Kamál / Excellence

The month of Kamal (Excellence) is beginning soon. In book 7 (section 4 of Unit 1), we can read the following.

To develop our spiritual qualities, we must be aware of the high spiritual station that God has destined for each of us and steadily move towards it. Our eyes should be fixed on excellence; we should not be satisfied with mediocrity. Living according to the standards of today's society lulls us into mediocrity. Many people think that excellence is achieved through competition with others. But, in fact, competition entangles us even further in the trappings of society. The force that drives us towards excellence should be our ardent desire to achieve what God has bountifully ordained for us. Striving for excellence means striving to develop to its fullest that with which we have been endowed. Shoghi Effendi tells us:

"The chosen ones of God ... should not look at the depraved conditions of the society in which they live, nor at the evidences of moral degradation and frivolous conduct which the people around them display. They should not content themselves merely with relative distinction and excellence. Rather they should fix their gaze upon nobler heights by setting the counsels and exhortations of the Pen of Glory as their supreme goal. Then it will be readily realized how numerous are the stages that still remain to be traversed and how far off the desired goal lies-a goal which is none other than exemplifying heavenly morals and virtues."

The understanding of the concept of excellence is not the common one we encounter in wider society today. Perhaps it would be beneficial for our understanding and translation of that which is written into reality, if we reflect on some quotes on the matter. For this purpose (or simply as readings at the coming Nineteen Day Feast), you will find some quotes from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá related to excellence below.

Striving for Perfection

Strain every nerve to acquire both inner and outer perfections, for the fruit of the human tree hath ever been and will ever be perfections both within and without. It is not desirable that a man be left without knowledge or skills, for he is then but a barren tree. Then, so much as capacity and capability allow, ye needs must deck the tree of being with fruits such as knowledge, wisdom, spiritual perception and eloquent speech. [Bahá'u'lláh, from a Tablet-translated from the Persian, quoted in Excellence in All Things, Compilation by the BWC]

Make ye then a mighty effort, that the purity and sanctity which, above all else, are cherished by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, shall distinguish the people of Bahá; that in every kind of excellence the people of God shall surpass all other human beings; that both outwardly and inwardly they shall prove superior to the rest; that for purity, immaculacy, refinement, and the preservation of health, they shall be leaders in the
vanguard of those who know. And that by their freedom from enslavement, their
knowledge, their self-control, they shall be first among the pure, the free and the wise.
[Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá, no. 129]

Perfection in Deeds and Virtues

The most vital duty, in this day, is to purify your characters, to correct your manners,
and improve your conduct. The beloved of the Merciful must show forth such
caracter and conduct among His creatures, that the fragrance of their holiness may
be shed upon the whole world, and may quicken the dead, inasmuch as the purpose
of the Manifestation of God and the dawning of the limitless lights of the Invisible is to
educate the souls of men, and refine the character of every living man — so that
blessed individuals, who have freed themselves from the murk of the animal world,
shall rise up with those qualities which are the adornings of the reality of man....

...they should exemplify in every aspect of their lives those attributes and virtues that
are born of God and should arise to distinguish themselves by their goodly behaviour.
They should justify their claim to be Bahá'ís by deeds and not by name. He is a true
Bahá'í who strives by day and by night to progress and advance along the path of
human endeavor, whose most cherished desire is so to live and act as to enrich and
illuminate the world, whose source of inspiration is the essence of Divine virtue,
whose aim in life is so to conduct himself as to be the cause of infinite progress. Only
when he attains unto such perfect gifts can it be said of him that he is a true Bahá'í.
For in this holy Dispensation, the crowning glory of bygone ages and cycles, true
Faith is no mere acknowledgement of the Unity of God, but rather the living of a life
that will manifest all the perfections and virtues implied in such belief.... [`Abdu'l-
Bahá, quoted in Excellence in All Things, Compilation by the BWC]

Say: Beware, O people of Bahá, lest ye walk in the ways of them whose words differ
from their deeds. Strive that ye may be enabled to manifest to the peoples of the earth
the signs of God, and to mirror forth His commandments. Let your acts be a guide
unto all mankind, for the professions of most men, be they high or low, differ from
their conduct. It is through your deeds that ye can distinguish yourselves from others.
Through them the brightness of your light can be shed upon the whole earth. Happy is
the man that heedeth My counsel, and keepeth the precepts prescribed by Him Who is
the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. [Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, no. 139]

It behoveth the craftsmen of the world at each moment to offer a thousand tokens of
gratitude at the Sacred Threshold, and to exert their highest endeavour and diligently
pursue their professions so that their efforts may produce that which will manifest the
greatest beauty and perfection before the eyes of all men. [Selections from the
Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá, no. 127]

Step by Step Towards Perfection
Success or failure, gain or loss, must, therefore, depend upon man’s own exertions. The more he striveth, the greater will be his progress. We fain would hope that the vernal showers of the bounty of God may cause the flowers of true understanding to spring from the soil of men’s hearts, and may wash them from all earthly defilements. [Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, page no. 34]

Let each morn be better than its eve and each morrow richer than its yesterday. Man’s merit lieth in service and virtue and not in the pageantry of wealth and riches.... Guard against idleness and sloth, and cling unto that which profiteth mankind, whether young or old, whether high or low.... [Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 138]

Florence Khanum relates two sayings she heard from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. On one occasion He said to her “‘Sabr kun; mithl-i-Man bash” – be patient, be as I am. The other was when some one expressed discouragement to Him, saying they could not possibly acquire all the qualities and virtues that Bahá’ís are directed to possess, and the Master replied, “Kam Kam. Ruz bih ruz” – little by little; day by day.’ [Vignettes from the Life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá]