

Achieving True Freedom

An Exploration of the Kitab-i-Aqdas

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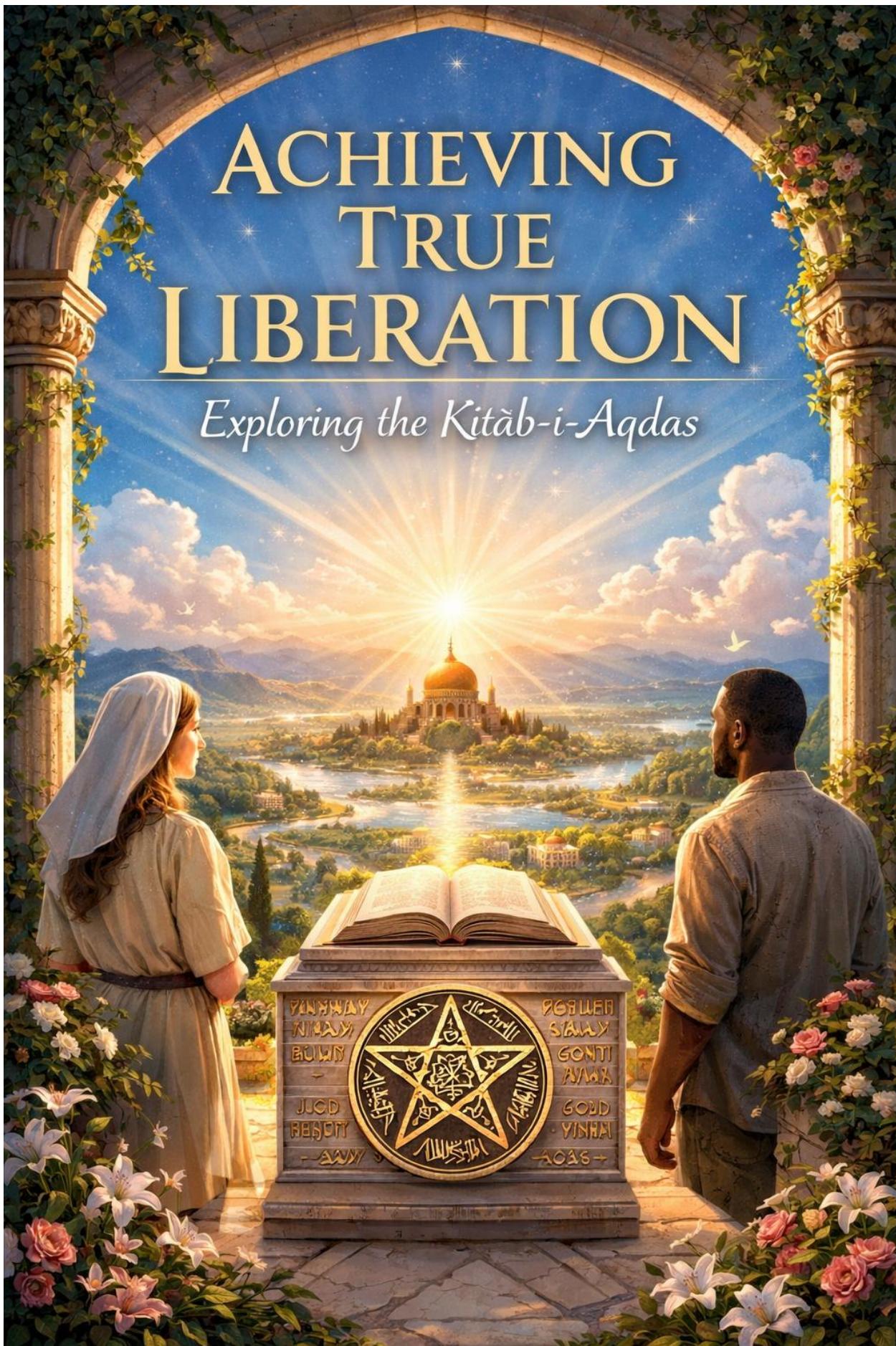
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ACHIEVING TRUE LIBERATION

Exploring the Kitāb-i-Aqdas



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Introduction

Praise be to God, the Creator of and Source of all inspiration, knowledge, and wisdom!

Allah'u'abha!

The Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, from 1844 to 1892, ushered in a new era for all mankind. The culmination of their revelations, the Bayán by the Báb in 1848 and the Kitáb-i-Aqdas by Bahá'u'lláh in 1873, offer a framework to develop individuals, communities, and nations in a newly spiritual way. The Bayán, which was unfinished prior to the Báb's execution in 1850, was symbolically completed by the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. This book began with a desire to study the Kitáb-i-Aqdas and to understand what it is truly offering humanity, not only in isolated passages, but as a complete and integrated work.

When I first began writing, I had a narrower vision of what the book would become. I expected to remain close to the surface of the text, speaking about themes and laws in a straightforward way. As the chapters unfolded, the Aqdas drew me further inward and further outward at the same time. It drew me inward into belief, prayer, and the reality of the soul. It drew me outward into relationships, community life, leadership, and peace. Writing this book became a process of discovery, where the Kitáb-i-Aqdas increasingly revealed itself as a composition of spiritual life, rather than a list of isolated commands.

This book aims to place the Kitáb-i-Aqdas in the exalted position it deserves to be. To do this, we need to understand the Kitáb-i-Aqdas is more than a book of laws. It is a framework for God's will, which is to liberate souls, to create distinct spiritual communities, and to bring about unity among the people of the world. It does not speak only to what we should do, but to who we are, what we can become, and what kind of world can emerge when human beings learn to live in justice and mercy. It is not meant to crush the soul beneath obligation, but to awaken the soul into dignity, purpose, and spiritual maturity.

The Bayán will be used as a primary supplement, as well as other writings by Bahá'u'lláh. No other sources will be considered. This is not because other voices have no value, but because I wanted the Scriptures to speak with their own force and internal coherence. It is a technique which is rarely used, to use Scripture to explain Scripture. The Kitáb-i-Aqdas makes no claim of starting completely from scratch, to not have any prior origins or inspirations. It also does not deny the reality of the world in which it was created. The world was already deep into the Industrial Revolution and on the cusp of the Modern age. Societies were progressing in certain qualities more than others, and each society carried strengths and weaknesses.

What the Kitáb-i-Aqdas does is act like a composer of music, taking instruments, notes and chords which already exist, and using them to create an entirely new composition. This composition is unique in itself, but it should not be terribly strange to anyone. When listened to in its entirety, you may feel its vibrations within your soul, a soul which does yearn to have a relationship with the divine. This composition is itself a technique able to create more heavenly compositions, where the compositions are the various organizations of society. It refines what already exists so that mankind can be prepared, guided, and inspired to continue its progress into perpetual tomorrow, a tomorrow of hope, love, and if so desired, peace.

I make no claim of expertise, divinity, or scholarly prowess. I make no claim where the contents of this book is the only way to interpret the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. My perspective is but one perspective and my hope is more authors offer their own perspectives on this magnificent work. The Kitáb-i-Aqdas is worthy of scholarship and a place on every bookshelf, coffeetable, and handbag.

This book is divided into four parts. The first part is the pillars of belief and serves as the foundation for the rest of the book. The second part focuses on the relationship we are capable of having with God along with the virtues this relationship develops. The third part starts to explore the practical application of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas on our private lives and relationships, outlining a set of rights and responsibilities from birth to maturity. The fourth part explores leadership in the civil and faith-based spheres, culminating in a vision of the future we can all be a part of.

Different readers will approach this book with different needs. Some may be seeking clarity of belief. Some may be seeking a devotional path that is practical and sustaining. Some may be recovering from deep emotional wounds and need a gentle way to return to God without fear. Some may be looking for a way to teach others without coercion, and to support growth without control. Some may be drawn to the chapters on leadership and peace, because they sense that the future of mankind depends on spiritual principles being applied with wisdom. The book is written to hold all of these paths together, because the Kitáb-i-Aqdas itself holds them together. Inner life and outer life cannot be separated for long without injury to one or the other.

Whether you currently believe in Bahá'u'lláh or not, I feel the Kitáb-i-Aqdas has something to offer for everyone. Liberation is for everyone, to include you and your loved ones. I am grateful you have given this book a chance to be read. Thank you!

1. Belief in God

1.1 Chapter Introduction

The Kitab-i-Aqdas never explicitly says you must believe in God, but the mention of God is everywhere within it. The belief in God is foundational to everything else within the Kitab-i-Aqdas. The book is rarely considered a mystical treatise nor is rarely recommended to read to learn how to grow your spirit. In reality, the Kitab-i-Aqdas's entire purpose is the growth of the human spirit through a constant interweaving of mystic teachings, theology, and straightforward commands.

One way Baha'u'llah enables this journey is by ensuring God is part of every single command and teaching. He does this by calling on God's various names and attributes. I counted 110 different names used for God within the Kitab-i-Aqdas. This is not every name of God and of course all of names can exist within every language. Both the Bab and Baha'u'llah would teach God is inclusive of all names and is the source of all names.¹ Instead of studying all 100 different names, the next section will focus on a grouping these names and attributes into 19 groups. I chose 19 due to the significance of the number in representing unity. These 19 groups will start with one concept and use this concept to progress to the next concept. Each group name will also have a number showing how often the names in the group appear in the Kitab-i-Aqdas.

1.2 19 Groups of Names and Attributes

1.2.1 Subtlety (2)

Subtlety is the quality of being difficult to analyze or even detect. When combined with the name Inaccessible, we can start to imagine God's mysterious and hidden nature. God may seem unable to be directly observed, or to some, lacking in direct evidence or proof. Yet, these qualities are highly nuanced. Subtlety can be viewed as an interweaving of words, meanings, ideas, and feelings which language may not be able to fully convey, or the conveyance can be completely relative to the contexts of time, space, and perspective. In one moment you may have an understanding and in the next, you gain a different understanding.

There are hundreds of traditions which attempt to explain who God is through art, music, dance, and poetic stories. They are filled with metaphor, exaggerated expressions, and other methods in an attempt to express the mystery which is God. Each are expressions of the subtlety of God, when all taken together are a divine tapestry whose threads are interwoven in truth and a shared experience along a spiritual journey. This also means there is more than one way to experience God. The Kitab-i-Aqdas provides the framework to open up these experiences, to find the different pathways to explore the hidden nature of God. All one must do is seek, to be a seeker.

The next 18 groups include the quality of Subtlety.

¹ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #167

1.2.2 Manifestation (2)

One way God assists the seeker is by manifesting signs that hint at His presence. The purpose is to make the inaccessible more accessible, even if it isn't accessibility in God's entirety. These signs might not be obvious like a stop sign, but could be more like being nearsighted as you approach a highway sign pointing to multiple paths. It may be something not immediately clear, or if you are looking in a different direction, the sign is something you may not observe. Signs are full of subtlety.

These signs could come from the natural world and the laws of creation in which we are a part of. They could come from others like ourselves through their actions, thoughts, and feelings. They could even come from our own imagination or subconscious, such as with a dream. A seeker may not observe every sign. When the seeker observes a sign, they may not understand the significance of the sign completely. A person who is not seeking may not even be aware there are signs. Yet, they are there for everyone with great consistency.

God can be made Manifest in different forms to include through humanity. A human Manifestation of God is a reflection and embodiment of God Himself. This subject will go into deeper detail regarding Manifestations of God in Chapter 6 "Belief in the Manifestation of God."

The next 17 groups include the quality of Manifestation.

1.2.3 Knowledge (46)

The Kitab-i-Aqdas uses the names such as All-Knowing, All-Informed, Wise, and the Knower of All Things frequently. These words conveys God's own infinite knowledge, a knowledge when Manifested is all full of Subtlety. Sometimes the knowledge may seem inaccessible or difficult to understand. This is an acceptable perspective. Sometimes knowledge is entirely based on perspective, especially within space and time. What a person knows in one moment as true can change as facts change, conditions change, or new knowledge becomes known. What is true within the Kitab-i-Aqdas is God possesses all knowledge.

Sometimes this knowledge is viewed as a knowledge of all facts. This could be knowledge of what is within our hearts. It could be knowledge of all possible outcomes. This could be a knowledge of all which has been manifested. This could be a knowledge of all which could be manifested. This knowledge is derived from the Manifestations of the Signs.

As names such as All-Knowing exist with Subtlety, these infinite modes of potential clarity and understanding are interwoven within each other, completely nuanced, and are all pathways to the name Manifest. This knowledge leads to God being the Wise, knowing how to apply knowledge in the best way possible.

The next 16 groups include the quality of Knowledge.

1.2.4 Creation (6)

God's names include the Dawning Place of Signs and the Creator of the Earth and Heavens. Creation is manifested through God's Knowledge. God's role as Creator begins to become evident, showing how His

knowledge shapes and sustains the universe. "Every beginning is from God and unto Him it returns. He is indeed the source of creation and the ultimate destination of all the worlds."²

With God being the creator, is also demonstrates God's eternal preexistence. God is the Creator, not the created. God is the Cause and Creation is the Effect. Through Knowledge, God is able to express His purpose, and through Creation He is able to fulfill this purpose. As God is the Creator of the Earth and Heavens, He is the Creator of all we are able to observe and all which we are unable to observe. God is the Creator of the Seen and the Unseen. God is the creator of all we feel and experience. God is the creator of all purpose, of all action, of all energy, and of all matter. God is the creator of you and I, and all which we care about.

Creation demonstrates Subtlety in that even seemingly simple things, such as a human cell, are complex and quite mysterious. The How and the Why a cell originates and functions demonstrate the subtle craftsmanship of a Creator, whereupon so far the answers to why remain quite inaccessible. All of Creation maintains this Subtlety.

The next 15 groups include the quality of creation.

1.2.5 Power (36)

The Power group includes the second most frequency of names in the Kitab-i-Aqdas. These names include the Almighty, All-Powerful, All-Capable, All-Subduing, and All-Sufficient. Each of these names express a different mode or aspect of God as Power. With God being the Creator, an awareness of God's Power and omnipotence follows.

Might can be synonymous with strength, especially with the traditional notions of being able to exert a great amount of force. Power can be viewed in how strength can be projected, or the ability to exert influence. Being capable is the ability to get things done, especially through skill. Subduing is being able to express one's Will over another. Being All-Sufficient means being qualified and competent in using power to achieve the required goals and to fulfill purpose.

These names all demonstrate God's ability to govern and sustain all which has been created. Notice how Power comes after other attributes such as being All-Knowing. Knowledge leads to Power. Power itself does not lead to being All-Knowing. This shows, in a way, how being Almighty or All-Subduing can be quite nuanced by Subtlety. Skill in using might and power involves knowing what tools to use, or exactly the right amount of energy to achieve the purpose within creation. The use of power might be a challenge to understand, as is understanding God's Will, which is a Will that subdues all of creation. The Will of God could be quite difficult to comprehend or fathom, also being a part of the greater mystery of God. There is hidden strength, such as how fine-tuned the laws of physics are or how life seemingly came from inert matter. Power does not need to be coercive but instead influential, such as in the role to guide hearts or establish those natural laws. The rotation of the planets or the growth of a seed show how God can

² Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #144

invisibly utilize power. There doesn't need to be extravagant, one-time shows of might for power to be manifested. Because God manifests the Signs, power does not need to be a show of domination, but a gentle way to empower creation to flourish. Dramatic interventions are always possible with God if it serves a purpose, and whether they are dramatic or subtle, the power is always transformative. "He can seize the world with a single word of His presence."³

The next 14 groups include the quality of power.

1.2.6 Lordship (51)

The Kitab-i-Aqdas includes many different ways in describing the various ways God is Lord. The title of Lord is used to describe concepts such as the Lord of Beauty, of all Religion, of Grandeur, of the Seen and Unseen. Lordship can be defined as God's ultimate authority. This authority would be over all creation and is derived from God's knowledge and power. Lordship can discuss authority and governance. This authority is absolute, encompassing everything which is seen and unseen. Lordship is universal, transcending all divisions, stations, ranks, and beliefs.

God is the ruler over all creation, although as God is Subtlety, Lordship can also be a mystery. Lordship might be observed through the Manifestation of Signs, understood through Knowledge, witnessed through Creation, and felt through Power.

The next 13 groups include the quality of lordship.

1.2.7 Justice (6)

Justice is expressed through the names Judge, Just, and Reckoner. Justice can often be seen as the determination between right and wrong. It can also be viewed as the balance expressed through God's Lordship. Although justice can often be immediately evident, Subtlety allows for justice to be precise, operating beyond the surface. This includes realities which can seem hidden, such as intentions, unseen consequences, or other spiritual conditions.

Justice can be witnessed through the various signs manifested, especially in how perfectly ordered creation is. Justice requires the omniscience of God to truly be balanced, informed of every action, intention, and consequence. Justice is the fulfillment of the purpose of creation in an equitable way. Justice requires God's power to be upheld. Power without justice can become tyranny. Justice ensures power is fair and equitable. All of creation benefits from justice.

God as an All-Capable Reckoner is able to calculate and account for all actions, intentions, and consequences, to include those seemingly unknown. God as the All-Knowing Judge determines the best rulings according to divine principles. Judgment and reckoning are required for justice to be implemented. As Lord, God's justice becomes evident as does order within His governance.

³ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #132

The next 12 groups include the quality of justice.

1.2.8 Exaltation (9)

God's justice demonstrates God's exalted nature. The names of Most Exalted, Most High, Great, Majestic, Most Glorious, and the Greatest Infallibility come from God's role as Just. Without justice, God's Power, Lordship, and Knowledge would be unworthy of exaltation. However, because of God's Justice, nothing else in creation can be more exalted than God.

Given God's Knowledge and Power, the Name of Greatest Infallibility demonstrates the fairness and righteousness of justice, showing that God does not and will not error. God's Subtlety can make His Exaltation seem veiled, especially when compared to more superficial things we can place above ourselves, or when we place ourselves above everything. Subtlety is what creates awe and acknowledges the extraordinary nature, despite being incomprehensible. The Manifestation of the Signs and of God help reveal different aspects of God's exalted nature.

The belief in God's Exaltation is not because God feels jealousy if you do not, nor needs to be exalted to feel good. The belief in God's Exaltation is a function of God's Lordship and Justice above any other form of justice and authority.

The next 11 groups include the quality of exaltation.

1.2.9 Independence (9)

The names of God in the group Independence include Self-Sufficient, Self-Subsisting, and Independent of All Worlds. It should be noted the Power group utilized the Name All-Sufficient. All-Sufficient demonstrates how God can suffice all things, whereas Self-Sufficient shows how God can suffice Himself without requiring any support from creation itself.

God has complete autonomy. God is independent of our own belief or exaltation. It also means God does not need anything in return in being Just, Almighty, All-Knowing, and Inaccessible. God acts only due to His own purpose. This purpose, this Cause, is solely for creation's benefit. "Evil deeds do not harm Us, good deeds do not benefit Us"⁴ and due to this, God is free of corruption.⁵

The next 10 groups include the quality of independence.

1.2.10 Command (6)

The Kitab-i-Aqdas describes God as being the Commander, Ordainer, and Fulfiller. These names serve as the foundation for legislation and the execution of this legislation. These roles in one way serves as the

⁴ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #59

⁵ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #64

Word through which the entire framework of order, laws, directives, and intentions are used to shape the destiny of creation.

It would seem justice would require the command in practice. God cannot judge without establishing a standard to judge against. This would definitely be correct. With Commander being a Name of God, it is more about the attribute. In order for belief in God's command to exist, one must believe in the attribute of Justice first. Otherwise, a person would not follow the command.

Subtlety is still the foundation here within Command. Even a simple outward command could have significant and profound spiritual meaning. Believing in the Command thus, isn't just merely acting on the command, but believing the Command itself has an inner essence full of mystery, spiritual progress, and deeper purpose within the grand scope of creation. The Command is bound within God's All-Knowing nature and serves as the framework not just for people, but for all creation. Command acts through God's Lordship and serves the balance of Justice. The Command is Exalted over any other command and is independent of everything other than God Himself.

The next 9 groups include the quality of command.

1.2.11 Counsel (6)

The group counsel is informed by the names Counselor, Speaker, and Source of Inspiration. Unlike Command which is more about legislation, Counsel is more about helping navigate complex moral, spiritual, and practical challenges which may not have a clear prohibition. This complements Command.

Belief in God as a Counselor means you believe God can provide you with advice and wisdom. The originates from God being Wise and All-Informed. God can do this as the Speaker, using His Word or Manifestations of His Word to provide guidance at anytime. This guidance could be sought or offered voluntarily. These counsels, advice, and wisdom act within God's name Source of Inspiration. The inspirations inspired could be inner understandings or renewed energies to act.

Counsel interacts with Subtlety by allowing for a process of self-discovery through the hidden, inner dimensions of truth which may Manifest through Signs and Manifestations of God. While inspiration itself is a creation, effective counsel can help ensure a person may find harmony and balance within the framework of creation itself. Counsel could be highly contextual and individualized, which requires God's knowledge to ensure relevance and timeliness. God's counsel is authoritative as Lord and is another pathway to justice, as His counsel will be most fair and equitable. The Exalted nature of God ensures a sense of awe and respect for His wisdom. The counsel is effective through God's independence, ensuring the counsel is solely for the benefit of creation, not from any need or want.

The next 8 groups include the quality counsel.

1.2.12 Faithfulness (3)

Faithfulness is a name or attribute rarely attributed to God, or at least in what I read and hear. Usually faithfulness is used only in the context of a person in relation to God or a significant loved one. This group is highlighted by the names in the Kitab-i-Aqdas of Trustworthy and Faithful Guardian.

Belief in God as being Trustworthy is the result of believing God's counsel and command. You can trust God's command and counsel is not only wise, but upheld. They are not arbitrary or motivated in negative qualities such as selfishness. God can be relied upon in good times and in bad times to exist within all the names expressed. God upholds His promises and fulfills His roles as Lord and Creator justly.

God is the Faithful Guardian. Being faithful, God is unwavering in His promises and in upholding justice. He is loyal to creation and being independent, is not affected by human actions or decisions. God being a guardian demonstrates an active role within creation. While God being Inaccessible may seem God is impersonal, this is quite far from the truth. Inaccessible is solely due to His exalted nature, not due to a lack of care or concern for creation. God is our guardian. Creation could face challenges, and God is able to protect it and guide it, ensuring it flourishes. Within humanity, God is like a shepherd.

Both these names are a testament to the faithfulness of God, especially to each individual person although not exclusive to humanity. There is a steadfast commitment to our guidance, protection, and well-being. This should help encourage a sense of hope, trust, and gratitude in our own walks of faith.

The next 7 groups include the quality faithfulness.

1.2.13 Praise (4)

God's names in this group include All-Praised, Praised, and Praiseworthy. This demonstrates how created entities, not just humanity, praise God and His names. God is worthy of adoration due to how all of these prior names are manifested within creation.

Praise can be for God's Subtlety, awe, and wonderment. The hidden aspects of God's nature invite reflection and admiration. Praise can be for God's manifestations, helping to connect humanity to the divine. Praise can be for God's omniscience, for understanding all things perfectly for the benefit of creation. Praise can be for creation itself, for its beauty, complexity, artistry, and magnificence. Praise can be for God's power and Lordship, for the ability to govern, sustain, and transform creation into constantly better versions. Praise can be for God's purpose and justice, for the assurance there is fairness and moral accountability. God deserves praise for being the Most High and Most Glorious, showing a deep reverence for His supreme nature. God can be praised for needing nothing but giving everything selflessly, being fully independent of creation. Praise is for God's command, providing a moral and spiritual framework for all. Praise for laws which promote growth, harmony, justice, and peace. Praise can be for God's counsel which ensures humanity can navigate life's challenges in a wise and caring way. Praise is for God's faithfulness in His consistent care and fulfillment of promises, for being steadfast in being an active part in developing our spiritual and material needs.

The next 6 groups include the quality of praise.

1.2.14 Love (11)

Love is probably the most often stated attribute of God. It would seem natural to place the Love grouping much earlier in this. Baha'u'llah says "I was in my ancient essence and eternal being when I knew my love

for you; therefore, I created you, cast my image upon you, and revealed my beauty to you.”⁶ It appears love was the beginning, but the ancient essence of Subtlety is the beginning.

Believing in God the Subtlety can teach God’s presence is real, even when unseen. This is a foundation to prepare a believer to recognize love even in those troublesome and mysterious times. Love itself often seems hidden, which requires God to Manifest it. The Manifestation is the expression of love, which appears in signs, prophets, and scriptures. Manifestations help make love seem tangible instead of being inaccessible. As we see in the Hidden Word, God’s love is intentional, born through God’s knowledge. Love is purposeful and directed towards the well-being of all creation. Creation teaches our existence is an expression of love. Everything is the gift. Love is born from Power, as it is protective and able to sustain creation. Love without power is ineffective. Love has authority derived from God’s Lordship, expressed with authority. God’s love can lead one wisely. If Love wasn’t a result of Justice, it would not be perfectly balanced. God does not favor in Love, nor is inequitable.

Discipline is not out of anger or jealousy, but is a method to guide and protect those He loves. The belief in God’s Exaltation also leads to feeling God’s Love is also Exaltation. It is higher than human love and is limitless. Love is not bound by any limitation and it is unconditional and constant. Independence teaches God loves not because God needs something from us, but because the Love is True. God is not dependent on our love, which means His Love is completely free. The Command of God demonstrates how Love provides direction through laws, teachings, and boundaries. Love is not merely only a feeling but God’s Love includes guidance. God’s Love is not silent and He can speak and inspire, providing loving counsel. Faithfulness teaches Love is reliable and any unreliable love is not love. Love is eternal, just as God is eternal. God will not abandon or forget His creation.

Once recognizing God’s greatness through these various names and attributes, Praise teaches God’s greatness naturally leads to Love. Feeling and understanding how wonderful God is, in all of these attributes, there is no other result to also love Him. Love itself is the highest form of praise. As an example of God’s Love, His names include Beloved, Loving, and Gracious.

Grace is an attribute which encapsulates God’s Love succinctly. It is personal and relational. When we started with God as being inaccessible, God’s love is deeply personal. “I knew my Love for You.” Grace is intimate. Grace is the foundation of spiritual aid. Grace is Love in action. Grace is given even if it is not deserved. Every person, being created out of Love, is a recipient of Grace.

The next 5 groups include the quality of love.

1.2.15 Forgiveness (15)

Forgiveness is one of the ultimate expressions of love. With the names of God including All-Forgiving, Ever-Forgiving, and Oft-Forgiving, we see forgiveness can include forgiving all transgressions, lasting

⁶ The Hidden Words in Arabic #3

eternally, and can occur with great frequency. There are no limitations on what can be forgiven for God and any forgiveness lasts forever. What is forgiven today will not be held against you tomorrow.

Believing in the Forgiveness of God does require believing in the qualities of God's Love. Once we know love is not transactional and completely selfless, we can also believe forgiveness is all not transactional. Forgiveness shows unconditional care and devotion. The mistakes and failings of a person will not separate them from God. God, being the embodiment of Faithfulness, is steadfast in His Love and Forgiveness. No person is unworthy of forgiveness. Belief in God's forgiveness also helps strengthen and secure one's belief in His love. It helps feel the love is constantly being expressed and renewed, whose purpose is to uplift creation. God's command and counsel is not about creating a fear of punishment, but it is to deepen the relationship we have with God.

The next 4 groups include the quality of forgiveness.

1.2.16 Mercy (29)

Mercy builds on forgiveness and is still sourced from God's Love and His other attributes. Mercy includes the names All-Merciful, Most Merciful, and Most Compassionate. Forgiveness is a reaction to something gone wrong such as a mistake. Mercy is a proactive support for the future. Believing God is All-Merciful means you believe God knows, through His Knowledge, you will need help and assistance. You will be imperfect. Mercy is gentleness, patience, and protection. Mercy will help ensure we are guided away from that which harms us.

God being Most Compassionate shows God has sympathy and compassion for all of His creation, to include us. Mercy is the action used to express this compassion. For example, a parent can see their child wanting to learn how to walk. They see the difficulty the child has and compassion moves the parent to feel for the struggle. These feelings compel the parent to want to comfort and encourage the child. Mercy is helping the child up if they did fall, making sure the child will not be harmed too much by falling, and guiding them so they can keep trying to walk. Eventually, this expression of love and nurture will lead to the success and growth of the child.

God's Mercy is eternal, unconditional, powerful, and subtle. It can sometimes seem difficult to understand His Mercy when we are going through difficult times and His Mercy seems hidden. Yet, it is always there, invisibly ensuring our progress and success.

The next 3 groups include the quality of mercy.

1.2.17 Generosity (22)

Generosity includes the names All-Bountiful, Bestower, Most Generous, and Most Bountiful. These three attributes highlight a natural progression of God's love from Mercy. God being the Most Generous means He will give freely with love with no expectations of anything in return nor any limitation. God being All and Most Bountiful shows God will give with great abundance and encompasses all of creation. God being the Bestower demonstrates another aspect of a personal relationship. He will deliberately give blessings

according to our needs and capacity. The abundance is intentional and specific. "God enriches who He wills through the means of the heaven and earth."⁷

Generosity can be quite Subtle as He can give in ways which seem hidden or unnoticed. It can require perception and an open mind and open heart. These gifts are manifested in every aspect of life and are tangible and real. Knowledge can influence the bounty and bestowals by God knowing what to give, when to give, and how much to give. This generosity will be in ways which benefits all of creation, which itself is an act of generosity. As God's Power is absolute, there is no constraints by need or scarcity. God can give without any limitations. Lordship is reflected because generosity as He is Lord of all Things, and all things are sustained under His care and authority. As God is Just, He will not give unequally or unfairly. The gifts may not be the same for all, but everyone will receive what they need. As God is exalted over all, His generosity is also spiritual in nature, not just material. It helps us connect with the divine. True generosity will not seek anything in return, showing God's Independence. One of the greatest gifts God can provide is knowledge in how to live a righteous life through His command and counsel. These gifts allow us to thrive, not just merely survive. God's generosity is faithful and unwavering. Even though belief in God's praiseworthiness allows us to recognize His love and generosity, the generosity also gives us more reasons to offer praise to Him. We are moved to glorify Him. Forgiveness itself is an act of generosity, offering a fresh start and renewal.

The next 2 groups include generosity.

1.2.18 Sovereignty (4)

Belief in God as the Sovereign, Lord of Dominion, the Ruler, and the Master. It is a natural expansion of Lordship. A Lord focuses on the care and provision of creation, ensuring it is sustained and guided. A sovereign ruler has absolute rule and authority. The belief of God's love, forgiveness, mercy, and generosity leads to believing in God's ability to control and rule over all of existence.

Believing in God the Sovereign means you believe His authority is absolute and independent of any other authority. As a Ruler, there is belief He actively governs and ensures order. With God as the Master, He has personal ownership and control over all things. God expresses mastery over all matters. God's Dominion is both the spiritual and physical worlds. This sovereignty is built upon all the other beliefs, names, and attributes expressed so far. It is continuous and never ends. Much like how God loves, it is built on faithfulness, forgiveness, mercy, and generosity according to the capacities of creation, capacities which can be ever-changing.

Recognizing God's sovereignty crowns this progression, affirming His ultimate control over all realms.

1.2.19 Purity (9)

Purity includes the names of Purest, True, and One. This is the pinnacle of belief in God. These names describe God's transcendence, incorruptibility, and oneness. Being the Purest, God is beyond all

⁷ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #66

imperfection and is entirely flawless. Nothing can limit or alter Him. Being True, God is constant and beyond any falsehood, while all else in creation is temporary. Being One, God is indivisible and without equal. There is no multiplicity of His essence and He is inclusive of all reality and of all creation.

In our journey through the groups, building our foundations of belief, we have an opportunity in believing in the true and transcendent nature of God. Without this journey, belief in God's Purity or oneness might seem shallow. For example, what might be the consequence of believing God is One but lack belief in the other names of God?

Belief in God's Oneness without belief in God's Subtlety might view God as being remote, causing a possible agnostic or deistic perspective. Belief in God's Oneness without belief in God's Manifestation would prevent the person from recognizing or connecting with the divine, causing a possible rejection of prophecy, scriptures, and religious teachings. Faith could be reduced to a mere philosophy instead of a living reality. Belief in God's Oneness without belief in God's Knowledge causes one to feel God lacks wisdom and His rulings imperfect and arbitrary. This could cause a fatalistic or impersonal view of God where He is not aware of individual lives.

Belief in God's Oneness without belief in God as Creator would remove God's role as the source of existence. This would lead to pantheism or atheism. Belief in God's Oneness without belief in God's Power means His oneness is meaningless as He cannot act. This could lead to polytheism or dualism where other forces compete with God's will. Belief in God's Oneness without belief in God's Lordship would mean God is unable to sustain or guide His creation. This could lead to nihilism. Belief in God's Oneness without Justice might make it seem God is unconcerned with fairness or morality. This could lead to tyranny, cruelty, or oppressive religious views where oneness is used as the justification.

Belief in God's Oneness without Exaltation might make God seem too human, leading to anthropomorphism where God is viewed as a human-like figure. Belief in God's Oneness without Independence would cause belief God needs something to exist, leading to a belief in paganism where others share divine authority. Belief in God's Oneness without belief in His Command would lead to moral relativism where there are no consequences or ultimate justice, possibly no right or wrong. Belief in God's Oneness without His Counsel would have one believe there is no divine wisdom guiding human affairs, leading to despair or confusion and potentially directionless.

Belief in God's Oneness without His Faithfulness could make God seem fickle and unreliable in fulfilling promises. This would lead to distrust in religion and a fear God is not dependable. Belief in Oneness but not belief in God's praiseworthiness would mean worship has no meaning. God would not inspire love or devotion, leading to spiritual emptiness. Belief in Oneness with belief in God's love makes oneness cold and rigid. It leads to fear-based religion, where obedience is motivated by dread. Belief in God's Oneness without His forgiveness make God seem unapproachable and terrifying. This would lead to a legalistic religion where perfection is the only goal to prevent eternal condemnation.

Belief in God's Oneness without His Mercy is rigid and oppressive, leading to hopelessness and possibly depression, where a sinner may feel there is no way back to God or salvation. Belief in God's Oneness without His generosity is a belief where creation is an accident and good things are merely a matter of

luck. This could lead to pessimism where people believe God does not care about their well-being. Belief in God's Oneness without His sovereignty could mean God has no impact and other forces could challenge Him. This also could lead to polytheism or deism where God's rule is questioned, challenged, or replaced by others.

Belief in God's Purity leads to an understanding which there is no partner with God as the Greatest Infallibility⁸. No one else has been given a share in this station. This belief means God never errs and is absent of imperfection. Truth is never compromised. The essence of infallibility is oneness, as God cannot be divided against Himself.

As you can see, a lack of belief in any one of these names or attributes compromises belief in God's purity, truth, and oneness. If any are missing, God cannot be truly be One and God cannot be True. With any missing, instead of religion we develop some other type of corrupt ideology which lack the completeness of truth, spirit, and experience.

1.3 The Purpose of God

"Blessed is the one who understands the purpose of God in what has been revealed from the heaven of His will, which reigns supreme over all the worlds."⁹ What is the purpose of God? Within the 19 groups of names and attributes, we learn about who or what God is, but we do not necessarily learn why God has acted as He has. There are various answers throughout the writings of the Bab and Baha'u'llah. One answer by the Bab is "Your purpose for me is that I recognize You in all things, so that I may not be ignorant of You in anything."¹⁰ Baha'u'llah also says "Whoever has known Me has known the intended purpose."¹¹

Belief in these Names and attributes of God are a pathway to understanding what this purpose is. The purpose of God is not solely the commandments and prohibitions¹² and never will be.

1.4 The Breath of God

The breath of God is a mode in how God expresses His purpose. It "wafts through all else"¹³ and "passes through all created things."¹⁴ The breath has fragrance¹⁵ and causes action and movement. If there is no

⁸ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #47

⁹ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #125

¹⁰ Persian Bayan, Vahid 2 Gate 3

¹¹ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #138

¹² Lawh-i-Sirraj

¹³ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #158

movement due to the breath of God, the person or object is considered dead.¹⁶ Thus the breath of God is what gives life. Having both fragrance and life also means this breath can permeate and be deeply felt. Fragrance can attract others, but often fragrance can be hidden by other smells.

The breath of God cannot be confined, as itself is movement causing movement. It is spreading to those with a receptive nose or receptive soul. It is a sign of beauty and renewal. A fragrance does not discriminate and is able to permeate or be sensed by anyone open to it. Believing in God also means believing in the Breath.

1.5 Covenant of God

The Kitab-i-Aqdas describes the covenant of God. A covenant is a formal agreement God has made with humanity. It defines expectations, rewards, and responsibilities between Himself and us. This ties into God's Faithfulness but also includes our own faithfulness. This section will not go into various details of this covenant but it is important there is belief in this covenant.

¹⁴ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #111

¹⁵ Lawh-i-Aqdas

¹⁶ Suriy-i-Haykal Verse #167

2. Belief in the Human Soul

2.1 Chapter Introduction

The Kitab-i-Aqdas regularly describes the human soul and the station of humans and humanity. Baha'u'llah does not explicitly state a belief in the human soul is required in the Kitab-i-Aqdas or other writing, but like the belief in God, it is strongly implied. This will be the second foundation of this book upon which the Kitab-i-Aqdas rests upon.

The soul is an idea which is quite cross-cultural. There are many distinct traditions describing the human soul in some way or another. Chapter 1 described how God is the creator of everything, is eternal, and other qualities which would testify to how distinct and seemingly disconnected cultures include such similar ideas. Each tradition may not say the exact same thing about the soul. Examples include the Hindu progression of the soul through various physical lifeforms or the Platonic concept of the distinct human soul. Yet the foundations of truth are all there. This chapter could potentially serve as a bridge between these various traditions and provide a clear understanding of the soul and allow cross-cultural and interfaith dialogue to exist. After all, we are all equally human.

This chapter will be divided into four main sections: the Reality of the Human Soul, the Unique Nature of the Soul, the Inner Struggles of the Soul, and the Fate of the Soul. These sections are derived from the Kitab-i-Aqdas as the primary source document. Any supplementation from other sources from the Bab and Baha'u'llah will be noted.

2.2 The Reality of the Human Soul

The first belief is the fact the human soul exists and is real. The soul in its form did not eternally pre-exist but was created by God. Baha'u'llah says simply we are created from water.¹⁷ Baha'u'llah says water is one of the key components of all creation, celestial and terrestrial, along with fire, air, and earth as they combine to make heat, moisture, cold, and dryness.¹⁸ He also describes various kinds of water used in the creation of spirit, soul, and body in the same tablet. Baha'u'llah describes the water of semen as being pure, not something itself which needs purified.¹⁹ Water, regardless of the source, is the foundation of all life.

¹⁷ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #148

¹⁸ Tablet of the Light Verses and Disjoined Letters

¹⁹ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #74

Baha'u'llah says that we are brought to life with a spirit from God²⁰, through the divine breath.²¹ All living things are animated by this breath of God, which is spirit itself. This breath works as the catalyst upon water and the other elements, giving life to everything living. This includes organic entities such as animals, plants, bacteria, and other things biology classifies as living. This spirit also is within other non-organic objects such as the sun, the moon, earth, and other objects whose lifespan endures for millions and billions of years. The spirit animates the body and it animates the human soul as well as the souls of endless creatures.²² The soul is not created at the moment of conception, as it does require the body to be the vessel and for its elements to reach a stage of maturity. Baha'u'llah does not exactly define when this exactly occurs but this could occur during embryonic or fetal development.

The human soul is the innermost part of ourselves. The soul provides the “direction of the spirit towards one orientation over others.”²³ The soul can be ignited by fire of the love of God or by one’s own whim. This expresses the soul itself has free will. Despite God’s names and attributes of power and knowledge, God has imparted every thing made of spirit the freedom to move as it wishes, according to its temperament and direction.

Baha'u'llah expresses all souls and all humans are Signs of the divine reality.²⁴ In Chapter 1, we learned how these signs are subtle and when manifested, are a foundation for us in understanding God and His purpose. The soul is also a sign, functioning as a mirror capable of reflecting God’s reality. This is true for all people.²⁵ The names and attributes are manifested in the human soul.²⁶ This mirrorship is a way to recognize God within us.²⁷ These manifestations of Signs can occur in the same way God’s names and attributes can also be believed in, perhaps in stages or through periods of continued realization.

²⁰ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #73

²¹ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #158

²² Suriy-i-Rais (Tablet to the Chief) - This tablet provides a very good sermon about the nature of the soul

²³ Suriy-i-Rais

²⁴ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #72

²⁵ Kitab-i-Badi - This book offers an in-depth explanation of what it means to be a mirror

²⁶ Kitab-i-Iqan (Book of Certitude) - Another great source about the potentials of the soul

²⁷ The Qur'an: “We shall show them Our signs in the horizons and within themselves until it becomes clear to them that it is the truth.” Also repeated in the Persian Bayan, the Seven Valleys, and the Kitab-i-Iqan.

2.3 The Unique Nature of the Soul

Baha'u'llah describes the body as being a temple, and the collection of all people as being temples of humankind.²⁸ The figurative heart serves as a malleable lens within the body which serves to perceive divine truth. This helps a person with receptivity to God, which in turn helps a soul determine its destiny and spiritual path.

The Suriy-i-Haykal (Surah of the Temple) describes how Baha'u'llah, being a Manifestation of God, is a sacred vessel in the highest form. Every human body, although temporary, is also a sacred vessel although in a lower station than that of the Manifestation of God. The temple is temporary but is a place of worship and the development of spiritual qualities, according to its capacity as a mirror. This means the body is also capable of being used to nurture the soul, not just through material means but through being used for spiritually purposeful conduct and expression of divine attributes.

The soul is capable of having an exalted and noble station.²⁹ There are various stations and ranks a soul is capable of achieving. The soul itself was born noble³⁰ but requires effort to remain so by turning one's sight inward. There is no higher station than a person bearing witness to God.³¹ The human soul's natural station is higher than that of animals, but can descend to the level of an animal's soul if it is neglected.³²

Each person and each soul has its own capacity.³³ Not every person's soul will express the divine attributes and names equally or in the same exact way. They are expressed according to one's capacity.³⁴ This means every soul may have its own distinct strengths and weaknesses, bound by the human temple and its position in time and space. These different combinations of capacity, reflections of divine names and attributes, and effects of the body ensures every soul is distinct, much like the iris of the eye or the lines of the palm of the hand.

²⁸ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #96

²⁹ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #120

³⁰ The Arabic Hidden Words #13

³¹ Persian Bayan, Vahid 1 Gate 2

³² Persian Bayan, Vahid 5, Gate 14

³³ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #176

³⁴ Kitab-i-Iqan

2.4 The Inner Struggles of the Soul

Baha'u'llah describes a suspicious soul³⁵ as an opposition to one who uses reason. A suspicious soul could be someone who is ruled by doubt and is not sure who or what to trust. This doubt could be about God, God's purpose, or even their own purpose in life. This skepticism may exist even if truth or a path forward is evident. They may not understand the good in certain situations, understand the potential wisdom in difficult situations, and due to this, lack discipline to truly submit to God. This lack of discipline could lead to self-destructive acts and habits, which can lead a person further down the road of headlessness and suspicion. A suspicious soul could be someone who is deceptive, also known as hypocritical. They may outwardly portray belief but inwardly or in private has other beliefs and actions.

Baha'u'llah teaches these suspicions act as idols.³⁶ These idols are the cause of humiliation and loss and keep a soul from ascending to the station they are rightful to inherit and claim. However, the Kitab-i-Aqdas does include the most simple perspective to help alleviate these inner struggles the soul may face.

Baha'u'llah says all are servants.³⁷ The soul's fundamental purpose is in relation to the divine. All souls are servants. Belief not only in the soul, but in the soul's purpose as a servant of God. This establishes trust and humility, eliminating the symptoms of a suspicious soul such as distrust, skepticism, arrogance, or hypocrisy. Belief in servitude to God is the source of freedom for the soul³⁸ and reveals our true human rank.³⁹

2.5 The Fate of the Soul

One matter which is not a matter of belief is the fact death of the body is inevitable. This is 100% guaranteed and is inescapable. It is also 100% fact once the body has died, the energy which used to be within the body no longer exists within it. It is also 100% fact and proven by science that energy does not merely disappear or cease to exist. The energy goes elsewhere. Where does it go?

Baha'u'llah reminds us we will return to dust.⁴⁰ The temple of the human body will end. The soul will take flight.⁴¹ Taking flight symbolizes the soul's transcendence over material life, to a real place higher than

³⁵ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #119

³⁶ Lawh-i-Dunya (Tablet of the World)

³⁷ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #72

³⁸ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #125

³⁹ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #120

⁴⁰ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #148

⁴¹ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse# 97

where it was. The soul is also capable of transcending the human body even before the body has perished, if a person so desires and believes. “If you are a person of mystery and longing, take flight with the wings of the saints’ aspirations so that you may see the secrets of the beloved and reach the light of the loved one. ‘Indeed we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him we will return.’”⁴² Baha’u’llah throughout His teachings reminds us the importance of the soul being allowed to take flight while the body is alive while constantly being aware of the inevitable flight when the body no longer exists. The first is not inevitable but desired by God, and the second is inevitable and desired for a believer and God. A suspicious soul might show fear for the second flight, fearing the end of everything. A soul in belief is prepared for flight. A soul prepared for flight is a liberated soul.

The desired journey of the soul is onboard the Crimson Ark.⁴³ It represents salvation and refuge, much like how the Noah’s Ark led the people of the time to salvation. Belief in the salvation of the soul during the life of the body and after is important, especially within the belief of all the names and attributes of God. The journey in the Crimson Ark requires belief in God, in all the names and attributes of God. The journey in the Crimson Ark requires belief that you have a soul. The journey in the Crimson Ark requires belief that every person has a soul, even a person you feel might be an enemy. The fate of the soul doesn’t require only consideration of your own salvation, but in the salvation of others.⁴⁴ The fate of the soul requires a belief that other souls deserve salvation. All souls deserve liberation. All souls are capable of transcending the bounds of self and body. All souls are able to take flight.

The next chapter will discuss the potential destinations of the soul, the worlds of God.

⁴² Haft Vadi (The Seven Valleys)

⁴³ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #84

⁴⁴ BH00093 (Letters to the Land of Kha)

3. Belief in the Worlds of God

3.1 Introduction

Religious cosmology has always been a subject I have always found fascinating. Every culture in the world has a creation story where the world(s) come into existence, Earth is formed with the major elements from which life begins, and humanity is created. All of this creation has a divine aspect to it. There are elements of truth within all of these stories, whether you believe them to be legend, myth, or absolute sources of fact. They help shape identity, purpose, and help us understand our place within creation.

You will discover the cosmology expressed by Baha'u'llah within the Kitab-i-Aqdas and further elaborated upon in His other writings has elements which may seem familiar. There will also be elements which seem strange, depending on your cultural perspective. I feel the Zoroastrian and Hindu traditions will find the closest relationship to the cosmology of Baha'u'llah, but even then, what is expressed by Baha'u'llah (as well as the Primal Point) is completely unique.

Belief in the worlds of God, while again not being explicitly expressed as required by the Kitab-i-Aqdas, is vital to the belief in the Cause of God. The journey of the soul must go somewhere. Pre-existence must have had an origin. I hope this chapter will help unlock some of these mysteries and fortify the belief in the worlds of God. This belief is another foundation upon which the spiritual journey of individuals and our systems of organization rests upon. Our journey depends on this belief.

3.2 Nature of the Worlds

The Kitab-i-Aqdas describes many worlds specifically. There is the lesser world, the greater world, spiritual worlds, heaven, and various kingdoms of these worlds. To introduce the nature of the worlds, I want to start with a long passage from the Suriy-i-Wafa (Tablet to Vafa).

As for what you asked concerning the worlds, know that God has worlds without end, infinite beyond comprehension, and no one encompasses them except His All-Knowing, All-Wise Self. Reflect on sleep, for it is a great sign among people if they were to ponder. For example, you see something in your sleep at night, and you find it exactly as you saw it after a year, or two, or more, or less. Even though the world in which you saw what you saw in your sleep is not the same as the world you are in, what you saw in your sleep must exist in this world at the time you saw it in your sleep, and you are among the witnesses.

Moreover, you see something that did not exist in the world, yet it appears afterward. This confirms that the world in which you saw what you saw is another world that has neither a beginning nor an end. If you say that this world is in your mind and is balanced within it by a command from an All-Mighty, All-Powerful source, this is true. And if you say that the spirit, when it is detached from attachments during sleep, is directed by God into a world that is concealed within the mystery of this world, this is also true.

Indeed, God has world after world and creation after creation, and in each world, He has ordained what none can enumerate except His All-Accounting, All-Knowing Self. Reflect on

what We have cast upon you so that you may understand the intention of your Lord and the Lord of all worlds. Within it lies a treasure of the mysteries of wisdom, and We have not elaborated on it due to the grief that has overwhelmed Me from those who were created by My word, if you are among those who hear.

Baha'u'llah says God reigns over all worlds.⁴⁵ With the Tablet to Vafa above, we can understand these worlds are infinite in number. Some may view worlds as being planets, but the usage suggests entities such as the universe or plane of existence. Dreams may not be an actual world, but are a sign of these various worlds. There are various theories which seem to address this type of reality, such as multiverses and quantum entanglement. I personally find quantum entanglement an interesting theory, as it expresses the interconnectedness of particles at great distances. Distances merely vary according to perspective. A small distance for a person might seem like a magnificent journey for a snail, and a small distance for a snail may seem like a magnificent journey for a tree. To a ray of light, all distances will seem to be the same. The key is no matter the distance, a cause with one particle can have effect on another. What if this were applied to worlds which are infinite in number?

This leads to an infinite number of potentialities. As Baha'u'llah discusses the existence of spiritual worlds that cannot be expressed by words nor pointed to by signs,⁴⁶ these worlds could exist in the same location as us but on a different plane of existence. They could also exist other locations which we sometimes pass through as Earth is on its own celestial journey, rotating around a Sun which rotates around the center of the Milky Way Galaxy, which rotates around the center of the universe, which might rotate around something else. We are never in the same spot we once were and most likely, never be in that exact same spot ever again. Our physical world is called the lesser world.⁴⁷ There is also a greater world.⁴⁸ In the writings of Baha'u'llah, the greater world seems to represent the very structure of existence itself. It's a vast spiritual reality which includes all divine realms.

3.2.1 Kingdoms Within the Worlds

The Kingdom of Names bears witness God desires to rule over our hearts.⁴⁹ This Kingdom of Names is manifested in all worlds, spiritual and lesser. In the lesser world we may be aware of this Kingdom through the various signs, just as we were in learning about God. Every name and attribute is manifested from this Kingdom, and every name and attribute returns to this Kingdom.⁵⁰ It could also be possible

⁴⁵ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #39

⁴⁶ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #116

⁴⁷ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #55

⁴⁸ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #55

⁴⁹ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #83

⁵⁰ Tafsir-i-Hu (Interpretation of the Name He)

some of these spiritual worlds solely manifest a single Name. Imagine the possibility of a particular day, we happen to pass through a spiritual world which reflects the name Just. We could be working on some task and suddenly come to a realization about a separate matter which seemed unjust or unfair. This realization leads to an inspired solution. Could this inspiration have come solely from our own imagination? Or could this inspiration actually have come from God and the Kingdom of Justice in a greater world? The Kingdom of the Lord⁵¹ exists within all worlds. This kingdom represents God's sovereignty, one of the names of God. There is also the Kingdom of Command⁵², representing God's names of commander, ordainer, and fulfiller.

3.2.2 Cities and Schools Within the Kingdoms

These Kingdoms have cities of names where the Concourse on High and other dwellers exist.⁵³ If the worlds of God are countless, and God encompasses all names, it would also stand to reason these cities could also be infinite in number. Many scriptures refer to various cities in the worlds of God. Many Christians are familiar with the concept of Zion or the New Jerusalem. Hindus mention many celestial cities such as Amaravati and Dwarka, the birthplace of Lord Krishna.

These cities can also represent various stages of the maturation of the soul, such as the City of Love and Rapture.⁵⁴ Aiding this development are schools within these cities. The School of God is where the Tablets are revealed.⁵⁵ The School of God predates the creation of the Earth and heavens⁵⁶ and encompasses all the knowledge God the All-Knowing has. As we experienced in the chapter "Belief in God," belief in the knowledge of God is essential to belief in God the Creator. The Tablet may not necessarily be what is revealed in revelation, but what is revealed within the soul's personal journey. The School of God is something we could think of as a greater institute which itself has branches. These branches can focus on being sources of knowledge teaching a soul a particular value a soul can develop to progress along the divine names and attributes. The Kitab-i-Aqdas mentions the School of Detachment and the School of Meanings and Exposition while the Kitab-i-Badi mentions the School of Knowledge.

Imagine the various combinations which could exist within these schools, cities, and kingdoms. Say you enter the School of Servitude, either here in the lesser world by chance, through meditation, or through a glimpse through one of the greater spiritual worlds of God. This School may help teach virtues such as humility or the fear of God. These lessons within the School of Servitude may help you enter the City of

⁵¹ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #79

⁵² Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #91

⁵³ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #132

⁵⁴ Gems of Divine Mysteries

⁵⁵ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #176

⁵⁶ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #177

Submission which is when the soul is ready to surrender to God's Will. This School helps refine the soul and prepares it to reflect potential names such as the Almighty or the Lord of Lords. Eventually in Part 2 of this book regarding the relationship with God, I will present up to 39 virtues identified within the Kitab-i-Aqdas.

3.3 The Soul's Purpose Within These Worlds

Belief in the worlds of God is essential to those who believe they have a soul. The purpose of the soul is to find pathways beyond the lesser world, even if at first it is merely just glimpses into the greater world. The Bayan says the soul progresses degree by degree, especially those who ponder upon the realm of the infinite.⁵⁷ As the soul is designed to reflect the divine names of God, the greater worlds manifest the divine names more purely than in the lesser world. The soul though, even when bound by the temple of the body, is able to experience the greater world. Think in a sense nirvana as taught by Buddha. For a soul not seeking, they may consider an outcome or event to be a matter of destiny or fate. However, for a seeking soul who reflects upon the spiritual realities, they may see an event or outcome as a reflection of a City of God, a Kingdom of God, a manifestation of a Name, and something guided by the divine hand.

The eventual destination is Heaven. Heaven is often used in the Kitab-i-Aqdas as a spiritual world itself, designating both a source of blessings and a destination for the soul. This paradise also reflects the names and attributes of God, such as the Heaven of Bounty⁵⁸ and Heaven of Revelation.⁵⁹ Baha'u'llah says "Paradise, it is a reality beyond doubt, and today in this world, it is my Love and My pleasure. Whoever attains it, God will assist them in this world, and after death, He will admit them into a Paradise whose expanse is like that of the heavens and the earth."⁶⁰ Paradise is also "my Love, your heavenly home, reunion with me."⁶¹ The purpose of the soul is reunion with God in the heavenly paradise.

A person who is a seeker and goes on a journey similar to that as described by Baha'u'llah in the Seven Valleys can attain heaven even while on earth. It is the condition of the soul which is near to God. The beautiful thing which I personally love with this cosmology is even if I do not attain this station now, I will forever have opportunities after my body gives way. The condition of being distant from God, also known as Hell, is not a condition which lasts forever. I would highly recommend reading the Bayan's Vahid 2, Gate 16 for a wonderful sermon about paradise and hell.

⁵⁷ Persian Bayan Vahid 2, Gate 12

⁵⁸ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #55

⁵⁹ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verses #64 and #105

⁶⁰ Suriy-i-Vafa

⁶¹ The Hidden Words of Arabic #6

The Kitab-i-Aqdas does teach a powerful tool a person can use to elevate their own soul and that of others, reciting the Words of God in a melodious tone.⁶² This practice mimics the melodies which come from the greater worlds. Baha'u'llah often describes these melodies as from the “nightingales of the Supreme Paradise.”⁶³ It can also be the Words of God, no matter who sings them, are also heaven.

3.4 Inhabitants of the Greater Worlds

Earlier in this chapter the Celestial Concourse was mentioned. A concourse is a meeting place or a location where multiple paths merge. This could be similar to a convention center, transportation station, hotel, mall, or other places such as this. The Concourse on High would be the grouping of those who dwell in the greater worlds. They are inhabitants of the Eternal City.⁶⁴ These are the souls who have achieved the exaltation of paradise, of heaven, and of nearness to God. These souls wail when God restrains any knowledge, even for a moment, and they tremble and sway when He releases the knowledge.⁶⁵ They lament the fire of hatred⁶⁶ and have submitted to the Cause of God.⁶⁷

The Hosts of the Celestial realm and the nearest angels will aid anyone who rises to assist the Cause of God.⁶⁸ Angels are celestial beings whose purpose is to do God's will. They send His Tablets⁶⁹ and are able to traverse the greater worlds into our lesser world.⁷⁰ They will announce with a trumpet the arrival of a Messenger with a Message.⁷¹ Angels also announce the death of a person, bring about wrath and punishment for a soul which had not progressed.⁷²

⁶² Kitab-i-Aqdas Verses #116, #150, #160

⁶³ The Words of Paradise

⁶⁴ The Persian Hidden Words #71

⁶⁵ BH00230

⁶⁶ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #89

⁶⁷ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #132

⁶⁸ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #53

⁶⁹ Surah of Our Name The Messenger

⁷⁰ Tablet of the Birth

⁷¹ Kitab-i-Iqan (Book of Certitude)

⁷² Surah Fu'ad

A soul which has been purified can achieve a station as angels.⁷³ I do not believe a human soul has the ability to become an angel, but metaphorically they can have a station similar to an angel, serving many of the same purposes. These purified souls, which could include loved ones from here on Earth who have passed away, might be offering aid and assistance. Belief in these inhabitants helps us understand we are not alone on our spiritual journeys. God has devoted an incredible amount of energy within creation to help us and sustain us through our good times and bad times.

As you can see, there is this unity between all of creation. What we do today has effect with the beings of the greater worlds, not just here in our physical world. What happens in the greater worlds can also have effect here in our lesser world. We are all entangled. The best way to understand this interwoven unity, this entanglement, is through the Sidrat al-Muntaha.

3.5 Sidrat al-Muntaha

The Sidrat al-Muntaha means the Tree of the Farthest Extent. It is also known as the Divine Lote Tree. If we imagine we are looking out from a high mountain or maybe on a beach looking out to the ocean, we can see where the land and the sky meet. No matter how far on Earth we journey, we could never discover the physical point where the Earth and sky actually meet. The Sidrat al-Muntaha represents the point where the lesser world and the greater worlds meet. It is not something you can physically reach, but it is the furthest extent our terrestrial knowledge will get us before we need our spiritual knowledge to progress. The Kitab-i-Aqdas says “the Lote-Tree of the farthest limit proclaims: ‘There is no God but Me’”⁷⁴

The Sidrat al-Muntaha can call out and proclaim. It has Branches which provide shade and salvation.⁷⁵ As this is within the horizon where the worlds meet, it is also the point where light appears and disappears. The Divine Lote-Tree is the place of Dawn for the Day of Resurrection. The Breaker of Dawn, who speaks between the heavens and the earth⁷⁶ is also a celestial being often known as the Holy Spirit, or in Baha'u'llah's words the Holy Maiden. Baha'u'llah describes her this way:

I heard the most beautiful, the sweetest voice above my head. When I turned, I saw a maiden, the mention of my Lord's name suspended in the air, aligned with the sun's head, and I saw her rejoicing in herself. As if the embroidery of pleasure appears from her face and the light of mercy declares from her cheek. She was speaking between the heavens and the earth with a

⁷³ Kitab-i-Iqan (The Book of Certitude)

⁷⁴ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #100

⁷⁵ The Tablet of the Branch

⁷⁶ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #117

call that attracts hearts and minds and gives all my limbs, both outward and inward, the good news that my soul was rejoiced with, and honored servants rejoiced from it.⁷⁷

What is spoken from the Sidrat al-Muntaha is the Mother Book, which is the hidden treasure.⁷⁸ The Mother Book includes everything spoken by God, and things which people are not ready to hear. It contains all knowledge and also manifests all of God's names and attributes.

