

The Bahá'ís of Florence, OR ☞ Inter-Faith Devotional Service



THE NATURE OF GOOD AND EVIL

Native American Tradition

All things in the world are two. In our minds, we are two---good and evil. With our eyes we see two things---things that are fair, and things that are ugly...We have the right hand that strikes, and the left hand full of kindness, near the heart.

One foot may lead us to an evil way, the other foot may lead us to a good. So are all things two....

Eagle Chief, Pawnee (late 19th Century)

Zoroastrianism

Hear with your ears that which is the sovereign good; with a clear mind look upon the two sides

Between which each man must choose for himself....At the beginning, the twin spirits have declared their nature, the better and the evil, in thought and word and deed. And between the two, the wise ones choose well, not so the foolish.

Gatha, Yasna 30

Hinduism

The mind of man is of two kinds, pure and impure: impure when in the bondage of desire, pure when free from desire.

If one of evil life turn in his thought straightly to Me, count him amidst the good; He hath the high way chosen; he shall grow righteous ere long; he shall attain that peace Which changes not.

from the Maitri Upanishad; from the Bhagavad-Gita

Buddhism

The Tempter masters the lazy and irresolute man who dwells on the attractive side of things, ungoverned in his senses, and unrestrained in his food, like the wind overcomes a rotten tree.

But the Tempter cannot master a man who dwells on the distasteful side of things, self- controlled in his senses, moderate in eating, resolute and full of faith, like the wind cannot move a mountain crag.

...Make war on [the Tempter] with the sword of wisdom, and setting up your mind as a fortress, defend what you have won, remaining free from attachment.

One's own misdirected thought can do one more harm than an enemy or an ill-wisher.

From the Dhammapada, verses 7, 8, 40, 42

Christianity

Put on the whole armor of God that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

The New Testament: Ephesians 6:11-16

Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God.

The New Testament: 3 John 1:11

Bahá'í Faith

Every good thing is of God, and every evil thing is from yourselves.

The source of all good is trust in God, submission unto His command, and contentment with His holy will and pleasure....The source of all evil is for man to turn away from his Lord and set his heart on things ungodly.

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 149

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 155-156

It is evident that human personality [has] two aspects: the image or likeness of God, and the aspect of Satan. The human reality stands between these two: the divine and the satanic.

In short, man is endowed with two natures: one tendeth towards moral sublimity and intellectual perfection, while the other turneth to bestial degradation and carnal imperfections.

...The evil spirit, Satan or whatever is interpreted as evil, refers to the lower nature in man. ...God has never created an evil spirit; all such ideas and nomenclature are symbols expressing the mere human or earthly nature of man....It is evident, therefore, that man is in need of divine education and inspiration, that the spirit and bounties of God are essential to his development....

'Abdu'l-Bahá: The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 464
Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, p. 288
The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 294

...O lovers of worldly desire! Even as the swiftness of lightning ye have passed by the Beloved One, and have set your hearts on satanic fancies. Ye bow the knee before your vain imagining, and call it truth. Ye turn your eyes towards the thorn, and name it a flower. Not a pure breath have ye breathed, nor hath the breeze of detachment been wafted from the meadows of your hearts. Ye have cast to the winds the loving counsels of the Beloved and have effaced them utterly from the tablet of your hearts, and even as the beasts of the field, ye move and have your being within the pastures of desire and passion.

Close one eye and open the other.
Close one to the world and all that is

therein, and open the other to the hallowed beauty of the Beloved.

Thou art the daystar of the heavens of My holiness; let not the defilement of the world eclipse thy splendor....

...Treasure the companionship of the righteous and eschew all fellowship with the ungodly.

...Wings have I bestowed upon thee, that thou mayest fly to the realms of mystic holiness and not the regions of satanic fancy....

Bahá'u'lláh: Persian Hidden Words, nos. 45, 12, 73, 3,
79

Judaism

And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil....And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die.

The Old Testament: Genesis 2:8-9; 16-17

Islam

Then began Satan to whisper suggestions to them, bringing openly before their minds all their shame that was hidden from them (before): he said: "Your Lord only forbade you this tree, lest ye should become angels or such beings as live for ever." And he swore to them both, that he was their sincere adviser. So by deceit he brought about their fall....

O men! Let not then this present life deceive you, nor let the Chief Deceiver deceive you about God. Verily Satan is an enemy to you: so treat him as an enemy. He only invites his adherents, that they may become Companions of the Blazing Fire. For those who reject God, is a terrible Penalty: but for those who believe and work righteous deeds, is Forgiveness, and a magnificent Reward.

Muhammad (): The Qur'an: 7:20-22; 35: 5-7

Bahá'í Faith

...This story of Adam and Eve who ate from the tree, and their expulsion from Paradise, must be thought of simply as a symbol....Hence these verses of the Bible have numerous meanings. We will explain one of them...: Adam signifies the heavenly spirit of Adam, and Eve His human

soul. ...The tree of good and evil signifies the human world; for the spiritual and divine world is purely good and absolutely luminous, but in the human world light and darkness, good and evil, exist as opposite conditions. The meaning of the serpent is attachment to the human world. This attachment of the spirit to the human world led the soul and spirit of Adam from the world of freedom to the world of bondage and caused Him to turn from the Kingdom of Unity to the human world.... From the height of purity and absolute goodness, He entered into the world of good and evil.

