



The Nine-Sided Temple

*A Collection of Personal Reflections on Divine Reality
After A Decade In Darkness*

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Foreword

This is not a theological manifesto. It is not an academic paper, nor is it an attempt at poetry.

Rather, this work is a collection of insights into reality, however inadequate, based on my personal understanding of Bahá'í Scripture, conversations with wise individuals, and what I've been able to glean thus far from an eventful, beautiful, and painful life. This is my testimony.

I have written this despite feeling reluctant, because why would a lowly, imperfect person need to write anything, when the King of Glory has written?

But I did so anyway to allow myself to bluntly articulate what is in my heart.
Praise be to God, the Ever-Forgiving,
the All-Glorious.

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I

The Ordainer

Every atom, every speck of dust, every tree, plant and flower, indeed, every ray of light, every creature, everything, across the vastness of the Universe: all things move according to a single Command. Each and every thing is sustained by the Divine Will.

All things are governed by a perfect code where each and every possibility is accounted for from the beginning of time, which is without beginning, until the end, which shall never be. And nothing whatsoever escapes His grasp.

No matter what we single out, whether under a magnifying glass or through a telescope, all things inspire awe and wonder.

Music inspires us. Light, in the various ways it reveals reality, captivates us. Delicacies, scents and fragrances, the wind that blows on our faces on a warm afternoon in spring: all moments lived consciously fill the heart with praise and amazement.

Yet all this, our physical reality, is but one thin sliver of creation. Beyond it lie endless worlds of a different kind: the world of dreams, of thought, of knowledge, and countless magnificent heavenly realms. And in each of these worlds, again, all things move in accordance with the same Divine Will.

The more I contemplate this truth, the more I've come to understand what it means when we exclaim: God is the Most Great, the Mover of things seen and unseen!

As human beings, endowed with souls, we have been called into existence, *undeservedly*, to journey through these worlds, acquiring at each stage the powers and qualities needed to transcend to the next, continuously progressing, ever drawing closer to the Divine Presence.

This journey is not reserved for a select few, nor is its wondrousness reserved for the handful. Everyone who has been called into being—the unborn child, the poor and destitute, the famed and wealthy, the saints, and

even the iron-crowned tyrants among us—all are summoned to know and worship God. While justice and accountability must run their course, all will ultimately obtain their share and attain unto that which has been ordained for them.

II

The All-Merciful

Suffering is one of the mysteries of creation. The shrieks of a frightened deer, the ravaging wolves, starvation, poverty, slavery, abuse, torture, motherless infants left helpless to die.

“Why does God, the All-Merciful, allow it?” we ask.

And yet, as an elderly friend of mine told me a long time ago, all emotions and physical sensations, between joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain, are experienced within a very narrow band of consciousness and possibility.

Passing out during trauma or disappearing into trance in moments of rapture mark the limits.

For the one who suffers, there are benefits born within the spirit: detachment, resolve, a yearning for divine assistance, and hope. These are important dispositions, the ultimate significance of which will only become apparent at the appointed hour.

For the one who witnesses the suffering of others, including in the natural world, new spiritual realms are unlocked within the heart, enabling one to arise and become a channel for God's compassion, generosity, and grace.

What a privilege it is, and what a gift, to be a source of gladness unto others, and to mirror His kindness and care!

Suffering is a condition, inherent to and inevitable in this world, where imperfections exist as shadows that hint at the world of light.

All are called to alleviate the suffering of others, to avoid being the cause of grief, and at the same time all are called to accept, or better yet, embrace their own suffering, as and when it occurs.

Upon death, objectively, there is no reason for our souls to be spared an eternity of fire and brimstone, fear and torment, just as there is no natural imperative to spare the confused

whale the agony of withering away on the shores.

Yet, in the worlds of light that follow this dark place, limitless joy nonetheless awaits us: colors that sing, waves of love, deathless flowers.

Thousands upon thousands of glorious secrets will be revealed to each and every one of us. The wisdom of all things will be unveiled. God is indeed the All-Merciful, the Ever-Loving.

And so we bow to the Most Great Light, forehead to dust, trusting the wisdom that hides in the shriek of that frightened deer, until our eyes burn clear enough to read what is outwardly fire, as inwardly light.

III

The Powerful

Sinlessness is rare, sainthood all the more. Yet, as we journey and awaken to our frailties, we must strive, day by day, to become better.

Weakness is a given. Some of us are created physically weak, frail and sickly, prone to illness and fatigue. Others are weak in mind, anxious, frustrated, scattered in thought. Still others are weak in spirit, lacking will-power, discipline, and the strength to resist temptations.