The Holy Spirit also appears from the Sidrat al-Muntaha. Much like the Holy Maiden, revelation appears from them. While the Holy Maiden may be a personal apparition for Baha'u'llah, the Holy Spirit has descended from Heaven to animate the missions of those such as Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit has its own language.⁷⁹ The Holy Spirit can also act as an intermediary between the Manifestations of God and us, or between God and us. It calls from the Kingdom of God⁸⁰ and animates and inspires life within the soul, even if the soul seems inert or dead. The Holy Spirit is a source of grace.⁸¹

Belief in the Sidrat al-Muntaha is important as it helps a person understand there are pathways for divine assistance available to us. These can come when we need it, even if we don't seek this assistance. These can come if we choose to approach the Sidrat al-Muntaha on our own accord. It represents a constant hope for the soul and constant pathway for God's names and attributes to have real effect in our lives.

3.6 Summary

Belief in the worlds of God, and all which exists within them, is vital to the progression of the soul. These realms and entities are not abstractions and are signs of God's names and attributes and help manifest these realities in a way which can elevate the soul, whose purpose is to be near to God in the condition of paradise. This also demonstrates we are not alone in our journey. Sometimes life here in this lesser world can be difficult. There is suffering, pain, and seemingly insurmountable challenges. All of these experiences are real. Are these experiences supposed to keep us down, or help us rise to greater heights?

We are never alone as long as we believe we are not alone. Belief in angels as real entities, not merely as symbols, is important. Belief those prior to us who loved us may be offering a helping hand within the worlds of God is deeply heartfelt. Belief in the Holy Spirit as a real entity who animates life within the soul inspires living with purpose. Belief that the worlds of God are infinite ensures our imagination can be alive, never bound by our primary senses. Infinite worlds equal infinite possibilities. The spiritual journey unfolds endlessly across dimensions unseen. This is where unity comes from, the manifestation of God's

⁷⁷ Suriy-i-Haykal (Surah of the Temple)

⁷⁸ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #103

⁷⁹ Suriy-i-Haykal (Surah of the Temple)

⁸⁰ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #80

⁸¹ The Persian Hidden Words #58

Oneness. It may not necessarily be the manifestation of sameness, but through a real understanding every soul, every world, every being, and all of creation are woven together like a divine tapestry.

If any of this is ever in doubt, be open to dreaming. Be willing to remember those dreams. The Kitab-i-Iqan and books like the Surah of Joseph in the Qur'an, or even the Ahsan al-Qasas by the Bab (The Best of Stories) which further explains the Surah of Joseph, testify to the value and symbology which are embedded within dreams. I can personally testify I first started this path of my journey to the Bab and Baha'u'llah due to a series of dreams I experienced. Dream big. Be imaginative. Your soul is ready to for an amazing journey.

The next chapter will discuss belief in the Day of God, also known as the Day of Resurrection.

4. Belief in the Day of Resurrection

4.1 Introduction

Belief in God, all of God's names and attributes, the human soul, the soul's purpose, the infinite worlds of God, and the inhabitants of these worlds set the stage for establishing belief in the Day of Resurrection. The Day of Resurrection is a theme which occurs in many religious traditions. Zoroastrianism and Hinduism teach there are cyclical periods which culminates in the triumph of good over evil. The Abrahamic faiths teach of the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth, through a Messianic figure, where bodies rise from the grave with new life. The Mayans devoted much of their astronomical sciences towards understanding these spiritual cycles of return, rebirth, and the victory of good.

Belief in the Day of Resurrection is a belief the Kitab-i-Aqdas assumes, although it does not provide a detailed explanation. Baha'u'llah devoted the Kitab-i-Iqan (The Book of Certitude) entirely to discussing the Day of Resurrection and is an incredible resource for understanding. The Persian Bayan by the Primal Point (Bab) discusses the Day with many layers and perspectives, where it could be understood in potentially infinite ways. The Day is a foundation in the religion of God. This chapter will lightly touch upon what the Kitab-i-Aqdas has to say about the Day and how it ties into the beliefs established in the first three chapters.

4.2 Moses and Jesus

Verse #80 of the Kitab-i-Aqdas uses powerful imagery to describe what the Day of Resurrection is, without itself being an explanation which required volumes to write. He describes two different prophetic figures from the past to illustrate the Day. With the first, Baha'u'llah describes Moses as attaining the lights of the Ancient One. The Ancient One is most commonly referred to as God within the Kitab-i-Aqdas. In the Book of Exodus, Moses is described as climbing Mount Sinai, where God appeared to Him as the burning bush. The Ten Commandments were first revealed on Sinai. Why would Moses now have attained the lights of God, when He already done so in Exodus? The answer is in the next sentence of verse #80.

Moses drank the pure waters of reunion. He attained the presence of God. Did Moses attain this reunion with His physical body? This reunion is a soulful one, a reunion of a completely spiritual nature. On each Day of Resurrection, all are called upon. Reunion can also refer to the fact Moses is among us and we are reunited with Moses. Just as Moses first appeared to Pharaoh as a baby on the waters of the Nile river, the same waters which set Egypt ablaze, again history repeats itself. Fire, while seemingly a source of destruction, is also a source of renewal. Just as the forests, grasslands, and marshes of the Americas required fire to renew, so too do all of us. Fire is not an eternal punishment, but more like a symbol of the Phoenix or a Zoroastrian temple. From this reunion, Mount Sinai, which used to be the source of Revelation in the first days of Moses, now circles around the new Source of Revelation and the new Source of Divine Command.

The Spirit, which usually refers to Jesus Christ in Baha'u'llah's writings, calls from the Kingdom "Come, O sons of vanity!" If we consider what vanity is, which is those who are prideful and do things for the

purpose of being noticed, not because they are sincere in their action. The call to come could be a pathway to restore the person's self-worth through humility, a pathway of salvation. The Resurrection is not only for humans, but for all the hosts of God in the celestial worlds. These angels, saints, and other beings longed to meet God on this Day. It is an example all should be willing to follow. The city of Zion, which is a destination of paradise, also speaks about the promise of God which was always ordained in the Tablets of God.

4.3 The Covenant

In Chapter 1, we briefly alluded to belief in the Covenant of God as a required belief. This covenant is entirely about the Day of Resurrection where all are reunited with God. This promise has existed throughout many Scriptures and many faith traditions. The Qur'an expresses the trumpet and the blast. The trumpet and blast happened for prior Prophets bring a new Revelation, such as with Salih to the Thamud people⁸² where the trumpet is the announcement and the blast is the effect. There are two future trumpets and blasts.⁸³ The first blast causes universal death and the second blast resurrects all souls for judgement.

Outside of the Abrahamic faiths, this promise for the return of God remains strong. The faith of the Inca people taught the hopeful return of Viracocha. Viracocha is a name of God as Creator who departed across the ocean with a promise of return. The Iroquois believed in the return of Deganawida, a name of God which means Great Peacemaker. Deganawida is to return in a time of great turmoil to restore peace and unity. The Bhagavad Gita (4:7-8) says about the return of Krishna, a manifestation of Vishnu "Whenever righteousness declines and unrighteousness prevails, I manifest Myself. To protect the righteous, destroy the wicked, and establish dharma, I appear in every age." There are countless examples of the return of God. Most faiths teach this return, regardless of their historical connections to each other.

4.4 Fulfillment

The trumpet blast is often called the Great Announcement.⁸⁴ This announcement is "the Day of God; none is to be mentioned in it but His own Self, the Sovereign over all that is in the heavens and the earth. This is a Cause by which all that you hold as illusions and forms has been shaken." This verse expresses God's sovereignty but also alludes it should be a day where everything which is associated with God, such as all of those names and attributes which are a part of His own Self. By doing so, everything that we know can and will be changed. In regards to faith and religion, this could be traditions, false beliefs which are created by others, and other things we are attached to such as names. By reminding us God is the

⁸² The Holy Qur'an, Surah Al-Haqqah Verse 5

⁸³ The Holy Qur'an, Surah Az-Zumar Verse #68

⁸⁴ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #167

Sovereign, God is reminding us on the Day of Resurrection, anything is possible within the fulfillment of the Covenant.

Baha'u'llah describes the moon as being cleft asunder.⁸⁵ The moon, being it reflects the light of the Sun high in the nighttime sky, signifies its station as a Mirror of God, the God who brings light of day upon us. In the Kitab-i-Iqan, the moons can signify saints or scholars who reflected the cause of God from a revelation past, it could refer to the traditions and sciences attributed to the leaders and scholars of that prior age, and it could even refer to the practices derived from the laws of the past revelation. Splitting the moon, much like in the night vision of Muhammad, represents the act of God in changing all of these things for a new Day. What was current is now old. What was once today is now yesterday. Imagine how all of these forms would shake, like a great earthquake, by such an act of power from God the All-Powerful. With every irrevocable matter being clearly distinguished⁸⁶ we are able to discern what was true from the past and what was false. This causes a radical transformation within the world itself, to include the religious, moral, and social structures of all humankind. The Day of Resurrection itself is an irrevocable matter, as it is the greatest promise God makes with us. God promises change.

"The light has shone from the horizon of manifestation, and the horizons have been illuminated as the Owner of the Day of the Covenant has come.⁸⁷

4.5 Seize the Day

Baha'u'llah refers to what the Bab had prior said in verse 135 in the Kitab-i-Aqdas: "if you attain what We reveal, you will ask from the grace of God for Him to reign upon your innermost selves, for that is a glory beyond reach. For Him to drink a cup of water with you is greater than for every soul to drink of His own existence, indeed greater than all things."

This cup of grace, this cup of water, is what purifies the soul. This water gives life and nourishes the innermost part of ourselves, much like it purified Moses or purified Jesus after His baptism. The Day, then, is born out of love for us, our salvation, and the awakening of the soul. There is no greater honor for a soul than for this. Baha'u'llah says to seize the Day. Belief in the Day of Resurrection is not a passive act. It requires an active belief in God, all the names and attributes of God, the human soul and its potentials, all the world's of God, and the belief everything within the material world is subject to renewal and transformation.

⁸⁵ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #81

⁸⁶ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #81

⁸⁷ Lawh-i-Ishraqat (Tablet of Splendors)

4.6 The Day Manifests God's Names and Attributes

The Day of Resurrection exemplifies and magnifies God's names and attributes. The following are brief descriptions in how using the 19 groups from Chapter 1.

4.6.1 The Day as Unveiling

The Day of Resurrection reflects Subtlety, as the Day and Hour is hidden until it is revealed. "The hour has come, the call has been raised, the cry has appeared, and the mountains have passed, but the people do not perceive it."⁸⁸ This demonstrates the soul must not rely on the physical senses derived from the body, but from its spiritual capacities.

The Day reflects Manifestation, as the Day unveils what was hidden. "We have opened the doors of the kingdom for you. Do you shut the doors of your houses in My face? This is indeed a great error. Say: He has come from the heaven as He came the first time."⁸⁹ What was subtle is fully manifested and truths which were once veiled become clear and undeniable. The doors of the Kingdom, the spiritual worlds of God, are open and revealed. This Manifestation has happened before, is happening today, and will happen again tomorrow.

The Day reflects Knowledge, as the Day separates truth from falsehood. "Thus does God teach you what will save you from doubt and perplexity and deliver you in this world and the next."⁹⁰ Past misunderstandings are corrected, hidden wisdom is brought forth, and those who seemed wise are humbled before God. Divine knowledge is fully revealed.

The Day reflects Creation, as the Day is when a new reality is born. "He created all things by His command and sovereignty and decreed for every matter a time in His Book."⁹¹ With every time, the last leads to the first, the end leads to the new. "Everything will set down its burden; how blessed is the sender of this favor that encompasses all things, visible and hidden. This is how we created the cosmos anew today"⁹²

The Day reflects Power, as the Day establishes divine authority. "...the signs of the Resurrection, such as "the splitting of the sky," "the breaking of the earth," "the leveling of the mountains," "the rising of the dead from their physical graves," and similar expressions that signify the signs of the Last Day."⁹³ No force can resist the unfolding of the divine decree and God's power is made evident.

⁸⁸ BH00010, Letters to Tehran through Ali-Akbar

⁸⁹ The Lawh-i-Aqdas (Most Holy Tablet) aka Tablet to the Christians

⁹⁰ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #163

⁹¹ BH00054: Unnamed Tablet about the annihilation of all things

⁹² Suriy-i-Haykal

⁹³ Kitab-i-Badi

4.6.2 The Day as Judgment and Renewal

The Day reflects Lordship, as the Day affirms God's Sovereignty. "Thus commands you the Lord of the Day of Judgment. Reside in the fortress of My love."⁹⁴ All past rulers and authorities are weighed against this balance, even if they have acted according to the law of yesterday. The Day confirms God's rule over all of the worlds and every soul and being within them.

The Day reflects Justice, as the Day brings perfect judgment. "Beware, oh people, do not deprive yourselves of the seas of meanings and do not follow every rebellious devil. Then look with the corner of holiness to the balance of God, so that you may know His true, straight balance. Say, today it is the right of every soul to purify its heart from attachment to what was created between the heavens and the earth."⁹⁵ No injustice will remain hidden and all souls will stand accountable for their deeds. There are no exceptions. The balance is set and no soul will be wronged.

The Day reflects Exaltation, as the Day magnifies God's Glory (Baha). "Today is a day that cannot be equaled by the previous centuries for even a single hour. This most holy and exalted day has always been and will forever be set apart and is referred to in the divine books."⁹⁶ All of the worlds bear witness. On the Day, God's supreme station is affirmed.

The Day reflects Independence, as the Day reveals that God needs no one. "All things will appear from the possibility of the earth and will return to Him. God will be alone and unique in His holy residence, free from space, time, remembrance, statement, indication, description, praise, exaltation, and diminution, and no one knows it but He and those who have knowledge of the Book with Him."⁹⁷ No force could hasten nor delay the Day. It does not come from human effort, nor from human interpretations and traditions.

The Day reflects Command, as the Day implements divine law. "This is the Day of Resurrection and the Lord of all worlds. This is the Day of the Call and My immutable decree."⁹⁸ Past laws and dispensations are weighed and fulfilled, while God's Will is executed without resistance even if it seems He is being resisted.

The Day reflects Counsel, as the Day reveals God's wisdom. "I have not ceased advising this creation and planning for their acceptance of God, their Lord, and their faith in God, their Creator. And that they believe in Him on the day of His Manifestation, all that is on earth. If so, My being will be pleased, for everyone has reached the pinnacle of their existence, attained the appearance of their Beloved, and

⁹⁴ The Epistle to the Son of the Wolf

⁹⁵ Suriy-i-Bayan (The Chapter of Paradise)

⁹⁶ BH00093 (Letters to the Land of Kha)

⁹⁷ Kitab-i-Sultan

⁹⁸ BH00141 (Unnamed Tablet to Abu'l-Hasan)

realized the possible manifestations of their purpose. Otherwise, My heart is not saddened, for I have nurtured everything for that.”⁹⁹ The wisdom can remove all veils, bring clarity to all who attain this counsel. The Day is not merely a reckoning, but a moment of divine instruction.

4.6.3 The Day as Mercy and Fulfillment

The Day reflects Faithfulness, as the Day fulfills God’s promises. “This is a reminder from Us to whomever turns to God and hears His sweetest voice, which rose between earth and heaven, that they may give thanks to their Lord, the Ever-Watchful, the Self-Subsisting. The promise has been fulfilled, and the Promised One has come.”¹⁰⁰ Prophecies and promises reach their climax, assuring the faithful with certainty that their devotion was not in vain.

The Day reflects Praise, as the Day inspires worship. “O assembly of sages in the land of Há, the Supreme Pen declares: Today is a day of remembrance and praise, a day of praiseworthy qualities. God willing, you should quench the thirst of the parched with the Euphrates of divine mercy, and guide the homeless to their true homeland. With utmost spirit and joy, bring glad tidings of the All-Merciful’s favor to the inhabitants of the world and arise to serve with wisdom.”¹⁰¹ All throughout the worlds, such as the hosts of heaven, glorify God on this Day. The Day reveals majesty, evoking praise with spirit and joy. Even those who doubted are overwhelmed by awe.

The Day reflects Love, as the Day is an expression of divine love. “This is a day on which fire speaks in all things; the Beloved of the worlds has come.”¹⁰² The Day isn’t merely about judgment, it is about God’s love for His creation. The fire which speaks in all things is the fire of transformation,¹⁰³ an opportunity for every soul to embrace nearness to God.

The Day reflects Forgiveness, as the day offers redemption. “If you abandon your deeds and believe in Him in those days, perhaps Allah will forgive your misdeeds. Indeed, He is the Mighty, the Generous.”¹⁰⁴ It is a Day when barriers between the soul and God are removed. Those who seek forgiveness, it is granted to full measure.

⁹⁹ Epistle to the Son of the Wolf

¹⁰⁰ BH00091

¹⁰¹ BH00141

¹⁰² Suriy-i-Rais (Chapter of the Chief)

¹⁰³ The Tafsir-i-Hu (Tafsir of the Name He)

¹⁰⁴ Suriy-i-Haykal

The Day reflects Mercy, as the day is a triumph of divine mercy. “the effulgent lights of the dawn of meanings that have shone forth in these merciful days.”¹⁰⁵ Judgment is tempered by mercy and even those who rejected the truth might still find grace.

The Day reflects Generosity, as the day bestows divine gifts. “I commanded the breezes of spring, and opened the gates of heaven, and the clouds rained. Blessed is the one who succeeded in recognizing Allah in his days.”¹⁰⁶ Spiritual capacities are unlocked for those who accept them. The gates of divine bestowal have opened. This bounty demonstrates the Day is not merely about accountability, but it is about bounty.

The Day reflects Sovereignty, as the day confirms who rules. “The sighs of the highest heaven rose, and the tears of the angels and the Spirit descended. Say, if you have anything greater than what has come from the Dominion of Will, bring it forth and do not follow every ignorant, rejected one. Say, come so I may show you what you have neglected in this day attributed to God, the Mighty, the Beloved. This is the day in which the fragrance of the Merciful has spread, the breaths of revelation have wafted, and the Nightingale of the Cause has sung upon the branches. The kingdom belongs to God, the Master of kings.”¹⁰⁷ On this Day, all those who claim power are shown their claims are false, as God is the true ruler of existence. The Dominion belongs to none but God.

The Day reflects Purity, as the day confirms the absolute triumph of truth. “The Pen of the Most High declares in this Most Great Manifestation: “This is the Day of God, if you would but recognize it. And this is the Day of Manifestation, if you would but witness it. On this day, none is mentioned except God alone, if you would but perceive it. He has come with the Truth, sanctified from all witness and witnessed, and purified from all that has flowed from the Pen and appeared from the tongue, if you would but know it.”¹⁰⁸ The day separates truth from illusion. No falsehood, corruption, or impurity can remain. The Day is a testament of Oneness. It is a Day of Unity.

4.7 The First Paragraph of the Kitab-i-Aqdas

In the first verse of the Kitab-i-Aqdas, Baha’u’llah says “The first thing that God has prescribed for His servants is the recognition of the dawning place of His Revelation and the source of His command, which is the station of His own Self in the realm of command and creation.” The next two chapters will discuss belief in the Command of God (Chapter 5) and belief in the Manifestation of God (Chapter 6), which complete the covenant of God. These two beliefs comprise the foundation of the Kitab-i-Aqdas, derived from belief in the Day of Resurrection. Belief in these two things help reinforce belief in God, the

¹⁰⁵ Kitab-i-Badi

¹⁰⁶ Lawh-i-Istinaq

¹⁰⁷ BH00010 (Letters to Tehran through Ali-Akbar)

¹⁰⁸ BH00074

station of the soul, and the worlds of God. All of this is a cycle which is an endless loop of self-discovery and transformation. All of this is embedded within the very first law of the Kitab-i-Aqdas. As you see, the Kitab-i-Aqdas is not merely a book of laws. It is the Most Holy Book. It is the fulfillment of the Covenant of God.

5. Belief in the Commands of God

5.1 Introduction: The Divine Command as the Source of Order

Belief in the Command of God is central to the Kitab-i-Aqdas and the entire revelation of Baha'u'llah. It has been a central tenet of all religion. It is a direct reflection of God's names as Commander, Fulfiller, and Ordainer.

5.1.1 Command of God Before and After

"This is the command of God, before and after, and with it He has adorned the scriptures of former generations. This is the mention of God, before and after, with which He has embroidered the fabric of the Book of Existence, if you are of those who perceive. This is the command of God, before and after."¹⁰⁹

Baha'u'llah affirms this is the religion of God from before and after.¹¹⁰ The Book of Existence encompasses all of creation, not just the Command. However, the Command is derived from the Book of Existence and is the standard for creation. The Command from before does not have everything within the Book of Existence, neither does the current, and neither does the future Command. Baha'u'llah says "Regarding the question about the heavenly names, the pulse of the world is in the hands of the knowledgeable physician. He sees the ailment and with His wisdom, He treats it. Each day has its own secret, and every matter has its own sound. The remedy for today's pain is one thing, and for tomorrow, another. Be mindful of today and speak of today's matters."¹¹¹

Basically there are many chapters in the Book of Existence, an eternal reality which precedes and outlasts creation itself. God does not promise any chapter will be the only chapter forever, but through the covenant expressed within each chapter, there is also the promise of future chapters which are more adapted to the needs and aspirations of humankind. Not everything in a chapter is completely new, but each prior chapter establishes the foundations for the next. Any archaeologist will testify history is built in layers. Religion is a part of this history.

5.1.2 Revelation

Each chapter of the Book of Existence is unveiled through divine revelation, adapting to the spiritual needs of each age. Revelation is the disclosure of truth or knowledge from God. It is the process by which God's command is unveiled, renewing itself in every age. Given one of God's attributes is Subtlety, it could be difficult for a person to believe in revelation when it happens. There are many traditions out there which teach their revelation is the final revelation for the rest of time. There are other traditions where it is taught because the recent revelation is true, prior revelations could not have been true.

¹⁰⁹ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #138

¹¹⁰ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #182

¹¹¹ Tablet of Mánikchí Şáhib

This is the Revelation around which evidence and proof circle.¹¹² God does what He wills and decrees what He desires. This is a test of faith for many. “They do not consider the manifestations of divine Oneness impossible in the realm of dominion, and if a soul deems it impossible, what difference is there between him and those who considered God’s hand to be tied? And if they regard God, exalted be His mention, as free to choose, they must accept every command that emanates from the source of His decree, without escape or refuge. There is no sanctuary or shelter except in Him. The matter that requires presenting evidence and proof of a claim is not contingent upon the opinions of people, whether knowledgeable or ignorant, and it never has been and never will be.”¹¹³ Revelation itself is the proof of divine authority, not whether people accept it.

The Kitab-i-Aqdas describes this revelation as the most exalted and most wondrous. “In every subsequent manifestation, the appearance of God is the most exalted.”¹¹⁴ This does not take away from the station of prior revelations, and future revelations will also be most exalted and wondrous when compared to this current one.

5.1.3 The Book

Throughout the Kitab-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'llah refers to the Book. Bahá'u'llah uses the word Book to describe various aspects of creation and the knowledge God has. Often times in the Kitab-i-Aqdas, the Book without any other description refers to the Kitab-i-Aqdas itself. “This blessed verse was mentioned: His Exalted Majesty said, “Refer what you do not understand from the Book to the branch that has branched from this mighty root.” The ‘Book’ refers to the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, and the ‘branch that has branched off from this mighty root’ refers to the Aghsan.”¹¹⁵

Belief in the Command of God means believing in the Kitab-i-Aqdas as the Book, the Most Exalted and Wondrous Revelation, and an update in the single religion of God. The Kitab-i-Aqdas is central to the continuity of God’s favor upon us, the latest expression of Divine Will. It is a Mercy for us and a proof of divine authority. It is the source of true freedom. The Kitab-i-Aqdas is all of this and a source of the divine ordinances and laws. The rest of the chapter will expand upon these themes further.

5.2 The Continuity of Divine Command Across Dispensations

When the King of Austria (a Christian) visited the al-Aqsa Mosque (Muslim) in Jerusalem (Jewish Holy Place), Bahá'u'llah tells him he passed by the Light of Divine Unity coming from the prison of Akka.¹¹⁶

¹¹² Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #136

¹¹³ Surah of the Temple Verses 241 & 242

¹¹⁴ The Persian Bayan, Vahid 4, Gate 12

¹¹⁵ A Tablet to Varqa (Letters to Yazd) and BH00057

¹¹⁶ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #85

There was an opportunity to experience the Oneness of God. There was an opportunity to experience the continuity of divine command across revelatory dispensations. The King had an opportunity to believe in unity. Believing in the command of today would mean believing in the command of yesterday. It encompasses all prior commands.

The prior commands and prior books span across history, but not all words claiming to be God's book is God's book. For example, Baha'u'llah says the Qur'an, the Gospel, the Psalms, the Torah, and the Bayan¹¹⁷ are revelations from God. If we look at the Bible, the Gospel would include the words and actions of Jesus Christ as documented in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, John, and Luke. This does not include the sermons of Paul who wrote or inspired the writings of Acts, Romans, and other New Testament books. There is a distinction in the command coming through a Manifestation of God versus the inspirations of the leader immediately following the Manifestation. Paul was not the Word but was subservient to the Word. Elsewhere, Baha'u'llah testifies to the truths of Zoroastrian and Hindu teachings as being relevant to the relative position of people in time and condition.¹¹⁸ This command could be inclusive of all cultures which discuss a deity, worship, and social guidance. Belief in the command does not necessarily mean spending a great effort determining what exactly from the past was from God and what was from the inspirations of normal people like you and I. Belief in the command means to acknowledge God is the source of all truth before, during, and after today. Baha'u'llah warns in the Kitab-i-Aqdas "The books of the world and all the scriptures therein avail you nothing today, except by this Book, which speaks at the pivot of creation."¹¹⁹ Through the name of God All-Encompassing, the Command of Today encompasses and surpasses all the Commands of Yesterday. This is a vital belief on the path of Divine Unity.

5.2.1 The Most Great Command

Baha'u'llah describes the Command of today as the Most Great Order, the Most Great Law, the Most Great Proof, and the Most Great Balance. He says "The order has been disturbed by this Most Great Order, and the arrangement has been altered by this wondrous Revelation, the like of which the eye of creation has never witnessed."¹²⁰ This is a testament in the fact there are good things from the past worth keeping, which can provide a positive contribution to the future. It is also a testament to the fact for the need of the old to be rearranged and altered in a new and substantial way. Progress cannot happen if we hold onto the old ways of doing things. Progress requires a belief that God's religion is progressively unfolding and adapting to the needs of different ages.

The Most Great Proof testifies to the truthfulness of this claim. "This is the Balance of Guidance for those in the heavens and on the earth, and the Most Great Proof, if only you knew. Say: Through it, every proof

¹¹⁷ The Kitab-i-Badi

¹¹⁸ Tablet to Manichki Sahib

¹¹⁹ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #168

¹²⁰ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #181

has been established throughout the ages, if only you were certain. Say: Through it, every poor soul has been enriched, every learned one has been taught, and whoever desires to ascend unto God has been lifted up. Beware lest you differ concerning it.”¹²¹ The proof can be witnessed through the development of the ages, such as through the Islamic Golden Age or the rise of powerful Hindu kingdoms throughout Southeast Asia. New revelation brings new prosperity for those who believe and implement the Most Great Command. Just as the Islamic Golden Age ended and the Hindu Kingdoms of the Khmer gave way to Buddhist cultures, we must also allow God to continue guiding us to better ways of living and being.

This is because of the Command being the Most Great Balance and Most Great Law. The balance cannot be measured by prior rules and sciences which existed yesterday.¹²² The Balance fulfills the prophecies of old,¹²³ the Covenant of God, and is the balance of justice. When the balance of justice is set up on the Day of Resurrection, everyone will be given their due.¹²⁴ Who has status and honor yesterday may not have status and honor today. A law which was raised to the heights of heaven yesterday may be annulled today. The Command is both immutable and variable depending on what we need. The Most Great Law is for all in heaven and on earth,¹²⁵ not just for a select few. It is the standard of judgment for all today, not only for tomorrow.

“Everything is realized by His decisive command when the Sun of ordinances rises from the horizon of explanation. All are to follow it, even if it be a command that rends asunder the hearts of the adherents of religions. He does as He wills and is not questioned about what He wills.”¹²⁶

5.3 The Command is Manifestations of Light

The Kitab-i-Aqdas utilizes many forms of symbolism to describe the Command and Revelation of God. Many of these names and symbols focus on how the Command manifests the Light, such as is associated with the Day of Resurrection. The Command is the Sun of Wisdom and the Sun of Explanation. Within the laws and counsel, there are pathways to understanding, the application of knowledge, and explanations and interpretations.

The Sun emerges from the Sundrat-ul Muntaha at dawn. The Command is the dawning place of the knowledge of God and is adorned with the Seal of the Breaker of the Dawn, who speaks between the

¹²¹ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #183

¹²² Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #99

¹²³ Lawh-i-Ishraqat (Tablet of Splendors)

¹²⁴ Surah to the Kings

¹²⁵ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #6

¹²⁶ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #7

heavens and the Earth.¹²⁷ This affirms the Command is authentically divine and a true pathway away from darkness. Just as God had bestowed upon Muhammad the title Seal of the Prophets, the seal authenticates what came prior, it also unseals divine mysteries. As a seal could also denote finality, we know the Sun and the command are unalterable. They are forever true, even when the Sun arises again in the future. As the Sun rises for the new Day, the Command can also be known as the Book of Origin.¹²⁸ While final and unalterable, it is also new and as fresh as the first days of springtime.

Even outside of the revelation being the dawn of a new day, the command also serves as a lamp, lighting a pathway for us on our spiritual destination. The Kitab-i-Aqdas describes the command as a Lamp of God's Care, a Lamp of Wisdom, a Lamp of Success, and a Lamp of Eternity. These lamps serve to guide us, providing direction, nurture, and a promise of success for our souls. Much like how God led the Jews from Egypt to the promised land of Canaan, the Kitab-i-Aqdas will lead people to their spiritual destiny.

"This is a Book that has become the Lamp of Eternity for the world and its most upright Path among the peoples. Say: It is the Dawning-Place of the knowledge of God, if you but knew, and the Rising-Point of the commandments of God, if you but recognized."¹²⁹

5.4 The Command Nurtures Us

"O Greatest Sea! Sprinkle upon the nations that which you have been commanded by the Ancient Lord, and adorn the temples of humankind with the fabric of the laws through which hearts may rejoice and eyes be brightened."¹³⁰

When you look at a fabric, you can see the finest fabrics have a high density of interwoven threads which provide strength, durability, and protection. The fine fabric provides comfort and beauty, being able to help a person uniquely express their own personality and character. The fabric of laws serves a similar purpose. They are to adorn the temple of humankind, the same temple used to elevate the souls to the heights of heaven. One must beware not to remove threads from the fabric. The fabric could seem weak and dull. It will not cause hearts to rejoice nor brighten the eyes of those who witness it. All of the laws are like an ornament¹³¹ helping others to recognize the beauty of the Command.

"From My laws, the fragrance of My garment are diffused."¹³² Baha'u'llah expresses fragrance regularly in the Kitab-i-Aqdas and elsewhere. Fragrance is a pleasant smell emanating from an object, in this case

¹²⁷ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #117

¹²⁸ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #121

¹²⁹ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #186

¹³⁰ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #96

¹³¹ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #98

¹³² Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #4

God's garment. The laws are a source of this diffusion. As a pleasant smell attracts a lover to their beloved, or a bee to a flower, the laws can also attract the hearts of a spiritual seeker. "Blessed is the lover who has inhaled the fragrance of the Beloved from this word, from which the breezes of bounty have wafted in an indescribable manner. By My life, whoever drinks the nectar of justice from the hands of grace will circle around My commands which have shone forth from the horizon of creativity."¹³³ The nectar is also described as the nectar of life.¹³⁴ Anyone who wears this fabric of laws will be examples of a loving and nurturing justice and life.

Baha'u'llah tells us not to consider the Command and the Kitab-i-Aqdas as merely as laws, but as the choice sealed wine.¹³⁵ Drinking from this wine, much like how the disciples of Jesus did in the last supper, will cause every bone to be set in motion with life.¹³⁶ Imagine the fragrance of such a wine. Who wouldn't want to inhale it and drink it? Who wouldn't want others to inhale it and drink it?

The Command is also often referred to in terms of water. Water has always been considered a purifying element. The Bab says "it symbolizes the radiance of the Sun of His bounty."¹³⁷ Those who act in accordance to the Command are drinking from the Kawthar (abundant river from paradise) of life.¹³⁸ These pure and flowing waters from the clear stream provide prosperity when drunk with the belief and remembrance of God.¹³⁹ The water may be provided as showers of grace¹⁴⁰ poured down from heaven as a favor from God to us. These waters act as a salvation and a great gift to us.

We are also nurtured by the Command coming forth the Most Great Ocean. Within the ocean are pearls of knowledge and wisdom.¹⁴¹ The ocean serves as a great metaphor for the bounties of God. Depending on the depths one is able to dive to, there is incredible amounts of knowledge, wisdom, and mysteries waiting to be attained. These pearls are valuable, but as they can only be had through diving, it requires effort and work to reach. These are not just free gifts.

¹³³ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #4

¹³⁴ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #150

¹³⁵ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #5

¹³⁶ Kitab-i-Aqdas #173

¹³⁷ The Persian Bayan Vahid 5, Gate 14

¹³⁸ Kitab-i-Aqdas #73

¹³⁹ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #50

¹⁴⁰ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #55

¹⁴¹ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #180

"Beware that compassion does not prevent you from carrying out the laws of God. Act according to what you have been commanded by a compassionate and merciful Lord. We have nurtured you with the whips of wisdom and laws for your own protection and the elevation of your station, just as parents nurture their children."¹⁴² As this nurture is from God in the role of Divine Parent out of love for us, we must also "carry out My ordinances out of love for My beauty."¹⁴³

Belief in the commands of God is belief in the love of God. Belief in the commands of God also requires a love for God and the beauty of God's creation.

5.5 The Command Provides True Freedom

The laws of the Command serve mostly as bounds.¹⁴⁴ These boundaries serve as a framework whereupon the soul may be elevated and the world within which we live can better manifest the spiritual qualities of heaven. This does not mean we should expect some type of fraudulent utopia. All of this requires work and requires skill navigating these boundaries. These boundaries are not particularly strict and are the cause of absolute freedom.¹⁴⁵

In this small sermon about freedom from the Kitab-i-Aqdas, Baha'u'llah says:

123 Freedom ends in consequences that lead to discord, whose fire cannot be extinguished—thus informs you the Reckoner, the All-Knowing. Know that the sources and manifestations of freedom are found in animals. For humanity, it is necessary to be under laws that protect them from the ignorance of their own selves and the harm of the deceitful. Freedom removes a person from the realm of courtesy and dignity, reducing them to the lowest of the low.

124 Observe the people; they are like sheep, in need of a shepherd to protect them—this is indeed an absolute truth. We affirm this in certain contexts but not in others, for We are all-knowing.

125 Say: True freedom lies in following My commandments, if you are of those who know. If people were to follow what We have revealed to them from the heaven of divine revelation, they would find themselves in absolute freedom. Blessed is the one who understands the purpose of God in what has been revealed from the heaven of His will, which reigns supreme over all the worlds. Say: The freedom that benefits you is found in servitude to the True God, and whoever has tasted its sweetness will not trade it for the kingdom of the heavens and the earth.

¹⁴² Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #45

¹⁴³ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #4

¹⁴⁴ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #148

¹⁴⁵ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #125

True freedom is derived from the protection the Command provides. The command is a key to God's mercy,¹⁴⁶ helping us unlock new doors of realization and possibility derived from God's love. These possibilities from true freedom is not solely for the individual. "The ordinances of God are the greatest means for the order of the world and the preservation of nations."¹⁴⁷ The scope of the Command is great. The Command is not merely for individual belief, but is also designed for the order of the world.

"There is none other God but Me, the One, the All-Knowing, the All-Informed.' This is a station God has designated for this most wondrous, most exalted Revelation. This is from the grace of God, if you are of those who know. This is from His irrevocable command, His greatest name, His supreme word, and the dawning place of His most excellent names, if you are of those who understand. Indeed, by it, all the rising and setting points are made manifest. Reflect, O people, on what has been revealed in truth, and ponder it, and do not be of the transgressors."¹⁴⁸

5.6 Conclusion

With the Kitab-i-Aqdas, the Command of God has been made new. It is more than being a book of laws. Belief in the full station of this Command also reflects the belief in God, belief in the soul, and belief in the worlds of God. Believing the Command is a reflection of God's Will, Love, Mercy, and all the other names gives purpose to action. Thus, to believe in the Command is to believe in the unfolding of God's will, to see divine order in all things, and to recognize that the next step in understanding this reality is belief in the Manifestation of God Himself.

¹⁴⁶ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #3

¹⁴⁷ Kitab-i-Aqdas #3

¹⁴⁸ Kitab-i-Aqdas #143

6. Belief in the Manifestation of God

6.1 The Station of the Manifestation

In Chapter 1, we explored the various names and attributes of God to help understand what belief in God can encompass. The second group is Manifestation. The ability for God to manifest Himself to His creation is fundamental for us. Manifestation turns the inaccessible and subtle into more tangible and easier to discern aspects of reality. One of the ways God manifests Himself is through the human flesh. While this flesh is bound by the material world, the soul within it reflects divinity in such a way the other names and attributes of God also appear. While the historical terms of prophet, messenger, avatar, or apostle help us understand aspects of this divinity and purpose, the Manifestation serves as the living bridge between our human soul and divine reality.

We also explored in Chapter 3 the symbol of the Sidrat al-Muntaha, the tree of the farthest extent. The Manifestation of God serves as the Dawning Place, a title used regularly throughout the Kitab-i-Aqdas. The Manifestation is the Dawning Place of Revelation, of the Light of Divinity, of God's Most Excellent Names, of Grandeur, of God's Most Radiant Cause, and of Oneness. This Dawn itself marks the fulfillment of the Day of Resurrection. "By Him the Hour has come."¹⁴⁹ He appears "in the Most Glorious attire"¹⁵⁰ as if He were a Monarch. The Manifestation is also the means by which the human soul is able to understand God's will, purpose, and those other names and attributes more fully. "Whoever has turned to Me has turned to the Worshiped One."¹⁵¹ The Manifestation is the focal point for the devotional life for God, much like the Qiblah of Islam or the Temple of Judaism. Thus, all Manifestations of God are the Sidrat al-Muntaha, with each being a branch of this divine tree.

This whole purpose of the Manifestation is entirely for our soul. The belief in the soul, as described in Chapter 2, requires belief in the Manifestation as the primary means of progress towards God. They serve not only as the Dawn for the worlds of God, but they also serve as the Dawn of the transcendence of the soul as it prepares to navigate the spiritual worlds of God. We express this belief by recognizing the Dawning Place of Grandeur, their exalted nature over everything else on Earth, and their high spiritual capacity and fragrance. We express this belief by recognizing their Revelation, which is the Word of God, the Command and Counsel which guides and organizes all with justice and mercy. We practice this through submission and love, in fear and in awe, in faithfulness and good deeds.

This station of Manifestation has been fulfilled by many throughout history. Baha'u'llah is the most recent of these Manifestations of God who has brought forth Revelation as their divinely ordained mission. Prior to Baha'u'llah was the Bab, who was also known as the Primal Point. There have been countless others throughout history. The Bab Himself had said in the Persian Bayan, "The names and attributes are

¹⁴⁹ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #81

¹⁵⁰ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #82

¹⁵¹ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #131

manifestations of the multiplicity of that primal unity. Reflect upon the verbal letters of the Bayán: all multiplicity originates from the first unity, even if it extends infinitely. And in the multiplicity of the universal manifestations, there arises a strength in the manifestation surpassing that of the primal unity. Yet, all things are realized through Him, and all return to Him, just as they originate from Him.” Even if we look at traditions which seem polytheistic, they are not. All are Manifestations of God, expressions of God’s attributes according to the needs and cultures of their time.

Belief in Baha’u’llah is belief in all the prior Manifestations of God, belief their words and cause were true, but also belief that the prior Manifestation’s teachings are now superceded by Baha’u’llah’s revelation. It is the dawn of a new day with a new command, which will serve us until the dawn of the next day with a next Manifestation. The next sections of this chapter will go more fully into the titles, powers, and roles of the Manifestation of God and our relationship with Him.

6.2 Baha’u’llah

In Baha’u’llah’s writings, some Manifestations are referred to by certain titles. For example, Jesus is often referred to as the Spirit¹⁵² and Muhammad as the Messenger of God.¹⁵³ In the Bayan, the Bab had said everything in the Bayan is for He Whom God Shall Make Manifest (HWGSMM), a title used at least 240 times in the Bayan. Baha’u’llah refers to this title in the Kitab-i-Aqdas in verse #137. This helps signal to the Babi community the station Baha’u’llah is claiming. HWGSMM was said to be one to complete the Bayan.¹⁵⁴ The Kitab-i-Aqdas serves as the completion of the Bayan, with some laws abrogated and some laws confirmed. As we go through this book, we will sometimes refer to these changes or instances where a command from the Bayan might still apply. Understand though, that while the Kitab-i-Aqdas also refers to the Bab as Baha’u’llah’s Herald,¹⁵⁵ the Bab was completely a Manifestation of God. Baha’u’llah is also a Herald for a future Manifestation of God who will come no earlier than 2873AD (1029 Badi Calendar).¹⁵⁶

Baha’u’llah was often referred to as the Greatest Name.¹⁵⁷ The Greatest Name is reference to various Muslim traditions. In one way, God can elevate any of His names to be the greatest, as ultimately all names come from the word “One”. In this dispensation, the Greatest Name is Baha, which means Glory. Much like how Jesus was given the name Son, these names are used to demonstrate a primary purpose in the mission of the Manifestation. The Gospel of John says the gospel exists so all may become sons of God,

¹⁵² Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #80

¹⁵³ The Suriy-i-Rais (Surah to the Chief)

¹⁵⁴ The Testament of the Bab to Subh-i-Azal

¹⁵⁵ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #137

¹⁵⁶ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #37

¹⁵⁷ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #51

so thus Jesus's mission was to teach Sonship of God the Father. Simultaneously, Krishna means all-attractive and His mission was to demonstrate what true devotion to God and knowledge of the true Self, which are all manifestations of Beauty and Love. The purpose of Baha'u'llah's mission then, is for us to embody and believe in the quality of Glory. The revelation is to demonstrate in every way the exaltation of God, His Majesty over all, and only He is the Infallible. It is also our purpose to reflect this Glory to the best of our abilities, which helps make the world around us more beautiful, more magnificent, and more illustrious. This purpose teaches us we all deserve these attributes and are also able to manifest them, if we so believe. This Glory reigns supreme over all the worlds.¹⁵⁸

The Kitab-i-Aqdas does not go too deeply into the biography of Baha'u'llah, which may matter to some. Belief in Baha'u'llah as the Manifestation of God does not require knowledge of the biography, but there are some aspects about Him which are mentioned. The Book says He is unlettered,¹⁵⁹ saying "I have not entered schools, nor have I studied scholarly works." Despite this, He is unmatched in the fields of mystical insight and knowledge and none can keep up with Him in the course of wisdom and expression.¹⁶⁰ He Himself had entered various Schools of God.¹⁶¹ Baha'u'llah first had His epiphany of station while within the prison called the Black Pit of Tehran in the year 1852 (8 BE). He says this in the Surih-i-Haykal:

So when I saw myself at the pole of affliction, I heard the most beautiful, the sweetest voice above my head. When I turned, I saw a maiden, the mention of my Lord's name suspended in the air, aligned with the sun's head, and I saw her rejoicing in herself. As if the embroidery of pleasure appears from her face and the light of mercy declares from her cheek. She was speaking between the heavens and the earth with a call that attracts hearts and minds and gives all my limbs, both outward and inward, the good news that my soul was rejoiced with, and honored servants rejoiced from it.

She pointed with her finger at my head and addressed those in the heavens and the earth, by God, this is the beloved of the worlds, but you do not understand. This is the beauty of God among you and His authority within you, if you indeed know. This is the secret of God and His treasure and the command of God and His dignity for those in the dominion of command and creation, if you indeed comprehend. Indeed, this is the one whom those in the realm of permanence long to meet, then those who have settled behind the most splendid pavilion, but you turn away from his beauty.

¹⁵⁸ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #127

¹⁵⁹ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #104

¹⁶⁰ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #101

¹⁶¹ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verses #175 & 176

In Baghdad, He revealed His mission during the festival of Ridván in 1863 (19 BE), “when We manifested to those in existence with Our most beautiful names and highest attributes.”¹⁶² This mission continued until His passing in 1892 in Akka. Both Baghdad and Akka were part of the Ottoman Empire in these days. While in Akka, Bahá'u'lláh was in the Most Great Prison, where the Kitab-i-Aqdas itself was revealed.¹⁶³ Despite being a prisoner of the Persian and Ottoman Empires for most of this 40 year period as a Manifestation of God, He says His love is able to burn away veils¹⁶⁴ which inhibit one’s ability to fully believe in God. This love and imprisonment serves one major purpose.

Hasten to what you were promised in the Books of God, and do not follow the ways of the ignorant. My body has been imprisoned for the liberation of your souls. Turn towards the Face, and do not follow every tyrant and obstinate one. He accepted the greatest humiliation for your honor.¹⁶⁵

Bahá'u'lláh’s mission is the freedom of our souls from oppression. It might seem somewhat similar to the liberation theology of the 1960’s, which used Christian doctrine as inspirations of revolution.

You will see the rest of this book outlines how the Kitab-i-Aqdas fulfills this mission through the commands and revelation of Glory. Every law, counsel, exhortation, and theological ruling should be considered from the perspective of this mission, the mission born of the love from God for all of us.

6.3 How Bahá'u'lláh Fulfills His Mission

The Kitab-i-Aqdas is ripe with various symbols and expressions of the way Bahá'u'lláh fulfills His Mission for us. These titles include the Sun, the Pen, the Shepherd, the Sea, the Master, the Remembrance, the Temple, the Judge, the Chief, the Reminder, the Tongue, the Book, and We. These titles are often used in conjunction with other descriptions, but as you can see, these titles are encompassing of many roles and duties. All of these roles are framed within the name Glorious, and Bahá'u'lláh’s roles should be considered with respect of this exalted station.

Belief in Bahá'u'lláh as the Manifestation of God for our age does not mean to merely view Him as a philosopher or ethical reformer. He should not be viewed as a Unitarian where all paths currently lead to the same destination. Belief in Bahá'u'lláh as the Manifestation of God for our age means to view Him as more glorious than any person. This station lasts until the Day of His Revelation sets and a new Manifestation of God appears to fulfill the next Covenant. Every word, every letter, every breath which came from Bahá'u'lláh is the pathway for freedom.

¹⁶² Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #75

¹⁶³ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #132

¹⁶⁴ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #132

¹⁶⁵ The Lawh-i-Aqdas (Most Holy Tablet)

6.4 Conclusion of Part 1

This concludes the key components of belief which are vital to understanding the Kitab-i-Aqdas and building distinctive communities of glory. I understand these beliefs in their entirety will not be automatic. It would be inauthentic of myself to say my belief today was exactly the same as my belief yesterday. My belief will also change tomorrow as I learn more about myself. I will even admit as I have written this first part, I have expressed things I did not even realize I believed in. Belief is always in motion. Much like when quantum entanglement was discussed, as soon as we make an observation of a thing, the nature of that thing has already changed in some shape, condition, or position.

Part 2 will focus on ways the Kitab-i-Aqdas guides us to have a devotional relationship with God. This devotional relationship will not automatically cause you to believe in everything immediately, but it will provide pathways to unveiling the Subtle and giving purpose to your soul's journey towards true freedom. These practices will also help develop key virtues we can use in our everyday life. These virtues not only inform our beliefs, but also our actions, words, and perspectives towards the diversity of others who we experience each passing day.

7. Foundational Virtues

7.1 Introduction to Virtues

When virtues are often discussed, they can often seem to be absolutes. Either you have a virtue or you do not. I don't necessarily believe that this is the only way to view virtues. Throughout the Kitab-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh is often serving the role as Counselor instead of Commander. It is important to be able to distinguish which is a command and which is a counsel. A counselor will use wisdom to advise on the best course of action, but the counsel is not necessarily binding. The person receiving counsel must still decide what the final action will be, given the context of the situation they find themselves in. When it comes to virtues, these are not laws. They are counsels. The Kitab-i-Aqdas, due to this, is also a book of counsel.

Virtues are not fixed destinations, like train stations along a fixed track. You cannot get on one train and reach a virtue, then go on another train and reach another. I like to view virtues more like stars in the nighttime sky. We are familiar with Polaris, the North Star that was used by ancient people all over the world to know which direction was north. Polaris is also part of the constellation known as Ursa Minor (Little Bear) or the Little Dipper. Imagine a virtue being a star and all virtues being part of a constellation. We can use these stars to navigate daily life, while never reaching them as an absolute destination. We should never just navigate using one star, but use the entire constellation when we consider what actions we should take in a given situation.

Virtues then, help us on our spiritual journey. They help us develop our souls. They help us embody the names and attributes of God within us, and bring us closer to Him. Each star can be reflected within us as we are mirrors. Virtues also do not happen automatically. They appear and develop with practice and patience. It takes considerable wisdom in learning how to navigate the entire constellation of virtues, but we are not alone in this journey. We can develop and refine our virtues through regular spiritual practices which also enhance our relationship with God. As God is independent of us, God counsels us to these practices and virtues solely for us. God desires this relationship for us. This relationship is vital to our liberation.

7.2 Five Spiritual Practices

There are five regular spiritual practices the next chapters will discuss. These spiritual practices include prayer, remembrance, recitation, reflection, and honoring God. All five of these practices are designed to develop the soul in different ways. If one is missing, we may also be missing opportunities to enhance our virtues and liberate ourselves. Each spiritual practice is as if we are attending these different spiritual schools within the cities and kingdoms of God. Yet, each practice is vital for the other practices. For example, if we do not practice reflection, our prayer may not fully sincere or honest. Our recitation would not seem personal. The way we honor God might be contrary to our abilities and intentions.

Remembrance cannot be fully realized if we are unable to discover how God works within ourselves.

7.3 Five Innate Virtues

There are some virtues which Baha'u'llah describes as being innate.¹⁶⁶ These virtues are piety, pure truthfulness, courtesy, loyalty, and trustworthiness. This means all people were born with the ability to have these virtues and apply them in some way within their lives. This does not mean they do not need to be practiced, but it can be trusted every person was born with these initial virtues, whether or not every person you meet is attempting to use them. To a person who views virtue as absolute, these virtues might seem rare. To a person who views virtue as existing on a spectrum, there are signs these virtues are everywhere. The innate virtues can be viewed as foundational virtues, from which other virtues can also emerge. A person who only has these five virtues can accomplish great good in this world.

7.3.1 Piety

Piety is often viewed as being committed to religious practice, especially those who spend considerable effort in promoting an image of religiosity. When looking at the Kitab-i-Aqdas, it does not feel as though this is the context Baha'u'llah defines piety. Let's look at how piety is used in the Kitab-i-Aqdas.

In verse #64, we are commanded to piety after Baha'u'llah forbids oppression and lewdness. These two acts are acts against others. Again in verse #71, oppression and wrongdoing is the opposition to piety. In verse #88, piety is paired with justice. In verse #108, piety is described with sincerity to describe how to do remembrance of God. In verse #148, piety is paired with kindness to oppose contention and disputes.

It seems as though for Baha'u'llah, piety is not about outward religious appearances. Piety is more about serving one's obligations and duties towards others. These obligations could be towards parents, children, your work, your community, and to yourself. Piety isn't a virtue to look good, it is a virtue to guide how we go about our spiritual practice and treat others. How we treat others is also a pathway in how we honor God.

I believe piety is innate, or part of our natural disposition, because we always have sense of obligation to others, especially when we start our lives as children. Learning what we are supposed to do, how to help our parents, and how to play with our siblings and friends are all ways we naturally seek piety at an early age. It may not seem like spiritual practice as children, but once we reach the age of maturity, piety is important in how we navigate our place within society.

7.3.2 Pure Truthfulness

The Kitab-i-Aqdas only mentions truthfulness once, and it is combined with the adjective pure. We are not counseled to be merely truthful, but to adorn our tongues with pure truthfulness.¹⁶⁷ The common view is truthfulness is a strict adherence to fact or expressing their opinions of a matter. While facts

¹⁶⁶ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #120

¹⁶⁷ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #120

should never be denied, nor opinions be avoided, pure truthfulness expresses a different standard than what is common.

One way to consider this standard is to remain aware the person you are communicating with has a soul which is trying to attain liberation, whether or not this person is aware of it in the moment. Pure truthfulness is a virtue which can guide how we express truth in a way which uplifts and conveys more of the constellation of virtues. Being truthful may seem as if it requires courage, but pure truthfulness is not about courage at all. It is about grace, being able to say what is needed in a way the soul can receive. There are no sharp edges which aim to hurt another. There are no pedestals to place yourself above the person. Pure truthfulness is a warm embrace which lets the person know you are together in a shared experience. This also means it is a truthfulness which is not judgmental.

There are millions of ways to share the truth. Millions of people may also have their own understandings of what is true or untrue. Pure truthfulness helps provide a higher standard which allows a healthy relationship with others regardless of divergent perspectives. Pure truthfulness is innate as every person with a desire to know what is true and real, while learning this in a loving and caring way. Every person deserves this respect.

7.3.3 Courtesy

Baha'u'llah describes courtesy with dignity in opposition to freedom.¹⁶⁸ In the Lawh-i-Dunya, Baha'u'llah says "O people of God, I adjure you by courtesy and good manners, for the supreme seat of ethics is first and foremost. Blessed is the soul that has been illuminated by the light of etiquette and adorned with the trappings of truth. Possessing manners is possessing a high station."

Courtesy is a virtue which focuses on the consideration and respect of others. Courtesy can be polite and it can also be kind. I like to view courtesy within the act of driving. When I am driving, I have a destination and often a specific time I need to be at the destination. If I am solely focused on my journey, I might do so recklessly and endangering others who are also on the road. If I am driving with courtesy, I am driving with the understanding every person on the road is also attempting to attain a destination at a potentially scheduled time. My journey must never hinder another person's journey.

When Baha'u'llah describes courtesy in opposition to freedom, Baha'u'llah is making sure we understand freedom as a virtue can be quite harmful, as it may cause individuals to compete to exert their freedoms at the cost of other individual's freedom. Courtesy also opposes coercion and aggression. The libertarian non-aggression principle is one way to view courtesy on a large scale non-religious practice. While everyone desires freedom, everyone deserves courtesy. The Golden Rule to treat others as you desire to be treated is innate to all of us. This is part of the pathway to actual liberation.

¹⁶⁸ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #123

7.3.4 Loyalty

Loyalty is a virtue which can purify a soul.¹⁶⁹ Baha'u'llah often pairs loyalty with love and steadfastness to help express the purpose of loyalty. The first loyalty is to God in servitude.¹⁷⁰ Loyalty is also in service to anyone you make a commitment to. Loyalty is not something we demand from others, as we must not oppress. Loyalty is only something we may offer to another. We have opportunities to show loyalty to parents, to those who lead us, whether we voluntarily or involuntarily are led.

Sometimes there are competing loyalties and this can be difficult to navigate or discern. Imagine a scenario where two parents divorce and each are competing in their authority for the child. It can be confusing to navigate when the child shows obedience or loyalty. In the Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, Baha'u'llah describes how competing loyalties existed within His family. His future daughter-in-law, Fatimah Khanum expressed her loyalty to her sister, but the sister was trying to prevent Fatimah Khanum from expressing her loyalty to her fiance, Abbas Effendi (The Most Great Branch). Eventually the sister was loyal to Mirza Yahya (Baha'u'llah's half-brother). In the last year of His life, Baha'u'llah asked God to take care of the sister, despite her being disloyal to Him.

Loyalty is a virtue which must be navigated within the full constellation, and not as a star by itself. It takes considerable wisdom to navigate. Loyalty must not violate other virtues. Yet, we should not be scared of offering our loyalty. Loyalty is the expression of devotion, not love. Loyalty is love through time, complete with the acts and long-term service required to ensure a timeless relationship.

7.3.5 Trustworthiness

Baha'u'llah describes Himself as the trustworthy counselor.¹⁷¹ This is in opposition to describing those who are wolves in sheep's garments. He enjoins responsibilities for the trustworthy to act as trustees¹⁷² with their obligations.¹⁷³ Trustworthiness eliminates doubts in the affairs of the world.¹⁷⁴ Baha'u'llah joins trustworthiness with the lights of certainty, steadfastness, and tranquility.¹⁷⁵

Trustworthiness is not exactly about being truthful, but it is a virtue which guides when we must lead. We can be trusted to fulfill our responsibilities and to navigate virtues even when there are no witnesses to

¹⁶⁹ Lawh-i-Sirraj

¹⁷⁰ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #120

¹⁷¹ Kitab-i-Aqds Verse #52

¹⁷² Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #69

¹⁷³ Words of Paradise

¹⁷⁴ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #134

¹⁷⁵ Lawh-i-Dunya

our actions. It is a virtue which allows the protection of others, while also providing peace of mind and spirit for the person who is trusting you. These obligations might be tangible, such as honoring an agreement, supervising a team, or being a parent. Some of these obligations may seem intangible, such as a friend sharing information which may leave them vulnerable. A trustworthy person will react to these obligations with a sense of duty, perhaps being guided by the virtues of piety, courtesy, and loyalty. These virtues are also guided by trustworthiness. No virtue can truly exist if a person is not trustworthy.

Trustworthiness is innate because everyone wishes to be trusted, such as the child wanting to do something without supervision. When trustworthiness is compromised, it risks conflict in that moment and into the future. It is a virtue which is difficult to restore. Yet, it is not absolute. Trustworthiness is also based on having realistic expectations, which are also a sign of trustworthiness. These expectations should be steady, which is why steadfastness is often joined with trustworthiness in Baha'u'llah's counsels to us. Shifting expectations are impossible to be fulfilled and cannot be used to express another's lack of trustworthiness. As we can see, trustworthiness requires a delicate balance to be achieved between two people, as it requires not only the intention of yourself, but the perception of who observes you.

7.4 Moderation

All of these virtues require moderation. This moderation can exist within the expression of individual virtues, but the other virtues within the constellation also provide moderating influences to ensure a single virtue does not overpower another. They are all part of the Balance of God.

