

Interpretation of the Holy Writings

Bahá'u'lláh

Translated



Interpretation of the Holy Writings

*"Whoso interpreteth what hath been sent down from the heaven of Revelation, and altereth its evident meaning, he, verily, is of them that have perverted the Sublime Word of God, and is of the lost ones in the Lucid Book."*¹

*"Amongst the people is he who seateth himself amid the sandals by the door whilst coveting in his heart the seat of honor. Say: What manner of man art thou, O vain and heedless one, who wouldst appear as other than thou art? And among the people is he who layeth claim to inner knowledge, and still deeper knowledge concealed within this knowledge. Say: Thou speakest false! By God! What thou dost possess is naught but husks which We have left to thee as bones are left to dogs. By the righteousness of the one true God! Were anyone to wash the feet of all mankind, and were he to worship God in the forests, valleys, and mountains, upon high hills and lofty peaks, to leave no rock or tree, no clod of earth, but was a witness to his worship—yet, should the fragrance of My good pleasure not be inhaled from him, his works would never be acceptable unto God. Thus hath it been decreed by Him Who is the Lord of all. How many a man hath secluded himself in the climes of India, denied himself the things that God hath decreed as lawful, imposed upon himself austerities and mortifications, and hath not been remembered by God, the Revealer of Verses. Make not your deeds as snares wherewith to entrap the object of your aspiration, and deprive not yourselves of this Ultimate Objective for which have ever yearned all such as have drawn nigh unto God. Say: The very life of all deeds is My good pleasure, and all things depend upon Mine acceptance. Read ye the Tablets that ye may know what hath been purposed in the Books of God, the All-Glorious, the Ever-Bounteous. He who attaineth to My love hath title to a throne of gold, to sit thereon in honor over all the world; he who is deprived thereof, though he sit upon the dust, that dust would seek refuge with God, the Lord of all Religions."*²

*"Say: O leaders of religion! 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. In this most perfect Balance whatsoever the peoples and kindreds of the earth possess must be weighed, while the measure of its weight should be tested according to its own standard, did ye but know it."*³

1. Baha'u'llah, The Most Holy Book, para 105

2. Baha'u'llah, The Most Holy Book, para 36

3. Baha'u'llah, The Most Holy Book, para 99



TRANSLATION

*"Assist ye, O My people, My chosen servants who have arisen to make mention of Me among My creatures and to exalt My Word throughout My realm. These, truly, are the stars of the heaven of My loving providence and the lamps of My guidance unto all mankind. But he whose words conflict with that which hath been sent down in My Holy Tablets is not of Me. Beware lest ye follow any impious pretender. These Tablets are embellished with the seal of Him Who causeth the dawn to appear, Who lifteth up His voice between the heavens and the earth. Lay hold on this Sure Handle and on the Cord of My mighty and unassailable Cause."*⁴

*"We, verily, see amongst you him who taketh hold of the Book of God and citeth from it proofs and arguments wherewith to repudiate his Lord, even as the followers of every other Faith sought reasons in their Holy Books for refuting Him Who is the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting. Say: God, the True One, is My witness that neither the Scriptures of the world, nor all the books and writings in existence, shall, in this Day, avail you aught without this, the Living Book, Who proclaimeth in the midmost heart of creation: "Verily, there is none other God but Me, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.""*⁵

*"Say: This is the infallible Balance which the Hand of God is holding, in which all who are in the heavens and all who are on the earth are weighed, and their fate determined, if ye be of them that believe and recognize this truth. Say: This is the Most Great Testimony, by which the validity of every proof throughout the ages hath been established, would that ye might be assured thereof. Say: Through it the poor have been enriched, the learned enlightened, and the seekers enabled to ascend unto the presence of God. Beware lest ye make it a cause of dissension amongst you. Be ye as firmly settled as the immovable mountain in the Cause of your Lord, the Mighty, the Loving."*⁶

*"They that are the worshipers of the idol which their imaginations have carved, and who call it Inner Reality, such men are in truth accounted among the heathen. To this hath the All-Merciful borne witness in His Tablets. He, verily, is the All-Knowing, the All-Wise."*⁷

"And among the people is he who layeth claim to inner knowledge

This is a reference to people who claim access to esoteric knowledge and whose attachment to such knowledge veils them from the Revelation of the Manifestation of God. Elsewhere Bahá'u'lláh affirms: *"They that are the worshipers of the idol which their imaginations have carved, and who call it Inner Reality, such men are in truth accounted among the heathen."*⁸

"Whoso interpreteth what hath been sent down from the heaven of Revelation, and altereth its evident meaning

In several of His Tablets, Bahá'u'lláh affirms the distinction between allegorical verses, which are susceptible to interpretation, and those verses that relate to such subjects as the laws and

⁴. Baha'u'llah, The Most Holy Book, para 117

⁵. Baha'u'llah, The Most Holy Book, para 168

⁶. Baha'u'llah, The Most Holy Book, para 183

⁷. Baha'u'llah, Gleanings CLX

⁸. Notes to Kitab-i-Aqdas no. 60

ordinances, worship and religious observances, whose meanings are evident and which demand compliance on the part of the believers.

As explained in notes 145 and 184, Bahá'u'lláh designated 'Abdu'lBahá, His eldest Son, as His Successor and the Interpreter of His Teachings. 'Abdu'lBahá in His turn appointed His eldest grandson, Shoghi Effendi, to succeed Him as interpreter of the holy Writ and Guardian of the Cause. The interpretations of 'Abdu'lBahá and Shoghi Effendi are considered divinely guided and are binding on the Bahá'ís.

The existence of authoritative interpretations does not preclude the individual from engaging in the study of the Teachings and thereby arriving at a personal interpretation or understanding. A clear distinction is, however, drawn in the Bahá'í Writings between authoritative interpretation and the understanding that each individual arrives at from a study of its Teachings. Individual interpretations based on a person's understanding of the Teachings constitute the fruit of man's rational power and may well contribute to a greater comprehension of the Faith. Such views, nevertheless, lack authority. In presenting their personal ideas, individuals are cautioned not to discard the authority of the revealed words, not to deny or contend with the authoritative interpretation, and not to engage in controversy; rather they should offer their thoughts as a contribution to knowledge, making it clear that their views are merely their own.”⁹

“refer ye whatsoever ye understand not in the Book to Him Who hath branched from this mighty **Stock**

Bahá'u'lláh invests 'Abdu'lBahá with the right of interpreting His holy Writ.”¹⁰

“turn your faces toward Him Whom God hath purposed, Who hath branched from this Ancient **Root**

Bahá'u'lláh here alludes to 'Abdu'lBahá as His Successor and calls upon the believers to turn towards Him. In the Book of the Covenant, His Will and Testament, Bahá'u'lláh discloses the intention of this verse. He states: *“The object of this sacred verse is none other except the Most Mighty Branch.”* The *“Most Mighty Branch”* is one of the titles conferred by Bahá'u'lláh on 'Abdu'lBahá.”¹¹



⁹. Notes to Kitab-i-Aqdas no. 130

¹⁰. Notes to Kitab-i-Aqdas no. 184

¹¹. Notes to Kitab-i-Aqdas no. 145