

The background image is a vertical rectangular composition. The top half features a dark, stormy sky with a prominent, bright yellow lightning bolt striking down from the upper left. Below the sky, the water is depicted with vibrant, swirling colors of blue, green, and purple, suggesting a turbulent sea. In the lower center, a small, dark wooden boat is shown, with a lone figure inside, navigating the rough waters. The overall mood is one of adversity and spiritual struggle.

*Spiritual
Solution
to
Adversity*

Spiritual Solution to Adversity

Why Suffer?

Take Heaven's Advice

www.TheKnowledgeOfGod.com

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Spiritual Solution to Adversity

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ISBN: 9780937661406

Library of Congress Control Number: 2011928204

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Introduction

The prime purpose of this book is to show that the panacea for human suffering is the adoption of a spiritual perspective. As intended by our Creator, this perspective must serve as the first and foremost armor of protection for human soul. Without this armor, we are vulnerable to the relentless changes and chances of this life; we have little, if any, resistance to the mounting pains and pressures of daily living. Our knowledge of God, our awareness of His ever-presence in our lives, and His plan for our everlasting destiny is our soul's immune system. Without this knowledge, we are exposed to countless dangers of a changing world; we have little if any protection against the unpleasant events of our life.

God's Greatest Gift

If you were given a chance to ask God for one favor, for one gift, what would it be? Please make your choice before reading further.

The following quotations contain the choice answer:

Above all else, the greatest gift and the most wondrous blessing hath ever been and will continue to be Wisdom. It is man's unfailing Protector.¹

Bahá'u'lláh

Happy is the man that findeth wisdom...all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her. Proverbs 3:13, 15

He to whom wisdom is given, much good is given him.

Qur'án 2:272

What is the hallmark of wisdom? How can we separate the wise from the foolish? By the choices they make. The quality of our choices determines the degree of wisdom we have attained.

Wisdom is basically of two kinds:

- Worldly, and
- Spiritual

Some people rate high in one or the other; others rate low or high in both. There are as many levels of wisdom as there are people.

Who can teach us “spiritual wisdom” and where can we find it? Only God can teach us this wisdom and only in His Word can we discover its wonders and mysteries. This small book presents a summary of the divine Wisdom on the meaning and purpose of adversity. They show how we can transform the negative events of our lives into positive, how we can turn the stumbling blocks into stepping stones to spiritual progress.

As there are physical laws, so are these spiritual laws. Feel free to doubt anything you wish, but do not doubt the following laws:

- Behind every problem lies a spiritual solution.
- We are in need of God just as we are in need of food and water. Unless we anchor our lives on God, we are like a small boat at the mercy of raging storms all the days of our lives. We may deny the law of gravity, but it is to our own advantage to accept it and harmonize our lives with it. The spiritual laws that govern the human soul—the spiritual kingdom—are as certain as the laws that govern the material kingdom.

A Plan of Action

To benefit from this book, select a plan of action. The purpose of this book is not to simply impart information, but to elevate your perspective of the unpleasant events of your life. One plan of action is to mark the quotations that appeal to you, that relate to your needs. Then review them frequently, especially at difficult times in your life.

Just as we can master physical skills—such as playing the piano or driving—through repetition, so must we try to master spiritual skills. Through repeated readings of your favorite quotations, you will be able to raise your tolerance to adversity. You will be able to awaken and strengthen your “spiritual instinct” hidden deep in your soul. Once awakened, you will find your soul connected to eternity. That connection will diminish the burden of your suffering. Little by little, your spiritual perspective will produce new layers of protection for your soul.

Let me cite one example. A few years ago, after speaking to a rather large audience, a young career lady came to me and quietly asked if I could offer a solution to some of the serious challenges she was facing. There was no time to engage in a long discussion. In response, I simply asked her to read *The Tablet of Patience*. A year later, after I had finished my talk in the same hall, she approached me and said, “Thank you for your suggestion. I read *The Tablet of Patience* and now I am praying for more suffering!” I was utterly astonished by her words. I could not believe that the reading of a dozen pages could impact someone’s life so profoundly. This example is, of course, unusual. Yet, it demonstrates the miraculous powers of a spiritual perspective—its incredible wonders and mysteries.

May God bless you and aid you in all your endeavors.

Turning Stress Into Strength

This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice
and be glad in it.

Psalms 118:24

Come to me...and I will give you rest. Christ (Matt. 11:28 NIV)

There is no peace for thee save by...turning unto Me...²Bahá'u'lláh

Turn unto Him, for thy Lord is near, ready to answer.

Muhammad (Qur'án 11:64)

The Lord gives strength to his people; the Lord blesses his
people with peace.

Psalms 29:11 NIV

He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

Psalms 147:3 NIV

Sorrow not if, in these days and on this earthly plane, things
contrary to your wishes have been ordained and manifested
by God, for days of blissful joy, of heavenly delight, are
assuredly in store for you. Worlds, holy and spiritually
glorious, will be unveiled to your eyes. You are destined by
Him, in this world and hereafter, to partake of their benefits,
to share in their joys, and to obtain a portion of their
sustaining grace. To each and every one of them you will, no
doubt, attain.³

Bahá'u'lláh

A little boy was leading his sister up a mountain path. "Why,"
she complained, "it's all rocky and bumpy." "Sure," he said,
"the bumps are what you climb on." This is the wonder of our
lives: we can use adversity as stepping-stones to God or as
stumbling-stones to our graves.

This book explores the meaning and purpose of adversity as well as the causes and the cures of the overwhelming stress and distress of our time. But before studying those issues, we should first look at the problem of evil, and see where it comes from.

Whence Comes Evil?

When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.

Romans 7:21 NIV

If humans are made in the image of their Creator, then where does evil come from? The failure to decipher the mystery of adversity or evil, to see it through an eternal perspective, to recognize its roots and its roles in human life, has perhaps drawn more hearts away from or against God than anything else. The apparent existence of evil is the first and *seemingly* the most convincing objection raised against the compassionate Creator by those alienated from His compassion.

The question of suffering is of such magnitude that it has puzzled such great thinkers as Einstein. Although he believed in a Creator, in an intelligent Being, he could not attribute love to that Being.

To understand the mystery of suffering, we must delve deep into the realm of reason, and resist the temptation of riding upon the drifting clouds of emotion or personal desires.

What then is the source of evil? Is it God's creation or ours? Evil springs not from our essence, but from our will to supersede or subdue our divine and exalted essence. It is the inevitable consequence of our freedom of choice. If we could not choose to err, then how could we be free? And without freedom, would we not be mere slaves, subservient to our immutable instincts?

Without freedom, love loses its supreme splendor, its honor and identity. And if love is lost, then what purpose is there in living?

God made everything perfect, and bestowed His gifts on all His creation. Among the gifts He bestowed on humans is the freedom of choice. That freedom allows us to turn good into evil, including freedom itself. That is not God's creation, it is ours; it is not His fault, it is ours.

Aside from our freedom to choose our destiny, there is still another explanation for evil. Often we pass judgment in the context of our immediate needs and desires. We look only at part of the picture. For instance, we detest darkness, yet it is in darkness that the stars glitter. We avoid sickness, yet it is by sickness that we appreciate health. We despise death, yet it is by death that we rise from the earthly to the heavenly, that we can gain admission into the eternal world and witness God's glorious mansions in heaven.

In *Some Answered Questions*, a book mostly concerned with Bahá'í answers to questions of identity and purpose, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that "evil" has no absolute or independent life of its own. It rests either in a vacuum or else carries a relative existence and identity. "Darkness" cannot appear or exist on its own; it prevails only when light is no more, thus pointing to the absence—not the presence—of a power. We may perceive an angry snake as evil, so may the snake perceive us. A hungry lioness is death to the hunted, but life to her hungry cubs.

Aside from the vile deeds and thoughts that spring from our freedom, evil has no existence. The universe is the mirror of absolute love, perfection, and purity. The Viewer is God Himself.

Every good thing is of God, and every evil thing is from yourselves.⁴ Bahá'u'lláh

Everything that God created is good... I Timothy 4:4 NEB

He has made everything beautiful... Eccl. 3:11 NIV

Yet your countrymen say, “The way of the Lord is not just.”
but it is their way that is not just. Ezekiel, 33:17 NIV

Will they not look up to the heaven above them, and
consider how we have reared it and decked it forth, and that
there are no flaws therein? Qur’án 50:6

The evil in man is the only thing out of harmony with God, the
only thing outside the realm of His creation.

