

What Good Can Come From Suffering?

By Susan Gammage ¹

It can be hard to accept that God causes the bad things to happen, but in a way it's comforting too:

Through suffering he will attain to an eternal happiness which nothing can take from him. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 178)

'Abdul-Bahá promises there's light at the end of our suffering:

But the end of all these is bliss, overflowing joy, everlasting exultation, happiness and supreme contentment. It is eternal life, never ending glory, a lordly gift and divine sovereignty! (Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, v3, p. 547)

God promises that even the suffering of children will be compensated:

As to the subject of babes and infants and weak ones who are afflicted by the hands of oppressors: this contains great wisdom and this subject is of paramount importance. In brief, for those souls there is a recompense in another world and many details are connected with this matter. For those souls that suffering is the greatest mercy of God. Verily that mercy of the Lord is far better and preferable to all the comfort of this world and the growth and development of this place of mortality.

With regard to the spiritual significance of the suffering of children "who are afflicted at the hands of the oppressor", 'Abdu'l-Bahá ... also explains that to be a recipient of God's mercy is "preferable to a hundred thousand earthly comforts", and He promises that "in the world to come a mighty recompense awaiteth such souls". (From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, 2 December, 1985. https://bahai-library.com/uwj_oppression_children)

God knows that we need suffering for the perfection of our souls, which is the purpose of our lives.

In this world he must prepare himself for the life beyond. That which he needs in the world of the Kingdom must be obtained here. Just as he prepared himself in the world of the matrix by acquiring forces necessary in this sphere of existence, so, likewise, the indispensable forces of the divine existence must be potentially attained in this world. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 226, #81.3)

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By what means can man acquire these things? ... through self-sacrifice [and] ... through severance from this world. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 226, #81.6)

God uses suffering to build our characters. He wants us to trust Him, which is easy to do when things are going well, but not so easy when our lives are in chaos. It's easy to obey God when we're not being tempted, but when things get hard, it's a lot harder:

It is easy to approach the Kingdom of Heaven, but hard to stand firm and staunch within it, for the tests are rigorous, and heavy to bear. (Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 274)

In every human being, there are two opposing forces. Our higher nature wants us to progress and our lower nature wants us to regress. Some people grow in faith through tests, while others lose their faith.

The souls who bear the tests of God become the manifestations of great bounties; for the divine trials cause some souls to become entirely lifeless, while they cause the holy souls to ascend to the highest degree of love and solidity. They cause progress and they also cause retrogression. (Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá v2, p. 324)

God wants us to develop perseverance through our trials. For example, if you plant a lawn and you want it to be green and healthy, you start out by watering the seeds, but once they take root, you have to deny them water in order for it to reach its roots down deep looking for it and becoming stronger. Otherwise, the roots will be too shallow to last long. By allowing us to face our hardships God helps us develop spiritual qualities:

If adversity befall thee not in My path, how canst thou walk in the ways of them that are content with My pleasure? If trials afflict thee not in thy longing to meet Me, how wilt thou attain the light in thy love for My beauty? (Bahá'u'lláh, The Arabic Hidden Words #50)

If you see people who've gone through hard times, you'll see a lot of depth there, which is attractive. I think God wants us to learn empathy: He comforts us in our troubles so that we can comfort others. If we haven't gone through a hard time, we can't relate to others going through the same test. Perhaps this is why in the Tablet of Ahmad Bahá'u'lláh says: "the wisdom of every command shall be tested".

God wants us to grow closer to others, so that we can grow together through adversity. We can have pity on those who fall and have no one to pick them up. In our society, relationships have become very shallow, and men especially have no close friends. We value our independence and don't know what it is to lean on other people in times of need:

Indeed the believers have not yet fully learned to draw on each other's love for strength and consolation in time of need. The Cause of God is endowed with

tremendous powers, and the reason the believers do not gain more from it is because they have not learned to fully draw on these mighty forces of love and strength and harmony generated by the Faith. (Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 93, #321)

God wants us to learn to rely on each other, so He uses trouble to help us draw closer together in interdependence.

