

COMPREHENSION AND THE FUNCTIONING OF THE SOUL

Faculties of Mind and Human Soul

1. Now regarding the question whether the faculties of the mind and the human soul are one and the same. These faculties are but the inherent properties of the soul, such as the power of imagination, of thought, of understanding; powers that are the essential requisites of the reality of man, even as the solar ray is the inherent property of the sun. The temple of man is like unto a mirror, his soul is as the sun, and his mental faculties even as the rays that emanate from that source of light. The ray may cease to fall upon the mirror, but it can in no wise be dissociated from the sun.

In short, the point is this, that the world of man is supernatural in its relation to the vegetable kingdom, though in reality it is not so. Relatively to the plant, the reality of man, his power of hearing and sight, are all supernatural, and for the plant to comprehend that reality and the nature of the powers of man's mind is impossible. In like manner for man to comprehend the Divine Essence and the nature of the great Hereafter is in no wise possible. The merciful outpourings of that Divine Essence, however, are vouchsafed unto all beings and it is incumbent upon man to ponder in his heart upon the effusions of the Divine Grace, the soul being counted as one, rather than upon the Divine Essence itself. This is the utmost limit for human understanding. As it hath previously been mentioned, these attributes and perfections that we recount of the Divine Essence, these we have derived from the existence and observation of beings, and it is not that we have comprehended the essence and perfection of God. When we say that the Divine Essence understandeth and is free, we do not mean that we have discovered the Divine Will and Purpose, but rather that we have acquired knowledge of them through the Divine Grace revealed and manifested in the realities of things.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Tablet to August Forel*, pp. 24-26

2. So the stone, the earth, the tree, however much they may evolve, cannot comprehend the reality of man and cannot imagine the powers of sight, of hearing, and of the other senses, although they are all alike created. Therefore, how can man, the created, understand the reality of the pure Essence of the Creator?

‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Some Answered Questions*, p. 147

Methods of Comprehension

3. There are only four accepted methods of comprehension--that is to say, the realities of things are understood by these four methods.

The first method is by the senses--that is to say, all that the eye, the ear, the taste, the smell, the touch perceive is understood by this method. Today this method is considered the most perfect by all the European philosophers: they say that the principal method of gaining knowledge is through the senses; they consider it supreme, although it is imperfect, for it commits errors. For example, the greatest of the senses is the power of sight. The sight sees the mirage as water, and it sees images reflected in mirrors as real and existent; large bodies which are distant appear to be small, and a whirling point appears as a circle. The sight believes the earth to be motionless and sees the sun in motion, and in many similar cases it makes mistakes. Therefore, we cannot trust it.

The second is the method of reason, which was that of the ancient philosophers, the pillars of wisdom; this is the method of the understanding. They proved things by reason and held firmly to logical proofs; all their arguments are arguments of reason. Notwithstanding this, they differed greatly, and their opinions were contradictory. They even changed their views--that is to say, during twenty years they would prove the existence of a thing by logical arguments, and afterward they would deny it by logical arguments--so much so that Plato at first logically proved the immobility of the earth and the movement of the sun; later by logical arguments he proved that the sun was the stationary center, and that the earth was moving. Afterward the Ptolemaic theory was spread abroad, and the idea of Plato was entirely forgotten, until at last a new observer again called it to life. Thus all the mathematicians disagreed, although they relied upon arguments of reason. In the same way, by logical arguments, they would prove a problem at a certain time, then afterward by arguments of the same nature they would deny it. So one of the philosophers would firmly uphold a theory for a time with strong arguments and proofs to support it, which afterward he would retract and contradict by arguments of reason. Therefore, it is evident that the method of reason is not perfect, for the differences of the ancient philosophers, the want of stability and the variations of their opinions, prove this. For if it were perfect, all ought to be united in their ideas and agreed in their opinions.

The third method of understanding is by tradition--that is, through the text of the Holy Scriptures--for people say, "In the Old and New Testaments, God spoke thus." This method equally is not perfect, because the traditions are understood by the reason. As the reason itself is liable to err, how can it be said that in interpreting the meaning of the traditions it will not err, for it is possible for it to make mistakes, and certainty cannot be attained. This is the method of the religious leaders; whatever they understand and comprehend from the text of the books is that which their reason understands from the text, and not necessarily the real truth; for the reason is like a balance, and the meanings contained in the text of the Holy Books are like the thing which is weighed. If the balance is untrue, how can the weight be ascertained?

Know then: that which is in the hands of people, that which they believe, is liable to error. For, in proving or disproving a thing, if a proof is brought forward which is taken from the evidence of our senses, this method, as has become evident, is not perfect; if the proofs are intellectual, the same is true; or if they are traditional, such proofs also are not perfect. Therefore, there is no standard in the hands of people upon which we can rely.

But the bounty of the Holy Spirit gives the true method of comprehension which is infallible and indubitable. This is through the help of the Holy Spirit which comes to man, and this is the condition in which certainty can alone be attained.

'Abdu'l-Bahá: Some Answered Questions, pp. 297-299

Human Knowledge Is Of Two Kinds

4. A subject that is essential¹ for the comprehension of the questions that we have mentioned, and of others of which we are about to speak, so that the essence of the problems may be understood, is this: that human knowledge is of two kinds. One is the knowledge of things perceptible to the senses--that is to say, things which the eye, or ear, or smell, or taste, or touch can perceive, which are called objective or sensible. So the sun, because it can be seen, is said to be objective; and in the same way sounds are sensible because the ear hears them;

¹ Lit., the pivot.

perfumes are sensible because they can be inhaled and the sense of smell perceives them; foods are sensible because the palate perceives their sweetness, sourness or saltiness; heat and cold are sensible because the feelings perceive them. These are said to be sensible realities.

The other kind of human knowledge is intellectual--that is to say, it is a reality of the intellect; it has no outward form and no place and is not perceptible to the senses. For example, the power of intellect is not sensible; none of the inner qualities of man is a sensible thing; on the contrary, they are intellectual realities. So love is a mental reality and not sensible; for this reality the ear does not hear, the eye does not see, the smell does not perceive, the taste does not discern, the touch does not feel. Even ethereal matter, the forces of which are said in physics to be heat, light, electricity and magnetism, is an intellectual reality, and is not sensible. In the same way, nature, also, in its essence is an intellectual reality and is not sensible; the human spirit is an intellectual, not sensible reality. In explaining these intellectual realities, one is obliged to express them by sensible figures because in exterior existence there is nothing that is not material. Therefore, to explain the reality of the spirit--its condition, its station--one is obliged to give explanations under the forms of sensible things because in the external world all that exists is sensible. For example, grief and happiness are intellectual things; when you wish to express those spiritual qualities you say: "My heart is oppressed; my heart is dilated," though the heart of man is neither oppressed nor dilated. This is an intellectual or spiritual state, to explain which you are obliged to have recourse to sensible figures. Another example: you say, "such an individual made great progress," though he is remaining in the same place; or again, "such a one's position was exalted," although, like everyone else, he walks upon the earth. This exaltation and this progress are spiritual states and intellectual realities, but to explain them you are obliged to have recourse to sensible figures because in the exterior world there is nothing that is not sensible.

So the symbol of knowledge is light, and of ignorance, darkness; but reflect, is knowledge sensible light, or ignorance sensible darkness? No, they are merely symbols. These are only intellectual states, but when you desire to express them outwardly, you call knowledge light, and ignorance darkness. You say: "My heart was gloomy, and it became enlightened." Now, that light of knowledge, and that darkness of ignorance, are intellectual realities, not sensible ones; but when we seek for explanations in the external world, we are obliged to give them a sensible form.

Then it is evident that the dove which descended upon Christ was not a material dove, but it was a spiritual state, which, that it might be comprehensible, was expressed by a sensible figure. Thus in the Old Testament it is said that God appeared as a pillar of fire: this does not signify the material form; it is an intellectual reality which is expressed by a sensible image.

Christ says, "The Father is in the Son, and the Son is in the Father." Was Christ within God, or God within Christ? No, in the name of God! On the contrary, this is an intellectual state which is expressed in a sensible figure.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 83-85

The Power And The Comprehension Of The Human Spirit Are Of Two Kinds

5. Yesterday we were occupied in discussing the immortality of the spirit. Know that the power and the comprehension of the human spirit are of two kinds--that is to say, they perceive and act in two different modes. One way is through instruments and organs: thus with this eye it sees; with this ear it hears; with this tongue it talks. Such is the action of the spirit, and the

perception of the reality of man, by means of organs--that is to say, that the spirit is the seer, through the eyes; the spirit is the hearer, through the ear; the spirit is the speaker, through the tongue.

The other manifestation of the powers and actions of the spirit is without instruments and organs. For example, in the state of sleep without eyes it sees; without an ear it hears; without a tongue it speaks; without feet it runs. Briefly, these actions are beyond the means of instruments and organs. How often it happens that it sees a dream in the world of sleep, and its signification becomes apparent two years afterward in corresponding events. In the same way, how many times it happens that a question which one cannot solve in the world of wakefulness is solved in the world of dreams. In wakefulness the eye sees only for a short distance, but in dreams he who is in the East sees the West. Awake he sees the present; in sleep he sees the future. In wakefulness, by means of rapid transit, at the most he can travel only twenty farsakhs² an hour; in sleep, in the twinkling of an eye, he traverses the East and West. For the spirit travels in two different ways: without means, which is spiritual traveling; and with means, which is material traveling: as birds which fly, and those which are carried.

In the time of sleep this body is as though dead; it does not see nor hear; it does not feel; it has no consciousness, no perception--that is to say, the powers of man have become inactive, but the spirit lives and subsists. Nay, its penetration is increased, its flight is higher, and its intelligence is greater. To consider that after the death of the body the spirit perishes is like imagining that a bird in a cage will be destroyed if the cage is broken, though the bird has nothing to fear from the destruction of the cage. Our body is like the cage, and the spirit is like the bird. We see that without the cage this bird flies in the world of sleep; therefore, if the cage becomes broken, the bird will continue and exist. Its feelings will be even more powerful, its perceptions greater, and its happiness increased. In truth, from hell it reaches a paradise of delights because for the thankful birds there is no paradise greater than freedom from the cage. That is why with utmost joy and happiness the martyrs hasten to the plain of sacrifice.

In wakefulness the eye of man sees at the utmost as far as one hour of distance³ because through the instrumentality of the body the power of the spirit is thus determined; but with the inner sight and the mental eye it sees America, and it can perceive that which is there, and discover the conditions of things and organize affairs. If, then, the spirit were the same as the body, it would be necessary that the power of the inner sight should also be in the same proportion. Therefore, it is evident that this spirit is different from the body, and that the bird is different from the cage, and that the power and penetration of the spirit is stronger without the intermediary of the body. Now, if the instrument is abandoned, the possessor of the instrument continues to act. For example, if the pen is abandoned or broken, the writer remains living and present; if a house is ruined, the owner is alive and existing. This is one of the logical evidences for the immortality of the soul.

There is another: this body becomes weak or heavy or sick, or it finds health; it becomes tired or rested; sometimes the hand or leg is amputated, or its physical power is crippled; it becomes blind or deaf or dumb; its limbs may become paralyzed; briefly, the body may have all the imperfections. Nevertheless, the spirit in its original state, in its own spiritual perception, will be eternal and perpetual; it neither finds any imperfection, nor will it become crippled. But when the body is wholly subjected to disease and misfortune, it is deprived of the bounty of the spirit,

² One farsakh is equivalent to about four miles.

³ It is a Persian custom to reckon distance by time.

like a mirror which, when it becomes broken or dirty or dusty, cannot reflect the rays of the sun nor any longer show its bounties.

We have already explained that the spirit of man is not in the body because it is freed and sanctified from entrance and exit, which are bodily conditions. The connection of the spirit with the body is like that of the sun with the mirror. Briefly, the human spirit is in one condition. It neither becomes ill from the diseases of the body nor cured by its health; it does not become sick, nor weak, nor miserable, nor poor, nor light, nor small--that is to say, it will not be injured because of the infirmities of the body, and no effect will be visible even if the body becomes weak, or if the hands and feet and tongue be cut off, or if it loses the power of hearing or sight. Therefore, it is evident and certain that the spirit is different from the body, and that its duration is independent of that of the body; on the contrary, the spirit with the utmost greatness rules in the world of the body; and its power and influence, like the bounty of the sun in the mirror, are apparent and visible. But when the mirror becomes dusty or breaks, it will cease to reflect the rays of the sun.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 227-229

Human Comprehension Is Different Than That Of The Animal

6. Thus it is clear that if there were not in man a power different from any of those of the animals, the latter would be superior to man in inventions and the comprehension of realities. Therefore, it is evident that man has a gift which the animal does not possess. Now, the animal perceives sensible things but does not perceive intellectual realities. For example, that which is within the range of its vision the animal sees, but that which is beyond the range of sight it is not possible for it to perceive, and it cannot imagine it. So it is not possible for the animal to understand that the earth has the form of a globe. But man from known things proves unknown things and discovers unknown truths. For example, man sees the curve of the horizon, and from this he infers the roundness of the earth. The Pole Star at Akka, for instance, is at 33-- that is to say, it is 33 above the horizon. When a man goes toward the North Pole, the Pole Star rises one degree above the horizon for each degree of distance that he travels--that is to say, the altitude of the Pole Star will be 34, then 40, then 50, then 60, then 70. If he reaches the North Pole the altitude of the Pole Star will be 90 or have attained the zenith--that is to say, will be directly overhead. This Pole Star and its ascension are sensible things. The further one goes toward the Pole, the higher the Pole Star rises; from these two known truths an unknown thing has been discovered--that is, that the horizon is curved, meaning that the horizon of each degree of the earth is a different horizon from that of another degree. Man perceives this and proves from it an invisible thing which is the roundness of the earth. This it is impossible for the animal to perceive. In the same way, it cannot understand that the sun is the center and that the earth revolves around it. The animal is the captive of the senses and bound by them; all that is beyond the senses, the things that they do not control, the animal can never understand, although in the outer senses it is greater than man. Hence it is proved and verified that in man there is a power of discovery by which he is distinguished from the animals, and this is the spirit of man.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 187-188

The Reality Of Man Embraces The Realities Of Things

7. Know that the reality of man embraces the realities of things, and discovers the verities, properties and secrets of things. So all these arts, wonders, sciences and knowledge have been discovered by the human reality. At one time these sciences, knowledge, wonders and arts were hidden and concealed secrets; then gradually the human reality discovered them and brought them from the realm of the invisible to the plane of the visible. Therefore, it is evident that the reality of man embraces things. Thus it is in Europe and discovers America; it is on the earth, and it makes discoveries in the heavens. It is the revealer of the secrets of things, and it is the knower of the realities of that which exists. These discoveries corresponding to the reality are similar to revelation, which is spiritual comprehension, divine inspiration and the association of human spirits. For instance, the Prophet says, "I saw, I said, I heard such a thing." It is, therefore, evident that the spirit has great perception without the intermediary of any of the five senses, such as the eyes or ears. Among spiritual souls there are spiritual understandings, discoveries, a communion which is purified from imagination and fancy, an association which is sanctified from time and place. So it is written in the Gospel that, on Mount Tabor, Moses and Elias came to Christ, and it is evident that this was not a material meeting. It was a spiritual condition which is expressed as a physical meeting.

