

# **The Language of the Heart: Parallels between Chinese and Bahá'í Approaches to the Spiritual Self**

*Sim Tze Hong*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Chinese use the language of the heart to describe things relating to human nature. For example, “open heart” means happy, “close heart” means concern, and “use heart” means to concentrate. The Chinese use the heart to “think” and to express feelings.

Both Chinese and Bahá'í teachings recognise the nobility of a human spirit that is created to reflect divine attributes. The “heart” is the part of human nature bestowed by the creator to be pure, kind and radiant. Man needs to go through the process of transformation and development. The teachings of the Manifestations of God<sup>1</sup> and saints raise human consciousness about the spiritual self. When a man follows the teachings of the Manifestation of God, he is enlightened and gains true knowledge about the spiritual self. An enlightened man has unity within him, is motivated to serve, and brings unity among people. When a man lives his life with pure and goodly deeds, he contributes to the advancement of civilization.

The Chinese recognise the true self as a man having a divine mandate rather than a man having a covenant with God as in other religions. As cultures interact, it becomes more important to find the common ground between them. This paper focuses on the parallels between the Chinese, especially Confucian teachings, and the Bahá'í teachings about the

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<sup>1</sup> “Manifestation of God” is terminology used in the Bahá'í Faith for a Divine Teacher or Prophet. The concept is like God being the Sun and the Manifestations of God being the mirrors, who perfectly reflect the attributes of God.

spiritual self. The discussion of this paper talks about the nature of the heart, the pathway to perfection, and the knowledge of oneself.

## THE NATURE OF THE HEART

Chinese traditions and Bahá'í teachings have profound and similar concepts about the nature of the heart. The Chinese concept of the heart refers to human nature that is created *Cheng*, *Ren* and *Ming*. The Bahá'í concept of the heart refers to human nature that is created "pure, kindly and radiant." *Cheng* is similar to "pure," *Ren* is similar to "kindly" and *Ming* is similar to "radiant."

### The Chinese Concept of the Heart

#### A Heart that is *Cheng*

*Cheng* can mean a heart that is pure, sincere and truthful. In the Confucian classic, *The Doctrine of the Mean*, it says: "What *Tian* (Heaven) has conferred is called the Nature"<sup>2</sup> and "*Cheng* is the Way of *Tian*, to be *Cheng* is the way of men."<sup>3</sup> *Tian* is the Creator.<sup>4</sup> The Chinese knowledge of *Tian* includes the fear of *Gui Sheng* (ghost and God). Confucius says that *Gui Sheng* cannot be seen or heard, yet they manifest in all things and "all things cannot exist without them." They cause the people of the world to worship them. Confucius says: "The arrival of *Sheng* is unpredictable, how can one's heart be unpure? Its essence is mysterious, but it manifests everywhere. So manifest, so *Cheng* (truthful) that it cannot be veiled."<sup>5</sup>

Human beings understand *Tian* by being *Cheng*. *Cheng* is the foundation for all relationships. In *The Doctrine of the Mean*, it mentions that the pre-requisite for a man to be trusted by the ruler is to be trusted by his friends. The pre-requisite to be trusted by a friend is to be trusted by parents. The pre-requisite to be trusted by parents is to be *Cheng*, to be

<sup>2</sup> *The Four Books, The Doctrine of the Mean*. p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 46.

<sup>4</sup> The Chinese concept of *Tian* is the Creator of all things. *Tian* is lower than *Dao*. *Dao* is the essence and the power of existence and is unknowable. *Dao* is similar to the Bahá'í concept of God and *Tian* is similar to one of the Names of God-- Creator.

<sup>5</sup> *The Four Books, The Doctrine of the Mean*, p. 36.

sincere in one's act. In order to be *Cheng*, one needs to know what is *Shang* (the Supreme Good). Without knowing *Shang*, it is impossible to be *Cheng*.<sup>6</sup> Since "Cheng is the Way of *Tian*," to know *Shang* is to know *Tian*. Since "to be *Cheng* is the way of man" and "what *Tian* has conferred is called the Nature," to know *Tian* is human nature and to follow the way of *Tian* becomes the first duty of man.

*The Doctrine of the Mean* describes the process to be *Cheng* and to know. Firstly, through human nature, it says: "to be *Ming* (to know) by being *Cheng* is called nature (human)." Secondly, through education, it says: "to be *Cheng* through knowing is called *Jiao* (education)."<sup>7</sup> The concept of *Jiao* or education is defined as follows:

"What *Tian* has conferred is called Nature, to follow Nature is called *Dao*<sup>8</sup> (the Way), *Siu Dao* is called *Jiao* (to learn and to live by *Dao* is called education)."<sup>9</sup>

The Chinese word *Jiao* means both religion and education. From the above definition, religion and education are not separated from each other. To live by *Dao* needs *Cheng* or truthfulness. Confucius says, "*Dao* cannot be left for an instant. If it could be left, it would not be *Dao*. Therefore a *Jun Zi* (superior man) is cautious when he is not watched, fearful (fear *Dao*) when he is not heard (in privacy). There is nothing that is most hidden and most minute that does not manifest."<sup>10</sup> The relationship between a man and *Dao* is like a fish and the ocean. The fish may not be aware of the sea and may not see the sea. Nevertheless, the fish is dependent on the sea and cannot leave it. Confucius points out the need to apply truthfulness in society. He says if he were to rule, he would ensure that abuses of the legal system do not arise. People would fear the righteousness of the rulers. If people do not have sufficient grounds for their case, they would feel shameful and not take their disputes to court. This is called "knowing the root," and "knowing the

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 46.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> *Dao* in this context refers to the heavenly way instead of the essence of God as explained in a previous footnote.

<sup>9</sup> *The Four Books, The Doctrine of the Mean*. p. 24.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

root is called the perfection of knowledge."<sup>11</sup> This is the concept of *Cheng* and its application.

Referring to *Cheng*, Mengcius says: "A great man is he who does not lose his childhood heart"(maintaining a pure heart).<sup>12</sup> The level of purity or *Cheng* that man can achieve varies. Only a saint can achieve the level of perfect *Cheng*. In *The Doctrine of the Mean*, it says:

"Only the perfect *Cheng* of the world can adjust the great invariable relations of mankind, establish the great fundamental virtues of humanity, and know the transforming and nurturing operation of Heaven and Earth. What enables him to do so? It is because his *Cheng* has reached the stage of *Ren*, his knowledge is perfect and profound, just as the sky that is vast and has no limit."<sup>13</sup>

In another passage from the same book, it reads:

"Only the perfect *Cheng* of the world can perfectly develop his nature. Able to perfectly develop his own nature he can develop others' nature. Able to develop others' nature he can develop the nature of all things. Able to develop the nature of all things he can assist the transforming and nurturing power of Heaven and Earth. Able to assist the transforming and nurturing power of Heaven and Earth he can stand parallel to Heaven and Earth"<sup>14</sup>

An ordinary man cannot be compared to a saint who is able to "perfectly develop his nature." Nevertheless, Confucius says that a man can strive to be *Cheng* by "choosing *Shang* (Supreme Good) and firmly holding to it," "studying it extensively," "inquiring into it thoroughly," "differentiating it clearly," and "practicing it earnestly."<sup>15</sup> Confucius continues that an ordinary man is "second" to the saint (and cannot know everything), so he should focus on investigating the reality of certain fields of study.<sup>16</sup> In another passage, Confucius says:

<sup>11</sup> *The Four Books, The Great Learning*, pp. 6-8.

<sup>12</sup> *The Four Books, The Works of Mengcius*, p. 414.

<sup>13</sup> *The Four Books, The Doctrine of the Mean*. p. 58.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, p. 48.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p. 46.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, p. 48.

