

GLEANINGS

#10

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. 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 peterry19@gmail.com so that I can share them with everyone taking this course.

TENTH WEEK'S SELECTIONS (XCIII-XCIX)

The principal themes in the seven excerpts from the Writings of Baha'u'llah collected here are universal revelation [XCIII]; the unity of God [XCIV]; the gifts of God to man [XCV]; the evanescence of this world [XCVI]; the station of the human being can be changed, like copper to gold [XCVII]; weigh not the Book of God in the scale of human knowledge [XCVIII]; and the grave situation of humanity, wherein belief in God is dying out [XCIX].

– XCIII –

Know thou that every created thing is a sign of the revelation of God. Each, according to its capacity, is, and will ever remain, a token of the Almighty. Inasmuch as He, the sovereign Lord of all, hath willed to reveal His sovereignty in the kingdom of names and attributes, each and every created thing hath, through the act of the Divine Will, been made a sign of His glory. So pervasive and general is this revelation that nothing whatsoever in the whole universe can be discovered that doth not reflect His splendor. Under such conditions every consideration of proximity and remoteness is obliterated.... Were the Hand of Divine power to divest of this high endowment all created things, the entire universe would become desolate and void.

*This Tablet, addressed like others cited in Gleanings to Shaykh Salman, includes Baha'u'llah's commentary on a verse from the famous Persian poet Sa'adi. It begins with a description of the universal revelation of God, without which "the entire universe would become desolate and void". Nothing would exist. While the Kitab-i-Iqan expatiates on this theme twice, without citing the Kitab-i-Iqan, which was published in 1931, in the Guardian's translation. It is notable that the Guardian considered this text, and other verses of this selection to be of sufficient importance that it deserved to be reiterated for Baha'i readers. Most Baha'is know about progressive revelation, through the Manifestations of God, but many have never heard of universal revelation, without which **"the entire universe would become desolate and void."***

Behold, how immeasurably exalted is the Lord your God above all created things! Witness the majesty of His sovereignty, His ascendancy, and supreme power. If the things which have been created by Him—magnified be His glory—and ordained to be the manifestations of His names and attributes, stand, by virtue of the grace with which they have been endowed, exalted beyond all proximity and remoteness, how much loftier must be that Divine Essence that hath called them into being?...

*Once again, the Guardian cites a text in which Baha'u'llah exalts **“the things which have been created by Him”**, indicating that they are, because they are **“the manifestations of His names and attributes”**, with which God has endowed them, **“exalted beyond all proximity and remoteless”**. This stunning verse indicates that the creation of God is endowed with spiritual potency that we human beings hardly ever glimpse let alone fully appreciate. In one of His Tablets, Baha'u'llah echoes this theme when He says that the earth will cry out to be tread upon human beings who do not recognize and love the Creator! This certainly gives us a closer understanding of the references in the Bible to the waters of the sea and the mountains declaring the glory of God, and singing the praises of Him Who created them. All things are living, by virtue of their being **“the manifestations of His names and attributes”**. The love of Baha'u'llah, 'Abdu'l-Baha and the Guardian for nature and Baha'u'llah's insistence that humans treat animals with kindness are windows into this mystery.*

Meditate on what the poet hath written: “Wonder not, if my Best-Beloved be closer to me than mine own self; wonder at this, that I, despite such nearness, should still be so far from Him.”... [Sa'adi] Considering what God hath revealed, that “We are closer to man than his life-vein,” [Qur'an 50:15] the poet hath, in allusion to this verse, stated that, though the revelation of my Best-Beloved hath so permeated my being that He is closer to me than my life-vein, yet, notwithstanding my certitude of its reality and my recognition of my station, I am still so far removed from Him. By this he meaneth that his heart, which is the seat of the All-Merciful and the throne wherein abideth the splendor of His revelation, is forgetful of its Creator, hath strayed from His path, hath shut out itself from His glory, and is stained with the defilement of earthly desires.

*This truth, that God is “closer to man than his life-vein”, which is explained by Baha'u'llah by virtue of **“the things which have been created by Him—magnified be His glory”** being*

“ordained to be the manifestations of His names and attributes” is not depicted, as it was understood by many of the mystics of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, as indicating that God and man are of the same reality and substance, but rather because God has ordained that all things be endowed with this station of closeness to their Creator. When Sa’adi refers to the distance of man from God, “wonder at this, that I, despite such nearness, should still be so far from Him” Baha’u’llah explains that the cause of this distance is not that God is exalted above all things, but rather because his heart “is forgetful of its Creator, hath strayed from His path, hath shut out itself from His glory, and is stained with the defilement of earthly desires.” We can know that intimate connection with God if we remember our Creator, do not stray from His path, do not shut ourselves from His glory, and are not stained with the defilement of earthly desires.

It should be remembered in this connection that the one true God is in Himself exalted beyond and above proximity and remoteness. His reality transcendeth such limitations. His relationship to His creatures knoweth no degrees. That some are near and others are far is to be ascribed to the manifestations themselves.

