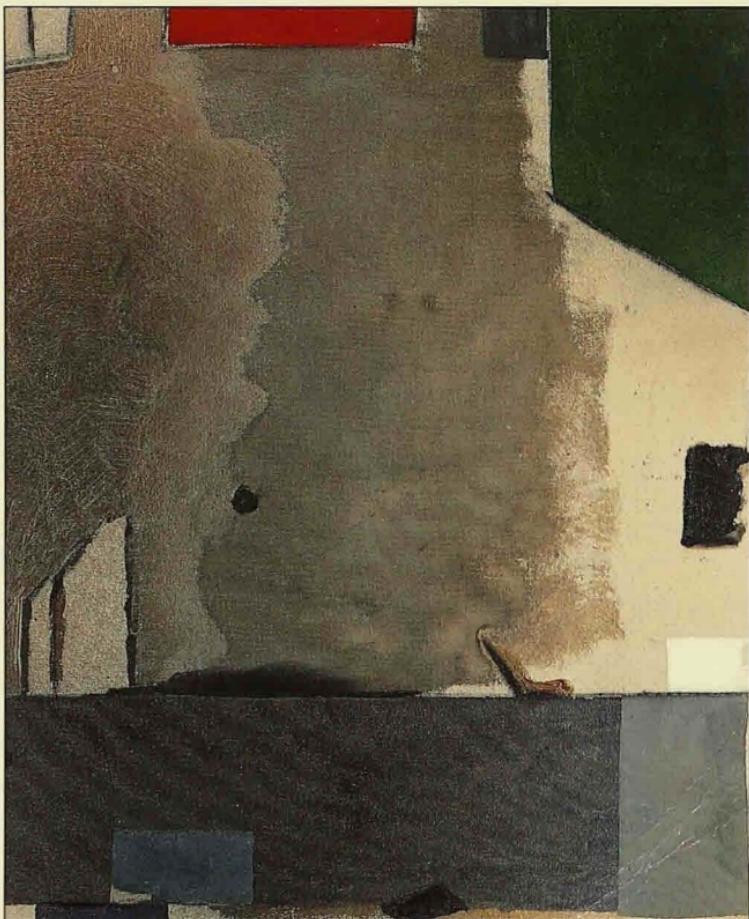


# DIMENSIONS <sup>IN</sup> SPIRITUALITY



J A McLEAN

# Dimensions in Spirituality

*Reflections on the Meaning of  
Spiritual Life and Transformation  
in Light of the Bahá'í Faith*

by

J.A. MCLEAN

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*I dedicate this book to my parents  
Allan James and Joyce Mary Halsted McLean  
and to my brother and sister  
Mary Louise and Stephen Stewart Mclean  
in loving remembrance and gratitude for momentous days*

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Rare is that scholar who works in a vacuum. All these friends have been exemplary in their dedication to the cause of Bahá'í studies and by their example have encouraged me in my own work. Finally, in the spirit of 'the last shall be first', I remember gratefully here my wife, Brigitte Maloney McLean, who has magnanimously accepted my absence because of the long solitary hours spent in my study. Her patience for this and other things is hereby lovingly and gratefully acknowledged.

## *Foreword*

Spirituality is one of those several areas in Bahá'í studies that awaits further development. It is hoped that the present work may help advance the discussion of a subject that is absolutely vital to Bahá'í scholarship. Bahá'í scripture itself discloses, of course, a vast and detailed map that gives the individual a multitude of meaningful statements on the nature of the spiritual life. Yet the very diversity and complexity of this map invite, if need be, closer interpretations of its contours in order to make it more meaningful to the individual's spiritual journey. *Dimensions in Spirituality* has been written in the hope of making the reading of the vast map of spirituality offered in the Bahá'í writings somewhat more meaningful to the preoccupations of the thoughtful individual.

I have had two main concerns in writing this book: first, to define somewhat more clearly the meaning of spirituality, and second, to outline a process of spiritual transformation. In so doing, I have not approached this all-important subject in any rigorous way but have rather offered a series of personal and preliminary reflections on the varied phenomena dealing with spiritual life. Consequently, this book makes no attempt to be a definitive or 'hard' scholarly work on the subject. Indeed, an attempt merely to make an in-depth analysis of the concept of spirituality without taking a view of the dynamics involved in spiritual transformation would amount, in my view, to a defeat of its own purpose. I say this because spirituality has to do with the human condition, that lived experience of the soul who encounters God, self and others while living in the world. A better understanding of our living-in-the-world cannot be imparted by analysis alone. It requires the insights that a more holistic interpretation of those experiences can offer. Although we may analyze, before or after the fact, in order better to understand, experiences in spiritual life often come to us in surprising moments and modes of immediate apprehension and awakening.

The following thoughts on spirituality and transformation are situated loosely within a Bahá'í theological framework. Readers will consequently recognize an element of apology in the discussion that follows. I say this unblushingly for in my view it is indeed indispensable to continue to make known at the present hour the relevance of the Bahá'í view of spirituality to a world that still largely ignores the claims and superlative teachings of this most recent of the world's great religions. Other sections of the book, however, follow a more descriptive and analytical method.

Such a vast subject as spirituality can only be treated by a diversity of approaches and I do not lay claim, in a preliminary work such as this, to having covered all the ground, or even all of the parameters. I have not, for example, dealt with the corporate aspects of spirituality. The Bahá'í Faith clearly has a great deal to say about community or corporate spirituality and its effect upon the individual, but this has not been my main focus here. I have also not discussed the ramifications of unity, the key teaching of the Bahá'í Faith. It is to be hoped that others will take up these and other questions relating to spirituality.

Nothing can be more important than the subject of spirituality for it is an expression of the life of the soul, that most precious of divine endowments bestowed upon us by our Creator as we journey through life. Spirituality is that tangible and concrete expression of our love for God, our understanding of His truth and the searching out of His ways. It reflects the preeminence of the personal, what is nearest and dearest in the heart and mind of the individual believer, and what God seems to value most. It concerns that education of the spirit that is the whole purpose of religion. To live the life, we have been told time and again, is the essential thing, the *summum bonum*. It is there that we will succeed or fail.

Spirituality cannot be fully understood only as an armchair exercise. In order to understand spirituality and to become spiritual beings we have to participate in the process. This process consists mainly in the working out of a life map for spiritual growth and development, one that often enough has to be worked out amid, and often thanks to, the trials of life. One of the great benefits of the working out of this life map of spiritual values is that we will gain insights into the dynamics of the psycho-spiritual process of growth, a process that we shall be able to impart to others by example as well as by teaching, and thereby, it is

## FOREWORD

hoped, help to spiritualize the world.

One of the benefits of writing this book is that it has allowed me to reflect somewhat more deeply on certain of the inner dynamics of the spiritual life. It would be a great source of satisfaction to know that this book had inspired others to persevere in their quest to become spiritual persons or that it had prompted them to explore more intensively such a worthy subject.

J.A. McLean

*Gatineau, Quebec, Canada*

*June 1994*

## *Introduction*

Man is in the highest degree of materiality, and at the beginning of spirituality . . .<sup>1</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá

The notion of spirituality has generated a vast amount of literature and discussion over the years, both in the East and the West. More than 20 volumes in the series *World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest* have recently been published. They highlight a renewed interest in spiritual matters. In the 1990s it has, in certain quarters, become somewhat fashionable to seek spirituality. The idea that human beings can develop certain very positive and enduring qualities, for example, faith, trust, love and the capacity for spiritual knowledge, is significant. That through the cultivation and development of these qualities a person can achieve both some degree of self-understanding and a certain relatedness to transcendent realities has been seen to be of paramount importance. It is only through the cultivation of the spiritual life, of spirituality as such, that humanity can achieve a lasting interior harmony which has serious, positive and permanent social and practical consequences.

In discussing spirituality we are doing nothing less than talking about what religion in fact, really and truly offers to human nature and consequently to the social structures with which it interacts. It is not simply a case of offering a theoretical understanding of human nature and society which can then be set down in some kind of manual, but of providing the concrete conditions for real change and growth; and importantly, the means for sustaining those qualities associated with change and growth. Interestingly, this book will show that a certain degree of real theological understanding is an essential element in spirituality, in guiding practice and in locating areas of human experience where change or transformation can occur. Spirituality is not simply a set of feelings nor is it just ethical awareness – significant though these are.

## INTRODUCTION

Simply put, but not simply undertaken, spirituality for Bahá'ís is living the Bahá'í life deeply and intensely: 'The great thing is to "Live the Life" – to have our lives so saturated with the Divine teaching and the Bahá'í Spirit.'<sup>2</sup> It is the assimilation and integration in our lives of the Bahá'í teachings and the spiritual realities which they are about. Bahá'u'lláh's remark that 'man [humanity] should know his own self and recognize that which leadeth unto loftiness or lowliness, glory or abasement, wealth or poverty'<sup>3</sup> indicates the temporal nature of spirituality. It is not simply abstract knowledge or a refinement of concepts and ideas nor is it a human based moralism. Spirituality in a Bahá'í context is a living relationship with God and His Messenger or Manifestation, undertaken within the vicissitudes of time and change.

Attempts to define the notion of spirituality have encountered problems. As Jack McLean shows, spirituality is not a univocal term. It is difficult to define, to pin down. He is surely correct in discerning more a pattern of spiritualities, a range of spiritual qualities (available in degree to human nature throughout history) that can be emphasized in and condition a particular notion of spirituality.

An important analysis of language is offered in this book. It shows the problems associated with a limited view of human language, especially in those areas where language is pushed to its limits. Where powerful non-definable human possibilities are on the line, that is when we are talking seriously about opportunities for spiritual transformation, language leads us through metaphor and symbol to those areas in our lives where real and enduring changes can occur. As Jack McLean shows, the prayers and meditations of the Bahá'í Faith tell us much about language and spirituality. Not only are the prayers themselves occasions for spiritual transformation, but, if we really and truly participate in their conversational style we are expressing and glorifying our knowledge and love of God and His Manifestation. In so doing we ourselves undergo change both inwardly and outwardly in our relationships with others. On another level, the prayers and meditations provide a resource for understanding the need for spiritual transformation and the elements associated in such transformation.

In this book the author has provided us with a map of spirituality from a Bahá'í perspective. Here is described a process, a journey of transformation. Drawing insights from other religious traditions, from

theology, philosophy, psychology and literature, he shows how the Bahá'í teachings continue yet deepen considerably the traditions of spirituality of the East and the West. In so doing he is not only taking seriously Shoghi Effendi's request that scholarship, indeed Bahá'í writing, should correlate the Bahá'í teachings with elements in human experience, but he is also making a real and valuable contribution to the world's literature on spirituality.

Spirituality is humanity's greatest resource. One of the most vital things about this is that unlike our natural resources spirituality is not consumed in its use. In our exercise of spirituality, that is in our development of spiritual qualities, we are drawing on an unfathomable resource. In our collective exercise of spirituality we are nothing less than on the road to 'the spiritualization of the world'.<sup>4</sup>

Stephen Lambden

Robert Parry

*Newcastle, England, July 1994*

## *The Starting Point: The Search for Truth*

### **Spiritual Transformation is a Process**

In order better to understand spirituality it is only natural to ask at the outset: 'What is spirituality?' Such an immense question, however, raises issues of great magnitude. It is like asking, 'What is life?', 'What is love?', 'What is the nature of the human being?', 'What is truth?' Such questions, simply put, beg answers of oceanic proportions. Formulas hardly cover the ground. They are at best partial answers in our search better to understand spirituality, for spirituality reflects a multi-faceted and ever-changing process. Despite attempts to fix the meaning of spirituality through analysis, an ineffable quality surrounds it. This is especially true of the dynamics of spiritual transformation which to a great extent remain subtle and mysterious but nonetheless real in their operation. Formulas, moreover, anticipate a predictable outcome and there is decidedly an element of the unknown and the unpredictable in the search for God. The person who takes the spiritual vocation seriously will sooner or later find moments of crisis, what mythologist Joseph Campbell calls 'moments of original experience'<sup>1</sup> when the familiar laws and teachings that we have lived by no longer seem to apply. During these moments of harsh realism, formulas seem to be of little help. At such times we are often called upon to endure or to understand in ways that were unknown to us before. At such times we may become lost in 'the cloud of unknowing', waiting for the light to reappear.

We are perhaps better served by description than by analysis in our search to understand spirituality. For, if we become preoccupied by definition, which tends to be static, we shall miss the all-important process which is dynamic, growing, evolving. Dissection may be

appropriate for the laboratory, but with spirituality observation and reflection will serve us better.

This does not mean that spirituality has no basic parameters or that it is an irrational entity. What these parameters are, however, remain quite subjective.<sup>2</sup> Certainly one would do well to include such attributes as love, knowledge of God, detachment, faith, sacrifice, obedience, commitment, prayer, meditation and good deeds in any discussion of spirituality. There are, however, many other spiritual attributes equally vital to the discussion – justice, for example, being but one of these. ‘Subjective’, moreover, does not mean less valid. On the contrary, there are many genuine and legitimate ways to God, and many styles of spirituality. Indeed, each person must find his or her own path to God.

Exceptions and contradictions abound when one surveys the patterns of the spiritual search. One should not assume consequently that all spiritually minded people search for the same things. Some search primarily for the acquisition of certain states of consciousness such as illumination, peace of mind, bliss or what is glibly called ‘God-consciousness’. Some crave love. Others search for acceptance in a community of like-minded souls. Still others search for sure answers to questions that have been troubling them. These people want to know in a definitive fashion. Some want to change, to break bad habits that may have led them into a life of enslavement and degradation. Then there are those who have no predetermined answers but who nonetheless set out on a spiritual quest, trusting in no traditional authority save the voices of their own inner selves. One should not even assume that all those who find God/Truth are searching. Sometimes people go unwarily about their business when suddenly God catches their attention and transforms their lives in a moment. Certain people sometimes accept a spiritual path without question. The spiritual path that they have chosen may remain largely unexamined, a question of tradition or heritage. Some do not search; rather, they are found or have discovered that they have always simply been Bahá’ís.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Starting Point: The Search for God/Truth**

It is safe to say that the vast majority of people do not search for God/Truth. The tragic and morally decayed condition of the world today attests to this. What gives us cause for hope is that increasing

## THE STARTING POINT: THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH

numbers of people are beginning to discover that the spiritual ingredient may well solve their own troubles and those of the world. So let us begin with the search and attempt to answer in what follows three basic questions that come immediately to mind: Why should we search? How should we search? For what should we search?

If we look at the Bahá'í teaching relating to the spiritual search, what Bahá'ís usually call 'the independent investigation of truth' or 'the independent and personal search for truth', we shall realize that this teaching, next to the oneness of humanity – which is 'the hall-mark of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation and the pivot of His teachings'<sup>4</sup> – is the primary teaching of the Bahá'í Faith. To a great extent the teaching was developed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá.<sup>5</sup> It is featured in a much more prominent way in His talks than in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh. Yet the implications of this teaching have largely been overlooked. With few exceptions, Bahá'í scholars have written little on this key teaching compared with other areas of Bahá'í scholarship.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps the search for truth is deceptively simple. Perhaps the deeper implications of its meaning have passed unnoticed. Whatever the reasons, the search for truth merits renewed investigation, especially since it has crucial consequences for spiritual development. Of course, Christ gave the same injunction centuries ago: 'Seek, and you will find.'<sup>7</sup> Bahá'u'lláh too has asked His followers in this age to 'look into all things with a searching eye.'<sup>8</sup> We should also realize that injunctions of Christ and Bahá'u'lláh to seek the truth applies to seeker, neophyte and confirmed believer alike. No one is exempted from seeking the truth, even those – perhaps especially those – who believe they have found it. Shoghi Effendi made this clear in a comprehensive outline of Bahá'í history and principles when he stated: 'It [the Bahá'í Faith], moreover, enjoins upon *its followers* the primary duty of an unfettered search after truth.'<sup>9</sup> This statement makes it clear that the search is not only for seekers but for believers as well. The timeworn analogy of finding the right road still applies. You may be fortunate indeed if you have found the right road to the celestial city, but you still have to travel the distance.

In His very first explanation of Bahá'í principles in the West,<sup>10</sup> before the Theosophical Society in London on 30 September 1911, 'Abdu'l-Bahá presented the search for truth as the first Bahá'í teaching:

Firstly: He [Bahá'u'lláh] lays stress on the search for Truth. This is most important, because the people are too easily led by tradition. It is

because of this that they are often antagonistic to each other, and dispute with one another.<sup>11</sup>

By consistently placing this teaching first in His sequential exposés of Bahá'í teachings in the West, 'Abdu'l-Bahá seems to have stressed its paramount importance, an importance He emphatically repeated. 'It is evident, therefore, that there is nothing of greater importance to mankind than the investigation of truth.'<sup>12</sup> Such a teaching, incidentally, also helps to bind together the scientist and the religionist. Both are bound to search for all truth, both material and spiritual.

Since the search for truth is the cardinal Bahá'í teaching, we have to consider the sense of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's qualifying adjective 'first'. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statements about the search for truth suggest that the search must be the first step in the sequential order of things. The Chinese saying is pertinent: 'The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.' Yet 'Abdu'l-Bahá seems to be telling us – as common sense itself might – that the most important thing *is* to seek out the truth, for many do not take this preliminary but imperative step. His statements about the search for truth go further than that, however. They suggest that the search must not only be the first initiative in our discovery of reality but that the search must be carried out in a particular fashion. Not any old search will do.

The combined expression God/Truth indicates that both the personal (mystic) and impersonal (cognitive) aspects of reality are or ought to be included in the search. The personal search for Truth includes the search for God as a personal Being in what one might call the realm of intimacy. The other aspect of the search involves the more philosophical mode of the discovery of objective, metaphysical truths. The search for God/Truth in the Bahá'í Faith is configured then in at least three ways that are all intimately connected: 1) as a quest for knowledge about ultimate, pressing or final questions, whether in metaphysical or more pragmatic, empirical form; 2) as a search for God; 3) as the discovery of true self.

The search for God/Truth can mean a search for abstract knowledge in the theological or philosophical sense, as a set of concepts and principles that we believe are true and by which we can orient our lives. These principles may be ethical, philosophical, theological or spiritual ideals embodied as a corpus of knowledge or forms of wisdom. This type of knowledge must also include self-knowledge, a comprehensive

## THE STARTING POINT: THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH

science of man that is so sadly lacking in present-day sciences and humanities. The knowledge of the inner individual corresponds to more objective forms of truth, for how one perceives oneself will lead to the creation of more objective forms of knowledge in the world. The truth that is in oneself corresponds in this view to the truth that is in the world. In the Bahá'í view, such knowledge has been divinely revealed in the teachings of the Prophets or Manifestations of God, sacred figures who have received these teachings from an omniscient Deity and who embody the Truth in their own persons. Such knowledge may also derive purely from the exercise of reason, that is, from natural theology. Both natural and revealed theology offer statements of a rational and intuitive nature on the meaning of human life and experience, the nature of God and the divinity of the individual.

In the mystical search, particularly in the western tradition, the believer seeks to know God through direct experience of Him<sup>13</sup> through the vehicle of the sacred figure who is revealed to the seeker's soul or consciousness, the divine essence within the human being. Such subjective and personal mystical experiences of the divine, whether found in nature, one of the 'two books' of God,<sup>14</sup> or within human consciousness itself, are also implied in the phrase 'the search for truth' as explicated by Bahá'u'lláh in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* in those passages concerned with 'the true seeker'.<sup>15</sup> With theological or philosophical knowledge, truth is viewed as being more objective, coherent and rational, and less personal. Such forms of knowledge may also offer pragmatic insights into the human condition to which they speak. In the search for God or the discovery of true self, truth is discovered in an intensely personal way and is interpreted as being embodied and perfectly expressed within the sacred figure who not only teaches the truth, but who *is* the truth in human form, the divine logos embodied within the human frame. In this understanding, the sacred figure, although omniscient and transcendent, is nonetheless intimate, personal, real, loving and revealed within the soul as the expression of true self.

The search for God as Truth is never a one-way street. We may initiate the search ourselves by seeking God but sometimes He surprises us by taking the initiative and finding us, even when we are not aware that we had been seeking Him until, that is, the moment that He chooses to reveal Himself to us. The sincere search for God always

ends in an encounter with the divine. Once we have determined to seek Him with diligence, we will find Him, or He will find us.

### **'Abdu'l-Bahá's Description of the Search for Truth as a Moral Imperative**

'Abdu'l-Bahá, speaking to the pragmatic peoples of the West, presented the search for truth as a moral imperative, a sacred duty which God has called upon all humanity to observe:

God has created man and endowed him with the power of reason whereby he may arrive at valid conclusions. Therefore, man must endeavour in all things to investigate the fundamental reality. If he does not independently investigate, he has failed to utilize the talent that God has bestowed upon him.<sup>16</sup>

We see here that seeking the truth has something to do with fulfilling one's human potential, of using to the fullest the intellectual capacities that are ours. Further, 'Abdu'l-Bahá taught that there is much at stake for our individual and collective spiritual life in the independent search for truth. If people would sincerely seek the truth, He taught, they would find themselves united,<sup>17</sup> a remarkable statement in itself, since those who claim to have sought and found the truth have often offered as a result a bewildering maze of diverse and antagonistic opinions. The search for truth, He said, would liberate men from repeating the errors of the past,<sup>18</sup> errors which naturally include the warlike ways and deep-seated traditional prejudices and hatreds of a race at war with itself.

'Abdu'l-Bahá presented the search for truth as a call to investigate what He called simply 'reality' (Arabic, *al-Haqq*) and He seems to have in mind an investigation of first principles, a comprehensive body of knowledge consisting of theological, philosophical and ethical statements which constitute both an interpretation of the cosmos and a practical remedy for the ills affecting humankind. The pragmatic aspect of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's social and economic teachings merits further attention. By centering attention on the nature of social organization, 'Abdu'l-Bahá both widened and made more concrete the scope of the theological and philosophical frame of reference which generally tends to be quite speculative.

## THE STARTING POINT: THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH

The societal implications of the search for truth are just as profound as the personal ones. We have for too long thought of the search for truth as merely a private and personal quest for illumination and fulfilment. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá no doubt saw it in this light, but His view of the search for truth extended much farther. His remarkable statement that the investigation of the truth will free society from the shackles of the past seems to hold the promise of progressive social change and the transformation of a warring world into a peaceful global society.

The first [principle] is the independent investigation of truth; for blind imitation of the past will stunt the mind. But once every soul inquireth into truth, *society will be freed from the darkness of continually repeating the past.*<sup>19</sup> (emphasis mine)

This liberation from the age-old dialectic of error bodes well for a profound and positive social change, one that will be a boon to all those who yearn for social justice. The search for truth yields a surprising formula, then, not only for the growth and fulfilment of the individual’s spiritual and intellectual powers but also one for non-violent evolutionary social change.

### Bahá’u’lláh’s Description of the Mystic Search for the Beloved: The True Seeker

The search for truth depicted in Bahá’u’lláh’s writings is addressed primarily to the solitary individual and is couched in the language of the mystic. Bahá’u’lláh’s two best-known mystical compositions are *The Seven Valleys* and *The Four Valleys*, written between 1858 and 1862.<sup>20</sup> The first was addressed to Shaykh Muhyi’d-Dín, a judge and Sufi mystic; the second to Shaykh ‘Abdu’r-Rahmán of Karkúk. Bahá’u’lláh’s works draw on and are similar to the images found in *The Conference of the Birds* (*Manṭiqu’l-Tayr*) by the twelfth century Persian Sufi Farídu’d-Dín ‘Aṭṭár. Bahá’u’lláh employs in these two slight but prodigiously meaningful volumes the language and terminology of the Sufi mystic. In both *The Seven Valleys* and *the Conference of the Birds* the journey of the soul is traced through seven stages or valleys before it reaches the object of its existence, unification with, or the presence of, its creator, whom the Sufis often refer to as the ‘Friend’ or the ‘Beloved’.

In both works, the first valley is the valley of search. Bahá'u'lláh's language as He describes the valley of search is abstruse, intense and transpersonal, bespeaking the language of spiritual passion, the language of the soul longing to be united with its beloved. In contrast, as previously mentioned, the search for truth in the writings and talks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá is presented as a pragmatic moral obligation with substantial benefits for society. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's description of the search challenges the seeker to a contest with the intellectual dead weight of the past by renouncing hollow or meaningless tradition and submitting to the discipline of an investigation.

In the mystical search described by Bahá'u'lláh, the believer knows at the outset what it is he seeks: unification with his Beloved. His anguish and his torment is that he does not know exactly how to find Him. The subsequent valleys, however, reveal the path. In the valley of search, Bahá'u'lláh sets the standard for the journey: the search, above all, must be one of burning intensity, the fire a true lover feels when he is separated from his beloved. The true seeker, Bahá'u'lláh says, will never reach his goal without this passionate intensity, an intensity never to be confused with religious fanaticism which He describes as 'a world-devouring fire'.<sup>21</sup>

There is a story about an ancient Greek philosopher that relates the importance of the intensity of the search. According to the story, one day a student came to the philosopher with a question. 'Master,' enquired the student, 'how should I look for the truth?' Without answering, the philosopher took the pupil by the hand and led him down to the water's edge. His teacher knelt down on the bank. The dutiful student did likewise. Suddenly, the teacher reached over and grabbed the pupil by the back of the neck and thrust his head into the water. He held him there for some time and when it seemed that the lungs of his pupil were about to burst, the philosopher released his hold, drawing the student's head back out of the water. Panic-stricken and alarmed, the younger man looked incredulously at his teacher through water-drenched eyes. The teacher waited a moment until his pupil had regained both his breath and his composure and then said, 'That is how we must seek the truth. With the urgency of the drowning man who seeks the life-giving air.'<sup>22</sup>

The teacher hoped to convey to his pupil the realization that our very life depends upon finding the truth. The search for truth

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resembles, then, Durkheim's definition of religion. It is '*la vie sérieuse*' – serious business. The anecdote also brings to mind a line from a prayer of praise and thanksgiving of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, thanking God for allowing the believers to reach their cherished goal: 'Thou hast suffered the thirsty fish to reach the ocean of reality ...'<sup>23</sup> The beached fish gasps to find again the life-giving waters, and when it does, it swims in its own element with the greatest joy. Otherwise it perishes.

The seeker must also be patient, says Bahá'u'lláh: 'if he strive for a hundred thousand years and yet fail to behold the beauty of the Friend, he should not falter.'<sup>24</sup>

In this valley, Bahá'u'lláh also speaks of the necessary process of purifying the soul, and like 'Abdu'l-Bahá, He counsels that ancestral forms of worship not be used as a guide to find the Beloved. The spiritual pilgrim must travel alone to find the city of certitude:

It is incumbent on these servants that they cleanse the heart – which is the wellspring of divine treasures – from every marking, and that they turn away from imitation, which is following the traces of their forefathers and sires, and shut the door of friendliness and enmity upon all the people of the earth.<sup>25</sup>

This cleansing of the heart would seem to imply that all acquired forms of knowledge, forms of knowledge not intrinsic to the revelation itself, should be bracketed from our consciousness in our search for God. In order to find God, we must engage in a kind of *via negativa* in which the mind is emptied from acquired worldly knowledge – precisely the reverse of the procedure used in traditional education and scholarship where the blank mind is filled up, so to speak.

One of the more common errors in the search for God is to believe that we can somehow find Him more easily through acquired knowledge or the effort of study. The spiritual experience of finding God in the soul, which is one of the forms of finding the truth, in no way depends on learning. It depends rather on purity of heart, clarity of vision and love of God. Says Bahá'u'lláh in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, 'purity of heart, chastity of soul, and freedom of spirit'<sup>26</sup> are what is required to understand the Word of God. Free the mind and heart from all save Me, Bahá'u'lláh says, and you shall find Me. We have to free ourselves from our intellectual baggage and stand simple and naked before God, going before Him like the humble little child. This emptying or voiding

of the self comes with a stripping away of the projected personae of the false gnostic or the fictitious wise one we imagine ourselves to be until we find the living core at the centre, the Manifestation of God residing within the human heart:

O Son of Spirit! . . . Turn thy sight unto thyself, that thou mayest find Me standing within thee, mighty, powerful and self-subsisting.<sup>27</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh's counsel may seem troubling on first reading. The seeker is exhorted to 'shut the door of friendliness and enmity upon all the people of the earth'. We readily understand in part. Enmity is the opponent of love and whatever drives out love is antipathetic to God. Yet why should we 'shut the door of friendliness' on our own kind? Does Bahá'u'lláh counsel us to sacrifice love and fellowship with others in our search for the truth, virtues that have always been at the heart of religious faith? Hardly. Taken in the global context of the many passages in the Bahá'í writings which exhort Bahá'ís to demonstrate friendliness, love and affection to all who cross their path,<sup>28</sup> it appears we should not interpret this one passage to mean that in our search for the truth we should withdraw from society or shun other souls. Bahá'u'lláh's teaching should perhaps be taken as hyperbole, an overstatement in order to make a point. His counsel contains a oblique warning about the great power of love, the sovereign ruler of the human heart. He wishes to emphasize that should any love other than the love of God become supreme in our hearts, it will blind us to the recognition of God as our One True Friend and Beloved. The same is true for hatred, which is a deadly poison. Both emotions are capable, more than any others, of unleashing great forces within us. They must not be allowed, consequently, to monopolize or wither the affections of the soul. In the valley of search, the greatest of loves must be reserved for God alone.

Love is universally recognized as a passion and Bahá'u'lláh advocates spiritual passion as a *sine qua non* in the search for God. He sees it as the blaze that we must ourselves enkindle. This spiritual passion is not, however, purely voluntary. It is able to work with our cognitive faculties to enable us to conceive divine knowledge, to lead us into the state of certitude. Hence it has a real connection with the acquisition of true knowledge. Once enkindled, these hot coals of spiritual passion will help burn away the dross of ignorance:

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Only when the lamp of search, of earnest striving, of longing desire, of passionate devotion, of fervid love, of rapture, and ecstasy, is kindled within the seeker's heart, and the breeze of His loving-kindness is wafted upon his soul, will the darkness of error be dispelled, the mists of doubts and misgivings be dissipated, and the lights of knowledge and certitude envelop his being.<sup>29</sup>

Spiritual passion in our search for the truth will serve as the motor for our efforts. Its driving force will assist as much as the practice of spiritual virtue in attaining our goal. This spiritual passion is not, however, the blind passion of religious fanaticism or the stilted and myopic view that admits no other opinions than its own. It is the pure passion of a sincere hunger and thirst after God, an in-born craving for things spiritual, a craving that recognizes that without spiritual fulfilment we can never be whole, never be completely human, in the same way that the parched earth can never be alive without the refreshment and nourishment of life-giving rain. The spiritual passion that Bahá'u'lláh recommends constitutes one of the mighty instruments that will help us to win the goal of union with God.

### The True Seeker: Understanding the Meaning of Detachment

'Where are the embodiments of detachment, O Lord of the worlds?<sup>30</sup>  
Bahá'u'lláh, *The Fire Tablet*

In 1862, during His self-imposed withdrawal into the mountains of Kurdistan, Bahá'u'lláh revealed the book that was to become His doctrinal *magnum opus*, the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, the Book of Certitude. In *God Passes By* Shoghi Effendi has cogently summarized the main themes of this text<sup>31</sup> that is 'Foremost among the priceless treasures cast forth from the billowing ocean of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation'<sup>32</sup>, the 'Choice Sealed Wine'<sup>33</sup> proffered to those willing to become inebriated with the ambrosia of divine knowledge.

Among the diverse grand themes treated in the *Íqán*, we find a lofty treatment of spirituality, 'an exhortation to observe a spirituality of detachment, based on the practice of ideal spiritual virtues and discipline of spirit which will bring about the union of the soul with God'.<sup>34</sup> Bahá'u'lláh's concept of spiritual detachment is at the same time a mysticism that points to the soul's union with God and is treated

in those pages that are sometimes erroneously referred to as 'the Tablet of the True Seeker'.<sup>35</sup>

In the prologue of the *Íqán*, Bahá'u'lláh singles out detachment as the spiritual prerequisite for the attainment of true understanding: 'No man shall attain the shores of the ocean of true understanding except he be detached from all that is in heaven and on earth'.<sup>36</sup> We are struck by the awesome force of this statement, not only by its categorical assertion of the unsurpassed importance of detachment as a spiritual attribute, but also because of the way that it links detachment to true understanding. It is this passage, above all others, that gives detachment a new priority in the ranking of spiritual virtues. Bahá'u'lláh's prologue alerts us to the fact that in His dispensation we must begin to acquire an understanding of this spiritual virtue that has come to forefront of spiritual virtues. The linking of detachment to understanding gives detachment an active value – that of understanding God and His Manifestation, of interpreting and analyzing the world – rather than merely equating detachment with the passive, albeit necessary, virtue of quietude and stability that is liable to foster the inner peace of the soul. Detachment also has applications for behaviour, for a response to life and to concrete life situations. .

As detachment is highlighted in the preamble to the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, so it figures also in the conclusion of the *Hidden Words* as a clarion call to reveal spiritual virtues in our own lives:

I bear witness, O friends! that the favour is complete, the argument fulfilled, the proof manifest and the evidence established. Let it now be seen what your endeavours in the path of detachment will reveal.<sup>37</sup>

### Some Basic Meanings of Detachment

The various meanings of any word are often related to one another conceptually. Because of this it is hazardous to attempt to define closely a primal spiritual virtue such as detachment. The more one tries to identify common meanings or elemental patterns of the word, the more one realizes that all of the meanings of detachment are interconnected. Meanings that appear to be more common are related to uncommon ones. We begin to realize that one meaning implies all meanings. Thus all of the meanings of a primal spiritual virtue like detachment are, to use a crude mechanical analogy, like the gears in a transmission. The

high gears may be the ones most commonly used, but the lower gears are just as important. The lower gears must be run through to reach high gears. This hazard of definition-making becomes paradoxically one of its merits, because at the risk of engaging in a kind of levelling process in meaning, one can also point to the interconnectedness of the words, a reflection of the interconnectedness of life itself.

We can see this interconnectedness of the meanings of detachment by making a brief overview of the most common ones. The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines 'detachment' as 'a state of aloofness from or indifference to other people, one's surroundings, public opinion, etc.'. Related to this is 'disinterested independence of judgement'. Other meanings are 'the act or process of detaching or being detached' and 'an instance of this' where 'detach' is defined as 'unfasten or disengage and remove', 'impartial' and 'unemotional'.<sup>38</sup> Leaving aside the military definitions, most people would probably maintain that 'detachment' means primarily being aloof or feeling unaffected. I maintain, however, that it suggests, above all, being truly free. Being free comes, in the first instance, from detaching ourselves from the world and then attaching ourselves to God. If we wish to be attached to God, we will seek His will, obey Him and live according to His laws. By doing this we begin to sacrifice our own will for His. Through sacrifice, we begin to live a life of purity. In living a life based on a willing obedience to God's laws, we also begin to discover who we really are – we discover our true identity. Through the knowledge of God, we discover the knowledge of our true selves. We discover that we are made in the image and likeness of God. Other virtues are also implied. Obedience implies humility, because one who prefers God's will to his own is humble. Humility implies selflessness, which is akin to sacrifice, and so on. In sum, we see that one spiritual attribute implies another until they are all implied. One sees a causal relationship between them.

One could even go so far as to say that to practise earnestly one virtue is to practise them all, since they all are bound up with one another. One could say further that the one who is deficient in one of them is deficient in all, since all the meanings are connected. But this is to state an ideal. We all know individuals who strongly exemplify some spiritual virtues but who are weak in others.

Within the Bahá'í community, the primacy of detachment as a

spiritual quality appears to loom large in the community's consciousness of what constitutes the elements of spirituality. A 'Spirituality Questionnaire' I circulated in the Ottawa region in 1984 elicited 22 responses from Bahá'ís, an admittedly small sample. No mention was made in the questionnaire of 'detachment'. However, it was selected most frequently as the quality that would identify an individual as being 'spiritual'.<sup>39</sup>

Bearing in mind the risks of definition-making, we can more closely examine some of the more common meanings suggested by the spiritual virtue of detachment. There are 63 references to 'detachment' in James Heggie's *An Index of Quotations from the Bahá'í Sacred Writings*, a figure that indicates that detachment has a fairly high profile among the spiritual virtues mentioned in the Bahá'í writings. The following generalities about the meaning of detachment are based on examination and reflection of all of the texts listed by Heggie. I have taken care to examine them in context, thereby hoping to make a more faithful reading of the text.<sup>40</sup>

Based on the connotative meanings of the particular text, I propose a pattern of five basic meanings of the spiritual attribute of detachment. These meanings have to do with concepts: 1) freedom (the inner state of being or feeling free); 2) attachment to the will of God; 3) sacrifice and obedience; 4) knowledge of God and knowledge of self; and 5) purity and sanctity.

### *Freedom*

The more common usage of the word 'detached' in everyday speech sounds distant echoes of the deeper meanings of the word 'spirituality'. The statement 'Kazim is a very detached person', for example, carries a somewhat negative connotation, that of someone standing apart or isolated from others, of someone uninvolved or unconcerned. The admonition 'try to be detached from the situation' is somewhat closer to its meaning in spiritual terms. It suggests a certain emotional distance from the situation, so as to avoid becoming enmeshed. Yet this usage suggests nothing positive other than avoiding emotional entrapment. The word 'detachment' in the Bahá'í writings, however, is used in such a way that both eliminates its negative connotations and enriches its more positive sense.

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Detachment refers, above all, to an inner state of being or feeling free. This is, to my mind, one of the basic meanings of the word but one which we do not usually associate with it. However, Bahá'u'lláh, in inviting humankind to accept His revelation, writes:

Cast away that which ye possess, and, on the wings of detachment, soar beyond all created things. Thus biddeth you the Lord of creation, the movement of Whose Pen hath revolutionized the soul of mankind.<sup>41</sup>

This casting away and the soaring on wings convey that sense of freedom which results from an acceptance of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation. Bahá'u'lláh's exhortation brings to mind two distinct images of freedom. The casting away is suggestive of a ship that is weighing anchor and moving out to sea. It might also suggest that the traveller on board is leaving behind all that bound him to life on land. The other image is that of a bird soaring untrammelled through space to tremendous heights. By acquiring the quality of detachment, Bahá'u'lláh suggests, the individual has the ability to break away, to scale new heights of consciousness and attain lofty, spiritual states of mind.

There is an idea of joy implicit in the concept of detachment that is not usually associated with the word. In fact, this exclusion of joy from detachment has given the word a lacklustre, negative quality. The previous quotation exhorting us to soar on the wings of detachment brings to mind the idea of flight from the world and the joy that breaking away from the world can bring. Too often detachment is associated with asceticism, with denial. Yet 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us that joy is in store for those who break the bonds of their own desires and fly free with the will of God:

One who is imprisoned by desires is always unhappy; the children of the Kingdom have unchained themselves from their desires. Break all fetters and seek for spiritual joy and enlightenment; then, though you walk on this earth, you will perceive yourselves to be within the divine horizon.<sup>42</sup>

In a more practical context, that of explaining how work is incumbent upon all and identical to worship in the Bahá'í dispensation, 'Abdu'l-Bahá also indicated the connection between detachment and freedom. Work is not an end in itself and the individual must not be attached to work as a value in itself, independent of God. Work, in the Bahá'í context, becomes a connection between man and his Creator and this

connection can be had only through the practice of detachment:

In this dispensation, these things [work and occupation] constitute devotion. It is incumbent upon every man to be occupied; but his heart must be *free and detached*. Occupation is identical with devotion.<sup>43</sup> (emphasis mine)

The individual, then, by being detached, should live free; further, he should, at the end of his life, die in a state of freedom and detachment. Bahá'u'lláh explains that the mission of the prophets has been to provide us with education, education to free us from this life at the hour of death:

The purpose underlying Their revelation hath been to educate all men, that they may, at the hour of death, ascend, in the utmost purity and sanctity and with absolute detachment, to the throne of the Most High.<sup>44</sup>

In those parts of the world that enjoy high standards of living, we are liable, and with good reason, to think of material goods and comforts as one of the major obstacles to the practice of detachment. Seen in a positive light, material goods and comforts represent a tangible reward for labour. They are symbols of success in the world, the outward badges that hope to command the respect of others. Material goods seem to legitimize our existence. To some they are outward extensions of a personal need for power, respect or adulation. Their danger lies, however, in their potential somehow to act as substitutes for spiritual values. Material goods embellish our surroundings and generally make life easier, which paradoxically should have the effect of freeing us to devote our lives to humanitarian, philanthropic or spiritual pursuits. In a perverse way, material goods can actually dull our spiritual senses and still that inward voice that every human being has that would lead to the search for the transcendent.

Detachment cannot become ours simply by force of will. It can, however, be abundantly fostered by prayer and meditation. The experience of adversity when accepted in the right spirit also becomes an effective means of fostering detachment.<sup>45</sup> This inner state of being or feeling free means not only not refusing to be ruffled by the petty affairs of the world but also maintaining our composure in the face of severe life tests, surely a more difficult challenge. 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that detachment is a by-product of suffering and leads to

freedom.

Just as the plough furrows the earth deeply, purifying it of weeds and thistles, so suffering and tribulation free man from the petty affairs of this worldly life until he arrives at a state of complete detachment.<sup>46</sup>

We see here again how freedom is implied by detachment. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's text suggests that the detached person is the experienced person, the person who has been tried. We can safely say that any detachment that has been won without adversity is not true detachment. It is merely the appearance of detachment. The seventeenth-century master poet and essayist John Milton, whose writings reflect high moral purpose and which are an expression of near perfect literary form, made the same point about virtue itself in his *Areopagitica*, a speech before parliament in which he argued for the repeal of censorship laws. Milton's argument for tried and tested virtue also applies well to detachment:

I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat. Assuredly we bring not innocence into the world, we bring impurity much rather: that which purifies us is trial, and trial is by what is contrary.<sup>47</sup>

Detachment cannot really be won by taking the easy path of avoidance and withdrawal.

### *Attachment to the Will of God*

It is a commonplace that detachment from worldly things means, conversely, attachment to God. If we are detached from the world, one sometimes hears, then we are attached to God. This formula, however, states an ideal. One proposition does not necessarily follow the other. One can be detached from the world and be attached to something other than God: to the contemplation of one's own self or even to one's own spirituality, as often happens in the monastic life. Or one can be detached from the world through a total devotion to one's art, skill or cause and still not be attached to God. Detachment from the world, in the Bahá'í understanding, means at the same time attachment to God. More specifically, it means attachment to the will of God, what we

perceive to be God's purpose for us, either in our individual life plan, or in the collective building up of a global world order.

In one of His Tablets, Bahá'u'lláh prays for His believers to become detached from their own wills and attached to the will of God:

I beg of Thee, O Beloved of every understanding heart and the Desire of such as have near access unto Thee, to grant that Thy loved ones may become wholly detached from their own inclinations, holding fast unto that which pleaseth Thee. Attire them, O Lord, with the robe of righteousness and illumine them with the splendours of the light of detachment.<sup>48</sup>

We might also call this state 'reliance upon God'. This meaning of attachment to God as reliance upon Him is akin to the familiar admonition to have trust or faith in God. This reliance on God, 'Abdu'l-Bahá counselled, should be such that we do not expect help from anyone but Him, not even from family members:

It behoveth thee to sever thyself from all desires save thy Lord, the Supreme, expecting no help or aid from anyone in the Universe, not even from thy father or children.<sup>49</sup>

To another He wrote:

. . . neither kind father or beloved son, mother or sister help us. No persons assist except the Benevolent Almighty.

When thou knowest Him, thou art independent from all else. When thou art attached to His love, then thou art detached from every kith and kin.<sup>50</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá is not, of course, suggesting here that we never ask for assistance when in need, nor is He attempting to deny the obvious – that friends and family do assist us in times of trouble. He is rather pointing to the motivating power of God which works through people's lives and animates their deeds, causing them to come to the assistance of other souls. God is the ultimate benefactor, He seems to be saying.

In another context, Bahá'u'lláh reveals that our reliance upon God should be such that we count everything except Him as utter nothingness. After making the sobering statement that, at the hour of death, some sinners have become faithful while, conversely, some devout believers have lost their faith, Bahá'u'lláh states:

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Our purpose in revealing these convincing and weighty utterances is to impress upon the seeker that he should regard all else beside God as transient, and count all things save Him, Who is the Object of all adoration, as utter nothingness.<sup>51</sup>

### *Sacrifice and Obedience*

Sacrifice and obedience stand side by side and both are implied by the spiritual virtue of detachment. We can, of course, obey without making any great sacrifice. We can even obey God begrudgingly, which is of little benefit because the value of the sacrifice is annulled by an ill-will of the spirit. Yet obedience to God can be of great benefit to us, even if we wrongly perceive the sacrifice we are making as a great loss to ourselves. It is noteworthy that Mabel Hyde Paine, the compiler of *The Divine Art of Living*, a compilation of Bahá'í scripture and the utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, placed quotations about sacrifice and detachment together in Chapter 9, which she entitled simply 'Detachment and Sacrifice'. Although the connection may be fortuitous, it is rather more likely that she meant to indicate a relationship between the two.

In a talk on obedience to a party of pilgrims at 'Akká in 1905, 'Abdu'l-Bahá said:

Real obedience and real sacrifice are identical – absolute readiness to follow and perform whatever you are called upon to do in the Cause of God. When you really love God, you will be willing to sacrifice everything and submit yourself entirely to His Will.<sup>52</sup>

In the context of obedience, Bahá'u'lláh recalls for us the biblical story of Abraham's sacrifice of His son.<sup>53</sup> Although the object lesson of the story is traditionally thought to be obedience, Bahá'u'lláh also links it to detachment:

The Voice of God commanded Him to offer up Ishmael as a sacrifice, so that His steadfastness in the Faith of God and His detachment from all else but Him may be demonstrated unto men.<sup>54</sup>

God's purpose, Bahá'u'lláh tells us further, was to make his son a sacrifice for the 'sins and iniquities of all the peoples of the earth'.<sup>55</sup> Bahá'u'lláh also mentions in the same context the sacrifice of the Imám Husayn by Muhammad, thus broadening the idea of sacrifice to include holy souls other than Jesus. Bahá'u'lláh Himself was to offer up His

own son, Mírzá Mihdí, the Purest Branch, after a tragic accident, so that all humanity might be quickened and united.<sup>56</sup> As to the motive for obedience, Christ taught us that it should be the love of God: 'If ye love me, keep my commandments.'<sup>57</sup>

Sacrifice means, above all, the sacrifice of self and its most cherished desires, wants, needs or appetites. The self here refers to the metaphorical but nonetheless real lower self, the elemental, covetous 'half'<sup>58</sup> of our dual nature. This lower self can be understood as a misdirected wilfulness that insists on having what it wants at the risk of thwarting the growth and maturity of our divine nature. Bahá'í scripture makes the connection clear between detachment and the sacrifice of self. The connection comes, paradoxically, with a severing, a de-attachment, a cutting away of the desires of self in order to attach or conform to the will of God:

As to the reference in the Arabic *Hidden Words* that the human being must become detached from self, here too the meaning is that he should not seek out anything whatever for his own self in this swiftly-passing life but that he should cut the self away, that is, he should yield up the self and all its concerns on the field of martyrdom, at the time of the coming of the Lord.<sup>59</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá refers here to the martyr, who is the epitome of detachment. The martyr is detached because he is totally attached to the will of God. In sacrificing himself in the path of God, the martyr clings with resignation to the will of God and gives up what is most precious in this world, life itself.

Bahá'u'lláh writes that one of the distinguishing features of the dispensation of the Báb was the number of learned divines who accepted the Báb's revelation. He mentions thirteen of them by name, among them Mullá Husayn, the Báb-u'l-Báb (the gate of the Gate), the first Letter of the Living, the first to believe in the Báb. He also mentions the number of some four hundred illumined souls 'whose names are all inscribed upon the "Guarded Tablet" of God.'<sup>60</sup> Bahá'u'lláh speaks of their martyrdom in these terms:

They laid down their lives for their Well-Beloved, and surrendered their all in His path. Their breasts were made targets for the darts of the enemy, and their heads adorned the spears of the infidel. No land remained which did not drink the blood of these embodiments of

detachment, and no sword that did not bruise their necks.<sup>61</sup>

These two passages have both literal and symbolic meanings. Above all, the words of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá validate the act of martyrdom. The martyr gives his life for his faith. A Bahá'í will not deny his faith to save his life, and martyrdom becomes the only legitimate resolution for those who are put in that harrowing position. In the passage by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, however, the term 'martyrdom' is also used in a symbolic sense and He equates it with the detachment that is necessary for the sacrifice of self.

Martyrs, it has been said, do not always wish to be martyrs, and to become a martyr is an agonizing process.<sup>62</sup> Job suffered martyrdom and lived to tell the tale, but he did not wish martyrdom for himself. It was visited upon him. When faced with the inevitable, the martyr dies in the spirit of sacrifice and is happy to lay down his life in the path of God and submit to His will, faithful to His command. To 'yield up the self' to the will of God may at times be perceived as a martyrdom for the believer. The true believer, like the martyr, may not initially wish for the will of God, or choose to obey it, but once he begins to do so, he gives himself up and is recreated. Often, like Job, the martyr comes to see that he has no choice, for the alternative, however desirous it may appear, turns out to be illusion or shame, repudiation and denial. It is not always a question of simply obeying this law or that. The test often lies in our attitude, in our total response to an adverse situation, with all its challenges and pain. The Bahá'í writings equate the sacrifice of self with the martyrdom of the body because the process can be for some as difficult as the martyrdom of the body, yet the rewards and benefits of doing so are presented as being as inestimably great:

O Son of Man! By My beauty! To tinge thy hair with thy blood is greater in My sight than the creation of the universe and the light of both worlds. Strive then to attain this, O servant!<sup>63</sup>

### *Knowledge of God and Knowledge of Self*

Bahá'u'lláh relates detachment and the knowledge of God with the knowledge of our true selves:

O My servants! Could ye but apprehend with what wonders of My munificence and bounty I have willed to entrust your souls, ye would,

of a truth, rid yourselves of attachment to all created things, and would gain a true knowledge of your own selves – a knowledge which is the same as the comprehension of Mine own Being.<sup>64</sup>

We discussed above Bahá'u'lláh's assertion in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* that complete detachment is necessary for true understanding. Later in the same book He again associates the power of understanding with detachment. In the context of the habitual rejection of the Manifestation of God by the people of His age, Bahá'u'lláh writes:

To them that are possessed of true understanding and insight the Súrah of Húd surely sufficeth. Ponder a while those holy words in your heart, and, with utter detachment, strive to grasp their meaning.<sup>65</sup>

The same relationship between detachment and understanding is pointed out elsewhere. In the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* Bahá'u'lláh states:

Not, however, until thou consumest with the flame of utter detachment those veils of idle learning, that are current amongst men, canst thou behold the resplendent morn of true knowledge.<sup>66</sup>

There is, moreover, a facet of detachment which relates to the cognitive or intellectual function of the human mind. As was the case with the link between joy and detachment, the preeminent spiritual virtue opens up an unfamiliar dimension: its association with the mind. Detachment operates through the active quality of perception, through a power of analysis that apprehends and understands the world, and, as far as possible, apprehends the world of God and His Manifestation. There is a tendency to see detachment simply as a spiritual virtue; that is, as nothing more than a theological attitude that is put into practice through daily living. Detachment is also – and this point is worth emphasizing – a state of mind that reflects understanding or perception. To be clear-sighted and to reflect deeper understanding, one must be detached.

One can, therefore, make a link between detachment and the kind of objective judgement that is required in certain life situations. For example, in the context of choosing a marriage partner, the statement is made in *A Fortress for Well-Being* that detachment 'is perhaps the most important prerequisite for making objective judgements while becoming informed of one another's character.'<sup>67</sup> We find here a surprising reversal of the commonly held criteria for the selection of

a mate. Attachment, rather than detachment, is usually taken as the primary indicator of a successful marriage. Further, it is stated that detachment 'brings strength, independence, stability, and self-knowledge'.<sup>68</sup> Detachment here denotes objectivity. One could extend this meaning of detachment to make a connection between detachment and the objective judgement and powers of observation required in scientific or systematic investigations. The detached observer watches and records. He does not allow his own personal biases to influence the result of the experiment. In order to make accurate assessments of many given situations, both professional and personal, one must be a detached observer. Thus we can also identify detachment as a quality that deals with the practical as well as the spiritual domain of life.

The following passage makes clear the connection between true understanding, that is the knowledge of God, and detachment:

Detachment is as the sun; in whatsoever heart it doth shine it quencheth the fire of covetousness and self. He whose sight is illumined with the light of understanding will assuredly detach himself from the world and the vanities thereof.<sup>69</sup>

This relationship of detachment and understanding and the knowledge of God is also made clear in this quintessential passage: 'The essence of detachment is for man to turn his face toward the courts of the Lord, to enter His presence, behold His Countenance, and stand as witness before Him'.<sup>70</sup> This short sentence, with its four serial infinitive phrases, presents us with the essence of detachment. The sentence can be interpreted as identifying detachment with our whole life's purpose and orientation through faith in God and His Manifestation, prayer and meditation, and the practice of good deeds.

The awakening of faith is the turning to God, 'to turn his face'; the entering His presence is belief in the Manifestation, 'to enter His presence'; to hear His teachings and to bear witness to them is to 'behold His Countenance, and stand as witness before Him'. Further, this succinct passage can be interpreted as an analogy of entering the prayer room or the temple, or moving deeper within the courts of the royal domain. There is, moreover, in Bahá'u'lláh's description of detachment a perceptible pattern of movement which compresses time and points to the progress or process of spiritual growth. One can follow the movement of the believer from a remote distance until he

attains proximity to his heart's desire. First, he turns his face to God. This is the awakening of faith. The believer then stands at a distance but has the intention of drawing closer to God. Then he enters the presence. Finally, he hears and witnesses. One can moreover interpret this text on detachment as a comparison between merely having faith, 'to turn his face', and the mystical experience of the divine presence through prayer and meditation, for 'to enter His presence' strongly suggests both prayer and meditation. Now a witness can either remain silent or speak. 'To stand as witness' could also indicate living the life through the silent testimony of one's behaviour, for one does not speak when one stands as witness in the presence of God. Another interpretation, that which favours speech rather than silence, could invoke in the 'standing as witness' before God teaching one's faith through the power of words. This is the witness who stands before and proclaims on behalf of God. All the same the silent witness indicates the growth of faith, for faith grows, as it has been said, through listening. Thus this brief passage contains within it a comparison of the different degrees of attaining the presence of God, and the two ways by which one can serve God: by the active and vocal means of words (teaching) or by the silent testimony of one's deeds, which paradoxically, speaks louder than words.

### *Purity and Sanctity*

The last fundamental meaning of detachment to be considered here is that which links it to the notion of purity or sanctity or holiness. In a passage that combines the idea of sacrifice with that of purity or sanctity, Bahá'u'lláh writes:

It behoveth the people of Bahá to die to the world and all that is therein, to be so detached from all earthly things that the inmates of Paradise may inhale from their garment the sweet smelling savour of sanctity, that all the peoples of the earth may recognize in their faces the brightness of the All-Merciful . . .<sup>71</sup>

We may baulk at the idea that anyone of our acquaintance may be sanctified or holy. It seems like an unattainable goal or a quality that is appropriate only for God or His divine Manifestations. The word 'holy' also carries with it the negative connotation of the Pharisaic

attitude of smugness, of self-righteousness, of being 'holier than thou'. Although we may willingly ascribe such a rare and awesome characteristic to God, we may feel that we are too profane to share in such a divine characteristic. Yet Bahá'u'lláh's exhortation in this text calls us exactly to that distinction. We have also to bear in mind here that purity or sanctity in the Bahá'í perspective does not mean asceticism, a denial of the legitimate pleasures of life, a humourless attitude or standing apart and aloof from other human beings.

Rudolf Otto (1896-1937) in his classic study *Das Heilige* (The Idea of the Holy), an analysis of the category of the holy as something particular only to the experience of religion, ascribed primarily to this category, in his now well-known phrase, the meaning of *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*.<sup>72</sup> The holy remains an awesome and fascinating mystery, something that is basically unapproachable yet which draws us to it. Otto recognized that in a derived sense 'holy' also means completely good or morally perfect.<sup>73</sup> The idea of sanctity or holiness would seem essentially to combine the idea of being wholly consecrated or devoted to God with that of moral goodness or perfection.<sup>74</sup> The idea of the holy, moreover, is usually contrasted with the idea of the 'profane', he who stands *pro* (before) the *fanum* (temple). We recall the word 'fane', meaning temple, in the Bahá'í prayer for the fast: 'I beseech Thee by this Revelation whereby darkness hath been turned into light, through which the Frequented *Fane* hath been built . . .'<sup>75</sup> That which was holy or sacred belonged to the temple and was consecrated to God. The idea of the holy includes not only sacred persons and places but may extend also to include events, communities, even life as a whole. This idea of consecration or devotion to God, combined with the idea of moral goodness or perfection, would also seem to coincide with the meaning of detachment in this passage of Bahá'u'lláh:

O ye the beloved of the one true God! Pass beyond the narrow retreats of your evil and corrupt desires, and advance into the vast immensity of the realm of God, and abide in the meads of sanctity and of detachment, that the fragrance of your deeds may lead the whole of mankind to the ocean of God's unfading glory.<sup>76</sup>

This passage contains the interesting notion of the fragrance of holiness, the fragrance of the robe of holiness worn by the Manifestations of God.

## The True Seeker. Other Guidelines: Freedom but not Spiritual Anarchy, Moral Integrity, Humility, Freedom from Prejudice, Sincerity

In addition to Bahá'u'lláh's descriptions of spirituality and detachment in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, the *Hidden Words* and the *Seven Valleys* and the *Four Valleys*, there are also many implications for the true seeker contained in Shoghi Effendi's phrase 'unfettered search after truth'<sup>77</sup> that forms part of his summary statement of Bahá'í principles. Yet a word of caution might be sounded at this juncture. At the antipole, the phrase might be understood as an invitation to pursue a form of spiritual anarchy: that the individual is in some sense a totally self-directed being who has the right to search wherever he wishes, even in violation of spiritual laws and principles. The individual who pursues such a path of spiritual anarchy declares himself independent of all other teachers, laws and authorities except himself, on the grounds that only under these conditions can he be truly independent, personal and free.

Such an attitude is liable, however, only to disillusion the seeker or to confirm the impression that his subjective experiences of reality are the real thing. Such individuals become, in effect, believers in a religion with a following of one. Bahá'u'lláh has a sharp word for those who take their own thoughts to be ultimate reality:

They that are the worshippers of the idol which their imaginations have carved, and who call it Inner Reality, such men are in truth accounted among the heathen. To this hath the All-Merciful borne witness in His Tablets. He, verily, is the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.<sup>78</sup>

Whether Bahá'u'lláh speaks here of the schooled or the unschooled, to believe that one's petty speculations and personal experiences have the truth value of the Absolute amounts to a supreme form of ignorance or pure superstition.

The Bahá'í Faith, however, recommends a search that is both guided and guarded. The guarded nature of the search in the Bahá'í view contains a strong element of spiritual discipline. Any serious seeker will employ some form of discipline, whether ethical, spiritual or intellectual, one that includes, for example, the practices of prayer, meditation and study, and familiarizing oneself with the various belief systems and community lifestyles. Spiritual discipline also includes the

observance of the moral law and, in the Bahá'í perspective at least, the avoidance of all forms of vice, violence, sexual promiscuity, homosexuality, psychic dabbling, satanism and what Shoghi Effendi calls 'the prostitution of art and of literature'.<sup>79</sup>

The spirit of humility, moreover, will help protect the seeker from the spiritual anarchy of the self-indulgent search. Humility (evanescence), 'Abdu'l-Bahá teaches, is one of 'the seven qualifications' of the 'divinely enlightened soul'.<sup>80</sup>

... man must become evanescent in God. Must forget his own selfish conditions that he may thus arise to the station of sacrifice. It should be to such a degree that if he sleep, it should not be for pleasure, but to rest the body in order to do better, to speak better, to explain more beautifully, to serve the servants of God and to prove the truths.<sup>81</sup>

Frank Pakenham, Earl of Longford writes: 'Without humility, therefore, there can be no hope of spiritual progress.'<sup>82</sup> Humility is not just loving others before oneself and deferring to them. It is a constant reminder of the limitations of one's own powers and a realization that much greater souls than oneself have gone on before. Humility is the realization that whatever gifts we may possess, if we do possess any, are not really ours at all. They come from God and are to be used for the benefit and edification of others. The Earl of Longford writes: 'We must never cease to ask ourselves the question, "What good have we which we have not received, and if we have received it why should we take pride in it?"'<sup>83</sup> Notwithstanding, there is such a thing as justifiable pride which the ancient Greeks and Romans called *megalopsuchia* and *magnanimitas* respectively.<sup>84</sup> This is the pride that one feels when, by dint of one's own efforts, one has sought *areté* (Gk. excellence), has pursued 'excellence in all things'.<sup>85</sup> Should honours come to the individual soul who pursues such excellence, he still repeats the bestowing '*non dignus sum*' ('I am not worthy')<sup>86</sup> and gives praise and thanksgiving.

The Bahá'í Faith also mentions the virtue of sincerity in connection with the search. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that had the Jews sincerely investigated for themselves, they would have recognized and believed in Christ as Messiah,<sup>87</sup> a statement that says much for the far-reaching consequences of one spiritual virtue when it is practised with integrity.

Bahá'u'lláh also says: 'They whose eyes are illumined with the light of understanding will perceive the sweet savours of the All-Merciful, and will embrace His truth. These are they who are truly sincere.'<sup>88</sup>

One of the most challenging directives that Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá lay before us in our search for truth is the abolition of prejudice. This applies to all the well-recognized forms of prejudice which are so destructive to society: those of race, religion, class, ethnicity, and so on. Prejudice blights the individual's spiritual development, as it blocks the flow of love and produces in its stagnation the foul black waters of hatred. Referring to the New World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, Shoghi Effendi writes:

The methods it employs, the standard it inculcates, incline it to neither East nor West, neither Jew nor Gentile, neither rich nor poor, neither white nor coloured. Its watchword is the unification of the human race

...<sup>89</sup>

Realistically, it is difficult to unlearn all of the prejudices that may have influenced us in the past. We can, however, be consciously aware of how strong feelings or convictions for or against someone or something may cause pre-judgement and partiality. While it is in the spirit of friendly competition to favour our athletic team or to discriminate in our choice of cars or coffee, hasty judgements of others or their beliefs before we have interacted with them can lead us to false perceptions and conclusions, perceptions that may create deep-seated feelings of ill-will. The Bahá'í Faith rather advocates a frame of mind that strives to remain open to any question, as if it were seeing the question for the first time.

This great initiative in the search for truth to which Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá exhort us and the 'affirmative action'<sup>90</sup> that the Bahá'í Faith recommends to individuals in mapping out their own destinies has to be seen as a vote of confidence in the individual's ability to recognize the truth. No more is humankind to be looked upon as a child who must be hand-held by a spiritual director in order to reach valid conclusions about reality. Intellectual maturity is at hand. The determination of our own beliefs, although involving great challenges, is a selective process that we must engage in ourselves.

## Bahá'u'lláh is Consistent with His Own Principle

When we look carefully at the injunction to search for truth given in the Bahá'í Faith, and examine at the same time the claims that Bahá'u'lláh made as a divine Manifestation to be the 'Promise of All Ages',<sup>91</sup> there appears to be something of a conundrum. Bahá'u'lláh, on the one hand, advises us to be totally independent and unfettered in our search for truth. On the other hand, He says that He is the truth and that His revelation constitutes the highest and purest form of truth ever revealed to humankind:

The highest essence and most perfect expression of whatsoever the peoples of old have either said or written hath, through this most potent Revelation, been sent down from the heaven of the Will of the All-Possessing, the Ever-Abiding God.<sup>92</sup>

This is an astounding claim, one that no sincere seeker of the truth should ignore. The search may strike us then as a foregone conclusion. He says, 'Seek the truth', but at the same time He says, 'I am truth that ye seek.' If we take Bahá'u'lláh at His word, does this acceptance not invalidate or nullify the search that He has explicitly counselled us to carry out? Further, if our search is supposed to be independent and personal, how can we be justified in accepting Him without critical examination?

Simply, we cannot. We must apply the principle of search to Bahá'u'lláh's revelation and to the stupendous claims that He has made, for this is what He has asked us repeatedly to do. Bahá'u'lláh is consistent with Himself on this point. Even though Bahá'u'lláh speaks with the voice of God, He does not ask us to look into all things with a searching eye and at the same time to accept Him blindly. Faith based on conscious knowledge is what He demands. Writing to the kings of the earth while a prisoner in Adrianople, Bahá'u'lláh urges, 'Examine Our Cause'<sup>93</sup> and 'Look into all things with a searching eye'.<sup>94</sup> He often marshals proofs in the exposition of His teachings and makes solicitous appeals to our good judgement and our sense of equity with phrases such as 'ponder', 'reflect', 'What could be the reason for...?', 'consider', 'Pause for but a little while and reflect', etc.<sup>95</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá similarly appeals specifically to 'logical proofs' and 'spiritual proofs'<sup>96</sup> to validate the truths of divine revelation and uses a dialectical method in explaining the philosophical and theological truths of His father's revelation. Reject superstition, we are told. Be

passively sceptical until you find valid grounds for belief. Apply all the tests, and if you find that Bahá'u'lláh and His revelation pass the test, then accept it as true. The tests, moreover, are not those of pure logic alone. There are the more subtle but equally sure tests of the intuition that speak through the heart as well as the all-inclusive vision of faith. In the last analysis, the seeker is always left free because he is free to accept or reject God, to accept or reject His Manifestation. We may well test the revelation but we soon discover that the revelation also tests us.

The weight of Bahá'u'lláh's claims demands that every seeker of truth heed the summons to examine His cause. It is not only Bahá'u'lláh's claim to be the Divine Logos given voice through His extraordinary writings that should claim our attention. Like the other prophetic figures throughout history, Bahá'u'lláh willingly paid the price for His belief in God, in Himself and in the Cause He proclaimed. Born a Persian prince, He renounced wealth and endured a life of imprisonment, danger, deprivation, scorn and exile, a victim of two middle eastern potentates, the Iranian Násiri'd-Dín Sháh and the Ottoman Sultán, 'Abdu'l-Azíz. He endured magnanimously the constant intrigues and machinations of His faithless half-brother Mírzá Yahyá who poisoned Him on two different occasions, the first an act that caused Bahá'u'lláh to suffer from a trembling hand for the rest of His life.<sup>7</sup> All His life He bore the scars of the chains and metal collar that had been hung around His neck while He was imprisoned in the Síyah-Chál (Black Pit), a dungeon in Teheran. Like all of the divine Manifestations before Him, He was willing to sacrifice Himself so that He might 'build anew the whole world' and 'that all the peoples of the earth may attain unto abiding joy, and be filled with gladness'.<sup>8</sup> He was the Pastor of the flock of all humanity, the 'First Leader of all mankind'.<sup>9</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh lived a life of holiness and moral integrity. The only word portrait of Bahá'u'lláh left to posterity by a westerner, orientalist Professor Edward G. Browne of Cambridge University, informs us that He was a very extraordinary personage indeed, one who inspired the deepest awe, love and devotion.

The face of him on whom I gazed I can never forget, though I cannot describe it. Those piercing eyes seemed to read one's very soul; power and authority sat on that ample brow; while the deep lines on the forehead and face implied an age which the jet-black hair and beard

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flowing down in indistinguishable luxuriance almost to the waist seemed to belie. No need to ask in whose presence I stood, as I bowed myself before one who is the object of a devotion and love which kings might envy and emperors sigh for in vain!<sup>100</sup>

The divine system that He created, the world order of Bahá'u'lláh, is the model and pattern of a future world society, the kingdom of God on earth, which now functions in embryonic form within the Bahá'í world community. His life as the Promised One of all ages has fulfilled the eschatological prophecies of the world religions, and the things that He prophesied Himself came true and continue to come true.<sup>101</sup> It is He who Isaiah called 'Wonderful Counsellor', 'the mighty God', 'Everlasting Father', the 'Prince of Peace'.<sup>102</sup> On the pragmatic level, His teachings have created a united worldwide community dedicated to the unity of humankind, the establishment of world peace and the betterment of human society. For all those who seek proofs, these factors have to be taken into consideration when assessing the divine mission of Bahá'u'lláh.

### The Search for Truth and Our Own Religious Heritage

'Abdu'l-Bahá does not counsel us to reject holus bolus the religions of our forefathers, for the spiritual teachings of religion are considered to be of the greatest spiritual benefit to all people.<sup>103</sup> The injunction to seek truth is based on the premise, nonetheless, that over the centuries the religion of our forefathers has become burdened with non-essentials which have overlain the spiritual core of the world's faiths. We are being summoned, then, like the archaeologist, to conduct a 'dig' – to attempt to get down to the priceless artifacts buried within the religious traditions, artifacts that lie deep down within the thick clay of human interpretation and dogma. In short, what each human being is being called upon to do is to examine his or her own faith with a critical eye.

'Abdu'l-Bahá issues a bold summons. It requires effort to begin this search, to pull oneself out of the rut of the beaten path of least resistance, a path that offers the comfort and social familiarity of centuries of tradition. It requires effort to pray, to search, to read, to study in order to find the truth. It demands courage too – the courage to question and to engage in dialogue with our families and friends

about their beliefs and with the religious leaders of our faith. Yet we are asked to go further. We are clearly being asked in the course of our search to reject those doctrines which strike us as being incredible, spurious or superstitious. 'Abdu'l-Bahá further exhorts the seeker to renounce tradition and ancestral worship. Referring to the search for truth He says:

The meaning is that every individual member of humankind is exhorted to and commanded to set aside superstitious beliefs, traditions and blind imitation of ancestral forms in religion and investigate reality for himself.<sup>104</sup>

Yet the thorny question is posed. Which of the teachings are we to accept and which are to be rejected? As a general guideline, those dogmas or doctrines which have no strong basis in scripture and do not conform to reason should perhaps be rejected. This does not mean, of course, that reason alone becomes the sole criterion for evaluating faith. Science may lead one to the supernatural but it does not in itself endorse or reject the supernatural. Our faith must be self-validating. Faith is based on the supernatural phenomena of God, of prophetic figures and of divine revelation. Science makes no judgement about these types of phenomena which fall outside of its domain. In other words, it is not the use of reason alone which can determine the validity of faith. This would lead us to a kind of stultifying religion of deism, or to Kant's religion based on reason alone, a religion of moral practicality without transcendence.

Further, the search may not always be motivated solely by the wish to find truth. Disillusionment with the existing order often sets in at some point. Often, the rituals and practices of a particular faith lose their meaning or vitality for a believer or may seem outmoded. More telling is the fact that sometimes the believer finds that the very things that he values most highly are not being practised within the faith. Examples of narrow-minded prejudice against persons of other faiths or indeed of the same faith, moral hypocrisy, greed or deceit may at times impel a person to seek elsewhere.<sup>105</sup>

In its extreme form, religious prejudice becomes expressed as religious fanaticism, a tragic calamity which Bahá'u'lláh describes as 'a world-devouring fire, whose violence none can quench'.<sup>106</sup> The history of religion is replete with the sad examples of how religious

prejudice has lead to fear, to bigotry, to hatred and ultimately to persecution or wars of religion in which millions of souls have perished. 'Millions' is no exaggeration when we look at the global history of the wars of religion from ancient times to the present. For example, the terrible and unrelenting persecution of the Albigeneses (Cathari) from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries in the Languedoc in France practically destroyed the whole provencal civilization and completely wiped out the sect by the end of the fourteenth century. Fernand Niel writes, 'It is said that the crusade against the Albigeneses exacted a million victims...'<sup>107</sup> In our search for spiritual truth, we must see, then, all faiths as friendly.

A sincere search for the truth will lead us to a greater rapprochement of our belief system with those of people of other faiths. If we have committed ourselves to an investigation of reality, the search will lead to forms of religious unity:

Reality or truth is one, yet there are many religious beliefs, denominations, creeds and differing opinions in the world today. Why should these differences exist? Because they do not investigate and examine the fundamental unity, which is one and unchangeable. If they seek reality itself, they will agree and be united; for reality is indivisible and not multiple. It is evident, therefore, that there is nothing of greater importance to mankind than the investigation of truth.<sup>108</sup>

The inter-religious unity that will result from a seeking out of the fundamentals of the divine religions will no doubt witness a greatly enhanced tolerance and mutual understanding and respect, perhaps even common forms of worship. The Bahá'í view is that ultimately there will be one world faith which will come about not as the direct result of a pan-unity movement of the world faiths but as the result of the acceptance of Bahá'u'lláh as the universal Manifestation of God.

### What is Truth?

The Bahá'í Faith looks upon itself as the one Great Truth which has come to embrace all other truths. It is important to emphasize that the Bahá'í Faith does postulate *the* Truth with a capital 'T' and not just a piecemeal system of a multitude of truths that co-exist. Many remain sceptical, however, of the possibility of harmonizing the diverse systems of thought into one balanced whole. The sceptic might view

such an end as a grand pretence producing the opposite effect. The Bahá'í system would be counted, in the sceptical view, as just one more competing truth which would only add, like a splintering glass, to the fractious multiplicity of competing truth claims. We should consider, however, that the very idea of competing partial truths or a plurality of truths suggests at the same time the idea of a total or an all-embracing truth, in which these partial truths may be resolved and harmonized, in the same way that the part is suggestive of the whole, or the macrocosmic universe is contained within the microcosm or the many leads us inevitably to the One.

