

GLEANINGS

#1

Introduction

Whenever we are studying the Word of God, that is, the revelations of the Manifestations of God, there are some principles derived from the Writings of Baha'ullah that we might keep in mind:

The first is...

“The understanding of His words and the comprehension of the utterances of the Birds of Heaven are in no wise dependent upon human learning. They depend solely upon purity of heart, chastity of soul, and freedom of spirit.” (Kitab-i-Iqan)

The second is...

“...in every age, the reading of the scriptures and holy books is for no other purpose except to enable the reader to apprehend their meaning and unravel their innermost mysteries. Otherwise reading, without understanding, is of no abiding profit unto man.” (Kitab-i-Iqan)

The third is...

“It is evident unto thee that the Birds of Heaven and Doves of Eternity speak a twofold language. One language, the outward language, is devoid of allusions, is unconcealed and unveiled...The other language is veiled and concealed, so that whatever lieth hidden in the heart of the malevolent may be made manifest and their innermost being be disclosed...None apprehendeth the meaning of these utterances except them whose hearts are assured, whose souls have found favor with God, and whose minds are detached from all else but Him. In such utterances, the literal meaning, as generally understood by the people, is not what hath been intended.” (Kitab-i-Iqan)

The fourth is this...

“Know assuredly that just as thou firmly believest that the Word of God, exalted be His glory, endureth forever, thou must, likewise, believe with undoubting faith that its meaning can never be exhausted.” (Gleanings LXXXIX)

A fifth principle, which will be readily recognized as we read GLEANINGS, is no doubt found in the Writings of Baha'u'llah, but is best known as it is described in a letter written on behalf of the Guardian:

“One might liken Bahá'u'lláh's teachings to a sphere; there are points poles apart, and in between the thoughts and doctrines that unite them.” (Shoghi Effendi, 5 July 1947, Scholarship, p. 2)

FIRST WEEK'S SELECTIONS (I-XIII)

I

“Lauded and glorified art Thou, O Lord, my God! How can I make mention of Thee, assured as I am that no tongue, however deep its wisdom, can befittingly magnify Thy name, nor can the bird of the human heart, however great its longing, ever hope to ascend into the heaven of Thy majesty and knowledge.”

The nature of God, of the Manifestation of God and the unknowability of God are described in this opening selection. The nature of God is discussed in a number of other selections, including XIX, XXVI, XXVII, XCIV, CXXIV, CXVIII and CLX. What we know about God is what is revealed by God to us through the Manifestations of God, in the Person and Book of each of the Manifestations. This principle is elaborated in XXI and in XXII. The unknowability of God apart from His revelation of Himself is discussed in XXVI.

II

“The beginning of all things is the knowledge of God, and the end of all things is strict observance of whatsoever hath been sent down from the empyrean of the Divine Will that pervadeth all that is in the heavens and all that is on the earth.”

This principle is stated in the opening of the Kitab-i-Aqdas: “The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the recognition of Him Who is the Dayspring of His Revelation and the Fountain of His laws, Who representeth the Godhead in both the Kingdom of His Cause and the world of creation...It behooveth everyone who reacheth this most sublime station, this

summit of transcendent glory, to observe every ordinance of Him Who is the Desire of the world. These twin duties are inseparable. Neither is acceptable without the other.”

III

“The Revelation which from time immemorial hath been acclaimed as the Purpose and Promise of all the Prophets of God, and the most cherished Desire of His Messengers, hath now, by virtue of the pervasive Will of the Almighty and at His irresistible bidding, been revealed unto men.”

The theme of this passage and the others (IV-XII) in this opening selection is that the Day promised by all of the Manifestations of God of the past has now come. This Day is not only a Dispensation in length...it will be a Cycle lasting at least a half million years. This is the astonishing proclamation of Baha'u'llah, “This, truly, is a Revelation which revealeth itself only once every five hundred thousand years.” It is reiterated by ‘Abdu’l-Baha and cited in “The Dispensation of Baha'u'llah” of Shoghi Effendi: “From this thou canst imagine the magnitude of the Bahá’í cycle—a cycle that must extend over a period of at least five hundred thousand years.”