God is “exalted beyond and above proximity and remoteness”, whereas it is the “manifestations” of “His names and attributes” which are endowed with “degrees”. Whereas He has no degrees in “His relationship to His creatures”, “that some are near and others are far is to be ascribed to the manifestations themselves.” In another of His Tablets, Baha’u’llah states that all created things are endowed with degrees and ranks, and He cites as examples the nails that we pare and eyes that we treasure and protect.

That the heart is the throne, in which the Revelation of God the All-Merciful is centered, is attested by the holy utterances which We have formerly revealed. Among them is this saying: “Earth and heaven cannot contain Me; what can alone contain Me is the heart of him that believeth in Me, and is faithful to My Cause.” How often hath the human heart, which is the recipient of the light of God and the seat of the revelation of the All-Merciful, erred from Him Who is the Source of that light and the Wellspring of that revelation. It is the waywardness of the heart that removeth it far from God, and condemneth it to remoteness from Him. Those hearts, however, that are aware of His Presence, are close to Him, and are to be regarded as having drawn nigh unto His throne.

This affirmation of the primacy of the heart is one of teachings of Baha'u'llah that have appealed the most to His followers. He indicates that the heart is the closest to Him, that "what can alone contain Me is the heart of him that believeth in Me, and is faithful to My Cause" whereas "It is the waywardness of the heart that removeth it far from God, and condemneth it to remoteness from Him". It is man's choice, not God's choice that determines whether we are close to Him or far away.

Consider, moreover, how frequently doth man become forgetful of his own self, whilst God remaineth, through His all-encompassing knowledge, aware of His creature, and continueth to shed upon him the manifest radiance of His glory. It is evident, therefore, that, in such circumstances, He is closer to him than his own self. He will, indeed, so remain forever, for, whereas the one true God knoweth all things, perceiveth all things, and comprehendeth all things, mortal man is prone to err, and is ignorant of the mysteries that lie enfolded within him....

Baha'u'llah reminds us that "mortal man is prone to err, and is ignorant of the mysteries that lie enfolded within him". This statement recalls the words of Jesus at His crucifixion: "Forgive them Lord, for they know what they do." How then can we condemn each other, when we know that all of us are "prone to err" and that all of us are "ignorant of the mysteries enfolded within"? Our forgiveness, our mercy should know no end. But, since we are prone to err, it often is not...and that as well we must learn to forgive.

Let no one imagine that by Our assertion that all created things are the signs of the revelation of God is meant that—God forbid—all men, be they good or evil, pious or infidel, are equal in the sight of God. Nor doth it imply that the Divine Being—magnified be His name and exalted be His glory—is, under any circumstances, comparable unto men, or can, in any way, be associated with His creatures. Such an error hath been committed by certain foolish ones who, after having ascended into the heavens of their idle fancies, have interpreted Divine Unity to mean that all created things are the signs of God, and that, consequently, there is no distinction whatsoever between them. Some have even outstripped them by maintaining that these signs are peers and partners of God Himself. Gracious God! He, verily, is one and indivisible; one in His essence, one in His attributes. Everything besides Him is as nothing when brought face to face with the resplendent revelation of but one of His names, with no

more than the faintest intimation of His glory—how much less when confronted with His own Self!

When Baha'u'llah speaks of "certain foolish ones" He is speaking of those who believe there to be no difference between individual human beings, and none between human beings and God, as He explains "have interpreted Divine Unity to mean that all created things are the signs of God, and that, consequently, there is no distinction whatsoever between them" and that "these signs are peers and partners of God Himself." Whereas all created things show forth the "names and attributes of God", they are not to be compared with His "resplendent revelation of but one of His names, with no more than the faintest intimation of His glory—how much less when confronted with His own Self". All things are endowed with "the names and attributes of God" according to their capacity, not in equal proportion, and God's revelation of those "names and attributes", which occurs through His Manifestations, is infinitely exalted above those of His creatures.

By the righteousness of My name, the All-Merciful! The Pen of the Most High trembleth with a great trembling and is sore shaken at the revelation of these words. How puny and insignificant is the evanescent drop when compared with the waves and billows of God's limitless and everlasting Ocean, and how utterly contemptible must every contingent and perishable thing appear when brought face to face with the uncreated, the unspeakable glory of the Eternal! We implore pardon of God, the All-Powerful, for them that entertain such beliefs, and give utterance to such words. Say: O people! How can a fleeting fancy compare with the Self-Subsisting, and how can the Creator be likened unto His creatures, who are but as the script of His Pen? Nay, His script excelleth all things, and is sanctified from, and immeasurably exalted above, all creatures.

