

THE TWO PARTS OF THE LAW OF GOD

The teachings and ordinances of the eternal Religion of God are of two kinds, of two parts; the one is comprised of those which are fundamental, spiritual, eternal, perennial; the other of those that are secondary, material, situational, dispensational.

This theme has been explained by 'Abdu'l Baha in a number of His talks, including those published in the volumes entitled Some Answered Questions (SAQ:55-57); Utterances of Abdul Beha Abbas to two young men, American pilgrims to Acre, 1901 (UAB:18-19; Paris Talks (PT:II:#44); Promulgation of Universal Peace (PUP:97 98,106,168,338 39,364 66,393,445). This theme was also confirmed to be a distinctive teaching of the Baha'i Faith by Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian, in a number of his letters, including in Guidance for Today and Tomorrow (GTT:2,118,129). Separate documents are devoted to a)the essential teachings of religion; b)the secondary teachings of religion; c)the two kinds of language of the Manifestations of God; d)the twofold station of the Manifestation; e)the universal and prophetic revelation of God; f)the perennial and dispensational covenants of each Manifestation of God. There are references to all of these themes in many of the revealed verses of the various Manifestations.

Baha'u'llah's appointed interpreter, called "mubayyin" in Arabic, meaning "one who clarifies", was His eldest son, 'Abbas Effendi, Who asked that He be called 'Abdu'l-Baha, the "servant of Baha'u'llah". In the years 1904-1906, Laura Clifford Barney, one of the first Americans to become a believer, visited 'Abdu'l-Baha in the Holy Land. She asked Him many questions, carefully transcribed His answers, and, after submitting these notes for His correction, published this collection, simultaneously in Persian and in English translation, under the title Some Answered Questions. In one of those talks, in a commentary upon the eleventh chapter of the Apocalypse of St. John, also called the Book of Revelation, 'Abdu'l-Baha elaborated upon this subject:

که شریعت الله بر دو قسم منقسم [One is the very foundation and belongs to the spiritual realm]; that is, it pertains to spiritual virtues and divine qualities [و روحانیاتست یعنی تعلق بفضائل روحانی]. This part suffers neither change nor alteration [این قدس الاقداس است]; It is the Holy of Holies [و اخلاق رحمانی دارد این تغییر و تبدیل نمیکند], which constitutes the essence of the religion of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Christ, Muḥammad, the Báb, and Bahá'u'lláh [که جوهر شریعت آدم و شریعت نوح و شریعت ابراهیم و شریعت موسی و شریعت مسیح و شریعت محمد و شریعت حضرت اعلی و شریعت جمال مبارک است and which will endure throughout all the prophetic Dispensations [باقی و برقرار ابدآ منسخ نمیشود زیرا آن حقیقت]. It will never be abrogated, for it consists in spiritual rather than material truth [آن ایمانست عرفانست ایقان است]. It is faith, knowledge, certitude, justice [روحانیه است نه جسمانیه عدالت], justice [امانت است], trustworthiness [مرؤت است], love of God [دیانت است], high-mindedness [محبت], piety [امانت است], and charity¹ [الله است]. It is mercy to the poor [رحم بر فقیران], assistance to the oppressed [فريادرسي]

¹This word is not found in the Persian; instead there is this phrase – **مواسات در حال است** – which means “the sending of condolences”, implying the expression of empathy for the sufferings of others..

و دستگیری [مظلومان], generosity to the needy [انفاق بر بیچارگان], and upliftment of the fallen [او انفاق بر بیچارگان], and purity [آزادگی], forbearance [آپاکی], detachment [او آزادگی], humility [او آپاکی], patience [او ثبات است], and constancy [او صبر]. These are divine qualities [او اخلاق رحمانیست]. These commandments will never be abrogated [او این احکام ابدآ نسخ نمیشود], but will remain in force and effect for all eternity [او ثبات است]. These human virtues are renewed in every Dispensation [بلکه تا ابد الاباد مرعی و برقرار است]. [او فضائل عالم انسانی در هر دوری از ادوار تجدید گردد] for at the close of each Dispensation the spiritual law of God [ازیرا در اوخر هر دوره شریعت الله], which consists in the human virtues, vanishes in substance and persists only in form [روحانیه یعنی فضائل انسانیه از میان رود و صورتش باقی]. (SAQ, chapter XI, paragraph 7)

