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**THE
NEW
GARDEN**

HOOSHMAND FATHEA'ZAM

THE
New Garden

HOOSHMAND FATHEA'ZAM

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“Proclaim unto the children of assurance that within the realms of holiness...a new garden hath appeared, round which circle the denizens of the realm on high and the immortal dwellers of the exalted paradise. Strive, then, that ye may attain that station, that ye may unravel the mysteries of love from its wind-flowers and learn the secret of divine and consummate wisdom from its eternal fruits.”

—BAHA'U'LLAH

"The New Garden" is dedicated to the awakening masses of India, as a token of my gratitude for all the good lessons of devotion, sincerity and love that I have learnt from them.

—H.F.

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—H.F.

New Delhi,
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GOD AND HIS RELIGION

The Purpose Of Our Lives

Have you ever compared a jungle with a farm? In the jungle the trees grow wild; there are thick shrubs and untamed creepers. The farm has geometrical borders, tilled earth, network of canals and streams—a patch of corn here, a field of sugarcane there.

What is the difference between the wild jungle and the farm?

In the farm you can see *order* in everything while in the jungle there is no *order*. In the farm things have been cared for and tended to, while in the jungle everything grows haphazardly and without order.

Where there is *order* there is a *purpose*.

We do not make field for nothing. We do not dig canals and wells for no reason. We have a purpose in doing all this. If there was no purpose in doing so, we would have left the field to the rains, the winds and sun. We would have abandoned it to grow into a jungle with all its wild life.

The field has *order*. The field has a *purpose*.

Look at the Creation as a whole. Do you not see perfect order in everything? Look at the moon, how it comes and how it goes! Next month the crescent of the new moon will once more glitter in the sky like a golden dagger. Wait for 14 more days and watch the full moon rise in all its beauty like a silver shield. You can count the days of the moon because it comes and goes according to an *order*. Look at the sun, the change of the seasons, the birth of a child, the growth of a field. Everywhere

there is order and therefore there is a purpose behind all these things. They cannot be without a reason.

What is the purpose of our creation? To know God our Creator, and to worship Him.

If we know Him, the purpose of our lives is fulfilled. The purpose of a lamp is to give light. The purpose of a flute is to give out melodious notes. We must know God if the purpose of our lives has to be fulfilled. If we do not know Him, we are like unlit lamps, silent flutes.

Baha'u'llah, the great Manifestation of God for this age, reveals a prayer, saying :

“I bear witness, O my God, that Thou hast created me to know Thee and to worship Thee. I testify, at this moment, to my powerlessness and to Thy might, to my poverty and to Thy wealth.

“There is none other God but Thee, the help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting.”

Baha'u'llah has asked us to recite this prayer at noon every day lest we forget why we have been created. Let us be melodious flutes, vibrant with the praise of God. Let us not be silent flutes !

How To Know God

Our life on earth is chiefly dependent on the sun. It gives us light and life. If for a second the blessing of the sun were withdrawn from us, everything would die on the face of the earth. However, it is impossible for us to get very close to the sun, impossible to go directly to it. If we do so, the sun, the same source of light and life, will burn us away. We are too weak to bear the direct heat and light of the powerful sun. But the sun gives its energy,

heat, light and life to us through the medium of its rays. The rays of the sun connect us to the sun.

God, the Almighty, the Creator, the Omnipotent, is immeasurably greater than what we can imagine. He is the "Unknowable Essence". How can we reach Him through our own efforts? We will get burnt by trying to get too near to the sun. How can we then ever hope to be able to reach God, the Creator of all things—the All-Glorious, the Most High? We cannot go to Him but He can reach out to us. The sun sends its energies to us through its rays. God's guidance and glory come to us through His Manifestations like Krishna, Christ, Muhammad and Baha'u'llah. The Manifestations of God are the only means which can take us to Him. Had it not been for Them, our world would have remained dark and our lives would have been dead indeed.

If we recognize the Manifestations of God, we have recognized God. If we deny Them, we have denied God.

Baha'u'llah, the Manifestation of God, for our age, tells us :

"The door of the knowledge of the Ancient Being hath ever been, and will continue for ever to be, closed in the face of men. No man's understanding shall ever gain access unto His holy court. As a token of His mercy, however, and as a proof of His loving-kindness, He hath manifested unto men the Day Stars of His divine guidance, the Symbols to His divine unity, and hath ordained the knowledge of these sanctified Beings to be identical with the knowledge of His own Self. Whoso recognizeth them hath recognized God. Whoso hearkeneth to their call, hath hearkened to the voice of God, and whoso testifieth to the truth of their Revelation,

hath testified to the truth of God Himself. Whoso disbelieveth in them, hath disbelieved in God. Every one of them is the Way of God, connecteth this world with the realms above, and the Standard of His Truth unto every one in the kingdoms of earth and heaven. They are the Manifestations of God amidst men, the evidences of His Truth, and the signs of His Glory.”

The Love Of God

The knowledge of the Manifestations of God creates the love of God in our hearts. The love of God is the source of everlasting happiness. Love is the cause of our creation, as Baha'u'llah says :

“O Son of Man ! Veiled in My immemorial being and in the ancient eternity of My essence, I knew My love of thee ; therefore I created thee, have engraved on thee Mine image and revealed to thee My beauty.”

God loved us and created us. Because God has loved and will always continue to love us, He will never leave us alone in our helplessness. He manifests Himself to us from time to time. Abdu'l-Baha says :

“Consider to what extent the love of God makes itself manifest. Among the signs of His love which appear in the world are the dawning-points of His Manifestations. What an infinite degree of love is reflected by the divine Manifestations towards mankind ! For the sake of guiding the people they have willingly forfeited their lives to resuscitate human hearts. They have accepted the cross. To enable human souls to attain the supreme degree

of advancement, they have suffered during their limited years extreme ordeals and difficulties.....

“Observe how rarely human souls sacrifice their pleasure or comfort for others ; how improbable that a man would offer his eye or suffer himself to be dismembered for the benefit of another. Yet all the divine Manifestations suffered, offered their lives and blood, sacrificed their existence, comfort and all they possessed for the sake of mankind. Therefore consider how much they love. Were it not for their illumination, human souls would not be radiant. How effective is their love...This is a sign of the love of God ; a ray of the Sun of Reality.”

God loves us. He wants us to love Him too.

“O Son of the Wondrous Vision,” says Baha’u’llah, “I have breathed within thee a breath of My own Spirit, that thou mayest be My lover. Why hast thou forsaken Me and sought a beloved other than Me ?”

“To be God’s lover ! That is the sole object of life for a Baha’i. To have God as his closest companion and most intimate friend, his Peerless Beloved, in Whose Presence is fulness of joy ! And to love God means to love everything and everybody, for all are of God. The real Baha’i will be the perfect lover. He will love everyone with a pure heart, fervently. He will hate no one. He will despise no one, for he will have learnt to see the face of the Beloved in every face, and to find His traces everywhere. His love will know no limit of sect, nation, class or race.”*

*Baha’u’llah & the New Era.

The love of man for man will be easy if the love of God is in our hearts. In the words of Abdu'l-Baha, "The love which exists between the hearts of believers is prompted by the ideal of the unity of spirits. This love is attained through the knowledge of God, so that men see the Divine love reflected in the hearts. Each sees in the other the beauty of God reflected in the soul, and, finding this point of similarity, they are attracted to one another in love. This love will make all men the waves of one sea. This love will make them all the stars of one heaven and the fruits of one tree. This love will bring the realization of true accord, the foundation of real unity."

Remember the Call of God :

"O son of Being ! Love Me, that I may love thee.
If thou lovest Me not, My love can in no wise
reach thee. Know this, O servant."

Oneness Of Religion

When we are Baha'is, we believe in all the religions of the past as divine in origin. We do not change our religion to become Baha'is because we believe that God has only one religion which comes to us from time to time. By accepting the religion of all ages we have made our belief in God more perfect. We have not in fact changed it. A seed grows into roots, then puts forth a stem and leaves, flowers and fruit. The tree is the same tree all the time. It does not change. It only grows. The sun is the same sun though it dawns from different horizons. The people of the world through blind imitations and ignorance worship the dawning place from which their ancestors saw the Sun of God's Manifestation. If the same Sun rises from a different dawning-point, they ignore it and become bewildered. But when we look at the Sun we recognize it as the same Sun that has shone before from other horizons.

Baha'is believe that all the Prophets of the past are equal in rank and purpose. They are all divine Gardeners helping the growth of the blessed Tree of God. Therefore, when we are Baha'is we are united in one common Faith.

Baha'u'llah writes :

“Consider the sun. Were it to say now, ‘I am the sun of yesterday,’ it would speak the truth. And should it, bearing the sequence of time in mind, claim to be other than that sun, it still would speak the truth. In like manner, if it be said that all the days are but one and the same, it is correct and true. And if it be said, with respect to their particular names and designations, that they differ, that again is true. For though they are the same, yet one doth recognize in each a separate designation, a specific attribute, a particular character. Conceive accordingly the distinction, variation, and unity characteristic of various Manifestations of holiness, that thou mayest comprehend the allusions made by the Creator of all names and attributes to the mysteries of distinction and unity, and discover the answer to thy question as to why that everlasting beauty should have, at the sundry times, called Himself by different names and titles.”

Again, Baha'u'llah assured us that there is no distinction and difference between the different Manifestations of God. Their names may be different but they represent the same Truth, are seated upon the same Throne and enjoy the same nearness to God. He invites us to believe in all of them, when He says :

“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. 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."

Religion Repeats Itself

There are different seasons in every year. First comes spring with all its beauty, then summer and the season of harvest and abundance. After a while winter sets in and nature is stripped of its abundance and glory. But the end of each winter is the beginning of another spring time, to be followed again by the harvest season.

Every day the morning sun rises gradually until it reaches its zenith, then gradually goes down again until it sets. As the sun disappears from the face of the earth, everything is wrapped in darkness. But when all the candles and lamps of the world fail to dispel the darkness, the sun rises again—the same beautiful, the same glorious sun. This is exactly what happens with great religions.

When the Sun of Reality rises, a New Day of glory sets in. Everywhere there is light. Everybody is happy for the

age of darkness has gone. A New Day begins and gradually draws to its end. There comes a time in every religion when Truth is veiled by the appearance of man-made teachings. The more man forgets the teachings of God, the darker becomes his spiritual life. When man introduces his own teachings and interprets religion to suit his selfish motives, the age of darkness pervades the world. The only sources of light for us in such a dark night are the few saints and sages who are like the small earthen lamps and candles which burn after the sun has set. These small lights also burn out one after another and the world falls into the deep slumber of ignorance. This is the time when the Sun of Truth shines forth once again. In the past, the Sun of Truth has shone through Krishna, Buddha, Christ, Muhammad and others. In this dark age, the Sun of Truth shines once more through Baha'u'llah, the Glory of God. Let us not be satisfied with our earthen lamps and vanishing candles. The Sun is shining. Wake up! Wake up!

Baha'u'llah proclaims :

“Verily I say, this is the Day in which mankind can behold the Face, and hear the Voice of the Promised One. The Call of God hath been raised and the light of His countenance hath been lifted up upon men. 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 token of his glory.”

Progressive Religions

Abdu'l-Baha says :

“From the seed of reality religion has grown into a tree which has put forth leaves and branches,

blossoms and fruit. After a time this tree has fallen into a condition of decay. The leaves and blossoms have withered and perished; and tree has become stricken and fruitless. It is not reasonable that man should hold to the old tree, claiming that its life forces are undiminished, its fruit unequalled, its existence eternal. The seed of reality must be sown again in human hearts in order that a new tree may grow therefrom and new divine fruits refresh the world. By this means the nations and peoples now divergent in religion will be brought into unity, imitations will be forsaken and a universal brotherhood in the reality itself will be established. Warfare and strife will cease among mankind; all will be reconciled as servants of God..."

Religion is a spiritual school in which mankind receives divine teachings and progresses in body and soul. The founder of this school is God. The children of men have to pass through this divine school if they seek progress and happiness. In the beginning, one has to go to the first standard of a school, and there the loving teacher starts with alphabets and elementaries. When, through the care and kindness of our teacher, our mind is sufficiently developed, we are sent to the second standard where we find another teacher basing his teachings on what we have already learnt in the previous standard, but adding to them new measures of knowledge. Our mind and body thus grow in this school under the guidance of our teachers.

Can we say that any of these teachers who teach in different standards is better than the others? Can we dislike the teacher of the second standard merely because we happened to love our teacher in the first standard?

Can we say that what we were taught in the first standard was better than the lessons in the second standard? Of course not! These different standards belong to the same school. They follow the same method of teaching, but our ages and capacities are different in each standard. When we were six years old, our capacities were very little, so the wise founder of the school advised the teacher of our standard to give us so much of knowledge as we could then understand. What we were taught in that standard were the best lessons we could receive at that particular age. If we were then given the lessons of the third standard to begin with, we could never make any progress. The same is true with religion. God is One and His institution of Religion is one. It is we who have different capacities in different ages.

Our divine Teachers, the Manifestations of God, are wise teachers. All of them have one purpose which is to help us progress in the Kingdom of God. But man has been developing down the ages and his capacities have changed with his growth. We must therefore see wisdom of this evolutionary law of progress which God has provided for us through His Manifestations in different ages. We must not allow ourselves to remain in one standard of this divine Institution merely because we love the Teacher who has taught us in that standard. This is not true love which we have for our Teacher because if we remain in His class, He will be sad. He wants us to go further and receive instructions from the Teachers of the next standards too. This does not mean that the knowledge of one Teacher is less than that of another. No. All these Teachers have the same degree of knowledge. All of Them are equally wise and important. Because They are wise, They give us only as much knowledge as we require at a certain time. But They assure us that when we have

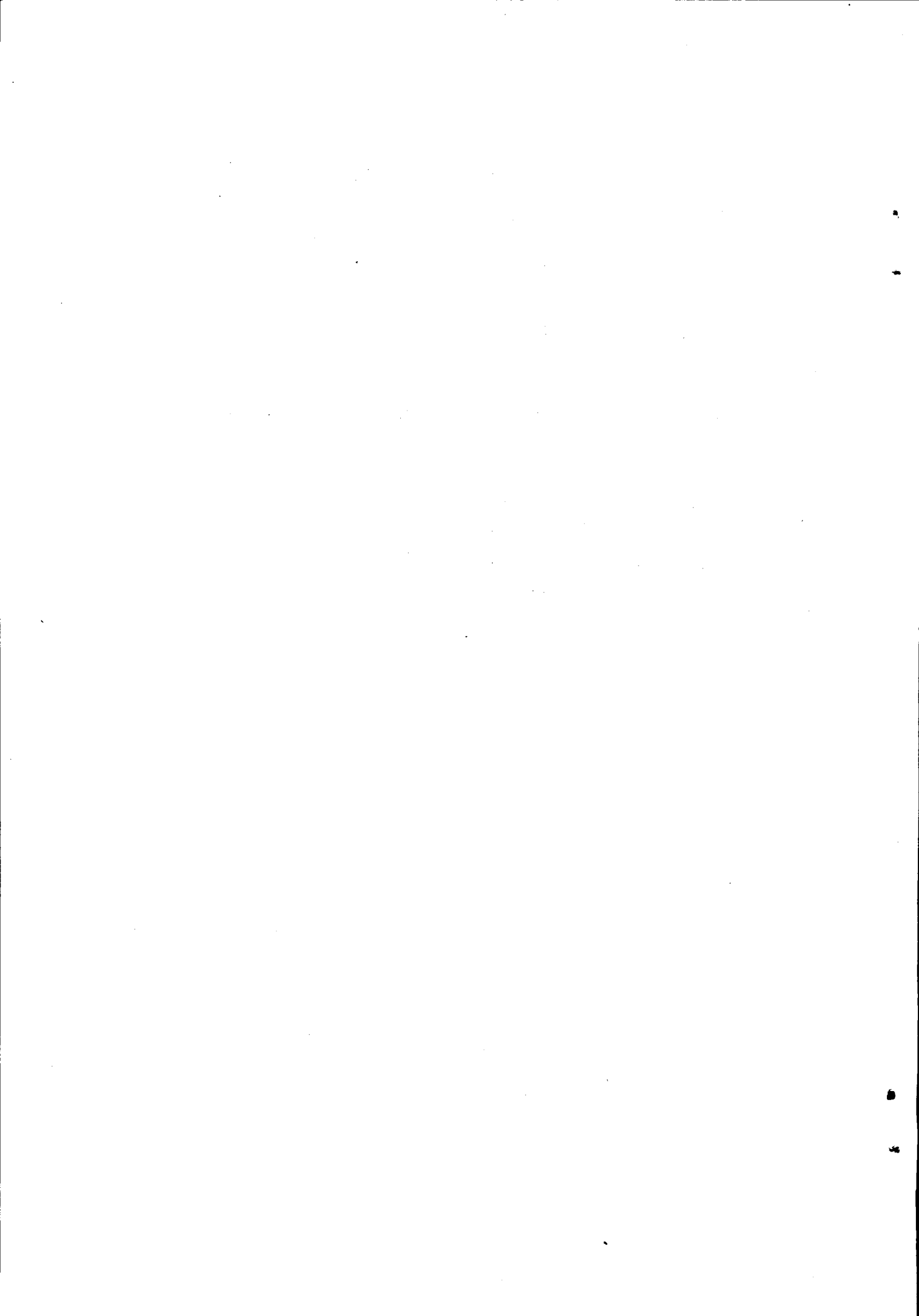
done our best and followed Their instructions, we will have another Teacher who will help us along further progress. Our next Teacher in turn praises the effort and ability of the previous Teacher who gave us knowledge. In the like manner we see that all the Prophets of God have praised the Manifestations who came before Them, and have promised further education through a Teacher who is to come after them.

If any one of us stops his progress in the school of the religion of God, he will be a failure, but if he believes in progress and wisdom of divine Manifestations, he will try to qualify himself in such a way as to be able to receive a greater measure of knowledge from the divine Teacher who has brought the lessons for his age.

Baha'u'llah has taught that the foundation of all religions is one. In all the standards of school one is taught to be honest, to be truthful, to be kind, etc. These fundamental rules do not change when we move into a higher standard. Be it in the first, second or third standard, these heavenly attributes are always praised. They are eternal Truths, true in every age. These are the foundations. But the foundation alone is not enough. Something must be built on this foundation which will suit our needs in different ages. This is exactly what the religions of God do. - On the same foundation of truth, which is unchangeable, they develop knowledge and capacity of man to a higher degree at every stage of his growth. In doing so they still base their rules on the foundations of knowledge taught by the previous Manifestations of God, just as the algebra taught in the higher standards of a school is based on the elementary arithmetic rules we study in our childhood.

Now we are living in a new cycle of human power which means we are now living in a new age and have greater powers and capacities than we have ever had before. Thanks to the Manifestations of the past we have been prepared to receive a great measure of the knowledge of God through His Mouth-piece for this new age —Baha'u'llah.

Baha'u'llah teaches us the Oneness of God, the oneness of religion and the oneness of mankind. He has praised all the Prophets of the past and has pointed out to us how all of Them have given the glad-tidings that in the fulness of time Their beloved Promised One will come. The golden chain of prophethood has been linked together through Baha'u'llah. It is a beautiful story.



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MANIFESTATIONS OF GOD

1905

Krishna

Krishna was a Messenger of God. His Message was the Message of love. He was born in a prison. This was a sign for us to know that all of us are born in the prison of self, the prison of this world. Krishna miraculously escaped from prison. If we try to be good, if we try to be godly, we too, can escape from the prison of self.

Krishna, like all the other Manifestations of God, was confronted with the forces of evil. He fought against evil and became victorious. No matter how powerful evil might be, the power of truth is always victorious.

Krishna became the king of Dwarka—which means the small Gate. He was the gate of the knowledge of God Himself. His teachings were for the good of man. But alas! man has rejected them.

Krishna was sad that the people could not understand Him. He complained that people did not believe in Him because He came in human form. They had their own fancies about God and His Manifestation. Therefore, when Krishna claimed that He manifested God, the people rejected Him. This is what Krishna says in the Gita :

“The deluded despise Me clad in human body not knowing My higher nature as Lord of all existence.” (Gita, IX, II)

Even His beloved disciple Arjuna could not understand the Divine Power in Krishna. Arjuna could not believe that the temple of man might become the seat of the Divine Being. They say that Krishna had to

transfigure Himself into the Divine Form so that Arjuna could see His power and believe in Him.

This means that Krishna helped Arjuna to understand His spiritual majesty and grandeur before Arjuna could find faith in the Lord. The battle of Kurukshetra took a different turn when Arjuna took up arms to obey the Lord.

You know that this battle was the battle between Good and Evil. The Kaurvas, the cousins of the Pandavas, started it. Arjuna, the mighty one among the Pandavas, was led by Krishna to fight the army of Darkness. Krishna was Arjuna's charioteer. But Arjuna did not want to fight his own relatives. His beloved teacher and his friends were in the army of the Kaurvas. Arjuna tried to argue and laid down his mighty bow. But Krishna demanded that Arjuna should surrender himself to Him and follow Him.

When we find the Manifestation of God and embrace His faith, we must obey His Commands. This is what Krishna taught us in the Gita.

"Surrendering in thought all actions to Me, regarding Me as the Supreme and resorting to Steadfastness in understanding, do thou fix thy thought constantly on Me." (Gita XVIII, 57)

Krishna was the abode of peace. He called us to Himself, saying :

"Abandoning all duties, come to Me alone for Shelter, be not grieved, for I shall release thee from all evils." (Gita, XVIII, 66)

Krishna, the Manifestation of God, brought a new civilization. He delivered man from evil and sorrow. He

assured His followers that in future also God would manifest Himself to repeat what Krishna had done. In order to guide the wandering people of the world to the straight path of God, He said :

“Whenever there is a decline of righteousness and rise of unrighteousness, O Bharta (Arjuna) ; then I send forth Myself for the protection of good, for the destruction of the wicked and for the establishment of righteousness. I come into being from age to age.” (Gita, IV, 7,8)

We shall see in the following pages how this promise of the Lord has been fulfilled.

Buddha

Buddha was born in a royal family of the Himalayan kingdom. He was still a baby when an old sage, named Asita, visited the palace. Asita was a godly man and he gave the good news to the father of Buddha that his son would become the Saviour of Man.

Buddha was then called Prince Gautama. His father provided his beloved son with all the enjoyments of life. He wanted to make his son a good king. But Gautama found that wordly pleasures alone were not the cause of comfort. One day He saw an old man, then a man who was sick, and then one who had died. He found out that all human beings were subject to suffering and death. Therefore He realized the spiritual happiness alone could make all men really happy. He left His home, His wife and child to seek spiritual truth. In the beginning He went to far away jungles and denied Himself food and comfort. This was not helpful. For if the body is weakened, mental powers also grow weak. It was under

a Bodhi Tree in India that Buddha received His enlightenment. From that day He started His great mission to save mankind from suffering. He told men to purify their souls and minds, to avoid greed and dishonesty and to realize that this world of suffering is a place where they should prepare themselves for eternal and spiritual joy and happiness.

He set an example for us in His blessed life. Where He was sitting under the Tree wrapped in meditation, Mara, the evil one, tried to tempt Him by offering Him the wealth of the world and the pleasures of senses. But Buddha, the Enlightened One, overcame the forces of evil. His power was the power of the spirit.

Through His wonderful teachings, Buddha helped millions of people of various nations to attain spiritual salvation.

In the days of Buddha the people of His country were fighting against each other in the name of God. They had, in fact, set up many different gods and goddesses for themselves. Buddha knew that the way to God was only through His Manifestation. He was the Manifestation of God, therefore, He did not want people to fight against each other in the name of God Whom they could not know except through Him. He was a wise teacher. To avoid quarrels among the people, He was mostly silent about God but called upon them to obey Him, the Manifestation of Truth. In this way he succeeded in uniting millions of people who were divided among themselves either in the name of God or in the name of caste. He said, "One does not become a Brahmin by birth, one does not become an outcast by birth, one becomes Brahmin by act, one becomes an outcast by act."

Shortly before His passing away from this earth, Buddha made a great promise to His followers who were afraid that His Cause would gradually die away. He said :

"I am not the first Buddha who came upon earth nor shall I be the last. In due time another Buddha will arise in the world, a holy one, a supremely enlightened one endowed with wisdom in conduct, auspicious, knowing the universe, an incomparable leader of men, a master of angels and mortals. He shall reveal to you the same eternal truths which I have taught you. He will preach to you this religion, glorious in its origin, glorious at the climax, and glorious at the goal, in the spirit and in the letter. He will proclaim a religious life wholly perfect and pure such as I now proclaim. His disciples will number many thousands while Mine number many hundreds."

