

**Light,  
Goodness,  
The Tree of Life**

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*Behold the Tree of Life,  
whose power is in the goodness  
illuminating each and every heart.*

What is the nature of Goodness? Why is it so admirable and attractive on one hand, while it is, on the other, so easily compromised? Why is it needed at all? We discovered a truth about Goodness at the end of a spiritual quest some years ago, and in this book we share its essence with you.

The world is at a crucial point in its development. Through eons and ages, compelling forces have driven evolution towards the state where one day a species would arise that is able to reflect on its own nature, recognise that there are moral choices, and contemplate the nature of good and evil. Since its earliest days, humans have sought to develop these unique capacities. Despite setbacks, there is now a better awareness of moral issues than ever before; many normal practices of past ages, such as slavery and war, are now clearly seen for the evils that they are. But there is one more step yet to take: to realise that Goodness is not just an individual moral preference but a standard that can be applied to all aspects of life. With mastery of science and technology; with knowledge of history, religion, and evolution, with realisation of the interconnectedness of all existence, humanity is at the turning point. The way of parochialism, prejudice, and greed will, with today's technology and population, eventually lead to the destruction of life on Earth. Alternatively we can raise our standards, embrace the principle of Goodness inherent in all of us, and work together to be protectors, nurturers, and guardians of our planet and its life.

In this book we explain what we have learnt about the principle of Goodness and its practical application to all kinds of endeavours. The principle can be used by people from all walks of life and from different cultures, regardless of one's religion or ideology. While some of the concepts and language used in this book reflect our personal beliefs, the reader will find that the principle itself is not restricted to those who agree with us. One does not have to believe as we do in the loving Creator of all things, or in a soul, or in eternal life. Goodness is there in all and for all; it can be examined and tested, and will work. Goodness is the seed which, if nurtured in the heart, will grow into the Tree of Life. Beneath its shade will grow and flourish a world civilisation and a verdant world ecosystem, man and nature in the harmony, not of Eden's childhood innocence, but of wisdom, knowledge, and spiritual maturity. In this little book we can at best give only a brief glimpse of the vast potential and tremendous power of true Goodness, but we can give you a touchstone, a sacred touchstone, by which good can be told apart from evil and the wisdom of every choice can be tested. This touchstone will release creative potentials within everyone who uses it and enable us all, together, to generate a vast range of solutions that address the myriad issues faced by people all over the world. We hope that it will inspire you and be a shining light in your life as it is for us.

Gitie and Ron

## Light

*O Son of Spirit! My first counsel is this: Possess a pure, kindly and radiant heart, that thine may be a sovereignty ancient, imperishable, and everlasting. -- Baha'u'llah.*

All the world is filled with the virtues of the Spirit, but to humans alone belongs the privilege of being the only species that can make a conscious decision to be moral, to direct the mind and heart towards life and love regardless of the immediate hardships that this may cause. This is our highest faculty, the greatest gift from our Creator. The time has come for this faculty to reach its maturity, and nothing less than recognising this and using our moral conscience will advance the evolution of this realm of existence. But we must be wise. Just as we unlock the atom and find within it the power of the Sun, so must we unlock the secret of life and find within it: heaven. Our wisdom, our light, must be reflected in our ethics and our conduct as well as in our mastery and control.

This is a message for both the heart and mind. We must look within, to the reality of our spirit and the Great Spirit that made us, rather than to the world of cause and effect. The source of our light is the Source of Life. The tree is real, but it flourishes in the light. The energy, the direction, the power of the light, is Goodness.

## Goodness

*As you did these things to the least of my creatures, you did them to me. -- Jesus.*

Few realise the power of goodness latent within each and every human being, the power that can be harnessed and applied to all aspects of human endeavour. Goodness enables people from all walks of life to come together and work together for the mutual benefit of all. Goodness respects the common elements of love and life that bind all existence and seek to harm none. By building the harmony of coexistence it truly unites all. While even one person or one creature is wilfully harmed, mankind will not be able to achieve true peace or sustain it for any significant period of time. Understanding this principle is the key to the transformation that the world so desperately needs.

The principle of goodness can be put simply:

***Goodness is to try to benefit everyone;  
Evil is to deliberately attempt to harm even a single innocent one.***

These are not mere definitions of the words “good” and “evil”, rather, they are word portraits of two realities: good, which is to be sought, and evil, to be strictly avoided. Moral Goodness recognises the intentions behind an action rather than simply its effects. Moral goodness or evil concerns our will in action, about that which we try to do as opposed to its resulting effects. Effects can be profitable, constructive, useful, fortunate, beneficial, or the opposite, but they cannot be morally good or bad. Good and evil are in the mind and heart, not in the world of cause and effect.

Goodness is grounded in the unity of all sentient beings, a unity inherent in the essence of love that permeates all of existence and gives and sustains life at all levels. This unity does not come from collectivism or uniformity or adherence to beliefs or rules. It is integral in the harmony of coexistence which sustains life and growth for all that exists on this planet and beyond. Goodness creates and preserves the unity of the interests of all, such that everyone whom our actions affect

and who doesn't wilfully exclude themselves from this unity is benefited.

Evil is not simply the logical complement of goodness, because many things we might do are neither good nor bad. Evil is to wilfully attempt to destroy or damage the unity of all. Purposely harming someone who has done no harm automatically creates division, for they legitimately want to preserve their well being. Consider someone who would like to be a part of the unity of all. However, others are deliberately harming this person. This person has a legitimate reason not to be united with the others, nor to cooperate in their plans. Therefore deliberately harming even one innocent person is in contradiction with the ideal of unity, and is wrong.

The principle of Goodness may seem at first unreasonable, it may seem as if it is not always the most cost-effective thing to do; but morality is not about a cost-benefit analysis, it is a priority that trumps all other priorities. It is the true principle of the heart. Goodness, not emotions, not sentimental or romantic love, is the true essence of the human heart, and without Goodness the heart cannot flourish, no matter how much worldly advantage is obtained without it.

Good and evil are realities that concern our willed intention, not the outcome of our acts. People have neither the omnipotence nor the omniscience to always and everywhere succeed in their plans. Even when all effort has been made to follow goodness, things can go wrong and harm may result. In other words, we may sometimes fail. This is why it is the intention and attempt which must be moral and our actions must demonstrate these intentions. When harm is done, justice is needed to restore the unity which was fragmented. It is incumbent on every person to be just. To demand justice for one at the cost of justice to another is an injustice. Injustice can neither achieve goodness nor build unity.

Unity is not all or nothing, but has degrees and increasing levels of perfection. Therefore we should never give up on anyone unless they choose to continue to harm others and so cut all ties of reconciliation irretrievably. Nor should we expect from others that which is beyond their capacity. In like manner, we must expect from ourselves that which is within our capacity.

This teaching of Goodness is not just another inspiring appeal. It is a sacred touchstone that distinguishes right from wrong, guiding individual conduct and social laws and policies.

