

Faith & Trust

Recently, the following quote from Baha'u'llah was read at a community feast:

O My servants! Sorrow not if, in these days and on this earthly plane, things contrary to your wishes have been ordained and manifested by God, for days of blissful joy, of heavenly delight, are assuredly in store for you. Worlds, holy and spiritually glorious, will be unveiled to your eyes. You are destined by Him, in this world and hereafter, to partake of their benefits, to share in their joys, and to obtain a portion of their sustaining grace. To each and every one of them you will, no doubt, attain.

(Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 329)

I pondered the words and searched my soul for the reality check it needed. Yes, I profess that Baha'u'llah is the messenger from God in this day. But do I believe these words? Trust in God's promise? I seem to be hypocritical in actions; my faith subdued by my apparent reality focus. Do I dare to believe and trust? Was He in fact speaking to my neighbor and I just conversation dipped? I am too much inside myself to accept these words. Too afraid, I need to control my reality in my allusion of reality. My self preservation requires my locking self in and out the "promise." So, what do the writings tell me to help me grow into this station of acceptance and surrender?

Abdu'l-Baha speaks of Haji Muhammad-Riday-i-Shirazi in Memorials of the Faithful, p. 116:

He was outstanding as to character, and lived after the commandments of God: tranquil and long-suffering, in his surrender to God's will he was selflessness itself. He had no personal aims whatever, no feeling of attachment to this fleeting world. His one desire was to please his Lord, his one hope, to walk the holy path.

Wow, tranquil and long-suffering I doubt that those would be the words spoke about me, long-suffering maybe but not tranquil and certainly entwined and attached to this fleeting world. Hoping to better myself but not too fast or too much at a time. Somewhat selfless in a selfish way.

And should the servant ascend to even loftier heights, quit this mortal world of dust, and seek to ascend unto the celestial abode, he will then pass from this city into the City of Absolute Nothingness, that is, of dying to self and living in God. In this station, this most exalted habitation, this journey of utter self-effacement, the wayfarer forgetteth his soul, spirit, body, and very being, immerseth himself in the sea of nothingness, and liveth on earth as one unworthy of mention. Nor will one find any sign of his existence, for he hath vanished from the realm of the visible and attained unto the heights of self-abnegation.

Were We to recount the mysteries of this city, the dominions of the hearts of men would be laid to waste in the intensity of their longing for this mighty station. For this is the station wherein the effulgent glories of the Beloved are revealed to the sincere lover and

the resplendent lights of the Friend are cast upon the severed heart that is devoted to Him.

How can a true lover continue to exist when once the effulgent glories of the Beloved are revealed? How can the shadow endure when once the sun hath shone forth? How can a devoted heart have any being before the existence of the Object of its devotion? Nay, by the One in Whose hand is my soul! In this station, the seeker's complete surrender and utter effacement before his Creator will be such that, were he to search the East and the West, and traverse land, sea, mountain and plain, he would find no trace of his own self or of any other soul.

(Baha'u'llah, Gems of Divine Mysteries, p. 70)

How can I believe and trust?

And now concerning thy question regarding the soul of man and its survival after death. 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. The movement of My Pen is stilled when it attempteth to befittingly describe the loftiness and glory of so exalted a station. The honor with which the Hand of Mercy will invest the soul is such as no tongue can adequately reveal, nor any other earthly agency describe. Blessed is the soul which, at the hour of its separation from the body, is sanctified from the vain imaginings of the peoples of the world. Such a soul liveth and moveth in accordance with the Will of its Creator, and entereth the all-highest Paradise. The Maids of Heaven, inmates of the loftiest mansions, will circle around it, and the Prophets of God and His chosen ones will seek its companionship. With them that soul will freely converse, and will recount unto them that which it hath been made to endure in the path of God, the Lord of all worlds. If any man be told that which hath been ordained for such a soul in the worlds of God, the Lord of the throne on high and of earth below, his whole being will instantly blaze out in his great longing to attain that most exalted, that sanctified and resplendent station.... The nature of the soul after death can never be described, nor is it meet and permissible to reveal its whole character to the eyes of men. The Prophets and Messengers of God have been sent down for the sole purpose of guiding mankind to the straight Path of Truth. 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. The light which these souls radiate is responsible for the progress of the world and the advancement of its peoples. They are like unto leaven which leaveneth the world of being, and constitute the animating force through which the arts and wonders of the world are made manifest. Through them the clouds rain their bounty upon men, and the earth bringeth forth its fruits. All things must needs have a cause, a motive power, an animating principle. These souls and symbols of detachment have provided, and will continue to provide, the supreme moving impulse in the world of

