

Fear into Faith

-OVERCOMING ANXIETY-

Susan Gammage

Fear into Faith - Overcoming Anxiety

A Baha'i Perspective

By Susan Gammage

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Dedication

For Vera and Peter

**And for
Val and Karl**

**And for
Michael and Sarah**

**And for
Chris**

And With Profound Gratitude to the Divine Physician

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Introduction

I know fear very well, having suffered from anxiety my whole life, possibly back into the womb, and I'm grateful I was able to learn how fear produced disease in my body and learned how to recognize it, and say good bye. Now I want to pass on what I've discovered to others.

I've noticed that when we use the word "anxiety", the problem becomes a medical one, which needs medication to manage the symptoms; and it's something we have to live with for the rest of our lives, in one form or another (from worry and stress at one end of the spectrum, to full blown panic attacks and generalized anxiety disorder at the other). So I don't like to use this term.

I find it much more empowering to use the term "fear" instead. Fear gives us more hope for reconciling the object of our fear, and changing our lives as a result.

With that said, let's look at a variety of ways to look at fear, and then look at what the Baha'i Writings teach us about overcoming it.

What is Fear?

The dictionary defines fear as:

1. a distressing emotion aroused by impending danger, evil, pain, etc., whether the threat is real or imagined
2. concern or anxiety; solicitude: a fear for someone's safety.
3. reverential awe, especially toward God
4. something that causes feelings of dread or apprehension
5. something a person is afraid of: Cancer is a common fear.

Other words for fear include: worry, anxiety, panic, stress, afraid, dread, hypertension, foreboding, apprehension, consternation, dismay, terror, fright, panic, horror, trepidation and qualm.

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), is used by psychiatrists or GPs to help them decide which diagnosis a person experiencing mental distress should receive. Their Anxiety disorder classifications include:

- Acute Stress Disorder
- Social Phobia
- Generalised Anxiety Disorder
- Panic Attack
- Specific phobias
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Anxiety Disorder due to general medical condition
- Agoraphobia
- Agoraphobia without history of Panic Disorder
- Panic Disorder without Agoraphobia and Panic Disorder with Agoraphobia
- Anxiety Disorder not otherwise specified

I like these definitions the least, because once it becomes a medical diagnosis, it's in the hands of the medical doctors and pharmaceutical companies and out of the individual's ability to change. It's disempowering and unhelpful.

Some people suggest fear is an acronym for:

False **E**vidence **A**ppearing **R**eal

False **E**motions **A**ppearing **R**eal

False **E**xpectations **A**bout **R**eality

Forget **E**verything **A**nd **R**un

Forgetting Everything About Reality

Forgetting Everything's All Right

Finding Excuses And Reasons

Failure Expected And Received

Future Events Appearing Real

Future Events Appear Real

Future Events Already Ruined

Frantic Effort to Avoid Reality

I like this definition best, because it suggests there is something wrong with our thinking, which is in our power to change.

However we define fear, some studies suggest that between 60-90% of visits to GPs and other health care professions are stress related.

Paxil and Zoloft (two of the more popular anti-anxiety medications) ranked 7th and 8th in the top ten prescribed medications in the US (these two medications totaled almost \$5 Billion in sales in 2002).

According to "The Economic Burden of Anxiety Disorders," a study commissioned by the Anxiety Disorders Association of America and based on data gathered by the association and published in the Journal of Clinical Psychiatry, anxiety disorders cost the U.S. more than \$42 billion a year, almost one third of the \$148 billion total mental health bill for the U.S. More than \$22.84 billion of those costs are associated with the repeated use of healthcare services, as those with anxiety disorders seek relief for symptoms that mimic physical illnesses.

Statistics from a recent global stress research study show that stress is felt worldwide, and stress affects women differently than men (The Health Centre, 2006). A recent Roper Starch Worldwide survey of 30,000 people between the ages of 13 and 65 in 30 countries showed that:

- Nearly one in four mothers who work full-time and have children under 13 feel stress almost every day and report the greatest stress worldwide
- Globally, 23% of women executives and professionals, and 19% of their male peers, say they feel 'super-stressed'

As long as we look to science to find the answers, we fall deeper into the hole and can't ever get out. When we look to religion, there are lots of answers from the Divine Physician, a source we can trust. When we learn to apply the Divine Remedy, there is hope for a complete recovery.

Henry Wright, a Christian Minister who introduced me to the idea that perhaps as much as 80% of all diseases are caused by specific sins (anger, bitterness, jealousy, fear, worry) has

coined his study "pneumapsychosomatology ®" or PPS. PPS is a field of study and application that encompasses spirituality, theology, science, medicine, psychology and psychiatry. It is a Biblically-based, integrative approach to health beyond disease management. The aim is toward healing, prevention and eradication of disease through understanding the principles of the spirit, soul, body connection.

In a recent newsletter, he said:

The terms for fear in today's society are stress and anxiety. We do not recognize it as fear. The world tries to find other words to mask the Biblical perspective because the world wants to deal with things psychologically.

The activity of a spirit of Fear has been masked as a psychological defect and the big word that hides our true enemy can be found in one term called "negative emotions". But Paul said in Ephesians 6 that our war, our battle, is not with flesh and blood.

This opens a new dimension. No wonder we have not had much success in healing for psychological and biological problems, even in Christianity, because we do not recognize our enemy. We do not even see the kingdom that is working in us and teaching us how to think opposite of our God. When we see the effects of it in our lives, we just call it a psychological defect.

Even in Christian psychiatry, with all due respect, when we see the imbalances of body chemistry caused by fear (as in anxiety and stress), rather than getting them out of our life and having our mind renewed (mind of Christ), we try to balance the imbalance of chemistry through psychiatric drugs. That does not deliver us; that does not heal us. It binds us to the problem without the true enemy being defeated.

In fact it is an attempt to bypass the penalty of disobedience artificially without taking responsibility for the participation with sin that caused the disease. This is key to the equation of the pathways to disease and healing.

Caveat: While I believe it's true that anxiety has a spiritual component, the House of Justice has said:

Regarding your question about methods of healing which involve temporarily re-experiencing or remembering events, these are complex medical matters and as stipulated in the Teachings, believers should seek the best medical advice which is available and follow it. Experience seems to suggest that the healing process can often be a lengthy and stressful one requiring the close guidance and help of trained professionals. Advice given by well-meaning believers to the effect that you should seek to transcend psychological problems does not qualify as competent advice on what is essentially a medical issue. (Universal House of Justice, 1985 Dec 02, Child Abuse, Psychology and Knowledge of Self)

Obviously I support their encouragement to consult trained professionals, and for some people, this may mean medical doctors who aren't trained in the spiritual realities of life.

In the next series of articles, I want to look at what the Baha'i Writings have to say about fear and anxiety, and hopefully by the end, those who are afflicted in this way will have some spiritual tools to advance their recovery, in addition to any other tools they may also find useful from other perspectives. As with everything in the Faith, combining religion with

science is always a good idea! Science has a lot to say on this topic – so my focus will be to look at what religion has to say.

What Are We Afraid Of?

In the April 2, 2001 issue of Time Magazine, there is an article listing over 4,000 different types of fear.

But it all boils down to just 2 things: Will I be OK, and what will people think of me?

Will I Be OK?	What will People Think of Me?
Money	Friends
Health, Injury, Pain	Bosses
Children	Parents
Environment (Global warming; tornados, floods, tsunamis etc)	Baha'i Community
Schedules	God
Cars	Education
Food (GMO's, additives, preservatives)	Criticism
Safety	Acceptance
Pets (can I survive their death)	Failure
Phobias (snakes, flying, spiders etc)	Looking silly or stupid and being laughed at
Tomorrow	Bullying
The Unknown	Divorce

The Baha'i Writings give us a glimmer into some of the things we're afraid of, and how to understand the reality of our fears so that we can look at them differently.

Will I be OK?

Annihilation:

The conception of annihilation is a factor in human degradation, a cause of human debasement and lowliness, a source of human fear and abjection. It has been conducive to the dispersion and weakening of human thought . . . If he dwells upon the thought of non-existence he will become utterly incompetent; with weakened will-power his ambition for progress will be lessened and the acquisition of human virtues will cease. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Baha'i World Faith, p. 265-266)

Danger:

Bahá'ís should make it absolutely clear that we do not fear being placed in danger, and are not asking to be given a safe berth in hours of national crisis -- quite the contrary -- any dangerous service the Bahá'ís can render their fellow-men during the agonies of war, they should be anxious to accept. (Shoghi Effendi, The Unfolding Destiny of the British Baha'i Community, p. 259)

If thou didst hear the Call yet fear and the desire to preserve thy life prompted thee to remain heedless to it, thou art such a person as hath never been nor is worthy of mention; if thou hast not heard it, then thou art bereft of the sense of hearing.' In brief, such men are they whose words are the pride of the world, and whose deeds are the shame of the nations. (Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 61)

Death:

In the path of their Lord they shall not fear for their lives; rather will they sacrifice their all in their eagerness to behold the face of their Well-Beloved when once He hath appeared in this Name, the Almighty, the All-Powerful, the All-Glorious, the Most Holy. (Baha'u'llah, The Summons of the Lord of Hosts, p. 8)

All men are in God's hands, and even if they do get killed we know there is another life beyond this that can hold great hope and happiness for the soul. (Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 237)

Thou art My dominion and My dominion perisheth not; wherefore fearest thou thy perishing? Thou art My light and My light shall never be extinguished; why dost thou dread extinction? Thou art My glory and My glory fadeth not; thou art My robe and My robe shall never be outworn. Abide then in thy love for Me, that thou mayest find Me in the realm of glory. (Baha'u'llah, The Hidden Words, Arabic 14)

Through his ignorance, man fears death; but the death he shrinks from is imaginary and absolutely unreal; it is only human imagination. (Abdu'l-Baha, Baha'i World Faith, p. 264)

Economic downturns:

He hopes that the friends will display a certain amount of faith and courage and not fear present economic conditions. We should not let financial considerations hamper our work and discourage us in rendering our services. (Shoghi Effendi, Extracts from the USBN)

Evil:

Fear not the manifestations of the Evil One. (Baha'u'llah, The Summons of the Lord of Hosts, p. 9)

Future:

The Bahá'ís all over the world are subject sometimes to suffering, along with their fellow-men. Whatever vicissitudes befall their country, they will be protected though, and watched over by Bahá'u'lláh, and should not fear the future but rather fear any failure on their part to carry out the work of His Cause. (Shoghi Effendi, Dawn of a New Day, p. 202)

God's Laws:

Were His law to be such as to strike terror into the hearts of all that are in heaven and on earth, that law is naught but manifest justice. The fears and agitation which the revelation of this law provoke in men's hearts should indeed be likened to the cries of the sucking babe weaned from his mother's milk, if ye be of them that perceive. (Baha'u'llah, Principles of Bahá'í Administration, p. 6)

Happenings of the World:

O sincere servant of the True One! I hear thou art grieved and distressed at the happenings of the world and the vicissitudes of fortune. Wherefore this fear and sorrow? The true lovers of the Abha Beauty, and they that have quaffed the Cup of the Covenant fear no calamity, nor feel depressed in the hour of trial. They regard the fire of adversity as their garden of delight, and the depth of the sea the expanse of heaven. (Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, p. 309)

Ignorance:

Fear not the ignorant. (Baha'u'llah, The Summons of the Lord of Hosts, p. 16)

Materialism:

In earthly riches fear is hidden and peril is concealed. (Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 219)

Poor people:

Fear the sighs of the poor and of the upright in heart who, at every break of day, bewail their plight, and be unto them a benignant sovereign. They, verily, are thy treasures on earth. It behoveth thee, therefore, to safeguard thy treasures from the assaults of them who wish to rob thee. Inquire into their affairs, and ascertain, every year, nay every month, their condition, and be not of them that are careless of their duty. (Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 236)

Poverty:

The fear of poverty should not deter them from sacrificing for the Fund, and that the assistance and bounty of the Source of all good and of all wealth are unailing and assured. (Universal House of Justice, NSA USA - Developing Distinctive Baha'i Communities)

Separation from God:

Thou seest, O Lord my God, the tears of Thy favored ones, shed because of their separation from Thee, and the fears of Thy devoted ones in their remoteness from Thy Holy Court. (Baha'u'llah, Baha'i Prayers, p. 145)

What will Others think of Me?

Abasement:

Fear not abasement, for glory shall one day rest on thee. (Baha'u'llah, The Hidden Words, Arabic 53)

Blame:

The blame of the blamer shall they not fear. (Abdu'l-Baha, Memorials of the Faithful, p. 51)

Attacks to the Faith:

The recent articles attacking the Cause are a sign that its influence is sufficiently felt to be feared -- a great compliment to the progress you are making in spreading the message! (Shoghi Effendi, Letters from the Guardian to Australia and New Zealand, p. 59)

Consultation:

They must also learn to really make use of the great principle of consultation. There is a time set aside at the Nineteen Day Feasts for the Community to express its views and make suggestions to its Assembly; the Assembly and the believers should look forward to this happy period of discussion, and neither fear it nor suppress it. (Shoghi Effendi, The Compilation of Compilations vol. I, p. 452)

Discord:

Guard ye the Cause of God, protect His law and have the utmost fear of discord. This is the foundation of the belief of the people of Baha. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Compilation of Compilations vol. I, p. 172)

Ignorance

Fear not the ignorant. (Baha'u'llah, The Summons of the Lord of Hosts, p. 16)

Making mistakes:

It is indeed time for audacious action undeterred by a fear of mistakes, fired by the urgency of ministering to the pressing needs of humanity. (Universal House of Justice, Unlocking the Power of Action)

Opposition:

There is no need to fear opposition from without if the life within be sound and vigorous. (Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 417)

Others:

. . . let the fear of no one dismay Thee, and be Thou not of them that waver. (Bahá'u'lláh, The Promised Day is Come, p. 24-25)

Punishment:

In the conduct of life, man is actuated by two main motives: 'The Hope for Reward' and 'The Fear of Punishment'. (Abdu'l-Baha, Paris Talks, p. 157)

See then how wide is the difference between material civilization and divine. With force and punishments, material civilization seeketh to restrain the people from mischief, from inflicting harm on society and committing crimes. But in a divine civilization, the individual is so conditioned that with no fear of punishment, he shunneth the perpetration of crimes, seeth the crime itself as the severest of torments, and with alacrity and joy, setteth himself to acquiring the virtues of humankind, to furthering human progress, and to spreading light across the world. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 132-33)

Rejection:

We must not allow the fear of rejection by our friends and neighbours to deter us from our goal to live the Bahá'í life. (Universal House of Justice, Lights of Guidance, p. 528)

Knowing our station:

Were We to reveal thy station, the hearts of men would be sorely agitated, their footsteps would slip, the embodiments of vain-glory would be dumbfounded, would fall down upon the ground, and would thrust the fingers of heedlessness into their ears, for fear of hearing. (Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 207)

Teaching:

Warn and acquaint the people, O Servant, with the things We have sent down unto Thee, and let the fear of no one dismay Thee, and be Thou not of them that waver. The day is approaching when God will have exalted His Cause and magnified His testimony in the eyes of all who are in the heavens and all who are on the earth. Place, in all circumstances, Thy whole trust in Thy Lord, and fix Thy gaze upon Him, and turn away from all them that repudiate His truth. Let God, Thy Lord, be Thy sufficing succorer and helper. We have pledged Ourselves to secure Thy triumph upon earth and to exalt Our Cause above all men, though no king be found who would turn his face towards Thee. (Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 248-249)

Unpopularity:

Not by merely imitating the excesses and laxity of the extravagant age they live in; not by the idle neglect of the sacred responsibilities it is their privilege to shoulder; not by the silent compromise of the principles dearly cherished by 'Abdu'l-Bahá; not by their fear of unpopularity or their dread of censure can they hope to rouse society from its spiritual lethargy, and serve as a model to a civilization the foundations of which the corrosion of prejudice has wellnigh undermined. By the sublimity of their principles, the warmth of their love, the spotless purity of their character, and the depth of their devoutness and piety, let them demonstrate to their fellow-countrymen the ennobling reality of a power that shall weld a disrupted world. We can prove ourselves worthy of our Cause only if in our individual conduct and corporate life we sedulously imitate the example of our beloved Master, Whom the terrors of tyranny, the storms of incessant abuse, the oppressiveness of humiliation, never caused to deviate a hair's breadth from the revealed Law of Bahá'u'lláh. (Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Administration, p. 131-32)

Reactions to Fear

When you're up against something you're afraid of, you have 3 unconscious reactions: fight, flight or let it paralyze you. These reactions were meant to get us out of dangerous situations and then return the body to homeostasis. Unfortunately many of us grew up in environments where alcohol, abuse or violence meant these reactions were frequently and then permanently activated. Then as adults we entered a world characterized by stress, further reinforcing reactions that were never meant to be a permanent part of our lives.

What happens in the body? We know that our hypothalamus reacts to fear, anxiety, stress and phobias as well as to rage, anger and hostility. All of these negative emotions send the body into a "fight or flight" response, which puts cortisol into the blood. The cortisol is supposed to shut off when the danger is over, but this doesn't happen when we have long-term phobias and fears. We no longer have the homeostasis needed to maintain our health, which causes dis-ease in the body.

When you flee, you are programming yourself to flee every time you are afraid. If you fight, you program yourself to fight every time you are afraid. If you freeze, you set yourself up for a lifetime of apathy and lethargy, putting your life on hold and not accomplishing everything God wanted for you. All of these reactions take you further from God, leaving you alone with your idle fancies and vain imaginings (I'm not safe, he had it coming, she caused it, I'd better not go out of my comfort zone). All of them cause you to flee back into the prison you just escaped from; not something any of us want to do.

The House of Justice shows what this looks like on a global scale:

This projection of portentous happenings cuts across the divide in time between the twentieth century and the new millennium, according to the reckoning of the common era. It is a projection that underscores the contrast between the confident vision that propels the constructive endeavours of an illumined community and the tangled fears seizing the millions upon millions who are as yet unaware of the Day in which they are living. Bereft of authentic guidance, they dwell on the horrors of the century, despairing over what these could imply for the future, hardly appreciating that this very century contains a light that will be shed on centuries to come. Ill-equipped to interpret the social commotion at play throughout the planet, they listen to the pundits of error and sink deeper into a slough of despond. Troubled by forecasts of doom, they do battle with the phantoms of a wrongly informed imagination. Knowing nothing of the transformative vision vouchsafed by the Lord of the Age, they stumble ahead, blind to the peerlessness of the new Day of God. (The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 156, 1999, p. 4)

Fortunately Baha'u'llah understood all too well our frailties and reactions and has given us a lot of ways to get ourselves out of this trap. We'll get to those in a little bit but first it's important to understand how fear affects us so that we have the motivation we need to implement the solutions.

Fear Starts with Thoughts:

Fear starts with thoughts. If we could interview fear, it might tell us something like:

I'm a spiritual parasite and I need you. I will work you over slowly, engineer circumstances in your life to get you to think about what can go wrong. I'm going to give you pictures because fear always projects something that hasn't happened yet. I'm going to make you speculate through dread and morbidity and I'm going to project into the future all the things that might go wrong so that I can get you thinking about that and get you to forget to say your prayers or turn to the Writings. You're listening to me but over here you're picking up messages at the soul level also. And if I can get you to keep thinking about this, I know that the thoughts I'm giving you through temptation will become part of your personality. You're going to be so easy because I don't even have to tempt you any longer. I can just give you stimuli and your long term memory will kick in. You're in torment while fear is at peace, happy that it won.

What you are meditating on or thinking about every day occupies your mind. You may be meditating on the good things or you may be thinking about all the things that will go wrong in your life today and tomorrow.

Fear projects into the future. For example, you might think that because today was a bad day, tomorrow will be too; or "nothing good has ever happened to me and nothing ever will". The object of your fear is not only being projected into tomorrow, but also yesterday's projected fear is here today, and you find yourself back on the hamster wheel of fear. Fear trains you how to think – then your thoughts become a part of who you are.

God has a perfect will for you and He wants only the best for you. He wants you to overcome your fear, but fear might tell you:

- I don't know who I'm going to be without my fear.
- I'm afraid of who I will be if I don't have my fear anymore.
- I don't want to get well because fear has become my identity (better the devil you know than the devil you don't)
- My finances depend on my being sick
- Being afraid gives me something to talk about. If I don't have that, what will I talk about?
- What if I don't need to take care of me anymore? Who will I be without my fear?

We don't think these things consciously, but they do exist at a subconscious level.

Fear affects our health:

Fear, anger, worry, et cetera, are very prejudicial to health, while hope, love, joy, et cetera, are correspondingly beneficial. (Dr. J.E. Esslemont, *Baha'u'llah and the New Era*, p. 107)

Sometimes fear will paralyze us neurologically.

Sometimes if the nervous system is paralyzed through fear, a spiritual remedy is necessary. (Abdu'l-Bahá, *Abdu'l-Bahá in London*, p. 65)

Henry Wright, a Christian Minister who has done extensive studies on the spiritual roots of disease suggests that as much as 80% of all diseases have a spiritual root of fear, stress and anxiety. His book "A More Excellent Way" combines science with religion and I recommend it highly.

Fear becomes a self-fulfilling Prophecy

Fear can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. The fruit of fear becomes what you fear the most comes out on you. Fear will try to help you get healed, help God out. It demands action right now. It says that you know enough right now. If you think about something long enough or often enough, it becomes your reality.

The reality of man is his thought, not his material body. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 17)

Fear causes us to act out:

The sorrows, fears and perplexities evoked by this latest conflict in the unfoldment of the Lesser Peace have intensified the feelings of grievance and outrage at the recurrent crises agitating the planet. The anxieties of people across the globe are even now being played out publicly in angry demonstrations too overwhelming to be ignored. The issues they protest and the emotions they arouse often add to the chaos and confusion they hope by such public displays to resolve. For the friends of God, there is an unambiguous explanation for what is occurring; they have only to recall the vision and principles offered by the Faith if they are to respond effectively to the challenges posed by the spread of distress and dismay. Let them strive to understand more deeply the Teachings that are relevant by reviewing letters of Shoghi Effendi which have been published in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, particularly those entitled "The Goal of a New World Order", "America and the Most Great Peace", and "The Unfoldment of World Civilization". (The Universal House of Justice, *Ridvan 160*, 2003)

Fear causes us to compare ourselves to Others

If you listen to those lies you'll start looking around the room and seeing those who have been healed when you haven't. Comparison will lead you into envy and jealousy, which will lead into bitterness, separation from God, and further and further into the prison of self.

Know, verily, the heart wherein the least remnant of envy yet lingers, shall never attain My everlasting dominion, nor inhale the sweet savors of holiness breathing from My kingdom of sanctity. (Baha'u'llah, *The Persian Hidden Words* 6)

. . . greed, envy, covetousness, jealousy and suspicion prevent man from ascending to the realms of holiness, imprisoning him in the claws of self and the cage of egotism. ('Abdu'l-Baha, *Baha'i Scriptures*, p. 546)

Fear disperses and weakens our ability to think:

It has been conducive to the dispersion and weakening of human thought. (Abdu'l-Bahá, *Baha'i World Faith*, p. 265)

Have you ever met someone who was so afraid they can't even think? The ability to think properly can be shut down by fear. That's what phobias and panic attacks are all about.

Our lower nature use uses things in our environment to program us for fear. For example, I was at a friend's house one time and we were watching the Weather Channel and saw a

winter storm coming. My friend needed to stop everything every 10 min. for an update. Although she was at home with lots of food, and didn't need to go anywhere, I watched her get progressively anxious with every update. No amount of reassurance helped. Her fear eventually turned into a full-blown panic attack and she was unable to enjoy our visit. It was just a storm with some snow coming and based on what I was hearing, the roads were still open and plowed, and I had every intention of driving home in it. Her fear was so high that she wouldn't let me leave. Because I didn't want to give her anything more to fear, I agreed to spend the night and leave the next day, when the storm had passed. The storm wasn't the problem. Her thoughts about the storm were the problem.

Another example is that my ex-husband used to watch the Weather Channel too, and while he had custody of our 10-year-old son, he saw another storm coming. Afraid that the roads would be closed, he brought our son home a day early and even thought I wasn't home, he left him there. I was away for the weekend on a retreat with friends, not watching television and consequently I didn't know about the storm. Sure enough, the storm hit, and the roads were closed all around my friend's house, and I couldn't get home for two days, leaving my son "home alone" for three days.

Your fear is not about the thing itself, but about the thoughts and lies emanating from your lower nature which torment you.

A friend of mine told me: One time I went into Home Depot. There were fluorescent fixtures there and I started feeling faint and sick and couldn't see well. From then on, any time I went anywhere where there were fluorescent lights, I started feeling miserable. Over time I became programmed so that every time I went anywhere, I felt fear so I stopped leaving the house. It wasn't the fluorescent lights that were bothering me, it was fear. It was what I was telling myself about the fluorescent lights.

Here's another example. Perhaps you read somewhere about toxic fumes emanating from paint, so you don't paint a room that badly needs it. Then you won't go anywhere where there is fresh paint. It's not about the paint itself, but that you've been taught to fear the paint.

We do the same thing with food. Between GMO, pesticides and additives, there's very little food that's safe anymore. Obviously this has to change! There are ways of asking God to protect us from the negative effects of the food, though, so we don't all have to grow our own and become raw foodists because of our fear.

Because I lived in fear my whole life, and suffered from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, with its concomitant anxiety disorder, my therapist suggested I had adrenal exhaustion. This made sense to me, so instead of turning to God and asking Him to help heal my adrenals, I started researching adrenal exhaustion on the Internet and at the library. One of the things I read told me that food intolerances fed adrenal exhaustion, so spending money that should've gone for groceries, I went for allergy testing, and sure enough I discovered that I had severe intolerances to just about everything I ate: wheat, gluten, dairy, yeast, sugar, caffeine, potatoes, tomatoes, corn, soy, peanuts and chocolate. On and on the list of things I couldn't eat went! Although I wasn't aware of any symptoms in my body, I believed the fear generated from the book and proven by the tests. I came home and immediately got rid of everything in the house that had any of the ingredients on my "no" list and spent money I somehow found, buying replacements. Because the money appeared as if by magic, I took this as a sign that God supported this direction by showering His confirmations on me. The testing also revealed a severe dust allergy and since I had three bookcases full of books (read dust and mold collectors) I was obsessing over how I

could find and afford bookcases with doors to reduce the dust in my bedroom! Fortunately God introduced me to these teachings before I went off and spent more money that I couldn't afford! Not only were my adrenals restored, but I was also healed of PTSD, anxiety, depression and no longer have to wear a night guard to protect against grinding teeth! I'm a believer!

The moral of these stories is that when fear becomes one with the thing, our bodies respond and give us a reaction, so we need to be discerning in what we watch or read or listen to, and make sure we feed ourselves with a steady diet of Baha'i Writings, so we understand the spiritual reality of the world as well as we understand the physical reality.

Fear blinds you to the truth:

If you see with the eyes of fear instead of the eyes of faith, that is a form of blindness. All you can see is what's going on. You aren't seeing God in the picture.

Be eyes to the blind, and a guiding light unto the feet of the erring. (Baha'u'llah, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 93)

Fear drives you to find a quick fix

We think: We know that God is not going to worry, so somebody better and it might as well be me, so we take over from God.

Fear can drive you into being driven and God won't be able to meet you. Fear will tell you you're supposed to be healed today, right now. In fact you should have been healed yesterday.

God often waits for the last possible minute before He answers prayers:

He, as well as some of the other friends who are motivated by a great force of faith, believe firmly that God's miracles will not fail to perform their wonders and at the very eleventh hour the full sum will be collected. (Shoghi Effendi, Extracts from the USBN)

Fear drives you to perfectionism

If we have been driven to do things, then fear was at the root of what drives us. Being driven comes from our lower nature. Leadership comes from God.

Perfection in worldly things is a joy to the body of a man but in no wise does it glorify his soul. It may be that a man who has every material benefit, and who lives surrounded by all the greatest comfort modern civilization can give him, is denied the all important gift of the Holy Spirit. It is indeed a good and praiseworthy thing to progress materially, but in so doing, let us not neglect the more important spiritual progress, and close our eyes to the Divine light shining in our midst. Only by improving spiritually as well as materially can we make any real progress, and become perfect beings. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 62-63)

Fear is an obstacle to Service:

. . . the fear and anxieties that distract their minds . . . are among the formidable obstacles that stand in the path of every world-be warrior in the service of

Bahá'u'lláh, obstacles which he must battle against the surmount in his crusade for the redemption of his own countrymen. (Shoghi Effendi: Citadel of Faith, p. 149)

Fear leads to sin:

Look at most sin and underneath it you will find fear.

- We lie because we're afraid we will be punished if we tell the truth.
- We gossip because we're afraid people will judge us, and we think if we divert attention to someone else, we'll be safe.
- We steal because we're afraid we can't afford the things we want or need without it.
- We have sex with people we aren't married to, in order to find relief from our fears.

On and on the list goes.

Fear makes us bury the treasure God has given us:

I still get panic attacks occasionally, which are related to being exposed or seen. For example, this weekend we were meeting with our Auxiliary Board member, and after the meeting I asked to meet with him to talk privately about some issues I was having with tutoring study circles. I was taking a LOT of risks in speaking very frankly about my limitations, and after he was gone, I had a real panic attack from being so vulnerable. But again, I knew what it was, where it was coming from, and how to get through it. In the past, being seen meant the possibility of being killed, so coming out of hiding hasn't been easy! I want to put more of myself into my blog postings, but this too, is pushing me to put this quote into practice:

Thou art even as a finely tempered sword concealed in the darkness of its sheath and its value hidden from the artificer's knowledge. Wherefore come forth from the sheath of self and desire that thy worth may be made resplendent and manifest unto all the world. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words 72)

It's a lot easier for me to stay "concealed with my value hidden"! I don't think this is what God wants or the world needs from any of us, though. So I push through, panic attacks or not!

Fear makes a slave of us

Fear is an attachment to the world, which brings on bondage. We don't want to be in bondage. Whatever rules us is going to make a slave of us.

For attachment to the world has become the cause of the bondage of spirits, and this bondage is identical with sin, which has been transmitted from Adam to His posterity. It is because of this attachment that men have been deprived of essential spirituality and exalted position. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 123-124)

One fear brings on another

Fear will control you and bring on other fears such as fear of others, fear of failure, fear of being ourselves etc. For example: "I can't be myself because you might not like me. I might fail you in your expectations of me, and then you're not going to want me around, and then you'll break my heart and then I'm surely going to die. So now I'm afraid if you."

Do you see how this works? Then we're on the hamster wheel, going round and round with our thoughts and spiraling down into self-pity (depression).

We might even be afraid of trusting our whole selves to our Father, God. What would we be afraid of? He may ask too much of us.

Aside from the obvious problem of the gods of our parents having failed us, once we get past that fear, we might still be afraid of something else. You can see how fear builds on more fear until we truly lose all sense of faith. These negative thoughts have no fruit and serve no useful purpose.

But many things come to the mind of man which are like the waves of the sea of imaginations; they have no fruit, and no result comes from them. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 252)

Fear prevents us from mourning:

How many mothers have not dared, through fear and dread, to mourn over their slaughtered children! (Abdu'l-Baha, A Traveller's Narrative, p. 66)

Fear prevents us from giving or receiving love

When you have Fear, you are not made perfect in love. You are unable to give and receive love without Fear.

Love is a light that never dwelleth in a heart possessed by fear. (Baha'u'llah, The Four Valleys, p. 58)

In the hearts of men no real love is found, and the condition is such that, unless their susceptibilities are quickened by some power so that unity, love and accord may develop within them, there can be no healing (Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 171)

Fear removes all faith.

Fear and faith both project into the future and both demand to be fulfilled. Without faith, it's impossible to please God

Isn't it amazing that you will listen to an invisible voice of fear and not listen to the invisible voice of God? You need a new set of ears. You need to ask God to give you eyes to see and ears to hear.

If thy faith be fearful, seize thou My Tablet, and preserve it in the bosom of trust. (Baha'u'llah, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 103)

Fear slackens our ardor and quenches hope:

Take ye good heed lest this calamitous day slacken the flames of your ardor, and quench your tender hopes. (Abdu'l-Baha, Baha'i World Faith, p. 349)

Fear slows down progress:

The fears and anxieties engendered by a steadily deteriorating international situation which cannot but dismay the stoutest hearts, have no doubt contributed, in varying degrees, and in no small measure, to a slowing down of the progress of the collective enterprise, so nobly, so enthusiastically and so energetically initiated by the upholders of the Faith . . . (Shoghi Effendi, Messages to the Indian Subcontinent, p. 298)

Fear takes us out of the Present Moment

Worry robs us of the present moment. If we're always worried about what might happen, and focus our attention on some imaginary future, we can't be living in the present moment at the same time.

We want God to create our future and when we succumb to fear, fear creates your future.

Of course, has worrying or being anxious or stressed ever changed anything? Has it ever helped in any situation? Of course not! It just makes everything worse, and takes us further away from God!

'Abdu'l-Bahá asks us to consider our thoughts and motives and to be ever mindful and on our guard, so this doesn't happen. When we are able to do this, we will find it easier to live in the moment:

Consider the motive of every soul, and ponder the thought he cherisheth. Be ye straightway mindful and on your guard. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 315)

Fear Becomes Who We Are

You can become one psychologically and spiritually with fear. Fear can become part of you biologically.

Biologically through the mind-body connection you now have a disease called high blood pressure, angina, heart arrhythmias all are fear-based. These diseases are all a response to thoughts. How many times have you heard of someone going to the hospital, thinking they were having a heart attack, to find out it was "only" a panic attack. There was nothing wrong with the heart or cardio-vascular system. It was fear triggering these imbalances.

If a man thinks too much of his health, he will become afflicted. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Throne of the Inner Temple, p 22)

Fear can even lead to covenant-breaking

Mírzá Yahyá, for example, had no faith; only fear. He had access to the presence of God and through fear, and envy, he lost it all.

In a Tablet addressed to the Bahá'ís of Shiraz, 'Abdu'l-Bahá gives a detailed account of the life of Mirza Yahya: his craven fears, his incompetence, his uxoriousness, his constant flights from danger, real or imaginary. (H.M. Balyuzi, Baha'u'llah - The King of Glory, p. 183)

During Bahá'u'lláh's absence, news reached Baghdad of the martyrdom of a certain believer of Najaf-Abad, near Isfahan. Mirza Yahya was highly alarmed, fearing that an outbreak of persecution could lead the enemies of the Faith to him, the nominee of the Báb, and cost him his life. With these thoughts in mind, he decided to change his residence. With the help of a certain Mirza 'Aliy-i-Tabrizi, he bought a consignment of shoes, disguised himself as a Jew and went to Basra where he remained for some time and occupied himself in his newfound profession of shoe merchant . . . It was during this period under the leadership of Mirza Yahya, inspired by his wicked advisor Siyyid Muhammad, that some of the most heinous atrocities were committed. (Adib Taherzadeh, *The Child of the Covenant*, p. 110)

Fear can creep in without you noticing:

Fear can come in quickly without you noticing. For example, here are a couple of stories from friends of mine:

One day my husband's heart was skipping a beat and I noticed he wasn't well. He'd turned white as a sheet. I said a quick prayer and went the phone to call a Doctor. He was put in the hospital right away and went through some tests. About six months later, a friend called to tell me her brother-in-law had just died of a heart attack at age 78. My husband knew he'd had troubles with his heart and he too was 78, so now he started to think he could be next. We prayed and that night, his heart started skipping beats again. Instead of panicking, I told him to ask God to forgive him for falling back into fear. He said he didn't have any fear. I insisted and reluctantly he did, and then he turned over and went back to sleep and so did I. The next morning we were getting ready for work and he woke up to say that I was right. When he'd talked with God, God had showed him how he responded when he heard that 78-year-old had just died of a heart attack. He said a quick thought went through his mind: "That could've been me". That taught placed fear in his heart, and created the symptoms of a heart attack. That's how quickly it can come in. Unless you're paying attention to your thoughts, you won't be able to recognize what's happening.

Here's another example:

A few years ago, I had chronic hives for seven weeks. When they told me that the root cause of hives was fear, I didn't worry about it, because I had taken care of my fear. I'd done my homework and didn't have any fear anymore. Finally after seven weeks of putting up with the hives, I decided to ask God "if I have any fear at all, please tell me about it." I heard my head say: "I sure dread XXX." Maybe I only said it once, but dread equals fear. I thanked God for showing me; took responsibility for bringing on the fear and the hives; asked for forgiveness; cast fear aside and the next morning I was free from my hives. That's how simple it can be!

Conclusion:

How wonderful it is to see God's love at work and what He's given us to work with.

Love is a light that never dwelleth in a heart possessed by fear. (Baha'u'llah, *The Four Valleys*, p. 58)

Even so, it's normal to have mixed emotions about fear:

As we witness on all sides the growing restlessness of a restless age, we are filled with mixed feelings of fear and hope -- fear, at the prospect of yet another deadly encounter, the inevitability of which is alas! becoming increasingly manifest; hope, in the serene assurance that whatever cataclysm may yet visit humanity, it cannot but hasten the approaching era of universal and lasting peace so emphatically proclaimed by the Pen of Bahá'u'lláh. (Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration, p. 145)

What is the Purpose of Fear?

In his book "If You Want to Walk on Water, You Have To Get Out Of The Boat", author John Ortburg says: "Fear is designed to call attention to danger so we can set things right".

In the Baha'i Faith, we're told that the purpose of our lives is to know and worship God, so we can be pretty confident that every test we encounter will lead us to fulfill our purpose.

We often see that we need opposites in order to grow. It seems to be part of God's design. In the Fire Tablet we read some of them:

Were it not for the cold, how would the heat of Thy words prevail, O Expounder of the worlds?

Were it not for calamity, how would the sun of Thy patience shine, O Light of the worlds?

Lament not because of the wicked. Thou wert created to bear and endure, O Patience of the worlds. (Baha'u'llah, Baha'i Prayers, p. 217)

I think the opposite of fear is trust, and we can ask ourselves this question:

Do you really trust that God will provide for your every need?

Whenever I find myself falling back into the habit of thought which leads to anxiety, I remind myself, and say out loud to God:

I trust you!

No matter what the fear is, this seems to banish it.

If I'm afraid I'll be stung by the bees flying on my balcony, I turn to God and say: I trust you to protect me!

If I'm afraid of being rejected for something I say, I turn to God and say: I trust you to put the right words in my mouth!

If I'm afraid of being alone, I turn to God and say: I trust you to be there for me, 24/7!

If I'm afraid of trying something I've never done before and failing and being humiliated, I turn to God and say: I trust you to help me through this and to be there to catch me if I fall.

I love this quote and remind myself of it often:

Armed with the power of Thy name nothing can ever hurt me, and with Thy love in my heart all the world's afflictions can in no wise alarm me. (Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations by Baha'u'llah, p. 208)

It's been set to music by Devon Gundry and the music video to go along with it is very powerful. Click here to watch it! http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vxa7ONF_fPs

What about the Fear Of God?

We've talked about God's love for us, but what about the fear of God? Where does that fit in?

