

Summary of

“He hath known God who hath known himself”: A Deepening Course on the Bahá’í Revelation

A COMPILATION FROM THE
BAHÁ’Í SACRED WRITINGS

Intro

I am Richard Kochmann. Here I present a summary of a major work (a more than 400 page compilation) of the Bahá’í Writings -- entitled “He hath known God who hath known himself”, which I have been involved with since the late 1960’s as part of three generations in a family of Bahá’í scholars.

So, first, some background on the participants and contributors: The first of these scholars was Howard Colby Ives, the grandfather of my first Bahá’í teacher and late wife, Barbara Ives -- who had met with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in 1912, initially at the Master’s beckoning call, singling him out in a large gathering, for a private meeting.

About this experience Howard had written “*He looked at me!* It seemed as though never before had anyone seen *me*.” [from *The Bahá’í World*, Vol. 1940-1944, “In Memoriam” Section, p. 610], and “such an understanding love enveloped me that even at that distance and with a heart still cold a thrill ran through me as if a breeze from a divine morning had touched my brow.” [Ibid., as above.]

Years later, Howard wrote his recollections of his initial introduction to the Faith from the prodding but gentle persistence of a dear friend whom he finally decided he couldn’t reasonably refuse, to the initial encounter and other reminiscences of the Master’s visit to America in 1912, in a memoir reviewing all those events, which he finalized during the evening years of his life, when he was going deaf and blind, but could still sit up in bed and compose by the “touch system” on an old typewriter, before eventually being completely overtaken by cancer, as he approached his 75th year. As to his losing many of his physical faculties, he considered it a blessing -- to enable him to prepare for the next life!

This work, the memoir, was entitled “*Portals to Freedom*”, and completed and first published by B. Dalton & Company in 1937.

History

In his mid-40’s, Howard had been an ordained Unitarian Minister, with many questions about “Return” and “Revival”, as he began his 46th year, when he first came across the Faith and was “ushered in” to meet with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá personally.

That first meeting was in a large reception room of the Ansonia Hotel in New York City, where his friend had brought him. Once there, after joining the crowd that had gathered in a spacious waiting room for the Master to appear, he found himself being strangely beckoned from across the large meeting room by the Master Himself, who was summoning him to approach, and when he did, he was embraced and suddenly ushered into a private meeting in separate chamber, with just the Master (who had even dismissed His interpreter). He said later, “and life has never been (quite) the same since”. More about this incredible experience can be found in unfolding detail in his memorable book “*Portals*” referenced above.

After having studied the Faith and becoming a believer, Howard eventually chose to give up his congregation and means of livelihood within the Church, and became an itinerant Bahá’í teacher along with his wife Mabel, (best known among the friends as ‘Riswana’ which was her name as bestowed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá) -- opening new communities primarily across the northeastern United States (but in the beginning venturing as far southwest as Pittsburgh)...

“Their first stop” Pittsburgh was “where, besides working during the day” (as traveling salespersons with often a new product to market) “...they held thirty-six meetings in six weeks”(Ibid. *The Bahá’í World...*, cited above, p. 611) which they (and other Bahá’í itinerant teachers) did during this period -- by advertising and hosting Bahá’í talks in local hotels, and after several weeks moving on to expose and open the next new community as well as revisiting earlier ones that they had already visited and opened to the Faith.

During these years the couple virtually lived out of suitcases, giving up what would otherwise be considered any kind of a normal or ordinary life -- for the next 15 years, never settling into a permanent home until they became too old to travel teach regularly -- but that is one of the ways the Faith was promoted by itinerant teachers who sacrificed everything else, in the early formative days of the spread of the Faith in North America.

Howard was also a constant student of the Writings, in the special class of Bahá’í scholar, writing not only Bahá’í-themed and inspired poetry, but also in creating (gathering and organizing) a huge compendium he continued to develop and work on, of what had been either already translated or was just then being provided to the Bahá’ís in the West by the Guardian, entitled “*The Ocean of His Utterances*” -- which was subsequently typed and circulated (passed around) via individually typed or carbon copies -- to all the friends in America, (and which can now be found [the compilation] under its original title, on line, at bahai-library.com).