## The Tree of Life

*He who overcomes the evil he has done with the good that he afterwards does, he sheds a light over the world like the moon when it is free of clouds. -- Gautama Buddha; Dhammapada 173.*

Until now Goodness has been seen as a matter of private opinion. But Goodness is universal, and contains the power to generate a new civilisation. These simple principles of goodness and justice empower people to create systems that can build such a world. Yet strangely, this vital reality has not been described before in plain words that allow it to be used consistently to generate moral concepts, rules, and laws.

Laws are the public understanding, the minimal requirements, in performing good and avoiding evil, that may reasonably be expected from the people. As we are finite in capabilities and in knowledge, there must forever be a realm wherein moral judgements can be passed, but which can never be the subject of laws. The principle of Goodness empowers every person to see the realities of things for themselves rather than relying on the opinions of others. When individuals conduct themselves wisely with goodness and justice, peace and unity will be maintained.

Applying genuine Goodness requires a basic change in thinking and in consideration of acceptable solutions. Not only must a solution try to benefit everyone involved, but also it must also not wilfully harm any innocent one.

Imagine living in a world in which you knew that you mattered. Yes, in life accidents can and will happen. Sometimes solutions will not be the best, but nobody will be deliberately trying to wrong you. The result is a world in which you can trust, a world where you are not isolated, vulnerable, and insecure.

Such trust and security frees the spirit from fear. It unleashes creativity and joy of life, nurturing genuine benevolence towards all life. Only when mankind has learnt how to create a culture and an environment in which it is possible to live with this security and freedom can there be peace on earth. This is why it is vitally important not to implement any solution that harms even one innocent.

Benefiting everyone and harming no one may seem an impossible hope. But we already do many things, collectively and as individuals, without hurting anyone. Our difficulty is that we do not apply it consistently and to everything. Unwittingly, we may buy products from companies that knowingly cause harm and injury to other creatures, damage the environment, or exploit their workers. We let our governments pass laws that are not based on justice but on buying votes and influence, without regard for the innocent who may be hurt. Current legal systems are not based on finding truth and delivering justice, but on adversarial processes in which the better debating team wins. These and many other problems arise because the ethic of doing no harm to any innocent is not applied consistently to all our affairs.

When this ethic of Goodness is applied everywhere systems will start supporting each other and the whole dynamic of the world will change. Each one of us can start in small ways. Indeed, one person can apply Goodness successfully in their own life, even if all the rest of the world does not. When this happens, when others see it and start using it for themselves, the synergy generated will start changing the expectations of groups, companies, and those in power, and the process will rapidly gain momentum. For example, the resources to provide food, clothing, education, and health care to all the peoples of the world already exist. What has prevented this from becoming a reality is the lack of understanding of the principles and practice of goodness.

This principle is not simply a naive appeal to everyone to be good, for the good will, desire, and drive to build a better world already exist. Even though most of us are discouraged to a greater or lesser degree by the problems of the world, the main problem facing humanity is not the lack of good will or the desire to benefit others. People feel powerless, not because they don't want to do right, but because they don't always know what will make the real difference. What is missing is the understanding that the obstacle before us is not practical but moral. Making good practical decisions is important, but making good moral ones is indispensable. When morality is abandoned for seemingly 'practical' reasons, one has not found a solution to the problem, which often perpetuates in another form until it becomes a bigger crisis. This is ultimately neither practical nor moral.

The belief that no common understanding of ethics is possible incapacitates people, sapping the strength and guidance to properly organise their personal lives or to address the deficiencies of social, economic, civic, judicial, religious and other systems. At a cursory glance it seems impossible to try to benefit everyone and to harm not a single innocent one. But we must not falter, for our duty is to try, whether or not we succeed. This teaching is new, and differs from the understanding of the world. According to the current practice it is not so bad if a highly beneficial plan involves harming just a few, or even one, person. But this principle teaches that deliberately harming just one innocent is evil, no matter what benefit the world might get from it.

The world practises pragmatism, but the right path demands that we practise Goodness. Universal friendship is more likely to make everyone happy than antagonism and belligerence. Therefore the unity of all the inhabitants of Earth is the best way for all of us to grow and flourish and create a healthy environment for our descendants. The greatest benefits of Goodness are completely unmeasurable by any worldly standard.

By providing the common key to working in harmony, Goodness frees the creativity of every single person. All the knowledge of our species should be called upon to find solutions to the deep problems we mutually face. With complete freedom of speech and belief, any possibility can be investigated. The tyranny of ideologies, dangerous beliefs, and unchallenged superstitions that promote harm and injustice will lose their power as they are subjected to the clear light of an analysis to seek out and promote the good and reject the evil.

Every race and religion has a history that contains the best and the worst of all that humanity is capable. It is no shame to repudiate a belief or practice of our ancestors, or even ourselves. But it is limitless glory to have the courage and humility to make those changes that will lead to happiness and joy for all life on Earth. Indeed, only by doing this will we truly honour our ancestors, for only this proves that we who are their legacy have the capacity to learn and grow, as they learned and grew.

With the principle of Goodness any race, any religion, any nation, could choose for itself the boundless honour of leading the Earth to paradise. Unlike the mythic paradise from which we were once excluded, this will be a paradise of the adulthood of humanity, understanding good and evil, and freely choosing good.

## **Virtues: The Seed's First Growth**

The law of Goodness is the pure light from the Spirit of Life. As a seed becomes a sapling, so must our understanding grow from the simple principle of benefiting all and harming no innocent one. The first growth of the seed of the tree of wisdom is the virtues.

We think we know the virtues; but if we truly did, there would be no need for the Light of Goodness, and the conditions of the world would reflect that fact. From the state of the world we can see that we do not yet understand, and so we must use Goodness to gain insight. Goodness empowers everyone, so we need only consider a handful of the virtues here. The capacity to do likewise with others that we do not examine, thanks to the law of Goodness, now belongs to everyone.

### **Justice**

*The best beloved of all things in my sight is Justice; turn not away therefrom if thou desirest me, and neglect it not that I may confide in thee. By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others, and shall know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbour. Ponder this in thy heart, how it behoveth thee to be. Verily justice is My gift to thee and the sign of My loving kindness. Set it then before thine eyes.*  
-- Baha'u'llah.

When we refuse to allow that anyone should be excluded against their will from their place in unity with all others, we are practising justice. By doing so, we stand firm against evil. The law of Goodness clearly tells us that observing and promoting justice is obligatory for all who have the capacity to choose right from wrong.

## Unity

To wish and strive for the wellbeing of all, to refuse to harm any except those who by their own choices compel us to do so in defence of ourselves or other innocent ones, this is the very essence of unity. Just as the gardener tends the plant, knowing and expecting that it will grow into its own true nature, so the lover of true unity hopes and prays that each one will grow, flourish, and reflect the eternal light in their own unique way. The lover of unity therefore never tries to force everyone into the same mould or expects others to abandon their own genuine vision. However, the malicious are intent on shattering unity and the welfare of others, and the true lover of unity and Goodness must not be foolish. The innocent must be defended, so the wise never mistake appearances for genuine unity.

