

Laws Abrogated by Bahá'u'lláh

(compiled by an individual)

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ABROGATION OF LAWS AND PRACTICES FROM PREVIOUS DISPENSATIONS

Holy War

On the first day that the Ancient Beauty ascended His Most Great Throne in the garden named Ridván, the Tongue of Glory gave utterance to three blessed words. First, that in this Revelation the law of the sword (Jihad) hath been annulled.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Days of Remembrance, 9.1)

Uncleanness

God hath, likewise, as a bounty from His presence, abolished the concept of "uncleanness", whereby divers things and peoples have been held to be impure. He, of a certainty, is the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Generous. Verily, all created things were immersed in the sea of purification when, on that first day of Ridvan, We shed upon the whole of creation the splendours of Our most excellent Names and Our most exalted Attributes. This, verily, is a token of My loving providence, which hath encompassed all the worlds.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas, K75)

Note 106. God hath ... abolished the concept of "uncleanness", whereby divers things and peoples have been held to be impure. # 75

The concept of ritual "uncleanness", as understood and practised in some tribal societies and in the religious communities of certain earlier Dispensations, has been abolished by Bahá'u'lláh. He states that through His Revelation "all created things were immersed in the sea of purification".

We have commanded you to pray and fast from the beginning of maturity; this is ordained by God, your Lord and the Lord of your forefathers. He hath exempted from this those who are weak from illness or age, as a bounty from His Presence, and He is the Forgiving, the Generous. God hath granted you leave to prostrate yourselves on any surface that is clean, for We have removed in this regard the limitation that had been laid down in the Book; God, indeed, hath knowledge of that whereof ye know naught.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas, K10)

Note 15. God hath granted you leave to prostrate yourselves on any surface that is clean, for We have removed in this regard the limitation that had been laid down in the Book. #10

The requirements of prayer in previous Dispensations have often included prostration. In the Arabic Bayán the Báb called upon the believers to lay their foreheads on surfaces of crystal when prostrating. Similarly, in Islám, certain restrictions are imposed with regard to the surface on which Muslims are permitted to prostrate. Bahá'u'lláh abrogates such restrictions and simply specifies *"any surface that is clean"*.

Priesthood, monasticism, and asceticism

How many a man hath secluded himself in the climes of India, denied himself the things that God hath decreed as lawful, imposed upon himself austerities and mortifications, and hath not been remembered by God, the Revealer of Verses.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas, K36)

Note 61. How many a man hath secluded himself in the climes of India, denied himself the things that God hath decreed as lawful, imposed upon himself austerities and mortifications. #36

These verses constitute the prohibition of monasticism and asceticism. ... In the Words of Paradise Bahá'u'lláh amplifies these provisions. He states: "*Living in seclusion or practising asceticism is not acceptable in the presence of God,*" and He calls upon those involved to "*observe that which will cause joy and radiance*". He instructs those who have taken up "*their abodes in the caves of the mountains*" or who have "*repaired to graveyards at night*" to abandon these practices, and He enjoins them not to deprive themselves of the "*bounties*" of this world which have been created by God for humankind. And in the Tablet of Bishárát, while acknowledging the "*pious deeds*" of monks and priests, Bahá'u'lláh calls upon them to "*give up the life of seclusion and direct their steps towards the open world and busy themselves with that which will profit themselves and others*". He also grants them leave "*to enter into wedlock that they may bring forth one who will make mention of God*".

