

Finding the Trace of the Traceless Friend

Reflection on Bahá'í Scholarship as a Journey in the Valley of Search

Wolfgang A. Klebel

Introduction

In this paper the attempt is made to shed some light at Bahá'í Scholarship from the First Valley of the Seven Valleys of Bahá'u'lláh, the Valley of Search. This Valley ends with the words that were chosen as title for this paper:

From the Valley of Search:

And if, by the help of God, he findeth on this journey a trace of the traceless Friend, and inhaleth the fragrance of the long-lost Joseph from the heavenly messenger, he shall straightway step into THE VALLEY OF LOVE and be dissolved in the fire of love. (SVFV 7)¹

The combination of finding a “trace” of a “traceless friend” indicates the mysteriousness and complexity of this task, and introduces us into the mystical realm where words are used to describe what is impossible to define, and what can only be described in opposing concepts, which indicate an integral reality and unity behind these words. The friend is found when his fragrance is inhaled, when a trace is found and the finding is a process which never ends, a journey which cannot be concluded in a rational and factual way. It can only be a nearness that is ephemeral like a fragrance, yet it is real and even

more real than physical reality. It is described as finding a trace of somebody who does not leave a trace, who is traceless. It can easily be seen by this ending of the Valley of Search that we will have to be concerned to remain in the ambience of this mystical description when carefully finding one of the many possible interpretations and then translating these mystical concepts into common language.

Through this conundrum with no solution, in this question with no answer, a mystery is expressed that leads to a truth that transcends logic and reason. Yet, it is not unreasonable, neither is it illogical, actually, it is more and deeper and needs to be experienced, leading to a totally new vision of reality. The reflections presented here are certainly not comprehensive because they are exceedingly limited for two reasons, one is that the Words of Manifestations are inexhaustible, and the other is that these thoughts are subjective and only represent what this writer has experienced and found in an attentive reading of this Tablet. Another limitation of this paper is the fact that only selected passages of this text can be deeply reflected upon and other sentences will be commented on with less depth in order to stay within the frame of this investigation.

The introductory section of the Seven Valleys closes with the following words, indicating that the purpose of this Book is “*that every man may thereby win his way to the summit of realities, until none shall contemplate anything whatsoever but that he shall see God therein.*” (SVFV 1)²

Two considerations stand out here that will be guiding ideas for this paper. One is the fact that this Tablet is written so *that every man may thereby win his way to the summit of reality*. In other words, this Tablet will open for everybody a new and higher way to understand reality. The other thought is equally important namely that this reality is such that it is revealing God, so that God can be seen *therein*. Consequently, it should not be surprising that the reflections presented in this paper are

not necessarily consonant with modern ideas of scholarship; rather, they will present a new understanding of it.

This new understanding was presented in a letter about Bahá'í Scholarship, written on behalf of the Bahá'í Universal House of Justice, October 7, 1980, presented here in three parts:

The combination of absolute loyalty to the Manifestation of God and His Teachings, with the searching and intelligent study of the Teachings and history of the Faith which those Teachings themselves enjoin, is a particular strength of this Dispensation.

This searching after truth in the Teachings of the Faith is the first of the obligations of a Bahá'í scholar and it is combined with absolute loyalty to the Manifestation of God. This is distinguished from the theology of previous dispensations where extremes of blind literality are opposed by an extreme position of doubts.

In past Dispensations the believers have tended to divide into two mutually antagonistic groups: those who held blindly to the letter of the Revelation, and those who questioned and doubted everything. Like all extremes, both these can lead into error.

What most distinguishes the Bahá'í scholar from other theologians is the “unfettered search after truth,” which has to be executed with intelligence and understanding, it has to admit the possibility of error and consequently needs to be marked by maturity and forbearance. Disunity and discord must be avoided by a humble understanding of the limited ability of the scholar. The letter of the Universal House of Justice continues in quoting Shoghi Effendi.

The beloved Guardian has written that “The Bahá'í Faith ... enjoins upon its followers the primary duty of an unfettered search after truth...”. Bahá'ís are called upon

to follow the Faith with intelligence and understanding. Inevitably believers will commit errors as they strive to rise to this degree of maturity, and this calls for forbearance and humility on the part of all concerned, so that such matters do not cause disunity or discord among the friends.³

This statement raises the question how can the “unfettered search after truth” be combined with “absolute loyalty to the Manifestation of God.” This is a crucial question that will be dealt with throughout this paper. This is a question that all Bahá’í scholars have to face, the question if the search for unfettered truth must lead towards disloyalty to the Administrative Order of the Faith. A relative high number of Bahá’í scholars were unable to solve this problem and came to the tragic conclusion to have to leave the Faith; some even became outspoken enemies of the Faith. Bahá’u’lláh’s words in the Valley of Search are expected to give us the answer to this question, which deals with the philosophical, cultural and religious conviction of the seeker, and how that relates to the possibility of an unfettered search after truth.

How this unfettered search can be executed without conflict and in loyalty to the Manifestation will be answered briefly here and then explained at length. The answer is in the statement of the question, even an unfettered search depends on the preconditions and premises of the search. In simple words, if I search in a place where the item to be found is not, I cannot find it. In any search, in any travel, we must be at the right point of departure, in order to go where we wish to go. As will be explained below it is the issue of the hermeneutic circle, every question, and every search starts with a foreknowledge that determines its outcome. For example, if my understanding of the world is strictly materialistic, no matter how much I search I will never find God in this physical world, especially if I make the assumption that what cannot be placed in space and time and be counted, does not exist. In that case, any concept

of transcendence, of the spiritual or of God is excluded and cannot be found.

The following topics will be dealt with in this reflection on the Valley of Search. Throughout these investigations the question of unfettered search for truth versus loyalty to the faith will be constantly kept in mind and will form the background of these reflections.

1. Preconditions of search
2. Independent Investigation and the role of the heart, culture and tradition
3. How to deal with distractions
4. The standard of Majnún, *seek her everywhere*
5. The exclusivity of search and sacrificing everything for it
6. Seeking the truth in *every country*, in *every mind* and in *every soul*

This will lead the seeker into the next valley, the Valley of Love on the journey to find a *Trace of the Traceless Friend*. It is important that the scholar realizes that it is only a trace of the truth that he is able to communicate to others, and that makes his teaching valuable. On the other hand, this trace is the truth – even though it is not the absolute truth – it is only the truth that is available today, the truth that can be found in the investigation of the scholar.

Searching for the trace of somebody who leaves no trace, i.e., is traceless, is certainly testing the patience of any scholar which is indicated in the next paragraph where it is said; that *the steed of this Valley is patience*.

Even if he searches a *hundred thousand years* in patience and devotion, he never will reach the final truth, which can be compared with the description of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh as a limitless ocean. The scholar needs to ever be aware in

humility that he remains at the shores of this ocean; he can only step into it.

When considering that the Valley of Search is the first valley the wayfarer must pass to reach his goal, we must understand that the study of the Writings, that scholarship is only the first of the Seven Valleys, the first stride; a believer has to make in his path. Contrary to all other previous religions, the Bahá'í scholar is, therefore, not in a privileged position, he is not superior to any other believer. He is the one who starts on the first level in the Path of God like anybody else. He might be specialized and therefore especially able to find things others might miss. On the other hand he should never forget that it is not scholarship or human learning, but purity of the heart, which is needed to understand the Revelation, as Bahá'u'lláh has stated.

The understanding of His words and the comprehension of the utterances of the Birds of Heaven are in no wise dependent upon human learning. They depend solely upon purity of heart, chastity of soul, and freedom of spirit. This is evidenced by those who, today, though without a single letter of the accepted standards of learning, are occupying the loftiest seats of knowledge; and the garden of their hearts is adorned, through the showers of divine grace, with the roses of wisdom and the tulips of understanding. Well is it with the sincere in heart for their share of the light of a mighty Day! (KI 210)

Therefore, the scholar will never be the Priest or Mulláh like in the Islamic community or the Theologian like in Christianity, who stands above the regular believers because of his knowledge and understanding of the revelation. While doing more in this area of search than most people, as far as his scholarship is concerned, he is studying only in the first Valley and needs to progress personally through all the Seven Valleys. Otherwise his research might only be touching the surface. Keeping up the search but not proceeding through all the valleys could be

compared to the tinkling cymbal of St. Paul (1 Cor. 13; 1-3), who stresses the need for charity, just like here, after the valley of Search follows the Valley of Love.

