

What Are the Traits of a True Seeker?

Everything revolves around this question: How ready and receptive is your heart to new knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes? Is your heart thirsty for truth? Bahá'u'lláh teaches that if someone is not thirsty for living waters, he should not be offered a cup:

O SON OF DUST!

The wise are they that speak not unless they obtain a hearing, even as the cup-bearer, who proffereth not his cup till he findeth a seeker, and the lover who crieth not out from the depths of his heart until he gazeth upon the beauty of his beloved. Wherefore sow the seeds of wisdom and knowledge in the pure soil of the heart, and keep them hidden, till the hyacinths of divine wisdom spring from the heart and not from mire and clay.¹

Christ used a beautiful parable to show the great variety of hearts people have. First, He spoke about the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy concerning those who would deny their Messiah:

Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: "You will be ever hearing but never understand-

ing; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them." Matthew 13:13-15

Then He referred to a few disciples who were exceptions:

But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. Matthew 13:16

After complimenting His dear disciples, Jesus revealed the parable of the sower:

Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. But the one who received the seed that fell on good

soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.

Matthew 13:18-23

The Báb compares a person without spiritual capacity to a stone, and the one with capacity to a mirror

The One true God may be compared unto the sun and the believer unto a mirror. No sooner is the mirror placed before the sun than it reflects its light. The unbeliever may be likened unto a stone. No matter how long it is exposed to the sunshine, it cannot reflect the sun.²

'Abdu'l-Bahá presents a similar analogy to portray the same principle:

Behold how the sun shines upon all creation, but only surfaces that are pure and polished can reflect its glory and light...Green and living trees can absorb the bounty of the sun; dead roots and withered branches are destroyed by it. Therefore, man must seek capacity and develop readiness.³

Bahá'u'lláh begins His *Book of Certitude*, which pertains to the proofs of His divine Mission, with these verses:

No man shall attain the shores of the ocean of true understanding except he be detached from all that is in heaven and on earth. Sanctify your souls, O ye peoples of the world, that haply ye may attain that

station which God hath destined for you...⁴

In this statement, Bahá'u'lláh considers two conditions essential for finding the truth:

- *detachment*
- *sanctity*

What is detachment? Life on earth can be compared to a plane ride, and God to the solid ground that supports and sustains our souls. Our goal is to jump out of the plane, which is our ego, and away from the clouds, which are the illusions that surround us.

Detachment means separating yourself temporarily from whatever you have learned. It means starting your spiritual journey with no preconceived notions. It means stepping out of your plane with no strings attached, simply for the sake of beholding wonders you have never seen before. Of course, when you jump, you carry a parachute, which at the right moment opens to protect you and to allow you to descend gracefully and confidently. The parachute is the potential—the pure mind and the pure heart—that God placed in your soul to protect you from self-destruction. If you trust Him and put everything in His hand, he will open your parachute at the right moment. He will help you open your mind and soul to the splendors of His light. What will happen if you jump with a cord attached to you and to the plane? You will dangle dangerously.

Thus, to find the truth, you must put everything aside—everything you have learned from your parents, your pastor, your priest, or any other “authority figure.” If you begin your journey with any strings attached, you will be dragged, dangling, behind the plane.

The second condition Bahá'u'lláh considers essential for finding the truth is sanctity. Attachment originates mostly in the emotions, especially the fear of losing something precious; sanctity pertains mostly to the purity of the soul.

Think of your soul as a sheet of paper. Can anyone write a clear message on a cluttered page? The more cluttered the page, the harder it is to write. God is always looking for a blank space on our soul to write special messages, such as hope and happiness. He constantly declares that He loves us. That is why He made us. He created the universe for our sake and provided for us every heavenly gift imaginable. He sent His most glorious creations, His Messengers of hope and peace, and allowed them to suffer for our sake. He gave us every potential, every celestial gift from His heavenly treasures. He did not withhold anything from us. We manifest His beauty and grandeur. What more can we expect? Our only duty in return for all these blessings is to leave a little blank space for Him, so that He can keep writing His special messages of love for us.

What will happen if our souls are cluttered with worldliness? How can

God find space to write? What will happen if our souls are cluttered with self-satisfaction, greed, selfishness, pride, pretension, self-deception, prejudice, and plausible excuses? What will happen if a person writes messages like these:

- O God, I love you, but I am really too busy! (A common and seemingly innocent excuse for putting one's immediate self-interest above one's duty to God.)
- O God, I love you, but investigating the news of the Advent of the One you have promised is not my job. There are thousands of other people who know the Scripture better than I do. I depend on them. If there is any “good news,” they will tell me. (Another unacceptable excuse.)
- O God, I love you, but I am afraid! How do I know I will not be deceived? (Another seemingly innocent excuse for avoiding personal responsibility.)

