

The Call to Self-Sacrifice

*“Let your vision be world-embracing, rather than
confined to your own self.”*

~Bahá'u'lláh

#1 O friends! It behooveth you to refresh and revive your souls through the gracious favors which in this Divine, this soul-stirring Springtime are being showered upon you. The Daystar of His great glory hath shed its radiance upon you, and the clouds of His limitless grace have overshadowed you. How high the reward of him that hath not deprived himself of so great a bounty, nor failed to recognize the beauty of his Best-Beloved in this, His new attire. Watch over yourselves, for the Evil One is lying in wait, ready to entrap you. Gird yourselves against his wicked devices, and, led by the light of the name of the All-Seeing God, make your escape from the darkness that surroundeth you. Let your vision be world-embracing, rather than confined to your own self. The Evil One is he that hindereth the rise and obstructeth the spiritual progress of the children of men.

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh: XLIII

#2 I admonish thee, and those who are like thee, to deal not with anyone as ye have dealt with Us. Beware lest ye follow in the footsteps of the Evil One and walk in the ways of the unjust. Take from this world only to the measure of your needs, and forgo that which exceedeth them. Observe equity in all your judgements, and transgress not the bounds of justice, nor be of them that stray from its path.

*Bahá'u'lláh / The Summons of the
Lord of Hosts: Súriy-i-Mulúk*

#3 O people of the world! Follow not the promptings of the self, for it summoneth insistently to wickedness and lust; follow, rather, Him Who is the Possessor of all created things, Who biddeth you to show forth piety, and manifest the fear of God. He, verily, is independent of all His creatures. Take heed not to stir up mischief in the land after it hath been set in order. Whoso acteth in this way is not of Us, and We are quit of him. Such is the command which hath, through the power of truth, been made manifest from the heaven of Revelation.

Bahá'u'lláh / The Kitáb-i-Aqdas

#4 O ye loved ones of God! In this, the Bahá'í dispensation, God's Cause is spirit unalloyed. His Cause belongeth not to the material world. It cometh neither for strife nor war, nor for acts of mischief or of shame; it is neither for quarrelling with other Faiths, nor for conflicts with the nations. Its only army is the love of God, its only joy the clear wine of His knowledge, its only battle the expounding of the Truth; its one crusade is against the insistent self, the evil promptings of the human heart. Its victory is to submit and yield, and to be selfless is its everlasting glory. In brief, it is spirit upon spirit:

Unless ye must,
Bruise not the serpent in the dust,
How much less wound a man.
And if ye can,
No ant should ye alarm,
Much less a brother harm.

#5 Let all your striving be for this, to become the source of life and immortality, and peace and comfort and joy, to every human soul, whether one known to you or a stranger, one opposed to you or on your side. Look ye not upon the purity or impurity of his nature: look ye upon the all-embracing mercy of the Lord, the light of Whose grace hath embosomed the whole earth and all who dwell thereon, and in the plenitude of Whose bounty are immersed both the wise and the ignorant. Stranger and friend alike are seated at the table of His favor. Even as the believer, the denier who turneth away from God doth at the same time cup his hands and drink from the sea of His bestowals.

It behooveth the loved ones of the Lord to be the signs and tokens of His universal mercy and the embodiments of His own excelling grace. Like the sun, let them cast their rays upon garden and rubbish heap alike, and even as clouds in spring, let them shed down their rain upon flower and thorn. Let them seek but love and faithfulness, let them not follow the ways of unkindness, let their talk be confined to the secrets of friendship and of peace. Such are the attributes of the righteous, such is the

distinguishing mark of those who serve His Threshold.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá: 206

#6 O ye loved ones of God! Praise be to Him, the bright banner of the Covenant is flying higher every day, while the flag of perfidy hath been reversed, and hangeth at half-mast. The benighted attackers have been shaken to their core; they are now as ruined sepulchers, and even as blind creatures that dwell beneath the earth they creep and crawl about a corner of the tomb, and out of that hole, from time to time, like unto savage beasts, do they jibber and howl. Glory be to God! How can the darkness hope to overcome the light, how can a magician's cords hold fast "a serpent plain for all to see"? "Then lo! It swallowed up their lying wonders."¹ Alas for them! They have deluded themselves with a fable, and to indulge their appetites they have done away with their own selves. They gave up everlasting glory in exchange for human pride, and they sacrificed greatness in both worlds to the demands of the insistent self. This is that of which We have forewarned you. Ere long shall ye behold the foolish in manifest loss.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá: 206

#7 You have asked why it was necessary for the soul that was from God to make this journey back to God? Would you like to understand the reality of this question just as I teach it, or do you wish to hear it as the world teaches it? For if I should answer you according to the latter way, this would be but imitation and would not make the subject clear.

