



8. Spiritual Privilege and My Envelope

Dedication to the Sacredness of the Bahá'í Fund Compiled by the National Spiritual Assembly of Azerbaijan



Giving to the Fund ... is a spiritual privilege, not open to those who have not accepted Bahá'u'lláh, of which no believer should deny himself. It is both a responsibility and a source of bounty.

—The Universal House of Justice

... under no circumstances the believers should accept financial help from non-Bahá'ís for use in connection with specific administrative activities of the Faith ... because the institutions which the Bahá'ís are gradually building are in the nature of gifts from Bahá'u'lláh to the world ...

—Shoghi Effendi

This edition of *The Roaring Fountain* will prepare the wayfarer to appreciate the privilege of participating in the Bahá'í Fund and to break down any psychological barriers before him. These barriers range from personal to cultural, emotional to intellectual; but before analyzing them, let us first look at the “privilege” itself. What exactly is a “spiritual privilege?” And why is it only open to those who have accepted Bahá'u'lláh?

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Many years ago I visited the village of Lahij situated on the southern slopes of the greater Caucasus mountain range in the Ismaili region. Lahij has a population of about 800 inhabitants, who are experts in crafts and hand-hammered copper pottery. They also specialize in stone construction, so much so that they built the entire village using small river rocks. Their sophisticated underground drainage system dates back centuries. They have used their talents to create beauty and aspire to perfection. As I walked through the alleyways of Lahij, I was directed by the inhabitants to visit the restaurant at the end of a narrow passage. When I got there, I noticed that the entrance was small and dark, and the food was expensive and over my budget; I debated whether or not to try it.



After much deliberation, I decided to pass through the old gate and enter the arched corridor. I was pleasantly greeted by the unexpected: an open-aired garden, complete with majestic trees and a placid water basin, perched atop a breathtaking valley. The waiter came forward with a warm welcome and invited me to a table overlooking the Niyal mountain range. From there I could see the Girdiman River carving through the valley and animal herds dotting the countryside. The jingle of the mountain goats' bell collars made music as they waded through the river. As I sat back, the waiter brought me goat cheese, fresh tarragon, and baked bread straight from the oven. A cool breeze complemented the summer heat,

and I could hear the flow of the river like a gentle but roaring fountain. My nerves calmed. I was able to



Girdiman River, Lahij - Ismaili



I stayed in that restaurant for the entire day, and no one bothered me to leave; the owner had afforded me this “*privilege*,” as his personal guest. From the moment I stepped inside the garden, the owner made me feel as if the entire place belonged to me. I put my hands in the basin, sprinkled my face, took pictures, and awaited the main course: Pilov, kebabs, grape leaves, fresh yogurt mixed with mountain garlic. After eating to my heart’s content, I even took a nap. The restaurant owner’s hospitality made me reflect on the nature of “*privilege*,” and namely, a “*spiritual privilege*.” If a mortal man could enrich my life with such privileges simply because I took a step into his garden, then what “*spiritual privileges*” could God bestow upon me if I took a step into His Garden?

... whosoever comes with one good act, God will give him tenfold. There is no doubt that the living Lord shall assist and confirm the generous soul.

—‘Abdu’l-Bahá

The Lord’s privileges must be limitless. They must include everything tangible—like material goods—as well as intangible—like love, harmony, compassion, good health, contentment, joy, prosperity, vision, and knowledge—because God is sovereign over all things. But just as I had to take a step into the restaurant to enjoy its blessings, we must take sincere and sacrificial steps towards God’s path in order to embrace our spiritual privileges. If we do not, we deprive ourselves. Just as I initially denied myself the privilege of entering the restaurant when all the inhabitants of Lahij repeatedly directed me to it, likewise, we often ignore the guidance provided by Assembly treasurers on the Bahá’í Fund. We must take steps fearlessly—especially because opportunities come and go. Years later, I went back to Lahij, and regrettably, the restaurant owner had passed away and the garden had been converted to a residential building. How fortunate I felt to have been presented with that privilege!