The great question 'What is truth?' that Pilate posed to Jesus<sup>109</sup> remains one of the great perennial questions. The difficult question of what constitutes truth is one metaphysical abstraction that philosophers have tended to shy away from. Yet for the person in search of spirituality, it is vital to have some concept of the nature of truth, for when one embraces spirituality, one also embraces its truths which are in large part its constituents. I propose here, therefore, a brief outline of this question.

We can retain two perspectives when answering the question 'What is truth?': 1) The theological perspective that is based on faith as 'conscious knowledge' and which assumes a belief in divine revelation, the process by which the hidden God makes Himself known through the power of human utterance as recorded in holy writ. 2) The philosophical perspective, that is, what results from the process of critical thinking. The Bahá'í view of things recognizes no clear province between the theological and philosophical modes. When they are not compatible, says Etienne Gilson, following Aquinas, there is surely something wrong with our philosophy.<sup>110</sup>

Rather than proposing an abstract metaphysical theory, it is perhaps more fruitful to approach the question of the truth from a pragmatic theological frame of reference. The simplest and most pragmatic definition of truth in a theological context would be 'truth is what the pen of Bahá'u'lláh reveals'. This claim, however, is not made in any exclusive way in the sense that the truth is found only in Bahá'u'lláh's writings, but it means that Bahá'u'lláh's revelation is, above all, the fountainhead of truth. This claim derives from the statements of Bahá'u'lláh Himself and is predicated upon two factors: 1) Bahá'u'lláh's metaphysical nature as a divine Manifestation of God;

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and 2) the nature of the divine revelation He has left as a priceless legacy to humankind.

Bahá'u'lláh claimed that His revelation constituted the highest and purest form of truth yet revealed to humanity and was the essence of all true thought:

The highest essence and most perfect expression of whatsoever the peoples of old have either said or written hath, through this most potent Revelation, been sent down from the heaven of the Will of the All-Possessing, the Ever-Abiding God.<sup>111</sup>

The knowledge that Bahá'u'lláh possessed, Bahá'ís believe, was not the result of ingenious or systematic thinking, or even holy living, although His thinking was indeed ingenious and His life holy. It was a pure gift, a divine grace from God, which transmitted to Him the intuitive understanding of all things:

O King! I was but a man like others, asleep upon My couch, when lo, the breezes of the All-Glorious were wafted over Me, and taught Me the knowledge of all that hath been. This thing is not from Me, but from One Who is Almighty and All-Knowing.<sup>112</sup>

Thus the truth Bahá'u'lláh proposes to speak to us is a divine initiative, the entrance of the Creator, so to speak, onto the stage of human history through His chosen persona, 'a pure and stainless Soul'<sup>113</sup> who acts as God's chosen mouthpiece and the expression of His will for humankind. Divine revelation is, in the Bahá'í view, the most profuse divine grace that can be bestowed upon the human race:

That which is preeminent above all other gifts, is incorruptible in nature, and pertaineth to God Himself, is the gift of Divine Revelation. Every bounty conferred by the Creator upon man, be it material or spiritual, is subservient unto this.<sup>114</sup>

The believer, however, is not asked to accept such statements of Bahá'u'lláh blindly. This is not a matter of blind faith but of enlightened faith. Rational and authoritative philosophical arguments are also offered as proofs of Bahá'í teaching.<sup>115</sup>

Some of the philosophical considerations of truth are discussed in the 'correspondence' and 'coherence' theories, both of which contain useful insights. According to the correspondence theory, put forward

by the realist<sup>116</sup> British philosopher G.E. Moore (1873-1958) in *Some Main Problems of Philosophy* (1953), which take a common sense approach, truth consists basically in an agreement or a correspondence between any statement and its referent. When statement and referent correspond, we have a true statement, a fact. 'Quebec was founded by Champlain in 1608' is true because it corresponds to reality. The true statement, one should hasten to add, does not in itself imply a weight of value; that is, it is not necessarily highly significant or meaningful. 'Billing Bunting is the usher at the United Church' may be a true statement but the statement does not carry a great weight of value, except, of course, for Billy and perhaps his family and friends. The fact that Betty is engaged to marry Ronnie is not terribly meaningful for anyone but Betty and Ronnie, their friends and family. The true statement, however, should be value-laden, preferably for the greatest number of people.

Value is closely linked to the question of truth. A weight of value should be present in the truth statement to make it meaningful and worthwhile. Briefly, we might make the commonly observed distinctions of 'subject' and 'object' and apply these to values as subjective and objective. In a Bahá'í perspective, objective values are those values that are most clearly defined in the Bahá'í teachings and are held dear by all. Human life, for example, is sacred because it has a spiritual function, and has, therefore, great value. The sanctity of life is an objective value since it is declared to be of high value in the Bahá'í teachings and is of equal value for all members of the community. Descriptive or prescriptive ethical statements or laws made in the Bahá'í writings are the standard for establishing these objective values. The Bahá'í revelation does seem to prioritize certain spiritual values by giving greater weight to some. The virtue of truthfulness, for example, is given an usually high value priority in the Bahá'í Faith:

Truthfulness is the foundation of all human virtues. Without truthfulness progress and success, in all of 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>117</sup>

Outside of this value ranking, how to prioritize values becomes a thorny question. The prioritization of values is far from being a spiritual question only. Values extend to every dimension of life. In the

social and political arena, there are concerted campaigns to win the funds that are allocated to remedy various urgent social and political issues. Which projects should receive the greatest funding has to do with the prioritization of values. But which is the greatest issue? The environment, chronic hunger in the third world, women's issues, health care, funds for research and development? One can easily see the problem.

There are also subjective values for which there is no objective standard or clear test. These are values that belong to questions of aesthetics or personal taste. While the Bahá'í writings make broad general statements about art, beauty and the like, it is primarily the individual who ascribes value where questions of taste are concerned. Da Vinci, Van Gogh and Picasso have all earned a significant place in the history of art, yet it is up to the individual to ascribe, if he wishes to do so, greater value to the work of one artist or the other based on a subjective judgement of criteria that pertain to painting.

The absolute idealist philosopher F.H. Bradley (1846-1924) criticized the correspondence theory because he found it inadequate to explain the truth. He proposed instead the coherence theory.<sup>118</sup> Bradley thought the explanation of truth as a correspondence of facts to reality was too atomistic and restrictive a view. To reduce truth to facts that sit in isolation from one another was to reduce truth to meaningless particles of knowledge. Bradley held such an approach to be a 'mutilation'. Truth for Bradley had to be part of a larger picture, a more global vision of the Absolute, what one might call 'metatruth' or 'cosmic truth'. Statements of truth, according to Bradley, should not stand in isolation but rather resemble his concept of the Absolute as 'a single and all-inclusive experience, which embraces every partial diversity in concord'.<sup>119</sup> Further, truth must in some way clarify, harmonize with or be consistent with existing knowledge. It must somehow add to or subtract from existing truth.

Both theories have a certain relevance to the understanding of truth as conceived in the Bahá'í Faith. The correspondence theory, however, raises the vital question of the standard: by what standard are we going to measure the validity of purported statements of truth? The American synthetic idealist Josiah Royce (1855-1916), who accorded great importance to religion in reality,<sup>120</sup> recognized the need for a larger truth to serve as a standard in determining the truth of thought. The

true standard was the real. 'To be real now means primarily, to be valid, to be true, to be in essence the standard for ideas.'<sup>121</sup> The naturalist (critical realist) philosopher George Santayana (1863-1952) also recognized that the truth had to act as a standard for thought.<sup>122</sup>

But can philosophy serve as the standard for truth? The Bahá'í writings strongly validate the study of philosophy. Bahá'u'lláh in His *Lawh-i-Hikmat* (Tablet of Wisdom) singles out Socrates for the greatest praise, calling him 'the most distinguished of all philosophers' and 'highly versed in wisdom'.<sup>123</sup> He also mentions in the same tablet Empedocles, Pythagoras, Hippocrates, Plato and Pliny, although modern philosophers up to the time of Bahá'u'lláh are not mentioned. In this tablet Bahá'u'lláh states that philosophy derives from the teachings of the prophets. He declares that true philosophers do not deny God but rather acknowledge His existence and admit their powerlessness to describe Him. Further, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in response to a letter from the famous Swiss entomologist Dr Auguste Forel, treated at some length the metaphysical question of the existence of God, nature and the soul and made this favourable comment on philosophers generally while objecting to materialists:

It is as thou hast written, not philosophers in general but narrow-minded materialists that are meant. As to deistic philosophers, such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, they are indeed worthy of esteem and of the highest praise, for they have rendered distinguished services to mankind. In like manner we regard the materialistic, accomplished, moderate philosophers, that have been of service (to mankind).<sup>124</sup>

Yet in spite of the validation made in the Bahá'í writings of philosophy in general and these philosophers in particular, no one current of philosophy or any one thinker can be held up as the standard for truth. As Bahá'í thinker Betty Hoff Conow has stated: 'Truth, on any human level, is never exact.'<sup>125</sup> One of the reasons this is true is because philosophy, while it recognizes the role of intuition in the acquisition of knowledge, is predicated predominantly on the pervasive use of reason as the tool for an understanding of reality; whereas the Bahá'í Faith ascribes a certain inadequacy to reason as an epistemic tool, as it does to intuitive, inspirational and traditional epistemic tools. It views 'the bounty of the Holy Spirit' alone as creating 'the condition in which certainty alone can be attained'.<sup>126</sup> Philosophy itself, therefore,

cannot serve as the standard for truth. Further, the history of philosophy reveals a long line of divergent, contradictory schools, and regardless of the relative merits of each school, they neither make any real claim to possessing the truth nor offer pragmatic solutions to the ills of society. Even the philosophy of religion, while it examines grounds for belief in God, investigates various forms of religious knowledge and identifies common characteristics in religious experience, or common elements in the religions of humankind, does not recognize in any normative way the phenomenon of divine revelation or the authority of prophetic teaching, elements that are fundamental to a Bahá'í understanding of reality.

Philosophy also casts a critical eye on the reality of faith itself, the very foundation of religion, which philosophers have faulted for being too irrational, dogmatic, uncritical and blind. Such objections, however, have been largely overcome in the Bahá'í Faith with its emphasis on enlightened reason, its definition of faith as 'conscious knowledge',<sup>127</sup> its method of critical thinking and its counsel to avoid religious fanaticism and dogmatic presumption.

Neither can science, although it is accorded a great position of honour in the Bahá'í Faith, serve as the standard for 'metatruth' or 'cosmic truth'; for although science retains descriptive values, it has no notion, nor can it have, of prescriptive values since these lie wholly outside its domain. One of the preeminent contemporary philosophers of world religions, Huston Smith, has distinguished between 'instrumental' (descriptive) and 'intrinsic' (prescriptive) values as they relate to science. 'Instrumental' values of science can tell us that smoking is harmful to health but only if health is assumed to be a value. On any intrinsic value of health, however, science cannot rule. In addition to 'normative values' being *ultra vires* for science, Smith names and explains 'purposes', 'life meanings' and 'quality' as being foreign to the scientific view.<sup>128</sup> Consequently, any system, philosophic or scientific, that ignores divine revelation and prophetic teaching, has to be, from the Bahá'í viewpoint at least, incomplete if not defective.

Bahá'u'lláh, however, does make the claim that His revelation is the standard for truth. His Book is the cosmic truth, that all-encompassing reality which contains all things and to which all things must be referred:

Weigh not the Book of God with such standards and sciences as are

current amongst you, for the Book itself is the unerring balance established amongst men. In this most perfect balance whatsoever the peoples and kindreds possess must be weighed, while the measure of its weight should be tested according to its own standard, did ye but know it.<sup>129</sup>

Here we have at last a standard that is valid; the Book of God measures all other books and is to be measured only by its own standards. Bahá'u'lláh's revelation, therefore, allows both the correspondence theory and the coherence theory by being at the same time the standard for truth and the one great cosmic truth which contains and harmonizes all other truths. Bahá'u'lláh's teachings realistically describe things as they are (the world as object) as well as prescribe ideal values. All of this amounts to a cohesive body of supernatural knowledge which we can call the absolute truth, which Royce argued was implicit in the relativistic denial of any absolute truth; that is, the denial itself is a recognition of the existence of absolute truth. Bahá'u'lláh's divine standard demonstrates the theories in epistemology, ethics and metaphysics that there is a final standard for belief (epistemology) and action (ethics) and one ultimate reality (metaphysics) which contains all things and by which all philosophical truths can be measured.

### Seven Criteria of Truth

Based on an understanding of truth as gleaned from Bahá'u'lláh's writings, we can say that the Truth presents the following criteria:

- 1) Truth is expressed in its highest and purest form as divine revelation.
- 2) Truth must correspond to statements of fact and carry the weight of value; that is, truth must be both real and meaningful (charged with significance).
- 3) There is an absolute truth but our understanding of it is relative.
- 4) Truth presents itself as an ideal unified vision of reality.
- 5) Truth is verifiable.
- 6) Truth is a dynamic force, capable of rendering both individuals and society more progressive, just, united, peaceful and loving; that is, free.
- 7) Truth is the ultimately real.

## *The Turning Point: Belief in Bahá'u'lláh*

Have we not all been guilty of keeping the greatest of all secrets hidden in our hearts? Our hope that some day such a Mighty One would come and He would hold the destiny of every individual soul and that of the whole human race in His hands. That He would wield His power and bend us into His instruments so that we would forever banish sorrow from the face of the earth. Now friends, the time has come for the telling of that great secret.

### **The Implications of Belief in Bahá'u'lláh for Spiritual Transformation**

If we view faith in God as the beginning of spirituality and the search for truth as the fundamental prerequisite in the process of spiritualization, then through belief in Bahá'u'lláh, spirituality takes an exponential leap. A declaration of faith in Bahá'u'lláh constitutes a new spiritual birth and marks the beginning of a new orientation in the spiritual life. Such an affirmation does not preclude, however, spiritual growth without explicit belief in Bahá'u'lláh, for the Bahá'í Faith does not take such a restrictive view of transformation. The Bahá'í writings do suggest, however, that the recognition of Bahá'u'lláh is crucial to real spiritual growth, both for the individual soul and for the collective spiritual development of humanity.

Whenever a soul recognizes in Bahá'u'lláh the Manifestation of God for our age, in so doing, he or she has fulfilled one of the 'twin duties' prescribed by God for humanity in this age:

The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the recognition of Him Who is the Day Spring 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.<sup>1</sup>

Belief in Bahá'u'lláh means attaining the presence of God, a presence that signifies entering into paradise:

Whoso hath recognized the Day Spring of Divine guidance and entered His holy court hath drawn nigh unto God and attained His Presence, a Presence which is the real Paradise, and of which the loftiest mansions of heaven are but a symbol.<sup>2</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh further explains the significance of fulfilling or failing to fulfil our first duty:

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>3</sup>

This little phrase 'hath gone astray, though he be the author of every righteous deed' might be unsettling to some, who might feel that Bahá'u'lláh is conjuring up with this statement the fearful spectre of religious fundamentalism with its saved/damned, sinner/saint, people of truth/people of the lie scenario. How does one understand His words?

The literalist approach would not interpret it: the text means what it says. The literal approach is certainly as valid as any other hermeneutical principle when it is appropriate. Yet if a Bahá'í takes the literal and reductionist approach to this text, he runs the risk of being taken as an elitist fundamentalist. Some may view its literal interpretation as a betrayal of the Bahá'í teachings which positively embrace the founders and the fundamental verities of the world's religions. The text invites, therefore, comparisons to other passages in the Bahá'í writings. The text clearly points to the paramount importance of recognizing the Manifestation of God, Bahá'u'lláh, and views this act as the greatest of all deeds. But the phrase 'hath gone astray', it is important to note, is not a categorical rejection, even less a damnation of those who do not recognize Bahá'u'lláh. Both the spirit and the letter of other passages from the Bahá'í writings make this point clear. For example, one of the main points that 'Abdu'l-Bahá made during His talk on 'Religious Prejudices' in Paris in 1911 was precisely that there was no religious group that was exclusively saved. Indeed, 'Abdu'l-Bahá emphasized that such an outlook was 'the principal reason of the unrest among nations.'<sup>4</sup> In that address He stated:

## THE TURNING POINT: BELIEF IN BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

They [those who hold this elitist outlook] teach their followers to believe that their own form of religion is the only one pleasing to God, and that followers of any other persuasion are condemned by the All-Loving Father and deprived of His Mercy and Grace.<sup>5</sup>

The rest of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's talk was devoted to precepts to reconcile Jews, Christians and Muslims: 'Bahá'u'lláh spent His life teaching this lesson of Love and Unity.'<sup>6</sup>

It is, moreover, a well-established hermeneutical principle not to base an understanding of scripture on just one passage where others are also available that bear on the same theme. If we put this passage in context with other passages, we will see that the Bahá'í writings themselves specifically reject the neat monolithic standard of the saved/lost outlook that often prevails in the Abrahamic faiths:

The one all-loving God bestows His divine Grace and Favour on all mankind; one and all are servants of the Most High, and His Goodness, Mercy and loving Kindness are showered upon all His creatures. The glory of humanity is the heritage of each one.<sup>7</sup>

Another passage reads:

Look upon the whole human race as members of one family, all children of God; and, in so doing, you will see no difference between them... Think of all men as being flowers, leaves or buds of this tree, and try to help each and all to realize and enjoy God's blessings. God neglects none: He loves all.<sup>8</sup>

The Bahá'í Faith, therefore, not only specifically enjoins tolerance and loving-kindness towards the followers of other faiths but accepts the missions of the founders of other faiths. That the Bahá'í Faith is one of the faiths most open to other religions is a view that not only derives from the Bahá'í writings themselves but has been substantiated by many, including the eminent English historian Arnold J. Toynbee (1889-1975). Toynbee stated that 'Of all the Judaic religions, Bahá'ísm is the most tolerant. In its catholicity, it comes near to Mahayana Buddhism or to Hinduism.'<sup>9</sup> The attitude of the Bahá'í Faith towards salvation, both of its own members and of members of other faiths, is non-categorical. The Bahá'í Faith contains bright promises, not only for those who believe in it but for all who sincerely believe in God.<sup>10</sup> Bahá'ís are also admonished not to be led into the smug pride of over-confidence in their own salvation because they have become believers

in God's latest Manifestation. Bahá'u'lláh warns believers not to be self-righteous and over-confident where matters of their own salvation are concerned. In a very sobering passage He states:

How often hath a sinner, at the hour of death, attained to the essence of faith, and, quaffing the immortal draught, hath taken his flight unto the celestial Concourse. And how often hath a devout believer, at the hour of his soul's ascension, been so changed as to fall into the nethermost fire.<sup>11</sup>

By some mysterious process of loss of faith, even at the hour of death, the believer may become an unbeliever. Bahá'u'lláh goes on to say however:

Our purpose in revealing these convincing and weighty utterances is to impress upon the seeker that he should regard all else beside God as transient, and count all things save Him, Who is the Object of all adoration, as utter nothingness.<sup>12</sup>

If anything, belief in Bahá'u'lláh puts upon the Bahá'ís a greater responsibility more perfectly to order their lives, since they have been given the most liberal measure of divine guidance ever offered to humanity. Further, this text 'hath gone astray' should not be taken to mean that Bahá'ís themselves do not go astray. Since they are human, it is safe to assume that Bahá'ís can go astray, and like other folk, they do go astray.

There are, moreover, a few hermeneutical principles that we can apply to this key text in order to arrive at a closer understanding of it. The application of these principles does not mean, however, that we can claim to have perfectly understood the words of God. First, we can eliminate the cultural or historical biases in the text. Bahá'u'lláh's words do not appear to be conditioned by historical circumstances. Neither does the language appear to be ambiguous nor does it contain veiled or recondite allusions, nor apparent symbolic significance. At least three hermeneutical principles are pertinent to the understanding of it:<sup>13</sup> 1) our own conditioned and limited understanding of the sacred writings; 2) the relativity of religious truth; and 3) the principle of what Dann J. May calls 'interpretive moderation'.<sup>14</sup>

The text suggests that we may have only a very limited and conditioned understanding of the central, crucial role of the Manifestation of God for the salvation of both the individual soul and, in

Bahá'u'lláh's case particularly, the salvation of the entire planet. Rather than fostering a spirit of judgemental intolerance, what Bahá'u'lláh's text calls us to is a new interpretation of the vital importance of recognizing the Manifestation of God when He appears in the world. Such a strong affirmation of divine authority on Bahá'u'lláh's part – and there are many other instances of this – is not, however, without precedent in the history of religion. Evangelicals are fond of quoting Jesus in John 14:6, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me', and 1 Timothy 2:5 'For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus' in support of their view that there is only 'one way' to salvation. Bahá'u'lláh also made very strong salvific claims and challenging statements: 'No man can obtain everlasting life, unless he embraceth the truth of this inestimable, this wondrous and sublime Revelation.'<sup>15</sup> And, 'Say: O ye who are as dead! The Hand of Divine Bounty proffereth unto you the Water of Life. Hasten and drink your fill. Whoso hath been re-born in this Day, shall never die; whoso remaineth dead, shall never live.'<sup>16</sup> These statements are challenging indeed. They should, however, be seen in the light of other texts revealed by Bahá'u'lláh. The Bahá'í writings do not advocate a 'one way only' approach to salvation, either in doctrine or in attitude.

In the Bahá'í perspective, the words of any Manifestation of God have both a historical and a trans-historical meaning. When considered from the viewpoint of dispensational religion, statements of divine authority and exclusiveness are made by the Manifestations in a historical context. They refer to a point in space-time. Statements of exclusivist divine authority, such as the statement of Jesus in John 14:6, are valid until the end of the dispensation, when a new Manifestation of God arises. Christ's words were exclusively and literally true until the declaration of the mission of Muhammad, that is, true for that historical period. The trans-historical nature of Christ's statement, however, is applicable to all times and, from a Bahá'í point of view, even to all other Manifestations. When such words are spoken by a Manifestation of God in His divine station, it is not the historical man who speaks but the eternal mouthpiece of God. This is the station of the divine logos, the eternal Word which has neither beginning nor end. It is the station of 'Verily, Verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am', a statement that provoked the Jews who heard Jesus to stone

Him<sup>17</sup> because the words ‘I am’ were taken by them as a reference to the four-lettered tetragrammaton (JHVH), the Hebrew name for God decreed in the *Mishnah* to be too holy to be pronounced and which denied the life to come for those who uttered it.

Bahá'u'lláh's claim to divine manifestationhood has to be seen, similarly, in both its historical and trans-historical dimensions: first, as a statement belonging to the religious dispensation of Mírzá Husayn 'Alí, Bahá'u'lláh, a dispensation that is to last for no less than one thousand years; second as a trans-historical statement indicating the importance of belief in the metaphysical nature of the divine Manifestation, a statement that is valid for all eternity.

There are several weighty statements in the Bahá'í writings that attest to the salvific role of the divine Manifestation:

- 1) The divine Manifestations are the first material and spiritual educators of humanity. Without their intervention in human history, humanity would still be at the rudimentary level of the beast.
- 2) There can be no true knowledge of God without an apprehension of the teachings of the divine Manifestations.
- 3) Cosmologically, the divine Manifestation or the divine word is the ‘primal will’, that is the agent for creation. As Keven Brown explains, although God is the creator of all things, to say that God ‘caused’ creation is to imply an effect.<sup>18</sup> The effect would therefore be dependent on the cause and God is not dependent. It is the divine Manifestation who engenders all of creation, for God, in the Bahá'í understanding, stands completely outside the order of created things.
- 4) The fact that souls stand near or close to God is dependent on the will of the divine Manifestation. Through His grace the destiny of the individual soul is determined.

These brief considerations help us to understand the importance of the role of the divine Manifestation in creation, in history and in soteriology.

The second hermeneutical principle relating to the challenging phrase ‘hath gone astray’ has to do with the relativity of religious truth which, along with progressive revelation, Shoghi Effendi has identified as ‘the fundamental principle which constitutes the bedrock of Bahá'í belief’.<sup>19</sup> The Bahá'í concept of the relativity of religious truth has a

number of meanings.<sup>20</sup> The words 'hath gone astray' cannot be understood in any absolute sense, for we do not know exactly what the phrase means. It is relative to our understanding. I would suggest that in the light of other statements in the Bahá'í writings that it perhaps does *not* mean being consigned to hell or that one who does not believe in Bahá'u'lláh is of a defective moral character. The analogy of the archer, the arrow and target comes to mind.<sup>21</sup> The arrow goes astray if it misses the target. Relatively speaking, the arrow also goes astray if it lands anywhere but in the bull's eye. But as long as the archer continues to shoot, there remains the distinct possibility that he may hit the bull's eye. Further, consider the analogy of the shepherd and the sheep upon which the phrase 'hath gone astray' would appear to be based. It can be said that the sheep goes astray only when it leaves the care of the shepherd. The shepherd does not punish the sheep for going astray, for the sheep will perish if it is left on its own. The role of the divine shepherd is to bring the sheep safely home.

The third hermeneutical principle has to do with what Dann J. May calls 'interpretive moderation'. He writes:

The process of interpretation is not exempt from this principle [of moderation]. However, the historical record is filled with numerous and varied examples of excessive and outrageous approaches to the understanding of religious writings, doctrines and rituals – often at the cost of untold human suffering.<sup>22</sup>

Fortunately, the Bahá'ís have not made a practice of using this phrase of Bahá'u'lláh to compel others to accept Bahá'u'lláh's station. Yet Bahá'u'lláh's statement is plain for all to see and has to be given serious consideration by all those who would investigate His weighty claims at this critical juncture in the destiny of humankind. For with His statement that our 'first duty' is to recognize the Manifestation, Bahá'u'lláh has reordered the spiritual priorities of humanity and has made a decisive statement on the relationship between faith in Him and good deeds. His statement, moreover, may also have a special and pointed significance for the religious, for the words 'righteous deed' are strongly tinged with religious overtones. The biblical 'righteous' person (*Heb. sedeq*) was the model of the good Jew, the person whose life best conformed to the Mosaic commandments and the moral law.

Bahá'u'lláh's 'truth claims' create, therefore, an opportunity to reassess one's spiritual position in life and to examine the implications

of His station for the spiritual development of the individual as well as the planet.

This discussion raises the question of the *person* of Bahá'u'lláh as distinguished from His teachings. In the past, one could safely approach the Bahá'í Faith through a study of its social principles such as the equality of men and women, universal education, world peace, the abolition of prejudice, the protection of minority rights, the adjustment of the economic question, and so on. These teachings have today become very widespread, if not commonplace, from the time they were first proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh late in the last century. Today they are accepted by almost every thinking, broad-minded person, religious and non-religious alike.

To pay lip service to social principles, however, is impersonal and non-threatening. It does not require any commitment of the inner person, a commitment which may demand a reorientation of lifestyle or a dedication of time and energy, that may require us to leave the 'comfortable pew' of a non-committed lifestyle and become active in a cause that really does transform society. Focusing on the source of these teachings, on the *person* of Bahá'u'lláh, adds a vital personal dimension to the discussion, and it is the personal dimension which is most likely to engage all of one's being, to touch us intimately and move us to action.

Individuals are more likely to become active in a worthy cause for the love of a glorious Person, rather than by the aesthetic appeal of a set of principles that remain in the abstract. Bahá'u'lláh asks of us not only that we do our best to live out His teachings but also that we participate actively in the erection of a new social order, a new world society which will be the concretization of these spiritual ideals. The source of these teachings is surely more important than the teachings themselves, for in one sense Bahá'u'lláh is the essence of His teachings. Surely the cause is greater than the effect, the source greater than its manifestation. We come to know the source by 'becoming reacquainted with the life and character of Bahá'u'lláh'.<sup>23</sup> The love of Bahá'u'lláh will assist us, as much as any study of the teachings, in our task of spiritual transformation.

We have perhaps for too long found sanctuary in the proclamation of the teachings. It is now not only timely but necessary to redirect the focus of the peoples of the world to the source of these salvific

teachings, to the station of Bahá'u'lláh, He Who is proclaimed as the 'Lord of the Age', 'the Speaker on Sinai', 'the Lord of Hosts', the 'Prince of Peace', the 'Glory of the Lord', the 'Spirit of Truth', 'the Son of Man' who 'shall come in the glory of His Father', the 'Promise of All Ages'.<sup>24</sup>

### Faith and Deeds in Light of the Final Moment

The relationship between belief and action, faith and deeds or 'faith and works', as it was called, is a question that once preoccupied Christian theologians. The faith and works question became one of the many theological controversies that helped spark the Protestant reformation of Martin Luther (1483-1546) with the publication of the *Ninety-Five Theses* against indulgences at Würtenberg in 1517. The starting point of Luther's controversial theology was justification by faith, not works, based on his reading of Romans 3:27-8 in which St Paul states, 'Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.' The question of faith and works may strike us as one of those old and stale theological questions belonging to past ages, but the question is perennial and has been taken up anew in the Bahá'í Faith.

From a Bahá'í perspective, we cannot argue categorically that the deed is greater than faith, or vice-versa. The question presents itself not dichotomously as an 'either/or' proposition but as a single statement. The question to ask is: What more precisely is the relationship between faith and deeds? Here, however, it is mainly a question of emphasizing the importance of faith. There is therefore an admitted imbalance in the discussion, for the Bahá'í writings in many passages stress that it is only pure deeds performed for the love God that will be acceptable at heaven's gate. For example, in the *Hidden Words* Bahá'u'lláh states:

#### O Children of Adam!

Holy words and pure and goodly deeds ascend unto the heaven of celestial glory. Strive that your deeds may be cleansed from the dust of self and hypocrisy and find favour at the court of glory; for ere long the assayers of mankind shall, in the holy presence of the Adored One, accept naught but absolute virtue and deeds of stainless purity...<sup>25</sup>

O Son of My Handmaid!

Guidance hath ever been given by words, and now it is given by deeds. Every one must show forth deeds that are pure and holy, for words are the property of all alike, whereas such deeds as these belong only to Our loved ones. Strive then with heart and soul to distinguish yourselves by your deeds. In this wise We counsel you in this holy and resplendent tablet.<sup>26</sup>

Let us look, then, at one pole of the discussion, that of faith.

Bahá'u'lláh's writings appear to place primary importance on faith or belief in the Manifestation of God. Deeds are secondary, especially if they are performed without the benefit of faith in God. We have already discussed this concept in considering Bahá'u'lláh's statement '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.'

Bahá'u'lláh's Herald, the Prophet-Martyr the Báb, also makes the same point:

For indeed if thou dost open the heart of a person for His sake, better will it be for thee than every virtuous deed; since deeds are secondary to faith in Him and certitude in His Reality.<sup>27</sup>

Yet the recognition of the twin stations of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh carries with it another duty: the observance of divine laws, an observance which can certainly qualify in some sense as the performance of deeds. The twin duties of faith and action, belief and conduct, become in Bahá'u'lláh's words 'inseparable'. One wisdom in Bahá'u'lláh's statement is that it has the effect of protecting the believer from what might be called idle faith. The quality of the believer's faith is to be demonstrated through his deeds: '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.'<sup>28</sup> Thus faith and deeds face one another in a kind of symbiotic relationship. Faith in the Manifestation and observance of His laws are the Siamese twins of the Bahá'í revelation. They are forever joined.

Faith in Bahá'u'lláh is, however, the starting point. It constitutes all at once an insight, an inspiration, a profound revelation and a great discovery, an adventure in certitude and a supreme act of love. It is in sum a creative act but it does not exist purely for its own sake, as *ars*

*gratia artis*. It is connected with life and informs all of life, and in the final analysis has to be demonstrated in concrete form. The performance of noble deeds is in one sense the whole purpose of religion, its final fruit.

To demonstrate the veracity of the Báb's statement that 'deeds are secondary to faith in Him and certitude in His reality', one example comes to mind. While it is admittedly not the usual fabric of the theological argument, it is certainly the stuff of real existential experience – the deathbed conversion. Some might feel that it is not valid to argue from such a subjective experience, one that would appear to be rare, one that cannot be objectified or analyzed. Indeed, it could conceivably take place without an observer being aware of it at all. As a result, we know little about the subject and there is scarcely any literature dealing with it. However, those who are present when a loved one passes away tell us that there is a moving depth to this almost imperceptible experience, something that has been witnessed on more than one occasion.

One of the most striking examples of the deathbed conversion is that of the French symbolic poet Arthur Rimbaud (1854–91), one of the most evocative, sensitive and subtle masters in all poetry. The restless and troubled author of *Une Saison en Enfer* (*A Season in Hell*), after having undergone at the Conception Hospital in Marseille in May 1891 the amputation of his right leg owing to a cancerous tumour, sank into a terrible depression during which he cried day and night. Even his doctors refused to see him, so overcome with pity were they when they witnessed the lamentations of the condemned 37-year-old. But then, according to Rimbaud's beloved sister Isabelle, a sudden transformation took hold of him. In the midst of the atrocious physical suffering that was ravaging his body, serenity and resignation descended. Isabelle reported that: 'Il s'immatérialise, quelque chose de miraculeux et de solennel flotte autour de lui.' ('He has become spirit, something miraculous and solemn hovers about him.')<sup>29</sup> Isabelle's testimony says that Rimbaud began to call upon Christ and the Virgin Mary with sublime invocations and to make vows and promises. As he lay dying, he gave instructions to leave his possessions to various friends. He asked for prayers and that the verse 'Allah Kerim, Allah Kerim' (May God's will be done) be repeated at each moment. After his last visit with Rimbaud, the chaplain remarked to Isabelle: 'Your brother has

faith, my child. What were you telling us then? He has faith, and such that I have never seen.<sup>30</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh's affirmation of the deathbed conversion is clearly borne out by Rimbaud's experience. Bahá'u'lláh similarly affirms that the experience is not as rare as we might suppose: 'How often hath a sinner, at the hour of death, attained to the essence of faith, and, quaffing the immortal draught, hath taken his flight unto the celestial Concourse' (emphasis mine).<sup>31</sup> By definition a sinner is not one who has led a life devoted to the good deed. A 'sinner' usually means someone who has ignored the divine prohibition or broken the divine law. Further, the sinner who now stands at death's door is about to be deprived of any further opportunity of performing any deed whatsoever, good or bad.

The conclusion that one might draw from Bahá'u'lláh's statement is this: if salvation depends on the good deed, then the sinner must be denied salvation. Not so, says Bahá'u'lláh, for the sinner in his dying moments can be saved by faith. In spite of the wrongs that he may have committed, if a soul is willing to drink the cup of the pure beverage of faith and turn to God in that final earthly moment, the way to heaven may be won. One can, moreover, assume that such an individual may have lived a life without faith in God, or perhaps had a faith that suffered a deep eclipse. Yet faith, that inexhaustible creator of endless possibilities, becomes possible as the soul faces eternity. Further, the sinful deeds committed by the sinner which we have been so often told deserve, and will lead to, damnation are forgiven. If salvation were to be won through the deed alone, again, it could not be won in this instance. The conclusion that follows is inescapable. Salvation can only be accomplished through faith. In this dramatic context, the reality of faith, lone and self-subsistent, enduring by nothing but its own powers, proves that it has vanquished the deed and the spent life that had ignored God.

Bahá'u'lláh continues His sobering passage with the other sudden and surprising reversal. The 'devout believer' can also change in those final moments and fall into the fire of denial and unbelief, the 'nethermost fire'. Faith in Bahá'u'lláh, consequently, is to be seen as the supreme accomplishment of all that the individual can do as he lives out his brief days on earth. Bahá'u'lláh refers to the station of belief in Him as 'this summit of transcendent glory' and a 'most sublime station'.<sup>32</sup> Through belief in Bahá'u'lláh not only does a

believer attain to the ultimate object of life in this world, he is also being born into a fuller and richer life after death:

He that partaketh of the waters of my Revelation will taste all the incorruptible delights ordained by God from the beginning that hath no beginning to the end that hath no end.<sup>33</sup>

### Our First Duty and the Covenant: The Suzerain-Vassal Relationship

Bahá'u'lláh's injunction that our 'first duty' is to recognize Him as the Manifestation of God for our age raises a central question. In what sense is recognition of Bahá'u'lláh a duty?<sup>34</sup> The question may seem surprising for we normally associate the recognition of a prophetic figure with faith, love, knowledge or some kind of intuitive vision. Recognition of the Prophet is surely an act of free will, whereas the word 'duty' suggests some kind of obligation. Political ideologues may succeed for a time in convincing or coercing individuals to believe in something. It is more difficult, however, to *oblige* individuals to believe in someone. Belief is something that one either willingly assents to or does not. Why, then, does Bahá'u'lláh speak of the recognition of Him as a duty?

When Bahá'u'lláh speaks of our 'first duty' as recognizing Him, He is invoking the language both of ethics and of the covenant.<sup>35</sup> The most common notion of the term 'duty' is 'that which is morally incumbent'. The Cambridge realist philosopher G.E. Moore, however, connected the sense of duty with the notion of the good. Moore defined duty in his *Principia Ethica* as 'that action which will cause more good to the universe than any possible alternative'.<sup>36</sup> Following Moore's line of thinking, Wheelwright suggests three basic notions of duty: 1) A duty is something that is within our power to perform. 2) Doing our duty will cause more good than will any alternative action. 3) Performance of the duty will cause the greatest good to the greatest number.<sup>37</sup> We should also remember in this context that the word 'duty' carries a nuance of free will. While 'duty' does suggest moral incumbency, it does not at the same time speak of coercion or external compulsion. While the duty may be there, it is left to the individual to perform it or not, as the person sees fit. All of these ethical criteria of 'duty' can be applied to the 'duty' to recognize Bahá'u'lláh.

At its foundation the covenant is a binding relationship based on

a mutual agreement between God and humanity through which certain promises are made by God conditioned upon specific obligations to be respected by the Prophet and by all of humanity. Sometimes the covenant is entered into unilaterally by God, the covenantor, without His exacting obligations on the part of the covenantee. For example, in Genesis 12:2-3, as part of the Abrahamic covenant, God made a number of promises to Abraham without apparently exacting any obligations: ‘And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing. And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.’ It is not until the account in Genesis 17:2-10 when Abram is given the new name of Abraham that the obligation of circumcision is exacted, making the covenant a bilateral agreement. However, it is clear that God’s unilateral promise of blessing forms part of the covenant relationship since the formula of blessings and curses is used<sup>38</sup> and blessing and curses are one of the basic motifs of the covenant.

God did exact one fundamental thing from Abraham, as He had in an earlier age in the covenant with Noah<sup>39</sup> – obedience, both in the requirement of circumcision as a sign of the covenant and in the story of the near sacrifice of Isaac.<sup>40</sup>

All covenants have pronounced legal features. The ancient Israelite covenant had strong resemblances with Hittite suzerainty treaties<sup>41</sup> and the word ‘covenant’ still has legal force today in English law. The modern Bahá’í covenant likewise has a very powerful and well-defined legal framework that is based on the authority of divine law.<sup>42</sup> It is, however, an over-simplification and a distortion to emphasize the contractual and legal aspects of the covenant to the detriment of its other features. It should not be overlooked that in addition to these strong legal aspects, the Bahá’í covenant has also built into it an energetic spiritual dynamic which, like the Tao, keeps the universe on course, and ‘unfolding as it should’, thus exercising a powerful cosmological effect that goes well beyond its concrete legal framework of divine commandments. Further, the Bahá’í covenant has built into it the promise of divine grace and protection, and the powerful cosmological overtones alluded to can be properly classified as mysterious.

There is a power in this Cause – a mysterious power – far, far, far away

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from the ken of men and angels; that invisible power is the cause of all these outward activities. It moves the hearts. It rends the mountains. It administers the complicated affairs of the Cause. It inspires the friends. It dashes into a thousand pieces all the forces of opposition. It creates new spiritual worlds. This is the mystery of the Kingdom of Abhá.<sup>43</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh's phrase 'the first duty' is suggestive of a certain type of covenant relationship, that of the suzerain-vassal or the master-servant, underscored by His use of the word 'servants' in 'prescribed by God for His servants'. Here God and/or the Manifestation is speaking as the suzerain speaks to his vassal or the master speaks to his servants. Bahá'u'lláh's noble language redounds with courtly or feudal motif since the Manifestation of God is depicted here and elsewhere as the ambassador or envoy of the divine King (God), 'Who representeth the Godhead in both the Kingdom of His Cause and the world of creation'.<sup>44</sup> The theological substratum of this covenantal relationship between the suzerain (Bahá'u'lláh) and His vassal (humanity) is based on the concept of privilege (grace, bounty) granted to the vassal by the suzerain in the expectation of reciprocity. One can suppose that this expectation of reciprocity from the vassal is owed to God, through His divine Manifestation, for having been granted the bounty of creation, life itself. The creatures owe to God their physical existence and, more importantly, their spiritual life. Similarly, in medieval times, the vassal owed his earthly existence to his suzerain and stood therefore in obligation to him. The vassal also lived beholden to the suzerain for the protection that his suzerain afforded.

The whole purpose of creation according to the covenant is for the individual to recognize the Manifestation of God when He appears. God has bestowed physical and spiritual life to this end – that man might recognize the Manifestation of God and thereby fulfil his purpose as a created being. The 'first duty' stands then as the highest moral obligation placed upon man because it is a fitting expression not only of the gratitude that he owes the divine King for the graces of His office but also because the fulfilment of this duty will accomplish the spiritual purpose for which man has been created: the recognition of Bahá'u'lláh. This means simply that Bahá'u'lláh, in His station of Manifestation of God, has the right to be recognized for what He is. To recognize Him becomes not only our moral obligation but our greatest

and most inestimable privilege. This is the high paradox of Bahá'u'lláh's statement. Although He calls recognition of Him a duty it is really a privilege.

Yet, like many obligations, it cannot be easily accomplished without love for Him. Neither does Bahá'u'lláh expect, as His writings make clear, that we accept Him solely on the basis of duty. We cannot therefore speak of something as important as the acceptance of Bahá'u'lláh based on this one passage that invokes the notion of duty. Above all, we must familiarize ourselves with His writings and His life and come to know of the unspeakable sufferings that He willingly endured so that conflict and conflagration could be forever stilled and peace fill the face of the earth.

There are other spiritual virtues that stand closely identified with the Bahá'í covenant and which flow naturally from a belief in Bahá'u'lláh. These virtues apply equally well to the Judaeo-Christian concepts of the divine covenant and include recognition of divine authority, obedience and willing submission to divine laws in order to avail ourselves of the protection, strength and stability that such laws bring into our lives.

When we declare our belief in Bahá'u'lláh, we voluntarily recognize His authority and place ourselves under the tutelage of His laws. The Manifestation of God comes to the world invested with the greatest authority that can be bestowed upon an individual by God, an authority that does not hesitate to dissolve the weighty and sacred laws of preceding religious dispensations and substitute these with laws that conform more perfectly to the needs of the present age. A willingness to follow these laws helps to ground the believer firmly in the faith of God. The recognition of this divine authority will help create in the believer a spirit, not of blind obedience, but of voluntary acceptance and willing submission to such laws that an enlightened understanding will recognize as being 'the highest means for the maintenance of order in the world and the security of its peoples'.<sup>45</sup> Right-mindedness needs to be brought to the observance of Bahá'u'lláh's laws. From being a thankless duty or toil, the believer should strive to reach that condition which Canadian poet Archibald Lampman (1861-99) described as the 'Divinest self-forgetfulness' in his beautiful didactic lyric 'The Largest Life', a self-forgetfulness that is 'at first/A task, then a tonic, then a need'.<sup>46</sup> With right-mindedness that which was first perceived as a

burden will give us wings. One can learn to take delight in the practice of the divine laws which may have looked at first as a duty one had to struggle to fulfil.

### The Process of Deepening One's Faith and Spiritual Transformation

When one becomes an avowed believer in Bahá'u'lláh, he or she is required to begin a process of deepening in the Bahá'í writings. One cannot over-emphasize the importance of deepening for it has especially important implications for spiritual transformation.

Spiritual knowledge empowers believers. The Bahá'í writings confer upon the believer a wealth of knowledge, the assimilation of which greatly assists in the process of spiritual transformation. The divine knowledge revealed in the Bahá'í writings is unequalled, providing an inexhaustible source of spiritual richness and power. Shoghi Effendi asserts that the Bahá'í writings surpass in volume, profundity and scope the scriptures of the previous dispensations of the world religions:

Praise be to God that the spirit of the Holy Writings and Tablets which have been revealed in this wondrous Dispensation concerning matters of major or minor importance, whether essential or otherwise, related to the sciences and the arts, to natural philosophy, literature, politics or economics, have so permeated the world that since the inception of the world in the course of past Dispensations and bygone ages nothing like it has ever been seen or heard.<sup>47</sup>

Deepening in the Bahá'í scriptures is a sacred act of the highest order. It is worthy of the intensive concentration of the Hebrew scribe, the deep meditative attitude of the Hindu holy man and the spiritual discipline and passion of the mystic. Bahá'u'lláh recommends that we approach the writings in a spirit of reverence and meditation, taking great care when reading them and anxious to discover the hidden truths and sustaining powers that lie in their ocean depths.

Just as importantly, Bahá'u'lláh has also given us a new understanding of the deepening process itself. Simply reading the sacred writings hardly qualifies as deepening, just as merely 'reading' prayers hardly qualifies as praying. The true deepening process is a higher type of spiritual exercise, whose sanctity is able to inspire the soul, guide, conduct and elevate the mind. Through meditative deepening believers

can discover that spiritual state so highly prized by Bahá'u'lláh – detachment, a detachment in which their only desire is to live for the will of God:

Were any man to ponder in his heart that which the Pen of the Most High hath revealed and to taste of its sweetness, he would, of a certainty, find himself emptied and delivered from his own desires, and utterly subservient to the Will of the Almighty. Happy is the man that hath attained so high a station, and hath not deprived himself of so bountiful a grace.<sup>48</sup>

Deepening in the Bahá'í writings should not be construed merely as a search for meaning, even the worthy search for spiritual meaning. It can also be more significantly an occasion of encounter with the person of the divine Manifestation, Bahá'u'lláh, for the essence of His person is manifested within His teachings and the fragrance of His spirit has been diffused throughout the garment of His words. He waits for us to approach and discover Him. 'Abdu'l-Bahá indicated to Edward 'Saffa' Kinney's bible study class in New York in 1912 that, among other things, they desired to enter the presence of God: '... you desire to approach the presence of God'.<sup>49</sup> This 'attaining the presence' can be viewed as one of the great purposes of deepening.

Such a divine encounter cannot be won, however, by a mere 'intellectual grasp' of concepts and principles. While an intellectual understanding of Bahá'í teachings is vital and not to be deprecated, the intellectual pursuit of the teachings alone is too superficial an approach to foster real spiritual growth. On the one hand Shoghi Effendi states:

If the Bahá'ís want to be really effective in teaching the Cause they need to be much better informed and able to discuss intelligently, intellectually, the present condition of the world and its problems.<sup>50</sup>

At the same time, he points out that certain souls who cling to an intellectual understanding of the teachings without having a firm grounding in the Covenant can be 'dangerous' to the spiritual foundation of the Bahá'í Faith. He said that there are

... far more dangerous [than external enemies], insidious, lukewarm people inside the Faith who have no real attachment to the Covenant, and consequently uphold the intellectual aspect of the teachings while at the same time undermining the spiritual foundation upon which the whole Cause of God rests.<sup>51</sup>

Shoghi Effendi has also commented that a purely intellectual grasp of the Bahá'í teachings will not adequately ensure that the believer will remain within the protection of the Covenant: 'An intellectual grasp of the teachings is purely superficial; with the first real test such believers are shaken from the bough!'<sup>32</sup> The deeper spiritual qualities of reverence and devotion, loyalty, steadfastness and obedience are also required.

We are exhorted to read the sacred writings morning and evening as a requirement of our covenant with God: 'Recite ye the verses of God every morn and eventide. Whoso faileth to recite them hath not been faithful to the Covenant of God and His Testament . . .' <sup>33</sup> We are further asked to ponder the writings as we read them and to meditate on their meaning. We are encouraged to exert ourselves so that we may plunge into the depths of the writings and strive to uncover the hidden layers of truth within. We are also counselled to study the writings in order to become true scholars of the Faith. 'Abdu'l-Bahá said to the friends in Paris: 'I counsel you that you study earnestly the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, so that, God helping you, you may in deed and truth become Bahá'ís.'<sup>34</sup> Study suggests note taking, eager research, questioning, dialogue and discussion in order more clearly to understand the subject at hand. It is worthwhile to remember also that the purpose of studying Bahá'u'lláh's teachings is not just personal enrichment; it is primarily teaching. In fact, it would be no exaggeration to say that the process of individual deepening lies at the foundation of the whole process of education in the Bahá'í Faith.

Deepening in the Faith has, then, a number of vital functions in the life of the believer and the community, all of which contribute, in one way or another, to spiritual transformation: 1) Deepening in the teachings in a sacred spirit of reverence can become the occasion for encountering the Spirit of Bahá'u'lláh. 2) Deepening spiritually empowers us and enables us to become convincing and effective teachers of the Bahá'í Faith. 3) Deepening gives us a good grounding in the covenant and acts as a protection against the tests of life. 4) By contrast, lack of good deepening can lead to confusion, disagreement and differences about the teachings and the principles and laws of the

Bahá'í administrative order. Deepening helps to minimize this confusion and helps, therefore, to create unity among the friends. 5) Thoughtfully deepening in the Bahá'í writings helps to train the mind and to find solutions to the crises that plague humanity in all spheres of life.

Shoghi Effendi makes this comment:

If you read the utterances of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá with selflessness and care and concentrate upon them, you will discover truths unknown to you before and will obtain an insight into the problems that have baffled the great thinkers of the world.<sup>55</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá has also said that the 'mightiest' of the pillars that support the Faith of God are 'learning and the use of the mind, the expansion of consciousness, and insight into the realities of the universe and the hidden mysteries of Almighty God'.<sup>56</sup> We can conclude from this statement that deepening is a whole attitude towards the knowledge of God upon which all of theology and philosophy depend.

Further, this ancient botanical analogy of the seed and the plant used by Shoghi Effendi explains simply but effectively the process of deepening in spiritual transformation:

When a person becomes a Bahá'í, actually what takes place is that the seed of the spirit starts to grow in the human soul. This seed must be watered by the outpourings of the Holy Spirit. These gifts of the spirit are received through prayer, meditation, study of the Holy Utterances and service to the Cause of God . . .<sup>57</sup>

Finally, there is a less common meaning to the phrase 'deepening', one that has more to do with life than with learning. This is simply the experiential or existential dimension of the Bahá'í life. The Bahá'í who has walked in many paths, has tasted of the many experiences of life, both bitter and sweet, in his upward spiritual development and has remained faithful to the covenant throughout, has a dimension to his life that others who have been less creative, less tried, less adventurous or less experienced may not. These life events create a deep dimension to the life of faith which helps to make a believer rich in experience, learning and resources. This is another meaning of the phrase 'deepening in the faith'.

## Teaching the Bahá'í Faith and Spirituality

Bahá'u'lláh made a fundamental change in the organization of His community by abolishing professional clergy. Every Bahá'í is called upon to be a minister of the Faith. Teaching His message is something that devolves, therefore, on every believer. Since there is no clergy and since the Bahá'í feasts and holy days are not ritualized worship services that involve congregational prayer,<sup>58</sup> there is no longer any need for preaching and for the repetition of cultic rituals. The various other functions of religion performed by clergy in the past, whether that of theological study or teaching, or personal counselling, have been assumed by either by individuals or the Bahá'í assemblies. The local spiritual assembly officiates at marriage ceremonies and there is no special ritual that accompanies birth or death, other than civil registration and the funeral. Any decisions relating to questions of Bahá'í law come under the jurisdiction of Bahá'í assemblies, which are elected by the community. Individual Bahá'ís have no decision-making power or legal authority over the community.

Teaching the Bahá'í Faith has been defined by Bahá'u'lláh as the 'supreme objective' of a believer.<sup>59</sup> Although its primary purpose is to bring the mission of Bahá'u'lláh to the attention of the world, teaching the Bahá'í Faith has important implications for spirituality and for spiritual transformation. Teaching the Bahá'í Faith is both a cause and an effect of spirituality; that is, teaching the Faith greatly enhances our spirituality. Our spirituality allows us, in turn, to become more effective teachers. The process goes on in an endless cycle: teaching enhances spirituality, an enhanced spirituality makes for more effective teaching, effective teaching in turn increases spirituality and so on. Teaching the Faith, therefore, is neither a late-stage adjunct nor a consequence of spirituality. We do not begin to teach the Faith once we feel that we have become spiritually qualified to do so, for there is no end to degrees of spirituality. If we wait to become ideally spiritual before we feel qualified to teach, we may wait a very long time indeed. The result may well be no teaching at all.

Along with prayer and service, teaching the Faith is one of the chief means to achieve spirituality. This is true for a number of reasons: 'Of all the gifts of God', says 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 'the greatest is the gift of Teaching.'<sup>60</sup> Further, He says, 'It is clear that in this day, confirmations from the unseen world are encompassing all those who deliver the

divine Message.<sup>61</sup> These statements alone tell us that teaching the Faith is the most potent source of the grace of God of which we can avail ourselves. The grace is commensurate with the greatness of the Cause and the Cause is the unity of humanity. Therefore, both the Cause and the grace are great: ‘Were the dominions of the whole, entire earth to be thine, it would not equal this great dominion which is no other than spreading the guidance of God.’<sup>62</sup>

The purpose of teaching is to spread the message brought by Bahá’u’lláh to all corners of the globe and to leaven all strata of society with His life-giving principles in order to establish the new world order. The Bahá’í Faith is, therefore, a religion with a mission. It is not, however, a religion of missionaries. This is not just subtle word-play. The word missionary has historical connotations with proselytizing. The Bahá’í Faith has been purged of the several negative associations made with the word ‘proselytism’. Proselytism or religious coercion is forbidden to Bahá’ís. The teaching of the Faith is to be carried out in a spirit of moderation, wisdom and dignity.

The inspirational quality of the teaching act attracts divine grace and transforms the soul.

By the righteousness of God! Whoso openeth his lips in this Day and maketh mention of the name of his Lord, the hosts of Divine inspiration shall descend upon him from the heaven of My name, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. On him also shall descend the Concourse on high, each bearing aloft a chalice of pure light.<sup>63</sup>

There is something in this inspirational quality of the teaching act originating in the celestial choirs that makes teaching akin to the inspiration of the dramatic performance. As long as the actor moves upon the stage and declaims his lines, he is animated by something other than his own self – the power of the words that make up the script. The Bahá’í teacher is not, of course, an actor in the strict sense of the word. He is not just playing a role. He is essentially teaching. The Bahá’í teacher does not assume a persona that is not his. He uses his own persona but it becomes transformed in the presentation of the Faith. There remains nonetheless something of the inspirational quality of the actor in the presentation. There is animation, there is dialogue, there is movement, there are gestures, there is tone of voice and emphasis. All these belong to the actor but they are used by the Bahá’í teacher in his presentation of the Cause. There are, no doubt, physiolog-

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ical changes that accompany the act of teaching. The body is alert. The mind is focused. The teacher feels an intense love both for the subject that he teaches and for his audience. The transformation is therefore not spiritual alone, since the act of teaching is performed within the vehicle of the body. Like the whole house that is illuminated when the lights are turned on, teaching illuminates the whole person, body, soul and spirit:

I swear by the Day Star of Divine Revelation! The very moment ye arise, ye will witness how a flood of Divine knowledge will gush out of your hearts, and will behold the wonders of His heavenly wisdom manifested in all their glory before you.<sup>64</sup>

The teacher, moreover, unlike the salesperson, does not merely present a product. Marshall McLuhan's dictum applies to teaching the Bahá'í Faith: the medium is the message; that is, a Bahá'í is perceived as being the embodiment of what he teaches. If he is perceived as practising what he preaches, the message will be effective. Thus for the teaching act to be integral and effective, the Bahá'í knows that it is necessary to strive to embody the virtues prescribed by the revelation:

God hath prescribed unto every one the duty of teaching His Cause. Whoever ariseth to discharge this duty, must needs, ere he proclaimeth His Message, adorn himself with the ornament of an upright and praiseworthy character, so that his words may attract the hearts of such as are receptive to his call. Without it, he can never hope to influence his hearers.<sup>65</sup>

The teacher, then, to be effective must continually strive to live a life of virtue. This life of virtue coupled with the repeated promises of divine inspiration while teaching will ensure that the heart of the true seeker will be set ablaze.

'Abdu'l-Bahá further explains what these qualities of the teacher should be:

Be a sign of love, a manifestation of mercy, a fountain of tenderness, kind-hearted, good to all and gentle to the servants of God, and especially to those who bear every relation to thee, both men and women. Bear every ordeal that befall eth thee from the people and confront them not save with kindness, with great love and good wishes.<sup>66</sup>

The teaching opportunity also affords us the challenge of performing a spiritual balancing act, of reconciling and harmonizing the opposites in our nature. Teaching presents us, for example, with the opportunity of observing tact and wisdom but must not leave the listener unmoved. The teacher must be courageous but not proud or domineering. The teacher must be humble, yet at the same time inspire the hearts of his listeners. The teacher must be 'as unrestrained as the wind, while carrying the Message of Him Who hath caused the Dawn of Divine Guidance to break',<sup>67</sup> yet reserved and thoughtful to the needs of those whom he teaches. He must present the Faith as one presents 'a gift to a king' yet without at the same time being obsequious. Teaching is both an art and a science.

### **The Exercise of Volition**

'Abdu'l-Bahá affirms that volition has certain connections with the knowledge of God. The human will must be properly disposed to receive divine guidance if it is to be acquired:

Will is the centre or focus of human understanding. We must *will* to know God, just as we must *will* in order to possess the life He has given us. The human will must be subdued and trained into the Will of God. It is a great power to have a strong will, but a greater power to give that will to God.<sup>68</sup>

As the individual struggles to change and to attain spirituality, he must allow himself to experience and to rely on the omnipotence of God. At the same time the believer must learn to exercise his own volition, an exercise that is connected with a word so often used in the Bahá'í writings – 'strive': 'Strive to be shining examples unto all mankind, and true reminders of the virtues of God amidst men.'<sup>69</sup> And, 'Strive that your deeds may be cleansed from the dust of self and hypocrisy and find favour at the court of glory . . .'<sup>70</sup> Also, 'Strive ye with all your hearts, raise up your voices and shout, until this dark world be filled with light, and this narrow place of shadows be widened out . . .'<sup>71</sup> The possibilities seem limitless with the exercise of effort and will. ' . . . nothing whatsoever can be regarded as unattainable. Endeavour, ceaseless endeavour, is required. Nothing short of an indomitable determination can possibly achieve it.'<sup>72</sup>

There are times, however, when we realize that it is futile to struggle

against circumstance. For those personal situations that cannot be changed in the short term, Bahá'u'lláh counsels patience, a practice that is highly valued for those wishing to achieve spirituality. Patience is especially recommended when we are face to face with hardship and calamity: 'Blessed are the steadfastly enduring, they that are patient under ills and hardships, who lament not over anything that befalleth them, and who tread the path of resignation . . .'<sup>73</sup>

We cannot, however, abandon all initiative for our spiritual growth while we patiently wait for God to change us. This would be an abdication of our personal responsibilities. Thus, in the succinct 'knowledge, volition, action' triad which 'Abdu'l-Bahá expounds as a formula for the accomplishment of any task – 'The attainment of any object is conditioned upon knowledge, volition and action. Unless these three conditions are forthcoming, there is no execution or accomplishment'<sup>74</sup> – and presumably this includes that of the development of our own spirituality – the volition element becomes vital, for 'Abdu'l-Bahá has said that 'intention brings attainment'.<sup>75</sup> While looking to and relying upon the omnipotence of God, and being patient, the individual at the same time must begin to exercise his volition in order to further spiritual growth. The exercise of the individual will in the practice of good deeds becomes the instrument through which God acts.

The simple and beautiful prayer of 'Abdu'l-Bahá that begins, 'O God! Refresh and gladden my spirit' is well illustrative of this interplay between the omnipotence of God and the exercise of our own volition in order to change ourselves.

O God! Refresh and gladden my spirit. Purify my heart. Illumine my powers. I lay all my affairs in Thy hand. Thou art my Guide and my Refuge. I will no longer be sorrowful and grieved; I will be a happy and joyful being. O God! I will no longer be full of anxiety, nor will I let trouble harass me. I will not dwell on the unpleasant things of life.

O God! Thou art more friend to me than I am to myself. I dedicate myself to Thee, O Lord.<sup>76</sup>

For purposes of illustration, the prayer can be neatly broken into a binary form. In the first half, the believer petitions God to change him; in the second, the spiritual aspirant makes a series of affirmations about his abilities to change his own state of mind. The transition from petitioning God for assistance to the affirmation of one's own abilities is so fluid that one scarcely notices the shift.

The opening of the prayer is a petition for spiritual refreshment and affirms our trust in God and calls for His guidance: 'O God! Refresh and gladden my spirit. Purify my heart. Illumine my powers. I lay all my affairs in Thy hand. Thou art my Guide and my Refuge.' The prayer then shifts its focus from God to the self with a number of self-affirmations that have the effect of encouraging the individual to rely on his own spiritual powers and affirming his own abilities in order to change his state of mind. This is underscored by the five point repetition of the phrase 'I will':

*I will no longer be sorrowful and grieved; I will be a happy and joyful being. O God! I will no longer be full of anxiety, nor will I let trouble harass me. I will not dwell on the unpleasant things of life.* (my emphasis)

'Abdu'l-Bahá's prayer is a indicator that the individual is free to assist in the creation of a spiritual state of mind that will bring quietude and serenity. There is also the pointed indication that not dwelling on the unpleasant things of life contributes to our happiness and well-being, an affirmation that is consistent with the 'as a man thinketh, so is he' philosophy.

### **'Abdu'l-Bahá's Magna Carta for Spiritual Transformation**

'Abdu'l-Bahá has left us a set of teachings that may be considered a Magna Carta of spiritual growth and healthy psychological development. In these passages, 'Abdu'l-Bahá not only identifies all of the indicators for our psycho-spiritual development but also points out the impediments to the sound development of the personality and tells us at the same time how such impediments can be overcome without doing harm to ourselves. The passages are to be found in Myron Phelps's book *Life and Teachings of Abbas Effendi*. It should be pointed out that although Phelps's book does contain a few doctrinal errors on the Bahá'í Faith,<sup>7</sup> and the cited passages cannot be considered to be scripture, nonetheless the words Phelps attributes to 'Abdu'l-Bahá seem to be consistent with Bahá'í teaching and there is nothing in them that would raise doubts as to their authenticity. Together they constitute a very remarkable summary of spiritual growth:

Every deed of life is a thought expressing itself in action; it is the actual mirror of the man within. The act sets up a force which is the spirit of the deed. Successive acts done in furtherance of a purpose produce an

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accumulating spiritual force which never dies.

Therefore we must be active – we must be up and doing. Our deeds build up our characters, and the building of our characters is our task. Life in this world is for this purpose. We are, while here, more or less arbiters of our own destiny; but in the world to come we cannot progress except by grace of the Divine Will. Therefore let us attend to the building of character as the one thing essential.

If heredity has not given us the qualities of character necessary for our high moral and spiritual advancement, we must labour to build up a new structure within ourselves which will be adequate to that aim. Each man must look to himself and within himself to find his errors and weaknesses.

When we find weak points in our character we must begin to tear down; and also we must not neglect to build up good qualities in place of the evil ones which we discard. It is a law of our nature that to remove a characteristic permanently another must be developed in its stead.

Self-discipline is the first aim of one who desires to live a true life. But as to this do not misunderstand me; I do not mean the discipline, widely practised in old times and even by many at the present day, which consists in mortifying the flesh and deadening the emotions. Enjoy pleasant things, look with pleasure upon beautiful things, but without clinging to them, without longing to possess them, without holding them dearer than God. The flesh, the senses, the emotions, are the instruments by which we attain to the understanding of truth. But they must be kept as instruments, and not allowed to become our masters, as they are likely to do if we fail to keep guard over them.

Sense indulgence is evil because it keeps the soul away from God. Unless it is held in check progress towards God is quite out of the question. You cannot serve two masters. And it is difficult to deal with, because sensations remains as abstractions in the mind, and, though so subtle that they can scarcely be recognized, exert an effective influence towards their own repetition.

Yet while making earnest efforts to subjugate the senses man is liable to err; his nature is very complex, and to find the true path requires wisdom. If he attacks them by indiscriminate repression, as by asceticism, worse evils will be encountered; for the effort may produce serious physical or mental disorders, perhaps insanity or death; or it may result in merely diverting the uneradicated evil tendency into some other channel where it may be even more injurious to the character; and it will in any case tend to foster selfishness, which is worse than

sensuality.

Therefore the attractions of the senses must be met, not by running away from them but directly, by a man's will and the power which is within himself to resist evil when temptation arises. Thus only can desire be eradicated from the nature of man.

Selfishness must also be rooted out, not only in its gross, but in its exceedingly subtle forms. A man may be selfish even to an extreme and be quite ignorant of it. Not until a man has wholly freed himself from lust and selfishness will he be able to distinguish between what is good in him and what is not. Lust and selfishness lead men ignorantly to evil acts, and evil acts in turn increase lust, selfishness, and ignorance.

To learn one's own nature is better than to seek for the unknown and the unknowable.

There is need for great wisdom in building up one's character. One must have tolerance and know how to apply it; charity, and know how to bestow it; love, and know how to love all things.

Only to be always speaking of love is not sufficient. We must love in our hearts. Nor can love and hate exist together, for love and hate are opposites. If a man declaims that he loves every one, while his actions contradict his words, his assertions have no worth.

Do not mortify the flesh. Care for the body as the vehicle of the soul and the spirit within; but at the same time do not pamper it.

Cultivate your finer nature through your senses and your emotions, taking care meanwhile that they do not become your masters.

Look always to God for aid, not to frail human nature. Call on [the spirit of Bahá'u'lláh] for strength to guide you. That spirit is now the renovating influence upon this earth

Be calm, be joyous, and not only when the sky is clear, but when the clouds gather as well. To be calm and brave under difficulties is a proof of spiritual force. But let no man, because he has gained outward control over himself, imagine that he has accomplished the highest cultivation of his character. There must be inner calmness, based on a sense of security in God's protection, and a desire to do good for the sake of good. One should find pleasure in the doing of good deeds; he should not do them with an eye to the reward which they are to bring.

When he has reached this point, a man may be said indeed to have conquered himself.<sup>78</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá's words are so lucid, incisive and eloquent that they scarcely require any commentary. It might be worthwhile, however, simply to point out the central issues that He raises in these key

passages dealing with spiritual transformation:

- 1) The importance of deeds.
- 2) The need to replace weak points with strong ones (vices with virtues).
- 3) The role of the five senses in spiritual development.
- 4) The meaning of true discipline; the avoidance of repression and asceticism.
- 5) The danger of selfishness to spiritual growth.
- 6) The importance of love, tolerance and wisdom in character-building.
- 7) The need to rely on God and to be calm and serene during difficulties.
- 8) The need for inner calm as well as outward control.

### The Daily Programme of Spirituality

A Bahá'í once asked 'Abdu'l-Bahá how he could go about the formidable task of becoming more spiritual. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's answer was that short but memorable and meaningful phrase 'Kam kam. Rúz beh rúz.' (Little by little. Day by day).<sup>79</sup> St Paul wrote to the Corinthians, 'I die daily.'<sup>80</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote to a believer, 'Verily, I beseech the Lord of Hosts to increase thy faith each day over that of the previous day ...'<sup>81</sup> Howard Colby Ives, who at one point had despaired of ever reaching the high standards of spirituality that 'Abdu'l-Bahá placed before him, was consoled with this thought:

Under the influence of such tremendous thoughts as these I one day asked 'Abdu'l-Bahá how it could ever be possible for me, deep in the mass of weak and selfish humanity, ever to hope to attain when the goal was so high and great. He said that it is to be accomplished little by little; little by little. And I thought to myself, I have all eternity for this journey from self to God. The thing to do is to get started.<sup>82</sup>

These exhortations really contain a methodology for spiritual development: the daily programme. The work of spiritual transformation must go on and take place in the multitude of atomic moments and episodes that daily make up our lives. Bearing this in mind, our focus should be on the daily effort to become more spiritual.

One can envisage five main points that could make up the broad

framework of a daily programme of spirituality:<sup>83</sup>

- 1) A realization of the importance of making spiritual progress on a daily basis and making a firm resolve to do so.
- 2) Prayer to start and end the day, along with study of or meditation on the sacred writings. If other opportunities are found for mental prayer throughout the day, so much the better.
- 3) The daily self-examination of conscience.
- 4) Thanksgiving for spiritual progress made.
- 5) Repentance of wrongs committed and a resolve to improve.

It is important to note that in the Bahá'í Faith these are all private exercises. There are no public flourishes of demonstrative thanksgiving in the Bahá'í Faith as there are in some religions and no public confession of sins. Asking forgiveness of others when we have unjustly hurt them is a necessary step in the reconciliation of souls, just as forgiving oneself is a necessary step in the reconciliation with self.

'Abdu'l-Bahá makes these recommendations for daily spiritual progress:

Therefore I say that man must travel in the way of God. Day by day he must endeavour to become better, his belief must increase and become firmer, his good qualities and his turning to God must be greater, the fire of his love must flame more brightly; then day by day he will make progress, for to stop advancing is the means of going back.<sup>84</sup>

Here the time frame is set for spiritual progress. It is 'day by day'. The orientation of the day must be set with a resolve to increase in spirituality: moral goodness, increased steadfastness and strength of faith, God consciousness, a greater expression of divine love. These are all part of the process and can be set as spiritual goals.

The day both begins and ends with prayer and the reading of the creative word. Bahá'u'lláh stipulates that to remain faithful to our covenant with God we must recite the verses of God both morning and evening:

Recite ye the verses of God every morn and eventide. Whoso faileth to recite them hath not been faithful to the Covenant of God and His Testament, and whoso turneth away from these holy verses in this Day is of those who throughout eternity have turned away from God. Fear ye God, O My servants, one and all.<sup>85</sup>

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There is also the exhortation to study the teachings on a daily basis and to reflect or meditate upon their meaning:

Peruse ye every day the verses revealed by God. Blessed is the man who reciteth them and reflecteth upon them. He truly is of them with whom it shall be well.<sup>86</sup>

By beginning the day with prayer and meditation or study of the writings, we not only fulfil our covenant with God, we bring gladness to our soul and inspiration to our day. Spiritual study is one of the great delights for those who have followed its ways. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, 'There is no greater pleasure than to study God's Word with a spiritual mind.'<sup>87</sup>

Other facets of the daily programme are the methods of self-evaluation and thanksgiving. 'Abdu'l-Bahá recommends a daily examination of conscience: 'Every day, in the morning when arising you should compare today with yesterday and see in what condition you are.'<sup>88</sup> Bahá'u'lláh also commands:

O Son of Being! Bring thyself to account each day ere thou art summoned to a reckoning; for death, unheralded, shall come upon thee and thou shalt be called to give account for thy deeds.<sup>89</sup>

This accounting does not necessarily have to be done in the evening, as is sometimes assumed. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's exhortation suggests that it can also be done in the morning. What is important is not so much the time of day but that it be done. The attitude in which this spiritual exercise is carried out is crucial, for there is a potential for self abuse here. In the past, religious institutions have fostered an inordinate amount of neurotic religious guilt when it comes to sin. This has been one of the unfortunate legacies of the western religions. Guilt and the sense of shame were used as repressive measures to control and manipulate communities. The daily examination of conscience is not to be carried out, therefore, with the severity of the Spanish Inquisition. It would be a self-defeating exercise were we to examine our conscience with extreme moral scrupulousness, berating ourselves because of peccadillos.

It is noteworthy that in the context of the examination of conscience, 'Abdu'l-Bahá presents a balanced view, looking at both sides of the scale. The positive note is sounded first with a recommendation to give thanks for spiritual progress attained.

If you see your belief is stronger and your heart more occupied with God and your love increased and your freedom from the world greater than thank God and ask for the increase of these qualities.<sup>90</sup>

The expression of thanksgiving is also conducive to spiritual advancement. When we thank God, we are giving praise. The more we are thankful for the bounties that we have received, the more we give praise, and the more the bounties increase: 'Be thou happy and well pleased and arise to offer thanks to God, in order that thanksgiving may conduce to the increase of bounty.'<sup>91</sup> 'Render continual thanks unto God so that the confirmations of God may encircle you all.'<sup>92</sup>

This is the century of science, inventions, discoveries and universal laws. This is the century of the revelation of the mysteries of God . . . Therefore, you must render thanks and glorification to God that you were born in this age. Furthermore you have listened to the call of Bahá'u'lláh . . . You were asleep; you are awakened. Your ears are attentive; your hearts are informed. You have acquired the love of God. You have attained to the knowledge of God. This is the most great bestowal of God.<sup>93</sup>

On the other side of the scale, if we find that we have done wrong, He says:

You must begin to pray and repent for all that you have done which is wrong and you must implore and ask for help and assistance that you may become better than yesterday so that you may continue to make progress.<sup>94</sup>

We should not be deceived by the child-like simplicity of these words which are the fundamennt of moral behaviour. We may have heard them many times from parents, teachers and elders, and we have heard them so often precisely because they are true. Yet, with all their simplicity, there is nothing harder to accomplish. There is a real distinction, however, between a sincere and temporary regret or remorse for wrongs done, regret that can be therapeutic or educational if it motivates us to correct the fault, and neurotic or excessive guilt that paralyses us while we wallow in self-pity, and create for ourselves a dammed up store of unhealthy energy that is often unleashed in the repetition of the mistake. It is admittedly difficult to decipher the irrational roots of self-condemnation, but suffice it to say that although self-examination is recommended in the Bahá'í Faith, self-condemna-

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tion definitely is not, for it is a travesty of our belief in God's love and heavenly compassion and over-exaggerates the importance of self.

