

Perception Into Faith: A Radical Discontinuity Within Unity

by William Barnes

Anyone familiar with the New Testament synoptic Gospels knows that differences over the life and genealogy of Christ exist in their accounts. One curious example of this is their treatment of the events taking place around the crucifixion of Jesus. All four mention that two other individuals were strung up with Him, one to either side. John simply mentions them, except to report that late in the afternoon they had their legs broken so they might not linger into the following day and have their groans spoil everybody's Sabbath. Matthew, faithful to the earlier penned account of Mark, reports the additional piece of biography that these two individuals were thieves, and goes on to inform us that, blind to the last, these unrepentant souls went to their death jeering Christ. But Luke has a different version of what transpired between these three dying figures. Luke says that one thief truly recognized Christ and asked that Christ remember him when He came into His heavenly kingdom. His reward for this sincere eleventh-hour request is Christ's promise that the thief shall have eternal life alongside Christ in paradise.

Such a wide variance is, I think, a result not of sloppy reporting of the facts, but of the different meanings that the writers or compilers of each gospel wished to bring out of the events of the day. The modern skeptical temper tends to think that the accounts of Matthew or Mark probably have the essential facts of the story right. If such facts are the real interest of the crucifixion, then Luke, or whoever wrote the gospel with his name attached to it, is easily dismissed as just another propagandist for a lot of hokum about an afterlife. Yet Luke may have been telling another kind of story. His version means to get readers to look past a poor carpenter to see a Being so loving that even His own death agonies do not stop the flow of compassion to others, and that in the life and action of such a Being resides the key to everlasting life for all.

Maybe Christ did miraculously walk out of His tomb, but to give life to another at the moment of losing His own is the real miracle and the real message of His mission. To obtain this everlasting existence people must, like the thief, see past the expiring body called Jesus to the eternal Christ shining in unchangeable splendor. To see Him as he saw Himself is the necessary requirement to be with Him. The thief redeems himself and his whole sorry existence in this single, final act of revolutionary perception, and by this act this social misfit became an exemplar, not only of every man's search for true life but also of God's delight in bestowing that life to whomever sincerely asks for it, at any moment and under any set of circumstances, no matter what the life lived to that moment. Any discussion of the life-affirming mission of the Prophet and His Words must make stories like this the cornerstone of its argument. Being one of the central myths about humanity, Luke's account tells us about more than one man. It explicates the race.

Human Natures

The Holy Books tell us that the human being is a double-natured creature, where the word nature denotes the animating and organizing power behind a recognizable form of itself. Thus if the individual is two natures he has two forms. As far as this life is concerned human beings are composed of a body or outer form, which comes forth from earth, and a soul or inner form which is sent forth from eternity.¹ Each returns in some form to its original homeland at death.

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But though double natured, every individual is, nevertheless, one entity: a unity structured as a kind of polarity—we'll return to this word. Thus, as all the religions tell us, the human self is really two selves in relation. One part is the animal self, called the ego, the self building up around and concerning itself with bodily experiences and material life. The other is the spiritual self, the expressions of the awareness of eternity.

The animal spirit incarnate in the ego is the originator of everything selfish, narrow and beastly in man. Hence the ego is not a particularly happy, friendly or generous fellow. He is, in fact, what is meant by the traditional designations of Lucifer, the light-bringer rising at the dawn of every life to lead wayfarers astray into the path of self-love.²

And as another name for this execrable creature indicates, the ego is not really one personality but a "legion" of "multiple identities born of passion and desire:"³ a raucous pandemonium of contentious, contradictory, screaming monkeys which give the appearance of emanating from a single intelligence and holding together for some over-riding purpose only because they are associated with an object existing within conventionally known limits of space and time, namely, the body. He is the tendency to self-will, chaos and destruction: defensive, fretful, sulky and murderous. He sees the world as an anarchic scramble after material comfort and security which can only be obtained either by those strong enough to impose their will upon others, or by those who live in strict accordance with the strong man's wishes. In his largest form he is the Leviathan of Hobbes and the Bible, and he is huge only because his material appetites are insatiable. In his smallest form he is a whining, wheedling, hypochondriac playing on his supposed helplessness to get others sympathies. In either incarnation his concern is chiefly with hindering others freedom and purpose to maximize his own.

In any form this satanic self is obviously not what religious scripture means by man's true self, that part of every person said to be made in the image and likeness of God. This second part of man is called the eternal self and it, too, can be said to have two parts: an individuality, or soul, metaphorically inhabited by a greater creative spirit, called Holy. Thus 'Abdu'l-Bahá says that "man has a soul in which dwells the divine spirit."⁴ "The divine aspect or spiritual nature," He says, "consists of the breaths of the Holy Spirit."⁵ These "breaths of the Holy Spirit" are, in their broadest sense, Revelation from God. If this divine spirit is like the ocean, the individual souls are like its waves. We cannot conceive of an ocean without waves, and we cannot conceive of waves independently of the ocean.

