

TEACHINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

I will speak to you concerning the special teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. All the divine principles announced by the tongue of the prophets of the past are to be found in the words of Bahá'u'lláh; but in addition to these, He has revealed certain new teachings which are not found in any of the sacred books of former times. I shall mention some of them; the others which are many in number may be found in the books, tablets and epistles written by Bahá'u'lláh, such as the Hidden Words, the Glad-Tidings, the Words of Paradise, Tajallíyát, Tarazat and others. Likewise in the Book of Aqdas there are new teachings which cannot be found in any of the past books or epistles of the prophets.

A fundamental teaching of Bahá'u'lláh is the oneness of the world of humanity. Addressing mankind, He says: "Ye are all leaves of one tree and the fruits of one branch." By this it is meant that the world of humanity is like a tree, the nations or peoples are the different limbs or branches of that tree and the individual human creatures are as the fruits and blossoms thereof. In this way His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh expressed the oneness of humankind whereas in all religious teachings of the past, the human world has been represented as divided into two parts, one known as the people of the Book of God or the pure tree and the other the people of infidelity and error or the evil tree. The former were considered as belonging to the faithful and the others to the hosts of the irreligious and infidel; one part of humanity the recipients of divine mercy and the other the object of the wrath of their Creator. His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh removed this by proclaiming the oneness of the world of humanity and this principle is specialized in His teachings for He has submerged all mankind in the sea of divine generosity. Some are asleep; they need to be awakened. Some are ailing; they need to be healed. Some are immature as children; they need to be trained. But all are recipients of the bounty and bestowals of God.

Another new principle revealed by His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh is the injunction to investigate truth; that is to say, no man should blindly follow his ancestors and forefathers. Nay, each must see with his own eyes, hear with his own ears and investigate the truth himself in order that he may follow the truth instead of blind acquiescence and imitation of ancestral beliefs.

His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh has announced that the foundation of all the religions of God is one; that oneness is truth and truth is oneness which does not admit of plurality. This teaching is new and specialized to this Manifestation.

He sets forth a new principle for this day in the announcement that religion must be the cause of unity, harmony and agreement among mankind. If it be the cause of discord and hostility, if it leads to separation and creates conflict, the absence of religion would be preferable in the world.

Furthermore He proclaims that religion must be in harmony with science and reason. If it does not conform to science and reconcile with reason it is superstition. Down to the present day it has been customary for man to accept a religious teaching even though it were not in accord with human reason and judgment. The harmony of religious belief with reason is a new vista which Bahá'u'lláh has opened for the soul of man.

He establishes the equality of man and woman. This is peculiar to the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, for all other religions have placed man above woman.

A new religious principle is that prejudice and fanaticism whether sectarian, denominational, patriotic or political are destructive to the foundation of human solidarity; therefore man should release himself from such bonds in order that the oneness of the world of humanity may become manifest.

Universal Peace is assured by Bahá'u'lláh as a fundamental accomplishment of the religion of God; that peace shall prevail among nations, governments and peoples, among religions, races and all conditions of mankind. This is one of the special characteristics of the Word of God revealed in this Manifestation.

Bahá'u'lláh declares that all mankind should attain knowledge and acquire an education. This is a necessary principle of religious belief and observance characteristically new in this dispensation.

He has set forth the solution and provided the remedy for the economic question. No religious books of the past Prophets speak of this important human problem.

He has ordained and established the House of Justice which is endowed with a political as well as a religious function, the consummate union and blending of church and state. This institution is under the protecting power of Bahá'u'lláh Himself. A universal or international House of Justice shall also be organized. Its rulings shall be in accordance with the commands and teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, and that which the universal House of Justice ordains shall be obeyed by all mankind. This international House of Justice shall be appointed and organized from the Houses of Justice of the whole world, and all the world shall come under its administration.

