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Sacrifice is His "utmost hope, the joy of my heart, the consolation of my soul and my final desire."

Again and again He rejects commiseration offered on account of His calamities and afflictions. They are not calamities, but bounties, they are not afflictions but gifts; not hardships, but tranquillity; not trouble, but mercy; and we thank God for this great favour." (p. 128.) He asserts His independence of all His enemies can do to harm Him.

"I am free," he writes, "though I should remain in prison; all fortresses and castles cannot confine me, and the dungeon cannot bring me under the narrow bondage of the world. The spirit is ever soaring, even if the body be in the depths ... Therefore, neither the prison is a cause of sorrow, nor freedom from it a source of joy." (p. 151)

These letters fill hundreds of printed pages. Each correspondent is addressed by some special spiritual title chosen by 'Abdu'l-Bahá for him or for her, personally, as, "Thou Who Art Turning to the Divine Kingdom... Thou Candle of the Love of God," "Thou Servant of God," "Thou Opened Rose in the Garden of Abhá," "Thou Who Art Awakened to the Cause of God," "Thou Worshipper of Truth," "Thou Servant of Humanity," "Thou Who Art Yearning for the Glad Tidings of God."

He deals with diverse problems; answers countless questions about the past and the present, about Revelation, about Christianity, about social life, the life of the home, about marriage and children. He sets forth the cause of God and its administration. He exposes the error and the evil of the times. He comforts, counsels, commands, urges; He chants praises of God and of His faithful ones. Whatever the subject, whatever the occasion, whatever the need, the same divine might of His creative love calls into action the awakening spirit of the people of the West. His heart, He writes (p. 60), overflows with gladness and exultation as He reads the letters of the beloved of God whose eyes are enlightened by God, whose hearts and consciences are purified by knowledge and love of God and who have found peace of soul through the commemoration of God.

He remembers them at all times, prays for them every morn

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and eve (p. 113) "Do not think that ye are forgotten for one moment" (p. 593). "Trust thou in the love of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, for verily nothing equals it." (p. 201)

If for any reason letters do not reach Him He misses them and life and conscience do not find happiness and joy. (p. 375). Yet important and dearly cherished as letters are He is in close and living touch

with the faithful in spite of distance, in spite of interruption in correspondence. Time and place do not control the Spirit nor the inwardness of spiritual realities: geographical remoteness from a heavenly centre will not obscure the vision of its glory. "When the Spirit is breathed in the East its signs immediately appear in the West, and it hath a spiritual dominion which penetrates the pillars of the world." (p. 289.) If the friends be firm in the cause of God and in His service, spiritual letters come down to them from the Kingdom of Abhá. Their descent is according to an eternal law; their movement is like that of wave following wave and they bear tidings of the unity of God. The love of 'Abdu'l-Bahá for His faithful friends is itself another and a special messenger between them. If a human heart be truly sensitive to the call of God, then there is stretched between its centre and the centre of the Kingdom a connection through which the spirit sends its messages. Every faithful loving heart is endued with this means of communion. (pp. 787, 628.)

'Abdu'l-Bahá is spiritually present with the faithful at their meetings and is their protector, "spreading His wings over them." (pp. 287, 628)

In phrase after phrase, passage after passage challenging, rigorous, profound, He tells of the transcendent unimagined imperishable splendour of the Abhá Kingdom they are entering. (p. 289.)

"O maidservant of God! Every star hath a setting but the star of knowledge of God in the Divine heaven; every light shall darken save the light of the guidance of God, every glory shall vanish away save the glory under the shadow of the word of God." (p. 129.) He calls on the beloved (pp. 411-2) to seize the opportunity God's mercy offers them -- "Truly I say unto you, this is a gift which neither the dominion of the world, nor all the riches of its treasures,

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nor the glory of its distinguished men, can rival in this resplendent century and new age; inasmuch as crowns are transient but this is eternal and will never be taken away." "In this material world nothing hath any result, even if it be dominion over the East and the West. But that which hath an immortal result is servitude in the Holy Threshold, service which is rendered to the Kingdom of God. and which gives guidance to all on the earth." (p. 424.) "O beloved of God! Know ye that the world is like unto a mirage which the thirsty one thinks to be water . . . Leave it to its people and turn unto the Kingdom of your Lord, the merciful."

He pours His blessing upon them. "Blessed are ye, O stars that shine with the light of the love of God! Blessed are ye, O lamps that burn with the fire of love of God. Blessed are ye whose hearts are drawn to the Kingdom. Glad tidings to you who are severed from all save God Glad tidings to you through the gift of the Covenant... Rejoice ... Be glad ... Lift up your hearts

.. Let your eyes be solaced by the vision of the bounties of the spiritual Realm." (p. 30.)