The divine spirit animating man's eternal self is, according to Bahá'í teachings, the source of all noble thoughts and emotion, selfless acts and great visions. This eternal self is the tendency in human beings toward integrating and harmonizing the chaos of ego desires into unified, developing patterns. He is the urge toward infinity, all human aspirations to be God-like in thought and action.

The eternal self is exuberant, selfless, a lover of freedom, especially for others, and is unified within himself toward this end for his own freedom is guaranteed in this effort. He is concerned with eternal life and spiritual ideals. He is huge because he contains all things within himself.⁶

The eternal world is mostly hidden and religion is meant to inform humanity about it. The eternal self is, too, mostly hidden and the lives and words of the Prophets are meant to bring it to perception. Satan, the ego, being, in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words, "the product of human minds and of instinctive tendencies toward error"⁷ is the doubter of eternity and nobility. The Bible calls him, correctly, the "accuser,"⁸ and the Bahá'í Writings "the blamer,"⁹ because he points the finger at others to prevent his own and prior sins being noticed, and to prevent others from being inspired by nobility.

The ego is the first self we are aware of because we are first aware of material desires. Once established in the soul he loathes renouncing his privileged position to man's eternal self, who should rightfully sit there. The drama of human life is to decide which of these two selves will get the upper hand. This drama is played out by actors who have radically different ideas about the nature of the play itself. Thus the Master states: "In man there are two natures; his spiritual or higher nature and his material or lower nature. In one he approaches God, in the other he lives for the world alone. Signs of both of these natures are to be found in men."¹⁰

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The ego opposes the eternal self not because it is created evil, but because it can't see eternity. It is a temporal selfhood bound by temporal constraints of thought and passion. To such a personality material comfort and power are the only things it makes any sense pursuing in a life dominated by the thought of impending extinction, in a world called by 'Abdu'l-Bahá "this vanishing world, this death in life."¹¹ Incapable by himself of experiencing anything other than the world and its laws, the ego thinks eternity is all a silly piece of imagination stemming from frustrated hopes in life. He works to keep human vision confined within the cramped, gloomy vault of space and time. In such ways he becomes in Bahá'u'lláh's words the "Evil One" that "hindereth the rise and obstructeth the spiritual progress of the children of men."¹²

As the embodiment of radically opposing spiritual conditions, the human soul is in the paradoxical position of being as close to and as far away from God as it is possible for any creature to be. 'Abdu'l-Bahá puts it this way:

Man is in the highest degree of materiality, and at the beginning of spirituality—that is to say, he is the end of imperfection and the beginning of perfection. He is at the last degree of darkness, and at the beginning of light; that is why it has been said that the condition of man is at the end of night and the beginning of day, meaning that he is the sum of all the degrees of imperfection, and that he possesses the degrees of perfection. He has the animal side as well as the angelic side, and the aim of the educator is to so train human souls that their angelic aspect may overcome their animal side. Then if the divine power in man, which is his essential perfection, overcomes the satanic power, which is absolute imperfection, he becomes the most excellent among creature; but if the satanic power overcome the divine power, he becomes the lowest of the creatures. That is why he is the end of imperfection and the beginning of perfection. Not in any other of the species in the world of existence is there such a difference, contrast, contradiction and opposition as in the species of man.¹³

'Abdu'l-Bahá is not saying here that within man is a graded moral continuum stretching from complete darkness to total light in which the "end of imperfection and the beginning of perfection" are contiguous points. This would make man single-natured and unconscious like the animal. He is saying that man is created morally double-natured, and that "the end of imperfection" and "the beginning of perfection" are polar and hierarchical opposites of light and dark structuring human nature. That is, they do not form a complementary polarity, but a contradictory one.¹⁴ Light and dark are symbols for absolute conditions of existence, and though they stand in a kind of conjunction in thought there can never be any transformational connection between and uniting them.

Spiritually we live in both conditions at once. Movement is toward one or the other pure condition. But this movement is like the rising movement from the world of sleep to the world of wakefulness and the setting decline of wakefulness to sleep. That is, one world simply and completely replaces another. There is no bridge. It is not a movement between sites on the same plane of existence, like the movement between the bedroom in which one awakens and the kitchen where one prepares breakfast. The two worlds of the soul express a radical ontological separation, which cannot on these premises be papered over by any epistemology of being. They are in "contrast, contradiction and opposition."