Baha'u'llah alludes to moderation in verse #43 when describing a state between despair in calamities nor excessively rejoicing in happiness. Baha'u'llah explicitly states "Truly, I say, moderation in all things is beloved. When it is exceeded, it leads to harm."¹⁷⁶ Nothing is excluded within moderation.

Moderation can be seen as both a virtue and a practice. It is a virtue because it is a guiding principle and by definition, can never be absolute. It is a practice because it takes constant work and awareness to discover what is the middle way. As we can observe with the 5 innate virtues, each helps the others achieve the middle way. The closer we are able to discover moderation, the closer we are able to achieve liberation for ourselves and for others we care about.

Moderation is also a foundational principle for the two final virtues of this chapter. These virtues are the fear of God and the love of God. If one exists without the other, we are unable to have a healthy relationship with God. Our spiritual practices will be unbalanced, our spiritual compass could lead us in the wrong directions, and liberation may seem as oppression from the eyes of the observer.

7.5 The Fear and Love of God

Baha'u'llah says "all will perish from a single Word from God" without the fear of God.¹⁷⁷ Without this virtue, one may become arrogant.¹⁷⁸ This arrogance could cause one to place themselves in the position

¹⁷⁶ The Words of Paradise, Ninth Leaf

of God or the Manifestation of God. This fear of God is a method to understand God, in all of His names and attributes, is Most Powerful, the Lord of All, and is the Judge. If we do not follow the commands, we may struggle when we pass away from Earth. If we follow the commands but make no attempt at following the counsel of virtues, we also may struggle. The fear of God also comes with the idea not to have fear of others. We should fear only God and God alone.

Fear should not be the cause of anxiety, but instead should be filled with an awe-filled admiration of God's majesty.¹⁷⁹ However, if we only fear God without the love of God, we could be greatly handicapped.

The love of God balances out fear by providing purpose. It helps temper the awareness of might and justice with the confidence of forgiveness, mercy, and grace. Love is the ultimate aim¹⁸⁰ and is the ultimate motivation for all good. The Seven Valleys describes love as expansive of all horizons, able to transform agony to ecstasy.

How fear and love complement each other is beautifully portrayed elsewhere in the Seven Valleys.

At last, the tree of his hope bore the fruit of despair, and the fire of his anticipation cooled down. Until one night, weary of life, he left his home and went to the market. Suddenly, a watchman started following him. He began to run, and the watchman gave chase until more watchmen gathered, and from every side, they blocked the path of the restless lover.

The poor man was weeping from his heart and running in fear, thinking to himself, "This watchman is my Azrael (angel of death), so hastily pursuing me, or perhaps an avenger, harboring enmity against the devotees." That man, weary from the arrow of love, kept running and wailing until he reached a garden wall. With great effort and hardship, he managed to climb over the extremely tall wall, sacrificing his very life, and threw himself into the garden.

He saw his beloved holding a lantern, looking for a lost ring. When the heartbroken lover saw his heart-stealing beloved, he sighed and raised his hands in prayer, saying, "O God, grant dignity and wealth to these watchmen and preserve them, for they were like Gabriel, guiding this weak soul, or like Israfil, giving life to this lowly one."

These two virtues, the fear and love of God, are the virtues which will drive the spiritual practices described in the next chapters. Along with the foundational values, they will inform the practice and development of the various virtues Baha'u'llah desires us to use as our guiding stars.

¹⁷⁷ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #40

¹⁷⁸ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #148

¹⁷⁹ Kitab-i-Badi

¹⁸⁰ Hidden Words in Arabic #5

8. Prayer

Prayer is the first spiritual practice this book present. Baha'u'llah dedicated a large part of the Kitab-i-Aqdas towards prayer. This chapter will describe what the Book discusses regarding prayer and some emergent virtues which are cultivated by the spiritual practice of prayer. There is obligatory prayer, which is a required daily practice. There is also non-obligatory prayer, which is personal prayer whenever you feel the need or desire to communicate with God. Chapter 12 will use one of the obligatory prayers to describe some of the ways prayer could be expressed.

8.1 Who is Required to Pray

The age of maturity is the age when a believer is first required to pray, as well as other religious duties such as fasting.¹⁸¹ The age of maturity will be discussed more in depth in Chapter 15, but the age is defined as 11 for spiritual practices.¹⁸²

Prayer is also not required if any person is ill or if they are in old age. Old age is not defined, but at this time is up to the believer. Any person who is not required to pray may do so if they feel compelled to. There is no requirement for a medical professional to determine if an illness qualifies for prayer exemption, nor to determine if a person has reached old age. Once again, no definitive universal number was described. I feel this is also more of a stage of life which is determined by certain prerequisites.

A woman who is menstruating does not have to perform obligatory prayer nor fast¹⁸³. She is to perform the ablutions and repeat the phrase “Glory be to God, the Lord of Splendor and Beauty” 95 times in a 24-hour period starting at noon. This repetition does not need to be done all at once, and there is no particular method described. How she performs this spiritual task is entirely up to her. This exclusion is not due to her being impure, but more of a mercy. As the medium and long prayers include the physical acts of prostration, the pain associated with prostrating might be distracting. I don’t believe God wants us to be unduly troubled during prayer. The act of remembrance, covered more deeply in Chapter 9, is also equally important as prayer. I hope a person would not feel a woman is spiritually weaker for praying less than is required of a man and find remembrance to be as vital to the soul as prayer is.

8.2 Preparation for Obligatory Prayer

Ablutions are required in preparation for obligatory prayer.¹⁸⁴ An ablution is the washing of your hands and face with water. If ablutions cannot be performed, the short prayer should be offered to God prior to the obligatory prayer “In the Name of God, the Purest, the Purest” five times. The purpose of ablution is a

¹⁸¹ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #10

¹⁸² BB00083

¹⁸³ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #13

¹⁸⁴ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #18

ritualistic way to symbolize purifying yourself prior to prayer. While ablutions is an outer form of purifying, one must not neglect the aspects of purifying inwardly. There are no hard rules, but I feel part of the purpose of the obligatory prayer is to purify. The Salat-i-Kabir (Great Obligatory Prayer) is a great example.

There are no other preparations described. However, the prayer is meant to be an individual act with the requirement of congregational prayer being lifted.¹⁸⁵ This does not mean congregational prayer is prohibited, but no individual should be expected to do so. There should be no pressure to pray with others.

For personal prayer, ablutions do not need to be performed although you could if you want to.

8.3 Length of Prayer

The length of the obligatory prayer was to consist of nine rak'ahs. A rak'ah is a sequence of movements performed during the prayer, such as prostrating and standing up. However, after the Kitab-i-Aqdas was revealed, Baha'u'llah provided three different obligatory prayers. One can be chosen each day. The small prayer is quite short and can be remembered and conducted quite easily. The midmost prayer follows the structure most like the original obligatory prayer and can take a few minutes to perform. The great prayer is designed more for a deep meditation which can take at least fifteen minutes. All of the times can vary depending on if you sing, take time to reflect on the words, or even repeat some of the invocations.

For individual, non-obligatory prayer the length does not matter. I feel the obligatory prayer, while designed to stand alone without other prayers, can be a great way to lead into personal prayer. Personal prayer is where you say what is within your heart to God. The obligatory prayer can help set the stage in establishing sincerity, detachment, and other spiritual qualities. Still, pray whenever you feel like it.

8.4 Time of Day

The obligatory prayer was originally to be performed three times per day. Once in the morning between sunrise until noon. The second time would be between noon and sunset. The final time is from sunset until two hours after sunset. These instructions follow with the midmost prayer, which is designed most closely to the original prayer prescribed in the Kitab-i-Aqdas.

The small prayer is to be performed at noon, which is from noon until sunset. The great prayer is to be performed anytime in the 24 hour period.

For believers who are in high latitudes where the time of day can vary greatly depending on the season, the use of watches and clocks to determine prayer times are acceptable.¹⁸⁶ For example, in Calgary, Canada, sunset is close to 10pm during the summer solstice and closer to 8pm during the spring equinox.

¹⁸⁵ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #12

¹⁸⁶ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #10

In Quito, Ecuador, sunset was at 6:21pm. In Quito, sunset is usually around the same time due to its location at the equator. A person in Calgary could choose to do the evening prayer closer to 8pm year-round as that could be similar to the spring equinox, or maybe they choose a random location near the equator such as in Quito. Any of these alternatives are acceptable as it can be reasonably be sunset somewhere in that longitude.

Depending on perspective, one may feel a longer prayer will have more merit than the other, but really Baha'u'llah did not say either is preferred. The intention is to follow your own heart and express your spirit depending on your own circumstances each day. It is important that it is performed daily, as prayer is the foundation of a loving relationship with God.

As God has also prescribed work as an act of worship, I would recommend not getting too concerned about how to balance a busy lifestyle with the devotional act of prayer. This will develop naturally as your relationship grows. You will start to develop a sense of when you need to pray, or which prayer is the best for that day. I have found the great prayer difficult to recite word for word. When I get a little lost, I paraphrase or just start expressing what feels right within myself. Sometimes I also use prerecorded music to guide me.

No matter what, the important aspect is that prayer is done at least once per day.

8.5 Direction of Prayer

The direction of obligatory prayer is called the Qiblih, or the point of adoration. As the point is currently the point where the Sun of Truth and Explanation had set, this would be the mansion of Bahji in present day Acre, Israel.

Even though we are to turn to where Baha'u'llah was last manifested in the flesh, it does not mean we are praying to Baha'u'llah or worshiping Him. We are still praying to God. The purpose for praying towards Baha'u'llah is due to His role as the Manifestation of God. Baha'u'llah is directly branched from the Sundrat'u'l-Muntaha and reflects the names and attributes of God. If we turn our souls towards Baha'u'llah, it helps our souls to also reflect these names and attributes as mirrors. Say, in one example, we turn to the Qiblih and by doing so, we turn to God's name All-Bountiful. Simultaneously, we are also turning away from the symbols of wealth which might exist elsewhere near us, such as a luxurious building, gold jewelry, or a TV promoting consumerism. We eliminate potential idols each time we turn to God through the practice of facing the Qiblih. It truly is the point of adoration.

Although we are mirrors and prayer helps us reflect the names and attributes of God, we must not be thinking of any particular name or attribute of God during prayer. The Bab says this in the Persian Bayan "The worshiper, during prayer, should see none but their Beloved and focus solely on God, One without Partner. If they bring to mind any name or attribute in their worship, they become veiled, and their worship is not accepted."¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷ The Persian Bayan, Vahid 9 Gate 19

Today, there are various apps which can be used to determine the most correct direction for prayer. However, if you are travelling and don't have a tool to use, it is acceptable to face the direction you feel is the most right. As with everything in religion, intention is the most important aspect. For prayers which are not obligatory, a believer can face in any direction. God is in all directions.

As a simple sidenote, Acre is one of the world's longest continuously lived settlements, going back to the Bronze Age. It also served as the final stronghold for Christian Crusaders before they were defeated by the Mamluks. Today Acre is a diverse small city with a well-balanced mix of people of various religions.

8.6 The Prayer for the Dead

The prayer for the dead provides for two options. The first option is to recite the full prayer revealed. There is a version for the male deceased and another for the female deceased. The second option exists if the believer has not remembered the full prayer. This second option is to say Allahu-Akbar (God is Great) six times. The prayer is performed during Qunut, which is based on the Muslim tradition of praying in a standing position, with the palms facing outward towards the sky. The Qunut is also a part of the obligatory prayers and signifies a position and condition of praise towards God. No other requirements exist in the prayer for the dead.

The Prayer for the Dead is the only prayer allowed to be performed in a congregation. This is a beautiful way for a community to honor the life of a loved one. With the repetition of the six verses 19 times, this can create a powerfully emotional experience as the departed journeys towards God.

The person should be buried with spirit and fragrance.

8.7 No Restrictions on Hair and Clothing

A person can wear their hair as they wish.¹⁸⁸ Baha'u'llah refers to bones and the like as not being able to invalidate the prayer. The clothing materials worn during prayer also do not invalidate prayer. These are items which religious scholars and leaders had often described as making a person impure, or their prayer to have less effect. It is a primary reason why you might see a Muslim woman put on a clean and white outer garment before she prays. Baha'u'llah states these rules were not in the Qur'an and in the Aqdas, He is explicitly stating a believer can wear their hair and clothing as they wish. The clothes worn for prayer must be clean, in keeping with the idea of being purified through ablutions.

I believe the main purpose of this is to demonstrate what truly matters in prayer is the spirit and sincerity of the person. Baha'u'llah and God are for the reformation of hearts, and the liberation of the soul. Prayer is spiritual communion with God. With prayer also meant to be done in private, it also helps demonstrate the fact that God does not see us as these sexual creatures, or with sexual eyes. He sees our spirit. He feels our soul. The rules by scholars who say otherwise are attributing desire on God, giving God human and animal attributes falsely.

¹⁸⁸ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #9

A female believer can also interpret these lack of restrictions as they please. Could a woman, in private, pray without any clothing? Could a woman wear athletic shorts and a sports bra? Could she wear a burqa? This is entirely left up to her and her only.

Baha'u'llah does regularly use garments as a symbol of our character. An example is in a letter to Ali-Akbar, where Baha'u'llah hopes all the friends of God may be adorned with the garment of sanctity.¹⁸⁹ The garment is what others is supposed to see from us. In this example, people who are or who are not Baha'i is will be able to easily see a Baha'i is holy and inviolable in their belief and conduct. Perhaps saintly. This outer garment is more important than the actual garment, and this outer garment is portrayed through good deeds and morals. It is not portrayed through words or wishful thinking.

8.8 Clean Flooring

For prostration, Baha'u'llah allows for any clean surface. This does mean the surface must be clean. A person may use a clean prayer rug, but a prayer rug is not required. You could be on an old wooden flooring and it is acceptable if it is clean. You could be on the finest marble and it is acceptable if it is clean. Once again, the idea is for prayer to be accessible and focused on the spirit, not the material.

8.9 In Times of Exceptional Natural Phenomena

The Bab had outlined a specific prayer for the signs, or natural phenomena. Baha'u'llah has abrogated this and says we only need to say, ““Greatness belongs to God, the Lord of what is seen and what is unseen, the Lord of all the worlds.”

The verse is a great reminder in times of fear and distress. Sometimes in the greatness of human potential, nature offers humbling and dangerous experiences. Being able to remember that whatever we are experiencing, no matter how great or awe-inspiring it seems, it is not as great as God. God is the Lord of what we observed and the Lord of what we have not yet observed. Hopefully these words can provide solace in those times of exceptional natural phenomena, the signs of God.

8.10 During Travel

During travel, obligatory prayer may be replaced while taking rest. The first option is to do a single prostration on a clean surface and recite “Glory be to God, the Lord of Grandeur and Majesty, of Bounty and Grace.” If one is unable to find a clean surface or is unable to prostrate for any reason, the second option is to say “Glory be to God.”

After the prostration, sit in the position of unity. I interpret this as a cross-legged position common to many religions, but you may have another way to sit which demonstrates reverence. While seated, say “Glory be to God, the Lord of Dominion and Sovereignty” 18 times. This totals to 19 repetitions of Glory.

¹⁸⁹ BH00010: Letters to Tehran Through Ali-Akbar

It should be noted that after the Kitab-i-Aqdas was released, the obligatory prayer had changed to include the short prayer. This can, at a minimum, take just a minute although the length can vary depending on how you recite the prayer.

8.11 Emergent Virtues

I want to close this chapter with a brief introduction to a few emergent virtues. These virtues are born from the innate virtue piety and can be developed through the practice of prayer, although not exclusively through prayer. I believe prayer is a great way to develop and express piety.

8.11.1 Detachment

Abandon what you possess and soar with the wings of detachment above the realm of creation.¹⁹⁰

Rooted in the innate virtue of piety, detachment arises when the soul turns its gaze from the world to the divine. Prayer invites the soul to release its grip on the transient, anchoring itself instead in the eternal. In the quiet moment of turning to God, the heart loosens its hold on worldly ambitions, fears, and desires. This daily act of reorientation weakens the illusion that material things possess lasting authority. By facing the Qiblah, one is not just turning toward a physical direction, but symbolically turning away from all other directions—detaching from every voice except the voice of God. Over time, this consistent detachment makes the soul freer, clearer, and more faithful to the unseen.

8.11.2 Humility

Return to Him, humbled, submissive, and lowly, for He will forgive your misdeeds. Your Lord is indeed the Oft-Forgiving, the Almighty, the Merciful.¹⁹¹

The humility that blossoms in prayer is the natural fruit of piety's inward reverence. True prayer is not performed from a station of pride, but from the recognition of utter dependence. When the worshiper stands before God, all claims to self-sufficiency are stripped away. The body bows; the tongue confesses. There is no pretense in the sincere prayer of a seeker. Through this repeated posture of submission, humility takes root—not as weakness, but as spiritual clarity. The one who prays recognizes that every good comes from beyond, and every virtue is sustained by grace.

8.11.3 Lowliness

O Son of Spirit! I created you lofty, yet you have made yourself lowly. Ascend to what you were created for.¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #54

¹⁹¹ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #184

¹⁹² The Hidden Words in Arabic #22

Piety teaches the soul to rejoice in lowliness, knowing that nearness to God requires the annihilation of self. Closely related to humility, lowliness is the virtue of embracing one's smallness before the majesty of God. In prayer, the worshiper does not merely acknowledge imperfection, but consciously descends into a state of lowliness to rise spiritually. Bahá'u'lláh often prays from a place of utter abasement, saying, "I am the most lowly servant at Thy threshold." This condition is not self-contempt but the recognition that the soul is nothing without God. Through the rhythm of prayer, the soul learns to take joy in this smallness, for it becomes the vessel through which divine light pours forth.

8.11.4 Reverence

To Him ascends the good word, and all faces prostrate before Him, and all who are in the heavens and the earth worship Him. There is nothing, but it glorifies Him with praise and fears from His reverence, there is no god but He, the Mighty, the Eternal.¹⁹³

Reverence is the emotional shape of piety—an inward trembling in the presence of the sacred. Prayer awakens this sense of awe—an awareness that one is standing before the Most High. Reverence is not simply about solemnity, but about approaching the divine with love and fear in equal measure. Through prayer, especially in its prescribed forms, the soul learns the etiquette of approach: washing before entering the divine presence, facing the Qiblah, reciting words with care. These gestures, repeated daily, form a spiritual discipline that trains the soul in reverence. In time, this posture flows beyond prayer into every aspect of life.

8.11.5 Thankfulness

All the bounty is in Our hand, and We give it to whom We wish from Our near servants. Thus, We have favored you time after time so that you may thank your Lord with a thankfulness that opens the possible worlds to thank Our merciful, compassionate Self.¹⁹⁴

Thankfulness flows from piety's deep recognition of God as the Source of all that is. Every prayer is, in essence, a return to the Giver. Whether petitioning, praising, or weeping in longing, the soul is always brought back to the remembrance of what has been given. Thankfulness grows in the soil of this awareness. Even in hardship, prayer allows the soul to perceive mercy beneath trial and wisdom within pain. In turning to God again and again, one cannot help but begin to notice the countless, quiet gifts that fill each moment. Thus, prayer transforms the heart—not only into one that asks, but one that overflows with gratitude.

8.11.6 The Example of Bahá'u'llah

The writings of Bahá'u'llah are full of examples of Him praying to God as a servant. In this condition, Bahá'u'llah is showing us the framework of how prayer can be. We do not necessarily have to say exactly

¹⁹³ Lawh-i-Madinatut-Tawhid (Tablet of the City of Unity)

¹⁹⁴ Suriy-i-Haykal (Surah of the Temple)

what Baha'u'llah would say, as most of these prayers were for the time, space, and context of the particular moment the prayer was revealed. We can see what Baha'u'llah prayed for, to whom, and maybe see if God answered these prayers and if so, in what way. We must always remember that while Baha'u'llah was a Manifestation of God, Baha'u'llah was still human. I interpret this human condition as He was not omniscient or omnipresent, but had capacities to serve a specific mission God had ordained for Him. When Baha'u'llah was praying to God, this was not necessarily revelation as God would not pray to God. It is important to be mindful of Baha'u'llah's human condition and not to confuse Him as God.

With that said, the answering of prayers is entirely up to God. The purpose of prayer is not for wishes to be granted, but for the will of us to merge with that of the will of God. Often Baha'u'llah would pray that a person would attain certain spiritual qualities or be assisted in doing so. I believe God would always provide this assistance. Yet, it is still up to the individual person to choose to embody those qualities. This means if Baha'u'llah prayed for a person, or prayed for the qualities and assistance of a person, it does not automatically mean this person attained that quality or station.

This is why emergent virtues such as detachment, humility, lowliness, reverence, and thankfulness are all vital to the practice of prayer. No matter what the outcome, whether we recognize it or not, and whether another person reflects our wish or not, we must always be thankful for the assistance, mercy, and bounty God does provide us. We should do our best to pray like Baha'u'llah did, according to the time, space, and context of our individual and unique lives. This practice will help the innate piety which exists within us to further emerge and express itself more fully within our lives.

This is one of the pathways to liberate our souls, just as Baha'u'llah's soul was liberated.

8.12 Congregational Prayer

While congregational prayer is not a part of the obligatory prayer, it is a part of the spiritual practice of the Mashriq-ul-Adhkar. There is a delicate balance to praying together, but not to pray merely to be seen and appear pious. There is another delicate balance in being free to still pray as you feel compelled to do so while not requiring a rigid tradition of there being specific prayers or rituals in a congregation. For example, we should be careful that people only ask for healing prayers. Prayers must only come from a place of liberation and true expressions of the soul. If a particular day there is no congregational prayer, it is also acceptable and does not reflect on the community negatively. It could be on this day, the believers desire only to pray privately. Once again, the emergent virtues could be expressed in many different ways. Detachment from ritual is vital, as is detachment from expectation of others.

Each unique soul has its own spiritual capacity in any given moment. Congregational prayer should only serve the purpose of uplifting each other's souls, not as any litmus test of the progress of another. Humility should help prevent such outcomes. All prayer is in reverence for the Beloved, not ourselves, not our institutions, and not our traditions. All is from God and all is for God. We are all equally lowly before Him. To Him we should be thankful, and thankful for the opportunity to share our beliefs and worship with others.

9. Recitation

The next spiritual practice Baha'u'llah describes in the Kitab-i-Aqdas is recitation. Recitation is a practice which can go hand-in-hand with the obligatory prayers, as a person must be able to recite them to completely fulfill the obligation. Recitation is also a practice which exists outside the obligatory prayers, and is the primary means to make the Word of God known. You can say recitation is a conduit of divine power. If God's Word is reflective of the animating power of God's Breath, recitation is also us animating our souls and the world around us with this animating and creative power of God. Recitation also helps develop emergent virtues derived from the innate virtue loyalty.

9.1 Who is Required to Recite and When?

Recitation is a practice, which unlike the obligatory prayers, is not restricted by age or health. All believers are commanded to "recite the verses of God every morning and evening. He who does not recite has not fulfilled the covenant of God and His testament."¹⁹⁵ This is a universal obligation without exceptions. Every person, however, may fulfill this obligation according to their own capacities and it will vary in form and effort.

There is no definitive time designated as morning and evening. Simply it could mean the beginning of your day and the end of the day. Traditionally this would mean from dawn or sunrise until noon for the morning, and when light decreases until bedtime for the evening. For people who must work non-traditional schedules, this would be left up to your own circumstances and conscious. For example, if you wake up in the afternoon to work, the afternoon might be your morning and the period after midnight is your evening. What would not change is there are two distinct periods to recite the verses of God, establishing a daily rhythm.

9.2 What Should Be Recited?

Baha'u'llah instructs us to recite the verses revealed by God. In Chapter 5, we defined what the Word of God is, which are the verses. Today, this includes everything by Baha'u'llah. He says "Whoever reads a verse from My verses, it is better for him than reading the books of the former and latter generations. This is the declaration of the Merciful, if you are of those who listen. Say: This is true knowledge, if you are of those who recognize."¹⁹⁶

While a person can recite the verses of the Gospel or other former Scriptures from God, we are counseled to use Baha'u'llah's revelation as our primary focus. This does not prohibit reading prior Scriptures, as reading is not exactly recitation. What is excluded from this command? Anything which is not God's words. For example, this book is not from God so you should not use this book for recitation. Any leader after Baha'u'llah who is not a Manifestation of God should not be used for recitation. No

¹⁹⁵ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #149

¹⁹⁶ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #138

scholar deserves to be recited, nor the most beautiful poet. Recitation is reserved for God's Word and God's Word only.

Baha'u'llah's writings include the Kitab-i-Aqdas and many other tablets, letters, and prayers. You can recite in the original Arabic or Persian, but you should do so in a way which you can comprehend. If this means translating to your native language, do so. In today's age, there are many tools capable of translating such as OpenAI's ChatGPT, which was used for the translations used within this book.

9.3 How Should One Recite?

Baha'u'llah offers a few guidelines in how a believer should recite the verses of God. The first counsel from Baha'u'llah is not to overburden yourself in reciting the verses of God. Recitation should come with spirit and joy¹⁹⁷ and it is welcome for one who is "enraptured by the love of My Name, the Merciful."¹⁹⁸ Reciting one verse with spirit and joy is more beneficial for the soul than to recite numerous verses to the point of weariness or listlessness.

I feel this guidance is exceptionally inclusive, as it allows a person to determine what is best for them. Say you struggle with literacy and can only read and understand a few simple words. That's ok! What if you are neurodivergent? Do what you can! Did you just have a long day? God understands. Will I commit a day off to recite for an hour? Yes, if you are able to do so with spirit and joy! Baha'u'llah only wants what is best for you, the individual. God is Most Merciful.

Baha'u'llah also says we should not expect other souls to be overburdened in this spiritual practice. In general, we should not overburden any soul with anything which makes them heavy and lethargic. If a person is reciting with spirit, joy, and love, if they recite in melodious tones, it is one of the most powerful effects known. He says "they perceive from them that which no dominion of the heavens and the earth can equal, and through them they discover the fragrance of My worlds, which today are known only to those endowed with vision from this exalted station. Say, it draws pure hearts to spiritual worlds that cannot be expressed by words nor pointed to by signs. Blessed are those who listen."¹⁹⁹

9.4 Purpose of Recitation

This brings us to the purpose of recitation. Recitation is to be heartfelt. This isn't solely to touch our own heart, but to potentially touch the hearts of a soul which is listless. Heartfelt recitation of God's verses is like a beautiful flower alone in a garden, attracting not only our eyes and noses, but also that of butterflies, bees, and other creatures animated by God's spirit to its fragrance. The verses of God permeate the visible and invisible, inside and outside of us.

¹⁹⁷ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #149

¹⁹⁸ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #150

¹⁹⁹ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #116

This also means recitation can be both a private and public practice. Baha'u'llah describes recitation as one of the practices of the Mashriq'u'l-Adhkar. Setting the verses of God to music and singing them would seem to be an important community and cultural practice of believers, according to the style and instrumentation they feel is best. One doesn't have to be a professional singer. Whatever is a most melodious tone for you and heartfelt is what is important. The cool aspect of any spiritual practice is that it is a practice, meant to be practiced. The practice helps develop a skill, such as memorizing, embodying, singing, and feeling the Word of God. No one will ever be perfect but with any practice, time and patience is key.

9.5 Emergent Virtues

With the idea of practice in mind, like prayer, reciting the verses of God helps develop your virtues. For this practice, I want to focus on the innate virtue loyalty. Recitation naturally helps develop loyalty towards God as it expresses a love, honor, and respect that His Word is supreme and able to liberate the souls of yourself and others on its own. Being able to resist the urge to recite other words which are not from God helps express this loyalty. There are also emergent virtues which can be derived from loyalty which are expressed within the Kitab-i-Aqdas. They are fidelity, morality, righteousness, servitude, and steadfastness.

9.5.1 Fidelity

O beloved of My heart, from all the previous ranks, the tree of fidelity is a blessed tree. Its fruits are beloved, and its effects and secrets are enduring and perpetual. If observed well, it is the leader of the armies of love and the forerunner of the people of affection and truth. From the depths of my heart, I present exaltation and peace to them.²⁰⁰

Fidelity is generally described as the ability to be loyal or faithful to your obligations, duties, and commitments. This is important for all types of relationships, whether they are personal or public such as in business or government. I feel the best way to describe fidelity is through modern sound technology. Fidelity is often the quality used to describe how true to the original sound the reproduced sound is. When we recite in melodious tones, we are being true to the original sound God spoke to us. This original sound is a sound of love, affection, and truth.

Recitation helps express fidelity by honoring the Covenant of God, where a divine trust was placed within our souls. Reciting the verses of God each morning and evening helps renew the vow, reminding the heart the allegiance we have to God, the source of all creation. This practice helps develop fidelity by detaching us from false allegiances, such as to our own ego or even to other worldly sources. These worldly sources could be to religious institutions not grounded by the verses, cultural values, traditions, political ideologies, or even the pleasures of life. Fidelity serves as the compass to keep the soul from drifting aimlessly in the ocean. Imagine what it may have been like for a person to hear the Bab or Baha'u'llah recite the verses of God. This was through just one person. Now imagine if a community of

²⁰⁰ BH00010 (Letters to Tehran)

people, say even 10 people reciting the verses of God. This is 10 times the effect, 10 different channels for the Word to pass through and have a positive effect within the world.

9.5.2 Morality

A true human being is likened to the sky in the sight of the Merciful, with the sun and moon being his hearing and sight, and his radiant morals as shining stars. His station is the highest, and his effects nurture existence.²⁰¹

Morality is a disciplined adherence to standards of right and wrong. Reciting the verses of God helps us understand what these standards are by refining that moral compass. Recitation is a positive action one can take, one which is not grounded in cultural practices of guilt and shame. Guilt is not a virtue. Neither is shame. God's verses transform, not humiliate. They cleanse without accusation.

Imagine the breaths you take when you speak or when you sing. You inhale the life sustaining oxygen from the air, in preparation for your recital. Then you express a verse of God through the exhale. Your voice causes the air to vibrate throughout yourself, even more if you are singing. This vibration is the Word coursing through you. You feel it. You may not automatically embody the morals God desires for us immediately, but with every vibration we are positively effected. The souls of those nearby will also feel these vibrations, these transcendent spiritual truths. These effects of morality nurture existence.

Morality then, does not merely become a matter of law, but a measure of our loyalty to God and to the liberation of our souls. Morality is the true spirit of the law, not the law itself.

9.5.3 Righteousness

Religion is a clear light and a strong fortress for the protection and comfort of the people of the world. It commands righteousness through the fear of God and forbids wrongdoing. If the lamp of religion remains hidden, chaos and disorder will find their way, and the lights of justice and fairness, and the sun of security and tranquility, will be obscured from their radiance.²⁰²

Righteousness is the outward manifestation of our moral clarity. It is an expression of our loyalty to the love and fear of God. Recitation helps shape this virtue by stirring our souls to act in the ways the verses affirm. Righteousness is virtue in action, guided by the full constellation from the lamp of religion.

As we feel the vibrations of the Word, the soul can feel what is right, what is wrong, what is noble, and what is more base conduct. This isn't merely about legalism, but it is conscientiousness of God's Will as we live the life gifted to us. Righteousness is not what we proclaim publicly, but in how we express our loyalty to God when people are observing and when they are not. Finally, righteousness helps ensure our recitation is sincere, not just a public display or an empty exercise in which we recite solely because we

²⁰¹ Kitab-i-Ahd (Tablet of My Covenant)

²⁰² Lawh-i-Ishraqat (The Tablet of Splendors)

were told to recite. Righteousness ensures we recite because we believe recitation will improve our righteousness.

9.5.4 Servitude

Say: The freedom that benefits you is found in servitude to the True God, and whoever has tasted its sweetness will not trade it for the kingdom of the heavens and the earth.²⁰³

Servitude is a virtue which can seemingly have negative connotation. In Chapter 5, we discuss freedom and how true freedom comes from believing in and acting on God's Command. Servitude to God is the voluntary offering of the self to the divine Will. It is not an act of forced bondage nor slavery. While prostrating in prayer is the outward symbol of servitude, recitation helps orient our soul to declare "I am Yours." Each verse is a step deeper to loving service, Each verse is a movement towards serving God's cause.

Loyalty expressed through servitude is capable of freeing us from the oppression of others, the tyranny of our own selves, and the illusion of control. Like the flower blooming through heartfelt recitation of God's verses, attracting those who also seek righteousness, fidelity, and morality, we are able to taste the sweet nectar of surrender to the Beloved. It was the Beloved who created the flower for us.

9.5.5 Steadfastness

O Lord, the thunder of the heavens has seized us, and with You is the abundance of everlasting life. Verily, You are capable of whatever You will. Do not deprive us of what we desire; then write for us the reward of those who are close among Your servants and sincere among Your creation. Then guide us to steadfastness in Your love, in a manner that nothing less than You prevents us from You, and nothing besides You diverts us from Your love. Verily, You are capable of whatever You will, and indeed, You are the Mighty, the Generous.²⁰⁴

Loyalty is constantly being tested in a myriad of ways. Recitation helps fortify the virtue of steadfastness, which is an unwavering persistence in the path of God. True servitude is the world's most difficult path. The examples of the Manifestations of God testify to this. One's body was crucified. Thankfully the soul cannot be crucified. Servitude could seem like suffering to an outsider, but true steadfastness is devotion, grace, strength, and freedom.

Recitation helps develop steadfastness by fortifying the soul through hardship or temptation. When there is a time of crisis, despair, and hope seems lost, the Word can provide us a shield of hope and a sword of light. The Word which has vibrated through us carves these niches of strength within our bones, our muscles, and our hearts. It helps develop our loyalty not just in times of plenty, but in times of tribulation. Even if a tornado were to infiltrate the orchestra, the song would still be played to its completion. The

²⁰³ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #125

²⁰⁴ Suriy-i-Rais (Surah to the Chief)

vibrations of the Word of God is like a harp stilling the storm within us. Our steadfastness is the best gift we can offer another, even in reciting the verses when conditions do not seem obviously right to do so.

9.6 A Gentle Reminder

To close this chapter, I want to offer a reminder that these virtues are not absolute. One is not 100% righteous nor 0% righteous, for examples. As we express our loyalty to God, we must do so in ways which does not betray our loyalty to His creation, which can be nurtured through our steadfast servitude. Yes, there are definitely clear commands of what is right and what is wrong. There are also situations where God seems relatively silent for some reason or another. Morality and righteousness must be practiced to increase. They are not automatic for any person, even if your desire is to seem like a saint. In an orchestra, a clarinet can play a melody and then a trumpet. Even though they play the same notes, the sound and its vibrations will be different. When both instruments are played at the same time with the same melody, the sound and its vibrations are amplified and again sounds different.

I offer this prayer Baha'u'llah revealed at the end of the Lawh-i-Ahabab (Tablet to the Friends)

Glory be to You, my God. You know that I am in prison, calling Your beloved to a share of Your gifts, purely for Your sake. When the idolaters surrounded me from all sides, I remembered You, O Master of names and attributes. I ask You to grant Your servants success in supporting Your cause and elevating Your word, then strengthen them in what manifests the sanctification of Your Essence among Your creatures, and the glorification of Your commands among Your creation. O Lord, enlighten the eyes of their hearts with the light of Your knowledge, and adorn their forms with the embroidery of Your Most Beautiful Names in the realm of creation. Indeed, You are capable of what You will; there is no god but You, the Mighty, the Wise.

10. Remembrance

The next spiritual practice is Dhikr, or the remembrance of God. Before exploring the formal aspects of dhikr, I want to linger on the nature of remembrance itself. What does it feel like to remember anything at all?

Sometimes remembrance is a conscious act. I choose to revisit a memory, like returning to an old house where every doorway leads to a different feeling. Perhaps I'm alone, walking through its corridors quietly, or perhaps I open the door for someone else, inviting them in through a story. It may be lighthearted, like the hope of laughter on a stage, or personal, shared only with one close listener. Whatever the reason, remembrance is not just to recall, it is to relive. I'm not just telling a story, I'm feeling it again. And the story may not even be the same one I told last time, because I am no longer the same person remembering it.

Then there are the memories that come unbidden, like visitors in the middle of the day. A flash of color, a familiar scent, a sudden voice causing something to stir. I see a bluebird glide into a patch of grass, and suddenly I'm a child again in my grandparents' yard. I hear an accent, a cadence, and a long-buried grief awakens. These are not thoughts I chased, but echoes that found me. Through sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste, these gateways of senses, the soul is stirred. Something subtle passes through, like a breeze carrying fragrance from a distant garden.

Remembrance also comes in dreams. The real and unreal merge. A face that no longer walks this world appears and says something you didn't know you needed to hear. You wake with a strange emotion lingering, one part truth, one part mystery. Sometimes these dreams feel like a letter from another world. Did it arrive by chance, or did a divine hand guide it?

All these are ways we remember ourselves, including our past, our longings, our unspoken questions. But how do we remember the One who is veiled in every veil, whose Name echoes behind the curtain of all things? How do we remember God, who is the Most Hidden, the Most Subtle?

This chapter will explore both formal and informal ways to remember God, the purpose remembrance fulfills in the soul's journey, and the virtues that blossom in its light.

10.1 What Are We Remembering About God?

The Kitab-i-Aqdas does describe some memories we should use when remembering God. We are to remember God among His creation.²⁰⁵ Creation, as we learned in Chapters 2 and 3, is everything within us and outside of us. Creation is seen and unseen. We are to remember God's bounty²⁰⁶ provided to us

²⁰⁵ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #117

²⁰⁶ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #112

through this Creation. Within this creation, we can remember God's mercy²⁰⁷ and His greatness and power.²⁰⁸ If creation seems scary or intimidating, we can always remember to seek refuge in God²⁰⁹ such as with the prayer of the signs.

We are to remember His mighty and wondrous Name.²¹⁰ This Name could refer to Baha'u'llah, which uses God's name of Glorious, or it could also refer to every name of God. We learned a lot of God's names in Chapter 1. We do not need to burden ourselves with remembering every name each time, but we should also be careful not to neglect any name over time. Nothing is excluded from the virtue moderation. When we remember Baha'u'llah, we remember He is not God, but the Manifestation of God and the dawning place of His most excellent names and the supreme Word (Revelation).²¹¹

Given we are to remember God, we are also to remember the Book (Kitab-i-Aqdas)²¹² and what was revealed from Him,²¹³ which is the entirety of Baha'u'llah's Revelation.

10.2 Subconscious Remembrance

Subconscious remembrance is not something we do. It is something we allow. It is the state of being open to what God is constantly offering.

O Essence of Heedlessness

Alas, that a hundred thousand spiritual tongues are embodied in one speaking tongue, and a hundred thousand hidden meanings appear in one melody—yet there is no ear to hear, nor heart to grasp a single word.²¹⁴

If there are a hundred thousand spiritual tongues, perhaps from those infinite spiritual worlds we have opportunities to pass through, there could also be a hundred thousand spiritual ears for every ear, or a hundred thousand spiritual hearts for every heart which grasps a single word.

²⁰⁷ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #14

²⁰⁸ Kitab-i-Aqdas #11

²⁰⁹ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #167

²¹⁰ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #50

²¹¹ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #143

²¹² Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #185

²¹³ Kitab-i-Aqdas #172

²¹⁴ The Hidden Words in Persian #16

The Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #185 offers a simple blueprint for subconscious remembrance. Baha'u'llah says "This is the counsel of God, if you are among those who hear. This is the grace of God, if you are among those who turn toward Him. This is the remembrance of God, if you are among those who feel. This is the treasure of God, if you are among those who know."

10.2.1 Receiving Through Our Senses

Subconscious remembrance is not actively remembering, but allowing memories and reminders enter our being. When Baha'u'llah mentions our hearing, He wants us to be able to hear God. This could be rhythm of verses recited, the calls of birds in moments of silence, or the subtle stirrings within. We hear a voice without a voice. Hearing often calls for action. When you hear a siren, you respond. In the same way, hearing the counsel of God leads us to live it.

To know is to open the mind. Hearing is one path to knowing, but so are reading, witnessing, reflecting. Our minds process endless streams of experience, and within those may be hidden names or attributes of God waiting to be recognized. If we approach knowledge with honesty rather than bias, we allow the truth to lead. Bahá'u'lláh calls knowing the treasure of God. And like any treasure, when uncovered, it changes us.

To feel is to awaken the heart. Baha'u'llah says hearts are capable of enlightenment.²¹⁵ Yet we often avoid feeling to avoid pain. Some pursue drugs to feel what they cannot otherwise access, or to hide what they can no longer bear. But everything we encounter evokes feeling. And what if the very feeling we fear is the doorway to insight? Perhaps it's at least a path to empathy.

When our senses, mind, and heart are open in this way, the soul can begin to turn. Subconscious remembrance is that turning, not as a command, but as a quiet alignment. We may not always be fully oriented toward God in our daily lives, but remembrance begins in our willingness to receive. We don't say, "I am a mirror." We simply become one.

10.3 Conscious Remembrance

Conscious remembrance is the intentional act of turning the heart and soul towards God. The Kitab-i-Aqdas provides guidance in how this remembrance should be carried out, allowing much of it to be done openly or in secret. Much like how Baha'u'llah did not want a person to be burdened by tiresome recitation, the Bab taught how remembrance should be done with spirit and fragrance. Baha'u'llah encourages us to exalt, magnify, and glorify their Lord with joy and gladness.²¹⁶ We should thank Him with joy and spiritual fragrance.²¹⁷

²¹⁵ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #31

²¹⁶ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #16

²¹⁷ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #74

The purpose is never to perform remembrance for its own sake. Just as we use our senses to receive from God, we use our faculties to give back to God and others. We use our voices to help others hear. We use our minds to help others know. We use our hearts to help others feel. Our souls can help others turn towards Him. To do so, you have to actually feel the spirit and fragrance. It has to come from deep within you. Remembrance is felt, not merely spoken.

10.3.1 Ways to Remember

We are also to rejoice in the joy of the Greatest Name (Baha'u'llah), by which hearts are enraptured and the minds of the near ones are attracted.²¹⁸ This is not an act of worship towards Baha'u'llah Himself, but a celebration this name exists, that it has manifested in the form of the temple of Baha'u'llah, and that it is a sign of God's mercy. Baha'u'llah is the point of adoration (Qiblih).

One way we can conduct remembrance is through music. Music is a ladder for the ascent of souls to the highest horizon.²¹⁹ Baha'u'llah warns us by saying "do not make it the wings of self and desire" and to "beware your listening does not lead you away from the path of dignity and reverence." Ladders can be used to ascend or descend. For a soul to be liberated, it must ascend.

Baha'u'llah also says "do not conduct remembrance in the streets or marketplaces. Do so in a place designated for remembrance or in your home. This is closer to sincerity and piety."²²⁰ If we feel inspired to remember God in the streets and marketplaces, this would be one of those times to practice secret remembrance, done silently or in a whisper. Sometimes I imagine a musical where random people join me for a choreographed dance and singing, but it's really only in my head. Remembrance of God can also joyously occur with spiritual fragrance even in silence.

10.3.2 A Warning

True remembrance is designed so we can feel the spirit and share the spirit. The Bayan says remembrance has no value if it keeps us from recognizing God and His Manifestations. Denying a Manifestation is the same as denying God. Baha'u'llah echoes this warning, telling us "beware...that remembrance veils you from this Most Mighty Remembrance." This warning is incredibly important. What if our remembrance is contrary to what God desires? What if we end up not recognizing the future Manifestation of God, cause future generations from recognizing the future Manifestation of God, or do so in a way which prevents people of today from recognizing Baha'u'llah as the Manifestation of God? Say for example, we express the remembrance of God's name All-Merciful and we respond to a person with apathy, indifference, or cruelty. Is this response in remembrance? Will a person come to love God or love Baha'u'llah or will they be driven away?

²¹⁸ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #51

²¹⁹ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #51

²²⁰ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #108

10.3.3 The Recitation of Alláh-u-Abhá

"Each day, the recitation of Alláh-u-Abhá (God is Most Glorious) is to be done 95 times while facing the Qiblih. Ablutions need to be done prior.²²¹ This is a daily practice of remembrance which helps teach us one way to remember a Name of God. This recitation can be done in secret or in the open, depending on where you are. You can perform this all at once or spread it out during the day. However, if you spread it out, ablutions would need to be performed each time. You can use prayer beads or other tool to keep count, but do be mindful of the fact you are not remembering the count. You are remembering God.

This practice is derived from the Persian Bayan in Vahid 5, Gate 17. "In this gate, it is decreed that from sunrise to sunset, every soul is permitted to recite ninety-five times phrases such as "*God is Most Glorious*" (*Alláh-u-Abhá*), "*God is Most Great*" (*Alláh-u-A'żam*), "*God is Most Manifest*" (*Alláh-u-Ażhar*), "*God is Most Radiant*" (*Alláh-u-Anwar*), "*God is Most Exalted*" (*Alláh-u-Akbar*), or similar exalted expressions." There would be nothing wrong in adding any of these statements of praise to your remembrance, as long as you are still capable of doing so with spirit, joy, and fragrance. I could envision a worship service of the People of Baha where nothing is happening but using music to collectively sing these names and praises of God. Wouldn't that truly be glorious?

10.4 Emergent Virtues From Courtesy

Remembrance is not only inward or mystical. It reshapes how we carry ourselves in the world. Courtesy is the innate virtue that allows remembrance to take root in action. While remembrance turns the heart toward God, courtesy turns that heart toward others with grace and awareness. As we remember God, we become more sensitive to how our presence, words, and behavior reflect what we carry inside. Courtesy is the outer shell, but these six emergent virtues are its living qualities. Each one refines our remembrance into a social, spiritual, and interpersonal offering—how we show that we have remembered well.

10.4.1 Dignity

Remembrance nurtures dignity by anchoring the soul in divine will. When we remember God's providence and perfection, we cease striving to elevate ourselves through comparison, complaint, or vanity. Dignity blossoms as a form of quiet acceptance, a noble posture rooted not in status, but in contentment. Through remembrance, we realize our worth is not in the eyes of others but in being known and seen by God. Dignity, as a fruit of courtesy, teaches us to stand before both friend and foe with the same measured self-respect, because the soul that remembers God knows that He alone determines value.

²²¹ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #18

10.4.2 Fairness

Remembrance restores fairness by keeping the inner lamp of divine guidance lit. When God's names such as Just, All-Seeing, All-Wise are on our tongue and in our heart, we measure our judgments against something greater than impulse or self-interest. Fairness emerges from courtesy when our dealings are governed by principle, not preference. Remembrance reminds us that justice is not just a system but a state of being; it is a form of spiritual clarity that preserves order and shields the weak. In remembering God, we recall that every soul has a station, and fairness is the way we honor it.

10.4.3 Kindness

Kindness flows from remembrance as the fragrance of divine mercy. In remembering the Loving, the Compassionate, the All-Forgiving, our own conduct softens. Courtesy is given emotional warmth through kindness; it moves beyond politeness into heartfelt concern. Kindness is the echo of God's remembrance within us, extended to others not because they earned it, but because we have remembered who they are in God's sight. Each act of sincere remembrance deepens our reservoir of compassion, making kindness not just a virtue, but a reflex of the soul.

10.4.4 Purity

Remembrance cleanses the soul, preparing it for purity. When we speak God's names or dwell upon His attributes, we are not merely repeating phrases—we are washing the inner self of ego, distraction, and worldly attachment. Courtesy without purity can become performance, but when remembrance purifies intention, even simple actions gain spiritual depth. The more our remembrance is sincere, the more our hearts are cleared of noise, making room for subtle inspiration. Purity, then, is the refinement of remembrance—it emerges not in separation from the world, but in our ability to live in it with a heart undisturbed.

10.4.5 Radiance

Remembrance fills the soul with light, and this light is what gives birth to radiance. When the soul remembers God with joy and fragrance, it begins to glow with spiritual vitality. Radiance is courtesy that shines—it warms conversations, softens conflicts, and uplifts gatherings. It is not boastful exuberance, but the presence of divine remembrance made visible. Radiant souls don't try to impress; they express something beyond themselves. Through consistent remembrance, one becomes like a lamp in the window of God's house, seen from afar, and comforting up close.

10.4.6 Refinement

Refinement is the art of making remembrance visible through beauty and care. It is courtesy matured and sculpted by remembrance. When we remember God, we begin to pay attention not only to what we say, but how we say it; not only to what we do, but how we do it. Refinement is not luxury, but precision and grace in conduct. It is how remembrance elevates the mundane into the sacred. The more we remember the Sublime and the Most Exalted, the more we try to reflect that glory in our actions, our speech, our presentation—even in silence.

10.5 In Closing

I want to close this chapter with a prophetic warning Baha'u'llah sent to Napoleon III and his fake claim of remembrance and how it violated the innate virtues of courtesy by betraying the people of Europe:

O King, We heard a word from you when the King of Russia asked you about the judgment of war. Your Lord is the All-Knowing, the All-Informed. You said, I was asleep in the cradle, the call of the oppressed woke me until they were drowned in the Black Sea. Thus We heard, and your Lord is a witness to what I say. We testify that it was not the call that woke you but desire, for We tested you and found you secluded. Recognize the tone of speech and be of the discerning.

We do not wish to return to you a bad word to preserve the station We granted you in the visible life. We chose courtesy and made it a habit of the close ones. It is a garment that suits every soul, young and old. Blessed is the one who made it the adornment of his body, and woe to the one who is deprived of this great favor. If you were the possessor of the word, you would not have cast the Book of God behind your back when it was sent to you from the Mighty, the Wise. We tested you with it, and We did not find you as you claimed. Arise and make up for what you missed. The world will perish and what you have, and the dominion will remain for God, your Lord, and the Lord of your forefathers. You should not limit matters to what your desire wants. Beware the sighs of the oppressed, protect him from the arrows of the oppressors. What you did will cause matters to differ in your kingdom, and the dominion will leave your hand as a result of your actions. Then you will find yourself in manifest loss, and earthquakes will seize all tribes there unless you arise to support this cause and follow the Spirit in this straight path.²²²

True remembrance is not proclaimed but it is proven. May our remembrance never be a veil, but a mirror turned toward the Sun, that all who witness us may remember Him.

²²² Suriy-i-Haykal (Surah of the Temple)

11. Reflection

The next spiritual practice Baha'u'llah describes in the Kitab-i-Aqdas is reflection. Regularly we are commanded to reflect throughout the revelation. Reflection as a spiritual practice is not something you commonly hear about, especially in Abrahamic religious circles. I typically viewed reflection as an act of mindful contemplation, perhaps thinking about how Baha'u'llah teaches "O Son of Being! Bring yourself to account each day before you are summoned to account, for death will come suddenly, and you will stand in judgment over your own self."²²³ Bringing to account had always seemed to be about asking myself if I have done what I was supposed to do, such as obeying Baha'u'llah's laws. What if there is more to this accounting ledger?

Reflection, if I had to provide a definition, is the process of integrating prayer, recitation, and remembrance into one's soul so as to prepare the soul to honor God. Reflection serves as the bridge towards increased God consciousness within the self. Many religious traditions define this process as the core of their religion. Islam calls it submission to God's will although reflection is missing from the traditional pillars of faith. Reflection is recognizing that our accounting ledger is about how our inner self measures against God's Self.

We aren't judging based on the standards of humankind, but we are comparing how we align with God's desire for us. If Muhammad is an example, he regularly retreated to the cave of Hira to reflect, and it was here when he first received revelation. After Jesus was baptized, he spent 40 days in the desert wilderness of Galilee, reflecting and preparing himself for His mission. Moses spent 40 days on Mount Sinai whereupon the law of the Torah eventually emerged. Baha'u'llah, before publicly announcing His mission from God, spent 2 years in Sulaymaniyah as a Naqshbandi Sufi detached from all He was attached to. Reflection is how God shines through us.

11.1 Purposes of Reflection

Reflecting is for understanding²²⁴ through discovering hidden pearls²²⁵ such as pearls of mysteries from the Ocean.²²⁶ What are we to understand?

11.1.1 The Choice Sealed Wine

One of the hidden pearls of mystery is the Choice Sealed Wine itself. The Kitab-i-Aqdas is not merely a book of laws. Imagine you are practicing recitation of a verse of the Kitab-i-Aqdas and you take some time to reflect upon the verse. Depending on which spiritual world you are passing through, you might gain an

²²³ The Hidden Words of Arabic #31

²²⁴ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #5

²²⁵ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #136

²²⁶ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse # 137

understanding and on a different day, gain another understanding due to passing through a different spiritual world. The hidden pearls are plural, which means there could be countless forms of wisdom to be gained.

11.1.2 The Bayan

There is a section of the Kitab-i-Aqdas addressed specifically towards the People of Eloquence, also known as the Babi's. Baha'u'llah says whoever "reflects on these verses (from the Bayan) and discovers the hidden pearls within them, by God, will find the fragrance of the Merciful emanating from the direction of the prison, and his heart will hasten toward it with longing—nothing will stop him, not the armies of the heavens or the earth."²²⁷ The Primal Point says "for nothing has been ordained except for the sake of the Day of the Manifestation of He Whom God shall make manifest, so that if a soul stands before God, there should be no condition within them except refinement—that nothing may be witnessed in them except the love of God."²²⁸ The Bayan is a love letter to Baha'u'llah and to reflect the Bayan, is to discover hidden pearls of love for Baha'u'llah.

11.1.3 The Qiblih

Baha'u'llah says to "reflect regarding the Qiblih²²⁹ pearls of mysteries from the ocean." To continue the theme of love and adoration, what would it mean to reflect regarding the Qiblih? Reflection, such as in this case, is not merely to acknowledge a fact, but to feel the nuances from the ocean of meanings. Today, what am I turning towards? Tomorrow, what am I turning away from? Reflection regarding the Qiblih may offer opportunities to identify what we love, and from what we love, what do we turn to more than Baha'u'llah? Do we have multiple points of adoration?

11.1.4 Dawn and Evening on the Mercy and Favors of God

Baha'u'llah tells us to "reflect, during the dawn and evening, on the mercy and favors of God. Give thanks."²³⁰ This could be a practice we take during the obligatory prayer. Maybe during the prayer, we take moments to pause and reflect on the portion of the prayer recited. In those moments, we are meditating on a mercy God had bestowed on you. You might not be in prayer, but curled up in bed or your sofa, reflecting on a favor. This is also a practice to help you, even on a burdensome day with some struggle or pain, to identify something good within it. This type of reflection is a difficult practice, but one which may help provide perspective to certain feelings. The heart is a great place for hidden pearls to be unveiled.

²²⁷ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #136

²²⁸ The Persian Bayan Vahid 8 Gate 6

²²⁹ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse # 137

²³⁰ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #33

11.1.5 Your Lifecycle

The Kitab-i-Aqdas tells us to “reflect on what you were created from; indeed, all were created from a base fluid.”²³¹ Baha'u'llah also says to “reflect on your end, don’t be unjust.”²³² He provides counsel for how we live our lives between our creation and our end. He says “the days of your life pass as the winds blow, and your glory will be rolled up as was the glory of those before you. Reflect, O people, where are your past days, and where are your vanished years? Blessed are the days that were spent in the remembrance of God, and the hours devoted to His praise, the All-Wise.”²³³

Reflection here is combined with remembrance. What of God do we remember? How is a name of God manifesting within my life? Is there too much dust on my soul’s mirror? Do I praise something more than God? Maybe reflecting on the beginning, knowing all people were created from an egg, a sperm, and the breath of life from God gives us new insights and understandings in how we apply our constellation of virtues. Awareness of the inevitable end may keep a regular perspective for the unique situations we find ourselves in.

11.1.6 The World and the Conditions of Its People

Reflection is also a bridge between the individual’s spiritual life and how we use our life to honor God within the world. Baha'u'llah says to “reflect upon the world and the condition of its people.”²³⁴ Maybe you are reading a political editorial or having a conversation with a friend regarding a social issue. Emotions are high as there are reasons to feel strongly. What if you reflect during such moments? Your prayers, recitation, and remembrance has prepared you to reflect and how to respond. You may view the world using a map, or view it from an image taken from space. You may notice or feel its vastness, or its smallness, depending on your reflection. Both can be true. You may feel the joys and pains of people near or far from you. You might feel aspects of oneness and aspects of difference, and see the truths of both aspects. We may observe what we should not do, and the potentials harms which occur when people lack faith, lack love for God, or lack the fear of God.

Reflection then, is not solely about how our souls reflect God for our own liberation, but reflection is also about the potential liberation of the world and its people. Reflection is what helps make prayer, recitation, and remembrance active within the world. Reflection is the initiator of the Cause of God.

²³¹ The Suriy-i-Haykal (To the King of Paris)

²³² Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #148

²³³ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #40

²³⁴ The Suriy-i-Haykal (To the King of Paris)

11.2 How Do We Reflect?

An example is set forth in the supreme word, upon which the entirety of religion is established. Through its utterance, the foundation of all religion is confirmed. In the hour of death, all will speak this word and return to Him. The reflections within mirrors inevitably return to their origin. When the mirrors reflect the image of the sun, they return to it, for their existence began with it. The mirrors' purpose lies solely in their capacity as mirrors, reflecting the sun from which they originated.²³⁵

The quote above from the Bab encapsulates perfectly what it means to be a mirror. We are what we reflect, in this life and thereafter. If the purpose of the mirror of the soul is to reflect the light of God, what inhibits the ability to reflect?

It could be the orientation of our mirror. Reflection of divine light could be anywhere from 0 to 100%, merely based on the direction our mirror is facing. Our ability to reflect could be influenced by objects getting between the mirror and the Sun. These objects can be veils, created by ourselves or by others, which are used to keep a person from identifying the light. When a veil exists, what direction will a mirror turn? Other objects can be accumulated dust. This dust can represent a mirror which reflected the light radiantly, but stopped its spiritual practice. Maybe the mirror thought once it attained a spiritual station, that the station was permanent, mistakenly doing what it wanted. Each day which passes allows more dust to settle on the mirror. Eventually, no light reflects as the dust absorbs the light.

How do we reflect to ensure our best reflection, so that our soul may attain the liberation of paradise?

11.2.1 Detach and Purify

Baha'u'llah says in the Book of Certitude: "the door mentioned in the statement that the servants will not reach the shore of the sea of knowledge except by completely cutting off from everything in the heavens and the earth. Purify yourselves, O people of the earth, so that you may reach the position that God has destined for you, and enter into a pavilion that God has raised in the sky of explanation."

We learned earlier how prayer can help increase the virtue of detachment and how remembrance can help increase the virtue of purity. These practices help identify what is important for our souls, but we can also learn a lot by what is missing from the obligatory prayers, the verses of God, and the names and attributes of God.

For example, we do not see any description of human race or differences of races. There is not a single writing from the Bab or Baha'u'llah discussing race. Yet, during the European Enlightenment emerging in the 15th century, the idea of race and the subsequent ideologies of race supremacy spread throughout the world as Europe colonized various parts of the globe. By the time Baha'u'llah emerged from the prison of Akka in the late 1870's, nearby Beirut was an intellectual hotspot where race highly influenced the sociopolitical discourse. Beirut was the most common port of entry for pilgrims to Baha'u'llah. It was

²³⁵ The Persian Bayan: Vahid 1 Gate 9

where his son, Abbas Effendi, sought medical care. Yet, race was notably absent from the Revelation of God through Baha'u'llah. This begs the question: Is race real?