being. The world beyond is as different from this world as this world is different from that of the child while still in the womb of its mother. When the soul attaineth the Presence of God, it will assume the form that best befitteth its immortality and is worthy of its celestial habitation. Such an existence is a contingent and not an absolute existence, inasmuch as the former is preceded by a cause, whilst the latter is independent thereof. Absolute existence is strictly confined to God, exalted be His glory. Well is it with them that apprehend this truth. Wert thou to ponder in thine heart the behavior of the Prophets of God thou wouldst assuredly and readily testify that there must needs be other worlds besides this world. The majority of the truly wise and learned have, throughout the ages, as it hath been recorded by the Pen of Glory in the Tablet of Wisdom, borne witness to the truth of that which the holy Writ of God hath revealed. Even the materialists have testified in their writings to the wisdom of these divinely-appointed Messengers, and have regarded the references made by the Prophets to Paradise, to hell fire, to future reward and punishment, to have been actuated by a desire to educate and uplift the souls of men. Consider, therefore, how the generality of mankind, whatever their beliefs or theories, have recognized the excellence, and admitted the superiority, of these Prophets of God. These Gems of Detachment are acclaimed by some as the embodiments of wisdom, while others believe them to be the mouthpiece of God Himself. How could such Souls have consented to surrender themselves unto their enemies if they believed all the worlds of God to have been reduced to this earthly life? Would they have willingly suffered such afflictions and torments as no man hath ever experienced or witnessed?

(Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 155)

But I am a mere mortal. I need the illusion of self and control. Others have taught me in the school of hard knocks not to trust all.

Know thou for a certainty that whoso disbelieveth in God is neither trustworthy nor truthful. This, indeed, is the truth, the undoubted truth. He that acteth treacherously towards God will, also, act treacherously towards his king. Nothing whatever can deter such a man from evil, nothing can hinder him from betraying his neighbor, nothing can induce him to walk uprightly.

Take heed that thou resign not the reins of the affairs of thy state into the hands of others, and repose not thy confidence in ministers unworthy of thy trust, and be not of them that live in heedlessness. Shun them whose hearts are turned away from thee, and place not thy confidence in them, and entrust them not with thine affairs and the affairs of such as profess thy faith. Beware that thou allow not the wolf to become the shepherd of God's flock, and surrender not the fate of His loved ones to the mercy of the malicious. Expect not that they who violate the ordinances of God will be trustworthy or sincere in the faith they profess. Avoid them, and preserve strict guard over thyself, lest their devices and mischief hurt thee. Turn away from them, and fix thy gaze upon God, thy Lord, the All-Glorious, the Most Bountiful. He that giveth up himself wholly to God, God shall, assuredly, be with him; and he that placeth his complete trust in God, God shall, verily, protect him from whatsoever may harm him, and shield him from the wickedness of every evil plotter.

Wert thou to incline thine ear unto My speech and observe My counsel, God would exalt thee to so eminent a position that the designs of no man on the whole earth can ever touch or hurt thee.

(Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 232)

So, am I worthy of this “promise?”

Say: O my Lord, my Best-Beloved, the Mover of my actions, the Lode Star of my soul, the Voice that crieth in mine inmost being, the Object of mine heart's adoration! Praise be to Thee for having enabled me to turn my face towards Thee, for having set my soul ablaze through remembrance of Thee, for having aided Me to proclaim Thy Name and to sing Thy praises.

My God, my God! If none be found to stray from Thy path, how, then, can the ensign of Thy mercy be unfurled, or the banner of Thy bountiful favor be hoisted? And if iniquity be not committed, what is it that can proclaim Thee to be the Concealer of men's sins, the Ever-Forgiving, the Omniscient, the All-Wise? May my soul be a sacrifice to the trespasses of them that trespass against Thee, for upon such trespasses are wafted the sweet savors of the tender mercies of Thy Name, the Compassionate, the All-Merciful. May my life be laid down for the transgressions of such as transgress against Thee, for through them the breath of Thy grace and the fragrance of Thy loving-kindness are made known and diffused amongst men. May my inmost being be offered up for the sins of them that have sinned against Thee, for it is as a result of such sins that the Day Star of Thy manifold favors revealeth itself above the horizon of Thy bounty, and the clouds of Thy never-failing providence rain down their gifts upon the realities of all created things.