Mendicancy

O people of Bahá! It is incumbent upon each one of you to engage in some occupation -- such as a craft, a trade or the like. We have exalted your engagement in such work to the rank of worship of the one true God. Reflect, O people, on the grace and blessings of your Lord, and yield Him thanks at eventide and dawn. Waste not your hours in idleness and sloth, but occupy yourselves with what will profit you and others.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas, K33)

It is unlawful to beg, and it is forbidden to give to him who beggeth. All have been enjoined to earn a living, and as for those who are incapable of doing so, it is incumbent on the Deputies of God and on the wealthy to make adequate provision for them.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas, K147)

Note 56. to engage in some occupation. #33

It is obligatory for men and women to engage in a trade or profession. Bahá'u'lláh exalts "*engagement in such work*" to the "*rank of worship*" of God. The spiritual and practical significance of this law, and the mutual responsibility of the individual and society for its implementation are explained in a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi:

With reference to Bahá'u'lláh's command concerning the engagement of the believers in some sort of profession: the Teachings are most emphatic on this matter, particularly the statement in the Aqdas to this effect which makes it quite clear that idle people who lack the desire to work can have no place in the new World Order. As a corollary of this principle, Bahá'u'lláh further states that mendicity should not only be discouraged but entirely wiped out from the face of society. It is the duty of those who are in charge of the organization of society to give every individual the opportunity of acquiring the necessary talent in some kind of profession, and also the means of utilizing such a talent, both for its own sake and for the sake of earning the means of his livelihood. Every individual, no matter how handicapped and limited he may be, is under the obligation of engaging in some work or profession, for work, especially when performed in the spirit of service, is according to Bahá'u'lláh a form of worship. It has not only a utilitarian purpose, but has a value in itself, because it draws us nearer to God, and enables us to better grasp His purpose for us in this world. It is obvious, therefore, that the inheritance of wealth cannot make anyone immune from daily work.

In one of His Tablets, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that *"if a person is incapable of earning a living, is stricken by dire poverty or becometh helpless, then it is incumbent on the wealthy or the Deputies to provide him with a monthly allowance for his subsistence. . . . By 'Deputies' is meant the representatives of the people, that is to say the members of the House of Justice."* (See also note 162 on mendicancy.)

In response to a question concerning whether Bahá'u'lláh's injunction requires a wife and mother, as well as her husband, to work for a livelihood, the Universal House of Justice has explained that Bahá'u'lláh's directive is for the friends to be engaged in an occupation which will profit themselves and others, and that homemaking is a highly honourable and responsible work of fundamental importance to society.

Concerning the retirement from work for individuals who have reached a certain age, Shoghi Effendi in a letter written on his behalf stated that "this is a matter on which the International House of Justice will have to legislate as there are no provisions in the Aqdas concerning it".

Note 162. It is unlawful to beg, and it is forbidden to give to him who beggeth. #147

In a Tablet 'Abdu'l-Bahá expounds the meaning of this verse. He states that *"mendicancy is forbidden and that giving charity to people who take up begging as their profession is also prohibited"*. He further points out in that same Tablet: *"The object is to uproot mendicancy altogether. However, if a person is incapable of earning a living, is stricken by dire poverty or becometh helpless, then it is incumbent on the wealthy or the Deputies to provide him with a monthly allowance for his subsistence . . . By 'Deputies' is meant the representatives of the people, that is to say the members of the House of Justice."*

The prohibition against giving charity to people who beg does not preclude individuals and Spiritual Assemblies from extending financial assistance to the poor and needy or from providing them with opportunities to acquire such skills as would enable them to earn a livelihood (see note 56).

Pulpits

Ye have been prohibited from making use of pulpits. Whoso wisheth to recite unto you the verses of his Lord, let him sit on a chair placed upon a dais, that he may make mention of God, his Lord, and the Lord of all mankind. It is pleasing to God that ye should seat yourselves on chairs and benches as a mark of honour for the love ye bear for Him and for the Manifestation of His glorious and resplendent Cause.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas, K154)

Note 168. Ye have been prohibited from making use of pulpits. Whoso wisheth to recite unto you the verses of his Lord, let him sit on a chair placed upon a dais. #154

These provisions have their antecedent in the Persian Bayán. The Báb forbade the use of pulpits for the delivery of sermons and the reading of the Text. He specified, instead, that to enable all to hear the Word of God clearly, a chair for the speaker should be placed upon a platform.

