

# *Memorials of the Faithful:*

## The Virtues of Inner and Outer Transformation

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### 1. Introduction

The appearance of God's Manifestation initiates a twofold process of disintegration of the old world order and integration of the new world order.<sup>1</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá's book *Memorials of the Faithful* provides insights into the integration process associated with the lives of a group, who recognized the new Manifestation of God, and later accepted His eldest son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the appointed Center of the Covenant and sole Interpreter of His Writings. This study was initiated after reading two observations Marzieh Gail included in her Proem to *Memorials of the Faithful*. "...it is a kind of testament of values endorsed and willed to us by the Bahá'í [sic] Exemplar.... These are short and simple accounts, but they constitute a manual of how to live, and how to die" [MF xi]. What values did 'Abdu'l-Bahá identify for these 79 individuals who were closely associated with Bahá'u'lláh during his period of exile from Baghdad to the prison of Akká? Why did 'Abdu'l-Bahá feel it was important to leave a record? Some insight comes from Bahá'u'lláh:

*And yet, is not the object of every Revelation to effect a transformation in the whole character of mankind, a transformation that shall manifest itself both outwardly and inwardly, that shall affect both its inner life and external conditions? For if the character of mankind be not changed, the futility of God's universal Manifestations would be apparent. [K1 240]*

In order to identify the inward and outward transformation of the Faithful<sup>2</sup>, a simple process for analysis was used. Each time a virtue was mentioned for an individual it was recorded. If a virtue was mentioned multiple times for one of the Faithful, it was recorded as a single occurrence. No attempt has been made to interpret any actions as being an example of a virtue. The summary was then reviewed to identify how the internal and external virtues were demonstrated in the character, manners and conduct of the Faithful, and when details were provided by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, how the Faithful achieved the virtue. The Faithful’s conduct was investigated in greater detail using the stages of transformation described in Bahá’u’lláh’s book, *The Seven Valleys*, and will be used as a guide for achieving the goal of recognizing the Manifestation of God.

Before presenting the results of this study it would be useful to summarize the evolution of our understanding of spiritual values in the context of religious history. A brief review of the Judaic, Christian and Islamic teachings related to the development of moral principles will be presented. This is not meant to be a comprehensive study, but provides background to Bahá’u’lláh’s quotation above, that one of the reasons the divine Messengers have been sent is to effect internal and external changes in the life of the faithful that are in accordance with the requirements of the time in which they live.

## 2. Jewish, Christian, and Islamic moral principles

### Judaism

In Judaism, Moses presented the guidance of God to His followers in the form of the Ten Commandments [Exodus 20:2-17]. The first four Commandments focused on mankind's behavior in his relationship to his Creator.

1. *You shall have no other gods before Me.*
2. *You shall not make for yourself a carved image... you shall not bow down to them nor serve them...*
3. *You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain...*
4. *Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy...*

The remaining six Commandments guide the believers' behavior with the rest of mankind and their external conduct.

5. *Honor your father and your mother...*
6. *You shall not murder.*
7. *You shall not commit adultery.*
8. *You shall not steal.*
9. *You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*
10. *You shall not covet your neighbor's house... neighbor's wife, his male... female servant, nor his ox, donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's....*

The limited number of rules makes sense given pen and paper were not available during the time of Moses; most people could not read; and a list of ten rules was easily memorized.

### Christianity

Christians continued to use the Ten Commandments as guidance for their daily conduct, plus they adopted the spiritual

values of Christ. Several examples of these values are summarized in the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes appear in two locations, in Mathew during the Sermon on the Mont eight were identified<sup>3</sup>, and in Luke, four were mentioned. The Beatitudes unique to Matthew include the meek, the merciful, the pure of heart, and the peacemakers. These teachings are spiritually focused, and include guidance for both internal (e.g. “Blessed are the pure in heart”) and external transformation (e.g. “Blessed are the peacemakers”).

The Catholic Church later adopted seven additional virtues—four Cardinal virtues and three Theological Virtues. The number seven is significant because it represents God and divine perfection. The Cardinal virtues were identified by Greek philosophers Aristotle and Plato, who regarded temperance, wisdom, justice, and courage as the four most desirable character traits. The number four refers to the material world (e.g. four seasons, four directions). These virtues were called Cardinal, which means hinge, because all the other virtues hang on them. After the New Testament was written, faith, hope and charity were referred to as the Theological virtues. The number three references the Holy Trinity, and it is believed that these virtues may only be acquired and improved through the Grace of God. The source of these virtues comes from Paul, First Corinthians 13:13: “...and now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love...” The use of the word charity should not be confused with the donation of money or goods to the needy; this virtue is referring to man’s Love of God and love of humanity on behalf of God.

## Islam

In the Quran, Muḥammad provides new guidance for the believer which focuses on their inner and outer behavior. Some of the areas addressed included behavior related to knowledge, spiritual development, speech, and manners and new virtues

such as moderation, honour, courtesy, generosity, and truthfulness.

Muḥammad stresses the importance of truth and knowledge: “*and shun the word that is false*” [al-Hajj 22:30], “*O ye who believe! If a wicked person comes to you with any news, ascertain the truth, lest ye harm people unwittingly, and afterwards become full of repentance for what ye have done*” [Al-Hujurat 49:6], and “*And pursue not that of which thou hast no knowledge...*” [al-Isra' 17:36].