This promise gave the hope to Buddhists that they would not be left alone on this earth but would receive the light of guidance from another glorious Buddha. Buddha is now rejoicing in His eternal abode because He sees His glorious promise fulfilled in Baha'u'llah, the Glory of God.

Moses

In a far-away land there was a group of slaves living a very difficult life. They were called the 'Children of Israel' and were working as slaves under the mighty emperor of Egypt. These people belonged to another country, now called Israel, but had been taken away from their homes by force. Only a Manifestation of God could save them from their suffering. So Moses was destined to arise for the salvation of these people. He was alone and the

Egyptian emperor had every means to destroy Him. But when the Manifestation of God comes, He is bestowed with such a great power that no power on earth can overcome it. Moses, unaided and single-handed, arose to give the glad-tidings of the Kingdom of God to His people.

When Moses declared Himself as the Manifestation of God, the Children of Israel knew that the time of their suffering was over. They followed Him. They came back to Israel, the Holy Land, and started a new life. The emperor of Egypt, with all his might and all his power, could not prevent them. When he and his army tried to do so, they were drowned in the Red Sea.

The Words of God transformed the lives of the Children of Israel. Though they had been mere slaves, they established a wealthy kingdom. They became great teachers of mankind. Many of the philosophers and teachers of other lands derived their knowledge from the followers of Moses. For with His coming, the Manifestation of God not only brings us happiness but also gives us the source of great knowledge and wisdom.

Moses summarised His teachings in 10 laws. They were beautiful laws. He told us to love God ; never to love anything else more than God ; to love our father and mother and to obey them. He told us not to steal ; not to hurt other people ; to be pure and clean ; to be always truthful. Besides these beautiful teachings, Moses made a promise to His people that in the fulness of time, the Lord of Hosts will come to deliver them from all sufferings. He promised that when the Lord of Hosts comes, the Children of Israel will once more return to the Holy Land after ages of separation, and will unite again in the land of their forefathers.

The Lord of Hosts has come. Baha'u'llah has proclaimed that the Day of God, promised in the Holy Books of the past, has come. He gave the glad-tidings to the followers of Moses that their cherished Promise has been fulfilled. Jews of all countries, after an age-long separation, during which time they endured all forms of humiliation and suffering have now gathered together in the Holy Land. They have established a separate homeland for themselves called Israel. According to the Promise of Moses all this had to be fulfilled when the Lord of Hosts sat on the Throne of Judgment on this earth. Many Jews, when they saw how the Children of Israel had gathered in the Holy Land according to the Promise in their Holy Book, understood that the Lord of Hosts had come. Otherwise it would have been impossible for them to gather together.

In the Baha'i World Community there are many Jews who have believed in Baha'u'llah as their glorious Promised One.

Jesus Christ

The story of Jesus Christ is a very beautiful story. It is a story of the love of God and the love of mankind. It is the story of a Manifestation of God.

Before Christ revealed His Mission to mankind, there lived a holy man by the name of John the Baptist. We have seen in the story of Buddha how a holy man gave the good news that the Saviour of mankind would soon appear. This is exactly what happened before Christ revealed His Mission. John the Baptist gave the good news to the people of his time that the Messenger of God would come to deliver them from all sorrows. The people of that time did not like to change their ideas ; they wished

to go on imitating what their forefathers had done for centuries before them. The priests who led the people did not want a Messenger of God to come, because they were afraid that if He came they might lose their position. Therefore, they put John the Baptist in prison and after sometime they cut off his head. John was happy to give even his life in the path of God.

Jesus Christ was born in a very simple home. Joseph, who was known to be His father, was only a carpenter. Christ was born in the Holy Land. He was very good and kind to the people even when He was a young boy and working as a carpenter with His father. When He was a young man, He said, "The time has now come for me to look after the business of my real heavenly Father."

He went out for meditation for many days, then came back to the people revealing His true mission. He gave the glad-tidings of the Kingdom of God. Once He went to a holy place. This was a centre of pilgrimage and reverence for the Jews, but they had also turned it into a business centre. Christ went and pulled down their shops and chased them out of the holy place. He said, "This is the House of God. You should not pollute it with your worldly interests." He wanted to show that the Religion of God should not become a source of material gains.

In the days of Christ there were very many people who were spiritually sick and spiritually dead. He cured them and gave them life with the power of the Word of God. Soon He became very popular. The priests grew jealous and did not like that their followers should be attracted by this simple man who was teaching a new way of life for the people. When He told them that He was their spiritual King, the One Promised in their Holy Books, the priests grew very angry because they expected their king to

be a man with worldly grandeur while Jesus Christ was a simple man. He had even no shoes. Nevertheless, He proclaimed that He was the King of Israel. "I am your true King", He said, "I am the Master of the New Kingdom. These worldly kingdoms are nothing as compared to the everlasting Kingdom of God." But the Jews did not want to believe Him. They rose against Him and had Him crucified along with two thieves. Even on the Cross, Jesus Christ prayed for the forgiveness of His enemies.

The Jews did not understand the true meaning of their Holy Book ; they did not even know that by killing the Manifestation of God, they could not kill His voice as it was the Voice of God and would be heard in every land.

When Christ died, very simple and ordinary people were among those who believed in Him. They had received new spiritual life by the power of the Word of Christ and had risen out of their graves of ignorance. Although these early disciples of Christ were humble fishermen, ordinary clerks, farmers and tillers of the soil, they were guided by a Manifestation of God and received new powers through Him. They scattered far and wide throughout the world and spread the good Message of their Master—Jesus Christ. Many of them even gave their lives for the sake of His Cause. Under great hardships and the threat of the sword, they carried His Message to different peoples and cried aloud that the Kingdom of God had been established on earth through Jesus. Though mere fishermen and farmers, they withstood the onslaught of the forces of the whole world. They conquered nation after nation with the Word of God and brought new spiritual life to all who came under their influence. This was the divine power of Jesus Christ, the Manifestation of God.

Before He left this world, Christ, like Krishna and Moses, assured the people of the world that in the fullness of time He would come again in the glory of His Heavenly Father. He said to the people of His age that He had many other things to say but they would not be able to understand them. He promised, however, that another great Messenger would later come to tell them more about God and religion.

Baha'is give the good news to their Christian brothers that Christ has come again in the glory of the Father. This is what Baha'u'llah said to the leaders of Christianity, "Surely the Father hath come and hath fulfilled that which you were promised in the Kingdom of God....."

Muhammad

There is a land called Arabia. It is mostly desert with very little water, and a hot, unfavourable climate. In this difficult land there used to live savage tribes who were always at war with one another. They were so savage and ignorant that they used to bury alive their own daughters just because they were girls, and women were no more than slaves in these days.

But no matter how cruel those people were, they were still God's children and had to be educated. So Muhammad, the Prophet of God, was born among them.

Muhammad was a simple man. He was in charge of a caravan, taking camel-loads and goods from Arabia to sell in other lands. Most of the Manifestations of God were simple people. Even those who, like Buddha, came from higher ranks in life, gave up their princely positions to live simple lives. God wants to show that it is His wealth and His influence that work through His Manifestations. When

charged with the Power of God, even the humblest person becomes victorious over all the power of the world.

One day when Muhammad was praying on a hill-top, He received inspiration from God. He had not been to any school. He could not even write His own name, but from that hour the verses of the Holy Quran were revealed through Him. From then onwards, Muhammad was no longer a leader of a caravan. He was the Messenger of God. He went to the people with His Message. At first nobody listened to Him. When He insisted that they should stop worshipping the idols they had built, and should believe in the One True God, the people of Arabia rose against Him. They called Him a mad man. They ridiculed Him as a poor poet. But Muhammad went about saying, "O people, I am the Messenger of God. I have come to save you and to lead you to the Path of Truth." This was too much for the proud people of Arabia. They had tolerated Muhammad at first, then they had persecuted Him and His followers, but after 13 long years of suffering Muhammad was still calling upon them to turn to the One Compassionate God and follow His Commandments. Why should they put aside their own gods? They thought. Besides, they were too busy with their continuous warfare. They had no more patience with Muhammad. So they decided to kill Him and His handful of followers. But the Mission of Muhammad was not yet fulfilled. He still had other laws to give to people of His age. He left His birth-place, Mecca, for another town, now called Medina.

The enemies of the Cause of God organized great armies to kill Muhammad and His band of followers. Muhammad had to protect the Cause of God and those who had come to believe in God, so He permitted His followers to fight against the savages who wished to

destroy them. Thus, in the days of Muhammad, as in the life time of Krishna, the armies of Light and of Darkness arrayed their forces against each other.

Muhammad was a Divine shepherd. He had to protect His innocent flock from the attack of savage wolves. In the beginning, Muhammad and His followers had a difficult time. Many of them were killed while defending themselves against the fierce onslaught of their enemies. But all the time Muhammad assured them that the Cause of God had always been victorious and would always continue to be so. When the Muhammadans, His followers, were surrounded by powerful enemies, Muhammad foretold that mighty empires would soon crumble before them because they were alive with the Spirit of God, whereas others were spiritually dead.

This has come to pass as we all know. The great Persian and Roman empires were defeated by a handful of Arabs whose lives were transformed after they believed in Muhammad, the Prophet of God, and accepted His divine Message. The Message of God transformed the lives of millions of other people too, for the teachings of Islam spread from India to Spain. During the age of Islam's golden civilization many different nations were united in one great brotherhood. They offered their daily Prayers to the One God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. They recited Holy Quran which prescribes a life of virtue and submission to the Will of the Almighty. Even today millions of people all over the world pray the same prayer and read the same Holy Book. Muhammad, like all the Manifestations of the past, assured His followers that a great Messenger would come after Him. He said that the Religion of God which had come down from heaven through Him, would go back to God after passing of a thousand years. By this he meant that people would

forget His teachings in the course of one thousand years. But after that, He said, when no trace of God's Religion was left on earth, a mighty Trumpet sound would be heard—not once but twice—and the people of the world would behold the Face of God Himself.

The Trumpet sound means the Call of God. The Call of God has already been raised twice in this age foretold by Muhammad. The Bab appeared exactly one thousand years after the revelation of Islam. Almost immediately after Him, Baha'u'llah declared His Mission. Was it not the Bab Who called men to God and reminded them of God's great Promise? And was it not Baha'u'llah Who raised up the cry a second time immediately after the Bab, calling upon the children of God to behold His Face?

The Bab

'Bab' means 'Gate' ! The Bab was the Gate to a new Kingdom—the Kingdom of God on earth.

The Bab was very young when He told people about the Message which God had given Him. He was only twenty-five years old. A beautiful city in the south of Iran, called Shiraz, was the birthplace of the Bab. The people of Iran were Muhammadans, so He was given a name that was much used in that country. He was called Ali Muhammad, and was a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad Himself. The Bab's father died soon after His birth, so He was placed under the care of His maternal uncle. As a child He was sent to a teacher who taught the Quran and elementary subjects. But from his early childhood, the Bab was different from other children. He was always asking difficult questions and then giving the answers Himself in a way that astonished His elders.

Often when other children were busy at play, He would be found wrapped in prayer under the shade of a tree or in some other quiet spot.

Later, when the Bab revealed His reality as a Manifestation of God, both His uncle and His teacher believed in Him because they had known Him since His childhood, and seen the difference between Him and other children. His uncle even died as a martyr for the Cause of God revealed through his Nephew, the Bab.

Before the Bab declared His Mission as a Messenger of God, there were two famous teachers who said that according to the Quran and the holy traditions, the Promised One of Islam would soon appear. These two teachers were Shaikh Ahmad and his chief disciple Siyyid Kazim. Because they were holy men and very learned, many people believed what they said and prepared themselves to receive the Promised One.

When Siyyid Kazim died, his followers scattered in different directions to find the Promised One. A number of them, under the leadership of a pious and learned young man, called Mulla Husayn, spent 40 days in prayer and fasting, and then took the road to Shiraz.

Their prayers were answered. Near the gate of Shiraz, Mulla Husayn met a radiant young man who had come out to receive him. This young man was none other than the Bab Himself.

He invited Mulla Husayn to His house and there, on the 23rd of May 1844, nearly one hundred and twenty-five years ago, the Bab declared Himself as the Promised One.

Mulla Husayn's heart had been drawn towards the Bab from the minute his eyes rested on him outside the

gate of Shiraz, but now that his Host made His great announcement, he asked for some proof by which he could know Him as the Promised One. The Bab said that no proof was greater than divine verses revealed by a Manifestation of God. Then, taking up His pen and paper, He wrote down His first sacred Writing. Though He had not attended any school except for a brief period in His childhood, the Bab, like all the other Manifestations, was endowed with a deep knowledge which was a gift of God. He wrote with great speed, and as He wrote, He chanted the verses in a heavenly, mild voice. Mulla Husayn needed no further proof. With tears in his eyes, he prostrated himself before the Manifestation of God.

Mulla Husayn was the Bab's first disciple. The Bab gave him the title of Babu'l-Bab which means the gate of Gate. That night was the beginning of a new era. The Baha'i calendar starts from that year.

It was not long before many people came to believe in the Bab. Some met Him, some read His holy Writings while others recognized Him through dreams and visions.

The Manifestation of God is like the sun. When the sun rises, everybody sees it except those who are fast asleep. Even the sleeping ones must sooner or later come to know that the sun is shining.

The Message of the Bab was first given to the people of Iran. But the Muslims of other countries did not yet know that their Promised One had come. Therefore when thousands of Muslims from all countries gathered in Mecca for pilgrimage, the Bab journeyed to this holiest spot of Islam to tell them that the object of their adoration had come and that He was their Promised One. Nobody listened to Him; but the Bab had completed His announcement.

When the Bab returned to His native land, He was met by a group of soldiers who had come to arrest Him because the fanatical Mullas did not want the new Faith to spread. These Mullas made every effort to put out the Light of God which was burning in the breast of the Blessed Bab. From that day the Bab had to undergo many hardships. His short but brilliant life was mostly spent in prison after He had made His Declaration. Twice He was sent to prisons built on very cold and forbidding mountains. But no chains or prisons could ever prevent the Call of God from spreading. When the Bab was in prison, His faithful followers spread His Message throughout the country, and during that brief time, thousands of people gave their lives for His Cause.

The Bab was still young, about 31 years of age, when they decided to kill Him. The Bab knew that He would be martyred in the path of God. He was glad to give His life so that the people of the world might come to understand the purpose of their lives and turn to God and His eternal kingdom. The day of His martyrdom was 9th of July, 1850. In the morning, the officer who was in charge of the Bab's execution, came to Him in the prison. The Bab was talking to one of His followers who was writing down His last instructions. The officer told Him that the time had come for His execution and soldiers were ready in the city square to carry out the orders. The Bab said that He had to finish His conversation with His disciple, but the officer laughed and said that a prisoner could not choose to do as he wished. As the Bab was being taken away, He said that no power on earth could harm Him until He had completed His Mission in this world, and had finished what He intended to say. The officer paid no attention and took the Bab to the public square. At this time, one of the disciples of the Bab,

a young man named Muhammad Ali Zunuzi, rushed forward and, throwing himself at the feet of His beloved Master, begged to be permitted to die with Him. The officer tried to push him away but Muhammad Ali Zunuzi wept and entreated so much that he was obliged to take him also.

In the square where the soldiers were waiting to shoot the Bab, a great crowd had gathered. They all watched while the Bab and His young disciple were tied in such a way that the head of the disciple rested on the chest of his Beloved. Then came the great moment. Drums were beaten, trumpets were sounded. And as the sound of the trumpets died away, the terrible order was heard: "Fire." Hundreds of soldiers who had taken aim, fired their guns. A huge cloud of smoke spread through the whole place. The smell of gun-powder filled the air. After sometime when the smoke cleared, there came a great surprise. There was no trace of the Bab, while His faithful disciple was standing there unharmed. No one knew what to think. Many people said that a miracle had happened and the Bab had gone up to Heaven. The firing squad and their commander had never seen such an extraordinary thing happen before. Officers were sent in every direction to search for the Bab. The same officer who had brought the Bab from the prison cell, now found Him sitting calmly at the same place, finishing his conversation which had been rudely interrupted. The Bab turned to the officer and smiled saying that His Mission on earth was now completed, and that He was ready to sacrifice His life to prove the truth of His Mission.

The Bab was once more taken into the square, but the commander of the firing squad refused to have anything to do with His execution. He took his soldiers out of the square and swore that nothing would make him take the

life of such an innocent and saintly youth. Another company of soldiers was found to carry out the execution, and this time hundreds of bullets riddled the bodies of the Bab and His faithful disciple. His beautiful face, which was not scarred by the bullets, still bore a lovely smile showing the peace and happiness of One who had given His life to proclaim the beginning of a new era for mankind.

The Bab was a great Manifestation of God. In all His Writings He said that the main purpose of His coming was to give the glad-tidings that very soon the Promised One of all ages would appear. He warned His followers to beware lest they failed to recognize "Him Whom God shall make manifest." He said that they should lay aside every thing else and follow Him as soon as they heard His Message. The Bab wrote many prayers beseeching God that His own life might be accepted as a sacrifice to the Beloved of His heart, the One "Whom God shall make manifest." He even referred in His Writings to the Order of Baha'u'llah, and said: "Well is it with Him who follows Baha'u'llah."

The Bab's prayers were answered and His promise was fulfilled. Nineteen years after His Mission, Baha'u'llah openly declared that He was the Promised One Whose coming had been foretold by all the Manifestations of God in past ages.

Baha'u'llah

On April 21st 1863, Baha'u'llah proclaimed to the world that "The Revelation which, from time immemorial, had been acclaimed as the purpose and promise of all Prophets of God, and the most cherished desire of His Messengers, had now... been revealed unto men."

When Baha'u'llah made this wonderful announcement, He was prisoner at the hands of two powerful monarchs, and He was being exiled to Acre, "the most desolate of lands."

About 46 years before this announcement, Baha'u'llah was born in the house of a distinguished Minister of the royal court of Iran. Though from the days of His childhood everybody could notice that Baha'u'llah was different from other children, but no one actually knew that this wonderful Boy was soon to change the whole destiny of mankind. When He was 14 years old, Baha'u'llah was already famous in the court for His learning and wisdom. He was 22 years of age when His father died. The government wished Him to take over the position His father had occupied. They thought this gifted young man would make a very good minister, but Baha'u'llah had no intention of wasting His time in the management of worldly affairs. Being a man of God, He took no interest in the royal life which was offered Him. He left the court and its ministers to follow the path set for Him by the Almighty.

When the Bab declared His Mission, Baha'u'llah was 27 years old. He immediately accepted the Bab as the Manifestation of God and soon became one of His most powerful and famous followers.

At the time when the Government and fanatical Mullas persecuted the followers of the Bab, Baha'u'llah was not spared in any way. He was twice imprisoned, and once He was beaten so severely with whips and canes that the soles of His feet started bleeding. Nine years after the Bab's Declaration, Baha'u'llah was thrown into a dark dungeon. This was a terrible underground room which had no window or other opening except the door through

which they entered. In this dungeon Baha'u'llah was imprisoned with about 150 murderers, highway robbers and other such criminals. The chains that were put round His neck were so heavy that He could not lift up His head. Here Baha'u'llah spent four terrible months of suffering, yet it was in this same dungeon that the Glory of God filled His soul. He writes that one night in a dream He heard the following words vibrating from all sides.

“Verily, We shall render Thee victorious by Thyself and by Thy Pen”.

Baha'u'llah endured all these hardships for our sake and for the sake of generations to come. He bore chains round His blessed neck in order to free us from the chains and fetters of prejudice, bigotry and enmity.

At last Baha'u'llah and His family were deprived of all their ancestral riches and ordered to leave the country. They were exiled to Baghdad in the bitter cold of winter. The road lay along mountaineous parts of Iran where thick snow and ice covered the ground. Baha'u'llah, His wife and young children had to walk hundreds of miles to their destination and the fact that they did not have proper clothing made the journey evermore difficult to endure. At last they reached Baghdad but Baha'u'llah's sufferings did not come to an end in that city. However, had Baha'u'llah been afraid of hardships and difficulties, He could have enjoyed a luxurious life in the court of the king of Iran. He was prepared to endure any amount of suffering in the path of God.

The fame of Baha'u'llah soon spread throughout Baghdad and other cities of Iraq, and many people came to the door of this exiled Prisoner to receive His blessings. The followers of the Bab gathered round Him from different parts of Iran and Iraq seeking guidance and

inspiration. But there were some who became jealous of His fame. Among them was His own brother Yahya, who was living under Baha'u'llah's loving care and guidance. Yahya thought that, because he was respected by the followers of the Bab, he might be accepted as their leader if he should denounce Baha'u'llah. He did not realize that by turning against the Manifestation of God, he was bringing almost his own doom. For when a Manifestation appears, only those who accept His servitude can hope for true greatness. Even His closest relatives are no exceptions, because a Manifestation of God stands apart from all other human beings and has a station which no one else can share. All the past Manifestations have had brothers and sisters or other relatives, but even their names have now been forgotten.

Yahya's plotting caused disunity among the followers of the Bab and this made Baha'u'llah very sad. One night without telling anybody, He left His home and went into the mountains of Kurdistan. He spent two years of secluded life in these mountains giving all His time to prayer and meditation. He stayed in a small cave and lived on every simple food. Nobody knew His name. Nobody knew where He had come from. But soon, like a moon in a dark night, His light shed over all Kurdistan and everybody heard of the "Nameless One". All this time His family and friends in Baghdad who were heart-broken by His departure, did not know where He was. Then they too heard about the "Nameless One", the great Saint who was known to have inherent knowledge bestowed upon Him by God. Baha'u'llah's son, Abdu'l-Baha, immediately knew that this could be no one than His beloved Father. He sent letters and a special messenger entreating Him to return because not only His own

family but all the followers of the Bab were suffering from His absence.

Thus, after spending two years in prayer and meditation, Baha'u'llah returned to Baghdad and with Him returned the joy of all the Bab's followers. The only people who were angry about His return were the fanatical Mullas and His treacherous and jealous brother Yahya. The Mullas did not want Baha'u'llah to stay in Baghdad because He was too close to certain sacred places belonging to the Muslims, and pilgrims who came to visit these places were often attracted by Baha'u'llah's charm and personality. These Mullas kept on complaining until the Government of Iran joined hands with the authorities of the Turkish Empire to remove Baha'u'llah to a more distant place—Istanbul. The same thing happened in Istanbul which was the seat of the Muslim Caliphs. Baha'u'llah's great wisdom and personal charm attracted many people. "He must not stay in Istanbul any longer", said the fanatical Mullas, so once more He was sent to a smaller town, Adrianople. From there He was again exiled, but this time to Acre in the Holy Land, which was then a special penal colony reserved for murderers, thieves and highway robbers undergoing life imprisonment. It was a terrible place and for the first few days after their arrival, even water was denied to Baha'u'llah, His family and friends. The hardships and sufferings of Baha'u'llah in Acre are too many to describe. In the beginning He was imprisoned in a lonely cell where even His children were not permitted to see Him. He lacked every means of comfort, and was surrounded by enemies day and night. Yet it was from Acre that He sent His famous letters to the most powerful kings and rulers of His day, calling upon them to listen to the Message of God and obey the Commandments of the King of Kings. No one but a

Manifestation of God could dare to address those who had imprisoned Him as a king addresses his vassals.

Baha'u'llah raised the banner of universal peace and brotherhood from His prison walls and though the powers of the world combined their forces against Him, He was victorious over them all as God had promised Him in His dream. The Message of Baha'u'llah influenced the hearts of thousands of people and many of them gave their lives for His Cause. Through the power of the Word of God and the sacrifices of the followers of Baha'u'llah, now hundreds of thousands of people who were once divided under various names have become like members of one family.

Although Baha'u'llah was sent to Acre as a prisoner for life, He chose to leave that fortress city nine years after His arrival. By this time, His great personal charm had made such friends of all those around Him—even His hard-hearted jailor—that no one objected to His leaving His prison. Baha'u'llah spent the remaining years of His life in a place outside the city of Acre where He passed away to His heavenly Kingdom on May 29th, 1892.

The Message of Baha'u'llah spread to different parts of the world from the Holy Land as had been foretold in the sacred Books of the past. In Buddhist scriptures, the Holy Land is referred to as a Paradise in the West, the Seat of the Promised One—Amitabha. To the Jews it is "The Promised Land" from where the Law of God will once more go out into the world. The Christians and Muslims too, have wonderful prophecies about this sacred country which has been their Holy Land for many centuries. Since the time when Baha'u'llah was exiled to Acre the Holy Land of the religions of the past has become the World Centre of the Baha'i Faith.

