



2. Degree of Sacrifice and My Envelope

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



...such giving has been considered in our Teachings as a spiritual obligation and an act of sacrifice, which is closely related to the spiritual development of the individual believer.

—The Universal House of Justice

The importance of contributing resides in the degree of sacrifice of the giver, the spirit of devotion with which the contribution is made and the unity of the friends in this service; these attract the confirmations of God and enhance the dignity and self-respect of the individuals and the community.

—The Universal House of Justice

The words generosity, sacrifice, and spiritual development go hand-in-hand in the Bahá'í Holy Writings on contributions. Sacrifice seems to be the elixir that turns contributions into divine confirmation and spiritual development. When I started my journey, I remember how puzzled I was with three new phrases I had never heard before: “utmost generosity,” “degree of sacrifice,” and “spirit of devotion.” I had briefly

read about “generosity” in a story that described a wealthy man giving money to the poor on his deathbed. I had also observed certain individuals in our community who served with a spirit of devotion. But I had no clue how sacrifice was measured, never mind trying to practice it when offering contributions. What a paradox in the work of our Lord when a material thing, such as money, is used to test our willingness to sacrifice and lead us to profound spiritual growth—allowing us to “*attract the confirmations of God and enhance the dignity and self-respect of the individuals and the community.*”

He who is the Eternal Truth—exalted be His glory—hath made the fulfilment of every undertaking on earth dependent on material means.

—Bahá’u’lláh

How do we express sacrifice in contributions? Our minds become preoccupied with monetary notes when we begin to ask ourselves, “Should I contribute 10 or 100? Should I give 1,000 or 5,000? What difference would my 100 make in the path of God? How much is sacrificial? And how little is selfish?” Obviously there are no answers to these questions, because numbers do not define our spirituality. But they are a part of our spiritual journey. When we consider numbers, we test our generosity and our sacrifice. Some Bahá’ís follow their emotions in giving; others simply reach into their pocket if the situation arises and give what they have; yet others listen to the treasurer’s report and decide whether there is a need to contribute this month. Although God is so compassionate that He accepts everyone’s sincere contributions, the question remains: When do we reach “sacrifice”?



Shoghi Effendi, The Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith

...There can be no limit to one's contributions.... The more one can give the better it is, especially when such offerings necessitate the sacrifice of other wants and desires on the part of the donor. The harder the sacrifice the more meritorious will it be, of course, in the sight of God. For after all it is not so much the quantity of one's offerings that matters, but rather the measure of deprivation that such offerings entail.”

—Shoghi Effendi

How eloquently has Shoghi Effendi clarified the definition of “utmost generosity” and “degree of sacrifice” in just one passage! The measuring cup does not seem to be numbers at all, but “*sacrifice of other wants and desires*” and “*measure of deprivation that such offerings entail.*” We need to find the line between comfortable contributions and sacrificial contributions. When I made a conscious decision to put an end to arbitrary contributions and focus my attention on creating a balance between sacrifice and desire in my life, the undertaking turned into a re-evaluation of my life. I began to reflect, I took long

walks to contemplate, interviewed myself, brought myself to the table with a pen and paper, responded honestly and frankly to my desires, figured out how much I owned, how much I owed, how much I really needed, and where I could cross the threshold of sacrifice.

I remember very well that during the process of re-evaluation, I began to receive confirmations from various sides in the form of small miracles. For instance one of my relatives who owed me money for a long time, even though I had forgotten, called me to make arrangements to pay me back. My search finally brought me to this passage about the connection between sacrifice and the confirmations of God.



Calculate



Re-evaluate



Blessings

It is not the amount of the contribution which is important, but the degree of self-sacrifice that it entails—for it is this that attracts the confirmations of God.

—The Universal House of Justice

Therefore, I like to think that even a mere search that indicates to God we are trying to take a step towards the right path and find our threshold for sacrifice may attract the confirmation of God. At least for me it did. On one occasion, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá took a contribution and kissed it because He inhaled from it a breath of sacrifice from one of His maidservants of God.

Gloria Faizi, in "*Stories about Bahá'í Funds*," writes the following account. In one of Hájí Amín's trips to the Holy Land, he passed through a village where a very poor woman gave him a small coin as her contribution in the path of God. He took the coin and put it in his pocket before heading out to the Holy Land. As soon as he arrived, Hájí Amín was accepted into the presence of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. As usual, he presented the donations he had gathered along with his report to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Who showered him with gratitude and praise for his untiring services in the path of God.

As we even read in the last edition of "*The Roaring Fountain*," Hájí Amín's integrity was not to be questioned, as he was the Trustee of God appointed by Bahá'u'lláh. Furthermore, he had never made a mistake in his calculations before. But this time, to his astonishment, when he presented ‘Abdu’l-Bahá the contribution bag, the Master kindly looked at Hájí Amín in his eyes and said something was missing. Hájí Amín could not believe what he was hearing and was unable to speak. He humbly left the presence of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in deep anguish, for he could not understand what had happened.

Hájí Amín was so distressed that he went to his room in tears and fell on his knees to prostrate himself in prayers and meditation. As he prostrated with his head on the floor, he felt a hard piece of metal under his knee and immediately stood up and reached for the metal stuck in his robe. To his surprise the metal was the same small coin the poor woman had given as a contribution. The coin had slipped through a hole in Hájí Amín's pocket into the lining of his coat. Without delay he took the coin and went to the presence

of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, who immediately showered His love and praise on Hájí Amín. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, The Master, kissed the coin, saying that “This was worth more than all the other offerings because it had been given with the greatest sacrifice.”

In this glorious Dispensation the treasures laid up by kings and queens are not worthy of mention, nor will they be acceptable in the presence of God. However, a grain of mustard offered by His loved ones will be extolled in the exalted court of His holiness and invested with the ornament of His acceptance.

—Bahá’u’lláh

Once again the man whom Bahá’u’lláh had entitled The Trustee of God goes through the agony of witnessing an incident which brought him closer to the mysteries of the universe on Bahá’í contributions. Large numbers of contributions with many zeros remained in the bag, but ‘Abdu’l-Bahá patiently waited to kiss the small coin.

The story taught me two very important and significant lessons. One is that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was fully knowledgeable about the sacrificial contribution made by the poor lady before it was delivered to the Holy Land. This extraordinary concept that God is aware of our contributions at the moment of giving—and not at the time of delivery—was briefly discussed in the last edition of *The Roaring Fountain*. We will come back to this concept in future newsletters when we discuss disclosing our identity on the envelope. The second important message in the story is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s remark that the coin was worth more than all the other donations. It taught me that whether we are wealthy or poor, the degree of sacrifice will make our coin equal to all the treasures of the world.

The importance of contributing resides in the degree of sacrifice of the giver, the spirit of devotion with which the contribution is made and the unity of the friends in this service; these attract the confirmations of God and enhance the dignity and self-respect of the individuals and the community.

—The Universal House of Justice



The Journey Continues...

Next Chapter: My Poverty...



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