

The Seven Valleys

Bahá'u'lláh

Original English



The Seven Valleys

An exposition of the mysteries enshrined in the stages of ascent for them that seek to journey unto God, the Almighty, the Ever-Forgiving

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate!

Praise be to God Who hath made being to come forth from nothingness; graven upon the tablet of man a measure of the mysteries of His eternity; taught him from the storehouse of divine utterance that which he knew not; made him a perspicuous book unto such as have believed and surrendered their souls; given him to behold, in this dark and ruinous age, a new creation within all things; and caused him to speak forth, from the midmost heart of eternity, and in a new and wondrous voice, embodied in the most excellent Temple.¹ And all to this end: that every man may testify, in himself and by himself, before the Seat of the revelation of his Lord, that there is none other God but Him; and that all may reach that summit of realities where none shall contemplate anything but that he shall perceive God therein. This is the vision of the splendours which have been deposited within the realities of all things; for otherwise He,

¹ The Manifestation of God.



ORIGINAL



AUDIO

exalted be His glory, is entirely sanctified above being seen or witnessed: “No vision taketh in Him, but He taketh in all vision; He is the Subtile, the All-Perceiving.”²

And I praise and glorify that primal Sea which hath branched out from the ocean of the unseen Essence, and that primal Morn which hath broken forth upon the horizon of Singleness, and that primal Sun which hath risen in the heaven of everlasting splendour, and that primal Fire which was kindled from the Lamp of eternity within the Niche of oneness: He Who is called “Aḥmad” in the kingdom of the exalted ones, and “Muḥammad” amongst the concourse of the favoured ones, and “Maḥmúd” in the realm of the sincere;³ and in the hearts of the knowing, “whichsoever ye call upon, most beauteous are His names.”⁴ And upon His kindred and His companions be abundant, abiding, and eternal peace!

To continue: I have hearkened to the song of the nightingale of knowledge upon the twigs of the tree of thine inmost being, and to the cooing of the dove of certitude upon the branches of the bower of thine heart. Methinks I inhaled the fragrance of purity from the raiment of thy love and, in perusing thy letter, attained thy very presence. I noted, moreover, thine allusions to thy death in God and thy life through Him, and the love thou dost cherish for the beloved of the Lord and for the Manifestations of His names and the Exponents of His attributes. I have purposed, therefore, to acquaint thee with holy and resplendent tokens from the realms of might and glory, that haply they may draw thee nigh unto the court of holiness, nearness, and beauty, and draw thee to a station wherein thou shalt see naught in all existence but the hallowed Countenance of thy Beloved, and wilt behold all of creation as a day wherein none was deemed worthy of mention.⁵

² Qur’án 6:103.

³ Aḥmad, Muḥammad, and Maḥmúd are names and titles of the Prophet derived from the verb “to praise”, “to extol”.

⁴ Qur’án 17:110.

⁵ Cf. Qur’án 76:1.

Of this did the nightingale of oneness sing in the garden of his mystical treatise,⁶ saying, “And there shall appear upon the tablet of thine heart an inscription of the subtle mysteries of the verse ‘Fear ye God; God will teach you’, and the bird of thy spirit shall recall the sanctuaries of ancient splendour, and soar upon the wings of longing into the heaven of the command ‘Walk the beaten paths of thy Lord’, and partake of the choice fruits of communion in the gardens of the utterance ‘Feed, moreover, on every kind of fruit.’”⁷

By My life, O friend! Wert thou to taste the fruits of these verdant trees that spring from the soil of true understanding, once the effulgent light of His Essence hath been reflected in the Mirrors of His names and attributes yearning would seize the reins of patience and restraint from out thy hand and stir thy spirit into commotion with the splendours of His light. It would draw thee from this abode of dust unto thy true and heavenly habitation in the midmost heart of mystic knowledge, and raise thee to a station wherein thou wilt soar in the air even as thou treadest upon the earth, and wilt walk upon the water even as thou movest over the land. Wherefore, may it rejoice me, and thee, and whosoever mounteth into the heaven of knowledge, and whose heart hath been revived by the breezes of certitude that waft from the Sheba of the All-Merciful upon the meadow of his inner being. Peace be upon him who followeth the way of guidance!⁸

And further: the stages that mark the wayfarers’ journey from their mortal abode to the heavenly homeland are said to be seven. Some have referred to them as seven valleys, and others, as seven cities.⁹ And it is said that until the wayfarer taketh leave of self and traverseth

⁶ Literally, “in the garden of Ghawthíyyih”. The *Risáliy-i-Ghawthíyyih* is a mystical treatise by ‘Abdu’l-Qádir-i-Gílání (ca. 1077–1166). The sentence that follows is a quotation from this work.

⁷ Qur’án 2:282, 16:69.

⁸ Qur’án 20:47.

⁹ ‘Aṭṭár (ca. 1119–1230) in his *Mantıqu’ı-Ṭayr* (The Conference of the Birds) has elaborated seven valleys through which the birds pass in search of their king. Bahá’u’lláh refers to ‘Aṭṭár’s scheme of the valleys. Rúmí (1207–1273) alludes to the “seven cities of love” crossed by ‘Aṭṭár.

these stages, he shall never attain the ocean of nearness and reunion nor taste of the matchless wine.

The first is 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. Nor should he ever become downhearted: If he strive for a hundred thousand years and yet fail to behold the beauty of the Friend, he should not falter. For those who seek the Kaaba of “for Us” rejoice in the tidings “In Our ways shall We assuredly guide them.”¹⁰ In their search, they have stoutly girded up the loins of service and at every moment journey from the plane of heedlessness into the realm of search. No bond shall hold them back and no counsel deter them.

It is incumbent upon these servants to cleanse the heart, which is the wellspring of divine treasures, of every marking; turn away from imitation, which is following the traces of their forefathers; and shut the door of friendship and enmity upon all the people of the earth.

In this journey the seeker reacheth a station wherein he seeth all created things wandering distracted in search of the Friend. How many a Jacob will he see searching after his Joseph, how many a lover will he behold hastening towards the Well-Beloved; a world of adoring souls will he witness tracing the path of the Adored One! At every moment he findeth a weighty matter, in every hour he becometh aware of a new mystery; for he hath severed his heart from both worlds and set out for the Kaaba of the Beloved. At every step, aid from the invisible Realm will attend him and the fervour of his search will grow.

One must judge of search by the standard of the Majnún of love.¹¹ It is related that one day they came upon Majnún sifting the dust, his tears flowing down. They asked, “What doest thou?” He

¹⁰ Qur’án 29:69.

¹¹ Majnún means “madman”. This is the title of the celebrated lover of ancient Persian and Arabian lore whose beloved was Laylí. Symbolizing true human love bordering on the divine, the story has been the theme of many Persian romantic poems, most famously that of Niẓámí, written in 1188.

said, "I seek for Laylí." "Alas for thee!" they cried, "Laylí is of pure spirit, yet thou seekest her in the dust!" He said, "I seek her everywhere; haply somewhere I shall find her."

Yea, though to the wise it be shameful to seek the Lord of Lords in the dust, yet this betokeneth intense ardour in searching. "Whoso seeketh out a thing and persisteth with zeal shall find it."¹²

The true seeker hunteth naught but the object of his quest, and the sincere lover hath no desire save reunion with his beloved. Nor shall the seeker reach his goal unless he sacrifice all things.

That is, whatever he hath seen, and heard, and understood — all he must set at naught with "no God is there", that he may enter into the realm of the spirit, which is the city of "but God".¹³

Labour is needed, if we are to seek Him; ardour is needed, if we are to drink the nectar of reunion with Him; and if we taste of this cup, we shall cast away the world.

On this journey the wayfarer dwelleth in every abode, however humble, and resideth in every land. In every face he seeketh the beauty of the Friend; in every region he searcheth after the Beloved. He joineth every company and seeketh fellowship with every soul, that haply in some heart he may discern the secret of the Beloved, or in some face behold the beauty of the Adored One.

And if, by the help of the Creator, he findeth on this journey a trace of the traceless Friend, and inhaleth the fragrance of the long-lost Joseph from the heavenly herald, he shall straightway step into the Valley of Love and be consumed in the fire of love. In this city the heaven of rapture is upraised, and the world-illuminating sun of yearning shineth, and the fire of love is set ablaze; and when the fire of love is ablaze, it burneth to ashes the harvest of reason.

Now is the wayfarer oblivious of himself, and of aught besides himself. He seeth neither ignorance nor knowledge, neither doubt nor certitude; he knoweth not the morn of guidance from the night of error. He fleeth from both unbelief and faith, and findeth in deadly poison his heart's relief. Wherefore 'Aṭṭār saith:

¹² Arabic proverb.

¹³ A reference to the Islamic profession of faith: "No God is there but God, and Muḥammad is the Messenger of God."

For the infidel, error — for the faithful, faith;
For 'Aṭṭār's heart, an atom of thy pain.

The steed of this valley is pain, and if there be no pain this journey will never end. In this plane the lover hath no thought save the Beloved, and seeketh no refuge save the Friend. At every moment he offereth a hundred lives in the path of the Loved One, at every step he throweth a thousand heads at His feet.

O My brother! Until thou enter the Egypt of love, thou shalt never gaze upon the Joseph-like beauty of the Friend; and until, like Jacob, thou forsake thine outward eyes, thou shalt never open the eye of thine inward being; and until thou burn with the fire of love, thou shalt never find thyself in the true yearning's embrace.

A lover feareth nothing and can suffer no harm: Thou seest him chill in the fire and dry in the sea.

A lover is he who is chill in hellfire;
A knower is he who is dry in the sea.¹⁴

Love accepteth no existence and wisheth no life: In death it seeth life, and in shame it seeketh glory. To merit the madness of love, one must abound in sanity; to merit the bonds of the Friend, one must be free in spirit. Blessed the neck that is caught in His noose, and happy the head that falleth on the dust in the path of His love. Wherefore, O friend, renounce thy self, that thou mayest find the Peerless One; and soar beyond this mortal world, that thou mayest find thy nest in the abode of heaven. Be as naught, if thou wouldst kindle the fire of being and be fit for the pathway of love.

Ne'er will love allow a living soul to tread its way;
Ne'er will the falcon deign to seize a lifeless prey.¹⁵

¹⁴ Saná'í (ca. 1045–1131).

¹⁵ Saná'í.

Love setteth a world aflame at every turn and layeth waste every land wherein it raiseth its banner. Being hath no existence in its kingdom; the wise wield no command within its realm. The leviathan of love swalloweth the master of reason and slayeth the lord of knowledge. It drinketh the seven seas, but its heart's thirst is still unquenched and it asketh, "Is there yet any more?"¹⁶ It shunneth its own self and draweth away from all on earth.

Love's a stranger to earth and heaven too;
In him are lunacies seventy and two.¹⁷

Love hath bound a myriad victims in its fetters and pierced a myriad wise men with its arrow. Know that every redness thou seest in the world is from its wrath, and every paleness in men's cheeks is from its poison. It yieldeth no remedy but death and walketh not save in the valley of extinction; yet sweeter than honey is its venom upon the lover's lips, and fairer its deadly sting, in the seeker's sight, than a hundred thousand lives.

