

*The Spiritual  
Design of  
Creation*



*Solving the puzzle of  
human life and destiny*

# **The Spiritual Design of Creation**

**Solving the Puzzle of  
Human Life and Destiny**



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***The Spiritual Design of Creation***

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***Dedicated to***

***A caring and generous Creator who  
has made us a mirror of His own Self  
and granted us the glory and the honor  
of knowing and loving Him***

God created man in His own image... Genesis 1:27

For thou hast made man a little lower than the angels, and  
hast crowned him with glory and honor. Psalms 8:5

The kingdom of God is within you. Christ (Luke 17:21)

How blest are those who know their need of God; the  
kingdom of Heaven is theirs. Christ (Matt. 5:3 NEB)

The source of all learning is the knowledge of God, exalted  
be His Glory. Bahá'u'lláh

Let him who glories glory in this: that he understands and  
knows Me. Jeremiah 9:24 NKJ

## **About the Author**

I taught for thirty years at two state universities in the United States, and had the honor of touching the lives of some 9,000 students. I taught courses in mental health, psychology of human development, educational psychology, and creativity.

Soon after retirement, I decided to serve as defense attorney for God! Why did I take this job? Well, I have always wanted to be on the side of the disadvantaged the wronged ones who cannot hire expensive attorneys to defend them. Today God is being blamed for every evil that happens on the earth. Should not someone defend the “Wronged One” of the universe? I have always wanted to make a difference. The best place to begin is with God. His love makes all the difference.

# **Contents**

## *What Is the Source of all Knowledge?*

So Little Time! So Much to Read!



## **Part I**

### **Preparing for the Journey of the Search for Truth**

#### *Chapter 1. The Spiritual Design of Creation*

What Does It Mean?

#### *Chapter 2. Does Your Fish Bowl Need Fresh Water?*

Is There an Invisible Universe?



## **Part II**

### **Evidence for God**

#### *Chapter 3. The Fingerprints of God*

Scientific Evidence for God's Presence in the Universe

Quotations from Great Scientists



## **Part III**

### **Evidence for the Afterlife and Human Spirit**

#### *Chapter 4. Glimpses of Eternity*

Scientific Evidence for the Afterlife

#### *Chapter 5. Other Examples of Life After Life*

The Blind Suddenly Begin to See

*Chapter 6. What Is Spirit?*

*Chapter 7. Humans and Animals*

*Chapter 8. Drink From the Chalice of Immortality*



**Part IV**

**Response to Objections  
Raised Against God**

*Chapter 9. When Bad Things Happen to Good People*

*Chapter 10. Would You Feed the Master or Buy His Shoes?*



**Part V**

**Knowing the Spiritual  
Design of Creation**

*Chapter 11. The Spiritual Design of Creation*



**Part VI**

**Knowing and Loving God**

*Chapter 12. Who Needs God?*



**Part VII**

**Who Needs Religion?**

*Chapter 13. The Two Kinds of Believers*

Enlightened and Dogmatic

*Chapter 14. Who Needs Religion?*

*Chapter 15. Spiritual State of the World*



## **Part VIII**

### **A Final Appeal**

#### *Chapter 16. One Rose—Many Petals*



### **Appendices**

*Appendix I: Other Works by the Same Author*

*Appendix II: The Grand City of the Cell*

*Appendix III: God's Fingerprint on the Universe*

*Appendix IV: Religious Leaders*

The Prime Source of Misinformation Concerning  
the Spiritual Dimension of Life

## **What Is the Source of All Knowledge?**

We all tend to focus on our physical needs and ignore the spiritual dimension of our life so long as we can sail smoothly through life. Only when a tragedy disturbs our peace, do we remember our divine destiny and recognize that there is more to life than making a living. Only then do we hear the voice of our Creator deep in our soul and we begin to realize that the attractions and glamors of this life have no relevance to who we are. Only then do we discover that we are spiritual beings with a divine mission—a knowledge that can elevate our soul from the earthly to the heavenly and give meaning and purpose to our lives.

This book is a gift to all seekers and lovers of truth who wish to cushion their soul against the mounting pressures of our times. It is an effort to draw us closer to God by bringing together the prime pieces of the “puzzle of human life and destiny.”

Scientists—mathematicians, physicists, chemists, and astronomers—study the laws that govern the universe; this book examines the laws that govern our relationship with the One who created the universe. This knowledge is sunshine for the soul. It is the greatest and most enduring source of joy and peace for every human being. It crowns our life with meaning and purpose. Without the light of this knowledge, life loses its everlasting splendors; it may not be even worth living!

### ***So Little Time! So Much to Read!***

Today “free” time is becoming scarce and very “expensive.” Reading a book such as this requires a large investment of time. You may say to yourself: “I am so busy, I don’t have time to organize my office or clean my house! I have also a pile of books waiting to be read! Why should I add one more to the pile?”

If you are facing such a dilemma, you are not alone. I also have such a pile! The first two chapters of this book are written to help you decide what should come first in your life—what kind of knowledge should receive priority:

***The beginning of all things is the knowledge of God...***<sup>1</sup>

*Bahá'u'lláh*

***The source of all learning is the knowledge of God, exalted be His Glory...***<sup>2</sup>

*Bahá'u'lláh*

Once you have read through the first two chapters, you will be convinced that discovering the Spiritual Design of Creation must be your first and foremost mission in life. For, you will recognize that your everlasting destiny depends on it:

***The supreme cause for creating the world and all that is therein is for man to know God.***<sup>3</sup>

*Bahá'u'lláh*

Anyone who has gained even a glimpse of the wonders and glories enshrined in this knowledge, would not hesitate to seek it all the days of his life. What honor, what glory can compare with knowing and becoming intimate with the Creator of the universe?

***Let him who glories, glory in this: that he understands and knows Me.*** *Jeremiah 9:24*

As stated, the first two chapters of this book emphasize the significance of seeking “the knowledge of God.” They set the tone and prepare you for an enchanting journey toward fulfilling your foremost mission in life. They also describe the diseased state of the world and the grave dangers to mankind, if the trend toward materialism is allowed to continue.

## **Part I**

### **Preparing for the Journey of the Search for Truth**

# I

## **The Spiritual Design of Creation:**

### **What Does It Mean?**

The knowledge of “the spiritual design of creation” is synonymous with “the knowledge of God.” It refers to discovering or knowing the answers to these questions:

- Do reason and science point to the existence of a spiritual dimension in the universe? What evidence is there for God, for the human soul, and for the afterlife?
- Why were humans created?
- What is the purpose of human life?
- And how can that purpose be fulfilled?

The beginning of all knowledge is to know why we were created and what is our foremost mission in life. Sacred Scriptures declare that we have been created to know and love God; that if we fail to attain this most splendid knowledge, this most glorious purpose, we have lived in vain, as if we had never been born! What if we fail to fulfill this mission? Imagine how you would feel if you traveled a hundred years toward a city and discovered at the last moment that you had traveled in the opposite direction? Now imagine our sense of utter distress if upon entering our everlasting home, we suddenly faced this reality: during our brief life on the earth, we could have traveled billions of miles toward our goal—our divine destiny—but we failed to take even one step in that direction!

Everything good and lasting comes from advancing toward the Kingdom of God, the City of absolute perfection, where nothing can be found except the light of love and knowledge. Knowing and building an intimate relationship with our Creator must be our first and foremost mission in life. If we fulfill this mission, everything else will fall into place, everything else will take care of itself:

***But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.***  
*Christ (Matt. 6:33)*

The first step in “seeking the Kingdom of God” is to know and understand that Kingdom, to learn why “*everything is as it is.*”

In this age of doubt and despair, a growing number of people, especially the young and educated, are abandoning their faith. Many of them are even expressing doubt about God’s very existence. Much scientific evidence is presented in this book to convince such skeptics that in addition to the visible universe, there is an invisible or spiritual universe.

Whatever convinces them to accept scientific discoveries, may also convince them to accept what science says about God.

With the exception of several nations that lived under communism, most people, perhaps as many as 80 percent of them, state that they believe in God. For United States citizens, the figure rises to 95 percent or higher. Would such believers also benefit from this book? Consider these reasons:

- Faith can exist on numerous levels. Unless faith reaches the level of absolute certainty, it cannot manifest its true potentials and wonders—its transforming powers in human life.
- The reason most believers, perhaps as many as 99 percent of them, fail to reach the level of absolute certainty in their faith is because of the misconceptions they have picked up—mostly from their religious leaders—and accepted them as the absolute truth.

The prevailing misconceptions about the spiritual dimension of life prevent them from attaining an intimate relationship with God. But once the misconceptions are removed, the light of God and the perfection of His spiritual design of creation become as manifest as the splendors of the sun.

God is not distant or disinterested in our life and destiny. On the contrary, His love and affection for human beings is boundless. He is intimately involved in our lives, but will not break His own laws. He will not deviate from “the Spiritual Design of Creation.” Any deviation would imply a lack of perfection in the original design.

Whenever we face a tragedy or a failure and rush to judge our Creator—because He has failed to live up to our flawed expectations and standards—it points to our failure to know God’s Kingdom: the spiritual laws that govern our relationship with Him. It indicates that we have a desire to create our own Creator—one who conforms to *our* design!

The knowledge of God—knowing Him as He truly is—elevates our thoughts and feelings. It helps us recognize and understand the everlasting laws that bind us to our Creator. Once we know and understand the reasons behind those laws, the reason behind everything that happens, we begin to trust God. That is the first step in building an intimate relationship with the One who longs to see us move toward Him—more than we could ever imagine!

As long as those obstacles—misconceptions—are in place, it is impossible to become intimate with our Creator, to establish a warm and loving relationship with the One who is the infinite source of Love. How can we truly love someone against whom we carry grudges?

Job encountered tragedies far beyond anyone could imagine. Yet his trust in his Creator did not waver. His true knowledge of God and His Kingdom sustained his soul and saved his faith. It gave him the wisdom to know why he was suffering, and the strength and patience to endure the unbearable. It helped him reach this conclusion: there is a reason for everything that happens, even if we cannot know the reason.

## *What is a “Paradigm”?*

The key to transformation is “paradigm shift.” What is a paradigm? “A paradigm is like a pair of glasses; it affects the way you see everything in your life. If you look at things through the paradigm of correct principles, what you see in life is dramatically different from what you see through any other centered paradigm.”<sup>1</sup>

The power of a paradigm affects every human being. It shapes the way we perceive ourselves, others, and the world; it determines our values, goals, relationships, and feelings. Each of us is shaped by a particular family, cultural, political, and religious climate. What can transform us is a willingness to set aside our old, obsolete paradigms, our old understanding of reality, and see life with a new vision.

Albert Einstein was once asked: “What is the most important question you can ask in life?” He answered, “Is the universe a friendly place?” This book demonstrates that the universe is more than friendly—it is absolute love and perfection. But before we can see its awesome wonders, we must take on a paradigm shift. Our only guide should be the light of reason and our pure spiritual instinct—our capacity to know and love God. The sun needs no evidence to distinguish it from darkness.

If each of us takes a small step toward enhancing our own life and expanding our own vision, the cumulative effect will be a giant leap for mankind.

There was a young man walking down a deserted beach just before dawn. In the distance he saw a frail old man. As he approached the old man, he saw him picking up stranded starfish and throwing them back into the sea. The young man gazed in wonder as the old man threw the small starfish from the sand to the water. He asked, “Old man, why do you spend so much energy doing what seems to be a waste of time?”

The old man explained that the stranded starfish would die if left in the morning sun.

“But there must be thousands of beaches and millions of starfish!” exclaimed the young man. “How can you make any difference?”

The old man looked down at the small starfish in his hand and as he threw it to the safety of the sea, he said, “I make a difference to this one.”

## 2

# Does Your Fish Bowl Need Fresh Water?

## Is There an Invisible Universe?

The evidence presented in *The Spiritual Design of Creation* points to the existence of an invisible universe parallel to the visible. It demonstrates that these two dimensions of creation are complementary to each other, and unless we learn to harmonize them in our life and set them to motion, like the two wings of a bird, we cannot rise to our divine destiny.

We are not billions of cells assembled to live for a few decades, to age, and then be buried forever in a grave! Each of us is a soul with a celestial destiny. Unless we become airborne and witness the divine blessings in store for us, we cannot manifest our potential; we cannot attain the true state of happiness—even if we own all the treasures of the earth.

We are enclosed like an egg within the shell of our earthly life. Unless we break out of the shell and fly heavenward, we cannot attain true liberty, we cannot witness the wonders that we are designed to experience. The shell will impede our vision on multiple levels.

On one level, the shell is the pessimism that surrounds us; it is our negative attitude that stifles our desire to search for meaning and purpose in our life. The shell is also our ego that prevents us from acknowledging our need to break through the illusions that have kept us closed to new ideas.

This book is written in response to the gradual and persistent decline of faith in the heart of mankind. It offers a message of hope to all seekers and lovers of truth, whatever their belief system, especially to those:

- Who have never been exposed to the spiritual dimension of life.
- Who have lost their faith in response to the dogmatic teachings and doctrines of the religion they inherited.
- Who must struggle to keep their faith because of unresolved questions concerning their belief system.

*The Spiritual Design of Creation* brings the light of hope to all those who have a thirst for true knowledge, but cannot find answers in the teachings and dogmas of old and

established religions—teachings that have been altered and filtered through the minds of religious leaders for centuries and presented as the absolute truth and the key to the mansions of heaven.

## ***The Role of Religious leaders***

The role of religious leaders—often with contradictory claims—in the decline of faith in the heart of humankind has been enormous. As long as people rely on them as their true guides to heaven, the decline will continue.

Religious leaders should be models of nobility—shining examples to be emulated by their followers; unfortunately they have served the opposite role. They have enjoyed a monopoly over the spiritual life of countless millions of followers throughout all ages. They have been looked up to by masses of people as their guiding stars to heaven, and yet they have served as a voice for separation and religious prejudice in all ages. To gain power, they have divided their religion into many segments. Christianity has been divided into hundreds of denominations. If these leaders cannot be fair or objective in relation to their own religion, how much harder is it for them to be fair or objective in relation to other religions?

All great Messengers have been persecuted by the religious leaders of their time. Religious leaders have also persecuted scientists who have challenged their literal and dogmatic interpretation of their Scriptures. Many of them continue to persist in their anti-intellectual and anti-scientific views. Their negative role in the spiritual life of people has been confirmed and predicted in all sacred Scriptures.

The loss of faith in the heart of humankind is a tragedy of momentous proportions. It is the root cause of most of the pain and suffering endured by mankind. Much of the blame for the loss of faith falls on religious leaders who care more about the financial status of their church or mosque than the spiritual state of the world. Because of its prime significance, this topic is discussed at some length in: ***The Knowledge of God.***

## ***How Can Faith Transform Human Life?***

The knowledge of the spiritual design of creation is not a mere philosophy that begins and ends with words. It is a knowledge that will lead to action. It has an enormous potential for transforming lives, for raising ethical standards. It changes our self-image and the way we perceive the world. It blends us with the universe. It dispels all feelings of loneliness and separation.

The knowledge of our divine destiny is as critical to our emotional and spiritual health and survival as the quality of the air we breathe is to our physical health and survival. Behind almost every problem that burdens the soul or society—whether it relates to depression and anxiety or to dishonesty, prejudice, greed, poverty, or war—behind every

human problem lies a spiritual solution. Unless that solution is applied, human suffering will continue to expand and intensify on a scale never seen before.

Human civilization now stands on a dangerous brink. Technology has been advancing at a rapid pace, while the spiritual dimension of life has been falling fast behind. The ultimate consequences of this disparity are unimaginable. Life for future generations will continue to become more stressful—devoid of the ethical values that have preserved civilizations since the dawn of history.

The transforming impact of knowing one's spiritual destiny has been witnessed on countless individuals, but seldom has it been demonstrated through scientific studies. Some years ago, I made an effort to fill this gap by taking a small step in this direction. While teaching at a state university in New York, I exposed a group of college students (about twenty of them who were members of a club) to some of the concepts presented in this book for about eight months. They attended group discussions once a week and did some reading. I then sent a questionnaire to those closest to the students—parents, siblings, boyfriends, girlfriends, and friends. What was discovered astonished everyone. There were substantial positive changes in every aspect of their lives. But the most surprising discovery was this: there was also a substantial improvement in their grade point average!

How and why did this happen? When those students gained a glimpse of the “Big Picture,” when they recognized what really matters in human life, they felt more secure, confident, and goal-oriented. And they were less likely to waste time!

If you are in the prime of your life, if you identify with those young people, and have a desire, as they did, to encounter and solve the puzzle of human life and destiny, you now have a chance to follow their example and discover for yourself a new level of motivation and desire for distinction. Your education provides you with worldly privileges and honors. You now also have a chance to attain spiritual distinctions and honors. This book makes it possible for you to take the first step. You can muddle through life as many do, or choose your own destiny. You are God's noblest creation—but only in potential. What you do with that potential is up to you!

## ***The Present and Future Generations in Grave Danger***

At that time many will turn away from the faith.

Christ (Matt. 24:10 NIV)

During the last two centuries, the light of knowledge and love of God has continued to become dimmer in the heart of humankind. This holds true especially for the more recent generations. Young people today define their success in terms of receiving good grades at school, entering a prestigious university, graduating with honors, and then getting a job with an income that would make them proud. Is this the reason God created us? Is this the true meaning of success?

People are so busy and so infatuated with the wonders of material success, they have little time to wonder about questions of human purpose and destiny. They are compensating for their lack of faith with “faith in materialism.” The stressful and competitive life of

recent generations can be compared to the state of a person swimming towards a destination—a swimmer who is also tired, hungry, and thirsty, but for now has no chance of meeting those needs. Unfortunately, the swimmers in life seldom if ever even have a destination. They continue to swim through the turbulent waters of their unpleasant life without a chance to rest or to satisfy their thirst and hunger for everlasting life. They accumulate wealth for a happy and restful retirement. But that golden age arrives with unpleasant signs, such as: “Welcome to the age of frailty, dementia, and disease!” Other warning signs such as loneliness, despondency, and depression also become more visible. Is this what life is all about?

Material gains are not as glamorous as they are portrayed by Hollywood. It would be a great service to us, as well as to lonely and old people, if we all spent a couple of hours every month in a nursing home. The experience would be invaluable. It would give us a chance to see an image of the end of our journey before it has arrived!

### ***How Do People Adopt Their Beliefs?***

Most people conform to what others expect of them, and at the same time try to control others to conform to their expectations. “A bride served baked ham, and her husband asked why she had cut the ends off. ‘Well, that’s the way mother always did it,’ she replied. The next time his mother-in-law stopped by, he asked her why she always cut the ends off the ham. ‘That’s the way my mother did it,’ she replied. And when grandma visited, she too was asked why she sliced the ends off. She said, ‘That’s the only way I could get it into the pan.’”

Psychologists believe that most people live and conform as the bride did; they do not take time to measure the pan. Over 90 percent of people conform to the customs, traditions, attitudes, beliefs, and ideologies of their ancestors. They get used to what they find around them, just as a fish born in a little bowl.

Each fish lives and bathes in the water, drinks it, tastes it, and adds its own little odor to it. The process of change is so gradual, and the fish are so busy swimming and hitting their heads against the bowl, they hardly know what’s going on.

Some sensitive fish complain of the bitter taste of the water. They know something is wrong and they cry out: “We deserve better treatment—we are out of breath, under stress, and surrounded by parasites and vicious worms. Can anyone save us? Can someone filter the water?” Sometimes, in desperation, some fish swallow a few worms, but to no avail. The worms keep multiplying in ever-increasing numbers.

Other fish say: “We agree, something must be done, but the pollution is beyond restoration, the worms beyond control. All the filters in the world could not cleanse the water.”

The real solution is to start with a fresh bowl of water from the heart of heavens.

Most people believe or disbelieve in God, and follow a specific religion or denomination, not for rational reasons, but for other reasons, such as:

- What their parents taught them and how—through love and respect, or through fear and pressure.
- What unique experiences they had.
- What is the prevailing belief system in their culture.

Surprisingly, both believers and non-believers have a great deal in common. They both fail to investigate the truth for themselves. Seldom if ever do they take the time to verify the reasons for their beliefs or disbeliefs.

The dramatic stories of two ministers I have known demonstrate the power of personal experience in shaping one's beliefs. They were attending a seminary school to prepare for a ministerial position in their church. However, they both suddenly changed course. One of them "lost" his faith—turning agnostic—because his doctoral dissertation was rejected! The other also "lost" his faith—turning atheist—because of persistent racial prejudice in his church!

Believers and disbelievers share other characteristics and tendencies:

- They both believe that it is not possible to prove the existence of God and the afterlife through scientific and rational evidence.
- They both feel that they have no need to verify their beliefs.
- They are both sure of their beliefs.
- And finally, they both look down on each other!

Believers consider the atheists and agnostics lost souls. Non-believers consider the believers dogmatic.

Most people—perhaps as many as 99 percent of them—make up their mind about perhaps the most important question in human life—the existence of God and the afterlife—without any investigation! This book is written to change this widely accepted and practiced tradition. It invites you—whether you are a believer or a non-believer—to set aside your feelings and assumptions and to allow reason and evidence to determine your beliefs.

### ***When We Don't Know That We Don't Know***

You may say: "I am pleased with my life and experience no sense of deficiency in my soul. Why should I take the time to look for evidence for the existence of God and the afterlife?" Consider this response to your question: Suppose all your life you lived in a cloudy and dark city, where you never saw the sun. Would you know what you were missing? In this age, most people are used to living a "cloudy life." They do not know what they are missing until and unless they experience it.

The burden of pain and pressures that we carry equals *the false assumptions* we have adopted and accepted concerning our purpose and destiny—who are we, what really

matters, and where are we going? This book puts those assumptions to the test of reason and scientific evidence.

Nothing can enhance the quality of your life as much as your intimate and personal relationship with God—***provided you have attained the state of “absolute certainty.”*** Once you experience that state—gain even a glimpse of it—you will sacrifice everything else in your life to preserve and enhance it. Once you attain that state, you will experience a sense of the profoundest peace and joy—one that you may never before have experienced. This is called the state of “nirvana”—the state that great mystics have wished for and hoped to attain throughout all ages. Once you experience that state, you will say: “How could I have lived without it?”

Perhaps the greatest gift we have is our freedom to choose our own destiny. This book offers you an opportunity to take advantage of this freedom to strive to attain a state of “***absolute certainty***” about God and the everlasting life that awaits you and every other human being. But attaining that most splendid state, and gaining that most glorious of gifts, requires discipline, patience, persistence, and desire. Can any worthy goal be attained without practicing these virtues?

If you search for God with ***absolute sincerity***, you will “***see***” God with ***absolute clarity***. The following promise was not made in vain:

***Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall SEE God.*** *Christ (Matt. 5:8)*

To a “pure heart” with a “clear vision,” God shines as brightly as the sun. To a clouded heart with a clouded vision, He becomes totally invisible:

***He was robed in a CLOUD...his face was like the SUN...*** *Revelation 10:1 NIV*

Your eyelids weigh almost nothing, yet they can conceal the glory and grandeur of the sun. That is also the power of your inner vision. The first step in your journey toward the sun is to set your feelings and previous assumptions aside and direct your gaze toward your own mind—your rational powers.

## ***The Difference Between Knowing God Versus Believing in God***

We should recognize that there is a vast difference between “***knowing***” God and “***believing***” in God. There is also a vast difference between believing in God by evidence versus believing by rote memory, conformity, or convenience.

What do we mean by “knowing God”? God is infinitely beyond human understanding. We do not have direct access to our Creator, but we have direct access to His Design of Creation. That is the prime purpose of this book: to learn why God made us the way He did; and how we can use that knowledge to understand our life and destiny, and become intimate with our Creator. Unless we know His Design of Creation, we cannot trust Him; and without trust, we cannot have a genuine and intimate relationship with Him. Intimacy can be built only on trust, and trust only on knowledge—not ignorance.

A lack of knowledge of the spiritual design of creation leads us to many misconceptions and unjustified grudges against our Designer. We often create and design our own image of God, then take Him to court, place Him on trial, and pass judgment against Him—when one who should really stand accused exists only in our mind! These misconceptions prevent us from attaining a state of intimacy with our Creator.

Believing in God without knowing God has little if any value. It may even be dangerous. Religious wars have been waged by people who thought that they believed in God—the God of their own creation. Suicide bombers take innocent lives as a favor to God and as a sure ticket to heaven! Do such fanatics believe in the God who created them, or in the god that they have created? And do they believe because of evidence or are their beliefs carved onto their distorted minds by their religious leaders with the chisel of their vested interests?

Studying the scientific evidence for the existence of God is also an essential aspect of knowing God. By studying such evidence, we expand our knowledge. We learn how He manifests His glory both in the universe and in the human spirit. Studying the evidence for the afterlife is yet another way we can expand our knowledge of God. How can we trust and become intimate with a Creator who we believe will destroy us—the ones He made in His own splendid image?

Human life is an exciting journey from ignorance to knowledge. The first step of the journey is to know the One who designed us. Only He can lead us out of confusion, only He has the map, and only He can give us directions to our divine destiny. Trying to solve “the human puzzle” without His Map is like trying to find a way out of a vast desert at night in the midst of a raging sandstorm.

The foremost requisite in human life *is to have a passion for spiritual growth and perfection*. This passion gives us a purpose and the incentive to move forward. Our Creator has designed each of us to anchor our life in Him—to live with hope and a desire to “reach for the stars.” But our freedom of choice allows us to go either up or down. Which way is easier? Most people prefer to side and slide with the crowd! Only a few make an effort “to enter through the narrow gate:”

*Someone asked him [Jesus], “Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?” He said to them, “MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO ENTER THROUGH THE NARROW DOOR, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, ‘Sir, open the door for us.’ But he will answer, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from.’”*

*Luke 13:23-25 NIV*

## ***Is Life Without Hope Worth Living?***

Before making the earth and the heavens, God made wisdom:

The Lord possessed me [wisdom] at the beginning of his work... When there were no oceans, I was given birth, when there were no springs abounding with water; before the mountains were settled in place, before the hills, I was given birth. Proverbs 8:22-25

Why did God start with wisdom? Because wisdom is *the Designer* of all things, the true standard of judgment and the guiding force. That is exactly how we should proceed. Before living another day, before glancing at another page of our lives, we need to seek wisdom. Living without wisdom is as meaningless and absurd as trying to read a book in an unknown language. In the glory and light of wisdom, life glows with meaning; it turns into the most exciting and enchanting song. No wonder a book that summarizes the wisdom of centuries declares: “*The first thing is to acquire wisdom*” Proverbs 4:7.

*For wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her.*

Proverbs 8:11

God is like the sun, and everything else in creation like a light bulb. Each “bulb” receives and reflects light exactly as God planned, *except human beings*. Some of them choose to cover their bulbs—their hearts and minds—with thick layers of tar. They do not allow any light to enter or to exit. Some of the bulbs shine so faintly that a lamp is needed to find them; others shine so brightly that they illumine the earth and beyond.

All people fear blindness, and they do everything within their power to avoid it. Yet many have no fear of *spiritual* blindness. In fact, they do everything within their power to preserve their dark, dreary, little inner world. All that matters to them is eyesight, not insight. They live by fear, the fear of losing their sweet dreams—their fairy fantasies. Deep in their hearts they know that if they ever expose themselves to the light, their illusions will suddenly vanish like a pocket of mist touched by the sun.

This book invites you to have no fear of the light, to soar high, to take a close look at the sun, to approach the stars, and to see a glimmer of the wisdom that designed the universe.

This book invites you to recognize your greatness and the grand spiritual destiny that awaits you. You may be a small fish in the kingdom of man but a giant whale in the kingdom of heaven. If the world fails to appreciate your uniqueness, remember that “the mighty oak was once a nut like you!”

This book sheds intense light on the prevailing illusions that prevent most people from reaching their potential—the illusions that are keeping the world in darkness and despair. Do you think you too, without knowing, may have a few? Are you willing to see some of them disappear? If you are, then come on board for an enchanting journey that will take you across many majestic meadows and mountains twinkling with countless blooming flowers of light.

The only provision you need for this journey is patience. Each chapter will throw a little more light on your path. As you advance, your journey will grow more exciting. You will find that virtually all your critical questions are resolved; questions such as who we are, why we were put here, and what on earth are we doing; questions about God and the reasons for suffering; questions about creating permanent peace on this shaky planet; and how we can immunize ourselves against the epidemic spread of stress and despair.

Many people make judgment without investigating the facts. They simply assume that they know the truth, as if they had been born with it. They often judge like the little girl who saw a pig with her six sucking piglets. She ran to her dad and yelled: “Come quickly. Six little pigs are pumping their mother. She is near bursting!”

At some point in life we stop answering questions and start questioning the answers. This is healthy; only by questioning can we grow. In this book you are encouraged to question everything, even the existence of God. Here nothing is taken for granted.

Two principles guide all scientific endeavors: reason and consistency. This book follows them faithfully. I make this pledge: if, after finishing this book, you find any single idea contrary to reason and consistency, please write to me and point out the violation. I will either respond to you personally or resolve the issue in a forthcoming edition.

***I invite you to begin your journey with confidence, with an expectation that there are answers to your questions, answers that make sense and are consistent with established scientific principles.*** What more can you ask for? That is the way I began my journey some thirty years ago. I started with that expectation, and it has made all the difference in every aspect of my life. As Robert Frost said:

***“Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.”***

Read this book and write your objections to any statement that you may find unreasonable. Please be as critical as you can be. Challenge the contents of this book as you read, and when you have finished the last chapter and have viewed the total picture, please send your comments and questions to me. I will be honored to respond to every letter, email, or phone call that I may receive.

***May God bless you and aid you in  
your journey of the search for truth***

## **Part II**

### **Evidence for God:**

*The most manifest of the manifest  
and the most hidden of the hidden!<sup>1</sup> Bahá'u'lláh*

# 3

## The Fingerprints of God

### Scientific Evidence for God's Presence in the Universe

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge.

Psalms 19:1-2 NIV

And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your *mind*, and with all your strength.

Mark 12:30 NKJ

The glory and greatness of Almighty God are marvelously discerned in all His works and divinely read in the book of heaven.

Galilei Galileo

God Almighty does not throw dice.

Albert Einstein

It is visible that God is; it is invisible *what* He is.

Stephen Charnock

A child asked his atheist father, "Does God know that we don't believe in Him?"

There are two kinds of light and two kinds of sight. One light illuminates matter, the other ideas; one light shines in the heavens, the other in the hearts of humankind. One sight sees the morning light, the other the light of truth. Can you remember trying to explain something to someone without success? He could not see your point. Even if you spent a hundred years explaining, it wouldn't make a bit of difference. Why? Can you make a person see in the dark? Until light is allowed to shine through the mind, it cannot see. The evidence, no matter how convincing, remains invisible in the dark. This is a lesson that often comes late to most of us.

No question can better test a person's in-sight and in-light than the question of God. To some people, nothing is as evident as God; to others, nothing as obscure. To some minds, He is the most mighty and majestic force in all universe; to others, He is only a myth.

The first and foremost question in life is this: Who made us and the universe? Were we designed by God or by chance? The answer to this question changes everything in our lives. Some people assume that science has nothing to do with God; others believe that science actually disproves God. This chapter shows that science and God are as intertwined as the sun and the light, and that as clearly as the light points to the sun, the universe points to God.

This is the age of science and reason. It is impossible for an intelligent person to accept the existence of God or the divine origin of any religion on blind faith. We need

proof from God Himself, and if He is really what He tells us He is, namely omniscient and omnipotent, He should be able to give us ample proof.<sup>1</sup> Dr. K. Karipineni

This chapter presents a few statements from eminent scientists and great thinkers to demonstrate God's distinct presence in the universe—from the tiniest cells to the great galaxies.

God has concealed Himself in His creation. Science is now beginning to unravel His glory and splendor. As our knowledge advances, the idea of an intelligent Being pervading all things becomes progressively more evident and credible. As noted psychologist Dr. Wayne Dyer states:

Forty years ago the question “Do you believe in God?” was most commonly answered with, “Of course not, I’m a scientist.” Today, more and more, the scientist’s answer to the same question is, “Of course, I’m a scientist.”<sup>2</sup>

Robert Herman—scientist, executive director of American Scientific Affiliation and author of *The God Who Would Be Known*—puts it this way: “Everywhere you look in science, the harder it becomes to understand the universe without God.”<sup>3</sup>

Fred Heeren confirms the same point:

The more physicists learn about the universe, the more they come to appreciate how impossible it would be for all the right conditions for life to come together in our universe by chance. A universe with stars and life requires a precise balance between the strength of nature’s four fundamental forces, a very precise ratio of proton to electron mass, etc. Stephen Hawking describes how the values of the many fundamental numbers in nature’s laws “seem to have been very finely adjusted to make possible the development of life,” and how God appears to have “very carefully chosen” the initial configuration of the universe. “Carefully choosing” and “finely adjusting” are clearly acts of the will.<sup>4</sup>

Astrophysicist Dr. Hugh Ross confirms the same trend:

Astronomers who do not draw theistic or deistic conclusions are becoming rare, and even the few dissenters hint that the tide is against them.<sup>5</sup>

Since 1985 the evidences for a divinely caused and designed universe have been accumulating dramatically. Consequently, a growing number of astronomers and physicists have been making theological inferences. For example, American astronomer George Greenstein, in *The Symbiotic Universe* (1988), concluded:

As we survey all the evidence, the thought insistently arises that some supernatural agency—or, rather, Agency—must be involved. Is it possible that suddenly, without intending to, we have stumbled upon scientific proof of the existence of a Supreme Being? Was it God who stepped in and so providentially crafted the cosmos for our benefit?

British Physicist Paul Davies in his 1983 book, *God and the New Physics*, denied the possibility of God as Creator and promoted an atheistic interpretation of the universe. But, just one year later, his thinking had begun to change. In his 1984 book, *Superforce*, he wrote:

The laws [of physics]...seem themselves to be the product of exceedingly ingenious design...The universe must have a purpose.

In his 1988 book, *The Cosmic Blueprint*, Davies expressed further change:

[I see] powerful evidence that there is something going on behind it all. The impression of design is overwhelming.<sup>6</sup>

According to science historian Frederic B. Burnham, the community of scientists now considers the idea that God created the universe “a more respectable hypothesis today than at any time in the last hundred years.” Denial of theism among astronomers is now rare, and even the few dissenters hint at the strength of the evidence.<sup>7</sup>

Henry Margenau, professor Emeritus of Physics and Natural Philosophy at Yale University, with a distinguished career in both molecular and nuclear physics, in his book *The Miracle of Existence* presents the following evidence concerning “unity” or “oneness” in the universe:

“Unity” and “oneness” are a staple in the everyday diet of the poet and the mystic. But why can physicists speak today about such matters? Have our physicists “gone mystic”?

One of the reasons physicists are justified in addressing these issues is...the sameness of the properties of the elementary constituents of matter. Every grade school pupil knows that there is an amazing consistency and unity in nature. All oxygen atoms, and all atoms of a given species, have the same mass or weight. All electrons have the same mass, spin, and charge, which reflects an accuracy that could never be achieved in man-made things, and this is true for all the properties of the known elementary constituents of matter. When we find this sameness and unity in the macroscopic, everyday world—for example, the fact that coins and paper bills are of the same value, that automobiles are of the same make, or that all machinery from an assembly line is uniform—we at once assume that they were designed by man and therefore reflect the underlying mind of man. Should we not make a similar assumption, and are we not compelled to make it, with respect to the fundamental entities of atomic and nuclear physics?<sup>8</sup>

Fred Heeren offers these statements and conclusion:

Our universe is precariously balanced between expansion and collapse, between an expansion force that prohibits the universe from crashing back into itself early in the expansion, and enough gravitational force so that matter can collect into galaxies rather than disperse into gases. The ratio between the universe’s actual density to the critical density is called Omega. George Smoot says, “The most minute deviation either side of an Omega of 1 consigns our potential universe to oblivion.”

According to the findings of 20th-century physics, matter and antimatter must have been produced in equal amounts in any conversion of energy into mass associated with the creation event. But this forces physicists to acknowledge yet another finely tuned parameter to bring about our habitable universe. Particles of matter must have slightly outnumbered particles of antimatter by an extremely critical amount. Once again, it appears that a very precise selection was made.

Princeton physicist Freeman Dyson writes, “The more I examine the universe and the details of its architecture, the more evidence I find that the universe in some sense must have known we were coming.” NASA astronomer John O’Keefe says, “It is my view that these circumstances indicate that the Universe was created for man to live in.”

When you consider the many, purposeful choices that were made to bring about this universe, you realize that all eternity past has been anticipating these few moments you’re now experiencing. There is tremendous purpose in your being here. Your life is an incredibly rare gift.<sup>9</sup>

In the following statement, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá<sup>10</sup> refers to the order and perfection of the laws of the universe as an evidence of the Designer:

[Nature] is subjected to an absolute organization, to determined laws, to a complete order and a finished design, from which it will never depart—to such a degree indeed, that if you look carefully and with keen sight, from the smallest invisible atom up to such large bodies...as the globe of the sun or the other great stars and luminous spheres, whether you regard their arrangement, their composition, their form or their movement, you will find that all are in the highest degree of organization and are under one law from which they will never depart.

But when you look at Nature itself, you see that it has no intelligence, no will. For instance, the nature of fire is to burn; it burns without will or intelligence. The nature of water is fluidity; it flows without will or intelligence. The nature of the sun is radiance; it shines without will or intelligence. The nature of vapor is to ascend; it ascends without will or intelligence...

Now, when you behold in existence such organizations, arrangements and laws, can you say that all these are the effect of Nature, though Nature has neither intelligence nor perception? If not, it becomes evident that this Nature, which has neither perception nor intelligence, is in the grasp of Almighty God, Who is the Ruler of the world of Nature; whatever He wishes, He causes Nature to manifest.<sup>11</sup>



### ***Quotations from Great Scientists***

If the various atomic and nuclear forces affecting electrons, protons, and neutrons had been just a smidgeon weaker or stronger, the atoms we see today wouldn’t exist—they’d either fly apart or collapse. Without atoms, there’d be no elements, no molecules, nothing but a chaotic soup of quantum particles.

The same goes for the force of gravity. Had it been just a tad weaker or stronger, the stars we see today wouldn’t exist; they’d either blow apart or implode under their own

weight. Without stars, there'd be no sun, no solar system, no earth, no imaginable life whatsoever—only cosmological bedlam.

How very, very easily our universe could've turned out disastrously! Is it merely coincidence that it didn't? That it came out looking and behaving so beautifully?..<sup>12</sup>

Michael Guillen, theoretical physicist

The gravitational constant, if it were off by one part in a hundred million, then the expansion of the universe after the Big Bang would not have occurred in the fashion that was necessary for life to occur. When you look at that evidence, it is very difficult to adopt the view that this was just chance. But if you are willing to consider the possibility of a designer, this becomes a rather plausible explanation for what is otherwise an exceedingly improbable even—namely, our existence.<sup>13</sup> Dr. Francis Collins

I find it quite improbable that such order came out of chaos...God to me is a mystery, but is the explanation for the miracle of existence. Why there is something instead of nothing?<sup>14</sup>

Astronomer Allan Sandage,  
recognized for his precise measurement of  
the size and age of the universe

There is a divine Providence over and above the materialistic happenings of biological evolution.<sup>15</sup>

John Eccles, Noble Prize-winning neurophysiologist

## ***Evolution and Creation***

***Man evolved on earth,  
but was designed in heaven***

The current view among most biologists is that necessity or “evolutionary pressures” have created all living organisms—from the simplest to the most complex. According to this concept, an organism does not have to pass through “B” in order to get to “C.” It can jump the required intermediate steps. But can we from purely biological perspective explain why can organisms jump from A to C? Who made such a progression possible?

The concept of macro-evolution is challenged by most Christians, because it contradicts the Biblical version of Creation. Many volumes are written to show that although micro-evolution is a fact, necessity cannot explain macro-evolution:

Chance or necessity [evolutionary pressure] cannot account for recent findings in microbiology, such as DNA coding or the specificity of hemoglobin. As in physics, modern biochemistry no longer allows for purely naturalistic explanations. Foster says that the old “chance” position is now “replaced by a new idea of the importance and dominance of specificity in the universe, with the inevitable implication that God exists.”<sup>16</sup>

***Evolution neither proves nor disproves the existence of God. It shows God's fingerprint on the universe.*** It does not disprove the original design; it simply expresses the mechanisms for the ***gradual emergence*** or material realization of the design. Evolution can explain how the “process of publishing” developed. It cannot identify the author or explain the whole meaning and the purpose of the book.

The history of science shows that the scope of new discoveries is sometimes overextended and exaggerated, especially if two competing groups are involved. Scientists exaggerate the implications of the theory of evolution; religionists try to find loopholes in the theory to invalidate it entirely.

Man's distinction over animals lies in his spiritual, not physical, powers—his self-consciousness, creativity, abstract reasoning, freedom of thinking, and the ability to make moral choices. Must physical similarity alone point to spiritual commonalty? A fetus in its early stages seems like some animals, yet it is perfectly human.

The theory of evolution in no way disproves God. It only contradicts *a literal* interpretation of the Bible. We should note that no one can claim a monopoly in understanding the Bible.

Nothing in biology makes sense except in the light of evolution.<sup>17</sup> Theodosius Dolzhansky,  
a leading biologist

Today the theory of evolution has provided a battleground for literal-minded believers and strict evolutionists who suffer from a hardening of attitudes, who cannot fit God into their sense-bound theories. The concepts of evolution and anti-evolution have become a religion worshiped by both camps. Can there be a middle ground, where the extremists from both camps can meet and reconcile their differences? This chapter shows that such a possibility does indeed exist. It indicates that evolution is a fact, that life emerged gradually, but was from the beginning guided.

I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who has endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect has intended us to forgo their use. Galileo

Dr. Francis Collins—an evolutionist who “headed a multinational 2,400-scientist team that co-mapped the 3 billion biochemical letters of our genetic blueprint”—considers the moral-spiritual nature of human beings the most convincing evidence for the existence of God:

The comparison of chimp and human sequences, interesting as it is, does not tell us what it means to be human. In my view, DNA sequence alone even if accompanied by a vast trove of data on biological function [data that prove evolution], will never explain certain special human attributes, such as the knowledge of the Moral Law and the universal search for God. Freeing God from the burden of special acts of creation does not remove Him as the source of the things that make humanity special, and of the universe itself. It merely shows us something of how He operates.<sup>18</sup>

## *What is Nature?*

Recognized scientist, Dr. Michael Guillen, formerly a professor of theoretical physics at Harvard University, in his book *Can a Smart Person Believe in God?* refers to the same kind of evidence:

According to the latest evidence alleged by paleoanthropologists, humans as we know them appeared suddenly and mysteriously only a very, very short while ago. (See, for example, *Becoming Human: Evolution and Human Uniqueness*, by Ian Tattershall.)... The Great Leap Forward (other scientists call it *The Creative*

*Explosion*) was momentous because we humans suddenly appeared on the earth with traits never before seen in the animal kingdom—not even in any supposed protohuman species. And what exactly were these traits that make us unique? All the things that encompass what most of us would call the human soul: art, culture, and religion.<sup>19</sup>

The best way to demonstrate this concept is by analogy. Suppose we have a cup of milk and pour a little—a few drops—into a second cup. Can there be nutrients in those few drops that cannot be found in the original cup of milk? For instance, can we find calcium, potassium, or protein in the second cup, but not in the first? If our sole origin is dust, plants, and animals; and if the qualities or attributes that allow us to relate to ourselves, to others, and to the universe as a whole also came from those three sources (dust, plants, and animals), where do the distinctions or unique qualities that make us human come from? What then is the source of our spiritual potentials and powers? If we are “drops” from the “cup of nature,” can there be qualities or distinctions in us that cannot be found in that cup—our supposedly original source—the world of nature? No, that is impossible, as the example of milk demonstrates.

We can find the same concept expressed more fully long ago by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in a letter addressed to Dr. August Forel, one of the most eminent scientists of his time:

Man hath the powers of will and understanding, but nature hath them not. Nature is constrained, man is free. Nature is bereft of understanding, man understandeth. Nature is unaware of past events, man is aware of them. Nature forecasteth not the future, man by his discerning power seeth that which is to come. Nature hath no consciousness of itself, man knoweth about all things. Should any one suppose that man is but a part of the world of nature...and thus nature is the originator of these perfections...to him we make reply and say: the part dependeth upon the whole; the part cannot possess perfections thereof the whole is deprived.<sup>20</sup>

The word “nature” is defined as “the sum total of the forces at work throughout the universe.” What is the original substance of the universe—the earth and the heavenly bodies? What is the original substance of the material world? Is it other than atoms that come together to produce substances such as air, water, dirt, sand, and gravel? According to materialists—those who deny the existence of God and a spiritual world—whatever we find in human beings originated from “nature,” such as water and dirt. These questions seek answers: Is there any evidence of planning or power of reasoning in water and dirt? Is there any trace of consciousness of self or of God in dust and gravel? Is there any sign of honesty and integrity in atoms? If not, where do these qualities come from? Do they not point to a spiritual world *beyond* “nature” where wisdom, reason, and consciousness rule?

What about the *laws* of nature? Nature could not create those laws. As we noted, the original substance of nature is water and dirt. Can water and dirt create the laws of gravity, of physics and chemistry? Who then made these laws? Did dirt and water decide that the earth must revolve around itself and around the sun with perfect precision and order—to move not even a second faster or slower in a thousand years?

The sea with its grandeur cannot deviate by an atom from the laws of nature; the sun in all its magnificence cannot deviate as much as a needle’s point from the laws of nature, and can never comprehend the conditions, the state, the qualities, the

movements, and the nature of man. What, then, is the power in this small body of man which encompasses all this? What is this ruling power by which he subdues all things?<sup>21</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Bahá

### *Quotations from Great Scientists*

The scientist is possessed by the sense of universal causation... His religious feeling takes the form of a rapturous amazement at the harmony of natural law, which reveals an intelligence of such superiority that, compared with it, all the systematic thinking and acting of human beings is an utterly insignificant reflection.<sup>22</sup>

Albert Einstein

The laws of science, as we know them at present, contain many fundamental numbers, like the size of the electric charge of the electron and the ratio of the masses of the proton and the electron... The remarkable fact is that the values of these numbers seem to have been very finely adjusted to make possible the development of life.<sup>23</sup>

Stephen Hawking  
Theoretical Physicist

A common sense interpretation of the facts suggests that a superintellect has monkeyed with physics, as well as with chemistry and biology, and that there are no blind forces worth speaking about in nature. The numbers one calculates from the facts seem to me so overwhelming as to put this conclusion almost beyond question.<sup>24</sup>

Sir Fred Hoyle  
Astrophysicist

No one can study chemistry and see the wonderful way in which certain elements combine with the nicety of the most delicate machine ever invented, and not come to the inevitable conclusion that there is a Big Engineer who is running this universe.

Thomas Edison

The probability of life originating from accident is comparable to the probability of the unabridged dictionary resulting from an explosion in a printing shop.<sup>25</sup>

George Wald, Biochemist  
Nobel Prize Winner

It almost seems as if the universe must in some sense have known that we were coming.

Freeman Dyson, Physicist

For life to have been a chemical accident on earth is like looking for a particular grain of sand on all the beaches in all the planets in the universe—and finding it... There is no other way in which we can understand the precise ordering of the chemicals of life except to invoke the creations on a cosmic scale.<sup>26\*</sup>

Chandra Wickramasinghe  
Noted Scientist

Do you believe reason and faith are opposed to one another?... That believing in God has nothing whatsoever to do with the discoveries and achievements of science?... I believe that, like siblings, reason and faith look and act differently, but under the skin

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\* For further quotations from other eminent scientists concerning the presence of God in the universe, see the Appendix.

they share certain genetic similarities. In particular, they're identical in this regard: science and religion are each a potent mixture of both IQ [Intelligence Quotient] and SQ [Spiritual Quotient].<sup>27</sup>

Michael Guillen  
Theoretical Physicist

## *The Size and Origin of the Universe*

The light of the sun, traveling at a speed of 300,000 kilometers per second, takes about eight minutes to reach our planet. Perhaps the best way to know the speed of light is to see how many times it circles the earth *per second: seven and a half times!* Such a speed is entirely beyond human understanding. Traveling at the speed of light, it would take several hours to reach the farthest limits of our solar system, but a journey to 'Alpha Centauri' the closest star to us... would take four years and four months. With the present speed of space rockets, the same journey would take over a hundred thousand years! As an infinitesimally small part of the observable universe, our galaxy—the Milky Way—is a collection of two hundred billion stars.

Since the Big Bang, 14 billion years ago, the universe has continued to expand. The radius of the observable universe, as a result of expansion has now reached 46 billion light years—a figure that continues to increase.