“*Cheng*, is the act to perfect one’s own nature. *Dao* (the Divine Way), is the way to perfect one’s own way. *Cheng* is the beginning and the end of all things...*Cheng* perfects not only oneself, but it also perfects all things. Perfecting oneself is being *Ren* (benevolence); perfecting all things is knowledge. All these are the virtues of (human) nature, the unity of the inward and outward *Dao*.”<sup>17</sup>

In sum, *Cheng* perfects a man inwardly, and perfects all things outwardly. Since *Ren* is the outcome of being *Cheng*, it is necessary to elaborate the Confucian concept of *Ren*.

### A Heart that is *Ren*

*Ren* can mean a heart that is benevolent and kind, or a heart that fully expresses human nature. It is the perfection of *Cheng*. Mengcius says: “*Ren* is the human heart; *Yi* (justice) is the human path.”<sup>18</sup> In another passage, he says, “*Ren* is the distinguishing characteristic of man. As embodied in man’s conduct, it is called *Dao* (the Way).”<sup>19</sup> That means a man having the quality of *Ren* is in harmony with the heavenly way. Mengcius says that *Ren* is the “little difference” that distinguishes a human being from an animal.”<sup>20</sup> Confucius elaborates *Ren* in many ways. Kong Jiang (the 72th descendent of Confucius) says that *Ren* is the way men “know each other, love each other and associate with each other.”<sup>21</sup> From this perspective, it is easier to understand *Ren* in the ways a man exercises his powers to know, to love, and to will.

### *Ren and Knowing*

At the level of knowing, to be *Ren* is to recognise the nobility of oneself. Mengcius says the business of a *Jun Zi* (superior man) is to have “noble aims.” To have “noble aims” is to “practice *Ren* and *Yi*.” To kill an innocent man is “not *Ren*,” to take things not belonging to oneself is “not *Yi*.” The intention and action of a man should be guided by these principles. Mengcius says: “intention is based on *Ren* and action is based on *Yi*. Then the business of a great man is completed.”<sup>22</sup> Zhengcius says

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 50.

<sup>18</sup> *The Four Books, The Works of Mengcius*. p. 484.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p. 542.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 416.

<sup>21</sup> Kong Jien, *KongZi De Ren Sheng Ze Dao*. (Confucius Way of Life) p. 5.

<sup>22</sup> *The Four Books, The Works of Mengcius*. p. 526.

that a *Si* (scholar) has a "heavy responsibility" and a "long way." To set *Ren* as a personal responsibility is "heavy" and to stop only at death is "long." Thus a *Si* has to persevere and be steadfast.<sup>23</sup>

Regarding the ways to be *Ren*, *Zi Xia* says if one "learns intensively, fixes his aim, inquires earnestly, and reflects over current matters, then he encompasses *Ren*."<sup>24</sup> Learning needs discipline and requires one to make the right choice. Confucius says "to discipline oneself and to observe *Li* (propriety) is *Ren*," to do so, one "sees not contrary to *Li*, listens not contrary to *Li*, speaks not contrary to *Li*, acts not contrary to *Li*."<sup>25</sup> *Ren* begins with oneself. Confucius says "if the aim is fixed upon *Ren*, there will be no practice of wickedness." He says that a man with *Ren* is "able to like men (the righteous) and to hate men (the wicked)."<sup>26</sup>

### *Ren and Loving*

At the level of loving, to practice *Ren* is to avoid conflict, to create harmony and unity. Confucius suggests the golden rule can avoid conflict, he says: "not to do to others as you would not wish done to yourself. To have no murmuring against you in your country, and none in the family."<sup>27</sup> Mengcius suggests an active way to create harmony and unity, he says: "All men have some things that they cannot bear, extend that feeling to what they can bear, then it is *Ren*. All men have some things that they will not do, extend that feeling to what they will do, then it is *Yi* (justice)."<sup>28</sup> What a man can rightfully bear and will rightfully do should be in line with *Ren* and *Yi*. Mengcius explains with the following example:

"All men have a heart that cannot bear the suffering of others... If a man suddenly sees a child who is about to fall into a well, he will be alarmed and have sympathy. Such a feeling does not come from the intention to befriend the child's parents, nor from the intention to be praised by

<sup>23</sup> *The Four Books, The Confucian Analects*, p. 128.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* p. 246.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* p. 166.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* p. 88.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* p.166.

<sup>28</sup> *The Four Book, The Works of Mengcius*. p.548

neighbours, nor from trying to avoid the irritating noise of the crying child."<sup>29</sup>

Mengcius says a man should possess a few kinds of heart, he states:

"A man without a sympathetic heart is not a man; without a heart of shame he is not a man; without a heart of modesty and complaisance (gentleness, willingness to please others) he is not a man; without a heart to differentiate between good and evil he is not a man. A sympathetic heart is the beginning of *Ren* (benevolence); a heart of shame is the beginning of *Yi* (justice), a heart of modesty and complaisance is the beginning of *Li* (propriety), and a heart to differentiate good and evil is the beginning of *Zi* (wisdom). All men have these four beginnings (inherited qualities), just as they have four limbs."<sup>30</sup>

A man needs to develop his four limbs so that he can grow and remain active physically. Similarly, a man needs to develop his "four beginnings" of *Ren*, *Yi*, *Li*, *Zi* so that he can grow and remain active morally and spiritually. *Ren* creates a society that is caring and forgiving. *Yi* creates a society that is truthful and righteous. *Li* creates an orderly and courteous society. *Zi* creates a society free from unseemly influences. The result is harmony and unity in society, which leads to a morally and spiritually advanced civilization. .

### *Ren and Willing*

At the level of willing, a man begins the practice of *Ren* with his family. Mengcius says: "The essence of *Ren* (benevolence) is service to one's parents. The essence of *Yi* (justice) is obedience to one's elder brother. The essence of knowledge is to understand both (*Ren* and *Yi*) and persevere in them. The essence of *Li* (propriety) is to regulate and to refine both. The essence of *Yue* (music; happiness) is to rejoice from having both."<sup>31</sup> At the social level, a man reflects his quality of *Ren* through associating with others. Confucius says:

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p. 320.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 406.

"Establish for others as you wish to be established yourself, achieve for others as you wish to be achieved yourself. To take a matter around you as an example and extend it to others is the method of practicing *Ren*."<sup>32</sup>

Therefore, action is most important because it is the tangible product of one's nature and the result of one's will. In human relationships and actions, Mengcius points out that a great difference exists between "not being able" and "not being willing." "Not being able" refers to things beyond a man's capacity. "Not being willing" refers to things within a man's capacity but things a man refuses to do. However, men always use the reason of "not being able" as an excuse to refuse things that they should do but are not willing to do. Mengcius explains with the following example. If a man was asked to carry a mountain or jump across the ocean, he can refuse, and say that he is not able to do so because it is beyond his capacity. However, if a strong man is asked to make a walking stick out of a branch for an elderly man, he should not refuse by giving the excuse that he is not able to do so, because in this case, the request lies within his capacity to accomplish the task.<sup>33</sup> Besides, to be kind and helpful to the elderly is a social responsibility. Man needs goodwill in all human relationships and to have an attitude of service to others. A human heart with *Ren* will naturally associate with others in a spirit of good will. A heart that is *Cheng* and *Ren* will be *Ming*.

#### A Heart that is *Ming*

*Ming* means radiant. A person with truthful words and deeds is like the sun that is radiant and cannot be veiled. In *The Doctrine of the Mean*, it mentions the process and outcomes of being *Cheng*. It says: "Being *Cheng* becomes apparent. Being apparent becomes manifest. Being manifest becomes *Ming* (radiant). Being *Ming* moves (others' hearts). Being moved, things (old habits and bad customs) are changed. Being changed, things (society) are transformed."<sup>34</sup> In other words, if a heart is truthful, a man's words and deeds will be truthful and manifest. His words and deeds exert influence on others and can transform society. He will be like a lamp that provides guidance to others. The degree that a

<sup>32</sup> *The Four Books, The Confucian Analects*, p. 114.

