

Who Needs Religion?

**The Honor of Knowing
and Loving God**

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Who Needs Religion?

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I

Who Needs Religion?

Religion bestoweth upon man the most precious of all gifts, offereth the cup of prosperity, imparteth eternal life, and showereth imperishable benefits upon mankind.¹ Bahá'u'lláh

The Link Between God and Man

God is infinite, beyond our grasps:

For minds cannot grasp Me nor hearts contain Me.²
Bahá'u'lláh

How then does the infinite communicate with the finite? In the Bahá'í Scriptures God is often likened to the sun and His Messengers or Redeemers to the rays of the sun. Mrs. Ruhyyih Rabbani illustrates this relationship very well:

There are grand opposites in life, grand extremes, and yet these opposites and extremes...produce the state of balance which makes the universe so ordered and perfect. For instance there is the sun 93,000,000 miles away from us, an incandescent ball of flaming gases...near which no life can survive, and yet here are we, so far away...living and thriving because of that sun. What reconciles us to that which we could never endure at close range, which would utterly destroy us? What unites us with it and enables us to tap its powers and react to it? An intermediary which conveys to us just the right amount of the sun's force to make life possible on this planet. The intermediary is the sun's ray which brings light and heat with it; we do not go to the sun and it does not come to us, but through

this suitable intermediary we get all the good of the sun we require.

The thing that created this vast system of galaxies... must be something which in its relation to us is very much like the sun in its relation to us, something which brought us into being, which we could never, because of our very nature, directly come into contact with, but from which we derive all our motivation. This something men call "God."³

In the absence of the rays, gloom and darkness prevail:

The honor of man is through the attainment of the knowledge of God; his happiness is from the love of God; his joy is in the glad tidings of God; his greatness is dependent upon his servitude to God.⁴ 'Abdu'l-Bahá

A man's steps are directed by the Lord. How can anyone understand his own way? Proverbs 20:24 NIV

Truly man's guidance is with Us [God]. Qur'án 92:12

Thy word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light on my path. Psalms 119:105 NEB

You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. Psalms 73:24 NIV

We are endowed with limitless and ever-unfolding potentials—physical, intellectual, as well as spiritual. Our physical nature is but a means, not an end; it binds the immortal with the mortal, the invisible with the visible. Yet, if left unchecked, untamed and unguided, "the means" subdues "the end," growing beyond reason, without grace. It stifles our spiritual powers, leaving our souls unfulfilled, shallow, and empty. The consequence is the decay and debasement of not only the human self but human civilization as well.

The cities suffocate in the dense smoke of pollution, the oceans cry in vain, the air whispers sadness and anger, and the earth bemoans the scars and ravages of an untamed and unguided civilization.

...the earth will mourn... Jeremiah 4:28 NIV

The land mourns and wastes away...

Isaiah 33:9 NIV

...and man shall say: what aileth her [the earth]? Qur'án 99:3

The civilization...will, if allowed to overleap the bounds of moderation, bring great evil upon men. Thus warneth you He Who is the All-Knowing. If carried to excess, civilization will prove as prolific a source of evil as it had been of goodness when kept within the restraints of moderation. Meditate on this, O people, and be not of them that wander distraught in the wilderness of error. The day is approaching when its flame will devour the cities...⁵

Bahá'u'lláh

Our spirit can be inspired only by a greater Spirit, and our noble essence kindled only by a Source endowed with greater Nobility, a pure and radiant Power already stirred and enkindled.

Bahá'u'lláh writes:

These energies with which the...Source of heavenly guidance hath endowed the reality of man lie, however, latent within him, even as the flame is hidden within the candle and the rays of light are potentially present in the lamp. The radiance of these energies may be obscured by worldly desires even as the light of the sun can be concealed beneath the dust and dross which cover the mirror. Neither the candle nor the lamp can be lighted through their own unaided efforts, nor can it ever be possible for the mirror to free itself from its dross. It is clear and evident that until a fire is kindled the lamp will never be ignited, and unless the dross is blotted out from the face of the mirror it can never represent the image of the sun nor reflect its light and glory.⁶

Bahá'u'lláh

The unfolding of every potential requires an educator. Scientists cultivate our mental and material powers, while the divine Teachers educate and guide our moral and spiritual powers; scientists unravel and advance the earthly culture, while the divine Educators reveal and unfold the heavenly civilization—“the city that descends from heaven.”

Religion makes easy and felicitous what in any case is necessary.

William James

Religion is the first thing and the last thing, and until a man has found God and been found by God, he begins at no beginning, he works to no end. H.G. Wells

At times in the lonely silence of the night and in rare lonely moments I come upon a sort of communion of myself with Something great that is not myself...These moments happen and are the supreme fact of my religious life... H.G. Wells

Religion uplifts not only the soul but the society as well. Great civilizations have always followed the advent of great Messengers.

Balance Between the Material and Spiritual Civilizations

Real human progress depends not so much on inventive ingenuity as on conscience...The splitting of the atom has changed everything save our mode of thinking, and thus we drift towards unparalleled catastrophe. We shall require a substantially new manner of thinking...to survive.