I am he, O my Lord, that hath confessed to Thee the multitude of his evil doings, that hath acknowledged what no man hath acknowledged. I have made haste to attain unto the ocean of Thy forgiveness, and have sought shelter beneath the shadow of Thy most gracious favor. Grant, I beseech Thee, O Thou Who art the Everlasting King and the Sovereign Protector of all men, that I may be enabled to manifest that which shall cause the hearts and souls of men to soar in the limitless immensity of Thy love, and to commune with Thy Spirit. Strengthen me through the power of Thy sovereignty, that I may turn all created things towards the Day Spring of Thy Manifestation and the Source of Thy Revelation. Aid me, O my Lord, to surrender myself wholly to Thy Will, and to arise and serve Thee, for I cherish this earthly life for no other purpose than to compass the Tabernacle of Thy Revelation and the Seat of Thy Glory. Thou seest me, O my God, detached from all else but Thee, and humble and subservient to Thy Will. Deal with me as it beseemeth Thee, and as it befitteth Thy highness and great glory.

(Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 310)

But I am trapped in my habits.

Hear Me, ye mortal birds! In the Rose Garden of changeless splendor a Flower hath begun to bloom, compared to which every other flower is but a thorn, and before the brightness of Whose glory the very essence of beauty must pale and wither. Arise, therefore, and, with the whole enthusiasm of your hearts, with all the eagerness of your souls, the full fervor of your will, and the concentrated efforts of your entire being, strive to attain the paradise of His presence, and endeavor to inhale the fragrance of the incorruptible Flower, to breathe the sweet savors of holiness, and to obtain a portion of this perfume of celestial glory. Whoso followeth this counsel will break his chains asunder, will taste the abandonment of enraptured love, will attain unto his heart's desire, and will surrender his soul into the hands of his Beloved. Bursting through his cage, he will, even as the bird of the spirit, wing his flight to his holy and everlasting nest.

Night hath succeeded day, and day hath succeeded night, and the hours and moments of your lives have come and gone, and yet none of you hath, for one instant, consented to detach himself from that which perisheth. Bestir yourselves, that the brief moments that are still yours may not be dissipated and lost. Even as the swiftness of lightning your days shall pass, and your bodies shall be laid to rest beneath a canopy of dust. What can ye then achieve? How can ye atone for your past failure?

The everlasting Candle shineth in its naked glory. Behold how it hath consumed every mortal veil. O ye moth-like lovers of His light! Brave every danger, and consecrate your souls to its consuming flame. O ye that thirst after Him! Strip yourselves of every earthly affection, and hasten to embrace your Beloved. With a zest that none can equal make haste to attain unto Him. The Flower, thus far hidden from the sight of men, is unveiled to your eyes. In the open radiance of His glory He standeth before you. His voice summoneth all the holy and sanctified beings to come and be united with Him. Happy is he that turneth thereunto; well is it with him that hath attained, and gazed on the light of so wondrous a countenance.

(Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 320)

So how can I change?

O thou who hast surrendered thy will to God! By self-surrender and perpetual union with God is meant that men should merge their will wholly in the Will of God, and regard their desires as utter nothingness beside His Purpose. Whatsoever the Creator commandeth His creatures to observe, the same must they diligently, and with the utmost joy and eagerness, arise and fulfil. They should in no wise allow their fancy to obscure their judgment, neither should they regard their own imaginings as the voice of the Eternal. In the Prayer of Fasting We have revealed: "Should Thy Will decree that out of Thy mouth these words proceed and be addressed unto them, 'Observe, for My Beauty's sake, the fast, O people, and set no limit to its duration,' I swear by the majesty of Thy glory, that every one of them will faithfully observe it, will abstain from whatsoever will violate Thy law, and will continue to do so until they yield up their souls unto Thee." In

this consisteth the complete surrender of one's will to the Will of God. Meditate on this, that thou mayest drink in the waters of everlasting life which flow through the words of the Lord of all mankind, and mayest testify that the one true God hath ever been immeasurably exalted above His creatures. He, verily, is the Incomparable, the Ever-Abiding, the Omniscient, the All-Wise. The station of absolute self-surrender transcendeth, and will ever remain exalted above, every other station.

