

Achieving True Liberation

An Exploration of the Kitab-i-Aqdas

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2026-02-22

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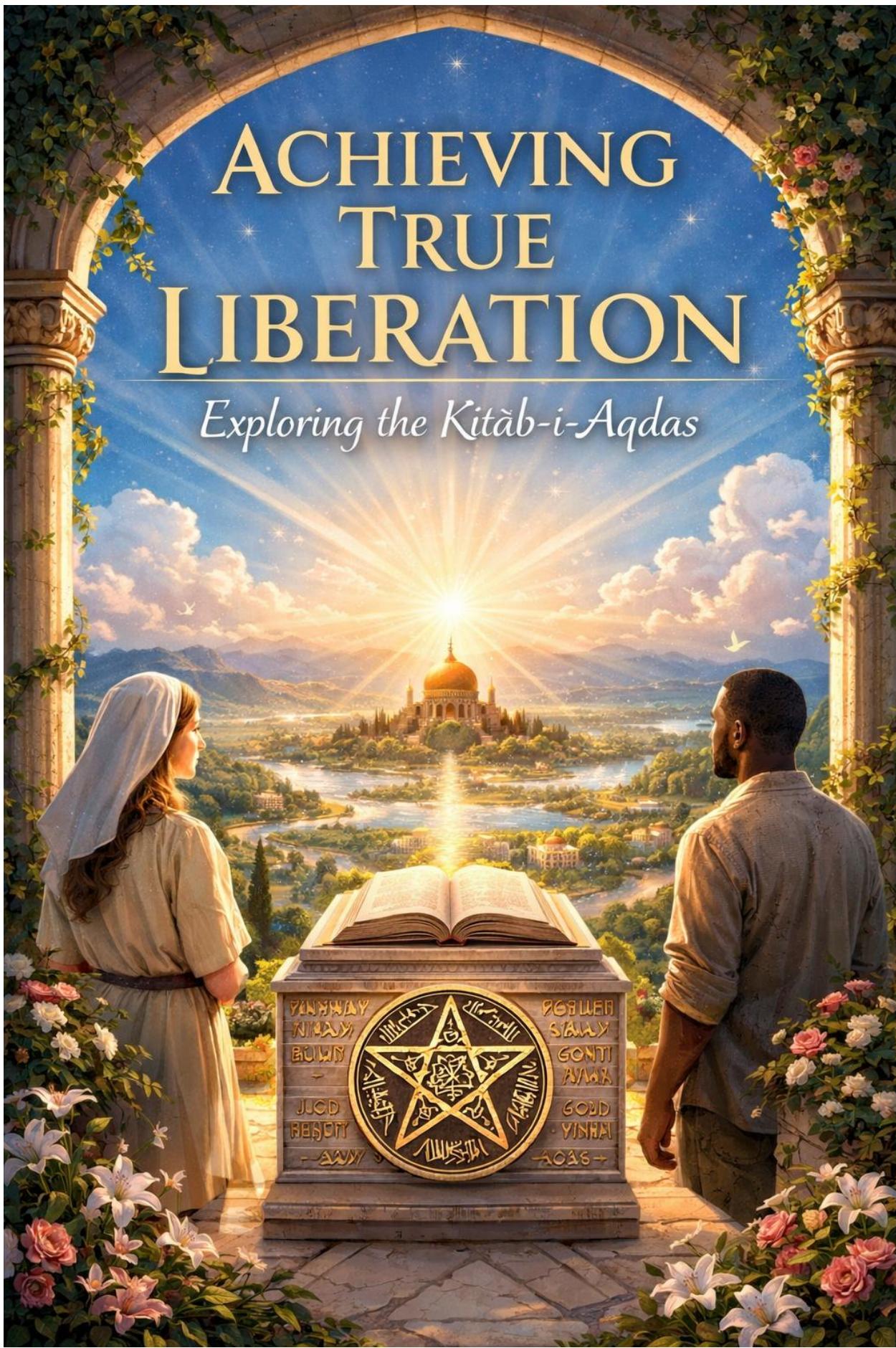
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Cover

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 Kitáb-i-Aqdas never explicitly says you must believe in God, but the mention of God is everywhere within it. Belief in God is foundational to everything else in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. The book is rarely considered a mystical treatise, nor is it often recommended as a text for learning how to grow your spirit. In reality, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas is written for the growth of the human spirit through a constant interweaving of mystical teaching, theology, and straightforward commands. One way Bahá'u'lláh enables this journey is by ensuring God is present in 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 Kitáb-i-Aqdas. This is not every name of God, and of course names can exist within every language. Both the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh teach that God is inclusive of all names and is the source of all names. Rather than studying all 110 names one by one, the next section groups these names and attributes into 19 groups. I chose 19 due to the significance of the number in representing unity. These 19 groups begin with one concept and then progress to the next. Each group name also includes a number showing how often the names in that group appear in the Kitáb-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 whose 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 is an expression of the subtlety of God, which, 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 Kitáb-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.

1.2.2 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, including 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 Kitáb-i-Aqdas uses the names such as All-Knowing, All-Informed, Wise, and the Knower of All Things frequently. These words convey God's own infinite knowledge, a knowledge that, when manifested, is 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 Kitáb-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."¹

With God being the Creator, that 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 frequent of names in the Kitáb-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

¹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #144

can invisibly utilize power. There does not 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.”²

The next 14 groups include the quality of Power.

1.2.6 Lordship (51)

The Kitáb-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.

² Kitáb-i-Aqdas #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"³ and due to this, God is free of corruption.⁴

The next 10 groups include the quality of Independence.

1.2.10 Command (6)

The Kitáb-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

³ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #59

⁴ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #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. This 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 Kitáb-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. Bahá'u'lláh 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.”⁵ 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

⁵ 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."⁶

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

⁶ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #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 Infallibility⁷. 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.

Reflection: Which name or attribute felt most real to you, and which felt most distant?

These names teach us who God is, but they also point beyond themselves, toward the purpose behind what has been revealed.

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."⁸ 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 Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. One answer by the Báb is "Your purpose for me is that I recognize You in all things, so that I may not be

⁷ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #47

⁸ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #125

ignorant of You in anything.”⁹ Bahá’u’lláh also says “Whoever has known Me has known the intended purpose.”¹⁰

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 prohibitions¹¹ and never will be.

Reflection: If the purpose is to recognize God in all things, what is one place in your life you rarely look for Him?

The purpose of God is not merely stated, it is carried, and one way it is carried is through what Bahá’u’lláh calls the Breath of God.

1.4 The Breath of God

The breath of God is a mode in how God expresses His purpose. It “wafts through all else”¹² and “passes through all created things.”¹³ The breath has fragrance¹⁴ and causes action and movement. If there is no movement due to the breath of God, the person or object is considered dead.¹⁵ 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.

Reflection: What in your life feels like fragrance and movement, and what feels like dead air?

The Breath of God describes God’s influence, and the covenant describes our relationship to that influence, and what it asks of us.

⁹ Persian Bayán, Váhid 2 Gate 3

¹⁰ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #138

¹¹ Lawh-i-Sirāj

¹² Kitáb-i-Aqdas #158

¹³ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #111

¹⁴ Lawh-i-Aqdas

¹⁵ Súríy-i-Haykal #167

1.5 Covenant of God

The Kitáb-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.

Reflection: If God is faithful, what is one act of faithfulness you can offer in return?

With these foundations set, we can now gather the thread of this chapter before turning toward the soul.

1.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter established why belief in God is foundational to everything else in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, even though the Kitáb-i-Aqdas never explicitly says you must believe in God. We began with the simple observation that God is present everywhere within the book, and that Bahá'u'lláh weaves mystical teaching, theology, and straightforward commands together for the growth of the human spirit. From there, we explored how Bahá'u'lláh calls on God's names and attributes as a way to keep God present in every command and teaching, and I grouped these names into 19 groups which begin with one concept and progress to the next. We then moved from the question of who God is to why God has acted as He has, and how the purpose of God is not solely commandments and prohibitions. This led into the breath of God as a mode of expression which wafts through all else, gives life, has fragrance, and spreads to receptive souls. Finally, we closed with belief in the covenant of God, as a formal agreement defining expectations, rewards, and responsibilities between God and humanity, and without these beliefs we do not develop religion but instead develop some other type of corrupt ideology lacking the completeness of truth, spirit, and experience. This foundation is also a step toward true liberation, where faith is chosen freely and fear loses its power. With this foundation set, Chapter 2 turns to the second foundation of this book: belief in the human soul, its reality, its unique nature, its inner struggles, and its fate.

2. Belief in the Human Soul

2.1 Chapter Introduction

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

The soul is an idea that appears across languages, eras, and peoples. Even when cultures are distant, people still speak of an inner reality that remembers, chooses, struggles, and longs for meaning. In Chapter 1, we looked outward—toward God's names and attributes, and toward the Breath of God as the active influence that gives life and fragrance. Here we turn inward, toward the receiver of that Breath: the human soul. This shared human question becomes one more doorway for honest conversation, because whatever else we are, we are 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 Kitáb-i-Aqdas as the primary source document. Any supplementation from other sources from the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh will be noted.

Reflection: When you say “I,” what part of you is speaking—body, mind, or something deeper? We first need to establish what it means to say the soul exists at all.

2.2 The Reality of the Human Soul

The first belief is the fact the human soul exists and is real. All living things have a soul, but the human soul is distinct to humans. The human soul is capable of self-awareness, moral choice, and a consciousness which can turn towards God.

The human soul in its form did not eternally pre-exist but was created by God, uniquely for each individual. Bahá'u'lláh says, simply, that we are created from water.¹⁶ This water is both the physical foundation of the body and a symbol for the flowing grace of the Divine Will. Bahá'u'lláh 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.¹⁷ He also describes various kinds of water used in the creation of spirit, soul, and body in the same tablet. Bahá'u'lláh describes the water of semen as being pure, not something itself which needs purified.¹⁸ Water, regardless of the source, is the foundation of all life.

¹⁶ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #148

¹⁷ Tablet of the Light Verses and Disjoined Letters

¹⁸ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #74

Bahá'u'lláh says that we are brought to life with a spirit from God¹⁹, through the divine breath.²⁰ All living things are animated by this breath of God, which is spirit itself. Spirit is the animating breath of life; the soul is the inner life of a living thing; and the human soul is the unique form of soul in humanity. 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 of every living thing, and within that living animation each creature has its own soul; in humans, this is the human soul.²¹ 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. The body is the soul's womb. Bahá'u'lláh does not define exactly when this occurs but this could occur during embryonic or fetal development.

The human soul is the innermost part of ourselves. The human soul provides the "direction of the spirit towards one orientation over others."²² 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, and every soul within it, the freedom to move as it wishes, according to its temperament and direction.

Bahá'u'lláh expresses all souls, whether in animals or in humans, and all humans are Signs of the divine reality.²³ 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.²⁴ The names and attributes are manifested in the human soul.²⁵ This mirrorship is a way to recognize God within us.²⁶ 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.

¹⁹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #73

²⁰ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #158

²¹ Suriy-i-Rais (Tablet to the Chief) - This tablet provides a very good sermon about the nature of the soul

²² Suriy-i-Rais

²³ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #72

²⁴ Kitab-i-Badi - This book offers an in-depth explanation of what it means to be a mirror

²⁵ Kitab-i-Iqan (Book of Certitude) - Another great source about the potentials of the soul

²⁶ 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.

Reflection: What makes you irreplaceable, even if no one else can see it? From existence, we can move to the soul's distinct qualities and capacities.

2.3 The Unique Nature of the Soul

Bahá'u'lláh describes the body as being a temple, and the collection of all people as being temples of humankind.²⁷ 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 human soul determine its destiny and spiritual path.

The Suriy-i-Haykal (Surah of the Temple) describes how Bahá'u'lláh, 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 human soul, not just through material means but through being used for spiritually purposeful conduct and expression of divine attributes.

The human soul is capable of having an exalted and noble station.²⁸ There are various stations and ranks a soul is capable of achieving. The soul itself was born noble²⁹ but requires effort to remain so by turning one's sight inward. There is no higher station than a person bearing witness to God.³⁰ 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.³¹

Each person and each human soul has its own capacity.³² 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.³³ 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.

Reflection: What inner habit most often steals your freedom—fear, suspicion, or pride?

²⁷ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #96

²⁸ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #120

²⁹ The Arabic Hidden Words #13

³⁰ Persian Bayan, Vahid 1 Gate 2

³¹ Persian Bayan, Vahid 5, Gate 14

³² Kitáb-i-Aqdas #176

³³ Kitab-i-Iqan

Once the soul's potential is clear, we can be honest about the conflicts that dim it.

2.4 The Inner Struggles of the Soul

Bahá'u'lláh describes a suspicious soul³⁴ as an opposition to one who uses reason. This suggests that the soul and reason are meant to be allies. When we are 'headless' or suspicious, we aren't just losing faith; we are losing the proper use of our intellect. We begin to use our minds to build walls (idols) instead of bridges to the truth.

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. For example, a person may seek externally induced mystical experiences by depriving themselves of their mental faculties such as reason. 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. With the example of externally induced experiences, the mirror of the soul isn't reflecting the light of God; it is merely caught in the glare of its own internal chemistry.

Bahá'u'lláh teaches these suspicions act as idols.³⁵ 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 Kitáb-i-Aqdas does include the most simple perspective to help alleviate these inner struggles the soul may face.

Bahá'u'lláh says all are servants.³⁶ 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 soul³⁷ and reveals our true human rank.³⁸

Reflection: In your recent moments of doubt, was your reason acting as a lamp to find the truth, or an idol to justify your own whim?

³⁴ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #119

³⁵ Lawh-i-Dunya (Tablet of the World)

³⁶ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #72

³⁷ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #125

³⁸ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #120

From struggle, the chapter turns to the question every soul eventually faces: its departure and destination.

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. Death is the singular inescapable certainty of the material condition. It is also absolutely true once the body has died, the energy which used to be within the body no longer exists within it. It is also a fact that the body's heat and motion no longer remain in the same way once life has departed. In the material world, what we call energy changes form rather than vanishing, and this can be a useful reminder that endings are not always simple. This is not offered as proof of the soul, but as a way to keep the mind from collapsing death into mere emptiness. Where does that life go?

Bahá'u'lláh reminds us we will return to dust.³⁹ The temple of the human body will end. The human soul will take flight.⁴⁰ Taking flight symbolizes the soul's transcendence over material life, to a real place higher than 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.'"⁴¹ Bahá'u'lláh 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 human soul is onboard the Crimson Ark.⁴² Crimson often represents the blood from sacrifice and the victory of divine authority. The Crimson Ark 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.⁴³ The fate of the

³⁹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #148

⁴⁰ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #97

⁴¹ Haft Vadi (The Seven Valleys)

⁴² Kitáb-i-Aqdas #84

⁴³ BH00093 (Letters to the Land of Kha)

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.

Reflection: If death is certain, what would it mean to live as if your soul is preparing for flight?

This chapter has treated belief in the soul as more than a comforting idea. It is a lens for reading the Kitáb-i-Aqdas itself: commands become training for the inner self, virtues become capacities the soul can grow into, and struggle becomes a sign that the soul is alive and capable of change. Belief in the soul is one of the roots of true liberation, because it insists that you are not trapped inside appetite, habit, or fear, and that your life has meaning beyond what can be measured.

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

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 Bahá'u'lláh within the Kitáb-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 Bahá'u'lláh, but even then, what is expressed by Bahá'u'lláh (as well as the Báb) is completely unique. Belief in the worlds of God, while again not being explicitly expressed as required by the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, is vital to the belief in the Cause of God. The journey of the soul must go somewhere. Pre-existence must have an origin. These worlds may not be easily recognized in a physical sense, but are nevertheless real. In this chapter, I will explore these worlds as layered realms of meaning and existence, and how they contain kingdoms, cities, schools, and living beings. Each of these realities helps describe how the human soul can mature beyond its current form, and why the spiritual journey does not end at the boundaries of this world. These are some of the deepest mysteries of creation, full of subtlety. 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 Kitáb-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 Súriy-i-Vafá (Tablet to Vafá).

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.

Bahá'u'lláh says God reigns over all worlds.⁴⁴ With the Tablet to Vafá 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 superposition. I personally find quantum superposition an interesting theory, as it expresses how particles exist in multiple states simultaneously until observed. What if consciousness and spiritual awareness work similarly? Just as observation collapses quantum possibilities into a single actualized state, perhaps spiritual seeking allows the soul to access worlds that are always present but not always perceived, existing simultaneously in the same location but on different planes of existence.

This leads to an infinite number of potentialities. As Bahá'u'lláh discusses the existence of spiritual worlds that cannot be expressed by words nor pointed to by signs,⁴⁵ 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.⁴⁶ There is also a greater world.⁴⁷ In the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 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.⁴⁸ 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

⁴⁴ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #39

⁴⁵ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #116

⁴⁶ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #55

⁴⁷ *Kitáb-i-Aqdas #55

⁴⁸ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #83

from this Kingdom, and every name and attribute returns to this Kingdom.⁴⁹ It could also be possible 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 Lord⁵⁰ exists within all worlds. This kingdom represents God's sovereignty, one of the names of God. There is also the Kingdom of Command⁵¹, 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.⁵² 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.⁵³ Aiding this development are schools within these cities. The School of God is where the Tablets are revealed.⁵⁴ The School of God predates the creation of the Earth and heavens⁵⁵ 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 Kitáb-i-Aqdas mentions the School of Detachment and the School of Meanings and Exposition while the Kitáb-i-Badí' mentions the School of Knowledge.

⁴⁹ Tafsir-i-Hu (Interpretation of the Name He)

⁵⁰ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #79

⁵¹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #91

⁵² Kitáb-i-Aqdas #132

⁵³ Gems of Divine Mysteries

⁵⁴ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #176

⁵⁵ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #177

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 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 Kitáb-i-Aqdas.

Reflection: If you imagined your next trial as a lesson in a "School," what virtue would you hope you are being taught?

With the structure of worlds, kingdoms, cities, and schools in view, we can now ask what all of this is for, and what the soul is meant to become.

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.⁵⁶ 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.

This journey is fundamentally about liberation by freeing the soul from the limitations of the lesser world and the veils that separate it from God. Just as Buddhist philosophy speaks of liberation from suffering and Hindu tradition speaks of moksha (release from the cycle of rebirth), Bahá'u'lláh's cosmology presents liberation as the soul's progressive freedom from attachment to the material world and its movement toward reunion with the divine. This liberation isn't a single moment of escape but an ongoing process of spiritual unfoldment across infinite worlds, and this is part of what I mean by achieving true liberation.

The eventual destination is Heaven. Heaven is often used in the Kitáb-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 Bounty⁵⁷ and Heaven of Revelation.⁵⁸ Bahá'u'lláh says

⁵⁶ Persian Bayan Vahid 2, Gate 12

⁵⁷ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #55

⁵⁸ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #64 and #105

"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."⁵⁹ Paradise is also "my Love, your heavenly home, reunion with me."⁶⁰ 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 Bahá'u'lláh 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.

The Kitáb-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.⁶¹ This practice mimics the melodies which come from the greater worlds. Bahá'u'lláh often describes these melodies as from the "nightingales of the Supreme Paradise."⁶² It can also be the Words of God, no matter who sings them, are also heaven.

Reflection: If Heaven can be a condition of nearness, what would "one step nearer" look like in your inner life today?

To see how the worlds of God are not empty space but living reality, we now turn to who dwells in them and how they aid the soul.

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.⁶³ 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.⁶⁴ They lament the fire of hatred⁶⁵ and have submitted to the Cause of God.⁶⁶

⁵⁹ Súríy-i-Vafá

⁶⁰ The Hidden Words of Arabic #6

⁶¹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #116, #150, #160

⁶² The Words of Paradise

⁶³ The Persian Hidden Words #71

⁶⁴ BH00230 (Unnamed Writing)

The Hosts of the Celestial realm and the nearest angels will aid anyone who rises to assist the Cause of God.⁶⁷ Angels are celestial beings whose purpose is to do God's will. They send His Tablets⁶⁸ and are able to traverse the greater worlds into our lesser world.⁶⁹ They will announce with a trumpet the arrival of a Messenger with a Message.⁷⁰ Angels also announce the death of a person, bring about wrath and punishment for a soul which had not progressed.⁷¹

A soul which has been purified can achieve a station as angels.⁷² Human souls remain distinct from angels in nature, but can reach similar levels of spiritual development and serve similar purposes, offering aid and assistance from the spiritual worlds. 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-Muntahá.

Reflection: If unseen beings can aid a soul, what kind of help would you be willing to receive without controlling how it arrives?

To make sense of how the worlds touch, and how divine assistance can cross their boundary, we now turn to the image of the Sidrat al-Muntahá.

3.5 Sidrat al-Muntahá

The Sidrat al-Muntahá 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

⁶⁵ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #89

⁶⁶ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #132

⁶⁷ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #53

⁶⁸ Surah of Our Name The Messenger

⁶⁹ Tablet of the Birth

⁷⁰ Kitáb-i-Íqán (Book of Certitude)

⁷¹ Surah Fu'ad

⁷² Kitáb-i-Íqán (The Book of Certitude)

discover the physical point where the Earth and sky actually meet. The Sidrat al-Muntahá 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 Kitáb-i-Aqdas says “the Lote-Tree of the farthest limit proclaims: ‘There is no God but Me’”⁷³

The Sidrat al-Muntahá can call out and proclaim. It has Branches which provide shade and salvation.⁷⁴ 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 earth⁷⁵ is also a celestial being often known as the Holy Spirit, or in Bahá'u'lláh's words the Holy Maiden. Bahá'u'lláh 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 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.⁷⁶

What is spoken from the Sidrat al-Muntahá is the Mother Book, which is the hidden treasure.⁷⁷ 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-Muntahá. Much like the Holy Maiden, revelation appears from them. While the Holy Maiden may be a personal apparition for Bahá'u'lláh, the Holy Spirit has descended from Heaven to animate the missions of those such as Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit has its own language.⁷⁸ The Holy Spirit can also act as an intermediary between the Manifestations of God and us, or

⁷³ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #100

⁷⁴ The Tablet of the Branch

⁷⁵ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #117

⁷⁶ Súratu'l-Haykal (Surah of the Temple)

⁷⁷ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #103

⁷⁸ Súratu'l-Haykal (Surah of the Temple)

between God and us. It calls from the Kingdom of God⁷⁹ and animates and inspires life within the soul, even if the soul seems inert or dead. The Holy Spirit is a source of grace.⁸⁰

Belief in the Sidrat al-Muntahá 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-Muntahá 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.

Reflection: Where do you sense the “horizon” in your own life, the place where reason reaches its limit and the soul must learn trust?

Having looked at the worlds themselves, their inhabitants, and the point where worlds meet, we can now gather what this belief changes in the life of the soul.

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 demonstrate 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 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 Kitáb-i-Íqán and books like the Surah of Joseph in the Qur'an, or even the Ahsan al-Qasas by the Báb (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 Báb and Bahá'u'lláh due to a series of dreams I experienced. Dream big. Be imaginative. Your soul is ready for an amazing journey. The next chapter will discuss belief in the Day of God, also known as the Day of Resurrection.

⁷⁹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #80

⁸⁰ The Persian Hidden Words #58

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 culminate 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 Kitáb-i-Aqdas assumes, although it does not provide a detailed explanation. Bahá'u'lláh devoted the Kitáb-i-Íqán (The Book of Certitude) entirely to discussing the Day of Resurrection and is an incredible resource for understanding. The Persian Bayán by the Primal Point (the Báb) 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 Kitáb-i-Aqdas has to say about the Day and how it ties into the beliefs established in the first three chapters. The Day of Resurrection, the Day of Judgment, the Day of God, and the Day of the Covenant describe different aspects of one divine reality. We begin with the vivid images Bahá'u'lláh uses to show the Day in motion, not as an abstract idea.

4.2 Moses and Jesus

Verse #80 of the Kitáb-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, Bahá'u'lláh describes Moses as attaining the lights of the Ancient One. The Ancient One is most commonly referred to as God within the Kitáb-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 Bahá'u'lláh'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.

Reflection: When a new Day dawns, what changes in the way we understand past Revelation?

From these images of reunion, we now turn to the promise behind reunion, which is the Covenant itself.

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 when prior Prophets brought a new Revelation, such as with Šálih to the Thamúd people.⁸¹ The trumpet is the announcement and the blast is the effect. There are two future trumpets and blasts.⁸² 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 Gítā (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.

Reflection: If the promise of return echoes across religions, what would fulfillment feel like when it arrives?

Next, we look at how Bahá'u'lláh describes the shaking of forms that happens when the promise becomes present.