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

Therefore, according to Bahá'u'lláh, after the Valley of Search the wayfarer must pass the Valley of Love in order to come to the Valley of Knowledge and only after that will he reach the Valley of Unity with the Friend. This process is an essential feature of the mystic path, which any seeker and any scholar must pursue; all these elements need to be considered when trying to reflect on any part of the Seven Valleys. Additionally, this process of seven steps should not be understood as a time bound process; it is an internal and spiritual process as Bahá'u'lláh stated at the end of the Seven Valleys, where he said:

These journeys have no visible ending in the world of time, but the severed wayfarer – if invisible confirmation descend upon him and the Guardian of the Cause assist him – may cross these seven stages in seven steps, nay rather in seven breaths, nay rather in a single breath, if God will and desire it. And this is of “His grace on such of His servants as He pleaseth.”⁴ (SVFV 41)

Bahá'u'lláh often describes the truth in its diversity because of the limitation of men, but when the wayfarer passes the world of denial he can reach the world of Unity and Diversity, the world of Limitation and Detachment as it is stated in the Book of Certitude:

Please God, that we avoid the land of denial, and advance into the ocean of acceptance, so that we may perceive, with an eye purged from all conflicting elements, the worlds of unity and diversity, of variation and oneness, of limitation and detachment, and wing our flight unto the highest and innermost sanctuary of the inner meaning of the Word of God. (KI 60)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá has interpreted this principle when He talked about the way of understanding the limited from the unlimited, or the lower level of reality from the higher.

Now as to the infinite Power that knoweth no limitations; limitation itself proveth the existence of the unlimited, for the limited is known through the unlimited, just as weakness itself proveth the existence of power, ignorance the existence of knowledge, poverty the existence of wealth. Without wealth there would be no poverty, without knowledge no ignorance, without light no darkness. Darkness itself is a proof of the existence of light for darkness is the absence of light.

(TAF 20)

Without spiritual Unity there could not be Diversity, or to say it philosophically, without the Whole there could not be any Parts. In the same way it can be stated that without parts there would not be any whole. Obviously, in this opposition the polar concepts constitute each other. Considering the Integral Whole (das “Integrale Ganze” in German⁵), one could say that unity in diversity is just the other side of the same coin. The consequences of this principle of Unity in Diversity, as

mentioned here, towards understanding philosophy and especially ontology cannot be pursued further here, but is certainly of great importance.

This consideration is extremely important, because every other kind of research which uses a methodology based on a materialistic and reductionistic understanding of reality will not find anything that is described in this tablet and is, therefore, not only useless but destined to fail. A scholar may use the methodology of material research in this area, because he is trained and educated that way, and he might not even be conscious of this. Often this will lead to consequences that are destructive and will unquestioningly come to results that contradict what is expressed in this Tablet. Therefore, the premises and presuppositions of any research need to be kept in mind and need to be further explored below.

Prerequisites of Search

In the first verse of this Valley of Search, Bahá'u'lláh presents the following preconditions required of the wayfarer who starts his search. The seeker must be aware of the following:

- He must use the steed of patience
- He needs to avoid downheartedness and faltering
- He should be strengthened by Service
- He will need to go from heedlessness to the realm of being
- He should not be held back by any bond
- He must not be deterred by counsel

In the beginning of the mystical writings of the Valleys of Search, Bahá'u'lláh begins with this remarkable statement giving the reader a trace of what to expect.

From the Valley of Search:

The steed of this Valley is patience; without patience the wayfarer on this journey will reach nowhere and attain no goal.

Patience is required for this enterprise of scholarship, of searching; patience is the vehicle, the steed and mount, which carries the wayfarer to his goal. It is interesting that patience and forbearance are here mentioned as accelerating the search, like the use of a horse will speed up any travel. Yet, patience is the opposite of impatient zeal and eagerness, which are seemingly the forces promoting speed. This seeming contradiction, that a patient approach will speed up the travel more than the speediest travel leads us patiently to the goal. On the other hand, extreme impatient behavior, will never lead anywhere.

Any eager and hasty attempt to reach his goal is excluded here. The zeal for scientific success and the anxious effort that creates competition among scholars must be avoided, as it would *reach nowhere and attain no goal*. This could be compared with the Freudian statement that warns the analyst not to be eager in striving for cure, since such “therapeutic zeal” does not lead to a successful therapy. It is, rather, counterproductive. The patience needed here is further explained in the next sentence from the Kitáb-i-Íqán, in His tablets and the Hidden Words:

He must never seek to exalt himself above any one, must wash away from the tablet of his heart every trace of pride and vain-glory, must cling unto patience and resignation, observe silence and refrain from idle talk.

(KI 193)

It behoveth whosoever hath set his face towards the Most Sublime Horizon to cleave tenaciously unto the

cord of patience, and to put his reliance in God, the Help in Peril, the Unconstrained. (TB 212)⁶

48. O SON OF MAN!

For everything there is a sign. The sign of love is fortitude under My decree and patience under My trials.
(HW)

From the Valley of Search:

Nor should he ever be downhearted; if he strive for a hundred thousand years and yet fail to behold the beauty of the Friend, he should not falter.

It could easily be seen that such an attitude is making a Bahá'í scholar unique in modern academic circles, where success is related to production and is judged by the prevailing philosophical and political prejudices, so that true and unfettered search is most of the time unacceptable and often censured, when it contradicts accepted standards. When patience is required not only as a precondition to search but also as the carrying supposition of the unfettered search of the scholar, the opposite condition becomes not only ineffective, but is most of the time an active hindrance, leading to impatience and to a superficial acceptance of something as truth, which is not properly and patiently researched. Consequently, any research without this steed of patience is suspect, is unscientific and leads nowhere, or most of the time this "nowhere" is error and falsity, is half-truth and delusion of truth.

Another quality, this patience gives the scholar, is the fact that he needs to avoid being downhearted, being depressed and giving up. As long as he rides his steed of patience he can go on forever with his search and never give up, because the traces of traceless friend will become manifest at the right time. This attitude required by Bahá'u'lláh for the search is based on trust, is based on the certitude that the search is not dependent on the

marginal ability of the researcher, but is supported and guided by the beauty of the Friend, Who has promised guidance on the path the scholarly pursuit is based on.

What this means in the practice of research is a trust in the divine providence, that the right ideas, the proper sources and the often accidental circumstances of researching will be guided and will neither depend on the ingenuity of the scholar nor on his effort and eagerness. What is required most of all is the ability to accept and listen to the sources and to the people and often to seemingly accidental happenings that inspire the student of wisdom.

Approaching scholarship when being carried along by patience is giving access and openness to the truth to appear, enables the student to see and notice the truth and allows him to see with the *new eye*, *the new ear*. The message he hears from the Word of God, the truth he sees in the world of Creations will penetrate into his *new heart* and then become conscious in his mind, giving him a *new mind*, a new ability to express the truth he has seen and heard.

Then will the manifold favors and outpouring grace of the holy and everlasting Spirit confer such new life upon the seeker that he will find himself endowed with a new eye, a new ear, a new heart, and a new mind.

That allows him to see the universe, nature and science in a new light and brings certitude of a new kind and station.

He will contemplate the manifest signs of the universe, and will penetrate the hidden mysteries of the soul. Gazing with the eye of God, he will perceive within every atom a door that leadeth him to the stations of absolute certitude. He will discover in all things the mysteries of Divine Revelation, and the evidences of an everlasting Manifestation. (GWB 267)

Another question is the length of this search and when the goal is reached. What could be the meaning of the statement of Bahá'u'lláh, when He wrote "*if he strive for a hundred thousand years and yet fail.*" What does Bahá'u'lláh mean when talking about 100,000 years of searching, yet failing?

It is clear that such a number is more than a hyperbole for a long search. Even saying for hundred years would be an exaggeration for what any scholar possibly could do, hundred thousand years are not simply an exaggeration, this number must be indicating something different. What is meant here? Is it talking about a search for eternity? Is it the progress of humanity and not the individual researcher? All of these interpretations and many others are possible, this writer prefers another one. Normally, in any material search we go from searching to finding and then having, possessing whatever we were searching for. Even in our life when we have a life-long search for example for a profession, for a spouse and other serious goals, we hopefully end up with finding what we looked for, with achieving our goals at work or finding a spouse we can love and behold.

Obviously, in the search proposed in the Seven Valleys there is no clear definable and reachable goal present. One reason is obvious, what we search for is beyond reaching, the Beauty of the Friend, the path to God does not have an end, is inexhaustible and in some ways unknown and unreachable.

What is the solution to this hundred thousand year of searching, which is explained as failing and not coming to an end? One answer that comes to mind is this: the searching is not a searching for a goal that would end the search, but that the search itself is the goal and, therefore, it cannot end; or in other words, the end is in the search and we are not expected to have a reachable goal, or the goal is so far away, even beyond any reach that we never can attain it and yet, searching for it is all what we must and can do.

This vision of an endless yet meaningful search will give the Bahá'í scholar a different approach to his final quest and all the studies and research efforts are then seen from a higher point of view. They become relative to the real search and the same happens to all findings the scholar might achieve; they will never become the source of pride and feeling of superiority over any fellow searcher, even of the non-scholarly type. When the final goal of search is the unknown, the infinite, or absolute, all of which is beyond reach, then the relative differences between searchers become minimal and must be neglected, because they make no difference in the search effort.

Other conditions for the true seeker are added in the first paragraph in the beginning of the valley of search. The scholar who searches for truth needs to do this in the way of service and he must stay away from heedlessness. Additionally, she needs to be independent and not held to anyone and should not be influenced by critical and bad counsel.