Baha'u'llah is that Great Manifestation of God Whose coming all the Manifestations of the past have foretold. The divine religions of all ages lead to the same direction and teach the same goal—the Baha'i Faith. They are like many rivers that flow into the ocean. Each river irrigates thousands of acres of land, but no single river is by itself, as vast and powerful as the mighty ocean because the ocean is the meeting place of all these rivers. In the Baha'i Community followers of all religions have come together and become united. Even though they are from the four corners of the earth, they have now joined hands in one great Brotherhood, one common Faith.

The waters of different Rivers merge into one, indeed when they pour into the Mighty Ocean!

COVENANT

Abdu'l-Baha

Baha'u'llah was a Divine Architect. He drafted the magnificent Plan for the unity of mankind. He laid the firm foundation of this sacred Edifice and selected the necessary materials.

But who was to erect this wonderful Edifice after Baha'u'llah had left us? It is true that His plan was complete but even a perfect plan must be left in the hands of a qualified person or the construction may collapse altogether. No matter how perfect the plan and how firm the foundation of a building, if it is not properly supervised by a capable man, the construction may go up entirely different from the plan intended by the architect.

When Baha'u'llah passed away He left the execution of His Divine Plan in the hands of His son. He appointed Abdu'l-Baha as the Centre of His Covenant and asked His followers to turn to him for guidance.

Abdu'l-Baha means the servant of Baha. He was the eldest son of Baha'u'llah, and was born on the 23rd of May, 1844, the very same night that the Bab declared His Mission. A blessed son was born to a blessed house at a blessed hour.

Abdu'l-Baha was only eight years of age when Baha'u'llah was thrown into that terrible dungeon. From early childhood he willingly shared all the sufferings of his beloved Father. He accompanied Baha'u'llah on the difficult journey from Tehran to Baghdad, and spent forty years of his life in prison and in exile. When Abdu'l-Baha was set free at last, he was an old man. But the

love of God had kept him happy even in the darkest hours of his life. He had a deep spiritual happiness which the worst of prisons could not take away. Abdu'l-Baha wanted us to enjoy that kind of happiness too. He says :

“Happiness consists of two kinds : physical and spiritual. The physical happiness is limited ; its utmost duration is one day, one month, one year. It hath no result. Spiritual happiness appeareth in one’s soul with the love of God and suffereth one to attain to the virtues and perfections of the world of humanity. Therefore, endeavour as much as thou art able in order to illumine the lamp of thy heart by the light of love”.

Baha’u’llah announced the Word of God to Abdu’l-Baha in Baghdad. Though still a young child, Abdu’l-Baha recognized the Station of his Father and, throwing himself at the feet of Baha’u’llah, begged to be accepted as a sacrifice for His Cause. From that day, Abdu’l-Baha gave his whole life to the service of Baha’u’llah and sacrificed every comfort in His path. Abdu’l-Baha won the love and respect of Baha’u’llah’s followers at a very early age, and later came to be known among them as “the Master”. When Baha’u’llah passed away and His will which is known as the Book of the Covenant was opened, the Baha’is were happy to know that Baha’u’llah had appointed Abdu’l-Baha as the Centre of His Covenant and as the authorized interpreter of His teachings.

The appointment of the Centre of the Covenant is a unique characteristic of the Baha’i Faith. All the religions of the past became divided after the death of their Founders because the followers did not know where to turn after the Manifestations of God had left them. They started to interpret the teachings of God as they themselves under-

stood them and, as they did not understand them the same way, these teachings were explained in different forms. This became the cause of disunity among the followers of the past religions. In the Baha'i Faith, however, the case has been different. Baha'u'llah who had come to remove all kinds of disunity from among the peoples of the world, did not allow the Baha'i Faith itself to become divided. He wrote a document in which He appointed Abdu'l-Baha as the one to whom all Baha'is should turn for guidance in matters concerning His teachings. This document, the Book of the Covenant, saved Baha'is from disunity. The Book of the Covenant preserved the unity of the followers of Baha'u'llah but caused the jealousy of Abdu'l-Baha's brother, Muhammad Ali. Like Yahya at the time of Baha'u'llah, Muhammad Ali tried to bring disunity among the Baha'is in the days of Abdu'l-Baha. He imagined that as he was the son of Baha'u'llah, he, too, could make a claim to leadership, but his efforts were useless because his outward relationship with the Manifestation of God was of no value when he did not obey what Baha'u'llah had commanded. Muhammad Ali was like a branch which had grown out of a mighty Tree, but which could bear no fruit because it had dried up and become worthless. And, like a withered branch, he was cut off and thrown away.

When Muhammad Ali failed in bringing about disunity among the Baha'is he joined hands with the enemies of the Cause and tried to harm Abdu'l-Baha. He poisoned the minds of Government officials against the Master and said that he was gathering people around him so as to rise against the Government. When Abdu'l-Baha was building the Shrine of the Bab on Mount Carmel, Muhammad Ali reported that he was building a fortress, and this made the Turkish Government send a special party to the Holy

Land to investigate the matter. Muhammad Ali succeeded in bribing the corrupt General who came as the head of the party, and false reports were sent to Turkey about Abdu'l-Baha.

Abdu'l-Baha in the meantime, was giving every hour of his life to the service of the Cause. The beautiful tablets which streamed from his pen brought joy and inspiration to thousands of Baha'is in the world. Through his precious letters, he guided and strengthened their steps in the path of service to their Faith. When he was not occupied in writing, the Master was busy visiting the sick and seeing to the needs of the poor. From his scanty purse he freely gave to others, and no one ever turned away disappointed from the door of the Master's house.

Abdu'l-Baha paid little attention to the party of officials who had come to investigate the false charges brought against him. Muhammad Ali, on the other hand, showed them great respect and showered them with gifts and presents. Before they left, the General in charge of the party swore that he would come back to hang Abdu'l-Baha at the city gate. This brought great rejoicing to the Master's enemies, while those who loved him were filled with anxiety. Many of his friends begged Abdu'l-Baha to flee from the Holy Land while there was still time, but the Master whose trust was always in God, did not worry in the least. He said :

“To me prison is freedom, to me incarceration is an open court, to me humility is identical with glory, to me adversity is a gift and death is life.”

The General who wanted to hang Abdu'l-Baha himself was killed in a war soon after he left the Holy Land. The Turkish Empire itself was broken up and a new regime took over the affairs of the Government. Muhammad Ali

and the few others who had broken the Covenant of Baha'u'llah were frustrated in their efforts to harm Abdu'l-Baha or to bring disunity among the Baha'is. They fell to disgrace and their shameful schemes became known to everyone.

With the change of Government came Abdu'l-Baha's freedom after a lifetime of imprisonment. At last the Master, who had served Baha'u'llah's Cause so faithfully under severe hardships, was free to move about and take the Message of his Father to the people of other countries. The Baha'is of the West requested him to travel to Europe and America and, though old in age and very weak from years of imprisonment, Abdu'l-Baha graciously accepted their invitation.

During his journey to the West, Abdu'l-Baha spoke to thousands of people about the Baha'is Faith. Sometimes he gave several lectures in one day. Both Baha'is and non-Baha'is came from far-off distances to visit him and hear his inspiring words. Wherever he went, Abdu'l-Baha was busy teaching the Cause from early morning till late at night. He did not think of himself even when he was ill with fever and his friends begged him to rest.

In America, Abdu'l-Baha laid the cornerstone of the first Baha'i House of Worship in the West which is now a beautiful building dedicated to the glory of the Cause of God.

Abdu'l-Baha's travels in Europe and America produced wonderful results. The Baha'i Faith was established in many countries, and before Abdu'l-Baha passed away, he encouraged the believers to carry the new Message to other countries.

The Master passed away from this life in the Holy Land on the 28th of November, 1921. His resting place is in a room adjacent to the Shrine of the Bab in the same building which he himself built during his lifetime.

Abdu'l-Baha was the Expounder of the Faith of God, the interpreter of the Writings of Baha'u'llah, and the perfect Exemplar of His teachings. Baha'u'llah has called him "The Mystery of God."

Shoghi Effendi—The Guardian of the Faith

Abdu'l-Baha was like a loving father for the Baha'is. When he passed away the Baha'is of the world were very sad indeed. Abdu'l-Baha's ministry had lasted about 30 years during which time the Baha'is had progressed under his unerring guidance and deepened their understanding in the teachings of Baha'u'llah. When Abdu'l-Baha left this world, the Baha'is felt like orphans who had lost their wise and loving parent. The enemies of the Cause on the other hand, and those who had broken the Covenant of Baha'u'llah, thought that this was the time for them to come forward and carry out their wicked plans. They thought that because Abdu'l-Baha was not there to protect the unity of the Baha'is, it would be easy for them to attack the Cause. They did not know that God would not allow any breach in the unity of His Cause in this age.

Abdu'l-Baha had already provided for the unity of Baha'u'llah's followers. He too, had made firm covenant with Baha'is all over the world. He had left behind a wonderful Tablet—the Will and Testament—in which he had appointed his grandson Shoghi Effendi, as the Guardian of the Faith of God.

With the passing of Abdu'l-Baha the Baha'is lost a loving father, but in Shoghi Effendi they found a "true brother."

Shoghi Effendi was born in the blessed household of Abdu'l-Baha. His mother was the daughter of Abdu'l-Baha and his father was a close relative of the Bab. Abdu'l-Baha has called him "the most wondrous, unique and priceless pearl that doth gleam out from the twin surging seas" and "the sacred bough that hath branched out from the Twin Holy Trees" because in him the families of the Bab and Baha'u'llah were joined together. Shoghi Effendi grew up under the direct care and supervision of Abdu'l-Baha but no one was aware of the station for which Abdu'l-Baha was preparing him although many saw signs of greatness in Shoghi Effendi long before Abdu'l-Baha passed away. An American Baha'i once wrote to the Master asking if she had correctly understood a prophecy mentioned in the Bible according to which there should be then living a young child who was destined to hold the helm of the Cause after Abdu'l-Baha. The Master replied that she was right and that the blessed child was living and would soon illumine the world with his radiance. To another person Abdu'l-Baha gave the assurance that the blessed child would "raise the Cause of God to great heights."

Shoghi Effendi was a young boy when the beloved Master wrote his Will and Testament. He was only twenty-four years of age when he became the Guardian of the Cause of God, but because he was always assisted by Baha'u'llah, it did not matter that he was not old in years. Abdu'l-Baha called Shoghi Effendi the Sign of God on earth and said that all who obeyed him had obeyed God. It was through the great wisdom and spiritual guidance of

Shoghi Effendi that the Message of Baha'u'llah was carried to every country of the globe.

When Abdu'l-Baha passed away, Shoghi Effendi was studying in England at Oxford University. His cherished desire was to serve the beloved Master throughout his life and to be able to translate the sacred Writings of Baha'i Faith into English for thousands of believers who could not read them in Persian or Arabic. The news of the passing away of Abdu'l-Baha was such a great blow to Shoghi Effendi that he became ill. Before he had fully recovered from the shock of being so suddenly separated from the Master, he arrived in the Holy Land to find out that Abdu'l-Baha had given him the crushing responsibility of being the Guardian of the Cause of God. But when God gives anyone a task to accomplish in the world, He also gives him the strength to carry it out. After many weeks spent in meditation and prayer, Shoghi Effendi was ready to start his great work in life. And God blessed him with divine wisdom and inspiration in every step he took for the promotion of His Cause.

During the 36 years of his guardianship, Shoghi Effendi had no other thought but the progress of the Cause. He worked day and night, did not spare himself in any way. His personal life was very simple, he seldom had more than one meal in twenty-four hours, or slept more than a few hours every night. The rest of his time was given to his ever-growing work for the Cause of Baha'u'llah. Those who saw the amount of work he accomplished every day realized that it was only through the power of God that a simple man could do so much day after day and year after year.

The enemies of the Cause who had hoped to carry out their evil designs after the passing of Abdu'l-Baha, soon

realized that the Faith of Baha'u'llah was now guarded by the iron arms of Shoghi Effendi. It was he who taught the Baha'is of the world how to work together so as to establish the World Order of Baha'u'llah, and how to carry out the instructions of Abdu'l-Baha mentioned in his Tablet of the Divine Plan. In this Tablet which the Master wrote to the Baha'is before he passed away, he calls upon them all to arise for the promotion of the Cause, to forsake their homes and their comforts, and carry the Message of Baha'u'llah to the far off corners of the world. Shoghi Effendi trained the Baha'is for years in order to prepare them for this great task. He taught them how to work through their local and national Assemblies, because unless the Baha'is learned to work as a united body, it would be impossible for them to accomplish anything. And when they were prepared for the great undertaking, the Guardian encouraged them to scatter throughout the world and carry the banner of Baha'u'llah to every part of the globe. Under his divine guidance, hundreds of Baha'is went out with the torch of Faith and settled in distant islands and territories so as to give the new Message to people everywhere.

When Abdu'l-Baha passed away the Baha'i Faith had spread to 35 countries, but during the life time of the beloved Guardian, the Message of Baha'u'llah was carried to over 251 countries of the world including all the places mentioned by Abdu'l-Baha in the Tablet of the Divine Plan.

In his Will and Testament, Abdu'l-Baha had called upon Baha'is of the world to arise for the service of the Cause, and not to rest for a single moment until they had established the banner of the Faith in every part of the globe. Our dear Guardian carried out this request of the Master throughout his entire life and up to his very last day in this world. He passed away on the 4th of November,

1957, in London where he had gone to purchase materials for the construction of Baha'i Institutions in the Holy Land.

The Guardian left us only after he was sure that his efforts during his 36 years of Guardianship had given the Universal Faith of Baha'u'llah such a firm foundation that his work could be carried on by the Baha'is when he had gone. Like the perfect captain of a boat, he set the directions we were to follow and gave us the necessary instructions before he went away to rest. There could be no danger of our losing the way because the direction and the course we were to take were fixed by the Guardian himself. Under his spiritual guidance this Ark of God will surely reach its destination. During his lifetime, Shoghi Effendi drafted a Ten-Year Plan which ended in 1963. According to this Plan, all the Baha'is of the world were to work closely together in taking the Message of Baha'u'llah to the remaining islands and territories of the globe where the Baha'i Faith had not yet been established. The Guardian himself supervised the progress of this Plan in its early stages and, before he passed away, over 4200 Baha'i Centres had been established in the world, while Baha'i literature had been translated into over 200 different languages.

In the Holy Land—the World Centre of the Faith—the Guardian built a beautiful superstructure over the Shrine of the Bab, and also an International Archives building where original Writings of the Bab and Baha'u'llah, as well as other very precious relics are kept. These buildings and the lovely gardens surrounding them are one of the most beautiful spots in the world, and thousands of people come to visit them every year.

Shoghi Effendi completed his work by appointing 27 Hands of the Cause whom he called the "Chief Stewards"

of the Faith and to whom he gave the responsibility of protecting the Cause and spreading the Teachings of Baha'u'llah. When the Guardian passed away, the Hands of the Cause elected a body of 9 from among themselves to remain in the Holy Land and see to the work at the World Centre. These were called the Custodians. The rest of the Hands scattered throughout the world to help in completing the Guardian's Ten-Year Plan.

The end of the Ten-Year Plan in 1963 marked a new milestone in the history of the Baha'i Faith. A full century had passed since the day when Baha'u'llah proclaimed His Mission, and the Baha'is of the world elected the first International House of Justice—that Supreme Body which Abdu'l-Baha has assured us will be under the direct guidance of God and infallible in all its decisions.

To celebrate this occasion Baha'is of the world were called to a great feast in London from 28th April to 2nd May, 1963. Over 6200 people from all over the world attended this great festival. The unity of mankind was embodied in this grand celebration. Peoples of so many races and backgrounds in their national costumes formed a beautiful garden of Baha'u'llah. That colourful audience in the Baha'i World Congress were indeed the most befitting bouquet that we could offer to the precious memory of Shoghi Effendi, our beloved Guardian who had provided for us the Ten-Year Spiritual Crusade potent with so many victories and achievements.

Thanks to the untiring and ceaseless efforts of the beloved Guardian, the Baha'is of the world are well prepared for this tremendous new development in the progress of the Cause of God. Shoghi Effendi, as Abdu'l-Baha foretold when he was still a child, did indeed raise the Cause of God to great heights !

SOME OF THE TEACHINGS
&
PRINCIPLES

Oneness of Mankind

Baha'u'llah has taught us the Oneness of Mankind. All human beings are children of one God. If we believe in one Heavenly Father, then we must accept each other as brothers and sisters, as members of one family—the family of Man.

Before Baha'u'llah brought us the light of unity, there were many causes which made men think they were different from others. Some people thought that because the colour of their skin was white, they were better than those who were black or yellow or brown. Baha'u'llah said this is not true. Man is not different because of his colour. If they are different, it is because they have received different degrees of education and not because they have different colours of skin. The different coloured peoples of the world are like the different kinds of flowers you find in a garden. If all the flowers of a garden were of the same colour, it would not be so beautiful. Baha'u'llah said God is like a kind Shepherd for Whom the white sheep are no better than the brown or the black. God loves us all no matter what the colour of our skin may be or which part of the world we may come from. Why should we, then, look upon each other as strangers? Baha'u'llah has kindled such love in the hearts of His followers that they feel like members of the same family even though they come from all the countries of the world. In His Writings, Baha'u'llah says :

“O well-beloved ones! The tabernacle of unity hath been raised; regard ye not one another as strangers. Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch.”

"Be ye as the fingers of one hand, and the members of one body. Thus counselleth you the Pen of Revelation."

Abdu'l-Baha has written :

"Among the teachings of His Holiness Baha'u'llah is the oneness of the world of humanity ; that all human beings are the sheep of God and He is the kind Shepherd. This Shepherd is kind to all the sheep, because He created them all, trained them, provided for them and protected them. There is no doubt that the shepherd is kind to all the sheep and should there be among these sheep ignorant ones, they must be educated; if there be children, they must be trained until they reach maturity; if there be sick ones, they must be cured. There must be no hatred and enmity, for as by a kind physician these ignorant, sick ones should be treated."

Let us pray for the unity of mankind :

"O my God, O my God ! Unite the hearts of Thy servants, and reveal to them Thy great purpose. May they follow Thy commandments and abide in Thy law. Help them, O God, in their endeavour, and grant them strength to serve Thee. O God, leave them not to themselves, but guide their steps by the light of Thy knowledge and cheer their hearts by Thy love. Verily, Thou art their Helper and their Lord."

Baha'u'llah

Removal of Prejudice

Baha'u'llah teaches that all forms of prejudice must be forgotten, whether it is national prejudice or racial pre-

judice or religious prejudice. As long as people cling to prejudice, we will not have any peace on earth.

All the wars that we have had in the past, all the murders and the bloodshed, have been due to prejudice of some kind. People have fought over their country or their religion, bringing destruction to the world and death to millions of their fellow humans. Abdu'l-Bahia says :

“If this prejudice and enmity are on account of religion (consider that) religion should be the cause of fellowship, otherwise it is fruitless. And if this prejudice be the prejudice of nationality (consider that) all mankind are of one nation; all have sprung from the tree of Adam, and Adam is the root of the tree. That tree is one and all these nations are like branches, while the individuals of humanity are like leaves, blossoms and fruits thereof. Then the establishment of various nations and the consequent shedding of blood and destruction of the edifice of humanity result from human ignorance and selfish motives.

“As to the patriotic prejudice, this is also due to absolute ignorance, for the surface of the earth is one native land. Every one can live in any spot on the terrestrial globe. Therefore all the world is man's birthplace. These boundries and outlets have been devised by man. In the creation such boundries and outlets were not assigned. Europe is one continent, Asia is one continent, Africa is one continent, Australia is one continent, but some of the souls, from personal motives and selfish interests, have divided each one of these continents and considered a certain part as their own country. God has set up no frontier between France and Germany ; they are continuous. Yet,

in the first centuries, selfish souls, for the promotion of their own interests, have assigned boundries and outlets and have, day by day, attached more importance to these, until this led to intense enmity, bloodshed and rapacity in subsequent centuries. In the same way this will continue indefinitely, and if this conception of patriotism remains limited within a certain circle, it will be the primary cause of the world's destruction. No wise and just person will acknowledge these imaginary distinctions: Every limited area which we call our native country we regard as our motherland, whereas the terrestrial globe is the motherland of all, and not any restricted area. In short, for a few days we live on this earth and eventually we are buried in it, it is our eternal tomb. Is it worthwhile that we should engage in bloodshed and tear one another to pieces for this eternal tomb? Nay, far from it, neither is God pleased with such conduct nor would any sane man approve of it.

“Consider! The blessed animals engage in no patriotic quarrels. They are in the utmost fellowship with one another and live together in harmony. For example, if a dove from the East and a dove from the West, a dove from the North and a dove from the South chance to arrive, at the same time, in one spot, they immediately associate in harmony. So is it with all the blessed animals and birds. But the ferocious animals, as soon as they meet, attack and fight with each other, tear each other to pieces and it is impossible for them to live peaceably together in one spot. They are all unsociable and fierce, savage and combative fighters.”

Search After Truth

When a child is born in a Christian family, he becomes a Christian. When the parents are Muslims the children also become Muslims; if they are Hindus their children become Hindus. Why? Because most of the people of the world go on imitating their forefathers, and as long as this kind of blind imitation is carried on, people cannot become united. They fight over their imitations. Everyone claims that he has got the truth and all others are in the wrong. People seldom stop to think that had they been born into some other family with other beliefs, they would have thought quite differently from what they now believe to be the only true way.

Baha'u'llah teaches that Truth is one. If the people of the world would stop imitating their fathers and search after Truth for themselves, they would all reach the same conclusion and become united. The different peoples are like children who live in different houses and look at the sun through coloured window panes. But as the colour of the panes in each house is different from that of the other houses, one child is looking at the sun through green glass and thinks the colour of the sun is green, while another child is looking through blue glass and thinks it is blue, and a third child believes the sun to be red because his window panes are red. These children may even quarrel over the colour of the sun, each believing what he sees to be the right colour. But if they would stop looking at the sun through their little window panes, and step outside into the open, they would all see the true colour of the sun and have nothing to fight over.

Baha'u'llah is calling upon the children of men to step out of the houses they have inherited from their great-grand-parents and stop looking at the sun through coloured

window panes. For the sun we are looking at is the same sun, and once we remove the coloured glass from before our eyes, we will all see it in its true colour.

God expects us to think about what we believe instead of following a certain belief for no better reason than that our forefathers have believed that way for many generations. If we all search after Truth for ourselves, we will come to see that Truth is one; it can bring us all together and make us forsake the differences of the past.

Abdu'l-Baha says :

“.....the divine religions of the Holy Manifestations of God are in reality one though in name and nomenclature they differ. Man must be a lover of the light no matter from what day-spring it may appear. He must be a lover of the rose no matter in what soil it may be growing. He must be a seeker of the truth no matter from what source it comes. Attachment to the lantern is not loving the light. Attachment to the earth is not befitting but enjoyment of the rose which develops from the soil is worthy. Devotion to the tree is profitless but partaking of the fruit is beneficial. Luscious fruits no matter upon what tree they grow or where they may be found must be enjoyed. The word of truth no matter which tongue utters it must be sanctioned. Absolute verities no matter in what book they be recorded must be accepted. If we harbour prejudice it will be the cause of deprivation and ignorance. The strife between religions, nations and races arises from misunderstanding. If we investigate the religions to discover the principles underlying their foundations we will find they agree, for the fundamental reality of them is one and not multiple. By this mean the

religionists of the world will reach their point of unity and reconciliation . . . ”

At another place Abdu'l-Baha says :

“Alas! that humanity is completely submerged in imitations and unrealities notwithstanding the truth of divine religion has ever remained the same. Superstitions have obscured the fundamental reality, the world is darkened and the light of religion is not apparent. This darkness is conducive to differences and dissensions; rites and dogmas are many and various; therefore discord has arisen among the religious systems whereas religion is for the unification of mankind. True religion is the source of love and agreement amongst men, the cause of the development of praiseworthy qualities; but the people are holding to the counterfeit and imitations, negligent of the reality which unifies; so they are bereft and deprived of the radiance of religion. They follow superstitions inherited from their fathers and ancestors. To such an extent has this prevailed that they have taken away the heavenly light of divine truth and sit in the darkness of imitations and imaginations: That which was meant to be conducive to life has become the cause of death; that which should have been an evidence of knowledge is now a proof of ignorance; that which was a factor in the sublimity of human nature has proved to be its degradation. Therefore the realm of the religionist has gradually narrowed and darkened and the sphere of the materialist has widened and advanced; for the religionist has held to imitation and counterfeit, neglecting and discarding holiness and the sacred reality of religion. When the sun sets it is the time for bats to fly.

They come forth because they are creatures of the night. When the lights of religion become darkened the materialists appear. They are the bats of night. The decline of religion is their time of activity; they seek the shadows when the world is darkened and clouds have spread over it.

