

Free Will: Some quotations ¹

...all the doings of man are sustained by the power of divine assistance, but the choice of good or evil belongs to him alone. ²

‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Certain matters are subject to the free will of man, such as acting with justice and fairness, or injustice and iniquity—in other words, the choice of good or evil actions. It is clear and evident that the will of man figures greatly in these actions. But there are certain matters where man is forced and compelled, such as sleep, death, sickness, failing powers, misfortune, and material loss: These are not subject to the will of man and he is not accountable for them, for he is compelled to endure them. But he is free in the choice of good and evil actions, and it is of his own accord that he performs them.

For example, should he so wish, he can pass his days in praise of God, and should he so desire, he can occupy himself with that which is other than Him. He can light the candle of his heart with the flame of the love of God and become a well-wisher of the world, or he can become an enemy of all mankind or set his affections on worldly things; he can choose to be just or iniquitous. All these deeds and actions are under his own control, and he is therefore accountable for them. ³

‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Our meaning is that the choice of good and evil belongs to man, but that under all circumstances he is dependent upon the life-sustaining assistance of Divine Providence. The sovereignty of God is great indeed, and all are held captive in the grasp of His power. The servant can do nothing of his own will alone: God is almighty and all-powerful and bestows His assistance upon all creation. ⁴

‘Abdu’l-Bahá

¹ Original source: <https://bahaiquotes.com/subject/free-will>, but quotes from *Some Answered Questions* updated from <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdul-baha/some-answered-questions/1#610118851>

² *Some Answered Questions*: www.bahai.org/r/139812793

³ *Some Answered Questions*: www.bahai.org/r/550346255

⁴ *Some Answered Questions*: www.bahai.org/r/266082217

There is, unfortunately, no way that one can force his own good upon a man. The element of free will is there and all we believers—and even the Manifestation of God Himself—can do is to offer the truth to mankind. If the people of the world persist, as they seem to be doing, in their blind materialism, they must bear the consequences in a prolongation of their present condition, and even a worsening of it. Our duty as Bahá'ís is to build up such a love and unity within our own ranks that the people will be attracted by this example to the Cause. We also must teach all we can and strengthen the Bahá'í community in the Administration. But more we cannot do to avert the great sufferings which seemingly still lie ahead of the world in its present evil state. ⁵

Shoghi Effendi

By the exercise of his free will, man either affirms his spiritual purpose in life or chooses to perpetuate evil by living below his highest station. The question is asked: *"Is such a behaviour to be attributed to God, or to their proper selves?"* ⁶ And concludes:

Every good thing is of God, and every evil thing is from yourselves...
⁷ ⁸

The Universal House of Justice

Man's physical existence on this earth is a period during which the moral exercise of his free will is tried and tested in order to prepare his soul for the other worlds of God, and we must welcome affliction and tribulations as opportunities for improvement in our eternal selves. ⁹

The Universal House of Justice

The vantage point that gives us perspective and is the foundation of our belief and actions rests on our recognition of the sovereignty of God and our submission to His will as revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, His

⁵ October 13, 1947 letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer.

⁶ *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*: www.bahai.org/r/919240596

⁷ *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*: www.bahai.org/r/919240596

⁸ 14 March 1985 letter to an individual: www.bahai.org/r/337082800.

⁹ 16 July 1960 letter to an individual believer.

supreme Manifestation for this promised Day. To accept the Prophet of God in His time and to abide by His bidding are the two essential, inseparable duties which each soul was created to fulfil. One exercises these twin duties by one's own choice, an act constituting the highest expression of the free will with which every human being has been endowed by an all-loving Creator. ¹⁰

Universal House of Justice

There are numerous individuals who share the ideals of the Faith and draw inspiration from its Teachings, while disagreeing with certain of its features, but those who actually enter the Bahá'í community have accepted, by their own free will, to follow the Teachings in their entirety, understanding that, if doubts and disagreements arise in the process of translating the Teachings into practice, the final arbiter is, by the explicit authority of the Revealed Text, the Universal House of Justice. ¹¹

Universal House of Justice

A meaningful covenant between God and man must require freedom of choice on both sides, and that man must exercise his free will in choosing his response to his Creator. ¹²

Adib Taherzadeh

Because of his spiritual qualities man has been endowed by the Creator with the special faculty of free will, a faculty which is absent in the rest of His creation on earth. ¹³

Adib Taherzadeh

But here is the real solution. The rich should be merciful to the poor, but with their free-will, not with force. Should it be with force it would be useless. It should be according to law and not by violence, so that through a general law every one might know his duty. For example,

¹⁰ 29 December 1988 to the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh in the United States of America re Individual Rights and Freedoms, www.bahai.org/r/021823256

¹¹ 7 April 1999: To all National Spiritual Assemblies re Issues Related to the Study of the Bahá'í Faith: www.bahai.org/r/535682824