Spiritual awakening does not mean one is free from one's weaknesses or the promptings of the lower self.

If anything, as our consciousness expands and we yearn for purity and light, we become ever more aware of our frailties and blemishes, each flaw illuminated like a crack in marble under the sun.

This is the beginning of a lifelong battle, a great war, between the insistent lower self and our ascending soul. This is not just a fight between our animal instincts and divine yearnings, but beyond that, it is about developing the capacity needed to transcend our reality and reach our God-given potential.

Walking this path is not easy. One gets distracted, discouraged, disappointed, disheartened, and disillusioned, until, finally, one is dismantled.

Indeed, it is through the very act of striving, and failing, and rising again, that we become truly reliant on God, the All-Powerful.

Recognising one's own weaknesses does not absolve one from the obligation to try to overcome them, but in realizing our ultimate powerlessness, we come to see the boundless greatness of God.

A sense of failing or even a feeling of worthlessness can be transformed into a deeply felt sense of humility, the soil in which true devotion takes root.

To know one is undeserving is the *key* to coming to worship God purely, and to serve humanity for the sake of God alone. There can be no claim on rewards, no claim on heaven. There is nothing to be redeemed by our own merit, for we all fall short.

So we pray, for the sake of God. We love, for the sake of God. We strive and endure, for His sake. And He alone is the All-Powerful, the Source of all strength, the One who turns our weaknesses into wings for our ascent.

IV

The Unknowable

Many years ago, a childhood friend posed a question. In seeking to disprove God's omnipotence, he asked me: "If God can do anything, can he create a rock so heavy that He Himself cannot lift it up?"

Obviously, he explained, if the answer is that God can indeed create such a heavy rock, then His inability to lift up the rock would disprove His omnipotence, and likewise if God was not able to create it, we would be forced to conclude the same.

At the time, my answer to him was that God is exalted above all of creation, and unconstrained by the logic that constrains us mortals.

But while this answer still holds true today, the riddle has kept returning to me, perplexing me.

It took me thirty years to realize that there is in fact an answer that solves it in the realm of physics and might be acceptable to present-day scientists.

You see, the fallacy in my friend's question was to assume that reality is one-dimensional. But just as time and space are infinite, so reality in its manifold iterations is infinite.

In one instance, God, the Fashioner, would indeed be able to create said rock, and would be unable to move it with all His might, and in another instance He would not be able to fashion such a rock as He is the Mover of all things.

Both instances can hold true, *simultaneously*, and as God's Presence permeates creation throughout all of its dimensions, His omnipotence is settled and absolute.

Of course, riddles such as these are unworthy of God, but it speaks to an important truth, which is worth discussing, namely that God is Unknowable.

We say God is One, but He is exalted above numbers. We say He is Great, but He is beyond measure. We say we were created in His image, but He has no likeness. He is the Peerless.

We say God is the All-Loving, the Ever-Forgiving, the All-Merciful, and the All-Wise, but He is far removed from any of His Names. All Names prostrate themselves before His Unknowable Essence.

And still, all of us were called into being to *know* God and worship Him, all created things reflect His Names resplendently, and all things sing His praise and reveal His Divine Attributes.

As I contemplate this more, I have come to realize that both God's injunction to get to know Him, as well as the creation of His Names—which enable us to heed His call—are for *our* benefit, and for ours alone.

His wish to be known, and the creation of all things that followed as a result, rather than a necessity, are but tokens of His loving kindness and grace. He is the All-Bountiful, the Self-Subsisting.

V

The Bestower

When we read about the next world, the afterlife, we come across familiar imagery. Valleys, rivers, flowers, mansions, music, and cities of light. It's tempting to think of these as just metaphorical or perhaps as imagination based on the things we encounter on this Earth. But perhaps the opposite is true.

As we think deeply about this idea of reality being inverted, it enables us to come to a completely different perspective on things such as wealth, worth, and, ultimately, detachment.

Over time, I've found it helpful to regard the world we live in, as a kind of low-resolution version of the true world. While perfectly designed, this world is essentially—and intentionally—*a realm of imperfections*.

Flowers bloom, and wither. Faces gleam, and wrinkle. Impressive mausoleums turn into ruins. Everywhere we look, we see growth, followed by decay.

But when we consider the next world as one of utter perfection, where trees are ever-flourishing, souls are ever-wakeful, and life is ever-pleasant, ever-wondrous, and ever-progressive; a dream-like world, where each soul is granted a bespoke experience befitting their station, then a pathway of

detachment from this netherworld begins to emerge.