"The cup of knowledge is floating over, blessed are they who drink of it deeply! . . . The gates of heaven are open, blessed are they who see. The hosts of heaven stand in battle-array-what joy to them who win the victory. The trumpet of life is sounding - how glad the ears of them that hear!" (p. 621.) He calls on them again and again to realise the supreme privilege which is vouchsafed them by the mercy of God, and to pour forth every kind of praise to Him for ever from grateful, happy, radiant hearts. (pp. 182, 259, 413, 594, etc.)

There is a note of warning, too: "The time is short, and the Divine Courser moves swiftly on." (p. 406.) To those who complain the path to the Kingdom is hard, obstacles many, difficulties severe; who are perplexed, burdened, discouraged, He says such trials are to be expected. Earthly aims are not won without effort and perseverance, and obstacles to these great spiritual attainments naturally are greater still.

Through steadfastness in overcoming these trials, the soul of the believer is brought nearer to God and at last reaches the condition of knowledge and assurance. As Nature, having borne with

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patience the lightning and thunderbolts and storms of winters, is afterwards rewarded with the season of blossoms, flowers and fruits; so in the Kingdom of heaven the storms of trials give a constant heart the means of earning the good pleasure of God and the prizes of the Kingdom.

How extreme in times long past were the troubles of the lovers of Christ. Yet their courage was proof, and their reward was eternal life and everlasting Glory.

If tests are severe, it is that they may expose the weakness of those who are unworthy, and enable every true hearted soul to "shine from the horizon of the Most Great Guidance." To any such soul tests, however violent, are a gift from God, the Exalted, and He hastens towards them with joy and gladness, for they will cleanse him of those imperfections that keep him removed from his Beloved. (p. 722.)

'Abdu'l-Bahá bids the faithful not to be grieved at the divine trials: but to turn to God, to bow before His will in lowliness, to pray to Him, to be content under all conditions, to be thankful to Him in the midst of affliction.

They are to know that in this age the greatest of all titles, the highest of all praise is given for resolution and firmness because the tests and trials are of the greatest intensity.

The mastery of life and its trials belongs only to believers and comes only

from turning to God. When asked about problems of human relationships or the life of the home He affirms that one must at all times be free from merely personal desires and warmed with devotion to God. One must love all people and one's own family with a ray of the infinite Godward love - personal love is not enough. To one whose home was a place of strain He wrote: "It behoveth thee to sever thyself from all desires save for thy Lord the supreme, expecting no aid or help from anyone in the Universe, not even thy father or children. Resign thyself to God . . . Be patient. Endure every difficulty and hardship with an uplifted heart, an aspiring spirit, a tongue that delights to make mention of the All-merciful." (pp. 97-8) To another He wrote explaining: "When thou beholdest with the eye of Truth, then thou wilt realise that in this

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world neither known nor unknown, neither kind father nor beloved son, neither mother nor sister help us. No persons assist except the benevolent Almighty. When thou knowest Him, thou art independent of all else. When thou art attached to His love then thou art detached kith and kin." (p. 671.) Only when the heart has broken the lure of a limited love can it be attuned to the perfect love, the perfect joy that will satisfy it for ever.

"Know that in every home where God is praised and prayed to, and His Kingdom proclaimed, that home is a garden of God and a paradise of His happiness." (p. 69.)

He writes of the importance of marriage and of its responsibilities (e.g., pp. 609, 627) and shows (p. 605) that true marriage is accessible only to the spiritually minded, and that the real bond between husband and wife is none other than the Word of God.

He suggests that the naming of a child should be made a religious and social occasion: that friends should be invited to the home and that before the name is given suitable prayers should be said; after which the company should enjoy some light repast together. He calls for obedience and kindness from children to their parents (p. 551); and on the other hand, in the strongest manner, stresses the obligation laid by God in this Dispensation on parents to bring up their children in the knowledge and fear of God, "Should they neglect this matter they shall be held responsible and worthy of reproach in the presence of the stern Lord. This is a sin unpardonable ...(p. 579.)

For those who seek comfort in the anguish of a fresh bereavement He lifts a little the veil that hides from them that eternal world in which love knows no separation. He bids them remember this parting is limited to the body, its length will be counted in days and over the Spirit death has no dominion at all. Reunion and everlasting consolation are near. "Thy son shall be with thee in the Kingdom of God and thou shalt behold his smiling face and his brow illumined with the beauty of eternal happiness; then thou wilt have comfort and wilt give thanks to God for His loving kindness to thee." (p. 86.)