Muḥammad’s guidance for spiritual development includes: “*There is a mosque whose foundation was laid from the first day on piety; it is more worthy of the standing forth (for prayer) therein. In it are men who love to be purified; and Allah loveth those who make themselves pure...*” [at-Taubah 9:108]. “*Most Gracious are those who walk on the earth in humility*” [al-Furqan 25:63], “*eat and drink: But waste not by excess, for Allah loveth not the wasters*” [al-Ar'af 7:31], and “*be moderate in thy pace*” [Luqman 31:19].

The believers received the following guidance related to speech and its use: “*Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious*” [an-Nahl 16:125], “*no burden do We place on any soul, but that which it can bear;- whenever ye speak, speak justly*” [al-An'am 6:152], and “*When a (courteous) greeting is offered to you, meet it with a greeting still more courteous or (at least) of equal courtesy...*” [An Nisa 4:86].

Fellow human beings are to be treated with magnanimity, “*Those who spend (freely), whether in prosperity, or in adversity; who restrain anger, and pardon (all) men;- for Allah loves those who do good*” [al-E Imram 3:134], and “*do good to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, those in need, neighbours who are near, neighbours who are strangers, the companion by your side, the wayfarer (ye meet), and what your right hands possess: For Allah loveth not the arrogant, the vainglorious...*” [An Nisa 4:36].

### 3. Overview of Virtues in *Memorials of the Faithful*

*Memorials of the Faithful* is a gift from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to future generations. In these brief accounts we are provided with “a testament of the values endorsed and willed to us by the Bahá’í Exemplar”. We will now see how the Faithful lived these virtues through the eyes of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. The Faithful includes a group of 79 believers, including some family members, who were exiled and or imprisoned with Bahá’u’lláh, or provided Him some type of service. A list of the 82 virtues ‘Abdu’l-Bahá mentioned in *Memorials of the Faithful* has been summarized in Table 1.

acquiescence	faithfulness	long suffering	self-sacrifice
assurance	fear of God	love	selflessness
bravery	firmness	love of God	sensitivity
calmness	forbearance	love of Manifestation	serenity
candour	freedom	lowliness before God	servitude
certitude	friendliness	loyalty	severance
chastity	generosity	magnanimity	spirituality
cheerfulness	gentleness	meekness	steadfastness
composure	godliness	mildness	strength
constancy	God's love	modesty	submissiveness
contentment	gratitude	nobility	tenderness
courage	happiness	patience	thankfulness
detachment	high-mindedness	peacefulness	tranquility
determination	holiness	perception	trust
devotion	honour	perseverance	trustworthiness
dignity	humility	piety	truthfulness
eloquence	illumination	purity	wisdom
endurance	independence	radiance	wonderment
energy	joy	reliability	zeal
evanescence	kindness	resignation	
faith	knowledge	righteousness	

Table 1: *Memorials of the Faithful* mentions 82 virtues

‘Abdu’l-Bahá found virtue in everyone, from the servant and water carrier to the calligrapher and scholar. When the data was analyzed to determine if certain occupations were identified with the same virtues, no pattern was found. This was a difficult analysis to perform because of the small sample size and the occupation was not identified for everyone in the Memorials (16% were not identified). The individuals with the highest number of different virtues mentioned included a group of people from diverse backgrounds, Hájí ‘Alí-‘Askar-i-Tabrízí, a merchant, Mishkín-Qalam, calligrapher, Áqá Ibráhím-i-Işfahání, trader, Hájí Muḥammad-Ridáy-i-Shirází, servant, Ismu’lláhu’l-Aşdaq, scholar, Muḥammad-Ibráhím-i-Tabrízí, trader, ‘Azím-i-Tafríshí, water carrier, Ustád Báqir and Ustád Ahmad, carpenter, Hájí Mírzá Muḥammad-Taquí, the Afnán, merchant, Ustád Qulám-‘Alíy-i-Najjár, carpenter, and Áqá ‘Alíy-i-Qazvíní, occupation unknown.

The virtues mentioned most frequently were faith (28 individuals), loyalty (28), Love of God (27), love (23), trustworthiness (21), patience (19), contentment (18), joy (17), happiness (16), and detachment (15). Table 1 distinguishes two types of love including: the Faithful’s love of the Manifestation and love of their fellow human beings. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s description of how the Faithful demonstrated the three virtues faith, loyalty and trustworthiness will be presented now.

## Faith

‘Abdu’l-Bahá describes different aspects of the virtue of faith. In the first group of phrases, “*unsullied in faith*” [MF 63] and “*His faith is unalloyed*” [MF 74], his focus is on purity of faith. The purifying of their faith and leaving their religious traditions behind was a way of expanding their love for their new Faith. As an example, during the early days of Christianity there were two types of Christians—Jewish and Gentile. These two groups did not associate with each other because the Jewish Christians continued their traditions (eating kosher food,

circumcision<sup>4</sup>, etc.) and felt the Gentiles were unclean.<sup>5</sup> Over time, the Gentile Christians, who did not bring their traditions into Christianity, grew in numbers to become the religion we know today. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has highlighted the importance of leaving these traditions behind once one has recognized the newest Manifestation of God.