From the Valley of Search:

In their search, they have stoutly girded up the loins of service... (SVFV 3)

Here another thought is introduced into the process of search that is the value of service in the relation to the search. As stated before, usually searching ends in finding and then in sharing the findings with others, which is a service and the function of this process is what distinguishes the scholar. This sharing is the service the scholar provides. What about a search that does not have a determined finding, a search that is ongoing and never ending? How to share what is not yet or not definitely found? It appears that such a sharing requires humility because there is no pride in finding, there is only service in continuing searching and sharing and communicating this kind of searching to others.

What the scholar finds is only a new step forward in understanding; there is no absolute truth to be found and what is found is relative in relation of further searching and finding. With this attitude the scholar will communicate this ongoing searching to the pupil and will consequently elevate the pupil to the level of a fellow searcher, and the unity of searching is the goal, not the finding. Actually this unity of all fellow searchers requires that the scholar listens to everybody, as it is stated later on in this Valley of Search so eloquently.

The service of the scholar is not in teaching the uneducated, the nonprofessional, but in sharing this new form of search which elevates every student of the Writings into the state of a fellow searcher. In this way searching and scholarship becomes consultation, consultation with every fellow searcher and the true consultation consists in listening and accepting any opinion, without prejudice, especially not the prejudice of the learned towards the uneducated. This consideration is preparing us to understand what is said later about where to search and where to find.

From the Valley of Search:

In the next sentence the wayfarers

... seek at every moment to journey from the plane of heedlessness into the realm of being. No bond shall hold them back, and no counsel shall deter them. (SVFV 4)

It is remarkable that Bahá'u'lláh opposes the plane of heedlessness with the realm of being. Heedlessness is lack of care and negligence; both are not only moral concepts but attitudes that affect intellectual honesty and rational integrity. The search is not an “either/or”; it is a process, a journey, which everyone has to go through. We all are wayfarers in this Valley of Search that leads us from heedlessness, from carelessness and negligence into the realm of being, which is the realm of truth and verity, the realm of actuality and reality.

Any objective finding, knowing and recognizing what is, is a process, a vision; it is never a final position that can be reached, owned and defended. Contrary to that, it consists in the unification of polar opposites, which can only happen in the process of living and searching; therefore, Bahá'u'lláh warns us to not accept any bond and limit set from the outside and tells us to be independent in regards of counsel. In other words, we need to follow our own understanding, our own knowledge and vision, as is expressed in the Hidden Word about justice. As a matter of fact, this consideration will be repeated later on, indicating the importance of this aspect, not only in regards to the search for truth, but also about the search for justice, which is praised by Bahá'u'lláh as a gift to mankind. We always need to have before our eyes the following verse.

2. O SON OF SPIRIT!

The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice; turn not away therefrom if thou desirest Me, and neglect it not that I may confide in thee. By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbor. Ponder this in thy heart; how it behooveth thee to be. Verily justice is My gift to thee and the sign of My loving-kindness. Set it then before thine eyes. (HW Ar. 2)

From Carelessness to Reality

Heedlessness is here opposed to reality, when using the equivalent word carelessness for heedlessness, we realize what is required. It is the care for ourselves and for “the other”, because we cannot be a “self” if we do not understand ourselves with the other, if we are not part of and participant in the world of the other, in humankind. Developmentally, in the child, the self is developed in the relationship to the other, to the mother in the beginning and all other humans in the end. In

other words, we become a self when we learn to relate to another, and the self is always consisting in this relationship. Heedlessness and carelessness interrupt this relationship and therefore, it interrupts the self in understanding him/herself, the other and all other things. It is in this understanding that Heidegger talks about “Sorge” or care as a fundamental concept of ontology (“Dasein”), as comprehending self and others.

Ferdinand Ebner⁷ has described two ways of knowing, the personal and substantial and has indicated that ignoring the ‘I – Thou’ relationship of personally knowing the other, we lose ourselves and end in what he calls self-isolation (Ich-Einsamkeit), i.e. actually losing ourselves. This carelessness cannot find reality as it really is and ends up in substantial knowing, like knowing things and misses the value and meaning of the person, of oneself and of others. Carelessness leads to the loss of virtue, the loss of purpose in life and the loss of reality.

Be not careless of the virtues with which ye have been endowed, neither be neglectful of your high destiny.
(GWB 196)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá about the people of Bahá points out what this care can mean for the people of Bahá’í, when He stated:

And that by their freedom from enslavement, their knowledge, their self-control, they shall be first among the pure, the free and the wise. (SWAB 150)

Concluding these preconditions of search, the seeker must be aware of the following: This process of study, as it is laid out in front of the seeker traveling on the steed of patience, being a servant and caring will be examined further in the following chapters in an attempt of a reflection on the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh. These findings, which are here espoused in all humility, are given to the reader, and will have to be critiqued, corrected and extended in the sense of true consultation.

Independent Investigation and the role of the heart, culture and tradition

With the next Verse Bahá'u'lláh tells us how to search by describing what is required to have an independent investigation, and interestingly he concentrates his focus upon the heart and not the mind.

From the Valley of Search:

It is incumbent on these servants that they cleanse the heart – which is the wellspring of divine treasures – from every marking, and that they turn away from imitation, which is following the traces of their forefathers and sires, and shut the door of friendliness and enmity upon all the people of the earth. (SVFV 4)

How do we understand this required cleansing of the heart? In many places Bahá'u'lláh speaks about “... *the human heart, which is the recipient of the light of God and the seat of the revelation of the All-Merciful ...*” (GWB 186). The relative new science of neurocardiology can give us some indication that even from a scientific point of view the heart is much more than a mechanical pump, but is also a neurological center that can function independently from the brain, as is known in heart transplants. In a previous paper of this writer the role of the heart was described⁸, here only some relevant points will be mentioned. According to neurocardiology

Recent work in the relatively new field of neurocardiology has firmly reestablished that the heart is a sensory organ and a sophisticated information encoding and processing center. Its circuitry enables it to learn, remember and make functional decisions independent of the cranial brain.⁹

There are several reports that after a heart transplant many basic preferences of the patient change.¹⁰ While not researched because of patient confidentiality these reports need to be taken seriously and it must be assumed that many more of what usually is called unconscious is placed in the heart and not in the brain. Whatever is known by the heart becomes conscious in the brain as knowledge, which is understood as certainty. This certitude distinguishes it from thought or opinion. Bahá'u'lláh then gives us a warning that the heart may be affected by markings, by some stain, in other words not be pure. Consequently, He redirects the seeker to “*turn away imitation, which is following the traces of their forefathers and sires.*” From this statement we can understand that the marking, which affects the purity of the heart, might be this imitation, this following in the traditional ways of thinking.

My personal understanding of this sentence is as follows. Following the traces of our intellectual ancestors or forefathers, or thinking in traditional ways, means being restricted by their way of thinking and unable to comprehend anything new. When Bahá'u'lláh talks here about fathers and sires, we need to take this at first in a concrete and practical way: everybody learns to talk and think from his parents. Everybody grows up in a specific cultural environment, first the environment of his family, then of his school and only much later the cultural environment of his time.

In the beginning the little child has no choice, but beginning with the teen years, the youth starts selecting and eventually will find his own understanding. We can say he is able to choose his own intellectual fathers and follows them in his thinking. But he never will totally shed the influence of his childhood. Consequently, we can take this turning away from imitations in a wider sense and include in it the whole cultural and philosophical environment of any seeker into this consideration.

That raises another question for the scholar. Since all thinking and searching happens in the context of the accepted

culture, how can we not think in the way of our forefathers? Can we ever totally avoid the thinking style, the cultural ideas and concepts that we have acquired throughout life? The word used for this change in this translation is “turn away”, which is equivalent with the word convert, which has the Latin root of turning as well. So when we turn away from this imitation, when we become converts to a new vision, what happens to the traditional thinking? What do we have to do, how do we convert to a new way of thinking? And how do we learn this new way of thinking that is required here?

An indication of what to do is in the next sentence, where Bahá'u'lláh requires us to “*shut the door of friendliness and enmity upon all the people of the earth.*” Avoiding friendliness and enmity, or love and hate for all people means, if nothing else, to not be influenced by any feelings, positive or negative towards people and their ideas and systems of thought.

We need to avoid a seemingly contradiction in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh. When He states here that we need to shut the door to *friendliness and enmity* He obviously means something different than when He said. *Consort with all men, O people of Bahá, in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship.* (GWB 288) The answer is, that the demonstration of a spirit of friendliness is mentioned when the talk is about how we should behave towards individual people we meet, there friendliness is of utmost importance. The other passage, about shutting the door to friendliness and enmity has to understood according to this statement

We have, moreover, commanded you to cleanse your hearts from every trace of the love or hate of the peoples of the world, lest aught should divert you from one course or impel you towards another. (SLH 1)

Here it is meant the love or hate, the emotional involvement, which leads us to accept one or the other side of an argument and makes us prefer one or the other side of an opposing

understanding. In other words, we need to be free from emotional attachment to certain ideas that are held by the peoples of the world.

