

## Seven Invisible Enemies that Trap Us in the Prison of Self

By Susan Gammage <sup>1</sup>

"Abdu'l-Bahá talks about seven material ideas and worldly thoughts which attract man to the centre of self. These seven "invisible enemies" prevents us from ascending to the realms of holiness and imprison us in the claws of self and the cage of egotism. These seven are:

- Anger
- Passion
- Ignorance
- Prejudice
- Greed
- Envy
- Covetousness
- Jealousy
- Suspicion

Just as the earth attracts everything to the centre of gravity, and every object thrown upward into space will come down, so also material ideas and worldly thoughts attract man to the centre of self. Anger, passion, ignorance, prejudice, greed, envy, covetousness, jealousy and suspicion prevent man from ascending to the realms of holiness, imprisoning him in the claws of self and the cage of egotism. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, cited by Mirzá Ahmad Sohráb in Star of the West, Vol.10. No. 6, p. 126)

What does surrendering to these enemies result in?

- We're prevented from ascending to the realms of holiness
- We're trapped in the claws of self and the cage of egotism.
- Whenever we try to escape from one of these, we will unconsciously fall into hands of another

Let's look at each one separately to see why "Abdu'l-Bahá refers to them as enemies.

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<sup>1</sup> Prepared by David Bowie (2023) for posting, with permission of author, at [https://bahai-library.com/gammage\\_various\\_essays](https://bahai-library.com/gammage_various_essays)

## Anger

Anger	Anger doth burn the liver: avoid [it] as you would a lion. (Bahá'u'lláh, The Compilation of Compilations vol. I, p. 460, #1020)
Antagonism (means rivalry, resentment, ill will)	Antagonism and contradiction are unfortunate and always destructive to truth. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 72)
Strife (means conflict, friction, rivalry)	<p>Nothing whatsoever can, in this Day, inflict a greater harm upon this Cause than ... strife ... among the loved ones of God. Flee them, through the power of God and His sovereign aid, and strive ye to knit together the hearts of men, in His Name, the Unifier, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. (Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 8)</p> <p>Gird up the loins of your endeavor, O people of Bahá, that haply the tumult of religious dissension and strife that agitateth the peoples of the earth may be stilled, that every trace of it may be completely obliterated. (Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 13)</p>
Argue	The more the friends argue back and forth and maintain, each side, that their point of view is the right one, the worse the whole situation becomes. (Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 94. #324)
Contention (means argument, debate, controversy)	<p>Nothing whatsoever can, in this Day, inflict a greater harm upon this Cause than . . . contention . . . among the loved ones of God. Flee them, through the power of God and His sovereign aid, and strive ye to knit together the hearts of men, in His Name, the Unifier, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. (Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 8)</p> <p>The worldwide undertakings on which the Cause of God is embarked are far too significant, the need of the peoples of the world for the Message of Bahá'u'lláh far too urgent, the perils facing mankind far too grave, the progress of events far too swift, to permit His followers to squander their time and efforts in fruitless contention. Now, if ever, is the time for love among the friends, for unity of understanding and endeavor, for self-sacrifice and service by Bahá'ís in every part of the world. (The Universal House of Justice, 1992 Dec 10, Issues Related to Study Compilation)</p>
Cruelty	The domestic animals do not manifest hatred and cruelty toward each other; that is the attribute of the wild and ferocious beasts. In a flock of one thousand sheep you will witness no bloodshed. Numberless species of birds are peaceful in flocks. Wolves, lions, tigers are ferocious because it is their natural and necessary means for obtaining food. Man has no need of such ferocity; his food is provided in other ways. Therefore it is evident that warfare, cruelty and bloodshed in the kingdom of man are caused by human greed, hatred and