⁸¹ The Holy Qur'an, Surah Al-Haqqah #5

⁸² The Holy Qur'an, Surah Az-Zumar #68

4.4 Fulfillment

The trumpet blast is often called the Great Announcement.⁸³ 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 Sovereign, God is reminding us on the Day of Resurrection, anything is possible within the fulfillment of the Covenant.

Bahá'u'lláh describes the moon as being cleft asunder.⁸⁴ 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 Kitáb-i-Íqán, 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 distinguished⁸⁵ 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.⁸⁶

Reflection: If the Day shakes inherited forms, what is the soul supposed to do with that shaking?

Bahá'u'lláh answers by calling the believer to act, not to watch.

4.5 Seize the Day

Bahá'u'lláh refers to what the Báb had prior said in verse 135 in the Kitáb-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

⁸³ *Kitáb-i-Aqdas #167*

⁸⁴ *Kitáb-i-Aqdas #81*

⁸⁵ *Kitáb-i-Aqdas #81*

⁸⁶ *Lawh-i-Ishraqat (Tablet of Splendors)*

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. Bahá'u'lláh 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 worlds of God, and the belief everything within the material world is subject to renewal and transformation.

Reflection: If belief is meant to be active, what does the Day reveal about God's character?

To answer, we now return to the Names and attributes from Chapter 1 and see how the Day makes them visible.

4.6 The Day Manifests God's Names and Attributes

The Day of Resurrection exemplifies and magnifies God's names and attributes. The following demonstrates how any believer can explore this connection using the framework established in 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."⁸⁷ 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."⁸⁸ 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."⁸⁹ Past

⁸⁷ BH00010, Letters to Tehran through Ali-Akbar

⁸⁸ The Lawh-i-Aqdas (Most Holy Tablet) aka Tablet to the Christians

⁸⁹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #163

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.”⁹⁰ 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”⁹¹

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.”⁹² No force can resist the unfolding of the divine decree and God’s power is made evident.

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.”⁹³ 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.”⁹⁴ 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.”⁹⁵ All of the worlds bear witness. On the Day, God’s supreme station is affirmed.

⁹⁰ BH00054: Unnamed Tablet about the annihilation of all things

⁹¹ Suriy-i-Haykal

⁹² Kitab-i-Badi

⁹³ The Epistle to the Son of the Wolf

⁹⁴ Suriy-i-Bayán (The Chapter of Paradise)

⁹⁵ BH00093 (Letters to the Land of Kha)

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.”⁹⁶ 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.”⁹⁷ 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 realized the possible manifestations of their purpose. Otherwise, My heart is not saddened, for I have nurtured everything for that.”⁹⁸ 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.”⁹⁹ 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.”¹⁰⁰ 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.

⁹⁶ Kitab-i-Sultan

⁹⁷ BH00141 (Unnamed Tablet to Abu'l-Hasan)

⁹⁸ Epistle to the Son of the Wolf

⁹⁹ BH00091

¹⁰⁰ BH00141

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."¹⁰¹ 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,¹⁰² 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."¹⁰³ It is a Day when barriers between the soul and God are removed. Those who seek forgiveness, it is granted to full measure.

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."¹⁰⁴ 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."¹⁰⁵ 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."¹⁰⁶ 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,

¹⁰¹ Suriy-i-Rais (Chapter of the Chief)

¹⁰² The Tafsir-i-Hu (Tafsir of the Name He)

¹⁰³ Suriy-i-Haykal

¹⁰⁴ Kitab-i-Badi

¹⁰⁵ Lawh-i-Istinaq

¹⁰⁶ BH00010 (Letters to Tehran through Ali-Akbar)

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.”¹⁰⁷ 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.

The Day is therefore historical through the appearance of a new Manifestation, and it is inward through the resurrection and transformation of the soul.

Reflection: If the Day transforms both the world and the soul, how does the soul move through the worlds of God when it recognizes the Day?

We now return to the worlds described in Chapter 3 and describe the Day as a migration of the soul.

4.7 The Day as the Soul’s Migration through the Worlds

The Day of Resurrection is the “Great Return” where the Human Soul transcends the limitations of its private Self to navigate the Worlds of God with newfound clarity. On this Day, the soul is resurrected from the grave of the World of Nasut (the physical realm of shadows and limitations) and is invited into the World of Malakut (the Kingdom of signs). This is not a physical movement, but a shift in the mirror of the soul. When the soul recognizes the Manifestation, it ceases to be a suspicious soul lost in the headless state of doubt and becomes a sanctified Mirror capable of reflecting the light of the World of Jabarut (the Celestial Might). The Resurrection is thus the graduation day of the soul, where the lessons learned in the School of Servitude are finally applied as the soul enters the City of Submission.

Furthermore, the balance of the Resurrection serves as the bridge between the soul’s internal foundational virtues and its external environment. As the soul moves through the worlds of God, the Day of Resurrection acts as a spiritual climate shift. The breath of the Merciful mentioned in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas transforms the atmosphere of the soul’s residence. The return is seen as the soul reclaiming its original identity by aligning its attributes with the Divine Names manifested on this Day. By drinking from the pure waters of reunion, the soul effectively migrates from the isolation of the individual world into the unified Kingdom of Affirmation. This transition ensures that the Resurrection is not merely an external historical event, but an internal advancement where the soul finally realizes its purpose across all the worlds of God.

Reflection: If the first law of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas begins with recognition, what does that recognition complete?

4.8 The First Paragraph of the Kitab-i-Aqdas

In the first verse of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá’u’lláh says

¹⁰⁷ BH00074

"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 compromise the foundation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, derived from belief in the Day of Resurrection. Belief in these two things help reinforce belief in God, the 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 Kitáb-i-Aqdas. As you see, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas is not merely a book of laws. It is the Most Holy Book. It is the fulfillment of the Covenant of God.

Resurrection reveals the Day, Command establishes its authority, and the Manifestation makes it known.

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 Kitáb-i-Aqdas and the entire revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. It has been a central tenet of all religion. It is a direct reflection of God's names as Commander, Fulfiller, and Ordainer. As established in Chapter 1, the name of God as Commander becomes clear and actionable once we understand God as the Just Reckoner, the Greatest Infallibility, and the Independent. The Command is built upon nine prior layers of attributes before serving as the pivot to the nine other layers that proceed from the Command. Let us explore what the Command is and what it means for our liberation.

5.2 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."¹⁰⁸

Bahá'u'lláh affirms this is the religion of God from before and after.¹⁰⁹ 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. Bahá'u'lláh 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."¹¹⁰

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.

5.2.1 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

¹⁰⁸ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #138

¹⁰⁹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #182

¹¹⁰ Tablet of Mánikchí Şáhib

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.

This is the Revelation around which evidence and proof circle.¹¹¹ 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."¹¹² Revelation itself is the proof of divine authority, not whether people accept it.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas describes this revelation as the most exalted and most wondrous. "In every subsequent manifestation, the appearance of God is the most exalted."¹¹³ 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.

5.2.2 The Book

Throughout the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh refers to the Book. Bahá'u'lláh uses the word Book to describe various aspects of creation and the knowledge God has. Often times in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Book without any other description refers to the Kitáb-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 Aghṣán."¹¹⁴

Belief in the Command of God means believing in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas as the Book, the Most Exalted and Wondrous Revelation, and an update in the single religion of God. The Kitáb-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 Kitáb-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.

Reflection: Do I treat divine command as an intrusion, or as an expression of love that gives shape to life?

¹¹¹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #136

¹¹² Súriy-i-Haykal Verses 241 & 242

¹¹³ The Persian Bayán, Váhid 4, Gate 12

¹¹⁴ A Tablet to Varqá (Letters to Yazd) and BH00057

To see why the Command matters now, we must first see how it has always moved through history.

5.3 The Continuity of Divine Command Across Dispensations

When the King of Austria (a Christian) visited the al-Aqṣá Mosque (Muslim) in Jerusalem (Jewish Holy Place), Bahá'u'lláh tells him he passed by the Light of Divine Unity coming from the prison of 'Akká.¹¹⁵ 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, Bahá'u'lláh says the Qur'án, the Gospel, the Psalms, the Torah, and the Bayán¹¹⁶ 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, Bahá'u'lláh testifies to the truths of Zoroastrian and Hindu teachings as being relevant to the relative position of people in time and condition.¹¹⁷ 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. Bahá'u'lláh warns in the Kitáb-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."¹¹⁸ 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.

5.3.1 The Bayán as Paradise Awaiting Its Lord

The Persian and Arabic Bayán were revealed by the Báb around 1848. Together they are known simply as the Bayán, whose very name means "Paradise." It reveals how divine Command flows from dispensation to dispensation. He revealed only 11 Unities in the Arabic, and the Persian ended at Unity 9 Gate 10. The Arabic Bayán consists of short commands, while the Persian expands on those same commands with the deeper theology of why, explaining why paradise awaits its Lord.

¹¹⁵ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #85

¹¹⁶ The Kitáb-i-Badí'

¹¹⁷ Tablet to Mánikchí Sháhib

¹¹⁸ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #168

The Báb structured His revelation with intentional incompleteness. It was designed for 19 Unities of 19 Gates (361 sections total). Yet what paradise could be complete without its Lord? It is the Persian Bayán which prepares a garden whose gates would only open when “He Whom God Shall Make Manifest” arrived. From beginning to end, the Bayán serves less as a final destination than as a prepared dwelling, a paradise awaiting its Beloved. The Báb warned His followers not to use His own book as grounds for rejecting the Promised One, knowing that those who clung to the garden’s gates might miss the Lord of the garden Himself. This makes the Bayán unique. It is scripture that teaches believers how to move beyond itself, a paradise that exists primarily to welcome its Sovereign. The Báb says: “I counsel all followers of the Bayán: If, at the appearance of Him Whom God will make manifest, you are all granted success to attain the greatest paradise and the supreme encounter, then blessed are you, thrice blessed!”¹¹⁹

The laws of paradise are not complete until the Master of paradise gives them life. The Báb declared: “In Him Whom God will make manifest, all the ordinances of the Bayán are fulfilled. He is none other than the Point of the Bayán.”¹²⁰ Every Bayánic law was like a seed planted in paradise’s soil, not because the Báb’s authority was incomplete, but because divine wisdom knows which seeds must grow and which must transform when the divine Gardener arrives. When Bahá’u’lláh appeared, He both honored the Bayán’s preparation and cultivated its garden according to the season’s needs, bringing some plants to flower while planting new varieties for a maturing world. The pattern is clear. Command flows continuously from age to age, each paradise preparing the ground for its successor, each garden teaching souls how to recognize the next Gardener. This is why recognition of the Manifestation and belief in His Command are inseparable. For what use is paradise without the One for whom it was made?

“The fruit of this is that, on the Day of Resurrection, no soul should remain veiled from the commands of He Whom God shall make manifest. For if He commands over all existence, His command is the command of God—yesterday, today, and forever.”¹²¹ The Lord of paradise has arrived. Let us turn to the Kitáb-i-Aqdas.

5.3.2 The Most Great Command

Bahá’u’lláh 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.”¹²² This is a testament to 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 there is

¹¹⁹ Persian Bayán Váhid 2, Gate 16

¹²⁰ Persian Bayán Váhid 4, Gate 7

¹²¹ The Persian Bayán Váhid 8, Gate 4

¹²² Kitáb-i-Aqdas #181

a need for 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.

When the Kitáb-i-Aqdas declares that 'the order has been disturbed by this Most Great Order', it signals an integrated design rather than a collection of isolated commands. In this work, I attempt to map that integrated Order as I perceive it within the text. The names and structures I employ are tools of reference and indexing; they are not claims of authority. Other mappings are possible.

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 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."¹²³ 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.¹²⁴ The Balance fulfills the prophecies of old,¹²⁵ 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.¹²⁶ 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,¹²⁷ 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."¹²⁸

¹²³ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #183

¹²⁴ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #99

¹²⁵ Lawḥ-i-Ishrāqāt (Tablet of Splendors)

¹²⁶ Súriy-i-Mulúk (Súriy-i-Mulúk)

¹²⁷ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #6

¹²⁸ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #7

Reflection: Do I recognize divine authority as living guidance, or do I only accept it when it agrees with what I already prefer?

If the Command is truly from God, it must also illuminate the mind and awaken understanding.

5.4 The Command is Manifestations of Light

The Kitáb-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 Sidrat al-Muntahá 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 heavens and the Earth.¹²⁹ 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.¹³⁰ 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 Kitáb-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 Kitáb-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."¹³¹

Reflection: Do I see the Command as something that forms me, or as something I merely study from a distance?

Light is not only meant to be seen, but to be walked in.

¹²⁹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #117

¹³⁰ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #121

¹³¹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #186

5.5 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.”¹³²

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 ornament¹³³ helping others to recognize the beauty of the Command.

“From My laws, the fragrance of My garment is diffused.”¹³⁴ Bahá'u'lláh expresses fragrance regularly in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas and elsewhere. Fragrance is a pleasant smell emanating from an object, in this case 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.”¹³⁵ The nectar is also described as the nectar of life.¹³⁶ Anyone who wears this fabric of laws will be examples of a loving and nurturing justice and life.

Bahá'u'lláh tells us not to consider the Command and the Kitáb-i-Aqdas as merely laws, but as the choice sealed wine.¹³⁷ 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.¹³⁸ Imagine the fragrance of such a wine. Who would not want to inhale it and drink it? Who would not want others to inhale it and drink it?

¹³² Kitáb-i-Aqdas #96

¹³³ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #98

¹³⁴ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #4

¹³⁵ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #4

¹³⁶ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #150

¹³⁷ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #5

¹³⁸ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #173

The Command is also often referred to in terms of water. Water has always been considered a purifying element. The Báb says “it symbolizes the radiance of the Sun of His bounty.”¹³⁹ Those who act in accordance with the Command are drinking from the Kawthar (abundant river from paradise) of life.¹⁴⁰ These pure and flowing waters from the clear stream provide prosperity when drunk with the belief and remembrance of God.¹⁴¹ The water may be provided as showers of grace¹⁴² 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 from the Most Great Ocean. Within the ocean are pearls of knowledge and wisdom.¹⁴³ 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.

“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.”¹⁴⁴ 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.”¹⁴⁵

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.

Reflection: Do I mistake freedom for the absence of restraint, or do I see freedom as the power to live with dignity and purpose?

To understand liberation, we must first understand what the Command is protecting.

¹³⁹ The Persian Bayán Váhid 5, Gate 14

¹⁴⁰ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #73

¹⁴¹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #50

¹⁴² Kitáb-i-Aqdas #55

¹⁴³ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #180

¹⁴⁴ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #45

¹⁴⁵ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #4

5.6 The Command Provides True Liberation

The laws of the Command serve mostly as bounds.¹⁴⁶ 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.¹⁴⁷

In this small sermon about freedom from the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh 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.

True freedom is derived from the protection the Command provides. The command is a key to God's mercy,¹⁴⁸ helping us unlock new doors of realization and possibility derived from God's love. These possibilities from true freedom are not solely for the individual. "The ordinances of God are the greatest means for the order of the world and the preservation of nations."¹⁴⁹ 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.

Within this wider scope, the Command establishes a pattern of trusteeship rather than domination. Just as a shepherd is accountable for the care, safety, and nourishment of the flock, authority under the Command carries responsibility before it carries power. The sheep are not owned as objects but

¹⁴⁶ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #148

¹⁴⁷ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #125

¹⁴⁸ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #3

¹⁴⁹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #3

entrusted as lives, each with dignity, limits, and protection owed to them. In this sense, the Command defines both rights and responsibilities at once: the right of souls and communities to be safeguarded from harm and confusion, and the responsibility of those who act in God's name to serve, preserve, and guide without exploitation. Order is therefore not imposed for its own sake, but upheld as a trust, measured by care, justice, and fidelity to the purpose for which the Command was given.

"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."¹⁵⁰

Reflection: Do I want the benefits of divine order without accepting the trust and responsibility that make it possible?

To close this chapter, we can gather its images and claims into a single view of what the Command is, and why it liberates.

5.7 Conclusion

With the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Command of God has been made new. It is more than laws. It is fabric adorning souls, fragrance attracting seekers, wine enlivening bones, water purifying hearts, and light guiding humanity. Command is not restriction but revelation, not burden but bounty, not constraint but freedom's foundation.

Belief in the Command reflects belief in God, the soul, and the worlds of God. The Command flows from the Book of Existence like eternal chapters. Each complete in itself, each preparing for what follows. From Torah to Gospel, from Gospel to Qur'án, from Qur'án to Bayán, from Bayán to Aqdas, paradise prepares for its Lord.

Yet Command cannot exist without Commander. 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 belief in the Manifestation of God Himself is the foundation upon which all Command rests.

¹⁵⁰ Kitáb-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 Kitáb-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."¹⁵¹ He appears "in the Most Glorious attire"¹⁵² 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."¹⁵³ 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.

Reflection: What changes in your daily life when you treat Revelation as the place where the hidden becomes knowable?

This is where we step from God's attributes into God's appearance in history.

¹⁵¹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #81

¹⁵² Kitáb-i-Aqdas #82

¹⁵³ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #131

6.2 Countless Adams

This station of Manifestation has been fulfilled by many throughout history. The Kitáb-i-Aqdas nor Bahá'u'lláh's writings describe all the Manifestations throughout history, but God has spoken to the people of the world at different places and at different times. The Báb had said "From the appearance of Adam to the first manifestation and the Point of the Bayán, only 12,210 years of this world's time have passed. Beyond this, there is no doubt that God has created countless Adams, whose number is known to none but Him."¹⁵⁴ The Adam described in the Book of Genesis of the Hebrew Torah would have lived around 10,360BC, just as the world was emerging from the last Ice Age and humankind was starting to transition to a more agrarian lifestyle. There could have been countless Adams. These Adams could have emerged in various places throughout the world to establish the foundations of human civilization. A Garden of Eden would represent the emergence of plants being cultivated, a Garden which emerged in newly forming agrarian societies. These Adams could have also helped guide mankind as we look back beyond 10,360BC. While Genesis says Adam was the first man and Eve was the first woman, it is definitely clear Adam represented a dawn of a new era of humanity from the Paleolithic and Mesolithic periods into the Holocene. Humankind had emerged into a new creation, where God was guiding the development of us throughout the world.

Reflection: When you read sacred origins, do you look for a single date, or for a single turning point in the soul of humanity?

With that widening of history, we can return to the most immediate Dawn for our age.

6.3 The Báb, The Primal Point

This brings us to the Báb. He was known by the various titles in the context of Islam, particularly in Shí'a Islam such as the Qa'im. However, there are two names and titles which I want to bring particular attention to, given these two names are rather universal in nature. The first title is the Primal Point.

My understanding of the Primal Point is that it signifies the ultimate unity and reality of all things. It is the essence of the oneness in its most pure form, if you recall Purity and One as the pinnacle of understanding the Essence of God. The Primal Point is the point where all creation returns to and from all creation emerges. I think of the Primal Point as being as if a black hole, where all energy and mass return to. I also think of the Primal Point as being as if the Big Bang, where all energy and mass expand from a point and all reality of the Universe emerges from. In this context, creation ended one cycle and a new cycle emerged.

The most common name is the Báb. The word Báb means the Gate. A Gate is never the ultimate destination. It is the entrance we pass through as we arrive to our destination. In this context, the Gate is where we leave one space, Adam and the Holocene, and emerge in a new space, Bahá'u'lláh and the

¹⁵⁴ Persian Bayán Vahid 3 Gate 13

emerging Anthropocene epoch. The Primal Point and the Báb are two distinct ways to express a complex but singular reality. The Báb relates to this theme in the Persian Bayán by saying:

“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.”

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.

Reflection: What is the difference between a destination you possess, and a Gate that changes who you are as you pass through it?

That Gate leads directly to the pattern the Báb placed at the center of His Revelation.

6.4 The Vahid, The Number 19

The Báb placed significant importance on the number 19. Some tie the origin of its significance to the Qur’án’s Surah al-Muddaththir, where the Seal of the Prophets describes 19 angels who guard the gates of Hell. The number is a marker of faith in God. The audience to whom the Seal of the Prophets was speaking to in the early Meccan period was most likely the Jewish population of Mecca, who observed the lunisolar Metonic cycle. This cycle represents the 19 year cycles where the lunar phases repeat at the same solar periods. Today’s Easter observances follow this Metonic cycle. Other ancient cultures also observed this cycle, such as the Polynesians.

Mathematically 19 is a prime number, which is indivisible by any other numbers. Within it, it includes the number one and the number 9, which is the highest single digit whose value is inclusive of all other single digits. In this context, 19 can represent the Bayánic verse of unity and multiplicity shared in the last section. The Báb makes regular use of the number 19 throughout the Bayán and other writings. As you recall, the Bayán’s intended structure was to be 19 Vahids of 19 Gates, 361 total Gates. A Vahid, using the Arabic abjad system of numerology, represents the number 19. Vahid literally means unity. Thus the Bayán would represent 19 separate unities, each multiplicities of 19, which comprise one Paradise (Bayán). There are 19 gates to pass through for each unity, much like the Báb Himself was a Gate.

When we refer back to the Báb’s ministry, the first believers were called the Letters of the Living. There were 18 of them and together with the Báb, were 19 in total. Each had served as gates in their own way and ushered in a period of considerable upheaval in Persia. All but one were executed for apostasy from Islam, much like what the Qur’án was alluding to in Surah al-Muddaththir. Before He was executed, He had implemented the Bayánic Calendar of 19 months of 19 days and as you will see throughout this book, 19 is a common feature of this cycle. How does Bahá’u’lláh represent the Vahid, the Unity of the Number 19? Let’s explore who Bahá’u’lláh is and the connection to the Báb’s Revelation.

Reflection: Where in your life do you feel unity most strongly, and what pattern helps you return to it when multiplicity overwhelms you?

From the pattern of nineteen, we now turn to the Glory that fulfills it.

6.5 Bahá'u'lláh, The Glory of God

Bahá'u'lláh is the most recent of these Manifestations of God who has brought forth Revelation as their divinely ordained mission. Belief in Bahá'u'lláh is belief in all the prior Manifestations of God, belief their words and causes were true, but also belief that the prior Manifestation's teachings are now superseded by Bahá'u'lláh'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.

In Bahá'u'lláh's writings, some Manifestations are referred to by certain titles. For example, Jesus is often referred to as the Spirit¹⁵⁵ and Muhammad as the Messenger of God.¹⁵⁶ In the Bayán, the Báb had said everything in the Bayán is for He Whom God Shall Make Manifest (HWGSMM), a title used at least 240 times in the Bayán. Bahá'u'lláh refers to this title in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas #137. This helps signal to the Bábí community the station Bahá'u'lláh is claiming. HWGSMM was said to be one to complete the Bayán.¹⁵⁷ The Kitáb-i-Aqdas serves as the completion of the Bayán, 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 Bayán might still apply. Understand though, that while the Kitáb-i-Aqdas also refers to the Báb as Bahá'u'lláh's Herald,¹⁵⁸ the Báb was completely a Manifestation of God. Bahá'u'lláh is also a Herald for a future Manifestation of God who will come no earlier than 2873AD (1029 Badi' Calendar).¹⁵⁹

Bahá'u'lláh was often referred to as the Greatest Name.¹⁶⁰ 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, 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 Bahá'u'lláh's mission then, is for our

¹⁵⁵ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #80

¹⁵⁶ The Súrý-i-Ra'ís (Súrah to the Chief)

¹⁵⁷ The Testament of the Báb to Subh-i-Azal

¹⁵⁸ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #137

¹⁵⁹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #37

¹⁶⁰ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #51

souls 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.¹⁶¹

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas does not go too deeply into the biography of Bahá'u'lláh, which may matter to some. Belief in Bahá'u'lláh 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,¹⁶² 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.¹⁶³ He Himself had entered various Schools of God.¹⁶⁴ Bahá'u'lláh 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 Súrfí-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.

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."¹⁶⁵ This mission began 19 years after the Báb began His ministry in May 1844 (0 BE). It continued until His passing in 1892 in 'Akká,

¹⁶¹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #127

¹⁶² Kitáb-i-Aqdas #104

¹⁶³ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #101

¹⁶⁴ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #175 and #176

¹⁶⁵ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #75

19 years after Bahá'u'lláh revealed the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. The 10 year period from 1863 to 1873 was much like a pivot period, where the Bayán was still the Command of God, but Bahá'u'lláh was declaring His mission and station to believers of the Báb and prior Manifestations, to leaders in Asia and Europe. The Command emerged through writings such as the Súriy-i-Haykal (The Súrah of the Temple) which addresses four monarchs and the Pope, and the Súriy-i-Mulúk (addressing Kings in general). The Bayán, which was an incomplete paradise and like a Gate, was to be passed through over one period of 19 years (1 Vahid), and Bahá'u'lláh was to live for one Vahid of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. This was no mere coincidence. The Vahid is the design of this new post Adam cycle.

