

Program for the Feast of Sovereignty (Sultan)

By Susan Gammage ¹

Opening Music: Possess a Pure Heart <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U141AajCCuA>

As we move into the Bahá'í month of Sovereignty, and I am looking towards the Feast, I realize I don't really know very much about what sovereignty means or how it's used in the Bahá'í Faith, so I thought I'd take this opportunity to find out.

The first thing that became apparent as I looked at the Bahá'í Writings is that God's sovereignty is different than man's.

For example, man's sovereignty and worldly dominion implies the subjection and external allegiance of all the peoples and kindreds of the earth; where the loved ones are exalted and made to live in peace and the enemies abased and tormented.

And now, ponder this in thine heart: Were sovereignty to mean earthly sovereignty and worldly dominion, were it to imply the subjection and external allegiance of all the peoples and kindreds of the earth whereby His loved ones should be exalted and be made to live in peace, and His enemies be abased and tormented such form of sovereignty would not be true of God Himself, the Source of all dominion, Whose majesty and power all things testify. (Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 125)

The worldly dominion of the kings of the earth, despite their solicitude for their subjects and their help of the poor, are assured only of an outward and fleeting allegiance, while in the hearts of men they inspire neither affection nor respect:

To resume: Our purpose in setting forth these truths hath been to demonstrate the sovereignty of Him Who is the King of kings. Be fair: Is this sovereignty which, through the utterance of one Word, hath manifested such pervading influence, ascendancy, and awful majesty, is this sovereignty superior, or is the worldly dominion of these kings of the earth who, despite their solicitude for their subjects and their help of the poor, are assured only of an outward and fleeting allegiance, while in the hearts of men they inspire neither affection nor respect? Hath not that sovereignty, through the potency of one word, subdued, quickened, and revitalized the whole world? What! Can the lowly dust compare with Him Who is the Lord of Lords? What tongue dare utter the immensity of difference that lieth between them? Nay, all comparison falleth short in attaining the hallowed sanctuary of His sovereignty. Were man to reflect, he would surely perceive that even the servant of His threshold ruleth over all created things! This hath already been witnessed, and will in future be made manifest. (Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Íqán, pp. 123 124)

¹ Prepared by David Bowie (2023) for posting, with permission of author, at https://bahai-library.com/gammage_feast_programs

Unlike an earthly sovereign, God is apart from and immeasurably exalted above all created things. The whole universe reflects His glory, while He is independent of and transcends His creatures. He exercises undisputed sovereignty over the world of being; all existence is dependent on Him; and He is the source of our sustenance:

Regard thou the one true God as One Who is apart from, and immeasurably exalted above, all created things. The whole universe reflecteth His glory, while He is Himself independent of, and transcendeth His creatures. This is the true meaning of Divine unity. He Who is the Eternal Truth is the one Power Who exerciseth undisputed sovereignty over the world of being, Whose image is reflected in the mirror of the entire creation. All existence is dependent upon Him, and from Him is derived the source of the sustenance of all things. (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 166)

While earthly sovereigns are eventually forgotten and come to be regarded as utter nothingness, the sovereignty demonstrated by the Ideal King exerts a power which triumphs over all created things and encompasses all creation.

Consider at all times the sovereignty exercised by the Ideal King, and behold the evidences of His power and paramount influence. Sanctify your ears from the idle talk of them that are the symbols of denial and the exponents of violence and anger. The hour is approaching when ye will witness the power of the one true God triumphing over all created things and the signs of His sovereignty encompassing all creation. On that day ye will discover how all else besides Him will have been forgotten and come to be regarded as utter nothingness. (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 72-73)

Earthly sovereignty is of no worth or ever will be in the eyes of God:

Know, therefore, O questioning seeker, that earthly sovereignty is of no worth, nor will it ever be, in the eyes of God and His chosen Ones. (Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 125)

In this day, all sovereignty is with God, who has no peer or equal:

The Pen of Revelation exclaimeth: "On this Day the Kingdom is God's!" The Tongue of Power is calling: "On this Day all sovereignty is, in very deed, with God!" The Phoenix of the realms above crieth out from the immortal Branch: "The glory of all greatness belongeth to God, the Incomparable, the All-Compelling!" The Mystic Dove proclaimeth from its blissful bower, in the everlasting Paradise: "The source of all bounty is derived, in this Day, from God, the One, the Forgiving!" The Bird of the Throne warbleth its melody in its retreats of holiness: "Supreme ascendancy is to be attributed, this Day, to none except God, Him Who hath no peer nor equal, Who is the Most Powerful, the All-Subduing!" The inmost essence of all things voiceth in all things the testimony: "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!" The Quintessence of Glory hath lifted up its voice above My head, and crieth from such heights as neither pen nor tongue can in any degree describe: "God is my witness! He, the Ancient of everlasting days is come, girded with majesty and power. There is none other God but Him, the All-Glorious, the Almighty, the All-Highest, the All-Wise, the All-Pervading, the All-Seeing, the All-Informed, the Sovereign Protector, the Source of eternal light!" (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 35-36)

His power overshadows all created beings:

Magnified, therefore, be the marvelous evidences of Thy transcendent power! Magnified be the potency of Thine exalted might! Magnified be the majesty of Thine all-encompassing greatness, and the energizing influence of Thy will! Such is Thy greatness that wert Thou to concentrate the eyes of all men in the eye of one of Thy servants, and to compress all their hearts within his heart, and wert Thou to enable him to behold within himself all the things Thou hast created through Thy power and fashioned through Thy might, and were he to ponder, throughout eternity, over the realms of Thy creation and the range of Thy handiwork, he would unflinching discover that there is no created thing but is overshadowed by Thine all-conquering power, and is vitalized through Thine all-embracing sovereignty. (Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh, p. 90)

He holds for all time, undisputed sovereignty over all in heaven and earth, whether or not anyone on earth obeys Him:

Verily He Who is the Day-star of Truth and Revealer of the Supreme Being holdeth, for all time, undisputed sovereignty over all that is in heaven and on earth, though no man be found on earth to obey Him. (Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 97)

He is independent of all earthly dominion, even if He was utterly destitute:

He verily is independent of all earthly dominion, though He be utterly destitute. (Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 97)

No one can frustrate God's purpose or prevail against Him. He does what He wants and rules as He pleases:

Praised be Thou, O Lord my God! I bear witness that from eternity Thou wert exalted in Thy transcendent majesty and might, and wilt to eternity abide in Thy surpassing power and glory. None in the kingdoms of earth and heaven can frustrate Thy purpose; none throughout the realms of revelation and of creation can prevail against Thee. At Thy command Thou doest what Thou wilt, and by the power of Thy sovereignty Thou rulest as Thou pleasest. (Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh, p. 32)

If God's loving-kindness and bountiful favors ever ceased, the entire creation would perish and all that are in heaven and earth would be reduced to utter nothingness. This wouldn't happen with man's sovereignty.

Glory be to Thee, O my God! The power of Thy might beareth me witness! I can have no doubt that should the holy breaths of Thy loving-kindness and the breeze of Thy bountiful favor cease, for less than the twinkling of an eye, to breathe over all created things, the entire creation would perish, and all that are in heaven and on earth would be reduced to utter nothingness. (Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh, p. 90)

If they cast Him into a fire, He'll rear His head in the heart of the ocean; if they cast Him into a darksome pit, they will find Him seated on earth's loftiest heights; and if He be buried beneath the depths of the earth, His Spirit will soar to the apex of heaven; and if they shed His blood, every drop thereof shall cry out and invoke God.

By the righteousness of God! Should they cast Him into a fire kindled on the continent, He will assuredly rear His head in the midmost heart of the ocean and proclaim: "He is the Lord of all that are in heaven and all that are on earth!" And if they cast Him into a darksome pit, they will find Him seated on earth's loftiest heights calling aloud to all mankind: "Lo, the Desire of the World is come in His majesty, His sovereignty, His transcendent dominion!" And if He be buried beneath the depths of the earth, His Spirit soaring to the apex of heaven shall peal the summons: "Behold ye the coming of the Glory; witness ye the Kingdom of God, the Most Holy, the Gracious, the All-Powerful!" And if they shed His blood, every drop thereof shall cry out and invoke God in this Name through which the fragrance of His raiment hath been diffused in all directions. (Bahá'u'lláh, The Summons of the Lord of Hosts, pp. 60-61, #1.116)

In this day,

- the Kingdom is God's
- all sovereignty is with God
- the glory of all greatness belongs to God
- the source of all bounty is derived from God
- supreme ascendancy is to be attributed to none except God
- all forgiveness flows from God

