

him see. Looking back through history, however, his eye will catch sight of a white highway somewhat hidden by the thickets of the wilderness, but very straight, and marked at definite intervals by brilliant lights. What is that path through the maze of human thought and feeling? Is it a figment of the imagination, or has a merciful Creator given to His created a planned Way to Him?

Steadily rising in the world today is the disturbing belief that religious institutions have failed. The sincere seeker finds in every house of Worship, be it Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism or Muhammadanism, the same exalted sentiments of worship and of brotherhood yet sees the failure of each to translate that sentiment into the disposition of its people. The church, a house divided against itself, is torn by nationalism, racial suppressions and economic injustice. At such a time Bahá'u'lláh* recalls us to the oneness of the foundation of all religions and to the essential rightness of that foundation. Religion has never failed, though human institutions have had their hours of birth and death.

Even earthly cultures have resulted directly or indirectly from the impetus of revealed religion. The lettered Jews sprang from the spiritual genius of Moses; the glory of ancient Persia reflects the fire of Zoroaster; unfolding Europe lifts her spires in homage to the glorious Nazarene; the mathematics of the Arabs of Cordova, the architecture, astronomy and poetic genius of the Muhammadan world in the middle centuries bespeak in like manner the gift of Muhammad. The force which has repeatedly, and often out of the blackest despondency, brought into being such brilliant marks of progress, and more amazing still, renewed that grip on life, joy and salvation which characterizes the spring season of a great religion, is the eternal Christ, the Word that is in Prophethood. Through it man is imbued with the Holy Spirit and is motivated by a master emotion. One hundred years after Jesus lived on earth Greek Christian would not have raised sword against Roman Christian. He would have been conscious first that he was Christian, second that he was Greek. Today one is first German, French, American or English, and as an afterthought we are Christians together. In the spring-season of Christianity the master emotion was a common love for God, and other emotions were sublimated to it. Nothing short of such vitality can today raise to the point of good health the spiritual temperature of the world.

That the seed of such a renewal is even now at work cannot be doubted. While on the one hand we have a falling away of faith, on the other hand are to be found signs of the budding of new spiritual powers. Thousands of seekers, Galahads in quest of Truth, have scaled walls of superstition and intolerance which were centuries in the making. The Message of Bahá'u'lláh, divine in origin and free from artificial wrappings, constitutes a new light to the seeker and reopens before his eyes the kingdom of heaven.

But what is the kingdom of heaven? Does the goal we seek pertain entirely to other-worldliness? Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven is within you." One would do well to ask oneself each morning, "Do you live in heaven?" Neither heaven

nor hell can be limited to place, but rather are described by Bahá'u'lláh as conditions. To the Eskimo hell has ever been an ice-floe to which one is infinitely bound; to the Arab it is boiling oil into which one is cast; to some of the ancients it appeared as a refuse heap outside the city gate. The paint brush of symbolism has faithfully portrayed in terms of mortal experience, a state of utter deprivation, suffering and loss that is applicable to both this world and the next. Heaven, on the other hand, is conscious nearness to God, and this condition too is possible on earth. To be sure, the worlds beyond are an endless reality, for the soul, a creation of God, cannot be annihilated. As the child in the womb of the mother develops faculties for its earthly experience, similarly we develop in this matrix world our spiritual sight, hearing, speech and the like, for an abundant life through all the further realms of God. Indeed, so infinitely precious is that continuance that Bahá'u'lláh says, "If anyone could realize what hath been ordained — he would immediately yearn with a great longing for that immutable, exalted, holy and glorious station."

To continue in heaven, one must necessarily be born into that condition here. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the son of Bahá'u'lláh, explains that to be in heaven is to "move in the atmosphere of God's Holy Will." Surely this is heaven, but who can discover the Will of God? Bahá'u'lláh gives us the key. "Whatsoever hath been revealed in His Tablets is but a reflection of His Will. So complete must be thy consecration that every trace of worldly desire will be washed from thy heart. Know assuredly that My commandments are the lamps of My loving providence among My servants and the keys of My mercy for My creatures."

Revelation, the open door to paradise, is indissolubly linked with the Messenger. With one gracious gesture God bestows upon the world a divine physician, an infallible law-giver, a perfect pattern of His holy attributes, and a point of union of a man with his God. Happy is the heart that directly experiences fusion with the Manifestation of God's Perfection. Paul would be made alive in Christ Jesus. Ali, youthful disciple of this day, proclaimed as he gave his life, "If I recant, whither shall I go? In him I have found my paradise." The Word is the bread of life, one Word throughout the ages and cycles, though the speakers have been many. How well has God done His part! The soul, refreshed by the heavenly bread and waters of Revelation, finds itself on the ancient, eternal path. To tread that path with dignity and joy is the birthright of every man. Therefore once in about a thousand years God in His great compassion clears the path of the accumulation of superstition and imagination that the way may be made plain once more for the sincere seeker. And this has He done today through Bahá'u'lláh.

But we have yet to travel that path, to become steadfast, to enter the City of Certitude, and to come into spiritual possession of life through the motivation of the Will of God. Granted that God has done His part; what steps are left to us?