The reality underlying this question is that the evil spirit, Satan or whatever is interpreted as evil, refers to the lower nature in man. This baser nature is symbolized in various ways. In man there are two expressions: One is the expression of nature; the other, the expression of the spiritual realm. The world of nature is defective. Look at it clearly, casting aside all superstition and imagination. If you should leave a man uneducated and barbarous in the wilds of Africa, would there be any doubt about his remaining ignorant? God has never created an evil spirit; all such ideas and nomenclature are symbols expressing the mere human or earthly nature of man. It is an essential condition of the soil of earth that thorns, weeds and fruitless trees may grow from it. Relatively

speaking, this is evil; it is simply the lower state and baser product of nature.

#8 It is evident, therefore, that man is in need of divine education and inspiration, that the spirit and bounties of God are essential to his development. That is to say, the teachings of Christ and the Prophets are necessary for his education and guidance. Why? Because They are the divine Gardeners Who till the earth of human hearts and minds. They educate man, uproot the weeds, burn the thorns and remodel the waste places into gardens and orchards where fruitful trees grow. The wisdom and purpose of Their training is that man must pass from degree to degree of progressive unfoldment until perfection is attained. For instance, if a man should live his entire life in one city, he cannot gain a knowledge of the whole world. To become perfectly informed he must visit other cities, see the mountains and valleys, cross the rivers and traverse the plains. In other words, without progressive and universal education perfection will not be attained.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace: 97.

#9 Until a being setteth his foot in the plane of sacrifice, he is bereft of every favor and grace; and this plane of sacrifice is the realm of dying to the self, that the radiance of the living God may then shine forth. The martyr's field is the place of detachment from self, that the anthems of eternity may be upraised. Do all ye can to become wholly weary of self, and bind yourselves to that Countenance of Splendors; and once ye have reached such heights of servitude, ye will find, gathered within your shadow, all created things. This is boundless grace; this is the highest sovereignty; this is the life that dieth not. All else save this is at the last but manifest perdition and great loss.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá: 36

#10 The Twin Luminaries of this resplendent age have taught us this: Prayer is the essential spiritual conversation of the soul with its Maker, direct and without intermediation. It is the spiritual food that sustains the life of the spirit. Like the morning's dew, it brings freshness to the heart and cleanses it, purifying it from attachments of the insistent self. It is a fire that burns away the veils and a light that leads to the ocean of reunion with the Almighty.

On its wings does the soul soar in the heavens of God and draw closer to the divine reality. Upon its quality depends the development of the limitless capacities of the soul and the attraction of the bounties of God, but the prolongation of prayer is not desirable.

The Universal House of Justice, from a letter dated 18 December 2014 to the Bahá'ís in Iran

#11 One of the most significant developments that mark the unfoldment of the Divine Plan at this time has been the advancements at the level of culture that the Bahá'í community has experienced and to which the House of Justice has in several of its messages referred. These advancements deserve profound reflection. Every devoted believer will surely wish to guard and further foster them. Accordingly, the friends must pay heed to their manner of communication which can do so much to impact the community's culture. They must aim to raise consciousness without awakening the insistent self, to disseminate insight without cultivating a sense of celebrity, to address issues profoundly but not court controversy, to remain clear in expression but not descend to crassness prevalent in common discourse, and to avoid deliberately or unintentionally setting the agenda for the community or, in seeking the approval of society, recasting the community's endeavors in terms that can undermine those very endeavors.

From a letter dated 4 April 2018 to a National Spiritual Assembly written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

#12 O Thou kind and loving Providence! The east is astir and the west surgeth even as the eternal billows of the sea. The gentle breezes of holiness are diffused and, from the Unseen Kingdom, the rays of the Orb of Truth shine

forth resplendent. The anthems of divine unity are being chanted and the ensigns of celestial might are waving. The angelic Voice is raised and, even as the roaring of the leviathan, soundeth the call to selflessness and evanescence. ...

...The beloved of the Lord, with their musk-scented breath, burn like bright candles in every clime, and the friends of the All-Merciful, even as unfolding flowers, can be found in all regions. Not for a moment do they rest; they breathe not but in remembrance of Thee, and crave naught but to serve Thy Cause. In the meadows of truth they are as sweet-singing nightingales, and in the flower garden of guidance they are even as brightly colored blossoms. With mystic flowers they adorn the walks of the Garden of Reality; as swaying cypresses they line the riverbanks of the Divine Will. Above the horizon of being they shine as radiant stars; in the firmament of the world they gleam as resplendent orbs. Manifestations of celestial grace are they, and daysprings of the light of divine assistance.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá: 233

Your personal prayers

Reflection on the Text

Discussion:

Discuss the term “the insistent self”?

ⁱ Qur'án 26:31; 26:44; the reference is to Moses' rod, and the enchanters.