

GLEANINGS

#4

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'u'llah that we might keep in mind. These were cited in the first lesson, repeated in the second lesson, and will remain in this position in case you need reminding:

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)

In other words, you don't need an academic degree or the equivalent to understand the Writings of Baha'u'llah.

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)

In other words, you do need to know how to read, and to make the effort to understand what you are reading...because reading without understanding is of no value.

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)

In other words, the Manifestations sometimes intend for their words to be understood literally, and in other cases to be understood symbolically. We can do both, as long as we are **“detached from all else but Him”**, that is, not assuming that our prior knowledge will enable us to understand what He is saying. We need to be prepared to learn something new, all the time.

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)

In other words, the words revealed by the Manifestations, in this case by Baha'u'llah, have many meanings, not just one meaning.

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)

In other words, we need to keep the big picture in mind as we read and think about the Baha'i teachings, rather than looking at every teaching in isolation.

A participant in this course recommended the following:

Immerse yourselves in the ocean of My words, that ye may unravel its secrets, and discover all the pearls of wisdom that lie hid in its depths. (Kitab-i-Aqdas #182)

A similar and complementary verse is this:

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.
(Kitab-i-Aqdas #149)

If you would like to bring up other principles, please email me at peter19@gmail.com so that I can share them with everyone taking this course.

FOURTH WEEK'S SELECTIONS (XXVII-XXXIV)

The principal themes in the eight excerpts from the Writings of Baha'u'llah collected here are the nature of God (XXVII), the meaning of divine Unity (XXVIII), the purpose of God in creating man (XXIX), the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Bab in Baha'u'llah (XXX), the story of Abraham, Isaac and Ishmael (XXXII), the revelation and Will of God (XXXIII), and the purpose of sending Manifestations to humanity (XXXIV). All of these are what are called theological topics in the world in which we live, and while we can find some of them mentioned in the Tablets and Talks of 'Abdu'l-Baha and the letters of the Guardian, most of them are to be found in the Writings of Baha'u'llah. These are core doctrines of the Faith, these are foundational teachings. And they are also to be found, in most cases, in the revealed writings and utterances of previous Manifestations of God.

Baha'u'llah alluded to these core teachings in His introduction to the Arabic Hidden Words:

This is that which hath descended from the realm of glory, uttered by the tongue of power and might, and revealed unto the Prophets of old. We have taken the inner essence thereof and clothed it in the garment of brevity, as a token of grace unto the righteous, that they may stand faithful unto the Covenant of God, may fulfill in their lives His trust, and in the realm of spirit obtain the gem of divine virtue.

These are the teachings that were “**revealed unto the Prophets of old**”, they aren't new, they aren't temporary, they aren't progressive, they aren't surprising, they don't fit the times in which we live. They are ancient, eternal, perennial, familiar and they fit all times.

XXVII

All praise to the unity of God, and all honor to Him, the sovereign Lord, the incomparable and all-glorious Ruler of the universe, Who, out of utter nothingness, hath created the reality of all things, Who, from naught, hath brought into being the most refined and subtle elements of His creation, and Who, rescuing His creatures from the abasement of

remoteness and the perils of ultimate extinction, hath received them into His kingdom of incorruptible glory. Nothing short of His all-encompassing grace, His all-pervading mercy, could have possibly achieved it. How could it, otherwise, have been possible for sheer nothingness to have acquired by itself the worthiness and capacity to emerge from its state of nonexistence into the realm of being?

Where do we find this teaching in the Books of **“the prophets of old”**? **“Who, out of utter nothingness, hath created the reality of all things”** in the first book of Genesis and in a number of passages of the Qur’an. **“Who, rescuing His creatures from the abasement of remoteness and the perils of ultimate extinction”** describes what happened to Noah and repeatedly to the children of Israel, as well as the Jews who became followers of Jesus. The repeated redemption of humanity from the messes which they have made for themselves is a theme spoken of often by **“the prophets of old”**. This redemption from chaos is not only a theme depicted by the prophets but in the lives of those who turned to the Manifestations of God.

Having created the world and all that liveth and moveth therein, He, through the direct operation of His unconstrained and sovereign Will, chose to confer upon man the unique distinction and capacity to know Him and to love Him — a capacity that must needs be regarded as the generating impulse and the primary purpose underlying the whole of creation.... Upon the inmost reality of each and every created thing He hath shed the light of one of His names, and made it a recipient of the glory of one of His attributes. Upon the reality of man, however, He hath focused the radiance of all of His names and attributes, and made it a mirror of His own Self. Alone of all created things man hath been singled out for so great a favor, so enduring a bounty.

What distinguished Adam and Eve from all of the other creatures depicted in the first chapters of Genesis? It was that they had a **“unique distinction and capacity to know Him and to love Him”**. And likewise, upon Adam and Eve were **“focused the radiance of all of His names and attributes”** and the **“reality of man”** is **“a mirror of His own Self”**. In Genesis God declares that man is created in His image and likeness. No other creature is endowed with this nature.

These energies with which the Daystar of Divine bounty and Source of heavenly guidance hath endowed the reality of man lie, however, latent within him, even as the flame is hidden within the candle and the rays of light are potentially present in the lamp. The radiance of these energies may be obscured by worldly desires even as the light of the sun can be concealed beneath the dust and dross which cover the mirror. Neither the candle nor the lamp can be lighted through their own unaided efforts, nor can it ever be possible for the

mirror to free itself from its dross. It is clear and evident that until a fire is kindled the lamp will never be ignited, and unless the dross is blotted out from the face of the mirror it can never represent the image of the sun nor reflect its light and glory.

The potentiality of humanity, which lies **“latent within him”** is also demonstrated in the story of Adam and Eve, which is also told in the Qur’an. **“The radiance of these energies may be obscured by worldly desires”**. That is what happened when first Eve and then Adam, desiring more than what they had been given by their Creator, heeded the assurances of the serpent that they could have more. But **“through their “own unaided efforts”** they could not free themselves from **“the dust and dross which cover the mirror”** of the human heart. It is only through the process of purification – in their case by being expelled from the Garden of Eden and having to fare for themselves in the wilderness – that this **“dross”** could be **“blotted out from the face of the mirror”** and thereby mirror forth the image and likeness of their Creator.