“His Holiness Baha’u’llah has risen from the eastern horizon. Like the glory of the sun He has come into the world. He has reflected the reality of divine religion, dispelled the darkness of imitations, laid the foundation of new teachings and resuscitated the world.

“The first teaching of Baha’u’llah is the investigation of reality. Man must seek the reality himself, forsaking imitations and adherence to mere hereditary forms. As the nations of the world are following imitations in lieu of truth and as imitations are many and various, differences of belief have been productive of strife and warfare. So long as these imitations remain, the oneness of the world of humanity is impossible. Therefore we must investigate the reality in order that by its light the clouds and darkness may be dispelled. Reality is one reality, it does not admit multiplicity or division. If the nations of the world investigate reality they will agree and become united. Many people and sects...have sought reality through the guidance and teaching of Baha’u’llah. They have become united and now live in a state of agreement and love; among them there is no longer the least trace of enmity and strife.”

Universal Language

One of the causes of misunderstanding in the world is that people cannot understand each other’s language.

Every country has a different tongue and when a person goes from his own land to another part of the world, he feels that he is among strangers.

Baha'u'llah has come to unite all the peoples of the world and make them like members of the same family. One of His laws, therefore, is that a common language must be taught in every part of the world, so that every person will learn that language besides his own native tongue. In this way, people will feel at home no matter where they go because they can all understand each other.

The difference in language sometimes causes misunderstanding which may even lead to dangerous conflicts. Take the name of our Creator for example. In the Hindi language He is called Ishwara, in Arabic Allah and in English God. Ignorant people think that God is different from Ishwara or Allah, and fight with each other over these different names. When the people can all speak one common, universal language, they will come to realize that it is the same Creator they are all referring to. This in itself will remove a lot of misunderstandings from among them.

The Baha'is have so far translated the Message of Baha'u'llah into about 318 languages of the world because people do not know one common language. When the universal language is adopted in the world, it will become much easier to give the teachings of Baha'u'llah to different peoples, and everyone will be able to read the sacred Writings of the Manifestation of God Himself, in that language.

Equality Between Men And Women

If you cut off the feathers from one of the wings of a pigeon, it will be unable to fly no matter how strong its

other wing may be, because a bird needs two wings in order to fly.

Abdu'l-Baha says :

“Humanity is like a bird with its two wings—the one is man, the other woman. Unless both wings are strong and impelled by some common force, the bird cannot fly heavenward.”

Again he says :

“God has created all creatures in couples. Man, beast, or vegetable, all the things of these three kingdoms are of two sexes, and there is absolute equality between them.

“In the vegetable world there are male plants and female plants ; they have equal rights, and possess an equal share of the beauty of their species ; though indeed the tree that bears fruit might be said to be superior to that which is unfruitful.

“In the animal kingdom we see that the male and the female have equal rights ; and that they each share the advantages of their kind.

“Now in the two lower kingdoms of nature we have seen that there is no question of the superiority of one sex over the other. In the world of humanity we find a great difference, the female sex is treated as though inferior, and is not allowed equal rights and privileges. This condition is due not to nature but to education. In the Divine Creation there is no such distinction. Neither sex is superior to the other in the sight of God. . . .”

God has created us all as human beings, and it makes no difference to Him whether we are men or women. To a loving parent sons and daughters are equally dear.

Abdu'l-Baha says that men and women both "belong to humankind and that in the estimation of God they are equal, for each is the complement of the other in the divine creative plan. The only distinction between them in the sight of God is the purity and righteousness of their deeds and actions, for that one is preferred by God who is most nearly in the spiritual image and likeness of the Creator."

Since God's bounty reaches man and woman alike, we should make no distinction between them. The duties of a man in a community may be different from those of a woman, but their rights and privileges must be equal. We should not think that a woman's talents are less than a man's. In the past women did not have the same education and opportunities as men, that is why they were not able to develop their different capacities.

When Baha'is are electing their assemblies every year, the members they choose are those who are most sincere and capable. It does not make any difference whether they are men or women. We should always remember that God looks to the heart and character of a person and not the sex.

Abdu'l-Baha says :

"One whose thought is pure, whose education is superior, whose scientific attainments are greater, whose deeds of philanthropy excel, be that one man or woman, white or colored, is entitled to full rights and recognition ; there is no differentiation whatsoever."

Universal Education

One of the teachings of Baha'u'llah is that every child—boy or girl—must receive an education. If the parents neglect the education of their children, they are responsible before God. This is the command of Baha'u'llah:

“It is decreed that every father must educate his sons and daughters in learning and in writing..... He who neglects that which hath been commanded (in this matter) if he be rich, it is incumbent on the trustees of the House of Justice to recover from him the amount required for the education of his children ; otherwise (i.e. if the parent be not capable) the matter shall devolve upon the House of Justice. Verily We have made it (the House of Justice) an asylum for the poor and needy.

“He who educates his son, or any other children, it is as though he hath educated one of My children.”

The education of children, therefore, is a compulsory and binding law for all Baha'is. If the parents can afford to educate their children but neglect to do so, then the Spiritual Assembly must force them to see to their education. But if they are poor, the Spiritual Assembly must provide for the education of the children through the funds of the community.

From the Words of Baha'u'llah it is apparent that the education of children is a sacred task. He says :

“He who educates his son or any other children, it is as though he hath educated one of My children.”

Is it not a privilege and great honour for us to educate one of Baha'u'llah's children? We can receive this honour if only we educate our own children or those of other people.

We cannot say that we need our young children to work at home or take the cattle out to the pasture, so they have no time to go to school. We must remember that looking after the cattle or working in the field is not a command of God, but education is. If we do not obey this command, we are responsible. Similarly, we cannot say that our child is a girl and a girl does not require any education. Abdu'l-Baha had said that although there is equality between the rights of men and women but in the case of education, if priority must be given, it must be given to girls because they will become the mothers of the future, and an educated mother can bring up better children.

But education, according to Baha'u'llah, is not only to learn how to read and write. Children must be educated in such a way that they will be able to serve the human race. At present, children who live in different parts of the world are being brought up to be loyal to their own country alone, and sometimes hatred towards another nation is engraved on their young minds. They are taught to be proud of being Germans or Arabs or Chinese and made to believe that their race, their religion or their special caste is the best in the world. According to the Baha'i Faith this is not correct. The aim of education must be to bring up men and women who believe that "the earth is one country and mankind its citizens", and who will give their love and their services to the betterment of the whole world. If people adopt this method of education, it will take but one generation to establish the unity of all mankind.

Baha'u'llah also says :

“Schools must first train the children in the principles of religion, so that the Promise and the Threat, recorded in the books of God, may prevent them from the things forbidden and adorn them with the mantle of the commandments. But this in such a measure that it may not injure the children by resulting in ignorant fanaticism and bigotry.”

This means that the spiritual values taught by the Manifestations of God, must be the basis for every system of education. Only through spiritual enlightenment can men become happier in life, because they will learn to live without any prejudice towards their fellowmen and be full of hope and confidence for the future.

Education must free us from superstitions and prejudices and also from the clutches of materialism. Abdu'l-Baha writes :

“And among the teachings of His Holiness Baha'u'llah is man's freedom, that through the ideal Power he should be free and emancipated from the captivity of the world of nature ; for as long as man is captive to nature he is a ferocious animal, as the struggle for existence is one of the exigencies of the world of nature. This matter of the struggle for existence is the fountain-head of all calamities and is the supreme affliction.”

No Baha'i should ever deprive his children from acquiring true knowledge for according to Baha'u'llah :

“Knowledge is like unto wings for the being (of man) and is like a ladder for ascending. To acquire knowledge is incumbent upon all, but of

those sciences which may profit the people of the earth, and not such sciences as begin in mere words and end in mere words. The possessors of sciences and arts have a great right among the people of the world. Indeed, the real treasury of man is his knowledge. Knowledge is the means of honour, prosperity, joy, gladness, happiness and exultation."

Religion And Science Must Work Together

God has given us the power of thinking so that we may be different from the animals. Because man can use his mind, he has been able to progress down the ages, and to live very differently today than he used to thousands of years ago. New discoveries and inventions have made it possible for people to live in better homes and to fight against disease and ignorance. But material progress is of little use to us if we do not progress spiritually also. God has given us religion to help us along our spiritual progress. Science without religion can do a lot of harm, but religion without science can also cause trouble. For the real progress of human race, both are necessary together. Science and religion must go hand in hand.

Science provides us with the tools and religion tells us how to use them. An axe or a sickle is a very useful thing if we use it correctly. But if a murderer gets hold of an axe or a sickle, that same useful tool becomes a dangerous weapon. The trouble with the world today is that science has provided tools for people who use them as weapons because they have no religion to teach them how to make the best use of these tools. On the other hand, if we forsake science and stop using our mind and reason altogether, religion will become nothing but ignorance and

superstition, and therefore harmful to the people of the world.

In the past people have thought that religion and science could not work together, but Baha'u'llah teaches that true religion is in agreement with true science. He tells us that our hearts and our minds can accept the same truths.

We will conclude this chapter with a wonderful quotation from a talk by Abdu'l-Baha :

"God made religion and science to be the measure.....of our understanding. Take heed that you neglect not such a wonderful power. Weigh all things in this balance....."

"Put all your beliefs into harmony with science; there can be no opposition, for truth is one. When religion, shorn of its superstitions, traditions and unintelligent dogmas, shows its conformity with science, then will there be a great unifying, cleansing force in the world, which will sweep before it all wars, disagreements, discords and struggles—and then will mankind be united in the power of the love of God."

Extremes of Wealth & Poverty Must End

Baha'u'llah tells us that He prefers justice to everything else in the world :

"O Son of Spirit !

"The best beloved of all things in My sight is justice, turn not away therefrom if thou desirest Me."

Abdu'l-Baha says :

“One of the most important principles of the Teaching of Baha'u'llah is :

“The right of every human being to his daily bread whereby he exists, or the equalisation of the means of livelihood.

“The arrangements of the circumstances of the people must be such that poverty shall disappear, that every one, as far as possible, according to his rank and position, shall share in comfort and well-being.

“We see amongst us men who are overburdened with riches on the one hand, and on the other those unfortunate ones who starve with nothing ; those who possess several stately palaces, and those who have not where to lay their head. Some we find with numerous courses of costly and dainty food, whilst others can scarcely find sufficient crusts to keep them alive. Whilst some are clothed in velvets, furs and fine linen, others have insufficient, poor and thin garments with which to protect them from the cold.

“This condition of affairs is wrong, and must be remedied.

“Certainly, some being enormously rich and others lamentably poor, an organisation is necessary to control and improve this state of affairs. It is important to limit riches, as it is also of importance to limit poverty. Either extreme is not good.

“.....When we see poverty allowed to reach a condition of starvation it is a sure sign that some-

where we shall find tyranny. Men must bestir themselves in this matter, and no longer delay in altering conditions which bring the misery of grinding poverty to a very large number of the people.....”

There are a number of wonderful laws and teachings in the Baha'i Faith for the creation of a balanced society where there are no extremes of wealth or poverty. Many of these laws must be put into practice by the Governments of the world, but the basic solution of the economic problems of today depends upon the individual. Baha'is are encouraged to make every effort towards material as well as spiritual advancement, but they should never forget these Words of Baha'u'llah :

“The essence of wealth is love for Me. Whoso loveth Me is the possessor of all things, and he that loveth Me not is, indeed, of the poor and needy.”

True wealth for a Baha'i then is the love of God in his heart. When he possesses this great treasure which no one can take away from him, material riches will not be of great value in his eyes and outward poverty cannot become the cause of his unhappiness. Baha'u'llah says :

“O Son of My Handmaid !

“Be not troubled in poverty nor confident in riches, for poverty is followed by riches, and riches are followed by poverty.....”

Once our hearts are detached from the riches of this world, it becomes easy for us to share our wealth with those who are in need, and this is what Baha'u'llah expects His followers to do. In one of the Tablets of Abdu'l-Baha we read :

"Among the teachings of Baha'u'llah is voluntary sharing of one's property with others among mankind. This voluntary sharing is greater than (legally imposed) equality, and consists in this, that one should not prefer oneself to others, but rather should sacrifice one's life and property for others. But this should not be introduced by coercion so that it becomes a law which man is compelled to follow. Nay, rather, man should voluntarily and of his own choice sacrifice his property and life for others, and spend willingly for the poor, just as is done in Iran among the Baha'is."

No matter how poor a person may be, he can still find others who are poorer than himself and with whom he can share what he has. To the rich Baha'u'llah says :

"O Ye Rich Ones on Earth !

"The poor in your midst are My trust ; guard ye My trust, and be not intent only on your own ease."

He warns them not to forget those who are in need for they will be punishable if they are selfish :

"O Children of Dust !

"Tell the rich of the midnight sighing of the poor, lest heedlessness lead them into the path of destruction, and deprive them of the Tree of Wealth. To give and to be generous are attributes of Mine : well is it with him that adornest himself with My virtues."

Although the rich are called upon to give of their riches, Baha'u'llah forbids the poor to beg. He says that they must strive to earn their own living putting their

trust in the Almighty. Every individual is called upon to "pursue his profession and calling in this world, to hold....."

We must never envy those who have more money than we do, for Baha'u'llah says :

"O Son of Earth !

"Know, verily, the heart wherein the least remnant of envy yet lingers, shall never attain My everlasting dominion, nor inhale the sweet savours of holiness breathing from My kingdom of sanctity."

And again :

"O My Servant !

"Purge thy heart from malice and, innocent of envy, enter the divine court of holiness."

We must know that wealth in itself is not a virtue. It can become a dangerous thing. Baha'u'llah says that God tests men with gold, just as gold is tested by fire. He also says :

"Know ye in truth that wealth is a mighty barrier between the seeker and his desire, the lover and his beloved. The rich, but for a few, shall in no wise attain the court of His presence nor enter the city of content and resignation. Well is it then with him, who, being rich, is not hindered by his riches from the eternal kingdom, nor deprived by them of imperishable dominion. By the Most Great Name ! The splendor of such a wealthy man shall illumine the dwellers of heaven, even as the sun enlightens the people of the earth."

Our object in life, therefore, should not be gathering wealth so as to enjoy a short life of comfort in this world.

Material riches can profit us only after we have acquired spiritual wealth and come to know ourselves and the purpose of our lives in this world.

Baha'u'llah has written :

“Man should know his own self and know those things which lead to loftiness or to baseness, to shame or to honour, to affluence or to poverty. After man has realized his own being and become mature, then for him wealth is needed. If this wealth is acquired through a craft and profession, it is approvable and worthy of praise to men of wisdom, especially to those servants who arise to train the world and beautify the souls of nations.....”

Whether we possess the riches of this world or not, let us remember that we can all be spiritually rich if we let the love of God enter into our hearts. This is what God tells every one of us through Baha'u'llah :

“I created thee rich, why dost thou bring thyself down to poverty? Noble I made thee, wherewith dost thou abase thyself? Out of the essence of knowledge I gave thee being, why seekest thou enlightenment from anyone beside Me? Out of the clay of love I moulded thee, how dost thou busy thyself with another? Turn thy sight unto thyself, that thou mayest find Me standing within thee, mighty, powerful and self-subsisting.”

Happiness

One of Baha'u'llah's great bounties to us is the joy and happiness He has created in our hearts. We are joyful because the love of God is within us. We are happy

because we know the meaning and purpose of our short lives on this earth. We rejoice because we have found our Beloved, and through the influence of His creative Words are now at peace with the rest of humanity.

Baha'u'llah says :

“O My friends that dwell upon the dust ! Haste forth unto your celestial habitation. Announce unto yourselves the joyful tidings ! He Who is the Best-Beloved is come ! He hath crowned Himself with the glory of God’s Revelation ; and hath unlocked to the face of men the doors of His ancient Paradise. ‘Let all eyes rejoice, and let every ear be gladdened, for now is the time to gaze on His beauty, now is the fit time to hearken to His voice.’ Proclaim unto every longing lover : ‘Behold, your Well-Beloved hath come among men’ and to the messenger of the Monarch of love impart the tidings : ‘Lo, the Adored One hath appeared arrayed in the fullness of His glory ! O lovers of His beauty ! Turn the anguish of your separation from Him into the joy of an everlasting reunion.’”

The joy of having recognized the Beloved and hearkened to His voice fills the heart of every Baha’i. This great bounty was felt by the thousands of Baha’i martyrs who were glad to give their precious lives for the sake of their Beloved. When the joy of Faith takes possession of our heart, nothing on this earth can discourage us or make us unhappy. Poverty, sickness and hardship can be forgotten when the love of God and His creatures is in our hearts.

Abdu’l-Baha often made mention of this continuous happiness which he felt even when he was living in prison under very severe conditions. He wrote :

"I was happy in imprisonment. I was in the utmost elation, for I was not a criminal, they had imprisoned me in the path of God...I was happy that—praise be to God—I was a prisoner in the Cause of God, that my life was not wasted, that it was spent in the Divine service. Nobody who saw me imagined that I was in prison. They beheld me in the utmost joy, complete thankfulness and health, paying no attention to the prison."

The happiness which comes through the love we feel for God and our fellow creatures makes us more worthy of giving praise to the Almighty and of receiving His blessings. Baha'u'llah has written :

"O Son of Man !

"Rejoice in the gladness of thine heart, that thou mayest be worthy to see Me and to mirror forth My beauty."

Baha'is should always reflect the radiant light of happiness. How can we be unhappy when we read these wonderful Words of Baha'u'llah :

"O Son of Spirit !

"With the joyful tidings of light I hail thee ; rejoice. To the Court of Holiness I summon thee ; abide therein that thou mayest live in peace for evermore."

Baha'u'llah says that the heart is the seat of God. When the heart has known the joy of receiving its Beloved, no happiness on earth can compare with it. The wealth of the world cannot add to this happiness, nor can the

lack of prosperity become a cause of sorrow to such a heart.

The joy which comes with the pleasures of this world is not true happiness because it does not endure, and Baha'u'llah tells us not to be affected by it :

“O son of Man !

“Should prosperity befall thee, rejoice not, and should abasement come upon thee, grieve not for both shall pass away and be no more.”

Abdu'l-Baha says :

“When a man is thirsty he drinks water. When he is hungry he eats food. But if a man be not thirsty, water gives him no pleasure and if his hunger be already satisfied, food is distasteful to him. This is not so with spiritual enjoyment. Spiritual enjoyment brings always joy. The love of God brings endless happiness. These are joys in themselves and not alleviations...

“God created in us a divine holy spirit—the human spirit with its intellectual powers which are above the powers of nature. By this we enjoy the ecstasies of the spirit and see the world illumined... This power distinguishes you above all other creatures, why do you devote it only to your material conditions ? This is that which should be used for the acquisition and manifestation of the bounties of God, that ye may establish the Kingdom of God among men and attain to happiness in both worlds, the visible and the invisible.”

Let us be happy because we are living in such a wonderful age. Let us enjoy the paradise which God has

prepared for us where men live as brothers, and where the strifes and differences of the past are forgotten.

Let us rejoice in these words of Abdu'l-Baha :

“Glad Tidings!

For everlasting life is here.

O ye that sleep, awake !

O ye heedless ones, learn wisdom !

O blind, receive your sight !

O deaf, hear !

O dumb, speak !

O dead, arise !

Be happy !

Be happy !

Be full of joy.”

Immortality

Our lives are very short. Twenty or thirty years may seem a long time when we are still very young, but when we have left those years behind us, we wonder how they could have gone by so swiftly. The years that lie ahead of us will also pass like fleeting moments, and death will soon overtake us all.

Is death the end of everything for us? No! The Baha'i Faith teaches that death is not the end. It is only a beginning. Baha'u'llah says :

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

Death is the beginning of our spiritual journey towards God. It is a re-birth—a spiritual re-birth.

When our soul departs from our body, it continues to live and progress in the Kingdom of God. But it never comes back to the earth in a material form.

A nightingale which has always lived in a cage does not know any other place but the cage. It may get glimpses of a garden through the bars of its cage but the poor bird has no conception of freedom and has never known the joy of flying in the green woods or the open fields. If you open the door of the cage to set the bird free, it may hop to a corner of the cage and not want to come out, and when you put your hand in to take the bird out, it becomes frightened and tries to escape from your hand. But once the bird is free, it soars high in the open sky and sings among the green trees. It makes its home in the flowered meadows and the perfumed woods, and never comes back to a cage even if you offer it thousands of golden cages.

In the same way when the soul is being set free from the cage of this body, those who are not aware of the Kingdom of God, and the happiness which awaits them after they depart from this life, find it very difficult to die. It is because they know of only the cage, and are unaware of the heaven of God's love and eternal mercy.

Those who have recognized the Manifestations of God, however, are sure of the immortality of the soul and everlasting life. Somebody asked Baha'u'llah about life after death, and this was His reply :

“And now concerning thy question regarding the soul of man and its survival after death. Know thou of a truth that the soul, after its separation from the body, will continue to progress until it attaineth the presence of God, in a state and condition which neither the revolution of ages and

centuries nor the changes and chances of his world, can alter. It will endure as long as the Kingdom of God, His sovereignty, His dominion and power will endure. It will manifest the signs of God and His attributes, and will reveal His loving-kindness and bounty. The movement of My Pen is stilled when it attempteth to befittingly describe the loftiness and glory of so exalted a station."

Death is spiritual re-birth for each one of us. Let us therefore be prepared to welcome "the messenger of joy" whenever it may knock at our door.

Heaven & Hell

If you plant a field in the proper season, water it regularly and protect it from pests and birds, you will be rewarded with a rich harvest. But if you do not sow your seeds at the right time, and neglect to water the field, you cannot hope for a good crop. You will be punishable for your negligence when the time comes to reap the harvest and who can be blamed for the loss except you yourself?

Reward and punishment are necessary for the order of the world. Reward and punishment are the natural consequences of our own deeds. All the Messengers of the past have tried to make us realize that what we do in this world does not only affect our lives here, but continues to bear results after our death. If our deeds are good, they will produce good results and become the cause of everlasting happiness, if they are bad, they will bear evil results and bring eternal suffering to us. It is not because God wishes to take revenge on those who have done wrong, but because it is impossible to get good results from bad actions just as it is impossible to have beautiful

flowers in the garden when we have planted weeds. This is what is meant by reward and punishment. But this essential belief which has been taught in all religions has been greatly misunderstood.

The Manifestations of God have explained the existence of reward and punishment through symbols and parables. We have mentioned that the Manifestations of God are perfect Educators. A perfect educator must necessarily teach in a way that his students may understand or else there would be no purpose in his teaching. To make people understand that they will have to account for their deeds even after their life in this world is over, God's Messengers have pictured a life full of joy and pleasure for the good, and spoken of torture and misery for the wicked. The pleasures and tortures they have mentioned are those that people know of in this world because it was the only way to make people understand the importance of Their teachings on life after death.

To a small child who asks about knowledge, the parent may say that it is sweeter than anything he has ever enjoyed. He does not mean, of course, that knowledge is a kind of food which can be tasted, and when the child is older, he will come to know what his parent meant by the description he gave. Most of the people in the world are taking the symbols and parables which the Manifestations of God have used about life after death quite literally, and do not realize that they were meant to illustrate spiritual experiences. They have, therefore, set up an imaginary hell and heaven. Some believe hell to be a horrible place with fire, disease and horrid devils in which sinners are tortured for ever. And heaven, according to them, is a beautiful garden full of delicious fruits and earthly pleasures. Others believe that our souls will return to

this world after death as if there were no other place in the whole of the universe except our little planet. They say that we will come back in different forms, and that we may even come as animals depending on the kind of deeds we have done in our life-time.

Whereas the Manifestations of the past have had to speak of our experiences after death in symbolic terms, Baha'u'llah says we are now ready to know the true meaning of heaven and hell. The two important facts which we must remember are these :

1. Our souls are immortal and continue to live after our bodies are dead.
2. Our deeds in this world will produce their results even after the soul departs from the body.

The world into which the soul enters after departing from the body, is very different from the world we are used to here. Abdu'l-Baha says it is as different from this world as our world is different from the womb of the mother where a child lives before it is born. And, in the same way as a child prepares for his life in this world by developing his eyes, ears and limbs which he does not need in his mother's womb, but without which he cannot live a normal, healthy life here, we too, must prepare for a happy life in the next world where our souls will be born into after leaving this world. In the next world we are not going to need physical eyes and ears any more, but we will need spiritual qualities which we can acquire in this world by following the teachings of God sent to us through His Messengers.

There is, however, a great difference between the condition of a child in his mother's womb and that of a person who is living in this world. The unborn child is not responsible for his own development because he has no

choice and cannot help himself in any way. But in this world we are given the power to choose between right and wrong, good and bad. We are, therefore, responsible for our spiritual development, and if we fail to grow strong and healthy in spirit, we are going to be very unhappy in the next world. This state of unhappiness is called hell. If on the other hand, we strive to understand and obey the laws of God, we will be preparing for a life of happiness in the next world and we will enjoy the state which is spoken of as heaven. Baha'u'llah says that heaven is nearness to God and hell is being deprived of this bounty. He calls upon each one of us to strive to become worthy of the eternal blessings which are prepared for us in the worlds to come :

“O Son of Bounty !