## Friendliness

Friendship delights the heart and calls forth friendship in return. Wherever we can create greater desire for unity and caring, friendship can assist. As with unity, we can see the possibilities and also the limits of friendship when we consider the overriding goal given by the law of Goodness. Friendship with a tyrant might be wise if the friend gains the tyrant's ear and persuades him to give up evil, but unwise if it merely encourages the tyrant. As with all virtues, Goodness gives us a solid ground from which to understand when we should or shouldn't display a given virtue.

## Truthfulness

A striking case of guidance given by the law of Goodness is the case of truthfulness. Some say we should always be truthful; others that although truthfulness sometimes causes harm, it is such an important principle that we should follow it anyway. Others say we should be truthful depending on the circumstances. But what are those circumstances?

Sometimes words are words and sometimes words are deeds. A teacher uses words to impart knowledge and skills, but a military commander uses words as deeds: orders to the troops to do one thing or another. Not all deeds are commands or orders; sometimes information can also be a deed.

A child might ask: If a person intending to do harm demanded to know where the intended victim was to be found, and we could not remain silent, should we lie or tell the truth? After having told the child to always be truthful, it is not good enough to simply say of this case "This is different"; nor should we give the child foolish and unworkable advice by saying "Truthfulness is so important that we should always tell the truth no matter what other wrongs may ensue." This kind of advice puts the child in a quandary between preventing a wrong and wanting to be truthful. What is the clear insight that provides definite and workable advice in such a case?

Consider that sometimes words have a practical effect, as with the military commander's orders and the answer given to the person the child asked about, and sometimes words provide information so that others can make moral choices of their own. This distinction is useful in connection with Goodness, for if words simply have a practical effect, and that effect is bad, as with this evil person, then truthfulness enables the evil one to be more evil, and so is itself wrong, for the truth harms the evil one's innocent victim. On the other hand, when someone needs information to make moral choices, their choices will be better if they have better information, and so lying to such a person indirectly causes harm when their later choices are less wise than they could have been. Now we see that the law of Goodness gives us a clear and coherent way to think about a virtue such as truthfulness. The virtues may be virtuous, but they are not the primary ingredients of morality. That distinction belongs to the law of Goodness.

**Reliability, Responsibility, Trustworthiness.**

Many of the virtues work towards creating the basics of a decent and civil society. Promoting such a society and community is clearly recommended by the law of Goodness, for benefiting everyone to the maximum possible extent is clearly easier the more smoothly people can work together. No one can do everything for themselves; inasmuch as we need others, so they need us. The means by which we may trust others to provide for us and they may trust that we shall provide for them are such bedrock principles of order as promises and contracts. These should be supported both by the inculcation of virtues and the upholding of laws for enforcing legal contracts.

**Courage**

Courage deserves a special mention amongst the virtues. Exactly what it means to benefit someone, we do not discuss at length here. A simple person might think benefit is just being happy, but a wiser person will know that the simple joy of doing some good and seeing others happy might benefit one's self far more than an evening of riotous happiness. An individual can study and learn lifelong, and still not exhaust the understanding of benefit, and likewise our species can philosophise for centuries and millennia and still keep discovering new insights.

One of the mysteries of benefit is that there are rare times when we can benefit ourselves by losing our own benefits, even to the extent of losing our own life. This is the supreme instance of courage, when one sees and understands that he will save others from great harm by harming himself. Although Goodness tells us to benefit everyone, and everyone includes ourselves, nevertheless the hero chooses harm for himself in order to benefit others. The hero benefits, but not in a way that is necessarily visible to the world, and not in any tangible form, but rather in becoming a greater person, the person who is a hero in the service of others.

We see from the indefinite nature of the benefit that the hero receives, that it is impossible for others to choose this benefit on behalf of the hero. That is, someone can morally exercise the courage to sacrifice their own life for others, but no one else can make that choice for them. One cannot talk of having the 'courage' to harm some innocents for others. One cannot say that the harmed innocents have been benefited by being given the status of heroes. The true courage that takes the spiritual warrior to the heaven of the brave is the courage to help the innocent, not the false courage to take what are sometimes called 'hard decisions', usually meaning decisions to harm others.

**Respect, Consideration, Joyfulness, Modesty**

When we respect others we will be more likely to try to understand the ways in which they differ from ourselves. When we do that, we find that they are not so different after all, that seemingly inexplicable strangeness may be caused by the same motivations as our own. We need to understand others so that we can make our plans in such a way as to benefit both them and us, and we need to show them our own view of the world so that they may do the same for us. All these projects will be fostered by the basic virtues governing our attitudes towards and consideration of others.

We can also apply respect and consideration towards ourselves. We can respect ourselves to encourage and motivate our own development.

**All the Virtues**

The essence of the light is the law of Goodness; the virtues are derived from the law as it applies to the realities of the world, so virtues are not absolutes. Virtues start and stop, but Goodness applies everywhere.

In all the many virtues, our approach should be expansive, hopeful, and positive. It has truly been said we can only change ourselves. If everyone tries to give more than they take, there will be so much love, care, compassion, and tolerance in the world that everyone receives more than they give. But nothing happens overnight, so it is wise to be forgiving, both of ourselves and of those who wrong us. Although we might think, of our own life, that it made only the slightest difference to the world, it joins with the good will of others to create an upward spiral that will transform the world.

## **The Tree Grows According to its Seed**

The nature of the tree is the outcome of the nature of its seed. In the biological world, many kinds of seeds give many kinds of good and beautiful trees, but for the Tree of Life, there is only one seed, the law of true Goodness: that we should try to benefit everyone and never attempt to harm any innocent one. A system of human conduct that finds its inspiration in the fruit of any other tree will be an infernal system, no matter how attractive it may seem.

The astute reader will want to know: does true Goodness have power, that is, does it provide genuine guidance or is it merely a pleasant-sounding phrase? Think of the First Officer of the Titanic on its first and last Atlantic crossing. When the iceberg was spotted directly ahead, he ordered the ship to be turned hard to port, in an effort to entirely miss the iceberg and thus save the lives of all on board. Some have argued that the correct decision would have been to order 'full astern' and steer directly at the iceberg, the theory being that this would have crumpled the front of the ship, but damaged fewer of the watertight compartments in the hull, allowing the ship to remain afloat. True, advocates of this theory say, the third-class passengers in the bow of the ship would have been certainly killed, but the overall death toll would have been lower.

The argument behind this hypothetical proposal is based on the prevailing ethic of our time, the idea that the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few. This idea is called utilitarianism, and it and hundreds of variants of it are almost unconsciously assumed in much modern discourse as being the 'obviously right' thing to do.

The principle of Goodness says: To aim the ship at the iceberg is to directly choose to sacrifice the lives of the passengers in the bow, and is therefore wrong, no matter what the consequences. Therefore the only morally correct choice (and the one the officer in fact took) was to attempt to miss the iceberg entirely, as this was a genuine attempt to save every single life.