To the faithful or as he names them "the people of adoration," He writes "death is an ark of deliverance," (p. 444.) Could these

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mourners but see in heaven now the faithful souls they lament, wonder and joy would check their tears. He comforts a mourning mother (p. 405) "O Bird of the Rose-Garden of Fidelity! Be of no cheerless heart; have no wing nor feather broken; sigh not, neither do thou wail nor sit chilled in a corner. The little girl lamented is in the divine Rose-Garden in the highest happiness and delight. Why then art thou grieved, sorrowing with a bleeding heart? This is the day of rejoicing and the hour of ecstasy. This is the season of the spiritually dead coming forth from their graves and gathering together, This is the promised time for the attainment of plenteous grace.

"Be calm, be strong, be grateful, and become a lamp full of light, that the darkness of sorrow may be scattered and the sun of everlasting joy arise in brilliant splendour from the dawning place of heart and soul, Upon thee be the Glory of the Most Glorious!"

To a physician seeking counsel, He writes (p. 688): " Whenever thou presentest thyself at the bed of a patient turn thy face towardl the Lord of the Kingdom and supplicate assistance from the Holy Spirit and heat the ailments of the sick one." (p. 685)

Answering an enquiry about the nature of the sympathetic nervous system He explains that the powers of the sympathetic nerve are not exclusively spiritual nor exclusively physical, but are between the two and connected with both. The operation of the nerve is normal when its relations with the spiritual and the physical systems are perfect. "When the material and the divine world are rightly co-related, when the hearts become heavenly and the aspirations grow pure and divine, then perfect connection between the two systems will follow. Then shall this power be shown in its perfection, and physical and spiritual diseases shall receive complete healing. The exposition is brief. Ponder, and thou shall understand the meaning." (p. 309)

All life in reality opens on heaven, and all experience lies in the path of God. To those who consult Him about the study and practice of letters, music, painting, science, and the like, 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that these pursuits are one and all to be inspired by the sense of worship. "Art is worship," as He once said. He affirms that a spiritual motive in the artist will quicken his progress and heighten his proficiency. A believer will find his art a natural

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medium of communicating the Divine Message; if his work has itself a spiritual quality it will awaken the spiritual susceptibilities of the beholder while his

social intercourse with fellow-artists will tend to guide their thoughts to appreciation of the Divine Beauty.

(pp. 449-50.)

At the present time all divine power poured from heaven on humanity has its focus in Bahá'u'lláh, and reaches mankind through His mediation alone. As in our solar system the source of all physical light is the sun, and every light directly or indirectly is derived from it, so in the spiritual realm every Age has its Messiah and truth is attained by men only through Him.

(p. 592.) "Whatever question thou hast in thy heart," writes

'Abdu'l-Bahá, "turn thou thy heart towards the kingdom of Abhá and entreat at the threshold of the Almighty and reflect upon that problem; then unquestionably the light of Truth shall dawn and the reality of that problem will become evident and clear to thee. For the teachings of His Highness Bahá'u'lláh are the keys to all the doors." (p.

692.)

In the past, He points out, there were great philosophers who upheld the ideal of the oneness of humanity; but at that time the support and inspiration of heaven were not forthcoming so that their endeavours bore no fruit. To-day there are many souls in the world who spread thoughts of peace and reconciliation and long to establish the unity of the human race. But they likewise are without the dynamic power to carry their ideal into effect. This power belongs only to the instructions and exhortations of Bahá'u'lláh whose summons to world-unity is supported by the word of God and by all the resources of the Kingdom of the Most High. "Therefore, O thou lover of the oneness of the world of humanity, spread thou as much as thou canst the instructions and teachings of His Highness Bahá'u'lláh." (p. 691.)

There is indeed need of a thousand teachers, He writes, each one severed from the world, attracted by the Holy Spirit, radiant with the joy of the Kingdom, seeking no reward or recompense. "Strive with life and guide the people to the Kingdom of God, lead them to the straight pathway, inform them of the greatness of the Cause and give them the glad tidings." (p. 360.)