“Out of the wastes of nothingness, with the clay of My command I made thee to appear, and have ordained for thy training every atom in existence and the essence of all created things. Thus, ere thou didst issue from thy mother's womb, I destined for thee two founts of gleaming milk, eyes to watch over thee, and hearts to love thee. Out of My loving-kindness, 'neath the shade of My mercy I nurtured thee, and guarded thee by the essence of My grace and favour. And My purpose in all this was that thou mightest attain My everlasting dominion and become worthy of My invisible bestowals”.

Miracles

The Manifestations of God are endowed with great powers. They are able to perform things that are impossible for other people to do. The greatest of their miracles are Their teachings, Their personal lives and the influence of Their words on the hearts of men for centuries

after They Themselves have left this world. These miracles have been performed by all the Manifestations of God.

The Messengers of God have had no worldly means or power with which to influence people, and They have always been opposed by the forces of the state and all the powerful and learned people of Their time. Those who first believed in Them have been poor and insignificant people, without any worldly position. In spite of all this, Their Message has spread and conquered the world and brought about new Civilizations. This story has been repeated in every age, and with the coming of every Manifestation a new civilization has been established in the world. When we hear of the ancient Hindu civilization, or the civilizations which the Jews or Christians or Moslems developed during the past ages, we must remember that the Founder of each of these great Movements was a single Messenger of God Who, in His day, stood alone against the forces of the whole world, and still came out victorious ! What greater miracle do we need to prove the truth of these Manifestations of God !

There are many people who believe that the proof of Prophethood lies in the performance of some difficult task which is usually expected of a magician. The followers of each religion relate extraordinary things about the Founder of their Faith to prove that He was a true Manifestation of God. The Hindus say that one day when the baby Krishna was being carried by His father, His feet touched the river Jamuna and the water immediately receded to allow Him to be carried to the other side. The Christians say that Christ satisfied the hunger of hundreds of people with a few loaves of bread. Similar miracles are attributed to Zoroaster, Buddha, Moses and Muhammad by Their followers.

Baha'is believe that all the Manifestations of God have been capable of accomplishing extraordinary things, but such deeds are neither convincing to those who do not believe in Them, nor can they be brought as proofs to Their Prophethood. A Christian, for instance, may tell a Jew or a Buddhist that Christ gave life to a dead person but his words will have little effect on the person who does not believe in Jesus. It certainly will not convince him that Christ was a Manifestation of God. He may even say that it is only the followers of Christ who have attributed this miracle to Him. Even those who lived in the days of Jesus did not believe in Him because of His miracles. But if the Christian points out how the beautiful teachings of Christ have brought eternal life to millions of people who were spiritually dead, or refers to the saintly life of Christ Himself which had inspired the hearts of many generations of the human race, no one can deny it. The life of Jesus Christ and His teachings are by far greater miracles than His having raised to life one or two people who might have lived for a few more years and died again.

The Manifestations of God are divine Physicians. What we should expect from them is that they give us a prescription which will cure our spiritual ailments. It is foolish of us to expect them to prove their Prophethood through the demonstration of magical performances. We do not ask a doctor who has come to prescribe for a patient to prove his skill by jumping from the roof. The only way the doctor can prove that he is indeed what he claims to be, is to cure his patient. That is why Baha'u'llah, in spite of the fact that those who were with Him saw Him accomplish extraordinary things, has forbidden Baha'is to mention them as proofs of His greatness. The following

incident, which occurred when Baha'u'llah was in Baghdad, shows how valueless these so-called miracles can be.

A council of Muslim divines who knew that they could not deny the Truth of Baha'u'llah through argument and logic, asked Him to perform a miracle for them, hoping that Baha'u'llah would refuse and thus give them an excuse to denounce Him. They chose one of the greatest Mullas from among themselves to deliver the message to Baha'u'llah. His reply to them was that the Cause of God was not a plaything and that He had not come to set up a magical show in order to please the whims and fancies of the people. But if they would all decide upon a certain thing, no matter how impossible it might seem, Baha'u'llah would accomplish it before their eyes, on condition that when the miracle was performed, they would all accept Him as the Promised One.

The Mullas did not accept the condition. They were afraid that Baha'u'llah might perform the miracle and they would then have no excuse for denying His Claim. So they dispersed without asking Baha'u'llah for any miracle.

The incident clearly shows that miracles, even if performed, do not serve to prove anything to those who have already decided to deny the Truth. For those who are just in their judgment and willing to understand the teachings of the Manifestations of God are in themselves true and lasting miracles.

Moral And Ethical Teachings

One of the principles of the Baha'i Faith is that the foundation of all religions is one. The moral principles of all religions are certainly a part of the foundation of the religions. Therefore they are similar.

In the teachings of Baha'u'llah, we find very high standards of ethics and personal conduct. We can say that almost all the teachings of Baha'u'llah influence the personal conduct and behaviour of man. In the Revelation of Baha'u'llah there are literally thousands of Tablets revealed by the Bab, Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha and in the writings of Shoghi Effendi setting the pattern of Baha'i life based on purity of mind and action. We are not able to compile all such beautiful writings even in a large book. Nevertheless it is appropriate to have some glimpses of such beautiful writings from the Baha'i Scriptures.

Readers have to continue their studies and immerse themselves in the immeasurable ocean of the Holy Writings if they wish to bring out such treasures and incomparable gems.

Baha'u'llah writes to one of His own sons :

“Be generous in prosperity, and thankful in adversity. Be worthy of the trust of thy neighbour, and look upon him with a bright and friendly face. Be a treasure to the poor, an admonisher to the rich, an answerer of the cry of the needy, a preserver of the sanctity of thy pledge. Be fair in thy judgment, and guarded in thy speech. Be unjust to no man, and show all meekness to all men. Be as a lamp unto them that walk in darkness, a joy to the sorrowful, a sea for the thirsty, a haven for the distressed, an upholder and defender of the victim of oppression. Let integrity and uprightness distinguish all thine acts. Be a home for the stranger, a balm to the suffering, a tower of strength for the fugitive. Be eyes to the blind, and a guiding light unto the feet of the erring. Be an ornament to a countenance of truth, a crown to

the brow of fidelity; a pillar of the temple of righteousness, a breath of life to the body of mankind, an ensign of the hosts of justice, a luminary above the horizon of virtue, a dew to the soil of the human heart, an ark on the ocean of knowledge, a sun in the heaven of bounty, a gem on the diadem of wisdom, a shining light in the firmament of thy generation, a fruit upon the tree of humility."

We are giving below some more quotations from the Holy Writings pertaining to our personal conduct :

"All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilisation.....To act like the beasts of the field is unworthy of man. Those virtues that befit his dignity are forbearance, mercy, compassion and loving-kindness towards all the peoples and kindreds of the earth.

"To transgress the limits of one's own rank and station is in no wise permissible. The integrity of every rank and station must needs be preserved. By this is meant that every created thing should be viewed in the light of the station it hath been ordained to occupy."

—BAHA'U'LLAH

* * *

"Charity is beloved and acceptable before God, and is accounted the chief among all good deeds. Indeed, this blessed world is, in this connection, a sun among worlds. Blessed is he who prefers his brother before himself; such an one is of the people of Baha.

"They who are possessed of riches, must have the utmost regard for the poor for great is the honour destined by God for those poor who are steadfast in patience.....There is no honour, except what God may please to bestow, that can compare to this honour. Great is the blessedness awaiting the poor that endure patiently and conceal their sufferings, and well is it with the rich who bestow their riches on the needy and prefer them before themselves."

—BAHA'U'LLAH

* * *

"To look after the sick is one of the greatest duties! Every soul who becomes sick, the other friends should certainly offer the life (of service) in the utmost kindness..."

—ABDU'L-BAHA

* * *

"We, verily, have chosen courtesy, and made it the true mark of such as are nigh unto Him. Courtesy is, in truth, a raiment which fitteth all men, whether young or old. Well is it with him that adorneth his temple therewith, and woe unto him who is deprived of this great bounty.

"O people of God! I exhort you to courtesy. Courtesy is, in the primary station, the Lord of all virtues. Blessed is he who is illumined with the light of courtesy, and is adorned with the mantle of uprightness! He who is endowed with courtesy is endowed with a great station."

—BAHA'U'LLAH

* * *

"Beware lest ye prefer yourselves above your neighbours.

"Be fair to yourselves and to others, that the evidences of justice may be revealed, through your deeds, among Our faithful servants.

"Equity is the most fundamental among human virtues. Thy evaluation of all things must needs depend upon it.

"Say ! Observe equity in your judgment ; ye man of understanding heart ! He that is unjust in his judgment is destitute of the characteristics that distinguish man's station."

—BAHA'U'LLAH

* * *

"We love to see you at all times consorting in amity and concord within the paradise of My good-pleasure, and to inhale from your acts the fragrance of friendliness and unity, of loving kindness and fellowship. . . . We shall always be with you; if We inhale the perfume of your fellowship, Our heart will assuredly rejoice, for naught else can satisfy Us."

—BAHA'U'LLAH

* * *

"The poor in your midst are My trust; guard ye My trust ; and be not intent only on your own ease.

"If ye encounter one who is poor, treat him not disdainfully. Reflect upon that whereof ye were created. Every one of you was created of sorry germ."

—BAHA'U'LLAH

* * *

"A kindly tongue is the lodestone of the hearts of men. It is the bread of the Spirit, it clotheth the

words with meaning, it is the fountain of the light of wisdom and understanding."

—BAHA'U'LLAH

* * *

"Each sees in the other the beauty of God reflected in the soul, and finding this point of similarity they are attracted to one another in love. This love will make all men the waves of one sea, this love will make them all the stars of one heaven, and the fruits of one tree. This love will bring the realisation of true accord, the foundation of real unity.

"Love is unlimited, boundless, infinite! Material things are limited, circumscribed, finite. . . . It is clear that limited material ties are insufficient to adequately express the universal love. The great unselfish love for humanity is bonded by none of these imperfect, semi-selfish bounds; this is the one perfect love, possible to all mankind, and can only be achieved by the power of the Divine Spirit."

—ABDU'L-BAHA

* * *

"Deal not treacherously with the substance of your neighbour. Be ye trustworthy on earth, and withhold not from the poor the things given unto you by God through His grace. He, verily, will bestow upon you the double of what ye possess."

—BAHA'U'LLAH

* * *

"Good speech and truthfulness are, in loftiness of position and rank, like unto the sun which hath risen from the horizon of the heaven of knowledge".

—BAHA'U'LLAH

ADMINISTRATION.

Religion Without Priest

There was a time when it was necessary to have a group of people in society to be in charge of religious affairs. Ordinary people were either illiterate or did not have the time to make a proper study of their religion. They therefore engaged a number of people who had no other task or profession in life except to study religion and to see that people observed its laws. That is why we find Brahmins among the Hindus; Bhikkhus among the Buddhists, priests among the Christians and Mullas among the Muslims.

In the Baha'i Faith professional priesthood is abolished and this is one of the distinctions of our religion. Baha'u'llah says that although it was necessary to have priests in the past, they are no more needed in our age. He has called upon every one of us to search after Truth for himself so that we may see with our own eyes and not with the eyes of others, and hear with our own ears and understand with our own power of understanding. In searching after Truth Baha'is acquire sufficient knowledge about their Faith which is not the case with people of other religions who expect to receive instructions from clergymen. Every Baha'i has to pray for himself and cannot pay another man to pray for him as is done by many people in other religions. A Baha'i asks for God's grace and forgiveness himself and does not need a priest to do it for him through man-made rituals and ceremonies. Every Baha'i can establish contact with God through His Manifestation, and no medium is required between us and Baha'u'llah.

Although there have been many good priests in every religion, a lot of harm which has been done in the name of religion has been due to the priests in every age. Two priests living in one neighbourhood did not always agree on religious problems, and their disagreement brought a great deal of trouble in the world. Some people thought this priest was right, while others believed that one's view to be correct, and so disunity and divisions arose in every religion. Gradually many sects were formed and men quarrelled with each other over different interpretations of their sacred writings, and this became the cause of wars and bloodshed.

Such things cannot happen in the Baha'i Faith. First of all there are no priests or other personalities in the Faith who can form a following from among the believers. All are equal in the Faith. Secondly, nobody has the right to interpret the teachings and Writings of Baha'u'llah. This authority was given only to Abdu'l-Baha by Baha'u'llah Himself, and after Abdu'l-Baha, the right of interpretation was given to Shoghi Effendi alone.

It is dangerous to be able to earn a living through religion because many insincere people may be attracted to this profession for no other reason than that they want to live an easy life or have a good income. Such people have always misled others in the garb of priesthood, and have committed many crimes in the name of religion so as to serve their own selfish interests.

Baha'u'llah has abolished the institution of priesthood so that no one can ever hope to misuse religion in order to serve his own selfish and worldly desires.

The history of the past shows that whenever a Manifestation of God appeared in the world, priests of the

previous religions were the first to oppose Him. Why? Because those priests knew that by believing in the new Manifestation, they would have to sacrifice their positions, their wealth and material comforts. They therefore tried their best to uproot the new religion as soon as it appeared among them. Buddhism was pushed out of India by the priests of the time. Christ was crucified because the Jewish priests opposed Him. The Bab was martyred because Muslim priests did not want people to believe in Him. Baha'u'llah suffered all His life chiefly because the Mullas instigated the government and the people of their time to rise against the new Cause of God.

There were exceptions of course. Many learned priests who lived at the time of the Bab and Baha'u'llah, believed in Them, and some even shed their blood in the path of God. But when they believed in the Bab and Baha'u'llah, they no longer remained priests. They became Baha'is—humble servants of the Cause of God. They took up other professions with which to earn their livelihood. They did not mingle money with religion or a worldly profession with the Faith of God.

Instead of having priests to see to religious affairs in the community, Baha'u'llah laid down the foundation of a wonderful system of Administration through which all of us can work together for the progress of the Faith and the spiritual welfare of the community. Baha'i Administration, like all the other teachings of Baha'u'llah, is divine in origin. We shall read more about it in the following pages.

What is Baha'i Administration ?

If there is a river on one side, and a stretch of farmland on the other, how would we bring water to the

various fields we wish to grow? We would first dig a canal which is large enough to bring sufficient water from the river to irrigate the whole area. Then we would dig smaller canals which would take water from the large canal to different sections of the land. And lastly, we would require a multitude of small streams to take water from these canals to every single field. When our system of canals and streams is completed, the river will be able to irrigate all the farmland.

Baha'i Administration, Shoghi Effendi has told us, is like a system of canals and streams "through which... the Holy Spirit of the Cause pours forth to the Baha'i communities scattered throughout the entire world".

In previous ages the priests were expected to bring the water of life from its Fountainhead to the people of the time. But their power was limited. They could carry a handful of this water, and that too, only as long as they had the strength and the zeal to do so.

But Baha'u'llah has not entrusted this task to individuals. He has planned a wonderful network of channels through which the water of life is brought to the field of existence. This plan is called the World Order of Baha'u'llah, and Baha'i Administration is a part of it.

The good news of the World Order of Baha'u'llah was first proclaimed by the Bab when He said :

"Well is it with him who fixeth his gaze upon the Order of Baha'u'llah, and rendereth thanks unto his Lord ! For He will assuredly be made manifest."

Baha'u'llah laid the foundation for this World Order, and drafted its plan. Later, Abdu'l-Baha explained this

divine plan, gave us its details and started its construction. But it was through the lifelong efforts of Shoghi Effendi that the Baha'i Administration was gradually built up, joining far-flung communities together and making them parts of a unified whole.

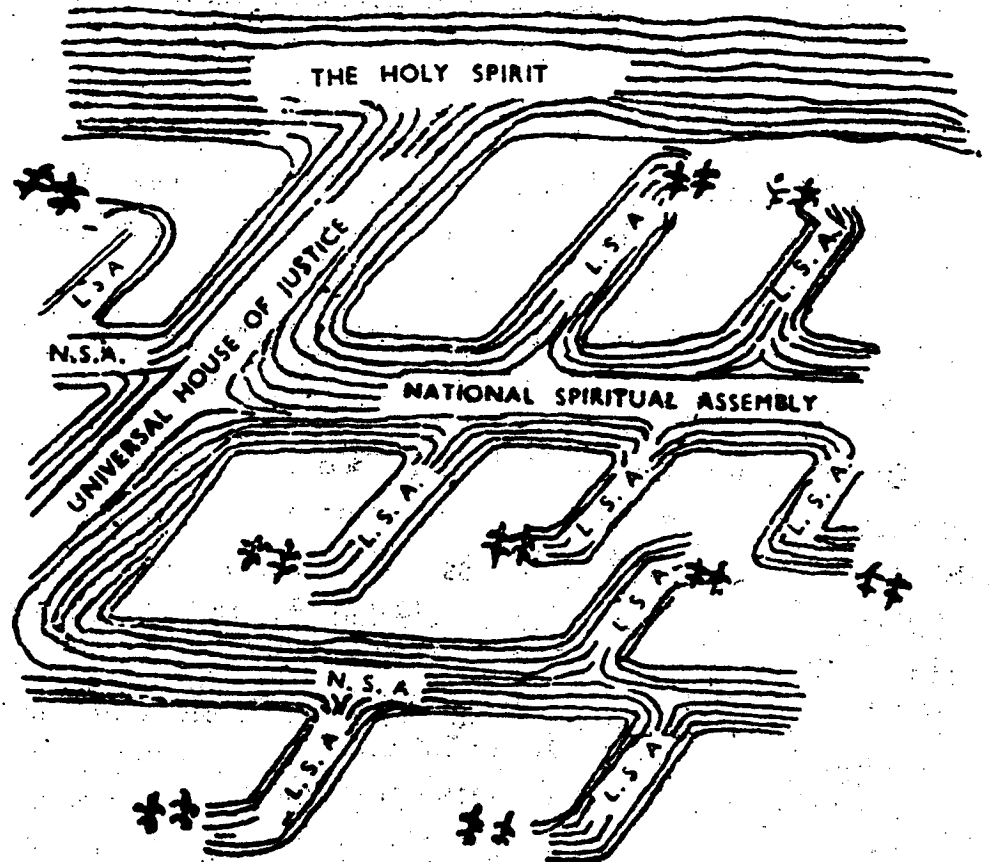
Baha'i Administration is different from every other form of religious order because it is not man-made. It is the Plan of God for this age, given to us through His Manifestation, Baha'u'llah, and destined to establish order and peace among all the various peoples of the earth.

Baha'i Administration is composed of many parts, all connected together. It consists of Local Spiritual Assemblies which are elected by the Baha'is of villages or towns, National Spiritual Assemblies elected by the Baha'is of countries, and the Universal House of Justice, elected by all the Baha'is of the world through their National Assemblies.

If we think of the Local Spiritual Assemblies as the streams which bring water from the canals to the different fields, the National Spiritual Assemblies will be the canals that connect these streams to the one large canal into which water flows from the river itself; and the Supreme House of Justice is that main canal. It is through the House of Justice that God's guidance flows out into all parts of the world.

Before we go on to the duties and responsibilities of each of these parts separately, let us make it quite clear that Baha'i Administration can never be divorced from Baha'u'llah's other teachings. No Baha'i can believe in Baha'u'llah without accepting His Administrative Order, and working through it, because the Message of God has

not been brought for the happiness of the individual alone, but also for the unity and welfare of society. This is how we may illustrate our Administration.



As you can see from the above illustration, individuals within society are like grains of corn in a field. A single grain of corn is of little significance. But every grain of corn profits by the water which flows in for the benefit of the whole field.

We must know that our individual happiness lies in the welfare of a unified society and strive to strengthen this Administrative Order on which depends the hope of the future of mankind.

Election of a Spiritual Assembly

In the Book of Aqdas, Baha'u'llah has ordained that in every place where the number of adult Baha'is is nine or

more, a Spiritual Assembly may be elected. This Spiritual Assembly, as a body, will serve the local community to which it belongs.

How do we elect our Local Spiritual Assembly ?

Let us suppose that the Baha'is of Rampur, which is a village in India with about 60 believers, wish to elect their Spiritual Assembly. These are some of the points which they should remember :

1. They cannot form their Assembly at any time of the year. They can only elect their Assembly on the 21st of April which is the Anniversary of the Declaration of Baha'u'llah, the day on which Baha'u'llah announced in the Garden of Ridvan, that He was the Promised One of all ages. The 21st of April is the first day of our Ridvan festival and the only day on which Baha'is can elect their Spiritual Assembly. If an Assembly is not elected within the 24 hours between sunset on the 20th of April and sunset on the 21st, then a whole year may pass until April 21st of the next year when the day of election comes round again.
2. Only Baha'is who are either 21 years of age or above 21, can vote for and be elected to the Spiritual Assembly. If, for instance, among the 60 Baha'is living in Rampur, there are 35 men and women who are either 21 or above that age, only these 35 can vote for their Assembly; and the members they choose for their Assembly must also be from among these 35 men and women.
3. Every person who votes, must write down the names of the nine persons whom he or she considers most worthy for being elected on the Spiritual

Assembly. A vote is not valid if more or less than nine names are mentioned or if one name is repeated.

4. People should never be elected on the Spiritual Assembly because of their wealth or name in the community, or because they have shown kindness to us in some way and we wish to reward them, but because of their sincerity and devotion to the Cause of God and their ability in serving the Faith. Every Baha'i who can vote should consider the character and spiritual qualities of the men and women in his community, and also pray to God that he may be guided to name the right people for the Assembly.
5. No Baha'i is permitted to recommend anyone as worthy of the membership of the Spiritual Assembly, no matter how good that person may be. Baha'u'llah has forbidden us to nominate any individual or try to draw attention to any special person before or during the election. No one in the Baha'i community must know whom the other person has named, or intends to name in his voting paper. Even husband and wife or the closest friends cannot consult together as to whom they should choose. Every single Baha'i must seek assistance from God alone and make his own decisions in this matter without being influenced by the opinions of others. Only a Baha'i who cannot write is allowed to ask a trusted person to write down the names which he or she dictates.

Having all these points in mind, the Baha'is of Rampur proceed to elect the members of their Spiritual Assembly

for that year. If they have all gathered at one place to give their votes, they will start their meeting with prayers asking God to help and bless them in their sacred task. Then the ballots will be collected, and a few Baha'is will be asked to count the votes. One person will read out the names written on each slip of paper, while two or three others will make a careful note of the number of votes received by each individual. The nine Baha'is, who have got the largest number of votes, are elected as members of the Local Spiritual Assembly for that year.

And thus the Baha'is of Rampur, like their fellow-believers in thousands of other villages, towns and cities in the East and the West, are blessed with a Spiritual Assembly that will serve their community until the first day of Ridvan of the next year, when the process of election is once more repeated throughout the Baha'i World.

Duties of a Local Spiritual Assembly

Regarding the duties of the Spiritual Assemblies, Baha'u'llah has written :

"It behoveth them to be the trusted ones of the Merciful among men and to regard themselves as the guardians appointed of God for all that dwell on earth. It is incumbent upon them to take counsel together and to have regard for the interests of the servants of God for His sake, even as they regard to their own interests and to choose that which is meet and seemly. Thus hath the Lord your God commanded you. Beware lest ye put away that which is clearly revealed in His Tablet. Fear God, O ye that perceive."

The Spiritual Assembly of every village or town must therefore guard the interests of the Baha'is in that locality.

The most important work of every Spiritual Assembly is to help Baha'is teach the Cause of God. The Message of Baha'u'llah is the source of blessings for all mankind, and our Spiritual Assemblies must become channels through which this great bounty can reach the people in every part of the world.

When you have formed your Spiritual Assembly, make sure that it takes up the matter of teaching as its main task.

Another important duty of a Spiritual Assembly is to try to promote amity and love among the believers. An Assembly must create a loving atmosphere of unity among the Baha'is ; it must see that everybody is happy in that community. If there are any differences among the friends, it is the duty of the Spiritual Assembly to see that they are removed. Each Spiritual Assembly must act as a wise and loving father to the Baha'is of its own locality.

Writing on the duties of Spiritual Assemblies, the Guardian says :

“They must do their utmost to extend at all times the helping hand to the poor, the sick, the disabled, the orphan, the widow, irrespective of colour, caste and creed.”

Every Spiritual Assembly has to have its own Fund. We will see how this Fund is to be collected by the voluntary contributions of the friends, and how it is to be utilized for the interests of the Cause and the community. If the Baha'is enrich the Funds of their Assemblies, the

Assemblies will, in turn, be able to come to their aid when they are in need of assistance.