Much of what we call evil stems from our own choosing—our
deviation from our own divine nature. “Most of the shadows of
this life are caused by our standing in our own sunshine.” If we
follow, with unfailing devotion, the spiritual laws declared by
God’s great Teachers, we shall gain such a power and freedom
as to rise above every evil, every undesirable outcome.

...were men to abide by and observe the divine teachings,
every trace of evil would be banished from the face of the
earth.⁵ Bahá’u’lláh

Adversity as a Positive Force

Life is a grindstone. But whether it grinds us down or
polishes us up depends on us.⁶

Obstacles are what you see when you take your eyes off your
goal.⁷

The mind knows that adversity and struggle make life richer,
yet the heart remains unconvinced. Literary works abound with
the virtue of suffering, yet people remain untouched. Why?
Suffering reaches the deepest emotions of human beings. It is a
question not of the mind but of the heart. Further, suffering is
ongoing and immediate, but its virtues and rewards arrive later,
sometimes as late as eternity! Patience is a scarce virtue. It is
not a hallmark of being human; the desire for instant remedies
and rewards is!

Adversity is the diamond dust Heaven polishes its jewels with.⁸

Strength is born in the deep silence of long-suffering hearts; not amid joy.⁹

Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure, than to take rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much, because they live in the grey twilight that knows not victory nor defeat.¹⁰

There are some defeats more triumphant than victories.¹¹

Defeat is not the worst of failures. Not to have tried is the true failure.¹²

The brightest crowns that are worn in heaven have been tried, and smelted, and polished, and glorified through the furnace of tribulation.¹³

In still another way, that which we call evil is a challenge testing our will, trying our patience, and removing the shield from our protected and untested egos, so that our worthiness may unfold, and our hidden secrets bloom from the potential into the actual.

Calamity is the perfect glass wherein we truly see and know ourselves.¹⁴

It takes both rain and sunshine to make a rainbow.¹⁵

In all his dispensations God is at work for our good. In prosperity he tries our gratitude; in mediocrity, our contentment; in misfortune, our submission; in darkness, our faith; under temptation, our steadfastness, and at all times, our obedience and trust in him.¹⁶

It is easy to be grateful in times of health and prosperity. It is easy to love those who love us:

If you love those who love you, what reward will you get?...And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Christ (Matt. 5:46-48 NIV)

It is easy when life offers peaches, pears, and cherries. What happens when it hands us a rough coconut, when it conceals the life giving juice inside a hard shell?

Adversity brings out both the best and the worst in us. A farmer sold truckloads of potatoes to a merchant for a good price. But another farmer would receive little for his potatoes. He wondered why. One day he asked the buyer: "Why do you pay me less than my neighbor?" "Because" the buyer answered "he grades his potatoes, but you don't." The farmer was puzzled for he knew his neighbor did not do this. One day he confronted him and asked him to reveal the secret. "My friend," his neighbor said, "you take the easy way out, you take your truck on smooth highways. I take mine over rough country roads. The truck works like a giant shaker, and by the time I get to my destination, my potatoes are graded."

Yes, the rough, unyielding earth is a giant shaker. It separates the trusting from the untrusting, the patient from the impatient, the unselfish from the selfish. It forces everyone to reveal his true self:

He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. I Cor. 4:5 NIV

Great trials are the seed beds of great honors. They cultivate our inner strength. They are the pressure points that squeeze our very essence. From them arise champions who carry aloft the flame of glory and honor, who display the outermost dimension of human resolve and resilience.

When he has tested me, I will come forth as gold. Job 23:1 NIV

I thank God for my handicaps, for, through them, I have found myself, my work, and my God.¹⁷

Suffering detaches us from the bond of the world, and allows our spirit to soar freely toward God.

The mind and spirit of man advance when he is tried by suffering. The more the ground is ploughed the better the seed will grow, the better the harvest will be. Just as the plough furrows the earth deeply, purifying it of weeds and thistles, so suffering and tribulation free man from the petty affairs of this worldly life until he arrives at a state of complete detachment. His attitude in this world will be that of divine happiness. Man is, so to speak, unripe: the heat of the fire of suffering will mature him. Look back to the times past and you will find that the greatest men have suffered most.¹⁸

‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Men who suffer not, attain no perfection. The plant most pruned by the gardeners is that one which, when the summer comes, will have the most beautiful blossoms and the most abundant fruit.¹⁹

‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Once we had a lovely shamrock, beautiful to behold. After a while it began to wither. A friend said pruning would be the perfect remedy. At first we hesitated; it seemed a painful thought, almost cruel, to mutilate our lovely, helpless, innocent flower. We could not believe that it would rise again. Eventually we accepted and applied our friend’s perfect remedy. A few weeks after the pruning, we had a plant prettier than we had before—greener and decked with more flowers. The shamrock is not with us any more but its memory of enduring the pain of pruning in pursuit of perfection lives on.

Job, the exemplary model of suffering, knew that the winds of adversity make human life to glow and glitter:

Behold, God works all these things...with a man...that he may be enlightened with the light of life. Job 33:29-30

Adversity sometimes awakens our slumbering, encapsulated egos. It is the call of the watchman that the morning has come. The only voice some people can hear is their own mourning. Unless they hear their own crying, they will not search for spiritual comfort:

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
Christ (Matt. 5:4 NIV)

Angels are awakened by mourning, not by silence. Apathy and indifference are the tombs of the dead.

Truth is violated by falsehood, but it is outraged by silence.²⁰

Our grief makes us pray to the supreme Provider; our tears make the sun shine; our mourning leads us to the presence of the supreme Comforter:

The Father...shall give you another Comforter...I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.
Christ (John 14:16, 18)

Astonishing as it may seem, the deepest and most lasting happiness can come to us through suffering:

To attain eternal happiness one must suffer. He who has reached the state of self-sacrifice has true joy.²¹ Abdu'l-Bahá

Shielded by the love of God, strengthened by His trust, and inspired by His words and His wisdom, the seeming obstacles in our way not only fail to deter us, but aid us to grow stronger, and lead us to new and higher horizons. They present us with challenges by which we may be motivated to strive, to stand, to march, perhaps to stumble and fall, but to rise again, each time growing a little stronger. “How did you learn to skate?” someone asked the winner. ‘By getting up every time I fell down,’ was the reply.” Of course, we can choose not to rise, and that’s an expression of our freedom of choice.

Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising each time we fall.²²

But whatever we do, we are never expected to perform beyond our potential. If a wise teacher has no expectations beyond the potential of his pupils, how could the divine Teacher—the essence of all Knowledge and Wisdom—have expectations beyond our potential?

My yoke is easy and my burden light. Christ (Matt. 11:30)

We will not burden a soul beyond its power...
Muhammad (Qur'án 23:64)

Thus viewed from a broader perspective, what we call “evil” and “the unpleasant,” stand as opportunities to test our will, as gifts to enrich our spirit, as stepping-stones to a new and fuller life. Without adversity, life would lose its challenge, its twist, its sense of suspension and drama.

The divine Jeweler wishes to see us cultivated, polished, precious. He wants to turn the rough stones into refined jewels. Yet we fail to recognize His Wisdom, we refuse to trust His skill. He shapes and reshapes us through adversity. He carries us through many a sharp edge, through many a crucible; all for our own good, all for our own refinement:

Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline.
Christ (Rev. 3:19 NIV)

Happy the man whom God rebukes! therefore do not reject the discipline of the Almighty. Job 5:17 NEB

Gold is tried in fire, and acceptable men in the furnace of adversity. Eccl. 2:5

Destruction hath appeared by land and by sea on account of what men's hands have wrought, that it might make them taste somewhat of the fruit of their doings, that perhaps they might turn to God. Muhammad (Qur'án 30:40)

Submitting to God

The source of all glory is acceptance of whatsoever the Lord hath bestowed, and contentment with that which God hath ordained.²³ Bahá'u'lláh

Thou...hast bidden them celebrate Thy glory...that each and all may be enabled to attain unto that which Thou hast destined for them by Thy decree, and ordained unto them through Thine irrevocable will and purpose.²⁴ Bahá'u'lláh

...unveil to their eyes what Thou hast decreed for them...so that they may rush forward to meet what is preordained for them...²⁵ Bahá'u'lláh

In the Bahá'í Writings we read a story about a blind man who blessed people, and whenever he prayed for them, his prayer was answered. Then someone asked him “Your prayers for others always seem to be answered. Why then do you not pray for your blindness to be removed?” He responded: “Submission to the Will of God is far better than the personal pleasure of being able to see.”²⁶

Humility requires that we acknowledge our short-sightedness:

My life is but the weaving between my God and me.
I only choose the colors, He weaveth steadily.
Sometimes he weaveth sorrow, and I in foolish pride,
forget he sees the upper, and I the under side.²⁷

Like a thread, we must submit our lives to the Hand of the Weaver, trust His skill rather than our fantasies, and let Him dream and draw with His wondrous Vision the immortal design of our destiny.