As to the most great characteristic of the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh -- a specific teaching not given by any of the Prophets of the past -- it is the ordination and appointment of the Center of the Covenant. By this appointment and provision He has safeguarded and protected the religion of God against differences and schisms, making it impossible for anyone to create a new sect or faction of belief. To insure unity and agreement He has entered into a Covenant with all the people of the world including the Interpreter and Explainer of His teachings so that no one may interpret or explain the religion of God according to his own view or opinion and thus create a sect founded upon his individual understanding of the divine words. The Book of the Covenant or Testament of Bahá'u'lláh is the means of preventing such a possibility, for whosoever shall speak from the authority of himself alone shall be degraded. Be ye informed and cognizant of this. ~ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 453-458

Bahá'u'lláh: His Teachings

Bahá'u'lláh presents a vision of life that insists upon a fundamental redefinition of all human relationships--among human beings themselves, between human beings and the natural world, between the individual and society, and between the members of society and its institutions. Each of these relationships must be reassessed in light of humanity's evolving understanding of God's will and purpose. New laws and concepts are enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh so that human consciousness can be freed from patterns of response set by tradition, and the foundations of a global civilization can be erected. "*A new life*", Bahá'u'lláh declares, "*is, in this age, stirring within all the peoples of the earth.*"¹

Because the implications of Bahá'u'lláh's message are both social and spiritual, His teachings redefine the very concept of religion. He is not the Founder of a religion as religion is conventionally understood, but rather the Prophet of civilization and collective transformation--the "Originator of a new universal cycle" in human history.² His message transcends all religious categories. His vision of the oneness of humankind involves not just the deepening of human solidarity, the safeguarding of human rights, or the establishment of an enduring peace, but rather "an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced."³ His prescriptions for the moral reformation of human nature are unique in their approach and universal in their applicability.

At a moment when civilization has lost touch with the underlying spiritual and ethical moorings that anchor human relations, the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh reconnect the individual soul to the world of the sacred and shed new light on humankind's collective destiny. In addressing those fundamental yearnings that incline each human being towards transcendence, Bahá'u'lláh affirms that a loving Creator has fashioned the universe with the “*clay of love*” and placed within every heart the “*essence*” of Divine “*light*” and “*beauty*.”⁴ Humanity, He says, has arrived at the dawn of its maturity, when its “*innate excellence*” and latent creative capacities can at last find complete expression.⁵ His Revelation has “*breathed a new life into every human frame, and instilled into every word a fresh potency. All created things proclaim the evidences of this world-wide regeneration.*”⁶

As repeatedly emphasized throughout Bahá'u'lláh's writings, the primary purpose of God in revealing His will through His Manifestations is to effect a transformation in the spiritual and material life of human society:

*...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.*⁷

Bahá'u'lláh, like Abraham, Buddha, Christ, Muhammad and the other Divine Messengers who preceded Him, tapped the deepest roots of human motivation opening up new realms of moral, intellectual, and cultural achievement. “*Noble have I created thee,*” is the Divine assurance, “*Rise then unto that for which thou wast created.*”⁸ He states that “*the purpose for which mortal men have...stepped into the realm of being, is that they may work for the betterment of the world and live together in concord and harmony.*”⁹ “*Let each morn,*” He urges, “*be better than its eve and each morrow richer than its yesterday. Man's merit lieth in service and virtue and not in the pageantry of wealth and riches ... Guard against idleness and sloth, and cling unto that which profiteth mankind, whether young or old, whether high or low.*”¹⁰

The transformation called for by Bahá'u'lláh is directed to the inner life and character of every human being and to the organization of society – a transformation that engenders cooperation, compassion, rectitude of conduct, and justice. In linking spiritual development to personal behavior, Bahá'u'lláh wrote “*that the citadels of men's hearts should be subdued through the hosts of a noble character and praiseworthy deeds.*”¹¹ He exhorts the world's peoples to “*illumine their beings with the light of trustworthiness,*” “*the ornament of honesty,*” and the “*emblems*” of “*generosity.*”¹² Service to humankind is the purpose of both individual life and all social arrangements: “*Do not busy yourselves in your own concerns; let your thoughts be fixed upon that which will rehabilitate the fortunes of mankind and sanctify the hearts and souls of men.*”¹³ And further: “*The progress of the world, the development of nations, the tranquility of peoples, and the peace of all that dwell on earth are among the principles and ordinances of God.*”¹⁴