Baha'u'llah's affirmation of the exaltation of God above everything ever ascribed to Him by mere human beings comes across with great emphasis and intensity. Not only is God exalted above His creation, but "His script excelleth all things, and is sanctified from, and immeasurably exalted above, all creatures." The Word of God is so depicted, and this has been acknowledged by Jews in their sanctification of the Torah scroll, by Christians in their reading of the Bible in every prayer service, by Muslims in their recitation of verses from the Qur'an five times a day. However, the way that human beings live their lives demonstrates that we forget these truths, and are not conscious of them during our every

waking moment. That is what the Manifestations intend for us to do, and facilitate in many ways.

Furthermore, consider the signs of the revelation of God in their relation one to another. Can the sun, which is but one of these signs, be regarded as equal in rank to darkness? The one true God beareth Me witness! No man can believe it, unless he be of those whose hearts are straitened, and whose eyes have become deluded. Say: Consider your own selves. Your nails and eyes are both parts of your bodies. Do ye regard them of equal rank and value? If ye say, yea; say, then: ye have indeed charged with imposture, the Lord, my God, the All-Glorious, inasmuch as ye pare the one, and cherish the other as dearly as your own life.

Here is the verse cited earlier, that points out the difference between the rank of the Creator and that of the creation.

To transgress the limits of one's own rank and station is, in no wise, permissible. The integrity of every rank and station must needs be preserved. By this is meant that every created thing should be viewed in the light of the station it hath been ordained to occupy.

This is a fundamental principle of the religion of God and not a teaching of Baha'u'llah alone. Hence, the rejection of this teaching by those who claim that everyone is the same, that all ranks and stations are or should be abolished is a rejection of one of the perennial truths of religion.

It should be borne in mind, however, that when the light of My Name, the All-Pervading, hath shed its radiance upon the universe, each and every created thing hath, according to a fixed decree, been endowed with the capacity to exercise a particular influence, and been made to possess a distinct virtue. Consider the effect of poison. Deadly though it is, it possesseth the power of exerting, under certain conditions, a beneficial influence. The potency infused into all created things is the direct consequence of the revelation of this most blessed Name. Glorified be He, Who is the Creator of all names and attributes! Cast into the fire the tree that hath rot and dried up, and abide under the shadow of the green and goodly Tree, and partake of the fruit thereof.

This statement, that “every created thing hath, according to a fixed degree, been endowed with the capacity to exercise a particular influence, and been made to possess a distinct virtue” not only points to the differentiation between kinds of creations, such as minerals, plants, animals and humans, but between individuals, for He has said “every created thing”, and this indicates what many mystics have discerned, which is the distinctive uniqueness of every created thing. This the nature of God that is not only manifested in all human beings, created as the Book of Genesis states, “in the image and likeness of God” but in all created things. He is unique, and each of us is unique. The consequence of violating this principle, of the differentiation of all things, is “the fire” for justice will be served. This recalls the language of the gospels, which also speaks of the fruitless and fruitful tree.

The people living in the days of the Manifestations of God have, for the most part, uttered such unseemly sayings. These have been set down circumstantially in the revealed Books and Holy Scriptures.

Baha’u’llah represents this belief in the absence of distinction between mere human beings on the one hand and God and even His Word on the other as a degradation of religious belief that afflicts “the most part” of “the people in the days of the Manifestations of God”. This attributes, from His point of view, for their rejection of each of the Manifestations of God. This is a teaching found “in the revealed Books and Holy Scriptures” and hence not only in His revelation.

He is really a believer in the Unity of God who recognizeth in each and every created thing the sign of the revelation of Him Who is the Eternal Truth, and not he who maintaineth that the creature is indistinguishable from the Creator.

This is His most succinct expression of this principle of religion. But, as the following paragraphs indicate, it is not as simple as it sounds. What He intends by this is that a true “believer in the Unity of God” is not the one who recognizes the “names and attributes of God” in all things, for that is potentially known by all of humanity, but rather, “the sign of the revelation of Him Who is the Eternal Truth”, that is, the Manifestation of God.

Consider, for instance, the revelation of the light of the Name of God, the Educator. Behold, how in all things the evidences of such a revelation are manifest, how the

betterment of all beings dependeth upon it. This education is of two kinds. The one is universal. Its influence pervadeth all things and sustaineth them. It is for this reason that God hath assumed the title, “Lord of all worlds.” The other is confined to them that have come under the shadow of this Name, and sought the shelter of this most mighty Revelation. They, however, that have failed to seek this shelter, have deprived themselves of this privilege, and are powerless to benefit from the spiritual sustenance that hath been sent down through the heavenly grace of this Most Great Name. How great the gulf fixed between the one and the other! If the veil were lifted, and the full glory of the station of those that have turned wholly towards God, and have, in their love for Him, renounced the world, were made manifest, the entire creation would be dumbfounded. The true believer in the Unity of God will, as it hath already been explained, recognize, in the believer and the unbeliever, the evidences of the revelation of both of these Names. Were this revelation to be withdrawn, all would perish.