The mind needs not only to be free of any traditional conventions and cultural influences, but the heart as well needs to be free, without stain and not influenced by feelings of love or hate towards anybody. One could state that this is an intellectual and emotional stance of independence and objectivity that is very difficult to achieve. This can only be reached in a tangential process, in slowly coming closer and closer to this ideal situation.

Additionally, we need to realize that this is a negative requirement. It is, so to speak, a detachment (“de-tachment”) from something negative, which requires necessarily a new attachment (“ad-tachment”) to something, i.e. to something positive and to a new way of thinking that is not yet mentioned in this section, but is a requirement for the true seeker. It does give a better understanding to the above mentioned fact that patience needs to be the steed of this travel, *from heedlessness to the realm of being*. Being detached we need to attach ourselves to the Beloved, the *fundamentals of His Faith* and then we can proclaim the new message, the Word of the Manifestation as it is said here:

So should be every one that claimeth to be a lover of the one true God. It behoveth him to fix his gaze upon the fundamentals of His Faith, and to labor diligently for its propagation. Wholly for the sake of God he should proclaim His Message, and with that same spirit accept whatever response his words may evoke in his hearer. He who shall accept and believe, shall receive his reward; and he who shall turn away, shall receive none other than his own punishment. (GWB 339)

The spirit of this service of teaching is indicated in the next statement of Bahá'u'lláh, we have to be unrestrained and free from any precondition when searching and teaching the faith.

Be unrestrained as the wind, while carrying the Message of Him Who hath caused the Dawn of Divine Guidance to break. Consider, how the wind, faithful to that which God hath ordained, bloweth upon all the regions of the earth, be they inhabited or desolate. Neither the sight of desolation, nor the evidences of prosperity, can either pain or please it. It bloweth in every direction, as bidden by its Creator. (GWB 339)

The question of basic assumptions in any scientific endeavor

The required loyalty to the Revelation of the Manifestation of God becomes for the Bahá'í scholar an important question. Logically, there should not be any difference in having basic assumption of different kind. For example, if I take the assumption of Neo-Darwinism and regard the writings of Darwin as the truth of evolution, or if I take the assumption of the Progressive Movement based on Marxism, or the assumption of Reductionism or the basic assumptions of any other ideology, why would it be less scientific to have assumptions that originate in a religious area, such as Christian, Islamic or Bahá'í Revelation, or basic ideas of Buddhism or Hinduism? Why is it regarded as less scientific to believe in the Bible, than to believe in the Writings of Marx or Darwin? In this case one could say that the Bible was written 2000 years ago, so there was scientific progress that abolished the biblical truth.

Obviously, this argument does not hold true when considering the Writings of the Bahá'í Faith, especially since Marx and Darwin, for example, were contemporaries to Bahá'u'lláh and the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi were written later. What other arguments can the scientific

community bring to show that religious assumptions are unscientific? Is it the fact that religious writers did not use the scientific method?

Shoghi Effendi has claimed that Bahá'ís believe that their Revelation is scientific in its method, and this claim would have to be disproven before scientists could be justified to call the Bahá'í Writings unscientific:

The Revelation proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh, His followers believe, is divine in origin, all embracing in scope, broad in its outlook, scientific in its method, humanitarian in its principles and dynamic in the influence it exerts on the hearts and minds of men.¹¹

This argument would lead us into the question about the scientific method, considering that Shoghi Effendi did study in Oxford and was familiar with this method and must have known what this statement implied.

Obviously, neither Bahá'u'lláh nor 'Abdu'l-Bahá had academic schooling but does that mean they were necessarily uneducated and did not understand what they wrote? This would have to be proven first, before their Writings can be dismissed as unscientific. All of these issues need to be discussed first, but an off-handed refusal to accept assumptions because they are based on religion, is certainly unscientific, especially because science spends very little effort answering these questions for their respective fields. Moreover, most scientists take their basic assumptions for granted and argue from them, but never proof them.

This discussion raises the philosophical question, which is as old as the logic of Aristotle: how to proof the first premise in a deductive series of conclusions. Science cannot solve this problem. It is rather a question of the philosophy of science, but not a question of any particular science.

There are other first assumptions that cannot be proven by the scientific method. Issues like this: “Why is there something and not rather nothing?” or “Does reality exist?” or “What is real and what is not real?” are not scientific questions but belong into the philosophical area of discourse, where the scientific method is not applicable.

For example, the Darwinist explanation of evolution by accidental mutations and the survival of the fittest is one explanation, and is held as truth, especially if other explanations are excluded beforehand, such as a final goal of evolution or any kind of pre-design. Here the assumption is made that only mechanistic and material causes are existing in reality, and that everything can be reduced to its most common and simplest denominator. Typically, modern science assumes that reality is such that all can be explained by efficient causality and that there is no meaning and no goal-directed activity existing in reality; often science assumes, as well, that free will, value and spiritual meaning are all false and unscientific concepts. Under these assumptions, Darwinism is the only explanation for the evolution of the finches in the Galapagos, and in an unscientific and totally unproven generalization, these finches are taken as the example that has to be followed by everything in this world, including humanity. Darwinists declare this as a scientifically proven truth for all evolution in this world. This quick step from the Galapagos finches to humanity and eventually to God is neither scientific, nor logical, or rational and certainly has a motivation that is outside of the consideration of these scientists, but must be strong enough to let them overlook their irrationality.

On the other hand, these questions need to be answered before a scientific deduction can be made or any scientific hypothesis can be presented to the experiment. Usually, these questions are assumed, are accepted as common sense, and rarely are they questioned. So why are religious assumptions questioned, if common sense assumptions are accepted without questions? At least in religious assumptions we have an author

and have a documented history, common sense assumptions are taken for granted without that knowledge, but the whole system of science is based on them and only philosophers are interested in this issue.

If a Bahá'í scholar is confronted with this issue, he first must solve it for himself. When these issues come up in a discussion with other scientists, the basic issue needs to be discussed. It is unfortunately common, that most academics would not be ready for such a discussion and would refuse to accept anything that does not fit their preferred ideology. Then this ideology needs to be discussed first, and this becomes tedious. So for all practical purposes, these issues cannot be discussed in most academic circles.

Consequently, the Bahá'í scholar must avoid, if possible, to enter a discussion that would be a useless argument and he/she has to approach these issue in other ways. One way would be to follow the scientific practice of not questioning assumptions and presenting them as common sense and true. In this case, the scholar would not bring quotes from religious sources but present the truth in his argument that is obvious to him. Another way would be to quote honestly the source, but not get into the issue of its scientific quality, only answer if these assumptions are questioned.

On the other hand, it would not be honest if the religious affiliation of the scholar is dissimulated. So it might be stated somewhere that the scholar is of a certain faith and has a special relationship to these sources and when he presents them he needs to do it in a way that does not elicit contradiction. This is not easy, but certainly possible, and it fits the Bahá'í conviction of avoiding arguments and disunity. In any case, when confronted, he would have to answer, and then a discussion should take place. If the rejection of his assumption is never voiced and if he is blacklisted because of it, there is not much he can do, because usually this happens in secrecy and cannot be challenged. It should be different following the academic

tradition that these issues need to be open for discussion and not secretly pursued, but alas, this is the academic world we live in today.

The words of Jesus (Matthew 10:16) come to mind when considering the Bahá'í scholar in a modern academic setting.

*Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves:
be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.*

How to deal with distraction

Bahá'u'lláh has not overlooked this issue. In the next paragraph He makes an interesting observation, He talks about the fact that everybody is looking for truth, everybody is like the biblical patriarch Jacob looking for his lost son Joseph, who was sold to Egypt. He states that all created things are searching. Being created, means having to search and find.

From the Valley of Search:

In this journey the seeker reacheth a stage wherein he seeth all created things wandering distracted in search of the Friend. How many a Jacob will he see, hunting after his Joseph; he will behold many a lover, hasting to seek the Beloved, he will witness a world of desiring ones searching after the One Desired. (SVFV 5)

Freud, in his *Three Essays on Sexuality*, discusses what he has found in analytic praxis, i.e., “The finding of an object is in fact a re-finding of it.”¹² Talking about psychology, Freud does not have to go further and he explains this sentence by explaining that what we had in early childhood, in our relationship with mother, is what we look for later in life, so that the finding of a relationship is really a re-finding of this original relation. The need to search and to find is explained that way, but explaining a later experience by an earlier might be psychologically interesting, yet, the question remains about

the origin of this need to search and to find. What is it that everybody is looking for, is searching for? In what way is finding it the fulfillment of his life? Recently the same question was stated in a more profound way.