He knows our potential and the wonders of our being. He sees the gift of His own Self, and He wants it unveiled, gleaming with full glory and splendor:

O MY SERVANT!

Thou art even as a finely tempered sword concealed in the darkness of its sheath and its value hidden from the artificer's knowledge. Wherefore come forth from the sheath of self and desire that thy worth may be made resplendent and manifest unto all the world.²⁸

Bahá'u'lláh

O MY FRIEND!

Thou art the day-star of the heavens of My holiness, let not the defilement of the world eclipse thy splendor. Rend asunder the veil of heedlessness, that from behind the clouds thou mayest emerge resplendent and array all things with the apparel of life.²⁹

Bahá'u'lláh

We should never judge the divine Justice by our own standards—human judgment. For we live in a dark and deep valley, unable to see beyond the boundaries of our confined vision. When the season of separation arrives, and we rise to higher horizons, we shall have a far better vision and perspective from which to see and to judge. Only then can we know the “why?” behind our own destiny, the reasons for seeming injustices. For He who withholds here can replenish elsewhere, and He who withdraws now can reward a thousandfold later (Matt. 19:29).

Has faith in God's justice declined in our age?

And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night?...However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?

Christ (Luke 18:7-8 NIV)

Life continues beyond the “barrier of death,” rising from the earthly to the heavenly, from fleeting flesh to eternal honor and glory. The Gardener in His Wisdom prunes a branch, but only to strengthen the tree; He uproots a sapling from the sandy shore, but only to plant it elsewhere in the realm of eternity, that it may grow taller and stronger. But the tree bewails and bemoans—not

knowing what lies beyond its vision, beyond the realm of the knowable.

Thou art My light and My light shall never be extinguished,
why dost thou dread extinction?³⁰ Bahá'u'lláh

We are asked to submit to God, but not to grief. No benefit ever comes from mere suffering. The benefit always comes from the attitude toward the suffering. Grief, adversity, and stress are our enemies. Submitting to them is a sure sign of defeat. Happiness is a victory that must be gained with determination and desire. In this battle, our best guide and helper is God.

Though I sit in darkness, the Lord will be my light.
Micah 7:8 NIV

In *The Seven Valleys* Bahá'u'lláh tells a story with a lesson for anyone afflicted with pain and suffering. A young lover lost his dearly beloved. Without her, life was a hard and empty shell. It gave him no purpose for which to live. His body was wasting away from the agony of separation. His days were long and restless, his nights dark and sleepless. He would give a thousand lives for a glimpse of his beloved. But nothing would save him, no one could help him.

Then one night, he could bear life no more. In desperation, he left his house for the market-place. Suddenly a policeman, who became suspicious, followed him. Seized with fear, he ran away. Other policemen joined in and closed all the avenues of escape. He continued to run for fear of his life.

He saw the policemen as angels of death, as hunters in search of a game. He mourned and wailed, not knowing what to do, which way to turn. Suddenly he saw a garden wall, and with all his might he climbed it and threw himself from the top of the wall into the garden.

There, to his utter delight and astonishment, he saw the beautiful face of his beloved. She had a lamp in her hand, searching for a ring she had lost.

The ones he had feared led him to the object of his search. Those he had hated forced him to the presence of his beloved. What at first had seemed as the angel of death, suddenly turned into the angel of life. What at the beginning was disguised as tyranny, suddenly changed into mercy and justice. The guards' wrath led the lost one to the light of reunion with the one he loved and adored. Only after he had climbed the wall of separation could he see a purpose in the pursuit, a meaning in the wrath. Bahá'u'lláh then concludes:

Now if the lover could have looked ahead, he would have blessed the watchman at the start, and prayed on his behalf, and he would have seen that tyranny as justice; but since the end was veiled to him, he moaned and made his plaint in the beginning. Yet those who journey in the garden land of knowledge, because they see the end in the beginning, see peace in war and friendliness in anger.³¹

Those who view their destiny in the light of God's knowledge "see the end in the beginning" and the beginning in the end. They know the pain and suffering of this world brings them nearer and nearer to their Beloved, God.

Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?

Our Maker assures us that bad things never touch the lives of the trustful, who submit fully all their wishes to His unerring wisdom.

...he that placeth his complete trust in God, God shall, verily, protect him from whatsoever may harm him...³²

Bahá'u'lláh

Nothing save that which profiteth them can befall My loved ones.³³

Bahá'u'lláh

In all things God works for the good of those who love him.

Romans 8:28 NIV

Trust in God does not imply that one can always escape stress and adversity. It only means that one has been adequately vaccinated and has a sufficient supply of antidotes ready for new invaders.

Likewise, trust in God does not in any way imply inaction or passivity. It means doing one's utmost in conformity with the Will of the Highest and then leaving the consequences to Him.

And persevere steadfastly, for verily God will preserve the reward of the righteous.

Muhammad (Qur'án 11:117)

In ancient times they used to say "Trust God, but tie your camel!" In our times we should say, "Trust God, but fasten your seat belt!" As Saint Augustine said, "Before God can deliver us, we must undeceive ourselves."

I planted the seed, and Apollos watered it; but God made it grow.

I Corinthians 36:6 NEB

Man plans his journey by his own wit, but it is the Lord who guides his steps.

Proverbs 16:9 NEB

Trust must be tested and verified. Each test prepares the learner for another, more advanced test.

And We [God] will test you with evil and with good...

Qur'án 21:36

This is the favor of my Lord, to try me whether I will be thankful or unthankful.

Qur'án 27:40

Suppose our bank or employer gives us a check smaller than expected. If we have trust, we do not feel perturbed; we know we will be repaid later. If we lack trust, anxiety grips our soul. To be effective, our contract with God (you do your share, I will do mine) must be signed with the whole heart. Most people sign it with reservation, with added lines of fine print, which are

magnified and sharpened in times of trouble. These people are assenters, not believers. Assenters, unlike believers, can draw very few benefits from their accounts. When the assenter falls, he finds himself in the grips of gloom and ingratitude; when he rises, he gleams and glows and swells with pride.

And if We [God] cause man to taste Our mercy, and then deprive him of it, verily, he is despairing, ungrateful. And if after trouble hath befallen him We cause him to taste Our favor, he will surely exclaim, “The evils are passed away from me.” Verily, he is joyous, boastful.

Muhammad (Qur’án 11:12-13)

When trouble befalleth a man he crieth to Us. Afterwards, when We have bestowed favor on him, he saith, “God knew that I deserved it.” Nay, it is a test. But the greater part of them know it not.

Qur’án 39:50

We count and recount our woes. Should we not also count our blessings? Can anyone succeed?

Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.

Genesis 15:5 NIV

Dealing with daily demands is a challenge that everyone should confront gracefully. But there comes a time when the challenge turns into a war. At that point the combatant must immediately withdraw from hostile ground, place his weapons on God’s shoulder, and let Him wage his wars.

God has infinite rewards to give away. Who deserves the most? The one who in times of trouble protests, or the one who submits gracefully and glorifies God? Who deserves the highest honors? The grateful, or the chronic complainers?

Blessed are the steadfastly enduring, they that are patient under ills and hardships, who lament not over anything that befalleth them, and who tread the path of resignation.³⁴

Bahá’u’lláh

Aid me, O my Lord, to surrender myself wholly to Thy Will,
and to arise and serve Thee...³⁵ Bahá'u'lláh

God's gifts of love and grace come in various wrappings. Sometimes they wear the disguise of adversity. Only those with penetrating visions recognize the gifts and embrace them with their whole hearts. Others—who see only the wrappings—engage in fight or flight. Without the disguise, the trustful could not be distinguished from the untrustful, the believer could not be separated from the assenter. Bahá'u'lláh assures us that adversity wears only the appearance of fire; its true identity is nothing but light and mercy:

O SON OF MAN!