The call of God is simple, clear, compelling. Bahá'u'lláh reminds us that the first need is for a pure heart and a desire to become ever more pure. He

proclaims, "My first counsel is this: Possess a pure, kindly and radiant heart, that thine may be a sovereignty ancient, imperishable and everlasting. " A static purity cannot exist. Today's degree must melt into tomorrow's. Even the fire of tests and ordeals are a blessing to this end. "With fire we test the gold," Bahá'u'lláh writes. How else can gold be purified? Great souls discover that they are either the possessors or the possessed. Life, the teacher, becomes the enemy of the soul who, steeped in self-love, is the continual prisoner of the clutch of circumstance; but the friend of one who, purified of self-demands, counts as pure gain the lessons of this sometimes ruthless teacher, and learns to possess it all, a happy treasure, for the sake of God, the Dear, the Knower.

The second step is assuredly the attainment of understanding. Meditation and prayer, 'Abdu'l-Bahá assures us, are the wings of our understanding. Faculties allowed to rust in blind imitation or fallen into disuse, must be called into activity. 'Abdu'l-Bahá points out that the mind is like a mirror which reflects that to which it is turned. If the mirror reflects the lustful and sordid, can the owner claim better than the lowest condition? If the same mirror becomes the reflector of arts and scientific realities its status is undeniably high. Greatest of all is the noble station of the soul that turns its mirror toward the spiritual Sun of Revelation and becomes warmed and illumined by its direct ray. A well-known business genius attributes a large measure of success to undisturbed meditation upon his affairs for fifteen minutes at the beginning of each day. He is undoubtedly correct. How much more, then, it is necessary that the soul seeking a heavenly condition learn the use of such a faculty for the reflection of the kingdom of heaven. More interesting still, consider the possible result of a whole world of people using the power of meditation, or reflection, for the dispensing of God's affairs on earth. Such meditation is akin to prayer.

What sincere traveler would not give the half of his kingdom to consciously walk and talk with God? Yet the science of prayer is so little understood that in the words of Tennyson we are

"A child crying in the night,
A child crying for the light,
And with no language but a cry."

How different the mature experience of the heart that turns in complete abandonment to the Will of God, never dictating always listening. The fears, bafflement and complexities of the world fade before the grandeur of his adoration. His heart is a shrine in which he meets with his Beloved. Four suggestions are made for us by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. "The worshiper must pray with a detached spirit, unconditional surrender of the will, concentrated attention, and spiritual passion."

When 'Abdu'l-Bahá was in New York, He called to him an ardent Bahá'í and said, "If you will come to me at dawn tomorrow, I will teach you to pray."

Delighted, Mr. M. arose at four and crossed the city, arriving for his lesson at six. With what exultant expectation he must have greeted this opportunity! He found 'Abdu'l-Bahá already at prayer, kneeling by the side of the bed. Mr. M. followed suit, taking care to place himself directly across. Seeing that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was quite lost in his own reverie, Mr. M. began to pray silently for his friends, his family and finally for the crowned heads of Europe. No word was uttered by the quiet man before him. He went over all the prayers he knew then, and repeated them twice, three times — still no sound broke the expectant hush. Mr. M. surreptitiously rubbed one knee and wondered vaguely about his back. He began again, hearing as he did so, the birds heralding the dawn outside the window. An hour passed, and finally two. Mr. M. was quite numb now. His eye, roving along the wall, caught sight of a large crack. He dallied with a touch of indignation but let his gaze pass again to the still figure across the bed. The ecstasy that he saw arrested him and he drank deeply of the sight. Suddenly he wanted to pray like that. Selfish desires were forgotten. Sorrow, conflict, and even his immediate surroundings were as if they had never been. He was conscious of only one thing, a passionate desire to draw near to God. Closing his eyes again he set the world firmly aside, and amazingly his heart teemed with prayer, eager, joyous, tumultuous prayer. He felt cleansed by humility and lifted by a new peace. 'Abdu'l-Bahá had taught him to pray! The "Master of 'Akká" immediately arose and came to him. His eyes rested smilingly upon the newly humbled Mr. M. "When you pray," He said, "you must not think of your aching body, nor of the birds outside the window, nor of the cracks in the wall!" He became very serious then, and added, "When you wish to pray you must first know that you are standing in the presence of the Almighty!"

What balm is in detachment. What peace is in true surrender to His Will. And as to spiritual passion, who shall enter paradise without it? Verily I believe that God will choose to lift into His very Presence the least peasant who hurls himself upon the breast of God in fiery supplication in preference to the kings and learned men of the whole earth if to the latter the smug complacency of a dulled age is sufficient. In the book of Revelation it is said, "So because thou art lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I will spew thee out of my mouth!" 'Abdu'l-Bahá said, "In the highest prayer men pray only for the love of God." This is spiritual passion indeed.