<sup>33</sup> *The Four Books, The Works of Mengcius*, p. 272.

<sup>34</sup> *The Four Books, The Doctrine of the Mean*, p. 48.



heart is *Ming* is in proportion to his degree of *Cheng* and the services a man is willing to perform.

In sum, the Chinese concept of human nature is based on *Cheng*, *Ren* and *Ming*. Human nature is bestowed by Heaven, created to be pure, sincere and truthful. A pure heart knows Heaven; it perfects oneself inwardly, and perfects others outwardly. Man is also created to be kind, truth-seeking and noble. Man has the duty to create unity and harmony in society. A man who has these qualities will be spiritually radiant and contributes to the advancement of society.

### The Bahá'í Concept of the Heart

The Bahá'í concept of the heart is similar to the Chinese one. In *The Hidden Words*, Bahá'u'lláh, the prophet founder of the Bahá'í Faith mentions that man is "created" by God to be "rich" and "noble" and should not seek "enlightenment" from anyone besides God.<sup>35</sup> He says that all things "in heaven and earth" have been "ordained" for men "except the human heart," which God has "made the habitation" of His "beauty and glory."<sup>36</sup> Man has no ownership of the heart. Man is the trustee of the heart and has the obligation to care for the heart. By doing so, a man can fulfil in his life, God's trust. Referring to the heart, Bahá'u'lláh says:

"My first counsel is this: Possess a pure, kindly and radiant heart, that thine may be a sovereignty ancient, imperishable and everlasting."<sup>37</sup>

A "pure, kindly and radiant heart" is the spiritual basis of human nature and is the pre-requisite for all human development.

#### A Pure Heart

A pure heart is similar to the Confucian concept of *Cheng* - pure, truthful and able to recognise *Shang* (the Supreme Good). Mengcius says that a great man has a "childhood heart." Similarly 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the son of Bahá'u'lláh once held a child close to him and said that "the true Bahá'í

<sup>35</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, 1:13, p. 8.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 2:27, p. 32.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 1:1, p. 5.

loves children, because Jesus says they are of the Kingdom of heaven. A simple pure heart is near to God; a child has no worldly ambitions."<sup>38</sup> In another passage, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says: "Whosoever has a pure heart and renders good deeds is nearer to God and the object of His favor."<sup>39</sup> Purity and truthfulness are inseparable. Just as the Chinese say that to be *Cheng* is to recognise *Shang*, to have a pure heart is to recognise God and to be "near to God." To have a truthful heart is to obey God and to "render good deeds."

When one observes the sun, he will notice that to give light is the characteristic and the necessity of the sun. Similarly, the nature of a mirror has the characteristic and the necessity to reflect light. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says that a "pure heart" becomes the "mirror of the beauty of truth" to "manifest" (divine) "Light." 'Abdu'l-Bahá exalts "purity from every defeat" as "the first perfection" for a man. He adds: "In all ...actions and conduct there must first be purity."<sup>40</sup> A man with a pure heart manifests his perfect nature, like a spotless mirror, he reflects perfectly the light of God. This is similar to the Chinese saying that to know by being *Cheng* is called "nature" (human).

A man gains true knowledge by reflecting the knowledge of God. The Chinese say that "to be *Cheng* through knowing is called education" and education is to live by the way of *Dao*. Similarly, Bahá'ís recognise that following the teachings of the Manifestation of God is the beginning of all learning. Bahá'u'lláh says: "The source of all learning is the knowledge of God, ... and this cannot be attained save through the knowledge of His divine Manifestation."<sup>41</sup> The "perfect *Cheng* of the world" who knows the "operation of Heaven and Earth" mentioned by the Chinese can be compared to the Manifestation of God. The Chinese recognise the supreme "Good" through their Saints and Bahá'ís recognise God through the Manifestation of God. Throughout the history of China, there has not been a figure commonly known as a "prophet" who establishes a religion as in other major world religions. The Chinese recognition of the "Good" is a profound act of self knowledge and an awareness of a divine mandate. The Bahá'í recognition of God is a

<sup>38</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *'Abdu'l-Bahá in London*, p. 59.

<sup>39</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 300.

<sup>40</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í World Faith*, Compilation, p. 333.

<sup>41</sup> Esslemont, J.E. *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*. Quoted from *Words of Wisdom*, p. 74.

covenant and an act of obedience to the Teachings of their prophet founders.

In the *Kitab'i-Aqdas*--the Most Holy Book Bahá'u'lláh says the recognition of the Manifestation of God is "the first duty prescribed by God for His servants." He adds: "Whoso achieveth this duty hath attained unto all good; and whoso is deprived thereof hath gone astray, though he be the author of every righteous deed."<sup>42</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that "actions alone are not sufficient; they are a body of the greatest loveliness, but without spirit." He adds: "that which is the cause of everlasting life, eternal honor, universal enlightenment, real salvation and prosperity is, first of all, the knowledge of God."<sup>43</sup> This is similar to the Confucian concept of *Cheng* being the foundation of all relationships. Without knowing the "Supreme Good," it is impossible to be *Cheng*; without *Cheng*, it is impossible to be trusted by others.

The recognition of God is coupled with the love of God. When man loves God and lives in God, man can receive love from God. This is a reciprocal process. Referring to this relationship, Bahá'u'lláh says: "Love Me that I may love thee. If thou loveth Me not, My love can in no wise reach thee."<sup>44</sup> A fish leaving the ocean cannot enjoy the bounty of the ocean. 'Abdu'l-Bahá further explains: "the love of God enables man to purify his innermost heart."<sup>45</sup> Love has to be coupled with obedience. Bahá'u'lláh says that whoso recognises God has reached a "most sublime station" and has to observe "every ordinance" of God. These are "twin duties" which are "inseparable" and "neither is acceptable without the other."<sup>46</sup> Observing the ordinances of God needs truthfulness. Truthfulness, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, is "the foundation of all human virtues." He added: "Without truthfulness progress and success, in all the worlds of God, are impossible for any soul. When this holy attribute is established in man, all the divine qualities will also be acquired."<sup>47</sup> This is similar to the Confucius saying that to be truthful is "knowing the root."

<sup>42</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitab-i-Aqdas*, p. 19.

<sup>43</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 300.

<sup>44</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, 1:5, p. 6.

<sup>45</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 60.

<sup>46</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitab-i-Aqdas*, p. 19.

<sup>47</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 26.

The knowledge of God motivates man to focus his attention on noble spiritual goals in life, and not to be attached to material goals. Spiritual goals are eternal, and material goals are transient. The spirit of man is everlasting, and the body of man is mortal. Purification of the heart develops the spirit of man. For this Bahá'u'lláh says: "Abandon not for that which perisheth an everlasting dominion, and cast not away celestial sovereignty for a worldly desire."<sup>48</sup> To have a pure heart, a man needs to detach himself from all things except God. Bahá'u'lláh says:

"Blind thine eyes, that is, to all save My beauty; stop thine ears to all save My word; empty thyself of all learning save the knowledge of Me; that with a clear vision, a pure heart and an attentive ear thou mayest enter the court of My holiness."<sup>49</sup>

To be detached from all things except God is similar to the condition described in the Chinese saying of "firmly holding" to "Good," to study it extensively and to practise it earnestly.

In sum, the first duty for man is to recognise God. Purity of heart enables a man to recognise God through the Manifestation of God. This recognition is coupled with love, which in turn purifies one's heart. This love is coupled to obedience. Recognizing God and observing God's ordinances are twin duties that cannot be separated. Observing God's ordinances needs truthfulness, and truthfulness is the foundation of all human virtues. A pure heart is the spiritual basis of human nature and the pre-requisite of all noble human conduct and action. In order to purify his heart, a man needs to detach himself from all things except God.