It's true, that we need both:

Every Man is guided both by the Love of God and by the Fear of God. (The Universal House of Justice, Messages 1963 to 1986, p. 499)

So what does the fear of God mean, exactly? Shoghi Effendi described it with two meanings, awe and reverence on the one hand; and terror and fear on the other:

You have asked the exact meaning of the term 'Fear of God' mentioned in Bahá'í Sacred Writings; it often means awe, but has also other connotations such as reverence, terror and fear. (Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 237)

It seems that humanity needs both reward and punishment, so God has given us both hope and a warning.

And it was this peerless Source of wisdom that at the beginning of the foundation of the world ascended the stair of inner meaning and when enthroned upon the pulpit of utterance, through the operation of the divine Will, proclaimed two words. The first heralded the promise of reward, while the second voiced the ominous warning of punishment. The promise gave rise to hope and the warning begat fear. Thus the basis of world order hath been firmly established upon these twin principles. (Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 66)

Fear of punishment or fear of the anger of God if we do evil, are needed to keep our feet on the right path, not so that we cringe before Him as we would before a tyrant, but knowing that His Mercy exceeds His Justice:

You ask him about the fear of God: perhaps the friends do not realize that the majority of human beings need the element of fear in order to discipline their conduct? Only a relatively very highly evolved soul would always be disciplined by love alone. Fear of punishment, fear of the anger of God if we do evil, are needed to keep people's feet on the right path. Of course we should love God - but we must fear Him in the sense of a child fearing the righteous anger and chastisement of a parent; not cringe before Him as before a tyrant, but know His Mercy exceeds His Justice! (Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 239)

Sadly, many of us grew up with tyrants and learned to cringe, never having learned about the transformative power of love. God wants us to fear him and know of His mercy at the same time:

Fear ye the merciful Lord. (Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 40)

In explaining the fear of God to children, there is no objection to teaching it as 'Abdu'l-Bahá so often taught everything, in the form of parables. Also the child should be made to understand that we don't fear God because He is cruel, but we

fear Him because He is Just, and, if we do wrong and deserve to be punished, then in His Justice He may see fit to punish us. We must both love God and fear Him. (Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 237)

Having a negative fear of God (that you are going straight to hell) is not the same as having a Holy fear of God (where you know that God is awesome).

A lot of people have grown up believing that God's going to get them if they do something wrong; that if it doesn't happen now, they're definitely going straight to hell. The concept of sin and hell are so imbedded in our psyche, it's hard to hear Baha'u'llah's explanation, and even harder to let go of our childhood training.

Let's take a minute to think about these new concepts.

The Baha'i Writings teach us that sin is imperfection and defects coming from the demands of our lower nature.

All sin comes from the demands of nature, and these demands, which arise from the physical qualities, are not sins with respect to the animals, while for man they are sin. The animal is the source of imperfections, such as anger, sensuality, jealousy, avarice, cruelty, pride: all these defects are found in animals but do not constitute sins. But in man they are sins. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 119)

There's a link between sin and health:

It is certainly the case that sins are a potent cause of physical ailments. If humankind were free from the defilements of sin and waywardness, and lived according to a natural, inborn equilibrium, without following wherever their passions led, it is undeniable that diseases would no longer take the ascendant, nor diversify with such intensity. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 152)

If the soul falls into sin, the body is in torment! (Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 65)

Surely this torment is hell!

Shoghi Effendi agrees that hell is not a place but a state of being:

Heaven and hell are conditions within our own beings. (Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 519)

'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us such as hostility and hatred (emanations of the "fight" response to fear) are the torments of hell.

Think ye of love and good fellowship as the delights of heaven, think ye of hostility and hatred as the torments of hell. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 244)

Flight, Fight or Flee reactions all separate us from God, which is the greatest torment of all:

But for the people of God separation from God is the greatest torment of all. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 265)

These torments of hell do not have to be permanent conditions if we see their purpose is to educate:

That [ordeals, adversities and tribulations] which is for testing is for one's education and development, and that which is for punishment of deeds is severe retribution. The father and the teacher sometimes show tenderness towards the children and at other times deal harshly with them. Such severity is for educational purposes; it is true tenderness and absolute bounty and grace. Although in appearance it is wrath, in reality it is kindness. Although outwardly it is an ordeal, inwardly it is a cooling draught. ('Abdul-Bahá, Divine Art of Living, p. 85)

We're promised that God will forgive any sin if we ask for His forgiveness:

Should anyone be afflicted by a sin, it behoveth him to repent thereof and return unto his Lord. He, verily, granteth forgiveness unto whomsoever He willeth, and none may question that which it pleaseth Him to ordain. He is, in truth, the Ever-Forgiving. (Baha'u'llah, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 37)

If we struggle with the idea that God has not forgiven us for something, we have a negative fear of God, and it's interfering with our ability to have faith. If we believe in a punishing God, it's hard to believe in an All-Merciful, Ever-Forgiving one. Perhaps that's why most of the prayers end reminding us of this nature of God. You won't ever see God described as:

- The All-Vengeful
- The All-Condemning
- The Never-Forgiving

Are you afraid that God's ticked off because you blew it, or that he's going to stop loving you? These are just superstitions:

Abdu'l-Bahá replied that superstitions were of two kinds; those that were harmful and dangerous, and those that were harmless and produced certain good effects. For example, there were some poor people who believed that misfortunes and punishments were caused by a Great Angel with a sword in his hand, who struck down those who stole, and committed murder and crimes. They thought the flashes of lightning were the weapons of this angel, and that if they did wrong they would be struck by lightning. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Abdu'l-Bahá in London, p. 73)

Read the biblical story of the prodigal son. Even though he'd squandered all his money and lived a life against everything the father had taught him, he welcomed his son back with open arms and threw a party. That's what God wants to do for us. He wants to throw a party every time we come back to Him.

The hearts are cheered whenever you are mentioned, the souls are comforted in your love, the holy spirits are captivated by your fragrance, the eyes are expecting to see you and the hearts are longing to meet you, owing to the fact that your hearts were kindled with the fire of the love of God, your ears were charmed by hearing the Word of God and your souls were rested in the appearance of the mysteries of God. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablets of Abdu'l-Bahá v2, p. 346)

Remember that you have value before God. He created you because He loved you.

Veiled in My immemorial being and in the ancient eternity of My essence, I knew My love for thee; therefore I created thee, have engraved on thee Mine image and revealed to thee My beauty. (Bahá'u'lláh, Arabic Hidden Words 3)

He created you, knowing you'd make terrible mistakes in your life and despite this, He says: "My work is perfect. Question it not."

With the hands of power I made thee and with the fingers of strength I created thee; and within thee have I placed the essence of My light. Be thou content with it and seek naught else, for My work is perfect and My command is binding. Question it not, nor have a doubt thereof. (Baha'u'llah, Hidden Words, Arabic 12)

The only perfect human being was Abdul-Bahá. God doesn't need another perfect one. He loves us even with all of our imperfections:

O thou beloved of my heart! Verily, my soul longs for thee, for the lamp of the love of Bahá' is lighted within thy heart and I love to look upon thy face, for it is glittering with the light of guidance among the creatures. Glory be to Him who hath united hearts together! (Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablets of Abdu'l-Bahá v1, p. 129)

Conclusion:

When you blow it, (and you always will), God has given you the ability to do something about it. Call yourself to account; ask God's forgiveness, and determine to make today better than yesterday. Then strive to put your actions in accordance with the teachings. That's all He asks of us.

What Makes Us Susceptible To Fear?

Fear starts with thoughts. If you worry, it's a sin because you're avoiding a clear command of God. Fear trains you until fearful thoughts become part of who you are. The Baha'i Writings teach us that we can and should change our thoughts:

When a thought of war comes, oppose it by a stronger thought of peace. A thought of hatred must be destroyed by a more powerful thought of love. Thoughts of war bring destruction to all harmony, well-being, restfulness and content. (Abdu'l-Baha, Paris Talks, p. 29)

David Norris, in a presentation called "The Power of Good (with a capital G)", said:

There are no stressful circumstances, only stressful thoughts. When we get pissed off and frustrated or tense, it's not because the task is so big but because we have decided to remain small. We have been silently searching for the easy route and have unconsciously been willing to accept the lesser rewards and circumstances. Internally, we have been asking for a lighter load when we would have just as easily been granted a stronger back, had we asked.

Fear programmed us early in life and it can be part of our emotional makeup. It can be so much a part of you that it becomes part of your personality.

Part of your mind is aligned with what God has said is true, and part is aligned with what your lower nature says is true, which can lead to multiple identities. Only one of these can be true at a time. God wants us to be set free from this confusion.

Let all be set free from the multiple identities that were born of passion and desire, and in the oneness of their love for God find a new way of life. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 76)

Other ways of looking at this might be parent-adult- child, conscious/unconscious, or ego-superego and id.

When you agree with both of these, fear becomes truth to you. When we have the truth of God and the truth of our lower nature, this leads to multiple identities. To become stable in all ways is what God wants for us. I don't want to be double minded anymore. How about you? I want to hate fear so much that I cast it away and rejoice in being single-minded in God once again. You can hate the double mindedness but love yourself.

Being double minded leads to torment. You don't know which voice to listen to. When thoughts come to you from your lower nature, recognize them as idle fancies and vain imaginings, turn to God and ask Him for forgiveness, cast them off and go do something else.

Fear goes from something that God can handle to something that's too big for Him. It's too big for God. That's what fear thinks. But nothing is too big for God. We can be so focused on fear that we lose sight of God.

Fear started before I was born. I was born 10 months after my parents got married and my mother always said that she didn't have time to get to know her husband before he became a father. He was a very violent man and subject to quick mood swings. She was undoubtedly affected by this throughout her pregnancy. During the birth process the doctors lost my heart beat had to perform an emergency cesarean. God had a plan for me but fear had established itself before I was even born, so that my life was filled with all kinds of fear.

It's so insidious that you don't even see it. Your lower nature tries to convince you that it's your savior. It convinces you to take anti-anxiety medication so that the drugs can be your savior and your healer. Whatever you start doing to get rid of the fear or to advance your healing, instead of using the Word of God is bringing on a different kind of bondage. Not only are you in bondage to fear but now you're in bondage to medication. Lifelong management of your disease becomes a double bondage. If you take drugs to control your fear they won't save you because you still have the spirit of fear in you. It didn't go away. This can often lead to side effects and addictions. Fear begets fear.

If you haven't been loved properly, you don't have the ability to give and receive love without fear, unless the fear has been removed. Fear is directly tied to not being loved and not feeling safe. Lack of love and the presence of Fear go hand in hand.

Here are some other things which bring on fear:

Attacks on the Faith

You should not worry about attacks on the Faith, as these in the end cannot but result in the further growth of the Faith. (Shoghi Effendi, High Endeavours - Messages to Alaska, p. 28)

Change:

The two years that have elapsed since the passing of our beloved Master have been for the Cause, as well as for mankind, years of deep anxiety and pain. The momentous changes that are taking place in the history of both have proved so swift and far-reaching as to arouse in certain hearts a strange misgiving as to their stability and future. (Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration, p. 50)

Startling changes in recent years have profoundly altered the character of society, plunging humankind into a state of anxiety. Everyone on the planet has been touched in some way by the breakdown of religious and political institutions which traditionally have provided stability. As disturbing as these dislocations are to individuals, Bahá'ís view them as preparing the ground for the process of building a new social order which can support a lasting peace. (Baha'i International Community, 1993 Mar 15, Women Peace Process)

We've lost our bearings through forces we can't control or understand:

We have toiled to build a community at a period when the world has witnessed startling changes which have profoundly altered the character of society and plunged it into an unprecedented state of worry and confusion. Indeed, the world in its current condition has lost its bearings through the operation of forces it neither understands nor can control. (The Universal House of Justice, 1992 Nov 26, Second Message to World Congress, p. 2)

Too much change, too quickly:

In the wake of such horrendous disruptions, there have been unexampled advances in the realms of science, technology and social organization; a veritable explosion of knowledge; and an even more remarkable burgeoning in the awakening and rise of masses of humanity which were previously presumed to be dormant. These masses are claiming their rightful places within the community of nations which has greatly expanded. With the simultaneous development of communications at the speed of light and transportation at the speed of sound, the world has contracted into a mere neighbourhood in which people are instantly aware of each other's affairs and have immediate access to each other. And yet, even with such miraculous advances, with the emergence of 7 international organizations, and with valiant attempts and brilliant successes at international cooperation, nations are at woeful odds with one another, people are convulsed by economic upheavals, races feel more alienated than before and are filled with mistrust, humiliation and fear. (26 November 1992, message from the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World, Second Bahá'í World Congress, New York)

Day to Day Pressures:

In reading over my diaries - so very little of which I have quoted out of hundred of pages written off and on throughout the years - it seems strange to me there is practically no reference to the World War raging everywhere during almost six years and constituting such a dire threat to the safety of the World Centre of the Faith and particularly to the Guardian himself as Head of that Faith. Nothing could more eloquently testify to the internal upheavals he was going through during all those years than this blank. The day-to-day pressures and the work, worry and mental exhaustion were so great that it crowded mention of this constant threat and anxiety into the background. (Ruhyyih Khanum, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 177)

Decline of the Old World Order:

The sorrows, fears and perplexities evoked by this latest conflict in the unfoldment of the Lesser Peace have intensified the feelings of grievance and outrage at the recurrent crises agitating the planet. The anxieties of people across the globe are even now being played out publicly in angry demonstrations too overwhelming to be ignored. The issues they protest and the emotions they arouse often add to the chaos and confusion they hope by such public displays to resolve. For the friends of God, there is an unambiguous explanation for what is occurring; they have only to recall the vision and principles offered by the Faith if they are to respond effectively to the challenges posed by the spread of distress and dismay. Let them strive to understand more deeply the Teachings that are relevant by reviewing letters of Shoghi Effendi which have been published in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, particularly those entitled "The Goal of a New World Order", "America and the Most Great Peace", and "The Unfoldment of World Civilization". (The Universal House of Justice, *Ridván 160*, 2003)

Eventually, as an ever-evolving civilization exhausts its spiritual sources, a process of disintegration sets in, as it does throughout the phenomenal world. Turning again to analogies offered by nature, Bahá'u'lláh compares this hiatus in the development of civilization to the onset of winter. Moral vitality diminishes, as does social cohesion. Challenges which would have been overcome at an earlier age, or been turned into

opportunities for exploration and achievement, become insuperable barriers. Religion loses its relevance, and experimentation becomes increasingly fragmented, further deepening social divisions. Increasingly, uncertainty about the meaning and value of life generates anxiety and confusion. (Baha'i International Community, 1992 May 29, Statement on Baha'u'llah, p. 14)

We have toiled to build a community at a period when the world has witnessed startling changes which have profoundly altered the character of society and plunged it into an unprecedented state of worry and confusion. (The Universal House of Justice, 1997 Aug 13, Science and Religion, p. 6)

The friends need not have any grave anxiety as to the immediate developments of the present situation. (Shoghi Effendi, Extracts from the USBN)

Doubt:

If thou dost ponder a while, it will be evident that it is incumbent upon a lowly servant to acquiesce to whatever proof God hath appointed, and not to follow his own idle fancy. (The Báb, Selections from the Writings of the Báb, p. 122)

And when the heart is turned unto the Sun, then the eye will be opened and will recognize the Sun through the Sun itself. Then man will be in no need of arguments (or proofs), for the Sun is altogether independent, and absolute independence is in need of nothing, and proofs are one of the things of which absolute independence has no need. Be not like Thomas; be thou like Peter. I hope you will be healed physically, mentally and spiritually. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Baha'i World Faith, p. 383-384)

Let the doubter arise, and himself verify the truth of such assertions. (Shoghi Effendi, Messages to America, p. 17)

We are certain that when you share this letter with the friends and they have these quotations from the Scriptures and the Writings of the Guardian drawn to their attention, their doubts and misgivings will be dispelled and they will be able to devote their every effort to spreading the Message of Bahá'u'lláh, serenely confident in the power of His Covenant to overcome whatever tests an inscrutable Providence may shower upon it, thus demonstrating its ability to redeem a travailing world and to upraise the Standard of the Kingdom of God on earth. (Shoghi Effendi, Wellspring of Guidance, p. 44-56)

Since we are all imperfect and have to learn the perfect standard which Bahá'u'lláh has unveiled, there are often things in the Teachings themselves which individual believers find difficult, and which they have to strive to learn and understand. All the believers are growing and this is a gradual process. Each one, as you say, must develop wisdom, and with this must realize the fundamental importance of the unity of the community and the bond of love and affection among the believers, for the sake of which he will sacrifice many things. ... (The Universal House of Justice, Messages 1963 to 1986, p. 631)

In the early days of the Faith in Isfahan, when I began to study the Tablets and Writings of the Báb, and listen to the explanations of the friends, I found the proofs of His Revelation convincing and conclusive and the testimonies supremely sound and perfect. So I was assured in myself that this Cause was the Cause of God and the Manifestation of His Grandeur, the dawning of the Day-Star of Truth promised to

be revealed by the Almighty. But when I was alone with no one to talk to, I was often overtaken with doubts. The idle fancies of my past life, and the whisperings of the evil one were tempting me... God knows how much I wept and how many nights I stayed awake till morning. There were days when I forgot to eat because I was so immersed in my thoughts. I tried by every means to relieve myself of these doubts. Several times I became steadfast in the Cause and believed, but later I would waver and become perplexed and dismayed. (Adib Taherzadeh, Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, v2, p. 197)

The only remedy for the individual who still has a glimmer of faith in his heart, but who has doubts about the Cause, is to admit that he may be wrong in his assessment of the teachings of the Faith, to affirm that Bahá'u'lláh's knowledge is of God, and to surrender his feelings and thoughts completely to Him. Once he submits himself in this way and perseveres in doing so with sincerity and truthfulness, the channels of the grace of God open and his heart becomes the recipient of the light of true knowledge. He will discover, some time in his life, either by intuition or through prayer and meditation, the answer to all his problems and objections. Every trace of conflict will disappear from his mind. He will readily understand the reasons behind those very teachings which previously baffled his intellect, and will find many mysteries enshrined in the utterances of Bahá'u'lláh, mysteries of which he was completely unaware in earlier days. (Adib Taherzadeh, The Revelation of Baha'u'llah v 2, p. 218-219)

Excessive desires and the resulting distress and anxiety when they don't come through:

Distress and anxiety have waxed great and every flourishing region is laid waste. O Lord! Hearts are heavy, and souls are in anguish. Have mercy on these poor souls and do not leave them to the excesses of their own desires. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablets of the Divine Plan, p. 57)

Exhaustion from the pressure to get things done:

When I remonstrated with him about standing for so many hours to do this work when he was still so exhausted and begged him to wait a few days until he was feeling stronger, he said "No, I must finish it, it is worrying me. (Ruhiiyyih Khanum, The Priceless Pearl, p. 446)

Forces of darkness

We are moved therefore to express our warm commendation for your assertion of such qualities of leadership at a time when the Army of Light must of necessity be doubly mobilized to counter the march of forces of darkness that are wreaking fear and confusion in the hearts of people everywhere. (The Universal House of Justice, 2002 April 26, US NSA 5 Year Plan - Lines of Action a Welcome Integration.htm, p. 1)

Distress and anxiety have waxed great and every flourishing region is laid waste. O Lord! Hearts are heavy, and souls are in anguish. Have mercy on these poor souls and do not leave them to the excesses of their own desires. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablets of the Divine Plan, p. 57)

Illness:

He was very sad to hear that you have not been well, for it undoubtedly caused much anxiety to the members of your family and also kept you from your work. The Cause cannot afford seeing its fine servants ill and handicapped. Please take great care of yourself that the attack may not recur. (Shoghi Effendi, Messages to the Indian Subcontinent, p. 77)

Knowledge:

We've heard it said "sometimes a little knowledge is a dangerous thing". Sometimes a little of the wrong kind of knowledge can kill us! Since 1961, scientists have known about the "nocebo phenomenon". According to this reverse placebo effect, a patient will become sick or sicker after being told of negative side effects, or on being informed of specifics about an illness just diagnosed.

Medicine has become increasingly fear-based. For example, doctors encourage patients to have regular mammograms, colonoscopies, etc. They justify the expense by saying things like: "we tell everyone of this age to get one, because we know X percentage of people in your age group will get cancer, polyps etc". So we go because we don't to be part of that percentage. We're afraid we might be and are hoping for early detection of something that was planted in our minds as a possibility.

Pharmaceutical companies are now advertising their products and are required by law to alert consumers to all the side effects. The advertiser's goal is to trigger people's fear so they think that they need such a product; and at the same time, produces a fear of what might happen if they take it.

Such seeds sow fear in people's minds, consciously or subconsciously. Where previously we hadn't even considered the possibility of contracting a certain disease, now we start worrying about it, and now every little abdominal pain feeds the worry. Some studies suggest that the current high rates of colon and rectal cancers are linked with the amount of information in the media that there is a high rate of colon and rectal cancers.

Perhaps this is why 'Abdu'l-Bahá says the only time it's OK to lie is for a doctor to tell someone he's getting better:

If a doctor consoles a sick man by saying: "Thank God you are better, and there is hope of your recovery," though these words are contrary to the truth, yet they may become the consolation of the patient and the turning-point of the illness. This is not blameworthy. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í World Faith, p. 320)

He understood the power of negative thinking on our health!

Lack of Education:

This is why studying the right kind of education is so important.

Do not thou worry that thou couldst not study in the material schools, because thou hast received lessons in the Verses of the Oneness (of God) in the Divine University. (Shoghi Effendi, Japan Will Turn Ablaze, p. 37)

Major Plan of God

The Major Plan of God is at work throughout the world, hastening the disintegration of the old order as the new one unfolds. While it is propelling forward a social transformation of a magnitude never before witnessed, fear and uncertainty grip the consciousness of a majority of the world's people, who remain unaware of God's purpose in this Day. (The Universal House of Justice, 2001 Nov 12, International Endowment Fund)

Materialism:

The gross materialism that engulfs the entire nation at the present hour; the attachment to worldly things that enshrouds the souls of men; the fear and anxieties that distract their minds; the pleasure and dissipations that fill their time, the prejudices and animosities that darken their outlook, the apathy and lethargy that paralyze their spiritual faculties -- these are among the formidable obstacles that stand in the path of every world-be warrior in the service of Bahá'u'lláh, obstacles which he must battle against the surmount in his crusade for the redemption of his own countrymen. (Shoghi Effendi: Citadel of Faith, p. 149)

Need for Money

The problem that in these days is arousing his (Shoghi Effendi's) anxiety is the way this large sum is to be collected in such a very short period of time, to resume the building operations right after the convention. He, as well as some of the other friends who are motivated by a great force of faith, believe firmly that God's miracles will not fail to perform their wonders and at the very eleventh hour the full sum will be collected. Shoghi Effendi wishes you to express his loving greetings to all the friends in Wilmette and ask them to join with him in their moments of private prayer and meditation, and ask God not to fail them, but as heretofore send them His confirmations and blessings. (Shoghi Effendi, Extracts from the USBN)

Not Reflecting on the Causes:

Though the world is encompassed with misery and distress, yet no man hath paused to reflect what the cause or source of that may be. (Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p.163)

Problems and Complications at Work:

He himself, having undertaken at such a disturbed time to raise at least the first story or arcade of the new part of the Báb's Shrine, finds himself beset with worries, problems and complications which have not only doubled his work, but exhaust and harass him all the time. So at least, let the British friends know that when they struggle and feel hard beset, they are not struggling and worrying alone! Far from it!! (Shoghi Effendi, The Unfolding Destiny of the British Baha'i Community, p. 225)

Selfishness (being anxious to make their fortune):

We perceive that men are carried away by passion and selfishness, each man thinking only of what will benefit himself even if it means the ruin of his brother. They are all anxious to make their fortune and care little or nothing for the welfare of others. They are concerned about their own peace and comfort, while the condition

of their fellows troubles them not at all. Unhappily this is the road most men tread. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 80)

Service to the Faith:

What with his speaking, deepening the believers, translating, traveling, worrying, his [Khan] soul 'wore out the sheath', and he was frail and often ill. (Marzieh Gail, Arches of the Years, p. 36)

Striving to meet the Standards of the Faith:

To be required to be happy and assured, while busily serving the Cause, can raise in us more than a little anxiety. (Universal House of Justice, Quickeners of Mankind, p. 116)

Turning away from God:

As they gradually strayed from the path of their Ideal Leader and Master, as they turned away from the Light of God and corrupted the principle of His Divine unity, and as they increasingly centered their attention upon them who were only the revealers of the potency of His Word, their power was turned into weakness, their glory into shame, their courage into fear. (Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 69)

Turning to the Wrong Place for Answers:

Whenever the True Counsellor uttered a word in admonishment, lo, they all denounced Him as a mover of mischief and rejected His claim. How bewildering, how confusing is such behaviour! (Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p.163)

Uncertainty about the Meaning and Value of Life:

Increasingly, uncertainty about the meaning and value of life generates anxiety and confusion. (Baha'i International Community, 1992 May 29, Statement on Baha'u'llah, p. 14)

Using non-Baha'i Methodologies:

This seminar seems to have provided a very valuable forum for the discussion of a number of aspects of Bahá'í scholarship, and the airing of certain problems which have been worrying some of the friends in relationship to their work and to their fellow believers. We believe that many of the problems arise from an attempt by some Bahá'í scholars to make use of methodologies devised by non-Bahá'ís without thinking through the implications of such a course and without working out a methodology which would be in consonance with the spirit of the Faith. (The Universal House of Justice, Messages 1963 to 1986, p. 388)

Wanting Instant Gratification:

We feel that an over-anxiousness on your part about a breakthrough and an undue worry over the state of society can be counter-productive. While there are opportunities for greater growth than is occurring, neither your Assembly nor the friends must burden themselves with feelings of failure at every disappointment, for

such feelings are self-fulfilling and can easily cause stagnation in the expansion of the Cause. The tendency toward frustration, sometimes induced by a desire for instant gratification, must be resisted by an effort to gain deeper appreciation of the divine process. (Universal House of Justice, NSA USA - Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities)

War and Calamities:

Behold the disturbances which, for many a long year, have afflicted the earth, and the perturbation that hath seized its peoples. It hath either been ravaged by war, or tormented by sudden and unforeseen calamities. (Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p.163)

Work - The way we orient ourselves towards work:

Consider how difficult for man is the attainment of pleasures and happiness in this mortal world. How easy it is for the animal. Look upon the fields and flowers, prairies, streams, forests and mountains. The grazing animals, the birds of the air, the fishes neither toil nor undergo hardships; they sow not, nor are they concerned about the reaping; they have no anxiety about business or politics -- no trouble or worry whatsoever. All the fields and grasses, all the meadows of fruits and grains, all the mountain slopes and streams of salubrious water belong to them. They do not labor for their livelihood and happiness because everything is provided and made possible for them. If the life of man be confined to this physical, material outlook, the animal's life is a hundred times better, easier and more productive of comfort and contentment. The animal is nobler, more serene and confident because each hour is free from anxiety and worry; but man, restless and dissatisfied, runs from morn till eve, sailing the seas, diving beneath them in submarines, flying aloft in airplanes, delving into the lowest strata of the earth to obtain his livelihood -- all with the greatest difficulty, anxiety and unrest. Therefore, in this respect the animal is nobler, more serene, poised and confident. Consider the birds in the forest and jungle: how they build their nests high in the swaying treetops, build them with the utmost skill and beauty -- swinging, rocking in the morning breezes, drinking the pure, sweet water, enjoying the most enchanting views as they fly here and there high overhead, singing joyously -- all without labor, free from worry, care and forebodings. If man's life be confined to the elemental, physical world of enjoyment, one lark is nobler, more admirable than all humanity because its livelihood is prepared, its condition complete, its accomplishment perfect and natural. But the life of man is not so restricted; it is divine, eternal, not mortal and sensual. For him a spiritual existence and livelihood is prepared and ordained in the divine creative plan. His life is intended to be a life of spiritual enjoyment to which the animal can never attain. This enjoyment depends upon the acquisition of heavenly virtues. The sublimity of man is his attainment of the knowledge of God. The bliss of man is the acquiring of heavenly bestowals, which descend upon him in the outflow of the bounty of God. The happiness of man is in the fragrance of the love of God. This is the highest pinnacle of attainment in the human world. How preferable to the animal and its hopeless kingdom! (Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 184-185)

Overcoming Fear

Introduction

How can we get free of this mess?

Whatever we call it, we all need to rise up, take back our lives and claim what fear has stolen from us.

It's time to get whole again. You deserve it. God wants it for you. But how do you go about it?

Many people turn to prayer but prayer by itself isn't enough. With a voice from your lower nature saying "God's never going to hear my prayers", you might wonder why you're not getting well. Maybe it's because you don't dare face your enemy. You've been waiting for God to face your fear for you, but He can't do it until you take action. Prayer must always be followed by action:

Prayer and meditation are very important factors in deepening the spiritual life of the individual, but with them must go also action and example, as these are the tangible result of the former. Both are essential. (Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 456)

In order to be set free, we want to first develop a perfect hatred for all that fear stands for in our life.

Fear is going to show up all the time, but we can learn to recognize it and cast it away.

Since fear is most often a spiritual disease that manifests itself physically, there may be need for a physical treatment before the spiritual can be started.

Here's my story:

I thought I was trusting God but because I really wanted to get well, I said the healing prayer and then went to a naturopath, a homeopath, an iridologist, an astrologer and a bodyworker. I used essential oils and Bach Flower remedies. I drank carrot juice and greens powder. I had a colon cleanse and a parasite cleanse and took lots of supplements. I followed a strict dietary regime eliminating all possible food intolerances.

What was wrong with all of this, was that these alternatives became my Savior, my healer, and I truly believed that if I didn't do all of them, I'd be in trouble.

All this time I had faith that God was going to heal me but because I was in fear, I kept getting sicker and trying new things and getting sicker.

It came to a point that I didn't want the last 40 years of my life to be a series of increasingly difficult medical problems. I wanted to live a vibrant healthy life. I was afraid

(totally unconsciously) that God wasn't going to heal me so I thought that maybe I'd better help Him out.

And did all these healers and remedies really help me? They gave me symptomatic relief, which is what kept me going back and led me to believe that I was working with God and that He had guided me to the right healer, but it was only cutting down the weeds. It wasn't killing them at their root.

I wasn't looking to God for healing, I was looking for everything else.

If anyone had told me I wasn't relying on God, I would've told them that they were liars. I truly believed I was depending on God and doing things His way, and I was, to the best of my ability with what I understood at the time. You see, we can't be truly obedient if we don't know or don't understand. This is a progressive revelation not an instantaneous one. God's ocean is vast and deep, we don't automatically understand that the moment we sign our cards and become Baha'is. Gradually, through reading the Writings morning and night and by meditating on the insights, we come to understand and apply the teachings, little by little, day by day. So the material I learned here opens a new vista of understanding things at a whole new level and I pray that what I'm about to share with you will have that effect on you too.

At one extreme, there is a range of treatments including Electric Shock Treatments:

The Guardian, much as his heart goes out to you in your fear and suffering, Cannot tell you whether electric shock treatments should or should not be used, as this is a purely medical question, and there is no reference to such details in our Scriptures. The best scientists must pass upon such methods, not laymen. (Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 281)

For the purposes of this book, though, I will be looking primarily at spiritual treatments, since fear is helped more by these:

Thus an illness caused by affliction fear, nervous impressions, will be helped more effectively by spiritual rather than by physical treatment. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p 151-152)

Overcoming Fear by Turning to God

Why aren't we getting better?

I'm often asked why people with anxiety aren't getting better. The Baha'i Writings have some answers.

I want to first acknowledge that of course, Baha'is are required to seek medical treatment and follow the doctor's instructions when we are sick:

It is incumbent upon everyone to seek medical treatment and to follow the doctor's instructions, for this is in compliance with the divine ordinance, but, in reality, He Who giveth healing is God. ('Abdu'l-Bahá: Selections from the Writings of 'Abdul- Bahá, p. 156)

For purposes of this book though, I want to explore the untapped resource that we have in turning to God.

Most of us don't consult the right source. We forget that God is the Healer and look for healing everywhere else:

There is but one power which heals-that is God. ('Abdul-Bahá, 'Abdul-Bahá in London, p. 95)

The All-Knowing Physician hath His finger on the pulse of mankind. He perceiveth the disease, and prescribeth, in His unerring wisdom, the remedy. (Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 212)

Its sickness is approaching the stage of utter hopelessness, inasmuch as the true Physician is debarred from administering the remedy, whilst unskilled practitioners are regarded with favor, and are accorded full freedom to act. (Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 39)

Unfortunately, in doing so, most of us leave our health in the hands of unskilled physicians:

He hath fallen under the control of unskillful physicians who are hurried away by vain desires and are of those who stray madly. (Compilations, Baha'i Scriptures, p. 112)

And today we see him under the hands of those who are taken by the intoxication of the wine of deceits in such manner that they do not know what is best for themselves (Compilations, Baha'i Scriptures, p. 112)

These physicians often have the wrong motivations, so they're only able to heal us to a certain extent:

And if one of them endeavor to better his health, his intention will not be but to profit himself thereof whether by name or effect, therefore he will not be able to heal him save to a certain extent. (Compilations, Baha'i Scriptures, p. 112)

Many of them become doctors because it feeds their ego, so of course they can't discover the cause of the disease or have any knowledge of the remedy:

They that are intoxicated by self-conceit have interposed themselves between it and the Divine and infallible Physician. Witness how they have entangled all men, themselves included, in the mesh of their devices. They can neither discover the cause of the disease, nor have they any knowledge of the remedy. (Commissioned by The Universal House of Justice, One Common Faith)

Some doctors see themselves as gods, so of course their patients suffer:

In one of His Tablets (Iqtiddarat, p. 85) Bahá'u'lláh mentions that a disease has afflicted many of those who, in their own estimation, have acquired a measure of knowledge and learning. The disease is that such people consider themselves to be the equal of the Manifestation of God and on the same level. He states that a great many people suffer from this disease and consequently they have deprived themselves of the bounties of God's Revelation. (Adib Taherzadeh, The Child of the Covenant, p. 13)

'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us that medical science will much improve when we have spiritual awakening:

Abdu'l-Bahá does often state that the medical science will much improve. With the appearance of every revelation a new insight is created in man and this in turn express itself in the growth of science. This has happened in past dispensations and we find its earliest fruits in our present day. What we see however is only the beginning. With the spiritual awakening of man this force will develop and marvelous results will become manifest. (Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 287)

When we've had this awakening, we'll realize that God is the source of all healing; no one or nothing else. Period.

Now that we understand why we need to turn to God to heal us of our anxiety, let's look at how, and what gets in the way.

How Do We Turn to God?

It's important to get to know who we are through the eyes of God, and accept our place in His family. Once we truly believe that "God is greater than any great thing", it will set us free.

Fear is not greater than God.

Fear is not greater than the Word of God.

God is greater than Fear, and God is greater than medical doctors, which is why we need to turn to Him.

Greater is God than every great one! (Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations by Baha'u'llah, p. 320)

This is the standard we want to get to – that our love for God is so great, that we have no fear of anyone.

Such is my love for Thee that I can fear no one, though the powers of all the worlds be arrayed against me. Alone and unaided I have, by the power of Thy might, arisen to proclaim Thy Cause, unafraid of the host of my oppressors. (Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations by Baha'u'llah, p. 187)

We turn to God knowing He has the power to change weakness into strength; doubt into certainty and more important for our study, fear into calm:

Thou art He Who changeth through His bidding abasement into glory, and weakness into strength, and powerlessness into might, and fear into calm, and doubt into certainty. No God is there but Thee, the Mighty, the Beneficent. (Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations by Baha'u'llah, p. 249)

That's right! God can turn fear into calm, so why do we choose to live with it, when we can easily come back to a place of peace?

Because our fear matters to us, overcoming it matters to God, because He loves us and doesn't want us to suffer, so let's give Him our anxieties! He stands ready to take them from us!

It's hard to do this if we don't first have a relationship with God as our "loving parent", our "friend" or our "best lover". I discuss more about this in the section Overcoming Fear with Love.

Understand the way the world works – see the end in the beginning:

God created the world and everything in it, and as He says:

My work is perfect and My command is binding. Question it not, nor have a doubt thereof. (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words 12)

We get ourselves into trouble when we don't like the world the way it is, and want to see things differently. By turning to God, through reading the Writings, we start to understand the world better, which makes it easier to be more at peace with what is going on around us.

Sometimes we're in the middle of a test, and in a lot of fear, not wanting to move forward, and it's then that God sends the Watchman to push us over the wall. He's always with us, willing to help, even when His help feels like more calamities. Let's take a look at a story to illustrate.

There was once a lover who had sighed for long years in separation from his beloved, and wasted in the fire of remoteness. From the rule of love, his heart was empty of patience, and his body weary of his spirit; he reckoned life without her as a mockery, and time consumed him away. How many a day he found no rest in longing for her; how many a night the pain of her kept him from sleep; his body was worn to a sigh, his heart's wound had turned him to a cry of sorrow. He had given a thousand lives for one taste of the cup of her presence, but it availed him not. The doctors knew no cure for him, and companions avoided his company; yea, physicians have no medicine for one sick of love, unless the favor of the beloved one deliver him.

At last, the tree of his longing yielded the fruit of despair, and the fire of his hope fell to ashes. Then one night he could live no more, and he went out of his house and made for the marketplace. On a sudden, a watchman followed after him. He broke into a run, with the watchman following; then other watchmen came together, and barred every passage to the weary one. And the wretched one cried from his heart, and ran here and there, and moaned to himself: "Surely this watchman is Izra'il, my angel of death, following so fast upon me; or he is a tyrant of men, seeking to harm me." His feet carried him on, the one bleeding with the arrow of love, and his heart lamented. Then he came to a garden wall, and with untold pain he scaled it, for it proved very high; and forgetting his life, he threw himself down to the garden.

And there he beheld his beloved with a lamp in her hand, searching for a ring she had lost. When the heart-surrendered lover looked on his ravishing love, he drew a great breath and raised up his hands in prayer, crying: "O God! Give Thou glory to the watchman, and riches and long life. For the watchman was Gabriel, guiding this poor one; or he was Israfil, bringing life to this wretched one!"

Indeed, his words were true, for he had found many a secret justice in this seeming tyranny of the watchman, and seen how many a mercy lay hid behind the veil. Out of wrath, the guard had led him who was athirst in love's desert to the sea of his loved one, and lit up the dark night of absence with the light of reunion. He had driven one who was afar, into the garden of nearness, had guided an ailing soul to the heart's physician.

Now if the lover could have looked ahead, he would have blessed the watchman at the start, and prayed on his behalf, and he would have seen that tyranny as justice; but since the end was veiled to him, he moaned and made his plaint in the beginning. Yet those who journey in the garden land of knowledge, because they see the end in the beginning, see peace in war and friendliness in anger. (Baha'u'llah, *The Seven Valleys*, p. 13)

Stress and strain are essential parts of God's creation. It's the reason why atoms and molecules, crystals and everything that exists though them do not fall apart. It's why buildings don't collapse and why we can drive safely across a bridge.