Everyone worships reality. Each person looks about him, listens a moment – listens as long as life will let him pause to listen – and then he falls down and worships whatever it is that looks like this is what it is all about.¹³

This is what – according Bahá'u'lláh – the seeker and a fortiori the scholar will observe, all of creation is distracted in this search, but the search is in all of them. Everyone is searching reality for truth; for this final answer, even if somebody might find that the final answer is in the understanding that there is no truth at all, he still is searching for that and whole philosophical theories have been built on this. Unfortunately, many look in the wrong direction for answers, distracted they follow their vain imagination, they develop ideologies and answers, that are not truthful and lead astray, but the searching is there, even when the finding is in error, when it is distorted by tradition or based on assumptions that are wrong.

Bahá'u'lláh gives us the answer in a metaphor: it is search for the Ka'bih, the goal for the Muslim pilgrim in Mecca, it is the final search for spiritual fulfillment, and He indicates that it needs the aid from this Invisible Realm, basically the help from the Creator.

Bahíyyih Nakhjavání raises an interesting issue when thinking about questions, especially final questions.

We naively perceive questions as 'doubt' and answers as 'certitude' and assume, rather glibly, that just by being Bahá'ís we have all the longed for answers to the imponderable questions of our age. We forget that it is the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh that has unleashed these questions upon us over the last century and a half. It is

actually His principles – of the relativity of truth and the progressive nature of spiritual evolution – that have caused such revolutions in men’s thinking and set into motion such questions in the minds of scientists and housewives alike.¹⁴

The alert scholar can easily follow these thoughts and find in the different ideologies that are today propagated and espoused, a distraction from the truth and it is additionally interesting to find which of the Bahá’í principle has caused the question and, unfortunately, the wrong answer that becomes a distraction for the seeker and scholar.

For example, could it not be that the concept of deconstruction, so popular in postmodern philosophy, is a failed attempt to deal with the fact that truth in the Bahá’í faith is called relative in the sense of being progressively renewed in every Revelation, so that this concept must be confronted with the idea of a progressive theology and philosophy, which is reaching for the truth, but is not ever reaching absolute truths? Naturally, when this possibility is considered, the causes for the need to deconstruct are changing. It has nothing to do with post-colonialism or the power imposed by a Western constructive narrative. While all these going explanations may have some aspect of truth, they really hide what is going on, i.e., the progressive change in understanding reality, which is the real event that is usually not seen by all the wise men of post modernism.

The English philosopher Bertrand Russell¹⁵ has called Communism and Nazism a religion. Shoghi Effendi, following Bahá’u’lláh (ESW 46), calls them a “religious irreligion.”¹⁶ One could say that they are substitute religions, substituting an imaginary reality for what is real and final in this world. The fact that even 70 years of this “religion” in Russia did not work and that communism did not do better in any other country where it was tried, even in East Germany, should convince the followers of this ideology. Yet, the fact that it is accepted as a

pseudo-religion can explain that it still finds many followers, especially in the Western “intelligentsia,” who accept this secularized religion in order to avoid any true religion.

Bahá'u'lláh gives us to think when he continues to talk what the seeker finds.

From the Valley of Search:

At every moment he findeth a weighty matter, in every hour he becometh aware of a mystery; for he hath taken his heart away from both worlds, and set out for the Ka'bih¹⁷ of the Beloved. At every step, aid from the Invisible Realm will attend him and the heat of his search will grow. (SVFV 5)

Bahá'u'lláh indicates something important here. When the seeker or the scholar sees the distractions that are presented today, he could find important issues and become aware of a mystery, as long as he has taken his heart away from *both worlds*. What could be the meaning of “both worlds?” The interpretation I would like to follow is to assume that these two worlds are, the world of the “seen” and the world of the “unseen”, the world of the manifest and the world of the hidden, or as it is stated in the Valley of Unity:

And thus firstness and lastness, outwardness and inwardness are, in the sense referred to, true of thyself, that in these four states conferred upon thee thou shouldst comprehend the four divine states, and that the nightingale of thine heart on all the branches of the rosetree of existence, whether visible or concealed, should cry out: “He is the first and the last, the Seen and the Hidden...” (SVFV 27)

These two worlds of outwardness and inwardness are both called “*true of thyself*” and are specifically described by Bahá'u'lláh, when he explained them:

In thine outward appearance thou tellest of the appearance of power in the realms of divine creation; in thine inward being thou revealest the hidden mysteries which are the divine trust deposited within thee. (SVFV 26)

It is clearly indicated that the outwardness is the physical, bodily aspect of the human person and that the inwardness presents the spiritual and inner aspect of man. The first is related to the physical creation, the other is called a hidden mystery deposited by God into men.

What is interesting here when this explanation is accepted, is the fact that Bahá'u'lláh requires that the seeker take his heart away from both worlds, in other words, the seeker must be detached from both, from false attachment to his body and his physical existence as well as from his mind, and his spiritual "vain imaginations", which can equally be leading him astray, causing heedlessness and carelessness and looking into the wrong sources in the search for meaning in life and for finding the truth.

This is a clear distinction to the Christian tradition, where the spiritual was the solution and the material was the way leading to destruction. Where the world of nature was condemned but the world of "super-nature" was the goal. The Bahá'í understanding does not divide the world into nature as the realm of the devil and super-nature as the realm of God. There is the devil in both, to continue the metaphor, and both can be a source of finding God, or can be a source of wrong attachment leading away from God. This is expressed as well in the statement of 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

Briefly, all effort and exertion put forth by man from the fullness of his heart is worship, if it is prompted by the highest motives and the will to do service to humanity. This is worship: to serve mankind and to minister to the needs of the people. Service is prayer. (PT 176)

For the Bahá'í scholar and seeker, the world is no longer divided into the natural and the super-natural. The world has become one again and the direction the seeker needs to take is using both, the physical and spiritual, both the body and the mind to elevate himself on the Path of God, in search of the Ka'bih¹⁸ of the Beloved.

In doing so there is another aspect mentioned by Bahá'u'lláh. The seeker as well as the scholar, one might say, is promised that *“At every step, aid from the Invisible Realm will attend him and the heat of his search will grow.”* This promise is the Divine assurance that for the true seeker finding will eventually happen, as long as his heart is pure and as long as he is not directing his search towards vain imitations of culture and tradition and as long as he avoids heedlessness in his intellectual and physical life.

Bahá'u'lláh promises the seeker that *“At every moment he findeth a weighty matter, in every hour he becometh aware of a mystery.”* The question can be raised what are those weighty matters and those mysteries, if not the ultimate reality, the final goal and the truth of this world? To stay in the picture as presented by Bahá'u'lláh, in the verse before, the seeker

*will behold many a lover, hasting to seek the Beloved, he
will witness a world of desiring ones searching after the
One Desired.*

Bahá'u'lláh in the following verses continues to describe the search of the seeker and He presents us with an interesting comparison, the standard of Majnún.

The standard of Majnún,¹⁹ “seek her everywhere”

What is the standard of Majnún is the question here.

From the Valley of Search:

One must judge of search by the standard of the Majnún of Love. It is related that one day they came upon Majnún sifting the dust, and his tears flowing down. They said, "What doest thou?" He said, "I seek for Laylí." They cried, "Alas for thee! Laylí is of pure spirit, and thou seekest her in the dust!" He said, "I seek her everywhere; haply somewhere I shall find her."

The first consideration is following what was said above about both aspects of reality. To find the spiritual lover by sifting dust does not make sense in common understanding, yet, it indicates the unity of reality, the unity of the inward and outward aspect, of the manifest and the hidden. This could be a reminder to all seekers and scholars to not neglect the physical reality, and to take this world seriously without false attachment to it. Only in the unity between the spiritual and material can the seeker find the "beloved."

Yea, although to the wise it be shameful to seek the Lord of Lords in the dust, yet this betokeneth intense ardor in searching. "Whoso seeketh out a thing with zeal shall find it."²⁰

Here the ardor of searching is held against conventional wisdom, which would find it shameful to search in the material world for the spiritual, in the dust for the beloved. The question might be asked what is meant by sifting dust and seeking the Lord in the dust. Without doubt, at least in the English translation it is an allusion to the word of Genesis 2:7:

And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

Here it is stated that man was created from the dust of this world and that the spirit or breath was then given to him to make him a living soul.

The exclusivity of search and sacrificing everything for it

In the next two concluding paragraphs the main themes of this Valley of Search are repeated and summarized, yet, this is done in a very special way. These two paragraphs seem to contradict each other. This contradiction or opposition must be understood as a message that can only be expressed by stating polar opposites describing reality in two polar, yet complementary statements. This is not a unique example in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, who frequently makes such statements, for example, when talking about an end that has not end or describing God as the most hidden and the most manifest.

In the first paragraph, it is described how the seeker in his hunt for the Beloved One has to sacrifice everything, which seems to describe a person who leaves this world, like a hermit or monk, not only leaving the physical world but also the world of intellect and science by giving up everything he knows in order to reach the realm of the spirit.

In opposition to that, in the next paragraph, it is described that the seeker must not only go into every land and region, but also join every company and fellowship in order to find the secret of the Friend and the beauty of the Loved One. This reminds us of Majnún who seeks the spiritual Laylí in the dust of this world and who was described as an example of intensive search.