His memorable book, “*Portals...*” had after its first publication in 1937, eventually become translated in those intermediate years -- into nearly 30 languages (including Farsi) -- world-wide and was especially beloved by the Persian friends, because of its being the memoirs of a relatable and spiritually-minded Westerner in his encounters and recollections of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

Before his death Howard (who was referred to in the family as “Uncle-Granddaddy”) had also written his young, beloved and favorite granddaughter Barbara (who was then in her mid-teens and fixated on pursuing a career as a film star in Hollywood), a very direct, determined, and impassioned letter encouraging her to devote her life to “the study of the Writings” in service to the Faith, and not allow her then desire to pursue a life as an actress, with goals of a Hollywood career to interfere with this prerequisite or calling. This letter too, circulated and passed through the hands of many of the early friends, and was known as the “My Dearest Grandbobby” letter as that is how he addressed Barbara.

Moving onward, I subsequently met Barbara at the Greenacre Bahá’í School in the summer of 1969. By this point (with the passing of nearly 30 years from where our story had left off!) she had grown up, married, and was raising a family. By this point in time, also, she had become a scholar or researcher of the Bahá’í Revelation (as modeled and encouraged by her grandfather), wishing to discover or uncover Bahá’u’lláh’s own definitions and explanations of His Writings, and the admonitions, premises, prophecies and principles, laws and commandments contained therein – to be seen and understood by mind and heart, and not through the eyes or interpretation of one’s “neighbor”. During this process she continued to sense the closeness, guidance and doting encouragement and example of her loving grandfather!

Bahá’u’lláh had said that it was incumbent to see with one’s own eyes, and not through the eyes of one’s neighbor, as this was an important element and aspect of independent investigation, and the need for the individual to personally examine and test the wisdom of each commandment.

[“The principles of the Teachings of Bahá’u’lláh should be carefully studied, one by one, until they are realized and understood by mind and heart -- so will you become strong followers of the light, truly spiritual, heavenly soldiers of God, acquiring and spreading the true civilization in Persia, in Europe, and in the whole world. This will be the paradise which is to come on earth, when all mankind will be gathered together under the tent of unity in the Kingdom of Glory.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 22); and “...It is incumbent upon everyone, in this day, to perceive with the eye of God, and to hearken with His ear. Whoso beholdeth Me with an eye besides Mine own will never be able to know Me. None among the Manifestations of old, except to a prescribed degree, hath ever completely apprehended the nature of this Revelation.” (Bahá’u’lláh, cited by Shoghi Effendi, in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 77)]

When I came across Barbara at the Greenacre Bahá’í School in the summer of 1969, I was an impressionable and longing Bahá’í youth – having just completed a year of home front pioneering on an Indian Pueblo in the U.S. Southwest, and was seeking many answers to eternal questions. I thought that by beginning a doctorate level of study at the U. Mass School of Education on the

Amherst campus, that I could find the direction I was seeking, as many outstanding and prominent Bahá'ís were on campus during that period. I felt elated to have considered such an opportunity.

Through unusual if not other-worldly circumstances, however, Barbara was able to sympathize with me and present an alternative mode of study. She, who was working even then on the preliminary research to expand her grandfather's studies into a course about Man's Knowledge of God, the Station of the Manifestations, the Covenant in many of its aspects, and the duties and responsibilities of the believers as party to that Covenant – made clear to me that there were not yet full time Bahá'í institutions (for the study of the Word) in this country (the West) that could provide and accommodate that level of coursework and immersion in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh – but that she could offer time spent in her home to provide the level of study and immersion in the Sacred Writings that I was seeking.

So thus began a two year program commitment to uncover the evident and hidden dynamics of this Revelation! By the end of summer I had moved in and installed myself in her family home in upstate western New York, with its vast Bahá'í library and exceedingly competent teacher and guide, finding work at a local expediting department in a large quasi-military aircraft device developer/manufacturer in the area, to pay my expenses.