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The world of humanity to-day is like a sick and feeble man; the teachers are wise physicians. The remedies which they are to apply are two. The first to be given is that of guidance, that the people "may turn unto God, hearken to the divine commandments and go forth with a hearing ear and a seeing eye." When this remedy has had its effect, then the people are "to be trained in the conduct, morals and deeds of the Supreme Concourse, encouraged and inspired with the gifts of the Kingdom of Abhá." (pp. 36-7.) Their hearts are to be cleansed of all ill-will and to be strengthened in all the attributes of love and union so that East and West may be joined in one, and universal peace be established. In the pursuit of their task, teachers are not to spare

themselves nor to seek rest. They are to make the utmost endeavour to bring the Glad Tidings to the ears of mankind and are to accept every calamity and affliction in their love for God and their reliance on 'Abdu'l-Bahá. (p. 38.) They are to drink from the eternal chalice of the love of God, to enjoy its ecstasy and in the radiance of the beauty of Abhá be all aglow with zeal, delight and eager energy. They all are to work together in perfect unanimity and singleness of purpose. "Ye must attain such spiritual unity and agreement that ye may express one spirit and one life." (p. 23.)

It was to this end, to unite the hearts of the beloved of God, that Bahá'u'lláh endured all difficulties and all ordeals (p. 247); and the aim of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's devotion and service is the same; "that union and affection may be created among the beloved of God, nay the whole of the human world." (p. 421.)

Nothing can exceed the emphasis and earnestness with which in these Tablets he appeals for concord and unity among believers, This is the vital instrument through which is to be achieved the master-objective of the Bahá'í Movement, namely the transforming of the earth into a paradise, the wide world into one home, the nations of East and West into one household. "Not until this (union) is realised will the cause advance by any means whatsoever." Therefore, even in those early days of the Faith when believers were very few in the West, He begins the work of organisation, urges co-operation and gatherings among the friends, the forming of committees for promoting the Cause and of what were at that

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time called Boards of Consultation. "The greatest means for the union and harmony of all is Spiritual Meetings. This matter is very important." (p. 125.) Such meetings will be magnets drawing down divine strength, "Blessed are ye," He writes to one group, "for organising the assembly of unity." As these meetings begin to materialise, He insists that the highest degree of union and harmony must exist between them. The spiritual meeting of consultation in New York must be in the fullest accord with that in Chicago, and when a similar meeting "shall be organised in Washington, these two meetings of Chicago and New York must be in unity and harmony with that meeting."

He watches over the constitution of these bodies, instructs that each shall have its clearly marked purpose and fit into the general scheme as an integral part of the whole, and that no spirit of exclusiveness shall be aroused such as has happened in earlier Dispensations when arrangements which "were in the beginning a means for harmony became in the end a cause of trouble." (p. 394.)

He enjoins, too, the great observance of the Faith, the yearly fast from March 2nd-20th; "the nineteen-day Fast is a duty to be observed by all" (p.

57) - and the "Feast of Remembrance or Meeting of Faithfulness" as it was then called (p. 421).

"This Feast," He writes (p. 468), "was established by His Highness The Bab, to occur once in nineteen days. Likewise the Blessed Perfection hath commanded, encouraged and reiterated it. Therefore, it hath the utmost importance. Undoubtedly you must give the greatest attention to its establishment and raise it to the highest point of importance, so that it may become continual and constant."

He then gives directions as to the keeping of the Feast; and concludes - "If the Feast is arranged in this manner and in the way mentioned, that supper is the Lord's supper, for the result is the same result and the effect is the same effect." (pp. 468-9.)

These Tablets, published in America and written chiefly to American believers, form a sister - and complementary - volume to that which contains 'Abdu'l-Bahá's American addresses and bears the title The Promulgation of Universal Peace. Taken

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together they form, as it were, a complete circle of Divine and practical instruction for the times.

The Addresses constitute the profoundest and most comprehensive textbook on modern problems. They reveal what true modernism is, dealing with the larger aspects of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, with questions of the relations and the history of religions and of peoples, with science and philosophy, with the principles of world order and with definite plans for its establishment. The Tablets, on the other hand, are directed for the most part to individuals, often to individuals who look to Him with ardent belief and adoring love. They reveal clearly and emphatically the essential nature of His own special station as the bondservant of Bahá'u'lláh and the Centre of the Covenant. They are heart to heart talks on the personal hopes and aspirations of His correspondents, their personal trials and difficulties, their personal duties and obligations to God and His Faith. The writer's attitude is that of a host greeting an honoured and loved guest, a father welcoming a dear son home from a long and perilous journey: it is that of a divine messenger who brings to those struggling in the uncertain turmoil of earthly life a foretaste of the sweetness and fragrance and harmony and peace of Paradise and of the eternal glory and power that will be the reward of victory.

'Abdu'l-Bahá stated that these Tablets have an importance which will not be appreciated for many long years to come. But perhaps their message of the impassioned all-embracing love of God will never be more sadly needed than it is now, nor more precious than it is to us as we battle on through the heart of

the storm and the darkness and the ruin of the Night of judgment and Retribution.

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