God wants us to draw closer to Him. When we feel close, that's a high point in our lives. He uses the hard times to draw us closer, even though it feels like He's abandoned us, as the poem "Footprints" suggests:

One night I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord. Many scenes from my life flashed across the sky. In each scene I noticed footprints in the sand. Sometimes there were two sets of footprints, other times there were one set of footprints. This bothered me because I noticed that during the low periods of my life, when I was suffering from anguish, sorrow or defeat, I could see only one set of footprints. So I said to the Lord, "You promised me Lord, that if I followed you, you would walk with me always. But I have noticed that during the most trying periods of my life there have only been one set of footprints in the sand. Why, when I needed you most, you have not been there for me?" The Lord replied, "The times when you have seen only one set of footprints, is when I carried you."
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When I first became a Bahá'í, I read the following quote and thought that was all the Writings had to say about forgiveness:

If someone commits an error and wrong toward you, you must instantly forgive him. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 453, #134.2)

Over time, though, I came to realize that forgiveness is a process, which can be summed up in 5 Steps:

- Identify the hurt and the lies you told yourself
- Ask God to forgive you for believing the lies; and for acting in ways contrary to His will
- Ask God to forgive others
- Forgive the person who hurt you
- Forgive yourself

Let's look at each of these separately.

Identify the Hurt and the Lies You Told Yourself

We all have tests and difficulties; often arising from other people. We've all had people who have broken our hearts.

What causes problems for us are the lies we tell ourselves about an event, and it's helpful to learn to separate the two:

The event: I was fired.

The message: I'm worthless and unemployable.

The event: An argument with a spouse.

The message: She's divorcing me.

The event: You break a Baha'i law.

The message: I'm going straight to hell.

You get the idea! I'm sure you've got your own version!

The biggest problem with what we tell ourselves is this: we don't know where the interpretations are coming from. We don't stop and ask:

- Is this really how God thinks?
- Is this thought coming from the kingdom of God or the kingdom of darkness?
- Is this truth or an idle fancy?
- Is this real or a vain imagining?

When we learn to pay attention to our thoughts; and sort out truth from falsehood, we're ready to take the next step.

Ask God to Forgive You

I don't know what your concept of God is, but mine is that He is:

- The God of Grace to the wicked
- The All-Forgiving
- The All-Knowing Counselor
- The All-Merciful
- The Compassionate with all
- The Loving
- The Most Compassionate
- The Pitier of the downtrodden
- The Refuge of the fearful
- The Restorer

Does that sound like the kind of God that would condemn anyone for all of eternity? Yet many of us are afraid to turn to Him, fearing His wrath, condemnation, judgment and punishment. Beneath the fear is that we are going straight to hell for the things we have done or failed to do. This is a lot of negative thinking to overcome!

The truth is that despite the fact that we're told to fear God, nowhere in the Writings does it refer to God as the:

- All-Wrathful
- The Ever-Unforgiving
- The Never Forgiving
- The All Condemning
- The All Judgmental

There's no sin that's unforgiveable. God even forgives covenant breakers!

It is important to note that should a Covenant-breaker recognize his mistakes, become conscious of his transgressions against the Cause of God and find the urge to repent, the Centre of the Cause, when satisfied he is sincerely repentant, will forgive his past deeds and restore his credibility and status as a Bahá'í in good standing in the community. (Adib Taherzadeh, *The Child of the Covenant*, p. 240)

God forgives anyone who asks because His mercy exceeds His fury and once you've been forgiven your sins are washed away!

Wherefore, hearken ye unto My speech, and return ye to God and repent, that He, through His grace, may have mercy upon you, may wash away your sins, and forgive your trespasses. The greatness of His mercy surpasseth the fury of His wrath, and His grace encompasseth all who have been called into being and been clothed with the robe of life, be they of the past or of the future." (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, LXVI, p. 130)

It's like being born anew:

Say: Be not despondent. After the revelation of this blessed verse it is as though thou hast been born anew from thy mother's womb. (Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 77)

Ask God to Forgive Others

Coming to forgiveness can be a process! Sometimes there's something someone has done to us that seems so big, and so bad, that we can't imagine ever being able to forgive.

Perhaps the idea of forgiveness might seem intellectually worthwhile; but at a heart level, we aren't yet ready to let go and forgive. It's at these times we can ask God to forgive the person for us.

That's what I had to do with my parents.

As a child I was the victim of their sexual, physical and ritualistic abuse, for which they ultimately had their rights of parenthood removed. I knew from reading the writings that the standard was that I must "instantly forgive", and I wanted to be obedient. I just didn't

know how. Coming to that place required a lot of little steps; and a LOT of understanding of the Bahá'í Writings on the purpose of life; the nature of tests and difficulties; justice etc.

When I took my question to the House of Justice they said:

As a devoted believer you are urged to strive to develop forgiveness in your heart toward your parents who have abused you in so disgraceful a manner... (Universal House of Justice to this author, 9 September 1992)

You'll note the date of this letter was 1992; and it wasn't until 2010 that I was finally able to let it go and forgive them completely.