It behoveth thee to consecrate thyself to the Will of God. Whatsoever hath been revealed in His Tablets is but a reflection of His Will. So complete must be thy consecration, that every trace of worldly desire will be washed from thine heart. This is the meaning of true unity.

Do thou beseech God to enable thee to remain steadfast in this path, and to aid thee to guide the peoples of the world to Him Who is the manifest and sovereign Ruler, Who hath revealed Himself in a distinct attire, Who giveth utterance to a Divine and specific Message. This is the essence of faith and certitude. They that are the worshipers 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.

(Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 337)

From where do I find the strength to change?

I implore Thee, O my Lord, by Thy name the splendors of which have encompassed the earth and the heavens, to enable me so to surrender my will to what Thou hast decreed in Thy Tablets, that I may cease to discover within me any desire except what Thou didst desire through the power of Thy sovereignty, and any will save what Thou didst destine for me by Thy will.

Whither shall I turn, O my God, powerless as I am to discover any other way except the way Thou didst set before Thy chosen Ones? All the atoms of the earth proclaim Thee to be God, and testify that there is none other God besides Thee. Thou hast from eternity been powerful to do what Thou hast willed, and to ordain what Thou hast pleased.

Do Thou destine for me, O my God, what will set me, at all times, towards Thee, and enable me to cleave continually to the cord of Thy grace, and to proclaim Thy name, and to look for whatsoever may flow down from Thy pen. I am poor and desolate, O my Lord, and Thou art the All-Possessing, the Most High. Have pity, then, upon me through the wonders of Thy mercy, and send down upon me, every moment of my life, the things wherewith Thou hast recreated the hearts of all Thy creatures who have recognized Thy unity, and of all Thy people who are wholly devoted to Thee.

(Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations by Baha'u'llah, p. 241)

To whom can I turn for assistance?

Great God! When the stream of utterance reached this stage, We beheld, and lo! the sweet savours of God were being wafted from the dayspring of Revelation, and the morning breeze was blowing out of the Sheba of the Eternal. Its tidings rejoiced anew the heart, and imparted immeasurable gladness to the soul. It made all things new, and brought unnumbered and inestimable gifts from the unknowable Friend. The robe of human praise can never hope to match Its noble stature, and Its shining figure the mantle of utterance can never fit. Without word It unfoldeth the inner mysteries, and without speech It revealeth the secrets of the divine sayings. It teacheth lamentation and moaning to the nightingales warbling upon the bough of remoteness and bereavement, instructeth them in the art of love's ways, and showeth them the secret of heart-surrender. To the flowers of the Ridvan of heavenly reunion It revealeth the endearments of the impassioned lover, and unveileth the charm of the fair. Upon the anemones of the garden of love It bestoweth the mysteries of truth, and within the breasts of lovers It entrusteth the symbols of the innermost subtleties. At this hour, so liberal is the outpouring of Its grace that the holy Spirit itself is envious! It hath imparted to the drop the waves of the sea, and endowed the mote with the splendour of the sun. So great are the overflowings of Its bounty that the foulest beetle hath sought the perfume of the musk, and the bat the light of the sun. It hath quickened the dead with the breath of life, and caused them to speed out of the sepulchres of their mortal bodies. It hath established the ignorant upon the seats of learning, and elevated the oppressor to the throne of justice.

(Baha'u'llah, *The Kitab-i-Iqan*, p. 58)

Your words are true but these are new times and you are not here today for answers to my unique problems.

The question of consultation is of the utmost importance, and is one of the most potent instruments conducive to the tranquillity and felicity of the people. For example, when a believer is uncertain about his affairs, or when he seeketh to pursue a project or trade, the friends should gather together and devise a solution for him. He, in his turn, should act accordingly. Likewise in larger issues, when a problem ariseth, or a difficulty occurreth, the wise should gather, consult, and devise a solution. They should then rely upon the one true God, and surrender to His Providence, in whatever way it may be revealed, for divine confirmations will undoubtedly assist. Consultation, therefore, is one of the explicit ordinances of the Lord of mankind.

(*Compilations, The Compilation of Compilations vol. I*, p. 96)

Won't this leave me open to abuse?