And since there can be no tie of direct intercourse to bind the one true God with His creation, and no resemblance whatever can exist between the transient and the Eternal, the contingent and the Absolute, He hath ordained that in every age and dispensation a pure and stainless Soul be made manifest in the kingdoms of earth and heaven. Unto this subtle, this mysterious and ethereal Being He hath assigned a twofold nature; the physical, pertaining to the world of matter, and the spiritual, which is born of the substance of God Himself. He hath, moreover, conferred upon Him a double station. The first station, which is related to His innermost reality, representeth Him as One Whose voice is the voice of God Himself. To this testifieth the tradition: “Manifold and mysterious is My relationship with God. I am He, Himself, and He is I, Myself, except that I am that I am, and He is that He is.” And in like manner, the words: “Arise, O Muḥammad, for lo, the Lover and the Beloved are joined together and made one in Thee.” He similarly saith: “There is no distinction whatsoever between Thee and Them, except that They are Thy Servants.” The second station is the human station, exemplified by the following verses: “I am but a man like you.” (Q 41:6) “Say, praise be to my Lord! Am I more than a man, an apostle?” (Q 17:93) These Essences of Detachment, these resplendent Realities are the channels of God’s all-pervasive grace. Led by the light of unfailing guidance, and invested with supreme sovereignty, They are commissioned to use the inspiration of Their words, the effusions of Their infallible grace and the sanctifying breeze of Their Revelation for the cleansing of every longing heart and receptive spirit from the dross and dust of earthly cares and limitations. Then, and only then, will the Trust of God, latent in the reality of man, emerge, as resplendent as the rising Orb of Divine Revelation, from behind the veil of concealment, and implant the ensign of its revealed glory upon the summits of men’s hearts.

The first appearance of the Manifestation of God in the Bible is not in the earliest chapters. It is glimpsed in the story of Enoch, who was taken up into heaven by God, and first depicted in Noah, the man who found favor with God and escaped the destruction of those who did not. In the Qur'an, it is Adam who is depicted as having the two natures – divine and human – and then Idris (Enoch), Noah, Abraham and the other prophets depicted in Genesis. There are many references to these Manifestations of God who are intermediaries between God and human beings in the writings of the “**prophets of old**”, such as to the Avatars in Hinduism, the Tathagatas in Buddhism, the Yazdaniyans in Zoroastrianism. As we plainly see in the references Baha'u'llah cited from the Qur'an, these Manifestations are also attested in that scripture.

From the foregoing passages and allusions it hath been made indubitably clear that in the kingdoms of earth and heaven there must needs be manifested a Being, an Essence Who shall act as a Manifestation and Vehicle for the transmission of the grace of the Divinity Itself, the Sovereign Lord of all. Through the Teachings of this Daystar of Truth every man will advance and develop until he attaineth the station at which he can manifest all the potential forces with which his inmost true self hath been endowed. It is for this very purpose that in every age and dispensation the Prophets of God and His chosen Ones have appeared amongst men, and have evinced such power as is born of God and such might as only the Eternal can reveal.

This is how all of the prophets of God have described themselves, as divine educators, whose role has been to provide the “**teachings**” through which “**every man will advance and develop until he attaineth the station at which he can manifest all the potential forces with which his inmost true self hath been endowed.**” The most succinct and possibly the most beautiful summary of what education is all about.

Can one of sane mind ever seriously imagine that, in view of certain words the meaning of which he cannot comprehend, the portal of God's infinite guidance can ever be closed in the face of men? Can he ever conceive for these Divine Luminaries, these resplendent Lights either a beginning or an end? What outpouring flood can compare with the stream of His all-embracing grace, and what blessing can excel the evidences of so great and pervasive a mercy? There can be no doubt whatever that if for one moment the tide of His mercy and grace were to be withheld from the world, it would completely perish. For this reason, from the beginning that hath no beginning the portals of Divine mercy have been flung open to the face of all created things, and the clouds of Truth will continue to the end that hath no end to rain on the soil of human capacity, reality and personality their favors and bounties. Such hath been God's method continued from everlasting to everlasting.

Baha'u'llah has depicted in Kitab-i-Iqan the consequences of Jews, Christians and Muslims believing that **“the portal of God’s infinite guidance can ever be closed in the face of men”**. Islam is not the only religion whose followers have believed that their prophet is the last prophet. This is virtually universal over the course of religious history...but not a single one of the Manifestations of God failed to speak of His prophetic successor. Passages could be cited from virtually all of the world’s scriptures to demonstrate this to be a fact. The many references to Baha'u'llah being the “Promised One of all ages” cited in the previous passages we have read in Gleanings attest to the ubiquity of this theme and that this is not a new teaching of Baha'u'llah. As Baha'u'llah concludes here: **“Such hath been God’s method continued from everlasting to everlasting.”**

XXVIII

Happy is the man who will arise to serve My Cause, and glorify My beauteous Name. Take hold of My Book with the power of My might, and cleave tenaciously to whatsoever commandment thy Lord, the Ordainer, the All-Wise, hath prescribed therein. Behold, O Muḥammad, how the sayings and doings of the followers of Shí’ih Islám have dulled the joy and fervor of its early days, and tarnished the pristine brilliancy of its light. In its primitive days, whilst they still adhered to the precepts associated with the name of their Prophet, the Lord of mankind, their career was marked by an unbroken chain of victories and triumphs. As they gradually strayed from the path of their Ideal Leader and Master, as they turned away from the Light of God and corrupted the principle of His Divine unity, and as they increasingly centered their attention upon them who were only the revealers of the potency of His Word, their power was turned into weakness, their glory into shame, their courage into fear. Thou dost witness to what a pass they have come. Behold, how they have joined partners with Him Who is the Focal-Point of Divine unity. Behold how their evil doings have hindered them from recognizing, in the Day of Resurrection, the Word of Truth, exalted be His glory. We cherish the hope that this people will henceforth shield themselves from vain hopes and idle fancies, and will attain to a true understanding of the meaning of Divine unity.