The education of Baha'i children and youth is another responsibility of our Spiritual Assemblies. In the words of the beloved Guardian, they "must promote by every means in their power the material as well as the spiritual enlightenment of youth, the means for the education of children, institute, whenever possible, Baha'i educational institutions, organise and supervise their work and provide the best means for their progress and development."

Yet another important duty of the Spiritual Assemblies according to the Guardian, is that "they must undertake arrangements of the regular meetings of the friends, the feasts and the anniversaries, as well as the special gatherings designed to serve and promote the social, intellectual and spiritual interests of their fellow-men."

What we have mentioned above are some of the important functions of every Local Spiritual Assembly. Members of the Spiritual Assembly must be very careful not to fail in discharging their duties. They must always remember these Words of Baha'u'llah :

"It behoveth them to be the trusted ones of the Merciful among men ... and to have regard for the interests of the servants of God, for His sake."

Officers Of The Spiritual Assembly

The members of a Spiritual Assembly are those nine Baha'is who receive more votes than the others in every community on the day of election. The first thing that the members of an Assembly must do, after their election, is to gather and hold their first meeting. Out of the nine

elected members, the one who has received more votes than the other eight is the temporary chairman and he must arrange for the members to hold their first meeting as soon as possible.

They must begin their meeting with prayers, and ask God to help them in promoting His Cause and serving the community that has chosen them. After that, they must elect the officers of the Spiritual Assembly for that year.

Every Spiritual Assembly must have a Chairman, a Vice-Chairman, a Secretary and a Treasurer. This is necessary and makes the work of the Assembly much easier.

The work of the Chairman is to conduct the meetings and help the Assembly to arrive at some decision. If the members just gather to talk and disperse, they cannot be of any use in the Assembly at all. The Chairman asks for the views of all the members in every matter that comes up for discussion, then asks them to vote on the subject and ensures that the Assembly comes to a decision about the various matters with which it has to deal. In the chapter on Consultation, we will read more about this.

The Vice-Chairman conducts the meetings of the Assembly, whenever the Chairman is unable to attend—in case of illness, for example.

The Secretary is the one who keeps a record of all the work of the Assembly—all that has to be done as well as all that has been accomplished. The Secretary writes all the letters which have to be sent to individuals, to other local Assemblies, or to the National Spiritual Assembly. It is through its Secretary that every local Assembly is in touch with the rest of the Baha'i World.

The Treasurer is in charge of the Fund of the Assembly. He gives receipts to all who contribute to the Fund and pays out from this amount for the expenses undertaken by the Spiritual Assembly at every meeting.

When electing the officers of the Assembly, the members must look to the merits of each individual and see which one from among them is more capable of performing the duties assigned to these different officers. The same principles that had been taken into consideration for the election of the members of the Assembly, should now be applied in electing its officers. This election, therefore, is also to be carried out by secret ballot, and without any sort of propaganda. No one should be elected for the sake of his or her social standing. If, for example, among the members of the Assembly there is an elderly person who is respected in the community because of his age, there is no reason why he should be elected to be Chairman of the Spiritual Assembly, unless he is the one who is most capable of carrying out this duty. The same is true of a person whose wealth gives him a social position.

On the other hand, we must also remember that the officers of the Spiritual Assembly have no special position in the community. The Chairman, for instance, is not the leader of the community or the most respected personality. His or her station outside the Spiritual Assembly, is the same as any other member of the community and, as soon as the meeting of the Assembly is over, he or she has no more rights in the community than any other Baha'i.

To make the point quite clear, let us think of the people of a village who need pure drinking water and decide to dig a well. The headman in that village, though respected in every way, may have no knowledge of how to go about digging a well, while a young man, with

no special position in the village, may have had a lot of experience in this matter. Which of these two men would the villagers choose to conduct the job? It is the young man who will be entrusted with the work, and the headman of the village may be the first one to choose him for this purpose. And, while working on the well, all the villagers—even the head himself—will accept the guidance of the young man they themselves have chosen to supervise the work. This does not mean, of course, that the young man is going to become the leader of the village in everything, or that the headman is going to lose his position in the community. But this spirit of co-operation is going to benefit everybody in that village.

It is in this spirit of loving cooperation and harmony that the Baha'is elect their Spiritual Assembly and the Spiritual Assembly elects its officers.

The beloved Guardian wrote that the members of a Spiritual Assembly "should approach their task with extreme humility, and endeavour, by their open-mindedness, their high sense of justice and duty, their candour, their modesty, their entire devotion to the welfare and interests of the friends, the Cause, and humanity, to win, not only the confidence and the genuine support and respect of those whom they serve, but also their esteem and real affection....."

The Spiritual Assembly At Work

I

Let us suppose that the village of Rampur has elected its Local Spiritual Assembly, and Babulal has had more votes than the other eight members. What happens next? Babulal invites all the other members to gather at a special

hour in one place, so as to hold their first meeting. They decide to meet an hour after sunset on the 22nd April, the second day of the Feast of Ridvan; and the place is to be the village square. We will follow them there to see what they will do.

Babulal arrives a little before the appointed time. He has brought his lamp with him in case their meeting should continue until after dark. The other members now start arriving from their work in the fields. They greet each other and go to the village well for a wash. After having cleaned and refreshed themselves, they gather on a platform in the village square. At exactly an hour after sunset, Babulal announces that the Assembly will start its work.

First of all a few prayers are said by two or three of the members, and this gives their meeting a wonderful spiritual atmosphere. Then Babulal says that they must elect the Chairman of the Assembly. He cuts a sheet of paper into small pieces and, giving each member one piece, requests them to write down the name of the person whom they consider most suited among themselves to be Chairman of their Assembly.

The Rampur Baha'is are still very young in the Faith. Five of the members of the Assembly cannot write; so Babulal asks one of the members to go to each of these in turn, and write down the name of the person they want to elect as Chairman. The nine pieces of paper are then collected and mixed together in such a way that no one can tell to whom each belongs. Then Babulal asks two other members to help him count the votes. While he himself reads them out one by one, the other two make a note of the names on paper, and then count them to see

which member has received more votes than all the others.

Lal Chand has received 5 votes, Babulal 3 votes and Kamla one vote. Therefore Lal Chand is elected as the Chairman of the Assembly. If no one had been given more than four votes, they would have to repeat this election because the officers of the Assembly must each get at least 5 votes in order to be elected; and when no one receives this number of votes, the election is repeated until someone does get the number of votes required.

Now that Lal Chand has been chosen as Chairman, it is his duty to supervise the election of the rest of the Assembly's officers. After thanking Babulal for having done his part, Lal Chand proceeds to hand out the pieces of paper on which all the members must now vote for their Vice-Chairman. The same procedure that was carried out for the election of the Chairman, is now repeated in electing all the other officers of the Assembly.

As a result of the election Mrs. Shanta Devi is elected as Vice-Chairman, Babulal as Secretary and Hassan Ali as Treasurer of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Rampur.

The Chairman then asks the Secretary to record what has been done in the first meeting of the Assembly.

By this time it is quite late, and one of the members suggests that they adjourn the meeting and come together again the next day. All agree to this proposal, and it is decided to hold their next meeting on the morrow at the same time and at the same place. The meeting is closed with a prayer, as every Baha'i gathering should be, and the members of the Assembly go to their homes.

We shall read about their second meeting in the coming pages.

Consultation

Baha'i Administration works through consultation. Consultation is applied to Baha'i work in the Nineteen-Day Feast, the Local Spiritual Assembly, the Convention, the National Spiritual Assembly, and in our Committee meetings and Conferences. The Guardian tells us to remember two important things when we are consulting in Baha'i gatherings—truthfulness and frankness.

While we come together in a Baha'i meeting, we must always feel that Baha'u'llah is with us in spirit. This creates a wonderful spiritual atmosphere which helps us in our consultations. If we feel the presence of Baha'u'llah in our meetings, we will always try to be worthy servants of His Cause, whether we are serving on an Assembly, a Committee or a Nineteen-Day Feast; we will make every effort to suppress selfish motives or unfair statements when we are joining in consultations; no trace of insincerity will find its way into our discussions, and nothing but the truth will be spoken, for Baha'u'llah has said :

"O Heedless Ones !

"Think not the secrets of hearts are hidden, nay, know ye of a certainty that in clear characters they are engraved and are openly manifest in the holy Presence."

In Baha'i consultations everybody should express his views with absolute freedom. He should only think of

the interests of the Cause, and forget about his personal relationship with other individuals. For example, if a father and a son are both members of an Assembly, at the time of consultation or of giving votes the son should not consider it his duty to agree with his father. Although Baha'is are commanded to have greatest respect for their parents, but when they are taking part in Baha'i consultations they must remember that they are responsible only to Baha'u'llah Who is present in their meeting and Whose Cause they are serving, and should never let personal feelings interfere with the interests of the Faith. Therefore, if the son feels that his father's views are wrong, it is his duty to say so, and the father should not expect his son to do otherwise, because he knows that they have both come to the meeting in order to serve the Cause with absolute honesty, and are not expected to please each other with their views.

Let us beware lest petty personal grudges creep into our hearts at the time of consultation and influence our views. If, for instance, an acquaintance of mine has not given me his time when I asked him to do something for me, I should take great care that this incident does not prejudice my views against some good suggestion which that person may have in the meeting. Here again, I must remember the presence of Baha'u'llah, and let nothing come in the way of service to His Cause. When Baha'is come together in a meeting they should work as "fingers of one hand" and "drops of one ocean".

We should never insist on our views, or try to impose our will on others. We have all seen how two small children sometimes quarrel, each one insisting that he is right and the other is wrong. They may continue to quarrel in this way for a long time without achieving

anything, but when their father comes, they lower their raised voices through love and respect for him, and soon their problem is solved in his presence. If we know that Baha'u'llah is with us at every meeting, we will never act in a manner which is unworthy in His presence.

Although every Baha'i is free to express his opinion in consultation, the decision which is arrived at depends on the views of the majority of the members. Once a decision has been taken, every Baha'i must respect it, even those who had different views themselves. Let us suppose that Shyam is a member of a Spiritual Assembly, and suggests that the meeting for the Feast of 12th of Ridvan be held on the morning of the 2nd of May. But the majority of the members vote for the Baha'is to gather after sunset on May 1st. Now Shyam might have had very good reasons for his suggestion, but once the Assembly has decided against it, Shyam must put aside his own view, accept the decision of the Assembly with all his heart, and try his best in helping to arrange for the meeting after sunset.

Abdu'l-Baha has said :

"In this day, Assemblies of consultation are of the greatest importance and a vital necessity. Obedience unto them is essential and obligatory. The members thereof must take counsel together in such wise that no occasion for ill-feeling or discord may arise. This can be attained when every member expresseth with absolute freedom his own opinion and setteth forth his argument. Should any one oppose, he must on no account feel hurt for not until matters are fully discussed can the right way be revealed. The shining spark of truth cometh forth only after the clash of differing opinions. If,

after discussion, a decision be carried unanimously, well and good; but if, the Lord forbid, differences of opinion should arise, a majority of voices must prevail."

The different views offered by the members of an Assembly are like different ingredients of a delicious stew. When we want to make a good stew we mix a lot of things together and boil it until it is well cooked. It is delicious only when the ingredients are well blended, for each contributes to the taste of the stew. But if we were to taste those ingredients separately, they would never taste so good. Similarly, every individual opinion offered by the Baha'is gathered in a meeting contributes something towards the ultimate decision which is taken. But the decision itself is not one person's opinion. It is the decision of an Assembly and the result which has been derived from the views of all the members.

In the following Tablet, Abdu'l-Baha clearly shows the way Baha'is should consult together. Let us read it carefully and follow it in our meetings :

"The prime requisite for them that take counsel together are purity of motive, radiance of spirit, detachment from all else save God, attraction to His Divine Fragrance, humility and lowliness amongst His loved ones, patience and long suffering in difficulties and servitude to His exalted Threshold. Should they be graciously aided to acquire these attributes, victory from the unseen Kingdom of Baha shall be vouchsafed to them.

"The first condition is absolute love and harmony amongst the members of the Assembly. They must be wholly free from estrangement and must

manifest in themselves the Unity of God, for they are the waves of one sea, the drops of one river, the stars of one heaven, the rays of one sun, the trees of one orchard, the flowers of one garden. Should harmony of thought and absolute unity be non-existent, that gathering shall be dispersed and that Assembly be brought to naught. The second condition: They must, when coming together, turn their faces to the Kingdom on High and ask aid from the Realm of Glory. They must then proceed with the utmost devotion; courtesy, dignity, care and moderation to express their views. They must in every matter search out the truth and not insist upon their own opinion, for stubbornness and persistence in one's views will lead ultimately to discord and wrangling and the truth will remain hidden. The honoured members must with all freedom express their own thoughts, and it is in no wise permissible for one to belittle the thought of another, nay, he must with moderation set forth the truth, and should differences of opinion arise, a majority of voices must prevail, and all must obey and submit to the majority. It is again not permitted that any one of the honoured members object to or censure, whether in or out of the meeting, any decision arrived at previously, though that decision be not right, for such criticism would prevent any decision from being enforced. In short, whatsoever thing is arranged in harmony and with love and purity of motive, its result is light, and should the least trace of estrangement prevail the result shall be darkness upon darkness.

“If this be so regarded, that Assembly shall be of God, but otherwise it shall lead to coolness and

alienation that proceed from the Evil One. Discussions must all be confined to spiritual matters that pertain to the training of souls, the instruction of children, the relief of the poor, the help of the feeble throughout all classes in the world, kindness to all peoples, the diffusion of the fragrances of God and the exaltation of His Holy Word. Should they endeavour to fulfil these conditions the Grace of the Holy Spirit shall be vouchsafed unto them, and that Assembly shall become the centre of the Divine blessings, the hosts of Divine confirmation shall come to their aid and they shall day by day receive a new effusion of Spirit."

The Spiritual Assembly At Work

II

The nine members of the Spiritual Assembly of Rampur met again on the 23rd April. The Chairman asked some of the members to say a few prayers. These were prayers revealed by Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha, some of them specially for the purpose of being read in the meetings. After the opening prayers, the Chairman asked the Secretary to read the minutes of the previous meeting from the notes he had taken down. This is what the Secretary read :

"The first meeting of the Spiritual Assembly of Rampur was held on the 22nd of April, an hour after sunset. Opening prayers were read and Mr. Babulal conducted the first part of the meeting. Election of the Chairman took place; Mr. Lal Chand was elected Chairman, and Babulal invited him to conduct the rest of the meeting. The election of the officers of the Assembly was con-

tinued, and the following members were elected :

“Mrs. Shanti Devi, Vice-Chairman; Mr. Hassan Ali, Treasurer; and Babulal, Secretary.

“It was decided to hold the next meeting of the Assembly on the 23rd of April. The meeting adjourned with a closing prayer, three hours after sunset.”

When the Secretary finished reading, the Chairman asked the other members if they approved of the minutes of their last meeting. Everybody agreed that the minutes were correct, and Babulal noted down that the minutes of the last meeting had been read and approved.

Then the Chairman announced that as the main purpose of every Spiritual Assembly was to spread the Message of God, they would like to discuss this matter in their meeting.

Then the Chairman invited each member to express his or her views on this subject. When they had all given their views, the Chairman summarised them as follows :

1. We ourselves need to know more about the Cause.
2. We need literature.
3. We need a Fund.
4. We have to start our teaching activities in the neighbouring villages.

Then they took up these subjects one by one. One of the members suggested that they tell the community about this important undertaking and see if anybody could participate in the teaching campaign that they were going to start. One member suggested that in order to know more about the Cause they would need to have weekly meetings to study the Cause. They could utilize their

Saturday meetings for this purpose. He suggested that they ask Sunil who was a teacher in the Baha'i School of the neighbouring village to conduct the classes.

Chairman asked who seconded this proposal. Ameeta seconded it. After a little discussion the Chairman put the suggestion to vote. He announced that those who are in favour of the suggestion to call Sunil from village Gandhinagar for conducting their Saturday classes, might raise their hands.

Seven members raised their hands. The other two members, Amrik and Lal Chand, who thought that Sunil would not be able to come all the way, did not agree with the proposal and did not raise their hands.

The Chairman announced that the suggestion was carried and asked the Secretary to record the same in the minutes.

Then the Chairman announced that Sunil, the teacher, has to travel by bus to reach their village and he must leave his part-time job that he was doing in the evening in his village. Therefore, a Fund had to be raised to help Sunil to reach Rampur and conduct the classes. The Chairman asked others as to what they thought about this matter. Amrik said, "We, members of the Assembly, must set an example of devotion to our Faith for the rest of community. I promise to pay one day's wages to the Fund every month. I will be glad to offer it to the Assembly." This made all the members very happy and they congratulated Amrik for his generous donation to the community. They were particularly happy that though Amrik originally did not vote for the suggestion, now that it had been passed by the L.S.A., he lent his support to it. When an Assembly passes a resolution,

whether we agree with it or not, we must accept and respect the vote of majority. The other members of the L.S.A. also contributed some money. Their names and the amounts promised by them were noted by the Secretary. The Treasurer also made a note of these contributions and announced that Rs. 6/- P.M. were promised by the members of the Assembly for the Fund.

It was decided to announce this to the community in the Nineteen-day Feast (N.D.F.), to be held on 28th April (Feast of Beauty), and to ask friends to cooperate in the matter.

The Chairman then reverted to the question of literature required for their teaching activities. After discussion the Assembly came to the conclusion that they must ask the N.S.A. to help them in the matter.

After these arrangements were made the Chairman announced that the question they must next discuss was how to start spreading the Faith in the neighbouring villages.

Babulal proposed that every Sunday they must go in groups to villages around Rampur. Others also agreed with the suggestion. Another member added that Sunday would be the most suitable day because on Saturday they would have their study class and Sunil also could accompany them in their teaching tours on Sunday.

Babulal, the Secretary, noted all this.

The Chairman asked if there were any more suggestions on the subject.

Hassan Ali said that it was a good idea to hold large public meetings on special Holy Days and anniversaries

and invite the non-Baha'i friends and relatives from nearby places to these meetings.

This suggestion was seconded, put to vote and approved by the Assembly.

It was decided to place these plans before the community at the next N.D.F. and request the Baha'is of Rampur to help the Fund of the Assembly and volunteer to go out for teaching activities to neighbouring villages.

Lastly, they decided that the next meeting of the L.S.A. would take place on 29th April—one day after the N.D.F. so as to be able to discuss the suggestions put forth to the Assembly by the community during the Feast.

After closing prayer, the members of the Assembly went home with joyful hearts, thanking God for having assisted them in arriving at such vital decisions for the good of the community.

What took place in this meeting is an example of how a Spiritual Assembly should conduct its work—how it should enter upon discussions, and how it should arrive at useful decisions. The problems which come up in different communities may not be the same; even their needs may not necessarily be alike. Every Assembly should carefully consider its duties and decide to take up its tasks according to their importance in each community.

The Spiritual Assembly At Work *(In The Nineteen-Day Feast)*

III

It is the Feast of Beauty (Jamal), and the Baha'is of Rampur have gathered together for their Nineteen-Day

Feast. The Chairman of the Assembly conducts all the meetings of the Nineteen-Day Feasts unless he is unable to attend, in which case the Vice-Chairman takes his place. The first part of the Feast is always given to prayers and readings from the Writings of the Bab, Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha. These can be read by any of the Baha'is present in the gathering at the request of the Chairman, while all listen to the Words with great care and attention. The number of prayers and readings must not be so many as to make everybody tired.

When the Baha'is of Rampur finished the first part of the programme, the Chairman of their Spiritual Assembly, Lal Chand, asked the Secretary, Babulal, to read the report of the Assembly. Babulal informed the community about the results of the election of the officers of the Assembly and about the Assembly's decision to start a teaching campaign for spreading the Message of God in the neighbouring area. He also informed the community of the assistance needed in the teaching work and the funds which were required to invite a teacher and hold conferences.

After the report of the Secretary, the Chairman asked the members of the community to give their suggestions on the matter, and tell how far they were able to help. Each of the Baha'is promised to help in one way or another. One said that he could supply a pound of wheat in each conference, another said he would pay the one-way fare of the teacher once in a month, while the third promised to dedicate one full day each week to teaching activities. Besides these promises of cooperation, the Baha'is of Rampur drew the attention of their Assembly to some very important facts which they had not considered. For example, besides the weekly study classes and teaching tours, they

might also be ready and get organised to give the Message in the country fairs which were being held from time to time. Those who were going to these fairs should also take Baha'i literature with them for distribution. Many valuable suggestions were also given in order to economize on the funds etc. The Secretary noted down all these suggestions which had been made in the Nineteen-Day Feast, so that the Spiritual Assembly might take decisions on them in its next session.

The Chairman promised that the Spiritual Assembly would carefully consider all the given suggestions and communicate the results of its decisions to the community in the next Nineteen-Day Feast.

The third part of the programme of the Nineteen-Day Feast is the entertainment period. Four of the Baha'i families in Rampur had joined together in providing some puffed rice to be served to everyone. A group of young people who knew some beautiful songs was permitted by the Chairman to sing, and many of the others joined them in the chorus. A Baha'i girl recited a lovely poem which she had memorised in the school and every body liked it very much.

The spirit of unity and happiness with which the Baha'is of Rampur held their Nineteen-Day Feast brought spiritual blessings which were felt by all. They left the meeting after a closing prayer, and took their happiness with them into their homes.

Some Points On The 19-Day Feast

One of the duties of every Assembly is to see that friends of its locality observe the N.D.F. Nineteen-Day

Feasts are meetings to be held once every 19 days by the Baha'is of every town or village. As this Feast is recommended by the Bab and ratified by Baha'u'llah, therefore it is considered to be very important.

Q. What is the purpose of a Nineteen-Day Feast ?

Abdu'l-Baha says that in the 19-Day Feast "people may gather together and outwardly show fellowship and love, that the Divine mysteries may be disposed. The object is concord, that through this fellowship hearts may become perfectly united, and reciprocity and mutual helpfulness be established."

Q. What should we do in the 19-Day Feast ?

This feast is a part of the Baha'i Administration and as the beloved Guardian has explained, the programme of the N.D.F. consists of three parts. The first part is devotional programme. Prayers and readings from the Holy Writings may be offered by a few friends at the beginning of this Feast. The second part is administrative. The Spiritual Assembly through its Secretary gives reports of its activities and asks Baha'i friends of the place to give their suggestions and pledges for the promotion of the Cause of Baha'u'llah. The period of consultation is the time for the believers to voice their proposals to be sent through the L.S.A. to the N.S.A. The third part is entertainment. Songs may be sung by the friends, stories may be told, etc. Refreshments, no matter how simple, are served.

Q. Who invites people to the Feast ?

Where there is an Assembly, the Secretary invites the Baha'is according to the dates given in the

Baha'i calendar to a particular place at a specific time. In a place where there is no Assembly, Baha'is may form a group and elect a person out of themselves as the Secretary of the Group. This Secretary will remind the Baha'i Community about the 19-Day Feasts.

Q. Who conducts the NDF ?

Chairman of the Assembly conducts the NDF as well. He will ask persons to chant prayers at the beginning and request friends to consult the Assembly during the second part of the NDF.

Q. Who plays host to the Feast ?

Usually individual Baha'is play host at the Feast, turn by turn. Sometimes the LSA observes the NDF by using its own funds. It is also possible that a few Baha'is may join together and be the host of a Feast. It is preferable that entertainment should consist of some refreshment or snacks. But this is not absolutely necessary. Baha'u'llah says that even by serving plain water we can be the host of the NDF. The important thing in the NDF is the spiritual development of the Baha'is and increasing the unity and harmony among them. It should also serve to assist in the progress of the Cause in the locality in consultation and collaboration with the Spiritual Assembly.

We quote below from the writings of Abdu'l-Baha to show the spirit of every Baha'i meeting :

"In these meetings outside conversation must be entirely avoided, and the gathering must be confin-

ed to chanting the verses and reading the Words, and to matters which concern the Cause of God, such as explaining proofs, adducing clear and manifest evidences, and tracing the signs of the Beloved One of the creatures. Those who attend the meeting must, before entering, be arrayed with the utmost cleanliness and turn to the Abha Kingdom, and then enter the meeting with all meekness and humbleness ; and while the tablets are being read, must be quiet and silent ; and if one wishes to speak he must do so with all courtesy, with the satisfaction and permission of those present, and do it with eloquence and fluency."