Here Baha’u’llah references the two kinds of divine revelation, what Baha’u’llah called universal revelation and the revelation through the Manifestations of God in Kitab-i-Iqan: “This education is of two kinds. The one is universal. Its influence pervadeth all things and sustaineth them. It is for this reason that God hath assumed the title, “Lord of all worlds.” The other is confined to them that have come under the shadow of this Name, and sought the shelter of this most mighty Revelation.” The current understanding in the academy and elsewhere is that there are a plurality of religions and all of them are equally pathways to God. Baha’u’llah states that there is one religion of God which is discerned by “those that have turned wholly towards God, and have, in their love for Him, renounced the world” whereas the influence of the universal revelation of God “pervadeth all things and sustaineth them.”

Baha’u’llah is also asserting that it is “the revelation of the light of the Name of God, the Educator”, that is, in the Manifestation of God, that brings about the revelation of both types of divine revelation. It is not that God reveals Himself directly through His names and attributes in all things and then only to a few through the supreme revelation of His Names in His Manifestations. Rather, both kinds of revelation come to us through the Manifestations.

Consider, in like manner, the revelation of the light of the Name of God, the Incomparable. Behold, how this light hath enveloped the entire creation, how each and

every thing manifesteth the sign of His Unity, testifieth to the reality of Him Who is the Eternal Truth, proclaimeth His sovereignty, His oneness, and His power. This revelation is a token of His mercy that hath encompassed all created things. They that have joined partners with Him, however, are unaware of such a revelation, and are deprived of the Faith through which they can draw near unto, and be united with, Him. Witness how the divers peoples and kindreds of the earth bear witness to His unity, and recognize His oneness. But for the sign of the Unity of God within them, they would have never acknowledged the truth of the words, "There is none other God but God." And yet, consider how grievously they have erred, and strayed from His path. Inasmuch as they have failed to recognize the Sovereign Revealer, they have ceased to be reckoned among those who may be regarded as true believers in the Unity of God.

Likewise, "the Incomparable", a Name of God that refers to the Manifestation, likewise "testifieth to the reality of Him Who is the Eternal Truth, proclaimeth His sovereignty, His oneness, and His power." He points out that "the divers peoples and kindreds of the earth bear witness to His unity, and recognize His oneness", that is, the unity and oneness of God, "And yet, consider how grievously they have erred, and strayed from His path. Inasmuch as they have failed to recognize the Sovereign Revealer, they have ceased to be reckoned among those who may be regarded as true believers in the Unity of God." This is the consequence of having "failed to recognize" the Manifestation of God in His Day, and in this Day of Days, Baha'u'llah.

This sign of the revelation of the Divine Being in them that have joined partners with Him may, in a sense, be regarded as a reflection of the glory with which the faithful are illumined. None, however, can comprehend this truth save men endued with understanding. They that have truly recognized the Unity of God should be regarded as the primary manifestations of this Name. It is they who have quaffed the wine of Divine Unity from the cup which the hand of God hath proffered unto them, and who have turned their faces towards Him. How vast the distance that separateth these sanctified beings from those men that are so far away from God!...

It is those who have recognized Baha'u'llah who "should be regarded as the primary manifestations of this Name", that is, of "the Unity of God". Those who have "joined partners with Him" are, on the other hand, "a reflection of the glory with which the faithful are illumined". Joining partners with Him is believing that anyone is the Manifestation of

God apart from Him, There is only one Manifestation in one Dispensation, and one Supreme Manifestation in one Cycle. He concludes this with an affirmation of the vast difference between the two sets of human beings, “How vast the distance that separateth these sanctified beings from those men that are so far away from God!”

God grant that, with a penetrating vision, thou mayest perceive, in all things, the sign of the revelation of Him Who is the Ancient King, and recognize how exalted and sanctified from the whole creation is that most holy and sacred Being. This, in truth, is the very root and essence of belief in the unity and singleness of God. “God was alone; there was none else besides Him.” He, now, is what He hath ever been. There is none other God but Him, the One, the Incomparable, the Almighty, the Most Exalted, the Most Great.

Baha’u’llah asks that “God grant that” His reader “mayest perceive, in all things, the sign of the revelation of Him Who is the Ancient King...the most holy and sacred Being”, that is Himself, the Supreme Manifestation of God. Recognizing the “unity and singleness of God” is recognizing the “unity and singleness” of Himself, as the embodiment of the Manifestation of God. Baha’u’llah affirmed the very same in other verses, such as in the Tablet of Ahmad: “Lo, the Nightingale of Paradise singeth upon the twigs of the Tree of Eternity, with holy and sweet melodies, proclaiming to the sincere ones the glad tidings of the nearness of God, calling the believers in the Divine Unity to the court of the Presence of the Generous One, informing the severed ones of the message which hath been revealed by God, the King, the Glorious, the Peerless, guiding the lovers to the seat of sanctity and to this resplendent Beauty. Verily this is that Most Great Beauty, foretold in the Books of the Messengers, through Whom truth shall be distinguished from error and the wisdom of every command shall be tested. Verily He is the Tree of Life that bringeth forth the fruits of God, the Exalted, the Powerful, the Great. O Ahmad! Bear thou witness that verily He is God and there is no God but Him, the King, the Protector, the Incomparable, the Omnipotent...O people, if ye deny these verses, by what proof have ye believed in God? Produce it, O assemblage of false ones. Nay, by the One in Whose hand is my soul, they are not, and never shall be able to do this, even should they combine to assist one another...Be thou assured in thyself that verily, he who turneth away from this Beauty hath also turned away from the Messengers of the past and sheweth pride towards God from all eternity to all eternity.”