There is absolutely nothing positive about being in "the highest degree of materiality." This is "absolute imperfection." This is Satan the ego, the "lowest of creatures" because he intentionally commits evil and consciously leads others to do the same. The "sum of the degrees of imperfection" is its final degree. This is not the palest light of dawn, but the "last degree of darkness," "the end of night" or ultimate moral blackness.

There is everything positive about being the "beginning of spirituality." This is to be the "beginning of light," its origin and highest point from which all spiritual light in creation emanates. The "beginning of perfection" means to be the highest being in creation because one latently "possesses the degrees of perfection." This is "the beginning of day."

Spiritually, "light does not unite itself with darkness."¹⁵ This can only mean that, too, darkness wants no part of light. All action within the soul is therefore apocalyptic. It is life or death.¹⁶ All or nothing.

There is no both/and, only either/or at this level. Whoever is not with me is against me, says the Christ. There can be no fence sitters. The lukewarm are the most execrable. Those with “lifeless hearts” can never approach Him. The gradualists have no place.

In an apocalyptic world a person can be the incarnation of Satan his whole life, but on the cross of extinction he may see the Light, act and win eternal life. Likewise a person may have been the incarnation of pious devotion yet, as Bahá'u'lláh warns, “at the hour of his soul’s ascension, been so changed as to fall into the nethermost fire.”¹⁷ Because change is all or nothing at all in an apocalypse, spiritually the smallest is the same as the largest. Hence ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asserts that: “For no veil is greater than egotism and no matter how thin the covering may be, yet will it finally veil man entirely and prevent him from receiving his portion of the eternal bounty.”¹⁸ And Christ can tell His disciples of workers in a field where the last to arrive at the end of the day get the same pay as the first to work at the crack of dawn.¹⁹

Good Deeds Not Enough

The apocalyptic ontology of the Holy Books is the source of the Prophets continually pointing to the workings of the uncomfortable ethical principle that good actions performed without knowledge of God—which doesn’t mean acting solely with an eye to heavenly reward, but with the understanding that righteous acts are a praise of God and flow out from the promptings of an eternal Self—such good acts, however praiseworthy and helpful they may be, “cannot be the cause of eternal salvation” and “entrance into the Kingdom of God”²⁰ because they do not bring about a conscious perception of eternity.²¹

An act done without this dimension of awareness is not a perfect act, and one must be perfect “as your Father which is in heaven is perfect”²² if one is to enter eternity. Now perfection for humanity, whatever the moral philosophers tell us, can never mean without ethical blemish. If being stainless is the criteria we are all going to be roasted, so we might as well get on enjoying what time we have here. Neither can perfection mean to do as well as God does. Not being God all human acts are by definition imperfect. Here, the mechanical workings of an indifferent, abstract moral law would also automatically dispatch everyone to hell.

But perfection in some sense must be achievable since Christ said we are to be perfect. A key to the whole question lies in the word holiness, which is wholeness. A perfect act is a completed one. This does not mean an act ending in time. It means any act predicated upon the perception of eternity.

Every kind of perception is through a faculty, sight through the eyes, hearing through the ears, abstract knowledge through the intellect. The perceptual faculty through which human beings perceive eternity is the human heart, which doesn’t mean the throbbing organ in the middle of the chest but the sensitive receiver at the center of being. The heart is the connection with eternity because Bahá'u'lláh says it is the “seat of the revelation of the inner mysteries of God.”²³

When Bahá'u'lláh says, “Our mission is to seize and possess the hearts of men,”²⁴ He means His Revelation will throw open “the doors of the hearts of men, which in reality are the doors of heaven”²⁵ so that latent spiritual powers and perceptions may awaken, enabling the soul to see eternal things and things eternally, and to do eternally effective actions.

The Manifestations have all been chiefly concerned with developing this faculty of faith, for faith which means knowledge of God or the recognition of His Manifestation and obedience to His laws,²⁶ depends upon its healthy functioning. Humankind has mostly ignored Them, and this failure to perceive what the Manifestations were telling us about our true Self has caused a decline in the power of this faculty to perceive, and this causes man to lose faith in himself.²⁷

The age-old dispute over salvation by faith or works alone is fallacious since it overlooks the fact that faith is an inner act, a form of perception. Both faith and works are necessary for salvation, but faith is first as a precondition for spiritual works. “By faith is meant, first, conscious knowledge, and second, the practice of good deeds,” says ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.²⁸ “Deeds are secondary to faith in Him and certitude in His Reality,” says the Báb.²⁹ Outer works are necessary as an expression and demonstration, that is a completing and perfecting, of inner faith. It is faith that inspires deeds, while deeds realize faith.