Wherefore must the veils of the satanic self be burned away in the fire of love, that the spirit may be cleansed and refined, and thus may apprehend the station of Him but for Whom the world would not have been created.¹⁸

Kindle the fire of love and burn away all things;
Then set thy foot into the land of the lovers.¹⁹

And if, confirmed by the Creator, the lover escapeth the claws of the eagle of love, he will enter the Realm of Knowledge and come out of doubt into certitude, and turn from the darkness of wayward desire to the guiding light of the fear of God. His inner eye will open and he will privily

¹⁶ Qur'án 50:30.

¹⁷ Rúmí.

¹⁸ An allusion to the Ḥadīth in which God is said to address the Prophet Muhammad in these words: "But for Thee, I would not have created the spheres."

¹⁹ From a poem of Bahá'u'lláh.

converse with his Beloved; he will unlock the gates of truth and supplication and shut the doors of idle fancy. He in this realm is content with the divine decree, and seeth war as peace, and in death findeth the meaning of everlasting life. With both inward and outward eyes he witnesseth the mysteries of resurrection in the realms of creation and in the souls of men, and with a spiritual heart apprehendeth the wisdom of God in His endless manifestations. In the sea he findeth a drop, in a drop he beholdeth the secrets of the sea.

Split the atom's heart, and lo!

Within it thou wilt find a sun.²⁰

Gazing with the eye of absolute insight, the wayfarer in this valley seeth in God's creation neither contradiction nor incongruity, and at every moment exclaimeth, "No defect canst thou see in the creation of the God of mercy. Repeat the gaze: Seest thou a single flaw?"²¹ He beholdeth justice in injustice, and in justice, grace. In ignorance he findeth many a knowledge hidden, and in knowledge a myriad wisdoms manifest. He breaketh the cage of the body and the hold of the passions, and communeth with the denizens of the immortal realm. He scaleth the ladders of inner truth and hasteneth to the heaven of inner meanings. He rideth in the ark of "We will surely show them Our signs in the world and within themselves", and saileth upon the sea of "until it become plain to them that it is the truth".²² And if he meeteth with injustice he shall have patience, and if he cometh upon wrath he shall manifest love.

There was once a lover, it is said, who had sighed for long years in separation from his beloved, and wasted in the fire of remoteness. From the rule of love, his breast was void of patience and his body weary of his spirit; he reckoned life without her as a mockery, and the world consumed him away. How many a day he found no respite from his longing; how many a night the pain of her kept him from sleep. His body was worn to a sigh, and his heart's wound had turned him to a cry of sorrow. A thousand lives would he freely have given for one taste of the cup of her

²⁰ Hátif-i-Işfahání (d.1783).

²¹ Qur'án 67:3.

²² Qur'án 41:53.

presence, and yet even this was not within his reach. The doctors knew no cure for him, and companions avoided his company; yea, physicians have no remedy for one sick of love, unless the favour of the beloved deliver him.

At last the tree of his longing yielded the fruit of despair, and the fire of his hope fell to ashes. Then one night he could bear life no more, and he left his house for the marketplace. On a sudden, a watchman followed after him. He broke into a run, with the watchman in swift pursuit; then other watchmen came together and barred every passage to the weary one. And that wretched one cried from his heart, and ran here and there, and moaned to himself, "Surely this watchman is 'Izrá'íl, my angel of death, following so fast upon me, or he is a tyrant of men, prompted by hatred and malice." His feet carried him on — that hapless one bleeding with the arrow of love — while his heart lamented. Then he came to a garden wall, and with untold pain and trouble he scaled it. He saw that it was very high; yet, forgetting his life, he threw himself down into the garden.

And there he beheld his beloved with a lamp in her hand, searching for a ring she had lost. When the heart-surrendered lover looked upon his ravishing love, he drew a great breath and lifted his hands in prayer, crying, "O God! Bestow honour upon the watchman, and riches and long life. For the watchman was Gabriel, guiding this poor one; or he was Isráfíl, bringing life to this wretched one!"

Indeed, his words were true; for he had found many a secret justice in this seeming tyranny of the watchman, and had seen how many a mercy lay hid behind the veil. In one stroke of wrath, the guard had joined one who was athirst in the desert of love to the sea of the beloved, and dispelled the darkness of separation with the shining light of reunion. He had led one who was afar to the garden of nearness, and guided an ailing soul to the heart's physician.

Now if the lover could have seen the end, he would from the beginning have blessed the watchman, prayed God on his behalf, and seen his tyranny as justice; but since the end was veiled to him, he lamented and made his plaint in the beginning. Yet those who journey in the

garden land of true knowledge, since they see the end in the beginning, behold peace in war and conciliation in enmity.

Such is the state of the wayfarers in this valley, but the people of the valleys above this see the end and the beginning as one. Nay, they see neither “beginning” nor “end” and witness neither “first” nor “last”. Nay rather, the denizens of the city of immortality, who dwell in the celestial garden, see not even “neither first nor last”: They fly from all that is first and repulse all that is last. For these have passed over the worlds of names and, swift as lightning, fled beyond the worlds of attributes. Thus is it said: “The perfection of belief in Divine Unity is to deny Him any attributes.”²³ And they have made their dwelling-place in the shadow of the Divine Essence.

Wherefore Khájih ‘Abdu’lláh²⁴ — may God the Most High sanctify his blessed soul — hath made, in this connection, a subtle point and spoken an eloquent word as to the meaning of “Guide Thou us on the straight path”,²⁵ which is: “Show us the right way; that is, honour us with the love of Thine Essence, that we may be freed from occupation with ourselves and aught else save Thee, and may become wholly Thine; that we may know only Thee, and see only Thee, and think of none save Thee.”

