

You Are Invited

Are You Dressed for the Banquet of Heaven?

Blessed are those who are invited... Christ (Rev. 19:9 NIV)

Many are invited, but few are chosen. Christ (Matt. 22:14 NIV)

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Has the Key to the Banquet of Heaven Been Lost?

Most people have lost their confidence, both in themselves and in those who lead them. They live as if the key to the Banquet of Heaven has been lost and no one can find it. This small book may not give you the key, but at least it will help you look where you may find it.

Wonders of Wisdom

Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens... Daniel 12:3 NIV

What is the virtue that helps us make sound decisions? Wisdom! Wisdom is so versatile and so powerful it can open any door, even that of the Kingdom of Heaven. This virtue is so precious, so dear, we must cherish it as our lives.

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

What is the most evident sign of wisdom? Thirst for knowledge, especially "the knowledge of God."

Pay attention to my wisdom, listen well to my words of insight... Proverbs 5:1 NIV

Unfortunately many people suppress their thirst for so long, they do not know their need. Do you have a desire to recognize and satisfy your need for being more spiritual? If you do, persist in your search. Persistence is an evidence of sincerity, and the

first requirement for success. Can anyone reach a goal without striving? Sometimes a little effort at the start, leads to big differences at the end. The message presented here is of that kind.

If wisdom is the key that unlocks every door, then how can we put it to the service of our spiritual destiny? Let us suppose wisdom could speak. What would it ask us to do before anything else? It would most likely draw our attention to these questions:

- For what purpose are you living? What is your goal in life? Have you discovered that goal?
- And do you know how you can reach your goal?

Let us now see if we can find an answer to both questions. The following statement teaches us the prime purpose of our lives. We should frame it and read it every day, because the world constantly draws us away from remembering it and practicing it:

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

Are You Dressed for the Banquet of Heaven?

Can we seek and enter the Kingdom of God without striving? No, that kingdom is so glorious, we must spare no effort to attain it. Trying to reach that goal is like trying to climb a steep mountain:

Who may go up the mountain of the Lord? And who may stand in His holy place? He who has ***clean hands and a pure heart***...He shall receive a blessing from the Lord, and justice from God his savior. Such is the fortune of those who seek Him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob. Psalms 24:3-6 NEB

What is the first requirement for a successful expedition to the top of this mountain? The first requirement is to be alert and on guard, to stay awake and watch for every clue and sign along the way. What happens if a climber fails to pay attention to the signs?

Be on guard! Be alert...keep watch...do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: “**Watch!**”

Christ (Mark 13:33-37 NIV)

Be always ***on the watch***...that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.

Christ (Luke 21:36 NIV)

To help us get ready for our spiritual journey toward Him, to prepare us for the unequalled honor of recognizing Him and entering His glorious Kingdom, Jesus gave us several instructions or commands. The following are the most critical:

- Be dressed
- Keep your clothes with you
- Trim your lamps
- Keep your lamps burning
- Buy and wear white clothes
- Wash your robes
- Fasten your belt around your waist
- Buy an ointment for your eyes

Consider these references:

Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and ***keeps his clothes with him***, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed.

Christ (Rev. 16:15 NEB)

Behold, I am coming soon!...Blessed are those who ***wash their robes***...

Christ (Rev. 22:12 NIV)

I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and ***white clothes to wear***, so you can cover your shameful nakedness...

Christ (Rev. 3:18 NIV)

Those who were ready went in with him to the wedding...

Christ (Matt. 25:10 NKJ)

What is the purpose of the preceding instructions? How critical are they? Should we obey them? What if we ignore them? If we fail to pay close attention, can we reach our destination? No, even a small detour—a little negligence or disobedience—can lead us away from our destination, from the great honor of attaining the presence of the One who is the very Purpose of our lives. What happens when we fail to watch for the signs along the highway? We get lost. The same holds true in the spiritual journey.

What does Jesus mean by asking us to be dressed, to trim our lamps, and to buy ointment for our eyes? It is evident, He means: anyone who wishes to become worthy of Him, must prepare himself spiritually. That great honor is not granted to anyone by chance or inheritance. It requires sincere and sustained efforts, just as preparing for a long journey does.