### A Kindly Heart

A kindly heart is similar to *Ren*. To be kind implies the need to associate with others. It is also easier to understand a kindly heart from the way a man exercises his powers to know, to love and to will. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says that the difference between man and animal is their degrees of consciousness. Referring to an animal, he says: "It has no consideration or consciousness of good and evil. It simply follows its natural instinct and inclination."<sup>50</sup> While the Chinese practice *Ren* as an act of self-

<sup>48</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*. 2:37, p.35.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 2:11, p. 26.

<sup>50</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*. p. 40.

consciousness, Bahá'ís practice kindness as an act of following the teachings of the Prophets. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

“The Prophets of God have come to show man the way of righteousness in order that he may not follow his own natural impulse but govern his action by the light of Their precept and example. According to Their teachings he should do that which is found to be praiseworthy by the standard of reason and judgment of intellect, even though it be opposed to his natural human inclination; and he should not do that which is found to be unworthy by that same standard, even though it be in the direction of his natural impulse and desire.”<sup>51</sup>

From this perspective, to have a kindly heart, a man may need to act in opposition to his “natural human inclination” and “natural impulse and desire.” A man is able to do so because he has “consciousness of good and evil” and is able to reason by his intellect. To have a kindly heart does not mean to do good action alone. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says that “good action” alone, though “praiseworthy,” is not enough. In order for a righteous action to be “perfect and complete,” three “virtues of humanity” are needed, namely: the “knowledge of God”, the “love of God” and “goodwill”.<sup>52</sup> From this perspective, a kindly heart knows through the “knowledge of God,” loves through the “love of God,” and wills through “goodwill.”

### *Knowledge of God*

The knowledge of God, according to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, is “the cause of spiritual progress and attraction, and through it the perception of truth, the exaltation of humanity, divine civilization, rightness of morals and illumination are obtained.”<sup>53</sup> The knowledge of God is the cause of nobility of a man and the exaltation of humanity. Bahá'u'lláh says man is created “noble.” He uses the example of a phoenix to describe the need of a man to transcend his body, to “burst” the bodily “cage asunder”<sup>54</sup> and “on the wings” of his soul, to soar “to the realm of the infinite.”<sup>55</sup> A phoenix soars high in the kingdom above and will not be content with

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*. pp. 300-301

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, 2:38, p. 36.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 2:1, p. 23.

the earth below. Similarly, a man with noble aims seeks the exalted knowledge of God, and will not be content with material knowledge of the world.

Similar to the Chinese way of a *Jun Zi* who has “noble aims” and observes *Ren* and *Yi* (justice), Bahá'u'lláh makes justice a requirement for a man who wishes to win His confidence. He says: “The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice” and “justice is My gift to thee and the sign of My loving-kindness.” He adds that by justice, “thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbour.”<sup>56</sup> To see and to know by oneself means to independently investigate truth. This echoes the saying of *Zi Xia* that if one “learns intensively, fixes his aim, inquires earnestly, and reflects over current matters, then he encompasses *Ren*.”

Similar to the Confucian teaching on the way to observe *Li* (propriety), Bahá'u'lláh says:

“Hear no evil, and see no evil, abase not thyself, neither sigh and weep. Speak no evil, that thou mayest not hear it spoken unto thee.” In addition, one should always have his “heart unsullied,” his “thoughts pure,” and his “nature sanctified.”<sup>57</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh says one should know how to differentiate between good and evil, to “treasure the companionship of the righteous and eschew all fellowship with the ungodly.”<sup>58</sup>

Knowledge of God is truth. Through the knowledge of God, a man can obtain “spiritual progress” and can contribute to the “exaltation of humanity” and the advancement of “divine civilization.”

### *Love of God*

There are different degrees of love: love of self, love of friends, love of God and love of human beings for one another. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains the differences between these bonds of love. He says that self-love “is a

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 1:2, pp. 5-6.

<sup>57</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, 2:44, p. 37.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 2:3, p. 24.

strange trait and the means of the destruction of many important souls in the world. If man be imbued with all good qualities but he be selfish, all the other virtues will fade or pass away and eventually he will grow worse.”<sup>59</sup> Love between friends is not true love, because it is “originated by the accidental conditions of life,” “subject to transmutation,” “subject to change,” and is merely “fascination” and “acquaintanceship.” The love of God is the “real and great love,” it purifies a man’s heart and enlightens his soul. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says:

“The spiritual love of God maketh man pure and holy and clotheth him with the garment of virtue and purity... This love is not physical... it is absolutely spiritual... The souls whose consciences are enlightened through the light of the love of God, they are like unto shining lights and resemble stars of holiness in the heaven of purity... The real and great love is the love of God. That is holy above the imaginations and thoughts of men.”<sup>60</sup>

In addition, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says that the love of God, is “the fruit of human existence,” “the spirit of life, and the eternal bounty” and the “greatest power in the human world.” Without the love of God, “the contingent world would be in darkness... the hearts of men would be dead, and deprived of the sensations of existence; ... spiritual union would be lost... the light of unity would not illuminate humanity.”<sup>61</sup>

The love of human beings for one another is similar to *Ren*. This is universal love. Mengcius says that to be *Ren* is to extend what one “can bear” and “will do” to others, according to *Ren* (benevolence) and *Yi* (justice). Similarly, Bahá’í teachings encourage people to have a kindly heart towards others. However, very few can achieve this, since profound self-knowledge is needed. From the Bahá’í point of view, the love of man for man has a spiritual foundation and is only possible through the love of God. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says the love of man for man is “prompted by the ideal of the unity of spirits.” He says:

“This love (love of man for man) is attained through the knowledge of God, so that men see the Divine Love reflected in the heart. Each sees in the other the Beauty of God reflected in the soul, and finding this point

<sup>59</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 136.

<sup>60</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 22

<sup>61</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 301.

of similarity, they are attracted to one another in love... This love will bring the realization of true accord, the foundation of real unity."<sup>62</sup>

The love of God therefore is the foundation of all human love. The love of God motivates a man to transcend his self love and his love for his friends, and enables him to have true love for others, to have universal love.

The tangible action of loving God is to love man. Similar to the golden rule of Confucius not to do to others as you would not wish done to yourself, Bahá'u'lláh says: "Ascribe not to any soul that which thou wouldst not have ascribed to thee, and say not that which thou doest not."<sup>63</sup> In addition, He says: "Magnify not the faults of others that thine own faults may not appear great; and wish not the abasement of anyone, that thine own abasement be not exposed."<sup>64</sup> To avoid conflict and the abasement of man, Bahá'u'lláh prohibits backbiting and idle talk. He says:

"The tongue is for mentioning what is good, defile it not with unseemly talk... everyone should utter that which is meet and seemly, and should refrain from slander, abuse and whatever causeth sadness in men."<sup>65</sup>

Avoiding conflict by disciplining the tongue is not enough. A man needs to actively carry forward deeds of kindness, to create unity and harmony. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

"Knowledge is not enough; we hope by the Love of God we shall put it into practice. We know that to help the poor and to be merciful is good and pleases God, but knowledge alone does not feed the starving man, nor can the poor be warmed by knowledge or words in the bitter winter; we must give the practical help of Loving-kindness."<sup>66</sup>

Similar to the saying of Mengcius that a man has a "sympathetic heart" and should extend this feeling to "what a man can bear," Bahá'u'lláh

<sup>62</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, pp. 180-181.

<sup>63</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, 1:29, p. 12.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 2:44, p. 37.

<sup>65</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitab-i-Aqdas*, p. 182.

