

NSA USA - The Bahai Faith and Homosexuality

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THE BAHAI FAITH AND HOMOSEXUALITY

A Compilation of Selections from the Baha'i Writings

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- I. The Struggle Between the Material and Spiritual Natures of Man

In man there are two natures; his spiritual or higher nature and his material or lower nature. In one he approaches God, in the other he lives for the world alone. Signs of both of these natures are to be found in men.... Every good habit, every noble quality belongs to man's spiritual nature, whereas all his imperfections and sinful actions are born of his material nature.... But if on the contrary he rejects the things of God and allows his evil passions to conquer him, then he is no better than a mere animal. (Abdu'l-Baha, Paris Talks, p. 60)

Then we must labor to destroy the animal condition, till the meaning of humanity shall come to light.(Baha'u'llah, Seven Valleys, p. 34)

Nature is the material world. When we look upon it, we see that it is dark and imperfect. For instance, if we allow a piece of land to remain in its natural condition, we will find it covered with thorns and thistles; useless weeds and wild vegetation will flourish upon it, and it will become like a jungle....

If man himself is left in his natural state, he will become lower than the animal and continue to grow more ignorant and imperfect.... If we wish to illumine this dark plane of human existence, we must bring man forth from the hopeless captivity of nature.... But left in his natural condition without education and training, it is certain that he will become more depraved and vicious than the animal....

God has sent forth the Prophets for the purpose of quickening the soul of man into higher and divine recognitions. He has revealed the heavenly Books for this great purpose.... This divine and ideal power has been bestowed upon man

in order that he may purify himself from the imperfections of nature and uplift his soul to the realm of might and power.... The mission of the Prophets of God has been to train the souls of humanity and free them from the thralldom of natural instincts and physical tendencies....

The conclusion is irresistible that the splendors of the Sun of Truth, the Word of God, have been the source and cause of human upbuilding and civilization. The world of nature is the kingdom of the animal.... It lives under the bondage of nature and nature's laws....

This is not the glory of man. The glory of man is in the knowledge of God, spiritual susceptibilities, attainment to transcendent powers and the bounties of the Holy Spirit. The glory of man is in being informed of the teachings of God. This is the glory of humanity.... (Abdu'l-Baha, Promulgation of Universal Peace, pp. 308-312)

Know ye that the embodiment of liberty and its symbol is the animal. That which becometh man is submission unto such restraints as will protect him from his own ignorance, and guard him against the harm of the mischief-maker. Liberty causeth man to overstep the bounds of propriety, and to infringe on the dignity of his station. It debaseth him to the level of extreme depravity and wickedness. (Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, paragraph 123)

As we have before indicated, this human reality stands between the higher and the lower in man, between the world of the animal and the world of Divinity. When the animal proclivity in man becomes predominant, he sinks even lower than the brute. When the heavenly powers are triumphant in his nature, he becomes the noblest and most superior being in the world of creation. All the imperfections found in the animal are found in man.... So to speak, the reality of man is clad in the outer garment of the animal, the habiliments of the world of nature, the world of darkness, imperfections and unlimited baseness.

On the other hand, we find in him justice, sincerity, faithfulness, knowledge, wisdom, illumination, mercy and pity, coupled with intellect, comprehension, the power to grasp the realities of things and the ability to penetrate the truths of existence. All these great perfections are to be found in man. Therefore, we say that man is a reality which stands between light and darkness. From this standpoint his nature is threefold: animal, human and divine. The animal nature is darkness; the heavenly is light in light.

The holy Manifestations of God come into the world to dispel the darkness of the animal, or physical, nature of man, to purify him from his imperfections in order that his heavenly and spiritual nature may become quickened, his divine qualities awakened, his perfections visible, his potential powers revealed and all the virtues of the world of humanity latent within him may come to life.... They liberate man from the darkness of the world of nature, deliver him from despair, error, ignorance, imperfections and all evil qualities....

These holy Manifestations liberate the world of humanity from the imperfections which beset it and cause men to appear in the beauty of heavenly perfections.