What does this arrangement tell us about the search described in this valley? It seems that in order to search and to find, a balance must be found between these two spiritual movements, a movement that is at the same time moving away from the world and into the world. First the movement away from this world and its temptation will be described.

Excursion on Vain Imagination / Idle Fancy

In the following section the attempt is made to correlate statements of the Bahá'í Writings with the concept of the seven deadly sins or the eight vices from the Christian tradition. This concept is linked to the works of the 4th century monk Evagrius Ponticus, who listed eight evil thoughts. The description of these eight vices as presented below, is taken mainly from the paper of Karl Wucherer:²¹ *Maskierte Depression und Trägheit in der klassischen Achtlasterlehre* (Masked Depression and Heedlessness in the Classical Doctrine of the Eight Vices), where the history of these teachings is explored and extensively analyzed according to modern psychological findings of “Daseinsanalyse” a special form of existential analysis developed in Austria.

Vain imagination and idle fancy are a recurring theme of the Bahá'í Writings and can be found in the Writings of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, as well as in the interpretation of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. This section will explore the meaning of these concepts and will attempt to correlate them with insights developed in the Christian tradition, especially as it was developed into the Eight Vices or Seven Capital Sins.

In these two statements of Bahá'u'lláh, the use of these two concepts is made first in explaining how His enemies are trying to hide him using vain imaginations and idle fancies.

For now, however, they have hidden Me behind a veil of darkness, whose fabric they have woven with the hands of idle fancy and vain imagination. (SLH 135)

Yet, the faithful is blessed to have been able to utterly abolish these dangerous attitudes, vices or idols of the self in his life with the help of God.

Blessed art thou for having utterly abolished the idol of self and of vain imagination, and for having rent asunder

the veil of idle fancy, through the power of the might of thy Lord, the Supreme Protector, the Almighty, the one Beloved. (GWB 291)

In the Valley of Knowledge, the wayfarer will be able to shut the doors to vain imaginations through the fear of God.

Come out of doubt into certitude, and turn from the darkness of illusion to the guiding light of the fear of God. His inner eyes will open and he will privily converse with his Beloved; he will set ajar the gate of truth and piety, and shut the doors of vain imaginings. (SVFV 10)

In the Kitáb-i-Íqán, Bahá'u'lláh describes another valley, the valley of arrogance and pride which is entered by petty-minded souls who follow the leaders of their faith and are lost in idles fancy.

Consequently, such behavior can be attributed to naught save the petty-mindedness of such souls as tread the valley of arrogance and pride, are lost in the wilds of remoteness, walk in the ways of their idle fancy, and follow the dictates of the leaders of their faith. (KI 14)

Previously, under the precondition of search, it was mentioned that cleansing the heart means to *turn away from imitation, which is following the traces of their forefathers and sires.*

It is incumbent on these servants that they cleanse the heart — which is the wellspring of divine treasures — from every marking, and that they turn away from imitation, which is following the traces of their forefathers and sires, and shut the door of friendliness and enmity upon all the people of the earth. (SVFV)

It appears from these statements above that the phrase idle fancy and vain imagination is both connected with ideologies that remain in the tradition of a culture and with the refusal to accept the new vision of a Manifestation. In the traditional doctrine of vices in Christian ethical tradition both of these statements, the idle fancy and vain imagination might be correlated to the first two vices of pride and vainglory. The eight vices are organized towards their location in the human body as described below.

Doctrine of the Eight Vices

This doctrine is presented here in a shortened form taken from the paper by Wucherer and every vice is correlated with statements from the Bahá'í Writings and a comment. They are headed by the respected faculty used or better abused during their execution.

Rational Faculty: Mind

1. Pride Ὑπερηφάνια (*hyperēphania*) – Hubris
2. Vainglory Κενοδοξία (*kenodoxia*) – Boasting

Idle Fancy and Vain Imagination

Know, moreover, that should one who hath attained unto these stations and embarked upon these journeys fall prey to pride and vainglory, he would at that very moment come to naught and return to the first step without realizing it. (GDM 65)

Like in the doctrine of the Eight Vices, the danger to succumb to these two vices is greatest for those who have successfully overcome all the other lower vices, and the statement of Bahá'u'lláh expresses this warning most clearly. Even a person who has reached the status of an academician or

scholar and has habitually overcome the lower forms of vices is not protected by his or her seemingly virtuous and moral life from these basic intellectual and spiritual vices. Therefore, it is important to have this possibility of pride and vainglory in front of our mind in all scholarly and academic efforts and to preserve a cautious attitude with humility and forbearance in all scholarly and personal enterprises. This was clearly stated by the Universal House of Justice as mentioned above in the introduction where it was stated:

Inevitably believers will commit errors as they strive to rise to this degree of maturity, and this calls for forbearance and humility on the part of all concerned, so that such matters do not cause disunity or discord among the friends.²²

Emotional Faculty: Heart

3. Heedlessness/Distraction Ἀκηδία (*akēdia*) – Lethargy, Carelessness

Thus did they wander in the paths of delusion and the ways of heedlessness, and return to their abode in that fire which feedeth on their own souls. These, verily, are numbered with the infidels whose names have been inscribed by the Pen of God in His holy Book. Nor have they ever found, or will ever find, a friend or helper.
(GDM 31)

Bahá'u'lláh makes here a very interesting remark, contending that persons given to heedlessness or carelessness will never find a friend. Clearly, friendship and love is based on an attitude of care and concern for others; a careless person will be a lonely person who has to fill his life with the other basic vices to find distraction and pleasure.

4. Anger Ὀργή (*orgē*) – Wrath, Anger

Most of the people are bewildered in their drunkenness and wear on their faces the evidences of anger. (PB 100)

Another interesting remark of Bahá'u'lláh here is the fact that anger is first shown in their faces, because it originates in the heart or in the emotional section, then becomes visible in the body, especially in the face, and only later becomes known intellectually to the angry person. Hence, we have the observation that outsiders can recognize that somebody gets angry, even when the angry person denies these feelings. When anger shows in the face the mind will then exaggerate this anger by self-talk and develop the anger into rage, unless the person manages and controls his anger properly.

5. Depression Λύπη (*lypē*) – Sorrow, Grief or Envy as Sadness at another's good fortune

I have, however, contented Myself with that which was mentioned, lest thou become wearied in thy journey or feel inclined to turn back, or lest thou be overtaken by sadness and sorrow and overcome with despondency, trouble and fatigue. (GDM 11-12)

This is the emotional aspects of a failed life where carelessness, anger and depression prevent the heart to be open to his fellowman and finally to the Revelation of God, especially when the self has not developed its potential and failed his purpose.

Instinctual Faculty: Abdomen or Gut

6. Money Addiction Φιλαργυρία (*philargyria*) – avarice, greed

Why, then, exhibit such greed in amassing the treasures of the earth, when your days are numbered and your

chance is well-nigh lost? Will ye not, then, O heedless ones, shake off your slumber? (GWB 127)

7. Sexual Addiction Πορνεία (*porneia*) – prostitution, fornication, lust

He should cleanse his heart from all evil passions and corrupt desires, for the fear of God is the weapon that can render him victorious, the primary instrument whereby he can achieve his purpose. (GWB 272)

8. Food Addiction Γαστριμαργία (*gastrimargia*) – gluttony

Is it on your food and your drink that ye pride yourselves, on the riches ye lay up in your treasuries, on the diversity and the cost of the ornaments with which ye deck yourselves? (PB 10)

It is rather remarkable to observe how failing in these lower regions of life is causing the higher capacities to fail as well, which was observed already before in the doctrine of the eight Vices in early Christianity, and which seems to be still true as described in psychology and ethics. A more advanced study of Bahá'í Ethic, which cannot be provided in this paper, could shed further light at this correlation and might help to develop this doctrine in the future. We are now returning back to the Seven Valleys after this excursion.

From the Valley of Search:

The true seeker hunteth naught but the object of his quest and the lover hath no desire save union with his beloved. Nor shall the seeker reach his goal unless he sacrifices all things. That is, whatever he hath seen, and heard, and understood, all must he set at naught, that he may enter the realm of the spirit, which is the City of

God. Labor is needed, if we are to seek Him; ardor is needed, if we are to drink of the honey of reunion with Him; and if we taste of this cup, we shall cast away the world. (SVFV 6)

In order to reach the union with his beloved, the wayfarer has to set aside and sacrifices everything he has seen, heard and understood. In other words, he has to be free from all prejudices, even those that come with his culture and tradition, especially the traditions that came from any previous religion. Additionally, he has to be free from any philosophical prejudice, any ideology no matter how prevalent and pervasive it is or how strongly it is presented in academia today.

Without this freedom from tradition, from what “is known”, from “what one has learned” and even from what is the accepted way of understanding and doing research, the wayfarer and scholar will not be able to find the beloved and come to reach the goal of unification, or, as it is said here, he would not enter *the realm of the spirit, which is the City of God.*

The realm of the spirit was explained by Bahá’u’lláh as the place from where the Manifestation come with their message to mankind.

