

Gaining an Historical Perspective

Book 9

Unit 1

The Eternal Covenant

**PRE-PUBLICATION EDITION
MATERIAL IN DEVELOPMENT**

VERSION 1.1.1.PP

28 March 2015



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Ruhi Institute
Apartado Postal: 402032
Cali, Colombia
Tel: 57 2 828-2599
Email: instituto@ruhi.org
Website: www.ruhi.org

The Ruhi Institute is an educational institution functioning under the aegis of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Colombia. Its purpose is to develop human resources dedicated to the spiritual, social and cultural progress of the Colombian people. Over the decades its materials have increasingly been used by national Bahá'í communities in all parts of the world.

The approach to curriculum development followed by the Ruhi Institute differs significantly from the traditional one of design, field-testing and evaluation, carried out in a linear fashion. The first step in writing any set of materials is taken, rather, when an experience is created at the grassroots in performing some act of service in response to the exigencies of the development of a community. Materials emerge out of this experience and become an expression of it. They are, on the one hand, a record of the learning that occurs in applying the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith in a particular area of service and, on the other, an instrument for the systematization of that learning. The approach has been described in the following terms in the small volume *Learning About Growth: The story of the Ruhi Institute and large-scale expansion of the Bahá'í Faith in Colombia*:

Once an educational need is identified, a small group of people, working at the grassroots, consult among themselves, develop a set of ideas for educational activities, and put them into practice. The results of this practice are reviewed, evaluated and consulted upon; in light of this consultation, a modified set of educational activities is put into practice, and subjected to reflection that leads to further modification and revision. At no time in this process of curriculum development does action await the final preparation and evaluation of educational materials. At every stage, educational activities proceed with the best materials at hand, in the conviction that it is only through practice and reflection, both pursued in light of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, that more appropriate curricula can gradually evolve. Yet, this is not a setting in which a few individuals are developing materials for their own use, and it does become necessary at some point to finalize the structure and content of each unit so that it may be used with confidence by others. The decision to release a final version of the materials for a given course is made simply when it is noticed that modifications are becoming negligible. It is important to note that the various aspects of this process of consultation, action and reflection are carried out parallel with one another, and not performed in a linear sequence which would be inherently artificial.

As the use of the materials of the Ruhi Institute has become more widespread, the development process has drawn increasingly on experience worldwide in applying the teachings to the life of humanity. Though in practice the process today can take diverse forms, depending on the nature of the material in development, there are generally three stages that give rise to what is considered the final published edition.

1. Initial Outline

At this stage a course or text contains the basic concepts and a set of passages from the Bahá'í writings that, taken together, are believed to achieve the educational objective in question. For some time, this initial outline of ideas is used by small groups of individuals in the field, as part of the efforts to elaborate effective course content.

2. Alpha Version

As action progresses, the material is refined and begins to reflect new experience gained, incorporating ideas that arise out of it. Not infrequently, certain concepts are amended,

new passages from the Bahá'í writings added, or a series of simple exercises introduced to facilitate comprehension of a topic or to help develop an important skill or attitude. Through this process, a consolidated course or text emerges which is generally regarded as the "alpha version".

3. *Pre-Publication Edition*

In time it is determined, generally on the basis of the integrity of the content, to make the course or text more widely available as a pre-publication edition. Through its continued use, it becomes apparent when a section needs to be moved or an exercise or two revised. Several successive versions may appear. Gradually, however, fewer and fewer modifications are required to achieve the intended purpose of the course or text, and the material, at this stage, goes for publication.

We are happy to make available to selected organizations and institutions one of the units that has reached the pre-publication stage. It is the first of three units of a book currently in development entitled *Gaining an Historical Perspective*. You are encouraged to send us any comments you have based on your experience in using the course content.

Ruhi Institute

Now consult about the significance of the following quotation in your group:

“The essence of love is for man to turn his heart to the Beloved One, and sever himself from all else but Him, and desire naught save that which is the desire of his Lord.”⁴

SECTION 2

It is a fundamental belief of every Bahá'í that the reality of God is unknowable. He is far above human understanding, and His glory can never be praised adequately by the human tongue. The human heart can never fathom His infinite mysteries. Any description, image, or likeness of God is but a product of human imagination.

If the reality of God is unknowable, what does it mean, then, to know God? Bahá'u'lláh teaches us that we should strive to know the attributes of God—attributes such as His all-embracing knowledge, His infinite wisdom, His limitless love, His justice, His mercy, His might, and His glory that are revealed to us by those holy and sanctified Beings we recognize as Manifestations of God. To explore this essential concept further, read the quotations below and answer the questions that follow.

“The door of the knowledge of the Ancient Being hath ever been, and will continue forever to be, closed in the face of men. No man’s understanding shall ever gain access unto His holy court.”⁵

“The knowledge of the reality of the Divinity is in no wise possible . . .”⁶

“How shall we know God? We know Him by His attributes. We know Him by His signs. We know Him by His names. We know not what the reality of the sun is, but we know the sun by the ray, by the heat, by its efficacy and penetration.”⁷

1. To think about the implications of the statements “the door of the knowledge of the Ancient Being hath ever been, and will continue forever to be, closed in the face of men” and “no man’s understanding shall ever gain access unto His holy court”, look at the sentences below. Can any one of them be true?
 - a. Through a lifetime of prayer and meditation, living in isolation from the things of this material world, we can become more and more spiritual and eventually understand the essence of God. T F
 - b. God exists in nature—in the air, the sun, the plants, and the animals; by connecting with nature, we come to know the reality of God. T F
 - c. God is unknowable because He exists in everything in the universe, and no human mind can comprehend the universe in its entirety. T F
 - d. From time to time God descends from on high, taking on human form and living among us. T F

- e. Since we can never really know God, it means that we can each make Him Whoever we need Him to be. T F
- f. We cannot know God until we pass into the next world, where we will meet Him and reside with Him forever. T F
2. What are some of the insights we gain into the nature of our knowledge of God from the analogy of the sun? _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

“And not an atom of all the atoms in existence,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states, “not a creature from amongst the creatures but speaketh His praise and telleth of His attributes and names . . .” The signs of God are everywhere around us. Some of our happiest and most tender moments in life are those spent contemplating His signs in creation. In the volume *Prayers and Meditations by Bahá’u’lláh*, the Guardian has compiled a selection of verses in which we can lose ourselves in hours of such reflection. Below is a passage from that volume. Read it together with your group today, though later you may wish to find a moment, alone, to meditate on it.

“I am well aware, O my Lord, that I have been so carried away by the clear tokens of Thy loving-kindness, and so completely inebriated with the wine of Thine utterance, that whatever I behold I readily discover that it maketh Thee known unto me, and it remindeth me of Thy signs, and of Thy tokens, and of Thy testimonies. By Thy glory! Every time I lift up mine eyes unto Thy heaven, I call to mind Thy highness and Thy loftiness, and Thine incomparable glory and greatness; and every time I turn my gaze to Thine earth, I am made to recognize the evidences of Thy power and the tokens of Thy bounty. And when I behold the sea, I find that it speaketh to me of Thy majesty, and of the potency of Thy might, and of Thy sovereignty and Thy grandeur. And at whatever time I contemplate the mountains, I am led to discover the ensigns of Thy victory and the standards of Thine omnipotence.

“I swear by Thy might, O Thou in Whose grasp are the reins of all mankind, and the destinies of the nations! I am so inflamed by my love for Thee, and so inebriated with the wine of Thy oneness, that I can hear from the whisper of the winds the sound of Thy glorification and praise, and can recognize in the murmur of the waters the voice that proclaimeth Thy virtues and Thine attributes, and can apprehend from the rustling of the leaves the mysteries that have been irrevocably ordained by Thee in Thy realm.

“Glorified art Thou, O God of all names and Creator of the heavens! I render Thee thanks that Thou hast made known unto Thy servants this Day whereon the river that is life indeed hath flowed forth from the fingers of Thy bounty, and the

springtime of Thy revelation and Thy presence hath appeared through Thy manifestation unto all who are in Thy heaven and all who are on Thy earth.”⁸

SECTION 3

The quotations we studied in the previous section clearly indicate that it is impossible for us to know the reality, or essence, of God. What we can do is to gain more and more understanding of His attributes as revealed to us by His Manifestation and learn to recognize His signs in creation. A question we must ask ourselves, then, is, How we can increase our capacity to discern the attributes of God?

Having created us to know Him and to worship Him, God has given each of us the faculties and powers necessary to fulfill the purpose of our lives. However, these spiritual faculties must be developed, protected, and used for that which God intended. The quotations we will examine in the next few sections will help us think about our capacity to perceive spiritual reality. Since the Writings employ words referring to the physical world to describe spiritual aspects of existence, it would be beneficial to reflect first on the way intellectual reality is often expressed. In this connection, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells us that “human knowledge is of two kinds”. He then goes on to explain:

“One is the knowledge acquired through the senses. That which the eye, the ear, or the senses of smell, taste, or touch can perceive is called ‘sensible’. For example, the sun is sensible, as it can be seen. Likewise, sounds are sensible, as the ear can hear them; odors, as they can be inhaled and perceived by the sense of smell; foods, as the palate can perceive their sweetness, sourness, bitterness, or saltiness; heat and cold, as the sense of touch can perceive them. These are called sensible realities.

“The other kind of human knowledge is that of intelligible things; that is, it consists of intelligible realities which have no outward form or place and which are not sensible. For example, the power of the mind is not sensible, nor are any of the human attributes: These are intelligible realities. Love, likewise, is an intelligible and not a sensible reality. For the ear does not hear these realities, the eye does not see them, the smell does not sense them, the taste does not detect them, the touch does not perceive them. Even the ether, the forces of which are said in natural philosophy to be heat, light, electricity, and magnetism, is an intelligible and not a sensible reality. Likewise, nature itself is an intelligible and not a sensible reality; the human spirit is an intelligible and not a sensible reality.

“But when you undertake to express these intelligible realities, you have no recourse but to cast them in the mold of the sensible, for outwardly there is nothing beyond the sensible. Thus, when you wish to express the reality of the spirit and its conditions and degrees, you are obliged to describe them in terms of sensible things, since outwardly there exists nothing but the sensible. For example, grief and happiness are intelligible things, but when you wish to express these spiritual conditions you say, ‘My heart became heavy’, or ‘My heart was uplifted’, although one’s heart is not literally made heavy or lifted up. Rather, it is a spiritual or

intelligible condition, the expression of which requires the use of sensible terms. Another example is when you say, ‘So-and-so has greatly advanced’, although he has remained in the same place, or ‘So-and-so has a high position’, whereas, like everyone else, he continues to walk upon the earth. This elevation and advancement are spiritual conditions and intelligible realities, but to express them you must use sensible terms, since outwardly there is nothing beyond the sensible.

“To cite another example, knowledge is figuratively described as light, and ignorance as darkness. But reflect: Is knowledge sensible light or ignorance sensible darkness? Certainly not. These are only intelligible conditions, but when you wish to express them outwardly you call knowledge light and ignorance darkness and say, ‘My heart was dark and it became illumined.’ Now, the light of knowledge and the darkness of ignorance are intelligible realities, not sensible ones, but when we seek to express them outwardly, we are obliged to give them a sensible form.”⁹

In the space below write a few sentences, each of which explains an intellectual or spiritual reality by using words that refer to things perceivable through the senses.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

SECTION 4

Bearing in mind the subtleties of the language needed to describe spiritual reality, let us turn to a few quotations that tell us about the nature of some of the spiritual powers with which we are endowed. Among these various powers is one to which we can refer as “inner sight”.

“... observe all the things which God hath created at His behest with the eye of the spirit, even as ye see things with the eyes of your bodies.”¹⁰

“Therefore, we must thank God that He has created for us both material blessings and spiritual bestowals. He has given us material gifts and spiritual graces, outer sight to view the lights of the sun and inner vision by which we may perceive the glory of God.”¹¹

“They whose eyes are illumined with the light of understanding will perceive the sweet savors of the All-Merciful, and will embrace His truth. These are they who are truly sincere.”¹²

“... were man to gaze with the eye of divine and spiritual discernment, he will readily recognize that nothing whatsoever can exist without the revelation of the splendor of God, the ideal King.”¹³

“With fixed and steady gaze, born of the unerring eye of God, scan for a while the horizon of divine knowledge, and contemplate those words of perfection which the Eternal hath revealed, that haply the mysteries of divine wisdom, hidden ere now beneath the veil of glory and treasured within the tabernacle of His grace, may be made manifest unto you.”¹⁴

1. Give some examples of things we see with the “eye of the spirit”: _____

2. Why is making a list of things we see with the “eye of the spirit” more challenging than thinking of what we can see with our physical eyes? _____

3. For what purpose has God given us inner vision? _____

4. Complete the following sentences on the basis of the above passages:
 - a. If our eyes are illumined with the light of understanding, we will _____
_____, and will _____
_____.

- b. If we were to gaze with the eye of divine and spiritual discernment, we would readily recognize _____
_____ .
- c. With fixed and steady gaze, born of the unerring eye of God, we should scan _____ ,
and contemplate _____
_____ .
- d. If we scan for a while the horizon of divine knowledge with fixed and steady gaze, born of the unerring eye of God, and contemplate those words of perfection which the Eternal has revealed, _____

_____, will be made manifest unto us.
5. How do we develop our inner sight? _____

6. Are some people born without the capacity to see with their inner eyes? _____
7. Describe some of your sentiments when, with your physical sight, you see beauty in nature. _____

8. Describe some of your sentiments when, with your inner eye, you behold spiritual beauty. _____

9. How does developing inner sight protect us from being attracted to the baser things of life? _____

10. As we increasingly sharpen our inner sight, we perceive reality around us with greater and greater clarity. The way we look at events and circumstances changes. Read through the list in the left-hand column below. What are some of the things we see

when we gaze on each situation with the eye of the spirit? Some possibilities are given in the right-hand column. Connect them, bearing in mind that some options may be applicable to more than one situation.

- In a world where more and more young people are being seduced by its allurements and drawn into its short-lived excitements, we encounter groups of youth—still few but growing in number—responding with vigor and determination to the call of the Universal House of Justice to serve their communities.
- In a country torn by strife, we enter a neighborhood or village where the institute process is being established and Bahá'í activities are taking root, and there is a willingness on the part of more and more of its inhabitants to participate in the process of community building set in motion by these activities.
- In a culture where people are encouraged to boast about what they have achieved, we find in the Bahá'í community people working shoulder to shoulder and taking joy in the accomplishments of those around them.
- In general, while striving tirelessly to help build a better world, we are faced with the magnitude of the forces of disintegration, whose operation is evident in so much of the turmoil and devastation in the society around us.
- We catch a glimpse of the spiritual susceptibilities of a population.
- We see some of the implications of the principle of the oneness of humankind.
- We see how gracefully and wisely the Universal House of Justice is harnessing energies into a global enterprise.
- While never losing sight of the pain and suffering of humanity, we see barriers that block its progress being swept away and space being created for the process of integration to draw diverse groups together in cooperation and collaboration.
- We see some of the implications of a humble posture of learning.
- We catch a glimpse of the vision of the Universal House of Justice for the Bahá'í community.
- We perceive receptivity to the message of Bahá'u'lláh.
- We catch a glimpse of the capacity of the Faith to raise up a “new race of men”.
- We see a population striving to resist the forces of oppression and beginning to take charge of its own material and spiritual development.
- We see the immense potential of youth to contribute to the advancement of society.

SECTION 5

Now let us consider another of the spiritual powers we possess, one that we can call “inner hearing”.