Nay, they would even soar above this station, as it is said: “Love is a veil betwixt the lover and beloved.” “More than this I am not permitted to tell.”

At this hour the morn of true knowledge hath dawned and the lamps of wayfaring and wandering have been quenched.

Veiled from this was Moses too,
Despite His virtue and His light.

²³ From a Ḥadīth.

²⁴ Shaykh Abú Ismá‘íl ‘Abdu’lláh Anṣárí of Hirát (1006–1089), a Ṣúfí master, poet, and scholar.

²⁵ Qur’án 1:6.

Then thou who hast no wings at all,
Abandon any hope of flight!²⁶

If thou be a man of communion and prayer, soar upon the wings of assistance from the holy ones, that thou mayest behold the mysteries of the Friend and attain the lights of the Beloved: “Verily, we are God’s, and to Him shall we return.”²⁷

After passing through the Valley of Knowledge, which is the last station of limitation, the wayfarer cometh to the First Station of Unity and drinketh from the cup of oneness, and gazeth upon the manifestations of singleness. In this station he pierceth the veils of plurality, fleeth the realms of the flesh, and ascendeth unto the heaven of unity. With the ear of God he heareth; with the eye of God he beholdeth the mysteries of divine creation. He steppeth into the inner sanctuary of the Friend and, as an intimate, shareth the pavilion of the Well-Beloved. He stretcheth forth the hand of truth from the sleeve of the Absolute and revealeth the mysteries of divine power. He seeth in himself neither name nor fame nor rank, but findeth his own praise in the praise of God, and in the name of God beholdeth his own. To him “all songs are from that sovereign King” and every melody from Him. He sitteth on the throne of “Say, all things are of God”²⁸ and reclineth upon the seat of “There is no power nor strength but in God alone”²⁹. He looketh upon all things with the eye of Unity, and seeth the effulgent rays of the Sun of Truth shining from the dayspring of the Divine Essence upon all created things alike, and beholdeth the lights of Unity reflected upon all creation.

It is known to thine eminence that all the variations which the wayfarer in the stages of his journey beholdeth in the realms of being proceed from his own vision. We shall give an example of this, that the meaning may become fully clear. Consider the visible sun: Although it shineth with the same radiance upon all existence, and at the behest of the Lord of Revelation

²⁶ Rûmî.

²⁷ Qur’án 2:156.

²⁸ Qur’án 4:78.

²⁹ Qur’án 18:39.

bestoweth light on all things, yet in each place it becometh manifest and sheddeth its bounty according to the potentialities of that place. For instance, in a mirror it reflecteth its own disk and shape, and this is due to the clarity of the mirror itself; through a crystal it maketh fire to appear; and in other things it showeth only the effect of its shining, but not its full disk. And yet, through that effect, by the command of the Creator it traineth each thing according to the capacity of that thing, even as thou dost observe.

In like manner, colours become visible in each object according to its nature. For instance, in a yellow glass the rays shine yellow; in a white glass they are white; and in a red glass red rays are visible. These variations proceed from the object itself, not from the light. And if a place be shut away from the light, as by walls and a roof, it will be entirely bereft of the light of the sun and deprived of its rays.

Thus it is that certain feeble souls have confined the wide expanse of knowledge within the walls of self and passion, and beneath the cloak of ignorance and blindness, and have thereby veiled themselves from the light of the mystic Sun and the mysteries of the eternal Beloved. They have strayed far from the gem-like wisdom of the resplendent Faith of the Lord of the Messengers,³⁰ have been shut out of the inner court of the All-Beauteous, and have been banished from the Kaaba of glory. Such is the worth of the people of this age!

And if a nightingale soar beyond the clay of self and dwell in the rose bower of the heart, and in Arabian melodies and sweet Persian tones recount the mysteries of God — a single word whereof quickeneth anew every lifeless form and bestoweth the spirit of holiness upon every mouldering bone — thou wilt behold a thousand claws of envy and a myriad talons of hatred hunting after Him and striving with all their power to encompass His death.

Yea, to the beetle a sweet fragrance seemeth foul, and to the man sick of a rheum a pleasant perfume availeth naught. Wherefore hath it been said for the guidance of the ignorant:

³⁰ The Prophet Muḥammad.

Cleanse thou the rheum from out thine head

And breathe the breath of God instead.³¹

In sum, the differences among objects have now been made plain. Thus when the wayfarer gazeth only upon the place of appearance — that is, when he considereth only the glass — he seeth yellow and red and white. And so it is that conflict hath prevailed amongst men, and a darksome dust from limited souls hath settled over the world. Others gaze upon the effulgence of the light, while yet others have drunk of the wine of oneness and see naught but the sun itself.

As the wayfarers traverse these three differing planes, their understanding and their words differ accordingly, and hence the sign of conflict hath ever appeared on earth. For there are some who dwell on the plane of Divine Unity and speak of that world, and some inhabit the realms of limitation, and some the grades of self, while others are completely veiled. Thus do the ignorant people of the day, who have no share of the radiance of the divine Beauty, make certain claims and, in every age and cycle, inflict upon the people of the ocean of Divine Unity what they themselves deserve. “If God should chastise men for their perverse doings, He would not leave upon the earth a moving thing! But to an appointed time doth He respite them.”³²

O My brother! A pure heart is as a mirror; cleanse it with the burnish of love and severance from all save God, that the true sun may shine therein and the eternal morning dawn. Then wilt thou clearly see the meaning of “Earth and heaven cannot contain Me; what can alone contain Me is the heart of him that believeth in Me.”³³ And thou wilt take up thy life in thy hand and with infinite longing cast it before thy newly found Beloved.

