The Month of Ala / Loftiness

Soon the month of "loftiness" begins. The word loftiness indicates elevation of character or spirit, extending high in the air, exalted in rank, dignity, and elevated in style, tone or sentiment. Perhaps we can discern different perspectives of loftiness in our reflections and meditations in this month.

The first is the loftiness of God, His Word, and His Cause. The quotes convey the loftiness of God Who is exalted above all else and the Possessor of all things, gives a glimpse of the lofty station of the Word of God, explains the Greatness of His Cause and this Day, and a prayer that, from a human's viewpoint, bear witness to the loftiness of God. The commonality of the first set of quotes is the exalted and lofty station of God, His Words, and His Cause, which is simply beyond our capacity to comprehend.

The second set of quotes expresses the loftiness of the station of a human being. This lofty station is a natural consequence as God has "engraved upon" us, His "image". The quotes relates our loftiness with that of Gods, explains with the beautiful imagery of the bird, how lofty our station is and what we would do if we perceived this, urges us to rise to the station for which we are created, and finally the Tablet of Visitation of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá where we begin with the exalted station of God and our lowliness.

Finally, the third set of quotes connects the fast as a spiritual law that enables us to spiritually grow and attain loftier stations.

Loftiness of God, His Word and His Cause

Reading 1.

HE IS GOD, EXALTED IS HE, THE LORD OF MAJESTY AND POWER

A praise which is exalted above every mention or description beseemeth the Adored One, the Possessor of all things visible and invisible, Who hath enabled the Primal Point to reveal countless Books and Epistles and Who, through the potency of His sublime Word, hath called into being the entire creation, whether of the former or more recent generations. Moreover He hath in every age and cycle, in conformity with His transcendent wisdom, sent forth a divine Messenger to revive the dispirited and despondent souls with the living waters of His utterance, One Who is indeed the Expounder, the true Interpreter, inasmuch as man is unable to comprehend that which hath streamed forth from the Pen of Glory and is recorded in His heavenly Books. ...
O friend of mine! The Word of God is the king of words and its pervasive influence is incalculable. It hath ever dominated and will continue to dominate the realm of being. The Great Being saith: The Word is the master key for the whole world, inasmuch as through its potency the doors of the hearts of men, which in reality are the doors of heaven, are unlocked. No sooner had but a glimmer of its effulgent splendor shone forth upon the mirror of love than the blessed word “I am the Best-Beloved” was reflected therein. It is an ocean inexhaustible in riches, comprehending all things. Every thing which can be perceived is but an emanation therefrom. High, immeasurably high is this sublime station, in whose shadow moveth the essence of loftiness and splendor, wrapt in praise and adoration. [Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh, Lawḥ-i-Maqṣūd]

Reading 2.
Consider at all times the sovereignty exercised by the Ideal King, and behold the evidences of His power and paramount influence. Sanctify your ears from the idle talk of them that are the symbols of denial and the exponents of violence and anger. The hour is approaching when ye will witness the power of the one true God triumphing over all created things and the signs of His sovereignty encompassing all creation. On that day ye will discover how all else besides Him will have been forgotten and come to be regarded as utter nothingness.

It should, however, be borne in mind that God and His Manifestation can, under no circumstances, be dissociated from the loftiness and sublimity which They inherently possess. Nay, loftiness and sublimity are themselves the creations of His Word, if ye choose to see with My sight not with yours. [Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh , nr 29]

Reading 3.
O affectionate seeker! Shouldst thou soar in the holy realm of the spirit, thou wouldst recognize God manifest and exalted above all things, in such wise that thine eyes would behold none else but Him. “God was alone; there was none else besides Him.” So lofty is this station that no testimony can bear it witness, neither evidence do justice to its truth. Wert thou to explore the sacred domain of truth, thou wilt find that all things are known only by the light of His recognition, that He hath ever been, and will continue forever to be, known through Himself. And if thou dwellest in the land of testimony, content thyself with that which He, Himself, hath revealed: “Is it not enough for them that We have sent down unto Thee the Book?”69 This is the testimony which He, Himself, hath ordained; greater proof than this there is none, nor ever will be: “This proof is His Word; His own Self, the testimony of His truth.” [Bahá’u’lláh, Kitab-i-Iqan, Part 1, paragraph 100]
Reading 4.

