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Here the quoted text appears in a letter written by Bahá'u'lláh to one of his followers, in the later years of his mission.[2]

The quoted words, however, come from the Qur'an. In this English translation of the passage, we see yet another example of Bahá'u'lláh reframing an ancient concept and bringing out new and beautiful meanings. The translation is an inspired one, for it is clear that this is what Bahá'u'lláh means in the context he uses the sentence. He is speaking to his followers about their duty to teach the Baha'i Faith and the manner in which they should discharge this duty.

A more usual rendering into English of the Quranic passage is as follows:

And whoever saves a life, it is as though he had saved the lives of all men.[Sura 5:32]

Yet the translation used in the Baha'i text is coherent with the original Arabic of the Qur'an – for the verb used in the Qur'an is connected with “life” ('ahya) (literally to enliven, to breathe life into) and the verb “save” does not appear in the Qur'anic verse.

The passage has, however, an even more ancient provenance, and as the Qur'an itself states, it comes from a law of the Jewish people.

Whoever destroys a soul, it is considered as if he destroyed an entire world. And whoever saves a life, it is considered as if he saved an entire world.[3]

This older meaning is still present in Bahá'u'lláh's words for in this letter Bahá'u'lláh reiterates several times a prohibition on violence or causing disorder.

Fear ye God and sow not the seeds of dissension amongst men.[4]

Those who perpetrate deeds that would create turmoil among the people ... are numbered with the mischief-makers ...[5]

Fear ye God and commit not such deeds as would cause My loved ones on earth to lament.[6]

Restrain thou the inhabitants of those regions from provocative acts, from strife, dissension or aught else that would create trouble. That which is praiseworthy in these days is the promotion of the Cause.[7]

The reason why the subject of aid and assistance hath time and again streamed and will continue to stream from the Pen of Providence is to warn the friends of God lest they engage in activities that would give rise to strife and turmoil. It is incumbent upon them, one and all, to diligently seek ways to help the Cause of God in such manner as We have explained. This is but a token of His grace especially conferred upon His loved ones that every one of them may attain the station characterized by the words: 'Whoso quickeneth a soul hath verily quickened all mankind.' [8]

In all these passages we see a prohibition of harm to others and society. Elsewhere we have seen Bahá'u'lláh's [emphasis on the sacredness of life](#), and prohibition of killing. However here Baha'u'llah goes beyond the ancient Jewish text. It is not enough to abstain from taking life. One must not

engage in behaviour that may cause harm.

We also see the introduction of a new positive idea. It is not enough to save physical life – for the life of the soul is not limited to the physical world.

Wert thou to attain to but a dewdrop of the crystal waters of divine knowledge, thou wouldst readily realize that true life is not the life of the flesh but the life of the spirit.[9]

It is for this reason that Bahá'u'lláh asks us to pass around the cup of life, but with understanding and compassion.

O people! Spread not disorder on the earth nor dispute with your fellow men, for this would ill beseem them that occupy, beneath the shadow of their Lord, the station of such as are faithful to the one true God. Whosoever ye encounter a thirsty soul, give him to drink from the cup of everlasting life; and whosoever ye find a hearing ear, recite unto him the verses of God, the Powerful, the Mighty, the Compassionate.[10]

(This article is the 172nd in a series of what I hope will be 200 articles in 200 days for the 200th anniversary of the birth of Bahá'u'lláh. The anniversary is being celebrated around the world on 21 and 22 October 2017, The articles are simply my personal reflections on Bahá'u'lláh's life and work. Any errors or inadequacies in these articles are solely my responsibility.)

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