My calamity is My providence, outwardly it is fire and vengeance, but inwardly it is light and mercy.³⁶ Bahá'u'lláh

We are like a balloon floating through the air. The life of comfort, ease, and success inflates our ego. The bigger we get, the higher we ascend. If we continue to climb unchecked, we will burst at the point of our weakness. Adversity is the pressure that keeps us from inflating. It is a power that helps us rise without getting bigger. It is the hand of heaven pressuring our soul, the hand that keeps the soaring balloon from bursting. We may not like being small but that is the way God likes us the most. For the smaller we become, the higher He lifts us.

Adversity is a blessing from heaven. If we see the big picture, if we see what lies behind the veil, not only we welcome God's plan, but rejoice in seeing His helping hand in our lives.

Sometimes the patient is told that his recovery depends on surgery, radiation, or electric shock. Only if the patient trusts his physician and submits to the blade or the "fire" can he expect benefits from the treatment. But submitting to God should cause far less concern. For a physician may err and harm his patient, God never does. Instead of resisting the fire of adversity, we should wear our protective suit of faith, embrace its blazing and

devouring flames with courage and confidence, and behold with wonder and awe the beauty of its light. To become fireproof, our suit must be tailored with patience out of faith and trust.

O SON OF SPIRIT!

There is no peace for thee save by renouncing thyself and turning unto Me; for it behooveth thee to glory in My name, not in thine own; to put thy trust in Me and not in thyself...³⁷

Bahá'u'lláh

Whoso trusted in the Lord, happy is he. Proverbs 16:20

Put thou thy trust in Him that liveth and dieth not...

Qur'án 25:60

The source of all good is trust in God...³⁸

Bahá'u'lláh

Say not, "I will surely do it tomorrow" without [saying], "If God will."

Qur'án 18:23

A man was climbing a high mountain when he lost his balance. As he descended, he caught and held on to a small branch. He could see no helper except God and began to pray. While praying, he heard a mysterious voice saying "Loosen your grip. Let go of the branch." In response he shouted: "Is there anyone else up there?"

Without patience the wayfarer on this journey [of spiritual advancement] will reach nowhere and attain no goal.³⁹

Bahá'u'lláh

Bahá'u'lláh states that God has in store a special kingdom, unspeakably glorious, for those who endure patiently. Our Creator loves patience so much that He has crowned it with immeasurable rewards and honors. No other virtue has received such favor.

Verily those who endure with patience shall be repaid; their reward shall not be by measure.

Qur'án 13:39

In Him have I placed My trust; and into His hands have I committed My Cause. He will, certainly, repay all them that

endure with patience and put their confidence in Him.⁴⁰

Bahá'u'lláh

In your patience possess ye your souls. Christ (Luke 21:19)

By standing firm you will win true life for yourselves.

Christ (Luke 21:19 REB)

Total trust in God, unconditional self-surrender, and patience are the wellspring of tranquility and peace. Life in ancient Arabia was tough. The *Qur'án* addressed this need with exquisite words of wisdom. Its crowning message is submission and self-surrender to God. Without this message, Arabians could have hardly survived, much less live a life of tranquility.

Trust and patience eventually overcome the perilous powers of the blazing fire. Thereafter, the seeker of tranquility sees nothing but the wonders of pure light and love. Through stress he finds strength, and in loneliness he discerns the delights of heaven. Behind the gloom of clouds he beholds the glory of God, and in the pangs of death he detects (in Bahá'u'lláh's words) "the secrets of everlasting life."

A great portion of human suffering comes from people; especially one's "close enemies." God's Messengers have declared that an enemy should be disarmed with love.

Turn away evil by what is better, and lo! he between whom and thyself was enmity, shall be as though he were a warm friend! But none attain to this save men steadfast in patience, and none attain to it except the most highly favored.

Qur'án 41:34-35

For most people the thought of loving an enemy is harder to bear than the pain of hating him.

For years I thought loving an enemy was the hardest item on our spiritual agenda until I came across 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words that we should first change the identity of an enemy, alter our perception of him from foe to friend, and then love him. Loving an enemy requires effort. But if we see an enemy as a friend,

then we will find another friend to love. Rising to such an exalted rank requires absolute self-surrender to the Creator. As the *Qur'án* declares, only those who are “***the most highly favored***” by God can attain it. Its mastery manifests the awesome power of trust in human life. It shows how an intimate relation with God lifts the burden of stress from our souls.

The station of absolute self-surrender transcendeth, and will ever remain exalted above, every other station.⁴¹ Bahá'u'lláh

And whoso resigneth himself to God pursueth the way of truth... Qur'án 72:14

Changing the identity of an enemy and loving him requires titanic effort, yet there is a selfish reason that can make the effort rewarding. That reason is this: an enemy has the power to bring out the best in us. No one else can match his potential for lifting us out of the slough of mediocrity.

But for the tribulations which are sustained in Thy path, how could Thy true lovers be recognized; and were it not for the trials which are borne for love of Thee, how could the station of such as yearn for Thee be revealed?⁴² Bahá'u'lláh

As Dr. Wayne Dyer notes, “Everything that happened to you is a lesson you can be grateful for. Everyone who came into your life was a teacher, regardless of how much you choose to hate and blame him or her. There truly are no accidents.”

Thus when a new “enemy” enters our life, we should cheer him on and welcome him with these words: “Thanks for dawning upon my life. Without you the fruits of my soul would not reach the peak of perfection. You are the light of the blazing summer to my soul. You think you can burn me out. That is your fantasy. You are my challenge; without you my life would lose much of its luster. If you knew how fast you are making me grow, how fast you are lifting me above mediocrity, you would instantly stop being my foe and become my best friend!”

When our goal is God, obstacles turn into bridges. But as soon as we lose sight of our goal, the bridges turn into walls. As Dr. Leo Busgalia, the renowned “ambassador of love” states: “When you reach the end of your rope, hang on, tie a knot and swing” to the very presence of God. When their pain and stress reached unbearable proportions in prison, instead of bemoaning their fate, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the other Bahá’í prisoners engaged in joking and laughing. Who knows, maybe some of them swung and danced to the music of heaven. Otherwise, how could they survive and bear the horrible sufferings.

Looking Through God’s Eyes

The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.

I Samuel 16:7

How can one see life’s inner beauty and perfection? How can one hear the divine symphony?

With the ear of God he heareth, with the eye of God he beholdeth the mysteries of divine creation.⁴³ Bahá’u’lláh

Is there any man of insight, O my God, that can behold Thee with Thine own eye...?⁴⁴ Bahá’u’lláh

The ultimate panacea for reducing stress and suffering is to rise to higher horizons, to look through God’s eyes, and see everything from His perspective. How can we do this? By becoming spiritual entrepreneurs, and following God’s way of doing business. For instance, we like short-term investments. God likes long-term investments. We fear the loss of our capital and buy insurance to make sure our savings are safe. God wants us to fear less, and trust more.

How little faith you have!

Christ (Matt. 6:30 NEB)

We care mostly for our self-interests. God wants us to be devoted to universal-interests. We are conservative and conventional in our enterprises. God wants us to be bold and daring. We are impatient and seek quick returns. God wants us to be patient and to choose investments that mature later—when we must live solely on our savings. We prefer enterprises concerned with physical fitness. God prefers spiritual fitness.

So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ...seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Christ (Matthew 6:31,33 NIV)

The result is this: our short term, high risk investments constantly take us on roller coaster rides with many ups and downs. Sometimes it is scary to see how far down we go.

The risky enterprise of doing business our way continues until our dizzying ride comes to an abrupt end, crushing our hopes and dreams, and taking the dearly treasured stocks of a lifetime to the depths. But when we change our perspective and look through God’s eyes, our spirits begin to soar, on a steady upward course until we reach His very presence. Becoming spiritual entrepreneurs—by trusting in God, looking through His eyes, investing in His Wisdom, and doing business in His way—is an Eternal Enterprise, unlimited in the bounties and blessings it bestows upon us.

Magnified be Thy name, O my God! I testify that if Thy servants were to turn towards Thee with the eyes Thou didst create in them and with the ears wherewith Thou didst endow them, they would all be carried away by a single word sent down from the right hand of the throne of Thy majesty. That word alone would suffice to brighten their faces, and to assure their hearts, and to cause their souls to soar up to the atmosphere of Thy great glory, and to ascend into the heaven of Thy sovereignty.⁴⁵

Bahá’u’lláh

Life is a school where we must learn to exchange our own standards of judgment for God's.

You judge by worldly standards. Christ (John 8:15 NEB)

...how can My way accord with thine?⁴⁶ Bahá'u'lláh

...human standards of judgment are faulty, finite.⁴⁷
`Abdu'l-Bahá

God has always offered the largest cup of suffering to those He loves the most: His Messengers. And from them He has received nothing but gratitude. They are the models who manifest the grandeur of living the most glorious life.