Whensoever the light of the revelation of the King of Oneness setteth upon the throne of the heart and soul, His radiance becometh visible in every limb and member. At that time, the mystery of the famed tradition gleameth out of the darkness: “A servant is drawn unto Me in

³¹ Rûmî.

³² Qur’ân 16:61.

³³ From a Ḥadîth.

prayer until I answer him, and when I have answered him, I become the ear wherewith he heareth ...”³⁴ For thus the Master of the house hath appeared within His home, and all the pillars of the dwelling are ashine with His light. And as the action and effect of the light are from the Light-Giver, so it is that all move through Him and arise by His will. This is that wellspring whereof the near ones drink, as it is said: “A fount whereof they who draw nigh to God shall drink”.³⁵

However, let none construe these utterances to imply the incarnation or descent of the worlds of God into the grades of His creatures, nor should they lead thine eminence to such misapprehensions. For God, in His Essence, is sanctified above all ascent and descent, egress and regress; He hath through all eternity been exalted beyond the attributes of His creation, and will ever remain so. No man hath ever known Him; no soul hath ever fathomed the nature of His Being. In the valley of His knowledge every mystic wandereth astray; in the comprehension of His Essence every saint standeth bewildered. Sanctified is He above the understanding of the wise; exalted is He beyond the knowledge of the knowing! “The way is barred and all seeking rejected. His proof is His signs, His evidence His being.”³⁶

Wherefore the lovers of the countenance of the Beloved have said, “O Thou Whose Essence alone can lead to His Essence, and Who transcendeth all likeness to His creatures”.³⁷ How can utter nothingness spur its charger in the arena of eternity, or a fleeting shadow reach to the everlasting sun? The Friend addressed by the words “But for Thee” hath said, “We have failed to know Thee”; and the Beloved alluded to by the words “or even closer” hath said, “nor attained Thy presence”.³⁸

³⁴ From a Ḥadīth.

³⁵ Qur’án 83:28.

³⁶ From a Ḥadīth.

³⁷ From a prayer of Imám ‘Alí.

³⁸ “But for Thee” refers to the Ḥadīth quoted in note 26. “We have failed to know Thee” alludes to a prayer attributed to Muḥammad that says, “We have not known Thee, O God, as Thou

Indeed, the references that have been made to the degrees of mystic knowledge pertain to the knowledge of the effulgences of that Sun of Truth as it becometh reflected in various mirrors. And the effulgence of that light is present within the hearts, yet it is hidden beneath the veils of selfish desires and earthly attachments, even as a candle within a lantern of iron, and only when the cover is lifted doth the light of the candle shine out.

In like manner, when thou dost strip the veils of illusion from the face of thine heart, the lights of Oneness will be made manifest.

It is clear, then, that even these rays are not subject to egress or regress — how much less that Essence of existence and longed-for Mystery. O My brother, consider these matters in the spirit of enquiry, not in blind imitation. A true wayfarer will not be deterred by the impediment of words, nor daunted by the sway of insinuations.

How can a curtain part the lover from his love,
When Alexander's wall cannot keep them apart?³⁹

Secrets are many, and strangers are myriad. Volumes will not suffice to hold the mystery of the Beloved, nor can it be exhausted in these pages, though it be no more than a word, no more than a sign. "Knowledge is one point, which the foolish have multiplied."⁴⁰

Infer, then, from this the differences among the worlds. Though the worlds of God be infinite, yet some refer to them as four: the world of time, which hath both a beginning and an end; the world of duration, which hath a beginning but whose end is not apparent; the world of primordial reality, whose beginning is not to be seen but which is known to have an end; and the world of eternity, of which neither the beginning nor the end is visible. Although there are many differing statements as to these points, to recount them in detail would result in weariness. Thus some have said that the world of perpetuity hath neither beginning nor end, oughtest to be known." "Or even closer" alludes to Qur'án 53:9.

³⁹ Sa'dí (ca. 1213–1292), author of the *Gulistán* and other poetical works.

⁴⁰ From a Ḥadīth.

and have equated the world of eternity with the invisible, inaccessible, and unknowable Essence. Others have called these the worlds of the Heavenly Court, of the Celestial Dominion, of the Divine Kingdom, and of Mortal Existence.

Moreover, the journeys in the pathway of love have been reckoned as four: from the creatures to the True One, from the True One to the creatures, from the creatures to the creatures, and from the True One to the True One.

There is many an utterance of the sages and mystics of former times which I have not mentioned here, since I mislike copious citation from the sayings of the past; for quotation from the words of others betokeneth acquired learning and not divine bestowal. Even so much as I have quoted here is out of deference to the wont of men and after the manner of the learned. Further, such matters are beyond the scope of this epistle. My unwillingness to recount their sayings is not from pride; rather, it is the manifestation of wisdom and the revelation of bounty.

If Khidr did wreck the vessel on the sea,
A thousand rights are in this wrong concealed.⁴¹

Otherwise, this Servant regardeth Himself as utterly lost and non-existent, even before one of the beloved of God, how much less in the presence of His holy ones. Glorified be my Lord, the Most High! Moreover, our aim is to recount the stages of the wayfarer's journey, not to set forth the conflicting utterances of the mystics.