آن اساس شریعت الله که [روحانی] and consist in human virtues, are never subject to abrogation but are eternal and everlasting [او فضائل عالم انسانیست غیر منسوخ و باقی], and are renewed in every prophetic Dispensation [او برقرار و در دوره هر پیغمبری تجدید میگردد]. (SAQ, chapter XI, paragraph 9)

Briefly, what is meant by the term “Holy of Holies” [باری از کلمه قدس القداس] is that spiritual law که ابدآ تغییر و تبدیل نمیکند و [مقدص آن شریعت روحانیه است] which can never be changed or abrogated [او مقصد از شهر مقدس] is the material law [او منسوخ نمیشود], and what is meant by the “Holy City” [که منسوخ میشود] which may indeed be abrogated [او شریعت جسمانیه است]... (SAQ, chapter XI, paragraph 11)

The second part of the religion of God, which pertains to the material world and which concerns such things as fasting; prayer; worship; marriage; divorce; manumission; legal rulings; transactions; and penalties and punishments for murder, assault, theft, and injury, is changed and altered in every prophetic Dispensation and may be abrogated—for policies, transactions, punishments, and other laws are bound to change according to the exigencies of the time. (SAQ, chapter XI, paragraph 9)

“And the temple of God was opened in heaven.” (Revelation 11:19) This means that the divine Jerusalem has appeared and the Holy of Holies has become manifest. **Among the people of true knowledge, the Holy of Holies refers to the essence of the religion of God and His true teachings, which have remained unchanged throughout all the prophetic Dispensations, as was explained previously, while Jerusalem encompasses the reality of the religion of God, which is the Holy of Holies, as well as all the laws, transactions, rites, and material ordinances, which constitute the city.** (SAQ, chapter XI, paragraph 42)

An example of one of the perennial teachings of the religion of God is identified in another chapter of this book:

The Prophets, however, hold that there are the world of God, the world of the Kingdom, and the world of creation: three things. The first emanation is the outpouring grace of the Kingdom, which has emanated from God and has appeared in the realities of all things, even as

the rays emanating from the sun are reflected in all things. And that grace—the rays—appears in infinite forms in the realities of all things, and is specified and individuated according to their capacity, receptivity, and essence. (*SAQ, chapter LXXXII, paragraph 17*)

'Abdu'l-Baha gave a number of other talks on the twofold law of God, which were not corrected by 'Abdu'l-Baha and published in the original Persian, but only in uncorrected English translations. They are not as word for word accurate as the talks cited above. Nevertheless, they reiterate the same principles. In many of His talks 'Abdu'l-Baha indicated that the cause of unity among those of different religious heritages is for them to prioritize the essential and perennial teachings, not those which differ from Prophet to Prophet, from Dispensation to Dispensation.

The earliest of these talks that was translated into English and published is dated 24 November 1901, in which 'Abdu'l-Baha explained to two pilgrims to the Holy Land:

The law and commandments are divided into two branches, spiritual teachings and corporeal or material teachings. Spiritual teachings pertain to morality and character which are the breezes of the Holy Spirit, the life of the soul. The spiritual teachings will never be abolished in any cycle, as they are the eternal law. One of the commandments is the love of God, and is the virtue that crowns the heads of the believers...

The material teachings, those which distinguish lawful from unlawful things, change according to the exigency of the times, because circumstances and conditions are not always the same. (*Utterances of Abdul Beha Abbas to two young men, American pilgrims to Acre, 1901; New York: The Board of Counsel, 1902, p. 18-19*)

'Abdu'l-Baha spoke on this theme in Paris in 1911:

The spiritual part never changes. All the Manifestations of God and His Prophets have taught the same truths and given the same spiritual law. They all teach the one code of morality. There is no division in the truth. The Sun has sent forth many rays to illumine human intelligence, the light is always the same.

Religion has two main parts:

(1) The Spiritual.

(2) The Practical.

