

THE ETERNAL EXAMPLE

Freedom

QUOTATIONS | STORIES | REFLECTIONS
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The background is a dark, monochromatic image with a heavy, textured appearance, possibly a close-up of a tree trunk or a similar natural surface. The texture is characterized by vertical lines and irregular, organic shapes. A prominent feature is a large, hollowed-out section in the center, which is highlighted by a thin, bright orange border. The word "QUOTATIONS" is centered within this orange-bordered area in a white, sans-serif font.

QUOTATIONS

*T*oday, humanity is bowed down with trouble, sorrow and grief, no one escapes; the world is wet with tears; but, thank God, the remedy is at our doors. Let us turn our hearts away from the world of matter and live in the spiritual world! It alone can give us freedom! If we are hemmed in by difficulties we have only to call upon God, and by His great Mercy we shall be helped.

If sorrow and adversity visit us, let us turn our faces to the Kingdom and heavenly consolation will be outpoured.

If we are sick and in distress let us implore God's healing, and He will answer our prayer.

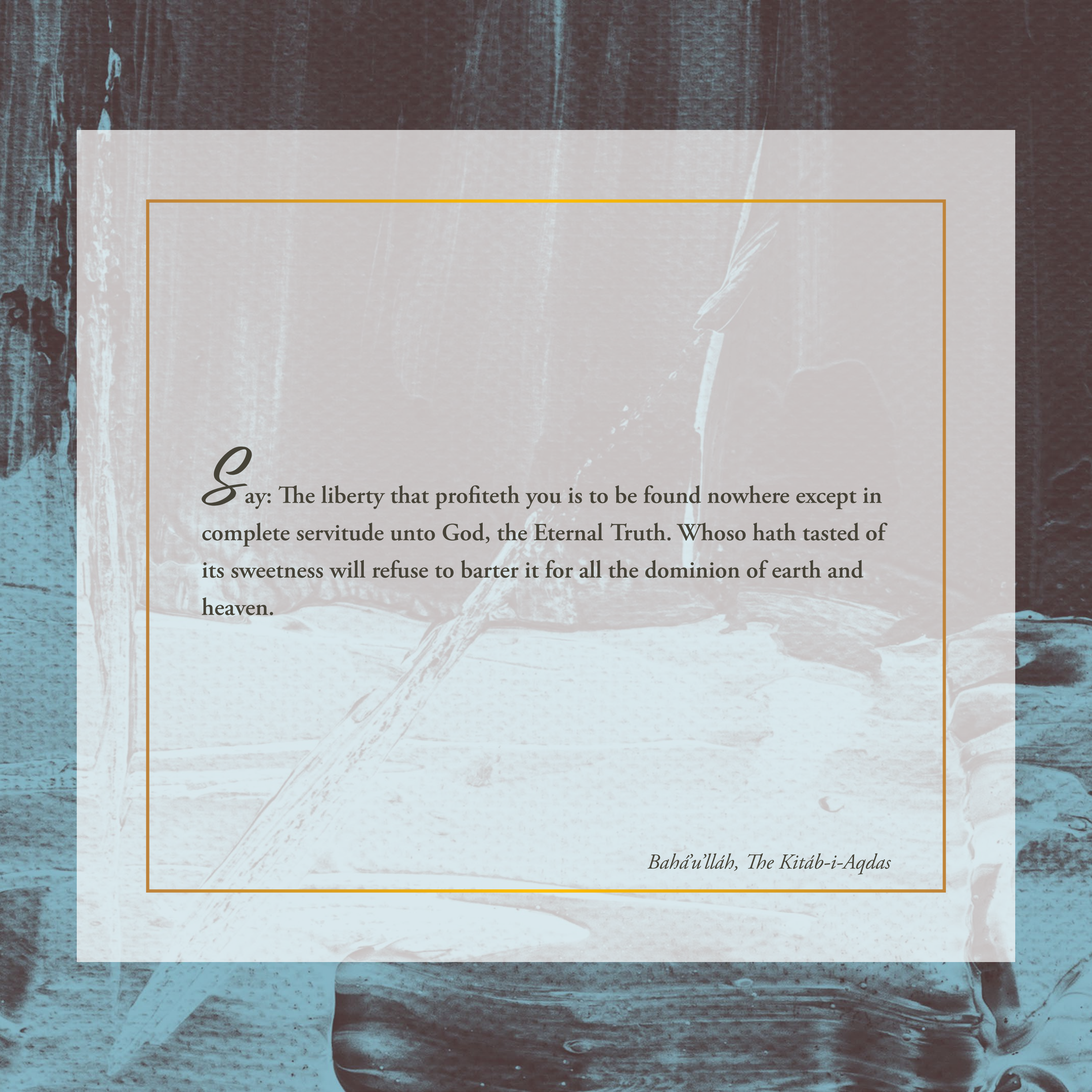
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When our thoughts are filled with the bitterness of this world, let us turn our eyes to the sweetness of God's compassion and He will send us heavenly calm! If we are imprisoned in the material world, our spirit can soar into the Heavens and we shall be free indeed!

When our days are drawing to a close, let us think of the eternal worlds, and we shall be full of joy!