The other important question about this privilege is why Fund contributions are only open to those who have accepted Bahá'u'lláh. The Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith has elegantly clarified that one of the reasons for this special privilege is "*because the institutions which the Bahá'ís are gradually building are in the nature of gifts from Bahá'u'lláh to the world.*" This statement highlights the special role that Bahá'ís have in serving humankind, and the way the Fund helps forge the relationship between mankind and Bahá'u'lláh.

The spiritual relationship between Bahá'u'lláh and His believers is based on a "*divine Covenant*" that requires a profound connection, created through worship, obedience, obligatory prayers, attending Feast, humility, rectitude of conduct, service to mankind, love for all, reverence, going on pilgrimage, generous and sacrificial offerings made to the Bahá'í Fund, and a range of other responsibilities. Therefore, the relationship extends beyond money. It is about accepting Bahá'u'lláh as the Manifestation of God for this age and entering into the "*divine Covenant.*"



Bahjí, the resting place of Bahá'u'lláh, the Manifestation of God

Contributions towards the Bahá'í Fund are simply one aspect of a web of related responsibilities. If a soul does not believe in Bahá'u'lláh, does not worship Him, does not obey His laws or love Him, then what is the purpose of offering one's possession to Him? The Bahá'í Fund allows Bahá'u'lláh and the believer to express their love for each other. It is a mutual love relationship not a financial one. "*Love Me, that I may love thee,*" Bahá'u'lláh revealed. "*If thou lovest Me not, My love can in no wise reach thee.*"

There is a profound aspect to the relationship between a believer and the Fund, which holds true irrespective of his or her economic condition. When a human soul accepts Bahá'u'lláh as the Manifestation of God for this age and enters into the divine Covenant, that soul should progressively bring his or her whole life into harmony with the divine purpose—he becomes a co-worker in the Cause of God and receives the bounty of being permitted to devote his material possessions, no matter how meagre, to the work of the Faith.

—The Universal House of Justice

... support of the Bahá'í Fund is a bounty reserved by Bahá'u'lláh to His declared followers.

—The Universal House of Justice



The Universal House of Justice is under "the protection, unerring guidance and care of the one true Lord. He shall guard it from error and will protect it under the wing of His sanctity and infallibility."

What are the barriers that hinder Bahá'ís from aligning their lives with the Covenant? Of making sacrificial contributions? What does contribution mean to each one of us? What did our family, schools, and society teach us about generosity? What fears do we have about giving up possessions? What do we think about when we prepare to make contributions to the Bahá'í Fund? With what attitude do we give? How do we approach the treasurer? Or the Fund box? Do we put our names on the envelope? Why? Why not?

Asking ourselves these questions, and many others, helps us advance on our journey. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions, but it is important that we at least embark on a journey of spiritual growth. Such questions are tools to boost reflection. Bahá'u'lláh's love is limitless. "*The essence of Bahá'u'lláh's Teaching*," 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, "*is all-embracing love.*" There are no hard and fast rules for giving to the Bahá'í Fund; rather, everyone is simply encouraged to adorn himself with generosity.

To give and to be generous are attributes of Mine; well is it with him that adorneth himself with My virtues.

—Bahá'u'lláh

This issue of *the Roaring Fountain* is coming to an end. It is clear that the Bahá'í Fund is a unique privilege, and that in order to open ourselves to its bounties, we must "*progressively bring our whole life into harmony with the divine purpose.*" But we have not addressed the psychological barriers that can make this a challenge. In the next issue, we will explore how to overcome these hindrances to *right living*.

We must be like the fountain or spring that is continually emptying itself of all that it has and is continually being refilled from an invisible source. To be continually giving out for the good of our fellows undeterred by fear of poverty and reliant on the unfailing bounty of the Source of all wealth and all good—this is the secret of right living.

—Shoghi Effendi



The Journey Continues...

Next Chapter: My Traditional Heritage...

The Roaring Fountain Bulletins

Stories about the Fund

Fundraising Projects



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