The second group of adjectives ‘Abdu’l-Bahá uses to describe faith includes “*strong*” [MF 127], “*firm*” [MF 164], “*firmly rooted*” [MF 164], “*and sound in faith*” [MF 141]. This description of faith is not a surprise given the extreme levels of sacrifice the Faithful had made in order to be in such close proximity to Bahá’u’lláh. These descriptions of the Faithful are easy to understand because they use the senses to convey the virtue. Another form used by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to convey faith is the metaphor of light. In two examples, the reality of faith, which has no outward form, is described in a way that the reader must use his inner ears, eyes and heart to understand how it was demonstrated by the Faithful, “*and his brows shone with faith*” [MF 98] and “*he had lit the light of faith in the chapel of his heart*” [MF 131].

‘Abdu’l-Bahá also brings to our attention that faith is not static, and mentions for one of the Faithful, “*his faith and certitude growing stronger with every passing day*” [MF 154]. How did they increase their faith? Guidance is provided by the activities of various individuals who spent their days and nights in “*the remembrance of God and in teaching His Cause*” [MF 180], “*reciting Holy Writ, or expounding the Texts, or unraveling the most complex of spiritual themes*” [MF 181], “*communing with God and chanting prayers*” [MF 42], “*chanting prayers, communing with God and calling upon Him*” [MF 146], and “*remembering and praising God; he chanted prayers, and carefully attended to his religious duties...*” [MF 66].



## Loyalty

When ‘Abdu’l-Bahá mentions the virtue loyalty, he refers to loyalty to the Covenant. This was particularly important following the ascension of Bahá’u’lláh when “*the fires of tests leaped up and a whirlwind of violation battered the edifice down*” [MF 159]. During this time, “*the absence of Bahá’u’lláh was not to be endured*” [MF 107], “*separation consumed us, the once bright days turned black as night, and all those roses of other hours were dust and rubble now*” [MF 23], and “*they were consumed with sorrow, like candles flickering away; they longed for death, and stayed firm in the Covenant and labored hard and well to spread that Daystar’s Faith...*” [MF 41]. It is no surprise that this virtue was second on the list given the critical period of the Faith’s history, when the Bábís were tested by the appearance of Him whom God will make manifest, and later when the early Bahá’ís were tested following the ascension of Bahá’u’lláh with accepting the Will and Testament of Bahá’u’lláh and recognizing ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as the one Center of the Covenant.

## Trustworthiness

Closely related to loyalty, is trustworthiness. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá addresses this virtue by identifying who trusted the Faithful and in what capacity they were trusted. The Faithful were “*trusted companions of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*” [MF 41], and “*Trusted by everyone...*” [MF 55]. Their trustworthiness was demonstrated in several capacities, “*a trustworthy friend*” [MF 57], “*confidant*” [MF 102], “*attendant and companion*” [MF 119], “*helper to every traveler*” [MF 154] and “*a trusted refuge...*” [MF 107]. Further explanation will not be provided here because the history of how both Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá suffered betrayal by their half brothers, Mírzá Yahya and Muḥammad-‘Alí, is well documented elsewhere.

## 4. Character, Manners and Conduct

The study of the virtues mentioned in *Memorials of the Faithful* will be defined within the framework for transformation outlined by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “*The most vital duty, in this day, is to purify your characters, to correct your manners, and improve your conduct*” [SWAB 13].

The Merriam Webster dictionary defines character, manners and conduct as follows:

Character: the way someone thinks, feels, and behaves

Manners: the way that a person normally behaves especially while with other people

Conduct: the way that a person behaves in a particular place or situation

### Bahá’í Character

In order to narrow down the list of 82 virtues for the discussion of character, a search of the Bahá’í writings, which have been translated into English, was conducted. It turned up six virtues used to describe character. These six virtues appeared in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s writings and include happiness<sup>6</sup>, humility<sup>7</sup>, serenity<sup>8</sup>, mercy<sup>9</sup>, nobility<sup>10</sup> and spirituality<sup>11</sup>. All of these virtues were also used to describe individuals in *Memorials of the Faithful*, with the exception of mercy. A brief summary of how the Faithful demonstrated these character virtues follows.

The Faithful were happy under all conditions. One would expect the Faithful would be happy having recognized and attained the presence of their Beloved, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá describes one such person, “*his heart happy in the presence of the Beloved of mankind*” [MF 68]. This happiness was maintained even when the external situation worsened. “*For some time he prospered and was happy*” [MF 76], “*they were perfectly content with their frugal life, supremely happy*” [MF 40], “*Now I am*

*homeless, and happy*” [MF 130], and *“the greater the tyranny of the oppressors, the happier he was...”* [MF 163].

The Faithful expressed humility before God. While they may have been humble people before friends, family and coworkers, this was not the focus of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s comments. *“I turned toward God and, humbly beseeching Him”* [MF 44], *“and humbly practicing her devotions”* [MF 193], *“Humbly entreating Thy heavenly Realm”* [MF 176], *“turning their faces toward Thy Kingdom, humbly supplicating Thy lofty Realms”* [MF 176] and *“spent his time humbly calling upon God, entreating Him, offering praise...”* [MF 79].