“Happy is the man who will arise to serve My Cause” is another perennial teaching of the religion of God, as Baha'u'llah points out in this passage from another Tablet: **“Say: To assist Me is to teach My Cause. This is a theme with which whole Tablets are laden. This is the changeless commandment of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future.”** (Baha'u'llah, Tablet to Siyyid Mihdiy-i-Dahaji; in Tablets of Baha'u'llah revealed after the Kitab-i-Aqdas, pp. 198-199) Baha'u'llah refers to the corruption of the Imami Shi'i Islamic Faith, that of the Twelve Imams, the first of whom, the Imam ‘Ali ibn Abu Talib, was a cousin of Muhammad and the

husband of His daughter Fatimih. When He says that **“they gradually strayed from the path of their ideal Leader and Master”**, meaning Muhammad the Messenger of God, and **“corrupted the principle of”** the unity of unity of God which is focused in the Most Great Infallibility of the Manifestation of God, and **“increasingly centered their attention upon them who were only the revealers of the potency of His Word, their power was turned into weakness, their glory into shame, their courage into fear”**. Baha’u’llah spoke on the same theme in the Ishraqat, a Tablet revealed after the Kitab-i-Aqdas, writing the following:

In response to thy request the Pen of Glory hath graciously described the stations and grades of the Most Great Infallibility. The purpose is that all should know of a certainty that the Seal of the Prophets may the souls of all else but Him be offered up for His sake — is without likeness, peer or partner in His Own station. The Holy Ones [the Twelve Imams] may the blessings of God be upon them — were created through the potency of His Word, and after Him they were the most learned and the most distinguished among the people and abide in the utmost station of servitude. The divine Essence, sanctified from every comparison and likeness, is established in the Prophet, and God’s inmost Reality, exalted above any peer or partner, is manifest in Him. This is the station of true unity and of veritable singleness. The followers of the previous Dispensation grievously failed to acquire an adequate understanding of this station. The Primal Point may the life of all else but Him be offered up for His sake — saith: “If the Seal of the Prophets had not uttered the word ‘Successorship,’ such a station would not have been created.”

He indicates that their **“evil doings have hindered them from recognizing, in the Day of Resurrection, the Word of Truth”**, that is, the Manifestations of God when they appeared, first the Bab, and second, Baha’u’llah, the true recipients of the Most Great Infallibility.

The Person of the Manifestation hath ever been the representative and mouthpiece of God. He, in truth, is the Dayspring of God’s most excellent Titles, and the Dawning-Place of His exalted Attributes. If any be set up by His side as peers, if they be regarded as identical with His Person, how can it, then, be maintained that the Divine Being is One and Incomparable, that His Essence is indivisible and peerless? Meditate on that which We have, through the power of truth, revealed unto thee, and be thou of them that comprehend its meaning.

This has been the teaching of the religion of God in every age, but, as Baha’u’llah indicates, the unique station and authority of the Manifestation of God has been misunderstood by the followers of previous Manifestations of God. This truth is espoused in the Torah, the Gospels, the Qur’an, the Persan Bayan and other scriptures.

XXIX

The purpose of God in creating man hath been, and will ever be, to enable him to know his Creator and to attain His Presence. To this most excellent aim, this supreme objective, all the heavenly Books and the divinely revealed and weighty Scriptures unequivocally bear witness. Whoso hath recognized the Dayspring 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. Such a man hath attained the knowledge of the station of Him Who is “at the distance of two bows,” (Qur’an 53:9) Who standeth beyond the Sadratu’l-Muntahá (Qur’an 53:14). Whoso hath failed to recognize Him will have condemned himself to the misery of remoteness, a remoteness which is naught but utter nothingness and the essence of the nethermost fire. Such will be his fate, though to outward seeming he may occupy the earth’s loftiest seats and be established upon its most exalted throne.

“The purpose of God in creating man” is what? Is it, as we often fondly imagine, to do whatever we wish, when we wish, until we die? Is it, as we so often experience, to do what other people expect of us, until we manage to break free of their domination and do whatever we wish? Baha’u’llah completes that sentence: **“The purpose of God in creating man hath been, and will ever be, to enable him to know his Creator and to attain His Presence.”** In other verses Baha’u’llah writes: **“Unless one recognize God and love Him, his cry shall not be heard by God in this Day. This is of the essence of His Faith, did ye but know it.”** (GL CXXXV) **“That which beseemeth you is the love of God, and the love of Him Who is the Manifestation of His Essence, and the observance of whatsoever He chooseth to prescribe unto you, did ye but know it.”** (GL CXXXIX)

Baha’u’llah’s answer to this question is not just particular to Him. He follows this verse with **“To this most excellent aim, this supreme objective, all the heavenly Books and the divinely revealed and weighty Scriptures unequivocally bear witness.”** This is an essential, eternal, perennial teaching of the Manifestations of God. Where is this purpose stated where it is recognized, affirmed and openly declared twice every day of every year? **“And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be upon thy heart...”** (Torah – Devarim (Deuteronomy), 6:5; <https://oceanlibrary.com/link/p3RcY/jps-book-of-deuteronomy/>) Observant Jews recite this verse morning and evening. But where else? How about from the Gospels: **“Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.”** (Gospel of Matthew, 22:35; <https://oceanlibrary.com/link/9UAgj/kjv-gospel-of-matthew/>) And,

to make the point even more pointedly, Jesus said: **“He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”** (Gospel of Matthew 10:37; <https://oceanlibrary.com/link/6mZWS/kjv-gospel-of-matthew/>) How about from the Qur’an: **“O Believers! make not friends of your fathers or your brethren if they love unbelief above faith: and whoso of you shall make them his friends, will be wrong doers. SAY: If your fathers, and your sons, and your brethren, and your wives, and your kindred, and the wealth which ye have gained, and merchandise which ye fear may be unsold, and dwellings wherein ye delight, be dearer to you than God and His Apostle and efforts on his Path, then wait until God shall Himself enter on His work: and God guideth not the impious.”** (Sura IX. Immunity, 9:23; https://oceanlibrary.com/link/LAhaJ/sura-ix-immunity_muhammad/)