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Salvation by works alone says that, ideally, good works must lead up to faith and then lead out from it. This is true, but not in the sense of the moral continuum with the middle point separating the least evil act from the least good one. The soul, as we saw, is not on a moral continuum.³⁰ It is a conjunction of radically opposing conditions of being, one tending “towards moral sublimity and intellectual perfection, while the other turneth to bestial degradation and carnal imperfections.”³¹ The soul’s movements are apocalyptic. Faith is, initially, not a transforming but a transmuting act.³² It redeems and completes those imperfect acts leading up to it and informs those acts leading out from it. It completes life by recreating and renewing it, making it holy or whole, changing becoming into a form of being. Bahá’u’lláh states: “Whosoever acknowledged His truth and turned unto Him, his good works outweighed his misdeeds, and all his sins were remitted and forgiven. Thereby is the truth of these words concerning Him made manifest: ‘Swift is He in reckoning.’ Thus God turneth iniquity into righteousness, were ye to explore the realms of divine knowledge, and fathom the mysteries of His wisdom.”³³

Faith may come at any moment. Hence there can be no critical mass of accumulated good works, which by sheer weight will automatically swing open heaven’s doors. If eternal life could be won this way, then we may rightly revolt against heaven’s ways when a pathetically wrong individual like the thief wins the grand prize simply through the ludicrously good fortune of accidentally being in the right place at the right time and saying just the right thing. But more than this, salvation by works alone makes the Prophets and Their Message irrelevant to renewing and running human society.

What makes an action holy, or complete and perfect, is not, finally, any quality which the doer brings to the action, such as purity of intention or efficiency of execution. What makes an action holy is God’s acceptance of it.³⁴ For if we knew how to perform holy actions and did them, then God Himself would become irrelevant for spiritual growth and individual salvation.

Holiness, or completion by divine acceptance, is what separates an act of faith from a merely good act. Seeking divine acceptance is the essential aspect missing from good deeds performed by following “a mere code of laws” whether society’s or one’s own, since Bahá’u’lláh says “all things are dependent upon His Will, and the worth of all acts is conditioned upon His acceptance and pleasure.”³⁵

To say deeds lead up to faith is therefore technically misleading. One attains faith by opening a new center of perceptual awareness. And the perception which opens eternity to view was stated by Christ: “Whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it.”³⁶ Initially, faith is a connection of love not effort. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says:

*For faith, which is life eternal, is a sign of bounty, and not the result of justice. The flame of the fire of love, in this world of earth and water, comes through the power of attraction and not by effort and striving. Nevertheless, by effort and perseverance, knowledge, science and other perfections can be acquired; but only the light of the Divine Beauty can transport and move the spirits through the force of attraction.*³⁷

Of course any humanitarian deed is meritorious and is worthy of respect and reward. “For every act performed there shall be a recompense according to the estimate of God,” says Bahá’u’lláh.³⁸ But acts carried out with no real thought taken for the soul’s uplift express no conscious spirituality—that is, they express no attraction for God, only a form of socially-conditioned conscience. Thus even an infinity of movement toward “good” along the horizontal social axis of good and evil gains one not a millimeter of vertical lift toward eternity.³⁹ Further, the nearly perfect is as far away as the grossly imperfect, because both are part of a different internal order of being and awareness. Any attachment to this world is the limiting ego at work, and even attachment to the improvement of this world alone is a form of this attachment. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá puts the principle this way:

*The foundation of success and salvation is the knowledge of God, and the results of the knowledge of God are the good actions which are the fruits of faith. If man has not this knowledge, he will be separated from God, and when this separation exists, good actions will not have complete effect...the foundation is to know God, and the good actions result from this knowledge. (G)ood actions alone, without the knowledge of God, cannot be the cause of eternal salvation, everlasting success, and prosperity, and entrance into the Kingdom of God.*⁴⁰

The thief on the cross performed the one redemptive act an individual must perform to gain eternity. He saw Reality and gave himself over to it.⁴¹ In this act he purified (i.e., made holy) his entire existence because he attained the real purpose of every human life. He recognized that since the Prophet sees deepest into Reality, His Message alone defines the good. He defines the good as seeing as He does and seeking after eternity or the Kingdom of God, all other things “shall be added unto you” once this search gets up in earnest. It is to enable every seeking soul to find the Kingdom of God within him that the Prophets come into the world.

Hence we return to the hill of Calvary where the thief finds that Christ’s promise of eternal life follows immediately upon his just awakened perception of eternity embodied in Him, as it did just as suddenly upon Peter’s declaration of the Sonship of Christ. Some kind of revolutionary leap is indicated in this story, and it is worthwhile inquiring into what happened within the soul of that thief in that holy moment. This will provide us with some comprehension of the nature of faith and with some understanding of spiritual growth and resurrection. Too, we shall find that the contradictory polar opposition that constitutes human nature and that divided the ethical action also divides into levels of perception.