And now concerning thy reference to the existence of two Gods. Beware, beware, lest thou be led to join partners with the Lord, thy God. He is, and hath from everlasting been, one and alone, without peer or equal, eternal in the past, eternal in the future, detached from all things, ever-abiding, unchangeable, and self-subsisting. He hath assigned no associate unto Himself in His Kingdom, no counselor to counsel Him, none to compare unto Him, none to rival His glory. To this every atom of the universe beareth witness, and beyond it the inmates of the realms on high, they that occupy the most exalted seats, and whose names are remembered before the Throne of Glory.

*This Tablet was written in Arabic to Jinab-i-Hashim. Whatever Baha'u'llah affirms about the nature of God is also about the nature of the Manifestation of God, that is, of Himself. Furthermore, even if every human being were to fail to recognize this truth, nevertheless, to this truth **“every atom of the universe beareth witness, and beyond it the inmates of the realms on high”**. Hence, physical reality attests to Him, along with the inhabitants of the spiritual realms. The only ones who are bereft of this awareness are the human beings who fail to recognize Him.*

Bear thou witness in thine inmost heart unto this testimony which God hath Himself and for Himself pronounced, that there is none other God but Him, that all else besides Him have been created by His behest, have been fashioned by His leave, are subject to His law, are as a thing forgotten when compared to the glorious evidences of His oneness, and are as nothing when brought face to face with the mighty revelations of His unity.

*Here He, the Supreme Manifestation, is attesting that **“which God hath Himself and for Himself pronounced, that there is none other God but Him, that all else besides Him have been created by His behest, have been fashioned by His leave, are subject to His law, are as a thing forgotten when compared to the glorious evidences of His oneness...”** These are statements about Baha'u'llah, and they attest to all of humanity being **“subject to His law”**, not, as some have supposed, only those who have recognized Him. For, as the Bab stated in a well-known prayer, **“All are His servants, and all abide by His bidding.”** When, in Kitab-i-Aqdas, Baha'u'llah states that the one who recognizes Him*

must obey His laws, He is not exempting those who have not recognized Him from doing so. He is affirming that the one who has attained to “irfan” (recognition) is obligated to follow the divine law, not exempted from doing so as some of the Sufis imagined.

He, in truth, hath, throughout eternity, been one in His Essence, one in His attributes, one in His works. Any and every comparison is applicable only to His creatures, and all conceptions of association are conceptions that belong solely to those that serve Him. Immeasurably exalted is His Essence above the descriptions of His creatures. He, alone, occupieth the Seat of transcendent majesty, of supreme and inaccessible glory. The birds of men’s hearts, however high they soar, can never hope to attain the heights of His unknowable Essence. It is He Who hath called into being the whole of creation, Who hath caused every created thing to spring forth at His behest. Shall, then, the thing that was born by virtue of the word which His Pen hath revealed, and which the finger of His Will hath directed, be regarded as partner with Him, or an embodiment of His Self? Far be it from His glory that human pen or tongue should hint at His mystery, or that human heart conceive His Essence. All else besides Him stand poor and desolate at His door, all are powerless before the greatness of His might, all are but slaves in His Kingdom. He is rich enough to dispense with all creatures.

*The nature of God is compared with the nature of man, and His concluding sentence is “**All else besides Him stand poor and desolate at His door, all are powerless before the greatness of His might, all are but slaves in His Kingdom**” and “**He is rich enough to dispense with all creatures.**”*

The tie of servitude established between the worshiper and the adored One, between the creature and the Creator, should in itself be regarded as a token of His gracious favor unto men, and not as an indication of any merit they may possess. To this testifieth every true and discerning believer.

*However, this is not simply a statement about the nature of God. For that truth is already known to most of humanity, as it has been taught since the time of Abraham, if not earlier. What He is asserting is that this is the distinction between the human being and Himself, the Manifestation of God. So great is the distinction that “**The tie of servitude...should be regarded as a token of His gracious favor unto men, and not as an indication of any merit they may possess.**” The “true and discerning believer” is the one who realizes that it*

is by God's infinite grace that he is accepted as a servant of God, and that he has not earned that privilege nor does he possess it inherently. His submission to God is absolute and unconditional, and so much be his submission to the Manifestation of God.