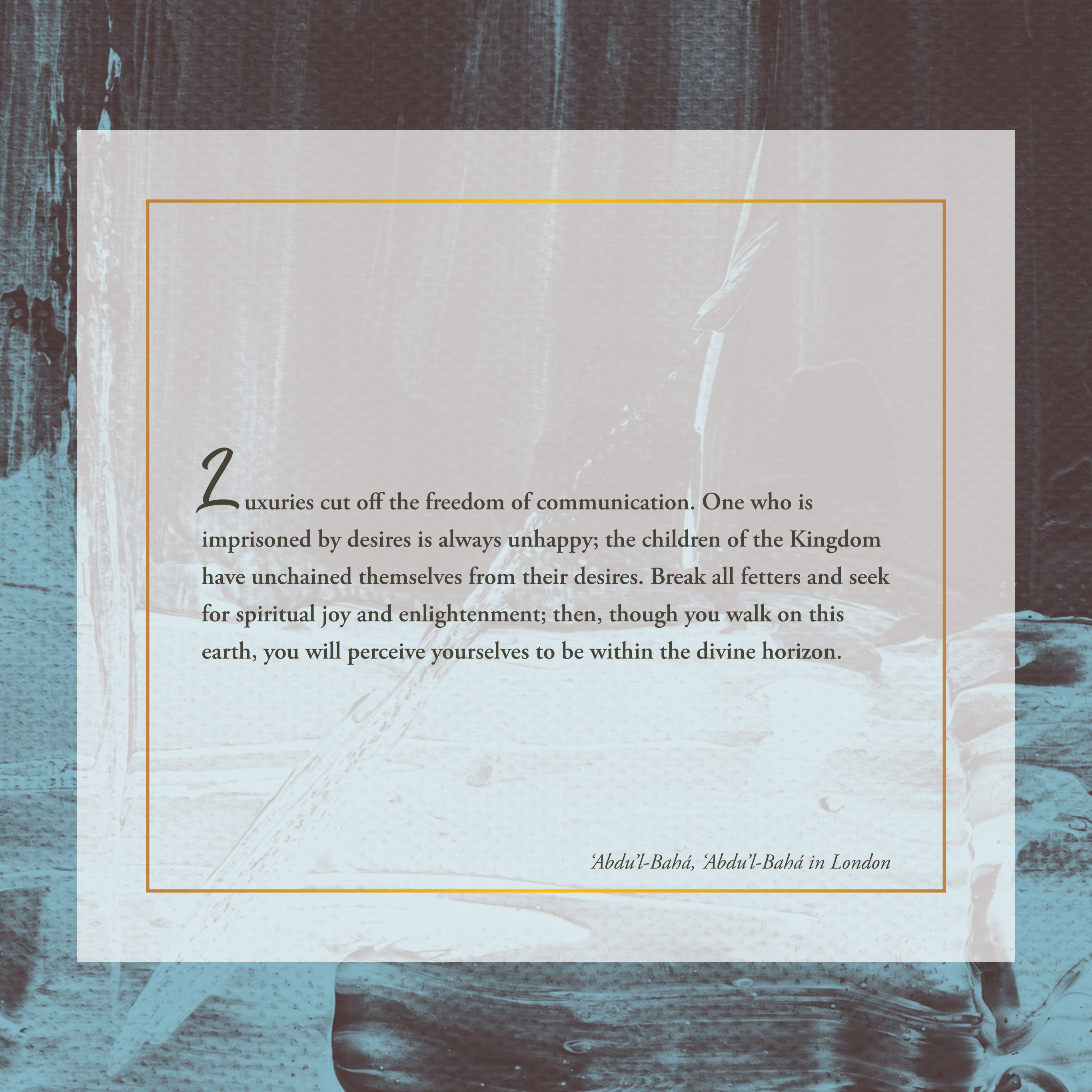
You see all round you proofs of the inadequacy of material things—how joy, comfort, peace and consolation are not to be found in the transitory things of the world. Is it not then foolishness to refuse to seek these treasures where they may be found? The doors of the spiritual Kingdom are open to all, and without is absolute darkness.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks




*S*ay: The liberty that profiteth you is to be found nowhere except in complete servitude unto God, the Eternal Truth. Whoso hath tasted of its sweetness will refuse to barter it for all the dominion of earth and heaven.

Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas



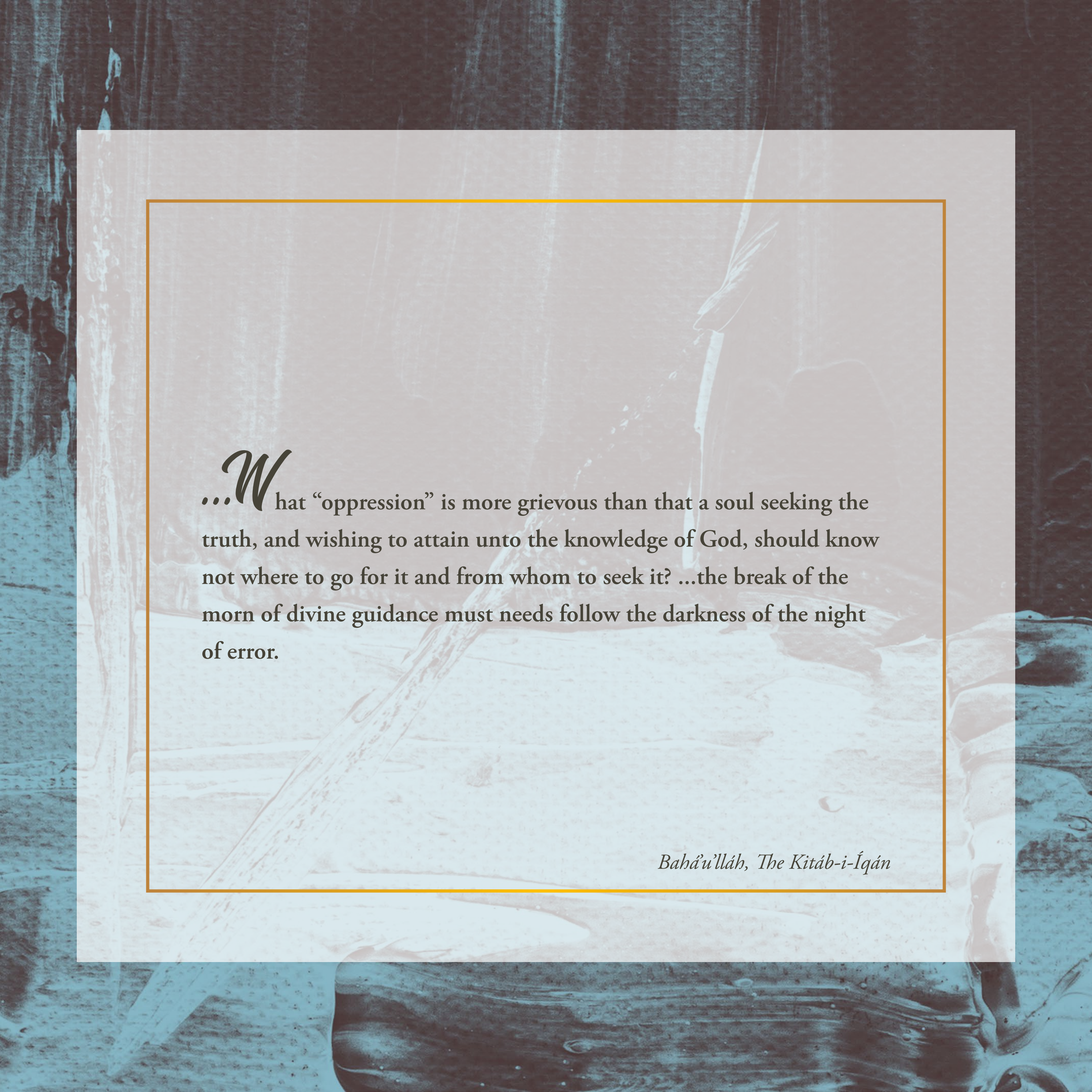
Luxuries cut off the freedom of communication. One who is imprisoned by desires is always unhappy; the children of the Kingdom have unchained themselves from their desires. Break all fetters and seek for spiritual joy and enlightenment; then, though you walk on this earth, you will perceive yourselves to be within the divine horizon.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, 'Abdu'l-Bahá in London



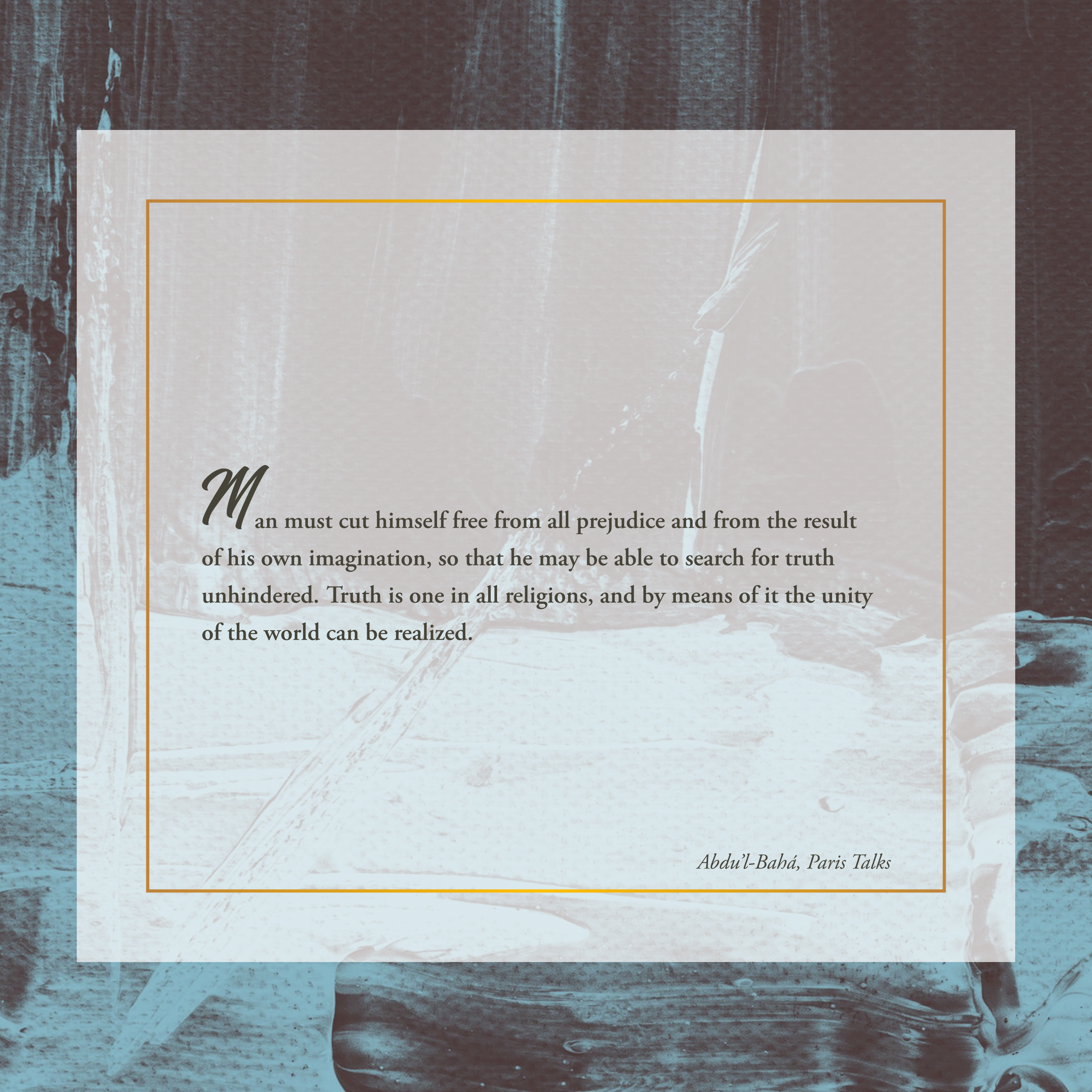
...*U*nless man is released from the material world, freed from the captivity of materialism and receiving a portion of the bounties of the spiritual world, he shall be deprived of the bestowals and favors of the Kingdom of God, and the utmost we can say of him is that he is a perfect animal.