Andromeda, the closest galaxy to us, also a spiral galaxy, is 2.9 million light years away. The visible universe contains hundreds of billions of galaxies at distances of millions and even billions of light years. Each galaxy contains between tens of millions of stars such as in 'dwarf galaxies,' to hundreds of billions of stars as in 'giant galaxies'. The galaxies farthest away from us are therefore the panorama of the past history of the universe.<sup>28</sup>

Dr. Rafie Mavaddat

ABC news recently announced that scientists have just discovered that the universe is three times larger than previously estimated! The number of stars—some of them many times larger than our sun—is now estimated to be:  
10,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000.

How long would it take to count these stars at the rate of one per second 24 hours a day? It would take 317,097,919,837,645,865,043 years!

Contemplating the size and origin of a universe so vast and so integrated, awakens in us a sense of awe and wonder. Where did these countless billions of stars and planets come from? Who set them in motion? Who harmonized them? Did the universe spring out of "nothing" and for no reason? Can even one atom appear out of "nothing"?

The scientific evidence for God is vast—the Creator's fingerprints appear everywhere: from the tiny atoms to the great galaxies. Why then do some people deny God, and others offer Him only a conditional acceptance? For most people belief in God is a question of feelings and tradition, not reason or evidence. They like to believe in a God of their own creation—their own desire. If He qualifies, then they praise Him; otherwise they ignore Him. They want a supreme servant who serves them well, an all-powerful bodyguard who cushions them from danger. They desire a bountiful treasure-keeper who bestows infinite riches for the asking, who protects them from disease and death.

Many people use the prevalence of suffering and injustice in the world as a reason to reject God. *They depend on their feelings rather than the rules of reason.* This concept, more than any other, undermines people's faith in God. Because of its paramount significance, this topic occupies an entire chapter in this book. See *Chapter 6: When Bad Things Happen to Good People.*

## *The Humble Heart*

To what extent can we know God? In a spirit of humility, we must acknowledge our limitations. Consider this question: Why can we not imagine "infinity"? Because we have a "finite" mind. Can a cup contain an ocean? How then can our finite mind contain God—the infinite?

To understand something, we must be able to transcend it. We can discover the mysteries of the mineral, vegetable, and animal kingdom, because we are above them: We have abilities they do not have. But can even the smartest animal really know us? Only to a limited extent. The same principle applies to our relationship with God. God is infinitely greater than we are; we are infinitely smaller than He is. We become aware of His presence through His creation, just as we know a person through his fingerprints.

*And as we reflect, we observe that man is like unto a tiny organism contained within a fruit; this fruit hath developed out of the blossom, the blossom hath grown out of the tree, the tree is sustained by the sap, and the sap formed out of earth and water. How then can this tiny organism comprehend the nature of the garden, conceive of the gardener and comprehend his being? That is manifestly impossible. Should that organism understand and reflect, it would observe that this garden, this tree, this blossom, and this fruit would in no wise have come to exist by themselves in such order and perfection. Similarly the wise and reflecting soul will know of a certainty that this infinite universe with all its grandeur and perfect order could not have come to exist by itself.<sup>29</sup>*

*'Abdu'l-Bahá*

Bahá'u'lláh<sup>30</sup> describes God as:

*The most manifest of the manifest and the most hidden of the hidden!*<sup>31</sup>

The evidence for the previous statement is this: Some of the most brilliant scientists *do not believe* in God; some of the most brilliant scientists *do believe* in God. I have met many on both sides. How can this be? Once again: Because God is the *most manifest of the manifest* and the *most hidden of the hidden*.

How is it possible to be as visible as the sun and yet remain hidden in the clouds? It all depends on the viewer—the *eye* in his heart:

He was robed in a *cloud*...His face was like the *sun*... Christ (Revelation 10:1 NIV)

Behold, He is coming with *clouds*, and every *eye* will see Him... Christ (Revelation 1:7 NKJ)

Blessed are the *pure* in heart, for they shall *see* God. Christ (Matt. 5:8)

Only a humble heart can discern the glory of God. "Seek the Lord all you *humble* of the land" (Zeph. 2:3). God shines in every created thing, from a humble firefly to the

brightest stars, yet some hearts cannot see any trace of Him. He has placed His mark of excellence everywhere and in everything. He has enclosed more evidence for Himself in the universe than for anything else. If such a measure of evidence existed for anything else—which did not involve emotions—no one would ever question its existence. I once tried to convince a philosophy student of God’s existence. After finding himself incapable of rejecting the evidence, he finally said, “I wish I could refute your evidence, but I can’t!” His mind had no power to reject the evidence, yet his heart could see no trace of God. A man saw his terribly sick friend reading a book about God. “Why are you wasting your time?” he asked. “Don’t worry,” the sick friend whispered proudly. “I am only looking for loopholes.”

It is much harder for the mind to disregard God than to witness Him within the dazzling splendors of His creation. Our Creator loves to live in the human heart, but He is quite choosy about His home and habitat. He invites as guests to His heavenly Banquet and visits only the hearts that are receptive.

Knowing God requires a *sincere, persistent, and passionate thirst for truth*. Mere intellectual curiosity is not sufficient.

Whoever is *thirsty*, let him come; and whoever *wishes*, let him take the free gift of the water of life. Christ (Rev. 22:17 NIV)

Thou shalt find Him, if thou seek Him with *all* thy heart and with *all* thy soul. Deuteronomy 4:29

Blessed are those who wash their robes [spiritual purity], that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city [of God]. Revelation 22:14 NIV

Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it. Christ (Luke 18:17 NKJ)

Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon him while He is near. Isaiah 55:6

A mother was concerned about her son having the right diet. “I have a nice cookbook, I’m going to send it to him so he can make some real meals for himself,” she said. “Don’t bother, dear,” a friend said, “It won’t work. All those recipes start out by saying, ‘Take a clean pan...’” Yes, “***God is the most manifest of the manifest and the most hidden of the hidden.***” Manifest in the city of light, hidden in the city of clouds and spiritual darkness.

- Teacher to a little girl: “Show me where God is, and I will give you an ice cream cone.”
- Little girl: “Show me where God is not, and I will give you three cones.”

### ***The Trend Toward Disbelief***

See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples... Isaiah 60:2 NIV

[On that day] the love of most will grow cold. Christ (Matt. 24:12 NIV)

The world is in great turmoil, and the minds of its people are in a state of utter confusion. We entreat the Almighty that He may graciously illuminate them with the glory of His Justice, and enable them to discover that which will be profitable unto

them at all times and under all conditions. He, verily is the All-Possessing, the Most High.<sup>32</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

Since mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, although the advancement of science has given us more reasons to believe in God, the world as a whole has been moving towards disbelief in God. The trend has been gaining momentum in recent times. Each generation is becoming more materialistic and less spiritual. If this trend is allowed to continue, it will lead to undesirable consequences, discussed later in this book. It is helpful to explore the reasons behind the trend toward atheism:

- The decline of family stability.
- The glamour of materialism.
- Lack of time. People are busier than ever before.
- Lack of discipline and commitment to practice the values that faith in God requires.
- The widespread news of hypocrisy on the part of those who profess belief in God.
- The spread of cynicism and lack of trust.
- The spread of confusion: many contradictory claims to the only way to God.
- The opposition of the church to established scientific facts.
- Widespread misconceptions about God.
- A failure to know the spiritual design of creation.
- The unfounded but common assumption that it is unscientific to believe in God.
- The role of religious leaders in spreading misinformation about God and the afterlife

The preceding reasons lead us to this conclusion: Disbelief in God is rooted both in the heart and in the mind. Negative feelings prevent us from being objective regarding our Creator. Lack of true knowledge leads us to create our own unique God—one that exists only in our imagination. It is extremely difficult—if not impossible—to believe in the existence of a man-made God. On the other hand, it is extremely easy to believe in the existence of God as He really is! That is the prime purpose of this book. Each chapter sheds a little light on the subject, and lifts a little the veil of mystery that shrouds the glory within us and the great glory beyond us.

All praise and glory be to God Who, through the power of His might, hath delivered His creation from the nakedness of non-existence, and clothed it with the mantle of life. From among all created things He hath singled out for His special favor the pure, the gem-like reality of man, and invested it with a unique capacity of knowing Him and of reflecting the greatness of His glory.<sup>33</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

## **Part III**

### **Evidence for the Afterlife and Human Spirit**

# 4

## Glimpses of Eternity

### Scientific Evidence for the Afterlife

We go to the grave of a friend, saying, “A man is dead;” but angels throng about him, saying, “A man is born.” Henry Beecher

Is death the last sleep? No, it is the last and final awakening. Sir Walter Scott

Most people believe in their own immortality, but seldom is their belief based on solid proof. This and the next chapter present proofs for the afterlife. In the heart of every human being is planted the seed of immortality, which longs to blossom. Often the seed fails to sprout and spread because of lack of nourishment; sometimes it simply dies. The purpose of this chapter is to nourish this seed, to awaken anyone who has a desire to arise and behold the majestic dawn. This awakening of the self brings unspeakable peace and ecstasy to the soul—it bestows pleasure beyond all pleasures. Suddenly the soul discovers the missing link in the circle of hope and happiness. If this happens to you, your life will never be the same again. Once awakened, a soul can never sleep; the joy of watching the majestic dawn keeps it excited and awake daylong and nightlong.

This world is simply the prelude to the next. The real show begins when the curtain is lifted. A little girl was asked why she liked a particular TV show. “I like it,” she said, “because as soon as it is over, *Sesame Street* comes on.”

What happens after death is so unspeakably glorious that our imaginations and our feelings do not suffice to form even an approximate conception of it...<sup>1</sup> Carl Jung

Scientific studies confirm the positive impact of increased awareness of our immortal destiny:

Vernon Larson...has studied the effects of death-related vision on the lives of people who simply read about them. To do this, he administered death-anxiety tests to dozens of people before having them read literature on death-related visions. Several days after the subjects had read the material, Larson administered the tests again. He found that 87 percent of his subjects had an increased belief in life after death, an increase in the desire to love others, and an increase in the desire to demonstrate love to others...<sup>2</sup>

Knowledge of the next life prevents or diminishes suicide substantially. What happens if those who have attempted suicide learn about the afterlife?

Dr. Bruce Greyson found that very few of those who read about these death-related visions attempted to kill themselves again. On the other hand those who didn't read about them tried to commit suicide again with the usual frequency, an astounding ***fifty to one hundred times the rate of the normal population.***<sup>3</sup>

Even if the ratio was one to ten, instead of one to fifty, why is this knowledge not being promoted, especially among young people?

## ***Life at Death***

True faith is ***the enlightened*** faith, which meets two requirements: reason and consistency. If a belief fails to meet these two requirements, it is mere superstition—it is blind faith. Belief in the afterlife is an example of enlightened faith.

We are asked first to prove an idea and, if it is good, if it passes the test of reason, then to hold fast to it:

Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.

I Thess. 5:21

God in His Wisdom does not expect us to acknowledge His great glory without ample evidence. In recent decades scientists have been unraveling some of the mysteries of the beyond. The accumulated evidence for “life after life” is overwhelming. The evidence comes mostly from three observations:

- After revival, people who were ***clinically dead***<sup>\*</sup> describe specific and accurate details about the rescue attempts as well as events beyond their field of vision. Two relatives were discussing how to divide the fortune of a “dead” man, not knowing that he was watching and hearing every word. A friend of mine was stopped by a man on the street and thanked for the help he gave him in an emergency room. The man had never set “eyes” on my friend, yet recognized him as an attending physician.
- People of all ages, with diverse cultural and religious backgrounds, see and describe a world, unlike the physical, in astonishingly similar terms. A recent study puts the number of people with near-death visions in the United States alone at eight million.

***Can these visions be regarded as hallucinations—such as those that result from oxygen starvation? Hallucinations vary between people; they are not consistent and do not correspond to reality. In contrast, near death visions reveal a remarkable consistency, and they correspond to reality. If these visions are not rooted in an objective reality, then why do they contain identical elements?***

- People who are clinically dead, suddenly experience total freedom from physical afflictions and infirmities. The blind begin to see, the deaf begin to hear.

This chapter offers several examples of near-death vision from published sources. Near-death visions are not rare. At a given time, more than eight million people in U.S. have had such visions. The following are two examples from *Heading toward Omega*, by psychologist Dr. Kenneth Ring. The first story demonstrates the joy of discovering that

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<sup>\*</sup> Clinical death is the state in which vital signs have ceased: the heart is in ventricular fibrillation, there is a total lack of electrical activity on the cortex of the brain (flat EEG), and brain-stem activity is abolished (loss of the corneal reflex, fixed and dilated pupils, and loss of the gag reflex). *The Spiritual Brain*, p. 155

death is only a transition, and not the end of life; the second story gives us a glimpse of heaven.\*

### *The State of the Soul*

...the next thing I knew I was standing in a mist and I knew immediately that I had died and I was so happy that I had died but I was still alive. And I cannot tell you how I felt. It was “Oh, God, I’m dead, but I’m here!” And I started pouring out these enormous feelings of gratitude...My consciousness was filled with nothing but these feelings of gratitude because I still existed and yet I knew perfectly well that I had died...

While I was pouring out these feelings...the mist started being infiltrated with enormous light and the light just got brighter and brighter and brighter. It is so bright but it doesn’t hurt your eyes...At that point, I had no consciousness...of having a body. It was just pure consciousness. And this enormously bright light seemed almost to cradle me. I just seemed to exist in it and be part of it and be nurtured by it, and the feeling just became more and more and more ecstatic and glorious and perfect...If you took the one thousand best things that ever happened to you in your life and multiplied it by a million, maybe you could get close to this feeling...<sup>4</sup>

### *A Glimpse of Heaven*

Heaven is nearness to God and hell remoteness from His presence. The following story shows what it is like to be in heaven, in the presence of the One who is the source and the essence of the most splendid joy:

At first I became aware of beautiful colors...They were magnified in crystallized light and beamed with a brilliance in every direction. It was as if all this light was coming at me through a prism made by a most beautiful and purified diamond, and yet at the same time it was as if I were in its center. I was in a heavenly pasture with flowers. It was another place, another time, and perhaps it was even another universe. But it was definitely another consciousness—vibrant and more alive than the one I had known in my earthly life. My ears were filled with a music so beautiful no composer could ever duplicate. It was soothing, gentle, and warm and seemed to come from a source deep within me.

Everything that occurred to me while I was in this state of consciousness was vastly beyond anything I had ever experienced and yet at the same time it was familiar—as if I had always known of its existence. Even now when I try to describe something so beautiful I am mute with awe. There are no words in any language to describe such grandeur. Even the great literary works by men and women fortunate enough to have experienced this blissful state paint only a shadow of its glory. I don’t know to this day where I was. I was no longer aware of my physical existence on earth, of my friends, my family, or my relatives...It was like a rebirth into another, higher kind of life.

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\* The case studies in this chapter and the next are presented with permission from the publishers.

As my senses expanded, I became aware of colors that were far beyond the spectrum of the rainbow known to the human eye...It was as if I was in the center of a lotus flower which was unfolding its beauty around me in every direction. I became aware of being in the middle of a tunnel. I was speeding closer and closer to a light at the other end. In the far distance I saw what I can only describe, in the limited language available to me now, as two circles.

In the middle of one circle was a most beautiful being. It was neither a man nor a woman, but it was both. I have never, before or since, seen anything as beautiful, loving, and perfectly pleasant as this being. An immense, radiant love poured from it. An incredible light shone through every single pore of its face. The colors of the light were magnificent, vibrant, and alive. The light radiated outward. It was a brilliant white superimposed with what I can only describe as a golden hue. I was filled with an intense feeling of joy and awe. I was consumed with an absolutely inexpressible amount of love. I had the overpowering feeling that I was in the presence of the source of my life and perhaps even my creator. In spite of the tremendous awe it inspired, I felt I knew this being extremely well. With all my heart I wanted to embrace and melt into it as if we were one—for although it was neither my mother nor my father, it was both.

The second circle surrounded the first. In it I became aware of six shimmering mother-of-pearl-like impressions which unfolded and opened up in the way the petals of a freshly created flower open up to the sun. They were living beings. Their beauty, charm, splendid emanating colors, and the closeness I felt to them were breathtaking. From beyond this impression, I became aware of the most powerful, radiant, brilliant white light. It totally absorbed my consciousness. It shone through this glorious scene like the sun rising on the horizon through a veil which had suddenly opened. This magnificent light seemed to be pouring through a brilliant crystal. It seemed to radiate from the very center of the consciousness I was in and to shine out in every direction through the infinite expanses of the universe. I became aware that it was part of all living things and that at the same time all living things were part of it. I knew it was omnipotent, that it represented infinite divine love. It was as if my heart wanted to leap out of my body towards it. It was almost as though I had met my Maker. Even though the light seemed thousands and thousands of times stronger than the brightest sunlight, it did not bother my eyes. My only desire was to have more and more of it and to bathe in it forever.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Closer to the Light***

My favorite book on near-death vision is *Closer to the Light*, by Dr. Melvin Morse (a pediatrician) and Paul Perry. ***What makes this book special is that it pertains to children.*** Let us review several examples from this book:

John was an eleven-year-old patient of mine who was dying of lymphoma. In his last days, he was hospitalized with severe, untreatable pneumonia. Though he was having difficulty breathing and was in constant pain, he was given very few drugs such as morphine and Valium because they make breathing more difficult.

Three days before John died, a circle of loved ones gathered around his bed. They were startled when John suddenly sat upright and announced that Jesus was in the room. He then asked for everyone to pray for him.

At about 3 a.m. John sat up again, startling the four people who had gathered around the bed to pray. "There are beautiful colors and more colors. You can double jump up here, double jump!"

At 4 a.m. an extraordinary event occurred. They were joined by a woman who said that she had received a strong premonition that she had to visit John right away. She was not known to John's parents, but her son was a playmate of John's. She had no explanation for why she would suddenly visit John at 4 A.M. except to explain that she had had a vivid dream about John and had felt a need to visit him that was overpowering.

By dawn, it seemed that life was almost over for John. His breathing was labored, and his heart was pounding like that of a marathon runner's. Even then, little John had more to communicate. Opening his eyes wide, he asked his grieving parents to "let me go."

"Don't be afraid," he said. "I've seen God, angels, and shepherds. I see the white horse."

As sick as he was, John still begged his family not to feel sorry for him. He had seen where he was going, and it was a joyous and wondrous place. "It's wonderful. It's beautiful," he said, his hand held out in front of him.

Soon he laid back and fell asleep. John never regained consciousness and died two days later.<sup>6</sup>



Dr. Morse describes an unusual case in which the Being of Light appeared not to the child but to his mother:

The child had severe cerebral palsy secondary to brain damage and a seizure disorder that had shown up on an abnormal EEG. These are afflictions from which children simply don't recover. If they survive infancy, they spend their lives severely retarded.

The doctors told her their prognosis, but still the mother stayed with her child. By all accounts she was with the boy almost twenty-four hours a day for several months. Perhaps it was the strain of the ordeal or sleep deprivation that led to what happened next.

Late one night, she said, a Being of Light came into her hospital room. Later she described it as having the shape of a person, but not the features of either a male or a female. It glowed with a cold, gray light as though light were being beamed through an ice cube.

"Your son will be all right," the being said.

The woman said that she felt as though love were being poured into her body. "It was marvelous."

The next day she shared this vision with her medical team. She was especially excited because the being had assured her that her son was going to be normal. Could they please do another EEG to see if anything had happened?

They repeated the brain-wave test and came up with the startling results: normal. The child had made a full recovery.<sup>7</sup>



The following case presents a seemingly unexplainable recovery:

I have another story from one of my own patients. When I am wondering about the mysterious nature of the soul and the unknown energy that sparks our lives, I think about this case. It happened to a boy I'll call Ben. This "boy" is now a forty-seven-year-old policeman, but when he was fourteen, he developed a serious case of rheumatic fever and was hospitalized for weeks at Boston Children's Hospital.

His situation continued to worsen, until one day he began experiencing severe chest pains. They became worse and worse until he could ignore them no longer. He remembers speaking to the nurse and saying that something bad was happening. He saw her run from the room to get a doctor, and then he noticed something strange: He was able to follow her. He floated behind her as she explained the situation to a doctor and then followed them as they ran back into his room to look at his body. He realized that he was looking at his own body, hovering above the whole scene like a dispassionate observer.

He looked down and saw that he was linked to his body by a silver cord that was attached to his foot. That was the only connection that he seemed to have. A few seconds earlier he had been in severe pain. Now he was floating painlessly above his body while doctors and nurses began their lifesaving cardiac resuscitation.

While he watched what was going on below him, he suddenly felt as though there had been a great increase in his intelligence. He became aware of two Beings of Light, one on either side, who stayed with him as he peacefully watched the frantic scene below. He says that the presence of these beings gave him a sense of peace, love, and understanding. It wasn't as though he "knew everything," Ben now says. "It was more like I suddenly realized that life is a lot more simple than most of us think."

The doctors were losing Ben, or at least his body. They had tried everything they knew and were now pushing a long needle into his chest to inject his heart with epinephrine. As he watched this desperate procedure, the Beings of Light on either side of him asked if he wanted to stay on earth or go with them. "I want to stay," he said, watching as the doctors waited for the epinephrine to kick in.

The beings left, and Ben watched as the doctors gave up and pulled a sheet over his face. He could hear people talking in the hallway, consoling the doctors and nurses who had just lost their young patient. A student nurse remained at his bedside, softly crying. She had worked with him throughout his long hospitalization, and they had gotten to know each other quite well.

Suddenly, the Beings of Light reappeared and told him he could return to his body. Ben could hardly believe it. He thought he was dead, and from the looks of things, he

was. Now the two spirits told him that he could return to his body, a body that had been left for dead by his physicians.

With what felt like a hiccup, Ben was back in his body. He threw the sheet from himself, pulled the needle from his chest, and shouted, "I'm alive!"<sup>8</sup>



The next case presents a change of heart from a desire to die to a will to live:

As a teenager she had injured her leg skiing, and her ligaments were surgically repaired. She developed a serious infection of the blood and bone afterward and nearly died. She was lying on the living room couch when she suddenly felt as if she had left her body. The pain and fevered chills she had been experiencing were gone.

"Suddenly I was above my body, looking down from a corner of the room. I felt a wonderful warmth with no chills. A man was standing behind me. The warmth seemed to come from that person and spread around me. I did not turn around. I stared in relief at my form on the bed. I was at peace. I knew I was dead.

"Then I thought. 'I should have done this sooner!' Over the years, I have had a hard time explaining how this man talked to me. Yet he did, and the communication was so warm and loving and so peaceful, that I knew the radiant white light was his love. He knew what I had been through, and his compassion put me at rest.

"'You are dead, you know,' he said.

"'Yes, I know. It's great!'

"'Do you truly want to be dead?'

"'Oh yes. Why not, this is all so wonderful.' I thought of the Light and the love.

"Looking down at myself on the bed below, I saw my friend put her hand to my body's forehead and then neck to find a pulse. She was screaming. Other people were shouting, 'She's dead, she's dead.'

"I saw my mother's face and my brother's face. He was overseas and they were calling him. I saw a whole network of phone lines, with people's faces on the phones. I felt sad that they were upset, but felt that they would get over it. Even my mother and father would want me to have release from the pain I was having.

"'But look what you are missing,' the voice said.

"I saw a tall blond man walking with two children. The little girl jumped up and down and her curls shook. The other was a boy. I recognized this as being my future family. I felt a longing for my husband and children even before I had met them!

"The bliss I felt as a dead person suddenly felt temporary. I began to waiver about the joys of being dead before I had even experienced the fullness of life. 'Yes I want to go back,' I said. And I went back."

The light changed Michele's life, or as she puts, it "enlightened" her. As with so many others who have had this spiritual experience, the world made more sense after seeing the Light. Things fit together coherently. Most of all, life seemed to have real purpose. "I realized that death was not to be feared," said Michele. "The only real fear is in not

accomplishing our work in this life.” By the way, Michele is married to a former basketball player who is blond. They have two children, a boy and a girl.<sup>9</sup>

### ***The Light Beyond***

The following five examples come from *The Light Beyond*, by Raymond Moody, M.D.

I was terribly ill and near death with heart problems at the same time that my sister was near death in another part of the same hospital with a diabetic coma. I left my body and went into the corner of my room, where I watched them work on me down below.

Suddenly, I found myself in conversation with my sister, who was up there with me. I was very attached to her, and we were having a great conversation about what was going on down there when she began to move away from me.

When I awoke, I told the doctor that my sister had died. He denied it, but at my insistence he had a nurse check on it. She had in fact died, just as I knew she had.<sup>10</sup>

Although most people like to stay, the woman in the following extract argued for the chance of coming back to life:

One woman in Los Angeles has faced this question from the Being of Light twice in her life. Once in the late fifties when she was in a coma following an automobile accident, the Being told her it was time to die and go to heaven.

She argued with him, complaining that she was too young to die. But the Being wouldn't budge until she said, "But I'm young, I haven't danced enough yet."

At that point the Being gave out a hearty laugh and allowed her to live.

About thirty years later, she had a cardiac arrest while undergoing minor surgery. Again she passed through the tunnel and found herself with the Being, and again he told her it was her time to die.

This time she argued that she had children to raise and couldn't leave them at this point in their lives.

"Okay," said the Being. "But this is the last time. The next time you have to stay."<sup>11</sup>

We can learn many lessons from those who have seen glimpses of the glory. One lesson is this: we will get a taste of any pain we inflict on others:

Everything you have done is there (in the review) for you to evaluate, and as unpleasant as some parts of it are for you to see, it feels so good to get it all out. In life, you can play around and make excuses for yourself and even cover up, and you can stay miserable, if you want to, by doing all this covering up. But when I was there in that review there was no covering up. I was the very people that I hurt, and I was the very people I helped to feel good.<sup>12</sup>

The following example shows how seeing a glimpse of the afterlife can make an individual more tolerant:

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 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.<sup>13</sup>



The next example shows how a seminary student learned to devote more time to live and love, and give less time to theological theories:

My doctor told me I “died” during the surgery. But I told him that I came to life. I saw in that vision what a stuck-up ass I was with all that theory, looking down on everyone who wasn’t a member of my denomination or didn’t subscribe to the theological beliefs that I did.

A lot of people I know are going to be surprised when they find out that the Lord isn’t interested in theology. He seems to find some of it amusing, as a matter of fact, because he wasn’t interested at all in anything about my denomination. He wanted to know what was in my heart not my head.<sup>14</sup>

### ***What About Suicide?***

Examples offered so far point to positive experiences. Are there also examples that point to negative experiences? Negative encounters are extremely rare. Many of them relate to suicide. The following examples should serve as a warning to all those who entertain thoughts of suicide. They should teach them a lesson of patience and endurance for adversity.

Beverly is a happily married, forty-seven-year-old woman who is quick to say that she is glad to be alive. She seems so happy that it is hard to believe that as a child she almost succeeded in killing herself.

She was raised in Philadelphia by parents who were so abusive that she is still unable to discuss the specifics of her childhood. How she attempted to commit suicide makes me believe that life for her was indeed horrific.

At the age of seven, she towed her sled to the top of a very steep hill and aimed it at a cement bench by the street. Her plan was to slide headfirst into the bench. Without hesitating, she lay down and took what was to be her last ride.

She successfully hit the bench and immediately found herself floating above her body. She saw children surrounding her, but no one went for help. Instead, they examined the wounds and went back to their play. This heartless reaction didn’t surprise her because she lived in a tough, inner-city neighborhood.

She floated higher and higher to the rooftops of the buildings, where she had never been before. She also saw that the apartments had fake Tudor fronts. Things then changed:

“I went up and up and faded into a deep silver-blue surrounding. Then came something that looked like a big umbrella without a stick. This umbrella seemed to fold around me, and everything became very dark. Then, suddenly, I was in a very intense, bright light. I felt...loved in a way that I had never felt before.

“Then I heard a voice from the Light: ‘You have made a mistake. Your life is not yours to take. You must go back.’ I argued with the voice. ‘No one cares about me.’ The answer I got back was shocking. ‘You’re right. No one on this planet cares about you, including your parents. It is your job to care for yourself.’” Beverly was suddenly returned to her body, which at this point wasn’t a pleasant place to be. She was in intense pain. Her mouth had been imbedded in a wooden railing around the bench. Her neck was broken. She tried to move her head and lost many of her teeth and a piece of her tongue.

Beverly remembers thinking that as soon as she could she would go back to the top of the snowy hill and try to kill herself again. As soon as that thought came to mind, Beverly was engulfed by the umbrella and taken out of her body again.

Warm in this “bubble of love and life,” she was treated to an awesome vision. The warm bubble melted the snow and ice from a nearby tree on which she often played. The bubble showed her that, although the tree was encased in snow and ice now, it would have green leaves on it in the summertime. She saw herself sitting beneath the tree, eating a sweet apple from its branches, and feeling pleasure and joy. Suddenly, she understood what was being shown to her.

“I saw that the winter tree with the snow on it and the summer tree with the apples were two parts of a whole. I saw that my life now was like the winter tree. And when I realized that summer was ahead, I was willing to go back into my body.”

Life was not easy for this woman, who had a long recovery process. She spent many months in a coma and still has some paralysis in her fingers. As she says, “It wasn’t as tough to get out of my body as it has been to get back in.”

The experience immediately transformed her. After her coma, she spoke up more for her rights, becoming a self-advocate instead of a dispirited victim of child abuse.

She has spent her life establishing a family of love, the type that she never had herself. She is happily married with three children. She wears an umbrella on a charm necklace to always remember what the experience taught her: “When you hurt yourself, everything is hurt.”<sup>15</sup>



Here is another case related to suicide: “Annie was a very depressed teenager. By the age of sixteen she had experimented with drugs, alcohol, boys, and all the other teenage vices. When her boyfriend announced at a party that he was leaving her for another girl, Annie decided to kill herself. Her mother had committed suicide a few years before. As Annie told it, ‘I just decided to emulate my mother.’ She picks up the story from there”:

I decided to kill myself just the way my mother had. I took a handful of barbiturates and swallowed them with vodka, lots of it. I gulped down as much vodka as I could and went back out to the living room where the party was going on.

I just sat on the couch and didn't say anything, I could feel the mixture coming over me and I began to doze off. The funny thing was that nobody noticed since most of my friends were a little bit high themselves.

If I had lain back, I would have fallen asleep and died and nobody would have noticed. But instead I was sitting forward when I passed out and just fell facedown onto the floor.

A bunch of people panicked. A couple of the boys carried me to the bathroom and one of my girlfriends put her finger in my throat and made me throw up in the bathtub. No one wanted to call the police so they decided to keep me awake and give me a shower. They turned on the shower and kept talking to me.

It took me awhile to realize that I was out of my body and floating up by the ceiling. I wasn't alone. There was someone else there, a Guardian Angel or something. We were both made of light. I felt three-dimensional and I seemed to be made of something that wasn't solid, maybe gelatin.

I remember feeling love and peace and also feeling as though I had escaped from all the tension and frustration in my life. I felt kind of enveloped by light. It was a wonderful feeling.

I was very close to my Guardian Angel at this point. I could no longer see my body or anything earthly. I just was there with the angel. The angel didn't speak, but it communicated. I was shown the beauty of my body and every body. I was told that my body was a gift and I was supposed to take care of it, not kill it. After hearing this, I felt very, very ashamed of what I had done and hoped that I would live. I began to beg the light for life. The feeling that came back was the strongest feeling of love I have ever experienced, even more than the feeling of love I have for my own children.

My friends had taken me to a hospital, because the next thing I remember was waking up in an emergency room.<sup>16</sup>

The experience transformed Annie's life dramatically. She stopped "drinking and drugging and as a result developed a new set of friends."

Books that describe negative encounters are very few. *Beyond the Darkness* by Angie Fenimore, who committed suicide, is one of the best, for it provides much details. Here is a brief summary of what she went through:

I could feel myself hovering near the ceiling. Then I left the room, traveling at lightning speed. When I stopped, I was with my mother who cradled me like an infant. I watched my life flash before my eyes. Then everything went black and I sensed myself rushing through space again. This time, it was a bone-chilling place with no sense of hope.

When I came to a stop, I was in a cold, barren room with teenagers, who had ghoulish faces and the haunted, vacant eyes of the dead. Although no one spoke, a voice entered my head and told me in somber tones that these teens had committed suicide."

Suddenly, I felt being flung further into darkness. Fear consumed me and I was sucked into another vast room, this one shrouded in a black mist. I was surrounded by countless other humans as far as my eyes could see. They were the most miserable people I have ever seen. All wandered about, lost and tormented—and all sense of time had vanished. These miserable people could have been in this horrible place for a minute or a thousand years. Something told me I was at a way-station for people who had killed themselves. I had died and was on the edge of hell! “Is this really what you want?” another voice boomed out at me. Twisting to see where it had come from, I noticed a tiny pinpoint of light grew stronger and larger, filling me with a sense of hope. Then all at once, a figure in billowing white robes of splendid beauty became visible in the brilliance. Peace overcame me as He approached. I sensed immediately that He knew all about me and what I had done. But He told me without words that my hard life was nothing compared to what lay ahead.

I understood for the first time how wrong my suicide had been. My tears wouldn't stop flowing. I prayed to God for forgiveness. In an instant, I felt myself moving once more. I thought my final journey into hell had begun, yet instead of plummeting further into the black nightmare, I was swept up in the brilliant light. When I opened my eyes, I was stunned to find myself back on my couch and in my own body. I was woozy, but alive. God had brought me back. I survived the drug overdose, and never again considered suicide. No matter how hard life becomes, it is a blessing compared to the terrors of hell. God gave me a second chance—and I intend to make the most of every moment!<sup>17</sup>

People often misbehave because they think they can get away with it. If everyone was absolutely convinced that at death one must face the consequences of one's deed, that every deed is recorded and preserved, and that every noble deed will shine as a permanent gem on one's crown of immortal glory—our planet would turn into a place of peace and a jewel of joy.

Consider this example reported by Dr. Morse:

I once interviewed a man who had such an experience. He had been a teenage gangster, a violent man interested only in his own personal gain. He nearly died when he was slashed with a broken bottle while attempting to rob a convenience store. While in the ambulance on the way to the hospital, he perceived himself being pulled out of his body while it burst into flames. Instead of perceiving loving guardian angels, he said that the faces of his friends who had died on the street appeared to him, crying in pain that they said would never end. As a result of his experience, he left his life of crime and ultimately became ordained as a minister.<sup>18</sup>

Knowledge of the afterlife teaches us accountability. If we are sure that our deeds will never be erased, that they lead to everlasting shame or honor, would not our awareness of such a consequence inspire us to rise to higher spheres of nobility? Those who gain a glimpse of the afterlife discover to their utter amazement that the record of their deeds is complete, without any omission or errors:

Most of us would find the notion of feeling the impact of every one of our past actions perfectly dreadful. It isn't just the really terrible things that we barely admit to. Life reviews seem to include all the little cheaty things too, the million ways we were mean

to brothers and sisters, or the way we ignored the lonely kid when we had friends. Some experiencers [of those who gain a glimpse of the next life] find they are even accountable for unkind or impure thoughts.<sup>19</sup>

Think not the deeds ye have committed have been blotted from My sight. By My beauty! All your doings hath My Pen graven with open characters upon tablets of chrysolite.<sup>20</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

Set before thine eyes God's unerring Balance and, as one standing in His Presence, weigh in that Balance thine actions every day, every moment of thy life. Bring thyself to account ere thou art summoned to a reckoning...<sup>21</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

Ye will most certainly be called upon to answer for His trust on the day when the Balance of Justice shall be set, the day when unto every one shall be rendered his due, when the doings of all men, be they rich or poor, shall be weighed.<sup>22</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

For surely if deeds were not rewarded and yielded no fruit, then the Cause of God—exalted is He—would prove futile.<sup>23</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

## 5

### **Other Examples of Life After Life**

#### **The Blind Suddenly Begin to See**

The following case indicates that at the moment of transition to the spiritual life, physical handicaps disappear.

Vicki, a forty-five year old blind woman, was one of more than thirty persons that Dr. Ken Ring and Sharon Cooper interviewed during a two-year study concerning near-death experiences of the blind. The results of their study appear in their book *Mindsight*. Vicki was born blind, her optic nerve having been completely destroyed at birth because of an excess of oxygen she received in the incubator...

Vicki found herself floating above her body in the emergency room of a hospital following an automobile accident. She was aware of being up near the ceiling watching a male doctor and a female nurse working on her body:

I perceived that I was up on the ceiling, and thought, “Well, that’s kind of weird. What am I doing up here? I thought, “Well, this must be me. Am I dead?...” This was the only time I could ever relate to seeing and to what light was, because I experienced it.

Everybody there was made of light. And I was made of light. What the light conveyed was love. There was love everywhere. It was like love came from the grass, from the birds, and from the trees.

Vicki then becomes aware of specific persons, she knew in life, who are welcoming her. There are five of them. Debby and Diane were Vicki’s blind schoolmates, who had died years before, at ages 11 and 6. In life, they had both been profoundly retarded as well as blind, but here they appeared bright and beautiful, healthy and vitally alive. They were no longer children, but, as Vicki phrased it, “in their prime.”

In addition, Vicki reports seeing two of her childhood caretakers, both of whom had also previously died. Finally, there was Vicki’s grandmother—who had essentially raised Vicki and had died two years before this incident. In these encounters, no actual words were exchanged, Vicki says, but only feelings—feelings of love and welcome.

In the midst of this rapture, Vicki suddenly gains a sense of total knowledge:

I had a feeling like I knew everything...and everything made sense. I just knew that this was where...I would find the answers to all the questions about life, the planets, God, and about everything.

I had a hard time relating to seeing...because I've never experienced it. And it was something very foreign to me...It was like hearing words and not being able to understand them, but knowing that they were words...<sup>1</sup>



Death is no more than passing from one room into another. But there's a difference for me, you know. Because in that other room I shall be able to see. Helen Keller

### *Other Examples*

The following example from *Transformed by the Light* shows a connection between this world and the next. It demonstrates the efforts of heavenly beings to help the earthly:

I was in a garden [in heaven]. All the colors were intense. The grass was a deep vibrant green, flowers were radiant reds, yellows, and blues, and birds of all beauty fluttered in the bushes. Everything was lit by a shadowless brilliance that was all-pervading.

This light did not cast a shadow, which I realized when I cupped my hands tightly together and the palm side was just as light as the back side. There were no sounds of motors or discord or commotions. No sound but the songs of birds and the sounds (yes, 'sounds') of flowers blooming.

Behind me through a glasslike wall were throngs of people going through their daily business amid commotion, noise, shouting, dirt, grime—people with problems—people as we see them every day.

In the garden room above me I became aware of voices—singing voices—yet in the garden there was only one person visible.

I went over to him to see what he was doing. He told me that he had a large stack of messages and that he was attempting to send them to the people that I could see through the glass wall.

'They have problems,' he said. 'And I have messages that I would like to give them that will help them. But they won't stop worrying about their problems long enough to look this way and let my message come through to them.'<sup>2</sup>



The following example comes from *I Saw Heaven* by Arthur Yensen:

Gradually the earth scene faded away, and through it loomed a bright, new beautiful world—beautiful beyond imagination! For half a minute I could see both worlds at once. Finally, when the earth was all gone, I stood in a glory that could only be seen.

In the background were two beautiful, round-topped mountains, similar to Fujiyama in Japan. The tops were snowcapped, and the slopes were adorned with foliage of indescribable beauty. The mountain appeared to be about fifteen miles away, yet I

could see individual flowers growing on their slopes. I estimated my vision to be about one hundred times better than on earth.

To the left was a shimmering lake containing a different kind of water—clear, golden, radiant, and alluring. It seemed to be alive. The whole landscape was carpeted with grass so vivid, clear, and green, that it defies description. To the right was a grove of large, luxuriant trees, composed of the same clear material that seemed to make up everything.

I saw twenty people beyond the first trees, playing a singing-dancing game. They were having a hilarious time holding hands and dancing in a circle—fast and lively. As soon as they saw me, four of the players left the game and joyfully skipped over to greet me. As they approached, I estimated their ages to be: thirty, twenty, and twelve. Their bodies seemed almost weightless, and the grace and beauty of their easy movement was fascinating to watch. Both sexes had long, luxuriant hair entwined with flowers, which hung down in glossy masses to their waists. Their only clothing was a gossamer loin cloth with a loop over one shoulder and a broad ribbon streaming out behind in graceful curves and curlicues. Their magnificence not only thrilled me, but filled me with awe.

The oldest, largest, and strongest-looking man announced pleasantly, “You are in the land of the dead. We lived on earth, like you, till we came here.” He invited me to look at my arm. I looked, and it was translucent; that is, I could dimly see through it. Next they had me look at the grass and trees. They were also translucent...

Then I noticed that the landscape was gradually becoming familiar. It seemed as if I had been here before. I remembered what was on the other side of the mountains. Then with a sudden burst of joy, I realized that this was my real home! Back on earth I had been a visitor, a misfit, and a homesick stranger. With a sigh of relief, I said to myself, Thank God I’m back again. This time I’ll stay!

The oldest man, who looked like a Greek god, continued to explain. “Everything over here is pure. The elements don’t mix or break down as they do on earth. Everything is kept in place by an all-pervading Master-Vibration, which prevents aging. That’s why things don’t get dirty, or wear out, and why everything looks so bright and new.” Then I understood how heaven could be eternal...

[I was told:] you have more important work to do on earth, and you must go back and do it! There will come a time of great confusion and the people will need your stabilizing influence. When your work on earth is done, then you can come back here and stay.<sup>3</sup>

E.G.M. Richie describes the overwhelming love that surrounded her:

It was as if all reality were composed of radioactive love and I was being bombarded by waves of love radiation. Every leaf, every tree, every stone in every building was a sun unto itself, emanating love. This was no mere mental perception. It was a physical feeling that penetrated my very core.<sup>4</sup>



Here is an unusual case as reported by Dr. Melvin Morse:

I received a phone call one day from a very upset mother who wanted to know if it was possible to witness a near-death experience. Her seventeen-year-old son, Shane, had recently died in a traffic accident. He was riding his bicycle and was struck by a truck. Thrown through the air, he suffered massive head injuries.

His parents were called to the hospital where he had been taken. They found their son brain dead and being kept alive by life-support machines. He died several hours later. They went home to break the news to their fifteen-year old daughter who was deaf. She was not even aware that her brother was dead.

When they went into the house, they were surprised to find her in a trance but conscious. She was talking to someone. She said it was her brother. The girl said she had been taking a nap after school when she could suddenly see and hear her brother. She said she was awake and able to look around her room, but at the same time she was in another world. She was still in that other world when her distraught parents came in the door.

She described the accident. She could see her brother flying through the air and knew without being told that he was really dead at the scene. Her brother seemed to be calling her, although he was not speaking in words. "I've got to show you something really cool," he communicated.

The two of them rose in the air, high above the scene of the accident. Her brother had apparently been there before because he said to her, "wait until you see what's next!"

Cheryl, the deaf sister, says that they then went to heaven. While in heaven she met relatives who had died but she could still see her mother standing there in the living room and was able to also see her late brother. She was able to speak, so her family was able to hear what she thought Shane was saying to her. At one point he started teasing his sister, saying, "I know something you don't know," over and over again. Finally he told her that their aunt was pregnant with a boy, a fact unknown to the family at the time.

This event was witnessed by three family members, all of whom are normal healthy adults who have no reason to invent such a story and many reasons not to publicize it. The mother discusses it freely, believing it's proof that her son survived bodily death. Her husband, one of the eyewitnesses, refuses to discuss the incident.<sup>5</sup>



Dr. Morse also reports this incidence:

The television program "Unsolved Mysteries" broadcast the story of a young respiratory therapist in Dallas who was found murdered in her apartment. There were no suspects and no clues until another respiratory therapist at the same hospital began having a dream. In that dream the murdered therapist came to her and said: "I have been murdered by Edward Copina," an orderly who worked at the same hospital.

She awoke in a fright and told her husband, who was a physician at the same hospital. They dismissed the event as a nightmare.

And yet the dream happened again. And then a third time in which the frightened physician watched as his wife seemed to be possessed by the dead woman's spirit.

“Why haven’t you gone to the police?” the physician was asked by his seemingly possessed wife. “Because we have no evidence. They [the police] will ignore us!”

“The evidence is in the jewelry,” said the wife. “He took some of my jewelry.”

The couple went to the police and told them what had happened. Rather than reject their testimony, the police questioned the orderly and he admitted to the murder. Later it was discovered that his girlfriend was wearing the dead woman’s jewelry.<sup>6</sup>

It seems some of those who pass away receive special powers to appear in our dreams. They belong mostly to the ranks of highly spiritual people who have lived a noble life, with hearts as pure and innocent as those of children. I have been pleasantly surprised by seeing two wonderful souls in my dreams after they had passed away. Aside from being highly spiritual, they had this in common: they had both offended me “unintentionally” in a significant way. And they both appeared in my dream to apologize for the wrong they had done. One of them visited me several years after he had passed away. He wept as he embraced me. In response to his tears, I too began to cry. The other person visited me immediately after his death. In life he was proud and powerful. In my dream, he appeared contrite and remorseful. He asked me for some food. At the time of my dream I did not know that he had passed away. I recorded my dream and a few weeks later learned that the day I had my dream was the same day he had passed away.

What I learned from these dreams is this: even if we offend others *unintentionally*, we should express our sincere apology, and seek their forgiveness immediately, and not wait until we have passed away.

The experience of getting a glimpse of the afterlife is as old as humanity. The following passage is attributed to Salvius, a saint from the sixth century:

Four days ago, I died and was taken by two angels to the height of heaven. And it was just as though I rose above not only this squalid earth, but even the sun and moon, the clouds and stars. Then I went through a gate that was brighter than normal daylight, into a place where the entire floor shone like gold and silver. The light was indescribable, and I can’t tell you how vast it was.<sup>7</sup>

Dr. Morse concludes:

I have never interviewed anyone who had a near-death experience who told me that they came back to make more money or to spend more time at their jobs away from their families. Rarely do they tell me that they learned they were not selfish enough or greedy enough. Instead they become convinced that they need to be more loving and kind. They react to their experience by living life to its fullest. They believe their lives have a purpose, even if that purpose is obscure to them. Invariably it involves concepts such as love of family or service to others. They seem to know that the love they create while living will be reflected and radiated back to them when they die...

My own life has been transformed by my research. I try to spend a lot more time with my family. I have taken to heart what one little girl told me she learned from her near-death experience: “It’s nice to be nice, Dr. Morse.” The knowledge that when we die we perceive another reality that quite literally sheds light on this one somehow motivates me to be a better person.”<sup>8</sup>



This case indicates that human life begins at the moment of conception:

A group of parishioners at a small country church were listening to a talk on Heaven when a short, heavysset policewoman named Dorothy Young raised her hand. She told the congregation that she knew there was a Heaven because she had been there. She had been in the hospital in the process of miscarrying her fourth child when she felt a cold, dark, chill pass over her. Suddenly she was surrounded by a warm, bright light that totally enveloped her. She felt happier than she ever had before. It was utterly quiet, she said, “a quiet without shadows or walls.” She heard the sound of a baby crying deep in the Light. She was given to understand that her stillborn daughter was going to stay in the Light and that she was fine.

When Dorothy “came back” from the gray mist where she had heard her baby, a sheet was over her head. She had been pronounced dead. When she pulled the sheet off her head, the nurse in the room shrieked and had to be sent home. Dorothy herself has never grieved for the baby who was born dead. She had a bone-deep conviction that because she was a mother to three other children, God pulled her back to finish her work on earth, she believes she will see her stillborn daughter in Heaven.<sup>9</sup>



Dr. Mario Beauregard, a neuroscientist from the University of Montreal, has conducted much research into the neuroscience of consciousness. He was selected by the Word Media Net to be among the “one Hundred Pioneers of the twenty-first century.” In his book *The Spiritual Brain*, he presents much evidence to prove the existence of “the nonmaterial- and ultimately spiritual-nature of man.” He considers Near Death Vision a convincing evidence of the existence of a power beyond the brain. In a chapter called “Toward a Nonmaterial Science of Mind,” he presents this case:

When all of Pam’s vital signs were stopped, the surgeon began to cut through her skull with a surgical saw. At that point, she reported that she felt herself “pop” outside her body and hover above the operating table. From her out-of-body position, she could see the doctors working on her lifeless body. She observed, “I thought the way they had my head shaved was very peculiar. I expected them to take all of the hair, but they did not.” She described, with considerable accuracy for a person who knew nothing of surgical practice, the Midas Rex bone saw used to open the skull. Pam also heard and reported later what was happening during the operation and what the nurses in the operating room had said. At a certain point, she became conscious of floating out of the operation room and traveling down a tunnel with a light. Deceased relatives and friends were waiting at the end of this tunnel, including her long-dead grandmother. She entered the presence of a brilliant, wonderfully warm and loving light and sensed that her soul was part of God and that everything in existence was created from the Light (the breathing of God). This extraordinary experience ended when Pam’s deceased uncle led her back to her body.<sup>10</sup>

Dr. Beauregard then concludes:

Why is this story significant, other than as a tale of medical heroics? Pam’s case strongly suggest that: (1) mind, consciousness, and self can continue when the brain is

no longer functional and clinical criteria of death have been reached; and (2) RSMEs\* can occur when the brain is not functioning. In other words, this case seriously challenges the materialist view that mind, consciousness, and self are simply by-products of electrochemical brain processes, and RSMEs are delusions created by a defective brain.<sup>11</sup>



The authority who has probably investigated the question of death more than anyone else in the world is Dr. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross. She has stated “in countless interviews that the visionary testimony of her patients proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that death is but a doorway to a better world.”<sup>12</sup> The evidence for near-death vision does not come, as Dr. Moody observes, “from darkened rooms in circumstances contrived by witch doctors, but in the bright light of emergency and operating rooms, presided over by physicians.”<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps a most convincing evidence for the afterlife comes from the following observation by Dr. Ross:

There are a great number of car accidents in our country in which several people are injured or killed, especially on holiday weekends like Labor Day, Memorial Day, or the Fourth of July. If several people are injured and/or killed in an accident, the injured children are usually taken to the nearest hospital and, depending on the circumstance and the severity of their injury, later transferred to more specialized centers. Rarely is a child ever informed as to how many members of the family were killed at the site of the accident...