'Abdu'l-Bahá: Some Answered Questions, p. 252

8. Existence is of two kinds: one is the existence of God which is beyond the comprehension of man. He, the invisible, the lofty and the incomprehensible, is preceded by no cause but rather is the Originator of the cause of causes. He, the Ancient, hath had no beginning and is the all-independent. The second kind of existence is the human existence. It is a common existence, comprehensible to the human mind, is not ancient, is dependent and hath a cause to it. The mortal substance does not become eternal and vice versa; the human kind does not become a Creator and vice versa. The transformation of the innate substance is impossible.

In the world of existence--that which is comprehensible--there are stages of mortality: the first stage is the mineral world, next is the vegetable world. In the latter world the mineral doth exist but with a distinctive feature which is the vegetable characteristic. Likewise in the animal world, the mineral and vegetable characteristics are present and in addition the characteristics of the animal world are to be found, which are the faculties of hearing and of sight. In the human world the characteristics of the mineral, vegetable and animal worlds are found and in addition that of the human kind, namely the intellectual characteristic, which discovereth the realities of things and comprehendeth universal principles.

Man, therefore, on the plane of the contingent world is the most perfect being. By man is meant the perfect individual, who is like unto a mirror in which the divine perfections are manifested and reflected. But the sun doth not descend from the height of its sanctity to enter into the mirror, but when the latter is purified and turned towards the Sun of Truth, the perfections of this Sun, consisting of light and heat, are reflected and manifested in that mirror. These souls are the Divine Manifestations of God.

'Abdu'l-Bahá: Selections ... 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Pp. 61-62

Powers Of Comprehension, Intelligence, And Knowledge Are Developmental

9. Praise be to God, throughout succeeding centuries and ages the call of civilization hath been raised, the world of humanity hath been advancing and progressing day by day, various countries have been developing by leaps and bounds, and material improvements have increased,

until the world of existence obtained universal capacity to receive the spiritual teachings and to hearken to the Divine Call. The suckling babe passeth through various physical stages, growing and developing at every stage, until its body reacheth the age of maturity. Having arrived at this stage it acquireth the capacity to manifest spiritual and intellectual perfections. The lights of comprehension, intelligence and knowledge become perceptible in it and the powers of its soul unfold. Similarly, in the contingent world, the human species hath undergone progressive physical changes and, by a slow process, hath scaled the ladder of civilization, realizing in itself the wonders, excellencies and gifts of humanity in their most glorious form, until it gained the capacity to express the splendours of spiritual perfections and divine ideals and became capable of hearkening to the call of God. Then at last the call of the Kingdom was raised, the spiritual virtues and perfections were revealed, the Sun of Reality dawned, and the teachings of the Most Great Peace, of the oneness of the world of humanity and of the universality of men, were promoted. We hope that the effulgence of these rays shall become more and more intense, and the ideal virtues more resplendent, so that the goal of this universal human process will be attained and the love of God will appear in the utmost grace and beauty and bedazzle all hearts.

‘**Abdu’-Bahá**: *Selections ... ‘Abdu’-Bahá*, pp. 285-286

Ignorance is Proof of Knowledge

10. For example, when you look at man, you see that he is weak. This very weakness of the creature is a proof of the power of the Eternal Almighty One, because, if there were no power, weakness could not be imagined. Then the weakness of the creature is a proof of the power of God; for if there were no power, there could be no weakness; so from this weakness it becomes evident that there is power in the world. Again, in the contingent world there is poverty; then necessarily wealth exists, since poverty is apparent in the world. In the contingent world there is ignorance; necessarily knowledge exists, because ignorance is found; for if there were no knowledge, neither would there be ignorance. Ignorance is the nonexistence of knowledge, and if there were no existence, nonexistence could not be realized.

‘**Abdu’l-Bahá**: *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 5-6

God Is Independent Of The Comprehension Of All Beings

11. Were you to ponder, but for a while, these utterances in your heart, you would surely find the portals of understanding unlocked before your face, and would behold all knowledge and the mysteries thereof unveiled before your eyes. Such things take place only that the souls of men may develop and be delivered from the prison-cage of self and desire. Otherwise, that ideal King hath, throughout eternity, been in His Essence independent of the comprehension of all beings, and will continue, for ever, in His own Being to be exalted above the adoration of every soul. A single breeze of His affluence doth suffice to adorn all mankind with the robe of wealth; and one drop out of the ocean of His bountiful grace is enough to confer upon all beings the glory of everlasting life. But inasmuch as the divine Purpose hath decreed that the true should be known from the false, and the sun from the shadow, He hath, therefore, in every season sent down upon mankind the showers of tests from His realm of glory.

Bahá’u’lláh: *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, pp. 52-53

12. We have also heard a number of the foolish of the earth assert that the genuine text of the heavenly Gospel doth not exist amongst the Christians, that it hath ascended unto heaven. How grievously they have erred! How oblivious of the fact that such a statement imputeth the gravest injustice and tyranny to a gracious and loving Providence! How could God, when once the Day-star of the beauty of Jesus had disappeared from the sight of His people, and ascended unto the fourth heaven, cause His holy Book, His most great testimony amongst His creatures, to disappear also? What would be left to that people to cling to from the setting of the day-star of Jesus until the rise of the sun of the Muhammadan Dispensation? What law could be their stay and guide? How could such people be made the victims of the avenging wrath of God, the omnipotent Avenger? How could they be afflicted with the scourge of chastisement by the heavenly King? Above all, how could the flow of the grace of the All-Bountiful be stayed? How could the ocean of His tender mercies be stilled? We take refuge with God, from that which His creatures have fancied about Him! Exalted is He above their comprehension!

Bahá'u'lláh: *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, pp. 89-90

The Divine Reality is Beyond Human Understanding

13. O NOBLE Friends! O Seekers for the Kingdom of God! Man all over the world is seeking for God. All that exists is God; but the Reality of Divinity is holy above all understanding.

The pictures of Divinity that come to our mind are the product of our fancy; they exist in the realm of our imagination. They are not adequate to the Truth; truth in its essence cannot be put into words.

Divinity cannot be comprehended because it is comprehending.

Man, who has also a real existence, is comprehended by God; therefore, the Divinity which man can understand is partial; it is not complete. Divinity is actual Truth and real existence, and not any representation of it. Divinity itself contains All, and is not contained.

Although the mineral, vegetable, animal and man all have actual being, yet the mineral has no knowledge of the vegetable. It cannot apprehend it. It cannot imagine nor understand it.

It is the same with the vegetable. Any progress it may make, however highly it may become developed, it will never apprehend the animal, nor understand it. It is, so to speak, without news of it. It has no ears, no sight, no understanding.

It is the same with the animal. However much it may progress in its own kingdom, however refined its feelings may become, it will have no real notion of the world of man or of his special intellectual faculties.

The animal cannot understand the roundness of the earth, nor its motion in space, nor the central position of the sun, nor can it imagine such a thing as the all-pervading ether.

Although the mineral, vegetable, animal and man himself are actual beings, the difference between their kingdoms prevents members of the lower degree from comprehending the essence and nature of those of the superior degree. This being so, how can the temporal and phenomenal comprehend the Lord of Hosts?

It is clear that this is impossible!

But the Essence of Divinity, the Sun of Truth, shines forth upon all horizons and is spreading its rays upon all things. Each creature is the recipient of some portion of that power, and man, who contains the perfection of the mineral, the vegetable and animal, as well as his own distinctive qualities, has become the noblest of created beings. It stands written that he is

made in the Image of God. Mysteries that were hidden he discovers; and secrets that were concealed he brings into the light. By Science and by Art he brings hidden powers into the region of the visible world. Man perceives the hidden law in created things and co-operates with it.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *‘Abdu’l-Bahá in London*, pp. 22-23

14. How wondrous is the unity of the Living, the Ever-Abiding God--a unity which is exalted above all limitations, that transcendeth the comprehension of all created things! He hath, from everlasting, dwelt in His inaccessible habitation of holiness and glory, and will unto everlasting continue to be enthroned upon the heights of His independent sovereignty and grandeur. How lofty hath been His incorruptible Essence, how completely independent of the knowledge of all created things, and how immensely exalted will it remain above the praise of all the inhabitants of the heavens and the earth!

From the exalted source, and out of the essence of His favor and bounty He hath entrusted every created thing with a sign of His knowledge, so that none of His creatures may be deprived of its share in expressing, each according to its capacity and rank, this knowledge. This sign is the mirror of His beauty in the world of creation. The greater the effort exerted for the refinement of this sublime and noble mirror, the more faithfully will it be made to reflect the glory of the names and attributes of God, and reveal the wonders of His signs and knowledge. Every created thing will be enabled (so great is this reflecting power) to reveal the potentialities of its pre-ordained station, will recognize its capacity and limitations, and will testify to the truth that “He, verily, is God; there is none other God besides Him.”...

Bahá’u’lláh: *Gleanings*, pp. 261-262

15. All glory be to Thee, O Lord my God! I bear witness for Thee to that whereto Thou Thyself didst bear witness for Thine own Self, ere the day Thou hadst created the creation or made mention thereof, that Thou art God, and that there is none other God beside Thee. From eternity Thou hast, in Thy transcendent oneness, been immeasurably exalted above Thy servants’ conception of Thy unity, and wilt to eternity remain, in Thine unapproachable singleness, far above the praise of Thy creatures. No words that any one beside Thee may utter can ever beseem Thee, and no man’s description except Thine own description can befit Thy nature. All who adore Thy unity have been sore perplexed to fathom the mystery of Thy oneness, and all have confessed their powerlessness to attain unto the comprehension of Thine essence and to scale the pinnacle of Thy knowledge. The mighty have all acknowledged their weakness, and the learned recognized their ignorance. They that are possessed of influence are as nothing when compared with the revelations of Thy stupendous sovereignty, and they who are exalted sink into oblivion when brought before the manifestations of Thy great glory. The radiance of the brightest luminaries is eclipsed by the effulgent splendors of Thy face, and the tongues of the most eloquent of speakers falter under the unrestrained effusions of Thy holy utterance, and the foundations of the mightiest structures tremble before the onrushing force of Thy compelling power.

Bahá’u’lláh: *Prayers and Meditations*, pp. 130-131

16. Lauded be Thy name, O my God! I testify that no thought of Thee, howsoever wondrous, can ever ascend into the heaven of Thy knowledge, and no praise of Thee, no matter how transcendent, can soar up to the atmosphere of Thy wisdom. From eternity Thou hast been

removed far above the reach and the ken of the comprehension of Thy servants, and immeasurably exalted above the strivings of Thy bondslaves to express Thy mystery. What power can the shadowy creature claim to possess when face to face with Him Who is the Uncreated?

Bahá'u'lláh: *Prayers and Meditations*, p. 149

17. As to me--and to this Thou art Thyself my witness --I call upon Thee saying: "I have no will of mine own, O my Lord, and my Master and my Ruler, before the indications of Thy will, and can have no purpose in the face of the revelation of Thy purpose. I swear by Thy glory! I wish only what Thou wishest, and cherish only what Thou cherishest. What I have chosen for myself is what Thou hast Thyself chosen for me, O Thou the Possessor of my soul!" Nay, I find myself to be altogether nothing when face to face with the manifold revelations of Thy names, how much less when confronted with the effulgent splendors of the light of Thine own Self. O miserable me! Were I to attempt merely to describe Thee, such an attempt would itself be an evidence of my impiety, and would attest my heedlessness in the face of the clear and resplendent tokens of Thy oneness. Who else except Thee can claim to be worthy of any notice in the face of Thine own revelation, and who is he that can be deemed sufficiently qualified to adequately praise Thee, or to pride himself on having befittingly described Thy glory? Nay--and to this Thou dost Thyself bear witness--it hath incontrovertibly been made evident that Thou art the one God, the Incomparable, Whose help is implored by all men. From everlasting Thou wert alone, with none to describe Thee, and wilt abide for ever the same with no one else to equal or rival Thee. Were the existence of any co-equal with Thee to be recognized, how could it then be maintained that Thou art the Incomparable, or that Thy Godhead is immeasurably exalted above all peers or likeness? The contemplation of the highest minds that have recognized Thy unity failed to attain unto the comprehension of the One Thou hast created through the word of Thy commandment, how much more must it be powerless to soar into the atmosphere of the knowledge of Thine own Being. Every praise which any tongue or pen can recount, every imagination which any heart can devise, is debarred from the station which Thy most exalted Pen hath ordained, how much more must it fall short of the heights which Thou hast Thyself immensely exalted above the conception and the description of any creature. For the attempt of the evanescent to conceive the signs of the Uncreated is as the stirring of the drop before the tumult of Thy billowing oceans. Nay, forbid it, O my God, that I should thus venture to describe Thee, for every similitude and comparison must pertain to what is essentially created by Thee. How can then such similitude and comparison ever befit Thee, or reach up unto Thy Self?

Bahá'u'lláh: *Prayers and Meditations*, pp. 193-194

18. My God, Thou Whom I adore and worship, Who art Most Powerful! I testify that no description by any created thing can ever reveal Thee, and no praise which any being is able to utter can express Thee. Neither the comprehension of any one in the whole world, nor the intelligence of any of its peoples, can, as it befiteth Thee, gain admittance into the court of Thy holiness, or unravel Thy mystery. What sin hath kept the inmates of the city of Thy names so far from Thine all-glorious Horizon, and deprived them of access to Thy most great Ocean? One single letter of Thy Book is the mother of all utterances, and a word therefrom the begetter of all creation. What ingratitude have Thy servants shown forth that Thou hast withheld them, one and all, from recognizing Thee? A drop out of the ocean of Thy mercy sufficeth to quench the flames of hell, and a spark of the fire of Thy love is enough to set ablaze a whole world.

Bahá'u'lláh: *Prayers and Meditations*, p. 245

19. GOD testifieth that there is none other God but Him. His are the kingdoms in the heavens and on the earth and all that is between them. He is exalted above the comprehension of all things, and is inscrutable to the mind of every created being; none shall be able to fathom the oneness of His Being or to unravel the nature of His Existence. No peer or likeness, no similitude or equal can ever be joined with Him. Yield ye praise then unto Him and glorify Him and bear ye witness to the sanctity and oneness of His Being and magnify His might and majesty with wondrous glorification. This will enable you to gain admittance into the all-highest Paradise. Would that ye had firm faith in the revelation of the signs of God.