There is still another reason why Jesus emphasizes the need for being alert and awake. He knows most travelers are so tired and confused; they are so negligent and inattentive, they will pay no attention to the glorious news of His coming. He knows they are so sleepy that ***even if He comes to their door and knocks, they may not open the door for Him:***

Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, ***so that when He comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for Him.*** It will be good for those servants whose Master finds them watching when He comes. I tell you the truth, He will dress Himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready...

Christ (Luke 12:35-38 NIV)

Only those with clean clothes are allowed into the banquet. If someone enters with no clothes (lack of virtues) or with the wrong clothes (impure motives and deeds) he will be asked to leave. No failure, no negligence can lead to a more serious consequence:

The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son...But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. "Friend," he asked, "how did you get in here without wedding clothes?" The man was speechless. Then the king told the attendants, "Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." ***For many are invited, but few are chosen.***

Christ (Matt. 22:1-2, 11-14 NIV)

That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows.

Christ (Luke 12:47 NIV)

Being a member of the majority is not a safety net:

Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.

Christ (Matt. 7:13 NKJ)

Learning from History

Success in any endeavor—professional, artistic, athletic—requires preparation. Nowhere is the necessity of preparations more essential than in the realm of religion, where roots run deep and emotions run high. That greater efforts and more persistent preparation are required for discerning and discovering religious truth, versus any other truth, is clearly indicated from humanity's previous performance.

History provides the most compelling and conclusive evidence testifying to the repeated and consistent failure of the great

majority of the believers to recognize the divine Message in its infancy—a failure so glaring and dramatic as to seem utterly incredible. At the dawn of every dispensation, at the onset of every religious cycle, the seekers of truth have failed to discern the truth, even when confronted with its very Source. They have stood face to face with the Object of their search without ever seeing or knowing it. “Great spirits have always faced violent opposition from mediocre minds.”² “Truth always lags behind, limping along the arm of time.”³ “The way of the world is to praise dead saints and persecute living ones.”⁴

You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet
your fathers did not persecute? Acts 7:51-52 NIV

Consider a few examples. Noah was one of the first to proclaim the truth, to declare the divine Mission. What response did He stir in His seekers? How did the people treat Him? Did they welcome Him, acclaim Him, and adore Him? What about the people to whom Abraham was sent? Were they receptive, rational, and open-minded? What of Moses? What of Jesus, of His herald, and of His apostles? The list can go on and on. “Which of the prophets have not the people persecuted?” (Acts 7:52).

If the Jews in the days of Christ had been dispassionate and open-minded, they would not have condemned Him...they followed blindly...their leaders, who were...immured in tradition, clothed mentally from head to foot in inherited dogmas and prejudices. The result was that the river of Christianity was turned out of its natural bed and instead of first irrigating the lives of the Chosen People, to whom Christ came, as their promised Messiah, it passed them by and shed its life-giving waters in distant lands.⁵

Does not such a perfect record of failure prove that the people lacked receptivity; that they had failed to prepare themselves? Is this not sufficient to indicate that we too may lack the same magical powers of perception and discernment? Of course, the

people to whom the previous Messengers were sent always considered themselves ready and receptive. The same holds true today. Yet if we are sincere in our motives, we must seek to learn from the examples of history, to efface from our conscience every sign of self-righteousness, every trace of ego. “Anyone who wishes to be my follower,” Jesus instructs, “must leave self behind” (Mark 8:34 NEB).

The only way we know we are dreaming is to awaken.⁶

We must begin with an awareness of our weaknesses and inadequacies in recognizing the Truth. We must look back to learn what caused the countless generations before us to fail. We must treat our spiritual test the same way we treat a school test, one that is repeated again and again: We need to find the difficult items, the ones that caused almost all of those taking the earlier test (during the first few decades or centuries after the inception of a new religion) to fail.

The Source and Essence of all Goodness

Search for Truth

What is the first step towards God, to heaven, and to all goodness? If we fail to find the answer, we have lived in vain—we have wasted the most precious gift that God has given us: our life. The following statement from Bahá’u’lláh is the answer to this critical question. We should frame it, read it every day, and practice it every moment of our life. It is the key to all goodness:

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 Bahá’u’lláh

The teachings of Bahá'u'lláh begin with an independent and impartial search for truth; a principle that is the bedrock of Bahá'í beliefs, the basis of the new Plan for a world society, the foundation upon which rests the destiny of every individual and, ultimately, all humanity.