Certain elements have gathered and combine in chemical affinity. The tree, the man, the fish are due to this attraction and cohesion which have brought the elements together. A composition or composite being has resulted. The outcome of certain atomic grouping, for instance, is a mirror, table or clock because a cohesive power has magnetized and bound these atoms together. When that attracting power is withdrawn, dissolution and disintegration follow; no mirror, table or clock remain -- no trace, no existence. Therefore, commingling of the atoms brings forth a reality, while dispersion or dissemination of them is equivalent to nonexistence. (Abdu'l-Baha, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 207)

Martha Root calls this the "power of attraction":

This composition of atoms which constitutes the body or mortal element of any created being, is temporary. When the power of attraction which holds these atoms together is withdrawn, the body as such ceases to exist. (Martha Root, *Misc Baha'i, Appreciations of the Baha'i Faith*, p. 11)

In our lives these forces of stress and strain are equally essential, but most of us regard them as unacceptable and struggle to reject and overcome them at every turn. Our powerlessness over whatever comes to pass is in most part what we come to think of as the cause of our unhappiness, but this is wrong thinking. We're told in the Writings that everything that happens to us (affliction, sorrow, toil, anguish, sacrifice) is all, in fact, a blessing from God.

O ye lovers of God! Do not dwell on what is coming to pass in this holy place, and be ye in no wise alarmed. Whatsoever may happen is for the best, because affliction is but the essence of bounty, and sorrow and toil are mercy unalloyed, and anguish is peace of mind, and to make a sacrifice is to receive a gift, and whatsoever may come to pass hath issued from God's grace. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá, pp. 243-246)

We can reduce our anxiety's hold over us by looking at our fears as the cries of a suckling babe weaned from his mother's milk, and have compassion for our poor selves:

The fears and agitation which the revelation of this law provokes in men's hearts should indeed be likened to the cries of the suckling babe weaned from his mother's milk, if ye be of them that perceive. (Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 175)

God knows our frailty, and that we get anxious, and he asks us to give that cup of anxiety to Him for His blessing:

These friends are perfectly infatuated with Thy nearness; they have given their hearts for the beauty of Thy face; are devoted to Thy Kingdom and are intoxicated by the wine of belief. In the meeting of the covenant they are bearing in their hands the cup of anxiety, needing Thy benevolence and yearning for the heavenly blessings. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablets of Abdu'l-Bahá v3, p. 646)

'Abdu'l-Bahá reminds us that from the beginning of time, sorrow and anxiety, regret and tribulation, have always been the lot of every loyal servant of God, and tells us that the solution is to set our hearts on the tender mercies of God, so we can be filled with abiding joy and intense gladness.

O my well-beloved, deeply spiritual sister! Day and night thou livest in my memory. Whenever I remember thee my heart swelleth with sadness and my regret groweth more intense. Grieve not, for I am thy true, thy unfailing comforter. Let neither despondency nor despair becloud the serenity of thy life or restrain thy freedom. These days shall pass away. We will, please God, in the Abhá Kingdom and beneath the sheltering shadow of the Blessed Beauty, forget all these our earthly cares and will find each one of these base calumnies amply compensated by His expressions of praise and favour. From the beginning of time sorrow and anxiety, regret and tribulation, have always been the lot of every loyal servant of God. Ponder this in thine heart and consider how very true it is. Wherefore, set thine heart on the tender mercies of the Ancient Beauty and be thou filled with abiding joy and intense gladness. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahiyiyh Khanum, p. 4)

He knows that trying to be happy and assured while serving the Cause can cause anxiety, and reassures us that everyone's life has crisis and victory; agony and blessing, frustration and progress. We're not alone or unique in the stresses facing us.

To be required to be happy and assured, while busily serving the Cause, can raise in us more than a little anxiety. The Faith brings each one of us crises as well as victories. Our own lives and even the lives of the central Figures of the Faith have been fraught with agony as well as blessing, with failure and frustration and grief, as frequently as with progress. This is the nature of life. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Quickeners of Mankind*, p. 117)

The way to peace is to give your worries to God, so we don't have to worry about them anymore. He knows what we need before we do. All we have to do is lay all our affairs in His Hands and then trust Him with everything that happens to us.

You should, therefore, leave all your affairs in His Hands, place your trust in Him, and rely upon Him. He will assuredly not forsake you. In this, likewise, there is no doubt. (Baha'u'llah, *Fire and Light*, p. 10)

When you give Him your anxieties, you don't have to worry about them anymore, because He's got them in hand.

Many of us have trouble trusting God. It doesn't matter how much we see His work in our lives; we still might have trouble trusting. Perhaps we think: "Maybe He's forgotten about me; maybe He's dropped the ball; maybe He's too busy to get back to me . . ."

We get in trouble when we think He's not answering our prayers fast enough, so we take them back and start worrying again.

For example, my son grew up in the Faith but never declared, and has gone the way of many of his peers, immersed in materialism and the pleasures of his lower nature. Every day I pray that he will find Baha'u'llah again, and come back to the Faith. Every time I see my son in crisis, I take back this worry. I know that if he was a deepened Baha'i he'd be able to handle his tests and have an easier life, more filled with joy. For years my prayers for him have, at times been intense. I've dedicated many fasts to this purpose, and I don't see any evidence that my prayers have been answered. When I catch myself in this negative downward spiral of mistrust and anger with God, I'm glad I've memorized this quote! Now whenever I start to feel anxious about this, or anything, I say: "I trust you God. I might not like your timing or your answer, but I trust you." Just reminding myself of God's love brings me back to a place of peace.

God's Assistance:

Every one of us have a loving, heavenly father who knows what we need and He meets our needs before we even need them. This is a hard concept to grasp when you haven't had an earthly father who models this for us. In this case we need to start with something small – a mustard seed of faith.

It's hard to trust God if you don't know him – it develops slowly the more you have a relationship with Him – the more time you spend with Him, trusting Him with one small thing that needs help – then you can trust Him with something bigger tomorrow.

For example: I started with the Remover of Difficulties. When my son was very little I wanted Him to turn to God whenever he had trouble, so I was teaching him this skill at the same time I was teaching myself. I know we're not supposed to change the wording of the prayers, but I wanted to make it more real for both of us. Starting with something small in

this case, included looking for a lost toy. I said: "Is there any remover of missing toys save God . . ." and then when we found it, it was proof that we could take our troubles to God and He would answer.

Is there any Remover of difficulties save God? Say: Praised be God! He is God! All are His servants, and all abide by His bidding! (The Bab, Baha'i Prayers, p. 27)

God's shoulders are big enough to handle everyone's worries, because He cares for each one of us. Sure He has a lot of other things to do, but God is infinite, so He can do it all.

God's Protection

I have nothing to be afraid of, because I know that God loves me, takes care of my every need, protects me and wants me to succeed. He created and brought me to the tests in my life and He'll bring me through them if I let Him.

No matter what happens, nothing is as important as our feeling of trust in God, our inner peacefulness and faith that all, in the end, in spite of the severity of the ordeals we may pass through will come out as Bahá'u'lláh has promised. (Shoghi Effendi?, Lights of Guidance, p. 237)

In our battles against fear, we must be willing to throw ourselves on the absolute care of God. Trust Him whether you live or die, whether you win or you lose.

Sometimes if we peel away the layers of our fear, we'll discover that underneath them all is a fear that we will die. Baha'is are lucky because there are so many wonderful Writings that talk about death, and the more we know about it, the less we'll have to fear. Even if the worst thing happens to us and we do get killed, we know there's another world beyond this one, which brings us great hope and happiness.

All men are in God's hands, and even if they do get killed we know there is another life beyond this that can hold great hope and happiness for the soul. (Shoghi Effendi?, Lights of Guidance, p. 237)

God created each of us because He loved us, so of course He cares about every detail of our lives. He's sent us all the things we're worried about and He's promised to never abandon us as we go through our tests.

Whatever hath befallen you, hath been for the sake of God. This is the truth, and in this there is no doubt . . . No father will surrender his sons to devouring beasts; no shepherd will leave his flock to ravaging wolves. He will most certainly do his utmost to protect his own. (Baha'u'llah, Fire and Light, p. 10)

He's promised to protect us, no matter what:

Let the fear of no one dismay thee. Trust in the Lord, thy God, for He is sufficient unto whosoever trusteth in Him. He, verily, shall protect thee, and in Him shalt thou abide in safety. (Baha'u'llah, Gems of Divine Mysteries, p. 60)

All we have to do is mention His name! No matter what our fears are, whether they include self-criticism, inadequacy, inability or inexperience, we're told to bury our fears in the assurances of Baha'u'llah, because He's promised to send the Concourse on High to help. All we have to do is mention His name and He'll set in motion all the help we'll need.

Let no excessive self-criticism or any feelings of inadequacy, inability or inexperience hinder you or cause you to be afraid. Bury your fears in the assurances of Bahá'u'lláh. Has He not asserted that upon anyone who mentions His Name will descend the "hosts of Divine inspiration" and that on such a one will also descend the "Concourse on high, each bearing aloft a chalice of pure light"? (The Universal House of Justice, Ridvan 152, 1995, p. 4)

God doesn't say something if He doesn't believe it or if it won't do us any good.

If you feel afraid when there's nothing to be afraid of, hold on to God, cling to the cord, and know that He wants you to get past your fear so you can be whole.

Cling ye to the Cord of steadfastness, in such wise that all vain imaginings may utterly vanish. (Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 75)

Say: It behoveth every one that holdeth fast to the hem of Our Robe to be untainted by anything from which the Concourse on high may be averse. Thus hath it been decreed by thy Lord, the All-Glorious, in this His perspicuous Tablet. (Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, p. 307)

We've been assured of God's protection. All we have to remember is the power of His name and His love:

Armed with the power of Thy name nothing can ever hurt me, and with Thy love in my heart all the world's afflictions can in no wise alarm me. (Baha'u'llah, *Prayers and Meditations by Baha'u'llah*, p. 208)

Shoghi Effendi has given us an amazing visualization to use to imagine God's protection and if we read it every morning, it will set us up to feel safe as we go through our day:

Putting on the armor of His love, firmly buckling on the shield of His mighty Covenant, mounted on the steed of steadfastness, holding aloft the lance of the Word of the Lord of Hosts, and with unquestioning reliance on His promises as the best provision for their journey, let them set their faces towards those fields that still remain unexplored and direct their steps to those goals that are as yet unattained, assured that He Who has led them to achieve such triumphs, and to store up such prizes in His Kingdom, will continue to assist them in enriching their spiritual birthright to a degree that no finite mind can imagine or human heart perceive. (Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Baha'i World - 1950-1957*, p. 101)

The Báb has given us a prayer we can use, and it too is a great visualization:

O Lord! Protect us from what lieth in front of us and behind us, above our heads, on our right, on our left, below our feet and every other side to which we are exposed. Verily, Thy protection over all things is unfailing. (The Báb, *Baha'i Prayers*, p. 133)

There are other practical measures we can take as well. In a letter written by the House of Justice to me, they told me:

In one of His Tablets, 'Abdu'l-Bahá has responded to concerns expressed to Him by a believer with the following:

. . . if you seek immunity from the sway of the forces of the contingent world, hang the Most Great Name in your dwelling, wear the ring of the Most Great Name on your finger, place the picture of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in your home and always recite the prayers that I have written; then you will behold the marvellous effect they produce. Those so-called forces will prove but illusions and will be wiped out and exterminated. (The Universal House of Justice, 1985 Dec 02, Child Abuse, Psychology and Knowledge of Self)

It's certainly easy to:

- hang the Most Great Name in your dwelling
- wear the ring of the Most Great Name on your finger
- place the picture of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in your home
- recite the prayers that 'Abdu'l-Bahá has written

He is God

What does it mean to really trust? To believe and have faith that God has things in control. It's a state of being. You believe God just because He is God. I think we sometimes forget this but God understands so He reminds us at the beginning of many prayers he where He says:

- He is God
- O God, my God

I used to say the second one without thinking about it, but now I realize that what I am saying is: "O God, MY God". He's mine! I can count on Him!

God says "I am" not for what He's going to do for us or to us but for what He does for us already. We learn to trust Him whether we're healed or whether we're not.

Catching and Being Grateful for God's Bounties

God sends us so many bounties that they're often referred to as a flood. The key is to catch them! We can't catch them if our glass is pointing downward – we have to turn the glass up.

I'd tutored Ruhi Book 1 many times before I finally understood that my whole job in life is to collect the bounties, without worrying how big my receptacle is and without comparing it to others. Now I jokingly refer to myself as a "bounty hunter" and help others learn to catch their bounties too.

The whole duty of man in this Day is to attain that share of the flood of grace which God poureth forth for him. Let none, therefore, consider the largeness or smallness of the receptacle. The portion of some might lie in the palm of a man's hand, the portion of others might fill a cup, and of others even a gallon-measure. (Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 8)

One key to reducing fear is to anticipate God's bounties, even in moments of deep anxiety. Baha'u'llah models this for us, by giving us a prayer we can say, to acknowledge our ordeals, and trust in His bounties:

O my God! O my God! Thou seest me drowned in the sea of ordeals, seized upon by the fire of infidelity, with tears flowing in the dark night rolling in the bed of sleeplessness, mine eyes expectant to see the dawn of the lights of Faith. And when I am anxious, as the fish whose bowels are inflamed upon the dust, I anticipate the manifestation of Thy bounties from all sides! (Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablets of Abdu'l-Bahá v2, p. 381)

There are many prayers of gratitude which remind us of His bounties (all the things He does for us). These are things that we often take for granted because we're so busy focusing on what we don't have. They include:

- He called us into being and infused into us His love and knowledge. (Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations by Baha'u'llah, p. 177)
- He strengthened us with the knowledge of Himself and caused us to enter into His protection (Bahá'u'lláh, Baha'i Scriptures, p. 94)
- He's given us the cup of everlasting life. (Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 31)
- He's torn our veils aside (Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations by Baha'u'llah, p. 77)
- He's shown us the marvels of His Revelation (Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations by Baha'u'llah, p. 150)
- He's supplied us with every good thing. (Bahá'u'lláh, Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh, p. 323)
- He's blessed us with a steady stream of bestowals. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Divine Philosophy, p. 134-135)
- He allowed us to live in the West where we enjoy perfect liberty, security and peace. Is there a greater blessing than this? Freedom! Liberty! Security! These are the great bestowals of God. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Foundations of World Unity, p. 62)

Obviously there are many more things we could thank Him for. I encourage you to make your own list.

For example: I think of 5 things to be grateful for before getting out of bed in the morning, and 5 new things I'm grateful for before going to bed at night, to remind me of His presence and intervention in my life. The more I look, the more I see, and the more I see, the easier it is to trust Him with my fears and my life.

Further Assurance:

Another thing to consider is that to be free of Fear, we must be able to receive God's love and feel safe in it, regardless of whether anyone else loves you or not. God loves you. You must get to a place where you understand and believe that you are accepted by God and loved by God no matter what you think you might have done to lose His love. Once you are complete in God's love, there is nothing left to fear.

He will certainly pray that you may entirely overcome your fear-complex. When you concentrate your thoughts on realizing that you now belong to Bahá'u'lláh, are His servant whom He loves and will always help, if you ask Him to, and that the great spiritual strength of the Cause of God is behind you for you to draw upon, you will soon see your fears melting away. (Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 237)

Once we've tasted the sweetness of God's favors, we can be assured that our path will be cleared of all trouble and tribulations, every time we mention His name.

Whoso hath quaffed the living waters of Thy favors can fear no trouble in Thy path, neither can he be deterred by any tribulation from remembering Thee or from celebrating Thy praise. (Baha'u'llah, *Prayers and Meditations* by Baha'u'llah, p. 154)

There's nothing we can do to cause Him to turn away from us. He's already forgiven us, so we don't need to let our misdeeds stand in the way of turning to Him.

Turn unto Him, and fear not because of thy deeds. He, in truth, forgiveth whomsoever He desireth as a bounty on His part; no God is there but Him, the Ever-Forgiving, the All-Bounteous. (Baha'u'llah, *The Kitab-i-Aqdas*, p. 86)

God's made a covenant or pledge with us – that He'll never leave us alone. The more we study and learn about the power of the Covenant, the more we'll see how it removes all the obstacles in our path:

Have no fear or doubts. The power of the Covenant will assist you and invigorate you and remove every obstacle from your path. "He, verily, will aid everyone that aideth Him, and will remember everyone that remembereth Him" (*The Universal House of Justice*, Ridvan 145, 1988, p. 3)

The more we understand this, the less we have to fear.

God wants us to live in the spiritual world. The more time we spend there, we'll realize that fear doesn't live there.

Ascend to the zenith of an existence which is never beclouded by the fears and forebodings of non-existence. (Abdu'l-Baha, *Baha'i World Faith - Abdu'l-Baha Section*, p. 265)

The more we love God, the more we realize we have nothing to fear and no harm can come to us:

A lover feareth nothing and no harm can come nigh him: Thou seest him chill in the fire and dry in the sea. (Baha'u'llah, *The Seven Valleys*, p. 9)

What Gets in the Way of Turning to God?

We don't believe that God's got it all under control. Baha'u'llah reminds us that He's breathed new life into each one of us, to regenerate us, so that we have nothing to fear:

We have, at the bidding of the omnipotent Ordainer, breathed a new life into every human frame, and instilled into every word a fresh potency. All created things proclaim the evidences of this world-wide regeneration. This is the most great, the most joyful tidings imparted by the Pen of this Wronged One to mankind. Wherefore

fear ye, O My well-beloved ones? Who is it that can dismay you? (Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 84)

We don't Trust's God's Process and His Timetable. If we believe "If God loved me He'd remove the problem", we've bought into another lie, by believing, "if God loves me." That's where we go wrong. God does love each one of us unconditionally and thinking that He doesn't is fear talking again. When we put our trust in God, He will set things in motion to lead us out of our captivity in the prison of self. Hasn't that already happened? He set things in motion for you to read this blog or buy this book and He let you read this far, so He absolutely will get you out of your captivity, as long as we trust Him and turn to Him.

That seeker must, at all times, put his trust in God, must renounce the peoples of the earth, must detach himself from the world of dust, and cleave unto Him Who is the Lord of Lords. He must . . . wash away from the tablet of his heart every trace of pride and vain-glory, must cling unto patience and resignation, observe silence and refrain from idle talk. (Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 264-265)

He that giveth up himself wholly to God, God shall, assuredly, be with him; and he that placeth his complete trust in God, God shall, verily, protect him from whatsoever may harm him, and shield him from the wickedness of every evil plotter. (Baha'u'llah, The Proclamation of Baha'u'llah, p. 47)

We think we can do things our way. The reason the Manifestations of God have come to earth is because mankind turned away from God's injunctions. Everything is easier when we follow His guidance no matter in which religion it is found. Many people think they can make their own decisions or do things their way, but without God as the uniting factor, it won't work. Shoghi Effendi tells us how the pendulum can swing from one extreme to another, and then back again:

These fashions are not permanent they are bound to change. Today the fad is a materialistic view of life and of the world. A day will soon come when it will become deeply religious and spiritual. In fact, we can discern the beginning of such a change in the writings of some of the most eminent souls and liberal minds. When the pendulum will start its full swing then we shall see all such eminent men turn again to God. (Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 211)

Today our society is largely content to go through life without God. This has to change and it can change, by starting with us. When we bury our fears in His assurance, we teach others to do the same.

Conclusion:

When our primary focus is directed towards Him, He will take care of everything else in your life! God makes some wonderful promises in the following quote:

I swear by God, should the traveller in the path of salvation and the seeker for the summits of righteousness attain to this supreme and lofty state, he will inhale the fragrance of the True One from remote distances and discern the brilliant morn of guidance from the Day-springs of all things. Every atom and object will direct him to the Beloved and the Desired One. He will become so discerning that he will distinguish truth from falsehood as the sun from shadow. For example; if the breeze of truth should blow forth from the east of creation, he will surely inhale it in the west of emanation. Likewise, he will distinguish all the signs of the True One—such

as wonderful words, incomparable deeds, and brilliant actions—from the deeds, actions and traces of all else, just as the jeweller distinguishes the gem from the stone, and man the spring from autumn and heat from cold.

When the head of the soul is purified from the ailment (lit. cold) of the contingent and existent, it will unfailingly discover the fragrance of the Beloved from distant stations, arrive at the city of the assurance of His Highness the Beneficent, through the effect of this fragrance, and behold the wonders of the wisdom of His Highness the Most Holy, in that spiritual city.

It will detect the hidden knowledges from the forms of the leaves of the tree of that city, hear the glorification and praise of the Lord of Lords from its soil, with the outward and inward ears, and perceive the mysteries of “advent” and “return” with the outward eye.

What shall we mention of the signs, tokens, appearances and splendors ordained in that city, by the command of the King of Names and Attributes! It quencheth thirst without water, and increaseth the heat of the love of God without fire. The ideal consummate wisdom is hidden in every plant, and a thousand nightingales of speech are in ecstasy and rapture upon every rose branch. The mystery of the fire of Moses is revealed in its wonderful tulips, and the breath of the Holy Spirit of Jesus emanates from its fragrances of holiness.

It bestows wealth without gold and grants immortality without death. A paradise is concealed in every leaf, and a hundred thousand wisdoms are treasured in every one of its chambers.

Those who earnestly endeavor in the way of God, after severance from all else, will become so attached to that city that they will not abandon it for an instant. They will hear conclusive proofs from the hyacinth of that assembly and will receive clear arguments from the beauty of the rose and the melody of the nightingale. This city is renewed and adorned every one thousand years, more or less. Therefore, O my friends, we must make an efforts to attain to that city and remove the veils of glory, through divine favors and lordly compassion, so that we may sacrifice the withered soul in the path of the New Beloved, and show forth a hundred thousand supplications and humiliations in order to be favored with that attainment. (Bahá'í Scriptures, p. 51-52)

It's a long passage, so let's us summarize what He's promised if we turn to Him:

- We will inhale His fragrance from remote distances and discern His guidance
- Every atom and object will direct us to our Beloved
- We will become so discerning that we will distinguish truth from falsehood
- We will distinguish all the signs of God – His wonderful words, incomparable deeds, and brilliant actions
- We will arrive at the city of His assurance
- We will detect the hidden knowledge
- We will find the ideal hidden wisdom

- We will receive wealth (without gold) and immortality (without death).
- We will see the paradise concealed in every leaf, and a hundred thousand wisdoms treasured in every one of its chambers.
- We will become so attached to the city of God that we will not abandon it for an instant.
- We will hear conclusive proofs and will receive clear arguments

In order to be favored with that attainment we need to:

- make an effort
- remove our veils
- show forth a hundred thousand supplications and humiliations

To conclude this section, I'd like to share a prayer which can assist you to be the person God wants you to be:

I beg Thee to forgive me, O my Lord, for every mention but the mention of Thee, and for every praise but the praise of Thee, and for every delight but delight in Thy nearness, and for every pleasure but the pleasure of communion with Thee, and for every joy but the joy of Thy love and of Thy good-pleasure, and for all things pertaining unto me which bear no relationship unto Thee, O Thou Who art the Lord of lords, He Who provideth the means and unlocketh the doors.
(The Báb, Bahá'í Prayers, p. 79)

Say it, and study it for clues about how to orient your life, and it will surely help you!

Abandoned by God

Those who've experienced extreme trauma in their lives will know how lonely and desolate it feels when we believe with every fiber of our being that God has abandoned us.

Bahá'u'lláh too felt abandoned by God as we see in this quote:

O Lord my God! Thou beholdest my dwelling-place, and the prison into which I am cast, and the woes I suffer. By Thy might! No pen can recount them, nor can any tongue describe or number them. I know not, O my God, for what purpose Thou hast abandoned me to Thine adversaries. Thy glory beareth me witness! I sorrow not for the vexations I endure for love of Thee, nor feel perturbed by the calamities that overtake me in Thy path. My grief is rather because Thou delayest to fulfill what Thou hast determined in the Tablets of Thy Revelation, and ordained in the books of Thy decree and judgment. (Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations by Baha'u'llah, p. 10-11)

But He never does:

God, the Vigilant, the Just, the Loving, the All-Wise . . . will [not] be willing to abandon His children to their fate. (Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come*, p. 4-5)

Have you ever heard the expression: When you point a finger at someone, there are three fingers pointing back at you? This is what is really happening. Often it's we who are blaming Him because we don't understand a particular test, or we aren't deepened enough in the Writings to know the purpose of tests, or we think that life should go a certain way:

They have abandoned their God, and clung unto their desires. They truly have strayed and are in error. (Baha'u'llah, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 134)

Or we think we know what is best for us:

The counterfeit or imitation of true religion has adulterated human belief and the foundations have been lost sight of . . . This is verily the century when these imitations must be forsaken, superstitions abandoned and God alone worshiped. We must look at the reality of the prophets and their teachings in order that we may agree. (Abdu'l-Bahá, *Foundations of World Unity*, p. 16)

God wants us to trust him, and we can't do that without faith:

That individual, however, who puts his faith in God and believes in the words of God -- because he is promised and certain of a plentiful reward in the next life, and because worldly benefits as compared to the abiding joy and glory of future planes of existence are nothing to him -- will for the sake of God abandon his own peace and profit and will freely consecrate his heart and soul to the common good. (Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 96-97)

God wants us to return to Him, and He tells us how:

Out of the essence of knowledge I gave thee being, why seekest thou enlightenment from anyone beside Me? Out of the clay of love I molded thee, how dost thou busy thyself with another? Turn thy sight unto thyself, that thou mayest find Me standing within thee, mighty, powerful and self-subsisting. (Baha'u'llah, *The Arabic Hidden Words* 13)

We need to give up our will and submit to the will of God:

Commit thyself to God; give up thy will and choose that of God; abandon thy desire and lay hold on that of God; that thou mayest be a holy, spiritual and heavenly example among the maid-servants of God. (Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of Abdu'l-Bahá* v1, p. 89-90)

He gives us a prayer we can use to help us return to Him:

I implore Thee, O my God, by Thy mercy that hath surpassed all created things, and to which all that are immersed beneath the oceans of Thy names bear witness, not to abandon me unto my self, for my heart is prone to evil. Guard me, then, within the stronghold of Thy protection and the shelter of Thy care. I am he, O my God, whose only wish is what Thou hast determined by the power of Thy might. All I have chosen for myself is to be assisted by Thy gracious appointments and the ruling of

Thy will, and to be aided with the tokens of Thy decree and judgment. I beseech Thee, O Thou Who art the Beloved of the hearts which long for Thee, by the Manifestations of Thy Cause and the Day-Springs of Thine inspiration, and the Exponents of Thy majesty, and the Treasuries of Thy knowledge, not to suffer me to be deprived of Thy holy Habitation, Thy Fane and Thy Tabernacle. Aid me, O my Lord, to attain His hallowed court, and to circle round His person, and to stand humbly at His door. Thou art He Whose power is from everlasting to everlasting. Nothing escapeth Thy knowledge. Thou art, verily, the God of power, the God of glory and wisdom. Praised be God, the Lord of the worlds! (Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations by Baha'u'llah, p. 210-211)

Drawing Closer to God

Since the entire purpose of our existence is to know and worship God, many people want to know how they can do this, when God feels so far away or so outside their realm of knowledge and understanding.

First of all, we need to understand He's not way up in the sky somewhere, but closer to us than our life-vein!

God hath revealed, that "We are closer to man than his life-vein" (Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 185)

My love is in thee, know it, that thou mayest find Me near unto thee. (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words, 10)

My love has made in thee its home, it cannot be concealed. My light is manifest to thee, it cannot be obscured. (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words, 20)

Thou art but one step away from the glorious heights above and from the celestial tree of love. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 7)

So if He's so close, why does He seem so far away? Bahá'u'lláh understands this question and has asked us to mediate on it!

Meditate on what the poet hath written: "Wonder not, if my Best-Beloved be closer to me than mine own self; wonder at this, that I, despite such nearness, should still be so far from Him." (Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 185)

So if He's so close, who moved?

This is such an important topic, that Bahá'u'lláh tells us the only thing to feel sorry about is that we have drawn away from Him:

Sorrow not save that thou art far from Us. (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words, 35)

And the only thing worth celebrating is our return:

Rejoice not save that thou art drawing near and returning unto Us. (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words, 35)

What causes us to turn away?

First of all, He knows this about us:

At all times I am near unto thee, but thou art ever far from Me. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 21)

The learned and the wise have for long years striven and failed to attain the presence of the All-Glorious; they have spent their lives in search of Him, yet did not behold the beauty of His countenance. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 22)

It's how He created us!

Ye shall be hindered from loving Me and souls shall be perturbed as they make mention of Me. For minds cannot grasp Me nor hearts contain Me. (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words, 66)

With that in mind, let's look at the specific things that cause us to turn away.

Envy!

Know, verily, the heart wherein the least remnant of envy yet lingers, shall never attain My everlasting dominion, nor inhale the sweet savors of holiness breathing from My kingdom of sanctity. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 6)

Wealth:

Know ye in truth that wealth is a mighty barrier between the seeker and his desire, the lover and his beloved. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 53)

We stop mentioning God and keep remote from Him:

Wherefore have ye neglected the mention of the Loved One, and kept remote from His holy presence? (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 46)

We don't trust God:

I desire communion with thee, but thou wouldst put no trust in Me. The sword of thy rebellion hath felled the tree of thy hope. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 21)

So we turn to other sources for enlightenment:

Out of the essence of knowledge I gave thee being, why seekest thou enlightenment from anyone beside Me? Out of the clay of love I molded thee, how dost thou busy thyself with another? (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words, 13)

And look for God in all the wrong places:

Why hast thou forsaken Me and sought a beloved other than Me? (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words, 19)

And content ourselves with things that aren't as good:

Upon the tree of effulgent glory I have hung for thee the choicest fruits, wherefore hast thou turned away and contented thyself with that which is less good? (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words, 21)

And with things that perish:

To the eternal I call thee, yet thou dost seek that which perisheth. (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words, 23)

We choose to shame ourselves:

Imperishable glory I have chosen for thee, yet boundless shame thou hast chosen for thyself. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 21)

We get caught up in "self":

Thou didst remain so wrapt in the veil of self, that thine eyes beheld not the beauty of the Beloved, nor did thy hand touch the hem of His robe. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 22)

We've given our hearts to someone or something else:

All that is in heaven and earth I have ordained for thee, except the human heart, which I have made the habitation of My beauty and glory; yet thou didst give My home and dwelling to another than Me; and whenever the manifestation of My holiness sought His own abode, a stranger found He there, and, homeless, hastened unto the sanctuary of the Beloved. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 27)

We busy ourselves with our own preoccupations:

Many a day hath passed over thee whilst thou hast busied thyself with thy fancies and idle imaginings. (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words, 62)

Or with other people:

At many a dawn have I turned from the realms of the Placeless unto thine abode, and found thee on the bed of ease busied with others than Myself. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 28)

And trade God's love for a mere cupful of something else:

Alas! How strange and pitiful; for a mere cupful, they have turned away from the billowing seas of the Most High, and remained far from the most effulgent horizon. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 2)

Preferring the foul dregs of impurity to God's celestial wine:

Every one hath turned away from the celestial wine of unity unto the foul dregs of impurity, and, content with mortal cup, hath put away the chalice of immortal

beauty. Vile is that wherewith he is contented. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 61)

Our hearts defiled with desire and passion:

Why with thine heart defiled with desire and passion dost thou seek to commune with Me and to enter My sacred realm? Far, far are ye from that which ye desire. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 68)

We are neglectful of His bounties:

When fully grown, thou didst neglect all My bounties and occupied thyself with thine idle imaginings, in such wise that thou didst become wholly forgetful, and, turning away from the portals of the Friend didst abide within the courts of My enemy. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 29)

And content ourselves with dust:

. . . the hearts of men, content with transient dust, have strayed far from their eternal nest . . . (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 2)

We busy ourselves with idle arguments, debates, and conflicts:

The essence of beauty is within the peerless pavilion, set upon the throne of glory, whilst ye busy yourselves with idle contentions. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 46)

We're careless with the treasure we have:

. . . with eyes turned towards the slough of heedlessness are bereft of the glory of the divine presence. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 2)

Our hearts are lifeless:

Never shall mortal eye recognize the everlasting Beauty, nor the lifeless heart delight in aught but in the withered bloom. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 10)

And God doesn't want us to approach Him in that state:

Approach Me not with lifeless hearts, defiled with worldly desires and cravings. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 19)

And we take pleasure in hanging out with others like us:

For like seeketh like, and taketh pleasure in the company of its kind. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 10)

We spend time with those who don't have our best interests at heart:

Worldly friends, seeking their own good, appear to love one the other, whereas the true Friend hath loved and doth love you for your own sakes; indeed He hath suffered for your guidance countless afflictions. Be not disloyal to such a Friend, nay rather hasten unto Him. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 52)

Or who turn the radiance of our hearts into infernal fire:

Beware! Walk not with the ungodly and seek not fellowship with him, for such companionship turneth the radiance of the heart into infernal fire. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 57)

We're occupied with idle imaginings:

. . . occupied thyself with thine idle imaginings . . . (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 29)

And become forgetful of God:

. . . thou didst become wholly forgetful . . . (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 29)

Or worse, turn away from God and join forces with His enemies:

. . . turning away from the portals of the Friend didst abide within the courts of My enemy. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 29)

We content ourselves with things that die and set our affections on things of this world:

Abandon not the everlasting beauty for a beauty that must die, and set not your affections on this mortal world of dust. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 14)

We think we know best:

What hath made thee turn away from Our desire and seek thine own? (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words, 23)

The result?

We won't ever find satisfaction:

If thou seekest another than Me, yea, if thou searchest the universe for evermore, thy quest will be in vain. (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words, 15)

What happens when we turn away?

We deprive ourselves of God's bounties and become sorely afflicted:

The sweet savors of holiness are breathing and the breath of bounty is wafted, yet ye are all sorely afflicted and deprived thereof. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 46)

We stray and perish:

My love is My stronghold; he that entereth therein is safe and secure, and he that turneth away shall surely stray and perish. (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words, 9)

There seems to be some urgency to get back to God:

While there is yet time, return, and lose not thy chance. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words 21)

The time cometh, when the nightingale of holiness will no longer unfold the inner mysteries and ye will all be bereft of the celestial melody and of the voice from on high. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 15)

Seize thy chance, for it will come to thee no more. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 40)

How do we turn back?

Draw near and enter:

God has promised that His gates are open wide, but very draw near and even fewer are able to enter:

The gates that open on the Placeless stand wide and the habitation of the loved one is adorned with the lovers' blood, yet all but a few remain bereft of this celestial city, and even of these few, none but the smallest handful hath been found with a pure heart and sanctified spirit. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 17)

So how can we get back to a place of connection to God and ensure we are one of those who enter His court?

Stop looking elsewhere:

Wouldst thou have Me, seek none other than Me . . . for My will and the will of another than Me, even as fire and water, cannot dwell together in one heart. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 31)

Put God first:

God wants us to love him better than we love anyone or anything else:

I desire to be loved alone and above all that is. (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words, 8)

Make a list of all the things you "love" and see which ones get in the way of your relationship with God. Many of us assume we need to love our spouses or children or pets more than anything else, but God wants to be first in our lives. If He isn't, ask yourself what you can do to make sure He comes first.

An easy way is to make sure you're honoring your spiritual obligations is to use this checklist to review where you stand:

Bahá'u'lláh has stated quite clearly in His Writings the essential requisites for our spiritual growth, and these are stressed again and again by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His talks and Tablets. One can summarize them briefly in this way:

The recital each day of one of the Obligatory Prayers with pure-hearted devotion.

The regular reading of the Sacred Scriptures, specifically at least each morning and evening, with reverence, attention and thought.

Prayerful meditation on the teachings, so that we may understand them more deeply, fulfil them more faithfully, and convey them more accurately to others.

Striving every day to bring our behaviour more into accordance with the high standards that are set forth in the Teachings.

Teaching the Cause of God.

Selfless service in the work of the Cause and in the carrying on of our trade or profession. (Universal House of Justice, Lights of Guidance, p. 540)

Other daily practices include saying the 95 Allá'u'Abhá's:

We have also decided that it is timely for Bahá'ís in every land to take to their hearts the words of the Kitab-i-Aqdas: "It hath been ordained that every believer in God, the Lord of Judgment, shall, each day, having washed his hands and then his face, seat himself and, turning unto God, repeat `Allah-u-Abha' ninety-five times. Such was the decree of the Maker of the Heavens when, with majesty and power, He established Himself upon the thrones of His Names." Let all experience the spiritual enrichment brought to their souls by this simple act of worshipful meditation. (Universal House of Justice, Laws of the Kitab-i-Aqdas, Further Application of, 28 Dec, 1999)

Of course, we can and should say them at other times of the day as well:

'Abdul-Bahá encourages the use of the sacred phrase Alláh-u-Bahá as a focus for invocation. "The Greatest Name should be found upon the lips in the first awakening moment of early dawn. It should be fed upon by consistent use in daily invocation, in trouble, under opposition, and should be the last word breathed when the head rests upon the pillow at night. It is the name of comfort, protection, happiness, illumination, love and unity. ('Abdul-Bahá, Wisdom of the Master, p. 58)

The purpose of saying this prayer is to help us advance towards God:

Question - What is the reason that every one should mention every morning, ninety five times, the Greatest Name; i.e., Allah'u'Abha! "It is only for mentioning the name of God, for to commemorate His Holy Name causes us to advance toward Him and to be more vigilant." (Unauthenticated Tablet or talk attributed to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Barstow collection) <http://www.bahai-library.com/zamir/barstow2.html#151>

The Hidden Words also give us lots of practical advice on how to draw closer to God:

Turn away from ourselves:

If thou lovest Me, turn away from thyself . . . (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words, 7)

Turn towards God, renouncing everything except Him:

Turn thy face unto Mine and renounce all save Me. (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words, 15)

In one prayer we can ask to detach ourselves from others so we can draw closer:

I have detached myself from my kindred and have sought through Thee to become independent of all that dwell on earth and ever ready to receive that which is praiseworthy in Thy sight. (The Bab, Baha'i Prayers, p. 21)

And in another, He tells us it is our reality:

O Lord! I am single, alone and lowly. For me there is no support save Thee, no helper except Thee and no sustainer beside Thee. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Baha'i Prayers, p. 187)

Stop focusing on our own pleasure and focus only on what God wants for us:

If thou seekest My pleasure, regard not thine own . . . (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words, 7)

Glory in God's name and not in our own:

It behooveth thee to glory in My name, not in thine own . . . (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words, 8)

Trust in God and not in ourselves:

It behooveth thee to . . . put thy trust in Me and not in thyself . . . (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words, 8)

Turn our sight unto ourselves to find God standing within:

Turn thy sight unto thyself, that thou mayest find Me standing within thee, mighty, powerful and self-subsisting. (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words, 13)

Commune with God's spirit:

Forget all save Me and commune with My spirit. This is of the essence of My command, therefore turn unto it. (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words, 16)

Obedience:

Walk in My statutes for love of Me and deny thyself that which thou desirest if thou seekest My pleasure. (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words, 38)
Neglect not My commandments if thou lovest My beauty. (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words, 39)

This is such an important one, that Bahá'u'lláh tells us that nothing else will do:

Wert thou to speed through the immensity of space and traverse the expanse of heaven, yet thou wouldst find no rest save in submission to Our command and humbleness before Our Face. (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words, 40)

Cleanse your body of all things:

The temple of being is My throne; cleanse it of all things, that there I may be established and there I may abide. (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words, 58)

Cleanse your heart of all things:

Thy heart is My home; sanctify it for My descent. Thy spirit is My place of revelation; cleanse it for My manifestation. (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words, 59)

Wake up!