Although a brief example hath been given concerning the beginning and ending of the relative and contingent world, yet a further illustration is now provided, that the full meaning may become clear. For instance, let thine eminence consider his own self: Thou art first in relation to thy son, and last in relation to thy father. 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. And thus firstness and lastness, outwardness and inwardness, are, in the sense referred to, all true of thyself, so that in these four states conferred upon thee thou mayest comprehend the four divine states, and that

⁴¹ Rûmî; a reference to Qur'án 18:71.

the nightingale of thine heart, warbling on all the flowering branches of the tree of existence, whether seen or unseen, might cry out: "He is the First and the Last, the Seen and the Hidden!"⁴²

These statements are made in the sphere of that which is relative. Otherwise, those souls who with but one step have traversed the world of the relative and the conditioned, and dwelt in the court of independent sovereignty, and pitched their tent in the realms of absolute authority and command, have burned away these relativities with a single spark, and blotted out these words with a mere dewdrop. And they swim in the sea of the spirit, and soar in the holy atmosphere of light. Then what existence have words, on such a plane, that "first" and "last", or other than these, should be mentioned or described? In this realm, the first is the same as the last, and the last is the same as the first.

In thy soul, of love build thou a fire
And burn all thoughts and words entire.⁴³

O My friend, look to thyself: Hadst thou not become a father and begotten a son, neither wouldst thou have comprehended these words. Now forget them one and all, that thou mayest learn from the Master of Love in the schoolhouse of Divine Unity, mayest return unto God, forsake the land of unreality for thy true station, and dwell beneath the shadow of the tree of knowledge.

O thou dear one! Impoverish thyself, that thou mayest enter the lofty court of riches; and humble thy body, that thou mayest drink from the stream of glory and attain to the full meaning of the poems whereof thou hadst asked.

Thus it hath been made clear that these stages depend on the attainment of the wayfarer. In every city he will behold a world, in every valley reach a spring, in every meadow hear a song. But the falcon of the mystic heaven hath many a wondrous carol of the spirit in its breast, and the Persian bird keepeth in its soul many a sweet Arabian melody; yet these are hidden, and hidden shall remain.

⁴² Qur'án 57:3.

⁴³ Rûmî.

If I speak forth, many a mind will shatter,
And if I write, many a pen will break.⁴⁴

Peace be upon him who concludeth this exalted journey and followeth the way of truth by the lights of guidance.

The wayfarer, after traversing the high planes of this supernal journey, entereth into the City of Contentment. In this valley he feeleth the breezes of divine contentment blowing from the plane of the spirit. He burneth away the veils of want, and with inward and outward eye perceiveth within and without all things the day of "God will satisfy everyone out of His abundance."⁴⁵ From sorrow he turneth to bliss, and from grief to joy, and from anguish and dejection to delight and rapture.

Although, to outward seeming, the wayfarers in this valley may dwell upon the dust, yet inwardly they are throned in the heights of mystic meaning; they partake of the eternal bounties of heaven and drink of the delicate wines of the spirit.

The tongue faileth in describing these three valleys, and speech falleth short. The pen steppeth not into this arena, the ink leaveth only a blot. In these stations, the nightingale of the heart hath other songs and secrets, which make the heart to leap and the soul to cry out, but this mystery of inner meaning may be whispered only from heart to heart, and confided only from breast to breast.

The bliss of mystic knowers can be only told from heart to heart,
A bliss no messenger can bear and no missive dare impart.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ This refers to Bahá'u'lláh Himself, Who had not yet declared His mission.

⁴⁵ Qur'án 4:130.

⁴⁶ Cf. 'Aṭṭár.

How many are the matters I have out of weakness left unsaid;
For my words would fail to reckon them and mine every effort would fall short.⁴⁷

O friend, till thou enter the garden of these inner meanings, thou shalt never taste of the imperishable wine of this valley. And shouldst thou taste of it, thou wilt turn away from all else and drink of the cup of contentment; thou wilt loose thyself from all things and bind thyself unto Him, and lay down thy life in His path and offer up thy soul for His sake. And this, even though in this realm there is no “all else” that thou needst forget: “God was alone; there was none else besides Him.”⁴⁸ For on this plane the traveller witnesseth the beauty of the Friend in all things. In fire he seeth the face of the Beloved; in illusion he beholdeth the secret of reality; in the attributes he readeth the riddle of the Essence. For he hath burnt away all veils with a sigh, and cast aside all coverings with a glance. With piercing sight he gazeth upon the new creation, and with lucid heart he graspeth subtle verities. The words “And we have made thy sight sharp in this day”⁴⁹ are a sufficient proof of this assertion and a befitting description of this state.

After journeying through the planes of pure contentment, the traveller cometh to the Valley of Wonderment and is tossed upon the oceans of grandeur, and at every moment his wonder increaseth. Now he seeth the embodiment of wealth as poverty itself, and the essence of independence as sheer impotence. Now is he struck dumb with the beauty of the All-Glorious; again is he wearied out with his own life. How many a mystic tree hath this whirlwind of bewilderment snatched by the roots, how many a soul hath it worn out and exhausted. For in this valley the traveller is flung into confusion, albeit, in the eyes of him who hath attained, such signs are esteemed and well beloved. At every moment, he beholdeth a wondrous world and a new creation, and goeth from astonishment to astonishment, and is lost in awe before the new handiwork of Him Who is the sovereign Lord of all.

⁴⁷ Ibn-i-Fárid (1181–1235).

⁴⁸ From a Ḥadīth.

⁴⁹ Cf. Qur’án 50:21.

Indeed, O brother, if we ponder each created thing, we shall witness a myriad consummate wisdoms and learn a myriad new and wondrous truths. One of the created phenomena is the dream. Behold how many secrets have been deposited therein, how many wisdoms treasured up, how many worlds concealed. Observe how thou art asleep in a dwelling, and its doors are shut; on a sudden thou findest thyself in a far-off city, which thou enterest without moving thy feet or wearying thy body. Without taxing thine eyes, thou seest; without troubling thine ears, thou hearest; without a tongue, thou speakest. And perchance when ten years have passed, thou wilt witness in this temporal world the very things thou hast dreamt tonight.