The dates of holding the Feasts are as follows :

| | | |
|----------------|--------------|-------------|
| 21st March | 1st Baha | Splendour |
| 9th April | 1st Jalal | Glory |
| 28th April | 1st Jamal | Beauty |
| 17th May | 1st Azmat | Grandeur |
| 5th June | 1st Nur | Light |
| 24th June | 1st Rahmat | Mercy |
| 13th July | 1st Kalimat | Words |
| 1st August | 1st Kamal | Perfection |
| 20th August | 1st Asma | Names |
| 8th September | 1st Izzat | Might |
| 27th September | 1st Mashiyat | Will |
| 16th October | 1st Ilm | Knowledge |
| 4th November | 1st Qudrat | Power |
| 23rd November | 1st Qawl | Speech |
| 12th December | 1st Masail | Questions |
| 31st December | 1st Sharf | Honour |
| 19th January | 1st Sultan | Sovereignty |
| 7th February | 1st Mulk | Dominion |
| 2nd March | 1st Ala | Loftiness |

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The Spiritual Assembly of Rampur met on the day after the Nineteen-Day Feast and, when the minutes of their previous meeting had been read and approved, they discussed the suggestions given by the community in the Feast. After careful consideration, they approved all the suggestions except one.

The Assembly decided to invite all the Baha'is on the last day of Ridvan, to a picnic so that from that day friends might know how they were divided into groups to go to various villages for teaching activities. Three of the members of the Assembly were chosen to form a Committee in order to arrange a suitable programme for the meeting that was to take place on the last day of Ridvan.

Before closing the meeting of the Assembly, there was one other thing to see to. Two of the members had begged the Assembly to help them solve a personal difficulty which had come up between them and on which they had not been able to agree. The Assembly listened to what each side had to say, and then proposed a solution for their problem in a spirit of great love and wisdom.

When the Secretary of the Assembly consulted his notes the next day, he wrote the following letter to the National Spiritual Assembly.

The Secretary,
National Spiritual Assembly,
New Delhi.

Dear Baha'i Friends,

We are glad to inform you that by the grace of Baha'u'llah we have formed our Spiritual Assembly in Rampur. We have already sent you the forms which you

asked us to fill out after the election, giving the names and addresses of the members and officers of the Assembly.

To begin with we have requested Mr. Sunil, the Baha'i teacher of Gandhinagar, to come every Saturday to our village for conducting weekly study meetings.

It was further decided that on every Sunday a number of friends in mobile groups will go to the neighbouring villages for teaching the Cause among new areas.

We have raised a special Fund in the Assembly and friends so far have contributed Rs. 14.50 and promised to contribute the same amount every month. This amount will be spent for teaching activities under the supervision of this Assembly.

As we require sufficient quantity of literature, we request you to please send a large number of pamphlets and declaration cards to this Assembly.

We hope to write to you the good news of the progress of the Cause in our next letter.

May Baha'u'llah assist us in His service !

Yours sincerely,
BABU LAL
Secretary

National Spiritual Assembly

All the Local Spiritual Assemblies in our country are joined together through a National Spiritual Assembly (N.S.A.).

The National Spiritual Assembly is a body which is elected by the Baha'is of the country through a Convention. Delegates are sent to this Convention from all the Local Spiritual Assemblies of that country. The basic rules of Baha'i elections, which have been mentioned before, must be remembered in the election of the National Spiritual Assembly too. Election for us Baha'is is a sacred duty and takes on a spiritual character; no prior nominations and no propaganda are ever used.

The purpose of a National Spiritual Assembly is to unify the work which is done by the Baha'is throughout the country and to encourage them in their activities. Baha'i communities lend their cooperation to the N.S.A. through their Local Spiritual Assemblies. The National Spiritual Assembly keeps in touch with the Baha'is of the country through letters and circulars. It provides them with news about the activities of other Baha'is and the progress of the Faith throughout the world. It also asks for their cooperation and invites consultations and suggestions.

The circulars of the N.S.A. are read by the Secretaries of the Local Spiritual Assemblies in the Nineteen-Day Feasts. If they call for consultation every individual Baha'i is welcome to give his views or promise of cooperation. The result of these consultations in the Nineteen-Day Feasts will be sent to the National Spiritual Assembly by the Local Spiritual Assembly of each place. The N.S.A. will then go through all these suggestions and decide upon such matters after careful deliberations.

If there is no Local Spiritual Assembly in a place but only a group of Baha'is (less than 9 persons), the N.S.A. writes to the person who has been chosen by the group to

act as Secretary. When there is only one Baha'i in a place the N.S.A. corresponds with him directly.

As the N.S.A. has various duties to see to, it appoints committees to help in this work. The members who are to serve on these committees are chosen by the N.S.A. itself, and to each committee a special task is given. If, for example, the N.S.A. of India decides to build a House of Worship in the country, it will appoint a special committee to see to all the details of the work and give suggestions for the construction of the Temple. The N.S.A. is free to accept the suggestions of the committee; to modify or even to reject them. Local Spiritual Assemblies can also elect committees in the same way to assist them in case they feel the necessity. The committees which are appointed by the National Spiritual Assembly or by Local Spiritual Assemblies are directly responsible to the Assembly for which they are working. The Local Spiritual Assemblies are responsible to the National Spiritual Assembly, and the N.S.A. is the highest authority for the Baha'is in every country.

The National Spiritual Assembly, like the Local Spiritual Assembly, elects a Chairman, a Vice-Chairman, a Treasurer and a Secretary. The duties of the officers in the N.S.A. are the same as those of the officers of a Local Spiritual Assembly but on national level.

Convention

The election of the members of a National Spiritual Assembly is an indirect election. This means that each Baha'i community elects certain delegates from its own locality, and these delegates who are representatives of the Baha'i Communities throughout the country meet at a

Convention where they elect the members of the National Spiritual Assembly.

The number of delegates which are elected in each locality depends upon the number of Baha'is in that place. For example, if the Baha'is of Rampur are fifty in number, they may be asked to send only one delegate to the National Convention of India, whereas the Baha'is of Bombay, being one hundred, will send two delegates, and the Baha'is of Benaras who are three hundred, will send six. The N.S.A. of every country allocates delegates to various centres.

These delegates to the Convention all gather at one place, preferably where the National Spiritual Assembly's office is situated, sometime during the 12 days of Ridvan (April 21st to May 2nd). The main purpose of the Convention is to elect the members of the National Spiritual Assembly for that year. But delegates who come from all parts of the country will also have an opportunity to consult with the National Spiritual Assembly and with each other about the progress of the Cause in the country.

After the Convention has been opened with prayers, the members must first of all elect a Chairman for their meetings. The duty of the Chairman here too, is to see that the consultations are carried out in an orderly manner and with Baha'i spirit. The members of the Convention also elect a Secretary to record the suggestions which they wish to offer to the National Spiritual Assembly.

Here are a few important points which we must know about Convention :

(1) Delegates to the Convention must elect the members of the National Spiritual Assembly from among the

Baha'is of the whole country. It is not necessary that they should elect the members from among the delegates to the Convention. They can choose any 9 persons from among the entire Baha'i community of the country to which they belong.

(2) Those who are elected as delegates to the Convention have no duties or privileges other than their participation in the Convention and the election of the National Spiritual Assembly. When the Convention is over, their duties as delegates also come to an end unless a vacancy arises on the N.S.A. and the delegates are called upon to vote in by-election. In other words, a Convention is not a permanent body, and there can be no permanent members when the Convention itself dissolves.

(3) The Convention is a consultative body. Its recommendations are passed on to the National Spiritual Assembly and the National Spiritual Assembly is free to accept or reject those recommendations.

(4) The Convention has no supremacy over the National Spiritual Assembly. The National Spiritual Assembly is the highest authority in each country and has control over all Local Spiritual Assemblies and individual Baha'is in the country.

The Universal House of Justice

One of the unique institutions of the Baha'i Faith is the Universal House of Justice whose members are elected out of the Baha'is of the whole world through their National Spiritual Assemblies. Baha'u'llah has assured us that He will continue to guide the Baha'is through the Universal House of Justice as long as the Baha'i Dispensation lasts.

Baha'u'llah has given us the fundamental laws and teachings of God for this age, but He has said that we shall also need other social rules which will have to be set down gradually for us in accordance with our changing needs. These social rules and regulations, Baha'u'llah says, must be set down by the Universal House of Justice which will always be under the unerring guidance of God.

About the Universal House of Justice, Abdu'l-Baha says :

"It be established under the necessary conditions—with members from all the people—that House of Justice will be under the protection and the guardianship of God. If that House of Justice shall decide unanimously, or by majority, upon any question not mentioned in the Book, that decision and command will be guarded from mistake."

It is therefore obvious that the Universal House of Justice will be inspired in all its decisions, and whatever rules it may set down, will be perfect for the requirements of the times. But we must not think that the House of Justice will ever change those fundamental principles which have been given us by Baha'u'llah. What it will do is to lay down the rules by which we must carry out the laws of Baha'u'llah. For instance, one of the principles of the Baha'i Faith is that there should be no extremes of wealth or poverty in the world. But Baha'u'llah has not told us how much tax people should pay. It is left to the Universal House of Justice to work out a method of taxation which will enable everyone to live a comfortable life, and at the same time, prevent anyone from accumulating unnecessary riches.

Another example is that Baha'u'llah has commanded us to have a universal language in the world, but he has not mentioned which language it should be. This again has been left to the Universal House of Justice to decide. In this connection Baha'u'llah writes :

“.....in Our Epistles, have We commanded the Trustees of the House of Justice, either to choose one of the existing tongues, or to originate a new one, and in like manner to adopt a common script, teaching these to the children in the schools of the world, that the world may become even as one land and one home.”

Although the Universal House of Justice cannot change anything which has been revealed by Baha'u'llah, or alter any of the interpretations of Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi, it can change its own decisions if circumstances require it. Supposing the Universal House of Justice, at one time, decides upon how much tax should be paid. That decision is no doubt perfect for that time, but fifty years from then it may no more suit the requirements of the time. The Universal House of Justice, therefore, is free to change the decision which was made at a previous date.

In his Will and Testament Abdu'l-Baha writes:

“Unto the most Holy Book everyone must turn, and all that is not expressly recorded therein must be referred to the Universal Assembly. That which this body, either unanimously or by a majority, doth carry, that is verily the truth and the purpose of God Himself. Whoso doth deviate therefrom is verily of them that love discord, hath shown forth

malice and turned away from the Lord of the Covenant."

The labours of our beloved Guardian during 36 years of his ministry, paved the way for the establishment of the Universal House of Justice. The Guardian mentioned that the Universal House of Justice was like the dome of a building which needed strong pillars to support it. Those pillars, he said, were the National Spiritual Assemblies of the world. And it was through the ceaseless efforts of our Guardian that these pillars went up one by one in all parts of the earth. Under the divine guidance of the Guardian, Baha'is learned how to work in groups and Local Assemblies and how to work together in each country through their National Spiritual Assembly. When they had come so far, he gave them the Ten-Year Plan which taught the National Spiritual Assemblies to work together in a world undertaking, and also helped the Baha'is to establish the rest of the pillars of the Universal House of Justice. By the end of the Ten-Year Plan in 1963, there were enough National Spiritual Assemblies throughout the world to establish the Universal House of Justice.

Abdu'l-Baha foretold that the Universal House of Justice would be formed when the Baha'i Faith had spread to all parts of the world, and this too, was fulfilled by the end of the Ten-Year Plan in April 1963.

Some Important Points About the Baha'i Administration

1. Obedience to the decisions of the Assembly.

A Baha'i Spiritual Assembly should be regarded by the Baha'is as a sacred institution because it is based on

the Teachings of God. We must therefore obey all the decisions of the Assembly. Abdu'l-Baha has said that he himself would obey the decisions of the Spiritual Assembly even if he knew that some of those decisions were wrong. This shows that by obeying the Assembly, we are obeying a Command of God.

2. What should we do if we feel that a certain decision taken by our Local Spiritual Assembly is not correct?

First, we must obey that decision because God has commanded us to do so. But we can appeal to the National Spiritual Assembly to re-consider the decision of our Local Assembly. By obeying our Local and National Spiritual Assemblies, we strengthen the foundation of Baha'i Administration. There could be no unity among us if we were each to obey only some of our Assembly's decisions.

3. Can we say that because we do not like some of the members of the Assembly, we do not wish to obey the decisions of that Assembly?

No. This is a very wrong attitude. Our loyalty to the Spiritual Assembly is not dependent on our liking or disliking its members. It is the institution of Baha'u'llah to which we are loyal, no matter who the members of that Assembly may be. The unity of the community is safeguarded only if we lend our complete support to the institutions of the Cause regardless of their members.

4. Can we resign from the membership of a Spiritual Assembly?

No. Not unless we have a very good reason, such as continuous bad health or having changed our residence

to some other town or village. When we are elected as members of an Assembly, we must remember that God has given us the privilege of serving our community. Our loyalty to the Teachings of Baha'u'llah and our love for Him should encourage us to accept any responsibility in the service of His Cause.

5. Can we consult the Spiritual Assembly about our personal problems ?

Yes, we can. Abdu'l-Baha has encouraged the Baha'is to take their problems to the Spiritual Assembly and consult them about their difficulties. If, God forbid, there should arise any differences between two Baha'is, they should ask the Spiritual Assembly to help them solve their problems, and should willingly accept the decision of the Assembly.

6. Is the Spiritual Assembly responsible to the Baha'is who elect it ?

No. The Local Spiritual Assembly is responsible to God, and in administrative matters to the National Spiritual Assembly of the country. Every Assembly should take its decisions for the good of the Cause. In problems which may arise between members of the community, it should be impartial and deal with justice. It does not matter how the community may react towards its decisions, so long as the Assembly has been guided by justice.

7. Is the authority of any Baha'i higher than the authority of a Spiritual Assembly ?

No. There is no individual leadership in the Cause. Being Chairman or Secretary of an Assembly does not

give an individual any special rights. Outside the meeting of the Assembly the members have no more rights than any other Baha'i in the community, and like them, have to abide by all the decisions of the Assembly. There is absolute equality of rights in the Baha'i Faith.

Baha'i Temples

The Baha'i Faith is a universal religion, therefore the Baha'i temple is a universal house of worship of God. When Baha'is build their temples they dedicate them to the people of the world. Everyone belonging to any religion, caste or creed is welcome in the Baha'i temple. The sacred Writings of all religions are being read in our temples. In Baha'i temples people as members of one family gather under one roof to worship one Almighty God.

The structure of the Baha'i temples is a symbol of unity in itself. They are nine-sided buildings. Each side has a gate. All these gates open to a central hall under one beautiful dome. These nine gates and nine-sided structures symbolize the nine major religions of the world. They express the basic unity of all religions. When we are in the central hall looking around we see beautiful gates on all sides. There is no front door or back door in a Baha'i temple, all gates open on all sides, all receiving light and sending light to the central hall where peoples of all kinds have gathered together to worship God. This is a wonderful way to show in a building equality and unity of religions.

The Baha'i temples are not merely houses of worship. They are institutions. Around these nine-sided temples

will be nine humanitarian institutions like school, orphanage, hospital, etc., each connected to one side of the temple, through beautiful roads and pathways. All these roads lead to the House of God. Is it not a beautiful arrangement? It certainly is and it is because Abdu'l-Baha himself in his revealed Tablets has outlined the plan for Baha'i temples.

At present we have five Houses of Worship in the five continents of the world. One is in Asia in Ishkabad, Russia, one is in Wilmette in the United States of America, one is in Kampala, Africa, one in Sydney, Australia and one in Frankfurt, Germany, in the continent of Europe. They are called mother temples of each continent because in future numerous temples will be built in many countries of the world. Already many countries have acquired lands to build their temples.

The Baha'i Fund

If you were living in a village where there was a flood and someone's house had been washed away, leaving him and his children without a house, and then you came to know that a number of people were helping to build a shelter for this homeless family, what would you do? Would you say you were too poor to help, or would you come forward with your share, no matter how little it might be, to make it possible for this family to have a roof over their heads in the rainy season. What you might have to offer, may be a cartload of stones or a very small sum of money, it would be one of many other donations which, when put together, shall make it possible to build a shelter for this family that had no other home.

The human race today is like a homeless family caught in the tempest of war and hundreds of other calamities,

and the Baha'i Faith is the refuge in which humanity can find peace and happiness. The Baha'is of the world are striving to build up this shelter for mankind. Would not every one of us come forward to help ?

We must establish the institutions of the Cause, build our Centres and Houses of Worship, translate the teachings of the Faith into all the languages of the world, publish pamphlets and books. And for these and many other undertakings, we are in need of material means as well as spiritual help. This is why every Local and National Spiritual Assembly has a special Fund towards which Baha'is can contribute.

The contributions must be made voluntarily; no one can oblige us to donate to the funds if we do not wish to do so. But contribution to our funds is a spiritual obligation, and a test of our Faith. No Baha'i, knowing the importance of this Cause to humanity, can deprive himself of the privilege of helping to raise its institutions and bringing it to the notice of the suffering world.

The amount we give to the Baha'i Fund is not as important as the spirit in which we give our contribution. When the Baha'is wanted to build the Temple in America, Abdu'l-Baha asked the believers of the world to contribute towards it. There was an English lady who was very poor but longed to give something for the Temple. All she had in the world which she could sell was her long, beautiful golden hair. Although it meant a great sacrifice, she cut her long hair and contributed the money to the Fund. In this way she, too, could participate in building a glorious Temple.

Our beloved Guardian has said :

SOME OF THE LAWS

and

OBLIGATIONS

"We must be like the fountain or spring that is continually emptying itself of all that it has and is continually being refilled from an invisible source. To be continually giving out for the good of our fellows undeterred by the fear of poverty and reliant on the unfailing bounty of the Source of all wealth and all good—this is the secret of right living."

Every Spiritual Assembly must establish a Fund. Members of the community must contribute according to their capacity by their own free will. By our giving a part of what God has given us, we offer our thanksgiving to our benevolent God.

Remember what Abdu'l-Baha has said :

"O ye friends of God, rest assured that in place of this contribution, your commerce, your agriculture and your industry shall be blessed many times. Whosoever comes with one good act, God will give him tenfold. There is no doubt that the living Lord assists and confirms the generous soul."

Cleanliness

Baha'u'llah says in the Book of Aqdas:

"Be the essence of cleanliness among mankind... under all circumstances confirm yourselves to refined manners...let no trace of uncleanness appear on your clothes. . . . Immerse yourselves in pure water; a water which hath been used is not allowable Verily we have desired to see in you the manifestations of Paradise on earth, so that there may be diffused from you that whereat the hearts of the favoured ones shall rejoice."

This command of Baha'u'llah helps us to understand the importance of cleanliness. God wants us to be healthy and happy throughout our days. If we do not keep clean, our health will be affected and when we are not healthy, we cannot be as happy as we should be.

Science has proved that most of the diseases in the world are caused by uncleanness. If we eat food with dirty hands, we endanger our health because many diseases enter our bodies in that way. If we put dirty hands on our eyes, we will have eye trouble. In many villages of the world today, people wash their clothes and dishes in water which is not very clean. Sometimes even their drinking water is far from being pure, and this can bring them a lot of unhappiness in the form of various diseases.

Keeping ourselves, our clothes and our homes clean is very important for us as Baha'is because it is a command of Baha'u'llah. Abdu'l-Baha has said:

“External cleanliness, although it is but a physical thing, has great influence upon spirituality . . . The fact of having a pure and spotless body exercises an influence upon the spirit of man.”

Prayer

“If one friend feels love for another he will wish to say so. Though he knows that the friend is aware that he loves him, he will still wish to say so God knows the wishes of all hearts, but the impulse to pray is a natural one, springing from man’s love to God. . . .”

Abdu’l-Baha says that prayer is conversation with God. At another place he says:

“We should speak in the language of heaven—in the language of the spirit—for there is a language of the spirit and heart. It is as different from our language as our own language is different from that of the animals, who express themselves only by cries and sounds.

“It is the language of the spirit which speaks to God. When, in prayer, we are freed from all outward things and turn to God, then it is as if in our hearts we hear the voice of God. Without words we speak, we communicate, we converse with God and hear the answer...All of us, when we attain to a truly spiritual condition, can hear the voice of God.”

Prayer is the food of soul. We cannot grow strong and healthy in spirit if we do not pray. Therefore

prayer is compulsory in our religion. Baha'u'llah, in His Most Holy Book (Aqdas), writes :

“Chant (or recite) the Words of God every morning and evening. The one who neglects this has not been faithful to the Covenant of God and His agreement, and he who turns away from it today is of those who have turned away from God. Fear God, O my people ! Let not too much reading (of the Sacred Word) and actions by day or night make you proud. To chant but one verse with joy and gladness is better for you than reading all the Revelations of the Omnipotent God with carelessness. Chant the Tablets of God in such measure that ye be not overtaken with fatigue and depression. Burden not the soul so as to cause exhaustion and languor but rather refresh it that thus it may soar on the wings of Revelation to the Dawning-place of proofs. This brings you nearer to God, were ye of those who understand.”

From these sacred Words of Baha'u'llah we understand that Baha'i prayers, though compulsory, must not be treated as a sort of ritual or ceremony. You will find many people who think that by the mere recitation of some words, which they do not usually understand, they are performing a meritorious deed. Some people believe that if they recite a whole book of Sacred Writings in one day they will find favour in the sight of God and be rewarded in some way.

Thousands of people spend hours reading their sacred Books in Sanskrit or Latin or Arabic when they do not understand a word of these languages. They do this because they suppose that the mere recitation of sacred

Words will bring them salvation, when they are blindly imitating what their fathers did before them. In the Baha'i Faith lip worship is not permitted. Baha'u'llah says: "To chant but one verse with joy and gladness is better for you than reading all the Revelations of the Omnipotent God with carelessness." He warns us not to burden "the soul so as to cause exhaustion and languor, but rather refresh it that thus it may soar on the wings of Revelation to the Dawning-place of proofs."

There are hundreds of beautiful prayers revealed by the Bab, Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha. Baha'is are encouraged to read them whenever they wish to pray. Baha'i meetings usually open and close with prayers. One person reads or chants from the Holy Writings in the meeting while the rest listen and meditate upon the words. The prayers are very inspiring and one can experience great joy and spiritual upliftment when Baha'i prayers are being recited. These prayers are not obligatory and it is left to every individual to recite them whenever he likes. But Baha'is do have compulsory prayers too. Baha'u'llah has revealed three such prayers. We are free to select any one of these three prayers, but we must use one of them every day. Of these prayers, there is one that must be said once in every 24 hours. It is called the long Obligatory Prayer. Then there is a shorter prayer which must be said three times a day—in the morning, at mid-day and in the evening. The third is a very short prayer, to be said once every day at noon.

You can find all these prayers printed in Baha'i prayer books. The short compulsory prayer can be found in the first chapter of this book under the subject "Purpose of Our Lives" (on page 2). If you decide to say this prayer every noon, it is best to memorize it. But which-

ever prayer you choose to say, you must remember that the spirit with which we offer our prayers is of the greatest importance. Abdu'l-Baha says:

“In the highest prayer, men pray only for the love of God, not because they fear Him or hell, or hope for bounty or heaven. . . . When a man falls in love with a human being, it is impossible for him to keep from mentioning the name of his beloved. How much more difficult is it to keep from mentioning the Name of God when one has come to love Him. . . . The spiritual man finds no delight in anything save in commemoration of God.”

Fasting

In the Baha'i Calender there are four and sometimes five days between the 18th and 19th months of the year which are called the “Days of Ha” or the Intercalary Days. During these days Baha'is entertain their friends and relatives, or feed the poor amongst them. With the beginning of the 19th month, the month of Loftiness (Ala), the period of our fasting begins.

Throughout the nineteen days of fasting, we do not eat or drink anything from sunrise to sunset. We get up at dawn to pray to God and thank Him for all His favours and blessings. Then we eat our food before the sun rises and have nothing more during the day until the sun has set. We break our fast at sunset after offering our prayers.

These 19 days of fasting bring us closer to God than other times. When we keep the fast we are showing in a symbolic way our love for God and our faithfulness in carrying out His commandments.

This is what Abdu'l-Baha says about fasting:

"Fasting is a symbol. Fasting signifies abstinence from lust. Physical fasting is a symbol of that abstinence, and is a reminder; that is, just as a person abstains from physical appetites, he is to abstain from self-appetites and self-desires. But mere abstention from food has no effect on the spirit. It is only a symbol, a reminder. Otherwise it is of no importance. Fasting for this purpose does not mean entire abstinence from food. The golden rule as to food is, do not take too much or too little. Moderation is necessary. There is a sect in India who practise extreme abstinence, and gradually reduce their food until they exist on almost nothing. But their intelligence suffers. A man is not fit to do service for God with brain or body if he is weakened by lack of food. He cannot see clearly."

