

Humor and Laughter

by Bahá'u'lláh, Abdu'l-Bahá and the Universal House of Justice

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From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

1. Methinks at this moment, I catch the fragrance of His garment¹ blowing from the Egypt of Baha;² verily He seemeth near at hand, though men may think Him far away.³ My soul doth smell the perfume shed by the Beloved One; My sense is filled with the fragrance of My dear Companion. The duty of long years of love obey And tell the tale of happy days gone by, That land and sky may laugh aloud today, And it may gladden mind and heart and eye.⁴

(*The Four Valleys*, in *The Seven Valleys and The Four Valleys* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995), pp. 59-60)

From the Writings and Utterances of `Abdu'l-Bahá

2. Even as the clouds let us shed down tears, and as the lightning flashes let us laugh at our coursings through east and west. By day, by night, let us think but of spreading the sweet savours of God. Let us not keep on forever with our fancies and illusions, with our analysing and interpreting and circulating of complex dubieties. Let us put aside all thoughts of self; let us close our eyes to all on earth, let us neither make known our sufferings nor complain of our wrongs. Rather let us become oblivious of our own selves, and drinking down the wine of heavenly grace, let us cry out our joy, and lose ourselves in the beauty of the All-Glorious.

(*Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), section 195, p. 236)

3. The Prison was a garden of roses to him,⁵ and his narrow cell a wide and fragrant place. At the time when we were in the barracks he fell dangerously ill and was confined to his bed. He suffered many complications, until finally the doctor gave him up and would visit him no more. Then the sick man breathed his last. Mirza Aqa Jan ran to Bahá'u'lláh, with word of the death. Not only had the patient ceased to breathe, but his body was already going limp. His family were gathered about him, mourning him, shedding bitter tears. The Blessed Beauty said, "Go; chant the prayer of Ya Shafi—O Thou, the Healer—and Mirza Ja'far will come alive. Very rapidly, he will be as well as ever." I reached his bedside. His body was cold and all the signs of death were present. Slowly, he began to stir; soon he could move his limbs, and before an hour had passed he lifted his head, sat up, and proceeded to laugh and tell jokes.

He lived for a long time after that, occupied as ever with serving the friends. This giving service was a point of pride with him: to all, he was a servant. He was always modest and humble, calling

1 Literally, the garment of Ha, which is the letter "H" and here represents Baha.

2 This reference is to the story of Joseph in the Qur'an and the Bible.

3 This refers to those who did not expect the imminent advent of Him Whom God Shall Manifest.

4 The Mathnavi.

5 Mirza Ja far-i-Yazdi.

God to mind, and to the highest degree full of hope and faith. Finally, while in the Most Great Prison, he abandoned this earthly life and winged his way to the life beyond.

(*Memorials of the Faithful* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971), pp. 157-58)

4. I desire to make manifest among the friends in America a new light that they may become a new people, that a new foundation may be established and complete harmony be realized; for the foundation of Bahá'u'lláh is love. When you go to Green Acre, you must have infinite love for each other, each preferring the other before himself. The people must be so attracted to you that they will exclaim, "What happiness exists among you!" and will see in your faces the lights of the Kingdom; then in wonderment they will turn to you and seek the cause of your happiness. You must give the message through action and deed, not alone by word. Word must be conjoined with deed. You must love your friend better than yourself; yes, be willing to sacrifice yourself. The Cause of Bahá'u'lláh has not yet appeared in this country. I desire that you be ready to sacrifice everything for each other, even life itself; then I will know that the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh has been established. I will pray for you that you may become the cause of upraising the lights of God. May everyone point to you and ask, "Why are these people so happy?" I want you to be happy in Green Acre, to laugh, smile and rejoice in order that others may be made happy by you. I will pray for you.

(*The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by Abdu'l- Baha during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912 rev. ed.* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), p. 218)

5. My home is the home of peace. My home is the home of joy and delight. My home is the home of laughter and exultation. Whosoever enters through the portals of this home, must go out with gladsome heart. This is the home of light; whosoever enters here must become illumined....⁶

(From a reported utterance, published in *Star of the West*, vol. 9, no. 3, 28 April 1918), p. 40)

From Letters Written on Behalf of the Universal House of Justice

6. The Universal House of Justice has requested us to acknowledge your letter of November 6, 1977 and to say that while laughter should not be suppressed or frowned upon, it should not be indulged in at the expense of the feelings of others. What one says or does in a humorous vein should not give rise to prejudice of any kind. You may recall Abdu'l-Bahá's caution "Beware lest ye offend the feelings of anyone, or sadden the heart of any person..." (From "Tablets of Abdu'l-Bahá", vol. I, p. 45)

(1 December 1977 to an individual believer)

7. On page 25⁷ of *The Advent of Divine Justice* the beloved Guardian is describing the requirements not only of chastity, but of "a chaste and holy life"—both the adjectives are important. One of the signs of a decadent society, a sign which is very evident in the world today, is an almost frenetic devotion to pleasure and diversion, an insatiable thirst for amusement, a fanatical devotion to games and sport, a reluctance to treat any matter seriously, and a scornful, derisory attitude towards virtue and solid worth. Abandonment of "a frivolous conduct" does not imply that a Bahá'í must be sour-faced or perpetually solemn. Humour, happiness, joy are characteristics of a true Bahá'í life. Frivolity palls and eventually leads to boredom and emptiness, but true happiness and joy and humour that are parts of a balanced life that includes serious thought, compassion and humble servitude to God are characteristics that enrich life and add to its radiance.

Shoghi Effendi's choice of words was always significant, and each one is important in understanding his guidance. In this particular passage, he does not forbid "trivial" pleasures, but he does warn against "excessive attachment" to them and indicates that they can often be "misdirected". One is reminded of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's caution that we should not let a pastime become a waste of time.

(8 May 1979 to an individual believer, cited in the compilation, *A Chaste and Holy Life*)

6 "...not an authentic text, but is to be regarded as a pilgrim's note." Letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, 21 May 1978.

7 On page 25 in the 1956 U.S. edition; on page 30 in the 1984 U.S. edition.

8. Humour too, as you say, is an essential element in preserving a proper balance in this life and in our comprehension of reality.
(23 July 1985 to an individual believer)
9. The House of Justice suggests that you may wish to review the use of humour in your news reports to ensure that the appearance of insensitivity may not be conveyed inadvertently in a report. It was concerned by the account of an auction held at a barn dance hosted by the Local Spiritual Assembly of ... While the intention of the author was clearly to jokingly convey the exuberance and enthusiasm which were manifested on that occasion, care should be exercised to avoid giving offence to those who are sensitive to the historical record of the oppression of women and the denial of their human rights.

The House of Justice trusts that you will find a way of conveying these observations to the editors of your newsletter in such a manner that their enthusiasm is not dampened. Indeed, they merit commendation for the overall quality of their work.

(1 July 1988 to a National Spiritual Assembly)