

Trustworthiness: A Cardinal Bahá'í Virtue

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Extracts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

O people! The goodliest vesture in the sight of God in this day is trustworthiness. All bounty and honour shall be the portion of the soul that arrayeth itself with this greatest of adornments.
(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian) [1]

Regard thou faith as a tree. Its fruits, leaves, boughs and branches are, and have ever been, trustworthiness, truthfulness, uprightness and forbearance.
(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian) [2]

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", rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983), sec. 134, p. 290) [3]

Beautify your tongues, O people, with truthfulness, and adorn your souls with the ornament of honesty. Beware, O people, that ye deal not treacherously with any one. Be ye the trustees of God amongst His creatures, and the emblems of His generosity amidst His people. They that follow their lusts and corrupt inclinations, have erred and dissipated their efforts. They, indeed, are of the lost...
("Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh", sec. 136, p. 297) [4]

The purpose of the one true God in manifesting Himself is to summon all mankind to truthfulness and sincerity, to piety and trustworthiness, to resignation and submissiveness to the Will of God, to forbearance and kindness, to uprightness and wisdom. His object is to array every man with the mantle of a saintly character, and to adorn him with the ornament of holy and goodly deeds.
("Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh", sec. 137, p. 299) [5]

Say: Let truthfulness and courtesy be your adorning. Suffer not yourselves to be deprived of the robe of forbearance and justice, that the sweet savours of holiness may be wafted from your hearts upon all created things. Say: Beware, O people of Bahá, lest ye walk in the ways of them whose words differ from their deeds. Strive that ye may be enabled to manifest to the peoples of the earth the signs of God, and to mirror forth His commandments....

“Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh”, sec. 139, p. 305)

[6]

We ask God, exalted be His glory, to confirm each one of the friends in that land in the acquisition of such praiseworthy characteristics as shall conduce to the spread of justice and equity among the peoples of the world. The first, the fundamental purpose underlying creation hath ever been, and will continue to be, none other than the appearance of trustworthiness and godliness, of sincerity and goodwill amongst mankind, for these qualities are the cause of peace, security and tranquillity. Blessed are those who possess such virtues.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

[7]

I beseech Thee, O my God, by all the transcendent glory of Thy Name, to clothe Thy loved ones in the robe of justice and to illumine their beings with the light of trustworthiness. Thou art the One Who hath power to do as He pleaseth and Who holdeth within His grasp the reins of all things, visible and invisible.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Arabic)

[8]

Say: O people of God! Adorn your temples with the adornment of trustworthiness and piety. Help, then, your Lord with the hosts of goodly deeds and a praiseworthy character...

(“Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas”, (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1988), p. 120)

[9]

One day of days We repaired unto Our Green Island. Upon Our arrival, We beheld its streams flowing, and its trees luxuriant, and the sunlight playing in their midst. Turning Our face to the right, We beheld what the pen is powerless to describe; nor can it set forth that which the eye of the Lord of Mankind witnessed in that most sanctified, that most sublime, that blest, and most exalted Spot. Turning, then, to the left We gazed on one of the Beauties of the Most Sublime Paradise, standing on a pillar of light, and calling aloud saying: ‘O inmates of earth and heaven! Behold ye My beauty, and My radiance, and My revelation, and My effulgence. By God, the True One! I am Trustworthiness and the revelation thereof, and the beauty thereof. I will recompense whosoever will cleave unto Me, and recognize My rank and station, and hold fast unto My hem. I am the most great ornament of the people of Bahá, and the vesture of glory unto all who are in the kingdom of creation. I am the supreme instrument for the prosperity of the world, and the horizon of assurance unto all beings.’ Thus have We sent down for thee that which will draw men nigh unto the Lord of creation.

(“Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas”, p. 122)

[10]

The fourth Ṭaráz concerneth trustworthiness. Verily it is the door of security for all that dwell on earth and a token of glory on the part of the All-Merciful. He who partaketh thereof hath indeed partaken of the treasures of wealth and prosperity. Trustworthiness is the greatest portal leading unto the tranquillity and security of the people. In truth the stability of every affair hath depended and doth depend upon it. All the domains of power, of grandeur and of wealth are illumined by its light.

(“Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas”, p. 37)

[11]

Were a man in this day to adorn himself with the raiment of trustworthiness it were better for him in the sight of God than that he should journey on foot towards the holy court and be blessed with meeting the Adored One and standing before His Seat of Glory. Trustworthiness is as a stronghold to the city of humanity, and as eyes to the human temple. Whosoever remaineth deprived thereof shall, before His Throne, be reckoned as one bereft of vision.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

[12]

We call to remembrance every one of the friends and exhort them to have regard to trustworthiness, which is a charge that God hath entrusted to the safe-keeping of His servants; to righteousness, which He hath made to be a citadel of strength for His well-favoured ones and faithful, humble servants; and to whatever virtues shall conduce to their dignity and honour among all peoples.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Arabic)

[13]

O ye friends of God in His cities and His loved ones in His lands! This Wronged One enjoineeth on you honesty and piety. Blessed the city that shineth by their light. Through them man is exalted, and the door of security is unlocked before the face of all creation. Happy the man that cleaveth fast unto them, and recognizeth their virtue, and woe betide him that denieth their station.

(“Epistle to the Son of the Wolf”, rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1988), p.