The Revolutionary Leap

Every human being is born into a dying world, and for as long as he identifies himself with that world and its limitations he, too, is a dying form of life, capable only of delaying but not overcoming the pull of nature toward extinction. To live eternally the individual must be granted the gift of faith, for the Master tells us that the “meaning of eternal life is the gift of the Holy Spirit.”⁴² It is obtaining the power of true vision. This is a vision, however incomplete, not of the future but of Reality—the kind of experience we mean when we say things like “the veil lifted” or “the scales fell from my eyes.” So far as perceiving eternity is concerned, Bahá’u’lláh informs us that “none discerneth in this day save those who have been granted vision by this sublime Beauty.”⁴³

The Bahá’í Writings call entering into conscious communion with the Holy Spirit entering into the spirit of faith. Being a connection between two sentient spirits, however radically different in essence, faith, then, is a higher way of perception and knowing, not a bottomless mental abyss into which one must blindly plummet so that Providence can demonstrate its ability to rescue human beings from their worst suicidal tendencies. Faith is a spiritual resurrection or move into a larger mental existence. Faith expands not demands the intellectual powers of the soul. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says some extraordinary things about souls in this state of existence:

*The fourth degree of spirit is the heavenly spirit; it is the spirit of faith and the bounty of God; it comes from the breath of the Holy Spirit, and by the divine power it becomes the cause of eternal life. It is the power which makes the earthly man heavenly, and the imperfect man perfect. It makes the impure to be pure, the silent eloquent; it purifies and sanctifies those made captive by carnal desires; it makes the ignorant wise.*⁴⁴

In another place He described this state more fully:

*But the spirit of faith which is of the Kingdom consists of the all-comprehending grace and the perfect attainment and the power of sanctity and the divine effulgence from the Sun of Truth on luminous light-seeking essences from the presence of the divine Unity. And by this Spirit is the life of the spirit of man, when it is fortified thereby, as Christ saith: ‘That which is born of the Spirit is Spirit.’ And this Spirit hath both restitution and return, inasmuch as it consists of the Light of God and the unconditioned grace. So, having regard to this state and station, Christ announced that John the Baptist was Elias, who was to come before Christ. And the likeness of this station is as that of lamps kindled: for these in respect to their glasses and oil-holders are different, but in respect to their light, One, and in respect to their lumination, One; nay, each one is identical with the other, without imputation of plurality, or diversity or multiplicity or separateness. This is the Truth and beyond Truth there is only error.*⁴⁵

The spiritually unenlightened human spirit, He says, “consists of the rational, or logical, reasoning faculty, which apprehends general ideas and things intelligible and perceptible.”⁴⁶ is part of the world and

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lives for it unless the spirit of faith is awakened and perceptions of the reality of eternity are opened. This occurs only when the soul voluntarily surrenders itself to the Prophet and His Message.

In the spirit of faith knowledge is a direct perception of realities, what traditional philosophers called knowledge of things, not knowledge about things.⁴⁷ With direct perception there is no need of logical or rational arguments, neither experiment nor hypothesis is required.⁴⁸ For these in relation to direct perception are themselves veils of knowledge, and not knowledge itself. In direct perception the individual sees behind an expiring body of things called the material world to perceive their revealed forms standing within it. Comprehension becomes apprehension, because knowledge is no longer conceptual but existential, that is, a permanent part of one's existence. Epistemologically, creation is no longer purely objective, i.e., an alien body of objects confronting the inquiring intelligence. But neither are these objects purely subjective. In faith, creation and reason form an identity—two parts of one unmediated unity, which is the basis of true understanding.

The soul in the spirit of faith is a living power. Such a soul, Christ said, was “a son of God” like Him, though to an incalculably lesser degree. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says: “The station which he who hath truly recognized this Revelation will attain is the same as the one ordained for such prophets of the house of Israel as are not regarded as Manifestations ‘endowed with constancy.’”⁴⁹ And Bahá’u’lláh says: “O My Servant! Obey Me and I shall make thee like unto Myself. I say ‘Be,’ and it is, and thou shalt say ‘Be,’ and it shall be.”⁵⁰ Such souls, the Book of Revelation tells us, “may have right to the tree of life.”⁵¹

Yet the soul that passes from the human spirit into the spirit of faith undergoes no change of nature or alteration of essence. It remains unchanged in its fundamental reality, yet experiences a tremendous and concentrated infusion of power. This causes the individual to resemble a fissioning atom, the inrushing force knocking him out of his established orbit of experience into another and larger one, transforming his ways of thought, perception and behavior and acting as the authority for later acts and statements. He becomes a satellite of a Greater Selfhood, orbiting the Manifestation of God.⁵²