The Bab: *Selections from the Báb*, p. 154

20. I have known Thee by Thy making known unto me that Thou art unknowable to anyone save Thyself. I have become apprised by the creation Thou hast fashioned out of sheer non-existence that the way to attain the comprehension of Thine Essence is barred to everyone. Thou art God, besides Whom there is none other God. No one except Thine Own Self can comprehend Thy nature. Thou art without peer or partner. From everlasting Thou hast been alone with no one else besides Thee and unto everlasting Thou wilt continue to be the same, while no created thing shall ever approach Thine exalted position.

The Báb: *Selections from the Báb*, p. 196

21. Exalted art Thou, O my God! All mankind are powerless to celebrate Thy glory and the minds of men fall short of yielding praise unto Thee. I bear witness in Thy presence, O my God, that Thou art made known by Thy wondrous tokens and art recognized through the revelations of Thy signs. The fact that Thou hast brought us forth into existence prompteth me to acknowledge before Thee that Thou art immeasurably exalted above our praise, and by virtue of the qualities wherewith Thou hast endowed our beings I testify unto Thee that Thou art transcendent beyond our comprehension.

The Báb: *Selections from the Báb*, p. 197

22. Question: What is the meaning of the Trinity, of the Three Persons in One?

Answer: The Divine Reality, which is purified and sanctified from the understanding of human beings and which can never be imagined by the people of wisdom and of intelligence, is exempt from all conception. That Lordly Reality admits of no division; for division and multiplicity are properties of creatures which are contingent existences, and not accidents which happen to the self-existent.

'Abdu'l-Bahá: *Some Answered Questions*, p. 113

23. We have already explained that the names and attributes of the Divinity themselves require the existence of beings. Although this subject has been explained in detail, we will speak of it again briefly. Know that an educator without pupils cannot be imagined; a monarch without subjects could not exist; a master without scholars cannot be appointed; a creator without a creature is impossible; a provider without those provided for cannot be conceived; for all the divine names and attributes demand the existence of beings. If we could imagine a time when no beings existed, this imagination would be the denial of the Divinity of God. Moreover, absolute nonexistence cannot become existence. If the beings were absolutely nonexistent, existence

would not have come into being. Therefore, as the Essence of Unity (that is, the existence of God) is everlasting and eternal--that is to say, it has neither beginning nor end--it is certain that this world of existence, this endless universe, has neither beginning nor end. Yes, it may be that one of the parts of the universe, one of the globes, for example, may come into existence, or may be disintegrated, but the other endless globes are still existing; the universe would not be disordered nor destroyed. On the contrary, existence is eternal and perpetual. As each globe has a beginning, necessarily it has an end because every composition, collective or particular, must of necessity be decomposed. The only difference is that some are quickly decomposed, and others more slowly, but it is impossible that a composed thing should not eventually be decomposed.

‘**Abdu’l-Bahá**: *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 180-181

24. As our knowledge of things, even of created and limited things, is knowledge of their qualities and not of their essence, how is it possible to comprehend in its essence the Divine Reality, which is unlimited? For the inner essence of anything is not comprehended, but only its qualities. For example, the inner essence of the sun is unknown, but is understood by its qualities, which are heat and light. The inner essence of man is unknown and not evident, but by its qualities it is characterized and known. Thus everything is known by its qualities and not by its essence. Although the mind encompasses all things, and the outward beings are comprehended by it, nevertheless these beings with regard to their essence are unknown; they are only known with regard to their qualities.

Then how can the eternal everlasting Lord, Who is held sanctified from comprehension and conception, be known by His essence? That is to say, as things can only be known by their qualities and not by their essence, it is certain that the Divine Reality is unknown with regard to its essence and is known with regard to its attributes. Besides, how can the phenomenal reality embrace the Preexistent Reality? For comprehension is the result of encompassing--embracing must be, so that comprehension may be--and the Essence of Unity surrounds all and is not surrounded.

Also the difference of conditions in the world of beings is an obstacle to comprehension. For example, this mineral belongs to the mineral kingdom; however far it may rise, it can never comprehend the power of growth. The plants, the trees, whatever progress they may make, cannot conceive of the power of sight or the powers of the other senses; and the animal cannot imagine the condition of man--that is to say, his spiritual powers. Difference of condition is an obstacle to knowledge; the inferior degree cannot comprehend the superior degree. How then can the phenomenal reality comprehend the Preexistent Reality? Knowing God, therefore, means the comprehension and the knowledge of His attributes, and not of His Reality. This knowledge of the attributes is also proportioned to the capacity and power of man; it is not absolute. Philosophy consists in comprehending the reality of things as they exist, according to the capacity and the power of man. For the phenomenal reality can comprehend the Preexistent attributes only to the extent of the human capacity. The mystery of Divinity is sanctified and purified from the comprehension of the beings, for all that comes to the imagination is that which man understands, and the power of the understanding of man does not embrace the Reality of the Divine Essence. All that man is able to understand are the attributes of Divinity, the radiance of which appears and is visible in the world and within men's souls.

When we look at the world and within men's souls, we see wonderful signs of the divine perfections, which are clear and apparent; for the reality of things proves the Universal Reality. The Reality of Divinity may be compared to the sun, which from the height of its magnificence

shines upon all the horizons; and each horizon, and each soul, receives a share of its radiance. If this light and these rays did not exist, beings would not exist; all beings express something and partake of some ray and portion of this light. The splendors of the perfections, bounties and attributes of God shine forth and radiate from the reality of the Perfect Man--that is to say, the Unique One, the supreme Manifestation of God. Other beings receive only one ray, but the supreme Manifestation is the mirror for this Sun, which appears and becomes manifest in it, with all its perfections, attributes, signs and wonders.

The knowledge of the Reality of the Divinity is impossible and unattainable, but the knowledge of the Manifestations of God is the knowledge of God, for the bounties, splendors and divine attributes are apparent in Them. Therefore, if man attains to the knowledge of the Manifestations of God, he will attain to the knowledge of God; and if he be neglectful of the knowledge of the Holy Manifestations, he will be bereft of the knowledge of God. It is then ascertained and proved that the Holy Manifestations are the center of the bounty, signs and perfections of God. Blessed are those who receive the light of the divine bounties from the enlightened Dawning-points!

We hope that the Friends of God, like an attractive force, will draw these bounties from the source itself, and that they will arise with such illumination and signs that they will be evident proofs of the Sun of Reality.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Some Answered Questions, pp. 220-222

25. The existence of the Divine Being hath been clearly established, on the basis of logical proofs, but the reality of the Godhead is beyond the grasp of the mind. When thou dost carefully consider this matter, thou wilt see that a lower plane can never comprehend a higher. The mineral kingdom, for example, which is lower, is precluded from comprehending the vegetable kingdom; for the mineral, any such understanding would be utterly impossible. In the same way, no matter how far the vegetable kingdom may develop, it will achieve no conception of the animal kingdom, and any such comprehension at its level would be unthinkable, for the animal occupieth a plane higher than that of the vegetable: this tree cannot conceive of hearing and sight. And the animal kingdom, no matter how far it may evolve, can never become aware of the reality of the intellect, which discovereth the inner essence of all things, and comprehendeth those realities which cannot be seen; for the human plane as compared with that of the animal is very high. And although these beings all co-exist in the contingent world, in each case the difference in their stations precludeth their grasp of the whole; for no lower degree can understand a higher, such comprehension being impossible.

The higher plane, however, understandeth the lower. The animal, for instance, comprehendeth the mineral and vegetable, the human understandeth the planes of the animal, vegetable and mineral. But the mineral cannot possibly understand the realms of man. And notwithstanding the fact that all these entities co-exist in the phenomenal world, even so, no lower degree can ever comprehend a higher.

Then how could it be possible for a contingent reality, that is, man, to understand the nature of that pre-existent Essence, the Divine Being? The difference in station between man and the Divine Reality is thousands upon thousands of times greater than the difference between vegetable and animal. And that which a human being would conjure up in his mind is but the fanciful image of his human condition, it doth not encompass God’s reality but rather is encompassed by it. That is, man graspeth his own illusory conceptions, but the Reality of Divinity can never be grasped: It, Itself, encompasseth all created things, and all created things

are in Its grasp. That Divinity which man doth imagine for himself existeth only in his mind, not in truth. Man, however, existeth both in his mind and in truth; thus man is greater than that fanciful reality which he is able to imagine.

The furthest limits of this bird of clay are these: he can flutter along for some short distance, into the endless vast; but he can never soar upward to the Sun in the high heavens. We must, nevertheless, set forth reasoned or inspired proofs as to the existence of the Divine Being, that is, proofs commensurate with the understanding of man.

It is obvious that all created things are connected one to another by a linkage complete and perfect, even, for example, as are the members of the human body. Note how all the members and component parts of the human body are connected one to another. In the same way, all the members of this endless universe are linked one to another. The foot and the step, for example, are connected to the ear and the eye; the eye must look ahead before the step is taken. The ear must hear before the eye will carefully observe. And whatever member of the human body is deficient, produceth a deficiency in the other members. The brain is connected with the heart and stomach, the lungs are connected with all the members. So is it with the other members of the body.

And each one of these members hath its own special function. The mind force--whether we call it pre-existent or contingent--doth direct and co-ordinate all the members of the human body, seeing to it that each part or member duly performeth its own special function. If, however, there be some interruption in the power of the mind, all the members will fail to carry out their essential functions, deficiencies will appear in the body and the functioning of its members, and the power will prove ineffective.

Likewise, look into this endless universe: a universal power inevitably existeth, which encompasseth all, directing and regulating all the parts of this infinite creation; and were it not for this Director, this Co-ordinator, the universe would be flawed and deficient. It would be even as a madman; whereas ye can see that this endless creation carrieth out its functions in perfect order, every separate part of it performing its own task with complete reliability, nor is there any flaw to be found in all its workings. Thus it is clear that a Universal Power existeth, directing and regulating this infinite universe. Every rational mind can grasp this fact.

Furthermore, although all created things grow and develop, yet are they subjected to influences from without. For instance, the sun giveth heat, the rain nourisheth, the wind bringeth life, so that man can develop and grow. Thus it is clear that the human body is under influences from the outside, and that without those influences man could not grow. And likewise, those outside influences are subjected to other influences in their turn. For example, the growth and development of a human being is dependent upon the existence of water, and water is dependent upon the existence of rain, and rain is dependent upon the existence of clouds, and clouds are dependent upon the existence of the sun, which causeth land and sea to produce vapour, the condensation of vapour forming the clouds. Thus each one of these entities exerteth its influence and is likewise influenced in its turn. Inescapably then, the process leadeth to One Who influenceth all, and yet is influenced by none, thus severing the chain. The inner reality of that Being, however, is not known, although His effects are clear and evident.

And further, all created beings are limited, and this very limitation of all beings proveth the reality of the Limitless; for the existence of a limited being denoteth the existence of a Limitless One.

To sum it up, there are many such proofs, establishing the existence of that Universal Reality. And since that Reality is pre-existent, It is untouched by the conditions that govern

phenomena; for whatever entity is subject to circumstances and the play of events is contingent, not pre-existent. Know then: that divinity which other communions and peoples have conjured up, falleth within the scope of their imagination, and not beyond it, whereas the reality of the Godhead is beyond all conceiving.

As to the Holy Manifestations of God, They are the focal points where the signs, tokens and perfections of that sacred, pre-existent Reality appear in all their splendour. They are an eternal grace, a heavenly glory, and on Them dependeth the everlasting life of humankind. To illustrate: the Sun of Truth dwelleth in a sky to which no soul hath any access, and which no mind can reach, and He is far beyond the comprehension of all creatures. Yet the Holy Manifestations of God are even as a looking-glass, burnished and without stain, which gathereth streams of light out of that Sun, and then scattereth the glory over the rest of creation. In that polished surface, the Sun with all Its majesty standeth clearly revealed. Thus, should the mirrored Sun proclaim, 'I am the Sun!' this is but truth; and should It cry, 'I am not the Sun!' this is the truth as well. And although the Day-Star, with all Its glory, Its beauty, Its perfections, be clearly visible in that mirror without stain, still It hath not come down from Its own lofty station in the realms above, It hath not made Its way into the mirror; rather doth It continue to abide, as It will forever, in the supernal heights of Its own holiness.

And further, all the earth's creatures require the bounty of the sun, for their very existence is dependent upon solar light and heat. Should they be deprived of the sun, they would be wiped out. This is the being with God, as referred to in the Holy Books: man must be with his Lord.

It is clear, then, that the essential reality of God is revealed in His perfections; and the sun, with its perfections, reflected in a mirror, is a visible thing, an entity clearly expressing the bounty of God.

My hope is that thou wilt acquire a perceptive eye, a hearing ear, and that the veils will be removed from thy sight.

'Abdu'l-Bahá: *Selections ... 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, pp. 46-51

26. Consider the rational faculty with which God hath endowed the essence of man. Examine thine own self, and behold how thy motion and stillness, thy will and purpose, thy sight and hearing, thy sense of smell and power of speech, and whatever else is related to, or transcendeth, thy physical senses or spiritual perceptions, all proceed from, and owe their existence to, this same faculty. So closely are they related unto it, that if in less than the twinkling of an eye its relationship to the human body be severed, each and every one of these senses will cease immediately to exercise its function, and will be deprived of the power to manifest the evidences of its activity. It is indubitably clear and evident that each of these afore-mentioned instruments has depended, and will ever continue to depend, for its proper functioning on this rational faculty, which should be regarded as a sign of the revelation of Him Who is the sovereign Lord of all. Through its manifestation all these names and attributes have been revealed, and by the suspension of its action they are all destroyed and perish.

It would be wholly untrue to maintain that this faculty is the same as the power of vision, inasmuch as the power of vision is derived from it and acteth in dependence upon it. It would, likewise, be idle to contend that this faculty can be identified with the sense of hearing, as the sense of hearing receiveth from the rational faculty the requisite energy for performing its functions.

This same relationship bindeth this faculty with whatsoever hath been the recipient of these names and attributes within the human temple. These diverse names and revealed attributes have

been generated through the agency of this sign of God. Immeasurably exalted is this sign, in its essence and reality, above all such names and attributes. Nay, all else besides it will, when compared with its glory, fade into utter nothingness and become a thing forgotten.

Wert thou to ponder in thine heart, from now until the end that hath no end, and with all the concentrated intelligence and understanding which the greatest minds have attained in the past or will attain in the future, this divinely ordained and subtle Reality, this sign of the revelation of the All-Abiding, All-Glorious God, thou wilt fail to comprehend its mystery or to appraise its virtue. Having recognized thy powerlessness to attain to an adequate understanding of that Reality which abideth within thee, thou wilt readily admit the futility of such efforts as may be attempted by thee, or by any of the created things, to fathom the mystery of the Living God, the Day Star of unfading glory, the Ancient of everlasting days. This confession of helplessness which mature contemplation must eventually impel every mind to make is in itself the acme of human understanding, and marketh the culmination of man's development.