In the meantime, I was comforted knowing that I could "strive to develop forgiveness in my heart".

I was also comforted knowing that I could pray for my parents. As I learned from the Báb:

Thousand upon thousand of what thou hast asked for thy parents shall be thy recompense! (Selections from the Writings of the Báb, p. 94)

Obviously I wanted forgiveness for myself; so I recognized I had to ask forgiveness for them, and I did.

God can see our sincerity. He knows what's in our hearts, and when we take one step towards becoming more in line with His teachings, He will take it from there; and start the healing and forgiveness process.

Here are two prayers you can use to ask God to forgive others:

O God, my God! Lowly, suppliant and fallen upon my face, I beseech Thee with all the ardor of my invocation to pardon whosoever hath hurt me, forgive him that hath conspired against me and offended me, and wash away the misdeeds of them that have wrought injustice upon me. Vouchsafe unto them Thy goodly gifts, give them joy, relieve them from sorrow, grant them peace and prosperity, give them Thy bliss and pour upon them Thy bounty. Thou art the Powerful, the Gracious, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting! (The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 19)

O Lord! In this Most Great Dispensation Thou dost accept the intercession of children in behalf of their parents. This is one of the special infinite bestowals of this Dispensation. Therefore, O Thou kind Lord, accept the request of this Thy servant at the threshold of Thy singleness and submerge his father in the ocean of Thy grace, because this son hath arisen to render Thee service and is exerting effort at all times in the pathway of Thy love, Verily, Thou art the Giver, the Forgiver and the Kind! ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Lights of Guidance, p. 230, #770)

Forgive the Person Who Hurt You

The House of Justice tells us that to nurse a grievance or hatred towards anyone else is spiritually poisonous:

To nurse a grievance or hatred against another soul is spiritually poisonous to the soul which nurses it. (Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, 5 January 1992)

The antidote is to see the person who hurt you as a child of God, and attempt to overlook his sins, if we want to remove bitterness from our soul:

To strive to see another person as a child of God and, however heinous his deeds, to attempt to overlook his sins for the sake of God, removes bitterness from the soul and both ennobles and strengthens it. (Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, 5 January 1992)

We learn how to separate the sin from the sinner by seeing our oppressors as captives of their lower nature, whose actions only lead them deeper into unhappiness and separation from God:

As a devoted believer you are urged to strive to develop forgiveness in your heart toward your parents who have abused you in so disgraceful a manner, and to attain a level of insight which sees them as captives of their lower nature, whose actions can only lead them deeper into unhappiness and separation from God. (Universal House of Justice to this author, 9 September 1992)

It's not enough to forgive someone once, or even a few times. The Bahá'í standard is to forgive someone a hundred thousand times:

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)

Forgive Yourself

It's much harder to forgive ourselves, than it is to forgive others.

We love Bahá'u'lláh and want to do the right thing, but it's hard when we live in a society whose behaviour is so at variance with the Faith.

It is often difficult for us to do things because they are so very different from what we are used to, not because the thing itself is particularly difficult. With you, and indeed most Bahá'ís, who are now, as adults, accepting this glorious Faith, no doubt some of the ordinances . . . are hard to understand and obey at first. (Shoghi Effendi, Lights Of Guidance, p. 342, #1150)

God knows that in our weakness, we will repeatedly stumble when we try to walk in the path He has pointed out to us.

The House of Justice asks us to point out that the recognition of the Manifestation of God is but the beginning of a process of growth and that as we become more deepened in the Teachings and strive to follow His principles, we gradually approach more and more the perfect pattern which is presented to us. Bahá'u'lláh recognizes that human beings are fallible. He knows that, in our weakness, we shall repeatedly stumble when we try to walk in the path He has pointed out to us. (From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, included in a 1993 compilation available at https://bahai-library.com/compilation_homosexuality_bwc)

The key is to be patient with ourselves:

We must be patient with others, infinitely patient, but also with our own poor selves, remembering that even the Prophets of God sometimes got tired and cried out in despair! (Shoghi Effendi, *The Unfolding Destiny of the British Bahá'í Community*, p. 456)

He urges you to persevere and add up your accomplishments, rather than to dwell on the dark side of things. Everyone's life has both a dark and bright side. (Shoghi Effendi, *The Unfolding Destiny of the British Bahá'í Community*, p. 457)

Don't think you're alone in beating yourself up – even Shoghi Effendi had his moments. Shoghi Effendi considered himself a failure to “Rise to the situation the Master's passing had placed him in” (*Rúhíyyih Rabbani, The Priceless Pearl*, p. 72)- and this distressed him for many years.