Shortly before children die there is often a very “clear moment,” as I call it. Those who have remained in a coma since the accident or after the surgery open their eyes and seem very coherent. Those who have had great pain and discomfort are very quiet and at peace. It is in those moments that I asked them if they were willing to share what they were experiencing.

“Yes, everything is all right now. Mommy and Peter are already waiting for me,” one boy replied. With a content little smile, he slipped back into a coma from which he made the transition we call death.

I was quite aware that his mother had died at the scene of the accident, but Peter had not died. He had been brought to a special burn unit in another hospital, because the car had caught fire before he was extricated from the wreck. Since I was only collecting data, I accepted the boy’s information and determined to look in on Peter. It was not necessary, however, because as I passed the nursing station there was a call from the other hospital to inform me that Peter had died a few minutes earlier.

In all the years that I have quietly collected data from California to Sydney, Australia; from white and black children, aboriginals, Eskimos, South Americans, to Libyan youngsters, *every single child who mentioned that someone was waiting for him mentioned a person who actually preceded him in death, if only by a few moments. And yet none of these children had been informed of the recent death of the relatives by us at any time.* [Emphasis added].<sup>14</sup>

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\* RSME: religious, spiritual, and/or mystical experiences.

Any critical thinker, any scientist who can produce an explanation for the preceding observation, other than the survival of the soul, deserves a Nobel Prize.

Some people, who are confronted with convincing evidence against a belief that they do not wish to accept, resort to unreasonable explanations. For instance, they claim that near-death visions are merely hallucinations resulting from oxygen starvation. Their view is totally unfounded for the following reasons:

- Cross cultural studies indicate that the basic elements of near-death visions are identical. Hallucinations vary. They are as different as the individuals who experience them.
- Those who have visions describe their environment with remarkable accuracy. Hallucinations are completely out of touch with reality.
- Those who experience such visions describe events beyond their immediate environment—sometimes in far-away places. Even those who are fully conscious cannot do this.
- Some of those who experience such visions can “read” the minds of the people around them. They can actually experience their thoughts. This too is beyond the ability of conscious people, much less those who hallucinate.
- Some blind people experiencing such visions are able to see and describe their environment accurately. How can oxygen starvation explain this?

Some people are so skeptical concerning the spiritual dimension of life that they will not be convinced unless and until they experience it!

***But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.*** *Christ (Luke 8:15 NIV)*

***I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?*** *Christ (John 3:12 NIV)*

Mally Cox-Chapman, who has made extensive studies of near-death vision, in her book *The Case for Heaven*, describes how the experience of the afterlife transforms both the atheists and the believers:

If they were atheists before, they are believers afterward. If they had a firm commitment to one particular religion before, they believe any religious path leads to God afterward. And in study after study, conversation after conversation, they say that they absolutely believe that their souls will persist beyond physical death.<sup>15</sup>

For some people, evidence does not matter. They abide by this rule:

Convince me against my will, I will believe the same still!



## *O Children of Peace!*

Some of you have said that life is only a dream and death the end of the dream. You wake up, and it is no more.

But I say unto you that death is waking up to the Dawn, to a vast world of charm and wonder. It is a journey from the gloomy nest of the earth to an everlasting and ever-blooming garden of joy and peace.

It is passing beyond the clouds and basking in luminous lights of the heavens in all their beauty and splendor.

It is setting the soul free from the bonds of the earth.

It is returning to the mansions of God.<sup>16</sup>

A 4-year-old boy asked his 5-year-old sister, “Where do babies come from?” “Don’t you know that they come from heaven?” his sister declared confidently. The boy was not convinced. “If babies come from heaven,” he asked, “then why do parents go to the hospital to get them?” “Because that is where they put a skin on them,” came the answer. The little girl was right, but she revealed only part of the truth. Not only do we come from heaven, we also *return* to heaven. All we get on earth is a temporary skin for living in a temporary home.

Death is not a period but a comma in the story of life.

John Milton

I’m not afraid to die. I just don’t want to be there when it happens.

Woody Allen

## *Sacred Scriptures*

Does near-death vision find any biblical support? The following passage from St. Paul does indeed lend credibility to such visions:

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows—was caught up to Paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell.

II Corinthians 12:2-4

The Hebrew Scriptures also support the return of the spirit to God:

Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.

Ecclesiastes 12:7

While on the cross, Jesus turned to the good thief and said, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). He did not say, “after tomorrow” or “at the end of the age”; He said, “today.” Christ’s pronouncement points to the immediate release of the soul at death. It also shows that the soul preserves its identity and consciousness. What would be the purpose of being in paradise if you are unconscious? Christ compared death to going into another country (Matt. 25:14). One does not go to another country to sleep.

The promise of the return of the soul to God is made also in the Scriptures of other faiths:

Then [at death] he will be united with Me. Be certain of that.	Bhagavad-Gita 8:4
Soon ye return to Us: and We will let you know what ye have done!	Qur'án 10:24
For unto God shall be the final gathering.	Qur'án 35:19
All men have proceeded from God and unto Him shall all return. <sup>17</sup>	The Báb
Verily, we are God's...And unto Him we do return. <sup>18</sup>	Bahá'u'lláh

## 6

### What Is Spirit?

I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? Christ (John 3:12 NIV)

But it is the spirit in man, the breath of the Almighty that gives him understanding. Job 32:8

For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except a man's spirit within him. I Cor. 2:11

How quickly passes away the glory of this life. The world is the vase, the body the flower, and the spirit the fragrance. The flower fades and falls to the winds, but the fragrance lives on.

Words can never adequately describe the invisible. For instance, we know that matter is *energy*. But what is energy? Can we picture it in our minds? Can we truly see electrical or magnetic power in our imagination? We can define spirit in the same way that we define matter; we can define it as *spiritual* energy.

'Abdu'l-Bahá states that matter is composed of atoms. Everything that is composed eventually *decomposes*. But spirit, unlike matter, is simple. It is not composed of elements. Therefore it never *decomposes*; it is eternal. Spirit is the only simple substance in all the universe. God Himself is Spirit. He patterned our spirit after His own.

The following is perhaps the most comprehensive definition of the spirit:

It is a divine energy, a substance, simple, and self-subsistent...it is the Most Sublime Essence of God.<sup>1</sup>

Is there a center in the brain that connects the physical with the spiritual? Dr. Melvin Morse offers a summary of research on this topic and then adds his own conclusion:

We have a large area of our brain devoted to spiritual visions and psychical abilities. This area of our brain, the right temporal lobe and surrounding structures, is as large as our language center. The rich research on the brain indicates that this area can be activated in a number of different ways, from dying or experiencing the death of others to meditation. Sometimes it becomes activated for no apparent reason at all. It is this area of the brain that allows us to have visions, out-of-body experiences, and even the sorts of premonitions of death that more than 25 percent of the parents in the SIDS [sudden infant death syndrome] study had about their children.

Research into this whole field has proven that we have a portion of the brain that connects us with the divine. But are these experiences and the research surrounding them any proof of life after death? As far as I am concerned, the answer is yes. When I review the medical literature, I think it points directly to evidence that some aspect of human consciousness survives death. Other researchers agree with me. Physician Michael Schroter-Kunhardt, for instance, conducted a comprehensive review of the scientific literature and concluded that “the paranormal capacities of the dying person suggest the existence of a time-and-space-transcending immortal soul.” Other researchers have reached the same conclusions. Be it through case studies of their own or research they have reviewed, there is in the scientific community a growing belief in the human spirit.<sup>2</sup>

In science it is acceptable to reach a conclusion simply by recognizing *the effect* of an entity or a stimulus, without seeing the entity or the stimulus itself. For instance, scientists first accepted the existence of the atom long before they had any direct means of detecting it. The idea or theory of the atom made sense. It explained the unexplainable; it filled and fitted a missing piece of the puzzle. Another example: before the invention of the compass, scientists knew about the existence of magnetic force. Such a force explained the unexplainable. The compass simply made the evidence visible.

Let us now apply the same standard to the spirit. The spirit is invisible, yet without it much remains unexplainable. The whole “psychic” dimension of human experience—such as true dreams of the past, present, and future, of things that stand completely beyond the range of the dreamer’s experience or knowledge—remains unexplained.

About five years before my mother passed away, I received in a dream a letter with this message, “Your mother will live for 86 years.” I never told my mother about this dream. I did not know if it would come true. Sure enough, it did. She died at the age of 86. *Who* knew about my mother’s life span, and why was I told? Obviously, the future is always in the future. Then how can a person know something that *has not even happened?*

Let me cite one more personal example. Some years ago I had a benign tumor, which a surgeon removed. Shortly after, it returned and grew even larger. This time, I accepted this “uninvited guest” and decided to leave it alone—that is, until the next episode.

Several years later, while on a trip about 2,000 miles away from home, I had a dream. A man and a woman suddenly appeared before me, and checked the tumor just like a doctor. Suddenly one of the two visitors expressed astonishment at the size of the tumor. I woke up right away, and knew what the dream meant: I must visit a surgeon, and I did. The surgeon recommended surgery, and although I was far away from home and my doctor, I decided to follow her advice. After the surgery, I wanted to know the size of the tumor. “Was it the size of an egg?” I asked the surgeon. “No, it was a cyst the size of a tomato!” She answered. I was quite surprised, because the tumor had felt smaller than a walnut. (Most of it had grown inside the tissues.)

What made this episode even more real was this: Just as in my dream, the operating team consisted of a woman and a man—one served as a surgeon, the other as an anesthesiologist.

This dream raises many questions: How did anyone know that I had a tumor? Who were the two visitors? Did they know me? Why did they warn me? What would have happened if they had not appeared in my dream?

In the following dream Linda was forewarned about the death of her son, who was accidentally shot and killed at a party.

One of the kids at the party found a gun. No one was sure if it was real or not. They were passing it around when one of the kids took it outside and fired it into the air. "I think it's a cap gun," she said, handing it barrel-first to the boy. At that point the gun went off and the bullet hit him in the chest.

"It's real! It's real!" he shouted before falling dead.

Needless to say the death of her child was devastating to Linda. But the predeath vision her son had two months before his death and another incident have given Linda the hope that her child's death was not senseless. As she puts it: "His death has taught many people about life."

Two months before his death, Linda's son came to the breakfast table looking tired. When she asked what was wrong, he said that he'd had a very vivid dream. He said that a tall lady dressed in white "like a glowing princess" had come to him and told him that time was running short. All the doors around him in this dream closed, and the only place left to go was down a long hallway.

"And that was it," he said. "It was weird."

Throughout the month he continued to dream this same dream. He also drew pictures of things that appeared to him during these dreams. A tall monument was one object.

He did not know what the drawings meant but he continued to produce them and ask his parents for their opinion. Linda wrote about them in her journal and even collected some of the drawings.

Two days before he was shot, the boy went for a walk with his mother. He took her hand and said in the most serious of tones: "If I die, don't cry about it. I know I'm going to be happy there because they showed me. It's beautiful."

Linda was shocked. She asked him pointedly if he was thinking of committing suicide, which he denied. "I just don't think I'm going to be here much longer."

Two days later he was shot in the chest.

On the night her son was shot, Linda awoke with a backache. She sat up with a start and began to cry. She said her upper back hurt and she was afraid something awful had happened. When the phone rang a few minutes later, Linda stood up and screamed "my son is dead," before her husband picked up the receiver and heard the bad news from the police.

When they buried the boy a few days later, both Linda and her husband noticed something they had seen on his drawing pads. The tall monument from a neighboring grave was the same as in his pictures. The same could be said about the tree at the graveside.

“I have told my doctor what happened but he just discounts it as being an experience caused by a stressful situation,” she says. “But I wrote down that he thought he was going to die two months before he did. And I felt the bullet when he felt the bullet and knew it killed him before the police called. I quit talking to doctors about it because they just say I was in shock. But this isn’t shock.”<sup>3</sup>

Dr. Melvin Morse offers this personal example:

In 1988 my father appeared to me when he died. The first knowledge I had of his death was through this vision. Here is what happened:

One night in January I came home late from the hospital. It had been a very difficult day and I was only interested in sleep. I turned off my beeper and my telephone and told my wife that I didn’t want to be disturbed for any reason. Then I went to bed.

As I fell asleep in the darkened room, my father appeared to me in a dream. He just stood there facing me. He spoke very clearly. “Melvin, call your answering service. I have something to tell you.”

I awoke with a start and charged into the living room. “My dad just told me to call my answering service,” I said to my wife. I made the call and was told that my mother had been trying to reach me with an urgent message. It was to tell me that my father had died.

Since that very personal event I have had little doubt that the human brain has the ability to communicate telepathically. It is how these paranormal events take place that baffles me.<sup>4</sup>

Some discoveries have been inspired by dreams. In a dream Albert Einstein saw himself riding a beam of light. This dream guided him to a new theory that in turn helped him formulate the theory of relativity.

Visions—perceived in the state of wakefulness—also point to our spiritual essence. Consider the story of Martha, a nursing-home worker:

Martha was always very close to her mother. When Martha divorced her husband, she moved into a house next door to her mother. Between the two of them they raised Martha’s four children. The mother never complained about this sort of “second motherhood” that had taken place. Instead she enjoyed caring for the children during the day while her daughter was at work.

One day, quite unexpectedly, the mother died. She had a heart attack and was dead before the paramedics arrived.

Martha felt destroyed by the loss. She stayed home from her job until her finances forced her to return to work. Even then she kept her mother’s house just as it was when she died and would visit it daily. “Her spirit was still there,” she explained. “And it felt good to just have that presence around.”

About a year after the mother’s death, two of Martha’s children were killed in an automobile accident. They were riding in a car with one of their uncles when another car made a left turn in front of them. The children were thrown through the windshield and died en route to the hospital.

Martha was devastated, and so was the rest of the family. These children had been the “babies” of the family, and their unexpected loss was as painful as the loss of Martha’s mother.

However, it seemed as though the only one in the family who could maintain composure was Martha. She selected the caskets and arranged the funeral. She even planned the service and helped the minister write the eulogy. She did this all alone, with no family help, mainly because she was the only one in the family who could control her emotions.

The day before the funeral she went to her children’s closet and selected their best Sunday outfits. Then she went to the funeral home, where she was given a private room in which to dress them for burial. The children’s bodies were brought into the room, and then she was left alone.

Martha undressed her children and looked at their bodies one last time. She realized now that she had held her emotions in for too long. She began to sob.

Suddenly she noticed that her mother was standing in the room next to her. She was smiling as she placed a comforting hand on her daughter.

“It’s okay,” she said to Martha. “They are here with me now. I’ll take care of them.”

This vision at this time was like a spiritual rebirth for Martha. She had lost so much in the past year, but in just these few seconds it was behind her.

“When my mother appeared to me, I suddenly understood everything,” said Martha. “I knew what would happen when I died and I knew what my goal on earth should be.”

For Martha that goal is to help other people, especially those in need of spiritual renewal. As a direct result of this vision she now works in nursing homes as a nursing assistant. She takes great pride in working with people who are very senile or dying. Jobs like these are among the most challenging in society. Such work involves extremely difficult tasks, such as feeding people who are too old to swallow well, or changing diapers for those who are too feeble to leave their bed. These occupations have a very high burnout rate. Yet Martha has done this type of job for more than twenty years now and says she would be completely comfortable doing it for twenty more.

It is the vision she had of her mother that keeps her going. She feels that it is her job to relay to the sick and dying what she has seen.

“I tell these old people my own story,” she said. “It helps them feel good about their own lives and takes away their fears of dying.”<sup>5</sup>

Medical literature is full of stories of dramatic healing that cannot be explained by the physical laws of healing. Most experienced physicians encounter miraculous recoveries that contradict their academic training. The following case, reported by Dr. Melvin Morse, shows how the life of a young boy was restored:

A nurse who had worked at a midwestern hospital for twenty years told me a story that illustrates the resuscitative power of the NDEs [those who have near death experience].

She said that one of her young patients had a cardiac arrest and nearly died. The resuscitation was plagued with technical problems which ultimately rendered the machinery on the crash cart useless. Yet just as the resuscitation team was giving up, the patient came back to life.

That evening he was angry. He said he was “having fun in heaven,” and that he didn’t want to return. “But I saw this light and it told me I had to come back to life.”

The nurse thought he was delirious. She assured him that it was the doctors made him come back, not a talking light that he saw in his dreams.

“You’re wrong,” insisted the boy. “The machine they were trying to use wasn’t plugged in. It was God that made me come back.” She checked the cords on the crash cart and discovered he was right. Now she believes that he did come back on his own.<sup>6</sup>

Dr. Morse concludes,

I am convinced, after more than a decade of studying the near-death experience, that this light that comes to us when we die is real. I do not think it is simply a byproduct of human brain activity.<sup>7</sup>

Recently in our county a man killed his girl friend’s little daughter and buried her in the woods. What he told the police was: “I left the girl in the car, went into the store, and when I returned she was missing.” The police did not believe him. A lady in our county, whom I know, told the police that the girl had been murdered. She gave the police a description of the place where she was buried. The police searched the area and found the girl’s body. What physical law can explain this phenomenon?

Another example of human experience that is beyond the range of either microscope or telescope includes the incredible and miraculous life and influence of God’s great Messengers and Redeemers. Imagine a poor young carpenter from Nazareth with little education. He changes hundreds of millions of lives during the next two thousand years or more! All these observations lead us to this conclusion: it simply makes sense to acknowledge a power invisible to the eye yet visible to human understanding.

One reason why people have difficulty accepting the existence and immortality of the soul is the false assumption that if something cannot be touched, seen, heard, or smelled, then it does not exist. If we start with that assumption, then how can we remain open-minded?

There is yet another reason for the widespread prejudice, especially among the educated, against any evidence for the existence of the soul. To some extent the prejudice is a reaction against the extreme fundamentalist and fanatical thinking so prevalent among the believers of our time. As a rule, one extreme leads to another. It is a sort of defense mechanism: if you deny my conclusive evidence that the earth is older than 6,000 years, then I will deny everything you say; I will deny even your very soul. This is the spirit in which some scientists are reacting to religious extremists, to faith without thought, to belief without the enlightenment of reason.

Those who suffer most from this unfortunate relationship between scientists and religionists are the young people. They do not know who to believe.

Fortunately, within the circle of scientists we find many who remain open-minded and nondefensive. Consider Dr. Wilder Penfield, widely recognized as the father of neurosurgery. Much of what we know about brain function comes from his work. Just before his death, Dr. Penfield wrote a book called *The Mystery of the Mind*. In that book, which is based on his empirical experience with thousands of brain operations, he demonstrates a distinction between mind and brain. He compares the brain to a computer's hardware and the mind to a computer's software as well as the person who programs the software. Based on a lifetime of research, Dr. Penfield came "to take seriously, even to believe, that the consciousness of man, the mind, is NOT something to be reduced to brain mechanism."<sup>8</sup> Dr. Penfield became fully convinced that brain and mind are two *separate* entities—that the mind exists on its own. As he explains:

...after a professional lifetime spent in trying to discover how the brain accounts for the mind, it comes as a surprise now to discover, during this final examination of the evidence, that the dualist hypothesis (the mind is separate from the brain) seems the more reasonable of explanations.

Since every man must adopt for himself, without the help of science, his way of life and his personal religion, I have long had my own private beliefs. What a thrill it is, then, to discover that the scientist, too, can legitimately believe in the existence of the spirit!<sup>9</sup>

And again:

For my own part, after years of striving to explain the mind on the basis of brain-action alone, I have come to the conclusion that it is simpler (and far easier to be logical) if one adopts the hypothesis that our being does consist of two fundamental elements.<sup>10</sup>

Ewin Schrödinger, one of the greatest physicists of our time, testifies to the immortality of the mind:

I venture to call it [the mind] indestructible...Physical theory in its present stage strongly suggests the indestructibility of Mind by Time.<sup>11</sup>

Then what is the spirit? It is the power that sustains and fuels the mind. Without it, the brain would simply be a mass of cells. Without it, none of the scientific discoveries could be made. Without it, there would be no freedom of choice, no creativity. Without it, there would be no civilization, no arts, or appreciation of beauty, no sense of meaning and purpose, no wisdom, no awareness of God, no conscience, no hope, no dreams, no self-esteem, no self-awareness, no humor. Human beings would feel and act like frogs, gorillas, cows, turtles, snakes, and snails. Love itself would descend to a mere ritual directed by instincts. The image of God in man would disappear.

In the Bahá'í Writings, the body is compared to a mirror and the soul to the light. Death is only the breaking of the mirror and its separation from the light. Light, which is energy, is never destroyed. The spirit is sometimes compared to a butterfly leaving its cocoon, or to a bird flying away from its cage. Near-death visions clearly confirm these comparisons:

...after this, my mind was the main point of attraction, and the body...was only something to encase my mind. I didn't care if I had a body or not.<sup>12</sup>

Physical infirmities are simply that: physical. At death they disappear like drifting clouds swept away by a swift wind of light. The blind begin to see; the sick, the aged, and the handicapped lose all their infirmities. The insane become sane—their diseased brains and bodies no longer hamper the light of spirit. The light begins to shine through a new body suitable for spiritual realms. As Dr. Elizabeth Kübler Ross notes:

In a near-death experience, the body becomes perfect again. Quadriplegics are no longer paralyzed, multiple sclerosis patients who have been in wheel chairs for years say that when they were out of their bodies, they were able to sing and dance.<sup>13</sup>

Larry Dossey, M.D. offers this account about a patient's experience while she was unconscious and under surgery:

She had something else to show that amazed her and the rest of the surgery team as well—a clear, detailed memory of the frantic conversation of the surgeons and nurses during her cardiac arrest; the OR layout; the scribbles on the surgery schedule board in the hall outside; the color of the sheets covering the operating table; the hairstyle of the head scrub nurse; the names of the surgeons in the doctors' lounge down the corridor who were waiting for her case to be concluded; and even the trivial fact that her anesthesiologist that day was wearing unmatched socks. All this she knew even though she had been fully anesthetized and unconscious during the surgery and the cardiac arrest.

But what made Sarah's vision even more momentous was the fact that, since birth, she had been blind.<sup>14</sup>

Raymond Moody, M.D., offers this example:

On Long Island, a seventy-year-old woman who had been blind since the age of eighteen was able to describe in vivid detail what was happening around her as doctors resuscitated her after a heart attack.

Not only could she describe what the instruments used looked like, but she could even describe their colors.

The most amazing thing about this to me was that most of these instruments weren't even thought of over fifty years ago when she could last see. On top of all this, she was even able to tell the doctor that he was wearing a blue suit when he began the resuscitation.<sup>15</sup>

At death our perceptions sharpen, our minds clear, our understanding increases. There remains no power to rationalize, to lie, to cling to illusions and denials, no way to escape from reality. It is as if a veil is lifted from our eyes.

Bahá'u'lláh uses several analogies to help us recognize the relationship between the body and the soul:

Thou hast asked Me whether man... will retain, after his physical death, the self-same individuality, personality, consciousness, and understanding that characterize his life in this world. If this should be the case, how is it, thou hast observed, that whereas such slight injuries to his mental faculties as fainting and severe illness deprive him of his understanding and consciousness, his death, which must involve the decomposition of his body and the dissolution of its elements, is powerless to destroy that

understanding and extinguish that consciousness? How can any one imagine that man's consciousness and personality will be maintained, when the very instruments necessary to their existence and function will have completely disintegrated?

Know thou that the soul of man is exalted above, and is independent of all infirmities of body or mind. That a sick person showeth signs of weakness is due to the hindrances that interpose themselves between his soul and his body, for the soul itself remaineth unaffected by any bodily ailments. Consider the light of the lamp. Though an external object may interfere with its radiance, the light itself continueth to shine with undiminished power. In like manner, every malady afflicting the body of man is an impediment that preventeth the soul from manifesting its inherent might and power. When it leaveth the body, however, it will evince such ascendancy, and reveal such influence as no force on earth can equal. Every pure, every refined and sanctified soul will be endowed with tremendous power, and shall rejoice with exceeding gladness.

Consider the lamp which is hidden under a bushel. Though its light be shining, yet its radiance is concealed from men. Likewise, consider the sun which hath been obscured by the clouds. Observe how its splendor appeareth to have diminished, when in reality the source of that light hath remained unchanged. The soul of man should be likened unto this sun, and all things on earth should be regarded as his body. So long as no external impediment interveneth between them, the body will, in its entirety, continue to reflect the light of the soul, and to be sustained by its power. As soon as, however, a veil interposeth itself between them, the brightness of that light seemeth to lessen.<sup>16</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh



One of the created phenomena is the dream. Behold how many secrets are deposited therein, how many wisdoms treasured up, how many worlds concealed. Observe, how thou art asleep in a dwelling, and its doors are barred; on a sudden thou findest thyself in a far-off city, which thou enterest without moving thy feet or wearying thy body; without using thine eyes, thou seest; without taxing thine ears, thou hearest; without a tongue, thou speakest. And perchance when ten years are gone, thou wilt witness in the outer world the very things thou hast dreamed tonight.

Now there are many wisdoms to ponder in the dream, which none but the people of this Valley can comprehend in their true elements. First, what is this world, where without eye and ear and hand and tongue a man puts all of these to use? Second, how is it that in the outer world thou seest today the effect of a dream, when thou didst vision it in the world of sleep some ten years past? Consider the difference between these two worlds and the mysteries which they conceal, that thou mayest attain to divine confirmations and heavenly discoveries and enter the regions of holiness.

God, the Exalted, hath placed these signs in men, to the end that philosophers may not deny the mysteries of the life beyond nor belittle that which hath been promised them.<sup>17</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh

In the Bahá'í Writings—a religion dedicated to the unity of humankind—death is also compared to birth. For instance, the womb's sole purpose is to prepare a new being for life in this physical world. This world's sole purpose is to prepare the soul for the next world. As the Creator keeps this realm concealed from the fetus, so does He conceal the

next realm from the soul. Imagine for a moment a baby tightly restrained in the womb with nothing to do or see, no one to play with, no cartoons to watch, no kissing and hugging, no chocolate, ice cream, or cookies, and no sister or brother to push or scream at. Imagine a child in the womb fully aware of all these amusements, attractions, temptations, and blessings outside the womb. It would be utterly frustrated. The baby would not want to wait for nine seconds, let alone nine months. Can there be a greater misery than seeing all these wonderful things almost within reach, yet unreachable? The same holds true with us who are struggling on this tiny planet with all its pressures and problems.

Thank God we cannot *see* the glories beyond. Thank God also for letting us know, for giving us hope for the future. Just knowing that someday we can escape from the cage gives us the strength to enjoy our stay in the cage. Indeed, with an eternal outlook, the cage can be a very exciting place. Many of us love the cage so much that we do not want to leave it. Some people become so attached to the cage that when they are given a chance to fly away, they like to carry a round-trip, rather than a one-way, ticket.

Once I heard a speaker say, "If human beings deny the invisible, they should go to the university where Mr. and Mrs. Cow are the professors. Because some philosophers engage in many years of study and investigation until they come to this conclusion: what matters is what you see. If you don't see something it does not exist. But Mr. and Mrs. Cow come to that same conclusion without ever studying or investigating. Now who is smarter?"<sup>18</sup> Then he added, "Mr. and Mrs. Cow as well as Mr. and Mrs. Sheep are also kinder and more peaceful than human beings. Take Mrs. Sheep. She does not harm her kind, never abuses her babies, and provides milk for anyone who wants to drink; she shows no prejudice or discrimination. Even a dead sheep is preferable to a dead person, and many living persons as well. Its wool covers our bodies, its skin protects our feet, and its meat satisfies our hunger."



### ***O My Beloved!***

In death lies the essence of living and in separation hides the secret of togetherness.

The flower withers and dies, but its fragrance lives on. The snow melts, but the water joins the streams.

In your birth there is a wisdom, and in your death a wisdom greater still.

Behind the veil hides the glory, and behind the stranger the face of the friend.

Your life is but a shadow of what is to come, and echo of the music from above.<sup>19</sup>

*A Messenger of Joy*

### ***O Passing Pilgrims!***

Gather blossoms of joy while you may. Hang your troubles upon the trees, and cast your cares to the wind.

Banish the night with your love, wake the dawn with your praise.

Sing and dance and be merry, but know that there are other songs to sing.

Live, but do not cling to your lives. Own, but do not be attached to your treasures.

Cherish your pearls and rubies, let them dazzle your eyes, but know they are not yours. They belong to the earth.

Celebrate life, but be ready to depart the moment the banquet ends.

When life bids you farewell and death greets you, embrace her with open arms.<sup>20</sup>

*A Messenger of Joy*

## 7

### **Humans and Animals**

Perhaps the best way to get a glimpse of “spirit” is to compare humans with animals. Consider the enormous superiority of human beings over animals. Compare the mental abilities of some of the brightest and most creative people such as Einstein and Newton with the mental abilities of the brightest and most creative animals ever discovered. Strict evolutionists assume that the enormous differences in intelligence between humans and animals are due to their brain size! In other words, Einstein was greater than the brightest gorilla because his brain, in comparison to his body, weighed more! But as we shall see, this assumption suffers from many flaws. Consider the following statement from Dr. Thomas Rowe, professor of neuroscience—regarding the study of the brain:

Why do we have such an enormous brain? The strict evolutionist will suggest that the environment provides pressures which ensure that a big brain will be genetically dominant...What environmental pressures are we talking about? To see the fallacy of this concept, let us examine the case of “Lucy.” That’s the name given to the supposedly distant human ancestor who walked upright in the African Savannah...Carbon 14 dating indicates she may have lived 3.5 million years ago. Based on her braincase, it would seem that she had more brains than any other creature of that era. Now, if she already was able to dominate her environment, why would there have been pressure to have an even bigger brain?...

Another hole in the argument for random evolutionary pressures producing us is this: Why didn’t the same forces produce rivals for our niche? Didn’t the same pressures and the same advantages act on the Chimpanzee? Yet, their line of apedom, despite being very clever and despite having a big brain, never came close to ours. There are other animals with big brains and lots of intelligence, such as the elephant. Why didn’t they continue to develop a bigger and bigger brain? The answer is that they already dominated their ecological niche and the tradeoff of having an even bigger brain which would result in helplessness at birth, apparently just was not worth it, whatever advantage they could gain.<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Rowe concludes:

There is no way that simple evolutionary pressures could have produced the modern human. The level of development and the level of complexity within the brain is far beyond anything we would require to dominate our ecological niche. Indeed, the hyper-development of the brain, in terms of dominating our environment, has reached a point where the difficulties in giving birth [because of a bigger head] and the

helplessness of childhood [a consequence of a bigger head] actually argue for regressionary pressures toward smaller brains!...

If we are not a random event, then there must be some purpose behind our creation. If not a biological accident, then what are we?...We are not mere physical beings; we have an immortal soul that distinguishes us from the rest of the animal kingdom. That makes us essentially spiritual beings, not just biological. We are trapped in a physical body in the matrix of this physical, three dimensional world, and while here, we are subject to all the rules and restrictions of this world. But just as the unborn child is trapped in the physical matrix of the womb of the mother and yet is destined to become so much more, we are similarly destined to become much, much more when we cast off the dross of this physical existence. And the part that continues on is the immortal soul. All the religions tell of a life that follows this one.<sup>2</sup>

Yes, genetically we are almost identical with chimpanzees. Only about two percent of our genes are different from their genes. But can this small difference account for our vast spiritual and intellectual differences? Can this difference explain the distinctions of human beings—who discover the mysteries of the atoms and the wonders of the great galaxies—over the brightest animals?

The greatest intellectual achievement so far reported for animals is this: A chimpanzee was once observed putting a stick into a hole. Each time he did this, a few termites would crawl on it. The chimpanzee would then bring the stick out and lick it to eat the termites. It was not explained how this happened. Very likely, it happened by accident. This single incidence was hailed by some biologists as an evidence of abstract thinking and reasoning in animals! This is still perhaps the biggest news regarding animal thinking! It is unlikely that any other chimpanzee would break this record. The placing of a stick in a hole is the highest intellectual achievement any animal has so far attained!

Yes, we have a much bigger brain than a chimpanzee. But can the sheer *size* or *shape* of the brain explain all the wonders of being human? Are the differences a matter of quantity or quality? Compare the brain of a chimpanzee and the brain of a human being to two books of different sizes. Outwardly, they look alike, but when you look *inside*, when you begin to read the two books, you see a world of difference. In one book you find little pieces of information, repeated over and over again; in the other you discover infinite marvels as complex and awesome as traveling to the moon and as incredible as the creation of computer chips the size of a finger nail. In one book you see only a form of love controlled by instincts and conditioning rather than on conscious choice; in the other you see a love that is as infinitely supreme and exalted as the love of God—the unknowable, invisible Essence. In one book you notice virtually no artistic talents; in the other, you discover Michelangelo. In one book you recognize the simple and repetitious gibberings that constitute the ‘language’ of the chimpanzee; in the other, you find the music of Mozart and Chopin. In one book you read only the code of physical survival whether inherent or learned; in the other you read complex and diverse concepts about the meaning and purpose of life. In one book you see no trace of self; in the other you discover that the writer knows, and he knows that he knows, that he can look at himself, investigate himself, make fun of himself, and laugh at himself. In one book you see a highly developed recognition of odors, visual and hearing acuity, sense of balance, and capacity for acrobatics; in the other you read about the theory of relativity or a discussion

on the difference between humans and animals. In one book you see no awareness of anything but the present; in the other you find an awareness of the past, of mortality and death, a record of past cultures, a discussion of the evidence for a Creator and the afterlife. In one book you notice monotonous repetition of behavior throughout its pages; in the other you discover constant and often dramatic advancement from page to page. In one book you find no sign of moral values; in the other you find a host of values such as honesty, courtesy, and self-control.

We could go on and on. The point is this: the cover (in this case the brain) does not explain the content. There must be another power or essence that writes the book of human race—one that transcends the brain. That power must differ from the brain itself; it must be non-physical.

Can the bigger size of the human brain account for the wonders of the mind? We can see differences in the brain size of various species of animals, yet we find that all of them (frogs, mice, cats, cows, dogs, monkeys, etc.) share *the same* plane of existence. ***They all lack the distinguishing features of humans.*** The mere size or the structure of our brain alone would allow us to be superior to a gorilla in the same way that a gorilla is superior to a goat, a dolphin to a dog, a fox to a frog, or a rabbit to a roach.

As neuroscientist, Dr. Vargha, notes:

As we learn more about the way the brain functions and the mind operates, we see more and more distinctions between the mind of the human being and the mind of the animal, and these distinctions are of a spiritual nature.

Our differences, even though they may have a biological basis, are a reflection of something that is inherent to the capacity of the human mind, which is a reflection of a spiritual being.<sup>3</sup>

What is our root? Is our mind and spirit rooted in a monkey or a mouse? Does our spirit come from God or from the ground? Do our spiritual distinctions originate in the divine, or in dogs and donkeys? In the following statement, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá compares the supreme glory and grandeur of the human spirit to those of lower beings, such as animals and minerals:

What a difference between the human world and the world of the animal, between the elevation of man and the abasement of the animal, between the perfections of man and the ignorance of the animal, between the light of man and the darkness of the animal, between the glory of man and the degradation of the animal! An Arab child of ten years can manage two or three hundred camels in the desert, and with his voice can lead them forward or turn them back. A weak Hindu can so control a huge elephant that the elephant becomes the most obedient of servants.

All things are subdued by the hand of man; he can resist nature while all other creatures are captives of nature: none can depart from her requirements. Man alone can resist nature. Nature attracts bodies to the center of the earth; man through mechanical means goes far from it and soars in the air. Nature prevents man from crossing the seas; man builds a ship, and he travels and voyages across the great ocean...man drives engines over the mountains and through the wildernesses, and gathers in one spot the news of the events of the East and West. All this is contrary to

nature. The sea with its grandeur cannot deviate by an atom from the laws of nature; the sun in all its magnificence cannot deviate as much as a needle's point from the laws of nature, and can never comprehend the conditions, the state, the qualities, the movements and the nature of man.

What, then, is the power in this small body of man which encompasses all this? What is this ruling power by which he subdues all things?<sup>4</sup>

Human powers and distinctions point to the independent existence of the mind, which itself is a power of the soul. The mind can be regarded as a spiritual energy or entity that manifests itself in the brain—as the light in the mirror—but transcends the brain. As Dr. Wayne Dyer notes:

Those in the new physics of quantum mechanics are only beginning to prove what metaphysics (beyond physics) has indicated for centuries. There is an invisible force in the universe that pervades all life. Even more astonishing, as reported by John Gliedman in *Scientific Digest*... is that “several leading theorists have arrived at the same startling conclusions: their work suggests a hidden spiritual world, within all of us.” Gliedman sardonically called it “the ghost in the machine.” It is this apparition within all of us—this dimension of our humanity that defies measurement—that continues to baffle scientists. Yet even many of their own are now concluding that the “soul”—that “ghost in the machine”—exists. Gliedman’s article, titled “Scientists in Search of the Soul,” quotes many of the most respected and distinguished scientists from all over the globe. Some conclude that our nonmaterial (invisible) self is what constitutes our human traits of conscious self-awareness, free will, personal identity, creativity and emotions. They contend that the invisible presence exerts a physical influence on us and, even more astounding, that this non-material self survives the death of the physical brain.

Another intriguing notion comes from John von Neumann, a mathematician and scientist described by Nobel laureate Hans Bethe as perhaps “the smartest man who ever lived.” Bethe once remarked, “I have sometimes wondered whether a brain like John von Neumann’s does not indicate a species superior to that of man.” And what were von Neumann’s conclusions? “That physical reality was a figment of the human imagination and that the only true reality was thought.” Eugene Wigner, winner of the 1963 Nobel Prize in physics who studied von Neumann’s formulations, stated publicly, “Man may have a nonmaterial consciousness capable of influencing matter.”<sup>5</sup>

Noted physician and author Dr. Larry Dossey, after presenting evidence to prove the independence of the mind from the brain, concludes:

This picture of the mind is quite different from that given in contemporary biology and medicine, which says that the mind is limited to the brain and to the present, and that it will perish when the body dies. But this cannot be entirely true, for there are simply things that “mind” can do that “brain” cannot. The nonlocal view suggests that the mind cannot be limited to specific points in space (brains or bodies) or in time (the present moment), but is infinite in space and time; thus the mind is omnipresent, eternal, and immortal. If minds are indeed nonlocal, this means that in principle they cannot be walled off and separated from one another: at some level they are unitary and one.<sup>6</sup>

For about a decade, studies done at Princeton University's Engineering Anomalies Research Laboratory (PEAR Lab) have indicated that subjects can influence the outcome of random physical events and can mentally convey complex information to other subjects from whom they are widely separated, even by global distances. These studies show not only that a sender can mentally transmit detailed information to a receiver on the other side of the earth, but also that the receiver usually "gets" the information up to three days before it is sent. The details of these studies are contained in Robert G. Jahn's and Brenda J. Dunne's epochal book *Margins of Reality*. These experiments demonstrate that the mind is nonlocal not only in space but in time as well.<sup>7</sup>

Dr. Penfield, the noted neurosurgeon, confirms the same principle:

It is what we have learned to call the mind that seems to focus attention. The mind is aware of what is going on. The mind reasons and makes new decisions. It understands. It acts as though endowed with an energy of its own. It can make decisions and put them into effect by calling upon various brain mechanisms. It does this by activating neuron-mechanisms. This, it seems, could only be brought about by expenditure of energy...the mind must be viewed as a basic element in itself. One might, then, call it a medium, an essence, a soma. That is to say, it has a continuing existence.<sup>8</sup>

What Dr. Penfield and Dr. Dossey discovered through scientific studies, Job declared long ago:

But it is the spirit in man, the breath of the Almighty that gives him understanding.

Job 32:8

### ***A Second Look at Dr. Rowe's Views***

Thus, as Dr. Rowe states, if there were a link between human beings and chimpanzees, why then would our ancient ancestors go through an evolutionary process that worked against their very survival? Why would those with bigger heads survive and those with smaller heads disappear? A bigger head is a risk factor for both the mother and the baby.

Why do medical doctors sometimes rely on forceps to assist a birth? Do they use it for babies with small heads or big heads? Forceps are used because the head, unlike the shoulders, is inflexible.

According to the theory of evolution, big-headed babies and their mothers would have gradually disappeared. Yet the exact opposite has happened. Those with smaller heads have disappeared and those with bigger heads have survived! How can this be? When a concept is stretched beyond its limits, it creates loopholes that cannot be filled; it leads to contradictions that cannot be explained.

## *The Four Kingdoms of Creation*

Dr. Mario Beauregard from the University of Montreal, in his book—*The Spiritual Brain*—offers much evidence to show the wide chasm that separates human beings from animals—intellectually, emotionally, socially, morally, and spiritually. For instance, the ability to generate ideas and then communicate them to others through language is one of the most distinct qualities of human beings. “Some researchers have devoted their careers to teaching simple deaf-language signs to apes.” What have they found?

- First, they do not have the capacity to manipulate a symbol system given to them by humans, and to communicate with it.
- Second, unfortunately, they have nothing to say.
- And third, they do not use any such system in the wild.<sup>9</sup>

What about intelligence? Consider this example: “A researcher hides food in one of several containers out of sight of the animal. Then the chimp is allowed to choose one container after the experimenter indicates the correct choice by various methods, such as staring, nodding, pointing, tapping, or placing a marker. Only with considerable training do chimps and other primates manage to score above chance.”<sup>10</sup>

What about emotional intelligence? Chimpanzees are supposed to be our closest relatives. Should they not also be closest to us emotionally? Studies indicate that dogs have a greater ability to understand human emotions than chimpanzees “even though the human face is more similar to the chimpanzee’s face than it is to the canine face.” (Similarity should give apes an advantage.)

What about spiritual concerns and questions, such as: Why were we created, what on earth are we supposed to accomplish, and where are we going? Can we detect any signs of such concerns and questions among the most intelligent animals—apes, elephants, pigs, porpoises, raccoons, and dogs? (Has anyone been able to prove which of these animals is “brighter”?)

What about moral values—such as choosing to be kind, just, generous, chaste, courteous, loyal, patient, or devoted to the service of humankind? What about the most sublime virtue: wisdom?

Will, through evolution, apes and still later, dogs and dolphins begin to show human distinctions such as concern for the purpose and meaning of their lives just as we do? Will they start to look for scientific evidence for the existence of the soul and the afterlife? Will they, through further evolution, begin to learn about God, submit to His Wisdom, ask for forgiveness of their sins, and pray for peace among the nations? Will apes and other animals eventually be able to love their enemies and forgive their wrongdoings? Will they begin to demonstrate virtues such as honesty, courtesy, and chastity? These questions appear superfluous, but they are raised for a reason: to remind us of the infinite chasm that separates a human being from the most advanced animals.

The best way—perhaps the only way—to recognize human uniqueness and distinction is to look at man’s *highest* nature, the one he does *not* share with animals, not at his *lowest*

nature—the one he *does* share with animals. Because, as mentioned, we have two “natures.” Physically we are just like animals. Only by looking at man’s “spiritual nature” can we become aware of the wonders of an invisible power we call *the spirit*, only then can we discern the most wondrous creation—one that is able to know and glorify its Creator.

There are four kingdoms of creation: mineral, vegetable, animal, and human. To recognize the infinite gap between a human being and an ape, it is helpful to begin by comparing *the first three kingdoms*:

- Each of those kingdoms looks distinctly different. We can readily tell one from the other.
- Each kingdom on a higher level has something (a feature or a distinction) that a lower does not have. What a difference between a stone, a rose, and a bird!

Let us now compare *the third* and *the fourth* kingdoms. Unlike members of the other three lower kingdoms, which look distinctly different, members of these two kingdoms look alike and act alike. Physically the members of the human kingdom look much like another species of the animal kingdom. A human being is more similar to an ape than an ape is to a bird. We are also genetically very similar to the primates.

What does our apparent similarity with primates teach us? It indicates that we are just another species of animals.

Is this not the prime reason many people fail to recognize their infinite distinctions over apes? Is this not the prime reason they fail to recognize that they are not merely billions of cells, but a soul—an invisible being—living temporarily in a visible body?

The skeptics look at a gorilla and then at a human being, and they see little if any difference. They conclude that a human being is just more highly evolved gorilla! What they fail to recognize is that appearances can be quite deceptive, because, unlike the differences between the first three kingdoms, the crucial differences between the third and the fourth kingdoms are totally invisible. We cannot see the true image of a human being—his spirit—except by its effects, by its expressions, by what it can accomplish.

The spiritual nature of a human being is fully—a hundred percent—invisible. When we look at a person, we do not see him—his spiritual image—at all. His body completely conceals his true self—his spirit—from our eyes. The person hiding behind a charming face may be such a monster that if we saw his self—his true image—we would run away in fear. His appearance has no relevance to what or who he is. This does not hold true for animals. A gorilla is only a gorilla and a goat is only a goat. There is nothing else there. No person is hiding behind.

A dog, perhaps closer to us socially and emotionally than an ape, may bury a piece of bone. But it does so according to its instincts. It is not conscious of its act, and cannot be guilty of hoarding. Every species of animals is controlled by a spectrum of inborn behavior over which it has no control. This is the reason it is unfair and unethical to punish a cat that “steals” and enjoys one’s favorite lunch!

I live in a wooded area, where deer often come to our yard to graze and rest. They usually come together—four or five of them—lie on the grass within two to three meters from

each other, sometimes for a couple of hours. While resting, they direct their eyes in a given direction for long periods of time, like “living statues!” They simply stare in a given direction. **They see each other**, but do not look **into** each other’s eyes as we do. As a result of watching their gaze, I have reached this conclusion: One difference between the two kingdoms is this: Animals can **only see** each other, but human beings not only see each other, they are also able to **look at** each other and **into** each other!

Animals and human beings both see the same way: their eyes transfer light patterns to their brain that are then interpreted as images. Their shared experience ends at this point. What happens next pinpoints the true difference between the two kingdoms. After seeing an image, an animal can only react according to its predetermined instincts. Its behavior is programmed by its genes. For human beings, the eyes and the brain serve only as a window—as a way to see, to look, to think, and to choose a response. The one who looks, thinks, and chooses to respond has at least two unique distinctions:

- He remains always hidden as he looks through the eyes to see the world—the physical beings. This is why the “eyes” are described as a “window” to the soul.
- Unlike animals, a human being has the power of choice. He has a choice to hate his enemy or to love him. He can kill his enemy, or allow his enemy to kill him.

When an animal sees an object, there is no onlooker behind its window—its eyes.

How do we know that raccoons can see in darkness? **We cannot see their “sense of seeing.” Only by observing their behavior can we conclude that they have such a gift, such a power. The same principle applies to spiritual power.** Only by looking at the wonders of the spirit, only by observing its effects—such as the ability to discover the mysteries of universe—can we become aware of its existence. Only by learning that people who are clinically dead, can be alive, do we become aware of an independent power that can function without the brain. Only when we hear stories of people who are totally blind, yet they suddenly begin to see while they are clinically dead, do we become aware of the presence of a spiritual power—the soul—that can see without eyes. Only by learning that some human beings can “communicate” mentally (hundreds of kilometers away from each other), do we become aware of the existence of an invisible power that can function without depending on any material means. Only by learning about the dreams that come true years or decades later, can we become aware of the existence of the spirit—a power that can transcend the dimension of time—an entity that can experience the future before it has arrived.

Although we cannot see the spirit during waking hours, **we can indeed see it while we are asleep.** What or who is it that sees, hears, talks, and recognizes relatives and friends during sleep? The dream world can be as real as the waking life with all its wonders. In the dream world, we can gain even greater powers, such as seeing places we have not previously seen. We can even experience the past or the future. We can also receive help and guidance to make a good choice. Dreams—such as one I had about a cyst that required surgery—have shaped and saved many lives, and continue to do so.