Perhaps none of God's teachings is ignored or violated as widely as the independent search for truth, yet none is as vital and consequential. Mary Maxwell in her book *Prescription for Living* speaks of this topic and describes how most people behave:

Though our most distinguishing feature is our brain, we seldom use it to think deeply; we skim over the surface of life with remarkable rapidity, much like those long-legged water bugs that paddle themselves gaily over the top of the pond, never seeming even to get their feet wet. So many of our thoughts we accept ready made, handed to us by our ancestors, our friends, our teachers or our clergymen...

A man should be something for himself; if his father is a Unitarian, he should not become one merely because he inherited the belief along with his last name and the farm and cows. Likewise, in every important field in life individuals should exert their God-given prerogative of thinking and choosing for themselves...Everything a man's father was may be excellent, it may be just the best thing for him too—but he should think about it and assimilate it into himself by his own volition; for the reverse can also be true, everything his father was may be the worst possible thing for him and ruin him if he follows the same path.⁸

To search for truth is not only a right and responsibility, but an honor and glory.

If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him keep step to music which he hears, however measured or far away.⁹

The heart must have a desire to know. The soul must thirst for truth. Sincere and passionate desire moves the heart of heaven. Those who have no thirst are not even invited:

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

To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. Christ (Rev. 21:6 NIV)

An independent search for truth signifies a state of absolute freedom from preconceived or biased judgment, a state in which the seeker stands face to face with reality without depending on anyone save his own pure soul, his own sense of justice.

God give me the courage to face a fact, though it slay me.¹⁰

It is the privilege as well as the divinely ordained duty of every individual—whatever his religious beliefs—to embark on and pace the path of the search for truth all on his own, without depending on any other source of authority than his own pure vision. He should not stop or stay where he was carried and left, but rather return to the beginning, moving cautiously, examining his future course, step by step, independently and through the intertwined workings of both a pure mind and a pure spirit dedicated to truth.

If we begin with certainties, we shall end in doubts; but if we begin with doubts, and are patient, we shall end in certainties.¹¹

The seeker of truth should not believe something simply because he was told to believe, never assume an idea to be right or wrong on the basis of tradition or convention—especially the dogmas he was asked to accept on faith and regard as truth, without the support of reason.

Believe nothing...merely because you have been told it...or because it is traditional, or because you yourselves have imagined it. Do not believe what your teacher tells you

merely out of respect for the teacher. But whatsoever, after due examination and analysis, you find to be conducive to the good, the benefit, and the welfare of all beings—that doctrine believe and cling to, and take it as your guide. Buddha

Aristotle could have avoided the mistake of thinking women have fewer teeth than men by asking Mrs. Aristotle to keep her mouth open while he counted. He did not do so because he thought he knew.¹²

Justice

The first provision for the journey of the search for truth is not a degree in theology or an important position in a synagogue or a church; it is justice. Bahá'u'lláh adores justice and elevates it to unimagined heights of honor and glory:

O SON OF SPIRIT!

The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice; turn not away therefrom if thou desirest Me, and neglect it not that I may confide in thee. By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbor. Ponder this in thy heart; how it behooveth thee to be. Verily justice is My gift to thee and the sign of My loving-kindness. Set it then before thine eyes.¹³

After referring to a host of virtues, Bahá'u'lláh summarizes them by saying that “The essence of all that We have revealed for thee is Justice.” How can justice be the essence of so many virtues? Because everything good originates from justice. Because virtue springs from truth, and truth from justice. When a seeker walks in the path of justice and seeks in the light of justice, he cannot but find the truth. And when he finds the truth, he is in possession of a power divine, immortal and boundless, a power that sets him free from every bond (John 8:32), from bondage to falsehood, and from the blinding forces of ego.

...through knowledge shall the *just* be delivered. Proverbs 11:9

Bahá'u'lláh teaches that the beginning of being human is fairness, and that all things depends on this virtue. If fairness and justice prevailed in the world, every conflict would be solved, every problem resolved. If people had judged with justice, Jesus would never have been condemned and crucified; Moses and Noah and Abraham and all the other Messengers would never have been rejected, ridiculed, persecuted. If justice had reigned, wars would never have been waged, aggressions never justified, prejudice never condoned. Justice is the antidote to every social conflict, to every spiritual malady.