– XCV –

Know thou that, according to what thy Lord, the Lord of all men, hath decreed in His Book, the favors vouchsafed by Him unto mankind have been, and will ever remain, limitless in their range. First and foremost among these favors, which the Almighty hath conferred upon man, is the gift of understanding. His purpose in conferring such a gift is none other except to enable His creature to know and recognize the one true God—exalted be His glory. This gift giveth man the power to discern the truth in all things, leadeth him to that which is right, and helpeth him to discover the secrets of creation. Next in rank, is the power of vision, the chief instrument whereby his understanding can function. The senses of hearing, of the heart, and the like, are similarly to be reckoned among the gifts with which the human body is endowed. Immeasurably exalted is the Almighty Who hath created these powers, and revealed them in the body of man.

*This Tablet was written in Persian for Nī'matu'llah, probably a member of the Nī'matu'llahi Sufi Order, which was based in Iran. Baha'u'llah affirms that the Manifestation of God has **"vouchsafed...unto mankind...favors...limitless in their range"** and that the **"first and foremost among these favors...is the gift of understanding."** Among the Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Baha we read: **"It is clear that learning is the greatest bestowal of God; that knowledge and the acquirement thereof is a blessing from heaven. Thus is it incumbent upon the friends of God to exert such an effort and strive with such eagerness to promote divine knowledge, culture and the sciences, that ere long those who are schoolchildren today will become the most erudite of all the fraternity of the wise. This is a service rendered unto God Himself, and it is one of His inescapable commandments."** (Additional Tablets, Extracts and Talks) In His talk at Columbia University, on 19 April 1912, (PUP #12), 'Abdu'l-Baha spoke words along these lines: **"The outcome of this intellectual endowment is science, which is especially characteristic of man. This scientific power investigates and apprehends created objects and the laws***

surrounding them. It is the discoverer of the hidden and mysterious secrets of the material universe and is peculiar to man alone. The most noble and praiseworthy accomplishment of man, therefore, is scientific knowledge and attainment. Science may be likened to a mirror wherein the images of the mysteries of outer phenomena are reflected. It brings forth and exhibits to us in the arena of knowledge all the product of the past. It links together past and present. The philosophical conclusions of bygone centuries, the teachings of the Prophets and wisdom of former sages are crystallized and reproduced in the scientific advancement of today. Science is the discoverer of the past. From its premises of past and present we deduce conclusions as to the future. Science is the governor of nature and its mysteries, the one agency by which man explores the institutions of material creation.”

Every one of these gifts is an undoubted evidence of the majesty, the power, the ascendancy, the all-embracing knowledge of the one true God—exalted be His glory. Consider the sense of touch. Witness how its power hath spread itself over the entire human body. Whereas the faculties of sight and of hearing are each localized in a particular center, the sense of touch embraceth the whole human frame. Glorified be His power, magnified be His sovereignty!

These “gifts” are “undoubted evidence of the majesty, the power, the ascendancy, the all-embracing knowledge of the one true God”. Baha’u’llah states, unequivocally, that God is the creator of man, that He has designed our nature, that we are not accidental, we are proofs of His existence. When ‘Abdu’l-Baha asserted that science and religion are in harmony, He clearly did not intend for anyone to believe that this means that the theory of evolution as it was described in His day and which has become an established doctrine of contemporary science is compatible with the teachings of the Manifestations. On the contrary! We are proofs, in our spiritual and physical attributes alike of not only the existence of God, but of His “power” and “sovereignty”. What then did ‘Abdu’l-Baha intend by declaring this to be one of the principles taught by Baha’u’llah? Surely it is that the truth discovered by science is in agreement with the truth revealed by the Manifestations of God. Whatever is attested by human science which conflicts with what has been revealed by God’s command is a human understanding which will, sooner or later, be replaced with the truth. When science and revelation are aligned, then will humanity have attained to the unity of knowledge that has been sought for millennia, not compelled but compelling.

These gifts are inherent in man himself. That which is preeminent above all other gifts, is incorruptible in nature, and pertaineth to God Himself, is the gift of Divine Revelation. Every bounty conferred by the Creator upon man, be it material or spiritual, is subservient unto this. It is, in its essence, and will ever so remain, the Bread which cometh down from Heaven. It is God's supreme testimony, the clearest evidence of His truth, the sign of His consummate bounty, the token of His all-encompassing mercy, the proof of His most loving providence, the symbol of His most perfect grace. He hath, indeed, partaken of this highest gift of God who hath recognized His Manifestation in this Day.