In comments on this law, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi have made it clear that in the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár (where sermons are prohibited and only the words of Holy Scripture may be read) the reader may stand or sit, and if necessary to be better heard, may use a low moveable platform, but that no pulpit is permitted. In the case of meetings in places other than the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, it is also permissible for the reader or speaker to sit or stand, and to use a platform. In one of His Tablets, when reiterating the prohibition of the use of pulpits in any location, 'Abdu'l-Bahá has stressed that when Bahá'ís deliver their speeches in gatherings, they are to do so in an attitude of utmost humility and self-abnegation.

Confession of sins and kissing of hands

The kissing of hands hath been forbidden in the Book. This practice is prohibited by God, the Lord of glory and command. To none is it permitted to seek absolution from another soul; let repentance be between yourselves and God. He, verily, is the Pardoner, the Bounteous, the Gracious, the One Who absolveth the repentant.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas, K34)

Note 57. The kissing of hands hath been forbidden in the Book. #34

In a number of earlier religious Dispensations and in certain cultures the kissing of the hand of a religious figure or of a prominent person was expected as a mark of reverence and deference to such persons and as a token of submission to their authority. Bahá'u'lláh prohibits the kissing of hands and, in His Tablets, He also condemns such practices as prostrating oneself before another person and other forms of behaviour that abase one individual in relation to another. (See note 58.)

Note 58. To none is it permitted to seek absolution from another soul. #34

Bahá'u'lláh prohibits confession to, and seeking absolution of one's sins from, a human being. Instead one should beg forgiveness from God. In the Tablet of Bishárát, He states that *"such confession before people results in one's humiliation and abasement"*, and He affirms that God *"wisheth not the humiliation of His servants"*.

Shoghi Effendi sets the prohibition into context. His secretary has written on his behalf that we

. . . are forbidden to confess to any person, as do the Catholics to their priests, our sins and shortcomings, or to do so in public, as some religious sects do. However, if we spontaneously desire to acknowledge we have been wrong in something, or that we have some fault of character, and ask another person's forgiveness or pardon, we are quite free to do so.

The Universal House of Justice has also clarified that Bahá'u'lláh's prohibition concerning the confession of sins does not prevent an individual from admitting transgressions in the course of consultations held under the aegis of Bahá'í institutions. Likewise, it does not preclude the possibility of seeking advice from a close friend or of a professional counsellor regarding such matters.

Congregational prayer, except in the Prayer for the dead

It hath been ordained that obligatory prayer is to be performed by each of you individually. Save in the Prayer for the Dead, the practice of congregational prayer hath been annulled. He, of a truth, is the Ordainer, the All-Wise.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas, K12)

Note 19. Save in the Prayer for the Dead, the practice of congregational prayer hath been annulled. #12

Congregational prayer, in the sense of formal obligatory prayer which is to be recited in accordance with a prescribed ritual as, for example, is the custom in Islám where Friday prayer in the mosque is led by an imám, has been annulled in the Bahá'í Dispensation. The Prayer for the Dead (see note 10) is the only congregational prayer prescribed by Bahá'í law. It is to be recited by one of those present while the remainder of the party stands in silence; the reader has no special status. The congregation is not required to face the Qiblih (Q&A 85).

The three daily Obligatory Prayers are to be recited individually, not in congregation.

There is no prescribed way for the recital of the many other Bahá'í prayers, and all are free to use such non-obligatory prayers in gatherings or individually as they please. In this regard, Shoghi Effendi states that

. . . although the friends are thus left to follow their own inclination, . . . they should take the utmost care that any manner they practise should not acquire too rigid a character, and thus develop into an institution. This is a point which the friends should always bear in mind, lest they deviate from the clear path indicated in the Teachings.

Muttering sacred verses in the street

To none is it permitted to mutter sacred verses before the public gaze as he walketh in the street or marketplace; nay rather, if he wish to magnify the Lord, it behoveth him to do so in such places as have been erected for this purpose, or in his own home. This is more in keeping with sincerity and godliness. Thus hath the sun of Our commandment shone forth above the horizon of Our utterance. Blessed, then, be those who do Our bidding.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas, K108)

Note 135. To none is it permitted to mutter sacred verses before the public gaze as he walketh in the street or marketplace. #108

This is an allusion to the practice of certain clerics and religious leaders of earlier Dispensations who, out of hypocrisy and affectation, and in order to win the praise of their followers, would ostentatiously mutter prayers in public places as a demonstration of their piety. Bahá'u'lláh forbids such behaviour and stresses the importance of humility and genuine devotion to God.