Let us now see what justice means. Let us see where it can flourish or find a home. What qualities or conditions can sustain it? Justice stands on two pillars: independence of judgment, and purity of heart. To attain independence of judgment, the seeker must recognize that he is the master of his own destiny and accountable for his own acts; that he must see with his own eyes and judge with his own mind; that he cannot allow anyone to decide his beliefs for him (whether it is a loving-protecting parent, a persuasive priest, or a well-wishing friend); that his early exposure to a particular religion, or set of beliefs, is as accidental as his name or his neighborhood; and therefore he cannot, and will not, allow mere accidents to determine his spiritual destiny for him—to be Christian instead of Hindu, Jew instead of Muslim, idolater instead of atheist. Bahá'u'lláh writes:

Take heed lest ye allow yourselves to be shut out as by a veil from this Day Star that shineth above the dayspring of the Will of your Lord...Purge your sight, that ye may perceive its glory with your own eyes, and depend not on the sight of any one except your self, for God hath never burdened any soul beyond its power. Thus hath it been sent down unto the Prophets and Messengers of old, and been recorded in all the Scriptures.¹⁴

‘Abdu’l-Bahá confirms:

God has given man the eye of investigation by which he may see and recognize truth. He has endowed man with ears that he may hear the message of reality and conferred upon him the gift of reason by which he may discover things for himself. This is his endowment and equipment for the investigation of reality. Man is not intended to see through the eyes of another, hear through another’s ears nor comprehend with another’s brain. Each human creature has individual endowment, power and responsibility in the creative plan of God. Therefore, depend upon your own reason and judgment and adhere to the outcome of your own investigation; otherwise, you will be utterly submerged in the sea of ignorance and deprived of all the bounties of God.¹⁵

To achieve justice, to rise above one’s confined vision of truth constitutes a most awesome challenge confronting every seeker of truth; and few can attain such an exalted and transcendent vision without continuous, dedicated, and enduring efforts.

A young child need not strive to attain such an outlook. For, at the outset, he has no preconceived or predetermined notions of reality; he tends to see things as they are, and not as he wants them to be. He reflects a heart pure and radiant, he commands a mind untouched and untainted by prejudice, by prejudgments. No wonder being childlike assumes such an exceedingly honored rank in the divine Judgment as to be declared an essential attribute for entering the heavenly home: “Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein” (Luke 18:17).

Purity of Heart

But justice cannot stand on the independence of judgment alone. It requires a second pillar to sustain it, and that pillar is purity of heart—from every selfish motive, from worldliness, from egotism, from all preconceived notions or beliefs, from all

acquired learning, from any inclination to believe or disbelieve, to accept or reject, to yield or to resist.

Better keep yourself clean and bright; you are the window through which you must see the world.¹⁶

God's wisdom allows a seed to grow only in a pure soil—whether the seed yields food or faith. The parable of the sower stands as fresh and timely today as it stood some twenty centuries earlier (Luke 8:11-15). If a seed falls on unprepared soil, it is destined to die.

Bahá'u'lláh echoes the same theme in seemingly different—yet distinctly similar—terms:

O SON OF SPIRIT!

My first counsel is this: Possess a pure, kindly and radiant heart, that thine may be a sovereignty ancient, imperishable and everlasting.¹⁷

Purity of heart is the most precious virtue. It is the virtue that can bestow on a believer the honor of seeing God. Can any honor be greater than this?

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

Christ (Matt. 5:8)

Even in darkness light dawns for the upright, for the gracious and compassionate and righteous man.

Psalms 112:4 NIV

Open Mind

A closed-minded and closed-hearted person will not only find the gates of the Kingdom closed to him, he will find all avenues closed, including his own barricaded self.

Today, if you will hear His voice: Do not harden your hearts...

Psalms 95:7-8 NKJ

“A mind, like a parachute, will not work unless it is open.” “Just as a single wave is powered by the entire ocean, a sincere mind

has vast resources at its command.” Once the mind has seen the glimmer of light, it will be unable to live in darkness:

Man’s mind, stretched to a new idea, never goes back to its original dimension.¹⁸

He who fears to venture into the unknown, to find his own destiny, to seek his own hidden powers, stands a stranger before his own self, unable to hear the voice of his own conscience. He lives an impoverished life—deprived of all the spiritual joys ordained for him—without ever recognizing the deprivation and the loss, the missing link that binds him to reality.