These passages imply that to a great extent, we have the capacity to be our own spiritual directors of conscience, for Bahá'u'lláh also affirms that no one knows us better than we know ourselves.<sup>95</sup>

## *Models and Profiles of Spiritual Transformation*

### **The Model as a Configuration of Spiritual Reality**

The word ‘model’ normally denotes certain characteristics which are not typical of its use here. Scientists make thorough-going use of models to configure the dynamics of science. Scholars in the social sciences have borrowed the ‘model’ from the methods of hard science because they feel it will lend credibility to their work as conveying a more accurate representation of social reality. Although the model-method can be a useful didactic tool, it should be used carefully, especially in religious studies. While any work of scholarship should be scientific in its method, that is, orderly and methodical in a broad sense, the ‘hard’ scientific model aims for predictable, that is, more or less fixed or typical, patterns of behaviour. As such, it has certain limited uses compared with other methods to explain adequately spiritual reality or truth which is much more fluid, dynamic, on-going and alive.

Spiritual reality demonstrates a dynamic quality, an ‘*élan vital*’,<sup>1</sup> to use philosopher Henri Bergson’s expression; that is, an evolutionary process of transition, change, spiritual growth and development. I feel, therefore, that the model approach to Bahá’í theology is best suited to a logical-empirical cognitive (true/untrue) approach to spiritual questions, to a concern with logical consistency and verifiability. Historical, phenomenological (descriptive), speculative, interpretive or creative approaches to spiritual reality are perhaps better suited when the intent is to capture the variety and holistic nature of religious experience.

In a Bahá’í context, the use of the scientific model to explain metaphysical truths has already been advocated by Dr William S.

Hatcher. In 'The Scientific Revolution: Model Building' in *Logic and Logos*<sup>2</sup> Hatcher argues that the scientific model is a truer representation of reality. He characterizes the scientific revolution as a paradigm shift from mythical to model-building thinking. His advocacy of the model to explain spiritual and metaphysical concepts, while valid, has to be viewed with a certain caution. If model-building becomes pervasive as an approach to the study of religion, it runs the risk of becoming reductionist. The truths of religion and the experiences of faith are compromised when they are reduced to a quest to resolve the cognitive question. This approach creates, moreover, an unnecessarily restrictive unidimensional method that is inadequate to explicate the multi-parametered reality of religion. Hatcher's assumption, moreover, that myth stems from pre-logical thought, is based on an overly telescoped interpretation of the meaning of myth. Myth's predominant feature is narrative and the mythological symbols that feature in the unrolling of narrative, as mythologist Joseph Campbell has lucidly written, have an internal logic of their own.<sup>3</sup> While myth certainly depicts causes and events in nature and history that have long been rejected by science and historiography, structuralism, and to a lesser extent functionalism, have rendered intelligible the seemingly chaotic and random patterns of myth. Myths contain symbols that reflect profound truths about human existence and the workings of divine powers operant in the human psyche or spirit. Myth cannot be excluded from Bahá'í studies on the grounds that it belongs to a pre-scientific age.

Having stated this reservation about the use of the scientific model as it applies to religion, my use of model refers in its simplest sense to a pattern, that is, to a living model or experience, an experience that one seeks or wishes to recreate. This use approximates that of the artist who speaks of models for art. The artist hopes to capture a certain image on canvas, not as an exact representation, but as a creative interpretation. Further, my view of model – a view that is not incompatible with the artistic one – is one that is bolstered by phenomenology, defined by the philosopher Husserl (1859-1938) as a sustained and penetrating description or analysis of the *eidós*, the essence of a phenomenon intuited by the mind.<sup>4</sup> Phenomenology is also connected with conceptual analysis and with that part of existentialism that involves the study of being. It was further applied to the comparative study of religion where phenomena were described in detail,

analyzed and compared in an 'objective' manner. These latter applications are not, however, a direct concern of this study.

Two models are presented briefly here, although there are undoubtedly other possible configurations suggested by the Bahá'í writings: 1) the Lunar Phase Model of Illumination and 2) the New Birth Model or the Model of the Awakening. Both of these models are based on personal interpretations of passages in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The new birth model has obvious connections with Christ's teaching of rebirth. In the lunar phase mode, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's use of the analogy of the moon, an ancient symbol of the human psyche, to indicate the gradual process of spiritual transformation, is a striking and original approach to the question of spiritual growth which invites some explanation.

Both models involve not only spiritual transformation, but also changes in the perception of the believer, either sudden or gradual. There is a holistic quality to these two spiritual models; that is, they involve the whole person. Positive spiritual changes have notable effects primarily on the spirit, but these effects are immediately felt by the senses too as the faculty of perception. Although the Bahá'í model of the new birth shares some common features with the Christian experience, there are also certain marked differences between the Bahá'í and Christian understanding of new birth which shall be explicated below.

Although these two models are based on different paradigms, there are not iron-clad distinctions between them. Both models suggest a shift or transition from a lower to a higher state of consciousness. Further, these two models share essentially the common property of a transformation in the essence (soul) of the individual, or the experiencing of a fresh acquaintance with rare, dramatic and/or delightful or beautiful spiritual states, and the redirection of the individual's life along new ethical paths. The lunar model particularly indicates a gradual, developmental process. The new birth model, however, while it would seem to point to a sudden spiritual happening, is often precipitated by a lengthy period of spiritual gestation, of upheaval or ferment. The spiritual birth often occurs after an intense search or troubled episodes. Spiritual birth, like human birth itself, is sometimes dramatic or traumatic, or, by contrast, gentle. Thus we cannot affirm categorically that a spiritual birthing is either this or that, except that

it is a birth, that is, the most primary creative acts.

### **Approaches to Transformation in the World Religions: A Brief Examination**

The approach to, or the interpretation of, spiritual transformation varies considerably in the great world religions. The self-affirming concept that we are able to change ourselves is one that the Bahá'í Faith shares especially with its goal-oriented sister religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Although the notion of transformation exists in the religions of Asia, it takes on a very different meaning in them. Transformation is not to be understood as in the Abrahamic faiths as a behavioural change from A to B, but rather as a profound psychological adjustment. Indeed, these religions would view the very notion of 'spiritual transformation' as much too presumptuous a goal. In their view, to fix such a self-determining goal would be counterproductive to achieving it. Buddhism, for example, aims primarily at illumination as its great goal and a profound psychological adjustment to the suffering that besets us, one that will release from the 'tragic state of delusion' that leads us to believe that we can find contentment in the fulfilment of our ego drives.<sup>5</sup> Hinduism aims for the release (*Moksha*) from the cycle of birth and rebirth (*Samsara*) and the monism of the self (*Atman*) becoming absorbed into the impersonal Absolute (*Brahman*) indicated most typically in the *Chándogya Upanishad* by a conversation between Uddálaka Aruni and his son Svetaketu, through the lesson of the fig tree and its seeds and the salt in the water. Uddálaka Aruni after instructing Svetaketu to cut up some seeds from a fig tree and to dissolve a piece of salt in water affirms to his son that the essence of the seed and the essence of the salt, although invisible, are nonetheless in the seed and the water. Uddálaka Aruni then declares to his son the identification of Atman with Brahman: 'This finest essence – the whole universe has it as its Self: That is the Real: That is the Self: That *you* are, Svetaketu!'<sup>6</sup>

Taoism takes the position that in order to change ourselves what we have to do is *wu wei* ('not doing'), that is, to do nothing other than to liberate ourselves from volitional or purposeful action and become one with the pre-established harmony of the universe. In so doing we

will attain tranquillity. Lao Tzu (551-479 BC) says in the *Tao Te Ching*: 'Do that which consists in taking no action' and 'Without stirring abroad, one can know the whole world; without looking out of the window, one can see the way of heaven.'<sup>7</sup> Zen Buddhism aims at *Satori*, a brilliant flash of insight that is achieved with illumination. Zen, like Taoism, holds that 'one should not try to plan or manage one's life because not all of the goals will be reached, and only needless frustration will result'.<sup>8</sup> These faiths recommend a quietist approach, beautifully described in the *Zenrin Kushu* poem: 'Sitting quietly, doing nothing, Spring comes, and the grass grows by itself.'<sup>9</sup> All of them advise that one sit down to meditate quietly to free the mind from the busy currents of thought that vibrate through it.

Mainstream Christianity, the three main branches of Judaism and Islam could all subscribe to a quiet piety and ethics that may be encapsulated as simply doing the will of God and living humbly with man, or as the Ecclesiastes has it 'Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man'.<sup>10</sup> There are also charismatic versions of the three Judaic faiths that stress the manifestation of the in-dwelling Spirit of God as evidence of faith, either in born-again revivalist experiences or collective enthusiastic manifestations of the presence of the spirit. Attitudes towards piety and ethics in the three Abrahamic faiths, however, differ widely. Moral positions fluctuate greatly from hard-line and orthodox to the more 'liberal', while the orthodox would view some of the ethical positions of their co-religionists as simply permissive or blatantly sinful, especially in some churches of Protestant Christianity.~~or within other traditions~~

Generally speaking, the Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity, Islam and the Bahá'í Faith emphasize law and morality and obedience to the will of God. Within Christianity there is a strong emphasis on spiritual rebirth, grace and the salvific power of Christ. The western faiths are typically dichotomous in their view of the individual and we find in them contrasts between body and soul, matter and spirit. By contrast, the Asian faiths emphasize more the unity and harmony of the cosmos as a point of departure and attempt to bring the individual into harmony with that pre-existent force. With these religions, there is no belief in a highly individualized self who struggles either with itself and/or against the universe. In fact, for Buddhism, the self is a non-existent fiction:

Buddhism stands unique in the history of human thought in denying the existence of such a Soul, Self or *Atman*. According to the teaching of the Buddha, the idea of self is an imaginary, false belief which has no corresponding reality, and it produces harmful thoughts of 'me' and 'mine', selfish desire, craving, attachment, hatred, ill-will, conceit, pride, egoism, and other defilements, impurities and problems. It is the source of all the troubles in the world from personal conflicts to wars between nations. In short, to this false view can be traced all the evil in the world.<sup>11</sup>

The solution was to make the *Dhamma* and oneself a refuge, and to cultivate right mindfulness (meditation) which consisted of living in the present moment and of being a detached observer of one's own fluctuating emotions and states of mind. This teaching was set forth in the Buddha's key text on meditation and mental development, the *Satipatthána-sutta* ('The Setting-up of Mindfulness').

### The Alchemy of Spiritual Transformation

The models described below illustrate the processes of spiritual transformation. One meaning of transformation comes to us from the ancient art of alchemy. Alchemy, as one simple but cogent definition has it, 'combines spirituality with chemistry'.<sup>12</sup> In the West, alchemy originates from second century gnostic texts on metallurgy. In its early stages, at least, its intent was mostly technological.<sup>13</sup> The early texts on metallurgy invited a mystical interpretation which was consistent with the esoteric mind-set of the times.

The language of this mystical-symbolic interpretation of alchemist texts finds an exact echo in the Bahá'í writings. 'Abdu'l-Bahá uses the language of the alchemist when He speaks of the 'philosopher's stone',<sup>14</sup> and Bahá'u'lláh of the 'Divine Elixir',<sup>15</sup> the substance that could perform the feat of transforming base metals into gold. Bahá'u'lláh not only substantiated the alchemist's claim that it was possible to transform base metals into gold<sup>16</sup> – a practice that has now been scientifically carried out but has proven thus far too expensive – He carried the claim one step further by asserting that it is also possible to enable any metal to take on the properties of any other.<sup>17</sup> This may indicate symbolically that all things are in all things, that there is, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá said, an 'intrinsic oneness of all phenomena'.<sup>18</sup>

This mystical interpretation of the alchemical transformation of the base metals into gold is an eloquent comment on spiritual transformation. Based on this analogy, spiritual transformation points to a change in human nature, to gaining the state of spiritual perfection or attaining the immortality of the soul, since gold was once thought to be immutable and incorruptible, as is the soul once it has attained immortality. We are base metal, according to this logic. The Word of God as the Divine Elixir is able to transform us into pure gold, to empower us to become spiritual souls and like gold, to become incorruptible and everlasting. Bahá'u'lláh's usage of the terms of the alchemist implies all of this. Further, it is clear that Bahá'u'lláh sees Himself as the Divine Alchemist who is able to effect this change within the individual human soul as well as within whole societies through the Divine Elixir of His revelation.

In alchemy this transformation was called 'transmutation' and it is with this sense of the word that we come closest to the meaning of spiritual transformation. Transmutation means to change in nature, to effect a change in substance, to alter in essence, but it also includes the more literal meanings of a change in form or energy. Thus, when we speak about spiritual transformation in the human being, we refer to a basic change in nature or activity. Bahá'u'lláh has used this very word 'transmute' in connection with the 'Divine Elixir' (Word of God) as an alchemical agent of transformation: 'Such is the potency of the Divine Elixir, which, swift as the twinkling of an eye, transmuteth the souls of men!'<sup>19</sup> This powerful phrase of Bahá'u'lláh points to the instantaneous change wrought by the Divine Elixir, the Word of God. The alchemical analogy of spiritual transformation includes the basic notion that there must be a transforming agent. The concept of a transforming agent is fundamental to spiritual transformation. The individual must labour in the work of self-transformation. That much is clear. But at the same time, the individual cannot, in the Bahá'í understanding, by his or her own unaided efforts, effect a spiritual transformation of self. He may, if he wishes, call on purely human mentors and their writings to assist in the change. Yet he will travel further by calling upon the divine Manifestation for assistance, for the divine Manifestation is the perfect vehicle to effect spiritual transformation and is the great reservoir of compassion, spiritual graces and powers who longs to come to our assistance to effect the transformation

we desire.

The Bahá'í writings assure us of the possibility of self-transformation, a process which is dependent upon our observance of certain spiritual teachings and practices. Shoghi Effendi Rabbáni (1897-1957), the head and Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith from 1921 to 1957, wrote to an individual believer who had sought his counsel on the means of spiritual growth and was assured of the possibility of spiritual transformation:

He wishes again to assure you he will pray for your spiritual advancement in the Holy Shrines. The power of God can entirely transmute our characters and make of us beings entirely unlike our previous selves.<sup>20</sup>

Shoghi Effendi went on to outline a formula which, while brief, can be viewed as a guide for spiritual transformation:

Through prayer and supplication, obedience to the divine laws Bahá'u'lláh has revealed, and ever-increasing service to His Faith, we can change ourselves.<sup>21</sup>

These points, along with the preceding passage, indicate a four-point formula for spiritual transformation:

- 1) Faith in the power of God
- 2) Prayer and supplication
- 3) Obedience to divine laws
- 4) Service to the Cause

Similarly, the Universal House of Justice, the supreme governing body of the Bahá'í Faith, set out 'the essential requisites for our spiritual growth':

- 1) The recital each day of one of the Obligatory Prayers with pure-hearted devotion.
- 2) The regular reading of the Sacred Scriptures, specifically at least each morning and evening, with reverence, attention and thought.
- 3) Prayerful meditation on the teachings, so that we may understand them more deeply, fulfil them more faithfully and convey them more accurately to others.
- 4) Strive every day to bring our behaviour more into accordance with the high standards that are set forth in the teachings.
- 5) Teaching the Cause of God.
- 6) Selfless service in the work of the Cause and in the carrying on of

our trade or profession.<sup>22</sup>

The Universal House of Justice wished to 'stress them, because they represent the path towards the attainment of true spirituality that has been laid down by the Manifestation of God for this age'.<sup>23</sup>

It has to be pointed out, however, that one cannot simplistically apply a formula and expect instantaneous or perfect results. The believer must also have ready a philosophy of crisis to see him through the tests of life or simply draw upon his strength to endure and persevere in the path of spiritual development and self realization.

### The Mystical Dimension

I infer that there is something belonging to the mystical realm in the two models outlined below; namely, some mystery in the perceptible changes that come about, a mystery that escapes rationalization. A consideration of the place of the mystical dimension in Bahá'í understanding will, consequently, be made briefly. With the two models proposed, we are clearly in that realm of the ineffable and mysterious but also the ultimately real. Without here going into some of the more usual definitions of mystical experience, and without entering into a long discussion on the validity of the experience itself, it might prove useful to make a few observations about the subject generally.

Mystical experience needs no justification from a Bahá'í viewpoint. That it is certainly a difficult subject all will recognize. Certain cautions about mystical experience have been observed by Shoghi Effendi, the main one being that there is a danger of imaginary, self-generated, mystical experience. God rather than self, would be the author of the rare 'deeply spiritual experience'.<sup>24</sup> Shoghi Effendi maintained, however, that visions are not confined to the prophets alone but stated that it is difficult to distinguish between imaginations and true visions. Whatever 'revelations' an individual may have, however, cannot be construed as constituting *infallible* guidance, which is reserved for the prophets alone.<sup>25</sup> Personal inclination, moreover, may not draw us to the subject; but despite its extreme subjectivity, a subjectivity that has often been a target for criticism, we cannot simply ignore mysticism either, even less argue against it. One of the three major works of Bahá'u'lláh,<sup>26</sup> the *Seven Valleys*, is a mystical treatise, and much of the

tenor of Bahá'u'lláh's writing is cast in a mystical vein.

It is regrettable that very little Bahá'í scholarship to date has explored the topic of mysticism in a positive light and very few Bahá'ís have written personal accounts of mystical experiences. Such accounts would make valuable inroads into the phenomenon of mysticism from a Bahá'í point of view. This current scarcity of personal testimony indicates either the rarity of the experience or a hesitancy to express such experiences in the public forum of writing – I suspect the latter – although one Bahá'í book incidentally contains mystical experiences of western seekers who have become Bahá'ís.<sup>27</sup>

The value of mystical experience for spiritual transformation is real enough. For one thing, mysticism is clearly linked to prayer, although one would not be justified in reducing mysticism to prayer alone. Many mystical experiences also occur in the dream state. Prayer itself in Bahá'í teaching is defined as 'that mystic feeling which unites man with God' which lies at the 'core of religious faith'.<sup>28</sup> However, spiritual attributes or states of mind such as experiencing the majesty, awe, or power of God, rebirth, true thankfulness, divine compassion, love of God, fear of God, repentance, deliverance, fellowship with the True Friend, evanescence, bliss, etc., – attributes that are just a name for many, – are for the mystic the real thing. Although the mystic may be the proverbial rare bird, he has had a concrete rather than theoretical experience of the spiritual world and has come to know its truths and experiences, truths and experiences of which few are able to tell. It is because of this concrete experience of the spiritual realm that the testimony of the mystic is so valuable to the community. The mystic is a witness to the reality of the spiritual world and to the divine Manifestation and can, consequently, be a source of comfort, guidance and encouragement to all who seek the spiritual dimension. Too much has been made of the 'ineffable' and subjective nature of the mystic's world. We have but to peruse the writings of the mystics over the centuries to realize that they have given us illuminating and concise descriptions of their experiences, although many of them insist that their words come nowhere near the mark of describing the actual experience.

One of the more pervasive, false stereotypes about mystics is that they do nothing but contemplate. A review of the lives of the mystics and saints reveals that many of them were very active in their religious

communities and in the life of society. St Francis of Assisi (1181/2-1226), for example, did much more than just pray when he founded the Franciscan order. He and his monks were actively involved in what we would call today 'peaceful conflict resolution'. He attempted to establish peace between warring factions of the towns of his native Italy. One such incident occurred on 15 August 1222 in the public square of Bologna. St Francis preached a sermon on 'Angles, men, demons' to almost the entire population of the city. Afterwards, the noble families of the city, who had been engaged in ancient bloody quarrels, were reconciled. The Franciscans also performed a similar peace mission in the town of Arezzo.<sup>29</sup> St Vincent de Paul (c.1580-1660), another example, was a highly practical and unusually active man, doing his best to bring the kingdom of God on earth. Among other things, this busy man founded the Lazirite Fathers and, with St Louise de Marillac, the congregation of the Sisters of Charity, the first uncloistered women to care for the sick and poor. He is perhaps best known for the Society of St Vincent de Paul, founded in 1883, the lay organization that bears his name and is dedicated to the service of the poor. Captured by pirates in 1605 and sold into slavery in Tunisia for two years, this canonized saint accomplished many prodigious works. Among other things, he redeemed thousands of slaves on the African coast, helped to cleanse the Mediterranean from the gangs of pirates that had infested it, reformed the clergy, assisted in the spiritualization of the common lay Catholic, sent his Sisters of Charity to mission among rough soldiers, and founded several charitable enterprises.<sup>30</sup> His life proves that mysticism is not incompatible with active service.

What has been perhaps overlooked in the life of the mystics is the teaching function that they exercised, usually with individuals or small groups, either through the witness of their lives or through the power of their words. Anyone who has had a genuine mystical experience, an event that cannot be mistaken for counterfeit, has much to contribute to enrich our understanding of the theologies and spiritualities that enable us to learn something of the nature of God and to follow the practicalities of the spiritual life, thus assisting us to draw closer to the Creator. Mystics, moreover, are still among us. The respected Canadian Jungian therapist Dr Marion Woodman, a healer of the distressed psyches of women, was as a child very much in touch with the angels and continues to be guided by her 'inner voices' and

spiritual intuitions. In *The Feminine Face of God*, an account of the spiritual histories of several prominent women in religion, Woodman relates that as a child she used to 'talk to the angels': 'They told me about how flowers grew and about all the things that went on out in the garden, and about relationships. I would sit by the kitchen window while my mother was ironing and relate to her what the angels were saying to me.'<sup>31</sup> As a child, Marion became strangely aware of the hidden things in people's lives which she would quite often openly declare, to the embarrassment both of her parents and of those who were the objects of these personal insights, although her Scots minister father was more accepting of her gift. When Marion grew up she 'never lost touch with the inner voices', as she now came to call them. A painful but welcome conversion experience in a crypt of St Paul's cathedral in London confirmed Marion in the Anglican church and allowed her to become reconciled to herself, to 'come face-to-face with her fear of being judged unworthy by the divine' which she had perceived until then mainly through the prism of the authoritarian masculine figure. Although Woodman never fully subscribed to church dogma, from that time on she began to explore more fully Sophia and *Shekhinah* (Heb.), the feminine aspects of divinity. Becoming reconciled to herself assisted her to become the expert healer of troubled souls that she is today.<sup>32</sup>

Following here, then, are four brief points stated as objections to mysticism, each with a response. As a Bahá'í who wishes to do so may pursue mystical experience through the spiritual discipline of the methods outlined in the Bahá'í writings,<sup>33</sup> one can feel at ease with such an approach since the Bahá'í Faith also has built in a formula of 'checks and balances' which, when observed, will prevent the excesses and imbalances that have occurred with certain types of mysticism in the past.

*Objection: The mystical experience is indescribable so it is a waste of time to discuss it.*

*Response:* The words may fall short but the many varieties of mystical experience have been described in great detail by the mystics and have contributed a rich literature. These experiences can serve as inspiration for our own spiritual undertakings.

*Objection: Bahá'u'lláh wrote the Seven Valleys for future generations. Only He knows what it means and He wrote this work only as an example of unattainable experiences for our own inspiration.*

**Response:** In an absolute sense, only Bahá'u'lláh knows what He meant when He wrote this work. It is true that much of it escapes us. Yet the *Seven Valleys* was written for His followers in order that they might follow and discover the mystical path it outlines. He has, moreover, indicated that we should follow its path: ‘Peace be upon those who walk in the Right Path!’<sup>34</sup> The mystical path constitutes an achievable spiritual discipline and is not merely a privileged experience reserved for the very few. Dr David Starr Jordan’s comment about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá indicates that one can combine mysticism with pragmatism: “‘Abdu’l-Bahá will surely unite the East and the West: for He treads the mystic way with practical feet.’<sup>35</sup>

*Objection: Mystical experience can become self-indulgent, repressive, even degraded.*

**Response:** In the Sufi and Hindu traditions, mystics often become beggars in order to subsist. They live either in isolation or in closed communities and are consequently of little benefit to society. If a Bahá’í chooses to follow the mystical path, he or she must observe certain practices which are articles of Bahá’í law. No one can become a professional mystic in the Bahá’í Faith or claim any special station other than servant to humanity. Every Bahá’í must earn a living by dint of diligent labour and become a source of social good. Marriage is highly recommended and children are seen as the purpose of wedlock in order ‘that ye may bring forth one who will make mention of Me amid My servants’.<sup>36</sup> Asceticism and severe discipline are forbidden in the Bahá’í Faith. Most importantly, however, spiritual experiences cannot be pursued in isolation from the laws of God and ethical behaviour. It is clear from what Bahá'u'lláh has written that ethical excellence, social intercourse and fellowship with the community must be close companions of anyone who chooses to follow the mystical path. The one must follow the other.

*Objection: Mystical experience is too subjective to be of any value for those who wish to analyze it as a mode of knowledge.*

Response: That mysticism is subjective should not be an impediment to its study or the inclination to experience it. Great literature is also written from a subjective point of view, as is great music. The arts are subjective. In this subjectivity the mystic is closer to the creative artist than to the scientist. This does not mean, however, that the mystic mode and any knowledge it conveys does not fall within the realm of *scientia* (knowledge). Clearly it does. Mystical experience can be analyzed like any other form of experience or knowledge. An over-concern to verify the nature or validity of mystical experience, or to cast doubt upon it, is often merely a disguised attempt to reduce it to a cognitive perception of reality, with a preoccupation to 'prove', disprove or dismiss. We do not verify great art or literature. Mysticism in this respect resembles the creative arts: we experience it. As to the spurious nature of certain mystical experiences, it is certainly true that mental pathology mimics true mystical experience, but those experiences that have retained our attention in the long annals of mystical literature do not strike us as counterfeit coin, nor do the lives of those who have had such experiences, in spite of the severe mental stresses that have afflicted some of them, conform to the pattern of mental pathology.

### Mysticism and the Deed

The practice of the good deed, it is important to point out, takes precedence over the mystical experience. Its value is therefore relative to the practice of ethical virtues and goodly conduct. Although the Bahá'í Faith recognizes the value of mystical experience in the life of faith, spiritual experiences, however significant they may be to the believer, are not to be sought after as the ultimate purpose of life. It is the daily 'walk with God', the faith-transformed character demonstrated in concrete action that is the touchstone of faith. Moral integrity and spirituality share a higher priority than mystical experience on the scale of Bahá'í values, although it is not to be denied that a genuine mystical experience can be so dramatic as to alter profoundly our sense of ourselves, our understanding of God and the world, and our moral and spiritual values. Spiritual experiences, for the fortunate ones who have them, can, it is hoped, be translated into concrete actions. Such experiences, however, do not become the yardstick by which faith is

measured. Spiritual experiences may assist us in our journey towards God but they are not the journey itself.

### The Lunar Phase Model of Illumination

'Abdu'l-Bahá, in a rare and beautiful analogy which uses the ancient symbol of light, compares the process of spiritual transformation to the four lunar phases:

Know thou, verily, the brilliant realities and sanctified spirits are likened to a shining crescent. It has one face turned toward the Sun of Truth, and another face opposite to the contingent world. The journey of this crescent in the heaven of the universe ends in (becoming) a full moon. That is, that face of it which is turned toward the divine world becomes also opposite to the contingent world, and by this, both its merciful and spiritual, as well as contingent, perfections become complete.<sup>37</sup>

Light may stand variously for knowledge, guidance, purity or virtuous living, or all these things, or the rays of the Holy Spirit which are beamed down upon the human soul. George Townshend, the most distinguished Bahá'í writer in the western world and Hand of the Cause of God, interpreted the light of the waxing moon in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's analogy as a symbol of 'detachment from the world'.<sup>38</sup> We can understand Townshend's meaning of light as detachment if we consider that the more we are filled with light, the more we become detached from the womb of the natural self and the further we travel along the path of attachment to God and His good pleasure.

During the first phase of the waxing moon, the crescent moon represents the believer's first turning to God. This can be understood as the condition of initial belief in God or the early glow of the light of the consciousness of faith. In the second phase the light intensifies when the believer recognizes the station of the Manifestation of God. The soul's earthward face, however, is still in shadow, indicating the persistence of old habits and darker mental predispositions. In the third phase the moon of the soul gradually becomes fuller with the consistent and patient practice of spiritual virtues expressed in a life of service. In the fourth, full moon phase, the moon has come to fulfil its true potential by being a full and 'perfect' reflection of the light of the sun. This phase corresponds to the fully spiritual person, the true Bahá'í,

the heroic soul, the ‘true believer’ or Townshend’s ‘spiritually mature soul’.<sup>39</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has defined the ‘true believer’ as: 1) ‘the one who follows the Manifestation of God in all things’<sup>40</sup> and 2) as one who ‘brings forth leaves and fruit, proving that the life principle within him has been awakened and quickened’.<sup>41</sup> Bahá’u’lláh has further indicated the superlative station that the true believer in His revelation occupies:

By the sorrows which afflict the beauty of the All-Glorious! Such is the station ordained for the true believer that if to an extent smaller than a needle’s eye the glory of that station were to be unveiled to mankind, every beholder would be consumed away in his longing to attain it.<sup>42</sup>

Shoghi Effendi has also made the remarkable statement that the true believer in the Bahá’í revelation enjoys the same station as that conferred upon the lesser prophets of Israel and Judah. Such a superlative claim is indicative of the greatness of the Bahá’í dispensation as the culmination of the religions of the past and attests to the mighty outpouring of grace with which Providence has infused the Bahá’í revelation:

The station which he who hath truly recognized this Revelation will attain is the same as the one ordained for such prophets of the house of Israel as are not regarded as Manifestations endowed with constancy'.<sup>43</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s analogy of the lunar phases is both a succinct and evocative way to indicate the gradual, mysterious, almost imperceptible nature of the individual’s spiritual growth. The phases of the moon are not clear-cut segments, like those of a puzzle. They merge one into the other, all in a gradual process. The stages in the growth of the soul, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has elsewhere said, are not categorical. The soul progresses, not in categories or degrees, but in its state. This transcending of stages or degrees of spiritual development indicates that the soul operates under laws of its own which lie outside the categories of thought that usually typify our understanding of the growth process: ‘The soul does not evolve from degree to degree as a law – it only evolves nearer to God, by the Mercy and Bounty of God.’<sup>44</sup>

Using the lunar phase model, then, as an understanding of spiritual growth, the Bahá’í view of transformation is one of a phased process. This process is really the work of a lifetime and begins at the moment one becomes conscious that one is a spiritual being endowed with an

immortal soul. There is never an end to this process until the soul, after the death of the body, finally attains immutability and timelessness in the presence of God.

Know thou of a truth that the soul, after its separation from the body, will continue to progress until it attaineth the presence of God, in a state and condition which neither the revolution of ages and centuries, nor the changes and chances of this world, can alter.<sup>45</sup>

### The New Birth Model of the Awakening

As we have seen, 'the power of God can entirely transmute our characters and make of us beings entirely unlike our previous selves,'<sup>46</sup> as Shoghi Effendi asserts, or, in the words of Jesus to the incredulous Pharisee, Nicodemus, cause us to be 'born again'.<sup>47</sup> According to Christ, the individual, in order to find a fullness of life and life everlasting, must believe in Him (Jesus) and through the power of faith, transcend the natural order and believe in the Spirit and the power of the kingdom or spiritual world. It is belief in Him and in His world that constitutes the new birth. Christ's words can also be taken to mean deliverance from the rule of nature; that is, breaking the bonds of the subjugation of the natural person by the spiritual person.

New birth is a teaching that is not only consonant with the Christian Faith, it is also specifically taught in the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, in words reminiscent of Jesus:

Until man is born again from the world of nature, that is to say, becomes detached from the world of nature, he is essentially an animal, and it is the teachings of God which convert this animal into a human soul.<sup>48</sup>

Confirming the words of Christ, 'Abdu'l-Bahá further says:

As the babe is born into the light of this physical world, so must the physical and intellectual man be born into the light of the world of Divinity.<sup>49</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá also spoke of the second birth in response to a question about how to train children to be unselfish. Without conversion of the Holy Spirit, He stated, man is 'like an animal, a fierce animal'.<sup>50</sup>

This is why His Holiness Christ says that we must be born again. When man is born from the womb of the mother he is freed from material

darkness. In the same way he must be born from the world of nature so that he may become free from the darkness of the world of nature. This is the second birth . . . When his spirit overcomes his body, the second birth takes place and he becomes freed from imperfections. He becomes filled with virtues.<sup>51</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh Himself declares in one of His meditations that His followers have been 'born again' by the waters of the Spirit:

I render Thee thanks, therefore, and extol Thee, in the name of all them that are dear to Thee, for that Thou hast caused them to be born again, by reason of the living waters which have flowed down out of the mouth of Thy will.<sup>52</sup>

The symbol 'living waters' employed by Bahá'u'lláh here is identical to that of Jesus: 'Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.'<sup>53</sup> Water can be viewed as the active power of the Holy Spirit. In another of His meditations Bahá'u'lláh prays that 'all the dwellers of Thine earth and heaven may be born anew . . .'.<sup>54</sup>

The new birth experience has definite affinities with the awakening of Bahá'u'lláh's 'true seeker' who, like an amazed Rip Van Winkle,<sup>55</sup> is roused after years of slumber to experience a new world of joy and certitude as a delighted traveller in a glorious antique land and who is by the moment discovering a new creation:

At that hour will the mystic Herald, bearing the joyful tidings of the Spirit, shine forth from the City of God resplendent as the morn, and, through the trumpet-blast of knowledge, will awaken the heart, the soul, and the spirit from the slumber of negligence. Then will the manifold favours and outpouring grace of the holy and everlasting Spirit confer such new life upon the seeker that he will find himself endowed with a new eye, a new ear, a new heart, and a new mind.<sup>56</sup>

It is this passage, perhaps more than any other, that speaks to us of a radical change in perception brought about by new birth. More than any other is birth a creative act, for it holds the promise of new perceptions and powers and the experience of a heretofore unknown world. New birth also indicates a heightened state of mind, a fortified sense of power and purpose, or an increased awareness of the presence of divine love breaking in on us.

For Bahá'ís, it is faith in Bahá'u'lláh that generates the experience

of the new birth, faith as ‘conscious knowledge’ that one has found ultimate meaning and final purpose, faith in the salvation of the soul, and the joy and certitude of having discovered the truth of Bahá’u’lláh’s revelation. Through faith in Him we enter ‘real Paradise’ and through faith in Him we attain unto the presence of God.<sup>7</sup>

The new birth is often preceded, however, by two things: 1) troubled times and 2) the search for truth. Sometimes the two go hand in hand. If we focus on the mysterious, dramatic or miraculous aspect of the experience of new birth, we can easily overlook the significance of the labour pains that have precipitated the experience and may indeed follow it. Spiritual labour often precedes spiritual birth. This labour may take on a variety of forms: a troubled life without spiritual values, a meaningless, unhappy or confused existence. Sorrow, moreover, is often the precursor to positive transformation.

### **Comparing the Bahá’í and Christian Experience of New Birth**

The Bahá’í Faith follows Christianity in its understanding of the Holy Spirit as the agent and catalyst of new birth. A catalyst has the characteristic of precipitating change while remaining unchanged itself. In modern day Christianity, however, the phrase ‘born again’ remains associated with evangelical churches, some of which are fundamentalist.<sup>8</sup> Within evangelical Christianity, the uniform experience of being ‘born again’ is one that the believer *must* have in order to be accepted as a member of the community. This stereotypical experience has become a religio-cultural determinant and acts as a *rite de passage* or password. By comparison, being ‘born again’ is not a normative experience for entry into the Bahá’í Faith; one does not have to have such a characteristically uniform experience in order to become a Bahá’í.

What the evangelical ‘born again’ experience seems to deny, with its once and for all version of rebirth, is the whole growth process involved in spiritual development, a process that takes place over time and expresses itself throughout the various stages that lead to spiritual maturation and wisdom. Being ‘born again’ is the ‘falling in love’ stage of spiritual experience. The evangelical media men present their version of rebirth as being the apex and final destination of a journey to God rather than a beginning. While rebirth testifies to the power of

the Spirit and is an ancient proof of God's love, it is not the proof of the believer's enduring love for God. It is stage one love. As a 'religion of enthusiasm', 'born again' Christianity makes rebirth the centre and focus of Christian experience, rather than the humble beginnings of a lifelong process. The media-orchestrated experience of rebirth, moreover, often turns the dignity of the faith experience into a shabby vaudeville sideshow or maudlin melodrama. Rebirth *şekş* to live in the now but it forgets the possibilities of time. Time can be one of the greatest allies in the process of spiritual development, for only time can bring experience, and experience greatly enriches and deepens the life of faith as nothing else can. Time is required for the real problem-solving that is an integral part of transformation, albeit the most weighty problems of life, according to Carl Jung, are never completely resolved: 'The serious problems of life, however, are never fully solved.'<sup>59</sup>

The Bahá'í Faith, while it affirms the validity of the 'born again' experience, looks upon it as a gradual development. Spiritual transformation occurs throughout a number of seasons, seasons that demand of us much patience and an increase of wisdom. Although some Bahá'ís have indeed experienced new birth in a dramatic conversion or peak spiritual experience,<sup>60</sup> we should be wary of thinking that the process of conversion is complete with one sudden and dramatic spiritual act, no matter how meaningful. Conversion may be seen as the beginning rather than the end of a journey or as a very meaningful watershed in the voyage towards God. 'Conversion', Shoghi Effendi has said, 'is after all a slow process.'<sup>61</sup> We should be wary, therefore, of viewing the new birth experience as a 'once and for all', 'be all and end all' event and should not be surprised if old habits still linger on after the experience of new birth. And although often advertised as such, the new birth experience has proven to be no guarantee of a complete and permanent moral rectitude, as the experiences of some prominent 'born again' members of the church have occasionally sadly demonstrated.<sup>62</sup> We must distinguish, consequently, the rapidity of the supernatural experience of being 'born again' from the much longer process of the transformation of character that comes by dint of human effort and which is beset with constant challenges.

Within Christianity, the new birth model is often presented as an

experience of grace, as if it were independent of spiritual labour. The practice of spiritual virtue, however, is demanded by new birth, virtue that requires more than mere continual proclamations of joy and thanksgiving. New birth, while it may be dramatic for some, is not so for others, for the topography of rebirth is greatly diverse. For some, rebirth will mean simply new or dramatic understandings, clear insights or fresh spiritual discoveries. For others, it will signify some unique spiritual victory or experience, a more acute awareness of living by the will of God or the exercise of some spiritual virtue previously latent. Still others may find that new birth is a passage from doubt into certitude or the experience of new heights and depths of love or joy.

It is worthwhile to pause here and summarize the Bahá'í understanding of new birth:

- 1) It comes about under the aegis of the Holy Spirit.
- 2) It is characterized by a significant or qualitative raising of consciousness.
- 3) The experience is characterized by a feeling of joy or well-being and by marked positive differences in one's perception.
- 4) It is characterized by a feeling of certitude that one has found God in His latest Manifestation, Bahá'u'lláh.
- 5) The new birth is often preceded or followed by a period of search or inquiry and often by episodes of confusion, aimlessness or difficulties.
- 6) The new birth is a lengthy process that takes place over time and leads one through many stages and valleys but always towards the goal of spiritual fulfilment.

At bottom, however, as Christ indicated, there is a mystery involved in the whole process, a mystery that lifts it out of the natural or mental sphere of things and places it squarely into the dynamic workings of the supernatural order:

The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.<sup>63</sup>

### **'Abdu'l-Bahá: The Model for Humanity**

'Abdu'l-Bahá (1844-1921), one of the three central figures of the Bahá'í

Faith, is a unique personage in the history of religion. Past ages have never seen His like; future ages will never witness such a personage again. What makes 'Abdu'l-Bahá unique is the consummate blending of divine and human attributes in His personality. Bahá'u'lláh's son specifically rejected the claim that He was a prophetic figure of any description, either a major one in the station of the divine logos or one of the company of minor prophets which 'receive the bounty of the independent Prophets', and which 'profit by the light of the Guidance of the universal Prophets'.<sup>64</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá has qualified His own station as that of servitude, 'a servitude which is complete, pure and real, firmly established, enduring, obvious, explicitly revealed and subject to no interpretation whatever . . . I am the Interpreter of the Word of God; such is my interpretation'.<sup>65</sup>

As Shoghi Effendi has pointed out and made clear, however, 'Abdu'l-Bahá occupies such a transcendent station that He cannot be regarded merely as an interpreter and as one of the servants:

To regard Him in such a light is a manifest betrayal of the priceless heritage bequeathed by Bahá'u'lláh to mankind. Immeasurably exalted is the station conferred upon Him by the Supreme Pen above and beyond the implications of these, His own written statements.<sup>66</sup>

Shoghi Effendi states that 'above and beyond' 'Abdu'l-Bahá's many titles<sup>67</sup> He is the Mystery of God, a designation which indicates that in His person the 'incompatible characteristics of a human nature and superhuman knowledge and perfection have been blended and are completely harmonized'.<sup>68</sup> Although, as Shoghi Effendi has stated, we are not justified in assigning to 'Abdu'l-Bahá the station of prophethood, it is clear that 'superhuman knowledge and perfection' are qualities that we might normally associate with prophethood. Had 'Abdu'l-Bahá not interpreted His own station to the contrary, it is also clear that much of what Bahá'u'lláh wrote about Him could have easily been interpreted as assigning 'Abdu'l-Bahá prophetic status:

We have made Thee a shelter for all mankind, a shield unto all who are in heaven and on earth, a stronghold for whosoever hath believed in God, the Incomparable, the All-Knowing. God grant that through Thee He may protect them, may enrich and sustain them, that He may inspire Thee with that which shall be a wellspring of wealth unto all created

things, an ocean of bounty unto all men, and the dayspring of mercy unto all peoples.<sup>69</sup>

Although He made no such claim to prophethood, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was such a majestic and awe-inspiring figure that many people who saw Him concluded that He was a prophet, a judgement 'Abdu'l-Bahá took pains to dispel. Indeed, some of the early American Bahá'ís had been too quick to conclude that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was the second coming of Christ, which prompted this statement from the Centre of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant:

Gracious God! Time and again this question hath arisen, and its answer hath emanated in a clear and irrefutable statement from the pen of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, that what is meant in the prophecies by the 'Lord of Hosts' and the 'Promised Christ' is the Blessed Perfection (Bahá'u'lláh) and His holiness the Exalted One (the Báb).<sup>70</sup>

That 'Abdu'l-Bahá had to make such a denial is a sure indication that He was perceived to be a prophet by those who had the privilege to meet Him. This much is clear from the several records of personal encounters with 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

One person who had such a response was the noted Bahá'í writer Stanwood Cobb. At Green Acre Bahá'í School in 1977 Cobb, who at that time was in his nineties, was asked what he thought of 'Abdu'l-Bahá now that he was able to look upon Him from the vantage point of many years. He replied, overcome with emotion, 'Well, if I told you what I really thought you would find it reprehensible.' When asked what he meant by the statement, he replied, 'If 'Abdu'l-Bahá had not specifically denied being a prophet, as far as I was concerned, He was. He moved with the ease of the king, was as free as a bird and did just as He pleased.' What pleased 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as He often stated, was, of course, to do the will of His father. But what Cobb perceived in 'Abdu'l-Bahá was a kingly freedom and majestic power which indicated to him that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was master of His fate in a way that no ordinary man was and possessed a freedom and a power that Cobb could only associate with what we might call a prophet.

While 'Abdu'l-Bahá is not a prophet, neither is He just a perfected human being, a kind of Weberian 'ideal type' or a Nietzschean spiritual *Obermensch* (superman). The ill-founded notion that He might be is based on an exaggerated belief in the perfectibility of the human race;

that in time a whole race of individuals could attain the perfection of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Shoghi Effendi's statement that 'Abdu'l-Bahá fulfils a 'unique function'<sup>71</sup> within the history of religion belies such a suggestion. Such a fanciful idea is also clearly countered by these words of Bahá'u'lláh, for we can scarcely imagine such exalted words being applied to the individuals compromising the generality of humanity, spiritually perfected though they may be:

Render thanks unto God, O people, for His appearance; for verily He is the most great Favour unto you, the most perfect bounty upon you; and through Him every mouldering bone is quickened. Whoso turneth towards Him hath turned towards God, and whoso turneth away from Him hath turned away from My Beauty, hath repudiated My Proof, and transgressed against Me. He is the Trust of God amongst you, His charge within you, His manifestation unto you and His appearance among His favoured servants . . .<sup>72</sup>

For the purposes of our spiritual transformation, it is 'Abdu'l-Bahá's designations as 'the perfect Exemplar of His [Bahá'u'lláh's] teachings . . . the embodiment of every Bahá'í ideal, the incarnation of every Bahá'í virtue'<sup>73</sup> that carry special significance. Spiritual aspirants can find in 'Abdu'l-Bahá the true role model.

A role model must possess several important qualities. The model must be ideal, but genuinely ideal, that is, there must be no discrepancy between the saying and the doing, between 'talking the talk' and 'walking the walk'. The model must be absolutely credible and present a way of life that is worthy of deep admiration and which the aspirant longs to imitate. The model must also be accessible and approachable, that is, close enough to ordinary human beings through the model's genuine humanity but at the same time representing a higher spiritual perception, moral integrity and way of life.

As to the approachability and accessibility of the role model, we come to an important point in our consideration of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the true model of spirituality: His overwhelming and approachable humanity. At a higher level, many feel that Bahá'u'lláh is too clouded over with a transcendent holiness for them to be able in some way to follow His example. This does not mean that Bahá'u'lláh is unapproachable. On the contrary, many sincere seekers have come to know Him in prayer, through His teachings and in the mighty sacrifices He made during His life-long imprisonment and exile. Yet 'Abdu'l-Bahá

is closer to us in time and in space. Bahá'u'lláh died in the late nineteenth century, while 'Abdu'l-Bahá shared our age, surviving into the twenty-second year of the twentieth. Although their numbers are dwindling, there are still Bahá'ís living who knew 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Further, although we have historical records of the life of Bahá'u'lláh which include some anecdotal accounts, what Bahá'u'lláh's life was on a day-to-day basis is something that remains to a great extent closed to us. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, by contrast, lived out His life under public scrutiny. As the representative and deputy of His Father during the days of exile, as the Centre of His Faith in Haifa and during His teaching tours in Europe and America when He met the notables of His age, 'Abdu'l-Bahá came under the test of daily public scrutiny and won the hearts of all who knew Him, except those few enemies who were tortured by jealousy, envy and hate. By all accounts, there was no discrepancy between the word and the deed, between principle and practice. 'Abdu'l-Bahá was the living embodiment of all that He taught. He was, however, much more than that, representing an image of God that had never walked upon the earth, the Mystery of God.

'Abdu'l-Bahá advised all those who believed in Him to follow His example: '... look at Me, follow Me, be as I am.'<sup>74</sup> By attempting to exemplify the spiritual virtues that the Master manifested, by familiarizing ourselves with His life, and while remembering at the same time that we are not He and that we are as 'radically different' from Him as He is from Bahá'u'lláh,<sup>75</sup> we can begin to approach the living of the Bahá'í life. He is, as Annamarie Kunz Honnold calls Him, a 'Spiritual Genius'.<sup>76</sup> Honnold had the unique privilege of meeting 'Abdu'l-Bahá when she went as a child on pilgrimage to Haifa in 1921 with her parents, Dr and Mrs Jakob Kunz, and was blessed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá when He revealed a prayer for her and her sister Margaret K. Ruhe.<sup>77</sup>

Mrs Honnold presents 'Abdu'l-Bahá's spirituality to her readers through a rich collection of 'vignettes' – stories, sayings and comments – each exemplifying a spiritual virtue in the life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, each virtue based on a historical anecdote. She states that the three overarching spiritual attributes of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's life were His purity, kindness and radiance, three attributes based on the first Hidden Word of Bahá'u'lláh: 'O Son of Spirit! My first counsel is this: Possess a pure, kindly and radiant heart, that thine may be a sovereignty

ancient, imperishable and everlasting.'<sup>78</sup> She then goes on to illustrate the following litany of ethical and spiritual virtues in the life of 'Abbás Effendi: selflessness, humility, simplicity, cleanliness, patience, fortitude, integrity, sincerity, purity, kindness, discipline, forgiveness, sensitivity to the feelings and needs of others, encouragement, gentleness, sympathy and understanding, generosity, charity, sacrifice, magnanimity, thoughtfulness, consideration, compassion, concern, courtesy and graciousness, hospitality, tenderness, love, service, commitment, involvement, justice, equality, moderation, truthfulness, knowledge and wisdom, happiness, spirituality, radiant acquiescence, prayerfulness, equanimity, imperturbability, courage, calm, serenity, trust, submission, devotion, contentment, cheerfulness, laughter and humour, all lived to the fullest in their purity and integrity.

'Abdu'l-Bahá's spirituality was intensely personal. He mingled with the crowd, loved children, and although He appeared as literally glorious to those who had the spiritual eyes to discern His station as 'the stainless Mirror of His [Bahá'u'lláh's] light',<sup>79</sup> He never presented Himself as holy, austere or unapproachable. Witnesses to His life also mention His practicality. In Montreal, for example, He took the streetcar instead of a carriage to return to the Maxwell home in order to save one dollar in the fare; when He arrived He presented one pound to each of the servants.<sup>80</sup> While He received little schooling, His writings show that He had the kind of awesome intellect that belongs to the genius. Although He was simple and unaffected in His manners, He typified nobility and courtesy in His bearing and His speech. He was schooled all His life in adversity, persecution and imprisonment, yet poured out love on His enemies and retained no trace of bitterness for lost opportunities, for God, He said – and His life was more than ample proof – could always be served, even in prison. His greatest joy was to serve God in the Most Great Prison and to know that if He suffered, He suffered as an unjustly persecuted Servant of God. He remained happy, active and free. Happiness and freedom were two of the keynotes of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's spirituality.

Shoghi Effendi further reminds us of his grandfather's spirituality, a spirituality that challenges us all by its example:

Let them remember His courage, His genuine love, His informal and indiscriminating fellowship, His contempt for and impatience of criticism, tempered by His tact and wisdom.<sup>81</sup>

Shoghi Effendi also speaks of:

. . . His keen sense of justice, His spontaneous sympathy for the downtrodden, His ever-abiding sense of the oneness of the human race, His overflowing love for its members, and His displeasure with those who dared to flout His wishes, to deride His methods, to challenge His principles, or to nullify His acts.<sup>82</sup>

Such brief consideration of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's spirituality merely serves as an invitation for further investigation into the life of one who can truly be called the model for all humanity. He was both majestic and divine but infinitely sweet and loving in His humanity. So near to us, yet so far.

## *The Mystical Sense: Prayer and Meditation*

Pray for my soul.  
 More things are wrought by prayer  
 Than this world dreams of.  
 Wherefore, let thy voice  
 Rise like a fountain for me night and day.  
 For what are men better than sheep or goats  
 That nourish a blind life within the brain,  
 If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer  
 Both for themselves and those who call them friend?  
 For so the whole round earth is every way  
 Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.

*King Arthur to Sir Bedivere*  
*'The Passing of Arthur'*  
*Idylls of the King, Tennyson*

### **The Decline of Prayer and the Rise of the Spirit of Secularism and Materialism**

The eclipse of prayer in our age is one of the more baneful consequences of the rise of secularism. Even the religious have not remained unaffected. In *The Feminine Face of God*, Sherry Ruth Anderson and Patricia Hopkins refer to an unnamed survey, recent at the time (1991), 'at one of the oldest and most prestigious divinity schools in North America' that focused on the frequency of prayer among third year students. Over 80 percent stated that they had never had a 'deep experience of prayer'. Two-thirds of these students said that they did not pray at all on a regular basis.<sup>1</sup>

Harvey Cox in *The Secular City* cogently captured the spirit of

secularism seen through the eyes of one who still believes in transcendence, one who argues that, faced with a dying Christendom, the modern religious must ask, as prisoner Dietrich Bonhoeffer did, how to 'speak of God without religion' – how to speak of God with a secular voice.<sup>2</sup> Cox's treatment of the subject is far from being dated, and while the secular city debate has long since died down, the secular spirit rages on with full force. We are mistaken, however, if we had anticipated in Cox's treatment of the secular city the voice of prophetic protest, for Harvey Cox does not bemoan or indict the secular spirit. He sees in secularization and urbanization creative possibilities for the renewal of Christianity. As Daniel Callahan puts it, Cox engages in 'ecstatically hailing contemporary social change as the occasion for a revitalized Christianity'.<sup>3</sup>

But Cox regrettably is silent on the question of prayer. While he neither advocates a role for prayer in the secular city, nor discusses the implications of secularism for the decline of prayer, one can apply, in backhanded fashion, a few of his insights on the secular spirit for a better understanding of why the practice of prayer has declined so dramatically. Coupled with reflections on statements from the Bahá'i writings, one can also gather precisely what is vital in prayer and why it is so worth preserving.

Cox quotes the Dutch theologian C.A. van Peursen in saying that secularization is the deliverance of the individual 'first from religious and then from metaphysical control over his reason and his language'.<sup>4</sup> Cox comments: 'The age of the secular city, the epoch whose ethos is quickly spreading into every corner of the globe, *is* an age of "no religion at all".'<sup>5</sup>

There is a faint echo in Cox's words of Bahá'u'lláh's more severe prophetic judgement spoken in the last century which clearly anticipated not only the age of secularization but the solution to its devitalizing influence:

The vitality of men's belief in God is dying out in every land; nothing short of His wholesome medicine can ever restore it. The corrosion of ungodliness is eating into the vitals of human society; what else but the Elixir of His potent Revelation can cleanse and revive it?<sup>6</sup>

For secularism has momentarily defeated religion by default. It has overcome faith by neglect, a neglect that we now sadly recognize to

be far from benign. In the words of Cox:

The forces of secularization have no serious interest in persecuting religion. Secularization simply bypasses and undercuts religion and goes on to other things. It has relativized religious world views and thus rendered them innocuous. Religion has been privatized.<sup>7</sup>

The roots of secularism, like those of materialism, lie at bottom in the loss of faith. But this very loss of faith, with its concomitant loss of meaning and moral values, has created a restless vacuum. This vacuum has been replaced by the vortex of the secular spirit, a vortex that has pulled into its whirling cone the whole train of modern society. This all-pervasive spirit of secularism has, temporarily at least, muted the voice of the adoration of God, both in public and private prayer. With the decline in public worship and the emptying out of houses of worship dating back to the 1960s,<sup>8</sup> prayer has ceased to be vital for many. Just as public prayer has dramatically declined as a result of dwindling church membership, it comes as no surprise that private prayer has also to a great extent been abandoned.

This secular effect that continues unabated is the very antithesis of those spiritual values which ground souls and society in God and direct the individual towards the ultimate goal of self-transcendence and the fulfilment of spiritual potential. Secularism views itself entirely in terms of the here and now, 'views the world not in terms of some other world but in terms of itself'.<sup>9</sup> Worldliness is its own happy god, living entirely for the moment, as a fashion show of the sensual, an academy award for the thrill of the sensate, as a parade for technological 'hype'. Secularism is an implicit ideology by which millions live but it has no higher purposes, no unifying vision, no reflective consciousness. This hotly-pursued material metropolis is like a dream which the sleeper is unable to reify since he participates so fully in it that he becomes part of it. Reflective consciousness is not possible until the dreamer wakes up and is disassociated from the dream.

The principal preoccupation of secular society is functional: 'Will it work?' Strangely enough, the mega-projects of the present age often seem to work to the detriment of the society they are designed to benefit. Secular society, it would appear, is being consumed by the monster it has itself created. In a society that looks for its solutions entirely in the material world, in human resources and purely human

projects, proposals and solutions, devoid of any divine assistance, there can be no place for prayer, except as a mechanical ritual from another age used only when people are born, marry, or die like so many products of a service industry mentality.

Shoghi Effendi in the 1930s pointed to the 'signs of moral downfall' – a process that has since greatly intensified – that result when 'the light of religion is quenched in men's hearts' and 'the divinely appointed Robe, designed to adorn the human temple, is deliberately discarded'.<sup>10</sup> Shoghi Effendi's word 'deliberately' is telling. Religion has been wilfully and purposefully abandoned in a futile quest for some unrestrained and illusory freedom. Religion as a social force is consequently eviscerated. Institutions totter and crumble. The respect and recognition due the place of prayer is lost.

The cancerous growth of materialism, having deviated higher spiritual energy into more sensate channels, is also a factor in the decline in prayer. 'Abdu'l-Bahá said:

The world for the most part is sunk in materialism, and the blessings of the Holy Spirit are ignored. There is so little real spiritual feeling, and the progress of the world is for the most part merely material. Men are becoming like unto beasts that perish, for we know that they have no spiritual feeling – they do not turn to God, they have no religion! These things belong to man alone, and if he is without them he is a prisoner of nature, and no whit better than an animal.<sup>11</sup>

Materialism is akin to secularism in its blind neglect of divine spirit but places greater value on the body, creature comforts and possessions. Materialism cannot be reduced, however, to a mere love of possessions. There is also a psychologically elusive and addictive side to materialism. It creates the illusion of the concrete, the secure and the permanent. It is, in fact, this illusion of stability that accounts for a great deal of the lure of materialism, an allurement created by the consumer's fascination with the fleeting image of the superficially beautiful and exciting. This seduction by the projected image creates a sought-after, repeatable, sensual experience that the unwary consumer does not realize is actually void of any real substance while it gives the illusion of being real and permanent. Materialism subtly dupes the consumer and plays into the trickster philosophy of deception. Biologism, just one of the varied multiple facets of materialism, has moreover created a cult of the physical body, a cult that has become a real obsession,

especially in North America, with its mixed but unmatched images of the perfectly brushed look of the svelte cosmopolitan girl, the trim, hard athletic body built for speed and the power lifter with the bulging muscles. Physical fitness, although recommended, cannot create immortality all by itself.

As these pernicious tides have risen, the belief in a personal God has simultaneously ebbed. Paradoxically, some modern day theologies with their own metaphysical gods have also contributed to the decline in prayer. For how, we can ask, can one pray to a 'ground of being' or to a God of process in history or to the Absolute? I allude here to Paul Tillich's 'ground of being', to the notion in the process theology of Alfred North Whitehead that God is a non-transcendent changing Being who acts within the changing dynamics of historical processes, and to Georg Hegel's idea of God as the Absolute or Universal Reason.<sup>12</sup> I cite these examples not to indict the systems on which they are built, which are otherwise remarkable for their intellectual depth, but rather to underscore the point that many modern-day theologies lack any cogent, in-depth understanding of the concept of a personal God. These theological systems may have in fact only served to vitiate the belief in a personal God and the intimate relationship that must link Creator and created one. While such theologies provide us with valid philosophical understandings of God, they often fail to take into account how such abstract and impersonal systems may be reconciled with a belief in God as 'Personal Being'. They present the very real danger of depersonalizing and abstracting God to such a degree that He remains too remote from human experience. Also, such theologies rarely discuss the vital functions of divine love in the life of faith.

By contrast, prayer is predicated on a belief in God as a personal Being, the Lord and true Father of humanity who loves and cares for His creation as a loving father loves his child, as a compassionate mother cares for her offspring, and who, in the words of Jesus, sees the little sparrow fall: 'Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.'<sup>13</sup> While the Bahá'í Faith does not reduce God to the status of 'person', that is a person alongside of other persons, God remains nonetheless personal for the Bahá'í. He can be related to, prayed to and experienced in a intimate and personal way, as the most intimate, loving and personal Friend, and, for those who desire it, in mystical experience as Love

itself.

Neither materialism nor secularism (*sæculum* = present age), because they live in the here and now, include a concept of eternity. Both shallow ideologies restrict human beings to the present, to a purely political, economic, technological and functional context. Yet paradoxically, by restricting the sense of vision to the here and now, both secularism and materialism have made us the bondslaves of time. Urbanites live by the clock, slavishly measuring deadlines and energies against the pulse of the digital clock. Prayer, on the other hand, seeks to lift the believer out of the stream of time and into the flow of eternity. Therein lies one of its greatest resources. Prayer takes the believer up and out of the concreteness of everyday life situations and places him in the flow of the abstract and the eternal. Prayer liberates the individual from the tyranny of time and allows for the breathing in of the breathless hush of eternity.

There is a caution to be sounded here, however. Prayer and its link to transcendence should not be thought of merely as an out-of-body escape from an evil material world. For, as underscored by the recently emerged creation spiritualities – whether those concerned with the cherishing and preservation of Earth Mother or those which reconnect men and women with the blood and bone of their own bodies as an indwelling expression of the sacred – God is also to be found within the black soil, within root and earth, within womb, blood and bone. There is the sacred found too.<sup>14</sup>

Viewed from another perspective, there is much to love in the secular city, much that can be reconciled with faith. The modern metropolis contains the most valued treasures of art, literature and culture, as well as the best facilities that education, medicine, science and technology have to offer. One can also love the rich diversity, the dynamism and vibrant energy of the city, the impressive city centres with their sleek designs, reflective glass and the towering structures that 'Abdu'l-Bahá called 'the minarets of the Western World commerce and industry'.<sup>15</sup> Despite the anonymity and callousness of the city, one can still find there tolerance and liberality, many worthy causes, a concern for social justice, and the human face of charity and compassion in the shelters and soup kitchens.

Yet coupled with the human skill, prowess and creativity displayed in the secular city, the sadness, seamy and crass are also grossly

manifested: the homeless huddling for shelter, the increased violence often linked to the drug trade, ethnic or gang rivalry, runaway teens succumbing to drugs and prostitution, assorted street people competing with one another to stay alive, and the plying of the sex trade. The racist, seething with violence and hatred, is also there. The beautiful face of this sophisticated lady is marred with open sores.

How then can we reconcile the secular spirit with the spirit of prayer, this dichotomy of body and soul? How can urbanites accommodate the imperious demands of matter and the aspirations of spirit? To return to Cox, how can one reconcile the spirit of Christianity, or any religion for that matter, with the shape of the secular city? In 'How to Speak of God in a Secular Style' in *The Secular City Debate*, Harmon R. Holcomb finds Harvey Cox wanting on this very point. Cox's attempt to reconcile his theological base with secularity seems 'strained and off the point, like a theological addendum to a book about something else'.<sup>16</sup> I agree. Cox's attempt to reconcile the secular spirit with the spirit of Christianity is far from successful. But that meaningful relationship and reconciliation can be largely created through the spirit of prayer. In other words, the reconciliation can be effected in no other way than by *giving the lifeless body a divine spirit*. Secular society lies before us like a comatose sleeping maiden, 'a body of the greatest loveliness',<sup>17</sup> but without spirit. The spirit of prayer and divine teachings will put life into this moribund society, a life that is sound, robust, disciplined, purposeful, surely guided, prosperous, reverent and beautiful. It will also give us a new and real sense of the divine image of the body, of the idea that while we are here, the sacred expresses itself primarily through the body and its senses, powers and abilities.

The believer who prays can make his or her prayers meaningful in the secular society by finding and doing the will of God in the mundane affairs in which he or she is daily involved. It would be all too easy to abandon this worldly society to its own self-destructive ways but in so doing we would be contributing to our own self-destruction. We cannot retreat into the private corner of our own isolationism. Whatever fruit can be garnered from a critically ill civilization must be preserved for the new society which in time will emerge from the chaotic state in which we now live. Believers must somehow tread the fine line between becoming engulfed and destroyed by the feuds and

fascinations of the old world order, and labouring to do their part in the construction of the new. In so doing, each individual must learn to draw his or her own line.

Prayer can be of the greatest assistance in this task. Prayer will help to guide the believer to find the will of God, to find and demonstrate those spiritual values which will help to illuminate and foster the growth of those failing secular institutions which govern us. In the spirit of prayer, secularism ceases to be seen as an enemy and becomes a friend. For the believer, however, secularism must remain a friend with whom one has developed a healthy rivalry, for secularism can be such a strong competitor as to threaten to defeat the forces of spirituality. I say 'threaten', for in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's judgement, that threat will never be carried out:

Likewise didst thou ask whether, in this Bahá'í Dispensation, the spiritual will ultimately prevail. It is certain that spirituality will defeat materialism, that the heavenly will subdue the human, and that through divine education the masses of mankind generally will take great steps forward in all degrees of life...<sup>18</sup>

### Five Types of Prayer

Prayer lies at the heart of spirituality and defines its essential life. It is prayer more than anything else that will cultivate the sense of spirituality in the individual:

It is not sufficient for a believer to merely accept and observe the teachings. He should, in addition, cultivate the sense of spirituality, which he can acquire chiefly by means of prayer.<sup>19</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá, moreover, exhorts those who would be spiritual to the frequent practice of prayer:

O thou advancer toward the Kingdom! Endeavour thou day by day to increase thy yearning and attraction so that the attitude of supplication and prayer may be realized more often.<sup>20</sup>

Two basic questions arise in connection with prayer. The first, what lies at the heart of prayer? The second, why should we pray at all? In answering these fundamental questions, it might prove useful to distinguish five types of prayer which also correspond to grounds for

prayer:

- 1) The prayer of petition
- 2) The obligatory (ritual) prayer
- 3) The prayer of longing
- 4/5) Congregational and private prayer

*The Prayer of Petition and the Relation of Dependence*

The prayer of petition lies at the first level of prayer. It is, simply stated, what the petitioner requests when in need of something. In the prayer of petition we recognize that we are in a highly dependent relationship to God. Such a prayer is articulated as an expression of the saying of the Báb that: 'All things lie imprisoned within the grasp of His might. Nothing is impossible to Him. He removes every difficulty and surmounts every obstacle.'<sup>21</sup> The relationship binding the believer to God in the prayer of petition is akin to Hans-Joachim Schoeps's definition of religion – following Schleiermacher – as '... the relationship between man and the superhuman power he believes in and feels himself to be dependent on'.<sup>22</sup>

For the sceptic, this relationship of dependence upon God is commonly caricatured as a weakness and expressed in the stock phrase, 'Religion is a crutch'. The dependence relationship is not easily accepted by everyone, for to some it signifies weakness, a lack of strength or inner resources. Hegel did not like Schleiermacher's definition of religion at all:

The philosopher Hegel attempted to undermine this proposal by pointing out that if this feeling of dependency were truly the essence of religion, then dogs would be the most religious beings since they exhibit this quality to perfection.<sup>23</sup>

When one examines the crutch analogy more closely, ones find that it is a weak criticism of the argument for dependence, for dependence and reciprocity are woven into the very fabric of life itself. The current acute ecological crisis reveals this fact most dramatically. Because of the ecological disaster now threatening the world, planet watchers have become more aware than ever of the inter-dependence of all life forms. Although it is not completely obvious how all species are interconnected, this much is clear: if, in the subtle, fragile and intricate web of

life in which all living creatures are suspended, the simpler forms of plant and animal life die, then at some critical point we shall die with them. We cling, however, to the magical, naive thinking that we are somehow independent, above or outside of the natural order. Human beings have been very slow to realize that they are highly dependent on the plant and animal forms with which they share the planet. We depend, moreover, on society to supply whatever goods and medical, social and technological services we need to carry on efficiently with the business of living. In a creational sense, moreover, we are not the architects of our own being. We cannot consequently view ourselves as being fully self-sufficient.

It is a fatal mistake to believe in one's own self-sufficiency. Such thinking has lead to catastrophe not only in the ecological realm but also in the political realm, as all the great wars of this century attest. All past and present totalitarian regimes hold in common a belief in their own powers. Similarly, at the individual level one should not believe that one is self-sufficient. To depend upon the Supreme Intelligent Force who created and guides life is not to lean on a crutch; it is an act of creative intelligence. Partisans of this independence psychology would see as the ideal person the hermit; that solitary one who lives in total isolation, growing his own food, making his own clothes, healing his own self when he is sick and living only with his own company. Such a rare bird, however, is scarcely found today anywhere on the face of the earth.

Another aspect of the prayer of petition to which we must be attentive concerns the necessity for action. The prayer of petition must be accompanied with bold gestures of realism. God may open doors; we still have to walk through them. The believer, consequently, must be an active participant in allowing the divine will to flow through him. He must act to help create the conditions that will allow the prayer to be answered. Discovering the will of God is not just passively waiting. It is actively seeking.

The prayer of petition, if it is said only in those moments of need or crisis, is a very limited use of prayer. Prayers for spiritual advancement, 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us, are highly praised, but even in these cases the prayer is based on the request. God still has something we want. The Bahá'í writings point, however, to other forms of prayer, forms of prayer that spring from a higher motivation.

*The Obligatory (Ritual) Prayer*

The obligatory prayer (Ar. *salat*) as distinguished from private or inner prayer (Ar. *du'a*) is regulated by divine law and is an expression of our obedience to God. In the highest type of prayer, 'Abdu'l-Bahá is reported to have said in a talk to pilgrims in 1900, believers pray only for the love of God: 'In the highest prayer, men pray only for the love of God, not because they fear Him or hell, or hope for bounty or heaven ... The spiritual man finds no delight in anything save in commemoration of God.'<sup>24</sup>

In the light of these words, we can ask ourselves why would God oblige us to pray, regulating this divine law with the force of a command? The short answer to the question is that prayer is a duty simply because we need to be reminded of the presence of God when our imperfect love fails to prompt us to seek God out for higher motives.

Know that prayer is indispensable and obligatory, and man under no pretext whatsoever is excused from performing the prayer unless he be mentally unsound, or an insurmountable obstacle prevent him.<sup>25</sup>

Duty, which is the ground of this passage and which has been considered elsewhere,<sup>26</sup> is a question of principle. Prayer is morally incumbent because it is absolutely necessary for the growth of the soul. It is not just recommended or optional. It is something that we have to do, regardless of our personal likes or dislikes or momentary inclinations. In this sense, it is a discipline. The religious believer is the praying believer. Prayer is something that goes with the life of faith in the same way that numbers go with mathematics or letters with literature. Prayer as a form of spiritual discipline is something that must be practised, regardless of the ceaseless fluctuations of our hearts.

There is, however, a spirit hidden in Bahá'u'lláh's law of prayer, a spirit which is greater than the law of prayer itself, greater than the duty which calls us to something higher. A Bahá'í can say the obligatory prayer perfunctorily and dispense with duty and in so doing feel superficially justified in the eyes of God. This is not, however, the spirit contained in the letter of the law. The spirit of ritual prayer – ritual here meaning 'patterned behaviour, often communal, consisting of prescribed actions performed periodically and/or repetitively'<sup>27</sup> – is a spirit that desires intimate communion or conversation with God.

Friedrich Heiler (1892-1967), comparative religionist at the University of Marburg and Lutheran convert from Roman Catholicism, in his master-work *Prayer*, begins his essay with an impressive literary *tour de force* that breaks down the 'astonishing multiplicity of forms' of prayer. Here is a partial citation:

Prayer appears in history in an astonishing multiplicity of forms; as the calm collectedness of a devout individual soul, and as the ceremonial liturgy of a great congregation; as an original creation of a religious genius, and as an imitation on the part of a simple, average religious person; as the spontaneous expression of upspringing religious experience, and as the mechanical recitation of an incomprehensible formula; as bliss and ecstasy of heart, and as painful fulfilment of the law; as the involuntary discharge of an overwhelming emotion, and as the voluntary concentration on a religious object; as loud shouting and crying, and as still, silent absorption; as artistic poetry, and as stammering speech; as the flight of the spirit to the supreme Light, and as a cry out of the deep distress of the heart; as joyous thanksgiving and ecstatic praise, and as humble supplication for forgiveness and compassion...<sup>28</sup>

Such writing is not only scholarly; it is of a great poetical beauty, a beauty that is retained, even in translation. Heiler describes this intimate communion, in language reminiscent of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's, as 'a living relation of man to God, a direct and inner contact, a refuge, a mutual intercourse, a conversation, spiritual commerce, an association... a union of an "I" and a "Thou"'.<sup>29</sup> Although prayer might begin as discipline, the intent is that the believer might be drawn spontaneously to God in an eager quest for the divine presence.

In what sense is prayer a 'ritual' in the Bahá'í Faith? Although there are no 'man-made' rituals in the religion, there are nonetheless a very few divinely-prescribed ones. The ritual of prayer is the main one. One could for the sake of argument say that the law of fasting as well as the Nineteen Day Feast and the observance of Holy Days are also divinely prescribed rituals. Shoghi Effendi states, however, that 'Bahá'u'lláh has reduced all ritual and form to an absolute minimum in His Faith.'<sup>30</sup> It is, therefore, incorrect to say that there is no ritual in the Bahá'í Faith, as is sometimes claimed. The word is correctly used when it refers to a divinely prescribed repetitive gesture. Divinely prescribed ritual in the Bahá'í Faith is regulated and sanctioned by Bahá'í law.