¹² *The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 1

¹³ *The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 1

a rich person has a large income and a poor person a small income. To put it in a more explicit way: a rich person in this case must be exempt from taxes. If the poor person gives one-tenth of his income and the rich person one-tenth of his income, it will be unjust. Thus in this way a law should be made that the poor person who has only ten kilos and needs them all for his necessary food, be exempt from paying taxes. But if the rich person, who has ten thousand kilos, pays one-tenth or two-tenths taxes on his products, it will not be a hardship to him. For example, if he gives two thousand kilos, he will still have eight thousand kilos. If a person has fifty thousand kilos, even though he gives ten thousand kilos he will still have forty thousand kilos. Therefore, laws must be made in this way. These laws must do away with the present system of wages and earnings. If today the owners of factories increase the wages of their employees, after a month or a year, they will again cry and strike and ask for more increase. This work has no end. ¹⁴

'Abdu'l-Bahá

But the development of spiritual qualities is not controlled by nature. Although the soul aspires to spiritual things, the acquiring of spiritual qualities depends upon effort. It is in this domain that man has been given free will. This is very similar to a bird which in flight must use its wings to counteract the force of gravity. If it fails to do this, it will be pulled down instantly by this force. ¹⁵

Adib Taherzadeh

God in His justice gives His creatures the opportunity to carry out their duties without His interference; they have free will to behave as they please. Of course, He has full knowledge of how each individual will behave in discharging the obligations which the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh has placed on him but He leaves the person free to play his part and He does not judge him before he commits an error. This is similar to the relationship between a teacher and pupil. In the course of teaching his students the teacher usually comes to know the ability and capacity of each one. Suppose that he

¹⁴ *Star of the West*, Volume 7, Issue 9, 20 August 1916

¹⁵ *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, v 3, p. 78

finds one of his pupils to be inattentive to his work and negligent in his school duties. He may be certain that his pupil is going to fail his examinations but foreknowledge of that failure does not entitle the teacher to prevent the student from taking part. It is the student's prerogative to sit his examinations and no one has the right to deprive him of that privilege. ¹⁶

Adib Taherzadeh

In each Dispensation a considerable number of people have been led to follow the path of truth by their own free will, whereas the majority of the peoples have rejected the call of God and followed the dictates of their own selves. ¹⁷

Adib Taherzadeh

Man has free will. If he chooses to disregard the provisions of the Covenant and to fall in love with the world, its vanities and its material attractions, then he becomes a bonds slave of earthly things and his soul, deprived of the power of faith, becomes impoverished. On the other hand, when the individual aspires to spiritual things, turns to the Manifestation of God, and does not direct all his affections towards this mortal world, then his soul becomes illumined with the rays of the Sun of Truth and will fulfil the purpose for which it has been created. ¹⁸

Adib Taherzadeh

While the Manifestations of God all shine with the splendours of God's Revelation, they can reveal themselves in only two ways. The first is to appear in their naked glory. Should this happen, all human beings would witness their awesome power, would bow before their majesty and would submit their will entirely to God's Viceregent on earth. People would thus become puppets of God and lose their free will; all would follow the path of truth, not by their own volition but by capitulating to the irresistible power of the Manifestation of God. By the force of God's command, all would obey His teachings and would

¹⁶ *The Child of the Covenant*, p. 258

¹⁷ *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, v 3, p. 3

¹⁸ *The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 8-9

live a goodly life; no one would have the choice to be different. The Covenant of God would become meaningless because if there were no free will, how could human beings observe the laws of the Covenant? Should the Manifestation of God appear in this way and expose His august attributes to the generality of mankind, people would be devoid of the power of creativity, becoming creatures whose actions were controlled from a higher realm. The principles of justice and of reward and punishment would then become inoperative in society. The only other way that the Manifestations of God can reveal themselves, which ensures the preservation of human free will, is to conceal their divine power behind the veil of human characteristics. Although they possess majestic, divine qualities, it is, according to Bahá'u'lláh, against the law of God for them to reveal these to the generality of mankind. For instance, we observe with amazement that Bahá'u'lláh, the Supreme Manifestation of God, who held the powers of earth and heaven in His hands, and who, through the utterance of one word, as testified by Himself in His Tablets, could have conquered the hearts of His enemies, did not exercise His God-given spiritual powers to stay the hands of His oppressors. Thus He appeared to the generality of mankind to be an ordinary human being devoid of any superhuman powers; only those who have spiritual eyes can see a glimpse of His radiant light and recognize His station, while the great majority of the people fail to discover His inner spiritual reality. Through this method people can exercise their free will to accept or to reject the Message of God, to live in accordance with His teachings or to disobey Him.¹⁹

Adib Taherzadeh

¹⁹ *The Child of the Covenant*, p. 17