The Pen of Revelation exclaimeth: "On this Day the Kingdom is God's!" The Tongue of Power is calling: "On this Day all sovereignty is, in very deed, with God!" The Phoenix of the realms above crieth out from the immortal Branch: "The glory of all greatness belongeth to God, the Incomparable, the All-Compelling!" The Mystic Dove proclaimeth from its blissful bower, in the everlasting Paradise: "The source of all bounty is derived, in this Day, from God, the One, the Forgiving!" The Bird of the Throne warbleth its melody in its retreats of holiness: "Supreme ascendancy is to be attributed, this Day, to none except God, Him Who hath no peer nor equal,

Who is the Most Powerful, the All-Subduing!" The inmost essence of all things voiceth in all things the testimony: "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!" The Quintessence of Glory hath lifted up its voice above My head, and crieth from such heights as neither pen nor tongue can in any degree describe: "God is my witness! He, the Ancient of everlasting days is come, girded with majesty and power. There is none other God but Him, the All-Glorious, the Almighty, the All-Highest, the All-Wise, the All-Pervading, the All-Seeing, the All-Informed, the Sovereign Protector, the Source of eternal light!" (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 35 36)

We can search the entire universe and we won't ever find a sovereignty that endures:

O SON OF UTTERANCE!

Turn thy face unto Mine and renounce all save Me; for My sovereignty endureth and My dominion perisheth not. If thou seekest another than Me, yea, if thou searchest the universe for evermore, thy quest will be in vain. (Bahá'u'lláh, The Hidden Words, Arabic #15)

God's sovereignty will continue forever, while the names of those who oppose Him will be unknown and forgotten.

His sovereignty will continue forever, while those who opposed Him are sleeping in the dust, their very names unknown, forgotten. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 5)

Every man of insight will acknowledge, declare, profess, affirm and assert God's sovereignty and perceive the greatness of His majesty and the compelling power of His might:

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. (Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh, p. 3)

God doesn't want us to set our affections on mortal sovereignty:

O CHILDREN OF NEGLIGENCE!

Set not your affections on mortal sovereignty and rejoice not therein. Ye are even as the unwary bird that with full confidence warbleth upon the bough; till of a sudden the fowler Death throws it upon the dust, and the melody, the form and the color are gone, leaving not a trace. Wherefore take heed, O bondslaves of desire! (Bahá'u'lláh, The Hidden Words, Persian #75)

He warns us not to glorify ourselves with the gay livery of the world and become attached to a fleeting sovereignty, which would cause us to abandon His imperishable dominion.

O CHILDREN OF VAINGLORY!

For a fleeting sovereignty ye have abandoned My imperishable dominion, and have adorned yourselves with the gay livery of the world and made of it your boast. By My beauty! All will I gather beneath the one-colored covering of the dust and efface all these diverse colors save them that choose My own, and that is purging from every color. (Bahá'u'lláh, The Hidden Words, Persian #74)

The best way to learn about God's sovereignty is to immerse ourselves in the ocean of His words, so that we can unravel its secrets and discover all the pearls of wisdom which lie hid in its depths:

Immerse yourselves in the ocean of My words, that ye may unravel its secrets, and discover all the pearls of wisdom that lie hid in its depths. Take heed that ye do not vacillate in your determination to embrace the truth of this Cause - a Cause through which the potentialities of the might of God have been revealed, and His sovereignty established. (Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, pp. 85-86, #182)

In this Day, by virtue of His irresistible and all-subduing sovereignty, He has caused every soul to expire and called into being a new creation as a token of His grace to us:

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. (Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, pp. 29-30)

God's wish for us, in revealing His sovereignty, is that we recognize the wonders of His Revelation and the greatness of its power, so that we can arise and encourage others to bestir themselves to aid His Cause:

Oh, would that a discerning and fair-minded soul could be found who would recognize the wonders of this Revelation - wonders that proclaim the sovereignty of God and the greatness of its power. Would that such a man might arise and, wholly for the sake of God, admonish, privately and openly, the people, that haply they may bestir themselves and aid this wronged One Whom the workers of iniquity have so sorely afflicted. (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 37)

For those who humble themselves before His sovereignty, He promises great blessedness, which includes being honored with meeting Him; attaining the good pleasure of His will; circling round Him and standing before His throne. For those who don't, they will be subjected to much woe, and numbered with the infidels.