The Faithful also experienced serenity in this material plane and the next world. The majority of the statements in *Memorials of the Faithful* were related to the passing of their souls to the Abhá Kingdom. *“...By nature was spiritual and serene”* [MF 55], *“he lived to be eighty years old, at which time, serenely patient, he soared away to the Threshold of God”* [MF 139], *“he hastened away, tranquil, serene, rejoicing in the tidings of the Kingdom, out of this swiftly fading life to the world that does not die”* [MF 155], and *“serene and happy, rejoicing in the tidings of the Kingdom, he soared away to that mysterious land”* [MF 153]. How were they able to achieve this serenity? They were happy based on their rejoicing in receiving the Glad tidings on the Kingdom, and humbled by recognizing the Manifestation of God.

During one of his talks, while visiting the United States, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá commented that people should express their thankfulness for the favors of God through action, and not just verbal thanks. He noted:

*To express his gratitude for the favors of God man must show forth praiseworthy actions. In response to these bestowals he must render good deeds, be self-sacrificing, loving the servants of God, forfeiting even life for them, showing kindness to all the creatures. He must be*

*severed from the world, attracted to the Kingdom of Abhá, the face radiant, the tongue eloquent, the ear attentive, striving day and night to attain the good pleasure of God. Whatsoever he wishes to do must be in harmony with the good pleasure of God. He must observe and see what is the will of God and act accordingly. There can be no doubt that such commendable deeds are thankfulness for the favors of God.* [PUP 236-237]

The virtues of happiness, humility and serenity focus on how the Faithful were feeling on a sustained basis. The remaining two character virtues focus on how the Faithful expressed their gratitude through praiseworthy actions.

Nobility is defined as the quality of being noble in character, and having high moral principles or ideals. Three examples of nobility are summarized here as examples of external transformation of behavior, through showing kindness, goodness, generosity and virtuousness. “*He spent most of his time in showing kindness to friend and stranger alike; he was a magnanimous being, with open hand and heart*” [MF 165], “*This man, noble and high-minded ... Learning that his father was a captive there, he came with all speed to the fortress so that he too might have a share of those dire afflictions*” [MF 140], “*suffering, in his surrender to God’s will he was selflessness itself. He had no personal aims whatever, no feeling of attachment to this fleeting world. His one desire was to please his Lord...*” [MF 117].

The last virtue included in this group is spirituality. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s comments draw attention to the unity of the spiritual and the physical where the life of the spirit must be reflected in the physical world. This state was achieved by “*Persevering in his devotions, known for holy practices and nightly communings and vigils, his heart was illumined, and he was spiritual of mind and soul...*” [MF 84]. Spirituality was thus demonstrated: “*In him the inner and outer perfections,*

*the spiritual and physical, were joined together*” [MF 147], “*spiritual of heart, a man detached from all worldly things*” [MF 78], “*his life spiritual*” [MF 8], and “*high, spiritual aims...*” [MF 119].

### **Bahá’í Manners**

Bahá’u’lláh identifies good deeds which transform virtues into spiritual manners in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. Among the virtues, He identifies in this Holy Book, the Faithful are to be truthful, trustworthy, faithful, righteous, fear God, just and fair, tactful and wise, courteous, hospitable, persevering, detached, hospitable and to be: absolutely submissive to the Will of God. In the synopsis and codification of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, there is also a list of guidelines for how the Faithful should behave in relationship to one another. This list includes, “Not to: stir up mischief, be hypocritical, be proud, be fanatical, prefer one’s self to one’s neighbor, contend with one’s neighbor, indulge one’s passions, lament in adversity, contend with those in authority, lose one’s temper, anger one’s neighbor.”

There are not a lot of examples of how the Faithful demonstrated manners in *Memorials of the Faithful*. The reason for the lack of examples is unknown. It may not have been the focus of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá recording these accounts or it may reflect the living conditions of the Faithful. They were constantly being persecuted or imprisoned, and the opportunities for interactions were limited. This period represents that point in history where the two fold process of the fall of the old world order and the rise of the new world order was just beginning. Through the conduct of the Faithful, they achieved the objective of recognizing the Manifestation of God, and with His passing accepting His appointed Center of the Covenant. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá acknowledged one example of manners related to the virtue of courtesy in the story of Siyyid Muḥammad-Taqí Manshádí.

*He was a treasury of justice and righteousness, entirely free from any attachment to worldly things. He had accustomed himself to a very spare way of life, caring nothing for food or sleep, comfort or peace. He lived all alone in a single room, passed the nights on a couch of palm branches, and slept in a corner. But to the, travelers, he was a spring in the desert; for them, he provided the softest of pillows, and the best table he could afford... [MF 55].*

## **Bahá'í Conduct**

‘Abdu’l-Bahá provided further context for studying the conduct of the Faithful during one of the talks he gave during his visit to the United States.