Ritual prayer is partly but not wholly functional. The common analogy of the athlete will serve to clarify. The athlete trains to reach a top condition of performance. Once the goal is achieved, the athlete may wish to stop training but knows that the level of performance will drop. Ritual prayer works the same way. It is functional in that it assists us to reach a certain level of spirituality but if it is abandoned at that point the level of spiritual excellence will drop. Prayer, however, is an end in itself and exists for its own sake, beyond any purely functional consideration.

Further, when 'Abdu'l-Bahá says that no one is exempted from prayer, His statement suggests that even – and perhaps especially – the spiritually accomplished also have a duty to pray. Again, like the athlete, the believer is not at all exempt from spiritual training once a level of proficiency has been reached. If the believer wishes to remain at that level of spiritual proficiency or go beyond it, he must pray. Even the saintly souls, it sounds ironic to say, must pray. It is usually such a soul who uses prayer most frequently, even though his whole life expresses an attitude of communion with God through which all of his actions become beautiful prayers: 'Therefore strive that your actions day by day may be beautiful prayers.'<sup>31</sup>

The moral of the Greek myth of the feathered flight of the Athenian Daidalus, whom Socrates had claimed as an ancestor, and his son Icarus,<sup>32</sup> has a certain relevance to prayer. The ancient story may be reinterpreted in the light of prayer as protection from the heights of self-deceit brought on by spiritual pride. In their attempt to escape from King Minos on the island of Crete, Icarus was warned by his father not to fly too close to the sun. Icarus, intoxicated by the joy of his flight, did not heed the words of his father and flew dangerously close to the fiery orb. The heat of the sun melted the wax holding the feathers together, Icarus fell and was drowned in the sea. What is sometimes forgotten in the telling of this story is that Daidalus followed his own advice, was successful and escaped to southern Italy. Although the purpose of this myth was primarily to reinforce the Greek maxim of the golden mean, the meaning of the story can be stretched to apply to prayer. Prayer protects us from the dizzying effects of self love and will protect us from the fall that is sure to come if we fly too close to the unquenchable fire of our own egos; for the higher we climb in our own eyes, or the eyes of the world, the further we can fall.

Finally, it is worth sounding a realistic note when it comes to obligatory prayer. The realities of life are such that sometimes the individual is in a condition that does not allow for sustained prayer or temporarily eclipses the desire to pray. Similarly, some individuals may feel disinclined to observe the long obligatory prayer with its genuflections and postures. In both of these cases, the short obligatory prayer would be the prayer of choice. Shoghi Effendi advised one believer who was not comfortable with the genuflections of the long obligatory prayer to say the short one:

He would advise you to only use the short mid-day Obligatory Prayer. This has no genuflections and only requires that when saying it the believer turn his face towards 'Akká where Bahá'u'lláh is buried . . . we cannot force ourselves to understand or feel these things [the wisdom in the genuflections], that is why He gave us also the very short and simple prayer, for those who did not feel the desire to perform the acts associated with the other two.<sup>33</sup>

These words reflect not only an outlook of down-to-earth realism but are also a testimony of how the various forms of Bahá'í prayer are suitable to the temperament of the individual believer.

### *The Prayer of Longing*

The prayer of longing is the highest kind of prayer, the prayer in which one does not pray because one needs something – the fulfilment of material needs or the more worthy motive of solving personal tests and difficulties or even for spiritual advancement. As pressing and necessary as these issues may be for personal development, they are all superseded by the prayer of longing. The prayer of longing is uttered in the language of love. It is the longing for oneness with God, for intimate communion with Him, the desire to share in His divine attributes. It is uttered in the supplication that God, in His mercy, might pour out blessings upon us, transform our being and make us more like Him. In the prayer of longing the believer prays to become blessed. Although there may be certain affinities with the prayer of petition, in reality the prayer of longing desires nothing but oneness with God.

The wisdom of prayer is this: That it causeth a connection between the servant and the True One, because in that state of prayer man with all

his heart and soul turneth his face towards His Highness the Almighty, seeking His association and desiring His love and compassion. The greatest happiness for a lover is to converse with his beloved, and the greatest gift for the seeker is to become familiar with the object of his longing ...<sup>34</sup>

The prayer of longing, then, is a desire for intimacy with God, so that we may share in His blessedness. Heiler quotes Augustine: 'When I seek Thee, my God, I seek a blessed life.' Heiler comments: 'His words uncover the psychical root of all prayer.'<sup>35</sup> As we have seen, the highest kind of prayer, according to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, is that which is undertaken out of love for God. The prayer of longing is the longing for the love of God.

There is one philosophical question connected with prayer that deserves consideration. It has to do with the necessity of prayer in light of the belief in God as omniscient preordainer. 'Abdu'l-Bahá was asked by a correspondent:

Why pray? What is the wisdom thereof, for God has established everything and executes all affairs after the best order – therefore, what is the wisdom in beseeching and supplicating and in stating one's wants and seeking help?<sup>36</sup>

It is significant that 'Abdu'l-Bahá did not frame His response within the context of a discussion of fate (*Ar. Kismet*) or free will and determinism. His answer drew attention to the benefits of prayer to the suppliant:

Know thou, verily, it is becoming in a weak one to supplicate to the Strong One and it behooveth a seeker of bounty to beseech the Glorious Bountiful One. When one supplicates to his Lord, turns to Him and seeks bounty from His Ocean, this supplication brings light to his heart, illumination to his sight, life to his soul and exaltation to his being.<sup>37</sup>

In other words, prayer is much more than a device for helping us to determine a favourable future course of events for ourselves or others, as legitimate a need as this might be. Prayer is spiritual communication that goes beyond the prayer of petition. We might also suppose that although God knows the future, He does not determine all of it. Much of it we determine for ourselves, for 'Abdu'l-Bahá teaches that 'justice, equity, tyranny and injustice', 'good and evil actions' are 'subject to

the free will of man'.<sup>38</sup> By performing the good or the bad we in part determine our own future, for these things return to us. The awesome power that flows with sincere prayer is such, however, that it can influence the divine will to determine a favourable outcome of events for us, events which might have turned out otherwise had we not supplicated the 'prayer-hearing, prayer-answering God'. Finally, if God, as cited above, 'executes all affairs after the best order', it is also equally clear that humanity has tragically disordered God's creation. Prayer will help to restore the measure and order that God intended for creation from the beginning.<sup>39</sup>

### *Private and Congregational Prayer*

Among the remarkable variety in forms and moods of prayer two types remain: congregational prayer and private prayer. The Bahá'í Faith has modified greatly the first and given a new emphasis to the second. It is noteworthy that the law of congregational prayer, except for the dead, has been annulled by Bahá'u'lláh.

The fact that there is virtually no congregational prayer for Bahá'ís has resulted in three significant modifications that have greatly facilitated the practice of prayer: 1) There is no unison recital of prayers. 2) There are virtually no congregational bodily gestures performed simultaneously. 3) There are prayer readers but no prayer leaders. This last point is not merely a question of semantics; it carries other implications.

When Bahá'ís recite their unique congregational prayer, the prayer for the departed, they do not recite it in unison in the same way, for example, that Christians recite the Lord's Prayer in church. Rather, one person reads the prayer aloud while the group stands silently; there is no reading in unison. In the unison recital of prayers, it is sometimes difficult for everyone to read or recite exactly at the same time and this can make concentration on the prayer itself difficult. Congregational prayer often also calls for the assumption of simultaneous bodily postures and gestures. For example, all move in unison in the Roman Catholic mass. Protestants rise together to sing hymns. In Islam, the male and female congregations at Friday mosque perform all of their movements in unison. In the Bahá'í Faith, communal gestures of reverence, whether standing, bowing, genuflecting, etc. have been

almost entirely abolished; they have been retained, however, for two of the three daily obligatory prayers said by the individual. The prayer for the dead is the only prayer in which the believers are required to stand together at the same time. The standing position is a mark of reverence due the memory and station of the soul and loved one who has left the world.

Having one person read for the assemblage, as is the common practice in Bahá'í group prayer, may appear to be a subtle form of congregational prayer, but this is not the case. Whether directed by the imám who stands in front of the rows of worshippers at Friday mosque, the Jewish lay *chazan* (cantor) or the Christian minister of service, the prayers of congregations are *lead*, usually by clergy. In the Bahá'í Faith the prayer is *read* and everyone prays with the reader. Again, this statement is not just word play. The role of the prayer reader is different from the prayer leader. Although 'any good Moslem can lead the faithful in prayer,'<sup>40</sup> in congregational prayer in Islam it is usually the imám who does so. In Christianity it is usually clergy who lead prayers. There are no prayer leaders in the Bahá'í Faith. There are simply prayer readers.

There are other implications of Bahá'u'lláh's virtual abolition of congregational prayer. The first and obvious implication is a re-emphasis on individual and private prayer. While group prayer is practised in the Bahá'í Faith and helps create that keenly felt and much desired unity of souls, prayer remains largely an individual, daily activity in the Bahá'í Faith. The Bahá'í prayers are voiced by and large in the first person subjective and objective cases, ('I', 'me', 'my') rather than the plural form ('we', 'our', 'us'). This is by no means a rule since there are prayers for the Spiritual Assembly that speak in the plural voice, as well as other prayers for praise and thanksgiving, forgiveness, meetings, families, and so on that also use the plural voice, but the singular voice is more frequent. This is not to minimize by comparison the unity produced by the prayers that speak in the plural voice. The fact is that the Bahá'í Faith has raised our communal consciousness by providing us with prayers that speak in the plural voice. In these prayers believers pray with one voice.

It is noteworthy in this context that Heiler views congregational prayer as a less effective type of prayer than personal prayer. He distinguishes 'primary' from 'secondary' types of prayer. Primary

prayer, he says, can be found 'only in unadulterated, simple prayer as it lives in unsophisticated, primitive human beings and in outstanding men of creative genius'.<sup>41</sup> The inferior, secondary types of prayer include the philosophical idea of prayer, 'a cold abstraction',<sup>42</sup> and congregational forms of prayer:

The ritual forms of prayer, the cultural hymn, liturgical common prayer as an institution of the cultus, all these types are phenomena of congelation in which the upspringing personal life has been transmuted into objective, impersonal forms and rules.<sup>43</sup>

Bahá'ís would certainly view the prayers of Bahá'u'lláh as fulfilling Heiler's criterion of belonging to 'outstanding men of creative genius'. The founders of the divinely revealed religions have left us with their life-giving teachings but comparatively few prayers for private worship. In the Christian and Islamic traditions there are the Lord's Prayer and the 'El Fatiha',<sup>44</sup> this latter being both 'the opening of the Book' and 'the Mother of the Book', as it is the first surah of the Qur'án. This one short prayer of seven verses is recited in the ears of a newly born Muslim baby and is the last thing a Muslim hears when he dies. Although these are not the only prayers left us by Jesus and Muḥammad, the prayers they did leave suitable for private worship are relatively few.

In the Bahá'í Faith, on the other hand, the Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb and 'Abdu'l-Bahá have bequeathed a vast treasury of prayers and meditations for personal use. This abundance of divinely revealed prayer for private worship is something unique in the history of religion. These prayers, moreover, constitute an autopoiesis (flow of energy) throughout a whole sequence of spiritual states of mind and heart. They have been revealed with all of the conditions of life in mind: petition and supplication; praise and exaltation; joy, thanksgiving, distress and comfort-seeking; for waking, sleeping and travelling; for protection and detachment; for forgiveness, steadfastness, teaching; ritual prayers, etc. These prayers are divinely revealed and as such are endowed with a power that our spontaneous prayers do not have, no matter how sincere. Many Bahá'ís have found that the words of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá give a more fitting and exact utterance to their own spiritual condition than their own voices ever could. The Bahá'í prayers not only speak *to* us, they speak *through* us and back to

God. Although Bahá'ís are left entirely free to utter their own spontaneous heartfelt prayers in private communion, the prayers of the Manifestation are to be preferred and can be used in combination with oral report from the heart. The prayers of Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, though fixed in script, always retain their fresh air of spontaneity and their inexhaustible natural flow of divine energy no matter how many times they are said.

There is another wisdom in the recommendation to use the prayers of the divine Manifestations, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, and the prayers of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Perfect Exemplar. Were the spontaneous prayers of ordinary individuals to be used for collective worship, certain difficulties could arise: 1) Spontaneous personal prayer could come to rival the prayers of the Manifestation. 2) In time some of the spontaneous prayers could become traditional and pressure to include them as part of Bahá'í worship could develop. 3) Individuals with good oral report could in time become 'pray-ers'.

Another reason why it is wise to use the prayers of Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb and 'Abdu'l-Bahá for collective worship is a cultural one. Since the Bahá'í Faith is second only to Christianity in being the most widely spread religion on the face of the earth,<sup>45</sup> were local or traditional prayers and customs to be introduced into Bahá'í worship, the practices could in time become so diverse as to cause differences. The prayers of Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb and 'Abdu'l-Bahá have become one of the powerful tools for welding the divergent cultural elements of the world together in a common worship. In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, it is stated:

... as the Cause embraces members of all races and religions we should be careful not to introduce into it the customs of our previous beliefs. Bahá'u'lláh has given us the obligatory prayers, also prayers before sleeping, for travellers, etc. We should not introduce a new set of prayers He has not specified, when He has given us already so many, for so many occasions.<sup>46</sup>

### Meditation and the Doctrine of the Sacred Memory of Persons

The Bahá'í Faith, like several of the world's religions, recommends the practice of meditation. To this end Bahá'u'lláh quotes a well-known verse: 'One hour's reflection is preferable to seventy years of pious

worship.'<sup>47</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

The spirit man is itself informed and strengthened during meditation; through it affairs of which man knew nothing are unfolded before his view. Through it he receives divine inspiration, through it he receives heavenly food.<sup>48</sup>

Although general principles behind the theory and practice of meditation are found in Bahá'í sacred scripture, no one specific technique has been recommended. The individual is consequently free to choose preferred techniques of posture, breathing and mental preparation. There are basic similarities among all of the methods in any case. The choice of the method is not, at least in the Bahá'í view, what is vital. What is vital is that we practise meditation according to the method that we find comfortable and effective.

The Bahá'í writings suggest one form of meditation that requires very little effort, is efficacious and accessible to all. It is a simple technique that is already practised by every human being. This is the act of remembering. For the purposes of spiritual meditation, remembering refers to the operation of the sacred memory, what I call the 'doctrine of the sacred memory of persons'. The technique is deceptively simple and consists in reminding ourselves that we can become more spiritual *simply by remembering that we are spiritual beings already*. We simply remember. This pensive remembering stimulates the recovery of the ancestral memory of our spiritual nature. The belief in sacred memory is based on the intuition that deep within our psyches is located a primeval memory of the birth of our true identity as spiritual persons. This spiritual component of the unconscious, though forgotten, exists in a latent state in everyone. This primal and universal spiritual memory, whether as Jung's archetypes or Joseph Campbell's 'public myth',<sup>49</sup> is reflected in the mythologies, poetry, dreams, music and art but especially in the scriptures, symbols and traditions of the world's religions.

Our primary spiritual consciousness has become buried over the aeons by the multiple forms of ego: the dense layers of the clay of materialism, godlessness, selfishness and sensuality. The spiritual seeker must, therefore, become a pilgrim archaeologist in order to recover this lost memory. As seekers we must go digging for this buried foundation, the foundation of our true selves. Yet the digging is simple.

We recollect our ancient spiritual birth through memory, by reactivating the doctrine of the sacred memory persons.

The idea itself is centuries old and runs, like a thread, through the Hindu tradition of Vedanta and the Upanishads and the yoga of the Middle Ages, back to Greece, to Plato and Plotinus and to the Christian Gnostics as well. The idea of remembering is often connected with the belief in reincarnation. There is nothing, however, in the recollection of the sacred memory that makes it dependent on reincarnation, for once the soul comes into existence, which in the Bahá'í view occurs at conception, it is able, through education, to possess the past as well as the future.

Bahá'u'lláh in the *Hidden Words* alludes to our sacred memory and gently prompts us to remember the circumstances of our divine creation:

O My Friends!

Have ye forgotten that true and radiant morn, when in those hallowed and blessed surroundings ye were all gathered in My presence beneath the shade of the tree of life, which is planted in the all-glorious paradise? Awe-struck ye listened as I gave utterance to these three most holy words: O friends! Prefer not your will to Mine, never desire that which I have not desired for you, and approach Me not with lifeless hearts, defiled with worldly desires and cravings.<sup>50</sup>

Apart from the moral implications of 'the three most holy words', Bahá'u'lláh here refers to 'the Dawn of divine Revelation when the Exalted One (the Báb) manifested Himself in the plenitude of His glory',<sup>51</sup> while 'the gathering of the people implieth a spiritual communion, not a physical one'.<sup>52</sup> There are also implications of our primeval spiritual creation. The tree of life 'is the blessed tree, which hath flourished in the Most Great Paradise, and casteth its shadow upon all regions', 'the Tabernacle of the Lord of Grace, the divine Lote-Tree'.<sup>53</sup> It also has its parallel in the Genesis account of our spiritual origins in the creation of Adam and Eve. The 'tree of life' is perhaps the same 'tree of life' in the Genesis account of the creation of Adam and Eve:

And out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.<sup>54</sup>

Further on in Genesis the 'woman' says to the serpent:

We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.<sup>55</sup>

In both Bahá'u'lláh's Hidden Word and in the Genesis account the voice of God issues divine commands in connection with the sacred tree. This indicates that the trees of life and of good and evil are reflections of the divine will. As the word of God, the tree of life stands at the centre of the garden, that is, in the centre of paradise. The tree of life also offers its shelter to all humanity. The command not to partake of the fruit of the tree of life indicates that the Word of God is holy and must remain inviolate.

There are two striking images in this Hidden Word. The first is an image of unity, the image of the divine assembly or the gathering together. The master and the disciples, the divine Teacher and His initiates, assemble beneath the shade of the tree of life, the tree that distinguishes truth from falsehood, good from evil. The tree, in addition to being a symbol of the Word or Manifestation of God, is also an eternal symbol of unity: the tree is one community, so to speak, a unified gathering of individual leaves, twigs and branches.

The second image is that of all creation falling silent, awe-struck, as it listens to the sacred voice. Here we perceive the sacred exchange that takes place with the enunciation of the holy word and the reciprocal reverent listening of the disciple, the twin acts of sacred teaching and learning. The annunciation and the hearing of the holy word are sacred acts of primordial time: the divine will has intended that the sons and daughters of the Ancient of Days be gathered together under the shade of the Tree of Life to listen to the divine voice. Thus, the basic purpose of the Bahá'í revelation, which is the gathering of all the citizens of the earth into one universal faith under the tree of unity, has its origins at the very beginnings of creation.

The doctrine of the sacred memory of persons means, therefore, nothing other than a willingness to listen to the voice of our divine Teacher, a voice that spoke deep within the human soul on that first morning in time. This voice of God, the voice of the divine Manifestation, can be heard within each one of us. This listening to the voice of God within the soul is listening to Eve, the spiritual soul, who is the

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companion of Adam, the physical man. Eve, the symbol of the sacred reality of the soul, is depicted as the *anima* in Jung's analytical psychology and is identified as the feminine principle by 'Abdu'l-Bahá: 'Adam signifies the heavenly spirit of Adam, and Eve His human soul.'<sup>56</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh asks that we remember this sacred act of our primeval creation:

Would ye but sanctify your souls, ye would at this present hour recall that place and those surroundings, and the truth of My utterance should be made evident unto all of you.<sup>57</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh's Hidden Word suggests that we can reactivate this sacred memory by listening to the counsel of God which is the very reason for our creation. Through this we become awakened, that is, conscious once again of our spiritual origins.

Remembering or recollection is also a special method of learning, as taught in the doctrine of Plato. Plato held that the Ideas, although forgotten, were already imbedded in the soul and that by gaining knowledge of the Forms and Ideas through philosophic contemplation of the Good, the individual was recalling a disincarnate spiritual existence.<sup>58</sup> Although it is often assumed that Plato's doctrine of recollection as learning was based on his belief in reincarnation, his teaching can also be taken as an oblique or backhanded criticism of reincarnation, for Plato taught that *forgetting* the knowledge of the Forms and Ideas was a consequence of reincarnation.<sup>59</sup> Through philosophic contemplation one recovered the knowledge of the Forms. Said Eliade: 'It is in returning to earthly life that the soul "forgets" the Ideas.'<sup>60</sup> It could be argued consequently that Plato's endorsement of reincarnation was not complete, for with the return to the body came the loss of the knowledge of the Ideas; although, according to Eliade, the events of former lives were remembered.<sup>61</sup> For Plato, it was only in the disincarnate or out of body state between incarnations that the soul was able to share 'in pure and perfect knowledge'.<sup>62</sup>

### Meditation and Problem-Solving: Breaking the Focus on Self

Meditation is a type of concentrated thinking that can be used effectively to solve problems. The problem-solving aspect of meditation

includes, naturally, examining the root of a problem and looking for a solution. Meditation will help bring insight to a puzzle. The discovery through meditation of solutions to problems, however, does not usually translate into a 'quick fix' for the more profound problems of human existence. A sustained effort of some duration is usually required to make many of our more deep-seated problems manageable.

The very act of meditation itself often greatly contributes to the solution of the problem, for it brings with it an assuaging of the pain or a measure of pacification. There are, however, many and varied solutions to be discovered in the open-ended and often surprising process of meditation.

When we are faced with a personal problem or a personality conflict, we all too often fall into the habit of wanting to resolve the problem through sheer will power. We exhibit the natural tendency to fall back on our own defences. Meditation prevents us from acting too rashly through a desire for power. Particularly if it is used in conjunction with a careful consideration of the divine teachings, meditation helps us to determine our own destiny and contributes greatly to peace of mind. Meditation helps us, moreover, to pursue a course of action more steadily, by providing us with sure guidance, for through meditation we liberate the higher self, the voice of the divine will within.

One of the great difficulties that arises when we have a personal problem is that we become overly involved in it. This usually means that we over-focus on self. To use a analogy again from the world of sports, over-focusing is rather like the proud father who watches his athletic son from the stands. If he focuses only on his offspring and what he is doing, he will fail to appreciate the efforts of the team and the dynamics and strategies of the game and how it is won or lost. Personal problems cause us to focus on our hurts or threatened egos with all of the disappointments, challenges and setbacks, frustrations or traumas that go with it.

The difficulty is precisely here. If we focus too closely on the hurts, threats or challenges to the ego, we risk losing two vital qualities that are of great assistance in solving personal problems: detachment and perspective. Meditation provides certain benefits that help us to counteract this natural tendency to over-focus on the personal self. With the letting go that comes with detachment, we are able to gain a certain objectivity, that is, a higher perspective over our situation.

With that objectivity comes the beginning of a mastery of the situation and a solution to the problem. Over-focusing on self, however, causes us to be blind to the all important happenings that are going on in the periphery and the possibilities of solution that wait there.

Through over-focusing on the self, we fail to see the bigger picture. Meditation will help us to focus on the wider scene and submerge the ego in the divine will of acceptance. Using this approach, rather than focusing on the root of the problem or on its solutions, we simply leave the personal self behind and concentrate on the larger picture. We break the focus or fixed perspective we have of the problem and self. When we meditate, it is sometimes useful, instead of turning our vision inward, to turn it up and outward, so to speak, into the universe around us and above us. With this upward and outward-directed vision, we experience a greater oneness with the divine will, the divine Mind or Universal Spirit that expresses itself in all of creation. To turn our vision outward, we may simply picture a universe that is peaceful and harmonious or try to imagine the grandeur of God. We may actually try to visualize or 'feel' that loving and harmonious universe that is the creation of God, that larger, benign picture.

Meditating with this more universal vision will cause us to break out of the mould of self, and acquire a more 'cosmic consciousness'. Attaining this larger perspective will help us to see that our own little problems and emotions do not matter much. We will see that we are minute particles in the plan of God, that we are but a drop in His ocean, a speck of dust in His pathway. The amazing thing is, however, that we are glad to discover our microcosmic selves, glad to discover that we are very small in the universe of God and that He has so arranged things that we are well sustained and provided for, even as a tiny cog in the magnificent universe. We discover that we do well, as a thread in the woof of the overall pattern, to fit in with all of the other components, large and small, that make up God's universe. This perspective is the difference between the worm's eye view and the bird's eye view of the world.

### **Prayer and Service to Society**

For a Bahá'í, to serve means essentially to be active in both the life of faith and in society. Unlike certain other forms of spirituality which

focus almost exclusively inwardly and disdain any involvement with mundane life or connection with 'the real world', Bahá'í spirituality means participating to the fullest extent possible in the life of society. For a Bahá'í, to further the aims and purposes of the Bahá'í revelation means also to participate in the erection of a new society, whose blueprint the Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith have drawn up and whose keynote is justice.<sup>63</sup>

This new society is Bahá'u'lláh's new world order which is completely without parallel in the utopian societies and systems of government that have evolved until the present day. This world system of Bahá'u'lláh, which exists today in embryonic form and whose Head is the Universal House of Justice, is the visible expression of all the intangible spiritual precepts and superlative teachings that Bahá'u'lláh has revealed to humanity. The Kingdom of God, for a Bahá'í, is not only within us. It is and shall be without us, that is, outside of us as the mirror image of the kingdom within. The Bahá'í vision of the future is that society and its institutions of government will be the expression of that inner and heavenly Kingdom of God promised for aeons in the sacred scriptures of the world. It is the concretization of what St John the Divine and St Augustine saw in their respective visions of the celestial city.

Spirituality for a Bahá'í means, moreover, to be involved with the life of society in order to preserve and promote its finest heritage. Bahá'u'lláh's states that 'all men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization'.<sup>64</sup> This is the expression of the everlasting Spirit as the spirit of progress in concrete material forms. This means, among other things, becoming involved with worthwhile causes, devoting oneself to philanthropy, educating oneself, marrying and raising a family, exercising a trade or a profession, etc. In short, becoming involved in the quotidian and the mundane in order to promote the well-being of humanity.

Bahá'í sponsorship of socio-economic projects in developing countries illustrates well the Bahá'í principle of involvement with the secular life of society. Indeed, one would not wish to promote too radical a disparity between the secular and the sacred nature of things, since in the Bahá'í view, the material should be conceived as the visible expression of the spiritual. The Bahá'í Faith has also given humanity a world outlook on religion since the Bahá'í Faith concerns itself

'primarily with the nature of those essential relationships that must bind all the states and nations as members of one human family'.<sup>65</sup> Such an international perspective brings to the Bahá'í religion a functional and pragmatic perspective of international political and social cooperation that enlarges the view of those spiritualities that focus narrowly on the individual's personal development.

Yet while we inculcate a world-embracing vision that sees the planet as one country and advocates a global approach to the solution of the desperate challenges that face humanity today, we would not be justified in entirely subordinating the role of the individual to all-powerful world-shaping institutions with their collective decision-making and legislative powers. Such a view cannot be supported by the overall context of Bahá'í teaching which summons the individual to personal regeneration. For the Bahá'í writings make it clear that in the last analysis our collective relationships rise or fall on the efforts of individuals:

This challenge so severe and insistent, and yet so glorious, faces no doubt primarily the individual believer on whom, in the last resort, depends the fate of the entire community. He it is who constitutes the warp and woof on which the quality and pattern of the whole fabric must depend.<sup>66</sup>

Although the context of this quotation refers to the teaching of the Bahá'í Faith, the basic principle remains valid for any worthwhile cause. The Bahá'í Faith has also situated the solitary individual in a new context within society, one that harmonizes and balances his relationship with society as a whole. This should be of particular value to the western world which has exalted the rights of the individual above those of the welfare of society at large:

How noteworthy that in the Order of Bahá'u'lláh, while the individual will is subordinated to that of society, the individual is not lost in the mass but becomes the focus of primary development, so that he may find his own place in the flow of progress, and society as a whole may benefit from the accumulated talents and abilities of the individuals composing it. Such an individual finds fulfilment of his potential not merely in satisfying his own wants but in realizing his completeness in being at one with humanity and with the divinely ordained purpose of creation.<sup>67</sup>

# *A Paradigm of Spirituality and Life Tests*

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart,  
O God, thou wilt not despise.<sup>1</sup>

The *Miserere*

## **The Role of Life Tests in Spiritual Development**

The Bahá'í writings affirm that the development of spirituality depends largely on how we deal with life's tests. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

The labourer cuts up the earth with his plough, and from that earth comes the rich and plentiful harvest. The more a man is chastened, the greater is the harvest of spiritual virtues shown forth by him.<sup>2</sup>

Since tests and difficulties are not only a persistent but also painful feature of the human landscape, we would do well to acquire a deeper understanding of both the meaning and dynamics of tests and difficulties. Moral philosophy, while helpful, is not the whole story in understanding this vital question. The wider philosophical question of theodicy – the accounting for evil while affirming a belief in a benevolent God – forms some of the background to a discussion of tests and difficulties. We should recognize, however, that there are limits to a strictly rational approach to the understanding of the pain and suffering that accompany adversity. For most people, totally satisfactory answers to the question of suffering, especially the suffering of the innocent or the question of sudden, tragic death, trauma and long-term pain, are scarcely to be found in the explanations of philosophers and theologians. Although the gift of understanding may assist in coping with and alleviating suffering, suffering is essentially a *pragmatique* that must be lived through and endured. In this *pragmatique* of suffering, the believer becomes engaged in a process psychology, namely, the

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connections between the believer's psycho-spiritual response to the tests of 'real life' and the spiritual growth process.

The life test, while certainly stressful, is not just some undifferentiated form of stress and should not be levelled off in our efforts to rationalize the test as *just* a form of stress. The personal test is a unique kind of opportunistic situation that has the potential for profound moral and spiritual development. In the test we are being measured, for better or worse. We shall grow, mark time or regress as a result of the test. It is up to us to decide the response we shall choose and to make efforts to deal with the difficulty.

The phrase 'life test' carries two meanings. First, it refers to a kind of test that in Maslow's phrase is an inverted 'peak experience',<sup>3</sup> an experience of being sorely tested and pushed to the emotional limits. Second, it refers to an experience by which we stand to make great gain or loss. I consequently define the 'life test' as 'any severely adverse or painful condition that holds the potential for great spiritual gain or loss or holds the promise of either moral maturity or ineptitude'. The dynamics that apply to life tests apply also to any of life's less severe adversarial situations. Life tests are also characterized by the personal dimension. The test is uniquely yours or mine. It lies within the 'I-Thou' category.<sup>4</sup> These personal tests break in on our everyday mundane consciousness with the strength of an existential happening whose weight and reality cannot be ignored or denied. Their severity seems to make everything else appear theoretical by comparison.

What follows, then, is a loose or soft paradigm of the process at work in life tests, one which will more closely define their significance for spiritual growth. This process is identified by a number of stages or states of mind that a believer might find helpful in successfully working through or overcoming a personal test. One can view these stages as the existential imperatives in dealing with life tests. They are:

- 1) Recognizing the benefits of tests
- 2) Acceptance
- 3) Logotherapy
- 4) Relying on the creative word
- 5) Distinguishing between types of tests
- 6) Understanding process
- 7) The role of pride and remorse

These stages are not necessarily consecutive *a priori* or *a posteriori* happenings. The believer does not have to behave in a deterministic pattern in order to work through a test. I emphasize, however, that without observing these stages, or least some of them, it becomes very difficult to manage personal tests successfully. Further, there is a kind of biogenic pattern of growth or life cycle to the test. The test appears in some ways to have a life of its own and experiences at some point its own demise. To become consciously aware of this process and pattern of growth in the personal test becomes one of the most valuable tools of acquisition in successfully overcoming personal tests. What Bahá'u'lláh has said in *The Seven Valleys* about the journey of the soul also applies here: 'but the severed wayfarer . . . may cross these seven stages in seven steps, nay rather in seven breaths, nay rather in a single breath, if God will and desire it.'<sup>5</sup> The believer can overcome the test by experiencing either one, some or all of the stages, separately or consecutively.

### **The Benefits of Personal Tests**

The Bahá'í understanding of personal tests and difficulties stands in marked contrast to the popularly held notion that pain and suffering are the destroyers of happiness and worthless hindrances to personal fulfilment. The Bahá'í writings point to the many significant benefits that can potentially accrue from tests when they are rightly understood and accepted. These outstanding benefits are: 1) A more lucid self-understanding based upon the on-going discovery of our true spiritual nature, the realization that true self is spiritual self. 2) A deepening, strengthening or enhancement of such primary spiritual qualities as faith, love, knowledge, detachment, obedience, sacrifice and justice. These spiritual qualities cannot be acquired magically. They are acquired through dint of effort and attitude. They emerge as reactions to adversity, as the unformed contours of a sculpture emerge gradually under the skilled chisel of the artist. With the experience of the tests of life comes an enrichment of our spiritual being and a gradual increase of spiritual maturity. Detachment from the world is significantly experienced.

We often feel that we are alone in a moment of test. This feeling tends to intensify our sense of isolation. In one sense we are alone. No

one else can assume for us the test that we have to bear. Even though no one but God can penetrate into the inmost heart of the suffering that may accompany a personal test, it is worth reminding ourselves at such times that we do have the resources of prayer, the support and understanding of friends, the counsel of the creative word and the loving-kindness of Bahá'u'lláh.

The experience of being tested, however, is part of an ancient and universal pattern of life. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, when answering a correspondent who was experiencing the trials of life, offered His consolation with a reminder that the experience was not confined to the believer alone. It was a universal fact of life:

Therefore, do not think for one moment that these trials and ordeals are confined to thee. In reality all the people are surrounded with sufferings so that they may not attach their hearts to the world, but will seek for composure and rest in the divine world and beg for the bestowal of the Kingdom.<sup>6</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá's counsel helps to break the isolation that a believer feels during the test, with its reminder that trials are a universal fact of life. It is also axiomatic that our spirituality can develop only through affliction. Tests and difficulties are a law of life.

Men who suffer not, attain no perfection. The plant most pruned by gardeners, is that one which, when the summer comes, will have the most beautiful blossoms and the most abundant fruit.<sup>7</sup>

This one beautiful metaphor of 'Abdu'l-Bahá may serve as a summary statement of life tests, for it contains all of the essential elements for a coherent understanding of them. There is an implied comparison between the plant that holds the potential for growth and the human being. The pain of growth is indicated by the pruning process of the gardeners, the Manifestations of God. In due season, this pruning will yield a variety of spiritual virtues, 'beautiful blossoms', abundant fruit which will be garnered during the harvest season, 'when the summer comes'. This harvest season or coming of summer could refer to the attainment of spiritual maturity or could well be a veiled allusion to death itself, which promises the full fruition of spiritual virtues that the seeker has laboured after in this life.

## Accepting Tests with a Willing Heart

The first stage in the process of being tested is the stage of acceptance. Acceptance, one has to bear in mind, is only one side of the coin. Rejection is the other. A test can be rendered null and void by a refusal to recognize the test. If we refuse to recognize that we are being testing, we engage in denial. In order to derive any spiritual benefit from a test, it must be accepted and accepted in the right spirit of magnanimity. Although this attitude of acceptance is certainly difficult, since the personal test brings no small measure of psychic pain, it is the key means of overcoming the adversity and deriving the spiritual benefits of the test. Acceptance is the sister virtue of submission to the will of God, that attitude of heart and mind which is the cornerstone of faith in Islam. We accept and submit to the 'tests of God'<sup>8</sup> because we recognize in them a potential stepping-stone in spiritual development. Once we begin to accept a test – and this acceptance often depends on our perception of the test itself – we more easily overcome the pain, anger, rebellion, depression or other mental disturbances or negative effects that accompany the test.

'Abdu'l-Bahá speaks of this willingness to accept and endure tests in order to reap the benefits they have to offer:

Unless one accept suffering, undergo trials and endure vicissitudes, he will reap no reward nor will he attain success and prosperity. Therefore, thou must likewise endure great tests so that the infinite divine outpourings may encircle thee...<sup>9</sup>

French Jesuit Jean Pierre de Caussade (1675-1751), whose spirituality was strongly influenced by the works of St Francis of Sales<sup>10</sup> (1567-1622), the Bishop of Geneva, wrote that 'Passive fidelity consists in loving acceptance of all that God sends at every moment', expressed more simply by St Francis of Sales as always saying yes to God: 'Yes and always Yes.'<sup>11</sup>

Endurance is one of the spiritual virtues that is of special benefit during tests and difficulties. In the above passage, 'Abdu'l-Bahá repeats the verb 'endure'. Shoghi Effendi viewed suffering matched with endurance as qualifiers of greatness:

This is the way of the world. The greatest among us seems to be the one who has suffered most and withstood best the battles of life.<sup>12</sup>

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In 1894 Ida Scott Taylor, writer and compiler of the *Year Book of English Authors*, wrote about the value of endurance in spiritual life in words that are just as timely today as when she wrote them:

We can, perhaps, find it easy to be charitable for God, to be kind for God, to be useful for God, but how do we feel about enduring for God? This is what entire consecration means – not the willingness to serve Him alone, nor the readiness to die a martyr's death for His cause; but to live for Him . . .<sup>13</sup>

Endurance is strongly connected to another highly prized virtue in the Bahá'í view – steadfastness. This is valued as one of the great spiritual virtues, one that promises bountiful rewards:

For whosoever standeth firm and steadfast in this holy, this glorious, and exalted Revelation, such power shall be given him as to enable him to face and withstand all that is in heaven and on earth. Of this God is Himself a witness.<sup>14</sup>

The gift of acceptance has been recognized by psychiatrists as being of great therapeutic value for distressed souls. Psychotherapist M. Scott Peck, one of the contemporary healers of the psyche who practises a synthesis of psychotherapy and spirituality, advocates the virtue of acceptance when dealing with the tests of life:

Life is difficult. This is a great truth, one of the greatest truths. It is a great truth because once we truly see this truth, we transcend it. Once we truly know that life is difficult – once we truly understand and accept it – then life is no longer difficult. Because once it is accepted, the fact that life is difficult no longer matters.<sup>15</sup>

Viktor Frankl, the founder of the logotherapy school of psychiatry, illustrates the practicability of the virtue of acceptance, with the case of a woman he treated in private practice. For decades she was able to endure cheerfully the tormenting auditory hallucinations that are associated with schizophrenia. By her own account, she was able to withstand continually jeering, taunting voices by being thankful that she was not deaf, believing it was better to hear these jeers and taunts than to hear nothing at all. Her acceptance and thankfulness, her rare magnanimity, not only permitted her to endure what might have driven others insane but enabled her to carry on cheerfully with her daily activities.<sup>16</sup> The patience and thankfulness exhibited by this brave

lady are precisely the two spiritual virtues recommended by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during moments of test: 'Praise thou God, that thou hast been tried and hast experienced such a test. Be patient and grateful.'<sup>17</sup> He also says in the same vein:

Be not troubled because of hardships and ordeals; turn unto God, bowing in humbleness and praying to Him, while bearing every ordeal, contented under all conditions and thankful in every difficulty.<sup>18</sup>

The epitome of this predisposing attitude to accept the tests of life 'Abdu'l-Bahá has qualified in that phrase familiar to Bahá'ís as 'radiant acquiescence'. This phrase, which signifies the joyful acceptance of the will of God no matter what He sends, and which 'Abdu'l-Bahá contrasts with 'dull resignation',<sup>19</sup> represents the ideal spiritual state which a believer hopes to emulate in the face of adversity. Radiant acquiescence has, however, much greater implications than being the means to enable us to conquer the tests of life, if that were not enough:

The confirmations of the Spirit are all those powers and gifts which some are born with and which men sometimes call genius, but for which others have to strive with infinite pains. They come to that man or woman who accepts his life with radiant acquiescence.<sup>20</sup>

Perhaps it is precisely because accepting the tests of life with a radiant heart is such a difficult state to achieve that the gifts of radiant acquiescence far outstrip our imagining. In this context, Julian of Norwich (1342-1416), English anchoress, offers some practical advice for dealing with our trials. 'Mother Julian' was an unpretentious and practically-minded English mystic who in her *Revelations of Divine Love* set before us the most practical of moral theologies in a simple but profound language of loving wisdom. She counsels us to make light of our trials, for by so doing, she writes, we will experience less of their pain. This insight demonstrates both the wisdom of her spiritual counsel and her sharp psychological insight:

The more casually we take them [our sufferings], and the less store we set by them for love of him, the less will be the pain we experience, and the greater our thanks and reward.<sup>21</sup>

However, when we speak of accepting the tests of life, a note of caution should be sounded. Accepting the tests of life has to be sharply distinguished from the ready acceptance of abuse, whether psychic or

physical. Where it lies in one's power, no one should allow oneself to become the victim of abuse.<sup>22</sup> When it becomes necessary to acquiesce to pain, one does so for the noble purpose of fostering spiritual development, not for self-punishment or to become the target for the aggression of others.

Further, Bahá'u'lláh encourages us to develop a broader vision of our trials, a vision that has as its salient feature that quality of being able to see the end in the beginning. This use of paradoxical language, of seeing the end in the beginning, so typical of the mystics, is based on the conviction that suffering in the path of God is not meaningless sport on God's part but will bring its own sure reward. Adib Taherzadeh, commenting on Rumi's story, retold by Bahá'u'lláh, of the lost lover who is found in the garden, encapsulates this spiritual attitude of acceptance as follows:

He acquires a new vision and beings to understand the mysteries of God's Revelation and creation. He will not be despondent when faced with pain and calamities. Rather, he will approach them with understanding and resignation, for he will 'see the end in the beginning' and will discover that suffering and tribulations are eventually realized to be God's mercy and blessing.<sup>23</sup>

### Logotherapy: Finding Meaning in Life Tests

When we are confronted with a life test, it is vitally important to invest it with the force of meaning. We must be able to determine why we are being tested, and just as importantly, discover what our response should be. This search for meaning is a significant therapeutic measure in itself, for the rational measure of ascribing meaning to adversity will greatly assist in the acceptance and mastery of it.

The logotherapy school of humanistic psychology has much to offer in the understanding and alleviation of suffering. Victor Frankl, who followed Freud and Adler with his 'third school' of logotherapy (Gk. *logos* = meaning), applies the question of the search for meaning to the alleviation of suffering. Frankl believes that logotherapy will do much to counteract the existential vacuum, the prevailing sense of hopelessness, despair and meaninglessness that afflicts large numbers of people today. Frankl teaches that the search for meaning should be the motivating force in our lives and that finding a meaning in the midst

of life's difficulties allows for an acceptance and promotes an alleviation of the tests that come our way. The quest for meaning is not only reserved for the trials of life. Frankl sees it as fundamental in all that we do, especially in our work, our love relationships or in the causes that we may espouse. This search for meaning Frankl contrasted with the 'pleasure principle' of Freud or the 'will to power' of his former teacher, Alfred Adler.

Frankl's teaching takes on a certain credibility in light of his own life. Unlike many an armchair philosopher, Frankl worked out his own teaching over a three-year period in the trying circumstances of Nazi concentration camps. He also turned down the permission that was granted to him by the Nazis to emigrate to America in order to look after his Jewish parents, knowing full well that he faced the possibility of being sent to a concentration camp as a consequence.<sup>24</sup> Frankl observed time and again that the inmates who survived the appalling conditions of Auschwitz and the other camps were those who were able to find a meaning in or a purpose to their suffering, either in their immediate circumstances by helping other inmates or by clinging with conviction to some present or future goal or project, even when it was the most mundane of things or the most ordinary of fancies. Frankl attributed his own survival to his 'rich intellectual background', 'an inner life on which to draw' and a 'mission to counsel other inmates'.<sup>25</sup> Following the war Frankl was able to verify the efficacy of the principles of logotherapy over many years in private practice.

Every life test has a personal meaning for each believer. Frankl's spiritually oriented existential logotherapy is based on the individual's ability to ascribe meaning to suffering as a form of sacrifice. Frankl ties his understanding of logotherapy to the meaning of sacrifice: 'Suffering ceases to be suffering in some way at the moment it finds a meaning, such as the meaning of sacrifice.'<sup>26</sup> He cites the case of an elderly medical practitioner who once consulted him for severe depression as a dramatic example of logotherapy. The doctor's wife had died two years earlier. The physician, however, had not been able to overcome his loss and work through his grief. Frankl asked the distraught doctor if he would have preferred to have died before his wife. 'Oh,' he said, 'for her this would have been terrible; how she would have suffered!' Frankl pointed out to the doctor that a meaning could be found in the fact that his wife had died first: 'You see, Doctor, such a suffering has

been spared her, and it is you who have spared her this suffering; but now, you have to pay for it by surviving and mourning her.<sup>27</sup> The bereaved doctor for the first time was able to find a meaning in his suffering. His wife had been spared the suffering of mourning him. Once the doctor found a personal meaning in his suffering, he was more willing to bear it.

Dr 'Abdu'l-Missagh Ghádirian in his article 'Human Responses to Life Stress and Suffering', drawing on Frankl's logotherapy, has cogently stated the same basic idea. Finding meaning will lead to an lessening of anxiety or dread.

The way that we perceive and react to an event or crisis is largely responsible for the ultimate effect of that event upon us. If we can understand and make sense out of an event and draw some objective conclusion from it which could give meaning to our life, the impact of that event will be less dreadful.<sup>28</sup>

Bahá'í scripture suggests several meanings to situations of adversity. Making sense of them helps us not only to cope with but more importantly to overcome the tests of life. Here are a few of the meanings for personal tests found in Bahá'í scripture:<sup>29</sup>

- 1) Tests are an inescapable law of life.
- 2) Tests foster spiritual growth.
- 3) Tests and afflictions are evidences of God's loving care. This is a reflection of the conviction in a personal God.
- 4) We are confronted with tests in order to overcome some weakness or moral failure.
- 5) Tests are a punishment for sins.
- 6) Test distinguish the true believer from the false believer, the sincere from the insincere, the courageous from the coward, the loyal from the disloyal, and the weak from the strong. In other words, they reveal our true identity.
- 7) Tests foster detachment from the world.
- 8) Through tests, we become firm and steadfast.

'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us, however, that sometimes we are struck with a misfortune for which no apparent reason can be found. His remarks were made in the context of illness but they are equally valid for other tests. In these cases, we must rely on pure faith and trust in God:

I beseech God to ordain prosperity unto thee in this world, to confer favour upon thee in His supreme Kingdom, and to heal thee from the illness which has befallen thee for some hidden reason which no one knows save God. Verily, the will of God engages occasionally in some matter for which mankind is unable to find out the reason. The causes and reasons shall appear. Trust in God and confide in Him, and resign thyself to the will of God.<sup>30</sup>

Once again, we cannot wholly rationalize the meaning of adversity.

### **The Transforming Power of the Divine Word: Comparing the Writings of Shakespeare and Bahá'u'lláh**

A Bahá'í will find meaning in tests by clinging to the Word of God, by a total immersion of the mind and soul in the Bahá'í sacred writings. This immersion of our spirits in the creative and directive power of the divine word carries particular benefits for the believer during tests. Immersing ourselves in Bahá'u'lláh's writings will provide us with the saving graces and spiritual sustenance we require to see us through affliction, remind us to keep within the boundaries of Bahá'í law, and give us the necessary guidance for any future action.

When we turn to the writings for guidance, we begin to experience something of the regenerative power that lies within the words of a Manifestation of God, a power which quite distinguishes the writings of Bahá'u'lláh from other forms of literature. It is important to understand the difference between Bahá'í sacred literature and other forms of writing, for the way we perceive the Word of God will, in large measure, determine whether or not it will have any beneficial effect upon us.

To draw out this distinction, Horace Holley (1887-1960) the distinguished Bahá'í administrator, poet and writer, in his essay 'The Writings of Bahá'u'lláh' commented on the differences between the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and those of Shakespeare. While Holley contrasts specifically the writings of Shakespeare and Bahá'u'lláh, one can interpret his essay as a broader comparison between secular and sacred literature. Holley views the writings of Shakespeare and Bahá'u'lláh as being on a continuum that leads from the ultimate depiction of the depths and heights of human experience to the transcendent realm of the divine. Holley sees the works of the master

English playwright and the sacred writings of the divine Manifestation Bahá'u'lláh as belonging in two different dimensions, but at a certain point the two *genres* intersect.

Like so many others who have commented on the English bard, Holley recognizes that Shakespeare brought the art of literature to the outermost limits of human expression, to a point beyond which there could be no passing:

Thus it seems to most students that Shakespeare is and must be supreme in literature for all time. Shakespeare, it seems, sounded all the *available* notes on the keyboard of life. One by one he brings every type of man and woman upon the stage, where one by one their inmost secrets are exquisitely, completely told. The gesture of good and evil, power and weakness alike he rendered in all its deepest significance.<sup>31</sup>

Horace Holley, however, interprets Shakespeare as having recognized a limitation in himself and in his writings that the poet/playwright was powerless to transcend. Holley sees the gesture of the burial of the magician Prospero's books and magic wand in *The Tempest* as going beyond the more usual interpretation of the poet's cessation from literature because of the declining powers of old age and the drying up of the creative powers. Holley interprets the burial of Prospero's wand and books rather as a metaphor for Shakespeare the man and for his own self-recognized limitations as a writer. For Holley, Shakespeare recognized through Prospero's broken wand 'that all human drama had begun to crumble away with the perception of a greater and a beyond'.<sup>32</sup> In other words, the burial of Prospero's wand does not merely signify the withering of Shakespeare's poetic powers in old age but rather that he stood at the window of an infinite, transcendent dimension, and, despite the fact that he stood, through the powers of his own vision, at the door of this vaster realm, the great poet was unable to walk through. This recognition was an act of profound humility on the part of the English master dramatist:

Master of motives within the range of his own experience, Shakespeare at last paid reverent homage to motives outside its ken . . . Shakespeare's old age cannot be taken as the guttered candle, the empty lamp – it was the opening of a weary student's window at dawn, when the rising sun shames the candle to his own gladdened eyes.<sup>33</sup>

In a musical analogy, Holley writes that Shakespeare sounded all of

the notes 'on the keyboard of life'. The analogy is telling. Only certain notes are available within the confines of the keyboard. Shakespeare sounded all the *available* notes, says Holley. Other notes there were, silent notes that Shakespeare could not play. Bahá'u'lláh 'does not sound the Shakespearean notes, because he sounds the notes that have been silent in us all'.<sup>34</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, the master musician, plays an unheard tune and in a scale that sounds out a totally new experience of the divine.

Holley's analogy invites extension. Bahá'u'lláh is not only a master musician. He has orchestrated Plato's 'music of the spheres', the celestial melody that once only the gods could hear, so that now, through divine revelation, that instrument of grace, can be heard by mortals too. Thus the relationship of the poet and the prophet is indicated by the continuum from the human to the divine. They are not in conflict. The prophet, travelling to the apex of the arc, continues the journey into the divine realm that the poet had begun in the human. Shakespeare, the archetypical poet, stands at the outermost edge of the human dimension, the edge that touches on the divine, the shore that touches on the great ocean of transcendence. Bahá'u'lláh, the Holy Mariner, bids us set sail with Him across the Seven Seas.

That this is so does not imply criticism of Shakespeare. His work and Bahá'u'lláh's are not at cross purposes. As the great teacher and literary critic Northrop Frye put it in this brief definition of literature: 'Literature is a human apocalypse, man's revelation to man.'<sup>35</sup> Frye's definition of literature appears to be one definition of revelation turned on its head. Bahá'u'lláh's writings, to continue the definition, are a spiritual apocalypse, God's revelation to man. Sacred literature reaches down from heaven to earth. Secular literature reaches from earth up to heaven. In any case, where Shakespeare ends, there Bahá'u'lláh begins. Shakespeare is a master portrayer of life as we know it. The purpose of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation, however, is not to portray life. It is to invade and sustain life, to give it fresh meaning and a new motive power and purpose, one that is not, however, to represent, but to recreate. Unlike Shakespeare, Bahá'u'lláh's revelation does not start with purely human experience devoid of transcendence. It starts when the divine voice speaks to His spiritual child, promising the bestowal of eternal life. Holley summarizes his main point:

Thus in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh there is an influence not dwelling

elsewhere in literature or philosophy. That influence permeates and proceeds from a literary and philosophic form, but the power of the influence well-nigh shatters the cup of speech.<sup>36</sup>

Within His revelation, Bahá'u'lláh Himself has stated, there lies a regenerative power that is the vehicle for the whole creative process that the will of God has fashioned for its own purposes:

Every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God is endowed with such potency as can instil new life into every human frame, if ye be of them that comprehend this truth. All the wondrous works ye behold in this world have been manifested through the operation of His supreme and most exalted Will, His wondrous and inflexible purpose.<sup>37</sup>

Reverently perusing the Word of God, pondering and meditating on its meanings and taking its admonitions to heart allows us to participate in this divine creative process. The words of the Manifestation of God have the power to transform our consciousness and to recreate us either quickly in 'the twinkling of an eye' or more slowly according to the exigencies of time. Immersing ourselves in the ocean of God's Word gives us a renewed and purified spiritual vision that allows us to pursue our lives by following more closely the precepts contained in the revelation.

### Type 1 and Type 2 Tests: Pedagogy and Punishment

Like all of the world religions, the Bahá'í Faith has its own view of theodicy, an accounting for the evil in the world while at the same time affirming belief in a benevolent God. The theodicy inherent in the Bahá'í Faith is quite Islamic in its basic orientation. Alan L. Berger's treatment of Islam in 'Evil and Suffering' in *Introduction to the Study of Religion* reveals this basic similarity. Berger writes:

The fundamental attitude of Islam toward evil and suffering is submission ('*aslama* means 'to submit') to the right relationship with God. Suffering in Islam is therefore viewed largely in instrumental terms as 1) punishment for sin and/or 2) a trial or test. John Bowker suggests that the 'hard' response of Islam requires patience and endurance. 'Suffering', he writes, is 'part of God's strict justice'.<sup>38</sup>

These words will have a familiar ring for the Bahá'í. 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes in a similar vein, viewing suffering either as punishment for sins

and/or a trial or test:

Know thou that ordeals are of two kinds: One kind is for trial (to test the soul), and the other is punishment for actions . . . That which is for testing is educational developmental and that which is the punishment of deeds is severe retribution.<sup>39</sup>

Tests fall, then, into two categories, either 'pedagogy' or 'punishment'.<sup>40</sup> The 'pedagogical' I shall call here a *Type 1* test and the 'punitive' *Type 2*. For the *Type 1* test, 'Abdu'l-Bahá follows the Islamic view of the visitation of evil as a trial which the believer must endure patiently since it is an evidence of God's wisdom or justice. *Type 1* tests are in some sense 'to prove' the spiritual mettle of the believer. They would seem to follow as a consequence of belief in God, as expressed in the quranic phrase, 'Do men think when they say "We believe" they shall be let alone and not be put to proof?'.<sup>41</sup>

In Islamic theology, the trial, however grievous, is seen basically as a measure of God's justice. It is God who knows. We do not know, so we do well to accept the will of God. In Bahá'í theology, however, the test is seen in the light of having a positive beneficial effect on spiritual development. Such a view allows us more readily to accept the test and to benefit from the process of spiritual growth that the test can foster. 'Abdu'l-Bahá speaking the mystical language of paradox, described the tests that He Himself was destined to meet:

These are not calamities, but bounties, they are not afflictions, but gifts; not hardships, but tranquillity; not trouble, but mercy – and we thank God for this great favour.<sup>42</sup>

The eastern faiths generally view trials as a result of a failure to make a profound psychological adjustment to both the perception of ourselves and the ills that surround us. The 'Compassionate Buddha', for example, said that accounting for suffering was the kernel of His teaching: 'I teach only two things, O disciples, the fact of suffering and the possibility of escape from suffering.'<sup>43</sup> His fundamental teaching on suffering was contained in the 'Four Noble Truths', which identified the root cause of suffering as *tanha*, usually translated as desire. *Tanha* may be understood, however, as a misdirected attachment of the soul to things not worthy of its affections. Suffering in the Buddhist viewpoint especially is also thought to be brought on by a failure to realize that both the self and the material world are not, in themselves,

real:

Yet, in the Buddha's view, it was this very belief in the attainment of lasting happiness, in conventional human terms, that was the true source of suffering. Man, by his unwillingness to accept what he interprets as life's failure to give him, without stint, whatever he desires, finds himself caught in an emotional trap of his own making. This trap is the product of his own ego. It takes form from the self's insatiable appetites and delusions, its enormous blind unattainable desires, its never-satisfied craving or thirst, 'tanha' or in Sanskrit 'trishna'. It is tanha which leads the individual to place a tacit demand on life which life by its very nature cannot fulfil.<sup>44</sup>

The Bahá'í perspective of the *Type 1* test brings a corrective to the long-established viewpoint that attributes all of our sufferings to sin, to the breaking of a divine commandment, a tendency that runs all through the Judeo-Christian tradition. We find echoes of this view in a passage in the Gospel in which Jesus corrects the hasty understanding of the disciples that sin was not the precipitating cause of accidental death.<sup>45</sup> That suffering is necessarily caused by sin is also the viewpoint expressed by the witnesses in the Book of Job who urged Job simply to confess the hidden sin they presumed him to have committed and which, they reasoned, had caused the terrible calamities that had befallen him. In their haste to condemn Job, the witnesses had wrongly concluded that he must have violated the law of Moses or failed to observe the moral precepts required of a *sedeq* (righteous one):

Is not thy wickedness great? and thine iniquities infinite? For thou hast taken a pledge from thy brother for nought, and stripped the naked of their clothing. Thou hast not given water to the weary to drink, and thou hast withholden bread from the hungry.<sup>46</sup>

In his defence, Job affirmed his own righteousness to counter the charges of the witnesses:

My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined. Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food.<sup>47</sup>

If the witnesses were looking for a quick confession from Job, in order to get to the bottom of his troubles, it was not be forthcoming. In the face of his overwhelming personal agony Job maintained both his

innocence and his belief in a supremely benevolent God.

With the *Type 1* test we should reject the perception, then, that all our sufferings are a result of sin or neglect, a perception that only perpetuates a needless sense of guilt. The *Type 1* test is seen as an evidence of a loving not a punitive God, for His tests are sent to us for our own spiritual maturation:

Tests are benefits from God, for which we should thank Him. Grief and sorrow do not come to us by chance, they are sent to us by the Divine mercy for our own perfecting.<sup>48</sup>

Part of the test for the believer, in fact, may lie in the necessity to correct the false perception that punishment is being meted out for some misdeed. *Type 1* tests occur through no fault of the individual but through events over which a person has no control or which occur in the natural course of events. Traumatic or dysfunctional illness, sudden death, separation, betrayal, personal loss, poverty, fragile health, victimization by others and loss of livelihood are all examples of *Type 1* tests. Bahá'u'lláh asserts that such trials have for ever been the lot of the loved ones of God:

Know ye that trials and tribulations have, from time immemorial, been the lot of the chosen Ones of God and His beloved, and such of His servants as are detached from all else but Him . . .<sup>49</sup>

The *Type 2* test, however, does result from sins of commission or omission, from a violation of a divine law or the failure to observe in its integrity some spiritual virtue. The *Type 2* test, although it is retributive in nature, reflects the will of a just, wise and loving God, since correction is meted out as a means of returning the believer to the right path through repentance for sins which 'Abdu'l-Bahá has qualified as 'the return from disobedience to obedience'.<sup>50</sup>

There is, however, no iron-clad division between the *Type 1* and the *Type 2* test. Certain tests can be subtle combinations of both. This is particularly true of tests concerning interpersonal relationships. Whatever the nature of the test, however, or its origin, the result for the believer should be the same: 'In both cases prayers and supplications should be offered to the sacred Threshold, so that thou mayest remain firm in tests, and patient in ordeals.'<sup>51</sup>

There is another process or dynamic at work during a test which bodes either well or ill for our spiritual development. Life tests are

personalized. They throw into relief our weak points or flaws. Aristotle's concept of *harmatia*, which has come to be known somewhat misleadingly as the 'tragic flaw' but which means simply 'error' (of judgement) or 'transgression', is pertinent here. While the word has for a long time been associated with ancient Greek drama and the fall of the tragic hero, the notion is applicable to everyone. *Harmatia* refers to a specific moral failing or error of judgement that can lead to tragic consequences for an otherwise predominantly good human being.<sup>32</sup> Greek myths and plays, biblical and Shakespearean literature abound in examples of men and women who stood above all others of their generation but for whom a specific moral failing or vice meant tragedy. We think, for example, of the pathological jealousy of a Saul or Judas, the vaulting ambition of Macbeth, the failed nerve and indecision of Hamlet, the unbridled passion of Romeo and Juliet which led ultimately to their untimely deaths.

The object lesson is valid for all of us. Our particular character flaws or moral weaknesses can bring mayhem into our lives if they are not recognized and corrected. The value of the test is precisely that it brings these failings into sharp relief so that they may be recognized for the dangerous liabilities that they are and a serious attempt made to overcome them. The test becomes, consequently, an opportunity for allowing us to face and overcome our moral flaws or, in more traditional theological language, to repent of our sins and foreswear our vices.

The character flaw, however, is not always a wicked, immoral or sinful tendency. The sin (if there be sin) may be one of neglect or omission. The lost or failed opportunity is a good example of how an individual, who may be outstanding in other respects, proves unable to rise to the occasion or fulfil a critical duty. This dereliction of duty is another aspect of the *Type 2* test.

### **Further Understanding Process**

It bears repeating that accepting the test and dealing with it in a spirit of magnanimity is crucial to our spiritual health. This is so for another reason. The test will in a sense become our fate if we do not face it. It will crop up again and again with increasing severity in a kind of Sisyphus effect. The Corinthian hero Sisyphus was one of those

unfortunates that Odysseus met during his travels among the lands and isles of Greece before finally arriving home in Ithaca. Along with Tityos the giant and Tantalos,<sup>53</sup> Sisyphus was consigned to the place of punishment in Tartaros (hell), the abode of the wicked. The nature of Sisyphus's sin is lost to us but his punishment was to be eternally condemned to roll a great stone up a hill, only to have it slip away from him and roll down again once it had reached the top.<sup>54</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá makes clear the repetitive process that must accompany a personal test that continues to go unrecognized.:

Tests are a means by which a soul is measured as to its fitness, and proven out by its own acts. God knows its fitness beforehand, and also its unpreparedness, but man, with an ego, would not believe himself unfit unless proof were given him. Consequently his susceptibility to evil is proven to him when he falls into the tests, and the tests are continued until the soul realizes its own unfitness, then remorse and regret tend to root out the weakness.

The same test comes again in greater degree, until it is shown that a former weakness has become a strength, and the power to overcome evil has been established.<sup>55</sup>

This seminal text of 'Abdu'l-Bahá discloses a kind of pattern or process by which we fall into tests. The test is triggered by the 'ego', 'the subtle tempter', which can be understood as the inclination to follow self-dictated desires. This inclination to follow the desires of self betrays an ignorance of one's true nature which can only be revealed by following divine precept rather than the dictates of self. Our naivety and vulnerability are indicated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá's phrase 'would not believe himself unfit unless proof were given him'.

Like the Genesis account of the fall of Adam and Eve, this text of 'Abdu'l-Bahá clearly implies that one of the functions of the test is to make us wise to our own natures, that is, to become aware of our own vulnerabilities in the propensity for evil, both requirements of wisdom. For until we are tested, we enjoy the delights but also the dangers of innocence. When we experience tests, however, we come face to face with our potentialities for both good and evil. In the Genesis account, this innocence is indicated in the pre-fall stage by the state of nakedness of Adam and Eve which was superseded in the post-fall stage by the putting on of 'coats of skins',<sup>56</sup> an indication that the couple now possessed self-consciousness, that is, knowledge of self. Formerly our

divine parents roamed as naked creatures, living freely and innocently under the impulses of the unrestrained self and following the dictates of natural law. Thereafter, they become clothed in the garment of the precepts of divine revelation.

In 'Abdu'l-Bahá's account above we have a clear description of the ego's over-confidence in its own abilities, a kind of passion of the powers of self, the pride or 'hubris' that goes before a fall. This 'ego' or self has elsewhere been defined in the Bahá'í writings as the binary 'higher' or spiritual self, the creation of God, and the 'lower' self which Shoghi Effendi has defined as 'the dark, animalistic heritage each one of us has, the lower nature that can develop into a monster of selfishness, brutality, lust and so on.'<sup>57</sup> The definition is unsparing but realistic. Interestingly, 'Abdu'l-Bahá suggests that the Satan against which we battle is the 'insistent self' which is another definition of the ego.<sup>58</sup>

The great challenge of overcoming self is not the only means by which a believer comes safely through a personal test. Although many achieve such a singular distinction, it must also be recognized that one is often brought through a test, not by any means of some inner alchemical transformation but by a sudden shift in outer circumstances. Where the individual does not have the inner resources to deal with the test, God often alters the outer circumstances so that the believer is relieved of the burden. The fact that God more often than not removes the outer difficulty in order to relieve us from our straightened circumstances is reflected in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement: 'For how many an affair was involved in difficulty and then was straightened, and how many a problem was solved by the permission of God.'<sup>59</sup> The Báb's best-known and best-loved prayer indicates this power of God to change the outer circumstances in our favour: 'Is there any remover of difficulties save God? Say: Praised be God! He is God! All are His servants, and all abide by His bidding!'<sup>60</sup> The test, then, may be overcome as much by the removal of the outer obstacle by the power and grace of God as by the inner transformation of the individual.

Further, this straightening of affairs that the individual was unable to accomplish reflects three spiritual principles: 1) It is a confirmation of the omnipotence of God as reflected in this statement of the Báb: 'All things lie prisoned within the grasp of His might. Nothing is impossible to Him. He removes every difficulty and surmounts every obstacle.'<sup>61</sup> 2) It testifies to the fact that the human being is often impotent to deal

with situations that threaten spiritual growth. This very weakness causes the believer to turn to God for divine assistance and bestows a greater realization of God's protection. 3) It recognizes that there is a term put on every test. When the term of that test is reached, the test is removed through the mercy of God, although the knowledge of the term lies with God alone. George Townshend beautifully expressed this sentiment of the end term of the trial in the following meditation:

For every void there is a filling, and to every prayer there is an answer.

All tribulation has its ending, and to every seeking there is a finding.

For the weary, rest is waiting, and for the lonely, love.

Therefore will I be content, and will keep a heart at peace. My faith is founded upon Truth, and I will bear witness through every trial to the goodness and mercy of God.<sup>62</sup>

For certain decisive types of tests there is a mysterious turning point or watershed at which the individual, to use the school analogy, either passes or fails; either he finds the wherewithal to deal with the test or he does not. The tests experienced by the believers, 'Abdu'l-Bahá has explained, are in direct proportion to the greatness of the Revelation.<sup>63</sup> Bahá'ís can therefore be expected to be severely tested. Yet at the same time, they are promised an ample outpouring of God's protection and guidance. Shoghi Effendi has written of this passing or failing of tests in these terms:

No amount of organization can solve the inner problems or produce or prevent, as the case may be, victory or failure at a crucial moment. In such times as these, particularly, individuals are torn by great forces at large in the world, and we see some weak ones suddenly become miraculously strong, and strong ones fail . . .<sup>64</sup>

Titanic tests often prove to be traumatic but some of them are solved quickly. Other tests, however, lack this sudden, dramatic onset or resolution and may prove to be slow and lingering and may in some cases persist for years, depending on the individual's ability to understand and overcome them. The promise, however, that tests can be decisively conquered is made clear in the letters of Shoghi Effendi: 'You will suddenly find that you have conquered many of the problems which upset you, and then you will wonder why they should have troubled you at all'.<sup>65</sup>

While the Bahá'í writings sometimes speak the military parlance

of 'victory' and 'conquering tests', we should not overlook the fact that in the life of the test, the battle is sometimes 'won by inches'. The process seems at times painfully slow but through persistence and patience, the believer will soon discover a spiritual breakthrough, one that will more than make up for the ordeal that he or she has gone through. Although the process of working through adversity may seem slow, the results seem to grow exponentially:

In other words, every step forward is not a slow drudgery of climbing but involves a tremendous boost, a tremendous multiplication of energy, of capacity. The steps may not be easy to take, but the advantages gained after each one are so rich that they merit any amount of exertion on our part.<sup>66</sup>

One can also discern a parallel between the tests and challenges of the individual believer and the tests and challenges to the Bahá'í Faith at large. What is true for the Bahá'í Cause in the world is also true for the spiritual growth of the individual. Neither the Bahá'í Faith as a whole nor the individual within it can expect victories and growth without crises and setbacks. Such periodic setbacks are characteristics of life in the mortal world. 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that, 'The world of mortality is a world of contradictions, of opposites; motion being compulsory everything must either go forward or retreat.'<sup>67</sup> But we also have the assurance that there can be no retrogression of the spirit. All movement is bound towards a perfect state. In other words, we start at the mean point on our line of spiritual development and move forward in an upward direction. We cannot move below our starting point: 'In the realm of spirit there is no retreat possible, all movement is bound to be towards a perfect state.'<sup>68</sup> Happily, we cannot unlearn our spiritual lessons if we are willing to profit by them. We build on them.

Although tests promote spiritual growth, it also has to be recognized that the test does not automatically ensure advancement; it can also bring failure. Failure, however, also has to be recognized and accepted as part of the process of spiritual growth. It is important in this respect not to view failure as a decisive act, as a once and for all situation; for failure, if the individual resolves to face the weakness again with courage, can serve as the impetus for overcoming the test. It cannot be said that one has failed a test unless one consciously chooses, as a final solution, to trust the promptings of self instead of the promptings of God – unless one consciously chooses oneself as one is, rather than choosing to strive towards what one can become. Paradoxically, failure,

with all its inherent dangers, may ultimately prove to be the next giant step on the path to spirituality. Repeated failures can indeed produce discouragement but the Bahá'í teachings retain an optimistic outlook by drawing our attention to the fact that past mistakes, no matter how long they might have persisted, can ultimately further our spirituality:

We must always look ahead and seek to accomplish in the future what we may have failed to do in the past. Failures, tests, and trials, if we use them correctly, can become the means of purifying our spirits, strengthening our characters, and enable us to rise to greater heights of service.<sup>69</sup>

It is all too easy for us to see failure at every turn, especially if we constantly measure our conduct against the ideals and high demands encountered in every other line of the Bahá'í writings. We should not forget, however, that the Bahá'í Faith, while it presents an uncompromising stand on moral issues and requires a high level of spiritual conduct, also teaches loving sympathy and understanding of human frailty. The Bahá'í writings and prayers are full of the abundant waters of compassion. Certain stories about the Founders of the Bahá'í Faith are told with humour and the Bahá'í literature itself is sprinkled with a measure of humour and tempered with a frank realism vis-à-vis the less than perfect people who make up the greater part of humanity, Bahá'ís included. The following passage written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, for example, is remarkable for the note of frank realism it sounds:

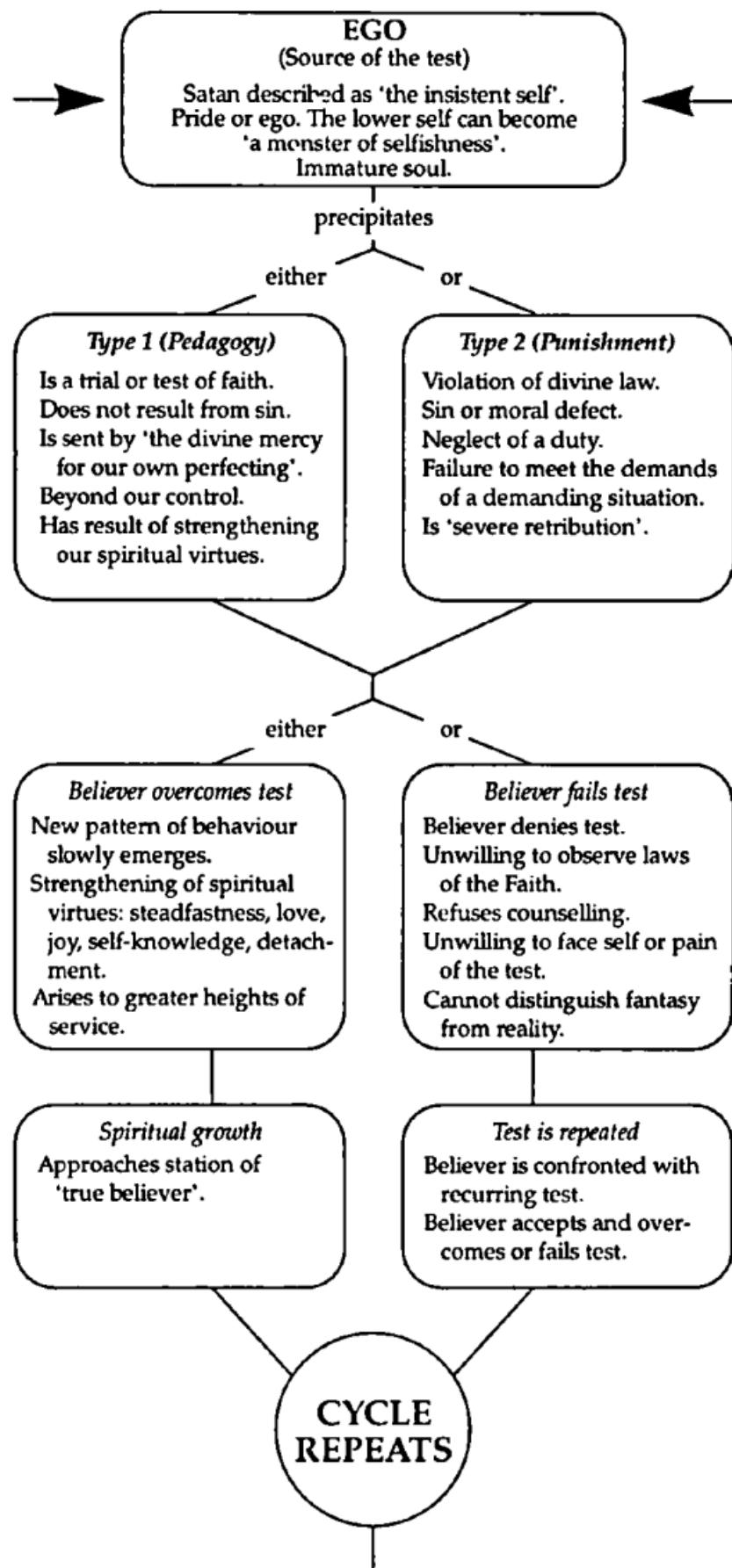
There is a difference between character and faith; it is often very hard to accept this fact and put up with it, but the fact remains that a person may believe in and love the Cause – even to being ready to die for it – and yet not have a good personal character, or possess traits at variance with the teachings. We should try to change, to let the Power of God help recreate us and make us true Bahá'ís in deed as well as in belief. But sometimes the process is slow, sometimes it never happens because the individual does not try hard enough. But these things cause us suffering and are a test to us . . .<sup>70</sup>

### A Basic Schema of the Process of Life Tests

Figure 1 outlines the basic process of the cycle of life tests in both *Types 1* and *2*.