“He has designed the outer ear to enjoy the melodies of sound and the inner hearing wherewith we may hear the voice of our Creator.”¹⁵

“Wert thou to incline thine inner ear unto all created things, thou wouldst hear: ‘The Ancient of Days is come in His great glory!’”¹⁶

“The fire of Thy love that burneth continually within me hath so inflamed me that whoever among Thy creatures approacheth me, and inclineth his inner ear towards me, cannot fail to hear its raging within each of my veins.”¹⁷

“Say: This is the Day when every ear must needs be attentive to His voice. Harken ye to the Call of this wronged One, and magnify ye the name of the one true God . . .”¹⁸

“If thou truly givest ear to that which hath been revealed for thee from My Supreme Pen at this moment, thou shalt soar with the wings of eagerness in the heaven of love for the Lord of the Day of the Covenant, and wilt say during all the days of thy life: Thanks be unto Thee, O Thou the Desire of the world, and praise be unto Thee, O Thou the Beloved of the people of understanding.”¹⁹

1. For what purpose has God given us inner hearing? _____

2. What would we hear if we were to incline our inner ear towards all created things? _____

3. Complete each of the following sentences on the basis of the above quotations:
 - a. In this Day every ear should be attentive to _____ .
 - b. In this Day we should _____ to the Call of Bahá’u’lláh and should _____ the name of the one true God.
 - c. If we truly give ear to that which has been revealed for us from the Supreme Pen, we would soar _____
_____ and would say _____

4. Discuss in your group what it means to hear the voice of the Manifestation of God, and write down some of your thoughts. _____

5. Why do some people ignore the counsels and admonitions of the Manifestation of God?

6. Describe some of your sentiments when, with your physical ear, you hear a beautiful melody. _____

7. Describe some of your sentiments when you read references in the Writings to divine melodies, as in the opening passage of the Tablet of Aḥmad quoted below.

“Lo, the Nightingale of Paradise singeth upon the twigs of the Tree of Eternity, with holy and sweet melodies, proclaiming to the sincere ones the glad tidings of the nearness of God, calling the believers in the Divine Unity to the court of the Presence of the Generous One, informing the severed ones of the message which hath been revealed by God, the King, the Glorious, the Peerless, guiding the lovers to the seat of sanctity and to this resplendent Beauty.”²⁰

SECTION 6

Another spiritual faculty with which we are each endowed is referred to as the “heart”. Like the physical heart, which may be considered the seat of life, it is the seat of the love of God and the center of true understanding.

“Should there be ignited in thy heart the burning brand of the love of God, thou wouldst seek neither rest nor composure, neither laughter nor repose, but wouldst hasten to scale the highest summits in the realms of divine nearness, sanctity, and beauty.”²¹

“O living flame of heavenly love! Thine heart hath been so fired with the love of God that from ten thousand leagues afar its warmth and radiance may be felt and seen. The fire lit by mortal hand imparteth light and warmth to but a little space, whereas that sacred flame which the Hand of God hath kindled, though burning in the east, will set aflame the west and give warmth to both the north and the south; nay, it shall rise from this world to glow with the hottest flame in the realms on high, flooding with light the Kingdom of eternal glory.”²²

“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.”²³

“Say, implore God to open to your hearts the portals of true understanding that ye may be apprised of that of which no one is apprised. Verily, He is the Giver, the Forgiving, the Compassionate.”²⁴

“... O brother! kindle with the oil of wisdom the lamp of the spirit within the innermost chamber of thy heart, and guard it with the globe of understanding...”²⁵

1. What does the “burning brand of the love of God” ignited in our hearts spur us to do? _____

2. Mention some of the far-reaching effects of a heart that has been set afire with the love of God. _____

3. Complete the following sentences on the basis of the above quotations:
 - a. If we were to ponder the words of the Manifestation in our hearts, we would find _____, and would behold _____.
 - b. We should ask God to _____ our hearts to the portals of _____ that we may be _____ of that which no one is apprised.

4. Is there a difference between just reading the words of the Manifestation and pondering them in our hearts? _____

5. What should we kindle within the “innermost chamber” of our hearts? _____

6. With what should we kindle the “lamp of the spirit” within the “innermost chamber” of our hearts? _____

7. With what should we guard the “lamp of the spirit” kindled with the “oil of wisdom” within the “innermost chamber” of our hearts? _____

8. Can you say a few words about how understanding guards the “lamp of the spirit”? _____

SECTION 7

In the previous three sections we looked at some of the spiritual faculties God has bestowed upon us to help us fulfill the purpose of our lives to know Him and to worship Him. We saw that the Writings use words like “eye”, “ear”, and “heart” to refer to the powers upon which we can draw in trying to perceive spiritual reality. However, we should not think of our inner faculties in the same way that we do our physical senses, each with a specific function. Remember our earlier discussion that made clear the limits of human language in describing spiritual and intellectual reality, which is not bound by material existence. Often, for instance, different images are found in the Writings to refer to inner sight. The following quotation from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá illustrates this:

“O thou possessor of a seeing heart! Although, materially speaking, thou art deprived of physical sight, yet, praise be to God, spiritual insight is thine. Thy heart seeth and thy spirit heareth. Bodily sight is subject to a thousand maladies and assuredly will ultimately be lost. Thus no importance should be attached to it. But the sight of the heart is illumined. It discerneth and discovereth the divine Kingdom. It is everlasting and eternal. Praise God, therefore, that the sight of thy heart is illumined, and the hearing of thy mind responsive.”²⁶

Although the nature of our spiritual faculties may not be so readily described, our awareness of their operation is essential. It is important for us to recognize that we are each endowed with inner faculties that work in harmony with the processes in which our minds engage through the instrumentality of the brain and the senses that provide it with information.

And just as we have to take care of our physical faculties so that they do not become impaired by illness or misuse, so, too, must we protect and sharpen our spiritual faculties if they are to enable us to penetrate the mysteries of the universe and discern the attributes of God. The quotation below and the questions that follow will help you think about this matter.

“Thine eye is My trust, suffer not the dust of vain desires to becloud its luster. Thine ear is a sign of My bounty, let not the tumult of unseemly motives turn it away from My Word that encompasseth all creation. Thine heart is My treasury, allow not the treacherous hand of self to rob thee of the pearls which I have treasured therein. Thine hand is a symbol of My loving-kindness, hinder it not from holding fast unto My guarded and hidden Tablets.”²⁷

1. What does the “dust of vain desires” do to the luster of our inner eyes? _____

2. What does the “tumult of unseemly motives” do to our inner ear? _____

3. What does the “treacherous hand of self” do to the heart? _____

4. What are some of the indications that an inner eye has been beclouded by the “dust of vain desires”? _____

5. What are some of the indications that an inner ear has been distracted by the “tumult of unseemly motives”? _____

6. What are some of the characteristics of a heart whose pearls have been robbed by the “treacherous hand of self”? _____

Now discuss the following question in your group: In what ways do our inner faculties assist us in recognizing the attributes of God? Below is some space to write down a few of the ideas you consider.

It is suggested that you end this section by memorizing the following passage:

“O Son of Dust! Blind thine eyes, that thou mayest behold My beauty; stop thine ears, that thou mayest hearken unto the sweet melody of My voice; empty thyself of all learning, that thou mayest partake of My knowledge; and sanctify thyself from riches, that thou mayest obtain a lasting share from the ocean of My eternal wealth. Blind thine eyes, that is, to all save My beauty; stop thine ears to all save My word; empty thyself of all learning save the knowledge of Me; that with a clear vision, a pure heart and an attentive ear thou mayest enter the court of My holiness.”²⁸

SECTION 8

As we continually polish the mirrors of our hearts and protect our inner faculties from vain imaginings, we are able to use these faculties to gain greater and greater understanding of the attributes of God and to fulfill the purpose of our lives. In the next few sections, we will reflect on some of the names of God that we find in the Writings, names which tell us of His most exalted attributes. Our reflections will begin by contemplating His names, the All-Knowing and the All-Wise. We will then consider, each in turn, several others—the All-Loving and the Kind, the All-Bountiful and the Gracious, the Most Generous and the Giving, the All-Merciful and the Forgiving, the All-Powerful and the Almighty. For each such pair we will explore two sets of quotations. The first will provide us with insight into the attributes of God as they pertain to His divine Reality, unknowable in its Essence. The second will help us to see how these attributes are manifested in our lives, particularly in our service to the Cause. Having carried out these reflections, we will then ponder the significance of His name, the All-Glorious.

God is the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. His knowledge holds all things, while He Himself is beyond the understanding of any of His creatures. The cure for all the ills of humanity is that which flows from His absolute wisdom.

“Nothing whatsoever escapeth Him. He knoweth the secrets both of the heavens and of the earth. His knowledge embraceth all things.”²⁹

“It is evident and manifest unto every discerning observer that even as the light of the star fadeth before the effulgent splendor of the sun, so doth the luminary of earthly knowledge, of wisdom, and understanding vanish into nothingness when brought face to face with the resplendent glories of the Sun of Truth, the Day-star of divine enlightenment.”³⁰

“Behold, how many are the mysteries that lie as yet unravelled within the tabernacle of the knowledge of God, and how numerous the gems of His wisdom that are still concealed in His inviolable treasuries! Shouldest thou ponder this in thine heart, thou wouldst realize that His handiwork knoweth neither beginning nor end.”³¹

“The All-Knowing Physician hath His finger on the pulse of mankind. He perceiveth the disease, and prescribeth, in His unerring wisdom, the remedy.”³²

On the basis of the quotations above, you may wish to write a few sentences that refer to God, the All-Knowing, and to His knowledge and wisdom. An example is given to assist you.

- a. God knows the secrets both of the heavens and of the earth.
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____
- f. _____

Now, with the above quotations in mind, try to write a few sentences that refer to some of the things God knows about every human being. Two examples are given to assist you.

- a. God knows the secrets of our hearts.
- b. He knows our capacity.
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____
- f. _____
- g. _____

SECTION 9

The Writings explain that the human capacity to discover the mysteries of the universe is but a sign of the attribute of God, the All-Knowing. When we allow His words to penetrate our hearts, and as we grow in certitude, we become illumined with the light of His knowledge.

“. . . the moment the word expressing My attribute ‘The Omniscient’ issueth forth from My mouth, every created thing will, according to its capacity and limitations, be invested with the power to unfold the knowledge of the most marvelous sciences, and will be empowered to manifest them in the course of time at the bidding of Him Who is the Almighty, the All-Knowing.”³³

“Sow the seeds of My divine wisdom in the pure soil of thy heart, and water them with the water of certitude, that the hyacinths of My knowledge and wisdom may spring up fresh and green in the sacred city of thy heart.”³⁴

“The quintessence of knowledge is powerless to comprehend Thy nature, and the inmost reality of every praise of Thee falleth short of the seat of Thy great glory and of Thine all-compelling power. Every utterance that seeketh to describe Thee, and every knowledge that attempteth to comprehend Thee, is but an expression of Thine own creating, and is begotten by Thy will, and fashioned in conformity with Thy purpose.”³⁵

“Knowledge is praiseworthy when it is coupled with ethical conduct and virtuous character; otherwise it is a deadly poison, a frightful danger.”³⁶

“Although to acquire the sciences and arts is the greatest glory of mankind, this is so only on condition that man’s river floweth into the mighty Sea, and draweth from God’s ancient source His inspiration. When this cometh to pass, then every teacher is as a shoreless ocean, every pupil a prodigal fountain of knowledge. If, then, the pursuit of knowledge leadeth to the beauty of Him Who is the object of all knowledge, how excellent that goal; but if not, a mere drop will perhaps shut a man off from flooding grace, for with learning cometh arrogance and pride, and it bringeth on error and indifference to God.”³⁷

“Make manifest in Thy lands humble and submissive souls, their faces illumined with the rays of guidance, severed from the world, extolling Thy Name, uttering Thy praise, and diffusing the fragrance of Thy holiness amongst mankind.”³⁸

Much of what we know is acquired through the observation and study of the physical world around us. The source of our knowledge of spiritual reality is that which God reveals through His Manifestation. The Writings suggest that this is like reading two books, the “Book of Creation” and the “Book of Revelation”. The pursuit of knowledge is one of the noblest aims established by Bahá’u’lláh for individuals and for humanity as a whole. Yet we must be cautious in this regard. For in the same way that the acquisition of knowledge can become the cause of our glory and honor, it can also lead to our abasement, if we allow ourselves to grow in pride. The seeker of knowledge must remain vigilant to tread the path of learning with the utmost humility.

Let us think about someone who realizes how little he knows the more learned he becomes. The humility this person feels before God is manifested in humility before his fellow human beings, who, like all of creation, were brought into being to reflect God's names and attributes. He has no desire to advance himself over others, nor is there any trace of superiority in his heart. In whatever people say, independent of their acquired knowledge, he seeks out pearls of wisdom. What counsels from the above quotations has this person taken to heart?

SECTION 10

God is the All-Loving, the Kind. His love is infinite and all-embracing. Indeed, the entire universe is held together by the force of His love. If it were to be withdrawn, even for the blink of an eye, all things would perish. By their very existence, all created things reflect His love.

“His care and loving-kindness surge even as the eternal billows of the sea, and His blessings are continually showered from His eternal Kingdom.”³⁹

“All the atoms of the earth declare My love for thee.”⁴⁰

“Veiled in My immemorial being and in the ancient eternity of My essence, I knew My love for thee; therefore I created thee, have engraved on thee Mine image and revealed to thee My beauty.”⁴¹

“Out of My loving-kindness, ‘neath the shade of My mercy I nurtured thee, and guarded thee by the essence of My grace and favor. And My purpose in all this was that thou mightest attain My everlasting dominion and become worthy of My invisible bestowals.”⁴²

“My love has made in thee its home, it cannot be concealed. My light is manifest to thee, it cannot be obscured.”⁴³

“Were it not for the love of God, hearts would be inanimate, spirits would wither, and the reality of man would be bereft of the everlasting bestowals.”⁴⁴

“Were it not for the love of God, the contingent world would be plunged in darkness. Were it not for the love of God, the hearts of men would be bereft of life and deprived of the stirrings of conscience.”⁴⁵

“There is nothing greater or more blessed than the Love of God! It gives healing to the sick, balm to the wounded, joy and consolation to the whole world, and

through it alone can man attain Life Everlasting. The *essence* of all religions is the Love of God, and it is the foundation of all the sacred teachings.”⁴⁶

“Love is the light that guideth in darkness, the living link that uniteth God with man, that assureth the progress of every illumined soul.”⁴⁷

“The world passeth away, and that which is everlasting is the love of God.”⁴⁸

On the basis of the above quotations, write a few sentences that refer to God, the All-Loving, and to His love. One example is given to assist you.

- a. The love of God is everlasting.
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____
- f. _____

Reflect on how vital is the force of God’s love in your own life, and write a few sentences that express your thoughts. Two examples are given as an assistance.

- a. God’s loving-kindness constantly surrounds us.
- b. His love protects us.
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____
- f. _____
- g. _____

SECTION 11

The entire universe is held together by the all-pervading love that emanates from God. Yet only the human being has the privilege of knowing this love, of loving Him consciously. With hearts longing to reach His presence, we turn towards God and seek His pleasure. And as we abandon our own desires and lose ourselves in His love, our words and actions become a

reflection of our love for Him; we become more and more capable of expressing limitless love towards all of humanity.