Bahá'u'lláh: *Gleanings*, pp. 164-166

27. Existence is of two kinds: One is the existence of God which is beyond the comprehension of man. He, the invisible, the lofty and the incomprehensible, is preceded by no cause but rather is the originator of the Cause of Causes. He, the Ancient, has had no beginning and is the All-Independent. The second kind of existence is the human existence. It is a common existence, comprehensible to the human mind, is not ancient, is dependent and has a cause to it. The mortal substance does not become eternal and vice-versa; the human kind does not become a Creator and vice-versa. The transformation of the innate substance is impossible.

In the world of existence, that which is comprehensible, is in three stages of mortality: the first stage is the mineral world, next the vegetable world, and in the latter the mineral world does exist but has a distinctive feature which is the vegetable characteristic. Likewise, in the animal world, the mineral and vegetable characteristics are present and in addition the characteristics of the animal world are to be found: it has the faculties of hearing and of sight. In the human world the characteristics of the mineral, vegetable and animal worlds are found and in addition those of the human kind are existing. That is the intellectual characteristic, which discovers the realities of things and comprehends the all-important facts.

Man, therefore, on the plane of the contingent beings is the most perfect being. By man is meant the perfect individual, who is like unto a mirror in which the divine perfections are manifested and reflected. But the sun does not condescend from the height of its sanctity to enter into the mirror, but when the latter is purified and turned towards the Sun of Truth, the perfections of this Sun, consisting of light and heat, are reflected and manifested in that mirror. These souls are the Divine Manifestations of God.

'Abdu'l-Bahá: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 505

28. What is meant by a personal God is a God Who is conscious of His creation, Who has a Mind, a Will, a Purpose, and not, as many scientists and materialists believe, an unconscious and determined force operating in the universe. Such conception of the Diving Being, as the Supreme and ever present Reality in the world, is not anthropomorphic, for it transcends all human limitations and forms, and does by no means attempt to define the essence of Divinity which is obviously beyond any human comprehension. To say that God is a personal Reality does not mean that He has a physical form, or does in any way resemble a human being. To entertain such belief would be sheer blasphemy.

Praise Of God Is Beyond Human Understanding

29. Praise be to God, the All-Possessing, the King of incomparable glory, a praise which is immeasurably above the understanding of all created things, and is exalted beyond the grasp of the minds of men. None else besides Him hath ever been able to sing adequately His praise, nor will any man succeed at any time in describing the full measure of His glory. Who is it that can claim to have attained the heights of His exalted Essence, and what mind can measure the depths of His unfathomable mystery? From each and every revelation emanating from the Source of His glory, holy and never-ending evidences of unimaginable splendor have appeared, and out of every manifestation of His invincible power oceans of eternal light have outpoured. How immensely exalted are the wondrous testimonies of His almighty sovereignty, a glimmer of which, if it but touched them, would utterly consume all that are in the heavens and in the earth! How indescribably lofty are the tokens of His consummate power, a single sign of which, however inconsiderable, must transcend the comprehension of whatsoever hath, from the beginning that hath no beginning, been brought into being, or will be created in the future till the end that hath no end. All the Embodiments of His Names wander in the wilderness of search, athirst and eager to discover His Essence, and all the Manifestations of His Attributes implore Him, from the Sinai of Holiness, to unravel His mystery.

Bahá'u'lláh: *Gleanings*, pp. 60-61

Difference of Conditions in the World of Beings is an Obstacle to Comprehension

30. Also the difference of conditions in the world of beings is an obstacle to comprehension. For example, this mineral belongs to the mineral kingdom; however far it may rise, it can never comprehend the power of growth. The plants, the trees, whatever progress they may make, cannot conceive of the power of sight or the powers of the other senses; and the animal cannot imagine the condition of man--that is to say, his spiritual powers. Difference of condition is an obstacle to knowledge; the inferior degree cannot comprehend the superior degree. How then can the phenomenal reality comprehend the Preexistent Reality? Knowing God, therefore, means the comprehension and the knowledge of His attributes, and not of His Reality. This knowledge of the attributes is also proportioned to the capacity and power of man; it is not absolute. Philosophy consists in comprehending the reality of things as they exist, according to the capacity and the power of man. For the phenomenal reality can comprehend the Preexistent attributes only to the extent of the human capacity. The mystery of Divinity is sanctified and purified from the comprehension of the beings, for all that comes to the imagination is that which man understands, and the power of the understanding of man does not embrace the Reality of the Divine Essence. All that man is able to understand are the attributes of Divinity, the radiance of which appears and is visible in the world and within men's souls.

'Abdu'l-Bahá: *Some Answered Questions*, p. 221

Humanity Requires Assistance for Understanding

31. We can well perceive how the whole human race is encompassed with great, with incalculable afflictions. We see it languishing on its bed of sickness, sore-tried and disillusioned.

They that are intoxicated by self-conceit have interposed themselves between it and the Divine and infallible Physician. Witness how they have entangled all men, themselves included, in the mesh of their devices. They can neither discover the cause of the disease, nor have they any knowledge of the remedy. They have conceived the straight to be crooked, and have imagined their friend an enemy.

Bahá'u'lláh: *Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 116-117

Seek Guidance In Understanding The Implication Of God's Covenant In This Day

32. May the Beloved bless, sustain and guide you, to enable you, to acquire a fuller understanding of the implications of God's Covenant in this day, and contribute effectively to its clarification and its comprehension by the believers.

Shoghi Effendi: *Light of Divine Guidance Vol. 2*, p. 89

Manifestations Are The True Mirrors Of The Sanctified Essence Of God

33. Question.--What connection has the Reality of Divinity with the Lordly Rising-places and the Divine Dawning-points?

Answer.--Know that the Reality of Divinity or the substance of the Essence of Oneness is pure sanctity and absolute holiness--that is to say, it is sanctified and exempt from all praise. The whole of the supreme attributes of the degrees of existence, in reference to this plane, are only imaginations. It is invisible, incomprehensible, inaccessible, a pure essence which cannot be described, for the Divine Essence surrounds all things. Verily, that which surrounds is greater than the surrounded, and the surrounded cannot contain that by which it is surrounded, nor comprehend its reality. However far mind may progress, though it may reach to the final degree of comprehension, the limit of understanding, it beholds the divine signs and attributes in the world of creation and not in the world of God. For the essence and the attributes of the Lord of Unity are in the heights of sanctity, and for the minds and understandings there is no way to approach that position. "The way is closed, and seeking is forbidden."

It is evident that the human understanding is a quality of the existence of man, and that man is a sign of God: how can the quality of the sign surround the creator of the sign?--that is to say, how can the understanding, which is a quality of the existence of man, comprehend God? Therefore, the Reality of the Divinity is hidden from all comprehension, and concealed from the minds of all men. It is absolutely impossible to ascend to that plane. We see that everything which is lower is powerless to comprehend the reality of that which is higher. So the stone, the earth, the tree, however much they may evolve, cannot comprehend the reality of man and cannot imagine the powers of sight, of hearing, and of the other senses, although they are all alike created. Therefore, how can man, the created, understand the reality of the pure Essence of the Creator? This plane is unapproachable by the understanding; no explanation is sufficient for its comprehension, and there is no power to indicate it. What has an atom of dust to do with the pure world, and what relation is there between the limited mind and the infinite world? Minds are powerless to comprehend God, and the souls become bewildered in explaining Him. "The eyes see Him not, but He seeth the eyes. He is the Omniscient, the Knower."⁴

Consequently, with reference to this plane of existence, every statement and elucidation is

⁴ Cf. Qur'án 6:104.

defective, all praise and all description are unworthy, every conception is vain, and every meditation is futile. But for this Essence of the essences, this Truth of truths, this Mystery of mysteries, there are reflections, auroras, appearances and resplendencies in the world of existence. The dawning-place of these splendors, the place of these reflections, and the appearance of these manifestations are the Holy Dawning-places, the Universal Realities and the Divine Beings, Who are the true mirrors of the sanctified Essence of God. All the perfections, the bounties, the splendors which come from God are visible and evident in the Reality of the Holy Manifestations, like the sun which is resplendent in a clear polished mirror with all its perfections and bounties. If it be said that the mirrors are the manifestations of the sun and the dawning-places of the rising star, this does not mean that the sun has descended from the height of its sanctity and become incorporated in the mirror, nor that the Unlimited Reality is limited to this place of appearance. God forbid! This is the belief of the adherents of anthropomorphism. No; all the praises, the descriptions and exaltations refer to the Holy Manifestations--that is to say, all the descriptions, the qualities, the names and the attributes which we mention return to the Divine Manifestations; but as no one has attained to the reality of the Essence of Divinity, so no one is able to describe, explain, praise or glorify it. Therefore, all that the human reality knows, discovers and understands of the names, the attributes and the perfections of God refer to these Holy Manifestations. There is no access to anything else: "the way is closed, and seeking is forbidden."

Nevertheless, we speak of the names and attributes of the Divine Reality, and we praise Him by attributing to Him sight, hearing, power, life and knowledge. We affirm these names and attributes, not to prove the perfections of God, but to deny that He is capable of imperfections. When we look at the existing world, we see that ignorance is imperfection and knowledge is perfection; therefore, we say that the sanctified Essence of God is wisdom. Weakness is imperfection, and power is perfection; consequently, we say that the sanctified Essence of God is the acme of power. It is not that we can comprehend His knowledge, His sight, His power and life, for it is beyond our comprehension; for the essential names and attributes of God are identical with His Essence, and His Essence is above all comprehension. If the attributes are not identical with the Essence, there must also be a multiplicity of preexistences, and differences between the attributes and the Essence must also exist; and as Preexistence is necessary, therefore, the sequence of preexistences would become infinite. This is an evident error.

Accordingly all these attributes, names, praises and eulogies apply to the Places of Manifestation; and all that we imagine and suppose beside them is mere imagination, for we have no means of comprehending that which is invisible and inaccessible. This is why it is said: "All that you have distinguished through the illusion of your imagination in your subtle mental images is but a creation like unto yourself, and returns to you."⁵ It is clear that if we wish to imagine the Reality of Divinity, this imagination is the surrounded, and we are the surrounding one; and it is sure that the one who surrounds is greater than the surrounded. From this it is certain and evident that if we imagine a Divine Reality outside of the Holy Manifestations, it is pure imagination, for there is no way to approach the Reality of Divinity which is not cut off to us, and all that we imagine is mere supposition.

Therefore, reflect that different peoples of the world are revolving around imaginations and are worshipers of the idols of thoughts and conjectures. They are not aware of this; they consider their imaginations to be the Reality which is withdrawn from all comprehension and purified

⁵ From a hadith.

from all descriptions. They regard themselves as the people of Unity, and the others as worshipers of idols; but idols at least have a mineral existence, while the idols of thoughts and the imaginations of man are but fancies; they have not even mineral existence. "Take heed ye who are endued with discernment."⁶

Know that the attributes of perfection, the splendor of the divine bounties, and the lights of inspiration are visible and evident in all the Holy Manifestations; but the glorious Word of God, Christ, and the Greatest Name, Bahá'u'lláh, are manifestations and evidences which are beyond imagination, for They possess all the perfections of the former Manifestations; and more than that, They possess some perfections which make the other Manifestations dependent upon Them. So all the Prophets of Israel were centers of inspiration; Christ also was a receiver of inspiration, but what a difference between the inspiration of the Word of God and the revelations of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Elijah!

Reflect that light is the expression of the vibrations of the etheric matter: the nerves of the eye are affected by these vibrations, and sight is produced. The light of the lamp exists through the vibration of the etheric matter; so also does that of the sun, but what a difference between the light of the sun and that of the stars or the lamp!

The spirit of man appears and is manifest in the embryonic condition, and also in that of childhood and of maturity, and it is resplendent and evident in the condition of perfection. The spirit is one, but in the embryonic condition the power of sight and of hearing is lacking. In the state of maturity and perfection it appears in the utmost splendor and brilliance. In the same way the seed in the beginning becomes leaves and is the place where the vegetable spirit appears; in the condition of fruit it manifests the same spirit--that is to say, the power of growth appears in the utmost perfection; but what a difference between the condition of the leaves and that of the fruit! For from the fruit a hundred thousand leaves appear, though they all grow and develop through the same vegetable spirit. Notice the difference between the virtues and perfections of Christ, the splendors and brilliance of Bahá'u'lláh, and the virtues of the Prophets of Israel, such as Ezekiel or Samuel. All were the manifestations of inspiration, but between them there is an infinite difference. Salutations!

'Abdu'l-Bahá: Some Answered Questions, pp. 146-150

Teachings of Manifestations Provide the Beginning of Understanding

34. When the Unseen, the Eternal, the Divine Essence, caused the Day Star of Muhammad to rise above the horizon of knowledge, among the cavils which the Jewish divines raised against Him was that after Moses no Prophet should be sent of God. Yea, mention hath been made in the Scriptures of a Soul Who must needs be made manifest and Who will advance the Faith, and promote the interests of the people of Moses, so that the Law of the Mosaic Dispensation may encompass the whole earth. Thus hath the King of eternal glory referred in His Book to the words uttered by those wanderers in the vale of remoteness and error: "'The hand of God,' say the Jews, 'is chained up.' Chained up be their own hands; And for that which they have said, they were accursed. Nay, outstretched are both His hands!" "The hand of God is above their hands." Although the commentators of the Qur'án have related in divers manners the circumstances attending the revelation of this verse, yet thou shouldst endeavor to apprehend the purpose thereof. He saith: How false is that which the Jews have imagined! How can the hand of

⁶ Qur'án 59:2.

Him Who is the King in truth, Who caused the countenance of Moses to be made manifest, and conferred upon Him the robe of Prophethood--how can the hand of such a One be chained and fettered? How can He be conceived as powerless to raise up yet another Messenger after Moses? Behold the absurdity of their saying; how far it hath strayed from the path of knowledge and understanding! Observe how in this Day also, all these people have occupied themselves with such foolish absurdities. For over a thousand years they have been reciting this verse, and unwittingly pronouncing their censure against the Jews, utterly unaware that they themselves, openly and privily, are voicing the sentiments and belief of the Jewish people! Thou art surely aware of their idle contention, that all Revelation is ended, that the portals of Divine mercy are closed, that from the day springs of eternal holiness no Sun shall rise again, that the Ocean of everlasting bounty is forever stilled, and that out of the Tabernacle of ancient glory the Messengers of God have ceased to be made manifest. Such is the measure of the understanding of these small-minded, contemptible people. These people have imagined that the flow of God's all-encompassing grace and plenteous mercies, the cessation of which no mind can contemplate, has been halted. From every side they have risen and girded up the loins of tyranny, and exerted the utmost endeavor to quench with the bitter waters of their vain fancy the flame of God's Burning Bush, oblivious that the globe of power shall, within its own mighty stronghold, protect the Lamp of God....