By 1873, both Baghdad and 'Akká were part of the Ottoman Empire. While in 'Akká, Bahá'u'lláh was in the Most Great Prison, where the Kitáb-i-Aqdas itself was revealed.¹⁶⁶ 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 veils¹⁶⁷ 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.¹⁶⁸

Bahá'u'lláh's mission is the liberation 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. Yet the center here is not political power, but the soul's deliverance from every form of tyranny, outward and inward.

You will see the rest of this book outlines how the Kitáb-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.

Reflection: When you think of liberation, do you imagine escape from a place, or the awakening of a capacity you forgot you had?

With that mission named, we can now look at how Bahá'u'lláh describes His own roles in fulfilling it.

6.6 How Bahá'u'lláh Fulfills His Mission

The Kitáb-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

¹⁶⁶ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #132

¹⁶⁷ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #132

¹⁶⁸ The Lawh-i-Aqdas (Most Holy Tablet)

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.

Reflection: What would change if you treated every command as a path toward freedom, rather than a burden placed upon you?

That question is why Part 1 must end not with ideas alone, but with a call to lived response.

6.7 Conclusion of Part 1

We began this journey in Chapter 1 exploring the names and attributes of God from Subtlety to Purity, from Knowledge to Love, discovering that God's essence remains forever inaccessible yet His purpose is for us to recognize Him in all things. Yet how would we recognize any of this without the Manifestation. Without the Manifestation, God's subtlety would remain forever hidden rather than purposefully veiled, His love would be an abstract concept rather than a tangible reality, and His covenant would be mere speculation. The Manifestation is the voice of the breath of God, carrying its fragrance to receptive souls.

In Chapter 2, we learned the human soul is a mirror capable of reflecting divine attributes, born noble yet requiring cultivation to remain so. But without the Manifestation's teachings, how would we know the soul's divine origin, its capacity for flight, or its destiny aboard the Crimson Ark. The Manifestation shows us what the polished mirror looks like and demonstrates the soul's potential made visible in the human temple.

Chapter 3 revealed infinite worlds beyond our lesser world including kingdoms, cities, and schools where souls progress through stages of spiritual maturation. Without the Manifestation, these worlds would remain speculation, dreams without interpretation, mystery without guidance. The Manifestation is the Sidrat al-Muntahá made knowable, the point where heaven touches earth, where the greater worlds become accessible to seeking souls.

In Chapter 4, we discovered the Day of Resurrection is happening now, not as bodies rising from graves but as souls awakening to divine truth. Yet without the Manifestation, how would we recognize this Day. How would we know the trumpet has sounded, the moon has been cleft, and all forms are being shaken. The Manifestation announces the Day, embodies its reality, and calls us to seize it rather than wait passively.

Chapter 5 established that God's Command flows eternally through revelations such as the Torah, Gospel, Qur'án, Bayán, and Aqdas, each paradise preparing for its Lord. Yet Command cannot exist without Commander. The Manifestation is the living authority who speaks the Most Great Command, the Sun rising from the Sidrat al-Muntahá at dawn, the lamp lighting our pathway toward true liberation. Belief in the Manifestation completes the foundation we have built across these six chapters.

The Manifestation is not simply another belief to add to our collection. It is the answer to every question these chapters have raised, the lens through which all other beliefs become clear and actionable. With this foundation complete, a question naturally emerges. What do we do with these beliefs? Belief alone, however complete, remains incomplete without expression. The breath of God does not merely inform. It moves and animates. The Commands we have received through the Manifestation call us not simply to know, but to act, not merely to understand, but to practice, not just to believe, but to become. Part 2 will explore how these beliefs translate into a living relationship with God through spiritual practices that transform knowledge into experience, conviction into devotion, and understanding into love.

7. Foundational Virtues

7.1 Introduction to Virtues

Part 2 is going to focus on the relationship we are capable of developing with God through spiritual practice. These spiritual practices help the soul retain its naturally born nobility by developing our virtues, which help us reflect the names and attributes of God. We will focus on this process of inner transformation by describing innate, foundational, and emergent virtues, and how these virtues emerge from spiritual practice. Throughout each chapter we will use a short fictional story as a vehicle to illustrate how virtues can illuminate the soul of a protagonist in a difficult situation. This story is designed to be used as one example in how God inspires inner transformation, guides God-conscious awareness, and inspires actions which reflect all virtues. The story will be told in this chapter, and illuminated without any plot advancement from Chapters 8 to 13.

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 Kitáb-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 Kitáb-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.

Reflection: Which virtues feel like guiding stars for you today, and how do they change the way you interpret counsel as something lived rather than something enforced?

The next section defines the five daily practices that make the constellation usable in real life.

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 be 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.

Reflection: If you had to choose one practice that most often gets neglected, what virtues do you think weaken first when it is missing?

To clarify what these practices restore, we begin with the virtues Bahá'u'lláh calls innate.

7.3 Five Innate Virtues

There are some virtues which Bahá'u'lláh describes as being innate.¹⁶⁹ 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. Being innate, they do not require education as they are a natural part of being human. But because they are integrated into our DNA, it also takes considerable effort to override them. I call these manual overrides.

Being innate 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. The spiritual practices help restore our noble right in cases we choose to override the virtue born within us.

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 Kitáb-i-Aqdas, it does not feel as though this is the context Bahá'u'lláh defines piety. Let's look at how piety is used in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas.

In Kitáb-i-Aqdas #64, we are commanded to piety after Bahá'u'lláh forbids oppression and lewdness. These two acts are acts against others. Again in Kitáb-i-Aqdas #71, oppression and wrongdoing is the opposition to piety. In Kitáb-i-Aqdas #88, piety is paired with justice. In Kitáb-i-Aqdas #108, piety is

¹⁶⁹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #120

described with sincerity to describe how to do remembrance of God. In Kitáb-i-Aqdas #148, piety is paired with kindness to oppose contention and disputes.

It seems as though for Bahá'u'lláh, 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 a 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 Kitáb-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.¹⁷⁰ The common view is truthfulness is a strict adherence to fact or expressing their opinions of a matter. While facts 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 *has* a desire to know what is true and real, while learning this in a loving and caring way. Every person deserves this respect.

¹⁷⁰ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #120

7.3.3 Courtesy

Bahá'u'lláh describes courtesy with dignity in opposition to freedom.¹⁷¹ In the Lawh-i-Dunyá, Bahá'u'lláh 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 Bahá'u'lláh describes courtesy in opposition to freedom, Bahá'u'lláh 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 nonaggression principle is one way to view courtesy on a large scale nonreligious 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.

7.3.4 Loyalty

Loyalty is a virtue which can purify a soul.¹⁷² Bahá'u'lláh often pairs loyalty with love and steadfastness to help express the purpose of loyalty. The first loyalty is to God in servitude.¹⁷³ 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, Bahá'u'lláh describes how competing loyalties existed within His family. His future daughter-in-law, Fátimih Khánúm expressed her loyalty to her sister, but the sister was trying to prevent Fátimih Khánúm from expressing her loyalty to her fiancé, 'Abbás Effendi (The Most Great Branch). Eventually the sister was loyal to Mírzá Yahyá (Bahá'u'lláh's half-brother). In the last year of His life, Bahá'u'lláh asked God to take care of the sister, despite her being disloyal to Him.

¹⁷¹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #123

¹⁷² Lawh-i-Siráj

¹⁷³ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #120

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

Bahá'u'lláh describes Himself as the trustworthy counselor.¹⁷⁴ This is in opposition to describing those who are wolves in sheep's garments. He enjoins responsibilities for the trustworthy to act as trustees¹⁷⁵ with their obligations.¹⁷⁶ Trustworthiness eliminates doubts in the affairs of the world.¹⁷⁷ Bahá'u'lláh joins trustworthiness with the lights of certainty, steadfastness, and tranquility.¹⁷⁸

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 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 Bahá'u'lláh'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.

7.3.6 Manual Overrides

Manual overrides are required for a person to stop utilizing their innate virtues. These could be conscious choices we make, but they could also be imposed upon us by others. They hijack the human temple and

¹⁷⁴ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #52

¹⁷⁵ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #69

¹⁷⁶ Words of Paradise

¹⁷⁷ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #134

¹⁷⁸ Lawḥ-i-Dunyá

interfere with our soul's ability to orient towards the Sun of Truth. Where the Sun provides liberation, these overrides tend to be sources of suffering and self-imprisonment. I will categorize these manual overrides in five ways. These five ways can easily interact with each other, depending on the situation:

1. Social and Traditional Overrides: These are external structures such as with family, clergy, or societal expectations. Religious and cultural practices such as blind imitation of traditions without any personal investigation overrides pure truthfulness. There could be family authority figures who attempt to govern another's soul, perpetuating different standards for girls than boys. This overrides courtesy.
2. Identity and Shame Overrides: These are internal overrides where we adopt a false narrative about ourselves. We may view a past mistake as a permanent stain on our worthiness, rather than opportunities of reconciliation and progress. This overrides piety. We may see others who excel at something we wish to excel at, and feel too ordinary or worse, worthless. This overrides trustworthiness by preventing us to spread our wings and believe we can be more or achieve more.
3. Sensory and Material Overrides: These are internal overrides often in relationships to external structures. We could choose to remain in emotionally comfortable places, while emotional depths seem too demanding. This overrides our potentials for loyalty. We might choose to constantly overload our senses, refusing moments of silence or self-awareness. This overrides courtesy to ourselves.
4. Intellectual and Ego Overrides: These are internal overrides focused on the self. We could have an over-reliance on our own senses and experiences as the primary sources of truth or evidence. Not only does this cause self-exaltation, but it overrides pure truthfulness by denying potential sources of truth. We could have cognitive rigidity where we define things in the most narrow way solely to fit narratives or normative views of the world. This overrides trustworthiness.
5. Relational Overrides: These are often the focus of traditional religious discourse. These overrides occur solely in the space of human connection, both internally and externally. The ego may attempt to dominate that of another. Sometimes we may seek instant gratification of desires, overriding both courtesy and piety. We could withhold difficult truths which prevent others from making knowledgeable and appropriate decisions, overriding pure truthfulness.

I want to provide an example of how these overrides could interplay with each other. Say a person belongs to a very conservative religious community, where absolute chastity is a primary worth of a young woman. Both young men and young women, due to the traditions and rituals of their families and community, may not learn how to form healthy and meaningful bonds out of fear of being led to temptation. They can only see each other fearfully, despite the potential for a soulful connection. This focus on temptation from desire ironically only allows them to see each other as objects of temptation, increasing the taboo desire they feel for each other. Eventually they fulfill their desire, despite their fear of being ruled by demonic forces. Each uses each other purely for an immediate pleasure, even if that soulful connection had not yet been developed. Afterwards, both feel guilt and shame as strongly as they

had felt their initial desire. The young woman in particular feels she has lost something she can never recover, worthless not only to her future husband but in the eyes of God and her family. Maybe both can keep their actions a secret, hidden from the eyes of those who judge, but only if a new life was not created.

This situation covers all five manual overrides in various ways. One could wonder if either the woman or man are truly liberated by these manual overrides, which outwardly seem to be born of a belief in a virtue, but at the cost of other virtues. I would argue both individuals suffer greatly from a prison God desires us to be free from. If the manual overrides served as clouds hiding the innate virtues, the five spiritual practices are the ways we can allow the Sun to shine gloriously through.

Reflection: Where do you recognize a manual override in yourself that does not erase an innate virtue, but temporarily clouds it and redirects it?

Having named distortion, we now name the balancing principle that keeps virtue from turning into excess.

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.

Bahá'u'lláh alludes to moderation in Kitáb-i-Aqdas #43 when describing a state between despair in calamities nor excessively rejoicing in happiness. Bahá'u'lláh explicitly states "Truly, I say, moderation in all things is beloved. When it is exceeded, it leads to harm."¹⁷⁹ 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 five 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.

Reflection: When have you watched a virtue become harmful because it lost moderation and began to overpower the rest of the constellation?

¹⁷⁹ The Words of Paradise, Ninth Leaf

With moderation established, we can now see how fear and love function as paired forces that orient the soul toward God without distortion.

7.5 The Fear and Love of God

Bahá'u'lláh says "all will perish from a single Word from God" without the fear of God.¹⁸⁰ Without this virtue, one may become arrogant.¹⁸¹ This arrogance could cause one to place themselves in the position 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.¹⁸² 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 aim¹⁸³ 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 'Azrá'íl (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

¹⁸⁰ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #40

¹⁸¹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #148

¹⁸² Kitáb-i-Badí'

¹⁸³ Hidden Words in Arabic #5

dignity and wealth to these watchmen and preserve them, for they were like Jabrī'l, guiding this weak soul, or like Isráfil, giving life to this lowly one."

While this story utilizes the fear of being apprehended by a guard to illustrate this story, Bahá'u'lláh refers to God as a Guardian in books such as the Súriy-i-Haykal. The story is a great example in how the very pressure of fear can deliver you to a spiritual reunion with your Beloved. The man's gratitude towards the guard for causing fear shows how intricately fear and love are meant to exist together, as moderating forces upon the soul of a believer.

Now I want to share a story of my own and thereafter, show how the virtues of the fear and love of God, plus moderation, can illuminate this story.

Reflection: In a moment of moral pressure, what helps you keep fear from becoming anxiety and love from becoming indulgence?

With these two forces in place, we can now watch them operate inside a single moment where power, truth, and responsibility collide.

7.6 The Unknown Sister - A Story

The envelope wasn't physically heavy, but it made her pause before opening it. The way things feel when they contain more than they should. She set it on the small conference table and adjusted the strap of her bag with her foot, nudging it farther under the chair so her daughter wouldn't tip it over.

Her brother sat across from her, hands folded, posture careful. He had insisted she read it first. You're the executor, he had said simply. I trust you. Whatever it is, we'll handle it. He meant it, and that made it harder, not easier.

Her daughter swung her legs beneath the table, humming to herself, tracing the wood grain with one finger. She had brought her along because childcare had fallen through and because, somehow, it had felt wrong to do this without her. The child's presence grounded the room, even as it made the moment feel slightly unreal.

The room was cool, the air conditioning running steadily in the background. The lawyer sat at the head of the table, quiet and professional, ready to answer questions when needed but offering nothing unprompted.

She opened the envelope and unfolded the pages. The language was formal, exacting. Names, dates, clauses that flattened a life into orderly sections. She moved through the familiar parts first, personal effects, instructions about the house, the residue of decisions her father had already made peace with. Her eyes scanned automatically, the way they always did when she was responsible for something important.

Then she stopped.

There was a name she didn't recognize.

She went back, reading it again, slower this time. The name appeared once, then again, tied to a date of birth. Her mind did the math before she could stop it. Fourteen. Born while her parents were still married, years before her mother's long illness had taken her.

Her daughter leaned over and whispered, "Mama, can I have a snack?"

"In a minute," she said softly, without looking up, trying to veil the shakiness she felt deep within her.

She continued reading. The remaining assets were to be divided into three equal parts. One to her. One to her brother. One to a sister she had never known.

The room didn't change, but her body did. Her brother watched her face, reading nothing from it, waiting. He didn't ask questions. He didn't lean forward. He simply stayed where he was, steady and present, as if that were the only thing he could responsibly offer.

She turned the page. There was an address. Another woman's name. No explanation. No letter. No attempt to frame what this meant or why it was here. Just the facts, laid out with the same neutrality as everything else.

Her daughter slid off the chair and crouched on the floor, pulling a small car from her bag and rolling it back and forth beneath the table. "It's going to the store," she announced.

"That's nice," she said, her voice calm, practiced.

She was aware, suddenly, of how many things were happening at once. The memory of her father's voice, steady and familiar. The image of a sister she had never known, living an ordinary life somewhere else, believing certain things to be true. The knowledge that she was now responsible for turning this document into reality.

She glanced at her brother. He gave her a small nod, the kind that said take your time, though he couldn't possibly know what she had just read. Whatever he saw on her face, he didn't try to interpret it. He trusted her to carry it first.

The air in the room felt thick now, as if the coolness had been replaced by something denser.

She folded the pages carefully, aligning the corners. Her daughter crawled back into her lap, warm and solid, pressing her cheek against her arm. The child smelled faintly of apple slices and vanilla shampoo.

"Are we done?" her daughter asked.

"Almost," she said.

She placed the will back into the envelope. She glanced at the lawyer, who waited patiently, pen poised over a legal pad, ready to explain whatever needed explaining. But she did not speak. There would be time for questions later, legal ones, practical ones, but not yet. Right now there was only the knowledge itself, newly uncovered, sitting between her and the life she had thought she understood.

Outside the window, the day continued without reference to any of it. Somewhere else, a teenaged girl was moving through her afternoon, unaware that her name had been written into another family's future. And here, in this room, with her brother waiting patiently and her child tracing imaginary roads along the floor, she held the first quiet moment of a truth that would not stay contained for long.

Reflection: When a truth places power in your hands, what inner posture helps you keep responsibility from turning into control or avoidance?

To see how virtues illuminate action, we now return to the same moment and observe it through fear, love, and moderation.

7.7 Illuminations of the Unknown Sister - Foundational Virtues

7.7.1 Fear of God

The fear of God doesn't tell her what to do, but it puts her back in proportion. The will has placed power in her hands, and she feels how easily she could confuse permission with righteousness, comfort with justice, silence with peace. Awe steadies her. God alone is Judge, Most Powerful, Lord of all outcomes. That fear is not panic. It is sobriety. It frees her from fearing her brother's eventual reaction or the lawyer's gaze, because she is not answering to them first. The fear liberates her from a fear of losing her presumed inheritance, an inheritance to share with her daughter.

7.7.2 Love of God

The love of God softens what fear has steadied. It allows her to look at the will without hardening, to see not only disruption but care reaching beyond death. Love reminds her that justice is not only measured, but meant to heal, and that mercy can exist without erasing truth. It gives purpose to restraint and patience, assuring her that goodness is not proved by control, but by a willingness to let compassion guide whatever must come next. The love of God gives assurances that even when provision is less than desired, provision exists in correct proportion.

7.7.3 Moderation

Moderation steadies her between extremes. She does not collapse into despair at what has been uncovered, nor does she rush toward relief by forcing resolution. She resists the urge to freeze everything in place and the opposite urge to act simply to end the tension. Moderation holds fear and love in balance, keeping either from overpowering the other. It reminds her that neither silence nor action is pure on its own, and that liberation lies in remaining attentive, restrained, and awake to the middle way as it slowly reveals itself.

Reflection: Which virtue in this illumination feels most difficult to embody when your emotions are loud and the consequences are real?

To close the chapter, we now set the trajectory for how each practice in Part 2 will restore an innate virtue and help other virtues emerge.

7.8 Summary

In each chapter from Chapters 8 to 12, we will introduce a new spiritual practice described in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. An associated innate virtue will be described as being restored by this spiritual practice. For each innate virtue, other virtues will emerge giving the innate virtue further form and application. We will start with prayer and piety, seeing what God counsels us towards, and how piety illuminates the story “The Unknown Sister.” From there, each chapter will deepen the same moral moment, so that by Chapter 13 we can see unity not as an abstract ideal, but as a constellation we learn to navigate when truth arrives with weight and responsibility.

8. Prayer

8.1 Introduction

Prayer is the first spiritual practice this book presents. Bahá'u'lláh dedicated a large part of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas to prayer. This chapter will describe what the Book discusses regarding prayer, and some emergent virtues from piety which are cultivated by the spiritual attachment 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. Prayer is like calibrating a compass before you walk into the day, because it helps the soul remember which direction is truly north.

Reflection: When you think of prayer as daily calibration, what would change in how you approach obligation, sincerity, and freedom?

We begin by clarifying who is required to pray, because the boundaries of duty reveal the mercy within the command.

8.2 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.¹⁸⁴ The age of maturity will be discussed more in depth in Chapter 15, but the age is defined as 11 for spiritual practices.¹⁸⁵

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 fast¹⁸⁶. 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.

¹⁸⁴ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #10

¹⁸⁵ BB00083

¹⁸⁶ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #13

Reflection: Where do you see mercy operating inside religious duty, especially where life stages and bodily realities make devotion more demanding?

With duty clarified, we can now look at how prayer begins, not with complexity, but with simple preparation.

8.3 Preparation for Obligatory Prayer

Ablutions are required in preparation for obligatory prayer.¹⁸⁷ 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 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 Ṣalát i Kabír (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.¹⁸⁸ 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.

Reflection: What would it look like to treat ablutions as a symbol of inner cleansing rather than as a test of outward perfection?

Once preparation is simple, the next question becomes practical: how long must prayer be, and how long may it be?

8.4 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 Kitáb-i-Aqdas was revealed, Bahá’u’lláh 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 individualized 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

¹⁸⁷ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #18

¹⁸⁸ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #12

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.

Reflection: If prayer is a daily foundation, how do you keep flexibility from becoming neglect, and discipline from becoming burden?

After length, the next practical question is timing, because daily rhythm shapes what devotion becomes over time.

8.5 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 Kitáb-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.¹⁸⁹ For example, in Calgary, Canada, sunset is close to 10pm during the summer solstice and closer to 8pm during the spring equinox. 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 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 Bahá'u'lláh 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 pre recorded music to guide me.

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

¹⁸⁹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #10

Reflection: When time becomes irregular, how do you preserve the spirit of daily prayer without turning it into a scheduling anxiety?

Once timing is understood, we can now consider orientation, because direction becomes a physical reminder of what the heart is turning toward.

8.6 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 Bahí in present day Acre, Israel.

Even though we are to turn to where Bahá'u'lláh was last manifested in the flesh, it does not mean we are praying to Bahá'u'lláh or worshiping Him. We are still praying to God. The purpose for praying towards Bahá'u'lláh is due to His role as the Manifestation of God. Bahá'u'lláh is directly branched from the Sidrat al Muntahá and reflects the names and attributes of God. If we turn our souls towards Bahá'u'lláh, 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 Báb says this in the Persian Bayán "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."¹⁹⁰

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.

Reflection: When you physically turn toward the Qiblih, what inner turning do you most need in that same moment?

With direction established, we can now see why prayer is protected from hierarchy, so that worship remains addressed to God alone.

¹⁹⁰ The Persian Bayán, Váhid 9 Gate 19

8.7 Congregational Prayer

The Báb had prohibited congregational prayer except for the prayer for the deceased.¹⁹¹ The Báb explains none may worship God in a station beneath God. He continues by saying any designated prayer leader, such as an Imam, represents a letter of affirmation but present themselves as a letter of negation when a new revelation exists. The prayer leader's affirmation is only an outward appearance instead of a spiritual condition. They are no longer allowed to lead. This keeps our prayer focused on God.

Bahá'u'lláh continues the prohibition in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas.¹⁹² He provides some changes to the Prayer of the Dead.

Reflection: What changes in your own prayer when there is no religious hierarchy between you and God?
With congregational prayer limited, the one exception becomes a window into how a community can honor a soul with unity and humility.

8.8 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 Alláhu Akbar (God is Great) six times. The prayer is performed during Qunút, which is based on the Muslim tradition of praying in a standing position, with the palms facing outward towards the sky. The Qunút 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.

Reflection: How does praying together for the deceased reveal unity without creating spiritual rank among the living?

From burial prayer, we turn to accessibility, because Bahá'u'lláh removes many barriers that once turned purity into exclusion.

8.9 No Restrictions on Hair and Clothing

A person can wear their hair as they wish.¹⁹³ Bahá'u'lláh 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

¹⁹¹ The Persian Bayán Váhid 9, Gate 9

¹⁹² Kitáb-i-Aqdas #12

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. Bahá'u'lláh states these rules were not in the Qur'án and in the Kitáb-i-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. Bahá'u'lláh 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.

A female believer can also interpret these lack of restrictions as she 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.

Bahá'u'lláh does regularly use garments as a symbol of our character. An example is in a letter to 'Alí Akbar, where Bahá'u'lláh hopes all the friends of God may be adorned with the garment of sanctity.¹⁹⁴ The garment is what others are supposed to see from us. In this example, people who are or who are not Bahá'í will be able to easily see a Bahá'í as 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.

Reflection: When outward restrictions fall away, what inner sincerity remains, and how do you keep it from becoming performance?