We can continue endlessly finding a hundred other excuses people give for avoiding their responsibility to God, to themselves, and to society. The result is this: We keep the page so full, make it so cluttered with personal messages and excuses, there is no room for God's angels to write.

Human beings are experts at blaming others and finding excuses. A little girl asked a famous musician for his

autograph. "Sorry my hand is too tired from playing." he claimed. "My hands are even more tired from applauding!" she responded.

God sends us many clues and gives us many signs to help us to find Him and follow Him. We must become sensitive to these clues and discover their inner meanings. It is said that nothing happens by coincidence, that there is a reason for everything. We can discover the reasons only if we attune our souls to the heavenly music. God constantly sends us messages, but we are too busy to listen. He offers us many opportunities that we ignore.

We must pray constantly to become worthy of the gifts of God. Seeing Him with our hearts and souls is the most precious of all gifts. It does not come by force, but by capacity. We must pray for a greater capacity. A little girl loved maple syrup and often dipped her finger into the big barrel. One day, she fell in and, as she was sinking, she prayed, "O Lord, make me equal to the opportunity!" That should be our daily prayer. The ocean of God's gifts and blessings is endless. We all have a chance to immerse our souls in the Word of God:

Immerse yourselves in the ocean of My words, that ye may unravel its secrets, and discover all the pearls of wisdom that lie hid in its depths.⁵
Bahá'u'lláh

We must constantly polish our hearts to make them as pure as glass, so that

they may absorb the light. God does not wish to live in a dirty house. Would you? Would you touch your pure and precious garment with dirty hands?

O SON OF BEING!

Thy heart is My home; sanctify it for My descent. Thy spirit is My place of revelation; cleanse it for My manifestation.⁶ Bahá'u'lláh

**O WEED THAT
SPRINGETH OUT OF DUST!**

Wherefore have not these soiled hands of thine touched first thine own garment, and why with thine heart defiled with desire and passion dost thou seek to commune with Me and to enter My sacred realm? Far, far are ye from that which ye desire.⁷ Bahá'u'lláh

This life is a test. What is the purpose of a test? To reveal what lies hidden. Every opportunity, every challenge reveals our inner motives; it shows whether we are fearful or bold, narrow-minded or broad-minded, bound by tradition or by truth, by self-interest or by common-interest.

In dealing with men it is God's purpose to test them and to see what they truly are. Ecclesiastes 3:18

The grading of all the tests is done at the end of this life, which is the beginning of the next. That is the most awesome scene in the eternal destiny of every human being. No one can escape it. At that point we will receive

our final evaluations. We will be told how we have scored.

The news of the coming of great Messengers presents the most challenging and decisive test for human beings. Some people hear the news and ignore it; others scan it briefly and stop; some investigate it all their lives but never make a commitment; others accept it but do little to promote it; some oppose it; and others embrace it and promote it with all their hearts and souls.

The test of recognizing God's Messengers and Redeemers is mostly spiritual; it pertains to the heart and soul. If people acted according to reason, proof, and evidence, the whole world would be Bahá'ís. For, as we noted, the rational evidence for the Bahá'í Faith is overwhelming. But unless the hearts are ready and receptive, no amount of evidence can make any difference.

To pass a test, the individual must meet certain requirements, must make certain preparations. Unless those requirements are met, the individual cannot succeed. How can a seeker pass his or her tests? What are the traits of a true seeker? Are you willing to test yourself? It is wise to look at your soul objectively and without fear. Your whole destiny depends on your courage and desire to know yourself. The following is a test. The left column lists the standards by which you can judge yourself; it shows the traits of a true

seeker. The right column offers you an opportunity to rate yourself. In relation to each trait listed, give yourself a rating from 1 to 5: 1 indicates that you judge yourself to be farthest away from the true seeker; 5 shows you are closest.