Being able to set aside certain assumptions about what is real or unreal, despite there being common ideas and ideologies current among the people of the age or people of a culture, is vital to reflection. When Baha'u'llah says certitude can only happen by separating ourselves from these assumptions, we are no longer allowing those assumptions to be chains weighing us down. These chains are often described by Baha'u'llah as vain imaginings and idle fancies. A vain imagining is something we create in our own head which is not real and serves no positive purpose in our world of existence. Reflection helps use the spiritual practices to help identify what is real, what is actually true, versus what people may tell us is real and true. This discernment is incredibly important.

Other vain imaginings which people often attach themselves to can include political ideologies or parties, religious identity and labels, conditions of the ego, or even social and economic outcomes. Detach from all save God. To purify in these types of context could include identifying what we love or hate and understanding why. Do we allow our feelings to judge where we shouldn't? Do we blindly follow what is popular or what our families commanded us to follow? Do we get caught up in our own self-doubts and insecurities? These things act to turn our mirrors in directions which reflect corruption, not the radiant light of God. Even if we proclaim "I believe" and still remain attached to things which may not even be real or conducive to the liberation of self, soul, and society, we accumulate a substantial amount of dust on our mirrors.

God is the creator of all, but maybe Satan is merely the corrupter.

11.2.2 Cleanse the Mirror

So far I had avoided discussing meditation. Meditation is not explicitly commanded by the Bab or Baha'u'llah and it is not a spiritual practice by itself. Yet, meditation can be a tool to help a person reflect. When we have identified what to detach from or purify from, it can be beneficial to take time to be quiet.

The essence of faith is to speak little and to act abundantly; and if one's words exceed his deeds, know that his nonexistence is better than his existence, and his demise is better than his survival. The foundation of well-being is silence, consideration of the consequences, and withdrawal from the people.²³⁶

Reflection requires silence, stillness, and a sincere desire to look both inward and while looking outward, deeply. Our spiritual eyes must be piercing. Tools such as meditation or yoga can be useful, as long as the practice themselves are not distracting. Within my own reflection practice, I might curl up on a couch and watch birds eat, sing, and play. Hiking and camping are incredible times to reflect, even if you are with a loved one navigating the depths of your relationship. The most socially isolating time I am able to take is a road day trip, listening to music both vocal and instrumental. I've learned more during these 3 periods of

²³⁶ Asl-i-Kullu'l-Khayr (Essence of All Good)

time than I ever have only reading books, in school, or doing the common roles of life. The times of reflection helps consolidate all of these sources of knowledge, feeling, and experience into a form greater than the sum of their parts.

Through this process we can identify a truth about every aspect of our lives, and allow spiritual discernment to increasingly act as our compass. While imperfect, we strive for the process of perfection.

11.2.3 Reorient

The eventual goal is for the soul to be reoriented, facing away from these attachments, imaginings, and worldly affairs and turned towards God. Baha'u'llah asks us "O Son of the Cloud I call you to eternal life, yet you seek annihilation. Why have you turned away from what I love and turned toward what you desire?"²³⁷

I will close this section with the first paragraphs of Baha'u'llah's Seven Valleys describing the Valley of the Annihilation of Self:

Upon ascending the lofty stages of bewilderment, the seeker enters the valley of true poverty, the principal annihilation. This stage is marked by the annihilation of the self and the subsistence in God.... For when the sincere lover and the concordant beloved reach the meeting of the loved one and the lover, they ignite a fire from the radiance of the loved one's beauty and the heart's fire of the lover. This fire burns all the curtains and veils, even burning all that is with them, down to their core and shell, until nothing remains but the beloved....This is because what is with people is limited to their own limitations, and what is with God is holy beyond that.

11.3 Emergent Virtues From Truthfulness

Reflection helps develop the innate virtue of truthfulness by helping a believer embody what is true and identifying what may be mere illusion. Reflection also helps discern how to act in a given situation which affirms truth and the love of God. Reflection also helps a person go beyond saying "I believe" and being able to help conform their souls to the truth of what belief entails. As God is the source of all truth, a soul seeking God consciousness through reflection can seem to also be a source of truth.

11.3.1 Eloquence

The above passage describes eloquence, which Baha'u'llah says the possessors of intelligence must seize.²³⁸ Eloquence is the ability to express truth beautifully and clearly. Eloquence is usually associated with speech, but it can also be in the manner we write or how we use our bodies. It is a reflection of the title "Blessed Beauty" where God is the source of all beauty and truth. As we reflect on God's names, the

²³⁷ The Hidden Words of Arabic #23

²³⁸ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #2

Manifestation of God, and the Truth revealed from them, we may discover the beauty in all aspects of truth. Beauty itself is quite clear and draws people to the truth. Reflection helps not only helps us understand truth for ourselves, but helps us express it in a way which draws the souls waiting to be liberated from that which is not true.

11.3.2 Heedful

In the above quote, heedlessness is in opposition to wisdom. To be heedless, means being unaware or unwilling to fulfill responsibilities, or are unaware of what is around them. It is a foundational reason for apathy, which is inaction of the heart and soul. Reflection helps one become heedful instead of heedless, as we become aware of the reality of the world around us, the nature of souls, the purpose of life, creation, and revelation. We can understand how God's names manifest around us, and maybe exists in ways which aren't obvious. Our awareness of reality increases. Our awareness of our place in the world becomes more clear. This form of truth being revealed through reflection guides our responsibilities to God, to ourselves, and to others near to us and within this world. Reflection encourages us to take heed and act appropriately.

11.3.3 Perceptive

The above quote describes being attuned to God's sight, came to know God, and never hesitated in action. Perception is required to understand the subtle truths, the truths which are not explicitly defined. These truths could have more than one pathway, and each pathway is like light being refracted through a prism. From one light, we can see red which is truthfully light. We can see green, which is truthfully light. These different colors can bring different lenses and ways to see what is being reflected back to our eyes. Reflection helps us develop the ability not to just see these differences with our physical eyes, but with God's sight which exists within us.

11.3.4 Wisdom

Reflection helps develop wisdom. Wisdom is not just knowledge of truth, but the just application of knowledge. Reflection helps a person create truth within their entire being. We might read a verse of God and take some time to navigate its application in our lives. There may have been a situation we struggled with and with later reflection, we may have discovered a better way to have navigated the situation or our feelings. Wisdom helps us feel the spirit of religious law and counsel, not just the outward form.

11.3.5 Reason

Reason is the alignment of reality and clarity of thought. Sometimes we come across those who seem to value reason or logic as the primary modes of knowing truth, but as Baha'u'llah says, reason alone cannot comprehend most things. Reflection helps develop God's sight within us, so that we can not only know what true, but we can be aligned with it. Reason developed with the other virtues of truthfulness, and in conjunction with the rest of the constellation of virtues, is definitely the greatest sign within us. It can help us distinguish what is a beneficial science, or understand the consequences of actions in both the long-term and short-term. Reflection helps our alignment and adds to our clarity. We can act like a chessmaster, seeing several moves ahead and anticipating potential outcomes.

11.3.6 Sincerity

Reflection helps solidify potentially the most important virtue animating from truthfulness. Sincerity is the purity of motive in word and action. It helps align the heart and soul so that your actions are truth, without any doubt. Sincerity helps bring peace to whoever you assist, teach, or love as the orientation of your truth is not for personal gain or merely to check a box. You act because you love. You act because you want to share the beauty of truth, you want to share the light and love of God in your words and actions, big and small. Reflection helps understand how we can be better, and how we can ensure truthfulness has the most positive effect.

12. Honoring God

12.1 Introduction

In the opening of the Kitab-i-Aqdas, which frames the purpose of the Book, Baha'u'llah says "The tongue of My power has spoken in the dominion of My greatness, addressing My creation: "Carry out My ordinances out of love for My beauty." Blessed is the lover who has inhaled the fragrance of the Beloved from this word, from which the breezes of bounty have wafted in an indescribable manner."²³⁹ This places an important context for our spiritual practice. Every command is to be carried out of love.

This love is not one-way. In Chapter 1 we learned how one of God's names is Love and Beloved. God's love not only burns away the veils²⁴⁰ which prevent the soul from being a true mirror, it is also the key to the hidden treasure.²⁴¹ The hidden treasure is the liberation of the soul. Created noble, the soul is born already bearing honor, a sign of God's hope that each one may rise to the seat of divine nobility.

Honor is the condition of being uplifted by God's love. God desires that every soul may turn in their hearts to a seat of honor and nobility.²⁴² Although God does not need us to uplift Him, there are ways we can honor our love of the Beloved. When this book transitions to the various ordinances, these are all pathways to honor God's love for us and to express love for God. These pathways are ways to live in alignment with divine truth, pathways to that hidden treasure. Some of these pathways I feel are rather spiritual in nature and key components to our spiritual practice, hence naming this spiritual practice as honoring God.

This chapter will introduce various aspects of honoring God through individual and social acts of devotion. Some are woven into the rhythm of the Badi calendar, a sacred cycle of 19 months, fasts, and festivals, while others are more spontaneous acts of devotion. These are practices which form the bedrock of the spiritual identity of a community. In honoring God, we begin to walk the path of law not as burden, but as love made visible.

12.2 Build the Mashriq'ul-Adhkar

The Mashriq'ul-Adhkar means the Dawning Place of the Remembrance of God. It is every house built for the remembrance in cities and villages.²⁴³ These houses are to be built in the name of the Lord of all

²³⁹ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #4

²⁴⁰ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #132

²⁴¹ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #15

²⁴² Lawh-i-Madinat'ut-Tawhid (Tablet of the City of Unity)

²⁴³ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #115

religions.²⁴⁴ They are to be built as perfectly as possible. They are to be adorned with that which befits them, not with images and likenesses. The Dawning Place has chambers, where children may recite the verses in the best melodies.²⁴⁵ They should be established with wisdom, so that its building does not cause conflict.²⁴⁶ For example, Baha'u'llah advised the community of Tehran and some others to wait to establish the Mashriq-ul-Adhkár. Baha'u'llah says:

“Blessed is the hive, the house, the station, the city, the heart, the mountain, the cave, the sanctuary, the wilderness, the land, the sea, the island, and the dwelling where the mention and praise of God have been raised.”

While being perfect, they also do not need to be extravagant. For example, Jinab-i-'Aziz and Mirza Muhammad Kazim established Mashriq-ul-Adhkars at their houses. Their perfection was not the wealth used to build them nor world renowned architects. The perfection was from the love, devotion, sincerity, and purity of intention used in their creation and use.

Baha'u'llah says we should “turn towards the Dawning Place at dawn, reflecting, remembering, reflecting, and seeking forgiveness. Remembrance should be with spirit and fragrance. When we enter, we should sit in silence, listening to the verses of God.” This implies the presence of someone reciting the verses of God aloud.

With Baha'u'llah himself being the breaker of dawn, the Mashriq'ul-Adhkár is designed to represent the dawn within each of us who enter it, and perhaps the dawn of God's love in every city and village where one is built. The Mashriq-ul-Adhkár also are symbols of the houses where revelation started, such as the Bab's house in Shiraz and Baha'u'llah's house in Baghdad. Each visit, in a way, can be as a pilgrimage.

The Mashriq-ul-Adhkár is the foundation of the spiritual life of the community, honoring God as they feel within their liberating souls. If many people were to attend at dawn, you would have an opportunity for congregational remembrance. As remembrance is to be in melodious tones, there could be music. Baha'u'llah “remember(s) those who gathered or will gather to serve God, that they may rejoice and be among the thankful. Upon them are My glory, My remembrance, and My praise.”²⁴⁷

As there would be chambers, there are also opportunities for private remembrance. The choice could be yours, depending on how your spirit needs that day. Remembrance in the Dawning Place is not required in the evenings, but I could see if a person wanted to do their evening remembrance in a Dawning Place, that should be an option. The Mashriq'ul-Adhkár is the heartbeat of a community's spiritual life, built not

²⁴⁴ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #31

²⁴⁵ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #150

²⁴⁶ BH00054

²⁴⁷ BH00230

to impose rituals, but to invite liberation. Whether for solitary prayer or congregational praise, whether sung in melody or whispered in longing, it honors God in a way each soul recognizes as home.

12.3 Pilgrimage

The Kitab-i-Aqdas enjoins pilgrimage to the Sacred House.²⁴⁸ I like to think of the Sacred House as a recurring station in sacred history, much like how the title Manifestation of God has been fulfilled by many people. The Sacred House is where revelation first dawned. When the revelation of the Bab was first fulfilled, the House was the Bab's home in Shiraz, Iran. When the revelation of Baha'u'llah was first announced, the House was Baha'u'llah's home in Baghdad, Iraq. Baha'u'llah revealed two pilgrimage tablets for both Sacred Houses.

The purpose of pilgrimage is a way to physically portray the spiritual journey to God. As such, this way to honor God is quite sacred. There is no time frame, no schedule, no permission, nor any tour guides to point the way or tell you what to do. Pilgrimage is not an act of tourism. It is solely an act of devotion. I like to think of it that God desires to welcome you to His house and you are the honored guest. As an act of hospitality, God will provide for whatever you actually need for the nourishment and comfort of the soul.

The pilgrimage is for only those who are able to. Any able-bodied man who is able to perform pilgrimage should as long as it does not cause financial hardship. Women are exempt. This does not mean a woman cannot do pilgrimage, but there is no penalty or judgment by God if an able-bodied woman with financial means does not do pilgrimage.

Baha'u'llah also allowed a person who desired to conduct pilgrimage, but was unable to, for Himself to fulfill the pilgrimage requirement.²⁴⁹ Today, visiting the Sacred House is not fully possible. Both houses no longer stand and the land is used for other purposes. However, pilgrimage is still partially possible. I have not done so yet, but it is my hope to visit one of locations. In the tablets Baha'u'llah revealed for pilgrimage, the Suriy-i-Hajj I (Shiraz) and II (Baghdad), there are prayers and acts one can take leading up to arriving to the location where the Houses stood. If I am unable to, I do hope that I may do so in a dream or in some other meditative state.

12.4 Rights of God (Huqúqu'lláh)

The Rights of God, also known as Huqúqu'lláh, is a way to honor God through the purification of wealth.²⁵⁰ The Bab had initially introduced the Rights of God in Vahid 5, Gate 19 of the Bayan. In the Bayan, the Rights of God were assigned to He Whom God Shall Make Manifest, and fulfilled through Baha'u'llah.

²⁴⁸ Kitab-i-Aqdas #32

²⁴⁹ BH00250

²⁵⁰ Kitab-i-Aqdas #97

Baha'u'llah says the purpose is to bring people to higher stations. Baha'u'llah describes the payment as mandatory, saying not to withhold ourselves from this great bounty. If the Huquq was not paid with joy and radiance, Baha'u'llah would not accept it.²⁵¹

The Rights of God is paid solely from wealth, not income. If one's wealth reaches 100 mithqáls (425g) of gold, 19 mithqáls (80.75g) thereof belong to God. Basically it is a 19% contribution. In a letter to Jinab-i-Samandar²⁵² Baha'u'llah explains there is a minimum amount upon which the Huquq is paid, which is 19 mithqáls (80.75g). Wealth is similar to a balance sheet of a business. You take assets, subtract liabilities, and you end up with total equity. Once the Huquq has been paid on a portion of wealth, that portion is not subject to payment again. When a new 19 mithqáls is reached, a new 19% payment is required. Endowments for charity are also a part of the Huquq'u'llah²⁵³

Baha'u'llah would use the Rights of God to take care of the affairs of the believers, as these things require money. These affairs included teaching²⁵⁴, taking care of the poor²⁵⁵, prisoners, travel, and other affairs. He had instructed an unspecified woman to give two-thirds of the Huquq'u'llah for good works, and one-third to the Holy Court, which was to Baha'u'llah.²⁵⁶ In another letter, He says all of it can be paid for charity.²⁵⁷ It seems there was no rigid methodology in how Huquq'u'llah was used. The Kitab-i-Aqdas also specifies endowments can be used for elevated places, which could be the two Houses to be established in every city, such as the Mashriq'ul-Adhkar and the House of Justice.

For those who collected the Rights of God, He warned not to betray the Rights of God. This means not to use it for personal gain or any other action which goes against the Revelation. Baha'u'llah required a collector to provide a receipt and to keep records about how each Huquq payment was dispersed. Financial accountability is guaranteed. Eventually, Baha'u'llah enjoins the Trustees of the Houses of Justice to receive and present the Rights of God.²⁵⁸

This way to honor God is a pathway to honor the rest of the People of Baha, as it is the primary way to be able to afford the care of each other and the care of the Cause of God.

²⁵¹ BH00214

²⁵² BH00077

²⁵³ Kitab-i-Aqdas #42

²⁵⁴ BH00234

²⁵⁵ BH00086

²⁵⁶ BH00158

²⁵⁷ BH00261

²⁵⁸ BH00282

12.5 Engaging in an Occupation

Related to the Rights of God, Baha'u'llah wants us to honor God through engaging in an occupation.²⁵⁹ Working is equivalent to worship. The purpose is to engage in activities which benefit yourself and others. The purpose is not necessarily to gain wealth solely for your own pleasures and comforts. He says in BH10890 “Blessed is he who beareth burdens but causeth none to bear his own. Let him engage in craft and profession - a single coin earned thereby is, in the sight of God, more beloved than the treasure that is gathered unrightfully and made ready.”

Working is a responsibility. When Baha'u'llah says a blessed person does not cause burdens for another, this can be viewed in various ways. For example, maybe you own a business and employ a person. Paying a wage which keeps the employee in poverty could be a burden. Another way to read this is you do not force another to take financial responsibility for you when you are able to work.

12.6 Zakat

The Kitab-i-Aqdas enjoins upon us the payment of zakát for whatsoever is beneath the value of Huquq'u'llah.²⁶⁰ In 1873 when the Kitab-i-Aqdas was revealed, the minimum was only going to be specified if God wills. A few times, Baha'u'llah tells the believers to follow the zakát teachings of the Qur'an.²⁶¹

“Alms are for the poor and the needy, and those employed to administer the (funds); for those whose hearts have been (recently) reconciled (to Truth); for those in bondage and in debt; in the cause of Allah; and for the wayfarer: (thus is it) ordained by Allah, and Allah is full of knowledge and wisdom.”²⁶²

The Qur'an does not specify an exact amount, but it states in multiple places to be regular in charity²⁶³, or who are active in deeds of charity.²⁶⁴ Zakát's purpose is very similar to the Rights of God, except there is no minimum threshold of wealth a person must achieve to pay. There is also no set amount to pay. The only command is regularity. How one conducts zakát is completely discretionary and it relies entirely on one's conscious and unique circumstances.

²⁵⁹ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #33

²⁶⁰ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #146

²⁶¹ BH00069 and BH11399

²⁶² Surah At-Tawbah (9:60)

²⁶³ Surah al-Muzzammil (73:20)

²⁶⁴ Surah al-Mu'minun (23:4)

For example, in the days of Bahá'u'llah a person could pay a slave's debt, or take another financial measure to free them. A person could offer a bed to someone travelling. A Trustee of alms could receive money for their role as a Trustee. There is no rigid practice. One may honor God as they please.

12.7 The Bayanic Calendar

The Bayanic calendar was first introduced by the Bab in the Book of the Reckoning. In it, He creates a system of divine time with 19 months of 19 days. Each month is named after a name of God, and the days of the week are named after spiritual qualities. Below is a table describing the months:

[Here are the days of the week²⁶⁵:](#)

Month #	Arabic Name	English Name	Elemental Phase	Thematic Phase	Spiritual Function
1	Bahá'	Splendor	Fire	Glorification	The Point; essence of all months; attributed to "He Whom God Shall Make Manifest"; Naw-Rúz = Day of "There is no God but God"
2	Jalál	Glory	Fire	Glorification	Kindles the fire of hearts; glory of divine majesty
3	Jamál	Beauty	Fire	Glorification	Radiates divine beauty; fuels yearning and love
4	'Ażamat	Grandeur	Air	Praise	Spirits are created and sustained through grandeur
5	Núr	Light	Air	Praise	Light of divine guidance

²⁶⁵ BH01964

Month #	Arabic Name	English Name	Elemental Phase	Thematic Phase	Spiritual Function
6	Rahmat	Mercy	Air	Praise	Mercy as the sustaining breath of spiritual life
7	Kalimát	Words	Air	Praise	Divine Word as sustaining truth
8	Kamál	Perfection	Water	Oneness	Dies to imperfection, lives in affirmation of truth
9	Asmá'	Names	Water	Oneness	Realization of divine Names beyond negation
10	'Izzat	Might	Water	Oneness	Strength comes through detachment from ego
11	Mashíyyat	Will	Water	Oneness	Submission to the divine Will negates self-will
12	'Ilm	Knowledge	Water	Oneness	True knowledge arises through divine affirmation
13	Qudrat	Power	Water	Oneness	Divine power is manifest through surrender
14	Qawl	Speech	Dust	Magnification	Exalted speech gives life to

Month #	Arabic Name	English Name	Elemental Phase	Thematic Phase	Spiritual Function
15	Masá'il	Questions	Dust	Magnification	souls purified from falsehood Questioning as a means of spiritual revival
16	Sharaf	Honor	Dust	Magnification	Honor gained by steadfastness in God's love
17	Sultán	Sovereignty	Dust	Magnification	Life granted by renouncing all but divine sovereignty
18	Mulk	Dominion	Dust	Magnification	All divine elements are gathered into earthly dominion
	Ayyám-i-Há	The Days of Ha		Intercalary	Days outside the calendar cycle; devoted to hospitality, charity, and spiritual preparation before the Fast.
19	'Alá'	Loftiness	Dust	Magnification	Final culmination; fruit of divine creation realized

Arabic Name	English Meaning	Julian Counterpart
Jalál	Glory	Saturday
Jamál	Beauty	Sunday

Arabic Name	English Meaning	Julian Counterpart
Kamál	Perfection	Monday
Fidál	Grace	Tuesday
'Idál	Justice	Wednesday
Istijlál	Majesty	Thursday
Istiqlál	Independence	Friday

Baha'u'llah uses this calendar in the Kitab-i-Aqdas to describe ways to honor God with regularity, based on the sacred pulse of the calendar. These acts are opportunities for all People of Baha to share experiences, memories, and develop stronger bonds of love, friendship, and kinship. The calendar also helps express the potential spiritual worlds we might pass through in greater cosmic order. The next sections will be chronological events and acts Baha'u'llah prescribes.

12.7.1 1 Baha - Naw-Ruz

The Bayanic calendar starts with the festival of Naw-Ruz.²⁶⁶ This holiday dates back to Zoroastrian times and has been a long-time cultural norm for Persia. The day has now been elevated as the first day in the sacred cycle of time. 1 Baha, when we overlap the names of the months for as the days, could be called the Baha of Baha, or the Splendor of All Splendor. Baha'u'llah says "in it the breath of life passes over all created things. Blessed is the one who encounters it with spirit and joy, for we bear witness that they are among the victorious."²⁶⁷ The Bab called it the Day of God.²⁶⁸

The day is astronomically defined by when the sun transitions from Pisces to Aries. This also correlates to the spring equinox, when there are 12 hours of day and 12 hours of night for every location in the world. Thus, it is also a day which honors the Oneness of God and the unity of humankind.

Naw-Ruz is a festival for those who observed the fast out of love for God.²⁶⁹ The festival begins at sunrise.²⁷⁰ Although Naw-Ruz originated in classical Persia, there are no rules specifying how the festival should be conducted. It could blend with any culture as long as the festival is observed in a way which abides by the Kitab-i-Aqdas. All that is required is spirit and joy.

²⁶⁶ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #16

²⁶⁷ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #111

²⁶⁸ Persian Bayan Vahid 6, Gate 14

²⁶⁹ BH03908

²⁷⁰ BH00215

12.7.2 Ridván: 13 Jalál to 5 Jamál

Ridvan is “the Most Great Festival, which is the king of festivals, being those days when the Ancient Beauty emerged from the Most Great House and illumined the Najibiyih Garden with the light of His countenance. This is also called the Festival of Ridvan and the Festival of Roses, comprising twelve days from the Ancient Beauty’s first entry into that garden at the afternoon hour of the thirty-second day after Naw-Ruz, until His departure from the garden at noon of the forty-third day after Naw-Ruz. Work is forbidden on three days of this blessed festival: the first day, from afternoon to afternoon; the ninth day; and the final day. On the remaining days they may engage in their occupations.”²⁷¹

The days where work is prohibited are 13 Jalál, 2 Jamál, and 5 Jamál.

Baha’u’llah manifested the most beautiful names and the highest attributes. All things have been immersed in the ocean of purity from the 1st day of Ridván.²⁷² It is a bounty so that you may associate with the followers of other religions and proclaim the Cause of your Lord. It is the crown of deeds. It is a period characterized by “boundless joy, gladness, and delight.”²⁷³

It appears this festival’s focus would be to proclaim the Cause to the followers of other religions. Here are some possible ideas to observe Ridván. One would be to hold the festival in a public place which is not necessarily a Baha’i space. If it is a Baha’i space, there should be adequate space to welcome those who are not the People of Baha. There could be marketing materials welcoming the city or village to participate, particularly on the days all People of Baha are available to serve at the festival. A program could be Day 1, to celebrate the Announcement and who Baha’u’llah is. Day 9 could be to focus on sharing some of the new teachings and what makes the Revelation relevant and impactful. Day 12 could close with a shared spiritual practice of prayer, remembrance, and recitation, welcoming new believers and giving thanks to God for the bounty received. How would you and your community observe Ridván?

12.7.3 Ayyam-i-Ha (Days of Giving)

Ayyam-i-Ha are the the intercalary days, which are not bound by the limits of the year and its months. Most years are 4 days of Ha, and on leap years, there are 5. They are considered the days of giving.²⁷⁴ The giving is for yourself, relatives, the poor, and the needy and the purpose of the giving is to exalt, magnify, and glorify the Lord with joy and gladness. There is deep spiritual meaning behind these days. Baha’u’llah says the Days of the Manifestation of Ha are eleven, with six being associated with creation. The

²⁷¹ BH02278

²⁷² Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #75

²⁷³ BH00856

²⁷⁴ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #16

remaining 5 are revealed on the Night of Power through the letter “Ba.” These days are like a day of sacrifice, where creation itself is completed.²⁷⁵

I feel the placement of the Days of Ha after the month of Mulk is highly intentional given the purpose of the Bayanic calendar. Mulk means dominion and is to symbolize the period when we consolidate the spiritual elements within our earthly realm. These spiritual elements are a bounty, as much as what we earn through our occupations are also a bounty. If Mulk is for consolidation, the Days of Ha is for giving the excess with joy. This giving prepares us for the detachment from the earthly means we express through the fast immediately after the Days of Ha.

This would not have to be the only times to give the Rights of God and Zakat, but this could be great times to do so. Zakat does not have to be financial, and could be how we give a portion of our time in service to another. The community of the People of Baha, after accounting for what they have during Mulk, can assist those who struggled with a kind act. Maybe they consult on a plan to make the next year fruitful for those in need. It’s a great time to take care of all the People of Baha as well as those who are not. Ayyam-i-Ha is not considered a festival by Baha’u’llah.

12.7.4 The Fast

The fast is every year for the entire month of ‘Alá’.²⁷⁶ The People of Baha are to refrain from eating and drinking from sunrise until sunset. Also forbidden are desires, which the Arabic Bayan includes intimate relations with your spouse. The fast is required for any person who has attained the age of maturity for spiritual practice (age 11)²⁷⁷, as it was for the obligatory prayer. For those who are mature but are travelling, sick, pregnant, nursing, menstruating, or old (age 42+), they are excused from fasting. This does not mean the exclusion from responsibility denies a person a right to blessings. Any person who is not required to fast may still fast if they choose to do so.

With the fast coming immediately after the Days of Ha and prior to Naw Ruz, it is the culmination of a year of spiritual attainment and practice. The fast is a cause of refinement and reformation of souls.²⁷⁸

12.7.5 Hospitality

Every Bayanic month, hospitality has been prescribed, even if it is only with water.²⁷⁹ The purpose is to bring hearts together. Baha’u’llah and the Sacred Household regularly provided hospitality to visitors and

²⁷⁵ BH01228

²⁷⁶ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #16

²⁷⁷ Arabic Bayan Vahid 8 Gate 18

²⁷⁸ BH08745

²⁷⁹ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse #57

pilgrims when they were able to. Hospitality is the generous reception of guests, without expecting anything in return. This act of hospitality does not need to be a feast. This brings hearts together because it is an act of service.

This is my personal perspective: “My home is your home. In my home, I serve your needs. In my home, we are friends. In my home, we may serve the Cause of God. In my home, we are One.”

12.8 The Hijri Calendar

There are two other festivals to honor God which are based on the Hijri calendar, the calendar used by Muslims. In BH02278, written after the Kitab-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'llah clarifies the dates of the festivals without using the Bayanic calendar, despite its revelation. I believe the purpose is to tie in the significance of these dates prior to the existence of the Bayanic calendar, as a transition from the revelation of the Qur'an towards the fulfillment of the Qur'an.

12.8.1 5 Jamadiyu'l-Avval

This day in the Hijri year 1260, is when the Primal Point made His declaration to the Babu'l-Bab (Mulla Husayn). This correlates to the year May 23, 1844 in the Gregorian calendar. This night and day are of supreme greatness before God.

12.8.2 1 - 2 Muharram

The Primal Point was born on 1 Muharram 1235 and Bahá'u'llah was born on 2 Muharram 1233. These two days are to be treated as one single festival. 1 Muharram is also the first day of the Hijri calendar. Muharram is considered in Islam to be a sacred month and is now associated with the birth of the most recent Dawnbreakers of Revelation, the Dawnbreakers who eventually made Naw Ruz the new 1st day of the Bayanic calendar.

12.9 Emerging Virtues From Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness can be an innate value tied to the various practices of honoring God. This is because trust is the foundation of every sacred act. Without trust, no offering has weight, no word has substance, and no community can endure. Bahá'u'lláh calls trustworthiness “the greatest portal leading unto the tranquility and security of the people.” When we honor God, we are also showing that God can trust us—that we will protect what is sacred, give what is due, and carry the responsibilities of our lives with integrity. A trustworthy soul is one who remembers that every action echoes into the unseen, and that God’s love is never separate from His trust.

12.9.1 Justice

Justice is not just a command, it is a quality of trustworthiness lived out in action. When we act justly, we honor God by aligning our decisions with divine equity rather than personal advantage. Justice means giving every soul their due, whether in material provision, opportunity, or recognition. It is not partial to friend or stranger. When Bahá'u'lláh tells us to be the essence of justice, He is asking us to hold ourselves

accountable, to weigh our own selves before judging another, and to protect the rights of the poor and the oppressed. In this way, justice becomes a mirror of God's own trust in us, that we will not misuse what we are given, nor withhold what we owe.

12.9.2 Mindfulness

To be mindful is to live with attentive stewardship, to be aware not only of our actions, but of their spiritual implications. Honoring God through mindfulness means honoring the weight of every choice, word, and moment. Bahá'u'lláh speaks of those who "walk upon the earth with heedfulness," and calls us to remember Him at all times. When we remember God in our work, in our hospitality, in our silence, we cultivate an inner state that is less reactive and more receptive. Mindfulness is trust in the present moment, a gentle form of reverence that listens before it speaks, and gives before it takes.

12.9.3 Patience

Patience is trust stretched across time. It is the ability to wait without resentment, to labor without guarantee, and to suffer without complaint. When we are patient, we honor God's wisdom in timing, and we yield our own urgency to His greater plan. Bahá'u'lláh teaches that "with every difficulty there is ease," and that the days of sorrow are not permanent. Patience is not the absence of struggle, it is the posture of trust that transforms struggle into spiritual growth. It is a way of remembering that delay is not denial, and that God sees what we cannot.

12.9.4 Repentant

To be repentant is not to be ashamed, it is to be courageous enough to return. Every soul falters, forgets, or falls short of trustworthiness at some point. But honoring God includes returning, again and again, to the seat of His mercy. Bahá'u'lláh's writings are filled with calls to return. "Turn unto God and repent," He says, "for His forgiveness is infinite." Repentance is the act of cleansing the mirror. It is not about groveling, but about restoring clarity. In repenting, we affirm that God is still worthy of our honor, and that we still desire to be vessels of His trust.

12.9.5 Submissive

Submission, in its truest form, is not self-erasure but an act of deep dignity. It means yielding to what is right, not because we are weak, but because we recognize a higher truth. Submissiveness to God is the soul's way of accepting correction, embracing guidance, and releasing control. It allows us to be taught, even when we thought we knew. Bahá'u'lláh writes, "The source of true knowledge is submission unto God," and in this light, submission becomes a virtue of strength. It is what lets us be molded by divine hands, rather than hardened by pride.

12.10 Conclusion

This ends the portion of the book which discusses the spiritual practices of the Kitab-i-Aqdas. Prayer, recitation, remembrance, reflection, and honoring God are each pathways for our liberation and pathways to develop and navigate our constellation of virtues. It is my hope you have been inspired to

perform these spiritual practices and further your relationship with God. There is one more chapter to close Part 2. We will discuss one important topic which exists throughout the writings of Baha'u'llah. Unity.

13. Unity

13.1 From One Comes Many, From Many Comes One

Unity is a surprisingly complex idea. I sometimes feel unity is defined by many as meaning sameness, like an orchestra of clarinets each playing the same melody. It might seem good in theory, but in implementation is a highly unnatural arrangement which no person would pay to attend nor critically acclaim. To others unity means a minority should submit to the will of the majority, merely so there is no conflict. This would be like an orchestra where the clarinets outnumber the horns and are in front of microphones. The horns are not allowed any contribution and once again, it would not be an arrangement anyone would want to be a part of.

Instead, the Bab opens the Bayan with a different vision of unity derived from the name of God, the One:

The names and attributes are manifestations of the multiplicity of that primal unity. Reflect upon the verbal letters of the Bayán: all multiplicity originates from the first unity, even if it extends infinitely. And in the multiplicity of the universal manifestations, there arises a strength in the manifestation surpassing that of the primal unity. Yet, all things are realized through Him, and all return to Him, just as they originate from Him.²⁸⁰

If I had to summarize this theme here and elsewhere in the Bayan or the teachings of Baha'u'llah, it would be that from One comes many, and many returns to One. It is the very essence of the Bab being called the Primal Point.

13.2 Unity in the Names of God

In Chapter 1, we explored the various names and attributes of God. With God being One, all the other names are multiplied. They describe various attributes and these names exist in thousands of languages, which are also derived from one tongue and one breath. All of these names and attributes eventually return to the point of Oneness.

13.3 Unity in the Worlds of God

In Chapter 3, we explored the various worlds of God. Within a single creation, everything seen and unseen was multiplied. There are infinite worlds and planes of existence. Yet, when creation is ready to be made new, it is rolled all into one.²⁸¹ All of these worlds eventually return to the point of Oneness.

²⁸⁰ The Persian Bayan Vahid 3 Gate 10

²⁸¹ BH00103

13.4 Unity in the Spiritual Practices

Throughout Chapters 8-12, we explored the various spiritual practices. From one soul are multiple pathways for the soul to be more fully expressed, while exploring not only the multiplicity of the names, attributes, and worlds of God, but also exploring the essential unity underlying it all. From one God are a multiplication of souls throughout the world, and from this multiplication of souls comes One. All souls return to God.

If any of these spiritual practices are neglected, the ability for the soul to achieve its own internal unity is severely compromised. Unity must be achieved within us before unity can be expressed outwardly. Unity cannot be imposed from the outside. It first must be composed from the inside.

13.5 Unity in the Virtues

We also explored several virtues. With God being the essence of all virtue, these virtues are the lights guiding each of us. For example, from one light of trustworthiness can come multiple expressions of trustworthiness, and from these multiple expressions of trustworthiness can we return to the source of all virtue.

All these virtues are like stars of a greater constellation. The constellation itself can be called Unity. When all the stars are within view, they are all interconnected and work as One. If one virtue shines too strongly, there is risk nearby stars cannot be seen. The constellation is broken. If one virtue is never developed, the constellation is also broken. The stars may not shine equally at all times, but they must all be seen in order for the constellation of unity to form. The constellation

The shape of the constellation may be seen differently. One constellation may appear as a Scorpio while to another, it may appear as an Orion. These ways to interpret what we see can be limitless, as our experiences are unique, our souls are unique, and our place in the spiritual worlds may always be in a unique position. From these multitudes of constellations of unity return to one, which is also unity. These constellations will be seen by others. These constellations are the evidence of sincere belief, being signs of the spirit of God for those who seek God.

As we see, unity is not sameness. Instead, it is like a well-rehearsed orchestra with hundreds of instruments. These instruments play different melodies, different notes, different tones, yet harmonize into the most beautiful sound ever heard. This harmonized sound passes through one ear, and it is heard and felt. This is unity.

13.6 Unity in the Kitab-i-Aqdas

When the Kitab-i-Aqdas commands us to recognize the Manifestation of God for this age, this is the foundation of all unity. You are committing yourself to belief in God, the worlds of God, the revelations of God, and all Manifestations of God. You are committing yourself to various spiritual practices and the development of your inner virtues. You are committing yourself to the liberation of your soul. You are also committing yourself to the liberation of souls near to you. These commitments can only arise through a commitment to unity, to the Oneness of God, to the essential Oneness of everything.

The Kitab-i-Aqdas is a book of unity. Because of this, as we proceed from belief and spiritual practice to practical application, we are constantly reminded of this essential unity. Every law, counsel, boundary, and exhortation exists for unity. Unity is the path of glory. Unity is the path of liberation.

However, if we attempt to achieve unity without the entire Book guiding us, unity becomes a mere illusion. If unity is the only virtue, goal, or law, the religion of God becomes a deadly weapon which oppresses the souls God desires to liberate.

The Kitab-i-Aqdas is not a book of sameness. While it prescribes the same Book to all, how the Book is expressed will have infinite forms. This is by design. From these infinite forms, from each and every one of us, we have the opportunity to all walk a singular path of unity.

14. From Birth to Maturity

14.1 Introduction

The first two parts of this book used the Kitab-i-Aqdas as a foundation for the theology and beliefs enshrined in Baha'u'llah's teachings, as well as the practices which immerse a soul into the spiritual worlds, developing a relationship with God and the soul's virtues. The rest of this book will be more legalistic, leaning heavily into the idea the Kitab-i-Aqdas is a book of laws.

Instead of approaching this from a perspective of saying do not do this, do not do that, I want to present the laws within a new framework. Every law and counsel is an opportunity to express the rights of an individual as well as an expression of their responsibilities. Baha'u'llah calls the laws and counsels as boundaries not to be exceeded²⁸² while also saying we must exceed the boundaries of self and desire.²⁸³ There is this free space to operate in, where a person may do as they feel best. I imagine this free space to be as if you are living in a nation, able to travel to any city, village, state, province, or natural area up to the boundaries of the next nation. Within these boundaries, you have certain rights and you have certain responsibilities. This space between the boundaries, the spiritual nation of Baha'u'llah and of the People of Baha, are places for the beliefs and virtues to most fully express themselves. It is a space entrusted to us by God.

An example of how to frame rights and responsibilities could be from the spiritual practice to pray daily. Any person has the right to pray if they so choose to do so. A believer accepts the responsibility to pray daily. No person or institution is allowed to coerce another into praying, nor are they allowed to deny a person the right to pray. If a person does not believe, they do not have the responsibility. This is the spirit of divine law, trusteeship instead of control.

The entirety of Part 3 will discuss all the rights and responsibilities afforded to all people as expressed within the Kitab-i-Aqdas. As you proceed, imagine how each right and responsibility interacts with the Unity Constellation. Imagine what a nation of Baha'u'llah could look like, living your life where the citizens live within the boundaries you share, even if they do not all believe the same.

This chapter will start with the rights of all people from conception throughout their life. No responsibilities will be addressed here, as babies, children, or others who have not attained maturity have responsibilities in the faith of God.

14.2 The Right to Life

In Chapter 2 Belief in the Human Soul, we discussed how all life is animated by the spirit of God, with the human soul being created once the developing body has reached a certain stage. Baha'u'llah prohibits

²⁸² Kitab-i-Aqdas #29

²⁸³ Kitab-i-Aqdas #2

taking a life twice in the Kitab-i-Aqdas in verses 29 and 73. With the prohibition against taking a life, comes the right to life for all. This would include from the very moment of conception, even if the soul has yet to be expressed. At no stage of a human life can this right be deprived.

14.3 The Right to Identity

Verse 120 explicitly states the People of Baha have the opportunity for “their stations to be revealed, your names will be established, and the ranks and remembrances will be elevated in a well-guarded Tablet.” This implies a right to be named, a right to establish a unique identity, and a right to be treated as an individual. No person has the right to restrict the potentials of identity. No person has the right to force any type of identity on another, to include broad group identities.

While verse 120 does state the People of Baha has the opportunity stated, the right to identity is for every person from the moment they exist. The identity “People of Baha” cannot be forced onto another nor can it be denied.

14.4 The Right to Purity

Verse 74 decreed the water of semen as pure. Water is used throughout the Kitab-i-Aqdas as a purifying agent. This means from the moment of creation, a person is created pure and they are born pure. This applies regardless of the circumstances a person is created. Every person has a right to spiritual purity. This means they also have a right to be free from corruption. Verse 64 says “corruption is not of Us.”

14.5 The Right to Dignified Appearance

Verse 74 builds further on the theme of purity, cleanliness, and refinement. Baha'u'llah says there should be no traces of dirt on their garments, unless there is a reason. The water's essential properties cannot be changed. This implies every person has a right to clothing which has been cleansed with water prior to being worn. There is also no restriction on clothing in Verse 159. Each person has a right to wear clothing without being judged for their clothing.

In addition, Verse 106 requires at least weekly baths or pouring water over yourself (showering) using fresh water, and Verse 152 saying the feet being cleaned each day in the summer and every three days in the winter. Every person has a right to being physically clean. Verse 76 expresses the use of rosewater and pure perfume so one's fragrance is pleasing. These types of perfumes could have floral extracts, resins, essential oils, citrus, and natural spices. Synthetic chemicals or artificial musk may not be as pure. Every person has a right to be fragrant as a manifestation of paradise on earth. The purpose is to gladden those nearby, not to distract, distort, or intoxicate.

The Kitab-i-Aqdas also says for all people to have trimmed nails. Verse 44 says to never shave your head, that hair is a sign of the natural order of creation. For males, the hair should not pass the limits of the ears. Each person has a right to trimmed nails and hair. Each person also has a right for their hair to be displayed or presented.

14.6 The Right to Love and Kindness

Throughout the Kitab-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh enjoins kindness and love for all.²⁸⁴ All people have a right to love and kindness. These are not conditional nor are they earned. This helps foster a sense of emotional well-being and security. Affection²⁸⁵ is a limitless tool, as long as no other rights are violated.

14.7 The Right to Be Free of Oppression

The Kitab-i-Aqdas forbids oppression.²⁸⁶ Oppression is used in the context of lewdness, which opposes the virtues of righteousness and piety.²⁸⁷ Oppression causes corruption. It is associated with deception and wrongdoing. Oppression can be associated with tyranny and opposes the fear of God. This type of oppression destroys what God creates. Oppression causes humiliation and is caused by the heedless. Oppression opposes justice and healing. Oppression can be caused by the intoxication of desire and hatred. Let's explore the types of oppression and what all people have a right to from conception.

14.7.1 Maturity

Bahá'u'lláh describes various acts dependent upon reaching maturity.²⁸⁸ Every person has a right to mature and also a right to be free from being forced to be mature before they are mature. Preventing maturity is an act of oppression. This can be done by withholding education, preventing skill development, or by shielding from small responsibilities. Forcing a person to be mature before they are mature is also oppression. This can be done by forcing responsibility they are yet able to handle spiritually, physically, and emotionally. A child should be a child. A person with a developmental handicap should be treated compassionately within the context of their handicap.

14.7.2 Lewdness

All people have a right to be free from lewdness.²⁸⁹ Lewdness can be defined as the intent to cause sexual desire through crude or obscene acts and words. Lewdness can also be the intent to shock or humiliate someone through those sexual acts or words. These acts can be unwelcome, or forced upon a person who does not consent. If a person lacks maturity, consent can never be provided.

²⁸⁴ Kitab-i-Aqdas 48

²⁸⁵ Kitab-i-Aqdas 65

²⁸⁶ Kitab-i-Aqdas 71

²⁸⁷ Kitab-i-Aqdas #64

²⁸⁸ Kitab-i-Aqdas 10 & 27

²⁸⁹ Kitab-i-Aqdas 74

14.7.3 Pederasty

Pederasty²⁹⁰ is the practice of a mature man having sex with an immature male. While the Kitab-i-Aqdas does not explicitly apply the law to females, the primary aspect of pederasty would apply regardless of gender. There is the right for an immature person to be free from having sex with a mature person. This is another act of oppression which is associated with the right to be free from maturing before they are ready.

14.7.4 Marriage

All people have a right to be free from a forced marriage.²⁹¹ Marriage is conditioned upon maturity and consent. Anyone under the age of maturity is protected from marriage. Between pederasty, lewdness, and marriage, every person has a right to sexual autonomy and safety.

14.7.5 Physical and Emotional Harm

All people have a right to protection from physical and emotional harm.²⁹² The threat of physical harm to coerce consent would also be prohibited. Emotional harm can include contention, disputes, backbiting, and slander.²⁹³ Instead, all people have a right to consultation and a right to walk away and leave emotional harm.

14.7.6 Slavery

All people have a right from being purchased or sold as slaves or servants.

14.7.7 Provision

All people have a right to provision, even if they are unable to work. This would include all people who are not mature and have no responsibility to work. Provision can include food, shelter, clothing, and other basic necessities. For those who work, their provision would be fair wages or compensation which ensures food, shelter, clothing, and basic necessities.

As all people have a right to provision, all people have a right against being forced to beg. Those who are not mature cannot be forced to beg by their families. A person who begs has either been denied their right to provision, or has chosen not to exercise their responsibility to work (post maturity).

Finally, provision can also include basic environmental necessities, such as clean air, clean water, and food free from undisclosed toxins and chemicals.

²⁹⁰ Kitab-i-Aqdas 107

²⁹¹ Kitab-i-Aqdas 65

²⁹² Kitab-i-Aqdas 148

²⁹³ Kitab-i-Aqdas 19

14.7.8 Hatred

All people have a right to be free from hatred. Hatred can be expressed verbally, physically, and even through exclusionary acts such as shunning. Baha'u'llah associates hatred with an intoxication of desire. Some of these desires can be vain imaginings, such as race, superiority ideology, nationality, religion, or other aspects of identity. Hatred can also be an expression of unfulfilled desire, where a person takes what they want from another.

14.7.9 Corruption

All people have a right to be free from corruption. This is not only political corruption, but all acts of dishonesty, fraud, or the degradation of virtues. Corruption can tie into some of the other rights, such as with lewdness as lewdness corrupts the virtue of purity. Corruption can be utilized by people in power, but also those who are compelling specific actions or material gain.

There is a right to be free from consuming that which robs a person of reason.²⁹⁴ This will cause a person to become heedless and suspicious. Opium is explicitly mentioned²⁹⁵ along with gambling. Reason is a virtue all people have a right to.

14.7.10 Tyranny

Tyranny is the use of power which is cruel, unfair, harsh, or unjust. This can apply in any relationship where there is a power dynamic involved. Every person has a right to be free from tyranny.²⁹⁶

14.7.11 Justice

All people have a right to justice. Justice can include the fair implementation of a legal system by a government, but it can also be a general fairness in how you are treated, especially when compared with others. Rules, regulations, rewards, punishments, and rights are executed in the same manner for one as they are for another.

14.8 The Right to a Skilled Physician

Baha'u'llah says for those who fall ill, skilled physicians should be referred to.²⁹⁷ Every person has a right to a skilled physician who is capable of treating the illness. This does not guarantee any person the best treatment money can buy, but a minimal baseline. This does not guarantee every illness will be cured.

²⁹⁴ Kitab-i-Aqdas 119

²⁹⁵ Kitab-i-Aqdas 155 & 190

²⁹⁶ Kitab-i-Aqdas 70

²⁹⁷ Kitab-i-Aqdas 113

The right is solely for the ability to refer to a skilled physician, not to any particular course of treatment nor to any particular outcome.

For those who have yet reached maturity, this could be considered under the right to provision. If a skilled physician's treatment plan is not followed, it could be considered a denial of provision and an act of oppression.

14.9 The Right to Inheritance

All people have a right to receive any inheritance provided to them through the legal contract of a will and testament.²⁹⁸ This right can not be deprived under any circumstance. If a person has not reached maturity, their inheritance must be protected through a trust. This trust is managed professionally and responsibly until the youth reaches maturity.

14.10 The Right to Worship

All people have a right to worship. They also have a right to be free from being forced to worship, which is an act of oppression. Associated with this right is the right to music and being able to recite the verses of God in a melodious way. The right to music cannot be restricted although it should be governed by the rights afforded to all people. Baha'u'llah warns music should not lead anyone from a path of dignity.

All people have a right to a Mashriq'ul-Adhkar. These are to be built in every village and city. Every child has the right to attend a Mashriq'ul-Adhkar and recite the verses of God therein. They also have the right to be enraptured by the love of God. To deny this right is an act of oppression. To restrict the building of the Mashriq is an act of neglect.

14.11 The Right to Education

Baha'u'llah emphasizes the right to education.²⁹⁹ Education includes at least two languages³⁰⁰ (the primary language of home and a secondary language), science,³⁰¹ arts, crafts,³⁰² and the sacred words of God.³⁰³ This education involves the skills required to learn these subjects, such as reading, writing, arithmetic, and critical thinking. Education involves the virtues and rights enjoined by Baha'u'llah as well as the gradual

²⁹⁸ Kitab-i-Aqdas 20 and 109

²⁹⁹ Kitab-i-Aqdas 48

³⁰⁰ Kitab-i-Aqdas 118

³⁰¹ Kitab-i-Aqdas 77

³⁰² Kitab-i-Aqdas 33

³⁰³ Kitab-i-Aqdas 150

introduction of responsibilities to ensure maturity. Education also includes a variety of methodologies, and in particular, children should have a right to play. All people have a right to education.

As all have a right to be free from oppression, the right to education also includes a right to be free from indoctrination. While being taught all of these subjects, it must be done with fact, balanced opinions, and without any coercion of belief. All rights must be ensured during education.

14.12 Responsibilities

People who have not reached maturity have no responsibility in the command of God, other than what is necessary to mature.

15. From Maturity to Devotion

15.1 The First Responsibility

In the prior chapter we established some basic rights all people have from conception until maturity. In this chapter, we will begin a series of chapters of life once maturity is reached and the devotional identity expected of a Person of Baha. This devotional identity will guide and inform all rights and responsibilities for the remainder of Part 3.

Before explaining what maturity is, I want to introduce what I believe is the first responsibility we have at maturity. Baha'u'llah says "no one should object to those who rule over the people."³⁰⁴ Instead of objecting to rule, we should leave leaders to what they have, such as their power, and focus our attention on the hearts of people. This is also a right. Every person has the right to peacefully be led. They also have the right and responsibility to guide hearts, through their conduct and speech. Every responsibility a person has from maturity must be exercised in a way which does not overstep the bounds of law, no matter where you live. To change or influence law and leadership, the changing of hearts is the core of the devotional identity.

Maturity will be a good way to help understand how to frame this concept.

15.2 What is Maturity?

The Kitab-i-Aqdas mentions maturity twice. The first is when prayer and fasting become obligatory³⁰⁵ and when to receive inheritance.³⁰⁶ On the latter right, Baha'u'llah conditions trusteeship if the descendant is weak instead of being mature. What might weakness be related to?

Weakness is usually associated with physical strength, but strength is not a sole determination of maturity. I believe weakness in this case is associated with two major characteristics. The first would be a person who lacks firmness in character, or maybe someone who is still understanding who they are as a person. The second characteristic would be the inability to function normally or fully. This might be a level of codependency, whether it be financial or emotional, which does not exist when someone is mature.

To support these ideas, we can look further in Baha'u'llah's revelation. In the Lawh-i-Rais (A Tablet to a Chief), Baha'u'llah closes with an instruction for Ali Pasha. He says "Ask God to help you reach maturity so that you become aware of the beauty and ugliness of deeds and actions." To reach maturity, one must understand the consequences of their actions.

³⁰⁴ Kitab-i-Aqdas #95

³⁰⁵ Kitab-i-Aqdas 10

³⁰⁶ Kitab-i-Aqdas 27

Finally, the Kitab-i-Aqdas also conditions marriage upon the consent of both potential spouses. This would be the final qualification for the determination of maturity, the ability to consent.

15.3 The Laws of Maturity and Consent in Nations

With the first responsibility stated earlier, it would be wise to consult the laws of the land you live in. In Persia and the Ottoman Empire of the late 19th century, consent and maturity were determined to be 15 years of age. In the Qajar dynasty, the prerequisite age to be a King was 18 years. While Baha'u'llah never explicitly stated a person needs to reach a prerequisite age to be mature, the Bab established the age of 19.³⁰⁷ Prior to 19, there are 2 other stages of maturation described in BB00083. At age 11, one is to start prayer and fasting. At age 15 is the second stage of maturation, with the completion of reason and moral awareness. Age 19 is the final stage of full spiritual and legal maturity.

Where the laws which have jurisdiction do explicitly say, those laws need to be followed if they are more strict. For example, as of this writing Bahrain's law is age 21 and South Korea is 20. These ages of maturity and consent would need to be followed instead of the 19 prescribed by the Bab.

The Bab provided flexibility. If someone shows capacity for any of these stages, they should not be delayed. For example, if a child wants to pray and fast before age 11, allow them if they have the ability to understand why they are praying and fasting.

There are times when a person suffers from developmental handicaps which prevent their ability to be fully mature. To determine if a person is fully mature at the age 19 threshold requires careful consultation and consideration of certain qualities. These qualities would be financial and emotional independence, firmness in character and identity, and is able to understand the consequences of their actions. Remember, it is the right of every person to mature, but they also have a right to be free from being forced to be mature before they are ready.

15.4 The Devotional Identity of a Mature Adult

Maturity marks the official beginning of the devotional identity of an adult, if they choose to do so. Baha'u'llah says in tablet BH00528:

When man attaineth the age of maturity, he must investigate and, putting his trust in God and sanctified from love and hate, reflect upon that whereunto the people adhere. He must hear with his own ears and see with his own eyes, for if he looketh through the eyes of another, he will be deprived of beholding the effulgent rays of the Sun of Divine Knowledge. Various parties exist in the world, and each hath regarded itself as being in the right, as He, exalted be He, hath said: "Each party rejoiceth in what it possesseth."

³⁰⁷ Arabic Bayan Vahid 10, Gate 14

He goes on to say the “understanding of every soul must.... behold itself independent.”³⁰⁸ This establishes the next set of rights and responsibilities of every person after they reach maturity. We have the right to independently seek truth and the responsibility to be independent as we seek truth. To be a Person of Baha means to actively believe in and see the truth of Baha’u’llah, not to do so blindly. If there is a criticism or argument against Baha’u’llah or the People of Baha, do not turn your back on it. Investigate. Always be diligent in understanding each side of an argument or perspective, much like a judge allowing both a prosecutor and defender in cross examining evidence while presenting their cases. We have the responsibility to do the spiritual work ourselves, not to defer it upon others.

15.5 Right to Belief

Every mature person has a right to believe as they wish, even if Baha’u’llah says this comes with consequences. You may not believe in anything in Part 1 of this book, or maybe have partial belief. You might even believe in Baha’u’llah but are part of an organization which claims infallibility. This is your right. Baha’u’llah says it is the responsibility of every mature adult to reflect on what people adhere, see with your own eyes, and react from there. His hope is to be one with the People of Baha, but this hope comes without coercion.

A person of Baha has the right and responsibility to every spiritual practice described in Part 2, and the right and responsibility to develop their own Unity Constellation of virtues. Those who are not a person of Baha has the right to practice any or all of these practices and develop any or all of those virtues according to their belief. None should ever be deprived, no matter who they are.

15.6 Spiritual Accountability

There are various guidelines in the Kitab-i-Aqdas which focus on aspects of spiritual accountability. I will provide a list of these without added explanation.

1. A responsibility not to destroy what God has built.³⁰⁹ A right to what God has built and created.
2. A responsibility not to oppose or object to Baha’u’llah.³¹⁰ A right to support Baha’u’llah and His Cause.
3. A responsibility not to hesitate in following Baha’u’llah’s command.³¹¹ A right to trust in and act sincerely in implementing the Kitab-i-Aqdas and related commands.

³⁰⁸ BH00601

³⁰⁹ Kitab-i-Aqdas 73

³¹⁰ Kitab-i-Aqdas 141 & 162

³¹¹ Kitab-i-Aqdas 132, 162, & 182

4. A responsibility not to question Baha'u'llah's actions.³¹² A right to believe Baha'u'llah's actions reflect the Will of God, who represents all names to include Most Subtle.
 5. A responsibility not to corrupt the Cause of God.³¹³ A right to allow the Cause of God to reform the Earth.
 6. A responsibility not to measure the Book of God by your own desires.³¹⁴ A right to measure your desires according to the Book of God.
 7. A responsibility not to object to the fragrance of God, which is His love.³¹⁵ A right to receive God's love.
 8. A responsibility not to withhold yourself from the bounties and grace of God.³¹⁶ A right receiving the bounties and grace of God.
 9. A responsibility not to deny what God has permitted.³¹⁷ A right to be free from the tyranny of those who deny what God has permitted or allow which God has forbade.
 10. A responsibility to raise up the Sacred Houses and the places whereupon the Throne of the Lord (wherever the Bab and Baha'u'llah had lived and possibly imprisoned).³¹⁸ A right to raise up and access the Sacred Houses and Thrones of the Lord.
 11. A responsibility to ask about the Cause of God and what your souls need.³¹⁹ A right to be able to ask about the Cause of God and what your souls need.
 12. A responsibility to never deviate from a verses outward meaning.³²⁰ A right to interpret the outward meaning according to its explicit intent. A right to interpret inward meanings without
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³¹² Kitab-i-Aqdas 7, 49, & 126

³¹³ Kitab-i-Aqdas 64 & 165

³¹⁴ Kitab-i-Aqdas 165

³¹⁵ Kitab-i-Aqdas 179

³¹⁶ Kitab-i-Aqdas 179

³¹⁷ Kitab-i-Aqdas 36

³¹⁸ Kitab-i-Aqdas 133

³¹⁹ Kitab-i-Aqdas 126

³²⁰ Kitab-i-Aqdas 105

restriction. There is also a responsibility to interpret both the inward and outward meanings.³²¹ This is a right of every mature person.

15.7 The Right to Spiritual Maturity

The writings of Baha'u'llah often refer to another kind of maturity, spiritual maturity. Even if you have reached maturity in the traditional sense, it does not mean you have reached spiritual maturity. To help describe what spiritual maturity is, Baha'u'llah does use the traditional descriptions of maturity as symbols for the spiritual side.

The Kitab-i-Badi is the largest single book by Baha'u'llah, written in response to questions from a man who followed Mirza Yahya, denying belief in Baha'u'llah as a Manifestation of God. This section will not go into a discussion of Mirza Yahya (see Chapter [unspecified yet]. A significant portion of this book discusses the conditions and reasons for lack of belief in individuals, especially those who are led by those who claim belief in God yet are spiritually corrupt.