One of the created phenomena is the dream. Behold how many secrets are deposited therein, how many wisdoms treasured up, how many worlds concealed. Observe, how thou art asleep in a dwelling, and its doors are barred; on a sudden thou findest thyself

in a far-off city, which thou enterest without moving thy feet or wearying thy body; without using thine eyes, thou seest; without taxing thine ears, thou hearest; without a tongue, thou speakest. And perchance when ten years are gone, thou wilt witness in the outer world the very things thou hast dreamed tonight.

Now there are many wisdoms to ponder in the dream, which none but the people of this Valley can comprehend in their true elements. First, what is this world, where without eye and ear and hand and tongue a man puts all of these to use? Second, how is it that in the outer world thou seest today the effect of a dream, when thou didst vision it in the world of sleep some ten years past? Consider the difference between these two worlds and the mysteries which they conceal, that thou mayest attain to divine confirmations and heavenly discoveries and enter the regions of holiness.

God, the Exalted, hath placed these signs in men, to the end that philosophers may not deny the mysteries of the life beyond nor belittle that which hath been promised them.<sup>11</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh

To conclude: The reason some people doubt the existence of a human “spirit” is that it is invisible. To believe in the existence of an invisible power is not easy. How difficult it would be to believe in a power that can produce light, move a car, and allow people to hear and see each other across the globe if one did not know the technology behind it?

The following incidence demonstrates the supreme power of instinct and the total lack of reasoning power in animals. We live in a wooded area. A few years ago, while we were away from home for six months, half a dozen raccoons climbed the wall two stories, broke into our attic and made it their living quarters! When we returned, we trapped them, and released them some 15 miles away in a remote area. The raccoons had no opportunity to see the road, while in a truck and confined to their trap. We fixed the hole in the roof and were certain that we were safe. But to our utter surprise, several of those raccoons found their way back to our house and broke into our attic through the same spot they had entered.

Once again we decided to trap them. Would they remember the trap in which they had spent an entire night and several hours during the day without water and very little food? Would they remember how terrified they were while in the trap, and how hard they had tried to escape by removing the grass underneath the holes under their feet? Fortunately not! Despite their incredible memory to find their way back to our house, among thousands of other houses, they could not “think” “reason” or “remember” the consequences of making the same mistake—entering the same dangerous trap! Their instinct for finding our address through their inborn GPS was perfect. But they had nothing—no guide—to warn them of the grave consequences of a trap they had previously fallen into!

By the way, when we first fixed the roof, we believed that all the raccoons were out. But we were wrong. Two raccoons were still hiding in the attic. Since they had no way to get out, they broke through the ceiling a few days later and jumped down into our study! We placed a trap in that room. One of them entered the trap during the night while we were asleep. In the morning, we allowed the other to escape through the window on the second floor.

Once again we assumed that a raccoon that had been confined in the attic for several days and watched its helpless friend in a trap during the night would never approach that trap again. Would this last raccoon finally learn a lesson? No, it would not! Once again, it returned, broke through the plastic, and made the attic its home! We were able to trap this experienced raccoon on the first night! Many months have passed, and we have heard no noises in the attic. We believe that this is the end of the story, because all the raccoons that had experienced the comfort of living in our attic were taken to a very remote area, beyond the stretch of their memories.

Physically, raccoons are far superior to human beings. They can see clearly in the dark and climb a wall with their bare hands and feet. Their paws are powerful. These raccoons had broken through a plastic barrier while hanging onto a wall! Yet their intelligence for learning from a repeated experience—for avoiding a dangerous trap—was zero! Any learning on their part would have been due to conditioning requiring many repetitions. What a contrast!

A quote from *Some Answered Questions*:

Though man has powers and outer senses in common with the animal, yet an extraordinary power exists in him of which the animal is bereft. The sciences, arts, inventions, trades and discoveries of realities are the results of this spiritual power. This is a power which encompasses all things, comprehends their realities, discovers all the hidden mysteries of beings, and through this knowledge controls them. It even perceives things which do not exist outwardly—that is to say, intellectual realities which are not sensible, and which have no outward existence because they are invisible...

Moreover, these existing sciences, arts, laws and endless inventions of man at one time were invisible, mysterious and hidden secrets; it is only the all-encompassing human power which has discovered and brought them out from the plane of the invisible to the plane of the visible...If we say that these are effects of powers which animals also have, and of the powers of the bodily senses, we see clearly and evidently that the animals are, in regard to these powers, superior to man. For example, the sight of animals is much more keen than the sight of man; so also is their power of smell and taste. Briefly, in the powers which animals and men have in common, the animal is often the more powerful. For example, let us take the power of memory. If you carry a pigeon from here to a distant country, and there set it free, it will return, for it remembers the way...

Thus it is clear that if there were not in man a power different from any of those of the animals, the latter would be superior to man in inventions and the comprehension of realities. Therefore, it is evident that man has a gift which the animal does not possess. Now, the animal perceives sensible things but does not perceive intellectual realities. For example, that which is within the range of its vision the animal sees, but that which is beyond the range of sight it is not possible for it to perceive, and it cannot imagine it. So it is not possible for the animal to understand that the earth has the form of a globe. But man from known things proves unknown things and discovers unknown truths. For example, man sees the curve of the horizon, and from this he infers the roundness of the earth...The animal is the captive of the senses and bound by

them; all that is beyond the senses, the things that they do not control, the animal can never understand, although in the outer senses it is greater than man. Hence it is proved and verified that in man there is a power of discovery by which he is distinguished from the animals, and this is the spirit of man.<sup>12</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

A true comparison between humans and animals must be based on the most intelligent behavior observed in animals and the most intelligent behavior observed in humans. We must compare *the uppermost limits* of their capabilities, for two reasons:

- The lowest level of human potential and the highest level of animal potential may show some minor similarities; they may overlap. If one monkey in a million happens to tie two sticks together, we may use this incidence as an evidence of abstract thinking. Such a conclusion is unreasonable, because *the highest level* of animal instinct may approach and resemble *the lowest level* of human thinking. At this point, the lines are not clear.
- We can find human beings of such low intelligence who cannot reason even on a primitive level. Is it fair to use such individuals as a standard of human thinking?

Therefore, in terms of intelligence, a fair comparison between the two kingdoms must be based on the capabilities of the brightest human beings and the brightest animals ever discovered. We must compare the mind of Einstein or Edison with the mind of the brightest and most creative ape, porpoise, pig, dog, or raccoon ever observed. *Only then can we know the true difference between a human being and an animal.*

### *Is the Human Life Without a Purpose?*

The consummation of this limitless universe with all its grandeur and glory hath been man himself who, in this world of being, toileth and suffereth for a time, with diverse ills and pains, and ultimately disintegrates, leaving no trace and no fruit after him. Were it so, there is no doubt that this infinite universe with all its perfections has ended in sham and delusion with no result, no fruit, no permanence and no effect. It would be utterly without meaning.<sup>13</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá



Is death a Messenger of Joy or a Messenger of Grief?

Suddenly a voice in my soul broke its silence. It spoke, saying: you are like the rays of the sun on the peak of a mountain at eventide. You shall soon fade away and take refuge in the silent heart of the earth.

Soon you shall become but a memory cast to the wind—forgotten, forsaken.

Your days are like smoke blown away by a breeze. They are but a breath on the wings of the clouds.



***Then a voice spoke from heaven:***

***O My Loved Ones on Earth!***

I dwelt on earth for a little while.  
I drank from the purest waters, and ate of the sweetest fruits.  
I walked through meadows and mountains, and smelled the fragrance of flowers.  
I saw the radiance of the sun and the splendor of the stars.  
I witnessed the fury of the thunder and the peace of the forest.  
I beheld the gloom of the night and the glory of the dawn.  
I dined and danced, I laughed and cried.  
Then like a hunter in pursuit of prey, death made me its target.  
I fell as a bird, but rose again.  
Death had no power over my soul.  
I am crowned with glory, and robed in rapture and peace.  
I am the immortal bird of heaven.  
The hunter cannot find me or follow me again.  
I am a drop, but as vast as the seven seas.  
Yea, I am the pure breath of the heart of heavens.  
I flow and fly as the soft silk of light.  
I ride on the winds and roam with the clouds.  
I bathe in the sun and dance on the moon.  
I rest on the laps of angels and behold the Beauty and Glory of God.  
I am embraced by love and peace, and not strained by pain and grief.  
I am circled with hope and happiness, and not torn by toil and tears.  
O that the earthly ones could witness my wonders.  
O that they could see the rapture in my soul, the heaven in my heart,  
the praise on my lips, and the glow on my face.<sup>14</sup>

*A Messenger of Joy*

***O Passing Voyagers!***

Death does not put out the light. It only shatters the lamp. The light does not die. It only departs and joins the heart of heaven. Like a breeze that stirs the forest, and spreads the fragrance of flowers, death lifts the veil and sets the soul free on its journey home.<sup>15</sup>

*A Messenger of Joy*

***O Children of Dream!***

Some of you have called death a curse written upon your brow.  
But I say unto you that death is not a curse, but a blessing.

It is not farewell to living, but a greeting to a messenger of joy.  
It is not a voyage to grief, but a glorious journey to God.  
It is not a tragedy of life, but a triumph of spirit.  
It is not the tale of nothingness, but tidings of victories and wonders.<sup>16</sup> *A Messenger of Joy*\*

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\* *A Messenger of Joy* is a book of poetry I composed to comfort all those who have lost a loved one or fear coming to terms with their own death.

## 8

### **Drink from the Chalice of Immortality**

But there comes a moment when man wearies of the things he has won; when he suspects with bewilderment and dismay that there is another purpose, some profound and eternal purpose in his being. It is then he discovers that beyond the kingdom of the world there exists a kingdom of the soul. A.J. Cronin

Death is an expansion of consciousness, a full awakening, an elevation from the domain of concealment to the realm of revelation. While watching a friend die, St. Benedict saw the whole world gathered before his eyes in a flood of light. Here is a brief account of that experience:

...anyone who has seen a little of the light of the Creator finds all of creation small, because the innermost hidden place of the mind is opened up by that light, and is so much expanded in God that it stands above the world. In fact, the soul that sees this is even raised above itself. Rapt above itself in the light of God, its inner powers are enlarged. When it looks down from above, it finds that what it formerly could not grasp is now small...Of course, in saying that the world was gathered before his eyes, I do not mean that heaven and earth shrunk, but that his spirit widened. He who is rapt in God can see without difficulty everything that is below God. Therefore in that light that was shining before his exterior eyes, there was an inner light in his mind, which lifted his spirit to the heights and showed him how paltry were the things below.<sup>1</sup>

Carol Zaleski offers further insight:

...the seventh century monk Baldarius...sees the whole world collected before his eyes and in one glance can make out cities, rivers, buildings, and countries, as well as individual people. Alberic relates that “while I was standing in the first heaven, everything above and below me seemed lucid and transparent.” Adammán, Alberic, and Tundal discover that the inhabitants of the highest heaven can see all sides of everything without turning; they face one other and are surrounded by the countenance of God in every direction.<sup>2</sup>

Survivors of near-death visions experience the profoundest change imaginable. Among the changes is this: they gain a global perspective—they become world-minded. Lines of separation—racial, religious, and class—disappear from their field of vision. They become spiritual, open-minded, non-judgmental, and goal-oriented.

One of the best known authorities on near-death vision is Dr. Kenneth Ring, emeritus professor of psychology at the University of Connecticut. Dr. Ring never came close to death, yet simply by studying people who did, he experienced a profound transformation. He remembers feeling spiritually adrift in his early years, as if he had lost his way. Here he describes how looking beyond the grave into the glories of heaven transformed his soul:

The effect, combined with a certain quality of luminous serenity which many near-death survivors display, made me feel that I myself was undergoing an extended spiritual awakening. In any event, as my interviews continued, I found that I was no longer oppressed by the spiritual deadness that had, ironically, provided the initial impetus to my research. In fact, my feeling was becoming just the opposite.<sup>3</sup>

Dr. Ring is not unique in his appreciation of the impact of such a spiritual awakening. The testimony of millions of people confirms his conclusions. Those who get a glimpse of the glories beyond become new creations with new hearts and visions—they are inspired by a new and passionate purpose for life. Many of those who attempt suicide, do not return to their previous state of despair. They do not attempt suicide again. What a potent force for change we have in our hand, and how little we use it to uplift and edify the despairing, depressed, and distressed peoples of our time.

Sheila, who had a near-death vision as a result of a near-drowning accident, summarized her transformation in these words: “I try to get on with my mundane life and not get too serious, but the sense of responsibility and higher purpose is always there. Most people don’t realize how precious life is...The Light convinced me that there is more to life than most people experience.”<sup>4</sup>

Dr. Melvin Morse’s sample of young people who had had near-death visions ten years earlier as children, showed no rebellion against society, no teenage pregnancies, no excessive risk-taking, and no brain damage from lack of oxygen. In fact, they received good grades and showed a clear distinction over the average population in all aspects of their lives.

### ***Drink Before the Glass Is Broken***

How bitter is the taste of death to those who sleep through life as in a long dream, and how sweet to those who keep pace with the seasons. Leo Tolstoy tells a story about a farmer who never had enough land to farm. See if such a story applies to you or to someone you know.

There once was a man named Martin who had a small farm of 30 acres where he grew vegetables for his wife to sell at their roadside stand...But Martin was not satisfied and would say, “I do not have enough land. If I had more land, I could quit my job in town and farm full time.” Soon an opportunity arose, and Martin borrowed money to purchase a field of equal size adjoining his property. Since he kept his job in town to help pay for the field, he now worked far into the night preparing the land, planting and caring for the plants that grew lavishly and beautifully...

But Martin was not satisfied and would say, “I do not have enough land. If I had another farm, we could sell vegetables to the stores in town as well as at our stand.” Soon an opportunity arose, and Martin was able to purchase 140 acres nearby...

But Martin was not satisfied and would say, “I do not have enough land. If I could buy more land, we could sell to the chain stores—that is where the real money is.” Soon an opportunity arose, and Martin purchased a farm of nearly 250 tillable acres. He closed the roadside stand, hired men to manage each farm, and a woman to truck the produce during the harvest season. He built refrigerated storage buildings so that he could sell when the prices were highest. Martin’s wife did the bookwork while he supervised his many employees, including the seasonal help who migrated in to assist at harvest time. He now sold to many small stores within a 40-mile area as well as to a national chain.

On weekends, when they would go out for dinner, his wife would say, “God is good to us, Martin. There is nothing we lack.” But Martin was not satisfied and would say, “I do not have enough land. If I could buy land south of here, we could grow other crops that our climate will not allow.” Soon an opportunity arose to purchase a large farm 300 miles south. Now Martin commuted between farms and began to work long hours on weekends.

After a very long day, Martin suffered a heart attack and died. He was buried in a small cemetery plot, seven feet long, four feet wide, and six feet deep. Just enough land.<sup>5</sup>

Some people dream of being a glamorous “star.” They may not realize that every star at last loses its glow and glitter, that it falls and sinks into a graveyard. Only those who remain radiant with the love of God stay aloft, only *they* continue to bathe in celestial splendor. This is how Daniel predicted the state of our time and our lives:

At that time Michael [the Promised One]...will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered...Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever...Many will go here and there to increase knowledge. Daniel 12:1-4

Once a famous movie star made a long journey to visit an immortal star: Mother Teresa. This is what she told her:

I’ve had a terrifying dream in which I saw myself as a broken-down movie star, living in misery—alone and forgotten. In the dream I saw myself lying on my deathbed, broken and unloved, a lonely pathetic woman who had led an empty, useless life. Then I was staring at my own grave. The headstone was overgrown with weeds and covered with mildew and moss. I could hardly make out my name because the grave was so uncared for. It was the grave of someone who’d been forgotten. But standing by the side of the grave was you, Mother Teresa. And when I awoke, bathed in sweat and crying bitterly, I realized I had to rush to your side. I’m convinced my haunting dream is a vision of what my life could become. I know that working for you can lead to my salvation!

This dream awakened a dreamer of fame. Many are not so fortunate. They are so wrapped up in their sweet illusions that nothing can stir them, nothing can awaken their sleeping souls. The star's dream of being abandoned and forgotten in a graveyard presents a perfect view of the end of life's journey on this planet. It contains an urgent lesson for all of us.

This is the age of despair, depression, anxiety, and stress. The real cause is spiritual starvation, because most people live in a spiritual vacuum. They live lives of *quiet desperation*. They carry life's burden without ever experiencing the immortal joys that can come only from spiritual awakening.

Where is happiness?

Not in unbelief—

Voltaire was an infidel of the most pronounced type. He wrote: "I wish I had never been born."

Not in pleasure—

Lord Byron lived a life of pleasure, if anyone did. He wrote: "The worm, the canker, and the grief are mine alone."

Not in money—

Jay Gould, the American millionaire, had plenty of that. When dying he said: "I suppose I am the most miserable man on earth."

Not in position and fame—

Lord Beaconsfield enjoyed more than his share of both. He wrote: "Youth is a mistake; manhood, a struggle; old age, a regret."

Not in military glory—

Alexander the Great conquered the known world in his day. Having done so, he wept, because, he said, "There are no more worlds to conquer."

Where, then, is true happiness? In knowing and loving God and looking forward to seeing Him. *Full* recognition of immortality, of our divine destiny, can change the world, and transform our lives more than anything else. I emphasize *full* because many people simply *assume* they are immortal. The assumption is often based on tradition or conformity rather than on irrefutable evidence. Full recognition means belief without doubt; it means being as sure as seeing the sun. Without the glorious light of immortality, everything loses its meaning and purpose, everything ends in a grave. Have you been to a funeral recently? In the last two years I have seen the bodies of three of my relatives descend into the ground. It is the saddest thing to see a human being suddenly disappear forever. When I lost my mother, I could not eat for three days. The sudden loss was unbearable. But gradually the shock subsided and now I feel happy for her. For she lived a wonderful life here, and I believe she is continuing that course in the hereafter.

When we cast the light of immortality on our lives, everything ends in glory, the grave itself takes on a different meaning. Everything becomes bright and beautiful, even adversity turns into an adventure. In that light, suffering appears as the angel of growth, not grief. Life turns into a journey; death becomes the most exciting point of the journey. Can you think of anything as exhilarating as seeing the Creator of the universe? Can you

imagine two scenarios with greater contrasting consequence: going underground to utter darkness, and going to One brighter than the sun?

What is our most magnificent goal in this life? To prepare and make ourselves worthy of heaven. That is the goal our Creator has chosen for us. Let us be honest, have you ever known anyone who wanted to go to hell? If you have, then you can be sure he does not know what hell is like. The only reason people may have for wanting to go to hell is to meet their friends!

What is *the most critical moment* in the life of every human being between the point of birth and eternity? That moment comes when a soul is being assessed by the Creator. That is by far the scariest moment and the greatest event a human being will ever encounter. How did you feel when you were awaiting the results of a critical exam, when you wanted to know if you passed or failed? Multiply that feeling by  $10^{80}$  (the number of atoms in the universe) and you will know how you will feel when you see yourself being assessed by God.

Imagine you were given everything you could ever wish to have for all the days of your life:

- every food you could dream of
- the most marvelous mansions
- thousands of servants
- the most expensive cars and planes
- the spouse of your dreams
- children you are proud of
- friends who adore you
- the most glamorous jewels
- perfect health and happiness
- fame and popularity throughout the planet

Suppose you were offered all these blessings with one condition: when you died, all that remained of you would be the body that goes to the grave.

Now suppose you had only a few of those blessings on a small scale, but you were told that at the end your soul would enter the paradise of peace to be with God and all your loved ones forever. Which one would you choose? Perfect life on earth and nothingness at the end, or a very ordinary life here but perfect life in heaven? I am certain most people would choose a perfect life in heaven for this simple reason: everything on earth ends, everything in heaven endures. All the joys of the earth are spoiled by the sight of the grave. Thus, knowledge of the life beyond gives us a joy beyond all the joys of the earth.

The famous billionaire Malcolm Forbes always lived on the edge, and enjoyed the earthly life to the full. He spent millions for his last birthday party. A few days before his death he seemed in perfect health. He was asked if he had his choice, what would he choose above all else? "Eternal life!" was his immediate response. He knew his wealth would soon pass into the hands of others. What he did not know was how soon.

The American editor and owner of a health magazine with a large circulation was once interviewed on television. He spoke confidently about his diet and good health and declared his firm intention to live for many more years. A few minutes after the interview, he had a heart attack and died soon afterwards.

When my son was an 8-year-old, the high point for him was to receive a new toy or the same brand of shoes worn by his friends. The toy survived for only a few days before it “died” with no apparent cause. Nothing and no one could revive his feeling except another toy, which in its turn also had the same brief “life”. This is the way many grown-ups live: they live for the “toys” of life. If their team wins, they are happy for a few days; if it loses, they feel depressed. If the cost of beer goes up, their mood goes down; if the cost goes down, their mood goes up.

My son loved to collect sport cards. At the time I asked him “What would you do if you had lots of money?” “I would buy a lot of cards,” he answered. “What would you do after that?” I asked. “I would buy more cards,” he said proudly. “Suppose all this world was cards and you owned them all, what would you do then?” I asked. “I would sell them and make lots of money,” he answered. “What would you do then?” I asked. “I would rule the world,” he responded. I found no evidence of “detachment” in him. He seemed as attached to the glitters of the world as are most adults.

I know a selfish man who had no regard for ethical values. When someone asked him about his afterlife, he responded, “I will worry about my afterlife when I get there.” His response reminds me of this story: “An exasperated mother, whose son was always getting into mischief, finally asked him, ‘How do you expect to get into heaven?’ The boy thought it over and said, ‘Well, I’ll just run in and out and in and out and keep slamming the door until St. Peter says, ‘For heaven’s sake, Jimmy, come in or stay out. And you know what I will do!’” A few years before his death, the selfish man had a vivid dream. He said: “Suddenly an unpleasant and ugly creature made of wood appeared before me. I asked, ‘Are you an angel of death? Have you come to take me? I am ready to go!’ In response, the creature simply said, ‘No rush!’ and then disappeared.” Was this creature giving the selfish man a clue concerning his future life?

Sometimes, the older we get, the deeper grows our love for the world. A woman married to an archaeologist was asked what her husband thought of her. “The older I get,” she said, “the more he loves me.” This world is tough, cold and unyielding, yet many cling to it like a scared little baby clings to its mother. They can’t let go. Some people always dream of coming back to this world, not knowing what lies on the other side. It is as if they were making a reservation for a round-trip. Some of them keep their bodies frozen at great cost for fear of being homeless on their return. Our bodies are worth as much as the fingernails we clip and throw away, yet many seek their true identities in their perishable bodies.

This life is like a sand castle children build on a seashore. Suddenly a wave comes and washes it away. Dr. Kushner once observed a few children building sand castles on a beach. A big wave washed everything away. But instead of crying or feeling sad, they laughed, joined hands, walked a little distance and started to build again. There is a lesson in this for us. When our eyes are on the Kingdom, the waves of a changing world may destroy our possessions but not our peace, our health but not our hope, our life but not

our love. Believing in the afterlife is like expecting a sunny tomorrow. Not believing in an afterlife is like assuming that there will be *no* tomorrow.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, a true model of spiritual joy and perfection, gladly suffered, for 40 years, the dangers, deprivations, and rigors of exile and imprisonment because of his beliefs. His faith and attitude enabled Him to turn the horrible prison into a heavenly paradise.. In his *Paris Talks* delivered in 1911-1912, he said:

...all the sorrow and the grief that exist come from the world of matter—the spiritual world bestows only the joy!...all the trials and troubles come from this world of illusion...the spiritual Kingdom never causes sadness. A man living with his thoughts in this Kingdom knows perpetual joy...

Today, humanity is bowed down with trouble, sorrow and grief, no one escapes; the world is wet with tears; but, thank God, the remedy is at our doors. Let us turn our hearts away from the world of matter and live in the spiritual world! It alone can give us freedom! If we are hemmed in by difficulties we have only to call upon God, and by His great Mercy we shall be helped...

When our thoughts are filled with bitterness of this world, let us turn our eyes to the sweetness of God’s compassion and He will send us heavenly calm! If we are imprisoned in the material world, our spirit can soar into the Heavens and we shall be free indeed!

When our days are drawing to a close, let us think of the eternal worlds, and we shall be full of joy!...

If your days on earth are numbered, you know that everlasting life awaits you...

I myself was in prison forty years—one year alone would have been impossible to bear—nobody survived that imprisonment more than a year! But, thank God, during all those forty years I was supremely happy! Every day, on waking, it was like hearing good tidings, and every night infinite joy was mine. Spirituality was my comfort, and turning to God was my greatest joy. If this had not been so, do you think it possible that I could have lived through those forty years in prison?<sup>6</sup>

With the right attitude, we discover that it takes a lot less effort to be happy than unhappy, a lot less to find harmony than disharmony. The way to heaven is smooth and surrounded by beautiful scenes. The way to hell is rough, with unpredictable pitfalls and hazards. Yet many fail to pause and ponder, even to look and see the difference. It takes a lot less effort to head for heaven than for hell, yet many take the bumpy road of despair, stress, and struggle.

What is the alchemy that transforms the base metal of humanity into the glowing gold of heaven, the power that makes the mediocre beautiful and the bright brilliant, that turns the dross of the world into diamonds of light? That alchemy and that power is faith. It is faith in the supreme Judge of the universe; it is hope for everlasting reunion with the purpose of our love.

As it is said, “No one gets out of this world alive.” A few years ago my life was in grave danger. My doctor did not know what was wrong. I suffered from many symptoms and was moving with full speed toward an untimely death. One night I dreamed I was in a bus

with two other passengers I did not know. The bus was moving at full speed. It was dark with only one light visible at the end of the street. As I sat in the bus, I knew that when the bus reached the end of the street, my life would be over. My attention was drawn to the many stores that stood along the street, closed, locked, and unattended. I knew the stores had once been occupied by people who had died and whose destiny I was following. The sight of the closed shops created a somber mood. Aside from that I felt neither happy nor sad, only thoughtful. I could see my life quickly coming to a close. I turned my face to the occupants of the bus and said, "What difference does it make, even if we live 50 or 60 or 70 more years, eventually we will have to die." The bus continued its journey until it reached the light at the end. At that moment I woke up. My dream reminds me of Eric Hoffer's words: "Life is a bus ride...all our squabbling and vying are about a seat in the bus, and the ride is over before we know it."

The lights are all out  
In the mansion of clay;  
The curtains are drawn,  
For the dweller's away;  
She silently slipped  
O'er the threshold by night,  
To make her abode  
In the City of Light.

The Báb compares this life to dreaming. Suppose you are dreaming that you are in a most beautiful garden. You are walking, talking, and laughing with your friends; you are experiencing supreme joy. Suddenly you wake up and are astonished to see all that joy has come to an abrupt end.

Now suppose you are having a bad dream. A lion is chasing you and you are running away, but the lion is getting closer. When the lion touches you, you scream and wake up. You cannot believe that this was all a dream. This time you are glad that you were only dreaming and your dream ended.

This is exactly how this life can be described. If you are happy, it will suddenly end. If you are unhappy, if some human monsters are chasing you, that will also end. But in both cases (as in a dream) your pains and pleasures seem so real to you that you cannot believe that they will suddenly end. Your mind tells you that they will end, but your heart will not believe you.

The main difference between dreaming and living is this: in a dream you cannot make conscious choices. Things happen to you with little if any control on your part. In life you can make conscious choices. You can decide to be spiritual or worldly, selfish or unselfish. Your ability to make conscious choices means you are accountable for everything you do and you will be rewarded or deprived of the reward depending on your choices.

If your life is nothing but a nightmare, then you of all people will have the best chance to exercise your inner powers. You will be like a person who stands on a treadmill; he has no choice but to run. You wish for rest, but running on the treadmill strengthens your heart and builds up your muscles. The treadmill helps you develop patience, endurance, dignity, and trust. If you are not on a treadmill, you can still grow by helping those who

are on the treadmill. But you will have less chance for growth because your life of ease may make you forget and falter.

The point is this: good or bad, this life eventually ends. We should neither despair when life gives us a rough coconut, nor feel self-satisfied when it gives us a bowl of cherries or peaches.

We should be like a bird that is always ready to fly, not one that leaves its wings full of mud. What is this mud? It is the attachment to the world, it is ignoring one's ultimate purpose, it is forgetting others and remembering only one's self-interest, it is nearness to gold and remoteness from God. We should at least be as prepared for our eternal home as Winston Churchill, who said, "I am ready to meet my Maker. Whether my Maker is prepared for the great ordeal of meeting me is another matter!"

Every falling leaf declares this warning to the discerning eye: soon the season of separation will arrive. You too will fall, just as you see others falling. As Bahá'u'lláh declares, the passing away of our parents is a clear evidence that we too shall pass away.

Time and tide wait for no man. Geoffrey Chaucer

No hand can make the clock strike for me the hours that are passed. George Gordon Byron

All my possessions for a moment of time. Queen Elizabeth I (last words)

Before the summer has ended and autumn has arrived, strive to bring forth the most fragrant fruits and make the sweetest wine. Then fill the chalice of immortality, drink therefrom, and bestow it unto others. Drink before the glass is broken and the wine is no more.

Emerge from behind the veil, by the leave of thy Lord, the All-Glorious, the Most Powerful, and seize, before the eyes of those who are in the heavens and those who are on the earth, *the Chalice of Immortality*, in the name of thy Lord, the Inaccessible, the Most High, and quaff thy fill, and be not of them that tarry. I swear by God! The moment thou touchest the Cup with thy lips, the Concourse on high will acclaim thee saying, "Drink with healthy relish, O man that hast truly believed in God!" And the inhabitants of the Cities of Immortality will cry out, "Joy be to thee, O thou that hast drained the Cup of His love!" And the Tongue of Grandeur will hail thee, "Great is the blessedness that awaiteth thee, O My servant, for thou hast attained unto that which none hath attained, except such as have detached themselves from all that is in the heavens and all that is on the earth, and who are the emblems of true detachment."<sup>7</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh

Sing the songs of heaven before the glory of spring and the abundance of summer are gone, sing before the parting season has arrived. Soon the shading clouds of autumn and the gloom of winter will set in. There will be no more singing, only the eerie silence of the night.

O CHILDREN OF NEGLIGENCE!

Set not your affections on mortal sovereignty and rejoice not therein. Ye are even as the unwary bird that with full confidence warbleth upon the bough; till of a sudden the fowler Death throws it upon the dust, and the melody, the form and the color are gone, leaving not a trace. Wherefore take heed, O bondslaves of desire!<sup>8</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

O CHILDREN OF VAINGLORY!

For a fleeting sovereignty ye have abandoned My imperishable dominion, and have adorned yourselves with the gay livery of the world and made of it your boast. By My beauty! All will I gather beneath the one-colored covering of the dust and efface all these diverse colors save them that choose My own, and that is purging from every color.<sup>9</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh



***O Birds of Paradise!***

When the Master Spirit of heavens calls you, say to him in your heart: You have been my joy and my desire.

You gave me a temple to abide therein for a little while.

And now that the temple is fallen, I shall rise to my home, to a paradise of peace and splendor.

I shall rise on the wings of joy and rapture to the nest of my hopes and dreams.

I shall come to the mountain top, and rejoice and sing and dance to the songs of heaven.

Toil I shall not see. Troubles I shall not know.<sup>10</sup>

*A Messenger of Joy*

## **Part IV**

### **Response to Objections Raised Against God**

## 9

### **When “Bad” Things Happen to Good People**

The preceding is the title of a best-seller by Dr. Harold Kushner. By the number of copies of the book that were sold, we can see the overwhelming interest people have in this topic. Dr. Kushner’s answer is simply this: God is just but impotent. He does not have the power to help the suffering of innocent people! As a defense attorney for God, I accept the affirmation of justice, but totally deny the charge of impotence.

Let us get to the heart of the issue. Many people see a majestic mind at work in the universe but a clear absence of love on our planet. They then blame God for the lack of love—for allowing human beings to perform evil acts. They say, “If God is All-Perfect, All-Powerful, and All-Merciful, why then does He stay silent while the innocent suffer?” Examples of questions people raise are these:

- Why did I lose my child?
- Why did my husband leave me?
- Why did I get involved in an accident?
- Why did I lose my job?
- Why did my son become addicted to drugs?
- Why am I unhappy?
- Why do poverty, disease, crime, deception, and war exist?

Since more people lose their faith because of prevailing suffering in the world rather than for a lack of scientific evidence for the existence of God, let us examine the former reason in some detail. Whenever you find yourself wondering about the widespread suffering in the world, first review the defense presented in this chapter, and then write your solution on how you would make a better world without suffering. If you succeed, you qualify for a \$10,000 reward. But before reaching a verdict, consider the following issues:

- God has a long-range plan for human beings. His vision and wisdom extend far beyond ours. For instance, we are mainly motivated by immediate gains and pleasures, but God wants to raise us aloft so that we can look beyond our personal concerns. He wants us to widen our horizons, to expand our vision, just as we would encourage a child to labor and learn, and to wait for the joy of a better tomorrow.

God's wisdom and justice must be judged with patience. This Employer does not pay by the hour. He waits for retirement! He assures us that those who patiently suffer here will be abundantly repaid in the hereafter. If we do not have faith in God's promises, then that is *our* problem, not *His*. *We* deserve the blame. Why do we find it easier to trust a friend's promises than God's? Jesus declared: “

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

Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?  
Christ (John 11:40)

As ye have faith so shall your powers and blessings be.<sup>1</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Our Creator assures us that He takes everything into account. ***Even a warm greeting to a stranger will not go unrewarded.***

The rewards given us in the hereafter are infinitely superior to those given here. For this life passes away, the next one does not. The blessings of heaven are eternal, those of the earth are ephemeral. A few years of suffering on the earth, and then reaping the abundant bounties of our patience in heaven forever, is by far the greatest bargain in all the universe. Nothing can ever approach it. Then why complain? Why attribute injustice to God? Is not the reason for our complaints a lack of faith on our part rather than a lack of justice on God's part?

- What would the world be like without suffering? Quite monotonous and unexciting! People would still be complaining—of boredom, despite a life of ease. How many spoiled people do we see who have everything money can buy, and who are still miserable? Happiness comes not from absence of stress and distress but from conquering them.
- It is a well-established fact that a sense of appreciation grows from observing or experiencing contrasts. Without darkness, light never glows. Fragrance comes alive because of its contrast with a foul odor. Love shines more brightly in the dark depths of selfishness; humility radiates more warmly in the gloomy clouds of vanity; achievement, enthusiasm, and success manifest their splendor with greater intensity in the lingering mist of failure, idleness, and apathy. By removing adversity, we take away life's infinite diversity, richness, adventure, and fulfillment. What would the Olympics be like if every athlete was a winner?

A great poet who lived many centuries ago tells this story:

A king was on a ship with one of his best servants. The servant, who had never before taken a voyage—in fact, as a child of the mountains had never even seen the coast—sat in the empty belly of the ship and screamed, cried, trembled, and wailed. All were kind to him and tried to calm his fears, but their kindness reached only his ear, not his fearful heart. The ruler could hardly bear to hear the servant's cries any more, and the voyage through blue waters under blue sky was no longer a pleasure for him. Then the wise man, the physician, approached him and said, “Your Highness, with your permission, I can calm him down.” Without a moment's hesitation, the king gave his permission. The wise man ordered the seamen to throw the servant overboard; the seamen did this to the coward only too gladly. The servant thrashed about in the water, gasped for air,

clutched the side of the ship, and begged that they take him onboard again. So they pulled him up by his hair. From then on he sat very quietly in a corner. No one heard another word of fear come from his mouth. The king was amazed and asked the wise man, “What wisdom is contained in this action?”

The wise man answered, “He’s never tasted the salt of the sea. And he didn’t know how great the danger was in the water. So he couldn’t know how wonderful it is to have the sturdy planks of the ship under him. Only he who has faced danger can know the value of peace and composure.”<sup>2</sup>

- Adversity helps us to grow, mature, and blossom. What is a spoiled child? One who is overprotected, who is not allowed to strive and to experience loss and failure; one who has never known the joy of adventure, the exhilaration of victory, the ecstasy of conquering the crown of a mountain.

A soul must first experience a sense of emptiness to strive for fullness, and a sense of smallness to seek greatness. The road to greatness is paved with service and servitude. To demonstrate this, Jesus washed the feet of His servants. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said that when a bird finds itself low it begins to ascend, and when it finds itself high it begins to descend.

- A life of ease eliminates initiative and stifles imagination. All inventions are answers to obstacles.
- ***The main reason for widespread suffering has always been people’s refusal to accept God’s guidance.*** Our Creator *allows* suffering; we choose and control its *spread* and *intensity*. He gives us both the gift of freedom and the gift of guidance. He asks us to wage love and peace, not war. What would happen if people followed only one of God’s rules, the golden rule (treat others the way you would like to be treated)? Is that too much to ask? Is that beyond our reach? If we disobey, who is to blame?

Most of us fail to fully trust God. We always withhold part of our soul for ourselves—for our selfish desires. We act like a man who sent \$100 to the Internal Revenue Service for the taxes he owed. At the end of his letter he added, “If I can’t sleep, I will send you the rest.”

A plant in need of light always turns to the light. Human beings are the only creatures in all the world who can choose darkness over light, evil over good. The irony is this: people want freedom, but when they face the consequences of making bad choices, they blame God!

- Let us consider another alternative. What would happen if God rescued the ***good*** people? What would happen if He interfered in His own laws, which are perfect? He would become a capricious Creator. If a child fell from a balcony, He would have to protect him. If a bad person fell, He would have to decide how bad he is, and on that basis control the speed of the fall! If a storm came, He would have to decide which houses should be hit hard, which houses should receive minor damage, and which houses should be spared, depending on the kind of people living in each house. If a plane crashed, He would have to decide where it should fall, who should die, who should be injured and with what degree of severity, and who should be spared. If a bad person ate junk food, He should let him get sick. If a good person ate junk food, He

should protect him. The fallacy of such a system is too evident to require further analysis. When people raise objections against God, they simplify their questions, they do not think of the consequences.

Instead of interfering in His own laws, ***God asks us to be patient and to trust Him that the rewards of patience are boundless, that His justice is perfect far beyond our limited imagination.***

- If God became directly involved in our lives to protect us from bad decisions, then we would become totally dependent on Him. We would sit and let Him make all the decisions for us. We could no longer be independent human beings. The gift of freedom would be lost.

In creating human beings, among the infinite possibilities that the Creator faced, He chose the one that would allow the noblest, the richest, the most exciting, and the least monotonous life on our planet and beyond. The two words that describe all these features are: absolute perfection. Is it conceivable that God, the source of all knowledge and wisdom, would choose any alternative but the best—anything but absolute perfection? The hallmark of the perfection of creation is diversity and uniqueness. The principle of diversity is so pervasive that there has never been nor will ever be two individuals exactly alike. This uniqueness places a halo of mystery around every human being. This mystery makes life full of drama, richness and excitement.

Jesus said that within us lies the kingdom of heaven. We are created as vast, perfect, and as rich as heaven. This passage from Bahá'u'lláh shows the infinite richness of human beings:

How resplendent the luminaries of knowledge that shine in an atom, and how vast the oceans of wisdom that surge within a drop! To a supreme degree is this true of man, who, among all created things, hath been invested with the robe of such gifts, and hath been singled out for the glory of such distinction. For in him are potentially revealed all the attributes and names of God to a degree that no other created being hath excelled or surpassed. All these names and attributes are applicable to him. Even as He hath said: “Man is My mystery, and I am his mystery.”<sup>3</sup>

The complexity and mystery of human nature stands far beyond imagination. Human beings are as mysterious and unfathomable as God Himself. According to Islamic Scriptures, “He hath known God who hath known himself.”<sup>4</sup> If we ever decipher the mystery of man, we have deciphered the mystery of God.

Our Creator could not give us freedom and at the same time eliminate pain and suffering. This is elementary logic. Can a line be both a circle and a square at the same time? Can something be both black and white? Can we eat a cake and have it too? The same principle is involved when people ask: can God make a stone that He cannot lift? Answer: if God is All-Powerful, then He can lift ***anything*** even as big as the infinite universe. Can a stone be bigger than infinity? Do you see the fallacy in the question? Asking that question is exactly like asking: can a person be perfect but imperfect at the same time? If God is all-powerful, then He can do ***anything***. To ask if there is something He cannot do is simply a contradiction in logic.

Although logic tells us that it is impossible to have freedom without suffering, we continue to complain and blame God. Why? Suffering is an emotional and personal issue, just like relationships. Most people fail to apply reason to personal-emotional issues. We can see examples of this all around us. We can prove to a person by reason alone why he should not smoke, eat too much chocolate, beat his wife, marry his unfit girlfriend, or be prejudiced toward his neighbor. But our reasoning will be as effective as telling a little child he cannot eat his favorite candy because it will cause cavities in his teeth. Our words will bounce back as soon as they hit his eardrums.

Since the question of suffering is primarily an emotional issue, let me now offer an emotional response in the form of a personal story.

When we are in pain, does God suffer for us and with us, or does He remain uninvolved? First let me answer the question and then tell the story. If God is love, can He lack empathy and sympathy? Can anyone love without sensing another's grief? Let me illustrate my point by a dream I had. My cup of suffering has been full most of the days of my life. I have endured just about every kind of mental and physical anguish. I do not know how I could have survived life's fast currents without building a spiritual anchor. How did I build an anchor? It seems over the course of my life I advanced through four stages. The process was painfully slow and the price exceptionally high. Here are the stages I went through:

- The stage of "why" characterized by depression and impatience. I wondered what I had done to deserve the pain and prayed to God to remove it. But praying did not seem to help. My pain would not go away.
- The stage of submission, characterized by a "wait-and-see" attitude. This lessened the pain.
- The stage of understanding. I began to recognize that there must have been reasons for my suffering.
- The stage of acceptance and gratitude. Usually that came about years later, after I had seen the fruits of my patience.

Looking back at the big picture, I see each of my sufferings as a growth hormone, painfully injected. The pain went away, but not the gain. It was well worth it.

While in the first stage, I prayed to God to remove the pain without having any idea that the pain was simply the wrapping of a gift. The wrapping was used to test the depth of my trust in the Gift-giver. If God had done as I asked, I would have lost a precious gift for simply rejecting the wrapping. Should I not then thank the Gift-giver for disregarding my urgent pleas?

Now let me cite a dream as an evidence of God's pain for human suffering. The dream may help those who wonder about God's love and compassion. One night I suddenly found myself in the presence of a divine Being. Instantly I recognized this Being as the "Glory of God." I felt so close to Him! He spoke with me and a few others as an intimate friend. After a while I asked Him if He wanted to take a walk, and he said yes. We walked for quite awhile, perhaps for as long as 20 to 30 minutes. We walked through many different terrains: streets, deep slopes, high hills, shattered buildings, meadows, and

mountains. During this journey He spoke continuously. It was wonderful, like being in heaven. I felt so intimate with Him that at one point I found myself slightly ahead of Him. Instantly I recognized my fault and exclaimed, “I should not be walking ahead of my Lord!”\* He spoke in a language that I had never heard before, yet I understood everything He said. During our long walk, He continued to talk without pause until I saw Him suddenly place His hand on His chest and say something like: “My heart! The pain in my heart!” Then He sat down on the ground. Expressions of pain and anguish appeared on His face. At this point, I was thinking of asking Him a question, but I did not. I woke up knowing the reason for His grief: **His** pain came from **my** pain. When I woke up, I could not recall even a single word He had uttered.†

This dream did not eliminate the source of my anguish, but it comforted me. What a wonderful feeling to know that Someone knows and cares. This dream indicates that:

- God **does** care and suffers for us.
- He gives us strength to cope with our suffering.
- But as a rule He does not remove the pain.

Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers, pray for powers equal to your tasks.

If we pray with all our heart and soul, God may (depending on our persistence, sincerity, reasons, and the consequences) give us certain clues to see the light. The most obvious way He gives us clues is through dreams. Sometimes the way He sends us ideas is like a radio signal. If our soul is pure and sensitive, it can receive and decode the signal.

This vision from *I Am With You Always* also indicates that God is a partner in our suffering:

I was going through a stressful times and had an excruciating headache. So bad, in fact, that I had wrapped my head in my dark cashmere sweater to try to keep out the light which seemed to hurt my head. My face was uncovered. I had been writhing on the bed, apparently, because I was lying crosswise on the bed, with my head toward the east. The pain was so bad that I felt tears in my eyes. Then I realized that someone was standing at my head, and when I opened my eyes I saw a “shining stranger” bathed in light. He was crying and the tears that fell from his eyes were dropping on my eyes, causing tears that I had thought were my own. In a type of out-of-body experience, I felt myself leave my body and turn to face him. We embraced and together began turning and ascending in a type of dance of mystical union.<sup>5</sup>

As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you...

Isaiah 66:13

The Lord is close to the brokenhearted...

Psalms 34:18

The following story, related by Dr. Melvin Morse, supports the same principle:

One of my patients was involved in a severe car accident that occurred when his mother was driving. He received extensive injuries and was scarred and crippled for

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\* And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, to love mercy, and to walk **humbly with your God**.

† A few details of this dream have been omitted.

life. Even though the mother was not at fault, she told me, “I have tried and convicted myself long ago.”

She had been comforted, however, by a vivid vision she had several weeks before the accident. She had a lucid dream, unlike any she had ever had before. She suddenly awoke and realized that a presence was in her room. This presence was hard for her to describe, but seemed to be either an angel or perhaps her deceased mother. Although she could not give many details, she had a terrible knowledge that her son would be in an accident. At the end of the dream, she heard, in her mind, her son saying “Now I know how turtles feel.” The experience was so real that she immediately went to check on her son. Later, when her son was in the hospital, a nurse came to the mother and said that he might have to be in a body cast, and the nurse said, “You know, he will look like a Ninja Turtle.”...

The real meaning of this dream is that this mother needed support at a terrible time in her life... She feels she could not have gone on without the understanding she received from this dream.<sup>6</sup>

Let me now cite two more dreams to show that not only God, but other spiritual beings, also care for our suffering. Someone—a wonderful person, as perfect as a human being can be—had unknowingly participated in an event that caused great pain to me. A few years later this person passed away and shortly thereafter appeared in my dream. As soon as he saw me, he embraced me and began to cry. Instantly I knew why. Without any exchange of words, I recognized his thoughts and then I too began to cry. For a short while we both cried as if with one heart, each knowing what the other thought. I knew then, and after waking, that his sadness came from the role he had played in the unfolding drama of my destiny. I can see no other reason for his coming into my dream. For in the earthly realm perhaps the only thing he knew about me was my name. Never again have I seen him in any of my dreams. Again, this person did not remove the source of my pain; he simply comforted me by showing his love for me.

Many years later, a similar event repeated itself. Once again I was wronged by yet another wonderful person who meant well, but his action was unfair and unjustified. Instead of complaining or protesting, I responded with patience and resignation. Sometime later I saw him in a dream and asked him to explain himself. He appeared confident and self-assured. In response, he simply gave me the name of a well-known person and told me to ask him. A few years passed, and once again he came to me in a dream. This time he appeared extremely humble, sad, and regretful, just the opposite of the way he looked the first time. He simply asked me to give him some food. In the morning, I wrote my dream. Within a few days I read in the newspaper that he had passed away on the same day I had dreamed of him. Did he come to ask for forgiveness? If he did, I had already forgiven him.

Our Creator has told us, “I will rejoice in thy salvation” (Psalms 9:14). If He rejoices in our salvation, how does He feel when we deny Him or do wrong? “If I were God, this world of sin and suffering would break my heart,” declared Goethe, the German poet. It seems even being God isn’t a bed of roses. Sometimes I ask myself: “If God knows everything and there is nothing for Him to learn, doesn’t He get bored?” Then I say,

“Human beings are so unpredictable, He can’t believe some of the things they do! His only amusement is to watch them do the unpredictable!”

One of the attributes of God is “long-suffering.” God’s patience is all-enduring. However, in the end, the wronged ones will be repaid for their suffering, the wrongdoers will receive their due punishment, and justice will be done. What alienates us from God is our lack of faith that the rewards of patience are definite and boundless. If we knew the outcome of trusting God, if we could see His justice for the wrongdoers and His favors for the wronged ones, then we would all accept our destiny, however painful, with enthusiasm and gratitude.

This acceptance, however, in no way implies passivity or submission to cruelty. The attitude of contentment, acceptance, and gratitude in the face of adversity should always be sustained by persistent, reasonable, and just action. God does not do for us what *we* are capable of doing. If there was a better way of creating the universe, God would have known. We must be certain that God’s design is perfect, and that no one can improve upon perfection.

The Lord God is subtle, but malicious he is not.