How long art thou to slumber on thy bed? Lift up thy head from slumber, for the Sun hath risen to the zenith, haply it may shine upon thee with the light of beauty. (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words, 62)

Free yourself of all idle fancies:

Wherefore, free thyself from the veils of idle fancies and enter into My court. (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words, 63)

Stop looking elsewhere:

Abide not but in the rose-garden of the spirit . . . Seek thou no shelter except in the Sheba of the well-beloved . . . dwell not save on the mount of faithfulness. Therein is thy habitation, if on the wings of thy soul thou soarest to the realm of the infinite and seekest to attain thy goal. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 1)

Take one step towards Him:

Take thou one pace and with the next advance into the immortal realm and enter the pavilion of eternity. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 7)

Look and listen to the Voice of God:

Blind thine eyes, that is, to all save My beauty; stop thine ears to all save My word (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 11)

Empty yourself of all acquired knowledge:

Empty thyself of all learning, that thou mayest partake of My knowledge. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 11)

Sanctify yourself from all riches:

Sanctify thyself from riches, that thou mayest obtain a lasting share from the ocean of My eternal wealth. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 11)

Attain a clear vision, pure heart and attentive ear:

With a clear vision, a pure heart and an attentive ear thou mayest enter the court of My holiness. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 11)

Empty your hearts of all save God:

Ponder awhile. Hast thou ever heard that friend and foe should abide in one heart? Cast out then the stranger, that the Friend may enter His home. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 26)

Escape from the cage you've put yourself in:

Burst thy cage asunder, and even as the phoenix of love soar into the firmament of holiness. Renounce thyself and, filled with the spirit of mercy, abide in the realm of celestial sanctity. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 38)
Up from thy prison ascend unto the glorious meads above, and from thy mortal cage wing thy flight unto the paradise of the Placeless. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 39)

Let go of malice and envy:

Purge thy heart from malice and, innocent of envy, enter the divine court of holiness. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 42)

Spend time with God's loved ones and the righteous:

He that seeketh to commune with God, let him betake himself to the companionship of His loved ones; and he that desireth to hearken unto the word of God, let him give ear to the words of His chosen ones. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 56)

Wouldst thou seek the grace of the Holy Spirit, enter into fellowship with the righteous. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 58)

How do we do any of these things?

Through prayer and meditation, and then being still enough to listen for the Voice of God:

I have the greatest desire to speak with you, but if I do not talk with my tongue I commune with my heart and my soul is with you. Without the medium of words it speaks to you of mysteries. Those who understand can converse with me thus. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Divine Philosophy, p. 119-120)

How do we know this works? Because He promises:

Ready is He to answer whosoever calleth upon Him, and nigh is He unto such as commune with Him. (Baha'u'llah, The Proclamation of Baha'u'llah, p. 60)

Bahá'u'lláh tells us we can return to Him "swift as a twinkling of an eye":

Swift as the twinkling of an eye ye can, if ye but wish it, reach and partake of this imperishable favor, this God-given grace, this incorruptible gift, this most potent and unspeakably glorious bounty. (Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 326)

For a true lover, reunion is inevitable:

Whither can a lover go but to the land of his beloved? and what seeker findeth rest away from his heart's desire? To the true lover reunion is life, and separation is death. His breast is void of patience and his heart hath no peace. A myriad lives he would forsake to hasten to the abode of his beloved. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 4)

Reasons to return to God:

Aside from the fact that it's our purpose in life, why else do we want to love God?

So He can call us by name:

I loved thy creation, hence I created thee. Wherefore, do thou love Me, that I may name thy name and fill thy soul with the spirit of life. (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words, 4)

So that His love can reach us:

Love Me, that I may love thee. If thou lovest Me not, My love can in no wise reach thee. Know this, O servant. (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words, 5)

So that we can return "home" and live in Paradise:

Thy Paradise is My love; thy heavenly home, reunion with Me. Enter therein and tarry not. This is that which hath been destined for thee in Our kingdom above and Our exalted dominion. (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words, 6)

To ensure that God will eternally live in us:

. . . that thou mayest die in Me and I may eternally live in thee. (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words, 7)

So that we can find God when we get to the next world:

Abide then in thy love for Me, that thou mayest find Me in the realm of glory. (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words, 14)

It's the only way to find peace within ourselves:

There is no peace for thee save by renouncing thyself and turning unto Me . . . (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words, 8)

To keep us safe and secure:

My love is My stronghold; he that entereth therein is safe and secure, and he that turneth away shall surely stray and perish. (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words, 9)

In order to be fit for everlasting life:

. . . that thou mayest be fit for everlasting life . . . (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words, 63)

In order to be worthy to meet God:

. . . that thou mayest be . . . worthy to meet Me. (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words, 63)

To avoid separation, weariness and trouble:

Thus may death not come upon thee, neither weariness nor trouble. (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words, 63)

What does He mean "that death may not come upon thee"? In another Hidden Word He tells us:

To the true lover . . . separation is death. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 4)

Conclusion:

In conclusion, Bahá'u'lláh has the last word:

I bear witness, O friends! that the favor is complete, the argument fulfilled, the proof manifest and the evidence established. Let it now be seen what your endeavors in the path of detachment will reveal. In this wise hath the divine favor been fully vouchsafed unto you and unto them that are in heaven and on earth. All praise to God, the Lord of all Worlds. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words, 82)

Overcoming Fear with Prayer

The goal of prayer is to get to a place of peace; not to get the specific thing we're asking for. Pray until the worry is gone. Some things you have to pray for days and weeks and months until you get to a place of peace.

If you don't have a relationship with God, prayer is just empty words. For example, when I became a Baha'i, I thought I couldn't talk to God except through the Baha'i prayers. I read in Ruhi book 1 that prayer was a conversation but I didn't feel like I was having a conversation when I was saying my prayers. They were just words going one way: from me to God. I went through the motions of saying the prayers but I wasn't connecting with them. Then I realized I was approaching Him with a lifeless heart, which He didn't want me to do.

O friends! . . . approach Me not with lifeless hearts, defiled with worldly desires and cravings. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words 19)

In order to have a conversation, we need to first have a relationship, otherwise it wouldn't mean anything. If I have a relationship with you, all of a sudden my words mean something. It's relationships that are important.

When I think about God as my Father and my Friend and my Best Lover, it opens the door to a much richer kind of conversation. Then the Creative Word of God can recreate me.

The greatest miracle of the Manifestation of God is that He changes the hearts of people and creates a new civilization merely through the influence of His word. Every word that He utters is creative and endowed with such potency that all the powers of the world will not be able to resist the world-vivifying forces that are released through it. Like the animating energies of the spring season which are let loose in abundance and penetrate to the core of all living things, the creative Word of the Manifestation of God revolutionizes human society and by its resistless force breaks down man-made barriers of opposition, creating a new race of men and a new civilization. (Adib Taherzadeh, The Revelation of Baha'u'llah v 3, p. 44)

Bahá'ís are generally encouraged to use the Creative Word, including those prayers and Tablets revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb and 'Abdu'l-Bahá which are authenticated and published in our Bahá'í literature. A letter dated 8 August 1942, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a National Spiritual Assembly, indicates that while spontaneous prayer is permitted, the revealed verses are preferred because "the revealed Word is endowed with a power of its own". The friends, therefore, must use them in their own supplications with radiant joy. This does not mean, however, that in addition to such prayers, they may not, in private, use their own words whenever they feel the inclination to do so. (The Universal House of Justice, 2001 Sep 19, Definition and Scope of 'Devotional Meetings')

As I continue to read the Writings, I'm learning to find the prayers that match exactly what I want to say. Most of the ones that resonate the most are not typically found in commercially available prayer books, so I've created a database of my favorites which you can find at www.thebahaiprayers.com .

Prayers for Protection:

The thing about fear is that we don't feel safe, so one of the easiest things we can do is to ask God to keep us safe, through prayers such as these:

O Lord! Protect us from what lieth in front of us and behind us, above our heads, on our right, on our left, below our feet and every other side to which we are exposed. Verily, Thy protection over all things is unfailing. (The Bab, Baha'i Prayers, p. 133)

I have risen this morning by Thy grace, O my God, and left my home trusting wholly in Thee, and committing myself to Thy care. Send down, then, upon me, out of the heaven of Thy mercy, a blessing from Thy side, and enable me to return home in safety even as Thou didst enable me to set out under Thy protection with my thoughts fixed steadfastly upon Thee. There is none other God but Thee, the One, the Incomparable, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. (Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations by Baha'u'llah, p. 266)

The Prayer of the Signs is a special form of Muslim obligatory prayer that was ordained to be said in times of natural events, like earthquakes, eclipses, and other such phenomena, which may cause fear and are taken to be signs or acts of God. The requirement of performing this prayer has been annulled. In its place a Bahá'í may say the following prayer, but this is not obligatory:

Dominion is God's, the Lord of the seen and the unseen, the Lord of creation.
(Baha'u'llah, The Kitab-i-Aqdas, p. 172)

Overcoming Fear by Reading the Writings:

We've been told in no uncertain terms to read the Writings morning and night and warned of the consequences if we don't:

Read the Verses of God every morning and evening, and he who does not read will not be known by the Covenant of God and His Testament. And he who turns away from them in this Day, verily he is of those who have turned away from God since the eternity of eternities. (Baha'u'llah, Baha'i Scriptures, p. 156)

We need to read with care and attention, even if all we can manage is one passage:

Be not deluded by meaningless repetition of prayers, but worship by day and by night. Should any one read but one Verse of the Verses with fragrance and spirituality, it shall avail more unto him than to read with slothfulness all the Books of God, the Protector, the Self-existent. (Baha'u'llah, Baha'i Scriptures, p. 156)

In order to meditate on the Word of God, we first have to immerse ourselves in its Ocean to find the pearls that He's hidden for us. In this way we become pearl divers!:

O peoples of the world! Cast away, in My name that transcendeth all other names, the things ye possess, and immerse yourselves in this Ocean in whose depths lay hidden the pearls of wisdom and of utterance, an ocean that surgeth in My name, the All-Merciful. Thus instructeth you He with Whom is the Mother Book. (Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 33-34)

We need to do it for lots of reasons, but in particular, we've been promised that if we do, it will cure us of our hypertension:

Cannot modern men and women be cured of hypertension and begin through the Word once again to find the lost certainty? Through faith will come serenity and maturity. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. ix)

The reason for this is because our minds must be renewed so that we can let go of old beliefs that feed our fear.

We gain knowledge of God from the Word of God. When we believe God's word and declare it, when we trust God and believe Him, He will protect and care for us and help us through all of all our troubles.

The Word of God is our guide. No other father is our guide or our healer. We can search everywhere for a cure and we won't find it, because Baha'u'llah promises:

Wert thou to speed through the immensity of space and traverse the expanse of heaven, yet thou wouldst find no rest save in submission to Our command and humbleness before Our Face. (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words 40)

The word of God gets the job done because the Writings are the Divine Remedy. Like any prescription given to you by a doctor, you have to take it in order to see results, and even then you have to give it time to work. Remember what the doctor says when he gives you an antibiotic? You have to take it for the whole 10 days even when you feel totally cured by day six or it will come back. The Divine Remedy is the same. It's not the remedy by itself that gets the job done but your obedience to the instructions. We need to continually choose to follow the Word of God, no matter what things might look like. You make a decision to believe God and not to yield to fear. That's why you need to take a step into action every single day. Fear will come back, but it will come as a temptation and you can treat it like any other temptation. You don't have to act on it.

Reading the Writings causes fear to vanish:

But great was my surprise to know how the ever-present Hand of the Master has removed so speedily all the difficulties in our way and how the light of His Divine Guidance caused the darkness of doubts, of fears and mistrust to vanish. (Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration, p. 27)

Look to the Writings to find the knowledge that eliminates fear:

In the treasuries of the knowledge of God there lieth concealed a knowledge which, when applied, will largely, though not wholly, eliminate fear. This knowledge, however, should be taught from childhood, as it will greatly aid in its elimination. (Baha'u'llah, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 32)

Discover the motivating purpose of God's Revelation:

Were men to discover the motivating purpose of God's Revelation, they would assuredly cast away their fears, and, with hearts filled with gratitude, rejoice with exceeding gladness. (Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 175)

Read the Writings to prevent trouble and tribulation

Whoso hath quaffed the living waters of Thy favors can fear no trouble in Thy path, neither can he be deterred by any tribulation from remembering Thee or from celebrating Thy praise. (Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations by Baha'u'llah, p. 154)

Deepen your knowledge and dedicate yourself to the Cause:

Let him resolve so to deepen his knowledge of the Faith and so to increase his standards of self-sacrifice and dedication to the Cause as to play his part in building a Community which will be worthy of this supreme bounty and which will be a beacon light to the peoples of this fear-wracked world. (The Universal House of Justice, Messages 1963 to 1986, p. 37)

Meditation:

It's not enough to read the Writings, and immerse ourselves in the Writings, but we're told we have to meditate on them as well.

It is incumbent upon you to ponder in your hearts and meditate upon His words. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 241)

In many places we're told to "ponder" on something:

Ponder this in thine heart, that the truth may be revealed unto thee, and be thou steadfast in His path. (Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 76)

Paying attention to what God asks us to ponder on will fill up our minds with the right kind of thoughts and leave no room for us to meditate on our fears by letting that hamster wheel to go round and round in your head. When we meditate on the wrong things, we're exalting fear and giving it power and wasting time better spent on teaching and service. When we do that it changes chemicals in our body. So meditate on God's word instead.

When we have our minds renewed by immersing it in the Ocean of God's Word, we can prove that what God has to tell us is the opposite of what fear has been telling us.

We go to the Word of God to find the truth that is there and the truth is what's going to set us free and make us whole. It's not mind over matter but faith over fear. It's the word of God over the word of our idle fancies.

Overcome Fear by Focusing on the Virtues

One of the purposes of our lives is to acquire the virtues we will need in the next world:

The purpose of the creation of man is the attainment of the supreme virtues of humanity through descent of the heavenly bestowals. (Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 4)

Bahá'ís believe that human beings are inherently noble, and that the purpose of life is to cultivate such attributes, skills, virtues and qualities as will enable them to contribute their share to the building of an ever-advancing civilization. True education releases capacities, develops analytical abilities, confidence, will, and goal-setting competencies, and instills the vision that will enable them to become self-motivating change agents, serving the best interests of the community. (Baha'i International Community, 1990 Mar 08, *Teacher's Situation Determining Factor of Quality*)

Although it might not make sense now, someday you will need these virtues and thank God you had a chance to develop them so you aren't handicapped in the next world!

As the child in the womb does not yet know the use of its members, it does not know what its eyes are for, neither its nose, nor ears, nor tongue -- so also it is with the soul on earth. It cannot understand here the uses and powers of its spiritual gifts, but directly it enters the eternal kingdom, it will become clearly apparent. ('Abdul-Bahá, *Bahá'í Prayers* 9, p. 48)

So it would make sense that we'd want to replace fear with something else that will benefit us more. These virtues can be found for every social problem, including overcoming anxiety.

There are spiritual principles, or what some call human values, by which solutions can be found for every social problem. Any well-intentioned group can, in a general sense, devise practical solutions to its problems, but good intentions and practical knowledge are usually not enough. The essential merit of spiritual principle is that it not only presents a perspective which harmonizes with the inherent nobility in human nature, it also induces an attitude, a dynamic, a will, an aspiration, which facilitate the discovery and implementation of practical measures. (Baha'i International Community, 1992 Mar 05, *Earth Charter Rio De Janeiro Declaration Oneness of*)

Focus on the virtues you're developing (or the ones that will help you through). Tenacity, courage, faith and noble exertions are some that help alleviate anxiety and stress:

I wish to reaffirm my deep sense of gratitude and admiration for the splendid manner in which the English believers are discharging their duties and responsibilities in these days of increasing peril, anxiety and stress. Their tenacity, courage, faith and noble exertions will as a magnet attract the undoubted and promised blessing of Bahá'u'lláh. (Shoghi Effendi, *The Unfolding Destiny of the British Baha'i Community*, p. 137)

Often when I'm feeling afraid, I will ask God to take the fear off my shoulders, and transmute it into peacefulness or courage or assertiveness or faith and trust – depending on the situation. That way I'm letting go of the stress, and using it for my growth and development.

Consultation:

One of the practices in Ruhi Book One is to study a prayer with someone. Consulting on the meanings together will develop our capacity to meditate and ponder more deeply on the meanings in the prayers.

Consultation allows an open examination of fears and misconceptions, the gathering and presentation of facts, the identification of relevant spiritual principles, and a collective exploration of ways to implement those principles so that unity is preserved and enhanced. (Bahá'í International Community, 1991 Nov 16, Report Rural Poverty Alleviation Efforts)

Courage:

I find it interesting that courage doesn't merit a chapter on its own, since conventional wisdom would suggest that courage is what is needed to overcome fear. Given that there are so many other clues in the Writings about what to do, courage only gets a passing nod here!

Whatever decreaseth fear increaseth courage. (Bahá'u'llah, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 32)

The most surprising quote on courage for me is this one:

The source of courage and power is the promotion of the Word of God, and steadfastness in His Love. (Bahá'u'llah, Tablets of Bahá'u'llah, p. 155)

This suggests to me that if we want to find courage, we need to learn to teach the Faith and find courage there.

Detachment

Let go of worry and let God take care of it.

Tear asunder, O my God, the veil of vain imaginings that hath obscured the vision of Thy people, that all may haste towards Thee, may tread the path of Thy pleasure, and walk in the ways of Thy Faith. We are, O my God, Thy servants and Thy bondsmen. Thou art sufficient unto us so that we can dispense with the world and all that is therein. We are wholly satisfied with all that hath befallen us in Thy path. (Bahá'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'llah, p. 101)

Try to imagine holding up a glass with some water in it. At first it seems simple enough, but the longer you hold it, the heavier it feels. If you hold it all day, you're likely to have your arm go numb and be unable to feel it anymore. Life's anxieties are exactly like that. At first they nibble away at you but it seems manageable. The more you think about them, they begin to interfere with your life, and the more entrenched they become, the harder it will be to stop the hamster wheel and let go of the worry. That's why it's so important to

give the stressors to God every day before going to sleep, so you can sleep well and wake up every day refreshed and ready to take on any challenge that comes your way.

How do you do that? Some people have a real or symbolic “worry tree” where they hang their problems before entering their house each day.

When I have a problem that has to be solved, I say the prayer for solving problems. This prayer was revealed by Bahá'u'lláh in Arabic for Jinab-i-Samandar (Shaykh Kazim Samandar), the father of the Hand of the Cause of God Tarazu'llah Samandari, to assist him in making a difficult decision. In regard to his affairs, let him repeat nineteen times:

O my God! Thou seest me detached from everything save Thee, clinging to Thee, to guide me in my doings in that which benefits me for the Glory of Thy Cause and the Loftiness of the state of Thy servants.

Let him then reflect upon the matter and undertake whatever cometh to mind. This vehement opposition ... will indeed give way to supreme prosperity.

I also like to use the 5 Steps of Prayer for Solving Problems:

The below five steps were suggested by the beloved Guardian Shoghi Effendi to a believer as a means of finding a solution through the use of prayer. This statement belongs to the category of statements known as “pilgrims notes”, and as such has no authority, but since it seems to be particularly helpful and clear it was felt that believers should not be deprived of it.

1st Step: Pray and meditate about it. Use the prayers of the Manifestations as they have the greatest power. Then remain in the silence of contemplation for a few minutes.

2nd Step: Arrive at a decision and hold this. This decision is usually born during the contemplation. It may seem almost impossible of accomplishment but if it seems to be as answer to a prayer or a way of solving the problem, then immediately take the next step.

3rd Step: Have determination to carry the decision through. Many fail here. The decision, budding into determination, is blighted and instead becomes a wish or a vague longing. When determination is born, immediately take the next step.

4th Step: Have faith and confidence that the power will flow through you, the right way will appear, the door will open, the right thought, the right message, the right principle, or the right book will be given to you. Have confidence and the right thing will come to your need. Then, as you rise from prayer, take at once the 5th step.

5th Step: Act as though it had all been answered. Then act with tireless, ceaseless energy. And as you act, you, yourself, will become a magnet, which will attract more power to your being, until you become an unobstructed channel for the Divine power to flow through you.

Many pray but do not remain for the last half of the first step. Some who meditate arrive at a decision, but fail to hold it. Few have the determination to carry the decision through, still fewer have the confidence that the right thing will come to

their need. But how many remember to act as though it had all been answered? How true are these words "Greater than the prayer is the spirit in which it is uttered" and greater than the way it is uttered is the spirit in which it is carried out. (Shoghi Effendi, Principles of Bahá'í Administration, p. 91)

Also, if I have a problem that still troubles me, I:

- Ask God to transmute it into peacefulness and acceptance
- Pray for detachment and God's will
- Forgive the person

Gratitude

If you aren't grateful for the things God has blessed you with in the past, why would He want to send you any more? We need to thank God for everything, including our tests and troubles:

As to the calamities and afflictions of Abdul-Bahá: These are not calamities, but bounties; they are not afflictions, but gifts; not hardships, but tranquillity; not trouble, but mercy -- and we thank God for this great favor. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablets of Abdu'l-Bahá v1, p. 128)

In short, thou shouldst thank God a hundred-thousand times for having been confirmed and strengthened in obtaining such a great gift [servitude]! Know thou the value thereof and consider that its price is highly appraised. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablets of Abdu'l-Bahá v3, p. 510)

Happiness and Joy

Happiness and joy don't come to us by choice. They require a decision:

I WILL be a happy and joyful being. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Baha'i Prayers, p. 150)

Try saying that out loud, right now, placing emphasis on the word "will" and see if it doesn't make you smile!

There's no point in waiting for some other time in the future to be happy when we can change our thinking to let happiness in today:

If we are not happy and joyous at this season, for what other season shall we wait and for what other time shall we look? (Abdu'l-Bahá, Baha'i World Faith, p. 351)

The Bahá'í Writings seem to suggest that happiness and inner tranquility ultimately hinge on our ability to see purpose and meaning in every moment, even in the midst of agonizing suffering. Again action is needed. We need to choose to rise above our suffering in order to find happiness.

Seek ye divine happiness through the hardships and sorrows of this physical world, and behold spiritual well-being in the struggles of this fleeting existence. Distill sugar and honey from the bitter poison of suffering. Recognize the caress of divine favor in the arrows of misfortune. Consider the lowest degree of humiliation in the path of the

Blessed Perfection as the highest station of Glory. Know descent to be identical with ascent, and consider death itself the essence of life. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Baha'i Scriptures, p. 439)

In the Valley of Wonderment, Bahá'u'lláh wrote of those that have rid themselves of earthly attachments:

At every moment he beholdeth a wondrous world, a new creation, and goeth from astonishment to astonishment, and is lost in awe at the works of the Lord of Oneness. (Baha'u'llah, Seven Valleys, p. 32)

Wouldn't you love to get to a place where every day you could say:

O Lord, increase my astonishment at Thee! (Baha'u'llah, The Seven Valleys, p. 33)

Mindfulness and Living in the Moment:

Many of those who've experienced extreme trauma, are stuck in the past. We can't get past the terror, horror, betrayal, rejection, bitterness and many other veils that distance us from God.

But God can't do anything to help as long as we're living in the past.

He urges you to grasp firmly the teachings of our Faith, the love of your family and many Bahá'í friends, to put the past behind entirely, realizing that it can do you no more harm; on the contrary, through changing you and making you spiritually aware, this very past can be a means of enriching your life in the future! (Shoghi Effendi, *Unfolding Destiny*, pp. 449-450)

He wants us to come into the present:

Pleasant is the realm of being, wert thou to attain thereto . . . Shouldst thou attain this station, thou wouldst be freed from destruction and death, from toil and sin. (Baha'u'llah, *The Persian Hidden Words* 70)

And focus on the future. His teachings are all directing us to a future which encompasses the Most Great Peace (which will benefit us as well as society at large):

Do not allow your minds to dwell on the present, but with eyes of faith look into the future, for in truth the Spirit of God is working in your midst. (Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 169)

Each day has enough trouble on its own, so you don't need to borrow trouble from tomorrow. When you think that God's not able to look after you, have a look at what He did for you yesterday and remind yourself that He's with you today and will help you tomorrow too, since they're all the same.

The past, the present, the future, all, in relation to God, are equal. Yesterday, today, tomorrow do not exist in the sun. (Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 116)

Once his effort is directed in the proper channel, if he does not succeed today, he will succeed tomorrow. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Star of the West*, Vol. 8, No. 1, p. 21)

'Abdu'l-Bahá shows us how easy it is to live in the moment, in the spiritual world:

Let us turn our hearts away from the world of matter and live in the spiritual world! It alone can give us freedom! If we are hemmed in by difficulties we have only to call upon God, and by His great Mercy we shall be helped. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 110)

Let us live in the spiritual realm . . . who wouldn't want that? No bills, unconditional love, rest, relaxation . . .

Is it possible to have those things in this world? It must be, or 'Abdul-Bahá wouldn't be suggesting we do it. I think this quote is talking about living in the present moment. For most of us, this present moment, right now, as I'm writing this and you're reading it, we are safe. We are free from abuse and bills, and in this moment, if we take the time to turn to the spiritual world, we can feel the love that's there for us, and get the rest and relaxation we need. We can all go there, right now, because right now, in this very minute, everything is totally OK. And all we have is this minute we're living in.

Perhaps our lives in the past were not what we wanted them to be; and we know that our life in the future will be rife with tests, but just now, in this moment, if we turn to the spiritual realm, everything is fine.

Peacefulness:

God wants us to be at peace. It's the reason Bahá'u'lláh suffered so much:

His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh endured ordeals and hardships sixty years . . . He willingly endured these difficulties . . . [that] peace and tranquility be realized by all. (Abdu'l-Baha, Baha'i World Faith, p. 230)

He teaches us that we need to know and understand the divine teachings in order to find peace and tranquility. It goes back to immersing ourselves in the Writings!

Praise be to Him, ye are acquainted with the various laws, institutions and principles of the world; today nothing short of these divine teachings can assure peace and tranquility to mankind. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 249)

God knows what has happened to us, and has given us prayers we can say:

Thou knowest all that is in me, O Lord, but I know not what is in Thee. Have mercy then upon me through Thy loving providence and inspire me with that which shall give peace to my heart during Thy days and tranquillity to my soul through the revelations of Thy sacred presence. (Compilations, The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting)

All laud and honor to Thee, O my God! Thou well knowest the things which, for a score of years, have happened in Thy days, and have continued to happen until this hour. No man can reckon, nor can any tongue tell, what hath befallen Thy chosen ones during all this time. They could obtain no shelter, nor find any refuge in which they could abide in safety. Turn, then, O my God, their fear into the evidences of Thy peace and Thy security, and their abasement into the sovereignty of Thy glory, and

their poverty into Thine all-sufficient riches, and their distress into the wonders of Thy perfect tranquillity. Vouchsafe unto them the fragrances of Thy might and Thy mercy, and send down upon them, out of Thy marvelous loving-kindness, what will enable them to dispense with all except Thee, and will detach them from aught save Thyself, that the sovereignty of Thy oneness may be revealed and the supremacy of Thy grace and Thy bounty demonstrated. (Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations by Baha'u'llah, p. 335)

Trust and detachment:

Baha'u'llah speaks directly to those of us with a fearful heart:

Say to them that are of a fearful heart: be strong, fear not, behold your God . . . Well is it with him who hath been illumined with the light of trust and detachment. (Baha'u'llah, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 146)

Spiritual Radiance

Spiritual radiance lights our path so we can get rid of the dark cloud caused by our anxiety:

If material anxiety envelops you in a dark cloud, spiritual radiance lightens your path. If your days on earth are numbered, you know that everlasting life awaits you. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 111)

Letting your light shine can have a very powerful effect on the world:

Let your light shine before the eyes of men. Such must be the purity of your character and the degree of your renunciation, that the people of the earth may through you recognize and be drawn closer to the heavenly Father who is the Source of purity and grace. (Shoghi Effendi, The Dawn-Breakers, p. 92)

It can be as simple as starting with a smile. Look at the effect one small gesture can have:

A bright and happy face cheers people on their way. If you are sad, and pass a child who is laughing, the child, seeing your sad face, will cease to laugh, not knowing why. If the day be dark, how much a gleam of sunshine is prized; so let believers wear smiling happy faces, gleaming like sunshine in the darkness. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Abdu'l-Bahá in London, p. 124-125)

Overcoming Fear through Love

We know from the Writings that love casts out fear:

Love is a light that never dwelleth in a heart possessed by fear. (Baha'u'llah, The Four Valleys, p. 58)

When referring to the Báb, he mentioned that "love had cast out fear" (Dr. J.E. Esslemont, Baha'u'llah and the New Era, p. 22)

We spoke earlier about the importance of faith, but did you know that:

The first sign of faith is love. (Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 337)

I found this quote extraordinary, particularly since God seems to have systematically removed everyone who might love me from my life. I lost my parents and siblings to estrangement caused by speaking out about my childhood abuse; my spouse to divorce caused by my inability to deal with my issues and his at the same time; potential mates due to excess childhood baggage on both sides; and my son who got too busy with his life to include me in it. With each loss, I've had nowhere to turn but to God's love. It's been the only constant, dependable, reliable and free source of love in my life. (Of course, my cats come pretty close but their love is not "free" in the sense that they're expensive to maintain; and they die all too soon!)

Through this process, I realize I have no idea what it means to love. My parent's love for me was violent and abusive; my husband's love for me was conditional on my looking after him; potential spouse's love for me was conditional on providing sex outside marriage; and my son's love for me changed as he got older and didn't need me any longer. My heart has been broken so many times, it was pretty closed off to both giving and receiving love. After the last potential husband left me, I described my heart to someone as hidden by a brick wall. As soon as I said these words, I realized I didn't want to spend the rest of my life stuck there, especially as a Bahá'í, whose job is to love all the world and try to serve it!

The wonderful part of this story is that all these losses helped me to achieve my life's purpose, which is to know and love God because I had to teach myself how to love from scratch.

Why is God's Love so Important?

The Bahá'í Writings tell us that through this love we receive eternal life and become the living image of God:

Through this love [that flows from God to man] man is endowed with physical existence, until, through the breath of the Holy Spirit -- this same love -- he receives eternal life and becomes the image of the Living God. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 179)

And perhaps more importantly, it's the origin of all the love in the world!

This love [that flows from God to man] is the origin of all the love in the world of creation. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 179)

If I wanted to learn to love others, I first had to learn to love God.

Love also gives healing to the sick, provides a balm to the wounded, and joy and consolation to the whole world. I was certainly in need of all of these!

There is nothing greater or more blessed than the Love of God! It gives healing to the sick, balm to the wounded, joy and consolation to the whole world, and through it alone can man attain Life Everlasting. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 82)

Why Does God Love Us?

John Ortberg, in his book "Love Beyond Reason", (p. 179-180) says that:

There is in every human heart an inextinguishable desire to be someone's prince, someone's princess. We want to be beloved . . . This cry of our heart to be loved is only the faint echo of God's desire to love us. Before you were ever born, you were beloved in the mind of God. This is the deepest secret to your identity.

The Bahá'í Writings tell us that God created us in His image because He loves us:

Veiled in My immemorial being and in the ancient eternity of My essence, I knew My love for thee; therefore I created thee, have engraved on thee Mine image and revealed to thee My beauty. (Bahá'u'lláh, Arabic Hidden Words 3)

He created us noble.

Noble I made thee . . . (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words 13)

He created us with a mine rich in gems of inestimable value.

Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. (Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 260).

This is the truth. Everything else we believe about ourselves is a lie.

John Ortberg continues:

God's love cannot be earned or won, only gratefully embraced. Nothing you will ever do could make God love you more than he does right now: not greater achievement, not greater beauty, not wider recognition, not even greater levels of spirituality and obedience . . . Nothing you have ever done could make God love you any less; not any sin, not any failure, not any guilt, nor any regret. The irony is we spend our lives trying to earn the love that we can only receive when we admit our poverty of spirit . . . To learn to live in the love of God is the challenge of a life-time.

Learning to believe in God's love isn't easy!

We can't love God if we don't love ourselves. When we're in this prison, we're suffering from a breakdown in relationships, leading to separation and estrangement between us and God.

God often gets our attention by calling to us saying:

O Beloved of God!

When I meditated on this I found myself asking these questions:

- If I am the beloved of God what more do I need to achieve or prove or acquire?
- If I am the beloved of God, who else do I need to impress? What other ladder do I need to climb?
- If I am the beloved of God, what am I going to add to my resume that is going to top that?

John Ortberg suggests:

What if you were to make your life an experiment of living in the love of God? Every morning, when you wake up, let your first words be "I am the beloved." Each night, when you go to sleep, let your last words echo, "I am the beloved." (John Ortberg, *Love Beyond Reason*, p. 182-183)

In case it's hard (if not impossible) to get your head around God's love for you, Bahá'u'lláh tells us how much we are loved:

Thy name is often mentioned in the presence of this Wronged One and the glances of Our loving-kindness and compassion are directed towards thee. (Baha'u'llah, *Tablets of Baha'u'llah*, p. 174)

He knows us; He sees our efforts; and He loves us unconditionally:

Rejoice thou with great joy that We have remembered thee both now and in the past. Indeed the sweet savours of this remembrance shall endure and shall not change throughout the eternity of the Names of God, the Lord of mankind. We have graciously accepted thy devotions, thy praise, thy teaching work and the services thou hast rendered for the sake of this mighty Announcement. We have also hearkened unto that which thy tongue hath uttered at the meetings and gatherings. Verily thy Lord heareth and observeth all things. (Baha'u'llah, *Tablets of Baha'u'llah*, p. 245)

God has given us 'Abdul-Bahá, who loves each one of us too, and is continually praying for us. He tells us:

At all times do I speak of you and call you to mind. I pray unto the Lord, and with tears I implore Him to rain down all these blessings upon you, and gladden your hearts, and make blissful your souls, and grant you exceeding joy and heavenly delights.... (Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 37)
Verily I love thee with all my heart and pray for thee every eve and morn (Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of Abdu'l-Bahá v1*, p. 112)

O maid-servant of God! Verily, I have not forgotten thee and will not forget thee. Trust thou in the love of Abdul-Bahá, for verily, nothing equals it. (Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of Abdu'l-Bahá v1*, p. 201)

It seems to me that 'Abdu'l-Bahá is showing us how to put into practice, this teaching of Bahá'u'lláh:

Love Me, that I may love thee. If thou lovest Me not, My love can in no wise reach thee. (Baha'u'llah, Hidden Words, Arabic 5)

Because I see evidence for 'Abdu'l-Bahá's love for me in these quotes, I want to love Him and turn to Him as my hero and role model.

And if you still need more earthly evidence of His love for us, just read any of the messages from the Universal House of Justice or even your National Spiritual Assembly, who always address us with great tenderness.

And if we find ourselves in need of potent prayers from the Universal House of Justice, all we have to do is write and ask them! We can write to the House at secretariat@bwc.org and we can also address our prayer requests to the secretary of our NSA.

When we allow ourselves to be infected with the love of God, we will have a significant effect on the progress of the whole world. Shoghi Effendi used the image of leaven as a picture of contagion. Leaven is what happens when you add yeast to bread dough – it causes it to ferment and expand. In the spiritual realm, leaven produces an altering or transforming influence. God's love for us has given us the ability to leaven the world, if only we are patient enough to recognize that the process is happening, unseen and unobserved.

Even though outwardly the number of the friends has not been increasing so rapidly, yet the spirit has not remained idle. The leaven of spirituality has been working, and when the time will come it will manifest itself in a sudden awakening. All that we need is a little more courage, perseverance and patience. There are many important men that are attentively watching the progress of the Faith but are reluctant to come forward and extend a helping hand. In time they will, and then we shall see the Cause of God spread by leaps and bounds. (Shoghi Effendi, *The Unfolding Destiny of the British Baha'i Community*, p. 430)

In a world the structure of whose political and social institutions is impaired, whose vision is befogged, whose conscience is bewildered, whose religious systems have become anemic and lost their virtue, this healing Agency, this leavening Power, this cementing Force, intensely alive and all-pervasive, has been taking shape, is crystallizing into institutions, is mobilizing its forces, and is preparing for the spiritual conquest and the complete redemption of mankind. Though the society which incarnates its ideals be small, and its direct and tangible benefits as yet inconsiderable, yet the potentialities with which it has been endowed, and through which it is destined to regenerate the individual and rebuild a broken world, are incalculable. (Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha'u'llah*, p. 195)

We have been Chosen by God

We have all known the pain of being on the outside, of not being wanted when they chose up teams, of being spurned by someone we love, or forgotten by someone we thought was a friend, or being held at arm's length by someone in our family, maybe even our spouse. Now God tells us that He had chosen us! We are wanted by God, if by no one else! God claims us as part of His family.

For I say unto you that He has chosen you to be His messengers of love throughout the world, to be His bearers of spiritual gifts to man, to be the means of spreading unity and concord on the earth. Thank God with all your hearts that such a privilege has been given unto you. For a life devoted to praise is not too long in which to thank God for such a favour. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 68)

From amongst all mankind hath He chosen you, and your eyes have been opened to the light of guidance and your ears attuned to the music of the Company above; and blessed by abounding grace, your hearts and souls have been born into new life. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 35)

O ye who are set aglow with the fire of God's Love! Blessed are ye for having been chosen by God for His love, in this new age, and joy be to you for having been guided to the Great Kingdom! Verily, your Lord hath chosen you to show the path to the Kingdom of God, among the people. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablets of Abdu'l-Bahá v1, p. 83)

This is a healing balm to those of us who have been abused or abandoned by others! Many of us were told that we were "chosen" for the abuse, or we came to believe that there was something on our foreheads that singled us out for victimhood. So the concept of being "chosen" doesn't have positive connotations.

Then in school, many of us longed to "fit in"; to be "chosen" for friends; for people to play with at recess; to be picked for sports teams, and when we weren't, we felt worthless and abandoned.

How great an honour it is, to know that we've been chosen by God! That He loves us and has plans for us. This is such an important part of our healing!

How I learned to love:

So how did I learn how to love? It started with this quote:

Love Me, that I may love thee. If thou lovest Me not, My love can in no wise reach thee. (Baha'u'llah, Hidden Words, Arabic 5)

This seemed like pretty good advice, not only in terms of my relationship to God but to other people too. I started to experiment with it by saying and doing loving things for people and watching their hearts soften towards me.

Then I had to look at the link between love and faith, as I worked through these questions. Maybe you can relate to some of them:

- How do we know that God is even there so we can love him, if we are sick, alone, estranged from our family, bankrupt, homeless and we've just been raped? Faith.
- How can we possibly believe in a loving God if we haven't ever felt loved from our families; if we've grown up neglected and abused and have no foundation or training from loving parents? Faith.
- What if all of these calamities have happened AFTER we've recognized Bahá'u'lláh and done all the right things – pioneered, participated in the core activities, donated to the fund, paid our Huqúq, prayed and mediated every day and we are still

marginalized from the society around us, and even worse, from the indifference of the Bahá'í community around us – raped, alone, abandoned, homeless, unemployed, bankrupt, sick, estranged from our families . . . ? Faith.

- How do we have faith when there is no love? When we feel abandoned by God, or worse, maybe cursed or punished? But for what crime? Faith.