The door of the knowledge of the Ancient of Days being thus closed in the face of all beings, the Source of infinite grace, according to His saying, “His grace hath transcended all things; My grace hath encompassed them all,” hath caused those luminous Gems of Holiness to appear out of the realm of the spirit, in the noble form of the human temple, and be made manifest unto all men, that they may impart unto the world the mysteries of the unchangeable Being, and tell of the subtleties of His imperishable Essence. (GWB)

The door of knowledge of God is closed to humanity unless and until it is opened by the Manifestation who comes from *this*

realm of the spirit as a human being and manifests unto all men the mysteries of God. He is described as the *unchangeable Being* and an *imperishable Essence*.

Giving up all knowledge in order to reach this realm of the spirit how is it possible for the seeker and especially the scholar, to function and what criteria can she use to promote her studies?

The question raised here is, “By what standard is a scholar to measure his research and studies, and how should she use the prevailing standard and methods, which are promoted today in academia?” How does she have to take the warning presented by Bahá’u’lláh when He stated:

Weigh not the Book of God with such standards and sciences as are current amongst you, for the Book itself is the unerring Balance established amongst men. (ESW 128)

One could assume that this warning is only useful in the science of theology and in interpreting religion, and that modern science being secular has its own standards and does not fall under this warning. While this could be true in some cases, where there is no interrelation between a particular science and religion, for most scientific enterprises it is not that simple, especially when we talk about basic scientific assumptions and premises, especially in the humanistic sciences like psychology, sociology, history and philosophy, which cannot be clearly separated in their standards and methods, because of the way these sciences are developed today. This precludes any opening towards the possibility of religion and leads directly towards atheism or agnosticism and their basic assumptions which are never discussed and which frequently exclude anything related to God or Religion.

The modern world, especially in its so-called post-modern development, is described by Bahá’u’lláh as being sick, as

languishing on its bed of sickness, sore-tried and disillusioned. Academia and schools of higher learning can be seen as the proponent of this malady, which has been described in the following quote.

We can well perceive how the whole human race is encompassed with great, with incalculable afflictions. We see it languishing on its bed of sickness, sore-tried and disillusioned. They that are intoxicated by self-conceit have interposed themselves between it and the Divine and infallible Physician. Witness how they have entangled all men, themselves included, in the mesh of their devices. They can neither discover the cause of the disease, nor have they any knowledge of the remedy. They have conceived the straight to be crooked, and have imagined their friend an enemy. (GWB 213)

Bahá'u'lláh clearly states in this passage that the reason for this world-wide affliction is the fact that their leaders are *intoxicated by self-conceit and have interposed themselves between it and the Divine and infallible Physician.* In other words, the leaders of today's humanity have replaced the religions of the past with new ideologies that can be described as substitute religions or irreligions. Since they neither know the cause of the problem nor the remedy for it, they promise solutions but do not deliver; in fact, what they deliver is worse than the problem they pretend to solve.

Whenever such an ideology was imposed with terror in any country from Germany, Russia and China to Cuba, the first result was a poorly functioning economy and in some cases like in the Ukraine and in China mass starvation. Even 70 years of Communism and Marxism in Russia, did not change this situation and all the terror of the regime did not improve the lot of the people. This is contrary to the hopes of Marx, who had predicted that a revolution based on his economic theory presented in the Communist Manifesto and developed in his book "the Capital" would change the fate of the workers

permanently and forever to a paradise-like state of final perfection.

Part of Germany, East-Germany, was occupied by Russia and placed under the same ideological rule, the once prosperous country became poor, while West-Germany regained its previous prosperity. This clearly demonstrates the inability and falseness of these ideologies; nevertheless, they are still pursued under different names today. Surprisingly, the same basic ideology is still active today and promoted by so-called "Progressives," becoming a substitute religion in the Western world.

The question is how does this consideration apply to the seeking Bahá'í scholar? Bahá'u'lláh requests that the *seeker sacrifices all things. That is, whatever he hath seen, and heard, and understood, all must he set at naught ...* Does that not mean that all ideologies, all false philosophies of modern thinking, even all accepted scientific ideologies in academia, need to be critically investigated by the Bahá'í scholar and seen from the Vision of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh? Obviously, a familiarity with this Vision is the condition sine qua non for such a process to be started.

The Universal House of Justice, in a letter written on December 10, 1992, reminds us of the statements written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi:

His secretary wrote, on another occasion, that:

Shoghi Effendi has for years urged the Bahá'ís (who asked his advice, and in general also) to study history, economics, sociology, etc., in order to be au courant with all the progressive movements and thoughts being put forth today, and so that they could correlate these to the Bahá'í teachings. What he wants the Bahá'ís to do is to study more, not to study less. The more general knowledge, scientific and otherwise, they possess, the

better. Likewise he is constantly urging them to really study the Bahá'í teachings more deeply.

This quote is followed up by further emphasizing that the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is the standard of truth for every believer.

In the simultaneous endeavor to pursue their studies and to delve deeply into the Bahá'í Teachings, believers are enjoined to maintain a keen awareness that the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is the standard of truth against which all other views and conclusions are to be measured.

This statement is followed up with a word from Bahá'u'lláh expressed in the Book of Certitude:

The heart must needs therefore be cleansed from the idle sayings of men, and sanctified from every earthly affection, so that it may discover the hidden meaning of divine inspiration, and become the treasury of the mysteries of divine knowledge... (KI 69)

The seeker, being a wayfarer in the Valley of Search, being an unstudied Bahá'í or a scholarly educated Bahá'í has to

... sacrifice all things. That is, whatever he hath seen, and heard, and understood, all must he set at naught, that he may enter the realm of the spirit...

This is not an easy task and requires a life-long effort and dedication. Actually, it is not a one time achievement, but a process that has to be always kept in mind as a guiding principle of all searching and studying. Only when this process is guiding the scholar he can precede to the other complementary side of his search, which is described in the next sentence of this tablet.

Beholding the beauty of the Loved One

On this journey the traveler abideth in every land and dwelleth in every region. In every face, he seeketh the beauty of the Friend; in every country he looketh for the Beloved. He joineth every company, and seeketh fellowship with every soul, that haply in some mind he may uncover the secret of the Friend, or in some face he may behold the beauty of the Loved One. (SVFV 7)

As described in the previous sentence, the seeker has to sacrifice everything and give all what he knows and what he has learned about this world, and in this following sentence it seems the opposite is recommended: the traveler in this journey is to live in every land and region and seek friendship with every soul. It needs to be noted that both of these movements are supposed to happen at the same time and they are not opposite but complementary. In other words the more the seeker gives up his previous knowledge, the better he can listen to the mind of others he meets and the more likely he can find the secret and beauty of the Bahá'í Revelation in the other.

In this movement away from what he knows and remembers about people and the world, he can better listen and find out about the truth that is in this world and can see the other as manifesting the sign of the creator, can see in him/her the beauty of the Loved One.

Now he can freely join every land, every country and can study every theory or ideology and is able to see and distinguish what is true and what is false. Having the standard of the Most Sublime Vision of Bahá'u'lláh and being established in the Covenant, he or she can benefit from many different ideas, correlate them with the revealed truth and find new understanding and new relationships in the thinking of today's scholars, they have a touchstone to sort out what is true and lasting and what is only temporary and passing.

In the previous section, where the wayfarer was encouraged to give up everything, even everything he knows, the traditional list of vices was mentioned. Especially the vices related to what are called in the Writings vain imagination and idle fancy. Here the virtues need to be mentioned which alone make it possible to follow the advice of Bahá'u'lláh to live in every land and join every company. There was developed in Christianity a list of virtues opposed by a list of vices by Felix Just, S.J., Ph.D.²³

Christian morality is not only based foundationally on the Ten Commandments (see Exod 20 & Deut 5), but also focuses traditionally on what are called the seven “Capital Sins” or “Deadly Sins,” often pairing and contrasting these with seven “Principal Virtues” which is presented below.

Virtue and Vice Lists

Capital Deadly Sins:	pride arrogance <i>superbia</i>	avarice greed <i>avaritia</i>	envy jealousy <i>invidia</i>	wrath anger <i>ira</i>
Principal Virtues:	humility modesty <i>humilitas</i>	generosity charity <i>liberalitas</i>	kindness gratitude <i>humanitas</i>	patience compassion <i>patientia</i>

Capital Deadly Sins:	lust impurity <i>luxuria</i>	gluttony voracity <i>gula</i>	sloth laziness <i>acedia</i>
Principal Virtues:	chastity purity <i>castitas</i>	temperance moderation <i>temperantia</i>	diligence fervor <i>industria</i>

It is not difficult to find Bahá'í Scriptures supporting this list, but this would be the task of a Bahá'í Ethic, which cannot be attempted in the frame of this paper.

Conclusion



The picture above is based on this statement of Bahá'u'lláh:

Consider the rational faculty with which God hath endowed the essence of man.