Albert Einstein

The end of the human race will be that it will eventually die of civilization. Ralph Waldo Emerson

In our era, material civilization has advanced, and is advancing, at an ever-increasing pace, whereas spiritual civilization has stagnated and declined. The sickly giant of materialism is rising with an ever-increasing tempo above the faint stirrings of our spiritual essence—of hope, faith, belief, and courage. Though spiritually afflicted and ailing, the giant is growing physically and mentally strong, utterly unprepared to face the new age. In His *Paris Talks*, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said:

All around us today we see how man surrounds himself with every modern convenience and luxury, and denies nothing to the physical and material side of his nature. But, take heed, lest in thinking too earnestly of the things of the body you

forget the things of the soul, for material advantages do not elevate the spirit of a man. Perfection in worldly things is a joy to the body of a man but in no wise does it glorify his soul.⁷

Dr. Wayne Dyer describes the futility of seeking self-esteem or self-worth from material things:

Most of us in the Western world identify ourselves and our relative degree of success or failure by the quality and quantity of stuff that we accumulate. When we make such a connection we are attaching our very worth as human beings to the acquisition of things. Consequently we set ourselves up for suffering when the stuff is not in our lives in sufficient quantity. We become our stuff.

When you adopt such a stance you set yourself up for perpetual frustration. What you are really saying is that you are valueless, incomplete, and worthless. You must continuously replenish your supply of material items in an effort to feel valued. The thesis “I am lacking value without stuff” leads to an endless pursuit of more. Striving for more things from the outside. This position prevents you from knowing that you are already whole, that you do not need anything else to be complete. It leads you to hoarding and ceaselessly comparing yourself to what others are accumulating. It takes your human gaze away from the eyes and hearts of those that you encounter, to their wallets and material possessions. The more you attach your value and humanity to those things outside of yourself, the more you give those things the power to control you. And when you are controlled by things external to yourself you are a slave to those externals, making suffering the only available course for you. Granted you may suffer in comfort, but still the agony is within you as long as those attachments remain.⁸

While millions die every year of hunger and malnutrition, others sprinkle their food with gold leaf. They also catch fish, remove a small delicate part for consumption, and bury the rest by the truckload.

Eat...of the good things with which We [God] have supplied you; but without excess, lest wrath fall upon you; for on whomever My wrath falls shall perish... Qur'án 20:83

Why the ever-growing and persistent disparity between man's scientific and spiritual maturity? Mankind has submitted to the wonders of the new science, but refused the marvels of the new revelation; it has placed its confidence in the idols of its own creation, instead of in the Marvels of its own Creator; otherwise it would witness mightier miracles, wonders more astounding than those achieved by the new science.

Religion is, verily, the chief instrument for the establishment of order in the world, and of tranquility amongst its peoples ... The greater the decline of religion, the more grievous the waywardness of the ungodly. This cannot but lead in the end to chaos and confusion.⁹ Bahá'u'lláh

...religion is a radiant light and an impregnable stronghold for the protection and welfare of the peoples of the world...¹⁰ Bahá'u'lláh

The time of the advent of the Light Bringers always coincides with the darkest points in human history—the points where faith has reached its lowest ebb, when religion has lost its purity, dignity, and honor in the eyes of the people.

The Need for a New Faith

Religion is a living, dynamic force. It must be reborn and renewed again and again. It must grow and adapt to the needs and capacity of the people of the time. Every subsequent Faith redefines spiritual precepts and unfolds truths beyond the comprehension of those living in the religious cycles of the past. Thus, the answers to the conflicts and crises of each era can be found only in God's latest revelation of Knowledge.

Many sincere and devoted seekers of truth—unable to receive inspiration and guidance from those wielding the scepter of religious authority—are becoming skeptical of the whole realm

of religion. In their desperation, they are increasingly turning to all sorts of cults or movements, hoping that at last they might find a guiding star to their destiny, a beaming light upon the horizon, a voice that may respond to the urgent call of their conscience.

Many believers of all religions mourn the loss of faith in the heart of humankind. Consider this statement from a Christian publication:

Religion, however, seems to have lost its moorings at this point in human development. Today, it is rife with factions, divided into sects, cults and denominations, its clergy often unsure of themselves and their mission. And tragically, the Bible, once acknowledged as a reliable source of knowledge for mankind from its Creator, has been criticized, doubted and downgraded. This has been done not only by skeptics and agnostics, but by those presumed to understand it best.¹¹

Bahá'u'lláh states that religion has lost its worth in the eyes of people. Shoghi Effendi confirms:

This vital force is dying out, this mighty agency has been scorned, this radiant light obscured, this impregnable stronghold abandoned, this beauteous robe discarded. God Himself has indeed been dethroned from the hearts of men...¹²

What Is Religion?

What is the heart and soul of religion? It is the practice of the spiritual laws that bring humans into harmony with God. It is an “everlasting dialogue between humanity and God.” It is the “voice of the deepest human experience.” What are the most precious words in human life? Love, joy, happiness, peace, contentment, and hope. Religion is the abundant source of all these blessings and more.

Faith is more than believing
In a well-ordered life;
It is more than victory
Over sin and strife.

Faith is more than planting
Seed beneath the sod;
Faith is daily walking
Hand in hand with God.¹³

Religion is the reaching out of one's whole being—mind, body, spirit, emotions, intuitions, affections, will—for completion, for inner unity, for true relation with those about us, for right relation to the universe in which we live. Religion is life, a certain kind of life, life as it should and could be, a life of harmony within and true adjustment without—life, therefore, in harmony with the life of God himself.¹⁴

Religion is a hunger for beauty and love and glory. It is wonder and awe, mystery and majesty, passion and ecstasy. It is the heart soaring to heights the head alone will never know; the apprehension of meanings science alone will never find; the awareness of values ethics alone will never reveal. It is the human spirit yearning for, and finding, something infinitely greater than itself which it calls God.¹⁵

It is the purpose of every new Revelation to enthrone God in the heart of humanity, to revitalize religion, to regain its exalted rank, and to restore its deserved dignity—unveiling, once again, its divine and wondrous vision.