Baha’u’llah follows up this statement by insisting that since the recognition of and love for God is inseparable from the recognition of and love for the Manifestation of God, **“Whoso hath recognized the Dayspring 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.”** In contrast to the experience of the one who has recognized Baha’u’llah in this Day, is that of the one who has not done so: **“Whoso hath failed to recognize Him will have condemned himself to the misery of remoteness, a remoteness which is naught but utter nothingness and the essence of the nethermost fire. Such will be his fate, though to outward seeming he may occupy the earth’s loftiest seats and be established upon its most exalted throne.”**

Previously we cited a passage from the Gospel of Matthew (chapter 25) that depicts this stark disparity between those who recognize and those who do not recognize the Manifestation of God, in this case the return of Jesus, the Son of man who will sit upon the throne and who will be King over all the world, briefly cited again here: **31When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: 32And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: 33And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.**

He Who is the Dayspring of Truth is, no doubt, fully capable of rescuing from such remoteness wayward souls and of causing them to draw nigh unto His court and attain His Presence. “If God had pleased He had surely made all men one people.” (Qur’an 42:8) His purpose, however, is to enable the pure in spirit and the detached in heart to ascend, by virtue of their own innate powers, unto the shores of the Most Great Ocean, that thereby they who seek the Beauty of the All-Glorious may be distinguished and separated from the

wayward and perverse. Thus hath it been ordained by the all-glorious and resplendent Pen....

Baha'u'llah referred to this principle (underlined) in the conclusion of Kitab-i-Iqan, in verses that were previously cited:

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. Thus hath Şádiq, son of Muḥammad, spoken: “God verily will test them and sift them.” This is the divine standard, this is the Touchstone of God, wherewith He proveth His servants. None apprehendeth the meaning of these utterances except them whose hearts are assured, whose souls have found favour with God, and whose minds are detached from all else but Him.

Also previously cited is this statement of Baha'u'llah (underlined) in The Dawn-Breakers (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.

This principle is also found in previously revealed scriptures, whether the Torah, the Gospels, or the Qur'an.

That the Manifestations of Divine justice, the Daysprings of heavenly grace, have when they appeared amongst men always been destitute of all earthly dominion and shorn of the means of worldly ascendancy, should be attributed to this same principle of separation and distinction which animateth the Divine Purpose. Were the Eternal Essence to manifest all that is latent within Him, were He to shine in the plentitude of His glory, none would be found to question His power or repudiate His truth. Nay, all created things would be so dazzled and thunderstruck by the evidences of His light as to be reduced to utter nothingness. How, then, can the godly be differentiated under such circumstances from the froward?

The spiritual rather than worldly dominion of the Manifestations of God is one of the characteristics of them all as described in detail in Kitab-i-Iqan. As Baha'u'llah affirms in this paragraph, “**the Divine Purpose**” is animated by the “**principle of separation and distinction**”.

Baha'u'llah also affirms **“the canopy of world order is upraised upon the two pillars of reward and punishment”** (Third Ishraq, in Ishraqat); **“The world is established upon the foundations of reward and punishment”** (Tablet of the Seven Questions, in Tabernacle of Unity); **“The structure of world stability and order hath been reared upon, and will continue to be sustained by, the twin pillars of reward and punishment”** (Lawh-i-Maqsud and Tablet to Mirza Abu'l-Fadl, in Tabernacle of Unity); **“And in another connection He hath uttered the following in the eloquent tongue: Justice hath a mighty force at its command. It is none other than reward and punishment for the deeds of men.”** (Lawh-i-Maqsud); **“That which traineth the world is Justice, for it is upheld by two pillars, reward and punishment. These two pillars are the sources of life to the world.”** (Thirteenth Glad Tidings, in Bisharat).

This principle hath operated in each of the previous Dispensations and been abundantly demonstrated.... It is for this reason that, in every age, when a new Manifestation hath appeared and a fresh revelation of God's transcendent power was vouchsafed unto men, they that misbelieved in Him, deluded by the appearance of the peerless and everlasting Beauty in the garb of mortal men, have failed to recognize Him. They have erred from His path and eschewed His company — the company of Him Who is the Symbol of nearness to God. They have even arisen to decimate the ranks of the faithful and to exterminate such as believed in Him.

Another affirmation that this is one of the essential, eternal, perennial teachings of religion is found here. It is, He asserts **“for this reason”**, that is, the **“principle of separation and distinction”**. that progressive revelation exists, so that **“they that misbelieved in Him...have failed to recognize Him”** and **“have even arisen to decimate the ranks of the faithful and to exterminate such as believed in Him”** can be separated from those who faithfully believe in Him.

Behold how in this Dispensation the worthless and foolish have fondly imagined that by such instruments as massacre, plunder and banishment they can extinguish the Lamp which the Hand of Divine power hath lit, or eclipse the Daystar of everlasting splendor. How utterly unaware they seem to be of the truth that such adversity is the oil that feedeth the flame of this Lamp! Such is God's transforming power. He changeth whatsoever He willeth; He verily hath power over all things....

The eternal and almighty power of the Manifestation of God, here called **“the Lamp which the Hand of Divine power hath lit”** and **“the Daystar of everlasting splendor”** is affirmed.