"Let us also bear in mind that the keynote of the Cause of god is not dictatorial authority but humble fellowship, not arbitrary power, but the spirit of frank and loving consultation. Nothing short of the spirit of a true Bahá'í can hope to reconcile the principles of mercy and justice, of freedom and submission, of the sanctity of the right of

the individual and of self-surrender, of vigilance, discretion, and prudence on the one hand, and fellowship, candor, and courage on the other."

(Shoghi Effendi: Bahá'í Administration, pp. 63-64)

Or lead to power seeking?

Such an attitude, however, is not dictated by considerations of selfish expediency, but is actuated, first and foremost, by the broad principle that the followers of Bahá'u'lláh will, under no circumstances, suffer themselves to be involved, whether as individuals or in their collective capacities, in matters that would entail the slightest departure from the fundamental verities and ideals of their Faith. Neither the charges which the uninformed and the malicious may be led to bring against them, nor the allurements of honors and rewards, will ever induce them to surrender their trust or to deviate from their path. Let their words proclaim, and their conduct testify, that they who follow Bahá'u'lláh, in whatever land they reside, are actuated by no selfish ambition, that they neither thirst for power, nor mind any wave of unpopularity, of distrust or criticism, which a strict adherence to their standards might provoke.

(21 March 1932 to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, published in "The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters, pp. 6467)

(Compilations, The Compilation of Compilations vol. I, p. 176)

Is it me or are things getting worse rather than better? How can I hold on to hope in a environment of quickening darkness?

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, the most turbulent in the history of the human race, has reached its end. Dismayed by the deepening moral and social chaos that marked its course, the generality of the world's peoples are eager to leave behind them the memories of the suffering that these decades brought with them. No matter how frail the foundations of confidence in the future may seem, no matter how great the dangers looming on the horizon, humanity appears desperate to believe that, through some fortuitous conjunction of circumstances, it will nevertheless be possible to bend the conditions of human life into conformity with prevailing human desires.

In the light of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh such hopes are not merely illusory, but miss entirely the nature and meaning of the great turning point through which our world has passed in these crucial hundred years. Only as humanity comes to understand the implications of what occurred during this period of history will it be able to meet the challenges that lie ahead. The value of the contribution we as Bahá'ís can make to the process demands that we ourselves grasp the significance of the historic transformation wrought by the twentieth century.

What makes this insight possible for us is the light shed by the rising Sun of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation and the influence it has come to exercise in human affairs. It is this opportunity that the following pages address.

LET US ACKNOWLEDGE AT THE OUTSET the magnitude of the ruin that the human race has brought upon itself during the period of history under review. The loss of life alone has been beyond counting. The disintegration of basic institutions of social order, the violation -- indeed, the abandonment -- of standards of decency, the betrayal of the life of the mind through surrender to ideologies as squalid as they have been empty, the invention and deployment of monstrous weapons of mass annihilation, the bankrupting of entire nations and the reduction of masses of human beings to hopeless poverty, the reckless destruction of the environment of the planet -- such are only the more obvious in a catalogue of horrors unknown to even the darkest of ages past. Merely to mention them is to call to mind the Divine warnings expressed in Bahá'u'lláh's words of a century ago: "O heedless ones! Though the wonders of My mercy have encompassed all created things, both visible and invisible, and though the revelations of My grace and bounty have permeated every atom of the universe, yet the rod with which I can chastise the wicked is grievous, and the fierceness of Mine anger against them terrible."1

Lest any observer of the Cause be tempted to misunderstand such warnings as only metaphorical, Shoghi Effendi, drawing some of the historical implications, wrote in 1941:

A tempest, unprecedented in its violence, unpredictable in its course, catastrophic in its immediate effects, unimaginably glorious in its ultimate consequences, is at present sweeping the face of the earth. Its driving power is remorselessly gaining in range and momentum. Its cleansing force, however much undetected, is increasing with every passing day. Humanity, gripped in the clutches of its devastating power, is smitten by the evidences of its resistless fury. It can neither perceive its origin, nor probe its significance, nor discern its outcome. Bewildered, agonized and helpless, it watches this great and mighty wind of God invading the remotest and fairest regions of the earth, rocking its foundations, deranging its equilibrium, sundering its nations, disrupting the homes of its peoples, wasting its cities, driving into exile its kings, pulling down its bulwarks, uprooting its institutions, dimming its light, and harrowing up the souls of its inhabitants

(Commissioned by The Universal House of Justice, Century of Light)

Why does God let it be this way?

