

The God of Fast and Slow

The high staccato trill of an eagle brought in the dawn this morning, when the sky was still a soft grey blanket. He repeated his verse several times, a cappella, without the noise of traffic below or the accompaniment of seagulls. When I looked up a few minutes later – 10? 15? 20? – the sky had turned a soft pink behind the red and white flag, but he was nowhere to be seen.

I began to write this during the time of the Bahá'í Fast. It runs for nineteen days at the beginning of March, from sunrise to sunset, finishing with our New Year on the first day of Spring, March 21st. It's a time of meditation, prayer, reflection, detachment – generally a quieter, slower time, that I find richer each passing year. Insights, ideas, the sought-after sigh of peace and connectedness, these are hard to come by in a fast-paced culture. (This is why the Fast should really be called the Slow!)

[Bahá'í prayers](#) speak of God in many ways, all poetic. This morning's prayer, for example: "O God, Who art the Author of all Manifestations, the Source of all Sources, the Fountainhead of all Revelations, and the Wellspring of all Lights! I testify that by Thy Name the heaven of understanding hath been adorned..."

In the Bahá'í [Sacred Writings](#), God has many Names, all of which are attributes: the Almighty, the Compassionate, the All-Generous, the Merciful, the Omnipotent, the Omniscient, the Creator... In fact, the name of the Messenger for the present age, Bahá'u'lláh, refers to the attribute "the Glory of God".

The language of the Writings may have a familiar ring to Muslim friends, since the Bahá'í Faith sprang out of Islam in much the same way that Christianity sprang out of Judaism. Just as Christianity and Judaism are praised in the Quran, the Bahá'í Writings laud the revelations of Islam, Christianity and Judaism, considering them its spiritual predecessors. The religions born farther East are also considered part of the family, chapters of the same Holy Book.

As a teenager, I fell in love with the beauty of the Bhagavad Gita and the story of the Buddha, both of which shine light on our concept of divinity from different angles. The image of God I grew up with is probably from a childhood story – perhaps one influenced by [Michelangelo's portrayal](#) in the Sistine Chapel? It carried the inherent problem of any image meant to portray the spiritual. I admit that its anthropomorphism was summarily dismissed by my young self. Now I look at that portrayal and appreciate it for the impossibility of the task as much as the sheer beauty of the artist's interpretation.

Then, at the age of 20, I discovered [the Bahá'í concept of God as "the Unknowable Essence"](#). I loved the notion of a God progressively revealed but never fully known by the human intellect. I loved learning about the revered teachers of humanity – such as Krishna, Abraham, Moses, Buddha, Zoroaster, Christ, and Muhammad – who founded entire civilizations through their teachings and loving example. The evolutionary, egalitarian nature of "progressive revelation" was new to me, with its reassuring notion that we would never be without spiritual and social guidance.

Now as I take stock, I think of the prescient words of Bahá'u'lláh of 150 years ago, warning that "*the prevailing order appeareth to be lamentably defective.*" Like the pre-dawn trill of the eagle, a new day was heralded, its ideals as lofty as its language. It carried magnificent promise: the birth of a world

civilization, of a system of democratic and just world governance marked by respect for universal rights.
The first blush of that day is ever so slowly spreading across the sky, if you look up.