<sup>66</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *'Abdu'l-Bahá in London*, pp. 60-61.



says: "Bestow My wealth upon My poor, that in heaven thou mayest draw from stores of unfading splendor and treasures of imperishable glory."<sup>67</sup> While to care for the needy and to be generous is praiseworthy, to offer up one's soul is more pleasing to God. Bahá'u'lláh says: "To offer up thy soul is a more glorious thing couldst thou but see with Mine eye."<sup>68</sup>

### *Goodwill*

Goodwill is the third virtue of humanity. 'Abdu'l-Bahá defines goodwill as "absolute light" and the "basis of good actions." He says that goodwill is "purified and sanctified from the impurities of selfishness, of enmity, of deception." He explains goodwill with the following example:

"Now it may be that a man performs an action which in appearance is righteous, but which is dictated by covetousness. For example, a butcher rears a sheep and protects it; but this righteous action of the butcher is dictated by desire to derive profit, and the result of this care is the slaughter of the poor sheep. How many righteous actions are dictated by covetousness! But goodwill is sanctified from such impurities."<sup>69</sup>

Mengcius says: "the essence of Ren is service to one's parents." Similarly, Bahá'ís regard services to one's parents as "sacred duties." 'Abdu'l-Bahá says: "The (children's) prosperity in this world and the Kingdom depends upon the good pleasure of parents, and without this they will be in manifest loss."<sup>70</sup> Goodwill begins from one's family. To extend it is to practice goodwill towards others. In this regard, Bahá'u'lláh says: "no man should enter the house of his friend save at his friend's pleasure, nor lay hands upon his treasures nor prefer his own will to his friend's, and in no wise seek an advantage over him."<sup>71</sup> In another passage, He says that one should "show forbearance and benevolence and love to one another," converse with a person with "a spirit of extreme kindness and goodwill" to help him "see and recognize the truth," without esteeming oneself to be superior to others.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, 1:57, p. 18.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 302.

<sup>70</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá'u'lláh, Bahá'í Education, Compilation, p. 39.

<sup>71</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, 2:43

<sup>72</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, V, p. 8.

Similar to the Confucian teaching of treating others as one would want to be treated, Bahá'u'lláh says: "He should not wish for others that which he does not wish for himself, nor promise that which he does not fulfil."<sup>73</sup>

Goodwill prevents enmity and hatred. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says: "We should manifest the spirit of justness and goodwill toward each other." If we do otherwise, such as "censure and pronounce anathema, praising ourselves and condemning all others," then "nothing but enmity and hatred, injustice and inhumanity can possibly result."<sup>74</sup> The Bahá'í standard of exercising goodwill can be seen in the following passage of 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

"Should other peoples and nations be unfaithful to you show your fidelity unto them, should they be unjust toward you show justice towards them, should they keep aloof from you attract them to yourself, should they show their enmity be friendly towards them, should they poison your lives sweeten their souls, should they inflict a wound upon you be a salve to their sores. Such are the attributes of the sincere! Such are the attributes of the truthful."<sup>75</sup>

Goodwill not only prevents "enmity and hatred," but it also brings unity. If we consider enmity and hatred, injustice and inhumanity to be like darkness in the world, justness and goodwill are like light in the world. To eliminate darkness, light is needed. A man needs to utilize his spiritual potential. Bahá'u'lláh says: "Were man to appreciate the greatness of his station and the loftiness of his destiny he would manifest naught save goodly character, pure deeds, and a seemly and praiseworthy conduct. If the learned and wise men of goodwill were to impart guidance unto the people, the whole earth would be regarded as one country."<sup>76</sup> In another passage, He says: "So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth."<sup>77</sup> This metaphor of light can further be illustrated by having a radiant heart.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. CXXV, p. 265.

<sup>74</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Foundations of World Unity*, p. 99.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 172.

<sup>77</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 288.

### A Radiant Heart

It is easier to understand a radiant heart with the metaphor of light in the context of a "light of unity." Man is like a lamp that potentially bears the light of God. Bahá'u'lláh says:

"Thou art My lamp and My light is in thee. Get thou from it thy radiance and seek none other than Me. For I have created thee rich and have bountifully shed My favor upon thee."<sup>78</sup>

The lamp cannot be lit by itself and it needs the light of God. The teaching of the new Manifestation of God lights the lamp of the heart. Bahá'u'lláh says the coming of a new Manifestation of God represents the "Godhead" of the age.<sup>79</sup> Turning towards the Manifestation of God is equivalent to turning towards the light of God, which provides the guidance, vision and direction for man. When a man polishes the mirror of his heart, he can reflect the light of God. Bahá'u'lláh says:

"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."<sup>80</sup>

A man enlightened by the teaching of God will "manifest" the light of his knowledge and wisdom. This light "cannot be obscured" and a man will be radiant. This is similar to the Confucian saying that a pure heart can understand all things, able to reflect outwardly and become radiant.

As already mentioned, the human heart belongs to God, it is the "home" for the love of God and God has a "great claim" on man. It is man's duty to lay his life in the path of God. Service to God is service to humanity. One way for a man to manifest God's command is to live his life according to divine teachings, to proclaim divine principles to the world. To walk the path of God, a man needs to willingly accept tests and trials. Bahá'u'lláh says: "My calamity is My providence, outwardly it is fire

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<sup>78</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, 1:11, p. 8.

<sup>79</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitab-i-Aqdas*, p. 19.

<sup>80</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, 1:20, p. 10.

and vengeance, but inwardly it is light and mercy. Hasten thereunto that thou mayest become an eternal light and an immortal spirit."<sup>81</sup>

A man who lives as a shining lamp through his deeds can illuminate the path for others with his light. A man who proclaims the Word of God is as a brilliant star that provides guidance and direction to the people of the world. When the light of God enlightens the people of the world, unity is manifested, and the "light of unity" will "illuminate the whole earth." This idea echoes the saying of Mengcius that a heart being *Cheng* becomes manifest and it can move hearts and transform society. Parallel to the Chinese saying that a heart that "fully develops its nature" can "stand parallel to Heaven and Earth," Bahá'u'lláh says: "Make mention of Me on My earth, that in My heaven I may remember thee, thus shall Mine eyes and thine be solaced."<sup>82</sup>

In sum, both the Confucian and the Bahá'í concepts of the heart talk about human nature being bestowed by the Creator and entrusted by the Creator. The Human heart has the potential to be pure, kind and radiant. It is man's duty to fulfil this divine trust and to optimize his potential through words and deeds. If a man fully develops the potential of his heart, a man will be worthy to return and to meet his Creator. A man who develops his heart is on the pathway to perfection. This pathway requires man to go through a process of transformation, to overcome obstacles, to find the lost heart and to cultivate it.

## PATHWAY TO PERFECTION

### Obstacles to Human Transformation

Perhaps the chief obstacle to human transformation is self-love or self-centeredness. Confucians consider a self-centered man as *Xiao Ren* and an other-centered man as *Jun Zi*. *Xiao Ren*, which literally means small man, is a man who loves the small self (to be self-centered) rather than the big self (to be other-centered). A *Jun Zi* is righteous and a *Xiao Ren* is just the opposite. These differences are described in the Confucian classic, *The Four Books*. A *Jun Zi* is "harmonious but not partisan with

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 1:50-51, p. 16.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 1:43, p. 15.

people;" a *Xiao Ren* is "partisan but not harmonious with people."<sup>83</sup> A *Jun Zi* "thinks of virtue" and "the sanctions of law;" a *Xiao Ren* "thinks of comfort" and "favour."<sup>84</sup> A *Jun Zi* is "conversant with *Yi* (justice); a *Xiao Ren* is "conversant with gain."<sup>85</sup> A *Jun Zi* is "satisfied and composed;" a *Xiao Ren* is "always full of distress."<sup>86</sup> A *Jun Zi* "enables others to accomplish good things, but does not enable others to accomplish bad things;" a *Xiao Ren* "does the opposite."<sup>87</sup> A *Jun Zi* is "affable, but not adulatory;" a *Xiao Ren* is "adulatory, but not affable."<sup>88</sup> A *Jun Zi* "has a dignified ease without pride;" a *Xiao Ren* has pride without a dignified ease."<sup>89</sup> A *Jun Zi* "has (high) expectation in himself;" a *Xiao Ren* "has (high) expectation in others."<sup>90</sup> As a result of the different personalities of a *Jun Zi* and a *Xiao Ren*, a *Jun Zi* "progresses upwards" and a *Xiao Ren* "declines downwards."<sup>91</sup>

*Xiao Ren* therefore represents a man with low consciousness and who fails to develop his potential. *Jun Zi* represents a man with high consciousness and who is progressing towards perfection. A man can never be totally freed from self and ego and from imperfection. Confucian himself said that he was far from being a saint. Nevertheless, a man should constantly strive to be a *Jun Zi*.