Were it not for the coming of these holy Manifestations of God, all mankind would be found on the plane of the animal. They would remain darkened and ignorant like those who have been denied schooling and who never had a teacher or trainer. Undoubtedly, such unfortunates will continue in their condition of need and deprivation. (Promulgation, pp. 465-466)

And yet, is not the object of every Revelation to effect a transformation in the whole character of mankind, a transformation that shall manifest itself both outwardly and inwardly, that shall affect both its inner life and external conditions? (Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Iqan, p. 240)

Our appetites and inclinations are strongly influenced by the condition of our physical makeup, and our bodies are in varying degrees of health, depending on factors such as heredity, environment, nourishment and our own treatment of them. Genetic variations occur, producing conditions which can create problems for the individual. Some conditions are of an emotional or psychological nature, producing such imbalances as quickness to anger, recklessness, timorousness, and so forth; others involve purely physical characteristics, resulting not only in unusual capacities but also in handicaps or diseases of various kinds.

Whether deficiencies are inborn or are acquired, our purpose in this life is to overcome them and to train ourselves in accordance with the pattern that is revealed to us in the divine Teachings. (From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, Sept. 11, 1995; published in "The American Baha'i", Qawl 152 BE/Nov. 23, 1995, p 11.)

II. The Importance of the Law of God

The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the recognition of Him Who is the Dayspring of His Revelation and the Fountain of His laws, Who representeth the Godhead in both the Kingdom of His Cause and the world of creation. 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. It behoveth every one who reacheth this most sublime station, this summit of transcendent glory, to observe every ordinance of Him Who is the Desire of the world. These twin duties are inseparable. Neither is acceptable without the other. Thus hath it been decreed by Him Who is the Source of Divine inspiration. (Aqdas, paragraph 1)

They whom God hath endued with insight will readily recognize that the precepts laid down by God constitute the highest means for the maintenance of order in the world and the security of its peoples. He that turneth away from them is accounted among the abject and foolish. We, verily, have commanded you to refuse the dictates of your evil passions and corrupt desires, and not to transgress the bounds which the Pen of the Most High hath fixed, for these are the breath of life unto all created things. The seas of Divine wisdom and Divine utterance have risen under the breath of the breeze of the All-

Merciful. Hasten to drink your fill, O men of understanding! They that have violated the Covenant of God by breaking His commandments, and have turned back on their heels, these have erred grievously in the sight of God, the All-Possessing, the Most High. (Aqdas, paragraph 2)

O ye peoples of the world! Know assuredly that My commandments are the lamps of My loving providence among My servants, and the keys of My mercy for My creatures. Thus hath it been sent down from the heaven of the Will of your Lord, the Lord of Revelation. Were any man to taste the sweetness of the words which the lips of the All-Merciful have willed to utter, he would, though the treasures of the earth be in his possession, renounce them one and all, that he might vindicate the truth of even one of His commandments, shining above the Dayspring of His bountiful care and loving-kindness.(Aqdas, paragraph 3)

Say: From My laws the sweet-smelling savour of My garment can be smelled, and by their aid the standards of Victory will be planted upon the highest peaks. The Tongue of My power hath, from the heaven of My omnipotent glory, addressed to My creation these words: "Observe My commandments, for the love of My beauty." Happy is the lover that hath inhaled the divine fragrance of his Best-Beloved from these words, laden with the perfume of a grace which no tongue can describe. By My life! He who hath drunk the choice wine of fairness from the hands of My bountiful favour will circle around My commandments that shine above the Dayspring of My creation.(Aqdas, paragraph 4)

Say: True liberty consisteth in man's submission unto My commandments, little as ye know it. Were men to observe that which We have sent down unto them from the Heaven of Revelation, they would, of a certainty, attain unto perfect liberty. Happy is the man that hath apprehended the Purpose of God in whatever He hath revealed from the Heaven of His Will that pervadeth all created things. Say: The liberty that profiteth you is to be found nowhere except in complete servitude unto God, the Eternal Truth. Whoso hath tasted of its sweetness will refuse to barter it for all the dominion of earth and heaven. (Aqdas, paragraph 125)

III. The Challenge of the Laws of Baha'u'llah

...[I]t is important to acknowledge, with all due humility, that basic to the Baha'i Teachings is the concept that it is only God Who knows the purpose of human life, and Who can convey this to us through His Manifestations. (From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, Sept. 11, 1995; published in "The American Baha'i", Qawl 152 BE/Nov. 23, 1995, p 11.)