Plurality of wives

God hath prescribed matrimony unto you. Beware that ye take not unto yourselves more wives than two. Whoso contenteth himself with a single partner from among the maidservants of God, both he and she shall live in tranquillity. And he who would take into his service a maid may do so with propriety. Such is the ordinance which, in truth and justice, hath been recorded by the Pen of Revelation. Enter into wedlock, O people, that ye may bring forth one who will make mention of Me amid My servants. This is My bidding unto you; hold fast to it as an assistance to yourselves.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas, K63)

Note 89. Beware that ye take not unto yourselves more wives than two. Whoso contenteth himself with a single partner from among the maidservants of God, both he and she shall live in tranquillity. #63

While the text of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas appears to permit bigamy, Bahá'u'lláh counsels that tranquillity and contentment derive from monogamy. In another Tablet, He underlines the importance of the individual's acting in such a way as to "*bring comfort to himself and to his partner*". 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the authorized Interpreter of the Bahá'í Writings, states that in the text of the Aqdas monogamy is in effect enjoined. He elaborates this theme in a number of Tablets, including the following:

Know thou that polygamy is not permitted under the law of God, for contentment with one wife hath been clearly stipulated. Taking a second wife is made dependent upon equity and justice being upheld between the two wives, under all conditions. However, observance of justice and equity towards two wives is utterly impossible. The fact that bigamy has been made dependent upon an impossible condition is clear proof of its absolute prohibition. Therefore it is not permissible for a man to have more than one wife.

Polygamy is a very ancient practice among the majority of humanity. The introduction of monogamy has been only gradually accomplished by the Manifestations of God. Jesus, for example, did not prohibit polygamy, but abolished divorce except in the case of fornication; Muhammad limited the number of wives to four, but making plurality of wives contingent on justice, and reintroducing permission for divorce; Bahá'u'lláh, Who was revealing His Teachings in the milieu of a Muslim society, introduced the question of monogamy gradually in accordance with the principles of wisdom and the progressive unfoldment of His purpose. The fact that He left His followers with an infallible Interpreter of His Writings enabled Him to outwardly permit two wives in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas but uphold a condition that enabled 'Abdu'l-Bahá to elucidate later that the intention of the law was to enforce monogamy.

Clothing

The Lord hath relieved you, as a bounty on His part, of the restrictions that formerly applied to clothing and to the trim of the beard. He, verily, is the Ordainer, the Omniscient. Let there be naught in your demeanour of which sound and upright minds would disapprove, and make not yourselves the playthings of the ignorant. Well is it with him who hath adorned himself with the vesture of seemly conduct and a praiseworthy character.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas, K159)

Note 175. The Lord hath relieved you ... of the restrictions that formerly applied to clothing and to the trim of the beard. # 159

Many rules about dress had their origins in the laws and traditional practices of the world's religions. For example, the Shi'ih clergy adopted for themselves a distinctive headdress and robes and, at one time, forbade the people to adopt European attire. Muslim practice, in its desire to emulate the custom of the Prophet, also introduced a number of restrictions with regard to the trim of the moustache and the length of the beard.

Bahá'u'lláh removed such limitations on one's apparel and beard. He leaves such matters to the "discretion" of the individual, and at the same time calls upon the believers not to transgress the bounds of propriety and to exercise moderation in all that pertains to dress.