Bahá'ís consider the heart as "a divine trust." 'Abdu'l-Bahá says the heart should be cleaned "from the stain of self-love" and should be adorned "with the coronal of pure intent."<sup>92</sup> As mentioned before, self-love causes the destruction of a soul and selfishness causes all the virtues in man to fade. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says that self-love is a trait within man called the "natal self" or the "ego." It is the inner voice that tells oneself: "I am a little better than the others," and "I am more important."<sup>93</sup> Bahá'í teachings also recognise that a man can never be free from self and ego,

<sup>83</sup> *The Four Books, The Confucian Analects*. p. 73.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*, p. 91.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, p. 93.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, p. 125.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, p. 172.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, p. 184.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, p. 187.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, p. 208.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, p. 196.

<sup>92</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilisation*, p. 116.

<sup>93</sup> Savi J., *The Eternal Quest for God*, pp. 126-128.

but he should strive to master the ego. Shoghi Effendi, the successor of 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

"The only people who are truly free of the "dross of self" are the Prophets, for to be free of one's ego is a hall-mark of perfection. We humans are never going to become perfect, for perfection belongs to a realm we are not destined to enter. However, we must constantly mount higher, seek to be more perfect. The ego is the animal in us, the heritage of the flesh which is full of selfish desires. By obeying the laws of God, seeking to live the life laid down in our teachings, and prayer and struggle, we can subdue our egos. We call people "saints" who have achieved the highest degree of mastery over their egos."<sup>94</sup>

Therefore, human transformation is a process of overcoming and mastering the ego. This can be achieved through striving to obey the laws of God in one's life. The pathway towards perfection is endless. In the pathway, a man needs to search for the lost heart and to cultivate it.

### Searching for the Lost Heart

According to Mengcius, it is important to learn extensively. He says: "Learn extensively and discuss minutely what is learned; the object is to go back and set forth in brief what is essential."<sup>95</sup> He adds: "The way of learning is none other than seeking the lost heart."

The lost heart refers to a man who is not conscious about *Ren* (benevolence) and *Yi* (justice). Mengcius says:

"*Ren* is the heart of man; *Yi* is the path of man. Alas indeed, to abandon the path (*Yi*) and not pursue it, to lose the heart and not know to seek for it. When men's fowls and dogs are lost, they know to seek for them again, but when they lose their hearts, they do not know to seek for them."<sup>96</sup>

<sup>94</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Unfolding Destiny*, p. 453.

<sup>95</sup> *The Four Books, The Works of Mengcius*, p. 414.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, p. 484.

To avoid losing the heart, a man needs to nourish his heart. The way to nourish the heart, according to Mengcius, is to make "the desires few." He says:

"As a man who makes the desires few, though the heart may be lost, but rarely. As a man with many desires, though the heart may be kept, but rarely."<sup>97</sup>

Men should be conscious about the divine mandate bestowed by Heaven. Mengcius says:

"Heaven's plan to create mankind is this: that those who first apprehend should instruct those who are slower to apprehend; those who are first to be conscious should instruct those who are later to be conscious."<sup>98</sup>

Mengcius regards himself as one who is "first to be conscious" and has the duty to instruct others. Mengcius is conscious about the ways of the two Moral Kings, Yao and Shun. Yao and Shun practiced *Dao* (Divine principles) and *Yi* (justice) during their ministries. Confucius says that men are created with different degrees of consciousness. He says:

"Those who are born with apprehension are the highest class of men. Those who learn and apprehend are second; those who have difficulties but they learn are the next class. As to those who have difficulties and yet do not learn, they are the lowest of men."<sup>99</sup>

Confucius regards the recognition of *Dao* (the Divine Way) as the ultimate goal of learning. He says: "Hearing (recognising) *Dao* in the morning, one can die in the evening (without regrets)."<sup>100</sup> Similarly, Bahá'ís regard the knowledge of God as "the source of all knowledge." Referring to the ignorance of man, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

"Is it not astonishing that although man has been created for the knowledge and love of God, for the virtues of the human world, for

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, p. 550.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, p. 444.

<sup>99</sup> *The Confucian Analects*, p. 220.

<sup>100</sup> *The Four Books, The Confucian Analects*. p. 90.

spirituality, heavenly illumination and life eternal, nevertheless he continues ignorant and negligent of all this? Consider how he seeks knowledge of everything except knowledge of God."<sup>101</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá continues with an example of God being the father and man being the son and says:

"It is as if a kind and loving father had provided a library of wonderful books for his son in order that he might be informed of the mysteries of creation; at the same time surrounding him with every means of comfort and enjoyment; but the son amuses himself with pebbles and playthings, neglectful of all his father's gifts and provision."<sup>102</sup>

The knowledge of God encompasses *Ren* (benevolence) and *Yi* (justice) mentioned by Mengcius. Mengcius says that making "the desires few" is the way to prevent losing the heart. Similarly, the Bahá'í Faith recognizes material attachment as the chief factor that leads man to be ignorant of the knowledge of God. Shoghi Effendi says:

"Indeed the chief reason for the evils now rampant in society is the lack of spirituality. The materialistic civilization of our age has so much absorbed the energy and interest of mankind that people in general do no longer feel the necessity of raising themselves above the forces and conditions of their daily material existence."<sup>103</sup>

A man needs to transcend his material life. This does not mean to abandon all material possessions. The Bahá'í Faith recognizes wealth as a means and not as an end in life. Bahá'u'lláh says:

"Well is it then with him, who, being rich, is not hindered by his riches from the eternal kingdom, nor deprived by them of imperishable dominion... The splendor of such a wealthy man shall illuminate the dwellers of heaven even as the sun enlightens the people of the earth!"<sup>104</sup>

<sup>101</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Foundation of World Unity*, p. 64.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, p. 86.

<sup>104</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, 2:53, p. 41.



Instead of being attached to material life, a man should strive to excel in all fields of learning. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says: "carry forward the various branches of knowledge, be active and progressive in the field of inventions and the arts. Endeavour to rectify the conduct of men, and seek to excel the whole world in moral character."<sup>105</sup> In this way, a man not only preserves his heart, but he also develops his heart.

### **Cultivating the Heart**

A man having found his heart can cultivate the growth of his heart. To cultivate the heart, it is necessary to clear the blockage of the heart and not violate the law of growth. In addition, a man needs to plant the seeds of divine knowledge and wisdom.

### Clearing the Blockage of the Heart

Mengcius encourages men to cultivate the heart constantly. He criticizes the ignorance of men and says that men who plant trees "know to nourish them." In the case of their own persons, men "do not know to nourish them." The reason is not that people love their trees more than their hearts, but it is because people fail to reflect about themselves.<sup>106</sup> A tree that has an outer form and shape is easy to perceive. The heart, an inner faculty, can only be realized through reflection. In order to nourish the heart, it is necessary to clear the path of the heart. Mengcius cites the example of a path in the hill. He says: "A path in a hill, if constantly being used, will become a road. If it is not being used, it will be blocked by wild grass."<sup>107</sup> As mentioned before, "heart" refers to human nature being *Ren* (benevolent) and the "path" refers to *Yi* (justice). The "wild grass" refers to desires that have to be kept "few."