Which was the right thing to do? We cannot simply say "But the principle of Goodness has backfired - over a thousand were killed" because that assumes that the correct way to judge the situation is the utilitarian way, deciding what to do by looking at the eventual outcome.

The significant point here is that we are not gods. The outcome is beyond our control, and even if it were not, measuring the relative benefits of different possibilities is beyond us. There are many reasons for this, which have been amply discussed by philosophers. All that we can control is the choice we make, the attempt we decide to put into operation.

If we choose less than optimally, if, as happened, the First Officer's decision led to a great loss of life, what can we say to salve the bitterness of that hard fact? There are intangibles that cannot be accounted for in any utilitarian computation of relative benefits. Under true Goodness, every single person knows that they will never be sacrificed (with sad regrets, to be sure, but sacrificed nonetheless) for some perceived benefit for someone else. How such a sense of security, held since childhood, would affect the choices and behaviour of people for the better cannot be foreseen or measured, but it is certainly real. Fear is a powerful cause of cruel and unjust behaviour, whereas security promotes kindness and benevolence. These are the kinds of things that would have to be

allowed for in judging this question rightly.

But to end our discussion of this example, one recent analyst investigated something that could not have been known to anyone at all on RMS Titanic that night: due to impurities, the steel of which the ship's hull was constructed was brittle; it was, indeed, at its most brittle at exactly the temperature of the frigid ocean waters. If Titanic had steamed straight at the iceberg, the bow would not have crumpled in an ordered fashion as the utilitarian argument above presumes. Rather, the entire hull from stem to stern would have shattered; icy water would have poured onto the boilers and fireboxes, causing a massive explosion that would have instantly taken out the radio room and sent the ship to the deep within fifteen minutes. Titanic would have simply vanished from the face of the earth, with the loss of all souls.

It seems to be a common happening that the utilitarian calculus, coldly and rationally computing how to get the best possible outcome, overlooks some hidden factor which brings all its fruits to nothing and makes a mockery of its cynical cruelty to the 'few' who are sacrificed for 'the big picture'.

The tree of "the greatest happiness for the greatest number" is an infernal tree. Unfortunately, it is the tree that looms largest over humanity at present, its weak and decayed branches threatening to crash upon any or all of us at any time.

Another infernal tree is currently one without a name, so we have called it *categorism*. This is the judging of issues, forming of policies, allegiances, and so on, according to some category in which people are deemed to fall. Laws that treat people differently because of their race or sex are examples of categorism. The uniqueness of each soul is ignored in favour of preconceptions arising from something beyond the person's control. All ideologies that focus on and theorise about people on such bases will ultimately poison the living system of interactions and bonds that we as a social species rely upon for our very life.

A mention must also be made here of a category that is held, sometimes rightly, sometimes wrongly, to be of the highest importance: whether or not a being is human. Goodness cannot pick and choose between species, so it pays regard to non-humans as well as to humans. Every sentient being experiences pleasure and pain in some form. In choosing goodness, there is no justification for harming any innocent creature. Therefore an opportunistic choice to harm members of another species in order to benefit humans must be wrong. An example is medical research on animals, where a choice is made that the benefit to humans 'outweighs' the misery of the victims of the researcher. This example brings out most clearly that the law of Goodness is not just a pragmatic choice of the 'best' outcome. Are we humans so timid and fearful that we need to make an animal suffer, often incredibly cruelly, for some gain, be it cosmetics, medical advance or even food? Is our self worth so low that despite all our advances in technology and our capacity for creative solutions, we still need to define our relationships with animals based on our power over them rather than our common sharing of sentient life force? Where is our superior station and capacity if we have to deprive lesser creatures of life or diminish their quality of life? These ways come from our past, before this age of maturity. To build a better world, we need to learn new and better ways of interacting with other creatures, so we can truly be the guardians of all.

Sometimes it requires real and substantial sacrifices on our part to be moral, and in these cases we will not see or understand the hidden reasons why these choices are not simply foolish. But the Tree of Life has its requirements, and violating them will kill the tree, and in our age of supremacy, able to exterminate life on Earth thousands of times over, killing the Tree of Life will kill us.

## The Flourishing Tree

Just as a literal tree has many parts, such as roots, trunk, branches, leaves, flowers, that must interact to sustain the life of the complete tree, so the Tree of Life has many aspects, which interact in complex ways to sustain the total organism, which in this case must be no less than all life on Earth.

Among these aspects of our metaphorical tree, we must include the human individual, that basic actor who makes the individual choices that, like the cells of the living tree, eventually add up to create a vast organism. The individual has many personal interactions and associations, such as friendships, families, and jobs. Then there are the guiding ideas by which individuals order their lives and associate with others, such as religions, philosophies, and cultures. There are also the systems that humans build to create a greater order, such as governments, justice systems, economies, and businesses.

All these interact and often merge one into another in ways that are so complex that it is beyond human capacity to keep track of them all or to hold an overall picture of all human doings. This is the fundamental flaw in 'pragmatic' thinking, which is the idea that we can make progress in human individual and social development by investigating it all and 'cleverly' coming up with smart plans. It can't be done. The only thing that can be done is to ensure, at each and every step, that all that we do, whether as an individual, a family, a society, nation, professional group, social group, religious organisation, or anything else, is in accordance with the pure light that is the law of Goodness.

A common, almost inevitable, feature of 'pragmatic' thinking in the sense we use the term here is the notion that "We can't afford the luxury of morals." This is because the 'pragmatic' planner, however well-intentioned, focuses on the end result and the seemingly efficient means to that result. Almost any large-scale plan will damage someone or some creature, and the steps to avoid it will always look expensive or difficult. The law of Goodness, however, is an organising principle that applies both to the large and the small: to governments and large corporations as well as to individuals. Thus there is a coherence, a common purpose, a compatibility, amongst all things arranged in accord with Goodness, that carries its own benefits to make up for any loss in pragmatically-determined worldly efficiency. In this way, we do not need to understand everything because there is a coherent principle into which everything is to fit that it benefits all.

### Living Cells: The Moral Individual

The law of Goodness speaks directly of the rights and responsibilities of the individual. We have a place, and also we must play our part, in our community and our environment. But there is no room here for the kind of pragmatic thinking described above, that makes individuals expendable. Each and every one is a unique soul, with a conscious mind and a conscience. Each and every person is endowed with an awareness of their own spirit, a perception of the higher spirit that permeates all of creation, the capacity to love, a recognition of virtues, an ability to understand morality, and the free will to choose the values by which to live. It is an individual that chooses to act with goodness and it is an individual that is injured by a harmful act. Everyone has the right to not be harmed along with the responsibility to not harm others, yet the significance of each individual is a forgotten factor in many ideologies and movements.