I testify before God to the greatness, the inconceivable greatness of this Revelation. Again and again have We, in most of Our Tablets, borne witness to this truth, that mankind may be roused from its heedlessness.” “How great is the Cause, how staggering the weight of its Message!” “In this most mighty Revelation all the Dispensations of the past have attained their highest, their final consummation.” “That which hath been made manifest in this preeminent, this most exalted Revelation, stands unparalleled in the annals of the past, nor will future ages witness its like.” “The purpose underlying all creation is the revelation of this most sublime, this most holy Day, the Day known as the Day of God, in His Books and Scriptures—the Day which all the Prophets, and the Chosen Ones, and the holy ones, have wished to witness.” “The highest essence and most perfect expression of whatsoever the peoples of old have either said or written hath, through this most potent Revelation, been sent down from the heaven of the Will of the All-Possessing, the Ever-Abiding God.” “This is the Day in which God’s most excellent favors have been poured out upon men, the Day in which His most mighty grace hath been infused into all created things.” “This is the Day whereon the Ocean of God’s mercy hath been manifested unto men, the Day in which the Daystar of His loving-kindness hath shed its radiance upon them, the Day in which the clouds of His bountiful favor have overshadowed the whole of mankind.” “By the righteousness of Mine own Self! Great, immeasurably great is this Cause! Mighty, inconceivably mighty is this Day!” [Bahá'u'lláh quoted in The Advent of Divine Justice p 77]

Reading 5.

All praise, O my God, be to Thee Who art the Source of all glory and majesty, of greatness and honor, of sovereignty and dominion, of loftiness and grace, of awe and power. Whomsoever Thou willest Thou causest to draw nigh unto the Most Great Ocean, and on whomsoever Thou desirest Thou conferrest the honor of recognizing Thy Most Ancient Name. Of all who are in heaven and on earth, none can withstand the operation of Thy sovereign Will. From all eternity Thou didst rule the entire creation, and Thou wilt continue for evermore to exercise Thy dominion over all created things. There is none other God but Thee, the Almighty, The Most Exalted, the All-Powerful, the All-Wise. Illumine, O Lord, the faces of Thy servants, that they may behold Thee; and cleanse their hearts that they may turn unto the court of Thy heavenly favors, and recognize Him Who is the Manifestation of Thy Self and the Dayspring of Thine Essence. Verily, Thou art the Lord of all worlds. There is no God but Thee, the Unconstrained, the All-Subduing. [Bahá'u'lláh, Bahai Prayers]
The lofty station of the human being

Reading 6.

O SON OF THE THRONE! Thy hearing is My hearing, hear thou therewith. Thy sight is My sight, do thou see therewith, that in thine inmost soul thou mayest testify unto My exalted sanctity, and I within Myself may bear witness unto an exalted station for thee.

[Bahá’u’lláh, The Hidden Words nr 44 Arabic]

Reading 7.

The purpose underlying the revelation of every heavenly Book, nay, of every divinely-revealed verse, is to endue all men with righteousness and understanding, so that peace and tranquillity may be firmly established amongst them. WHATSOEVER instillesh assurance into the hearts of men, whatsoever exalteth their station or promoteth their contentment, is acceptable in the sight of God. How lofty is the station which man, if he but choose to fulfill his high destiny, can attain! To what depths of degradation he can sink, depths which the meaneast of creatures have never reached! Seize, O friends, the chance which this Day offereth you, and deprive not yourselves of the liberal effusions of His grace. I beseech God that He may graciously enable every one of you to adorn himself, in this blessed Day, with the ornament of pure and holy deeds. He, verily, doeth whatsoever He willeth. [Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh nr 101]

Reading 8.