I sorrow not for the burden of My imprisonment. Neither do I grieve over My abasement, or the tribulation I suffer at the hands of Mine enemies. By My life! They are My glory, a glory wherewith God hath adorned His own Self. Would that ye know it!⁴⁸ Bahá'u'lláh



Thou knowest full well, O my God, that tribulations have showered upon me from all directions and that no one can dispel or transmute them except Thee. I know of a certainty, by virtue of my love for Thee, that Thou wilt never cause tribulations to befall any soul unless Thou desirest to exalt his station in Thy celestial Paradise and to buttress his heart in this earthly life with the bulwark of Thine all-compelling power, that it may not become inclined toward the vanities of this world...

Immensely exalted art Thou, O Lord of the heavens and earth, above the praise of all men, and may peace be upon Thy faithful servants and glory be unto God, the Lord of all the worlds.⁴⁹ The Báb



Glory to Thee, O my God! But for the tribulations which are sustained in Thy path, how could Thy true lovers be

recognized; and were it not for the trials which are borne for love of Thee, how could the station of such as yearn for Thee be revealed? Thy might beareth me witness! The companions of all who adore Thee are the tears they shed, and the comforters of such as seek Thee are the groans they utter, and the food of them who haste to meet Thee is the fragments of their broken hearts.

How sweet to my taste is the bitterness of death suffered in Thy path, and how precious in my estimation are the shafts of Thine enemies when encountered for the sake of the exaltation of Thy word! Let me quaff in Thy Cause, O my God, whatsoever Thou didst desire, and send down upon me in Thy love all Thou didst ordain. By Thy glory! I wish only what Thou wishest, and cherish what Thou cherishest. In Thee have I, at all times, placed my whole trust and confidence.⁵⁰

Bahá'u'lláh



Many are the woes of the wicked, but the Lord's unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in him. Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!

Psalms 32:10-11 NIV

Trust always in God, my people, pour out your hearts before him.

Psalms 62:8 NEB

Trust in the Lord for ever; for the Lord himself is an everlasting rock.

Isaiah 26:4 NEB

Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and rests his confidence upon him.

Jeremiah 17:7 NEB

The Most Joyful Tidings

This is the most great, the most joyful tidings... to mankind.⁵¹

Bahá'u'lláh

“The best remedy to stress and adversity is inner joy and peace. What if we could eliminate all the negative experiences in our life? Would we be free of stress? According to researchers at the University of California at Berkeley, the answer is no. The researchers found that the presence of positive factors in life, rather than merely a lack of negative factors, was most important in reducing stress...that too much emphasis has been given to eliminating negative experiences and not enough to teaching people to develop positive aspects of life...”⁵²

From God’s perspective, every day, no matter how dark and gloomy, is a day of celebration. What turns the gloom and grief into joy and glory is the knowledge of God and the great destiny He has in store for every wakeful and grateful servant.

If ye were aware of what God hath destined for you in the kingdom of His glory, verily ye would rejoice exceedingly and soar with the wings of joy unto the heights of happiness...⁵³ `Abdu’l-Bahá

The Bahá’í Faith brings the most joyful tidings to every human being—it is the greatest news since the dawn of history. It opens to every seeking soul the door of hope and fulfillment. It leaves no room or reason for an attitude of grief and gloom. To be a Bahá’í is to live in light and glory. To be a Bahá’í is to rejoice and sing the songs of praise and gratitude. To be a Bahá’í is to be awake at the dawn of the most glorious day. To be a Bahá’í is to breathe a new life and rise to a new horizon of hope and happiness.

Release yourselves, O nightingales of God, from the thorns and brambles of wretchedness and misery, and wing your flight to the rose-garden of unfading splendor. O My friends that dwell upon the dust! Haste forth unto your celestial habitation. Announce unto yourselves the joyful tidings: “He Who is the Best-Beloved is come! He hath crowned Himself with the glory of God’s Revelation, and hath unlocked to the face of men the doors of His ancient Paradise.” Let all eyes

rejoice, and let every ear be gladdened, for now is the time to gaze on His beauty, now is the fit time to hearken to His voice. Proclaim unto every longing lover: “Behold, your Well-Beloved hath come...”⁵⁴ Bahá’u’lláh

These wondrous words from Bahá’u’lláh should inspire and elevate every despondent soul:

“Lo, the Adored One hath appeared arrayed in the fullness of His glory!” O lovers of His beauty! Turn the anguish of your separation from Him into the joy of an everlasting reunion, and let the sweetness of His presence dissolve the bitterness of your remoteness from His court.⁵⁵



Behold how the manifold grace of God, which is being showered from the clouds of Divine glory, hath, in this day, encompassed the world... Take heed lest ye forfeit so precious a favor; beware lest ye belittle so remarkable a token of His grace. Abandon not the incorruptible benefits, and be not content with that which perisheth. Lift up the veil that obscureth your vision, and dispel the darkness with which it is enveloped, that ye may gaze on the naked beauty of the Beloved’s face, may behold that which no eye hath beheld, and hear that which no ear hath heard.

Hear Me, ye mortal birds! In the Rose Garden of changeless splendor a Flower hath begun to bloom, compared to which every other flower is but a thorn, and before the brightness of Whose glory the very essence of beauty must pale and wither. Arise, therefore, and, with the whole enthusiasm of your hearts, with all the eagerness of your souls, the full fervor of your will, and the concentrated efforts of your entire being, strive to attain the paradise of His presence, and endeavor to inhale the fragrance of the incorruptible Flower, to breathe the sweet savors of holiness, and to obtain a portion of this perfume of celestial glory. Whoso followeth this counsel will break his chains asunder... will attain unto

his heart's desire, and will surrender his soul into the hands of his Beloved. Bursting through his cage, he will, even as the bird of the spirit, wing his flight to his holy and everlasting nest.

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

...Strip yourselves of every earthly affection, and hasten to embrace your Beloved. With a zest that none can equal make haste to attain unto Him. The Flower, thus far hidden from the sight of men, is unveiled to your eyes. In the open radiance of His glory He standeth before you. His voice summoneth all the holy and sanctified beings to come and be united with Him. Happy is he that turneth thereunto; well is it with him that hath attained, and gazed on the light of so wondrous a countenance.⁵⁶

Bahá'u'lláh

The Age of Stress and Distress

On the earth, nations will be in anguish...Christ (Luke 21:25 NIV)

The winds of despair are, alas, blowing from every direction...⁵⁷

Bahá'u'lláh

We were not made to suffer, but to appreciate and enjoy all the blessings of God. The purpose of adversity is not to spoil the joy, but to strengthen our souls and sensitize our appreciation of the blessings.

What would happen if we struggled, endured pain and suffering, but gained no strength and no blessings? We would eventually break down. This is what is happening today. By far the greatest portion of adversity in our world is pointless pain and suffering; it is stress and distress without strength, without heavenly hope. This kind of suffering leads to nothing but loss and misery.

...for holy souls, trials are as the gift of God, the Exalted; but for weak souls they are an unexpected calamity.⁵⁸ `Abdu'l-Bahá

...the divine trials cause some souls to become entirely lifeless, while they cause the holy souls to ascend to the highest degree of love and solidity. They cause progress and they also cause retrogression.⁵⁹ `Abdu'l-Bahá

Ours is called the age of stress and distress. Christ called it the age of “oppression” or “great tribulation.” Many Christians still expect that age to arrive. But we can see the signs of its presence all around us.

Human beings have enormous adaptive or coping powers, otherwise they could not survive. One of them is to avoid encounters with reality: not to see, not to hear, not to think, and not to know. This power is being used today to its very limits, especially in relation to the terrible pains and sufferings of others. The problems are so enormous, people feel helpless. They know they cannot reverse a mighty river. Since they too are a part of the river, they feel lucky just to be able to stay on top and afloat.

People don't believe that any one or any group can restore the world. Their cynicism and the mounting stresses of their lives create a feeling of numbness or unawareness, like being dizzy or drunk. To restore awareness and hope is very difficult. This is our greatest challenge today: to awaken people. Once they are awakened, they will see, they will hear, and they will know.