'Abdu'l-Bahá (): Some Answered Questions, pp. 122-124

Briefly, the intellectual realities, such as all the qualities and admirable perfections of man, are purely good, and exist. Evil is simply their nonexistence. So ignorance is the want of knowledge; error is the want of guidance; forgetfulness is the want of memory; stupidity is the want of good sense. All these things have no real existence. In the same way, the [sense] realities are absolutely good, and evil is due to their nonexistence--that is to say, blindness is the want of sight, deafness is the want of hearing, poverty is the want of wealth, illness is the want of health, death is the want of life, and weakness is the

want of strength.

Nevertheless a doubt occurs to the mind--that is, scorpions and serpents are poisonous. Are they good or evil, for they are existing beings? Yes, a scorpion is evil in relation to man; a serpent is evil in relation to man; but in relation to themselves they are not evil, for their poison is their weapon, and by their sting they defend themselves. But as the elements of their poison do not agree with our elements--that is to say, as there is antagonism between these different elements, therefore, this antagonism is evil; but in reality as regards themselves they are good.

...It is possible that one thing in relation to another may be evil, and at the same time within the limits of its proper being it may not be evil.... All that God created, He created good...

....Certain qualities and natures innate in some men and apparently blameworthy are not so in reality. For example, from the beginning of his life you can see in a nursing child the signs of greed, of anger and of temper. Then, it may be said, good and evil are innate in the reality of man, and this is contrary to the pure goodness of nature and creation. The answer to this is that greed,

which is to ask for something more, is a praiseworthy quality provided that it is used suitably. So if a man is greedy to acquire science and knowledge, or to become compassionate, generous and just, it is most praiseworthy. If he exercises his anger and wrath against the bloodthirsty tyrants who are like ferocious beasts, it is very praiseworthy; but if he does not use these qualities in a right way, they are blameworthy. Then it is evident that in creation and nature evil does not exist at all; but when the natural qualities of man are used in an unlawful way, they are blameworthy.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, pp. 263-264; 215

We know absence of light is darkness, but no one would assert darkness was not a fact. It exists even though it is only the absence of something else. So evil exists too, and we cannot close our eyes to it, even though it is a negative existence. We must seek to supplant it by good, and if we see an evil person is not influenceable by us, then we should shun his company, for it is unhealthy.

Shoghi Effendi, Unfolding Destiny, p. 458

The friends must, at all times, bear in mind that they are, in a way, like soldiers under attack. The world is at present in an exceedingly dark condition spiritually; hatred and

prejudice of every sort are literally tearing it to pieces. We, on the other hand, are the custodians of the opposite forces, the forces of love, of unity, of peace and integration, and we must continually be on our guard, whether as individuals or as an Assembly or Community, lest through us these destructive, negative forces enter into our midst. In other words, we must beware lest the darkness of society become reflected in our acts and attitudes, perhaps all unconsciously. Love for each other, the deep sense that we are a new organism, the dawn-breakers of a new World Order, must constantly animate our Bahá'í lives, and we must pray to be protected from the contamination of society which is so diseased with prejudice.

Shoghi Effendi, Directives from the Guardian, p. 41

Indeed the actions of man himself breed a profusion of satanic power. For were men to abide by and observe the divine teachings, every trace of evil would be banished from the face of the earth. However, the widespread differences that exist among mankind and the prevalence of sedition, contention, conflict and the like are the primary factors which provoke the appearance of the satanic spirit. Yet the Holy Spirit hath ever shunned such matters. A world

in which naught can be perceived save strife, quarrels and corruption is bound to become the seat of the throne, the very metropolis, of Satan.

...I fain would hope that He Who is the All-Sufficing, the Inaccessible, may heed the solicitation of this lowly servant, may attire the people of the world with the raiment of goodly deeds and purge them from evil inclinations....

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 176-178

Material civilization has advanced unmistakably, but because it is not associated with divine civilization, evil and wickedness abound....Material civilization is like unto the lamp, while spiritual civilization is the light in that lamp. If the material and spiritual civilization become united, then we will have the light and the lamp together, and the outcome will be perfect. For material civilization is like unto a beautiful body, and spiritual civilization is like unto the spirit of life. If that wondrous spirit of life enters this beautiful body, the body will become a channel for the distribution and development of the perfections of humanity.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, pp. 103, 11



PRAYER FOR AMERICA

O Thou kind Lord! This gathering is turning to Thee. These hearts are radiant with Thy love. These minds and spirits are exhilarated by the message of Thy glad-tidings. O God! Let this American democracy become glorious in spiritual degrees even as it has aspired to material degrees, and render this just government victorious. Confirm this revered nation to upraise the standard of the oneness of humanity, to promulgate the Most Great Peace, to become thereby most glorious and praiseworthy among all the nations of the world. O God! This American nation is worthy of Thy favors and is deserving of Thy mercy. Make it precious and near to Thee through Thy bounty and bestowal.

—Abdu'l-Bahá