Consider at all times the sovereignty exercised by the Ideal King, and behold the evidences of His power and paramount influence. Sanctify your ears from the idle talk of them that are the symbols of denial and the exponents of violence and anger. The hour is approaching when ye will witness the power of the one true God triumphing over all created things and the signs of His sovereignty encompassing all creation. On that day ye will discover how all else besides Him will have been forgotten and come to be regarded as utter nothingness.

In every age those who reject the Manifestation have believed that He can be subdued by **“violence and anger”**, that He has no power in comparison to them. Hence the Roman Empire sought to extinguish Christianity, but who won the day? The Persian and Byzantine Empires sought to crush Islam, but they were crushed instead. In our own time, the enemies of Baha’u’llah believe they can exterminate His followers, but Baha’u’llah assures us that His Cause will triumph.

It should, however, be borne in mind that God and His Manifestation can, under no circumstances, be dissociated from the loftiness and sublimity which They inherently possess. Nay, loftiness and sublimity are themselves the creations of His Word, if ye choose to see with My sight not with yours.

The outward appearance has always been that the Manifestations of God are victims, powerful to protect themselves and their followers from the onslaught of opposing rulers and peoples. But Baha’u’llah assures us, as Moses and Jesus and Muhammad assured their adherents, that we should **“choose to see with My sight not with yours”** for, in truth, **“God and His Manifestations can, in no circumstances, be dissociated from the loftiness and sublimity which They inherently possess.”**

XXX

God witnesseth that there is no God but Him, the Gracious, the Best-Beloved. All grace and bounty are His. To whomsoever He will He giveth whatsoever is His wish. He, verily, is the All-Powerful, the Almighty, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting. We, verily, believe in Him Who, in the person of the Báb, hath been sent down by the Will of the one true God, the King of Kings, the All-Praised. We, moreover, swear fealty to the One Who, in the time of Mustagháth, is destined to be made manifest, as well as to those Who shall come after Him till the end that hath no end. We recognize in the manifestation of each one of them, whether outwardly or inwardly, the manifestation of none but God Himself, if ye be of those that comprehend. Every one of them is a mirror of God, reflecting naught else but His Self, His Beauty, His Might and Glory, if ye will understand. All else besides them are to be regarded

as mirrors capable of reflecting the glory of these Manifestations Who are themselves the Primary Mirrors of the Divine Being, if ye be not devoid of understanding. No one hath ever escaped them, neither are they to be hindered from achieving their purpose. These Mirrors will everlastingly succeed each other, and will continue to reflect the light of the Ancient of Days. They that reflect their glory will, in like manner, continue to exist forevermore, for the Grace of God can never cease from flowing. This is a truth that none can disprove.

In this passage, Baha'u'llah asserts that both the Bab and Himself are Manifestations of God, endowed with all of the unique characteristics of this station, endowed to them by God. He furthermore states that the Manifestations of God, called here **“the Primary Mirrors of the Divine Being”**, will endlessly succeed one another – **“These Mirrors will everlastingly succeed each other, and will continue to reflect the light of the Ancient of Days”** – as will their faithful followers – **“They that reflect their glory will, in like manner, continue to exist forevermore, for the Grace of God can never cease from flowing.”**

XXXI

Contemplate with thine inward eye the chain of successive Revelations that hath linked the Manifestation of Adam with that of the Báb. I testify before God that each one of these Manifestations hath been sent down through the operation of the Divine Will and Purpose, that each hath been the bearer of a specific Message, that each hath been entrusted with a divinely revealed Book and been commissioned to unravel the mysteries of a mighty Tablet. The measure of the Revelation with which every one of them hath been identified had been definitely foreordained. This, verily, is a token of Our favor unto them, if ye be of those that comprehend this truth.... And when this process of progressive Revelation culminated in the stage at which His peerless, His most sacred, and exalted Countenance was to be unveiled to men's eyes, He chose to hide His own Self behind a thousand veils, lest profane and mortal eyes discover His glory. This He did at a time when the signs and tokens of a divinely appointed Revelation were being showered upon Him — signs and tokens which none can reckon except the Lord, your God, the Lord of all worlds. And when the set time of concealment was fulfilled, We sent forth, whilst still wrapt within a myriad veils, an infinitesimal glimmer of the effulgent Glory enveloping the Face of the Youth, and lo, the entire company of the dwellers of the Realms above were seized with violent commotion and the favored of God fell down in adoration before Him. He hath, verily, manifested a glory such as none in the whole creation hath witnessed, inasmuch as He hath arisen to proclaim in person His Cause unto all who are in the heavens and all who are on the earth.

This passage does not merely refer to progressive revelation, but, most importantly, to the culmination of all previous revelations in the revelation of Baha'u'llah, **“in the stage at which His peerless, His most sacred, and exalted Countenance was to be unveiled to men’s eyes”**. He indicates that **“He chose to hide His own Self behind a thousand veils, lest profane and mortal eyes discover His glory”** and that when His time of **“concealment was fulfilled”** He **“sent forth, whilst still wrapt within a myriad veils, an infinitesimal glimmer of the effulgent Glory enveloping the Face of the Youth, and lo, the entire company of the dwellers of the Realms above were seized with violent commotion and the favored of God fell down in adoration before Him.”** Whereas humanity continued to be veiled from His reality, the spiritual kingdoms embraced His revelation as was predicted in the Apocalypse of St. John:

9After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; **10**And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. **11**And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, **12**Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen. (Chapter 7)

Many people, Baha'is included, have wondered why it was that Baha'u'llah did not “do miracles”, as did, for example, Moses and Jesus. Baha'u'llah discusses this issue in Sahifih-i-Shattiyih (also called the Book of the Tigris), for which there is an provisional translation. ‘Abdu’l-Baha explained that while Baha'u'llah did miracles (Some Answered Questions, 9:19), that He did not wish them to be widely reported, because miracles are only convincing to those who witness them (Some Answered Questions, 22:3-4), and because His proofs were fully adequate without adding miracles (the teacher has written a series of books on the proofs of the Manifestations of God and one of those volumes examines how He fulfilled at least 40 proofs, all of which are more convincing than miracles).