The first right of spiritual maturity is for a spiritual infant to be from receiving the knowledge of spiritual maturity. There is a corresponding responsibility for a teacher or other person to only give the knowledge of spiritual maturity to those who are capable and ready. This requires a high level for discernment. The Kitab-i-Badi says "most today are considered infants before God." Part of this lack of maturity is due to their constellation of virtues are not valued, such as the virtue of heedfulness. A sign of maturation is belief in the Manifestation of God.

The Kitab-i-Iqan discusses extensively why people lack this development. Baha'u'llah places considerable blame on religious leaders and institutions who inhibit spiritual maturity. They do this by distorting the Words of God by changing meanings, saying God said things God did not, or by interpreting verses against their explicit intent. These distortions introduce new doctrines, traditions, superstitions, and laws which God had not intended. A spiritually immature person struggles to understand what God actually wants in their life, such as these rights and responsibilities being discussed. The weak and immature are easily led astray by others who fabricate such distortions.³²²

The rights and responsibilities of spiritual accountability from the Kitab-i-Aqdas is the foundation to spiritual maturity. Even if you do not believe in Baha'u'llah, these principles are incredibly vital to your spiritual health. I personally believe if any person who is part of any religion is able to see what is from God (the source), they have a great chance to reach spiritual maturity. What I mean is if a Christian were to focus on the actual teachings and example of Jesus Christ as the primary source of their religious practice and understanding, while choosing to use all other sources such as the teachings of Saint Paul or their local pastor as secondary, they may have a great opportunity to mature in their God consciousness. "Today, knowledge and ignorance, high and low, nearness and distance, truth and falsehood, life and

³²¹ The Tafsir of the Surah of the Sun

³²² Lawh-i-Sirraj

death, maturity and infancy, wisdom and heedlessness, are all distinguished by the confirmation of the manifestation.”³²³ With this said, I do believe in what the Kitab-i-Aqdas says in its opening in believing in the Manifestation of God in this age. God says this is the source of all spiritual maturity.

The next right is to be allowed to attain the station of spiritual maturity. Each person has a responsibility to attain spiritual maturity and each person has a responsibility to allow others the ability to reach spiritual maturity, according to their capacities. Baha’u’llah says the children of the age must be nurtured with milk that is delicate and subtle until they attain maturity.³²⁴ An associated responsibility is for a person to no longer be moved by desires and illusions.³²⁵

15.8 Responsibilities of Spiritual Maturity

There are two important responsibilities for a person who has attained spiritual maturity. These responsibilities do not come with associated rights. The first responsibility of spiritual maturity is to never exceed your station.³²⁶ Baha’u’llah says a person can do this by purifying your soul from the world, not speaking of what you do not know, and refraining from mentioning what you do not understand. It is acceptable not to know everything. It is also acceptable to stay away from being placed on a pedestal. It would be worst if you placed yourself, or allowed others to place you in a position which replaces the Manifestation of God.

The next responsibility for a spiritually mature person is to convey God’s Cause.³²⁷ This responsibility is reserved only for the spiritually mature. A person who does not place the Manifestation of God as the primary source of God’s Will is unable to convey God’s Cause. They will distort God’s Cause. The purpose of conveying God’s Cause is for others to reach spiritual maturity. Spiritual maturity is the station where the soul has reached liberation. The liberation of the soul is a right afforded to all people.

This is the day that the Most Great Spirit foretold and proclaimed in the wilderness of yearning by His name. Those who drink of the wine must act with wisdom, engage in the proclamation of the Cause, and, in all matters, cling to the cord of consultation and hold fast to the hem of compassion, so that the children of the age may attain maturity through the kindness and mercy of the divine sages and be nourished in complete health.³²⁸

³²³ Kitab-i-Badi

³²⁴ BH00302

³²⁵ Words of Paradise

³²⁶ Kitab-i-Badi

³²⁷ BH00035

³²⁸ BH00123

15.9 The Bayanic Calendar's Rhythm of Maturity

The numbers 11, 15, and 19 are not arbitrary. They correspond to the months *Masá'il* (Questions), *Sultán* (Sovereignty), and *'Alá* (Loftiness) in the Bayáníc calendar. This is the divine rhythm by which the world itself matures. Thus, even time testifies that the awakening of awareness, the assumption of will, and the perfection of trust are one continuous act of God's creation. By the time a person turns 19, they would have completed 19 cycles of 19 months, a complete Vahid of life. This is the essence of unity.

16. The Private Self

This chapter will discuss the rights and responsibilities of a person when they have privacy. The Kitab-i-Aqdas does not explicitly describe a right to privacy, but it is heavily implied. The soul itself seems hidden within the flesh, its qualities not always obvious. The practices to refine this hidden entity are primarily private practices. We pray at home and in the hidden chambers of the Mashriq'ul-Adhkar. Our remembrance can occur in public, but in a way which is not meant to be seen except for the Mashriq'ul-Adhkar.

These are the times when no one knows their actions except for themselves and God. The private self could also be the thoughts and feelings which we do not freely show to others. What we think, feel, and do in private directly influences how our public self interacts in the communities near to us, public social media, or anonymous online spaces where the private and public self are merged closely together. Even when we are in public, we maintain the right to privacy. These rights from before you were mature still apply, as do the rights and responsibilities from the prior chapter. These rights and responsibilities of the private self help develop a robust psycho-spiritual framework for the liberation of the soul.

16.1 Responsibilities Associated With Premature Rights

With becoming mature, there are some responsibilities a person will carry into their private life. The associated rights were described earlier in Chapter 14's From Birth to Maturity. I will list these in this section, and as this chapter unfolds, some of these will be more fully discussed.

1. The responsibility of life
2. The responsibility of identity
3. The responsibility of purity
4. The responsibility of a dignified appearance
5. The responsibility of love and kindness
6. The responsibility to not oppress, to include lewdness, pederasty, physical harm, emotional harm, provision, hatred, corruption, tyranny, and justice.
7. The responsibility to have a skilled physician
8. The responsibility to education

16.2 The Right and Responsibility to Be Free From Illusions

Baha'u'llah discusses the need to be free from illusions. This is one of the most repeated commandments throughout His writings. In the Kitab-i-Aqdas, the warning exists in verses 17, 35, 37, 41, and 167. Illusions are deceptions. They alter our sense of reality and can erroneously shape our beliefs, feelings, thoughts, and actions. Illusions can also interfere with our faith. If God is the source of all creation, anything else we

find more important or influential than God might end up shaping our illusions. There are illusions which are unintentional, some which are intentional, some created for us by others, and some created by ourselves.

The Kitab-i-Aqdas describes illusions as idols of our desires.³²⁹ One cause of illusions are conjectures, which are opinions and conclusions made by inference, without evidence. We are certain this conjecture is true, even if it is not. Conjecture can take many forms. There could be superstitions passed on from prior generations, or even fictional stories of old treated as truth of today. Conjecture could be saying that God wants us to do something, but there is no evidence of this in any Scripture. Conjecture could be treating traditions and religious jurisprudence as revelation. Other forms of conjecture could be entertainment shows acting as fact-based news, political discussions that exclude legislation or voting records of representatives, conspiracy theories, gossip, or things we create within our own imaginations. We have a right to be free from the illusions of others, with a responsibility to discern what is evidence and what is not. We have a responsibility not to consume media which create these illusions. If we consider our constellation of virtues, conjecture hides reason. What is more damaging is feeling joy or happiness from such illusions. What if we create illusions about a loved one which negatively effects how we perceive that love?

What we create illusions within our own imaginations, it can be quite devastating for us spiritually, emotionally, and psychologically. Psychologically there are many disorders where illusions alter the sense of reality when compared to a more rational person. Suspicions³³⁰ are one way illusions effect how we approach truth, especially if it reaches to a level of paranoia. This means we have a right to be free from illusions including a right for us to be free from illusions we create for ourselves. We have a responsibility to be free from illusions we create for ourselves, even if such illusions are derived from past traumas or other false narratives. Illusions such as "I am unworthy of love," "I am always a victim," or "I deserve shame and humiliation" are incredible obstacles on our spiritual journey and life in this world. They violate our right to kindness, where we have a responsibility to be kind to ourselves. If such illusions interfere with your right to identity or other rights, remember you also have a right and responsibility to seek skilled physicians. The spiritual practices from Part 2 are also a vital pathway to burning away such illusions, which are considered veils between you and God.

16.3 The Right and Responsibility To Not Be Wretched

The Kitab-i-Aqdas tells us not to follow a wretched one.³³¹ A wretched person is miserable, has a poor character, or maybe is regularly claiming distress or misfortune. When we are discerning what is true or real, we should also try to discern if we are allowing a wretched person create illusions, such as the ones

³²⁹ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse 41

³³⁰ Lawh-i-Dunya (Tablet of the World)

³³¹ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse 70

described in the earlier section. We have a right and responsibility to never follow a wretched person, even if this person claims to be an authority in the subject they discuss. Is the talk show host miserable? Is this friend focused on all the things which are wrong in their life, without showing gratitude? When we are alone or having private thoughts, what type of person has influenced this precious time and mental resources?

We also have the right and responsibility to now be wretched ourselves. It would be a clear injustice if we are privately miserable but act with charisma to gain influence or followers. What if we look in the mirror and focus on changing our outer appearance with cosmetic surgery? This is not true to our identity and is a manipulative illusion. We must be careful to find pathways to avoid wretchedness in private so we do not create woe elsewhere.

16.4 The Right and Responsibility To Not Be a Tyrant

The same verse of the Kitab-i-Aqdas tells us not to follow a tyrant. This also means we also have a right and a responsibility not to be a tyrant. A tyrant is someone who is cruel, harsh, and applies rules more strictly for others than themselves. This starts in private just as wretchedness does. What if we create an illusion a person does not deserve a right merely because of another illusion such as race? This betrays the very Cause of God. Imagining any person can be deprived of rights you want to keep is tyranny, even if you do not have the power to act on it. Baha'u'llah says "Do not be preoccupied with yourself,³³² be in the thought of improving the world and refining nations." He further adds to "desire not for anyone what you would not desire for yourselves."³³³ Any thought or feeling which interferes with this responsibility is an illusion.

Sometimes illusions which cause tyranny are unintentional. Other times they can be intentional. Illusions which are not conjecture-based are delusions. A delusion is a purposeful deception. It can cause a false belief or even interfere with the hopes and plans of yourself or another. Baha'u'llah says it is important for scholars³³⁴ and sovereign leaders³³⁵ to stop being the source of delusions. However, this is not limited to scholars and sovereign leaders. The virtue of trustworthiness requires all of us to be free of delusions. We have a right and responsibility to avoid the delusions of others, and the right and responsibility to never be the source of delusions. Baha'u'llah says to break the chains of delusions in the name of the Lord of all mankind.³³⁶

³³² Lawh-i-Dunya (Tablet of the World)

³³³ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse 148

³³⁴ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse 165

³³⁵ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse 184

³³⁶ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse 165

16.5 Break the Boundaries of Self and Desire

Earlier in the chapter we shared Baha'u'llah's teaching how illusions are the idols of desires. Idols are often considered as objects worshiped as a false god, such as the golden calf created by the Hebrews while Moses was on a sojourn with God. Idols can also be things which are excessively adored to the point of being the primary driver of thoughts, feelings, and belief. Ultimately, all idols detract from God or in developing a personal relationship with all the names of God.

Like delusions, we are to break the boundaries of self and desire.³³⁷ If the command of God is the true boundary, self and desire are more restrictive boundaries. We have a right to break through them to attain the actual boundaries, which are represented by the Sidrat-ul-Muntaha, the boundary of the furthest horizon. No one has a right to keep you bounded by self and desire, nor do they have a right to shape them for you. On the other hand, we each have a responsibility to ourselves to put forth the effort to be free of self and desire. Self and desire is a source of division among people.³³⁸ Division and unity start with who we are in private.

16.6 The Self

The American Psychological Association dictionary, dated November 2023, says the self is the totality of the individual, consisting of all characteristic attributes, conscious and unconscious, mental and physical. Baha'u'llah wants us to break the boundaries of our characteristic attributes.

This can include personality traits such as being introvert or extrovert, your placement on a personality profile like a Jung typology, a zodiac profile, or even something simple as saying you are a happy person. These are habitual ways of how we shape our identity. These habits could vary between our private self and the adapted social self, or they can remain consistent in both settings. To break a boundary of self, we must be willing to break these habits which do not benefit our soul or the souls of others.

Cognitive attributes can be part of the characteristic attributes of self, such as our typical styles of thinking. This can include our styles of logic, inference, intuition, or how we see the strategic versus the tactical. To break the boundary of self, we must be willing to break our style of thinking.

Our emotional disposition such as baseline moods and tendencies help shape the self. Optimism and pessimism, stability and instability, and empathetic and narcissism are all various emotional conditions which have a full spectrum of unique expression. They shape our responses to relationships, stress, important events, and the unpredictable nature of life. To break the boundary of self, we must be willing to break the base emotions which guide our soul.

Values, morals, and ethical commitments shape are a part of our characteristic attributes. These can be influenced by philosophies, politics, cultural values, other religions, or even unique family situations. They

³³⁷ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse 2

³³⁸ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse 58

shape deep-seated goals, desires, and meanings. They shape our normative self, the person who we hope to be and the person who we hope to present to others. To break the boundary of self, we must be willing to break these values, morals, and ethical commitments.

Our physical characteristics are a part of our self. This can include observable characteristics such as our body composition, shape, height, skin and hair color, gender, or even how the parts of the body function. Less visible features such as chronic conditions and genetic profiles shape our experiences. To break the boundary of self, we must be willing to view the body as a temporary vessel for the soul, like discussed in Chapter 2.

Our social and relational attributes also comprise our characteristics of self. This can include interaction patterns such as dominance or submissiveness, giving or receiving, apathy or caring, or even cooperative or disruptive. These attributes also include the roles we serve or identify with. Being a parent, leader, teacher, artist, athlete, or inclusion in groups such as religious membership, clubs, corporations, or NGOs become a part of our self-perception. To break the boundary of self, we must be willing to break the boundaries of social and relational attributes.

16.7 Desires

Desires are a subject Baha'u'llah was deeply concerned about in the Kitab-i-Aqdas. The idea of desires interfering in the spiritual and social pathways are everywhere. Desires themselves are not prohibited, but their expression must be in a way which does not interfere with your spiritual journey nor with the spiritual journey of others. Desires which inhibit these things start with our private self and can become intentional and unintentional illusions of self. The Kitab-i-Aqdas has at least 17 different types of desires we are responsible for controlling. The next section will discuss these according to theme.

16.7.1 Desires of Status

Desires of status include a few aspects. The first would be in our station,³³⁹ meaning the position or status we hold within this world. How highly do we desire to be exalted? How special do we see ourselves when we consider our ambitions or look in the mirror? We have a responsibility to never exceed our stations, with an explicit prohibition on believing we can take the place of God in essence, quality, attributes, functions, or status. We also have a responsibility to be aware we are created from the same dust.³⁴⁰

We also have a responsibility in our desire of might.³⁴¹ What is the purpose in wanting power over another? Is it to dominate or is it to protect those who are vulnerable? Baha'u'llah warns leaders such as Napoleon the most mighty rulers on Earth have passed on, losing their entire kingdoms in an instant. Those kingdoms are God's, even when God allows a person to have sovereignty. This might is not limited

³³⁹ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse 86 & 170

³⁴⁰ Hidden Words of Arabic #68

³⁴¹ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse 86

to the rule of nations, though. There are power dynamics in families, business, councils, schools, and at local levels of government. Desiring might in any of these settings must be tempered with a desire to reflect other names of God. No matter if our kingdom is great or small, we have a responsibility in desiring them only if we desire to serve God.³⁴²

One way we often demonstrate our status is through our wealth, or obvious presentation of wealth. Baha'u'llah warns us in desiring the treasures of the world.³⁴³ We have a responsibility to earn and have some wealth, but we cannot deprive others of wealth in the process. Like sovereignty, the treasures you possess will be possessed by others when you pass from this world. We also have a responsibility in how we present our outward adornment,³⁴⁴ which can be fine clothing, jewelry, luxury goods, lavish homes, and other symbols. We have a right and responsibility to be refined in appearance, but not to be lavish.

One final way we express the desire of wealth status is through inheritance. When we consider what we have and what we might leave behind, how do we consider others? We have a right to inherit³⁴⁵ and a responsibility to give inheritance. Baha'u'llah describes in great detail to whom, without any prerequisites. For example, a descendant is always a descendant. We do not have a right to alter their station, even if our desires for our descendants do not align with their desires. A will is the final way to express one's desires and is a legacy we choose to leave behind. They can alter the entire course of families and others who fulfill the station of kin.

All of these desires of status can serve as illusions if we shape our identity by our status, might, and wealth. We have a right to desire status, might, and wealth, but being detached from them when we shape our identity helps ensure we keep God exalted and others as our equal.

16.7.2 Desires of Knowledge

There are three types of desires regarding knowledge we have a responsibility for. Baha'u'llah does not want us to be proud in our knowledge.³⁴⁶ This can be derived in our desire of status, to be known as always right. This can also be derived from a fear of being wrong. When we desire to be considered the source of knowledge, we stop being open to learning the mysteries and sciences of the world. We have a right to knowledge, and a responsibility to always be open to receiving knowledge.

Our knowledge helps shape how we respond within creation, especially our beliefs. When we are exercising our right to knowledge, we have the responsibility in prioritizing our sources. No source is

³⁴² Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse 83

³⁴³ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse 39

³⁴⁴ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse 89

³⁴⁵ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse 29

³⁴⁶ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse 41

forbidden. Yet, Baha'u'llah does challenge us by asking which Qiblah will we turn towards?³⁴⁷ Whichever source is our most adored source also becomes our source of belief and religion. Our responsibility is to ensure God and the Manifestation of God is our point of adoration for knowledge. To desire other sources more, we may struggle in our liberation of the soul.

One source of knowledge often attributed is the one called luck or chance. Even when we have knowledge of what likely outcomes are, we have a desire to beat those odds. Pride or desperation can motivate these actions, even when they are hidden. Baha'u'llah addresses this with a clear prohibition against gambling. We have no right to gambling and a responsibility to refrain. Gambling is often associated with games of chance whose goal is financial gain. Gambling is any action where we purposefully take on high probability of risk for the low possibility of reward. This can include games, but it can also include many other aspects of life. The desire for gambling stems from the idea we have a secret knowledge which can beat those odds. The desire also replaces putting forth the effort to take actions with lower risk and better possibilities of long-term reward.

These desires of pride in your knowledge, adoration in sources other than God, and gambling against known odds can all create illusions which keep us from learning what we need to know and applying it in responsible ways. When we are in private, do we feel there is knowledge to gain? When we are given knowledge, do we say outwardly we know but privately we are dismissing it because it is not our most trusted source? What are we willing to risk just to prove we are right or capable? These are all the types of questions the spiritual practices help answer, especially with self-reflection. They also help ensure our knowledge do not lead to harmful delusions which lead us and others astray.

16.7.3 Desires of Self-Interest

The Kitab-i-Aqdas describes how we should view ourselves as the fingers of one hand and the limbs of one body.³⁴⁸ This perspective starts in private. We have a right to self-interest, but there is a responsibility to the interests of those near to you. Mutual well-being requires a mutually shared interest in each other's goals, dreams, aspirations, and health.

Baha'u'llah says the affairs of self and desires can cause division. Some of these aspects have already been discussed earlier in this chapter. In addition to those ways, the desires of self-interest can also manifest in many other ways.

We might get caught up in the shame or guilt of past shortfalls. Our desires cause us to hold onto that pain and possibly over-correct into ways which create new shortfalls. A healthy practice of reflection, remembrance, and repentance can keep the desire to be pure from becoming a disillusioned fanatic.

We might get caught up in our careers or personal achievements, constantly planning what the next step is while overlooking friends, neighbors, coworkers, and others connected to us. These desires of self-

³⁴⁷ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse 137

³⁴⁸ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse 58

interest can also make us hunger for affirmation and other forms of praise, while privately we lack sincerity. For example, in private do we avoid prayer but desire to be seen as pious and righteous? Do we desire the other fingers of the hand to only serve one finger, with a desire to possess or control that which those fingers have? This can create desires of conformity instead of a unity through diversity.

Baha'u'llah says we should not desire for others what we would not desire for yourself.³⁴⁹ This is a great expression of the Golden Rule. We have a right to desire something for ourselves, but we have a responsibility to desire the similar thing for others. This is not a desire of sameness or conformity. For example, you might desire to be the CEO of a company. This does not mean you desire others to be the CEO of a company. Not everyone can be a CEO. But, another might desire to be an effective history teacher. These are not uniform goals. Yet, the potential CEO can still desire the fulfillment of the prospective teacher's professional goals and vice versa. Each person has their own path and their own desires we need to respect, honor, and desire as our own.

To close this section on self-interest, we have a right to be free from hatred and a responsibility to never hold hatred within us.³⁵⁰ The desires of hatred cause the beings of the spiritual worlds, the concourse on high, to lament, which is to express deep sorrow, anguish, and regret. The love of self should never cause the hatred of another. There is absolutely no reason to ever hate another. The desires of self-interest can create powerful illusions which when held within us, can destroy that which God desires.

16.7.4 Desires of the Body

The final section about desire will discuss the desires of the body. Baha'u'llah expresses specific commands regarding food and drink,³⁵¹ drugs such as opium,³⁵² and certain aspects regarding sex and sexuality. With food and drink, we should be mindful of our desires during fasting. Baha'u'llah goes into more detail regarding our responsibilities with food in the Tablet of Medicine. The first guidance in this tablet regards food. If food is medicine, our desires are associated with medicine and health. As we have a right to skilled physicians, we also have a right to health when physicians are not present. Some of the associated responsibilities which help temper desires are:

1. Do not eat except when hungry
 2. Do not drink except when thirsty
 3. Eat only after digestion
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³⁴⁹ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse 148

³⁵⁰ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse 89

³⁵¹ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse 17

³⁵² Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse 155

4. Swallow only after thorough chewing
5. Use foods to initially treat ailments
6. Do not mix opposites at the table. Begin with soft before hard, and liquid before solid.
7. Walk a little after eating
8. Avoid foods which are hard to chew
9. Eat only a little in the morning
10. Being excessive in eating aggravates illnesses

These guidances help temper the common desires associated with food so we do not eat excessively, nor eat foods which can cause us to become ill. Sometimes the desire of food makes us eat too quickly, or mix foods together to make eating more efficient. We have a right to be free from eating when we are not hungry, or even eating foods which harm us.

We also have a responsibility not to deprive ourselves of certain kinds of food as an ascetic practice, such as meats.³⁵³ Our desire to seem pious does not give a right to prohibit what God allows for others. Our desires for ourselves cannot be desires imposed onto others, even with food and drink.

We have a right to be free from opium and from consuming anything which robs us of reason. Our responsibility is to be free from the desires associated with their temporary benefits. We may desire to be free from pain, so we may consume a drug. The pain could be from the body, or it could be from the heart. We may have a desire to express a different personality, so we seek alcohol or a stimulant. We may desire a powerful spiritual experience without putting forth the effort, so we take a psychedelic. All of these items are like forms of gambling, where there is considerable risk for an immediate reward. The immediate reward is an illusion and could potentially lead to delusions.

The final desire for this chapter will be regarding sexual intercourse and associated desires. This was saved for last as this tends to be the most influential desire and interlinks with all other desires in some way or another. The Kitab-i-Aqdas mentions a few items regarding the desires of sex. We have responsibilities not to desire sex with children,³⁵⁴ nor with our parents and step-parents.³⁵⁵ Children have a right to be free from being desired sexually, even to be considered for engagement into marriage which is basically a promise of future sexual desire being expressed. Sex with another's spouse (adultery) is also

³⁵³ Suriy-i-Haykal

³⁵⁴ Kitab-i-Aqdas 107

³⁵⁵ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse 107

prohibited.³⁵⁶ This also means a married person is a right to be free from the desire of another person who is not their spouse.

We are also warned about allowing certain music and melodies³⁵⁷ causing desire. There is a right to music and melodies, but a responsibility to be virtuous in its use.

The Kitab-i-Aqdas also describes other sexual themes which are born from desires. Lewdness, oppression, corruption, tyranny, and physical and emotional harm can all be associated with sexual desire. Is it possible to sexually desire someone in a way which is not lewd, oppressive, corrupt, tyrannical, nor harmful? I would say yes, if we allow the other desires to also be managed. For example, some people seek power merely so they can have access to more sexual partners. Yet, coercive sexual desires are tyrannical. Some might seek wealth to purchase a comfortable life in exchange for sex. Even desiring marriage solely for a lawful sexual outlet can be a burden, when Baha'u'llah describes the purpose of marriage is tranquility and the creation of a life who knows God. The creation of life does include sex, but the purpose is not sex in itself.

Many consider sexuality to be a core part of their identity, which could be the biggest illusion for a soul to face. Sex is a phenomena which exists only with the body. When the body perishes, so to does the ability and desire for sex. If we allow sexual identity of any kind to shape our sense of self, consume our private thoughts and emotions, we end up trapping our soul in a prison which is difficult to escape from. When all the desires mentioned in this chapter exist to serve the sexual identity, the soul and associated psychology will suffer. Remembering the nature of the soul and its purpose is vital to being free from the illusions of the body and the self.

16.8 The Power of Moderation

This chapter might seem as though all desire is harmful. It is not. Remember the foundational virtues of Chapter 7. We have the innate virtues of piety, pure truthfulness, courtesy, loyalty, and trustworthiness. These can inform how we navigate our desires. For example with our sexual desires, can they be rooted in the innate virtues? They can be if we are immersed within them. These innate virtues can govern every single desire we feel so they can be desired in a healthy way.

Chapter 7 also described moderation, with the fear and love of God being the ultimate guiding principles of moderation. Moderation can take many forms when it comes to understanding the self. For example, where there is a desire for affirmation might also come with a fear of rejection. Every desire has an opposing fear. When our spiritual perspective is to fear God, we may learn not to fear these other illusions such as rejection. Without the fear of rejection, our desire for affirmation might moderate and take a healthier perspective. When our spiritual perspective is to love God, we may express the desire in a way which loves creation or even those we desire.

³⁵⁶ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse 19

³⁵⁷ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse 51

Moderation is the ultimate guide to ensuring our desires conform to the desires of God. Moderation is the fire which burns away the veils of illusions. Moderation is the pathway to guiding our self to be aligned with the divine Self.

16.9 Freedom

To conclude the discussion about the private self, there is one more desire I want to close with. Baha'u'llah warns in desiring freedom and taking pride in it.³⁵⁸ We each have a right to freedom, where true freedom is following God's commands through Baha'u'llah. Our private actions, thoughts, and feelings require freedom. Freedom is part of the human experience. For the soul to be liberated and free, our private self must desire the freedom of those in our spiritual journey. All of the illusions we create imprison the soul. Even private illusions can imprison the souls of others who care about our souls.

The next chapter will move on to those other souls. We will move past illusions and desires and cover actual actions we can take with others to govern this freedom. Can the fingers of each hand reach towards heaven together? They can with our rights and responsibilities of the private self being our true boundary.

³⁵⁸ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse 122

17. The Constructive Social Life

The next two chapters will move from the private self to the social life. This will focus on interactions with all people, regardless of their status in your life. This chapter will discuss the constructive social life which is framed as the Cause of God. These are a framework of positive actions designed to be the foundations and instruments of change within our communities.

Throughout the book, there have been allusions to our responsibilities towards others. The names of God shed light on the potential perspectives we can strive to. The soul and human station teaches us the special and noble character all people are capable of. The spiritual worlds allows us to creatively imagine the unique journeys all will take. The urgency of the Day of Resurrection ensures we act with the best interest of all. The command through the Manifestation of God inspires us with what is best in a world which sorely needs our best. The spiritual practices refine our constellation of virtues so we are increasingly an example to whomever we cross paths with. We established foundational rights all people deserve, regardless of any status. We also ensured we are aware of responsibilities of maturity while burning the veils of illusions and desires we have privately held.

All of the prior rights and responsibilities expressed so far in Part 3 still apply in this chapter. What follows builds upon this foundation.

17.1 The Cause of God

Throughout the book, we have several times mentioned the Cause of God in association to Huquq'u'llah, reflection, and even the spiritual worlds. My personal opinion is the Cause of God fully manifests itself in the constructive social life of a person, where we go beyond the individual and consider the community. To lead this concept, Kitab-i-Aqdas #58 presents a great framework to express the Cause of God and how to view community.

Beware lest the affairs of the self and desire cause division among you. Be like the fingers of one hand and the limbs of one body. Thus does the Pen of Revelation counsel you, if you are of those who believe with certainty.

#58 largely explains itself, but I do want to add the extra visual. What happens when a finger is injured, weak, or severed? The hand might still function but not as effectively as before. The same is true about the limbs of a body. It means we must make utmost care to ensure each aspect is strong, healthy, and purposeful in function. To do this, Baha'u'llah offers various guidance associated with the Cause of God.

All believers have the responsibility to exalt God's Word.³⁵⁹ This also places other words from other sources as secondary. This does not mean to exclude other words, but by keeping God's Word in its rightful station, all fingers can be mindful of what the Cause is. All people have a right to know what the Cause of God is and to know God's Word as exalted, even if they do not believe it. They deserve the

³⁵⁹ Kitab-i-Aqdas #38

opportunity to know. To clarify what God's Word is, Baha'u'llah says to use this Book only³⁶⁰ as prior scripture avails nothing today. While we acknowledge the truth of scriptures past, we must be completely understand they are relevant today as historical context, not sources of God's living will. This will remain true until the next Manifestation of God appears when the Kitab-i-Aqdas is replaced by a new Book.

We have responsibilities to associate³⁶¹ and consort³⁶² with the followers of other religions in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship. The followers of other religions have a right to be associated with, without being excluded nor shunned on the basis of belief. This allows us to proclaim³⁶³ and assist³⁶⁴ the Cause in a positive and healthy way. To help with proclamation, Baha'u'llah also advises us to learn different languages³⁶⁵ so we can communicate with different people. This is not a requirement, though. We should serve the Cause in all conditions.³⁶⁶ We are promised God strengthens us and He is with us and will aid us. With this promise, there is no need to hesitate in serving this Cause³⁶⁷ or to let disbelievers' sorrow to overcome us.³⁶⁸ With God's Word being exalted, there is no reason to dispute about God and His Cause³⁶⁹ even if there are interpretive differences and various understandings. We have right to be free from disputes about God and His Cause. The fear of God will help to keep veils away³⁷⁰ which can lead to disputes, much like they helped with the prior chapter's illusions and desires. God's love burns away those veils, a love which is the foundation of the friendliness and fellowship to show others.

We have a responsibility to support His chosen ones.³⁷¹ Throughout the revelation, Baha'u'llah refers to Manifestations of God as Chosen, but He also refers to others as chosen. Baha'u'llah in the Kitab-i-Badi offers an allegory of who chosen ones are. Those who rejected the idol of the golden calf, an illusion to

³⁶⁰ Kitab-i-Aqdas #168

³⁶¹ Kitab-i-Aqdas #75

³⁶² Kitab-i-Aqdas #144

³⁶³ Kitab-i-Aqdas #75

³⁶⁴ Kitab-i-Aqdas #38

³⁶⁵ Kitab-i-Aqdas #118

³⁶⁶ Kitab-i-Aqdas #74

³⁶⁷ Kitab-i-Aqdas #132

³⁶⁸ Kitab-i-Aqdas #35

³⁶⁹ Kitab-i-Aqdas #177

³⁷⁰ Kitab-i-Aqdas #132

³⁷¹ Kitab-i-Aqdas #117

the days of Moses, were chosen. Much like how the Hebrew people who believed in God and Moses were the Chosen Ones of God in those early days of Israel, Baha'u'llah affirms this criteria for today. In the Surah of the Temple, he says these chosen ones end up in God's Kingdom. In the Kitab-i-Aqdas, He says these chosen ones elevate His Word (exalting) and are the stars of heaven. To support one of these people could be in a variety of ways. It could be through prayer, financial assistance, giving food and other provisions, printing a book, or other logistical need. We have a responsibility to support them. Baha'u'llah regularly used Huquq'u'llah to support His chosen ones. We must be careful, though, from promoting ourselves as chosen.

For example, I have no right to claim I am chosen by God or Baha'u'llah. But, maybe we observe someone who exalts God's Word, is friendly and kind to people of varying religions, is learning languages to travel to a new land to proclaim the Cause, and exemplify this other criteria. We have a responsibility to support them. My personal belief is any person who says they are chosen by God or Baha'u'llah most likely is exalting themselves and should be approached cautiously. Now if a community feels I am chosen, they have every right to support me. Even then, all chosen ones are still fingers of the hand and limbs of the body. Never should we exalt anyone chosen, just merely support them in the Cause and the Cause only.

17.1.1 Community Building

Another purpose with the Cause of God is to ensure the development of our communities. The only guaranteed method of socioeconomic development which lifts up all fingers of a hand is through working together with shared or complimentary goals and roles. Baha'u'llah ties development as a responsibility for everyone.

Baha'u'llah says to build up the cities and lands of God³⁷² then remember Him within them. This building up includes not only specific buildings of faith, but also the infrastructure to support the entire Cause. In the chapter "Honoring God" we learned how having an occupation is a requirement for those who are able to. Each business and supporting jobs must have their buildings, markets, and networks such as communications and transportation. Infrastructure must exist to support the right to provision, even if provision is governed by market pricing. This provision as stated in Chapter 14.7 includes environmental necessities. Every person has a right to socioeconomic development, and it is a responsibility of all believers. Other infrastructure would be focused on what is needed to fulfill the full spectrum of rights afforded to all.

Outside of the business sphere, we are also to build your own houses (dwellings) as perfectly as possible in the lands.³⁷³ This would include the outside and the inside such as furnishings. This interplays highly with the constellation of virtues, and like all of our rights, we must be mindful in how we express them. A house must not need to be extravagant to be as perfect as possible, but within the means you have, keep

³⁷² Kitab-i-Aqdas #160

³⁷³ Kitab-i-Aqdas #31

it as perfect as possible. Baha'u'llah also tells us to renew our furnishings after the passing of nineteen years.³⁷⁴ All people have a right to secure dignified housing.

On the religious side, the command to build Mashriq-ul-Adhkars in every city and village is a key component of the socioeconomic development of the lands. It is the right of every person to have access to one, even if they do not have a responsibility to enter if they have different religious practices. As every person has a right to belief, there should be no restrictions in allowing the people of other religions from building whatever places of worship and faith. Remember we are to be friendly and offer fellowship. Yet, all believers of Baha'u'llah have a responsibility to build Mashriq-ul-Adhkars.

The final aspect of the socioeconomic development of the lands are to build Houses of Justice in every city³⁷⁵ when believing individuals reach 9 or more. The Houses of Justice have clearly defined roles, functions, and funding which will be explained in its own chapter due to its uniqueness and importance. While being tied to religious revelation, these Houses of Justice exist as representatives for all who dwell on Earth³⁷⁶ regardless of which city they are in. The implication is every city should receive the benefits of a House of Justice within them. The individuals who arise to serve on the Houses of Justice do so to serve the Cause.³⁷⁷ Houses of Justice do not need to be built in villages, but there is no exclusion if there are the minimum 9 individuals.

The Cause of God cannot be in progress without any of these aspects of socioeconomic development. If one is missing or excluded, the limbs of the body of the community will have weakness. Perhaps they will grow unequally. The Cause of God is the pathway of liberation for all people. In order to ensure this pathway is truly beneficial for all in a community, Baha'u'llah enjoins specific responsibilities for all believers and rights for all people. The following section will briefly list the positive social actions required to support the Cause of God.

17.1.2 Positive Social Actions

A responsibility to act with good deeds³⁷⁸ and a right to be free from bad deeds.

A responsibility to engage in activities which benefit yourself and others³⁷⁹ and a right to be free from harmful activities by others. Associated with this is a prohibition of idleness, the wasting of time without

³⁷⁴ Kitab-i-Aqdas #151

³⁷⁵ Kitab-i-Aqdas #30

³⁷⁶ Kitab-i-Aqdas #30

³⁷⁷ Lawh-i-Bisarat (Glad Tidings) - 13th Glad Tiding

³⁷⁸ Kitab-i-Aqdas #73

³⁷⁹ Kitab-i-Aqdas #33

any meaningful activity. Sloth is also prohibited, which is an apathetic reaction to opportunities and duties. With this, we have a right from being forced into idleness.

A responsibility to provide for the poor and needy³⁸⁰ and a right to be free of poverty.

A responsibility to provide hospitality³⁸¹ once per Bayani month.

A responsibility to fulfill promises³⁸² and a right for promises received to be fulfilled. Promises can be informal such as verbal agreements with friends or the proverbial pinky promise, or they can be formalized through contracts.

A responsibility to purify every disliked thing with water³⁸³ and a right to purified things. The layers of this could be garments, surfaces, buildings, and publicly shared spaces. As there is a prohibition on consuming intoxicants, as we purify things we should be careful in using chemicals which can act as toxins inside and outside the body.

A responsibility to respond with joy when invited to banquets and gatherings³⁸⁴ and a right to receive a response to such invitations. The response can be a no, but if it is a yes, the promise should be fulfilled. If the response is a joyless yes, consider making it a no.

A responsibility from being a plaything for the ignorant,³⁸⁵ a responsibility born from good manners. This can be associated with what we say, do, or present ourselves. All has a right from being considered as playthings.

A responsibility to seek knowledge for the recognition of the known³⁸⁶ and a right to seek knowledge. Relatedly we have a responsibility to read from sciences which benefit you³⁸⁷ with a right to be able to read these sciences. This could be rather expansive but would require discernment. In general, the pursuit of facts, the wisdom to use these facts to benefit yourself and others, and caution towards opinions which disguise facts and harms.

³⁸⁰ Kitab-i-Aqdas #16

³⁸¹ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse 57

³⁸² Kitab-i-Aqdas #156

³⁸³ Kitab-i-Aqdas #74

³⁸⁴ Kitab-i-Aqdas #156

³⁸⁵ Kitab-i-Aqdas #159

³⁸⁶ Kitab-i-Aqdas #102

³⁸⁷ Kitab-i-Aqdas #77

A responsibility to respond in kindness if angered.³⁸⁸ Note this is not a prohibition of anger, but a guidance to ensure anger does not end up betraying our constellation of virtues. There is a right to be responded to without anger.

A responsibility to respond to being rebuked without rebuking. This can imply a prohibition on rebuking altogether. Instead, in the spirit of friendliness and kindness, consider using reminders, counsel, or advice. Baha'u'llah advises Napoleon III and the people of France to cover up mistakes instead of arguing.³⁸⁹ This does not mean hide injustice or the breaking of laws.

These sets of responsibilities and rights are the pivotal framework of a healthy social life no matter who we cross paths with. In a perfect world where everyone believed in and abided by the Kitab-i-Aqdas, these positive social actions would be enough to create heaven on Earth. Realistically this may never be the case. For example, a person may consider implementing what they consider to be good deeds, but do so without the beliefs of part 1, the spiritual practices of part 2, and without refining their private life. This is the essence of the very first paragraph of the Kitab-i-Aqdas, where Baha'u'llah says "whoever is deprived of it is indeed among the people of error, even if he performs every good deed." We should be careful from taking shortcuts.

In the event of shortcuts within this framework, Baha'u'llah introduced protections to help ensure the rights of all people. These are all clear prohibitions which set boundaries we should never cross in our social life. Most are non-punitive and some are punitive. These are the first laws of the Kitab-i-Aqdas which Baha'u'llah designed to be enforceable by a justice system which this book covers. The next chapter will discuss the protections for the social life.

³⁸⁸ Kitab-i-Aqdas #153

³⁸⁹ The Suriy-i-Haykal 150 & 151

18. The Protective Social Life

When looking at the framework of the constructive social life and the Cause of God, that by itself could seem like a utopia. Yet, we know life is much more complex. In Chapter 2, we learned how each soul is created noble, is unique, and is embodied in the flesh with different experiences and capacities. Everyone lives their life in their own way. While the framework for the Cause of God with the underlying beliefs, spiritual practices, virtues, protected rights, and related responsibilities by themselves should be suitable for a society which liberates souls, it must also have measures to protect people, protect their rights, and ensure one person's expression of rights does not infringe upon another's rights. Everything discussed so far are goals to constantly be striving for.

Being a mirror reflecting God's names is not an automatic on-switch and Baha'u'llah understands this. Belief does not mean you will automatically treat others as we should, spiritual practice does not automatically mean you act with God consciousness, and being in front of another does not mean you see them as equal in soul capacity. All of these things are practices which need refinement, The mirror needs constant polish and reorientation. The limbs of the body need regular exercise.

This is where the protective social life comes in. These are a collection of clear prohibitions designed to protect the community. Some are punitive and many are not. On the punitive prohibitions, the prescribed punishment is designed to be implemented by communities with Houses of Justice. These are not retributive. In communities with a different code of laws, those laws are to be honored and respected. What follows are the protective measures Baha'u'llah ordained which safeguard dignity, harmony, and rights of all.

18.1 Protecting Against Those Who Exalt Themselves

The first danger I want to discuss is those who exalt themselves over another. The most egregious example would be someone who declares they have revelation of God before the completion of a full thousand years (2873 AD minimum).³⁹⁰ At some point, the period of the Kitab-i-Aqdas will end with a new Day of Resurrection, Manifestation of God, and a new Book.

18.1.1 Regarding Interpretation

A person does not need to declare themselves to have new revelation or to be a Manifestation to take steps to act like one. Baha'u'llah warns against interpreting what has been revealed and deviates from its outward meaning.³⁹¹ This causes distortion of God's Word and whoever does this is considered a loser in the eyes of God. These distortions caused by certain interpretive acts can fundamentally change what people believe are the Words of God and the true commands. Another way to cause distortion is by

³⁹⁰ Kitab-i-Aqdas #37

³⁹¹ Kitab-i-Aqdas #105

claiming these interpretations are equal to the Word, to the point a believer struggles to distinguish between Baha'u'llah and the interpreter.

Interpretation itself is not prohibited. Baha'u'llah advises to interpret both the outward and the inward.³⁹² To neglect either will cause deviation. If Baha'u'llah interprets anything Himself, this takes precedence. He says "if you differ on a matter, refer to what has been revealed by Him"³⁹³ The issue regarding interpretation is using interpretation to self-exalt or exalt another. For example, this entire book is how I personally interpret the Kitab-i-Aqdas and related writings. If you feel I error, let me know and allow me an opportunity to correct the error. This book should never be viewed above the Kitab-i-Aqdas. For this matter, I highly recommend reading the Kitab-i-Aqdas first and reference the verses highlighted in the footnotes. If you have an interpretation, even if it differs from mine, it is equal in station. Diverse views can lead to expanded knowledge and better understandings of truth. If we limit access to knowledge and understanding by limiting ourselves to only one interpretation, we actually limit our ability to learn, to gain wisdom, and to reflect God's name the All-Knowing.

When interpretation becomes a tool for elevating one person's voice above others as if it has divine authority, the step into claiming infallibility is dangerously close.

18.1.2 Regarding Infallibility

Another way to act like a Manifestation without declaring one is by claiming to be infallible. Baha'u'llah says there is no partner for the Source of the Cause in the greatest infallibility, that no one else has been given a share.³⁹⁴ By claiming infallibility, even if you do not claim to be a Manifestation, you are claiming the same station and role. Infallibility means a person is exempt from error or have an inability to make any mistakes. In the Lawh-i-Ishraqat (Tablet of Splendors), Baha'u'llah does describe a lesser infallibility where there are various stations. These stations include a protection by God from mistakes, disobedience, turning away, disbelief, polytheism, and the like. Each one can be referred to as lesser infallibility. If anyone deviates, they cannot be infallible. Lesser infallibility can only be conferred by God, not declared by a person. Much like the idea behind being a chosen one, you nor I can make this determination on our own.

Baha'u'llah gives an example in His sermon on infallibility in the Ishraqat. He declares

Look at the blessed, revealed verse that made pilgrimage to the House obligatory for everyone. Those who stood after Him in command are obliged to act according to what they were commanded in the Book. No one may transgress the limits of God and His traditions. He who transgresses is among the erring in the Book of God, Lord of the Great Throne.

³⁹² Tafsir on the Surah of the Sun

³⁹³ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse 53

³⁹⁴ Kitab-i-Aqdas #47

In this example, if someone declares pilgrimage to another place or site as lawful from God, they could never be infallible. Anyone who transgresses is in error. He includes another such message in the Kitab-i-Badi describing those who believe without hesitation as the people of infallibility as long as they remain under the shade of God. The Lawh-i-Sarraj confirms this. Yet, not a single individual was ever named infallible in any tablet of Baha'u'llah. There are countless He praises, yet never said any individual on their own was infallible. I believe the purpose of this was to protect those He praised from the dangers of self-exaltation.

18.1.3 Abolition of Prior Religious Practices

There are some other practices mentioned to help prevent the self-exaltation of another, or to keep us from exalting any other charismatic person. Baha'u'llah prohibits the kissing of hands³⁹⁵ as a sign of inferiority. We are all prohibited from ascending pulpits³⁹⁶ which physically visualizes one being above the others.

One of the most important in my view is the prohibition from seeking forgiveness from another.³⁹⁷ This is not a prohibition on apologizing for a mistake. What it is a command to only repent to God. If a person demands forgiveness from another, they have asserted an authority of superiority over another. If a person requests to be forgiven, they have submitted their soul symbolically to the one they feel they have wronged. Forgiveness can only happen when it is freely given without anything in return.

18.1.4 Begging

In addition, we are forbidden from begging and from giving to those who do beg.³⁹⁸ Begging is not solely an act of financial destitution. Begging can happen in the context of requesting mercy in a punishment. It can happen when we desire a secret to remain hidden. There are many aspects of begging, which can lead to blackmail, bribes, and other manipulative tactics. Begging completely compromises one's soul and risks causing the beggar to make compromises they would not normally make. This rule does not prevent a person from making a request, or stating their needs or wishes. Asking involves mutual respect and reciprocity. Begging requires one person to be seen as above another in a dangerous power dynamic.

18.1.5 Boasting

The final act of self-exaltation would be boasting.³⁹⁹ Boasting is prohibited. This can also take many forms involving pride and self-satisfaction, designed to convey a sense of superiority. These forms can include

³⁹⁵ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse 34

³⁹⁶ Kitab-i-Aqdas #154

³⁹⁷ Kitab-i-Aqdas #34

³⁹⁸ Kitab-i-Aqdas #147

³⁹⁹ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse 72

commonly used reasons for prejudice, such as skin-color, nationality, religious label, ethnicity, gender, and even body composition. It can include bragging about your wealth, skills, achievements, or other aspects of identity. To place yourself on a pedestal simultaneously involves placing another in a lower status than you. The only true way to increase your own station is to simultaneously help others increase theirs.

There is no right to self-exaltation, and all believers have a responsibility from self-exaltation and from exalting others. If anyone does, the best response would be to remind them we are “all created from water, and unto dust (we) shall return.”⁴⁰⁰

18.2 Prohibited Speech

The next set of prohibitions are associated with what we say and how we say it. Everything in this section is non-punitive, meaning Baha’u’llah did not create any enforceable fines or punishments. All of these are responsibilities of those who believe in Baha’u’llah, but none of these affect a legal right to speech unless later determined by the Houses of Justice.

18.2.1 Causing Sadness

The foundation of this section is the responsibility from section #148 of the Kitab-i-Aqdas. In the Persian Bayan’s Vahid 7 Gate 18, the Bab instituted a fine of nineteen mithqals to anyone who caused sadness to another’s heart and soul with their speech and conduct. Baha’u’llah restated this exact punitive law, but repealed the fine. Instead He requires us be kind and demonstrate piety, reminding us of the golden rule. There is no exception based on whether a person intended to cause sadness or if it was unintentional. We have a responsibility to show empathy. Mindfulness goes a long way, even if we can never control how others receive our speech. A spirit of friendship and fellowship is better for us. All people have a right to be free from sadness caused by another.

18.2.2 Slander

Slander is prohibited.⁴⁰¹ Slander, according to Merriam Webster and LegalZoom, is a form of spoken communication that is both false and malicious designed to injure the reputation of another. If the speech is true, it is not slander. If it is false but makes another look good, it is not slander. This could differentiate from libel which is written, but as of now I am uncertain if Baha’u’llah differentiated between oral and written speech. My gut feeling is both would be included, but I have no evidence of this for now other than Baha’u’llah’s stern responses to written statements which seemed like libel.

⁴⁰⁰ Kitab-i-Aqdas #148

⁴⁰¹ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse 19

18.2.3 Backbiting

Backbiting is prohibited.⁴⁰² Backbiting is basically slander without a person's knowledge. This means the speech must be false, malicious, and without the person's knowledge. All three criteria must be met for it to be backbiting. If the speech is true, malicious, and in secret, it is neither slander nor backbiting. If the speech is false, favorable, and in secret, it is neither slander nor backbiting.

What does it mean for speech to be true? The standard I would propose is for the speech to be fully accurate of what was said, whether it be verbatim quotes or paraphrasing the same effect. The speech must be fully contextualized. Any omission of relevant context would not meet the standard of truth and could end up being slander. Whoever recounts what another says has a right to share how the speech made them feel, even if this seems as though it is opinion. Feelings are real and thus true.

Finally, slander and backbiting are tools used to boast. By trying to injure someone's reputation through slander, you are also trying to boost your own reputation in comparison.

18.2.4 Contention and Disputing

Contention and disputing⁴⁰³ are forbidden. A dispute is basically a failure to agree. The basic reason why a dispute can persist is if one side or both sides are unwilling to adjust their original contention. Disagreement is not prohibited, but the persistent act of disagreement is. Contention ends up causing an environment of rivalry and competition. To resolve a dispute, both sides have to be willing to refer their difference to Baha'u'llah's revelation⁴⁰⁴ and to be willing to let go of their original contention, even if they feel they are most right. To let go of their original contention requires a moving of your position to the point of moderation (a virtue) or by deciding you have no control over the other's position and letting it go. Having a detachment from outcomes is vital to resolution.

18.2.5 Objecting

Objecting is prohibited.⁴⁰⁵ This is a seemingly broad concept and in my opinion, one that would be the most difficult to practice. An objection is a feeling (private) or expression (public) of disapproval. I could have included this in the private self discussion, but I felt this would be more relevant for the social life. However, all objection does start with the private self. The primary reason a person objects is because you feel something is wrong and it needs to be corrected. This can include individual objection or group-based objection such as assembling to protest.

⁴⁰² Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse 19

⁴⁰³ Kitab-i-Aqdas #148

⁴⁰⁴ Kitab-i-Aqdas #53

⁴⁰⁵ Kitab-i-Aqdas #73

What if you feel you are right? I see two pathways to answer this question. The first pathway would be to explore why you object, the consequences of your objecting for yourself and others, and deciding to let go of your objection. The second pathway is after exploring why you object, you decide to express it once in a constructive method. One constructive method I feel is useful is the Socratic Method. According to Wikipedia,

“the Socratic method, named after the Greek philosopher Socrates, is a form of inquiry and dialogue based on asking and answering questions. The goal is not to present a definitive answer or lecture but to help someone discover a deeper understanding of a topic on their own. Instead of telling you what to think, I’ve asked you a series of probing questions to help you examine your own beliefs and the logical consistency of your arguments.”

One key aspect of this method is it also gives the questioner an ability to learn from the answers. In the Bayanic calendar, the month of Questions (#15) comes immediately after the month of Speech (#14), which leads to the month of Honor (#16). The Bab’s method of organizing time seems to integrate the importance of asking questions to help develop honor. Now, someone who is boastful may not take kindly to being asked questions designed for a deeper understanding. Be mindful in how this method is used to prevent further conflict.

Another constructive method would be to offer a solution to which you feel is a problem. If the solution is accepted, you played a positive part in social change. If the solution is not accepted, allow it to be and use the experience to inform your own future thoughts, feelings, actions, and speech. As you get one shot to present your case, present your case to the best of your ability and in a manner which fits within the positive social life.

18.2.6 Raising Voices in Public Remembrance

Baha’u’llah prohibits raising voices in streets or marketplaces in remembrance.⁴⁰⁶ He says the proper place is within your own home or in places designated for remembrance, such as a Mashriq’ul-Adhkar or any other place of worship you choose to visit, regardless of religion. This will help keep people from trying to seem pious even if they are not, and it also will help prevent conflict with those who do not believe as you do. This also will help prevent uncomfortable situations of proselytizing. Yes, we are allowed to proclaim the Cause, but there are boundaries to be respected. Everyone has a right not to be pressured or made uncomfortable in public by loud religious expression.

18.2.7 Regarding Books and Other Writings

We are prohibited from reading sciences which lead to disputes.⁴⁰⁷ This could be expanded to any new types of media which has been introduced since 1873, when the Kitab-i-Aqdas was written. This can be

⁴⁰⁶ Kitab-i-Aqdas #108

⁴⁰⁷ Kitab-i-Aqdas #77

quite expansive, but can include opinion pieces, political treatises, ideological statements, jurisprudence based on traditions, or even commentary which goes against the Kitab-i-Aqdas (as all disputes should be referred to Baha'u'llah). However, we are also prohibited from obliterating those books.⁴⁰⁸ Everyone has a right to produce whatever content they want. Censorship is forbidden. We are responsible for what we consume.

18.3 Dehumanization

Self-exaltation and the types of prohibited speech are quite harmful to souls. In Chapter 2.3, we learned how the souls are created noble and all souls are the temples of a singular mankind. The protections above ensure the souls can continue to be treated as noble and as sacred temples. When those protections are violated, we start down a dangerous and slippery road. This is the road towards dehumanization.

Imagine everything which makes you be you. Part of this you is how you reflect God's names (even if you do not believe in God), your soul, your constellation of virtues, your identity, your rights, your private self, your social self, and all of the loved ones you experience. Each one of the issues regarding self-exaltation and prohibited speech can be used to deny you or another a targeted part of yourself, even if it seems small or insignificant. Repeated violations accumulate, expand, and over time, works to deprive the very things which make you human. This is the process of dehumanization. Another places you less human, and maybe more animal. What are the consequences? The consequences are inevitably violent and oppressive, towards individuals and target groups of people. These consequences include the targeted deprivation of rights, harm to the body, harm to the psychological and emotional self, and potentially the loss of life.

We have a right to be free from dehumanization and a responsibility to view every soul as capable of nobility, even if it feels they are falling short of that standard. The right hand always has the choice of helping the left hand, and our prayers and deeds can help restore temples which have fallen in a state of disrepair.

18.4 Violent and Oppressive Acts

To protect us within the social life, Baha'u'llah specified clear prohibitions for violent and oppressive acts, along with associated punishments for many of them. For those without specific punishments or severities, those are to be determined by Houses of Justice within their jurisdictions. There are only 8, but the intersection of these 9 aspects should cover most situations if anyone were to appreciate a small code of laws.

These will be listed in no particular order:

⁴⁰⁸ Kitab-i-Aqdas #77

Law #1: Carrying weapons.⁴⁰⁹ The only exception is during a time of necessity. Ownership is not prohibited. No punishment is specified. I would consider expanding this to include objects not typically used as weapons but carried with the intention of being used as a weapon.

Law #2: Striking another (assault & batter)⁴¹⁰ For injuries to the head and body⁴¹¹ there are unspecified fines for each level of severity. The fines are called diyah, which means blood money. 33% of all diyah is paid to the Houses of Justice⁴¹² and the other 66% is offered as compensation to the injured person.

Law #3: There is a fine for manslaughter and other accidental killing.⁴¹³ There are no exceptions. The diyah payment is 100 Bayánic Mithqáls of gold (See Appendix 4) for the family of the deceased.

Law #4: Murder (Homicide).⁴¹⁴ The punishment is execution or life imprisonment.⁴¹⁵

Law #5: Trespassing.⁴¹⁶ There is no punishment specified.

Law #6: Theft (stealing).⁴¹⁷ The 1st and 2nd offenses includes banishment and imprisonment. Banishment means they are not allowed to live in their home and will be banished to the prison. After the 3rd offense, the thief loses their anonymity and will be permanently marked on the forehead along with the banishment and imprisonment.

Law #7: Arson⁴¹⁸ has a punishment of either execution or life imprisonment. I do want to note this seems harsh compared to certain legal standards, but arson is impactful. It deprives a person of shelter, wealth, and potentially life. According to the US Fire Administration, in 2023 there were 344,600 residential fires which caused 2,890 deaths, 10,400 injuries, and over \$11 billion USD in property losses. Even if loss of life is unintentional, the arson is an intentional act.

⁴⁰⁹ Kitab-i-Aqdas #159

⁴¹⁰ Kitab-i-Aqdas #148

⁴¹¹ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse 56

⁴¹² Kitab-i-Aqdas #52

⁴¹³ Kitab-i-Aqdas #188

⁴¹⁴ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse 19

⁴¹⁵ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse 62

⁴¹⁶ Kitab-i-Aqdas #145

⁴¹⁷ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse 45

⁴¹⁸ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse 62

Law #8: Selling and buying people⁴¹⁹ without any stated punishment.

18.4.1 Intersection of Laws: An Example of Rape

One might read the Kitab-i-Aqdas and wonder why a crime such as rape is not specified. I believe it is because rape includes many aspects of these laws. Rape often includes the use of a weapon, in this case whatever was used to commit the act such as a man's penis. Rape often requires a physical assault, or the threat of physical assault. The victim's body was trespassed against without consent and the victim's body was used against their will, which is a theft. More could be stolen if virginity is a consideration.

This example of rape includes violations of laws #1, 2, 5, and 6 by the perpetrator. With laws 5 and 6 being determined by things such as severity, this could be a more severe punishment than is typical for rape. I feel intersectionality could be a way to simplify a legal code to make the mechanisms of justice fairly quick and straightforward. However, it is up to each House of Justice in how they refine and specify such laws. It would also make sense for a House of Justice to specifically specify rape.

This concludes the basic foundations of the social life. We will transition towards building and maintaining loving relationships, marriage, parenting, and divorce.

⁴¹⁹ Kitab-i-Aqdas Verse 72

19. Affectionate Relationships

This chapter is going to look at various kinds of affectionate relationships. Traditionally marriage is the type of relationship most think of when they imagine religion. It is true marriage is the foundation of affectionate relationships, but marriage is not the only kind. Marriage does not magically happen in a vacuum. There are affectionate relationships before marriage, some people choose never to marry, and then there are the situations where these affections end.

Marriage will be the foundation for this chapter. When we understand its purpose, we can consider how affectionate relationships are a deep reflection of our beliefs, regular spiritual practices, our unique constellation of values. They are shaped by our fidelity to the rights of all souls, and the rights and responsibilities we attain after maturity, whether privately or socially.

Much of the marriage law is from the Persian Bayan, with modifications within the Kitab-i-Aqdas. The Bayan is integral to the understanding of Baha'u'llah's marriage law. Symbolically, this is where I would say both Books find union, in the verses regarding the union of two people in wedlock.