# A PARADIGM OF SPIRITUALITY AND LIFE TESTS

## Understanding Process in Life Tests



## Erik Erikson's Eight Stages of the Life Cycle and the Spiritual Crisis

Psychologist Erik Erikson's 'Eight Stages of the Life Cycle' are relevant to the process of working through the tests of life.<sup>71</sup> Erikson developed his schema of the stages of the Life Cycle partly as a response to Freud's psycho-sexual stages as overriding determinants of human development. Central to Erikson's whole theory of the life cycle is the idea of the test as the progenitor of development. Erikson's basic theory is that at eight critical periods in our life the individual comes face to face with a test, what Erikson calls a 'crisis'. According to his theory, if we respond to the crisis effectively, a corresponding virtue emerges. If not, a corresponding failing will result. For example, in the first year of life, Stage 1, we are faced with the crisis of trust versus mistrust. We emerge with either hope or despondency. Throughout the rest of childhood (to Stage 4) there are other crises. In Stage 2 there is that of autonomy versus shame; we experience the virtue of will or its opposite, impotence. In Stage 3 the crisis is initiative versus guilt; we experience the virtue of purpose or its opposite, passivity. In Stage 4 the crisis is industry versus inferiority; we experience competency or incompetency. In adolescence (Stage 5) we experience the crisis of identity versus identity confusion; the virtue is fidelity or we experience the reverse, 'the vice of apathy'.<sup>72</sup> In adulthood (Stages 6 and 7) the crises are intimacy versus isolation, and generativity (creativity) versus self-absorption; the corresponding experiences are love or isolation, and care or apathy. In old age it is the crisis of integrity versus despair; the emerging virtue is wisdom or its opposite, futility.<sup>73</sup>

This simple outline of Erikson's theory already reveals a certain similarity to the process of life tests described by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. The purpose of the test, like Erikson's crisis, is to foster the development of spiritual virtues. Although Erikson refers to 'crisis' rather than 'test' to describe what happens in each stage of life, the basic idea is the same. The child who has few manual skills and whose industry (Stage 4) is being put to the test by making a bird house in woodwork class may experience frustration or pain as he or she grapples with the task. Similarly the believer whose faithfulness is being put to the test will also feel frustration or pain if he or she fails to be faithful. If we fail the test, we fall back or stand still. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says that tests 'cause progress and they also cause retrogression'.<sup>74</sup>

Unlike the adult believer, however, the child is not always faced with a conscious choice but in both cases the personality becomes more integrated if the test is met successfully and the individual moves onto the next stage. If the individual does not resolve the crisis, it may recur at a later stage and be integrated, or the individual may never overcome it at all. This state also parallels the Sisyphus effect referred to above in that so long as the individual does not confront the test and deal with it, he will have to face it repeatedly.

Erikson's crises and acquired virtues or vices take place within the chronological stages of childhood, adolescence, adulthood and old age but it may be useful to detemporalize his time framework. The crises that Erikson outlines can and do occur at any stage in the life cycle.

There is a definite spiritual dimension to much of Erikson's work. His religious 'Weltanschauung' appears in his books about Gandhi and Martin Luther.<sup>75</sup> In Stage 1 of the life cycle, for example, Erikson examines the relationship of the mother and the child in the development of 'basic trust', another expression for the classic definition of faith and its corresponding virtue of hope. J. Eugene Wright Jr. in interpreting Erikson's work stresses the fact that for Erikson 'basic trust and the childlike virtue of hope are essential to his vision of wholeness and vital life development'.<sup>76</sup> The predominant virtue of Stage 1 is hope, which is set against despondency. Wright comments that 'Hope is so dominant a theme in the Judeo-Christian religion that whole theologies have been centred around it'.<sup>77</sup> Wright cites as an example Jürgen Moltmann's *Theology of Hope*. Hope also features predominantly in the existential theology of Gabriel Marcel, who argues that the virtue of hope must be revived and given priority among the spiritual virtues.<sup>78</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá has repeatedly stated that one of the fulcrums of religious faith is 'trust', trust in God. It is essentially through trust in God that we acquire hope. Mabel Hyde Paine in her illuminating compilation of Bahá'í writings on spirituality, *The Divine Art of Living*, devotes the first chapter to the theme of 'Trusting in God'. Trust in God is, of course, one of the treasured legacies left to the Bahá'í revelation from the Judeo-Christian sacred writings. It forms part of that 'ancient Faith of God',<sup>79</sup> as Bahá'u'lláh calls it. The psalms of the prophet-king David are an outstanding affirmation of trust in God in the midst of a life that was subject to every kind of intrigue, sorrow, trial and

trouble: 'Blessed is that man that maketh the Lord his trust, and respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies.'<sup>80</sup> In one of the most beautiful passages about trust in God ever uttered 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

Oh, trust in God! for His bounty is everlasting, and in His Blessings for they are superb. Oh! put your faith in the Almighty, for He faileth not and His goodness endureth for ever! His Sun giveth light continually, and the Clouds of His Mercy are full of the Waters of Compassion with which He waters the hearts of all who trust Him. His refreshing Breeze ever carries healing in its wings to the parched souls of men!<sup>81</sup>

At this early stage in the child's life, the mother is the symbol of the faith which is found later in the institutions of religion, institutions which can either serve or do a disservice to faith. The mother is the first test for either trust or mistrust. Indeed, through her or because of her, a child's earliest tests are met or not. Wright says, 'The religious dimension is first experienced in and through the love and care of the mothering parent.'<sup>82</sup> Further, 'The child finds a sense of hallowed presence in the security of the mother's care. And this presence is of a quality of numinousness, a term usually reserved for deity.'<sup>83</sup> The 'basic trust' experienced through the mother is to say 'that there is an order in the universe which may be trusted'.<sup>84</sup> J. Eugene Wright, drawing on Peter Berger's 'prototypical human gestures', which Wright likens to Erikson's 'rituals', takes the simple example of the comforting presence of the mother who restores hope by reassuring the child who has been troubled by a nightmare:

In the middle of the night a child awakens from a frightening dream, a nightmare. The room is dark and the dream has shaken her trust in reality. She cries out for her mother. 'It is hardly an exaggeration to say that, at this moment, the mother is being invoked as a high priestess of protective order.'<sup>85</sup>

However, the mother who has never been cared for herself has never come to know basic trust and is therefore incapable of communicating basic trust to her children. The same will be true of the father. The influence of the mother on the faith of the child is stressed time and again in the Bahá'í writings:

If the mother is educated then her children will be well taught. When the mother is wise, then will the children be led into the path of wisdom.

If the mother be religious she will show her children how they should love God. If the mother is moral she guides her little ones into the ways of uprightness.<sup>86</sup>

In adolescence (Stage 5) the youth is preoccupied with forming his own identity. This is the age of experimentation, questioning and revolt. In adolescence there is a search for meaning and commitment, a search for 'ideology'. Referring to a contemporary of William James, E. D. Starbuck, Erikson reminds us that it is in adolescence that the religious conversion is most frequent.<sup>87</sup> Erikson found the 'way of identity' in the great religious and political personalities of the past. It was Thomas Jefferson 'who saw Jesus as his example and model', and who was able to accommodate Christian values to a post-revolutionary mentality in America.<sup>88</sup> Erikson saw 'the way of identity' also in Gandhi and in Martin Luther. According to Erikson, Luther's newly forged identity was reborn 'out of the matrix of the scriptures'.<sup>89</sup> Martin Luther's new theology became the basis for his new ideology: 'In Luther's case, religion provided the necessary ingredients for a new ideology.'<sup>90</sup>

In the Bahá'í perspective we can say that the spiritual test provides us with the opportunity to be eternal adolescents while we are at the same time adults. For during the test we are being continually called upon to forge anew our own unique and personal spiritual identities, an identity that is always emerging in the here and now. We may have in fact contributed to our test through an adolescent frame of mind, that is, an attitude of disregard or rebellion against the precepts of the revelation or an open disregard for divine law.

In Erikson's view of adulthood (Stages 6 and 7), the virtues of loving, nurturing and wisdom can emerge. If not, withdrawal, self-absorption and futility will prevail.<sup>91</sup> In adolescence the demand for love is selfish. Love in adolescence is a 'demanding for self' rather than a 'giving of self'.<sup>92</sup> The higher form of love in adulthood is the love that gives of self. It is *agapé* that best describes the ideal of mature love in adulthood and old age, that form of divine love used by the biblical writers to distinguish it from the more sensual associations of *eros*. *Agapé* refers to spiritual love in the multiple forms of the love of God. The Bahá'í view is in concord with the Christian view that the love of God is the highest of the spiritual virtues:

The essence of Bahá'u'lláh's Teaching is all-embracing love, for love includeth every excellence of humankind. It causeth every soul to go

forward. It bestoweth on each one, for a heritage, immortal life.<sup>93</sup>

### Before and After the Fall: Pride and Remorse

Pride has certain clear connections with the 'ego' which 'Abdu'l-Bahá has identified as the precipitating factor in the *Type 2* test. At the outset one may wonder why so much attention has been directed to the sin of pride. Why is a little exaggerated superciliousness looked upon as such a mortal danger to the soul? Church theologians long ago identified pride as the first of the seven deadly sins.<sup>94</sup> Following church teaching, Dante Alighieri puts pride as the first of the seven deadly sins.<sup>95</sup> Pride has been defined simply as 'the inordinate love of one's own excellence'.<sup>96</sup> Reduced to its lowest common denominator, pride is simply the overpowering love of self.

Pride is one of those ambivalent virtues, for there is both legitimate and illegitimate pride. Legitimate pride, so highly cherished by the ancient Greeks, is that justified satisfaction in one's accomplishments, the pride that provides the motivation to accomplish a worthy goal; or the feeling of the pride in one's family or faith. This sort of pride is not always totally selfish for it can be a source of respect for one's family, one's peers or one's community. Such pride usually aims to preserve a degree of excellence. Illegitimate pride, however, deadly pride, is the pride whose motivating force is lustful domination. It is based on vaulting ambition and an overwhelming love of self.

Bahá'u'lláh has something to say about false pride in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*. Speaking of the 'true seeker', He says: 'He must never seek to exalt himself above any one, must wash away from the tablet of his heart every trace of pride and vainglory . . .'.<sup>97</sup> It is noteworthy that Bahá'u'lláh has juxtaposed pride and vainglory in this way, for they are connected. The Bishop of Geneva, St Francis of Sales, defined vainglory as 'that which we accord ourselves for what is not in us, or for what is in us but not of us, and so not deserving of glory as far as we are concerned'.<sup>98</sup> C.S. Lewis viewed pride basically as our gain at the expense of someone else's loss. He viewed pride, unlike other sins and vices, as being essentially competitive. Further, he saw the great sin as revealing the element of hatred or enmity.<sup>99</sup> Those who are pathologically proud are really burnt up with hate and envy and will stop at nothing to secure for themselves the number one position.

There is one very sobering passage in Bahá'u'lláh's writings, which I have considered in another context,<sup>100</sup> a *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, that deals with our final moments here on earth and which is linked to pathological pride:

He [the true seeker] should forgive the sinful, and never despise his low estate, for none knoweth what his own end shall be. How often hath a sinner, at the hour of death, attained to the essence of faith, and, quaffing the immortal draught, hath taken his flight unto the celestial Concourse. And how often hath a devout believer, at the hour of his soul's ascension, been so changed as to fall into the nethermost fire. Our purpose in revealing these convincing and weighty utterances is to impress upon the seeker that he should regard all else beside God as transient, and count all things save Him, Who is the Object of all adoration, as utter nothingness.<sup>101</sup>

This passage reveals that spiritual pride or ego can kill the very light of faith and send us into the hell of hate and unbelief. Even though Bahá'u'lláh does not identify by name the fatal vice to which He refers, it seems clear that He is referring to pride. He does give us, however, in the same context, the remedy: to regard everything but God as 'utter nothingness'. The seeker must look upon himself as evanescent as the mist that disappears in the heat of the sun.

In that most awesome moment that constitutes the final passage from life to death and from death to life, one comes, so to speak, face to face with God. Salvation is ultimately determined in that moment. Why then does the 'devout believer' at the hour of death 'fall into the nethermost fire' of unbelief and hate?

C.S. Lewis comes to our rescue again with an interpretation of pride from a Christian perspective that sheds light on this passage of Bahá'u'lláh. The proud person likes to look down on people, says Lewis, and because of this cannot bear to look up, even to God, because in God 'you come up against something that is in every respect immeasurably superior to yourself'.<sup>102</sup> Like the bat that flees the light, the proud person who is consumed by self cannot bear to stand naked in the light of God's glory. He prefers his own poor little candle and turns away from the glory of God. Perhaps the 'devout believer' to whom Bahá'u'lláh refers was only play-acting at his role and looked upon himself, rather than God, as the source of his spiritual exaltation. For this too would seem to figure into the pathology of the sin of pride:

that we love self to such an extent that it squeezes out the love of God. Such pathological pride makes the one so afflicted forget that God alone is responsible for our very life and breath and that He is the source of our being and any qualities that we might possess, not we ourselves. Bahá'u'lláh's words are reminiscent of the pride and self-righteousness that Jesus condemned when He said to the chief priests and elders of His generation: 'Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.'<sup>103</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá has explained that the sincere believer will experience remorse or regret in the aftermath of the test, unless, of course, the conscience is defective. Remorse and regret, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá presents them, have the therapeutic value of expunging the sin or weakness – 'remorse and regret tend to root out the weakness'.<sup>104</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá says elsewhere: 'Nothing is more fruitful for man than the knowledge of his own shortcomings'.<sup>105</sup> Kahlil Gibran, a great admirer of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, wrote this beautiful passage about remorse as distinguished from guilt. Gibran's text also points to the maturation process by which the state of remorse contributes to the knowledge of self:

And how shall you punish those whose remorse is already greater than their misdeeds? Is not remorse the justice which is administered by that very law which you would fain serve? Yet you cannot lay remorse upon the innocent nor lift it from the heart of the guilty. Unbidden shall it call in the night, that men may wake and gaze upon themselves.<sup>106</sup>

## *Our Spiritual Anthropology: The Self and the Soul*

### **Our Notion of Self is Problematic**

One reason why moderns have such difficulty in making spiritual progress is that they have largely lost the notion of self as spiritual being. Ideas and beliefs once fundamental to a spiritual world view, like those of God, the spirit and soul, have been largely excluded from modern categories of thinking. There are, of course, religious traditions, theologies and philosophies that retain a belief in soul and spirit but these no longer have any vital effect on society. Some twentieth century psychologists of note, like Jung and Frankl, have preserved the concept of the individual as spiritual being and have articulated rich psychologies rooted in the spiritual dimension, yet these psychologies have influenced a comparatively select few. Literature sometimes touches on the question of spirituality but writers handle this dimension in a more oblique way and from another direction, that of human revelation, of 'man' revealing himself to 'man'. If we have been fortunate enough to retain the categories of soul and spirit as part of our own personal anthropology, we may sometimes experience difficulty integrating such categories with modern psychological notions. Thus modern psychology and the spiritual perception of self remain largely mutually exclusive disciplines, although within the last decade particularly there has been a spate of popular writing, mainly of the self-help variety, that has been steadily bridging the gap between psychology and spirituality, on the one hand, theology and world religions on the other.

Consequently, no widespread doctrine of the integrated self has yet evolved that systematically unites spiritual psychology with such time-honoured theological beliefs in God as personal Being and the immortality of the soul. Even the psychologies of such thinkers as Jung and Frankl, which have a strong spiritual basis, venture only so far into

the spiritual and theological domains. Jung and Frankl were reluctant to deal too directly with the implications of belief in a transcendent God and the soul. This would have necessarily diverted them from the familiar path of psychology into the thorny byways of religion and theology. The result is that spiritual anthropology has not yet fully breached the gap between religion and psychology. Further, the psychological schools of the Freudians, Jungians, Humanists, Existentialists and Behaviourists, etc. have mutually exclusive and sometimes diametrically opposed views of the spiritual nature of the human being.

Psychological language is also problematic. There is no common lexicology for such key terms as 'ego' or 'personality' among the main streams of psychology. Doctrinaire Freudians and Behaviourists deny any notion of a divine self. Indeed for Freud, religion is a neurosis, a projection of an unresolved Oedipal complex, God being the projection of the human father. Other schools like those of Frankl and Jung recognize the spiritual element in the human being. For Jung the spiritual element in the individual was instinctive and would appear to be a thinly disguised, spiritualized version of Freud's notion of drive (*Trieb*) or instinct. In Jung's view, the individual, instead of being driven by the libido, is driven by the psychic elements of the unconscious to seek God, who Jung equated with the divine self.

Victor Frankl, in contrast to Jung, wanted to minimize the fact that the individual was driven by anything in the unconscious, even religious drives, and put his emphasis on the freedom of the individual to choose his being (*das Entscheidene Sein*, the decisive being).<sup>1</sup> For the existentialist Frankl, the spiritual element in the human being is an agent that is free and responsible for determining its own being. Both Jung's individual psychology and Frankl's existentialist logotherapy share a spiritual concept of the human being and stand against Freud's instinctual, deterministic and mechanistic one. Still, neither Frankl nor Jung were willing to venture too far out and up into the notion of the transcendent God, to the One who is 'wholly other' (*das ganz Andere*).

### The Self and the Soul

The fluidity of the familiar word 'self' illustrates how ambiguous are such commonly used referents to the individual. 'Self' can refer at once

to the ego, the body, the personality or to consciousness itself. The self may refer to a body that is located in space-time but also denotes transcendental characteristics, such as the consciousness that is able to abstract itself, to analyze or imagine. There is also the religious self that prays and meditates. For Margaret Mead, the anthropologist, the self would be culturally determined. For the psychiatrist Harry Stack Sullivan the self was a social convention.<sup>2</sup> For Sullivan, the self is one's personal relationships, the point of convergence for all social relationships. In Buddhism there is no essential, permanent, substantial self, only a series of fluctuating states of consciousness. In Hinduism the self is entirely subsumed by the world or Brahman. For Freud the self was the ego, the rational self, a mechanistic, repressive agent that keeps the drives of the id, the libidinal or instinctual self in check, in order to make behaviour consonant with the norms and requirements of social reality. William James proposed a simple taxonomic scheme of the material self, the social self and the spiritual self. These were all part of the empirical self.<sup>3</sup> To this he added the 'I', which was for him the knowing self, the rational component. For Gordon Allport the self indicates a variety of functions including 'bodily sense, self-identity, ego-enhancement, ego-extension, rational activity, self-image, proprieate striving, and knowing'.<sup>4</sup> Allport adapted Emanuel Swedenborg's word 'proprium', which for Swedenborg meant selfishness and pride, to describe the self. Allport viewed the various activities of the self as functioning as a 'fusion': 'The fact is that at every stage of becoming a fusion of these functions is involved.'<sup>5</sup> The behaviourist John Watson, true to the school he founded, eschewed abstract theories and looked no further than 'the end product of our habit systems' for his definition of the self.<sup>6</sup> One can gather from these few brief examples that the western notion of the self is complex and may have tended to obscure rather than clarify the understanding of self.

It has now become imperative for the belief in self as divine spiritual being, as a unity of body and soul, to replace the pervasive current view that the pursuit of material and economic well-being is our sole *raison d'être*, a view that the disillusioned masses are coming increasingly to realize is a devitalizing and illusory one. A spiritual anthropology, grounded in God, with strong convictions in the existence of divine self and the soul, has to eclipse the various contemporary materialistic notions of eroticism, scientism and economism that pervade western

culture. To bring any lasting changes, any real health and well-being to the violent, distracted and corrupt society in which we live, we must begin to view ourselves primarily as divine spiritual beings.

This new and revitalized view of the human being, which is in part a revival of an ancient theological understanding, cannot be done simply through education and culture. The best method for spreading such a critically needed outlook is to offer it as part of the basic perspective within the framework of an existing world religion, one that offers the greatest likelihood of becoming the global religion of humanity, which, for Bahá'ís, is the Bahá'í Faith.<sup>7</sup> When promoted through the outlook of a world faith, spiritual anthropology is assumed within the moral, psychological and theological dimensions of the religion, rather than having to be imported as a view from the outside to revitalize or redefine any current notions of the individual.

The Bahá'í Faith provides a new doctrine of the human being as spiritual *anthros*, a divine anthropology that constitutes an important bridge spanning both psychology and religion. It does this in two ways. First, it recognizes the truths about the self in such psychologies as those of the Jungians and existential psychologists such as Frankl. This does not mean that all ideas within these schools are endorsed in Bahá'í teaching but that many of the insights of these psychologies can be understood to coincide with the Bahá'í view. Second, the Bahá'í Faith revives, develops, clarifies and perpetuates a belief in the critical ideas of 'spirit', 'soul' and a personal God, ideas now largely lost to psychology, and incorporates these within the global context of the self which it sees as being an integral part of psychology.

In the 1960s the systematic existential theologian Paul Tillich argued for a resurrection of the terms 'spirit' and 'soul' on the grounds that without an experience or understanding of spirit within oneself, one cannot analogically or symbolically understand God, the Great Spirit. Tillich also taught that the concept of 'spirit' best conveys the meaning of the dynamic element in the human being that makes creativity, energy and power possible. The concept of spirit unites the notion of mind with that of energy.<sup>8</sup> The German language, rightly, does not make a sharp distinction between spirit and mind, the word *Geist* being used for both concepts. This reactivation of the word 'spirit' and making it part of human language finds its highest expression in the Bahá'í writings, which use the word as part of its basic theological

language. Since the Bahá'í Faith reconciles and incorporates truths from both the fields of psychology and religion, it offers a spiritual anthropology which views the individual in the potentiality of the highest form, the image of divinity. Any divine spiritual anthropology will, moreover, necessarily incorporate the highest aspirations of the humanists, such as working selflessly for the welfare of all humanity, while going that one step further into the realm of transcendence.

When one comes to the definition of self or ego given in the Bahá'í writings, one finds that it offers a complete and essential definition of both human and divine psychology. The psychoanalytical definitions of Freud and the post-Freudians, and those of the more spiritually-minded existentialists and individual psychologists such as Frankl and Jung, find elements of their concepts reflected in Bahá'í thought, which brings at the same time a corrective to their views. The Freudians, in defining the self only as the ego, which was for them an agent of repression for instinctual, that is, mainly infantile sexual drives, promoted an overly libidinal or sexually energetic notion of the self based on the notion of drives. They viewed the religious dimension as being antithetical. On the other hand, the existentialists, in defining the self mainly as the conscious and decisive component in the human being, did not go far enough in assessing the importance of the untapped reservoir of the unconscious and its unsuspected but strong influence when it impinges on consciousness during episodes of psychic disturbance.

The Bahá'í concept of the self incorporates within it both the 'id' and 'libido' of Freudian thought with its instinctual notions of lust, drives, animality and ego-centred self-love, as well as the belief in the spiritual or divine self which is a creation of God and which is closer to the concept of the analytical and existential psychologists like Jung and Frankl. At the same time, Bahá'í teaching points to the freely accessible metaphorical distinctions of a 'higher' and 'lower' self within the individual, who becomes dedicated to the release of the higher self from the downward drag of the lower:

Self has really two meanings, or is used in two senses, in the Bahá'í writings; one is self, the identity of the individual created by God. This is the self mentioned in such passages as 'he hath known God who hath known himself etc.' The other self is the ego, the dark, animalistic heritage each one of us has, the lower nature that can develop into a

monster of selfishness, brutality, lust and so on. It is this self we must struggle against, or this side of our natures, in order to strengthen and free the spirit within us and help it to attain perfection.<sup>9</sup>

The technical definition of the ego used by Freud as a repressing agent of the id for the purposes of socialization cannot be supported on the basis of the above quotation. However, the concept of ego in the Bahá'í text clearly supports a view of the instinctual element ('selfishness', 'brutality', 'lust') in the human being which corresponds to certain elements of both the id and the libido in Freudian nomenclature and promotes the view of all civilized societies that the promptings of the ego must be resisted and controlled.<sup>10</sup> The ego is thus used in the Bahá'í writings in the pejorative sense of the selfish or unconscious drives in the human being and is contrasted with the 'enlightened soul':

. . . the complete and entire elimination of the ego would imply perfection – which man can never completely attain – but the ego can and should be ever-increasingly subordinated to the enlightened soul of man. This is what spiritual progress implies.<sup>11</sup>

The Bahá'í notion of the ego also implies the age-old theological notion of pride which precipitates the spiritual fall. As we have seen, this negative function of the ego is given in the context of facing personal tests:

Tests are a means by which a soul is measured as to its fitness, and proven out by its own acts. God knows its fitness beforehand, and also its unpreparedness, but man, with an ego, would not believe himself unfit unless proof were given him.<sup>12</sup>

Today, belief in the immortality of the soul is often doubted and rarely defended. With some exceptions,<sup>13</sup> it seems to have become a forgotten doctrine, the property of antiquated and dusty volumes of medieval theology. It was, however, taught by Christ,<sup>14</sup> and in the first centuries of the Christian era and throughout the Middle Ages was widely accepted. Like the belief in its sister notion of spirit, we must also reactivate and redefine belief in the soul, once the most widely believed of spiritual teachings, and integrate it with those truths of humanistic psychology belonging to the spirit of this age.

There can be no genuine spirituality without a belief in the soul. It is belief in the soul that carries us into the heart of spirituality, for it is through the power of the soul that the seeker approaches God and

discovers the sacred measures of true dignity and divinity. It is through the power of the soul that the individual demonstrates god-like attributes and discovers his or her birthright as a divine creation made in the image of God. Here, however, we must make an important distinction. It is not merely belief in the soul as a spiritual entity which matters, for all human beings, in the Bahá'í understanding, possess a soul. One does not have to be religious to believe in the soul. Writers and poets, creative artists of all sorts believe in the power of the soul. It is belief in an immortal, eternal soul which is critical to the welfare of the human being at the present hour, the soul that is filled with 'the spirit of faith',<sup>15</sup> the soul that lives for and aspires to see God. This is a critical distinction, for belief in the soul as the unique handiwork of God alone, connects it to its ultimate aim and purpose: to reflect God's glory in terrestrial life and ultimately to return to share intimacy with Him in an imperishable and glorified celestial life:

Know thou of a truth that the soul, after its separation from the body, will continue to progress until it attaineth the presence of God, in a state and condition which neither the revolution of ages and centuries, nor the changes and chances of this world, can alter. It will endure as long as the Kingdom of God, His sovereignty, His dominion and power will endure. It will manifest the signs of God and His attributes, and will reveal His loving kindness and bounty.<sup>16</sup>

I have alluded briefly above to a belief in the soul as conferring a measure of true dignity to the human being. In the social and political realms the individual has dignity only when individual human rights are recognized and protected. The codes of law and ethical principles that preserve human rights are meant to confer dignity and worth upon the individual and also to guarantee those conditions under which the individual's material well-being might flourish in society. Belief in the soul, however, confers dignity upon the individual because it inculcates that sense of reverence due the soul as the highest created entity in the divine order on the human plane. When there is a mutual recognition of persons as souls created by God, this confers dignity upon the interacting selves. One may be poor, uneducated or living in repressive conditions. One may even be dying but with the recognition of the soul as a divine creation of God, no small measure of the dignity and worth inherent in the individual is also realized.

Belief in the immortal soul also acts as the greatest bulwark against

the fear of death and annihilation. Jung has written that the majority of the patients that he treated in mid-life had at bottom a fear of death as the root cause of their neurosis.<sup>17</sup> It would seem that there is nothing so frightening as the idea that we shall disappear off the face of the earth without leaving a trace and become a thing quite forgotten, as if we had never existed. Thousands of people perish every day; only a very few of the denizens of history are remembered for having significantly altered the course of human events or for having contributed to the development of the arts and sciences. The rest of us who perish – that is, all of us – will for some time live on in the memories of those who have loved us. But even these memories will eventually fade with the passing generations. What is the sense to our lives, we wonder, if we shall disappear at the end of our days without ever leaving any trace of our identity, of who we are or what we are, of the love that we have brought into the world and of the tiny ways in which we have fought to make the world a better place? This fearful expectation of annihilation has greatly exaggerated the rumour of our impeding extinction. A strong belief in the immortality of the soul is the greatest antidote for the fear of death and the misplaced belief in our own annihilation. To believe that we shall not survive death and that consciousness shall be extinguished at the moment of our passing can only breed hopelessness, pessimism and despair, or at best a kind of joyless acceptance of our ultimate doom. Even those who eschew belief in the afterlife, but who choose nonetheless to count carefully and celebrate the days that are left to them, must be dogged with the persistent and inevitable prospect of their own extinction.

Belief in the immortality of the soul, however, is life-affirming, for it underscores and validates that grand idea that our human identity, whose genesis is one of God's creative acts, can never be destroyed and shall live on in a form that best befits the station that the soul has earned during its terrestrial life. With a firm belief in the immortality of the soul, the human being need not fear his or her own perishing and by living the life of faith may live on confidently in the expectation of life eternal:

Thou hast asked Me concerning the nature of the soul. Know, verily, that the soul is a sign of God, a heavenly gem whose reality the most learned of men hath failed to grasp, and whose mystery no mind, however acute, can ever hope to unravel. It is the first among all created

things to declare the excellence of its Creator, the first to recognize His glory, to cleave to His truth, and to bow down in adoration before Him. If it be faithful to God, it will reflect His light, and will, eventually, return unto Him. If it fail, however, in its allegiance to its Creator, it will become a victim to self and passion, and will, in the end sink in their depths.<sup>18</sup>

It was Plato (428/7-348/7 BCE) who in *The Phaedo* first attempted to prove the immortality of the soul. In Plato's teaching the soul gained immortality through philosophy, that is, the contemplation of eternal realities, the 'universals' or eternal Ideas such as justice and goodness. Indeed Plato has Socrates say to Simmias in *The Phaedo* that 'the true philosophers . . . are always occupied in the practice of dying'<sup>19</sup>, and 'For is not philosophy the study of death?'<sup>20</sup> Plato thus affirms the soul's immortality:

That soul, I say, herself invisible, departs to the invisible world – to the divine and immortal and rational: thither arriving, she is secure of bliss and released from the error and folly of men, their fears and wild passions and all other human ills, and forever dwells, as they say of the initiated, in company with the gods.<sup>21</sup>

Plato's view of philosophy was basically one of mystical contemplation. Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá also emphasize the need for meditation or contemplation, as well as prayer, in order to win immortality.

Plato's concept of the immortal, indivisible essence of the soul was adopted by Aquinas and has remained until today a mainstay of Roman Catholic dogmatic theology. Contemporary Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain writes:

A spiritual soul cannot be corrupted, since it possesses no matter; it cannot be disintegrated, since it has no substantial parts; it cannot lose its individual unity, since it is self-subsisting, nor its internal energy, since it contains within itself all the sources of its energies . . .<sup>22</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá's concept of the invisible, indivisible, eternal 'substance' of the soul is strikingly similar to that of Plato and therefore to Catholic teaching. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

The soul is not a combination of elements, it is not composed of many atoms, it is of one indivisible substance and therefore eternal. It is entirely out of the order of physical creation; it is immortal! . . . The soul,

being of that one indivisible substance, can suffer neither disintegration nor destruction, therefore there is no reason for its coming to an end.<sup>23</sup>

The notions of spirit and soul, however, were eliminated from psychology largely through the influence of scientific materialism in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Dr Wilhelm Wundt (1832-1920), who founded the first experimental psychology laboratory in Leipzig and who is often considered the founder of experimental psychology, wanted to do away with the notion of any mysterious metaphysical 'it', such as the soul, any central agency that maintained the integrity of the body and the mind. Such an intangible agency could not be subjected to the rigours of introspection and experimentation in the laboratory. Through introspection, Wundt and his followers broke down the mind atomistically into such components as basic sensations, feelings and images. The idea that there is no soul was also central to the works of F.A. Lange (1828-75). Both Wundt and Lange argued for a 'Psychologie ohne Seele' (psychology without a soul),<sup>24</sup> and for about the next hundred years their idea was widely accepted. Behaviourists, Structuralists and Freudians were only too happy in their dissections of the human psyche to go about naming external coordinates, behaviours and other processes. However, this resulted in an overly mechanistic and atomistic view of both the mind and the personality. An approach that did nothing but name and describe the outer manifestations of behaviour, or dissected inner emotional states of consciousness, did violence to the underlying whole. The human being does represent, after all, some kind of psychic unity. Reactions to Wundt's atomistic psychology were not long in coming. It was to reaffirm a holistic view of the individual that Wertheimer's, Koffka's and Köhler's Gestalt Psychology and later Kurt Goldstein's Organismic Theory were dedicated.

The nineteenth century materialists were unwilling to let the mystery of the soul stand as mystery. Instead of promoting a spiritual psychology of the human being that included soul, the materialistic psychologists went that one step further to proclaim that not only was the soul no mystery, it simply did not exist at all. The real was only what could be measured, quantified, manipulated or the object of introspection. Bahá'u'lláh affirms, however, the mystery of the soul as the most mysterious of the mysteries. This is not to say that a mystery is a non-existent thing or that the effects of something which

escapes our understanding are not acutely felt:

Verily I say, the human soul is, in its essence, one of the signs of God, a mystery among His mysteries. It is one of the mighty signs of the Almighty, the harbinger that proclaimeth the reality of all the worlds of God. Within it lieth concealed that which the world is now utterly incapable of apprehending.<sup>25</sup>

A powerful statement indeed. In addition to underscoring the reality of the mystery of the soul, this text of Bahá'u'lláh also reaffirms in a more general sense the belief in mystery itself, in those realities that lie completely outside the grasp of human rationality. For this sense of mystery is one of the more traditional meanings of faith: believing in those things which we do not fully understand in the here and now. This ancient meaning of faith has been mistakenly called 'blind faith', but it would be better to refer to it as 'humble faith' since it recognizes the limitations put on rational understanding to grasp fully things which are momentarily beyond its ken.

The question of the soul has always raised a further question of its relationship to the body. The following extract from the writings of Bahá'u'lláh puts the matter succinctly: 'The soul of man is the sun by which his body is illumined, and from which it draweth its sustenance, and should be so regarded'.<sup>26</sup> A similar affirmation is expressed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

The temple of man is like unto a mirror, his soul is as the sun, and his mental faculties even as the rays that emanate from that source of light. The ray may cease to fall upon the mirror, but it can in no wise be dissociated from the sun.<sup>27</sup>

## Personality

The everyday, outward identity of the individual is what is commonly understood as personality. Responding to a western audience about the meaning of personality, 'Abdu'l-Bahá provided a binary definition:

Personality is one of two kinds. One is the natural or God-given personality which the Western thinkers call individuality. Individuality is the inner aspect of man which is not subject to change.

The second is personality. Personality is the acquired virtues and perfections, with which man is adorned.<sup>28</sup>

The distinction made by 'Abdu'l-Bahá helps us to understand both the natural and God-given aspects of personality. His definition also puts an emphasis on the notion of free will in the development of spiritual qualities, a concept which was of great importance to Viktor Frankl. Frankl stressed repeatedly the notion of the individual's responsibility for his or her own spiritual being even under the most adverse conditions. In *Man's Search for Meaning* he writes:

The experiences of camp life show that man does have a choice of action . . . Man *can* preserve a vestige of spiritual freedom, of independence of mind, even in such terrible conditions of psychic and physical stress . . . everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.<sup>29</sup>

In the same vein, Frankl writes of finding meaning in the fleeting circumstances of life: 'Thus, the transitoriness of our existence in no way makes it meaningless. But it does constitute our responsibility; for everything hinges upon our realizing the essentially transitory possibilities.'<sup>30</sup>

A similar point is made by 'Abdu'l-Bahá about the necessity for the self to construct the personality: 'Personality is obtained through the effort of man, and through training and education.'<sup>31</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá's understanding of personality, however, differs from common or technical psychological usage. In the first place, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá uses the term 'individuality', He does not appear to intend personality as it is commonly understood. The two are usually synonymous in western society: your individuality is your personality.<sup>26</sup> In western thinking, your individuality is expressed through those character traits, attitudes and behaviour patterns that are unique and particular to you. This sum constitutes personality. In conventional psychology, the differences in personality are the expression of our individuality. We might itemize them, as Alice Heim did, as 'all the traits, sentiments, aptitudes, prejudices, emotions, attitudes, moods, self-perceptions, abilities, interests, skills, recollections, desires, ambitions and manners which make up the individual'.<sup>27</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, however, reinterprets the familiar terms for a divine purpose. He sees personality within the greater overall context of 'character'. Let us consider 'Abdu'l-Bahá's definitions of personality again:

## OUR SPIRITUAL ANTHROPOLOGY: THE SELF AND THE SOUL

Personality is one of two kinds. One is the natural or God-given personality which the Western thinkers call individuality. Individuality is the inner aspect of man which is not subject to change.

The second is personality. Personality is the acquired virtues and perfections, with which man is adorned.

When the individuality of man, i.e., his God-given natural virtues, is adorned with acquired virtues and perfections then we have character. When the infinite effulgences of God are revealed in the individual, then divine perfections which are invisible in all creation will become manifest in him.<sup>28</sup>

A simplified formula of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's explanation is:

$$\text{Individuality} + \text{Personality} = \text{Character}$$

By 'Abdu'l-Bahá's definition, our individuality is the God-given spiritual essence whose potential exists in each human being at birth. It is the raw material, so to speak, of our spiritual development. Personality is the form that we give to that raw material, what we become in the course of life through the refining process of education and through our own efforts. What 'Abdu'l-Bahá calls character is the combining of the two: the outcome of the original God-given attributes of our individuality with the acquired perfections or defects of our personality. Once again, as we often see in Bahá'í lexicology, it is a question of giving the old words new meanings.

This formula requires, however, further explanation. When 'Abdu'l-Bahá refers to the definition of personality as individuality, He begins with the individual nature that is created by God. That is our 'personality' by the first definition. It is our individuality given to us by God at birth, our spiritual heritage or birthright. For this the individual does not have to strive. It is a datum. It is, moreover, praiseworthy because it is divine in origin and consists of our outstanding, individual and specific spiritual attributes: knowledge, power, faithfulness, generosity, mercy and wealth are the ones He names.<sup>29</sup> Our personality by this definition is all of the positive characteristics of our divinely originated nature.

The second definition of personality refers to the characteristics acquired throughout a lifetime. These may be human or divine, perfect or imperfect, vices or virtues. They are perceived as a continuum or a modification of our individuality, our original God-given nature.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, viewing things ideally from the spiritual perspective, states that it would be better for the individual to endow himself with praiseworthy characteristics. These can best be obtained through individual effort and striving and through the benefits of training and education. These characteristics are a further refinement of the original God-given characteristics of our individuality, in the same way that the beauty of the statue is a refinement of the original marble.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, although believing in the soul, leans somewhat in the direction of the thinkers of the eastern religions of Buddhism and Taoism when He points to the element of impermanence, to those shifting states of consciousness that contribute to changes in personality: 'However, personality has no element of permanence in it, it is a shifting, changeable quality in man which can be turned either way.'<sup>30</sup> We must look to something other than the shifting sands of personality for that element of permanence within.

Our individuality is God-given, yet the development of our personality, according to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, is largely in our own hands. There is no mystery in it. If we habitually perform praiseworthy deeds and reveal heavenly attributes, we will become praiseworthy and heavenly. The force of habit is regarded as of special value in the building up of the acquired personality as is the affirmation of free will and the sense of responsibility in personal development. The God-given individuality at birth contains a promise of perfection. But whether that promise will be fulfilled or not depends on us. The God-given individuality can be subjected to perversion. Through bad habits we can even reach the low point, says 'Abdu'l-Bahá, where we are no longer able to distinguish good from evil or no longer have the power to resist evil. The opium eater serves as 'Abdu'l-Bahá's example and can serve to represent any drug-addicted person:

. . . it is in the nature of man to be harmed by poison, and to find enjoyment in sweets; but he changes his nature to such an extent that he takes poison, such as opium and arsenic in the form of a drug, and he accustoms himself to it to such an extent that if he does not receive it he may die.<sup>31</sup>

Wilfully violent individuals are also examples of those who no longer choose to resist evil.

As already mentioned above, both Frankl and Jung were reluctant to define the centre of the individual as soul, in the overtly religious

sense, because they feared that it would take them outside the domain of psychology and put them into the hands of the theologians. They wished to avoid this at all costs. Fortunately, both psychologists preserved the notion of the soul in any case. Jung, however, in spite of the wide support he received from such writers and thinkers as Arnold Toynbee, Philip Wylie, Lewis Mumford, Hermann Hesse, Paul Radin and the members of the Bollingen Foundation, was also criticized precisely because his psychology was judged to be too mystical or philosophical. A somewhat dated study that surveyed 45 teachers of the history of psychology ranked Jung thirtieth on the list of those who had made the most significant contributions to psychological theory, with Freud at the head of the list.<sup>32</sup>

Jung's psychology features some very prominent mystical, mythological and theological elements, many of them drawn from Hinduism and Buddhism. This has been precisely the reason for its appeal, at least in the eyes of his proponents. Jung himself stated that it was one of the great errors of the Freudians that they forbade themselves to learn the doctrine that God was our Father; the father figure remained antithetical to Freud.<sup>33</sup> Jung makes, however, this statement about theology which is indicative of his guarded view of the divine science: 'Theology does not help those who are looking for the key, because theology demands faith, and faith cannot be made: it is in the truest sense a gift of grace.'<sup>34</sup> This is a strange ground on which to reject theology. Much of what Jung discovered in his explorations into religion was based upon faith in the sense that God lay at the basis of the religious experience that he studied. For Jung faith was, at least, an awareness or consciousness of the divine element in the human soul and in the various deep forms of consciousness. While faith is certainly in some sense a gift of grace, it is a gift that in the Bahá'í understanding has been offered to everyone. Faith can remain dormant as a seed, blossom for a time and become at one point a dried up plant or flourish into a mighty tree. In the Bahá'í view, moreover, faith, both as a form of knowledge and in its psychospiritual sense, is developmental. By protecting their discipline from the perceived incursions of theology, the psychologists in one sense impoverished the richness of the doctrine of the soul.

## The Unconscious and Consciousness

The influence of the unconscious is by no means universally accepted among personality theorists. Freudians and Jungians believe it to be vital to an understanding of the psyche but for very different reasons. Existentialist psychologists like Viktor Frankl like to play down the role of the unconscious and emphasize the decision-making responsibility of the conscious mind. Although Freud was by no means the first to point to the existence of the unconscious mind, called by William James in America the 'subconscious mind', his writings drove home the reality of the unconscious both to the medical community and to the greater public.

Does the Bahá'í Faith have anything to say about the existence of the unconscious? More specifically, does the unconscious have any role to play in spiritual growth and development? There are two significant texts of 'Abdu'l-Bahá which clearly point to an unconscious factor that can determine behaviour. One of the passages describes the individual who is at the mercy of unconscious forces which drive him or her on to become an unwitting victim of self:

Just as the earth attracts everything to the centre of gravity, and every object thrown upward into space will come down, so also material ideas and worldly thoughts attract man to the centre of self. Anger, passion, ignorance, prejudice, greed, envy, covetousness, jealousy and suspicion prevent man from ascending to the realms of holiness, imprisoning him in the claws of self and the cage of egotism. The physical man, unassisted by the divine power, trying to escape from one of these invisible enemies, will *unconsciously* fall into the hands of another. No sooner does he attempt to soar upward than the density of the love of self, like the power of gravity, draws him to the centre of the earth. The only power that is capable of delivering man from this captivity is the power of the breaths of the Holy Spirit.<sup>35</sup> [emphasis mine]

'Abdu'l-Bahá's example of the 'physical man' would appear to be a clear indication that there is an unconscious field which, unseen, drives the behaviour of men and women. The context in which 'Abdu'l-Bahá makes His point would seem to indicate a negative role being ascribed to the unconscious. The unconscious will drive or lead the individual from one self-seeking situation to another. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's definition of faith as 'conscious knowledge'<sup>36</sup> takes on by contrast special significance in light of the above passage. Following from this

definition, the believer who has true faith, that is conscious knowledge, would be the one who has been delivered from the unsuspected, imperious drives of the unconscious mind. The behaviour of this person would be fully and freely determined in the light of consciousness.

The Bahá'í writings, however, also point to the existence of an unconscious drive that has beneficial effects. This is the notion of 'spiritual instinct', mentioned by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the context of offering up prayers for a departed soul:

The very fact that our spiritual instinct, surely never given in vain, prompts us to pray for the welfare of those, our loved ones, who have passed out of the material world: does it not bear witness to the continuance of their existence.<sup>37</sup>

Now, in the sense that we are aware of this spiritual instinct it is conscious, not unconscious. But 'Abdu'l-Bahá seems to be pointing to a drive or an inspiration that wells up from the unconscious depths to penetrate consciousness, and once it has penetrated consciousness, impels us to pray for the soul of the departed. This 'spiritual instinct' would seem to be a close relative of the Jungian concept of a 'religious drive'. The Jungian H. Bänziger declared that 'We may even speak of a religious drive just as we may speak of sexual and aggressive drives.'<sup>38</sup> Frankl, however, says: 'As for myself, I would not give a damn for a religiousness that I owed to some "religious drive". Genuine religiousness has not the character of driven-ness but rather that of deciding-ness.'<sup>39</sup> This statement is typical of Frankl's predilection for responsible, conscious decision-making in determining one's attitude and conduct.

Frankl has pointed out, however, that there is a constant transition across the permeable border of the conscious and the unconscious minds, and that spiritual awareness functions in both the conscious and the unconscious spheres:

Since the instinctual and the spiritual are both unconscious, and the spiritual may be conscious as well as unconscious, we now have to ask ourselves how sharp these two distinctions are. The border between conscious and unconscious is a very fluid one – it is permeable – for there is a constant transition from one to the other.<sup>40</sup>

## *The Imagination: The Double-Edged Sword of the Soul*

### **The Imagination: Defended and Doubted by Poets and Philosophers**

The imagination is one of the soul's greatest powers. It deserves a much closer scrutiny than it has previously received in the study of spirituality since it is a basic constituent of spiritual anthropology and has sure implications for spiritual growth. Imagination is a two-edged sword. On the one hand, when it is focused on those forces that lead to an unveiling of knowledge, the spiritualization of the soul and the beautification of the world, it becomes a powerful ally of spirituality. On the other hand, when its energies are harnessed in the service of the frivolous or the base, it can pose a serious threat to spiritual development.

'Abdu'l-Bahá includes the imagination among those spiritual powers which constitute the faculties of the human mind, along with thought, comprehension, memory and the common faculty.<sup>1</sup> For those who value creativity above all, imagination has God-like qualities, possessing the ability to penetrate a higher reality of truth and beauty.<sup>2</sup> In Blake's cosmic vision, imagination leads outside of space-time, directly into the world of eternity with its ethereal, airy sprites. Philosophers, working from within a rationalist framework, have tended to view imagination as a force redundant to the exercise of pure abstract reasoning or liable to lead it into error. In religion and theology there is a strong current of thought, dating back to biblical times through Aquinas, which views the imagination as inimical to the individual's moral and spiritual development. As for psychologists, they have been either bedevilled or simply uninterested by the imagination because the academic study of psychology views itself as being too empirical to take note of such an abstract and elusive

component of the mind. After all, one cannot study the imagination in the controlled experimental situation. There is, therefore, remarkably little psychological writing on the imagination itself,<sup>3</sup> despite its being the common property of everyone, something that is as commonplace as thinking, to which it may be more closely related than we have suspected.

For Blaise Pascal, imagination was the 'maîtresse d'erreur et de fausseté' ('mistress of error and falsehood').<sup>4</sup> Imagination is 'mistress', not only in the sense of the one who governs the world but also in the sense of mistress as lover: the one who comes to possess the heart and lead into moral error, the one who deceives and causes deception and a breaking of faith. Yet Pascal, even with all the rigours of his 'Jansénisme',<sup>5</sup> was ambivalent about the role of the imagination and admitted in the same context that imagination bestows happiness, health and riches.<sup>6</sup> Pascal's ambivalence about the imagination indicates that it wields a double-edged sword.

For twentieth century poet and essayist Wallace Stevens imagination was a veritable god, possessing qualities that in his view justified its reigning supreme over all other faculties. In his poem 'Another Weeping Woman' Stevens wrote:

The magnificent cause of being  
 The imagination, the one reality  
 In this imagined world  
 Leaves you  
 With him for whom no phantasy moves,  
 And you are pierced by death.<sup>7</sup>

In his apologia for imagination, 'Imagination as Value' in *The Necessary Angel, Essays on Reality and the Imagination* (1942) Stevens gave the imagination the predominant metaphysical value. He felt that the Romantics had devalued the imagination by equating it too closely with feeling.<sup>8</sup> Stevens wrote openly of his unqualified admiration for the powers of the imagination: 'The imagination is the only genius.'<sup>9</sup>

The philosophers, however, took a dimmer view of the imagination. Plato inaugurated a long tradition of distrust *vis-à-vis* the imagination because he regarded the image as illusory. The infinite variety of images of sensible things were for Plato merely imitations of the Forms which were the real essence of a thing, and the essence in his philoso-

phy was fixed and unchanging.<sup>10</sup> Similar are the images of physical objects because they are located in space-time and are subject to change. For Plato, consequently, the imagination's changeability made it less than a sure thing.

Aristotle's psychological approach to the imagination was more purely descriptive than Plato's and did not reflect the same distrust of the visionary faculty. For Aristotle, the imagination was an intermediary between the senses on the one hand and thoughts or ideas on the other. Aristotle concluded that the imagination worked through sense perception but developed from the sense to form abstract images. Professor of Literature A.S.P. Woodhouse regretted, however, the fact that Aristotle did not give a more central role to the imagination in his *Poetics*.<sup>11</sup>

Plotinus, the founder of Neoplatonism, with fine insight, saw a dual or ambivalent role for the imagination. He recognized its creative possibilities as well as its potentially deceptive nature. Plotinus made the distinction between a higher and a lower imagination, basically the same position that the Bahá'í Faith takes *vis-à-vis* this faculty.<sup>12</sup> Plotinus' views are not foreign to certain of the Bahá'í teachings. Professor Juan Cole cites Plotinus as the author of the doctrines of the unknowability of God, the emanation doctrine of creation, the co-eternity of the universe with God, and the *Nous* or Universal Intellect as an intermediary between God and creation.<sup>13</sup> One can find strong resemblances between these teachings and those of the Bahá'í Faith.

In the Bahá'í Faith, the imagination is viewed as a power of the soul which may focus either on higher, abstract, spiritual realities or on lower objects of self-gratification. Thus the Bahá'í teachings recognize a marked ambivalence, if not duality, of the imagination. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's schema resembles loosely Avicenna's treatise *On the Soul* and his 'faculty psychology', which was explored by the schoolmen of the Middle Ages, with its five internal sense powers: the central agency – resembling 'Abdu'l-Bahá's 'common faculty' – fantasy, imagination, memory, and the power of apprehension (understanding).<sup>14</sup> For Plotinus, the closer imagination worked with the senses, the more likely it was to deceive. The more it assisted in the convection of ideas, however, the closer it came to reality in operating as a function of the rational soul. Modern philosophy recognizes in aesthetics a legitimate role for the imagination. Both George Santayana<sup>15</sup> and John Dewey<sup>16</sup>

## THE IMAGINATION: THE DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD OF THE SOUL

accorded to the imagination a key role in the artistic experience by a transformation of the environment. For Santayana and Dewey, art is a kind of experience, both for the artist and the spectator, and it belonged to the imagination to create that experience. Within Christianity, St Augustine recognized a divine function for the imagination when employed in the service of the prophetic vision. He also recognized that the imagination is capable of reflecting and reproducing reality. When one reads literature or history, for example, one is able to produce a mental image which will assist understanding. Yet Augustine viewed the imagination as being inferior to the intellect since it was not always able to interpret accurately what it saw.<sup>17</sup> Augustine's judgement suggests that the imagination has to work in concert with the individual's other rational faculties in order to function correctly. He also remarked that the will greatly influenced the operation of the imagination.<sup>18</sup> In 'Abdu'l-Bahá's 'faculty psychology', the imagination gives birth to and forms images.<sup>19</sup> For Aquinas, the process was similar: 'But for the retention and preservation of these forms, the *phantasy* or *imagination* is appointed, being as it were a storehouse of forms received through the senses.'<sup>20</sup> // memory

### The Negative Side of the Imagination: Idle and Destructive Fantasy

Fantasy and wish-fulfilment have become highly sought after, marketable commodities to satisfy the demands of individual and mass psychology. Light entertainment in the printed, electronic and musical media has created a veritable 'dream machine' that indulges the fantasies of millions while turning million dollar profits. There are fantasy homes, fantasy vacations, fantasy clothing, even ~~a once-a-month concept~~ popular television series 'Fantasy Island' which has gone the way of all fantasies. Fantasy, not religion, has become the new opiate of the people. Fantasy dulls the hard edge of turgid quotidian reality and provides a temporary escape from the petty life. This, in part, explains fantasy's popularity.

For purposes of religious faith, however, fantasizing is not the innocent pastime that it appears to be. It discloses a more subtle and dangerous face for the spiritual life. It would no exaggeration to say that certain forms of fantasy can be potentially lethal for spiritual development. The eminent Bahá'í writer George Townshend points

to our idles fancies in his introduction to the *Hidden Words* as forming part of the script we have written for ourselves, a script that spells abasement:

... Bahá'u'lláh sees man by his own choice and act, impoverished and abased, busy with his own empty fancies and idle imaginings, distrusting and rebelling against God and thus destroying his hope, choosing boundless shame, binding himself in the fetters of this world and in the prison of self, bartering Paradise for the dust heap of the mortal world.<sup>21</sup>

If we have not done so already, we should begin to disabuse ourselves, then, of the false notion that 'idle fancies' and 'vain imaginings',<sup>22</sup> two characteristic and familiar phrases found in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, are harmless wisps of fancy that float momentarily before our eyes. Certainly some of our pipe dreams are innocuous and can be relegated to the category of harmless wishful thinking. But what Bahá'u'lláh seems to have in mind is far more detrimental to the life of the spirit.

Fancy-making has long been recognized by the world's great prophets and spiritual teachers as a dangerous threat to faith. Bahá'u'lláh, the Buddha and the Hindu sages, to name but a few, all speak of the dangers of vain imaginings and warn us to beware of *maya* (illusion). The Hebrew Bible and the Gospels have much to say about the waywardness of the human heart. The prophet Jeremiah – second only to the great Isaiah – who received his prophetic commission in 626 BCE during the reign of King Josiah in the last dramatic days before the fall of Jerusalem, spoke to the people of the kingdom of Judah in these words: 'O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved. How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?'<sup>23</sup> Foreseeing the redemption of Israel during the Messianic Age when all nations 'shall be gathered' unto Jerusalem, Jeremiah also said 'neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart'.<sup>24</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh, however, elaborates on this theme in greater detail than did the Manifestations of God of the past. When Bahá'u'lláh speaks of 'idle fancies' and 'vain imaginings', He seems to alert us to a certain type of nefarious mental activity. The idle fancies and vain imaginings of which He speaks appear to lie more in the form of habitual and self-centred ways of thinking or as deep-seated mental projections or images. It should be pointed out, however, that these fantasies and

imaginings are not obsessions in the pathological or clinical sense of the word but rather misdirected desires and false perceptions experienced by the generality of humanity. These vain imaginings can exert such great power and influence because they have as ancillaries our deepest passions and ‘covetous desires’,<sup>25</sup> passions and desires that Bahá’u’lláh qualifies as ‘evil’ and ‘corrupt’.<sup>26</sup>

These last two qualifiers ‘evil’ and ‘corrupt’ are, ~~certainly~~, judgemental, but judgement ~~is~~, it should be remembered, a rightful function of prophetic office. Yet Bahá’u’lláh’s judgement of human behaviour is neither too condemnatory, nor reflective of a view of the individual that is dark, negative or pessimistic. On the contrary, the Bahá’í writings underscore the nobility of the human being who comes under the guidance of the divine Manifestation. Such an individual is portrayed as standing at the apex of creation, a fine and noble creature, worthy of our deepest love and admiration. The noble station of the human being is celebrated in many passages in the Bahá’í writings. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says, for example, that ‘man is the most noble of beings’.<sup>27</sup> Bahá’u’lláh also writes:

Lofty is the station of man, were he to hold fast to righteousness and truth and to remain firm and steadfast in the Cause. In the eyes of the All-Merciful a true man appeareth even as a firmament . . . His is the loftiest station, and his influence educateth the world of being.<sup>28</sup>

But Bahá’u’lláh shatters self-deception with the realism of His prophetic pronouncements and tells us very frankly and truthfully how we (sometimes) behave. The Manifestation of God does not, however, merely pronounce judgement upon our spiritual condition as an idle exercise in spiritual sovereignty. He does, so to oblige us to confront ourselves honestly and at the same time offers to us His spiritual counsel, forgiveness and mercy. The judgement, therefore, is not meant to break our spirits or to heap heavy guilt upon our heads but rather to cause us to take sober stock of ourselves and ‘to gird up the loins’ of our ‘endeavour’<sup>29</sup> in order to persevere along our chosen highway.

Fantasy is a deceptive thought-form that is closely allied with the imagination but which is centred in unreality. It most closely resembles the mirage or quranic ‘vapour in the desert’,<sup>30</sup> to which it might well be compared. The mythologies of many peoples feature the trickster,<sup>31</sup> and fantasy is a very deceptive and subtle master trickster, deluding

even the most discerning thinker.

Fantasy<sup>is</sup> is inextricably linked to passion. 'Abdu'l-Bahá quotes an authoritative tradition of the Prophet Muhammad which warns the learned to wage *jihad* on their passions: 'As for him who is one of the learned: he must guard himself, defend his faith, oppose his passions and obey the commandments of his Lord.'<sup>32</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh also associates vain imaginings with passion:<sup>33</sup>

Alas! Alas! O Lovers of Worldly Desire!

Even as the swiftness of lightning ye have passed by the Beloved One, and have set your hearts on satanic fancies. Ye bow the knee before your vain imagining, and call it truth. Ye turn your eyes towards the thorn, and name it a flower. Not a pure breath have ye breathed, nor hath the breeze of detachment been wafted from the meadows of your hearts. Ye have cast to the winds the loving counsels of the Beloved and have effaced them utterly from the tablet of your hearts, and even as the beasts of the field, ye move and have your being within the pastures of desire and passion.<sup>33</sup>

The passion spoken of in this seminal Persian Hidden Word is (not that of high spiritual motivation but) that powerful force that drives elemental selfish desires. Passion, according to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, is one of the 'natural impurities', along with anger, worldliness, pride, lying, hypocrisy, fraud and self-love.<sup>34</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us that 'Man cannot free himself from the rage of the carnal passions except by the help of the Holy Spirit'. This, He explains, is the meaning of baptism of the grace and bounty of the Holy Spirit mentioned in such scriptures as John 1:33 and Mark 1:8. The baptism by fire in Matthew 3:11 and Luke 3:16 symbolizes the love of God, and the baptism by water, knowledge and life.<sup>35</sup> Even holy passions can be problematic if they are excessive. Shoghi Effendi, in a letter written on his behalf, explains that 'So many misunderstandings arise from the passionate attachment of the friends to the Faith and also their immaturity'.<sup>36</sup> The Bahá'í writings also point to the illusory or temporary nature of passion. Shoghi Effendi, advising a believer about the relative value of passion within the context of marriage, stated in a letter written on his behalf:

That two people should live their lives in love and harmony is of far greater importance than that they should be consumed with passion for each other. The one is a great rock of strength on which to lean in time of need; the other is a purely temporary thing which may at any

time die out.<sup>37</sup>

Another letter from Shoghi Effendi makes clear the threat of passion to spiritual development:

We must reach a spiritual plane where God comes first and great human passions are unable to turn us away from Him. All the time we see people who either through the force of hate or the passionate attachment they have to another person, sacrifice principle or bar themselves from the Path of God.<sup>38</sup>

Yet in being careful in the effort to understand and control harmful or illusory passion, one does not have to don the garb of the puritans or the anti-lifers, of those who see all forms of passion as villains. Like so many other spiritual attributes, passion can be virtuous as well as vicious, depending on how it is applied.<sup>39</sup> There is, to be sure, a place to mortify human passion but there is also a place in our search for God to give it free rein. Spiritual passion must be one of the key ingredients in our search for God, for God cannot be found in the lukewarm heart, in the tepid shallows of intellectualism. Bahá'u'lláh counsels ardour, labour and effort in our search after Him: 'Labour is needed, if we are to seek Him; ardour is needed, if we are to drink of the honey of reunion with Him; and if we taste of this cup, we shall cast away the world.'<sup>40</sup> He speaks of 'earnest striving', 'longing desire', 'passionate devotion', 'fervid love', 'rapture' and 'ecstasy' in our search after Him.<sup>41</sup> Passion has not only its rightful place in the search for God; it is indispensable.

The Hidden Word quoted above also discloses other features of the deceptive nature of the vain imagining: 'Ye turn your eyes towards the thorn, and name it a flower.' When one mistakenly calls a thorn a flower one deceives oneself completely. When the visually impaired ecstatic mistakes a thorn – a vexing dart that inflicts pain and has neither beauty nor aroma – for a flower – a blossom that is beautiful in colour and richly fragrant – he has gone completely wrong. Thus Bahá'u'lláh's poetic image helps us to understand that idle fancy and vain imagining can pervert our perception of reality and turn it around 180 degrees. Bahá'u'lláh's juxtaposition of the thorn and the flower might also suggest that for every truth there is a corresponding lie; for every beautiful form, an ugly one; for every true love, a false one. A great part of spiritual education lies in the ability to distinguish the true

love from the false and the truly beautiful from the hideously ugly.

This Hidden Word also points out how the vain imagination not only operates visually or perceptually but cognitively as well. Imagination can twist belief into untruth: 'Ye bow the knee before your vain imagining, and call it truth.' The intellectual, the scholar, the cleric may cling so ferociously to his or her own ideas as to be incapable of seeing the truth in anyone else's. Indeed, one may be quite wrong about one's strongest convictions. Such people <sup>intend</sup> behave as if their thoughts and writings have the value of divine revelation. Such false notions and flimsy ideas are the creation of one's own finite mind but the individual becomes attached to them in such a way as to honour them with the value of absolute truth: 'They that are the worshippers of the idol which their imaginations have carved, and who call it Inner Reality, such men are in truth accounted among the heathen.'<sup>41</sup>

### **'Abdu'l-Bahá's Teaching on the Imagination**

The unruly imagination does more than cause the individual to err intellectually. It has had deeper and more lasting consequences on religious history. It is the illusory nature of the imagination combined with stubborn intellectual pride that causes the scholar, the intellectual or the cleric to deny the Manifestation of God. This amounts not only to the supreme irony but also to one of the great tragedies of history. The Manifestation of God is the root of all knowledge, the Great Teacher, and yet He and the treasury of divine knowledge that He bestows upon the world are cruelly rejected by the wayward pupils. His divine revelation is the Truth, the Divine Standard which is the measure of all other forms of knowledge. Yet intellectual pride and the deceits of the imagination rebel against its open recognition.

'Abdu'l-Bahá explains:

Through imagination men receive a distorted view of a former Manifestation and are prevented from recognizing and accepting the Truth and Reality of the present one. They are veiled from the Light and Glory of God by imagination. These veils prevent the true Light from entering the soul. Therefore, men follow the false light of their imaginations and cling to error instead of truth.<sup>42</sup>

It is not, consequently, simply a question of passionate imagination leading us down the path of personal self-delusion and gratification.

The distorted imagination also has a truth-inhibiting function. It prevents people from seeing the source of truth when it is unveiled to humanity with the coming of the divine Manifestation. In this particular interpretation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, imagination stands out as an opponent of the truth; and an opponent of the truth can only lead into error.

Leaders of religion fail to understand properly the divine revelations they profess and transmit false notions to their congregations. The people are thus not ready to receive the subsequent Manifestation. The school room analogy serves well again. If the classroom teacher fails to understand algebra, the student will be stymied in his attempts to master calculus. Proper teaching at the first levels facilitates acceptance at the more advanced ones. Those Jews who accepted Christ as Messiah were in some sense true Jews who had understood the law of Moses. Literal interpretation of holy writ is one of the thickest veils of the imagination. It leads to the gravest errors, which then become fixed and taught with the authority of pure truth.

Paradoxically, a lack of imagination can also contribute to a rejection of the Manifestation of God. To contemplate the possibility of a new revelation from God is a fearful prospect for many. The old beaten path of hereditary belief is an easier road. Clergy, moreover, have a vested interest in their profession and fear losing their positions and attendant privileges. The individual does not allow himself to dare to imagine the possibility a new revelation breaking in on the world.

### **The Stranger**

Above we considered the Hidden Word in which Bahá'u'lláh warns us not to confuse the thorn with the rose. The *Hidden Words* contain another image which is also paralleled in the Book of Jeremiah: the stranger. In the Book of Jeremiah we read: 'Withhold thy foot from being unshod, and thy throat from thirst: but thou saidst, There is no hope: no; for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go.'<sup>43</sup> The wailing prophet speaks here with the voice of the collective 'I' to all the tribes of Judah. Jeremiah laments Israel's backsliding into polytheism or idol worship brought about in part through sexual intercourse and intermarriage with tribes and peoples outside of the Mosaic covenant. In the *Hidden Words* we find:

O My Friend in Word! Ponder awhile. Hast thou ever heard that friend and foe should abide in one heart? Cast out then the stranger, that the Friend may enter His home.<sup>44</sup>

Fantasy, like the stranger, exerts a wily fascination over the human heart, and fascination is one of those false loves about which 'Abdu'l-Bahá warns.<sup>45</sup> To welcome the stranger of idle fancy into one's heart is to estrange oneself, not only from oneself but also from the True Friend. Opening the door to the stranger of idle fancy draws a veil, in the words of the Tablet of Ahmad, between oneself and one's own heart. This estrangement from self accounts, moreover, for the preoccupation with the existential 'angst' on which a sizeable literature and philosophy focused in the post World War Two period, especially in Europe. Much of the literature of popular psychology and self-help is devoted to overcoming one's estrangement from one's true self.

The stranger – the 'foe' in Bahá'u'lláh's verse – may also be seen as an idol or false god placed upon the altar of the heart in place of the True Friend, the Manifestation of God. Bahá'u'lláh has elsewhere made it clear that these false gods are the imaginations of our own hearts: 'gods of its idle fancies'.<sup>46</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh is equally clear as to what to do with these strangers. They are not to be invited in, shown hospitality and entertained. They are to be 'cast out'.

Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá have placed a great emphasis on correct thinking and proper attitude in spiritual life. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has said: 'The reality of man is his thought, not his material body.'<sup>47</sup> However, many unwanted thoughts pass through our minds quite unconsciously. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has explained, moreover, that so-called 'bad thoughts' are reflected from other sources. Combating them only serves to intensify their force. He advises that we turn our backs to the negative thoughts by directing our minds to the Manifestation of God and letting the thoughts, as it were, bounce off us:

They [evil thoughts] come from other minds: they are reflected. One should not become a mirror for them – to reflect them, neither should one try to control them for this is impossible; it only aggravates the difficulty, causing more to appear.

One should constantly turn the mirror of his heart *squarely* toward God so that the Light of the Sun of Truth may be reflected there.<sup>48</sup>

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This is similar to Christ's teaching about not resisting evil: 'But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.'<sup>49</sup> Fighting 'bad thoughts' will only fuel their energies. But we must not put too much stock in thoughts as a metaphysical foundation. Many thoughts are like waves which come and go, without yielding any result.

The other kind of conceptions [true ones] is made up of vain thoughts and useless ideas which yield neither fruit nor result, and which have no reality. No, they surge like the waves of the sea of imaginations, and they pass away like idle dreams.<sup>50</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá recognizes the powerful role imagination plays in spiritual development. He calls imagination 'one of our greatest powers and a most difficult one to rule'.<sup>51</sup> On first reading, it might appear that the Bahá'í writings conceive of the imagination in the traditional religious fashion of a threat to spiritual development:

We are led astray by imagination, even in violation of will and reason. It is our test power. We are tested by our ability to control and subdue it. A man imagines he is wealthy. Some day real wealth comes to him, but it is never what he imagined it would be. Imagination is our greatest misleader. We hold to it until it becomes fixed in memory. Then we hold to it the stronger, believing it to be fact. It is a great power of the soul but without value unless rightly controlled and guided.<sup>52</sup>

This 'test power' may prove at times difficult to control. To illustrate, 'Abdu'l-Bahá gives the example of two men who are close friends:

They love each other so much they never wish to be parted. Yet when one of them dies, the other through fear dreads to be alone with the one he cared so much for in life. His imagination controls him and fills him with fear and horror.<sup>53</sup>

How can a person 'dread to be alone' with someone who is no longer there? Because through his imagination the man conjures up the spirit of his friend and imagines that he sees and hears him. He knows that this is contrary to reason, and dreading madness, is filled with fear and horror. This episode stands as a warning: the unbridled imagination can lead its hapless victim on to regret, dark melancholy, even madness. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's story points to the obsessional thinking that can result when the imagination takes over.

## Fantasy as a Form of False Religion

Any definition of religion must include some reference to the divine power or powers that rule the universe and upon which we depend. It is indeed apropos to look upon fantasy as a form of counterfeit religion. Fantasy derives such seeming power and influence because it operates as a form of religionless religion. The false religion of fantasy reveals itself in its many forms as polytheism. The identities of fantasy are multiple. They take on many guises. 'Abdu'l-Bahá exhorts us to release ourselves from the 'multiple identities' of passion and desire, those predictable companions of fantasy:

Let all be set free from the multiple identities that were born of passion and desire, and in the oneness of their love for God find a new way of life.'<sup>54</sup>

The gods of fantasy are set up on the altar of the wayward human heart to be served and worshipped. Idol worshippers create their own private myths and then begin to act out the tale that the imaginary gods have scripted. This acting out of the mythological creatures of the false religion of fantasy translates into profound negative consequences for private morality. Yet, like all forms of polytheism, the idolatrous faith cannot deliver on its promises. Like evasive shifting sands, the cherished desires constantly elude the disillusioned and wretched worshipper. Strangely, the disillusioned one may continue to serve at the altar of adoration in a misdirected fidelity.

Fantasy succeeds so well in its role of false religion because of the following elements:

- 1) It is polytheistic. It has an object or objects of worship, gods or idols of idle fancy.
- 2) It has a worshipper. The worshipper adores the gods of idle fancy.
- 3) It has values. The worshipper values his gods and his passions above all else. They are the supreme objects of desire.
- 4) There is a relationship of power between the worshipper and his gods. The idol holds power over the man or woman.
- 5) The worshipper has faith in the idol. The worshipper believes that the idol will bring happiness but the idol never fails to disillusion the worshipper.
- 6) Fantasy promises the fulfilment of material desires. It can be

identified, consequently, as one of the minions of the chief god of materialism.

Bahá'u'lláh clearly identifies the practice of fantasy as a form of false religion which He counsels us in the strongest possible terms to abandon:

Arise, O people, and, by the power of God's might, resolve to gain the victory over your own selves, that haply the whole earth may be freed and sanctified from its servitude to the gods of its idle fancies – gods that inflicted such loss upon, and are responsible for the misery of, their wretched worshippers. These idols form the obstacle that impeded man in his efforts to advance in the path of perfection. We cherish the hope that the Hand of Divine power may lend its assistance to mankind, and deliver it from its state of grievous abasement.<sup>55</sup>

There is another aspect to the question of fantasy that does not at first readily come to mind, one that relates it to unity and harmony in personal relationships. harbouring and following the dictates of idle fancy can foment disunity between ourselves, our friends and loved ones. Thus Bahá'u'lláh urges, 'Arise and, armed with the power of faith, shatter to pieces the gods of your vain imaginings, the sowers of dissension amongst you.'<sup>56</sup> We are led to see from this passage that the pursuit of idle fancy can cause us to break that most fundamental of Bahá'u'lláh's laws, that of unity. This breaking of the law of unity often means the breaking of our own hearts and, worst of all, the hearts of others, other than which, 'Abdu'l-Bahá has said, there is 'no greater sin'.<sup>57</sup>

In this passage Bahá'u'lláh also provides the remedy for the false religion of vain imaginings. Like the iconoclastic Prophet Abraham, enraged by the multitude of idols in his father's house, we are 'to shatter to pieces' the gods devised by our hearts. This, Bahá'u'lláh says, can be done with 'the power of faith'. In other words, we can destroy these gods of illusion by adopting and worshipping a more powerful God, the one true God, and by choosing to follow the prescriptions and laws contained in His revelation rather than by following the promptings of our selfish desires. The choice is ours, but it is a choice that sometimes has to be exercised with the discipline of waging a mental *jihad*.