My quest and questions, and interactions with Barbara helped to pave the way and reinforce her development of the evolving and expanded course “He hath known God who hath known himself” (*Kitab-i-Iqan/Book of Certitude*, p. 102; and *Gleanings*, p. 178).

Over the years this course of study had evolved into weekend study institutes, which we hosted in our home with Barbara as the facilitator, first in the Midwest, and later in the Southwest, as we were able to eventually marry and jointly pioneer on the Big Navajo Reservation. Eventually, we acquired some land in an area bordering another branch of the Navajo Reservation in western New Mexico, for the development of a Bahá'í school for the study of the Writings, to which Barbara was dedicated and for which we had begun excavation of the first building, at the time of her premature passing in early fall of 1977.

I later expanded the course, as new publications and translations became available from the World Centre, and also expanded it to include other discoveries in the Writings that rounded out and completed the story. This is especially interesting because Barbara's style of research was to gather together all available references on a particular subject (which are all scattered throughout the Writings and have no structure or organization to tie them together or relate them to one another -- in terms of the volumes we have available in the West at the present day), and cull them down to the most appropriate citations, while placing them, systematically, in a lengthy compendium that all can have access to and review, in just one place or document.

(By the time I had assumed and taken over the responsibilities for completing the course, I marveled at what Barbara had already accomplished in her quest, sense of organization, and modeling for other determined Bahá'í researchers. I also felt an abiding sense of her example and encouragement.)

In this compendium we have a diligently compiled and systematically organized approach to the Revelation of God for this Day, from references that were at one time scattered throughout the works of Shoghi Effendi's translations, but now under substantively unified, correlated and orderly subject headings from all available resources! Part of this process was greatly enhanced in accomplishment by the introduction of the late 1990's search engine, Ocean (inspired from the name Howard chose for his work) by Chad Jones – as a gift to the Bahá'í world!)

I will now discuss and highlight certain aspects and general categories of this work, which Barbara referred to as “the course”. (She felt this material to be suitable for the trainers of what she referred to as “the Teachers of the teachers” – and it was later submitted/“passed on” to the Counsellors at the International Teaching Center for that purpose.)

To obtain an understanding of the dynamic operations of the Covenant, which includes man's responsibility to God (and God's responsibility or promises to man) one must first have an understanding of the Word (“In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God”), Divine Unity (both between the Manifestation and God as “One” – as well as between all the Prophets and Manifestations (to make any distinction between any one of Them is to deny all of Them); and to recognize that each was endowed with a measured portion to reveal to mankind, at the time of His appearance, according to the Will of God, and the principle of progressively unfolding revelation), and that the Word itself is the covering to the inner mysteries, heavenly delights and majestic might and powers of a universal Revelation. Attendant with this was the recognition that individual spiritual progress is made by the fire that is in the heart, obedience, purity, love, sincerity and humility in all of one's strivings and endeavors, in the path of study and service toward the one true God.

In the section entitled “Man's Knowledge of God” we learn that man can not know God, nor have any direct access to that realm, as He is the surrounding One, and we are the surrounded, and to seek it is impiety, the way is barred; but that God can be known through His Manifestations.

In this regard, Bahá'u'lláh has revealed:

“And since there can be no tie of direct intercourse to bind the one true God with His creation, and no resemblance whatever can exist between the transient and the Eternal, the contingent and the Absolute, He hath ordained that in every age and dispensation a pure and stainless Soul be made manifest in the kingdoms of earth and heaven. Unto this subtle, this mysterious and ethereal Being He hath assigned a twofold nature; the physical, pertaining to the world of matter, and the spiritual, which is born of the substance of God Himself. He hath, moreover, conferred upon Him a double station. The first station, which is related to His innermost reality, representeth Him as One Whose voice is the voice of God Himself. To this testifieth the tradition: ‘Manifold and mysterious is My relationship with God. I am He, Himself, and He is I, Myself, except that I am that I am, and He is that He is.’ And in like manner, the words: ‘Arise, O Muhammad, for lo, the Lover and the Beloved are joined together and made one in