Man's highest faculty is his moral capacity, which includes his self-awareness, his ability to think morally, to distinguish between motivation and action, to temper his emotions and impulses with reason and understanding, to think through the consequences of his actions, and to choose to act with virtue. From the earliest times, man's need to realise this innate potential within the spirit has fuelled the search for God, to maintain a connection with the highest life-giving Spirit, to communicate with Him and please Him. In their zealotry, people have hoped that actions like

self-penance, fasting, sacrificial offerings of other humans or animals, or destroying and killing others with different views will enhance their union with God. The time for such immature thinking has long passed, and the consequences of it have never been more serious.

Goodness teaches that we should promote the best welfare of all; that is the source of our duties towards others, including animals. Avoidance of evil requires that we should avoid harming even a single innocent one; that is the source of the rights of individual humans and the rights of the nonhuman world to be treated with compassion and care. The nonhuman world has no responsibilities towards us, because on earth, although many creatures express love, care, and friendship, only humans have the full capacity to reason morally.

Just as we nourish our bodies and care for the physical, mental and emotional aspects of ourselves, so must we educate and train our ethical and moral attributes. Choosing to act with goodness releases great spiritual power. Making the choice frees the person from the wants and limitations that hold them to a predetermined outcome, and in so doing unleashes creativity at a higher level. It raises the person's understanding and capacity. It further attracts the spirit of goodness and many higher spiritual forces. As each person grows, it creates the power to change the nature of existing relationships, which in turn changes the nature of the problem and makes previously unimagined solutions possible.

Such is the power of goodness that it can even make one's enemy one's friend. But this will only happen if the person can trust us, which they will only do if we always consistently act with goodness towards everyone else. We must not forget that while Goodness asks us to benefit everyone, we ourselves are part of 'everyone', so our own well-being is also desirable. Therefore not only gifts, but also fair trades, beneficial promises, and many other things are within the scope of individual choice according to Goodness. In the same way that the cells of the tree exchange nutrients and perform a service for the rest of the tree, so each individual under the shade of the Tree of Life will play a constructive and mutually profitable role in wider human society.

### **Roots, Trunk, Branches, Leaves: Goodness in Society**

Attaining to the full benefits of this new understanding is the great challenge of this day. Although there have been notable individual exceptions, in the past mankind was unable to separate the great spiritual truths from their social preferences and practices. Also, each group's belief system was integrated with their need to physically protect their people. To gain political control, it was common to war with other territories, either eliminating or exiling the other group or coercing them into relinquishing their beliefs and joining the victor. Tragically, the spiritual truths that are so vital to manifesting and releasing the highest spirit within man were usually sacrificed in gaining political power. But as human understanding continued to evolve, we began to understand the nature of the spiritual truths and distinguish them from social, political, economic and cultural facets of life embedded within religions. Thus religious organisations that wielded great power in the earlier days have begun to lose their influence.

In the process of tearing away from the old ways, mankind has experimented with various social revolutions that claim to fix the ills of the past. Sadly, many of the systems created by these movements have only provided limited relief to some at the expense of others. Democratic governments have been the most successful in providing stability and creating an environment for prosperity, because they recognise the rights of each citizen to participate and contribute, which is an application of the principle of goodness. Also, secularism has upheld the primacy of the individual conscience, which, Goodness teaches, is the place where the most important moral duty must take place.

Unfortunately, even in secular democracies, not all is completely well. There is a tendency to view certain political ideas as the only correct ones, and secularism, rather than meaning freedom from

coercion by others' religious ideas, is sometimes taken to mean refusal to allow others to express ideas that came from a religious understanding. But most importantly, some promoters of these new systems forget that the world cannot be made a better place for some at the cost of others. This is the most vital component, the most important lesson of history that keeps slipping from the minds of social leaders. This is surprising, for which one of us has not heard dozens of stories of real people doing heroic and wonderful things in the most difficult and dangerous of situations? Do we not love to hear these stories over and over again? Do we not consider the people who act with goodness in these situations not only brave, but also righteous and admirable? Then why do we forget that it works? Why do we lose confidence in the power of goodness when its our turn to act?

Often, it is because we have a suspicion that what the hero did was somehow impractical, not a realistic way to run all our affairs. In fact, true Goodness is practical both for individuals and for the whole society. But it is important to be clear what Goodness is *not*.

Firstly, it is not a computer program: it will not provide one and only one correct answer to every question. Human creativity, originality, personal values, individual circumstances, and a myriad of other considerations can all be taken into account in choosing a course of action to benefit oneself and others.

Secondly, although it certainly should be explicitly acknowledged as a principle that must not be violated by governments or laws, it is not meant for direct use in itself as a civil or criminal law. Not being infallible, humans are neither wise enough nor powerful enough to always succeed in being perfectly good. It follows that they should not be punished for what cannot be avoided, and that there must be a realm where only one's private conscience can speak.

One link between the personal and the public is the connection between rights and responsibilities. Each person is responsible for the use and development of their moral faculties, to consider their intentions and actions, before making their choices. To take responsibility for one's self is a sign of growth and maturity. Social and religious movements have often required people to abandon this responsibility, handing control over to a select few who have misused their power and position. Every person who hands over to another their right and obligation to consider the moral implications of an action is also responsible for the ensuing harm. No one can hide behind a group or group ideology, no matter how comfortable, because it is not a group that has been endowed with a soul, a consciousness, a conscience and a mind. Only individuals have that power; groups are simply many individuals, each one individually choosing to support the same intent and action.

When we realise the preciousness of each individual and recognise that rights and responsibilities are inseparable, we reach a new realm of understanding: that none of us should deliberately devalue another being by destroying their rights and responsibilities. The challenge then is to construct a society that supports the individual in exercising both their rights and their responsibilities.

The principle of Goodness applies to governments and organisations of all kinds as much as it applies to the individual, for no human organisation may pretend that it is not directed somehow by humans, all of whom must obey the law of Goodness. The responsibilities of a good society towards its citizens is, primarily, to provide a conducive environment for flourishing. This means personal happiness, scope for personal development, reward for good and beneficent acts, oneness with other life on our planet and encouraging its flourishing in turn, and creation of stability and longevity of human society and all life on Earth. Goodness tells us we must benefit others, but it does not say what that benefit consists of. For that, wisdom is needed. Wisdom, compassion, care, love, and sensitivity all develop best when each person is treated with these same qualities during childhood. A good society, therefore, reinforces itself in an upward spiral of ever-greater flourishing. But the temptation of short-term profit is very great. Actions like treating a few people

unjustly for a perceived short term gain for some others, or torturing an animal today for a medical advance tomorrow might make utilitarian sense, but it destroys those very spiritual qualities that give eternal life to the individual and moral strength to society.

Once we realise the sanctity of each individual being and acknowledge their right to not be harmed, we begin to recognise the many areas in which we need to realign current planning practices, assumptions and popular doctrines. Unfortunately current laws and practices in most parts of the world are based on the two major evils mentioned before, categorism and utilitarianism, both of which seriously fail to implement the principle of goodness in their intentions and outcomes.