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 Baha'is, 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 Baha'i

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. Baha'u'llah would not have given us these things if they would not greatly benefit us, and, like children who are sensible enough to realize their father is wise and does what is good for them, we must accept to obey these ordinances even though at first we may not see any need for them. As we obey them we will gradually come to see in ourselves the benefits they confer. (From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, March 16, 1949; cited in LIGHTS OF GUIDANCE [LG], #1150, p. 343)

IV. Homosexual Acts are Forbidden in the Baha'i Faith

It is forbidden you to wed your fathers' wives. We shrink, for very shame, from treating of the subject of boys. Fear ye the Merciful, O peoples of the world! Commit not that which is forbidden you in Our Holy Tablet, and be not of those who rove distractedly in the wilderness of their desires. (Aqdas, paragraph 107)

The word translated here as "boys" has, in this context, in the Arabic original, the implication of paederasty. Shoghi Effendi has interpreted this reference as a prohibition on all homosexual relations. The Baha'i teachings on sexual morality centre on marriage and the family as the bedrock of the whole structure of human society and are designed to protect and strengthen that divine institution. Baha'i law thus restricts permissible sexual intercourse to that between a man and the woman to whom he is married. (Aqdas, Annotation to paragraph 107, p. 223)

The Universal House of Justice is authorized to change or repeal its own legislation as conditions change...but it cannot abrogate or change any of the laws which are explicitly laid down in the sacred Texts. It follows, then, that the House of Justice has no authority to change this clear teaching on homosexual practice. (From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, Sept. 11, 1995; published in "The American Baha'i", Qawl 152 BE/Nov. 23, 1995, p 11.)

V. The Struggle With Homosexual Inclinations

Baha'i teachings on sexual morality centre on marriage and the family as the bedrock of the whole structure of human society and are designed to protect and strengthen that divine institution. This Baha'i Law restricts permissible sexual intercourse to that between a man and the woman to whom he is married. Thus, it should not be so much a matter of whether a practicing homosexual can be a Baha'i as whether, having become a Baha'i, the homosexual can overcome his problem through knowledge of the teachings and reliance on Baha'u'llah. (From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, March 14, 1973; cited in LG, #1225, p. 365) Amongst the many other evils afflicting society in this spiritual low water mark in history is the question of immorality, and over- emphasis of sex. Homosexuality, according to the Writings

of Baha'u'llah, is spiritually condemned. This does not mean that people so afflicted must not be helped and advised and sympathized with. It does mean that we do not believe that it is a permissible way of life; which, alas, is all too often the accepted attitude nowadays. (From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, May 21, 1954; cited in LG, #1221, p. 364)

No matter how devoted and fine the love may be between people of the same sex, to let it find expression in sexual acts is wrong. To say that it is ideal is no excuse. Immorality of every sort is really forbidden by Baha'u'llah, and homosexual relationships He looks upon as such, besides being against nature.

To be afflicted this way in a great burden to a conscientious soul. But through the advice and help of doctors, through a strong and determined effort, and through prayer, a soul can overcome this handicap. (From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, March 26, 1950; cited in LG, #1223, p. 365; and in the annotation on p. 223 to paragraph 107 of the Kitab-i-Aqdas)

A number of sexual problems, such as homosexuality and transsexuality can well have medical aspects, and in such cases recourse should certainly be had to the best medical assistance. But it is clear from the teaching of Baha'u'llah that homosexuality is not a condition to which a person should be reconciled, but is a distortion of his or her nature which should be controlled or overcome. This may require a hard struggle, but so also can be the struggle of a heterosexual person to control his or her desires. The exercise of self-control in this, as in so very many other aspects of life, has a beneficial effect on the progress of the soul. (From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, January 12, 1973; cited in Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1968- 1973, pp. 110-111; also cited in LG, #1222, p. 365)

Any act or activity by a believer which is contrary to our teachings will surely be harmful to the spiritual future of the individual concerned, and may give non-Baha'is a wrong impression of the principles of our Faith.... While recognizing the Divine Origin and force of the sex impulse in man, religion teaches that it must be controlled, and Baha'u'llah's Law confines its expression to the marriage relationship. The unmarried homosexual is therefore in the same position as anyone else who does not marry. The Law of God requires them to practise chastity. Even though you feel that the conflict is more than you can bear, your affirmation "I do know I am a Baha'i" is a positive factor in the battle you must wage. Every believer needs to remember that an essential characteristic of this physical world is that we are constantly faced with trials, tribulations, hardships and sufferings and that by overcoming them we achieve our moral and spiritual development; that we must seek to accomplish in the future what we may have failed to do in the past; that is the way God tests His servants and we should look upon every failure or shortcoming as an opportunity to try again and to acquire fuller consciousness of the Divine Will and purpose. (From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, January 9, 1977; cited in LG, #1226, p. 366) The House of Justice

comments that while there is little in Baha'i literature that specifically points to the causes of homosexuality itself, there is much that concerns the nature of man, his inner life and growth, and the way to a true Baha'i life....