IV

“This is the Day in which God’s most excellent favors have been poured out upon men, the Day in which His most mighty grace hath been infused into all created things.”

“Soon will the present-day order be rolled up, and a new one spread out in its stead.” The scope of the change Baha'u'llah announces is unparalleled in human history.

V

“This is the Day whereon the Ocean of God’s mercy hath been manifested unto men, the Day in which the Day Star of His loving-kindness hath shed its radiance upon them, the Day in which the clouds of His bountiful favor have overshadowed the whole of mankind.”

Baha'u'llah speaks of the capacity of His followers to respond to His summons: **“They who are the beloved of God, in whatever place they gather and whomsoever they may meet, must evince, in their attitude towards God, and in the manner of their celebration of His praise and glory, such humility and submissiveness that every atom of the dust beneath their feet may attest the depth of their devotion. The conversation carried by these holy souls should be informed with such power that these same atoms of dust will be thrilled by its influence.”**

He does not belittle the capacity of any person, saying: **“The whole duty of man in this Day is to attain that share of the flood of grace which God poureth forth for him. Let none, therefore, consider the largeness or smallness of the receptacle. The portion of some might lie in the palm of a man’s hand, the portion of others might fill a cup, and of others even a gallon-measure.”** And then, for the first time in Gleanings, He calls upon us all: **“Every eye, in this Day, should seek what will best promote the Cause of God...Forget your own selves, and turn your eyes towards your neighbor. Bend your energies to whatever may foster the education of men.”** He also lovingly counsels us on how to carry out this blessed calling: **“Show forbearance and benevolence and love to one another. Should anyone among you be incapable of grasping a certain truth, or be striving to comprehend it, show forth, when conversing with him, a spirit of extreme kindliness and goodwill. Help him to see and recognize the truth, without esteeming yourself to be, in the least, superior to him, or to be possessed of greater endowments.”**

If Baha’u’llah had revealed this Tablet alone, humanity would be blessed with an unforgettable assurance of God’s love for us, and His wish that we love one another as He loves us.

VI

“Behold how the divers peoples and kindreds of the earth have been waiting for the coming of the Promised One. No sooner had He, Who is the Sun of Truth, been made manifest, than, lo, all turned away from Him, except them whom God was pleased to guide.”

As Jesus said in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 22:[14](#) **“For many are called, but few are chosen.”** And in the Gospel of John, chapter 15:[16](#) **“Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you...”**

Baha’u’llah said the same to a group of believers, reported by Nabil-i-A’zam, in *The Dawn-Breakers*, chapter 25, p. 586 **“Be thankful to God for having enabled you to recognise His Cause. Whoever has received this blessing must, prior to his acceptance, have performed some deed which, though he himself was unaware of its character, was ordained by God as a means whereby he has been guided to find and embrace the Truth. As to those who have remained deprived of such a blessing, their acts alone have hindered them from recognising the truth of this Revelation. We cherish the hope that you, who have attained to this light, will exert your utmost to banish the darkness of superstition and unbelief from the midst of the people. May your deeds proclaim your faith and enable you to lead the erring into the paths of eternal salvation. The memory of this night will never be forgotten. May it never be effaced by the passage of time, and may its mention linger for ever on the lips of men.”**

The station of the true believer in this Promised Day is described in this selection, along with LXXIII, LIV, LXXXIV, XCIII, XCIV and CLX. Other quotations with the same theme are to be found in “The Dispensation of Baha’u’llah”, a magnificent summary of the Baha’i teachings written by the infallible Guardian of the Faith which was published in a collection entitled The World Order of Baha’u’llah. A correlation of “The Dispensation of Baha’u’llah”, along with complementary texts found in other letters of the Guardian with Gleanings from the Writings of Baha’u’llah will follow this initial course.