Music

We have made it lawful for you to listen to music and singing. Take heed, however, lest listening thereto should cause you to overstep the bounds of propriety and dignity. Let your joy be the joy born of My Most Great Name, a Name that bringeth rapture to the heart, and filleth with ecstasy the minds of all who have drawn nigh unto God. We, verily, have made music as a ladder for your souls, a means whereby they may be lifted up unto the realm on high; make it not, therefore, as wings to self and passion. Truly, We are loath to see you numbered with the foolish.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas, K51)

Note 79. We have made it lawful for you to listen to music and singing. # 51

'Abdu'l-Bahá has written that "Among certain nations of the East, music was considered reprehensible". Though the Qur'án contains no specific guidance on the subject, some Muslims consider listening to music as unlawful, while others tolerate music within certain bounds and subject to particular conditions. There are a number of passages in the Bahá'í Writings in praise of music. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, for example, asserts that "music, sung or played, is spiritual food for soul and heart".

Slave trading

It is forbidden you to trade in slaves, be they men or women. It is not for him who is himself a servant to buy another of God's servants, and this hath been prohibited in His Holy Tablet. Thus, by His mercy, hath the commandment been recorded by the Pen of justice. Let no man exalt himself above another; all are but bondslaves before the Lord, and all exemplify the truth that there is none other God but Him. He, verily, is the All-Wise, Whose wisdom encompasseth all things.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas, K72)

ABROGATION OF LAWS FROM THE BAYÁN OF THE BÁB

Destruction of books

God hath relieved you of the ordinance laid down in the Bayan concerning the destruction of books. We have permitted you to read such sciences as are profitable unto you, not such as end in idle disputation; better is this for you, if ye be of them that comprehend.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas, K77)

Note 109. The destruction of books. #77

In the Tablet of Ishraqat Bahá'u'lláh, referring to the fact that the Báb had made the laws of the Bayan subject to His sanction, states that He put some of the Báb's laws into effect "*by embodying them in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas in different words*", while others He set aside.

With regard to the destruction of books, the Bayan commanded the Báb's followers to destroy all books except those that were written in vindication of the Cause and Religion of God. Bahá'u'lláh abrogates this specific law of the Bayan. As to the nature and severity of the laws of the Bayan, Shoghi Effendi in a letter written on his behalf provides the following comment:

The severe laws and injunctions revealed by the Bab can be properly appreciated and understood only when interpreted in the light of His own statements regarding the nature, purpose and character of His own Dispensation. As these statements clearly reveal, the Bábí Dispensation was essentially in the nature of a religious and indeed social revolution, and its duration had therefore to be short, but full of tragic events, of sweeping and drastic reforms. Those drastic measures enforced by the Báb and His followers were taken with the view of undermining the very foundations of Shi'ih orthodoxy, and thus paving the way for the coming of Bahá'u'lláh. To assert the independence of the new Dispensation, and to prepare also the ground for the approaching Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb had therefore to reveal very severe laws, even though most of them were never enforced. But the mere fact that He revealed them was in itself a proof of the independent character of His Dispensation and was sufficient to create such widespread agitation, and excite such opposition on the part of the clergy that led them to cause His eventual martyrdom.

Offering priceless gifts to Him Whom God will make manifest

God had formerly laid upon each one of the believers the duty of offering before Our throne priceless gifts from among his possessions. Now, in token of Our gracious favour, We have absolved them of this obligation.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas, K114)

Note 141. God had formerly laid upon each one of the believers the duty of offering before Our throne priceless gifts from among his possessions. Now ... We have absolved them of this obligation. #114

This passage abrogates a provision of the Bayan which decreed that all objects unparalleled of their kind should, upon the appearance of Him Whom God will make manifest, be rendered unto Him. The Báb explained that, since the Manifestation of God is beyond compare, whatever is peerless in its kind should rightfully be reserved for Him, unless He decrees otherwise.

Prohibition on questioning the Founder of the Faith

In the Bayan it had been forbidden you to ask Us questions. The Lord hath now relieved you of this prohibition, that ye may be free to ask what you need to ask, but not such idle questions as those on which the men of former times were wont to dwell. Fear God, and be ye of the righteous! Ask ye that which shall be of profit to you in the Cause of God and His dominion, for the portals of His tender compassion have been opened before all who dwell in heaven and on earth.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas, K126)

Note 146. In the Bayan it had been forbidden you to ask Us questions. #126

The Báb forbade His followers to ask questions of Him Whom God will make manifest (Bahá'u'lláh), unless their questions were submitted in writing and pertained to subjects worthy of His lofty station. See *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*.