With clothing freed, the next reminder is simple and physical, because even prostration asks only for cleanliness and reverence.

8.10 Clean Flooring

For prostration, Bahá'u'lláh 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.

Reflection: What does it teach you about God when prayer is made accessible on any clean surface, regardless of status or setting?

¹⁹³ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #9

¹⁹⁴ BH00010: Letters to Tehran Through Ali-Akbar

From ordinary surfaces, we move to extraordinary moments, because fear and awe can become doorways for remembrance rather than panic.

8.11 In Times of Exceptional Natural Phenomena

The Báb had outlined a specific prayer for the signs, or natural phenomena. Bahá'u'lláh 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.

Reflection: In moments when nature overwhelms you, what helps you turn awe into worship instead of anxiety?

From extraordinary moments, we move to ordinary disruption, because travel tests whether devotion is flexible without becoming optional.

8.12 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.

It should be noted that after the Kitáb-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.

Reflection: When life becomes mobile or disrupted, what makes prayer feel like a living relationship rather than a fragile routine?

With the practice established, we now return to the Unknown Sister and observe how prayer draws piety into new forms.

8.13 Illuminations of The Unknown Sister - Emergent Virtues from Piety

8.13.1 Detachment

Prayer loosens her grip on what the inheritance represents: security, fairness, even family identity. In turning toward God, she feels the subtle release of needing outcomes to protect her sense of order. The unknown sister is no longer a threat to what she thought she owned, but a reality she does not control. Detachment does not make the situation disappear; it simply removes the illusion that it belongs to her to possess or manage for her own sake.

8.13.2 Humility

In prayer, she feels how little she truly knows. The facts of the will do not grant her insight into motives, histories, or consequences. Humility quiets the instinct to believe her perspective is sufficient. She recognizes that being named executor does not elevate her above error or blind spots. Prayer places her back into dependence, reminding her that clarity is not earned by authority, but received slowly, if at all.

8.13.3 Lowliness

Prayer draws her into an awareness of smallness. Smallness is not insignificance, but limitation. She is one person standing at the edge of lives she cannot see and outcomes she cannot predict. Lowliness frees her from the pressure to be equal to the moment. She does not need to carry the weight of resolution yet. In accepting her lowliness, she allows space for guidance beyond her own strength or cleverness. In her daughter, she witnesses how there was a time she was on the floor playing as her parents were responsible over the challenges of parenthood and life.

8.13.4 Reverence

Through prayer, the situation takes on gravity. This is no longer merely a legal matter or family complication; it is a moment touching human lives shaped by forces larger than intention. Reverence restrains casual thinking. It slows her inner pace. She senses that how this truth is handled matters, not because she is being watched, but because she stands before something sacred: the fragile intersection of truth, life, and consequence.

8.13.5 Thankfulness

Prayer awakens gratitude in unexpected places. She becomes aware of what remains steady: her child's warmth, her brother's trust, the fact that truth surfaced while there was still time to respond thoughtfully. Thankfulness does not erase the difficulty, but it keeps bitterness from taking root. Even here, she can acknowledge that she has been given time, awareness, and the chance to approach what lies ahead with care. Her life exists through the spirit of God, sparked by the love her mother and father shared, even if that love was not perfect.

8.13.6 Innate Virtue Piety

In this moment, piety is her turning toward God rather than toward control. Detachment expresses piety by loosening her attachment to money, inheritance, and the version of family she assumed. Humility expresses piety by admitting her knowledge is partial and her authority does not make her right. Lowliness expresses piety by accepting her limits and refusing the impulse to play savior or judge. Reverence expresses piety by treating the situation as weighty and sacred, not merely legal. Thankfulness expresses piety by recognizing mercy within trial, and receiving time and guidance as gifts.

Reflection: Which of these emergent virtues would most change the next action you take when a truth disrupts your assumptions?

To keep this chapter grounded, we now look to Bahá'u'lláh Himself, not as an abstract model, but as an exemplar of praying as a servant.

8.14 The Example of Bahá'u'llah

The writings of Bahá'u'lláh are full of examples of Him praying to God as a servant. In this condition, Bahá'u'lláh is showing us the framework of how prayer can be. We do not necessarily have to say exactly what Bahá'u'lláh 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 Bahá'u'lláh prayed for, to whom, and maybe see if God answered these prayers and if so, in what way. We must always remember that while Bahá'u'lláh was a Manifestation of God, Bahá'u'lláh was still human. I interpret this human condition as He was not omniscient nor omnipresent, but had capacities to serve a specific mission God had ordained for Him. When Bahá'u'lláh was praying to God, this was not necessarily revelation as God would not pray to God. It is important to be mindful of Bahá'u'lláh'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 Bahá'u'lláh 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 Bahá'u'lláh 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 Bahá'u'lláh 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 Bahá'u'lláh's soul was liberated. As we proceed through these spiritual practice chapters, I invite you to look for how Bahá'u'lláh was an exemplar of His teachings. They are truly inspiring.

8.15 Summary

Prayer is the foundation of daily devotion because it teaches the soul how to turn, how to humble itself, and how to receive guidance without demanding control. When prayer is practiced with sincerity, it invites piety to express itself through detachment, humility, lowliness, reverence, and thankfulness, so that even unsettling truths can be carried with steadiness. In Chapter 9 we will turn to recitation, and see how the words we repeat shape the words we speak, and how pure truthfulness can begin to emerge through this practice.

9. Recitation

9.1 Introduction

The next spiritual practice Bahá'u'lláh describes in the Kitáb-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. Before we discuss what to recite, we first clarify the rhythm of the obligation, because morning and evening create a daily structure that shapes loyalty over time.

9.2 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 conscience. 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.

Reflection: What would shift in your inner life if you treated morning and evening recitation as two anchors that hold the day together?

With the rhythm established, we can now ask what is worthy of being recited, because the content of recitation defines what power we are welcoming into the soul.

9.3 What Should Be Recited?

Bahá'u'lláh 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 Bahá'u'lláh. He says "Whoever reads a verse from My verses, it is better for him than reading the books of the former and latter generations.

¹⁹⁵ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #149

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 Bahá'u'lláh'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 Bahá'u'lláh who is not a Manifestation of God should not be used for recitation. No scholar deserves to be recited, nor the most beautiful poet. Recitation is reserved for God's Word and God's Word only.

Bahá'u'lláh's writings include the Kitáb-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.

Reflection: When you choose what to recite, are you selecting what is easiest, what is most beautiful, or what most directly reforms your character?

Once the content is clear, the next question is method, because recitation can either enliven the soul or overburden it.

9.4 How Should One Recite?

Bahá'u'lláh offers a few guidelines in how a believer should recite the verses of God. The first counsel from Bahá'u'lláh 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! Bahá'u'lláh only wants what is best for you, the individual. God is Most Merciful.

Bahá'u'lláh 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

¹⁹⁶ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #138

¹⁹⁷ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #149

¹⁹⁸ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #150

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

Reflection: When you think about reciting with spirit and joy, what helps you keep devotion from turning into pressure or performance?

With method established, we can now ask why recitation exists at all, because purpose determines whether recitation becomes merely vocal or truly transformative.

9.5 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.

This also means recitation can be both a private and public practice. Bahá’u’lláh describes recitation as one of the practices of the Mashriq’ul-Adhkár. 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.

Reflection: If recitation is meant to carry fragrance into the world, what would it look like for your recitation to be both private nourishment and public service?

With the purpose stated, we return to the Unknown Sister and watch how loyalty becomes visible when recitation guards truth against distortion.

9.6 Illuminations of The Unknown Sister - Emergent Virtues from Loyalty

9.6.1 Fidelity

Through recitation, she feels drawn back to what must remain true, even when everything else feels unstable. Fidelity steadies her against distortion, against reshaping the facts to ease discomfort or soften

¹⁹⁹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #116

their weight. The Words she recites remind her that truth has its own sound, and her task is not to improve it or muffle it, but to remain faithful to it without embellishment or avoidance.

9.6.2 Morality

Recitation sharpens her inner sense of rightness without accusation. It does not condemn her uncertainty, but it does not excuse indifference either. The verses quiet emotional noise and help her distinguish moral clarity from emotional relief. Morality here is not about rules, but about refusing to let fear, convenience, or sentiment replace conscience. Morality is the Word allowing the discernment of herself.

9.6.3 Righteousness

As the words pass through her, righteousness becomes less about appearing just and more about inward alignment. She senses that whatever lies ahead must reflect integrity whether witnessed or unseen. Righteousness does not demand immediate action; it demands that future action not betray what she already knows to be upright, even if no one else ever learns the struggle behind it.

9.6.4 Servitude

Recitation shifts her posture from ownership to offering. She feels herself loosen the claim that this situation must resolve in a way that protects her comfort or preserves control. Servitude expresses itself as a willingness to carry responsibility without dominance, to serve truth without mastering it, and to accept that obedience to God may feel heavier before it feels freeing.

9.6.5 Steadfastness

The verses give her endurance rather than answers. Steadfastness forms quietly as she realizes this moment will not be resolved quickly or cleanly. Recitation anchors her so she does not retreat into avoidance or rush toward premature resolution. It prepares her to remain present, faithful, and oriented toward God even as uncertainty stretches forward.

9.6.6 Loyalty (Innate Virtue)

In this situation, loyalty is her decision to let God's Word remain supreme over her own instincts, narratives, or fears. Recitation keeps her allegiance clear: not to convenience, not to appearances, not even to inherited expectations, but to a truth that liberates by being spoken first within the soul before it is ever carried into the world.

Reflection: Which emergent virtue in this illumination most directly challenges your instinct to edit reality for comfort or safety?

To close the chapter, we now return to your reminder that virtue is a spectrum, and we connect that spectrum to the next practice of remembrance.

9.7 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 Bahá'u'lláh revealed at the end of the *Lawh-i-Ahbáb* (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.

9.8 Summary

Recitation establishes a daily rhythm of loyalty because it keeps the Word of God close to the tongue, close to the heart, and close to the moment when a choice must be made. When recitation is practiced with spirit and joy, it can draw fidelity, morality, righteousness, servitude, and steadfastness into clearer form, so that truth is not softened by fear or reshaped by convenience. In Chapter 10 we will turn to remembrance, and see how what we repeat outwardly becomes what we carry inwardly, and how the soul learns to remain turned toward God even when no words are being spoken.

10. Remembrance

10.1 Introduction

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.

Reflection: Where does remembrance already visit you without effort, and what might change if you learned to treat those moments as invitations rather than interruptions?

With the inner texture of remembrance established, we can now ask what the Kitáb-i-Aqdas tells us to remember about God.

10.2 What Are We Remembering About God?

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas does describe some memories we should use when remembering God. We are to remember God among His creation.²⁰⁰ 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 bounty²⁰¹ provided to us through this Creation. Within this creation, we can remember God's mercy²⁰² and His greatness and power.²⁰³ If creation seems scary or intimidating, we can always remember to seek refuge in God²⁰⁴ such as with the prayer of the signs.

We are to remember His mighty and wondrous Name.²⁰⁵ This Name could refer to Bahá'u'lláh, 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 Bahá'u'lláh, 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).²⁰⁶

Given we are to remember God, we are also to remember the Book (Kitáb-i-Aqdas)²⁰⁷ and what was revealed from Him,²⁰⁸ which is the entirety of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation.

Reflection: Which aspect of God do you most naturally remember? Which do you most often neglect over time?

With the content of remembrance clarified, we can now distinguish the two modes by which remembrance comes to us: what arrives unbidden, and what we choose deliberately.

²⁰⁰ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #117

²⁰¹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #112

²⁰² Kitáb-i-Aqdas #14

²⁰³ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #11

²⁰⁴ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #167

²⁰⁵ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #50

²⁰⁶ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #143

²⁰⁷ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #185

²⁰⁸ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #172

10.3 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.²⁰⁹

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.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas #185 offers a simple blueprint for subconscious remembrance. Bahá'u'lláh 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."

10.3.1 Receiving Through Our Senses

Subconscious remembrance is not actively remembering, but allowing memories and reminders enter our being. When Bahá'u'lláh mentions our hearing, He wants us to be able to hear God. This could be the 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. Bahá'u'lláh says hearts are capable of enlightenment.²¹⁰ 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

²⁰⁹ The Hidden Words in Persian #16

²¹⁰ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #31

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.

Reflection: What is one sense—sight, sound, smell, touch, or taste—that most often opens your heart, and how could you let it become a doorway to remembrance rather than distraction?

With subconscious remembrance described, we can now turn to conscious remembrance, where the soul chooses to remember God with intention, joy, and fragrance.

10.4 Conscious Remembrance

Conscious remembrance is the intentional act of turning the heart and soul towards God. The Kitáb-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 Bahá'u'lláh did not want a person to be burdened by tiresome recitation, the Báb taught how remembrance should be done with spirit and fragrance. Bahá'u'lláh encourages us to exalt, magnify, and glorify their Lord with joy and gladness.²¹¹ We should thank Him with joy and spiritual fragrance.²¹²

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.

10.4.1 Ways to Remember

We are also to rejoice in the joy of the Greatest Name (Bahá'u'lláh), by which hearts are enraptured and the minds of the near ones are attracted.²¹³ This is not an act of worship towards Bahá'u'lláh Himself, but a celebration this name exists, that it has manifested in the form of the temple of Bahá'u'lláh, and that it is a sign of God's mercy. Bahá'u'lláh 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.²¹⁴ Bahá'u'lláh 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.

²¹¹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #16

²¹² Kitáb-i-Aqdas #74

²¹³ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #51

²¹⁴ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #51

Bahá'u'lláh 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."²¹⁵ 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.

10.4.2 A Warning

True remembrance is designed so we can feel the spirit and share the spirit. The Bayán says remembrance has no value if it keeps us from recognizing God and His Manifestations. Denying a Manifestation is the same as denying God. Bahá'u'lláh 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 Bahá'u'lláh 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 Bahá'u'lláh or will they be driven away?

10.4.3 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.²¹⁶ 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 Bayán in Váhid 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?

²¹⁵ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #108

²¹⁶ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #18

Reflection: When remembrance is meant to be joyful and fragrant, what helps you keep it sincere when you are tired, distracted, or surrounded by others?

With remembrance described in both its quiet and deliberate forms, we now return to the Unknown Sister to see what courtesy looks like when it is fueled by remembrance.

10.5 Illuminations of The Unknown Sister - Emergent Virtues from Courtesy

10.5.1 Dignity

Through remembrance, she feels no need to justify herself inwardly or outwardly. The discovery does not diminish her worth, nor does her role enlarge it. Dignity settles her posture. She is upright but uninflated. She does not rush to explain, apologize, or defend. Remembering God frees her from measuring herself against imagined judgments, allowing her to stand quietly within the weight of what she carries.

10.5.2 Fairness

Remembrance keeps her from narrowing the situation to what is easiest or most familiar. As God's justice comes to mind, she becomes aware that every person touched by this truth has a claim beyond her preferences. Fairness does not yet demand action, but it reshapes perception, preventing her from unconsciously privileging one life, one comfort, or one narrative over another.

10.5.3 Kindness

In remembrance, the unknown girl becomes more than an abstract complication. She is a soul, loved by God, living an ordinary life with its own tenderness and vulnerability. Kindness emerges not as sentiment, but as restraint—an unwillingness to think carelessly or harshly about anyone involved. Remembering God softens her inner language before any outer words are spoken.

10.5.4 Purity

Remembrance clarifies her intention. She notices how easily curiosity, fear, or a desire for control could contaminate her thoughts. Purity keeps her from rehearsing explanations or imagining outcomes that serve her own relief. By returning to God inwardly, she keeps the situation from becoming a stage for ego, even privately within her own mind.

10.5.5 Radiance

As remembrance steadies her, a quiet calm begins to show. Not cheerfulness, not resolve, just presence without agitation. Radiance here is subtle: the absence of sharpness, the easing of tension in the room, the way her stillness reassures her child and does not alarm her brother. It is light without display.

10.5.6 Refinement

Remembrance trains her in care. She becomes attentive to small things which matter. Her tone, her silences, the way she folds the pages, the way she answers her child are all meaningful. Refinement does

not mean elegance; it means avoiding harm through roughness or haste. Even not speaking becomes an act shaped by consideration rather than avoidance.

10.5.7 Courtesy (Innate Virtue)

In this moment, courtesy is remembrance made visible. By remembering God, she remembers others as souls rather than obstacles. Courtesy governs her presence, restraining impulse and sharpening awareness. It does not resolve the situation, but it ensures that whatever follows will not be careless, dismissive, or self-serving.

Reflection: Which of these emergent virtues—dignity, fairness, kindness, purity, radiance, or refinement—most often fails first when you feel pressure, and why?

To end the chapter, we now turn to a warning, because remembrance is not proven by speech but by the way power is used.

10.6 In Closing

Here is a prophetic warning Bahá'u'lláh 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.²¹⁷

²¹⁷ Suríy-i-Haykal (Súrah of the Temple)

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. Remembrance deepens prayer and recitation by teaching the soul how to stay turned toward God even when no words are being spoken. By learning to receive through the senses and to consciously magnify God with joy and fragrance, courtesy emerges in forms that protect others from harm: dignity, fairness, kindness, purity, radiance, and refinement. In Chapter 11 we will turn to reflection, and see how the mind learns to listen inwardly so that remembrance becomes insight rather than mere emotion.

11. Reflection

The next spiritual practice Bahá'u'lláh describes in the Kitáb-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 Bahá'u'lláh 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."²¹⁸ Bringing to account had always seemed to be about asking myself if I have done what I was supposed to do, such as obeying Bahá'u'lláh'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. Bahá'u'lláh, 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.

Reflection: When you "bring yourself to account," what do you actually audit? Is there anything you tend to avoid?

With reflection defined as integration, we can now ask what purposes reflection serves, because purpose determines what kind of understanding is being sought.

11.1 Purposes of Reflection

Reflecting is for understanding²¹⁹ through discovering hidden pearls²²⁰ such as pearls of mysteries from the Ocean.²²¹ What are we to understand?

²¹⁸ The Hidden Words of Arabic #31

²¹⁹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #5

²²⁰ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #136

²²¹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #137

11.1.1 The Choice Sealed Wine

One of the hidden pearls of mystery is the Choice Sealed Wine itself. The Kitáb-i-Aqdas is not merely a book of laws. Imagine you are practicing recitation of a verse of the Kitáb-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 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 Bayán

There is a section of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas addressed specifically towards the People of Eloquence, also known as the Bábís. Bahá'u'lláh says whoever “reflects on these verses (from the Bayán) 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.”²²² 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.”²²³ The Bayán is a love letter to Bahá'u'lláh and to reflect the Bayán, is to discover hidden pearls of love for Bahá'u'lláh.

11.1.3 The Qiblih

Bahá'u'lláh says to “reflect regarding the Qiblih²²⁴ 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 Bahá'u'lláh? Do we have multiple points of adoration?

11.1.4 Dawn and Evening on the Mercy and Favors of God

Bahá'u'lláh tells us to “reflect, during the dawn and evening, on the mercy and favors of God. Give thanks.”²²⁵ 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

²²² Kitáb-i-Aqdas #136

²²³ The Persian Bayán Váhid 8 Gate 6

²²⁴ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #137

²²⁵ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #33

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.

11.1.5 Your Lifecycle

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas tells us to “reflect on what you were created from; indeed, all were created from a base fluid.”²²⁶ Bahá'u'lláh also says to “reflect on your end, don’t be unjust.”²²⁷ 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.”²²⁸

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. Bahá'u'lláh says to “reflect upon the world and the condition of its people.”²²⁹ 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 have 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.

²²⁶ The Suríy-i-Haykal (To the King of Paris)

²²⁷ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #148

²²⁸ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #40

²²⁹ The Suríy-i-Haykal (To the King of Paris)

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.

Reflection: Which purpose of reflection draws you most—hidden pearls, love of the Bayán, discernment of the Qiblih, gratitude at dawn and evening, mortality, or the condition of the world—and why?

With the purposes established, we can now move from why we reflect to how we reflect, because method determines whether insight becomes transformation.

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.²³⁰

The quote above from the Báb 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

Bahá'u'lláh 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."

²³⁰ The Persian Bayán: Váhid 1 Gate 9

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 Báb or Bahá'u'lláh 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 Bahá'u'lláh 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 Bahá'u'lláh. It was where his son, Abbas Effendi, sought medical care. Yet, race was notably absent from the Revelation of God through Bahá'u'lláh. 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 Bahá'u'lláh 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 Bahá'u'lláh 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 Báb or Bahá'u'lláh 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.²³¹

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. The purpose is not to empty the mind, but instead to allow the mind, heart, and soul to align with what God wills. 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 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. Bahá'u'lláh 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?"²³²

I will close this section with the first paragraphs of Bahá'u'lláh'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.

Reflection: When you notice "dust" on the mirror, what is your most common form of dust and what helps you cleanse it without self-condemnation?

²³¹ Asl-i-Kullu'l-Khayr (Essence of All Good)

²³² The Hidden Words of Arabic #23

With method established, we can now return to the Unknown Sister and see how reflection gives pure truthfulness its shape, so truth becomes alignment rather than weapon.

11.3 Illuminations of The Unknown Sister - Emergent Virtues from Pure Truthfulness

11.3.1 Eloquence

Through reflection, she senses that truth does not need force to be real. Eloquence begins as restraint, which is the understanding that when the time comes, truth must be expressed clearly, without excess or evasion. Reflection teaches her that how truth is spoken may matter as much as what is spoken, and that beauty and care can prevent truth from becoming a wound.

11.3.2 Heedfulness

Reflection awakens her to responsibility. She can no longer treat this as an abstract fact or a future problem. Heedfulness makes her aware that lives are already being shaped by what she now knows, even in stillness. This awareness does not rush her, but it prevents numbness, keeping her soul awake rather than sheltered by delay.

11.3.3 Perception

As she reflects, she begins to see multiple truths at once without forcing them into competition. The situation is not singular but layered: legal, familial, emotional, spiritual. Perception allows her to hold these realities together, recognizing that more than one truthful path may exist, each refracting the same light differently.

11.3.4 Wisdom

Reflection tempers insight with patience. Wisdom does not urge her toward immediate resolution, but toward fitting application. She understands that knowing what is true does not mean knowing when or how it should be acted upon. Wisdom grows as she senses the difference between correct action and premature action.

11.3.5 Reason

Reflection brings coherence to her thoughts. Emotion no longer dominates the landscape unchecked. Reason helps her see consequences unfolding beyond the present moment—how words spoken now may echo for years, how silence may also shape futures. It does not replace compassion; it steadies it.

11.3.6 Sincerity

In reflection, she examines her motives without flinching. She notices the subtle pull of self-protection, the desire to appear composed or benevolent. Sincerity strips these away gently, aligning her concern with love rather than image. Whatever she may eventually do, she wants it to arise from care, not from fear or convenience.

11.3.7 Pure Truthfulness (Innate Virtue)

In this moment, truthfulness is not disclosure but alignment. Reflection draws her soul into harmony with what is real, freeing her from illusion, denial, or self-deception. She becomes less concerned with managing appearances and more concerned with living honestly before God, trusting that truth, when carried with love, will eventually find its rightful expression.

Reflection: What are various things which can impair the emergent virtues from pure truthfulness? How does reflection overcome these impairments?

11.4 Summary

Reflection integrates prayer, recitation, and remembrance so that the soul becomes capable of discerning hidden pearls, cleansing the mirror, and reorienting toward God. It is both inward accounting and outward discernment, shaping truthfulness into eloquence, heedfulness, perception, wisdom, reason, and sincerity. In Chapter 12 we will turn to honoring God, and see how reflection becomes action, and how the inner alignment of the soul is translated into how we live.

12. Honoring God

12.1 Introduction

In the opening of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, which frames the purpose of the Book, Bahá'u'lláh 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.”²³³ This places an important context for our spiritual practice. Every command is to be carried out of love. This love is not only 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 veils²³⁴ which prevent the soul from being a true mirror, it is also the key to the hidden treasure.²³⁵ 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.²³⁶ 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. We will explore how we can honor God using sacred spaces, sacred resources, and through sacred time. 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, and as a concrete way to pursue true liberation in the spirit of liberation theology, where devotion reshapes both the soul and the life of a people.

Reflection: When you think of “honoring God,” do you feel burden, love, or something in between, and why?

We begin with the most communal and visible act of devotion, the building of places dedicated to remembrance.