The practical part of religion deals with exterior forms and ceremonies, and with modes of punishment for certain offenses. This is the material side of the law, and guides the customs and manners of the people.” (*'Abdu'l-Baha, Paris Talks, 12 November 1911, Paris, France, Part Two, #44*)

'Abdu'l-Baha spoke several times about this theme during His travels around Canada and the United States, in 1912, which are cited here:

The cause of this fellowship and unity lies in the fact that the divine law has two distinct aspects or functions: one the essential or fundamental, the other material or accidental. The

first aspect of the revealed religion of God is that which concerns the ethical development and spiritual progress of mankind, the awakening of potential human susceptibilities and the descent of divine bestowals. These ordinances are changeless, essential, eternal. The second function of the divine religion deals with material conditions, the laws of human intercourse and social regulation. These are subject to change and transformation in accordance with the time, place and conditions. The essential ordinances of religion were the same during the time of Abraham, the day of Moses and the cycle of Jesus, but the accidental or material laws were abrogated and superseded according to the exigency and requirement of each succeeding age. (PUP:97-98; 5 May 1912)

Each of the divine religions embodies two kinds of ordinances. The first is those which concern spiritual susceptibilities, the development of moral principles and the quickening of the conscience of man. These are essential or fundamental, one and the same in all religions, changeless and eternal--reality not subject to transformation. Abraham heralded this reality, Moses promulgated it, and Jesus Christ established it in the world of mankind. All the divine Prophets and Messengers were the instruments and channels of this same eternal, essential truth.

The second kind of ordinances in the divine religions are those which relate to the material affairs of humankind. These are the material or accidental laws which are subject to change in each day of manifestation, according to exigencies of the time, conditions and differing capacities of humanity. For instance, in the day of Moses ten commandments in regard to murder were revealed by Him. These commandments were in accordance with the requirements of that day and time. Other laws embodying drastic punishments were enacted by Moses--an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. The penalty for theft was amputation of the hand. These laws and penalties were applicable to the degree of the Israelitish people of that period, who dwelt in the wilderness and desert under conditions where severity was necessary and justifiable. But in the time of Jesus Christ this kind of law was not expedient; therefore, Christ abrogated and superseded the commands of Moses.

In brief, every one of the divine religions contains essential ordinances, which are not subject to change, and material ordinances, which are abrogated according to the exigencies of time. But the people of the world have forsaken the divine teachings and followed forms and imitations of the truth. Inasmuch as these human interpretations and superstitions differ, dissensions and bigotry have arisen, and strife and warfare have prevailed. By investigating the truth or foundation of reality underlying their own and other beliefs, all would be united and agreed, for this reality is one; it is not multiple and not divisible. (PUP:106; 7 May 1912)

Each of the divine religions has two aspects. The first is essential. It concerns morality and development of the virtues of the human world. This aspect is common to all. It is fundamental; it is one; there is no difference, no variation in it. As regards the inculcation of morality and the development of human virtues, there is no difference whatsoever between the teachings of Zoroaster, Jesus and Baha'u'llah. In this they agree; they are one. The second aspect of the divine religions is nonessential. It concerns human needs and undergoes change in every cycle according to the exigency of the time...Therefore, the

nonessentials which deal with details of community are changed according to the exigency of the time and conditions. But the essential foundation of the teachings of Moses, Zoroaster, Jesus and Baha'u'llah is identical, is one; there is no difference whatsoever... (PUP:168,169; 2 June 1912)

Each one of the divine religions has established two kinds of ordinances: the essential and the accidental. The essential ordinances rest upon the firm, unchanging, eternal foundations of the Word itself. They concern spiritualities, seek to stabilize morals, awaken intuitive susceptibilities, reveal the knowledge of God and inculcate the love of all mankind. The accidental laws concern the administration of outer human actions and relations, establishing rules and regulations requisite for the world of bodies and their control. These are ever subject to change and supersedure according to the exigencies of time, place and condition...the fundamental realities of the knowledge of God and the holy Manifestations, the purification of morals, the awakening of spiritual susceptibilities--eternal principles in which there is no change or transformation. Briefly, the foundation of the divine religions in one eternal foundation, but the laws for temporary conditions and exigencies are subject to change. Therefore, by adherence to these temporary laws, blindly following and imitating ancestral forms, difference and divergence have arisen among followers of the various religions, resulting in disunion, strife and hatred. Blind imitations and dogmatic observances are conducive to alienation and disagreement; they lead to bloodshed and destruction of the foundations of humanity. Therefore, the religionists of the world must lay aside these imitations and investigate the essential foundation or reality itself, which is not subject to change or transformation. This is the divine means of agreement and unification. (PUP:338-339; 25 September 1912)