Dr. Erik Blumenthal in *The Way to Inner Freedom* writes:

We applaud novelties, gadgets and technical achievements because they promise us comfort and entertainment without requiring any effort from us. But we shy away from things which are truly, fundamentally, new because we have to go through a learning process in order to understand them... Moreover, new ideas entail a process of transformation, a sort of death and rebirth in that the old must die to make way for the new. But human beings are resistant to the idea of death, and consequently we resist new ideas.¹⁹

Humility

Egotism is perhaps the darkest cloud that obscures and distorts the truth. Ego is the voice from within seeking to hear only itself: “I know, and I know that I know.” “I cannot be wrong.” “How could I fail to know the truth?” (John 9:40-41). Unless this whispering voice is silenced, the divine Call cannot be heard.

A chief element of justice, which subdues the hosts of ego, is humility. When ego yields to the call of Justice, humility rejoices and exults; it rises to the crest of honor, crowning itself and reigning with supreme splendor. Only in a heart in which meekness is made king and ego a bondman can the Truth

triumph, can the divine radiate and reality repose. As the Psalmist wrote:

The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way. Psalms 25:9

When God arose to judgment, to save all the meek of the earth. Psalms 76:9

For the Lord takes delight in his people; he crowns the humble with salvation. Psalms 149:4 NIV

Detachment

We can perceive truth in its pure essence to the extent that we can detach ourselves from and look objectively at our inherited beliefs or dogmas. For as we inherit wealth, so do we inherit beliefs, treading unconsciously the path of servitude and submission to the traditions and misjudgments of past generations. This is why Jesus addressed the conforming and rejecting masses of His time saying: “you are revealing in action what you learned from you father” (John 8:38 NEB).

We do everything by custom, even believe by it; our very axioms, let us boast of free thinking as we may, are oftenest simply such beliefs as we have never heard questioned.²⁰

We are all tattooed in our cradles with the beliefs of our tribe.²¹

We are profoundly influenced by our early education and training. If born to a Christian family, we grow up Christian; if born to a Jewish family, we grow up Jewish; if born to a Buddhist or a Hindu or a Muslim family, we grow up to follow suit, often with a special twist toward our own denomination, an undiminished loyalty to our own church, mosque, or synagogue. Even the children born to agnostics or atheists follow, as a rule, the footsteps of their parents, for the same magical powers seem to be at work. The astonishing fact is that what the believer

receives by chance—the accident of birth—he regards as absolute truth.

True, exceptions do occur, but as a rule, religious traditions persist unchanged over thousands of years—dominating hundreds of generations. Such unquestioned conformity stands contrary to reason and is utterly alien to the free spirit of the search for truth taught by all the great Messengers. One's beliefs—the building blocks of his destiny, both in this world and the next—should not be imprinted upon him by the accident of his birth.

Knowing God Through God

Bahá'u'lláh teaches that we should strive to know God's Messengers “through His own Self and not through others,”²² that we should gaze at the sun and recognize it by its radiance and glorious splendor, and not by its name or dawning-place. If we judge the sun by our own pure vision directly and independently of others' prejudgments, we cannot but recognize it, wherever and whenever it may rise—even if in the west and “in such an hour as we think not” (Matt. 24:44), “even if in the middle of the night” (Luke 12:38 NEB), and with a new name (Rev. 3:12; Isa. 62:2; 65:15). But if we seek to recognize the sun by conformity, through the misty sight of the majority, if we merely cherish the name of the Revealer (Jesus, Moses, Muhammad) instead of His nature—His radiance and splendor—we cannot but fail in our efforts.

Bahá'u'lláh asks us repeatedly to become detached from all things except God. Without detachment, we cannot attain freedom and justice, we cannot discern the truth:

No man shall attain the shores of the ocean of true understanding except he be detached from all that is in heaven and on earth. Sanctify your souls, O ye peoples of the world, that haply ye may attain that station which God hath destined for you...²³

The preceding and the following quotation about detachment appear at the very beginning of a book Bahá'u'lláh wrote in response to questions raised by a seeker of truth concerning the proofs of His claim. To take root in one's heart, they should be read, reread, and pondered upon.