Religion will not regain its old power until it can face change in the same spirit as does science.¹⁶

The revelation of Bahá'u'lláh reinterprets and reshapes religion, adapting it to the temper of our time, and crowning it with the loftiest dignity and honor—a splendor and nobility unmatched even by the new science. The Bahá'í Faith:

- Uproots dogmatism and superstition.
- Replaces untested faith and blind conformity with critical thinking, objective appraisal, and reasoned search.
- Prohibits coercion and emotionalism in the teaching of religion.
- Exalts science and demonstrates its essential harmony with religion.

- Allows no opportunity for division, discord, dissension, or sectarianism.
- Rejects mere verbal or intellectual assent as the basis of faith, regarding pure and pious deeds—in place of mere confession—as the only standard acceptable, the sole measure of sincerity, the unmatched mark of distinction, the chief criterion by which the believer can pride himself.
- Finally, it vitalizes the essential elements of divine faith, replacing the impractical with the practical, the irrelevant with the relevant, the man-made with the divine.

The Power of a Perfect Exemplar

It has always been, and it will always be true that people learn more from models than in any other way.

Example has more followers than reason. We unconsciously imitate what pleases us, and approximate to the characters we most admire.¹⁷

As all humans need the same nutrients to maintain their physical health, so do they for their spiritual health. A perfect Model inspired by God demonstrates the transforming power of those nutrients in the life of the spirit.

The divine Teachers are the light of the world, the beacons of hope, faith, and guidance. Theirs is the power to transform and elevate the human spirit offering, by the example of their noble thoughts and deeds, an Ideal—perfect, flawless—by which to draw and unravel the best and noblest in humans.

I have set an example that you should do as I have done for you. Christ (John 13:15 NIV)

Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. Christ (Matt. 5:48 NIV)
Also Matt. 10:25

For I am the Lord your God; ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy. Leviticus 11:44

Despite their greatness, human beings tend to be self-centered:

The egocentric tendency to rate ourselves more favorably than others see us has been demonstrated experimentally. In one study, a random sample of men were asked to rank themselves on their ability to get along with others. Defying mathematical laws, all subjects—every last one—put themselves in the top half of the population. Sixty percent rated themselves in the top 10 percent of the population, and an amazing 25 percent believed they were in the top 1 percent.¹⁸

People also tend to see and remember the negative.

What do you think about Harvey? He's handsome, hard-working, intelligent, and honest. He's also very conceited.

Did the last quality make a difference in your evaluation? If it did, you're not alone. Research shows that when people are aware of both the positive and negative characteristics of another, they tend to be more influenced by the undesirable traits. In one study, for example, researchers found that job interviewers were likely to reject candidates who revealed negative information even when the total amount of information was highly positive.¹⁹

The great teachers, by their models, teach us that moving up takes more effort than drifting down, but offers a better view. It is natural for little children to keep their toys for themselves, but once they learn the joy of sharing, they detach themselves from their toys. The walls of separation disappear from their mind, the possessive love submits to a detached love. Dr. Esslemont, author of a classic introductory book on the Bahá'í Faith, writes:

The Manifestation [the One who manifests God to us] is the Perfect Man, the Great Exemplar for Mankind, the First Fruit of the tree of humanity. Until we know Him we do not know the latent possibilities within ourselves. Christ tells us to consider the lilies how they grow, and declares that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. The lily grows from a very unattractive-looking bulb. If we had never seen a lily in bloom, never gazed on its matchless grace of foliage and flower, how could we know the reality contained

in that bulb? We might dissect it most carefully and examine it most minutely, but we would never discover the dormant beauty which the gardener knows how to awaken.

So until we have seen the Glory of God revealed in the Manifestation, we can have no idea of the spiritual beauty latent in our own nature and in that of our fellows. By knowing and loving the Manifestation of God and following His teachings we are enabled, little by little, to realize the potential perfections within ourselves; then, and not till then, does the meaning and purpose of life and of the universe become apparent to us.²⁰

The Power and Potential of Religion

The profoundest changes on our planet have been generated by the great Messengers, the greatest civilizations have always followed the dawning of great religions. The following statement is often quoted to show the supreme power of Christ, but its message holds true with all God's Messengers and Teachers:

Here is a man who was born in an obscure village. He never wrote a book. He never went to college. He never traveled two hundred miles from the place where he was born. He never did one of the things that usually accompany greatness ...all the armies that ever marched, and all navies that ever were built, and all the parliaments that ever sat, and all kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as has that one solitary life.²¹

Rúhiyyih Rabbání summarizes the supreme power of all great Messengers and Teachers:

Every world religion bears the same hall-mark. One man—not a society, or a board, or an elected head—just one lone man, arises on the horizon of an era and puts forth the most stupefying claim that he is the Mouthpiece of the One Invisible God. Such colossal audacity!...However dismally religion may

seem at the moment...to have failed, the fact remains that Abraham raised the cry of “One Invisible God” and that his progeny became two great monotheistic peoples—the Arabs and the Jews—who for thousands of years have influenced the course of our destiny; that the light Krishna shed illumined and civilized the Indian subcontinent; that Moses made a slave race one of the greatest, most gifted nations the world has ever seen; that Buddha shaped for the better the history of countless millions of Asiatics; that Zoroaster taught and reformed and made great a debased and ignorant people; that Christ changed the whole course of the western world; and that Muhammad tamed a race of savage idolaters and raised up a concourse of countries that produced the great Arabian culture, which in its turn promoted the European Renaissance.