Bahá'u'lláh: *Gleanings*, pp. 22-24

35. In like manner, strive thou to comprehend from these lucid, these powerful, conclusive, and unequivocal statements the meaning of the "cleaving of the heaven"--one of the signs that must needs herald the coming of the last Hour, the Day of Resurrection. As He hath said: "When the heaven shall be cloven asunder."⁷ By "heaven" is meant the heaven of divine Revelation, which is elevated with every Manifestation, and rent asunder with every subsequent one. By "cloven asunder" is meant that the former Dispensation is superseded and annulled. I swear by God! That this heaven being cloven asunder is, to the discerning, an act mightier than the cleaving of the skies! Ponder a while. That a divine Revelation which for years hath been securely established; beneath whose shadow all who have embraced it have been reared and nurtured; by the light of whose law generations of men have been disciplined; the excellency of whose word men have heard recounted by their fathers; in such wise that human eye hath beheld naught but the pervading influence of its grace, and mortal ear hath heard naught but the resounding majesty of its command--what act is mightier than that such a Revelation should, by the power of God, be "cloven asunder" and be abolished at the appearance of one soul? Reflect, is this a mightier act than that which these abject and foolish men have imagined the "cleaving of the heaven" to mean?

Bahá'u'lláh: *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, pp. 44-45

36. Likewise, in the verse concerning the "Spirit," He saith: "And they will ask Thee of the Spirit. Say, 'the Spirit proceedeth at My Lord's command.'"⁸ As soon as Muhammad's answer was given, they all clamorously protested, saying: "Lo! an ignorant man who knoweth not what the Spirit is, calleth Himself the Revealer of divine Knowledge!" And now behold the divines of the age who, because of their being honoured by His name, and finding that their fathers have

⁷ Qur'án 82:1.

⁸ Qur'án 2:189.

acknowledged His Revelation, have blindly submitted to His truth. Observe, were this people today to receive such answers in reply to such questionings, they would unhesitatingly reject and denounce them--nay, they would again utter the self-same cavils, even as they have uttered them in this day. All this, notwithstanding the fact that these Essences of being are immensely exalted above such fanciful images, and are immeasurably glorified beyond all these vain sayings and above the comprehension of every understanding heart. Their so-called learning, when compared with that Knowledge, is utter falsehood, and all their understanding naught but blatant error. Nay, whatsoever proceedeth from these Mines of divine Wisdom and these Treasuries of eternal knowledge is truth, and naught else but the truth. The saying: "Knowledge is one point, which the foolish have multiplied" is a proof of Our argument, and the tradition: "Knowledge is a light which God sheddeth into the heart of whomsoever He willeth" a confirmation of Our statement.

Bahá'u'lláh: *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, pp. 183-184

37. No understanding can grasp the nature of His Revelation, nor can any knowledge comprehend the full measure of His Faith. All sayings are dependent upon His sanction, and all things stand in need of His Cause. All else save Him are created by His command, and move and have their being through His law. He is the Revealer of the divine mysteries, and the Expounder of the hidden and ancient wisdom. Thus it is related in the "Biharu'l-Anvar," the "Avalim," and the "Yanbu" of Sadiq, son of Muhammad, that he spoke these words: "Knowledge is twenty and seven letters. All that the Prophets have revealed are two letters thereof. No man thus far hath known more than these two letters. But when the Qá'im shall arise, He will cause the remaining twenty and five letters to be made manifest." Consider; He hath declared Knowledge to consist of twenty and seven letters, and regarded all the Prophets, from Adam even unto the "Seal," as Expounders of only two letters thereof and of having been sent down with these two letters. He also saith that the Qá'im will reveal all the remaining twenty and five letters. Behold from this utterance how great and lofty is His station! His rank excelleth that of all the Prophets, and His Revelation transcendeth the comprehension and understanding of all their chosen ones. A Revelation, of which the Prophets of God, His saints and chosen ones, have either not been informed, or which, in pursuance of God's inscrutable Decree, they have not disclosed,--such a Revelation these mean and depraved people have sought to measure with their own deficient minds, their own deficient learning and understanding. Should it fail to conform to their standards, they straightway reject it. "Thinkest thou that the greater part of them hear or understand? They are even like unto the brutes! yea, they stray even further from the path!"⁹

Bahá'u'lláh: *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, pp. 243-244

38. In the Íqán, Bahá'u'lláh, wishing to emphasize the transcendent character of this new Day of God, reinforces the strength of His argument by His reference to the text of a correct and authorized tradition, which reveals the following: "Knowledge is twenty and seven letters. All that the Prophets have revealed are two letters thereof. No man thus far hath known more than these two letters. But when the Qá'im shall arise, He will cause the remaining twenty and five letters to be made manifest." And then immediately follow these confirming and illuminating words of Bahá'u'lláh: "Consider: He hath declared knowledge to consist of twenty and seven letters, and regarded all the prophets, from Adam even unto Muhammad, the 'seal,' as expounders of only two letters thereof. He also saith that the Qá'im will reveal all the remaining

⁹ Qur'án 25:44.

twenty and five letters. Behold from this utterance how great and lofty is His station! His rank excelleth that of all the prophets, and His revelation transcendeth the comprehension and understanding of all their chosen ones. A revelation, of which the prophets of God, His saints and chosen ones have either not been informed or which, in pursuance of God's inscrutable decree, they have not disclosed--such a revelation, these vile and villainous people have sought to measure with their own deficient minds, their own deficient learning and understanding."

In another passage of the same Book, Bahá'u'lláh, referring to the transformation effected by every Revelation in the ways, thoughts and manners of the people, reveals these words: "Is not the object of every Revelation to effect a transformation in the whole character of mankind, a transformation that shall manifest itself, both outwardly and inwardly, that shall affect both its inner life and external conditions? For if the character of mankind be not changed, the futility of God's universal Manifestations would be apparent."

Did not Christ Himself, addressing His disciples, utter these words: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth"?

From the text of this recognized tradition, as well as from the words of Christ, as attested by the Gospel, every unprejudiced observer will readily apprehend the magnitude of the Faith which Bahá'u'lláh has revealed, and recognize the staggering weight of the claim He has advanced. No wonder if 'Abdu'l-Bahá has portrayed in such lurid colors the fierceness of the agitation that shall center in the days to come round the nascent institutions of the Faith. We can now but faintly discern the beginnings of that turmoil which the rise and ascendancy of the Cause of God is destined to cast in the world.

Shoghi Effendi: *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 24-25

39. Wishing to stress the sublimity of the Báb's exalted station as compared with that of the Prophets of the past, Bahá'u'lláh in that same epistle asserts: "No understanding can grasp the nature of His Revelation, nor can any knowledge comprehend the full measure of His Faith." He then quotes, in confirmation of His argument, these prophetic words: "Knowledge is twenty and seven letters. All that the Prophets have revealed are two letters thereof. No man thus far hath known more than these two letters. But when the Qá'im shall arise, He will cause the remaining twenty and five letters to be made manifest." "Behold," He adds, "how great and lofty is His station! His rank excelleth that of all the Prophets and His Revelation transcendeth the comprehension and understanding of all their chosen ones." "Of His Revelation," He further adds, "the Prophets of God, His saints and chosen ones, have either not been informed, or, in pursuance of God's inscrutable decree, they have not disclosed."

Shoghi Effendi: *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 125

Recognizing The Authority Of The Manifestation Endows One With Constancy

40. Were He to decree as lawful the thing which from time immemorial had been forbidden, and forbid that which had, at all times, been regarded as lawful, to none is given the right to question His authority. Whoso will hesitate, though it be for less than a moment, should be regarded as a transgressor.

Whoso hath not recognized this sublime and fundamental verity, and hath failed to attain this most exalted station, the winds of doubt will agitate him, and the sayings of the infidels will distract his soul. He that hath acknowledged this principle will be endowed with the most perfect

constancy. All honour to this all-glorious station, the remembrance of which adorneth every exalted Tablet. Such is the teaching which God bestoweth on you, a teaching that will deliver you from all manner of doubt and perplexity, and enable you to attain unto salvation in both this world and in the next. He, verily, is the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Bountiful. He it is Who hath sent forth the Messengers, and sent down the Books to proclaim “There is none other God but Me, the Almighty, the All-Wise”.

Bahá'u'lláh: *The Kitáb-i-Áqdas*, K 162-163

Words Of Manifestation Are Beyond Human Understanding

41. In like manner, those words that have streamed forth from the source of power and descended from the heaven of glory are innumerable and beyond the ordinary comprehension of man. To them that are possessed of true understanding and insight the Surah of Hud surely sufficeth. Ponder a while those holy words in your heart, and, with utter detachment, strive to grasp their meaning. Examine the wondrous behaviour of the Prophets, and recall the defamations and denials uttered by the children of negation and falsehood, perchance you may cause the bird of the human heart to wing its flight away from the abodes of heedlessness and doubt unto the nest of faith and certainty, and drink deep from the pure waters of ancient wisdom, and partake of the fruit of the tree of divine knowledge. Such is the share of the pure in heart of the bread that hath descended from the realms of eternity and holiness.

Bahá'u'lláh: *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, pp. 5-6

42. Gracious God! How could there be conceived any existing relationship or possible connection between His Word and they that are created of it? The verse: “God would have you beware of Himself”¹⁰ unmistakably beareth witness to the reality of Our argument, and the words: “God was alone; there was none else besides Him” are a sure testimony of its truth. All the Prophets of God and their chosen Ones, all the divines, the sages, and the wise of every generation, unanimously recognize their inability to attain unto the comprehension of that Quintessence of all truth, and confess their incapacity to grasp Him, Who is the inmost Reality of all things.

Bahá'u'lláh: *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, pp. 98-99

43. The Báb, acclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh as the “Essence of Essences,” the “Sea of Seas,” the “Point round Whom the realities of the Prophets and Messengers revolve,” “from Whom God hath caused to proceed the knowledge of all that was and shall be,” Whose “rank excelleth that of all the Prophets,” and Whose “Revelation transcendeth the comprehension and understanding of all their chosen ones,” had delivered His Message and discharged His mission. He Who was, in the words of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, the “Morn of Truth” and “Harbinger of the Most Great Light,” Whose advent at once signalized the termination of the “Prophetic Cycle” and the inception of the “Cycle of Fulfillment,” had simultaneously through His Revelation banished the shades of night that had descended upon His country, and proclaimed the impending rise of that Incomparable Orb Whose radiance was to envelop the whole of mankind. He, as affirmed by Himself, “the Primal Point from which have been generated all created things,” “one of the sustaining pillars of the Primal Word of God,” the “Mystic Fane,” the “Great Announcement,”

¹⁰ Qur’án 6:103.

the "Flame of that supernal Light that glowed upon Sinai," the "Remembrance of God" concerning Whom "a separate Covenant hath been established with each and every Prophet" had, through His advent, at once fulfilled the promise of all ages and ushered in the consummation of all Revelations. He the "Qá'im" (He Who ariseth) promised to the Shi'ahs, the "Mihdi" (One Who is guided) awaited by the Sunnis, the "Return of John the Baptist" expected by the Christians, the "Ushidar-Mah" referred to in the Zoroastrian scriptures, the "Return of Elijah" anticipated by the Jews, Whose Revelation was to show forth "the signs and tokens of all the Prophets", Who was to "manifest the perfection of Moses, the radiance of Jesus and the patience of Job" had appeared, proclaimed His Cause, been mercilessly persecuted and died gloriously. The "Second Woe," spoken of in the Apocalypse of St. John the Divine, had, at long last, appeared, and the first of the two "Messengers," Whose appearance had been prophesied in the Qur'án, had been sent down. The first "Trumpet-Blast", destined to smite the earth with extermination, announced in the latter Book, had finally been sounded. "The Inevitable," "The Catastrophe," "The Resurrection," "The Earthquake of the Last Hour," foretold by that same Book, had all come to pass. The "clear tokens" had been "sent down," and the "Spirit" had "breathed," and the "souls" had "waked up," and the "heaven" had been "cleft," and the "angels" had "ranged in order," and the "stars" had been "blotted out," and the "earth" had "cast forth her burden," and "Paradise" had been "brought near," and "hell" had been "made to blaze," and the "Book" had been "set," and the "Bridge" had been "laid out," and the "Balance" had been "set up," and the "mountains scattered in dust." The "cleansing of the Sanctuary," prophesied by Daniel and confirmed by Jesus Christ in His reference to "the abomination of desolation," had been accomplished. The "day whose length shall be a thousand years," foretold by the Apostle of God in His Book, had terminated. The "forty and two months," during which the "Holy City," as predicted by St. John the Divine, would be trodden under foot, had elapsed. The "time of the end" had been ushered in, and the first of the "two Witnesses" into Whom, "after three days and a half the Spirit of Life from God" would enter, had arisen and had "ascended up to heaven in a cloud." The "remaining twenty and five letters to be made manifest," according to Islamic tradition, out of the "twenty and seven letters" of which Knowledge has been declared to consist, had been revealed. The "Man Child," mentioned in the Book of Revelation, destined to "rule all nations with a rod of iron," had released, through His coming, the creative energies which, reinforced by the effusions of a swiftly succeeding and infinitely mightier Revelation, were to instill into the entire human race the capacity to achieve its organic unification, attain maturity and thereby reach the final stage in its age-long evolution. The clarion-call addressed to the "concourse of kings and of the sons of kings," marking the inception of a process which, accelerated by Bahá'u'lláh's subsequent warnings to the entire company of the monarchs of East and West, was to produce so widespread a revolution in the fortunes of royalty, had been raised in the Qayyumu'l-Asma'. The "Order," whose foundation the Promised One was to establish in the Kitab-i-Aqdas, and the features of which the Center of the Covenant was to delineate in His Testament, and whose administrative framework the entire body of His followers are now erecting, had been categorically announced in the Persian Bayan. The laws which were designed, on the one hand, to abolish at a stroke the privileges and ceremonials, the ordinances and institutions of a superannuated Dispensation, and to bridge, on the other, the gap between an obsolete system and the institutions of a world-encompassing Order destined to supersede it, had been clearly formulated and proclaimed. The Covenant which, despite the determined assaults launched against it, succeeded, unlike all previous Dispensations, in preserving the integrity of the Faith of its Author, and in paving the way for the advent of the One Who was to be its Center

and Object, had been firmly and irrevocably established. The light which, throughout successive periods, was to propagate itself gradually from its cradle as far as Vancouver in the West and the China Sea in the East, and to diffuse its radiance as far as Iceland in the North and the Tasman Sea in the South, had broken. The forces of darkness, at first confined to the concerted hostility of the civil and ecclesiastical powers of Shi'ah Persia, gathering momentum, at a later stage, through the avowed and persistent opposition of the Caliph of Islam and the Sunni hierarchy in Turkey, and destined to culminate in the fierce antagonism of the sacerdotal orders associated with other and still more powerful religious systems, had launched their initial assault. The nucleus of the divinely ordained, world-embracing Community--a Community whose infant strength had already plucked asunder the fetters of Shi'ah orthodoxy, and which was, with every expansion in the range of its fellowship, to seek and obtain a wider and still more significant recognition of its claims to be the world religion of the future, had been formed and was slowly crystallizing. And, lastly, the seed, endowed by the Hand of Omnipotence with such vast potentialities, though rudely trampled under foot and seemingly perished from the face of the earth, had, through this very process, been vouchsafed the opportunity to germinate and remanifest itself, in the shape of a still more compelling Revelation--a Revelation destined to blossom forth, in a later period into the flourishing institutions of a world-wide administrative System, and to ripen, in the Golden Age as yet unborn, into mighty agencies functioning in consonance with the principles of a world-unifying, world-redeeming Order.