...they that tread the path of faith, they that thirst for the wine of certitude, must cleanse themselves of all that is earthly—their ears from idle talk, their minds from vain imaginings, their hearts from worldly affections, their eyes from that which perisheth. They should put their trust in God, and, holding fast unto Him, follow in His way. Then will they be made worthy of the effulgent glories of the sun of divine knowledge and understanding, and become the recipients of a grace that is infinite and unseen, inasmuch as man can never hope to attain unto the knowledge of the All-Glorious, can never quaff from the stream of divine knowledge and wisdom, can never enter the abode of immortality, nor partake of the cup of divine nearness and favor, unless and until he ceases to regard the words and deeds of mortal men as a standard for the true understanding and recognition of God and His Prophets.²⁴

Overcoming Obstacles

In the *Book of Revelation*, we are asked repeatedly to “overcome.” Overcome what? The obstacles that prevent us from learning the truth, from seeing the Glory of God:

I am coming soon...Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God...and ***I will also write on him my new name***. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Christ (Rev. 3:11-13 NIV)

See also Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 21:7-8; 3:5

Every seeker, in his search for truth, faces unique obstacles. Some face only a few, others face many. Let us look at some of these obstacles.

Overcoming Self-Deception

As Carlyle aptly observes, “The tragedy of life is not so much what men suffer, but rather what they miss.” The problem is that when people suffer, they are likely to know it and consequently to do something about it, but when they miss something—such as the boundless joy and contentment resulting from the recognition of the divine Wisdom revealed through God’s latest Revelation—they are not likely to know it and therefore to strive or take action.

The spiritually poor and closed-hearted is the last one to know that he is indeed poor and closed-hearted. If he knew, perhaps he would be more open. A sleeping and dreaming person can see and experience only his own engaging dreams. First he must be awakened. He must be helped to recognize his poverty, and then offered the heavenly riches. This is hard to do. Who would want to wake up from his soft sweet dreams, from the dark of unawareness and repose, to the dazzling light of reality? In the following announcement addressed to the peoples of our time, Jesus tries to awaken His sleeping servants. Please note the authority with which He speaks. This indeed is the “shout of the trumpet blast” that must bring the dead to life:

I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up!... If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief...

Revelation 3:1-3 NIV

In the following passage, which also concerns the peoples of our time, Jesus addresses the spiritually impoverished who think they are rich, the spiritually blind who are unaware of what they are missing:

I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other!... You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are poor... I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich... and [buy] salve

to put on your eyes, so that you can see...To him who overcomes [his apathy...] I will give right to sit with me on my throne... Christ (Rev. 3:15-21 NIV)

Getting needy people, who live under the illusion of wealth, to know their need and acknowledge their poverty is an awesome challenge.

The essence of understanding is to testify to one's poverty, and submit to the Will of the Lord...²⁵ Bahá'u'lláh

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Christ (Matt. 5:3 NIV)

Overcoming Illusions or “Idle-Fancies”

Bahá'u'lláh often counsels us to overcome the beliefs that we have been told to be true, but are in fact untrue. He calls such beliefs “idle-fancies” or “idols of vain imitation:”

Tear asunder, in My Name, the veils that have grievously blinded your vision, and, through the power born of your belief in the unity of God, scatter ***the idols of vain imitation***. Enter, then, the holy paradise of the good-pleasure of the All-Merciful. Sanctify your souls from whatsoever is not of God, and taste ye the sweetness of rest within the pale of His vast and mighty Revelation, and beneath the shadow of His supreme and infallible authority. Suffer not yourselves to be wrapt in the dense veils of your selfish desires, inasmuch as I have perfected in every one of you My creation, so that the excellence of My handiwork may be fully revealed unto men. It follows, therefore, that every man hath been, and will continue to be, able of himself to appreciate the Beauty of God, the Glorified. Had he not been endowed with such a capacity, how could he be called to account for his failure?²⁶

Overcoming Dependency on Religious Leaders

Many people submit their everlasting destiny to their religious leaders. They simply assume that when a person receives a

degree in theology, he is qualified to judge the truth, just as someone who receives an M.D. degree is qualified to treat patients. Unfortunately this is not the case. First, history proves that theologians are no better judges than ordinary people. They have always been the first to reject God's Messengers and Redeemers. For instance, when Jesus came, He was first condemned by religious leaders, and then by the masses who trusted their leaders.