“For every one of you his paramount duty is to choose for himself that on which no other may infringe and none usurp from him. Such a thing—and to this the Almighty is My witness—is the love of God, could ye but perceive it.”⁴⁹

“... magnify ye the name of the one true God, and adorn yourselves with the ornament of His remembrance, and illumine your hearts with the light of His love.”⁵⁰

“If thou lovest Me, turn away from thyself; and if thou seekest My pleasure, regard not thine own; that thou mayest die in Me and I may eternally live in thee.”⁵¹

“Whoso hath known Him shall soar in the immensity of His love, and shall be detached from the world and all that is therein.”⁵²

“Strive to become the manifestations of the love of God, the lamps of divine guidance shining amongst the kindreds of the earth with the light of love and concord.”⁵³

“Be thou a summoner to love, and be thou kind to all the human race. Love thou the children of men and share in their sorrows. . . . let thy face be bright with the fire of God’s love. Rest thou not for a moment, seek thou to draw no easeful breath. Thus mayest thou become a sign and symbol of God’s love, and a banner of His grace.”⁵⁴

“Now must the lovers of God arise to carry out these instructions of His: let them be kindly fathers to the children of the human race, and compassionate brothers to the youth, and self-denying offspring to those bent with years. The meaning of this is that ye must show forth tenderness and love to every human being, even to your enemies, and welcome them all with unalloyed friendship, good cheer, and loving-kindness.”⁵⁵

“Walk thou steadfastly in the love of God, and keep straight on in His Faith, and aid Him through the power of thine utterance.”⁵⁶

“Love the creatures for the sake of God and not for themselves.”⁵⁷

“Let all be united in this Divine power of love! Let all strive to grow in the light of the Sun of Truth, and reflecting this luminous love on all men, may their hearts become so united that they may dwell evermore in the radiance of the limitless love.”⁵⁸

The above quotations are filled with counsels indicating how our love for God shapes our state of being and our actions. For example, we seek to magnify His name out of our love for Him. Write similar statements based on the above counsels.

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____
- f. _____
- g. _____
- h. _____
- i. _____
- j. _____
- k. _____
- l. _____
- m. _____
- n. _____

SECTION 12

God is the All-Bountiful, the Gracious. All grace and bounty belong to Him. Every created thing exists in a state of total dependency on God’s bounty, the wonders of which never cease. All things partake, each in accordance with its capacity, of the living waters of His limitless grace.

“God witnesseth that there is no God but Him, the Gracious, the Best-Beloved. All grace and bounty are His. To whomsoever He will He giveth whatsoever is His wish.”⁵⁹

“No man can ever claim to have comprehended the nature of the hidden and manifold grace of God; none can fathom His all-embracing mercy.”⁶⁰

“A drop of the billowing ocean of His endless mercy hath adorned all creation with the ornament of existence, and a breath wafted from His peerless Paradise hath invested all beings with the robe of His sanctity and glory. A sprinkling from the unfathomed deep of His sovereign and all-pervasive Will hath, out of utter nothingness, called into being a creation which is infinite in its range and deathless

in its duration. The wonders of His bounty can never cease, and the stream of His merciful grace can never be arrested. The process of His creation hath had no beginning, and can have no end.”⁶¹

“The favors of God are unending, limitless. Infinite bounties have encompassed the world.”⁶²

“God’s grace is like the rain that cometh down from heaven: the water is not bounded by the limitations of form, yet on whatever place it poureth down, it taketh on limitations—dimensions, appearance, shape—according to the characteristics of that place. In a square pool, the water, previously unconfined, becometh a square . . . The rain itself hath no geometry, no limits, no form, but it taketh on one form or another, according to the restrictions of its vessel. In the same way, the Holy Essence of the Lord God is boundless, immeasurable, but His graces and splendors become finite in the creatures, because of their limitations . . .”⁶³

“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 fullness of His absolute bounty upon His creatures.”⁶⁴

“This is the Day whereon naught can be seen except the splendors of the Light that shineth from the face of Thy Lord, the Gracious, the Most Bountiful. Verily, We have caused every soul to expire by virtue of Our irresistible and all-subduing sovereignty. We have, then, called into being a new creation, as a token of Our grace unto men. I am, verily, the All-Bountiful, the Ancient of Days.”⁶⁵

With the above quotations in mind, write a few sentences that refer to God, the All-Bountiful, and to His bounty and manifold grace, as in the example below.

- a. All grace and bounty belong to God.
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____
- f. _____

All that we do—indeed, our very existence—is dependent on God’s absolute bounty and His wondrous grace. Can you write a few sentences describing the ways in which we feel their powerful effects in our lives? These two examples may assist you.

- a. God’s grace sustains us.

- b. The showers of His bounties cleanse us of all earthy defilements.
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____
- f. _____
- g. _____

SECTION 13

God's bounties are infinite and never ending. All grace flows from Him. He calls upon us to bestir ourselves and to take a portion from the ocean of His limitless grace, lest we allow ourselves to be deprived of all the bounties and blessings He has in store for us. We should not look at our own capacity, at our own weakness. Rather should we exert effort and place our trust in His all-sustaining grace. Heavenly bounties will descend upon hearts that, undimmed by the veil of "self" and filled with His grace, are illumined by the light of His love.

"Seize ye, O loved ones of the All-Merciful, the chalice of eternal life proffered by the hand of the bountiful favors of your Lord, the Possessor of the entire creation, then drink ye deep therefrom."⁶⁶

"Take thou thy portion of the ocean of His grace, and deprive not thyself of the things that lie hidden in its depths. Be thou of them that have partaken of its treasures. A dewdrop out of this ocean would, if shed upon all that are in the heavens and on the earth, suffice to enrich them with the bounty of God . . ."⁶⁷

"The whole duty of man in this Day is to attain that share of the flood of grace which God poureth forth for him. Let none, therefore, consider the largeness or smallness of the receptacle. The portion of some might lie in the palm of a man's hand, the portion of others might fill a cup, and of others even a gallon-measure."⁶⁸

"Rejoice in the grace of God and exult in the favors of thy Lord, the Compassionate, the Merciful."⁶⁹

"Grieve not if worldly possessions should pass from thy hands, for thy luminous heart is the greatest treasure, inasmuch as every heart that is confident in the grace of its Lord and is illumined by the light of its Creator is one of the treasures of the Kingdom, overflowing with heavenly riches and divine bounties. This is the greatest wealth!"⁷⁰

". . . there is no veil more obstructive than the self, and however tenuous that veil may be, at the last it will completely shut a person out, and deprive him of his portion of eternal grace."⁷¹

SECTION 14

God is the Most Generous, the Giving. His generosity is limitless. Every created thing, by its very existence, is continually beseeching Him for His gifts and bountiful favors. He gives not according to the merits of His creatures but out of His infinite generosity. Among the many favors God has bestowed upon humanity, the greatest is the gift of understanding, that we might know Him and worship Him. Yet, His acceptance of any act or praise from us is, in itself, a sign of His generosity.

“All existence is begotten by Thy bounty; deprive it not of the waters of Thy generosity, neither do Thou withhold it from the ocean of Thy mercy.”⁷⁴

“All creation and its empire are His. He bestoweth His gifts on whom He will, and from whom He will He withholdeth them. He is the Great Giver, the Most Generous, the Benevolent.”⁷⁵

“The earth is in motion and growth; the mountains, hills and prairies are green and pleasant; bounty is overflowing; mercy universal; rain is descending from the clouds of compassion; the brilliant sun is shining; the full moon adorneth the ethereal horizon; the great ocean-tide is flooding every little stream; gifts and favors follow one upon the other and a refreshing breeze is blowing, wafting the fragrant perfume of the blossoms. . . . Boundless treasure is in the hand of the King of Kings!”⁷⁶

“Know thou that, according to what thy Lord, the Lord of all men, hath decreed in His Book, the favors vouchsafed by Him unto mankind have been, and will ever remain, limitless in their range. First and foremost among these favors, which the Almighty hath conferred upon man, is the gift of understanding. His purpose in conferring such a gift is none other except to enable His creature to know and recognize the one true God—exalted be His glory.”⁷⁷

“Verily thy Lord is the Generous, the All-Bountiful. He will bestow upon thee what will dilate thy breast, gladden thine eyes, and enrapture thee at all times and under all conditions.”⁷⁸

“Is there any giver save God? He singleth out for His mercy whomsoever He willeth. Erelong will He open before you the gates of His knowledge and fill up your hearts with His love. He will cheer your souls with the gentle winds of His holiness and make bright your faces with the splendors of His lights, and exalt the memory of you amongst all peoples. Your Lord is verily the Compassionate, the Merciful.”⁷⁹

“. . . everything other than Thee is but Thy creation and is held in the hollow of Thy hand. To have accepted any act or praise from Thy creatures is but an evidence of the wonders of Thy grace and bountiful favors, and a manifestation of Thy generosity and providence.”⁸⁰

“From the billows of the ocean of Thy generosity the seas of eagerness and enthusiasm were revealed. Thou art what Thou art. Aught except Thee is unworthy of any mention unless it entereth beneath Thy shadow, and gaineth admittance into Thy court.”⁸¹

Write a few sentences which refer to God, the Most Generous, and to His generosity, as in the following example:

- a. God bestows His gifts on whomsoever He wills.
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____
- f. _____

Reflect for a moment on the above quotations and others with which you are familiar. What are some of the bounties and blessings that these passages suggest God will, from the heaven of His generosity, confer upon us? These two examples may assist you.

- a. God will give us that which will enlighten our eyes.
- b. With the gentle winds of His holiness, He will cheer our souls.
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____
- f. _____
- g. _____

SECTION 15

God’s gifts and favors are inexhaustible and everlasting, and we should seek to receive them with yearning souls. If we do not have thirst, we shall not take our portion of the life-giving waters He generously offers to every human being. If our souls do not hunger, we shall not partake of the heavenly food that He has laid out on the table of His generosity. We should remember that God’s generosity has no bounds and forever ask Him for His gifts. And whatsoever He deems best for us, we should be content with His Will. Such should be our gratitude to God that we spend our days in service to His loved ones, giving joyfully of

ourselves. Yet we know that even the opportunity to serve is one of His gifts to us. There can be no limit, then, to our gratitude and thankfulness.

“The doors of God are open, but we must be ready and fitted to enter. The ocean of divine providence is surging, but we must be able to swim. The bestowals of the Almighty are descending from the heaven of grace, but capacity to receive them is essential. The fountain of divine generosity is gushing forth, but we must have thirst for the living waters. Unless there be thirst, the salutary water will not assuage. Unless the soul hungers, the delicious foods of the heavenly table will not give sustenance.”⁸²

“Place your confidence in the everlasting bounty, turn to the presence of the generous God; ask assistance from the kingdom of Abhá; seek confirmation from the Supreme World; turn thy vision to the horizon of eternal wealth; and pray for help from the Source of Mercy!”⁸³

“The doors of His generosity are wide, wide open to us; but we must be attentive, alert and mindful, occupied with service to all mankind, appreciating the bestowals of God and ever conforming to His will.”⁸⁴

“To give and to be generous are attributes of Mine; well is it with him that adorneth himself with My virtues.”⁸⁵

“Be ye the trustees of God amongst His creatures, and the emblems of His generosity amidst His people.”⁸⁶

“Be generous in prosperity, and thankful in adversity.”⁸⁷

“Thank thou God that—praise be to Him!—the lamp of thy heart and soul hath been illumined with the light of guidance, and the chalice of hope and desire hath overflowed with the wine of the love of God. This blessing is an attainment for which thou shalt never fulfill the obligation of gratitude, even shouldst thou give thanks for a thousand ages and centuries. Therefore, thou must, in the utmost joy and gladness, with happiness and great cheer, unloose thy tongue in that prosperous land in praise of the All-Merciful and enable the eyes to see.”⁸⁸

“Thankfulness is of various kinds. There is a verbal thanksgiving which is confined to a mere utterance of gratitude. This is of no importance because perchance the tongue may give thanks while the heart is unaware of it. Many who offer thanks to God are of this type, their spirits and hearts unconscious of thanksgiving. This is mere usage, just as when we meet, receive a gift and say thank you, speaking the words without significance. One may say thank you a thousand times while the heart remains thankless, ungrateful. Therefore, mere verbal thanksgiving is without effect. But real thankfulness is a cordial giving of thanks from the heart. When man in response to the favors of God manifests susceptibilities of conscience, the heart is happy, the spirit is exhilarated. These spiritual susceptibilities are ideal thanksgiving.

“There is a cordial thanksgiving, too, which expresses itself in the deeds and actions of man when his heart is filled with gratitude. For example, God has conferred upon man the gift of guidance, and in thankfulness for this great gift certain deeds must emanate from him. To express his gratitude for the favors of God man must show forth praiseworthy actions. In response to these bestowals he must render good deeds, be self-sacrificing, loving the servants of God, forfeiting even life for them, showing kindness to all the creatures. He must be severed from the world, attracted to the Kingdom of Abhá, the face radiant, the tongue eloquent, the ear attentive, striving day and night to attain the good pleasure of God. Whatsoever he wishes to do must be in harmony with the good pleasure of God. He must observe and see what is the will of God and act accordingly. There can be no doubt that such commendable deeds are thankfulness for the favors of God.”⁸⁹

“In this day, to thank God for His bounties consisteth in possessing a radiant heart, and a soul open to the promptings of the spirit. This is the essence of thanksgiving.”⁹⁰

With longing hearts, we set our faces in the direction of God’s gifts and favors, ever ready to receive whatsoever He chooses to confer upon us. The prayers revealed by the Central Figures of our Faith tell us of these gifts and provide us with the language we need to think about them. The exercises below may assist us in this connection.

1. One of the things for which we beseech God is strength. For example, we say: “Feeble are we, strengthen us”, “Send down upon us Thy strength and power”, “I am weak, strengthen me with Thy power and potency”, “I entreat Thee . . . to strengthen me by Thy power which hath encompassed the heavens and the earth”, “Strengthen Thou, O my Lord, the hearts of them that love Thee”. For which of the following do we seek the gift of strength from God:

- ___ To carry out God’s commandments
- ___ To obey Him
- ___ To dominate others
- ___ To withstand the onslaught of opposition
- ___ To be in control of every situation
- ___ To be steadfast in God’s Faith
- ___ To aid God among His servants
- ___ To walk undeviatingly in the path of Truth
- ___ To serve God’s loved ones
- ___ To be able to have our own way whenever we want
- ___ To demand that others follow what we think is right
- ___ To be steadfast in our love towards God
- ___ To convince others of our opinions

- _____ To exalt His Word
- _____ To observe that which God has ordained
- _____ To achieve victory in the path of God

2. Among God’s gifts are sustenance, nourishment, health, and prosperity. In many prayers, we ask Him to bestow these gifts upon us. For example, we say: “Give us our daily bread, and grant Thine increase in the necessities of life”, “Pitiful are we, grant us Thy favor; poor, bestow upon us a share from the ocean of Thy wealth”, “We are needy; enrich and bless us from Thy boundless treasury”, “I beg of Thee . . . to purge me with the waters of Thy bounty from every affliction and disorder, and from all weakness and feebleness”. Write four sentences similar to the one given below.

- a. We ask God for sustenance and nourishment so that we may be independent of all but Him.

- b. _____

- c. _____

- d. _____

- e. _____

3. We also constantly ask God for His aid and assistance. We say, for example: “O God, my God! . . . deprive me not of the wellsprings of Thine aid and favor”, “Grant me then Thy sufficing help”, “I beseech Thee to aid and assist me at all times and under all conditions”, “O my Lord! Assist me with Thy triumphant and effective might”, “Let Thy celestial aid surround those who love Thee”. Indeed, it would be impossible for us to succeed in even the smallest of tasks without receiving a measure of His divine assistance. Below are some things for which we seek His aid. Mention a few others.

- | | |
|---|----------|
| a. <u>Winning His good-pleasure</u> | g. _____ |
| b. <u>Remaining steadfast</u> | h. _____ |
| c. <u>Having loving and tender hearts</u> | i. _____ |
| d. <u>Refuting what is vain and false</u> | j. _____ |
| e. _____ | k. _____ |
| f. _____ | l. _____ |

4. Confirmation is another gift for which we beseech God time and again. We say, for example: “Grant us heavenly confirmation. Bestow upon us the breath of the Holy Spirit”, “O our Lord! . . . assist us with the hosts of Thy supreme angels and confirm us through the holy ones of the Kingdom of Abhá”, “Through the spirit of power confirm Thou me in Thy Cause, O my Best-Beloved”, “O Lord! Confirm them in Thy servitude and assist them in Thy service”. What are some of the occasions when we ask to be reinforced by God’s confirmations? An example is given to assist you.