Shoghi Effendi: *God Passes By*, pp. 57-60

Apparent Differences In Teachings Among Manifestations Due To Limited Comprehension Of Certain Minds

44. That these divine Luminaries seem to be confined at times to specific designations and attributes, as you have observed and are now observing, is due solely to the imperfect and limited comprehension of certain minds. Otherwise, they have been at all times, and will through eternity continue to be, exalted above every praising name, and sanctified from every descriptive attribute. The quintessence of every name can hope for no access unto their court of holiness, and the highest and purest of all attributes can never approach their kingdom of glory. Immeasurably high are the Prophets of God exalted above the comprehension of men, who can never know them except by their own Selves. Far be it from His glory that His chosen Ones should be magnified by any other than their own persons. Glorified are they above the praise of men; exalted are they above human understanding!

Bahá'u'lláh: *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, pp. 34-35

Those Who Study Bahá'í Scripture Are Beginning to Understand

45. Whoso hath searched the depths of the oceans that lie hid within these exalted words, and fathomed their import, can be said to have discovered a glimmer of the unspeakable glory with which this mighty, this sublime, and most holy Revelation hath been endowed. From the excellence of so great a Revelation the honor with which its faithful followers must needs be invested can be well imagined. By the righteousness of the one true God! The very breath of these souls is in itself richer than all the treasures of the earth. Happy is the man that hath attained thereunto, and woe betide the heedless.

Bahá'u'lláh: *Gleanings*, p. 10

Kitáb-i-Áqdas Provides Foundation for Understanding

46. In more than one hundred volumes comprising the sacred Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the Kitáb-i-Áqdas is of unique importance. "To build anew the whole world" is the claim and challenge of His Message, and the Kitáb-i-Áqdas is the Charter of the future world civilization that Bahá'u'lláh has come to raise up. Its provisions rest squarely on the foundation established by past religions, for, in the words of Bahá'u'lláh, "This is the changeless Faith of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future." In this Revelation the concepts of the past are brought to a new level of understanding, and the social laws, changed to suit the age now dawning, are designed to carry humanity forward into a world civilization the splendours of which can as yet be scarcely imagined.

Bahá'u'lláh: *Aqdas: Other Sections*, pp. 1-2

Knowledge of the Divine Leads to Understanding

47. Ponder this in thine heart, that the sweet gales of divine knowledge, blowing from the meads of mercy, may waft upon thee the fragrance of the Beloved's utterance, and cause thy soul to attain the Ridvan of understanding. As the wayward of every age have failed to fathom the deeper import of these weighty and pregnant utterances, and imagined the answer of the Prophets of God to be irrelevant to the questions they asked them, they therefore have attributed ignorance and folly to those Essences of knowledge and understanding.

Bahá'u'lláh: *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 149

Those Who Have No Knowledge of the Divine Have No Understanding

48. My God, the Object of my adoration, the Goal of my desire, the All-Bountiful, the Most Compassionate! All life is of Thee, and all power lieth within the grasp of Thine omnipotence. Whosoever Thou exaltest is raised above the angels, and attaineth the station: 'Verily, We uplifted him to a place on high!'; and whosoever Thou dost abase is made lower than dust, nay, less than nothing. O Divine Providence! Though wicked, sinful, and intemperate, we still seek from Thee a 'seat of truth,' and long to behold the countenance of the Omnipotent King. It is Thine to command, and all sovereignty belongeth to Thee, and the realm of might boweth before Thy behest. Everything Thou doest is pure justice, nay, the very essence of grace. One gleam from the splendors of Thy Name, the All-Merciful, sufficeth to banish and blot out every trace of sinfulness from the world, and a single breath from the breezes of the Day of Thy Revelation is enough to adorn all mankind with a fresh attire. Vouchsafe Thy strength, O Almighty One, unto Thy weak creatures, and quicken them who are as dead, that haply they may find Thee, and may

be led unto the ocean of Thy guidance, and may remain steadfast in Thy Cause. Should the fragrance of Thy praise be shed abroad by any of the divers tongues of the world, out of the East or out of the West, it would, verily, be prized and greatly cherished. If such tongues, however, be deprived of that fragrance, they assuredly would be unworthy of any mention, in word or yet in thought. We beg of Thee, O Providence, to show Thy way unto all men, and to guide them aright. Thou art, verily, the Almighty, the Most Powerful, the All-Knowing, the All-Seeing.

Bahá'u'lláh: *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, pp. 9-10

An Understanding Heart Necessary for Grasping Divine Mysteries

49. O my beloved! Immeasurably exalted is the celestial Melody above the strivings of human ear to hear or mind to grasp its mystery! How can the helpless ant step into the court of the All-Glorious? And yet, feeble souls, through lack of understanding, reject these abstruse utterances, and question the truth of such traditions. Nay, none can comprehend them save those that are possessed of an understanding heart. Say, He is that End for Whom no end in all the universe can be imagined, and for Whom no beginning in the world of creation can be conceived. Behold, O concourse of the earth, the splendours of the End, revealed in the Manifestations of the Beginning!

Bahá'u'lláh: *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 168

The Divine Elixir Confers Understanding

50. Likewise, these souls, through the potency of the Divine Elixir, traverse, in the twinkling of an eye, the world of dust and advance into the realm of holiness; and with one step cover the earth of limitations and reach the domain of the Placeless. It behooveth thee to exert thine utmost to attain unto this Elixir which, in one fleeting breath, causeth the west of ignorance to reach the east of knowledge, illuminates the darkness of night with the resplendence of the morn, guideth the wanderer in the wilderness of doubt to the well-spring of the Divine Presence and Fount of certitude, and conferreth upon mortal souls the honour of acceptance into the Ridván of immortality. Now, could this gold be thought to be copper, these people could likewise be thought to be the same as before they were endowed with faith.

Bahá'u'lláh: *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, pp. 157-158

Station Of True Believer Beyond The Comprehension Of All Except Those Who Are Detached From All Save God

51. Later, the beauty of the countenance of the Friend of God¹¹ appeared from behind the veil, and another standard of divine guidance was hoisted. He invited the people of the earth to the light of righteousness. The more passionately He exhorted them, the fiercer waxed the envy and waywardness of the people, except those who wholly detached themselves from all save God, and ascended on the wings of certainty to the station which God hath exalted beyond the comprehension of men. It is well known what a host of enemies besieged Him, until at last the fires of envy and rebellion were kindled against Him. And after the episode of the fire came to

¹¹ Abraham.

pass, He, the lamp of God amongst men, was, as recorded in all books and chronicles, expelled from His city.

Bahá'u'lláh: *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, pp. 10-11

Excellence Of This Day Beyond Human Comprehension

52. O Nasir! The excellence of this Day is immensely exalted above the comprehension of men, however extensive their knowledge, however profound their understanding. How much more must it transcend the imaginations of them that have strayed from its light, and been shut out from its glory! Shouldst thou rend asunder the grievous veil that blindeth thy vision, thou wouldst behold such a bounty as naught, from the beginning that hath no beginning till the end that hath no end, can either resemble or equal. What language should He Who is the Mouthpiece of God choose to speak, so that they who are shut out as by a veil from Him can recognize His glory? The righteous, inmates of the Kingdom on high, shall drink deep from the Wine of Holiness, in My name, the all-glorious. None other besides them will share such benefits.

Bahá'u'lláh: *Gleanings*, p. 108

Payment Of The Right Of God Beyond Human Understanding

53. Should a person acquire one hundred mithqals of gold, nineteen mithqals thereof belong unto God, the Creator of earth and heaven. Take heed, O people, lest ye deprive yourselves of this great bounty. We have prescribed this law unto you while We are wholly independent of you and of all that are in the heavens and on the earth. Indeed there lie concealed in this command, mysteries and benefits which are beyond the comprehension of anyone save God, the All-Knowing, the All-Informed. Say, through this injunction God desireth to purify your possessions and enable you to draw nigh unto such stations as none can attain, except those whom God may please. Verily, He is the Generous, the Gracious, the Bountiful.

Bahá'u'lláh: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 306

Individuals Are Encouraged To Acquire Individual Understanding

54. To strive to obtain a more adequate understanding of the significance of Bahá'u'lláh's stupendous Revelation must, it is my unalterable conviction, remain the first obligation and the object of the constant endeavor of each one of its loyal adherents. An exact and thorough comprehension of so vast a system, so sublime a revelation, so sacred a trust, is for obvious reasons beyond the reach and ken of our finite minds. We can, however, and it is our bounden duty to seek to derive fresh inspiration and added sustenance as we labor for the propagation of His Faith through a clearer apprehension of the truths it enshrines and the principles on which it is based.

Shoghi Effendi: *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 100

55. Ours is the duty to ponder these things in our heart, to strive to widen our vision, and to deepen our comprehension of this Cause, and to arise, resolutely and unreservedly, to play our part, however small, in this greatest drama of the world's spiritual history.

Shoghi Effendi: *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 26

56. The existence of authoritative interpretations does not preclude the individual from engaging in the study of the Teachings and thereby arriving at a personal interpretation or understanding. A clear distinction is, however, drawn in the Bahá'í Writings between authoritative interpretation and the understanding that each individual arrives at from a study of its Teachings. Individual interpretations based on a person's understanding of the Teachings constitute the fruit of man's rational power and may well contribute to a greater comprehension of the Faith. Such views, nevertheless, lack authority. In presenting their personal ideas, individuals are cautioned not to discard the authority of the revealed words, not to deny or contend with the authoritative interpretation, and not to engage in controversy; rather they should offer their thoughts as a contribution to knowledge, making it clear that their views are merely their own.

Aqdas: Notes, pp. 221-222

The Conscience Of Man Is Within the Scope of the Comprehension of the King of Kings

57. In the middle ages, whereof the beginning was the time of the fall of the Roman Empire, and the end the capture of Constantinople at the hands of [the followers of] Islam, fierce intolerance and molestation of far and near arose in [all] the countries of Europe by reason of the paramount influence of religious leaders. The matter came to such a pass that the edifice of humanity seemed tottering to its fall, and the peace and comfort of chief and vassal, king and subject, became hidden behind the veil of annihilation. Night and day all parties were slaves to apprehension and disquietude: civilization was utterly destroyed: the control and order of countries was neglected: the principles and essentials of the happiness of the human race were in abeyance: the supports of kingly authority were shaken: but the influence and power of the heads of religion and of the monks were in all parts complete. But when they removed these differences, persecution, and bigotries out of their midst, and proclaimed the equal rights of all subjects and the liberty of men's consciences, the lights of glory and power arose and shone from the horizons of that kingdom in such wise that those countries made progress in every direction; and whereas the mightiest monarchy of Europe had been servile to and abased before the smallest government of Asia, now the great states of Asia are unable to oppose the small states of Europe. These are effectual and sufficient proofs that the conscience of man is sacred and to be respected; and that liberty thereof produces widening of ideas, amendment of morals, improvement of conduct, disclosure of the secrets of creation, and manifestation of the hidden verities of the contingent world. Moreover, if interrogation of conscience, which is one of the private possessions of the heart and the soul, take place in this world, what further recompense remains for man in the court of divine justice at the day of general resurrection? Convictions and ideas are within the scope of the comprehension of the King of kings, not of kings; and soul and conscience are between the fingers of control of the Lord of hearts, not of [His] servants. So in the world of existence two persons unanimous in all grades [of thought] and all beliefs cannot be found. 'The ways unto God are as the number of the breaths of [His] creatures' is a mysterious truth, and 'To every [people] We have appointed a [separate] rite'¹² is one of the subtleties of the Qur'án. If this vast energy and precious time which have been expended in persecuting other religions, and whereby no sort of result or effect has been obtained, had been spent in strengthening the basis of the monarchy, fortifying the imperial throne, making prosperous the

¹² Qur'án 22:35.

realms of the sovereign, and quickening the subjects of the king, ere now the royal dominions would have become prosperous, the seed-plot of the people would have been watered by the bounty of princely justice, and the splendor of the kingdom of Persia would be evident and apparent as the true dawn throughout the horizons of the world.”

‘Abdu’-Bahá: *A Traveler’s Narrative*, pp. 90-92

Differences In Ability To Understand Are Innate, But Education Exerts A Strong Influence

58. The Manifestations of God are likewise in agreement with the view that education exerteth the strongest possible influence on humankind. They affirm, however, that differences in the level of intelligence are innate; and this fact is obvious, and not worth debating. For we see that children of the same age, the same country, the same race, indeed of the same family, and trained by the same individual, still are different as to the degree of their comprehension and intelligence. One will make rapid progress, one will receive instruction only gradually, one will remain at the lowest stage of all. For no matter how much you may polish a shell, it will not turn into a gleaming pearl, nor can you change a dull pebble into a gem whose pure rays will light the world. Never, through training and cultivation, will the colocynth and the bitter tree¹³ change into the Tree of Blessedness.¹⁴ That is to say, education cannot alter the inner essence of a man, but it doth exert tremendous influence, and with this power it can bring forth from the individual whatever perfections and capacities are deposited within him. A grain of wheat, when cultivated by the farmer, will yield a whole harvest, and a seed, through the gardener’s care, will grow into a great tree. Thanks to a teacher’s loving efforts, the children of the primary school may reach the highest levels of achievement; indeed, his benefactions may lift some child of small account to an exalted throne. Thus is it clearly demonstrated that by their essential nature, minds vary as to their capacity, while education also playeth a great role and exerteth a powerful effect on their development.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Selections ... ‘Abdu’-Bahá*, pp. 131-132

Understanding and Comprehension of Scripture Is Not Dependent Upon Human Learning

59. Heed not the idle contention of those who maintain that the Book and verses thereof can never be a testimony unto the common people, inasmuch as they neither grasp their meaning nor appreciate their value. And yet, the unfailing testimony of God to both the East and the West is none other than the Qur’án. Were it beyond the comprehension of men, how could it have been declared as a universal testimony unto all people? If their contention be true, none would therefore be required, nor would it be necessary for them to know God, inasmuch as the knowledge of the divine Being transcendeth the knowledge of His Book, and the common people would not possess the capacity to comprehend it.

Such contention is utterly fallacious and inadmissible. It is actuated solely by arrogance and pride. Its motive is to lead the people astray from the Ridvan of divine good-pleasure and to tighten the reins of their authority over the people. And yet, in the sight of God, these common people are infinitely superior and exalted above their religious leaders who have turned away from the one true God. The understanding of His words and the comprehension of the utterances

¹³ cf. Qur’án 37:60 (The Tree of Zaqqum).