O My servants! Could ye apprehend with what wonders of My munificence and bounty I have willed to entrust your souls, ye would, of a truth, rid yourselves of attachment to all created things, and would gain a true knowledge of your own selves—a knowledge 327 which is the same as the comprehension of Mine own Being. Ye would find yourselves independent of all else but Me, and would perceive, with your inner and outer eye, and as manifest as the revelation of My effulgent Name, the seas of My loving-kindness and bounty moving within you. Suffer not your idle fancies, your evil passions, your insincerity and blindness of
heart to dim the luster, or stain the sanctity, of so lofty a station. Ye are even as the bird which soar eth, with the full force of its mighty wings and with complete and joyous confidence, through the immensity of the heavens, until, impelled to satisfy its hunger, it turneth longingly to the water and clay of the earth below it, and, having been entrapped in the mesh of its desire, findeth itself impotent to resume its flight to the realms whence it came. Powerless to shake off the burden weighing on its sullied wings, that bird, hitherto an inmate of the heavens, is now forced to seek a dwelling-place upon the dust. Wherefore, O My servants, defile not your wings with the clay of waywardness and vain desires, and suffer them not to be stained with the dust of envy and hate, that ye may not be hindered from soaring in the heavens of My divine knowledge. [Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh nr 153]

Reading 9.
O SON OF SPIRIT! Noble have I created thee, yet thou hast abased thyself. Rise then unto that for which thou wast created. [Bahá’u’lláh, The Hidden Words nr 22 Arabic]

Reading 10.
He is the All-Glorious!
O God, my God! Lowly and tearful, I raise my suppliant hands to Thee and cover my face in the dust of that Threshold of Thine, exalted above the knowledge of the learned, and the praise of all that glorify Thee. Graciously look upon Thy servant, humble and lowly at Thy door, with the glances of the eye of Thy mercy, and immerse him in the Ocean of Thine eternal grace.

Lord! He is a poor and lowly servant of Thine, enthralled and imploring Thee, captive in Thy hand, praying fervently to Thee, trusting in Thee, in tears before Thy face, calling to Thee and beseeching Thee, saying:
O Lord, my God! Give me Thy grace to serve Thy loved ones, strengthen me in my servitude to Thee, illumine my brow with the light of adoration in Thy court of holiness, and of prayer to Thy kingdom of grandeur. Help me to be selfless at the heavenly entrance of Thy gate, and aid me to be detached from all things within Thy holy precincts. Lord! Give me to drink from the chalice of selflessness; with its robe clothe me, and in its ocean immerse me. Make me as dust in the pathway of Thy loved ones, and grant that I may offer up my soul for the earth ennobled by the footsteps of Thy chosen ones in Thy path, O Lord of Glory in the Highest.

With this prayer doth Thy servant call Thee, at dawn tide and in the night-season. Fulfill his heart’s desire, O Lord! Illumine his heart, gladden his bosom,
kindle his light, that he may serve Thy Cause and Thy servants.

Thou art the Bestower, the Pitiful, the Most Bountiful, the Gracious, the Merciful, the Compassionate.

['Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablet of Visitation]

The Fast

Think not that We have revealed unto you a mere code of laws. Nay, rather, We have unsealed the choice Wine with the fingers of might and power. To this beareth witness that which the Pen of Revelation hath revealed. Meditate upon this, O men of insight! (Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitab-i-Aqdas, § 5)

For this physical fasting is a symbol of the spiritual fasting, that is, abstaining from all carnal desires, becoming characterized with the attributes of the spiritual ones, attracted to the heavenly fragrances and enkindled with the fire of the love of God. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablets of Abdu'l-Bahá v1, p. 40)