These are questions many of us have asked at one time or another.

How do we start building faith from a place where we don't feel loved?

There are no quick and easy answers to this question! I had to take myself back to the fundamental reason I became a Bahá'í – I believed that Bahá'u'lláh was who He claimed to be, and that He had the blueprint for humanity to get itself out of the mess it's in, therefore I could probably find the answers in the Writings. Sure enough, I did!

It was amazing how by studying the Writings morning and night, I was led to answers to questions I didn't even know I was grappling with! I wish I could distil what I've learned into an easy to follow recipe, but how can you see the ocean in a drop?

Everything I've written on my blog at www.susangammage.com/blog; or in my first book "Violence and Abuse: Reasons and Remedies" and here in this book is an attempt to share what I've learned. Finding the answer is like trying to put together a puzzle without being able to look at the picture on the box!

One of the first teachings I had to understand was that God loved me and promised never to forsake me. I didn't know what this meant, but I knew I could trust it:

Whatever hath befallen you, hath been for the sake of God. This is the truth, and in this there is no doubt. You should, therefore, leave all your affairs in His Hands, place your trust in Him, and rely upon Him. He will assuredly not forsake you. In this, likewise, there is no doubt. (Bahá'u'lláh, Fire and Light, p. 10)

Then I needed to learn that I was trapped in the prison of self. I'd put myself there, and God was willing to show me where to find the key and the keyhole, so that I could set myself free.

It helped to learn that even the Manifestation of God grappled with questions such as these, as he poured out his heart to God:

Hast Thou decreed for me, O my God, any joy after this tribulation, or any relief to succeed this affliction, or any ease to follow this trouble? (Baha'u'llah: Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, Pages: 7-8)

It also helped me to understand that even the Manifestations of God, who had access to God's love on a continual basis, also sometimes got tired and cried out in despair:

We must not only be patient with others, infinitely patient!, but also with our own poor selves, remembering that even the Prophets of God sometimes got tired and cried out in despair! (Shoghi Effendi, The Unfolding Destiny of the British Baha'i Community, p. 456)

The following prayer gave me some hope that my present feelings might not persist:

My God, my Adored One, my King, my Desire! What tongue can voice my thanks to Thee? I was heedless, Thou didst awaken me. I had turned back from Thee, Thou didst graciously aid me to turn towards Thee. I was as one dead, Thou didst quicken me with the water of life. I was withered, Thou didst revive me. (Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations, p. 264)

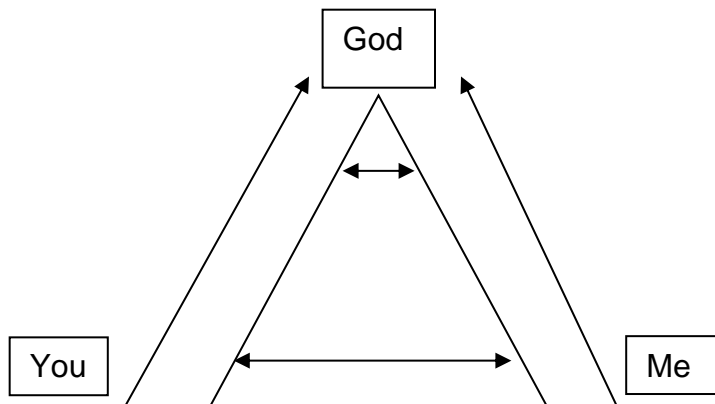
Shoghi Effendi's warning helped too! Being a perfectionist, I didn't want to be one of those Bahá'ís who failed their tests! In this quote I learned something about the Covenant and what happens when we don't do our part:

Life is a constant struggle, not only against forces around us, but above all against our own "ego". We can never afford to rest on our oars, for if we do, we soon see ourselves carried down stream again. Many of those who drift from the Cause do so for the reason that they had ceased to go on developing. They become complacent, or indifferent, and consequently cease to draw the spiritual strength and vitality from the Cause which they should have. Sometimes, of course, people fail because of a test they just do not meet, and often our severest tests come from each other. Certainly the believers should try to avert such things, and if they happen, remedy them through love. Generally speaking, nine-tenths of the Friends' troubles are because they don't do the Bahá'í thing, in relation to each other, to the administrative bodies, or in their personal lives. (Shoghi Effendi, Principles of Bahá'í Administration, p. 87-88)

Once I learned how to have a relationship with God and trust His love for me, I had to move on to establish loving relationships with other people as a means of getting rid of my fear.

Relationships with God at the Core:

I found this diagram very helpful in showing that the easiest way to get closer to another person is to get closer to God. Obviously this is easier if both parties believe in God and are willing to move towards Him! As the diagram below shows, the relationship would be closer than if neither partner was moving closer to God, but not nearly as close as it could be.



In any case, it's not my job to get you to go closer to God; it's my job to focus all my attention on developing my relationship to God, and trusting that you will too.

Each of us is responsible for one life only, and that is our own. Each of us is immeasurably far from being 'perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect' and the task of perfecting our own life and character is one that requires all our attention, our will-power and energy. (Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 92)

If we allow our attention and energy to be taken up in efforts to keep others right and remedy their faults, we are wasting precious time. We are like ploughmen each of whom has his team to manage and his plough to direct, and in order to keep his furrow straight he must keep his eye on his goal and concentrate on his own task. If he looks to this side and that to see how Tom and Harry are getting on and to criticize their ploughing, then his own furrow will assuredly become crooked. (Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 92)

Having said that, without God in the equation, none of our relationships can be as strong as they could be; and in fact the glue that holds them together is not strong enough to hold.

But the love which sometimes exists between friends is not (true) love, because it is subject to transmutation; this is merely fascination. As the breeze blows, the slender trees yield. If the wind is in the East the tree leans to the West, and if the wind turns to the West the tree leans to the East. This kind of love is originated by the accidental conditions of life. This is not love, it is merely acquaintanceship; it is subject to change. Today you will see two souls apparently in close friendship; tomorrow all this may be changed. Yesterday they were ready to die for one another, today they shun one another's society! This is not love; it is the yielding of the hearts to the accidents of life. When that which has caused this "love" to exist passes, the love passes also; this is not in reality love. ('Abdu'l-Bahá: *Paris Talks*, pp. 179-181)

In her diary, Juliet Thompson quotes 'Abdu'l-Bahá as using this analogy:

Now associate with good people. You must try to associate with those who will do you good and who will be the cause of your being more awakened, and not with those who will make you negligent of God. For example, if one goes into a garden and associates with flowers, one will surely inhale the beautiful fragrance, but if one goes to a place where there are bad-scented plants, it is sure he will inhale an unpleasant odour. In short, I mean that you will try to be with those who are purified and sanctified souls. Man must always associate with those from whom he can get light, or be with those to whom he can give light. He must either receive or give instructions. Otherwise, being with people without these two intentions, he is spending his time for nothing, and, by so doing, he is neither gaining nor causing others to gain. (*The Diary of Juliet Thompson*)

'Abdu'l-Bahá further tells us the difference between associating with those who have God in their hearts:

True friends are even as skilled physicians, and the Teachings of God are as healing balm, a medicine for the conscience of man. They clear the head, so that a man can breathe them in and delight in their sweet fragrance. They waken those who sleep. They bring awareness to the unheeding, and a portion to the outcast, and to the hopeless, hope. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 23)

He further tells us:

When any souls grow to be true believers, they will attain a spiritual relationship with one another, and show forth a tenderness which is not of this world. They will, all of them, become elated from a draught of divine love, and that union of theirs, that connection, will also abide forever. Souls, that is, who will consign their own selves to oblivion, strip from themselves the defects of humankind, and unchain themselves from human bondage, will beyond any doubt be illumined with the heavenly splendours of oneness, and will all attain unto real union in the world that dieth not. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 84-85)

Without the love of God in our hearts, we will never be able to attain the standard the Faith sets before us for turning strangers into friends:

One of the teachings is that love and faithfulness must so prevail in the hearts that men may see the stranger as a friend, the sinner as an intimate fellow, may count enemies as allies, regard foes as loving comrades, call their executioner the giver of life, and consider the denier as a believer and the unbeliever as a faithful one -- that is, men must behave in such a manner as may befit the believers, the faithful, the friend and the confidant. If this lamp may shine in a befitting manner in the assemblage of the world you will find that the regions will become fragrant and the world will become a delectable paradise, the surface of the earth will become an excellent garden, the world will become as one home, the different nations will become as one kind, and the peoples and nationalities of the East and West will become as one household. I hope such a day will come and such lights may dawn and such a Countenance may appear in the utmost beauty. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Baha'i Scriptures, p. 479)

Spiritual relationships endure through all the worlds of God:

Bodily relationships may pass; even two sisters may be inimical to each other, but the spiritual relationship is eternal, and brings about mutual love and service. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 'Abdu'l-Bahá in London, p. 75)

Marriage should lead to a profound friendship of spirit, which will endure in the next world, where there is no sex, and no giving and taking in marriage; just the way we should establish with our parents, our children, our brothers and sisters and friends deep spiritual bond which will be ever-lasting, and not merely physical bonds of human relationship. (Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 206)

As we know from the short obligatory prayer, the purpose of every soul in this world is to know and worship God:

I bear witness, O my God, that Thou hast created me to know Thee and to worship Thee. (Baha'u'llah, Baha'i Prayers, p. 3)

When we say this prayer every day, and strive to implement it in our own lives, we can't help but draw closer to God.

We also know that even after death, all souls continue to progress towards God.

And now concerning thy question regarding the soul of man and its survival after death. Know thou of a truth that the soul, after its separation from the body, will continue to progress until it attaineth the presence of God, in a state and condition which neither the revolution of ages and centuries, nor the changes and chances of this world, can alter. It will endure as long as the Kingdom of God, His sovereignty, His dominion and power will endure. It will manifest the signs of God and His attributes, and will reveal His loving kindness and bounty. (Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 155-156)

Obviously there are many paths to God, and it's even been said that "there are not atheists in foxholes", meaning that when the tests get most severe, even an atheist will reach out to God. God doesn't distinguish between Bahá'í or non-Bahá'í. Even when relationships are strained in this world, there is hope for closeness in the next world:

Are not all the people in that world the creatures of God? Therefore, in that world also they can make progress. As here they can receive light by their supplications, there also they can plead for forgiveness and receive light through entreaties and supplications. Thus as souls in this world, through the help of the supplications, the entreaties and the prayers of the holy ones, can acquire development, so is it the same after death. Through their own prayers and supplications they can also progress, more especially when they are the object of the intercession of the Holy Manifestations. (Adib Taherzadeh, The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 17)

Those of us who are Bahá'í know that spiritual relationships are stronger than blood relationships:

The friends should ... draw closer to each other, knowing that they form one spiritual family, closer to each other, in the sight of God, than those united by ties of blood. (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 8 May, 1948).

This doesn't mean that we won't see our non-Bahá'í loved ones in the next world. Far from it, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us:

A love that one may have entertained for any one will not be forgotten in the world of the Kingdom. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá v1, p. 205-206)

When family members are focused on God, there is more likely to be unity in a family, which will have a positive effect on the whole family:

Note ye how easily, where unity existeth in a given family, the affairs of that family are conducted; what progress the members of that family make, how they prosper in the world. Their concerns are in order, they enjoy comfort and tranquility, they are secure, their position is assured, they come to be envied by all. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 278)

On a practical level, Baha'u'llah gives us some guidance on how we can do this:

If any differences arise amongst you, behold Me standing before your face, and overlook the faults of one another for My name's sake and as a token of your love for My manifest and resplendent Cause. (Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 315)

Forming friendships with those who think they can do it without God are to be avoided as a protection to ourselves:

Expect not that they who violate the ordinances of God will be trustworthy or sincere in the faith they profess. Avoid them, and preserve strict guard over thyself, lest their devices and mischief hurt thee. Turn away from them, and fix thy gaze upon God, thy Lord, the All-Glorious, the Most Bountiful. He that giveth up himself wholly to God, God shall, assuredly, be with him; and he that placeth his complete trust in God, God shall, verily, protect him from whatsoever may harm him, and shield him from the wickedness of every evil plotter."

(Baha'u'llah, The Summons of the Lord of Hosts, p. 210)

A good test you can use is to ask yourself: after I have contact with this person, is my faith strengthened or weakened? Is my commitment to the laws of God strengthened or weakened?

Then act accordingly.

When we take Baha'u'llah's injunctions seriously and to seek the company of the righteous, we will draw closer to God; have more unified relationships; and ensure happiness in all the worlds of God. I think that's a good reason to put God at the core of all of our relationships. What do you think?

Building Friendships:

With regards to building friendships, I came across this quote and decided I had to put it into practice:

In fact, every one of the believers should choose one person every year and try to establish ties of friendship with him, so that all his fear would disappear. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, in *The Individual and Teaching: Raising the Divine Call*, p. 12)

I always pay attention to Writings that claim to be "a secret". What child doesn't love secrets? I'm certainly no exception! If God wants to tell me a secret, that's pretty exciting!

Know thou of a certainty that Love is the secret of God's holy Dispensation (Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 27)

I wondered what it meant that "love was the secret"? I decided to test it out in a variety of settings. What would happen if I responded with love to someone's anger? What if, when someone speaks unkindly to me, I try responding by asking:

- Are you ok?
- Are you having a difficult day?

It's amazing to watch their jaws drop and their face soften!

I put this approach to the test one day when I went to my local Postal Office. The lady serving me was extremely rude. Rather than responding in anger, I decided to try the loving approach. I went to the bakery across the street, bought a large chocolate cookie,

returned to the Post Office, gave it to her, and wished her a great day. Ever since, she has been very nice to me.

Some cynics might call this manipulative and perhaps it was, but at the time, my intentions were pure. I was trying to put into practice what I was learning, with no expectation of results. I think that's the key. We have to be loving without expecting a reward.

The guiding motive of the true Bábí must be pure love, without hope of reward or fear of punishment. (The Báb, Baha'u'llah and the New Era, p. 21)

While finding ways to be loving is its own reward, it's also fun to see an immediate, tangible reward as a friend of mine discovered on a recent trip to Germany. Here is the story in her own words:

It was Sunday morning, and I stayed with my Persian friends. The wife encouraged me to have a walk along the river Rheine, which can be seen from their window on the third floor. The sun just came out this Sunday and the view was breath taking from the City of Mainz an old Bishop city with the Hugh DOM and many churches. So I went along the beautiful river Rheine past the side where opposite the river Main joins the river Rhein. Many people were out for running, walking and just enjoying the rare sun shine in Germany.

I said some prayers and decided to wish every single person a "Good Morning". People responded happily. Nearly towards the end of my 2 hour walk a lady came walking rather fast with a little dog. When I said "Good morning" she immediately stopped, looked at me and said, do we know each other? So I responded: I do not know, but may be? She looked for a few seconds very intensively at me and then with a scream she said BARBARA! I looked at her as well, but didn't recognize her until she mentioned my name. At this moment I knew who she was. She said since 10 years she has been looking for me, but all the friends she asked did not know where I was. We both lived in another city in earlier years and now we have met after 28 years again. It was 20 Years this September that I left Germany for Haifa. She lives now with her husband one block from my Baha'i friends. So we had a lot to catch up with. It only happened because I have decided to wish every single person a "good morning." She was also the only one who asked me whether we know each other.

Recently I came across a letter I'd saved (I've moved so often it's amazing to me that I kept it!). It was written from someone I shared a locker with in grades 7-9 (we were 12-14). I went looking for her on the internet and found her at a site called classmates.com. I sent her a message, but to get a message back I had to pay (and I'm too cheap); and she didn't pay either - but somehow she got my name and started looking on the internet for me! She found my blog, learned where I lived and found my phone number (our phone company has the phone book online)! So she called me up and we caught up (she even knew how to say Baha'i correctly! She wants to hire me as a life coach!). So miracles abound when we act with love - and as I am reminded so often (from the quote in Ruhi book 1) - God's bounties are constantly showering down on us and it's our job to catch them.

The whole duty of man in this Day is to attain that share of the flood of grace which God poureth forth for him. (Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 8)

A Love Letter from God

God's love for us is immense! The more we immerse ourselves in the Ocean of God's Words, the more we begin to realize how serious He is about His love for us. And we need to feel it; to fill our souls up with it, if we are to have the energy or ability to teach or to serve His Cause.

To that end, I've combined short quotes into a Love Letter from God, to remind me of His love for me. As you read it, imagine it's written just for you (as indeed it was!).

O thou (insert your name), beloved of my heart! [\[1\]](#)

I knew My love for thee; therefore I created thee, have engraved on thee Mine image and revealed to thee My beauty. [\[2\]](#)

O thou (insert your name), beloved of my heart!

My claim on thee is great, it cannot be forgotten. My grace to thee is plenteous, it cannot be veiled. My love has made in thee its home, it cannot be concealed. My light is manifest to thee, it cannot be obscured. [\[3\]](#)

O thou (insert your name), beloved of my heart!

Rejoice thou with great joy that We have remembered thee both now and in the past. Indeed the sweet savours of this remembrance shall endure and shall not change throughout the eternity of the Names of God, the Lord of mankind. [\[4\]](#)

O thou (insert your name), beloved of my heart!

Sorrow not if, in these days and on this earthly plane, things contrary to your wishes have been ordained and manifested by God, for days of blissful joy, of heavenly delight, are assuredly in store for you. [\[5\]](#)

O thou (insert your name), beloved of my heart!

I have not forgotten nor will I forget thee. [\[6\]](#) Verily, my soul longs for thee, for the lamp of the love of Baha' is lighted within thy heart and I love to look upon thy face. [\[7\]](#)

O thou (insert your name), beloved of my heart!

I have utmost love for thee and thy family for thou servest me — how can I be offended at you? Be assured and happy. [\[8\]](#)

O thou (insert your name), beloved of my heart!

I love thee with all my heart and pray for thee every eve and morn. [9] I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine. [10] At all times do I speak of you and call you to mind. I pray unto the Lord, and with tears I implore Him to rain down all these blessings upon you, and gladden your hearts, and make blissful your souls, and grant you exceeding joy and heavenly delights. [11]

O thou (insert your name), beloved of my heart!

Thy name is often mentioned in the presence of this Wronged One and the glances of Our loving-kindness and compassion are directed towards thee. [12] The hearts are cheered whenever you are mentioned, the souls are comforted in your love, the holy spirits are captivated by your fragrance, the eyes are expecting to see you and the hearts are longing to meet you. [13] Indeed could ye but know how dear ye are in the presence of your true and heavenly Father, ye would stretch forth your wings and take your flight. [14]

O thou (insert your name), beloved of my heart!

Surely a day will come when all thy desires will be attained and God will answer all that which thou hast prayed for in thine heart, and I beg of Him to make all that which thou hast longed for, long ago, very attainable. Then thine heart will be overflowed with joy on account of such a great bounty. [15]

O thou (insert your name), beloved of my heart!

God has crowned you with honour and in your hearts has He set a radiant star; verily the light thereof shall brighten the whole world! [16]

O thou (insert your name), beloved of my heart!

He has chosen you to be His messengers of love throughout the world, to be His bearers of spiritual gifts to man, to be the means of spreading unity and concord on the earth. Thank God with all your hearts that such a privilege has been given unto you. [17]

O thou (insert your name), beloved of my heart!

We have graciously accepted thy devotions, thy praise, thy teaching work and the services thou hast rendered for the sake of this mighty Announcement. We have also hearkened unto that which thy tongue hath uttered at the meetings and gatherings. Verily thy Lord heareth and observeth all things. [18]

O thou (insert your name), beloved of my heart!

Know thou that, verily, the eye of favors is directed to thee and is beholding thee with a divine glance, so that thou mayest, with clear eyes, see the lights of the Kingdom upon the horizon. Remember, at all times, this great favor and thank thy Lord and supplicate to Him every day. [19]

O thou (insert your name), beloved of my heart!

I hope that, in the path of the love of God, thou wilt exert thyself exceedingly and thy wilt enjoy life. [\[20\]](#)

O thou (insert your name), beloved of my heart!

Now I say unto you, bear this on your hearts and in your minds. Verily your light shall illumine the whole world, your spirituality shall affect the heart of things. You shall in truth become the lighted torches of the globe. Fear not, neither be dismayed, for your light shall penetrate the densest darkness. This is the Promise of God, which I give unto you. Rise! and serve the Power of God! [\[21\]](#)

With Deepest Abiding Love,

God

Your True and Heavenly Father

Overcoming Fear with Forgiveness

One of the keys to overcoming any sin, including fear is to forgive:

- The person who caused the fear
- Yourself for believing the lie and keeping yourself on the hamster wheel
- God for sending you the test

And then we ask God for His forgiveness for blaming Him and others, and for holding on to the fear.

We do this for every single incident we can think of.

It's a simple process but unbelievably powerful, effective and life-changing. I encourage you to try it once and you'll be hooked!

My Story:

For the first 17 years of my life, I was subjected to some of the worst forms of abuse possible, at the hands of my parents. By the standards current today, particularly in the abuse recovery movement, what was done to me was unforgiveable, and yet I forgave!

I came to realize that the abuse perpetrated on me by myself, was far worse than anything my parents had done to me, and I did it every minute of every day for the next 36 years. How? By believing I was unworthy; a worthless piece of s**t; unwanted; unloved; and unlovable.

I believed these lies I told myself about what it meant that my parents could treat me in such an abhorrent manner; as though I was a "thing". I told myself that if they treated me that way, they must not love me, therefore, I must not be loveable. These lies kept me from being able to seek out friendships and a second marriage; kept me from fulfilling my potential in the work-world, because they filled me with self-doubt, self-loathing, self-hatred and self-pity.

In short, I came to realize that I was full of self, which is exactly what the Bahá'í Writings teach us we need to let go of:

If the fire of self overcome you, remember your own faults and not the faults of My creatures, inasmuch as every one of you knoweth his own self better than he knoweth others. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words 66)

If Baha'u'llah is right that:

The world is but a show, vain and empty, a mere nothing, bearing the semblance of reality. Set not your affections upon it. (Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 328)

Then maybe I need to look at what's going on through God's eyes, instead of the eyes of the current world. He tells us:

Close one eye and open the other. Close one to the world and all that is therein, and open the other to the hallowed beauty of the Beloved. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words)

With that in mind, everything I consider and reflect on is now done totally through the eyes of the Bahá'í Writings. I certainly don't have all the answers and I welcome other people to share their understanding of the Writings related to any given issue in a humble posture of learning, so that we can all advance the process of better understanding how to recover from abusive situations.

So, back to forgiveness.

Forgiving Others:

I've gone through several stages in my understanding of if or why or how to forgive my abusers. In the early days, I found a quote which I assumed was the Bahá'í standard:

If some one commits an error and wrong toward you, you must instantly forgive him. (Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 453)

I certainly wasn't in a position to do that, but I sincerely wanted to be obedient, so my prayers in those days were: "OK God, I can't forgive them, but You can, so please do!"

Then in one of my letters from the House of Justice, they told me:

As a devoted believer you are urged to strive to develop forgiveness in your heart toward your parents who have abused you in so disgraceful a manner, and to attain a level of insight which sees them as captives of their lower nature, whose actions can only lead them deeper into unhappiness and separation from God. (From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to this author, 9 September, 1992)

This was totally liberating! I loved their string of adjectives "strive to develop", which suggested that it could take a lifetime, and even if I never got there, as long as I was striving to develop, that was OK with God.

Secondly, I had to develop forgiveness "in my heart", not between us! So if I was never able to spend time with them again, it was enough to develop it in my heart, between God and I.

Finally, they wanted me to separate my parents from their sin – a concept I've just learned recently, but when I come back to this quote now, I can see what this means "to attain a level of insight which sees them as captives of their lower nature". By refusing to forgive them, I was not honoring the perfect beings that God created, I was only seeing the monsters of their lower natures. That truly was liberating!

I thought that forgiving my parents would be the hardest thing, but once I understood this quote, it became easier:

To forgive him will not be easy, and this is not something to which either you or the members of your family can force yourselves. Nevertheless, you should know that forgiveness is the standard which individual Baha'is are called upon to attain. It is an essential part of the spiritual growth of a person who has been wronged. To nurse a

grievance or hatred against another soul is spiritually poisonous to the soul which nurses it, but to strive to see another person as a child of God and, however heinous his deeds, to attempt to overlook his sins for the sake of God, removes bitterness from the soul and both ennobles and strengthens it. (Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, 5 January 1992)

It's not enough to forgive someone once, or even a few times. The Baha'i standard is to forgive someone a hundred thousand times:

Show ye an endeavor that all the nations and communities of the world, even the enemies, put their trust, assurance and hope in you; that if a person falls into errors for a hundred-thousand times he may yet turn his face to you, hopeful that you will forgive his sins; for he must not become hopeless, neither grieved nor despondent. This is the conduct and the manner of the people of Baha'. This is the foundation of the most high pathway! (Abdu'l-Baha, Tablets of Abdu'l-Baha v2, p. 436)

Looking at how 'Abdul-Bahá did it will help:

The peerless example of 'Abdu'l-Bahá merits close scrutiny in your quest for a sense of forgiveness; His abiding love for humanity, despite its waywardness and perversity enabled Him to manifest sincere compassion and magnanimity to those who had brought Him distress and hardship. (The Universal House of Justice, 1985 Dec 02, Child Abuse, Psychology and Knowledge of Self)

He forgave without speaking about it:

'Abdu'l-Bahá's signet ring disappeared during his Western journey. The Master had confided His loss to Florence and Khan, and named the thief but He did not wish them to speak of it. (Earl Redman, 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Their Midst, p. 228)

He forgave by looking at situations with love:

During this second stay in Chicago, 'Abdu'l-Bahá chose to stay in Corrine True's home for a day or two before moving to a hotel. When He arrived with His secretaries, Corrine serve them all tea. Unfortunately, it was a type of tea that Persians don't like, and some of them remarked that "there was a better tea". But the Master drank it anyway, saying, "This tea is very good because it is been prepared with love." (Earl Redman, 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Their Midst, p. 192)

He forgave with kindness:

There was a time when the Covenant-Breakers 'gave away the garments and personal effects of Bahá'u'lláh to government functionaries, to serve as chattels of bribery and to provide as well the means of humiliating 'Abdu'l-Bahá. At their instigation the Deputy-Governor of Haifa would, whilst visiting 'Abdu'l-Bahá, ostentatiously wear Bahá'u'lláh's cloak and brazenly use His spectacles. Before long this man was dismissed from his post and fell on evil days. Then he went to 'Abdu'l-Bahá and begged His forgiveness. He had acted, he said, in the manner he did, because he was prompted by 'Abdu'l-Bahá's own relatives. The Master showed him utmost kindness and generosity...' (Honnold, Annamarie, Vignettes from the Life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 84)

He forgave through generosity:

Juliet Thompson and other Bahá'ís decided to give the Master a birthday party, and a few of them baked a cake. She reported, 'We took several taxis to the Bronx, with the Master riding in the first one. As soon as His taxi had arrived there, the Master got out and walked into the park ahead of the rest of us. 'A group of young boys gathered around Him and started to laugh. Two or three of them threw stones at Him. With natural concern many of the friends hurried towards the Master, but He told them to stay away. The boys came closer to the Master, jeered at Him and pulled at His clothes. The Master did not become cross. He merely smiled at them radiantly, but the boys continued to behave as before. Then the Master turned towards the friends. 'Bring me the cake,' He said. No one had mentioned to Him that we had brought a cake. 'Some of us said, "But 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the cake is for your birthday." He repeated, "Bring me the cake." A friend uncovered a large sponge cake, with white icing, and gave it to the Master. As soon as the boys had seen the cake they began to calm down, and stared at the cake hungrily. 'The Master took it in His hands and looked at the cake with pleasure. The boys were now standing quietly around Him. "Bring me a knife," said the Master. A friend brought Him a knife. The Master counted the number of boys who were standing around Him and then cut the cake into the same number of pieces. Each boy eagerly took a piece, ate it with relish, and then ran away happily.' (Honnold, Annamarie, Vignettes from the Life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 45)

He forgave by giving gifts:

At one time the Master had a fine cloak of Persian wool, which had been given to Him. When a poor man appealed to Him for a garment, He sent for this cloak and gave it to him. The man took it but complained, saying it was only of cotton. 'No,' 'Abbas Effendi assured him, 'it is of wool'; and to prove it He lighted a match and burned a little of the nap. The man still grumbled that it was not good. 'Abbas Effendi reproved him for criticizing a gift, but He ended the interview by directing an attendant to give the man a mejidi (a coin then worth about four francs). It was observed that if someone vexed the Master, He always gave him a gift. (Honnold, Annamarie, Vignettes from the Life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 75)

He forgave by spending time with them:

If you could have seen the brute, Juliet, mumbling out his miserable excuses! But the Master took him in His arms and said: 'All those things are in the past. Never think of them again.' Then He invited Zillu's-Sultan two sons to spend a day with Him. (Misc Bahá'í, The Diary of Juliet Thompson)

On the other hand, there were times when He too, ran out of patience:

After returning to the holy land 'Abdu'l-Bahá sent Dr. Baghdadi a Tablet, and directed that copies be distributed to every community so that all could read it. The Master wrote here that during his stay in America he had forgiven a certain member of his suite four times, but that he would forgive the man's misdeeds no longer. 'Abdu'l-Bahá returned to Haifa, he proceeded directly to the room with His wife, Munirih Khanum, and said in a feeble voice, "Dr. Fared has ground me down!" (Earl Redman, 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Their Midst, p. 228)

Having forgiven someone, you might still wonder how much contact to have with those who have hurt you. The House of Justice offered me the following three steps, which you might find helpful:

Such an attitude [forgiveness] does not preclude your being prudent in deciding upon the appropriate amount of contact with your parents. In reaching your decision you should be guided by such factors as:

- their degree of remorse over what they inflicted on you in the past
- the extent of their present involvement in practices which are so contrary to Bahá'í Teachings
- the level of vulnerability you perceive within yourself to being influenced adversely by them.

In the process of reaching a decision, you may well find it useful to seek the advice of experts such as your therapist. (Universal House of Justice, to the author, 9 September 1992)

Forgiving Myself:

I took each individual act of abuse that had ever happened, for each person who had abused me. I looked at the lies I'd believed as an outcome of each single event. I forgave myself for each one; asked God for His forgiveness; and forgave each perpetrator. Immediately a huge weight was lifted off my shoulders and I've been free of anxiety (which is really fear) and depression (which is really self-pity) ever since.

Asking God for Forgiveness

I don't know what your concept of God is, but mine is that He is:

- God of Grace to the wicked
- My Beloved
- My only Hope
- My Sanctuary
- My sole Desire
- The All-Forgiving
- The All-Knowing Counselor
- The All-Merciful
- The Beloved
- The Beloved of my soul

- The Benevolent
- The Best Lover
- The Bestower of favours
- The Bestowing One
- The Bountiful One
- The Brightener
- The Bringer of Delight
- The Comforter
- The Compassionate with all
- The Everlasting Father
- The Forgiving
- The Friend
- The Generous
- The Great Giver
- The Haven for all
- The Healer
- The Help in Peril
- The Helper
- The Helping One
- The Incomparable Friend
- The Kind to all
- The Life-giving One
- The Lord of Joy
- The Loving
- The Merciful
- The Most Compassionate
- The Most Merciful One

- The One alone Beloved
- The Physician
- The Pitier of the downtrodden
- The Protector
- The Refuge of the fearful
- The Restorer
- The River that is life indeed
- The Satisfier
- The Shelter to all
- The Source of everlasting life
- The Succorer of all
- The Supreme Companion
- The Supreme Helper
- The Sustaining One
- The True Physician

Does that sound like the kind of God that would condemn anyone for all of eternity? Yet many of us are afraid to turn to Him, fearing His wrath, condemnation, judgment and punishment. Beneath the fear is that we are going straight to hell for the things we have done or failed to do. This is a lot of negative thinking to overcome!

The truth is that despite the fact that we're told to fear God, nowhere in the Writings does it refer to God as the:

- All-Wrathful
- The Ever-Unforgiving
- The Never Forgiving
- The All Condemning
- The All Judgmental

God forgives our sins every Ridván!

He, of a certainty, is the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Generous. Verily, all created things were immersed in the sea of purification when, on that first day of Ridvan, We shed upon the whole of creation the splendours of Our most excellent Names and Our most exalted Attributes. This, verily, is a token of My loving providence, which hath encompassed all the worlds. (Baha'u'llah, The Kitab-i-Aqdas, p. 47)

There's no sin that's unforgiveable. God even forgives covenant breakers!

It is important to note that should a Covenant-breaker recognize his mistakes, become conscious of his transgressions against the Cause of God and find the urge to repent, the Centre of the Cause, when satisfied he is sincerely repentant, will forgive his past deeds and restore his credibility and status as a Bahá'í in good standing in the community. (Adib Taherzadeh, *The Child of the Covenant*, p. 240)

God forgives anyone who asks because His mercy exceeds His fury! Once you've been forgiven, your sins are washed away!

Wherefore, hearken ye unto My speech, and return ye to God and repent, that He, through His grace, may have mercy upon you, may wash away your sins, and forgive your trespasses. The greatness of His mercy surpasseth the fury of His wrath, and His grace encompasseth all who have been called into being and been clothed with the robe of life." (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 130)

It's like being born anew:

Say: Be not despondent. After the revelation of this blessed verse it is as though thou hast been born anew from thy mother's womb. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 77)

He's assures everyone who responds to His call of His forgiveness, and doesn't want us to be afraid or sorry.

Fear not, nor be Thou grieved, for indeed unto such as have responded to Thy Call, whether men or women, We have assured forgiveness of sins, as known in the presence of the Best Beloved and in conformity with what Thou desirest. Verily His knowledge embraceth all things. (The Bab, *Selections from the Writings of the Bab*, p. 54)

He wants us to be proud of this bounty:

We have attired his temple with the robe of forgiveness and adorned his head with the crown of pardon. It beseemeth him to pride himself among all men upon this resplendent, this radiant and manifest bounty . . . Say: Thou art free from sin and error. Truly God hath purged thee with the living waters of His utterance in His Most Great Prison. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 77)

And we know that all sins are forgiven in 'Akká.

Verily, he that entereth therein, longing for it and eager to visit it, God will forgive his sins, both of the past and of the future. (Baha'u'llah, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 178)

The Prophet -- may the blessings of God and His salutations be upon Him -- is stated to have said: "In 'Akká are works of supererogation and acts which are beneficial, which God vouchsafed specially unto whomsoever He pleaseth. (Baha'u'llah, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 179 - 181)

If we have the bounty of going on pilgrimage we can go to Akká and recite these verses:

And he that saith in 'Akká: 'Glorified be God, and praise be unto God, and there is none other God but God, and most great is God, and there is no power nor strength except in God, the Exalted, the Mighty,' God will write down for him a thousand good deeds, and blot out from him a thousand evil deeds, and will uplift him a thousand grades in Paradise, and will forgive him his transgressions.

And whoso saith in 'Akká: 'I beg forgiveness of God,' God will forgive all his trespasses . . .

The Apostle of God -- may the blessings of God and His salutations be upon Him -- hath also said: "He that looketh upon the sea at eventide, and saith: 'God is Most Great!' at sunset, God will forgive his sins, though they be heaped as piles of sand.

And he that counteth forty waves, while repeating: 'God is Most Great!' -- exalted be He -- God will forgive his sins, both past and future." (Baha'u'llah, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 179 - 181)

And even if we never make it there, we can do it in our imaginations, since God accepts intention:

Every act ye meditate is as clear to Him as is that act when already accomplished. (Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 150)

Every spotless action, every sincere intent of ours will win the commendation of the True One, will be exalted and magnified by Him, and requited with a bounteous recompense. (Shoghi Effendi, The Compilation of Compilations vol II, p. 351-352)

My Process:

Once I understood that God loved me and created me perfect, I realized I had to forgive the lies emanating from my lower nature about my being unworthy and unlovable. They weren't God's truth, therefore why would I make them mine?

With the hands of power I made thee and with the fingers of strength I created thee; and within thee have I placed the essence of My light. Be thou content with it and seek naught else, for My work is perfect and My command is binding. Question it not, nor have a doubt thereof. (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words)

Then I had to look at the veils that had come between me and God as a result of my lack of forgiveness (anger, pride, self-pity, mistrust); and ask God for His forgiveness. I knew that I was forgiven because I started to feel lighter and happier, and because of quotes like this, I found myself doing more good deeds than ever before:

Thy generous Lord will . . . forgive thee thy sins and change them to good deeds. Verily the Lord is the Forgiving, the Merciful (Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablets of Abdu'l-Bahá v1, p. 89)

The more I grew in my understanding of God's forgiveness, the more I realized that of course God has forgiven all of us! He did so a LONG time ago!

God hath forgiven what is past. Henceforward everyone should utter that which is meet and seemly, and should refrain from slander, abuse and whatever causeth sadness in men. Lofty is the station of man! (Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 219-220)

God has given us prayers we can use when asking for His forgiveness:

Behold me, then, O my God, how I have fled from myself unto Thee, and have abandoned my own being that I may attain unto the splendors of the light of Thy Being, and have forsaken all that keepeth me back from Thee, and maketh me forgetful of Thee, in order that I may inhale the fragrances of Thy presence and Thy remembrance. Behold how I have stepped upon the dust of the city of Thy forgiveness and Thy bounty, and dwelt within the precincts of Thy transcendent mercy, and have besought Thee, through the sovereignty of Him Who is Thy Remembrance and Who hath appeared in the robe of Thy most pure and most august Beauty, to send down, in the course of this year, upon Thy loved ones what will enable them to dispense with any one except Thee, and will set them free to recognize the evidences of Thy sovereign will and all-conquering purpose, in such wise that they will seek only what Thou didst wish for them through Thy bidding, and will desire naught except what Thou didst desire for them through Thy will. Sanctify, then, their eyes, O my God, that they may behold the light of Thy Beauty, and purge their ears, that they may listen to the melodies of the Dove of Thy transcendent oneness. Flood, then, their hearts with the wonders of Thy love, and preserve their tongues from mentioning any one save Thee, and guard their faces from turning to aught else except Thyself. Potent art Thou to do what pleaseth Thee. Thou, verily, art the Almighty, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting. (Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations by Baha'u'llah, p. 335)

Cast, then, upon me, O my God, the glances of Thy mercy, and forgive me my trespasses and the trespasses of them that are dear to Thee, and which come in between us and the revelation of Thy triumph and Thy grace. Cancel Thou, moreover, our sins which have shut off our faces from the splendors of the Day-Star of Thy favors. Powerful art Thou to do Thy pleasure. Thou ordainest what Thou willest, and art not asked of what Thou wishest through the power of Thy sovereignty, nor canst Thou be frustrated in whatsoever Thou prescribest through Thine irrevocable decree. No God is there save Thee, the Almighty, the Most Powerful, the Ever-living, the Most Compassionate. (Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations by Baha'u'llah, p. 337)

O God, my God! Have mercy then upon my helpless state, my poverty, my misery, my abasement! Give me to drink from the generous cup of Thy grace and forgiveness, stir me with the sweet scents of Thy love, gladden my bosom with the light of Thy knowledge, purify my soul with the mysteries of Thy oneness, raise me to life with the gentle breeze that cometh from the gardens of Thy mercy -- till I sever myself from all else but Thee, and lay hold of the hem of Thy garment of grandeur, and consign to oblivion all that is not Thee, and be companioned by the sweet breathings that waft during these Thy days, and attain unto faithfulness at Thy Threshold of Holiness, and arise to serve Thy Cause, and to be humble before Thy loved ones, and, in the presence of Thy favoured ones, to be nothingness itself. Verily art Thou the Helper, the Sustainer, the Exalted, the Most Generous. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, pp. 4-5)

O Thou forgiving Lord! Thou art the shelter of all these Thy servants. Thou knowest the secrets and art aware of all things. We are all helpless, and Thou art the Mighty, the Omnipotent. We are all sinners, and Thou art the Forgiver of sins, the Merciful, the Compassionate. O Lord! Look not at our shortcomings. Deal with us according to Thy grace and bounty. Our shortcomings are many, but the ocean of Thy forgiveness is boundless. Our weakness is grievous, but the evidences of Thine aid and assistance are clear. Therefore, confirm and strengthen us. Enable us to do that which is worthy of Thy holy Threshold. Illumine our hearts, grant us discerning eyes and attentive ears. Resuscitate the dead and heal the sick. Bestow wealth upon the poor and give peace and security to the fearful. Accept us in Thy kingdom and illumine us with the light of guidance. Thou art the Powerful and the Omnipotent. Thou art the Generous. Thou art the Clement. Thou art the Kind. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 176)

I beg of God to forgive thy sins and to illumine thy face with the light of forgiveness, so that thou mayest conquer the self which desires the earthly world and prevent it from its wishes and appetites. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá v1, p. 80)

And here's an easy mantra we can memorize and repeat often:

Forgive me, O my Lord, my sins which have hindered me from walking in the ways of Thy good-pleasure, and from attaining the shores of the ocean of Thy oneness. (Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations by Baha'u'llah, p. 29)

Be not despondent! We are free from sin. He's already forgiven you and now it's time to forgive yourself and move on!