19.1 Marriage

Marriage is enjoined upon us.⁴²⁰ Enjoined is also used in the counsel to pray. This means it is part of the divine Doctor's prescription for us to be healthy. The Bab, when he described marriage being enjoined, reinforced the fact it is a firm obligation.⁴²¹ Baha'u'llah instructed monks to leave their seclusion so they may bear fruits and enter into wedlock.⁴²² To a particular believer, Baha'u'llah said marriage is not permitted to be passed by as it is God's tradition.⁴²³

19.1.1 Purpose of Marriage

From the second paragraph of the Marriage Prayer (I am unable to find the first), Baha'u'llah says marriage is a "fortress for well-being and salvation" and "that from you may appear he who will remember Me amongst My servants."⁴²⁴ These are the fruits both the Bab described as "a letter of their own being may remain to proclaim the unity of God."

The Bayan had recommended believers to separate if either partner is able to fulfill the obligation of having a baby. In the Suriy-i-Haykal, Baha'u'llah says "But for man, who, on My earth, would remember

⁴²⁰ Kitab-i-Aqdas #63

⁴²¹ Persian Bayan Vahid 8, Gate 15

⁴²² Suriy-i-Haykal

⁴²³ BH10796

⁴²⁴ BH03181

Me, and how could My attributes and My names be revealed?" Yet, in the Kitab-i-Badi as Baha'u'llah was addressing Azali Bayanis, He rebukes those who say a woman who is barren has no value. Baha'u'llah says those who make such claims have barren hearts, minds, eyes and are deprived of the mercy of God. The implication is every person has a right to create a child, with a responsibility to do so if you are able to. Still, every person maintains their right to love, kindness, and all the other rights if they are unable to create a child. Cruelty is forbidden.

What do you imagine when you hear the phrase a fortress for well-being and salvation? In my imagination, I like to relate the journey of an affectionate relationship and marriage to be similar to the journey of the soul to God the Beloved in Baha'u'llah's "The Seven Valleys" with the valley of unity being where a couple truly feels they are one. This unity helps provide emotional and spiritual stability through such methods as affection, trust, and loyalty. Each spouse is able and willing to shield each other, being each others fortress wall. As each acts in remembrance of each other, they can also reinforce a deeper remembrance of God. This unity helps each spouse develop their individual constellations of virtues, where they help compliment, balance, and merge with their loved one's constellation. These virtues are tested and refined, in good times and in bad. Finally, this fortress for salvation extends to the spouse's fruit, their children and to the community they live in. For the child, it provides stability to nurture their noble birthright. For the community, it serves as a lamp leading by example. In both ways, the married couple ensures God is remembered across generations.

Marriage, in this sense, is the very foundation of the constructive social life. Every mature person has a right to a fortress of well-being and salvation. No person has a responsibility to deny this right under any circumstances.

19.1.2 Who May Marry and How Many?

Everywhere Baha'u'llah describes marriage, he does define it within the male and female dynamic. BH03181 says "the Lord loves that His handmaidens be joined in marriage to His monotheistic servants." In the Aqdas He says "Beware that you do not exceed two wives. He who is content with one maid will ensure his own tranquility and hers as well." These verses explicitly says marriage is between a man and a woman.

These verses also allow for two wives (bigamy) with a promise of tranquility for a man who prefers monogamy. When looking at the divorce verses, such as in Kitab-i-Aqdas #68, it suggests a woman could also have a second husband. If she takes another husband, a new union is required to restore the first marriage. Baha'u'llah does not specify she must divorce the second husband, although traditionally religious institutions would not allow this.

I will explain within the context of marriage being a form of contract law. The 1st marriage with husband #1 was under Contract #1. They decided to end Contract #1. Therefore, the woman enters into Contract #2 with husband #2. If ex-husband #1 wants to be married again to the woman, they must mutually agree to a new Contract #3. The Kitab-i-Aqdas does not say Contract #2 must end.

Thus, every mature person has the right to marry, and if the law allows, the right to have up to two spouses. Yet this right is tempered by the responsibility to be content with one, for tranquility rests upon the foundation of simplicity and fidelity. The fortress of well-being may stand with two, but its walls are strongest when founded upon unity with one.

19.1.3 Consent

Marriage requires the consent of both parties.⁴²⁵ Consent can only be obtained by those who have attained maturity. Consent cannot be obtained through coercion or any type of threat. Consent is formerly recognized for both the man and woman with a phrase signifying their devotion to God.⁴²⁶

“Indeed, I am for God, the Lord of the heavens and the Lord of the earth, the Lord of all things, the Lord of what is seen and unseen, the Lord of the worlds.”

Consent also involves payment of a dowry from the groom to the bride. If the man is living in a city, he must offer between 19 and 95 Bayanic mithqals of gold. For a man living in a village, dowry is the same weight in silver.⁴²⁷ This continues the Bayan’s law, which also says the dowry must be in incremental steps of 19, and nothing in between. The groom offers what he is willing or able to pay and the bride chooses to accept. See Appendix 4 regarding the calculation of a Bayanic mithqal.

I feel it should be noted dowry is not a bride price paid to family, nor is symbolic in any way of the bride being property. The dowry is a gift for the bride. It is a symbol of affection towards her while helping provide financial security and stability. Currently, in most countries, women have a lower average income than men, are more likely to be single parents, and face the most risk. I believe those risks are less if the soul’s mirror is sincerely facing the Sun of Truth, but things happen, people change, and faith can waiver. While women are equal in the eyes of God, it is also true they often face unequal outcomes. Every believing groom has a responsibility to pay his bride the dowry, and every bride has a right to the dowry.

Baha’u’llah also enjoins consent of both parents of the bride and groom. This helps bring families together. He reminds us of the Qur’an and how that Holy Book relates kindness to parents to belief in the oneness of God.⁴²⁸ He says there are hidden purposes with this command. At best, I believe this serves a purpose of reconciliation for any parent and child who might be estranged, and an opportunity for parents who do not believe in God or Baha’u’llah to learn more about the Cause of God. At worst, two people who love each other may not get married. This can be a profound spiritual test for all involved.

⁴²⁵ Kitab-i-Aqdas #65

⁴²⁶ Persian Bayan Vahid 6, Gate 7

⁴²⁷ Kitab-i-Aqdas #65

⁴²⁸ BH02956

In a different tablet, Baha'u'llah discusses how since the Day of Resurrection, families and friendships have struggled when one believes and one does not. Often, the one who believes in Baha'u'llah becomes estranged with the other renouncing them.⁴²⁹ He says as a consequence, relationships are not considered. "Accepting souls are both fathers and sons, for they walk upon one path."

In one example, Baha'u'llah nominated himself to be in place of the father of Mirza Asadu'llah Isfani in his marriage with Gawhar in 1882.⁴³⁰ Baha'u'llah could not attend in person, but it does suggest the consent of parents carries a great deal of nuance. Ultimately, the Houses of Justice can appoint individuals to oversee marriages and determine such matters of consent. I think any House of Justice should be careful to focus on love, affection, and unity in such a way discord and resentment is not created.⁴³¹

19.1.4 Virginity

Marriage is not dependent on virginity. In a traditional sense, this helps keep marriage as an option for divorcees, widows, and single parents. Outside of the traditional sense, this also helps prevent purity standards from being established. Baha'u'llah in His counsels does regularly refer to chastity.⁴³² There is regular counsel towards women to be chaste when He says "The greatest ornament for the handmaidens hath ever been and still is chastity and virtue. By God! The light of chastity illumineth the horizons of the spiritual worlds and its fragrance reacheth unto the Most Exalted Paradise."⁴³³

While there is a right to purity and a right to be free from corruption, purity cannot be forced upon anyone. There cannot be any forms of oppression such as virginity inspections imposed upon women. With all of the teachings of Baha'u'llah, especially within the constellation of virtues, premarital sex would be strongly discouraged. This discouragement is based solely on purity, but it is to ensure the bonds of affection are not ruled by lust or other biological impulses of the body. The bonds of affection are to be ruled by spiritual considerations.

If one is solely attached to the concept of virginity, but overlooks other spiritual qualities, a marriage is going to have a difficult time. If a person has premarital sex, but later decides through their spiritual practice to develop chastity, this person can be purified. All of the spiritual virtues have opportunities to shine more brightly and are never completely lost.

To demonstrate this idea, I want to show two examples. In one, Baha'u'llah references Fatimah al-Zahra, the daughter of the Seal of the Prophets Muhammad. She was married to 'Ali ibn Abi Talib and they had

⁴²⁹ BH00091

⁴³⁰ BH00093

⁴³¹ Kitab-i-Aqdas #65

⁴³² BH00726

⁴³³ BH02573

at least 4 children. They are known in Shi'a Islam as the Ahl al-Bayt, where the Imams were descended. Baha'u'llah says "O Land of Sad, the Sun of Hijaz asks thee about His family, and the Virgin, the Chosen One, about her sons and daughter."⁴³⁴ How is it a mother is given the title Virgin? This demonstrates virginity is not solely a physical attribute but a spiritual condition for one who acts purely for the sake of God.

In the second example, Baha'u'llah is discussing Mirza Yahya, the leader of the Bayani people who did not believe in Baha'u'llah. He says "Every year he would summon a virgin from the outlying regions, ... veiled by the imaginary veils of these idolatrous temples whose reality is evident from their deeds."⁴³⁵ In this example, the coveting of virgins is a form of idolatry which is a veil between you and God.

19.1.5 The Marriage Contract

In the Bayan, once the consent verse is recited by both parties, they affix their seals (signatures) on a document. This is the marriage contract. The Bab requires witnesses representing both spouses, at least ten in total, to attest to dowry, consent, and signing the contract. The purpose of the witnesses is so that both spouses are protected, and neither can deny their marriage nor claim a fake marriage.⁴³⁶ This particularly protects the rights of women from coercion. The Houses of Justice are to ensure marriage is conducted according to the divine law. Each couple can add anything to the contract they feel is important.

One addition could be to state if the marriage is monogamous or polygamous. If it is monogamous, there is no possibility of future spouses within that marriage. If it is polygamous, consent would be a vital foundation. Both spouses and the newest spouse would have to each consent to this new union, along with the parents. If any person does not consent, the second marriage cannot be created. It is acceptable if the fortress is open to another, but never in such a way the fortress imprisons one spouse. This ensures each spouse retains the right to be free from coercion, with each bearing responsibility to honor the terms agreed upon.

The marriage contract becomes nullified if dowry is not paid, if one does not return home from travel by an agreed upon time, and if one of the spouses passes away.

19.1.6 Divorce

This contract can be terminated through divorce. Divorce is an option if any discord or aversion arises between the two, and marriage can continue if there is reconciliation and the fragrance of love emanates between them.⁴³⁷ Divorce requires a one-year waiting period for an opportunity for reconciliation and

⁴³⁴ BH02352

⁴³⁵ BH00357

⁴³⁶ BH00035

⁴³⁷ Kitab-i-Aqdas #68

love to be reestablished. Divorce is only allowed three times, which also means a person is only allowed to be married three times, even if you believe that fourth marriage is guaranteed to never end. During the waiting period, they are still considered legally married and the marriage contract is in effect.

19.1.7 Discord

Discord in a marriage is any kind of persistent conflict, hostility, aggression, a breach of trust, or even irreconcilable worldviews. If a marriage ever leads to the rights of one or both being violated regularly, it might be good to separate. The responsibility to remain married should never infringe upon the rights to safety, love, kindness, and freedom from oppression. Individual goals which are not mutually beneficial could be a source of argument.

19.1.8 Aversion

Aversion can be fairly broad in scope. It could be as simple as disliking each other, such as a loss of affection where bonds of intimacy or respect are lost. Aversion could be apathy or other emotional alienation where marriage feels cold or forced. If closeness feels forced or requires a sense of degradation, there is aversion. Aversion could also be from a situation where each others constellation of virtues are no longer aligned, compatible, or changed so significantly, the spiritual bond is severed.

19.1.9 Adultery

Adultery is a breach of the marriage contract which is enforceable by Houses of Justice. For each man and woman who commits adultery, a fine must be paid of nine Bayanic mithqals of gold.⁴³⁸ For each offense, the fine is doubled from the prior offense. This goes from 9 to 18 to 36 to 72 and so on. Baha'u'llah also specifies a humiliating punishment for a third offense, which would be similar to the punishment for theft, where a mark is placed on the thief's forehead. How the third punishment would take shape is up to the Houses of Justice. The purpose would be to let other people know someone is violating their marriage.

Adultery has also traditionally been treated as including all forms of extra-marital sex, to include people who are not married. One way I have personally considered this is within the scope of the age of maturity. What would happen if two people who are not mature nor independent decide to have consensual sex? It would most likely be financially impossible for both of them to pay 9 Bayanic mithqals of gold. The reason I view adultery as being more about contract law is because of the seriousness when a contract is violated. The Bab and Baha'u'llah repeatedly commanded people to honor their commitments, in both their personal and business lives, reflecting the virtues trustworthiness and fidelity.

19.2 Affectionate Relationships Leading to Marriage

With marriage being a fortress of well-being and salvation, we understand it is a core institution of our social life. Marriage does not happen in a vacuum. It requires the ability to build the bonds of affection

⁴³⁸ Kitab-i-Aqdas #49

and to feel the fragrance of love. Even if these bonds are built, marriage may not be a goal a person has. While there is a traditional ideal, we should be mindful Baha'u'llah says that "God loves unity and concord."⁴³⁹ In seeking an ideal, we shouldn't risk limiting the ways unity and concord can manifest itself in every day life.

19.2.1 Stage 1 - Friendship

As discussed in Chapter 18, our first foundation is friendliness and fellowship⁴⁴⁰ even with the followers of other religion.⁴⁴¹ We show friendliness through casual interactions, enjoyable shared experiences, and building connections based on mutual interests. Friendliness is characterized by warmth and kindness, not merely politeness. This starts from the moment we greet someone, such as by smiling and showing they are welcome. In our interactions, we engage in light conversation and show genuine interest in their lives, such as who they are, what they do, and what they enjoy. We offer invitations in social activities and accept invitations when possible.

Friendship requires mutual effort. Every person you come across may not be a friend. Baha'u'llah warns us not to associate with the wicked, nor seek companionship with them.⁴⁴² If someone comes up to you and does not start with a smile and a warm greeting, be cautious. If a stranger is focused on fulfilling their immediate wants, they may not be a friend. Friendship is not a transaction.

If a relationship only remains a friendship, this friendship is still a vital component in the Cause of God. This is the foundation of all other affectionate relationships

19.2.2 Stage 2 - Fellowship

Fellowship is a type of relationship which grows from friendship. You take everything you have been doing with your friends and add in some components of commitment, support, sacrifice, and growth. Fellowship adds a strong spiritual component, where you might meet together for spiritual practice, the study of scripture, or acts of service. When there are difficult times, you are there offering encouragement and accountability. You are willing to help, even if it requires a level of self-sacrifice such as sharing time or resources. The conversation can be more challenging, where discussions promote spiritual growth and understanding. This type of challenge can help each other deepen in faith.

There are times where one person desires fellowship, but the other friend or friends may not share this desire. A person should make the effort to achieve fellowship if they desire it, but it should not be done in any oppressive way. If fellowship is not returned, be content to in your friendship.

⁴³⁹ Kitab-i-Aqdas #70

⁴⁴⁰ Kitab-i-Aqdas #148

⁴⁴¹ Kitab-i-Aqdas #144

⁴⁴² Hidden Words of Persian #57

19.2.3 Stage 3 - Spiritual Kinship

From fellowship can come a relationship I am calling spiritual kinship. The foundation of this relationship is a shared belief in Baha'u'llah and living in the same Day of God. Distant souls are drawn closer⁴⁴³ by walking one path together, drinking the same nectar, gazing towards the same horizon, and are secluded together in one abode. In spiritual kinship, believers feel as though they are parents, children, and siblings to each other even if this is untrue biologically and legally. This brings a new layer when the Kitab-i-Aqdas says to show love and kindness to your kindred.⁴⁴⁴

The Hidden Words is, in my opinion, a pillar of spiritual kinship. Throughout the Arabic and Persian versions, Baha'u'llah enjoins us with a declaration "O Son..." where each of us are both a Son of God, a Son of Baha'u'llah in His role as Father, and thus we are siblings of each other. For example, when the Arabic Hidden Word #38 says "grieve not in your distance from us," we can share in our grief as a single family who longs for nearness to God.

19.2.4 Stage 4 - Courtship

Courtship takes what we have established in friendship, fellowship, and spiritual kinship and adds the fragrance of love. There is a sense of desire and longing to be near all the virtues the other person exemplifies. You love their piety, pure truthfulness, courtesy, loyalty, and trustworthiness, even if the person does not perfectly demonstrate them. You feel safe and secure with them. You can visualize building that fortress together, a fortress which has potential room for descendants. You can see your souls shining within the same mirror, even if they have not yet merged into one.

19.2.5 Stage 5 - Engagement

If courtship is successful, you are on the path towards marriage. When discussing marriage, Baha'u'llah counsels regarding the matter of marriage by saying "it behooves whosoever desires to enter into any matter to first hold fast to consultation and to act according to what appears therefrom, placing his trust in God, the Protector, the Self-Subsisting."⁴⁴⁵ This applies to attaining the consent of not only each other, but of the parents (or representatives of the parents). If the consultations are successful, you are engaged. If they are unsuccessful, you are not engaged. Thereupon you can either continue courtship or see if it is best to go back to spiritual kinship, and move on. At no point should this consultation lead to discord or enmity.

⁴⁴³ BH00091

⁴⁴⁴ Kitab-i-Aqdas #61

⁴⁴⁵ BH03310

Once engaged, Baha'u'llah advises delaying the wedding is not recommended.⁴⁴⁶ He did not define a hard limit though and in the same advice, said the timing of the wedding is entirely up to the couple's discretion. This might be something discussed by the couple and parents in their consultation.

19.2.6 Skipping Stages

Life can be rather complex and messy, and sometimes a person can be ruled by their passions more than their relationship with God. In modern life, it is common to start straight at courtship or a simulated marriage before the foundations of friendship were even established. The more stages which are skipped, the more difficult it is to establish an enduring fortress for salvation and well-being. It is not impossible, but if there is a sense of commitment without fully knowing what is being committed, tranquility may seem elusive.

Spiritual kinship might be the most difficult stage to achieve, especially if the relationship is an interfaith relationship. While Baha'u'llah enjoins friendship and fellowship with those of other religions, it takes a special discernment to identify if you are kin to one of another faith. Can you share in each others spiritual practice? Can you view each other as sharing soul-building experiences even with having different outward labels? Navigating this carefully and intentionally should open the doors of unity without neither having to compromise who they are. God is the Lord of all religions, and is the God to liberate all souls.

19.3 Non-Traditional Relationship Choices

To close this chapter, I want to briefly discuss two concepts which I feel are important for well-functioning communities to understand and accept. The first concept is when a person chooses to remain unmarried, regardless of the relationships they form. They may prefer spiritual kinship or courtship as representing their best way to show love. Celibacy, while not being enjoined upon believers, is a personal option which should be respected.

The second concept is those who express their right to identity in ways which are not easily defined by traditional religious labels and discourse. This can include gender identification, gender-role identification, and preferences in who they feel the fragrance of love for. This is where we should be reminded that God prefers unity and concord, the same God who created all souls noble. Communities need to ensure they are not the cause for discord or enmity, especially for an affectionate relationship to end. On the same token, as expressed in Chapter 16 "The Private Self," we also need to be aware as individuals what is an illusion and what is real. This is a delicate balance individuals and communities must navigate with care and consultation.

I am of the belief the fortress of salvation and well-being should be accessible to all in an inclusive way. All of these affectionate relationships, friendship, fellowship, spiritual kinship, courtship, engagement, and marriage are rights for all mature people, with friendship, fellowship, and spiritual kinship a right of all

⁴⁴⁶ BH01039

people from birth. Every person has a responsibility not to deny these rights. God prefers unity and concord.

20. Trusteeship

So far in Part 3, we have looked at how the Kitab-i-Aqdas guides us through the rights of all people and the responsibilities we have as peers. The Cause of God has first been introduced in our social life, which is an integral baseline in our interactions with others. This is not all the Cause is. I feel the most important aspect of the Cause of God is trusteeship.

A trust is a type of custodial relationship in which a person, people, or organization are charged to care for another. It is usually considered a legal term, but surprisingly describes responsibilities of trustees regularly in His revelation. A trustee is person, organization, or legal entity who is designated to be responsible for a trust. Typically a trustee is responsible for property or any other contractually obligated purpose. Trusteeship is how we describe the position, function, and duties of a trustee in relationship to the trust.

There are many kinds of trusteeships expressed in the Kitab-i-Aqdas. Baha'u'llah describes trusts for orphans, widows,⁴⁴⁷ weak descendants,⁴⁴⁸ the destitute⁴⁴⁹, and the kingdom.⁴⁵⁰ The trustees are the Houses of Justice, fathers, the wealthy, and God. To frame the rest of this chapter, let us take a look at the sacred trust of God with God as the Trustee.

20.1 God as Trustee - Kingdom as Trust

In verse 172, Baha'u'llah outlines the Sacred Trust. The trust includes three closely interconnected realities. They are dominion, the kingdom, and the realm of power. A dominion is an area or territory where sovereignty is exercised. Baha'u'llah associates dominion with the role of God the Witness. A kingdom is a specific type of dominion ruled by a monarch and the law the monarch governs by. Baha'u'llah associates the kingdom with the role of God the Trustee. The realm of power is a more broad concept which can include any area or subject where authority is exercised. The realm of power includes any place where there is a power dynamic within the political, social, and spiritual spheres. It is associated with the role of God the Helper.

Knowing God is sufficient to be a Witness, we understand He is the Judge in all of creation. He does observe how sovereignty is used and for what ends sovereignty achieves. We need to be constantly diligent in how we use sovereignty. Knowing God is sufficient to be a Trustee, we can trust God will be a steward of us, sharing what the Cause of God is for the liberation of our souls and ensuring the Kingdom

⁴⁴⁷ Kitab-i-Aqdas #21

⁴⁴⁸ Kitab-i-Aqdas #27

⁴⁴⁹ Kitab-i-Aqdas #147

⁴⁵⁰ Kitab-i-Aqdas #172

of God is a sovereignty deep within our hearts. Knowing God is sufficient to be a Helper, we can be assured of support and sustenance as we live our lives in remembrance of Him.

These three roles, Witness, Trustee, and Helper are three roles we can also serve as we align our souls with God's Names. If we serve as witness without serving as trustee or helper, we are merely judgemental. We exalt over others and use power to subdue and illicitly gain, even if those gains are according to the rules of society. If we merely try to be a helper, but we do not witness a root cause nor understand our roles as a steward, our efforts might only be temporary or cause further harm, even if unintentional. Trusteeship requires both witnessing and helping to be fully dynamic, just as God serves as Trustee of us. Most of the rest of the book will be framed within the context of Trusteeship, as we have moved into the realm of power and the dynamics power causes. This chapter will look at Trusteeship with weak descendants, widows, and the destitute.

20.2 Weak Descendants as Trust - Parents as Trust

Weak descendants include any children from the time they are conceived until they reach maturity and any adult descendants who are unable to attain maturity due to circumstances such as a developmental handicap. The Kitab-i-Aqdas first associates them with a trust related to inheritance. All rules regarding inheritance will be discussed at the end of this chapter. A trustee is recommended to manage their inheritance until they reach maturity, with an agreed upon rightful share of the profits paid to the trustee. The inheritance is to be invested with the purpose of gaining profit, also known as acting as a fiduciary.

Every father is enjoined to educate their sons and daughters in learning and writing, and also what has been prescribed.⁴⁵¹ This includes the teachings of Baha'u'llah and other subjects, such as sciences which profit mankind and the ability to recite the verses in Mashriq'u'l-Adhkars in the best of melodies. Baha'u'llah says any father who fulfills this duty for their children or even other children is the same as educating one of Baha'u'llah's children. It is an honor. If the father fails to educate their children, the trustees of the House of Justice are to take from the father whatever is necessary for their education if the father is wealthy. If the father is not wealthy, the matter is to be referred to the House of Justice. A negligent father has lost the right of fatherhood.⁴⁵²

In Chapter 14, many rights were defined for every person. The parents are entrusted with the responsibility in ensuring these rights as the child's trustee. The trust includes the right to life, identity, purity, dignified appearance, love and kindness, freedom from oppression, to skilled physicians, to inheritance, to worship, and to education. This responsibility lasts until the child reaches the age of 19. If there are periods when the mature child needs assistance, the parents must do so if they are able to.⁴⁵³

⁴⁵¹ Kitab-i-Aqdas #48

⁴⁵² BH09698

⁴⁵³ Arabic Bayan Vahid 10, Gate 14

The specifics does not have to be the same for every family, as each family has different environmental, cultural, and economic contexts. However, sincerity to the framework is vital. With the purpose of marriage being to create one who makes mention of God, the foundation of this could be teaching the names of God and nurturing souls who desire to mirror those names. Subtlety through Purity and the way they reflect will be unique as the child's iris's. Their right to identity includes their ability to shape this identity through these Names, which all lead back to One.

In fulfilling this trust, how does acting as a witness and helper help the parents? To a young child, a parent already seems so powerful and capable. The parent has full dominion. They are a witness to their child, their welfare, their personality, their environment, and everything else which affects the child. While the parent seems so powerful and capable, they witness the weakness and vulnerability of their child. They use their power in trust to nurture within that framework of responsibilities and belief. The purpose is to help the child become strong, mature, and not only a noble soul at birth, but an adult who retained their nobility. The framework of spiritual, educational, and full legal maturity at ages 11, 15, and 19 offer goals of refinement and targets for parents to achieve. Finally, the framework of witness, trustee, and helper also aligns with the Bayanic calendar's rhythm of maturity.

Age	Bayáníc Month	Meaning	Spiritual Station
11	<i>Masá'il</i>	"Questions" — awakening of understanding	Witness
15	<i>Sultán</i>	"Sovereignty" — command and responsibility	Trustee
19	<i>'Alá</i>	"Loftiness" — fulfillment and unity	Helper

If the child for some reason is unable to become mature and independent due to unplanned circumstances, these responsibilities for the parents never end.

20.3 Orphans as Trust - Houses of Justice as Trustee

Sometimes a child loses both parents. Throughout history, this has caused undue hardship upon children. Baha'u'llah laments this in the Lawh-i-Sultan, describing how the rulings of Naser al-Din Shah Qajar is causing new orphans to be made. The Kitab-i-Aqdas designates the Trustees of the Houses of Justice to be in trust of orphans.⁴⁵⁴ The funds are to be derived from any inheritance which is supposed to go to descendants when there are no dependents. This money is also to be used for widows and the general benefit of others.

Baha'u'llah served as the trustee for orphans in His lifetime. For example, he provided fifty tumens for the orphans of Hájí 'Alí Qarabagí.⁴⁵⁵ While orphans are being care for in trust by the Houses of Justice, it

⁴⁵⁴ Kitab-i-Aqdas #21

⁴⁵⁵ BH00332

would also be good if a person chose to adopt an orphaned child. As Baha'u'llah had described the honor it is for a father to educate a child that is not his own, imagine the glory in raising a child as if it were Baha'u'llah's? Orphans have a right to be taken care of. Their rights are not lost when their parents are lost.

20.4 Aging Parents as Trust - Mature Children as Trustee

For parents who have not forfeited their rights as parents due to neglect of their children, Baha'u'llah says the second greatest fruit is regard for the rights of one's parents.⁴⁵⁶ The Bab says we are to provide for our parents if they are not self-sufficient⁴⁵⁷ once we have reached maturity at age 19.

This helps establish a lifelong bond of mutual assistance between parents and children. All mature people are obligated to earn a living if they are able to, so this would mostly be assistance as parents age or random circumstances of life impact their ability to earn, even if temporarily. The parents are a trust with mature children serving as trustee.

Now, even as parents age, they must still be treated with the full dignity, respect, and rights of every person. Authority over their possessions cannot be denied unless a skilled physician has determined there is an onset of true mental incapacity.⁴⁵⁸ If an adult has lost their mental capacity but does not have mature children, the authority over their possessions, if not clearly defined by a legal contract, would be entrusted to the Houses of Justice.

In regards to aging, there are some rights and responsibilities associated with decaying health and the potential of dying. We had prior established the right to skilled physicians. If there is illness, seek a physician.⁴⁵⁹ Baha'u'llah uses a candle as an instructive metaphor. He says "Consider the candle and its light. If you protect it from outward elements through means such as a lantern or otherwise, then as long as the wax and wick remain, it is possible to preserve it from temporal vicissitudes. However, if it reaches its end - that is, if the wax and wick are exhausted - in this case the continuation of light is impossible. This latter state is determined, while the former state is conditional." He also says the preservation of human life is greater than any other matter.⁴⁶⁰

Forcing a person to artificially be alive would be a violation of the trust. Medical care has to be focused on healing a condition. It would be vital for parents and children to understand their rights and responsibilities in a spirit of consultation, especially in stressful and painful times.

⁴⁵⁶ BH02374

⁴⁵⁷ Arabic Bayan Vahid 10, Gate 14

⁴⁵⁸ BH00035

⁴⁵⁹ Kitab-i-Aqdas #113

⁴⁶⁰ BH00093

20.5 Widows as Trust - Houses of Justice as Trustee

Sometimes a wife loses her husband. Like orphans, this has often caused undue hardship to the widow. While she has the ability to work and earn a living, she may have also been provided for by her deceased husband. She may still be nurturing a child. We do not know her circumstances. While she has full autonomy of her life without losing any rights she had before and during her marriage, her care is entrusted to the Houses of Justice.

I want to explore the witness, trustee, and helper model with widows. How would witnessing manifest itself while respecting the rights and autonomy of the widow? Witnessing does not equal surveillance or invading privacy. That is contrary to our constellation of virtues such as courtesy. The House is not to serve as her master. Witnessing involves seeing their dominion clearly. This means ensuring she is safe from exploitation in a vulnerable time and she receives what is due to her from inheritance. If she is economically or socially vulnerable, it should be acknowledged without stripping her of her agency.

As trustee, the Houses are stewards of fairness. They do not act as her decision maker. They ensure systems of support are fairly distributed when requested, and they are freely available to be requested. They do not manage her choices, relationships, or property. Instead they oversee any process of communal support without favoritism or corruption. The purpose of this trusteeship is to offer help and assistance when needed, without coercion. They provide resources, which does not need to be limited to money. These resources could be access to a grief counselor, support groups, protection from social pressures, and introductions to new opportunities. The process of witness, trustee, and helper is an extremely simple yet thorough model to exercise power as an act of service.

20.6 The Destitute as Trust - The Wealthy as Trustee

In Chapter 18, we described the prohibition on begging. We also have a responsibility to never give to beggars, no matter what is desperately being asked of. This seems contrary to generosity, but we have outlined such responsibilities as Huquq'u'llah and Zakat. The goal is to create a community where no person would need to beg. No person deserves to be destitute nor desperate. Every person has a right to provision.

There are two trustees of the destitute. The first are the Houses of Justice.⁴⁶¹ The second are the wealthy. Each are to provide what is necessary. The Houses of Justice can consult on what is necessary, but with it could fall within the right of provision from Chapter 14 Section 7.7. A wealthy individual could also make this determination, according to how generous their spirit is.

Who is wealthy? I would define wealthy as any person who has wealth. Wealth is an abundance of resources which can be used to invest or make transactions without worry of running out of resources. The wealthy have plenty. The destitute or impoverished have nothing or very little. They are a trust and the wealthy are meant to serve as their trustees.

⁴⁶¹ Kitab-i-Aqdas #147

As a potential conflict of interest, a community might want to consider limiting how many wealthy people serve on Houses of Justice. Trusts struggle with ethical issues when there are conflicts of interest.

20.7 Animals and the Earth as Trust - Believers as Trustee

The Kitab-i-Aqdas does not explicitly tell us to take care of the Earth and all that is contained within the environment. There are allusions throughout. So far we have learned God has created everything, with the Earth made the vessel of our provision. While the parents have a responsibility to provide provision to their children, God has provided the provision for everyone. We also described how all people have a right to provision. I would say these provisions themselves have rights, and the living things of earth have a right to provision.

One of these provisions is water, which we have described as a purifying agent. How can water purify if the water is polluted? Baha'u'llah says rivers of fresh water gush forth from the stones (a natural spring) due to the sweetness of our Lord.⁴⁶² The water is created pure, just as we are. Yet, when God discusses our purity with lewdness and oppression, He says "beware that you do not corrupt the Earth after it has been reformed."⁴⁶³ What if one can be lewd and oppressive to water, which causes it to become impure? If oppression defiles the heart, pollution defiles the spring. Both are violations of purity, and both begin with heedlessness. The Bab describes the four elements of fire, air, water, and earth as purifying agents⁴⁶⁴ and are integrated within the Bayanic Calendar.⁴⁶⁵ Chapter 12.7 includes these elements in the table describing the calendar.

Creation is where we recognize the names of God and develop our virtues, a corrupted Earth would greatly increase the difficulty in achieving this spiritual progress. Thus, we have a moral ecology in which we operate.

20.7.1 Moral Ecology

Moral ecology can refer to the pragmatic evolution of ethics over time as if it were an ecosystem. It can also refer to the study of human interactions with the natural environment and the ethics of these interactions. Much like the water example, both of these definitions seem to be rather integrated. The environment shapes our morals, and our morals help shape the environment. None can actually ever be divorced from the other.

In numerous instances, Baha'u'llah describes Earth, or parts of the Earth, as having feelings, expressing feelings, and having spiritual experiences. Usually this is used as metaphor to describe feelings,

⁴⁶² Kitab-i-Aqdas #54

⁴⁶³ Kitab-i-Aqdas #64

⁴⁶⁴ Persian Bayan Vahid 5 Gate 14

⁴⁶⁵ Persian Bayan Vahid 5 Gate 3

expressions, and spiritual experiences people should be having. What if Earth does have feelings, expresses those feelings, and have spiritual experiences? "Every stone and tree has cried out with the loudest voice, Bethlehem has been moved by the breath of God, and the trembling of reunion has seized Mount Sinai.⁴⁶⁶ The Land of T (Tehran) is instructed not to grieve the injustice perpetuated upon it.⁴⁶⁷ The Land of Ba rejoiced when Baha'u'llah arrived after being released from the land of prison, which the land of prison became saddened.⁴⁶⁸ Flowers, fruits, trees, leaves, and rivers are pleasing examples of divine power and craftsmanship in honor of the passing of a believer.⁴⁶⁹ In the same tablet He says the trees, stones, clay, and pebbles serve as witnesses.

Every instance we observe Baha'u'llah's metaphors and descriptions of the earthly creation, maybe we should also consider the idea Baha'u'llah is describing that which is real in metaphorical ways. When He says "plant nothing in the garden of the heart except the flower of love"⁴⁷⁰ maybe we have two things to consider. The obvious is the heart should have love inside of it, so that love is what courses through our body and is able to be freely expressed outwardly, seen and admired by those who are able to observe this flower of love in the garden of the heart. The less obvious might be we should sometimes plant flowers out of love for the garden itself. Why not both? The flower we plant may inspire love by a person who witnesses it, whether the garden is in our heart or made from the Earth we were created from, and the Earth we will return to.

Trusteeship within moral ecology would be to view the ecology of the Earth, its minerals, its air, its water, its living things as an integral part of who we are. We witness it, we preside over it as trustees instead of as masters, and serve to help it thrive. When we are instructed to build up the lands and cities, this is definitely not an act of destruction. It is an act of construction, but in a way which is reverent to the idea the Earth is sacred, our provision for ourselves and future generations must be provided, and we are not the only things on Earth which has feelings and spiritual journeys. Imagine when the next future Manifestation of God appears hundreds of years from now. Will they witness an Earth and people who are more purified than when Baha'u'llah lived among us?

The Bab even included a prohibition from buying or selling the four elements of fire, air, water, and earth.⁴⁷¹ I do not see this prohibition continued by Baha'u'llah, nor do I see Baha'u'llah expressing a permission. In consideration of what the Bab intended, how might we adapt our economies to be mindful

⁴⁶⁶ The Lawh-i-Aqdas (Most Holy Tablet)

⁴⁶⁷ Kitab-i-Aqdas #91

⁴⁶⁸ Lawh-i-Ard-i-Ba (Tablet of the Land of Ba)

⁴⁶⁹ BH00010

⁴⁷⁰ The Hidden Words of Persian #2

⁴⁷¹ The Arabic Bayan 9, Gate 10

of how we use those four purifying elements in commerce? I personally witness how water is extracted from aquifers which cannot be replenished, bottled into plastic, and the plastic is thrown back into surface water. The profit margins of bottled water bring large, multinational corporations significant profits, yet it comes at potentially significant long-term externalized costs elsewhere. It may not reflect God's vision of justice for a few to profit at the cost of many. A trusteeship of these four elements could develop methods to account for externalized costs, or find ways for markets which believers operate in to guide the Bab's vision at various levels. Helping would find ways to ensure extraction does not exclude giving, that there are pathways to achieving a true accounting balance, tied to the virtue of moderation.

20.7.2 Animals

Baha'u'llah does tell us not to load an animal with more than it can bear.⁴⁷² He associates justice and fairness between the heavens and Earth. Loading an animal would explicitly mean examples such as ensuring a pack animal is not carrying excessive weight for an excessive duration. This also implies the burden is undue suffering, physical pain, and in this example, cruelty. When I consider other ways living creatures can suffer or face physical pain due to human activity, I also consider habitat loss where animals lose their shelter, food, and water. I consider pollution which makes a creature sick, disoriented, or in places like Chernobyl, mutated.

Baha'u'llah also says we should not be excessive in hunting⁴⁷³ for prey. Again, this is an act of provision without excess. This again is associated with justice and fairness. If animals are used to hunt, the names of God should be mentioned. If we are taking the life for provision, it comes with a spiritual act of reverence towards that which is lost, that which was provided by God. Should we hunt for sport and entertainment? If so, how does this reflect the names of God? Should we kill anything which attempts to eat our food sources? Should we use pesticides to spray yards, gardens, and fields and killing every insect which ventures onto that land? If we are viewing Earth as our dominion, do we have the power to do anything we wish for entertainment and comfort, or do we have a role as trustees? These are all types of questions we should consult on as we build up these lands and cities for the Cause of God.

In considering the witness, trustee, and helper model, we can be guided by the virtues of moderation, courtesy, and thankfulness. These can ensure that for anything we take, we are willing to give back something equal or more to that which we have taken from.

20.8 Wills and Testaments - Houses of Justice as Trustees

Every soul has been ordained to write a will.⁴⁷⁴ The will must have certain features:

1. Heading with the Greatest Name,
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⁴⁷² Kitab-i-Aqdas #187

⁴⁷³ Kitab-i-Aqdas #60

⁴⁷⁴ Kitab-i-Aqdas #109

2. Declaration of the oneness of God in the Manifestation of His appearance,
3. Good deeds they wish to be remembered for,
4. How they wish to be buried, and
5. The distribution of inheritance according to their wishes.

A will and testament is a legal contract, to be executed upon the death of a person, who is known as the testator. They entrust the Houses of Justice to act as the trustee of the contract, also known as the executor of the will. A testator can designate another person to execute, but the Houses of Justice still have the final responsibility to ensure the contract is fulfilled. If a will is not made prior to a person's death, then the local House of Justice will act according to the Kitab-i-Aqdas and a few amendments to the law afterwards.

When distributing the estate, there is an order of priorities. The funeral expenses are to be paid first, then any outstanding debts. If any money remains, the payment of Huquq'u'llah for any portions of wealth Huquq'u'llah was not paid on. If there is any money after Huquq'u'llah, then the estate will be distributed as inheritance.⁴⁷⁵

20.8.1 Inheritance Without a Will

The Arabic Bayan introduces the inheritance distribution with 2520 shares divided between seven categories (Books) of inheritors.⁴⁷⁶ Baha'u'llah kept this exactly the same in the Kitab-i-Aqdas but later changed it in BH01964. Below is the distribution. I listed the categories as described in the Bayan and Kitab-i-Aqdas, with the original number struck out. The changes from BH01964 are added or subtracted with the final total and percentage calculated.

Split from the Letter Z (Number 7)

- I. Descendants - Book T (9) according to number of M, Q, T – 540 + 540 = 1080 (42.8%)
- II. Spouses - Book H (8) according to number T and F – 480 - 90 = 390 (15.5%)
- III. Fathers - Book Z (7) according to number T and K – 420 - 90 = 330 (13.1%)
- IV. Mothers - Book W (6) according to number R, F, Y, A – 360 - 90 = 270 (10.7%)
- V. Brothers - Book H (5) according to number Sh – 300 - 90 = 210 (8.3%)
- VI. Sisters - Book D (4) according to number R and M – 240 - 90 = 150 (6.0%)
- VII. Teachers - Book J (3) according to number Q and F – 180 - 90 = 90 (3.6%)

⁴⁷⁵ BH00984

⁴⁷⁶ Arabic Bayan Vahid 10, Gate 14

20.8.2 Items Excluded From Sale

If the house is inhabited by descendants, the male descendants inherit the house.⁴⁷⁷

Specific garments are to be given to the male descendants. This may not exactly mean common clothing defined by gender roles. Instead, this could mean garments which have a significant meaning or purpose within the family. Ceremonial, spiritual, and culturally significant garments would be included. This also implies these types of garments are not to be sold as part of the estate, and remain a part of the family. An example of how a ceremonial garment might be designed could take inspiration from the Persian Bayan Vahid 5, Gate 10.

20.8.3 When an Inheritor Does Not Exist

It might not be guaranteed all seven categories of inheritors were born or are still alive when the deceased passes away. The Kitab-i-Aqdas provides guidance in these situations.

If there are no descendants, their portion will go to the House of Justice.⁴⁷⁸ (1080 of 2520 shares)

If the deceased has descendants but no other specified heirs, 2/3rds will go to the descendants and 1/3rd will go to the House of Justice.⁴⁷⁹ For example, if there is no spouse, 260 of 2520 shares will be added to the descendants for a total of 1340 shares. 130 shares will go to the House of Justice.

If there are no direct heirs from the first 6 categories but there are nephews, nieces, or their children, 2/3rds will go to them and 1/3rd to the House of Justice.⁴⁸⁰

If there are no direct heirs and no nephews, nieces, or their children, the inheritance from the first 6 categories will go to the House of Justice.⁴⁸¹

20.8.4 The Funeral

The funeral is mostly derived from the Persian Bayan Vahid 5, Gate 12 and Vahid 8, Gate 11 with some adjustments in the Kitab-i-Aqdas #128-130. The Bayan describes the cleansing and burial process as preparing the temple of the body for purification at the return of all things (resurrection). It is a process which must be done with the deepest honor of the person who passed. The following are the steps for the full funeral.

⁴⁷⁷ Kitab-i-Aqdas #25

⁴⁷⁸ Kitab-i-Aqdas #21

⁴⁷⁹ Kitab-i-Aqdas #22

⁴⁸⁰ Kitab-i-Aqdas #23

⁴⁸¹ Kitab-i-Aqdas #24

20.8.4.1 Preparation

1. Handle the body with dignity and stillness.
2. Repeat the six Names of God—or “God” alone—from the moment of death until burial.
3. Prepare pure water, optionally mixed with camphor and lotus leaves.
4. Ensure the washing is performed by the righteous.

20.8.4.2 Washing of the Body

5. Wash the head — “O Singular One.”
6. Wash the abdomen — “O Living One.”
7. Wash the right side — “O Self-Subsisting One.”
8. Wash the left side — “O Wise One.”
9. Wash the right foot — “O Just One.”
10. Wash the left foot — “O Powerful One.”
11. Perform one washing; up to three or five permitted.
12. Use water (warm or cool) suitable to the condition of the body.
13. After washing, perfume the body with fresh fragrance.

20.8.4.3 Shrouding

14. Shroud the body in five layers of silk or fine cotton.
15. Up to nineteen Names of God may be inscribed on the shroud.
16. Wrap the body with calm and reverence.

20.8.4.4 The Ring

17. Place on the right hand:

Men: “To God belongs whatever is in the heavens and the earth and what is between them, and God is All-Knowing of all things.” Women: “To God belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth and what is between them, and God is over all things Powerful.”

20.8.4.5 The Coffin

18. Place the body in a coffin of crystal, stone resistant to decay, or fine, hard wood.
19. Place fragrance within the coffin before closing it.

20.8.4.6 The Funeral Prayer (*Salát al-Janázah*)

20. The congregation stands; no bowing or prostration is performed.
21. The prayer is said once only, facing toward God.

O my God, this is Your servant (maidservant) and the son (daughter) of Your servant who has believed in You and Your signs, and has turned towards You, detached from all else but You. You are indeed the Most Merciful of the merciful. I beseech You, O Forgiver of sins and Concealer of faults, to deal with him in accordance with Your heavenly grace and ocean of

bounty, and to admit him into the shelter of Your supreme mercy, which has preceded the earth and the heavens. There is no God but You, the Forgiving, the Generous.

Then recite:

1. "Allah-u-Abhá", then "We all, verily, worship God" — 19 times.
2. "Allah-u-Abhá", then "We all, verily, bow down to God" — 19 times.
3. "Allah-u-Abhá", then "We all, verily, are devoted to God" — 19 times.
4. "Allah-u-Abhá", then "We all, verily, remember God" — 19 times.
5. "Allah-u-Abhá", then "We all, verily, are grateful to God" — 19 times.
6. "Allah-u-Abhá", then "We all, verily, are patient for God" — 19 times.

20.8.4.7 Burial

22. Following the prayer, the coffin is carried reverently to the grave.
23. Bury the body within one hour's distance from the place of death.
24. Bury the body with spirit and fragrance in a nearby place.
25. As the body is lowered, one may say:
"I began from God and returned to Him, detached from all else, and clinging to His Name, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate."
26. Maintain silence and remembrance until the burial is complete.

20.9 Closing Thoughts About Trusteeship

There are many aspects of life which could be covered regarding trusteeship, especially within our social lives and relationships. I hope covering these major themes helps provide a vision and framework in how to apply these ideas in the various complicated situations which arise in life. Trusteeship, as when it is applied to the raising of children in relation to the Bayanic Calendar, is an enriching way to add to the practice of Honoring God.

The key foundation of trusteeship, outside of viewing it as a spiritual or legal obligation, is the act of consultation. Everything regarding trusteeship, marriage, and other important matters requires the ability to consult. The last chapter of Part 3 is going to discuss consultation. With unity being the bridge between spiritual practices and virtue development and our rights and responsibilities, consultation is the bridge between unity and trusteeship. Consultation is the practical application of unity. Consultation is the engine that drives witnessing, the mechanism that enacts trusteeship, and the means through which we learn how best to help.

21. Consultation

In Chapter 15, we learned the close association of consultation with spiritual maturity. Baha'u'llah said to “cling to the cord of consultation.” Chapter 14 describes a right to consultation as an opposing force to oppression. Consultation is also a key part of affectionate relationships and trusteeship. Baha'u'llah describes consultation, when combined with compassion, are two radiant lights in the sky of wisdom.⁴⁸²

21.1 Types of Consultation

There are two types of consultation. One is when we refer a matter to an expert. The trained professional is capable on consulting their expertise to be a trustee to whom sought their expertise. They are skilled in being a witness of the problem and in providing the necessary help. In an example regarding seeking medical care, we are commanded to heed a doctor’s prescriptions and orders.⁴⁸³ We are to seek expertise where we lack expertise, and follow the expert’s commands in the subject they are an expert in. This is the same as following God. The only condition is the expert must actually be skilled. Standards in licensing, education, and other professional certifications can help a person discern who is an expert and how is not. We cannot follow every claimant.

The second type of consultation is among a group of peers. The Kitab-i-Aqdas mentions consultation only once, but it is directly in regards to trusteeship.

God has ordained that in every city a House of Justice should be established, where individuals shall gather in the number of Bahá (9), or more if desired. They should regard themselves as entering the presence of the Exalted One, observing the unseen. These members must be the trusted ones of the Merciful among people and the representatives of God for all who dwell on earth. They should consult on the welfare of the servants of God for His sake, just as they consult on their own affairs, and choose what is best.⁴⁸⁴

The Houses of Justice are to be the exemplars of trusteeship and consultation, but consultation is a binding command for all.⁴⁸⁵ There is no power except through unity, and no well-being except through

⁴⁸² Lawh-i-Ishraqat (Tablet of Illumination)

⁴⁸³ BH00093

⁴⁸⁴ Kitab-i-Aqdas #30

⁴⁸⁵ BH00046

consultation.⁴⁸⁶ Consultation is necessary in all matters.⁴⁸⁷ It increases awareness and turns conjecture into certitude.⁴⁸⁸ It is the cause and means of vigilance, welfare, and safety.⁴⁸⁹

The Holy Spirit confirms consultation.⁴⁹⁰ Consultation is such an act of power, Baha'u'llah even allowed acts of consultation to override his directives to community members when He was acting as administrator to the communities, such as which city to travel next.⁴⁹¹ Consultation does not override revelation from God, and works within the framework and boundaries provided to us.

All power mechanisms after Baha'u'llah are subordinate to consultation, no matter who has power and no matter the context of power. All consultation is guided by God and affirmed as part of the Cause of God.

21.2 Consultation Process

For the Houses of Justice, there was no specific consultation process outlined. For the general consultation for everyone else, there are a few guidelines Baha'u'llah provided.

As for what you wrote concerning consultation, after presentation they said that if disagreement arises among the first group assembled, new souls should be added and then by drawing lots select the number of the Greatest Name, or less or more than that, and consult anew. Whatever emerges therefrom is to be obeyed. And if disagreement still persists, "adorn the two with a third and take the strongest." Verily, He guideth whom He willeth to the straight path. Thus hath the Lord of all beings decreed in this station.⁴⁹²

When looking at this paragraph, there is no minimum number of people to consult. It could be between 2 people or more. Consultation does not need to be with a House of Justice. Since all matters are to be consulted upon with compassion, it would not be physically possible for a House of Justice to be involved in each one. This social responsibility is for all, and all have a right to consultation in matters which affect them.

⁴⁸⁶ BH00083

⁴⁸⁷ BH00083

⁴⁸⁸ BH00123

⁴⁸⁹ BH00083

⁴⁹⁰ BH00040

⁴⁹¹ BH00093

⁴⁹² BH00059

Ideally, the consultation goes well, a solution is agreed upon, and a course of action is taken. If the consultation ends in disagreement, then an unspecified number of random people are added to the consultation, chosen by lot. Drawing lots is completely random, such as putting names in a box and picking from the names. This helps bring fresh perspectives and more knowledge. If the consultation is successful, it must be obeyed.

Yet, if there is still disagreement, there is one more process. Adorning the two would refer to the two strongest remaining proposals from the prior two rounds of consultation. This could be two people, two ideas, two hypothesis, or two premises. The third might be a mediator introducing a third path or a different perspective applicable. The third could be the prior consultative group taking the two positions and discovering a middle path. Basically the third represents a stage of evaluation and refinement, a synthesis which extracts the highest quality result from the prior divergence.

Baha'u'llah does not necessarily express a majority rules framework. I could see a community adopting a majority rules perspective in some consultations, but there might be other factors to consider. Truth, justice, unity, and compassion might be more important than a simple majority. As Baha'u'llah says, consultation brings certitude, welfare, and safety to us through a depth of understanding. It is more than counting votes.

To evaluate consultation, I want to take a pass of the witness, trustee, and helper model through some of the prior concepts of this book.

21.3 Matters to Consult On

The following is a list of some potential subjects we could consult on:

Personal and Ethical – conscience, health, vocation, discipline, temperament, friendship, conduct, aspiration, repentance

Family and Household – marriage, parenting, inheritance, education, shelter, nutrition, caregiving, celebration, mourning

Community and Social – service, fellowship, conflict, culture, recreation, safety, hospitality, communication, reputation

Professional and Vocational – ethics, training, mentorship, innovation, employment, leadership, compensation, scheduling, evaluation

Economic and Financial – trade, investment, taxation, charity, property, production, distribution, consumption, stewardship

Religious and Spiritual – worship, doctrine, pilgrimage, ritual, study, repentance, translation, guidance, devotion

Civil and Political Governance – legislation, justice, security, planning, infrastructure, diplomacy, representation, welfare, education

21.4 Witnessing

In consultation, witnessing is the first role. To be a witness is directly tied to our capacities and orientation of a soul as a mirror of God. Witnessing is tied directly to our belief in God's names, as these names reflect within our souls and illuminates how we see truth. No person reflects all of God's names perfectly, and some names may appear in a soul more brightly than others. For example, a person may primarily reflect the name of Power more than Knowledge and another in the counsel may reflect Love more than Justice. Each person will witness differently, even if each person who witnesses are functionally equal in the consultation. Even if a person does not believe in God, they are capable of reflecting God's names.

With the mirrors illuminating truth in their own capacities, we describe what we observe the best we can. These observations include facts and how we feel about these facts. Opinions are equally important as facts, as opinions are true to the person who has them. We listen to how another in the counsel describes their own truth and observations. The mirrors of the names of God, when acting together, can merge their lights together. This illuminates the truth with a more radiant light which includes all Names each reflect. If Knowledge was missing with one person, another in the counsel might shine that light. We might not see all names of God as we serve as witness, but the chances to witness with an increasing number of names is much greater than if a person were to witness alone.

Witnessing requires the ability to ask questions. If a person feels they only have answers or their testimony is the only valid testimony, it will show by the inability of the person to ask questions. Consultation requires a perspective you can learn from another, even if you disagree with their perspective or observation. This is because to consult, each person must be willing to view their collective testimony as a single mirror illuminating by the Names of God, not merely illuminating with their own birth name.

21.5 Trustee

Consultation requires us to view us as trustees. We are trustees of what we witness, curated by our spiritual practices. These spiritual practices develop our innate and emergent virtues which govern how we treat our collective testimony. Much as the Holy Spirit moves through spiritual practice, It also moves through our constellations of virtue which guide our movements.

Every person has developed their virtues and is currently in the process of developing their virtues. This process needs to be respected. For example, one might be guided most strongly by humility and sincerity and another might be guided most strongly by righteousness and dignity. When combined together, we have four guiding lights instead of two each.

We are also trustees of truth. We treat what is witnessed as sacred, and we allow our spiritual practice as sacred to the process. This does not necessarily mean the counsel pray in the moment, but to allow our prayers, remembrance, recitation, reflection, and honoring God to also act in trust of our consultation. How does our conversations with God move us in this situation? What does God's Word say? Are there laws and counsels available which directly address our situation? How have my experiences influenced

what I observed? Do I view the others experiences as relevant as mine? Does the situation affect how we honor God together, such as in a later festival? There are many ways we can be trustees of our spiritual practice, and to allow our spiritual practice serve as trustees to consultation. Allow the Holy Spirit to move through you and the counsel. The Holy Spirit animates your practice and virtues.

21.6 Helper

Consultation requires us to be able to help each other during consultation and after consultation. Whether in agreement or disagreement, the counsel needs to ensure all individuals involved and anyone affected are supported and encouraged. As consultation operates within the social life, it is the key instrument to the Cause of God. The result of all consultation must be treated as fruits of the Cause of God. Fruits not only nurture, but they sow seeds for future trees and in theory, an exponentially increasing amount of fruit. Fruits will only emerge through help.

In helping, we might need to adapt how we viewed our role in the situation or adapt our understanding of what we witnessed. We may have to understand a prior result of consultation may not apply to every situation, so the fruits of consultation could vary in a case-by-case basis. We need to be able to affirm the positive aspect of each person's role and where difficulties arise, be willing to serve the person struggling with the consultation itself or the situation the consultation is addressing.

Each person has their own capacities to help. One might be adept at referencing Baha'u'llah's words, another might have a well-developed empathy. One might have skills to make a task easier, and another might have resources available to ease a burden. Help is additive and potentially multiplicative, being greater than the sum of its parts.

Finally, help does not equal coercion even in disagreement. Any concern in disagreement needs to be viewed as legitimate and addressed as best as possible. Consultation cannot be effective if it is missing compassion. Consultation, when well-assisted by the counsel and people of the community, is a process which renews unity. If the constellation of virtues is unity, how these constellations guide a counsel is also also unity.

21.7 Conclusion

I believe consultation, as confirmed by the Holy Spirit, the animating extension of revelation. It keeps the Book living and is the continual process which will liberate us. When we approach consultation as a divine process, we are utilizing all the skills we have learned through the Kitab-i-Aqdas itself. All souls will achieve their greatest degree of liberty through this process.

This concludes Part 3 of this book. The fourth and final part of this Book will progress to the Houses of Justice and how Baha'u'llah envisioned the period of time after Him and before the appearance of the next Manifestation of God. What is the vision after 1892 for the next 1,000+ years?

22. Houses of Justice

22.1 Introduction

The Kitab-i-Aqdas #30 says:

God has ordained that in every city a House of Justice should be established, where individuals shall gather in the number of Bahá (9), or more if desired. They should regard themselves as entering the presence of the Exalted One, observing the unseen. These members must be the trusted ones of the Merciful among people and the representatives of God for all who dwell on earth. They should consult on the welfare of the servants of God for His sake, just as they consult on their own affairs, and choose what is best. Thus has your Lord, the Mighty, the Forgiving, decreed. Beware not to neglect what is explicitly stated in the Tablet. Fear God, O people of insight.

This chapter is the beginning of Part 4: Leadership After Bahá'u'llah. Bahá'u'llah extensively discussed spiritual leadership and political governance throughout His writings. The Houses of Justice are the new institution Bahá'u'llah created which serves as a link between both spheres. We will discuss who may serve on a House of Justice, their roles, and how they are the foundation of a distinct governance model designed to liberate everyone within their jurisdiction. It should be noted I may refer to the singular House of Justice instead of the plural Houses at times. I view the singular House to be the name of the institution, while many Houses comprise the institution.

22.2 The Selection Process

Bahá'u'llah instructed a Council of Consultation to be formed for the appointment of trustees at a time when the formation of a House of Justice does not cause injustice upon the trustees or those they serve.⁴⁹³ Bahá'u'llah refrained from appointing anyone Himself. The time for appointment was too early due to kindled fire within the lands. He says "if today in various cities institutions specifically known by the name of House of Justice and the like become known, there is danger for all, as the people are immature. Leave them until their backs are strengthened and they attain their maturity."⁴⁹⁴

The Council's results are confirmed by the signatures of believers of the lands. This suggests there could be a separation in duties. The trustees are different than the Council of Consultation, who are different than the signatories of the results. The signatories would act as a notary and witness, testifying to the integrity of the selection process. The Council does not need to function through election, although that could be an option. The consultation would follow the rules set forth in Chapter 21, which would be guided by the Holy Spirit. Bahá'u'llah reminds the Council to "let them hold fast unto whatsoever leads to

⁴⁹³ BH06839

⁴⁹⁴ BH04495

exaltation, elevation, dignity, composure, goodly deeds, spiritual qualities, words of counsel, and the reformation of heedless souls, according to the requirements of the days.”

The Council process does not need to be rigid, as the consultation needs to be according to the requirements of the days. What might be relevant in 2026 may not be relevant five hundred years later. These Councils and the Houses of Justice act “until God shall come with His command.” Once the next Manifestation of God appears, this process ends.

In the Kitab-i-Aqdas and a few other tablets, Baha’u’llah does specifically say men serve on the Houses of Justice. There are some people who say only men can serve on the Houses of Justice due to how gender language is used. In a letter contained in BH00158 addressed to Narjis and Sakinah Khatun, he tells them any women who have partaken of the Choice Sealed Wine (The Kitab-i-Aqdas) are men, knights of the field. He warns of those who are deprived of certitude due to vain imaginings (illusions), while women such as them bring the light of certitude. BH00158 provides many statements regarding the station of women.