23)

[14]

Be ye God’s manifestations of trustworthiness in every land. So perfectly should ye mirror forth this quality that even were ye to travel through cities heaped with gold, your gaze would not for a single moment be seduced by its allure. This is the standard required of you, O assemblage of true believers. Assist ye your gracious Lord by your deeds so that in all the worlds of God His servants may perceive from you the sweet savours of the one true God.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Arabic)

[15]

He is the true servant of God who, in this day, were he to pass through cities of silver and gold, would not deign to look upon them, and whose heart would remain pure and undefiled from whatever things can be seen in this world, be they its goods or its treasures. I swear by the Sun of Truth! The breath of such a man is endowed with potency, and his words with attraction...

(Cited in Shoghi Effendi, “The Advent of Divine Justice” (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1984), p. 23)

[16]

Say: O bearer of My Name! Upon thee be My glory and My loving-kindness. Thou hast ever been adorned with the fair robe of trustworthiness and piety. These twin qualities are as two companions for thee in whom thou mayest find solace. They are as two sentinels who shall stand watch over thee, and two guardians that shall, by God’s leave, keep thee from harm.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

[17]

Cleave ye to the hem of the raiment of virtue and keep fast hold of the cord of piety and trustworthiness. Have regard to the good of the world and not to your own selfish desires. O peoples of God! Ye are the shepherds of the world. Keep ye your flocks unbesmirched by the mire of evil passion and desire, and adorn each one with the ornament of the fear of God. This is the firm command that hath issued forth in this day from the pen of the Ever-Abiding. I swear by the righteousness of God! The sword of upright conduct and a goodly character is sharper than blades of steel.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian and Arabic)

[18]

We ask God graciously to grant that all may evince such fairness of character, such goodness of deed and kindness of word as will meet with His good pleasure. It hath been decreed that the citadels of men’s hearts should be subdued through the hosts of a noble character and praiseworthy deeds. Contention, discord, strife and sedition have all been forbidden in the Book of God. Beseech the Lord that He deprive not His dominions of the effulgent light of the sun of

trustworthiness, nor deny them the radiance of the Day-Star of truthfulness or the splendour of the orb of justice and equity. Trustworthiness and piety are even as two luminaries shining resplendent above the horizon of the heaven of the Tablet in which are inscribed the ordinances of God. Well is it with them that have discerned them, and woe betide the heedless!

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian and Arabic) [19]

We have counselled all people, in the most clear and eloquent language, to adorn their characters with trustworthiness and godliness, and with such qualities as are conducive to the elevation of man's station in the world of being. This Wronged One testifieth that the purpose for which mortal men have, from utter nothingness, stepped into the realm of being, is that they may work for the betterment of the world and live together in concord and harmony. Dissension and strife have always been, and shall remain, rejected by God. The Books, the Scriptures and Holy Writings of previous ages have all proclaimed the joyful tidings that the purpose underlying this most mighty Revelation is none other than the rehabilitation of the world and its nations; that perchance the power of utterance may prevail over the power of arms, and the world's affairs be administered through the potency of love. We ask God, the True One, to invest all with the mantle of trustworthiness, for that is the world's comeliest garment.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian) [20]

Cleave thou to the fear of God and to whatsoever hath been revealed in His Book: thus biddeth thee He Who is the Word of Truth and the Knower of things unseen. Say: trustworthiness is the sun of the heaven of My commandments, truthfulness is its moon, and praiseworthy attributes are its stars. Yet the people, for the most part, understand not.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Arabic) [21]

We send Our greetings to the faithful followers of the one true God, who have tasted of the sweet waters of loving-kindness and directed their gaze toward the Realm of Glory. We enjoin upon them all to conduct themselves with trustworthiness and rectitude and to lead chaste and virtuous lives.

O beloved friends! Whoever adorneth his character with such virtues will be reckoned among the true servants of God, and his name will be commemorated by the Concourse on High; but he who depriveth himself thereof shall not be accounted of their number. Strive diligently to acquire such goodly qualities and traits of character as will be the cause of everlasting salvation. Make not the fruits of the tree of trustworthiness targets for the stones of treachery, nor rend its boughs asunder with the instruments of tyranny and oppression. Truthfulness and sincerity have always been the ornament of a man's character, and so they shall ever be.

O friends! Let not the deceptive glamour of this fleeting world—to whose impermanence all things attest—cut you off from God's enduring bestowals, nor deprive you from partaking of the spiritual sustenance that He hath sent down from the heaven of His bounty. Keep your gaze centred on Him Who is the Sovereign Word of Truth: place your whole reliance upon Him, and beg of Him to destine for you what is meet and fitting. Resign your affairs into the hands of God, the Lord of creation. Call ye to mind the people of former ages: whither are they sped, the prideful and vainglorious, the workers of iniquity and unrighteousness? Where are their hoards of treasure, their palaces, citadels and thrones? Reflect upon those bygone days, and the vicissitudes of which they tell, and be ye admonished thereby. The prayer of this Wronged One is that God may assist all to do what shall meet with His favour and acceptance.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian) [22]

Thou art most dear to Us; and, as We love thee, so love We all in whom may be perceived the goodly adornments of trustworthiness and uprightness, and such qualities of virtue and integrity

as have been enjoined upon men in the Book of God, the Lord of the Mighty Throne. Happy the lot of the soul that hath perceived the fragrant breaths of divine utterance, and given ear to what hath been revealed by God, the Omniscient, the All-Informed. God hath, verily, willed that His Cause should be assisted by the hosts of goodly deeds and a righteous character. Blessed, then, be the man that apprehendeth this truth and acteth conformably; and woe betide those who ignore or deny it!