Put differently, this realm is pixelated on purpose. Its blur and decay are built-in so that we learn to see beyond it and act accordingly.

If we truly considered this world to be a mirage, a play, a performance, how much value should we place on our fleeting possessions?

Gold, gems, jewels, silk carpets, artistic masterpieces, or whatever is deemed scarce and valuable on this Earth, the next world hides in abundance.

Knowledge, insights, and wisdom gleaned in this life, are but a drop

compared to the Ocean of consciousness that we are to be immersed in hereafter.

What this tells me is not that possessions and wealth need to be shunned, but rather that they need to serve a purpose and through virtuous living be converted into vehicles for worship.

Indeed, wealth is a gift from God, the Bestower, and its purpose is none other than to engage in acts of kindness, generosity, and charity.

A home, whether makeshift or majestic, is worthless, unless it be the site of hospitality, devotion, joy, and love.

A work of art should be cherished, admired, and preserved, in honor of His Beauty.

For although a mere low-resolution world, there are opportunities in this life which can only be seized here, opportunities of unimaginable significance and import.

Accumulating riches is not one of them, but sharing one's fortune, providing a helping hand to someone in need, enabling a child's education, providing shelter to a homeless person, offering care to an orphan, gladdening another's heart, or contributing to the Cause of God: these are endeavors worth living for.

And so while this world might only be a mirage, it is so only in permanence, not in consequence.

Low-resolution though it may be, this world *is* the designated arena for faith, virtuous striving and spiritual excellence. Here, through sacrifice, the mundane can be made holy, and a single deed is rendered eternal, in high-definition.

VI

The Point of Adoration

It might seem like the path to God is a highly individualized, lonesome experience, where solitude, introspection, detachment, free will, and personal accountability characterize the soul's eternal ascent.

But while it is true that we have a sense of self, which is everlasting, and we bear responsibility for our choices and actions, it's important to take the unity of all things into account.

Unity is not just about singing songs around a campfire. It is not just about looking past skin color or culture.

It is rather understanding that all souls—beyond time, space, and rank—form the spokes of a single wheel of being; one that revolves around the Will of God, at His behest, in perpetual adoration of His magnetic Light.

At the atomic level, the fundamental oneness of things is easier to grasp. Perception and language compel us to distinguish trees from buildings, planets from moons, and animals from rocks, but we know that over time, at the elementary level, all things are made to collide, absorb, combine, and transmute.

Looking deeper, we see a pattern of resemblance across scales: the electron's motion around the nucleus, a planet's orbit around its star, a star's path within the galaxy. Each is an ever-expansive reflection of the same divine order.

If we could observe physical reality at every scale and across the widest span of time, it would be obvious to us that the entire material realm, which makes up the endless Universe, constitutes a single, living entity.

I say *living*, because underlying all of it we discern the active operation of consciousness. Some creatures tap into it only superficially. In human form we reach more deeply. But it is only in the afterlife that we are

submerged in this vast Ocean of knowing, one of His greatest gifts to mankind.

Consciousness does not belong to each of us separately. It is a shared layer of creation, broadcast throughout all the worlds of God, and all beings draw from it to varying degrees.

The question I sometimes ask myself is whether we, as souls, live inside creation, or whether, in reality, creation unfolds within our own soul. Whatever the answer may be, God is the Exalted and entirely distinct in His Essence, just as the brush that touches the canvas does not equate the painting with the Painter.

What this all means is still beyond me. But at the least it tells me that in our journey toward God, in our efforts to mirror His Beauty, and in our explorations and deepening of consciousness, *we are together.*

Although caught in different currents, ebbs and flows, and separated as waves, we form a single living ocean. Although diverse in intensity, radiance and color, we reflect the same Light.

VII

The Gracious

Now that we've meditated on creation, both as the expression of God's Names and Attributes, as well as the multi-layered immensity throughout which the soul's journey toward our Creator unfolds, and now that we've considered the fundamental unity which underlies all of creation and binds us all together, I'd like to reflect on the subject of service and the hope to obtain God's good-pleasure.

I remember a while ago, I had to board a flight. The airport was extremely busy and since there was no place to

sit, I decided to start lining up at the gate rather early.

After what seemed like at least an hour, a long line had formed behind me. When the gate finally opened I was the first to get on the bus which would take us to the airplane.

Hopping on the bus, I happily sat down on the first seat by the entrance, resting my legs, and rather comfortably waited until the entire bus had filled up with passengers.

At the very last moment, the ground staff wheeled a man in a wheelchair to the bus, and—of course, unaware that I had been standing at the gate for so long—they asked if I could offer up my seat to him.