Thee.’ He similarly saith: ‘There is no distinction whatsoever between Thee and Them, except that They are Thy Servants.’ The second station is the human station, exemplified by the following verses: ‘I am but a man like you.’ ‘Say, praise be to my Lord! Am I more than a man, an apostle?’” He continues: “These Essences of Detachment, these resplendent Realities are the channels of God’s all-pervasive grace. Led by the light of unfailing guidance, and invested with supreme sovereignty, They are commissioned to use the inspiration of Their words, the effusions of Their infallible grace and the sanctifying breeze of Their Revelation for the cleansing of every longing heart and receptive spirit from the dross and dust of earthly cares and limitations. Then, and only then, will the Trust of God, latent in the reality of man, emerge, as resplendent as the rising Orb of Divine Revelation, from behind the veil of concealment, and implant the ensign of its revealed glory upon the summits of men’s hearts.”
(Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, pp. 66-67)

Other topics in the “course” include a lengthy examination of “Covenant” with such subtitles as: “The Law of God is divided into two parts; a twofold language” with even further subsections examining the first part (“the Holy of Holies”) with such topics or categories as “spiritual not material”; “from everlasting to everlasting”; “divine revelation is continuous, (orderly) and progressive (and not spasmodic or final)”; “this Universal Cycle”; “the Covenant between the Manifestation/s and God”; a section entitled: “Absolute, Eternal, Almighty and Universal Law” (including sub-sections describing the “Laws” of “Order, Love, Divine Unity, and Spiritual Progress”); and concluding with numerous references concerning: “Spiritual virtues, divine qualities, eternal commandments, and inner meanings”.

Regarding “inner meanings” Barbara was particularly keen on wanting to know more of the operation (origin, nature, purpose and functioning) of the “Maids of Heaven” (or Huris of Paradise), positioned beyond the station of the Manifestation on the wings of the Spirit) Who are the Essence or Inner Meaning/s of each of the Names and Attributes of God, as “It” descends through the power of the Covenant -- into the hearts of true believers and pure and sincere servants everywhere!

The next section or subtitle is about the “Holy City”, the “second part” (or material aspect) of the Covenant of God – which refers to the “material world”, “with two forms explicitly mentioned”: “to accept the coming Manifestations” and “to accept the Master and His administration after Him”.

From here we go to a lengthy subdivided section on the qualities and character of the true believers, their exalted rank, sublime station and ultimate purpose; “firmness in the Covenant” and “the station of full recognition”; “teachers must continually travel”; “love, harmony and fellowship amongst the believers”; “His never interrupted aid”; and Obedience to the Administrative Order, as well as “Never deny the spiritual to the material...”, and the Balance being “spirit and form”. This section is concluded with a brief acknowledgement of “the People of Bahá” – the new race of men as promised by God throughout eternity, who would emerge in this age from behind the veils of concealment, entering every city and being afraid of no one! Their appearance is also covered further on in the course, in a section entitled: “Ascendancy of...[His] independent sovereignty,...in

the plenitude of might and power,...revealed in its full splendor” in which their qualities, purpose, servitude and confirmed rank and powers are fully identified and explained.