(From a Tablet—translated from the Arabic) [23]

We send our greetings to the friends and exhort them to conduct themselves with rectitude, trustworthiness, piety, virtue and loving-kindness—with all those qualities, in fine, that will serve to bring forth man's true station in the world of being. He Who is the Eternal Truth, exalted by His glory, hath ever loved faithfulness. Well is it with him who adorneth his temple with its raiment, and is honoured by this greatest of distinctions.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian) [24]

Trustworthiness, wisdom and honesty are, of a truth, God's beauteous adornments for His creatures. These fair garments are a befitting vesture for every temple. Happy are those that comprehend, and well is it with them that acquire such virtues.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian and Arabic) [25]

Cleave ye at all times to the cord of trustworthiness and hold fast the hem of the garment of truthfulness: thus biddeth you He Who is the Truthful, the Trusted One. God is my witness, trustworthiness is a light that shineth refulgently from the heavens, and leadeth to the exaltation of the Cause of God, the Omnipotent, the Incomparable, the All-Praised. Whoso hath remained faithful to the Covenant hath been steadfast in his adherence to trustworthiness, whilst those who have repudiated it have erred grievously.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Arabic) [26]

It behoveth ye all so to adorn your inner and outer beings that, robed in trustworthiness, girt with righteousness and arrayed in truthfulness and rectitude, ye may become a means for the exaltation of the Cause and the education of the human race.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian) [27]

The companions of God are, in this day, the lump that must leaven the peoples of the world. They must show forth such trustworthiness, such truthfulness and perseverance, such deeds and character that all mankind may profit by their example....

(Cited in Shoghi Effendi, "The Advent of Divine Justice", p. 23) [28]

They who dwell within the Tabernacle of God, and are established upon the seats of everlasting glory, will refuse, though they be dying of hunger, to stretch their hands, and seize unlawfully the property of their neighbour, however vile and worthless he may be. The purpose of the one true God in manifesting Himself is to summon all mankind to truthfulness and sincerity, to piety and trustworthiness, to resignation and submissiveness to the will of God, to forbearance and kindness, to uprightness and wisdom. His object is to array every man with the mantle of a saintly character, and to adorn him with the ornament of holy and goodly deeds....

(Cited in Shoghi Effendi, "The Advent of Divine Justice", p. 24) [29]

O My loved ones! We charge you to conduct yourselves with trustworthiness and rectitude, that through you the attributes of your Lord may be manifested to His servants and the evidences of His exalted holiness may appear in every land. He is, verily, the Ordainer, the Ancient of Days.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Arabic)

[30]

I counsel you, O friends of God, to comport yourselves with the utmost trustworthiness in your dealings with my servants and people. By its aid shall the Cause of God be promoted throughout the world and its exalted sanctity become manifest to all creation. Be ye the repositories of the trust of all men. Thus have We commanded them in the Tablets. Thy Lord is, verily, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Arabic)

[31]

O friends of God in every land! This Wronged One adjureth you by the Best-Beloved of the world, Who is calling aloud in the Kingdom of Utterance, that ye deal not faithlessly with the substance of your fellow men. Be ye the trustees of God in His dominions and the embodiments of truthfulness throughout His realms. Blessed the man that heedeth the counsels of God and observeth His precepts.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Arabic)

[32]

We have enjoined upon all to become engaged in some trade or profession, and have accounted such occupation to be an act of worship. Before all else, however, thou shouldst receive, as a sign of God's acceptance, the mantle of trustworthiness from the hands of divine favour; for trustworthiness is the chief means of attracting confirmation and prosperity. We entreat God to make of it a radiant and mercifully showering rain-cloud that shall bring success and blessings to thy affairs. He of a truth is the All-Bountiful, the Gracious.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian and Arabic)

[33]

Commerce is as a heaven, whose sun is trustworthiness and whose moon is truthfulness. The most precious of all things in the estimation of Him Who is the Sovereign Truth is trustworthiness: thus hath it been recorded in the sacred Scroll of God. Entreat ye the one true God to enable all mankind to attain to this most noble and lofty station.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian and Arabic)

[34]

In connection with the demands for payment of which thou hast written in thy letter, it is manifestly clear that anyone who hath the ability to settle his debts, and yet neglecteth to do so, hath not acted in accordance with the good pleasure of the one true God. Those who incur debts should strive to settle them with all diligence and application. God's binding commandments with respect to trustworthiness, uprightness and the honouring of rights have been recorded in clear and perspicuous language in all the sacred Books, Tablets, Scriptures and holy Writings. Well is it with him whom the fleeting vanities of the world have not deprived of a lasting adornment, and whom avarice and negligence have not shut out from the illumination of the sun of trustworthiness. These matters, however, depend on the existence of ability, for the making of a demand is contingent upon ability to meet it. By the Lord of the Book, the former is not permissible in the absence of the latter. To this testifieth the Verse: "Respite thy debtor till he findeth means to pay."¹

(From a Tablet—translated from the Arabic)

[35]

In most of Our Tablets We have counselled the servants of God to be trustworthy and righteous, just and fair-minded. We have commanded them to eschew iniquity and evil and bidden them practise piety and the fear of God. The heedless, however, have been led only into ever-increasing loss. Truly, had God's creatures but conformed their actions to the will and pleasure of God, exalted be His glory, the whole earth would by now be seen as a single country, a blessed land of beauty and light.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Arabic)

[36]

Say: desist from wickedness and transgression, and lay hold on trustworthiness and piety, candour and sincerity. This is the commandment of God, the Lord of the Judgement Day. He Whom the world hath wronged speaketh not through the promptings of worldly desire, but in accordance with what hath been revealed in the Book of God, the Ordainer, the Ancient of Days. Righteousness of character is the means whereby the high stations attainable by man in the world of being may be made evident: to this testify God's honoured servants, whom the evil whisperings of the people have not deterred from arising to render service to their Lord, the King of the Mighty Throne.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Arabic)

[37]

Be thou of the people of hellfire,
but be not a hypocrite.