¹⁴ cf. Qur’án 24:35.

of the Birds of Heaven are in no wise dependent upon human learning. They depend solely upon purity of heart, chastity of soul, and freedom of spirit. This is evidenced by those who, today, though without a single letter of the accepted standards of learning, are occupying the loftiest seats of knowledge; and the garden of their hearts is adorned, through the showers of divine grace, with the roses of wisdom and the tulips of understanding. Well is it with the sincere in heart for their share of the light of a mighty Day!

Bahá'u'lláh: *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, pp. 210-211

60. We entreat the learned men of the Bayan not to follow in such ways, not to inflict, at the time of Mustaghath, upon Him Who is the divine Essence, the heavenly Light, the absolute Eternity, the Beginning and the End of the Manifestations of the Invisible, that which hath been inflicted in this day. We beg them not to depend upon their intellect, their comprehension and learning, nor to contend with the Revealer of celestial and infinite knowledge.

Bahá'u'lláh: *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 248

61. The highest faculties which the learned have possessed, and whatsoever truths they, in their search after the gems of Thy knowledge, have discovered; the brightest realities with which the wise have been endowed, and whatever secrets they, in their attempts to fathom the mysteries of Thy wisdom, have unraveled, have all been created through the generative power of the Spirit that was breathed into the Pen which Thy hands have fashioned. How, then, can the thing which Thy Pen hath created be capable of comprehending those treasures of Thy Faith with which, as decreed by Thee, that Pen hath been invested? How can it ever know of the Fingers that grasp Thy Pen, and of Thy merciful favors with which it hath been endowed? How can it, already unable to reach this station, be made aware of the existence of Thy Hand that controlleth the Fingers of Thy might? How can it attain unto the comprehension of the nature of Thy Will that animateth the movement of Thy Hand?

Bahá'u'lláh: *Prayers and Meditations*, p. 92

Those Who Are Reputed to Be Learned Are Sometimes Devoid of Understanding

62. He is the Almighty, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise! The winds of hatred have encompassed the Ark of Batha (Mecca), by reason of that which the hands of the oppressors have wrought. O thou who art reputed for thy learning! Thou hast pronounced sentence against them for whom the books of the world have wept, and in whose favor the scriptures of all religions have testified. Thou, who art gone far astray, art indeed wrapt in a thick veil. By God Himself! Thou hast pronounced judgment against them through whom the horizon of faith hath been illumined. Unto this bear witness They Who are the Dawning-Places of Revelation and the Manifestations of the Cause of thy Lord, the Most Merciful, Who have sacrificed Their souls and all that They possessed in His straight Path. The Faith of God hath cried everywhere, by reason of thy tyranny, and yet thou disportest thyself and art of them that exult. There is no hatred in Mine heart for thee nor for anyone. Every man of discernment beholdeth thee, and such as are like thee, engulfed in evident folly. Hadst thou realized that which thou hast done, thou wouldst have cast thyself into the fire, or abandoned thine home and fled unto the mountains, or wouldst have groaned until thou hadst returned unto the place destined for thee by Him Who is the Lord of strength and of might. O thou who art even as nothing! Rend thou asunder the veils of idle fancies and vain imaginings, that thou mayest behold the Day-Star of knowledge shining from

this resplendent Horizon. Thou hast torn in pieces a remnant of the Prophet Himself, and imagined that thou hadst helped the Faith of God. Thus hath thy soul prompted thee, and thou art truly one of the heedless. Thine act hath consumed the hearts of the Concourse on high, and those of such as have circled round the Cause of God, the Lord of the worlds. The soul of the Chaste One (Fatimih) melted, by reason of thy cruelty, and the inmates of Paradise wept sore in that blessed Spot.

Bahá'u'lláh: *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, pp. 79-81; *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 205-207

63. Judge thou fairly, I adjure thee by God. What proof did the Jewish doctors adduce wherewith to condemn Him Who was the Spirit of God (Jesus Christ), when He came unto them with truth? What could have been the evidence produced by the Pharisees and the idolatrous priests to justify their denial of Muhammad, the Apostle of God when He came unto them with a Book that judged between truth and falsehood with a justice which turned into light the darkness of the earth, and enraptured the hearts of such as had known Him? Indeed thou hast produced, in this day, the same proofs which the foolish divines advanced in that age. Unto this testifieth He Who is the King of the realm of grace in this great Prison. Thou hast, truly, walked in their ways, nay, hast surpassed them in their cruelty, and hast deemed thyself to be helping the Faith and defending the Law of God, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. By Him Who is the Truth! Thine iniquity hath made Gabriel to groan, and hath drawn tears from the Law of God, through which the breezes of justice have been wafted over all who are in heaven and on earth. Hast thou fondly imagined that the judgment thou didst pronounce hath profited thee? Nay, by Him Who is the King of all Names! Unto thy loss testifieth He with Whom is the knowledge of all things as recorded in the preserved Tablet.

Bahá'u'lláh: *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, pp. 81-82

64. For instance, a certain man,¹⁵ reputed for his learning and attainments, and accounting himself as one of the pre-eminent leaders of his people, hath in his book denounced and vilified all the exponents of true learning. This is made abundantly clear by his explicit statements as well as by his allusions throughout his book. As We had frequently heard about him, We purposed to read some of his works. Although We never felt disposed to peruse other peoples' writings, yet as some had questioned Us concerning him, We felt it necessary to refer to his books, in order that We might answer Our questioners with knowledge and understanding. His works, in the Arabic tongue, were, however, not available, until one day a certain man informed Us that one of his compositions, entitled *Irshadu'l-'Avam*,¹⁶ could be found in this city. From this title We perceived the odour of conceit and vainglory, inasmuch as he hath imagined himself a learned man and regarded the rest of the people ignorant. His worth was in fact made known by the very title he had chosen for his book. It became evident that its author was following the path of self and desire, and was lost in the wilderness of ignorance and folly. Methinks, he had forgotten the well-known tradition which sayeth: "Knowledge is all that is knowable; and might and power, all creation." Notwithstanding, We sent for the book, and kept it with Us a few days. It was probably referred to twice. The second time, We accidentally came upon the story of the "Mi'raj"¹⁷ of Muhammad, of Whom was spoken: "But for Thee, I would not have created the

¹⁵ Haji Mirza Karim Khan.

¹⁶ "Guidance unto the ignorant."

¹⁷ Ascent.

spheres.” We noticed that he had enumerated some twenty or more sciences, the knowledge of which he considered to be essential for the comprehension of the mystery of the “Mi’raj”. We gathered from his statements that unless a man be deeply versed in them all, he can never attain to a proper understanding of this transcendent and exalted theme. Among the specified sciences were the science of metaphysical abstractions, of alchemy, and natural magic. Such vain and discarded learnings, this man hath regarded as the prerequisites of the understanding of the sacred and abiding mysteries of divine Knowledge.

Bahá’u’lláh: *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, pp. 184-186

Every Human Being Has Limited Comprehension

65. However great the contradictions in Dr. Forel’s testament in regard to his attitude towards the Cause we cannot fail but to recognize him as a Bahá’í who had but a partial glimpse of the Bahá’í Revelation. No one can claim that his knowledge of this Revelation is adequate, especially at this time when the Bahá’í Faith is still in the embryonic stage of its development. Dr. Forel was sincere in his convictions but like every human being his comprehension was limited and this was not in his power to change.

Shoghi Effendi: *Light of Divine Guidance Vol. 2*, p. 19

Every Person Of Understanding Recognizes His Or Her Limitations

66. I swear by Thy glory, O Thou Who art the Lord of all being and the Possessor of all things visible and invisible! Every man of understanding hath been so bewildered at Thy knowledge, and every man endued with insight been so perplexed in his attempt to fathom the signs of Thy great glory, that all have recognized their powerlessness to visualize, and their impotence to soar into, the heaven wherefrom one of the Luminaries of the Manifestations of Thy knowledge and of the Day-Springs of Thy wisdom hath shone forth. Who is he that shall befittingly describe this most sublime station and this most august seat--the seat which, as decreed by Thee, transcendeth the comprehension of Thy creatures and the testimonies of Thy servants, and which hath everlastingly been hid from the understanding and the knowledge of men, and been closed with the seal of Thy name, the Self-Subsisting.

Bahá’u’lláh: *Prayers and Meditations*, p. 280

Gain Knowledge Of Yourselves As A Way To Understand God

67. O My servants! Could ye apprehend with what wonders of My munificence and bounty I have willed to entrust your souls, ye would, of a truth, rid yourselves of attachment to all created things, and would gain a true knowledge of your own selves--a knowledge which is the same as the comprehension of Mine own Being. Ye would find yourselves independent of all else but Me, and would perceive, with your inner and outer eye, and as manifest as the revelation of My effulgent Name, the seas of My loving-kindness and bounty moving within you. Suffer not your idle fancies, your evil passions, your insincerity and blindness of heart to dim the luster, or stain the sanctity, of so lofty a station. Ye are even as the bird which soareth, with the full force of its mighty wings and with complete and joyous confidence, through the immensity of the heavens, until, impelled to satisfy its hunger, it turneth longingly to the water and clay of the earth below it, and, having been entrapped in the mesh of its desire, findeth itself impotent to

resume its flight to the realms whence it came. Powerless to shake off the burden weighing on its sullied wings, that bird, hitherto an inmate of the heavens, is now forced to seek a dwelling-place upon the dust. Wherefore, O My servants, defile not your wings with the clay of waywardness and vain desires, and suffer them not to be stained with the dust of envy and hate, that ye may not be hindered from soaring in the heavens of My divine knowledge.

Bahá'u'lláh: *Gleanings*, pp. 326-327

Imagination Sometimes Inhibits Understanding

68. Although the commentators of the Qur'án have related in divers manners the circumstances attending the revelation of this verse, yet thou shouldst endeavour to apprehend the purpose thereof. He saith: How false is that which the Jews have imagined! How can the hand of Him Who is the King in truth, Who caused the countenance of Moses to be made manifest, and conferred upon Him the robe of Prophethood--how can the hand of such a One be chained and fettered? How can He be conceived as powerless to raise up yet another Messenger after Moses? Behold the absurdity of their saying; how far it hath strayed from the path of knowledge and understanding! Observe how in this day also, all these people have occupied themselves with such foolish absurdities. For over a thousand years they have been reciting this verse, and unwittingly pronouncing their censure against the Jews, utterly unaware that they themselves, openly and privily, are voicing the sentiments and belief of the Jewish people! Thou art surely aware of their idle contention, that all Revelation is ended, that the portals of Divine mercy are closed, that from the day-springs of eternal holiness no sun shall rise again, that the Ocean of everlasting bounty is forever stilled, and that out of the Tabernacle of ancient glory the Messengers of God have ceased to be made manifest. Such is the measure of the understanding of these small-minded, contemptible people. These people have imagined that the flow of God's all-encompassing grace and plenteous mercies, the cessation of which no mind can contemplate, has been halted. From every side they have risen and girded up the loins of tyranny, and exerted the utmost endeavour to quench with the bitter waters of their vain fancy the flame of God's burning Bush, oblivious that the globe of power shall within its own mighty stronghold protect the Lamp of God. The utter destitution into which this people have fallen doth surely suffice them, inasmuch as they have been deprived of the recognition of the essential Purpose and the knowledge of the Mystery and Substance of the Cause of God. For the highest and most excelling grace bestowed upon men is the grace of "attaining unto the Presence of God" and of His recognition, which has been promised unto all people. This is the utmost degree of grace vouchsafed unto man by the All-Bountiful, the Ancient of Days, and the fulness of His absolute bounty upon His creatures. Of this grace and bounty none of this people hath partaken, neither have they been honoured with this most exalted distinction. How numerous are those revealed verses which explicitly bear witness unto this most weighty truth and exalted Theme! And yet they have rejected it, and, after their own desire, misconstrued its meaning. Even as He hath revealed: "As for those who believe not in the signs of God, or that they shall ever meet Him, these of My mercy shall despair, and for them doth a grievous chastisement await."¹⁸ Also He saith: "They who bear in mind that they shall attain unto the Presence of their Lord, and that unto Him shall they return."¹⁹ Also in another instance He saith: "They who held it as certain that they

¹⁸ Qur'án 29:23

¹⁹ Qur'án 2:46.

must meet God, said, 'How oft, by God's will, hath a small host vanquished a numerous host!'"²⁰ In yet another instance He revealeth: "Let him then who hopeth to attain the presence of his Lord work a righteous work."²¹ And also He saith: "He ordereth all things. He maketh His signs clear, that ye may have firm faith in attaining the presence of your Lord."²²

Bahá'u'lláh: *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, pp. 136-139; *Gleanings*, p. 23

69. Behold how in this Dispensation the worthless and foolish have fondly imagined that by such instruments as massacre, plunder and banishment they can extinguish the Lamp which the Hand of Divine power hath lit, or eclipse the Day Star of everlasting splendor. How utterly unaware they seem to be of the truth that such adversity is the oil that feedeth the flame of this Lamp! Such is God's transforming power. He changeth whatsoever He willeth; He verily hath power over all things....

Bahá'u'lláh: *Gleanings*, p. 72

70. Some, deluded by their idle fancies, have conceived all created things as associates and partners of God, and imagined themselves to be the exponents of His unity. By Him Who is the one true God! Such men have been, and will continue to remain, the victims of blind imitation, and are to be numbered with them that have restricted and limited the conception of God.

Bahá'u'lláh: *Gleanings*, p. 166

71. Say: O people! Dust fill your mouths, and ashes blind your eyes, for having bartered away the Divine Joseph for the most paltry of prices. Oh, the misery that resteth upon you, ye that are far astray! Have ye imagined in your hearts that ye possess the power to outstrip Him and His Cause? Far from it! To this He, Himself, the All-Powerful, the Most Exalted, the Most Great, doth testify.

Bahá'u'lláh: *Gleanings*, p. 208

72. We can well perceive how the whole human race is encompassed with great, with incalculable afflictions. We see it languishing on its bed of sickness, sore-tried and disillusioned. They that are intoxicated by self-conceit have interposed themselves between it and the Divine and infallible Physician. Witness how they have entangled all men, themselves included, in the mesh of their devices. They can neither discover the cause of the disease, nor have they any knowledge of the remedy. They have conceived the straight to be crooked, and have imagined their friend an enemy.

Bahá'u'lláh: *Gleanings*, p. 213

73. Dost thou imagine, O Minister of the Shah in the City (Constantinople), that I hold within My grasp the ultimate destiny of the Cause of God? Thinkest thou that My imprisonment, or the shame I have been made to suffer, or even My death and utter annihilation, can deflect its course? Wretched is what thou hast imagined in thine heart! Thou art indeed of them that walk after the vain imaginings which their hearts devise. No God is there but Him. Powerful is He to

²⁰ Qur'án 2:249.

²¹ Qur'án 18:111.

²² Qur'án 13:2.

manifest His Cause, and to exalt His testimony, and to establish whatsoever is His Will, and to elevate it to so eminent a position that neither thine own hands, nor the hands of them that have turned away from Him, can ever touch or harm it.