²³³ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #4

²³⁴ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #132

²³⁵ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #15

²³⁶ Lawh-i-Madinat’ut-Tawhid (Tablet of the City of Unity)

12.2 Honor God Within Sacred Spaces

12.2.1 Build the Mashriq'u'l-Adhkár

The Mashriq'u'l-Adhkár means the Dawning Place of the Remembrance of God. It is every house built for the remembrance in cities and villages.²³⁷ These houses are to be built in the name of the Lord of all religions.²³⁸ 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.²³⁹ They should be established with wisdom, so that its building does not cause conflict.²⁴⁰ For example, Bahá'u'lláh advised the community of Tehran and some others to wait to establish the Mashriq'u'l-Adhkár. Bahá'u'lláh 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'u'l-Adhkárs 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.

Bahá'u'lláh 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 Bahá'u'lláh himself being the breaker of dawn, the Mashriq'u'l-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'u'l-Adhkár also is a symbol of the houses where revelation started, such as the Báb's house in Shiraz and Bahá'u'lláh's house in Baghdad. Each visit, in a way, can be as a pilgrimage.

The Mashriq'u'l-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.

²³⁷ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #115

²³⁸ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #31

²³⁹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #150

²⁴⁰ BH00054

Bahá'u'lláh "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."²⁴¹

As there would be chambers, there are also opportunities for private remembrance, recitation, reflection, or prayer. 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'u'l-Adhkár is the heartbeat of a community's spiritual life, built not 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. If you entered a Mashriq'u'l-Adhkár at dawn, what would you hope to leave behind, and what would you hope to carry out?

12.2.2 Pilgrimage

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas enjoins pilgrimage to the Sacred House.²⁴² 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 Báb was first proclaimed, the House was the Báb's home in Shiraz, Iran. When the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh was first announced, the House was Bahá'u'lláh's home in Baghdad, Iraq. Bahá'u'lláh 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, our Beloved 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.

Bahá'u'lláh also allowed a person who desired to conduct pilgrimage, but was unable to, for Himself to fulfill the pilgrimage requirement.²⁴³ 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 Bahá'u'lláh revealed for

²⁴¹ BH00230

²⁴² Kitáb-i-Aqdas #32

²⁴³ BH00250

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. What would make a journey feel like devotion rather than tourism for you, even if no one else understood it?

Reflection: When devotion becomes public through shared space, what protects it from turning into performance?

From sacred spaces and sacred journeys, we now turn to sacred resources, where love becomes accountable through the purification of wealth.

12.3 Honor God With Sacred Resources

12.3.1 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.²⁴⁴ The Báb 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 Bahá'u'lláh. Bahá'u'lláh says the purpose is to bring people to higher stations. Bahá'u'lláh describes the payment as mandatory, saying not to withhold ourselves from this great bounty. If the Huqúq was not paid with joy and radiance, Bahá'u'lláh would not accept it.²⁴⁵

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-Samandar,²⁴⁶ Bahá'u'lláh explains there is a minimum amount upon which the Huqúq 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 Huqúq 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 Huqúqu'lláh.²⁴⁷

Bahá'u'lláh would use the Rights of God to take care of the affairs of the believers, as these things require money. These affairs included teaching,²⁴⁸ taking care of the poor,²⁴⁹ prisoners, travel, and other affairs. He had instructed an unspecified woman to give two-thirds of the Huqúqu'lláh for good works, and one-

²⁴⁴ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #97

²⁴⁵ BH00214

²⁴⁶ BH00077

²⁴⁷ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #42

²⁴⁸ BH00234

²⁴⁹ BH00086

third to the Holy Court, which was to Bahá'u'lláh.²⁵⁰ In another letter, He says all of it can be paid for charity.²⁵¹ It seems there was no rigid methodology in how Ḥuqúqu'lláh was used. The Kitáb-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'u'l-Adhkár 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. Bahá'u'lláh required a collector to provide a receipt and to keep records about how each Ḥuqúq payment was dispersed. Financial accountability is guaranteed. Eventually, Bahá'u'lláh enjoins the Trustees of the Houses of Justice to receive and present the Rights of God.²⁵²

This way to honor God is a pathway to honor the rest of the People of Bahá, as it is the primary way to be able to afford the care of each other and the care of the Cause of God. When money is framed as “trust” rather than “possession,” what changes in your sense of responsibility?

12.3.2 Engaging in an Occupation

Related to the Rights of God, Bahá'u'lláh wants us to honor God through engaging in an occupation.²⁵³ 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 bears burdens but causes 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 born of love and honor. When Bahá'u'lláh 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.

There are also occupations we have which do not directly earn a wage or a profit, but assist in helping loved ones achieve their income. People who serve in such capacities, such as domestic labor or social work, should be rewarded well for their sacrifice and service. This is where engaging in an occupation as an act of worship intersects with Zakát, described in the next section. What would it look like for your work to feel like worship?

²⁵⁰ BH00158

²⁵¹ BH00261

²⁵² BH00282

²⁵³ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #33

12.3.3 Zakát

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas enjoins upon us the payment of Zakát for whatsoever is beneath the value of Huqúqu'lláh.²⁵⁴ In 1873 when the Kitáb-i-Aqdas was revealed, the minimum was only going to be specified if God wills. A few times, Bahá'u'lláh tells the believers to follow the Zakát teachings of the Qur'an.²⁵⁵

"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."²⁵⁶

The Qur'an does not specify an exact amount, but it states in multiple places to be regular in charity,²⁵⁷ or who are active in deeds of charity.²⁵⁸ 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 conscience and unique circumstances.

For example, in the days of Bahá'u'lláh a person could pay a slave's debt, or take another financial measure to free them. A person could offer a bed to someone traveling. 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. If giving is meant to be regular rather than spectacular, what kind of giving would you actually sustain?

Reflection: If wealth can be purified through love, what would it mean for generosity to become a habit rather than an exception?

With sacred resources in view, we now turn to sacred time, where regularity becomes a shared discipline that forms a community.

12.4 Honoring God in Sacred Time - The Badí‘ Calendar

The Badí‘ calendar was first introduced by the Báb in the Book of the Reckoning. In it, He creates a system of divine time with 19 months of 19 days. When one Vahid is multiplied by a Vahid, a Kull-i-Shay is created which symbolizes the unity of all things. Each month is named after a name of God, and the days of the week are named after spiritual qualities. The years are named after their Arabic abjad value, where the Báb described various meanings to those words. When 19 years have passed, the Bayan had existed for

²⁵⁴ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #146

²⁵⁵ BH00069 and BH11399

²⁵⁶ Surah At-Tawbah (9:60)

²⁵⁷ Surah al-Muzzammil (73:20)

²⁵⁸ Surah al-Mu'minun (23:4)

one Vahid. Note from Chapter 5, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas was revealed 19 years after the Bayan, completing the Bayan together as one Unity. Bahá'u'lláh's life on Earth ended after another 19 years were completed. Once 19 Vahid cycles have been completed, 1 Kull-i-Shay has been completed (361 years).

Bahá'u'lláh uses this calendar in the Kitáb-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 Bahá 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, being governed by the four elements of fire, air, water, and dust.²⁵⁹ These elements compose not only each aspect of us, but also the spirits which give us life.²⁶⁰

Fire is assigned to the first three months (Bahá', Jalál, Jamál). The fire in the calendar is the fire of God, synonymous with creation itself. This symbolizes the result of God's love for us, which is birth. At the beginning of each year, we have the opportunity to know rebirth through this kindling fire of God. Fire is also associated with the color white, which represents the purest simplicity before the emergence of multiplicity. Each year is an opportunity to be reborn.

Air is assigned to the next four months ('Azamat, Núr, Raḥmat, Kalimát). The air is associated with eternity and derived from the fire of God. Much like how the spirit animates all life, the air is the mode through which the spirit moves. Spirit is created and sustained as air is the element of preservation. We nourish, we flourish, and gain new strengths and abilities.

Water is assigned to the next six months (Kamál, Asmá', Izzat, Mashíyyat, 'Ilm, Qudrat). Water streams from the air of eternity and represents the divine unity. This is the phase where oneness, like water itself, purifies the soul. Whatever was gained earlier is purified. The multiplicity from the fire, while helping provide the air with helped us grow, is purified through the waters of oneness.

Dust is assigned to the final six months (Qawl, Masá'il, Sharaf, Sultán, Mulk, 'Alá') The dust is where all that is created through fire, air, and water is preserved. From dust fruit is harvested, while the stems and leaves prepare to descend from the tree and return to the soil. The excess of all which was grown is shed, leaving only which has matured. The fruit magnifies the names and attributes the soul has grown within it, ready to be elevated as what we cannot carry over passes away with death.

Reflection: If time itself can be sacred, what would it mean for your year to have a spiritual pulse rather than only deadlines?

With the calendar as our frame, we move through key days and seasons of sacred time, beginning with the year's first day, Naw-Rúz.

²⁵⁹ Persian Bayan Vahid 5, Gate 3

²⁶⁰ The Book of Reckoning

12.4.1 Naw-Rúz, 1 Bahá

The Badí‘ calendar starts with the festival of Naw-Rúz.²⁶¹ 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 Bahá, when we overlap the names of the months for as the days, could be called the Bahá of Bahá, or the Splendor of All Splendor. Bahá'u'lláh 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.”²⁶² The Báb called it the Day of God.²⁶³

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-Rúz is a festival for those who observed the fast out of love for God.²⁶⁴ The festival begins at sunrise.²⁶⁵ Although Naw-Rúz 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 Kitáb-i-Aqdas. All that is required is spirit and joy. If a holy day is meant to renew life, what would renewal actually look like in your own habits and relationships?

12.4.2 The Ridván Festival, 13 Jalál to 5 Jamál

Ridván 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 Ridván 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-Rúz, until His departure from the garden at noon of the forty-third day after Naw-Rúz. 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.”²⁶⁶ The days where work is prohibited are 13 Jalál, 2 Jamál, and 5 Jamál.

²⁶¹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #16

²⁶² Kitáb-i-Aqdas #111

²⁶³ Persian Bayan Vahid 6, Gate 14

²⁶⁴ BH03908

²⁶⁵ BH00215

²⁶⁶ BH02278

Bahá'u'lláh 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.²⁶⁷ 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."²⁶⁸

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 space owned by the people of Bahá. If it is such a space, there should be adequate space to welcome those who are not the People of Bahá. There could be marketing materials welcoming the city or village to participate, particularly on the days all People of Bahá are available to serve at the festival. A program could be Day 1, to celebrate the Announcement and who Bahá'u'lláh 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 the Ridván Festival with boundless joy? ### Ayyám-i-Há (Days of Giving)

Ayyám-i-Há are the the intercalary days, which are not bound by the limits of the year and its months. Most years are 4 days of Há, and on leap years, there are 5. They are considered the days of giving.²⁶⁹ 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. Bahá'u'lláh says the Days of the Manifestation of Há are eleven, with six being associated with creation. The remaining 5 were revealed on the Night of Power through the letter "Ba." These days are like a day of sacrifice, where creation itself is completed.²⁷⁰

I feel the placement of the Days of Há after the month of Mulk is highly intentional given the purpose of the *Bádí'* 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 Há 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 Há.

This would not have to be the only times to give the Rights of God and Zakát, but this could be great times to do so. Zakát 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 Bahá, 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

²⁶⁷ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #75

²⁶⁸ BH00856

²⁶⁹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #16

²⁷⁰ BH01228

fruitful for those in need. It's a great time to take care of all the People of Bahá as well as those who are not. Ayyám-i-Há is not considered a festival by Bahá'u'lláh. What do you most resist giving away, and what do you most need to give away to be freer?

12.4.3 The Fast, the Month of 'Alá'

The fast is every year for the entire month of 'Alá'.²⁷¹ The People of Bahá 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),²⁷² as it was for the obligatory prayer. For those who are mature but are traveling, 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 Há and prior to Naw-Rúz, it is the culmination of a year of spiritual attainment and practice. The fast is a cause of refinement and reformation of souls.²⁷³ When your body is restrained, what becomes louder, your ego or your soul?

12.4.4 Monthly Hospitality

Every Badí‘ month, hospitality has been prescribed, even if it is only with water.²⁷⁴ The purpose is to bring hearts together. Bahá'u'lláh and the Sacred Household regularly provided hospitality to visitors and 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." How does welcoming a guest to your home establish your home as a sacred space?

12.4.5 Holy Days Using 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 Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh clarifies the dates of the festivals without using the Badí‘ calendar, despite its revelation. I believe the purpose is to tie in the significance of

²⁷¹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #16

²⁷² Arabic Bayan Vahid 8 Gate 18

²⁷³ BH08745

²⁷⁴ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #57

these dates prior to the existence of the Bábí calendar, as a transition from the revelation of the Qur'an towards the fulfillment of the Qur'an.

12.4.6 Declaration of the Báb - 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 0 BE (May 23, 1844). This night and day are of supreme greatness before God. This day also marks the beginning of the Bábí calendar, with 0 BE being its first year.

12.4.7 The Twin Birthdays - 1 and 2 Muḥarram

The Primal Point was born on 1 Muḥarram 1235 and Bahá'u'lláh was born on 2 Muḥarram 1233. These two days are to be treated as one single festival. 1 Muḥarram is also the first day of the Hijri calendar. Muḥarram 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-Rúz the new 1st day of the Bábí calendar.

Reflection: What might be the purpose of holding devotion on two calendars at once, one inherited and one revealed?

We now return to the story, illuminating how honoring God can shape the executor's interior posture.

12.5 Illuminations of The Unknown Sister - Emergent Virtues from Trustworthiness

12.5.1 Justice

Honoring God turns the inheritance from a private dilemma into a trust held before a higher standard. Justice illuminates the rights embedded in the will without letting familiarity decide whose claim feels real. It presses her to see that "due" is not measured by closeness alone, and that she must not let comfort or fear quietly tilt the scales. Justice does not yet require movement; it requires that her inner weighing be clean.

12.5.2 Mindfulness

Mindfulness makes her attentive to the spiritual weight of small choices, what she thinks, what she rehearses, what she avoids. The room, the envelope, the date of birth, her daughter's warmth in her lap become reminders that nothing here is casual. Honoring God through mindfulness means she does not numb herself or dramatize the moment. She stays awake, listening inwardly before any word is spoken outwardly.

12.5.3 Patience

Patience teaches her to let time serve truth rather than rushing to relieve tension. Honoring God stretches her trust across uncertainty: she may not know the full story, the consequences, or the best manner of disclosure, but she can refuse haste. Patience does not delay out of cowardice; it delays out of reverence for timing, so that whatever comes later is not merely quick, but worthy.

12.5.4 Repentance

Repentance illuminates her without accusing her. As she honors God, she becomes aware of subtle places where her heart might harden: resentment, possessiveness, the desire to protect her father's image, the wish that the unknown girl did not exist. Repentance is the courage to return from those impulses before they shape her. It keeps her honest with God about what she feels, so she can be purified from what she does not want to become.

12.5.5 Submission

Submission steadies her against the illusion of control. Honoring God reminds her that this situation cannot be arranged into a painless shape by force of will. Submission does not erase her agency; it reorders it. She accepts that she must be guided, that she may be corrected, that she may have to do what is right even if it disrupts what feels safe. In that yielding, she becomes strong enough to carry what she did not choose.

12.5.6 Trustworthiness (Innate Virtue)

In this moment, trustworthiness is her recognition that she has been entrusted by law, by family, and by God with something sacred: the rights of others, the integrity of truth, and the unseen consequences of her choices. Honoring God makes that trust feel real. It calls her to protect what has been placed in her hands without bending it toward self interest, and to become someone God could rely upon even when no one else would ever know the difference. When we look back at honoring God as an expression of our love for the Beloved and His creation, this trustworthiness is the capacity of how much we are able to reliably express this love.

Reflection: If God alone knew your motives, what would you still choose to do next?

We close by gathering the practices together and pointing toward the final theme that completes Part 2.

12.6 Conclusion

This ends the portion of the book which discusses the spiritual practices of the Kitáb-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 Bahá'u'lláh. 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, it is a highly unnatural arrangement which no person would pay to attend nor critically acclaim it. 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 Báb opens the Bayán 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.²⁷⁵

If I had to summarize this theme here and elsewhere in the Bayán or the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, it would be that from One comes many, and many returns to One. It is the very essence of the Báb being called the Primal Point. So unity is not a policy, and it is not a mood. It is a pattern that repeats everywhere, in God's names, in creation's worlds, in the soul's practices, and in the virtues that shape character. If that pattern is real, it should be traceable. The rest of this chapter follows that trail, moving from the most abstract form of unity (God's Oneness) into the most personal form: how a single human heart tries to hold many truths without breaking.

13.1.1 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.

13.1.2 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.²⁷⁶ All of these worlds eventually return to the point of Oneness.

²⁷⁵ The Persian Bayan Vahid 3 Gate 10

²⁷⁶ BH00103

13.1.3 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.

The spiritual practices are not separate lanes. They are a single road approached from different angles. Prayer turns the will toward God. Recitation gives the Word a living voice. Remembrance keeps the heart oriented. Reflection integrates what the soul receives. Honoring God makes that inner order visible in action. When these practices converge, they form a kind of inner unity. And from that inner unity, virtues do not appear as isolated traits, but as interlocking lights.

Reflection: In what ways do you see oneness through many, or manyness from one?

Now we will explore those interlocking lights.

13.2 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 endures only when each virtue is allowed its rightful place.

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.

Reflection: What do your constellation of virtues look like? Do any shine brightly more than others? If so, why?

Unity becomes difficult when life becomes complicated. What happens when truth introduces a new person, when loyalty meets justice, when courtesy meets disclosure, when piety meets consequence? This is why the unknown sister matters in this chapter. She is not a metaphor for sameness. She is a test of whether many can still return to One without anyone being denied.

13.3 Illuminations of The Unknown Sister - The Constellation of Unity

Unity allows her to hold the whole without forcing it into sameness. The family she thought she knew has become many. Some are known and unknown, near and distant, yet all still originate from one source and return to one truth. Unity does not require her to silence any part of this reality or elevate one voice over another. Instead, it reveals how fear, love, restraint, truthfulness, and trustworthiness can sound together without collapsing into noise. The situation remains unresolved, but no longer fragmented. Like an orchestra mid-rehearsal, each element now has a place, and from their tension a deeper harmony becomes possible, even before a single note is played.

Unity is not only what we aim for. It is also what we can lose. The constellation fractures most easily when a single virtue becomes so luminous that it starts to behave like a sun. When that happens, the rest of the sky goes dark—even if we still call it light.

13.3.1 When the Constellation Fractures - 5 Examples

We will now explore what are the risks involved when we treat a virtue as an absolute destination, focusing so much on one virtue we do not allow the other virtues to shine. A virtue as a destination can serve as an idol, distracting us from the total vision God counsels us to. Here are some examples of risks the executor of the will could face if a single virtue is potentially replacing God as our object of devotion.

13.3.2 Piety as an Idol

She reads the will with disciplined attention, taking her role seriously and letting duty govern her posture and pace. The moment is held inside obligation, what must be carried, what must be executed, what must be borne without display. While piety feels good in this case, there are risks. Without pure truthfulness, piety can retreat into procedure, using “responsibility” to avoid fully naming what has been revealed. Without courtesy, piety can become spiritually correct yet relationally blunt, honoring duties while failing to protect how others must receive them. Without loyalty, piety can become impersonal righteousness, so “doing what is right” loses the warmth of standing with those who will be affected. Without trustworthiness, piety risks becoming image or intention without follow-through, where devotion to duty is felt but cannot be depended upon.

13.3.3 Pure Truthfulness as an Idol

The facts appear with clean force. There is one unfamiliar name, a birthdate, an address, and one truth laid down without explanation, as neutral and sharp as the legal language itself. Her mind computes meaning instantly, as if truth’s first duty is simply to be seen. While pure truthfulness feels good in this case, there are risks. Without piety, pure truthfulness can shrink into mere disclosure, detached from the reverence of obligation and the moral weight of consequences. Without courtesy, pure truthfulness can

land like a blow, accurate but unreceived, wounding the soul it claims to respect. Without loyalty, pure truthfulness can become isolating clarity, where saying what is real forgets the shared covenant of relationship and care over time. Without trustworthiness, pure truthfulness can become momentary candor without dependability, leaving others unsure whether the truth will be carried consistently into action.

13.3.4 Courtesy as an Idol

Her voice stays even and measured. Her soft answers to her daughter, calm stillness with her brother, no sudden gestures that would rupture the room. Courtesy preserves dignity in the air, keeping fear from spilling outward, maintaining a stable surface while something immense shifts underneath. While courtesy feels good in this case, there are risks. Without piety, courtesy can become social smoothness that preserves comfort while sidestepping the deeper obligations the moment demands. Without pure truthfulness, courtesy can become concealment-by-polish, where calm language quietly delays honest recognition. Without loyalty, courtesy can become neutral distance, respectful to everyone yet committed to no one when commitment is most needed. Without trustworthiness, courtesy can become performance, offering reassurance that feels stable while failing to secure what others will need to rely on.

13.3.5 Loyalty as an Idol

Her brother remains steady, hands folded, offering a quiet pledge: “I trust you; we will handle it.” Loyalty takes the form of presence—nonintrusive, watchful, ready—holding the room together by refusing to pull anything from her before she is ready to speak. While loyalty feels good in this case, there are risks. Without piety, loyalty can drift into allegiance to the familiar, protecting the old family story rather than yielding to higher obligation. Without pure truthfulness, loyalty can become protective silence, preserving bonds by keeping reality unspoken until truth arrives too late or too harshly. Without courtesy, loyalty can turn into blunt partisanship, defending “ours” in a way that disregards the dignity of those newly implicated. Without trustworthiness, loyalty can become sentiment without endurance, pledged in feeling but unreliable when sustained costs begin.

13.3.6 Trustworthiness as an Idol

She aligns the pages, refolds them cleanly, returns them to the envelope—executor-minded, controlled, careful not to let the room fracture. Trustworthiness shows itself as containment: she holds the truth first so others do not have to, managing the moment with steadiness that looks like strength. While trustworthiness feels good in this case, there are risks. Without piety, trustworthiness can become mere competence, faithful to process but not necessarily faithful to the moral meaning of what must be done. Without pure truthfulness, trustworthiness can become quiet management, keeping things “handled” while the essential truth remains unspoken. Without courtesy, trustworthiness can become hard reliability, efficient but emotionally unsafe for those who must eventually enter the reality with her. Without loyalty, trustworthiness can become cold trusteeship, fulfilling duties without the enduring devotion that assures others they are not alone in the outcome.

13.3.7 Reflections of the Unknown Sister

While we did not advance the plot of the story, you may have explored what is next for all characters involved. The constellation of virtues developed through spiritual practice leads to a profound sense of empathy for all involved, an awareness each are on their own spiritual paths intertwined with that of the executor of the will.

Reflection: If you were any one of these characters, how would you proceed?

I also hope this story and the illuminations we explored throughout offer an intuitive framework to help guide your inner transformation regardless of the difficult situations we inevitably are involved in. Most importantly, I hope you are willing to use the teachings of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh as primary sources for this framework. This leads us to the final unity explored in this chapter, that of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas.

These examples show why unity cannot be reduced to tone, consensus, or comfort. Unity is not achieved by avoiding tension, but by holding tension within a higher order. The Book is what names that order. Without revelation, “unity” becomes whatever the strongest voice needs it to mean. With revelation, unity becomes a path: not sameness, not coercion, but orientation to the One.

13.4 Unity in the Kitab-i-Aqdas

When the Kitáb-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 Kitáb-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.

Reflection: If you claim belief, yet pick and choose what to obey, what then do you believe? Can one achieve unity ignoring the many which composes One?

The Kitáb-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, and from each and every one of us, we have the opportunity to all walk a singular path of unity.

13.5 A Transition to Part 3

Unity is not something we announce. It is something we become. The proof is not in our claims, but in what our lives can hold without breaking: difference without contempt, truth without cruelty, loyalty

without blindness, justice without coldness, and reverence without denial. From One comes many, and from many comes one. If this is the pattern of God, then unity is not the flattening of souls, but the harmonizing of them—until the world can finally sound like what it was always meant to be. This leads us to Part 3, the rights and responsibilities the Kitab-i-Aqdas enjoins. They are the framework of how virtues become manifest in the social life, social systems, and institutions we participate in. What good is virtue if it is only contained within?

14. From Birth to Maturity

14.1 Introduction

The first two parts of this book used the Kitáb-i-Aqdas as a foundation for the theology and beliefs enshrined in Bahá'u'lláh'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 Kitáb-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. Bahá'u'lláh calls the laws and counsels boundaries not to be exceeded²⁷⁷ while also saying we must exceed the boundaries of self and desire.²⁷⁸ 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 Bahá'u'lláh and of the People of Bahá, 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 Kitáb-i-Aqdas. As you proceed, imagine how each right and responsibility interacts with the Unity Constellation. Imagine what a nation of Bahá'u'lláh could look like, living your life where the citizens live within the boundaries you share, even if they do not all believe the same. We will establish the internal foundations for our outward affectionate relationships, and describing how we consult as trustees over that which we have responsibility for.