Arise, and lift up your voices, that haply they that are fast asleep may be awakened.⁶⁰ Bahá'u'lláh

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you...Lift up your eyes and look about you...
Isaiah 60:1-4 NIV

Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die...
Revelation 3:2 NIV

I beseech God, exalted be His glory, that He may graciously awaken the peoples of the earth...⁶¹
Bahá'u'lláh

Instead of helplessly lying or sitting on our sickbeds, we should rejoice, arise, and invite all the peoples of the world to choose and apply the divine remedy:

The All-Knowing Physician hath His finger on the pulse of mankind. He perceiveth the disease, and prescribeth, in His unerring wisdom, the remedy. Every age hath its own problem, and every soul its particular aspiration. The remedy the world needeth in its present-day afflictions can never be the same as that which a subsequent age may require...

We can well perceive how the whole human race is encompassed with great, with incalculable afflictions. We see it languishing on its bed of sickness, sore-tried and disillusioned. They that are intoxicated by self-conceit have interposed themselves between it and the Divine and infallible Physician. Witness how they have entangled all men, themselves included, in the mesh of their devices. They can neither discover the cause of the disease, nor have they any knowledge of the remedy.⁶²
Bahá'u'lláh

Ignoring a problem does not solve or make it go away. Indeed the first step to solving a problem is to acknowledge it. Let us therefore glance briefly at the psychological, spiritual, and moral state of our time.

The pressures of our time have passed far beyond our tolerance. In their wake they have broken many a spirit and every known record of mental pain and anguish. Some social scientists maintain that at no time in human history has there been so

much stress and distress as there is today. Suicide is deemed the pulse of the inner stress of societies. The pulse has risen in recent decades. Its tempo has tripled among the youth of our time.

Undue stress dominates every aspect of modern life. It pervades all nations, ages, and strata of society. Its warning signs are clearly visible: in uncontrollable drug addiction, in rampant alcoholism, family disintegration, sexual abuse, mental breakdown, psychosomatic disorders, and in scores of other ways. Its signs are also evident in the unrivalled violence of our time. More people were killed in wars during the 20th century than all the other wars since the dawn of history. Similarly, in that century more people have been executed (genocide) by their own governments than in all the other centuries combined.

The decline of moral standards also points to a loss of inner strength, and to submission to the pressures of a changing and stressful world. Christian writers and scholars bewail the desperate moral temper of our time. Dr. James Kennedy, Christian orator and scholar states:

The Ten Commandments have simply been declared...nothing more than a collection of old-fashioned edicts that certainly have no bearing on our liberated modern lifestyles. It just seems that the difference between right and wrong has become a gray, blurry line. Everything depends on the situation...

- Abortion is OK if the baby isn't wanted
- Stealing is OK if it is embezzled from the right source
- Lying is OK if it "doesn't hurt anyone"
- Adultery is OK as long as you don't get caught
- Homosexuality is OK because different people have different needs
- Pornography is OK if it's shared by consenting adults.⁶³

Dr. Billy Graham, noted Christian leader, declares:

The whole world is sighing and suffering on a scale perhaps not known in human history: the refugees, the starving, the “new slaves,” the psychological woes, the emotional turmoils, the broken marriages, the rebellious children...and a thousand other troubles which beset every country in the world. There are no people anywhere that are immune. The rich and famous suffer as well as the poor and obscure.⁶⁴

Long ago, God’s Messengers and Prophets predicted the unrelenting pressures and great tribulations of our time:

There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. Daniel 12:1 NIV

For then there will be great tribulation—affliction, distress, and oppression—such as have not been found from the beginning of the world until now; no, and never will be [again]. Christ (Matt. 24:21 AB⁶⁵)

That shall be a distressful day... Qur’án 74:9

The prophecies declare that the people of our time live for the most part in the dark clouds of illusion and fantasy, and that they support those leaders who confirm and give credibility to those illusions and fantasies:

For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. II Timothy 4:3 NIV

...the flames of unbelief are burning high and the robe of wisdom [is] rent asunder...⁶⁶ Bahá’u’lláh

What is the root cause of the overwhelming anguish and oppression of our time? It is the lack of spiritual guidance, it is stress without inner strength:

The time is coming, says the Lord God, when I will send famine on the land, not hunger for bread or thirst for water, but for hearing the word of the Lord. Men shall stagger from north to south, they shall range from east to west, seeking the word of the Lord, but they shall not find it. Amos 8:11-12 NEB

Men wander about like sheep in distress for lack of a shepherd. My anger is turned against the shepherds, and I will visit with punishment the leaders of the flock...

Zechariah 10:2-3 NEB

The wisdom of their wise men shall vanish... Isaiah 29:14 NEB

In Matthew 24:29, Christ links the great tribulations of our time to the falling of the “stars” (spiritual leaders), who have always served as guiding lights for wanderers. If the “stars” have fallen, who can people look to for guidance? Here Bahá’u’lláh clarifies Christ’s purpose in referring to our time as the age of “great tribulation or oppression:”

What “oppression” is more grievous than that a soul seeking the truth, and wishing to attain unto the knowledge of God, should know not where to go for it and from whom to seek it? For opinions have sorely differed, and the ways unto the attainment of God have multiplied.⁶⁷

How would a severely sick patient feel if he went from doctor to doctor for treatment, and received a different medicine from each of them, yet his symptoms continued to worsen?

It is not the burden of living that weighs us down, it is the distress of wandering without God and an ultimate purpose for our lives. It is not the burden of working, it is the pressure of inner void and the lack of an eternal perspective. It is not the burden of studying, raising a family, or even coping with sickness; it is the stress of emptiness, the pangs of spiritual hunger, the pain of enduring doubt and despair, the agony of seeing no light either at the beginning or at the end of the journey.

“Have I been a wilderness to you?” asked the Lord. “A place of wandering and of darkness as the night?” No—It is this void in which I find myself. This is my wilderness, my place of wandering in darkness...

Bahá'u'lláh declares, as Jesus did, that in our time people's love for God and His Word will continue to grow cold, that the torchlight of faith will get dimmer by the day:

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?⁶⁸ Bahá'u'lláh

The world is in travail...Its face is turned towards...unbelief.⁶⁹ Bahá'u'lláh

When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?
Christ (Luke 18:8 NEB)

People will be...lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God...
II Timothy 3:2-4 NIV

The rise of stress in our time has been proportional to the decline of the blessings and gifts of God in the heart of the world. When faith dies and the love of God grows dim, what is there to give people lasting hope and happiness? See for yourself by pondering these questions:

Who can live a more abundant life, who can be more positive and have a higher, healthier self-esteem?

- The one who believes he goes to God, or to the grave?
- The one who believes he was made by choice, or by chance?
- The one who thinks he is perennial soul, or perishable cells?
- The one who believes he was made out of love and wisdom, or oxygen and ozone?
- The one whose end is God, or whose aim is gold?

- The one whose moral law is self-sacrifice, or survival of the fittest?
- The one who thinks he comes from God, or from a gorilla?
- The one who thinks his home is heaven, or hard stones?
- The one who thinks he is the image of the Fashioner of the universe, or the effigy of the achievements and blunders of a blind nature?

He who enjoys nearness to God, his shall be a life of
repose... Muhammad (Qur'án 56:87-88)

Whoever turneth away from My Remembrance, his shall
be a life of misery... Muhammad (Qur'án 20:123)

Are you caught in Trouble's net,
With the tide against you set?
Do you intermittently complain
That life is a sad strain?
Do trials range on range
In existence full of change?
Then leave this transitory life,
Where accident is rife.
And let your individual soul
Find mergence in the Whole.
Thus, cosmically wise,
Make your life a paradise.⁷⁰

Sources of Stress

Most of our stress originates from distorted or immature attitudes, values, and judgments. For instance, we have a tendency to think that other people are happier or luckier than we are, because they have something that we do not have. Then we conclude that the world has been unfair to us. But knowledge of God's ultimate justice prevents our distorted assumption and judgment from taking roots.

And follow what is revealed to thee, and persevere
steadfastly till God shall judge, for He is the best of judges.

Muhammad (Qur'án 10:109)

Stress also comes from a tendency to note what we do not have and overlook what we do have. This thought expresses itself as lack of appreciation, one of the weakest links in human character.

If ye would reckon up the favors of God, ye cannot count them! Surely man is unjust, ungrateful! Muhammad (Qur'án 14:37)

How few are grateful! Muhammad (Qur'án 67:23)

Truly man is to his Lord ungrateful...and eager in the love of this world. Muhammad (Qur'án 100:6-8)

Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him and bless his name; for the Lord is good and his love is everlasting, his constancy endures to all generations. Psalms 100:4-5 NEB

Some people thrive on complaining. Even if placed in the midst of paradise, they will find something wrong; they will see something out of order. Many suffer from “catastrophe expectation.” They assume that “if something bad can possibly happen, it will:”

- “If I invite them to the party, they probably won’t want to come.”
- “If I speak up in order to try and resolve a conflict, things will probably get worse.”
- “If I apply for the job I want, I probably won’t be hired.”
- “If I tell them how I really feel, they’ll probably laugh at me.”⁷¹

Negative thinking is one of the most contagious and widespread diseases of our time. It is believed that most of our thoughts are negative. Again faith in God prevents such distorted vision.