*Strive with all your power to be free from imperfections. Heedless souls are always seeking faults in others. What can the hypocrite know of others' faults when he is blind to his own? This is the meaning of the words in the Seven Valleys. It is a guide for human conduct. As long as a man does not find his own faults, he can never become perfect. Nothing is more fruitful for man than the knowledge of his own shortcomings. The Blessed Perfection says, "I wonder at the man who does not find his own imperfections." [PUP 244]*

*The Seven Valleys* was written in Baghdad after Bahá'u'lláh returned from the mountains near Sulaymáníyyih. It was written in response to a question from a judge who was a student of Sufi philosophy. The goal of the Sufi was to attain the presence of God through meditation, prayer, contemplation and ecstasy. In *The Seven Valleys* Bahá'u'lláh describes the seven stages of the wayfarer's path with the two goals of recognizing God's Manifestation for the age and breaking attachment with the material world, purifying and preparing the mind and heart. *The Seven Valleys* acts as a guide for conduct, and we will now look

at ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s description of the Faithful as they demonstrate the process of walking through the Valleys. Comments will be limited here to a few examples per Valley, with a brief summary of the virtues needed, or actions needed, to pass through the Valley, followed by one or two examples from *Memorials of the Faithful* which demonstrate the virtue or action.

### Valley of Search

In order to pass through the Valley of Search, Bahá’u’lláh recommends the seeker focus on their inner transformation and spiritual search. Success in passing this Valley is achieved when the Faithful demonstrate, “*The steed of this Valley is patience...*” [SV 5], “*Nor should he be downhearted...*” [SV 5], “*It is incumbent that they cleanse the heart...*” [SV 5], “*...turn away from blind imitation...*” [SV 5], and “*...sacrifice all things...*” [SV 7].

‘Abdu’l-Bahá cites an example of the Faithful demonstrating patience, and freeing themselves of attachment from this world, when he recounts the story of Ismu’lláhu’l-Aṣḍaq in the battle of Fort Tabarsi. “To begin with, they were far from home, surrounded and cut off by the foe; again, they were starving; and then there were the army’s sudden onslaughts and the bombshells raining down and bursting in the heart of the Fort. Under such circumstances to maintain an unwavering faith and patience is extremely difficult, and to endure such dire afflictions a rare phenomenon.” [DB 395 n. 1]

The story of ‘Abdu’lláh Baghdádí is provided as an example of someone’s inner transformation, and how he demonstrated his purity by cleansing his heart.

*Even among the nonbelievers, people were astonished at the change. What could have come over this youth, they wanted to know; how did it happen that he was suddenly detached from the world, eager and devoted? “He was*

*tainted, corrupted,” they said; “today he is abstemious and chaste. He was sunk in his appetites, but is now the soul of purity, living a righteous life. He has left the world behind him...”* [MF 130]

The words of Táhirih remind us of the importance in turning away from blind imitation.

*Let deeds, not words, testify to thy faith, if thou art a man of true learning. Cease idly repeating the traditions of the past, for the day of service, of steadfast action, is come. Now is the time to show forth the true signs of God, to rend asunder the veils of idle fancy, to promote the Word of God, and to sacrifice ourselves in His path. Let deeds, not words, be our adorning!* [MF 200]

## Valley of Love

In order to pass through the Valley of Love Bahá'u'lláh revealed the Faithful must “*forsake thine outward eyes; thou shalt never open the eye of thine inward being...*” [SV 9], “*A lover feareth nothing and no harm can come nigh unto him...*” [SV 9], and “*...veils of the satanic self be burned away at the fire of love...*” [SV 9].

When describing the Love of God, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá gives physical form to the unseen, by using the metaphor of burning candles, fire and stars. Fire has at least two functions in the Bahá’í writings; it can be used to burn away the veils and illusions which are blocking the seeker, or with increased intensity it acts as a power of attraction and welds together diverse elements. The inner transformation of the Faithful is very clear in the following descriptions of their veils of satanic self being burned away, “*Then his love of God burned away every obstructing veil and idle thought...*” [MF 22], “*...but the love he had for God was past all concealing. It burst from his heart, flamed out and consumed its coverings...*” [MF 2], “*...and they burst into flame with yearning love for God...*” [MF



176], and “...*the love of God sparked a revolution in the country of his inner self...*” [MF 83].

The love the Faithful experienced for the Manifestation of God, transformed them to the point where they were willing to accept pain and endure great hardship for extended periods of time. One example of an individual, who demonstrated this love, feared nothing and no harm came to him, was Mullá ‘Alí - Akbar. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá recounts,

*Things came to such a pass that in the end whenever there was an uproar Mullá ‘Alí would put on his turban, wrap himself in his ‘abá and sit waiting, for his enemies to rouse and the farráshes to break in and the guards to carry him off to prison. But observe the power of God! In spite of all this, he was kept safe. “The sign of a knower and lover is this, that you will find him dry in the sea.” That is how he was. His life hung by a thread from one moment to the next; the malevolent lay in wait for him; he was known everywhere as a Bahá’í—and still he was protected from all harm. He stayed dry in the depths of the sea, cool and safe in the heart of the fire, until the day he died... [MF 11]*

## Valley of Knowledge

In the Valley of Knowledge Bahá’u’lláh explains that the wayfarer is now aiming for higher spiritual goals. These are demonstrated when the Faithful “...*turn to the guiding light of the fear of God...*” [SV 11], “*He beholdeth justice in injustice, and in justice, grace...*” [SV 12], “...*if he meeteth injustice, he shall have patience...*” [SV 13], “...*if he cometh upon wrath he shall manifest love...*” [SV 13], and are “...*freed from turning towards ourselves...*” [SV 16].