Turning now to the questions you have posed, you are encouraged to study carefully the passages in the Holy Writings, and especially the Tablets and talks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, pertaining to the nature of man. Every human being has a spiritual nature and also a material nature; his purpose is to subdue the material nature, which inclines him to evil,

and, with the aid of Divine Teachings, to develop his spiritual nature so that he can manifest praiseworthy attributes. An individual who chooses to surrender to the promptings of his material nature can sink to levels of depravity and bestiality which are abhorrent to the discerning eye, and which are totally unworthy of the human station. The Bahá'í Teachings inform us that there is no independent force of evil in creation, but terms such as "devil" or Satan" are used in sacred books as symbols of the promptings of the lower nature of man.

(The Universal House of Justice, 1985 Dec 02, Child Abuse, Psychology and Knowledge of Self)

So it is up to me to choose.

To be born in this Day and to be the recipient of such favours is the greatest of God's bounties to man. But this privilege carries with it great responsibilities, too. For once the believer has recognized the Manifestation of God, his function is to obey His commandments faithfully. If such loyalty and devotion are not whole-hearted and unqualified, he cannot be called steadfast in the Covenant of God. The destiny of the true believer and the heights to which he can attain are dependent upon his sincerity and faithfulness in the Cause of God.

When the individual recognizes Bahá'u'lláh and is assured of His divine station, he then enters the 'ark'. The spiritual energies released by Bahá'u'lláh, as well as His Teachings, will assist him to advance and deepen in the Cause, but at the same time his tests will correspondingly multiply. For the faith of a believer is tested in various ways. Some are afflicted with suffering and persecution, others have spiritual battles which may last a lifetime. But if one has faith and is ready at all times to surrender his will fully to that of Bahá'u'lláh, he can win through. Otherwise, any trace of self or passion, of desire for and attachment to earthly things, will bar his spiritual advancement, and may in the end kill the spark of his faith altogether.

The station to which a true believer can attain in this day is extremely high. This is because Bahá'u'lláh has ushered in the Day of God and has shed His glory upon mankind. The world of being has become filled with the ocean of His Revelation and mankind has been given a new capacity. The following are the words of Bahá'u'lláh concerning the station of the true believer:

'O people of Baha! The river that is Life indeed hath flowed for your sakes. Quaff ye in My name, despite them that have disbelieved in God, the Lord of Revelation. We have made you to be the hands of Our Cause. Render ye victorious this Wronged One, Who hath been sore-tried in the hands of the workers of iniquity. He, verily, will aid every one that aideth Him, and will remember every one that remembereth Him. To this beareth witness this Tablet that hath shed the splendour of the loving-kindness of your

Lord, the All-Glorious, the All-Compelling.' 'Blessed are the people of Baha! God beareth Me witness! They are the solace of the eye of creation. Through them the universes have been adorned, and the Preserved Tablet embellished. They are the ones who have sailed on the ark of complete independence, with their faces set towards the Day-Spring of Beauty. How great is their blessedness that they have attained unto what their Lord, the Omniscient, the All-Wise, hath willed. Through their light the heavens have been adorned, and the faces of those that have drawn nigh unto Him made to shine.'
'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. For this reason it hath been decreed that in this earthly life the full measure of the glory of his own station should remain concealed from the eyes of such a believer.' *'If the veil be lifted, and the full glory of the station of those who have turned wholly towards God, and in their love for Him renounced the world, be made manifest, the entire creation would be dumbfounded.'*(4)

And 'Abdu'l-Bahá has written these words:

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'.(5)

Whoever achieves this station will become the embodiment of selflessness, humility and servitude, will die to himself and live in God. Such a believer is indeed worthy, as Bahá'u'lláh mentions in the Tablet of the Holy Mariner, to 'soar upon the wings of the spirit unto that station which the Lord hath exalted above all mention in the worlds below', to 'wing through space even as the favoured birds in the realm of eternal reunion', and to 'know the mysteries hidden in the Seas of light'.

(Adib Taherzadeh, The Revelation of Baha'u'llah v 1, p. 239)

I question my certitude and any faith, question my being and my ability to trust, how do I proceed?