But when we speak of religion, we mean the essential foundation or reality of religion...allegiance to the essential foundation of the divine religions is ever the cause of development and progress... (PUP:363; 12 October 1912; this talk was also published in Persian in *Khitabat:610-621*)

Furthermore, we wish to establish the point that the foundations of the religions of God are one foundation. This foundation is not multiple, for it is reality itself. Reality does not admit of multiplicity, although each of the divine religions is separable into two divisions. One concerns the world of morality and the ethical training of human nature. It is directed to the advancement of the world of humanity in general; it reveals and inculcates the knowledge of God and makes possible the discovery of the verities of life. This is ideal and spiritual teaching, the essential quality of divine religion, and not subject to change or transformation. It is the one foundation of all the religions of God. Therefore, the religions are essentially one and the same.

The second classification or division comprises social laws and regulations applicable to human conduct. This is not the essential spiritual quality of religion. It is subject to change and transformation according to the exigencies and requirements of time and place...Time changes conditions and laws change to suit conditions. We must remember that these

changing laws are not the essentials; they are the accidentals of religion. The essential ordinances established by a Manifestation of God are spiritual; they concern moralities, the ethical development of man and faith in God. They are ideal and necessarily permanent--expressions of the one foundation and not amenable to change or transformation. Therefore, the fundamental basis of the revealed religion of God is immutable, unchanging throughout the centuries, not subject to the varying conditions of the human world. (*PUP:364-365, 365-366; 12 October 1912; this talk was also published in Persian in Khitabat:610-621*)

If we investigate the foundations of the divine religions, we find them to be one, absolutely changeless and never subject to transformation. For example, each of the divine religions contains two kinds of laws or ordinances. One division concerns the world of morality and ethical institutions. These are the essential ordinances. They instill and awaken the knowledge and love of God, love for humanity, the virtues of the world of mankind, the attributes of the divine Kingdom, rebirth and resurrection from the kingdom of nature. These constitute one kind of divine law which is common to all and never subject to change. From the dawn of the Adamic cycle to the present day this fundamental law of God has continued changeless. This is the foundation of divine religion.

The second division comprises laws and institutions which provide for human needs and conditions according to exigencies of time and place. These are accidental, of no essential importance and should never have been made the cause and source of human contention...Such ordinances, therefore, constitute the second or nonessential division of the divine religions and are not of importance, for they deal with human transactions which are ever changing according to the requirements of time and place. Therefore, the intrinsic foundations of the divine religions are one. (*PUP:393-394; 6 November 1912*)

The divine religions embody two kinds of ordinances. First, there are those which constitute essential, or spiritual, teachings of the Word of God. These are faith in God, the acquisition of the virtues which characterize perfect manhood, praiseworthy moralities, the acquisition of the bestowals and bounties emanating from the divine effulgences--in brief, the ordinances which concern the realm of morals and ethics. This is the fundamental aspect of the religion of God, and this is of the highest importance because knowledge of God is the fundamental requirement of man...This is the essential foundation of all the divine religions, the reality itself, common to all. Abraham promulgated this; Moses proclaimed it. Christ and all the Prophets upheld this standard and aspect of divine religion.

Second, there are laws and ordinances which are temporary and nonessential. These concern human transactions and relations. They are accidental and subject to change according to the exigencies of time and place. These ordinances are neither permanent nor fundamental...