Faith inspires hope, confidence, contentment, and appreciation. It reveals life's inner beauty and perfection.

Attachment

Some of our stress comes from “attachment.” Attachment says: “In order to be happy you must have me.” The “me” is always something material, which we do not or cannot have. It relates not to God but to gold, not to courage or character but to cars and clothes, not to personal transformation but to personal control.

What is the antidote to attachment? De-tachment, a concept found abundantly in Bahá'u'lláh's works:

It behoveth the people of Bahá to die to the world and all that is therein, to be so detached from all earthly things that the inmates of Paradise may inhale from their garment the sweet smelling savor of sanctity, that all the peoples of the earth may recognize in their faces the brightness of the All-Merciful, and that through them may be spread abroad the signs and tokens of God, the Almighty, the All-Wise.⁷²

Attachment springs from faulty assumptions, often with the conditional word “if”: “I would be happy if only...” A “poor” American transferred with all the trappings of his poverty (his TV set, refrigerator, packaged foods, running water, etc.) to Somalia or Haiti will suddenly find himself among the elite and the object of envy to the poor! He finds a new abundance in his life, whereas earlier he had seen nothing but scarcity. This example shows that it is not what we have that counts most; it is what we think about what we have. Those who feel miserable often gain a new perspective on life by visiting very sick or dying patients. They too see a new abundance in their lives, which they had not discerned before.

We must detach ourselves not only from the world, but also from our delusions or distorted beliefs, from any knowledge, any learning—however popular—that fails to conform to God’s.

Not...until thou consumest with the flame of utter detachment those veils of idle learning, that are current amongst men, canst thou behold the resplendent morn of true knowledge.⁷³ Bahá’u’lláh

A popular attachment is to names or labels. Some people refuse to consider any car but their favorite one, any denomination but their own. Some people are attached to their little town. They think the world begins and ends right under their eyes.

Attachment to the body is common and one of the hardest to break. Dr. Dyer quotes this passage, “The saints say this is how you must treat the body, as a temporary residence. Don’t be attached to it or bound by it. Realize the infinite power of the light, the immortal consciousness of the soul, which is behind this corpse of sensation.”⁷⁴ He then elaborates:

I like that phrase “this corpse of sensation.” That is your body, a slave to the rules of form hindered always by the baggage of pains, aches, bones that crumble, and pimples that break out. But inside, where you are that formless astral thought, you are pure and devoid of the obstacles that rule in form. Attachment to your body is like having an attachment to suffering and being unwilling to let it go.

Detachment from your body does not mean a disregard for the perfection of your form. In fact, paradoxically, it almost always results in your taking better care of the covers that house your soul.⁷⁵

Attachment and ingratitude are perhaps the weakest links in human nature. They are at the root of immeasurable pain and suffering in the world. A suicide victim, a thief, a drug addict, a bigot, a child abuser, an embezzler, a tyrant, and hundreds of people like them have this in common: they are so intimately

attached to what they think and what they do that they cannot see any other way. In their own eyes they think they are doing the right thing:

Every way of a man is right in his own eyes. Proverbs 21:2

Every party rejoices in what is their own. Qur'án 30:31

All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes... Proverbs 16:2

There are countless attachments: to one's political party, race, gender, and diet. The world is glamorous; it entangles us by its charm in a myriad of ways. To set ourselves free, we must pray constantly for de-tachment:

O God, my God!...I beg of Thee, O Beloved of every understanding heart and the Desire of such as have near access unto Thee, to grant that Thy loved ones may become wholly detached from their own inclinations, holding fast unto that which pleaseth Thee. Attire them, O Lord, with the robe of righteousness and illumine them with the splendors of the light of detachment...No God is there but Thee, the Mighty, the Ever-Forgiving.⁷⁶ Bahá'u'lláh

Some people live a life of quiet desperation. They try desperately to hold on to their apathy, anxiety, pessimism, and their dosage of daily stress as if they were the anchors of stability, as if in their absence they would be swept away and drown. They cannot imagine that the restless river of life can lead them to pure and ever-flowing streams of peace and tranquility. They cannot believe that God has in store for them an abundance of grace, hope, joy, and happiness waiting to be claimed and carried away. They cannot dream that the Creator of the universe knows them, cares for them, and offers them riches out of His abundance.

They see that the world is passing them by. Instinctively they know they too must be flowing with life, but fear prevents them

from loosening their grip upon the fainting rainbow of their fantasies.

Persistence and endurance are essential to success in any endeavor. Our age of technology with its excessive demands on our time, have made us expect and glorify quick solutions and easy strategies. This perspective also defines our relationship with God. Few people are willing to invest the required time for spiritual growth and enrichment.

Consider this biblical passage:

Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of
God. John 3:3

What type of birth do people prefer? A quick and easy one. And why do they like to born again and again and again? First, because of the excitement of a quick birth without pain; and second, because they know their birth is reversible; they can always resume the life of a fetus. Further, they think it is a good deal to say a few words in exchange for gaining the kingdom of God. What do they have to lose?

There is still another reason for the wide-scale popularity and practice of multiple births. Many fetuses are dragged suddenly out of the cloudy comfort of their illusions into the full light of the day. The fetuses are often underdeveloped and unprepared for the demands of the new life. After a short exposure to the new world, they feel homesick. They long to return to the comfort of the old days, and they do. But they soon feel pressured and long for the light again. Thus the rebirth repeats itself.

Seeing the Big Picture

These are a few other tendencies that provide a breeding ground for stress—tendencies that are found in all of us:

- We desire the things we cannot have (such as a beautiful face) rather than the things we can have (such as a beautiful heart). Faith in God corrects this distortion.

Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?

Christ (Matt. 6:27 NKJ)

- We love to get even with our enemies. When wronged, we dream of revenge. God sets us free from anger and frustration by teaching us forgiveness.
- We love the things that can be gained and lost quickly: such as fortune, fame, pleasure, power, and praise. God teaches us to love the things that last forever: love, hope, faith, knowledge, and wisdom.
- We love to please and serve ourselves. God asks us to expand our circle of care and service, so that it will encompass all humankind. A recent study clearly shows that those who engage in charitable works enjoy a healthier and longer life than others.

Countless other examples can be cited to show that stress is mostly the product of an imagination at work in the darkness of separation or remoteness from God.

In thy presence is the fullness of joy, in thy right hand pleasures for evermore.

Psalms 16:11 NEB

Faith in God, like a telescope, extends our vision. It helps us see and judge with an infinite and eternal perspective. Happiness that is not found through God has a short life span, just like beautiful fireworks, which glow now and are gone forever. The following passage was recently reported about a famous, rich, popular, beautiful, bright, and glamorous movie star, who in search of happiness tried everything except God:

Finally, she gathered herself together and said, ‘Mother looks so peaceful. She doesn’t have a care in the world. She seems to have found the peace I never found. God knows I’ve tried. I’ve tried fame, food, men, drugs and drink, but I

never found peace.’ Then looking at her sleeping mother, so very near death, she said sadly, ‘Maybe death is the only peace.’

Some people must walk through ‘the valley of death’ to learn to awaken their souls from the stress of looking at the trivia, the wild, and the invading distractions of the world to the awesome splendor of beholding the beauty of the beyond. Dr. Raymond Moody quotes this story about a patient who gained such a gift as a result of a near-death vision she had as a child:

I never got wrapped up in family bickering like my brothers and sisters did. My mother said it was because I “had the bigger picture.” I suppose that might have been true.

I just knew though that nothing we were arguing about had any real importance. After meeting the Being of Light, I knew that any arguing that went on was meaningless. So when anything like that started in the family, I would just curl up with a book and let other people work out their problems. Mine had already been worked out for me. I am the same way even now—more than thirty years after it happened to me.⁷⁷

If a man takes no thought about what is distant, he will find sorrow near at hand.

The Gift of Health

The chief purpose of religion is to foster spiritual, not physical, health. But since the physical and the spiritual are interdependent, the divine Teachers reveal guidelines pertaining to our physical health as well, for the body is the temple of the spirit; when the temple fails, so does the spirit.