But if everything else fails, the only remedy for the individual who still has a glimmer of faith in his heart, but who has doubts about the Cause, is to admit that he may be wrong in his assessment of the teachings of the Faith, to affirm that Bahá'u'lláh's knowledge is of God, and to surrender his feelings and thoughts completely to Him. Once he submits himself in this way and perseveres in doing so with sincerity and truthfulness, the

channels of the grace of God open and his heart becomes the recipient of the light of true knowledge. He will discover, some time in his life, either by intuition or through prayer and meditation, the answer to all his problems and objections. Every trace of conflict will disappear from his mind. He will readily understand the reasons behind those very teachings which previously baffled his intellect, and will find many mysteries enshrined in the utterances of Bahá'u'lláh, mysteries of which he was completely unaware in earlier days.

The following words of Bahá'u'lláh in The Hidden Words demonstrate that not until man submits himself to God can he attain to the knowledge of His Revelation:

O Son of Dust!

Blind thine eyes, that thou mayest behold My beauty; stop thine ears, that thou mayest hearken unto the sweet melody of My voice; empty thyself of all learning, that thou mayest partake of My knowledge; and sanctify thyself from riches, that thou mayest obtain a lasting share from the ocean of My eternal wealth. Blind thine eyes, that is, to all save My beauty; stop thine ears to all save My word; empty thyself of all learning save the knowledge of Me; that with a clear vision, a pure heart and an attentive ear thou mayest enter the court of My holiness.[13]

(Adib Taherzadeh, The Revelation of Baha'u'llah v 2, p. 218)

To subdue one's self and to surrender one's will to the will of the Manifestation of God may prove to be the most difficult task for man to achieve. When the individual achieves this exalted goal of submitting himself to God, he becomes the recipient of His boundless favours.

All living creatures submit themselves in a physical sense to the forces of nature. A tree shows no resistance to the rain and the rays of the sun. It receives their life-giving energies and as a result it grows and flourishes. In a spiritual sense, man must do the same if he is to receive the bounties of God. The only difference is that whereas other living creatures submit themselves involuntarily to the forces of nature, man has free will to decide his options.

'Abdu'l-Bahá in one of His Tablets states that the highest degree of sacrifice in the path of God for a believer is to surrender his will entirely to the will of God, and become a true servant of the loved ones of the Blessed Beauty. For God, in His essence, is exalted above man's servitude to Him. Therefore to become a servant of God, one must serve His loved ones. 'Abdu'l-Bahá in this Tablet reiterates His station of servitude stating that in His innermost heart, He considers Himself to be the lowliest servant of the believers, and that His greatest ambition is to be able to render devoted service to each and every one of the friends.

(Adib Taherzadeh, The Revelation of Baha'u'llah v 3, p. 404)

How do I justify this faith and trust?

One of the strangest things witnessed is that the materialists of today are proud of their natural instincts and bondage. They state that nothing is entitled to belief and acceptance except that which is sensible or tangible. By their own statements they are captives of nature, unconscious of the spiritual world, uninformed of the divine Kingdom and unaware of heavenly bestowals. If this be a virtue the animal has attained it to a superlative degree, for the animal is absolutely ignorant of the realm of spirit and out of touch with the inner world of conscious realization. The animal would agree with the materialist in denying the existence of that which transcends the senses. If we admit that being limited to the plane of the senses is a virtue the animal is indeed more virtuous than man, for it is entirely bereft of that which lies beyond, absolutely oblivious of the kingdom of God and its traces whereas God has deposited within the human creature an illimitable power by which he can rule the world of nature.

(Abdu'l-Baha, Baha'i World Faith - Abdu'l-Baha Section, p. 235)

Define the requirements of faith?

In former times men either became believers, or else they became enemies of the cause of God. For instance, in the time of Moses, all those who believed in him as a prophet and in the unity of God, became of the faithful. In the time of Christ, those who believed in the divinity of the father and that Jesus was the word, became disciples. Faith consisted in the blind acceptance of these truths and those who accepted were considered saved, the rest were doomed to perdition.

But in this day the question is far more important. Faith does not consist in belief, it consists in deeds. It is not sufficient to believe in Baha'o'llah and to say, "I am of the people of El-Abha"; we must act in accordance with the teachings of Baha'o'llah, who commands us to become centers of divine attraction, so that the attributes of God may emanate from us, that we may become wise and well intentioned to all the peoples of the earth in order to better the condition of all.