It has been shown conclusively, that the foundation of the religion of God remains permanent and unchanging. It is that fixed foundation which ensures the progress and stability of the body politic and the illumination of humanity. It has ever been the cause of love and justice amongst men. It works for the true fellowship and unification of all

mankind, for it never changes and is not subject to supersedure. The accidental, or nonessential, laws which regulate the transactions of the social body and everyday affairs of life are changeable and subject to abrogation. (PUP:403, 404,404-405; 8 November 1912)

The teachings and ordinances of the divine religions are of two kinds. The first are spiritual and essential in nature--such as faith in God, faith in Christ, faith in Moses, faith in Abraham, faith in Muhammad, the love of God and the oneness of the world of humanity. These divine principles shall be spread throughout the world. Strife and enmity shall disappear, ignorance, hatred and hostility cease and all the human race be bound together. The second kind of ordinances and teachings concern the outer conditions and transactions of the world of mankind. They are the nonessential, accidental or temporary laws of human affairs which are subject to change and transformation according to the exigencies of time and place...

But the followers of the divine religions have turned away from the principles and ordinances which are essential and unchanging in the Word of God, forsaking those fundamental realities which have to do with the life of the human world, the eternal life--such as the love of God, faith in God, philanthropy, knowledge, spiritual perception, divine guidance--holding these to be contingent and nonessential while wrangling and disagreeing over such questions as whether divorce is lawful or unlawful, or whether this or that observance of a minor law is orthodox and true. The Jews consider divorce lawful; the Catholic Christians deem it unlawful; the outcome is discord and hostility between them. If they would investigate the one fundamental reality underlying the laws revealed by Moses and Christ, this condition of hatred and misunderstanding would be dispelled and divine unity prevail...Investigation of the one fundamental reality and allegiance to the essential unchanging principles of the Word of God can alone establish unity and love in human hearts. (PUP:445, 446; 18 November 1912)

'Abdu'l-Baha continued to refer to this theme in 1913, in Europe and in Egypt, including this talk:

Each divine revelation is divided into two parts. The first part is essential, and belongs to the world of morality. It is the exposition of significances and realities. It is the expression of the love of God, the knowledge of God. This is one in all the religions, unchangeable and immutable. The second part is inessential. It belongs to practical life, to transactions and business, and changes according to the requirements of the time of each prophet. (Abdu'l-Baha on Divine Philosophy, chapter V; also published in Persian in *Khitabat*, pp. 737-747)

He also wrote an article that was published in 1914, which expounds upon this theme:

There are two general and principal classes of divine teachings. One is spiritual, and pertains to the moralities. This is the fundamental basis of the divine law, unchangeable and unalterable, which has been reiterated and renewed in the cycle of every prophet. Its commands refer to justice, truthfulness, compassion, faith, love of God, self devotion, self

sacrifice, steadfastness, including all divine and merciful attributes. This is the unchanging and unmoving law of God.

"The second class of divine teachings is material and deals with behaviour, such as divorce, the commandments, the way of worshipping. All these conditions have changed in the cycle of every prophet. The character of divine sovereignty has no change or transformation, but the organization and administration change continually. This is why Jesus Christ said: "I came not to destroy the law, but to fulfill it." [Gospel of Matthew, 5:17] At the same time there are conditions that are changeable." (*Abdu'l-Baha, from an article published in The International Psychic Gazette, July 1914; excerpted in Star of the West, VII:17, p. 173.*)

Shoghi Effendi, grandson of 'Abdu'l-Baha, and appointed by Him to be the first Guardian of the Baha'i Faith, wrote regarding these two parts of the religion of God in a number of his letters, including those excerpted here:

The Revelation proclaimed by Baha'u'llah, His followers believe, is divine in origin, all-embracing in scope, broad in its outlook, scientific in its method, humanitarian in its principles and dynamic in the influence it exerts on the hearts and minds of men. **The mission of the Founder of their Faith, they conceive it to be, to proclaim** that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is continuous and progressive, **that the Founders of all past religions, though differing in the non-essential aspects of their teachings, "abide in the same Tabernacle, soar in the same heaven, are seated upon the same throne, utter the same speech and proclaim the same Faith."** (*Shoghi Effendi, in a letter to the High Commissioner for Palestine, entitled "The World Religion of Baha'u'llah: A Summary of Its Aims, Teachings and History," June 1933*)

