

Asceticism

Bahá'u'lláh, Abdu'l-Baha

Translated



Asceticism

*"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 honour 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."*¹

*"In brief, dissensions among various sects have opened the way to weakness. Each sect hath picked out a way for itself and is clinging to a certain cord. Despite manifest blindness and ignorance they pride themselves on their insight and knowledge. Among them are mystics who bear allegiance to the Faith of Islám, some of whom indulge in that which leadeth to idleness and seclusion. I swear by God! It lowereth man's station and maketh him swell with pride. Man must bring forth fruit. One who yieldeth no fruit is, in the words of the Spirit,³ like unto a fruitless tree, and a fruitless tree is fit but for the fire."*²

*"of the Most Exalted Paradise is the following: O people of the earth! Living in seclusion or practicing asceticism is not acceptable in the presence of God. It behooveth them that are endued with insight and understanding to observe that which will cause joy and radiance. Such practices as are sprung from the loins of idle fancy or are begotten of the womb of superstition ill beseem men of knowledge. In former times and more recently some people have been taking up their abodes in the caves of the mountains while others have repaired to graveyards at night. Say, give ear unto the counsels of this Wronged One. Abandon the things current amongst you and adopt that which the faithful Counselor biddeth you. Deprive not yourselves of the bounties which have been created for your sake..."*³

"It must not be implied that one should give up avocation and attainment to livelihood. On the contrary, in the Cause of Baha'u'llah monasticism and asceticism are not sanctioned. In this

1. Baha'u'llah, Kitáb-i-Aqdas, par. 36

2. Baha'u'llah, Words of Paradise

3. Baha'u'llah, Words of Paradise, The 10th Leaf



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great Cause the light of guidance is shining and radiant. Baha'u'llah has even said that occupation and labor are devotion. All humanity must obtain a livelihood by sweat of the brow and bodily exertion, at the same time seeking to lift the burden of others, striving to be the source of comfort to souls and facilitating the means of living. This in itself is devotion to God. Baha'u'llah has thereby encouraged action and stimulated service. But the energies of the heart must not be attached to these things; the soul must not be completely occupied with them. Though the mind is busy, the heart must be attracted toward the Kingdom of God in order that the virtues of humanity may be attained from every direction and source." ⁴

"By enduring ascetic hardships the powers of nature will undergo dissolution which will result in great weakness whereby one is made incapable of doing anything. He will not show any temper. He will not do any evil. He will not cause a riot; he is quiet. He is wronged; he is like a lamb. But this is due to weakness. But he who has attained spiritual asceticism acquires these attributes by strength of character. When a man by nature, that is to say, by some imperfection of nature, is incapable of committing uncommendable acts, that is nothing in his favor. But if he by sheer force of will and spiritual training attains to a state of character which prevents him from doing such things, this is a great credit to him. The insane man is entirely detached from all bonds and ties; he is absolutely free from all attachments. But this is not a commendation to him. But when the disciples of Christ, who were in a normal state of mind and body let go of everything in life, that is indeed commendable." ⁵

"Regarding your questions: by holiness in our Bahá'í teachings is meant attachment to God, His Precepts and His Will. We are not ascetics in any sense of the word. On the contrary, Baha'u'llah says God has created all the good things in the world for us to enjoy and partake of. But we must not become attached to them and put them before the spiritual things." ⁶

"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"

"These verses constitute the prohibition of monasticism and asceticism..." ⁷



⁴. Abdu'l-Baha, Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 187

⁵. Abdu'l-Baha, Star of the West, Volume 8, Issue 6, pp. 60-61; article in Fortnightly Review, June 1911, by Miss E. S. Stevens

⁶. On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Divine Guidance, vol. 2, pp. 71

⁷. Notes to the Kitab-i-Aqdas, no. 61