Man's physical existence on this earth is a period during which the moral exercise of his free will is tried and tested in order to prepare his soul for the other worlds of God, and we must welcome affliction and tribulations as opportunities for improvement in our eternal selves. The House of Justice points out that homosexuals are not the only segment of human society labouring at this daily task every human being is beset by such inner promptings as pride, greed, selfishness, lustful heterosexual or homosexual desires, to name a few which must be overcome and overcome them we must if we are to fulfill the purpose of our human existence. (From a letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, July 16, 1980; cited in LG, #1228, p. 367) The condition of being sexually attracted to some object other than a mature member of the opposite sex, a condition of which homosexuality is but one manifestation, is regarded by the Faith as a distortion of true human nature, as a problem to be overcome, no matter what specific physical or psychological condition may be the immediate cause. Any Baha'i who suffers from such a disability should be treated with understanding, and should be helped to control and overcome it. All of us suffer from imperfections which we must struggle to overcome, and we all need one another's understanding and patience. (From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, Sept. 11, 1995; published in "The American Baha'i", Qawl 152 BE/Nov. 23, 1995, p 11.)

VI. The Proper Attitude Towards Homosexual Behavior

O SON OF BEING!

How couldst thou forget thine own faults and busy thyself with the faults of others? Whoso doeth this is accursed of Me. (Baha'u'llah, Hidden Words, #26 from the Arabic)

O SON OF MAN!

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. (Hidden Words, #27 from the Arabic) He [the true seeker] should forgive the sinful, and never despise his low estate, for none knoweth what his own end shall be. (Iqan, p. 194)

It is the challenging task of the Baha'is to obey the law of God in their own lives, and, gradually to win the rest of mankind to its acceptance. (From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer; excerpts to all National Spiritual Assemblies, February 6, 1973: Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1968- 1973, p. 105; also cited in LG, #1146, pp. 341-342)

...it should be realized that there is 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. (Ibid., p.110; cited in LG, #1148, p. 342) The question of how to deal with homosexuals is a very difficult one. Homosexuality is forbidden in the Baha'i Faith by Baha'u'llah; so, for that matter, are immorality and adultery. If one is going to start imposing heavy sanctions on people who are the victims of this abnormality, however repulsive it may be to others, then it is only fair to impose equally heavy sanctions on any Baha'is who step beyond the moral limits defined by Baha'u'llah. Obviously at the present time this would create an impossible and ridiculous situation. He feels, therefore, that, through loving advice, through repeated warnings, any friends who are flagrantly immoral should be assisted, and, if possible, restrained. If their activities overstep all bounds and become a matter of public scandal, then the Assembly can consider depriving them of their voting rights. However, he does not advise this course of action and feels that it should only be resorted to in very flagrant cases. (From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, August 20, 1955; cited in LG, #1230, p. 367-368)

To regard homosexuals with prejudice and disdain would be entirely against the spirit of Baha'i Teachings. The doors are open for all of humanity to enter the Cause of God, irrespective of their present circumstances; this invitation applies to homosexuals as well as to any others who are engaged in practices contrary to the Baha'i Teachings. Associated with this invitation is the expectation that all believers will make a sincere and persistent effort to eradicate those aspects of their conduct which are not in conformity with Divine Law. It is through such adherence to the Baha'i Teachings that a true and enduring unity of the diverse elements of the Baha'i Community is achieved and safeguarded.

When a person wishes to join the Faith and it is generally known that he or she has a problem such as drinking, homosexuality, taking drugs, adultery, etc., the individual should be told in a patient and loving way of the Baha'i Teachings on these matters. If it is later discovered that a believer is violating Baha'i standards, it is the duty of the Spiritual Assembly to determine whether the immoral conduct is flagrant and can bring the name of the Faith into disrepute, in which case the Assembly must take action to counsel the believer and require him or her to make every effort to mend his ways.

If the individual fails to rectify his conduct in spite of repeated warnings, sanctions should be imposed. Assemblies, of course, must exercise care not to pry into the private lives of believers to ensure that they are behaving properly, but should not hesitate to take action in cases of blatant misbehavior. (From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, Sept. 11, 1995; published in "The American Baha'i", Qawl 152 BE/Nov. 23, 1995, p 11.)