Albert Einstein

A main source of our suffering is our *attitude* towards suffering. Two youths are selected for a track team. One finishes second, the other last. The one who finishes last celebrates because he made the team; the one who finishes second commits suicide, because he did not finish first.

The noted psychotherapist Dr. Scott Peck begins his book *The Road Less Traveled* by emphasizing this point:

Life is difficult. This is a great truth...Once we truly know that life is difficult—once we truly understand and accept it—then life is no longer difficult...

Most do not fully see this truth...Instead they moan...about the enormity of their problems...as if life...should be easy. They voice their belief...that their difficulties represent a unique kind of affliction that should not be and that has somehow been especially visited upon them...and not upon others...

What makes life difficult is that the process of confronting and solving problems is a painful one...Yet it is in this whole process of meeting and solving problems that life has its meaning...Problems call forth our courage and our wisdom; indeed, they create our courage and our wisdom...It is through the pain of confronting and resolving problems that we learn...<sup>7</sup>

The following vision from *I Am With You Always* teaches that in every negative experience—even as painful as dying on a cross—there lies something positive:

I had a visitation from Jesus on March 6, 1987. It was not a dream. I actually saw him standing alongside the bed. He was wearing a white robe and a red sash draped over his shoulder. He had a beard, a mustache, and long, light brown hair.

Anyway, while Jesus was by my left side, I was lying on my back with my head propped up and my eyes wide open. We looked at each other, and as I gazed into his clear blue eyes, he said: “Everything that happened to you, yes, was negative. But, look at it this way.”

Jesus extended his left arm out to the side to indicate that I should look in that direction. I turned my head, looked toward his hand, and saw a movie in the air. In the movie, I saw crowds of people along both sides of a road. The crowd in the movie and I (in bed) observed a gentleman walking down the road, dressed in shabby red and white garments. He looked physically weak and exhausted, because he was carrying a wooden cross upon his shoulder and back. Then it dawned on me that I was watching Jesus' own personal story of the very day he changed the world for all mankind.

Right at that moment of understanding, the Jesus alongside my bed asked, "You see what happened to me?" he continued, "it was negative," and his hand reached into the movie. Then, at the very moment he took the cross off his own back from the movie, he said, "But actually, it was positive."

Jesus removed the tiny cross from the movie, turned around, and faced me. However, the cross in Jesus' hand had transformed into a black addition sign, the size of a baseball.

For a few moments, Jesus held the black cross in front of me, and then said, "This cross is positive."

I looked intently at the black positive sign as he continued. "What happened to you was actually positive."

While I looked at Jesus beside me, I thought about the meaning behind both Jesus' story in the movie and the black cross he held in his hand. My thoughts quickly reviewed all that I had gone through and I received a complete understanding of why the adverse events had happened to me. Even though I had physically and emotionally suffered, these hardships were actually a spiritual gain. These losses were for my soul's growth here on earth. I thought how fortunate I was to experience these negative situations in this lifetime. I was so thankful that Jesus came to me and grateful for his healing, by answering my questions.<sup>8</sup>

Some of us are chronic complainers. We always want more and more. Have you heard the story of the boy who prayed fervently to God to give him \$200? He supported his pleas and prayers with a letter addressed to God. The letter was somehow forwarded to Washington. A senator saw it and thought he could make the boy happy by sending him \$10. When the boy saw that what he received was so much less than what he had asked for, he sent an angry letter to God asking why He had sent the \$200 to Washington to be so heavily taxed!

Two salesmen were sent to Africa to sell shoes. As soon as they arrived at their destination, one of them sent this telegraph to his company: "No use staying here. Nobody here *wears* shoes. I will leave tomorrow." A week later the other salesman sent this telegraph: "I have sold all the shoes I carried. Please rush 10,000 pairs. Nobody here *has* shoes."

## *Words of Wisdom*

Some people grumble because roses have thorns. I am thankful that thorns have roses.

I cannot prevent the birds of sorrow from passing over my head, but I can keep them from building a nest in my hair.

The soul would have no rainbow had the eyes no tears.

Take my word for it, the saddest thing under the sky is a soul incapable of sadness.

Lord, send me anywhere, only go with me. Lay any burden on me, only sustain me. Sever any tie but the tie that binds me to Thyself.

The following piece of poetry compares God's plan and purpose with human preferences. It was found on the body of a Confederate soldier during the U.S. Civil War:

I asked for health that I might do great things.

I was given grace that I might do better things.

I asked for riches that I might be happy.

I was given wisdom to cherish what I had.

I asked for power that I might have the praise of people.

I was given weakness that I might feel the need for God.

I asked for all things that I might enjoy life.

I was given life that I might enjoy all things.

I received nothing that I asked for.

But more than I hoped for.

# 10

## Would You Feed the Master or Buy His Shoes?

Later in the chapter you will know what this question means. This chapter presents one more piece of the puzzle about suffering.

We all know that a cause always leads to an effect and an effect always follows a cause. We know the consequences or effects of jumping from a high balcony onto a concrete pavement. The jumping presents a clear case of cause and effect. Few people would say, "I was standing on the balcony and suddenly the ground came up and hit me." However, some people are so irrational they may even make such a claim. I once read about a man who borrowed a pot from his neighbor. When he returned it broken, his neighbor protested. In response he gave two reasons to defend himself. "In the first place," he said, "I didn't borrow it; in the second place, when you gave it to me it was already broken!"

Now consider a cause-and-effect relationship that is a little more complex:

- Why did I feel so heavy after dinner?
- You ate too much or too fast for your digestion. Perhaps you ate the wrong food.



- Why did I gain so much weight?
- You ate too much, or ate a lot of junk food. Perhaps you did not exercise.

Here the person can argue his case, because the cause-and-effect relationship is not as clear as jumping. He may say, "No, I can gain weight just by breathing. That is the way God made me." Then we may respond, "Have you seen overweight people among primitive tribes? They breathe a lot more and much deeper because they have no television or reclining chairs and no car to carry them through the hills and the valleys." If he is still not satisfied, we may add, "Did you know that Americans get 65 percent of their calories from fat and sugar? God made many varieties of good food for us to enjoy. Is it His fault if we consume so much empty calories"?

In one study, researchers asked people how much junk food they ate. Then they analyzed their garbage. What do you think they discovered? People grossly underestimated the amount of junk food and grossly overestimated the amount of good food they ate.

Now consider a question with a more complex cause-and-effect relationship. Let us assume someone says, "I have done everything you can imagine for my son, yet he turned out to be terrible." Here the question is more complex; we need to deal with many

possible causes. Therefore it is harder to convince the person that he or she may have failed as a parent. Here are a few questions we may raise:

- Did you set a good example for him?
- Did you lie while telling him to be honest?
- Were you fair-minded?
- Did you go out of your way to help the poor and the disadvantaged?
- Did you love your neighbor as you love yourself?
- Did you pray every day to express your gratitude to God?
- Did you also demonstrate to your child the pleasure of praying?
- As you may know, raising a child is an awesome task. When you went to school, you devoted countless hours to studying or to learning to play the piano, or baseball and basketball. Did you spend as much time learning about raising children? (Research indicates that American parents speak only a few minutes a day with their children. Compare that with the time that television speaks to them.)
- How much time did you spend reading to your child from the many wonderful books published every year?
- Did you participate in social movements to create a better society for your child?
- Are you spiritual?
- Did you make sacrifices for the good of the world?
- Are you humble in admitting your weaknesses, or are you perfect like everyone else?
- Do you strive every day for self-improvement?
- Are you open-minded and always searching for the truth?

We can go on and on. The point is this: as a rule you cannot get jewels out of junk. Exceptions are definitely possible, but rare.

We can see from the preceding questions that, when it comes to child rearing, the cause-and-effect relationship is quite complex. Even one parental weakness can lead to far-reaching consequences that are difficult to predict. Since the cause and effect is very complex, parents can claim to have done everything “right” and yet end up with everything going wrong.

Remember that human beings are not well-known for having good eyesight when it comes to seeing their own faults. They are also not well-known for accepting blame. As we noted, people judge intimate issues far more by emotion than by reason. Time and again I have talked with parents who assume that they are doing everything right without having any insight into their own souls, without knowing the impact that their lives have on their children. Blaming God is simply a case of shifting responsibility for one’s faults and failures.

Let us now consider a more difficult question: untimely or violent death. When we encounter an untimely death, we become so emotionally involved we avoid pondering the principle of cause and effect. The tragedy is too big for us to handle and too complex to

analyze as we do when we burn our hand. In such cases we tend to look *beyond* our world for answers. If we are weak in faith, God appears the easiest and safest target for our blame. We say, “Why did He allow this to happen to me?” We speak as if God’s hands are guiding the steering wheel of every drunk driver, the gun of every assassin, and the mind of every thief. We simply make an assumption and issue a verdict without any desire to hear God’s side, without looking at the big picture, without examining the cause-and-effect relationship.

Once we had a long discussion in my class about human freedom and fate. I offered several explanations on suffering and particularly on untimely death. Near the end of our discussion a student asked, “I had a young friend who died from cancer. Why?” I was puzzled by her question and did not know what to say. After some hesitation, I referred to the law of cause and effect. Her only response to my purely logical explanation was to cry. If I had given her a thousand scientific reasons, she would not have heard them. Her soul was centered entirely on a lost friend. This example demonstrates perfectly the highly emotional nature of suffering and the inadequacy of logical reasoning to pacify bereaved hearts.

Consider the case of starving children, a tragedy that touches every compassionate heart. According to UNICEF:

24,000 children die every day from preventable causes. We believe that number should be zero.

In response to “Why does God allow these children suffer?” please read the following letter, written on behalf of all starving children to all members of human race.



***Dear Resident of the Planet Earth:***

Would you feed the Master or buy His shoes? In a moment you will know what I mean.

I am 4 years old. My name is Jennifer. I am one of thousands of starving children you may have watched on your TV screen. I have seen you taking pity on me. I have heard you say, “Why does God allow this?” I have also noticed your reluctance to look at my starving body. I don’t know why. Perhaps I make you feel guilty. All along you have acted as if you can do nothing except feel sorry for me. Your pity and grief for my suffering are commendable, but they will not add one calorie to my diet. Let me ask you some tough questions. I hope you don’t mind. I do not want to offend you. I am only curious to find some answers.

Let me start with your government, with how it spends your money. Over the years you have watched many military parades. They look so beautiful—the marching of soldiers in perfect unison, the music, the procession of tanks and missiles, the precision flying of skilled pilots, and the crowds watching in awe and admiration—all these make a fantastic display of pomp, power, pageantry, and pride. But I see them differently. I see them as an expensive puppet show for grown-ups. From time to time

your government has helped us, and I am grateful for that. But the help has been just enough to save us from a quick escape from our misery, from a quick departure from the planet Earth.

Did you know that a beautiful, awesome, big bird called the Stealth Bomber costs over \$2.2 billion to build. In case you are not good at math or did not take notice, that number is *two thousand two hundred million*. If, instead of building another big bird like that, your government were to save that money to buy food for me and all the other starving children, we would be very happy and grateful. It would be more than enough to feed us until the drought ends and our fields are green again.

I know you work during the week and are busy on weekends—shopping, watching football, fishing, going to church, or just driving around. Could you spare a few minutes from your busy schedule and write a letter to your congressman and ask for a little more consideration for me. The letter may cost you a few minutes and a few cents, but it may save my life.

Let me ask you another question. When you want to buy new shoes, do you ever say to yourself, “I can live without these extra shoes, but that little one can’t live without extra milk”? I don’t know how you will answer my question. Perhaps you will find the answer in your wardrobe, which looks very crowded. Perhaps the Coke and beer bottles in your home will give you some clues. Perhaps the answer is written on the expensive television you have or you want to buy. The answer may also be found in the savings accounts of the many millions of millionaires and billionaires around the globe.

I have heard that some of you buy \$50-or even \$100-shoes for your children. They are not very pretty and have fancy names like Nike Air™ or Reebok Pump™. One hundred dollars would be enough to feed me for a long time. You often complain about tough times. I don’t know where you find the money for those shoes and video games you buy for your children. I wish you could find a little money for me.

I have heard that some of you spend lots of money on your pets. You take them to veterinarians for check ups, and you buy toys for them. Some of you even arrange expensive funerals for your dogs and cats.

You do not know me. You cannot imagine my pain and suffering. Every day I ask my mother, “Will they bring food today?” She sighs and says, “I don’t know; we just have to wait and see.” I am so weak, I can’t even cry. My mother feels the same way. You should see the agony on her face when I ask her for food. We both look like corpses. There is no glow in our eyes. All day long my mother just sits and stares at me, my brother, and my sister. Sometimes she hugs me and presses my little skeleton to hers. That gives me a little comfort and shows that someone loves me. I have already seen the agonizing deaths of my father and grandfather. My little brother and sister are very sick. I don’t know how many more days or hours we can go on. But I don’t mind dying. For me death is a blessing. In fact, I look forward to dying. I know every child goes to heaven. I have no fear of death, for I have heard what the great Master has said about little children:

He [Jesus] called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: “I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 18:2-3

Don't feel sorry for me. I don't mind dying and going to live with my Master forevermore. But I don't know how you can live, I mean with your conscience forevermore. I don't know how you can do everything for your child but ignore me. As soon as he coughs, you take him to a doctor. As soon as he cries, you feed him. I am so weak, I can't even cough or cry.

Can you adopt me for a few months as your pet? Can you take me as your child and feed me for a few days? My body is far away from you, but my spirit stands near you. I am your neighbor. Can you love me as you love your child just for a season?

Let me finish my letter with a question. I have heard a beautiful passage from your Bible that pertains to me. Let me quote it for you, in case you have forgotten it, and then ask you a question:

***Then he [the Lord] will say to those on his left, “Depart from me, you who are cursed...For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink...” They will respond by asking, “Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty...?” He will reply, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.”***

*Christ (Matt. 25:41-45)*

***And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me.***

*Christ (Matt. 18:5)*

You are told that if you feed “one of the least of these” ***it is as if you have fed your own Master***, the One you adore and worship. I ***am*** “one of the least.” If someone found a shoe that belonged to the Master, and you had the money to buy it, how much would you pay? I am sure millions. Why then would you pay millions for a worn-out shoe, but refuse to buy food for the Master who wore the shoe? Am I less than a worn-out shoe? What more can I say? May God bless you.

A hungry child on the verge of departure from the planet Earth<sup>1</sup>



Let us resume our original discussion about blaming God for all the evils of the world. You may say, surely there must be some suffering beyond human control, like incurable diseases. Here, too, cause and effect is somewhat complex. We must recognize that God has placed many challenges and puzzles before us to solve. But they are well within the range of our powers. For instance, if we had shifted some of our resources (both mental and financial) from military resources to health services, we would have vanquished most of the “incurable” diseases of our time. In fact, if we use the knowledge we ***already*** have, we can eliminate over 90 percent of untimely disease and death from our planet.

It is easy to blame God. He does not appear in court with trial attorneys to answer charges and plead His case. But He has given us the power of reason and the gift of vision to understand and judge the case fairly. Blaming God or complaining serves no purpose. It

only relieves us from *our own* responsibility, it only conceals *our own* failure. The real remedy is to stop blaming God and to start soul searching. The real solution is to stop evading our obligations and to start arising to the challenges that stand before us with supreme courage and resolve.

I think about 51 percent of the misery on our planet results from adopting a cynical attitude about who we are, what we are doing, and where we are going. Forty-eight percent of our suffering comes from disregarding the very simple rules of consideration, justice, and love. Only one percent of our suffering comes from the design of creation. That touch of adversity is like a little rain after a long sunshine. It waters the flowers and makes the forest grow. Many search in vain for contentment and happiness. They look for it in banks and in bars, in work places and in vacation spas, in fatty foods and in romantic affairs. If they would only live by the light of knowing and loving God, they could eliminate most of their miseries. If only they knew that the secret of staying fit, young, and content is seeing themselves as spirit! If only they would recognize that it is merely the house that breaks down, not the host; that only the body ages and dies not the spirit! If they would just understand that only the physical frame goes into the cage, but the bird flies away to its heavenly home, chanting like a nightingale, soaring like an eagle!

O My servants! 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.<sup>2</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

Every pure, every refined and sanctified soul will be endowed with tremendous power, and shall rejoice with exceeding gladness.<sup>3</sup> Bahá'u'lláh



### Then a Soul Spoke from Heaven

O my loved ones on earth! I dwelt on earth for a little while.

I drank from the purest waters, and ate of the sweetest fruits.

I walked through meadows and mountains, and smelled the fragrance of flowers.

I saw the radiance of the sun and the splendor of the stars.

I witnessed the fury of the thunder and the peace of the forest.

I beheld the gloom of the night and the glory of the dawn.

I dined and danced, I laughed and cried.

Then like a hunter in pursuit of prey, death made me its target.

I fell as a bird, but rose again.

Death had no power over my soul.

I am crowned with glory, and robed in rapture and peace.

I am the immortal bird of heaven.  
The hunter cannot find me or follow me again.  
I am a drop, but as vast as the seven seas.  
Yea, I am the pure breath of the heart of heavens.  
I flow and fly as the soft silk of light.  
I ride on the winds and roam with the clouds.  
I bathe in the sun and dance on the moon.  
I rest on the laps of angels and behold the Beauty and Glory of God.  
I am embraced by love and peace, and not strained by pain and grief.  
I am circled with hope and happiness, and not torn by toil and tears.  
O that the earthly ones could witness my wonders.  
O that they could see the rapture in my soul, the heaven in my heart, the praise on my  
lips, and the glow on my face.<sup>4</sup> *A Messenger of Joy*

## **Part V**

### **Knowing the Spiritual Design of Creation**

## II

# The Spiritual Design of Creation

Ascribe greatness to our God...*His work is perfect*, for all His ways are justice.  
Deuteronomy 32:3-4 NKJ

As for God, *his way is perfect*.  
Psalms 18:30 NIV

Thou art the Lord of bounty and grace, invincible in Thy power and *most skillful in Thy designs*. No God is there but Thee, the All-Possessing, the Most Exalted.<sup>1</sup> The Báb

This chapter portrays the spiritual design of creation—an intricate design that can only be recognized and appreciated through careful study and reflection. It places a vast body of knowledge into a small capsule. Reading it is like climbing the Eiffel Tower. Each piece of evidence carries you a step higher.

The purpose and the essence of all knowledge is knowing the “design of creation,” the “blueprint of reality.” That knowledge gives us the closest look into the mind of the Maker of the universe, it gives us a glimpse of the way He thinks, plans, and designs. It offers us the only chance of observing the thoughts of the grand architect of creation as He draws and builds the house of His dreams. No other knowledge can ever be as fascinating and exciting as this.

This knowledge is also the road-map that shows us the plan, the process, and the purpose of human life on this planet and beyond. Basking in this knowledge is as essential to the soul as light is to the eye. Living without it is like walking blindfolded through a closed and complex maze.

Many people wonder about God and the way He manages His creation. They wonder if God could not have done a better job! Their wondering results from their small and limited vision. If they could dispel the shadows of their imagination, if they could see everything as God does, then they would witness unspeakable beauty and perfection in the work of the master Designer.



For a few minutes place yourself in God’s position—but only for a few minutes—and try to see everything from *His* perspective:

- God exists and wishes to express His love.

- He creates conscious intelligent beings in His own image, and He makes the universe to accommodate them.
- He does not wish to be seen by these beings. Indeed if they saw Him they would never know the joy of discovering Him through His Creation; they would be powerless to exercise their intelligence and free will, and would merely cling to Him like little children.
- Instead, He wants them to have the dignity of being mature, independent beings, to have the right of choosing their destiny, the freedom to think for themselves, even the right of rejecting Him—the One who created them. The gift of freedom is so noble and exalted that He allows and accepts even the denial of His own Being by His creation. His goal is neither to be the great Master of fearful slaves nor the grand Bribe-Giver of the universe.
- The Designer is a mystery to His intelligent creatures because he remains so far beyond their vision. He gives them many gifts, except the power of perception needed to understand Him. It is for their own good to be deprived of that power. If they ever gained it, there would be left no other mystery for them to resolve, nothing else to challenge their imagination. The Maker is the master key to all mysteries; if He is fully known, then *everything* is known.
- The Designer does not wish to be seen but wants to be heard. He loves to communicate with His intelligent creatures—to guide them and tell them of His supreme love, their splendid destiny, and the consequences of the choices they make.
- Since He does not wish to lift the veil of concealment, He creates communication links called Messengers, Teachers, or Redeemers who mediate between Him and His people.
- He endows His Messengers, who look physically like others, with special *spiritual* distinctions, so that those who *want* to know them can. The distinctions He gives them include:
  - Flawless character
  - Wisdom far beyond the reach of any other human being
  - Absolute self-sacrifice and surrender to God
  - Power to transform and spiritualize people and create a new civilization
  - Patience beyond measure
  - The gift of enduring pain
  - Unconditional love for the Creator and His creatures
  - Innate knowledge of truth
  - The ability to look into the hearts and souls of people
  - The capacity to perform wonders
  - Lack of any desire for worldly possessions and honors

- Knowledge of the past, present, and future
- A unique way of speaking—poetic, metaphorical, direct, beautiful, novel, authoritative, inspirational, spontaneous, and spiritual.
- The Maker also gives certain clues (prophecies) about the coming of each of His Messengers. But they are expressed in coded language, which become decoded mostly by the events of the Messengers’ lives. The majority of people—who always have a bent for the literal and material—keep their hearts and minds closed. They take the prophecies literally and therefore deny and cause much suffering to the One who comes to save them from “the fire” of separation from God, and offer them the gift of a new life. For instance, the Jews expected an *earthly* kingdom; Jesus disappointed them by offering them a *spiritual* kingdom.
- The Maker gives His Messengers or Mediators power over the laws of nature, but He asks them to use it sparingly. Otherwise, the fear of their visible and transcendent power overwhelms people, undermines their freedom, turns them into helpless and unwilling slaves who revere God and praise His power, not out of love and faith, but out of fear and force. This is not the way He wishes to be remembered and bonded with His loved ones.

Most people prefer the visible over the invisible, gold and glamour over spiritual glory. They remember their Messenger more for changing dirt into a diamond than for transforming hate-driven warriors into peaceful lovers of humankind; for giving life to a diseased body than to a dying soul. They glorify Him more for defying the laws of nature than for condemning the cruel traditions and unjust laws of the land. This attitude of “you must do something spectacular before I can trust you” is most demeaning and degrading to the Mission and high station of the Messengers. It is an attitude of *conditional* respect and trust. Imagine saying to a friend, “I cannot trust you and accept you unless you first do me some favors or perform a fantastic feat.” People consider this an insult, yet they do not hesitate to apply it to their immortal Friend. Miracles have no relevance to the Messengers’ Mission. Their goal is to bring love and life to the world, not to display magic.

- The great Designer gives identical distinctions to *all* His Messengers. He plants them around Himself *like petals of a beautiful rose*. Some people do not like pure and simple petals. They paint them and bend them the way they like to make them look different. Then they call their own bent or painted petal the only one made in heaven, the only line that connects them to God.

If people look closely at other petals, they will find them all alike. They will find them pure, fragrant, and equally beautiful—growing around one stem and rooted in the same garden. Unfortunately, most people do not take the time to look, to behold the beauty of the wondrous *rose of oneness*.

- Whenever and wherever intelligent beings need help, the Designer selects and sends a new Messenger to speak for Him. He asks the Messenger to give the people new assurances of His love and to share with them the new knowledge that they need to live in peace and prosperity, and to enjoy abundant happiness.

- He sends a new Messenger when people are in the depths of darkness; when they have forgotten the design of Creation and the purpose for which they were made; when they have lost their faith in their Creator and have become worldly, confused, and stressed; when they are blinded by the dark and drifting clouds of apathy and illusion.
- Unfortunately, those very clouds prevent people from seeing and recognizing the new light, the spiritual distinctions of the new Messenger. Often it takes them centuries to open their hearts and to embrace His message. Many have forgotten that it took three centuries before Jesus became “the light of the world.” Up to the end of the third century, Christians were a small minority and were treated as a cult. Even then, it took a powerful king (Constantine) to embrace the new faith and to spread it. If not for the influence of a skillful monarch, no one knows how many more generations would have passed before people would open their hearts to the distinguished and divine Messenger from Nazareth. The treatment given to Jesus was not the exception but the rule. No divine Teacher has ever been welcomed by the people. Most believers fear leaving their fishbowl, more than they fear the loss of their religious possessions—their spiritual heritage. Just like a scared little child, they cling to the hem of the old and outworn paradigm.

Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?

Christ (Matt. 8:26)

- The Creator loves His intelligent beings dearly—they are the mirrors of His own image, His marvelous masterpiece. He does not want them ever to be destroyed. So He places the seal of eternity on their souls and makes many marvelous “mansions” for them in heaven.
- He keeps these heavenly mansions hidden, for the same reason that He hides Himself: to preserve people’s freedom and independence—to save them from slavery and Himself from bribery. If people “saw” the awesome majesty of the glories beyond, they would become so overwhelmed and attracted to those wonders that they would lose the joy of living their earthly lives.

The Designer also wants to keep the flame of hope and adventure alive. He does not want His intelligent creatures to get bored, to ever lose the gift of living, loving, and learning. Life without mystery offers little excitement. Would a wise parent show or give all the enchanting toys to a little child at once?

- The Designer makes the earthly world beautiful with countless attractions. Everything is a mirror of His own Self, and a sign of His own beauty and perfection. “The heavens declare the glory of God.” When intelligent beings see the beauty of the world, they fall in love, slip, and lose their hearts and minds. They cling to the glitter of gold like a hungry baby to the warm breast of its mother. The wonders of the world, and the aura of treasures and pleasures, blind their eyes and numb their souls. The enchantment of glittering gifts, and the sound of soothing melodies, dull their vision. They become so engrossed in the earthly that they lose sight of the heavenly. They walk through life like sleepwalkers. Some of them hit their heads against many walls, fall into many traps, and endure many blows, yet they do not wake up from their engaging illusions. They refrain from exchanging their sweet dreams for the glory of the dawn.

- To wean intelligent beings away from this enchantment, the Designer tells them of the greater wonders in heaven. He tells them of pleasures beyond their hopes, of glories beyond their dreams. But most of them do not take notice. They prefer the tiny trickles of earthly rain to the celestial streams of milk and honey.
- The Maker knows that His creature's attachment to the world is strong. Some of them would do *anything* to get what they want. So He threatens the sinful and selfish with ever-enduring pain. He uses strong metaphors like "lakes of fire" and "burning brimstone." He does not wish to do this, but that is the only language they seem to understand. Some people with poor imagination take the metaphors literally and spread their many misconceptions about the caring Creator. Others mistake the fear of God—which means respect for His justice and awesome power—for a phobia.

Don't people love the sun and live by its light, yet fear its awesome powers—knowing that its blazing beams can destroy their sight? Thus they should love God, live by His Light, and fear disregarding His spiritual laws.

- The Designer makes all people spiritually equal at birth. They enter the world in a state of absolute purity and perfection. He gives each of them a pen to inscribe his or her destiny, during their earthly season. Each of them is given a chance to choose to live either in the light of knowledge or in the clouds of illusions; in the prison of conformity, fear, and tradition, or in the paradise of truth, detachment, courage, and adventure; to choose either ephemeral glitters on earth or eternal glories in heaven.
- Each soul is allowed to grow and evolve in its own way. The result is a beautiful garden of human beings with an infinite variety of temperament, taste, belief, and character.

Some of them become as beautiful as roses, as fragrant as jasmine, and as pure as the lilies of the valleys. Others are less fragrant, some have no fragrance, a few have a strange fragrance, and some of them do not look like flowers at all. They grow to become thorns and thistles whose main purpose and joy is to prick tender hands. No one likes to come in touch with them, but their presence is essential. They keep people alert and help everyone to remember how wonderful it is to be a flower.

- Since the Maker is not only the God of Loving-kindness but of Justice as well, He keeps in mind that some people have a better chance than others to grow into perfect flowers. He reminds everyone that, "From those who have more, more shall be expected." The reverse also holds true. Those who have been wronged will be repaid many times more for their pain and patience. Those who have hurt others will also face the bitter fruits of their works.

The Designer asks the intelligent beings to be patient and to trust His promises that justice *will* at last prevail, that every word or deed takes on an eternal life and remains to bring honor or shame to the speaker or doer. When wise people sense an injustice, they submit the rein of decision to a judge or jury. Can they not give that rein also to the great Judge of the universe?

- The grand Designer asks His conscious beings to strive for *relative* perfection—relative to their potential. He does not expect them to attain *absolute* perfection. He loves them to at least try to "play *His* melodies and sing *His* songs," He loves them.

He knows they are all like the little girl who was learning to sing. She said, “O my God, I am just practicing. Please don’t listen to me yet. I still squeak a lot.” He listens with love even when His creatures squeak. Dr. Robert Schuler, who has inspired millions with his message of “possibility thinking,” was once involved in a car accident. The driver of the other car came out yelling and cursing. To pacify him, Dr. Schuler said, “God loves you and I am trying!” As long as we are sincerely trying, we remain open to God’s blessings.

The grand Architect has bigger plans for His often-confused creatures than their little minds can conceive. He gives them some bitter-tasting pills and asks them to swallow without complaining. But complaining and moaning they do—in abundance. They think if they were God they would do a better job. They speak like the little girl who once told God, “You would do me a big favor if you put all the vitamins in ice cream and candies instead of liver, spinach, and cod liver oil!” “Everything that is enjoyable,” the pleasure-loving creatures complain, “is either illegal, unethical, or fattening!”

Some of God’s intelligent creatures love illusions more than reality. They find a myriad of reasons to justify their desires, and they love to argue with anyone who will listen. Many years ago, while I was writing this piece, my 9-year-old son was pulling and releasing a big rubber band in my crowded study. I told him, “Don’t do it in here, it will get lost.” He continued, and one minute later it was lost. When I reminded him of my prediction, he responded, “It did *not* get lost. I just can’t find it!”

- No plant needs to stay in the same garden forever. The wise Gardener has made many beautiful meadows, mountains, and valleys. He constantly transfers the crop of the earth to the gardens of heaven.
- People fear the transfer. They do not want to leave their bodies and possessions behind. But He assures them of greater possessions and a new superior and celestial body in heaven.
- Eventually, all intelligent beings are transferred. They suddenly find themselves in a new world. They learn that they no longer need their bodies to survive. They find that God’s promises have been true. They meet all their loved ones and friends who have preceded them. This is the home of the spirit, which was invisible to the earthly. The earth was not its permanent home. It was only a school and a testing ground on a long journey. Now the soul has gone through the learning and the tests and has arrived in its eternal home. It has entered the physical dimension, and then passed on to the spiritual spheres of the universe. Like a butterfly that flies away from a cocoon, it has left its prison cell behind.
- People can now continue to learn and grow from the special point of perfection they attained while they dwelt in the earthly realm. The Designer wanted a vast variety of plants in His garden. Sameness is a sign of imperfection; it does not excite the spirit. Further, it would be unfair if *the Designer* decided *who* should be a flower, *who* should be a thorn, *who* should have more fragrance and *who* should have less. He gave that choice to each person to make for him- or herself.

- When people reach the next world, the Designer does not need to hide Himself anymore. Why? Because people have already had their chance to choose the course of their destiny, to use their earthly life to produce either an abundant or a scanty crop. They have had time to attain a stage of spiritual maturity according to their capacity and desire. In His grand theater, the Designer needs a multitude of diverse actors and actresses to perform in His magnificent and majestic drama.

These are the main pieces of an amazing puzzle. Many people complain about how bad things are because they look only at a few pieces of the grand puzzle. They see gravel, not the awesome grandeur of galaxies; they look at a few pebbles, not the grand majesty of the mountain:

Stand close to a mountain and you will see only a massive wall of earth and stone. Stand at a distance and you will see towering heights. Often we find fault with what we see, when the fault really lies in where we stand.



Creation is a marvel of beauty and wonder, but only through God's eyes. The most magnificent painting on a canvas, viewed from behind, appears as an obscure and random blend of lines and colors. We cannot see its beauty and perfection unless we look at the front of the canvas. Discovering the perfect pattern and hidden beauty and order in the universe, and in our lives and destiny, is our prime mission. In this chapter we have tried to unravel and unveil that marvel, in order to catch a glimpse of the awesome order and wonder on the front of the canvas.

You have now seen the pattern—the main features of the design of reality. You have looked with the Designer's eyes. Suppose you were the puzzle-maker. Which pieces would you take away? What would you add? How would you make the puzzle more exciting and more perfect? Test your powers of imagination. If you cannot improve the design, then be pleased with the plan of your destiny. Flow with life like a fresh and fragrant flower on a fast-flowing river. Whenever you can, reduce the pollution in the river. Make it purer and fresher, but do not try to swim against the currents.

The river of life goes through many ups and downs, it follows many twists and turns. If you stay light and detached, you will find yourself floating on a dancing and exciting stream. You will see the splendor of the sun, the glow of the stars, and the black velvet of the night. You will hear the singing of the birds, the sigh of the wind, and the dancing of the leaves. You will feel the power of the thunder and the healing tears of the clouds. You will behold the breaking of the dawn, the brightness of the day, the setting of the sun, and the waking of the moon.

It is so exciting to stay on top, to know that the fast-flowing river will at last enter the sea of tranquility, the vast ocean of eternity. There, you will come face to face with the Designer Himself, the One who had worn a veil to remain hidden in the clouds of glory. Now He has lifted the veil from His awesome face. Now He glows with dazzling splendor for all those who have the eyes to see. He beams more brightly than the sun and all the stars in the heavens, yet His brightness soothes the eye. He speaks softly like the

tender breeze of the dawn, yet His power shatters the great galaxies. He is gentle like a little child, yet His majesty moves the mountains. He is kind like a mother with a babe in her arms, yet His justice is like a mighty gale, breaking the clouds.

What a marvelous Maker is He! What a wondrous Designer is He! Who would hesitate to throw himself into His longing and loving arms? Who would question His marvelous design? Who would fail to see His awesome wisdom? Who would doubt His promises?

O Thou Whose face is the object of my adoration, Whose beauty is my sanctuary, Whose habitation is my goal, Whose praise is my hope, Whose providence is my companion, Whose love is the cause of my being, Whose mention is my solace, Whose nearness is my desire, Whose presence is my dearest wish and highest aspiration...<sup>2</sup>

Were it not to celebrate Thy praise, my tongue would be of no use to me, and were it not for the sake of rendering service to Thee, my existence would avail me not. But for the pleasure of beholding the splendors of Thy realm of glory, why should I cherish sight? And but for the joy of giving ear to Thy most sweet voice, of what use is hearing?<sup>3</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh

## **Part VI**

### **Knowing and Loving God**

# 12

## Who Needs God?

How blest are those who know their need of God; the kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

Christ (Matt. 5:3 NEB)

Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Psalms 8:1

How awesome is the Lord Most High, the great King over all the earth!

Psalms 47:2

Thank God, there is God. What if we didn't have Him? A small child's prayer: "O God, bless me, bless my mom, dad, and sister. But make sure you take care of yourself. If something happens to you, we're all in trouble!"

### *The Master Violinist*

A young man of exceptional talent learned to play the violin under the guidance of his master for many years until he reached the very peak of perfection. The time finally came to display his genius before a vast audience. He stepped for the first time onto the stage. Thousands were anxiously awaiting his masterly melodies. As soon as his bow touched the strings, he captivated the audience by his grasp; he magnetized them by his grace. He moved them to the peaks of awe and ecstasy, joy and peace, immersed in enchanting melodies.

They gave him ovation after ovation, yet, to their utter amazement, they received no acknowledgment to their applause. He seemed in a daze, his eyes fixed on a point above the audience. Their applause did not move him, their standing ovations did not affect him. Young people whistled and shouted their praise. Children threw flowers, women showered him with their jewels, men threw their handkerchiefs. Nothing moved him, nothing distracted his attention.

The concert was over. The people rushed to the stage to resolve the mystery. As soon as they stepped on the platform, they found his master at the point upon which he had fixed his eyes. At that instant they saw the master smile and nod to his devoted student. The master's gentle nod suddenly transformed the violinist; like a breeze it moved his soul and stirred a little smile. Only then did he come out of his daze, only then did he take his eyes off his master, only then did he look at the audience.

They asked him why. He simply said, "My whole purpose was to please my master. I wanted to seek only *his* pleasure."

To live in the presence of great truths, to be dealing with eternal laws, to be led by permanent ideals—that is what keeps a man patient when the world ignores him, and calm and unspoiled when the world praises him. Francis G. Peabody

God is the supreme Master of the universe, the point of adoration for all beings. When we turn our faces toward Him, we draw strength and inspiration and become immune to the judgment of other people. Their praise instills no pride in our hearts; their censure brings no grief or despair to our souls.

Since God is love and knowledge and peace and perfection; from Him we draw only strength, hope, and wisdom. Without Him we are like voyagers on a rough sea, always at the mercy of winds and waves. God is the ark of peace and constancy. Even as a sail, our faith in Him catches the breath of His bounties and carries us to the shores of His peace and presence.

Happiness comes not from possessions or positions, but from relationships—and the grandest of all relationships is with God. When that is sound, life becomes a beautiful, endless, uninterrupted song.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, who manifested the love of God to its fullest, asks us to bring this glorious gift into every heart:

I exhort each of you...to sacrifice all your thoughts, words and actions to bring the knowledge of the Love of God into every heart.<sup>1</sup>

Every worldly need or desire is a veil between us and God. Only when we tear all veils do we recognize that we have no need or desire except for God. As a poet said, “God is, and all is well.”

Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Christ (Matt. 6:33)

### ***The Little Girl Who Would Not Say “A”***

I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? Christ (John 3:12)

God made everything for our sake and gave us everything we need to live in supreme—not mediocre—happiness. He invites us to soar to heavens on high. Many fear rising to dizzying heights, lest they fall, lest they wake up and lose sight of their earthly dreams and desires. Every soul is given wings to soar in the immensity of peace and joy. Yet many dwell in a comfortable cage, content with their daily rations.

Once I had a dear friend who wanted to be a pastor but instead became a college professor. In his youth he had spoken openly against racial discrimination in his church. He was told not to rock the boat. Feeling powerless, he left the church, his parents, and God.

He was exceptionally gifted and had almost everything most people wish to have: a close family, health, a secure position that he liked, status, good looks, abundant energy,

popularity, a brilliant mind, and high ethical standards. Despite all these gifts, he seldom seemed happy. He seemed to be always running but never arriving. Any skilled observer could detect the stress of the missing dimension—a spiritual purpose—in his life. He was like a person in a perfect and powerful car in high gear, but with no place to go, with no vision of a destination.

I worked with him, liked him, and wanted to make him happy, to make a difference to his life. Time and again I plotted and planned to inject something spiritual into our conversation, time and again I asked if he would read a book with a spiritual message. Each time I had to concede defeat. He would say, “Why do I need something spiritual? That is not relevant! I don’t *need* to believe in God!” I found him as hard and rough as a coconut shell. He had plenty of juice inside, but I could not crack the shell to extract even one drop.

His attitude reminded me of the story of a teacher who had a difficult time teaching a little girl the alphabet. “Say A,” the teacher said. The girl just raised her head and shook it back and forth, clamping her lips together. The teacher exercised patience and started again, “You are such a nice girl, please say A. It won’t hurt you.” In reply, she only stared. Finally, after many attempts, the teacher lost his patience. “Say A!” he screamed, “say A!” But the girl’s reply was only, “Mm-mm.” At that point, the teacher summoned the girl’s father. Together they implored the little one to say A. Finally she gave in and, to everyone’s amazement, pronounced a clear and beautiful A. The teacher, surprised by this amazing success, cried, “How marvelous! Now say B.” But the girl protested violently and banged her little fists on the desk as she said, “Now that’s enough. I knew all along what would happen if I said A. I knew you’d want me to say B and C, then I’d have to recite the whole alphabet, and then learn to read and write and do arithmetic. I should have known better. Why didn’t I keep my mouth shut?”<sup>2</sup>

Some people may force themselves to say “A” or perhaps “B” but no more. They say they believe in God, but hesitate to let Him lead them. Their prayers echo this message, “O my Lord, you know better, but...” They often act like the little girl who prayed, “O God, make me better, but not today!”

Even if you are on the right track, you’ll get run over if you just sit there. Will Rogers

### ***The Ingenious Thief Who Puzzled the Detectives***

Author and orator Dr. Harold Kushner tells a story that reveals the state of life for many people on our planet. The managers of a company learned of widespread thievery among their employees. They placed guards at every gate to catch the thieves. One thief was ingenious. Every day he collected an assortment of junk and carried it out in a wheelbarrow. He did this day after day, month after month. As time went on, the guards grew suspicious. Time and again they examined the junk for valuables. They sent samples to laboratories, but to no avail. Nothing worthwhile could be found. The ingenious thief continued his plot until the company went bankrupt.

One of the guards decided to resolve the mystery. One day he saw the junk collector—the thief—and begged him for the secret. The man laughed and said, “To this day I cannot believe it; it looks like magic. You see, I put in the junk to distract your attention, all the while stealing wheelbarrows!” Yes, our life is like a wheelbarrow. It is moving before our very eyes, yet we fail to discern the loss, we pay little if any attention to the big picture, the purpose for which we came into being. We remain preoccupied with the trivial while the precious moments of our lives are being stolen by the hand of time.

Bahá'u'lláh, who introduced the principle of “the oneness of humankind” and dedicated his life to creating a world of peace and harmony, reminds us of the brevity of our lives:

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?<sup>3</sup>

Closer is God to us than our own soul, yet we are so far from Him. Knowledge of God prevents us from being negligent, or negligence will prevent us from knowledge of God.

### *Defense Attorney for God*

What are the best moments of our lives? The moments devoted to knowing and loving God. Our failure to know our Creator—misunderstanding Him—prevents us from truly loving Him. Once I was asked to speak on the scientific evidence for the presence of God in the universe. The following introduction given in that talk offers a glimpse of this deeply-rooted problem—the prevailing misconceptions about God:

Dear friends! I am asked to serve as the defense attorney for God. What are the charges? The charges are many. Some people accuse God of being guilty of almost every crime committed on our planet. Others accuse Him of child neglect. They think He does not care for His children. Some people believe He is hard of hearing. He cannot hear their prayers. Others accuse Him of favoritism, liking some of His children more than the others, sending Saviors to some and not to others. Many people in our age charge Him with non-existence. They believe He is a myth, an invisible crutch for those who are ashamed of carrying visible crutches. Some of them have likened Him to opium or narcotics for those who can't afford to buy the real ones. No one has ever been charged with as many crimes and misdemeanors as God has been.

If I had to choose one job, it would definitely carry this title: Defense Attorney for God. I always like to be on the side of the disadvantaged. Today very few are willing to stand up for God and acquit Him of the unfair charges. I am honored to have this privilege tonight. Please be tough on me. Ask me the toughest questions, raise the toughest objections.

Because of the prevailing misconceptions, faith in God is dying in many hearts along with the joy and honor of knowing Him and loving Him. God is not on strike; people are.

## ***Being Awake in the Dream***

The Báb<sup>4</sup> compares this life to a dream. Death, He declares, is an awakening from the dream. While dreaming, everything looks real. As psychologist Dr. Dyer points out, the only way to tell that we are dreaming is to wake up. To us the earthly life seems real; gaining possessions appears as the ultimate victory. But the moment we wake up from our earthly dream, we will discover that our possessions were merely illusions that amused us for a few moments and distracted our attention from the real world. We will see them disappear as suddenly as a dream upon awakening.

Bahá'u'lláh compares this life to a puppet show, which looks very real to children. Some people become so absorbed in the show, they don't look to see the glories beyond, they fail to partake of the sweetest fruit of faith: spirituality.

***Spirituality is the greatest of God's gifts.***<sup>5</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Faith teaches us to remain awake in our dreams, to see the majestic wonders of being alive. Most of our disappointments come from this: clinging to an illusion and then seeing it suddenly vanish. For instance, when we buy a new toy we feel wonderful for a few days, but soon the toy loses its charm. We try other toys until we get tired of trying. Apathy then sets in. We submit to a life of quiet desperation.

Love for God and everything He has made is the one possession that never loses its charm. It grows fresher and sweeter every day. Without the radiance of love and faith the heart is but a dark and empty grave and the world a prison of despair and disappointment.

How blest are those who know their need of God; the kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

Christ (Matt. 5:3 NEB)

From him and through him and to him are all things.

Romans 11:36

‘Abdu’l-Bahá declares that “There is nothing so horrible in this world as the tomb, the abode of the decaying bodies of men.”<sup>6</sup> And we might add, there is nothing so wonderful as living in the heart of God, the eternal paradise of peace, awe, and ecstasy. Yet instead of looking up to Him and living in the heart of heaven, many look down to the cold, lonely, and dark depths of the earth. They examine the life cycles of bacteria and life in planets light years away, but not the wonders of eternal life destined for their own souls. They devise countless recipes and spend countless hours to delight their taste buds, but little to delight their soul. They dream not of a lofty and everlasting mansion in heaven, but of a house that will leak in the rain, and shake and break in the wind; a house that a small flame can quickly turn into ashes and submit to the wind.

## ***Source of the Fullest Joys***

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

Psalms 16:11

When His love is there, every bitterness turneth sweet.<sup>7</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Among the most common complaints of our time are depression, anxiety, stress, fatigue, and low self-esteem. All these symptoms mostly result from living a “circular” or

“spinning” life—one that ends in its beginning and begins in its ending. In times past, people used horses to grind food. The animals worked by moving in a circle all-day long. Only by being blindfolded could they be saved from a dizzying spell. That is how countless human beings go through life for half a century or more with their eyes open! Their souls mourn, their hearts faint, their spirits sink, their bodies wail, yet the instinct for survival, the fear of death, or sheer indecision prods them on to spin toward phantoms in the dark of apathy and fantasy—phantoms that wear the robe of life and light with glimmers of glamour, but in truth are the messengers of death and despair. We have a choice between God and the grave as our goal. Consider the following statements from those who regarded death as their final destiny and the grave as their ultimate goal:

The goal of life is death. Sigmund Freud

What is the purpose of human life? I don't know. I don't care. And it doesn't make any difference. Jack Kerouac

Life is a dead-end street. H.L. Mencken

We are here because one odd group of fishes had a peculiar fin anatomy that could transform into legs for terrestrial creatures. Stephen Gould

Without God life is but a journey through gloom and grief. The following is a portrayal of that life by a philosopher who could see no goal beyond his grave:

The life of man is a long march through the night, surrounded by invisible foes, tortured by weariness and pain, towards a goal that few can hope to reach, and where none may tarry long... We started somewhere, we don't know where; we are here, we don't know why; we are going to some great oblivion, we know not whither.

Bertrand Russell

No wonder many of those caught in the snare of a circular living choose death over life. They find their earthly goal—resting in the deep dark of the earth—more soothing than the dizzying spells of living. Only God can transform a life of “circular living”—which even animals cannot endure for long with their eyes open—into a spiritual ascent that leads into the very heart of heaven. Only God can lead the world to tranquillity and peace. Only God can lift the stress and distress of hopeless living. Only God can crown the world with immortal and enduring love, hope, and happiness.

Joy is not the absence of pain but the presence of Providence. Love of God is the only way out of the darkness of self, the only glimmer of glory that can break through the prison of grief and despair.

The life of man in a state of nature [without spiritual hope and happiness] is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short. Thomas Hobes

When Sir Isaac Newton was asked how he saw things so clearly, he replied, “I can stand on the shoulders of men like Galileo.” Faith elevates us and empowers us to stand on the shoulders of God Himself.

## *God's Fingerprint on the Soul of a Servant*

Tonight I had a dream in which I saw that the love of God means service. After an hour of trying to go back to sleep, I got up and began writing this piece.

Love of God is not only praying and shedding tears; it is bending on your knees, plowing the soil, and planting. Love of God is not only singing and saying Hallelujah; it is helping an old and lonely woman—one who is abandoned even by her own loved ones. Love of God is not only clapping and praising the Lord; it is listening to someone in pain and loving every minute of it. Love of God is not only going to church on Sundays; it is wearing your working clothes and planting a tree, even though you know you will not sit in its shade.

Let us assume you are very busy trying to finish writing a book, and then someone knocks on the door; you open it and see a young man you have known for several years. He has some serious mental disorders and asks if you have time to talk with him. You say yes, and he comes in, stays for a couple of hours, and then leaves. Your work has been delayed, but you don't mind. Three days later the young man returns. Again he wants to talk, and to borrow \$20. You let him in, listen to his story, and lend him the money. You don't know if he will return it, but you lend it anyway.