We cannot blink away these facts. Here is not only smoke which indicates the presence of fire, but a conflagration that the dimmest, most obstinate eyes are compelled to recognize.²²

What else but religion can cultivate the human conscience? What else but the divine teachings can exalt the human vision, can teach concern and compassion, can inspire respect for self and others?

How does love—the crown of all virtues—originate and flourish? Love for others begins with self-love (not a selfish love but one pure and humble), and self-love with self-respect, and self-respect with the realization that we are too good to be destroyed, that we are fashioned out of divine Love and preserved and cherished eternally by the supreme Fashioner; that human life is crowned with a purpose—a purpose far nobler than self-preservation or satisfaction of our baser needs; that we are more than matter, a mere mass of bone and flesh fashioned by blind forces or chance; that human distinction lies not in the riches of the world or the brief splendors of a defiled self, but in the purity of the spirit, in thirst for truth, in knowledge and wisdom, in service to humankind, and in devotion to the divine; that there exists a transcendent Being, One who watches over all and rewards all, One from whose Vision nothing can ever escape.

The purpose of science is to develop, without prejudice or preconception of any kind, a knowledge of the facts, the laws, and the processes of nature. The even more important task of religion on the other hand, is to develop the conscience, the ideals, and the aspirations of mankind.²³

Without loving and being loved by our Creator, we cannot even truly love ourselves, much less our kind. For without the knowledge of our eternal and exalted destiny, we have little incentive to sacrifice our own interests for those of our kind; we turn toward selfishness, an attitude destructive to our well-being and demeaning to our self-image; we become preoccupied with the vanities of the world, the fleeting pleasures and desires, the tendencies that ultimately debase our soul, defile and diminish our luster, depriving us of the lasting joys and pleasures ordained for us. Beyond all these, we must constantly encounter and dread the thought of utter extinction.

Man must be arched and buttressed from within, else the temple wavers to the dust.²⁴

The space of the whole universe is emptied...And frightening when there is no God.²⁵

Without God the world turns into a place of gloom, doubt, and darkness. It causes cynical views and visions of life such as these:

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.²⁶

It seems to me that we're all in the same boat with Christopher Columbus. He didn't know where he was going when he started. When he got there he didn't know where he was, and when he got back he didn't know where he had been.²⁷

I cannot find my way; there is no star in all the shrouded heavens anywhere...The world is...a kind of spiritual kindergarten where millions of bewildered infants are trying to spell "God" with the wrong blocks.²⁸

What a difference between the one who regards his earthly abode as an end in itself and the one who considers his life in this realm but a brief pause on a long journey, a mere moment in eternity, a stepping-stone toward a Kingdom so majestic, so sublime and magnificent as to transcend all the splendors of this world, to stand beyond the farthest bounds of human vision. What a difference between a voyager who anticipates and cherishes the joy of an ever-advancing journey toward the boundless Source of all joys and pleasures and perfections, and the voyager who finds the silent depths of the soil his ultimate end, his eternal home and resting-place. Such is the difference between the one who considers himself a spirit and the one who considers himself a body.

Among all my patients in the second half of life—that is to say, over thirty-five—there has not been one whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a religious outlook on life. It is safe to say that every one of them fell ill because he had lost that which the living religions of every age have given to their followers, and none of them has been really healed who did not regain his religious outlook. Carl Jung

God does not die on the day when we cease to believe in a personal deity, but we die on the day when our lives cease to be illuminated by the steady radiance, renewed daily, of a wonder, the source of which is beyond all reason.

Dag Hammarskjöld

Only through faith in divine Wisdom can we attain true liberty, can we free our souls from the bonds of our baser instincts, from that which stands alien to our true nature: the agonizing sense of suspicion, anguish, and anxiety; the ravages of misfortune and adversity; the fears of loneliness, the unknown, the unforeseen. When we are bound to the Love of God and absolute faith in His Wisdom, we are freed from every other bond—from bondage to our own self as well as the endless forces of a seemingly blind, cruel, and chaotic nature. No wonder Jesus said:

If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

John 8:31-32

And Bahá'u'lláh declared:

Say: True liberty consisteth in man's submission unto My commandments, little as ye know it. Were men to observe that which We have sent down unto them from the Heaven of Revelation, they would, of a certainty, attain unto perfect liberty... Say: The liberty that profiteth you is to be found nowhere except in complete servitude unto God, the Eternal Truth. Whoso hath tasted of its sweetness will refuse to barter it for all the dominion of earth and heaven.²⁹

The Bitter Fruits of Atheism

All ages of belief have been great; all of unbelief have been mean.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

To know the fruits of atheism, consider this conversation between an atheist and a Christian:

Atheist: Everything you say about Christianity sounds good. But what bothers me is the historical record. The Crusades, the Inquisition—all the terrible things done in the name of Christ.

Christian: True. But just remember, that's nothing compared to the things done in the name of secular faiths. Think of Hitler—6 million Jews murdered in the Holocaust. And Stalin—some 50 million people slaughtered in the Gulag. The fruits of atheism are much, much worse than any abuse of Christianity.