One thing that must be understood at the outset is the harm done by categorising people into groups and judging them on the basis of their group characteristics. Examples of such categories include sex, race, nationality, and health. Strictly, whether a category is accidental depends on circumstance; for example, one's sex is not accidental when considering the provision of beds in maternity hospitals, although it would be for most purposes.

Categorist doctrines commonly have a group to love and a group to hate, or they try to lay all praise at the feet of one group and all blame at those of the other. All such doctrines are part of the problem, not of the solution. The list of categorist doctrines commonly accepted today is too large to include here. However, most people believe in at least one categorist doctrine, but do not recognise this because the rationale (theory) for loving the in-group and distrusting or hating the out-group is so well developed. The great spiritual teacher, Baha'u'llah, wrote: "All are the fruit of one tree and the leaves of one branch." It is this great teaching, rather than categorism, that must form the basis of a lasting, flourishing, joyous world civilisation.

The harm done by group-based ideologies needs clarification. Any system whatever in an imperfect world will harm some, perhaps a lot, of people; so why are explicitly group-based systems different? Indeed, supporters of some categorist doctrines, for example, feminism, maintain that they are set up only to equalise the rights and responsibilities of the various groups they concern. But people are individuals, not an anonymous collective in groups. No group ideology can speak for the myriad unique souls in the group. Therefore it is inevitable that all group ideologies must deliver injustice to some with no redress, for the group identification overrides the individual's uniqueness. As this injustice is deeply certain, and not merely because of the human frailty that makes all our endeavours less than perfect, group ideologies cannot fulfil the requirements of Goodness, nor avoid evil. This makes it inevitable that all categorist ideologies will degenerate into hatred and tyranny. This is a hard lesson but a necessary one, for paying homage to categorism will forever prevent humanity from achieving a joyful and safe world.

On the other hand, if human institutions are built upon Goodness, with respect for individual liberty and freedom, then even though humans make mistakes, all kinds of safeguards can be included to try to catch and compensate individuals in cases where the rules unexpectedly deliver injustice. But all group-based ideologies judge persons first by their group membership, not their unique individuality. The individual first has to overcome group-based ideological theory before being considered for their unique life and circumstances. These doctrines also harm their own adherents, because supporting movements that ignore being just to others requires abandoning one's own moral responsibility, including the growth that comes from struggling with these choices. Building a lack of sympathy for a whole group into the very structure of society is not only unjust to all the individuals that are arbitrarily classified into the group, but also poisons the overall society and the members of the favoured groups.

Some categorist ideologies are rightly condemned by most well-meaning people, for example Nazism and Stalinism. Some are seen for their true infernal nature by only some; this group would probably include Marxism. And some are highly respected and well-regarded, but are fruits of the

infernal tree nevertheless. All of these violate the law of Goodness at its very heart, and must be left behind if humanity is to save itself from the dangers that threaten us now, for our species is so powerful that it is our own actions, not external forces, that will determine whether we will live or die.

This is a hard lesson, for so many have an attachment to some system that must now be left behind. This is especially so for those in the west who have invested many years studying or working in a field that is based on a categorist doctrine or theory, and also for those committed to the absolute truth of a religious or political dogma. Here is the true "dark night of the soul", in which the moral individual struggles with the lower forces urging one to maintain belief in these damaging ideologies, for to admit their fallacy is to admit one's own involvement, one's own mistakes, and one's own injustices towards others. To actually carry out the requirements of Goodness is not a difficult thing, but that does not mean that the path is necessarily easy. For a well-intentioned and generous person who has devoted years and much effort trying to do well, to learn that the path followed leads to the wrong destination is a hard thing to accept. All the more wonderful, therefore, must be the reward of those who are able to confront this truth.

### **The Basis of the State**

Every state must be constituted under the shelter of the Tree of Life. That is, the foundation of every constitution must be the sacred aspiration to benefit all, and the prohibition against deliberately causing harm to any innocent one. No state that holds that, if circumstances demand, it may sacrifice the health, sanity, freedom, happiness, life, or any other component of the benefit, of any innocent person, may any longer be tolerated on earth. The state will hold sacred the individual consciences of its members, up to but not including the point where a person's conscience suggests to them that they actually commit evil. It will readily be seen that no state that completely fulfils this condition currently exists on Earth.

The state is like the framework that supports a vast edifice. Each wise individual desires to profit themselves and to aid others, so each such individual will devise plans and pursue enterprises, work, invest, buy and sell, give to charity, enter into personal relationships, raise a family, take part in a community, care for the life of nature, flourish, and bring about the flourishing of others. The job of the state is to facilitate such acts and to encourage all to be the best and greatest they can be.

The prime duty, therefore, of the state, is the establishment of impartial and well-chosen laws: It must guarantee and enforce contracts and commitments. It must establish a system that properly brings home to the doer the rewards for benefits caused and the costs of damage done (to the environment, to others). Such a system will include a free market, though not one working defectively and distorted by the effects of power, such as we have today. It will include systems of automatic reward for creative and original endeavour, though not in the blighted form of the existing patent system, which can only be afforded by the wealthy and therefore acts to steal the work of the poor. There will be a criminal and civil justice system, dedicated first and foremost to discovering the truth and protecting the innocent, and acting with impartial justice.

Such a state will probably operate as a democracy, because democracy is demonstrably the best system yet invented for nurturing human flourishing; but it will not accept any philosophical principle of the automatic rightness of democratic votes, because the majority might vote for something contrary to the law of Goodness.

It will be a secular state, in the sense that no specific ideology will be permitted to hold a privileged position: no religion, no political party, no elite group. Yet it will also be a sacred state, in so far as it upholds the sacred law of Goodness. And why not? How can any credibly claim that a state need not be designed to promote the good of all the citizens, or that it may pick and choose

an unfortunate group, however few, to be thrown into misery?

The state is like a special part of the environment. Just as the natural environment must be healthy for the health of all creatures, so the state must be well-designed and ordered for the flourishing of human civilisation.

Part of the human environment is rights. These arise from responsibilities. We all desire not to be unjustly imprisoned and also not to be hit by lightning; yet we have a right to the former but not to the latter, because others have a responsibility to us not to unjustly imprison us, whereas impersonal nature casts lightning bolts wherever the laws of physics dictate under the prevailing circumstances. Thus we see that rights are actually a convenient form of speech for summarising certain responsibilities of humans and their institutions.

Animals have rights. Rights are not a result of the moral capacity of the one possessing the right, but of the obligations of others acting towards the one with the right; and as Goodness cannot in principle distinguish between sentient beings, except in the particulars of what constitutes their unique benefit, it cannot excuse deliberate harm to a non-human. An animal's right is a human's obligation.