‘Abdu’l-Bahá acknowledges how the Faithful “...*longed for knowledge of God...*” [MF 106], and after recognizing Bahá’u’lláh as the new Manifestation “...*drank the red wine*

*of knowledge from the hands of the Cupbearer of grace...*” [MF 49]. He also noted that their education was not limited to religious studies and included the sciences of the material world. For example, one gentleman was “...well versed in many branches of knowledge. For a long time he was in the schools, specializing in the fundamentals of religion and religious jurisprudence, and making researches into philosophy and metaphysics, logic and history, the contemplative and the narrated sciences...” [MF 156]. The importance of educating women is also confirmed with his comments about Táhirih, “...she studied various branches of knowledge and the arts, achieving remarkable ability in literary pursuits. Such was the degree of her scholarship and attainments that her father would often express his regret, saying, “Would that she had been a boy...” [MF 191].

The transformation of the Faithful is once again reflected in their conduct. Living under difficult situations ‘Abdu’l-Bahá records how Mishkín-Qalam turned to the guiding light of the fear of God.

*After the ascension of Bahá’u’lláh, Mishkín-Qalam remained loyal, solidly established in the Covenant. He stood before the violators like a brandished sword. He would never go half way with them; he feared no one but God; not for a moment did he falter, nor ever fail in service... [MF 100]*

The story of the wayfarer in the Valley of Knowledge, who beholds “justice in injustice, and in justice, grace”, shares similarities with the story of Nabíl-i-Akbar.

*Here, his enemies struck at him again. He was pursued by the watchmen; guards looked everywhere for him, asking after him in every street and alley, hunting him down to catch and torture him. Hiding, he would pass by them like the sigh of the oppressed, and rise to the hills; or again, like the tears of the wronged, he would slip*

*down into the valleys. He could no longer wear the turban denoting his rank; he disguised himself, putting on a layman's hat, so that they would fail to recognize him and would let him be. In secret, with all his powers he kept on spreading the Faith and setting forth its proofs, and was a guiding lamp to many souls... [MF 3]*

Mullá 'Alí-Akbar, was an example of one who if he came upon wrath, he manifested love.

*For the sake of God he cast all caution aside, as he hastened along the ways of love. He became as one frenzied, as a vagrant and one known to be mad. Because of his new Faith, he was mocked at in Tíhrán by high and low. When he walked through the streets and bázárs, the people pointed their fingers at him, calling him a Bahá'í... [MF 10]*

## Valley of Unity

In order to pass through the Valley of Unity Bahá'u'lláh revealed the Faithful must “*With the ear of God he heareth, with eye of God he beholdeth the mysteries of divine civilization...*” [SV 17], “*...seeth in himself neither name nor fame nor rank...*” [SV 18], and “*...looketh on all things with eye of oneness...*” [SV 18].

'Abdu'l-Bahá identifies several of the Faithful who “*He seeth in himself neither name nor fame nor rank.*” One of these was Mírzá Mihdíy-i-Káshání. “*This noble personage had been honored among men, but for God's love he lost both name and fame. He bore manifold misfortunes with never a complaint. He was content with God's decrees, and walked the ways of resignation...*” [MF 97]. This level of detachment from personal fame and rank could have been used to describe each of the Faithful, for they had sacrificed their social status and jobs, and the possibility of improving their fame and rank, in order to be close to the Manifestation of God. Being so close to Bahá'u'lláh

they were able to listen as the Revelation was revealed and with their eyes witnessed His behavior under these difficult situations. ‘Abdu’lláh Baghdádí was one whose “...*burning heart broke when he saw how victimized was Bahá’u’lláh, how patiently He suffered. ‘Abdu’lláh yearned to die for Him. And thus it came about that he offered up his life for his tender Companion, and hastened away, out of this dark world to the country of light...*” [MF 130].

### Valley of Contentment

In order to pass through the Valley of Contentment Bahá’u’lláh revealed the Faithful “...*feeletth winds of divine contentment...*” [SV 29], “...*burneth away the veils of want...*” [SV 29], “*From sorrow he turneth to bliss, from anguish to joy...*” [SV 29], and “...*throw thy life down in His path...*” [SV 31]. We can only imagine the joy, happiness and contentment the Faithful must have experienced having recognized the Manifestation of God, and living in such close proximity to Bahá’u’lláh.

One person who felt the winds of divine contentment was Muḥammad-‘Alí Sabbáq of Yazd who ‘Abdu’l-Bahá notes,

*The friends, one and all, were pleased with him, and he was cherished at the Holy Threshold; in this state he soared to abiding glory, leaving his kin to mourn. He was a kind man, an excellent one: content with God’s will for him, thankful, a man of dignity, long-suffering...* [MF 58]

Mírzá Mustafá Naráqí is an example of one who did throw his life down in His path. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá recounts,

*The farráshes hunted them down, and caught Mírzá Mustafá. But then the oppressors said, “Mírzá Mustafá had two long locks of hair. This cannot be the right man.” At once, Mírzá Mustafá took off his hat and*

*down fell the locks of hair. "Behold!" he told them. "I am the one." They arrested him then. They tortured him and Shaykh Ahmad until finally, in Tabríz, those two great men drained the cup of death and, martyred, hastened away to the Supreme Horizon. At the place where they were to be killed, Mírzá Mustafá cried out: "Kill me first, kill me before Shaykh Ahmad, that I may not see them shed his blood!..." [MF 149]*

## Valley of Wonderment

The state of the Faithful in the Valley of Wonderment, is like no other, and appears totally mystical for "...*the traveler is flung into confusion...*" [SV 32], "...*wearied out with his own life...*" [SV 32], and Bahá'u'lláh alludes to "...*how many worlds concealed...*" in dreams [SV 32], and "...*planes and states are folded up and hidden away within him...*" [SV 34].