- a. When teaching the Cause
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____
- f. _____
- g. _____

5. The joy we feel in our heart is yet another gift of God for which we long. We say, for example: “Let my heart be dilated with joy through the spirit of confirmation from Thy kingdom”, “. . . by the breezes of Thine eternity gladden me, O Thou Who art my God”, “Cheer our hearts through the potency of Thy love and good-pleasure”, “Render our souls joyous and happy through Thy glad tidings”, “. . . gladden our bosoms with the signs of Thy divine unity”. What are some of the ways in which God gives us joy? An example is given to assist you.

- a. Through His glad tidings
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____
- f. _____
- g. _____

To end this section, you may wish to memorize the following prayer, if you have not already done so on an earlier occasion:

“O thou who art turning thy face towards God! Close thine eyes to all things else, and open them to the realm of the All-Glorious. Ask whatsoever thou wishest of

Him alone; seek whatsoever thou seekest from Him alone. With a look He granteth a hundred thousand hopes, with a glance He healeth a hundred thousand incurable ills, with a nod He layeth balm on every wound, with a glimpse He freeth the hearts from the shackles of grief. He doeth as He doeth, and what recourse have we? He carrieth out His Will, He ordaineth what He pleaseth. Then better for thee to bow down thy head in submission, and put thy trust in the All-Merciful Lord.”⁹¹

SECTION 16

God is the All-Merciful, the Forgiving. With a drop from the ocean of His endless mercy, He has adorned all of creation with existence. Nothing is hidden from Him. He is aware of the transgressions of His creatures. Yet, His mercy embraces us all. The waters of His forgiveness wash away every transgression.

“All forgiveness floweth, in this Day, from God, Him to Whom none can compare, with Whom no partners can be joined, the Sovereign Protector of all men, and the Concealer of their sins!”⁹²

“The tenderness of Thy mercy, O my Lord, surpasseth the fury of Thy wrath, and Thy loving-kindness exceedeth Thy hot displeasure, and Thy grace excelleth Thy justice. Hold Thou, through Thy wondrous favors and mercies, the hands of Thy creatures, and suffer them not to be separated from the grace which Thou hast ordained as the means whereby they can recognize Thee.”⁹³

“And whenever My name ‘the Ever-Forgiving’ perceived that anyone of My friends had committed any transgression, it cried out in its great distress, and, overcome with anguish, fell upon the dust, and was borne away by a company of the invisible angels to its habitation in the realms above.”⁹⁴

“His surpassing mercy hath restrained the fury of His wrath, and caused most people to imagine that the one true God is unaware of the things they have privily committed. By Him Who is the All-Knowing, the All-Informed! The mirror of His knowledge reflecteth, with complete distinctness, precision and fidelity, the doings of all men. Say: Praise be to Thee, O Concealer of the sins of the weak and helpless! Magnified be Thy name, O Thou that forgivest the heedless ones that trespass against Thee!”⁹⁵

“Waft, then, unto me, O my God and my Beloved, from the right hand of Thy mercy and Thy loving-kindness, the holy breaths of Thy favors, that they may draw me away from myself and from the world unto the courts of Thy nearness and Thy presence. Potent art Thou to do what pleaseth Thee. Thou, truly, hast been supreme over all things.”⁹⁶

“My God, my God! If none be found to stray from Thy path, how, then, can the ensign of Thy mercy be unfurled, or the banner of Thy bountiful favor be hoisted? And if iniquity be not committed, what is it that can proclaim Thee to be the

Concealer of men's sins, the Ever-Forgiving, the Omniscient, the All-Wise? May my soul be a sacrifice to the trespasses of them that trespass against Thee, for upon such trespasses are wafted the sweet savors of the tender mercies of Thy Name, the Compassionate, the All-Merciful. May my life be laid down for the transgressions of such as transgress against Thee, for through them the breath of Thy grace and the fragrance of Thy loving-kindness are made known and diffused amongst men. May my inmost being be offered up for the sins of them that have sinned against Thee, for it is as a result of such sins that the Daystar of Thy manifold favors revealeth itself above the horizon of Thy bounty, and the clouds of Thy never-failing providencé rain down their gifts upon the realities of all created things.”⁹⁷

You are encouraged to write, on the basis of the above quotations, a few sentences which refer to God, the Forgiving, and to His mercy. An example is provided.

- a. All forgiveness flows from God.
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____
- f. _____

Think about your life and the comfort you take in beseeching God, that He deal with you not according to His justice and wrath but with His tender mercy and compassion. What are some of the assurances and promises of forgiveness and mercy to which we all cling? In this light, try to write a few sentences similar to the two examples below.

- a. God will conceal our sins.
- b. He will forgive the gravest of errors.
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____
- f. _____
- g. _____

SECTION 17

It is a requirement of life to grow constantly in recognition of God's manifold bounties and in obedience to His commands. We are to take account of our deeds each day and strive to do better the next. We should realize that we are weak and prone to error but remember that, if we focus on our shortcomings, we will live in despair. We should fix our eyes on His name, the Ever-Forgiving, and cling to His unfailing mercy. And just as we look to Him for forgiveness, so, too, should we treat others with compassion.

“Turn unto Him, and fear not because of thy deeds. He, in truth, forgiveth whomsoever He desireth as a bounty on His part; no God is there but Him, the Ever-Forgiving, the All-Bounteous.”⁹⁸

“Obstruct not the luminous spring of thy soul with the thorns and brambles of vain and inordinate affections, and impede not the flow of the living waters that stream from the fountain of thine heart. Set all thy hope in God, and cleave tenaciously to His unfailing mercy. Who else but Him can enrich the destitute, and deliver the fallen from his abasement?”⁹⁹

“When the sinner findeth himself wholly detached and freed from all save God, he should beg forgiveness and pardon from Him. Confession of sins and transgressions before human beings is not permissible, as it hath never been nor will ever be conducive to divine forgiveness. Moreover such confession before people results in one's humiliation and abasement, and God—exalted be His glory—wisheth not the humiliation of His servants. Verily He is the Compassionate, the Merciful.”¹⁰⁰

“...let your adorning be forgiveness and mercy and that which cheereth the hearts of the well-favored of God.”¹⁰¹

“Inasmuch as God is clement and loving to His children, lenient and merciful toward our shortcomings, why should we be unkind and unforgiving toward each other?”¹⁰²

“O ye friends of God! Make ye a mighty effort that all the peoples and kindreds of the world, even the enemies, should put their trust, confidence and hope in you. Should a soul commit a hundred thousand misdeeds, yet may he hope for forgiveness and may not become despondent or grieved.”¹⁰³

“Let not your heart be offended with anyone. If someone commits an error and wrong toward you, you must instantly forgive him. Do not complain of others. Refrain from reprimanding them, and if you wish to give admonition or advice, let it be offered in such a way that it will not burden the bearer. Turn all your thoughts toward bringing joy to hearts. Beware! Beware! lest ye offend any heart.”¹⁰⁴

“We must look upon our enemies with a sin-covering eye and act with justice when confronted with any injustice whatsoever, forgive all, consider the whole of

humanity as our own family, the whole earth as our own country, be sympathetic with all suffering, nurse the sick, offer a shelter to the exiled, help the poor and those in need, dress all wounds and share the happiness of each one. Be compassionate, so that your actions will shine like unto the light streaming forth from the lamp. If the whole world should arise to deny this cause, we must not fight. Our only role is to spread the teachings. If it be accepted, all is well; if not, leave the people to God.”¹⁰⁵

“O army of God! Beware lest ye harm any soul, or make any heart to sorrow; lest ye wound any man with your words, be he known to you or a stranger, be he friend or foe. Pray ye for all; ask ye that all be blessed, all be forgiven. Beware, beware, lest any of you seek vengeance, even against one who is thirsting for your blood. Beware, beware, lest ye offend the feelings of another, even though he be an evildoer, and he wish you ill. Look ye not upon the creatures, turn ye to their Creator. See ye not the never-yielding people, see but the Lord of Hosts. Gaze ye not down upon the dust, gaze upward at the shining sun, which hath caused every patch of darksome earth to glow with light.”¹⁰⁶

“There are two kinds of retributive actions: One is revenge and retaliation, and the other—punishment and requital. An individual has no right to seek revenge, but the body politic has the right to punish the criminal. Such punishment is intended to dissuade and deter others from committing similar crimes. It is for the protection of the rights of man and does not constitute revenge, for revenge is that inner gratification that results from returning like for like. This is not permissible, for no one has been given the right to seek revenge. And yet, if criminals were entirely left to their own devices, the order of the world would be disrupted. So while punishment is one of the essential requirements of the body politic, the wronged and aggrieved party has no right to seek revenge. On the contrary, he should show forgiveness and magnanimity, for this is that which befits the human world.”¹⁰⁷

The counsels found in these passages have numerous implications for our individual and collective lives. Here you may wish merely to consider two questions in your group: How do the above passages suggest we should deal with our own shortcomings and errors, and what do they tell us about the way in which we should respond to the shortcomings and errors of others? In relation to the first question, try to address in your discussions concepts such as negligence, guilt, shame, remorse, and hope. With respect to the second, your discussions could touch upon ideas such as forgiveness and vengeance, compassion and a sin-covering eye. You may find it helpful to sum up your conclusions in the space below.

“Say: He ordaineth as He pleaseth, by virtue of His sovereignty, and doeth whatsoever He willeth at His own behest. He shall not be asked of the things it pleaseth Him to ordain. He, in truth, is the Unrestrained, the All-Powerful, the All-Wise.”¹¹⁰

“Say: It is in Our power, should We wish it, to cause all created things to expire in an instant, and, with the next, to endue them again with life. The knowledge thereof, however, is with God alone, the All-Knowing, the All-Informed. It is in Our power, should We wish it, to enable a speck of floating dust to generate, in less than the twinkling of an eye, suns of infinite, of unimaginable splendor, to cause a dewdrop to develop into vast and numberless oceans, to infuse into every letter such a force as to empower it to unfold all the knowledge of past and future ages. This, in truth, is a matter simple of accomplishment. Such have been the evidences of My power from the beginning that hath no beginning until the end that hath no end.”¹¹¹

“Every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God is endowed with such potency as can instill new life into every human frame, if ye be of them that comprehend this truth. All the wondrous works ye behold in this world have been manifested through the operation of His supreme and most exalted Will, His wondrous and inflexible Purpose. Through the mere revelation of the word ‘Fashioner,’ issuing forth from His lips and proclaiming His attribute to mankind, such power is released as can generate, through successive ages, all the manifold arts which the hands of man can produce. This, verily, is a certain truth. No sooner is this resplendent word uttered, than its animating energies, stirring within all created things, give birth to the means and instruments whereby such arts can be produced and perfected. All the wondrous achievements ye now witness are the direct consequences of the Revelation of this Name. In the days to come, ye will, verily, behold things of which ye have never heard before. Thus hath it been decreed in the Tablets of God, and none can comprehend it except them whose sight is sharp. In like manner, the moment the word expressing My attribute ‘The Omniscient’ issueth forth from My mouth, every created thing will, according to its capacity and limitations, be invested with the power to unfold the knowledge of the most marvelous sciences, and will be empowered to manifest them in the course of time at the bidding of Him Who is the Almighty, the All-Knowing. Know thou of a certainty that the Revelation of every other Name is accompanied by a similar manifestation of Divine power. Every single letter proceeding out of the mouth of God is indeed a mother letter, and every word uttered by Him Who is the Wellspring of Divine Revelation is a mother word, and His Tablet a Mother Tablet. Well is it with them that apprehend this truth.”¹¹²

“I bear witness that the highest thoughts of all such as adore Thy unity, and the profoundest contemplations of all them that have recognized Thee, are but the product of what hath been generated through the movement of the Pen of Thy behest, and hath been begotten by Thy will.”¹¹³

“And this is clear: a power above and beyond the powers of nature must needs be brought to bear, to change this black darkness into light, and these hatreds and resentments, grudges and spites, these endless wrangles and wars, into fellowship

and love amongst all the peoples of the earth. This power is none other than the breathings of the Holy Spirit and the mighty inflow of the Word of God.”¹¹⁴

“Today nothing but the power of the Word of God which encompasses the realities of things can bring the thoughts, the minds, the hearts and the spirits under the shade of one Tree. He is the potent in all things, the vivifier of souls, the preserver and the controller of the world of mankind.”¹¹⁵

“We, verily, have ordained this Temple to be the source of all existence in the new creation, that all may know of a certainty My power to accomplish that which I have purposed through My word ‘Be’, and it is! Beneath the shadow of every letter of this Temple We shall raise up a people whose number none can reckon save God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting. Erelong shall God bring forth from His Temple such souls as will remain unswayed by the insinuations of the rebellious, and who will quaff at all times of the cup that is life indeed. These, truly, are of the blissful.”¹¹⁶

“The Cause of God, all deeds and words, are held within the grasp of His power. ‘All things lie imprisoned within the hollow of His mighty Hand; all things are easy and possible unto Him.’ He accomplisheth whatsoever He willeth, and doeth all that He desireth. ‘Whoso sayeth “why” or “wherefore” hath spoken blasphemy!’”¹¹⁷

“O Oppressors on Earth! Withdraw your hands from tyranny, for I have pledged Myself not to forgive any man’s injustice. This is My covenant which I have irrevocably decreed in the preserved tablet and sealed with My seal of glory.”¹¹⁸

“Who is there that can put out the light which the snow-white Hand of God hath lit? Where is he to be found that hath the power to quench the fire which hath been kindled through the might of thy Lord, the All-Powerful, the All-Compelling, the Almighty? It is the Hand of Divine might that hath extinguished the flames of dissension. Powerful is He to do that which He pleaseth. He saith: Be; and it is. Say: The fierce gales and whirlwinds of the world and its peoples can never shake the foundation upon which the rock-like stability of My chosen ones is based.”¹¹⁹

Write a few sentences which refer to God, the All-Powerful, and to His power. An example is given assist you.

- a. God is the Source of all sovereignty and power.
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____
- f. _____

Although we know that we are weak, we are also certain that God will empower us to serve His Cause. Reflecting on your own life and what you have witnessed in the field of service, write a few sentences about the power of Divine assistance.

- a. Formidable obstacles are overcome through the power of Divine assistance.
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____
- f. _____

SECTION 19

To serve the Cause of God effectively, we must first acknowledge our weakness and utter powerlessness and then turn towards Him Who is the Source of all power. God calls upon us to surrender our wills to His, to place our complete trust in Him, and to be content with that which He ordains. Drawing confidence from the knowledge that He does whatsoever He wills, we commit our affairs to His keeping and strive to bring our lives into conformity with His commands. Through His unfailing aid we are enabled, each in accordance with a measure of His grace, to serve His Cause.