A week later, you have some guests, and the young man comes back again. This time he is incoherent. He is dressed inappropriately and acts strangely. He is strong, and your guests feel threatened. You talk with the young man very kindly, but to no avail. He is not his normal self. You feel very uncomfortable for your guests. You don't know what to do. You don't want to ask him to leave for fear of offending him. He has been rejected many times and does not need one more rejection. Eventually you find a way out. You tell him very gently, "You look very tired. Would you like me to give you a ride home?" He says yes, but before going home he wants to find his roommate. He does not know where his roommate is. He asks you to take him to three or four department stores to find him. "If we can't find him," he says, "then take me to my home, which is eight miles away."

This search and delivery operation may take a long time, and you don't want to leave your guests alone. But you have no choice. The alternative is far more unpleasant. You tell him yes, and get ready to leave. You are about to go when you hear someone knocking. Who do you think it is? It is his roommate, who is looking for him! Your spirit soars with joy. You cannot believe the miracle! You could have missed him by just a few seconds. The young man leaves under the care of his roommate, who also suffers from serious mental disorders. For now the roommate is an angel who has saved you from a long, frustrating search and rescue operation.

A week later you hear that the police have arrested the young man and delivered him to a mental hospital about 120 miles away. The young man has your phone number but no money. The operator says, "Would you accept a collect call from..." You say yes. He tells you his story; he complains and complains and you listen. He continues to call you once every week. You accept all his collect calls. And once on a trip in the direction of his hospital you stop to see him and give him your support. He expresses his gratitude again and again for your help. He is feeling much better now but still has a long way to

recovery. He says he is very lonely and asks you to ask some friends to send him cards and letters and you do, but no one responds.

The young man is now out of the hospital. He is back to his normal self, very bright, congenial, and friendly. It is hard to believe he is the same person. He had faced a series of failures in a very short time; among them: his wife had left him and married someone else. He needed a period to escape from reality. Now he has returned to reality and accepted his destiny.

Was this story fiction, a figment of someone's imagination? No, it is a true story. It happened about a month ago. I was the lucky host!

Who is this young man? How did I know him? About fifteen years ago, I received a call from a student at the university, who said something like this: "I have heard you can help people. Can I talk with you? Can you help me with my problem?" He sounded quite disturbed and in need of immediate help. I did not know who he was. He introduced himself as a Christian and said that he lived in "His House," a Christian house. He called at 11:20 p.m. I talked with him for a few minutes but he wanted to continue. I asked him if he wanted to come to my home and talk at that very hour; he said yes, and arrived soon afterwards. My family was concerned about letting a stranger in at that late hour. I assured them that I felt safe and asked them to go to bed. That night he stayed and we talked until 2 or 3 in the morning. His major concern was this: a tumor had grown very close to his spinal cord. The doctors and his parents had urged him to immediately have an operation. But he was hesitant; he believed that God might cure him. That night I convinced him to go ahead with the surgery. For the next ten years I did not see or hear from him. Once we responded to an ad by a lawn-mowing service. The man sent to mow the lawn was this young man.

Here is the question: what power in the world could make a human being treat another the way I did? Can you think of anything but the power of the love of God? If it was not for God's love, I would have rejected him right from the beginning, even complained about his late call. But that power gave me the strength and the courage to say yes. I am sure you recognize that my purpose in telling you this story is not to brag or impress you. In fact, I make every effort to keep these acts secret. ***My only motive in talking about it is to prove the power of God in the life of a humble servant.*** I see myself as a speck of dust floating in His vast universe and radiating with the light of His love. Only His light makes me visible. Only ***He*** must receive the credit. ***He*** gave me the supreme honor of knowing Him and loving Him. ***He*** gave me the strength to cope. ***He*** gave me the courage to have confidence in my safety. What I did was not difficult at all. You cannot imagine my joy that night while listening to the young man and making a difference in his life. You cannot imagine the joy I feel when I think about my role not only in his earthly destiny but perhaps in his spiritual journey as well. You cannot imagine how grateful I am to God to have given me a test that I could pass.

The love of God is by far the richest and most sublime storehouse of joy and strength. People dream of winning a million dollars. They can love God for free—"no money down" and no bills to pay later. Yet they allow this incredible source of exhilaration and ecstasy to remain untapped. They act like a person who is shivering in the cold, yet refuses to take one step into the sunlight.

The ultimate test for us of what a truth means is the conduct it dictates or inspires.

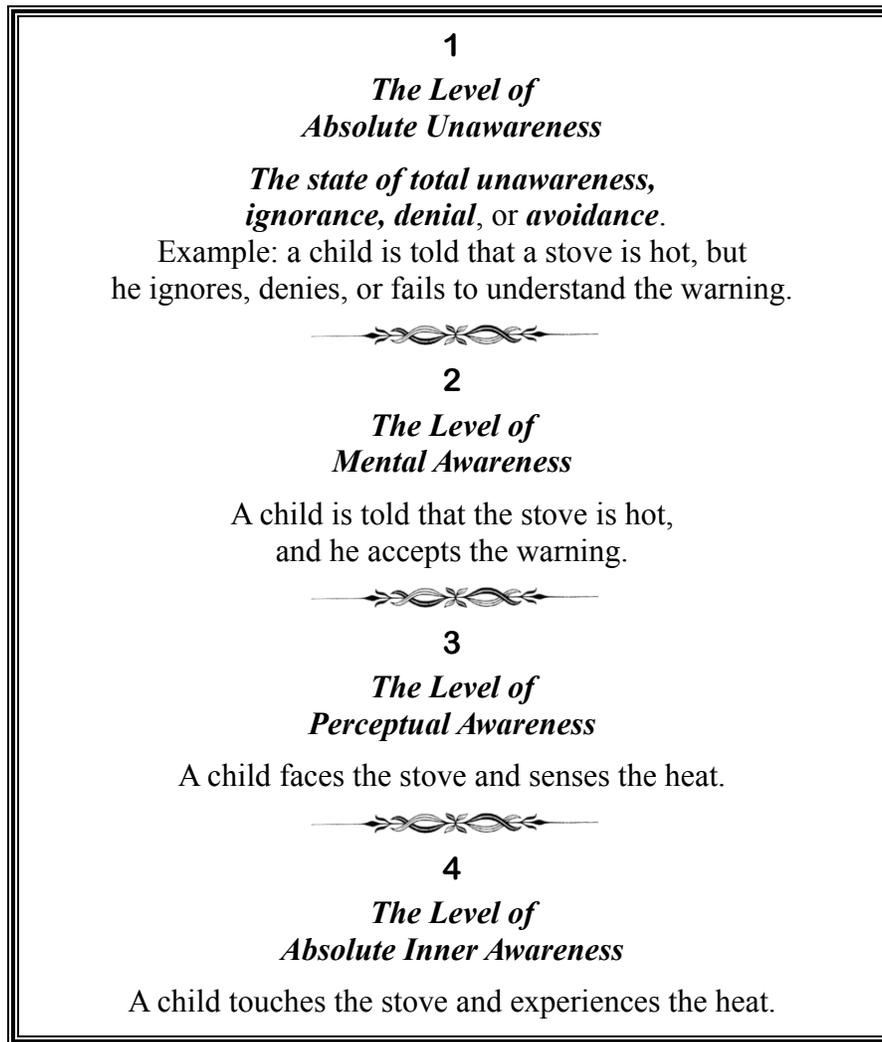
William James

## ***Levels of Faith or Trust in God***

Most people want to be delivered from temptation, but would like to keep in touch.

Robert Orben

Faith or trust comes from the “knowledge of God.” The more we know God, the more we will trust Him. How can we trust someone we do not know? Faith or trust in God can be classified into the following levels and stages:



Through suffering, the prophet Job experienced a profound spiritual transformation. He states that at a given point, he moved from the stage of simply “**hearing**” about God (level 2 or 3) and believing in Him to the stage of actually “**seeing**” Him (level 4):

Then Job replied to the Lord: “My ears had **heard of You**, but now my eyes have **seen You**.”

Job 42:1, 5

We know that no one can see God with his eyes. Yet everyone has the potential to see Him with his heart:

***Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.***

*Christ (Matt. 5:8)*

Please note that Jesus did **not** say: “Blessed are **smart** people!” We cannot see God with our mind; we can see Him only with our **heart**. The mind works like an eyelid. It is the gateway to the heart. It can know, but it cannot see. To an open and pure heart, the light of God shines as brightly as the sun. It seems most of those who deny God fail to open their eyelids. Their mind stands in the way of the light.

Is it possible to estimate the percentage of people—at this point in history—who function at each of the four levels? Here are some rough estimates:

Levels	Percentage	God’s Influence
<b><i>Level 1: Absolute Unawareness</i></b>	10%	God has <b><i>no</i></b> influence on the individual.
<b><i>Level 2: Mental Awareness</i></b>	70%	God is in the back of the mind, and has only <b><i>a little</i></b> influence on one’s feelings or daily living.
<b><i>Level 3: Perceptual Awareness</i></b>	19%	God has a <b><i>moderate</i></b> influence on one’s feelings and daily living.
<b><i>Level 4: Total Inner Awareness</i></b>	<1%	God has a <b><i>profound</i></b> influence on one’s feelings and daily living. He is at the very core of one’s life.

Feel free to adjust the percentages, since they do not come from research—they seem to be a reasonable estimate for the American population. The percentages will be different for other cultures.

True joy and inner peace come when an individual attains the fourth level: ***the stage of “seeing” or the state of absolute inner awareness of God***. This should be the ultimate goal of every human being. It is the prime purpose of this book: to remove obstacles that may prevent you from reaching your highest potential for knowing and loving God, trusting fully in His Wisdom, and submitting to what He has planned for you. Your level of growth depends entirely on your open-mindedness—opening the eyelids—and your desire for spiritual fulfillment.

Some people fear falling in love with God. They are at risk of experiencing the following side effects:

- A sense of security, inner peace, meaning, and purpose
- A healthy and humble self-esteem
- Basic values to live by
- Diminished fear of death
- A sense of accountability and a desire to pursue a noble life

- A healthy attitude toward adversity
- A sense of fellowship with people and with the entire universe
- A lingering sense of gratitude
- An undying hope for the future

It seems most people love God the way five-year-old Teddy loved spinach. When he was visiting his friend, the hostess asked him if he liked spinach. He said he did. But when the dish was passed to him, he declined to take any. When asked why, he said, “I like spinach, but not enough to eat it.”

It seems many believers maintain a safe distance from God. In a prayer meeting, people were shouting so loudly that it disturbed a little girl, who said, “Why don’t you people move closer to God, so you don’t have to shout so much!”

### ***Establishing a Relationship With God***

Establishing a relationship with God is not merely an intellectual achievement, like getting a doctorate in science or law. It is first and foremost a *spiritual* experience. It involves both the heart and the mind. Consider our relationship with our parents. We know we have parents, but does that knowledge in itself lead to a relationship? Some children have no feelings toward their parents; others have negative feelings.

When and how do we begin to experience a warm relationship with our parents? The process begins at birth. As we receive love and experience the joy of loving, we learn to feel and respond in kind and gradually extend our love to others. The same holds true with learning to love God. As we read the Word of God and ponder His infinite love for us, we experience a sense of joy just as we experienced that feeling during the early years of our lives. The process of learning to love God and to love our parents is quite similar. The main difference is that we see our parents by sight; we must see God by in-sight. Is that possible? We are told that it is:

Blessed are the pure in heart, for ***they will see God.***

Christ (Matt. 5:8 NIV)

Now suppose you had never seen your mother. Then one day, while you are in a meeting, someone comes to you and says: “The lady in blue dress in that corner is your mother!” Can you suddenly begin to love that lady? Knowledge in itself does not generate feelings.

How can we reach a point where we can actually “see” God? By praying to God sincerely and persistently, we gradually discover that our prayers are being heard. Once that happens, we enter a new stage in our relationship with God. We move from the stage of “knowing” or “hearing” to the stage of ***seeing God.*** That is what Job experienced!

In their relation to God, many people are in the position of the person who has never met his mother. Can such individuals establish an intimate bond with God? Relationships can be initiated at any age, but later in life they become harder. Feelings, like seeds, must be planted in the due season, and then cultivated with care. They can grow in stages—little by little, day by day.

Despite many obstacles, it is absolutely essential to realize that we are in charge of our destiny, that it is never too late to cultivate spiritual bonds with our Creator. To attain this lofty goal, what steps must be taken? What attitudes must prevail? Here are the requirements:

- ***A passionate desire for God.*** Desire is the fuel that sets the cycle in motion. But it must be intense, not half-hearted.
- ***A thirst for knowledge.*** Reading, wondering, and questioning must continue throughout our lives.
- ***Persistent praying.*** Prayer is the key that unlocks the gates of heaven.
- ***Persistence and patience.*** The process of bonding may take years. Impatience is a common reason for failure.
- ***Engaging in charitable deeds.*** Good deeds soften our hearts and make us more receptive to God.

***For results depend upon means, and the grace of God shall be all-sufficient unto you.***<sup>8</sup> *Bahá'u'lláh*

Is such an achievement—a bonding or feeling intimate with God—worthy of the efforts it requires? The answer can come only from those who have tried and succeeded. Suppose you wanted to know if it is worth going through the years of rigorous training necessary to become a doctor. Who would you ask? Who would have the best answer? Those who have never tried, or those who had tried a little and failed? No, the best answer could come only from those who have tried and succeeded.

When devoted seekers who have bonded with God are asked about their greatest achievement, their response is the placing of their intimate relationship with their Creator above any other in their lives. They would rather give up anything but their faith and love for God. We also learn of peoples from all cultures throughout all ages who have turned to the supernatural for support—a power beyond themselves. Why has the need to turn to God been so persistent? The answer lies in the way we were designed. We are an image of God, a reflection of His divine beauty and splendor.

When our Creator made us, He filled our soul with every goodness and every possible blessing, among them, is a special place of honor—a guestroom—for Himself. This room is very special. It is so vast that even the universe cannot contain it. Why did God design this room? He wanted to be a part of us and wanted us to be a part of Him. He loved us and wanted us to love Him, and to have a desire to bond with him. Why? He knew that we would be much happier with Him in our soul.

Loving relationship always bring joy. What more we—such lowly creatures—can expect? Can anyone imagine an honor equal to this: to have a guestroom in his heart for the One who, in less than a moment, created the universe—hundreds of billions of galaxies—and set them in motion in perfect order? Can a piece of jewel expect a greater honor than to be placed on the crown of a king? We are the jewels on the crown of creation. Everything is made for us to enjoy. ***The light of the knowledge of God makes everything beautiful.***

God created us out of sheer love, but left the honor of loving Him in return entirely to us. That is our hallmark. Our freedom to choose our destiny is our mark of distinction. That is what lifts us above the animal kingdom. Instinctive behavior is by force; loving behavior is by choice.

Unless that “guestroom” is occupied, there will always be an emptiness, a hunger for the special Guest of honor—the One who would not come unless invited. With that hunger in our soul, we cannot feel satisfied; we cannot attain our true potential for joy, purpose, peace, and hope. But once that hunger is satisfied, everything falls in place, everything begins to make sense. This is the reason we are told:

Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Christ (Matt. 6:33)

Who knows us best? The One who designed us. His manual of instructions says: “**Begin with Me!**” Unless we follow the Designer’s manual, our life, according to that same manual, will remain out of order—it will lack true joy and peace both in this world and the next, for countless ages to come! That seems to be a heavy price to pay for a little negligence, for failing to initiate a relationship! The reverse is also true: So much gain compared to so little efforts!

Knowledge of God comes from the mind; love of God comes from the heart—our emotional nature. Knowledge is “the light” and love is “the sight.” Light and sight are made for each other. Together they make everything look bright and beautiful. If one of them is absent, everything looks dark and dreary. What makes our relationship with God so wonderful is this: We have a choice to open our eyes and walk to the light, or keep our eyes closed and walk away from the light.

Thus, the first step in bonding with God is to awaken the dormant need and a deep longing in our soul:

***How blest are those who know their need of God; the kingdom of Heaven is theirs.***  
*Christ (Matt. 5:3 NEB)*

And this is the prime purpose of this book: To awaken and cultivate the “spiritual desire” in those who have already sensed that “true life” is more than “making a living”; that our purpose must be more than eating, drinking, sleeping, working, aging, aching, and dying; that the One who made us like Himself, would not allow His image to be buried in a grave; that He has an everlasting plan for us, and it is in our best interests to submit to that plan and partake of the glorious destiny He has in store for everyone for countless ages to come:

***In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you.***  
*Christ (John 14:2 NKJ)*

One knows God, not so much through reason, nor even through the heart, but through one’s feeling of complete dependence on Him, akin to the feeling experienced by an unweaned child in the arms of its mother. It does not know who holds it, warms it, feeds it; but it knows that there is this someone; and more than merely knows—it loves that being. Leo Tolstoy

When true lovers “fall in love” they become one physically and spiritually. Their joy comes from lifting the veils of separation and blending their souls in total trust and love. The same happens, but on a much grander scale, when we fall in love with God. We experience the exhilaration of oneness not with one, but with everyone and with all things. No one can know the depth of this joy and ecstasy without actually experiencing it.

The love of God creates the most enduring and genuine peak experience. Maslow describes “peak experience” as the “pure positive happiness when all doubts, all fears, all inhibitions, all tensions, all weaknesses” vanish. In that spiritual state, the individual “feels one with the world, fused with it, really belonging in it and to it, instead of being outside looking in.” He feels “like a member of a family not like an orphan.” Faith connects our tiny trickle of wisdom to an infinite, ever-flowing, and refreshing stream of light.

It is difficult to make a man miserable while he feels he is worthy of himself and claims kindred to the great God who made him.

I can see how it might be possible for a man to look down upon the earth and be an atheist, but I cannot conceive how he could look up into the heavens and say there is no God.

Abraham Lincoln

As one author notes, when scissors are “fastened together they become a marvelous instrument. This is what happens when we attach ourselves to God in a loving relationship with Him. As an instrument of God, we suddenly develop the power—the freedom—not only to cut through our own personal problems but even to begin cutting through the evil in the world.”

God is the light, the hope, the purpose, and the peace of the world. His love is the joy of life, and the “enlightened faith” the salt that savors life, and keeps in check the pests that thrive on negative thoughts and beliefs.

Love of God dwells in every heart. Like a beautiful flower hidden in a seed, it longs to unfurl its blazing splendor—it yearns to manifest its enchanting glory. As Michelangelo said: “all we need to do is remove the excess stone.” We can take ourselves out of God, but we cannot take God out of ourselves. To draw upon our greatness, we must have a great purpose. God gives us that purpose. People look everywhere in their search for meaning and purpose, except in their own souls. They think contentment is locked up in tomorrow and happiness is to be found in the next home. They think like a little girl who entered her parents’ bedroom and said, “In my room there aren’t any good dreams. Let me try your room.”

***My love is in thee, know it, that thou find Me near to thee.<sup>9</sup>***

*Bahá'u'lláh*

***There is no peace for thee save by...turning unto Me.<sup>10</sup>***

*Bahá'u'lláh*

***The Lord blesses his people with peace.***

*Psalms 29:11*

***Come to me...and I will give you rest.***

*Christ (Matt. 11:28)*

***Delight yourself in the Lord...He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn...***

*Psalms 37:4, 6*

*My love is My stronghold; he that entereth therein is safe and secure.*<sup>11</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

## ***Should We Both Love and Fear God?***

Should God be loved or feared? Without any doubt, love is the motive-power behind all creation, and it must be mutual. Only love—not fear—is worthy of love. The same motive must arise from the human heart to the One who made that heart: love.

Fear is an absence of love. When love fills the heart, it leaves no room for fear. The more we know God, the less we will fear Him. For God is love. How can love be feared?

Unfortunately, some people have little capacity for love. They are addicted to fear, just as some people are addicted to alcohol, overeating, or extremely loud music. That is the way human beings are. For those who cannot bask in the love of God, fear serves as a safety net—both as a motivator and as a deterrent. In this case, “fear” serves an essential purpose and is better than “nothing.”

This principle also holds true in human relations. Consider the following examples. Suppose you are a loyal employee because you love your job and your employer. What if you like neither of them? What then would motivate you to do your job well? Mostly the fear of losing your job. Consider also a driver who drives within the speed limits either for loving his life or for fearing a fine! Human beings are different, and they require different treatments.

Being aware of the consequences of one's deeds—such as a loss of benefits or blessings—is a sign of wisdom. This is the primary purpose of fear. It motivates those who are unable to appreciate or respond to love. Imagine a world without a police force! Fear of God serves as a protector. It protects us from those who would otherwise have no inhibition to follow their selfish desires.

## ***Memorable Quotations About God***

I would like to introduce you to one of the loneliest and unhappiest individuals on earth. I am talking about the man who does not believe in God. I can introduce you to such a man because I myself am one... You will be surprised to learn that the agnostic envies your faith in God, your settled belief in a heaven after life, and your blessed assurance that you will meet with your loved ones in an afterlife where there will be neither sadness nor pain. He would give anything to be able to embrace that faith and be comforted by it. For him there is only the grave and the persistence of matter. After the grave all he can see is the disintegration of the protoplasm and psychoplasm of which his body and personality are composed. W.O. Saunders

God is the fact of the fact, the life of the life, the soul of the soul, the incomprehensible... He cannot be seen; but by him all seeing comes. He cannot be heard, yet by him all hearing comes. He is not a being, yet apart from him there is no being.

To draw upon your greatness, you must have a great and worthwhile purpose. Otherwise you stay small, petty, and painfully boring. Unless you unlock your greatness, the only people around you will be those who seem to have an undying commitment to the trivia of their latest ailment, their relationship problems, and their victim stories in the form of “I said, and she said, and I said, and then she said,” along with a generous sprinkling of “Isn’t it awful?” “When is somebody going to do something?” and the “Things are getting worse, woe is me” blues.<sup>12</sup>

God’s gifts and blessings far exceed the limits of man’s best dreams.

## **Part VII**

### **Who Needs Religion?**

# 13

## **The Two Kinds of Believers** **Enlightened and Dogmatic**

If your religion has not changed you—you should change your religion.

This chapter focuses on the two kinds of thinking and believing—enlightened and dogmatic—qualities that characterize all people, believers and unbelievers alike. It shows why religion as a whole is failing in our time. It also reveals the true essence of religion, and offers a glimmer of hope to those who question the relevance of faith to modern life.

### *A Test to Identify Closed-Minded and Open-Minded Believers*

Are you a *dogmatic* or an *enlightened* believer, a *fanatic* or *rational* follower? Is your faith asleep or awake? Find out by responding to the questions at the end of this introduction.

I taught mental health to university students for many years. The topics included stress management, self-esteem, and communication skills. After years of teaching, I noticed that I had been ignoring an appealing and appropriate topic: how faith in God can affect one's sense of wellness or mental health. It did not seem reasonable to ignore a topic of such vital significance. But I faced a dilemma.

I had two potentially volatile groups of students in my classes. At one extreme were those who looked down on religion—they viewed it as a set of unscientific and dogmatic beliefs. At the other extreme were the outspoken fundamentalists who would not bend in their beliefs. If given a chance, the opposing poles would be readily drawn into a thunderous clash. That would not be conducive to wellness and mental health!

After some thought I found a solution that worked. I offered a definition of religion to which both groups could relate. The definition identified two sets of believers: dogmatic and enlightened. The fundamentalist students did not want to belong to the dogmatic; the label did not appeal to them. They wanted to identify with the enlightened. The non-religious students felt the same way. What they had rebelled against was the dogmatic belief, not the enlightened. This new understanding provided a common ground on which the two groups could meet.

After accomplishing this mission of peace and harmony, I felt safe to proceed with my goal of introducing my favorite but “forbidden” topic: how faith in a supreme being can

transform human life; how it can reduce depression, stress, loneliness, negativism, and lack of direction; how it can lead to positive thinking and a healthy self-esteem. This chapter and the next present some of the information that I now give to my students without causing any clashes—so far!

When religion grows weak superstition grows strong.

William Barclay

Psychologists have identified two belief systems: *dogmatic-fanatic* and *rational-enlightened*. This classification shows that the abuse of religion is the fault of abusive believers, not the fault of religion; just as the abuse of children is the fault of abusive parents, not the fault of parenthood. The classification may help those who have turned against God, who see nothing good in religion. It may help them to realize that the cause of their alienation and disenchantment is not God, but the abusive believers identified here as closed-minded.

The dictionary defines dogmatism as “an authoritative, arrogant assertion of unproved or unprovable principles” and fanaticism as “being possessed or driven by excessive and irrational zeal.”

The following is the first of two lists; each of them identifies one of the two belief systems. The traits listed show the extremes. Most people carry some traits from each system. It is mostly a matter of how many and at what level.

### ***Closed-Minded Believer***

Characteristics of *the closed-minded* believer:

- Judgmental and quick to condemn.
- Sees everything in black and white. People are either saved or unsaved, good or evil.
- Looks down on those with a different belief system; fearful and suspicious of outsiders.
- Irrational, superstitious.
- Argumentative.
- Literal-minded, unimaginative.
- Self-righteous; does not see or acknowledge his own prejudice, whether racial or religious.
- Places much blame on the devil.
- Is motivated mostly by the fear of God rather than the love of God.
- Is closed to new ideas; rigid; afraid of talking or associating with those outside his faith for fear of hearing something that may undermine his beliefs.
- Considers humans, by nature, as made by the Creator, evil and depraved. Fails to see God’s image in every person.

- Thinks he can—and must—break a moral law because he is doomed to be a sinner. To him, committing moral lapses is not a serious matter, for he can always ask for forgiveness. Sees God’s forgiveness almost as an invitation to give in to his temptations.
- Places more emphasis on verbal assent than on good deeds.
- Distorts information to fit his expectations. Confuses fantasy with reality; lives by illusions.
- Can think of only one aspect of a question at a time; is a one-way thinker; usually thinks of only one answer and one way of solving a problem.
- Fails to look at the big picture, narrow-minded.
- Afflicted with “ego-centric thinking.”
- For him, religion means observing rituals, going to church, synagogue, mosque, etc. The visible matters more than the invisible.
- His thoughts revolve around sin, guilt, hell, suspicion, fear, loss, devil, and damnation.

Some people do not know, and do not know that they do not know. A few do not know, but know that they do not know. ***Others do not know, but think they know.*** These are the most difficult to teach. The dogmatic-fanatic is of this kind. The Pharisees acted this way. No group was condemned by Jesus as severely as the Pharisees. What were they like? Closed-minded, obstinate, literal, judgmental, and self-righteous. They were strict sticklers whose faith was strangled in a web of literalism. They were “inoculated with small doses of belief, which kept them from catching the real thing.” Their golden rule was: “Do unto others before they do it unto you.”

What is the difference between ignorance and illusion? Ignorance is a blind man looking for his shadow in darkness. Illusion is following the blind man and seeing the shadow. The fanatic-dogmatic believer thrives not on knowledge, but on illusions and fantasies.

By far the greatest portion of evil committed in the name of religion comes from dogmatic-fanatic believers who, because of their blind zeal, often assume power and authority, and act out their illusions by force and violence. Dr. Scott Peck refers to the dominant influence of this segment of believers:

[From these believers] we see wars and inquisitions and persecutions. We see hypocrisy: people professing the brotherhood of man killing their fellows in the name of faith, lining their pockets at the expense of others, and practicing all manner of brutality. We see a bewildering multiplicity of rituals and images... We see ignorance, superstition, rigidity... Psychotherapists must spend enormous amounts of time and effort in the struggle to liberate their patients’ minds from outmoded religious ideas and concepts that are clearly destructive.<sup>1</sup>

## *The Way Children Think*

The thought patterns of closed-minded believers resemble the thought patterns of young children at a stage called “preoperational” by Swiss psychologist Piaget. It covers ages two to seven. These examples demonstrate children’s thinking during this stage:

A father proudly declared, “This week I lost five pounds.” His 4-year-old daughter responded, “Daddy, don’t worry, I will help you find them!”



A 5-year-old boy heard this: “When a car is hit from behind, usually the trunk is damaged.” He then asked, “Why don’t they make cars without a trunk?”



Sunday school teacher: “What do you think the ‘land flowing with milk and honey’ will be like?”

Student: “Sticky!”



Pastor: “When the Lord comes there will be earthquakes, thunder and storms, the mountains shall pass away, and the stars shall fall.”

Little girl to her mother: “Will I get out of school?”



Child to her mother: “Did Job swear and curse when he was one day old?”

Mother: Why do you ask?

Child: “Because the Bible says, ‘Job cursed the day he was born.’”



Teacher: “Why did the fish swallow Jonah?”

Child: “Because Jonah was homeless. He needed a warm soft place to rest.”



Mother to her son: “Apologize to God for being so rude.”

Son to his mother: “I did. God told me that the devil made me do it, and He spanked the devil four times.”

Now consider these true examples of thinking from grown-ups:

- When a television evangelist with millions of devoted viewers was recently asked about his scandals and sexual encounters, he replied something like this, “The devil is plotting to destroy my ministry!”
- Someone talked about the benefits of meditation. A pastor protested, “Don’t you think that when you meditate you open the door to the devil to come in and plant some seeds?”

- A man talked about the similarity between some Christian ceremonies and Mithraic cult ceremonies, which existed prior to the advent of Jesus. In response, a Bishop said that this only proves how clever the devil is. The devil knew in advance about these ceremonies, so he performed them long before Jesus to discredit the Christian faith!
- Many have read or heard the story of the Roman Catholic prelates [Bishops, Cardinals] who refused to look through Galileo's telescope. If they had, they would have seen for themselves the phases and motions of the solar system, planets and moons. So fearful were they to see a sun-centered system of planets, believing it contradicted Scripture and weakened the authority of the church, that they preferred to look the other way.<sup>2</sup>
- Some Christians who face fossils older than 10,000 years, refute the evidence by saying that "ancient fossils...never existed as plants or animals but had been created as fossils!" In His exhaustive job of "antiquating" His universe, God has even simulated the half-digested food found in many animal fossils!"<sup>3</sup>
- At any given time, we see distant stars as they existed millions or even billions of years ago. Because that is the time it takes for their lights to reach us. If God made the earth and the heavens 10,000 years ago, then where do these lights come from? "Is God sending us false stellar reports by light?" Some literal-minded believers resolve this question by claiming that "we see starlight, not because the stars were really there billions of years ago, but because God created the starlight *in situ*, as if it had been traveling for billions of years...[or because] the speed of light has actually changed. Perhaps light used to travel with much greater velocity, quickly bringing us the light from billions of light-years away, and then God slowed it down to its present velocity...In spite of the fact that the 'tired light' hypothesis was tested and proved groundless years ago, recent creation advocates continue to promote this hypothesis."<sup>4</sup>
- According to the World Christian Encyclopedia, there are 550 million [saved] Christians in the world. So if Christ returned today, perhaps one in ten would rise from earth to be forever with the Lord.<sup>5</sup>

The above number of 550 million represents almost a tenth of the earth's population and a quarter of all Christians. The figure does not include non-Christians, whatever their age. Just for fun, divide your Christian friends and relatives into groups of four and consider who would possibly qualify to be the one to be taken to heaven for eternal joy and peace, and who would be the three to be left behind for eternal suffering and pain.

What would be the difference between the chosen person who goes to heaven for never-ending bliss and the other three who are destined to remain on earth for permanent pain? Perhaps the chosen person told the truth more often than the other three, perhaps he paid a little more in tithes, perhaps he went to church more often, or perhaps he lost his temper fewer times than others. What court of justice would pass such an unfair and harsh punishment? Further, are Christian infants less "sinful" than Hindu or Muslim infants? (Some of those who advocate this theory believe that all non-Christians are left behind to suffer, including their children.) Would God differentiate between a 2-year-old born to a Christian family and a 2-year-old born to a Jewish family? What if one parent was

Christian, the other Jewish? What about the mentally retarded, or those who suffer from mental maladies at various levels of intensity? What about those who have never heard about Jesus Christ? Are members of nontraditional churches (such as the Seventh Day Adventists or Mormons) included among those who will be lifted, or do the lucky ones come mostly from long established Protestant churches? (For instance, Jehovah's Witnesses consider themselves the chosen ones, yet other Christian churches call them a cult.) What about the Roman Catholics? Are they "less" Christian and get fewer points? What sins disqualify people? We could ask hundreds of other questions, and we would find thousands of levels of integrity, spiritual purity, and responsibility (based on age and mental maturity) of people. What or where would be the dividing line for going to heaven (for everlasting pleasure) and for staying on earth (for never-ending pain)? And is it for mere mortal men to decide?

The preceding examples demonstrate simplistic and superficial thinking, which some adults never fully outgrow. As a rule, people adopt and apply different levels of thinking to various facets of their lives. For instance, they may apply a high level of thinking to business matters, but a low level to questions of belief or family relations.

The literal mind that prevailed during the time of Galileo (1633) still prevails:

...modern observers must wonder why the church was so utterly threatened by the idea of the earth revolving around the sun. To be sure, certain verses from scripture seemed to support the church's position, such as Psalm 93:1—"The world is firmly established; it cannot be moved"—and Psalms 104:5: "He set the earth on its foundation; it can never be moved." Also cited was Ecclesiastes 1:5: "The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises." Today, few believers argue that the authors of these verses were intending to teach science. Nonetheless, passionate claims were made to that effect, implying that a heliocentric system would somehow undermine the Christian faith.<sup>6</sup>

### ***Open-Minded or Enlightened Believer***

The ***enlightened*** believer thinks and behaves in exactly the opposite manner to the ***closed-minded*** believer. These are but a few of his attributes:

- Changes his views in the light of new evidence; is flexible and open to new ideas.
- Is humble; does not look down on those with a different belief system.
- Does not pass judgment on others (does not cast the first stone).
- Sees people as unique individuals, and does not categorize them (such as "saved" and "unsaved").
- Enjoys talking with those outside his faith or belief system, but avoids arguments.
- Is not literal-minded.
- Considers good deeds to be the heart of religion. For him, confession not sustained by good deeds is sheer hypocrisy.

- Believes that religion's foremost purpose is to transform lives, to inspire nobility, love, charity, honesty, chastity, self-sacrifice, patience, etc.
- Realizes that observing rituals or being visible in the house of worship serve no purpose other than to help him live more fully the law of love.
- Does not look down on outsiders. Respects people for their character, knowledge, and service to others rather than their beliefs, gender, wealth, power, nationality, appearance, or the color of their skin.
- Does not fear losing his faith. His faith is supported by both feelings and reason. (Reason does not fear.)
- Is motivated and inspired primarily by the love of God rather than the fear of God.
- Believes he is by nature noble, created in God's image, "a little lower than the angels."
- Does not believe that people are perfect, but that they have the potential for perfection.
- Sees "sin" as an expression of human freedom, rather than as an inevitable imposition of God's will.
- Does not see God's forgiveness as an invitation to give in to his temptations.
- His thoughts revolve around attributes such as trust, love, and perfection.

The same or similar qualities characterize the *unbelievers* as well. *We have, for instance, both dogmatic and enlightened atheists.* The dogmatic atheist is absolutely certain that there is no God, and loves to argue his case. The enlightened atheist is open-minded, curious, and humble.

Since we expect more from people who claim God as their guardian, we may exaggerate their evil deeds. Further, we fail to ask this most critical question: What happens in the *absence* of religion? For instance, just three tyrants—Hitler, Stalin, and Mao (all of them dogmatic unbelievers)—caused the deaths of far more people than all the religious wars in history. The estimate of the people they killed directly or indirectly is as high as a hundred million!

The following are a few examples of dogmatic and closed-minded believers who made a specific mark on history:

- The participants in the Spanish Inquisition.
- The Christians who tortured the scientists whose beliefs did not fit the literal interpretation of the Bible.
- Those who condemned the translation of the Bible and tortured or put to death a few who attempted it.
- The Pharisees who condemned Jesus to death.
- The Muslims who use violence as a means of attaining their goals.
- The Muslims who set fire to great libraries.

- The Muslims who banished Bahá'u'lláh, executed the Báb, and persecuted thousands of Bahá'ís.

***Dogmatic belief does not lead to self-actualization, mental health, and high self-esteem; enlightened belief does.*** In fact, dogmatic faith may be extremely stressful; it is a symptom of fear, insecurity, suspicion, emptiness, and ignorance.

The mind of a dogmatic person—whether believer or unbeliever—is as closed, fixed, and fragile as an eggshell; it must always be handled with care. Since it does not allow new knowledge to break through, it must feed only on itself. It cannot retain its freshness and fragrance for long. The mind of the enlightened believer is as open, flexible, fresh, and ever-flowing as a vast river. It always explores and comes in touch with new frontiers of knowledge and understanding.

The essence of all that We have revealed for thee is Justice, is for man to free himself from idle fancy and imitation, discern with the eye of oneness His glorious handiwork, and look into all things with a searching eye.<sup>7</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

### ***“Believers” Who Are Not Believers***

All sacred Scriptures speak of “believers” who are not true believers—pretenders who wear the robe of religion to attain their selfish ends. If there were no religion, they would find their own way—they would establish their own system to abuse society. Cults are created the same way and for the same reasons. Sacred Scriptures call such false believer and abusers: “hypocrites.” Note how severely they were condemned and exposed by Jesus:

“Woe to you...hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to... Woe to you, blind guides! You say, “If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.” You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred?...Woe to you, you **hypocrites!** You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. Woe to you, you **hypocrites!** You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Woe to you, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness. Woe to you, you **hypocrites!** You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. And you say, “If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.” Matthew 23:13-30 NIV

All sacred Scriptures condemn such pretenders, because they undermine the honor of believing:

This people draw near Me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor Me, but have removed their heart far from Me. Isaiah 29:13

They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men. Matthew 15:9

They profess that they know God; but in works they deny Him. Titus 1:16

The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 1 John 2:4

If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. 1 John 4:20

Surely, *the hypocrites* seek to deceive God, but He causes their deceit to backfire... Surely, the hypocrites will be in lowest depths of the Fire... Qur'án, 4:142, 145

*The hypocrites*, males and females, are alike. They enjoin evil and forbid what is good... The hypocrites are the wicked sinners. Qur'án, 9:67

...God bears witness that *the hypocrites* are liars. Qur'án, 63:1

Be thou of the people of hell-fire, but be not *a hypocrite*.<sup>8</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

Dishonest and deceptive people live everywhere and abuse every segment of society. Religion is no exception. Is there any social system that has not been abused? Have people not abused politics to attain their selfish ends? Do we not witness abuse in smaller units of society, such as the family and even in a sacred profession such as medicine? The design of creation allows parasites to exist. As long as the human race endures, so will parasites. We can never eliminate them. They know how to enter and infect every social agency. In recent years, they infected the economic system of many countries and brought them on the verge of bankruptcy. Cruel dictators have ruled since the dawn of history. The remedy is not to eliminate the economic or the political system, but to strengthen "the immune system" against the parasites to minimize their chances of survival.

As we noted, the spiritual Design of creation is perfect. The Architect who designed the celestial Mansion, in His manual He also provided the instructions for repairing and rebuilding the Mansion. This critical feature of the Design will be explained later in the book.

To know the value of true faith in God, we should look at its overall impact on society. Unfortunately, the negative draws more attention than the positive. If we assume that the hypocrites are 10 percent of a religious group, they attract more attention than the other 90 percent. To recognize the driving power of negative news, consider this example: Thousands of times ships have crossed the Atlantic, but they have not attracted as much attention as the Titanic on that one historic voyage.

There are many millions of honest and charitable believers who live their lives quietly without drawing any attention, without making any news. How would they live and how would they feel, if they had no faith in God, no rules for living, and no hope in the afterlife?

# 14

## Who Needs Religion?

Religion is not the opiate of the people. Rather, it brings us out of the dream in which we live into the reality of life, into the presence of God. John Schultz

The previous chapter focused on the negative consequences of dogmatic faith; this chapter focuses on the positive consequences of enlightened faith. It shows why religion in its pure essence is the source of the most enduring joy for all humans.

Life is a journey to eternity, and religion a map for the journey. The map helps us live our lives with a definite purpose. An accurate map shows us where we are, where we want to go, and how we can get there. It gives us a goal, and a sense of urgency about what really matters in life.

Whether we know it or not, we all follow a map. “Following no map” is itself a map. It may be called “the map of wandering” which is usually made and remade from moment to moment, and often is borrowed from the nearest person. Most of the misery in the world comes from having no map or from following the wrong one.

A map can be a precious time saver. Instead of wandering around, it helps us follow a steady course. A good map inspires you to:

- Believe that you are a spiritual being—a soul with a body, not a body with a soul.
- Recognize that your purpose is spiritual growth, which can come from knowing God, and loving Him and His creatures unconditionally.
- Be proud of yourself, for you are made in God’s image; and value and appreciate every human being as a gift from God.
- Believe that you are an immortal being, that your true home is heaven.
- Adorn your soul with virtues.
- Become a fruitful tree; have a desire to make the world abundantly richer.
- Keep in touch with your Creator every day, communicate with Him, and trust Him that when you do your best only the best will happen to you.
- Depend on reason as your guide, and be always in search of truth.

The following is an example of how a map helped me to spare myself from much suffering. When I received a promotion, one of my colleagues felt jealous, gossiped about me, and even took some action against me. In response, my map flashed this instant

message: “Forgive him, for God’s sake, and do not retaliate.” Only my faith in God gave me the strength to carry out that message without hesitation or doubt. Without that faith, I would be helpless. I would have tried at least to get even. How much time and energy did I save by not retaliating? My map also said, “Be kind to him; this too will please God.” I completely ignored his attitude and went out of my way to show him special kindness. This in turn gave me a sense of power and victory, for I had conquered my own ego! My map helped me turn a terrible and painful encounter into a pleasant adventure.

Our purpose in coming into this world is to become spiritually alive, otherwise we are as good as a dead cat. A little girl lost a beloved cat. As she mourned, her mother comforted her, “Don’t cry dear, your cat is with God.” “What in heaven does God want to do with a dead cat?” asked the clever girl. Yes, God wants only a living, enlightened, and spiritual soul.

In the absence of a map—an everlasting purpose—people busy themselves with trivial pursuits. There are some aging golfers whose remaining mission in life is to knock a few more strokes off their game. Some retired people spend hours in restaurants. What sustains them is to watch people and drink cup after cup of coffee. A map would not let them pursue such a shallow life.

We can center our lives on ourselves, our spouse, our children, our job, our possessions, our enemies, our friends, or on God. Every center, other than God, is unreliable and subject to change. Even if we have a perfect life, we are always in danger of losing it in an instant. No center save God can ever save us from fear and loss.

Whatever we place at the center of our lives become our source of wisdom, guidance, and inspiration. What a vast difference between having God at the center of our lives and having gold as our central purpose. True religion “teaches us the happiest way of living, the noblest way of enduring suffering, and the most peaceful way of dying.” True faith fills the earth with the fragrance of heaven.

Whatever the question, the answer lies deep in the human spirit. Every social problem—whether it is poverty, prejudice, or greed—can be traced to diseased souls. Justice can come only from just people, not from just a piece of paper.

### ***Enlightened Faith Versus No Faith***

The following questions demonstrate how an enlightened believer can gain a sense of stability, consistency, trust, hope, and self-worth from his or her beliefs.

For the sake of brevity only two groups are compared: the enlightened believer and enlightened unbeliever. The responses offered by each group may differ slightly from those given here. Feel free to substitute your own answers for the ones offered here.

### 1. WHO MADE YOU?

***Unbeliever:***

- Chance.
- I don't know.

***Believer:***

- God.



### 2. WHY WERE YOU MADE?

***Unbeliever:***

- I don't know. (Chance has no intelligence and hence no goal.)

***Believer:***

- To express God's love, even as light expresses the sun.
  - To become like the One who made me.
- To grow toward perfection and become worthy of my Creator.



### 3. WHAT MOTIVATES YOU TO DO GOOD?

***Unbeliever:***

- A good deed is its own reward.

***Believer:***

- A good deed is its own reward.
- The desire to express my love for God.
  - To receive God's love.
  - To receive eternal rewards.



### 4. HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH TEMPTATION?

***Unbeliever:***

- I remind myself to be good.

***Believer:***

- I remind myself to be good.
- I remember God, and He gives me strength.



**5. WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOU BREAK A LAW?**

***Unbeliever:***

- Feel guilty.
- Go to a psychologist.

***Believer:***

- Feel guilty.
- Go to a psychologist, a pastor, a rabbi, etc.
- Pray to God for forgiveness.



**6. HOW DO YOU DECIDE A MORAL ISSUE?**

***Unbeliever:***

- By observing justice.
- By observing the laws of the land.

***Believer:***

- By observing justice.
- By observing the laws of the land.
- By studying God's laws.



**7. HOW DID YOU BECOME A HUMAN?**

***Unbeliever:***

- I evolved from simple organisms.

***Believer:***

- God designed me just the way I am—a human. Although invisible, God's imprint was placed on me from the very beginning.



**8. WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOU FEEL LONELY?**

***Unbeliever:***

- I try to socialize.

***Believer:***

- I try to socialize.
- Since God is my best and most dependable companion, I seldom feel lonely.



**9. HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN PAIN AND SUFFERING?**

***Unbeliever:***

- I see them as a result of the laws of nature or human failure.

***Believer:***

- I see them as a result of the laws of nature or human failure.
- I also try to find a reason, a purpose for most of the things that happen. That relieves some of the pain. Even if I do not find a reason, my faith in God's ultimate justice comforts me.



**10. WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOU FACE A TRAGEDY?**

***Unbeliever:***

- I depend on others for help.

***Believer:***

- I depend on others for help.
- I also pray to God and depend on His help. I know if I trust Him, only the best can happen.



**11. DO YOU HAVE ANY HOPE THAT AFTER PASSING AWAY YOU WILL SEE YOUR LOVED ONES?**

***Unbeliever:***

- No, I have no hope.

***Believer:***

- Yes, I look forward to an eternal reunion.



**12. WHERE DO YOU GO AFTER DEATH?**

***Unbeliever:***

- I go to my grave.

***Believer:***

- I return to the One who made me, and to heaven.

Which of the two belief systems leads to a healthier self-esteem, self-actualization, and a fuller and more abundant life? Which system inspires and rewards, to a greater extent, noble deeds and attributes, such as love, patience, service, hope, positive thinking, trust, and self-sacrifice?

One reason that the enlightened unbeliever escapes from religion is to avoid encounters with the dogmatic believer. He sees dogmatic thinking and behavior so far from ideal that he fails to discern the positive aspects of a belief in God.

In virtually all cases, the enlightened believer has everything that the unbeliever has. ***But he has something more to live for. He believes in the support of the Creator who knows him and loves him—One who promises to bestow the most glorious blessings on him, blessings that will endure for all eternity.*** The unbeliever carries an insurance that can help him only if everything goes well, only if he stays healthy; while the enlightened believer has multiple insurances that come to his aid even on his deathbed.

Love of God does not make us perfect. It adds a positive dimension to our lives. It inspires us and gives us an extra incentive to attain the prime purpose of our lives, namely: to cultivate our potential, to advance spiritually, and become a better and happier person.

The enlightened believer is usually “invisible.” He does not shout out his beliefs or intrude into the lives of others. The dogmatic believer, on the other hand, is very visible. He is seen and heard everywhere and serves as the sole model of religion. This chapter portrays that side of religion—the positive—that usually goes unnoticed. Those who are critical of religion and perceive it as a source of evil, often fail to appreciate the positive and constructive powers of religion:

Until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, almost all hospital development was the result of private donations motivated by Judeo-Christian ideals of charity, love for one’s neighbors, and dedication to a ministry of healing...The largest publicly supported philanthropies in the U.S. were: The National Council of YMCSs (\$4.2 billion), American Red Cross (\$4.1 billion), Catholic charities USA (\$2.6 billion), and the Boys and Girls Club of America (\$1.1 billion)—every one of which, it might surprise you to learn, have religious foundings; their origins can be traced back to men and women of great faith.<sup>1</sup>

The positive consequences of faith can also be recognized by observing its impact on our health:

- Religious people are healthier and live longer.
- A study that involved over 20,000 adults over the course of ten years demonstrated that those who attend church at least once a week lived seven years longer. Among Afro-Americans the difference was fourteen years.
- Religious youths “show significantly lower levels of drug and alcohol abuse, premature sexual involvement, and delinquency...They are also less likely to express suicidal thoughts or make actual attempts on their lives.”
- The studies also indicate that: “Elderly people with deep, personal religious faith have a stronger sense of well-being and life satisfaction than their religious peers.
- A psychologist who has studied this issue concludes: “The cycle of materialistic pursuits is disappointing and exhausting in the long run and can make people perpetually unhappy.”

According to Marty Sullivan, MD, associate professor of medicine and director of science and healing, Center for Integrated Medicine at Duke University School of Medicine:

People with strong spiritual beliefs tend to live longer. They are less likely to develop heart disease, cancer, and other serious illnesses. They are more energetic and less likely to feel depressed or anxious.

Some studies have shown spiritual beliefs to be more important for good health than not smoking. That's a striking finding.

People who pray or meditate experience the relaxation response—a drop in blood pressure, heart rate and levels of stress hormones, such as cortisol.

Prayer and meditation also cause an increase in alpha and theta waves. These electrical impulses in the brain are associated with relaxation.