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

A person wearing a dark, hooded garment is walking through a misty, rocky landscape. The scene is dimly lit, with a soft light source creating a hazy atmosphere. The person is walking away from the viewer, towards the right side of the frame. The ground is uneven and rocky, and the background is filled with more rocks and a thick mist or fog.

...*W*hat “oppression” is more grievous than that a soul seeking the truth, and wishing to attain unto the knowledge of God, should know not where to go for it and from whom to seek it? ...the break of the morn of divine guidance must needs follow the darkness of the night of error.

Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Íqán



*M*an must cut himself free from all prejudice and from the result of his own imagination, so that he may be able to search for truth unhindered. Truth is one in all religions, and by means of it the unity of the world can be realized.

Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks

*I*n order to find truth we must give up our prejudices, our own small trivial notions; an open receptive mind is essential. If our chalice is full of self, there is no room in it for the water of life. The fact that we imagine ourselves to be right and everybody else wrong is the greatest of all obstacles in the path towards unity, and unity is necessary if we would reach truth, for truth is one.

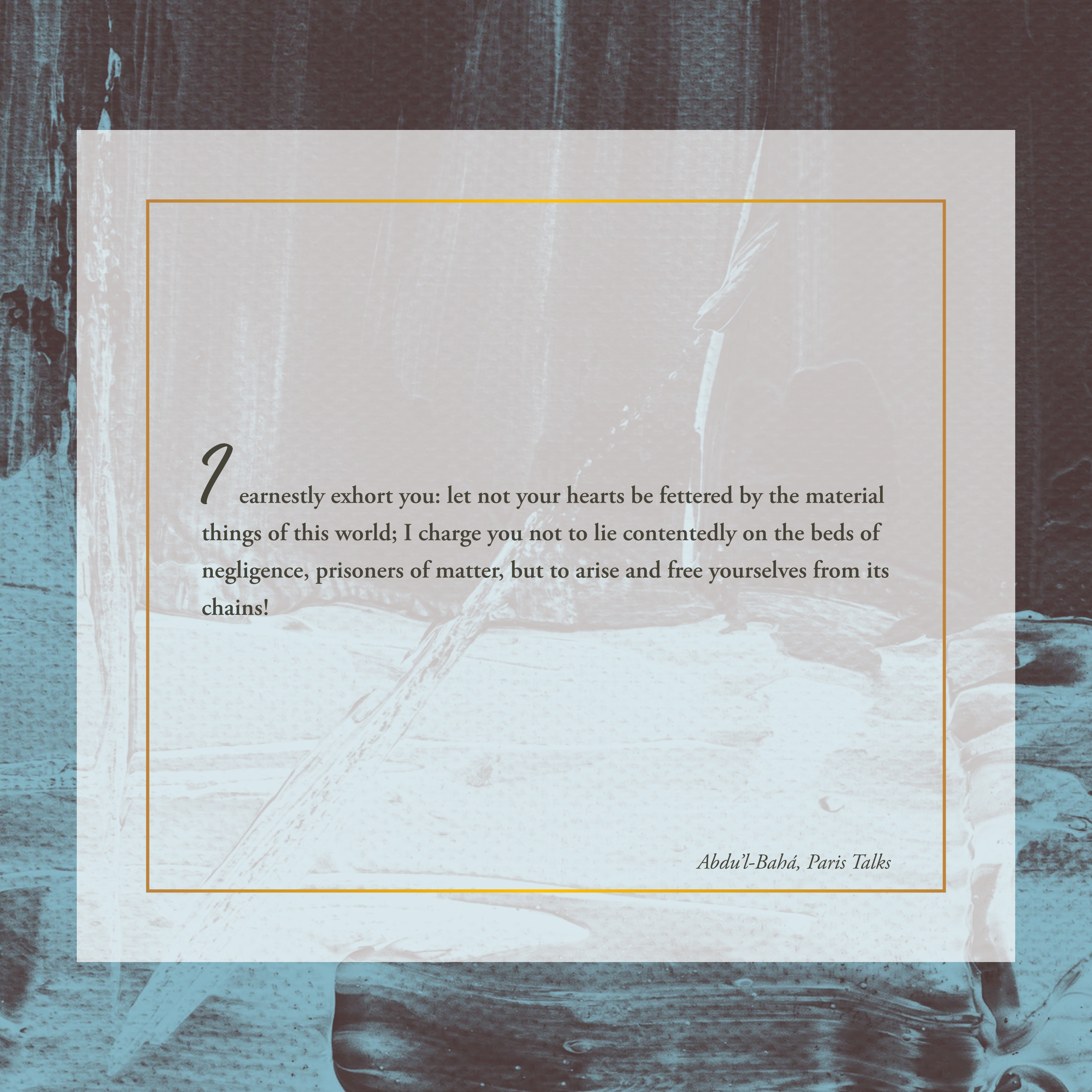
Therefore it is imperative that we should renounce our own particular prejudices and superstitions if we earnestly desire to seek the truth. Unless we make a distinction in our minds between dogma, superstition and prejudice on the one hand, and truth on the other, we cannot succeed. When we are in earnest in our search for anything we look for it everywhere. This principle we must carry out in our search for truth...