“Praised be Thou, O Lord my God! Every time I attempt to make mention of Thee, I am hindered by the sublimity of Thy station and the overpowering greatness of Thy might. For were I to praise Thee throughout the length of Thy dominion and the duration of Thy sovereignty, I would find that my praise of Thee can befit only such as are like unto me, who are themselves Thy creatures, and who have been generated through the power of Thy decree and been fashioned through the potency of Thy will. And at whatever time my pen ascribeth glory to any one of Thy names, methinks I can hear the voice of its lamentation in its remoteness from Thee, and can recognize its cry because of its separation from Thy Self.”¹²⁰

“All praise be to Thee, O Lord, my God! I know not how to sing Thy praise, how to describe Thy glory, how to call upon Thy Name. If I call upon Thee by Thy Name, the All-Possessing, I am compelled to recognize that He Who holdeth in His hand the immediate destinies of all created things is but a vassal dependent upon Thee, and is the creation of but a word proceeding from Thy mouth. And if I proclaim Thee by the name of Him Who is the All-Compelling, I readily discover that He is but a suppliant fallen upon the dust, awe-stricken by Thy dreadful might, Thy sovereignty and power. And if I attempt to describe Thee by glorifying the oneness of Thy Being, I soon realize that such a conception is but a notion which mine own fancy hath woven, and that Thou hast ever been immeasurably exalted above the vain imaginations which the hearts of men have devised.”¹²¹

“Glorified, immeasurably glorified art Thou, my Best-Beloved! Inasmuch as Thou hast ordained that the utmost limit to which they who lift their hearts to Thee can rise is the confession of their powerlessness to enter the realms of Thy holy and transcendent unity, and that the highest station which they who aspire to know Thee can reach is the acknowledgment of their impotence to attain the retreats of Thy sublime knowledge I, therefore, beseech Thee, by this very powerlessness which is beloved of Thee, and which Thou hast decreed as the goal of them that have reached and attained Thy court, and by the splendors of Thy countenance that have encompassed all things, and by the energies of Thy Will whereby the entire creation hath been generated, not to deprive them that have set their hopes in Thee of the wonders of Thy mercy, nor to withhold from such as have sought Thee the treasures of Thy grace.”¹²²

“I beg of Thee, O my God, by Thy most exalted Word which Thou hast ordained as the Divine Elixir unto all who are in Thy realm, the Elixir through whose potency the crude metal of human life hath been transmuted into purest gold, O Thou in Whose hands are both the visible and invisible kingdoms, to ordain that my choice be conformed to Thy choice and my wish to Thy wish, that I may be entirely content with that which Thou didst desire, and be wholly satisfied with what Thou didst destine for me by Thy bounteousness and favor. Potent art Thou to do as Thou willest. Thou, in very truth, art the All-Glorious, the All-Wise.”¹²³

“The source of all good is trust in God, submission unto His command, and contentment with His holy will and pleasure.”¹²⁴

“Nay, your true and abiding glory resideth in submission to the Word of Him Who is the Eternal Truth, and in your inward and outward detachment from aught else besides God, the All-Compelling, the Almighty.”¹²⁵

“Say: Beware, O people of Bahá, lest the strong ones of the earth rob you of your strength, or they who rule the world fill you with fear. Put your trust in God, and commit your affairs to His keeping. He, verily, will, through the power of truth, render you victorious, and He, verily, is powerful to do what He willeth, and in His grasp are the reins of omnipotent might.”¹²⁶

“Glorified art Thou, O Lord my God! Every man of insight confesseth Thy sovereignty and Thy dominion, and every discerning eye perceiveth the greatness of Thy majesty and the compelling power of Thy might. The winds of tests are powerless to hold back them that enjoy near access to Thee from setting their faces towards the horizon of Thy glory, and the tempests of trials must fail to draw away and hinder such as are wholly devoted to Thy will from approaching Thy court.

“Methinks, the lamp of Thy love is burning in their hearts, and the light of Thy tenderness is lit within their breasts. Adversities are incapable of estranging them from Thy Cause, and the vicissitudes of fortune can never cause them to stray from Thy pleasure.

“I beseech Thee, O my God, by them and by the sighs which their hearts utter in their separation from Thee, to keep them safe from the mischief of Thine

past had made reference to the Greatest Name, and throughout the centuries, many longed to catch a glimpse of its splendor. The followers of Krishna, for instance, expected His return under the name of “Vishnu Yasha”, which means “Glory of God”. It is written that one of Buddha’s disciples asked Him: “Who shall teach us when Thou are gone?” Buddha replied: “I am not the first Buddha who came upon earth, nor shall I be the last. In due time another Buddha will arise . . . He shall reveal to you the same eternal truths which I have taught you. He will preach to you His religion, glorious in its origin, glorious at the climax and glorious at the goal, in the spirit and in the letter.” Buddhist scriptures refer to “AMITABHA” as the “Infinite Light of Revelation”, the “Unbounded Light”, and the “Source of wisdom, of virtue and of Buddhahood”.

In Isaiah we read, “the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon; they shall see the glory of the Lord, the excellency of our God.” Jesus assured His followers that He would return “in the glory of his Father”.

As the Islamic Faith immediately preceded this new Day, some of the veils covering the hidden treasure were removed, and the followers of Muḥammad could perceive the first glimmers of the Greatest Name. Thus we find explicit reference to it in the traditions of Islám. For example, there is a powerful prayer which the Shí’ih Muslims chant at dawn during the month of fasting. The prayer invokes God through His names. There are nineteen such invocations, the first of which revolves around the name Bahá. The opening words of this prayer read as follows: “O God! My God! I beseech Thee by Thy Bahá, Thy Bahá in its entirety. I beseech Thee by all Thy Bahá . . .” It is an Islamic tradition that among the nineteen names invoked in this prayer, one is the Greatest Name of God.

At last, through the movement of the Báb’s exalted Pen, the remaining veils were torn away. His followers came to know that “Bahá” was the treasured name soon to be manifested in all splendor and majesty. So special did He consider this name that He instructed His secretary to use red ink wherever the word “Bahá” appeared in His Tablets. He explicitly stated: “Well is it with him who fixeth his gaze upon the Order of Bahá’u’lláh, and rendereth thanks unto his Lord.”

Bahá’u’lláh has confirmed that the Greatest Name of God is “Bahá”. There are various derivatives of the word and these are also regarded as the Greatest Name. “Abhá” means “Most Glorious” in Arabic. “Yá Bahá’u’l-Abhá” is an invocation meaning “O Thou the Glory of the Most Glorious”. “Alláh-u-Abhá” means “God is Most Glorious”. In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá’u’lláh exhorts us to repeat it ninety-five times every day, and we know well that this practice is a source of untold bounty and joy.

Two symbols associated with the Greatest Name are familiar to us all. One is the design in Arabic script by the great calligrapher Mishkín-Qalam:



The other is the symbol of the Greatest Name often found on a ring stone:



In the center of this emblem, the letters “B” and “H” in Arabic are drawn in a beautiful and intricate way. The three horizontal lines represent the world of God, the world of the Manifestations, and the world of creation respectively. Humanity, left to itself, can never recognize God and attain His presence. God, in His great bounty, has singled out His Chosen Ones to guide it and enable it to catch glimpses of the unfading glories of realms beyond. This is depicted in the symbol by having the middle horizontal line, which represents the world of the Manifestations, repeated in a vertical line, thus joining the world of the Creator to that of His creation. As for the two stars on either side of the emblem, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains:

“Upon the horizon of Eternal Glory two luminous stars have arisen in brilliance: one to the right and one to the left. This supreme mystery is the two diagrams placed to the right and to the left of the Greatest Name upon the stone of the noble ring: this is the mystery of the appearance of the Beauty of Abhá and of the Supreme Highness (the Báb). And though these two diagrams at the right and the left have the form of stars, they also represent the body of man, with the head, the two arms and the two legs, since this diagram has five points.”¹²⁸

It is hoped that this brief introduction will help you as you reflect on the significance of the Greatest Name, whose powerful influence pervades our lives. We repeat it ninety-five times a day. We invoke it in times of need. It is ever present in our minds and hearts. Below are but a few quotations referring to God’s splendor and glory:

“O servant who hast fixed his gaze upon My face! Hearken unto the Voice of thy Lord, the All-Glorious, calling aloud from the dayspring of grandeur and majesty. Verily His Call will draw thee nigh unto the realm of glory and will cause thee to extol His praise in such wise that every created thing will be enraptured, and to magnify His glory in such manner as to influence the entire creation. Truly thy Lord is the Protector, the Gracious, the All-Informed.”¹²⁹

“Thy might beareth me witness! Were it not to celebrate Thy praise, my tongue would be of no use to me, and were it not for the sake of rendering service to Thee, my existence would avail me not. But for the pleasure of beholding the splendors of Thy realm of glory, why should I cherish sight? And but for the joy of giving ear to Thy most sweet voice, of what use is hearing?”¹³⁰

“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 poured. 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.”¹³¹

SECTION 21

In the preceding sections, we have reflected on some of the names and attributes of God, knowing that our understanding of their significance gradually grows as we study the revealed Word and contemplate His creation. In dedicating our lives to the promotion of His Cause, we continually receive the blessings that flow from these exalted names. Before we leave this topic, you may wish to meditate on the passage below and, if possible, commit it to memory.

“Say: Blessed the slumberer who is awakened by My Breeze. Blessed the lifeless one who is quickened through My reviving breaths. Blessed the eye that is solaced by gazing at My beauty. Blessed the wayfarer who directeth his steps towards the Tabernacle of My glory and majesty. Blessed the distressed one who seeketh refuge beneath the shadow of My canopy. Blessed the sore athirst who hasteneth to the soft-flowing waters of My loving-kindness. Blessed the insatiate soul who casteth away his selfish desires for love of Me and taketh his place at the banquet table which I have sent down from the heaven of divine bounty for My chosen ones. Blessed the abased one who layeth fast hold on the cord of My glory; and the needy one who entereth beneath the shadow of the Tabernacle of My wealth. Blessed the ignorant one who seeketh the fountain of My knowledge; and the heedless one who cleaveth to the cord of My remembrance. Blessed the soul that hath been raised to life through My quickening breath and hath gained admittance into My heavenly Kingdom. Blessed the man whom the sweet savors of reunion with Me have stirred and caused to draw nigh unto the Day-spring of My Revelation. Blessed the ear that hath heard and the tongue that hath borne witness and the eye that hath seen and recognized the Lord Himself, in His great glory and majesty, invested with grandeur and dominion. Blessed are they that have attained His presence. Blessed the man who hath sought enlightenment from the Daystar of My Word. Blessed he who hath attired his head with the diadem of My love. Blessed is he who hath heard of My grief and hath arisen to aid Me among My people. Blessed is he who hath laid down his life in My path and hath borne manifold hardships for the sake of My name. Blessed the man who, assured of My Word, hath arisen from among

the dead to celebrate My praise. Blessed is he that hath been enraptured by My wondrous melodies and hath rent the veils asunder through the potency of My might. Blessed is he who hath remained faithful to My Covenant, and whom the things of the world have not kept back from attaining My Court of holiness. Blessed is the man who hath detached himself from all else but Me, hath soared in the atmosphere of My love, hath gained admittance into My Kingdom, gazed upon My realms of glory, quaffed the living waters of My bounty, hath drunk his fill from the heavenly river of My loving providence, acquainted himself with My Cause, apprehended that which I concealed within the treasury of My Words, and hath shone forth from the horizon of divine knowledge engaged in My praise and glorification. Verily, he is of Me. Upon him rest My mercy, My loving-kindness, My bounty and My glory.”¹³²

SECTION 22

Our reflections on the attributes of God over the past several sections have prepared us to explore further the concept of the Eternal Covenant. The Covenant is, in essence, about knowing God and obeying His commands. We have already said that we can never know the reality of God but that, out of His infinite love for humanity, He reveals to us His names and attributes, His Will and purpose, through His Manifestations. It is in this sense, then, that we speak of knowing God. Most of the concepts we will explore, beginning in this section and extending through Section 27, are drawn from the Kitáb-i-Íqán, in which Bahá'u'lláh explains to us the nature of God's Revelation. You may, of course, already be well familiar with this volume, having made it the object of your personal study. If not, you may wish to take the opportunity upon completion of this course to read the Kitáb-i-Íqán. Here we will only look at certain specific passages. Let us begin with the following statement:

“To every discerning and illumined heart it is evident that God, the unknowable Essence, the divine Being, is immensely exalted beyond every human attribute, such as corporeal existence, ascent and descent, egress and regress. Far be it from His glory that human tongue should adequately recount His praise, or that human heart comprehend His fathomless mystery. He is and hath ever been veiled in the ancient eternity of His Essence, and will remain in His Reality everlastingly hidden from the sight of men. ‘No vision taketh in Him, but He taketh in all vision; He is the Subtile, the All-Perceiving.’”¹³³

Expounding on this subject, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá offers us insight into the above statement of Bahá'u'lláh:

“The Invisible and Inaccessible can never be known; the absolute Essence can never be described. For the divine Essence is an all-encompassing reality, and all created things are encompassed. The all-encompassing must assuredly be greater than that which is encompassed, and thus the latter can in no wise discover the former or comprehend its reality. No matter how far human minds may advance, even attaining the highest degree of human comprehension, the uttermost limit of this comprehension is to behold the signs and attributes of God in the world of creation and not in the realm of Divinity. For the essence and the attributes of the

all-glorious Lord are enshrined in the inaccessible heights of sanctity, and human minds and understandings will never find a path to that station. ‘The way is barred, and all seeking rejected.’

“It is evident that whatsoever man understands is a consequence of his existence, and that man is a sign of the All-Merciful: How then can the consequence of the sign encompass the Creator of the sign? That is, how can human understanding, which is a consequence of man’s existence, comprehend God? Thus the reality of the Divinity lies hidden from all understanding and is concealed from the minds of all men, and to ascend to that station is in no wise possible.”¹³⁴

You may find the following exercises helpful in reflecting on the above quotations:

1. Give some examples of things that do not have corporeal or material existence. _____

2. Besides “corporeal existence”, “ascent and descent” and “egress and regress”, mention some other human characteristics that we know God is exalted beyond. For example, change is a human attribute that does not apply to God.

3. Referring to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s explanation, write a few sentences that indicate why human understanding can never comprehend the reality of God.

4. How would you explain our conviction that, although the human tongue cannot adequately recount God’s praises, we should nevertheless constantly praise Him in our prayers and in our thoughts? _____

5. How would you explain our conviction that, although the human heart cannot comprehend God’s fathomless mysteries, we should nevertheless make the greatest effort throughout life to reflect on His signs and His attributes? _____

In light of the above exercises, discuss the following question in your group: Given that God is exalted beyond every human attribute such as “ascent and descent”, “egress and regress”, what are the sacred scriptures trying to tell us when they refer to His descending unto earth from heaven, to His returning to the realms beyond, and to His eventual reappearance among human beings?

SECTION 23

Bahá’u’lláh further explains in the Kitáb-i-Íqán:

“The door of the knowledge of the Ancient of Days being thus closed in the face of all beings, the Source of infinite grace, according to His saying: ‘His grace hath transcended all things; My grace hath encompassed them all’ hath caused those luminous Gems of Holiness to appear out of the realm of the spirit, in the noble form of the human temple, and be made manifest unto all men, that they may impart unto the world the mysteries of the unchangeable Being, and tell of the subtleties of His imperishable Essence. These sanctified Mirrors, these Day-springs of ancient glory are one and all the Exponents on earth of Him Who is the central Orb of the universe, its Essence and ultimate Purpose. From Him proceed their knowledge and power; from Him is derived their sovereignty. The beauty of their countenance is but a reflection of His image, and their revelation a sign of His deathless glory. They are the Treasuries of divine knowledge, and the Repositories of celestial wisdom. Through them is transmitted a grace that is infinite, and by them is revealed the light that can never fade.”¹³⁵

“These Tabernacles of holiness, these primal Mirrors which reflect the light of unfading glory, are but expressions of Him Who is the Invisible of the Invisibles. By the revelation of these gems of divine virtue all the names and attributes of God, such as knowledge and power, sovereignty and dominion, mercy and wisdom, glory, bounty and grace, are made manifest.”¹³⁶

In the following excerpts from two Tablets revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, we find the same theme being addressed:

“Know thou of a certainty that the Unseen can in no wise incarnate His Essence and reveal it unto men. He is, and hath ever been, immensely exalted beyond all that can either be recounted or perceived. From His retreat of glory His voice is ever proclaiming: ‘Verily, I am God; there is none other God besides Me, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. I have manifested Myself unto men, and have sent down Him Who is the Dayspring of the signs of My Revelation. Through Him I have caused all creation to testify that there is none other God except Him, the Incomparable, the All-Informed, the All-Wise.’ He Who is everlastingly hidden from the eyes of men can never be known except through His Manifestation, and His Manifestation can adduce no greater proof of the truth of His Mission than the proof of His own Person.”¹³⁷

“O Salmán! The door of the knowledge of the Ancient Being hath ever been, and will continue forever to be, closed in the face of men. No man’s understanding shall ever gain access unto His holy court. As a token of His mercy, however, and as a proof of His loving-kindness, He hath manifested unto men the Daystars of His divine guidance, the Symbols of His divine unity, and hath ordained the knowledge of these sanctified Beings to be identical with the knowledge of His own Self. Whoso recognizeth them hath recognized God. Whoso hearkeneth to their call, hath hearkened to the Voice of God, and whoso testifieth to the truth of their Revelation, hath testified to the truth of God Himself. Whoso turneth away from them, hath turned away from God, and whoso disbelieveth in them, hath disbelieved in God. Every one of them is the Way of God that connecteth this world with the realms above, and the Standard of His Truth unto every one in the kingdoms of earth and heaven. They are the Manifestations of God amidst men, the evidences of His Truth, and the signs of His glory.”¹³⁸

The exercises that follow may aid you in your reflections on these passages.