A true seeker: Rate Yourself

- | | Farthest
away from
a true
seeker | | Closest
to a
true
seeker | | |
|---|---|---|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| • Has a deep desire to find the truth and pursues it with unwavering resolve. Searches for truth like the one who has lost a jewel. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| • Tests everything <i>for himself</i> , and does not depend on others—parents, peers, or pastors—to judge or decide. Refuses to seek safety in tradition or popularity. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| • Selfish interests do not stand in his way: “How will my friends react?” “What will my parents say?” Such questions may enter his mind, but they do not affect his judgment. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

A true seeker: Rate Yourself

- | | Farthest
away from
a true
seeker | | Closest
to a
true
seeker | | |
|--|---|---|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| • Erases from his mind all preconceived notions. Like a member of a jury, he begins with a clear slate. (Some people even allow a new name to affect their judgment. They refuse to study the Bahá’í Faith because, they say, it “sounds” strange!) A true seeker does not, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states, “while loving and clinging to one form of religion, permit himself to detest all others.” ⁸ | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| • Is sincere and does not argue merely to win a point. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| • Is patient and persistent, and willingly invests ample time and effort to discover his heart’s desire. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| • Has a good heart, free from deception, hypocrisy, and pretension. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

A true seeker: Rate Yourself

- | | Farthest
away from
a true
seeker | | Closest
to a
true
seeker | | |
|---|---|---|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| • Is humble enough to say, “I don’t know,” and confident enough to say, “I can find out.” | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| • Trusts God and prays constantly with all his heart and soul for His help. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| • Does not allow an emotional attachment to a given name to prevent him from accepting and loving a new name. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

If you give yourself 4 and 5 in all categories, you may be free from major emotional-spiritual obstacles and disabilities. Scores of 1 and 2 show serious disabilities, even if it is in only one of the ten categories listed. Please review the discussion on the role of “the weakest critical link” in human lives in *Heaven’s Most Glorious Gift*. Remember what happened to the spacecraft *Challenger* because of one critical flaw in its complex system. The same can happen to human beings. One critical flaw in your soul may hold you back from the light of truth. Remember also the analogy used by Bahá’u’lláh that a veil as small as an eyelid conceals the sun.

A score of 3 puts you in a state of conflict. You will be pulled by two opposite forces. In this case, as a rule, your conservative, safety-seeking nature will overcome your adventurous side. This is the way most people behave; they prefer their comfort zones. Even a single score of 3 can be a definite disadvantage.

As you can see, the spiritual path for most people is full of pitfalls and obstacles. To make the journey from your comfort zone through the steep valleys and the high mountains, you will need 4s and 5s in all ten categories. If you are a religious leader, in addition to facing all these challenges, you must contemplate and cope with the loss of the source of your livelihood. This requires much courage and detachment. Of course, the greater the sacrifice, the greater your reward.

If you lack, or fail to acquire, any of these ten virtues, you may be unable to discern the truth. Even a small patch of clouds can conceal the blazing splendor of the sun. Discovering and overcoming your special handicaps or “weakest critical links” is the first step in the search for truth. Taking this first step is perhaps the most challenging task. It requires absolute open-mindedness and dedication.

The fact that all the divine Messengers have been rejected by the overwhelming majority of people in their age is the best evidence of how difficult and vital it is to practice an “independent search for the truth.”

Perhaps the weakest critical link in human beings is a failure to see and recognize one’s own weaknesses. Do you ever recall meeting someone who said, “I am fanatical, egotistical, prejudiced, unloving, unjust, closed-minded, unwise, and irresponsible”?

One of the many traits that can prevent us from seeing the truth is pride. Few things in life are as difficult to detect as pride in one’s ego. It is as natural as breathing, and as toxic and invisible as radiation. Would you like to be tested? Consider these verses addressed to a people who lived long ago:

Woe to you...you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves for the righteous. And you say, “If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.” Christ (Matt. 23:29-30)

Suppose you lived in 27 A.D. and were a neighbor of Annas and Caiaphas, the two most prominent religious leaders among the Jews at the time of Jesus. As you may know, they both insisted that Christ be crucified. What would be the chances that you, their neighbor, would have opposed their verdict? If you genuinely believe that you would have gone along with your distinguished neighbors as well as the masses of people, spiritually you are in good shape, relatively free from pride. Remember that the odds against Christ were so high that even His

handful of beloved and distinguished disciples failed to defend Him.

Once again, suppose you lived at the time of Noah. What would be your chances of denying Him? We could repeat this question many times. Each time you would say, “Very likely, I would have been among the masses of deniers of truth.” If that is quite likely, isn’t it also quite likely that you may be in the same position? It should actually be easier for you to say “yes,” because you can readily see a recurring and consistent record of denial at the dawn of the Advent of every divine Messenger.