Similarly, Bahá'ís use the metaphor of clearing the soil of the heart. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says that if seeds are sown in soil "full of useless plants, weeds and rubbish," the seeds are "wasted." If seeds are sown in "pure, sweet and fertile soil," they may "vegetate," become "fresh and verdant and form into heaps of harvest." In the same passage, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

<sup>105</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í Education*, Compilation, p. 21.

<sup>106</sup> *The Four Books, The Works of Mengcius*, p. 484.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid*, p. 544.

"If the health and well-being of the body be expended in the path of the Kingdom, this is very acceptable and praiseworthy; and if it is expended to the benefit of the human world in general -- even though it be to their material (or bodily) benefit and be a means of doing good -- that is also acceptable. But if the health and welfare of man be spent in sensual desires, in a life on the animal plane, and in devilish pursuits -- then disease is better than such health; nay, death itself is preferable to such a life."<sup>108</sup>

A soil full of "useless plants, weeds and rubbish" refers to "sensual desires," living a life "on the animal plane," and "in devilish pursuits." These attachments do not befit a man's true station and should be cleared from the heart. In addition, Bahá'u'lláh warns men not to be beguiled by the world but that they walk the way of righteousness and truth. He says:

"Take heed lest the world beguile you as it beguiled the people who went before you! Observe ye the statutes and precepts of your Lord, and walk ye in this Way which hath been laid out before you in righteousness and truth. They who eschew iniquity and error, who adhere to virtue, are, in the sight of the one true God, among the choicest of His creatures."<sup>109</sup>

#### Not Violating the Law of Growth

The process of cultivating the heart is similar to cultivating crops. Each crop has its own pace of growth and men cannot violate this law of nature. Men have to labour with patience during the process of growth. Referring to this principle, Mengcius tells a story of a farmer who was impatient to wait for the growth of his crops. Feeling frustrated with the slow progress in his field, the farmer decided to labour in the field one day and he pulled each stalk higher from the ground. He then returned home to share the news that the stalks had grown double in height. His son was curious about the news and went to the field to investigate the next day. Not surprisingly, all the stalks died. Mengcius adds: "There are few in the world, who do not 'help' their crops to grow... what they do is not only of no benefit, but harmful."<sup>110</sup>

<sup>108</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 207.

<sup>109</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitab-i-Aqdas*. p. 45.

<sup>110</sup> *The Four Books, The Works of Mengcius*, p. 312.

Nurturing a man's spiritual welfare is similar to nurturing the crops. The difference between men is that each man is at a different stage of development. In guiding a heedless soul to the knowledge of truth, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says one should be patient and do it "little by little." One should conduct himself with "absolute rectitude," treat the soul "with the utmost kindness," and to exemplify with "divine instructions...good qualities and behaviour patterns." By doing so, one will succeed in awakening a "previously heedless individual," and will change his "ignorance to knowledge of the truth."<sup>111</sup>

### Planting the Seeds of Divine Knowledge and Wisdom

The metaphor of the heart being a "garden"<sup>112</sup> with "pure soil" and the "sacred city" is used by Bahá'u'lláh. In this "garden," a man should "sow the seeds of divine wisdom and knowledge" in its "pure soil." It is astonishing that Bahá'u'lláh repeats three times<sup>113</sup> the above phrase with almost identical words in *The Hidden Words*, a book that contains the essence of His teachings. One of these phrases is:

"Sow the seeds of My divine wisdom in the pure soil of thy heart, and water them with the water of certitude, that the hyacinths of My knowledge and wisdom may spring up fresh and green in the sacred city of thy heart."<sup>114</sup>

By repeating these phrases three times in *The Hidden Words*, it would seem to indicate that the cultivation of the heart is the primary duty for men. It is so fundamental, so difficult to sustain, so easy to forget that Bahá'u'lláh has to remind us again and again. Cultivating the heart is a slow process that needs patience. Before the "hyacinths" spring up, their beauty and their potential are hidden within seeds. Referring back to *The Hidden Words*, the seeds to be sown in the heart refers to the "delightful words," the "mystic holiness,"<sup>115</sup> the "divine mystery" and "divine utterance"<sup>116</sup> revealed by Bahá'u'lláh in His station as a Manifestation of God for mankind today. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says that God

<sup>111</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 265

<sup>112</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, 2:3., p. 24.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 2:33, 2:36, 2:78, pp. 34, 35, 49.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 2:23, p. 30.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, 2:33, p. 34.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 2:78, p. 49.

has sown seeds in the "soil of existence" and has irrigated it through "His spiritual bounties." This soil will surely bring forward "good plants of divine gifts," leaves of "love and union," stems of the "teachings of the True One and His supreme laws," and the "grain" of "heavenly blessings which giveth life to the souls."<sup>117</sup> In another passage, He says: "Unless the seed is sown, the bounty and blessing will not be attained; until the tree be planted, the fresh fruit will not be produced."<sup>118</sup>

It is not enough to sow divine seeds only in one's heart. A man has to avoid sowing the seeds of doubt, suspicion and dissension in the minds of other people and not lead them away from truth. Bahá'u'lláh warns people not to become the cause of disunity. He says: "Fear ye God and sow not the seeds of dissension amongst men."<sup>119</sup> On the other hand, a man should actively nourish the hearts of other people. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

"Use thy utmost power to sow and cast those pure seeds, the divine teachings, in the hearts which move and cheer by the fragrance of God."<sup>120</sup>

The revealed teachings of the Manifestation of God contain divine knowledge and wisdom. By turning towards such teachings, the heart can reflect divine knowledge and wisdom. The outcome of cultivating the heart is spiritual growth and development. Spiritual growth enables a man to gain a true knowledge of himself.

## KNOWLEDGE OF ONESELF

Knowledge of oneself is the precondition for all spiritual progress. This comes from the knowledge of the Manifestation of God. A man needs to know that the purpose of his creation is to bear spiritual fruits for humanity. A man's true nature is his spirit, which is immortal.

<sup>117</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 612.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid*, p. 632.

<sup>119</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 196.

<sup>120</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 171.

## Knowledge of the Manifestation of God

Throughout history, it is the Manifestations of God, saints and philosophers who awaken human consciousness, and refresh hearts and souls. Referring to the purpose of the Manifestations of God, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

"The divine prophets have revealed and founded religion. They have laid down certain laws and heavenly principles for the guidance of mankind. They have taught and promulgated the knowledge of God, established praiseworthy ethical ideals and inculcated the highest standards of virtues in the human world."<sup>121</sup>

In another passage, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says that the fundamental principles of the Religion of God are "morals and conduct, with the knowledge of divine mysteries" and the "light of the virtues of the world of humanity" is the result of "the love and knowledge of God."<sup>122</sup>

The Manifestation of God is the bridge that connects this world to the world of God. The coming of a new Manifestation of God inspires the people of the world, purifies old traditions and offers new lights of guidance to the people of His time. Man needs to renew consciousness individually and to renew civilization collectively. Bahá'u'lláh is the latest Manifestation of God. Referring to the social principles of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says: "Without these teachings progress and advancement for mankind are in no wise possible. Every community in the world findeth in these Divine Teachings the realization of its highest aspirations."<sup>123</sup> Bahá'u'lláh states:

"Consider, how can he that faileth in the day of God's Revelation to attain unto the grace of the "Divine Presence" and to recognize His Manifestation, be justly called learned, though he may have spent aeons in the pursuit of knowledge, and acquired all the limited and material learning of men? It is surely evident that he can in no wise be regarded as possessed of true knowledge. Whereas, the most unlettered of all men, if he be honoured with this supreme distinction, he verily is accounted as

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<sup>121</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í World Faith, Compilation*, p. 226.

<sup>122</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 53.