If a degree in theology is the key to heaven, why then have the rabbis continued to deny Jesus as their true Messiah for 2,000 years? Will they continue to wait for still another 2,000 years? When will they become tired of waiting? How long will Christian leaders wait for their Redeemer? When will they become tired?

When it comes to an understanding of religion, theologians are as confused as any other group of people. In fact, they are often the source of the confusion. Theology has become extremely complicated and obscured by human interpretation.

Religious leaders disagree about every conceivable issue. They differ about fundamental questions, such as the trinity, and about minor questions, such as women's right to preach. They even differ about God's true Name.

Would any reasonable person fly in a plane controlled by several pilots who disagree about how or where it should be flown? Yet this is how millions of people allow their *spiritual life* to be directed. They investigate (pay close attention or "watch") the earthly house that they buy, because they do not want to be deceived. But they let someone else select the heavenly house in which they will live forever! Bahá'u'lláh asks us to appreciate and honor those leaders who practice what they preach, but He also asks us not to let them make the most important choice of our life for us.

Bahá'u'lláh teaches that we should try to see with *our own* eyes and judge with *our own* mind. No one can see for us as well as we can see with our own eyes. Similarly, the most reliable way of knowing the truth is to depend on *our own* judgment and *our own* sense of right and wrong. *If we disregard this rule, we can in no way discover the truth.*

Freedom of Choice A Divine Gift

Ours is an abiding faith in the cause of human freedom. We know it is God's cause.²⁷

Complementary to the requirements of a thirst for truth, and a desire for impartiality or fairness is the individual's freedom of choice. To choose one's destiny with freedom—without compulsion or coercion—is one of God's special gifts to humans. Interfering with another's right of freedom is utterly alien to the spirit of divine teachings. Coercing or pressuring has no place in the realm of religion, and is forbidden in the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. Pressure works when one has little or no confidence in the rationality of his beliefs. If one's beliefs are rational, they will, of themselves, exert the desired protective powers.

Bahá'ís are admonished to present the Message of the new Revelation according to the spiritual receptivity and desire of the recipients. Bahá'u'lláh declares:

O SON OF DUST!

The wise are they that speak not unless they obtain a hearing, even as the cup-bearer, who proffereth not his cup till he findeth a seeker, and the lover who crieth not out from the depths of his heart until he gazeth upon the beauty of his beloved.²⁸

One's freedom of choice in the Bahá'í Faith is safeguarded also in other ways. One safeguard is Bahá'u'lláh's admonition against engaging in "idle disputes"—trying to prove one's point at any cost. Such a practice obscures the pure light of the spirit. While arguing, the individual submits his liberty to pride and competition, not for the sake of seeking the truth, but winning the point.

The only way to speak the truth is to speak lovingly.

Henry Thoreau

Nothing is so strong as gentleness, Nothing is so gentle as real strength.

Francis De Sales

Engaging in arguments, as in a game, suppresses the spirit of the search for truth, demeans the dignity of religion, and stifles the freedom of the human conscience to follow its own pure and undefiled course. Bahá'u'lláh writes:

O SON OF DUST!

Verily I say unto thee: Of all men the most negligent is he that disputeth idly and seeketh to advance himself over his brother. Say, O brethren! Let deeds, not words, be your adorning.²⁹

Everyone should carry his own burden. Placing the burden of responsibility for choice upon one's parents or priest is contrary to reason and unacceptable to God.

The soul burdened with its own works shall not be burdened with the burden of another: hereafter shall ye return to your Lord, and he will tell you of your works...

Qur'án 39:9

Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God

Christ (Matt. 6:33)

- Search for truth and love for truth should rank first in our lives:

To love truth for truth's sake is the principal part of human perfection in this world, and the seed-plot of all other virtues.³⁰

- The emancipation of the human spirit from unquestioned conformity is the first step toward building a better self and a better world.
- Truth reveals itself only to the humble in heart, to the discerning, to those in possession of an open mind and a pure spirit.

The chief requirement for finding the truth is justice, and the chief requirements for attaining justice are independence of judgment, and spiritual purity:

- Independence of judgment means that every one must seek the truth for himself, never lean on anyone else—his parents, priest, or friends—and let them to choose his beliefs for him. Before the Court of Divine Judgment, “everyone shall fall or stand for himself.”
- Spiritual purity signifies that truth must be sought with absolute openness and freedom from any preconceived notions or inclinations either to accept or to reject. Spiritual purity cannot be attained unless the self is liberated from all earthly concerns or egotistical obstacles or attachments—worldliness, greed, conceit, self-glory, lack of courage, self-deception, and illusions.