Human rights must additionally include essential freedoms such as the freedom of speech, for human society must be the result of the net negotiations of all with regard to the interests of all. Such things cannot be had if the state as it currently exists may suppress certain thoughts on the basis of the state's current understanding. As human understanding will always be limited and imperfect, so the understanding of a state or a community will be imperfect, and one never knows where the next insight will come from. Further, a genuinely new insight will probably sound outrageous until it has been understood properly. So, the right to think one's own thoughts, the right to state one's own opinions, and all other rights contributing to this, must be protected, and not violated even on the excuse of a superficial understanding of Goodness.

The state must also recognise the essence of human nature. People have different skills and talents and differ in their drive to develop them. People want to grow in different ways and to different degrees. All of this contributes to their uniqueness and their distinctive qualities. Humans naturally desire to distinguish themselves individually, a fact that gives rise to the multifarious ways in which persons may gain skills and distinctions. Radical egalitarianism ignores this primal fact, and is therefore doomed to always cause harm. It cannot, in consequence, be considered as the foundation of a state. On the other hand, extreme differences of wealth and poverty mean that some have more resources than the human mind can competently manage, whilst little is left over for the benefit of others, making it difficult to benefit everyone. Clearly, a workable state must allow and approve some degree of distinction, status, and difference in wealth or power, whilst containing limiting factors that prevent these distinctions and differences from becoming excessive.

We may make some conjectures as to the kinds of organisation that might aid the development of a healthy civilisation in which benefit is mutually reinforced by the interacting plans of one's self and others. The free market is a system that enables individuals to plan their acts and usage of resources most economically. Provided the price reflects the true cost of an item, including its cost on the non-human environment, a free market allows one to select products and services for least cost, without the individual needing to understand the entire system. As understanding the entire system of human action, including its effects on the natural world, is beyond any human agency, including any government, no system of planning or administration can perform as well as a proper free market. The state, though, should ensure, by appropriate charges, that the costs of things that damage the environment reflect that damage and so make them more expensive in the free market; this is in addition to specific laws regulating damaging behaviour, whether concerning the environment or not.

Also, the state must, as a special trust in regard to aiding human interaction, protect the basis of human interpersonal life: the family. The capacity of two people to promise each other support, love, and physical relationship, and to commit to raising a new innocent human life, is the foundation of human happiness. This is a sign of maturity as individuals and society. It carries a great privilege and a great responsibility. Today's children are the foundation of tomorrow's world. Fostering wholesome family relationships is fundamental to the growth of mature human interaction at all levels. Providing children with the love, security and stability they need at home is a prime responsibility of a good society. All western states have, at present, abandoned this responsibility. "No fault" divorce laws free defaulting parties in a marriage contract of their responsibilities, disregarding the consequences to their partner and children.

Such disregard for human vows generates in society the qualities of unreliability, lack of trust, insecurity and cynicism, which cannot be replaced by social security payments no matter how generous. The false principle of "best interests of the child" pays lip service to the child's innocence, and therefore right to consideration, but in fact betrays both the child and that parent, if any, who has not broken the marriage contract. This has far reaching effects in many aspects of human endeavour, some of which have only just begun to emerge. As an example, common western divorce laws invest rights in, typically, the woman, and impose costs on, typically, the man. In short, it typically pays women who have been, perhaps only temporarily, disaffected with their responsibilities, to shirk them without penalty, indeed, with positive reward in many cases. This prevents both men and women from taking their marital vows seriously. No one can commit fully to another knowing that at any time that person might walk out on their commitments and leave the faithful partner with nothing but bills. Also no one can undertake not to do this when the legal system will void any responsibilities that a person willingly chooses to undertake. By making it impossible for two people to give binding promises to each other, these practices prevent both men and women from maximising the potentials of their lives. Thus marriages that might have been happy, joyous, and fruitful never take place. The children are caught in the trauma of dysfunctional relationships, robbed of the benefits of two united and caring parents. Therefore the state must cease determining what a marriage is and must allow adults to freely promise each other whatever undertakings they, as autonomous moral agents, jointly choose.

Finally, as one cannot escape their obligations under the principle of Goodness, neither can any group. This includes people acting as officers for a government or other organisation. The ability to insulate oneself from the consequences of one's actions must be abolished, whether this occurs by holding some office, such as a judge or politician, or by setting up an intermediate legal structure, such as a company.

## **The Environment: The Tree Growing in the Good Earth**

The tree is not the soil or the water or the air or the light, nor the fertilising insect nor the bird in its nest. Yet the tree relies upon and in turn supports the health of all the surrounding living beings and environment, and has its part in the flourishing system of life. In like manner, humanity, now gifted with a mind capable of comprehending the principle of good and evil, is no longer merely another animal in the natural world, yet it needs the world of nature and in turn has a precious gift in its newfound wisdom that is indispensable for the very continuation of life on Earth.

It has been said by some of the world's foremost thinkers that the world would be better off without us, and they point to the many environmental disasters that our species has caused and the much greater ones we are in danger of causing. On the contrary, a world civilisation founded on Goodness is the next development in the increasing flourishing of life on this precious planet.

Let us look far into the future and see what awaits. Our good Sun has been burning steadily for about five billion years, and is expected to continue doing so for another five billion. Life, arising soon after things settled down after the original creation of the solar system, might be expected to

have five billion more good years ahead, if only those pesky humans would stop destroying the trees, killing the watercourses, creating nuclear waste dumps, and polluting the atmosphere.

Not so. Earth's orbit is in a band surrounding the sun, where the sun's heat is neither too much nor too little for water-based life to exist. Unfortunately, our sun, whilst steady, is not constant; it is very slowly heating up, and the Earth is now at the extreme inner edge of the habitable band. At some time, thought to be between one hundred million and five hundred million years from now, the heat will be just enough to put the Earth into the torrid zone where liquid water is impossible. The self-correcting temperature control of our planet will fail, the oceans will boil away, and runaway temperature will turn the Earth into a hell planet like Venus.

What is needed to stop this catastrophe is a very modest thing for a species capable of building spacecraft: erect a modest 'umbrella' at the Lagrangian (the balance point) between the Earth and the sun, with a control system that keeps it there, to shield the planet from a small fraction of the sunlight. Given a hundred million years warning, such a shield would be a paltry thing for a species such as ours, were it not for one problem: Will our descendants still be here in a hundred million years?

It is now clear that, far from being better off without us, the world will only survive if we remain. Yet a fair thinker, looking at the folly of human behaviour in our time, would have to hold out little hope that such long-term survival is in our destiny. After millions of years, billions of lives lived, to bring about a species capable of accepting such a sacred responsibility, will it all come to naught? Or will we prove that we do deserve the trust that our Creator, or fate, whichever you choose to believe, has placed within our hands?

To accept our responsibility, as well as to protect Earth from other tragedies such as encounters with killer meteors, our species must survive. To survive, we must do two things: we must keep the natural environment flourishing and healthy on a sustainable basis, and we human beings as a race must cease to be violent.

Clearly these considerations will affect the shape of the society we must now build, but one key object lesson is clear: to protect the environment, to bring about the flourishing of all life on earth and to sustain it, the only way possible is evolutionary change towards a peaceful, loving, and wise world civilisation. We cannot and we must not reject as 'unnatural' the systems and technologies that human ingenuity has brought about, for our technology is a precious asset of our whole planet, held by us in trust, as custodians of all life.