Even prayer and meditation, mighty channels of spiritual vitality, do not fully constitute the steps of man to the kingdom of God. The religion that is fruitless is dead. Bahá'u'lláh writes: "Let deeds, not words, be your adorning." Sincere prayer and meditation lead us to the next great step, effective living. Good deeds are the wealth of the friends. "Come not into My Court with empty hands," we are urged. Even daily work done in the spirit of service is accounted by Bahá'u'lláh as worship, and living apart for pious worship is discouraged. The very motive power of progress on the path to God is supplied by acceptable deeds, for spirituality itself, far from being a subjective experience, is the reflection of Godliness into channels of human living.

The greatest deeds are those of purposeful sacrifice. So great is this wealth that through it man's life takes on a sovereignty. Useless asceticism is not implied, for Bahá'u'lláh says, "Deprive not yourself of what is created for you." There is today, however, even in religious trends, a common emphasis on acquisition rather than giving. As truly as that the acorn is sacrificed to achieve the oak, renunciation is still the law of rebirth, and he who would side-step this law in his life will become spiritually impoverished.

Sacrifice for the eternal Cause of God is the greatest of all. Consider the peculiar joy of the apostles of all ages. The ruthless grip of circumstance can remove the pleasures and joys of the world with a single blow, but the poise and serenity of these spiritual giants points to an almost unbelievable freedom. What earthly bondage could touch a Stephen, spat upon and stoned, who cried, "Behold, I see the heavens opened!" Hasan, a Persian, starved and persecuted for the sake of his Lord, finding himself at last in the presence of Bahá'u'lláh, knew the earth to be a handful of dust in his fingers while every joy and fragrance of spirit filled his being. Haydar Ali, whom 'Abdu'l-Bahá called the angel of 'Akká because he had suffered every persecution, said quite simply to an American, "I have known only joy." The same joyous sovereignty completely enveloped the life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá whose years of imprisonment were worn like an ermine cloak. At one time he wrote, "Though I stay in prison it is just like paradise; afflictions and trials in the path of God give me joy; troubles rest me; death is life; to be despised is honor. . . . Seek, O servant of God, this life until day and night you remain in limitless joy."

The secret of so great a station is intimacy with God through His Messenger, an intimacy in which pure and selfless love is born. True love for God generates love for humanity for one who strives to serve God will find he can only do so by serving man. This devotion is a step immeasurably great along the Way. 'Abdu'l-Bahá calls every soul to have love and more love, a love that melts opposition, sweeps away all barriers, abounds in charity, large-heartedness and noble striving, boundless, irresistible, sweeping love. "Ah me!" he writes, "Each one must be a sign of love, a center of love, a sum of love,— a world of love, a universe of love! Hast thou love? Then thy power is irresistible. Hast thou sympathy? Then all the stars will sing thy praise."

These steps will lead inevitably to unity, the command of God for this age. Unity is not only the last step but the proof of the spiritual reality of the other steps. A Bahá'í becomes a Bahá'í only when this ideal is expressed in his life. He must seek to be the embodiment of love untainted by arrogance. The door is open to black and white, rich and poor, fellow countryman and foreign born. He extends the hand of friendship to every sincere soul and honors at his table every type and kind in the garden of his Lord. No ephemeral lines divide him from his fellows. He glories in the accomplishments of the strong and is a steward of the rights of the weak. He is, in short, the servant of all, the friend of all, the lover of all. He has cast himself into the sea of unity.

Bahá'u'lláh writes, "Ye are the fruits of one tree, the leaves of one branch.

Deal ye with one another with the utmost love and harmony. So powerful is the light of unity that it can illumine the whole earth. . . . Exert yourselves that ye may attain this transcendent and most sublime station... This goal excelleth every other goal, and this aspiration is the monarch of all aspirations." Moreover, He assures us, "That which God willeth shall come to pass and thou shalt see the earth even as the most Glorious Paradise."

A unity greater than fellowship will exist between the true lovers. Out of perfect union with the Will of the Beloved will appear a common passion, unity in the love of God. This celestial accomplishment of the near ones will give rise to the harmony of the race.

This in short is the path to God renewed. When we attain a united faith through the ever-flowing waters of Revelation; when our beliefs are raised to the plane of deeds and our thoughts harmonized by a common passion, then heaven will be opened before every sincere soul and society will inherit a new earth.

Today the stage is set for the greatest spiritual drama of history, for the rebirth of the powers of the human race will be for the first time world wide and in proportion to infinitely higher development. The promise of the end of the world is kept. The old world passes; tomorrow, swords are beaten into plough-shares. Bahá'u'lláh fulfills and renews all of the great Scriptures of the world and infuses all things with new life. He is the Michael spoken of by Daniel for the troublous time of the end when there is increase of knowledge, and running to and fro. He is the One promised by Jesus, of whom that sanctified Spirit said, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he shall guide you into all truth." He is the Mihdi promised by Muhammad. He is the Friend spoken of by Gautama, and the Sunrise of Zoroaster. His universal Spirit is the "Glory of God that shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea." His coming is the bow of promise in the sky. "Lo, every stone and clod crieth, 'The Promised One hath appeared, and the Kingdom is to God, the Powerful, the Mighty, the Pardoners.' "

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