Before God can deliver us, we must undeceive ourselves.³¹

- No one has the right to impose his beliefs on others. Coercing or pressuring belittles and demeans the station of religion. Arguments are not conducive to understanding and enlightenment, and ought to be avoided.

To find the truth, the seeker must have the courage to rise above all barriers, soaring with absolute freedom, without

fear. A free spirit never stumbles or falls; detached from the bonds of the earthly, it binds itself to eternity and becomes one with the divine.

The following quotation from Bahá'u'lláh summarizes all the basic requirements of the search for truth:

They that tread the path of faith, they that thirst for the wine of certitude, must cleanse themselves of all that is earthly—their ears from idle talk, their minds from vain imaginings, their hearts from worldly affections, their eyes from that which perisheth. They should put their trust in God, and, holding fast unto Him, follow in His way. Then will they be made worthy of the effulgent glories of the sun of divine knowledge and understanding, and become the recipients of a grace that is infinite and unseen, inasmuch as man can never hope to attain unto the knowledge of the All-Glorious, can never quaff from the stream of divine knowledge and wisdom, can never enter the abode of immortality, nor partake of the cup of divine nearness and favor, unless and until he ceases to regard the words and deeds of mortal men as a standard for the true understanding and recognition of God and His Prophets.³²

God has an infinite love for each of us. He sends the most loving and urgent invitations to anyone who wishes to enter His Kingdom:

The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.

Revelation 22:17 NIV

To have received such an invitation is a supreme blessing:

Blessed are those who are invited...

Revelation 19:9 NIV

What destiny will you choose for yourself? Will you continue to seek and search? Will you prepare yourself to receive the most

glorious gift from God: being ***chosen*** by Him as His guest of honor? Receiving this honor is far more difficult—and more precious—than receiving the first one: simply being invited. Because we are told that only ***a few*** will rise to the occasion:

For many are invited, but few are chosen.

Christ (Matt. 22:14 NIV)

We should keep in mind that the way we respond to God's invitation determines the way God will respond to us.

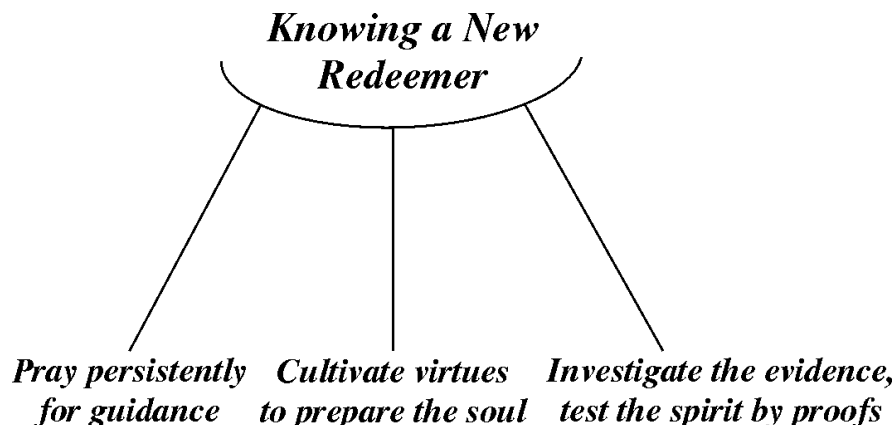
For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.

Christ (Luke 6:38 NKJ)

Knowing a new Redeemer requires efforts on three inseparable dimensions:

- Praying to God unceasingly for guidance.
- Cultivating the spiritual virtues required for the task.
- Investigating and testing the evidence He presents.

The first two dimensions are spiritual, the last one is intellectual. This book focused mostly on the second dimension: the attributes required for recognizing a new Redeemer from God. The first dimension—praying—is covered in *Prayer: the Key that Unlocks the Heart of Heaven*. The third dimension is covered in *I Shall Come Again, Lord of Lords, and King of Kings*. For a review of the preceding three volumes, see Part III of this book.



Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I
will give you rest. Christ (Matt. 11:28 NKJ)

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears
say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever
wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.

Christ (Rev. 22:17 NIV)

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