Here's a prayer we can say:

I beg Thee to forgive me, O my Lord, for every mention but the mention of Thee, and for every praise but the praise of Thee, and for every delight but delight in Thy nearness, and for every pleasure but the pleasure of communion with Thee, and for every joy but the joy of Thy love and of Thy good-pleasure, and for all things pertaining unto me which bear no relationship unto Thee, O Thou Who art the Lord of lords, He Who provideth the means and unlocketh the doors. (Selections from the Writings of The Báb, pp. 182-183)

I love it because it covers everything we might have done wrong! And then we need to let it go, trusting that God has forgiven us. We can more easily forgive ourselves when we truly believe God has forgiven us as soon as we turn in His direction.

He's assures everyone who responds to His call of His forgiveness, and doesn't want us to be afraid or sorry.

Fear not, nor be Thou grieved, for indeed unto such as have responded to Thy Call, whether men or women, We have assured forgiveness of sins, as known in the presence of the Best Beloved and in conformity with what Thou desirest. Verily His knowledge embraceth all things. (Selections from the Writings of the Báb, p. 55)

Sometimes when we can't forgive ourselves, it's because our ego and pride get in the way, as we believe we know more than God does. We're back in our lower nature.

Verily, the breezes of forgiveness have been wafted from the direction of your Lord, the God of Mercy; whoso turneth thereunto, shall be cleansed of his sins, and of all pain and sickness. Happy the man that hath turned towards them, and woe betide him that hath turned aside. (Bahá'u'lláh, the Summons of The Lord of Hosts, p. 68, #1.131)

Detachment from our self and ego is needed if we don't want to remain far from God's bountiful favours!

But as they were not detached from the things of this world and could not subdue their self and ego, they remained remote from His bountiful favours. (Adib Taherzadeh, The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh v 3, p. 404)

Prayers for Forgiveness

God has given us prayers we can use when asking for His forgiveness:

Behold me, then, O my God, how I have fled from myself unto Thee, and have abandoned my own being that I may attain unto the splendors of the light of Thy Being, and have forsaken all that keepeth me back from Thee, and maketh me forgetful of Thee, in order that I may inhale the fragrances of Thy presence and Thy remembrance. Behold how I have stepped upon the dust of the city of Thy forgiveness and Thy bounty, and dwelt within the precincts of Thy transcendent mercy, and have besought Thee, through the sovereignty of Him Who is Thy Remembrance and Who hath appeared in the robe of Thy most pure and most august Beauty, to send down, in the course of this year, upon Thy loved ones what will enable them to dispense with any one except Thee, and will set them free to recognize the evidences of Thy sovereign will and all-conquering purpose, in such wise that they will seek only what Thou didst wish for them through Thy bidding, and will desire naught except what Thou didst desire for them through Thy will. Sanctify, then, their eyes, O my God, that they may behold the light of Thy Beauty, and purge their ears, that they may listen to the melodies of the Dove of Thy transcendent oneness. Flood, then, their hearts with the wonders of Thy love, and preserve their tongues from mentioning any one save Thee, and guard their faces from turning to aught else except Thyself. Potent art Thou to do what pleaseth Thee. Thou, verily, art the Almighty, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting. (Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 336-337)

Cast, then, upon me, O my God, the glances of Thy mercy, and forgive me my trespasses and the trespasses of them that are dear to Thee, and which come in between us and the revelation of Thy triumph and Thy grace. Cancel Thou, moreover, our sins which have shut off our faces from the splendors of the Day-Star of Thy favors. Powerful art Thou to do Thy pleasure. Thou ordainest what Thou wilt, and art not asked of what Thou wishest through the power of Thy sovereignty, nor canst Thou be frustrated in whatsoever Thou prescribest through Thine irrevocable decree. No God is there save Thee, the Almighty, the Most Powerful, the Ever-living, the Most Compassionate. (Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh, p. 339)

O God, my God! Have mercy then upon my helpless state, my poverty, my misery, my abasement! Give me to drink from the generous cup of Thy grace and forgiveness, stir me with the sweet scents of Thy love, gladden my bosom with the light of Thy knowledge, purify my soul with the mysteries of Thy oneness, raise me to life with the gentle breeze that cometh from the gardens of Thy mercy -- till I sever myself from all else but Thee, and lay hold of the hem of Thy garment of grandeur, and consign to oblivion all that is not Thee, and be companioned by the sweet breathings that waft during these Thy days, and attain unto faithfulness at Thy Threshold of Holiness, and arise to serve Thy Cause, and to be humble before Thy loved ones, and, in the presence of Thy favoured ones, to be nothingness itself.