You see, Christianity doesn't make people perfect. But it does make us better than we would have been. Remove the restraint of God's law and the worst barbarian breaks forth. There's a famous story about the novelist Evelyn Waugh, who had a gift for making sharp comments that wounded even his friends. A woman asked him, "Mr. Waugh, how can you behave as you do and still call yourself a Christian." Waugh replied, "Madam, I may be as bad as you say. But believe me, if it were not for my religion, I would scarcely be a human being... And when

Christians act in accord with their faith, even in small measure, the result is a goodness that the world knows nothing about.³⁰



If the world is bad in spite of religion, can you imagine what a jungle it would be without it? Woodrow Wilson

The Rewards of Knowing and Loving God

Seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you. Christ (Luke 12:31)

All things work together for good to them that love God. Romans 8:28

What are the rewards of knowing and loving God? We are happiest when we love, and we can best love by knowing that we are loved, especially by Him who matters most—our Creator. By knowing that we are loved, we receive the first incentive for loving and honoring our own inner essence, a prerequisite or basis for loving others; and since, as the lovers and beloved of God, we consider everything a reflection of the divine, we cannot help but love all things; and since we believe our love and sacrifices are not in vain, we are stirred and inspired to grow and rise even more—from selfishness to service, from egotism to altruism, from self-love to self-sacrifice. For at the core of faith in the Knower of all things is the belief that no pure or pious act, however unknown, unnoted, or unworthy, can ever escape the Knower's all-encompassing and all-pervasive Vision, or to be erased from the imperishable tablets of His transcendent and supreme Knowledge.

Sow ye, and reap... Isaiah 37:30

He that reapeth...gathereth fruit unto life eternal. Christ (John 4:36)

...the Lord bestows favor and honor, no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless. Psalms 84:11 NIV

God desireth not to lay a burden upon you, but he desireth to purify you, and He would fill up the measure of His favor upon you...
Qur'án 5:9

...the Lord is waiting to show you his favor... Isaiah 3:18 NEB

As we turn toward God, seeking His blessings and bowing before the court of His might and majesty, we should remember that we do so not to satisfy His needs. How can the essence and provider of all Perfections, the boundless Source of all riches, stand in need? We turn toward our Creator to enrich and exalt our souls, to strengthen our will, to sooth our spirit, to satisfy our own needs. For the created is forever dependent on the Creator, the imperfect in need of the Perfect. Therefore, if we fail to turn to the divine Light, the very Source of our being, we deprive only our own selves of the boundless gifts, the eternal rewards ordained for us. In the words of Bahá'u'lláh:

The one true God, exalted be His glory, hath wished nothing for Himself. The allegiance of mankind profiteth Him not, neither doth its perversity harm Him. The Bird of the Realm of Utterance voiceth continually this call: "All things have I willed for thee, and thee, too, for thine own sake."³¹

No joy, no pleasure, can ever match or even remotely approach the joy of knowing and loving God through the channels of His grace and guidance. No reward, however abundant or sumptuous, can vie with the transcendent and unending rewards ordained for us through the recognition of the divine Will revealed by the latest Teacher of the new age. Bahá'u'lláh summons us all again and again to partake of our share of the bounties:

O people! In this blessed, this glorious Day, deprive not yourselves of the liberal effusions of bounty which the Lord of abounding grace hath vouchsafed unto you. In this Day showers of wisdom and utterance are pouring down from the clouds of divine mercy. Well is it with them who judge His Cause with fairness, and woe betide the unjust.³² Bahá'u'lláh

O friends! It behoveth you to refresh and revive your souls through the gracious favors which in this Divine, this soul-stirring Springtime are being showered upon you. The Day Star of His great glory hath shed its radiance upon you, and

the clouds of His limitless grace have overshadowed you. How high the reward of him that hath not deprived himself of so great a bounty, nor failed to recognize the beauty of his Best-Beloved in this, His new attire.³³ Bahá'u'lláh

Inspirational Quotations

O friends! Be not careless of the virtues with which ye have been endowed, neither be neglectful of your high destiny... Ye are the stars of the heaven of understanding, the breeze that stirreth at the break of day, the soft-flowing waters upon which must depend the very life of all men, the letters inscribed upon His sacred scroll. With the utmost unity, and in a spirit of perfect fellowship, exert yourselves, that ye may be enabled to achieve that which beseemeth this Day of God.³⁴ Bahá'u'lláh

So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth.³⁵ Bahá'u'lláh

The fundamental purpose animating the Faith of God and His Religion is to safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the human race, and to foster the spirit of love and fellowship amongst men.³⁶ Bahá'u'lláh

The perfect love needs an unselfish instrument, absolutely freed from fetters of every kind. The love of family is limited; the tie of blood relationship is not the strongest bond. Frequently members of the same family disagree, and even hate each other. Patriotic love is finite...³⁷ 'Abdu'l-Bahá

It is clear that limited material ties are insufficient to adequately express the universal love. The great unselfish love for humanity is bounded by none of these imperfect, semi-selfish bonds; this is the one perfect love, possible to all mankind, and can only be achieved by the power of the Divine Spirit.³⁸ 'Abdu'l-Bahá

This love will make all men the waves of one sea, this love will make them all the stars of one heaven and the fruits of one tree. This love will bring the realization of true accord, the foundation of real unity.³⁹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá

The diversity in the human family should be the cause of love and harmony, as it is in music where many different notes blend together in the making of a perfect chord.⁴⁰ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

We desire but the good of the world and happiness of the nations; yet they deem us a stirrer up of strife and sedition worthy of bondage and banishment...That all nations should become one in faith and all men as brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men should be strengthened; that diversity of religion should cease, and differences of race be annulled...⁴¹ Bahá’u’lláh

All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization.⁴² Bahá’u’lláh

If carried to excess, civilization will prove as prolific a source of evil as it had been of goodness when kept within the restraints of moderation.⁴³ Bahá’u’lláh

...only if material progress goes hand in hand with spirituality can any real progress come about...⁴⁴ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

2

Does Science Contradict or Confirm Religion?