Nor does the Baha'i Revelation, claiming as it does to be the culmination of a prophetic cycle and the fulfillment of the promise of all ages, attempt, under any circumstances, to invalidate those first and everlasting principles that animate and underlie the religions that have preceded it. The God-given authority, vested in each one of them, it admits and establishes as its firmest and ultimate basis. It regards them in no other light except as different stages in the eternal history and constant evolution of one religion, Divine and indivisible, of which it itself forms but an integral part. It neither seeks to obscure their Divine origin, nor to dwarf the admitted magnitude of their colossal achievements. It can countenance no attempt that seeks to distort their features or to stultify the truths which they instil. **Its teachings do not deviate a hair-breadth from the verities they enshrine, nor does the weight of its message detract one jot or one tittle from the influence they exert or the loyalty they inspire.** Far from aiming at the overthrow of the spiritual foundation of the world's religious systems, its avowed, its unalterable purpose is to widen their basis, to restate their fundamentals, to reconcile their aims, to reinvigorate their life, to demonstrate their oneness, to restore the pristine purity of their teachings, to coordinate their functions, and to assist in the realization of their highest aspirations...the fundamental principle which constitutes the bedrock of Baha'I belief, the principle that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is orderly, continuous, and progressive, and not spasmodic or final. (*Shoghi Effendi, letter addressed to the*

Western believers, 8 February 1934, entitled, "The Dispensation of Baha'u'llah," published in The World Order of Baha'u'llah, pp. 114,115; reprinted in Guidance for Today and Tomorrow (GTT:129,131)

The Faith standing identified with the name of Baha'u'llah disclaims any intention to belittle any of the Prophets gone before Him, to whittle down any of their teachings, to obscure, however slightly, the radiance of their Revelations, to oust them from the hearts of their followers, **to abrogate the fundamentals of their doctrines, to discard any of their revealed Books**, or to suppress the legitimate aspirations of their adherents. Repudiating the claim of any religion to be the final revelation of God to man, disclaiming finality for His own Revelation, Baha'u'llah inculcates the basic principle of the relativity of religious truth, the continuity of Divine Revelation, the progressiveness of religious experience. His aim is to widen the basis of all revealed religions and to unravel the mysteries of their scriptures. **He insists on the unqualified recognition of the unity of their purpose, restates the eternal verities they enshrine, coordinates their functions, distinguishes the essential and the authentic from the non-essential and spurious in their teachings**, separates the God-given truths from the priest prompted superstitions, and on this as a basis proclaims the possibility, and even prophesies the inevitability, of their unification, and the consummation of their highest hopes. (*Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 28 March, 1941, published with the title, The Promised Day is Come, p. 112; reprinted in Guidance for Today and Tomorrow (GTT:118)*

The fundamental principle enunciated by Baha'u'llah, followers of His Faith firmly believe, is that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is a continuous and progressive process, that **all the great religions on the world are divine in origin, that their basic principles are in complete harmony, that their aims and purposes are one and the same, that their teachings are but facets of one truth, that their functions are complementary, that they differ only in the nonessential aspects of their doctrines**, and that their missions represent successive stages in the spiritual evolution of human society... **His purpose, far from belittling the station of the Prophets gone before Him or of whittling down their teachings, is to restate the basic truths which these teachings enshrine in a manner that would conform to the needs, and be in consonance with the capacity, and be applicable to the problems, the ills, and perplexities, of the age in which we live.** (*Shoghi Effendi, in a letter to the United Nations Special Commission on Palestine, entitled "The Faith of Baha'u'llah," 14 July 1947; published in The Promised Day is Come, Foreword, p. v, 1961; reprinted in Guidance for Today and Tomorrow (GTT:2,3)*

This dual character of the divine Word can be discerned through an analysis of the verses revealed by Baha'u'llah, including the ones cited below, from the books entitled Hidden Words, Kitab-i-Iqan, and Kitab-i-Aqdas. The earliest reference in the Writings of Baha'u'llah to the two parts to the teachings and laws of the religion of God, is probably to be found in the Hidden Words (Arabic and Persian), revealed in 1858:

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. (*Baha'u'llah, Prelude, Arabic Hidden Words*)