We have attired his temple with the robe of forgiveness and adorned his head with the crown of pardon. It beseemeth him to pride himself among all men upon this resplendent, this radiant and manifest bounty. Say: Be not despondent. After the revelation of this blessed verse it is as though thou hast been born anew from thy mother's womb. Say: Thou art free from sin and error. Truly God hath purged thee with the living waters of His utterance in His Most Great Prison. We entreat Him—blessed and exalted is He—to graciously confirm thee in extolling Him and in magnifying His glory and to strengthen thee through the power of His invisible hosts. Verily, He is the Almighty, the Omnipotent. (Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 77)

Expecting others to ask you for Forgiveness

It's entirely possible that the person who committed the sin is unwilling to ask for forgiveness. In any case, they are required to confess it and ask for God's forgiveness, not man's.

The sinner, when in a state wherein he finds himself free and severed from all else save God, must beg for forgiveness and pardon (from God). It is not allowable to declare one's sins and transgressions before any man, inasmuch as this has not been, nor is conducive to securing God's forgiveness and pardon. At the same time such confession before the creatures leads to one's humiliation and abasement, and God --

exalted is His glory! -- does not wish for the humiliation of His servants. Verily He is compassionate and beneficent! A sinner must, between himself and God, beseech mercy from the Sea of Mercy and ask forgiveness from the Heaven of Beneficence. (Bahá'u'lláh, Baha'i Scriptures, p. 142)

They may even have passed on to the next world, and you are unable to talk to them about the impact their sin has had on you. It's still important to forgive.

As the spirit of man after putting off this material form has an everlasting life, certainly any existing being is capable of making progress; therefore it is permitted to ask for advancement, forgiveness, mercy, beneficence, and blessings for a man after his death, because existence is capable of progression. That is why in the prayers of Bahá'u'lláh forgiveness and remission of sins are asked for those who have died. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Baha'i World Faith, p. 329)

Getting out of Unsafe Situations

When the offense is ongoing, for example where there is ongoing abuse or violence of any kind, you will need to get to a place of safety before starting the process of forgiveness.

Sometimes people are a little confused about the Christian teaching to "turn the other cheek." 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us:

Then what Christ meant by forgiveness and pardon is not that, when nations attack you, burn your homes, plunder your goods, assault your wives, children and relatives, and violate your honour, you should be submissive in the presence of these tyrannical foes and allow them to perform all their cruelties and oppressions. No, the words of Christ refer to the conduct of two individuals toward each other. If one person assaults another, the injured one should forgive him. But the communities must protect the rights of man. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, pp. 270-271)

It's important to speak out to the Assemblies who can provide guidance:

This motivation [to change] is often propelled by the courage of those who report the offence, even in the face of the possibility of temporarily increasing the danger to the victim. Allowing the situation to continue, by silence, may very well be the greater evil. (National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada, Canadian Bahá'í News, Kalimát, B.E. 150, p. 44)

A brief note on justice:

There is a difference between justice and forgiveness. We all have to meet our Maker and justice is in the hands of God.

Bring thyself to account each day ere thou art summoned to a reckoning; for death, unheralded, shall come upon thee and thou shalt be called to give account for thy deeds. (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words 31)

He promises He notices everyone's sins:

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. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words 59)

Verily I say, whatsoever ye have concealed within your hearts is to Us open and manifest as the day; but that it is hidden is of Our grace and favor, and not of your deserving. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words 60)

Know, verily, that while the radiant dawn breaketh above the horizon of eternal holiness, the satanic secrets and deeds done in the gloom of night shall be laid bare and manifest before the peoples of the world. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words 67)

He's promised to never forgive another man's injustice:

I have pledged Myself not to forgive any man's injustice. This is My covenant which I have irrevocably decreed in the preserved tablet and sealed with My seal. (Baha'u'llah, The Persian Hidden Words)

Justice is also in the hands of the institutions:

. . . the Universal House of Justice underscores the responsibility of the Institutions of the Faith in unequivocal language: "It is inevitable that this community will, at times, be subject to delinquent behaviour of members whose actions do not conform to the standards of the Teachings. At such times, the institutions of the Faith will not hesitate to apply Bahá'í law with justice and fairness in full confidence that this Divine Law is the means for the true happiness of all concerned. (From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, 24 January, 1993)

Forgiveness is in the hands of the individual. It's important that we not get the two mixed up:

It should be realized that there is a distinction drawn in the Faith between the attitudes which should characterize individuals in their relationship to other people, namely, loving forgiveness, forbearance, and concern with one's own sins, not the sins of others, and those attitudes which should be shown by the Spiritual Assemblies, whose duty is to administer the law of God with Justice. (Universal House of Justice, Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1968-1973, p. 110)

There's a big temptation to focus on the injustices, to want to bring "the other guy" to justice, but this is not our job.

The Writings tell us that:

We are all sinners. (Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 176)

Knowing ourselves is our responsibility and a full time job. Baha'u'llah tells us:

"The first Taráz and the first effulgence which hath dawned from the horizon of the Mother Book is that man should know his own self and recognize that which leadeth

unto loftiness or lowliness, glory or abasement, wealth or poverty . . ." (Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 34-35)

So we are to focus all of our attention on ourselves, and to not even breathe the sins of others:

Breathe not the sins of others so long as thou art thyself a sinner. Shouldst thou transgress this command, accursed wouldst thou be, and to this I bear witness. (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words 27)

Each of us is responsible to God for our own lives; and none of us is perfect. Catching our own sins and asking God for forgive us requires all of our attention:

Each of us is responsible for one life only, and that is our own. Each of us is immeasurably far from being "perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect: and the task of perfecting our own life and character is one that requires all our attention, our will-power and energy... On no subject are the Bahá'í teachings more emphatic that on the necessity to abstain from fault-finding, while being ever eager to discover and root out our own faults and overcome our own failings." (Universal House of Justice, Lights of Guidance, p. 90)

So it's not appropriate to look to the abuser and focus on what they did to us, but to focus all of our energy on perfecting our own souls and looking after our own spiritual development. Shoghi Effendi succinctly tells us what happens when we focus on the sins of others:

If we allow our attention and energy to be taken up in efforts to keep others right and remedy their faults, we are wasting precious time. We are like ploughmen each of whom has his team to manage and his plough to direct, and in order to keep his furrow straight he must keep his eye on his goal and concentrate on his own task. If he looks to this side and that to see how Tom and Harry are getting on and to criticize their ploughing, then his own furrow will assuredly become crooked. (Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 92)

Overcoming Fear with Faith

What is faith?

Ruhiyyih Khanum describes it this way:

THIS IS FAITH

by Amatu'l-Bahá Ruhiyyih Khanum

To walk where there is no path
To breathe where there is no air
To see where there is not light-
This is Faith.

To cry out in the silence,
The silence of the night,
And hearing no echo believe
And believe again and again-
This is Faith.

To hold pebbles and see jewels
To raise sticks and see forests
To smile with weeping eyes-
This is Faith.

To say: "God, I believe" when others deny,
"I hear" when there is no answer,
"I see" though naught is seen-
This is Faith.

And the fierce love in the heart,
The savage love that cries
Hidden Thou art yet there !
Veil Thy face and mute Thy tongue
yet I see and hear Thee, Love,
Beat me down to the bare earth,
Yet I rise and love Thee, Love !"
This is Faith.

Faith and fear are both belief systems. You have to choose which one you're going to follow. You cannot defeat fear without faith.

God wants us to have faith in Him in all things. Nothing is more important.

No matter what happens, nothing is as important as our feeling of trust in God, our inner peacefulness and faith that all, in the end, in spite of the severity of the ordeals we may pass through will come out as Bahá'u'lláh has promised. (Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 237)

The words of God will defeat fear (which is the work of our lower nature) and give us faith in God's plan for us. Faith is one of God's attributes, which He's already bestowed on us.

Faith is walking with God as far as we know how to walk and then taking the next step into the black oblivion, and then keep on walking. We don't know what's next so we keep on going because He tells us:

As ye have faith so shall your powers and blessings be. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Baha'i Scriptures, p. 504)

All healing comes from the Word of God but we just can't acquire faith simply by reading the Word of God.

1. We have to trust the One who wrote it
2. We have to trust His words
3. We have to act on them.

This is an important three-part process.

When I first became a Baha'i, I somehow managed to accomplish the first two but ever since then I've been picking and choosing which Writings to act on: the easy ones. I was like a child stuffing myself with candy and relishing every mouthful so I didn't have room for the whole meal.

Our hopes are what motivate us, because that is what faith is. We hope to be freed from anxiety, we accept Baha'u'llah's authority, we immerse ourselves in His words and then we act on them in faith. The process draws us closer to God, because nowhere else will you find this approach to healing anxiety. You have to try it in faith, trusting God's authority.

Fear

Fear produces an emotion and feeling that we think is real but they are just emanations of our lower nature. We could also call them veils between us and God, or sin.

God gave us emotions to enhance our lives. The emotion of fear was intended to alert us to real danger so our bodies can activate the fight or flight response. When a person panics, their cerebral cortex sends signals to the hypothalamus gland—the brain of the endocrine system. It in turn sends out impulses and chemicals that make the body respond with a faster heartbeat, slower metabolism, an adrenaline rush, dry mouth, shaking knees, etc. This “fight or flight” reaction normally lasts only a few minutes. However, when a person is in bondage to fear, when stress and anxiety are a way of life, their body is going to stay stuck in this reaction.

Many of us live lives ruled by another kind of fear that comes from an imagined enemy, and this was not given to us by God. This fear is not the fight or flight God created us with but an aberration. It does not warn us or protect us, but instead brings about our destruction because we put our faith in the wrong thing. We weren't wired to remain in constant “fight or flight,” and many serious illnesses are the result of the body being on constant high alert.

Faith and fear are both belief systems starting in our imagination. Both project into the future and both demand to be fulfilled. If we're going to use it to imagine the worst, why not use it to imagine the best?

You have no guarantee that the object of your faith will ever happen or that the object of your fear will ever happen. We're giving more faith to what we fear than what we should

believe in (that God has a plan and His plan is better for us than anything we could conceive).

Imagination is the link between fear and faith. One comes from God and the other comes from the imagination of a darkened soul:

Knowledge is divided into two kinds: - divine knowledge and satanic knowledge. One appears from the inspiration of the Ideal King; the other emanates from the imaginations of darkened souls. (Bahá'u'lláh, Baha'i Scriptures, p. 23)

Fear and anxiety always project into the future, and they focus on something specific, perhaps a person or thing in our environment. It's true that imagination is a quality of the soul, but 'Abdu'l-Baha makes a distinction between idle fancies and vain imaginations – one has fruit and the other doesn't.

But many things come to the mind of man which are like the waves of the sea of imaginations; they have no fruit, and no result comes from them. (Abdu'l-Baha, Some Answered Questions, p. 252)

Fear is not real, though. It's just our lower nature at work. Once you understand that and separate yourself from fear, your quality of life will greatly improve.

Baha'u'llah doesn't want us to make fear our god:

O My brother! Forsake thine own desires, turn thy face unto thy Lord, and walk not in the footsteps of those who have taken their corrupt inclinations for their god, that perchance thou mayest find shelter in the heart of existence, beneath the redeeming shadow of Him Who traineth all names and attributes. (Baha'u'llah, Gems of Divine Mysteries, p. 48-49)

Take heed lest thou cling to the cord of idle fancy and withhold thyself from that which hath been ordained in the Kingdom of God, the Almighty, the All-Bountiful. (Baha'u'llah, The Summons of the Lord of Hosts, p. 62)

God asks us to have faith in Him, and to fear Him and nothing else:

Fear ye God and follow not your idle fancies and corrupt imaginings, but rather follow Him Who is come unto you invested with undeniable knowledge and unshakeable certitude. (Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 61)

When we don't, we're guilty of sin.

Fear is a lack of trust in God. It makes us sinners because God told us not to fear. If he tells us not to have fear and we do, it's a sin, even though we might not want to think of it that way.

How do the Writings link sin and fear?

Wash away, then, my sins, O my God, by Thy grace and bounty, and reckon me among such as are not overtaken by fear nor put to grief. Thou art, verily, the Almighty, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting. (Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations by Baha'u'llah, p. 212)

Before the throne of Thy oneness, amid the blaze of the beauty of Thy countenance, cause me to abide, for fear and trembling have violently crushed me. Beneath the ocean of Thy forgiveness, faced with the restlessness of the leviathan of glory, immerse me, for my sins have utterly doomed me. (Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations by Baha'u'llah, p. 234)

God wants us to quaff from His teachings and not from the god of our idle fancies and vain imaginations:

Cleanse them, then, O my God, from all idle fancies and vain imaginations, that they may inhale the fragrances of sanctity from the robe of Thy Revelation and Thy commandment. (Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations by Baha'u'llah, p. 307)

He wants us to secure His good pleasure, but we can't do it if we have faith in the wrong thing:

The object of thy belief in God is but to secure His good-pleasure. How then dost thou seek as a proof of thy faith a thing which hath been and is contrary to His good-pleasure? (The Báb, Selections from the Writings of the Báb, p. 122)

It's important that we understand that choosing to hold on to fear is sin. 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us that loss of faith is blameworthy because the soul is then overwhelmed by desires and passions, and man will become a source of imperfections, for which he is held responsible.

The differences among mankind are of two sorts: one is a difference of station, and this difference is not blameworthy. The other is a difference of faith and assurance; the loss of these is blameworthy, for then the soul is overwhelmed by his desires and passions, which deprive him of these blessings and prevent him from feeling the power of attraction of the love of God. Though that man is praiseworthy and acceptable in his station, yet as he is deprived of the perfections of that degree, he will become a source of imperfections, for which he is held responsible. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 130)

Nonetheless, most of us seem to learn by doing, and learn from our mistakes, and in this God is reassuring. He tell us we are all sinners, so we shouldn't be afraid of the word, or the label. It's just the reality of our life and everyone else's too.

We are all sinners, and Thou art the Forgiver of sins, the Merciful, the Compassionate. (Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 176)

In the Tablet of Ahmad, it says "the wisdom of every command shall be tested" so how can we test the wisdom of God's command if we don't sin (make mistakes, fall short)?

Since the purpose of our lives is to know and love God, everything that happens to us is uniquely designed to bring us to this place. We sin and feel the consequences so that we can recognize it, turn to God and ask His forgiveness. This is where faith comes in.

Without faith, we're bereft of all powers and blessings:

And now I give you a commandment that shall be for a covenant between you and me - that ye have faith; that your faith be steadfast as a rock that no earthly storms can move, that nothing can disturb, and that it endure through all things even to the end .

. . As ye have faith so shall your powers and blessings be. This is the balance - this is the balance - this is the balance. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í Readings, p. 313)

What you fear is headed your way because it's a form of faith, but it's not God's faith. It's the faith in our lower nature and it has the power to overthrow God's faith in our lives.

Fear is a lack of trust, and it says:

"God, you need help. You're not doing things fast enough. You're not answering the way I need you to answer. I wonder if you're going to answer at all?"

We may not be saying this in words but that's what's happening inside.

Fear is a form of insanity because it reminds you of what you are not; of what you don't have and of all the things in your life that you did wrong or failed to do. These thoughts get onto a hamster wheel that goes round and round, tormenting you for years!

Peace comes from God; fear comes from not believing God's word and trusting it. We don't have to be afraid. God loves us. He brought us to whatever is in front of us today, and He will bring us through it. He promises that victory always follows crisis.

[Life] brings each one of us crises as well as victories. Our own lives and even the lives of the central Figures of the Faith have been fraught with agony as well as blessing, with failure and frustration and grief, as frequently as with progress. This is the nature of life. (Universal House of Justice, Quickeners of Mankind, p. 117)

It may take years and needs lots of patience. It's important for us to see the end in the beginning, so we can hold on to our faith.

Look ye not upon the present, fix your gaze upon the times to come. In the beginning, how small is the seed, yet in the end it is a mighty tree. Look ye not upon the seed, look ye upon the tree, and its blossoms and its leaves and its fruits. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections, 40.3, p. 87)

If Fear is a form of faith and you believe what Fear says and not what God says, then according to your Fear-faith so be it unto you. Both are demanding to be fulfilled.

Yesterday's projected fear is here today. Today I have blessings and troubles from yesterday's beliefs. What I'm feeling today is being projected onto tomorrow could be fulfilled.

Man must not imagine disease but must ever trust God. Anyway, a man's life here in this world is temporary. He is in a world that is like a house, susceptible to every invasion, and God must protect man—man must be submissive to God. He must not occupy himself with things—imaginings. If a man thinks too much of his health, he will become afflicted. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Throne of the Inner Temple, p 22)

Is this truly what you want to have faith for?

'Abdu'l-Bahá suggests it's wise to avoid this kind of "fate".

But conditional fate may be likened to this: while there is still oil, a violent wind blows on the lamp, which extinguishes it. This is a conditional fate. It is wise to avoid it, to

protect oneself from it, to be cautious and circumspect. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p.244)

How then do we acquire faith? In the Covenant of Baha'u'llah, Adib Taherzideh gives us some clues.

To achieve this exalted goal man needs to recognize the station of Bahá'u'lláh as the Manifestation of God for this age and then observe His commandments with clear vision, mature reflection and a prayerful attitude. This can be achieved through deepening one's knowledge of the Faith and in serving His Cause. It is then that the heart will become the recipient of the knowledge of God, and will attain certitude in its faith. It is then that obedience to the teachings of the Faith becomes wholehearted, as the individual grasps the significance of God's commandments, and comes to understand their wisdom, their excellence and their necessity. It is then that his thoughts, his vision, his aspirations, his words, and his deeds will all be in harmony with the Covenant of God. And it is then that his soul will acquire spiritual qualities and virtues. This is the ultimate outcome of obedience to the Covenant, which will enable the soul to progress in the spiritual worlds of God. (Adib Taherzadeh, The Covenant of Baha'u'llah, p. 28)

To acquire faith man must cast out the 'stranger' from his heart. To the extent that he succeeds in doing this, he will acquire faith. Once the spark of faith is ignited within the heart it must be allowed to grow steadily into a flame, otherwise it could die because of attachment to this world. (Adib Taherzadeh, The Revelation of Baha'u'llah v 2, p. 217-218)

Faith comes to a man through submission to God. The surrendering of the self with all its accomplishments renders the soul free of attachment to this mortal world. It drives the 'stranger' away from the heart and enables him to receive the 'Friend' within its sanctuary. Bahá'u'lláh states: O Son of Man! Humble thyself before Me, that I may graciously visit thee... In another passage He reveals: O Son of Man! If thou lovest Me, turn away from thyself; and if thou seekest My pleasure, regard not thine own; that thou mayest die in Me and I may eternally live in thee. (Adib Taherzadeh, The Revelation of Baha'u'llah v 2, p. 220)

To sum up these quotes, we need to:

- recognize the station of Bahá'u'lláh as the Manifestation of God for this age
- observe His commandments with clear vision, mature reflection and a prayerful attitude.
- deepen one's knowledge of the Faith
- serve His Cause.
- cast out the 'stranger' from his heart.
- allow the spark of faith to grow steadily into a flame
- submission to God
- surrendering of the self with all its accomplishments

It's possible to have fear disguised as faith.

Have you ever heard a voice that sounds like it's coming from God because it comes from the Writings? Be careful, because it could be your lower nature trying to trick you! It's a kind of fear-based faith; a counterfeit faith. It's dangerous because it doesn't come out of real believing, but out of a fear need.

'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us to shun any person who quotes the Heavenly Utterances but is the emanation of hatred.

It is incumbent upon all the friends of God to shun any person in whom they perceive the emanation of hatred for the Glorious Beauty of Bahá, though he may quote all the Heavenly Utterances and cling to all the Books." He continues— "Glorious be His Name!—"Protect yourselves with utmost vigilance, lest you be entrapped in the snare of deception and fraud." This is the advice of the Pen of Destiny. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í World Faith, p. 430-431)

Sometimes that means we have to shun ourselves, if the Writings being quoted are used out of self-hatred; and to punish.

For example: I suffer from the addiction of perfectionism. My life so far has been so full of misery that I want to do everything in my power to ensure that the next life is better than this one. Much of what I've done in the past to follow every single law and injunction has been for the wrong reasons. It's come out of fear of God's punishment; that if I don't do it all and do it right, I will be making the next world just as bad, or worse than this one. As you can imagine, this hasn't been much fun!

For years I was listening to the wrong Writings and using them to beat myself up, in the name of "calling myself to account". The abuse I was perpetrating on myself was far worse than anything anyone else had ever done to me!

The messages that I heard were that it was important to get off of disability and "earn my livelihood by my calling", otherwise my life would "not bring forth fruit" and therefore only be "fit for the fire".

Can you see how punitive this voice was? Even though these quotes can all be found in the Writings, I was taking the wrong "remedy" and wondering why I was getting sicker.

One way to know if a voice is coming from your lower nature or from God is to ask yourself whether it's loving or condemning. God's voice is always loving. The voices I was listening to were definitely condemning!

I now know that God has another plan for me. Now I trust that my job is to be of service and His job is to look after the money. I'm a lot less stressed, knowing He's forgiven me and in His mercy, He's kept me out of a workforce I'm not equipped to handle.

Here's another example:

Fear took me all over North America looking for healing, in the name of faith. I was praying for healing and it wasn't happening the way I thought it should, so I went from healer to healer trying to find the right one for me. It says in the Baha'i Writings that we are to find the best healer even if we have to go to another city to find one so at one point I even went to Hawaii to work with a Baha'i healer there. I believed that God was being faithful to his word, because suddenly the money appeared so I could go. That's what fear was doing to me. I wanted to get healed but I didn't know that my need was driven by fear. If you'd told me I would've denied it. This was not God's will at all, since I was putting my faith in the healer and not in the "Divine Physician" and His "Divine Remedy." By sharing these teachings with you, I hope you'll know where and how to look for and apply the right "remedy" for your anxiety!

Conclusion:

Every time we turn from fear to faith, we can hear 'Abdu'l-Bahá cheering us on:

Thy letter was like a perfumed nosegay and from that nosegay the fragrance of faith and assurance was inhaled. Well done! Well done! that thou hast turned thy face toward the invisible Kingdom. Excellent! Excellent that thou art attracted to the Beauty of His Highness the Almighty! Well done! Well done! How happy thou art that thou hast attained to this Most Great Gift! (Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablets of Abdu'l-Bahá v3, p. 530)

Doubt

When we first become Bahá'ís, there are often things in the Writings which we find difficult. Striving to learn and understand is a gradual process, requiring wisdom:

Since we are all imperfect and have to learn the perfect standard which Bahá'u'lláh has unveiled, there are often things in the Teachings themselves which individual believers find difficult, and which they have to strive to learn and understand. All the believers are growing and this is a gradual process. Each one, as you say, must develop wisdom, and with this must realize the fundamental importance of the unity of the community and the bond of love and affection among the believers, for the sake of which he will sacrifice many things. ... (The Universal House of Justice, Messages 1963 to 1986, p. 631)

God has asked us not to doubt by following our idle fancy, but to give in to whatever proof God has given us:

If thou dost ponder a while, it will be evident that it is incumbent upon a lowly servant to acquiesce to whatever proof God hath appointed, and not to follow his own idle fancy. (The Báb, Selections from the Writings of the Báb, p. 122)

He wants the doubters to rise above their doubts:

Let the doubter arise, and himself verify the truth of such assertions. (Shoghi Effendi, Messages to America, p. 17)

When our hearts turn to God, He'll open our eyes so we can recognize His truth and no longer need arguments and proofs.

And when the heart is turned unto the Sun, then the eye will be opened and will recognize the Sun through the Sun itself. Then man will be in no need of arguments (or proofs), for the Sun is altogether independent, and absolute independence is in need of nothing, and proofs are one of the things of which absolute independence has no need. Be not like Thomas; be thou like Peter. I hope you will be healed physically, mentally and spiritually. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Baha'i World Faith, p. 383-384)

Doubts are dispelled by reading the Writings:

We are certain that when you share this letter with the friends and they have these quotations from the Scriptures and the Writings of the Guardian drawn to their attention, their doubts and misgivings will be dispelled and they will be able to devote their every effort to spreading the Message of Bahá'u'lláh, serenely confident in the power of His Covenant to overcome whatever tests an inscrutable Providence may shower upon it, thus demonstrating its ability to redeem a travailing world and to upraise the Standard of the Kingdom of God on earth. (Shoghi Effendi, *Wellspring of Guidance*, p. 44-56)

The only remedy for our doubt is to admit we might be wrong; that Bahá'u'lláh's knowledge is from God and be willing to surrender his feelings and thoughts to Him. The very act of submission opens our hearts and allows true knowledge to come in, so that every trace of conflict will disappear:

The only remedy for the individual who still has a glimmer of faith in his heart, but who has doubts about the Cause, is to admit that he may be wrong in his assessment of the teachings of the Faith, to affirm that Bahá'u'lláh's knowledge is of God, and to surrender his feelings and thoughts completely to Him. Once he submits himself in this way and perseveres in doing so with sincerity and truthfulness, the channels of the grace of God open and his heart becomes the recipient of the light of true knowledge. He will discover, some time in his life, either by intuition or through prayer and meditation, the answer to all his problems and objections. Every trace of conflict will disappear from his mind. He will readily understand the reasons behind those very teachings which previously baffled his intellect, and will find many mysteries enshrined in the utterances of Bahá'u'lláh, mysteries of which he was completely unaware in earlier days. (Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Baha'u'llah v 2*, p. 218-219)

Now that we've got a taste of what the Writings say about doubt, let's look at how it relates to fear.

Doubt is really behind anxiety and fear – we might think we've accepted God's love in our lives; we might think that we trust that He has a plan for us; but if we're feeling anxious about the future, it's because we doubt that He will really be there for us, opening the doors and paving the way. We believe in God, but we doubt that He will provide for us or give us what we need tomorrow.

How much do we really have faith and trust in God's bounties in our lives?

One minute we think we might trust God, and the other, we take matters into our own hands because we don't think He heard us; or that He is able to intervene. For example, maybe you're having some trouble in the area of money. Perhaps 60% of you trusts that God will provide and 40% doubts you'll be able to meet your expenses next month.

In another part of your life, you're worried about your children. Will you be able to do a good job as a parent? Will you be able to protect them from the tests of this world? Maybe you only trust God with 20% of that and think you have to do the other 80%.

Or what about forgiveness? Do you believe that God has forgiven you for mistakes you've made in the past? Maybe you've just come back from feast; or heard a beautiful prayer chanted and you believe about 70% that God loves you and has forgiven you, and 30% that you're going straight to hell.

Other areas you might doubt God's presence is in your marriage, career path, job, health, finding purpose of fulfillment in life; bitterness over what someone else has done to you. Maybe you know what the next step you need to take in life is; but you doubt that God will meet you there.

So life is going along, and you sort of trust God on all levels, until something bad happens. Perhaps you lose your job, and all of a sudden your trust level with God plummets down to 2% as you believe that your financial future is in your hands and not God's. You become worried, and obsessed about what to do next, absolutely forgetting to trust God. Now your belief that God loves you has also plummeted because why would He cause you to lose your job if He loves you?

Every day the gauges of trust in God's ability to provide for us in every area of our lives goes up and down with the changes and chances of this world. Sometimes they all go down to 2% trust in God at the same time, and that isn't enough to hold us through the test. This is what brings us to a crisis of faith. Everything we've built our life on in terms of trust in God goes down at once, and we're on shaky ground regarding our faith.

Doubt is a normal part of our spiritual journey. It's one of the tests God sends us for the perfection of our souls, so when you're faced with it, don't freak out; don't feel there's anything wrong with you.

God wants us to trust Him, to have faith that he will provide us with everything we need, but He doesn't expect that it will be 100% in all areas of our lives, all the time. Jesus said that all it would take to move a mountain was to have the faith as small as a mustard seed.

If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.' (Matt. xvii. 20.)

God understands how hard it is for us to trust a God we can't see. He asks us to be merciful to those who doubt.

The more clarity you have in terms of your own doubt, the easier it is to face it head-on. Like everything in our lower natures, it doesn't like to be brought out into the light of day. It often disguises itself as a nagging doubt, worry, anxiety, fear that something bad is going to happen, guilt, workaholism, pessimism, obsessive behaviour, a need for control. Underneath it all is a doubt that God is going to do what he says He's going to do.

A belief that tomorrow is going to be worse robs us of our joy, and prevents us from living in and enjoying the present.

Once we bring it to the surface, we have a choice and can better face it.

Every doubt you can name is an opportunity to exercise faith.

Doubt is opposite to faith; not the enemy of faith – it's the tool God uses for our growth.

You can go to the gym and look at all the equipment as your enemy and see it as too hard; you will never be able to get healthy. It's the same with doubt. Without doubt, your faith is never going to grow. We have to face each doubt as it comes along or we're never going to grow.

We never get to the point where we've conquered doubt entirely. We conquer one and there's another we need to work on; just like when we master a certain weight, we need to move on to the next level. We can't just go to the gym for a few weeks and we're strong for the rest of our lives. We have to keep exercising those muscles or they will atrophy.

God asks us to trust him a little more every day so our trust will grow. We need tests to help grow our faith. Our faith is the core of our relationship with God; without it, we can never grow closer to God.

Like everything in the faith; we seem to need opposites (were it not for the cold . . .)

You can't will yourself to trust God, any more than you can will yourself to trust another human being. Our faith grows the more we get to know Him, just as it does with other humans, by seeing his trustworthiness over time.

There are only 2 things we have control over – our thoughts and our actions. Most of us have developed mental patterns over time including our struggle with faith and doubt. If 40% of us trust God's ability to take care of us and 60% don't; we have a choice about which we're going to be. We can turn our mind, thoughts and attention towards trusting God or we can trust the voice of our lower nature which says we can only trust ourselves.

Make a list of all the ways God has come through for you in the past, to help you focus on believing he will continue to do so in the present and future.

Daily reading of the Writings and memorizing passages will help us remember to trust God. It helps us remember that God is who he says he is; and therefore we can trust Him.

Sometimes we need to lean on the faith of others. Perhaps we've never seen evidence of God working in a particular way in our lives, but we might have a friend who did; and we can trust that maybe if God was working in their lives; He could be working in ours too.

Once we know the areas in which we don't trust God; we can ignore it, and focus on turning our attention to all the ways in which we can and do, so that our trust can grow so big there's no room for doubt.

You don't have to trust God 100% in order to act as if you did. Even if you only trust God 1%, you still have a choice to act as if you trusted him 100% - In the 5 Steps of Prayer we learn to act as if it had all been answered. That's how we grow. We see God come through, so we can trust him more.

Fear is doubt in disguise.

Sometimes we have such high levels of doubt that we don't even have a grain of mustard seed of faith. Ask God to give you a sign. God is merciful. He wants us to have faith. He stands ready to answer whatever we pray for.

Overcoming Fear with Patience:

God is always there to help, even though it seems to take time. Fear won't let you wait. It demands that you get well now or get back down under it. Don't give up because the battle takes too long. Keep reminding yourself that:

He, verily, rewardeth beyond measure them that endure with patience. (Baha'u'llah, Gems of Divine Mysteries, p. 71)

The sign of love is fortitude under My decree and patience under My trials. (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words 48)

God, verily, loveth those women and men who show forth patience. (Baha'u'llah, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 43)

Ours is the duty to remain patient in these circumstances until relief be forthcoming from God, the Forgiving, the Bountiful. (Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 177)

We might find ourselves saying things like:

- I hope that's not true.
- I hope I'm getting better.
- I don't want to wait.
- I want God to heal me now and if He doesn't, I'll look somewhere else for relief.
- What good are prayers anyway?

These are not good weapons against fear, because the statements themselves are fear and doubt based.

Perhaps you've read quotes like:

O thou who art turning thy face towards God! Close thine eyes to all things else, and open them to the realm of the All-Glorious. Ask whatsoever thou wishest of Him alone; seek whatsoever thou seekest from Him alone. With a look He granteth a hundred thousand hopes, with a glance He healeth a hundred thousand incurable ills, with a nod He layeth balm on every wound, with a glimpse He freeth the hearts from the shackles of grief. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 51)

Forgetting the last two sentences:

He doeth as He doeth, and what recourse have we? He carrieth out His Will, He ordaineth what He pleaseth. Then better for thee to bow down thy head in submission, and put thy trust in the All-Merciful Lord. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 51)

Of course, God can do all these things, but sometimes the answer is no, and sometimes there are other things which need to be put into practice first.

If healing is right for the patient, it will certainly be granted; but for some ailing persons, healing would only be the cause of other ills. And therefore wisdom doth not permit an affirmative answer to the prayer. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdul-Bahá, p.161-162)

Perhaps healing you from anxiety without teaching you the importance of immersing yourself in the Writings, then helping you build the capacity for monitoring your thoughts, turning to God and asking for forgiveness is much more important. All of these skills will provide you with many more virtues, and will ensure the anxiety doesn't come back. Because anxiety is a sin, He can forgive us for it, but the work of repenting and making amends is ours alone.

Do you really think you'll go home and discover that healing from a lifetime of bad thinking will change overnight? No! It's going to take a while to have your mind renewed. You aren't going to learn to understand and apply the word of God all at once. You can't put what you're learning into practice all once. It's a process and it takes time, and it can even seem overwhelming at times.

Fear will have you believe that you should be walking out of here free to harvest the new learning, forgetting that I'm just planting seeds here, which then have to take hold, germinate, flower and mature before you can harvest the fruits. Along the way there will be a lot of weeding to do. Will you trust God to grow your health as you recover from anxiety?

There is one season to harrow the ground, another season to scatter the seeds, still another season to irrigate the fields and still another to harvest the crop. We must attend to these various kinds of activities in their proper seasons in order to become successful. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Consultation, p. 7)

Have you ever grown a tomato plant? The average maturation age for the tomatoes is between 55 days to 85 days. I'm watching my tomatoes grow right now and they're not growing fast enough to suit me, but I'm confident that God will grow them up in due time, and He will grow you up to. He wants you to grow and change so let's let God work with you.

God is already working with you, but the voice of fear tries to prevent it. Fear will tell you that if God really wanted you healed, you would be healed by now. God loves you and He will heal you gently. Some of you will be healed just by reading this book. Some will be healed before you started reading the book. Some of you after you finish the book. Some will be healed in a few weeks. You can trust that whatever is best for you, God will do. You might have a ton of allergies and one day you'll wake up and you won't have any. That's how it works - all in God's time.

Some people go from fear to faith faster than others because we all have different capacities and backgrounds, so let's not compare ourselves to anybody. If we do, we invite more emanations from lower nature. Don't let fear take away the right season for your complete recovery.

By taking this one step at a time, you're making new memories in your soul that will stay with you. You have had plenty of years of fear. Now you're bringing every thought into captivity and filling yourself up with the knowledge of God instead of the knowledge of your lower nature. Someone once said "I read and I forget. I do and I remember".

How do you do that? By practicing and eventually you learn to follow your own thoughts more and more until they become a way of life. You won't do it perfectly so don't expect to, but what's important is that you're going to start and God will meet you and you will grow.

You don't have to be perfect at getting rid of fear in one go. Even taking three steps forward and one step back, is still making progress. Don't give up and get discouraged when you find yourself slipping back. Be happy with that little step. One of these days you'll take three steps forward and make it all the way into God's loving arms.

Everything in nature has an ebb and a flow – the tides, the blood circulating in our body, day followed by night, summer followed by winter . . . It's only natural that your recovery from anxiety will be like this too.

The great and mighty ocean is powerless to change the ebb and flow of its tides -- nothing can stand against nature's laws! (Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 122)

Don't try reaching for it all in one day. Remember what Abdul-Bahá says: "little by little, day by day".

One would well remember the story of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who when approached by a believer in the depths of discouragement despairing of ever acquiring the qualities and virtues that Bahá'ís are required to possess, replied with the greatest compassion and encouragement, "little by little; day by day" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í World 12: 704)

Many people don't want to wait for the right season. They want a quick fix now but God is not going to let you go from fear to faith if you haven't dealt with the issues that are in between. The things that are creating the fear have to be dealt with first. You have to deal with the issues that created the fear in the first place.

Unless the season of winter appear, thunder roll, lightning flash, snow and rain fall, hail and frost descend and the intensity of cold execute its command, the season of the soul-refreshing spring would not come, the fragrant breeze would not waft, the moderation of temperature would not be realized, the roses and hyacinths would not grow, the surface of the earth would not become a delectable paradise, the trees would not bloom, neither would they bring forth fruits and leaves. That fierce inclemency of cold, snow, frost and tempest was the beginning of the manifestation of these roses, hyacinths, buds, blossoms and fruits. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablets of Abdu'l-Bahá v3, p. 655)

Before the coming of the spring, the earth looks as if dead and lifeless, but when it appears, all the world seems to spring into life and brightness -- into a new existence of beauty and joy. All nature is clad in fresh green, the grass springs up, the leaves bud, and the trees are covered with blossoms. But the spring passes, and then comes the summer, in which the promise of the spring is fulfilled; the spring blossoms ripen into fruit, and the fields are covered with yellow grain; the result of the new life of the spring is manifested. Then comes the autumn, in which the life of the spring and summer begins slowly to fade, and finally winter comes round, and the life of the earth seems to be completely extinct -- dead. (Compilations, Baha'i Prayers 9, p. 57)

Nothing lasts forever! Even if your life has been crippled for many years by anxiety, it too will pass, hopefully faster now that you have some tools to deal with it!