Science and Religion, the Two Wings of the Human Spirit

How can man believe that which he knows to be opposed to reason? Is this possible? Can the heart accept that which reason denies? Reason is the first faculty of man, and the religion of God is in harmony with it.¹ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

According to the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh, science and religion form the two wings of the human spirit. True civilization cannot rise unless the two wings work in harmony—each sustaining and complementing the work of the other.

Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind. Albert Einstein

Love is light and knowledge is power. The love that can lift and lead the power always comes from God.

If truth is one, then there can be no conflict between one truth and another. The universe is the treasure house of God’s wisdom, intelligence, glory, and power, and science a key to those treasures. Science uncovers the relationships between material realities; religion shows the relationships between spiritual realities. Conflict arises primarily out of misunderstanding, closed-mindedness, ignorance, and unwillingness to admit ignorance on the part of both the religionists and the scientists.

In their essence there can be no conflict between science and religion. Science is a reliable method of finding truth. Religion

is the search for a satisfying basis for life...If our religious leaders are to bring to the present day the vital, living spirit of their faith, they must take science seriously...Beyond the nature taught by science is the spirit that gives meaning to life.²

Reason teaches that the truths of divine revelation and those of nature cannot really be opposed to one another, and that whatever is at variance with them must necessarily be false.³

If at some period in the course of civilization we seriously find that our science and our religion are antagonistic, then there must be something wrong either with our science or with our religion.⁴

The heart will not long follow what the mind does not accept as true and trustworthy.⁵

The Mystery of Signs and Symbols

The words of the great Messengers are like a boundless sea rich in pearls of mysteries—pearls resting beneath the strata of signs and symbols. Precepts that seem deceptively simple may contain complexities far beyond human vision. Claiming absolute knowledge of God’s words indicates an ego stricken with self-deception or pride. Such knowledge is bestowed only upon the divine Messengers, because all humans err, “and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:32).

Believers who know almost nothing about the Bible—a Book abounding in mysteries and complexities—insist that they know its only true interpretation, not realizing that sometimes even the Revealers of the Words humble themselves before their own Words, acknowledging ignorance of their inner essence (Dan. 12:8-9).

If a scientist admits to ignorance, no one usually seems to mind; if a religionist admits to ignorance, that is another matter. Nothing, it is assumed, can remain impervious to a theologian’s sharp and far-reaching vision. Much of the Scriptural treasures are hidden in figures of speech—metaphors, similes, and symbols.

Only by recognizing such pearls of divine mysteries and unsealing their inner essence are we justified in interpreting them or testing them against scientific certainties.

Symbols are especially and abundantly applied to the signs of “the time of the end;” signs such as the arising of the dead, the shaking of the heavens, the coming of flaming fire, the descent of the Redeemer on the clouds, and similar dazzling, dramatic, and heavenly events crowned with earthly splendor.

The Scriptures prophesy that the expected Redeemer, the Lord, will at His coming unseal or disclose the mysteries. They also indicate that the knowledge of the mysteries is not given to the believers, and that they should refrain from regarding themselves as authorities, from forming preconceived notions of truth:

Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men’s hearts.

I Corinthians 4:5 NIV

A main reason people have failed to recognize the Redeemer of their age is that they have remembered and recognized the verses that fit into their image of Truth and forgotten or disregarded those that do not. The preceding verse from the Scriptures is a fitting example demonstrating such a disregard. Most believers ignore the preceding command; they continue to interpret the mysteries. They disregard the divine Will (the command not to interpret), because it stands contrary to their wishes, to their belief on how the Redeemer must come, what He must say, and what He must do. They place their wishes above God’s Will. This is what happened during the First Advent of Jesus, because the Pharisees, although unqualified to interpret the divine Words, acted as if they were infallible.

Bahá’u’lláh, in fulfillment of all the prophecies of the past Revelations, has unsealed the symbolic utterances of previous Manifestations. (See, for instance, *The Book of Certitude*.) Once the symbols are viewed in the light of the knowledge bestowed by Bahá’u’lláh, the conflicts and contradictions that have lingered for centuries, and beset and afflicted the two most potent forces in society—namely science and religion—utterly dissipate and

disappear, even as the clouds touched by the splendors of the sun. (For an interpretation of the symbols of the sacred Scriptures see *In the Clouds of Glory*.)

The Closed-Minded Scientist

A closed mind is like an egg. It rots from feeding only on itself. An open mind is like a blooming flower in a field. It brings out the best of itself and lends charm and fragrance to its surroundings. An open mind, like vapor, turns the sunlight into a rainbow of many colors.

Some men are like pyramids, which are very broad where they touch the ground, but grow narrow as they reach the sky.

Henry Ward Beecher

Just as the religionist errs in assuming the attitude of an all-knowing authority, so does the scientist in limiting his vision to mere material realities, or insisting on his own confined perspective or petty prejudices. No one can fully free himself from or stand above human faults and frailties. Scientists are no exception. History abounds with examples of scientists being solely dedicated to their own “scientific dogmas,” subservient to their own preconceived visions of reality.