Bahá'u'lláh clearly affirms the deep connection between the practical and spiritual dimensions of human existence. The creation of social structures that promote the development of both individual and collective capacities – capacities of the mind and spirit – receives particular emphasis in His teachings. Human beings, He says, have been “*created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization.*”¹⁵ The attainment of “*knowledge,*” “*wisdom,*” and “*spiritual perception*” should be the central object of human endeavor.¹⁶ The pursuit of “*Arts, crafts and sciences uplift the world of being, and are conducive*

to its exaltation.”¹⁷ But “in all things,” is His advice, humanity must “seek” the “Middle Way” for “whatsoever passeth beyond the limits of moderation will cease to exert a beneficial influence.”¹⁸

Just as the physical world is dependent upon the generative power of the sun’s rays for its development, so the individual soul’s ability to realize its true potential depends entirely upon its response to the interventions of God in human history. It is the creative power of the Revelations of God that unlocks the spiritual, moral, and intellectual capacities latent in human nature. Unaided by this Divine power, human nature remains the prisoner of instinct and of static cultural imperatives. In this regard, Bahá’u’lláh refers to His laws and teachings as the “choice Wine” that is “the breath of life unto all created things.”¹⁹ They are “lamps” of God’s “loving providence” and the “keys” of His “mercy.”²⁰

Humanity, the highest point of creation, contains within itself the capacity to reflect all the Divine attributes, and the soul of each human being is indelibly imprinted with the image of its Creator. “The soul,” Bahá’u’lláh says, “is a sign of God, a heavenly gem whose reality the most learned of men hath failed to grasp, and whose mystery no mind, however acute, can ever hope to unravel.”²¹ It is only as human beings awaken to their spiritual nature that they can be said to know God: “...to ascend unto the station conferred upon their own inmost being, the station of the knowledge of their own selves.”²² The investigation of reality is thus not only the right but the obligation of every human being. Since the Divine perfections are without limit, so the development of the rational soul is eternal, its progress vitally affected by the use it has made of its opportunities during its life on earth. The acquisition of spiritual qualities such as humility, kindness, forbearance, compassion, honesty and generosity prepare the soul for its journey to the light of its Creator. “Know thou of a truth that the soul,” Bahá’u’lláh confirms, “after its separation from the body, will continue to progress until it attaineth the presence of God, in a state and condition which neither the revolution of ages and centuries, nor the changes and chances of this world, can alter. It will endure as long as the Kingdom of God, His sovereignty, His dominion and power will endure.”²³

Bahá’u’lláh states that: “the peoples of the world, of whatever race or religion, derive their inspiration from one heavenly Source, and are the subjects of one God.”²⁴ The Founders of the world’s religions-- Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Krishna, Jesus, Muhammad – are one in Their nature and Their purpose, and the effect of these successive Revelations on human consciousness has been cumulative. Each succeeding Divine Messenger has been able to bring a fuller measure of truth, as humanity has developed the capacity to receive it. Further, while the central spiritual thrust has remained constant, the social ordinances brought by the Manifestations of God have been changed to meet the requirements of an ever-evolving humankind. In short, the world’s great religious systems are expressions of one, progressively revealed divine plan – “the changeless Faith of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future.”²⁵

Impelled forward by its steadily deepening relationship with its Creator, humanity has moved through stages in its collective development which are analogous to the periods of infancy, childhood, and adolescence in the lives of its individual members. It is now entering the period of its collective maturity. Fundamental to the challenge of maturity is for all the peoples of the world to embrace the consciousness of their oneness as a single human family whose homeland is the earth itself. “O contending peoples and kindreds of the earth,” Bahá’u’lláh urges, “Set your faces towards unity, and let the radiance of its light shine upon you.”²⁶ Humanity’s “well-being,” He affirms, “its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established.”²⁷