Be thou an unbeliever,
but be not a plotter.

Make thy home in taverns,
but tread not the path
of the mischief-maker.

Fear thou God,
but not the priest.

Give to the executioner thy head,
but not thy heart.

Let thine abode be under the stone,
but seek not the shelter of the cleric.

Thus doth the Holy Reed intone its melodies, and the Nightingale of Paradise warble its song, so that He may infuse life eternal into the mortal frames of men, impart to the temples of dust the essence of the Holy Spirit and the heavenly Light, and draw the transient world, through the potency of a single word, unto the Everlasting Kingdom.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

[38]

Extract from the Utterances of the Báb

One day the Báb asked that some honey be purchased for Him. The price at which it had been bought seemed to Him exorbitant. He refused it and said: "Honey of a superior quality could no doubt have been purchased at a lower price. I who am your example have been a merchant by profession. It behoves you in all your transactions to follow in My way. You must neither defraud your neighbour nor allow him to defraud you. Such was the way of your Master. The shrewdest and ablest of men were unable to deceive Him, nor did He on His part choose to act ungenerously towards the meanest and most helpless of creatures." He insisted that the attendant who had made that purchase should return and bring back to Him a honey superior in quality and cheaper in price.

(Cited in "The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation", trans. and ed. Shoghi Effendi, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), p. 303)

[39]

Extracts from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

Truthfulness is the foundation of all human virtues. Without truthfulness progress and success, in all the worlds of God, are impossible for any soul. When this holy attribute is established in man, all the divine qualities will also be acquired.

(Cited in Shoghi Effendi, "The Advent of Divine Justice", p. 26)

[40]

O Šádiq!² Truthfulness, uprightness and integrity are the attributes of the righteous and the hallmarks of the pure. Truthfulness is the goodliest of qualities as it comprehendeth all other virtues. A truthful person will be protected from all moral afflictions, will shrink from every evil deed, and be preserved from every wicked act, inasmuch as all vices and misdeeds are the very antithesis of truthfulness, and a truthful man will hold them all in utter abhorrence.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

[41]

O pure soul! Follow thou in the footsteps of the truthful and tread the way of the righteous, so that, through truthfulness, thou mayest come to occupy a Seat of Truth,³ and, through righteousness, thou mayest attain to abiding honour. If the sum of all sins were to be weighed in the balance, falsehood would, on its own, countervail them; nay, its evils would even outweigh them and its detriment prove greater. It were better for thee that thou shouldst be a blasphemer and tell the truth than that thou shouldst mouth the formulas of faith and yet be a liar. These clear words are addressed as an admonition to the peoples of the world. Render thanks unto God that it is through thee that this counsel hath been addressed to all mankind.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

[42]

O army of God! Through the protection and help vouchsafed by the Blessed Beauty—may my life be a sacrifice to His loved ones—ye must conduct yourselves in such a manner that ye may stand out distinguished and brilliant as the sun among other souls. Should any one of you enter a city, he should become a centre of attraction by reason of his sincerity, his faithfulness and love, his honesty and fidelity, his truthfulness and loving-kindness towards all the peoples of the world, so that the people of that city may cry out and say: 'This man is unquestionably a Bahá'í, for his manners, his behaviour, his conduct, his morals, his nature, and disposition reflect the attributes of the Bahá'ís.' Not until ye attain this station can ye be said to have been faithful to the Covenant and Testament of God. For He hath, through irrefutable Texts, entered into a binding Covenant with us all, requiring us to act in accordance with His sacred instructions and counsels.

("Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá" [rev. ed.], (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), sec. 35, pp. 70–71)

[43]

...we, and the friends of God, should on no account slacken our efforts to be loyal, sincere and men of good will. We should at all times manifest our truthfulness and sincerity, nay rather, we must be constant in our faithfulness and trustworthiness, and occupy ourselves in offering prayers for the good of all.

("Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá", sec. 225, p. 294)

[44]

The primary characteristic of true believers is trustworthiness whereas the primary characteristic of the rebellious is faithlessness.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

[45]

If a man were to perform every good work, yet fail in the least scruple to be entirely trustworthy and honest, his good works would become as dry tinder and his failure as a soul-consuming fire. If, on the other hand, he should fall short in all his affairs, yet act with trustworthiness and honesty, all his defects would ultimately be righted, all injuries remedied, and all infirmities healed. Our meaning is that, in the sight of God, trustworthiness is the bedrock of

His Faith and the foundation of all virtues and perfections. A man deprived of this quality is destitute of everything. What shall faith and piety avail if trustworthiness be lacking? Of what consequence can they be? What benefit or advantage can they confer? Wherefore ‘Abdu’l-Bahá counselleth the friends—nay, rather, fervently imploreth them—so vigilantly to guard the sanctity of the Cause of God and preserve their own dignity as individuals that all nations shall come to know and honour them for their trustworthiness and integrity. They can render no greater service than this today. To act otherwise would be to take an axe to the root of the Cause of God—we take refuge with God from this heinous transgression and pray that He will protect His loved ones from committing so flagrant a wrong.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

[46]