The world of dreams is provided as proof of a spiritual existence, where people see without eyes, hear without ears, and speak with out mouths. The story of Táhirih provides one example,

*One night when it was getting along toward dawn she laid her head on her pillow, lost all awareness of this earthly life, and dreamed a dream; in her vision a youth, a Siyyid... appeared to her in the heavens; he was standing in the air, reciting verses and praying with his hands upraised. At once, she memorized one of those verses... After the Báb had declared His mission, and His first book, "The Best of Stories,"<sup>6</sup> was circulated, Táhirih was reading a section of the text one day, and she came upon that same verse...she fell to her knees and bowed her forehead to the ground, convinced that the Báb's message was truth... [MF 193]*

Two interesting examples of planes and states folded and hidden away are summarized here as examples of the sudden

appearance of knowledge and what appears to be a miracle. Pahlaván Ridá, brother of Áqá Muḥammad-Báqir and Áqá Muḥammad-Ismá‘íl,

*...was a man to outward seeming untutored, devoid of learning. He was a tradesman, and like the others who came in at the start, he cast everything away out of love for God, attaining in one leap the highest reaches of knowledge. He is of those from the earlier time. So eloquent did he suddenly become that the people of Káshán were astounded... [MF 167]*

Mírzá Ja‘far -i-Yazdí,

*Then the sick man breathed his last. Mírzá Áqá Ján ran to Bahá’u’lláh, with word of the death. Not only had the patient ceased to breathe, but his body was already going limp. His family were gathered about him, mourning him, shedding bitter tears. The Blessed Beauty said, “Go; chant the prayer of Yá Sháfí—O Thou, the Healer—and Mírzá Ja‘far will come alive. Very rapidly, he will be as well as ever.” I reached his bedside. His body was cold and all the signs of death were present. Slowly, he began to stir; soon he could move his limbs, and before an hour had passed he lifted his head, sat up, and proceeded to laugh and tell jokes... [MF 158]*

## Valley of True Poverty and Absolute Nothingness

In order to pass through the Valley of True Poverty and Absolute Nothingness Bahá’u’lláh revealed the Faithful must be, “...poor in the things of the created world, rich in the things of God’s world...” [SV 36], “...burn away all veils and wrappings... outer wealth or personal opinions...” [SV 36], and “...must stray not the breadth of a hair from the law...” [SV 39].

‘Abdu’l-Bahá provides guidance on what the Faithful detached themselves from in order to be rich in the things of

God's world. *"His detachment from the things of this world and his attachment to the life of the spirit are indescribable"* [MF 43], *"...a man who lived free and detached from friend and stranger alike"* [MF 36], *"they freed themselves from friend and stranger alike, escaped from the superstitions that had blinded them before..."* [MF 63], *"He was detached from every selfish thought, averse to every mention..."* [MF 70], and *"...kept free from every unseemly thought, and shunned whatever went contrary to the Covenant of God..."* [MF 56].

One of the Faithful who gave up everything was Ustád Ismá'íl.

*Composed, happy, Ustád gave up his work, closed his eyes to his possessions, and left for Iraq, where he lived in poverty. He had recently taken a bride, and loved her beyond measure. Her mother arrived, and by subterfuge, obtained his permission to conduct the daughter back to Tihrán, supposedly for a visit. As soon as she reached Kirmánsháh, she went to the mujtahid, and told him that because her son-in-law had abandoned his religion, her daughter could not remain his lawful wife. The mujtahid arranged a divorce, and wedded the girl to another man. When word of this reached Baghdad, Ismá'íl, steadfast as ever, only laughed. "God be praised!" he said. "Nothing is left me on this pathway. I have lost everything, including my bride. I have been able to give Him all I possessed..."* [MF 29]

Bahá'ís have a two-fold responsibility: the first is to recognize the Manifestation of God, and the second is to follow His commandments. We will end this section on conduct, with the story of one who did not stray the breadth of a hair from the law, Hájí 'Alí-'Askar-i-Tabrízí.