In this new configuration of the psyche, what has occurred is not that a new center has come into being, but that the soul has come into awareness of the center of itself that has always been, the Power that is driving it. The experience of having touched one's essential humanity, the infinite Selfhood Bahá’u’lláh says is “standing within thee,”⁵³ is usually described as an ecstasy, a word carrying overtones of both connectedness and separation. It unites the individual within himself and with the humanity of all, but divides him from his fellow beings who have not had this experience. Yet the authentic experience of eternity does not divide the soul from his society by a quixotic withdrawal into a private utopia. No, he joins what Saint Augustine called the Commonwealth of the Saints, for at its highest intensity the true religious experience teaches or shows to the soul not just the reality of himself, but real humanity as a kingdom of power and glory of which faithful souls are its real members and the Prophets its real kings. This experience prepares the soul, is its initiation, for a spiritual world where souls “shall associate and commune intimately one with another, and shall be so closely associated in their lives, their aspirations, their aim and strivings as to be even as one soul.”⁵⁴

Every human being is born into the world at birth and borne out of it by death. The defining aim of the human spirit is the urge toward transcendence. This urge is fulfilled by a sacrificial offering of self, which means the deliberate attempt to make sacred some part of one's life, a turning of passion into compassion. What the soul has sacrificed of its life is what returns to eternity at death. The ultimate act of this kind is to sacrifice one's entire self; that is, to make one's entire life sacred, as the thief did. Only in this act does the soul transcend all human limitations and achieve real eternal life, which is the only kind of life that the Holy Books recognize.⁵⁵ It is this perception that both brings and begins faith.

Notes

- 1) “It is manifest that beyond this material body, man is endowed with another reality, which is the world of exemplars constituting the heavenly body of man...This other and inner reality is called the heavenly body, the ethereal form which corresponds to this body.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1982. *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*. Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, pp. 464-465.) The human soul, says Bahá’u’lláh, “is, in itself, a testimony that beareth witness to the existence of a world that is contingent, as well as to the reality of a world that hath neither beginning nor end.” (Bahá’u’lláh, 1976. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*. Second Revised Edition. Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, pp. 161-162.)