Before sun-rise we prepare ourselves for prayers and meditation. There are beautiful prayers revealed by Baha'u'llah, especially for this period. Shortly before sun-rise we finish our breakfast. We will not eat or drink from sun-rise to sun-set. During the period of fasting we, more than ever before, feel our love for Baha'u'llah and always remember that it is for His love that we observe the fast. After sun-set we break our fast. We also offer prayers before or after breaking the fast. Though there are a number of prayers especially revealed by Baha'u'llah for the fasting, we are allowed to offer any one of the revealed prayers from the Baha'i Holy Book. However, for the convenience of our dear readers, we mention below one of the prayers which may be said during the fasting period :

“Praise be to Thee, O Lord my God ! I beseech Thee by this Revelation whereby darkness hath been turned into light, through which the Frequented Fane hath been built, and the Written Tablet revealed, and the Outspread Roll uncovered, to send down upon me and upon them who are in my company that which will enable us to soar into the heavens of Thy transcendent glory, and will wash us from the stain of such doubts as have hindered the suspicious from entering into the tabernacle of Thy unity.

“I am the one, O my Lord, who hath held fast the cord of Thy loving-kindness, and clung to the hem of Thy mercy and favours. Do Thou ordain for me and for my loved ones the good of this world and of the world to come. Supply them, then, with the Hidden Gift Thou didst ordain for the choicest among Thy creatures. These are, O my Lord, the days in which Thou hast bidden Thy servants to observe the Fast. Blessed is he that observeth the Fast wholly for Thy sake and with absolute detachment from all things except Thee. Assist me and assist them, O my Lord, to obey Thee and to keep Thy precepts. Thou verily, hast power to do what Thou choosest.

“There is no God but Thee, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. All praise be to God, the Lord of all worlds.”

—BAHA’U’LLAH

The period of fasting continues to the last day of the Baha’i year. New year’s day which falls on the 21st of March, marks the end of the fast. Baha’is celebrate this day as the Feast of Naw Ruz.

Work Is Worship

Among the laws of Baha'u'llah is that everybody should work. It is a sin to beg or to be idle in life and therefore it is forbidden in the Baha'i Faith. Work is compulsory for everybody in this Cause, and when it is done in the spirit of service to the people of the world, it becomes a form of worship for the Baha'is. Baha'u'llah says :

"It is made incumbent on every one of you to engage in some one occupation, such as arts, trades, or the like. We have made this—your occupation—identical with the worship of God, the True One. Reflect O people, upon the mercy of God and upon His favours, then thank Him in mornings and evenings."

Abdu'l-Baha further explains :

"In the Baha'i Cause arts, sciences and all crafts are counted as worship. The man who makes a piece of note-paper to the best of his ability, conscientiously, concentrating all his forces on perfecting it, is giving praise to God. Briefly, all effort and exertion put forth by man from the fullness of his heart is worship, if it is prompted by the highest motives and the will to do service to humanity. This is worship: to serve mankind and to minister to the needs of the people. Service is prayer....."

Work is worship! Service is prayer! This is a wonderful law.

When we want to worship God, we must worship Him with happiness and sincerity. Baha'is believe that the

farmer who is tilling his land for the benefit of himself and others, is worshipping God. The carpenter who is making a door for somebody's house, or the tailor who is stitching a garment and trying to use all his skill in making it beautiful for some one to enjoy, is giving praise to God.

So we see that, with the blessing of Baha'u'llah, every field can become a temple of God, every workshop a house of worship. To a Baha'i, therefore, his work, no matter how difficult it may be, becomes a pleasant occupation because through it he can worship God. And a Baha'i will carry out his work with the same happiness, sincerity and honesty as he performs his prayers.

An ascetic who lives in a cave or in the heart of a jungle, is prepared to do all sorts of penance because he feels that in doing so he is worshipping God. Baha'u'llah has said that the age of asceticism and monkhood is over. He has, instead, made every type of useful work for us equal to the worship of God. Work can no more be tiresome for us when we consider it to be a prayer and do it with devotion.

Denunciation of the world and living a solitary life is not considered meritorious in our Faith. That is why Baha'is have no monks or ascetics among them. Baha'u'llah says :

“O people of the earth! A solitary life and severe discipline do not meet God's approval. The possessors of perception and knowledge should look into the means which are conducive to joy and fragrance. Such practices come forth and proceed from the loins of superstition and the womb of fancy, and are not worthy of the people of know-

ledge. Some of the people of the past and of later times dwelt in mountain caves, and others frequented the tombs during the night. Say: Harken to the advice of this Oppressed One. Abandon that which ye hold, and adhere unto what the trustworthy Counsellor commands. Deprive not yourselves of that which is created for you."

Let us worship God in our fields and our workshops. Let us praise Him by continuous and conscientious work. Let us offer sincere prayers to our Creator through our service to mankind. Let us remember this law of God for this age :

"Waste not your time in idleness and indolence, and occupy yourselves with that which will profit yourselves and others besides yourselves. Thus hath the matter been decreed in this Tablet, from the Horizon of which the Sun of Wisdom and Divine Utterance is gleaming! The most despised of men before God is he who sits and begs. Cling unto the rope of means, relying upon God, the Causer of Causes. Every soul who occupies himself in an art or trade... this will be accounted an act of worship before God. Verily this is from no other than His great and abundant favour!"

Teaching The Cause of God

If anyone asks us what is the duty of a Baha'i, we can say that a Baha'i should (1) study the Cause, (2) practise its Teachings, and (3) spread its Message. Baha'u'llah says, "God hath made it incumbent upon every soul to deliver His Cause according to his ability."

Why is it necessary for us to teach the Cause of God ?

When a person suffers from a terrible disease, and then finds a medicine which cures him and brings immediate relief from all his pain and suffering, he will certainly treasure that medicine with greatest care. But if he sees a friend of his suffering from the same disease, what will he do with the medicine? Will he selfishly keep it for himself and allow his friend to suffer? Of course not. He will gladly take the medicine to his friend and assure him that it will bring immediate relief from his sickness because he has already tested it himself.

Baha'u'llah is the "All-Knowing Physician", and He has brought a wonderful Medicine which can cure us of all our ailments. The disease of hatred, superstition, despair and disunity is destroying the people of the world. How can a true Baha'i, who has himself been cured of these ailments and knows the remedy, be indifferent towards the sufferings of others? Surely he must try to share what he himself has received from the teachings of God with his ailing brethren whom he finds on every hand.

In the Baha'i Faith we have no special people whose job is to preach and spread the Message of God. The responsibility of guiding people to the Cause, therefore, is placed on the shoulders of every individual believer.

What is our interest in giving the Message of God to other? We are not trying to gather an army. We do not hope for any material gain in giving the Message. We only teach the Cause of God because we feel love towards others and do not want them to be deprived of the great bounty which God has bestowed upon us in this age. We never try to impose our ideas upon other people. We do not argue with them. If they refuse to accept what

we offer them, we will still love them. We never tell people that they are wrong and we are right. We just present the Message which God has sent us through Baha'u'llah. It is left to them to accept it. Our love for others is not dependent on their becoming Baha'is. This is what Baha'u'llah orders us to do :

“O people of Baha! Ye are the dawning-places of the love and day-springs of the Favour of God. Defile not your tongues with curse or execrating anyone, and guard your eyes from that which is not worthy. Show forth that which ye possess (i.e. Truth). If it be accepted, the aim is attained. If not, to rebuke or interfere with him who rejects is vain. Leave him to himself, and advance towards God, the Protector, the Self-Subsistent. Be not the cause of sorrow how much less of sedition and strife! It is hoped that he may be nurtured in the shade of the tree of Divine Bounty and act as God has willed for you. Ye are all leaves of one tree and drops of one sea.”

Baha'u'llah expects us to teach ourselves before teaching others. This means that we should try our best to know about His teachings and to practise them in our own lives before we expect others to follow these teachings. In the Words of Baha'u'llah :

“The people of Baha must serve the Lord with wisdom, teach others by their lives, and manifest the Light of God in their deeds. The effect of deeds is in truth more powerful than that of words. . . . The effect of the word spoken by the teacher depends upon his purity of purpose and his severance. Some are content with words, but the

truth of words is tested by deeds and dependent upon life. Deeds reveal the station of the man. The words must be according to what has proceeded from the mouth of the Will of God and is recorded in Tablets.”

It is a great privilege for us to become a source of spiritual advancement and blessings to others. Perhaps in the spiritual world there can be nothing more precious for us than helping people to understand the purpose of their lives and to become united in one universal Cause. Abdu'l-Baha has said that every Baha'i should try to guide at least one person to the Cause of Baha'u'llah in one year. Teaching the Cause of Baha'u'llah is not dependent on our education. Abdu'l-Baha says that even if one cannot read and write, he can still prove that he is a true servant of mankind through his deeds and actions. If we live the life of a true Baha'i, people will themselves come to see that we are different because we have put into practice the teachings of God for this age. The importance of teaching the Cause and the blessings it brings us is clearly understood from this Tablet of Abdu'l-Baha :

“It is known and clear that today the unseen divine assistance encompasseth those who deliver the Message. And if the work of delivering the Message be neglected, the assistance shall be entirely cut off, for it is impossible that the friends of God could receive assistance unless they be engaged in delivering the Message. Under all conditions the Message must be delivered, but with wisdom. . . . The friends should be engaged in educating the souls and should become instruments in aiding the world of humanity to acquire spiritual joy and fragrance. For example : if every one of

the friends (believers) were to establish relations of friendship and right dealings with one of the negligent souls, associate and live with him with perfect kindness, and meanwhile through good conduct and moral behaviour lead him to divine instruction, to heavenly advice and teachings, surely he would gradually arouse that negligent person, would change his ignorance into knowledge."

Alcoholic Drinks are Prohibited

We have seen how man is distinguished from animals because of his mind and soul. God expects us to take good care of these precious gifts with which He has blessed the human race. We must strive to keep our minds and souls as healthy as possible.

Alcoholic drinks poison the mind to such an extent that people forget their station as human beings and drop to the level of beasts when they are drunk. Therefore, Baha'u'llah has forbidden us from using alcoholic drinks altogether.

There are many Baha'is who had the habit of using alcoholic drinks before they came to believe in this Faith. But after they accepted Baha'u'llah as the Manifestation of God, they proved their love and loyalty towards Him by getting rid of this harmful habit which brought nothing but financial, physical and spiritual loss. Now they drink from the water of life which Baha'u'llah has provided for us through His teachings, and do not need alcoholic drinks to keep them gay or make them forget their daily problems.

There are also some tribes in the world who were accustomed to serve alcoholic drinks during certain tribal

festivals or ceremonies. Now that they are Baha'is, they still perform those ceremonies but instead of alcoholic drinks they serve delicious juices which are free from the harm of alcohol.

Not only alcoholic drinks, but intoxicating drugs like opium, which poison the mind as well as the body, are also forbidden in the Baha'i Faith.

Observing The Holy Days

There are nine holy days throughout the year on which Baha'is should not work. These days have been set aside because some special event of great importance in the Cause has taken place on each of them, and they are therefore not to be treated the same as ordinary days. Seven of the holy days are feast days, and two of them commemorate the martyrdom of the Bab and the ascension of Baha'u'llah.

Of the feast days, the first is the Feast of Naw Ruz which marks the end of the fasting period and the beginning of the New Year.

The next three feasts are during the Ridvan festival. This is the anniversary of Baha'u'llah's Declaration which took place in Baghdad. During the twelve days we speak of as "the days of Ridvan," Baha'u'llah stayed in a beautiful garden called "Ridvan" where His friends and followers came to see Him for the last time before He left for Constantinople. Baha'u'llah was being exiled from Baghdad, and His many followers as well as hundreds of other people who had grown to love and respect Him, were filled with grief at His departure. But the bitter sorrow which weighed the hearts of His lovers was to be changed

into eternal joy, for it was during those days that Baha'u'llah openly declared that He was the One Whose coming the Divine Manifestations of the past had foretold, and for whom the Blessed Bab had given His precious life. In memory of those wonderful twelve days, we celebrate the Feast of Ridvan every year, and of these days, the first, the ninth and the twelfth are Holy Days on which we do not work.

Then we have the anniversary of the Declaration of the Bab, which is the day the Bab spoke of His Mission to Mulla Husayn for the first time in Shiraz.

The sixth and seventh of our feast days are the Birthdays of the Bab and Baha'u'llah.

Here are Baha'i Holy Days :

- | | |
|------------------|---|
| 1. March 21st | Feast of Naw Ruz (New Year) |
| 2. April 21st | First day of Ridvan—Declaration of Baha'u'llah (1863) at 3 P.M. |
| 3. April 29th | Ninth day of Ridvan. |
| 4. May 2nd | Twelfth day of Ridvan. |
| 5. May 23rd | Declaration of the Bab (1844), two hours and eleven minutes after sunset on May 22nd. |
| 6. May 29th | Ascension of Baha'u'llah (1892) at 3 A.M. |
| 7. July 9th | Martyrdom of the Bab (1850) at about noon. |
| 8. October 20th | Birthday of the Bab (1819) |
| 9. November 12th | Birthday of Baha'u'llah (1817) |

To the Baha'is sunset is the end of one day and the beginning of another. Therefore each of these Holy Days start with the sunset on the previous day. For example,

the Declaration of the Bab took place two hours and eleven minutes after sunset on the 22nd of May and ends at sunset on May 23rd. The day of Baha'u'llah's ascension starts at sunset on May 28th and ends at sunset on May 29th, and so on.

Abdu'l-Baha says that we should try to make these Holy Days different from the rest of the days of the year by taking some important step for the progress of the Cause and the service to humanity. We can establish a Baha'i center or a Baha'i class, we can start a school or a hospital, each community according to its capacity and its special needs. As individuals too, we can make decisions which will help us to become better Baha'is in our personal lives as well as better members in our community. So, according to Abdu'l-Baha, a feast day for us is not only for the purpose of eating good food and having a good time, although that too is part of a feast.

Neither do we sit and mourn on the day of the Bab's martyrdom or Baha'u'llah's ascension, for although it is natural for us to feel the grief of these days, we know that the only way to show our loyalty to the Manifestations of God is to dedicate our lives to the service of the Cause for which They lived and died.

Baha'is always gather to meet each other and to offer special prayers on the Holy Days. These meetings are very important because through them unity is established among the members of the community, and the unity of Baha'is becomes the cause of divine blessings.

Abdu'l-Baha says :

“It has been decided by the Desire of God that union and harmony may day by day increase among

the friends of God and the handmaids of the Merciful. Not until this is realized will the affairs advance by any means! And the greatest means for the union and harmony of all are Spiritual Meetings. This matter is very important and is as a magnet to attract divine confirmations."

Marriage

We have seen that there is no monastic life in Baha'i Faith. Marriage is an important institution in Baha'i Faith. In the "Aqdas", the Most Holy Book, Baha'u'llah says: "Enter into wedlock, O people, that may bring forth one who will make mention of Me."

Abdu'l-Baha says:

"The marriage of Baha'is means that the man and woman must become spiritually and physically united, so that they may have eternal unity throughout all the divine worlds, and improve the spiritual life of each other. This is Baha'i matrimony."

How is the Baha'i marriage performed? The necessary requirements for a Baha'i marriage are: (1) Man and woman must consent to marry each other. They cannot be forced to marry each other. (2) Parents of the bride and the bridegroom, if alive, must give consent for the marriage. Baha'u'llah says:

"As We desired to bring about love and friendship and the unity of the people, therefore, We made it conditional upon the consent of the parents also, that enmity and ill-feeling might be avoided."

When these necessary consents are obtained, the parties inform their Spiritual Assembly of their intention of marriage and fix a date so that a representative may be sent to witness the marriage. Then in the presence of a few persons they will repeat the following verse enjoined by Baha'u'llah in His Most Holy Book :

“We will all, verily, abide by the Will of God.”

And the bride will also say :

“We will all, verily, abide by the Will of God.”

After this the man and the woman become husband and wife and the date of the marriage is registered with the Spiritual Assembly.

Even if there is no Spiritual Assembly, the marriage can be performed, in the way we have described, by the bride and the bridegroom themselves in the presence of a few witnesses. Abdu'l-Baha says :

“The Baha'i betrothal is the perfect agreement and entire consent of both parties. They must show forth the utmost attention and become informed of one another's character. The firm covenant between them must become an eternal binding, and their intentions must be everlasting affinity, friendship, unity and life.”

In the light of this teaching, marriage is not only a material but a spiritual performance as well. We are not trading our boys and girls when they are married. We are joining them in reunion. It is customary among some people who make it an obligation on the girl and her parents to pay a certain amount or gift to the bridegroom's family and vice versa. There is no such system in the Baha'i marriage.

There are some beautiful prayers revealed by Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha for marriage which are not obligatory but can be said along with those verses, if so desired.

In marriage, as at any other happy occasion, people of every tribe or nation are free to entertain each other and have any kind of performances which are a part of their culture. These customs, however, should not be against the teachings of God in maintaining purity of character and dignity of man. There are beautiful folk-dances and folk-songs which enrich the new composite culture of mankind. Baha'is are encouraging this cultural heritage of people. Therefore, the beautiful cultural heritage of people, whether relating to marriage or other festive occasions, may be performed.

One may ask if a Baha'i can marry a non-Baha'i. Marriage of a Baha'i boy or girl to a non-Baha'i belonging to any other religion is possible. In fact one of the commands of Baha'u'llah for us is :

“to consort with the people of all religions with joy and fragrance; to show forth that which is declared by the speaker of the Mount; and to render justice in affairs. The followers of sincerity and faithfulness must consort with all the people of the world with joy and fragrance; for association is always conducive to union and harmony, and union and harmony are the causes of the order of the world and the life of nations. Blessed are they who hold fast to the rope of compassion and kindness and are detached from animosity and hatred.”

A Baha'i who gets married to a non-Baha'i should make it clear to his or her life-partner that he or she is a

Baha'i and has to obtain consent to perform Baha'i laws. As a Baha'i expects his or her non-Baha'i partner to take part in a simple but dignified Baha'i ceremony, he or she will also be ready to undergo marriage ceremonies of the religion of his or her partner.

The Baha'i marriage law is still another symbol of the oneness of mankind. It shows that the Baha'i Faith is not meant for a special cult or group. It is for the mankind.

Loyalty To Government

Baha'u'llah has forbidden us to engage in any activity that may harm society. We also have to refrain from anything that is not honest or is subversive. About a hundred years ago Baha'u'llah set this principle in one of His Writings:

"In every country or government where any of this community reside, they must behave toward that Government with faithfulness, trustfulness and truthfulness."

A Baha'i cannot be faithful to his religion if he is not faithful to his government.

Abdu'l-Baha has said:

"Loyalty to government, in the Baha'i view, is an essential spiritual and social principle." "We must obey and be the well-wishers of the government of the land....." "The essence of the Baha'i spirit is that in order to establish a better social order and economic condition, there must be allegiance to the laws and principles of government."

Loyalty to the government is a part of the character that has to be built up among us. Any act of treachery is a sin. Baha'u'llah says:

"Let integrity and uprightness distinguish all thine acts." "Beautify your tongues, O people, with truthfulness, and adorn your souls with the ornament of honesty. Beware, O people, that ye deal not treacherously with any one. Be ye the trustees of God amongst His creatures, and the emblems of His generosity amidst His people."

In this connection another important point may be mentioned that every Baha'i must observe.

Our Faith has nothing to do with politics and Baha'is cannot participate in any party politics whatsoever. This does not mean that we are against those who are in party politics or have some grudge against any particular party. We believe that God has set a direction for us to spend our energies and resources to build up a divine World Order. We have a God-given plan which includes all the good aspects of all programmes of the existing political parties and much more without having their shortcomings.

God has set a straight path for us to tread. This path is neither inclined towards left nor right, neither East nor West. It is the path of unity of all mankind in all parts of the world, belonging to various nations, creeds and classes. Moreover, the Order that Baha'u'llah has established in the world is divine in origin; and necessarily is quite different in nature, scope and dimension from that of man-made and often conflicting ideologies.

There is another reason that a Baha'i cannot participate in political movements. This has been explained by Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian, in one of his letters:

“.....We Baha’is are one all the world over ; we are seeking to build up a new World Order, divine in origin. How can we do this if every Baha’i is a member of a different political party—some of them diametrically opposite to each other? Where is our unity then? We would be divided, because of politics, against ourselves, and this is the opposite of our purpose. Obviously if one Baha’i in Austria is given freedom to choose a political party and join it, however good its aims may be, another Baha’i in Japan or America, or India, has the right to do the same thing and he might belong to a party the very opposite in principle to that which the Austrian Baha’i belongs to. Where would be the unity of the Faith then? These two spiritual brothers would be working against each other because of their political affiliations (as the Christians of Europe have been doing in so many fratricidal wars). The best way for a Baha’i to serve his country and the world is to work for the establishment of Baha’u’llah’s World Order, which will gradually unite all men and do away with divisive political systems and religious creeds.”

How One Becomes A Baha’i

Many times we hear this question: “How can I become a Baha’i?” Some people think that Baha’i Faith is a society which invites members. This is not correct. Some other people think that Baha’i are interested to change the names of the people and give them a new denomination in religious spheres. This is also not correct.

To become a Baha’i means to have conviction in the

Oneness of God, oneness of religions and oneness of mankind; to realise that religion is progressive and continuous and is for the sake of unity rather than disunity. A Baha'i, moreover, is convinced that all religions are divine in origin and are equal. However, a Baha'i believes that Baha'u'llah (the Glory of God) is the Manifestation of God for this age. And He, Baha'u'llah, like the Manifestations of God in the past, has come to open a new era of happiness and unity for us in this age. When one becomes a Baha'i, he finds the love of Baha'u'llah in his heart. When this conviction is there, we are Baha'is. No ceremony, baptism or change of name is necessary to usher a person in the Baha'i Faith. In other words, we do not believe in conversion without conviction and conviction needs no ceremony. Abdu'l-Baha says :

“The man who lives the life according to the teachings of Baha'u'llah is already a Baha'i.....”

The aims of Baha'is are to serve men and to bring unity and happiness to the world. Baha'is are trying to change the hearts of men. The change of heart is not possible except by the power of the Words of God.

Abdu'l-Baha was once asked, “What is a Baha'i?” He replied that “to be a Baha'i simply means to love all the world; to love the humanity and try to serve it; to work for universal peace and universal brotherhood.”

When a mirror is clean, it reflects the light. When it is not clean, it does not reflect anything. If Baha'is teach their religion to others, it is an attempt to clean up the dust of prejudice, hatred and animosity from the mirrors

of hearts. When pure-hearted people come in contact with the Sun of Truth, they receive the light in great measure and reflect it to others.

Many Baha'is of today are those who had always felt in their hearts the necessity of having new teachings for this new age, but they did not know as to how they could realise their feelings in practice. They did not know that there was a religion in the world that contained all the teachings they wished to exist in a religion. As soon as they heard about the Baha'i Faith, they believed in it as the Voice of God because they had already heard the Voice of God in their hearts without knowing about Baha'u'llah. They are those clean mirrors which have now been brought to the direction of the rays of the Sun of Truth and reflect its splendour. The mirrors of hearts, though clean, will remain dark if they are not turned towards the light.

When this conviction and realization of truth occurs in anybody, he becomes a Baha'i. However, there is a form to be filled in and signed by the Baha'is, giving their names and addresses and informing the National Spiritual Assembly of their country that they believe in Baha'u'llah. In this way one informs the Baha'i World Community that he is a fellow believer in Baha'u'llah. One is a Baha'i when he signs the declaration form and is accepted. When he is a Baha'i, he is a servant of men. By signing the declaration form, he pledges himself to serve humanity through the God-given administration which is a part of the divine guidance for this age. Declaration forms are being issued by the National Spiritual Assembly of each country and are given to believers in Baha'u'llah in that country to sign. The signed forms are returned to the National Assembly through Local Spiritual Assemblies.

In case there is no Local Assembly, those who declare themselves as Baha'is may well send the form directly to the N.S.A.

A Baha'i serves men and also prays for them. Among the innumerable beautiful prayers revealed, we read :

"O Thou Kind Lord ! Thou hast created all humanity from the same stock. Thou hast decreed that all shall belong to the same household. In Thy Holy Presence they are all Thy servants, and all mankind are sheltered beneath Thy Tabernacle; all have gathered together at Thy Table of Bounty; all are illumined through the light of Thy Providence.

"O God! Thou art kind to all, Thou hast provided for all, dost shelter all, conferrest life upon all, Thou hast endowed each and all with talents and faculties, and all are submerged in the Ocean of Thy Mercy.

"O Thou Kind Lord ! Unite all. Let the religions agree and make the nations one, so that they may see each other as one family and the whole earth as one home. May they all live together in perfect harmony.

"O God ! Raise aloft the banner of the oneness of mankind.

"Cement Thou, O God, the hearts together.

"O Thou Kind Father, O God ! Gladden our hearts through the fragrance of Thy love. Brighten