XXXII

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 peoples of the earth. This same honor, Jesus, the Son of Mary, besought the one true God, exalted be His name and glory, to confer upon

Him. For the same reason was Ḥusayn offered up as a sacrifice by Muḥammad, the Apostle of God.

The spiritual mystery of the sacrifice of one life for the redemption of others is explored in many Baha'i texts. It is also a theme found in all of the holy books of the previous Manifestations. Jewish scripture states that Abraham offered up Isaac, and Muslim belief is that Abraham offered up Ishmael. In either case, it was Abraham's willingness for His firstborn son to be sacrificed to God that was convincing proof of His obedience and His love of God. For in neither story was the firstborn son actually sacrificed. Jesus and Husayn were killed for their faith in God and are regarded as having served as sacrifices for the sins of their followers by Christians and Imami Shi'i Muslims. Baha'u'llah is also said to have offered up His son Mihdi as a sacrifice. 'Abdu'l-Baha wrote a Tablet about the importance of sacrifice as a principle of spiritual life. The last Arabic Hidden Word (#71) alludes to this sacrifice as **"the crimson ink that is shed in thy path": "Write all that We have revealed unto thee with the ink of light upon the tablet of thy spirit. Should this not be in thy power, then make thine ink of the essence of thy heart. If this thou canst not do, then write with that crimson ink that hath been shed in My path. Sweeter indeed is this to Me than all else, that its light may endure forever."**

No man can ever claim to have comprehended the nature of the hidden and manifold grace of God; none can fathom His all-embracing mercy. Such hath been the perversity of men and their transgressions, so grievous have been the trials that have afflicted the Prophets of God and their chosen ones, that all mankind deserveth to be tormented and to perish. God's hidden and most loving providence, however, hath, through both visible and invisible agencies, protected and will continue to protect it from the penalty of its wickedness. Ponder this in thine heart, that the truth may be revealed unto thee, and be thou steadfast in His path.

That "man can never claim to have comprehended the nature of the hidden and manifold grace of God" and **"none can fathom His all-embracing mercy"** is a blessing, for if we could comprehend it, given our tendency to err, and even to deliberately to transgress the law of God, perhaps we would be even more extreme in our **"wickedness"**. As a Christian pastor who recently passed used to remind his parishioners regularly, if it were not for the grace of God and His forgiveness of our sins, none of us would be worthy of paradise, all of us would be hell-bound.

XXXIII

It hath been decreed by Us that the Word of God and all the potentialities thereof shall be manifested unto men in strict conformity with such conditions as have been foreordained by Him Who is the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. We have, moreover, ordained that its veil of concealment be none other except its own Self. Such indeed is Our Power to achieve Our Purpose. Should the Word be allowed to release suddenly all the energies latent within it, no man could sustain the weight of so mighty a Revelation. Nay, all that is in heaven and on earth would flee in consternation before it.

While this is a principle inherent in progressive revelation, and is borne out by many statements in the scriptures, is demonstrated by Baha'u'llah in His refusal to permit the circulation of the Kitab-i-Aqdas for years after its revelation, because in His judgment the Baha'is were not ready to peruse it, let alone implement its laws. Also, while residing in Baghdad, in keeping with this principle, Baha'u'llah ordered that the following measure be taken: **No less an authority than Mírzá Áqá Ján, Bahá'u'lláh's amanuensis, affirms, as reported by Nabíl, that by the express order of Bahá'u'lláh, hundreds of thousands of verses, mostly written by His own hand, were obliterated and cast into the river. "Finding me reluctant to execute His orders," Mírzá Áqá Ján has related to Nabíl, "Bahá'u'lláh would reassure me saying: 'None is to be found at this time worthy to hear these melodies.' ... Not once, or twice, but innumerable times, was I commanded to repeat this act."** (God Passes By 8.24; https://oceanlibrary.com/link/EGGnj/god-passes-by_shoghi-effendi/)

Consider that which hath been sent down unto Muḥammad, the Apostle of God. The measure of the Revelation of which He was the bearer had been clearly foreordained by Him Who is the Almighty, the All-Powerful. They that heard Him, however, could apprehend His purpose only to the extent of their station and spiritual capacity. He, in like manner, uncovered the Face of Wisdom in proportion to their ability to sustain the burden of His Message. No sooner had mankind attained the stage of maturity, than the Word revealed to men's eyes the latent energies with which it had been endowed — energies which manifested themselves in the plenitude of their glory when the Ancient Beauty appeared, in the year sixty, in the person of 'Alí-Muḥammad, the Báb.

The revelation of verses corresponding to the capacity of humanity at the time of their revelation is a principle that is cited by Jesus, as related in the Gospel of John (chapter 16): **"¹²I 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: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come."** In the First Epistle to the Corinthians (chapter 13), Paul said: **"⁸Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there**

be knowledge, it shall vanish away. **9**For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. **10**But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away...**12**For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.” Baha’u’llah affirms, in many passages, and none more clearly than this, that He is the “Spirit of Truth”, “that which is perfect is come”, and now we can see “face to face”: “No sooner had mankind attained the stage of maturity, than the Word revealed to men’s eyes the latent energies with which it had been endowed — energies which manifested themselves in the plenitude of their glory when the Ancient Beauty appeared, in the year sixty, in the person of ‘Alí-Muḥammad, the Báb.”

XXXIV

All praise and glory be to God Who, through the power of His might, hath delivered His creation from the nakedness of nonexistence, and clothed it with the mantle of life. From among all created things He hath singled out for His special favor the pure, the gem-like reality of man, and invested it with a unique capacity of knowing Him and of reflecting the greatness of His glory. This twofold distinction conferred upon him hath cleansed away from his heart the rust of every vain desire, and made him worthy of the vesture with which his Creator hath deigned to clothe him. It hath served to rescue his soul from the wretchedness of ignorance.