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 do not yet bear responsibilities in the faith of God.

²⁷⁷ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #29

²⁷⁸ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #2

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. Bahá'u'lláh prohibits taking a life twice in the Kitáb-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.

Reflection: What does it mean to treat life as inviolable before a person can speak?

From that premise, identity becomes more than a label and becomes a sacred claim to personhood.

14.3 The Right to Identity

Verse 120 explicitly states the People of Bahá 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 Bahá have the opportunity stated, the right to identity is for every person from the moment they exist. The identity of People of Bahá cannot be forced onto another nor can it be denied.

Reflection: If a person is named by God, what does that imply about their moral worth?

The next right moves inward by naming purity as the original condition, not a reward.

14.4 The Right to Purity

Verse 74 decreed the water of semen as pure. Water is used throughout the Kitáb-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.”

Reflection: If purity is given, how should it shape the way a body is treated?

That question leads naturally into dignity as expressed through cleanliness, clothing, and presentation.

14.5 The Right to Dignified Appearance

Verse 74 builds further on the theme of purity, cleanliness, and refinement. Bahá'u'lláh 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 using fresh water, and Verse 152 requires the feet be 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 Kitáb-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.

Reflection: When dignity is outwardly protected, what should be protected inwardly?

From appearance, the chapter turns to the emotional climate every person deserves.

14.6 The Right to Love and Kindness

Throughout the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh enjoins kindness and love for all.²⁷⁹ 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. Affection²⁸⁰ is a limitless tool, as long as no other rights are violated.

Reflection: If love is a right, what violates it most directly?

This leads into oppression as the broad category of harms that strip rights away.

14.7 The Right to Be Free of Oppression

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas forbids oppression.²⁸¹ Oppression is used in the context of lewdness, which opposes the virtues of righteousness and piety.²⁸² 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.

²⁷⁹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #48

²⁸⁰ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #65

²⁸¹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #71

²⁸² Kitáb-i-Aqdas #64

14.7.1 Maturity

Bahá'u'lláh describes various acts dependent upon reaching maturity.²⁸³ 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 not 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.²⁸⁴ 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.

14.7.3 Pederasty

Pederasty²⁸⁵ is the practice of a mature man having sex with an immature male. While the Kitáb-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.²⁸⁶ Marriage is conditioned upon maturity and consent. Anyone under the age of maturity is protected from marriage from someone who has reached maturity. Where two people share the same stage of maturity, the Maturity-Matching Principle applies: peers at the same developmental stage may, with full parental consent and community guidance, enter into a marriage contract. Between pederasty, lewdness, and marriage, every person has a right to sexual autonomy and safety, especially as children.

²⁸³ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #10 & #27

²⁸⁴ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #74

²⁸⁵ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #107

²⁸⁶ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #65

14.7.5 Physical and Emotional Harm

All people have a right to protection from physical and emotional harm.²⁸⁷ The threat of physical harm to coerce consent would also be prohibited. Emotional harm can include contention, disputes, backbiting, and slander.²⁸⁸ 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 after maturity.

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

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. Bahá'u'lláh associates hatred with an intoxication of desire. Some of these desires can be vain imaginings, such as race, superiority ideology, nationality, named 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.

²⁸⁷ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #148

²⁸⁸ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #19

There is a right to be free from consuming that which robs a person of reason.²⁸⁹ This will cause a person to become heedless and suspicious. Opium is explicitly mentioned²⁹⁰ 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.²⁹¹

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.

Reflection: If oppression is forbidden, what practical care must be guaranteed?

From prevention of harm, the chapter turns to healing and the right to competent treatment.

14.8 The Right to a Skilled Physician

Bahá'u'lláh says for those who fall ill, skilled physicians should be referred to.²⁹² 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. 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. This intersects with the right to cleanliness, where cleanliness is a vital aspect of disease prevention. The right to provision also helps provide nutrition and a healthy quality of life for the duration of one's life.

Reflection: If a child is vulnerable, what must be protected beyond the body?

Material protections follow by addressing inheritance as a right that cannot be quietly taken.

²⁸⁹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #119

²⁹⁰ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #155 & #190

²⁹¹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #70

²⁹² Kitáb-i-Aqdas #113

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.²⁹³ 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.

Reflection: If worship is a right, what must never accompany it?

Freedom of conscience becomes clearer when worship is protected from coercion.

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. Music should be governed by the rights afforded to all people. Bahá'u'lláh warns music should not lead anyone from a path of dignity.

All people have a right to a Mashriq'u'l-Adhkár. These are to be built in every village and city. Every child has the right to attend a Mashriq'u'l-Adhkár 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'u'l-Adhkár is an act of neglect.

Reflection: What song or musical style have you felt deep within yourself?

Education is the bridge that turns potential into capacity without coercion.

14.11 The Right to Education

Bahá'u'lláh emphasizes the right to education.²⁹⁴ Education includes at least two languages²⁹⁵ (the primary language of home and a secondary language), science,²⁹⁶ arts, crafts,²⁹⁷ and the sacred words of God.²⁹⁸ 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 Bahá'u'lláh as well as the gradual

²⁹³ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #20 and #109

²⁹⁴ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #48

²⁹⁵ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #118

²⁹⁶ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #77

²⁹⁷ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #33

²⁹⁸ Kitáb-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.

Reflection: If rights come first, what does that imply about religious authority?

This reframes responsibility as a voluntary response to God, not a tool of control, which is central to achieving true liberation.

14.12 Responsibilities

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

Reflection: If the chapter begins at conception, what is its single thread?

The thread is trusteeship, where law names what must never be taken from a person, so that freedom can become dignity rather than license. From birth until the completion of maturity, every person exists in a state of trust; no contract, relationship, or institution may diminish their bodily autonomy, developmental freedom, or right to withdraw. I call this the Minor Trust, and will refer to this throughout Part 3.

14.13 Conclusion

These rights describe the minimum moral ground beneath every life, from conception through the approach to maturity. In this framework, law becomes the line that prevents domination, while leaving space for virtue, love, and conscience to grow. The next chapter turns to the responsibilities that emerge after maturity, where freedom is tested by what a person chooses to uphold.

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 Bahá. This devotional identity will guide and inform all rights and responsibilities for the remainder of Part 3. Maturity is an important concept, because societies in general have struggled to define it and to express what rights and responsibilities exist around it. This chapter frames maturity as the doorway where rights become stewardship, and where devotion becomes a lived identity rather than a private feeling.

Before explaining what maturity is, I want to introduce what I believe is the first responsibility we have at maturity. Bahá'u'lláh says "no one should object to those who rule over the people."²⁹⁹ 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. This is where achieving true liberation becomes practical, because liberation is not only what a soul rejects, but what a soul builds in public life through lawful conduct and a transformed heart.

Reflection: Where do you invest your energy, in contesting authority or in cultivating hearts?

With that first responsibility in view, we can now define what maturity means in this framework.

15.2 What is Maturity?

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas mentions maturity twice. The first is when prayer and fasting become obligatory³⁰⁰ and when to receive inheritance.³⁰¹ On the latter right, Bahá'u'lláh 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.

²⁹⁹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #95

³⁰⁰ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #10

³⁰¹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #27

To support these ideas, we can look further in Bahá'u'lláh's revelation. In the Lawh-i-Ra'ís (A Tablet to a Chief), Bahá'u'lláh 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. The Kitáb-i-Aqdas also conditions marriage upon the consent of both potential spouses. In other words, maturity is not only capacity, it is moral sight, and consent is one of its first proofs.

With these conditions, let's look at how the Badí' calendar's progression moves through the maturation process.

Reflection: If maturity is moral sight, what should time itself be teaching you?

The next section uses the sacred rhythm of the year to make the stages of maturity easier to see.

15.3 The Badí' Calendar's Rhythm of Maturity

A person matures through three stages at the ages of 11, 15, and 19. The numbers 11, 15, and 19 are not arbitrary. They correspond to the months Mashíyyat (Will), Masá'il (Questions), and 'Alá (Loftiness) in the Badí' 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. This section will be focused on the Báb's teachings of maturity. Bahá'u'lláh made no changes to the Báb's command regarding maturity.

15.3.1 At Age 11

Age 11 corresponds to God's name Huwa.³⁰² Huwa is composed of two Arabic letters "Ha" (ه) and letter "Waw" (و). Bahá'u'lláh says the letter Ha corresponds with God's inward identification and indexing of Himself as "He."³⁰³ Every other name is derived from this name. The name Waw, which means Will, represents the outward expression of Him. In the Badí' calendar's rhythm of maturity, at age 11 this would represent the potential of a person to become aware of their identity. Once aware of your identity, you are capable of expressing your identity through your will. This combination of identity and will forms the legal notion of consent, as well as the ability to believe and express belief.

The Báb teaches that at this age of Mashíyyat, a person is ready to fast and perform other spiritual practices. There is a spiritual practice the Báb taught that He wanted parents to teach their children at age 11 which I find quite interesting. He says they should be taught the knowledge of the bounty of God and write the Temples of Unity, which was first fashioned through the first Temple, the Temple of the Letter Ha.³⁰⁴ These Temples of Unity are 19 Temples which each include 11 units from the Names of God.

³⁰² The Persian Bayan Vahid 8, Gate 18

³⁰³ Tafsir-i-Hu (Interpretation of "He")

³⁰⁴ The Book of the Five Modes (BB00005)

They may be created in the form the child desires. For each day of the month, the child is to recite what they wrote within the temple, which begins a cycle which has a beginning and an end. It's a way to take the sacred rhythm of the Bábí calendar and make a sacred rhythm of the soul from it. The full instructions are within the Book of the Five Modes.

15.3.2 At Age 15

Age 15 marks the second state of maturity according to the Bábí calendar. This would mark the time when we reach the age of reason and moral awareness.³⁰⁵ The Báb says when this age is reached, this is when you are fully capable to choose your religion. We can say a person has progressed not just in knowing who they are and what they choose, they have the ability to understand the full consequences of their choices and actions through their ability to reason. Reason is also the ability to declare your intention or what you know is true.

15.3.3 At Age 19

19 marks the age of loftiness, when a person has progressed through each stage of development. You are complete. Age 19 marks the age of adulthood. This also marks the age when a person should be financially independent.³⁰⁶ This also marks the final stage of spiritual development, where again a person may affirm their belief and have full ability to recognize the Manifestation of God.³⁰⁷

To mark this age, a person should render thanksgiving for the day of his conception as an embryo.³⁰⁸ This also suggests the possibility we not just observe a birthday, but we celebrate the conception date as marking the age of a person. This also marks the first time we have the responsibility to practice reflection.

15.3.4 Progression Through Stages of Maturity

While there is a right for each person to be able to mature according to this sacred time, a child may not fully be able to. The Báb understood this and was compassionate. For example, He says if a child is unable to demonstrate their capability at age 11, then re evaluate at age 15, and again at age 19 if needed.³⁰⁹ He describes this as observing the conditions of limitation. One condition of limitation would be to recognize a person under the age 19 is not fully mature and is a child. The rights described in the last chapter remain intact. These conditions of limitation govern what I am calling the Maturity Matching Principle,

³⁰⁵ BB00083

³⁰⁶ The Arabic Bayan Vahid 10, Gate 14

³⁰⁷ The Book of Names

³⁰⁸ The Persian Bayan Vahid 5, Gate 4

³⁰⁹ BB00083

where we recognize these stages of maturity as distinct, and we encourage peer development and association within their maturity levels.

There are times when a person suffers from developmental handicaps which prevent their ability to be fully mature. To determine whether 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 the ability 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.

15.3.5 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. 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 stages of 11, 15, and 19. While nations may govern legal maturity, none govern the spiritual progression which establishes the devotional identity of a mature person.

Reflection: How do you use sacred time to mature your soul?

Now we move from the calendar's pattern into the adult's first inner obligations.

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. Bahá'u'lláh 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 posseseth."

He goes on to say the "understanding of every soul must.... behold itself independent."³¹⁰ 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 Bahá means to actively believe in and see the truth of Bahá'u'lláh, not to do so blindly. If there is a criticism or argument against Bahá'u'lláh or the People of Bahá, 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

³¹⁰ BH00601

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.

Reflection: What changes when you refuse borrowed eyes and borrowed ears?

With independent seeking established, we can now state the first explicit right that follows from it.

15.5 Right to Belief

Every mature person has a right to believe as they wish, even if Bahá'u'lláh 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 Bahá'u'lláh but are part of an organization which claims infallibility. This is your right. Bahá'u'lláh 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 Bahá, but this hope comes without coercion.

A person of Bahá 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 Bahá have 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.

Reflection: If belief cannot be coerced, what kind of accountability can still be asked of the soul?

From here, we can name the core accountabilities that shape devotion into conduct.

15.6 Spiritual Accountability

There are various guidelines in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas which focus on aspects of spiritual accountability. For each guideline, they will be presented as both a right and responsibility.

15.6.1 Looking Inward

The first sphere of spiritual accountability begins within the soul itself. There is a responsibility not to measure the Book of God by your own desires, and a corresponding right to measure your desires according to the Book of God. There is a responsibility not to object to the fragrance of God, which is His love, and a right to receive that love fully. There is a responsibility not to withhold yourself from the bounties and grace of God, and a right to receive them. There is a responsibility not to question Bahá'u'lláh's actions, and a right to believe those actions reflect the Will of God, who represents all names to include the Most Subtle. These four accountabilities share a common thread. The soul must be oriented toward God before it can look anywhere else.

15.6.2 Looking Outward

The second sphere extends from the soul into its relationship with the Cause and the world. There is a responsibility not to oppose or object to Bahá'u'lláh, and a right to support His Cause. There is a responsibility not to hesitate in following His command, and a right to trust and act sincerely in

implementing the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. There is a responsibility not to corrupt the Cause of God, and a right to allow the Cause to reform the Earth. There is a responsibility not to deny what God has permitted, and a right to be free from the tyranny of those who deny what God has permitted or allow what God has forbidden. Finally, there is a responsibility never to deviate from a verse's outward meaning, and a right to interpret both its outward and inward meanings. A soul oriented inward toward God will naturally begin to see the world through that same orientation.

15.6.3 Action

The third sphere is where orientation becomes conduct. There is a responsibility not to destroy what God has built, and a right to what God has built and created. There is a responsibility to raise up the Sacred Houses and the places whereupon the Throne of the Lord rested. There is a responsibility to ask about the Cause of God and what your soul needs, and a right to receive those answers. These are not passive accountabilities. They require a soul that has already done the inward work and looked outward with clarity, and is now ready to build.

Reflection: When you speak of maturity, do you mean legal adulthood or the soul's growth into discernment?

Next we widen the lens to spiritual maturity, where law becomes symbol and devotion becomes station.

15.7 The Right to Spiritual Maturity

The writings of Bahá'u'lláh 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, Bahá'u'lláh does use the traditional descriptions of maturity as symbols for the spiritual side.

The Kitáb-i-Badí' is the largest single book by Bahá'u'lláh, written in response to questions from a man who followed Mirza Yahya, denying belief in Bahá'u'lláh as a Manifestation of God. This section will not go into a discussion of Mirza Yahya (see Chapter 24, Spiritual Leadership). 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 receive 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 of discernment. The Kitáb-i-Badí' says "most today are considered infants before God." Part of this lack of maturity is due to their constellation of virtues not being valued, such as the virtue of heedfulness. A sign of maturation is belief in the Manifestation of God.

The Kitáb-i-Íqán discusses extensively why people lack this development. Bahá'u'lláh 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.³¹¹

The rights and responsibilities of spiritual accountability from the Kitáb-i-Aqdas is the foundation to spiritual maturity. Even if you do not believe in Bahá'u'lláh, 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 as 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 death, maturity and infancy, wisdom and heedlessness, are all distinguished by the confirmation of the manifestation."³¹² With this said, I do believe in what the Kitáb-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. Bahá'u'lláh says the children of the age must be nurtured with milk that is delicate and subtle until they attain maturity.³¹³ An associated responsibility is for a person to no longer be moved by desires and illusions.³¹⁴

Reflection: If spiritual maturity is a station, what obligations does it place on your speech and your influence?

Now we can name the responsibilities that belong to maturity in its spiritual sense.

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.³¹⁵ Bahá'u'lláh 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

³¹¹ *Lawḥ-i-Sirāj*

³¹² *Kitáb-i-Badí'*

³¹³ BH00302

³¹⁴ Words of Paradise

³¹⁵ *Kitáb-i-Badí'*

would be worse 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.³¹⁶ 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.³¹⁷

Reflection: If maturity is stewardship, what does it ask you to protect in those still growing?

To close, we return to your core pattern, and carry it forward into the private life of the mature soul.

15.9 Conclusion

Maturity is a right and in itself, marks the beginning of great responsibility. When combined with our constellation of virtues, our increased awareness of God's names and attributes, we can be sure to develop both our legal status of maturity, but also our spiritual station of maturity. This pattern of maturity exists in every layer of creation, exists within manifestation and command, and is a pattern I have leaned into greatly when writing this book. Everything is within this cycle of maturity, to include you and me. We must be careful to recognize, respect, and honor that which is not mature. The mature are the trustees of the immature. If the devotional identity is real, it will show itself first as lawful restraint, then as moral clarity, then as steady service.

With this, we take these responsibilities and look at what it means to be mature within our private lives. How do we prepare ourselves to be less immature so that we can manifest our maturity into the world? Chapter 16 will continue this cycle of maturity and look into our private lives.

³¹⁶ BH00035

³¹⁷ BH00123

16. The Private Self

This chapter will discuss the rights and responsibilities of a person when they have privacy. The Kitáb-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 Mashriqu'l-Adhkár. Our remembrance can occur in public, but in a way which is not meant to be seen except for the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár. Privacy is like a lamp behind a shade, because its light still shapes the room. This chapter frames that shaping as part of achieving true liberation.

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
9. The responsibility of the Minor Trust

Reflection: What have you allowed to shape your private reality?

The next section names the main threat to private reality, which is illusion.

16.2 The Right and Responsibility to Be Free From Illusions

Bahá'u'lláh discusses the need to be free from illusions. This is one of the most repeated commandments throughout His writings. In the Kitáb-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 Kitáb-i-Aqdas describes illusions as idols of our desires.³¹⁸ One cause of illusions is 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 affects how we perceive that love?

When 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. Suspicions³¹⁹ are one way illusions affect 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.

Reflection: Who are you privately following, and why?

³¹⁸ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #38

³¹⁹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #168

The next section applies illusion to influence, especially miserable influence.

16.3 The Right and Responsibility To Not Be Wretched

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas tells us not to follow a wretched one.³²⁰ 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 to create illusions, such as the ones 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 not 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.

Reflection: Where do you apply strictness to others that you refuse for yourself?

The next section treats tyranny as a private pattern before it becomes public harm.

16.4 The Right and Responsibility To Not Be a Tyrant

The same verse of the Kitáb-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. Bahá'u'lláh says "Do not be preoccupied with yourself,³²¹ 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."³²² 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. Bahá'u'lláh says it is important

³²⁰ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #75

³²¹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #144

³²² Kitáb-i-Aqdas #75

for scholars³²³ and sovereign leaders³²⁴ 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. Bahá'u'lláh says to break the chains of delusions in the name of the Lord of all mankind.³²⁵

Reflection: Which desire most often becomes your idol?

The next section names self and desire as boundaries that impersonate freedom.

16.5 Break the Boundaries of Self and Desire

Earlier in the chapter we shared Bahá'u'lláh'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.³²⁶ 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 Sidratu'l-Muntahá, 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.³²⁷ Division and unity start with who we are in private.

Reflection: Which parts of your identity feel permanent, and why?

The next section defines the self in practical terms so you can see what must be refined.

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. Bahá'u'lláh wants us to break the boundaries of our characteristic attributes.

³²³ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #38

³²⁴ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #118

³²⁵ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #74

³²⁶ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #132

³²⁷ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #35

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 a part of our characteristic attributes. These can be influenced by philosophies, politics, cultural values, other religions, or even unique family situations. They 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.

Reflection: Which desire feels most rational, yet most controlling?

The next section maps desire as a moral responsibility rather than a forbidden experience.

16.7 Desires

Desires are a subject Bahá'u'lláh was deeply concerned about in the Kitáb-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 Kitáb-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,³²⁸ 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.³²⁹

We also have a responsibility in our desire of might.³³⁰ What is the purpose in wanting power over another? Is it to dominate or is it to protect those who are vulnerable? Bahá'u'lláh 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 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.³³¹

One way we often demonstrate our status is through our wealth, or obvious presentation of wealth. Bahá'u'lláh warns us in desiring the treasures of the world.³³² 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,³³³ 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 inherit³³⁴ and a responsibility to give inheritance. Bahá'u'lláh describes in great detail to whom, without any

³²⁸ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #177

³²⁹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #132

³³⁰ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #117

³³¹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #160

³³² Kitáb-i-Aqdas #31

³³³ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #151

³³⁴ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #30

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. It 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. Bahá'u'lláh does not want us to be proud in our knowledge.³³⁵ 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 forbidden. Yet, Bahá'u'lláh does challenge us by asking which Qiblah will we turn towards?³³⁶ 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. Bahá'u'lláh 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

³³⁵ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #30

³³⁶ Lawh-i-Bi shárát 13

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 Kitáb-i-Aqdas describes how we should view ourselves as the fingers of one hand and the limbs of one body.³³⁷ 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.

Bahá'u'lláh 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-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.

Bahá'u'lláh says we should not desire for others what we would not desire for yourself.³³⁸ 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.³³⁹ 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

³³⁷ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #73

³³⁸ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #33

³³⁹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #16

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. Bahá'u'lláh expresses specific commands regarding food and drink,³⁴⁰ drugs such as opium,³⁴¹ and certain aspects regarding sex and sexuality. With food and drink, we should be mindful of our desires during fasting. Bahá'u'lláh 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
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.

³⁴⁰ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #57

³⁴¹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #156

We also have a responsibility not to deprive ourselves of certain kinds of food as an ascetic practice, such as meats.³⁴² 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 Kitáb-i-Aqdas mentions a few items regarding the desires of sex. We have responsibilities not to desire sex with children,³⁴³ nor with our parents and step-parents.³⁴⁴ 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 prohibited.³⁴⁵ This also means a married person has 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 melodies³⁴⁶ causing desire. There is a right to music and melodies, but a responsibility to be virtuous in its use.

The Kitáb-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 Bahá'u'lláh 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.

³⁴² Kitáb-i-Aqdas #74

³⁴³ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #156

³⁴⁴ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #159

³⁴⁵ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #102

³⁴⁶ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #77

Likewise, a desire for a relationship status can be an illusion. Wanting to be married solely for the purpose of having the status of wife or husband can harm the other spouse by replacing their humanity with the title of husband or wife. Having your identity fixed through relational expectation might force affectionate relationships into spaces neither are ready for.

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 too 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.

Reflection: Which desire could become healthier through virtue?

The next section identifies moderation as the discipline that reshapes desire without denying it.

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. Instead of one biological aspect being our identity, this aspect can be a small portion of our soulful identity. When we declare our “I am” statement, we have a wide variety of names and attributes to pull from instead of just one limiting aspect.

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.

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.

Reflection: What does freedom require when no one is watching?

The next section closes the chapter by tying private discipline to public unity.

16.9 Freedom

To conclude the discussion about the private self, there is one more desire I want to close with. Bahá'u'lláh warns in desiring freedom and taking pride in it.³⁴⁷ We each have a right to freedom, where true freedom is following God's commands through Bahá'u'lláh. 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 on 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.

To conclude this chapter, the private self is where freedom is either practiced or quietly refused. In private we either burn away illusions, or we feed them, and that choice shapes every relationship that follows. The next chapter moves from private discipline to shared conduct, asking how free souls protect the freedom of others in real actions.

³⁴⁷ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #153

17. The Constructive Social Life

This chapter marks the movement from the private cultivation of virtue into the shared arena of collective 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 form 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 toward. The soul and human station teach us the special and noble character all people are capable of. The spiritual worlds allow us to creatively imagine the unique journeys all will take. The urgency of the Day of Resurrection ensures we act with the best interests 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.

Reflection: How does personal belief become visible through community life?

This question opens the path toward understanding the Cause of God as lived experience.