The acknowledgment—that you would have been quite likely among the deniers—will move you to cleanse your soul from every lingering traces of ego, from any inclination to say, “I know I am right. If it had happened, I would have known it.” This acknowledgment may cause you to think deeply, to ponder, even to feel anxious or to sense a little fear. Such fear or anxiety is perfectly healthy. It will cause you to act. It will protect you from spiritual starvation, just as fear of physical death protects you from drunken driving.

Please try this process of questioning “What would be the chances...” on a few people you know: your friends, relatives, even your rabbi, pastor, or priest. Find out if they are willing to see themselves among the deniers. Then tell them about the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh, and see if they suddenly make an exception, such as “No, this

time it is different! I am pretty sure this could not have happened without my knowledge!” Please ponder this verse:

There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to [spiritual] death. Proverbs 14:12

Which way leads to death?

It is the easy way.

It is ignoring an invitation to investigate.

It is asking someone else to tell you the right way.

It is saying, “One billion people cannot be wrong.”

It is thinking, “I am too busy.”

It is failing to pray for guidance.

It is being afraid.

It is procrastinating.

It is wondering what others will say.

It is being attached to a well-established name.

The right way is usually narrow and uphill—straight to God. It is paved with humility, courage, detachment, trust, thirst for truth, and self-sacrifice. The wrong way is usually wide and downhill—straight away from God. It is paved with pride, complacency, apathy, and immediate self-interests.

I have a close friend who is a retired pastor. It is hard to find a person more caring, more honest, more charitable, more hard-working, and more friendly. He is as good as a human being can be. He even spent a few days in prison

for demonstrating against a war he believed was unjust. I thought he would be the best candidate for a book on the Bahá’í Faith. Therefore, I gave him a copy of *I Shall Come Again*, a 500-page volume that presents biblical prophecies about the Advents of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh. In response to my invitation to read the book, he said, “I read a lot of books. I can finish it in a week or two.” He made that statement two years ago. Since then, I have seen him several times. Each time, I have asked him if he has read the book, and each time he has presented a new alibi. The last time I asked him, he showed both embarrassment and annoyance.

All his life he has been exposed to the glorious hope of the Second Coming, and talked about it in his church. Now that he has in his hands a book that presents far more evidence on the Second Advent than he could ever find on the First, he procrastinates, he ignores his most glorious hope! He knows that because of his position, he has a special responsibility to investigate the news of the coming of his Master, yet he fails to heed the warnings and seek the blessings.

My pastor friend knows he is a wonderful person. Because of his confidence in his own goodness, he doesn’t dream that he may even be denying the One he has worshiped all his life. He may not realize that even the most wonderful people can fail. Both the laws of the physical and spiritual

worlds are such that sometimes a little caution may result in gigantic gains. An inexpensive fire alarm can save countless lives. A failure as innocent as remaining silent, as simple as ignoring a warning can be disastrous. Silence is not always innocent. As it is said, all that evil requires to triumph is for good people to do nothing.

If Annas and Caiaphas had followed Christ, it is quite likely that He would not have been crucified. Without question, there were thousands of wonderful people among the Jews who ignored Christ’s invitation. Remember that before becoming a Christian, St. Paul was a wonderful, dedicated Jew. He was as firm in his beliefs as my pastor friend. Yet he suffered from this critical weakness: he was narrow-minded. If God had not intervened, he would have continued to persecute the Christians.

There are millions of wonderful Christians living today. Without their love and dedication, our planet would become a gloomy place. They are, indeed, the salt of the earth. Yet many of them suffer from this critical weakness: They simply assume that if Christ had come, they would have known it. That was the assumption Paul made. He was expecting a powerful King—a Messiah who would subdue the forces of darkness just as Christians expect today.

That one seemingly innocent assumption that “If Christ comes I will know” kills all curiosity and creates complacency, a weakness Jesus con-

demned most severely in the Book of Revelation. But none of those millions of wonderful, but slumbering people, thinks that those passages about complacency may refer to him.

When he does, he awakens and begins to investigate. Once again we end where we started: It is extremely difficult to see the traces of pride, fear, or complacency in one's ego. A sure remedy is an absolute and unconditional humility.

If you are open-minded, you will attain the greatest good. For the mind is the first gate to wisdom, truth, and happiness. After the mind has done its work, the heart must prepare a place to welcome the truth with warmth and joy.