You have written on the question of how the friends should proceed in their business dealings with one another. This is a question of the greatest importance and a matter that deserveth the liveliest concern. In relations of this kind, the friends of God should act with the utmost trustworthiness and integrity. To be remiss in this area would be to turn one’s face away from the counsels of the Blessed Beauty and the holy precepts of God. If a man in his own home doth not treat his relations and friends with entire trustworthiness and integrity, his dealings with the outside world—no matter how much trustworthiness and honesty he may bring to them—will prove barren and unproductive. First one should order one’s own domestic affairs, then attend to one’s business with the public. One should certainly not argue that the friends need not be treated with undue care, or that it is unnecessary for them to attach too great importance to the practice of trustworthiness in their dealings with one another, but that it is in their relations with strangers that correct behaviour is essential. Talk like this is sheer fantasy and will lead to detriment and loss. Blessed be the soul that shineth with the light of trustworthiness among the people and becometh a sign of perfection amidst all men.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

[47]

Since the orderly running of your association dependeth upon the devotion, integrity, fair-mindedness and sanctity of purpose manifested by the friends of God, they should show forth in their management of its affairs such purity, nobility and far-sighted wisdom that they will become a model for other societies, and all people may be edified and enlightened by their example. In this way the Bahá’ís will become known to all as people who are dependable and honest, virtuous and enlightened, pure and refined; who are industrious and high-principled, liberal-minded and promoters of freedom; whose concern is to serve the common good, not to advance their own interests, and whose aim is to further the welfare and prosperity of the people, not to foster their own well-being.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

[48]

Your criterion should be to pursue your commercial activities with such fairness and equity as to be a cause of guidance to others. The friends of God should, through the instrumentality of their business, lead the people to God’s path, and make them so astonished as to exclaim: “How great is their truthfulness, how high their trustworthiness, and how true is their good will!”

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

[49]

Every business company should be established on divine principles. Its foundations should be trustworthiness, piety and truthfulness in order to protect the rights of the people.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

[50]

Commerce, agriculture and industry should not, in truth, be a bar to service of the one true God. Indeed, such occupations are most potent instruments and clear proofs for the manifestation

of the evidences of one's piety, of one's trustworthiness and of the virtues of the All-Merciful Lord.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian) [51]

Ye who are the sincere well-wishers of the state, who are the dutiful and compliant subjects of the government, should occupy yourselves in constant service. Anyone who entereth the employ of the government should show forth in all his deeds and actions the highest degree of rectitude and honesty, of temperance and self-discipline, of purity and sanctity, of justice and equity. If, God forbid, he should be guilty of the least breach of trust, or approach his duties in a slack or desultory fashion, or extort so much as a farthing from the populace, or seek to further his own selfish interests and personal gain—then it is certain that he shall be deprived of the outpourings of God's grace.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian) [52]

In discharging the functions of the office to which thou hast been appointed, thy conduct and actions should attest to the highest standard of trustworthiness and honesty, to a degree of sincerity that is altogether above suspicion, and to an integrity that is immune to the promptings of self-interest. Thus shall all know that the Bahá'ís are the embodiments of probity, and the very essence of spotless virtue. If they accept office, their motive is to render service to the whole of humanity, not to seek their own self-interest; and their object is to vindicate the cause of truth, not to give themselves over to self-indulgence and base ingratitude.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian) [53]

As for those who are engaged in government service, they should perform their duties with the utmost fidelity, trustworthiness, rectitude, uprightness, integrity and high-mindedness. Let them not tarnish their good repute by pursuing personal interests, nor, for the sake of transient worldly benefits, make themselves objects of public odium and outcasts of the Threshold of Grandeur.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian) [54]

Those persons who are selected to serve the public, or are appointed to administrative positions, should perform their duties in a spirit of true servitude and ready compliance. That is to say, they should be distinguished by their goodly disposition and virtuous character, content themselves with their allotted remuneration, and act with trustworthiness in all their doings. They should keep themselves aloof from unworthy motives, and be far removed above covetous designs; for rectitude, probity and righteousness are among the most potent means for attracting the grace of God and securing both the prosperity of the country and the welfare of the people. Glory and honour for man are not to be found in fortunes and riches, least of all in those which have been unlawfully amassed through extortion, embezzlement and corruption practised at the expense of an exploited populace. Supreme honour, nobility and greatness in the human world, and true felicity in this life and the life to come—all consist in equity and uprightness, sanctity and detachment. If a man would seek distinction, he should suffice himself with a frugal provision, seek to better the lot of the poor of the realm, choose the way of justice and fair-mindedness, and tread the path of high-spirited service. Such a one, needy though he be, shall win imperishable riches and attain unto everlasting honour.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian) [55]

If any of the friends should enter into the service of the government, they should make their occupation a means of drawing nearer to the divine Threshold: they should act with probity and uprightness, rigorously shun all forms of venality and corruption, and content themselves with the salaries they are receiving, taking pride, rather, in the degree of sagacity, competence and

judgement that they can bring to their work. If a person content himself with a single loaf of bread, and perform his duties with as much justice and fair-mindedness as lieth within his power, he will be the prince of mortals, and the most praiseworthy of men. Noble and distinguished will he be, despite his empty purse! Pre-eminent will he rank among the free, although his garb be old and worn! For man, praise and glory reside in virtuous and noble qualities; honour and distinction in nearness to the divine Threshold. The world's wealth is, by contrast, the stuff of illusion.⁴ Those who lust after it are the followers of evil and, ere long, they shall be plunged into confusion and despair. Which is better—that a man should be thus, or that he should comport himself with consecration and sanctity of purpose and stand out conspicuously for his integrity, uprightness and honesty? Nay, such qualities are better than the riches of Korah,⁵ and dearer than all the treasures of existence.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

