

Is faith a matter of "You either believe it or you don't"? Where do knowledge and reason fit into that?

To: XX, talisman9@yahoogroups.com
Subject: What is meant by "mashriq"?
Date sent: Thu, 01 Nov 2007 09:38:41 +0100

On 31 Oct 2007 at 11:29, XX wrote:

- > I think this leap of faith -- "You either believe it or you don't.
- > You decide." -- can only apply to the Manifestation, and even then
- > it can't be the only proof. If it means you decide to join then
- > accept everything that follows without question, where are the
- > checks and balances? What happens to reason?

"You either believe it or you don't" is a disastrous recipe for faith in anything, including the Manifestation. You may place your faith in the Manifestation, because you are impressed with his (her?) person, the story of his life, or what is written or recounted of what he taught, but your knowledge of these things is always **your** knowledge - it is imperfect and may contain mistakes. Continual questioning, gathering evidence, and reason are what enables you to separate the grain from the chaff of your own mistakes. Those who have a "take it or leave it" attitude are in fact elevating their own understanding above what the Manifestation taught. They have faith in their own understandings, and in nothing outside their own understandings. Everywhere and always, dogmatism is a symptom of arrogance towards God, while critical self-reflective thought is the mark of the humble disciple, who "turns again to the Lord."

The identification of the chaff of misunderstandings from the grain of truth is not something we have to do alone: if we are willing to listen to others (prerequisite: humility) we can hear information and arguments that help us. If we present our own understandings, using evidence and argument so that other people can understand what we mean, we can hear critique from them that might never have occurred to us alone. Again, it requires humility. Those who have a "take it or leave it" attitude are also elevating their own understanding above that of other people: they are saying they are now the teachers and do not need to be taught.

There is something called the "sin against the spirit" and I think it is just this: attitudes such as arrogance and presumption that make self-criticism and learning impossible. Everyone CAN learn and change, but some people refuse to, thinking that this is religious virtue. These people cannot benefit from the light of religion, they make a religious virtue of keeping their eyes tight shut. Abdu'l-Baha says:

If a soul remains far from the manifestation, he may yet be awakened; for he did not recognize the manifestation of the divine perfections. But if he loathe the divine perfections themselves -- in other words, the Holy Spirit -- it is evident that he is like a bat which hates the light.

This detestation of the light has no remedy and cannot be forgiven -- that is to say, it is impossible for him to come near unto God. This lamp is a lamp because of its light; without the light it would not be a lamp. Now if a soul has an aversion for the light of the lamp, he is, as it were, blind, and cannot comprehend the light; and blindness is the cause of everlasting banishment from God.

(Abdu'l-Baha, Some Answered Questions, p. 127)

And Jeremiah laments:

Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the LORD.
Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens.
(King James Bible, Lamentations 3:41-41)

So by accident we are back at the Mashriq - the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, the place from which the remembrance of God rises.

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