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...we must be willing to clear away all that we have previously learned, all that would clog our steps on the way to truth; we must not shrink if necessary from beginning our education all over again. We must not allow our love for any one religion or any one personality to so blind our eyes that we become fettered by superstition! When we are freed from all these bonds, seeking with liberated minds, then shall we be able to arrive at our goal.


‘Seek the truth, the truth shall make you free.’

Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks



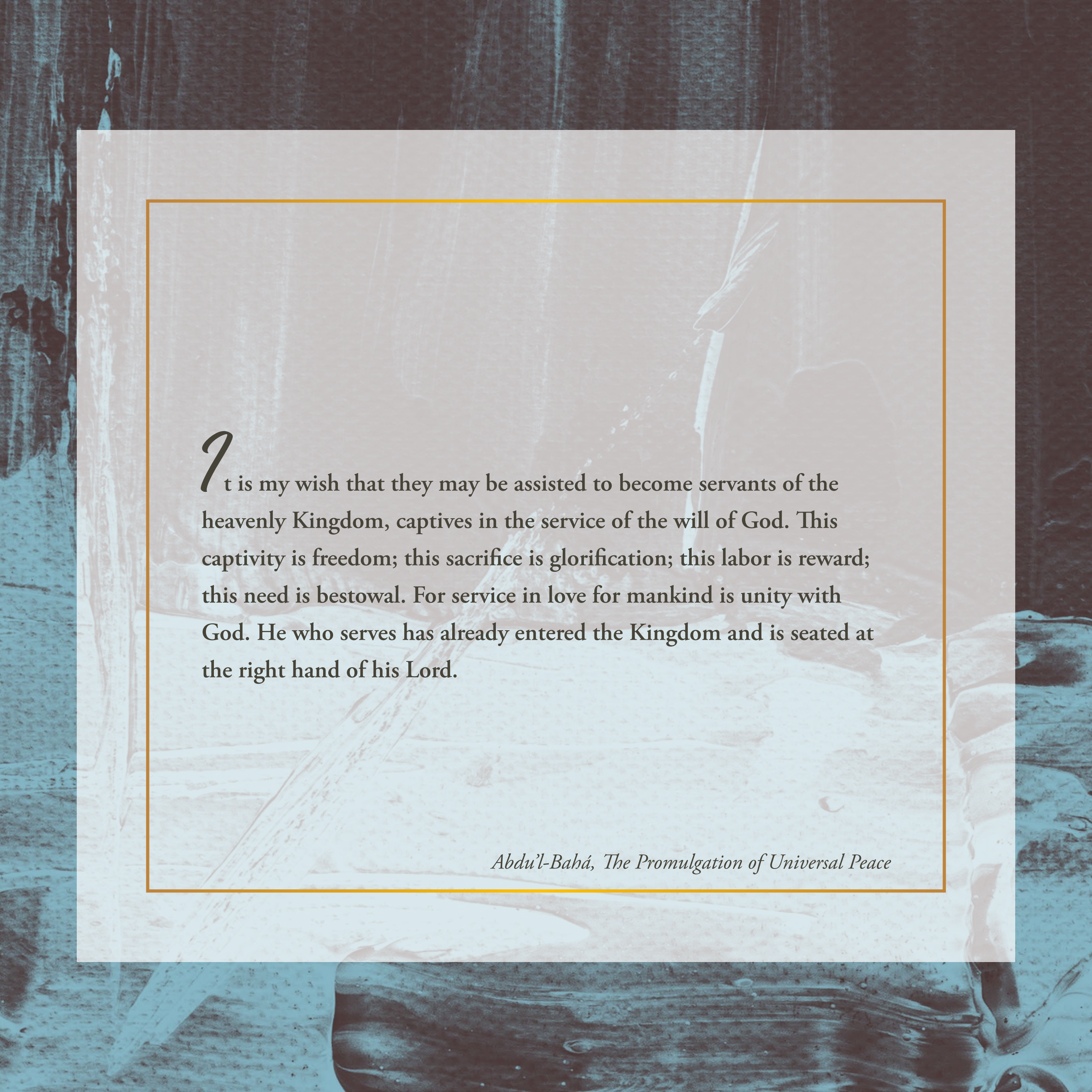
I earnestly exhort you: let not your hearts be fettered by the material things of this world; I charge you not to lie contentedly on the beds of negligence, prisoners of matter, but to arise and free yourselves from its chains!

Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks

A person in a dark, flowing robe stands in a desert landscape. The person is positioned on the right side of the frame, looking towards the left. The background features a large, light-colored rock formation or cliff face. The overall scene is bathed in a soft, golden light, suggesting a sunrise or sunset. The image has a slightly grainy, artistic quality.

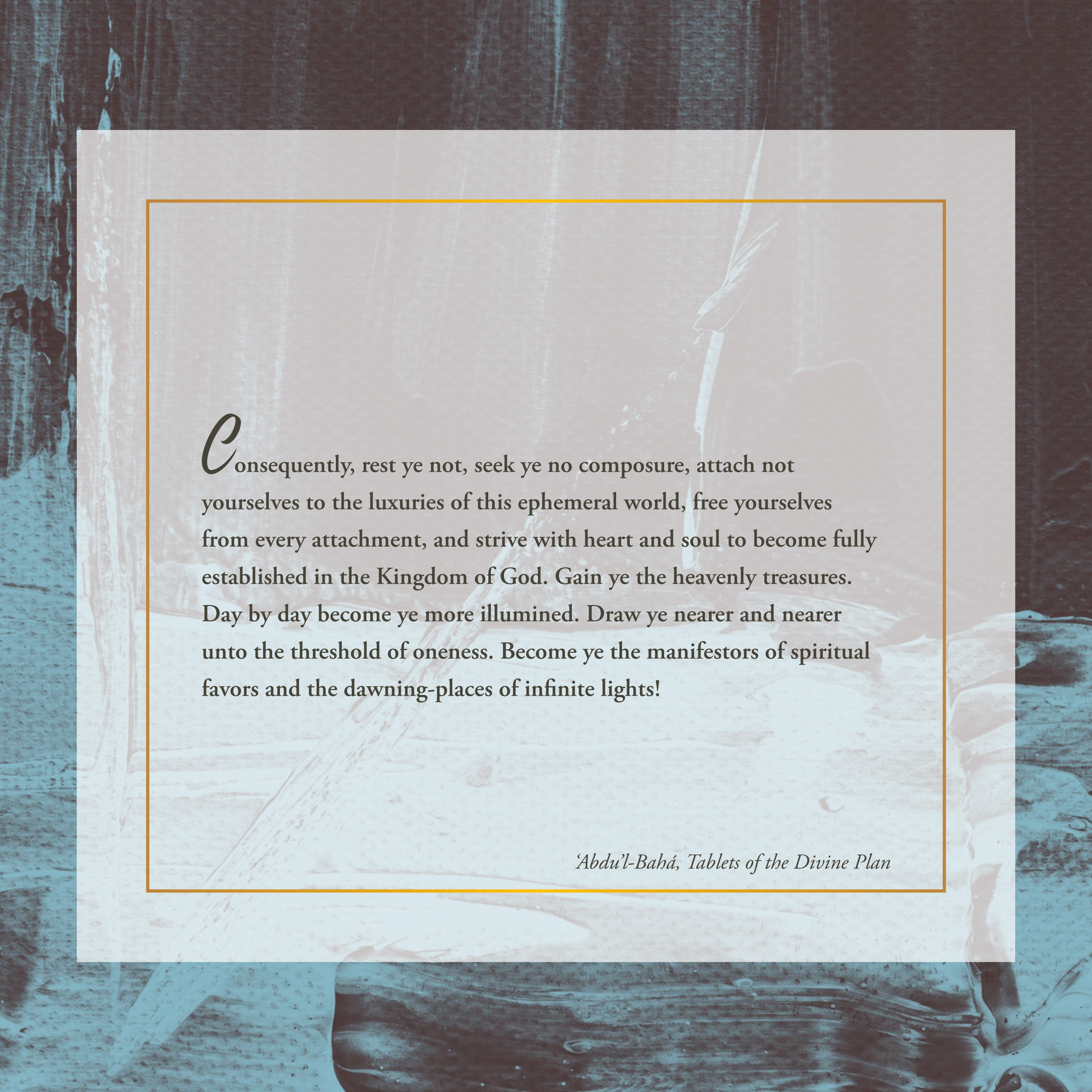
*B*e thou severed from this world, and reborn through the sweet scents of holiness that blow from the realm of the All-Highest.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá



*I*t is my wish that they may be assisted to become servants of the heavenly Kingdom, captives in the service of the will of God. This captivity is freedom; this sacrifice is glorification; this labor is reward; this need is bestowal. For service in love for mankind is unity with God. He who serves has already entered the Kingdom and is seated at the right hand of his Lord.

Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace



Consequently, rest ye not, seek ye no composure, attach not yourselves to the luxuries of this ephemeral world, free yourselves from every attachment, and strive with heart and soul to become fully established in the Kingdom of God. Gain ye the heavenly treasures. Day by day become ye more illumined. Draw ye nearer and nearer unto the threshold of oneness. Become ye the manifestors of spiritual favors and the dawning-places of infinite lights!

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablets of the Divine Plan

O peoples of the world! The Sun of Truth hath risen to illumine the whole earth, and to spiritualize the community of man. Laudable are the results and the fruits thereof, abundant the holy evidences deriving from this grace. This is mercy unalloyed and purest bounty; it is light for the world and all its peoples; it is harmony and fellowship, and love and solidarity; indeed it is compassion and unity, and the end of foreignness; it is the being at one, in complete dignity and freedom, with all on earth.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablets to The Hague

O God! We are weak; give us strength. We are poor; bestow upon us Thy illimitable treasures. We are sick; grant unto us Thy divine healing. We are impotent; give us Thy heavenly power. O Lord! Make us useful in this world; free us from the condition of self and desire. O Lord! Make us brethren in Thy love, and cause us to be loving toward all Thy children. Confirm us in service to the world of humanity so that we may become the servants of Thy servants, that we may love all Thy creatures and become compassionate to all Thy people. O Lord, Thou art the Almighty. Thou art the Merciful. Thou art the Forgiver. Thou art the Omnipotent.

Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace



STORIES

*M*ost of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's life has been spent in an Eastern prison, which he gladly endured rather than abjure his faith, one of the tenets of which is the absolute equality of souls regardless of physical differences, such as sex and colour. He recognizes no class distinctions except those conferred by service and the spirit of brotherly love. For this and other like doctrines he was held prisoner for forty years in the fortress city of 'Akká, in Palestine. When I requested to talk with him, I was told to come early, and called, according, at nine o'clock, for an interview. It was already mid-day to 'Abdu'l-Bahá who rises at four, and who had seen eighteen people before his breakfast at half-past six.

Representatives of many languages and nationalities awaited him in the drawing room.

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We sat in a circle facing ‘Abdu’l-Bahá who inquired if there were any questions we would like to ask. I said my editor had sent me to ascertain something of his prison life, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá at once related in a simple impersonal way one of the most remarkable stories conceivable.

“At nine years of age, I accompanied my father, Bahá’u’lláh, in his journey of exile to Baghdád, seventy of his disciples going with us. This decree of exile, after persistent persecution, was intended to effectively stamp out of Persia what the authorities considered a dangerous religion. Bahá’u’lláh, with his family and followers, was banished, and travelled from one place to another. When I was about twenty-five years old, we were moved from Constantinople to Adrianople, and from there went with a guard of soldiers to the fortified city of ‘Akká, where we were imprisoned and closely guarded.”

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We had no communication whatever with the out-side world. Each loaf of bread was cut open by the guard to see that it contained no message. All who believed in the Bahá'í manifestation, children, men and women, were imprisoned with us. There were one-hundred and fifty of us together in two rooms and no one was allowed to leave the place with the exceptions of four persons, who went to the bazaar to market each morning, under guard. The first summer was dreadful. 'Akká is a fever-ridden town. It was said that a bird attempting to fly over it would drop dead. The food was poor and insufficient, the water was drawn from a fever-infected well and the climate and conditions were such, that even the natives of the town fell ill. Many soldiers succumbed and eight out of ten of our guard died. During the intense heat, malaria, typhoid and dysentery attacked the prisoners, so that all, men, women and children, were sick at one time. There were no doctors, no medicines, no proper food, and no treatment of any kind.

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“I used to make broth for the people, and as I had much practice, I make good broth,” said ‘Abdu’l-Bahá laughingly.

At this point one of the Persians explained to me that it was on account of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s wonderful patience, helpfulness, and endurance that he was always called “The Master.” One could easily feel his mastership in his complete severance from time and place, and absolute detachment from all that even a Turkish prison could inflict.

“After two years of the strictest confinement permission was granted me to find a house so that we could live outside the prison walls but still within the fortifications. Many believers came from Persia to join us but they were not allowed to do so. Nine years passed. Sometimes we were better off and sometimes very much worse.

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It depended on the governor, who, if he happened to be a kind and lenient ruler, would grant us permission to leave the fortification, and would allow the believers free access to visit the house; but when the governor was more rigorous, extra guards were placed around us, and often pilgrims who had come from afar were turned away.”

I learned, afterwards, from a Persian, who, during these troublous times, was a member of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s household, that the Turkish government could not credit the fact that the interest of the English and American visitors was purely spiritual and not political. Often these pilgrims were refused permission to see him, and, many times, the whole trip from America would be rewarded merely by a glimpse of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá from his prison window...

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“With the advent of the Young Turks’ supremacy, realized through the Society of Union and Progress, all the political prisoners of the Ottoman Empire were set free. Events took the chains from my neck and placed them about Hamíd’s; ‘Abdu’l-Bahá came out of prison and ‘Abdu’l-Hamíd went in!’ ...

“Will you tell us how you felt while in prison and how you regard your freedom?” I asked. “We are glad that you are free.”

“Thank you,” he said graciously, and continuing—

“Freedom is not a matter of place. It is a condition. I was thankful for the prison, and the lack of liberty was very pleasing to me, for those days were passed in the path of service, under the utmost difficulties and trials, bearing fruits and results.

“Unless one accepts dire vicissitudes, he will not attain. To me prison is freedom, troubles rest me, death is life, and to be despised is honour.