	selfishness. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Foundations of World Unity, p. 24)
Dispute	Dispute not with any one concerning the things of this world and its affairs, for God hath abandoned them to such as have set their affection upon them. (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CXXVIII, p. 279)
Dissension (means opposition, rebellion, conflict)	<p>Nothing whatsoever can, in this Day, inflict a greater harm upon this Cause than dissension ... among the loved ones of God. Flee them, through the power of God and His sovereign aid, and strive ye to knit together the hearts of men, in His Name, the Unifier, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, V, p. 8)</p> <p>Would it add to the progress and advancement of a family if dissensions should arise among its members, fighting, pillaging each other, jealous and revengeful of injury, seeking selfish advantage? Nay, this would be the cause of the effacement of progress and advancement. So it is in the great family of nations, for nations are but an aggregate of families. Therefore as strife and dissension destroy a family and prevent its progress, so nations are destroyed and advancement hindered. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Foundations of World Unity, p. 100)</p>
Hatred	I charge you all that each one of you concentrate all the thoughts of your heart on love and unity. When a thought of war comes, oppose it by a stronger thought of peace. A thought of hatred must be destroyed by a more powerful thought of love. Thoughts of war bring destruction to all harmony, well-being, restfulness and content. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 29)
Holding grudges	... that if a person falls into errors for a hundred-thousand times he may yet turn his face to you, hopeful that you will forgive his sins; for he must not become hopeless, neither grieved nor despondent. This is the conduct and the manner of the people of Bahá'. This is the foundation of the most high pathway! (Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá v2, p. 436)
Malice	For malice is a grievous malady which depriveth man from recognizing the Great Being, and debarreth him from the splendors of the sun of certitude. We pray and hope that through the grace and mercy of God He may remove this mighty obstacle. He, verily, is the Potent, the All-Subduing, the Almighty. (Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 96)
Strife (means conflict, friction, rivalry)	<p>Nothing whatsoever can, in this Day, inflict a greater harm upon this Cause than dissension ... among the loved ones of God. Flee them, through the power of God and His sovereign aid, and strive ye to knit together the hearts of men, in His Name, the Unifier, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, V, p. 8)</p> <p>Gird up the loins of your endeavor, O people of Bahá, that haply the tumult of religious dissension and strife that agitateth the peoples of</p>

	the earth may be stilled, that every trace of it may be completely obliterated. (Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, pp. 13-14)
Tyranny	Judge fairly, O ignorant one that hath been shut out as by a veil from God. Thou hast clung to tyranny, and cast away justice; whereupon all created things have lamented, and still thou art among the wayward ... By God! The things thou possesseth shall profit thee not, nor what thou hast laid up through thy cruelty. Unto this beareth witness thy Lord, the All-Knowing. (Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 102)

Have you read the story of the fence? It nicely illustrates what happens when we get angry. Unfortunately the author is unknown, so I can't give credit:

There once was a little boy who had a bad temper. His father gave him a bag of nails and told him that every time he lost his temper, he must hammer a nail into the fence. The first day the boy had driven 37 nails into the fence. Over the next few weeks as he learned to control his anger, the number of nails hammered daily, gradually dwindled down. He discovered it was easier to hold his temper than to drive those nails into the fence.

Finally the day came when the boy didn't lose his temper at all. He told his father about it and the father suggested that the boy now pull out one nail for each day that he was able to hold his temper. The days passed and the young boy was finally able to tell his father that all the nails were gone.

The father took his son by the hand and led him to the fence. He said "you have done well, my son, but look at the holes in the fence. The fence will never be the same. When you say things in anger, they leave a scar just like this one." You can put a knife in a man and draw it out. It won't matter how many times you say I'm sorry, the wound is still there. Make sure you control your temper the next time you are tempted to say something you will regret later.

### Passion

Passion (means obsession, rage)	...we must reach a spiritual plane where God comes first and great human passions are unable to turn us away from Him. All the time we see people who either through the force of hate or the passionate attachment they have to another person, sacrifice principle or bar themselves from the path of God. (Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p9. 512-513, #1734)
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### Ignorance

Ignorance	Man must free himself from the weeds of ignorance, thorns of superstitions and thistles of imitations, that he may discover reality in the harvests of true knowledge. Otherwise the discovery of reality is
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	impossible, contention and divergence of religious belief will always remain and mankind, like ferocious wolves will rage and attack each other in hatred and antagonism. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Foundations of World Unity, p. 76)
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### Prejudice

Prejudice	If we allow prejudice of any kind to manifest itself in us, we shall be guilty before God of causing a setback to the progress and real growth of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. It is incumbent upon every believer to endeavour with a fierce determination to eliminate this defect from his thoughts and acts. (Messages of The Universal House of Justice: 1963-1986, , Lights of Guidance, p. 222, #117.3)
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### Greed