Barbara concluded her work on the course with sections delineating and defining “The Promise and the Threat as recorded in the Books of God” and “In the Beginning was the Word”. I added, because of new texts made available following her death in 1977 -- such as *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, and subsequently over the years, the *Kitab-i-Aqdas*, (Book of Laws), *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh...*, “Gems...”, “Tabernacle..” and finally the wondrous “*Summons of the Lord of Hosts*” – sections on “Opposition and Denial” as promoting the onward unfoldment and recognition of the Faith, that the “Letters of Negation must needs exist” in this realm, that “The Ocean will continue to surge” and “purge”, and more about the appearance of the new race of men in the new section as described above, which includes the longer version of the “Súriy-i-Haykal”, (Súrih of the Temple) in which Bahá’u’lláh addresses and defines the appearance of a new race of men whose advent the world hath awaited, “who remain undeterred by those who would seek to obstruct their path”. He continues “These are they who circle round the Cause of God...”; “Through them the believers in Divine Unity have turned towards Him Who is the Object of Adoration...”; those by virtue of whose movement “all things are set into motion” and by reason of their stillness “all things are brought to rest”; and “These souls are the protectors of the Cause of God on earth, who shall preserve its beauty from the obscuring dust of idle fancies and vain imaginings. In the path of their Lord they shall not fear for their lives; rather will they sacrifice their all in their eagerness to behold the face of their Well-Beloved when once He hath appeared in this Name, the Almighty, the All-Powerful, the All-Glorious, the Most Holy.” (Bahá’u’lláh, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, verses 12-16, pp. 8-9)

Further on in that same Tablet, Bahá’u’lláh indicates: “*O Living Temple! Stretch forth Thy hand over all who are in heaven and on earth, and seize within the grasp of Thy Will the reins of command. We have, verily, placed in Thy right hand the empire of all things. Do as Thou willest, and fear not the ignorant. Reach out to the Tablet that hath dawned above the horizon of the pen of Thy Lord, and take hold of it with such strength that, through Thee, the hands of all who inhabit the earth may be enabled to lay fast hold upon it. This, in truth, is that which becometh Thee, if Thou be of those who understand. Through the upraising of Thy hand to the heaven of My grace, the hands of all created things shall be lifted up to their Lord, the Mighty, the Powerful, the Gracious. Erelong shall We raise up, through the aid of Thy hand, other hands endued with power, with strength and might, and shall establish through them Our dominion over all that dwell in the realms of revelation and creation. Thus will the servants of God recognize the truth that there is none other God beside Me, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting. With these hands, moreover, We shall both bestow and withhold, though none can understand this save those who see with the eye of the spirit.*”

(Bahá’u’lláh, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, verse 31, p.18)

About this Tablet, Taherzadeh informs us:

“One of the most momentous of the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh is the Suriy-i-Haykal or Suratu'l-Haykal (Surih of the Temple). Bahá'u'lláh ordered the Surih and the Tablets to the Kings to be copied in the form of a pentacle symbolizing the human temple. The Tablets were copied in the following order: the Suriy-i-Haykal itself, then the Tablet to Pope Pius IX, the Tablet to Napoleon III, the Tablet to Czar Alexander II, the Tablet to Queen Victoria and the Tablet to Násiri'd-Dín Sháh. Associating this with the prophecy of Zechariah in the Old Testament, Bahá'u'lláh concludes the Suriy-i-Haykal with these words:

‘Thus have We built the Temple with the hands of power and might, could ye but know it. This is the Temple promised unto you in the Book. Draw ye nigh unto it. This is that which profiteth you, could ye but comprehend it. Be fair, O peoples of the earth! Which is preferable, this, or a temple which is built of clay? Set your faces towards it. Thus have ye been commanded by God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting. Follow ye His bidding, and praise ye God, your Lord, for that which He hath bestowed upon you. He verily, is the Truth. No God is there but He. He revealeth what He pleaseth, through His Words 'Be and it is.'

“Throughout the Tablet, the Pen of the Most High addresses the Haykal (Temple) and reveals the glory and majesty with which it is invested. In answer to a question, Bahá'u'lláh has stated that the Haykal which is addressed in this Surih is the Person of Bahá'u'lláh, and so is the voice which addresses the Haykal. It is fascinating to know that the One Who speaks with the voice of God in this Tablet is identical with the One spoken to.”

(Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, vol. 3, pp. 132-134)

The “course” (“He hath known God who hath known himself”) is now available on line in 3 languages (English, French and Spanish), thanks to the generous assistance of Jonah Winters, at: http://bahai-library.com/kochmann_deepening_course_compilation

I hope you will be able to avail yourself of this opportunity to plunge more deeply in the Ocean of His Utterances!

Most respectfully,

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