Thus, gendered terminology does not limit spiritual capacity. The measure of one’s fitness for the House is not outward form but inward reality. Those who have drunk from the Choice Sealed Wine are men in spirit. They are steadfast, detached, and radiant in faith. The Council must therefore discern the measure of this inner knightliness when selecting members, whether male or female in body.

22.3 Roles of the Houses of Justice

The Houses of Justice are to serve various interlinked roles. They include being trustees of the Merciful,⁴⁹⁵ the representatives of God,⁴⁹⁶ the shepherds of the sheep of God,⁴⁹⁷ and the dawning places of His command.⁴⁹⁸ These roles are broad in scope but they are also quite well-defined. In further sections, I will clarify each of the four roles.

In each role, there is no room to expand the scope beyond the limits what Baha’u’llah stated. There is no room to add additional roles, either. In the Tablet of the Houses of Justice, Baha’u’llah tells the members of the Houses of Justice to “be mindful not to act contrary to what has been revealed in the divine verses in this mighty, eternal Manifestation, for whatever the True One—exalted is His station—has decreed is indeed what is best for the servants.” He includes another restriction; religious practices should follow what God has revealed in His Book.

⁴⁹⁵ Kitab-i-Aqdas #21

⁴⁹⁶ Kitab-i-Aqdas #30

⁴⁹⁷ Kitab-i-Aqdas #52

⁴⁹⁸ Tablet of Splendors, 8th Illumination

He says in the same tablet these roles exist with the authority of the people. This means a House of Justice cannot be formed without the authority of the people, as we saw with the selection process. This also means the people must consult on what roles the House of Justice will serve. The House of Justice does not establish its own authority. In receiving the authority of the people, Baha'u'llah offers a first priority, followed by the other matters they should consult on. I interpret this to be a potential ranking, or a progression of the roles the House of Justice may take on over time.⁴⁹⁹ The next sections will discuss five separate authorities derived from the Tablet of the House of Justice, the four roles of the Houses of Justice in fulfilling what they have been authorized to do, and the progressive nature of these authorities.

22.3.1 Authority #1: The Propagation of the Cause of God

The first authority is the propagation of the Cause of God. If we were to assign a virtue, this would be the illumination phase of the House of Justice. The members of the House of Justice shine as one Mirror, manifesting divine light through their service. The Cause of God would include all aspects of a person within their social life, their affectionate relationships, and the various roles they fulfill. It also includes all of the preparatory steps to enhance the public sphere, such as the belief in God, the soul, the spiritual worlds, the Day of Resurrection, the Manifestations of God, the spiritual practices, the development of virtues, the recognition of rights, the ownership of responsibilities, and refinement within our personal lives.

To propagate means to reproduce, multiply, and to be fruitful. There are two main ways the Cause of God can expand. The first is for the Cause to be newly embraced by others whose conscious has been awakened. The second is for the Cause to inspire a healthy family life, where children are born to parents who holistically embrace the Cause. Both pathways would fall under the first authority of the House of Justice.

Role #1 Trustees of the Merciful: The foundation is for the trustees to consult on the welfare of others, just as they consult on their own.⁵⁰⁰ This is where the witness, trustee, and helper model is first institutionalized. They see where people are struggling and with what resources they do have, consult on a solution, and help. To assist, they manage endowments dedicated to charitable purposes.⁵⁰¹ These charitable purposes can include being used towards elevated places of the Cause, such as the maintenance of the pilgrimage sites in Shiraz and Baghdad and Mashriq'u'l-Adhkars. The trustees elevate the Cause, but not themselves. Finally, these endowments could be used to safeguard Baha'u'llah's Word, promote translation efforts, and publish Baha'u'llah's Word.

Role #2 Representatives of God: The foundation is to be an advocate on behalf of God, with full accountability for their actions and decisions. This would be the public-facing role. An example would be

⁴⁹⁹ Tablet of Splendors, 8th Illumination

⁵⁰⁰ Kitab-i-Aqdas #30

⁵⁰¹ Kitab-i-Aqdas #42

to share the nine Illuminations from the Tablet of Ishraqat to leaders, organize or support the organization of public dialogue focused on the teachings of Baha'u'llah in relevant context. Representatives act as exemplars, actively demonstrating through their lives how to live the Cause. Finally, they show full accountability. Maybe they provide transcripts of their consultations and public accounting of the endowments they receive and how endowments are spent.

Role #3 Shepherds of the sheep of God: As shepherds, they help guide the community through consultation. They protect by ensuring the propagation does not bring harm, Baha'u'llah's Word is not altered, nor that anyone's own words do not become equal to or greater than Baha'u'llah's. They promote an environment where affectionate relationships are encouraged and supported. They encourage community members to consult together and have a healthy social life. Protection does not equal policing, but by being vigilant.

Role #4 Dawning places of His command: This role is not about enforcement, legislation, or membership as propagation can only be had through invitation, not coercion. To be dawning places of His command, think of the role of the Mashriq ul-Adhkar in the life of a community. They serve as the dawning places of the remembrance of God. To be a dawning place, one must be seen as a symbol of God's light rising from the horizon in fellowship. A House of Justice could lead or support festivals, holy days, remembrance services, or monthly hospitality. They celebrate marriages and births, without officiating over them. They help inspire artistic endeavors or scholarly research into Baha'u'llah's teachings, sciences, and other forms of knowledge which shed light on truth.

There are many ways a House of Justice can consult on and help propagate the Cause of God. The most important aspect is those who are chosen to serve must be diligent in their virtues, and understand the community does not exist to serve them. They exist to serve the community. The authority is given to the House through the people's trust. Should that trust be withdrawn through consultation by the people, the House's mandate ceases. As long the House consults in the spirit Baha'u'llah ordained, it is confirmed by the Holy Spirit. Thus, the people and the House are co-trustees of one Cause, each guarding the other from injustice.

When propagation has been successful to a degree the people are pleased with, the people may choose to consult on whether to give the House its second authority.

22.3.2 Authority #2: The Morals of Souls

The second authority is the morals of souls. Where authority one was focused on illumination through propagation, the House of Justice will add refinement to its responsibilities. They will nurture virtue and conscience to assist inner transformation of the individual and transformation of the communities.

Role #1 Trustees of the Merciful: They view morality as a trust, but it is not imposed. The members of the House of Justice offer moral companionship. We should always be reminded the members of the House of Justice are also on their own spiritual journey. While selected for their leadership in how they express virtue and good deeds, they are still striving for moral improvement. Being entrusted to morals, they are more importantly entrusted to souls. The House of Justice consults in how to educate, mentor,

and counsel youth, families, and adults of all ages. Voluntary programs might be established for moral education or developing spiritual habits.

Role #2 Representatives of God: The House members are the moral exemplars, embodying the morality of souls publicly. When they consult on a matter of ethics or morality, not only do they record their consultation, but do so in a way which can be learned from by anyone who reads or watches. They may participate in local or civic dialogues on ethical or moral issues raised in public life, and do so humbly and gently. Through them, the public is aware God is active.

Role #3 Shepherds of the sheep of God: They consult on what nearby services are available to help others overcome moral struggles. However, services can never be imposed. Companionship is sharing a moral journey together. The members are not judges in this authority, but are Mirrors reflecting the names of God until others can see their own soulful nobility. Members offer consultation to help others learn how to repent and to forgive helps relationships move forward. The House may mediate moral disputes and guard against gossip or public humiliation.

Role #4 Dawning places of His command: The House consults on ways to transform Baha'u'llah's Word into the moral fabric of culture. Moral transformation is not viewed as austerity or deprivation, but as a radiant beauty all are attracted to. They support the development of arts, literature, and scholarship that ennoble human character and the development of the constellation of virtues. The members reinforce the connection between spiritual practice and virtues. Finally, if a Mashriq'ul-Adhkar has not been established, the House would need to find a pathway for its establishment. The Mashriq'ul-Adhkar is the foundation of the devotional life of the community, where remembrance of God inspires the culture.

When the moral character of the community is sufficiently reflected in their deeds and well-being, the people may decide to consult on granting the House of Justice the third authority.

22.3.3 Authority #3: The Preservation of Honor

The third authority is the preservation of honor. From here, the House moves past refinement towards the protection of human dignity, the protection of a soul created noble. We take the authorities of propagation, which teaches what the Cause of God is, and the authorities of refining morals, which transforms the people who believe, and apply them towards social action.

Preserving honor would be focused on taking steps and measures to protect the rights of all people, and to help heal those whose rights have been violated.

Role #1 Trustees of the Merciful: The honor of a person is the trust, and the House of Justice is the trustee. Baha'u'llah's instruction to consult on what benefits others as if they are consulting on what benefits each individual member is the foundation of this trusteeship. They witness the right of a person, without regarding whether the person is a believer of Baha'u'llah or not, and considers the best remedy.

Role #2 Representatives of God: The members of the House are the representatives of honor. They may choose to host or attend forums, media, and other public-facing outlets which emphasize the

preservation of honor. The House may assist or sponsor those, whether or not they are believers, who are actively working to preserve honor and protect the rights of people.

Role #3 Shepherds of the sheep of God: In guiding believers and others, the members of the House will consult on matters which ensure people are honoring others and being honored. They educate people, without exceptions, on the nature of the soul, the rights all are created with, the rights we mature into, our responsibilities, and how to express these rights while honoring the rights of others. The House also ensures those whose rights are compromised are protected, counseled, and not subjected to further degradation.

Role #4 Dawning places of His command: The House develops or sponsors educational, cultural, and civic programs designed to preserve the people's honor. These would be tied to the teachings of the Bab and Baha'u'llah, inspiring the various levels of outreach and social action. Education, culture, and civic programs can be completely interlinked, as each inform the other. Imagine a culture where Baha'u'llah's teachings about leading with good deeds and righteous acts starts to be integrated at every level of society, even in the political sphere. While the members of the House of Justice do not have the authority at this stage to participate in roles of government, they can be the guiding lights of those who do.

When the honor of the people are increasingly and sufficiently preserved, the people may decide to consult on granting the House of Justice the fourth authority.

22.3.4 Authority #4: The Development of Cities

The fourth authority is the development of cities. Through this point, the House of Justice has continued its successful trusteeship of propagating the Cause of God, the morals of souls, and the preservation of honor. The members of the House of Justice view the cities as bestowals from God, being treated with reverence and love. The purpose is to take the lands which were created by God and refine them so they reach a higher station towards perfection. This is not about achieving perfection, but the constant striving towards it.

The development of cities would include the physical, economic, educational, and environmental components by engaging with social institutions, endowments, urban design, educational systems, and civic planning. There is wisdom in delaying this authority until now. With the House of Justice experienced in preserving the honor of all people in the city, they will be better capable to ensure development also preserves and enhances honor.

Role #1 Trustees of the Merciful: The city is the trust, and the House of Justice is the trustee. The members of the House consult regarding services, infrastructure, zoning, and other related matters regarding development. The House is not the government. They do not enact ordinances, laws, taxation, or other legislative, executive, and judicial acts as a government entity. Instead, they consult. Consultation could include development firms, business leaders, non-profit organizations. The Houses could create or support organizations and individuals who are active in these roles.

Role #2 Representatives of God: This would be the role where the House of Justice shapes policy through example, not domination. They serve as advisers and experts in the public sphere, ensuring Baha'u'llah's

principles are active in civic affairs. The members may advocate for policies which align with the Cause, publish or present statements on ethics in economics, sustainable development, or community planning. They do this through their own integrity, transparency, and wisdom.

Role #3 Shepherds of the sheep of God: By this stage, being shepherds has become increasingly complex. Pastoral care continues, ensuring urbanization and its inherent materialism does not erode the soul of the community. The House promotes neighborhood-level consultation and may support projects which alleviate the suffering of vulnerable people. The diversity of the city is navigated as pathways of unity. A city will have multiple voices and organizations working towards various causes and goals. The House of Justice can encourage their support, refinement, and utilize resources to fill-in any potential needs being under-served. All of this is to ensure all within the city have access to the resources and opportunities required to support their rights and responsibilities to each other.

Role #4 Dawning places of His command: Within this role, the House of Justice can find ways to integrate spirituality into city design, to include Mashriq-ul-Adhkars and other places of worship. They can promote public festivals and other cultural events which celebrate service, knowledge, and beauty. Parks, gardens, and buildings could be encouraged to be designed in ways which reflect or symbolize divine virtues.

When the city's institutions embody justice, when culture and commerce serve human welfare, and when the people see divine beauty reflected in their civic life, the community is ready for the fifth authority: governance itself. At that stage, the House of Justice becomes not only the moral compass but the axis of order for the land.

22.3.5 Authority #5: The Governance For the Lands and Protection For the Servants

This is the final authority which can be granted to the House of Justice. There are two authorities intertwined which serve each other. They are the governance for the lands and the protection for the servants. One aspect cannot exist without the other. Unlike the other authorities, this one must be granted by the entire city, not just those who believe in Baha'u'llah. A successful House of Justice has laid the groundwork to be a trusted institution within the city through the prior four authorities. Once the House is responsible for governance and protection, they have been granted their final tools to continue the development of cities, the preservation of honor, refinement of morals, and the propagation of the Cause.

Role #1 Trustees of the Merciful: The government is the trust and the House of Justice is the trustee. The government's first role is the protection of the servants. As trustees, they are not focused on the protection of the government or the House of Justice itself. The House has no inherent right to exist except through the authority of the people. They are not only advocates for the rights of others, but they ensure legislation is enacted which protect the people's rights, the laws are enforced fairly, and any judgments reflect the principles of consultation Baha'u'llah taught us. Once again, consultation is the foundation of trusteeship and when done correctly, is guided by the Holy Spirit from God.

Role #2 Representatives of God: As representative of God, the members of the House act as though their city is God's, establishing a kingdom on Earth as it is in Heaven. The House strives to reflect the

names of God, even as they represent people of various faiths and those without belief in God. Everything they do, and those who work for them must constantly remember they are representatives of God. Their leadership nurtures a culture which better reflects those names and attributes more than prior to the House of Justice being created.

Role #3 Shepherds of the sheep of God: The House is responsible in all aspects of the nurturing and protection of all people in their cities. The protective measures of the Cause of God, such as expressed in Chapter 18, are the foundation of the House's role as shepherds. There is a delicate balance in being able to identify threats to one's safety, protecting it, while also ensuring the rights of all are also fully guaranteed. This may require continued educational efforts which promote healthy private and social habits as much as it does through legislative or criminal justice system actions.

Role #4 Dawning places of His command: This final role, in my opinion, is the pinnacle of the entire revelation of God through Baha'u'llah. Every law revealed in the Kitab-i-Aqdas is in effect. The implementation of this divine law is not only a dawning place of His command, but the dawning place of a new era for the city, and potentially humankind.

22.4 What is Not Mentioned

Baha'u'llah is quite clear in expressing what rights, responsibilities, and authorities people have in various aspects of life. This is true for those who serve various leadership positions, especially in government and religion. The House of Justice does have roles in both spheres. It could seem quite alarming in today's age to read about an institution born from religious decree to lead a city's government. I share those same concerns, which is why I find it useful to consider what is not mentioned by Baha'u'llah. My perspective is the House is only granted the authorities given to it, first as outlined by God and later as permitted by the people. These are two exceptionally strong guardrails, if honored.

One authority not granted to the House of Justice is the implementation of religious practice. The eighth splendor mentioned earlier in the chapter explicitly denies the House of Justice any authority in religious practice. Religious practice is entirely a responsibility of the individual, unenforceable by other people. This means the House of Justice, while decreed in the Most Holy Book, is not a religious institution. I believe this is why there are no laws with any punishment which exist solely in the private life of a person. We only see such laws to protect the social life, to prevent harmful acts towards others.

Given they have no role in religious practice, when the members of the House of Justice propagate the Cause of God, they also have no authority in interpretation, translation, or other aspects in the unveiling and understanding of Baha'u'llah's writings. Their authority is in propagation, as described earlier.

The House of Justice has no authority to be a monarch of a kingdom, although a monarchy can have a House of Justice. This is not an extensive list of what is not authorized, but I do hope these examples encourage reflection and creative thinking in understanding the unique and divine institution. With God being the source of all authority, authority can only be granted by God and His Manifestation. This authority cannot be taken as one wills.

22.5 Scope of Authority Beyond the Cities

Baha'u'llah says "all matters of State should be referred to the House of Justice."⁵⁰² He also says "Although a republican form of government profits all the peoples of the world, yet the majesty of kingship is one of the signs of God. We do not wish that the countries of the world should remain deprived thereof. If the sagacious combine the two forms into one, great will be their reward in the presence of God."

22.5.1 State-Level

A House of Justice can be established which has the authority of the matters of State and operates within a republican form of government. A republican form of government is a system where the people choose representatives for governance, legislation, and public decision-making. As with the cities, this is a consultative body whose authority is granted by the people.

A state-level House of Justice with the preceding authorities could theoretically be nominated the people of a city which has a House of Justice where the city is a city-state. Where the city is but a part of a larger jurisdiction, cities with Houses of Justice could authorize the creation of a state-level House of Justice to assist in the propagation of the Cause. The pattern to expand authority would follow the guidelines of the rest of this chapter. Other jurisdictions such as county, province, parish, and their equivalents in other cultures would also follow a similar pattern.

A singular city who has Authority #1 could not declare other authorities for other jurisdictions. This would mean jurisdictions must be adjoining. Within a state, it could also be possible to have multiple Houses of Justice operating at different authorities as they are dependent on those authorities being granted by the people of their locality. This is purposefully decentralized.

The only way to by-pass this is if a monarch creates a new republican monarchy with a House of Justice established within the new government. This scenario will be covered more in the next chapter.

22.5.2 World-Wide

Baha'u'llah also teaches the trustees of the House of Justice to adopt one language (or create one) and choose one script, so that the children of the world may appear in one homeland.⁵⁰³ This is a foundation in loving the world instead of having pride in their homeland. He adds the ministers of the House of

⁵⁰² Lawh-i-Bisarat

⁵⁰³ Lawh-i-Ishraqat.

Justice must implement the Most Great Peace.⁵⁰⁴ The Most Great Peace is the unification of the world's parties or the unification of the world's religion.⁵⁰⁵ This would fall under Authority #1.

These two authorities are universal in nature. There are two ways for this to be achieved, or a hybrid of the two ways. The first could be the Houses of Justice established throughout the lands consult together as one institution called the House of Justice. The second could be a world-wide House of Justice is established with these sole two authorities. This would be for the people to decide in due time. I believe either would be viable and effective.

The entire focus of this world-wide House of Justice would be to establish the Most Great Peace, nothing more and nothing less. They would work with political leaders, NGOs, and other organizations to progress towards the adoption of one language and script. There would be a number of smaller goals to work towards to achieve this, while also ensuring people maintain their right to language (especially their native language). This world-wide House would also be active in the political sphere in conflict-resolution and mediation, maybe supporting forums and educational efforts which works towards peace and diplomacy, and helping political parties have a vision greater than their own party.

Finally, the world-wide House of Justice would also work towards the unification of the world's religion. There could also be multiple pathways towards this goal. One would be nurturing the belief of all people towards Baha'u'llah. Another would be help reform other religions in such ways as their people recognize there is one God who has guided each of them. This pathway would indirectly lead people towards Baha'u'llah. Another pathway could simply be the leaders of the world's religions to consult together and determine all should live in peace together. All three of these pathways could be independent of each other or be closely linked, depending on the result of the House's consultations.

If there did end-up being a Most Great Peace established, it could also be the world's nations have decided to operate under a single constitution. If so, it might be possible for a House of Justice to have worked its way to Authority #5. However, a world-wide House of Justice cannot be established prior to the other preceding jurisdictions. This is never a top-down mechanism.

22.6 The Rest of Part 4

We are concluding this most important chapter of Part 4. I highly believe this model for the entire institution for the House of Justice is our best pathway in the liberation of humankind. Up to this point, we defined the ultimate structure from the ground-up. The rest of the chapters are going to slowly start from the tops of the political and religious power dynamics and work our way back down to the grassroots. To start at the top of the political structure, we will next look at Baha'u'llah's guidance to the monarchs of the world, His hope for a future monarch who believes in Him, and how He counseled monarchs and other state actors.

⁵⁰⁴ Lawh-i-Dunya (Tablet of the World)

⁵⁰⁵ Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih (Words of Paradise)

These teachings make up a large part of the Kitab-i-Aqdas and many of His unsolicited teachings.

23. Political Leadership

23.1 Introduction

The Houses of Justice were not meant to lead on their own. Paragraphs 77 through 97 of the Kitab-i-Aqdas includes a large portion addressing the assembly of kings, particular political leaders of the time, and various lands. Many of Baha'u'llah's teachings are about the responsibilities of political leaders, the rights they are to protect, and our responsibility to those leaders. Baha'u'llah says "Now, what seems good in the British nation's constitution, which is adorned with both the light of sovereignty and the consultation of the nation ... but the matter that is a cause of preservation and prohibition in both the outer and inner aspects, is the fear of God."⁵⁰⁶

The "Epistle to the Son of the Wolf" provides a great example of Baha'u'llah's vision. In addressing a Shaykh who serves the Ottoman Sultan, He offers this short sermon:

Every nation should consider the position of its ruler, be submissive to his command, act by his decree, and hold fast to his judgment. Kings are the manifestations of the power, elevation, and grandeur of God. This oppressed one has never flattered anyone; all bear witness to this fact. However, considering the status of kings is from God, and it is clear and known from the words of the Prophets and saints.

In the presence of the Spirit (Jesus), it was asked: "O Spirit of God, is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar or not?" He said: "Yes, render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's." He did not forbid it, and these two words are one to those who perceive, for what is Caesar's would not be lawful if it were not from God. Likewise, in the blessed verse: "Obey God and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you." The primary and foremost meaning of "those in authority" are the Imams (may the peace of God be upon them), who are the manifestations of power, the sources of command, the treasuries of knowledge, and the dawning places of divine wisdom. In the secondary rank, it refers to the kings and rulers whose light of justice illuminates and brightens the horizons of the world. It is hoped that from the Sultan (may God preserve him) a light of justice will shine that will encompass all the parties of the nations. All should ask God for what is befitting today for His sake.

This chapter will consider the derived authority from God a monarch may express, how the government derives its authority from the monarch, their responsibilities, potential opportunities leaders had in Baha'u'llah's time, and promises and prophecy God makes to certain lands (and the people therein). As seen in Baha'u'llah quoting both Jesus Christ and Muhammad, this has been a consistent teaching of God for thousands of years. Baha'u'llah gives us the framework to achieve this.

⁵⁰⁶ Lawh-i-Dunya (Tablet of the World)

23.2 Opportunities of Sovereign Leaders in Baha'u'llah's Time

Baha'u'llah addressed several sovereign leaders and the opportunities presented to them, in the Kitab-i-Aqdas and elsewhere. This section will briefly share some of these opportunities.

23.2.1 To the Emperor of Austria (Franz Joseph I)

He visited Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem in 1869 but did not enquire about Baha'u'llah, nor sense Him.⁵⁰⁷ Baha'u'llah was with the Emperor in all conditions, but the Emporer was clinging to the branch but heedless of the root. Baha'u'llah invited the Emperor to recognize Him instead of clinging to a prior Branch. Emperor Franz Joseph I missed the opportunity to express his belief in Jesus Christ by recognizing Him in a new name. Franz was a well-respected sovereign and reigned for 68 years until his death in 1916. The empire of Austria ended with his death, an outcome of World War I which started with his declaration of war against Serbia after the assassination of his heir.

23.2.2 To the King of Berlin (Wilhelm I)

The Second Reich of the German Empire was formed in 1870, just 3 years prior to the revealing of the Kitab-i-Aqdas. Baha'u'llah addresses Emperor Wilhelm I⁵⁰⁸ warning him about pride, and a king prior who sought to dominate the lands and rule over the people. He had originally resisted a constitutional monarchy but relented upon Otto von Bismarck's recommendation. Nevertheless, Germany remained militaristic and authoritarian with designs on restoring the Holy Roman Empire of Germany to its former glory. Wilhelm I passed away at the age of 90 in 1888.

23.2.3 Regarding Napoleon III of France

When Baha'u'llah reminded Wilhelm I of the prior king, He was referencing a fulfilled prophecy to Napoleon III of France. In the Suriy-i-Haykal, Baha'u'llah addressed Pope Pius IX of Rome, Czar Alexander III of Russia, Queen Victoria of Great Britain, and Sultan Nasir-i-d-din-Shah of Persia in addition to Napoleon III. Baha'u'llah in 1868 told Napoleon III after he claimed to fight against oppression:

"Due to your actions, affairs in your kingdom will differ, and dominion will slip from your hand as a result. Then, you'll find yourself in clear loss, and earthquakes will affect all tribes unless you stand in support of this cause and follow the spirit on this straight path. The honor you value won't last, it will fade unless you hold onto this strong rope. We see humiliation following you while you are among the heedless."

By the time the Kitab-i-Aqdas was revealed 5 years later, Napoleon III had been captured by Germany, and died a prisoner. He was remembered in France as a deserter of his army and was publicly humiliated.

⁵⁰⁷ Kitab-i-Aqdas #85

⁵⁰⁸ Kitab-i-Aqdas #86

This context places the warning to Emporer Wilhelm I as an urgent warning. Pride in yourself cannot come at the cost of your country and its citizens.

23.2.4 To the Kings and Presidents of the Americas

By 1873, the western hemisphere had largely become comprised of several new republics, starting with the United States of America in 1776. There was one independent King, Pedro II of Brazil, although descended from Austria's House of Habsburg. Europe also exercised colonial rule over many other lands.

Baha'u'llah instructs the Kings and Presidents to adorn the temple of dominion with the raiment of justice and piety, and its head with the crown of the remembrance of your Lord.⁵⁰⁹ Baha'u'llah did not promise the Americas would be the light of justice and piety, but it was their responsibility to do so.

Appendix 7 offers a table outlining the leaders of the world in 1873. The idea is to provide context for the Kitab-i-Aqdas's place in both time and space. Maybe you may ask yourself, did these nations seize the opportunity or let the opportunity pass away? Do these opportunities still exist? I believe where these opportunities were not acted on, these opportunities still exist. It is never too late to adorn the temple of dominion with the raiment of justice and piety.

23.3 Roles and Responsibilities of Monarchs

23.3.1 We Share the Same Foundations

Monarchs have various roles and responsibilities derived from their position. Before we get into the roles and responsibilities unique to monarchs, let's start from the beginning.

In the beginning, God created the worlds and everything within them. Over time humans emerged and God gave them a unique soul. Every human's souls is created noble, regardless of their social or economic status. A person who emerges as a monarch has a soul created by God, just like you, myself, and others we know. The monarch's soul has opportunities to pass through the spiritual worlds, and believe in God, their own soul, these spiritual worlds, the Day of Resurrection, the Command of God, and the Manifestations of God.

The monarch may not believe in God, believe in Baha'u'llah, or believe in these things. Yet, these opportunities exist. They may choose to pray, remember God in worship, recite the verses of God, reflect on themselves, and honor God through various practices. They may not do these things, or even publicly say they do but in their private life do not. The monarch has opportunities to develop and refine their virtues.

The monarch is also born with the same rights we have. As they attain maturity at age 19, they have additional responsibilities and rights. They have a private life, like we do, and may struggle with illusions, delusions and desires. They have opportunities to overcome them. Monarchs have a constructive social

⁵⁰⁹ Kitab-i-Aqdas #88

life, and need protections of this social life. Monarchs have affectionate relationships and have responsibilities towards those in their personal life to include being trustees and participating in consultation. As you can see, for every aspect of their existence, we share the same foundations.

23.3.2 Beyond Shared Foundations

The Kitab-i-Aqdas and Suriy-i-Muluk (The Tablet to the Kings) outline specific responsibilities monarchs have. This section will list these responsibilities:

23.3.2.1 Spiritual Foundations of Leadership

- Purify yourself from the wealth of the world, do not be preoccupied with wealth⁵¹⁰
- Take from the world only what is sufficient, leaving what is excessive⁵¹¹
- Do not let the love of others enter your heart, let the love of God rule the heart so you may know Oneness⁵¹²
- Act as vassals of God and rise to serve the Purpose for which you were created⁵¹³
- You are the shadow of God on earth⁵¹⁴
- Leave your houses (might refer to any dwelling places of monarchs to include palaces) and turn to the Kingdom of God⁵¹⁵
- Leave your laws and follow the law of God⁵¹⁶

23.3.2.2 Ethical Foundations of Leadership

- Do not wrong anyone⁵¹⁷
- Prevent oppressors from their oppression⁵¹⁸

⁵¹⁰ Kitab-i-Aqdas #79

⁵¹¹ Suriy-i-Muluk #21

⁵¹² Suriy-i-Muluk #62

⁵¹³ Kitab-i-Aqdas #82

⁵¹⁴ Suriy-i-Muluk #61

⁵¹⁵ Kitab-i-Aqdas #84

⁵¹⁶ Suriy-i-Muluk #23

⁵¹⁷ Suriy-i-Muluk #10

- Secure the rights of the oppressed⁵¹⁹
- Examine the affairs of people before issuing judgments or punishments⁵²⁰
- Do not punish those who do not disobey the your laws⁵²¹
- Recompense the debts of those wrongfully punished⁵²²
- Do not take people's money unjustly (bribes, blackmail, etc)⁵²³
- If a wicked person brings you news, verify it⁵²⁴
- Beware of listening to words of malice and hypocrisy⁵²⁵
- Do not impose upon others what you cannot bear yourselves⁵²⁶

23.3.2.3 Economic Foundations of Leadership

- Do not impose your expenses on your subjects beyond their capacity (do not over tax)⁵²⁷
 - Do not betray your trusteeship to the poor⁵²⁸
 - Spend on servants according to their need, not according to what they hoard or use for adornment, so that none are in need nor hoarding⁵²⁹
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⁵¹⁸ Suriy-i-Muluk #14

⁵¹⁹ Suriy-i-Muluk #14

⁵²⁰ Suriy-i-Muluk #19

⁵²¹ Suriy-i-Muluk #30

⁵²² Suriy-i-Muluk #32

⁵²³ Suriy-i-Muluk #83

⁵²⁴ Suriy-i-Muluk #35

⁵²⁵ Suriy-i-Muluk #37

⁵²⁶ Suriy-i-Muluk #42

⁵²⁷ Suriy-i-Muluk #11

⁵²⁸ Suriy-i-Muluk #12

⁵²⁹ Suriy-i-Muluk #

- It is not fitting to have some in abundance and others in clear poverty and humiliation⁵³⁰

23.3.2.4 Safety and Security Foundations of Leadership

- Reduce your armies so that your expenses decrease⁵³¹
- Maintain an army to protect the lands and kingdoms⁵³²
- Do not wrong those who have migrated to you and protect them⁵³³
- Reconcile among yourselves (sovereign leaders reconcile with sovereign leaders)⁵³⁴

23.3.2.5 Bureaucratic Administrative Foundations of Leadership

- Respect scholars who act according to their knowledge, follow the limits set by God, and judge according to what God has decreed in His Book⁵³⁵
- Do not gather around you agents who abandon their trusts and follow their desires⁵³⁶
- Consult with agents who exude the scent of faith and justice⁵³⁷
- Do not relinquish control of your affairs to others and do not become complacent⁵³⁸

23.3.3 Additional Rights of Monarchs

Baha'u'llah did not outline any additional rights of monarchs. Once again, what is excluded is quite informative. Baha'u'llah does not say the monarch should be concerned about the protection of their government, but only the citizens and lands. This is one example and I invite you to consider what other traditional notions of governance are excluded from Baha'u'llah's directives.

⁵³⁰ Suriy-i-Muluk #59

⁵³¹ Suriy-i-Muluk #10

⁵³² Suriy-i-Muluk #10

⁵³³ Suriy-i-Muluk #11

⁵³⁴ Suriy-i-Muluk #10

⁵³⁵ Suriy-i-Muluk #43

⁵³⁶ Suriy-i-Muluk #54

⁵³⁷ Suriy-i-Muluk #54

⁵³⁸ Suriy-i-Muluk #56

23.4 To Various Lands and Cities

Baha'u'llah had addressed various lands in the Kitab-i-Aqdas and in other writings. This section will only cover what is in the Kitab-i-Aqdas. We will see admonitions, prophecies, and encouragement. All of these are related to how the governments of these lands treat their citizens and their adversaries.

23.4.1 To the Company of Rome (Byzantine Rome)

Baha'u'llah hears the sound of the owl among them.⁵³⁹ He asks "Has the intoxication of desire seized you, or are you among the heedless?" In 1873, the Eastern Orthodox Church was a semi-autonomous religious entity governed under the Rum millet within the Ottoman Empire. Istanbul at the time was about 50% Sunni Muslim (versus over 90% today) with the Eastern Orthodox Catholics forming a significant population. Istanbul was the home of the former Eastern Roman Empire from the 4th through 15th centuries, the home of the first Christian monarch, and nearby Anatolia was the home of the first Pauline churches. The Greek population formed an important economic, social, and political base in the Ottoman Empire, even if politically they were considered second-class citizens.

When Baha'u'llah addresses the company of Rome, Baha'u'llah is directly referring to Orthodox Christians governed under the Rum millet, and the historical significance Rome had in representing the community who believed in Jesus Christ. When He mentions the owl, I believe Baha'u'llah is evoking Psalms 102 from King David of Israel. I will share the full text and allow the Psalms to carry the weight of this section and the next:

Hear my prayer, Lord; let my cry for help come to you. Do not hide your face from me when I am in distress. Turn your ear to me; when I call, answer me quickly. For my days vanish like smoke; my bones burn like glowing embers. My heart is blighted and withered like grass; I forget to eat my food. In my distress I groan aloud and am reduced to skin and bones. I am like a desert owl, like an owl among the ruins. I lie awake; I have become like a bird alone on a roof. All day long my enemies taunt me; those who rail against me use my name as a curse. For I eat ashes as my food and mingle my drink with tears because of your great wrath, for you have taken me up and thrown me aside. My days are like the evening shadow; I wither away like grass. But you, Lord, sit enthroned forever; your renown endures through all generations. You will arise and have compassion on Zion, for it is time to show favor to her; the appointed time has come. For her stones are dear to your servants; her very dust moves them to pity. The nations will fear the name of the Lord, all the kings of the earth will revere your glory. For the Lord will rebuild Zion and appear in his glory. He will respond to the prayer of the destitute; he will not despise their plea. Let this be written for a future generation, that a people not yet created may praise the Lord:

"The Lord looked down from his sanctuary on high, from heaven he viewed the earth, to hear the groans of the prisoners and release those condemned to death."

⁵³⁹ Kitab-i-Aqdas #89

So the name of the Lord will be declared in Zion and his praise in Jerusalem when the peoples and the kingdoms assemble to worship the Lord. In the course of my life he broke my strength; he cut short my days. So I said:

“Do not take me away, my God, in the midst of my days; your years go on through all generations. In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded. But you remain the same, and your years will never end. The children of your servants will live in your presence; their descendants will be established before you.”

The Eastern Orthodox Church suffered greatly in Istanbul and Anatolia not long after 1873. Massacres of Armenian Christians in 1894 and 1909, the Armenian Genocide during World War I, and the aftermath of the Greco-Turkish war led to a decline the Church has never recovered from in its historical homeland. These losses were tragic and painful and still form a painful scar for many in eastern Europe.

23.4.2 To the Point on the Shore of Two Seas (Istanbul)

Baha'u'llah turns His attention to the point on the shore of the two seas, which is Istanbul. He says:

The throne of oppression has been established upon you, and the fire of hatred has been ignited within you to such an extent that it has caused lamentation in the Concourse on high and those who circle around the exalted Throne. We see within you the ignorant ruling over the wise, and darkness boasting over the light, while you are in manifest delusion. Your outward adornment has deceived you. By the Lord of creation! It will perish, and the daughters and widows, and the tribes among you, shall weep. Thus does the All-Knowing, the All-Informed give you tidings.

In 1876, the Ottoman Empire did adopt a constitutional monarchy much like how Baha'u'llah had prescribed. In 1878, Sultan Abdul Hamid II suspended the constitution. The Ottoman Empire quickly declined and by 1922, after 620 years, the Ottoman Empire was no more. Istanbul, the former Constantinople, stopped being the capital of Christendom and Sunni Islam after 1600 years.

23.4.3 To the Banks of the Rhine River

Baha'u'llah addresses the rising Second Reich of the German Empire, formed in 1871 by the Prussian Wilhelm I. He says “We have seen you covered with blood, as the swords of retribution were drawn against you, and again you shall have it.”⁵⁴⁰ The Franco-Prussian War was fought in 1870, another of several wars between France, Prussia (later Germany) which started in the late 1790s. The Napoleonic Wars themselves had an estimated 4-6 million casualties, and many battles were fought along the Rhine River. These wars seemed to be a never-ending cycle of retribution.

⁵⁴⁰ Kitab-i-Aqdas #90

Baha'u'llah includes a prophecy stating that after 1873, the Rhine River banks will again be covered with blood. The Battles of Marne (1914 & 1918) and Verdun (1916) were fought during World War I. About 1.5 million casualties were reported in these three battles.

23.4.4 The Lamentation of Berlin

Baha'u'llah then addresses Berlin, the capitol of the German Empire. "We hear the lamentation of Berlin, though she is now in manifest glory." Lamentation is an expression of deep sadness and regret, often due to a sense of wrongdoing. Berlin was the capitol of the most industrialized, most modern, the most militaristic, and potentially the most authoritarian government in Western Europe. The First Reich was known as the Holy Roman Empire, when Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne as the first emperor of the symbolic Western Roman Empire in the year 800. This decentralized kingdom lasted until the Napoleonic War in 1806, nearly a thousand years of rule between the Roman Catholic Church and Frankish (a German ethnicity) monarchs.

I believe the lamentation of Berlin alludes to the lost moral leadership of the Holy Roman Empire amid the increasingly violent retributive wars throughout Europe, plus the repercussions throughout the world through colonialism and imperialism. The centralized Second Reich was not the same as the decentralized First Reich. The first was moderated by the influence of Christianity, while the second was no longer restrained by religious authority. The retributive wars in Europe did not end until World War 2, once the Third Reich was defeated.

Sadly, retribution endured as a consequence of the unraveling of moral authority once diffused and restrained across Eastern Rome, Western Rome, and the Sunni Caliphate. These traditions, despite their failures and imperfections, governed in reference to God rather than unconstrained force. As centralization displaced trusteeship and power slipped free from humility and law, the lands once oriented toward Jerusalem inherited cycles of violence instead of peace.

23.4.5 To the Lands Within Persia

The next section addresses the people and lands of Persia, where Baha'u'llah was born, raised, imprisoned, and exiled from.

23.4.5.1 To The Land of Tā (Tehran)

Baha'u'llah describes Tehran as the place where the Dawn of Manifestation was born⁵⁴¹, referencing the appearance of the Holy Maiden to Him in the Siyah-Chal prison of Tehran in 1852. Tehran is the source of the world's joy, so do not grieve over anything. He then offers two promises, one is conditional and the other is not.

⁵⁴¹ Kitab-i-Aqdas #91 - #93

The conditional promise relies on whether God will it or not. This promise is Tehran will be blessed by a sovereign leader who will rule with justice and gather the scattered sheep (believers) from the wolves. He will greet the people of Baha (those who believe in Baha'u'llah) with joy and gladness.

The unconditional promise has two parts. The first part is the masses will pass judgment upon Tehran, with things being overturned within Tehran. Yet, when this happens, be at peace because the divine bounty will not cease from you. After this period, tranquility will follow the turmoil. This promise has been decreed by God.

The unconditional promise does not require the conditional promise to be fulfilled. The period of turmoil and the period of tranquility are inevitable. It is hard to pinpoint any moment as being the specific turmoil. There was the civil war of 1908 to 1910 which ushered a constitutional revolution, the American-led coup in 1953 which replaced the constitution with absolute monarchy, and then the Islamic Revolution of 1979 which overthrew the monarchy with a constitutional theocracy based on Shi'a Islam. Each of these could be the turmoil depending on perspective, the entire period could be a part of a greater turmoil, or maybe it has not happened yet. Depending on what you believe the turmoil is, might inform what you believe the period of tranquility will be thereafter. No matter what, I do hope Tehran can become illuminated by that light from the Dawn of Revelation.

23.4.5.2 To the Land of Khá (Khurasan)

Baha'u'llah says "O Land of Khá! We hear within you the voices of men extolling your Lord, the Self-Sufficient, the Most Exalted. Blessed is the day when the banners of the Names are raised in the Kingdom of Creation in My Most Glorious Name. On that day, the sincere will rejoice in the victory of God, while the disbelievers will lament."⁵⁴²

I have wondered if this could mean Khurasan as the current province of Iran, or the greater historical area of Khurasan which includes modern cities such as Herat (Afghanistan), Bukhara (Uzbekistan), and Ashgabat (Turkmenistan). These areas were first included with the name Khurasan during the Zoroastrian Sasanian Empire in the 6th century. Where might a Kingdom begin which establishes the banners of the Names of God in His Most Glorious Name (Baha'u'llah)?

23.4.5.3 To the Land of Kāf and Rā

The final land from Persia mentioned by Baha'u'llah is the land of Kāf and Rā (Kirman). This paragraph #164 is immediately part of a series of paragraphs addressed to religious scholars. Baha'u'llah has witnessed that which He has chosen to remain a secret. However, I infer the later clause regarding the insinuations of the learned and the doubts of the skeptics to be potentially related to this secret.

One potential aspect of history which this may allude to is related to the husbands of two of Baha'u'llah's nieces, the daughters of Mirza Yahya (Subh-i-Azal). Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani and Sheikh Ahmad Rouhi were Azali Babi's who were influential in the revolutionary movements in the late 1800's Persia. In 1875,

⁵⁴² Kitab-i-Aqdas #94

just 2 years after this paragraph was revealed by Baha'u'llah, they went to various cities of Persia and later to Constantinople to garner support for greater freedoms for Persians. In 1896, Kermani assassinated Naser al-Din Shah and both were beheaded.

The followers of Baha'u'llah have long been associated with the assassination of the Shah and other revolutionary movements of Persia, despite Kermani and Rouhi writing public treatises against Baha'u'llah. Baha'u'llah says "no one should object to those who rule over the people"⁵⁴³ which is a clear instruction against revolution and rebellion.

23.5 Conclusion

As we can see, Baha'u'llah has a clear vision about the roles and responsibilities of kings and queens. This vision is direct from God. We can also look back into history and see the issues caused when kings, queens, and various leaders act contrary to this vision. The people under their rule and guidance suffer greatly. Early in this book I had briefly discussed suffering and ways to be liberated from suffering. While spiritual practice is the foundation, the pathways of suffering and the liberation therefrom also exist in the ways we organize and govern ourselves. John Locke had argued in 1689's "Two Treatises of Government" that political authority is based on the consent of the people. Do we consent to suffer or do we consent to be liberated from suffering?

To answer this question, we realize common mechanisms of change are not true pathways. Revolution, rebellion, and even protest do not consistently ease suffering or cause progress without consequences. The next chapter will help us look at this question with a different lens. We will look at spiritual and religious leadership in general in Chapter 24 and specifically at Baha'u'llah's vision for the Cause of God after His passing. These are all components of what we consent to, how we express consent, and reduce the suffering we and the generations after us experience.

⁵⁴³ Kitab-i-Aqdas #95

24. Spiritual Leadership

After discussing the Houses of Justice and civil sovereignty, a necessary question remains unresolved. If no institution governs belief, worship, or conscience, what form, if any, does spiritual leadership take?

Bahá'u'lláh is unambiguous. Authority over the soul belongs to God alone. No House of Justice, no ruler, and no scholar possesses the right to command belief, regulate spiritual practice, or act as an intermediary between a person and God. Yet this absence of coercive authority does not imply the absence of leadership. On the contrary, Bahá'u'lláh speaks repeatedly and with great intensity about those who influence souls.

This chapter will examine spiritual leadership as moral authority instead of institutional power, as service rather than control, and as illumination rather than governance. Before we identify the role of spiritual leaders, let us recount some of the firm prohibitions we have stated earlier in this book. Baha'u'llah says none possess authority over belief, over spiritual practices, over interpretation, nor from using names, persons, and traditions to veil a person from accessing God.

24.1 To the Concourse of Ulama (Religious Scholars)

Both the Bab and Baha'u'llah were considerably critical towards the Muslim ulama. The ulama are people who fulfilled a wide range of roles within the religion, such as scholarship, theological law, judges, interpreters, transmitters, government officials of Islamic states, teaching, community leaders, and other scholarly roles. They can be incredibly influential at all levels of society. Most of these roles are not exactly unique to Islam, though. A person can see aspects of these roles in all religions. Thus, the guidance Baha'u'llah offers in the Kitab-i-Aqdas can be applicable to many aspects of spiritual leadership of all religions, to include the religions the Bab and Baha'u'llah led.

This section will be a summary of the guidance for the ulama from paragraphs 165-172:

- Do not view yourself as greater than God. This can manifest itself in actions, not just words.
- Do not worship the idols of your own desires.
- Abandon your illusions and turn towards God.
- Do not weigh the Book of God with the rules and sciences you possess. This means old techniques may not actually be useful or relevant to understanding the Book of God, even Books such as the Qur'an.
- Do not weigh the Book of God with your own desires. Let God guide you instead of you trying to guide God.
- Do not corrupt the Cause of God.
- Do not create veils which hinder people's recognition of God.

- Do not let names keep you from God, such as the names of prior Prophets or the names of prior Books.
- Do not let your allegiance to a prior Prophet veil you from the authority of God.
- Do not let the spiritual practice of remembrance veil you. This refers more about performative worship instead of transformative.
- Do not become the cause of discord.
- Do not be the cause for others to reject God.

Many of these prohibitions may seem as though they had been discussed in various aspects of this book. This is because, like sovereign leaders, spiritual leaders are also normal people, like you and I. They have the same rights, the same responsibilities, their own spiritual journey, beliefs, spiritual life, social life, affectionate relationships, and goals. But, as we can see with some of Baha'u'llah's counsels, He was concerned with their influence over others. For various reasons, people who take on the various roles of the ulama chose these roles. They chose to take on certain responsibilities, and these responsibilities have real consequences within this world, especially to those individuals who relied on the ulama for guidance and salvation.

One of Baha'u'llah's missions was to liberate the souls from corrupt spiritual leaders. Yet, He did not abolish spiritual leadership. Instead, Baha'u'llah offers His own vision of spiritual leadership.

24.2 Scholars in the Cause of Baha

In the Kitab-i-Aqdas #173, Baha'u'llah offers these praises for scholars in the Cause of Baha:

Blessed are you, O concourse of scholars in the Cause of Bahá! By God, you are the waves of the Most Great Ocean, the stars of the heavens of bounty, and the banners of victory between the heavens and the earth. You are the dawning-places of steadfastness among the people and the rising-points of utterance for those in existence.

He also offers blessings to those who turn towards the scholars, and woe to the headless. These scholars and those who turn to them, and are nourished by the Revelation of God through Baha'u'llah.

24.2.1 Turning To

What does it mean to turn to? In the most simple terms, to turn to someone means to give your attention. The responsibility to turn towards scholars in the cause of Baha is a responsibility for anyone who believes in Baha'u'llah as a Manifestation of God. Yet, Baha'u'llah does not express any rights for scholars. Instead, the prohibitions and admonitions described for the Muslim Ulama would also apply to scholars in the Cause of God.

Without any additional rights, what do we give to scholars? We give our attention and support. Support does not necessarily mean financial support, but any type of support we want to offer. We may share

their explanations, insights, and arguments. We may support unfiltered access to historical sources. We may pray for them and their success. And, if a community has the resources to do so, offer financial support for their work or the logistics necessary to complete the work.

Yet, scholars do not carry authority. They have no right nor claim. Any person we turn towards is less authoritative than Baha'u'llah. While a scholar's work is valuable, it can never supplant the Word of God. Baha'u'llah says after His passing, to refer to what has been revealed from Him. Baha'u'llah is always the primary source until the next Manifestation of God comes. Everything scholars may unveil are portions, never the completeness. We should be careful never to make any scholar a primary source. For example, anyone who reads this book should never refer to this book as a primary source about Baha'u'llah. This is why I provide footnotes throughout, so a person can refer to the revelation itself. Your understanding might be different than mine, you may have better insights, and perhaps the totality of our insights helps others approach Baha'u'llah. It can never replace Baha'u'llah. If we focus on secondary sources and develop scholarship of secondary sources, every level thereafter will get farther and farther from God's intentions.

None can match Baha'u'llah in the field of mystical insight, knowledge, wisdom, and expression.⁵⁴⁴

24.3 Examples of Spiritual Leadership Gone Wrong

24.3.1 Shaykh Muhammad Hasan al-Najafi

Baha'u'llah says this about Shaykh Muhammad Hasan al-Najafi:

Mention the Shaykh who was called Muhammad before Hasan, who was among the most learned of scholars in his time.⁵⁴⁵ When the truth appeared, he and others like him turned away, while one who winnowed wheat and barley turned toward God. He spent his nights and days writing, as he claimed, the judgments of God, but when the Chosen One appeared, not a single letter of his work availed him. Had it benefited him, he would not have turned away from the face through which the countenances of the near ones are illumined. If you had believed in God at His appearance, the people would not have turned away from Him, and what has befallen Us today would not have occurred. Fear God and do not be among the heedless.

He was a the author of "Jawāhir al-kalām fī sharḥ sharā'i' al-islām," a book about Shi'a jurisprudence. By this point, jurisprudence sometimes had used the Qur'an as a source, but typically secondary sources were used to determine legal and ethical standards. The emphasis of sources other than God created a veil for al-Najafi and those who regarded al-Najafi as a primary source of understanding. Al-Najafi failed his followers.

⁵⁴⁴ Kitab-i-Aqdas #101

⁵⁴⁵ Kitab-i-Aqdas #166

24.3.2 Hajī Mirza Muhammad Karim Khān Kirmānī

Baha'u'llah mentions Karim:

Recall Karim⁵⁴⁶, when We summoned him to God, and he grew arrogant, following his own desires, even after We sent to him that which delighted the eye of proof in the realms of existence and completed the argument of God upon all in the heavens and the earth. We commanded him to turn in acceptance, as a favor from the Self-Sufficient, the Exalted. Yet he turned away, retreating, until the hosts of torment seized him, as a just decree from God. Verily, We were witnesses.

The following information is a summary from the Hurqalya Publications from the University of California Merced website as of 2025.⁵⁴⁷ Karim was the self-appointed third leader of the Twelver Shi'a Shaykhi movement.

The Shaykhi movement had started with Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i, who became a mujtahid who studied in Karbala at around age 40. A mujtahid was a scholar who was recognized to perform ijtaihad, deriving legal rulings based on the Qur'an, Hadith, and other secondary sources. Shaykh Ahmad eventually had visions that the Twelfth Imam would return in 1260AH (late 1843 or early 1844 AD), after 1,000 years of occultation. After he passed away in 1826, his appointed successor Siyyid Kazim Rashti continued this teaching through a newly formalized school called the Shaykhi School. Prior to passing away in 1843, Siyyid Kazim had instructed his students to search for the Qa'im (the returning Twelfth Imam).

Karim did not participate in the search. When one of the Shaykhi students, Mulla Husayn, first recognized the Bab on the evening of May 22, 1844, the Bab became the nominal leader of the Shaykhi School as the Qa'im and Twelfth Imam. Karim did not follow the Bab. Instead, he wrote a refutation called "The Crushing of Falsehood in Refutation of Babism." The same year the Kitab-i-Aqdas was penned, Karim had passed away. His last act was the writing of a Will and Testament appointing his hereditary descendants as leaders. The Shaykhi School still exists and is currently led by Hajji Sayyid Ali Musawi al-Hifzih.

24.3.3 Mirza Yahya Nuri (Subh-i-Azal)

Baha'u'llah addresses Mirza Yahya:

Say: O Manifestation of rejection, abandon concealment and then speak the truth among the people. By God, My tears have flowed down My cheeks upon seeing you inclining toward your desires and turning away from the One who created and fashioned you. Recall the favor of your Lord when We nurtured you through nights and days for the service of the Cause. Fear God and be among the repentant. Suppose your matter has been mistaken by the people—can it be mistaken by yourself? Fear God, and then remember when you stood in the presence

⁵⁴⁶ Kitab-i-Aqdas #170

⁵⁴⁷ <https://hurqalya.ucmerced.edu/node/24>

of the Throne and wrote what We revealed to you of the verses of God, the Almighty, the All-Powerful, the All-Capable.

Beware lest pride prevent you from turning toward the One True God. Turn to Him and do not fear your deeds, for He forgives whomever He wills by His grace. There is no God but Him, the Forgiving, the Generous. We counsel you for the sake of God; if you accept, it is for your own soul, and if you turn away, your Lord is independent of you and those who follow you with a clear delusion. God has taken the one who misled you. Return to Him, humbled, submissive, and lowly, for He will forgive your misdeeds. Your Lord is indeed the Oft-Forgiving, the Almighty, the Merciful.⁵⁴⁸

Mirza Yahya Nuri is Baha'u'llah's half-brother. When he completed his first Bayanic cycle at 19 years of age, the Primal Point had instructed him to execute His Will and Testament.⁵⁴⁹ Yahya, who was designated with the name Subh-i-Azal by the Bab, was the appointed custodian or steward. By this point in time in 1850, he was considered as a mirror, reflecting the light of God through the Bab. Yahya was not a Manifestation of God.

The testament instructs Subh-i-Azal to do specific acts. The custodian is instructed to safeguard and transmit the writings of the Báb without alteration, to distribute entrusted texts and responsibilities among designated individuals and regions, and to ensure unity, reverence, and fidelity to what has been revealed. He must act only within the limits given, neither adding nor subtracting anything, and preserve the Cause in its existing form until God reveals the next Manifestation. He is to coordinate the dissemination of the writings, protect them from misuse, and ensure that no individual claims excessive authority or possession. His role is custodial rather than sovereign: to maintain order, prevent division, uphold spiritual integrity, and ultimately surrender all authority the moment God makes His will manifest through another. The testament expressed the possibility God could manifest Himself again within the lifetime of Azal.

8 years later in 1858, Baha'u'llah wrote the *Tafsir-i-Hu*, an explanation of the Name of God "He." In it, Baha'u'llah affirms Yahya's status as a Mirror, whose purpose is to reflect divine names and attributes. Yahya is fully capable of reflecting the light of God if he remains faithful to God's command. It seems Yahya was at the threshold of remaining aligned and potentially turning away. In the same tablet, Baha'u'llah warns Yahya of being proud and exalting himself beyond his role. The Mirror must not mistake itself as the Source.

In 1863, Baha'u'llah had publicly announced that He is "He Whom God Shall Make Manifest." This was 19 years (a full Bayanic cycle) after the dawning of the Báb, and 13 years after His instruction to Mirza Yahya. Yahya did not recognize Baha'u'llah as a Manifestation of God. By 1868, when both had been taken to Constantinople and Edirne, Baha'u'llah revealed the *Kitab-i-Badi*. In it, Baha'u'llah describes how Mirza

⁵⁴⁸ Kitab-i-Aqdas #184

⁵⁴⁹ The Testament of the Honored Primal Point (BB00210)

Yahya had violated the trust given to him by the Bab, how he was no longer acting as a custodian. He left the Writings behind in Persia when he migrated to Baghdad. Baha'u'llah says Yahya focused more on concealment than custodianship, withholding the Bab's Texts, obstructing their circulation, and centralizing authority through himself instead of allowing the Bayani communities to be led by the Bayan.

Outside of custodianship, Baha'u'llah describes Yahya as acting contrary to what God desired of him. Yahya may have been ruled more by fear of others or a fear of losing prestige instead of fearing God. He acted with jealousy, attachment to status, and allowed these feelings to impair his moral conduct. Baha'u'llah accuses him of sowing suspicion, manipulating relationships, and permitting and encouraging harm to others. Yahya struggled with restraint, especially towards women and potentially drugs such as opium and hashish, which may have further multiplied his erratic behaviors. Baha'u'llah instructs Yahya's followers to read Yahya's Mustayqiz as evidence of Baha'u'llah's observations.

In the last year of Baha'u'llah's life on Earth in 1891, He continued to offer love and forgiveness towards Yahya. He instructs His followers to send someone to Cyprus to look after Yahya with the hope Yahya will recognize God's love. Still, at this time it was observed some of Yahya's followers put Yahya's image above others. His self-exaltation led to others exalting him as an idol.

24.4 Protecting Against Corrupt Spiritual Leaders

In the examples of Hasan al-Najafi, Karim Kirmani, and Mirza Yahya, we see different ways how spiritual leadership was used to self-exalt themselves and mislead others into believing in their exaltation. Each leader claimed rights for themselves which God did not allow, and failed their responsibilities as trustees over God's trust (the believer). Al-Najafi relied on secondary sources to interpret, Karim self-appointed himself and a hereditary successorship, and Yahya failed in his trusteeship. These three examples are as relevant today as they were when the Kitab-i-Aqdas was written.

By the time each had passed away, their souls were chained by their self-passion and self-indulgence. They failed to liberate themselves and worse yet, they inhibited the liberation of souls who turned towards them. As they pass through the spiritual worlds of God, my hope is they are able to be free of their constraints and can truly be set free.

Chapter 18.1 offers teachings which help protect the community from these types of leaders. These teachings include any claims of authoritative interpretations, of any type of infallibility, boasting, leading others to beg, and other prior religious practices such as ascending pulpits. People must constantly be wary of charismatic personalities who seek to use such claims to secure more rights than God allows and from being responsible over which God had commanded.

24.4.1 Qualities of Disbelievers

To help discern which people may be corrupt spiritual leaders, Baha'u'llah does offer much counsel throughout the Kitab-i-Aqdas. This will be a list of qualities attributed to disbelievers, to include those who claim belief and desire leadership.

- They seek prestige to any degree.⁵⁵⁰
- They claim hidden knowledge and esoteric understanding.
- They cling to their own principles.⁵⁵¹
- They are sorrowful.⁵⁵²
- They deny what God has permitted.⁵⁵³
- They treat outward actions as a substitute for inner sincerity (Example: “I pray in public, therefore I am righteous”).
- They hesitate in the Cause of God.⁵⁵⁴
- They are wolves in sheep’s garments.⁵⁵⁵
- They are intoxicated by desire.⁵⁵⁶
- They distort the Word of God.⁵⁵⁷

24.4.2 Your Responsibility to Remain Free

The foundation to ensuring you do not follow corrupt spiritual leaders is to adhere to believe in the rights you have. Believe these rights extend to everyone. Believe in your responsibilities derived in your belief in God. Believe in the responsibilities of those who do lead in any manner. Learn how the trusteeship model can be applied in any spiritual leadership role. Baha’u’llah did not prohibit clergy, nor religious scholarship. Be willing to lead if you feel you are capable and can withstand the temptations of disbelief. Be willing to allow others to lead if another is capable and can withstand the temptations of disbelief. Finally, use your spiritual practice and your constellation of virtues to help you discern the various ways spiritual leadership can be manifested.