Now there are many wisdoms to ponder in the dream, which none but the people of this valley can comprehend in their reality. First, what is this world where without eye or ear or hand or tongue one can put all these to use? Second, how is it that in the outer world thou seest today the effect of a dream which thou didst witness in the world of sleep some ten years past? Consider the difference between these two worlds, and the mysteries they conceal, that, attended by divine confirmations, thou mayest attain unto heavenly discoveries and enter the realms of holiness.

God, the Most High, hath placed these signs in men so that veiled minds might not deny the mysteries of the life beyond, nor belittle that which hath been promised them. For some hold fast to reason and deny whatever reason comprehendeth not, and yet feeble minds can never grasp the reality of the stages that we have related: The universal divine Intellect alone can comprehend them.

How can feeble reason embrace the Qur'án
Or the spider snare a phoenix in its web?⁵⁰

All these states are to be found and witnessed in the Valley of Wonderment, wherein the wayfarer at every moment seeketh for more and is not wearied. Thus the Lord of the first and

⁵⁰ Saná'í.

the last,⁵¹ in setting forth the grades of contemplation and expressing bewilderment, hath said:
“Increase my wonder and amazement at Thee, O God!”⁵²

Likewise, reflect upon the perfection of man’s creation, and that all these planes and states are folded up and hidden away within him.

Dost thou deem thyself a small and puny form,
When thou foldest within thyself the greater world?

We must therefore labour to destroy the animal condition, till the meaning of humanity cometh to light.

Likewise, Luqmán, who had drunk from the wellspring of wisdom and tasted of the waters of mercy, in proving to his son Nathan the planes of resurrection and death, advanced the dream as evidence and example. We relate it here, that through this evanescent Servant a memory may endure of that youth of the school of Divine Unity, that elder of the realms of instruction and detachment. He said: “O son, if thou art able not to sleep, then thou art able not to die. And if thou art able not to waken after sleep, then thou shalt be able not to rise after death.”

O friend, the heart is the dwelling-place of eternal mysteries: Make it not the home of fleeting fancies. Waste not the treasure of thy precious life occupied with this swiftly passing world. Thou comest from the world of holiness: Bind not thine heart to the earth. Thou art a dweller in the court of reunion: Choose not the homeland of the dust.

In sum, there is no end to the description of these stages, but because of the wrongs inflicted by the peoples of this age, this Servant is disinclined to continue:

The tale remaineth yet unfinished and untold;
Forgive me, then, for weariness hath taken hold.⁵³

⁵¹ The Prophet Muḥammad.

⁵² From a Ḥadīth.

⁵³ Rúmí.

The pen groaneth and the ink sheddeth tears, and the river of the heart surgeth in waves of blood. "Nothing can befall us but what God hath destined for us."⁵⁴ Peace be upon him who followeth the way of guidance!

After scaling the high summits of wonderment, the wayfarer cometh to the Valley of True Poverty and Absolute Nothingness. This station is that of dying to the self and living in God, of being poor in self and rich in the Desired One. Poverty, as here referred to, signifieth being poor in that which pertaineth to the world of creation and rich in what belongeth to the realms of God. For when the true lover and devoted friend reacheth the presence of the Beloved, the radiant beauty of the Loved One and the fire of the lover's heart will kindle a blaze and burn away all veils and wrappings. Yea, all that he hath, from marrow to skin, will be set aflame, so that nothing will remain save the Friend.

When once shone forth the attributes
Of Him Who is the ancient King,
All mention Moses burned away
Of every fleeting, transient thing.⁵⁵

Whoso hath attained this station is sanctified from all that pertaineth to the world. Wherefore, if those who have reached the ocean of His presence are found to possess none of the limited things of this perishable world, whether earthly riches or worldly opinions, it mattereth not. For that which is with His creatures is circumscribed by their own limitations, whereas that which is with God is sanctified therefrom. This utterance must be deeply pondered, that its purport may be clear. "Verily the righteous shall drink of a cup tempered at the camphor fountain."⁵⁶ If the true meaning of "camphor" become known, our true intent will become evident.

This station is that poverty of which it is said, "Poverty is My glory."⁵⁷ And of inward and outward poverty there is many a stage and many a meaning which I have not thought pertinent to

⁵⁴ Qur'án 9:51.

⁵⁵ Rúmí.

⁵⁶ Qur'án 76:5.

mention here; hence I have reserved these for another time, dependent on what God may desire and fate may seal.

This is the station wherein the multiplicity of all things perisheth in the wayfarer; and the divine Countenance, dawning above the horizon of eternity, riseth out of the darkness; and the meaning of “All on the earth shall pass away, but the face of thy Lord” is made manifest.⁵⁸

O My friend! Listen with heart and soul to the songs of the spirit, and treasure them as thine own eyes; for heavenly wisdoms, even as vernal showers, will not rain forever upon the earth of men’s hearts, and though the grace of the All-Bounteous One is never ceasing and never stilled, yet to every time and era a portion is allotted and a bounty assigned, which is vouchsafed in a given measure. “And no one thing is there, but with Us are its storehouses; and We send it not down but in settled measure.”⁵⁹ Indeed, the clouds of the Loved One’s mercy rain only on the garden of the spirit, and bestow this bounty only in the season of spring. Other seasons have no share in this supernal grace, and barren lands hold no portion of this bounteous favour.

O My brother! Not every sea hath pearls; not every branch will flower, nor will the nightingale sing thereon. Then, ere the nightingale of the mystic Paradise repair to the celestial garden, and the rays of the morn of inner meaning return to the Day-Star of Truth, make thou an effort, that haply in this dust-heap of a mortal world thou mayest catch a fragrance from the everlasting rose-garden and live in the shadow of the inhabitants of this everlasting city. And when thou hast attained this highest plane and most exalted degree, then shalt thou gaze on the Beloved and forget all else.