## **Beneath the Shade of the Tree of Life**

Our challenge is to evolve ourselves and all humanity towards perfect alignment with the law of Goodness. In doing this, it is not enough to criticise others, because no race, nation, or religion has acted in perfect accordance with Goodness. Whoever we are, of whatever culture or nationality we are a part, we must first criticise ourselves.

In this, forgiveness is necessary. We should not condemn the past doers of the mistakes we discover, as the infant cannot be judged by the standards of adults. The important thing is to find out what the mistakes are so we can stop repeating them. Only those who show the world that they can criticise themselves and lay concrete plans for change will be able to teach others to do the same with their laws, teachings, and traditions.

Whatever culture one is in, whatever holy book or political tract one follows, study it carefully, and identify those parts that are in accordance with Goodness. Those parts are the words of God,

and every teaching or philosophy that is at all worthy of continued existence will have them. As for those parts that teach a doctrine inconsistent with Goodness, they are false or are misinterpretations, and are not from our loving Creator. Have the courage to reject those false teachings. Show your friends and companions, with kindness, how and why these things cannot be from an infinitely loving God, and how and why they cannot lead to future progress and peace in the world. Humanity has evolved. Harmful ideas that were believable in past ages can prevent advances in the well-being of humanity now. Either these ideas will be set aside in wisdom as our species completes the advance to a higher level of awareness, or the cultures and societies that cling to them will fall ever further behind those who can find a way forward. At worst, the crises coming in future times will force change in the most unpleasant ways possible. How much better to have faith now and have the strength and courage to look truthfully at one's own culture, politics, and religion.

A group (whether a family, tribe, village, religion, state, or any other group) that deliberately adopts Goodness is the friend of everyone, except those who wish to be malicious towards them. All that is necessary to enter the umbrella of their care is to resist from trying to harm them. This is a low barrier to overcome and an easy standard to meet to make a firm friend, which is why the common bonds of love and friendship will spread far and fast as communities adopt Goodness. Being free from categorist hatred for past doings of groups, they will forget the battles and injustices of the ancestors and instead befriend the living. But also they will have a strength that is missing in the tolerant west today: they will know the importance of defending the unity of all who mean well against the fracturing efforts of those who would willingly damage others. Tolerant of diverging views, they will nevertheless know how to resist firmly the actual attempt at violence; they will resist it as soon as it appears; they will not have to wait until it becomes mass murder before they take action.

Even in a world that runs according to a mistaken ethical idea, Goodness works if practised by the individual. Being generally benevolent makes friends, yet the unwillingness to succumb to injustice prevents the unscrupulous from taking advantage of one's good will. As more people, cultures, religions, and states adopt Goodness and explicitly subject their understandings to its analysis, the power of Goodness increases and produces ever greater capacity to benefit those who adopt it.

To gather all humanity beneath the shade of the Tree of Life, to fulfil the vision that has been dimly glimpsed throughout the ages, to justify the trust that has been invested within us is a continuous process. We must all, individually and in our communities, study this sacred law of Goodness, learn how it applies to all the many things we humans do, and teach it to others; but most importantly, bring our own acts and intentions within its shelter. As we begin to embrace the principle of goodness in our lives and in all our endeavours, the world will begin to shine with the true light of lasting peace and harmony.

*Let the light in your heart glow  
Let the seed of goodness grow  
Into the Tree of Life  
Illuminating the world  
For all who dwell on Earth.*

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## The Spirit in the Tree

We are at the end of this short introduction to the reality of true Goodness. It requires no belief in God or a Creator, or in an immortal soul. It can be tested in the heart or by the mind. However, we cannot close without adding a few thoughts for those who, like us, believe that one's true reality is the immortal soul, a spirit that breathes life into the dust of the earth.

Many teachings are given about the soul, God, and eternity. Some believe that God requires some standard of belief or acceptance of a saviour, or else one will be tortured forever. Others say that God is too loving to judge, that the goal of life is the transformation of the soul, to be done through spiritual practices, meditation, achieving higher states of consciousness. Some seek to clear obstacles and entrapments that block the spirit or its working through the physical body. Some wish to attain Nirvana, others to live eternally in the kingdom of heaven, or become a being of light, or gain salvation. All of these teachings contain truth, for the awareness of a higher reality and the longing for a connection to it is built in to the deepest levels of human nature.

In this age mankind has reached the point where testable knowledge and religion meet, and soon will recognise the spiritual reality that is the foundation of all existence. A mature understanding compels one to recognise that God loves all of His creation, and no challenge is sufficiently worthy for a sincere soul than to strive to develop the use of one's highest faculty, the conscience, and to mirror, in mind, heart, and action, His highest qualities of love and Goodness.

Our human spirits are reflections of the Great Spirit that formed the world with all its chances for life and death, profit and loss, growth and decay, Good and evil. Goodness is a reality, pre-existent, before all else, and what we have written here does, we believe, show a true vision of it. The Great Spirit, facing that reality, freely chose to be Good rather than evil. In the infinite freedom of God's absolute power, He chose to place something else before and above that power, and in so doing became holy and worthy of worship rather than just an elemental force to be appeased. That choice took place in the time before time, and so there was never a time when God was other than infinitely Good; but still, things could have been otherwise, and so God deserves the praise that many give to Him.

In the love that both created and was born through this free choice, God desires that we, each and all, in His image, should have that same choice, freely to hold fast to Goodness or to reject it. We make this choice, not through declarations of faith, not through years of meditation and spiritual discipline, not through spiritual cleansings and healthy practices - although all these have their place. The choice is made in the choices we make, the daily decisions to compromise or not to compromise, choosing whether a problem is too hard and "requires" harm to another or whether we shall redouble our efforts to care for everyone and all sentient beings. In these free choices in this world balanced between heaven and hell, the soul is transformed. One is reborn in the image of the God of Goodness and love rather than the god of power.

Our acts will be judged in eternity, true, as we are responsible for our choices, and some shall be so transformed as to enter paradise whilst others will fall headlong into eternal torment. So, too, is it true that the God of love shall strive forever to rescue every lost soul. And all the other truths known to the wise are reflected in the full truth somewhere. All the spiritual practices and meditations have their benefit as long they open minds and hearts to greater realities. But the real transformation for every one who practices Goodness is to become the Companion of His Throne, the Throne Whose glory is Goodness, to become and be a soul filled with the Light of God, rejoicing in mind, heart, and spirit at the happiness and salvation of every being. This chance is for all. The time for seeing through a glass darkly has ended, for this is a new day, a day of understanding, in which obedience to intricate rules, ascetic practices, beliefs, confessions of faith or acceptance, and all such things from the childhood of our race are no longer enough. This is the

day to be born again in the image of God, freely choosing Good, knowing the meaning of that choice, and putting that choice into action.