Once again we should marvel at a child’s purity of perception, and try to follow him as our guide and example—in his innocence and spontaneous humility. We need to bow before the awesome complexities of the universe, to acknowledge our limitations, the inability of our minds to attain the infinite and the eternal. It seems evident that certain truths, whether in the material or spiritual realm, will forever remain beyond the bounds of our mind, transcending our fallible vision, and no scientist, however astute or ambitious, can ever gain access to such unreachable and transcendent truths.

Adler and Towne offer many examples to demonstrate the gap between “what is” and “what we know:”

At one time or another you've probably seen photos of sights invisible to the unaided eye: perhaps an infrared photo of a familiar area or the vastly enlarged image of a minute object taken by an electron microscope. You've also noticed how certain animals are able to hear sounds and smell odors that are not apparent to humans. Experiences like these remind us that there is much more going on in the world than we are able to experience with our limited senses, that our idea of reality is in fact only a partial one.

Even within the realm of our senses we're only aware of a small part of what is going on around us. For instance, most people who live in large cities find that the noises of traffic, people, and construction soon fade out of their awareness. Others can take a walk through the forest without distinguishing one bird's call from another or noticing the differences between various types of vegetation. On a personal level, we've all had the experience of failing to notice something unusual about a friend—perhaps a new hairstyle or a sad expression—until it's called to our attention.⁶

Intellect, Our Chief Guide to Truth

God has endowed us with the gift of the intellect to use it as a basis for all our decisions, as a means of reaching for truth. Bahá'u'lláh glorifies “the gift of understanding,” investing it with unimagined honor:

Know thou that, according to what thy Lord, the Lord of all men, hath decreed in His Book, the favors vouchsafed by Him unto mankind have been, and will ever remain, limitless in their range. First and foremost among these favors, which the Almighty hath conferred upon man, is the gift of understanding. His purpose in conferring such a gift is none other except to enable His creature to know and recognize the one true God—exalted be His glory. This gift giveth man the power to discern the truth in all things, leadeth him to that which is right, and helpeth him to discover the secrets of creation.⁷

The gift of understanding in its pure essence, undistorted and undefiled with prejudice or fantasy, constitutes our most loyal and dependable guide to truth, any truth; and nothing indicates that religion should be exempt from the rule. If kept pure and radiant, the human mind attracts and reflects, even as a mirror, to the extent of its potential, knowledge, truth, and wisdom. Otherwise it sinks in the depths of darkness, blinded by the forces of ego.

Man has received direct from God only one instrument wherewith to know himself and to know his relation to the universe—he has no other—and that instrument is reason.

Leo Tolstoy

All the tools with which mankind works upon its fate are dull, but the sharpest among them is the reason.

Carl Van Doren

Mind is the great lever of all things.

Daniel Webster

God's Messengers have exalted the human intellect and encouraged reasoning as a means of searching for truth. "Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord" (Isaiah 1:18). But because of our failure to reconcile the symbolic words of the Scriptures, on the one hand, and the disparities between religion and science, on the other, we have resigned ourselves to believing that religious truths need not follow the laws of logic or the rules of reason, that religion is the child of faith not to be nourished by the mind or guided and ruled by scientific standards.

People for the most part delight in superstitions.⁸ Bahá'u'lláh

The divine teachings—the very essence of Knowledge and the ultimate standard of Truth—are thus reduced to a set of rigid rites and rituals, dogmas and doctrines—faithfully preserved and passed from generation to generation.

...the practice of superstition is so congenial to the multitude that, if they are forcibly awakened, they still regret the loss of their pleasing vision.

Edward Gibbon

Disregarding the gift of reason is alien to the very spirit of divine Purpose. For how can the Creator—the Essence of justice and wisdom—expect us to fully dedicate our whole life to something

we find against our inherent way of thinking, contrary to our very nature? “Religion itself is acquired and assimilated through the mind, ‘the gift of understanding’; if denuded and deprived of the mind, how else could it be comprehended?”

The teachings of Bahá’u’lláh uproot superstition and dogmatism by elevating the gift of reason to unimagined heights of glory and honor, by regaining and restoring its due position in the dominion of divine faith. In His Paris talks ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said:

Consider what it is that singles man out from among created beings, and makes of him a creature apart. Is it not his reasoning power, his intelligence? Shall he not make use of these in his study of religion? I say unto you: weigh carefully in the balance of reason and science everything that is presented to you as religion. If it passes this test, then accept it, for it is truth! If, however, it does not so conform, then reject it, for it is ignorance!⁹

Thus by harmonizing the two wings of civilization, Bahá’u’lláh restores the balance between faith and reason, between the ideal and the real, between the spiritual and the material. By releasing the untapped and unlimited powers of science and religion into coordinated and complementary efforts, He has established a firm foundation for a new and noble civilization, “a city which descends from heaven”—radiant, pure, virtuous. A city that has “no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof” (Rev. 21:23).

In the words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

When religion, shorn of its superstitions, traditions, and unintelligent dogmas, shows its conformity with science, then will there be a great unifying, cleansing force in the world which will sweep before it all wars, disagreements, discords and struggles—and then will mankind be united in the power of the Love of God.¹⁰

Renowned physicist John Wheeler states that at the core of creation there must be an utterly simple idea. We see a

confirmation of his idea in a passage quoted by Bahá'u'lláh from the Islamic scriptures:

Knowledge is a single point, but the ignorant have multiplied it.¹¹

All knowledge, whether earthly or heavenly, is an expression of God in the universe. Since God is in harmony, knowledge too is in harmony.