Bahá'u'lláh: *Gleanings*, pp. 219-220

74. Every discerning eye can, in this Day, perceive the dawning light of God's Revelation, and every attentive ear can recognize the Voice that was heard from the Burning Bush. Such is the rushing of the waters of Divine mercy, that He Who is the Day Spring of the signs of God and the Revealer of the evidences of His glory is without veil or concealment associating and conversing with the peoples of the earth and its kindreds. How numerous are those who, with hearts intent upon malice, have sought Our Presence, and departed from it loyal and loving friends! The portals of grace are wide open before the face of all men. In Our outward dealings with them We have treated alike the righteous and the sinner, that perchance the evil-doer may attain the limitless ocean of Divine forgiveness. Our name "the Concealer" hath shed such a light upon men that the froward hath imagined himself to be numbered with the pious. No man that seeketh Us will We ever disappoint, neither shall he that hath set his face towards Us be denied access unto Our court....

Bahá'u'lláh: *Gleanings*, pp. 271-272

75. In past centuries the nations of the world have imagined that the law of God demanded blind imitation of ancestral forms of belief and worship. For example, the Jews were captives of hereditary racial religious observances. The Muslims, likewise, have been held in the bondage of traditionary forms and ceremonials. The Christians also have been implicit followers of ancient tradition and hereditary teaching. At the same time the basic foundation of the religion of God, which was ever the principle of love, unity and the fellowship of humanity, has been forsaken and cast aside, each religious system holding tenaciously to imitations of ancestral forms as the supreme essential. Therefore, hatred and hostility have appeared in the world instead of the divine fruitage of unity and love. By reason of this it has been impossible for the followers of religion to meet together in fellowship and agreement. Even contact and communication have been considered contaminating, and the outcome has been a condition of complete alienation and mutual bigotry. There has been no investigation of the essential underlying basis of reality. One whose father was a Jew invariably proved to be a Jew, a Muslim was born of a Muslim, a Buddhist was a Buddhist because of the faith of his father before him, and so on. In brief, religion was a heritage descending from father to son, ancestry to posterity, without investigation of the fundamental reality; consequently, all religionists were veiled, obscured and at variance.

'Abdu'l-Bahá: *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 443

Understanding Can Provide Protection and Healing

76. But the purpose of these verses is not what they have imagined. Nay, the terms "ascendancy," "power," and "authority" imply a totally different station and meaning. For instance, consider the pervading power of those drops of the blood of Husayn which besprinkled the earth. What ascendancy and influence hath the dust itself, through the sacredness and potency of that blood, exercised over the bodies and souls of men! So much so, that he who sought deliverance from his ills, was healed by touching the dust of that holy ground, and whosoever, wishing to protect his property, treasured with absolute faith and understanding, a

little of that holy earth within his house, safeguarded all his possessions. These are the outward manifestations of its potency. And were We to recount its hidden virtues they would assuredly say: "He verily hath considered the dust to be the Lord of Lords, and hath utterly forsaken the Faith of God."

Bahá'u'lláh: *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, pp. 127-128

Increasing Comprehension Of The Verities Of The Faith Is A Supreme Objective

77. The deepening and enrichment of the spiritual life of the individual believer, his increasing comprehension of the essential verities underlying this Faith, his training in its administrative processes, his understanding of the fundamentals of the Covenants established by its Author and the authorised Interpreter of its teachings should be made the supreme objectives of the national representatives responsible for the edification, the progress and consolidation of these communities.

Shoghi Effendi: *Letters to Aust. and New Zealand*, p. 93

Full Comprehension Of The Administrative Basis Of The Cause Is Necessary

78. Shoghi Effendi hopes that your summer school will increasingly develop and will become an important center for the spread of the Message. You should try to raise its intellectual as well as its spiritual standard and to pave the way for its future development into one of the foremost Bahá'í universities in the West. Much stress should be laid on the thorough study of the history and of the teachings of the Cause, and particularly of the nature, basis and outstanding features of the Administration. The severe tests and trials through which our German brethren have passed during the last few years clearly demonstrate how much they are in need of a full comprehension of the administrative basis of the Cause. It is hoped that in the coming years much progress will be achieved in this respect.

Shoghi Effendi: *Light of Divine Guidance Vol. 1*, pp. 52-53

The Full Implications Of The Station Of The Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá Are Beyond The Comprehension Of Any New Believer

79. Concerning the best method of presenting the Master's Will to the newcomers, Shoghi Effendi is of the opinion that the N.S.A. should first make some suitable extracts from the Testament and to send these to all the local Assemblies for their use, so that there may be full unity in circulating the provisions of the Will among the new believers. The problem of choosing such excerpts is left entirely to the discretion of the N.S.A. The main thing, as it appears to the Guardian, is that the full station of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá be clearly explained and that the origin, nature and working of the Administrative Order of the Faith be clearly stated. The full implications of such a recognition are evidently beyond the comprehension of any new believer. Such a knowledge can be acquired gradually and only when the essentials of the Faith have been clearly recognized and adequately understood.

Shoghi Effendi: *Directives of the Guardian*, p. 9

Interpreting Scripture--Authoritative Versus Personal

80. Whoso interpreteth what hath been sent down from the heaven of Revelation, and altereth its evident meaning # 105

In several of His Tablets, Baha'u'llah affirms the distinction between allegorical verses, which are susceptible to interpretation, and those verses that relate to such subjects as the laws and ordinances, worship and religious observances, whose meanings are evident and which demand compliance on the part of the believers.

As explained in notes 145 and 184, Bahá'u'lláh designated 'Abdu'l-Bahá, His eldest Son, as His Successor and the Interpreter of His Teachings. 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His turn appointed His eldest grandson, Shoghi Effendi, to succeed Him as interpreter of the holy Writ and Guardian of the Cause. The interpretations of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi are considered divinely guided and are binding on the Bahá'ís.

The existence of authoritative interpretations does not preclude the individual from engaging in the study of the Teachings and thereby arriving at a personal interpretation or understanding. A clear distinction is, however, drawn in the Baha'i Writings between authoritative interpretation and the understanding that each individual arrives at from a study of its Teachings. Individual interpretations based on a person's understanding of the Teachings constitute the fruit of man's rational power and may well contribute to a greater comprehension of the Faith. Such views, nevertheless, lack authority. In presenting their personal ideas, individuals are cautioned not to discard the authority of the revealed words, not to deny or contend with the authoritative interpretation, and not to engage in controversy; rather they should offer their thoughts as a contribution to knowledge, making it clear that their views are merely their own.

Aqdas: Notes, pp. 221-222

81. A clear distinction is made in our Faith between authoritative interpretation and the interpretation or understanding that each individual arrives at for himself from his study of its teachings. While the former is confined to the Guardian, the latter, according to the guidance given to us by the Guardian himself, should by no means be suppressed. In fact such individual interpretation is considered the fruit of man's rational power and conducive to a better understanding of the teachings, provided that no disputes or arguments arise among the friends and the individual himself understands and makes it clear that his views are merely his own. Individual interpretations continually change as one grows in comprehension of the teachings. In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi it is stated, 'To deepen in the Cause means to read the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and the Master so thoroughly as to be able to give it to others in its pure form. There are many who have some superficial idea of what the Cause stands for. They, therefore, present it together with all sorts of ideas that are their own. As the Cause is still in its early days we must be most careful lest we fall into this error and injure the Movement we so much adore. There is no limit to the study of the Cause. The more we read the Writings, the more truths we can find in Them, the more we will see that our previous notions were erroneous.' So, although individual insights can be enlightening and helpful, they can also be misleading. The friends must therefore learn to listen to the views of others without being over-awed or allowing their faith to be shaken, and to express their own views without pressing them on their fellow Bahá'ís.

The Cause of God is organic, growing and developing like a living being. Time and again it has faced crises which have perplexed the believers, but each time the Cause, impelled by the immutable purpose of God, overcame the crisis and went on to greater heights.

Limitations Of Comprehending The Physical World

82. As to thy question whether the physical world is subject to any limitations, know thou that the comprehension of this matter dependeth upon the observer himself. In one sense, it is limited; in another, it is exalted beyond all limitations. The one true God hath everlastingly existed, and will everlastingly continue to exist. His creation, likewise, hath had no beginning, and will have no end. All that is created, however, is preceded by a cause. This fact, in itself, establisheth, beyond the shadow of a doubt, the unity of the Creator.

Thou hast, moreover, asked Me concerning the nature of the celestial spheres. To comprehend their nature, it would be necessary to inquire into the meaning of the allusions that have been made in the Books of old to the celestial spheres and the heavens, and to discover the character of their relationship to this physical world, and the influence which they exert upon it. Every heart is filled with wonder at so bewildering a theme, and every mind is perplexed by its mystery. God, alone, can fathom its import. The learned men, that have fixed at several thousand years the life of this earth, have failed, throughout the long period of their observation, to consider either the number or the age of the other planets. Consider, moreover, the manifold divergencies that have resulted from the theories propounded by these men. Know thou that every fixed star hath its own planets, and every planet its own creatures, whose number no man can compute.

Bahá'u'lláh: *Gleanings*, pp. 162-163

Intoxication Decreases Ability To Comprehend And Is Forbidden

83. Intellect and the faculty of comprehension are God's gifts whereby man is distinguished from other animals. Will a wise man want to lose this Light in the darkness of intoxication? No, by God! This will not satisfy him! He will, rather, do that which will develop his powers of intelligence and understanding, and not increase his negligence, heedlessness and decline. This is an explicit text in the perspicuous Book, wherein God hath set forth every goodly virtue, and exposed every reprehensible act.

'Abdu'-Bahá: *Prohibition of Intoxication*, p. 247

Universal Language Is A Key To Understanding Others And Universal Peace

84. Today the greatest need of the world of humanity is discontinuance of the existing misunderstandings among nations. This can be accomplished through the unity of language. Unless the unity of languages is realized, the Most Great Peace and the oneness of the human world cannot be effectively organized and established because the function of language is to portray the mysteries and secrets of human hearts. The heart is like a box, and language is the key. Only by using the key can we open the box and observe the gems it contains. Therefore, the question of an auxiliary international tongue has the utmost importance. Through this means international education and training become possible; the evidence and history of the past can be acquired. The spread of the known facts of the human world depends upon language. The explanation of divine teachings can only be through this medium. As long as diversity of tongues and lack of comprehension of other languages continue, these glorious aims cannot be realized.

Therefore, the very first service to the world of man is to establish this auxiliary international means of communication. It will become the cause of the tranquility of the human commonwealth. Through it sciences and arts will be spread among the nations, and it will prove to be the means of the progress and development of all races.

‘**Abdu’-Bahá**: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 340

Speak Truthfully About That Which You Know To Be True

85. O Hadi! Thou hast not been in Our company, thou art therefore ignorant of the Cause. Act not according to thine idle imaginings. Aside from these things, scrutinize the Writings with thine own eyes and ponder upon that which hath come to pass. Have pity upon thyself and upon the servants of God and be not the cause of waywardness like unto the people aforesaid. The path is unmistakable and the proof is evident. Change injustice into justice and inequity into equity. We cherish the hope that the breaths of divine inspiration may strengthen thee and that thine inner ear may be enabled to hear the blessed words: ‘Say, it is God, then leave them to entertain themselves with their cavillings.’²³ Thou has been there (Cyprus) and hast seen him (Mirza Yahya). Now speak forth with fairness. Do not misrepresent the matter, neither to thyself nor to the people. Thou art both ignorant and uninformed. Give ear unto the Voice of this Wronged One and hasten towards the ocean of divine knowledge that perchance thou mayest be adorned with the ornament of comprehension and mayest renounce all else but God. Harken unto the Voice of this benevolent Counsellor, calling aloud, unveiled and manifest, before the faces of kings and their subjects, and summon the people of the world, one and all, unto Him Who is the Lord of Eternity. This is the Word from Whose horizon the day-star of unfailing grace shineth resplendent.

Bahá’u’lláh: *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, pp. 43-44

People of Understanding Comprehend Bahá’u’lláh’s Aim

86. O Shaykh! I swear by the Sun of Truth Which hath risen and shineth above the horizon of this Prison! The betterment of the world hath been the sole aim of this Wronged One. Unto this beareth witness every man of judgment, of discernment, of insight and understanding. Whilst afflicted with trials, He held fast unto the cord of patience and fortitude, and was satisfied with the things which have befallen Him at the hands of His enemies, and was crying out: ‘I have renounced My desire for Thy desire, O my God, and My will for the revelation of Thy Will. By Thy glory! I desire neither Myself nor My life except for the purpose of serving Thy Cause, and I love not My being save that I may sacrifice it in Thy path. Thou seest and knowest, O my Lord, that those whom We asked to be fair and just, have, unjustly and cruelly, risen up against Us. Openly they were with Me, yet secretly they assisted My foes, who have arisen to dishonor Me. O God, my God! I testify that Thou hast created Thy servants to aid Thy Cause and exalt Thy Word, and yet they have helped Thine enemies. I beseech Thee, by Thy Cause that hath encompassed the world of being, and by Thy Name wherewith Thou hast subjected the seen and unseen, to adorn the peoples of the earth with the light of Thy justice, and to illuminate their hearts with the brightness of Thy knowledge. I am, O my Lord, Thy servant and the son of Thy servant. I bear witness unto Thy unity, and Thy oneness, and to the sanctity of Thy self and the

²³ Qur’án 6:91.

purity of Thine Essence. Thou beholdest, O my Lord, Thy trusted ones at the mercy of the treacherous among Thy creatures, and the calumniators amidst Thy people. Thou knowest what hath befallen Us at the hands of them whom Thou knowest better than we know them. They have committed what hath torn the veil from such of Thy creatures as are nigh unto Thee. I beseech Thee to assist them to obtain that which hath escaped them in the days of the Dawning-Place of Thy Revelation and the Dayspring of Thine Inspiration. Potent art Thou to do what pleaseth Thee, and in Thy grasp are the reins of all that is in heaven and all that is on earth.” The voice and the lamentation of the true Faith have been raised. It calleth aloud and saith: “O people! By the righteousness of God! I have attained unto Him Who hath manifested me and sent me down. This is the Day whereon Sinai hath smiled at Him Who conversed upon it, and Carmel at its Revealer, and the Sadrah at Him Who taught it. Fear ye God, and be not of them that have denied Him. Withhold not yourselves from that which hath been revealed through His grace. Seize ye the living waters of immortality in the name of your Lord, the Lord of all names, and drink ye in the remembrance of Him, Who is the Mighty, the Peerless.”

We have, under all circumstances, enjoined on men what is right, and forbidden what is wrong. He Who is the Lord of Being is witness that this Wronged One hath besought from God for His creatures whatever is conducive to unity and harmony, fellowship and concord. By the righteousness of God! This Wronged One is not capable of dissimulation. He, verily, hath revealed that which He desired; He, truly, is the Lord of strength, the Unrestrained.

Bahá'u'lláh: *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, pp. 36-38

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