

THE ETERNAL EXAMPLE

Sacrifice

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The subject of sacrifice is a powerful, stirring, and mysterious one, which resounds through almost all cultural and religious history. Elevate shares this collection with the love and hope that it will remind us all of the tremendous level of sacrifice which 'Abdu'l-Bahá lived his own life, and encouraged us all to achieve. Some of the quotes include imagery of "martyrdom" and "giving up our lives". While for some around the world, living for the greater good does carry threat of physical danger, many of these concepts are reflective of a spiritual reality of sacrificing our own egos, personal ambitions, and material comforts in order to develop connection, manifest real love, and improve the state of the world as a whole.

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As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá puts it:

“If you plant a seed in the ground, a tree will become manifest from that seed. The seed sacrifices itself to the tree that will come from it. The seed is outwardly lost, destroyed; but the same seed which is sacrificed will be absorbed and embodied in the tree, its blossoms, fruit and branches. If the identity of that seed had not been sacrificed to the tree which became manifest from it, no branches, blossoms or fruits would have been forthcoming.”

The background is a complex, layered composition. It features several rectangular pieces of white paper that appear to be torn and layered on top of each other. These papers are set against a dark, almost black, background that is heavily textured with fine, dark, brush-like strokes or fibers. The overall effect is one of depth and texture, with the white paper providing a stark contrast to the dark, fibrous background. A thin, bright orange border frames the central area of the image.

QUOTATIONS

We have forsaken the path of God; we have given up attention to the divine Kingdom; we have not severed the heart from worldly attractions; we have become defiled with qualities which are not praiseworthy in the sight of God; we are so completely steeped in material issues and tendencies that we are not partakers of the virtues of humanity.

Little reflection, little admonition is necessary for us to realize the purpose of our creation. What a heavenly potentiality God has deposited within us! What a power God has given our spirits! He has endowed us with a power to penetrate the realities of things; but we must be self-abnegating, we must have pure spirits, pure intentions, and strive with heart and soul while in the human world to attain everlasting glory.

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I have come for the purpose of admonition and voicing the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. It is my hope that His will and guidance may influence your spirits, souls and hearts, causing them to become pure, holy, sanctified and illumined and making you lamps of heavenly illumination to the world. This is my desire; this is my hope through the assistance of God.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace

O my dear one! This day is the day of purification, the day of sanctification, the day of turning toward God, the day of severance from all else save God...the day of serving the beloved ones of God, the day of becoming utterly destitute of and free from egotism and desire and the day of purity and sacrifice in the path of God. This is incumbent upon thee, so that thou mayest be accepted in the court of the Almighty and praised in His lofty Threshold of Holiness.

Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas

With reference to what is meant by an individual becoming entirely forgetful of self: the intent is that he should rise up and sacrifice himself in the true sense, that is, he should obliterate the promptings of the human condition, and rid himself of such characteristics as are worthy of blame and constitute the gloomy darkness of this life on earth—not that he should allow his physical health to deteriorate and his body to become infirm.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, no.153

*T*his is the day when dogmas must be sacrificed in our search for truth. We must leave behind all save what is necessary for the needs of today, nor attach ourselves to any form or ritual which is in opposition to moral evolution.

Abdu'l-Bahá, Divine Philosophy

*C*ommit thyself to God; give up thy will and choose that of God;
abandon thy desire and lay hold on that of God; that thou mayest be a
holy, spiritual and heavenly example.

Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas

O thou faithful one! One of the requirements of faithfulness is that thou mayest sacrifice thyself and, in the divine path, close thine eye to every pleasure and strive with all thy soul that thou mayest disappear and be lost, like unto a drop, in the ocean of the love of God.

Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas

*U*ntil a being setteth his foot in the plane of sacrifice, he is bereft of every favour and grace; and this plane of sacrifice is the realm of dying to the self, that the radiance of the living God may then shine forth. The martyr's field is the place of detachment from self, that the anthems of eternity may be upraised. Do all ye can to become wholly weary of self, and bind yourselves to that Countenance of Splendours; and once ye have reached such heights of servitude, ye will find, gathered within your shadow, all created things. This is boundless grace; this is the highest sovereignty; this is the life that dieth not.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

Bahá'u'lláh has drawn the circle of unity, He has made a design for the uniting of all the peoples, and for the gathering of them all under the shelter of the tent of universal unity. This is the work of the Divine Bounty, and we must all strive with heart and soul until we have the reality of unity in our midst, and as we work, so will strength be given unto us. Leave all thought of self, and strive only to be obedient and submissive to the Will of God. In this way only shall we become citizens of the Kingdom of God, and attain unto life everlasting.

Paris Talks

*S*oon will our handful of days, our vanishing life, be gone, and we shall pass, empty-handed, into the hollow that is dug for those who speak no more; wherefore must we bind our hearts to the manifest Beauty, and cling to the lifeline that faileth never. We must gird ourselves for service, kindle love's flame, and burn away in its heat. We must loose our tongues till we set the wide world's heart afire, and with bright rays of guidance blot out the armies of the night, and then, for His sake, on the field of sacrifice, fling down our lives.

Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá

① Thou divine Providence, pitiful are we, grant us Thy succour; homeless wanderers, give us Thy shelter; scattered, do Thou unite us; astray, gather us to Thy fold; bereft, do Thou bestow upon us a share and portion; athirst, lead us to the well-spring of Life; frail, strengthen us that we may arise to help Thy Cause and offer ourselves as a living sacrifice in the pathway of guidance.

Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá

Even as the clouds let us shed down tears, and as the lightning flashes let us laugh at our coursings through east and west. By day, by night, let us think but of spreading the sweet savours of God. Let us not keep on forever with our fancies and illusions, with our analysing and interpreting and circulating of complex dubieties. Let us put aside all thoughts of self; let us close our eyes to all on earth, let us neither make known our sufferings nor complain of our wrongs. Rather let us become oblivious of our own selves, and drinking down the wine of heavenly grace, let us cry out our joy, and lose ourselves in the beauty of the All-Glorious.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

Thou knowest, O God, and art my witness that I have no desire in my heart save to attain Thy good pleasure, to be confirmed in servitude unto Thee, to consecrate myself in Thy service, to labor in Thy great vineyard and to sacrifice all in Thy path. Thou art the All-Knowing and the All-Seeing. I have no wish save to turn my steps, in my love for Thee, towards the mountains and the deserts to loudly proclaim the advent of Thy Kingdom, and to raise Thy call amidst all men. O God! Open Thou the way for this helpless one, grant Thou the remedy to this ailing one and bestow Thy healing upon this afflicted one. With burning heart and tearful eyes I supplicate Thee at Thy Threshold.

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O God! I am prepared to endure any ordeal in Thy path and desire with all my heart and soul to meet any hardship.

O God! Protect me from tests. Thou knowest full well that I have turned away from all things and freed myself of all thoughts. I have no occupation save mention of Thee and no aspiration save serving Thee.

Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í Prayers

O Thou Omnipotent Lord! Number me among the denizens of the Kingdom. This mortal world is my abode; grant me a habitation in the realms of the Placeless. To this earthly plane I pertain; shed upon me the effulgence of Thy glorious light. In this world of dust I dwell; make me an inmate of Thy heavenly realm, so that I may lay down my life in Thy path and attain to my heart's desire, may crown my head with the diadem of divine favour and raise the triumphal cry of "O Glory of God, the Most Glorious!"

Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í Prayers

*T*he souls who sacrifice self, become detached from the imperfections of the realm of man and free from the shackles of this ephemeral world, assuredly the splendors of the rays of divine union shall shine in their hearts and in the eternal paradise they shall find ideal relationship, union and happiness.

Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í World Faith



STORIES

A Persian friend arrived who had passed through 'Ishqabad,. He presented a cotton handkerchief to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Who untied it, and saw therein a piece of dry black bread, and a shriveled apple. The friend exclaimed: "A poor Bahá'í workman came to me: 'I hear thou goest into the presence of our Beloved. Nothing have I to send, but this my dinner. I pray thee offer it to Him with my loving devotion.'" 'Abdu'l-Bahá spread the poor handkerchief before Him, leaving His own luncheon untasted. He ate of the workman's dinner, broke pieces off the bread, and handed them to the assembled guests, saying: "Eat with me of this gift of humble love."

Lady Blomfield, "The Chosen Highway"

*H*ow could this Prisoner give to the needy of 'Akká every Friday morning? Had not His exiled family's wealth and property been almost totally confiscated? One pilgrim found that, 'All that the Master gives is a real sacrifice, and is saved by the cutting off of what most people would consider necessities.'

Honnold, Annamarie, "Vignettes from the Life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá"

In 'Akka the Master's room often contained not even a bed as He was continually giving His own to those more needy than He. Wrapped in a blanket, He would lie on the floor or even on the roof of His home. It was not possible to buy a bed in the town of 'Akka; a bed ordered from Haifa took at least thirty-six hours to arrive. Inevitably, when the Master went on His morning round of visitations and found a feverish individual tossing on bare ground, He sent him His bed. Only after His own situation was inadvertently discovered did He receive another bed, thanks to some kind friend.


Honnold, Annamarie, "Vignettes from the Life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá"

One day 'Abdu'l-Bahá learned that a lady had cut her lovely hair in order to contribute to the building of the House of Worship in Wilmette. He wrote to her with loving appreciation: 'On the one hand, I was deeply touched, for thou hadst sheared off those fair tresses of thine with the shears of detachment from this world and of self-sacrifice in the path of the Kingdom of God. And on the other, I was greatly pleased, for that dearly-beloved daughter hath evinced so great a spirit of self-sacrifice as to offer up so precious a part of her body in the pathway of the Cause of God. Hadst thou sought my opinion, I would in no wise have consented that thou shouldst shear off even a single thread of thy comely and wavy locks; nay, I myself would have contributed in thy name for the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar. This deed of thine is, however, an eloquent testimony to thy noble spirit of self-sacrifice.'

Honnold, Annamarie, "Vignettes from the Life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá"


The background is a complex, layered composition. It features several rectangular pieces of light-colored, textured paper or fabric, some of which are slightly offset or layered on top of each other. These are set against a dark, almost black, background that is heavily textured with numerous fine, dark, brush-like strokes and lines, creating a sense of depth and movement. The overall aesthetic is artistic and abstract.

REFLECTIONS




Why is sacrifice such a powerful act? What does it truly mean to “fling down our lives”? How does it relate to the quality of nobility?

What sorts of sacrifices can we make in our own lives for the benefit of others? Are they impractical or difficult to do?



What are we being called to sacrifice? What does sacrifice require? What makes sacrifice distinct from generosity and detachment?



How does 'Abdu'l-Bahá's example help us to understand the extent of sacrifice required from us if we are to make the world a better place?

How does sacrifice fit with maintaining our own spiritual health, wellbeing, responsibilities and relationships? How do we ensure that our sacrifices come from a place of love rather than pressure or guilt? How do we make sure sacrifice is not forced on people in the context of family, work or community life?



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