⁵⁵⁰ Kitab-i-Aqdas #36

⁵⁵¹ Kitab-i-Aqdas #17

⁵⁵² Kitab-i-Aqdas #35

⁵⁵³ Kitab-i-Aqdas #36

⁵⁵⁴ Kitab-i-Aqdas #162

⁵⁵⁵ Kitab-i-Aqdas #52

⁵⁵⁶ Kitab-i-Aqdas #39

⁵⁵⁷ Kitab-i-Aqdas #105

As we have a responsibility to turn towards scholars, Baha'u'llah also describes what should happen once He was no longer among us. After His passing in 1892, what was supposed to happen? The next chapter will describe spiritual successorship.

25. Spiritual Successorship

Spiritual successorship describes Bahá'u'lláh's plans for when He is no longer with us in person. The Kitab-i-Aqdas has a few paragraphs which outline His vision. This chapter will discuss these plans, as well as Bahá'u'lláh's explanations of these plans in His other writings. What was the future supposed to look like from 1892 up to today? How will we shape the future in Bahá'u'lláh's vision after today?

25.1 BH11278 (The Book of My Testament After Me)

I want to introduce The Book of My Testament After Me, designated as BH11278. I am unsure exactly when it was written, but as Bahá'u'lláh Himself named it the "Testament After Me," I feel it would still be relevant at any point after Him.

The book is uncompromising in its nature of spiritual successorship. Authority passes through God to the Manifestation and is non-transferable. Bahá'u'lláh says "Can anyone share with Him in authority? Nay, by the Lord, though all may claim such for themselves." The true focal point of authority is the Book itself. No one may alter, interpret, or legislate apart from what God has revealed. He asks "Do you find any changer besides God or any interpreter apart from Him?"

Succession is about recognition, not an inheritance. This recognition is borne of belief and submission to the Divine command, even when the Manifestation is no longer among us. Spiritual legitimacy is measured by fidelity to the divine light. Bahá'u'lláh says "The Remnant of God in these days is the Manifestation of Light." Without this light, claims of authority are like shadows, they don't reflect the light in the mirror of their soul. It may have form, but it lacks substance.

Finally, BH11278 establishes a model of successorship where all authority after the Manifestation is custodial, conditional, and answerable to God alone. It is not absolute, it is not infallible, and it does not grant any rights to any leader unless explicitly granted by God.

25.2 Endowments

Bahá'u'lláh says "no one is permitted to manage them except with permission of the Source of Revelation."⁵⁵⁸ He continues by saying endowments is passed to the Aghsán, after them the institution of the House of Justice if it is established in the land. If not, endowments revert to the people of Baha. These endowments can only be used as specified in the Book. The specifications are for charitable purposes and in elevated places for the Cause.

In BH08767, Bahá'u'lláh says all endowments revert to the Huquq'u'lláh. Chapter 12.4 describes the various ways Bahá'u'lláh had utilized these endowments. This was reiterated by Bahá'u'lláh in BH00979.

Bahá'u'lláh begins the Kitab-i-Ahd (The Book of My Covenant) with a sermon regarding wealth. The Kitab-i-Ahd, which is reflects His Will and Trust says He did not leave treasures. "There is hidden fear and

⁵⁵⁸ Kitab-i-Aqdas #42

concealed danger in wealth... The wealth of the world is untrustworthy." Baha'u'llah adds specifically for the Aghsan that "God has not granted them any right to the property of others." Outside of collecting Huquq'u'llah as an endowment for charity and the Cause of God, the Aghsan had to still earn a living. They have no right to collect any additional property from anyone. They are not the Cause of God.

25.3 Aghsán (The Branches of Baha'u'llah)

There are 2 collections of letters Baha'u'llah wrote which are unnamed. One is BH00023 which are letters to the Yazd community through Varqa, a well-respected follower in the time of Baha'u'llah. The other is BH00057, addressed to believers in Zanjan. Each has a portion which is entirely identical to each other, and both were written in 1881. They are explanations of certain parts of the Kitab-i-Aqdas, and will be referenced regularly in this chapter.

With the revelation of the Kitab-i-Aqdas and thereafter, Baha'u'llah would refer to branches which were not Himself or a Manifestation of God. Baha'u'llah defines the Aghsan as "the present branches." Among them are two Great Branches. After the present branches, souls are considered fruits and leaves. The branches are His sons. The Great Branches are the Ghusn-i-Azam (Abbas Effendi) which means Most Great Branch and then Ghusn-i-Akbar (Mirza Muhammad Ali) which means the Most Mighty Branch. Both are titles given by Baha'u'llah and relate to names of God. There were two other present branches, Ghusn-i-Anwar (Badi'u'llah) whose title means Luminous. There was also Diya'u'llah, who I am unable to locate a given Ghusn title. BH00017 (unnamed) does describe Diya as a Branch. Diya means Radiant. Another son, Ghusn-i-Athar (Mirza Mihdi) had passed away while in the prison in Akka in 1870. His title meant Pure.

For every son, there was either a title or name which related to a name of God. In Chapter 1, we described many of the names of God as well as potential dangers if we remove a name of God from our belief. I consider the entire tree of God, the Sundrat-ul-Muntaha, would bear the most fruits if all the branches were allowed to manifest these names of God fully.

In terms of endowments, after Baha'u'llah passed away, the Aghsán were responsible for endowments such as Huquq'u'llah. Baha'u'llah did not say one Branch, but all were responsible until the Houses of Justice are created. The Aghsán were to operate as a consultative body, where once again, consultation is guided by the Holy Spirit. They were to serve as trustees and examples of the future Houses of Justice. They were not to profit from these endowments. This did not happen. As one Branch took sole responsibility of endowments, the Holy Spirit was not able to guide their use towards charity and the elevated places of God, such as Mashriq'u'l-Adhkars, and the Sacred Houses in Shiraz and Baghdad.

After Ghusn-i-Akbar (Mirza Muhammad Ali) passed away, the Aghsán were no longer responsible for endowments. Until there are Houses of Justice, such as in your city, these endowments are to be managed by the people of Baha. The people of Baha are not to profit from them.

25.3.1 Serving on the Throne

After the Kitab-i-Aqdas was written and Baha'u'llah and His followers gained more freedoms in the Akka and Haifa areas, He would receive believers as pilgrims and letters from across Persia and the Ottoman

Empire. In the context of receiving believers, their news, requests, and giving decisions, support, and guidance, Baha'u'llah would refer to His place as the Sacred Throne with the Sacred Court.

The Aghsán served this Throne and Court. Abbas Effendi and Mirza Muhammad Ali during the entire period from 1873 - 1892. As Diya'u'llah and Badi'u'llah aged into maturity, they also served. The entire family was in support in various capacities. Unrelated followers, such as Mirza Aqa Jan, served as an amenuensis who recorded Baha'u'llah's words in His pen. For each Aghsán, I will provide an example of their service and another example of the praise Baha'u'llah gave them.

25.3.2 In Honor of Abbas Effendi

In respect to his service:

"O My Name! Upon thee be My Glory! The Most Great Branch hath presented thy letter and mentioned it before the face of the Wronged One. We have answered thee with that which no treasures of utterance can equal, and when it was sent down, the necks of the just bowed before it."⁵⁵⁹

In honor of his station:

"He is the One Who speaks as He pleases

O My Most Great Branch! Before the Wronged One has appeared thy letter, and We have heard that which thou didst commune with God, the Lord of the worlds. We have made thee a protection for all the worlds, and a guardian for all who are in the heavens and on earth, and a fortress for those who have believed in God, the One, the All-Knowing. We beseech God to protect them through thee, to enrich them through thee, to nourish them through thee, and to inspire thee with that which will make thee the Dawning-Place of wealth for all created things, the Ocean of bounty for all in the world, and the Dayspring of grace unto all peoples. He, verily, is the All-Powerful, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. We beseech Him to water through thee the earth and all that is therein, that there may grow from it the grass of wisdom and utterance, and the ears of knowledge and understanding. He, verily, is the Protector of whosoever turneth unto Him and the Helper of whosoever calleth upon Him. There is none other God but Him, the Mighty, the Praised One."⁵⁶⁰

25.3.3 In Honor of Mirza Muhammad Ali

In respect to his service:

"O Jamalu'd-Din! Upon thee be the Glory of God, the True, the Manifest King. The letters which thou didst send were presented before the Most Holy Court by the Greater Branch. We

⁵⁵⁹ BH00314

⁵⁶⁰ BH09144

beseech God to assist thee, to confirm thee, and to aid thee in that which will draw thee closer to Him in all conditions, and to exalt through thee His mention among His servants. In these days certain passages have been revealed under the name of "Traveler" - there would be no harm if they were sent to European lands."⁵⁶¹

In honor of his station:

"Blessed is he who seeketh shelter beneath the shade of the Branch of God, his Lord and the Lord of the Throne and the Lord of all the worlds. O My Branch! Be thou as the spring cloud of My loving-kindness, then shower upon all things in My wondrous Name. O My Branch! We have chosen thee by virtue of Him Who is the Chosen One choosing thee. Say: Praise be unto Thee, O God of the worlds! O Greater Branch! We have chosen thee for the triumph of My Cause. Arise to achieve a wondrous triumph. Subdue the cities of names through My Name, the Sovereign over all that He willeth. O thou Ocean! Surge by My Name, the All-Compelling, the Most Great. Open thou the cities of hearts through My Name, the Best-Beloved, the Mighty, the Impregnable. Every deed hath been made dependent upon thy love. Blessed is he who hath attained unto that which his Lord, the All-Knowing, hath willed. Blessed is he who hath heard thy call and turned to thee out of love for God, the Lord of the worlds."⁵⁶²

25.3.4 In Honor of Diya'u'llah (Also known as Ziya'u'llah)

In respect to his service:

"O people of Manshad! Upon you be the Glory of God, His grace, the mercy of God and His peace. Verily the Kingdom of Utterance hath turned toward you and made mention of you in such wise that all mention in the world hath bowed low at its revelation, that ye might rejoice and be numbered among the thankful. His honor Diya, one of My Branches, hath presented your letter and made mention of you before Our presence."⁵⁶³

In honor of his station:

"At this moment, one of the Branches of the Blessed Tree, His Holiness Diya, is present before Us. We have commanded him to pen this Tablet, from whose horizon's heaven hath shone forth the light of God's mercy, the Lord of the worlds."⁵⁶⁴

⁵⁶¹ BH07364

⁵⁶² BH09434

⁵⁶³ BH06516

⁵⁶⁴ BH03971

25.3.5 In Honor of Badi'u'llah

In respect to his service:

"O Mirza 'Ali-Akbar-i-Milani, upon him be the Glory of God!

In My Name, the Caller between earth and heaven! One of My Branches, who hath been named Badi'u'llah, hath presented thy letter before Our Face. We answer thee through this perspicuous Tablet."⁵⁶⁵

In honor of his station:

"He is the Mighty. The fire of separation, after the comfort of the days of union and communion, has burned the soul and melted the heart. The heart is with you - ask it about the state of affairs. We hope through God's grace that He will soon grant nearness and reunion. We long to see and yearn to speak with the Spirit of Life, Ziya'u'r-Rahman, that we may hear sweet words from those sugar-sweet lips in Samarkand. We remember Badi'u'llah with our tongue, seek him with our heart, and yearn for him with our soul. May my soul be sacrificed for thy nearness and thy words, O Badi'."⁵⁶⁶

25.4 Answering Questions About the Book

Baha'u'llah instructs us to "refer what you do not understand from the Book to the Branch that has branched forth from this mighty Root."⁵⁶⁷ He further explains this in the letters to Yazd and Zanjan. He says the Book refers to the Kitab-i-Aqdas and the Branch that has branched forth from this mighty Root refers to the Aghsán.

This is an extremely specific responsibility for the Aghsán as a consultative body. As we have learned throughout this book, Baha'u'llah repeatedly nurtures this sense of self-discovery, these opportunities to immerse yourself within God's consciousness on your own terms. This is your experience. This is your soul. This is your free-will. Liberation is your right, and liberation is the responsibility we have to ourselves and others. With this said, let's look closely at this verse.

Baha'u'llah starts the counsel with a conditional statement. "Refer what you do not understand." Baha'u'llah invites us in paragraph #53 to refer what is revealed from Him. We have a responsibility to attempt understanding through the spiritual practices of recitation, reflection, and where possible, actions which embody these teachings. Sometimes understanding unfolds over time as we pass through the spiritual worlds. Sometimes we feel stuck on an idea. To refer what we do not understand does not absolve our responsibility to attempt understanding on our own. We refer only once we have tried.

⁵⁶⁵ BH11823

⁵⁶⁶ BH10221

⁵⁶⁷ Kitab-i-Aqdas #174

The second phrase says “from the Book.” This phrase purposefully narrows the scope even further. In BH00023 and BH00057, the Book is explicitly defined as the Kitab-i-Aqdas and the Kitab-i-Aqdas only. This means we refer only what we do not understand of the Kitab-i-Aqdas. This does not include any other book or writing.

As it appears, the Aghsán were to consult together where any particular believer attempted to understand the Kitab-i-Aqdas but were unable to. The result of this consultation would be guided by the Holy Spirit. Baha'u'llah did not express any teaching the understanding of the Aghsan would replace other believer's understandings. The consultation was for the individual who did not understand, completely within the context of what they asked and understood already. I envision the Aghsán's role to be like that of scholars Baha'u'llah commanded us to turn to. While guided by the Holy Spirit, it may not encompass the entirety of the Most Great Ocean. This consultation would be incredibly valuable for the community.

Again, this did not happen.

25.5 The Branch to Turn Towards

The last part of the Kitab-i-Aqdas which describes spiritual successorship is from the paragraph 121. “When the sea of reunion is stilled, and the Book of Origin reaches its end, turn towards Him whom God has willed, the one who branched from this ancient Root.” The letters to Yazd and Zanjan also explain this. Baha'u'llah responds clearly to the inquiry:

“The divine intention refers to His Holiness, the Most Great Branch, and after him, His Holiness, the Most Mighty Branch. My spirit, essence, and being are a sacrifice for the dust of their feet.”

Baha'u'llah bestows great honor upon Abbas Effendi and Mirza Muhammad Ali. Baha'u'llah used the phrase “turn towards.” I understand this as Abbas Effendi has a responsibility, but he is not given any particular rights. While holding a high station, Baha'u'llah's leadership model does not change. Throughout the book, we describe how Baha'u'llah taught trusteeship in every level of society. Parents and monarchs and every level in between are to lead as trustees over that which they are entrusted to.

The Aghsán still exist to manage endowments and to explain what is not understood from the Kitab-i-Aqdas. I understand Abbas Effendi's role to be custodial, much as Mirza Yahya's was to be. Baha'u'llah from 1873 until His passing in 1892 strove to teach the Kitab-i-Aqdas, show love towards His family and kinsmen (all believers), and nurture the liberation of souls in an environment which was quite oppressive. The Aghsán were to be an example of the consultation all were capable of, if they believed.

None of the Branches had the authority to deprive any person of their rights, to deny anyone of their responsibilities, nor to change the law of Baha'u'llah. Again, this did not happen.

25.6 The Kitab-i-Ahd (The Book of My Covenant)

After Baha'u'llah passed away, this document was read and shared with the community. We shared the very first teaching within it regarding wealth. Baha'u'llah teaches the purpose of His revelation was “to

extinguish the flames of malice and hatred, so that the horizons of the hearts of the people of the world may be illuminated with the light of unity and attain true tranquility.” He promises our human station is great. He reminds us to hold firm to the Divine Command.

Baha’ullah describes all religion to be for love and unity. Strife and contention are forbidden. He offers blessings for those who lead, especially those who believe in the Divine Command. His purpose is for the Kitab-i-Aqdas to shine radiantly and rise in the horizon. He warns us not to make the Cause of God a tool for disorder and division. We are to say “All are from God.”

Baha’ullah reiterates His explanations from the letters to Zanjan and Yazd. He says “We have chosen the Most Mighty Branch after the Most Great Branch as a matter from the All-Knowing, the All-Aware.” He counsels love for the branches is incumbent upon everyone, without exceptions. He later says respect and regard for the branches are required, as well as for the entire family of Baha’ullah, the Afnán (the Bab’s family). Finally, all are counseled to serve the nations and reform the world. I want to clearly state one thing about the family. In the letters which have been mostly been unavailable to the People of Baha, the Sacred Family is honored repeatedly for their service and devotion to the Cause of God. Their respect and love is well-earned.

Sadly, these things in the Kitab-i-Ahd did not happen.

25.6.1 The Testament Requires Trusteeship

The Kitab-i-Ahd and BH11278 were both testaments from Baha’ullah. Abbas Effendi was entrusted to execute the final testament of Baha’ullah. He was to witness, to be a trustee, and to help. Nothing more and nothing less. It was an incredible honor and reflection of the high hopes Baha’ullah had for his eldest son. It was also a difficult position to be in. I will not explain further, but I can only say Baha’ullah’s final testament was not fulfilled. God’s All-Knowing nature, while aware of all the probabilities any outcome could have, knew there was a chance of success and a chance of failure. I feel the greatest failure stemmed from self-exaltation and the proceeding inability to consult. Remember, if consultation is guided by the Holy Spirit, what is guiding authoritarian rule?

I want to close this section on the Aghsn with an excerpt from the Tablet of Khalil, written sometime when Baha’ullah was in Edirne. When asked about His sons (who are not called Branches yet), He says:

As for what you asked about my son, know that if my sons follow God’s laws and do not exceed what has been specified in God’s book, the prevailing, the Ever-Existing, and they command themselves and the servants to do good, and they forbid evil, and they testify to what God has testified in His decisive verses, the conclusive, the definitive, and they believe in whoever God reveals on the day in which the times of the former and the latter are counted, and on it, everyone presents themselves to their Lord, and they will not disagree on God’s command and will not stray from His ordained, written law. Then know that they are leaves of the tree of monotheism and its fruits, and with them, the clouds rain and the clouds lift with grace if you truly believe. They are God’s household among you and His family in your midst, and His mercy upon the worlds if you know. From them, the breeze of God blows on you, and

the winds of dignity and love pass over those close. They are God's pen, His command, and His word among His creatures, and with them, He takes and gives if you understand. Through them, the earth has shone with the light of your Lord, and the signs of His grace have appeared to those who do not deny God's signs. However, those who hurt them have hurt me, and those who hurt me have deviated from God's path, the prevailing, the Ever-Existing. So, you will find the deviation of the deviators and their arrogance towards us and their transgression against ourselves without clear evidence or a preserved book.

Say, O people, they are God's signs among you, beware of arguing with them, or killing them, or be among those who oppress and do not realize. They are God's secret on earth and returned under the hands of the oppressors on this earth that fell behind the elevated mountains. All of that was returned to them at the time when they were young in the kingdom, and they had no sin but in the path of God, the Capable, the Powerful, the Mighty, the Beloved, and those from them who appear naturally and God runs from their tongues signs of His power, and he is among those God has chosen for His command. There is no god but He, to Him belongs creation and command, and we are all commanded by His command. We ask God to make them successful in obeying Him and to provide them with what pleases their hearts and the hearts of those who inherit Paradise from God, the Mighty, the Prevailing, the Ever-Existing.

It seems the sons were our greatest test.

25.7 The Path Forward

While the Aghsán were unable to fulfill their purpose, we still have a path to move on. Baha'u'llah taught after the Aghsán, if the Houses of Justice are not yet established, the People of Baha are the spiritual successors. As you read this, you might be a Person of Baha. I invite you to this path forward.

There are many roles we may take on as trustees. We can serve as scholars, we can organize remembrance services and the melodious recitation of the verses of God, we can promote our Holy Days and festivals, and we can nurture each other's path. We can manage endowments for the needy, and strive for the elevated places of the Cause. The possibilities are endless as long as you believe.

I believe this all starts with honoring not only the Kitab-i-Aqdas, but also Baha'u'llah's Testaments. If you hold any malice towards any of Baha'u'llah's family, let it go. It is in the past. Pray for their spiritual well-being and union with God. If you hold onto any notions of infallibility, let it go. Infallibility is reserved for the next Manifestation of God which will exist no earlier than 1,000 years after Baha'u'llah, and no later than the Bab's concept of Mustagith (about 1,500 years). Today is today and tomorrow is tomorrow.

The next chapter will focus in on Trusteeship Governance, where we put the various concepts of Part 4 together. This is a path we can all walk on together in the name of Baha, and in honor of His ministry.

26. Peace

26.1 The Most Great Peace

In Chapter 22, we describe the world-wide House of Justice's role in establishing the Most Great Peace, as described in the Ninth Leaf of Paradise in the Words of Paradise. The Most Great Peace is the unification of the world's affairs towards a common goal or the unification of the world's religions as one. Holy war is strictly prohibited, even if another religion or religious institution prescribes it.⁵⁶⁸

26.1.1 The Lesser Peace

Baha'u'llah's Epistle to the Son of the Wolf is a great review of many overarching themes Baha'u'llah had taught throughout His ministry. One of these themes is the Lesser Peace, which He describes as the greatest cause of the preservation of the world. It is not the only cause for the preservation of the world, but I do read this as there is risk the world may not be preserved if the Lesser Peace is not pursued.

The first responsibility to establish the Lesser Peace are the kings of the world, who are the dawning places of wealth and power. Baha'u'llah describes they should establish an assembly where they or the ministers who act on their behalf, to create a decree of unity between nations. They should also agree to limiting weapons to only that which is necessary for the defense of their nations. Baha'u'llah says if any sovereign leader rises against another, a declaration of war, all the other nations should prevent this offense. Instead of weapons, resources will be used for the reformation of the world.

The purpose of the Lesser Peace is not solely for the preservation of the world. The purpose also includes the establishment and preservation of the human rights of all, which is a way to ensure liberation while the soul is in the physical domain of Earth. The people who live under the Lesser Peace will be engaged in comfort and joy, and the lamentations of most will cease.

26.1.2 Trusteeship Is Required for Peace

Trusteeship is required in order to achieve either form of peace. World, religious, and even business leaders need to be able to view their wealth, power, and influence not within terms of domination, extraction, extortion, nor status but instead to view their uncanny abilities to lead as a trusteeship towards all. This concept is affirmed in the Kitab-i-Ahd's final paragraph, where Baha'u'llah states His Will and Testament. Those who lived when Baha'u'llah lived would hear his final Words being read, where He says:

“I counsel you to serve the nations and reform the world. From the Kingdom of the Bayán, what has been revealed is intended for the life of the world and the salvation of the nations.”

Every single member of humankind is to be a trustee, if they are capable. To have liberation, we need to be responsible for another's liberation. This does not happen automatically. This book has established all

⁵⁶⁸ Lawh-i-Bisarat (The Tablet of Glad-Tidings)

of the foundations for us to achieve the Lesser or the Most Great Peace. Let's put everything we have learned together and see what we can do to achieve God's vision through Baha'u'llah.

26.2 A World Assembly

The Lesser Peace is conditioned upon a world assembly. An assembly is any group of people who have chosen to meet for a common purpose. In everyday life, assemblies can be related to legislative, religious, educational, and social purposes. A world assembly would not be a world government. Nations do not lose their sovereignty.

There is no prerequisite required to convene a Lesser Peace assembly. This means this is not limited to the type of government a nation has. The participating governments can be decentralized or centralized power structures, capitalist or socialist economies, single-party or multi-party, and led by civilians or the military. Baha'u'llah did not describe any qualifications other than the attendees are sovereign leaders or the ministers acting on their behalf.

The assembly is not the United Nations. The United Nations is a commendable attempt at creating a more peaceful world, but it was designed with 5 nations have veto power on any security actions. Two of these nations have attacked other nations preemptively in the last 20 years without any consequences by member nations of the UN. Another has several disputed borders, and has recently claimed marine territory other nations had controlled. The Lesser Peace assembly is only for nations to agree to no longer attack each other. Once again, there are no exceptions. The Lesser Peace assembly is for nations to disarm to only what is necessary to defend their nations. While some nations follow this guidance, a majority do not. The United Nations is not the Lesser Peace assembly.

A world-wide House of Justice's sole purpose is to work towards this assembly. This House of Justice does not have any authority at the assembly, but they can be the organizers. The members do everything they can to teach and spread the idea of a Lesser Peace and this type of world assembly. Local Houses of Justice can also promote the Lesser Peace within their jurisdictions, regardless of the authority level granted to them by the people. Baha'u'llah also does not require there to be a world-wide House of Justice for a Lesser Assembly to be convened. Any sovereign leader can call the assembly, if they choose to do so.

26.3 A Common Affair

The Most Great Peace has two modes. The first mode of achievement is to work towards a common affair. An affair is a transaction or other matters of public state business. These common affairs could be identified through a world assembly similar to the Lesser Peace assembly. One really good example of a successful common affair the world has achieved since Baha'u'llah's call is when the nations of the world banned chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs).

Common affairs could be a wide variety of issues. A good starting point could be the rights discussed throughout this book, such as a right to education. Nations might agree to promote various virtues

associated with education, such as pure truthfulness which is not affected by ideology, state interest, or other power dynamics. Knowledge is not withheld nor is opinion treated as fact.

Nations retain their sovereignty and cannot be forced. An affair must genuinely be common. This means nations with relative strength cannot bully nor coerce another state. The people of all nations have the same rights listed in this book, even if the nation they live in does not honor those rights.

Houses of Justice can at the city level help be public figures of these rights and causes. If a House of Justice is able to attain the fifth level of authority, they can guide their nation towards the common affairs of all nations. However, a sovereign leader can also call for assemblies of common affairs as we progress to the Most Great Peace.

26.4 Unification of Religion

The second mode of the Most Great Peace is the unification of religion. I feel it might be common to view this principle as all people are part of the same religion or a dominate majority. I see three potential parallel pathways unification can take. The key is remember unity is more about how our constellation of virtues guide each of us. The more stars that shine brightly, the more light available to guide the right paths.

Parallel Pathway #1: The world increasingly becomes more aware of Baha'u'llah and the Kitab-i-Aqdas. They learn about the Cause of God, the liberation of souls and societies, and believe Baha'u'llah is from God.

Parallel Pathway #2: The religions of the world start to naturally adopt many of the teachings and beliefs of Baha'u'llah, such as the abolition of holy war and the full equality of women. These religions retain their names, their rituals, and traditions but evolve.

Parallel Pathway #3: The leaders of religions find points of common belief between each other, choosing friendliness. They draw from each others strengths. A good test of such pathway is how interfaith marriages are perceived.

None of these pathways are mutually exclusive and each can occur together. The world-wide House of Justice can work towards each of these 3 pathways, or any other pathway identified. Assemblies of religions can help foster these pathways.

26.5 A King Who Believes

We have a responsibility towards any sovereign leader who arises to serve the Cause of God. The Kitab-i-Aqdas #84 says:

Blessed is the king who arises to support My Cause in My kingdom and detaches himself from all else. He is one of the people of the Crimson Ark, which God has made for the people of Bahá. It is fitting for everyone to honor, revere, and assist him, that he may conquer cities with the keys of My Name, the One Who rules over all in the realms of the unseen and the seen. He

is as the sight of mankind, the most radiant crown upon the brow of creation, and the head of generosity for the body of the world. Support him, O people of Bahá, with wealth and lives.

26.6 Belief, Spiritual Practice, Social Life and Affectionate Relationships

We must be careful in how we pursue the Lesser and Most Great Peace. For example, it is incredibly difficult for a person to proclaim peace and unity if they struggle mightily to achieve such things in their personal life. Likewise, a community which fails to provide a healthy social life for its locality lacks the ability to prescribe more global measures. While it is entirely possible for top-down centralized peace initiatives to be formed, such as through a monarch who arises to serve the Cause, every other institution Baha'u'llah described is highly decentralized.

Decentralization is fundamentally more difficult and throughout history, decentralized institutions have regularly ceded increasing power and control towards centralization. Crisis are especially noteworthy in authorities seeking more control to avert the crisis, and out of fear, people are willing to reduce their rights for an increased sense of security. While rights are inherently popular, individual responsibilities rarely are. I don't want to seem cynical, as I enjoy my pleasures of life, but this has always been the most pressing philosophical issue regarding governance. What is our responsibility, and what am I willing to give up to pass that responsibility to a government composed of individuals, who also have the same self-interests I do?

This is why trusteeship is integral to every level of governance. For each right we hope to have, Baha'u'llah gives us an equal responsibility. Everything comes down to the individual. There is a cyclical never-ending process we must practice to increase our chances of creating a Lesser and Most Great Peace. First, we must believe such a peace is possible. We believe in God, our souls, the spiritual worlds, the Day of Resurrection, God's Command, and His Manifestation. We don't have to believe perfectly, but we believe there is more than meets the eye, and it inspires us. We perform our spiritual practices which help inform the development of our virtues. These transform our personal lives and prepare us for a healthy social life, full of potential for affectionate relationships. Our belief is expressed in good deeds. These deeds and experiences, even negative experiences, provide a feedback look back into the belief. Every day is a new opportunity for refinement. Practice may not lead to perfection, but it is the only pathway towards perfection. Always keep practicing.

This feedback loop ensures we are as capable as any person to participate in the emergence of peace. I recognize it can seem like hard work, and potentially a significant reorientation of our lifestyles. This work prepares us to be trustees. While being mindful Baha'u'llah did not want us overburdened, we can actively pursue good deeds. This can be as simple as helping an elderly person grab an item at a grocery store or as complex as raising another's child. Being a trustee can also utilizing your skills to actively work in social, civic, and political roles.

If Baha'u'llah envisioned a King to arise to serve the Cause, it requires not only an individual who believes, but an individual who believes and is willing to act on that belief. While not everyone can be a sovereign leader of a nation, there are countless ways we can serve as trustees. Use your imagination. Baha'u'llah

eliminated the intermediaries who created veils over our imagination. Explore within yourself, within your developing God consciousness. As peace grows within you, that peace can help others attain peace.

26.7 Towards the Last Chapter

We cannot do any of this alone. The last chapter of this book is about teaching the Cause. We will look at Baha'u'llah's guidance in teaching others. How will people know there is a Kitab-i-Aqdas created to liberate them starting today and for at least another 800 years?

27. Serving the Cause

Throughout the Kitab-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh enjoins upon us to serve the Cause of God. This can be done through proclamation, teaching, and being a good example. We are also to support those who serve, in whichever ways we can.⁵⁶⁹ This book has covered in significant detail how to be a good example, or at least has shared the framework the Kitab-i-Aqdas provides. Thus, this closing chapter will focus on proclaiming and teaching.

27.1 Proclaiming the Cause

27.1.1 The Abolition of Impurity

Bahá'u'lláh tells us to proclaim the Cause to the followers of other religions.⁵⁷⁰ This command comes immediately after describing the abolition of the law of impurity from all things and of other religions. This is a subtle but important foundation. The first day of Ridván itself purifies. Remember how Ridván is an annual festival whose purpose is to proclaim the Cause. Invite people to the festival and proclaim the purifying effect of Ridván. It is a day when people of all religions no longer have to view another as impure.

27.1.2 Mention God Among Nations and People

Bahá'u'lláh has permitted, but not required, people to learn various languages to proclaim the Cause of God throughout both East and West.⁵⁷¹ The Kitab-i-Aqdas also expresses a couple of proclamations God had made Himself through Bahá'u'lláh. I consider these proclamations to be examples of how to mention God among the nations and people.

One example is for people to turn with radiant faces and hearts of joy towards the Sidrat-ul Muntaha which proclaims "There is no God but Me, the All-Possessing, the Self-Subsisting."⁵⁷² Another example is when Bahá'u'lláh counsels us to be manifestations of steadfastness when the Book proclaims "There is no God but Me, the Almighty, the All-Praised."⁵⁷³

27.1.3 The Great Announcement

These two simple instructions parallel most of Bahá'u'lláh's guidance in what a proclamation consists of. When associated with the Day of Resurrection, the proclamation is about the Great Announcement

⁵⁶⁹ Kitab-i-Aqdas #117

⁵⁷⁰ Kitab-i-Aqdas #75

⁵⁷¹ Kitab-i-Aqdas #118

⁵⁷² Kitab-i-Aqdas #100

⁵⁷³ Kitab-i-Aqdas #134

where God has announced He has arrived to speak and guide humankind. Thus, proclamation should be considered as an announcement. Ridván is the day when Baha'u'llah first made His announcement to the world, and this announcement continued throughout the rest of His ministry.

We must be steadfast, radiant, and joyous in our proclamation. If we lack either trait or quality, the Great Announcement will not have the full effect. There are only four things which need proclaimed. The first is “there is no God but Me”, the second is God has spoken again through the name of Baha'u'llah, the Glory of God. The third proclamation is the Cause of God. You do not even have to explain the Cause of God in the proclamation, but that there is a Cause. A Cause can also be known as an effect of God’s Word. God exists, God speaks, and God affects you. If you were to say what the Cause is, I would advise to identify in one short sentence what the Cause is. For me, an effect could be as simple as saying “to usher in the Most Great Peace,” “to liberate the souls from oppression,” or “to purify all religion.” What is the Cause of God to you? If you believe in this Cause with radiance, joy, and steadfastness, share it but share it simply. The final part of the proclamation is the invitation. Invite the audience to the Cause.

27.2 Teaching the Cause

The Kitab-i-Aqdas itself says very little about teaching, yet we know teaching has a high station. With the inheritance law, teachers are the only non-familial category to receive a share in the absence of a will. If anyone chose to model their inheritance after the Aqdas, teachers receive 3.6%. This means not only are teachers entrusted with a task, we are also entrusted to serve the teachers. There is no other profession in the Kitab-i-Aqdas held with such a high responsibility.

Children are the first audience to teach, which is the responsibility of parents and the Houses of Justice in the absence of parents being able to fulfill this responsibility. Teaching is not limited to children, but it is for anyone who is interested in learning. In this capacity, even adults are children who are still developing their souls. Teaching comes after proclamation, if anyone had responded to the proclamation. If no one responded to the proclamation, we let go and move on.

Baha'u'llah instructs us adorn ourselves with good deeds, then through wisdom and eloquence.⁵⁷⁴ Baha'u'llah expands upon this simple framework in an unnamed tablet BH02623. I'm personally calling it "Teaching with the Measure of Mercy." It is a thorough but brief summary of all the ways Baha'u'llah Himself has taught others, and how we can teach using His example. The entirety of this section is derived from this tablet.

27.3 Teaching With The Measure of Mercy

Teaching with the measure of mercy begins with orientation. Baha'u'llah says the teacher is the “spiritual physician and the true sage.” A sage is one who is acclaimed and respected for their experience, judgment, and wisdom. Not every person who wants to teach is capable of teaching, but through time, practice, and patience, one can be a true sage if they desire to heal the spirit.

⁵⁷⁴ Kitab-i-Aqdas #73

27.3.1 Being a Spiritual Physician

The second aspect of a spiritual physician being needed is there are things in this world which have harmed the spirit of a soul. The teacher must look towards two conditions as they seek to heal the spirit with wisdom. The first condition is the requirements of the time and days. This could be a good application of the helper, trustee, and helper model of trusteeship. The teacher witnesses a common struggle people are having. For example, in the United States it has been common enough for religious leaders to sexually prey on children. There is considerable distrust of religious institutions due to these oppressive corruptions. Through witnessing such issues, a true sage will consider someone who responds to the proclamation could be a person who experienced such hardship in their youth. What might be the remedy for this issue of our days? The second condition directly speaks to this, which is the condition of the soul. If we witness a particular soul who has suffered from this greater social issue, we can serve as their trustee. The medicine we give them must be tailored to their condition in order to be of help. If we lack the wisdom to give the proper medicine, find an expert who can.

The best way to ensure we are qualified to be a spiritual physician is to be immersed in the spiritual practices of the Kitab-i-Aqdas. Pray, recite, remember, reflect, and honor God with regularity. This keeps the mirror of the soul oriented and polished as well as it can be. As spiritual practice is regular, without a rush, and with a sense of detachment, teaching is the same way. When we seek to teach, we do not give all treatments, all at once, without knowing the patient or student. We take time to know them, for them to know us, and only develop a treatment plan (teaching mode) once we know what needs healing.

27.3.2 Trauma of Bad Spiritual Leadership

Baha'u'llah describes what happens when people are subjected to spiritual leaders who are scholars of illusions. Remember the chapter on the private self and all of the illusions one may face. Imagine a soul who trusted a spiritual leader whose spirit was enraptured by their own illusions and desires, not the salvation or well-being of a soul? Baha'u'llah says this type of soul will be shaken by just the mention of spiritual leaders, let alone the divinity of God. He says in cases such as these, be wise by withholding teachings of command, power, manifestation, and such. Perhaps the focus would emphasize God's names of Mercy and Love, without expecting the soul to want to submit to any type of spiritual leader. Guide the person to healing. Let them heal from their spiritual trauma.

This trauma can be caused in a myriad of ways. I will not go in all the ways, but know if trusteeship is meant to be practiced in every level of human experience, so too have the expressions of oppression and tyranny. Be receptive and know this world has a lot of pain to heal. Even the teacher themselves could be healing as they heal.

27.3.3 Milk Before Meat

Baha'u'llah uses the analogy that you do not give a child meat instead of milk. They start with milk. The medicine of teaching is based on the developmental capacity of the student. The milk begins with a goodly character and pure deeds. The teacher is the example of this milk, and teaches this goodly character and pure deeds. This duration we give milk can vary, and is entirely dependent on the soul

receiving the milk. The person likes the ethics, but may not be ready for more difficult or challenging teachings.

Once the soul's capacity has been nurtured and has grown, the next stage is to give fruit. The fruit is guardianship (the Arabic word wilayat). A wali could be someone viewed as a saint or friend of God. This would be the stage where the teacher introduces Baha'u'llah as not merely a teacher of good character, but also as a friend who loves them. They are being prepared for maturity. They can view Baha'u'llah as an authority without panic or with suspicion. They can start to trust Baha'u'llah cares for them, and sees Him and their teacher as examples to follow. The spiritual practices can be introduced, instructed, and practiced. The soul explores these at their own pace and learn to develop a personal relationship with God. Even if there is a challenging time, or even a challenging teaching. Most importantly, the person feels safe to be themselves, a more regularly refining version of themselves. The soul may still wish God acted as they wanted, or that revelation more conformed to their wishes. Yet, because of their trust in Baha'u'llah, they still partake of their fruit. They remain friends.

Over time, the fruit has nurtured the soul and when they are ready, the teacher may give them the meat. The meat would be the most difficult aspects of belief. This could include expressing the full station of Baha'u'llah. For many, just the idea there is not a final prophet is a huge psychological challenge to overcome. Or in the case of someone abused by a person who claimed to be a man of God, or acting on behalf of God, this could be scary. It could take years to achieve the stage of meat. Other forms of meat would be teachings which challenge the current culture or commonly accepted notions of how things are. Meat can be tough to chew, and has to be prepared just at the right temperature, for the right duration, and with the right seasoning. Once the soul is consuming this spiritual meat, they are at the stage where they are willing to transform beyond their who they once were. They are developing their own God consciousness. This is the stage of submission to God's will.

27.3.4 Every Soul is a Seeker

Baha'u'llah explains that every soul is a seeker. They may not be actively seeking in the moment, but at some point they will. The reason why they stop seeking or turn away from God is due to what He calls the "fancies arranged beforehand." These fancies are shaped by parents, friends, religious leaders, non-spiritual leaders, cultural icons, and other sources. Burning away these fancies is very difficult.

The only way to burn through these fancies is for the spiritual physician to embrace mercy, kindness, and compassion. All souls were created in stages, and even if we desire a soul to be in a different stage for their own long-term well-being, we must never force upon the soul more than they are ready for. The journey is not on the teacher's terms. A seeker may seek, stop, seek, stop, and continue this cycle. The true sage is detached from outcomes. All that is desired is the soul is free from the oppression of prior institutions. A liberated soul can love and navigate the spiritual worlds freely. Maybe this soul, nurtured with milk, fruit, and then meat will help the next soul who suffered with the ways of the world.

27.4 The Kitab-i-Aqdas is the Curriculum

I want to close this book with one more observation. In real life, doctors work best when their top priority is the health of their patients. In the United States, healthcare has many bureaucratic layers which were originally designed to help facilitate the healthcare process. Over time, the bureaucratic layers became the process and the pathway to healing. The doctor has consumed more of their time in checking the boxes and filling out the appropriate forms more than actually being with their patients or leading care.

I believe this is why Baha'u'llah did not create any other curriculum or any formal institution. The Teaching With Mercy method is purposefully open-ended. Each stage of milk, fruit, and meat when working with a true sage is specifically curated for the seeker's needs. There is no standardized curriculum which works for every person. Yet, all potential curriculum can be derived from the Kitab-i-Aqdas and the letters, tablets, and books Baha'u'llah wrote to support the Kitab-i-Aqdas.

I hope this book had done a good job in demonstrating one way the Kitab-i-Aqdas could be viewed. I also hope this book has inspired a desire to explore the Kitab-i-Aqdas further, on your own terms. Finally, I do also hope there was something in the book to inspire you. In all truth, each chapter could have been a book in and of itself. There will always be much more to explore. No matter what your future holds, I do hope you believe you have a soul, its purpose is to be liberated, and that you are willing to act as a trustee to your own soul. Thank you!

28. Appendix 1: Names of God

The following is a list of the 19 groups of names of God and names which fall within them

1. Subtlety - Most Subtle
2. Manifestation - Manifest
3. Knowledge - All-Knowing, All-Informed, Wise, Knower of All Things
4. Creation - Dawning Place, Creator
5. Power - Almighty, All-Powerful, All-Capable, All-Subduing, All-Sufficient
6. Lordship - Lord
7. Justice - Judge, Just, Reckoner
8. Exaltation - Most Exalted, Most High, Great, Majestic, Most Glorious, Greatest Infallibility
9. Independence - Self-Sufficient, Self-Subsisting, Independent
10. Command - Commander, Ordainer, Fulfiller
11. Counsel - Counselor, Speaker, Source of Inspiration
12. Faithfulness - Trustworthy, Faithful Guardian
13. Praise - All-Praised, Praised, and Praiseworthy
14. Love - Beloved, Loving, Gracious
15. Forgiveness - All-Forgiving, Ever-Forgiving, Oft-Forgiving
16. Mercy - All-Merciful, Most Merciful, Most Compassionate
17. Generosity - All-Bountiful, Bestower, Most Generous, Most Bountiful
18. Sovereignty - Sovereign, Lord of Dominion, Ruler, Master
19. Purity - Purest, True, One

29. Appendix 2: Spiritual Practices

Here is a list of spiritual practices expressed in the Kitab-i-Aqdas:

- Prayer
 - Daily Obligatory Prayer
 - Prayer of the Signs
 - Prayer for the Dead
 - Personal Prayer (In Private)
 - Congregational Prayer
- Recitation (of the verses of God)
- Remembrance (Dhikr)
 - Subconscious Remembrance
 - Conscious Remembrance
- Reflection
- Honoring God
 - Building and Using Mashriq-ul-Adhkars
 - Pilgrimage (Baghdad or Shiraz)
 - Rights of God (Huqúqu'lláh)
 - Engaging in an Occupation
 - Zakat
 - Ayyam-i-Ha (Days of Giving)
 - Fasting
 - Monthly Hospitality
 - Festival of Naw-Ruz
 - Festival of Ridvan
 - Festival for the Declaration of the Bab

- Festival for the Twin Birthdays

30. Appendix 3: Virtues

Here is a list of the virtues identified in the Kitab-i-Aqdas and used for the Constellation of Virtues called Unity:

30.1 Foundational Virtues

1. Fear of God
2. Love of God
3. Moderation

30.2 Innate Virtues

1. Piety
2. Pure Truthfulness
3. Courtesy
4. Loyalty
5. Trustworthiness

30.3 Emergent Virtues

1. Emerging from Piety
 1. Detachment
 2. Humility
 3. Lowly
 4. Reverence
 5. Thankfulness
2. Emerging from Pure Truthfulness
 1. Eloquence
 2. Heedfulness
 3. Perception
 4. Reason
 5. Sincerity
 6. Wisdom

3. Emerging from Courtesy

1. Dignity
2. Fairness
3. Kindness
4. Purity
5. Radiance
6. Refinement

4. Emerging from Loyalty

1. Fidelity
2. Moral
3. Righteousness
4. Servitude
5. Steadfast

5. Emerging from Trustworthiness

1. Justice
2. Mindfulness
3. Patience
4. Repentant
5. Submissive

31. Appendix 4: The Bayanic Mithqal

31.0.1 Bayánic Mithqál

The Bayánic Mithqál is a unit of weight defined in the *Persian Bayán* (Vahid 5, Gate 19) as the measure of nineteen grains (nakhuds).

- 1 nakhud ≈ 0.195 grams (Qajar-era standard)⁵⁷⁵
- 1 Bayánic Mithqál ≈ 3.705 grams

Conversions

- 1 Bayánic Mithqál ≈ 0.119 troy ounces
- 9 Bayánic Mithqáls ≈ 33.345 grams ≈ 1.072 troy ounces
- 19 Bayánic Mithqáls ≈ 70.395 grams ≈ 2.263 troy ounces
- 95 Bayánic Mithqáls ≈ 352.975 grams ≈ 11.348 troy ounces
- 100 Bayánic Mithqáls ≈ 370.500 grams ≈ 11.909 troy ounces

⁵⁷⁵ Marcinkowski, M. Ismail, Measures and weights in the Islamic world : an English translation of Walther Hinz's hanbook "Islamische Masse und Gewichte" (2003)

32. Appendix 5: Letters and Meanings

The following is a list of Arabic letters, their associated numerical values (based on the abjad system where utilized in the sources), and the primary symbolism ascribed to them:

Letter (Arabic)	Abjad Value (Standard/Contextual)	Symbolism and Significance
Alif	1 (Implicit in sequence/One)	Represents the Divine Identity, blessings upon creation, and the letter of beginning. Symbol of affirmation in the utterance "but God". The first letter that spoke from God. Its total number of letters (A-L-F) is the number of the Most Exalted Name. It is the origin of all contingent and existential numbers.
- <i>Hidden Alif</i> (Soft Alif)	-	Station of Destiny or Beauty, reflects the countenance of 'Ali (reserved for his successor).
- <i>Standing Alif</i>	-	Established all creation in the kingdoms of creation and command.
Ba	2 (Implicit)	The Throne upon which the All-Merciful is established. First letter of the Book. The origin of all creation, as the Point dissolved and the Point was found beneath it. The innermost essence of Primary and Secondary Eternity, and multiplicity.
Jim	3 (Implicit)	Derived Name: Holy (Quddús). The sum of its similar numerical values in the Temple equals the number of "Allah" (36).
Dal	4 (Implicit)	Letter of finitude and limitation in the Muhammadan station.
Ha	5 (Explicitly \\$\text{Ha}'\\$)	Numerical value is 5. Symbolizes unity in the heart and detachment in praise. The outer form of the Temple of Man. The completion of man's creation in five years. The spirit of the <i>Surih</i> . The first line in the Temple is the number of knowledge.

Letter (Arabic)	Abjad Value (Standard/Contextual)	Symbolism and Significance
Vav	6 (Explicitly \\$\text{Vav}\\$)	Inner form of the Temple of Man. Letter of Being. Symbolizes Universal Guardianship and the spirit of the letter Ha. Its number is the number of Truth.
Za	7 (Implicit)	Similar Za's (in the ninth line of Temple computation) total 84 (Aziz). Related to the Book of David (Book of Za').
Ha (glutteral)	8 (Implicit)	One of the four letters of the Hidden, Well-Guarded Name (Bearers of creation, provision, death, life).
Ta	9 (Implicit)	Related to the Pentateuch (Book of Ta'). Similar Ta's (in the eleventh line of Temple computation) total 108 (Haqq/Truth).
Ya	10 (Implicit)	The final letter of the name of 'Ali. Manifestation of God's Hand. The number of Ya is associated with the recommended age for a woman to marry.
Kaf	20 (Implicit)	First word of the Command (Kun/Be!). Rank of the Primal Will.
Lam	30 (Implicit)	Banner of Grandeur/Divine Unity. Standard of Divine Unity. Its numerical value (30) is the number of nights God promised Moses. The Lam of multiplicity joins the Alif of unity (derivation of the cross).
Mim	40 (Explicitly 40)	First letter of Will (Mashiyyat). Completion of the appointed time/ranks (40 years). Letter of Glory/essence of manifestation.
Nun	50 (Implicit)	Rank of Purpose. Light of God in the niche/Covenant. Light of creation/invention/origination/glory.
Sad	60 (Implicit)	Glory of splendor, praise, Cloud, and Destiny.

Letter (Arabic)	Abjad Value (Standard/Contextual)	Symbolism and Significance
'Ayn	70 (Implicit)	Inmost Reality of the Will. Completion of the letters of the command "Be!". Transcendence of Divine Unity.
Fa	80 (Implicit)	Uniqueness of unity, All-Merciful, signs, and stations. Through its cleaving asunder, creation was wrought.
Qaf	100 (Implicit)	Mention of Power/ocean of Oneness. Manifestation of praise (in the Point). The Qaf mentioned in the Glorious Qur'an.
Ra	200 (Implicit)	Primary, Eternal Mercy. Universal mercy/creation.
Shin	300 (Implicit)	Associated with the inheritance portion for brothers.
Ta	400 (Implicit)	Soil of the graves (Husayn, his father, the Imams, the Messenger of God).
Kha	600 (Implicit)	Seclusion of oneness and imposition of the separation of attributes.
Dhal	700 (Implicit)	Pinnacle of the Throne, Paradise, ranks, and everything named.
Dad	800 (Implicit)	Associated with the 27th year of the writer's age.
Zha	900 (Implicit)	The letter that God created at the end of the name of 'Ali.

Key Numerical and Esoteric Terms:

Term	Numerical Value (if defined)	Meaning
Hayy (The Living)	18	The number of the Letters of the Living.
Vahid (Unity)	19	The number of the Signs of Unity, Manifestations, and the 19 units that revolve. It is the numerical basis for the Bayán (19 months, 19 days).
Kull Shay' (All Things)	361 (19 x 19)	The totality of creation, representing the number of the

Term	Numerical Value (if defined)	Meaning
Mustaghath (One Invoked for Help)	2010 (Implicit)	year. The ultimate number of the divine names. The number is related to the maximum limit of names revealed.
Baha (Splendor)	9 (Implicit)	A name of God. The number is associated with the name of Tahirih and Tehran. The month of Baha is singled out for Him Whom God shall make manifest.
Huva (He)	11 (Implicit)	The number 11 is the age where fasting becomes incumbent. The word Huva (He) is the essence of the mystery of the Point.

33. Appendix 6: Child Development Model

33.1 From Birth to Age 19 (Bayánic Calendar Alignment)

Approx. Age	Arabic Name	English Name	Developmental Theme
0–1	Bahá' (بهاء)	Splendor	The soul awakens to existence, radiant and receptive, reflecting divine beauty. This is the first awareness of life's light and the sacredness of being.
1–2	Jalál (جلال)	Glory	The infant discovers the majesty of love through attachment and trust, sensing protection and reverence in caregivers, laying the foundation for awe before God.
2–3	Jamál (جمال)	Beauty	Joy, play, and affection blossom. The child learns harmony and attraction, feeling the beauty of creation and the delight of being loved and loving.
3–4	'Ażamat (عظمة)	Grandeur	Expanding curiosity, the child begins to perceive vastness and order in the world. A sense of wonder and respect for greatness takes root.
4–5	Núr (نور)	Light	Awareness sharpens as understanding grows. The child names, identifies, and learns through light—discovering meaning and the joy of illumination and learning.
5–6	Raḥmat (رحمة)	Mercy	Compassion awakens as the child begins to care for others. Empathy, tenderness, and forgiveness become part of emotional life and social connection.
6–7	Kalimát (كلمات)	Words	Speech and comprehension deepen. The child learns the creative power of words, recognizing truth, honesty, and communication as spiritual acts.
7–8	Kamál (كمال)	Perfection	Awareness of right and wrong matures. The child seeks to act correctly, striving toward goodness and self-improvement with growing self-discipline and sincerity.
8–9	Asmá' (أسماء)	Names	The child discovers identity and individuality, learning that every person reflects divine attributes. Personal dignity

Approx. Age	Arabic Name	English Name	Developmental Theme
9–10	'Izzat (عزّة)	Might	and respect for others emerge.
10–11	Mashíyyat (مشيّة)	Will	Confidence and independence develop. The child feels inner strength and begins to test limits, learning that true might is tempered by humility.
11–12	'Ilm (علم)	Knowledge	The sense of choice awakens. The young mind begins to understand purpose, intention, and the difference between impulse and deliberate action.
12–13	Qudrat (قدرت)	Power	Curiosity matures into genuine inquiry. The child learns to question, reason, and seek knowledge with reverence, marking the dawn of moral reflection.
13–14	Qawl (قول)	Speech	Self-confidence and courage increase. The youth begins to act with conviction, recognizing personal strength as a trust to be used with justice.
14–15	Masá'il (مسائل)	Questions	Expression becomes more purposeful. The ability to articulate beliefs and values emerges, along with awareness of how speech shapes truth and unity.
15–16	Sharaf (شرف)	Honor	The moral intellect awakens fully. The youth questions deeply, seeking meaning and coherence, preparing for responsibility and the trust of maturity.
16–17	Sultán (سلطان)	Sovereignty	A sense of duty and moral honor arises. The young person strives for integrity, respect, and steadfastness in upholding divine and personal principles.
17–18	Mulk (ملك)	Dominion	Personal sovereignty and leadership appear. The youth learns to govern the self, balancing independence with humility and care for others.
18–19	'Alá' (علاء)	Loftiness	Wisdom consolidates as all capacities harmonize. The person begins to act responsibly within community life, exercising stewardship and social trust.
			Spiritual adulthood is attained. The

Approx. Age	Arabic Name	English Name	Developmental Theme
			individual embodies unity, love, and service — living as a helper of others and a conscious trustee of divine trust.

33.1.1 Overview

- Ages 0–11: Formation of awareness and empathy — the world of Witnessing.
- Ages 11–15: Moral and intellectual awakening — the world of Trusteeship.
- Ages 15–19: Social and spiritual integration — the world of Helping and Unity.

34. Appendix 7: Political Leaders in 1873

34.1 Of the Americas:

Nation / Power	Status (1873)	Independence Year	Head of State (in 1873)	Title
United States	Independent	1776	Ulysses S. Grant	President
Haiti	Independent	1804	Michel Domingue	President
Paraguay	Independent	1811	Salvador Jovellanos	President
Venezuela	Independent	1811	Antonio Guzmán Blanco	President
Argentina	Independent	1816	Domingo Faustino Sarmiento	President
Chile	Independent	1818	Federico Errázuriz Zañartu	President
Colombia	Independent	1819	Manuel Murillo Toro	President
Mexico	Independent	1821	Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada	President
Peru	Independent	1821	Manuel Pardo y Lavalle	President
Guatemala	Independent	1821	Justo Rufino Barrios	President
El Salvador	Independent	1821	Santiago González	President
Honduras	Independent	1821	Carlos Céleo Arias	President
Nicaragua	Independent	1821	José Diriangén Dávila	President
Costa Rica	Independent	1821	Tomás Guardia Gutiérrez	President
Brazil	Independent	1822	Pedro II	Emperor
Ecuador	Independent	1822	Gabriel García Moreno	President
Bolivia	Independent	1825	Adolfo Ballivián	President
Uruguay	Independent	1825	Tomás Gomensoro	Interim President
Dominican Republic	Independent	1844	Ignacio González	President
—	—	—	—	—
United Kingdom	Colonial Power	N/A	Queen Victoria	Queen
Spain	Colonial Power	N/A	Emilio Castelar	President ⁵⁷⁶

⁵⁷⁶ The Spanish political situation was highly unstable in 1873. King Amadeo I abdicated in February, and the First Spanish Republic was proclaimed. Therefore, Spain's head of state in the latter half of 1873 (ruling Cuba and Puerto Rico) was the President of the Executive Power, Emilio Castelar (who was serving at the end of the year).

Netherlands	Colonial Power	N/A	William III	King
France	Colonial Power	N/A	Patrice de MacMahon	President ⁵⁷⁷
Denmark	Colonial Power	N/A	Christian IX	King

34.2 Of Europe:

Nation	Status (1873)	Head of State (in 1873)	Title
German Empire	Empire	Wilhelm I	Emperor (Kaiser)
Austria-Hungary	Dual Monarchy	Franz Joseph I	Emperor-King
United Kingdom	Monarchy	Queen Victoria	Queen
Russian Empire	Empire	Alexander II	Emperor (Tsar)
French Republic	Republic	Patrice de MacMahon	President
Ottoman Empire	Empire	Sultan Abdülaziz	Sultan/Padishah
Kingdom of Italy	Monarchy	Victor Emmanuel II	King
Spain	Republic*	Emilio Castelar	President*
Kingdom of Portugal	Monarchy	Luís I	King
Kingdom of Sweden	Monarchy	Oscar II	King
Kingdom of Greece	Monarchy	George I	King
Kingdom of Belgium	Monarchy	Leopold II	King
Kingdom of the Netherlands	Monarchy	William III	King

34.3 Of Africa:

Nation / State	Political Status (1873)	Head of State (in 1873)	Title
Ethiopian Empire	Independent Empire	Yohannes IV	Emperor (Nəgusä Nägäst)
Republic of Liberia	Independent Republic	Joseph Jenkins Roberts	President
Egypt (Khedivate)	Autonomous State (under Ottoman suzerainty)	Isma'il Pasha	Khedive
Sultanate of Morocco	Independent Sultanate	Hassan I	Sultan
Tunis (Beylik)	Autonomous State (under Ottoman	Muhammad III as-Sadiq	Bey

⁵⁷⁷ France was under the Third Republic in 1873. It was not ruled by a monarch, but by a President, Patrice de MacMahon, who governed the French colonies in the Americas (e.g., French Guiana, Martinique).

suzerainty)

Oman & Zanzibar Sultanate	Independent (split from Oman in 1861)	Sayyid Barghash bin Said	Sultan
Asante Empire	Independent Empire	Kofi Karikari	Asantehene
Merina Kingdom (Madagascar)	Independent Kingdom	Ranavalona II	Queen

34.4 Of Asia:

Nation / State	Political Status (1873)	Head of State (in 1873)	Title
Qing Dynasty (China)	Empire	Tongzhi Emperor	Emperor
Meiji Japan	Empire	Emperor Meiji (Mutsuhito)	Emperor
Persia (Qajar Dynasty)	Empire	Nasser al-Din Shah Qajar	Shah (King of Kings)
Siam (Thailand)	Kingdom	Chulalongkorn (Rama V)	King
Afghanistan	Emirate	Sher Ali Khan	Amir
Vietnam (Nguyễn Dynasty)	Empire (under increasing French pressure)	Tự Đức	Emperor
British India	Colonial (Crown Rule established 1858)	Queen Victoria	Empress of India (declared 1876, but ruling via Viceroy)
Dutch East Indies (Indonesia)	Colony	William III (King of Netherlands)	King/Sovereign Power
Korean Empire (Joseon)	Kingdom (Chinese vassal, but effectively independent)	Gojong	King
Khivan Khanate	Khanate (Conquered by Russia in 1873)	Muhammad Rahim Khan II	Khan