17.1 The Cause of God

Throughout the book, we have several times mentioned the Cause of God in association with Ḥuqúqu'lláh, 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 introduce this concept, Kitáb-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, Bahá'u'lláh offers various guidance associated with the Cause of God.

All believers have the responsibility to exalt God's Word.³⁴⁸ 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 opportunity to know. To clarify what God's Word is, Bahá'u'lláh says to use this Book only³⁴⁹ as prior scripture avails nothing today. While we acknowledge the truth of scriptures past, we must 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 Kitáb-i-Aqdas is replaced by a new Book.

We have responsibilities to associate³⁵⁰ and consort³⁵¹ 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 proclaim³⁵² and assist³⁵³ the Cause in a positive and healthy way. To help with proclamation, Bahá'u'lláh also advises us to learn different languages³⁵⁴ so we can communicate with different people. This is not a requirement, though. We should serve the Cause in all conditions.³⁵⁵ 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 Cause³⁵⁶ or to let disbelievers' sorrow overcome us.³⁵⁷ With God's Word being exalted, there is no reason to dispute about God and His Cause³⁵⁸ even if there are interpretive differences and various understandings. We have the right to be free from disputes about God and His Cause. The fear of God will help to keep veils away³⁵⁹ 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.

³⁴⁸ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #38

³⁴⁹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #168

³⁵⁰ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #75

³⁵¹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #144

³⁵² Kitáb-i-Aqdas #75

³⁵³ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #38

³⁵⁴ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #118

³⁵⁵ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #74

³⁵⁶ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #132

³⁵⁷ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #35

³⁵⁸ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #177

³⁵⁹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #132

We have a responsibility to support His chosen ones.³⁶⁰ Throughout the revelation, Bahá'u'lláh refers to Manifestations of God as Chosen, but He also refers to others as chosen. Bahá'u'lláh in the Kitáb-i-Badí' offers an allegory of who chosen ones are. Those who rejected the idol of the golden calf, an allusion to 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, Bahá'u'lláh affirms this criteria for today. In the Súrih-i-Haykal, he says these chosen ones end up in God's Kingdom. In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, He says these chosen ones elevate His Word 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 needs. We have a responsibility to support them. Bahá'u'lláh regularly used Huqúqu'lláh to support His chosen ones. We must be careful, though, from promoting ourselves as chosen.

Reflection: What does it mean for faith to shape the physical world around us?

This reflection turns attention toward development as an expression of devotion.

17.2 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 complementary goals and roles. Bahá'u'lláh ties development as a responsibility for everyone.

Bahá'u'lláh says to build up the cities and lands of God³⁶¹ 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 our own houses as perfectly as possible in the lands.³⁶² 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 it as

³⁶⁰ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #117

³⁶¹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #160

³⁶² Kitáb-i-Aqdas #31

perfect as possible. Bahá'u'lláh also tells us to renew our furnishings after the passing of nineteen years.³⁶³ All people have a right to secure dignified housing.

On the religious side, the command to build Mashriqu'l-Adhkár 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 Bahá'u'lláh have a responsibility to build Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs.

The final aspect of the socioeconomic development of the lands are to build Houses of Justice in every city³⁶⁴ 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 Earth³⁶⁵ 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.³⁶⁶ Houses of Justice do not need to be built in villages, but there is no exclusion if there are the minimum 9 individuals.

Reflection: Which everyday behaviors quietly sustain a healthy society?

This reflection narrows the focus from structures to daily conduct.

17.3 Positive Social Actions

A responsibility to act with good deeds³⁶⁷ and a right to be free from bad deeds.

A responsibility to engage in activities which benefit yourself and others³⁶⁸ and a right to be free from harmful activities by others. Associated with this is a prohibition of idleness, the wasting of time without any meaningful activity. Sloth is also prohibited, which is an apathetic reaction to opportunities and duties. With this, we have a right to be free from being forced into idleness.

³⁶³ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #151

³⁶⁴ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #30

³⁶⁵ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #30

³⁶⁶ Lawh-i-Bi shárát 13

³⁶⁷ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #73

³⁶⁸ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #33

A responsibility to provide for the poor and needy³⁶⁹ and a right to be free of poverty.

A responsibility to provide hospitality³⁷⁰ once per Bayání month.

A responsibility to fulfill promises³⁷¹ 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 water³⁷² 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 gatherings³⁷³ 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,³⁷⁴ a responsibility born from good manners. This can be associated with what we say, do, or present ourselves. All have the right to be free from being considered as playthings.

A responsibility to seek knowledge for the recognition of the known³⁷⁵ and a right to seek knowledge. Relatedly we have a responsibility to read from sciences which benefit us³⁷⁶ 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.

³⁶⁹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #16

³⁷⁰ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #57

³⁷¹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #156

³⁷² Kitáb-i-Aqdas #74

³⁷³ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #156

³⁷⁴ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #159

³⁷⁵ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #102

³⁷⁶ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #77

A responsibility to respond in kindness if angered.³⁷⁷ 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. Bahá'u'lláh advises Napoleon III and the people of France to cover up mistakes instead of arguing.³⁷⁸ 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 Kitáb-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 Kitáb-i-Aqdas, where Bahá'u'lláh says whoever is deprived of it is indeed among the people of error, even if he performs every good deed. We should be careful not to take shortcuts.

In summary, the constructive social life translates devotion into visible patterns of care, development, and daily conduct that sustain communities. In the event of shortcuts within this framework, Bahá'u'lláh 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 Kitáb-i-Aqdas which Bahá'u'lláh designed to be enforceable by a justice system which this book covers. The next chapter therefore turns to the protective boundaries that preserve the dignity of social life.

³⁷⁷ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #153

³⁷⁸ Súrih-i-Haykal 150 & 151

18. The Protective Social Life

This chapter introduces the protective social life as the boundary system that preserves dignity, prevents harm, and keeps rights from colliding within community. 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 is goals to constantly be striving for.

Being a mirror reflecting God's names is not an automatic switch and Bahá'u'lláh 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 Bahá'u'lláh 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).³⁷⁹ At some point, the period of the Kitáb-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. Bahá'u'lláh warns against interpreting what has been revealed and deviates from its outward meaning.³⁸⁰ 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

³⁷⁹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #37

³⁸⁰ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #105

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

Interpretation itself is not prohibited. Bahá'u'lláh advises to interpret both the outward and the inward.³⁸¹ To neglect either will cause deviation. If Bahá'u'lláh interprets anything Himself, this takes precedence. He says "if you differ on a matter, refer to what has been revealed by Him"³⁸² The issue regarding interpretation is using interpretation to self-exalt or exalt another. For example, this entire book is how I personally interpret the Kitáb-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 Kitáb-i-Aqdas. For this matter, I highly recommend reading the Kitáb-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. Bahá'u'lláh says there is no partner for the Source of the Cause in the greatest infallibility, that no one else has been given a share.³⁸³ 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-Ishráqát (Tablet of Splendors), Bahá'u'lláh 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.

Bahá'u'lláh gives an example in His sermon on infallibility in the Ishráqát. 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.

³⁸¹ Tafsír on the Súrah of the Sun

³⁸² Kitáb-i-Aqdas #53

³⁸³ Kitáb-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 Kitáb-i-Badí' describing those who believe without hesitation as the people of infallibility as long as they remain under the shade of God. The Lawh-i-Sarráj confirms this. Yet, not a single individual was ever named infallible in any tablet of Bahá'u'lláh. 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. Bahá'u'lláh prohibits the kissing of hands³⁸⁴ as a sign of inferiority. We are all prohibited from ascending pulpits³⁸⁵ which physically visualizes one being above the others.

One of the most important in my view is the prohibition from seeking forgiveness from another.³⁸⁶ 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.³⁸⁷ 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.³⁸⁸ 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

³⁸⁴ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #34

³⁸⁵ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #154

³⁸⁶ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #34

³⁸⁷ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #147

³⁸⁸ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #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.”³⁸⁹

Reflection: Where do I subtly elevate my voice, knowledge, or spiritual practice above others, and what would humility look like in those moments?

This next section shifts from inner pride to outward words, because community safety begins with how we speak.

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 Bahá’u’lláh did not create any enforceable fines or punishments. All of these are responsibilities of those who believe in Bahá’u’lláh, 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 Kitáb-i-Aqdas. In the Persian Bayán’s Vahid 7 Gate 18, the Báb instituted a fine of nineteen mithqals to anyone who caused sadness to another’s heart and soul with their speech and conduct. Bahá’u’lláh 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.³⁹⁰ 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 Bahá’u’lláh differentiated

³⁸⁹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #148

³⁹⁰ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #19

between oral and written speech. My gut feeling is both would be included, but I have no evidence of this for now other than Bahá'u'lláh's stern responses to written statements which seemed like libel.

18.2.3 Backbiting

Backbiting is prohibited.³⁹¹ 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 disputing³⁹² 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 Bahá'u'lláh's revelation³⁹³ 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.³⁹⁴ 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

³⁹¹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #19

³⁹² Kitáb-i-Aqdas #148

³⁹³ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #53

³⁹⁴ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #73

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.

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 Badí’ calendar, the month of Questions (#15) comes immediately after the month of Speech (#14), which leads to the month of Honor (#16). The Báb’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

Bahá'u'lláh prohibits raising voices in streets or marketplaces in remembrance.³⁹⁵ He says the proper place is within your own home or in places designated for remembrance, such as a Mashriqu'l-Adhkár 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.

³⁹⁵ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #108

18.2.7 Regarding Books and Other Writings

We are prohibited from reading sciences which lead to disputes.³⁹⁶ This could be expanded to any new types of media which has been introduced since 1873, when the Kitáb-i-Aqdas was written. This can be quite expansive, but can include opinion pieces, political treatises, ideological statements, jurisprudence based on traditions, or even commentary which goes against the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (as all disputes should be referred to Bahá'u'lláh). However, we are also prohibited from obliterating those books.³⁹⁷ Everyone has a right to produce whatever content they want. Censorship is forbidden. We are responsible for what we consume.

Reflection: How often do my words protect another person's dignity, and when might they quietly erode it?

This next section connects small violations of dignity to the larger social descent into oppression.

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.

Another aspect in how dehumanization can occur is through institutionalization. Institutions alone are not inherently bad, but institutions are composed of individuals. If the people within an institution dehumanize anyone, the institution will reflect this. Political ideologies, nationality, religion, and even more personal ones such as marriage have all been tools to express the ways a person is less than human.

³⁹⁶ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #77

³⁹⁷ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #77

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. We have a responsibility to ensure no institution dehumanizes anyone, nor deprive them of their rights. For example, any attempt to use marriage to bypass protections of immaturity is oppression and could dehumanize a child as merely an object to fulfill adult wants and desires. We also have a responsibility to change the hearts of people and institutions to restore the sacred trusts authorized to us.

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. Our hands must always be active to retain or restore every person's inherent and rightful nobility, from birth and beyond death.

Reflection: What small patterns in my thinking or behavior could contribute to seeing another person as less fully human?

This next section lists the core violent and oppressive acts the community must restrain, with justice shaped by both law and conscience.

18.4 Violent and Oppressive Acts

To protect us within the social life, Bahá'u'lláh 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 8 aspects should cover most situations if anyone were to appreciate a small code of laws.

These will be listed in no particular order:

Law #1: Carrying weapons.³⁹⁸ 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)³⁹⁹ For injuries to the head and body⁴⁰⁰ 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 Justice⁴⁰¹ and the other 66% is offered as compensation to the injured person.

Law #3: There is a fine for manslaughter and other accidental killing.⁴⁰² There are no exceptions. The diyah payment is 100 Bayáníc mithqáls of gold (See Appendix 4) for the family of the deceased.

³⁹⁸ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #159

³⁹⁹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #148

⁴⁰⁰ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #56

⁴⁰¹ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #52

Law #4: Murder (Homicide).⁴⁰³ The punishment is execution or life imprisonment.⁴⁰⁴

Law #5: Trespassing.⁴⁰⁵ There is no punishment specified.

Law #6: Theft (stealing).⁴⁰⁶ 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: Arson⁴⁰⁷ 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.

Law #8: Selling and buying people⁴⁰⁸ without any stated punishment.

18.4.1 Intersection of Laws: An Example of Rape

One might read the Kitáb-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.

⁴⁰² Kitáb-i-Aqdas #188

⁴⁰³ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #19

⁴⁰⁴ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #62

⁴⁰⁵ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #145

⁴⁰⁶ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #45

⁴⁰⁷ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #62

⁴⁰⁸ Kitáb-i-Aqdas #72

Reflection: How do clear boundaries around harm shape my understanding of justice, responsibility, and protection within community?

This concludes the basic foundations of the social life. In the next chapter, we move from protection to construction as we transition toward building and maintaining loving relationships, marriage, parenting, and divorce.

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.⁴⁰⁹ 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.⁴¹⁰ Baha'u'llah instructed monks to leave their seclusion so they may bear fruits and enter into wedlock.⁴¹¹ To a particular believer, Baha'u'llah said marriage is not permitted to be passed by as it is God's tradition.⁴¹²

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."⁴¹³ 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

⁴⁰⁹ Kitab-i-Aqdas #63

⁴¹⁰ Persian Bayan Vahid 8, Gate 15

⁴¹¹ Suriy-i-Haykal

⁴¹² BH10796

⁴¹³ 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.⁴¹⁴ Consent can only be obtained by those who have attained maturity. The Maturity-Matching Principle, established in Chapters 14 and 15, governs who may consent to marriage. Two people at the same stage of maturity may marry with parental consent and community guidance. No person who has reached full maturity may marry a person who has not. Civil law governs where it sets a stricter age threshold.

Age 11 marks the earliest age a person can consent to marriage, if they have the means and meet the rest of the requirements covered.⁴¹⁵ Remember in Chapter 14 the prohibition of pederasty and the right to be free from this practice. No adult has a right to marry a child.

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.⁴¹⁶

“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.⁴¹⁷ 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.

⁴¹⁴ Kitab-i-Aqdas #65

⁴¹⁵ Arabic Bayan, Vahid 8, Gate 15

⁴¹⁶ Persian Bayan Vahid 6, Gate 7

⁴¹⁷ Kitab-i-Aqdas #65

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.⁴¹⁸ 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.

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.⁴¹⁹ 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 1882.⁴²⁰ 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.⁴²¹

As we can see, consent is multi-layered. The community nor parents who consent are greater than the individual, nor can they prevent or force consent. The spouse's consent is primary, parental consent is protective, and the community's guidance is at most supervisory. This remains true regardless of which stage of Maturity-Matching marriage is pursued.

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.⁴²² 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."⁴²³

⁴¹⁸ BH02956

⁴¹⁹ BH00091

⁴²⁰ BH00093

⁴²¹ Kitab-i-Aqdas #65

⁴²² BH00726

⁴²³ BH02573

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 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."⁴²⁴ 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."⁴²⁵ 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.⁴²⁶ 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

⁴²⁴ BH02352

⁴²⁵ BH00357

⁴²⁶ BH00035

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.⁴²⁷ Divorce requires a one-year waiting period for an opportunity for reconciliation and 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.⁴²⁸ 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

⁴²⁷ Kitab-i-Aqdas #68

⁴²⁸ Kitab-i-Aqdas #49

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 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."⁴²⁹ 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 fellowship⁴³⁰ even with the followers of other religion.⁴³¹ 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.⁴³² 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.

⁴²⁹ Kitab-i-Aqdas #70

⁴³⁰ Kitab-i-Aqdas #148

⁴³¹ Kitab-i-Aqdas #144

⁴³² Hidden Words of Persian #57

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.

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 closer⁴³³ 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.⁴³⁴

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.

⁴³³ BH00091

⁴³⁴ Kitab-i-Aqdas #61

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."⁴³⁵ 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.

Once engaged, Baha'u'llah advises delaying the wedding is not recommended.⁴³⁶ 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.

19.3 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.

Another way skipping stages is important is in the application of the Maturity-Matching Principle. It is important to note the fortress of well-being is most vulnerable when one partner is significantly more mature than the other, whether this is spiritually, emotionally, or developmentally. The Maturity-Matching Principle helps ensure there are outlets for healthy affectionate relationships at any stage of maturity. For example, throughout the world the incidence of teen pregnancies can be less than 1% and nearly 20% depending on the culture. Traditionally, this can be a difficult time as the social, religious, cultural, and legal structures bring additional pressures to both the teenage mother and her child.

A society that refuses to name adolescent desire is not protecting youth; it is abandoning them to secrecy. A society that names desire but refuses to restrain power is also abandoning them—this time to predation. For example, if two peers end up feeling love through friendship, fellowship, and spiritual kinship, which is the best path? One path is telling them to stop feeling as they do, which betrays their rights to identity and expression. This risks secretive acts and if things go too far, guilt and shame from unplanned outcomes. The other path is to accept these feelings as real. With this acknowledgment comes the potentials to gain mutual consent, that of the parents, and ensure they have access to the fortress of

⁴³⁵ BH03310

⁴³⁶ BH01039

well-being. Their relationship and marriage is supported by parents and the community until they are fully mature according to the Badi calendar.

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.

When these stages are skipped, as expressed in Chapter 16 "The Private Self," we also need to be aware as individuals what is an illusion and what is real as expressed in Chapter 16 (The Private Self). This is a delicate balance individuals and communities must navigate with care and consultation.

19.4 Non-Traditional Relationship Choices

19.4.1 Celibacy

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. A person could be asexual. Celibacy, while not being enjoined upon believers, is a personal option which should be respected.

19.4.2 Gender

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. The Kitab-i-Aqdas nor any teaching of the Bab and Baha'u'llah defined what it means to be a man or a woman. Baha'u'llah expands the common notions of gender in BH00158 when declaring believing women are men. Both men and women are Knights when they have partaken of the Choice Sealed Wine.

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 people from birth. Every person has a responsibility not to deny these rights. God prefers unity and concord. While marriage is defined within man and woman labels, the right to identity governs which gender we express. Who serves as the bride, the groom, the wife, and the husband is entirely up to the two people consenting to the marriage, and no one else. This can reflect in the marriage contract itself, defining who serves in each role for the duration of the contract, which if God wills it, stands the test of time.

19.4.3 Conclusion

Our relationships are probably the very fabric upon which we can measure the health of a community. The closer we become to someone, the more vulnerable we are. Each new stage opens up our hearts in exciting and powerful ways. Due to this, we have a reason to view ourselves as trustees to those we love, as well as to those who are vulnerable. The next chapter will discuss trusteeship, the authority gifted to us under the authority of God.

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,⁴³⁷ weak descendants,⁴³⁸ the destitute⁴³⁹, and the kingdom.⁴⁴⁰ 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

⁴³⁷ Kitab-i-Aqdas #21

⁴³⁸ Kitab-i-Aqdas #27

⁴³⁹ Kitab-i-Aqdas #147

⁴⁴⁰ 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.

20.1.1 Witness, Trustee, and Helper Model of Trusteeship

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.⁴⁴¹ 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'ul-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.⁴⁴²

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 full

⁴⁴¹ Kitab-i-Aqdas #48

⁴⁴² BH09698

maturity at 19. This remains true if the child consents to a Maturity-Matching marriage. If there are periods when the mature child needs assistance, the parents must do so if they are able to.⁴⁴³

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 a child's iris. 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. Nevertheless, a parent is never their owner. 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 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. For example, age 11 is governed by the name Mashiyyat. Through the identification of self and the outward expression, we can begin to witness. Age 15 is governed by the name Masa'il, where Questions awaken our understanding. These answers allow us to take what we witness, and feel a sense of responsibility to what is true. This is the spiritual station of trustee. By age 19, we are governed by the name 'Ala. This loftiness is about fulfillment of trust and unity. To fulfill a trusteeship, one must be willing to serve as the helper of the trust. This is the highest spiritual station, that of servitude.

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.⁴⁴⁴ 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.

⁴⁴³ Arabic Bayan Vahid 10, Gate 14

⁴⁴⁴ Kitab-i-Aqdas #21

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.⁴⁴⁵ While orphans are being care for in trust by the Houses of Justice, it 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 Spouse as Trust - Spouse as Trustee

In Chapter 19 we discussed marriage, where each spouse has certain responsibilities to each other. Some are shared, some belong go the husband, and some belong to the wife. Each spouse is the trustee of the other, not the possessor. For example, one does not marry solely to have a housemaid (indentured servant or slave). One does not marry solely to have a "legal" way to have sexual intercourse. One does not marry to gain financial independence or social status. Marriage is solely to establish that fortress of well-being.

When we consider the Maturity-Matching principle. we can also imagine an elderly, but wealthy person marrying a recent graduate with considerable student debt. The Maturity-Matching principle naturally prevents such arrangements where each spouse merely sees the other for exploitation. When a marriage happens in early life using the Maturity-Matching principle, such as in the age 15 stage, the spouses will also need assistance in developing their trusteeship. The parents of both spouses operate as a trust within a trust. Yet, the parents never determine the path such marriages take, but support as necessary until the spouse's themselves have gained full maturity. When done according to Baha'u'llah's teachings, this is a double-layer of protection and support enhancing each young person's liberation.

20.5 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.⁴⁴⁶ The Bab says we are to provide for our parents if they are not self-sufficient⁴⁴⁷ 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.

⁴⁴⁵ BH00332

⁴⁴⁶ BH02374

⁴⁴⁷ Arabic Bayan Vahid 10, Gate 14

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.⁴⁴⁸ 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.⁴⁴⁹ Bahá'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.⁴⁵⁰

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.

20.6 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

⁴⁴⁸ BH00035

⁴⁴⁹ Kitab-i-Aqdas #113

⁴⁵⁰ BH00093

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.

20.7 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.⁴⁵¹ 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.

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.

20.8 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.⁴⁵² The water is created pure, just as we are. Yet, when God discusses

⁴⁵¹ Kitab-i-Aqdas #147

⁴⁵² Kitab-i-Aqdas #54

our purity with lewdness and oppression, He says “beware that you do not corrupt the Earth after it has been reformed.”⁴⁵³ 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 agents⁴⁵⁴ and are integrated within the Bayanic Calendar.⁴⁵⁵ 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.

20.8.1 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, 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.”⁴⁵⁶ The Land of T (Tehran) is instructed not to grieve the injustice perpetuated upon it.⁴⁵⁷ 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.⁴⁵⁸ Flowers, fruits, trees, leaves, and rivers are pleasing examples of divine power and craftsmanship in honor of the passing of a believer.⁴⁵⁹ In the same tablet He says the trees, stones, clay, and pebbles serve as witnesses.

⁴⁵³ Kitab-i-Aqdas #64

⁴⁵⁴ Persian Bayan Vahid 5 Gate 14

⁴⁵⁵ Persian Bayan Vahid 5 Gate 3

⁴⁵⁶ The Lawh-i-Aqdas (Most Holy Tablet)

⁴⁵⁷ Kitab-i-Aqdas #91

⁴⁵⁸ Lawh-i-Ard-i-Ba (Tablet of the Land of Ba)

⁴⁵⁹ BH00010

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"⁴⁶⁰ 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.⁴⁶¹ 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 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.

20.8.2 Animals

Baha'u'llah does tell us not to load an animal with more than it can bear.⁴⁶² 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

⁴⁶⁰ The Hidden Words of Persian #2

⁴⁶¹ The Arabic Bayan Vahid 9, Gate 10

⁴⁶² Kitab-i-Aqdas #187

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 hunting⁴⁶³ 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.

20.9 Wills and Testaments - Houses of Justice as Trustees

Every soul has been ordained to write a will.⁴⁶⁴ The will must have certain features:

1. Heading with the Greatest Name,
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

⁴⁶³ Kitab-i-Aqdas #60

⁴⁶⁴ Kitab-i-Aqdas #109

Huquq'u'llah was not paid on. If there is any money after Huquq'u'llah, then the estate will be distributed as inheritance.⁴⁶⁵

20.9.1 Inheritance Without a Will

The Arabic Bayan introduces the inheritance distribution with 2520 shares divided between seven categories (Books) of inheritors.⁴⁶⁶ 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%)

20.9.2 Items Excluded From Sale

If the house is inhabited by descendants, the male descendants inherit the house.⁴⁶⁷

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.

20.9.3 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.⁴⁶⁸ (1080 of 2520 shares)

⁴⁶⁵ BH00984

⁴⁶⁶ Arabic Bayan Vahid 10, Gate 14

⁴⁶⁷ Kitab-i-Aqdas #25

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.⁴⁶⁹ 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.⁴⁷⁰

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.⁴⁷¹

20.9.4 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 much be done with the deepest honor of the person who passed. The following are the steps for the full funeral.

20.9.4.1 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.

20.9.4.2 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.