<sup>123</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í World Faith, Compilation*, p. 347.

one of those divinely-learned men whose knowledge is of God; for such a man hath attained the acme of knowledge, and hath reached the furthestmost summit of learning."<sup>124</sup>

In a statement of the Bahá'í International Community, it says:

"The Bahá'í teachings espouse the fundamental unity of mankind and the need for this reality to be manifested through the actions and attitudes of all peoples, based on a common spiritual commitment. On this basis, Bahá'ís see it as a basic objective both individually and collectively to carry forward an ever advancing civilization."<sup>125</sup>

As mentioned, the "basic objective" for a man is to "carry forward an ever advancing civilization," and without the social principles of Bahá'u'lláh, "progress and advancement for mankind are in no wise possible." A man cannot perfect the knowledge of his true self if he does not know his "basic objective." In addition, a man cannot achieve his "basic objective" if he does not know the social principles of the latest Manifestation of God--Bahá'u'lláh. Bahá'u'lláh says that the recognition of Manifestations of God and obedience to their teachings are "twin duties" that cannot be separated.<sup>126</sup> To obey God is to serve God; to serve God is to serve mankind. Man must perform services and to bear spiritual fruits for humanity.

### Man Must Bear Spiritual Fruits

Mengcius says: "He who has optimized his heart knows his nature. Knowing his nature, he knows *Tian* (Heaven). Preserving one's heart, nourishing one's nature, is the way to serve *Tian*. Short life or long life should not cause a man any double mindedness. Cultivate character and wait (for Heaven's command). This is the way to establish *Ming* (destiny)."<sup>127</sup> All men are born with a destiny. A man must fulfil his destiny by optimizing his heart's capacity to serve *Tian*. To serve *Tian* is

<sup>124</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitab-I-Iqan*, p. 145-146.

<sup>125</sup> Bahá'í International Community, *Social Welfare and Social Development* (Oct 1985). BIC Doc. #85-1009.

<sup>126</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitab-i-Aqdas*, p. 19.

<sup>127</sup> *The Four Books, The Works of Mengcius*. p. 512.

to serve humanity with a heart that practices *Ren* (benevolence) and *Yi* (justice).

A man is like a fruit tree in the garden of mankind. A man who occupies himself fully with material pursuits and does not distinguish himself with goodly deeds is like a tree that yields no fruit. A fruit tree that yields no fruit is useless. The Chinese describe a useless man as a “moving-corpse and walking-flesh.” This is the most despised of all men. A man’s value in life is to bear fruits that benefit both himself and others. Using the metaphor of a tree, Bahá’u’lláh says:

“The Prophets and Chosen Ones have all been commissioned by the One True God... to nurture the trees of human existence with the living waters of uprightness and understanding, that there may appear from them that which God hath deposited within their inmost selves. As may be readily observed, each tree yieldeth a certain fruit, and a barren tree is but fit for fire. The purpose of these Educators, in all they said and taught, was to preserve man’s exalted station... The fruits that best befit the tree of human life are trustworthiness and godliness, truthfulness and sincerity; but greater than all, after recognition of the unity of God... is regard for the rights that are due to one’s parents.”<sup>128</sup>

The fruits of “trustworthiness and godliness, truthfulness and sincerity” are meant for service to humanity. Service to humanity begins from serving one’s parents, because the family is the foundation of society. This echoes the Chinese saying already mentioned that “the pre-requisite to be trusted by friends is to be trusted by parents” and “the essence of *Ren* (benevolence) is service to one’s parents.”

A man who serves humanity optimizes his heart’s capacity. Referring back to the first counsel of Bahá’u’lláh, such a man will possess “a pure, kindly and radiant heart” and his heart will be “a sovereignty ancient, imperishable and everlasting.” He will come to recognise the immortality of his heart and will be characterized by spiritual attributes.

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<sup>128</sup> Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitab-i-Aqdas*, p. 139.

## Immortality of the Heart

The reality of a man is his heart. The heart can also be called the soul, and the soul is immortal. One way to understand the immortality of the soul is through the attainment of spiritual attributes or virtues. Loacius says that long life is not measured by how long a man lives. Long life is measured by how long people remember a man's virtues and deeds. He says: "Those who die but not perish (forgotten) have long life."<sup>129</sup> The immortality of the soul can be observed through its good effects.

Confucius says that man can observe the sign of the existence of God through acts of worship offered by people of the world.<sup>130</sup> Similarly, man can observe the sign of the immortality of the soul through burial ceremonies and ancestor worship. The recognition of the immortality of the soul motivates a man to focus his attention beyond this transient world of existence. Just as a baby in the womb needs to prepare for his physical development for the world after birth, a man needs to prepare for his spiritual development for the world after this life.

'Abdu'l-Bahá says: "Spiritual attributes are needed in the next world but must be attained in this world." Spiritual attributes are the outcome of a man who maximizes his heart's capacity. A spiritually enlightened man gains his "virtues or perfection" through seven ways. According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, these are: "knowledge of God," "love of God," "faith," "philanthropic deeds," "self sacrifice," "severance from this world," "sanctity and holiness." 'Abdu'l-Bahá added, "Unless he acquires these forces and attains to these requirements he will surely be deprived of the life that is eternal." On the other hand, if a man possesses "the knowledge of God" and "the love of God," lives in "utmost state of sanctity and holiness," and "becomes the cause of love among mankind," he shall surely attain to a "second birth" and enjoy "everlasting existence."<sup>131</sup>

In another passage, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says: "The purpose of man's creation is...unity and harmony."<sup>132</sup> The knowledge of God enables a man to

<sup>129</sup> Lao Zi, *Lao Zi*, p. 74.

<sup>130</sup> *The Four Books, The Doctrine of the Mean*, p. 34.

<sup>131</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Foundation of World Unity*, pp. 63- 64

<sup>132</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 4.



know the source of his creation. The love of God motivates a man to obey the teachings of God and to love mankind. When a man becomes the cause of unity among men, he truly fulfils his heart's capacity and the purpose of his creation.

## CONCLUSION

Chinese culture and Bahá'í teachings use the language of the heart to describe human nature and spiritual reality. They both consider the heart to be a divine trust and stress the need to optimize the potential of the heart. The Chinese concept of the heart is human nature that is created to be *Cheng*, *Ren* and *Ming*. The Bahá'í concept of the heart is human nature that is created to be "pure, kindly and radiant." They both say that purity of heart is required to recognize God and that being pure is the pre-requisite of all spiritual actions. They both say that the difference between man and animal lies in a different degree of consciousness, and that man has the capacity to know, to love, and to will. Man has the capacity to know his nobility, to love others, to extend goodwill to others and to create unity. The Chinese consider the way a man knows, loves and wills to be founded on self knowledge. Bahá'ís consider the way a man knows, loves and wills as the result of the knowledge of God, the love of God and goodwill.

Both Chinese culture and Bahá'í teachings talk about the golden rule of treating others as one would wanted to be treated. They both talk about an active way of extending help and being of service to others. In addition, Bahá'í teachings exalt the offering of one's soul in the path of service, and describe it to be a "more glorious thing".

A man who optimizes the potential of his heart is radiant and he becomes the light of guidance to others. He is on the pathway to perfection. Both Chinese culture and Bahá'í teachings talk about the need to overcome the obstacles of self-centredness, to be detached from desires and material possessions. They both emphasize the need to cultivate human hearts with patience, and to nurture hearts with divine principles, divine knowledge and wisdom.

The Chinese regard saints as those who have perfect *Cheng* and are able to establish a code of morals and conduct. Bahá'ís regard the

Manifestations of God as perfect souls who reveal divine laws and principles for the guidance of man. They see the Manifestation of God as the source of all knowledge, the source of human progress and the advancement of civilization.

A man who recognizes the Manifestation of God gains true knowledge of himself. Both Chinese culture and Bahá'í teachings recognise that the objective of man is to provide service to humanity. They both say that service to humanity begins with one's family. Through good words and good deeds, a man obtains spiritual attributes. Both teachings recognise the immortality of spiritual attributes and consider that the purpose of man's creation is unity and harmony.

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