*In case there was any uncertainty of the greatest gift of God to humanity, Baha'u'llah declares it in this passage to be **"the gift of Divine Revelation"**, which He compares to **"the Bread which cometh down from Heaven"**, symbolically depicted in the manna in the Sinai desert during the life of Moses, and in body of the Son of man in the life of Jesus. For Jesus embodied the Word of God, that is, His revelation. This is why Baha'u'llah wrote, in Kitab-i-Aqdas: **"Weigh not the Book of God with such standards and sciences as are current amongst you, for the Book itself is the unerring Balance established amongst men. In this most perfect Balance whatsoever the peoples and kindreds of the earth possess must be weighed, while the measure of its weight should be tested according to its own standard, did ye but know it."***

Render thanks unto thy Lord for having vouchsafed unto thee so great a bounty. Lift up thy voice and say: All praise be to Thee, O Thou, the Desire of every understanding heart!

– XCVI –

The Pen of the Most High is unceasingly calling; and yet, how few are those that have inclined their ear to its voice! The dwellers of the kingdom of names have busied themselves with the gay livery of the world, forgetful that every man that hath eyes to perceive and ears to hear cannot but readily recognize how evanescent are its colors.

*Baha'u'llah contrasts the **"few"** who have **"inclined their ear to"** the **"Pen of the Most High"** and the many who **"have busied themselves with the gay livery of the world"**. As*

in other verses found in Gleanings, here Baha'u'llah reiterates the statement of Jesus, that “many are called, but few are chosen”.

A new life is, in this age, stirring within all the peoples of the earth; and yet none hath discovered its cause or perceived its motive. Consider the peoples of the West. Witness how, in their pursuit of that which is vain and trivial, they have sacrificed, and are still sacrificing, countless lives for the sake of its establishment and promotion. The peoples of Persia, on the other hand, though the repository of a perspicuous and luminous Revelation, the glory of whose loftiness and renown hath encompassed the whole earth, are dispirited and sunk in deep lethargy.

Baha'u'llah is not only critical of His native Iran, “dispirited and sunk in deep lethargy” but also of “the peoples of the West” who, “in their pursuit of that which is vain and trivial...have sacrificed, and are still sacrificing, countless lives”. ‘Abdu’l-Baha reiterated these two characterizations in Risalih Madaniyyih.

O friends! Be not careless of the virtues with which ye have been endowed, neither be neglectful of your high destiny. Suffer not your labors to be wasted through the vain imaginations which certain hearts have devised. Ye are the stars of the heaven of understanding, the breeze that stirreth at the break of day, the soft-flowing waters upon which must depend the very life of all men, the letters inscribed upon His sacred scroll. With the utmost unity, and in a spirit of perfect fellowship, exert yourselves, that ye may be enabled to achieve that which beseemeth this Day of God. Verily I say, strife and dissension, and whatsoever the mind of man abhorreth, are entirely unworthy of his station. Center your energies in the propagation of the Faith of God. Whoso is worthy of so high a calling, let him arise and promote it. Whoso is unable, it is his duty to appoint him who will, in his stead, proclaim this Revelation, whose power hath caused the foundations of the mightiest structures to quake, every mountain to be crushed into dust, and every soul to be dumbfounded. Should the greatness of this Day be revealed in its fullness, every man would forsake a myriad lives in his longing to partake, though it be for one moment, of its great glory—how much more this world and its corruptible treasures!

Baha'u'llah calls upon “whoso is worthy of so high a calling” to “center your energies in the propagation of the Faith of God”, calling him to “arise and promote it.” To “whoso

is unable” He makes it “his duty to appoint him who will, in his stead, proclaim this Revelation”. These are the only two options He gives His followers – to teach or to enable others to teach. This commandment has not been implemented on a wide scale in the Baha’i community.

Be ye guided by wisdom in all your doings, and cleave ye tenaciously unto it. Please God ye may all be strengthened to carry out that which is the Will of God, and may be graciously assisted to appreciate the rank conferred upon such of His loved ones as have arisen to serve Him and magnify His name. Upon them be the glory of God, the glory of all that is in the heavens and all that is on the earth, and the glory of the inmates of the most exalted Paradise, the heaven of heavens.

*Baha’u’llah calls upon His followers to “**appreciate the rank conferred upon such of His loved ones as have arisen to serve Him and magnify His name**”. Hence, the very high station of teachers in the Faith of Baha’u’llah.*

– XCVII –

Consider the doubts which they who have joined partners with God have instilled into the hearts of the people of this land. “Is it ever possible,” they ask, “for gold to be transmuted into copper?” Say, Yes, by my Lord, it is possible. Its secret, however, lieth hidden in Our Knowledge. We will reveal it unto whom We will. Whoso doubteth Our power, let him ask the Lord his God, that He may disclose unto him the secret, and assure him of its truth. That copper can be turned into gold is in itself sufficient proof that gold can, in like manner, be transmuted into copper, if they be of them that can apprehend this truth. Every mineral can be made to acquire the density, form, and substance of each and every other mineral. The knowledge thereof is with Us in the Hidden Book.