Verily art Thou the Helper, the Sustainer, the Exalted, the Most Generous. (Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, pp. 4-5)

O Thou forgiving Lord! Thou art the shelter of all these Thy servants. Thou knowest the secrets and art aware of all things. We are all helpless, and Thou art the Mighty, the Omnipotent. We are all sinners, and Thou art the Forgiver of sins, the Merciful, the Compassionate. O Lord! Look not at our shortcomings. Deal with us according to Thy grace and bounty. Our shortcomings are many, but the ocean of Thy forgiveness is boundless. Our weakness is grievous, but the evidences of Thine aid and assistance are clear. Therefore, confirm and strengthen us. Enable us to do that which is worthy of Thy holy Threshold. Illumine our hearts, grant us discerning eyes and attentive ears. Resuscitate the dead and heal the sick. Bestow wealth upon the poor and give peace and security to the fearful. Accept us in Thy kingdom and illumine us with the light of guidance. Thou art the Powerful and the Omnipotent. Thou art the Generous. Thou art the Clement. Thou art the Kind. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 176, #62.10)

I beg of God to forgive thy sins and to illumine thy face with the light of forgiveness, so that thou mayest conquer the self which desires the earthly world and prevent it from its wishes and appetites. (Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá v1, p. 80)

And here's an easy mantra we can memorize and repeat often:

Forgive me, O my Lord, my sins which have hindered me from walking in the ways of Thy good-pleasure, and from attaining the shores of the ocean of Thy oneness. (Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh, p. 29, #XXV)

What's my purpose? What's the purpose in being alive? These are two questions I often hear! Many people struggle with this question and never find an answer, because they are looking in the material realm; and not in the spiritual.

As Bahá'ís we're lucky because the Bahá'í Writings tell us clearly! The purpose of this life is to prepare us for the next life:

One must remember that the purpose of this life is to prepare the soul for the next. (Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1983-1986, p. 232, #126.4)

There are 5 ways to accomplish this:

1. To know God and to be obedient to His commandments:

The purpose of God in creating man hath been, and will ever be, to enable him to know his Creator and to attain His Presence. To this most excellent aim, this supreme objective, all the heavenly Books and the divinely-revealed and weighty Scriptures unequivocally bear witness. (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, XXIX, p. 70)

If we accomplish this, we will be in paradise:

Whoso hath recognized the Day Spring of Divine guidance and entered His holy court hath drawn nigh unto God and attained His Presence, a Presence which is the real Paradise, and of which the loftiest mansions of heaven are but a symbol. Such a man hath attained the knowledge of the station of Him Who is "at the distance of two bows," Who standeth beyond the Sadratu'l-Muntahá. (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, XXIX pp. 70-71)

If we don't, we will have condemned ourselves to the misery of remoteness and the nethermost fire, no matter what our earthly life might look like.

Whoso hath failed to recognize Him will have condemned himself to the misery of remoteness, a remoteness which is naught but utter nothingness and the essence of the nethermost fire. Such will be his fate, though to outward seeming he may occupy the earth's loftiest seats and be established upon its most exalted throne. (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, XXIX, pp. 70-71)

The short obligatory prayer reminds us of our purpose every day when we say it:

I bear witness, O my God, that Thou hast created me to know Thee and to worship Thee. I testify, at this moment, to my powerlessness and to Thy might, to my

poverty and to Thy wealth. There is none other God but Thee, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting. (Prayers and Meditations of Bahá'u'lláh, CLXXXI, p. 314)

2. To attain our share of the flood of grace which God pours forth for us:

The whole duty of man in this Day is to attain that share of the flood of grace which God poureth forth for him. Let none, therefore, consider the largeness or smallness of the receptacle. The portion of some might lie in the palm of a man's hand, the portion of others might fill a cup, and of others even a gallon-measure. (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, V, p. 8)

3. To carry forward an ever-advancing civilization:

All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization. The Almighty beareth Me witness: To act like the beasts of the field is unworthy of man. Those virtues that befit his dignity are forbearance, mercy, compassion and loving-kindness towards all the peoples and kindreds of the earth. Say: O friends! Drink your fill from this crystal stream that floweth through the heavenly grace of Him Who is the Lord of Names. Let others partake of its waters in My name, that the leaders of men in every land may fully recognize the purpose for which the Eternal Truth hath been revealed, and the reason for which they themselves have been created. (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CIX, p. 214)