These descriptions, of going from the “**nakedness of nonexistence**” to being “**clothed...with the mantle of life**”, which is so astonishingly unlike the modern preoccupation with the unclothed human body and with the aesthetic of less is better, of minimalism, challenges us to embrace the unlimited colors and shapes and weaves of our universe and indeed the universes beyond this universe...and of recognizing “**the pure, the gem-like reality of man**”, with no hint of the self-loathing and discontent that so many of our ancestors have thought to be integral to a spiritual perspective reveals a confidence in the ongoing as well as the ultimate attainment of humanity to treasures beyond our conception. And that is precisely what Baha’u’llah described in these words from the penultimate passage (CLXV) in the Gleanings: “**Death proffereth unto every confident believer the cup that is life indeed. It bestoweth joy, and is the bearer of gladness. It conferreth the gift of everlasting life. 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.**” This “gem-like reality of man” is furthermore described as such that all will “fail to comprehend its mystery or to appraise its virtue”:

“Wert thou to ponder in thine heart, from now until the end that hath no end, and with all the concentrated intelligence and understanding which the greatest minds have attained in the past or will attain in the future, this divinely ordained and subtle Reality, this sign of the revelation of the All-Abiding, All-Glorious God, thou wilt fail to comprehend its mystery or to appraise its virtue. Having recognized thy powerlessness to attain to an adequate understanding of that Reality which abideth within thee, thou wilt readily admit the futility of such efforts as may be attempted by thee, or by any of the created things, to fathom the mystery of the Living God, the Daystar of unfading glory, the Ancient of everlasting days. This confession of helplessness which mature contemplation must eventually impel every mind to make is in itself the acme of human understanding, and marketh the culmination of man’s development.” (GL LXXXIII)

This robe with which the body and soul of man hath been adorned is the very foundation of his well-being and development. Oh, how blessed the day when, aided by the grace and might of the one true God, man will have freed himself from the bondage and corruption of the world and all that is therein, and will have attained unto true and abiding rest beneath the shadow of the Tree of Knowledge!

Every one of us have the opportunity to attain to **“true and abiding rest beneath the shadow of the Tree of Knowledge”** in the next world, the next life, after we die. Baha’u’llah seems to be talking about something else here...about the golden age of humanity that will be attained, **“how blessed the day”**, when mankind as a whole **“will have freed”** itself **“from the bondage and corruption of the world and all that is therein”**. We will have closed the gap between this world and the next world, between earth and paradise. We don’t have to wait until after death to experience a life that is dedicated to the knowledge and love of God. But the key to this transformation, from **“bondage and corruption”** to **“true and abiding rest”** is one thing...because Baha’u’llah says that to attain to that state **“man will have freed himself”**. Nobody is going to do this for us. We have to do it for ourselves. This is the coming of age of humanity. We’re adults now. Not just some of us, but all of us.

The songs which the bird of thine heart had uttered in its great love for its friends have reached their ears, and moved Me to answer thy questions, and reveal to thee such secrets as I am allowed to unfold. In thine esteemed letter thou hadst inquired which of the Prophets of God should be regarded as superior to others. Know thou assuredly that the essence of all the Prophets of God is one and the same. Their unity is absolute. God, the Creator, saith: There is no distinction whatsoever among the Bearers of My Message. They all have but one purpose; their secret is the same secret. To prefer one in honor to another, to exalt certain ones above the rest, is in no wise to be permitted. Every true Prophet hath regarded His

Message as fundamentally the same as the Revelation of every other Prophet gone before Him. If any man, therefore, should fail to comprehend this truth, and should consequently indulge in vain and unseemly language, no one whose sight is keen and whose understanding is enlightened would ever allow such idle talk to cause him to waver in his belief.

How astonishing it is to discover that there are secrets that Baha'u'llah is not permitted to reveal to us! For when He states that He will **“reveal to thee such secrets as I am allowed to unfold”** that means there is more. And that is why progressive revelation is necessary. In the future Manifestations will be permitted to reveal more of reality. His response to the first question is so loving and humble, and it calls for His followers to be loving and humble. For when He states that **“To prefer one in honor to another, to exalt certain ones above the rest, is in no wise to be permitted”** then we must treat Moses and Krishna, Jesus and Buddha, Muhammad and Zoroaster, the Bab and Baha'u'llah the same, and not **“exalt certain ones above the rest”**. Baha'u'llah knew that some of His followers wanted to depict Him as God, and therefore as superior to any Manifestation Who appeared in the past. The Guardian knew that there were Baha'is who believed that Baha'u'llah was the greatest Manifestation of them all. As if this was a football game, a lottery, a singing contest...Baha'u'llah gives us the best advice on how to respond to those who make claims of superiority: **“If any man, therefore, should fail to comprehend this truth, and should consequently indulge in vain and unseemly language, no one whose sight is keen and whose understanding is enlightened would ever allow such idle talk to cause him to waver in his belief.”**

The measure of the revelation of the Prophets of God in this world, however, must differ. Each and every one of them hath been the Bearer of a distinct Message, and hath been commissioned to reveal Himself through specific acts. It is for this reason that they appear to vary in their greatness. Their Revelation may be likened unto the light of the moon that sheddeth its radiance upon the earth. Though every time it appeareth, it revealeth a fresh measure of its brightness, yet its inherent splendor can never diminish, nor can its light suffer extinction.

The **“measure of the revelation of the Prophets of God in this world”** is a topic that has not been deeply explored, because the assumption of each religion has been that its founder is superior to all other founders. It invites a study of the **“distinct Message”** of each Manifestation, and the **“specific acts”** through which each one was **“commissioned to reveal Himself”**, what the Bab and Baha'u'llah call **“proofs of prophethood”**. While in other verses, Baha'u'llah compares the Manifestation of God to the Sun, in this passage He compares the revelation of the Manifestation to the **“light of the moon”**, which is entirely a reflection of the

light of the Sun. He compares the varying **“measure of its brightness”** of the moon in **“every time it appeareth”** to that of the various Manifestations. In the future we will come to a deeper understanding of this variation and appreciate how it was appropriate for the time in which it occurred.