- 2) “He truly is the false dawn, though believing himself to be the true one.” (Bahá’u’lláh, 1969. *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*. Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, p. 146) and “Satan, by which we mean the natural inclinations of the lower nature. This lower nature in man is symbolized as Satan—the evil ego within us, not an evil personality outside.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *Promulgation*. p. 287) And ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains the protean nature of “Satan” when he says: “Endeavor to the utmost to protect yourselves, because Satan appears in different robes and appeals to everyone according to each person’s own way, until he becomes like unto him (şatan), then he will leave him alone.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *Star of the West*, Vol. 13 #1 p. 20.
- 3) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1978. *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*. Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, p. 76.
- 4) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1969. *Paris Talks*. Eleventh British Edition. London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, p. 25.
- 5) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, p. 41.
- 6) “Do all ye can to become wholly weary of self, and bind yourselves to that Countenance of Splendours; and once ye have reached such heights of servitude, ye will find, gathered within your shadow, all created things.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *Selections*, pp. 76-77)
- 7) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *Promulgation*, p. 230.
- 8) The Book of Revelation 12:10.
- 9) “Be of them whom the tumult of the world, however much it may agitate them in the path of their Creator, can never sadden, whose purpose the blame of the blamer will never defeat.” (Bahá’u’lláh. *Gleanings*, p. 281) “Supply me, then, with what Thou hast written down for Thy chosen ones among Thy creatures, whom neither the blame of the blamer, nor the clamour of the infidel, nor the estrangement of such as have withdrawn from Thee, hath deterred from turning towards Thee.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Báb, Bahá’u’lláh, 1967. *Bahá’í Prayers: A Selection*. London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, #54 p. 59.
- 10) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *Paris Talks*, p. 60.
- 11) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *Selections*, p. 176.
- 12) Bahá’u’lláh, 1978. *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, p. 87.
- 13) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1981. *Some Answered Questions*. Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, pp. 235-236.
- 14) A complementary polarity is like that of humanity, where the complements, male and female, exist on the same plane, within the same Kingdom. Complements work together and are attracted to each other. As we say, “opposites attract.” In a contradictory polarity, the “poles” do not exist on the same plane, but are from different, i.e., higher and lower, Kingdoms of spirit. They do not work together, but against one another; each works to overcome the other. Here opposites repel. Transformation is the condition of mortality and the eternal does not become mortal and vice-versa. In another place ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states: “For the inner reality of man is a demarcation line between the shadow and the light, a place where the two seas meet; it is the lowest point on the arc of descent and therefore is capable of gaining all the grades above.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá quoted in *Bahá’í Education: A Compilation*. 1987. London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, p. 23)
- 15) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *Some Answered Questions*, p. 170.
- 16) See, for example, Deuteronomy 30: 15-19.
- 17) Bahá’u’lláh. *Gleanings*, p. 266.
- 18) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *Star of the West*, Vol. 10, No. 3, p. 27.
- 19) Matthew 20:16
- 20) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *Some Answered Questions*, p. 238.
- 21) The Bahá’í Writings call this seeing with the eyes of God. See, for example, Bahá’u’lláh, 1971. *The Hidden Words*. Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust. #44 Arabic.
- 22) Matthew 5: 48.
- 23) Bahá’u’lláh. *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*. Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, p. 192.
- 24) Bahá’u’lláh. *Gleanings*, p. 212.
- 25) Bahá’u’lláh. *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 173.
- 26) “The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the recognition of Him Who is the Day Spring of His Revelation and the Fountain of His laws, Who representeth the Godhead in both the Kingdom of His Cause and the world of creation. Whoso achieveth this duty hath attained unto all good; and whoso is deprived thereof, hath gone astray, though he be the author of every righteous deed. It behoveth every one who reacheth this most sublime station, this summit of transcendent glory, to observe every ordinance of Him Who is the Desire of the world. These twin duties are inseparable. Neither is acceptable without the other.” (Bahá’u’lláh. *Gleanings*, pp. 330-331) This two-fold obligation is, in reality, the two aspects of belief. For out from the act of recognition flow socially redeeming acts, the greatest of which is getting others to see Reality.
- 27) “Gracious God! It was intended that at the time of the manifestation of the One true God the faculty of recognizing Him would have been developed and matured and would have reached its culmination. However, it is now clearly demonstrated that in the disbelievers this faculty hath remained undeveloped and hath, indeed, degenerated.” (Bahá’u’lláh. *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 52-53.
- 28) *The Divine Art of Living: Selections from the Bahá’í Writings*. 1986. Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, p. 61.
- 29) Báb. 1976. *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*. Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, p. 133.
- 30) The works alone argument is really a works first argument. It grows from a deification of society. It hinges on the belief that the social law of right and wrong is a perfect image of the life and death dichotomy of the soul. It isn’t. Ever. Deeds without faith move the soul along the right or left side of the axial midpoint of social morality. But after faith deeds revolve the soul toward the center of being, so that by effort souls perfect the perfect state. In purely spiritual terms the

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point is not to perform enough good deeds to purchase a ticket to eternity, but to get free of the compulsive tyranny of the social law that always crucifies the prophets.

“The first and foremost duty prescribed unto men, next to recognition of Him Who is the Eternal Truth, is the duty of steadfastness in His Cause. Cleave thou unto it, and be of them whose minds are firmly fixed and grounded in God. No act, however meritorious, did or can ever compare unto it. It is the king of all acts, and to this thy Lord, the All-Highest, the Most-Powerful, will testify...” (Bahá'u'lláh. *Gleanings*, p. 290)