What specifically are the greatest idle fancies that pose such a

serious threat to our spiritual well being? The Christian writer and clergyman Martin Bell in his incisive book *The Way of the Wolf* shows great acumen in identifying these fantasies, what the New Testament calls 'demons' or 'devils',<sup>38</sup> and what Bell aptly calls those 'facile and deceptive structures of illusion that imbed themselves inside the souls of men with such a vengeance as to take possession of their very lives'.<sup>39</sup> It was these demons, some of them no doubt in the form of deep-seated neuroses or phobias, that Christ with his miraculous power went about 'casting out' some two thousand years ago.

Bell makes his point about illusion in a piece entitled 'How the Demons Captured Amy and What Happened Then', a tale about Amy Pembington, a beautiful 43-year-old woman who looks younger than her years but who suffers nonetheless from the 'turgid unrelenting boredom' of her life.<sup>40</sup> Amy is driven in her desperation to consult Lena, a tarot card reader and clairvoyant extraordinaire. Lena is a Gypsy who calls herself a witch; she is more witch than religious because she nowhere calls on the name of God and she accepts payment for her services. Lena is brutally frank to Amy about the demons that have possessed Amy's soul and she is skilful enough to be able to exorcise these demons during one reading of the cards.

All of Amy's illusions stand nakedly revealed through Lena's reading. They are, one and all, private myths about finding happiness, that holy grail that has been sought by so many in as many unholy places. Bell's story subtly combines the sheer liberating power of seeing oneself as one really is, with a scent of the macabre. He graphically describes the demons that inhabit Amy as 'sneering parasites of almost unbelievable magnitude and proportion'. Yet Amy succeeds, with the help of Lena the witch, in liberating herself from every one of them.

Lena turns up one by one in her reading of the tarot cards six demons of idle fancy and vain imagination that have taken possession of Amy's soul. Each qualifies as a big lie and each is bound up with great life issues:

- 1) The illusion about death
- 2) The illusion about love
- 3) The illusion about time
- 4) The illusion about freedom and security
- 5) The illusion about happiness
- 6) The illusion about the 'if-only'

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### *The illusion about death*

Amy hoped to escape from death by banishing the thought from her mind and by paying careful attention to fashion, personal style and appearance. She ignored the fact that she was 43 years old and that decay and death were going to set in sooner or later.

### *The illusion about love*

Amy deluded herself with the dream that someday love would come. She failed to see that her only real possibility for love lay with her husband Paul. She was enthralled by the voluptuous deceit that enchantment would soon be hers.

### *The illusion about time*

Amy suffered from the delusion that time would soon make things work for her. Lena made her realize that time will heal some wounds but that wounds can also become septic. Lena helped her realize that, more often than not, things work out in direct relation to the amount of effort and energy expended by the parties working on the solution.

### *The illusion about freedom and security*

Amy desperately sought freedom and security. She looked to her husband Paul to give it to her. Amy did not realize that it is a myth to seek freedom and security from the hands of someone else, for there is no true freedom and security to be had in this life. There is no complete escape from the anxiety of being insecure.

### *The illusion about happiness*

Amy made others, especially her husband Paul, responsible for her happiness. She did not learn that she had to take this responsibility for herself. It is an illusion to place the responsibility for our own happiness in the hands of another, whether that someone be spouse, child or friend.

*The illusion about the 'if-only'*

Amy believed too strongly in the fable of the 'if-only'. 'If only it were then instead of now, I would be happy. If only I were there and not here. If only Paul were someone else.' Such illusions robbed Amy of the only happiness that was ever available to her – that of her own situation in the here and now.

Amy Pembington is, of course, only an abstraction of all of us, an abstraction with which many can easily identify.

In summary, it can be said that the delusions of idle fancy act as obstructions to the life of the soul in the following four ways:

- 1) They can prevent us from turning with all our affections to God.
- 2) They can prevent us from appreciating and dealing with the reality of our situation and daily life.
- 3) Fantasy can lead us to perform deeds which are unacceptable in the sight of God and which may seriously impair spiritual development.
- 4) Fantasy can distort the perception of reality: the perception of self (our self-concept) or of others (distortions), or what we hold to be true (our belief system) or the choices that we make (private morality and behaviour).

**True Vision: The Creative Side of the Imagination**

There is another side to this ambivalent coin of the imagination. We would not be justified on the basis of the passages quoted above totally to condemn imagination, for the imagination is a divine gift that holds the potential for fostering spiritual growth. This is made clear by 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement, 'It is a great power of the soul', but stands in need of guidance and control to be effective.

We need to ask, however, 'What are the elements that can guide and control this unruly power?' One of the components of faith, which is now viewed by psychologists of religion as a complex nexus of socio-cognitive-affective elements, is the element of intellectual and spiritual vision. Spiritual vision is precisely the correct use of the imagination, imagination which fixes on the nature of spiritual truth. Bahá'u'lláh's writings extol the station of 'vision' and 'true vision'<sup>61</sup>, expressions also used by 'Abdu'l-Bahá,<sup>62</sup> for example in the context of recognizing the

Manifestation of God: 'Today Jews, Muhammadans, and Christians, not seeing the former Manifestation with true vision, are veiled from the Glory of God in Bahá'u'lláh.'<sup>63</sup> Bahá'u'lláh says, 'Let your vision be world-embracing',<sup>64</sup> which points to a kind of 'Weltanschauung' or spiritual world view.

Further, in the book of Proverbs it is written: 'Where there is no vision, the people perish.'<sup>65</sup> This can be interpreted in at least two ways: 1) Without the vision of a Prophet, the people perish. In other words, without the benefit of the Prophet's vision, communicated through laws and teachings, the people will destroy themselves. 2) Related to the first meaning, the vision could be metonymical for the holy book or divine revelation itself. One could even take the meaning further to include the broader secular sense of humanity's needing an agenda, a sense of purpose or guiding principles ('vision') to lead it through its crises.

Poets and artists especially have viewed imagination as one of the great divine powers. Samuel Taylor Coleridge saw in the workings of the imagination the God-like powers of creation. Coleridge modelled his own concept of the imagination on the creative act of God in the Book of Genesis. This he called the primary imagination:

The primary imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM.<sup>66</sup>

The poet or the artist, however, is a recipient of the 'secondary imagination' which was the finite counterpart of God's creative act. Coleridge saw in the workings of the imagination the creation of the symbol which became a mediator between its own creative powers and the truths produced by reason. Imagination for Coleridge was reason in rhapsody.<sup>67</sup>

One of the best known of romantic poets, William Wordsworth (1770-1850), found the philosophic considerations of the faculty of imagination much too confining. He felt that 'the word . . . has been overstrained . . . to meet the demands of the faculty which is perhaps the noblest of our nature.'<sup>68</sup> Wordsworth rejected the sharp distinction made between fancy and imagination which Coleridge promoted and stated that they were one quality though differing in value: 'Fancy is given to quicken and to beguile the temporal part of our nature,

imagination to incite and to support the eternal.<sup>69</sup> The religious sentiment was a prime sustainer of Wordsworth's poetry and he viewed imagination to be a faculty that dispensed not only truth and beauty but also spiritual love:

This spiritual Love acts nor can exist  
Without Imagination, which, in truth,  
Is but another name for absolute power  
And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,  
And Reason in her most exalted mood.  
This faculty hath been the feeding source  
Of our long labour.<sup>70</sup>

Wordsworth carried his belief in imagination much further to enter the domain of God as faith and eternal life:

And lastly, from its progress have we drawn  
Faith in life endless, the sustaining thought  
Of human Being, Eternity, and God . . .<sup>71</sup>

The visionary poet William Blake (1757-1827) joins Wordsworth in believing that imagination leads to eternity. He says simply, 'Imagination is eternity.'<sup>72</sup> In other words, humanity shares in eternity or gains eternity through the power of the imagination. For Blake, nature was the preeminent expression of the imagination and 'to the eyes of the man of Imagination, Nature is Imagination itself'.<sup>73</sup>

Blake, while he was certainly a brother to Wordsworth in his belief that imagination leads to nature and to the realms of God, believed that the imagination had a more pointedly active role than it did for Wordsworth and the Lake School poets, who sat passively and mused over the mysteries of the religion of the out-of-doors. For Blake, and this was atypical of the quietude of the Romantics, the imagination was a creative, tumultuous, struggling, never-ceasing, energetic agent. Like the poet Wallace Stevens in the twentieth century, Blake in the eighteenth and nineteenth took an extreme view of the supremacy of the imagination, a faculty which he, like Stevens, valued well above that of rationality, but which he viewed nonetheless as having sure connections with the genesis and unveiling of truth. In his cosmological work *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, one of Blake's prophetic writings embellished with marginal illustrations, we read in the 'Proverbs of

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Hell': 'What is now proved was once only imagin'd.'<sup>74</sup> This proverb is a clear indication that in Blake's mind truth found its source in the imagination and that *epistimé* and imagination were forever wed.<sup>75</sup> Be that as it may, the 'Creative Imagination' for Blake was not merely confined to the visual or literary arts. It was, in fact, the 'first principle' of knowledge 'and all others are derivative'.<sup>76</sup>

Blake's view of the imagination as the supreme creative power was set down in *The Four Zoas*, the first of his major prophetic books, and the earlier *Book of Los*, his mythological Book of Genesis. Los (Urthona) as the Creative Imagination, burning in his separation from Urizen (reason) and trapped in primordial chaos, struggles furiously to free himself and bring creation into being and mould it to form by releasing the exploding energies of his encased rage. One might read in Los's exploding energies the personality of Blake himself. But beyond its creatural function, the imagination played nothing less than a decidedly salvific role. Humanity would be restored from the fall through 'Jesus the Imagination' (Los/Urthona), who represents the whole person, and that integrative psychic or spiritual power that is able to reconcile and synthesize reason (Urizen). Urizen has usurped the powers of the mind with the other two 'Mighty Ones', the physical and spiritual faculties of the body (Tharmas) and the heart (Luvah), the seat of the emotions. Los is the only one able to bring about the psychic integration of these four within human consciousness and resolve the contrarieties in human nature. 'Jesus the Imagination' refers, moreover, to the creative divine spark in all of us.

As a man is, so he Sees. As the Eye is formed, such are its Powers. You certainly mistake, when you say that the Visions of Fancy are not to be found in This World. To Me This World is all One continued Vision of Fancy or Imagination.<sup>77</sup>

## *Some Parameters of the Concept of Spirituality*

### **Spirituality Requires Closer Definition**

Plato's dialogue *Euthyphro* contains a moral that can be applied to the study of spirituality. The central figure, Socrates, who has been charged by Meletus with corrupting the youth of Athens by attempting to overthrow the Athenian deities, meets the lawyer Euthyphro. Euthyphro, in what must be taken as a gesture of pointed irony, is prosecuting his own father for murder. Plato intends the reader to see through the veneer of Euthyphro's high sense of justice. In this dialogue, one of the best examples of the Socratic method, Socrates exposes the ignorance of Euthyphro who is unable to define clearly the basic concepts he professes to understand, such as 'justice' and 'piety'.<sup>1</sup> The same point can be applied to an understanding of spirituality. How can an individual become spiritual if he or she has no clear concept of what the word implies?

The word spirituality vexes first attempts to define it simply. What is meant by the assertion, for example, that a believer is spiritual? Does it mean that he or she is first and foremost pious, intellectually deep, detached, loving, devoted or mystical? Or does it mean that he has great faith? The answer points to the inclusiveness of the concept of spirituality, for any, several or all of these qualities refer to spirituality. The Bahá'í writings, moreover, are suggestive rather than explicit in defining the word; there appear to be no nominal definitions of the word 'spirituality' in the Bahá'í writings, although there are several contextual ones. Even the contextual definitions, however, sometimes impede clear understanding. Alfred North Whitehead's dictum that 'all definitions are lies'<sup>2</sup> seems to apply. The understanding of the word spirituality appears to operate at some deeper, intuitive level of multi-

layered meanings. Bahá'í scholarly literature on this vital subject, moreover, is not yet extensive. The scholarly understanding of spirituality must for now be based on a few instructive articles on this fundamental perspective of Bahá'í life and teaching.<sup>3</sup>

### **Spiritual Virtues are Specific**

Based on a small-scale sample I undertook locally several years ago, the Bahá'í community reflects a definite awareness of the importance of developing spiritual virtues in living the Bahá'í life.<sup>4</sup> Although the members of the Bahá'í community surveyed understood the term 'spirituality' in diverse ways, the respondents generally framed their understanding of spirituality in the context of fostering spiritual virtues, 'divine attributes' or 'spiritual qualities'. These results are consistent with the outlook of the Bahá'í writings themselves.

While the Bahá'í writings exhort the Bahá'ís to the practice of virtue, it is perhaps worth distinguishing between virtues that are specifically religious or spiritual and those moral virtues that are not. Although all virtues embody moral excellence and are worth striving for, not all virtues are specifically religious or spiritual. Basic trust is a virtue; trust in God is a specifically spiritual virtue. It is probably true that a believer sees all moral virtues as a reflection of the will of God but moral virtues may be practised by anyone, including non-believers, entirely outside a faith context. Indeed, psychologist Derek Wright asserts, based on studies now somewhat dated, that there is no direct correlation between moral behaviour and religious belief. Wright says, for example, that 'On experimental tests of honesty, those with a religious upbringing are not distinguishable from those without it.'<sup>5</sup> It would appear then that honesty, although universally admired, is not more integrally practised by those who profess religion than those who do not. Similarly, many of the moral values of New Age spiritual philosophy with its emphasis on 'trusting the universe', overcoming fear, building self-esteem, adopting a positive outlook, listening to and healing the inner child, are not specifically theocentric values, that is values grounded in God. While such New Age values have been helpful to thousands in overcoming personal problems, the religious origin of many of the values of the New Age has been jettisoned in the process.

I cite but two brief examples of this tendency. The first is based on

the title and contents of Dr Gerald Jampolsky's best-seller *Love is Letting Go of Fear*.<sup>6</sup> The title of this widely-read volume is really a paraphrased echo, whether conscious or not, of 1 John 4:18: 'There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear; because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.' In the Apostle's mind, the supreme love that overcomes fear is the love of God. Although it is understandable in light of Jampolsky's Jewish background that he may not be aware of the Apostle's insight into love and fear, nor cognizant of John's definition of God as love,<sup>7</sup> the love of God, a common heritage of the Judeo-Christian tradition, is nowhere mentioned. This is strange for one who has made love the whole keynote of his personal philosophy. For that matter, the word 'God' does not figure anywhere on the pages of Jampolsky's book, even though the book that was instrumental in his personal transformation, *A Course in Miracles*, is intrinsically religious. Indeed, many of the themes that Dr Jampolsky pursues in his volume are, but their religious source is neither recognized nor explored. Jampolsky's chosen themes such as the necessity of forgiveness for oneself and others, abstaining from judgement, renouncing aggression, living in peace of mind, living in the present, self-determining one's mental outlook, the daily self-examination of conscience and self-affirmation can all be traced directly to prophetic teaching, either to the teachings of the Torah, to Christ or to one of the Founders of the other world religions. Yet the prophetic source is nowhere recognized in this volume of spiritual psychology. In the spiritual psychology of the New Age 'love' is certainly there but the all-important phrase 'of God' is often conspicuously absent.

The second example has to do with the current emphasis on listening to and healing the inner child. Although grounded partly in developmental psychology and in the need to listen to the still persistent and unresolved voices of the hurts and traumas of childhood, listening to one's inner child also echoes the Gospel when Jesus says: 'Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.'<sup>8</sup> The voice of the inner child is the voice of innocence and purity, an innocence and purity that has all too often been shamed and wronged.

While moral virtue, consequently, is praiseworthy in any life, the Bahá'í writings emphasize the cultivation of those virtues which are specifically, although not exclusively, religious. Specifically spiritual

virtues pertain to the life of faith in God, prayer and divine law. Spiritual virtues connect most intimately the individual and God. One could argue, moreover, that spiritual virtues are the highest virtues since they contain other virtues within them. Faith in God, love and knowledge of Him, righteousness, prayer, sanctity, piety, the fear of God, wisdom, submission to the will of God – all are fundamental spiritual virtues that generate many other related virtues. Faith in God implies hope, love of God implies compassion. Belief in God implies honesty, for God calls the believer to a love of truth. The fear of God implies integrity. Prayer implies illumination. Faith in God implies trustworthiness, for to have faith means to trust. Submission to the will of God implies contentment and reliability. Detachment, explored in a previous chapter, is one of the specifically spiritual virtues that in the Bahá'í dispensation stands at the head of the list of those spiritual virtues to be cultivated. Thus the Bahá'í Faith looks upon spiritual virtue as a goal that includes, but passes beyond, the life of moral excellence. Spirituality gives to one's deeds and life a subtle fragrance that embellishes moral integrity.

### **The Limitations of Speech: Language Points to Unknown Qualities**

Language, with all its imprecisions and inadequacies, is the only tool available for the verbal communication of the divine teachings: 'The explanation of divine teachings can only be through this medium' [of language], says 'Abdu'l-Bahá.<sup>9</sup> Some of the difficulties in understanding the word 'spirituality' reflect the inadequacies of language.

Two principles must be kept in mind for an understanding of the function and nature of religious language. The first, basic to Bahá'í philosophical theology, is that the essence of a thing is unknown. Knowledge of a thing amounts to a knowledge of its attributes or qualities. Essential creation remains mysterious. 'Abdu'l-Bahá uses 'man' himself to exemplify the principle.<sup>10</sup> The second is that an understanding of 'intellectual knowledge' as distinguished from sensate knowledge depends on symbolic forms of expression: 'In explaining these intellectual realities', says 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 'one is obliged to express them by sensible figures because . . . in the external world all that exists is sensible.'<sup>11</sup> The phrase 'sensible figures' is similar to 'figures of speech' which operate largely as metaphors, comparisons

of unlike things that in spite of their disparity share some common feature(s).

The words 'spirit' and 'spiritual' point to essentially unknown quantities. What applies to the Bahá'í teaching about the nature of God applies also to spirit. Both are in essence unknowable. Christ's statement that 'God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth',<sup>12</sup> points to the unknown nature of both God and spirit. Descriptions of God abound in prophetic literature but definitions are rare. It is this unknown quality that impedes the attempt to pin-point a definition of spirit or spirituality. As philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein said, 'What we cannot speak about we must consign to silence'.<sup>13</sup>

Logical empiricists, positivists and analytical philosophers attacked religious language and metaphysics as 'nonsense', that is as a conglomerate of imprecise and meaningless statements. Rudolf Carnap, one of the Vienna Circle of logical positivists that was influential in the twenties and early thirties, gives a representative view. In his essay 'The Elimination of Metaphysics through the Logical Analysis of Language', Carnap says, speaking of such terms as 'emanation', 'essence', 'manifestation', 'the Infinite', 'objective spirit', 'the Absolute', etc., which are basic to metaphysics:

These expressions are in the same boat with 'teavy', our previously fabricated example. The metaphysician tells us that empirical truth-conditions cannot be specified; if he adds that nevertheless he 'means' something, we know that this is merely an allusion to associated images and feelings which, however, do not bestow a meaning on a word. The alleged statements of metaphysics which contain such words have no sense, assert nothing, are mere pseudo-statements.<sup>14</sup>

Carnap, who in his critique of metaphysical language targeted the grandiose idealistic philosophers of eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe, argued that the same principle of nonsense applied to any and all statements about God because God 'refers to something beyond experience'.<sup>15</sup> Not only metaphysics, then, but also theology must go the way of the meaningless statement. It is only the proponents of empirical science, according to the logical positivists, that make any meaningful statements. The poor metaphysicians, for all their verbiage, say nothing at all, according to Carnap: 'But actually the situation is that meaningful metaphysical statements are impossible'.<sup>16</sup> The logical

positivists, who were inspired by the growing ascendancy of science and their new found faith in scientific method, have nonetheless failed to represent the theist's position on language accurately. If there is one thing that theists are cognizant of and agree on, it is that any symbols of God, linguistic or otherwise, are but poor approximations of His reality. Theists fully recognize that much 'God-talk' is 'non-sense' because it is an inaccurate representation of the divine reality. Yet theists have ventured to talk about God, in spite of the severe limitations that human language puts on an understanding of Him, because they have understood that to remain silent about God is a greater error than to speak about Him in a limiting and imperfect way. Not to speak about Him at all would be more meaningless than remaining silent. This recognition of our powerlessness to describe God is the beginning of any true knowledge of Him. So St Thomas Aquinas writes: 'This is what is ultimate in the human knowledge of God: to know that we do not know God.'<sup>17</sup> This consciousness of severe limitation in describing God did not, however, prevent Aquinas and other theologians from writing reams about Him.

### The Symbol

Symbols are a pervasive feature of Bahá'í sacred scripture, as they are of the sacred scriptures of other faiths. The Bahá'í revelation, although born in the modern age and in its teachings reflects the spirit of true modernism, has nevertheless not abandoned the traditional use of the symbol to express spiritual truth. A perusal of the Bahá'í writings will soon alert the reader to the fact that the symbol is still very much alive in the scriptures of this modern-day revelation. It would seem, moreover, that the symbol as a vehicle of spiritual truth is as old as revelation itself and may endure as a tool of human expression as long as human language itself exists.

The fact that the Bible, using a vocabulary of approximately a mere 8,000 words – a fraction of the number used by Shakespeare – has had such an enormous impact on the development of language and civilization is due largely to the Bible's striking, concrete and original use of symbol to express the ways of God and the human condition. A great many of the biblical phrases that have survived in modern English are contained in symbolic expressions: 'the land of milk and

'honey', 'the apple of my eye', 'by the sweat of the brow', 'the handwriting is on the wall', 'thorn in the flesh' (side), 'separating the wheat from the chaff', 'written in stone', 'manna from heaven', 'don't cast your pearls before swine', 'the sacrificial lamb', 'cast your bread upon the waters', etc. Further, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá has indicated, symbolism is an inescapable function of language itself. With all of the inadequacies of words, the symbol stands out as a primary vehicle for expressing spiritual truth.

Philosophers have sometimes expressed the view, without going to the extremes of the logical positivists, that the symbolic forms of expression used in myth, poetry, religion and literature are less valid or precise forms of knowledge because they do not conform to the logic of more direct propositional language. According to this view, scientific language is more precise because it is verifiable. This means, according to Sir Karl Popper, whom many regard as the leading western philosopher of the twentieth century, that it is capable of falsification. In *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* and *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge*<sup>18</sup> Popper explored the paradoxical idea that the possibility of falsification was the index of true science. This supplanted the idea that there are scientific generalizations which are true beyond serious question. Popper's concept underscored the provisional nature of scientific truth. The truths of today's science are not necessarily the truths of tomorrow's. The revolutionary scientific paradigm shift illustrates Popper's point. Newton's view of celestial mechanics was questioned and supplanted by the more general theory of Einstein. Popper, however, did not share the views of the Vienna Circle that metaphysical statements are nonsense. His view was that metaphysical statements can be instrumental in revealing truth. Scientist and Nobel Prize winner for his work in immunology, Sir Peter Medawar interprets Popper's views on metaphysical statements by saying that 'so far from being nonsensical, metaphysical statements may lie on the pathway towards truth and may sometimes be conducive to the discovery of truth'.<sup>19</sup>

Science as well as religion employs a symbolic language, although the symbol in science, like the use of metaphor, finds a much narrower use than it does in literature and religion. Mary Hesse, for example, cites both scientists and philosophers of science who use metaphor.<sup>20</sup> In a similar vein, Earl R. MacCormac in *Metaphor and Myth in Science*

*and Religion* sees the metaphor as playing a useful function as new paradigms in scientific knowledge emerge: 'The very nature of science, however, is such that scientists need the metaphor as a bridge between old and new theories.'<sup>21</sup> To illustrate his point, MacCormac discusses as metaphors the changes in the meaning of the terms 'atom' and 'force' from Newton to the present.<sup>22</sup> MacCormac maintains that it is fictitious to rigidly divide language into cognitive and symbolic functions, those of science and religion respectively.

Although we have talked about 'the language of science' and 'the language of religion,' the languages of science and religion are not two distinct and unrelated realms of discourse. Rather, these two disciplines possess modes of discourse that are members of the same family of language. Wittgenstein's notion [in *Philosophical Investigations*] that different language usages are related as a 'family of resemblances' applies directly to the languages of science and religion.<sup>23</sup>

MacCormac further examines the structural similarities and differences of the languages of science and religion and draws the conclusion that a strict separation of the two is not tenable.<sup>24</sup> The language of the Bahá'í writings bears this out since it is scientific and symbolic, cognitive and discursive, metaphorical and symbolic.

- The symbol can be viewed as a kind of total integrator, for it acts on both a conscious and a subconscious level and integrates the three faces of the cognitive-intuitive-affective modes of knowledge into one mode. Any one face of this triad may be looking at us at any given time. When the symbol performs a total integration of the realities to which it points, all three faces look at us at once. It is also important to point out, however, that in the Bahá'í understanding, all forms of knowledge are not reduced to symbolic ones. Nevertheless, the symbol gives a more concrete expression to intangible truths – that is, it is more capable of making the ineffable expressible – and is more susceptible to consciousness-raising and depth-experience. The symbol deserves, therefore, an important consideration in any discussion of a Bahá'í understanding of epistemology.

Those who encounter the Bahá'í Faith for the first time often remark that the diction of Bahá'í scripture is either 'flowery' or 'archaic' and is consequently distracting to the reader or hinders the clear disclosure of textual meaning. The 'flowery' epithet refers to the symbolic poetry or prose of Bahá'í scripture the flavour of which strongly resembles

the work of English poets and writers of the Renaissance, particularly the Elizabethan 'metaphysicals', or authors who lived during the Tudor age. Writers and poets living under the Stuarts such as James I, to whom the translators of the 1611 English or 'authorized version' of the Bible dedicated their text,<sup>25</sup> also wrote in a style similar to that of the English translations of the Bahá'í writings.

Further, the language of certain of Bahá'u'lláh's writings does have very close affinities with the odes, lyrics, quatrains, idylls and didactic poems of the Persian Sufi mystics, saints and poets such as Attár, Firdawsí, Rúmí, Háfiz, Jámí and Sa'dí.<sup>26</sup> The word 'flowery', however, connotes something superfluous, unnecessarily extravagant or ornate or simply decorative. For people who through predilection or personal style like the simple declarative statement, the Bahá'í writings may well seem 'flowery'. Those whose personal style inclines them to plain speaking may wonder why Bahá'u'lláh did not make His points simply by enunciating a series of declarative statements or through prosaic, formal discourse without using such poetic language.

Before considering why Bahá'u'lláh chose the language He did, it is important to note that He wrote in both Persian and Arabic. The Persian language itself has many conventions, among them a poetic and heightened diction. It is this characteristic of the Persian language which is considered in English translation to be 'flowery'. Thus one reason why Bahá'u'lláh wrote in poetic style has to do with the conventions of the Persian language itself. Further, it should be pointed out that many of Bahá'u'lláh's writings are prosaic and do not contain any poetic elements in translation. These are often translations from the Arabic.

That Bahá'u'lláh used poetic language has much to do with the effective use of symbolic language itself and of the felicitous uses of the symbol for conveying spiritual truth. 'Abdu'l-Bahá cites among evocative biblical symbols the pillar of fire appearing to Moses and the messianic dove lighting upon Christ.<sup>27</sup> His explanation makes it clear that the symbol does not operate in religion merely as an esoteric, purely rhetorical or decorative invocation but rather that it is intrinsic to the very nature of language itself. This is true particularly of the spiritual language of the heart which is highly metaphorical. 'Abdu'l-Bahá gives examples of the use of metaphorical language:

For example, grief and happiness are intellectual things; when you wish

## SOME PARAMETERS OF THE CONCEPT OF SPIRITUALITY

to express those spiritual qualities you say: 'My heart is oppressed; my heart is dilated,' though the heart of man is neither oppressed nor dilated . . . Another example: you say, 'such an individual made great progress,' though he is remaining in the same place; or again, 'such a one's position was exalted,' although, like everyone else, he walks upon the earth. This exaltation and this progress are spiritual states and intellectual realities, but to explain them you are obliged to have recourse to sensible figures . . .

So the symbol of knowledge is light, and of ignorance, darkness; but reflect, is knowledge sensible light, or ignorance sensible darkness? No, they are merely symbols.<sup>28</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá's examples suggest an axiom of language: symbol and metaphor are basic to all thought.

The necessity of metaphor as a vehicle for the symbol in literary form depends upon our being in an external, sensible world. The existence of this external, sensible world points by implication to an internal, spiritual one. It is in the betwixt and between of these two worlds that the symbol operates. Or more exactly, the symbol bridges the gap between the internal spiritual world and the external material one. It puts the two worlds into *correspondence*, one of those doctrines of the Middle Ages that attracted the attention of the Schoolmen. A definition of symbol suggested by the relationship of the two worlds might be: the symbol is a transitional device that bridges the gap between the material and spiritual orders of being so as to reveal to us new spiritual truths and depth-experiences.

The symbolic and metaphorical device when used by the Manifestation of God is not merely a literary *tour de force* to impress with technical prowess, a sort of pyrotechnics of language. It is a holistic mode for both expressing and participating in reality itself, the most complete one available in the medium of language. The metaphor when expressed in the language of divine revelation is capable of evoking that total spiritual experience which includes the sum of humanity's creative and intellectual faculties. The symbol takes the seeker from a finite point in space-time and projects him into the unlimited space of the spiritual realm, a realm that is both infinite and intensely personal. The metaphor is consequently a powerful verbal instrument that is capable of assisting in spiritual transformation. The power of myth as a collective dream derives its power from nothing else but the

pervasive use of symbol. Metaphor, moreover, has strong, proven abilities to evoke deep states of consciousness. At bottom, the symbol in revelation-language is a vehicle for the power of the Holy Spirit. The individual must be open, however, to the possibility of symbol, must be willing to participate in and be sensitive to the power of the images being unveiled, to allow himself to be transported by them. Otherwise, the symbol with its poetic expressions will be looked upon only as an unnecessary distraction. It is precisely because the symbol is liable to evoke deep and meaningful spiritual experiences that it has had such recurring and enduring power in the history of religion.

Although the sign or symbol is a broad signifier that can be a non-verbal object, movement, activity, facet of nature, episode of history or even the cosmos itself, in its explicitly verbal form the symbol is often tied to metaphor. Metaphor constitutes a linguistic substratum that is basic to all language. Ordinary everyday speech is largely metaphorical, but metaphor has become so commonplace that speakers are no longer sensitized to its effect. Renowned literary critic Northrop Frye points out, for example, that when one refers to a talk as being 'dull and dry' one makes an implied comparison between the talk, on the one hand, and stale bread and bread knives, on the other.<sup>29</sup> To carry the analogy a little further, the dull talk, like the knife that has lost its edge, fails 'to cut' it. It makes no sharp demarcations, slices out no new patterns of thought. The dry talk was supposed to provide intellectual nourishment, but like stale bread, it has lost its nutrient value. Examples are numerous. The point is that through repetition, the force of these metaphors has become spent.

The language of the Bahá'í revelation brings these forgotten metaphors back to life and infuses them with a new vitality. Bahá'u'lláh's revelation-language has infused a new spirit into speech, resurrecting the power of language and investing it not only with new vitality but also with a whole new world view. The language of revelation brings new life to speech by inundating the reader or listener with imagery, images that speak through our senses and through them to our common, and sometimes to our less than common, experiences. The creative word puts ordinary language to use, however, for spiritual purposes: inspiration, instruction, reflection, devotion, correction and the like. Unlike secular literature which, to use Frye's expressions, 'is a concrete human world of immediate experience' or 'a human

apocalypse, man's revelation to man<sup>30</sup>, the language of revelation reveals to us an ancient but paradoxically newly-revealed spiritual order. This order transcends the ordinary human world of experience but invades and sustains it with dynamic spiritual power and meaning and creates 'an order of splendour' to which the seeker aspires to belong. The language of revelation is a celestial city, a superstructure that girds up the failing structures of a moribund world and breathes new life into uninspired human consciousness, a life and breath that will permanently sustain by providing fresh inspiration and meaning.

Although the Manifestation of God speaks to all humanity, He does not do as the secular writer often does and assume the point of view of the main character, speaking in that voice. He speaks with His own majestic voice and tells His truth as it has been revealed to Him by God. The divine Manifestation calls to humanity from a point above, yet at the same time speaks to our world, within our world and through our world. When Bahá'u'lláh speaks plainly, however, it is never simply to and for the world alone. It is always because He sees the world through the eyes of God, as one whose mission it is to transform the world, to make the mundane order a reflection of the spiritual vision. His vision is both *sui generis* – it is determined by no other influence than itself and is sufficient unto itself – and profoundly universal. It is a vision that is the master of all it surveys.

### Ten Categories of Symbols Used in the Bahá'í Writings

The symbols used in the Bahá'í writings restore and renew many of the ancient images of scripture. I would like to suggest ten possible categories of symbols found in the Bahá'í writings, indicated here followed by key words from the Bahá'í writings that illustrate the category. These are just some of the more prominent categories found in the Bahá'í writings and are not exhaustive.

- 1) *Pastoral*: garden, valley, shepherd, sheep, flowers, meadows, zephyrs, trees
- 2) *Hierarchies of the natural kingdoms*: atoms, clay, gems, stones, lodestone, thorns, brambles, fruit, wine, serpents, dogs, whales, lions, birds
- 3) *Elemental*: earth, air, fire, water, quintessential
- 4) *Celestial*: Abhá kingdom, mountains, clouds, sun, moon, stars

- 5) *Courtly*: king, monarch, lord, ministers, judge, servants, nobles
- 6) *Transpersonal language of love, hate or alienation*: lover, beloved, friend, enemy, foe, stranger, emigrant, banished one, exile
- 7) *Kinship and association*: mother, son, father, youth, brother, friend, companion, wayfarer, brethren, children
- 8) *Hearth and home*: home, fire, family, mirror, couch, axe, key, pen, lamp, lantern
- 9) *Town or country life*: path, field, physician, jeweller, artisan, merchant, metropolis, banquet, festal board
- 10) *Military*: sword, legions, castles, knights, battalions, armies, strongholds.

### Resolving Tensions between Disparate Worlds

The symbol is paradoxical. It is static because it is written in concrete form yet it is dynamic and infinite in the way that it moves the human spirit. It is an intellectual, analyzable construct but points to an ineffable spiritual reality. The symbol is both logical and intuitive. One of the unique functions of symbol, as mentioned above, is that it is able to blend and integrate within itself modes which appear to be contradictory or mutually exclusive. In this synthesizing mode, the symbol acts as a tool of the Word of God which 'Abdu'l-Bahá says is capable of 'harmonizing' the divergent traditions and customs in a plurality of world cultures:

Naught but the celestial potency of the Word of God, which ruleth and transcendeth the realities of all things, is capable of harmonizing the divergent thoughts, sentiments, ideas, and convictions of the children of men. Verily, it is the penetrating power in all things, the mover of souls and the binder and regulator in the world of humanity.<sup>31</sup>

The word of God is able at one and the same time to preserve divergent folkways and to harmonize them by blending their motifs into a higher unity of world culture. Metaphor and symbol when used in the language of divine revelation act much the same way in the world of human experience. Their point of reference is in the sensate world, in the world of common human experience, the empirical world; but their lodestar is another reality, the spiritual one, and their function is to integrate that spiritual reality with the temporal one, even if only momentarily. Thus the function of symbol can be seen to be highly

sympathetic to the keynote of the Bahá'í Faith itself: unity and integration in all its forms, a unity and integration that has the added gift of inspiration.

To summarize: the metaphor reconciles disparate and divergent worlds into a higher unity – the material and the spiritual, the logical and the intuitive, the world of thought and the world of feeling, the world of static form and the world of dynamic experience.

Two examples from the Bahá'í writings come to mind as instances of the reconciliation of disparate worlds. One is the use of military parlance. The other is the symbol of wine: 'Think not that We have revealed unto you a mere code of laws. Nay, rather, We have unsealed the choice Wine with the fingers of might and power.'<sup>32</sup>

One might suppose that the use of military images and the references to wine would be malapropos in Bahá'í scripture since Bahá'í teaching opposes war, except in very clearly defined circumstances of collective security,<sup>33</sup> and forbids the use of alcohol. Military language, however, has certain pointed and valid applications in Bahá'í scripture. Above all, it is the language of triumph and victory. In its call to assemble troops, train in the arts of war and make battle, the language of warfare keeps constantly in its sights the winning of the victory. Winning is the purpose of warfare and the language of war is used above all to inspire soldiers to conquer. To win the victory the soldier is expected to demonstrate the military virtues of discipline, courage, valour, obedience, pride, strength and resistance. But to win the victory it is also expected that the soldier not only slay but be slain. His first duty is to sacrifice himself. The sacrifice of life is the cost of winning the battle. The military language of triumph as used in the Bahá'í writings implies consequently the sacrifice of self.

Since Bahá'í teaching generally forbids war, it would seem that when Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá use militaristic figures of speech they are calling upon what the reader understands to be military virtues but for a spiritual purpose. This transformation of the military image is achieved largely through the linguistic device of symbol or metaphor. In so doing, the military virtues are divested of their base uses, such as the call to arms for the shedding of blood, and are used to inspire the believer to win the victory over self or boldly to proclaim the Bahá'í Faith. Here, for example, is an extended metaphor of Shoghi Effendi that uses as its central image the knight of faith:

Putting on the armour of His love, firmly buckling on the shield of His mighty Covenant, mounted on the steed of steadfastness, holding aloft the lance of the Word of the Lord of Hosts, and with unquestioning reliance on His promises as the best provision for their journey, let them set their faces towards those fields that still remain unexplored and direct their steps toward those goals that are as yet unattained . . .<sup>34</sup>

Shoghi Effendi's metaphor calls to mind the image of the medieval knight setting out on a holy crusade but all the knight's accoutrements and weapons have been transformed into the simple garb of the spiritual pilgrim destined for a holy shrine. The knight's armour becomes God's love. His shield is the covenant of God's word. His steed is steadfastness. His lance is the cutting edge of truth. His hope for a safe journey and return is faith in the promises of God. But the knight of faith is more than just the pilgrim or the crusader in Shoghi Effendi's rendering. He is the adventurous voyager or the daring pioneer, setting out for faraway unexplored lands in order to help lay the foundations of the new spiritual civilization of tomorrow.

The same transformation is true of Bahá'u'lláh's choice of the symbol of wine, a symbol often put to use by the Persian mystics and poets. Háfiz of Shiraz (1320-91), for example, who is usually recognized as the greatest lyric poet of Persia, has scattered references to wine liberally throughout his odes. In the opening couplet of 'Love and Wine' he gives these well-known lines: 'Fill, fill the cup with sparkling wine/Deep let me drink the juice divine.'<sup>35</sup> Bahá'u'lláh's use of symbol of the unsealing of 'the choice wine', while suggesting the milder and more pleasant effects of intoxication, points to the ecstatic effect produced upon all creation by the unveiling of His divine laws. Also implicit in Bahá'u'lláh's image of the choice wine is the idea of the absorption of divine laws by the believer. The believer is to imbibe, so to speak, into his spiritual being the divine laws with the same relish that the experienced connoisseur quaffs the wine. Just as the choicest wine has been well aged in oak casks, Bahá'u'lláh's symbol indicates that the wine of His revelation unseals the flavour of the heady wisdom of the generations. Moreover, as some may view wine as nourishment for the body, Bahá'u'lláh uses the symbol of the choice wine to suggest nourishment for the soul and spiritual life.

From these two examples we see understand how the Bahá'í writings retain for didactic purposes what value may be had even from

those things with which its laws are at odds and how it transforms them for a spiritual purpose.

### A Brief History of the Word ‘Spirituality’

The meaning of the words ‘spiritual’ and ‘spirituality’ have been problematic ever since they became objects of scholarship during the 1960s.<sup>36</sup> When one examines the history of the word spirituality, one begins to understand why the word is both puzzling and ambiguous. Of the thousands of substantives in the theological vocabulary, ‘spirituality’ is historically speaking the most recent newcomer to have made its way into the English language. The concept has simply not had time to congeal.

The word ‘spiritual’ has been familiar for centuries, of course, to theologians and those in religious orders. In the Christian tradition, at least, it dates back to the New Testament and St Paul and later to St Thomas Aquinas. Treatises on spirituality were written by clergy for clergy. There were notable exceptions, such as St Francis of Sales’s (1567-1622) *Introduction à la vie dévote* (*Introduction to the Devout Life*), written for the benefit of an aspiring Christian lay person whom he calls Philothea. Only relatively recently, however, has spirituality left the cloister and entered college. Since the 1960s spirituality has become the subject of some fairly intensive scholarship, although a few serious works on the topic have been published, mainly in French, dating back roughly to 1900.<sup>37</sup> B. Fraling points out that even as late as 1964 the German Catholic encyclopedia *Lexicon für Theologie und Kirche* contained no article with the heading ‘Spiritualität’ but referred the reader to the older term ‘Frömmigkeit’ (piety).<sup>38</sup> Within the past thirty years, however, there has been a flurry of scholarship in an attempt to more closely define spirituality.

Throughout the 1960s and beyond, ‘spirituality’ became the preferred term to designate such formerly-used words and phrases as ‘mystical life’, ‘piety’, ‘devout life’, ‘spiritual life’, ‘life of the soul’, etc. The word ‘spirituality’ has emerged, then, as a global reformulation of various existing terms that tended in themselves to be poorly understood except by those in religious orders. While the term ‘spirituality’ provided for an economy of expression, it did not provide for an economy of meaning.

The English word 'spirituality' came by way of the French *spiritualité* which in turn came through the medieval Latin vernacular *spiritualitas*. In the post World War Two period the French opened up some of the first scholarly investigations of the subject.<sup>39</sup> While Christian clerical spirituality was concerned with the life of prayer, contemplation and devotion as well as moral theology, spirituality in the twentieth century has tended to focus more on the wholeness of the human person in an effort to heal some of the divisions and traumas of the troubled psyche. In more recent times, a host of psychiatrists, psychologists and religious writers of various persuasions, using either the self-help or academic approaches, have successfully combined counselling techniques with the teachings of wisdom literature, theology, philosophy and the world religions. This literature is expanding greatly every month.

### **Understanding the Word 'Spirituality': Hermeneutical Guidelines**

In the interpretation of the word 'spirituality' there are a few considerations to keep in mind. The first is the fluidity of the word. The word 'spiritual' has a synthetic quality. Like a net that is widely cast and pulls into it a host of life forms from the sea, the concept of spirituality also draws to it many of the major categories or questions associated with the life of faith. There is the theological understanding of the concept of spirituality itself, questions of theodicy (an understanding of the divine in light of the presence of evil), notions of spiritual anthropology (self and identity), the dynamics of spiritual growth (process psychology), virtues to cultivate and vices to avoid (moral theology), the meaning of adversity (philosophy), finding answers to ultimate questions of faith (anagogy), the concept of God (divinity), even life beyond death. All of these notions could legitimately be drawn into a discussion of spirituality. This is why one would be justified in speaking not only of 'spirituality' but of 'spiritualities'. One can also speak of 'spiritualities' when referring to the differing approaches that the world religions take towards the practice of spirituality. The world religions offer a variety of spiritualities and diverse approaches are possible even within the same tradition.

Heggie registers over a hundred meanings of 'spirit' and 'spiritual'

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in *An Index of Quotations from the Bahá'í Sacred Writings*. By reviewing all of these meanings and by examining them in context, one can make at least four general statements about the use of the words 'spirit' or 'spiritual' in the Bahá'í writings. These hermeneutical guidelines may assist in a better understanding of the various meanings of the word 'spiritual'.

- 1) The meaning of the word 'spiritual' in Bahá'í scripture is equivocal.
- 2) Intuitive interpretations of the word exist on the first level. Although valid, they are not very precise.
- 3) Some meanings of the word spiritual are associative; that is, one meaning suggests another to form a 'cluster of meanings'.
- 4) Some meanings of the word are mutually exclusive.

Statements 1 and 2 are fairly clear. To illustrate, one can cite four phrases from the Bahá'í writings:

- i) 'spiritual distinction': 'For you I desire spiritual distinction – that is, you must become eminent and distinguished in morals. In the love of God you must become distinguished from all else.'<sup>40</sup>
- ii) 'spiritual gathering' (assembly): 'The signature of that meeting should be the Spiritual Gathering (House of Spirituality) and the wisdom is that hereafter the government should not infer by the term 'House of Justice' that a court is signified, that it is connected with political affairs . . . that Gathering has not the least connection with material affairs, and that its whole aim and consultation is confined to matters connected with spiritual affairs.'<sup>41</sup>
- iii) 'spiritual world': 'As to the question whether the souls will recognize each other in the spiritual world: This fact is certain . . .'<sup>42</sup>
- iv) 'spiritual proof': 'The proofs which we have adduced relative to the origin of the human species were logical proofs. Now we will give the spiritual proofs, which are essential.'<sup>43</sup>

Even though these examples are taken from translations, one will readily see that the meanings of the word 'spiritual' in these contexts are equivocal. 'Spiritual distinction' refers especially to distinction in morals and virtue. The 'spiritual assembly' refers to a religious governing body rather than to a political one. The 'spiritual world' in Bahá'í usage often refers to the world beyond; that is, to life after death. 'Spiritual proof' is a phrase used by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to refer especially

to an intuitive proof, a proof that is somewhat different from the rational one. All of these substantives are qualified by the common word 'spiritual' yet the meanings are quite clearly different. The examples point out, also, that the meanings of the word spiritual are sometimes mutually exclusive and have intrinsic meanings of their own. If one interchanged the meanings, one would be hard pressed to find a common denominator, other than the mysteries of spirit itself. One could hardly speak sensibly, for example, of an 'intuitive assembly', 'a next worldly distinction', and 'a governing religious proof'. The meanings of the word are not always synonymous.

Sometimes the word 'spiritual' may have no special religious significance but may refer simply to the human spirit, soul, intellect or character. This is the case with this statement of 'Abdu'l-Bahá: 'From the spiritual point of view, therefore, there is no difference between women and men.'<sup>44</sup> Further, the word 'spiritual' may suggest a cluster of meanings, that is, a number of associated meanings that form a kinship. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's phrase 'the spiritually learned' exemplifies the point:

The spiritually learned are lamps of guidance among the nations, and stars of good fortune shining from the horizons of humankind. They are fountains of life for such as lie in the death of ignorance and unawareness, and clear springs of perfections for those who thirst and wander in the wasteland of their defects and errors.<sup>45</sup>

In one sense, the passage interprets itself. According to the text, the 'spiritually learned' give life and the spirit of guidance to humanity. The virtue of knowledge is suggested ('lamps of guidance') as is spiritual strength or vitality in order to bring life ('fountain of life'). Thus here 'spiritual' suggests knowledge and spiritual strength, which are synonymous. Yet 'spiritual strength' is a tautology: nothing is added to the meaning by the word spiritual unless one understands by it strength of soul or character. In order to guide those who are in error, the spiritually learned would have to be a model of virtue. To be a model of virtue, the believer would have to be obedient to the laws of God. Obedience also suggests submissiveness. In order to guide others and free them from their defects and errors, the spiritually learned would have to show unbounded love. Thus one can see how this one word 'spiritual', in this context at least, suggests a cluster of meanings: knowledge, spiritual vitality, strength of soul, virtue,

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obedience and love. The phrase 'spiritually learned' might also simply suggest those who are learned in religious knowledge.

I find that there are a possible twelve basic meanings to the word 'spiritual'. These meanings can in turn be subdivided into eight primary meanings and four secondary meanings.

### *Primary Meanings*

- 1) God-like or godly
- 2) Pertaining to the life of the mind, soul or spirit
- 3) Pertaining to virtue, good character or conduct
- 4) Distinguished from material
- 5) Expressive of a depth of faith, love or knowledge
- 6) The agent for the divine will
- 7) That which creates, guides and sustains life
- 8) Expressive of energy or power

### *Secondary Meanings*

- 1) Religious in the sense of pertaining to a particular dispensation
- 2) Belonging to the category of religion
- 3) Heavenly in the sense of referring to the next world
- 4) Intuitive or psychological

### **Spirit as an Attribute of Power: The Sustaining Life Force**

The words 'spirit' and 'spiritual' seem to have taken refuge in our post-modern age in the domain of religion alone. Yet it was not always so. The idea of spirituality can also be found within the philosophical school of idealism and within the poetry of the romantics. The word 'spirit' also survives in most languages as a common noun. Modern science, psychology and psychiatry have to a great extent regrettably buried the ancient notion of 'spirit' as spirit-power because of its high abstraction and because the notion cannot be easily rationalized, measured or quantified. The word also has religious and philosophical overtones that make it inimical to scientific method.

Common everyday language, which is of course a mode of rational thought, still contains a few of the ancient meanings connected with

the word 'spiritual'.<sup>46</sup> Language tends to be conservative, evolving very slowly over time, and has thus preserved some of the primitive meanings of the word 'spirit'. These few everyday uses of the word reflect, moreover, a non-analytical or spontaneous mode of self-consciousness. Principally, they convey a concept of spirit that attributes power or energy to the individual. In everyday speech, one says, for example, 'This athlete has a lot of spirit,' meaning that he has a vital force, is active and cannot be easily defeated. One may also speak of a 'spirited horse', indicating that the horse is a powerful animal and cannot be easily restrained. One says, 'That's the spirit!' to someone who undertakes something challenging. 'Spirit' in these contexts denotes strong intention, forcefulness, vitality, even moral courage. Some forms of alcohol are called 'spirits'. This usage refers to a strongly distilled substance or essence and is an example of personification used in the plural to indicate there is a multiplication of the power factor; it reflects an ancient reference to invisible 'spirits'. The phrase 'human spirit', referring to that invisible and rational part of human nature, implies an ennobling and enduring influence on culture and society. All of these usages reflect an understanding of the word 'spirit' as an invisible power or vital force denoting energy or the presence of moral courage, qualities that cannot be completely rationalized by modern categories of scientific thought.

A belief in spirit-power was common in many ancient pre-literate societies. In these cultures the environment was believed to be alive with spirits, not only in human beings but in natural objects and events as well. Unlike moderns, pre-literate peoples never doubted that the human being had a spirit. The spirits that were believed to inhabit the world and indeed the bodies of other people were often thought to be malevolent and apt to be injurious if not placated.

In the Shinto religion of Japan we find the notion of *Kami* or vital life force applied not only to the spirits of ancestors, who are the objects of worship, but also to the natural processes of growth, fertility and birth common to all natural phenomena. *Kami* extends to guardian spirits of the land, occupations and skills and to national heroes or men of outstanding deeds or virtues. All of these are thought to be full of *Kami*. Today the notion has been modernized and extended to include

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virtues, precepts and concepts such as justice, order, blessing and cooperation.<sup>47</sup>

The Bahá'í Faith shares with the other Abrahamic faiths the fundamental outlook that it is the Holy Spirit which creates, sustains and empowers the human being. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's definition of spirit as the origin of all life, both physical and intellectual, is an exact parallel of the Hebraic notion of the creative, invasive and sustaining power of the Holy Spirit which is at the origin of all life: 'The greatest power in the realm and range of human existence is spirit – the divine breath which animates and pervades all things.'<sup>48</sup> One notes the close similarity between 'Abdu'l-Bahá's use of the word 'breath' and that of the Hebrew Bible in which the word *ruah* (Gk. *pneuma*), meaning 'wind', 'breath' or 'spirit', is used throughout the creation accounts of Genesis and particularly in the creation of Adam where it is stated: 'And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.'<sup>49</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá's view of the Holy Spirit as the origin of all life is in close keeping with the biblical and quranic traditions:

Likewise the Holy Spirit is the very cause of the life of man; without the Holy Spirit he would have no intellect, he would be unable to acquire his scientific knowledge by which his great influence over the rest of creation is gained. The illumination of the Holy Spirit gives to man the power of thought, and enables him to make discoveries by which he bends the laws of nature to his will.<sup>50</sup>

The Holy Spirit is the origin of life and the human spirit which it engenders must give life in return:

That which is truly spiritual must light the path to God, and must result in deeds. We cannot believe the call to be spiritual when there is no result. Spirit is reality, and when the spirit in each of us seeks to join itself with the Great Reality, it must in turn give life.<sup>51</sup>

The Holy Spirit brings to the individual believer and to the community the spiritual virtues of enlightenment, inspiration and the greatest bounty, eternal life itself: 'The Holy Spirit it is which, through the mediation of the Prophets of God, teaches spiritual virtues to man and enables him to attain Eternal Life.'<sup>52</sup>

## The Believer's Spiritual Station: A Question of Relativity

The spiritual aspect of the human being, the Bahá'í writings tell us, is capable of infinite growth. It always exists, therefore, as a potential in time and eternity, as long as the human being lives on earth or is a resident of the heavenly kingdom. While on earth, growth, regression and static states are all possible. The individual's spiritual station is relative to the perfection of the Manifestation of God and to the position of other souls. Compared to some, the individual may be far advanced; compared to others, well behind. The station of humanity collectively is also gauged by the position of the observer. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's phrase 'the good deeds of the righteous are the sins of the Near Ones'<sup>53</sup> points to this relativity. Bahá'u'lláh in the *Hidden Words* appears to use this same concept of relativity when addressing the believers. At times they are addressed as 'O Companion of My Throne', the throne being the apex or the centre, so to speak, of the presence of God; at other times He refers to them as 'O Weed that Springeth Out of Dust', the nadir on the scale of values, for what is more useless than a weed?

The Bahá'í writings present a noble view of the individual, coupled with realism:

How lofty is the station which man, if he but choose to fulfil his high destiny, can attain! To what depths of degradation he can sink, depths which the meanest of creatures have never reached.<sup>54</sup>

The theme of the individual's nobility, based on his metaphysical potential as the complete expression of all the names and attributes of God, is a theme that is developed in several passages of the Bahá'í writings. Yet the dire warnings about the catastrophic results in human suffering that result from following our base nature are also there.

### Spirit in Nature

Nature is the mirror of God's spirit. The Bahá'í writings speak of nature as one of three books of God, the other two being the revealed scripture (or the divine revelation) and the human being. 'The Book of Creation is in accord with the written Book . . . The Book of Creation is the command of God and the repository of divine mysteries.'<sup>55</sup> The third book is the book of 'man': 'Man is said to be the greatest representative

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of God, and he is the Book of Creation because all the mysteries of beings exist in him.<sup>56</sup>

The ability of nature to move the human soul to awe, even rapture, with her landscapes of unspoilt beauty has reserved for her an important place in humanity's spiritual development. Nature, from the time of Greece and Rome and for centuries after, has also had a preponderant role in the development of the arts and literature and has thus established a vital connection with the spiritual or intellectual function of the human psyche. Bahá'u'lláh eulogizes nature as one of the mightiest expressions of the divine will:

Say: Nature in its essence is the embodiment of My Name, the Maker, the Creator. Its manifestations are diversified by varying causes, and in this diversity there are signs for men of discernment. Nature is God's Will and is its expression in and through the contingent world. It is a dispensation of Providence ordained by the Ordainer, the All-Wise. Were anyone to affirm that it is the Will of God as manifested in the world of being, no one should question this assertion. It is endowed with a power whose reality men of learning fail to grasp. Indeed a man of insight can perceive naught therein save the effulgent splendour of Our Name, the Creator. Say: This is an existence which knoweth no decay, and Nature itself is lost in bewilderment before its revelations, its compelling evidences and its effulgent glory which have encompassed the universe.<sup>57</sup>

There is, however, also a warning in this statement not to focus on the creation and forget the Creator. Bahá'u'lláh asserts that it is erroneous to overvalue nature without recognizing nature's source:

Those who have rejected God and firmly clung to Nature as it is in itself are, verily, bereft of knowledge and wisdom. They are truly of them that are far astray. They have failed to attain the lofty summit and have fallen short of the ultimate purpose . . .<sup>58</sup>

Those who worship nature have in effect set up another idol to worship in place of God. Although the Bahá'í Faith rejects pantheism,<sup>59</sup> which deifies nature and confuses creation with the transcendent oneness of God, it seems to be more compatible with 'panentheism' (God is in all, but all is not God), a doctrine originated by the relatively unknown German philosopher C.F. Krause (1781-1832), a contemporary of Hegel, and revived in Whitehead's and Hartshorne's process theology, one

of the main schools of twentieth century theology.<sup>60</sup> Panentheism sees God as present and in-dwelling in all things, yet recognizes Him as the transcendent Being who stands above, beyond and outside of His creation. Panentheism thus avoids the error of pantheism, which concretizes God too mechanistically within His creation and which identifies Him too closely with matter and therefore with moral error. Panentheism recognizes that God is present in His creation through the multiple expressions of nature as emanations from God.

In the Tablet of Wisdom Bahá'u'lláh refers to Socrates' discovery of a universal or quintessential substance which runs throughout all of nature. This naturally includes the human being, since the human being is the most refined form of nature. This substance or nature, according to Bahá'u'lláh's interpretation of Socrates, most closely resembles the human spirit:

He [Socrates] it is who perceived a unique, a tempered, and a pervasive nature in things, bearing the closest likeness to the human spirit, and he discovered this nature to be distinct from the substance of things in their refined form. He hath a special pronouncement on this weighty theme.<sup>61</sup>

This quintessential substance would appear to be a kind of preternatural force upon which all matter depends. One finds a faint echo of Bahá'u'lláh's statement in Book 5 of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The context is a dialogue between the seraph Raphael who is sent by God to deliver a message to Adam and Eve in Eden to warn Adam that Satan is plotting his downfall, not by violence but by deceit (lines 461-505). Raphael warns Adam that his happiness depends upon his own free will. Raphael says to Adam that God has created all things from the same matter:

O Adam, one Almighty is, from whom  
All thing proceed, and up to him return,  
If not deprav'd from good, created all  
Such to perfection, one first matter all,  
Indu'd with various forms, various degrees  
Of substance, and in things that live, of life;  
But more refin'd, more spiritous, and pure,  
As nearer to him plac't or nearer tending

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Each in their several active Spheres assign'd,  
Till body up to spirit work, in bounds  
Proportioned to each kind.<sup>62</sup>

Angels are more refined because they are closer to God but it is a difference of degree, not of kind. This is why Raphael confesses that he can eat Adam's food which he can convert into his own proper substance. Raphael tells Adam that the time may come when Adam, having been purified into a pure spirit, may eat of angel's food and find it not too light to satisfy him.<sup>63</sup> One finds, then, in Milton's epic poem the loose parallel to Socrates' teaching that there is a universal spiritual substance, common to both men and angels, but specified at its own level.

Yet nature, from the point of view of the Bahá'í writings, is, like the individual, an ambiguous entity. Nature does not receive in the Bahá'í writings a uniformly benevolent treatment:

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.<sup>64</sup>

Like the determination of so many other values, the place assigned to nature in the scheme of things depends upon the point of view of the observer. The Bahá'í Faith recognizes in nature a relative rather than an absolute quality; that is, nature can only be understood in a particular context, in relationship to something else. Thus we can look at nature from the vantage point of the landscape painter or the poet, the gardener or the farmer, and all of these views would be different.

'Abdu'l-Bahá's exposé of nature in the above passage is predicated on the world view of the gardener. The gardener makes order out of chaos. He does not destroy nature but rather reorders it so as to make it more fruitful and productive. The idea of order and utility is imposed by the gardener upon the natural state. For the poet or the landscape painter, nature is usually preferred in its natural rather than its cultivated state. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's discourse on nature as a wild forest that is a potential garden is, of course, part of a wider analogy on the role of the prophets as the gardeners of humanity and the educators of the wild natural state of the human soul:

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The mission of the Prophets of God has been to train the souls of humanity and free them from the thraldom of natural instincts and physical tendencies. They are like unto Gardeners, and the world of humanity is the field of Their cultivation, the wilderness and untrained jungle growth wherein They proceed to labour.<sup>65</sup>

## *Essential Spirituality: Faith, Love, Knowledge*

Spirituality is predicated on the three fundamental realities of faith, love and knowledge. These realities are the great pillars of the temple of spirituality, pillars that are basic not only to spiritual life but to life itself. Even faith, which is often erroneously thought to be an exclusively religious category, has implications for everyone, including the non-religious. Paul Tillich's well-known definition of religion as 'ultimate concern' may be applied to both *homo religiosus* and to the secular individual. 'Ultimate concern' is whatever is supreme on the individual's scale of values. Existentialist-essentialist theologian Tillich writes:

Man is ultimately concerned about his being and meaning. 'To be or not to be' in *this* sense is a matter of ultimate, unconditional total and infinite concern . . . Man is ultimately concerned about that which determines his ultimate destiny beyond all preliminary necessities and accidents.<sup>1</sup>

### **Faith: Implicit and Explicit**

Faith most closely resembles in its description and character spirituality itself, for faith is the most primary quality of spirituality. Faith, like love, is infinite, and its meanings are virtually inexhaustible. The Universal House of Justice writes that one should not restrict the meaning of faith to one's personal experience or understanding:

You yourself admit, however, that by narrowing down the definition of faith to the experience of communion with the Spirit of Bahá'u'lláh as you describe it would create a barrier between those who have made the effort and gained the experience and those who have not. Beyond this, you should remember it has the danger of restricting the implica-

tions of faith and fixing its meaning . . . if you consider the following passages from the [Bahá'í] writings you will see the wide range of concepts alluded to.<sup>2</sup>

Faith is interconnected with many facets of human personality and behaviour – attitude, purpose, freedom of choice, self-concept and world view, to name but a few – and with our view and understanding of God. Faith has both intimately personal aspects (trust, hope, knowledge, belief, love) and cooperative or community aspects (action, interdependence, common goals, solidarity, objectives, strategies).

The Bahá'í Faith is grounded in a belief in an eternal, personal Creator-God, a God who is ultimately unknowable yet rational in the expression of His plans and purposes for humanity, who is cosmic and yet closer to us than our 'jugular vein',<sup>3</sup> who is hidden from view and yet works in full sight of all by revealing Himself on the stage of human history and in all the works of His creation. A vital belief in a personal Creator-God ensures the stability and happiness of the human soul during its earthly life and felicity after death. As to paradise, the undreamt of reward of those who are faithful to God, its reality is proclaimed throughout the Bahá'í writings:

As to Paradise: It is a reality and there can be no doubt about it, and now in this world it is realized through love of Me and My good-pleasure. Whosoever attaineth unto it God will aid him in this world below, and after death He will enable him to gain admittance into Paradise whose vastness is as that of heaven and earth.<sup>4</sup>

Faith is, moreover, a universal reality. Even though the Bahá'í Faith looks upon belief in Bahá'u'lláh as 'the essence of faith and certitude', and Bahá'u'lláh as the One who 'hath revealed Himself in a distinct attire,'<sup>5</sup> it does not make too sharp a distinction between those who have recognized Him and those who have not. Bahá'í teaching affirms that one can be a Bahá'í unconsciously, that is without ever having heard the name of Bahá'u'lláh. A young man who had come to see 'Abdu'l-Bahá in London in 1911 stated that he had never heard of the Bahá'í revelation but that he believed in its aims and purposes and desired to be a disciple of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. 'Abdu'l-Bahá replied: 'It makes no difference whether you have ever heard of Bahá'u'lláh or not . . . the man who lives the life according to the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh is already a Bahá'í.'<sup>6</sup>

One might be tempted to see a contradiction in these two statements, the one stating that the essence of faith and certitude is to guide others to the one particular and historically situated Manifestation of God, Bahá'u'lláh; the other, that one can be a Bahá'í without ever having heard of Him. The fact that the Bahá'í writings designate both individuals as Bahá'ís gives pause for thought. In the one view the recognition of the Manifestation of God is pivotal to the development of the individual's spiritual life; in the other the spiritual life is the essential thing, independent of the knowledge of the divine Manifestation's name. But one should not forget that those individuals who are already Bahá'ís also need to hear more of Bahá'u'lláh and His teachings so that their faith may be fully realized. Just knowing the Manifestation of God is not enough. It would seem, then, that the word 'Bahá'í' is used with great liberality in the Bahá'í writings and in the talks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and that it is used to designate both the avowed and the 'unconscious' believer, those who demonstrate both objective and subjective faith respectively.

'Abdu'l-Bahá taught that in the time of Christ 'all contingent beings possessed subjective faith and had unconscious obedience to His Holiness Christ'.<sup>7</sup> Although the notion of subjective faith is somewhat abstruse, perhaps part of its meaning may be that all contingent beings were in some sense *subject to* or dependent upon the faith of Christ. Without being conscious of it, all contingent beings received life through the faith of Christ, somewhat in the same manner as the fish depend on the sea for their very existence without being conscious of it. This unconscious obedience 'Abdu'l-Bahá further explains as a relationship of dependence in the same way that the branches, leaves and fruit are dependent for their existence upon the root of the tree:

For all parts of the creational world are one whole. Christ the Manifestor reflecting the divine Sun represented the whole. All the parts are subordinate and obedient to the whole. The contingent beings are the branches of the tree of life while the Messenger of God is the root of that tree. The branches, leaves and fruit are dependent for their existence upon the root of the tree of life. This condition of unconscious obedience constitutes subjective faith.<sup>8</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá's arboreal allegory is based not only upon a relation of the dependence of the part to the whole but is also an image of organic unity. The truth of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words is borne out by Christ

Himself. Or, if one prefers, the truth of Christ's words is borne out by 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman . . . Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.<sup>9</sup>

Thus Christ, like 'Abdu'l-Bahá, makes the relationship of dependence categorically clear. This parable is reminiscent of Paul's 'Christ-mysticism': that all believers are organic parts of the whole mystical body of Christ.

In another image of organic unity, quoted here from the Revised Standard version of the Bible, Paul compares Christ to the head of the body which commands the growth of the whole organism and its internal functioning as it grows in divine love:

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, *joined and knit together* by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love.<sup>10</sup> (emphasis mine)

One cannot help but notice that Paul's phrase 'joined and knit together' as here translated is parallel with a phrase in the Bahá'í Long Obligatory Prayer: 'He Who hath been manifested is the Hidden Mystery, the Treasured Symbol, through Whom the letters B and E (Be) have been *joined and knit together*' (emphasis mine).<sup>11</sup> The King James version translates the same phrase as 'fitly joined together and compacted'. Mystical union for Paul is to be found with Christ rather than with God and is implicit in Christ's parable of the true vine. In a study of Paul's mysticism, Dr Albert Schweitzer writes:

The fundamental thought of Pauline mysticism runs thus: I am in Christ; in Him I know myself as a being who is raised above this sensuous, sinful, and transient world and already belongs to the transcendent: in Him I am assured of resurrection; in Him I am a child of God.<sup>12</sup>

Here again we find certain echoes of Christ's parable of the true vine and, more indirectly, of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's subjective and objective faith.

## Faith as Theological Knowledge

One of the most frequently quoted definitions of faith found in the Bahá'í writings is this: 'By faith is meant, first, conscious knowledge, and second, the practice of good deeds.'<sup>13</sup> The context of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's definition was to clarify the point that the knowledge of God must be the prelude to good deeds. This context is important, although sometimes overlooked, for it places the knowledge of God not in the abstract but in the real world, linking it closely with deeds, that is behaviour. In another discussion of the same point, 'Abdu'l-Bahá stipulates that any act, however benevolent or praiseworthy, if not motivated by the knowledge and love of God and good will – that is, with purity of motive or sincerity – is imperfect.<sup>14</sup> What is most distinctive about this definition is that it establishes faith squarely as a form of knowledge rather than a belief in as yet unseen or unrealized things, one of the more traditional understandings of faith, at least in the Christian tradition. Hebrews makes this ancient view of faith explicit: 'Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.'<sup>15</sup>

The knowledge of faith is, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's definition affirms, 'conscious', an extremely important qualifier. Individual consciousness refers especially to the fact that one is aware and sure that one lives, feels and thinks, that one knows one's own existence, that one is cognizant of being perspicacious. Faith is 'knowing knowledge', knowledge that is informed, aware, alive. 'Conscious' knowledge has consequently the quality of sure knowledge and is like the high degree of certitude that one has about one's own existence. If one doubts one's own existence, virtually all knowledge one acquires will rest on shaky foundations. 'Conscious knowledge', therefore, refers to a type of knowledge that has a high degree of certitude. It is unlike the notion that has long persisted, and still persists, that faith is irrational or opposed to science. Even one as enlightened as the late Dr Lecomte du Noüy, who reinterpreted the theory of evolution in the light of modern physics and who rejected a strictly materialistic scientific world view, wrote in 1947: 'This development [the moral one] can only be based, in our actual society, on a unification, a reconciliation of the rational – science – *with the irrational – faith*' (emphasis mine).<sup>16</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá's definition further poses the question of what is

implied by this conscious knowledge of God. The answer appears to be 'the knowledge of God as contained in divine revelation', knowledge of 'those first and everlasting principles'<sup>17</sup> and 'verities of life'<sup>18</sup> which God has mediated to humanity through the founders of the great world religions.

The knowledge of faith should not, therefore, be too sharply distinguished from scientific or philosophical forms of knowledge. Philosophy requires faith of a kind as does science itself. The rationality of the physical universe, the rationality that makes it liable to investigation, theorization and experimentation, is based on faith in the rationality of the universe. If one takes, for example, the basic notion of causality which is fundamental to science, one realizes that the very notion of causality is taken on faith. The statement that 'every effect must have cause', is based on induction,<sup>19</sup> a method that Bertrand Russell said in his *Principles of Mathematics* (1903) was basically a method of guesswork. In order to test the truth of the statement that every effect must have a cause, one would have to verify empirically every individual effect to see whether or not it actually had a cause.<sup>20</sup> This is impossible. Probability is the faith of science. Scientific knowledge rests on the belief that the conclusive statement, since it is based on repeated experimentation, is more likely to be true than to be false. In science the possibility remains, however, that the statement could be false. Moreover, fundamental postulates in mathematics are based on induction. One could never actually collate all individual cases in order to determine results or repeat the experiment *ad infinitum*. One therefore concludes that the hypothesis being tested is true if the experiment produces the same results when repeated. Not only does science proceed with a certain type of faith but intuition remains as much a part of the scientific method as does experimentation or sheer accident, 'error and luck',<sup>21</sup> for that matter. This scientific intuition is accompanied by the attitude of faith, the attitude that will set out to venture forth, 'we know not where', to trust in the result before one has actually secured its proof empirically.

The concept of faith as knowledge of God is based in Bahá'í perspective on two fundamental convictions: 1) the intuitive, all-embracing, perfect knowledge of the Manifestation of God, and 2) the veracity of divine revelation. These are the two premises on which all the theories about faith and the knowledge of God are based. Bahá'ís

believe that the Manifestation of God possesses an inborn supernatural form of perfect knowledge which is bestowed on Him by the Creator through a process that cannot be completely rationalized. This supernatural divine knowledge is transmitted to humanity according to the individual's capacity – and in this sense the knowledge of God is relative – through divine revelation, a process which, however mysterious it may be, is nonetheless real. That which emanates from the 'mind' of God is transmitted to humanity through the Manifestation of God, not as through a filter but as the light of the divine essence reflected by the pure mirror of the Manifestation of God.

A belief in the intuitive knowledge possessed by the divine Manifestation cannot be tested in any 'hard' empirical way. It is *a priori* to the whole discussion.<sup>22</sup> What can be practically tested, however, is the operation of the social teachings of Bahá'í community life and the system of governance that Bahá'u'lláh has devised for a world society. Through an examination of the new world order of Bahá'u'lláh as practised by the Bahá'í community, one can empirically test the veracity of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings. Although the statement that the Manifestation of God possesses all-encompassing intuitive knowledge cannot be proven in a narrow empirical sense, one can nevertheless offer sound and abundant evidence that the divine Manifestation possesses this knowledge.

'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that the knowledge which the ordinary individual exhibits is of two sorts: the 'knowledge of things' [science and philosophy] and the 'knowledge of being' [ontology].<sup>23</sup> He explains that the knowledge of things is objective knowledge. It includes the knowledge of facts, the knowledge that enables us to live in the world. It comes through the operation of the five senses and is gained through reflection and evidence, through concentration and effort. The knowledge of being, on the other hand, is intuitive and is like the consciousness that one has of oneself, the way the mind is conscious of the body. One does not have to strive to gain this knowledge, nor does one need to be convinced of it through an appeal to evidence. It is direct knowledge. 'Abdu'l-Bahá calls the knowledge of being 'an absolute gift'.<sup>24</sup> The knowledge of the divine Manifestations bestowed by divine revelation is similarly intuitive, a pure gift surpassing immeasurably the intuitive knowledge which ordinary individuals possess:

Since the Sanctified Realities, the supreme Manifestations of God, surround the essence and qualities of the creatures, transcend and contain existing realities and understand all things, therefore Their knowledge is divine knowledge, and not acquired – that is to say, it is a holy bounty; it is a divine revelation.<sup>25</sup>

Ordinary individuals, like the Manifestations of God, possess intuitive knowledge, but at a much lower level. The intuitive knowledge of the divine Manifestations works at the macrocosmic level above and beyond ordinary knowledge. At the same time it penetrates into the microcosmic level to include ‘the essence and qualities of the creatures.’ With this all-encompassing insight, the Manifestation of God is the only one who justifiably stands in the position of being able to prescribe the law of God to humanity, for He understands ‘the essential connection which proceeds from the realities of things’, a phrase which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá uses as His definition of religion.<sup>26</sup> The Manifestation of God stands, therefore, at the centre of the circle of knowledge and is master of all points along the circumference. Only the knowledge of the essence of God is closed, even to Him; otherwise all questions are open.