We must look upon our enemies with a sin-covering eye and act with justice when confronted with any injustice whatsoever, forgive all, consider the whole of humanity as our own family, the whole earth as our own country, be sympathetic with all suffering, nurse the sick, offer a shelter to the exiled, help the poor and those in need, dress all wounds and share the happiness of each one. Be compassionate, so that your actions will shine like unto the light streaming forth from the lamp. If the whole world should arise to deny this cause, we must not fight. Our only role is to spread the teachings. If it be accepted, all is well; if not, leave the people to God.

If we see a man acting after this manner we can say of him: "Verily, he is a reflector of servitude!" We cannot conceive of a star without light, a tree without seed. If we claim to be followers of light we must diffuse the light through our actions. To label ourselves will not be sufficient. (Abdu'l-Baha, Divine Philosophy, p. 41)

In the Name of God, the Exalted, the Most High

THE source of all good is trust in God, submission unto His command, and contentment with His holy will and pleasure.

The essence of wisdom is the fear of God, the dread of His scourge and punishment, and the apprehension of His justice and decree.

The essence of religion is to testify unto that which the Lord hath revealed, and follow that which He hath ordained in His mighty Book.

The source of all glory is acceptance of whatsoever the Lord hath bestowed, and contentment with that which God hath ordained.

The essence of love is for man to turn his heart to the Beloved One, and sever himself from all else but Him, and desire naught save that which is the desire of his Lord.

True remembrance is to make mention of the Lord, the All-Praised, and forget aught else beside Him.

True reliance is for the servant to pursue his profession and calling in this world, to hold fast unto the Lord, to seek naught but His grace, inasmuch as in His Hands is the destiny of all His servants.

The essence of detachment is for man to turn his face towards the courts of the Lord, to enter His Presence, behold His Countenance, and stand as witness before Him.

The essence of understanding is to testify to one's poverty, and submit to the Will of the Lord, the Sovereign, the Gracious, the All-Powerful.

The source of courage and power is the promotion of the Word of God, and steadfastness in His Love.

The essence of charity is for the servant to recount the blessings of his Lord, and to render thanks unto Him at all times and under all conditions.

The essence of faith is fewness of words and abundance of deeds; he whose words exceed his deeds, know verily his death is better than his life.

The essence of true safety is to observe silence, to look at the end of things and to renounce the world.

The beginning of magnanimity is when man expendeth his wealth on himself, on his family and on the poor among his brethren in his Faith.

The essence of wealth is love for Me; whoso loveth Me is the possessor of all things, and he that loveth Me not is indeed of the poor and needy. This is that which the Finger of Glory and Splendour hath revealed.

The source of all evil is for man to turn away from his Lord and set his heart on things ungodly.

The most burning fire is to question the signs of God, to dispute idly that which He hath revealed, to deny Him and carry one's self proudly before Him.

The source of all learning is the knowledge of God, exalted be His Glory, and this cannot be attained save through the knowledge of His Divine Manifestation.

The essence of abasement is to pass out from under the shadow of the Merciful and seek the shelter of the Evil One.

The source of error is to disbelieve in the One true God, rely upon aught else but Him, and flee from His Decree.

True loss is for him whose days have been spent in utter ignorance of his self.

The essence of all that We have revealed for thee is Justice, is for man to free himself from idle fancy and imitation, discern with the eye of oneness His glorious handiwork, and look into all things with a searching eye.

Thus have We instructed thee, manifested unto thee Words of Wisdom, that thou mayest be thankful unto the Lord, thy God, and glory therein amidst all peoples.

(Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 153)

It is the challenging task of the Bahá'ís to obey the law of God in their own lives, and gradually to win the rest of mankind to its acceptance.

In considering the effect of obedience to the laws on individual lives, one must remember that the purpose of this life is to prepare the soul for the next. Here one must learn to control and direct one's animal impulses, not to be a slave to them. Life in this world is a succession of tests and achievements, of falling short and of making new spiritual advances. Sometimes the course may seem very hard, but one can witness, again and again, that the soul who steadfastly obeys the law of Bahá'u'lláh, however hard it may seem, grows spiritually, while the one who compromises with the law for the sake of his own apparent happiness is seen to have been following a chimera: he does not attain the happiness he sought, he retards his spiritual advance and often brings new problems upon himself.

(From a letter dated 6 February 1973 written by the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, published in "Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1968-1973, p. 106)