The mystic and wondrous Bride, hidden ere this beneath the veiling of utterance, hath now, by the grace of God and His divine favor, been made manifest even as the resplendent light shed by the beauty of the Beloved. I bear witness, O friends! that the favor is complete, the argument fulfilled, the proof manifest and the evidence established. Let it now be seen what your endeavors in the path of detachment will reveal. In this wise hath the divine favor been fully vouchsafed unto you and unto them that are in heaven and on earth. All praise to God, the Lord of all Worlds. (*Baha'u'llah, Final Words, Persian Hidden Words*)

Commentary:

There are 71 Hidden Words in Arabic and 82 in Persian. Each of these gems is one of the essential and perennial teachings of the Manifestations of God. And this is just the beginning of the references to this theme in the Writings of Baha'u'llah.

Here are verses of Baha'u'llah in Kitab-i-Iqan which refer to the essential teachings of the religion of God:

In another sense, by the terms “sun,” “moon,” and “stars” are meant such laws and teachings as have been established and proclaimed in every Dispensation, such as the laws of prayer and fasting. (*Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Iqan, paragraph 38*)

The traditions established the fact that in all Dispensations the law of prayer hath constituted a fundamental element of the Revelation of all the Prophets of God... (*Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Iqan, paragraph 39*)

Likewise, we find verses that identify perennial teachings of religion in Kitab-i-Aqdas:

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. (*Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, paragraph 149*)

This is the changeless Faith of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future. Let him that seeketh, attain it; and as to him that hath refused to seek it—verily, God is Self-Sufficient, above any need of His creatures. (*Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, paragraph 182*)

He is God, exalted be He, the Lord of majesty and power! The Prophets and Chosen Ones have all been commissioned by the One True God, magnified be His glory, to nurture the trees of

human existence with the living waters of uprightness and understanding, that there may appear from them that which God hath deposited within their inmost selves. As may be readily observed, each tree yieldeth a certain fruit, and a barren tree is but fit for fire. The purpose of these Educators, in all they said and taught, was to preserve man's exalted station. Well is it with him who in the Day of God hath laid fast hold upon His precepts and hath not deviated from His true and fundamental Law. **The fruits that best befit the tree of human life are trustworthiness and godliness, truthfulness and sincerity; but greater than all, after recognition of the unity of God, praised and glorified be He, is regard for the rights that are due to one's parents.** This teaching hath been mentioned in all the Books of God, and reaffirmed by the Most Exalted Pen. Consider that which the Merciful Lord hath revealed in the Qur'án, exalted are His words: "Worship ye God, join with Him no peer or likeness; and show forth kindness and charity towards your parents..." [Qur'an 4:36] Observe how loving-kindness to one's parents hath been linked to recognition of the one true God! Happy they who are endued with true wisdom and understanding, who see and perceive, who read and understand, and who observe that which God hath revealed in the Holy Books of old, and in this incomparable and wondrous Tablet. (*Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, Questions and Answers, #106*)

Baha'u'llah also writes of the dispensational teachings of the Manifestations of God:

The traditions established the fact that in all Dispensations the law of prayer hath constituted a fundamental element of the Revelation of all the Prophets of God—a **law the form and the manner of which hath been adapted to the varying requirements of every age.** Inasmuch as every subsequent Revelation hath abolished the manners, habits, and teachings that have been clearly, specifically, and firmly established by the former Dispensation, these have accordingly been symbolically expressed in terms of “sun” and “moon.” (*Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Iqan, paragraph 39*)

By the term “clouds” is meant those things that are contrary to the ways and desires of men. Even as He hath revealed in the verse already quoted: “As oft as an Apostle cometh unto you with that which your souls desire not, ye swell with pride, accusing some of being impostors and slaying others.” [Qur'an 2:87] These “clouds” signify, in one sense, the annulment of laws, the abrogation of former Dispensations, the repeal of rituals and customs current amongst men, the exalting of the illiterate faithful above the learned opposers of the Faith. (*Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Iqan, paragraph 79*)