The Friend, unveiled, doth shed the splendour of His light
Through every door and wall, O ye endued with sight!⁶⁰

⁵⁷ From a Ḥadīth.

⁵⁸ Qur’án 28:88.

⁵⁹ Qur’án 15:21.

⁶⁰ Hátif-i-Işfahání.

Thou hast given up the drop of life and drawn nigh unto the ocean of the Well-Beloved. This is the goal thou didst seek; God grant thou mayest attain thereunto.

In this city, even the veils of light are rent asunder and vanish away. “His beauty hath no veiling save light, His countenance no covering save revelation.”⁶¹ How strange that the Beloved is as visible as the sun and yet the heedless still hunt after tinsel and base metal. Yea, the intensity of His revelation hath veiled Him, and the fullness of His shining forth hath hidden Him.

Even as the noontide sun
Hath the True One brightly shined,
But alas that He hath come
To the city of the blind!⁶²

In this valley the wayfarer passeth beyond the stages of the “unity of existence” and the “unity of appearance” and reacheth a unity that is sanctified above both of these stations.⁶³ Ecstasy alone can encompass this theme, not utterance nor argument; and whosoever hath dwelt at this stage of the journey, or caught a breath from this garden, knoweth whereof We speak.

In all these journeys the wayfarer must stray not a hair’s breadth from the Law, for this is indeed the secret of the Path and the fruit of the Tree of Truth. And in all these stages he must cling to the robe of obedience to all that hath been enjoined, and hold fast to the cord of shunning all that is forbidden, that he may partake of the cup of the Law and be informed of the mysteries of Truth.

⁶¹ From a Ḥadīth.

⁶² Attributed to Rūmī.

⁶³ A reference to two Ṣūfī concepts. The doctrine of the unity of existence is commonly ascribed to Ibnu’l-Arabī (1165–1240), that of the unity of appearance to Aḥmad Sirhindī (1564–1624). See ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, chapter 82.

If any of the utterances of this Servant be not understood, or lead to perplexity, the same must be enquired of again, that no doubt may linger, and that the meaning may shine as resplendent as the face of the Beloved dawning from His “Glorious Station”.⁶⁴

These journeys have no visible ending in this temporal world, but the detached wayfarer — should invisible confirmation descend upon him and the Guardian of the Cause⁶⁵ assist him — may traverse these seven stages in seven steps, nay rather in seven breaths, nay even in a single breath, should God will and desire it. This is “a token of His grace vouchsafed unto whomsoever He pleaseth.”⁶⁶

They who soar in the heaven of Divine Unity and attain the depths of the sea of detachment reckon this city — which is the station of life in God — as the loftiest state of the mystic knowers and the furthestmost homeland of the faithful lovers. But to this evanescent One of the mystic ocean, this station is the first gate of the heart’s citadel, that is, man’s first entrance to the city of the heart; and the heart is endowed with four stages, which would be recounted should a kindred soul be found.

Shattered was the pen at once,
Rent and torn in twain the page,
When the pen did reach the point
Of depicting such a stage.⁶⁷



⁶⁴ Qur’án 17:79. A reference to the station of the Manifestation of God.

⁶⁵ “The word ‘Guardian’ in the Seven Valleys has no connection with the Bahá’í Guardianship.”
(From a letter dated 8 January 1949 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi.)

⁶⁶ Qur’án 2:90.

⁶⁷ Rúmí.

O My friend! Many a hound hunteth this gazelle of the desert of oneness; many an eagle pursueth this nightingale of the garden of eternity. Ravens of hatred lie in wait for this bird of the heavens of God, and the huntsman of envy stalketh this deer of the meadow of love.

O Şhayḵh! Make of thine effort a glass, that perchance it may shelter this flame from contrary winds, albeit this flame doth long to be kindled in the lamp of the Lord and to shine in the niche of the spirit. For the head that is raised up in the love of God will assuredly fall by the sword, and the life that is aflame with longing will assuredly be extinguished, and the heart that cleaveth to the remembrance of the Beloved will assuredly break. How well hath it been said:

Live free of love, for its peace

Is grief and sorrow at each breath.

It starteth but with ache and pain;

It endeth but with loss and death.⁶⁸

Peace be upon him who followeth the way of guidance!

The novel thoughts thou hast expressed as to the symbolism contained in the word “sparrow” were considered.⁶⁹ Thou appearest to be well grounded in mystic truth. However, in each realm, to every letter a meaning is allotted which pertaineth to that realm. Indeed, the wayfarer findeth a secret in every name and a mystery in every letter.

In one sense, these letters refer to the states of holiness. The first meaneth “Free thyself from the promptings of self, then approach thy Lord.” The second meaneth “Purify thyself from all save Him, that thou mayest offer up thy life for His sake.” The third meaneth “Draw back from the threshold of the one true God if thou art still possessed of earthly attributes.” The fourth meaneth “Render thanks unto thy Lord on His earth, that He may bless thee in His heaven, albeit in the realm of His unity His heaven is the same as His earth.” The fifth meaneth “Remove

⁶⁸ Ibn-i-Fárid.

⁶⁹ In what follows, Bahá'u'lláh interprets the meaning of each of the five letters comprising the word “sparrow” (gunjishk) in Persian.

from thine eyes the veils of limitation, that thou mayest learn that which thou knewest not of the stations of holiness.”

Wert thou to hearken unto the melodies of this mortal Bird, then wouldst thou seek out the eternal and undying chalice and renounce every fleeting and perishable cup. Peace be upon him who followeth the way of guidance!