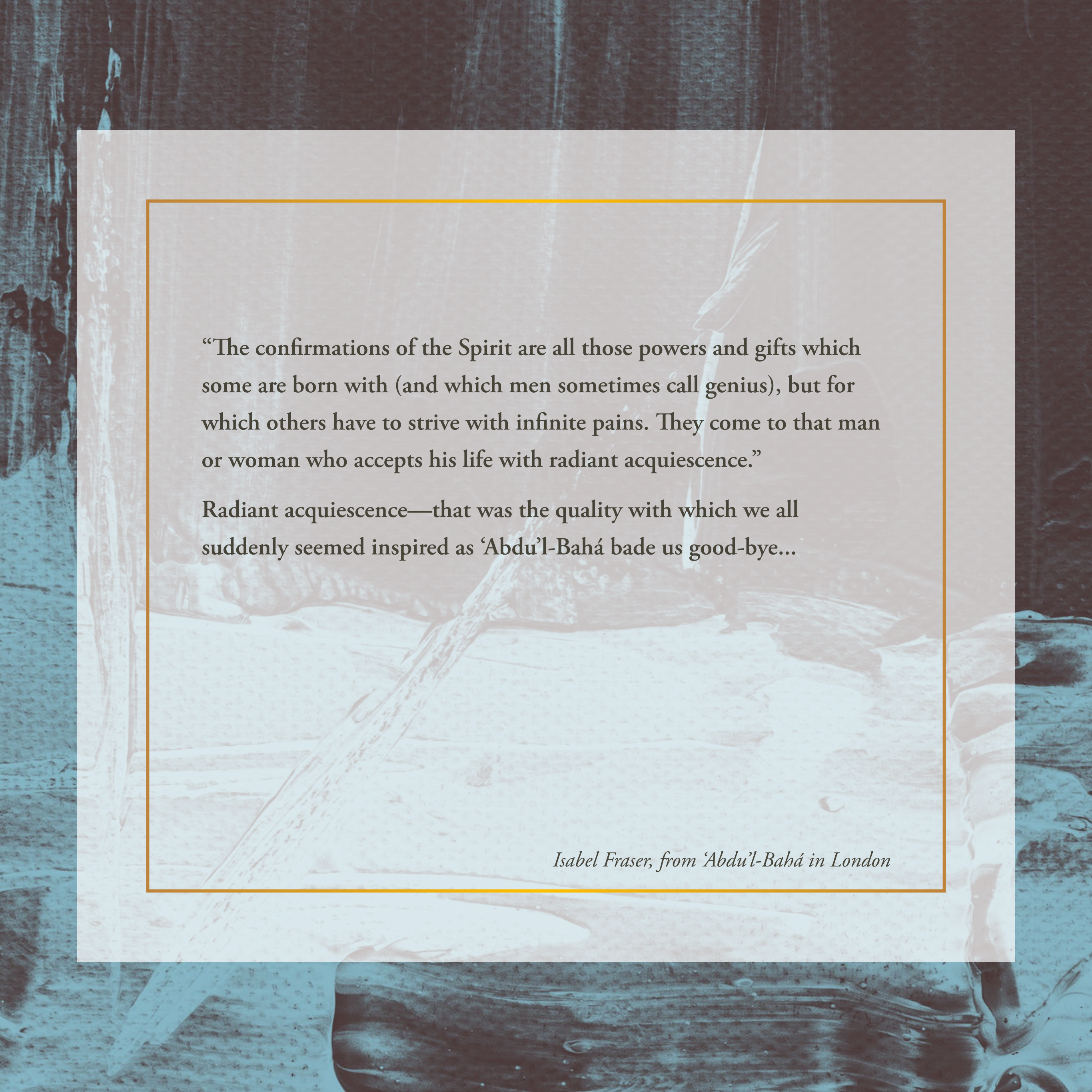
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Therefore, I was happy all that time in prison. When one is released from the prison of self, that is indeed release, for that is the greater prison. When this release takes place, then one cannot be outwardly imprisoned. When they put my feet in stocks, I would say to the guard, 'You cannot imprison me, for here I have light and air and bread and water. There will come a time when my body will be in the ground, and I shall have neither light nor air nor food nor water, but even then I shall not be imprisoned.' The afflictions which come to humanity sometimes tend to centre the consciousness upon the limitations, and this is a veritable prison. Release comes by making of the will a Door through which the confirmations of the Spirit come."

This sounded so like the old theology that the modern in me rose doubting if the discipline could be compensated for by the effort.

"What do you mean by the confirmations of the Spirit?"

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“The confirmations of the Spirit are all those powers and gifts which some are born with (and which men sometimes call genius), but for which others have to strive with infinite pains. They come to that man or woman who accepts his life with radiant acquiescence.”

Radiant acquiescence—that was the quality with which we all suddenly seemed inspired as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá bade us good-bye...

Isabel Fraser, from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in London



REFLECTIONS

A photograph of a person in a dark, heavy coat walking away on a snow-covered path through a forest. The path is partially covered in snow and leads into the distance. A large, textured tree trunk is visible in the foreground on the left. The overall scene is dimly lit, suggesting a winter or overcast day.

What are we being called to be free from?

A person wearing a dark, hooded cloak stands in a snowy, mountainous landscape. The person is positioned in the center-right of the frame, looking towards the left. The background features snow-covered ground and dark, rocky terrain under a pale sky. The entire scene is overlaid with a semi-transparent orange rectangle.


How is the freedom described in the quotations different from the mainstream understanding of freedom?

A person wearing a dark, heavy winter coat and a hat is walking away from the camera on a snow-covered path. The path is flanked by snow-covered bushes or trees. The scene is captured in a soft, slightly desaturated light, possibly overcast. The entire image is framed by a thin, light blue border.

How do we make sure our search for freedom does not infringe on the freedom of those around us?



How does the example of 'Abdu'l-Bahá help us to understand what true freedom is?

A photograph of a person in a dark coat walking on a snowy path through a forest. The person is seen from the side, walking away from the camera. The path is covered in snow and leads through a dense forest of trees. In the foreground, a large, textured tree trunk is visible on the left side. The overall scene is serene and quiet.

*Have you ever been in a state of true freedom? What did it feel like?
What characterised your thoughts and actions during that time?*



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