I felt exhilarated, honored even, that out of all people, I had been singled out for this small act of service. I got up and squeezed my way through the crowd to the other side of the bus where I saw some space to stand with my luggage.

While thanking God, I noticed that the space I stood in just happened to be the exact area where the air conditioner was leaking.

Ice-cold water dripped profusely on my head and neck, down my shirt. My smile grew with fondness at my awkward predicament and I knew the concourse on high were laughing with me. And He is the All-Humorous.

My point is, and this is my personal understanding, I don't see service as a duty, but as a delightful privilege.

God is the Omnipotent and is certainly not in need of our service. It is a bounty from God, and whenever the opportunity presents itself to render any service—especially in this netherworld—we must seize it with all our heart.

But what exactly constitutes service depends less on the act and more on the spirit with which it is performed.

Ultimately, while we may assume a pure motive, we have no idea whether or not the act is accepted at His Threshold. What I do know is that since there is no single act of service

that can be of any benefit whatsoever to His Exalted Being, we are called upon to serve our fellow man.

In this life, serving humanity *is* serving God.

We should never assume our acts warrant His approval, yet remember He is the Merciful, the Kind.

If, through trial and error, and striving, we gain His good-pleasure, even to the extent of a tiny mustard seed, it will be the cause of a soul's everlasting joy and ripple wondrously through all the worlds of God.

Our station is as of yet unbeknownst to us, as it is to others, and our potential is known only to God. What we can do,

however, is pray to God and beg for His assistance, that He may draw us closer to Him, purify our hearts, illuminate our souls, and that He may grant us the capacity and honor to serve His Divine Plan. He is the Gracious, the Giver.

VIII

The All-Loving

Do you believe in God?

Nowadays, this question is a matter of ontology—one’s views on whether something is real or not.

But when you trace the word ‘belief’ to its original roots, you’ll find it relates to trust and confidence, and perhaps more interestingly, that it shares roots with notions of care, to hold dear, and love.

And He is the Beloved.

Much has been written and many a serenade has been sung concerning the subject of love.

It can be heartwarming, stomach-churning, crushing, unsettling, and soothing. Love can be obsessive, possessive, addictive, even selfish and exclusionary. It can be heartbreak-
ing, torturous, captivating, and liberating. It can be caring, strengthening, unifying, healing, all-encompassing.

But while each of these faces of love are valid, in the context of the progress of souls, I like to think about love in its guise of *rapturous self-forgetfulness*.

You see, when I reflect on the divine mysteries, infused into the fabric of creation and at work in the soul's

journey towards Him, it is not driven by intellectual curiosity.

Rather, my musings are underwritten by sheer enthusiasm, astonishment, inspiration, and ecstasy.

It is as though a fire burns ever more intensely in my heart, its heat radiating from my hands, its light burning through my eyes.

Compelled to venture deeper, to suffer becomes a longing, to supplicate a need, and to bear witness a desire. To share becomes a wish, to connect a deep yearning, and to serve other people becomes the language of love, eager to be spoken in every tongue and idiom.

Where else can light travel, but outward and beyond? What is purification, but the extinguishment of darkness? And how else can we draw near, but with gratitude and joy?

And so we are invited, even as the flower by the sun, to bow and remember.

Praise be to God, the All-Loving.

IX

The Most Glorious

O Thou, Maker of all that hath been
and shalt be, before Whose splendor
suns are but sparks, before Whose
beauty roses bow with shame, before
Whose majesty oceans fall silent,
and mountains are humbled.

Thou art the Mysterious, the Hidden
made manifest, the Unseen veiled in
Thy brightness, the Unknowable Who
beholds every heart. O Thou Ordainer,
Ruler of the visible and the invisible.

Glory be to Thee, Who clotheth the naked atom with light, Who crowneth the dust with the diadem of Thy love, Who lifteth the broken wing and maketh it soar through worlds unfathomable.

Thou art the Fire that consumeth yet giveth life, the Water that drowneth yet reviveth, Thou art the Wine that maketh the lover forget all, save Thy Countenance.

All praise belongeth unto Thee, for the cry of the deer and laughter of the child, for the tear that falleth and the smile that riseth, O Thou Who art the Compassionate One, the All-Knowing, the Wise.

Thou art the Beginning without beginning, the End without ending, O Thou Who abideth in each and every heart that hath perished to itself.

Thou art glorified in the lowliest act of kindness, magnified in the hand that giveth, exalted in the silence after the lover's name is forgotten.

Praise be to Thee, O Most Glorious, O Desire of every understanding heart, O Goal of every yearning soul, O Beloved of all that hath been and shalt ever be.