The preceding comparisons are based on the lives of nonbelievers versus the believers *in general*. The true impact of faith can be measured only if we compare the nonbelievers with *the highly enlightened-spiritual believers*. The differences between those groups would be much greater.

The following story shows how religion and science complement each other. Two young men—one blind, the other paralyzed—dreamed of traveling together in a sailboat. But how could they accomplish this feat? Only by cooperating: by depending on the arms of the blind man and the eyesight of the paralyzed man. By sharing their talents and skills, they sailed through turbulent waters and attained their seemingly impossible dream.

Our soul is a mine filled with the most splendid gems of virtues. It is an image of God Himself. To show the upper limits of human potential for living a life of fulfillment, as intended by our Creator, let me present a brief section from another book of mine “*Choosing Your Destiny*”:

### ***Signs of Spiritual Perfection***

What are the signs of beauty and perfection that lie hidden in every soul?

As psychologist Abraham Maslow notes, only one percent of people attain self-actualization; the other ninety nine percent fall short of fulfilling their potential. We have forgotten the enduring joys and pleasures that God has ordained for us. We have shifted the basis of our hope and happiness from our heart and soul to our physical form. We often act like a guest who goes to a most magnificent feast, but instead of sitting, enjoying the scene, laughing, and listening to the music, picks up a sandwich and runs away.

Do you wish to become more spiritual? That is the main purpose of this book. If you read it with a receptive heart, it will inspire you to cultivate and reveal your soul's inner perfection.

The following are a few of the countless images of beauty and splendor that will dwell in the heart once it has been unlocked to allow the light of knowledge to enter and abide therein:<sup>2</sup>

- A tendency to see a wider and sharper image of the world.

- An inclination to think and act spontaneously as unspoiled children, to flow with life.
- An increased capacity for advancing to peak experiences of joy and beauty, and a sense of oneness with the world.
- A strong desire for extending friendship to yourself and others.
- A heightened susceptibility to fall in love with all people and all things and be unable to free yourself from the love.
- A tendency to be so enchanted by your journey of spiritual transformation, that you will gladly cancel all your other “trips.”
- An inclination to accept people as they are.
- A tendency to become so busy counting your blessings, you will have little time for anything else.
- An increased capacity for abandoning some of your favorite illusions.
- An opportunity to experience an intense thirst for knowledge.
- A surprise to find fulfillment and contentment chasing you rather than you chasing them.
- An intensified unfolding of your creative potential.
- A tendency to reveal the child in you without embarrassment, to see the humor and the lighter side of life.
- A tendency to shed tears often—that is, the tears that come from the joy of fellowship with God.
- A surprise to see some of your symptoms such as headache or fatigue fade away without any apparent reason.
- An inclination to celebrate *every* day and not wait for *special* days.
- A tendency to speak to God more often and enjoy the conversation.
- An ability to find the practice of a moral life a privilege and pleasure, rather than a pressure.
- An inclination to be so busy looking for the best in people that you won’t have time, and lose all desire and ability, to look for anything else.
- A tendency to uncover lessons or stepping-stones in adversity; to find a reason for everything.
- An increased ability to know that only the best can happen to those who live an awakened and enlightened life.
- A surprise to find yourself in the grip of peace and happiness and be unable to release yourself.
- A tendency to trust God and leave the unmanageable to His care.

- A loss of the ability to complain or worry for no apparent reason.
- A desire to cherish every moment of life as a gift from God.
- A tendency to be fascinated by the unknown and unfamiliar rather than to feel anxious or frightened.
- An increased capacity to fill the gap between what is and what should be.
- A tendency to feel both empowered and helpless, both glorified and humbled.
- An enhanced ability to be ruled by compassion, conscience, and justice rather than concern for personal consequences.
- A desire to cherish each person as a precious book filled with living lessons.
- A tendency to seek friendship with the pure and humble, and to avoid the pompous and pretentious.
- An increased capacity for finding abundance in your life—even if you are poor—and for sharing and giving.
- An ability to live for today and to prepare for and look forward to tomorrow.
- A tendency to see an enduring purpose and meaning in your life.
- An inclination to transform the agony of loneliness into the enjoyment of solitude.
- An ability to endure less the pain of complaining of problems and enjoy more the pleasure of finding solutions.
- A susceptibility to fall in love with God, and to thank Him and glorify Him both in good times and bad times.
- An inclination to experience frequent outbreaks of laughter and a loss of all sense of boredom.
- An increased capacity for experiencing a sense of awe, wonder, and ecstasy.
- An increased wisdom to see the “big beautiful picture” and not be distracted by little scratches or marks on the frame.
- An inclination to forget yourself and remember others.
- A tendency to cheer up, stir, and inspire people, but never to drag them up the mountain.
- An expanded capacity to become detached from all (people, power, and possessions), except from God.
- An insight to find pleasure in both work and worship, and to view them as one.
- An increased wisdom to see death as a door to a *new and expanded* heaven—the second one—for you have already experienced the first heaven here on earth.

If you find the slightest exaggeration in any of the portrayed images, ponder these promises once again:

You have so little faith...if you have faith... Nothing will be impossible to you.  
Christ (Matt. 17:20-21)

As you have faith, so shall your powers and blessing be.<sup>3</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

## ***Why Do “Good” People Need Faith?***

Some people claim that by reason alone they can choose their way of life and their values and live by them. They say they are mature and can tell right from wrong. Why would they need God to tell them how to live?

Those who resort to this reasoning, ask the wrong question. The real and relevant issue is not **knowing** what is right, but **doing** what is right. Belief in God reinforces our will power. It provides us with the inspiration, the motivation, the incentive, and the desire to live what we know to be right. Faith and trust in a Supreme Being is fuel for the fire, the power that drives the engine.

To demonstrate how absolute faith and trust in God can make much difference in our lives, sometimes in my talks I ask the audience: “Is there anyone who would like to dance for us?” The listeners look baffled and amused! Then, after a little pause I ask: “Why doesn’t anyone volunteer to dance?” The reason is obvious: We feel embarrassed to engage in an unseemly or untimely behavior before others. If we feel embarrassed before others, would we not feel embarrassed and even ashamed to engage in an unseemly behavior before God, if we **truly believed that He was watching**? The answer is self-evident. A true believer is ever aware that he lives constantly under God’s watchful eyes. He knows that nothing escapes the attention of the One who knows every human being better than he knows himself. Absolute faith and trust in God is by far the most powerful motivator to good deeds. It can transform a selfish person into unselfish. It can puncture an inflated ego. It can brighten a depressed soul just as light makes a piece of diamond to shine.

If firm faith and intimacy with God makes so much difference in the way we live, why do we find so many good people among nonbelievers? Where do they find their motivation? This is the answer: The “goodness” in those people would become a lot “better” if they believed in God! We all have a certain capacity for “goodness.” Belief in God simply expands our capacity. It elevates us a step higher; it enhances our “goodness.” The level of enhancement depends on the individual. Some people may advance moderately; others may experience total transformation.

Further, “good people” may behave themselves as long as they have not faced strong temptations. Only God can give a human being the power and the protection to sail safely through the turbulent waters of tests and trials and temptations that would otherwise break apart even a Titanic! No wonder many faithful people turn to God, more than ever before, at moments of great trials.

The most dramatic example of absolute faith and trust in God was observed recently in response of the Bahá’ís to the persecution imposed on them by the fanatic Islamic leaders of Iran. Thousands of Bahá’ís faced a choice: to lie about their beliefs and live, or to

stand by the truth and face death by hanging or a firing squad. Those believers looked at death without fear. They refused to deny their beliefs by uttering this lie: “I am *not* a Bahá’í!” Over 200 of these believers were put to death. Many of them were among the most successful members of society—doctors, lawyers, engineers, professors, and business leaders. Among them was a 16-year-old girl named Mona, who was pressured for months to utter that lie, yet she refused! She was finally hanged at age 17. This is the power of absolute trust in God. Can any power compare with it? The story of Mona’s life is demonstrated through a movie now under production.

### *True Examples of Faith*

Faith in God demonstrates its true power only in the lives of the most spiritually advanced believers—those who live truly by their beliefs. Their motivation and desire for distinction comes from love of God.

People can be divided into three categories:

- Those who may be called the conscience of society, who function at the highest spectrum of moral values.
- The average, people, the silent majority—the ones who neither hurt anyone nor do much good.
- The dishonest and deceptive people.

Suppose we wanted to study the impact of a healthy diet on human health. Who would be the best candidates? Those who consume junk food or those who consume healthy food? The same holds true with knowing the transforming power of faith in God. We must look at those who practice what they believe, who live by the Golden Rule, who truly love God and reflect that love to every member of humankind. Unfortunately, at this point in history, such dedicated people are only a minority of believers because we are living at the lowest point of faith, when love of God has departed from the hearts of most believers:

...the love of most will grow cold.

Christ (Matt. 24:12 NIV)

Nevertheless those few devoted believers show us—even as those who practice good nutrition—to what heights can true faith in God lift us.\*

Despite the decline of faith in our time, we can find millions of loving and devoted believers throughout the world who are feeding the poor, healing the sick, running soup kitchens, or building orphanages and schools for children. There are tens of thousands of “socio-economic” and charity projects throughout the world sponsored by various religions. Seldom do we hear about them.

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\* No religion teaches hatred, violence, prejudice, or deception. Unfortunately, most people do not have time or devote little time to study the teaching of their own religions, much less the beliefs of others. Much of what they know comes either from the media or their own religious leaders. In western nations, theologians have spread many misconceptions about Islam. I have written a book—over 500 pages—to demonstrate the remarkable harmony between the spiritual teachings of four great religions: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and the Bahá’í Faith. It is called: *Muhammad, the Spirit Who Glorified Jesus*.

How do we treat a person we do not like? We may multiply his weaknesses by 10 or even 100 and divide his virtues by the same numbers! How should we feel if we were perceived that way?

In our time, opinions are shaped by news media. That media is at the mercy of many forces, such as politics, economics, and public opinion—what people love to hear. Let us consider one example. In the United States, every year over 100,000 people die from the use and abuse of legal drugs, prescribed mostly by physicians. Most of these deaths are preventable. Every two weeks as many people die from drugs as they died in the Twin Towers in New York City. What would happen if instead of seeing ads that entice us to take drugs, once every two weeks we would see the faces of those who have died from drugs? And how would that impact the economic interests of drug companies and news media? Those 100,000 people do not make the news, but if a terrorist brings down a plane with 100 people on board, that will be the greatest news for weeks and months. The terrorists who bring down the plane have no religion. They are people with a criminal mind, who attach themselves to religion to justify their crimes.

As Chris Hedges, in his book *When Atheism Becomes Religion*, writes:

Terrorists arise in all cultures, all nations and all religions. Terrorists lurk within our own society. The bombing on April 19, 1995, of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City killed 168 people—19 of them children—and injured hundreds. It was carried out by an American citizen named Timothy McVeigh. William Krar and Judith Bruey of Nooday, Texas, pleaded guilty in 2003 to possession of a weapon of mass destruction. Investigators found inside their home and in three storage facilities a sodium cyanide bomb capable of killing thousands, more than a hundred explosives, half a million rounds of ammunition, dozens of illegal weapons, and a mound of white-supremacist and antigovernment literature. McVeigh was not a Muslim; neither was Krar or Bruey. None of these people was inspired to acts of terror by religion. Terrorists, for all their claims of religious martyrdom and noble self-sacrifice, are criminals. They mask their indiscriminate violence with noble abstractions, but they are all morally depraved.

...Conrad and Dostoevsky saw the breakup of personal identity, alienation, feelings of collective and personal humiliation and shame as the forces that fed acts of horrific violence. Revolutionary political change, whether dressed up in the language of religion, anarchy, fascism or communism, was another form of criminality.<sup>4</sup>

Religion has been a source of inspiration for millions of people. Great civilizations have emerged following the advent of great religions. Unfortunately, most of what we hear is negative, which always draws more attention.

A question we seldom ask is this: What would have happened if no religion had ever appeared on the face of the earth, for instance, if “the Ten Commandments” had not been sent to the Jews, if Buddha and Jesus had not appeared, and if Muhammad, Krishna, and Zoroaster had not spoken? We often fail to realize that even those who reject God, live under the influence of these great Messengers.

We also forget that human beings if left to themselves are extremely selfish. The power of love for a Creator teaches us to sacrifice our selfish interests for a greater interest—to

extend our love for ourselves to others. This is the core teaching of every religion. What would happen if we take this message out of the conscience of humankind? And since by reason alone we know it is best to be unselfish, who would motivate us to sacrifice our selfish interests for common interests? It is wishful thinking to believe that if we simply knew right from wrong, we would choose right. Going to college has little if any impact on raising our ethical values. Sometime ago, a study was carried out to identify the most saintly people in the United States. Who were they? They were Afro-American women living in the southern states! Those women fit this profile:

...unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Christ (Matt. 18:3 NIV)

### ***The Illusion of Future Happiness***

Our life, like our busy highways, is growing more hectic and crowded. The demand on our time is increasing relentlessly. The result is this: we seek quick remedies for our headache, toothache, or toe ache, but ignore, deny, or suppress the ache in our spirit. We do this despite knowing that we shall lose all—the head, the tooth, and the toe—but keep the spirit, the real owner of everything, the only “I and me.” By so doing, we become strangers to our own selves. Is the householder the house or is the house the householder?

- We bathe and cleanse our bodies but not our souls.
- We change our attire, but not our attitudes.
- We beautify our skin, but not our spirit.
- We seek a clear complexion but not a clear conscience.
- We polish our nails and our cars but not our character.
- We open our clogged arteries but not our minds.
- We worry about our ulcer, but ignore our ultimate destiny.
- We bask our bodies in the sun but leave our hearts in darkness.
- We fill our closets but leave our souls empty.
- We clear our gardens from weeds but not our conscience from guilt.
- We remove a callous from our toes but leave callousness in our hearts.
- We align our nose but leave our lives crooked.
- We worry about our hairline and baldness, but ignore our hollow brain.
- We remove the wrinkles from our face but not from our character.
- We make the fading, fleeting “form” fragrant but ignore the imperishable and eternal.

We ignore our soul, the glorious gift that must be groomed and made beautiful as a bride for the grand banquet of heaven. We forget the one who must be as pure and radiant as

the light and as free and detached as the wind to soar beyond the stars and reside in the Master's "many mansions" on high.

We assume that life will continue as it is, that we will have more time in the future to do all the things for which we find no time now. The thought of our mortality is too threatening.

The art of living successfully consists of being able to hold two opposite ideas in tension at the same time: first, to make long-term plans as if we were going to live forever; and, second, to conduct ourselves daily as if we were going to die tomorrow.

Sydney J. Harris

We live as if the present moments must be spent or invested for an elusive goal *that is always in the future*. And how do we define goals? As a fixed point in time that once arrived, fulfillment follows.

We must recognize that life is not a destination but a journey, that we are travelers through time, and a goal is a sign post we see just ahead, a point we pass by and at which we can only pause. Our whole life is only a viewing of sceneries. Nothing more. The goal at age nine or ninety is the same: growth. The difference is in the scenery. As author Gena Corea notes:

My early life had been fed with dreams and a deep feeling that if I waited, did my part and was patient, love would come to me and with it such a family life as fiction depicted and romance built up. It seems to me that I have always been waiting for something better—sometimes to see the best I had snatched from me.

The assumption that a goal is always in the future, totally distorts our vision of reality. It makes us waste the precious present for an elusive end, for a moving shadow that is never reached, for a mirage that appears splendid from afar but soon fades away. Consider a man who works twelve hours a day, six days a week, and saves huge sums through all his working years. He invests his most precious moments for wealth. When he thinks he has reached his goal and stops, he finds that he has reached only a new scenery, that the "goal" he pursued during a lifetime was nothing but fable and fantasy. Besides, he encounters new challenges to his illusive dreams, such as increased sickness and the fear of an impending death. Even in absence of these, he could "reach" no point of bliss, except move with time and see more sceneries.

So many invest their precious lives running for the end of the rainbow. As a comedian has said, "Young people look forward, old people look backward, and middle aged people look terrible!"

The future is now, this very second; the goal is here right within our reach, this very moment. What is *real* is *now*. The time to act is now. This planet is not our permanent home. We come from God and we may be recalled any minute. There is no time to wait or waste. As Bahá'u'lláh declares:

**O CHILDREN OF NEGLIGENCE!**

...Ye are even as the unwary bird that with full confidence warbleth upon the bough; till of a sudden the fowler Death throws it upon the dust, and the melody, the form and the color are gone, leaving not a trace. Wherefore take heed, O bondslaves of desire!<sup>5</sup>

## *What Is True Religion?*

There is...in many hearts a yearning for the firsthand experience of the presence of God. Many people are tired of religion reduced to social action, group therapy, or theological analysis. They wonder where the wonder went.

Robert Raines

Is religion, as God planned it, reflected in the life of the dogmatic or the enlightened believer? Is true faith generated by fear or by love? Should religion be approached and honored by reason or degraded by conformity and superstition?

The enlightened believer sees the professions and dogmas of the dogmatic believer as the perfect example of an immature and fearful faith, as the full expression of unthoughtful and desperate submission to authority and tradition. To him nothing could stand farther from the true purpose and essence of religion. The dogmatic believer also holds a similar view toward the enlightened believer. He simply labels him an unbeliever. His standard of judgment is quite simple: people are either “saved” or “unsaved.” Anyone who deviates from his dogmas is a sinner who is condemned to hell and eternal damnation.

Many of those who feel alienated from God, who abandon their faith, do so on the unfounded assumption that true religion consists merely of what the dogmatic believers propagate and defend. Nothing has harmed the dignity of religion and undermined its transforming power in inspiring love, hope, and faith as much as this unfortunate misconception.

People are asked not to be judgmental, yet often we find that the most judgmental people are those who wear the seal of “I am saved!” on their forehead. They are quite uptight, walk with an aura of superiority, and like a hunter look for victims to judge and condemn.

Today religion has lost much of its simplicity, innocence, and pristine purity. To many sincere seekers of truth, the religious scene looks like a vast jungle infested with unknown dangers, and with no visible path leading to the light. Belief has become the cheapest commodity in our time. Hundreds of competing groups try to “buy” converts at a paltry price. Faith has become synonymous with fanaticism and fantasy. Religion has turned into a rich compound of tradition, legend, myth, tale, illusion, ignorance, hypocrisy, fanaticism, violence, dogmatism, conformity, imitation, ritual, customs, and loyalty to a name. It lacks spiritual life. It is a body without a soul.

Consider this example. Many literal-minded believers take the story of creation literally, word for word. They believe the universe came into being about six to ten thousand years ago. This raises the question of how they explain both the existence of ancient fossils and the scientific evidence that the universe is so vast that the light from some of the stars we see today has been traveling for billions of years. The response concocted by the literal minded believers is that of “tired light:”

They propose that the speed of light has actually changed. Perhaps light used to travel with much greater velocity, quickly bringing us the light from billions of light-years away, and then God slowed it down to its present velocity...<sup>6</sup>

A Christian scholar, John Lightfoot, has even specified the exact hour of creation:

...he decided upon a creation date of October 18, 4000 B.C. Adam was created on October 23 at 9:00 a.m.<sup>7</sup>

One of the grave tragedies of our time is this: when people—especially the young and educated—hear the word “religion” they subconsciously associate it with the dogmatic-fanatic believer, with his judgmental, irrational, and simplistic mind. Why? Because he is far more visible and audible. Which draws more attention: the banging of a big drum or the singing of a nightingale? The time has come for the nightingales to sing loudly and in enchanting unison. They should start to sing out before there are only a few or none left to listen.

Perhaps no psychologist has studied human nature more than Abraham Maslow. His classification of human needs and traits of self-actualized or self-fulfilled individuals is a classic. Maslow places physiological needs at the bottom, and the need for “transcendence” at the top of all human needs. He defines transcendence as “spiritual needs for broader cosmic identification.” Religion has always been the instrument that has provided for this need. Sociologists tell us that no culture has ever been found without some form of religious beliefs.

Who then needs religion? Any being who finds his identity and essence more than flesh, blood, and bone. Anyone who feels there is more to life than carrying a body for 70, or 80 years, and then dropping it into a grave, often in a bad condition.

Jesus, said, “Let the little children come to me...for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it” (Mark 10:14-15).

What is an advantage children have over adults? Purity—purity from preconceived notions. As we are repeatedly exposed to certain beliefs, we become conditioned to them. Then we stop thinking about them. This is how we acquire habits. We learn to consider our beliefs as the truth and seldom, if ever, question them. It is like falling into a trap. How can we get out of the trap? By temporarily stepping out, but only temporarily, to view the scenery outside. This momentary change of scenery is absolutely essential for growth.

Spiritual growth is a journey out of the microcosm into an ever greater macrocosm...We must continually expand our realm of knowledge and our field of vision through the incorporation of new information...the learning of something new requires a giving up of the old self and a death of outworn knowledge. To develop a broader vision we must be willing to forsake, to kill, our narrower vision. In the short run it is more comfortable not to do this—to stay where we are, to keep using the same microcosmic map, to avoid suffering the death of cherished notions.<sup>8</sup> Dr. Scott Peck

The great thing in this world is not so much where we are, but in what direction we are moving. Oliver Holmes

In recent years, many scientists have begun to see God’s fingerprint on the universe. Publications on scientific evidence for God are growing at a rapid pace. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century and into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many believed that science would gradually replace religion. A century later, the opposite has happened. Instead of trying to replace religion, science is confirming its fundamental principles. Instead of eliminating its “rival” it is

rescuing it! We are beginning to see their complementary functions: that science unveils God's fingerprint on the universe, religion manifests His image on our soul.

Science without religion is lame; religion without science is blind. Albert Einstein

# 15

## Spiritual State of the World

The way of God and the religion of God have ceased to be of any worth in the eyes of men.<sup>1</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

A world spiritually destitute, morally bankrupt, politically disrupted, socially convulsed, economically paralyzed, writhing, bleeding and breaking up.<sup>2</sup> Shoghi Effendi

The wisdom of the wise will perish and the discernment of the discerning shall be lost. Isaiah 29:12 NEB

What is happening to the spiritual state of the world? A story is told about a man who was so literal, such a cut-and-dried thinker, that his knowledge turned into facts, his faith became theology, his love turned into lust, and his wisdom changed into science. St. Paul described this man as one who is “always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth” (II Tim 3:7).

To most people religion presents a confusing picture, marked by both love and hate, peace and war, enlightenment and fanaticism. Millions—especially the young and educated—are falling away from ancient religions everywhere on our planet, because they mostly find hypocrisy, prejudice, and dogmatism in those who claim to be their prime spokesmen.

Sacred Scriptures clearly predict the decline of religion, faith, and spirituality in our time. Amos 8:11 speaks of widespread famine in our age (the last days), not of earthly bread but of spiritual. In His Olivet Discourse, Jesus clearly predicted the spiritual state of our time:

At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other...the love of most will grow cold... Christ (Matt. 24:10,12)

Perhaps the best portrayal of the spiritual state of the world in our time is offered by St. Paul:

There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy...lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—***having a form of godliness but denying its power***...They are the kind who...[are] always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth. Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these men oppose the truth... II Tim 3:1-8

For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine [teaching]. 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. ***They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths*** [emphasis added]. II Tim 4:3-4

The Qur'án makes the same prediction:

O My Lord! My people have abandoned this Qur'án.

Qur'án 25:30

The sacred Scriptures of Islám (verbal statements by Muhammad) confirm both the Qur'án and the Biblical Scriptures:

There will come a time for my people when there will remain nothing of the Qur'án except its outward form and nothing of Islám except its name and they will call themselves by this name even though they are the people furthest from it. Their mosques will be full of people but they will be empty of right guidance. The religious leaders of that day will be the most evil religious leaders under the heavens; sedition and dissention will go out from them and to them will it return.<sup>3</sup>

The role of religious leaders is also predicted in Hebrew Scriptures:

In that day...O My people, your leaders will cause you to err, and confuse (destroy and swallow up) the course of your paths.

Isaiah 3:7, 12

The people wander like sheep oppressed for lack of a shepherd. My anger burns against the shepherds, and I will punish the leaders; for the Lord Almighty will care for his flock.

Zechariah 10:2-3 NIV

Not one Prophet of God was made manifest Who did not fall a victim to the relentless hate, to the denunciation, denial, and execration of the clerics of His day!<sup>4</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh

Leaders of religion, in every age, have hindered their people from attaining the shores of eternal salvation, inasmuch as they held the reins of authority in their mighty grasp. Some for the lust of leadership, others through want of knowledge and understanding, have been the cause of the deprivation of the people.<sup>5</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh

Over a hundred years ago, Bahá'u'lláh described and predicted the spiritual state of our time:

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?<sup>6</sup>

The world is in travail, and its agitation waxeth day by day. Its face is turned towards waywardness and unbelief. Such shall be its plight that to disclose it now would not be meet and seemly.<sup>7</sup>

Consider also these references:

It will be a time of great distress.

Christ (Matt. 24:21)

Nations will stand helpless, not knowing which way to turn...

Christ (Luke 21:25)

To compensate for pain and to cope with pressure, people have devised an assortment of escape routes. Some live from weekend to weekend, from vacation to vacation. Others go to bars, watch violent movies, rent scary videos, read romantic novels, or seek new sexual encounters; they join cults, form gangs, or practice voodoo and satanism; they resort to drugs, alcohol, or astrology; they run away from their families, abuse their children, or divorce their spouses; they escape from reality, and as a last resort attempt suicide.

Suicide as a means of escape is on the rise and occurs especially among young people. In the United States—one of the most prosperous countries in the world—**every day over a thousand young people try to take their own lives**. (The latest statistics place the figure at 500,000 a year.) At that rate there would be over 27,000 attempts around the planet **every day**.

Some people depend in vain on their wealth as a means of satisfying their spiritual hunger; others simply dream that if only they had more, happiness would be theirs:

Their silver and gold will not be able to save them in the day of the Lord's wrath.

They will not satisfy their hunger...

Ezekiel 7:19 NIV

Many people complain about being too busy, yet are afraid of free time; they do not know how to cope with freedom. The stress of freedom makes some workers workaholics and sends many retirees to an early death.

According to Harris Poll, in a fifteen-year period the number of leisure hours per week declined 37 percent, from 26.2 to 16.6. The sharing of “quality time” among family members has reached its lowest point. Dr. Roberta Berns in her book *Child, Family, Community* writes: “According to Shaevitz working couples typically spend only 12 minutes a week talking to each other.”<sup>12</sup> Another study indicates that married couples speak about 4 minutes a day with each other and 2 minutes a day with their children. The figures found in these studies are not fixed. They simply show us the trend in this age of transition.

The unrelenting stress and distress of our time and the massive energies devoted to defuse them create in most people **a state of spiritual exhaustion**. A state of the mind such as this: “I am tense, tired, anxious, and in need of escape. I have no time for anything else.” They try to go from one high to another before anxiety grips their soul. They take “nourishment” all the time, yet remain hungry. **They are constantly on the run yet feel entrapped**. This state of the mind often causes spiritual slumber. It manifests itself as apathy, coldness, and complacency, which are often concealed under a facade of self-satisfaction, covered with a shallow sense of well-being. The busy life, the constant search for a high, the demanding struggle for mere survival, **leave no room for self-awareness, reflection, curiosity, knowledge, and spiritual adventure**.

But where are to be found earnest seekers and inquiring minds?<sup>8</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh

## ***The State of Religion***

Today many see religion as a breeding ground for fanaticism, prejudice, violence, and war. What a tragedy! The critics say, “Religion has fallen and cannot get up.” “By consistent use and misuse, its meaning is no longer clear. It has become too smooth—slippery with too many meanings, debased by careless contradictions.”

Curiously, some of the criticism against the church comes from the church itself. Consider the following statements from Dr. John White, a Christian scholar:

Prior to His coming and the end of the age, Jesus said that “iniquity shall abound,” “impostors” in the church, wrote St. Paul, “will go on from bad to worse, deceivers

and deceived” (2 Timothy 3:13, RSV). It is a painful thing to have to point out the fulfillments around us of these predictions. The world expects the church to have a message, a message it too often simply does not have.<sup>9</sup>

According to Leslie Steffard, the British author, the word “Christian” has become one of the vaguest words in the English language. “The church of today,” says a leading psychologist, “is like an autumn leaf, dry and dead but retaining its form and structure.”

But truth is truth and the Church is currently in a state of decline. No one grieved more than our Lord that the Church would fall into appalling decay prior to His coming. Indeed this is the primary reason for His coming...

A former editor of *McLean's* magazine tells of a series of Holy Week services, held in an Ontario city. Five clergymen, old friends, sat until the early hours of the morning discussing the problems of the ministry, sipping coffee, and generally talking shop. Suddenly one of the men interjected the remark, “I’ll have to confess that if someone came and asked me point-blank how he could find God, I simply wouldn’t know what to say.” Then looking around at the others, he said, “And am I wrong in saying that the same would be true of the rest of you?” There was an extended silence but no rebuttal...According to St. Paul, the lapse into a “form of godliness without the power thereof” is to be a sign of the church as the end nears...<sup>10</sup>

In his book *Waiting for the Second Coming*, Dr. Ray Stedman writes:

While the world grows hard and cold to spiritual matters, church members feel a loss of personal faith and find their churches less and less relevant to the issues of modern life.<sup>11</sup>

A Christian magazine reports:

For most people...the Bible is a dead book. Many religious leaders readily admit this. George Barna is president of a research group that studies Christian habits and attitudes. He says most Americans consider the Bible to be largely irrelevant to life. “Many people, even Bible readers,” he says, “do not see Scriptures as containing instruction and answers that deal with the everyday problems they face.” We would have to agree with Bishop Spong’s observation about the sad state of biblical literacy. It also seems true that most people do not think the Bible’s message is important to their lives.<sup>12</sup>

Does the phrase “the dead in Christ” mean the *spiritually dead* believers?

- Pastor: My congregation is very lucky
- Bishop: Why?
- Pastor: They will be the first to be raptured (raised to heaven).
- Bishop: Why then are they lucky?
- Pastor: Because Paul said, “The dead in Christ shall rise first.”

Decline of religion in our time is universal. All ancient faiths are suffering from disintegration and disease. Consider the following statement from a Muslim leader:

The Islam practiced by the Muslims around the world today is vastly different from what is presented in the Qur'án. The true religion of Islam is buried under piles upon piles of traditions and human-made inventions that have been devised for political and economic gain. What the West perceives as Islam is nothing more than these inventions and erroneous practices carried out in the name of religion. They are not the practices advocated by the Qur'án. This is analogous to looking at the back side of a mirror—its original intent is no longer identifiable.<sup>13</sup>

As noted earlier, religion is the most powerful agency for transforming and spiritualizing the human race, yet it is falling short of that purpose. What are the prevailing perceptions of religion in the minds of most people, especially the young and educated? Here are a few:

- It is an agency of anti-intellectualism and anti-science.
- It is an agency of fear—fear of damnation, fire, and the “insatiable worm.”
- It is the right to suppress or even murder religious minorities with different ideologies, as happened to Armenians in Turkey and recently against the Bahá'ís in Iran.
- It is an exclusive club that is only for the “saved.”
- It is the opiate of the poor, the sick, the aged, and the uneducated.
- It is the yoke of anti-change, of preserving the outworn traditions, of holding onto archaic myths and illusions.

What a grave tragedy! These perceptions have devastating consequences for society. Matthew Fox, the author of *The Coming of Cosmic Christ*, states, “Time is short, and we must rescue what is valuable from that burning edifice we are familiar with as Church...”<sup>14</sup> “Time is rapidly running out for Mother Earth and mother Church.”<sup>15</sup>

What is the gravest dilemma every sincere seeker of truth must face today? It is this: he or she must face thousands of denominations, cults, and religions, all offering happiness and salvation from here to the hereafter. According to *Christianity Today*, Christianity alone has 25,000 denominations and is growing at the rate of about 250 a year! As we noted, St. Paul also predicted the spiritually chaotic state of our time: “They will gather around themselves a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear” (II Tim 4:4). If someone does not like what he hears, he starts a new denomination.

“As scarce as truth is, the supply is always greater than the demand.” The world “seems possessed by demons and redeemers and few can tell the difference.” “Billy Graham noted that there are at least 500 self-proclaimed messiahs in California alone.”<sup>16</sup>

Hebrew prophets described our age as one of confusion. We see how fully that prediction has come true. “‘Nothing reflects confusion more than a flock of sheep without a shepherd,’ writes L. Nelson Bell, Executive Editor of *Christianity Today*. ‘Beset by barking dogs, frustrated by one another and by the natural obstacles around them, leaderless sheep will mill about in a frenzy of indecision, unable to cope with the problems that confront them.’”<sup>17</sup>

...the day God visits you. Now is the time of their confusion.

Micah 7:4

Our age suffers from a vast spiritual vacuum. Ours is a generation whose greatest heroes are celebrities and athletes.

Human beings need models or exemplars to demonstrate to them the upper limits of human potential—to learn what is possible. Young people especially look up to them and consider them “heroes”—the ones who have achieved what others can only dream of achieving. These powerful and popular models and heroes exert a profound impact on the lives of others. What has been happening to these shining stars? They have been falling and losing their light. Let us examine them:

- **Politicians.** According to news reports, corruption and sexual scandals among our statesmen is rampant. The ones elected to lead us to a better life are regarded as the second least trusted group in society—next to car salesmen!
- **Religious Leaders.** The news about them is also bleak. Cases of corruption, sexual abuse, the cover up of scandals, and embroilment in politics have tarnished the reputation of those responsible for leading us to God, and to a life of purity and sanctity. In addition, we hear constantly of religious leaders who promote prejudice, and instigate war and violence.
- **Sport Heroes.** The news regarding these supposedly role models, who have a profound impact on young people, is also demoralizing. Apart from their questionable behavior off and on the field, many of our athletes have been disqualified for their use of illegal, performance-enhancing substances. These heroes seem to be falling at a steady rate.
- **Hollywood Stars.** Tabloids are popular because they expose the moral lapses of famous stars. These stars are also fading and losing their light. Most of them seem to be on the verge of undergoing divorce or rehabilitation—due to addiction to one drug or another.
- **Business Leaders.** For decades business leaders have enjoyed the respect and trust of the masses. However, dishonesty and greed have tarnished their image. More laws are regularly being passed to control their actions.

Who then is left untouched? Where is the light of hope? Where can people find a haven of purity and peace?

Our decisions cannot be better than the data that sustains them. To make good choices, we must seek knowledge; we must gather new and accurate data. Life has become so stressful, few people take time to seek knowledge. Most believers don't read even the sacred Writings of their own religion. And if they do, it is usually just something to fill or kill time. What is the number one topic of interest to people today? About 46 percent of mass market paperbacks are romance novels. A secondhand bookstore in our town sells romance novels by the grocery bags! In any given year, 60 percent of households don't buy a single book. What happens when people fail to seek knowledge? It is said that if all the believers around the world dust off all the copies of the Scriptures they have stored in their homes, they will cause the worst dust storm of the century!

The first step towards God is knowledge. Knowledge is the bridge that connects our spirit with His Spirit. True love can come only if this bridge is built—built so well that tests

and trials cannot shake or break it. Why have so many lost their trust in religion, and as a consequence, in their Creator? The main reason is a lack of true knowledge:

***My people are perished for lack of knowledge.***

*Hosea 4:6*

***Through Knowledge shall the just be delivered.***

*Proverbs 11:9*

The first step toward regaining people's loss of trust is to spread the "knowledge of God"—the spiritual design of creation.

It has been one of the great misconceptions throughout all ages that to know and love God, we need a mediator—a priest, or a pastor, a rabbi, or a mullá. Who are these mediators, and what do they believe? Each of them believes that only he knows the truth, and his rival—the one with a different set of beliefs—is lost, unsaved, and even condemned to everlasting fire. Can people with such a mindset be reliable, worthy of leading people to true knowledge of God?

This childish dependence of believers on their leaders has been the prime cause of prejudice, conflict, and war throughout all ages. Religious prejudice has been and is still being promoted by leaders who are doing the exact opposite of what their Scriptures ask them to do. Instead of serving as bridges of reconciliation and love, they have become giant walls of separation, superiority, and prejudice. The first step toward spiritual maturity is the emancipation of the human soul from leaders who have taken charge of people's relationship with God—leaders who make a living by breeding and spreading prejudice.

In this age of knowledge and enlightenment, why would anyone pay someone to tell him what to believe? Only children have such a need, not mature, educated adults. And yet the tradition and trend of dependency continues unchallenged.

Many of those in positions of power thrive on people's ignorance and lack of self-confidence. A man said to his psychologist, "My wife suffers from an inferiority complex." The psychologist asked, "Do you also have the same complex?" The man said, "No, mine is just the opposite. I am enjoying a superiority complex. What I want to know is this: how can I keep my complex and hers unchanged?"

The state of those who read their Scriptures is often no better than those that do not. They collect books and go over the pages without questioning, wondering, and reflecting. They simply repeat what they learn from others. Their knowledge is mostly rote learning. The following prophecy is about our time and clearly has predicted this dominant trend:

***Their religion is but a precept of men learnt by rote...***

*Isaiah 21:13*

You might have heard the story of Dr. Werner Von Braun, the German-born rocket specialist who traveled along with his chauffeur to many universities and centers of research to deliver an important talk. Once his chauffeur told him, "I have heard your talk so many times, I bet I can deliver it in your place and no one will know it." Dr. Von Braun said, "Would you like to try it tonight?" "Yes," replied the astonished chauffeur. The only preparation needed was an exchange of clothes. When the moment came, Dr. Von Braun sat in the back of the lecture hall wearing his chauffeur's uniform while the latter delivered the entire talk flawlessly. Then came the time for the audience to ask

questions. When the first questioner asked his question, the quick-thinking chauffeur said, “This is a simple question. I am certain that even my chauffeur can answer it!”

True religion is understanding, not quoting “authorities.” Religion is dynamic, progressive and flowing, not stagnant. “Still religion, like still water, is the first to freeze.” Religion is not a spare tire to be used in an emergency; it is the very light of life. Religion is not praying to God on Friday or Saturday and preying on people for the rest of the week. Religion is not praising the Lord on Sunday and pillaging people’s pockets on Monday. Religion is not sitting and praying, it is **running** and praying.

A man was lost in the woods. He saw a bear approaching. He remembered the words of his pastor: “When you are in danger, close your eyes, kneel down, and pray for deliverance.” He did as he had been directed. After a few tense moments, he slowly opened his eyes and saw the bear kneeling down in front of him. The man shouted, “Hallelujah! praise the Lord! We are both praying in the same way.” The bear said, “I don’t know about you, but I am saying grace! It may be too late for you. But if you get away and see another bear, don’t kneel and pray, **run** and pray.”

Wherever we look, we find someone who claims to be **the way** to salvation, **the authority** on the true meaning of God’s Word, or **the only voice of truth**. A man was asked to introduce himself. “I am Napoleon,” he declared proudly. Someone asked him how he knew. “God told me!” he replied confidently. At that moment another man shouted, “**I** did not tell you!” I have heard several television evangelists claiming that God speaks to them regularly and tells them exactly what they should tell people.

The perplexity of people and their inability to find the truth is predicted clearly by the prophet Amos:

“The days are coming,” declares the Sovereign Lord, “when I will send a famine through the land—not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord. Men will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the Lord, but they will not find it. Amos 8:11-12

The following statement from a Christian publication indicates that people are searching, but many are starving because of a lack of truth:

An irony of our times is that while many Church leaders are more and more agnostic, there has never been a time when such a high percentage of laymen believe that a spiritual revival is the need of our hour. *Fortune* magazine’s poll of the American people reveals that 53 percent of U.S. businessmen are convinced that a “spiritual awakening is what their nation most needs.”<sup>18</sup>

The prophet Joel, in the course of two chapters, mourns the loss of joy and gladness from the hearts of people, and the loss of heavenly food from the planet:

Hear this, you elders; listen, all who live in the land. Has anything like this ever happened in your days or in the days of your forefathers?...Wake up, you drunkards, and weep!...Surely the joy of people is withered away...What a dreadful day! For the day of the Lord is near; it will come like a destruction from the Almighty. Has not the food been cut off before our very eyes—joy and gladness from the house of our God?...The day of the Lord is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it?

Joel 1:2, 5, 12, 15-16; 2:11

After the mourning comes the good news:

Then the Lord will be jealous for his land and take pity on his people..."I am sending you grain, new wine and oil, enough to satisfy you fully"...Be glad, O people of Zion, rejoice in the Lord your God, for he has given you a Teacher for righteousness. He sends you abundant showers, both autumn and spring rains, as before. "I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten...And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people...And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved..."

Joel 2:18-19,23,25,28-29,32

Let it be known to all the mourners of the earth that a new Spirit is poured out upon the earth. Let it be declared to all those whose companion is despair, whose purpose earthly riches, whose final goal the grave, that the times of stress and distress have passed away, the waiting is over. Let it be proclaimed to all the peoples of the earth that they can choose between grief and gladness, between suffering and celebrating. Let all the lovers of truth know that a new Day has dawned. The choice between rising and celebrating the new Day, or staying asleep and dreaming is ours to make.

## **Part VIII**

### **A Final Appeal**

Consider the rose: whether it blossometh in the East or in the West, it is nonetheless a rose. For what mattereth in this respect is not the outward shape and form of the rose, but rather the smell and fragrance which it doth impart.<sup>1</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

Light is good in whatever lamp it is burning! A rose is beautiful in whatsoever garden it may bloom!<sup>2</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá

What is in a name? that which we call a rose  
By any other name would smell as sweet. Shakespeare

# 16

## One God One Faith One People

There is only one good, knowledge, and one evil, ignorance. Socrates

There is no slavery but ignorance. Robert Ingersoll

This chapter shows the oneness of religion in a unique way. Are you ready for a test? The quotations compiled in this chapter come from the Scriptures of five religions: Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and the Bahá'í Faith. Can you identify the source of each of them? (Circle the code letter for each source in the left column.) The references are at the end of the test.

Codes: H: Hinduism; J: Judaism; C: Christianity; I: Islam; B: Bahá'í Faith

- |           |  |
|-----------|--|
| H J C I B | 1. Through knowledge shall the just be delivered.                |
| H J C I B | 2. Let the wise listen and add to their learning.                |
| H J C I B | 3. O my Lord, increase knowledge unto me.                        |
| H J C I B | 4. Let him then who will, take the way to his Lord.              |
| H J C I B | 5. Whoever is thirsty, let him come.                             |
| H J C I B | 6. Our God and your God is one.                                  |
| H J C I B | 7. The Lord our God is one Lord.                                 |
| H J C I B | 8. Truly your God is but one, Lord of the heavens and the earth. |
| H J C I B | 9. Is there any God beside me, or any Creator?                   |
| H J C I B | 10. Glory to God.  |
| H J C I B | 11. Glory be to God!   |
| H J C I B | 12. The heavens declare the glory of God.                        |
| H J C I B | 13. All things...declare His glory...yet ye understand not.      |

- H J C I B 14. The angel said, "O Mary! Verily God announceth to thee the Word from Him: His name shall be Messiah Jesus."
- H J C I B 15. O Mary! Verily hath God chosen thee above the women of the worlds.
- H J C I B 16. No one is good except God alone.
- H J C I B 17. God is the source of my being.
- H J C I B 18. I call only upon my Lord.
- H J C I B 19. I can of my own self do nothing.
- H J C I B 20. My sole work is preaching from God, and His message.
- H J C I B 21. I only follow my Lord's utterances to me.
- H J C I B 22. This is God, my Lord: in Him do I put my trust.
- H J C I B 23. I am the way [to God].
- H J C I B 24. This is the way [to God], walk ye in it.
- H J C I B 25. Follow me: this is the right way [to God].
- H J C I B 26. Trust always in God.
- H J C I B 27. How goodly the reward of those who...put their trust in their Lord!
- H J C I B 28. Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself.
- H J C I B 29. My mercy embraceth all things.
- H J C I B 30. Lord...who faithfully keepest the covenant with those who love thee and observe thy commandments.
- H J C I B 31. A man will reach perfection if he does his duty as an act of worship to the Lord.
- H J C I B 32. For, by working for my [God's] sake only, you will achieve perfection.
- H J C I B 33. My Being sustains all creatures and brings them to birth.
- H J C I B 34. By His [God's] grace you will find supreme peace, and the state which is beyond all change.
- H J C I B 35. You [God] are first and highest in heaven...infinite of might and boundless in your glory.
- H J C I B 36. The man that loves me [God], he shall not perish.
- H J C I B 37. Fear no longer, for I will save you from sin and from bondage.
- H J C I B 38. He [God] is invisible always to the ignorant, but his sages see him with the eye of wisdom.

- H J C I B 39. Men of small understanding only pray for what is transient and perishable.
- H J C I B 40. Let him [a true believer] be friendly and compassionate to all...forgiving, ever-contented...pure...free from attachment...full of devotion.
- H J C I B 41. These acts [good deeds] must be performed without attachment or regard for their fruits.
- H J C I B 42. There is no power nor strength but in God alone.
- H J C I B 43. The source of all evil is for man to turn away from his Lord and set his heart on things ungodly.
- H J C I B 44. True knowledge...is the knowledge of God.
- H J C I B 45. For every one of you his paramount duty is to choose for himself that on which no others may infringe and none usurp from him. Such a thing...is the love of God.
- H J C I B 46. For everything there is a sign. The sign of love is fortitude under My decree and patience under My trials.
- H J C I B 47. The source of all glory is acceptance of whatsoever the Lord hath bestowed, and contentment with that which God hath ordained.
- H J C I B 48. The Source of all good is trust in God.
- H J C I B 49. Prefer not your will to Mine, never desire that which I have not desired for you.
- H J C I B 50. Put thy whole confidence in the grace of God, thy Lord. Let Him be thy trust.
- H J C I B 51. Render ye thanksgiving unto God that perchance He may deal mercifully with you.
- H J C I B 52. Whenever thou shalt long for Me, thou shalt find Me close to thee.
- H J C I B 53. Blessed is he that draweth nigh unto Him, and woe betide them that are far away.
- H J C I B 54. Return ye to God and repent, that He, through His grace, may have mercy upon you, may wash away your sins.
- H J C I B 55. The supreme cause for creating the world and all that is therein is for man to know God.
- H J C I B 56. The Word of God is the king of words.

**References:** (1) Proverbs 11:9; (2) Proverbs 1:7; (3) Qur'án 30:113; (4) Qur'án 73:19; (5) Revelation 22:17 NIV; (6) Qur'án 29:45; (7) Mark 12:29; (8) Qur'án 37:4-5; (9) Isaiah 44:8 NEB; (10) Luke 2:14; (11) Qur'án 12:108; (12) Psalms 19:1 NIV; (13) Qur'án 17:44 Y; (14) Qur'án 3:40; (15) Qur'án 3:37; (16) Luke 18:20 NEB; (17) John 8:42; (18) Qur'án 72:20; (19) John 15:5; (20) Qur'án 72:23; (21) Qur'án 7:202; (22)

Qur'án 42:8; (23) John 14:6 NIV; (24) Isaiah 30:21; (25) Qur'án 43:61; (26) Psalms 62:8; (27) Qur'án 29:58; (28) Leviticus 19:18 NIV; (29) Qur'án 7:155; (30) Daniel 9:5 NEB; (31) Krishna (Bhagavad-Gita, translated by Prabhavanada and Isherwood) p. 127; (32) Krishna, p. 98; (33) Krishna, p. 80; (34) Krishna, p. 129; (35) Krishna, p. 95; (36) Krishna, p. 85; (37) Krishna, p. 129; (38) Krishna, p. 112; (39) Krishna, p. 73; (40) Krishna, p. 99; (41) Krishna, p. 120; (42) Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 252; (43) Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 156; (44) The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 89; (45) Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 261; (46) Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh*, no. 48, A; (47) Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 155; (48) Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 155; (49) Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh*, no. 19, P; (50) Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 234; (51) The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 162; (52) Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys*, p. 63; (53) Bahá'u'lláh, *Bahá'i World Faith*, p. 51; (54) Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 130; (55) Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 268; (56) Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 173.



Quotations such as the preceding illustrate how similar are the basic teachings of the world's great religions. If we remove the divisive obstacles, people will find that they are more similar than they think. The best place to search for similarity is in the sacred scriptures; they are the main source for the values we hold. Recognizing the harmony between the beliefs of these religions is a first step toward unity, understanding, and peace.

Why are the sacred Scriptures so similar? This story may reveal the secret. A teacher asked, "Why did Jesus know the Scriptures so well?" "Because," a little girl answered, "His daddy wrote it."

The Jews were amazed and asked, "How did this man get such learning without having studied?" Jesus answered, "My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me." John 7:15-16

When it comes to religion, attachment to "name" or "label" poses the first obstacle to communication and understanding.