VII

“Verily I say, this is the Day in which mankind can behold the Face, and hear the Voice, of the Promised One.”

In this text Baha’u’llah refers to the Day of God, saying: **“Great indeed is this Day! The allusions made to it in all the sacred Scriptures as the Day of God attest its greatness.”** Many books have been written about these prophecies, and I can recommend those written by my friend Eileen Maddocks, who is with us here today. He continues: **“The soul of every Prophet of God, of every Divine Messenger, hath thirsted for this wondrous Day.”** Here are some of the words of Jesus, speaking of this Day, in the Gospel of John, chapter 16:12 **“I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. 13Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth.** In the Lawh-i-Aqdas of Baha’u’llah He says: **“Verily, He Who is the Spirit of Truth is come to guide you unto all truth.”** In the Suriy-i-Haykal, Baha’u’llah spoke again, quoting this prophecy of Jesus: **“In another passage He saith: “When He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth.” And yet behold how, when He did bring the truth, ye refused to turn your faces towards Him, and persisted in disporting yourselves with your pastimes and fancies.”**

The arrival of this Day should be such a joyous occasion, but when it occurred, Baha’u’llah says that **“all, except those whom the Almighty was pleased to guide, were found dumbfounded and heedless.”** But we should not despair, for He says: **“God grant that the light of unity may envelop the whole earth, and that the seal “the Kingdom is God’s” may be stamped upon the brow of all its peoples.”**

VIII

“By the righteousness of God! These are the days in which God hath proved the hearts of the entire company of His Messengers and Prophets, and beyond them those that stand guard over His sacred and inviolable Sanctuary, the inmates of the celestial Pavilion and dwellers

of the Tabernacle of Glory. How severe, therefore, the test to which they who join partners with God must needs be subjected!”

In Gleanings XIX we will read this statement: **“These attributes of God are not, and have never been, vouchsafed specially unto certain Prophets, and withheld from others. Nay, all the Prophets of God, His well-favored, His holy and chosen Messengers are, without exception, the bearers of His names, and the embodiments of His attributes. They only differ in the intensity of their revelation, and the comparative potency of their light. Even as He hath revealed: “Some of the Apostles We have caused to excel the others.” (Qur’an 2:253)** Baha’u’llah informs us that all of the Prophets have been made **“the bearers of His names, and the embodiments of His attributes”** but that they **“differ in the intensity of their revelation”** and elsewhere He will inform us that they are not endowed with the same knowledge. The previous Manifestations have not been fully informed about this Revelation. As Jesus said,

The expression **“joining partners with God”** is one used by Baha’u’llah to depict those who accept any source of divine authority apart from the Manifestation of God, for God has no partner, He is alone in His authority, in His nature, and hence also in His manifestation of Himself. This was applied in particular to those avowed followers of the Bab who rejected Him Whom God shall make manifest, the name the Bab gave to Baha’u’llah in the Persian Bayan.

IX

“O Husayn! Consider the eagerness with which certain peoples and nations have anticipated the return of Imam-Husayn, whose coming, after the appearance of the Qa’im, hath been prophesied, in days past, by the chosen ones of God, exacted be His glory...That hour is now come.”

Among the prophecies that were fulfilled by the Bab and Baha’u’llah, is that the twelfth Imam, sometimes called the Imam Mahdi, will return and He will be called the Qa’im, and that after Him will appear the Qayyum. These prophecies are among those recorded and treasured by the Imami Shi’i Muslims, that is, those who believe in twelve Imams after Muhammad the Messenger of God. When Baha’u’llah appeared, many of the inhabitants of modern-day Iraq, Afghanistan and most of those of Iran were Imami Shi’i Muslims. Baha’u’llah refers to this prophecy because He is the second Promised One of the Qur’an and Him Whom God shall make manifest in the Persian Bayan. Baha’u’llah’s given name was Husayn. Sometimes prophecies are fulfilled literally, but rarely in ways that we expect. Baha’u’llah laments that so few have recognized Him.