[56]

If one of the friends ... be appointed to a high administrative office, he should strive diligently to perform the duties committed to his charge with perfect honesty, integrity, sincerity, rectitude and uprightness. If, however, he abuse his position through corrupt or mercenary behaviour, he will be held in detestation at the Threshold of Grandeur and incur the wrath of the Abhá Beauty—nay, he shall be forsaken by the one true God and all who adore Him. So far from acting thus, he should content himself with his salary and allowances, seek out the way of righteousness, and dedicate his life to the service of state and people. Such must be the conduct and bearing of the Bahá'ís. Whoso transgresseth these bounds shall fall at length into manifest loss.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

[57]

Those souls who are employed in government departments should approach their duties with entire detachment, integrity and independence of spirit, and with complete consecration and sanctity of purpose. Content with the wages they are receiving, they should see that they do not stain their fair character through acts of bribery and fraud. Were one of the friends in this day to misappropriate so much as a single penny, the sacred mantle of God's Cause would become sullied by his action and the shame of it would attach to the whole community. Heaven forbid! Nay, rather, the government and people should come to repose such trust in the Bahá'ís as to wish to commit all affairs of state throughout the provinces into the chaste, pure hands of God's well-beloved.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

[58]

All government employees, whether of high or low rank, should, with perfect integrity, probity and rectitude, content themselves with the modest stipends and allowances that are theirs. They should keep their hands unsullied and preserve their fair name from blemish.... If a man deal faithlessly with a just government he shall have dealt faithlessly with God; and if he render it faithful service he shall have rendered that service to God.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

[59]

Let them perform their services with complete sanctity and detachment, and on no account defile themselves by receiving bribes, harbouring unseemly motives, or engaging in noxious practices. Let them be content with their wages, and seek distinction in truthfulness, straightforwardness, and the pursuit of virtue and excellence; for vanity in riches is worthy of none but the base, and pride in possessions beseemeth only the foolish. To attain to true glory and honour, man should exercise justice and equity, forbear to act in an oppressive manner, render service to his government, and work for the good of his fellow-citizens. Were he to seek after aught else but this he would indeed be in manifest loss.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

[60]

How foolish and ignorant must a man be, how base his nature, and how vile the clay of which he is fashioned, if he would defile himself with the contamination of bribery, corruption and perfidy towards the state! Truly, the vermin of the earth are to be preferred to such people!

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

[61]

If it should happen that one of the friends be called upon to serve his country and people in some capacity, he should apply himself to his work with heart and soul, and discharge his duties with perfect honesty, trustworthiness and godliness.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

[62]

Extracts from Letters Written by Shoghi Effendi

These are the days for rendering the divine Cause victorious and effective aid! The victory of God's Faith is dependent upon teaching; and teaching is conditional upon righteous actions and goodly deeds and conduct. The foundation-stone of a life lived in the way of God is the pursuit of moral excellence and the acquisition of a character endowed with qualities that are well-pleasing in His sight. The Bahá'ís should adorn themselves with this holy raiment; with this mighty sword they should conquer the citadels of men's hearts. People have grown weary and impatient of rhetoric and discourse, of preaching and sermonizing. In this day, the one thing that can deliver the world from its travail and attract the hearts of its peoples is deeds, not words; example, not precept; saintly virtues, not statements and charters issued by governments and nations on socio-political affairs. In all matters, great or small, word must be the complement of deed, and deed the companion of word: each must supplement, support and reinforce the other. It is in this respect that the Bahá'ís must seek distinction over other peoples and nations, whom the Pen of the Most High has epitomized in the following words: "Their words are the pride of the world, and their deeds are the shame of the nations."

(8 December 1923 to a Bahá'í community—translated from the Persian)

[63]

The employment that the Bahá'ís accept, the tasks and duties that they perform, should be of a kind whose benefits accrue to the nation as a whole and not such as are a means of profit to a small circle of high officials and a few select individuals. Further, the beloved friends and members of the Assemblies should, in the manifold circumstances of their lives and in all their multifarious dealings and pursuits, by their deeds, their bearing and demeanour, seek to demonstrate to their fellow-countrymen the excellence of this sacred Cause, to vindicate its truth, and give living testimony to its potency and the sublimity of its spirit. It is thus that the friends should proceed, not confining themselves to the delivery of the message, to explanations, expositions and elucidations. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Chief Interpreter of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, has written:

Wherefore it is incumbent upon all Bahá'ís to ponder this very delicate and vital matter in their hearts, that, unlike other religions, they may not content themselves with the noise, the clamour, the hollowness of religious doctrine. Nay, rather, they should exemplify in every aspect of their lives those attributes and virtues that are born of God and should arise to distinguish themselves by their goodly behaviour. They should justify their claim to be Bahá'ís by deeds and not by name. He is a true Bahá'í who strives by day and by night to progress and advance along the path of human endeavour, whose most cherished desire is so to live and act as to enrich and illuminate the world, whose source of inspiration is the essence of divine virtue, whose aim in life is so to conduct himself as to be the cause of infinite progress. Only when he attains unto such perfect gifts can it be said of him that he is a true Bahá'í. For in this holy Dispensation, the crowning glory of bygone ages and cycles, true faith is no mere acknowledgement of the unity of God, but rather the living of a life that will manifest all the perfections and virtues implied in such belief.⁶

See how firm and strongly-worded is this statement of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s, and how demanding its requirements! Notwithstanding, it is only when the Bahá’is are able fully and befittingly to distinguish their characters by the adornment of these divine virtues that they will appear before the eyes of the world in a worthy and appropriate manner and that the name of Bahá’u’lláh will set the universe ablaze.