Consider the rose: whether it blossometh in the East or in the West, it is nonetheless a rose. For what mattereth in this respect is not the outward shape and form of the rose, but rather the smell and fragrance which it doth impart.<sup>1</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

Light is good in whatever lamp it is burning! A rose is beautiful in whatsoever garden it may bloom!<sup>2</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá

What is in a name? that which we call a rose  
By any other name would smell as sweet. Shakespeare

Jesus used the analogy of the sheep and the shepherd to show that the faithful followers of God's Word instinctively recognize the Voice of the divine. If the Word has the same distinctions, it must echo the same Voice:

"The watchman [the one who protects and awakens others; symbolic of religious leaders] opens the gate for him [the Shepherd], and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and **his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they**

*do not recognize a stranger's voice.*” Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them...” [emphasis added]. John 10:3-6

Do not the preceding quotations from the five sacred Scriptures echo the Voice of the same Shepherd? There is a new religion that teaches that all great religions come from one source and declare the same truths, that the time has come for the faithful followers (other and other and other sheep) of the one supreme Shepherd to listen to the one distinct Voice of the divine and to come together into one vast fold in peace and harmony. That religion is called the Bahá'í Faith.

The time of separation has passed away. Ours is the age of “one flock and one Shepherd.”

I will save my flock, and they shall be ravaged no more...Then I will set over them one Shepherd to take care of them... Ezekiel 34:22-23

*...there shall be one flock and one shepherd.* Christ (John 10:16)

All these divisions we see on all sides, all these disputes and opposition, are caused because men cling to ritual and outward observances, and forget the simple, underlying truth. It is the outward practices of religion that are so different, and it is they that cause disputes and enmity—while the reality is always the same, and one... So let us one and all hold fast to truth, and we shall be free indeed! The day is coming when all the religions of the world will unite, for in principle they are one already.<sup>3</sup> Bahá'í Scriptures

A new world is dawning:

And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away. Then He who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.” Christ (Rev. 21:4-5 NKJ)

This book is one of several volumes. It answers some questions, and raises others. If you wish to continue your search for truth, if you wish to learn about a Faith that promotes “*Enlightened Faith*,” consider reading *One God, Many Faiths; One Garden, Many Flowers*, and *Heaven's Most Glorious Gift*. Refer to the next chapter for a brief review of their contents. They will continue to raise more questions and offer more answers. As it is said, “Destiny is not a matter of chance; it is a matter of choice.”

How regrettable indeed that man should debar himself from the fruits of the tree of wisdom while his days and hours pass away swiftly.<sup>4</sup> Seize the time, therefore, ere the glory of the divine springtime hath spent itself...<sup>5</sup> Bahá'í Scriptures

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Christ (Matt. 7:7-8)

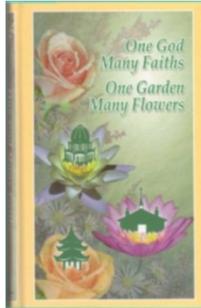
## **Appendices**

# **Appendix I**

## **Other Works by the Same Author**

This appendix introduces two small books closely relevant to the prime purpose of this book expressed in this verse:

How blest are those who know their need of God; the kingdom of Heaven is theirs. Christ (Matt. 5:3 NEB)



## **One God, Many Faiths; One Garden, Many Flowers**

### *Preface*

*We understand why children are afraid of darkness. But why are people afraid of light?*

*Plato*

It takes a special person to reach for the light, to go beyond the comfort zone of tradition and conformity. Selecting or accepting a book of this kind places you at the top of the pyramid of light-lovers. It shows a desire to discover; it points to an open mind unafraid to expand; it indicates courage to step beyond the safety of the familiar and the popular; it demonstrates a sense of trust and hope that there is more to life than is found in the morning paper or on the evening news.

This book is for those who wish to see the world grow up, those who feel like the little girl who said, "I'd like to be six. I'm tired of being five. I have been five for the whole year!"

Many people live "lives of quiet desperation." They believe they cannot make any difference. This book undermines that belief. It shows how a small step can lead to giant leaps for you and for humankind, how a sincere desire can bring rewards beyond your expectation. I hope the knowledge this book presents will help you take that small step with excitement and confidence. I hope it will stir and expand your desire for truth to blossom into an everlasting and ever-growing spiritual adventure and achievement.

***One God, Many Faiths*** presents the joyous news of the coming of the Kingdom, news for which people have been waiting thousands of years. It is written to proclaim that the Promised One of all nations and religions has come! It contains the most glorious message the human race has ever known: ***that the time is ripe for the peoples of the world to become one people, under one God and under one faith.***

The age of separation has passed—the time of togetherness has come. We can survive and prosper only by cooperating and caring for each other. A lady lost power in her car at a traffic light. The young driver behind her kept honking his horn. The lady stepped out of her car, went to the young man and said, “If you come and get my car started, I will blow your horn for you.” The world needs people who will step out of their little comfort zone and, instead of just sitting and making a noise, become a part of the divine symphony.

***One God, Many Faiths*** is about a new Faith—the Bahá’í Faith—which is uniting the peoples of all religions under one God. The knowledge of the new Faith—its marvelous teachings and incredible history—will lead you away from the stale odor of gloom and doom to a new and splendid garden. You will be surrounded by rows and rows of fragrant flowers. From every petal of those flowers you will hear a new song and symphony of peace and oneness, of hope and harmony.

You can be certain of this: if you investigate the Bahá’í Faith with a thirsting and humble heart, you will experience a sense of spiritual fulfillment that will edify and enrich your life beyond your expectation. Once you have reached the end of your journey, you will say, “How could I have lived without it?” Your degree of spiritual capacity and thirst for truth will determine the heights to which you will soar. The purpose of this book is to share with you the greatest and most joyous news the world has ever known—the ***knowledge*** of the most glorious advent in human history.

Through ***knowledge*** shall the just be delivered.

Proverbs 11:9

There is nothing of greater importance to mankind than ***the investigation of truth***.<sup>1</sup>

Bahá’í Scriptures

## ***Choosing Your Everlasting Destiny***

In this age of information overload, only a few people buy books, and of those who do, according to one report, only 10 percent read beyond the first few chapters! I hope you are one of those few champions who will persist to the finish line, one of those special people who place their spiritual destiny above everything else. If some topics interest you more than others, do not hesitate to read them first. But please make every effort to cover every topic. Otherwise, you may be unable to see the celestial scene, the grand design of your spiritual destiny. Even a small patch of cloud—a lack of knowledge—can prevent you from seeing the sun.

Deep inside us there is a feeling that nothing happens by chance. Is there a reason you heard about the Bahá’í Faith? Is an invisible hand guiding you? God is ever-present in our lives and constantly puts signs in our path, which we often fail to see.

Christ specifically asked us to pray, so that we might know Him at His return:

Take ye heed, watch and ***pray***...

Christ (Mark 13:33)

Watch ye therefore, and ***pray always***...

Christ (Luke 21:36)

Before embarking on this most critical and far-reaching journey of your life, pray that you will be assisted every step of the way. Will the One who asks us to pray, ignore our prayers? Will He not hold our hands if we ask Him?

Whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive. Christ (Matt. 21:22)

For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. Christ (Matt. 7:7-8)

And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved... Joel 2:32

This prayer should ascend from every heart—it should become everyone’s daily desire:

Show me thy ways, O Lord, teach me thy paths. Psalms 25:4-5

Through childhood training we become emotionally programmed into a specific system of belief. This system cannot be turned off and on by the sheer weight of evidence. A candle, however perfect, cannot set itself on fire. Without the light of God the soul is only a lump of wax. But as soon as it makes a move, it ignites the spark of truth; it sets in motion the heart of Heaven.

Concerning all acts of initiative and creation, there is one elementary truth—that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves, too. Johann Goethe

Wisdom indicates that the worthiest way to spend life is to invest it in something that outlives life, to devote it to a purpose that never dies. I hope the study of the Bahá’í Faith will serve that purpose for you. I hope you are among the few who have faith in God’s promises and are dedicated to discovering the knowledge of their fulfillment. I hope you are among those who will take the time to uncover this greatest of all mysteries: the coming of the One promised in all Scriptures, the supreme Messenger and Redeemer of our time, for whom the world has been waiting for thousands of years. “Actions deferred are all too often opportunities lost.”

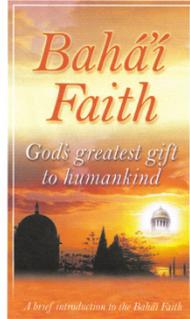
Obviously, you are not an average person. The fact that you are reading this book is evidence that you have already climbed from the deep valleys of apathy and unawareness, that you are already at the top of the pyramid of light-lovers. Let me therefore salute you for your wisdom, courage, and commitment to embarking on a journey that will continue beyond time into the eternal future. Let me commend you for giving a high priority to your spiritual life and destiny by making an independent investigation of truth. Let me also thank you for the honor of allowing me to share with you a message that has transformed my life beyond any estimation, and that can transform your life and that of every other person on our planet. May your search be a step that will lead to giant leaps for you and for humankind. I cherish the hope that some day I will have the honor of meeting you and knowing you. Until then, may God bless you and assist you in all your endeavors.



## *Table of Contents*

### **Questions and Answers About the Bahá'í Faith**

- Why Should Everyone Investigate the Bahá'í Faith?
- What Is the Bahá'í Faith?
- Who Are the Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith?
- What Do Bahá'ís Believe About God?
- Why Do We Need a New Faith?
- Is There Any Evidence That the Bahá'í Faith Transforms Lives?
- What Are the Two Most Critical Questions Every Seeker of Truth Should Ask?
- Why Have People Always Denied God's Messengers?
- Do Miracles Prove the Station of God's Messengers?
- By What Evidence Did Christ Prove His Divine Station?
- Who Was the Báb?
- How Was the Báb Martyred?
- Who Was Bahá'u'lláh?
- What Station Does Bahá'u'lláh Claim?
- What Other Proofs Establish the Validity of Bahá'u'lláh's Station?
- What Station Does the Báb Claim?
- How Do Bahá'ís Intend to Unify the Diverse Religions of the World?
- Is World Peace a Dream or a Destiny?
- Why Do Bahá'ís Emphasize "Independent Investigation of Truth"?
- Do Bahá'ís Have Clergy?
- How Do the Great Religions Differ?
- What Is Bahá'u'lláh's Plan for a Peaceful and Prosperous World?
- What Is Biological Prejudice?
- What Are Bahá'í Teachings on Marriage and Family?
- How Do Bahá'ís Reconcile Religion and Science?
- Is Human Nature Good or Evil?
- Are Bahá'ís Active in Improving the Socio-Economic State of the World?
- Do Bahá'ís Pray?
- What Are the Sacred Scriptures of the Bahá'í Faith?
- Do Bahá'ís Believe in the Afterlife?
- Do Bahá'ís Believe in Heaven and Hell?
- What Are the Two Levels of Knowledge?
- What Are the Traits of a True Seeker?
- What Is the Illusion of Waiting and Wishing?
- Why Do People Accept the Bahá'í Faith?
- Should Everyone Investigate the Bahá'í Faith?
- How Does One Become a Bahá'í?



A Chapter from:  
**Bahá'í Faith: God's Greatest  
Gift to Humankind**

**Discovering Our  
Purpose in Life**

“Where do we come from? What on earth are we doing? And where are we going?” These questions have been debated since the dawn of history. Some people support the earthly view. They think we come from bacteria and at death return to them in a “grave condition” to pay back our debts and sustain their survival! Others cherish the heavenly view, expressed in these words and verses:

*Verily, we are God's, and to Him shall we return.<sup>1</sup>*

*Bahá'u'lláh*

*Behold, all souls are Mine.*

*Ezekiel 18:4*

*The spirit shall return unto God.*

*Ecclesiastes 12:7*

To become worthy of the honor of returning to our Creator and attaining His presence, we must set our heart and soul on one goal: the cultivation of our spiritual potential. That is the prime purpose of our lives. We are not cells in aging bodies, but eternal souls set on an ever-advancing journey towards the One who made us. Can a traveler who stands still reach his destination? Our destination is God; the path that can lead us to His presence is paved with spiritual purity and perfection.

Which one is the master? The body or the soul? Devoting our precious lives to the demands of the flesh is spiritual slavery. It is laboring without reward. It is wasting the precious days of our lives.

We are told that our everlasting destiny is determined by the choices we make during our brief journey on earth. Some choices are trivial; others lead to far-reaching—indeed everlasting—consequences. Among the thousands, perhaps millions, of choices we make and actions we take during our lifetime, which ones count the most in shaping our destiny and leading us towards God—our ultimate goal? Can any choice or action be as critical and far-reaching as the following:

- *Knowing, loving, and trusting God.*
- *Discovering what He has planned for each of us, and*
- *Taking action to fulfill that plan?*

## ***Discovering God's Plan for Each of Us***

Is there a roadmap that can lead us to our destination, that can disclose what God has planned for each of us? To discover the answer to this question, we must consider this universal principle: ***To succeed in a task, we must meet certain requirements.*** Is the glorious task of accomplishing our spiritual mission an exception to this rule? Can we reach this goal without making some efforts, without meeting certain requirements? What are those rules or requirements? In our journey towards God, we face and must pass through the following two stages:

- The stage of “***hearing***”
- The stage of “***seeing***”

After much suffering, Job made this same journey:

Then Job answered the Lord and said:...My ears had ***heard*** of you, but now my eyes have ***seen*** you. Job 42:1, 5

What do we need to accomplish during the first stage—that of “***hearing?***”

- We must discover the latest revelation of divine knowledge: the religion that God has sent specifically for our time. Because only the latest religion provides the most timely instructions and the most relevant roadmap towards our divine destiny, towards what God has planned for each of us and for the world. Can the instructions we received in first grade be adequate when we are in 12<sup>th</sup> grade?
- We must then carefully study the teachings of that religion—the latest Revelation of Guidance from God to humankind.

During the ***second*** stage of your journey—that of ***seeing***—we must discover the answer to these questions:

- Is the Bahá’í Faith rooted in God’s Wisdom and Authority? ***Does the life of Bahá’u’lláh manifest the divine distinctions?***
- ***Are His Words the Word of God?*** Did He speak them on His own authority, or was He a spokesman for the One who inspired Him to speak?
- ***Is the Bahá’í Faith the fulfillment of the promises made in all the sacred Scriptures of the past?*** Is it rooted in the Bible?

Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets. Amos 3:7 NIV

Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it... Revelation 1:3 NIV

***When you pass through the “stage of seeing” your certainty rises to a level called “the critical mass,” where all your doubts disappear.*** You will no longer consider the Bahá’í Faith only as a great idea that may create a better world; you will begin to see it as the greatest and most glorious revelation of divine knowledge to humankind. You will no longer consider Bahá’u’lláh simply a progressive thinker, a leader, a philosopher or a genius, but the One who holds the blueprint for transforming our entire planet into a place of peace. You will no longer regard the Bahá’í Faith as just one more Faith or denomination among hundreds of others, but a Faith that manifests to perfection God’s Authority and Wisdom. You will recognize it as a Revelation that provides a Plan not only for humankind as a whole, but also as a roadmap for ***your*** life and the life of every other person for the next thousand years and more.

When you pass through the “***stage of seeing***” you reach the crest of certainty. You rise above the clouds that may prevent you from seeing the sun. Can anyone who sees the sun deny its glory and grandeur?

***The signs of God shine as manifest and resplendent as the sun amidst the works of His creatures.***<sup>2</sup> Bahá’u’lláh

***[A true seeker] will discriminate between truth and falsehood, even as he doth distinguish the sun from shadow.***<sup>3</sup> Bahá’u’lláh

During the ***first*** phase of your journey, you will enter the heavenly Mansion, enjoy its beauty and grandeur, but later, because of tests and trials, you may change your mind and leave. The ***second*** phase does not allow for a change of mind. Once you enter that phase, you become a part of the Mansion. Staying inside and serving becomes the very purpose of your life.

While you are passing through the “***stage of seeing***.”

- You learn to trust God and welcome what He is planned for you.
- You discover that the world is a friendly place, and that during your journey on earth you have a critical role to play.
- You find that the things that cause pain and suffering are only small bumps on the road to the greatest joy and peace.
- You become highly motivated to make the greatest difference while you have a chance. You become supremely conscious of these urgent reminders:

***Teach us to count how few days we have and so gain wisdom of heart.*** Psalms 90:12

***Seize thy chance, for it will come to thee no more.***<sup>4</sup> Bahá’u’lláh

***Imperishable glory I have chosen for thee...While there is yet time, return, and lose not thy chance.***<sup>5</sup> Bahá’u’lláh

When you pass through the “***stage of seeing***” you come to this conclusion: “In no way can I cultivate my spiritual potential and fulfill my divine destiny without stepping into

the light of the new Knowledge manifested in this age through *Bahá'u'lláh—the Glory of God*.

### ***The Role of Reason in Religion***

In discovering what God has planned for us, should we submit to the dictates of emotions, or depend on the demands of reason? What is the reliable standard? The validity of religion, like science, must stand on evidence; if it cannot pass the test of reason, it should be rejected. Any seeker who investigates the truth of a religion must demand proofs. If a religion cannot prove itself, it is unworthy of attention. What a different world it would be if all people followed this one rule, if they demanded irrefutable evidence before believing?

The prime reason science moves forward is this: scientists do not depend on what their parents or friends tell them to believe. They demand evidence. What has been, and still is, the norm in religion? Ask a hundred people: “Why are you a Christian, a Jew, or a Muslim?” What do you think they will say? If they followed the rules of reason, as scientists do, would they not be following one harmonious system of beliefs?

### ***The Difference Between Divine and Deceptive***

We all wonder about this question: Is it easy to tell the difference between the divine and the deceptive? Ponder for a moment, and ask yourself: Can there be a comparison between what God plans and what a deceiver devises? Would they not be as different as light and darkness? Can anyone with open eyes mistake one for the other?

As long as people fail to demand evidence for their beliefs, two things will happen:

- Deceivers will continue to find receptive listeners.
- The followers of great religions will remain divided.

You now have a chance and a choice to reverse both of these trends by doing exactly what others fail to do: demand convincing proofs for the truth of the Bahá'í Faith. If you fail to find such proofs, then reject it without hesitation.

The purpose of including this section is to encourage you to move forward in your journey in the search for truth, to help you become aware that the Bahá'í Faith does not consist merely of grand principles, and lofty goals and teachings.

The Bible compares a new religion to “the tree of life” (Rev. 22:2, 14). In what way are they comparable? And what are the main parts of this tree? To test or recognize a true religion, we must examine the following:

***Fruits:***        ***The fruits of the Tree of Life are its Scriptures and teachings.***

***Leaves:***       ***The leaves of this celestial Tree are the transforming and healing***

*powers it generates in the lives of the believers.*

**Trunk:** *The trunk of this blessed Tree is its divine institutions.*

**Roots:** *The roots of this heavenly Tree are the prophecies it has fulfilled.*

**Gardener:** *The One who owns and plants the Tree of Life—the Founder of the new Faith.*

The books introduced in the next section demonstrate that the Bahá'í Faith is a heavenly Tree—so mighty and so deeply rooted in the Bible and other sacred Scriptures—that only God, the divine Gardener, could have planted and preserved it.

Just as religion is “the tree of life,” so is our faith, which must bear not only luscious fruits, but also be rooted in reason—in the Word of God, and in the prophecies. Those who accept a religion without demanding evidence may compromise their own spiritual destiny. They may allow the clouds of emotions and illusions, rather than the light of reason and wisdom, to be their guide. Without knowing:

- They may *accept a false religion.*
- They may *reject a true religion.*

What is the most distinctive mark of being human? What quality separates us from animals? Our ability to think, to reason, and to understand. Imagine the consequences of failing to use these powers! And how few depend on them as a guide to their everlasting destiny!

Why did God give us the gift of reasoning? Is it not for knowing the truth, for discovering the purpose of our lives? What if we fail to depend on this gift? Would we not be in the position of a traveler who tries to find a house without an address or directions?

If you take the time to read some of the books introduced in the next section, you will be rewarded in two ways:

- *You will discover that the evidence for the divine origin of the Bahá'í Faith is as compelling as the evidence for scientific laws.*
- *Once you accept the Bahá'í Faith, you will not waver in your beliefs. Your rational powers will prevent you from denying the truth, even as these same powers prevent you from denying the established laws of science.*

## ***Taking Time for Your Eternal Destiny***

We do not come to this world to “make a living.” “Making a living” is not an end, but a means to an end: gaining the most glorious Gift that God may bestow on humans. What is that Gift? It is the gift of “spiritual life”—a life that will last as long as eternity. Can we gain this most precious Gift without efforts?

The world is demanding. It consumes all our energies and asks for more. If *we* fail to set priorities, *the demands of the day* will set our priorities for us. Even 15 minutes a day devoted to our spiritual destiny can transform the quality of our life in ways we cannot

imagine. “Let us reason together” (Isa. 1:18). While in school, how many hours did you spend to receive a passing grade in a course in history or geography? And why did you enroll in that course? Is your everlasting destiny less worthy or consequential than a course in history or geography?

Examine the brief introductions offered in the following section about several selected books and then decide which ones you wish to read. If “the demands of making a living” allow you to take only a few minutes a day for your spiritual life, start with books that will help you pass swiftly through the three steps involved in the “*stage of seeing*.”

- ***Knowing Bahá’u’lláh***
- ***Examining His sacred Scriptures***
- ***Studying the prophecies He has fulfilled***

To gain an adequate knowledge about the preceding topics, you must engage in a serious study of the Bahá’í Faith. To begin your journey of the search for truth, consider reading the following books:

1. ***Bahá’u’lláh: The One Promised in all Scriptures***, 235 pages. To know a religion, it is essential to know its Founder—the One who planted the Tree of Life. Reading this book is a “must” for anyone who wishes to know the Bahá’í Faith.
2. ***The Evidence for Bahá’u’lláh: The Glory of the Father***, 329 pages. This book presents 57 marks of distinction in the lives and teachings of Christ and Bahá’u’lláh and shows that the two great Figures are identical: They manifest the same marks of distinction. It offers many selections from their Words, as well as a summary of the hundreds of Biblical prophecies Bahá’u’lláh has fulfilled. This book is suitable especially for Christians.
3. ***Bahá’í Proofs***: The One who has sent Messengers to us has also given us clear and definitive standards by which they can be recognized. This book applies those standards to Bahá’u’lláh and proves that He has fulfilled every one of them on a scale never seen before.
4. ***The Greatest News: The News Everyone Should Hear***, 166 pages. This book presents the roots of the Tree of Life. It is addressed to Christians to prove that the promise of the Second Advent has already been fulfilled.
5. ***Death: The Door to Heaven***, 182 pages. This book offers a spiritual perspective on this life and the life beyond.
6. ***God’s 19 Great Little Tranquilizers: A Prescription for Peaceful and Purposeful Living***, 62 pages. This small book presents a summary of the spiritual principles and laws that are essential to a life of peace and happiness. It describes briefly the transforming and healing powers of the Tree of Life. This book is especially helpful to agnostics and atheists, as well as to those who wish to become more spiritual without joining any religion.
7. ***Bahá’í Prayers: Prayer—the Key to the Heart of Heaven***, 226 pages. We are asked to recognize a tree by its fruits (Matthew 7:20). Prayers are the first fruits of religion—its heart and soul. They are the heavenly lights that guide us to the

presence of God and manifest His glory and grandeur. The prayers offered in this book are a basketful of fruits from the Vineyard of *Bahá'u'lláh—the Glory of God*. They have the power to inspire, to elevate and unite the followers of all religions. They serve as the center of unity and peace for all nations.

If you are a seeker, and you have already read *The Spiritual Design of Creation*, and if you are committed to continue your investigation, you are invited to request a free copy of three of the preceding books:

❖ *Call*: 989-772-1432

❖ *Send an Email*: [info@TheKnowledgeOfGod.com](mailto:info@TheKnowledgeOfGod.com)

❖ *Write*: Global Perspective, 1106 Greenbanks Dr, Mt. Pleasant, MI 48858



*He Whose advent hath been foretold in the heavenly Scriptures is come, could ye but understand it. The world's horizon is illumined by the splendors of this Most Great Revelation. Haste ye with radiant hearts and be not of them that are bereft of understanding.*<sup>6</sup>

*Bahá'u'lláh*

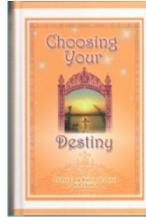
*“Come!” say the Spirit and the bride. “Come!” let each hearer reply. Come forward, you who are thirsty; accept the water of life, a free gift to all who desire it.*

*Christ (Rev. 22:17 NEB)*

*The Best-Beloved is come...All the favors of God have been sent down, as a token of His grace. The waters of everlasting life have, in their fullness, been proffered unto men. Every single cup hath been borne round by the hand of the Well-Beloved. Draw near, and tarry not, though it be for one short moment.*<sup>7</sup>

*Bahá'u'lláh*

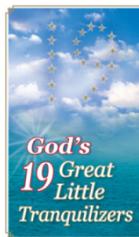
## ***Other Works by this Author***



### ***Choosing Your Destiny***

Most people leave their destiny to “chance.” Whatever their parents happen to believe, they believe. This book shows that our “destiny” is God’s most precious gift to us. Should we throw this gift to the wind? Should we allow “chance” rather than “choice” determine our destiny?

The Bahá’í Faith has come to give us spiritual insight and to help us choose our destiny in the light of reason and true knowledge, rather than in the darkness of tradition and conformity. The knowledge contained in *Choosing Your Destiny* can liberate us from past prejudices and illusions and set our souls free. It can help us become spiritual by developing “the divine image” in our soul.



### ***God's 19 Great Little Tranquilizers***

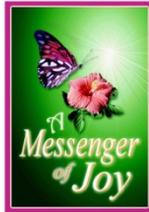
If God wanted to tranquilize our soul, what would He prescribe? This small book presents God’s prescription for peace and happiness. The 19 principles in this book are gleaned from the sacred Scriptures of great religions. Only the One who made us knows what we need to live a life of joy and peace.

Have you ever seen your soul? *God's 19 Great Little Tranquilizers* will help you see yourself—the treasures within your soul—in a light you have never seen before! Those “19 tranquilizers” are the breath of life, the first-aid kit for spiritual survival, a prescription for living an abundant life. They reveal the image of God in our heart and soul even as light reveals the mysteries of the universe to our sight. Without opening our soul to the glory of God and see His beautiful Image, we live in darkness and never know the reason we came to this world. This small book—67 pages—can elevate our

perspective, so that we can see our place in the universe, as our Creator intended, and witness a glimmer of the beauty and the glorious destiny that awaits us in “God’s many mansions in heaven.”

### ***The Knowledge of God***

This small book rests on this premise: We are spiritual beings created and designed in the most splendid Image, for a profound purpose—to grow and advance spiritually by remaining in touch with our Designer. Our welfare and our destiny depend on harmonizing our life with what He has planned and has in store for us. Unless we accept and submit to His plan, we cannot manifest our full potential, nor can we enjoy the blessings in store for us. Instead of blooming into a beautiful flower, we will live and die as a seed, without fulfilling our mission—the very reason we came into this world.



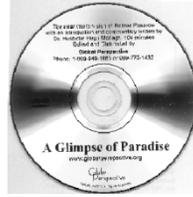
### ***A Messenger of Joy***

***A Messenger of Joy*** is the most comforting and positive book ever written on death and the afterlife. In consoling and uplifting the souls of the grieving, it sets a standard that is not likely to be surpassed for a long time.

This book portrays death as a message of joy and hope, and not as the news of sorrow and despair. It lifts the veil to show that death is not the end of life, but the beginning of an everlasting and most glorious journey toward God.

Why did we come to this world? Did we come to live for a few decades and then disappear into a grave? No! This book shows that we are here for a purpose—a most glorious purpose. We are at the beginning of a journey, where we pause for a moment, and then move on. Yet that one moment matters more than the eternity that follows it. It sets the course of the rest of the journey. The choices we make in this world determine our destiny in all the worlds that follow it. Should we not then learn how to spend this one moment the way God would wish us to spend it?

What a waste of life to live without knowing why we are here, where we are going, and how we can reach our destination—the one God has chosen for us? This small book offers the signposts that can help us make our journey pleasant and fruitful not only during our brief stay here but also during the eternity that follows it.

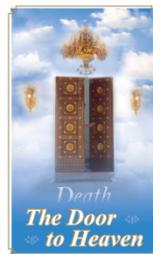


## ***A Glimpse of Paradise***

### **A Near-Death Vision of the Next Life**

This DVD (also video) contains a talk given by Reinee Pasarow about one of her near death visions. This is a state in which the individual shows no vital signs of life, yet experiences life to its fullest. What makes this story unique is this: Reinee’s vision guided her to become a Bahá’í. She was given several clues by a spiritual being about the Bahá’í Faith. For instance, one of the titles of Bahá’u’lláh—the Blessed Beauty—was revealed to her. She was also told the word “justice” and shown the seat of the Universal House of Justice, exactly as it is built. Reinee had many unusual dreams as a child, and three near death visions.

An introduction and a conclusion have been added to this DVD to make it more attractive and meaningful to all viewers, especially to seekers. They present Biblical and Bahá’í references to the many clues that Mrs. Pasarow received while in the presence of the Being of Light.



## ***Death: The Door to Heaven***

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## ***Compilations***



### ***Unto God Shall We Return***

This is the most reliable and comprehensive source of information on the destiny, reality, and immortality of the human soul.

***Unto God Shall We Return*** portrays a most glorious destiny for those who fulfill their lives' purpose during their short stay on this planet. It shows that death is not a voyage to grave, but to God. This book brings comfort to all those who mourn the loss of their loved ones, and instills hope, peace, and joy by unveiling glimpses of the glories that await anyone who fulfills his mission on earth and joins the host of heaven.

We are not permanent residents of this planet, but travelers on a journey to a new and exciting world:

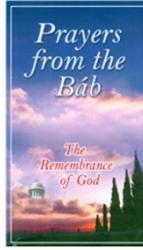
O Son of Man! Sorrow not save that thou art far from Us. Rejoice not save that thou art drawing near and returning unto Us. Bahá'u'lláh

Man is the life of the world, and the life of man is the spirit...Rejoice, for the life eternal is awaiting you. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá



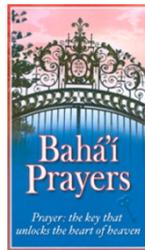
### ***Glorious Journey to God***

The first of its kind, ***The Glorious Journey to God*** presents hundreds of quotations on the afterlife from the Scriptures of four great religions: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and the Bahá'í Faith.



### ***Prayers from the Báb***

This is a compilation of prayers selected from the Writings of the Báb—the Herald of the Bahá'í Faith.



### ***Bahá'í Prayers***

This book presents 119 prayers from Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and many quotations on the honor and rules of praying from Bahá'í, Biblical and Islamic Scriptures.

## **Appendix II**

### **The Grand City of the Cell**

When God created the universe, He put His fingerprint on everything from the tiniest atoms to the greatest galaxies. Consider the tiny cell. Scientists tell us that a cell is as complex as a city.

Each tiny cell, smaller than the speck of a dust, contains DNA—a unique blueprint that contains enormous volumes of instructions. If the instructions contained in the DNA of a single cell were written out, they “would fill a thousand 600-page books” explains *National Geographic Magazine*. Each cell is a world, brimming with as many as a hundred trillion tiny groups of atoms called molecules. This is how *Newsweek* magazine illustrates the complexity of a cell:

Each of those 100 trillion cells functions like a walled city. Power plants generate the cell’s energy. Factories produce proteins, vital units of chemical commerce. Complex transportation systems guide specific chemicals from point to point within the cell and beyond. Sentries at the barricades control the export and import markets, and monitor the outside world for signs of danger. Disciplined biological armies stand ready to grapple with invaders. A centralized generic government maintains order.<sup>1</sup>

Michael Denton, a medical doctor and research scientist from Australia, in a chapter titled “The Puzzle of Perfection,” describes the awesome complexity of a single cell:

To grasp the reality of life as it has been revealed by molecular biology, we must magnify a cell a thousand million times until it is twenty kilometers in diameter and resembles a giant airship big enough to cover a great city like London or New York. What we would then see would be an object of unparalleled complexity and adaptive design. On the surface of the cell we would see millions of openings, like the port holes of a vast space ship, opening and closing to allow a continual stream of materials to flow in and out. If we were to enter one of these openings we would find ourselves in a world of supreme technology and bewildering complexity. We would see endless highly organized corridors and conduits branching in every direction away from the perimeter of the cell, some leading to the central memory bank in the nucleus and others to assembly plants and processing units. The nucleus itself would be a vast spherical chamber more than a kilometer in diameter, resembling a geodesic dome inside of which we would see, all neatly stacked together in ordered arrays, the miles of coiled chains of the DNA molecules. A huge range of products and raw material would shuttle along all the manifold conduits in a highly ordered fashion to and from all the various assembly plants in the outer regions of the cell...

What we would be witnessing would be an object resembling an immense automated factory, a factory larger than a city and carrying out almost as many unique functions as all the manufacturing activities of man on earth. However, it would be a factory which would have one capacity not equaled in any of our own most advanced machines, for it would be capable of replicating its entire structure within a matter of a few hours. To witness such an act at a magnification of one thousand million times would be an awe-inspiring spectacle...

It is the sheer universality of perfection, the fact that everywhere we look, to whatever depth we look, we find an elegance and ingenuity of an absolutely transcending quality, which so militates against the idea of chance. Is it really credible that random processes could have constructed a reality, the smallest element of which—a functional protein or gene—is complex beyond our own creative capacities?<sup>2</sup>

According to cell biologist Bruce Alberts, president of the National Academy of Sciences, “The entire cell can be viewed as a factory that contains an elaborate network of interlocking assembly lines, each of which is composed of a set of large protein machines.”

Alberts’ description is no idle metaphor. Even the simplest cells are bristling with high-tech machinery. On the outside, their surfaces are studded with sensors, gates, pumps and identification markers... Inside, cells are jam-packed with power plants, automated workshops and recycling units. Miniature monorails whisk materials from one location to another.<sup>3</sup>

### ***Time Limitations***

Some scientists state that evolution alone cannot explain the complexity and perfection of life. To prove their point, they depend on the limitations of time. Dr. James Coppedge, director of the Center for Probability Research in biology, “computed a world in which the entire crust of the earth—all the oceans, all the atoms, and the whole crust were available. He then had these amino acids bind at one and one-half trillion times faster than they do in nature. In computing the possibilities, he found that to provide a single protein molecule by chance combination would take ten to the 262 power years. Most of us do not have any idea what that means. To get a single cell—the single smallest living cell known to mankind—which is called the mycroplasm hominis H 39, would take ten to the 119,841 power years. That means that if you took thin pieces of paper and wrote 1 and then wrote zeros after them, you would fill up the entire known universe with paper before you could ever even write that number. That is how many years it would take to make one living cell.”<sup>4</sup>

French scientist and probability expert, Emile Barsk, states that “if anything on the cosmic level is of a probability less than ten to the fiftieth power, it will never happen. The probability of producing a human cell by chance is ten to the 119,000 power, a number so large that we cannot even comprehend it.”<sup>5</sup>

Michael Talbot in his book *Beyond the Quantum* offers the following statement:

The currently accepted wisdom in science is that life began in the primordial soup of Earth’s ancient seas and was the result of a completely random orchestration of events. The justification for this view is that given enough time and enough accidental

permutations of chemicals in such a primordial broth, it is possible that any complexity might have arisen. Similarly, and for a number of years now, adherents to this view have also pointed out that given enough time, a large work force of monkeys with an equally large number of typewriters could sooner or later come up with all the works of Shakespeare.

The problem with this view, according to Hoyle, is not that it is theoretically unsound, but that it is realistically impractical. In a recent article, mathematician David Osselton chided his fellow mathematicians for ever popularizing the issue of the monkeys and the typewriters in the first place. As Osselton points out, the basic mathematics behind the notion that given enough time a group of monkeys would eventually manage to type the works of Shakespeare may be simple and sound, but the sheer enormity of such a task makes it meaningless as an explanatory principle. According to Osselton's calculations, it would take a million million monkeys roughly a million million years to type out only the name of William Shakespeare. And to obtain a paltry two lines from one of Shakespeare's plays would require  $10^{150}$  strokes on a simplified fifty-character typewriter, or billions of billions of time more than the number of atoms in the whole universe...

Hoyle invokes the same argument: It is known that a living cell has a chain of amino acids, of which there are twenty different kinds. The function of these amino acids is in turn dependent upon 1,000 to 2,000 highly specialized enzymes. Hoyle postulates that for an enzyme to work by the amino acid chain, assuming its correct configuration in space, at least twenty to thirty key amino acids must be "right." According to Hoyle's calculations, the probability of a thousand different enzymes coming together in just the right way over the course of Earth's several billion years of history to form one living cell is a staggering  $10^{40,000}$  to 1.

Francis Crick, who shared a Nobel Prize for his work on the structure of DNA, likewise concluded, "An honest man, armed with all the knowledge available to us now, could only state that in some sense, the origin of life appears at the moment to be almost a miracle, so many are the conditions which would have had to have been satisfied to get it going."<sup>6</sup>

Dr. Hugh Ross confirms both the principle of evolution and the desire of some evolutionists to extend and exaggerate this principle beyond the evidence:

Natural selection can move a species only a limited distance from the species' norm, and the greater the distance, the lower the probability for survival. A good example of these limitations is demonstrated in dog breeding. One cannot possibly breed a dog significantly smaller than a teacup poodle. Moreover, such a poodle requires an intense level of care just to survive. More tellingly, if all the dog breeds were allowed to interact sexually, they would quickly revert back to their wild dog ancestries.

For macro-evolution to occur by strictly natural processes, multiple favorable mutations must take place simultaneously at a rate sufficient to overcome the natural extinction rate. This leads to an insurmountable problem.<sup>7</sup>

A scientist has calculated the time it takes by chance alone to get the letters of the following sentence in correct order:



## Appendix III

### God's Fingerprint on the Universe

Life could not have come into being by chance. Consider the following analogy. To produce a computer, many specific components must be gathered and put together in special ways. Naturally, we can have different designs, and we can substitute some components for others, yet there is a range for what materials can be used and how they must be combined for the computer to work. Sometimes even a small deviation from the necessary range of components will turn the computer from a scientific miracle to a useless mixture of metal and plastic. Anyone who has worked with computers knows the frustration of encountering even a small fault in the system. We can extend this example to the emergence of life on our planet. Dr. Hugh Ross, an astrophysicist, has compiled and listed 25 conditions that must have been present for life to emerge. The question is this: could all these required conditions have occurred by chance?

Here are just 5 out of 25 examples of “fine tuning” as described in *The Creator and the Cosmos*, by Dr. Ross:

1. ***strong nuclear force constant***  
*if larger:* no hydrogen; nuclei essential for life would be unstable  
*if smaller:* no elements other than hydrogen
2. ***weak nuclear force constant***  
*if larger:* too much hydrogen converted to helium in big bang, hence too much heavy element material made by star burning; no expulsion of heavy elements from stars  
*if smaller:* too little helium produced from big bang, hence too little heavy element material made by star burning; no expulsion of heavy elements from stars
3. ***gravitational force constant***  
*if larger:* stars would be too hot and would burn up too quickly and too unevenly  
*if smaller:* stars would remain so cool that nuclear fusion would never ignite, hence no heavy element production
4. ***electromagnetic force constant***  
*if larger:* insufficient chemical bonding; elements more massive than boron would be too unstable for fission  
*if smaller:* insufficient chemical bonding
5. ***ratio of electromagnetic force constant to gravitational force constant***  
*if larger:* no stars less than 1.4 solar masses, hence short stellar life spans and

uneven stellar luminosities

*if smaller*: no stars more than 0.8 solar masses, hence no heavy element production

The list of finely tuned characteristics for the universe continues to grow. The more accurately and extensively astronomers measure the universe, the more finely tuned they discover it to be.<sup>1</sup>

## **Appendix IV**

### **Religious Leaders: The Prime Source of Misinformation About the Spiritual Dimension of Life**

Ours is the age of the decline of faith:

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

*The vitality of men's belief in God is dying out in every land...*<sup>1</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

It is essential to explore the reasons behind the rapid decline of faith during the last two centuries. To find a remedy, we must first discover the cause. Unless we detect the source of the disease, there is little if any hope for recovery. Let us therefore get to the root of this epidemic disease.

Who are in charge of the spiritual life of people? Who must guide them and strengthen their faith? Who, but religious leaders? Are they not paid for this very reason? They hold much power within their grasp. They are assumed and expected to be saintly beyond reproach. They are also assumed to be experts in the knowledge of their sacred Scriptures. They reign in their synagogues, churches, or mosques like a king. They enjoy the respect of their followers, and are regarded by them as their guiding stars to heaven—the place of everlasting joy and peace rather than never-ending fire. Who would question such guiding star?

Despite their enormous influence in the affairs of the world—socio-economic, political, and spiritual—seldom have they been scrutinized. Seldom if ever have they been placed on trial. Let us do exactly what others have failed to do. The failure to do so is extremely costly to the spiritual welfare of all peoples and nations.

What is the first and foremost role of religious leaders? It is to serve as models of virtues. By their noble deeds they must demonstrate the transforming powers of faith. They must show how it can elevate the spiritual life of their followers. They should be shining examples of self-sacrifice and love for peoples of all faiths. They should also be open to new knowledge, to scientific discoveries, no matter where they may lead them.

Have they lived up to these standards? Have they respected scientific discoveries that could undermine their dogmatic thinking and beliefs? Have they also spread good-will among nations, especially between their followers and those of other faiths? Unfortunately, they have failed to live up to any one of these standards. In fact, they have

set an opposite example. Instead of crowning the spiritual life of humankind with honor, they have inflicted shame on this most glorious gift that heaven may bestow on humans.

In this age of science and enlightenment, they still take the metaphoric story of Adam and Eve literally! They still insist that God made Eve out of a rib removed from Adam! They are still refusing to look into the telescope—as they did during the time of Galileo and Copernicus—to witness the awesome design of creation both in the universe without and the universe within—the spiritual design of creation. They have failed to acknowledge the divine origin of all great religions. Instead of promoting unity and finding harmony between their faith and other faiths, they have tried to find and exaggerate minor differences.

I have known many of these leaders. Seldom have I found one who is open to new ideas, no matter how reasonable. Seldom have I found one who would reject the concept of “exclusive salvation”—“We are the only ones saved!”—a doctrine that has provided fuel for religious prejudice in all ages.

The very Scriptures that these leaders preach, predict their misleading role in this crowded and confusing age:

In that day...O My people, your leaders will cause you to err, and confuse the course of your path. Isaiah 3: 7, 17 AB

Therefore the people wander like sheep oppressed for lack of a shepherd. My anger burns against the shepherds, and I will punish the leaders; for the Lord Almighty will care for his flock... Zechariah 10:2-3 NIV

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. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. II Timothy 4:3-4 NIV

Note what Jesus said to the religious leaders of His age:

Woe to you, blind guides! You say, “If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.” You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred?...Woe to you, teachers of the [Mosaic] law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Matthew 23: 16, 17, 25 NIV

Religious leaders should have been the first to acknowledge the divine origin of great Messengers. Have they fulfilled this role? Once again, they have played just the opposite role:

Leaders of religion, in every age, have hindered their people from attaining the shores of eternal salvation, inasmuch as they held the reins of authority in their mighty grasp. Some for the lust of leadership, others through want of knowledge and understanding, have been the cause of the deprivation of the people.<sup>2</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

The extreme and persistent prejudice and narrow-mindedness displayed by those who should serve as models of true faith and shining examples of love and tolerance has been the prime cause of the decline of faith in our time—especially among the young and

educated. Their demeanor has diminished the honor of believing. If they are the best examples of true faith, who would want to have faith?

The news of sexual scandals committed by some religious leaders in the west, and the promotion of violence by others in the east, have further stained the honor of being an example for those in desperate need of an example. Instead of sending the child abusers—who engaged in the worst crime—to prison, church officials simply transferred them to other locations to find new victims to abuse! Is this what religion all about? Many lawsuits in several countries have been brought against the abusers. The church has paid billions of dollars in compensation.

When we went to school, we were graded. Grades make us more objective. Let us now grade the religious leaders to see more objectively where they stand. Please feel free to disagree with any grade assigned to them here. Minor disagreements can be expected. But if you disagree with any grade strongly, please let me know your reason. Perhaps we can reach a consensus concerning this critical issue.

### ***The Positive and Negative Impact of Religious Leaders on the World***

<b><i>The Functions Religious Leaders Should Serve</i></b>	<b><i>Positive</i></b>	<b><i>Negative</i></b>
Promoting harmony between followers of various religions		-4
Serving as shining examples of nobility for others—for both believers and nonbelievers.	0	
Promoting unity between denomination within their own religions	0	
Following reason and evidence rather than tradition as the standard of truth		-4
Respecting scientific studies		-4
Dividing their own religion into denominations and sects		-5
Emphasizing spiritual values over theological issues	0	
Working for racial equality	0	
Helping the poor	3	
Influencing the law-makers to reduce taxes for the poor and middle class	0	
Serving as peace-makers among nations	0	
<b>Score</b>	<b>+3</b>	<b>-17</b>

As these grades indicate, the impact of religious leaders on the spiritual health of the world has been extremely negative. Their grades are the opposite of what they should be.

What predictions have the Scriptures made about these leaders? What does the very the Bible they teach, declare about those in charge of the spiritual destiny of the humankind—the so-called “shepherds of the flock”?

At that time...Hear the cry of the shepherds, the wailing of the leaders of the flock, for the Lord is destroying their pasture. Jeremiah 25:33, 36 NIV

Weep and wail, you shepherds; roll in the dust, you leaders of the flock. For your time to be slaughtered has come; you will fall and be shattered like fine pottery. The shepherds will have nowhere to flee, the leaders of the flock no place to escape.

Jeremiah 25: 34-35 NIV  
See also Ezekiel 34:10

The appointed time predicted by the Prophets has now come! Should the believers continue to depend on these narrow-minded leaders as their guides to heaven? The spiritual destiny of humankind is too precious to be left in the hands of mostly dogmatic thinkers who are centuries behind their time.

This book is written to raise the status of faith above blind conformity promoted by most religious leaders who have taken charge and presented themselves as the true models of faith and trustworthy custodians of truth. And who are these leaders in charge? Each of them is convinced that only the believers on his side are worthy of God’s “many mansions in heaven,” and that others are “unsaved and lost” and therefore “fit for the fire!” This belief alone has alienated millions of enlightened thinkers from God. It is like asking GPS (global positioning system) for direction to a given destination and getting four or five opposite directions!

Do religious leaders have a monopoly over the truth? This book is written to show that they do not, that there is indeed a viable alternative. The facts presented here demonstrate that true faith can stand on both reason and scientific discoveries, that one truth cannot contradict another, that there is an absolute harmony between faith and reason, and between the spiritual teachings of all great religions.

It is my ardent wish that the facts presented in this book will reignite the flame of faith in all lovers of truth, especially in young and educated people who have been exposed to the fruits of science and must face this painful choice: either deny their faith, or deny the voice of reason within their soul.

The age of dependency has passed; the time of maturity and independence has arrived:

He hath endowed every soul with the capacity to recognize the signs of God. How could He, otherwise, have fulfilled His testimony unto men...?<sup>3</sup> Bahá’u’lláh

I have perfected in every one of you My creation, so that the excellence of My handiwork may be fully revealed unto men. It follows, therefore, that every man hath been, and will continue to be, able of himself to appreciate the Beauty of God, the Glorified. Had he not been endowed with such a capacity, how could he be called to account for his failure? If, in the Day when all the peoples of the earth will be gathered together, any man should, whilst standing in the presence of God, be asked:

“Wherefore hast thou disbelieved in My Beauty and turned away from My Self,” and if such a man should reply and say: “Inasmuch as all men have erred, and none hath been found willing to turn his face to the Truth, I, too, following their example, have

grievously failed to recognize the Beauty of the Eternal,” such a plea will, assuredly, be rejected. For the faith of no man can be conditioned by any one except himself.<sup>4</sup>  
Bahá’u’lláh

Purge your sight, that ye may perceive its glory with your own eyes, and depend not on the sight of any one except your self, for God hath never burdened any soul beyond its power. Thus hath it been sent down unto the Prophets and Messengers of old, and been recorded in all the Scriptures.<sup>5</sup>  
Bahá’u’lláh

Darkness hath encompassed every land, O my God... I beseech Thee, by Thy Most Great Name, to raise in every city a new creation that shall turn towards Thee, and shall remember Thee amidst Thy servants, and shall unfurl by virtue of their utterances and wisdom the ensigns of Thy victory, and shall detach themselves from all created things.

Potent art Thou to do Thy pleasure. No God is there but Thee, the Most Powerful, He Whose help is implored by all men.<sup>6</sup>  
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1. In case my letter moved you and you want to help, here is a good agency with many caring people who will ensure that your help (books) will make a difference:

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