According to Bahá’í Teachings, the key to health is to preserve the natural harmony of the elements of which the body is

formed. Disturbing the balance leads to diminishing health. Abdu'l-Bahá states:

The outer, physical causal factor in disease...is a disturbance in the balance, the proportionate equilibrium of all those elements of which the human body is composed. To illustrate: the body of man is a compound of many constituent substances, each component being present in a prescribed amount, contributing to the essential equilibrium of the whole. So long as these constituents remain in their due proportion, according to the natural balance of the whole—that is, no component suffereth a change in its natural proportionate degree and balance, no component being either augmented or decreased—there will be no physical cause for the incursion of disease...

This question requireth the most careful investigation. The Báb hath said that the people of Bahá must develop the science of medicine to such a high degree that they will heal illnesses by means of foods.⁷⁸

And again:

When highly-skilled physicians shall fully examine this matter, thoroughly and perseveringly, it will be clearly seen that the incursion of disease is due to a disturbance in the relative amounts of the body's component substances, and that treatment consisteth in adjusting these relative amounts, and that this can be apprehended and made possible by means of foods.⁷⁹

Bahá'í Teachings indicate that humans by nature are vegetarian and in the future meat will not be a part of the human diet.

In a Tablet to a physician, Bahá'u'lláh offers several instructions on how to preserve the health of the body. Here is a brief passage:

Do not neglect medical treatment when it is necessary...
Treat disease through diet, by preference, refraining from the

use of drugs; and if you find what is required in a single herb, do not resort to a compounded medicament.⁸⁰

One way to preserve the health of the body is to retain a high spirit. As a sound mind abides in a healthy body, so does a sound body depend on a healthy spirit. How can the health of the spirit be maintained? How can one manage to stay in a high spirit? Spiritual health grows from contentment, and contentment from an unconditional love for and an absolute trust in the Creator. The test of trusting is accepting the challenges, the hardships and the grief, with ‘radiant acquiescence.’ He who trusts the Creator, leaves the inevitable and the unknowable to His care; he prefers the Wisdom of the all-knowing to his own.

Blessed are all they that put their trust in him. Psalms 2:12

...let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice: let them ever shout for joy... Psalms 5:11

Scientific evidence confirms the healing powers of love and positive feelings:

If scientists suddenly discovered a drug that was as powerful as love in creating health, it would be heralded as a medical breakthrough and marketed overnight—especially if it had as few side effects and was as inexpensive as love. Love is intimately related with health. This is not sentimental exaggeration. One survey of ten thousand men with heart disease found a 50 percent reduction in frequency of chest pain (angina) in men who perceived their wives as supportive and loving...

David McClelland, Ph.D. of Harvard Medical School, has demonstrated the power of love to make the body healthier through what he calls the “Mother Teresa effect.” He showed a group of Harvard students a documentary of Mother Teresa ministering lovingly to the sick, and measured the levels of immunoglobulin A (IgA) in their saliva before and after

seeing the film. (IgA is an antibody active against viral infections such as colds.) IgA levels rose significantly in the students, even in many of those who considered Mother Teresa “too religious” or a fake.⁸¹

A cheerful heart is a good medicine.

Proverbs 17:22

We were not created to suffer, but to partake of all the joys ordained for us. Yet, to taste of the deepest joys, we must endure pain. Sometimes the noblest pleasures grow from hardships, from challenges that we are unable to overcome. Thus, absolute faith and trust in the Creator constitute the most precious and prized assets to our health, both physical and spiritual. They insure our health against the storm and stress of the passing days, and they are accessible to us all.

Prayers for Peace and Contentment

O God, my God! Be Thou not far from me, for tribulation upon tribulation hath gathered about me. O God, my God! Leave me not to myself, for the extreme of adversity hath come upon me. Out of the pure milk, drawn from the breasts of Thy loving-kindness, give me to drink, for my thirst hath utterly consumed me. Beneath the shadow of the wings of Thy mercy shelter me, for all mine adversaries with one consent have fallen upon me. Keep me near to the throne of Thy majesty, face to face with the revelation of the signs of Thy glory, for wretchedness hath grievously touched me. With the fruits of the Tree of Thine Eternity nourish me, for uttermost weakness hath overtaken me. From the cups of joy, proffered by the hands of Thy tender mercies, feed me, for manifold sorrows have laid mighty hold upon me. With the brodered robe of Thine omnipotent sovereignty attire me, for poverty hath altogether despoiled me. Lulled by the cooing of the Dove

*of Thine Eternity, suffer me to sleep, for woes at their blackest have befallen me. Before the throne of Thy oneness, amid the blaze of the beauty of Thy countenance, cause me to abide, for fear and trembling have violently crushed me. Beneath the ocean of Thy forgiveness, faced with the restlessness of the leviathan of glory, immerse me, for my sins have utterly doomed me.*⁸²

Bahá'u'lláh



*Is there any Remover of difficulties save God? Say: Praised be God! He is God! All are His servants and all abide by His bidding!*⁸³

The Báb



Glory to Thee, O my God! But for the tribulations which are sustained in Thy path, how could Thy true lovers be recognized; and were it not for the trials which are borne for love of Thee, how could the station of such as yearn for Thee be revealed? Thy might beareth me witness! The companions of all who adore Thee are the tears they shed, and the comforters of such as seek Thee are the groans they utter, and the food of them who haste to meet Thee is the fragments of their broken hearts...

...Let me quaff in Thy Cause, O my God, whatsoever Thou didst desire, and send down upon me in Thy love all Thou didst ordain. By Thy glory! I wish only what Thou wishest, and cherish what Thou cherishest. In Thee have I, at all times, placed my whole trust and confidence...

*Potent art Thou to do what pleaseth Thee. No God is there but Thee, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting.*⁸⁴

Bahá'u'lláh



Dispel my grief by Thy bounty and Thy generosity, O God, my God, and banish mine anguish through Thy sovereignty and Thy might. Thou seest me, O my God, with my face set towards Thee at a time when sorrows have compassed me

*on every side. I implore Thee, O Thou Who art the Lord of all being...to number me with them whom nothing whatsoever hath deterred from setting their faces toward Thee, O Thou Lord of all names and Maker of the heavens!*⁸⁵

Bahá'u'lláh



*Create in me a pure heart, O my God, and renew a tranquil conscience within me, O my Hope! Through the spirit of power confirm Thou me in Thy Cause, O my Best-Beloved, and by the light of Thy glory reveal unto me Thy path, O Thou the Goal of my desire! Through the power of Thy transcendent might lift me up unto the heaven of Thy holiness, O Source of my being, and by the breezes of Thine eternity gladden me, O Thou Who art my God! Let Thine everlasting melodies breathe tranquillity on me, O my Companion, and let the riches of Thine ancient countenance deliver me from all except Thee, O my Master, and let the tidings of the revelation of Thine incorruptible Essence bring me joy, O Thou Who art the most manifest of the manifest and the most hidden of the hidden!*⁸⁶

Bahá'u'lláh



*Thy name is my healing, O my God, and remembrance of Thee is my remedy. Nearness to Thee is my hope, and love for Thee is my companion. Thy mercy to me is my healing and my succor in both this world and the world to come. Thou, verily, art the All-Bountiful, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.*⁸⁷

Bahá'u'lláh



O God, my God! I beg of Thee by the ocean of Thy healing, and by the splendors of the Day-Star of Thy grace, and by Thy Name through which Thou didst subdue Thy servants, and by the pervasive power of Thy most exalted Word and the potency of Thy most august Pen, and by Thy mercy that hath preceded the creation of all who are in heaven and on

earth, to purge me with the waters of Thy bounty from every affliction and disorder, and from all weakness and feebleness.

Thou seest, O my Lord, Thy suppliant waiting at the door of Thy bounty, and him who hath set his hopes on Thee clinging to the cord of Thy generosity. Deny him not, I beseech Thee, the things he seeketh from the ocean of Thy grace and the Day-Star of Thy loving-kindness.⁸⁸

Bahá'u'lláh



O God! Refresh and gladden my spirit. Purify my heart. Illumine my powers. I lay all my affairs in Thy hand. Thou art my Guide and my Refuge. I will no longer be sorrowful and grieved; I will be a happy and joyful being. O God! I will no longer be full of anxiety, nor will I let trouble harass me. I will not dwell on the unpleasant things of life. O God! Thou art more friend to me than I am to myself. I dedicate myself to Thee, O Lord.⁸⁹

ʿAbdu'l-Bahá

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