It is clear and evident, therefore, that any apparent variation in the intensity of their light is not inherent in the light itself, but should rather be attributed to the varying receptivity of an ever-changing world. Every Prophet Whom the Almighty and Peerless Creator hath purposed to send to the peoples of the earth hath been entrusted with a Message, and charged to act in a manner that would best meet the requirements of the age in which He appeared. God’s purpose in sending His Prophets unto men is twofold. The first is to liberate the children of men from the darkness of ignorance, and guide them to the light of true understanding. The second is to ensure the peace and tranquillity of mankind, and provide all the means by which they can be established.

Baha’u’llah indicates that the purpose of God in sending the Prophets is twofold – the first is about spiritual education, and the second about ensuring **“the peace and tranquillity of mankind”**. The emphasis in both cases on quality of life, not complexity or technical development or wealth or any of the goals that most people are pursuing...and maybe that is why we haven’t achieved **“peace and tranquillity”**? Because we haven’t even taken the first steps in that direction? Of course individuals have, but Baha’u’llah is speaking pointedly about **“mankind”**. We won’t get there without each other.

The Prophets of God should be regarded as physicians whose task is to foster the well-being of the world and its peoples, that, through the spirit of oneness, they may heal the sickness of a divided humanity. To none is given the right to question their words or disparage their conduct, for they are the only ones who can claim to have understood the patient and to have correctly diagnosed its ailments. No man, however acute his perception, can ever hope to reach the heights which the wisdom and understanding of the Divine Physician have attained. Little wonder, then, if the treatment prescribed by the physician in this day should not be found to be identical with that which he prescribed before. How could it be otherwise when the ills affecting the sufferer necessitate at every stage of his sickness a special remedy? In like manner, every time the Prophets of God have illumined the world with the resplendent radiance of the Daystar of Divine knowledge, they have invariably summoned its peoples to embrace the light of God through such means as best befitted the exigencies of the age in which they appeared. They were thus able to scatter the darkness of ignorance, and to shed upon the world the glory of their own knowledge. It is towards the inmost essence of these Prophets, therefore, that the eye of every man of discernment must be directed,

inasmuch as their one and only purpose hath always been to guide the erring, and give peace to the afflicted.... These are not days of prosperity and triumph. The whole of mankind is in the grip of manifold ills. Strive, therefore, to save its life through the wholesome medicine which the almighty hand of the unerring Physician hath prepared.

This depiction of the Manifestations as divine physicians is found chiefly in the Tablets Baha'u'llah revealed for Manikchi Sahib, a Zoroastrian friend of the Faith. It seems likely that this Tablet, also written in Persian, was written either for Manikji Sahib or for another Zoroastrian. A comparison of the Tablets of Baha'u'llah already identified as sent to Manikchi Sahib, and published in Tabernacle of Unity, suggests that its recipient was not this individual because there is some duplication and variation in the contents and wording. Clearly this metaphor was suited to this reader, and not to either Muslims or Baha'is. This, in itself, is a lesson in how to teach...consider your audience, and adjust your speech accordingly. Baha'u'llah speaks to each individual in a personal manner, choosing words that resonate with that person, intellectually, emotionally.

And now concerning thy question regarding the nature of religion. Know thou that they who are truly wise have likened the world unto the human temple. As the body of man needeth a garment to clothe it, so the body of mankind must needs be adorned with the mantle of justice and wisdom. Its robe is the Revelation vouchsafed unto it by God. Whenever this robe hath fulfilled its purpose, the Almighty will assuredly renew it. For every age requireth a fresh measure of the light of God. Every Divine Revelation hath been sent down in a manner that befitted the circumstances of the age in which it hath appeared.

This passage uses the same imagery as that cited above, with the clothing of the human body described as a what is needed, for **“as the body of man needeth a garment to clothe it, so the body of mankind must needs be adorned with the mantle of justice and wisdom.”** This historical rootedness of divine revelation, **“every age requireth a fresh measure of the light of God”** and **“revelation hath been sent down in a manner that befitteth the circumstances of the age in which it appeared”** reiterates the study of progressive revelation that is called for in our time.

As to thy question regarding the sayings of the leaders of past religions. Every wise and praiseworthy man will no doubt eschew such vain and profitless talk. The incomparable Creator hath created all men from one same substance, and hath exalted their reality above the rest of His creatures. Success or failure, gain or loss, must, therefore, depend upon man's own exertions. The more he striveth, the greater will be his progress. We fain would hope

that the vernal showers of the bounty of God may cause the flowers of true understanding to spring from the soil of men's hearts, and may wash them from all earthly defilements.

As anyone who has read Kitab-i-Iqan knows, Baha'u'llah does not have a high regard for **“the sayings of the leaders of past religions”**. In abolishing the clergy, not only did Baha'u'llah affirm that every person is capable of understanding the teachings of God and of loving Him, without the assistance of an intermediary who deeds himself to be indispensable and of a higher station than a mere layman; He also affirmed that it is the clergy which has been principally responsible for misguiding humanity for millennia, because what they have said and written is, on the whole, **“vain and profitless talk”**. Our time and our culture are as firmly convinced of the great wisdom and knowledge of the **“learned”**, and so it will be as much of a challenge for us to detach ourselves from them as it was for our forebears. But Baha'u'llah gives us the assurance that **“Success or failure, gain or loss, must, therefore, depend upon man's own exertions. The more he striveth, the greater will be his progress.”** Everywhere we turn we are told to rely upon others, from our youngest to our oldest years...what Baha'u'llah is telling us is encouraging and also frightening. We aren't accustomed to depending on ourselves, believing that we are in charge of our own fate. But as a community of Baha'is, we can and should learn to encourage each other to wholeheartedly adopt this deep-seated conviction. Taking responsibility for ourselves is the way forward, and God is there to assist us, every step of the way.