*Then he took a little merchandise with him from Adrianople, and left for the city of Jum'ih-Bázár, to earn his livelihood. What he had with him was trifling, but still, it was carried off by thieves. When the Persian*

*Consul learned of this he presented a document to the Government, naming an enormous sum as the value of the stolen goods. By chance the thieves were caught and proved to be in possession of considerable funds. It was decided to investigate the case. The Consul called in Hájí 'Alí-'Askar and told him: "These thieves are very rich. In my report to the Government, I wrote that the amount of the theft was great. Therefore you must attend the trial and testify conformably to what I wrote."..."The Hájí only smiled. "Jináb-i-Khán," he said. "I have given up my life for the truth. I have nothing else. You are telling me to lie and bear false witness. Do with me as you please; I will not turn my back on what is right..."*

[MF 162]

## 5. Conclusions

This study was initiated with the objective of answering three questions: What virtues did 'Abdu'l-Bahá highlight for this group of faithful individuals? How did they demonstrate inner and outer transformation in their character, manners and conduct? How did they achieve this transformation?

What were the virtues? 'Abdu'l-Bahá recorded 82 virtues in *Memorials of the Faithful* which we need to "purify our characters, correct our manners and improve our conduct". Faith, loyalty, love of God, love, trustworthiness, patience, contentment, joy, happiness, and detachment were the most frequently mentioned virtues.

How was it demonstrated? The Faithful succeeded in knowing themselves and recognizing that which leads to loftiness. Studying *The Seven Valleys* along with *Memorials of the Faithful* provides a basis for understanding the conduct of the Faithful and a framework for identifying the behavior which led them to recognize the new Manifestation of God and later accept 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the Center of the Covenant.



How was it achieved? ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains virtues are not static, and the Faithful worked on increasing their faith daily by praying, remembering God, calling upon God, communing with God, and teaching His Cause. Tests and obedience to the laws also developed the Faithful’s virtues.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá provides us with the context for the virtues in *Memorials of the Faithful*, and his focus changed depending upon the situation or relationship of the individual he was discussing. Character, manners and conduct will change depending upon the needs of the day: for example, loyalty to the Covenant during the time the Faithful lived referred to following Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, but today this obedience has grown to include obeying and supporting the Universal House of Justice.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Jena Khodadad, “The Phenomenon of Newly Emerging Entities and the Twofold Process” (Irfán Colloquium at Louhelen, 2015)

<sup>2</sup> “Faithful” will be used to refer to the group of early believers ‘Abdu’l Bahá included in his book *Memorials of the Faithful*.

<sup>3</sup> The eight Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12:

*Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven. (5:3)*

*Blessed are those who mourn: for they will be comforted. (5:4)*

*Blessed are the meek: for they will inherit the earth. (5:5)*

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness: for they will be filled. (5:6)*

*Blessed are the merciful: for they will be shown mercy. (5:7)*

*Blessed are the pure in heart: for they will see God. (5:8)*

*Blessed are the peacemakers: for they will be called children of God. (5:9)*

*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (5:10)*

*Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

<sup>4</sup> “Within the movement, the hotly debated questions were whether Gentile followers of Jesus needed to become Jews, that is, whether male members needed to undergo circumcision. Did Gentile followers need to observe the Torah, the law of Moses? Paul’s answer was unequivocal—Gentiles were not required to adopt circumcision or to follow the Jewish law.” (Gager, John G 26). *Reinventing Paul*. Oxford: University Press, 2000.

The Apostle Paul: “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” (2 Corinthians 5:17)

<sup>5</sup>See JoAnn Borovicka, “Parallels in the Ministries of Táhírih and St. Paul,” Irfán at Louhelen, 2015

<sup>6</sup> Muḥammad-‘Alíy-i-Ardikání: “*He served with a loyal heart. He had a happy nature, a comely face; he was a man believing, seeking, tested and tried ...*” [MF 141]

<sup>7</sup> “*Know thou, verily, submissiveness is the good quality of the maid-servants of God, and humility is the character of the God-fearing leaves who have sprung forth from the Tree of Mercifulness ....*” [TAB 77]

<sup>8</sup> Siyyid Muḥammad-Taqí Manshádi: “*... for them, he provided the softest of pillows, and the best table he could afford. He had a smiling face and by nature was spiritual and serene ...*” [MF 55]

<sup>9</sup> “*O my friend, it is incumbent upon thee to be severed (from all else save God), to be attracted, to be sincere, and to spend thy life in the path of God. Be thou holy, spiritual, divine, lively, brilliant, godlike, sanctified, pure, with merciful character, firm in the Covenant, fluent and knowing; and gaze toward the Kingdom of El-ABHA with a heart brimming over with the love of God, with tears flowing the commemoration of God, with a face scintillating through the light of God, with a heart sincere to the beloved of God, and with a sword which divides truth from falsehood ....*” [TAB 166]

<sup>10</sup> ‘Abdu’s-Şálih, the Gardener: “*He emigrated to the Most Great Prison and here, at the Riḍván, achieved the honor of being appointed gardener. At this task he was second to none. In his faith, too, he was staunch, loyal, worthy of trust; as to his character, he was an embodiment of the sacred verse, “Of a noble nature art thou.” That is how he won the distinction of being gardener at the Riḍván, and of thus receiving the greatest bounty of all: almost daily, he entered the presence of Bahá’u’lláh ...*” [MF 26]

<sup>11</sup> “*Now amidst all the peoples of the world must the beloved arise, with a heart even as the day-star, a strong inward urge, a shining brow, a musk-scented breath, a tongue speaking ever of God, an exposition crystal-clear, a high resolve, a power born of heaven, a spiritual character, a confirmation nothing short of the divine ....*” [SWAB 241]