(30 October 1924 to a Local Spiritual Assembly—translated from the Persian) [64]

Nothing but the abundance of our actions, nothing but the purity of our lives and the integrity of our character, can in the last resort establish our claim that the Bahá’í spirit is in this day the sole agency that can translate a long-cherished ideal into an enduring achievement.

(24 November 1924 to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, published in “Bahá’í Administration: Selected Messages 1922–1932” [rev. ed.], (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1980), p. 68) [65]

This is the day for excellence of character and conduct. We should all adorn ourselves with these ornaments of the Kingdom while still in this world of being, so that we may render fit service to the Threshold of the Most Merciful.

(In the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter dated 24 November 1924 written on his behalf to an individual believer—translated from the Persian) [66]

The responsibilities of the members of the Spiritual Assemblies that are engaged in teaching the Cause of God in Eastern lands have been clearly laid down in the holy Texts.

These bid them to work towards the improvement of morals and the spread of learning; to strive to eradicate ignorance and unenlightenment, eliminate prejudice, and reinforce the foundation of true faith in people’s hearts and minds; to seek to develop self-reliance and avoidance of blind imitation; to aim to enhance the efficient management of their affairs, and observe purity and refinement in all circumstances; to show their commitment to truthfulness and honesty, and their ability to conduct themselves with frankness, courage and resolution.

They similarly enjoin them to lend their support to agricultural and industrial development, to consolidate the foundations of mutual assistance and cooperation, to promote the emancipation and advancement of women and support the compulsory education of both sexes, to encourage application of the principles of consultation among all classes, and to adhere in all dealings to a standard of scrupulous integrity.

They further impress upon them the virtue of trustworthiness and godliness, of purity of motive, kindness of heart, and detachment from the fetters of this material world. They call upon them so to sanctify themselves that they will rise above the corrupt and evil influences that exercise so powerful a sway over the Western world, and charge them to abide by the counsel of moderation at all times and under all conditions. They urge them to make detailed inquiry into the various branches of contemporary learning—arts and sciences alike—and to concentrate their attention on serving the general interests of the people; to deepen themselves by attentive study of the sacred Texts, and to apply the divine guidance they contain to the circumstances, needs and conditions of society today; to refrain from entering into the tangled affairs of political parties and to have neither concern for, nor involvement in, the controversies of politicians, the wranglings of theologians or any of the ailing social theories current amongst men.

They finally exhort them to be sincerely obedient, in both thought and word, to the laws duly enacted by the government of the realm, and to distance themselves from the methods, concepts and illgrounded arguments of extreme traditionalists and modernists alike; to accord honour, veneration and respect to—and endorse the efforts of—exponents of the arts and sciences, and to esteem and revere those who are possessed of extensive knowledge and scholarly erudition; to

uphold the right of freedom of conscience; and to abstain from criticizing and disparaging the manners, customs and beliefs of other individuals, peoples and nations.

These are among the most pressing requirements for the nations of the East. These are the basic, the binding, the inescapable responsibilities of the trustees of the Merciful, the representatives of the Bahá'í communities, the members of the Spiritual Assemblies.

(30 January 1926 to the Spiritual Assemblies throughout the East—translated from the Persian) [67]

The people of Bahá, under the jurisdiction of whatsoever state or government they may be residing, should conduct themselves with honesty and sincerity, trustworthiness and rectitude. They should concern themselves with men's hearts, and hold themselves aloof from the fluctuations and limitations of the contingent world. They are neither thirsty for prominence, nor acquisitive of power; they are neither adepts at dissimulation and hypocrisy, nor are they seekers after wealth and influence; they neither crave for the pomp and circumstance of high office, nor do they lust after the glory of titles and ranks. They are averse to affectation and ostentation, and shrink from the use of coercive force; they have closed their eyes to all but God, and set their hearts on the firm and incontrovertible promises of their Lord; they have severed the bonds of earthly expectations and attachments, and connected their lives to the One Peerless Beloved. Oblivious to themselves, they have occupied their energies in working towards the good of society; and, steadfastly adhering to the sound and wholesome principles of God's Faith, they have turned their backs on the morbid imaginings, the incoherent theories, and pernicious ideas of the victims of caprice and folly. While vigilantly refusing to accept political posts, they should wholeheartedly welcome the chance to assume administrative positions; for the primary purpose of the people of Bahá is to advance the interests and promote the welfare of the nation, not to further the devious ends and designs of the profligate and shameless. Such is the method of the Bahá'ís; such is the conduct of all spiritually illumined souls; and aught else is manifest error.

(February 1927 to the believers throughout the East—translated from the Persian) [68]

In their homes, ... in the daily contact of business transactions, ... the community of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh should satisfy themselves that in the eyes of the world at large and in the sight of their vigilant Master they are the living witnesses of those truths which He fondly cherished and tirelessly championed to the very end of His days...

(12 April 1927 to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, published in "Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages 1922–1932", p. 130) [69]

Let them so shape their lives and regulate their conduct that no charge of secrecy, of fraud, of bribery or of intimidation may, however ill-founded, be brought against them.

(21 March 1932 to the believers throughout North America, published in "The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters", rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), p. 64) [70]

It [rectitude of conduct] must be constantly reflected in the business dealings of all its members, in their domestic lives, in all manner of employment, and in any service they may, in the future, render their government or people....

