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Junior Focus

A Highway Code for the Scriptures?

HAVE YOU ever thought that how many road signs do not look like the thing they are supposed to represent? A good example is the sign for radiation on the right. Anyone could be forgiven for thinking that it means “beware of propellers”. At school we used to try and think up as many funny alternatives as we could. See what we came up with for the four others on the page. (Answers at the foot of the page.)



There is a serious side to all of this. Throughout the ages, people have tended to cling to the literal meaning of signs in their holy books. This has caused them great problems as the true meanings often remained hidden.

Consider, for example, this line from the Lord's prayer in the Bible: “Give us this day our daily bread”.⁽¹⁾ Bread could in one sense mean having enough food to eat to stay alive. I was watching a TV programme in September and a well-known Christian minister explained the meaning of the verse in exactly this way.⁽²⁾

The Bahá'í Writings give other, deeper meanings. For example, that bread is the Word of God that feeds our soul and keeps us spiritually alive.⁽³⁾

“The Spirit breathing through the Holy Scriptures is food for all who hunger. God Who has given the revelation to His Prophets will surely give of His abundance daily bread to all those who ask Him faithfully.”⁽⁴⁾

Understanding the real meaning of terms in the scriptures can sometimes be even more important. At the time of Jesus, kings were great leaders who would lead their people into battles. The Jewish holy books, found in the Old Testament of the Bible, had promised that a great king was to be sent in the future.⁽⁵⁾



When Christ came He was not the great general leading the Jews into war against the Romans that they had expected. His kingdom was a spiritual, not earthly, one. The Jewish priests at that time could not see that He was the One promised to them and turned against Him. This in turn led to His death on the cross.

“Now the Bahá'ís hold that the recorded signs did come to pass in the Manifestation of Christ, although not in the sense which the Jews understood, the description in the Torah⁽⁶⁾ being allegorical. For instance, among the signs is that of sovereignty. For Bahá'ís say that the sovereignty of Christ was a heavenly, divine, everlasting sovereignty, not a Napoleonic sovereignty that vanisheth in a short time.”⁽⁷⁾

Knowing the real meaning of signs in the scriptures then is extremely important. Bahá'u'lláh has explained many of these in the Book of Certitude (Kitáb-i-Íqán). Thinking back to the road signs there is another point to note. Countries around the world use the same signs. This has the advantage that there is no need to learn a new set of symbols when



travelling from one country to another.

In a similar way, the Bahá'í Writings indicate that the signs in different holy scriptures are generally the same. For example bread (or food) relates to those things that give life to the soul. This shows an important underlying unity of all the holy scriptures.

*“If thou wilt observe with discriminating eyes, thou wilt behold Them [the Manifestations of God] 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 splendour!”⁽⁸⁾
[emphasis added]*

The Book of Certitude then acts as a key for unlocking the meaning of all the holy books of the past – and at the same time demonstrates their true unity.

As it explains the true meaning of so many signs and acts as a guide, perhaps we should think of it as the highway code for scriptures!



John Parris

References & notes

1. Matthew 6:11
2. *Alpha: Will it change their lives?*, ITV, September 30, 2001
3. See, for example: Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán* (Book of Certitude), p. 15 UK edition (p. 23, US edition)
4. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 57
5. e.g. Isaiah Ch. 11
6. The Torah: first five books of the Old Testament, Law of Moses
7. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, pp. 45-46
8. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, XXII (pp. 51-52, UK edition) [quotation from the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* (Book of Certitude) pp. 98-99, UK edition; (p. 154, US edition)]

Answers:

1. Letter box ahead. 2. UFO landing site. 3. Beware of lowflying motorbikes. 4. Man having trouble with umbrella.