Baha'u'llah also wrote that in comparison with the teachings revealed in His Dispensation and Cycle, the teachings of previous Manifestations are similar to the secondary teachings of religion. When considered how many of His teachings are perennial, and the potential duration of His Dispensation and Cycle, this is not surprising:

For this day is the Lord of all days, and whatsoever hath been revealed therein by the Source of divine Revelation is the truth and the essence of all principles. This day may be likened to a

sea and all other days to gulfs and channels that have branched therefrom. That which is uttered and revealed in this day is the foundation, and is accounted as the Mother Book and the Source of all utterance. Although every day is associated with God, magnified be His glory, yet these days have been singled out and adorned with the ornament of intimate association with Him, for they have been extolled in the books of the Chosen Ones of God, as well as of some of His Prophets, as the “Day of God”. **In a sense this day and that which appeareth therein are to be regarded as the primary principles, while all other days and whatsoever appeareth in them are to be viewed as the secondary ordinances deduced therefrom, and which as such are subordinate and relative.** For instance, attending the mosque is secondary with respect to the recognition of God, for the former is dependent upon and conditioned by the latter. As to the principles current amongst the divines of this age, these are merely a set of rules which they have devised and from which they infer, each according to his own opinions and inclinations, the ordinances of God. (*Baha'u'llah, Tablet to Mirza Abu'l-Fadl Gulpaygani in response to questions from Manikchi Sahib, in The Tabernacle of Unity*)

The highest essence and most perfect expression of whatsoever the peoples of old have either said or written hath, through this most potent Revelation, been sent down from the heaven of the Will of the All-Possessing. (*Baha'u'llah, Gleanings, XLIII*)

COMMENTARY

There are many meanings of this duality of the Law of God, including the following:

First, *there are aspects of the Law which are immutable and which pertain to its eternal spirit; and, on the other hand, there are aspects of the Law which change according to the exigencies of the age in which they are revealed. This dichotomy is very clearly expressed in all of the above-cited quotations.*

Second, *the essential teachings are fundamental and perennial, while the secondary aspects of the law are subsidiary and dispensational--in this sense, the most important teachings are those which are eternal and which span all Dispensations, all Revelations. Hence, it is the essential teachings which compel our special attention, which we are enjoined to focus upon rather than the nonessential teachings.*

Third, *if religionists emphasize the material rather than the spiritual teachings they will always be at odds with each other, and they will continue to make claims to exclusive and to superior religious truth, which claims, of themselves, are conducive to dissension, to contention and spiritual blindness, and even to violence and warfare.*

Fourth, *the nonessential teachings are only applicable to the age to which they were revealed, and hence they cannot possibly serve their purpose in a later age--they are abrogated by the new Manifestation of God and His new revelation. In the latter age adherence to these nonessential ordinances has become an obstacle rather than an aid to attainment of Divine approval.*

Fifth, *when the followers of all religions investigate the foundations of religion, they will find that the essential teachings are held in common by all, and this will be the foundation of their unity.*

Sixth, another significance of this duality is that it affirms the greater value of the spirit of the Law of God over its letter, insisting that meaning is not limited to literal interpretation, even when the literal interpretation of a particular verse is entirely appropriate and necessary. Attachment to outward forms of religion may veil the soul from the spiritual realities which defy form, which transcend all limitations. According to this principle, the spirit is not in conflict with the letter of the Law, but rather, the letter is a guide to the spirit, a pathway to the Divine, and the Spirit is also a guide to the inner meaning of the letter. The letter of the Law is never an end in itself. When a soul adheres too closely to the letter of the Law, clinging to literal or traditional interpretations, or to etymological or other socially-constructed perspectives, it may lose contact with the spirit of the Law, and it is this spirit which is its essence, and which is responsible for its penetration and potency, its capacity to transform human life from the animal kingdom to the Kingdom of angels and prophets.

Seventh, the Guardian correlated many of the Baha'i teachings, and his letters which are cited here encourage us to explore correlations between the twofold stations of each Manifestation, their two Covenants, the two kinds of revelation from God, along with the two parts of the religion of God. These correlations will be explored in subsequent documents.

Note: This compilation and commentary were completed by Peter Terry in 1999. They were revised in 2023, 2024 and 2026.