Greed	Why, then, exhibit such greed in amassing the treasures of the earth, when your days are numbered and your chance is well-nigh lost? Will ye not, then, O heedless ones, shake off your slumber? (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, LXVI, p. 127)
Avarice (Greed)	Well is it with him ... whom avarice and negligence have not shut out from the illumination of the sun of trustworthiness. (Bahá'u'lláh, The Compilation of Compilations vol II, p. 336, #2047)
Gluttony	In all circumstances they should conduct themselves with moderation; if the meal be only one course this is more pleasing in the sight of God; however, according to their means, they should seek to have this single dish be of good quality. (Bahá'u'lláh, Lights of Guidance, p. 294, #1004)

### Envy

Envy	Know, verily, the heart wherein the least remnant of envy yet lingers, shall never attain My everlasting dominion, nor inhale the sweet savors of holiness breathing from My kingdom of sanctity.(Bahá'u'lláh, The Persian Hidden Words 6)
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### Covetousness

Covetousness	Put away all covetousness and seek contentment; for the covetous hath ever been deprived, and the contented hath ever been loved and praised. (Bahá'u'lláh, The Persian Hidden Words 50)
Love of luxury and comfort	All physical perfections come to an end; but the divine virtues are infinite. How many kings have flourished in luxury and in a brief moment all has

	disappeared! Their glory and their honor are forgotten. Where are all these sovereigns now? But those who have been servants of the divine beauty are never forgotten. The result of their works is everywhere visible. What king is there of two thousand years ago whose kingdom has lived in the hearts? But those disciples who were devoted to God - poor people who had neither fortune nor position - are to-day trees bearing fruit. Their banner is raised higher every day. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Divine Philosophy, p. 137)
Materialism	You see all round you proofs of the inadequacy of material things -- how joy, comfort, peace and consolation are not to be found in the transitory things of the world. Is it not then foolishness to refuse to seek these treasures where they may be found? The doors of the spiritual Kingdom are open to all, and without is absolute darkness. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 111)

### Jealousy

Jealousy	Jealousy consumeth the body ... avoid [it] as you would a lion. (Bahá'u'lláh, The Compilation of Compilations vol. I, p. 460, @1020)
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### Suspicion

Suspicion	Take heed that your words be purged from idle fancies and worldly desires and your deeds be cleansed from craftiness and suspicion. (Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 138)
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Trying to break free from any of these is a bit like herding kittens! No sooner do we try to escape from one we unconsciously fall into the hands of another. Whenever we attempt to soar upward, the density of the love of self, like gravity, draws us back to the centre of the earth:

The physical man, unassisted by the divine power, trying to escape from one of these invisible enemies, will unconsciously fall into hands of another. No sooner does he attempt to soar upward than the density of the love of self, like the power of gravity, draws him to the centre of the earth. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í Scriptures, p. 546, #986)

So how do we break free?

The only power capable of delivering us from this captivity is the power of the Holy Spirit.

The only power that is capable of delivering man from this captivity is the power of the Holy Spirit. The attraction of the power of the Holy Spirit is so effective that it keeps man ever on the path of upward ascension. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í Scriptures, p.546, #986)

How do we access this power?

"Abdu'l-Bahá gives us some clues.

- Ask God to expose you to its fragrance, move you by its breeze, enkindle you by its coals of fire and illuminate you by its brightness.
- Turn wholly to it so you will be enabled to ascertain its influence and power, the strength of its life and the greatness of its confirmation.
- Prepare yourself by making your heart empty and your eyes ready to look only toward the Kingdom of God.

He promises if we do these things, the radiance of that widespread effulgence will descend upon you in succession, and the motion rendered by the Holy Spirit will make you dispense with any other strong evidence that leads to the appearance of this Light.

I ask God to expose thee to its fragrance, move thee by its breeze, enkindle thee by its coals of fire and illuminate thee by its brightness. Turn thyself wholly to it -- thus thou shalt be enabled to ascertain its influence and power, the strength of its life and the greatness of its confirmation. Verily, I say unto thee, that if for the appearance of that Divine Essence thou desirest to have a definite proof, an indisputable testimony and a strong, convincing evidence, thou must prepare thyself to make thy heart empty and thine eye ready to look only toward the Kingdom of God. Then, at that time, the radiance of that widespread effulgence will descend upon thee successively, and that motion rendered thee by the Holy Spirit will make thee dispense with any other strong evidence that leadeth to the appearance of this Light, because the greatest and strongest proof for showing the abundance of the Spirit to the bodies is the very appearance of its power and influence in those bodies. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í World Faith, p. 368-369)