The Divine wisdom in fasting is manifold. Among them is this: As during those days (i.e. the period of fasting which the followers afterward observe) the Manifestation of the Sun of Reality, through Divine inspiration, is engaged in the descent (revealing) of Verses, the instituting of Divine Law and the arrangement of teachings, through excessive occupation and intensive attraction, there remains no condition or time for eating and drinking. For example, when His Holiness Moses went to Mount Tur (Sinai) and there engaged in instituting the Law of God, He fasted forty days. For the purpose of awakening and admonishing the people of Israel, fasting was enjoined upon them. Likewise, His Holiness Christ, in the beginning of instituting the Spiritual Law, the systemizing of the teachings and the arrangement of counsels, for forty days abstained from eating and drinking. In the beginning the disciples and Christians fasted. Later the assemblages of the chief Christians changed fasting into lenten observances. Likewise the koran having descended in the month of Ramadan, fasting during that month became a duty. In like manner His Holiness the Supreme (The Bab), in the beginning of the Manifestation through the excessive effect of descending verses, passed days in which His nourishment was reduced to tea only. Likewise, the Blessed Beauty (Bahá'u'lláh), when busy with instituting the Divine Teachings and during the days when the Verses (The Word of God) descended continuously, through the great effect of the Verses and the throbbing of the heart, took no food except the least amount. The purpose is this: In order to
follow the Divine Manifestation and for the purpose of admonition and the commemoration of their state, it became incumbent upon the people to fast during those days. For every sincere soul who has a beloved longs to experience that state in which his beloved is. If his beloved is in a state of sorrow, he desires sorrow; if in a state of joy, he desires joy; if in a state of rest, he desires rest; if in a state of trouble, he desires trouble. Now, since in this Millennial Day, His Holiness the Supreme (The Bab) fasted many days, and the Blessed Beauty (Bahá’u’lláh) took but little food or drink, it becomes necessary that the friends should follow that example... (Table talks by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, by Mrs. Corinne True: Star of the West, Vol. IV, no. 18. p.305 and Lights of Guidance, p. 234)

Glory be to Thee, O Lord my God! These are the days whereon Thou hast bidden all men to observe the fast, that through it they may purify their souls and rid themselves of all attachment to any one but Thee, and that out of their hearts may ascend that which will be worthy of the court of Thy majesty and may well beseech the seat of the revelation of Thy oneness. Grant, O my Lord, that this fast may become a river of life-giving waters and may yield the virtue wherewith Thou hast endowed it. Cleanse Thou by its means the hearts of Thy servants whom the evils of the world have failed to hinder from turning towards Thine All-glorious Name, and who have remained unmoved by the noise and tumult of such as have repudiated Thy most resplendent signs which have accompanied the advent of Thy Manifestation Whom Thou hast invested with Thy sovereignty, Thy power, Thy majesty and glory. These are the servants who, as soon as Thy call reached them, hastened in the direction of Thy mercy and were not kept back from Thee by the changes and chances of this world or by any human limitations. (Bahá’u’lláh, Prayers and Meditations by Bahá’u’lláh, p. 79)

We, verily, have set forth all things in Our Book, as a token of grace unto those who have believed in God, the Almighty, the Protector, the Self-Subsisting. And We have ordained obligatory prayer and fasting so that all may by these means draw nigh unto God, the Most Powerful, the Well-Beloved. We have written down these two laws and expounded every irrevocable decree. We have forbidden men from following whatsoever might cause them to stray from the Truth, and have commanded them to observe that which will draw them nearer unto Him Who is the Almighty, the All-Loving. Say: Observe ye the commandments of God for love of His beauty, and be not of those who follow in the ways of the abject and foolish. (Bahá’u’lláh, The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting)

... essentially a period of meditation and prayer, of spiritual recuperation, during which the believer must strive to make the necessary readjustments in his inner
life, and to refresh and reinvigorate the spiritual forces latent in his soul. Its significance and purpose are, fundamentally spiritual in character. Fasting is symbolic, and a reminder of abstinence from selfish and carnal desires.” (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, January 10, 1936 found in Lights of Guidance, p. 233)