3

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: enlightened and dogmatic. 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-minded, 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, but 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.¹

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.²

- 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!”³
- 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.”⁴
- 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.⁵

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.⁶

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 *un*believers 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.⁷

“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.
I 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*.⁸
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?

4

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 and peace 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 in His promise 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 becomes 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 manifest God's love, even as light manifests 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 20th 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 YMCs (\$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 foundations; their origins can be traced back to men and women of great faith.¹

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.²

- 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.³
‘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.

Examples of True 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.

How do we treat a person we do not like? We may multiply his weaknesses 10 or even 100 times 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. The media is at the mercy of many forces, such as politics, economics, and public opinion, namely 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 by their physicians. Most of these deaths are preventable. Every two weeks as many people die from such drugs as they died in the Twin Towers in New York City. What would happen if instead

* No religion teaches hatred, violence, prejudice, or deception. Unfortunately, most people fail 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.*

of seeing ads that entice us to take prescription drugs, once every two weeks we would see the faces of those who have died from prescribed 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 mindset, who attach themselves to religion to justify their crimes.

The same principle holds true with religious wars. For every one person killed in religious wars, more than one hundred have been killed in other wars. Yet religious wars draw more attention than other wars. Imagine the number of people killed in the two World Wars as well as those killed by communists in China, Russia, Cambodia, and North Korea. Their number exceeds one hundred million. World War II alone led to death of between forty to fifty million people.

The news media loves sensational news because they stir deep emotions in the listeners. 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 Noonday, 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.⁴

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)

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...⁵

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.⁶

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.⁷

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 19th century and into

the 20th 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

5

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.¹ Bahá'u'lláh

A world spiritually destitute, morally bankrupt, politically disrupted, socially convulsed, economically paralyzed, writhing, bleeding and breaking up.² 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.³

The role of religious leaders is repeatedly predicted in sacred 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!⁴ 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.⁵ 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?⁶

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.⁷

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.”¹² 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?⁸

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.⁹

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...¹⁰

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.¹¹

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.¹²

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.¹³

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...”¹⁴ “Time is rapidly running out for Mother Earth and mother Church.”¹⁵

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.”¹⁶

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.’”¹⁷

...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 our Creator 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 leader—a priest, or a pastor, a rabbi, or a mullá. Who are these leaders, 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.¹⁸

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...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.

One God Many Ways One Light Many Lamps

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.¹ Bahá'u'lláh

Light is good in whatever lamp it is burning! A rose is beautiful in whatsoever garden it may bloom!² 'Abdu'l-Bahá

What is in a name? that which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet. Shakespeare

6

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. |

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| 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. |

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|-----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 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.¹

Bahá'u'lláh

Light is good in whatever lamp it is burning! A rose is beautiful in whatsoever garden it may bloom!²

‘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 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.³

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)

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.⁴ Seize the time, therefore, ere the glory of the divine springtime hath spent itself...⁵

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.

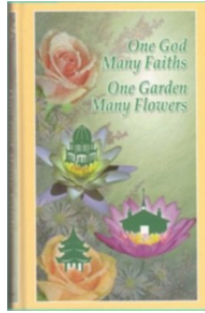
Christ (Matt. 7:7-8)

Other Works by the Same Author

The next chapter introduces two other books by this author 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)

7



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. ¹ 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.

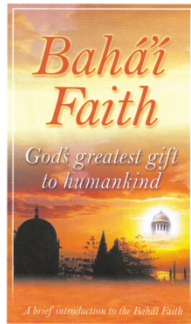


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A Chapter from:
**Bahá'í Faith: God's Greatest
Gift to Humankind**

**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.¹ 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 12th 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.*² Bahá'u'lláh

*[A true seeker] will discriminate between truth and falsehood, even as he doth distinguish the sun from shadow.*³ 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.⁴
Bahá'u'lláh

Imperishable glory I have chosen for thee...While there is yet time, return, and lose not thy chance.⁵ *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 one of the preceding books:

❖ **Call:** 989-772-1432

❖ **Send an Email:** 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.*⁶ *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.*⁷ *Bahá'u'lláh*

Appendix

Other Works by this Author

For further details, visit: www.GlobalPerspective.org.



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

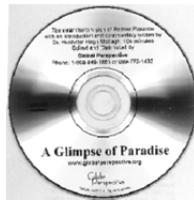
A Messenger of Joy is the most comforting and positive book ever written on death and the afterlife. In consoling and uplifting the souls of the grieving, it sets a standard that is not likely to be surpassed for a long time.

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.

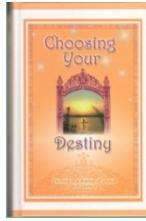


A Glimpse of Paradise

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.



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.



Death: The Door to Heaven

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.

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:

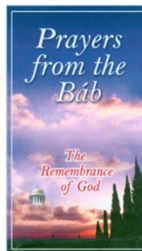
O Son of Man! Sorrow not save that thou art far from Us.
Rejoice not save that thou art drawing near and returning unto
Us. Bahá'u'lláh

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



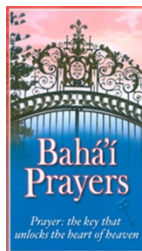
Glorious Journey to God

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.



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