Bahá'u'lláh teaches that the seeker of truth must pray constantly and sincerely for divine guidance. This prophecy is about us, the people of this age:

For many are invited, but few are chosen.
Christ (Matt. 22:14)

Both the preceding and the following verses indicate that the choice is mutual: As we choose God, so does God choose us.

No one can come to Me unless the Father has enabled him.
Christ (John 6:65)

Entering God's Kingdom requires certain qualifications. When we sanctify our souls and humble our hearts, then God says, "You are worthy of my grace." That is why praying is so essential. By praying, we ask God to

make us receptive to His call and deserving of the honor of entering His Kingdom and of meeting Him.

Praying is a connecting link by which God's grace can reach us. Bahá'u'lláh declares that the grace of God is sufficient, but it must first be activated by some means:

For results depend upon means, and the grace of God shall be all-sufficient unto you.⁹

We should recognize that we were made for a purpose much greater than eating, drinking, marrying, and being merry. Only by seeking the knowledge of God, as revealed through His latest Redeemer, can we attain the purpose for which we were created. If we reject that knowledge, He will reject us.

Because thou hath rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee...
Hosea 4:6

I began my spiritual adventures many years ago. My most intensive search began at age 27. At that point, I decided to read one book each week until I came to a definitive conclusion about the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. Within two years, I had read about 100 Bahá'í books. I read everything I could find. Some people have a hard time finishing even a book like this one. They underestimate the grave consequences of failing to acquire spiritual knowledge.

These principles bind us to our Creator:

- *freedom*

- *responsibility*
- *knowledge*
- *reward and punishment*

Because you are fortunate to have received the gift of the knowledge of Bahá'u'lláh, you are responsible to do everything within your power to help the seed of your knowledge to grow, and to bear celestial fruits for your soul. Your eternal destiny depends on it. It is far better for a person not to know than to know but take no action. Isn't that the way we treat our children? Do we not consider them responsible only *after* we have told them the rules, only *after* we have given them the gift of knowledge of right and wrong?

From anyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.
Luke 12:48

The world is in a desperate shape. Many unskilled doctors are offering instant remedies, but the patient is getting sicker. We can rectify the prevailing defective world order quickly and painlessly by accepting and applying God's remedy; or we can prolong our suffering by refusing to apply the remedy:

George was having trouble with a toothache, so he decided to visit the dentist.

"What do you charge for extracting a tooth?" George asked.

“Fifty dollars,” replied the dentist.
“Fifty dollars for only ten minutes’ work?” exclaimed George.
“Well,” replied the dentist, “if you wish, I can extract it very slowly.”

This pamphlet does not tell the full story of this supreme Revelation. It is mainly a call, an eye-opener. Its goal is to awaken you to the dawning of this great day of the Lord:

Happy the man who stays awake...
Christ (Rev. 16:15)

I beseech God, exalted be His glory, that He may graciously awaken the peoples of the earth...¹⁰ Bahá’u’lláh

Be on guard! Be alert...keep watch ...don’t let him find you sleeping.
Christ (Mark 13:33-37)

As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states, to attain and accomplish a goal, three conditions must be met:

- **knowing**
- **deciding**
- **acting**

You have met all three conditions **on a small scale**. You heard about the Bahá’í Faith, you decided to investigate it, and you acted on your decision. Now you need to continue your investigation until you have reached **the point of certainty**. That point comes when your knowledge turns into vision, when you move from the stage of “knowing” to the stage of “seeing.”

Once Jesus gave this standard as a way of separating truth from falsehood:

If a man chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. Christ (John 7:17)

The same rule applies to Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings. What is God’s will? It is to use **His** standards, not our own. Two of the most essential standards our Creator asks us to use are these:

- **good fruits**
- **fulfillment of prophecies**

Bahá’u’lláh fulfills both of these standards. He fulfills the second one on a scale that has never been seen before.

1. *The Hidden Words of Bahá’u’lláh* (Persian), no. 36.
2. *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 103.
3. *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 148.
4. *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 3.
5. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 136.
6. *The Hidden Words of Bahá’u’lláh* (Arabic), no. 59.
7. *The Hidden Words of Bahá’u’lláh* (Persian), no. 68.
8. *Paris Talks*, p. 138.
9. *The Hidden Words of Bahá’u’lláh* (Persian), no. 80.
10. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 216.



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