1. Complete the sentences below:
 - a. The door of the knowledge of God being closed in the face of all beings, He has caused those _____ to appear out of the _____ of the spirit, _____ of the _____, and be made _____.
 - b. These Gems of Holiness have appeared out the realm of the spirit and have been made manifest to all men that they may _____, and _____.
 - c. The beauty emanating from the Manifestations of God is a reflection of _____.

- d. Their revelation is a sign of _____ .
- e. They are the Treasuries of _____ .
- f. They are the Repositories of _____ .
- g. Through them is transmitted _____ .
- h. By them is revealed _____ .
- i. These primal Mirrors are but expressions of _____
_____ .
- j. By the revelation of these gems of divine virtue _____

_____ .
- k. The knowledge of these sanctified Beings is identical with _____
_____ .
- l. Whosoever has
 - recognized them has _____ ;
 - hearkened to their call has _____ ;
 - testified to the truth of their Revelation has _____
_____ ;
 - turned away from them has _____ ;
 - disbelieved in them has _____ .

2. Using the image of a mirror reflecting the sun, write a few sentences about how God makes Himself known to humanity.

SECTION 24

In the Kitáb-i-Íqán, Bahá'u'lláh refers to a twofold station of God's Manifestations. Regarding the first, He explains:

“... the Bearers of the trust of God are made manifest unto the peoples of the earth as the Exponents of a new Cause and the Bearers of a new Message. Inasmuch as these Birds of the Celestial Throne are all sent down from the heaven of the Will of God, and as they all arise to proclaim His irresistible Faith, they therefore are regarded as one soul and the same person. For they all drink from the one Cup of the love of God, and all partake of the fruit of the same Tree of Oneness. These Manifestations of God have each a twofold station. One is the station of pure abstraction and essential unity. In this respect, if thou callest them all by one name, and dost ascribe to them the same attribute, thou hast not erred from the truth. . . .

“It is clear and evident to thee that all the Prophets are the Temples of the Cause of God, Who have appeared clothed in divers attire. If thou wilt observe with discriminating eyes, thou wilt behold them all abiding in the same tabernacle, soaring in the same heaven, seated upon the same throne, uttering the same speech, and proclaiming the same Faith. Such is the unity of those Essences of being, those Luminaries of infinite and immeasurable splendor. Wherefore, should one of these Manifestations of Holiness proclaim saying: ‘I am the return of all the Prophets,’ He verily speaketh the truth. In like manner, in every subsequent Revelation, the return of the former Revelation is a fact, the truth of which is firmly established.”¹³⁹

Expounding on the subject of “return”, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá tells us that we should consider “not the individuality of the person but the reality of his perfections”. He goes on to explain:

“For example, last year there was a flower, and this year there has also appeared a flower. When I say that the flower of last year has returned, I do not mean that the same flower has returned with the selfsame identity. But since this flower is endowed with the same attributes as last year's flower—as it possesses the same fragrance, delicacy, color, and form—it is said that last year's flower has returned, and that this is that same flower. Likewise, when spring comes we say that last year's spring has returned, since all that was found in the former is to be found again in the latter. This is why Christ said, ‘Ye will witness all that came to pass in the days of the former Prophets.’

“Let us give another illustration: Last year's seed was sown, branches and leaves appeared, blossoms and fruit came forth, and in the end a new seed was produced. When this second seed is planted, it will grow into a tree, and once more those leaves, blossoms, branches, and fruit will return, and the former tree will once again appear. As the beginning was a seed and the end likewise a seed, we say that

the seed has returned. When we consider the material substance of the tree, it is different, but when we consider the blossoms, leaves, and fruit, the same fragrance, taste, and delicacy are produced. Hence the perfection of the tree has returned anew.

“In the same way, if we consider the individual, it is a different one, but if we consider the attributes and perfections, the same have returned.”¹⁴⁰

The exercises below are intended to help you think through some of the ideas presented in these passages.

1. On the basis of the excerpt from the Kitáb-i-Íqán, complete the following sentences:
 - a. Though the Manifestations of God are each the Exponents of a _____ and the Bearers of a _____, they are all sent down from the _____ of the _____ and all arise to proclaim _____.
 - b. In that God’s Manifestations are all _____ from the heaven of the Will of God and they all _____ His irresistible Faith, they therefore are regarded as _____ and the _____.
 - c. All of His Manifestations drink from the _____ of the _____ of God and partake of the _____ of the _____.
2. Are God’s names and attributes given to some of the Manifestations and not to others?

3. Referring to their station of unity, Bahá’u’lláh states that, though the Manifestations of God have appeared _____ in _____ attire, they are all the _____ of the Cause of God.
4. Bahá’u’lláh makes clear that God’s Manifestations all
– abide _____ ;
– soar _____ ;
– are seated _____ ;
– utter _____ ;
– proclaim _____ .

to the world of creation and to the limitations thereof. In this respect, each Manifestation of God hath a distinct individuality, a definitely prescribed mission, a predestined Revelation, and specially designated limitations. Each one of them is known by a different name, is characterized by a special attribute, fulfills a definite Mission, and is entrusted with a particular Revelation. . . .

“It is because of this difference in their station and mission that the words and utterances flowing from these Well-springs of divine knowledge appear to diverge and differ. Otherwise, in the eyes of them that are initiated into the mysteries of divine wisdom, all their utterances are in reality but the expressions of one Truth. As most of the people have failed to appreciate those stations to which We have referred, they therefore feel perplexed and dismayed at the varying utterances pronounced by Manifestations that are essentially one and the same.”¹⁴¹

In your efforts to reflect on the above passage, you are encouraged to carry out the following exercises:

1. Viewed from the standpoint of distinction, each one of the Manifestations of God has
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____
2. With respect to the station of distinction, each Manifestation
 - is known by _____ ;
 - is characterized by _____ ;
 - fulfills _____ ;
 - is entrusted with _____ .
3. Why do the words and utterances flowing from the Manifestations of God appear to differ? _____

4. Although the words and utterances of the Manifestations of God appear to differ because of their station and mission, they are, in reality, _____

Discuss the following question in your group: Given that the concept of the unity of the Manifestations of God is so clear, what do you think would cause a community to claim that the Founder of its religion is the best and the last? You may wish to write down here some of the points discussed.

SECTION 26

Regarding the Person of the Manifestation of God, we read in the Kitáb-i-Íqán:

“Were any of the all-embracing Manifestations of God to declare: ‘I am God!’ He verily speaketh the truth, and no doubt attacheth thereto. For it hath been repeatedly demonstrated that through their Revelation, their attributes and names, the Revelation of God, His name and His attributes, are made manifest in the world. Thus, He hath revealed: ‘Those shafts were God’s, not Thine!’ And also He saith: ‘In truth, they who plighted fealty unto thee, really plighted that fealty unto God.’ And were any of them to voice the utterance: ‘I am the Messenger of God,’ He also speaketh the truth, the indubitable truth. Even as He saith: ‘Muḥammad is not the father of any man among you, but He is the Messenger of God.’ Viewed in this light, they are all but Messengers of that ideal King, that unchangeable Essence. And were they all to proclaim: ‘I am the Seal of the Prophets,’ they verily utter but the truth, beyond the faintest shadow of doubt. For they are all but one person, one soul, one spirit, one being, one revelation. They are all the manifestation of the ‘Beginning’ and the ‘End,’ the ‘First’ and the ‘Last,’ the ‘Seen’ and ‘Hidden’—all of which pertain to Him Who is the innermost Spirit of Spirits and eternal Essence of Essences. And were they to say: ‘We are the servants of God,’ this also is a manifest and indisputable fact. For they have been made manifest in the uttermost state of servitude, a servitude the like of which no man can possibly attain. Thus in moments in which these Essences of being were deeply immersed beneath the oceans of ancient and everlasting holiness, or when they soared to the loftiest summits of divine mysteries, they claimed their utterance to be the Voice of divinity, the Call of God Himself. Were the eye of discernment to be opened, it would recognize that in this very state, they have considered themselves utterly effaced and nonexistent in the face of Him Who is the All-Pervading, the Incorruptible. Methinks they have regarded themselves as utter nothingness, and deemed their mention in that Court an act of blasphemy. For the slightest whispering of self, within such a Court, is an evidence of self-assertion and independent existence. In the eyes of them that have attained unto that Court, such a suggestion is itself a grievous transgression. How much more grievous would it be, were aught else to be mentioned in that Presence, were man’s heart, his tongue, his mind, or his soul, to be busied with anyone but the Well-Beloved, were his eyes

to behold any countenance other than His beauty, were his ear to be inclined to any melody but His voice, and were his feet to tread any way but His way. . . .

“By virtue of this station, they have claimed for themselves the Voice of Divinity and the like, whilst by virtue of their station of Messengership, they have declared themselves the Messengers of God. In every instance they have voiced an utterance that would conform to the requirements of the occasion, and have ascribed all these declarations to Themselves, declarations ranging from the realm of divine Revelation to the realm of creation, and from the domain of Divinity even unto the domain of earthly existence. Thus it is that whatsoever be their utterance, whether it pertain to the realm of Divinity, Lordship, Prophethood, Messengership, Guardianship, Apostleship or Servitude, all is true, beyond the shadow of a doubt. Therefore, these sayings which We have quoted in support of Our argument must be attentively considered, that the divergent utterances of the Manifestations of the Unseen and Daysprings of Holiness may cease to agitate the soul and perplex the mind.”¹⁴²

In the above passage, Bahá'u'lláh makes reference to words of Muḥammad from the Qur'án in explaining to us how the Manifestations of God speak of their own Person, of their Station, and of the message they each bring. To help you think through the profound concepts presented, the exercises below are provided.

1. Complete the following sentences:

- a. Bahá'u'lláh tells us that, were any of the Manifestations of God to declare: “I am God!”, He would be speaking the truth, for through their _____, their _____ and _____, the _____ of God, His _____ and His _____, are made _____ in the _____.
- b. Bahá'u'lláh explains that, were any of the Manifestations of God to make the statement “I am the Messenger of God,” He would also be speaking the truth, in that they are all but _____ of that _____, that _____.
- c. Bahá'u'lláh explains further that, were all the Manifestations of God to proclaim, “I am the Seal of the Prophets,” again they would be speaking to truth, for they are all but one _____, one _____, one _____, one _____, one _____ and for they are all the manifestation of the “_____” and the “_____,” the “_____” and the “_____,” the “_____” and “_____”—all of which pertain to _____.

d. Bahá'u'lláh goes on to tell us that, were all the Manifestations of God to say: “We are the servants of God,” this would also be an indisputable fact, for they have been made manifest in _____, a _____ the like of which _____.

2. Bahá'u'lláh makes clear that, in moments in which the Manifestations were deeply immersed beneath _____, or when they soared to _____, they claimed their utterance to be _____ of _____, the _____ of _____. In this very state, Bahá'u'lláh tells us, they have

- considered themselves _____,
- regarded themselves as _____,
- deemed their mention in God’s holy Court _____.

In the above passage, we read that the Manifestations of God have voiced their utterances in conformity with the requirements of the occasion and that, whatsoever they declare, whether it pertains to the realm of Divinity, Lordship, Prophethood, Messengership, Guardianship, Apostleship or Servitude, is true. Discuss in your group how knowledge of this fact is vital to our understanding of Bahá'u'lláh’s Writings as well as the scriptures of previous religions. Here is some space for you to note down a few of the points considered.

SECTION 27

In the following excerpt from a Tablet revealed by Bahá'u'lláh during the period of His banishment to 'Akká, He speaks of the suffering endured by all the Manifestations as they, Daystars of Divine bounty, shed the light of God's Revelation upon the people of their age:

“Consider the former generations. Witness how every time the Daystar of Divine bounty hath shed the light of His Revelation upon the world, the people of His Day have arisen against Him, and repudiated His truth. They who were regarded as the leaders of men have invariably striven to hinder their followers from turning unto Him Who is the Ocean of God's limitless bounty.

“Behold how the people, as a result of the verdict pronounced by the divines of His age, have cast Abraham, the Friend of God, into fire; how Moses, He Who held converse with the Almighty, was denounced as liar and slanderer. Reflect how Jesus, the Spirit of God, was, notwithstanding His extreme meekness and perfect tender-heartedness, treated by His enemies. So fierce was the opposition which He, the Essence of Being and Lord of the visible and invisible, had to face, that He had nowhere to lay His head. He wandered continually from place to place, deprived of a permanent abode. Ponder that which befell Muḥammad, the Seal of the Prophets, may the life of all else be a sacrifice unto Him. . . .

“Thou hast known how grievously the Prophets of God, His Messengers and Chosen Ones, have been afflicted. Meditate awhile on the motive and reason which have been responsible for such a persecution. At no time, in no Dispensation, have the Prophets of God escaped the blasphemy of their enemies, the cruelty of their oppressors, the denunciation of the learned of their age, who appeared in the guise of uprightness and piety. Day and night they passed through such agonies as none can ever measure, except the knowledge of the one true God, exalted be His glory.

“Consider this wronged One. Though the clearest proofs attest the truth of His Cause; though the prophecies He, in an unmistakable language, hath made have been fulfilled; though, in spite of His not being accounted among the learned, His being unschooled and inexperienced in the disputations current among the divines, He hath rained upon men the showers of His manifold and Divinely inspired knowledge; yet, behold how this generation hath rejected His authority, and rebelled against Him! He hath, during the greater part of His life, been sore-tried in the clutches of His enemies. His sufferings have now reached their culmination in this afflictive Prison, into which His oppressors have so unjustly thrown Him. God grant that, with a penetrating vision and radiant heart, thou mayest observe the things that have come to pass and are now happening, and, pondering them in thine heart, mayest recognize that which most men have, in this Day, failed to perceive. Please God, He may enable thee to inhale the sweet fragrance of His Day, to partake of the limitless effusions of His grace, to quaff thy fill, through His gracious favor, from the most great Ocean that surgeth in this Day in the name of the Ancient King, and to remain firm and immovable as the mountain in His Cause.”¹⁴³

This same theme is treated extensively in the Kitáb-i-Íqán. In one passage, for example, Bahá'u'lláh states:

“Moreover, consider the hardships and the bitterness of the lives of those Revealers of the divine Beauty. Reflect, how single-handed and alone they faced the world and all its peoples, and promulgated the Law of God! No matter how severe the persecutions inflicted upon those holy, those precious, and tender Souls, they still remained, in the plenitude of their power, patient, and, despite their ascendancy, they suffered and endured.”¹⁴⁴

It is suggested that you carry out the following exercises as you meditate on these words of Bahá'u'lláh and their significance:

1. How have the generality of the people responded to the call of each Manifestation of God when He appeared? _____

2. Who has striven to hinder the people from turning to Him? _____
3. At no _____, in no _____, Bahá'u'lláh tells us, have the Manifestations of God escaped the _____ of their _____, the _____ of their _____, the _____ of the _____, who appeared _____
_____.
4. What, do you think, are “the motive and reason” for which the Manifestations of God are so persecuted? _____

5. Referring to His Revelation and to the sufferings He endured, Bahá'u'lláh tells us to observe, with a penetrating vision and radiant heart, the things that have passed. What will we recognize when we do so? _____

6. Referring to the lives of God’s Manifestations, Bahá'u'lláh calls upon us to reflect on how they, single-handedly and alone, faced the world and all its peoples and promulgated the Law of God and how, despite their power and ascendancy, they remained patient and suffered and endured. Discuss in your group how such reflection is essential for the way we look at the progress of the Cause of God.