4. To acquire the virtues we'll need in the next world:

Just as a baby in womb doesn't know why it's developing arms, legs, eyelashes etc; we can't understand why we need to develop virtues for the next world either. We have to take it on faith, trusting that, just as it became apparent soon after birth, it will become clearly apparent in our next birth too:

As the child in the womb does not yet know the use of its members, it does not know what its eyes are for, neither its nose, nor ears, nor tongue -- so also it is with the soul on earth. It cannot understand here the uses and powers of its spiritual gifts, but directly it enters the eternal kingdom, it will become clearly apparent. ('Abdul-Bahá, Bahá'í Prayers 9, p. 48)

While the baby is in the womb, there are certain things which must be properly developed, or the baby will be handicapped in this world. Similarly, we must develop certain qualities in this world, or we will be handicapped in the next:

As it is not yet shown while the child is in the womb of its mother, what its condition will be, whether it will have all the gifts of God or not, whether it will be perfect in all its members or not, whether it will be blind, or deaf, or dumb—but afterwards, when it enters the world, then it becomes clearly apparent if it is defective or not—so it is with the soul in this present state. Its perfection or its lackness is not understood until it enters the heavenly kingdom; then it is clearly

seen, and then the soul understands whether or not it is lacking in the gifts of God. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í Prayers 9, p. 47)

To put it another way:

In this world he must prepare himself for the life beyond. That which he needs in the world of the Kingdom must be obtained here. Just as he prepared himself in the world of the matrix by acquiring forces necessary in this sphere of existence, so, likewise, the indispensable forces of the divine existence must be potentially attained in this world. What is he in need of in the Kingdom which transcends the life and limitation of this mortal sphere? That world beyond is a world of sanctity and radiance; therefore, it is necessary that in this world he should acquire these divine attributes. In that world there is need of spirituality, faith, assurance, the knowledge and love of God. These he must attain in this world so that after his ascension from the earthly to the heavenly Kingdom he shall find all that is needful in that eternal life ready for him. That divine world is manifestly a world of lights; therefore, man has need of illumination here. That is a world of love; the love of God is essential. It is a world of perfections; virtues, or perfections, must be acquired. That world is vivified by the breaths of the Holy Spirit; in this world we must seek them. That is the Kingdom of everlasting life; it must be attained during vanishing existence. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 226, #81.3-81.5)

What are the virtues that are important?

The virtues and attributes pertaining unto God are all evident and manifest, and have been mentioned and described in all the heavenly Books. Among them are trustworthiness, truthfulness, purity of heart while communing with God, forbearance, resignation to whatever the Almighty hath decreed, contentment with the things His Will hath provided, patience, nay, thankfulness in the midst of tribulation, and complete reliance, in all circumstances, upon Him. These rank, according to the estimate of God, among the highest and most laudable of all acts. All other acts are, and will ever remain, secondary and subordinate unto them. (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CXXXIV, p. 290)

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That divine world is manifestly a world of lights; therefore man has need of illumination here. That is a world of love; the love of God is essential. It is a world of perfections; virtues or perfections must be acquired. That world is vivified by the breaths of the Holy Spirit; in this world we must seek them. That is the Kingdom of

life everlasting; it must be attained during this vanishing existence. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Foundations of World Unity, p. 63-64)

Man is born naked and when dead he is also naked. He brings nothing with him to this world, and when he departs he cannot take anything physical with him to the next. But whatever he has given to the Cause of God while on this earth, his time, his labours, his resources, as well as his services to his fellow human beings, these he can take with him to the spiritual realms. This is one way of transforming something which belongs to the world of matter into the spiritual worlds of God. (Adib Taherzadeh, The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh v 3, p. 78)

So from these quotes we see that in this world, we need to develop:

- trustworthiness
- truthfulness
- purity of heart while communing with God
- forbearance
- resignation to whatever the Almighty hath decreed
- contentment with the things His Will hath provided
- patience and thankfulness in the midst of tribulation
- complete reliance, in all circumstances, upon God
- sanctity
- radiance
- spirituality
- faith
- assurance
- illumination
- the knowledge and love of God
- the breaths of the Holy Spirit
- time, labour, resources
- service to our fellow man

We won't understand how these qualities will be needed till we get to the next world:

For just as the effects and the fruitage of the uterine life are not to be found in that dark and narrow place, and only when the child is transferred to this wide earth do the benefits and uses of growth and development in that previous world become revealed—so likewise reward and punishment, heaven and hell, requital and retribution for actions done in this present life, will stand revealed in that other world beyond. And just as, if human life in the womb were limited to that uterine world, existence there would be nonsensical, irrelevant—so too if the life of this world, the deeds here done and their fruitage, did not come forth in the world beyond, the whole process would be irrational and foolish. (Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 185)

How can we acquire those things? Through:

- the knowledge of God
- the love of God
- faith
- philanthropic deeds
- self-sacrifice
- severance from this world
- sanctity and holiness

By what means can man acquire these things? How shall he obtain these merciful gifts and powers? First, through the knowledge of God. Second, through the love of God. Third, through faith. Fourth, through philanthropic deeds. Fifth, through self-sacrifice. Sixth, through severance from this world. Seventh, through sanctity and holiness. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 226, #81.6)

If we do these things, we will enjoy everlasting existence and more:

But if he possesses the knowledge of God, becomes ignited through the fire of the love of God, witnesses the great and mighty signs of the Kingdom, becomes the cause of love among mankind and lives in the utmost state of sanctity and holiness, he shall surely attain to second birth, be baptized by the Holy Spirit and enjoy everlasting existence. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 226, #81.6)

If we don't, we will surely be deprived of eternal life!

Unless he acquires these forces and attains to these requirements, he will surely be deprived of the life that is eternal. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 226, #81.6)

5. To Bear and Endure

In the Fire Tablet, we learn that we were created to "bear and endure"! (Bahá'u'lláh, Bahá'í Prayers, p. 218)

This suggests that we can't expect life to go our way; or to be easy!

As long as there will be **life** on earth, there will be also suffering, in various forms and degrees. (Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 280, #944)

The reason is to advance our minds and spirits; draw us closer to God; and help us acquire virtues:

"Does the soul progress more through sorrow or through the joy in this world?"
 'Abdu'l-Bahá.—"The mind and spirit of man advance when he is tried by suffering. The more the ground is ploughed the better the seed will grow, the better the

harvest will be. Just as the plough furrows the earth deeply, purifying it of weeds and thistles, so suffering and tribulation free man from the petty affairs of this worldly life until he arrives at a state of complete detachment. His attitude in this world will be that of divine happiness. Man is, so to speak, unripe: the heat of the fire of suffering will mature him. Look back to the times past and you will find that the greatest men have suffered most." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 178, #57.1)

This takes us back to know and worship God – since our suffering reminds us to turn to God.

How can we achieve our purpose in life?

One way is through work!

You should also endeavour to engage in some useful occupation, or by training yourself to have such an occupation, as work in itself another means at our disposal, in accordance with our Teachings, to draw nearer to God, and to better grasp His purpose for us in this world. (Universal House of Justice, Lights of Guidance, p. 282, #953)

And another, of course is through prayer – specifically the Short Obligatory Prayer:

I bear witness, O my God, that Thou hast created me to know Thee and to worship Thee. I testify, at this moment, to my powerlessness and to Thy might, to my poverty and to Thy wealth. There is none other God but Thee, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting. (Prayers and Meditations of Bahá'u'lláh, CLXXXI, p. 314)

How Should We Respond To Suffering

We're told to rejoice – a mental discipline that can be very difficult to achieve.

When calamity striketh, be ye patient and composed. However afflictive your sufferings may be, stay ye undisturbed, and with perfect confidence in the abounding grace of God, brave ye the tempest of tribulations and fiery ordeals. (Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 74)

Grieve not at the divine trials. Be not troubled because of hardships and ordeals; turn unto God, bowing in humbleness and praying to Him, while bearing every ordeal, contented under all conditions and thankful in every difficulty. Verily thy Lord loveth His maidservants who are patient, believing and firm. He draws them nigh unto Him through these ordeals and trials. (Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá v1, p. 51)

We need to cling to this thought in tough times:

If, however, for a few days, in compliance with God's all-encompassing wisdom, outward affairs should run their course contrary to one's cherished desire, this is of

no consequence and should not matter. Our intent is that all the friends should fix their gaze on the Supreme Horizon, and cling to that which hath been revealed in the Tablets. (Bahá'u'lláh, Fire and Light, p. 10)

We're told to:

Remember My days during thy days, and My distress and banishment in this remote prison. (Bahá'u'lláh, Tablet of Ahmad, Bahá'í Prayers, p. 210)

Bahá'u'lláh was:

Wrongly accused, imprisoned, beaten, chained, banished from country to country, betrayed, poisoned, stripped of material possessions, and "at every moment tormented with a fresh torment" ... For two score years, until the end of His earthly days, He remained a prisoner and exile ... [and experienced such] grief no ordinary mortal could endure. But lest we give way to feelings of gloom and distress, we take recourse in the tranquil calm He induces with such meaningful words as these: "We have borne it all with the utmost willingness and resignation, so that the souls of men may be edified, and the Word of God be exalted". (The Universal House of Justice, A Wider Horizon, Selected Letters 1983-1992, pp. 239-240)

And while we're remembering His days, we can join with Him in His suffering, and trust these words:

Now ye, as well, must certainly become my partners to some slight degree, and accept your share of tests and sorrows. But these episodes shall pass away, while that abiding glory and eternal life shall remain unchanged forever. Moreover, these afflictions shall be the cause of great advancement. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, pp. 238-239)

He's given us a prayer to use (The Tablet of Ahmad), in which He promises:

Should one who is in affliction or grief read this Tablet with absolute sincerity, God will dispel his sadness, solve his difficulties and remove his afflictions. (Bahá'u'lláh, Tablet of Ahmad, Bahá'í Prayers, p. 211)

And in the meantime, we can finish with a prayer:

I ask God to grant thee by His favor and grace that which is thy utmost desire; that the closed doors become opened, the uneven roads become even, thy face shine by the love of God, thy sight become brighter by witnessing the signs of God; that thou mayest attain spiritual joy, eternal happiness and heavenly life. (Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá v1, pp. 129-130)

How Can We Help Someone Who is Suffering

The Oneness of Humanity teaches us that when one part suffers, the whole part suffers.

... if any part is subjected to injury or becomes diseased, all the other parts and functions sympathetically respond, owing to the perfect oneness existing. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 321)

We can turn to each other in times of suffering:

... the human body, all the members of which are connected and linked with one another with the greatest strength. How much the organs, the members and the parts of the body of man are intermingled and connected for mutual aid and help, and how much they influence one another with the greatest strength. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 245)

It doesn't mean that we (as Bahá'ís) have to stand by and watch helplessly. We can take some comfort in knowing that there are things we can do:

Our duty as Bahá'ís is to build up such a love and unity within our own ranks that the people will be attracted by this example to the Cause. We also must teach all we can and strengthen the Bahá'í Community in the administration. But more we cannot do to avert the great sufferings which seemingly still lie ahead of the world in its present evil state. (Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 116, #396)

There is a power in drawing on each other's love when we are suffering:

Indeed the believers have not yet fully learned to draw on each other's love for strength and consolation in time of need. The Cause of God is endowed with tremendous powers, and the reason the believers do not gain more from it is because they have not learned to fully draw on these mighty forces of love and strength and harmony generated by the Faith. (Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 93, #321)

One of the purposes of a study circle is to build a depth of relationships where we can carry each other's burdens.

A distinguishing feature of study circles is that ... they have created a new dynamic within the community and have become nuclei of community life and ... bind the group together in fellowship ... (International Teaching Centre, February 2000, Training Institutes and Systematic Growth, #51.49. https://bahai-library.com/pdf/uhj/uhj_institutes_systematic_growth.pdf)

So we have an obligation to help one another, and one way we can do it is through home visits and visiting the sick:

We should all visit the sick. When they are in sorrow and suffering, it is a real help and benefit to have a friend come. Happiness is a great healer to those who are ill.

In the East it is the custom to call upon the patient often and meet him individually. The people in the East show the utmost kindness and compassion to the sick and suffering. This has greater effect than the remedy itself. You must always have this thought of love and affection when you visit the ailing and afflicted. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 204, #72.1)

In the midst of our suffering, when people don't know how to help, they might say things we think are trite, to help us through:

... [He] must at all times put his trust in God (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CXXV, p. 264)

All men are in God's hands. (Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 237, #791)

Prayers and supplications should be offered. ('Abdul-Bahá, Divine Art of Living, Test and Ordeals section, #2)

Be not troubled because of hardships and ordeals. (Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá v1, p. 51)

Even when we think these don't bring comfort in our darkest moments, the words of God have a power to heal:

Now, if thou wishest to know the divine remedy which will heal man from all sickness and will give him the health of the divine kingdom, know that it is the precepts and teachings of God. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í World Faith, p. 376)

...the people of religions find, in the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh... the immediate cure of the incurable disease, which relieves every pain, and bestows the infallible antidote for every deadly poison. (Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 305)

By understanding someone's pain, we don't need to say trite things; we can just "be" with them.