Bahá'u'lláh removes this prohibition of the Báb. He invites the believers to ask such questions as they "need to ask", and He cautions them to refrain from posing "idle questions" of the kind which preoccupied "*the men of former times*".

Restrictions on travel

God hath removed the restrictions on travel that had been imposed in the Bayan. He, verily, is the

Unconstrained; He doeth as He pleaseth and ordaineth whatsoever He willeth.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas, K131)

Note 153. God hath removed the restrictions on travel that had been imposed in the Bayan. #131

The Báb decreed certain restrictions on travel which were to remain in force until the advent of the Promised One of the Bayan, at which time the believers were instructed to set out, even if on foot, to meet Him, since the attainment of His presence was the fruit and purpose of their very existence.

Marriage with a non-believer

And now consider what hath been revealed in yet another passage, that perchance ye may forsake your own concepts and set your faces towards God, the Lord of being. He (the Báb) hath said: "It is unlawful to enter into marriage save with a believer in the Bayan. Should only one party to a marriage embrace this Cause, his or her possessions will become unlawful to the other, until such time as the latter hath converted. This law, however, will only take effect after the exaltation of the Cause of Him Whom We shall manifest in truth, or of that which hath already been made manifest in justice. Ere this, ye are at liberty to enter into wedlock as ye wish, that haply by this means ye may exalt the Cause of God."

(Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas, K139)

Note 158. It is unlawful to enter into marriage save with a believer in the Bayan. Should only one party to a marriage embrace this Cause, his or her possessions will become unlawful to the other. #139

The passage of the Bayan which Bahá'u'lláh here quotes draws the attention of the believers to the imminence of the coming of "Him Whom God will make manifest". Its prohibition of marriage with a non-Bábí and its provision that the property of a husband or wife who embraced the Faith could not lawfully pass to the non-Bábí spouse were explicitly held in abeyance by the Báb, and were subsequently annulled by Bahá'u'lláh before they could come into effect. Bahá'u'lláh, in quoting this law, points to the fact that, in revealing it, the Báb had clearly anticipated the possibility that the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh would rise to prominence before that of the Báb Himself.

In *God Passes By* Shoghi Effendi points out that the Bayan "should be regarded primarily as a eulogy of the Promised One rather than a code of laws and ordinances designed to be a

permanent guide to future generations". "Designedly severe in the rules and regulations it imposed,"he continues, "revolutionizing in the principles it instilled, calculated to awaken from their age-long torpor the clergy and the people, and to administer a sudden and fatal blow to obsolete and corrupt institutions, it proclaimed, through its drastic provisions, the advent of the anticipated Day, the Day when 'the Summoner shall summon to a stern business', when He will 'demolish whatever hath been before Him, even as the Apostle of God demolished the ways of those that preceded Him'" (see also note 109).

Fine for causing sadness to others

Ye have been forbidden in the Book of God to engage in contention and conflict, to strike another, or to commit similar acts whereby hearts and souls may be saddened. A fine of nineteen mithqals of gold had formerly been prescribed by Him Who is the Lord of all mankind for anyone who was the cause of sadness to another; in this Dispensation, however, He hath absolved you thereof and exhorteth you to show forth righteousness and piety. Such is the commandment which He hath enjoined upon you in this resplendent Tablet. Wish not for others what ye wish not for yourselves; fear God, and be not of the prideful. Ye are all created out of water, and unto dust shall ye return.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas, K148)

Note 163. A fine ... had formerly been prescribed ... for anyone who was the cause of sadness to another. #148

Bahá'u'lláh abrogates the law of the Persian Bayan concerning the payment of a fine in reparation for causing sadness to one's neighbour.