'Abdul-Bahá promises us it won't last forever and suggests we work while we're waiting:

The darkness of this gloomy night shall pass away. Again the Sun of Reality will dawn from the horizon of the hearts. Have patience - wait, but do not sit idle; work while you are waiting; smile while you are wearied with monotony. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Star of the West, Vol. 9, No. 13, p. 141).

And the House of Justice also encourages us the same way, also telling us to keep going:

These are the darkest hours before the break of day. Peace, as promised will come at night's end. Press on to meet the dawn. (Universal House of Justice, Ridván Message, April 1993)

Here are some additional spiritual principles to keep in mind:

Remind yourself that you have the right to fail:

A wide latitude for action must be allowed them, which means that a large margin for mistakes must also be allowed. (Universal House of Justice, Unlocking the Power of Action)

Give it time:

With each passing crisis in world affairs, it becomes easier for the citizen to distinguish between a love of country that enriches one's life, and submission to inflammatory rhetoric designed to provoke hatred and fear of others. (The Universal House of Justice, 2002 April, To the World's Religious Leaders, p. 1)

Look at the birds in the air – God takes care of all their needs, so He'll take care of ours.

No riches, wealth, comfort or ease of the material world is equal to the wealth of a bird; all the areas of these plains and mountains are its dwelling, and all the seeds and harvests are its food and wealth, and all the lands, villages, meadows, pastures, forests and wildernesses are its possessions. Now, which is the richer, this bird, or the most wealthy man? for no matter how many seeds it may take or bestow, its wealth does not decrease. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 79)

If God thinks a grassy field needs flowers, He'll add colour and beauty. If God can dress a field, He will surely dress us; and give us abundance. If he's interested in making a field beautiful, He'll make our lives beautiful too. It takes time, though, so we're back where we started, with patience.

Overcoming Fear with Courage

I was on a travel teaching trip to Nunavut, in Canada's arctic and I had a dream about a cougar, which symbolizes courage. Richard Hastings, <http://dreamsforpeace.wordpress.com/> a Bahá'í who analyzes dreams suggested in part:

The cougar is a symbol of being courageous and independent. So you are trying to take back your courage and independence. You can bring the cougar inside of you as if you are a cougar. The exercise would be to bring the cougar inside as if you were a cougar and then feel and see and hear what that is like, then use it. The goal is be a cougar with pure intentions. When you can let go of physical concerns, bring the resources inside of you and use them, then amazing things will happen.

Since this was a virtue I was trying to cultivate, I thought I'd explore it and see what it looked like. What follows is my personal reflection.

'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us:

Take courage! (Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 30)

I realized that I don't know much about courage, though I think my life has been a courageous one in many ways, so I'm curious about what the Bahá'í Writings can shed on this concept and invite you along on my exploration.

The first quote that comes to mind is:

The source of courage and power is the promotion of the Word of God, and steadfastness in His Love. (Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 155)

I have this one memorized but I realize now, that there are 2 parts to the quote:

- Promotion of the word of God
- Steadfastness in His love

This trip has not been one of teaching, curiously enough, given that I'm on a travel teaching trip! Instead it's been one of learning about love.

Before coming here, I was feeling unloved, unloveable and pretty sorry for myself! Single, alone and lonely! God had systematically removed every significant relationship from my life through estrangement and divorce (parents, siblings, spouse, significant others and son). Nothing I did to try to bring unity back into these relationships seemed to matter.

Since everything I read suggested we need relationships to heal, and I didn't have any, I asked God to show me I was loved and loveable. And look what He did for me! He brought me to Rankin Inlet, in the middle of a polar desert, to show me how much I'm loved!

He's used relationships with Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í friends and acquaintances around the globe, who follow my adventure on Facebook and on my blog, to prove my worth! Every day people call to pray with me; send words of encouragement through phone, email and

Facebook; and send presents to meet my most basic of needs for warmth and vision – the physical mirroring the spiritual! It's amazing, awe-inspiring, humbling and I am grateful!

Since coming here, there are many ways God shows me I'm loved every day; which helps me trust His love so I can stay steadfast in it, which is one source of courage I'm working on, and it's unfolding easily and effortlessly and I am grateful!

The first part of the quote is much harder! Much, much harder!

Although on the one hand, there are many ways to teach the Faith, and I'm doing a lot, it never feels like it's enough of the right kinds of teaching. I can be really quick to judge myself for not doing more direct teaching in my own neighborhoods, whether at home or here in this community.

Fortunately I'm in good company, as even the Bab didn't think He was doing enough of the right things!

I beg Thee to forgive me, O my Lord, for every mention but the mention of Thee, and for every praise but the praise of Thee, and for every delight but delight in Thy nearness, and for every pleasure but the pleasure of communion with Thee, and for every joy but the joy of Thy love and of Thy good-pleasure, and for all things pertaining unto me which bear no relationship unto Thee. (The Bab, Baha'i Prayers, p. 79)

My goal in coming here was threefold:

- To maintain a Bahá'í presence in an Inuit community while the only Bahá'í leaves for 10 weeks
- To have an adventure
- To have a writer's retreat

This is clear in my mind; and clear with the pioneer and those then are my marching orders.

So what then is courage in this situation, and what does being a cougar look like?

I keep coming back to the fact that I need more courage to promote the word of God; and that the only way I get it is to teach the Faith directly. Is that an accurate reading of this quote? Is that coming from my lower nature to "beat me up" or from my higher nature?

As a Bahá'í-inspired life coach I would ask a client which felt better, and I have to say that in my heart of hearts, I know that God is happy with what I am doing and is giving me exactly what I need; guiding me to what's good for me and for this community and I can let go of any expectations to do more than what I'm doing right now. My biggest job on this trip is to learn about His love as the source of my courage.

It's good that another thing my dream is teaching me is to be independent, because the relationship between steadfastness in God's love as a source of courage is certainly not out there in the larger community!

Let's look at another quote:

Whatever decreaseth fear increaseth courage. (Baha'u'llah, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 32)

I like this one too, because it brings me back to love. How you ask? 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us:

It was the Love of God that . . . gave to Moses courage and patience. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 82)

But more importantly, as Bahá'u'lláh tells us in the Four Valleys, love and fear can't exist in the same heart:

Love is a light that never dwelleth in a heart possessed by fear. (Baha'u'llah, The Four Valleys, p. 58)

So it seems to me that God is telling us that love, by decreasing fear, increases courage.

Feeling unloved by my parents, siblings, spouse, significant others and child has been the way God has used to teach me to turn to Him for love instead of seeking it in human beings:

I have detached myself from my kindred and have sought through Thee to become independent of all that dwell on earth and ever ready to receive that which is praiseworthy in Thy sight. (The Bab, Baha'i Prayers, p. 21)

OK, I confess, I didn't consciously detach myself from my kindred! I went kicking and screaming! But eventually I gave up and accepted what is, realizing:

We . . . turn nowhere for a haven but unto Thy safekeeping. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Baha'i Prayers, p. 22)

I came to realize that since the very purpose of our lives is nothing less than to know God and to worship Him, something had to happen so I could attain my purpose:

I bear witness, O my God, that Thou hast created me to know Thee and to worship Thee. (Bahá'u'lláh, Short Obligatory Prayer, Baha'i Prayers, p. 3)

So to get back to the topic of courage, I can't get courage without turning to God:

Strive as much as ye can to turn wholly toward the Kingdom, that ye may acquire innate courage and ideal power. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 206)

Once I learn to have love on the inside, and courage on the outside, I need to bring it inside myself, to calm the parts of me who aren't feeling so courageous:

May you be a source of courage to the affrighted one. (Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 425)

Enough about me. Let's take this quote to you, my readers.

As we're learning, courage has 2 parts:

Promotion of the Word of God:

'Abdu'l-Bahá gives us a clear link between courage and teaching and shows what we need to do:

Rest assured that the breathings of the Holy Spirit will loosen thy tongue. Speak, therefore; speak out with great courage at every meeting. When thou art about to begin thine address, turn first to Bahá'u'lláh, and ask for the confirmations of the Holy Spirit, then open thy lips and say whatever is suggested to thy heart; this, however, with the utmost courage, dignity and conviction. It is my hope that from day to day your gatherings will grow and flourish, and that those who are seeking after truth will hearken therein to reasoned arguments and conclusive proofs. I am with you heart and soul at every meeting; be sure of this. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 269)

A perfect story to illustrate this is:

Abdul-Bahá tested both the faith and courage of many of the Baha'is He met and Corinne True was one He really challenged. First, He had put her in charge of the Temple project, a woman dealing with many men. Then, as they stood at the train station before He left for Minneapolis, Abdul-Bahá told her, "Mrs. True, I want you to speak in public. I want you to tell the people about the faith." This completely floored Corinne and she objected, saying, "But Master, I can't do it; I have no training, no experience. I'm too frank." "The faith", she Thought, "had many gifted speakers, but she didn't consider herself to be one of them." Knowing what she was frantically thinking, Abdul-Bahá told her how to do it: "Forget what you can't do. Stand up and turn your heart wholly toward Me. Look over the heads of the audience and I'll never fail you." (Earl Redman, Abdul-Bahá in Their Midst, p. 195)

And another good one:

To another He said: "Man is like a bird in a cage. A bird cannot attain freedom merely by knowing that in the free world there are pure breezes, spacious skies, beautiful gardens, pleasant parks and fountains; rather, the bird must find the power to break the cage and soar into the wide firmament." (Earl Redman, Abdul-Bahá in Their Midst, p. 205)

I can really use stories like these to beat myself up. While valid for many people, at many times, I don't think this is what God's calling on me to do on this trip. This isn't what God wants from me right now. That's not what "steadfastness in His love" looks like for me.

Steadfastness in His Love

'Abdu'l-Bahá lovingly reminds us of the relationship between tests, persecutions and calamities as a way to acquire courage.

Consider thou the lives of the former sanctified souls; what tests have they not withstood and what persecutions have they not beheld; while they were surrounded with calamities they increased their firmness and while they were overwhelmed with tests they manifested more zeal and courage. Be thou also like unto them. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablets of Abdu'l-Bahá v2, p. 302)

For years I've been trying to overcome a lifetime of tests, by learning to apply the "divine remedy" to my healing, and as Bahá'u'lláh reminds us, nothing short of a mystic transformation can turn agitation into peace; doubt into certitude and timidity into courage.

It is evident that nothing short of this mystic transformation could cause such spirit and behaviour, so utterly unlike their previous habits and manners, to be made manifest in the world of being. For their agitation was turned into peace, their doubt into certitude, their timidity into courage. Such is the potency of the Divine Elixir, which, swift as the twinkling of an eye, transmuteth the souls of men! (Baha'u'llah, The Kitab-i-Iqan, p. 156-157)

It has and I am grateful!

By "following the instructions, I have been able to rid myself of anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and as a result no longer have TMJ (grinding teeth at night). And I am grateful!

But having faith, patience and courage is only the beginning!

Only have faith, patience and courage -- this is but the beginning, but surely you will succeed, for God is with you! (Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 101)

Surely you will succeed because God is with you! I love God's promises!

Overcoming Fear through Teaching and Service:

There are several reasons why taking action is one important key to overcoming anxiety.

It's not enough to pray for solutions. We must take action. It's the only way our prayers can be answered.

It is not sufficient to pray diligently for guidance, but this prayer must be followed by meditation as to the best methods of action and then action itself. Even if the action should not immediately produce results, or perhaps not be entirely correct, that does not make so much difference, because prayers can only be answered through action and if someone's action is wrong, God can use that method of showing the pathway which is right. (Shoghi Effendi, Guidelines for Teaching, p. 325)

Have no fears or doubts. Your opportunities are great, the confirmations of God abundant. Sally forth then, therefore, to seize your moment, to make your mark on the destiny of humankind. (The Universal House of Justice, 1994 Dec 22, To National Youth Conference, Phoenix Arizona)

In the Five Steps of Prayer For Solving Problems, Shoghi Effendi tells us to pray, meditate, come to a decision, and act as if it had all been answered. Then he warns us:

Many pray but do not remain for the last half of the first step. Some who meditate arrive at a decision, but fail to hold it. Few have the determination to carry the decision through, still fewer have the confidence that the right thing will come to their need. But how many remember to act as though it had all been answered? How true are those words - "Greater than the prayer is the spirit in which it is uttered" and greater than the way it is uttered is the spirit in which it is carried out. (Shoghi Effendi, Principles of Bahá'í Administration, p. 91)

Humanity is steadily sinking into a mess and we are the only ones who can help. There's no time to lose. The faster we learn these principles and take action to remove anxiety from our lives, the sooner we can use this reclaimed energy to carry out our duties.

There is no time to lose. The hour is ripe for the proclamation, without fear, without reserve, and without hesitation, and on a scale never as yet undertaken, of the One Message that can alone extricate humanity from the morass into which it is steadily sinking, and from which they who claim to be the followers of the Most Great Name can and will eventually rescue it. The sooner they who labor for the recognition and triumph of His Faith in the new world arise to carry out these inescapable duties, the sooner will the hopes, the aims and objectives of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as enshrined in His own Plan, be translated from the realm of vision to the plane of actuality and manifest the full force of the potentialities with which they have been endowed. (Shoghi Effendi, Messages to America, p. 79)

The great thing about taking action is that it distracts us from our worries. When we're active, our thoughts are turned to other things and we forget our fears:

Be not idle, but active and fear not. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í World Faith, p. 362)

Rúhíyyih Khanum tells us how Shoghi Effendi used this technique to his advantage:

In reading over my diaries - so very little of which I have quoted out of hundred of pages written off and on throughout the years - it seems strange to me there is practically no reference to the World War raging everywhere during almost six years and constituting such a dire threat to the safety of the World Centre of the Faith and particularly to the Guardian himself as Head of that Faith. Nothing could more eloquently testify to the internal upheavals he was going through during all those years than this blank. The day-to-day pressures and the work, worry and mental exhaustion were so great that it crowded mention of this constant threat and anxiety into the background. (Rúhíyyih Khanum, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 177)

There are two ways in which taking action will help yourself and others: teaching and service, and you'll want to be engaged with both of them, every day, particularly when you're anxious.

When we study the Writings on Teaching we learn how they inspire us to cast off our fears, misgivings and sense of inadequacy:

A study of the compilation [on teaching] will provide the friends with stimulating information on general guidelines to be followed by them when engaged in the teaching work. While many will be inspired, after reading the compilation, to cast aside their fears and misgivings and their sense of inadequacy, and will arise to speak forth announcing the glad-tidings of the Kingdom to their fellow-men. (Universal House of Justice, NSA USA - *Developing Distinctive Baha'i Communities*)

Once we've been inspired by the Writings, it's important to get out and teach, because that's the source of our courage and power:

The source of courage and power is the promotion of the Word of God, and steadfastness in His Love. (Baha'u'llah, *Tablets of Baha'u'llah*, p. 155)

Service is another very important component in reducing anxiety. We're told that only by implementing the system of Baha'u'llah can fear be eliminated. We do this through service:

Our contributions to the Faith are the surest way of lifting once and for all time the burden of hunger and misery from mankind, for it is only through the system of Bahá'u'lláh -- Divine in origin -- that the world can be gotten on its feet and want, fear, hunger, war, etc. be eliminated. (Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Funds: Contributions and Administration*, p. 12)

I love it when God tells us plainly that He's giving us "one of the great spiritual laws of life" because it makes me pay attention. When I focused on my diagnosis of anxiety and PTSD, I spent years in therapy, trying to analyze the source of my fears, but it kept me trapped on the hamster wheel of thinking about myself. When I read this quote, I realized that the key was to turn away from myself and towards achieving my true station in life - that of a servant:

The more we search for ourselves, the less likely we are to find ourselves; and the more we search for God, and to serve our fellow men, the more profoundly will we

become acquainted with ourselves, and the more inwardly assured. This is one of the great spiritual laws of life. (Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 114)

When we continually empty ourselves through service, trusting we'll be filled up by God, we're building our spiritual muscles and achieving our purpose in life, which is to draw closer to God.

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. (Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Funds: Contributions and Administration, p. 11)

'Abdu'l-Bahá reminds us (and the kings and rulers) that we all inhabit the same earth and we're all one family, so when one is unhappy we're all unhappy.

The poor man at the gate of his palace spoke out, saying: "O kind king! Assuming that you are from every point of view so happy, free from every worry and sadness - - do you not worry for us? You say that on your own account you have no worries -- but do you never worry about the poor in your land? Is it becoming or meet that you should be so well off and we in such dire want and need? In view of our needs and troubles how can you rest in your palace, how can you even say that you are free from worries and sorrows? As a ruler you must not be so egoistic as to think of yourself alone but you must think of those who are your subjects. When we are comfortable then you will be comfortable; when we are in misery how can you, as a king, be in happiness?" The purport is this that we are all inhabiting one globe of earth. In reality we are one family and each one of us is a member of this family. We must all be in the greatest happiness and comfort, under a just rule and regulation which is according to the good pleasure of God, thus causing us to be happy, for this life is fleeting. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Foundations of World Unity, p. 41)

Helping humanity understand the oneness of humanity counteracts the despair and anxiety which afflict us:

Only a fostering of the consciousness that "the earth is but one country and mankind its citizens" is capable of counteracting the despair and anxiety which afflict us. (Baha'i International Community, 1987 Aug 24, Relationship Between Disarmament Development)

The service we do for others isn't about serving them, though. It's about serving God.

The service of the friends belongs to God, not to them. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablets of Abdu'l-Baha v1, p. 61)

I can almost hear you saying: I don't have time to add another thing to my already busy life.

So why is service so important?

In the Bahá'í Writings, 'Abdul-Bahá tells us it lays the foundation for our own success:

By assisting in the success of another servant in the Cause does one...lay the foundation for one's own success and aspirations . . . ('Abdul-Bahá, Star of the West, Vol. 6, #6, p. 44)

This doesn't mean that service has to be outside our normal work life – we can all be of service to our families, our bosses, our co-workers and customers. It's more about attitude than it is about adding more to our workload. It's about getting rid of false dichotomies.

Transformation comes through service, so if we want to transmute our fear into something else, the key is service.

The power of God can entirely transmute our characters and make of us beings entirely unlike our previous selves. Through . . . ever-increasing service to His Faith, we can change ourselves. (Shoghi Effendi, *Spiritual Foundations*, p. 17)

As with everything I'm teaching you, the choice is always yours to make – do you want to be a slave to your moods, or to master them? The key is to find someone else who is suffering and help them, so you will see that others have it worse than you do:

Be not the slave of your moods, but their master. But if you are so angry, so depressed and so sore that your spirit cannot find deliverance and peace even in prayer, then quickly go and give some pleasure to someone lowly or sorrowful, or to a guilty or innocent sufferer! Sacrifice yourself, your talent, your time, your rest to another, to one who has to bear a heavier load than you. ([The Research] Department has found that these words were attributed to 'Abdu'l-Bahá in an unpublished English translation of notes in German by Dr. Josephine Fallscheer taken on 5 August 1910. As the statement is a pilgrim note, it cannot be authenticated.)

Overcoming Fear by Changing your Thoughts

Reprogramming your Subconscious Mind

Many people go through their lives without understanding why they make the same mistakes, follow the same patterns, and live in the same ruts. They aren't happy with their present situation, but they seem to be unable to make any lasting changes. Are you one of these people?

Perhaps you've attend seminars, read books, and taken courses, but, in the end, fallen back into the same dysfunctional patterns you've always followed! Why does it always turn out this way?

We struggle to make permanent changes in our lives because we input information only into our *conscious* mind. Here's the problem: your conscious mind is *not* what directs your behaviors and belief system.

To change your behaviors, you must first reprogram the hard-wired center of your mind: the subconscious mind.

How Does Your Subconscious Mind Work?

The subconscious is the largest part of our mind. It contains all the messages we've received throughout our lives. It holds millions and millions of thoughts grouped into clusters that form beliefs, mindsets and character traits.

The relationship between the conscious and subconscious minds is like an iceberg. The conscious mind is represented by the visible tip of the iceberg, while the subconscious is represented by the gigantic lower portion of the iceberg hidden from view.

You can't see the subconscious in action, but it certainly has a major impact on the voyage you take in your life.

The subconscious is the place where all of your learned behaviors reside. Once you learn to walk, you don't need to consider how to lift and place each foot to take the next step, do you? Of course not! Your subconscious mind automatically controls your steps.

Your subconscious learns behavior through repetition and practice. Just as it learned to control your footsteps when you learned to walk, it also controls your footsteps in your life's journey based on what you've reinforced throughout your life.

Some of these "habits of thought" need to be brought to the surface so they can be examined and changed in light of the new Revelation.

The good news is you can reprogram your subconscious mind by inputting and reinforcing new thoughts and actions, by reading the Baha'i Writings morning and night. The Creative Word of God will influence and educate and transform your outworn habits of thought.

There are several different techniques you can use to tap into the subconscious mind and reprogram how it works.

Here are some strategies you can use to change your mind and change your life:

Affirmations

Affirmations work to change your subconscious mind by using positive, personal, present tense statements to override the embedded negative thinking. By repeating these positive thoughts, you can create new pathways in your subconscious, giving it new attitudes.

Then your subconscious causes you to act in new ways that agree with these new attitudes. For example, repeating words from the Bahá'í prayers can change your mindset and set your intention for the day:

- I will be a happy and joyful being. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Baha'i Prayers, p. 150)
- Enable me to render service to the world of humanity ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 73)
- O God, guide me, protect me. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Baha'i Prayers, p. 36)
- Let my movement and my stillness be wholly directed by Thee. (Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations, p. 240)

Visualization

Visualization is the act of creating detailed mental pictures that depict a desired outcome so you can see success for yourself. These images stimulate the subconscious into accepting them as reality, which then directs behavior accordingly. Top athletes around the world use this technique during game-time.

The Bahá'í Writings are full of images leading to success. Some of my favorites include:

- At the right hand of the throne of Thy mercy, seat me. (Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations, p. 258)
- Behold me standing ready to do Thy will and Thy desire. (Baha'u'llah, The Kitab-i-Aqdas, p. 93)
- Bestow upon us a share from the ocean of Thy wealth. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Baha'i Prayers, p. 21)
- Break off from me the shackles of this nether world. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Baha'i Prayers, p. 57)
- Cause me to enter the garden of happiness. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Baha'i Prayers, p. 44)
- Create in me a pure heart and renew a tranquil conscience within me. (Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations, p. 248)
- Free me from the assaults of passion and desire. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 174)

- From the fragrant breezes of Thy joy let a breath pass over me. (Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations, p. 258)

Make a list of your own favorites and use them every day.

Using techniques like these can help you reprogram your subconscious mind and remove the burden of the negative thoughts buried there. Imagine the freedom of living your life without the automatic dysfunctional behaviors you've had driving you for years!

Conscious Mind

Now that we've discussed the subconscious mind, let's move on to the conscious mind, aware of the reality of our lower and higher natures and the necessity of keeping every thought captive.

Some spiritual principles to keep in mind in order to change your thoughts include:

Know that Fear doesn't Solve Anything:

He does not feel that fear -- for ourselves or for others -- solves any problem, or enables us to better meet it if it ever does arise. We do not know what the future holds exactly. (Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 237)

Knowledge of Self:

It's helpful to take an inventory of all your fears. They are so dangerous you'll want to be conscious of what they are, so that you can consciously work to eliminate them. Find a list of fears to consider.

The first Taráz and the first effulgence which hath dawned from the horizon of the Mother Book is that man should know his own self and recognize that which leadeth unto loftiness or lowliness, glory or abasement, wealth or poverty . . . (Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 34-35)

As you're learning, though, it's not enough to stay at this step, as therapy would have you do. It's only one piece of the puzzle.

Understand you're not alone in having fear:

For those of us in Haifa who had lived, under the aegis of our beloved Guardian, through the agonizing days in 1955 when another group of Bahá'ís were being unjustly persecuted, that time in Persia where the friends suffered senseless acts of barbarism, murder, rape and pillage of property, it was history repeating itself -- but with no Shoghi Effendi at the helm to guide and comfort us. We had to pray, act, endure the heavy-footed hours that never seemed to pass as the time for the execution of our fellow-Baha's drew nearer and nearer. The burden of anxiety for the fate of their co-religionists was shared by the entire Bahá'í world; the burden of responsibility and decision, however, fell upon the Hands of the Cause, particularly the body of the Custodians in Haifa, and was, indeed, an agonizing and almost insupportable burden to bear. (Custodians, Ministry of the Custodians, p. 19)

Understand that there will be strong emotions (sorrow, fear, disillusionment, perplexity, indignation, grievances), and that they are unimportant in the face of opportunities to advance the Cause:

The opportunities which the turmoil of the present age presents, with all the sorrows which it evokes, the fears which it excites, the disillusionment which it produces, the perplexities which it creates, the indignation which it arouses, the revolt which it provokes, the grievances it engenders, the spirit of restless search which it awakens, must, in like manner, be exploited for the purpose of spreading far and wide the knowledge of the redemptive power of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, and for enlisting fresh recruits in the ever-swelling army of His followers. So precious an opportunity, so rare a conjunction of favorable circumstances, may never again recur. (Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 47)

Make a choice:

We have to choose whether we are people of faith or people of fear. People of fear expect trouble to overtake them. People of faith choose to trust God is working in their life and if trouble should come, they trust God will enable them to overcome the trouble. Fear does not torment them for their faith demands to be fulfilled, faith that God will make a way where there seems to be no way.

Every time you recognize Fear rising up you have to respond with what you are going to believe. Make a decision that you are going to walk in love, be loved, and that Fear is not going to be your guide. You have to choose which one you want to believe. If you're practicing fear, you might want to ask yourself: who are you pleasing and who is your Lord in that part of your life?

Is it wise to turn away from such a loving Father, Who showers His blessings upon us, and to choose rather to be slaves of matter? (Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 108-109)

How lofty is the station which man, if he but choose to fulfill his high destiny, can attain! To what depths of degradation he can sink, depths which the meanest of creatures have never reached! Seize, O friends, the chance which this Day offereth you, and deprive not yourselves of the liberal effusions of His grace. (Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, p. 205)

Don't let fear fall on you:

O ye beloved of the Lord! Beware, beware lest ye hesitate and waver. Let not fear fall upon you, neither be troubled nor dismayed. (Abdu'l-Baha, *Baha'i World Faith*, p. 349)

Fear not, neither be dismayed, for your light shall penetrate the densest darkness. This is the Promise of God, which I give unto you. (Abdu'l-Baha, *Paris Talks*, p. 168)

Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine." (Abdu'l-Baha, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 168)

Decide to Stop:

Decide which kingdom you're going to worship: fear or faith.

That doesn't mean that every time you feel fear you need to be delivered from it. Instead, you need to apply what you're learning. You need to throw yourself into the absolute care of God whether we live or whether we die, whether we win or whether we lose. None of that matters. We need to throw ourselves on the absolute care of God.

God delivers us from all our fears. Hello! I have the knowledge of God in front of me! Use it! So when fear and worry come, show them your "no vacancy" sign.

I rule my spirit, not fear. I may be tempted by fear and worry but there's no room at the inn. Fear speaks to me and I do some knee-knocking but I don't yield to it because I have the law of God strong within me.

What's the worst thing that can happen to us? We can die and go to the next world!

Start taking charge of your own spirit. Start recognizing the source of those thoughts. Are they coming from your lower nature or from God? Hold every thought captive.

The Pen of the Most High addresseth Me, saying: Fear not. (Baha'u'llah, The Summons of the Lord of Hosts, p. 90)

Don't feed them:

There's a great story going around the internet – I haven't been able to find the author:

An old Cherokee told his grandson: "My son, there is a battle between two wolves inside us all. One is evil. It is anger, jealousy, greed, and resentment, inferiority, lies and ego. The other is good. It is joy, peace, love, hope, humility, kindness, empathy, and truth."

The boy thought about it, and asked, "Grandfather, which wolf wins?"

The old man quietly replied, "The one you feed."

It's likely more of a parable than a truth, but it makes an important point. If we feed our fears by ruminating on them, keeping on the hamster wheel, they will grow and dominate our lives. If we feed our higher nature through immersing ourselves in the word of God, we will align ourselves with our true purpose and the fears will fall away. The choice is ours to make.

Shoghi Effendi makes a similar point, when he reminds us of our high purpose and urges us not to allow any anxiety to deflect us from achieving it.

I appeal to every one of them, and particularly to the members of the assemblies who safeguard their interests, not to allow any disturbance, suffering, or anxiety to dim the splendour of their faith, to deflect them from their high purpose, to cause any division in their ranks, to interfere with the steady consolidation and expansion of their activities and institutions. I will specially pray that the work they have magnificently initiated, and so marvellously and soundly developed may suffer no setback, but rather continue to develop and yield its destined fruit. Persevere and rest assured. (Shoghi Effendi, Letters from the Guardian to Australia and New Zealand, p. 43)

Just because Shoghi Effendi told us not to let anxiety deflect us from our purpose, doesn't mean he too wasn't beset with worry from time to time. Rúhíyyih Khanum shares a story about that with us:

It was not, however, such dangers as these that caused Shoghi Effendi sleepless nights. His great concern was for the protection of the Twin Holy Shrines. As the Mandate ended and the Arab-Jewish war broke out, a very real danger threatened them and caused him acute anxiety. Bahji was only about fifteen miles from the frontier, over which an invading army might pour at any moment. This was one worry; the other worry, in a way even more intense, was caused by the mooted plan, at one time seriously considered, of placing the frontiers of the new Jewish State in such a way that its northern one would divide Haifa and 'Akká and thus the World Centre would be split in two, its Administrative Centre situated in one country and the Holiest Spot on earth, the Qiblih of the Faith, situated in another, hostile to it and hostile to the Faith itself. Should anyone wonder why the divinely guided Guardian worried so much over such things, I would like to give an explanation, out of my own understanding. It seems to me there are three factors involved in most situations: the Will of God in which His Beneficence, Omnipotence and the destiny He has ordained for man are all involved - and which ultimately rights all wrongs; the element of accident, which 'Abdu'l-Bahá says is inherent in nature; and the element of individual free will and responsibility. Bearing in mind these factors it is not surprising the Guardian should be deeply concerned over any situation that affected the interests and protection of the Faith, and should anxiously ponder the problems facing him, seeking to ensure that the right solution was found, the best opportunity seized, the greatest benefit for the Cause obtained. (Rúhíyyih Khanum, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 188-189)

Despite his worry, he didn't let it stop him from taking action as he pondered the problems and ensured that the right solution was found. That's what we must learn to do too.

Turn your back to fear:

This community can do no better than to gird up afresh its loins, turn its back upon the clamour of the age, its fears, confusion and strife, step resolutely forward on its chosen path, unshakably confident that with every step it takes, should it remain undeflected in its purpose and undimmed in its vision, a fresh outpouring of Divine grace will reinforce and guide its march on the highroad of its destiny. (Shoghi Effendi, *The Unfolding Destiny of the British Baha'i Community*)

Remind yourself there is nothing to be afraid of:

Through the movement of Our Pen of glory We have, at the bidding of the omnipotent Ordainer, breathed a new life into every human frame, and instilled into every word a fresh potency. All created things proclaim the evidences of this world-wide regeneration. This is the most great, the most joyful tidings imparted by the Pen of this wronged One to mankind. Wherefore fear ye, O My well-beloved ones? Who is it that can dismay you? (Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, p. 92-93)

The only thing we should be afraid of is God:

The days of your life shall roll away, and all the things with which ye are occupied and of which ye boast yourselves shall perish, and ye shall, most certainly, be

summoned by a company of His angels to appear at the spot where the limbs of the entire creation shall be made to tremble, and the flesh of every oppressor to creep. Ye shall be asked of the things your hands have wrought in this, your vain life, and shall be repaid for your doings. This is the day that shall inevitably come upon you, the hour that none can put back. To this the Tongue of Him that speaketh the truth and is the Knower of all things hath testified. (Baha'u'llah, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, p. 199)

Understand Death:

Should we have true faith in the words of the prophets we would not fear death nor feel despondent over the passing of our loved ones . . . Such earnest souls, when they pass out of this life, enter a state of being far nobler and more beautiful than this one. We fear it only because it is unknown to us and we have little faith in the words of the Prophets who bring a true message of certainty from that realm of the spirit. We should face death with joy especially if our life upon this plane of existence has been full of good deeds. (Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 207)

Thou art My dominion and My dominion perisheth not; wherefore fearest thou thy perishing? Thou art My light and My light shall never be extinguished; why dost thou dread extinction? Thou art My glory and My glory fadeth not; thou art My robe and My robe shall never be outworn. Abide then in thy love for Me, that thou mayest find Me in the realm of glory. (Baha'u'llah, *The Hidden Words, Arabic 14*)

Stop believing lies:

We need to stop believing the lies of our idle fancies and vain imaginings and start believing God. When we can look fear in the face and call it a pack of lies, it's very empowering. 'Abdu'l-Baha shows us how when we meet with lies we are miserable:

When we find truth, constancy, fidelity, and love, we are happy; but if we meet with lying, faithlessness, and deceit, we are miserable. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 65)

How much more so, when the lying is coming from us!

We want to stop lying to ourselves for another reason too. It's because lying is the worst quality, most odious sin, most blameworthy quality. It destroys all human perfections and leads to other vices and is the foundation of all evil! Surely that's reason enough to focus on what's real!

Consider that the worst of qualities and most odious of attributes, which is the foundation of all evil, is lying. No worse or more blameworthy quality than this can be imagined to exist; it is the destroyer of all human perfections and the cause of innumerable vices. There is no worse characteristic than this; it is the foundation of all evils. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 215)

Change our Thoughts:

It's important to have the right attitude towards our fears; and one way to do it is to remember the vision presented to us in the Writings:

Therefore, the dear friends of God who have such a broad and clear vision before them are not perturbed by such events, nor are they panic- stricken by such

thundering sounds, nor will they face such convulsions with fear and trepidation, nor will they be deterred, even for a moment, from fulfilling their sacred responsibilities. (Universal House of Justice, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 127)

It behoves man to abandon thoughts of non-existence and death which are absolutely imaginary and see himself ever living, everlasting in the divine purpose of his creation. He must turn away from ideas which degrade the human soul, so that day by day and hour by hour he may advance upward and higher to spiritual perception of the continuity of the human reality. (Abdu'l-Bahá, *Baha'i World Faith*, p. 265-266)

He urges you to put these dark thoughts from your mind, and remember that God, the Creator of all men, can bear to see them suffer so, it is not for us to question His wisdom. He can compensate the innocent, in His own way, for the afflictions they bear. (Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 237)

When you transform your negative outlook into a positive one, you can accomplish so much more. In doing so, your mind will be released from negative programming, allowing you to excel and succeed throughout your life.

I think this is what 'Abdul-Bahá means when he says:

I charge you all that each one of you concentrate all the thoughts of your heart on love and unity. When a thought of war comes, oppose it by a stronger thought of peace. A thought of hatred must be destroyed by a more powerful thought of love. Thoughts of war bring destruction to all harmony, well-being, restfulness and content. (Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 29)

Forget about them:

The Guardian urges you to forget all your fears . . . (Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 238)

How do we do that? Through teaching and service:

. . . with a tranquil heart and radiant spirit, to teach and serve the Faith all you can in Yonkers and its vicinity, while depending on God for your guidance and help. The teaching work is of the utmost importance in these days, and whoever engages in it will be reinforced by the Hosts on High. (Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 238)

Affirmations:

When fear tries to come back, stand up to it. Don't let it ruin your life anymore. Quote these words back to fear:

- I WILL no longer be full of anxiety, nor will I let trouble harass me. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Baha'i Prayers*, p. 150)
- I fear no tribulation in His path, nor any affliction in My love for Him and in the way of His good pleasure. (Baha'u'llah, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, p. 131)

- I WILL fear no one, though the powers of earth and heaven be leagued against Me. (Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 101)
- Armed with the power of Thy name nothing can ever hurt me, and with Thy love in my heart all the world's afflictions can in no wise alarm me. (Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations by Baha'u'llah, p. 208)
- I fear no tribulation in His path, nor any affliction in My love for Him and in the way of His good pleasure. (Baha'u'llah, The Summons of the Lord of Hosts, p. 131)
- Such is my love for Thee that I can fear no one, though the powers of all the worlds be arrayed against me. Alone and unaided I have, by the power of Thy might, arisen to proclaim Thy Cause, unafraid of the host of my oppressors. (Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations by Baha'u'llah, p. 187)
- Thou turnest restlessness into tranquillity, fear into confidence, weakness into strength, and abasement into glory. (Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations by Baha'u'llah, p. 212)
- Thou art He Who changeth through His bidding abasement into glory, and weakness into strength, and powerlessness into might, and fear into calm, and doubt into certainty. No God is there but Thee, the Mighty, the Beneficent. (Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations by Baha'u'llah, p. 249)

Stand up right now and say this with me:

Fear, you are a product of my lower nature. Fear, you are just an idle fancy and vain imagining.

Fear, God didn't give you to me. He gave me the power of love and the ability to discern good from evil. Because you're not from God you must be evil.

Fear, my father is in Heaven, on His throne and you're not.

Fear, Baha'u'llah's teachings told me all about you. He is my Deliverer, my Redeemer, my Savior. I'm under His protection at all times and under all conditions. He is my Comforter and the One who leads me into all truth. He is the Power of God within me. I've joined myself to God so if you want to tangle with me, you'll need to tangle with my Father. I'm under the shadow of His wings and I am perfectly safe. I will not listen to your lies anymore. So, what are you going to do about that?

Overcoming Fear through Tests and Difficulties

Once you decide to overcome your anxiety, and ask God for help, you can count on the fact that your tests will increase! He's giving you a chance to strengthen your resolve and try out your new skills. After all, reading about what to do is not the same as putting into practice what you're learning, and the best way to do this is through tests!

Sorrow not if, in these days and on this earthly plane, things contrary to your wishes have been ordained and manifested by God, for days of blissful joy, of heavenly delight, are assuredly in store for you. Worlds, holy and spiritually glorious, will be unveiled to your eyes. You are destined by Him, in this world and hereafter, to partake of their benefits, to share in their joys, and to obtain a portion of their sustaining grace. To each and every one of them you will, no doubt, attain. (Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p.328)

I love this quote! During my dark days, when I was writing to the House for guidance, they sent it to me. Often when they quote from the Writings, they don't give a source, so I thought they'd written it just for me! It was a real test for my ego to find it was written by Bahá'u'lláh for the whole world! 😊

I love it because it contains both an assurance that He understands that life doesn't go our way; and a promise we can count on, that better days are ahead, both in this world as well as in the world to come, even if we don't see it right now. It's very important to hold on to this promise, because it's what's going to get you through.

What you're going through could be a "dark night of the soul" and daylight will surely follow, just as it does every night.

In the Hidden Words, Bahá'u'lláh tells us:

For everything there is a sign. (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words, 48)

The sign of better days to come is found in nature, as day following night; and spring (hope) and summer (ease) following winter (cold, dark, bleak days of grief).

In the same Hidden Word, He also reminds us of how we demonstrate our love for Him:

The sign of love is fortitude under My decree and patience under My trials.
(Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words, 48)

Remind yourself that through this process, you are developing faith, trust, fortitude and patience! Someday you will need these virtues and thank God you had a chance to develop them so you aren't handicapped in the next world!