⁴⁶⁸ Kitab-i-Aqdas #21

⁴⁶⁹ Kitab-i-Aqdas #22

⁴⁷⁰ Kitab-i-Aqdas #23

⁴⁷¹ Kitab-i-Aqdas #24

20.9.4.3 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.

20.9.4.4 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."

20.9.4.5 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.

20.9.4.6 The Funeral Prayer (*Şalát 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.

20.9.4.7 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.

20.10 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 Badi Calendar, is an enriching way to add to the practice of Honoring God.

There are situations, while not specifically described in the Kitab-i-Aqdas, where the trusteeship model could be well applied. 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.⁴⁷²

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.⁴⁷³ 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.⁴⁷⁴

The Houses of Justice are to be the exemplars of trusteeship and consultation, but consultation is a binding command for all.⁴⁷⁵ There is no power except through unity, and no well-being except through

⁴⁷² Lawh-i-Ishraqat (Tablet of Illumination)

⁴⁷³ BH00093

⁴⁷⁴ Kitab-i-Aqdas #30

⁴⁷⁵ BH00046

consultation.⁴⁷⁶ Consultation is necessary in all matters.⁴⁷⁷ It increases awareness and turns conjecture into certitude.⁴⁷⁸ It is the cause and means of vigilance, welfare, and safety.⁴⁷⁹

The Holy Spirit confirms consultation.⁴⁸⁰ 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.⁴⁸¹ 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.⁴⁸²

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.

⁴⁷⁶ BH00083

⁴⁷⁷ BH00083

⁴⁷⁸ BH00123

⁴⁷⁹ BH00083

⁴⁸⁰ BH00040

⁴⁸¹ BH00093

⁴⁸² 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 subjects on which we might seek consultation are wide-ranging, touching nearly every dimension of human life. On the personal and ethical level, one might bring questions of conscience, health, vocation, discipline, temperament, friendship, conduct, aspiration, or repentance. Within the home, consultation may address marriage, parenting, inheritance, education, shelter, nutrition, caregiving, celebration, or mourning.

Moving outward into the broader community, subjects such as service, fellowship, conflict, culture, recreation, safety, hospitality, communication, and reputation all invite careful deliberation. In professional and vocational life, one may seek guidance on matters of ethics, training, mentorship, innovation, employment, leadership, compensation, scheduling, or evaluation. Economic affairs similarly offer rich ground for consultation, encompassing trade, investment, taxation, charity, property, production, distribution, consumption, and stewardship.

At the religious and spiritual level, questions of worship, doctrine, pilgrimage, ritual, study, repentance, translation, guidance, and devotion may be brought forward. And at the broadest scale of civil and political governance, consultation may bear upon legislation, justice, security, planning, infrastructure, diplomacy, representation, welfare, and education. Taken together, these subjects suggest that virtually no area of life falls entirely outside the scope of what consultation can illuminate.

These three levels could intersect in varying ways. Due to its importance, I do want to make a reminder regarding the Minor Trust. Any consultation regarding a minor, regardless of their level of maturity, must

prioritize protection over agreement. The rights described in preceding chapters must always be considered inviolable, without any compromise. This is true for any vulnerable member of a family, community, or nation. No consultation must violate the rights Baha'u'llah described to us, as these rights come directly from God Himself.

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 sew 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.⁴⁸³ 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."⁴⁸⁴

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

⁴⁸³ BH06839

⁴⁸⁴ 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,⁴⁸⁵ the representatives of God,⁴⁸⁶ the shepherds of the sheep of God,⁴⁸⁷ and the dawning places of His command.⁴⁸⁸ 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.

⁴⁸⁵ Kitab-i-Aqdas #21

⁴⁸⁶ Kitab-i-Aqdas #30

⁴⁸⁷ Kitab-i-Aqdas #52

⁴⁸⁸ 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.⁴⁸⁹ 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.⁴⁹⁰ 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.⁴⁹¹ 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

⁴⁸⁹ Tablet of Splendors, 8th Illumination

⁴⁹⁰ Kitab-i-Aqdas #30

⁴⁹¹ 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."⁴⁹² 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.⁴⁹³ This is a foundation in loving the world instead of having pride in their homeland. He adds the ministers of the House of

⁴⁹² Lawh-i-Bisarat

⁴⁹³ Lawh-i-Ishraqat.

Justice must implement the Most Great Peace.⁴⁹⁴ The Most Great Peace is the unification of the world's parties or the unification of the world's religion.⁴⁹⁵ 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.

⁴⁹⁴ Lawh-i-Dunya (Tablet of the World)

⁴⁹⁵ 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."⁴⁹⁶

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.

⁴⁹⁶ 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.⁴⁹⁷ 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 I⁴⁹⁸ 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.

⁴⁹⁷ Kitab-i-Aqdas #85

⁴⁹⁸ 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.⁴⁹⁹ 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

⁴⁹⁹ 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 wealth⁵⁰⁰
- Take from the world only what is sufficient, leaving what is excessive⁵⁰¹
- Do not let the love of others enter your heart, let the love of God rule the heart so you may know Oneness⁵⁰²
- Act as vassals of God and rise to serve the Purpose for which you were created⁵⁰³
- You are the shadow of God on earth⁵⁰⁴
- Leave your houses (might refer to any dwelling places of monarchs to include palaces) and turn to the Kingdom of God⁵⁰⁵
- Leave your laws and follow the law of God⁵⁰⁶

23.3.2.2 Ethical Foundations of Leadership

- Do not wrong anyone⁵⁰⁷
- Prevent oppressors from their oppression⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁰ Kitab-i-Aqdas #79

⁵⁰¹ Suriy-i-Muluk #21

⁵⁰² Suriy-i-Muluk #62

⁵⁰³ Kitab-i-Aqdas #82

⁵⁰⁴ Suriy-i-Muluk #61

⁵⁰⁵ Kitab-i-Aqdas #84

⁵⁰⁶ Suriy-i-Muluk #23

⁵⁰⁷ Suriy-i-Muluk #10

- Secure the rights of the oppressed⁵⁰⁹
- Examine the affairs of people before issuing judgments or punishments⁵¹⁰
- Do not punish those who do not disobey the your laws⁵¹¹
- Recompense the debts of those wrongfully punished⁵¹²
- Do not take people's money unjustly (bribes, blackmail, etc)⁵¹³
- If a wicked person brings you news, verify it⁵¹⁴
- Beware of listening to words of malice and hypocrisy⁵¹⁵
- Do not impose upon others what you cannot bear yourselves⁵¹⁶

23.3.2.3 Economic Foundations of Leadership

- Do not impose your expenses on your subjects beyond their capacity (do not over tax)⁵¹⁷
 - Do not betray your trusteeship to the poor⁵¹⁸
 - Spend on servants according to their need, not according to what they hoard or use for adornment, so that none are in need nor hoarding⁵¹⁹
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⁵⁰⁸ Suriy-i-Muluk #14

⁵⁰⁹ Suriy-i-Muluk #14

⁵¹⁰ Suriy-i-Muluk #19

⁵¹¹ Suriy-i-Muluk #30

⁵¹² Suriy-i-Muluk #32

⁵¹³ Suriy-i-Muluk #83

⁵¹⁴ Suriy-i-Muluk #35

⁵¹⁵ Suriy-i-Muluk #37

⁵¹⁶ Suriy-i-Muluk #42

⁵¹⁷ Suriy-i-Muluk #11

⁵¹⁸ Suriy-i-Muluk #12

⁵¹⁹ Suriy-i-Muluk #

- It is not fitting to have some in abundance and others in clear poverty and humiliation⁵²⁰

23.3.2.4 Safety and Security Foundations of Leadership

- Reduce your armies so that your expenses decrease⁵²¹
- Maintain an army to protect the lands and kingdoms⁵²²
- Do not wrong those who have migrated to you and protect them⁵²³
- Reconcile among yourselves (sovereign leaders reconcile with sovereign leaders)⁵²⁴

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 Book⁵²⁵
- Do not gather around you agents who abandon their trusts and follow their desires⁵²⁶
- Consult with agents who exude the scent of faith and justice⁵²⁷
- Do not relinquish control of your affairs to others and do not become complacent⁵²⁸

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.

⁵²⁰ Suriy-i-Muluk #59

⁵²¹ Suriy-i-Muluk #10

⁵²² Suriy-i-Muluk #10

⁵²³ Suriy-i-Muluk #11

⁵²⁴ Suriy-i-Muluk #10

⁵²⁵ Suriy-i-Muluk #43

⁵²⁶ Suriy-i-Muluk #54

⁵²⁷ Suriy-i-Muluk #54

⁵²⁸ 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.⁵²⁹ 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."

⁵²⁹ 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.”⁵³⁰ 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.

⁵³⁰ 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 born⁵³¹, 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.

⁵³¹ 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."⁵³²

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,

⁵³² 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"⁵³³ 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.

⁵³³ 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.⁵³⁴

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.⁵³⁵ 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.

⁵³⁴ Kitab-i-Aqdas #101

⁵³⁵ Kitab-i-Aqdas #166

24.3.2 Hajī Mirza Muhammad Karim Khān Kirmānī

Baha'u'llah mentions Karim:

Recall Karim⁵³⁶, 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 2025.⁵³⁷ 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

⁵³⁶ Kitab-i-Aqdas #170

⁵³⁷ <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.⁵³⁸

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.⁵³⁹ 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

⁵³⁸ Kitab-i-Aqdas #184

⁵³⁹ 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.⁵⁴⁰
- They claim hidden knowledge and esoteric understanding.
- They cling to their own principles.⁵⁴¹
- They are sorrowful.⁵⁴²
- They deny what God has permitted.⁵⁴³
- 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.⁵⁴⁴
- They are wolves in sheep’s garments.⁵⁴⁵
- They are intoxicated by desire.⁵⁴⁶
- They distort the Word of God.⁵⁴⁷

24.4.2 Your Responsibility to Remain Free

The foundation to ensuring you do not follow corrupt spiritual leaders is 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.

If we refer back to our constellation of unity, we rely on the stars of virtue to guide us. These stars borne from the essence of God, emanating from His will, known to us through the Command and His Manifestation. All of this exists for the transcendence and liberation of your soul. While this describes

⁵⁴⁰ Kitab-i-Aqdas #36

⁵⁴¹ Kitab-i-Aqdas #17

⁵⁴² Kitab-i-Aqdas #35

⁵⁴³ Kitab-i-Aqdas #36

⁵⁴⁴ Kitab-i-Aqdas #162

⁵⁴⁵ Kitab-i-Aqdas #52

⁵⁴⁶ Kitab-i-Aqdas #39

⁵⁴⁷ Kitab-i-Aqdas #105

spirituality, what is spirituality without a mode of transportation? Even the most experienced sailors use the stars to navigate and refer to charts, maps, and GPS to reach their destination safely. They captain their vessels. The religion of God, while changeless and eternal in nature, provides us the ability to sail. It is the direction, the stars, the entire constellation. All we have to do is navigate the ship so our soul can ascend. If we place someone else as the star, or some other institution, we are on their spiritual journey, not ours. Any spiritual leader we follow is not the star. They have their spiritual journey. We have ours.

What we can do is allow the diverse observations, expressions, and unique constellations of virtue we all possess to help illuminate each others way. One insight here, another there, and a spiritual practice everywhere gets us to paradise where our Lord awaits for us. 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.

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'llah'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'llah'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'llah'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'llah 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'llah 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'llah 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'llah says "no one is permitted to manage them except with permission of the Source of Revelation."⁵⁴⁸ 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'llah says all endowments revert to the Huquq'u'llah. Chapter 12.4 describes the various ways Bahá'u'llah had utilized these endowments. This was reiterated by Bahá'u'llah in BH00979.

Bahá'u'llah 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

⁵⁴⁸ 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."⁵⁴⁹

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."⁵⁵⁰

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

⁵⁴⁹ BH00314

⁵⁵⁰ 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."⁵⁵¹

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."⁵⁵²

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."⁵⁵³

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."⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁵¹ BH07364

⁵⁵² BH09434

⁵⁵³ BH06516

⁵⁵⁴ 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."⁵⁵⁵

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'."⁵⁵⁶

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."⁵⁵⁷ 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.

⁵⁵⁵ BH11823

⁵⁵⁶ BH10221

⁵⁵⁷ 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.⁵⁵⁸

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

⁵⁵⁸ 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'llah 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.⁵⁵⁹ 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'llah tells us to proclaim the Cause to the followers of other religions.⁵⁶⁰ 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'llah has permitted, but not required, people to learn various languages to proclaim the Cause of God throughout both East and West.⁵⁶¹ The Kitab-i-Aqdas also expresses a couple of proclamations God had made Himself through Bahá'u'llah. 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."⁵⁶² Another example is when Bahá'u'llah counsels us to be manifestations of steadfastness when the Book proclaims "There is no God but Me, the Almighty, the All-Praised."⁵⁶³

27.1.3 The Great Announcement

These two simple instructions parallel most of Bahá'u'llah's guidance in what a proclamation consists of. When associated with the Day of Resurrection, the proclamation is about the Great Announcement

⁵⁵⁹ Kitab-i-Aqdas #117

⁵⁶⁰ Kitab-i-Aqdas #75

⁵⁶¹ Kitab-i-Aqdas #118

⁵⁶² Kitab-i-Aqdas #100

⁵⁶³ 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.⁵⁶⁴ 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.

⁵⁶⁴ 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 9: A Structural Map of the Worlds of God

This appendix provides a reference framework for the terms used throughout this book when discussing the worlds of God. These terms describe relationships, functions, and stations of existence rather than physical locations or spatial realms. The purpose of this appendix is clarity and consistency, allowing readers to orient themselves without interrupting the narrative flow of the main chapters.

29.1 Worlds of God

The worlds of God are broad realms of existence beyond the material world. They represent levels of reality and meaning through which the soul journeys. Although not necessarily perceptible in a physical or spatial sense, these worlds are real and serve as the context for spiritual growth, transformation, and continuation beyond earthly life.

29.2 Kingdoms

Kingdoms are domains within the worlds of God associated with divine attributes. A kingdom may reflect an attribute such as Justice, Mercy, Knowledge, Power, or Command. Engagement with a kingdom shapes how an attribute is understood, experienced, and expressed by the soul as it matures.

29.3 Cities

Cities are shared spaces of meaning or experience within a kingdom. A city represents a collective context in which souls encounter similar conditions, lessons, or spiritual realities. Cities emphasize the relational and communal dimensions of spiritual existence rather than isolation or individualism.

29.4 Schools

Schools are contexts of learning and maturation within a city. They represent processes through which the soul acquires understanding, refinement, discipline, or detachment. Progress through schools is not uniform and depends on the soul's capacity, receptivity, and spiritual condition.

29.5 The Celestial Concourse

The Celestial Concourse refers to the gathering or communion of exalted souls and divine realities. It reflects unity, harmony, and cooperation in service to the will of God. The Concourse is not confined to a single world or kingdom but participates across realms of existence.

29.6 Angels

Angels are beings or realities associated with divine action, guidance, and the execution of God's will. They may be understood as forces, perfected souls, or expressions of divine attributes in action. Angels are not necessarily bound to anthropomorphic form or physical limitation.

29.7 Sidrat al-Muntahá (The Lote-Tree)

The Sidrat al-Muntahá represents the boundary at which created knowledge reaches its limit. It marks the meeting point between the created worlds and divine Revelation. Beyond this horizon lies that which cannot be fully grasped or comprehended by created beings.

29.8 The Mother Book

The Mother Book is the source from which divine knowledge and Revelation proceed. It represents divine order, coherence, and originating wisdom. Access to the Mother Book is mediated through Revelation rather than independent human inquiry.

29.9 The Holy Spirit and the Holy Maiden

The Holy Spirit and the Holy Maiden are expressions of divine inspiration, communication, and life-giving influence. They serve as intermediaries through which Revelation, guidance, and confirmation are conveyed to creation. These realities emphasize God's active and sustaining presence within the worlds of God.

30. Appendix 10: The Bayanic Calendar

1. Month #1: Arabic Name: Bahá'; English Name: Splendor; Elemental Phase: Fire; Thematic Phase: Glorification; Spiritual Function: 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. Month #2: Arabic Name: Jalál; English Name: Glory; Elemental Phase: Fire; Thematic Phase: Glorification; Spiritual Function: Kindles the fire of hearts; glory of divine majesty
3. Month #3: Arabic Name: Jamál; English Name: Beauty; Elemental Phase: Fire; Thematic Phase: Glorification; Spiritual Function: Radiates divine beauty; fuels yearning and love
4. Month #4: Arabic Name: 'Azamat; English Name: Grandeur; Elemental Phase: Air; Thematic Phase: Praise; Spiritual Function: Spirits are created and sustained through grandeur
5. Month #5: Arabic Name: Núr; English Name: Light; Elemental Phase: Air; Thematic Phase: Praise; Spiritual Function: Light of divine guidance permeates all realities
6. Month #6: Arabic Name: Rahmat; English Name: Mercy; Elemental Phase: Air; Thematic Phase: Praise; Spiritual Function: Mercy as the sustaining breath of spiritual life
7. Month #7: Arabic Name: Kalimát; English Name: Words; Elemental Phase: Air; Thematic Phase: Praise; Spiritual Function: Divine Word as sustaining truth
8. Month #8: Arabic Name: Kamál; English Name: Perfection; Elemental Phase: Water; Thematic Phase: Oneness; Spiritual Function: Dies to imperfection, lives in affirmation of truth

9. Month #9: Arabic Name: Asmá'; English Name: Names; Elemental Phase: Water; Thematic Phase: Oneness; Spiritual Function: Realization of divine Names beyond negation
10. Month #10: Arabic Name: 'Izzat; English Name: Might; Elemental Phase: Water; Thematic Phase: Oneness; Spiritual Function: Strength comes through detachment from ego
11. Month #11: Arabic Name: Mashíyyat; English Name: Will; Elemental Phase: Water; Thematic Phase: Oneness; Spiritual Function: Submission to the divine Will negates self-will
12. Month #12: Arabic Name: 'Ilm; English Name: Knowledge; Elemental Phase: Water; Thematic Phase: Oneness; Spiritual Function: True knowledge arises through divine affirmation
13. Month #13: Arabic Name: Qudrat; English Name: Power; Elemental Phase: Water; Thematic Phase: Oneness; Spiritual Function: Divine power is manifest through surrender
14. Month #14: Arabic Name: Qawl; English Name: Speech; Elemental Phase: Dust; Thematic Phase: Magnification; Spiritual Function: Exalted speech gives life to souls purified from falsehood
15. Month #15: Arabic Name: Masá'il; English Name: Questions; Elemental Phase: Dust; Thematic Phase: Magnification; Spiritual Function: Questioning as a means of spiritual revival
16. Month #16: Arabic Name: Sharaf; English Name: Honor; Elemental Phase: Dust; Thematic Phase: Magnification; Spiritual Function: Honor gained by steadfastness in God's love
17. Month #17: Arabic Name: Sultán; English Name: Sovereignty; Elemental Phase: Dust; Thematic Phase: Magnification; Spiritual Function: Life granted by renouncing all but divine sovereignty
18. Month #18: Arabic Name: Mulk; English Name: Dominion; Elemental Phase: Dust; Thematic Phase: Magnification; Spiritual Function: All divine elements are gathered into earthly dominion
19. Ayyám-i-Há: English Name: The Days of Ha; Thematic Phase: Intercalary; Spiritual Function: Days outside the calendar cycle; devoted to hospitality, charity, and spiritual preparation before the Fast.
20. Month #19: Arabic Name: 'Alá'; English Name: Loftiness; Elemental Phase: Dust; Thematic Phase: Magnification; Spiritual Function: Final culmination; fruit of divine creation realized

Here are the days of the week⁵⁶⁵:

1. Arabic Name: Jalál; English Meaning: Glory; Julian Counterpart: Saturday
 2. Arabic Name: Jamál; English Meaning: Beauty; Julian Counterpart: Sunday
 3. Arabic Name: Kamál; English Meaning: Perfection; Julian Counterpart: Monday
 4. Arabic Name: Fidál; English Meaning: Grace; Julian Counterpart: Tuesday
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5. Arabic Name: 'Idál; English Meaning: Justice; Julian Counterpart: Wednesday
6. Arabic Name: Istijlál; English Meaning: Majesty; Julian Counterpart: Thursday
7. Arabic Name: Istiqlál; English Meaning: Independence; Julian Counterpart: Friday

Names of the Years:

The following list identifies the words and symbolic letters that correspond to the numbers 1 through 19 within the mathematical and theological systems set forth in the writings of the Báb:

1. Alif: The first of all things and the station of the Point.
2. Bá': The first letter of the *Basmalah* and the beginning of the written Book.
3. Ab: The station of the singular third-person form and the beginning of derivation.
4. Dál: The throne of the Will and the fourth pillar of the Temple.
5. Báb: The letter *Há* (5) and the manifest aspect of the human temple.
6. Váv: The inner side of the human temple and the number of the word "He" (*Huva*).
7. Abad: The number of the "reeds" in the thicket of the Divine Realm and the Seven Acts of God.
8. Ját: The second letter of the name of the Point and the numerical value of the letter *Há* in the rank of air.
9. Bahá: The first month of the year and the name of the Unseen.
10. Hubb: The letter *Yá'* (10) and the rank of manifestation within the first decade.
11. Bahháj: The age of maturity for marriage and the number of the word *Huwa* (*He*).
12. Javáb: The number of the letters of the testimony "La ilaha illa'Llah" and the pillars of the Manifest Name.
13. Ahad: The Name of Oneness and the number of the station of the Unseen.
14. Vahháb: The number of the "Hand of God" and the total of the Letters of the Face.
15. Vidád: The number of the "wall" (*bi-súr*) mentioned in the mysteries of the Surih of Unity.
16. Badí': A station of completion and the rank of the first manifestation of the name *al-Jawád*.
17. Bahí: The spirit of geometry and the name whose beginning is *Bahá'*.
18. Abhá: The number of the word *Hayy* (The Living) and the count of the Letters of the Living circling the Point.
19. Váhid: The number of all things (*Kullu Shay'*) in its first degree and the name of the Unity.

31. 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)
- 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

32. 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:

32.1 Foundational Virtues

1. Fear of God
2. Love of God
3. Moderation

32.2 Innate Virtues

1. Piety
2. Pure Truthfulness
3. Courtesy
4. Loyalty
5. Trustworthiness

32.3 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

33. Appendix 4: The Bayanic Mithqal

33.0.1 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)⁵⁶⁶
- 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

⁵⁶⁶ Marcinkowski, M. Ismail, Measures and weights in the Islamic world : an English translation of Walther Hinz's hanbook "Islamische Masse und Gewichte" (2003)

34. 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.

35. Appendix 6: Child Development Model

35.1 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.

35.1.1 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.

36. Appendix 7: Political Leaders in 1873

36.1 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 ⁵⁶⁷

⁵⁶⁷ 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 ⁵⁶⁸
Denmark	Colonial Power	N/A	Christian IX	King

36.2 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

36.3 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

⁵⁶⁸ 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

36.4 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

37. Appendix 8: Trusteeship Levels and Roles

Level of Authority	Objective	Functional Roles	Witness (The Observation)	Trustee (The Responsibility)	Helper (The Action)
Level 1: Inspiration	Individual Integrity & Truth	Artist, Scientist, Friend	Identifying the “Divine Names” (Virtues) and laws of reality.	Guarding the purity of truth, creativity, and personal loyalty.	Inspiring radiance and “Independent Investigation” in others.
Level 2: Education	Moral & Spiritual Upbringing	Parent, Teacher, Scholar, Religious Leader	Noticing the specific “Milk, Fruit, or Meat” required for a soul’s growth.	Acting as a “Spiritual Physician” for those in one’s care.	Healing trauma and nurturing “God-consciousness” through wisdom.
Level 3: Honor	Human Rights & Social Identity	Social Work Organizer, NGO Leader, Lawyer	Recognizing where the “Right to Identity” or “Honor” is being oppressed.	Protecting the sacred boundaries of the soul and the property of others.	Intervening against “Slander” and advocating for the vulnerable.
Level 4: Welfare	Provision & Community Support	Business Owner/Manager, Wealth Manager	Viewing wealth and resources not as personal status, but as public trust.	Managing Endowments and capital for the “Salvation of Nations.”	Generating ethical prosperity and funding “Elevated Places” of service.
Level 5: Governance	Global & Local Peace	Politician, Legislator, Judge, Monarch, Diplomat, General	Discerning “Common Affairs” and the collective security of the people.	Exercising authority only via Consent and “Consultation.”	Establishing the Lesser Peace and protecting the “Rights of All.”