(25 December 1938 to the believers throughout North America, published as "The Advent of Divine Justice", p. 26) [71]

Extracts from Letters Written on Behalf of Shoghi Effendi
(To individual believers unless otherwise stated)

The permanence and stability achieved by any association, group or nation is a result of—and dependent upon—the soundness and worth of the principles upon which it bases the running of its affairs and the direction of its activities. The guiding principles of the Bahá'ís are: honesty, love, charity and trustworthiness; the setting of the common good above private interest; and the practice of godliness, virtue and moderation. Ultimately, then, their preservation and happiness are assured. Whatever misfortunes they may encounter, wrought by the wiles of the schemer and ill-wisher, shall all pass away like waves, and hardship shall be succeeded by joy. The friends are under the protection of the resistless power and inscrutable providence of God. There is no doubt that every blessed soul who brings his life into harmony with this all-swaying power shall give lustre to his works and win an ample recompense. The actions of those who choose to set themselves against it should provoke not antipathy on our part, but prayers for their guidance. Such was the way of the Bahá'ís in days gone by, and so must it be, now and for always.

(18 December 1925 to a National Spiritual Assembly—translated from the Persian) [72]

The Pen of the Most High has recorded: “Fear of God is the greatest commander that can render the Cause of God victorious, and the hosts which best befit this commander have ever been and are an upright character and pure and goodly deeds.”⁷ The people of Bahá should, then, lead their lives and conduct their affairs with the highest degree of sanctity and godliness, and uncompromisingly repudiate and dissociate themselves from the disreputable practices, the deplorable modes and customs prevalent among the people of the West. Piety and devotion should be the object of all who would be accounted lovers of this Cause, and the adornment of every righteous soul; otherwise, slowly but surely, the illumination conferred on the innermost reality of men’s hearts by the virtues of the human world will flicker and fade and die away, to be overwhelmed by the engulfing darkness of vice and depravity. Courtesy and dignity are what bring nobility and standing to a man; whereas frivolity and facetiousness, ribaldry and effrontery will lead to his abasement, degradation and humiliation. The Bahá'ís should, indeed must, seek to distinguish themselves in all things, for what difference else would there be between them and others? Any action, therefore, that is calculated to detract from the dignity of man’s station must be steadfastly avoided and shunned.

(21 January 1928—translated from the Persian) [73]

You brought up the question of showing forth honesty and trustworthiness when engaged in the service of the state. These are qualities that must distinguish all the activities of the friends, and the acquisition of which is a religious duty incumbent on every believer. That some of the leaders whom they serve may be unappreciative of their efforts, or fail correctly to value their services, should give no cause for surprise. The reason for such conduct is the remoteness of such men from the True Source of justice, equity and fair-mindedness. We should keep our vision centred on God, not on the doings of His creatures. Every spotless action, every sincere intent of ours will win the commendation of the True One, will be exalted and magnified by Him, and requited with a bounteous recompense.

(8 March 1948—translated from the Persian) [74]

It is with deep concern indeed that he has learned of the difficulties you have encountered in your business, and he was particularly grieved to hear of the bitter competition you are meeting from some Persians in New York, who seem determined to ruin and force you out of business, despite the fact that you have shown them kindness, and refused to deal with them harshly. Though the Guardian would advise that you continue keeping such a true Bahá'í attitude of forbearance, he wishes you at the same time not to give way, and not to allow any threat on their part to discourage or demoralize you. However unethical the methods they may employ, it should be your firm conviction that such malicious devices cannot in the long run succeed, and that the

most effective way of counteracting them is for you to maintain unreservedly the one true standard of business conduct inculcated in the Teachings.

(31 October 1938)

[75]

May I, in closing, also express his satisfaction at the improvement in Mr. ...’s business conditions. He will continue to pray that the high standard of integrity he has so well maintained in his business transactions may not only serve to draw upon him the confirmations and blessings of God, but in addition prove an effective means for the attraction of many souls to the Faith.

(4 November 1940)

[76]

As for your comment that the Faith has a need for selfless, love-intoxicated followers, for people of outstanding spiritual endowments, for powerful, eloquent speakers and for men of material resources and talents to vindicate the truth of our beloved Cause, the Guardian instructed me to write:

“What is needed is excellence of character and conduct, and compliance with the laws revealed by Bahá’u’lláh—these are the magnets that attract divine confirmation, and the means of establishing the validity and uniqueness of the Cause of the All-Glorious.”

He further bade me write:

“The removal of imperfections is a gradual process. Constant advice and admonition are necessary so that, step by step, the community may make good the various deficiencies that beset it and run its affairs on a planned and orderly basis.”

(12 January 1946)

[77]

The Guardian feels that your attitude towards the corrupt practice of accepting commissions from fellow physicians and pharmacists is most admirable. The more upright and noble the Bahá’ís are in their conduct, the more they will impress the public with the spiritual vitality of the Faith they believe in.

(20 October 1953)

[78]

He feels you should both consider the competent running of your business not only a moral obligation to any creditors outstanding, but also the wise and proper thing to do.

(6 June 1954)

[79]

Notes

- 1 Qur'án 2:280 ←
- 2 The name “Şádiq” means literally “truthful” or “sincere” ←
- 3 Qur'án, 54:55 ←
- 4 Cf. Qur'án, 3:185 and 57:20 ←
- 5 Name synonymous with great wealth, mentioned (in the form ‘Qárún’) in the Qur'án, 28:76 ←
- 6 Translated by Shoghi Effendi and published in “The Bahá'í World”, vol. 2, “1926–1928” (New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1928), p. xvi ←
- 7 From the Kitáb-i-'Ahd, published in “Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas” rev. ed. (Haifa: Bahá'í World Center, 1982), p. 222. ←