth what He pleaseth. Verily, the breezes of forgiveness have been wafted from the direction of your Lord, the God of Mercy; whoso turneth thereunto, shall be cleansed of his sins, and of all pain and sickness. Happy the man that hath turned towards them, and woe betide him that hath turned aside.<sup>7</sup>

### *A Prayer from Bahá'u'lláh*

Glorified art Thou, O Lord my God! Thou hast, in Thine all highest Paradise, assigned unto Thy servants such stations that if any one of them were to be unveiled to men's eyes all who are in heaven and all who are on earth would be dumbfounded. By Thy might! Were kings to witness so great a glory they would, assuredly, rid themselves of their dominions and cleave to such of their subjects as have entered beneath the shadow of Thine immeasurable mercy and sought the shelter of Thine all-glorious name.

I implore Thee, O Thou Who art the Beloved of the worlds and the Desire of all that have recognized Thee, by Thy name, through which Thou stirrest up whom Thou willest and drawest toward Thee whom Thou pleasest, to open the eyes of all that are dear to Thee, that haply they may not be veiled from Thee as the peoples of the earth are, but may outwardly perceive the signs and tokens of Thy power, and inwardly apprehend the things Thou didst ordain for them in the realms of Thy glory.

Potent art Thou to do Thy pleasure. Thou art the one alone Beloved in both this world and in the next. No God is there but Thee, the Most Exalted, the All-Glorious.<sup>8</sup>

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## Part I

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## **Part II**

### ***An Invitation to Christians***

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### ***Part III***

#### ***Quotations from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh***

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2. The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 83–85.
3. The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 5.
4. The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 27–28.
5. The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 29.
6. The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 29–30.
7. The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 17.
8. Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh, p. 209.