If the intuitive knowledge of the divine Manifestation conveyed by His teachings can be rationally apprehended by the human mind, the metaphysical and psychological process by which this knowledge is conveyed to humanity remains very much a mystery. The mysterious event that takes place when the divine Manifestation becomes the medium for the Godhead in the communication of holy writ rightly deserves to be called a miracle, for it belongs to a supernatural order of being completely outside the power and capacity of humankind to understand. Divine revelation is the supernatural act by which the hidden things of God are brought to light. It is the communication of the divine mind to the mind of humanity. Further, divine revelation is not the product of any effort or conscious reflection on the Prophet’s part; still less is it the result of some dialectical process by which He arrives at conclusions about the truth. It is, so to speak, divine dictation, the transfer of the thought of God to the mind of the Manifestation and through Him to the people of the world. The repetition of the word ‘Say’ or ‘Recite’ in Bahá’í and Islamic scripture or the ‘Thus saith the Lord’ in the Hebrew Bible indicate that the revelatory experience is being dictated by God.

Divine revelation also comes to the Manifestation of God as a

irresistible divine summons. As much as He may wish to do so at times, He is unable to resist the call. Muḥammad, prostrate with fear in a lonely cave on Mount Hira, is reported to have at first resisted the angel Gabriel's divine command to 'recite' the divine verses. Muḥammad is reported to have said that Gabriel appeared to him in a vision. The angel of revelation was seated on a cushion of silk and brocade, suspended between heaven and earth, and commanded Muḥammad to recite the verses Gabriel had written on a marvellous fabric. 'I cannot recite', protested the illiterate Prophet. Gabriel insisted, shaking Muḥammad violently and repeating the imperial command:<sup>27</sup>

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.  
 Recite thou, in the name of thy Lord who created; –  
 Created man from CLOTS OF BLOOD: –  
 Recite thou! For the Lord is most Beneficent,  
 Who hath taught the use of the pen; –  
 Hath taught Man that which he knoweth not.<sup>28</sup>

Similarly, Bahá'u'lláh indicated that:

... whenever I chose to hold my peace and be still, lo, the voice of the Holy Ghost, standing on my right hand, aroused me, and the Supreme Spirit appeared before my face, and Gabriel overshadowed me, and the Spirit of Glory stirred within my bosom, bidding me arise and break my silence.<sup>29</sup>

That rarest of experiences, the revelation of divine verses, is accompanied by the psychological experience of a tremendous power, one that all except those few and privileged eyewitnesses can only dimly imagine. All the poetic symbols of scripture are used to try to describe and encapsulate this experience of revelation which defies description: it is like the burning bush or a flame of fire on the mountaintop, peals of thunder, the ringing of the Great Bell, a flood of great waters let loose from heaven, heavenly music, a symphony of the most awesome power and divine might, the Bird of Paradise bursting forth in rapturous song. Whatever it may be, and whatever form it might take, the process of divine revelation communicates to humanity the omniscience of the Manifestation of God.

'Abdu'l-Bahá states that the knowledge of God 'is beyond all knowledge, and it is the greatest glory of the human world'.<sup>30</sup> It embraces at the same time ethics and morals (value), fact (science),

insight, inspiration, aesthetics and creativity. Scientific knowledge must occupy a second order after the knowledge of God, for science consists of only half of the knowledge of the universe, although some scientists have mistakenly taken it for *all* knowledge. Anjam Khursheed cites Karl Popper to this effect:

... science does not make assertions about ultimate questions – about the riddles of existence, or about man's task in the world. This has often been well understood. But some great scientists, and many lesser ones, have misunderstood the situation. The fact that science cannot make any pronouncement about ethical principles has been misinterpreted as indicating that there are no such principles, while in fact the search for truth presupposes ethics.<sup>31</sup>

Science must remain silent about values and is *ultra vires* where ultimate questions are raised. As Huston Smith puts it, at the most science can offer descriptive values, but never 'intrinsic' or 'normative' values. Smith gives these examples: 1) Market research can tell us what people do like, not what they should like. 2) Science can tell us that smoking damages health but says nothing as to whether health is better than 'somatic gratification'.<sup>32</sup> True theology, that is, the knowledge of God, leads to a higher state than 'material advantage' and 'outward civilization'. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

. . . but the knowledge of God 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>33</sup>

Is it justified to equate theology with the knowledge of God? One can answer both 'yes' and 'no'. The 'no' side would argue that one cannot put theology, which is human reflection on the divine, on a par with divine revelation, which belongs in a pristine, higher and qualitatively different category of its own. The 'yes' side would argue that revelation deals with matters with are in substance inescapably theological; that is, it targets primarily theological knowledge and not some other. Revelation is distinct from theology in the same way that the musical performance is different from the appreciation of music. Just as the appreciation of music is an afterthought or reflection on the making of music, so is theology an afterthought to the phenomenon of revelation. One is the source; the other is derivative. In the sense,

however, that revelation is in substance theological, that it contains constructs in its teachings which are metaphysical, it is appropriate to define theology as the knowledge of God, that is, as the knowledge of the revelation.

The word 'theology' was once viewed with a certain reluctance in the Bahá'í community, a reluctance that now seems to be waning in the face of the increasing number of theological and metaphysical papers that are being written by Bahá'ís.<sup>34</sup> This reluctance was owed mainly to a understanding of the word that was too narrow, one that was inferred from Christianity exclusively with its unalterable 'man-made' dogmatic theology. Suspicions in the Bahá'í community about theology were, and are, also based on the fact that theology has served as the handmaid of bitter controversy, even outright warfare, and has been a major factor contributing to the great schisms in the world religions. Yet the provisions of the Bahá'í covenant act as a mighty bulwark against acrimonious theological disputation and sectarianism, which in any case is forbidden to Bahá'ís. Most importantly, the Bahá'í administrative order, with its conspicuous absence of a clerical caste, allows for no authoritative and binding pronouncement to be made by any individual learned in religion.

The avoidance of the word 'theology' in the Bahá'í community may also be based on the impression that the scope and profundity of Bahá'í scriptures have brought us, paradoxically, into a post-theological age. Several authoritative and divinely-inspired Bahá'í texts such as Bahá'u'lláh's *Kitáb-i-Íqán* and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's *Some Answered Questions*, as well as the thousands of letters of Shoghi Effendi written in his capacity as head and Guardian of the Bahá'í Cause, which serve both as interpretation and commentary, may have left some with the impression that all of the old theological questions have now been disposed of. It seems more likely, however, that Bahá'u'lláh's revelation, rather than dealing theology a death blow, will contribute to its rebirth as *Regina Scientiarum* (Queen of the Sciences), a position it held during the Middle Ages.<sup>35</sup> For in this search for the knowledge of God, 'Abdu'l-Bahá counsels not only the mystic way, the way of prayer and meditation and contemplation, but also the way of discursive reason, the way of the intellect which is the method of theology:

... search for and choose Him and apply thyself to rational and

authoritative arguments. For arguments are a guide to the path and by this the heart will be turned unto the Sun of Truth.<sup>36</sup>

Further, 'Abdu'l-Bahá seems to suggest that arguments are needed to lead a seeker to the recognition of the Manifestation of God. At that point, the individual will directly recognize the truth and will no longer feel in need of rational demonstrations or proofs:

And when the heart is turned unto the Sun, then the eye will be opened and will recognize the Sun through the Sun itself. Then man will be in no need of arguments (or proofs), for the sun is altogether independent, and absolute independence is in need of nothing, and proofs are one of the things of which absolute independence has no need. Be not like Thomas; be thou like Peter.<sup>37</sup>

As is well known, theology (Gk. *theo* = God + *logos* = word, speech) means simply 'discourse about God or the science that treats of the divine'.<sup>38</sup> Theology attempts to make divine revelation itself and religious experience compatible with reason. Yet theology, according to philosopher F. R. Tennant, also includes in its broader sense comparative religion, a study 'Abdu'l-Bahá specifically endorsed while He was in America:

Praise be to God! You are living in a land of freedom. You are blessed with men of learning, men who are well versed in the comparative study of religion. You realize the need of unity and know the great harm which comes from prejudice and superstition.<sup>39</sup>

Tennant's admittedly atypical but nonetheless inviting view of a comprehensive theology also includes within it psychology of religion.<sup>40</sup> Theology is also intimately connected with philosophy, particularly metaphysics, and traditional Christian theology owes a great debt to the categories of Greek thought. St Thomas Aquinas's rational approach to theology, for example, was based mainly on the method of Aristotle which Aquinas integrated in its entirety into his theological writing. One can consequently equate theology in its broad definition with the knowledge of God, if by the knowledge of God one means a rational understanding of the divine teachings of the Manifestation of God.

'Abdu'l-Bahá has Himself given an excellent description of theology:

The first attribute of perfection is learning and the cultural attainments

of the mind, and this eminent station is achieved when the individual combines in himself a *thorough knowledge of those complex and transcendental realities pertaining to God*, of the fundamental truth of Qur'anic political and religious law, of the *contents of the sacred Scriptures of other faiths ...<sup>41</sup>* (emphasis mine)

'Abdu'l-Bahá would seem to be suggesting that the cultural attainments of the mind require three things: 1) theological science – 'a thorough knowledge of those complex and transcendental realities pertaining to God'; 2) Islamic science, understandable in the context of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's treatise, for He was writing 'to the rulers and the people of Persia';<sup>42</sup> 3) comparative religion: 'the contents of the sacred scriptures of other faiths'. 'Abdu'l-Bahá thus gives a preeminent station to theology in its various forms as an indicator of culture and learning. In its simplest, most authoritative and purest form theology is divine revelation, what I have elsewhere called 'revelation theology' or 'source theology'. Theology as revelation has to be distinguished from its lesser form, 'derivative theology',<sup>43</sup> the commentary of scholars.

### Faith as Trust

In its affirmation of the valid role of the intellect in the life of faith, the Bahá'í revelation should not be construed as reducing faith only to a rational analysis of theological propositions. One would be off-balance to insist only on the purely cognitive aspects of faith at the expense of its other dimensions. Faith has, moreover, a fundamental moral dimension in which the believer follows the prescriptions, observes the exhortations and puts into practice the law (teachings) contained in the revelation of God:

For in this holy Dispensation, the crowning glory of bygone ages and cycles, true faith is no mere acknowledgement of the unity of God, but rather the living of a life that will manifest all the virtues and perfections implied in such belief.<sup>44</sup>

Faith is also very much bound up with the moral virtue of trust, expressed preeminently in the classic definition of faith as trust in God. As we have seen, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews<sup>45</sup> best expresses this classic understanding of faith as trust, an understanding that finds its echo in Bahá'í scripture as well. The author of Hebrews

affirms that it is through faith (Gk. *pistis*) rather than the divine mind (*nous*) or reason (*logos*) that we come to understand the invisible or heavenly world:

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.<sup>46</sup>

Such a conception of faith has to do with an attitude of mind that invests strong belief or conviction in the existence of God and in the unseen things of God. Trust in God also implies hope, which has implications not only for the life of faith but for creative life as well. Renowned Canadian literary critic Northrop Frye drew, for example, a connection between hope and the literary dimension. In one of his lectures he said: 'Hope is to my mind a virtue that is closely related to the literary, because all hope is based on fiction; it has no facts to go on but it's where the creative impulse takes over.'<sup>47</sup> Trust in God goes beyond hope, however, to affirm itself in a '*substance of things hoped for*' (emphasis mine). It is '*evidence of things not seen*'. Faith here means strong personal conviction that what has not yet come to full potential will assuredly do so. It is the conviction that what now exists as an incomplete expression of the will of God will soon be realized and grow to perfect fruition. Faith as trust in God is the assurance of something being granted before it becomes an actual fact. This kind of faith begins with belief in an idea. It fashions an idea, then through a call to action assists in its realization. Purely secular concerns also operate on the same kind of faith – faith as an expression of belief in an idea.

In a panoramic review of Israelite history, the author of Hebrews engages in a kind of roll call of the prophets, judges, martyrs, heroes and heroines, all those who have endured, suffered and eventually triumphed through faith in God. He mentions Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Esau, Sarah, Joseph, Moses, Gideon, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and others. With such a 'cloud of witnesses' from the past, the author of Hebrews tells us that we too are to keep faith in our present troubles, assured of ultimate triumph through faith in God:

Wherefore seeing, we also are compassed about with so great a cloud

of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.<sup>48</sup>

These passages present faith not only as belief in the actualization of the immanent from out of the divine unseen world but also as ‘expectation based on experience’.<sup>49</sup> This type of faith is exactly the inverse of how faith is commonly viewed – as something that is lacking evidence. Here faith means precisely that which *is* based on evidence: ‘Here faith means belief, not for lack of evidence, but on account of evidence. It implies expectation that what has been found to be true in the past will continue to be favoured by evidence in the future.’<sup>50</sup> Perhaps this is one of the meanings of Bahá'u'lláh’s phrase ‘This is the changeless Faith of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future.’<sup>51</sup>

In the context of Hebrews, faith is the weighty evidence of God working throughout history in the lives of a host of true believers to bring them to success. Through faith, believers were brought through tests and ordeals, were granted success in the missions they undertook and were brought to ultimate triumph. Faith means, then, believing in the promises of God, that He will continue to work in the lives of the present generation, bringing them to victory as He did the believers of the past. It is to this kind of eternal faith that the Báb exhorted His followers, the Letters of the Living, in His stirring exhortation that inspired them to arise to fulfil their mission of breaking the dawn throughout Persia to herald in the dazzling light of God’s new revelation:

Has He not, in past days, caused Abraham, in spite of His seeming helplessness, to triumph over the forces of Nimrod? Has He not enabled Moses, whose staff was His only companion, to vanquish Pharaoh and his hosts? Has He not established the ascendancy of Jesus, poor and lowly as He was in the eyes of men, over the combined forces of the Jewish people? Has He not subjected the barbarous and militant tribes of Arabia to the holy and transforming discipline of Muḥammad, His Prophet? Arise in His name, put your trust wholly in Him, and be assured of ultimate victory.<sup>52</sup>

Such faith means believing that God will eventually set our troubles straight and assist us to triumph over evil and the forces of opposition:

And now you, if you act in accordance with the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, you may rest assured that you will be aided and con-

firmed. You will be rendered victorious in all that you undertake, and all the inhabitants of the earth will be unable to withstand you. You are the conquerors, because the power of the Holy Spirit is assisteth you.<sup>53</sup>

## Faith and Belief

Faith is usually expressed as a belief in someone or something, be it a person or an ideal, a set of beliefs, or at the more complex level, a complete belief-system. It is difficult strictly to separate faith from belief since the two are very closely intertwined. Faith, in the sense I use it here, is an attitude of mind and heart that forms the background to life. It is an existential vision of life and a concrete response to that vision. As stated above, faith is a conviction in the actualization of potential. At a higher stage, faith becomes the expression of all life since it means the total response and commitment of a person to an understanding of the higher Reality.

Stephen Boal, in a review of the key concepts of faith put forward by several theologians, highlighted the following themes as being 'germane to the faith state'. Boal's review indicates the several dimensions that comprise faith.<sup>54</sup>

- 1) An end-means relationship
- 2) An awareness of one's beliefs
- 3) The contributions of doubt and courage
- 4) The need for action
- 5) Self-integration, transcendence and centration
- 6) The need for subjectivity
- 7) The relationship to the unknown

Belief, however, is tied to doctrine, a formulated set of propositions or deeply held convictions. Yet faith cannot be reduced merely to belief in propositions. Belief, like faith, also has a dynamic psychological component that empowers individuals to action and gives them self-esteem. By comparison, mere ideology cannot sustain or empower individuals or societies for long. Beliefs that are based on faith, however, have the power to endure and are able to empower individuals, even whole societies, for very long periods of time.

Beliefs lie at various points along the sliding-scale of knowledge, from unsettled opinion through to the highest kind of certitude. These types of beliefs are expressed in everyday, common uses of the word.<sup>55</sup>

First, beliefs reflect mere opinions that can prove to be erroneous. For example, one can believe that a city councillor whom one had known personally for many years was an honest person until he was arrested and convicted in the light of overwhelming evidence of taking bribes. Belief in this case is an incorrectly held opinion; in other words, false knowledge. Second, belief can indicate probability. You can believe that a relative has moved to Vancouver over the holidays because you were so informed. Here we are on probable but not certain ground. Third, belief shares a common element with the state of faith in the relationship of trust. You believe in the credibility of the representative of an investment firm who has taken charge of your life savings. Because the individual has a long experience in the investment business and has a good track record, you hope he will be worthy of the trust. Fourth, belief indicates a form of knowledge that is a sure thing, an absolute conviction, a state of certitude that is beyond a shadow of a doubt. If one says, for example, 'I firmly believe that Bahá'u'lláh is a Manifestation of God', one believes without a doubt that Bahá'u'lláh is who He says He is. Once you have gone through the steps, however long or short they may be, to arrive at this conviction, if you thereafter doubt the statement, then you are in a crisis of faith, which in effect challenges the belief or holds it in suspension. In that case, the 'maybe' created by the crisis of faith indicates an unsettled opinion. Bahá'u'lláh cannot, however, be a Manifestation of God and not be a Manifestation of God at one and the same time. At some point the implications of such a weighty claim demand judgement. In the affirmative case – that Bahá'u'lláh is a Manifestation of God – you are expressing belief as a truth or a certitude. If you are already a believer in Bahá'u'lláh you do not look upon your belief as mere opinion, subject to error. If you admit the doubt of scientific probability, 'probably' Bahá'u'lláh is a Manifestation of God, you are in effect testifying to the weakness of your own faith, for such a belief is not a matter of opinion, at least not for you. Rather, it is a matter of certitude and makes an existential claim on your life in an absolute way. *Theoretically*, however, doubt is always possible. The question really becomes then: do I have the grounds to entertain seriously such doubts? But if doubt becomes existential doubt, then we have the crisis of faith.

Cavanagh distinguishes between beliefs that are mere opinion as 'alleged' and those that have a higher degree of certitude as 'demon-

strated'.<sup>56</sup> When evidence can be adduced for the belief so that the statement can be proven or verified by a method that eliminates doubt, then the belief can be taken to be true. The assertion, for example, that Bahá'u'lláh is a Manifestation of God can be substantiated by more than ample evidence.<sup>57</sup> Yet the fact of Bahá'u'lláh's prophethood may be meaningless to some or rejected by many in spite of abundant and clear proofs. Demonstrations of fact are no guarantees that the belief statement is going to be accepted. Will plays a great part in the recognition of faith. The individual's ability to perceive the truth also determines the acceptance or rejection of beliefs.

Comparative religionist Wilfred Cantwell Smith holds, however, in *Faith and Belief*<sup>58</sup> that the modern view of belief as mere opinion has separated it from its original meaning which was much closer to faith. As a result of very thorough lexical analysis of root words in Buddhist, Islamic, Hindu and Christian texts, Smith maintains that the original meaning of belief shared the root of the verb 'beloved' and meant to put one's trust in persons rather than in what they say.<sup>59</sup> In time, belief came to focus on the sayings of people as detached objective statements rather than trust in the persons themselves. Smith notes that originally the meaning of the Latin word *credo* did not mean 'the propositions to which I give assent', but rather giving one's heart or personal engagement, as reflected in the Latin *cor* meaning 'heart'.<sup>60</sup> *Credo*'s Sanskrit cognate *sradha* also meant 'putting one's heart into an enterprise'. This meaning suggests commitment and participation. Eventually, however, the meaning of belief came to denote something that indicated propositional formulas that can just as likely be proven false as true. The *Random House Dictionary* gives as an example of belief the statement 'that the earth is flat'.<sup>61</sup> Smith notes that the modern understanding of belief also involves suppositions about the falsifiability of the beliefs of other cultures and that the emphasis on belief tends to separate citizens of the planet from one another. We speak for example about what 'they believe' in contrast to – or in some cases, as opposed to – what 'we believe'. Belief, then, has become transformed from a first person affirmation of what one holds dear to a third person affirmation about the convictions of oneself and others. The original dimension of belief, however, was personal, 'belief in'. The predominant view of belief is now propositional, 'belief that'.<sup>62</sup> Existentially, (this is not Smith's word) personal belief as 'belief in' takes priority

over 'belief that'. We believe before we seek to justify, analyze or clarify the nature of our belief. Smith's argument attempts to reverse the modern cognitive approach to religion which makes faith conditional upon belief. He says in another work that continues his line of thinking, 'Without faith it is impious to believe,' which clearly identifies his position with a reaffirmation of biblical faith.<sup>63</sup>

The Bahá'í Faith certainly signals cautions about the insufficiency of belief and belief systems in the life of faith and would therefore be sympathetic to much of what Smith has written. The Bahá'í Faith concurs with the view that faith is something larger than belief and constitutes both a vision of life and a mode of action and involves a commitment to a cause or person. The note of caution found in the Bahá'í teachings on this subject is that belief should not be an agent merely for contemplating in a detached manner intellectual propositions, but should be rather a mode of action, a vision and a way of life. Belief cannot become, in the Bahá'í view, the epitome of religion, for to reduce religion to mere belief, as important as beliefs are, would amount to a distortion of religion. The voluntarist or theologian who is always asserting and analyzing beliefs is like a politician of religion. He is missing the essential part, especially if he does not live up to the ethical and spiritual demands of the religion:

Wherefore it is incumbent upon all Bahá'ís to ponder this very delicate and vital matter in their hearts, that, unlike other religions, they may not content themselves with the noise, the clamour, the hollowness of religious doctrine. Nay, rather, they should exemplify in every aspect of their lives the attributes and virtues that are born of God and should arise to distinguish themselves by their goodly behaviour. They should justify their claim to be Bahá'ís by deeds, not by name.<sup>64</sup>

When faith becomes primarily a matter of belief, it tends to become a force for controversy. The sad spectacle of the bloody history of Christian theology in the early, medieval and Renaissance churches is proof enough of this assertion. When faith is reduced to beliefs that are ossified in creeds, one almost invites a challenge to the veracity of the belief statement. When one is always asserting beliefs or devising doctrine, one is cutting with a knife, so to speak, for whenever a belief is put forward, one divides between those who accept the belief and those who do not. This is, in my view, part of the meaning of the caution expressed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá'. In order to achieve the unity of

the religions, theological differences will, to a great extent, have to be put aside and dialogue undertaken in a spirit of real understanding in order to discover those truths, codes of ethics and spiritualities which will lend themselves to bringing together rather than dividing the adherents of the great world faiths.

The Bahá'í world governing body, the Universal House of Justice, points to the irrational and tendentious manner in which leaders of religion have clung to their own outmoded orthodoxies, contributing thereby to the mistrust and confusion that have all too often characterized the relationship between the religions of the world:

If, therefore, humanity has come to a point of paralyzing conflict it must look to itself, to its own negligence, to the siren voices to which it has listened, for the source of the misunderstandings and confusion perpetrated in the name of religion. Those who have held blindly and selfishly to their particular orthodoxies, who have imposed on their votaries erroneous and conflicting interpretations of the pronouncements of the Prophets of God, bear heavy responsibility for this confusion – a confusion compounded by the artificial barriers erected between faith and reason, science and religion.<sup>65</sup>

## Faith and Courage

The Bahá'í writings make 'victory promises'<sup>66</sup> to those believers who are 'firm and steadfast', such confirmations as will 'enable the brave lions to conquer'.<sup>67</sup> This last metaphor 'the brave lions' reminds us that courage is a sign of faith. Such courage is exhibited not just in the face of opposition but also throughout the challenges, tests, and opportunities of daily living. Bahá'í scholar, administrator and teacher the late Dr Daniel C. Jordan in his succinct essay on spiritual transformation *Becoming Your True Self*, viewed courage, along with faith, as being basic to the 'process of transformation' and the 'release of potential':

Being attracted to that unknown in ourselves is faith; being able to utilize the energy from anxiety by formulating a goal and taking steps toward it is courage. Thus faith, doubt, anxiety and courage are all basic aspects of the process of transformation – the release of potential.<sup>68</sup>

Another quality of faith that is usually overlooked is coupled to courage: the sense of risk and adventure. The ability to take risks, to venture into creative enterprises and to think imaginatively is one of

the dynamic hallmarks of faith. One does a disservice to the power of faith by failing to use imagination and creativity, by becoming preoccupied with maintaining the conservative status quo, by occupying 'the comfortable pew'<sup>69</sup> or taking the path of least resistance. The Prophet Abraham is the prototype of the great adventurer, for He was willing to take risks, to venture forth when He was called upon by God to abandon His native city of Ur of the Chaldees in southern Babylonia for a destination unknown: 'By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out to a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.'<sup>70</sup>

It is this same sense of adventure in the face of the unknown that inspires the following lines of Lord Tennyson's, revealing at the same time a tenacity of courage and a magnanimous spirit of steadfastness. Tennyson's dramatic monologue 'Ulysses', spoken by the wanderer from Ithaca himself, stands as a great monument to the spirit of faith:

/Come, my friends  
 'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.  
 Push off, and sitting well in order smite  
 The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds  
 To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths  
 Of all the western stars, until I die.  
 It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:  
 It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,  
 And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.  
 Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'  
 We are not now that strength which in old days  
 Moved earth and heaven; that which we are, we  
 are;  
 One equal temper of heroic hearts,  
 Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will  
 To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.<sup>71</sup>

### **Love the Great Paradox**

*'Love. Stronger than death. Harder than hell.'* Meister Eckhart

Love and knowledge are the twin peaks that tower above the vast and rich landscape of theological virtues. It has long been a moot point

which of the two is greater. It is a sterile question in a way, something like arguing whether Dante Alligheri or Wolfgang Johann Goethe or William Shakespeare is the greater writer, or, as the disciples disputed, who would be greatest in the kingdom of God. 'Abdu'l-Bahá indicated that some arguments are never really resolved in a definitive way, giving as His example the debate between the theologians and the materialist philosophers about the miraculous birth of Christ. The pattern of argument and counter-argument presented by 'Abdu'l-Bahá is inconclusive and is intended to show that some questions are vexed and cannot be satisfactorily concluded.<sup>72</sup> If one attempts to resolve it in a definitive way, the question of the relative greatness of love and knowledge has the potential for becoming one of these sterile debates.

In *The Seven Valleys* Bahá'u'lláh says on the one hand: 'The Leviathan of love swalloweth the master of reason and destroyeth the lord of knowledge.'<sup>73</sup> This statement would seem to indicate the preeminence of love. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, on the other hand, says, '... that which is the cause of everlasting life, eternal honour, universal enlightenment, real salvation and prosperity is, first of all, the knowledge of God.'<sup>74</sup> In the Jewish tradition it is said that among the rank orders of angels the seraphs, or angels of knowledge and wisdom, stand above the cherubs, the angels of love. Bahá'u'lláh says in the *Hidden Words*: 'O Son of Man! I loved thy creation, hence I created thee.'<sup>75</sup> This love of God for His creation, a love which preceded the creative act, can be roughly compared to the love that the mother feels for her unborn child. The gospel letters speak this identical spiritual language: 'We love him, because he first loved us.'<sup>76</sup> Both Bahá'í and Christian scriptures, moreover, indicate that divine love is the primary motive behind creation. Yet, Bahá'u'lláh also says: 'O Son of Man! Veiled in My immemorial being and in the ancient eternity of My essence, I knew my love for thee; therefore I created thee...' (emphasis mine)<sup>77</sup> One might argue, consequently, that the knowledge of the love of God precedes the love of God itself. It creates less of a logical dilemma, however, simply to recognize that the two phenomena of love and knowledge exist inescapably together in the act of creation, as they must exist inescapably together in us. There should not be, consequently, any *de facto* incompatibility or epistemological tension between the knowledge and the love of God. Who speaks of the one, must also speak of the other.

The ancient Hebrews were familiar with this complementary relationship of knowing and loving. By a euphemism the Hebrew verb 'to know' also meant to have carnal knowledge, as in the phrase, 'And Adam knew Eve his wife.'<sup>78</sup> Epistemologically, one can understand this connection between knowing and loving as a direct, intuitive or intimate communication in which both modes become one aspect of the same thing. Further, in the mystical sense, the seeker who would truly know God cannot do so without loving Him for it is the passion of the spiritual love of God that leads to the knowledge of Him:

O My brother! Until thou enter the Egypt of love, thou shalt never come to the Joseph of the Beauty of the Friend; and until, like Jacob, thou forsake thine outward eyes, thou shalt never open the eye of thine inward being; and until thou burn with the fire of love, thou shalt never commune with the Lover of Longing.<sup>79</sup>

Whatever the characteristics and relative merits of these two paramount spiritual virtues, this text of Bahá'u'lláh indicates that the primary subject in spirituality has to be love, love in all its forms. When we close our eyes for the last time and breathe our last breath, much of the fate of our soul will depend on what we have understood of love, whom we have loved, how we have loved. It would, however, be better were we to find love early in life rather than late. The following episode from the Middle Ages related by Raymond Lull (c. 1232-c. 1315) expresses a poignant regret about finding love too late in life:

The Lover went to seek his Beloved, and he found a man who was dying without love. And he said: 'How great a sadness is it that any man should die without love!' So the Lover said to him that was dying: 'Say, why dost thou die without love?' And he replied: 'Because I lived without love.'<sup>80</sup>

The story reminds us of the words of Augustine: 'Too late have I loved thee, O Thou Beauty of ancient days, yet ever new! too late have I loved thee!'<sup>81</sup> Both quotations reveal something more than just the regrets expressed: they indicate a belated recognition of the power of love. However late, this recognition is preferable to dying in ignorance of love, for it is never too late to love.

More than any other power love rules the heart. St Francis of Sales, who made a major contribution to the understanding of Christian spirituality, writes well of how love lies at the centre of the soul and

dominates all other passions: 'Love is the soul's dominant passion; it rules all the movements of the heart, making them its own, and making us like that which we love.'<sup>82</sup> The language of St Francis is reminiscent of the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá: 'It is, therefore, evident that in the world of humanity the greatest king and sovereign is love.'<sup>83</sup>

For better or worse, this dominating power of love makes it the greatest force in shaping human relationships; real love, as well as being the great, creative healing force, is a passion that is capable of producing the greatest disorders. In all of the literature that has been generated over the centuries about love, much about hearts and flowers, innocence, dew drops, roses and sunshine has been written. But writers have not neglected to tell the tale about the dark storms of love with all of their tragic consequences. The sun of love casts a long shadow. In order to learn the brighter lessons of love, one has to take a long and informed look at its darker shades. What Jung has said about the human psyche, that one has to face its shadow in order for the individual to attain maturity, is also true of love. In order to understand and liberate the potentialities of divine love, one also has to recognize and understand something of the great disturbances that can be produced by the unbridled passions that masquerade as love. At its worst, misdirected or excessive love becomes a force for destruction or disillusion, not only for the individual but also for the collective. One has only to recall that tens of millions of souls have perished, and are still perishing, in the twentieth century in wars motivated by the insanity of excessive ethnic, tribal, nationalistic or sectarian love.

Moreover, and most importantly, human love can estrange us from the love of God. The realization that human love can alienate us from the love of God is both the strange irony and the vital lesson of love's role in spiritual life. This realization becomes especially important in distinguishing the noble and good in human love from the spurious, unworthy or fleeting. It is a high paradox to realize that the greatest obstacle to love is love. In order to discover the one great love, the love of God, we have not only to learn to overcome the lure of imperfect human loves but also to realize that human love without the love of God is imperfect. At its best, human love in its many forms of friendship, affection, love of family or country, to name but a few, expresses many fine, enduring qualities. In their highest expression, such forms of love approach love divine. Fine and good though these

forms of human love may be, if they are not beautified and strengthened with the love of God, they remain unfulfilled and imperfect.

Bahá'u'lláh in the *Book of Certitude* indicates that the only worthy object of love that the true lover will seek is the love of God. At the same time, moreover, He points out how other forms of love, if not suspended, may impede or frustrate the search for God. A simple analogy to illustrate might be that of the wind that fills the sail and drives the boat.<sup>84</sup> The wind of love is the motive power of the vessel of human action. The wind that fills the sail can bring the boat to port but can also drive it onto the rocks. The wind that drives our sails is the love of God. With it we shall safely reach our harbour. Without it, we shall navigate on perilous seas and run the risk of shipwreck and drowning.

Bahá'u'lláh writes of how other forms of love may impede our love for God:

He must so cleanse his heart that no remnant of either love or hate may linger therein, *lest that love blindly incline him to error*, or that hate repel him away from the truth. Even as thou dost witness in this day how most of the people, because of such love and hate, are bereft of the immortal Face, have strayed far from the Embodiments of the divine mysteries, and shepherdless, are roaming through the wilderness of oblivion and error.<sup>85</sup> (emphasis mine)

Bahá'u'lláh's exhortation to cleanse the heart from any trace of love save the love of God should perhaps be taken as hyperbole or as an admonition against allowing other forms of love to dethrone the love of God. Implicit in His statement is the recognition, and the warning, that the power of love is such that it can so dominate the human heart as to squeeze out the love of God. It is also noteworthy that in this same passage Bahá'u'lláh points out that love's opposite can have the same devastating effect. Hate can also dominate and consume the energies of the soul so that no trace of the love of God will linger. That much is to be expected. Yet it is strangely ironic that human love poses an equal threat to the love of God. Bahá'u'lláh's passage should not be read, however, *in extremis*. He does not counsel the abandonment of other forms of genuine love, a voiding of the natural affections of the heart or a wiping clean of the slate so that only some other-worldly,

ethereal love of God remains. A revelation that is predicated upon the unity of the world will not, needless to say, dispense with a deep and abiding love of humanity. Divine and human love are inseparable. This inseparability of the two is the theme of Blake's poem 'The Divine Image':

To Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love  
All pray in their distress;  
And to these virtues of delight  
Return their thankfulness.

For Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love  
Is God, our father dear,  
And Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love  
Is man, his child and care.

For Mercy has a human heart,  
Pity a human face,  
And love, the human form divine,  
And Peace, the human dress.  
Then every man of every clime  
That prays in his distress,  
Prays in the human form divine,  
Love, Mercy, Pity, Peace.

And all must love the human form,  
In heathen, Turk or Jew;  
Where Mercy, Love & Pity dwell;  
There God is dwelling too.<sup>86</sup>

Prophetic teaching, moreover, will not admit the one love without the other. We find both loves, human and divine, included in Christ's injunction to love, in His answer to the lawyer's question, 'Master, which is the great commandment in the law?' Christ's often quoted reply was that 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.'<sup>87</sup> These injunctions to love forever bind the love of God to the love of humanity.

## The Myth of the God Eros

In western culture, happiness is very much tied up with the fulfilment of romantic love. Light entertainment, whether through the media of television, film, popular music or the paperback novel, continues to captivate and allure the western psyche with its portrayals of love between the sexes. Romantic love, which has today become unashamedly, explicitly and exploitively sexual, has seeped into the whole fabric of western culture and is turning huge profits in doing so.

Yet the myth of romantic love has more than just entertainment value for vast masses of people. This pervasive portrayal of romance as the epitome of love has taken on the trappings of a popular creed. Through constant media exposure to this creed, millions have been led into the false belief – a belief that has been widely accepted on the flimsiest of grounds – that romantic love with its attendant qualities of good looks, charm, sexual attractiveness, affluence and smartness will ensure personal happiness. There is surely a direct connection between the fascination with the delightful promises of romantic love and the catastrophic divorce rate that has disrupted the lives of millions of families, bringing in its wake the pain of separation of couples and children from parents. Psychiatrist M. Scott Peck decries the untold suffering that this misplaced belief in the myth of romantic love has brought:

But as a psychiatrist I weep in my heart almost daily for the ghastly confusion and suffering that this myth [romantic love] fosters. Millions of people waste vast amounts of energy desperately and futilely attempting to make the reality of their lives conform to the unreality of the myth.<sup>88</sup>

M. Scott Peck and Viktor Frankl have given us valuable insights into both the psychology of falling in love and the nature of genuine love, insights which assist in a better understanding of this pervasive myth. Peck approaches the myth of romantic love as both a realist and an iconoclast who would smash the idol of romantic love from off its imaginary altar. Although Peck is far from being a biological determinist, he calls falling in love ‘a sex-linked erotic experience’ and ‘a genetically determined instinctual component of mating behaviour’.<sup>89</sup> Or put another way, it is nature’s way of tricking the unsuspecting into marriage in order to ensure the survival of the species.

It would be naive to abstract the explicitly sexual element from the pervasiveness of romantic love. It is always there in the chemistry of

the situation, even though it may be resting slightly below the surface in 'aim-inhibited' fashion, to use Freud's language. Any starry-eyed romantic reveries that once lingered nostalgically from the pre-1960s era have long been unashamedly abandoned in the desperate gamble that raw sexual power will prove to be the strongest element in holding couples together.

Peck explains the psychology of falling in love as a temporary collapse of the ego boundaries.<sup>90</sup> Drawing on Freud and developmental psychology, he explains that much of our psychological development consists in establishing separate ego boundaries from those of our parents. The baby does not clearly distinguish itself from the mother or the surrounding world. In fact, he first sees the mother as an extension of himself. As the infant grows older, he increasingly makes distinctions between self and the world. In adolescence, one of the principal tasks, as Erik Erikson has pointed out, is to forge an identity distinct from one's parents and to become a separate individual.<sup>91</sup> The process of individualization is a necessary task for the achievement of an autonomous adulthood. Yet according to Peck there is a certain loneliness in the confines of our ego boundaries. We long to break out of the cell of our loneliness and to merge again with the world. The experience of falling in love allows the individual to escape temporarily from his ego boundaries in sudden and dramatic fashion and to merge with the sexually other. Through falling in love, one rediscovers the feeling of wholeness between self and world that one had enjoyed in childhood. For lovers, says Peck:

All things seem possible! United with our beloved we feel we can conquer all obstacles. We believe that the strength of our love will cause the forces of opposition to bow down in submission and melt away into the darkness. All problems will be overcome. The future will be all light.<sup>92</sup>

Peck further compares these feelings of euphoria and omnipotence with those of the two-year-old who is king of the family and imagines he has unlimited power over the world.<sup>93</sup> Yet sooner or later these ego boundaries which were so blurred begin to snap back into place. The euphoria of first love begins to fade and we are awakened to the harsh morning light of reality and to that 'real' person opposite whom we are beginning to see as if for the first time. We now find that our partner's ego boundaries are beginning to intrude on our own. The endearing one with whom we had joyously shared love has now

become a separate person again with quirks of personality and annoying habits. That magical space once shared has mysteriously evaporated. The thrill has gone.

Peck explains that falling in love has little to do with the conscious choice of being loving because it is not an act of the will. On the contrary, it usually means the collapse of conscious and freely chosen ego affirmations. One can, however, choose how one is going to react to the experience though one does not choose the experience itself. The very expression 'to fall in love' indicates something accidental or sudden. It seems that the ability to be self-determining has been suspended.

In real loving, however, we choose to love. Drawing on Eric Fromm in *The Art of Loving*, Peck claims that real loving is a deliberate act of will.<sup>94</sup> No matter how loving we believe ourselves to be, if we do not love it is because we have chosen not to love. Our will may be at times defective and there are, to be sure, hidden impediments to loving, many of them due to strong unconscious forces and/or the defects of upbringing or experience. In so far as we are able, however, we must become conscious of these impediments and work to overcome them. Yet in the end, we choose to love or we do not. Peck contends that the real love of willing and choosing to love can grow paradoxically within a relationship in which we do not feel loving at all. He makes the surprising statement that 'real love does not have its roots in a feeling of love'.<sup>95</sup> He underscores the principle that real loving requires great effort:

One extends one's limits only by exceeding them and exceeding them requires effort. When we love someone our love becomes demonstrable or real only through exertion – through the fact that for that someone (or for ourself) we take an extra step or walk an extra mile. Love is not effortless. To the contrary, love is effortful.<sup>96</sup>

Peck also makes the following observations about the differences between real love and falling in love:

- 1) Real love brings a deep sense of peace and security. Falling in love often brings in the wake of its sheer intensity a palpable threat to our spiritual well-being. Much of the fear and dread that lovers often feel at the prospect of losing the loved one is a misapprehension of the threat to spiritual self that results with the onset of Eros.

Such a dominant, uncontrollable and arbitrary feeling as Eros can be threatening to spiritual development in that person who wishes to maintain a degree of self-control.

- 2) When individuals fall in love they are usually not concerned with furthering the spiritual development of the loved one. What they usually desire most is to perpetuate the ecstatic experience of Eros. The intensity of the love experience carries with it the illusion of self-sufficiency. Lovers believe that they stand in need of nothing except the assurance of the lover's perpetual love. Spiritual development in such a relationship becomes superfluous.
- 3) The purpose of real love is to nurture the spiritual development of another. Peck has defined love as 'the will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth'.<sup>97</sup> If we compare this definition of love with the euphoric experience of falling in love or being in love, we will see that falling in love or being in love has little to do with nurturing the spiritual growth of the other. But in nurturing the spiritual growth of the other, we find that the boundaries of our own spiritual self have been stretched beyond their previous limits. We grow in the process.

Viktor Frankl is less cautious than Peck in his approach to Eros. Peck intends to warn the unwary lover of the blind biological drives of Eros while Frankl views Eros more as an impulse that seeks spiritual unity with another. For Frankl there are basically two ways through which the human being can validate his or her own uniqueness. One way is active, through what he calls 'the realization of creative values'.<sup>98</sup> The other is the way of love. Unlike Peck, Frankl does not insist on the exercise of love as a disciplined exercise of the will but rather as a free ontological exercise.

For Frankl, love is a metaphysical act. When one is in love, according to Frankl, one is not merely stirred by physical excitation. One has also been aroused by the 'psychic emotionality' of the loved one.<sup>99</sup> This state of arousal corresponds to what is commonly called infatuation and can be accounted for by a common influence of both physical attraction and psychic influence. The psychic influence includes the particular character traits of the loved one. Frankl writes that the physical and psychic traits are but the means to attract the lover to the spiritual core of the loved one, which is the real goal of Eros. The physical and psychic dimensions merely correspond to the two outer layers of the

human being. The third and vital inner layer is the spiritual core:

The bodily and psychic lineaments of the personality are, so to speak, the outer 'dress' which the spiritual core 'wears'. While the sexually disposed person or the infatuated person feels attracted by the physical characteristics or psychic traits 'of' the partner – that is, something this other person 'has' – the lover loves the beloved's self – not something the beloved 'has' but what he 'is'.<sup>100</sup>

It is this penetration into the inner spiritual core of the loved one that is the real purpose of Eros for Frankl. It is but a means to reach the uniqueness of the individual as a spiritual self. Although Frankl recognizes that individuals can be blinded by infatuation, he sees the love relationship as having the potential to lead to a deeper and more lasting spiritual love. During the course of this loving a 'valuational image' of the loved one occurs, a vision of the spiritual potential of the loved one, something that is both invisible and as yet unrealized.<sup>101</sup> Real love leads to furthering this relationship with another as a spiritual being: 'Loving represents a coming to relationship with another as spiritual being'.<sup>102</sup>

In a specifically theological and moral perspective, C.S. Lewis warns of the spiritual dangers both to the love of God and the very life of the soul by the god-demon Eros. Lewis views passion-romance as a potential rival to God, an imperious spirit that threatens to dislodge the love of God from our hearts. In his remarkable book *The Four Loves*, which bears a similar title to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's exposé on the 'four kinds of love',<sup>103</sup> Lewis in admirable fashion explores the various dimensions of love as affection, friendship, Eros (romantic love) and charity (divine love). When Lewis speaks of the god Eros, who in Greek mythology is the son of Ares and Aphrodite (Cupid is the Roman counterpart), he does not mean primarily sexual appetite, the usual meaning of the word 'erotic'. Raw sexual desire is something that Lewis calls 'Venus'. When the sexes are ruled by Venus they desire 'it', the sexual relationship, rather than the person.<sup>104</sup> The carnal element, Lewis holds, is not the greatest danger of Eros. The real danger of Eros lies more in its becoming a mode of perception. Eros for Lewis is an idealized passion, a consummate blending of both an ideal and a feeling that focuses exclusively on the beloved, not as he or she really is, but as an artificially perfected object of desire that fills one with a perpetual longing for union. Eros, in Lewis's view, drastically alters one's very

perception of the world. The great by-product of the contemplation of Eros is pleasure and it feels as if the pleasure of Eros has an objective existence, something that exists in concrete form outside of the individual in the 'real world'. The one who has been visited by Eros becomes 'love's contemplative'<sup>105</sup> and what gives the lover the greatest pleasure is to go on thinking about the beloved.

One of the greatest dangers of Eros, according to Lewis, is in the drastic way that it takes hold of the human soul and monopolizes all its affections. But the terrible power of the god-demon Eros goes even beyond this. Eros, for some souls, can 'have the grandeur of a metaphysical pursuit'.<sup>106</sup> There is both an exaltation and a terror in passion-romance that we do not experience in the other forms of love. Herein lies precisely the danger. Eros is not only a counterfeit but also a potentially destructive imitation of love:

It is in the grandeur of Eros that the seeds of danger are concealed. He has spoken like a god. His total commitment, his reckless disregard of happiness, his transcendence of self-regard, sound like a message from the eternal world.<sup>107</sup>

The god Eros rules the soul to the detriment of the purer, saner and more stable forms of love, both human and divine. This is the form of love that most strongly compels worship, turning being in love into a pseudo-religion that manufactures its own goddess, a seemingly perfect idol, as its love-object. But the terrible powers of Eros may well lead far beyond idolatry. Eros may urge lovers to evil as well as to pleasure:

The love which leads to cruel and perjured unions, even to suicide-pacts and murder, is not likely to be wandering lust or idle sentiment. It may well be Eros in all his splendour; heart-breakingly sincere; ready for every sacrifice except renunciation.<sup>108</sup>

Lovers afflicted with Eros do not aim at being happy, for Eros is a counter-indication to happiness, as it is to marriage. Eros would rather share tormented unhappiness with the beloved than to live freely and happily without her. There is, to be sure, an element of slavery in all of this, of lovers helplessly binding themselves with the chains of their own love-hate as they succumb to the irresistible chemistry of Eros. We can offer little by way of rational explanation:

But he [the god Eros] may live on, mercilessly chaining together two

mutual tormentors, each raw all over with the poison of hate-in-love, each ravenous to receive and implacably refusing to give, jealous, suspicious, resentful, struggling for the upper hand, determined to be free and allow no freedom, living on 'scenes'.<sup>109</sup>

Novels like *Anna Karenina* and *Wuthering Heights*, Lewis reminds us, are full of the stuff of Eros. Happily the god Eros, like the Greek fertility god Dionysus whom he most closely resembles, usually dies with the waning of the season. Lewis comments dryly: 'It would be well if, in such case, he always died.'<sup>110</sup>

### The Waning of Eros

Individuals who have been enthralled by the power of Eros once may be driven to repeat the experience many times over. However, once the idol that has been haloed with an aura of perfection is discovered to have mortal feet of clay, the unhappy lover will abandon the divinity and go on to find other gods or goddesses to worship. The newly erected idol suffers, however, the same fate. Unable to sustain the lover's idealistic expectations, the idol is shattered and discarded once again. This process continues until the disillusioned lover makes the conscious choice to forego the renewed search to experience the ecstasy of Eros and to salvage what love remains in the transmuted relationship.

For all of its heady power, the magic of Eros dissipates with time. Within relationships couples sooner or later fall out of love in just the same way as they had fallen into it, seemingly beyond the control of the will. Couples then experience great difficulty in recreating the same degree of intimacy they did when they were 'in love'. With varying degrees of intensity, and at different times, every relationship enters this autumn of misunderstanding and disenchantment, and sometimes a dark winter of hostility. The antipathy may run so deep that the relationship is broken. Divorce often results. Regrettably, couples often abort long-standing relationships because they do not realize that this winter of discontent can be waited out and worked through. Although the moment when a relationship is brought to its breaking-point is a time of almost unbearable stress and heartache, such a 'winter of discontent' may well turn out to be the prelude to a springtime of hope. Where partners can summon up the goodwill to renew the commit-

ment, a marriage may be preserved. A deeper and more satisfying relationship characterized by a greater degree of stability and satisfaction at the core may well result in the aftermath of the crisis. Whether that springtime will blossom again depends, however, on the couple.

Haridas Chaudhuri writes that the greatest impediment to stable love relationships is emotional immaturity.<sup>111</sup> Emotional immaturity is characterized by hypersensitivity and impulsiveness or frequent outbursts of anger. It injects into the relationship either possessiveness or domination, or its opposite, appeasement and overindulgence. The weaker party who feels dominated will begin to rebel or will escape from such repressive domination. He or she may, similarly, flee from the suffocation of possessiveness. Appeasement and overindulgence will likewise degrade or destroy a relationship. When one person constantly sacrifices principle or his legitimate needs in order to satisfy an immature lover, the weaker party feels humiliated and devalued. The stronger party is thereby both spoiled and encouraged to continue the domination. The peace may be won, but at tremendous cost to one's self-respect.

Chaudhuri suggests that two great guiding principles can be used to overcome emotional immaturity: 1) delayed response and 2) the spirit of accommodation. He comments on the principle of delayed response:

So there is a great need to tutor our unconscious minds not to behave impulsively and emotionally. The principle of delayed response is a useful one . . . When involved in a provocative situation, it is wise not to respond instantly and temperamentally . . . Regular practice of meditation is of great help in such self-training.<sup>112</sup>

As for the spirit of accommodation, Chaudhuri says:

One has to give in, in order to earn the right to receive. If one expects others to fall in line with him, he must be ready to yield on occasion to their way, even though he may not like it . . . One has to make concessions to others in order to gain their support and cooperation.<sup>113</sup>

Combining these insights and practices will gradually enable couples to create a more stable and satisfying relationship, characterized by the emergence of a double subject, the 'we'. 'Abdu'l-Bahá also teaches that when two souls fuse in love and harmony, a third composite entity is

born. In the same way that two individuals create a new life by giving birth to a third, the spiritual union of two souls also creates the birth of a third spiritual entity:

Out of the fusion of two souls, a third subtle entity is born. Although invisible and intangible on earth, this entity combines the soul of two lovers. The progress of one mysteriously influences the other. They become the tutors of each other's soul. Distance or death, mere physical forces, could not provoke the disintegration of this new entity.<sup>114</sup>

### The Transformation of Eros

All human love is a metaphor for divine love. All that is positive in romantic love – its inspirational quality, its great motivating force, its all-consuming nature – all of this can become characteristic of our relationship with God. Both the Sufi mystics with their erotic symbolism of divine love and the mystics of the western church with their idea of 'spiritual marriage',<sup>115</sup> have always preferred the metaphor of human love to describe their love of God; for it is the one apt comparison that best captures the relationship between God and the soul. As the Sufi Jami has written, it is earthly love that can lead to the divine:

Even from earthly love thy face avert not,  
Since to the Real it may serve to raise thee.<sup>116</sup>

Sidney Spencer and other writers have pointed out that the erotic symbolism of the Sufis has sometimes been misunderstood by western readers as a glorification of sensual experience; whereas what the Sufis have celebrated, with their sometimes sensuous imagery, is the union of God and the soul. Al Ghazzali says: 'It is reasonable to give this passionate love to that One from whom all good things have come.'<sup>117</sup> In the western church the concept of 'spiritual marriage' has fused the meaning of human and divine love with its notions of 'a continuous, or almost continuous, sense of union with God' and 'a transformation of the soul so complete that it becomes wholly God-possessed ... a "theophatic" state – the individual is in all his activities the living organ or instrument of God'.<sup>118</sup> Spencer cites St Catherine of Genoa, Marie de l'Incarnation, Brother Lawrence, Mme Guyon, Luis de Léon, Ruysbroeck and John Tauler as past practitioners of spiritual marriage.<sup>119</sup> If the mystics are right, it is really our love for God that

informs and validates all of human love, not the reverse. To see the love between the sexes in its proper perspective, one has to see it as an outflow from the love of God:

And those souls whose inner being is lit by the love of God are even as spreading rays of light, and they shine out like stars of holiness in a pure and crystalline sky. For true love, real love, is the love of God, and this is sanctified beyond the notions and imaginings of men.<sup>120</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá makes the same point elsewhere:

Real love is the love which exists between God and His servants, the love which binds together holy souls. This is the love of the spiritual world, not the love of physical bodies and organisms.<sup>121</sup>

Divine love fulfils and perfects human love in a transformation of Eros. By this 'transformation of Eros' is meant that the instabilities, imperfections and deceptions of human love do not flaw divine love, which is perfect.

The following schema is meant to show in a rudimentary way how the imperfections of human love can be overcome and fulfilled by the perfections of divine love, how Eros strives to be fulfilled in *agapé*:

The Transformation of Eros			
Divine Love ( <i>Agapé</i> )			
ever-constant	is faithful	everlasting ecstasy	eternal love
fluctuates	sometimes betrays	perishable passion	temporal love
Human Love (Eros)			

What such a comparison reveals is that the claims that are so often made for human love – that it is ever-constant, faithful, eternal, uniquely ecstatic – are precisely those qualities that belong more befittingly to divine love.

'Abdu'l-Bahá in His exposé of the four kinds of love alludes to

'fascination', which may be taken as a euphemism for Eros. This fascination or infatuation element of 'the love which sometimes exists between friends'<sup>122</sup> is clearly one of the faces of the god Eros. This kind of love, says 'Abdu'l-Bahá, is subject to 'transmutation': 'As the breeze blows, the slender trees yield . . . This kind of love is originated by the accidental conditions of life.'<sup>123</sup> 'The accidental conditions of life' is not 'the ideal of the unity of spirits' which 'Abdu'l-Bahá states prompts the hearts of the believers.<sup>124</sup> In other words, something else has conspired to produce this love, something other than 'the unity of spirits'.

Further, in His mention of transmuted love 'Abdu'l-Bahá also points to the stormy side of Eros: 'Today you will see two souls apparently in close friendship; tomorrow all this may be changed. Yesterday they were ready to die for one another, today they shun one another's society!'<sup>125</sup> In the same passage 'Abdu'l-Bahá calls this type of love 'merely acquaintanceship'.<sup>126</sup> There is a faint note of irony in this word 'acquaintanceship' because if lovers are convinced of one thing, it is that they know one another very well. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's comment indicates that they were under a delusion that they really knew one another. Their knowledge of each other was merely at the surface.

### **The Greatest of Loves: The Sacrificial Love of the Divine Manifestation**

There is something very precious and noble in any willing sacrifice. Although sacrifice, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá indicates, is couched in mystery,<sup>127</sup> what it plainly manifests is the highest form of love. Bahá'u'lláh indicates that the station of sacrifice is very lofty. Indeed, to sacrifice oneself for the things of God, He says, is a greater deed than the very act of creation itself. What a sobering thought:

O Son of Man! By My beauty! To tinge thy hair with thy blood is greater in My sight than the creation of the universe and the light of both worlds. Strive then to attain this, O servant!<sup>128</sup>

Tingeing one's hair with one's own blood is the sign of self-immolation. These words of Bahá'u'lláh refer, however, not only to His friends and lovers who have suffered physical martyrdom or injury by the malicious, but also, and perhaps especially, to the spiritual sacrifice of

that individual who has willingly crucified the natural Adam or Eve in order to attain the things of God.

'Abdu'l-Bahá gives as one of the several meanings of sacrifice the offering up of the characteristics of a former identity to gain a higher, transformed and more perfected one. He bases His explanation on the botanical analogy of the seed and the tree: 'If the identity of that seed had not been sacrificed to the tree which became manifest from it, no branches, blossoms or fruits would have been forthcoming.'<sup>129</sup> In other words, only sacrifice – which He equates here with spiritual transformation – is able to bring into existence the final form of a thing, what it was intended from the beginning to manifest. Were the plant to generate no branches, blossoms or fruits, it would be considered as less than perfect, as something that had not fulfilled its true purpose. What is true for the seed and the tree is all the more true for the spiritual individual who is endowed with consciousness and free will. That individual who chooses to manifest spiritual attributes has attained to that ultimate purpose or has brought into existence his or her final form, that for which he or she was created and designed from the beginning.

The station of sacrifice, however, cannot be won without cost. The laying down of the burden of the elemental self can be painful. Believers have to be prepared to suffer in order to win the things of God. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's reference to the flame as the agent that transforms the solid, dark and cold properties of iron into the fluid and fervid qualities of molten metal may be taken as a symbol of suffering:

For instance consider the substance we call iron. Observe its qualities; it is solid, black, cold. These are the characteristics of iron. When the same iron absorbs heat from the fire, it sacrifices its attribute of solidity for the attribute of fluidity. It sacrifices its attribute of darkness for the attribute of light, which is a quality of the fire. It sacrifices its attribute of coldness to the quality of heat which the fire possesses; so that in the iron there remains no solidity, darkness or cold. It becomes illumined and transformed, having sacrificed its qualities to the qualities and attributes of fire.<sup>130</sup>

While 'Abdu'l-Bahá speaks of transformation as the conversion of iron by fire, Bahá'u'lláh speaks of purification as the purging of gold. Since gold is a precious metal and iron a base one, one can infer that the state of purification is a higher one than simple transformation, for

purification is a more refined state. But what this text of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the following one of Bahá'u'lláh share in common is the element of fire. In both texts fire may be taken to refer to the intense heat of suffering or test without which transformation and purification cannot take place. In one of the Hidden Words Bahá'u'lláh says:

O Son of Being! Busy not thyself with this world, for with fire We test the gold, and with gold We test Our servants.<sup>131</sup>

In Bahá'u'lláh's text there is double employment of the word 'gold' which, without a careful reading, may obscure His meaning rather than clarify it. The confusion is dispelled when one realizes that Bahá'u'lláh's use of the word gold is not univocal. In the first instance, gold may be taken as a symbol of the soul of the believer, for there is nothing more precious in the world than the faithful soul. The faithful soul is the true gold of the world. Bahá'u'lláh warns, however, that should the believers become too preoccupied with the life of the world – that is, forgetful of the things of God – they will be put to the test. It is this fire that tests the mettle of the believer's soul. In the second instance the word gold is closer to its meaning of a precious metal and is used as metonymy for money, or more generally, for the love of material things. If the believer becomes more attached to material possessions or the material world, here symbolized by 'gold' in its second meaning, the believer will be tested. God, says the first great commandment, does not allow anything to be loved above Him. Those who love anything above God will be put to the test.

There is another captivating image implicit in Bahá'u'lláh's Hidden Word. The reference to testing the gold and the servants calls to mind the image of God or the divine Manifestation as the heavenly goldsmith or divine assayer. When the goldsmith of yesteryear plunged the precious metal into the fire, he knew that it was purified of its dross when he could see his image reflected in the molten metal. This leads us to understand that the flame of suffering burns the dross of imperfection out of the human soul, until the divine image is more perfectly reflected in it. One can further understand through this maxim how one spiritual truth is connected to another. Bahá'u'lláh's Hidden Word is connected to the seminal text of Genesis of the individual being made in the image of God: 'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.'<sup>132</sup>

The fire of test makes the outline of that image sharper.

One question is raised, however, in connection with the sacrifice of the divine Manifestation. Believers stand in need of transformation. The Manifestations, Bahá'í scripture tells us, do not. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has explained that the metaphysical reality of the Manifestation, the Word of God, 'from all eternity has always been, and will be, in the exaltation of sanctification'.<sup>133</sup> The sacrifice of the Manifestations, consequently, has to be viewed in a context other than their need for transformation, for they are already in a state of divine perfection. Put plainly, the example of their sacrifice is for our benefit. It is for our sake that the Manifestations have endured the greatest anguish and physical pain, have willingly consented to bondage, banishment and death in a state of lowly submission. Not only did these holy souls willingly consent to these sufferings, they yearned for these afflictions, for they knew that only on account of their suffering would humanity be transformed:

The Ancient Beauty hath consented to be bound with chains that mankind may be released from its bondage, and hath accepted to be made a prisoner within this most mighty Stronghold that the whole world may attain unto true liberty. He hath drained to its dregs the cup of sorrow, that all the peoples of the earth may attain unto abiding joy, and be filled with gladness.<sup>134</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh observes that Jesus 'besought the one true God' to allow Him to be sacrificed 'as a ransom for the sins and iniquities of all the peoples of the earth'.<sup>135</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá also comments:

Observe how rarely human souls sacrifice their pleasure or comfort for others . . . Yet all the divine Manifestations suffered, offered Their lives and blood, sacrificed their existence, comfort and all They possessed for the sake of mankind.<sup>136</sup>

If one considers the persecution and suffering of the divine Manifestations in the light of justice, one is led to see that the persecutions they are made to endure constitute the greatest travesty of this superlative divine virtue; for as revealers of the law of God, they were innocent of all crimes. Indeed, they were the greatest benefactors of humanity. Their lives are, moreover, the best examples of moral purity and rectitude extant in the annals of history. The Manifestations were made to endure such cruel sufferings mainly because the new laws and teachings they proclaimed threatened the vested interests and upset

the existing ecclesiastical institutions and established mores. The Manifestations of God represented a new kind of power and a way of life that the established order could not abide. The Manifestations knew, however, that they would be perceived as being lawless by both the people and the secular and spiritual authorities of their day. Had they not been willing to suffer persecution and death for the cause they proclaimed, the truth of their words and the testimony of their lives would not be proven to an unbelieving world.

That they are willing to drink the bitter cup of sacrifice is one of the proofs of prophethood. Not all messianic pretenders are willing, however, to suffer and, if need be, die for their beliefs. History is full of the examples of false Christs and counterfeit prophets. The messianic pretender bar Kochba led a rebellion in Palestine in 132 CE. There is also the case of the apostasy of Sabbatai Zevi, a Jew of Spanish descent born at Smyrna in 1626. Sabbatianism was a mystical heresy which grew out of the earlier Community of the Devout founded in Palestine by the visionary Isaac Luria (1514-72), called '*Ari*' (the lion). Luria had been the leading figure in Cordova of both the theoretical and practical *Kabbalah*, the mystical lore of the Jews, as expounded by Luria through the *Zohar* (Book of Splendour). With the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, Messianic hopes had been rekindled and many Jews believed the Messianic age was about to dawn. Zevi proclaimed himself the Messiah at Gaza in 1665. However, when he was arrested and brought before the sultan, he was presented with the choice of death or converting to Islam. Zevi chose conversion to Islam. Large numbers of Jews continued to believe in him, despite his conversion, and naively regarded his apostasy as a 'sacred mystery'.<sup>137</sup>

The more precious the offering, the greater the sacrifice. When that offering is the life of the Manifestation, it is the most precious thing that can be offered up to God. The sacrifice of the divine Manifestations speaks to us then of the greatest love in the world, the totally selfless love, for there was no particle of self-love in the offering up of their lives. It was done purely for the love of God and His creatures:

What an infinite degree of love is reflected by the divine Manifestations toward mankind! For the sake of guiding the people They have willingly forfeited Their lives to resuscitate human hearts. They have accepted the cross. To enable human souls to attain the supreme degree of advancement, They have suffered during Their limited years extreme

ordeals and difficulties.<sup>138</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh testifies to the great infusion of cosmological grace with which all creation is blessed as a result of the sacrifice of the divine Manifestation. That most precious life when it is offered up for the love of God becomes the cause of the regeneration of all created things. The nature of all creation is transformed and sustained through the sufferings and sacrifice of the divine Manifestation. Bahá'u'lláh explains how the death of Jesus, in words that might apply equally well to the martyrdom of the Báb, caused this mysterious cosmological transformation of all things:

Know thou that when the Son of Man yielded up His breath to God, the whole creation wept with a great weeping. By sacrificing Himself, however, a fresh capacity was infused into all created things. Its evidences, as witnessed in all the peoples of the earth, are now manifest before thee. The deepest wisdom which the sages have uttered, the profoundest learning which any mind hath unfolded, the arts which the ablest hands have produced, the influence exerted by the most potent of rulers, are but manifestations of the quickening power released by His transcendent, His all-pervasive, and resplendent Spirit.<sup>139</sup>

In other words, the sacrificial death of Christ became the motivating force for the arts, science and government, for the energies of all of the civilized activities carried out on the face of the earth. Bahá'u'lláh's statement, although esoteric and mysterious, needs no proof for those who are able to perceive it. Such a sacrifice is of that Spirit which alone gives life to the world.

## *Conclusion*

And what may be concluded from the foregoing reflections on spirituality? If by a conclusion one means something fixed or final, there is little that we can conclude about spirituality, for spirituality is life on-going. It is an expression of the life that is now, the life that is developing in the present moment, the moment, in Buber's phrase, of the eternal Thou, the moment in which God 'speaks' to us through the meaning of events and persons, and through the multitude of designs that He has inscribed on creation. Much in the same manner as an alpinist pauses to enjoy a vista of the scenes he has left below and now surveys, what does come to mind as we cast a retrospective glance over the domain of spirituality, is the capital importance of the domain itself. It is a lordly estate, an estate that goes to the very heart of religion. For, in spite of all that has been said and written about spirituality, it reflects a simplicity that is expressive of the simplicity of holiness. For spirituality is nothing more than faith in God and an expression of the life lived for Him, and its essence is the desire for His love and the spirit of that endless search that leads to His door. But this 'nothing more' calls those who are ready for it to a lifetime of search and labour.

There are, of course, ancient and venerable traditions of spirituality in all of the world's great religions. We can all look to the richness of these spiritualities with great gain. What Bahá'u'lláh has bestowed to the world in our time, however, through the vast treasures of His sacred scripture, is God-renewed and revitalized divine guidance to the planetary citizens of a world come of age, and He has created a community framework, His new world order, in which spiritual life may be observed, not only in theory but more importantly, in praxis. For Bahá'u'lláh's sacred writings, as well as the inspired commentaries of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, and the wise insights of the Universal House of Justice on the condition of the world, provide those who live in the modern age, the age of planetary unity, with an ancient

wisdom, but one that sounds a contemporary note. For here, at last, is a world faith no longer dominated by the powers of priesthood and professional devotees, a faith that accepts the conclusions of science, one that is no longer oppressive in the demands it makes upon the human spirit, one that no longer stultifies the spirit of creativity, learning and free inquiry, but is rather sane and liberating in the moral rectitude that it requires of all those who choose to embrace its truths and follow its path.

Arnold J. Toynbee, who perhaps more than any other historian of the modern era has grasped the magnitude of the decisive spiritual influence that the world's religions have exerted in shaping the destinies of human culture and civilization, foresaw a new form of global faith that may well prove to find its fulfilment in the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. Toynbee wrote:

The historic religions, with their traditional forms of expression, are becoming outdated, and that is one of the reasons, I believe, why they have been losing their influence in recent times. But I also believe that men will not live without religion. Once we have been awakened to consciousness, we feel that we are strangers in this universe in which we have been placed. There is a burning desire within us to come into contact with the spiritual reality behind the universe, so as to achieve harmony with it.

That is why I believe we must abandon the historic religions in their old and perhaps obsolete external forms, in order to fit them into new forms which correspond to their fundamental similarity, appropriate to us and to our age. That is a tricky and difficult undertaking. I believe we shall try to tackle it, because I believe that, in the world we are moving towards, we shall feel the same need felt by most earlier generations, the need for a religion to which we can offer our whole-hearted devotion.<sup>1</sup>

It seems clear that Toynbee's 'we' refers to the citizens of the world and his reference to religion to a world faith – language that has been consonant with the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh for over a century.

For the present we shall continue to labour in the field that He has asked us to plough and to reap those harvests that are ripe. May we not forget that He has also asked us to pause to 'refresh and revive' our souls as we work, and in our moments of rest to laugh with those whom we love and to dance the dance of joy.

## *Appendix*

In 1984 I circulated a ‘Spirituality Questionnaire’ among the Bahá’ís living in my region. The responses to the question, ‘When a Bahá’í suggests that someone else is “spiritual” what does the word suggest to you?’ indicate that there are many different understandings of the word ‘spiritual’. Responses to the question were as follows:

1. ‘One who knows God and knows himself and actively develops the divine attributes’.
2. ‘Showing the attributes of God in his actions.’
3. ‘Someone who is praying and deepening every day and is busy teaching, if only by example.’
4. ‘That they feel service to others is more important than money. That they are trying to make themselves better people and the world a better place.’
5. ‘The “inner glow” of i) awareness of God, ii) acknowledgement of His plan for mankind and iii) commitment in daily life to undertaking thoughts and actions fulfilling God’s wishes.’
6. ‘That the person radiates the love of God and confidence in Him.’
7. ‘To a degree all of us are spiritual. It will suggest that someone is nice, someone is good-humoured, someone does not lose their temper, is trustworthy, thoughtful, etc. Biological, physical and environmental advantages may make it easier for some to behave this way than others.’
8. ‘“Spiritual” suggests that the individual is very much aware of God and God’s Plan in his life. He is – or striving to become – detached from the things of this world. His thoughts and actions are directed toward the path of service.’
9. ‘Detached – so profoundly in love that the changes of this world do not affect him. He is inwardly invariable.’
10. ‘That they are aware of spiritual qualities and they strive to develop and successfully manifest spiritual qualities in their lives.’

#### DIMENSIONS IN SPIRITUALITY

11. 'A lack of appreciation of the relationship between reality and its manifestation in the material world.'
12. i) The exercise of prayer. ii) Belief in the Manifestation. iii) The acquisition of knowledge and the exercise of love. iv) Willingness to play a part in service to His cause. v) The practice of 'radiant acquiescence'.
13. i) Deeds not words. ii) Moderation in all things. iii) Noticeable serenity, positive outlook, without naivete or blindness. iv) World vision. v) Developing outlook. vi) Humility. vii) Self-sacrifice (physical, social). viii) Magnetic: bring out the best in others, attract others.
14. 'That this person tries to apply Bahá'í principles in everyday life. This person lives within the principles and is very steadfast.'
15. 'A quality of someone who shows depth in both words and actions. This human depth differentiates man from the animals.'
16. 'That spiritual concepts (love, justice, sacrifice, etc.) take precedence over material concerns.'
17. 'I think that the word spiritual is not a good way to describe someone. Someone spiritual would be someone who is very kind, compassionate, trustworthy and above all, honest at all times. He or she might not necessarily be a religious person.'
18. 'Everyone is spiritual. We have a spirit and the ability and capacity to grow spiritually. Spiritual-type attributes for me are honesty, humility, trustworthiness, etc. – those qualities which are mentioned in the writings that we are to strive for.'
19. 'For a Bahá'í, to be spiritual would imply a high degree of sacrifice for the advancement of the Cause coupled with qualities such as selflessness, humbleness and submission to the Will of God.'
20. 'That they are consciously aware that there is a spiritual world, and that our spiritual soul is more important than our physical being.'
21. 'It means that compared to other people, there is a contrast between him and another person whom you might not call spiritual.'
22. 'The person exhibits a subtle awareness of your presence, an insight with a radiant acquiescence, and a love-directed attention from that person.'

## APPENDIX

Some of these definitions reflect deep understandings of the term spirituality. Yet one is struck by the diverse understandings of the term. Several of them (nos. 1, 2, 10, 18) refer explicitly to 'divine attributes' or 'spiritual qualities'. Other definitions (nos. 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 12, 13, 19, et al.) also make reference to various spiritual attributes without designating them as such. Others (nos. 4, 11, 16, 20, 21) contrast the material to the spiritual, making the spiritual preeminent. Some (nos. 15, 22) point to the more subtle qualities of depth and awareness; other stress the practical side (nos. 13, 14). Numbers 3, 5 and 8 make references to the needs of the Bahá'í Faith and point to teaching and the execution of the Divine Plan. Numbers 7 and 17 emphasize the universality of spirituality.

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# *Notes & References*

## *Introduction*

pp. i-xiv

1. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 235.
2. Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, cited in *Lights*, no. 376, p. 111.
3. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets*, p. 35.
4. Shoghi Effendi, *World Order*, p. 162.