I bear witness that he who hath known Thee hath known God, and he who hath attained unto Thy presence hath attained unto the presence of God. Great, therefore, is the blessedness of him who hath believed in Thee, and in Thy signs,

and hath humbled himself before Thy sovereignty, and hath been honored with meeting Thee, and hath attained the good pleasure of Thy will, and circled around Thee, and stood before Thy throne. Woe betide him that hath transgressed against Thee, and hath denied Thee, and repudiated Thy signs, and gainsaid Thy sovereignty, and risen up against Thee, and waxed proud before Thy face, and hath disputed Thy testimonies, and fled from Thy rule and Thy dominion, and been numbered with the infidels whose names have been inscribed by the fingers of Thy behest upon Thy holy Tablets. (Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 311 312)

The Manifestations of God, too, are invested with invincible sovereignty:

The significance and essential purpose underlying these words is to reveal and demonstrate unto the pure in heart and the sanctified in spirit that they Who are the Luminaries of truth and the Mirrors reflecting the light of divine Unity, in whatever age and cycle they are sent down from their invisible habitations of ancient glory unto this world, to educate the souls of men and endue with grace all created things, are invariably endowed with an all-compelling power, and invested with invincible sovereignty. (Baha'u'llah, The Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 97)

Their knowledge, power and sovereignty comes from God; Their beauty is a reflection of God's image and Their Revelations a sign of God's deathless glory:

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. (Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Íqán, pp. 99-100)

They are the channels of God's all-pervasive grace; led by the light of His unfailing guidance; commissioned to use the inspiration of Their words, and the sanctifying breeze of Their Revelation to cleanse every longing heart and receptive spirit from the dross and dust of earthly cares and limitations:

These Essences of Detachment, these resplendent Realities are the channels of God's all-pervasive grace. Led by the light of unfailing guidance, and invested with supreme sovereignty, They are commissioned to use the inspiration of Their words, the effusions of Their infallible grace and the sanctifying breeze of Their Revelation for the cleansing of every longing heart and receptive spirit from the dross and dust of earthly cares and limitations. (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 67)

There is also a kind of personal sovereignty referred to in the Writings, which will be imperishable and everlasting, but only for those who possess a pure, kindly and radiant heart:

O Son of Spirit!

My first council is this: Possess a pure, kindly and radiant heart, that thine may be a sovereignty ancient, imperishable and everlasting. (Bahá'u'lláh, The Hidden Words, Arabic # 1)

God has ordained that we will be the emblems of His sovereignty if we make sure that:

- pride doesn't deter us from recognizing the Source of Revelation
- the things of this world don't veil us or shut us out from God
- we arise to serve Him

Take heed lest pride deter you from recognizing the Source of Revelation; lest the things of this world shut you out as by a veil from Him Who is the Creator of heaven. Arise, and serve Him Who is the Desire of all nations, Who hath created you through a word from Him, and ordained you to be, for all time, the emblems of His sovereignty. (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 211-212)

Whenever we find that the deeds wrought by the embodiments of our idle fancy sadden us; or the acts committed by the wayward oppressors grieve us, it's then that we can seize the chalice of constancy through the power of God's Name and drink deep from the virtue of His sovereignty.

He's given us this tool as a token of His tender compassion and loving-kindness so that we may give thanks unto God for this bountiful favor:

Take heed lest the deeds wrought by the embodiments of idle fancy sadden you or the acts committed by every wayward oppressor grieve you. Seize ye the chalice of constancy through the power of His Name, quaff then therefrom by virtue of the sovereignty of God, the Powerful, the Omnipotent. Thus hath the Day-Star of My tender compassion and loving-kindness shone forth above the horizon of this Tablet that ye may render thanks unto your Lord, the Almighty, the All-Bountiful. (Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 247)

The praise we can give to God is limited because He is exalted beyond and above all comparison and likeness; above all imagination. We can never adequately describe the sublimity of His sovereignty or scale the heights of His majesty and holiness; and any attempt to give praise can only befit those of our own natures. Instead we can immerse ourselves in the sweetness of the praise He has given to His own Self and the description He's given of His own being:

I have clearly perceived, and I am wholly persuaded, that Thou hast from everlasting been immeasurably exalted above the mention of all beings, and wilt continue unto everlasting to remain far above the conception of Thy creatures. None can befittingly praise Thee except Thine own Self and such as are like unto Thee. Thou hast, verily, been at all times, and wilt everlastingly continue to remain, immensely exalted beyond and above all comparison and likeness, above all

imagination of parity or resemblance. Having, thus, recognized Thee as One Who is incomparable, and Whose nature none can possess, it becometh incontrovertibly evident that whosoever may praise Thee, his praise can befit only such as are of his own nature, and are subject to his own limitations, and it can in no wise adequately describe the sublimity of Thy sovereignty, nor scale the heights of Thy majesty and holiness. How sweet, therefore, is the praise Thou givest to Thine own Self, and the description Thou givest of Thine own Being! (Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 297 298)

Bahá'u'lláh has given us some prayers whereby we can turn unto God, acknowledge His sovereignty; and make our requests. In the following prayer, we ask Him to help us rid ourselves of everything save Him; to draw closer to Him and to remove the veils that have intervened between us and Him:

Turn thou unto God and say: O my Sovereign Lord! I am but a vassal of Thine, and Thou art, in truth, the King of Kings. I have lifted my suppliant hands unto the heaven of Thy grace and Thy bounties. Send down, then, upon me from the clouds of Thy generosity that which will rid me of all save Thee, and draw me nigh unto Thyself. I beseech Thee, O my Lord, by Thy name, which Thou hast made the king of names, and the manifestation of Thyself to all who are in heaven and on earth, to rend asunder the veils that have intervened between me and my recognition of the Dawning-Place of Thy signs and the Day Spring of Thy Revelation. Thou art, verily, the Almighty, the All-Powerful, the All-Bounteous. (Bahá'u'lláh, The Summons of the Lord of Hosts, p. 95, #1.185)

In this next prayer, we ask that we might be numbered among those who have recognized God and acknowledged His sovereignty; that we might drink the living waters of His loving kindness so that we forget all except Him; and be occupied only with Him:

I beseech Thee, by the praise wherewith Thou praisest Thyself and the glory wherewith Thou glorifiest Thine own Essence, to grant that we may be numbered among them that have recognized Thee and acknowledged Thy sovereignty in Thy days. Help us then to quaff, O my God, from the fingers of mercy the living waters of Thy loving-kindness, that we may utterly forget all else except Thee, and be occupied only with Thy Self. Powerful art Thou to do what Thou wilt. No God is there beside Thee, the Mighty, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting. (Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh, p. 30)

And in the following prayer, we acknowledge His power and our sins, and ask to behold His countenance anyway, so that He may banish and blot out every trace of sinfulness from the world and adorn all mankind with a fresh attire. We ask for strength for ourselves; and that those who are dead may find Him, be led unto the ocean of His guidance, and remain steadfast in His Cause.

O Divine Providence! Though wicked, sinful, and intemperate, we still seek from Thee a 'seat of truth,' and long to behold the countenance of the Omnipotent King.

It is Thine to command, and all sovereignty belongeth to Thee, and the realm of might boweth before Thy behest. Everything Thou doest is pure justice, nay, the very essence of grace. One gleam from the splendors of Thy Name, the All-Merciful, sufficeth to banish and blot out every trace of sinfulness from the world, and a single breath from the breezes of the Day of Thy Revelation is enough to adorn all mankind with a fresh attire. Vouchsafe Thy strength, O Almighty One, unto Thy weak creatures, and quicken them who are as dead, that haply they may find Thee, and may be led unto the ocean of Thy guidance, and may remain steadfast in Thy Cause. (Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 10)

And in the final prayer, we ask God to let our food be His beauty; our drink the light of His presence; our hope His pleasure; our work His praise; our companion His remembrance; our aid His sovereignty; our dwelling-place His habitation; and our home the seat which He has exalted above the limitations of those who are shut out as by a veil from Him.

Let my food, O my Lord, be Thy beauty, and my drink the light of Thy presence, and my hope Thy pleasure, and my work Thy praise, and my companion Thy remembrance, and my aid Thy sovereignty, and my dwelling-place Thy habitation, and my home the seat which Thou hast exalted above the limitations of them that are shut out as by a veil from Thee. (Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 126 127)

Closing Music: Wert Thou to Speed <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sbqCtod9NSU>