- 31) 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *Selections*, p. 288.
- 32) Transformation is changing the form of a thing into something else in the same kingdom of existence. Transmuting is changing the nature of the thing. That is, there is transformation within conditions of existence, but not between them. A progressive transformation within a condition or Kingdom of existence reveals more complexity within the possibilities (qualities) of development of that condition, but no number of transformations adds up to a transmutation. A transmutation reveals qualities that cannot be manifested within the possibilities of a lower condition. The lower is not evil, but simply constrained by inherent limitations from manifesting the qualities of the higher. Transmutation is a difference of not, not of degree. It is the kind of thing Bahá'u'lláh refers to when he says that the “task of converting satanic strength into heavenly power is one that We have been empowered to accomplish.” (Bahá'u'lláh. *Gleanings*, p. 200)
- 33) Bahá'u'lláh. *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, pp. 113-114.
- 34) “Man’s actions are acceptable after his having recognized (the Manifestation).” (Bahá'u'lláh. *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 61) In one clear instance Bahá'u'lláh writes, “For the doings of men are all dependent upon Thy good pleasure, and are conditioned by Thy behest. Shouldst Thou regard him who hath broken the fast as one who hath observed it, such a man would be reckoned among them who from eternity hath been keeping the fast. And shouldst Thou decree that he who hath observed the fast hath broken it, that person would be numbered with such as have caused the Robe of Thy Revelation to be stained with dust, and been far removed from the crystal waters of this living Fountain...the excellence of all things is dependent upon Thy bidding and Thy word, and the virtue of every act is conditioned by Thy leave and the good pleasure of Thy will, and may recognize that the reins of men’s doings are within the grasp of Thine acceptance and Thy commandment.” (*Bahá’í Prayers*. 1991 edition. Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust. pp. 262-263.)
- 35) Bahá'u'lláh. *Gleanings*, p. 293.
- 36) Matthew 16:25
- 37) 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *Some Answered Questions*, p. 130
- 38) Bahá'u'lláh. *Tablets*, p. 189. In another place, Bahá'u'lláh says: “He, verily, will pay the doer of good, whether man or woman, his due recompense, wert thou to follow what hath been sent unto thee by Him Who is the All-Knowing, the All-Informed.” (Bahá'u'lláh. *Epistle*, pp. 60-61)
- 39) See 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 300-305.
- 40) 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *Some Answered Questions*, p. 238.
- 41) “Know thou that faith is of two kinds. The first is objective faith that is expressed by the outer man, obedience of the limbs and senses. The other faith is subjective, the unconscious obedience to the will of God. There is no doubt that, in the day of a Manifestation such as Christ, all contingent beings possessed subjective faith and had unconscious obedience to His Holiness Christ.
“For all parts of the creational world are of one whole. Christ the Manifestor reflecting the divine sun represented the whole. All the parts are subordinate and obedient to the whole.... This condition of unconscious obedience constitutes subjective faith. But the discerning faith that consists of true knowledge of God and the comprehension of the divine words, of such faith there is very little in any age. That is why His Holiness Christ said to His followers, ‘Many are called but few are chosen.’” (*Bahá’í World Faith: Selections from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*. 1969. Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust. p. 364) Faith is recognition of the Manifestation.
- 42) 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *Some Answered Questions*, p. 242.
- 43) Bahá'u'lláh. *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. 1992. Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, p. 61, para. 116) “Vision,” said Bahá'u'lláh, “acteth as the agent and guide for true knowledge. Indeed in the estimation of men of wisdom keenness of understanding is due to keenness of vision.” (Bahá'u'lláh. *Tablets*, p. 35)
- 44) 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 144-145.
- 45) 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *Bahá’í World Faith*, p. 372.
- 46) *Ibid.*, p. 370.
- 47) Plato, for example makes this distinction in *The Republic*. Consider, too, Bahá'u'lláh’s warning to scholars: “Knowledge is a light which God casteth into the heart of whomsoever He willeth. It is this kind of knowledge which is and hath ever been praiseworthy, and not the limited knowledge that hath sprung forth from veiled and obscured minds. This limited knowledge they even stealthily borrow one from the other, and vainly pride themselves therein!” (Bahá'u'lláh. *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 46.)
- 48) “As to thy question regarding discoveries made by the soul after it hath put off its human form: certainly, that world is a world of perceptions and discoveries, for the interposed veil will be lifted away and the human spirit will gaze upon souls that are above, below, and on a par with it. It is similar to the condition of the human being in the womb, where the eyes are veiled, and all things are hidden away from him. Once he is born out of the uterine world and entereth this life, he findeth it, in relation to that of the womb, to be a place of perceptions and discoveries, and he observeth all things through his outer eye. In the same way, once he hath departeth this life, he will behold, in that world, whatsoever was hidden from him here: but he will look upon and comprehend all things with his inner eye.” ('Abdu'l-Bahá. *Selections*, pp. 170-171)

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- 49) 'Abdu'l-Bahá quoted in Shoghi Effendi. *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*. 1969 impression. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust. p. 111.
- 50) The Book of Revelation 22:14.
- 51) "Just as the conception of faith hath existed from the beginning that hath no beginning, and will endure till the end that hath no end, in like manner, will the true believer eternally live and endure. His spirit will everlastingly circle round the Will of God. He will last as long as God, Himself, will last." (Bahá'u'lláh. *Gleanings*, p. 141.)
- 53) Bahá'u'lláh. *The Hidden Words* #13 Arabic.
- 54) Bahá'u'lláh. *Gleanings*, p. 169-170.
- 55) "(W)hosoever in every dispensation is born of the Spirit and is quickened by the breath of the Manifestation of Holiness, he verily is of those that have attained unto 'life' and 'resurrection' and have entered into the 'paradise' of the love of God. And whosoever is not of them, is condemned to 'death' and 'deprivation,' to the 'fire' of unbelief, and to the 'wrath of God.'" (Bahá'u'lláh. *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 118.) And: "Observe: those who in appearance were physically alive, Christ considered dead; for life is eternal life, and existence is the real existence. Wherever in the Holy Books they speak of raising the dead, the meaning is that the dead were blessed with eternal life." ('Abdu'l-Bahá. *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 101-102.)