“The Prophets of God should be regarded as physicians whose task is to foster the well-being of the world and its peoples, that, through the spirit of oneness, they may heal the sickness of a divided humanity.”¹⁴⁶

“Little wonder, then, if the treatment prescribed by the physician in this day should not be found to be identical with that which he prescribed before. How could it be otherwise when the ills affecting the sufferer necessitate at every stage of his sickness a special remedy?”¹⁴⁷

“In like manner, every time the Prophets of God have illumined the world with the resplendent radiance of the Daystar of Divine knowledge, they have invariably summoned its peoples to embrace the light of God through such means as best befitted the exigencies of the age in which they appeared.”¹⁴⁸

Regarding progressive revelation, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains a number of essential points in the selection of passages below. He indicates, in this connection, that every Manifestation is the Founder of a new Dispensation, each with its own religious text, whether oral or written, which contains the revealed Word of God. We know, of course, that the Word of God is endowed with tremendous power, and the appearance of every Manifestation, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá reminds us, is accompanied by great human advances. Yet there is no end to the attainments of humanity, He makes clear, and so, in accordance with its growth and development, a new Manifestation will appear, the Bearer of a Revelation that confirms teachings fundamental to all the divine religions and which provides laws and ordinances, temporary in nature, suited to humanity’s spiritual receptiveness and capacity.

“The independent Prophets are each the Author of a divine religion and the Founder of a new Dispensation. At Their advent the world is clothed in a new attire, a new religion is established and a new Book revealed. These Prophets acquire the outpouring grace of the divine Reality without an intermediary. Their radiance is an essential radiance like that of the sun, which is luminous in and of itself and whose luminosity is an essential requirement rather than being acquired from another star: They are like the sun and not the moon. These Daysprings of the morn of Divine Unity are the fountainheads of divine grace and the mirrors of the Essence of Reality. . . .

“In the beginning, this tree was full of vitality and laden with blossoms and fruit, but gradually it grew old, spent, and barren, until it entirely withered and decayed. That is why the True Gardener will again plant a tender sapling of the same stock, that it may grow and develop day by day, extend its sheltering shade in this heavenly garden, and yield its prized fruit. So it is with the divine religions: With the passage of time, their original precepts are altered, their underlying truth entirely vanishes, their spirit departs, doctrinal innovations spring up, and they become a body without a soul. That is why they are renewed.”¹⁴⁹

“. . . the virtues of humanity and the possibilities of human advancement are boundless. There is no end to them, and whatever be the degree to which humanity may attain, there are always degrees beyond. There is no attainment in the contingent realm of which it may be said, ‘Beyond this state of being and perfection there is no other,’ or ‘This has achieved the superlative degree.’ No

matter how perfect it may appear, there is always a greater degree of attainment to be reached. . . .

“There are some who believe that the divine bounties are subject to cessation. For example, they think that the revelation of God, the effulgence of God and the bounties of God have ended. This is self-evidently a mistaken idea, for none of these is subject to termination. The reality of Divinity is like unto the sun, and revelation is like unto the rays thereof. If we should assert that the bounties of God are not everlasting, we are forced to believe that Divinity can come to an end, whereas the reality of Divinity enfolds all virtues and by reason of these bounties is perfect. Were it not possessed of all these perfections or virtues, it could not be Divinity. The sun is the sun because of its rays, light and heat. If it could be dispossessed of them, it would not be the sun. Therefore, if we say that the divinity or sovereignty of God is accidental and subject to termination, we must perforce think that Divinity itself is accidental, without foundation and not essential.”¹⁵⁰

“The divine religions embody two kinds of ordinances. First, there are those which constitute essential, or spiritual, teachings of the Word of God. These are faith in God, the acquirement of the virtues which characterize perfect manhood, praiseworthy moralities, the acquisition of the bestowals and bounties emanating from the divine effulgences—in brief, the ordinances which concern the realm of morals and ethics. This is the fundamental aspect of the religion of God, and this is of the highest importance because knowledge of God is the fundamental requirement of man. Man must comprehend the oneness of Divinity. He must come to know and acknowledge the precepts of God and realize for a certainty that the ethical development of humanity is dependent upon religion. He must get rid of all defects and seek the attainment of heavenly virtues in order that he may prove to be the image and likeness of God. It is recorded in the Holy Bible that God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.’ It is self-evident that the image and likeness mentioned do not apply to the form and semblance of a human being because the reality of Divinity is not limited to any form or figure. Nay, rather, the attributes and characteristics of God are intended. Even as God is pronounced to be just, man must likewise be just. As God is loving and kind to all men, man must likewise manifest loving-kindness to all humanity. As God is loyal and truthful, man must show forth the same attributes in the human world. Even as God exercises mercy toward all, man must prove himself to be the manifestation of mercy. In a word, the image and likeness of God constitute the virtues of God, and man is intended to become the recipient of the effulgences of divine attributes. This is the essential foundation of all the divine religions, the reality itself, common to all. Abraham promulgated this; Moses proclaimed it. Christ and all the Prophets upheld this standard and aspect of divine religion.

“Second, there are laws and ordinances which are temporary and nonessential. These concern human transactions and relations. They are accidental and subject to change according to the exigencies of time and place. These ordinances are neither permanent nor fundamental. For instance, during the time of Noah it was expedient that seafood be considered as lawful; therefore, God commanded Noah to partake of all marine animal life. During the time of Moses this was not in

accordance with the exigencies of Israel’s existence; therefore, a second command was revealed partly abrogating the law concerning marine foods. . . .

“It has been shown conclusively, therefore, that the foundation of the religion of God remains permanent and unchanging. It is that fixed foundation which ensures the progress and stability of the body politic and the illumination of humanity. It has ever been the cause of love and justice amongst men. It works for the true fellowship and unification of all mankind, for it never changes and is not subject to supersedure. The accidental, or nonessential, laws which regulate the transactions of the social body and everyday affairs of life are changeable and subject to abrogation.”¹⁵¹

1. Think of a religion widespread in your country or one with which you are familiar. How are its essential truths expressed? What are some of the laws which were applicable at the time they were brought by God’s Manifestation but which are no longer needed?

2. In your own words, explain the concept of “progressive revelation”.

**Energy, forgiveness, fortitude, purity, a good will, freedom from pride—
these are the treasures of the man who is born for heaven.**

Bhagavad Gita 16:1–3

Only by love can men see me, and know me, and come unto me.

Bhagavad Gita 11:54

**Therefore dedicate thyself to thy work, with no thought as to its reward.
For by working with no thought of reward, one attains to the Supreme.**

Bhagavad Gita 3:19

**By Me, Unmanifest in form, this whole universe was spun: in Me subsist all
beings, I do not subsist in them. . . .**

**A world of moving and unmoving things Material Nature brings to birth,
while I look on and supervise: this is the cause and this the means by which the
world revolves.**

**For that a human form I have assumed fools scorn Me, knowing nothing of
my higher nature—Great Lord of all contingent beings.**

Bhagavad Gita 9:4, 10–11

**Whenever there is a decline in righteousness, O Bharata, and the rise of
irreligion, it is then that I send forth My spirit.**

**For the salvation of the good, the destruction of the wicked, and for firmly
establishing true religion, I manifest myself from age to age.**

Bhagavad Gita 4:7–8

Both Abraham and Moses are associated with the Jewish Faith. Some believe the Former appeared around the 19th century BC, while the Latter may have lived in the 14th or 13th century BC. In addition to the Torah, which tells the story of the Jewish people and records their most central teachings, including the Ten Commandments revealed by Moses, there are several other written books associated with Judaism, some of which contain the pronouncements of Prophets Who came under His shadow. In these Texts, we read:

**I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of
the house of bondage.**

Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.

**Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image, nor any manner of likeness,
of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in
the water under the earth;**

**Thou shalt not bow down unto them, nor serve them; for I the Lord thy
God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children
unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me;**

**And showing mercy unto the thousandth generation of them that love Me
and keep My commandments.**

Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain.

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.

Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work;

But the seventh day is a sabbath unto the Lord thy God, in it thou shalt not do any manner of work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates;

For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested on the seventh day; wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

Thou shalt not murder.

Thou shalt not commit adultery.

Thou shalt not steal.

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house; thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his man-servant, nor his maid-servant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbor's.

Exodus 20:2–14

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures;

He leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul;

He guideth me in straight paths for His name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil,

For Thou art with me;

Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies;

Thou hast anointed my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life;

And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

Psalms 23:1–6

And He will teach us of His ways,

And we will walk in His paths';

For out of Zion shall go forth the law,

And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

And He shall judge between many peoples,

**And shall decide concerning mighty nations afar off;
And they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
And their spears into pruning-hooks;
Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
Neither shall they learn war any more.
But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig-tree;
And none shall make them afraid;
For the mouth of the Lord of hosts hath spoken.**

Micah 4:2–4

Though some believe Zoroaster appeared about 600 BC, there are also those who date His Revelation much earlier, perhaps as far back as the first half of the 2nd millennium BC. From the Sacred Texts of Zoroastrianism, we read:

Purity is for man, next to life, the greatest good.

Zend-Avesta

Let us embrace and propagate the good thoughts, good words, and good deeds that have been done and that will be done here and elsewhere, that we may be in the number of the good.

Zend-Avesta

Lord of broad vision, disclose to me for support the safeguards of your rule, those which are the reward for good thinking. Reveal to me, by reason of my virtuous piety, those conceptions in harmony with truth.

Gathas

Lord, let wisdom come in the company of truth across the earth! Yes, if ye shall be pleased with your prophet, reveal Thyself with visible help, mighty through Thy hand, through which he might set us in happiness.

Gathas

I ask Thee, Lord, about those things which indeed are coming and shall come . . .

. . . I ask about how that person shall be, namely, the blessed one who shall be eager to prosper the rule of the house or of the district or of the land with truth, and about when he—someone like Thee, Wise Lord—shall appear and with which actions.

Gathas

When a thousand two hundred and some years have passed from the inception of the religion of the Arabian and the overthrow of the Kingdom of Íran and

the degradation of the followers of My religion, a descendant of the Íránian kings will be raised up as a Prophet.

Dinkird

From the Scriptures of Buddhism, founded by Buddha sometime between the 6th and 4th centuries BC, we read:

A man full of faith, if endowed with virtue and glory, is respected, whatever place he may choose.

Good people shine from afar, like the snowy mountains; bad people are not seen, like arrows shot by night.

Dhammapada 21:303–4

We live happily indeed, not hating those who hate us! among men who hate us we dwell free from hatred!

We live happily indeed, free from ailments among the ailing! among men who are ailing let us dwell free from ailments!

We live happily indeed, free from greed among the greedy! among men who are greedy let us dwell free from greed!

We live happily indeed, though we call nothing our own! We shall be like the bright gods, feeding on happiness!

Victory breeds hatred, for the conquered is unhappy. He who has given up both victory and defeat, he, the contented, is happy.

There is no fire like passion; there is no losing throw like hatred; there is no pain like this body; there is no happiness higher than rest.

Hunger is the worst of diseases, the elements of the body the greatest evil; if one knows this truly, that is Nirvâna, the highest happiness.

Health is the greatest of gifts, contentedness the best riches; trust is the best of relationships, Nirvâna the highest happiness.

Dhammapada 15:197–204

All that we are is the result of what we have thought: it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain follows him, as the wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the carriage.

All that we are is the result of what we have thought: it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness follows him, like a shadow that never leaves him. . . .

For hatred does not cease by hatred at any time: hatred ceases by love, this is an old rule.

Dhammapada 1:1–2 and 5

At this period, brethren, there will arise in the world an Exalted One named Maitreya, Arahant, Fully Awakened, abounding in wisdom and

goodness, happy with knowledge of the worlds, unsurpassed as a guide to mortals willing to be led, a teacher for gods and men, an Exalted One, a Buddha, even as I am now. . . . The truth, lovely in its origin, lovely in its progress, lovely in its consummation, will he proclaim, both in the spirit and in the letter, the higher life will he make known, in all its fullness and in all its purity, even as I do now.

Digha Nikaya 26:25

In the New Testament, the Sacred Text of Christianity, we read the following words attributed to Jesus Christ, Whose Mission began around 30 AD:

Blessed *are* the poor in spirit: for their's is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed *are* they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

Blessed *are* the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed *are* they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

Blessed *are* the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed *are* the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

Blessed *are* the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

Blessed *are* they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for their's is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are ye, when *men* shall revile you, and persecute *you*, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great *is* your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.

Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.

Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Matthew 5:3–16

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock:

And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.

And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand:

And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.

Matthew 7:24–27

And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow;

And when he sowed, some *seeds* fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up:

Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth:

And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away.

And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them:

But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.

Who hath ears to hear, let him hear. . . .

Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower.

When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth *it* not, then cometh the wicked *one*, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.

But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it;

Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.

He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.

But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth *it*; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

Matthew 13:3–9, 18–23

Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.

But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up.

Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.

Matthew 24:42–44

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: . . .

John 16:12–13

For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.

Matthew 16:27

And from the Qur'án, the Holy Book of Islám, revealed by Muḥammad around 600 AD, we read:

God is the light of the Heavens and of the Earth. His Light is like a niche in which is a lamp—the lamp encased in glass—the glass, as it were, a glistening star. From a blessed tree is it lighted, the olive neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil would well nigh shine out, even though fire touched it not! It is light upon light. God guideth whom He will to His light, and God setteth forth parables to men, for God knoweth all things.

In the temples which God hath allowed to be reared, that His name may therein be remembered, do men praise Him morn and even.

Men whom neither merchandise nor traffic beguile from the remembrance of God, and from the observance of prayer, and the payment of the stated alms, through fear of the day when hearts *shall throb* and eyes shall roll:

That for their most excellent works may God recompense them, and of His bounty increase it to them more and more: for God maketh provision for whom He pleaseth without measure.

But as to the infidels, their works are like the vapour in a plain which the thirsty dreameth to be water, until when he cometh unto it, he findeth it not aught, but findeth that God is with him; and He fully payeth him his account: for swift to take account is God:

Or like the darkness on the deep sea when covered by billows riding upon billows, above which are clouds: darkness upon darkness. When a man reacheth forth his hand, he cannot nearly see it! He to whom God shall not give light, no light at all hath he!

Qur'án 24:35–40

And whoso maketh efforts for us, in our ways will we guide them: for God is assuredly with those who do righteous deeds.

Qur'án 29:69

Truly the men who resign themselves to God, and the women who resign themselves, and the believing men and the believing women, and the devout men and the devout women, and the men of truth, and the women of truth, and the patient men and the patient women, and the humble men and the humble women, and the men who give alms and the women who give alms, and the men who fast and the women who fast, and the chaste men and the chaste women, and the men and the women who oft remember God: for them hath God prepared forgiveness and a rich recompense.

Qur'án 33:35

Now hath a light and a clear Book come to you from God, by which God will guide him who shall follow after his good pleasure, to paths of peace, and will bring them out of the darkness to the light, by his will: and to the straight path will he guide them.

Qur'án 5:15–16

But love will the God of Mercy vouchsafe to those who believe and do the things that be right.

Qur'án 19:96

And hold ye fast by the cord of God, all of you, and break not loose from it; and remember God's goodness towards you, how that when ye were enemies, He united your hearts, and by his favor ye became brethren;

And when ye were on the brink of the pit of fire, he drew you back from it. Thus God clearly sheweth you his signs that ye may be guided;

And that there may be among you a people who invite to the Good, and enjoin the Just, and forbid the Wrong. These are they with whom it shall be well.

Qur'án 3:103–4

God! nought that is in Earth or that is in Heaven, is hidden unto Him. He it is who formeth you in your mothers' wombs. There is no god but He; the Mighty, the Wise!