The Lawh-i-Siraj was addressed to a Babi named Mulla ‘Ali-Muhammad-i-Siraj, resident of Isfahan, who wrote questions to Baha’u’llah as a follower of Mirza Yahya and was not convinced by His answers. Mirza Yahya apparently believed that because he had been the appointed leader of the Babis and Him Whom God shall make manifest would not appear for 1510 or 2001 years, that he was entitled to remain in his position of leadership. The transmutation of elements is in possession of the Manifestation of God, but rather than

referring only to material transmutation, Baha'u'llah also states that the soul of man can be transmuted through the power of the Word of God.

– XCVIII –

Say: O leaders of religion! Weigh not the Book of God with such standards and sciences as are current amongst you, for the Book itself is the unerring balance established amongst men. In this most perfect balance whatsoever the peoples and kindreds of the earth possess must be weighed, while the measure of its weight should be tested according to its own standard, did ye but know it.

The eye of My loving-kindness weepeth sore over you, inasmuch as ye have failed to recognize the One upon Whom ye have been calling in the daytime and in the night season, at even and at morn. Advance, O people, with snow-white faces and radiant hearts, unto the blest and crimson Spot, wherein the Sadratu'l-Muntahá is calling: “Verily, there is none other God beside Me, the Omnipotent Protector, the Self-Subsisting!”

O ye leaders of religion! Who is the man amongst you that can rival Me in vision or insight? Where is he to be found that dareth to claim to be My equal in utterance or wisdom? No, by My Lord, the All-Merciful! All on the earth shall pass away; and this is the face of your Lord, the Almighty, the Well-Beloved.

We have decreed, O people, that the highest and last end of all learning be the recognition of Him Who is the Object of all knowledge; and yet, behold how ye have allowed your learning to shut you out, as by a veil, from Him Who is the Dayspring of this Light, through Whom every hidden thing hath been revealed. Could ye but discover the source whence the splendor of this utterance is diffused, ye would cast away the peoples of the world and all that they possess, and would draw nigh unto this most blessed Seat of glory.

Say: This, verily, is the heaven in which the Mother Book is treasured, could ye but comprehend it. He it is Who hath caused the Rock to shout, and the Burning Bush to lift up its voice, upon the Mount rising above the Holy Land, and proclaim: “The Kingdom is God’s, the sovereign Lord of all, the All-Powerful, the Loving!”

We have not entered any school, nor read any of your dissertations. Incline your ears to the words of this unlettered One, wherewith He summoneth you unto God, the Ever-Abiding. Better is this for you than all the treasures of the earth, could ye but comprehend it.

These are passages #99-104 of the Kitab-i-Aqdas and refer to the innate learning of Baha'u'llah, the recognition of the Manifestation of God, and the Word of God as the scale in which all knowledge should be weighed.

– XCIX –

The vitality of men's belief in God is dying out in every land; nothing short of His wholesome medicine can ever restore it. The corrosion of ungodliness is eating into the vitals of human society; what else but the Elixir of His potent Revelation can cleanse and revive it? Is it within human power, O Ḥakím, to effect in the constituent elements of any of the minute and indivisible particles of matter so complete a transformation as to transmute it into purest gold? Perplexing and difficult as this may appear, the still greater task of converting satanic strength into heavenly power is one that We have been empowered to accomplish. The Force capable of such a transformation transcendeth the potency of the Elixir itself. The Word of God, alone, can claim the distinction of being endowed with the capacity required for so great and far-reaching a change.

*This Tablet, in Persian, was addressed to Mulla 'Ali-Akbar Ayadi, also called Hakim. Baha'u'llah refers in this passage to the transmutation of elements, and indicates that **"the still greater task of converting satanic strength into heavenly power is one that We have been empowered to accomplish...The Word of God, alone, can claim the distinction of being endowed with the capacity required for so great and far-reaching a change."** This conversion is called rebirth or spiritual birth in the gospels and also in the Baha'i Writings. The process whereby this happens is not widely discussed in Baha'i communities, and perhaps to their detriment. The Guardian directed his secretary to write that **"the core of religious faith is that mystic feeling which unites Man with God."** (Directives of the Guardian, Page: 86) He goes on to say in this passage that **"The Bahá'í Faith, like all other Divine Religions, is thus fundamentally mystic in character. Its***

*chief goal is the development of the individual and society." He puts the development of the individual and society within the context of religion that is not only fundamentally mystic, but the mystic feeling is at its very core." In another letter written on his behalf: "So the Spirit of God reaches us through the Souls of the Manifestations. We must learn to commune with Their Souls, and this is what the Martyrs seemed to have done, and what brought them such ecstasy of joy that life became nothing. This is the true mysticism, and the secret, inner meaning of life which humanity has at present, drifted so far from." (Unfolding Destiny, Pages: 406-407) And Baha'is thought that the Guardian was entirely focused on practical matters relating to the Administrative Order? To repeat Baha'u'llah, **"The Word of God, alone, can claim the distinction of being endowed with the capacity required for so great and far-reaching a change."***