It is this basic need that the mission of Bahá'u'lláh addresses. While the Manifestations before Him have each lent an essential impulse to the process of social and spiritual maturation, Bahá'u'lláh is empowered to generate forces that will bring into being a peaceful and integrated global society. Although the succession of the Revelations of God will continue “*until the end that hath no end*” – and with it the spiritual evolution of humanity – we are now entering the culminating stage of the social organization of life on this planet.²⁸ “*Peerless is this Day,*” Bahá'u'lláh states, “*for it is as the eye to past ages and centuries, and a light unto the darkness of the times.*”²⁹

In proclaiming the pivotal principle of the oneness of humankind, Bahá'u'lláh outlines a body of social precepts which He says must guide the future development of society. Strong emphasis is placed on the abolition of prejudices of all kinds. There is, Bahá'u'lláh insists, but one human race; notions that a particular racial or ethnic group is in some way superior to the rest of humanity are without foundation. Women and men are fully equal in the sight of God, and society must reorganize its life so as to give practical effect to this reality. The era has dawned, Bahá'u'lláh says, for the establishment of justice in human affairs, and considerable attention is given in His writings to the responsibility of society to ensure economic justice among its component groups. Closely related to these concerns is the obligation of parents to educate their children and the assertion that it is the responsibility of society to make certain that the means for universal education are provided. Every human being must be trained to “*look into all things with a searching eye*” so that truth can be independently ascertained³⁰. The resources of both science and faith must be tapped if the capacities of the world's peoples are to reach the levels needed to address the problems of the present hour. Reliance on consultative decision-making “*bestoweth greater awareness and transmuteth conjecture into certitude*” – thereby providing the means for effecting meaningful change where social progress has been inhibited.³¹ The adoption of the principle of collective security and the establishment of institutions of governance at the global level will ensure permanent stability and peace in international relations.

Thus, Bahá'u'lláh speaks definitively of life, its meaning, and the afterlife. He addresses both the individual in search of spiritual understanding and a harassed human race in need of tranquility, direction and hope. The moral and spiritual transformation of society, the relief of the diverse peoples of the earth from conflict, injustice, and suffering, and the birth of a progressive and peaceful global civilization are not only possible, Bahá'u'lláh says, but inevitable.

“**T***his is the Day*”, Bahá'u'lláh proclaims, “*in which God's most excellent favors have been poured out upon men, the Day in which His most mighty grace hath been infused into all created things.*”³² Every human being is the beneficiary of this process, and his “*whole duty...in this Day is to attain that share of the flood of grace which God poureth forth for him.*”³³ The history of humanity as one people is only now beginning. “*Great is thy blessedness, O earth, for thou hast been made the foot-stool of thy God, and been chosen as the seat of His mighty throne.*”³⁴ “*Soon will the present-day order be rolled up, and a new one spread out in its stead. Verily, the Lord speaketh the truth, and is the Knower of things unseen.*”³⁵

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1. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, 2d. rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976), p. 196.
 2. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1987), p. 93.
 3. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, 2d. rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), p. 43.
 4. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1985), pp. 7, 6, 12.

5. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 340.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 92-93.
7. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, 3d. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), pp. 240-241.
8. *The Hidden Words*, p. 9.
9. Bahá'u'lláh, quoted in *Trustworthiness: A Compilation of Extracts from the Bahá'í Writings* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1987), p. 5.
10. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995), p. 138.
11. *Trustworthiness*, p. 5.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 2; and Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984), p. 25.
13. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 93-94.
14. *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 129-130.
15. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 215.
16. Bahá'u'lláh, quoted in *Bahá'í Education: A Compilation, Compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1977), p. 5.
17. Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* (Wilmette, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1979), p. 26.
18. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 216; and Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), para. 43.
19. *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, para. 5 and 2.
20. *Ibid.*, para. 3.
21. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 158-159.
22. *Ibid.*, p.5.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 155-156.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 217.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 136.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 217.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 286.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
29. *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 79.
30. *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 157.
31. Bahá'u'lláh, quoted in *Consultation: A Compilation, Extracts from the Writings and Utterances of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980), p. 3.
32. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 6.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

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