He it is who hath sent down to thee "the Book." Some of its signs are of themselves perspicuous;—these are the basis of the Book—and others are figurative. But they whose hearts are given to err, follow its figures, craving discord, craving an interpretation; yet none knoweth its interpretation but God. And the stable in knowledge say, "We believe in it: it is all from our Lord." But none will bear this in mind, save men endued with understanding.

O our Lord! suffer not our hearts to go astray after that thou hast once guided us, and give us mercy from before thee; for verily thou art He who giveth.

O our Lord! For the day of whose coming there is not a doubt, thou wilt surely gather mankind together. Verily, God will not fail the promise.

Qur'án 3:5–9

SECTION 30

All the past Manifestations of God foretold the coming of the Day of God, a day when the peoples of the world would be united, when wars and misery would disappear, and peace would be established on earth. Such prophecies, of course, point to the advent of Bahá'u'lláh. So potent is the measure of God's bounty in this Day, and so excellent are the favors that are being showered upon humanity, that we have been blessed by two Manifestations of God, the Báb appearing only nine years before Bahá'u'lláh.

The Writings of the Báb are of a very special nature. His Dispensation, which began in 1844, was meant to be short, and its primary purpose was to prepare the people of Persia for the coming of Bahá'u'lláh.

The Tablet below is addressed by the Báb to Bahá'u'lláh, to Whom He refers as "Him Whom God shall make manifest". In it, the Báb begins speaking from the station of oneness by

saying that He is addressing a letter from God unto God. Then He speaks from the station of servitude and affirms that His most Holy Book, the Bayán, and those who believed in Him are but a present from Him to Bahá'u'lláh. “The Day of the Latter Resurrection” refers to the time of the appearance of Bahá'u'lláh. The Báb states that, even if, on that day, Bahá'u'lláh were to dismiss the entire company of the followers of the Bayán, He would be praised for doing so. The Báb then asks that Bahá'u'lláh, as a token of His favor, allow a period of nineteen years to pass before He declares His Mission. Bahá'u'lláh received the first stirrings of God's Revelation while imprisoned in the Siyáh-Chál of Tíhrán in 1852, yet He did not make His Mission known until Riḍván 1863, exactly nineteen years after the Báb's declaration.

He is the Most Glorious.

“He is God, no God is there but Him, the Almighty, the Best-Beloved. All that are in the heavens and on the earth and whatever lieth between them are His. Verily He is the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting.

“This is a letter from God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting, unto God, the Almighty, the Best-Beloved, to affirm that the Bayán and such as bear allegiance to it are but a present from me unto Thee and to express my undoubting faith that there is no God but Thee, that the kingdoms of Creation and Revelation are Thine, that no one can attain anything save by Thy power and that He Whom Thou hast raised up is but Thy servant and Thy Testimony. I, indeed, beg to address Him Whom God shall make manifest, by Thy leave in these words: ‘Shouldst Thou dismiss the entire company of the followers of the Bayán in the Day of the Latter Resurrection by a mere sign of Thy finger even while still a suckling babe, Thou wouldst indeed be praised in Thy indication. And though no doubt is there about it, do Thou grant a respite of nineteen years as a token of Thy favor so that those who have embraced this Cause may be graciously rewarded by Thee. Thou art verily the Lord of grace abounding. Thou dost indeed suffice every created thing and causest it to be independent of all things, while nothing in the heavens or on the earth or that which lieth between them can ever suffice Thee.’

“Verily Thou art the Self-Sufficient, the All-Knowing; Thou art indeed potent over all things.”¹⁵²

SECTION 31

That the Eternal Covenant of God is an inestimable bounty to humankind is clear from all that we have studied thus far. Through it, we are able to see His light, to hear His Word, and to understand His purpose for our lives. Yet, an important question remains to be asked: What is our part in the Eternal Covenant, in this agreement between God and humanity which is welded into our very beings? The opening passages of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas address this question in the clearest terms:

“The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the recognition of Him Who is the Dayspring of His Revelation and the Fountain of His laws, Who representeth the Godhead in both the Kingdom of His Cause and the world of creation. Whoso

SECTION 32

We know that, once we have recognized the Manifestation of God, our greatest duty is to follow His commandments. Yet, distracted by a world that is often forgetful of God, and subject to the constant promptings of the ego, from where do we find the strength to remain steadfast in His Covenant? What force keeps our feet firm on the straight path and enables us to observe His laws? Love is clearly one such force. The call in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas “Observe My commandments, for the love of My beauty” points to the inexhaustible source of our motivation:

“O ye peoples of the world! Know assuredly that My commandments are the lamps of My loving providence among My servants, and the keys of My mercy for My creatures. Thus hath it been sent down from the heaven of the Will of your Lord, the Lord of Revelation. Were any man to taste the sweetness of the words which the lips of the All-Merciful have willed to utter, he would, though the treasures of the earth be in his possession, renounce them one and all, that he might vindicate the truth of even one of His commandments, shining above the Dayspring of His bountiful care and loving-kindness.

“Say: From My laws the sweet-smelling savor of My garment can be smelled, and by their aid the standards of Victory will be planted upon the highest peaks. The Tongue of My power hath, from the heaven of My omnipotent glory, addressed to My creation these words: ‘Observe My commandments, for the love of My beauty.’ Happy is the lover that hath inhaled the divine fragrance of his Best-Beloved from these words, laden with the perfume of a grace which no tongue can describe. By My life! He who hath drunk the choice wine of fairness from the hands of My bountiful favor will circle around My commandments that shine above the Dayspring of My creation.

“Think not that We have revealed unto you a mere code of laws. Nay, rather, We have unsealed the choice Wine with the fingers of might and power. To this beareth witness that which the Pen of Revelation hath revealed. Meditate upon this, O men of insight!”¹⁵⁴

The above quotation speaks to us about the nature of the laws of God, which are described as “lamps” of His “loving providence”, as “keys” of His “mercy”, as “the choice Wine” which has been unsealed by “the fingers of might and power”, and it sheds light on the significance of obedience to these laws. It is suggested that you meditate on the passage and then write a short paragraph articulating a few thoughts about our love for the Most Great Beauty as a force that compels us to observe His laws.

No reflection on the above quotation can fail to recognize that living in obedience to God's commandments, motivated by our love for His beauty, is a most joyous state of being. We should remember, then, as we mentioned when we began this course, that our relationship with God is ultimately one of love and that knowledge of God is intimately connected to love for Him. You and the other members of your group may now wish to read through the verses below from The Hidden Words, which, no matter how well familiar to us, always touch our hearts and disclose to us new vistas of understanding.

“O Son of Man! Veiled in My immemorial being and in the ancient eternity of My essence, I knew My love for thee; therefore I created thee, have engraved on thee Mine image and revealed to thee My beauty.”¹⁵⁵

“O Son of Spirit! My claim on thee is great, it cannot be forgotten. My grace to thee is plenteous, it cannot be veiled. My love has made in thee its home, it cannot be concealed. My light is manifest to thee, it cannot be obscured.”¹⁵⁶

“O Son of Being! My love is My stronghold; he that entereth therein is safe and secure, and he that turneth away shall surely stray and perish.”¹⁵⁷

“O Son of Man! I loved thy creation, hence I created thee. Wherefore, do thou love Me, that I may name thy name and fill thy soul with the spirit of life.”¹⁵⁸

“O Son of Being! Thy Paradise is My love; thy heavenly home, reunion with Me. Enter therein and tarry not. This is that which hath been destined for thee in Our kingdom above and Our exalted dominion.”¹⁵⁹

“O Son of Man! If thou lovest Me, turn away from thyself; and if thou seekest My pleasure, regard not thine own; that thou mayest die in Me and I may eternally live in thee.”¹⁶⁰

“O Son of Being! Walk in My statutes for love of Me and deny thyself that which thou desirest if thou seekest My pleasure.”¹⁶¹

“O Son of Man! Neglect not My commandments if thou lovest My beauty, and forget not My counsels if thou wouldst attain My good pleasure.”¹⁶²

“O Son of Being! Love Me, that I may love thee. If thou lovest Me not, My love can in no wise reach thee. Know this, O servant.”¹⁶³

“O Son of the Wondrous Vision! I have breathed within thee a breath of My own Spirit, that thou mayest be My lover. Why hast thou forsaken Me and sought a beloved other than Me?”¹⁶⁴

“O Son of Justice! Whither can a lover go but to the land of his beloved? And what seeker findeth rest away from his heart’s desire? To the true lover reunion is life, and separation is death. His breast is void of patience and his heart hath no peace. A myriad lives he would forsake to hasten to the abode of his beloved.”¹⁶⁵

SECTION 33

With all that we have studied in this unit—with our reflections on the attributes of God and the way they are to find expression in our lives and service to the Cause, with the insights we have gained into the nature of progressive revelation and the unfoldment of God’s Will and purpose for humanity through His successive Manifestations, with our discussion of the inseparable twin duties of recognition and obedience in the forefront of our minds—let us now return to the question of the purpose of our lives to know God and to worship Him. We have said that God has endowed every soul with the capacity to fulfill this purpose. Therefore, the pursuit of knowledge, above all the knowledge of God, revealed through His Manifestation for this Day, is the most central concern of our lives. His words enable us to ascend into the heavens of Divine knowledge and scale the heights of God’s love. We must strive to hear His melodies with our inner ear and see His beauty with our inner eye. And we should always remember that the acquisition of knowledge must be accompanied by true understanding, which, the opening passages of the Kitáb-i-Íqán make clear, requires certain conditions:

“No man shall attain the shores of the ocean of true understanding except he be detached from all that is in heaven and on earth. Sanctify your souls, O ye peoples of the world, that haply ye may attain that station which God hath destined for you and enter thus the tabernacle which, according to the dispensations of Providence, hath been raised in the firmament of the Bayán.

“The essence of these words is this: they that tread the path of faith, they that thirst for the wine of certitude, must cleanse themselves of all that is earthly—their ears from idle talk, their minds from vain imaginings, their hearts from worldly affections, their eyes from that which perisheth. They should put their trust in God, and, holding fast unto Him, follow in His way. Then will they be made worthy of the effulgent glories of the sun of divine knowledge and understanding, and become the recipients of a grace that is infinite and unseen, inasmuch as man can never hope to attain unto the knowledge of the All-Glorious, can never quaff from the stream of divine knowledge and wisdom, can never enter the abode of immortality, nor partake of the cup of divine nearness and favor, unless and until

he ceases to regard the words and deeds of mortal men as a standard for the true understanding and recognition of God and His Prophets.”¹⁶⁶

How infinitely blessed we feel upon realizing that as we strive to fulfill our part in the Eternal Covenant of God we attain unto the City of Certitude and enter its gates, the City that has been bequeathed unto us to be our true home:

“Only when the lamp of search, of earnest striving, of longing desire, of passionate devotion, of fervid love, of rapture, and ecstasy, is kindled within the seeker’s heart, and the breeze of His loving-kindness is wafted upon his soul, will the darkness of error be dispelled, the mists of doubts and misgivings be dissipated, and the lights of knowledge and certitude envelop his being. At that hour will the mystic Herald, bearing the joyful tidings of the Spirit, shine forth from the City of God resplendent as the morn, and, through the trumpet-blast of knowledge, will awaken the heart, the soul, and the spirit from the slumber of negligence. Then will the manifold favors and outpouring grace of the holy and everlasting Spirit confer such new life upon the seeker that he will find himself endowed with a new eye, a new ear, a new heart, and a new mind. He will contemplate the manifest signs of the universe, and will penetrate the hidden mysteries of the soul. Gazing with the eye of God, he will perceive within every atom a door that leadeth him to the stations of absolute certitude. He will discover in all things the mysteries of divine Revelation and the evidences of an everlasting manifestation.

“I swear by God! Were he that treadeth the path of guidance and seeketh to scale the heights of righteousness to attain unto this glorious and supreme station, he would inhale at a distance of a thousand leagues the fragrance of God, and would perceive the resplendent morn of a divine Guidance rising above the dayspring of all things. Each and every thing, however small, would be to him a revelation, leading him to his Beloved, the Object of his quest. So great shall be the discernment of this seeker that he will discriminate between truth and falsehood even as he doth distinguish the sun from shadow. If in the uttermost corners of the East the sweet savors of God be wafted, he will assuredly recognize and inhale their fragrance, even though he be dwelling in the uttermost ends of the West. He will likewise clearly distinguish all the signs of God—His wondrous utterances, His great works, and mighty deeds—from the doings, words and ways of men, even as the jeweler who knoweth the gem from the stone, or the man who distinguisheth the spring from autumn and heat from cold. When the channel of the human soul is cleansed of all worldly and impeding attachments, it will unfailingly perceive the breath of the Beloved across immeasurable distances, and will, led by its perfume, attain and enter the City of Certitude. Therein he will discern the wonders of His ancient wisdom, and will perceive all the hidden teachings from the rustling leaves of the Tree—which flourisheth in that City. With both his inner and his outer ear he will hear from its dust the hymns of glory and praise ascending unto the Lord of Lords, and with his inner eye will he discover the mysteries of ‘return’ and ‘revival.’ How unspeakably glorious are the signs, the tokens, the revelations, and splendors which He Who is the King of names and attributes hath destined for that City! The attainment of this City quenqueth thirst without water, and kindleth the love of God without fire. Within every blade of grass are enshrined the mysteries of an inscrutable wisdom, and upon every rose-bush a myriad nightingales pour

out, in blissful rapture, their melody. Its wondrous tulips unfold the mystery of the undying Fire in the Burning Bush, and its sweet savors of holiness breathe the perfume of the Messianic Spirit. It bestoweth wealth without gold, and conferreth immortality without death. In every leaf ineffable delights are treasured, and within every chamber unnumbered mysteries lie hidden.

“They that valiantly labor in quest of God’s will, when once they have renounced all else but Him, will be so attached and wedded to that City that a moment’s separation from it would to them be unthinkable. They will hearken unto infallible proofs from the Hyacinth of that assembly, and receive the surest testimonies from the beauty of its Rose and the melody of its Nightingale. Once in about a thousand years shall this City be renewed and re-adorned. . . .

“That city is none other than the Word of God revealed in every age and dispensation. In the days of Moses it was the Pentateuch; in the days of Jesus the Gospel; in the days of Muḥammad the Messenger of God the Qur’án; in this day the Bayán; and in the dispensation of Him Whom God will make manifest His own Book—the Book unto which all the Books of former Dispensations must needs be referred, the Book which standeth amongst them all transcendent and supreme.”¹⁶⁷

SECTION 34

One of the most powerful desires that arises from the depths of the soul of every human being is the desire to be free. Having been born bound to the world of dust, we wish to rise above it and soar to heights which we know are ultimately within our reach. But alas, in trying to satisfy this desire, many go astray and, in the name of freedom, become slaves to worldly passions. It is essential for our spiritual existence and eternal journey towards God, then, to be firm in our conviction that we can only find freedom if we are faithful to the Covenant. We can only be free if we obey the laws brought to us by the Manifestation of God. We can only be free if we abide by the commandments of God for the love of His beauty. Let us end this course by memorizing the following quotations:

“Say: True liberty consisteth in man’s submission unto My commandments, little as ye know it. Were men to observe that which We have sent down unto them from the Heaven of Revelation, they would, of a certainty, attain unto perfect liberty. Happy is the man that hath apprehended the Purpose of God in whatever He hath revealed from the Heaven of His Will that pervadeth all created things. Say: The liberty that profiteth you is to be found nowhere except in complete servitude unto God, the Eternal Truth. Whoso hath tasted of its sweetness will refuse to barter it for all the dominion of earth and heaven.”¹⁶⁸

“O Son of Man! Wert thou to speed through the immensity of space and traverse the expanse of heaven, yet thou wouldst find no rest save in submission to Our command and humbleness before Our Face.”¹⁶⁹

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- ¹³⁴ *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 165–66.

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