As the child in the womb does not yet know the use of its members, it does not know what its eyes are for, neither its nose, nor ears, nor tongue -- so also it is with the soul on earth. It cannot understand here the uses and powers of its spiritual gifts,

but directly it enters the eternal kingdom, it will become clearly apparent. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í Prayers 9, p. 48)

'Abdu'l-Bahá shows how the virtues we are developing now are the seeds necessary for the trees of our lives to grow:

We must strive with energies of heart, soul and mind to develop and manifest the perfections and virtues latent within the realities of the phenomenal world, for the human reality may be compared to a seed. If we sow the seed, a mighty tree appears from it. The virtues of the seed are revealed in the tree; it puts forth branches, leaves, blossoms, and produces fruits. All these virtues were hidden and potential in the seed. Through the blessing and bounty of cultivation these virtues became apparent. Similarly the merciful God our creator has deposited within human realities certain virtues latent and potential. Through education and culture, these virtues deposited by the loving God will become apparent in the human reality even as the unfoldment of the tree from within the germinating seed. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Baha'i World Faith, p. 267)

When invited back into your life, God comes slowly and gently and He will work with you again but He's not going to eliminate your fears. He's going to bring you back into the face of your enemy through tests and difficulties, so that you can face them with Him by your side.

God sends us tests for the perfection of our souls; and to help us achieve our life's purpose, which is to draw closer to Him. When we understand this, it's easier to deal with them.

The House of justice urges you not to let it worry you. All through life Bahá'ís are faced with tests of many kinds, and problems and doubts, but it is through facing and overcoming them that we grow spiritually. (The Universal House of Justice, 1982 Jan 03, Teaching vs. Proselytizing)

It's important that we understand the purpose of tests and to know that God has sent them to us for the perfection of our souls.

You are encouraged to continue to keep in mind the spiritual dimension of your struggles. We are assured by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the following words: "The more difficulties one sees in the world the more perfect one becomes. The more you plough and dig the ground the more fertile it becomes. The more you cut the branches of a tree the higher and stronger it grows. The more you put the gold in the fire the purer it becomes. The more you sharpen the steel by grinding the better it cuts. Therefore, the more sorrows one sees the more perfect one becomes. That is why, in all times, the Prophets of God have had tribulations and difficulties to withstand. The more often the captain of a ship is in the tempest and difficult sailing the greater his knowledge becomes. Therefore I am happy that you have had great tribulations and difficulties... Strange it is that I love you and still I am happy that you have sorrows. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Star of the West, Vol. XIV, No. 2, p. 41)

It's easy to say we believe, but much harder to prove it to God and to ourselves:

It is easy to approach the Kingdom of Heaven, but hard to stand firm and staunch within it, for the tests are rigorous, and heavy to bear. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 274)

Whenever we pray for a particular quality or virtue, we can be sure that God will send us unique tests to help develop that quality. For example, perhaps you'd like to overcome anxiety. God will give you lots of fearful situations so that you can apply what you are learning. To a soul who doesn't understand, we might think that He's not answering our prayer, because our anxiety seems to be increasing and not decreasing. It's just God giving us lots of opportunities to practice.

Even as He hath revealed: 'Do men think when they say "We believe" they shall be let alone and not be put to proof?' (Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Íqán, pp. 8-9)

Only when we face our fears can we get freed from them.

The more often the captain of a ship is in the tempest and difficult sailing the greater his knowledge becomes. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Star of the West, Vol. XIV, No. 2, p. 41)

Here's a story to illustrate how God throws us overboard to teach us to rely on Him:

A king was sailing in a ship with his Persian slave. The slave had never been on the sea before; he began to weep and cry out and to shudder with fear, and however much they sought to quiet him he would not be still. The king's excursion was in a fair way to be spoiled and none knew what to do. Then a wise man who was on the ship said to the king, 'If thou wish, I shall quiet him.' The king answered, 'Truly this were a gracious deed.' The wise man bade them throw the slave into the sea. After he had choked down some water they seized him by the hair and drew him toward the ship. He clung to the ship with both hands, and once out of the water he sat in a corner and was still. The king was astonished, and asked, 'What wisdom lay in this?' The wise man answered: 'The slave did not know what it is to drown, and thus he did not value the safety of the ship. Even so doth a man value security who hath known calamity. (Marzieh Gail, Dawn Over Mount Hira, p. 9)

So what will get us through our tests?

1. Trust God and the process:

Whatever hath befallen you, hath been for the sake of God. This is the truth, and in this there is no doubt. You should, therefore, leave all your affairs in His Hands, place your trust in Him, and rely upon Him. He will assuredly not forsake you. In this, likewise, there is no doubt. No father will surrender his sons to devouring beasts; no shepherd will leave his flock to ravening wolves. He will most certainly do his utmost to protect his own. If, however, for a few days, in compliance with God's all-encompassing wisdom, outward affairs should run their course contrary to one's cherished desire, this is of no consequence and should not matter. (Baha'u'llah, Fire and Light, p. 10)

2. Be patient and composed, trusting in God's grace:

When calamity striketh, be ye patient and composed. However afflictive your sufferings may be, stay ye undisturbed, and with perfect confidence in the abounding grace of God, brave ye the tempest of tribulations and fiery ordeals. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 73)

3. Grin and bear it is God's advice to Bahá'u'lláh in the Fire Tablet!

Thou wert created to bear and endure, O Patience of the worlds. (Bahá'u'lláh, Baha'i Prayers, p. 218)

4. Turn towards God and cling to the Writings:

Our intent is that all the friends should fix their gaze on the Supreme Horizon, and cling to that which hath been revealed in the Tablets. (Bahá'u'lláh, Fire and Light, p. 10)

5. Understand that it's not forever and we will emerge more spiritual and closer to God.

The troubles of this world pass, and what we have left is what we have made of our souls; so it is to this we must look—to becoming more spiritual, drawing nearer to God, no matter what our human minds and bodies go through. (Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 297)

I'd like to conclude with this quote which is full of advice:

Naturally there will be periods of distress and difficulty, and even severe tests; but if the person turns firmly towards the Divine Manifestation, studies carefully His spiritual teachings and receives the blessings of the Holy Spirit, he will find that in reality these tests and difficulties have been the gifts of God to enable him to grow and develop. Thus you might look upon your own difficulties in the path of service. They are the means of your spirit growing and developing. You will suddenly find that you have conquered many of the problems which upset you, and then you will wonder why they should have troubled you at all. (Shoghi Effendi, Living the Life, p. 35-36.)

Tests After Becoming a Bahá'í

Yes, it's true that since becoming a Bahá'í the tests have been one intense test after another. Bahá'u'lláh tells us this is what happens:

Even as He hath revealed: 'Do men think when they say "We believe" they shall be let alone and not be put to proof?' (Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Íqán, pp. 8-9)

Shoghi Effendi tells us:

And yet, . . . it is the lot of the chosen ones of God, the people of Baha, to face adversity and suffer tribulation before achieving ultimate victory . . . (Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration, p. 60)

He understands how hard it is to bear our tests:

It is easy to approach the Kingdom of Heaven, but hard to stand firm and staunch within it, for the tests are rigorous, and heavy to bear. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 274)

He shows us there are two kinds of Bahá'ís – those who are tested and those who aren't. The Cause rests on those who are!

There is always an important difference between friends and tested friends. No matter how precious the first type may be, the future of the Cause rests upon the latter. (Shoghi Effendi, *The Light of Divine Guidance*, vol. 1, p. 34-35)

The world needs you to pass these tests!

God understands how hard it is:

It is often difficult for us to do things because they are so very different from what we are used to, not because the thing itself is particularly difficult. With you, and indeed most Bahá'ís, who are now, as adults, accepting this glorious Faith, no doubt some of the ordinances, like fasting and daily prayer, are hard to understand and obey at first. But we must always think that these things are given to all men for a thousand years to come. For Bahá'í children who see these things practiced in the home, they will be as natural and necessary a thing as going to church on Sunday was to the more pious generation of Christians. (Shoghi Effendi, *Lights Of Guidance*, p. 343)

It is not easy for people to learn the Bahá'í way, to overcome their inherited prejudices or to resist their personal temptations. This way takes time, is subject to checks and backsliding, but one can see, looking at the past 138 years, that there is an overall advance that is astonishing in the light of the obstacles to be overcome, and is accelerating with every passing decade. (The Universal House of Justice, *Messages 1963 to 1986*, p. 516)

This is what happens when you don't:

When an individual reaches a point where he recognizes Bahá'u'lláh as a Manifestation of God, his heart becomes the recipient of the light of God's Faith for this day. If the believer immerses himself from the start in the ocean of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, reads His writings daily not merely in order to add to his own knowledge but to receive the food of the spirit, seeks the companionship of the righteous, and arises to serve Him with sincerity and detachment, then he may steadily grow in faith and become a radiant and enthusiastic soul. He may obtain a deeper understanding of the writings and reach a point where both his mind and his heart work together in harmony. Such a believer will eventually find no conflict between the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and his own thinking. He will discover many a wisdom hidden in the utterances of Bahá'u'lláh and will recognize the limitations and shortcomings of his own finite mind. But if a believer, after having recognized Bahá'u'lláh, fails to follow this path, he may soon find himself in conflict with many aspects of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. His intellect may not be able to understand the wisdom behind many of His Teachings, he may indeed reject some of His precepts and eventually lose faith altogether. Some people struggle for years to overcome this problem, for they long to be confirmed in their faith. Often such an individual may be helped to acquire a true understanding of the Faith by those who truly believe in Bahá'u'lláh and are detached from this world. (Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Baha'u'llah v 2*, p. 217)

The House of Justice tells us:

The souls who bear the tests of God become the manifestations of great bounties: for the divine trials cause some souls to become entirely lifeless, while they cause the holy souls to ascent to the highest degree of love and solidity. (The Universal House of Justice, 1985 Dec 02, *Child Abuse, Psychology and Knowledge of Self*)

Don't become one of the lifeless! The world needs you!

In the end, it all boils down to one thing: trust in God!

No matter what happens, nothing is as important as our feeling of trust in God, our inner peacefulness and faith that all, in the end, in spite of the severity of the ordeals we may pass through will come out as Bahá'u'lláh has promised. (Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 237)

Hope this helps you to understand the tests you're having in a new light!

Overcoming Fear through Using Role Models:

Turn to Baha'u'llah:

In truth the Blessed Perfection was . . . a shelter for every fearing one.
(Abdu'l-Baha, Baha'i World Faith - Abdu'l-Baha Section, p. 221)

In the Tablet of Ahmad, Baha'u'llah asks us to:

Remember My days during thy days, and My distress and banishment in this remote prison. (Baha'u'llah, Baha'i Prayers, p. 210)

When I was in the deepest despair, remembering traumatic events of my childhood, I came across this quote, which helped to lift me out of my "self". I was feeling a lot of "poor me" and "why did this have to happen to me", and then I had to stop and remember Bahá'u'lláh's days.

Bahá'u'lláh was born into a wealthy family and was expected to follow his father into an important position in the government of Persia (Iran). He didn't want the position or the power. Instead He wanted to dedicate Himself to helping the oppressed, sick and poor and to champion the cause of justice.

As a result, His life included a series of imprisonments, and banishments. At one point He was imprisoned for four months in an underground reservoir for a public bath, with its only outlet a single passage down three steep flights of stone steps. He sat with his feet in stocks and a 100-pound iron chain around his neck. He and His fellow prisoners (150 thieves, murders and highwaymen) huddled in their own bodily wastes, languishing in the pit's inky gloom, subterranean cold and vermin and stench-ridden atmosphere.

When He was freed from prison, He and His family were banished to Bagdad (Iraq), a 3 month journey on foot over the mountains in the middle of winter without enough food.

"The throat Thou didst accustom to the touch of silk Thou hast, in the end, clasped with strong chains, and the body Thou didst ease with brocades and velvets Thou hast at last subjected to the abasement of a dungeon. Thy decree hath shackled Me with unnumbered fetters, and cast about My neck chains that none can sunder . . . How many the nights during which the weight of chains and fetters allowed Me no rest, and how numerous the days during which peace and tranquility were denied Me . . . Both bread and water . . . they have, for a time, forbidden unto this servant . . . and Thy behest summoned this servant to depart out of Persia, accompanied by a number of frail-bodied men and children of tender age, at this time when the cold is so intense that one cannot even speak, and ice and snow so abundant that it is impossible to move". (Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p. 109)

He stayed in Bagdad for 7 years, and then was banished again to Constantinople (Turkey), where he stayed for four months, and then was exiled again to Adrianople (Turkey). Again it was in winter and they didn't have the proper clothes to protect them from the harsh

weather. In order to drink, they had to light a fire to thaw ice from springs along the way. He stayed there for four and a half years and then was banished to the prison city of 'Akká (Israel), to which the worst criminals were sent. He remained there for the rest of His life (24 years).

He was discredited by His uncle, poisoned by his jealous half-brother and witnessed the death of His son. He was betrayed by people He trusted, stoned, and isolated from the Believers. For a time, to protect the Faith from the efforts of His half-brother, He lived as a hermit. He was the victim of ignorance, injustice, cruelty and fanaticism.

But every crisis was followed by victory, and this, I believe, is what is important to remember.

Although my repressed memories included all the positive and neutral memories too, once they came back I was able to see that like Bahá'u'lláh, there were times in my life that were peaceful, and activities that weren't abusive. From anger I learned to find my voice and take action. From poverty I was protected from materialism and learned to rely on God. From estrangement I gained knowledge of myself, and through it, knowledge of God. From being silenced, I was protected from backbiting and gossip.

So when you're feeling in the pit of despair, I urge you to remember not only the negative things that happened to you, and to Bahá'u'lláh, but to remember the victories that came from them as well.

Turn to the Blessed Spot:

Verily, I read thy letter which indicated that thou hast turned unto the Blessed Spot, that the Truth (of God) hath revealed itself to thee, that thy fear is quieted and that thou hast attained to composure, assuredly believing in this great Cause. (Abdu'l-Baha, Tablets of Abdu'l-Baha v1, p. 71)

Turn to 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

I wish to add a few words of assurance and sympathy in view of the heavy burden of responsibility that rests on your shoulders in these difficult and trying times. My fervent and increasing prayer is that 'Abdu'l-Bahá may show you the way that will enable you to continue your splendid pioneer work effectually, peacefully, free from every earthly care and anxiety. (Shoghi Effendi, *The Unfolding Destiny of the British Baha'i Community*, p. 30)

Haji Mirza Haydar-'Ali writes in the *Bihjatu's-Sudur* of the hopes of the Bahá'ís that, as the heir to Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá would, with the passage of years, come to resemble Him physically as well; but their hopes did not materialize, because sorrows and tribulations pressed hard upon 'Abdu'l-Bahá, afflictions weakened His frame and made Him a prey to a number of ailments. He goes on to say that 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in order to protect His followers from worry and anxiety, would not expose them to the knowledge of His maladies which at times were severe. (H.M. Balyuzi, *Abdu'l-Baha - The Centre of the Covenant*, p. 133)

Recently I've been reading the newly released "Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá" which is filled with His answers to questions people put to Him. It's so full of love, I feel that reading them is like reading love letters to me too!

Remember the suffering of 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

In times of disappointment, stress and anxiety, which we must inevitably encounter, we should remember the sufferings of our departed Master. Your work, your energy, your vigilance and care, your loving-kindness are assets that I greatly value and prize. Keep on, persevere, redouble in your efforts, repeat and rewrite the admonitions and instructions of our Beloved in your communications with individuals and Assemblies until they sink in their hearts and minds. This was truly our Beloved's way and method and none better can we ever pursue. Your present pioneer work will surely be remembered and extolled by future generations. My prayers will always be offered for you. In matters of contribution we should not use any compulsion whatsoever and ascertain clearly the desire of the donor. We should appeal to but not coerce the friends. (Shoghi Effendi, *The Compilation of Compilations* vol. I, p. 532)

In times of disappointment, stress and anxiety, which we must inevitably encounter, we should remember the sufferings of our departed Master. (From a letter written by Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 9 July 1926) (*The Universal House of Justice*, 1985 Dec 02, Child Abuse, Psychology and Knowledge of Self)

Turn to the Central Figures of the Faith:

Again, in *God Passes By*, he tells us of the anxieties of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, called upon to undertake a succession of colossal tasks throughout the entire period of His Ministry. Most recently, *The Priceless Pearl* has drawn aside the curtain on the life of the Guardian, and revealed to us the anxieties and agonies of the solitary and heroic figure who charted our course in service to the Cause for centuries to come. Yet who can doubt that all the central Figures demonstrated to the whole of mankind an assured and happy way of life? Here is where their example seems particularly precious. To rise above the disappointments, obstacles, and pain which we experience in serving the Cause is difficult enough, but to be called on, in doing so, to be happy and confident is perhaps the keenest spiritual test any of us can meet. The lives of the Founders of our Faith clearly show that to be fundamentally assured does not mean that we live without anxieties, nor does being happy mean that there are not periods of deep grief when, like the Guardian, we wrap ourselves in a blanket, pray and supplicate, and give ourselves time for healing in preparation for the next great effort. (*Universal House of Justice, Quickeners of Mankind*, p. 116)

Study the life of Bahiyyih Khanum:

The memory of the beloved Khanum will, assuredly, prove to be your great comfort in your moments of sufferings and anxiety and will guide your steps and strengthen your spiritual power and insight. (Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Indian Subcontinent*, p. 86)

How staunch was her faith, how calm her demeanour, how forgiving her attitude, how severe her trials, at a time when the forces of schism had rent asunder the ties that united the little band of exiles which had settled in Adrianople and whose fortunes seemed then to have sunk to their lowest ebb! It was in this period of extreme anxiety, when the rigours of a winter of exceptional severity, coupled with

the privations entailed by unhealthy housing accommodation and dire financial distress, undermined once for all her health and sapped the vitality which she had hitherto so thoroughly enjoyed. The stress and storm of that period made an abiding impression upon her mind, and she retained till the time of her death on her beautiful and angelic face evidences of its intense hardships. (Compilations, Bahiyyih Khanum, p. 33-34)

Study the Lives of the Martyrs and the Courage of the Baha'is in Iran:

But, thanks to the strengthening grace of Bahá'u'lláh and the demonstration of steadfastness by these noble friends (the Bahá'ís of Iran), we shall know how to meet the shafts of the enemy without fear. (The Universal House of Justice, Ridvan 153, 1996)

Read the Dawnbreakers

It is interesting to note as well that Shoghi Effendi encouraged the believers to study the Dawn-Breakers, which he described as an "unfailing instrument to allay distress." (Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, 23 October 1994)

Sometimes it's not enough to turn to books for comfort - you need a real person to talk to. That's when you can use the Institutions of the Faith.

Turn to the Continental Board of Counsellors:

When you have doubts and concerns about your own plans, confide in the Counsellors; when something they do causes you worry, talk to them in the proper spirit of Bahá'í consultation. Remember that they, like yourselves, are burdened with the work of the Cause and are beset with many concerns in its service, and they need your sympathetic understanding of the challenges they face. Open your hearts and your minds to them; regard them as your confidants, your loving friends. And be ever ready to extend to them your hand in support. (The Universal House of Justice, 1994 May 19, response to US NSA)

Turn to the Auxiliary Board:

Training alone, of course, does not necessarily lead to an upsurge in teaching activity. In every avenue of service, the friends need sustained encouragement. Our expectation is that the Auxiliary Board members, together with their assistants, will give special thought to how individual initiative can be cultivated, particularly as it relates to teaching. When training and encouragement are effective, a culture of growth is nourished in which the believers see their duty to teach as a natural consequence of having accepted Bahá'u'lláh. They "raise high the sacred torch of faith," as was 'Abdu'l-Baha's wish, "labour ceaselessly, by day and by night," and "consecrate every fleeting moment of their lives to the diffusion of the divine fragrance and the exaltation of God's holy Word." So enkindled do their hearts become with the fire of the love of God that whoever approaches them feels its warmth. They strive to be channels of the spirit, pure of heart, selfless and humble, possessing certitude and the courage that stems from reliance on God. In such a culture, teaching is the dominating passion of the lives of the believers. Fear of failure finds no place. Mutual support, commitment to learning, and appreciation of diversity of action are the prevailing norms. (The Universal House of Justice, 2001 Jan 09, Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors)

Overcoming Fear – Checklist

There's been a lot to consider in previous articles, so I wanted to summarize it here, so you can monitor your progress, and make sure you've covered all the bases.

Use this list as a checklist, and when you've completed them all, you'll have cast fear out and replaced it with the love of God.

Forgiveness	Forgive God
	Forgive yourself
	Forgive others
	Ask God for His forgiveness
Patience	Remember there is a season for everything
	Remind yourself that you have the right to fail
	Give it time
Prayer	Reading prayers morning and night
	Saying your Obligatory Prayer
	Using the Prayer for Protection
	Using specific prayers to overcome fear
Read the Writings	Reading the Writings morning and night
	Deepen your knowledge
	Meditation on the Words of God
	Study a prayer with someone
Role Models	Baha'u'llah
	'Abdu'l-Bahá
	Shoghi Effendi
	Central Figures
	Bahiyiyh Khanum
	Martyrs
	Dawnbreakers
	Continental Board of Counsellors
	Auxiliary Board Members
Sin	Understand lower and higher nature
	Understand the Nature of Sin
Teaching and Service	Action
	Distraction
	Teaching

	Service
	Core Activities
Tests and Difficulties	Understand the role and purpose of tests and difficulties
Thoughts	Knowledge of Self Fear doesn't solve anything Habits of Thought Stop Believing Lies Turn your back on fear Change Thoughts Stop Feeding the Fear Forget about Them Understand strong emotions Understand you're not alone Use Affirmations Make a choice and decide to stop Understand Death
Turn to God	Choose the Right Source Turn to God Trust God Take your problems to God See the end in the beginning Recognize Bounties Receive God's Love Recognize God's Forgiveness Recognize God's Protection Cling to the Cord
Virtues	Consultation Courage Detachment Faith Gratitude Happiness and Joy Love Mindfulness Peacefulness Radiance Trust

Now that you've checked off all the things on this list, hang up a mental "no room at the inn" sign inside your heart, so that fear and anxiety won't be able to express itself in you again.

What Can Others Do To Help Those Who Are Afraid?

One of the things I love about the Baha'i Faith is that it not only gives us advice on how we ourselves can transform, but it also suggests how we can help others. This shouldn't be so surprising since we are all one; and we've been told to walk in each other's shoes.

Advice:

The National Assembly should neither feel embarrassed nor ashamed in turning to the friends, continuously appealing to them to exemplify their faith and devotion to the Cause by sacrificing for it, and pointing out to them that they will grow spiritually through their acts of self-abnegation, that the fear of poverty should not deter them from sacrificing for the Fund, and that the assistance and bounty of the Source of all good and of all wealth are unfailing and assured. (Universal House of Justice, Lights of Guidance, p. 258-259)

Consultation

By consulting together, fears, misgivings and any sense of inadequacy can be cast aside, the group can set their own goals and then, together or each one alone, work for achievement of the goals. (International Teaching Centre, 1989 Jul 05, Encouraging the Formation of Teaching Groups)

Devotional Gatherings

The mere act of your gathering together is enough to scatter the forces of these vain and worthless people. (Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 84)

Groups

In a learning environment fear of failure is eliminated, and the friends are helped to focus on achievements and the new capacity for progress that learning creates. (International Teaching Centre, 1992, Building Visions of Growth)

Love and encouragement

Looking back upon those sullen days of my retirement, bitter with feelings of anxiety and gloom, I can recall with appreciation and gratitude those unmistakable evidences of your affection and steadfast zeal which I have received from time to time, and which have served to relieve in no small measure the burden that weighed so heavily upon my heart. (Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration, p. 66)

Protection:

. . . shelter those who are overshadowed by fear. (Abdu'l-Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 453)

Specific Prayers

Thou hast written concerning the Tablet of Baka Ya Ali -- Baka Ya Vafi (Tablet of Protection). This Tablet is for the healing of ailments. Whenever one is anxious about the recovery of an ill one, he may read this prayer with a melodious voice while in a state of the utmost attention and concentration. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablets of Abdu'l-Bahá v2, p. 469)

The following prayer of protection for the bearer has recently (July/August 1996) been translated into English from Arabic at the Bahá'í World Centre.

"In His Name, the Exalted, the All-Highest, the Most Sublime!

Glorified art Thou, O Lord my God! O Thou Who art my God, and my Master, and my Lord, and my Support, and my Hope, and my Refuge, and my Light. I ask of Thee, by Thine Hidden and Treasured Name, that none knoweth save Thine own Self, to protect the bearer of this Tablet from every calamity and pestilence, and from every wicked man and woman; from the evil of the evil-doers, and from the scheming of the unbelievers. Preserve him, moreover, O my God, from every pain and vexation, O Thou Who holdest in Thy hand the empire of all things. Thou, truly, art powerful over all things. Thou doest as Thou willest, and ordainest as Thou pleasest.

O Thou King of Kings! O Thou kind Lord! O Thou Source of ancient bounty, of grace, of generosity and bestowal! O Thou Healer of sicknesses! O Thou Sufficer of needs! O Thou Light of Light! O Thou Light above all Lights! O Thou Revealer of every Manifestation! O Thou the Compassionate! O Thou the Merciful! Do Thou have mercy upon the bearer of this Tablet, through Thy most great mercy and Thine abundant grace, O Thou the Gracious, Thou the Bounteous. Guard him, moreover, through Thy protection, from whatsoever his heart and mind may find repugnant. Of those endued with power, Thou, verily, art the most powerful. The Glory of God rest upon thee, O thou rising sun! Do thou testify unto that which God hath testified of His own Self, that there is none other God besides Him, the Almighty, the Best-Beloved."
Bahá'u'lláh

Understand their condition is not permanent:

It's important to remember that nothing stays the same and tomorrow is another day. Just because someone seems anxious today doesn't mean they will always be that way, particularly if they are doing what the Writings ask us to do:

People who looked anxious yesterday, today have faces shining with gladness.
(Abdu'l-Bahá, Divine Philosophy, p. 74)

Here's a story of how 'Abdu'l-Bahá dealt with people's fears:

Soon after the outbreak [of the war], Haifa, which was still under Turkish rule, was panic-stricken. Most of the inhabitants fled inland, fearing bombardment by the Allies. Those Baha'i friends who were merchants suffered great losses, for all their stores of tea, sugar, etc., were commandeered by the Government, without payment. The friends, in spite of the reassurances of the Master that no guns would be turned on Haifa, were living in constant fear, and the children, having heard terrible stories which were being told everywhere, grew quite ill, always looking round and about with frightened eyes.

At this time, the Master decided that it would be well to accept an invitation of the Shaykh of Abz'uSinz'an to remove the Baha'is and their children to that peaceful, healthy village, out of reach of the dreaded bombarding. In this village also, the very limited resources of the friends would, with strictest economy, be sufficient for their daily needs, with the help of the corn from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's storing. Shaykh Salih placed his house at the disposal of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and His family, Who received the most cordial welcome from this gracious and courteous chief of the Druze village of Abu-Sinan. The other Persian friends were gladly taken into various houses of the village, where they found themselves in most happy surroundings. Their food was of the simplest: lentils, dried beans, delicious olives and their oil, and sometimes milk, eggs, and even some goat's meat. The fresh pure air was, of course, wonderfully good for their health, and they quickly recovered calm nerves and strength of body. (Lady Blomfield, The Chosen Highway)

Prayers to Eliminate Fear

Detachment from Anxiety

Before praying to have all our fears removed you'll want to take authority over your life and let go of all emanations from your lower nature. You'll want to let go of all fears so you can live life totally free and independent of all save God.

Repeat each one of the following out loud for the best results:

I let go of all anxiety, phobias, claustrophobia and panic attacks.

I let go of the fear of tomorrow, where I expect things to go wrong.

I let go of all dread, worry, change, the unknown, and of making the wrong decisions.

I let go of all fear of losing my life.

I let go of all the wasted years I've spent in worry and anxiety.

I let go of all fear of death, the dying process and dying prematurely.

I let go of all fears of losing my children, of my children not becoming Baha'i, and of the loss of relationships.

I let go of all fear of disease, pain, suffering, disability and disfiguration.

I let go of all fear of doctors, hospitals, needles, blood and vomit.

I let go of all negative fears of God, of losing His pleasure, of being severely punished and losing any chance of salvation.

I let go of all fear of sin, of evil spirits and superstitions.

I let go of all fear of trusting God or man and all fears of betrayal.

I let go of all fears of any public speaking, being noticed or being killed.

I let go of all fears of self-consciousness, shyness, inferiority, criticism, inadequacy, reproof, harassment and bullying.

I let go of all fear of other people's facial expressions, other people's bitterness, other people's words of disapproval and verbal rejection.

I let go of all fear of humiliation and from being shamed.

I let go of all fear around other races and cultures, of bigotry, prejudice and abandonment.

I let go of all fears around obesity, alcoholics, sex offenders, drug-users and being around people who are drinking or doing drugs.

I let go of all fears of being alone and lonely.

I let go of all fear of abandoning my loved ones through death or disease.

I let go of all fear of not having enough money to provide for food, drink, housing, and clothing.

I let go of all fears of poverty, of having to live in a room in somebody else's house.

I let go of all fears of insanity, night terrors, torment, fearful dreams, nightmares, fearful visions and the dark.

I let go of all fear of allergic reactions to food, drink, clothes, dust, mold and chemicals in the environment.

I let go of all fear of drivenness and perfectionism that won't let me fail.

I let go of all desire to control other people, to need to know what's going to happen, to need for information.

I let go of all of my fear of being controlled.

I let go of my fear of my family members, my spouse and my children.

I let go of all fears of animals, including snakes, spiders, mice and bats.

I let go of my fear of all natural disasters including tornadoes, hurricanes, thunderstorms, fire or tsunamis.

I let go of all fear of my lower nature and what it's capable of doing, of war, conflict and terrorism.

I let go of all fear of estrangement, apathy and lethargy.

I let go of my fear of being touched, hugged, intimacy, having sex or the loss of sex.

I let go of all fear of my own sexuality, other people sexuality, menopause, menstrual cycles, pregnancy, PMS and childbirth.

I let go of my fear of success, Halloween and noise.

I let go of my fear of choking, suffocation, drowning.

I let go of my fear of weapons, of being robbed or abused sexually, physically or verbally.

I let go of my fear of premature death from accidents.

I let go of my fear of cowardice and self-pity.

I take responsibility for my own life, for making a commitment to my own healing to asking for help and depending on other people.

Fear: I have taken care of your hold on me. It's time for you to go.

I now realize how free I have become in order to have healing, wholeness, health and homeostasis from the top of my head to the bottom of my feet. Every cell, membrane, tissue and organ of my body has been healed from the effects of fear. Thank you God for healing me of all my fears.

Prayers for Healing Anxiety

O God! Refresh and gladden my spirit. Purify my heart. Illumine my powers. I lay all my affairs in Thy hand. Thou art my Guide and my Refuge. I will no longer be sorrowful and grieved; I will be a happy and joyful being. O God! I will no longer be full of anxiety, nor will I let trouble harass me. I will not dwell on the unpleasant things of life. O God! Thou art more friend to me than I am to myself. I dedicate myself to Thee, O Lord. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Baha'i Prayers, p. 151)

I beseech Thee, O my God, by them and by the sighs which their hearts utter in their separation from Thee, to keep them safe from the mischief of Thine adversaries, and to nourish their souls with what Thou hast ordained for Thy loved ones on whom shall come no fear and who shall not be put to grief. (Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations by Baha'u'llah, p. 3)

Pour forth upon all them that are dear to Thee what will preserve them from fear and trembling after me. Powerful art Thou to do whatsoever may please Thee. No God is there except Thee, the All-Glorious, the All-Wise. (Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations by Baha'u'llah, p. 18)

Lauded be Thy name, O Lord my God! I entreat Thee by Thy Name through which the Hour hath struck, and the Resurrection came to pass, and fear and trembling seized all that are in heaven and all that are on earth, to rain down, out of the heaven of Thy mercy and the clouds of Thy tender compassion, what will gladden the hearts of Thy servants, who have turned towards Thee and helped Thy Cause. Keep safe Thy servants and Thy handmaidens, O my Lord, from the darts of idle fancy and vain imaginings, and give them from the hands of Thy grace a draught of the soft-flowing waters of Thy knowledge. Thou, truly, art the Almighty, the Most Exalted, the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Generous. (Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations by Baha'u'llah, p. 72)

I am the one, O my God, who, through the love I bear to Thee, hath been able to dispense with all who are in heaven and on earth. Armed with this love, I am afraid of no one, though all the peoples of the world unite to hurt me. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations*, p. 309)

O Thou forgiving Lord! Thou art the shelter of all these Thy servants. Thou knowest the secrets and art aware of all things. We are all helpless, and Thou art the Mighty, the Omnipotent. We are all sinners, and Thou art the Forgiver of sins, the Merciful, the Compassionate. O Lord! Look not at our shortcomings. Deal with us according to Thy grace and bounty. Our shortcomings are many, but the ocean of Thy forgiveness is boundless. Our weakness is grievous, but the evidences of Thine aid and assistance are clear. Therefore, confirm and strengthen us. Enable us to do that which is worthy of Thy holy Threshold. Illumine our hearts, grant us discerning eyes and attentive ears. Resuscitate the dead and heal the sick. Bestow wealth upon the poor and give peace and security to the fearful. Accept us in Thy kingdom and illumine us with the light of guidance. Thou art the Powerful and the Omnipotent. Thou art the Generous. Thou art the Clement. Thou art the Kind. (Abdu'l-Baha, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 176)

Before the throne of Thy oneness, amid the blaze of the beauty of Thy countenance, cause me to abide, for fear and trembling have violently crushed me. Beneath the ocean of Thy forgiveness, faced with the restlessness of the leviathan of glory, immerse me, for my sins have utterly doomed me. (Baha'u'llah, *Prayers and Meditations* by Baha'u'llah, p. 234)

Turn, then, O my God, their fear into the evidences of Thy peace and Thy security, and their abasement into the sovereignty of Thy glory, and their poverty into Thine all-sufficient riches, and their distress into the wonders of Thy perfect tranquillity. Vouchsafe unto them the fragrances of Thy might and Thy mercy, and send down upon them, out of Thy marvelous loving-kindness, what will enable them to dispense with all except Thee, and will detach them from aught save Thyself, that the sovereignty of Thy oneness may be revealed and the supremacy of Thy grace and Thy bounty demonstrated. (Baha'u'llah, *Prayers and Meditations* by Baha'u'llah, p. 335)

O Thou pitiful God! These friends are perfectly infatuated with Thy nearness; they have given their hearts for the beauty of Thy face; are devoted to Thy Kingdom and are intoxicated by the wine of belief. In the meeting of the covenant they are bearing in their hands the cup of anxiety, needing Thy benevolence and yearning for the heavenly blessings. O Mighty Creator! Cause these souls to be the receptacle of Thy mercy, regarded by divine attention, and render each one as a lighted candle, that they may illuminate that region with the light of righteousness. Make them the companions of and partaker with this servant [Abdul-Baha] in the devotion of Thy Threshold. O my God! Strengthen the weak ones and open the eyes of those who are anxious to behold the beauty of the Kingdom, that they may arise with divine strength, heavenly bounty, spiritual blessing, ethereal breaths and mighty assistance for Thy service, dispelling the superstitions of the doubters, elucidating the proofs and evidences before all seekers, healing the sick, being kind to the poor, a refuge and home for the helpless and a light for

the hopeless. Thou art the Powerful and the Able, the Pitiful and Compassionate God!
(Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablets of Abdu'l-Bahá v3, p. 646 - 647)

We ask God to . . . raise them unto a station where the world and the lordship thereof shall not turn them aside from looking toward the Supreme Horizon, and where anxiety for gaining a livelihood and providing household goods shall not divert them from the thought of that day whereon the mountains shall be made like carpets . . . By my Lord, were I given the choice between the glory and opulence, the wealth and dignity, the ease and luxury wherein they are, and the distress and affliction wherein I am, I would certainly choose that wherein I am today, and I would not now exchange one atom of these afflictions for all that hath been created in the kingdom of production! Were it not for affliction in the way of God my continuance would have no sweetness for me, nor would my life profit me . . . And in all this we give thanks to God, the Lord of the worlds, and we praise Him under all circumstances, -- verily He is a witness unto all things. (Baha'u'llah, Tablet to the Shah of Persia, Baha'i Scriptures, p. 79-80)

In Islam a special prayer was ordained to be said in times of natural phenomena which cause fear, such as earthquakes. This has been annulled, and in its place a Bahá'í may say "Dominion is God's, the Lord of the seen and the unseen, the Lord of creation". (Baha'u'llah, Synopsis and Codification of the Kitab-i-Aqdas, p. 58)

Conclusion

You can defeat Fear. Fear is not greater than God! Fear is not greater than the Word of God! Fear is not greater than you!

You'll want to share these teachings with everyone you meet, but we need to exercise wisdom. It's unlikely they'll want to hear so all we can do is pray for them.

Not everything that a man knoweth can be disclosed, nor can everything that he can disclose be regarded as timely, nor can every timely utterance be considered as suited to the capacity of those who hear it.' Such is the consummate wisdom to be observed in thy pursuits. Be not oblivious thereof, if thou wishest to be a man of action under all conditions. First diagnose the disease and identify the malady, then prescribe the remedy, for such is the perfect method of the skilful physician. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 268)

Walking out of fear into faith doesn't mean that it won't visit you again. When you're standing in faith and fear is reaching all around you, that isn't fear-faith, that's a good thing, because it means you're facing your enemy. It's a good place to be. You're in temptation. Some people delude themselves into thinking that if they are finished with fear

they never have to face it down again. It's just another lie from our lower nature. We don't want to go there.

Ponder then in thine heart: Matters being such as thou dost witness, and as We also witness, where canst thou flee, and with whom shalt thou take refuge? Unto whom wilt thou turn thy gaze? In what land shalt thou dwell and upon what seat shalt thou abide? In what path shalt thou tread and at what hour wilt thou find repose? What shall become of thee in the end? Where shalt thou secure the cord of thy faith and fasten the tie of thine obedience? By Him Who revealeth Himself in His oneness and Whose own Self beareth witness to His unity! Should there be ignited in thy heart the burning brand of the love of God, thou wouldst seek neither rest nor composure, neither laughter nor repose, but wouldst hasten to scale the highest summits in the realms of divine nearness, sanctity, and beauty. Thou wouldst lament as a soul bereaved and weep as a heart filled with longing. Nor wouldst thou repair to thy home and abode unless God would lay bare before thee His Cause. (Baha'u'llah, Gems of Divine Mysteries, p. 13-14)

Once we've mastered these ways to eliminate fear, it's important to teach them to our children from their earliest childhood, so they will know how to eliminate them faster than we were able to:

In the treasuries of the knowledge of God there lieth concealed a knowledge which, when applied, will largely, though not wholly, eliminate fear. This knowledge, however, should be taught from childhood, as it will greatly aid in its elimination.... Whatever decreaseth fear increaseth courage. (Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 32)

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- [4] Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 245
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- [13] Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablets of Abdu'l-Bahá v2, p. 346
- [14] 'Abdul-Bahá, Fire and Light, p. 23
- [15] Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablets of Abdu'l-Bahá v1, p. 122
- [16] Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 68
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- [18] Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 245
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- [20] Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablets of Abdu'l-Bahá v1, p. 132
- [21] Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 168