Examine thine own self, and behold how thy motion and stillness, thy will and purpose ... all proceed from, and owe their existence to, this same faculty. (GWB 163)

The self, the human psyche has, according to the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, four aspects, which are opposite to each other and yet connected and even existing through each other. So we have the Stillness on the one side where the detachment and acceptance is located and where the wayfarer “sacrifices all things.” This is explained by Bahá'u'lláh that he must give up, “whatever he hath seen, and heard, and understood, all must he set at naught, that he may enter the realm of the spirit, which is the City of God”. (SVFV 6) The realm of the spirit is this area of the self where the stillness of the spirit is located and where

Detachment and Acceptance are predominant. This must be balanced and harmonized with the other side, the side of **Movement**, where the wayfarer is outgoing, and where he “*joineth every company, and seeketh fellowship with every soul, that haply in some mind he may uncover the secret of the Friend, or in some face he may behold the beauty of the Loved One.*” (SVFV 7)

These two sides of the self are complementary and it is the art of living to find the right balance between these two sides so that one supports the other. Any one-sided approach will become extreme and distorts the self. The other complementary polarity between **Will** and **Purpose** is showing the balance between the individual and social aspect of the self, so that the social and general purpose needs to regulate the individual will, in order that the action of the person becomes meaningful. This structure of the self is called tetrarchic, which concept has been developed by this writer in several papers in the *Lights of ‘Irfán* publications during the last 10 years, especially in book 12, 2010 under the title “The Essence of Man, Towards a Bahá’í Understanding of Human Nature and Psychology.”²⁴

In the beginning of this paper the question was raised how the “unfettered search after truth” can be combined with “absolute loyalty to the Manifestation of God.” Not only in the finding of scholars, but also in their methodology any answer to this question presupposes that reality is seen as it is seen in the Bahá’í Revelation. Any other viewpoint will come in conflict with the absolute loyalty to the Manifestation. Therefore, any reductionistic, materialistic or positivistic understanding of science, especially of the humanistic sciences, will lead the scholar astray and bring him/her in conflict with the Bahá’í Revelation. Any viewpoint that excludes anything spiritual from science and restricts science to the Newtonian mechanistic understanding of reality or to Descartes dualistic understanding of the world does not fit in the standard of the Bahá’í Revelation. There is no balance or harmony possible between the Bahá’í Revelation and some of the modern scientific

assumption about reality; there is balance only in reality between complementary aspects of life like described above. It is important to have this distinction in mind whenever the scholar is confronted by this question between unfettered search after truth and loyalty to the Manifestation of God.

Not only the Bahá'í scholar but every Bahá'í, be he/she learned or not, needs to live in this balance of the self between stillness and Movement, or the spiritual and material aspect of life and of the world, as well as between Will and Purpose and the individual intentionality regulated by the collective human goal of life. The only way to find this balance is to accept the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh as the standard of truth, not only in theology, but also in the basic understanding of the world, in philosophy and psychology, in the methodology and philosophical assumptions that are fundamental to any science, especially of the humanistic sciences. This was expressed in a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi which will close these considerations:

His secretary wrote, on another occasion, that:

Shoghi Effendi has for years urged the Bahá'ís (who asked his advice, and in general also) to study history, economics, sociology, etc., in order to be au courant with all the progressive movements and thoughts being put forth today, and so that they could correlate these to the Bahá'í teachings. What he wants the Bahá'ís to do is to study more, not to study less. The more general knowledge, scientific and otherwise, they possess, the better. Likewise he is constantly urging them to really study the Bahá'í teachings more deeply. (The Universal House of Justice, 1992 Dec 10, Issues Related to Study Compilation)

This quote is followed up further emphasizing that the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is the standard of truth for every believer.

In the simultaneous endeavor to pursue their studies and to delve deeply into the Bahá'í Teachings, believers are enjoined to maintain a keen awareness that the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is the standard of truth against which all other views and conclusions are to be measured.

NOTES

- ¹ A list of all appreciations of the Bahá'í Writings used in this paper is attached as the appendix I at the end of this book (p. 425).
- ² All words and sentences of Holy Scriptures in this paper are presented in italics, when quoted as a paragraph or when quoted in a sentence.
- ³ International Teaching Centre, Bahá'í Scholarship, letter written August, 9 1984.
- ⁴ Qur'an 2:84.
- ⁵ Augustinus Karl Wucherer-Huldenfeld, *Philosophische Theologie im Umbruch*, (Philosophic Theology in Radical Renewal); Boehlau Verlag, Vienna, Cologne, Weimar, 2011. The idea of the "Integrale Ganze" is described especially in the Fourth Excursion, pages 469-556, and the principle of Unity in Diversity is mentioned in the same context.
- ⁶ It needs to be noted that this division of the text into separate lines is not in the original and has been made in order to facilitate its understanding.
- ⁷ Confer Wolfgang Klebel, in *Lights of Irfán*, Book Eight, 2007, Bahá'í National Center, Evanston IL 60201, "The Word is the Master Key for the Whole World. The Bahá'í Revelation and the Teaching and Spirit of the Cause in Dialogical and Personal Thinking," pp. 53-124
- ⁸ Wolfgang Klebel, *Light of 'Irfan*, Book Ten, "In the Pure Soil of Thy Heart; Heart in Bahá'í Writings and Neurocardiology" (2009), pp.107-148
- ⁹ Rollin McGray, Ph.D. and Doc Childre, *The Appreciative Heart, The Psychophysiology of Positive Emotions and Optimal Functioning*. Published by the Institute of HeartMath, 14700 West Par Avenue; Boulder Creek, CA 95006; 2003, p. 1
- ¹⁰ Mindshock, Channel Four TV on June 26, 2006:
- This program featured the case of a heart transplant operation where the recipient underwent major changes after surgery. She woke up after the operation and said she would love a beer and yet she had never been a beer drinker ever. She suddenly developed a taste for green peppers

and Mexican food. Later she had a dream where she met the person whose heart she took. In the dream she knew his name as Tim L. The dream had a major effect on her and she believed that she had truly met the man who had donated the heart. Later she tried to pursue this but was refused because of patient confidentiality. But it became apparent that the heart was taken from a young man who loved to drink beer and eat Mexican food. His name was Tim Lamerande.

This amazing dream started a debate amongst some people involved in the medical profession. Many still refute their research. Yet the research seems quite strong. Professor Paul Pearsaul has collected several cases of similar organ transplants. Many people who have heart transplants seem to take on the personality of the donor. ...

Dr. Rollin McCray from California's HeartMath Institute has developed research started by Dr Andrew Armour. Dr Armour has claimed that there is a system of living neurons on the heart. McCray states that the heart must have a memory because such a function is vital to the organ. It must be able to store when the last heart beat occurred. Such a function is by its very nature a memory and therefore is a type of function normally associated with the brain.

¹¹ *U.S. Bahá'í News*, compilation of letters and extracts of writings from the Guardian published in the *Bahá'í news* of the United States [December 1924 – November 1934]

¹² *The complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud*, Standard Edition, London, Hogarth Press, 1966-1974, Volume 7, page 222

¹³ Evan Harris Walker, *The Physics of Consciousness, The Quantum Mind and the Meaning of Life*, Basic Books, Perseus Books Group, New York 2000, pp.327-328

¹⁴ Bahíyyih Nakhjavání, *Asking Questions, A Challenge to Fundamentalism*, George Ronald, Oxford 1990, p. 3

¹⁵ Bertrand Russell, who was by no means a friend of religion, stated in his book *Religion and Science* in the year 1935 the following:

“The older religion has thus become purified and in many ways beneficial, new religions have arisen, with all the persecuting zeal of vigorous youth, and with as great a readiness to oppose science as characterized the Inquisition in the time of Galileo. If you maintain in Germany that Christ was a Jew, or in Russia that the atom has lost its substantiality and become a mere series of events, you are liable to severe punishment.” (from a reprint by Oxford University Press, New York, Oxford, 1997, pages 247-248)

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- ¹⁶ “It is an economic theory, definitely harnessed to disbelief in God. It is a religious irreligion... It has a passionate sense of mission, and is carrying on its anti-God campaign ... (WOB 181)
- ¹⁷ The holy Sanctuary at Mecca. Here the word means “goal.”]
- ¹⁸ The holy Sanctuary at Mecca. Here the word means “goal.”]
- ¹⁹ Literally, Majnún means “insane.” This is the title of the celebrated lover of ancient Persian and Arabian lore, who’s beloved was Laylí, daughter of an Arabian prince. Symbolizing true human love bordering on the divine, the story has been made the theme of many a Persian romantic poem, particularly that of Nizami, written in 1188-1189 A.D
- ²⁰ Arabian proverb
- ²⁰ Augustinus Karl Wucherer-Huldenfeld “Befreiung und Gotteserkenntnis” (Liberation and Recognition of God), Böhlau Verlag, Wien, Köln, Weimar, 2009, pp. 71-101.
- ²² International Teaching Centre, 1984, Aug Bahá’í Scholarship
- ²³ Found on the internet under Virtues and Vices
- ²⁴ These papers are published electronically at irfancolloquia.org/database