## *Chapter 1*

### *The Starting Point: The Search for Truth*

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1. Joseph Campbell defines 'original experience' this way: 'Original experience has not been interpreted for you, and so you've got to work out your life for yourself.' *The Power of Myth*, p. 41.
2. For a discussion of several of these parameters, see Chapter 8, 'Some Parameters of the Concept of Spirituality'.
3. One of the most distinctive answers I have ever received to the question 'Why did you become a Bahá'í?' came from a distinguished Bahá'í in the United Kingdom who is serving the Bahá'í Faith with great energy and imagination in a number of different fields. She responded, 'Being a Bahá'í to me is like the sky. You don't need to go outside continually and check that the sky is still there. It's always there. The Bahá'í Faith is always just "there" too. I can't remember a time when I wasn't a Bahá'í.' Yet it would be wrong to think that this person had accepted her Faith uncritically, even less blindly, for her intelligence was quick, alert and probing.
4. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 217. Shoghi Effendi (1897-1957), the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, also stated that the oneness of humanity 'is the cornerstone of all the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, and should be presented as such, without the least hesitation, by the friends'. Quoted in *Lights*, no. 1589, p. 480.
5. A review of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's public talks in Europe and North America over a 23-month period from 1911 to 1913 will reveal that He appeared to regard the search for truth as the primary Bahá'í teaching, consistently placing it first in His sequential exposés of Bahá'í principles. He used the

word 'first' more frequently – 8 out of 15 times in *Promulgation of Universal Peace* alone – in connection with the independent investigation of the truth than with any other Bahá'í teaching. In His talks in Washington, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Boston, Montreal, Sacramento, on two occasions in New York, as well as in His long explanation of Bahá'í teachings in Paris, He gave the independent investigation of the truth as the first Bahá'í teaching. He used phrases such as, 'The first teaching of Bahá'u'lláh is the duty incumbent upon all to investigate reality' (*Promulgation*, p. 62). 'First, it is incumbent upon all mankind to investigate truth' (p. 105). 'First, investigate reality' (p. 169). Also, 'The first teaching of Bahá'u'lláh is the investigation of reality' (p. 180). Then, 'First, man must independently investigate reality . . .' (p. 314).

6. One notable exception is the fine article by Gary L. Matthews, 'The Searching Eye', *Bahá'í News*, September 1989, pp. 2-9.
7. The complete quotation is: 'And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.' Luke 11:9-10.
8. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets*, p. 157.
9. Shoghi Effendi, 'A World Religion', p. 9.
10. This was not the first public address of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in London. That was given on Sunday, 10 September 1911 in City Temple. He spoke from the pulpit to the evening congregation at the request of the church's pastor, the Rev R.J. Campbell. It was before the Theosophical Society, however, that He was first to present the Bahá'í principles in sequence, an approach that He was to take many times over in His public talks. See '*Abdu'l-Bahá in London*', pp. 17-20, pp. 26-30.
11. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in '*Abdu'l-Bahá in London*', pp. 27-8.
12. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, p. 63.
13. Although I am aware of gender sensitivity in discussions about God, I follow the convention of referring to God with the masculine pronoun. This is not an endorsement of so-called patriarchal domination of religion with its anti-feminist prejudicial attitudes and teachings. To refer to God as 'She' or 'It', however, would pose an equal number of insolvable dilemmas and is not a solution to the problem of gender reference to God. My adherence to the convention has not controverted my belief, however, that God is as much 'She' as He is 'He'.
14. The 'two books' are the book of revelation and the book of creation. 'The Book of Creation is in accord with the written Book . . . the Book of Creation is the command of God and the repository of divine mysteries' (*Makátib*, cited by Nakhjavání in *Response*, p. 13).
15. See Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, pp. 192-9.
16. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, pp. 312-13.
17. *ibid.* pp. 62-3.

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18. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections*, p. 248.
19. *ibid.*
20. During this period of His exile in Iraq, Bahá'u'lláh also wrote His supreme doctrinal work, the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* (Book of Certitude) and also His major ethical work, *The Hidden Words* (see Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, pp. 138-40). After His return from His self-imposed retirement in the mountains of Sulaymáníyyih, Bahá'u'lláh revealed an truly astonishing number of verses, the vast majority of which are lost to posterity. The Bahá'í historian Nabil has reported that Bahá'u'lláh's unrecorded verses during a single day and night were equal, on the average, to the length of the entire Qur'án (*God Passes By*, pp. 137-8). The Qur'án was revealed over a 26-year period.
21. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 288.
22. I have unfortunately been unable to locate the source of this story. I have dramatized it somewhat in the telling.
23. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Divine Plan*, p. 62.
24. Bahá'u'lláh, *Seven Valleys*, p. 5.
25. *ibid.*
26. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 211.
27. Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words*, Arabic, no. 13.
28. We find a multitude of such passages in the Bahá'í writings. This one will suffice as an example: 'It is permitted that the peoples and kindreds of the world associate with one another with joy and radiance. O people! Consort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets*, p. 22).
29. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, pp. 195-6.
30. Bahá'u'lláh, 'Fire Tablet', *Bahá'í Prayers*, p. 216.
31. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 139.
32. *ibid.* p. 138.
33. *ibid.* p. 139.
34. McLean, 'Prolegomena to Bahá'í Theology', *Journal of Bahá'í Studies*.
35. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, pp. 192-200.
36. *ibid.* p. 3.
37. Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words*, epilogue.
38. *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 8th ed., p. 317.
39. Respondents answered, among others, these two open questions: 1) When a Bahá'í says that someone is 'spiritual', what does the word suggest to you? 2) Are there any particular spiritual qualities, if you have not named them in number 1, which would qualify an individual more readily as being spiritual?

Respondents listed detachment as an indicator of spirituality as many times (9) as the attribute of 'love' and by a slim margin more frequently than the attribute of 'knowledge' (8).

The results indicate that respondents judged detachment to be as

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important to the notion of spirituality as the basic twin virtues of the love and knowledge of God.

40. Heggie, *Index of Quotations*. I have not examined the word in the source languages of Persian and Arabic because an examination of the source language does not solve for us any ambiguities of meaning that may be connected with the word in English. Indeed, Shoghi Effendi's translations are also interpretations which can actually solve many of the ambiguities of meaning in the source language. (See 'Commentaries' in *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, September-December 1991, pp. 63-74.)
41. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 139.
42. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in '*Abdu'l-Bahá in London*', p. 87.
43. *Sixty Days*. '*Abdu'l-Bahá in California*', pp. 60-1.
44. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 157.
45. For further discussion of this point see Chapter 5.
46. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 178.
47. Milton, 'Areopagitica', in *Survey of English Literature*, p. 407.
48. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets*, p. 59.
49. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets*, pp. 97-8.
50. *ibid.* p. 672.
51. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 195.
52. Grundy, *Ten Days*, p. 48.
53. Bahá'u'lláh's account of this event differs from the biblical one which names Isaac as the object of sacrifice. Bahá'ís accept Bahá'u'lláh's version.
54. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, pp. 75-6.
55. *ibid.* p. 76.
56. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 188. Mírzá Mihdí, who was then 20 years old, fell through an unprotected skylight while saying his prayers and pierced his ribs on a crate on the floor below. He died 22 hours later, on 23 June 1870.
57. John 14:15.
58. The word 'half' here should not be taken literally. It does not imply that our self is split.
59. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections*, p. 207.
60. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 223.
61. *ibid.* p. 224.
62. Remark made by the world renowned literary critic Northrop Frye in his course on 'Symbolism in the Bible' given at the University of Toronto in 1970. He was commenting on the Book of Job. From my course notes.
63. Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words*, Arabic no. 47.
64. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, pp. 326-7.
65. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 5.
66. *ibid.* pp. 68-9.
67. *Fortress for Well-Being*, p. 33.
68. *ibid.* p. 32.

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69. Bahá'u'lláh, quoted in *Divine Art of Living*, p. 66.
70. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets*, p. 155.
71. *ibid.* p. 100.
72. Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*. Otto treats the *mysterium tremendum* in chapter 4, pp. 12-24 and *fascinans* ('the element of fascination') on p. 35.
73. *ibid.*
74. 'Holy', *Dictionary of Religions*, p. 151.
75. Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations*, p. 9.
76. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 241.
77. Shoghi Effendi, 'The Faith of Bahá'u'lláh', a statement prepared in 1947 for the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine, p. 9.
78. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 338.
79. Shoghi Effendi, *Advent*, p. 30.
80. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in *Bahá'í World Faith*, p. 384. The other six qualifications are knowledge, faith, steadfastness, truthfulness, uprightness and fidelity.
81. *ibid.*
82. Pakenham, *Humility*, p. 88.
83. *ibid.* p. 78.
84. *ibid.* p. 51.
85. *Excellence in All Things* is the title of a compilation of Bahá'í writings on excellence in moral and spiritual conduct and proficiency in the arts and sciences. See *Compilation*, vol. 1.
86. Pakenham, *Humility*, p. 82.
87. 'Had they [Jews] investigated sincerely for themselves, they would surely have believed in Him, respected Him and bowed before Him in reverence. They would have considered His manifestation the greatest bestowal upon mankind.' 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, p. 62.
88. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 132.
89. Shoghi Effendi, *World Order*, p. 157.
90. This expression originates in the American civil rights movement of the 1960s and in the women's movement and refers to giving people equal opportunity in the work place.
91. This is the title of one of the volumes of exemplary Bahá'í teacher and writer George Townshend, former Irish cleric and sometime Canon of St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin, and Archdeacon of Clonfert. Townshend also wrote *Christ and Bahá'u'lláh*, *The Heart of the Gospel*, *The Mission of Bahá'u'lláh* and *The Glad Tidings of Bahá'u'lláh*. In 1951 he was named a Hand of the Cause of God by Shoghi Effendi, chiefly for the distinguished services he had rendered to the Bahá'í Faith as a writer but also for his 'devotion' and 'steadfastness' in the Cause of God. See the letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to George Townshend in Hofman, *George Townshend*, p. 349. Shoghi Effendi himself refers to Bahá'u'lláh as the 'Promise of All Ages'. See Shoghi Effendi, *World Order*, p. 103.

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92. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 95.
93. *ibid.* p. 252.
94. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets*, p. 157.
95. See, for example, Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 225.
96. 'Abdu'l-Bahá speaks of 'logical proofs' in reference to the evolution of the original species of *homo sapiens* and when He discusses the immortality of the spirit. He also advances 'spiritual proofs' for the origin of man. See 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 191-7, 225.
97. See Balyuzi, *King of Glory*, p. 225.
98. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, pp. 99-100.
99. *ibid.* p. 183.
100. Browne, quoted in Balyuzi, *King of Glory*, p. 372.
101. See Bahá'u'lláh, *Proclamation*, and Matthews, *Challenge of Bahá'u'lláh*.
102. Is. 9:6.
103. See, for example, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Secret*, p. 98, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in *Bahá'í World Faith*, p. 291, and Shoghi Effendi, *World Order*, p. 58.
104. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, p. 433.
105. One of my Bahá'í friends, a former Roman Catholic priest, left the church years ago when a fellow priest made some blatantly racist remarks about blacks. This was for him the proverbial last straw.
106. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 288.
107. Niel, *Albigois et Cathares*, p. 6 (my translation).
108. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, pp. 62-3.
109. John 18:38.
110. Charlesworth, *Philosophy of Religion*, pp. 63-4.
111. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets*, p. 87.
112. Bahá'u'lláh, *Proclamation*, p. 57.
113. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 66.
114. *ibid.* p. 195.
115. See for example 'Abdu'l-Bahá's *Some Answered Questions*, particularly the talks on 'Pantheism' (pp. 290-6) and 'Real Preexistence' (pp. 280-1).
116. Realism was the rival school of idealist philosophy. Idealism as a school dominated philosophy from the time of Berkley (1685-1753) until the first quarter of the twentieth century when it fell under attack from the realists lead by Moore, Samuel Alexander (1859-1938) and Bertrand Russell (1872-1970).

Realism holds that whatever exists is in some sense real, that it has an independent existence and is not dependent on the mind for its existence. Idealism, on the other hand, holds that only mind or spirit is ultimately real and that objects have no independent existence in themselves, unrelated to the mind.

Realism dates back to the scholastic doctrine of the late Middle Ages when it had a much different meaning to the one it has for modern realists. In scholasticism, realism referred to the Platonic doctrine of the

universals or Forms as ideas in the mind of God as being the ultimately real things. Their opponents, the nominalists, held that ultimately it was the particulars that were real: for example, it is the particular of the white chair that is real, not the universal of whiteness. See 'Realism vs. Nominalism' in Reck, *Speculative Philosophy*, pp. 69-75.

117. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in Shoghi Effendi, *Advent*, p. 26.
118. See Bradley, *Principles of Logic*, p. 584.
119. *Speculative Philosophy*, p. 174.
120. See Royce, *Religious Aspect of Philosophy*.
121. Royce, *World and the Individual*, p. 202.
122. See Reck, *Speculative Philosophy*, p. 93.
123. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets*, p. 146.
124. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í World Faith*, p. 337.
125. Conow, *Bahá'í Teachings*, p. 145.
126. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 299.
127. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in *Bahá'í World Faith*, p. 383.
128. Smith, *The Forgotten Truth*, pp. 14-16.
129. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 198.

## Chapter 2

### *The Turning Point: Belief in Bahá'u'lláh*

pp. 41-73

1. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, pp. 330-1.
2. ibid. p. 70.
3. ibid. p. 331.
4. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 45.
5. ibid.
6. ibid. p. 49.
7. ibid p. 129.
8. ibid. p. 170.
9. See *Christianity among the Religions of the World*, p. 104.
10. Bahá'u'lláh writes: 'As to those that have tasted of the fruit of man's earthly existence, which is the recognition of the one true God, exalted be His glory, their life hereafter is such as We are unable to describe. The knowledge thereof is with God, alone, the Lord of all worlds' (*Gleanings*, pp. 345-6).
11. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 266.
12. ibid.
13. The following three hermeneutical principles were suggested to me by Dann J. May's 'A Preliminary Survey of Hermeneutical Principles Found within the Bahá'í Writings', *Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, 1:3 (1989), pp. 39-55. I have adapted the first two somewhat.

14. This is the eighth and last of the principles of interpretation put forward by May.
15. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 183.
16. *ibid.* p. 213.
17. John 8:58-9.
18. 'A Bahá'í Perspective on the Origin of Matter', *Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, 2:3 (1989-90), p. 22.
19. Shoghi Effendi, *World Order*, p. 115.
20. For a discussion of relativism see Moojan Momen 'Relativism: A Basis for Bahá'í Metaphysics' in *Studies in the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions*, vol. 5, pp. 185-217. I have discussed relativity in the context of interreligious dialogue in 'Prolegomena to a Bahá'í Theology', *Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, 5.1, March-June, 1992, pp. 37-46. Udo Schaefer has also looked at this question in 'Die Relativität der Offenbarung' (The Relativity of Revelation), *Heilsgeschichte und Paradigmenwechsel* (Salvation History and Paradigm Shift), pp. 116-120 (translation forthcoming).
21. This analogy was suggested to me by my friend Kathleen Pfafflin of Gatineau, Quebec.
22. May, 'A Preliminary Survey', p. 51.
23. 'Proclamation is important, but friends should emphasize Station of Bahá'u'lláh', *American Bahá'í*, March, 1991, p. 2.
24. Shoghi Effendi sets forth many apocalyptic titles of Bahá'u'lláh in *God Passes By*. See, for example, pp. 93-7. These few epithets describing Bahá'u'lláh are from the Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions.
25. Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words*, Persian no. 69.
26. *ibid.* Persian no. 76.
27. The Báb, *Selections*, p. 133.
28. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 331.
29. Letter from Rimbaud's sister, Isabelle, 12 October 1896, quoted in Rimbaud, *Oeuvres Complètes*, p. 634 (my translation).
30. The above account is summarized from *ibid.* pp. 634-5.
31. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 194
32. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 331.
33. Bahá'u'lláh, quoted in Shoghi Effendi, *World Order*, p. 107.
34. As a background to this section, I have used 'The Sense of Duty' in Wheelwright, *Critical Introduction to Ethics*, pp. 123-46.
35. For a more complete discussion of the Covenant of God, see Taherzadeh, *The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh*.
36. Quoted in Wheelwright, *Critical Introduction to Ethics*, p. 129.
37. *ibid.* p. 30. This principle was enunciated by the English utilitarian philosopher, economist and theoretical jurist Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) in *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*. Bentham wrote that the object of all legislation must be 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number'.

38. Gen. 12:3.
39. Gen. 6:18, 7:5.
40. Gen. 22:1-13. The Qur'án and the Bahá'í Faith teach that the intended sacrifice was not Isaac but rather Ishmael: 'That which thou hast heard concerning Abraham, the Friend of the All-Merciful, is the truth, and no doubt is there about it. The Voice of God commanded Him to offer up Ishmael as a sacrifice, so that His steadfastness in the Faith of God and His detachment from all else but Him may be demonstrated unto men. The purpose of God, moreover, was to sacrifice him as a ransom for the sins and iniquities of all the people of the earth' (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, pp. 75-6).

Interestingly enough, Bahá'u'lláh's version of events concords with an Arabic apocrypha of the canonical gospels, 'The Gospel of Barnabas': 'Jesus fell with his face to the ground, saying: "O great Lord God, how great is thy mercy upon me, and what shall I give thee, Lord, for all that thou hast granted me?" The angel Gabriel answered: "Arise, Jesus, and remember Abraham, who being willing to make sacrifice to God of his only begotten son Ishmael to fulfil the word of God, and the knife not being able to cut his son, at my word offered in sacrifice a sheep. Even so therefore shalt thou do, O Jesus, servant of God"' (M.A. Yusseff, *The Gospel of Barnabas*, p. 11).

There is internal biblical evidence to support the point of view of the primacy of Ishmael. The Bible clearly states that Ishmael was Abraham's first born, and the law of primogenitor carried great weight for the ancient Hebrews. The Bible also says that Hagar, Ishmael's mother, was to be the full fledged wife of Abraham, not his concubine (Gen. 16:3), unlike Keturah who is called ambiguously his 'concubine' in 1 Chronicles 1:32 and his 'wife' in Gen. 25:1. Thus Hagar enjoyed the same distinction and status of being Abraham's wife as did Sarah. (Summarized from n. 16, 'The Gospel of Barnabas'. Keturah had 6 sons, and from this line descended Zoroaster and Bahá'u'lláh.

41. See Neufeld, *Hittite Law*.
42. The Universal House of Justice has its own constitution (1972). Local spiritual assemblies, Shoghi Effendi has said, 'will have to be considered as a legal person with the power to make binding contracts'. The Bahá'í assemblies function as 'religious courts' according to Declarations of Trust and By-laws whose purpose it is to 'clarify and strengthen the administrative legal functions of a Bahá'í community'. In the future, however, they will function as full-fledged houses of justice, that is courts of law, both spiritual and temporal. These assemblies, moreover, operate within their own jurisdictions and many assemblies have been granted seals of incorporation and have been empowered to exercise such functions as the enactment of marriage and divorce, the registration of birth and death, to hold property, and to create in the future social

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- institutions of welfare if need be. They further have the right to hear appeals and to settle disputes by the principle of arbitration.
43. Attributed to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Quoted in *Star of the West*, vol. 11, no. 14, p. 243.
  44. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 331.
  45. *ibid.*
  46. Lampman, 'The Largest Life', *Canadian Poetry*, vol. 1, pp. 97-8.
  47. Shoghi Effendi, in *Compilation*, vol. 1, pp. 204-5.
  48. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 343.
  49. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation* p. 459.
  50. Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, quoted in *Compilation*, vol. 1, no. 511. p. 230.
  51. *ibid.* no. 353, p. 183.
  52. Shoghi Effendi, quoted in *Divine Guidance*, vol. 2, p. 84.
  53. Bahá'u'lláh, *Aqdas*, no. 149. In answer to a question, Bahá'u'lláh clarified this statement: 'The prime requisite is the eagerness and love of sanctified souls to read the Word of God. To read one verse, or even one word, in a spirit of joy and radiance, is preferable to the perusal of many Books' (*ibid.* question 68).
  54. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 96.
  55. Shoghi Effendi, quoted in *Compilation*, vol. 1, no. 430, p. 205.
  56. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections*, p. 126.
  57. Shoghi Effendi, quoted in *Compilation*, vol. 1, no. 516, pp. 231-2.
  58. By no congregational prayer is meant that there is no recital of prayers in unison by the group and no bodily postures, whether standing, sitting, genuflecting, etc. that are performed by the worshippers at the same time. Bahá'ís do pray together, however, without unison recital or congregational gestures. The only exception to this is the prayer for the dead in which the entire group stands why one person recites the prayer. For a more detailed treatment of congregational prayer and why it has been abolished in the Bahá'í Faith, see further in this volume 'Private and Congregational Prayer', pp. 116-119.
  59. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 334.
  60. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Will and Testament*, p. 25.
  61. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections* p. 264.
  62. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets*, p. 254.
  63. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 280.
  64. *ibid.* p. 84.
  65. *ibid.* p. 335.
  66. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets*, p. 619-20.
  67. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 339.
  68. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, cited in Grundy, *Ten Days*, p. 31.
  69. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets*, p. 138.
  70. Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words*, Persian no. 69.

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71. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections*, p. 36.
72. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Secret*, p. 66.
73. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 129.
74. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, p. 157.
75. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, cited in Grundy, *Ten Days*, p. 31.
76. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í Prayers*, p. 152.
77. Kazem Kazemzadeh and Firuz Kazemzadeh, 'Five Books about 'Abdu'l-Bahá', *World Order*, Fall 1971, p. 76.
78. Attributed to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in Phelps, *Life and Teachings*, p. 159-64.
79. See *Star of the West*.
80. 1 Corinthians 15:31. The complete verse reads: 'I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus, our Lord, I die daily.' The Revised Standard Version reads: 'I protest, brethren, by my pride in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day.'
81. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets*, p. 166.
82. Ives, *Portals to Freedom*, p. 63.
83. It is interesting to compare this list with the six requisites for spiritual growth outlined by the Universal House of Justice. 'Bahá'u'lláh has stated quite clearly in His Writings the essential requisites for our spiritual growth and these are stressed again and again by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His talks and Tablets. One can summarize them briefly in this way: 1) The recital each day of one of the Obligatory Prayers with pure-hearted devotion. 2) The regular reading of the Sacred Scriptures, specifically at least each morning and evening, with reverence, attention and thought. 3) Prayerful meditation on the teachings, so that we may understand them more deeply, fulfil them more faithfully and convey them more accurately to others. 4) Strive every day to bring our behaviour more into accordance with the high standards that are set forth in the teachings. 5) Teaching the Cause of God. 6) Selfless service in the work of the Cause and in the carrying on of our trade or profession.' From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to a European National Spiritual Assembly, 1 September 1983.
84. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in *Star of the West*, vol. 8, no. 6, p. 68.
85. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, no. 149.
86. Bahá'u'lláh, quoted in *Compilation*, vol. 1, p. 188.
87. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in *ibid*, p. 203.
88. *ibid*. p. 376.
89. Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words*, Arabic no. 31.
90. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in *Compilation*, vol. 1, p. 376.
91. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets*, p. 484.
92. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, p. 189.
93. *ibid*. p. 188.
94. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in *Compilation*, vol. 1, p. 376.
95. '... every one of you knoweth his own self better than he knoweth

**Chapter 3**  
**Models and Profiles of Spiritual Transformation**  
pp. 74-100

1. Bergson, *Creative Evolution*. I have taken Bergson's phrase out of context and applied it to spirituality. His meaning of the *élan vital* (vital impetus) or *élan originel* (original impetus) was a spiritualized view of biogenics. It referred to the life processes acting or directing inert matter. He discussed the concept in relation to the simple act of vision (p. 96). In doing so, Bergson rejected what he called the 'mechanism' or 'finalism' of materialistic biological views. For his discussion of the *élan vital* see *Creative Evolution*, pp. 87-97.
2. Hatcher, *Logic and Logos*, pp. 30-2, 46.
3. Reacting to Freud's statement that it would be better to do away with the symbolic guise of religious doctrines and speak the plain truth suitable to the child's maturing state of intellectual development, Campbell wrote in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* that it was his purpose 'to uncover some of the truths disguised for us under the figures of religion and mythology . . .' (p. vii).
4. Phenomenology was a movement begun by Brentano and brought to prominence by Husserl. See Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations*, *The Paris Lectures*, and Muralt, *The Idea of Phenomenology*.
5. Ross, *Buddhism A Way of Life and Thought*, p. 24.
6. Chándogya Upanishad VI, xii, in Zaehner, *Hindu Scriptures*, pp. 110-11.
7. *Tao Te Ching*, LX III: 147 and XLVII: 106.
8. *What Man Believes*, p. 160.
9. Quoted by Watts in *Way of Zen*, p. 134. The *Zenrin Kushu* is 'an anthology of some five thousand two-line poems, compiled by Toyo Eicho (1429-1504). Its purpose was to provide Zen students with a source-book of verses from which to select couplets expressing the theme of the newly solved *koan*' (Watts, p. 117, n.4).
10. Ecc. 12:13.
11. Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, p. 51.
12. *Dictionary of Religions*, p. 30.
13. *ibid.* p. 31.
14. For example, 'as rare as the philosopher's stone' is the way that 'Abdu'l-Bahá characterizes those individuals whose 'innate moral quality' or 'instinctive intelligence' would prevent them from wrongdoing. *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 98.
15. Speaking of the 'mystic transformation' that affects the lives of those souls who accept the Manifestation of God in his day, Bahá'u'lláh writes:

- 'Likewise, these souls, through the potency of the Divine Elixir, traverse, in the twinkling of an eye, the world of dust and advance into the realm of holiness; and with one step cover the earth of limitations and reach the domain of the Placeless' (Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 157).
16. 'Is it ever possible', they ask, 'for copper to be transmuted into gold?' Say, Yes, by my Lord, it is possible. Its secret, however, lieth hidden in Our Knowledge. We will reveal it unto whom We will' (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 197).
  17. 'Every mineral can be made to acquire the density, form, and substance of each and every other mineral' (*ibid.* p. 198).
  18. One of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's most powerful talks, at Leland Stanford Junior University in October 1912, was on this theme. See *Promulgation*, pp. 348-55.
  19. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 157.
  20. Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 22 November 1941, cited in *Compilation*, vol. 2, no. 1770, p. 240.
  21. *ibid.*
  22. Letter of the Universal House of Justice to a European National Spiritual Assembly, 1 September 1983.
  23. *ibid.*
  24. Shoghi Effendi, cited in *Lights*, no. 1742, p. 515.
  25. See *Lights*, nos. 1739-42, pp. 513-15.
  26. The other two are the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* ('doctrinal') and the *Hidden Words* ('ethical'). See Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 140, for these designations.
  27. *Once to Every Man and Nation: Stories about Becoming a Bahá'í*, although its main intent is not to detail individual mystical experiences, does recount some of these.
  28. Shoghi Effendi, cited in *Lights*, no. 1845, p. 543.
  29. Editore, *Life and Times of St Francis*, pp. 36-7.
  30. For an excellent English-language biography of St Vincent de Paul see Purcell, *The World of Monsieur Vincent*. Purcell writes that all of France rejoiced over the canonization of the Gascony peasant in 1757. At the news of Monsieur Vincent's declaration of sainthood, Voltaire was heard to remark, 'Vincent de Paul. Now there's the saint for me!' (p. 11) Vincent de Paul was also known as the 'Apostle of Justice' because of his strong sense of this spiritual virtue (p. 12).
  31. Woodman, quoted in Anderson and Hopkins, *Feminine Face of God*, p. 28.
  32. *ibid.* pp. 28-30, 95-9.
  33. See, for example, Bahá'u'lláh's exposition of the attributes of 'the true seeker' in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, pp. 192-200, a passage which demonstrates the combination of ethical and spiritual discipline with mystical experiences.
  34. Bahá'u'lláh, *Seven Valleys*, p. 43.
  35. Cited in *Bahá'í World*, vol. 13, p. 822. Jordan was the first president of the

Leland Stanford Junior University in Palo Alto California and introduced 'Abdu'l-Bahá to some two thousand staff and students who had filled an assembly hall to hear 'one of the natural successors of the old Hebrew Prophets', as Jordan had called Him.

36. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, para. 63. The complete quotation is: 'Enter into wedlock, O people, that ye may bring forth one who will make mention of Me amid My servants. This is My bidding unto you; hold fast to it as an assistance to yourselves.'
37. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets*, pp. 108-9.
38. Townshend, *Mission of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 68.
39. *ibid.* p. 68.
40. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in Grundy, *Ten Days*, p. 25.
41. *ibid.* p. 43.
42. Bahá'u'lláh, quoted in Shoghi Effendi, *World Order*, p. 108.
43. *ibid.* p.111. The Manifestations of the house of Israel endowed with constancy are Abraham, Moses and Jesus Himself, who was from the tribe of Judah and descended from King David. Those not endowed with constancy are the lesser prophets such as Joel, Daniel, Hosea, Amos, Malachi, etc.
44. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 66.
45. Bahá'u'lláh, *Cleanings*, p. 155.
46. Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, quoted in *Compilation*, vol. 2, p. 240.
47. The phrase 'born again', which is central to Christ's teaching, can be found in John 3:3 and 3:7. Nicodemus certainly had a struggle understanding Christ's words. He seemed to be unable to grasp the difference between the literal and symbolic meanings of them, thus his questions, 'How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?' (John 3:4)
48. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, letter to the Central Organization for a Durable Peace, The Hague, 17 December 1919, in *Selections*, p. 304.
49. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, p. 288.
50. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in *Star of the West*, 31 December 1920, vol. 11, no. 16, p. 269.
51. *ibid.*
52. Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations*, p.42.
53. John 3:5.
54. Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations*, p. 44.
55. With this reference, I have taken the unhappy figure of Rip Van Winkle and put him into a more felicitous role. The old Dutch legend of Rip Van Winkle was taken up by America's first man of letters, Washington Irving (1783-1859), in his classic *The Sketch Book*. In Irving's story, Van Winkle falls into a twenty-year sleep under a tree in his village only to awaken again to an unhappy world in which he no longer finds any familiar

- place. Van Winkle's awakening can be taken as a symbol of the transiency of life or the individual's poor adaptation to the life of the world, the failure to adapt to the present because he dwells in the past.
56. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 196.
57. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 70.
58. The distinction is necessary because a church may be evangelical in orientation, that is grounded in scripture, but not necessarily fundamentalist. Fundamentalism indicates strictly literal interpretations of scripture, often coupled with intolerant attitudes to those whose interpretations of scripture may differ from the fundamentalists' or who follow other faiths. These last are usually considered by fundamentalists to be lost or unredeemed.
59. Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, p. 103.
60. See, again, Gottlieb, *Once to Every Man and Nation*, particularly Freeman, 'The Figure in the Red Robe'; Eiler, 'A Spiritual Crown'; Tichenor, 'Thrill of Recognition'; Lysaght, 'In the Clouds of Glory'; Johnson, 'Seasons of the Soul'; Shevin, 'In Desperation'; as well as Randie Gottlieb, 'Mind and Heart'.
61. Shoghi Effendi, quoted in *Compilation*, vol. 2, p. 309. The context of Shoghi Effendi's remark was that in teaching a seeker the Faith, one should approach him from his own angle of interest but gradually introduce him to 'the *entire* Message, in all its aspects'. One should do this 'gradually and tactfully' (emphasis mine).
62. Christian health care worker Susan Brandt of the Ottawa City Ministries, who works with street people, relates that she sometimes meets drug-addicted 'born again' Christians during the course of her work. One such individual, she relates, a former minister of the church, quoted these verses from Proverbs to her to justify his alcoholism: 'Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts. Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more' (31:6-7). It seems that this unfortunate soul had forgotten to read the other verses in Proverbs that warn against the use of wine (20:1; 21:17; 23:30-5).
63. John 3:8.
64. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 164.
65. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in Shoghi Effendi, *World Order*, p.133.
66. Shoghi Effendi, *ibid.*
67. The Guardian names some of these as: the Limb of the Law of God, the Most Mighty Branch, the unerring Interpreter of His Word, the Centre and Pivot of Bahá'u'lláh's peerless and all-enfolding Covenant, the Mainspring of the Oneness of Humanity, the Ensign of the Most Great Peace (*ibid.* p. 134).
68. Shoghi Effendi, *ibid.*
69. Bahá'u'lláh, quoted in *ibid.* pp. 135-6.

70. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in *ibid.* p. 139.
71. Shoghi Effendi, *ibid.* p. 131.
72. Bahá'u'lláh, quoted in *ibid.* p. 135.
73. Shoghi Effendi, *ibid.* p. 134.
74. Maxwell, *Early Pilgrimage*, p. 42.
75. Shoghi Effendi, *World Order*, p. 131.
76. Honnold, *Vignettes*, p. x.
77. *ibid.* p. xi.
78. Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words*, Arabic no. 1.
79. Shoghi Effendi, *World Order*, p. 134.
80. Honnold, *Vignettes*, p. 82.
81. Shoghi Effendi, *Advent*, p. 34.
82. *ibid.* pp. 34-5.

*Chapter 4*  
*The Mystical Sense: Prayer and Meditation*  
 pp. 101-27

1. Anderson and Hopkins, *Feminine Face of God*, p. 125.
2. Letter of Dietrich Bonhoeffer from prison, 30 April 1944, quoted by Cox in Callahan, ed., *Secular City*, p. 211. Cox develops this argument particularly in Chapter 11, 'To Speak in a Secular Fashion of God'.
3. 'Toward a Theology of Secularity' in Callahan, ed., *Secular City*, p. 91.
4. From a mimeographed report of a conference held at the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey, Switzerland, September 1959.
5. The quotation is from the first edition. The revised edition (1966) does not include it, but the idea is basic to Cox's discussion. The words 'no religion at all' are from Bonhoeffer's letter from prison cited above. See Bonhoeffer, *Prisoner for God*.
6. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 200.
7. Cox, in Callahan, ed., *Secular City*, p. 2.
8. In 1974, Udo Schaefer in *The Imperishable Dominion: The Bahá'í Faith and the Future of Mankind*, 'Religious Traditions Torn Down' had already referred to a statement from the Swedish archbishop, Ingmar Ström, quoted in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* of 16 March 1982, that in many Swedish communities those who attend the Sunday services are only the vicar's wife, the organist and a few residents of the neighbourhood home for the aged (p. 9). Schaefer also cites the same newspaper reporting that in 1974 in West Germany 83,277 Catholics and 210,000 Protestants resigned from church membership.
9. Cox, in Callahan, ed., *Secular City*, pp. 60-1.
10. Shoghi Effendi, *World Order*, pp. 186-7.
11. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 122.

12. Hegel, *On Art, Religion*. Hegel writes: 'When accordingly, we start with the ordinary conception of God, the philosophy of religion has to consider its signification – this, namely, that God is the Idea, the absolute, the essential reality . . .' (p. 150). Hegel's concept of God, however, reflects a radical immanence and tends easily to cross over into pantheism: 'Human reason – the consciousness of one's being – is indeed reason; it is the divine in man, and spirit, insofar as it is the spirit of God, is not a spirit beyond the stars, beyond the world. On the contrary, God is present, omnipresent, and exists as spirit in all spirits' (pp. 157-8). While one can agree with Hegel's omnipresence of God, this text at the same time clearly aims to restrict the notion of transcendence.
13. Matt. 10:29.
14. Matthew Fox is the current leading exponent of 'creation spirituality' which attributes a vital spirituality to Mother Earth, a spirituality that is worth understanding, preserving and nurturing. See, for example, Fox, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*.
15. Quoted in *Star of the West*, vol. 3, no. 3, p. 4. This was 'Abdu'l-Bahá's remark when, about to land at New York, He first observed the city skyline from the deck of the S.S. *Cedric* in April 1912.
16. Holcomb, in Callahan, ed., *Secular City*, p. 171.
17. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 300.
18. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections*, p. 191.
19. Shoghi Effendi, quoted in *Compilation*, vol. 2., p. 238. For an in-depth examination of the Bahá'í view of prayer see Hellaby and Hellaby, *Prayer: A Bahá'í Approach*.
20. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets*, p. 523.
21. The Báb, quoted in Nabil, *Dawn-Breakers*, p.
22. Joachim-Schoeps, *The Religions of Mankind*, p. 6.
23. Evans, Moynes and Martinello, *What Man Believes*, p. 3.
24. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in *Compilation*, vol. 2, p. 236.
25. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í World Faith*, p. 368.
26. See 'The Turning Point: Belief in Bahá'u'lláh'.
27. *Dictionary of Religions*, p. 273.
28. Heiler, *Prayer*.
29. *ibid.*
30. Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, quoted in *Lights*, no. 1524, p. 464.
31. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 81.
32. Rose, *Handbook of Greek Mythology*, p. 269.
33. Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, quoted in *Lights*, no. 1523, p. 464.
34. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í World Faith*, p. 368.
35. Heiler, quoted in 'The Essence of Prayer', in *World Treasury*, p. 310.
36. Quoted in *Divine Art of Living*, p. 45.

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37. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in *ibid*.
38. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 248.
39. It is clear from a reading of the first few verses of the Book of Genesis that God's first acts of creation imposed order upon the formless chaos. Measure and order are primordial designs of creation. The teachings of Bahá'u'lláh are meant to restore this primordial order to creation.
40. *What Man Believes*, p. 266.
41. Heiler, 'Prayer', quoted in *World Treasury*, p. 310.
42. *ibid.* p. 309.
43. *ibid.*
44. Qur'án, VIII English, 1 Arabic, Rodwell edition.
45. From world religious statistics in the 1988 Britannica *Book of the Year*.
46. Shoghi Effendi, quoted in *Lights*, no. 1487, p. 457.
47. Quoted in Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 238.
48. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 175.
49. 'The myth is the public dream and the dream is the private myth.' Campbell, *Power of Myth*, p. 40.
50. Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words*, Persian no. 19.
51. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in *References from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi concerning the Hidden Words*, the Universal House of Justice, December 1979.
52. *ibid.*
53. *ibid.*
54. Gen. 2:9.
55. Gen. 3: 2-3.
56. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 123.
57. Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words*, Persian no. 19.
58. Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, p. 125.
59. *ibid.*
60. *ibid.*
61. *ibid.*
62. *ibid.* p. 124.
63. John Huddleston has explored the search for a just society throughout history in the writings of statesmen and philosophers, in the revolts of the oppressed, in the erection of new laws, the founding of new religions and international systems of government. See Huddleston, *Search for a Just Society*.
64. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 215.
65. Shoghi Effendi, *World Order*, p. 43.
66. Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel*, p. 130.
67. The Universal House of Justice, *Individual Rights and Freedoms*, para. 51, p. 21.

*Chapter 5*  
*A Paradigm of Spirituality and Life Tests*  
 pp. 128-58

1. Psalms 51: 7.
2. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 51.
3. For discussion of the peak experience see Maslow, *Religions, Values, and Peak Experiences*. Basically, Maslow's peak experience refers to an altered state of consciousness, fleeting but totally spontaneous 'moments of highest happiness and fulfilment' and 'harmonious oneness' with the universe in which the individual loses self-consciousness and ceases to be concerned by the events of the past or the future. It is a vital experience of focusing on and living in the now when all things flow with ease.
4. *I and Thou* is the title of Martin Buber's influential book which first appeared in English in 1937. In *I and Thou* Buber develops a new epistemology based on the notion of encounter (*Begegnung*).
5. Bahá'u'lláh, *Seven Valleys*, pp. 40-1.
6. From *Diary of Mirza Sohrab*, 20 July 1914, in *Star of the West*, vol. 8, no. 18, p. 236.
7. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 51.
8. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets*, p. 325.
9. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in *Star of the West*, vol. 8, no. 19, p. 240.
10. The most famous works of St Francis de Sales are *Introduction to the Devout Life* (1609) and *Traité de l'amour de Dieu* (1616), both of which were adopted from instructions given to individuals.
11. Quoted by Frank Pakenham, Earl of Longford in *Humility*, p. 87.
12. Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Bahíyyih Khánúm*, p. 87.
13. Taylor, *Year Book of English Authors*, p. 212.
14. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 330.
15. Peck, *Road Less Travelled*, p. 15.
16. Frankl, *Doctor and the Soul*, p. 105.
17. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections*, p. 239.
18. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets*, p. 51.
19. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in *Divine Art of Living*, p. 65.
20. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in *Pattern of Bahá'í Life*, p. 35.
21. Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, p. 179.
22. Martyrs do endure abuse but the abuse and ultimate death that a martyr endures is endured willingly, not through some masochistic death-wish, but because the oppressor seeks by doing violence to the body what he has failed to compel the spirit to do: to force the martyr to deny what he believes to be true. For the martyr, to deny the truth, on which he has staked his very life, would amount to a denial of everything that he loves and holds dear.
23. Taherzadeh, *Revelation*, vol. 1, p. 98.

NOTES & REFERENCES, pp. 128-58.

24. 'A Conversation with Viktor Frankl of Vienna' in *Psychology Today*, vol. 1, no. 9, Feb. 1968, p. 57.
25. *ibid.* p. 63.
26. *Man's Search For Meaning*, p. 179.
27. *ibid.* pp. 178-9.
28. Ghadirian, 'Human Responses to Life Stress and Suffering', *Bahá'í Studies Notebook*, 3, 1-2 (1983), p. 50.
29. The following summary of the meaning of tests has been gleaned from 'Tests' in *Star of the West*, vol. 8, nos. 18 and 19, February and March 1918.
30. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in *Star of the West*, vol. 8, no. 18, p. 232.
31. Holley, quoted in *Star of the West*, vol. 13, no. 5, p. 105.
32. *ibid.*
33. *ibid.*
34. *ibid.* p. 106.
35. Frye, *Educated Imagination*, p. 44.
36. Holley, 'The Writings of Bahá'u'lláh', in *Star of the West*, vol. 13, no. 5, p. 106.
37. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 141.
38. Berger, *Introduction to the Study of Religion*, p. 189. Bowker is cited from his *Problems of Suffering in Religions of the World*, p. 115.
39. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in *Star of the West*, vol. 8, no. 18, p. 235.
40. From Berger, *Study of Religion*, p. 190. Berger writes: '... in Western monotheistic religions suffering tends to be viewed as a form of pedagogy or punishment.'
41. Qur'án 29:2.
42. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets*, p. 128.
43. Ross, *Three Ways of Asian Wisdom*, p. 81.
44. Ross, *Buddhism: A Way of Life and Thought*, pp. 75-6.
45. Luke 13:1-5.
46. Job 22:5-7.
47. Job 23:11-12.
48. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 50.
49. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 129.
50. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 91.
51. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in *Divine Art of Living*, p. 85.
52. House, *Aristotle's Poetics*, p. 94.
53. Tityos tried to rape Leto but the precise nature of Tantalos's sin is unknown. Both Tityos and Tantalos, however, dared to test the omniscience and friendship of the gods.
54. See the story of Sisyphus in Rose, *Handbook of Greek Mythology*, pp. 81-2.
55. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in *Star of the West*, vol. 6, no. 6, p. 45.
56. Gen. 3:21.
57. Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, quoted in *Lights*, no. 386, p. 113.

58. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections*, p. 256.
59. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets*, p. 456.
60. Bahá'í *Prayers*, p. 28.
61. The Báb, quoted in *Dawn-Breakers*, p. 219.
62. Townshend, *Mission of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 125.
63. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections*, p. 210.
64. Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Compilation*, vol. 2, p. 12.
65. *ibid.* p. 25.
66. Rabbaní, *Prescription for Living*, p. 43.
67. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*. p. 190.
68. *ibid.*
69. Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, quoted in *Compilation*, vol. 2, p. 11, no. 1294.
70. Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, quoted in *Lights*, no. 264, p. 76.
71. See Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle*. This section does not make a detailed point by point comparison of Erikson's theory with Bahá'í teachings but refers to Erikson's schema in a general way only. Erikson writes that each of the eight stages of the life cycle brings its own psychosocial crisis (p. 57), birth being the first great crisis when the human being is thrust from intrauterine existence into the larger, more challenging world of extrauterine life. This parallels the Bahá'í notion of the life test that confronts the believer in a 'cradle to grave' process. See pp. 51-107 for Erikson's discussion of the stages of the life cycle.
72. Wright, Erikson: *Identity and Religion*, p. 53.
73. *ibid.* pp. 51-4.
74. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets*, p. 324.
75. See Erikson's *Young Man Luther* and *Gandhi's Truth*. See also J. Eugene Wright's analysis of the religious dimensions of Erikson's work in 'Erik H. Erikson: *Homo Religiosus?*' in Erikson, *Identity and Religion*, pp. 179-207.
76. Wright, Erikson: *Identity and Religion*, p. 51.
77. *ibid.* p. 159.
78. See, for example, Marcel's 'Sketch of a Phenomenology and a Metaphysic of Hope' in *Homo Viator, Introduction to a Metaphysic of Hope*, pp. 29-67.
79. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 316.
80. Psalms 40:4.
81. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 108.
82. Wright, Erikson: *Identity and Religion*, p. 154.
83. *ibid.*
84. *ibid.* p. 155.
85. Berger, *A Rumour of Angels*.
86. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 162.
87. Wright, Erikson: *Identity and Religion*, p. 165.
88. Erikson, *Dimensions of a New Identity*, p. 44, quoted in Wright, Erikson: *Identity and Religion*, p. 166.

89. Erikson quoted in *ibid.* p. 166.
90. *ibid.* p. 167. Wright states that some have been critical of Erikson's reduction of Luther's theology to ideology and cites, for example, Peter Homans's essay 'The Significance of Erikson's Psychology for Modern Understandings of Religion', in Peter Homans, ed., *Childhood and Selfhood: Essays on Tradition, Religion, and Modernity in the Psychology of E. H. Erikson*, with an introduction by P. Homans. Homans recognizes, however, that some sort of ideology is a constituent of identity.
91. See Wright, *Erikson: Identity and Religion*, pp. 53-4.
92. *ibid.* p. 171.
93. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections*, p. 66.
94. The Seven Deadly Sins are pride, covetousness, lust, envy, gluttony, anger, sloth (*accidie* Gk. 'indifference', 'negligence'; *Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, pp. 4, 470).
95. This is in marked contrast to the disdainfully proud way they carried their heads erect while they were on earth. In *Canto* 11:88 a former proud one says to Dante: 'Here fine is paid for pompous pride rebelling.' See Gilbert, *Dante and His Comedy*.
96. See 'Pride', *Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p. 414.
97. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 193.
98. St Francis of Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, p. 100.
99. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, pp. 107-8.
100. See 'Faith and Deeds in Light of the Final Moment'.
101. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, pp. 194-5.
102. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*. p. 108.
103. Matt. 21:31.
104. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in *Star of the West*, vol. 6, no. 6, p. 45.
105. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, p. 244.
106. Gibran, *Prophet*, p. 43.

*Chapter 6*  
*Our Spiritual Anthropology: The Self and the Soul*  
pp. 159-75

1. Frankl, *Unconscious God*, p. 65.
2. Sullivan, *Conceptions of Modern Psychiatry*.
3. See James, *Principles of Psychology*, vol. 1, chapter 10.
4. Allport, *Becoming*, p. 56.
5. *ibid.*
6. Watson, 'Personality' in *Great Ideas in Psychology*, p. 404.
7. D. Barrett in 'World Religious Statistics' of the *Britannica Book of the Year*, 1988, p. 303 states that next to Christianity, the Bahá'í Faith is the most widely disseminated religion in the world.

NOTES & REFERENCES, pp. 159-75.

8. Paul Tillich, *Perspectives*, p. 119.
9. Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Lights*, no. 386, p. 113.
10. For a concise explanation of Freud's tripartite structure of personality see Hall and Lindzey, eds., 'Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory' in *Theories of Personality*, pp. 32-5.
11. Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Compilation*, vol. 2, p. 11, no. 1295.
12. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in *Star of the West*, vol. 6, no. 6, p. 45.
13. See, for example, Ward, *Defending the Soul*.
14. 'And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.' Matt. 10:28.
15. 'Abdu'l-Bahá uses this expression in His explanation of 'The Five Aspects of Spirit'. The 'spirit of faith' is the fourth degree of spirit 'and by the divine power it becomes the cause of eternal life' ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 144). He further differentiates the power of spirit from that of soul and mind: 'The human spirit which distinguishes man from the animal is the rational soul, and these two names – the human spirit and the rational soul – designate one thing . . . But the human spirit, unless assisted by the spirit of faith, does not become acquainted with the divine secrets and the heavenly realities . . . the mind is the power of the human spirit. Spirit is the lamp; mind is the light which shines from the lamp. Spirit is the tree, and the mind is the fruit. Mind is the perfection of the spirit and is its essential quality, as the sun's rays are the essential necessity of the sun' (*ibid.* pp. 208-9).
16. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, pp. 155-6.
17. Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, p. 104.
18. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, pp. 158-9.
19. Plato, *Phaedo*, p. 122.
20. *ibid.* p. 141.
21. *ibid.*
22. Maritain, quoted in Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, p. 49.
23. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 91.
24. Wundt's views were announced in *Principles of Physiological Psychology*, considered by many to be one of the most important books in the history of psychology.
25. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 160.
26. *ibid.* p. 155.
27. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 'Tablet to Dr Forel', *Bahá'í World Faith*, pp. 346-7.
28. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 'Individuality and Personality', *Star of the West*, vol. 4, no. 2, p. 38.
29. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, pp. 103-4.
30. *ibid.* p. 191.

NOTES & REFERENCES, pp. 159-75, 176-95.

31. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 'Individuality and Personality', *Star of the West*, vol.4, no. 2, p. 38.
32. See Allport, *Nature of Personality*.
33. Heim, *Intelligence and Personality*, p. 53.
34. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 'Individuality and Personality', *Star of the West*, vol. 4, no. 2, p. 38. Interested readers may wish to study 'Abdu'l-Bahá's complete talk for further explanation.
35. *ibid.*
36. *ibid.* p. 39.
37. *ibid.*
38. Coan and Zagona, cited by Hall and Lindzey in *Theories of Personality*, p. 110.
39. Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, p. 122.
40. *ibid.*
41. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 241.
42. 'By faith is meant, first, conscious knowledge, and second, the practice of good deeds. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in *Bahá'í World Faith*, p. 383.
43. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 90.
44. In *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Psychologie* in 1947, quoted by Frankl, *The Unconscious God*, p. 64.
45. *ibid.* p. 64.
46. *ibid.* p. 26.

*Chapter 7*

*The Imagination: The Double-Edged Sword of the Soul*  
pp. 176-95

1. See 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 210-11.
2. Apart from those references that indicate otherwise, the notes that follow in these passages on imagination have been selectively gleaned and adapted from the article 'Imagination' in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, pp. 370-6.
3. For example, my daughter Leah's college psychology textbook, *Psychology in Action* by Huffman, Vernoy and Williams (1987), a work of some 674 pages with an appendix contains no reference whatsoever to the imagination, although there are chapters on 'Perception' and 'States of Consciousness'.
4. Pascal, *Pensées*, no. 44, p. 49.
5. Jansenism was a movement of moral austerity and reform within the Roman Catholic church which was founded by Bishop Cornelius Jansen (1585-1638). Jansen promoted above all Augustine's doctrine of predestination and God's grace. The severe moral outlook of the Jansenists was opposed to Jesuit casuistry. In 1652 Pascal's sister entered

the convent at Port Royal, the Jansenist centre. Pascal held a conference there in 1658 outlining the apologetic element in the *Pensées* which held that only through the benefits of the Christian faith and the salvific mediation of Christ could the human being attain beatitude. Pascal's *Lettres provinciales* initiated a period of polemic against the Jesuits. His letters were indexed by the church in 1657 and King Louis XIV had them burned in 1660.

6. Pascal, *Pensées*, no. 44, p. 49.
7. Stevens, in *Poetry of Our Time*, p. 113.
8. Stevens, *Necessary Angel*, pp. 138-9.
9. *ibid.* p. 139.
10. 'Imagination', p. 371.
11. *ibid.*
12. For example, Bahá'u'lláh says: 'Blessed art thou for having utterly abolished the idol of self and of vain imagination, and for having rent asunder the veil of idle fancy, through the power of the might of thy Lord, the Supreme Protector, the Almighty, the one Beloved' (*Gleanings*, p. 291). On the other hand, He also says, 'Every praise which any tongue or pen can recount, every imagination which any heart can devise, is debarred from the station which Thy most exalted Pen hath ordained, how much more must it fall short of the heights which Thou hast Thyself immensely exalted above the conception and the description of any creature' (*Prayers and Meditations*, p. 194).
13. Cole, 'The Concept of the Manifestation in the Bahá'í Writings', *Bahá'í Studies*, vol. 9, pp. 2-3.
14. Avicenna, *On the Soul*, An., I, 5 (5rb); IV, I (17va).
15. See Santayana, *Reason in Art*.
16. See Dewey, *Art as Experience*.
17. St Augustine, *Epistles*, 6, 7.
18. 'Imagination', p. 371-2.
19. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 210.
20. *Summa Theologica*, 1, question 78, article 4.
21. George Townshend, Introduction to *Hidden Words*, p. vii (1954 edn.).
22. The terms 'idle fancy', 'fancy' or 'fancies' are used in various passages in Bahá'u'lláh's writings. See, for example, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 79, 80, 86 and 107; and *Gleanings*, pp. 245, 284, 299 and 337. For 'vain imaginings' see, for example, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 41, 58, 62, 79 and 107.
23. Jer. 4:14.
24. Jer. 3:17.
25. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 253.
26. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets*, p. 70.
27. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 235.
28. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets*, p. 220.

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29. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 243.
30. 'Vapour in the desert' is used in the English translation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 61. Rodwell translates Sura 24:39 (Light) as follows: 'But as to the infidels, their works are like the vapour in a plain which the thirsty dreameth to be water, until when he cometh unto it, he findeth it not aught, but findeth that God is with him; and He fully payeth him his account: for swift to take account is God.'
31. In North American Indian mythology, for example, the trickster is an ambiguous, less sober type of cultural or mythic hero who, most often in animal guise (coyote, raven, hare, blue jay, etc.), continues or alters the work of creation. Although often employing deceit and cunning, the trickster usually performs feats which are beneficial to humanity: the use of fire, the practice of medicine, the art of agriculture and so on.
32. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 34.
33. Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words*, Persian no. 45.
34. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 92.
35. *ibid.*
36. Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Compilation*, vol. 2, no. 1301, p. 13.
37. *ibid.* vol. 1, no. 884, pp. 404-5.
38. *ibid.* vol. 2, no. 1327, p. 22.
39. Bahá'u'lláh, *Seven Valleys*, p. 7.
40. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 195.
41. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 338.
42. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in *Ten Days*, p. 30.
43. Jer. 2:25.
44. Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words*, Persian no. 26.
45. 'But the love which sometimes exists between friends is not (true) love, because it is subject to transmutation; this is merely fascination.' 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 181.
46. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 93.
47. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 17.
48. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in *Lights*, no. 1730, p. 512.
49. Matt. 5:39.
50. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 251.
51. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in *Ten Days*, p. 30.
52. *ibid.*
53. *ibid.*
54. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections*, p. 76.
55. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 93.
56. *ibid.* p. 217.
57. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in *Dairy of Juliet Thompson*, p. 69.
58. See, for example, Matt. 9:32, Luke 4:35 and Luke 8:30-3. The word 'demon' is used in the Revised Standard Version, whereas the King James

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- version uses the word 'devil'.
59. Bell, *Way of the Wolf*, p. 48.
60. See *ibid.*, pp. 46-53.
61. For example: 'Great indeed is the blessedness of him who attaineth Thy presence, drinketh the wine of reunion proffered by the hand of Thy bounteousness . . . gaineth admittance into the most exalted Paradise and attaineth the station of revelation and vision before the throne of Thy majesty' (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets*, p. 116).
62. Other names have been used to contrast this illusory nature of the imagination with its creative or visionary functions. Blake and Coleridge, for example, called this function of the imagination 'Fancy', which is not to be confused, of course, with Bahá'u'lláh's negative use of 'idle fancy'.
63. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in *Ten Days*, p. 31.
64. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 94.
65. Prov. 29:18.
66. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ch. 13.
67. 'Imagination', p. 374.
68. *ibid.*
69. *ibid.* p. 375.
70. Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, 'Book Fourteenth-Conclusion. *The Prelude* is generally recognized to be the key document for the interpretation of Wordsworth's life and poetry.
71. 'Imagination', p. 374.
72. *ibid.*
73. *ibid.*
74. *ibid.*
75. Incidentally, Bahá'ís would read into another Proverb of Blake's 'The pride of the peacock is the glory of God', a prefiguration of the apocalyptic personage of Bahá'u'lláh.
76. 'Imagination', p. 373.
77. *ibid.*

*Chapter 8*  
*Some Parameters of the Concept of Spirituality*  
pp. 196-222

1. Most of the dialogue between Socrates and Euthyphro concerns the distinction between piety and impiety and only peripherally concerns justice. Euthyphro claims to know the distinction, asserting that impiety and murder are offences against the gods. Socrates joins the discussion with the question: 'And what is piety, and what is impiety?' See *The Works of Plato*.
2. A note from Professor Donald Wade's course 'Architects of Modern

- Religious Thought', Victoria College, University of Toronto, 1970. I have been unable to locate the dictum in Whitehead's writings.
3. Bill Hatcher's monograph 'The Concept of Spirituality' defines the meaning of spirituality and indicates the process of spiritual growth by examining the nature of man from a Bahá'í viewpoint and the requisite 'tools for spiritual growth'. Hatcher also examines some of the collective implications for spirituality. (The Association for Bahá'í Studies, Ottawa, 1982). See also Shapur Rassekh's essay 'Spiritualité dans le monde d'aujourd'hui' ('Spirituality in Today's World'), *La Pensée Bahá'ie*, Décembre 1983, no. 86, pp. 3-15.
  4. See Appendix 1.
  5. Wright, *Psychology of Moral Behaviour*, p. 232. See the whole chapter 'Religion, Education and Morality', pp. 229-47.
  6. The purpose of the following comments is not to denigrate Dr Gerald Jampolsky's book which, judging by its popularity, has been instrumental in the personal transformation of many, but simply to point out that the categories and themes that Jampolsky pursues in his book are for the most part intrinsically religious. Either Jampolsky is not aware of this, which is unlikely, or he has chosen in the interests of a greater appeal to put love, rather than God, at the centre of his spiritual psychology.
  7. 1 John 4:8.
  8. Mark 10: 15.
  9. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, p. 61.
  10. See 'Man's Knowledge of God' in 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 220-2.
  11. ibid. p. 84. For a more complete discussion see 'Outward Forms and Symbols Must be Used to Convey Intellectual Conceptions' in ibid. pp. 83-6.
  12. John 4:24.
  13. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophus* quoted in *Words About God*, p. 96.
  14. Carnap, 'The Elimination of Metaphysics through the Logical Analysis of Language' in Ayer, *Logical Positivism*, p. 67.
  15. ibid. p. 66.
  16. ibid. p. 76.
  17. Aquinas, 'Quaestiones Disputatae de Potentia Dei', 7, 5 to 14, quoted in *Words About God*, p. 1.
  18. See particularly the chapter 'Science: Conjectures and Refutations'.
  19. Medawar, *Threat and the Glory*, p. 100.
  20. See Hesse, *Models and Analogies in Science*.
  21. MacCormac, *Metaphor and Myth*, p. 36.
  22. ibid. pp. 34-5.
  23. ibid. p. 135.
  24. See the chapter 'Metaphor and Myth in Science and Religion' in ibid.

- pp. 135-57.
25. Interestingly enough, the so-called King James or 'authorized version' of 1611 was never in reality authorized by James or any convocation of the church or parliament. It was intended to be a revision of the popular Bishops' Bible of 1568 which followed the earlier translations of Tyndale and Coverdale and the mysterious translation of Thomas Matthew of 1537, which managed to claim to be licensed by Henry VIII. See James Moffatt, *A New Translation of the Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments*, pp. xxxviii-xxxix.
26. A good anthology of Persian poems spanning a millennium and translated into rhyming metrical English verse by such translator-scholars as E.G. Browne, A.J. Arberry, Edward FitzGerald and Sir E. Denison Ross is published in *Persian Poems*, edited by A.J. Arberry.
27. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 85.
28. *ibid.* p. 84.
29. Frye, *Educated Imagination*, p. 10.
30. *ibid.* pp. 8, 44.
31. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections*, p. 292.
32. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, para. 5.
33. Bahá'u'lláh's principle of collective security as explained by 'Abdu'l-Bahá is to take effect once an inviolable universal peace treaty is concluded by all nations. Under the provisions of the treaty, which is to operate in a greatly demilitarized world, were any nation to commit a clear act of aggression against another, all of the nations of the earth would rise up to crush the aggressor. See 'Bahá'u'lláh's Principle of Collective Security', in Shoghi Effendi, *World Order*, pp. 191-4.
34. Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Bahá'í World*, p. 102.
35. Háfiz, quoted in *Persian Poems*, p. 62.
36. This section highlights and reflects upon points taken from Walter Principe's article 'Toward Defining Spirituality' in *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses*, 12/2, Spring 1983, pp. 127-41.
37. Among these works are Auguste Saudreau's *La vie d'union à Dieu* (1900) and his popular *Manuel de spiritualité* (1916); Pierre Pourrat's influential four-volume *La spiritualité catholique* (1918-28); and Joseph de Guibert's 'Les études de théologie ascétiques et mystiques: Comment les comprendre?' in the first number of *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique* (1920). Guibert's study broadened the understanding of the word 'spirituality' to include parameters other than ascetic and mystical theology. See *ibid.* p. 133, note 15.
38. Fraling, cited in *ibid.* p. 127.
39. Louis Boyer's *Introduction à la vie spirituelle* (1960) prompted reviews from Jean Daniélou in 'A propos d'une introduction à la vie spirituelle', *Etudes* 94 (1961), pp. 170-4 and from Maurice Giuliani in 'Une introduction à la vie spirituelle', *Christus* 8 (1961), pp. 396-411. Also noteworthy is Jean

Leclercq's article 'Spiritualitas' in *Studi medievali* 3 (1962), pp. 279-96. Cited in *ibid.* p. 127, note 3. The discussion centred around the question of whether or not there was one or many Christian spiritualities.

40. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, p. 190.
41. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in *Bahá'í World Faith*, p. 406.
42. *ibid.* p. 367.
43. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 195.
44. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets*, p. 90.
45. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 33.
46. See Monk, Hofheinz et. al., *Exploring Religious Meaning*, p. 144. I have added some personal interpretations.
47. 'Ono Sokyo', *Shinto: The Kami Way*, p. 7.
48. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, p. 58.
49. Gen. 2:7.
50. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 59.
51. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in '*Abdu'l-Bahá in London*', p. 107.
52. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*. p. 59.
53. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 126.
54. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 206.
55. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Makátb*, cited in *Nakhjavání, Response*, p. 13.
56. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 236.
57. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets*, p. 142.
58. *ibid.* pp. 143-4.
59. Shoghi Effendi rejects the theories of divine incarnation, anthropomorphism and pantheism: 'So crude and fantastic a theory of Divine incarnation is as removed from, and incompatible with, the essentials of Bahá'í belief as are the no less inadmissible pantheistic and anthropomorphic conceptions of God – both of which the utterances of Bahá'u'lláh emphatically repudiate and the fallacy of which they expose' (*World Order*, pp. 112-13).
60. Whitehead wished to supplant what he viewed to be an overly transcendent and immutable concept of God by offering a more dynamic, on-going notion of God as immanent in creation, nature and history. However, in his efforts to temporalize God in the present moment and in nature he did violence to the changeless, eternal essence and transcendence of God. Whitehead says for example: 'It is as true to say that God transcends the world, as that the world transcends God.' And: 'It is as true to say that the world is immanent in God, as that God is immanent in the world' (p. 93). See Whitehead, 'God and the World' in Cousins, *Process Theology*. In Cousin's edition, Whitehead's essay is taken from the last chapter of Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, pp. 519-533, his most important statement on God and the world.
61. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets*, p. 146.
62. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, lines 469-79.

63. *ibid.* lines 491-5.
64. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, p. 308.
65. *ibid.* p. 310.

*Chapter 9*  
*Essential Spirituality: Faith, Love, Knowledge*  
pp. 223-64

1. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, p. 14. Tillich defined himself as being a 'fifty fifty' existentialist and essentialist theologian, two forms which he said 'belong together'. See Tillich, *Perspectives* p. 245.
2. Letter of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, 17 August 1976.
3. Shoghi Effendi has translated the word 'jugular' in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh as 'life-vein': 'The one true God is My witness! This most great, this fathomless and surging Ocean is near, astonishingly near, unto you. Behold it is closer to you than your life-vein!' Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 326.
4. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets*, p. 189.
5. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 338.
6. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in '*Abdu'l-Bahá in London*', p. 106.
7. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in *Bahá'í World Faith*, p. 364.
8. *ibid.*
9. John: 15:1, 4-5.
10. Eph. 4:15-16.
11. Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations*, p. 321.
12. Schweitzer, *Mysticism of Paul*, p. 3.
13. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in *Bahá'í World Faith*, p. 383.
14. See '*Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions*', pp. 300-5.
15. Heb. 11:1.
16. du Nouy, *Human Destiny*, p. 256.
17. Shoghi Effendi, *World Order*, p. 114.
18. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in *Bahá'í World Faith*, p. 274.
19. *Philosophy: An Introduction*. P.B. Medwar has criticized the concept of induction which is commonly – and in Medawar's view, erroneously – believed to lie at the basis of science. See Medwar, *Threat and the Glory*, pp. 96-100.
20. *Introduction to Philosophy*.
21. Sir Peter Medawar in *Threat and the Glory*, p. 97, writes that 'error and luck' are 'two very familiar elements in scientific thought and discovery'.
22. See note on *a priori*, *Philosophy: An Introduction*, p. 78.
23. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 157.
24. *ibid.*
25. *ibid.* pp. 157-8.

26. *ibid.* p. 158.
27. This is Maurice Gaudefroy-Demombyne's account of the beginnings of Muḥammad's revelation (*Mahomet* 72, 74). Gaudefroy-Demombyne bases this account on a number of sources including Tabari, Ibn Sa'd, Al Ainī, Ya'qubi and the modern authorities Nöldeke, Tor Andrae, Horowitz and Ahrens.
28. Qu'rān, Sura 96:1-8 (Thick Blood, or Clots of Blood), pp. 19-20.
29. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 103.
30. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 300.
31. Quoted by Anjam Khursheed in *Science and Religion*, p. 68.
32. Smith, 'Science and Theology: The Unstable Detente', in *Beyond the Post-Modern Mind*. p. 111.
33. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 300.
34. I have alluded to some of these books and papers in 'Prolegomena to a Bahá'í Theology', *Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, 5:1, March-June, 1992, pp. 49-51. Since then the output in the areas of Bahá'í theology and metaphysics has increased.
35. There seems to be a certain ambiguity as to whether the phrase *Regina Scientiarium* belongs to philosophy or theology. Theologians referred to theology in this manner, but according to Will Durant, philosophy was so designated during the Middle Ages. See Durant, *Pleasures of Philosophy*.
36. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í World Faith*, p. 383.
37. *ibid.* pp. 383-4.
38. *Penguin Dictionary of Religions*, p. 328.
39. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, p. 410.
40. Tennant writes that theology 'also includes the comparative study of religions and the psychology of religious experience'. See 'Theology', *Encyclopedia Britannica*, vol. 22, 1959. Cambridge philosopher Tennant elaborated his views of a comprehensive theology in his two-volume work *Philosophical Theology* and in his *Philosophy of the Sciences*.
41. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 35.
42. Holley, *Introduction* to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. viii.
43. See 'Prolegomena to Bahá'í Theology', *Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, 5:1, March-June 1992, p. 36.
44. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in *Compilation*, vol. 2, no. 2076, pp. 346-7.
45. Although the epistle bears the apostle Paul's name, it was not written by him, for the language and theology differ too much from that of St Paul. Paul's authorship of the document was questioned even in the first few centuries and was later doubted by the reformers, especially Calvin and Luther. Today it is generally accepted that Paul is not the author of this epistle. Hebrews is, however, a fine example of Hellenistic rhetoric that has been adapted to suit the purposes of Christian teaching. See *Understanding the New Testament*, p. 428.
46. Heb. 11:1-3.

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47. 'The Originals', CBC television broadcast, 23 November 1990. In this talk, Frye was discussing the implications of the Bible as the great literary code, as well as the implications of faith, hope and love for modern society, which he viewed as being in a 'dreadful mess'.
48. Heb. 12:1.
49. *Philosophy, An Introduction*, p. 49.
50. *ibid.*
51. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 85.
52. The Báb, quoted in *Dawn-Breakers*, p. 94.
53. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in *Compilation*, vol. 1, no. 309, p. 156.
54. Boal, 'What is Faith?' Unpublished manuscript presented at the annual meeting of the Canadian Association for Studies on the Bahá'í Faith, Niagara Falls, Ontario, 1980. Boal based his work on extracts from William James, L.A. Reid, Paul Tillich, Sören Kierkegaard, John Dewey and Gordon Allport.
55. The following discussion of belief is based largely on Cavanagh's 'Belief' in *Introduction to the Study of Religion*, pp. 48-63. I have, however, adapted Cavanagh's examples.
56. *ibid.* p. 52.
57. Limitations of space exclude going into elaborate proofs of the divine manifestationship of Bahá'u'lláh. However interested readers are referred to Abu'l-Fadl, *The Bahá'í Proofs*. For a modern treatment of this topic see Matthews, *The Challenge of Bahá'u'lláh*.
58. In addition to Smith's volume, I have also benefited from the insights of Colin Grant in 'Smith's and the Ethics of Belief' in *Sciences Religieuses/Studies in Religion*, 13:4, 1984, pp. 461-77.
59. Smith, *Faith and Belief*.
60. *ibid.* pp. 41 ff, 74. See also chapter Five, 'Credo and the Roman Catholic Church,' pp. 69-104.
61. *ibid.* p. 120.
62. See more on this distinction in Price, "'Belief in' and 'Belief That'", *Religious Studies* 1 (1966), pp. 5-27.
63. Smith, *On Understanding Islam*, p. 133.
64. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in *Compilation*, vol. 2, no. 2076, p. 346.
65. Universal House of Justice, *Promise*, para. 15.
66. For a compilation of such exhortations, see National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Hawaiian Islands, *Victory Promises*.
67. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in *Bahá'í World Faith*, p. 397.
68. Jordan, *Becoming Your True Self*, p. 32.
69. *The Comfortable Pew* is the title of a critique of organized religion written by the well-known Canadian journalist Pierre Berton.
70. Heb. 11:8.
71. Tennyson, 'Ulysses', lines 56-70.
72. See 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 87-8.

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73. Bahá'u'lláh, *Seven Valleys*, p. 10.
74. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 300.
75. Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words*, Arabic no. 4.
76. 1 John: 4:19. All of 1 John 4, except verses 1-3 which deal with the spirit of antichrist as those who do not recognize that 'Jesus Christ is come in the flesh', is an exposé on the love of God and the love of Christ. Verse 19 quoted here ostensibly refers to God but it could also be interpreted to refer to Jesus.
77. Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words*, Arabic no.3.
78. Gen. 4:1.
79. Bahá'u'lláh, *Seven Valleys*, p. 9.
80. Lull, *Book of the Lover and the Beloved*, p. 84 quoted in *Dazzling Darkness*, p. 147. Lull, a Christian missionary and philosopher from Majorca, made it his mission in life to convert Jews and especially Muslims to Christianity.
81. St Augustine, *Confessions*, Book X, 38.
82. St Francis of Sale, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, p. 135.
83. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, p. 256.
84. The analogy of the wind and the boat was used by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His discussion of free will and determinism. See 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 248-50.
85. Bahá'u'lláh *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 192.
86. Blake, 'The Divine Image'.
87. Matt. 22:37-9.
88. Peck, *Road Less Travelled*, p. 92.
89. ibid. pp. 84, 90.
90. ibid. pp. 86-90.
91. See Chapter 5.
92. Peck, *Road Less Travelled*, p. 88.
93. ibid. p. 86.
94. ibid. p. 83.
95. ibid. p. 88.
96. ibid. p. 83.
97. ibid. p. 81.
98. Frankl, *Doctor and the Soul*.
99. ibid. p. 134.
100. ibid. p. 135.
101. ibid. p. 150.
102. ibid. p. 135.
103. 'Abdu'l-Bahá identifies the four kinds of love as: 1) the love of God for man, 2) the love of man for God, 3) the love of God for the Self of God and 4) the love of 'man for man' (humanity). See 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, pp. 179-81.
104. Lewis, *Four Loves*, pp. 86-7.

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105. *ibid.* p. 87.
106. *ibid.* p. 94.
107. *ibid.* p. 99.
108. *ibid.* pp. 99-100.
109. *ibid.* p. 106.
110. *ibid.*
111. See Chaudhuri, 'Wisdom in Human Relationships'. What follows is a paraphrase of Chaudhuri's thought.  
*ibid.* p. 26. 1<sup>34</sup> - 1<sup>35</sup>
113. *ibid.* 1<sup>35</sup> - 1<sup>36</sup>
114. ~~ibid.~~ + *Clandon: Rosamond Sale*
115. See Spencer, *Mysticism in World Religion*, pp. 253-6.
116. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam*, p. 11, quoted in Spencer, *Mysticism in World Religion*, p. 318.
117. Smith, *Al-Ghazzáli the Mystic*, p. 177, quoted in Spencer, *Mysticism*, p. 318.
118. Quoted in Spencer, *Mysticism*, p. 254.
119. *ibid.* pp. 253-5.
120. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections*, p. 203.
121. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, p. 256.
122. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 181.
123. *ibid.*
124. *ibid.* p. 180.
125. *ibid.* p. 181.
126. *ibid.*
127. See 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, pp. 449-52.
128. Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words*, Arabic no. 47.
129. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, p. 451.
130. *ibid.* p. 452.
131. Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words*, Arabic no. 55.
132. Gen. 1:27.
133. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 153.
134. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 99.
135. *ibid.* p. 76.
136. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, p. 257.
137. Spencer, *Mysticism in World Religion*, pp. 201-5 and Isadore Epstein, *Judaism*, pp. 234, 244.
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1. Toynbee, quoted in Sabet, *Heavens*, pp. 14-15.

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