X

“The time foreordained unto the peoples and kindreds of the earth is now come. The promises of God, as recorded in the holy Scriptures, have all been fulfilled...Meditate upon this, O ye beloved of God, and let your ears be attentive unto His Word, so that ye may, by His grace and mercy, drink your fill from the crystal waters of constancy, and become as steadfast and immovable as the mountain in His Cause.”

For the second time in Gleanings, Baha'u'llah calls upon His followers to teach His Cause: **“It is incumbent, in this Day, upon every man to place his whole trust in the manifold bounties of God, and arise to disseminate, with the utmost wisdom, the verities of His Cause. Then, and only then, will the whole earth be enveloped with the morning light of His Revelation.”**

XI

“All glory be to this Day, the Day in which the fragrances of mercy have been wafted over all created things, a Day so blest that past ages and centuries can never hope to rival it, a Day in which the countenance of the Ancient of Days hath turned towards His holy seat.”

This is an announcement of the Day of God to Mount Carmel, where Baha'u'llah pitched His tent, and where His forerunner, the Bab and the appointed Center of His Covenant were buried. It features a dialogue between the earthly creation with the inhabitants of the spiritual worlds and Mount Carmel, and with the Voice of God, and for the third time in Gleanings it depicts His longing to teach the Faith: **“Oh, how I long to announce unto every spot on the surface of the earth, and to carry to each one of its cities, the glad-tidings of this Revelation—a Revelation to which the heart of Sinai hath been attracted, and in whose name the Burning Bush is calling: ‘Unto God, the Lord of Lords, belong the kingdoms of earth and heaven.’ Verily this is the Day in which both land and sea rejoice at this announcement, the Day for which have been laid up those things which God, through a bounty beyond the ken of mortal mind or heart, hath destined for revelation.”**

XII

“Bestir yourselves, O people, in anticipation of the days of Divine justice, for the promised hour is now come. Beware lest ye fail to apprehend its import and be accounted among the erring.”

What are “the days of Divine Justice”? Let us listen to how they are described by Jesus, in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 25:

[31](#)“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. [32](#)All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. [33](#)He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

[34](#)“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father...[35](#)For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, [36](#)I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

[37](#)“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? [38](#)When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? [39](#)When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

[40](#)“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

[41](#)“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me...[42](#)For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, [43](#)I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

[44](#)“They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

[45](#)“He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’

XIII

“Consider the past. How many, both high and low, have, at all times, yearningly awaited the advent of the Manifestations of God in the sanctified persons of His chosen ones...And whensoever the portals of grace did open, and the clouds of divine bounty did rain upon mankind, and the light of the Unseen did shine above the horizon of celestial might, they all denied Him, and turned away from His face—the face of God Himself....Reflect, what could have been the motive for such deeds? What could have prompted such behavior towards the Revealers of the beauty of the All-Glorious? Whatever in days gone by hath been the cause of the denial and opposition of those people hath now led to the perversity of the people of this age.”

In this selection Baha'u'llah explains why the Manifestations of God have been rejected. His language is firm and unequivocal. The causes of their rejection are **“pettymindedness”**, sheer **“opposition to the truth”**, and because they have **“weighed the revelation of God in the standard of human knowledge”**. This has occurred repeatedly throughout history, and it has resulted in the universal message of each of the Manifestations not being recognized and followed for millennia. Baha'u'llah begins with Moses and states that He summoned humanity and not just the descendants of the twelve sons of Jacob. He then refers to Jesus as having taught a message for the world which was rejected by His contemporaries. Then He states that the same happened to Muhammad, who came in fulfillment of the prophecies of Jesus. He concludes with this Day, in which all those who are on earth have rejected His revelation, calling those who do so **“small-minded, contemptible people.”**

Baha'u'llah did not soft pedal the errors of humanity, whether in the distant past or those who were His contemporaries. Nor did He excuse them in light of the challenges they faced in their various material and social circumstances. We might have preferred gentle and comforting words from the Manifestation of God, but to use a phrase common to my generation, He “told it like it is”.