

# Thousand Years Must Elapse

Examining a Tablet by 'Abdu'l-Baha

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A Tablet by 'Abdu'l-Baha addresses the present debasement of Persia and its future glory. It was translated by Shoghi Effendi and included in a letter from the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States. It was dated January 12, 1923. This is an extract from the Guardian's letter, followed by the full text of 'Abdu'l-Baha's Tablet.

"Only the other day, in the course of my study of various Baha'i documents[,] I came, as if by mere chance, across a very important message from our beloved 'Abdu'l-Baha, bearing no date, and revealing no sign as to exactly where, how and to whom it was given, written in the Master's own handwriting upon a leaflet that seemed ordinary and ill- preserved in appearance but which on close study proved of the profoundest interest to all believers in the East as well as in the West.

"As to the authenticity of these remarkable words, so clearly and forcibly written, there is no doubt whatsoever, and the measure of assurance it shall inspire the loved ones of Persia and the spirit of hopeful encouragement it shall breathe in the friends of the West, have urged me to communicate it to you, that, subject to your consideration and consent, it may be published amongst the friends and redouble their confidence in the very remarkable share the West is destined to contribute to the immediate spread of the Movement throughout the world. Recently, I have rendered it myself into English and enclosed is a copy of the full translation."

Here follows The Tablet of Abdu'l-Baha referred to in Shoghi Effendi's letter to the NSA of the United States dated 12 January 1923:

"A thousand years must elapse before Persia can, by the aid of material power, rise to the height of the peoples and governments of Europe. Baha'u'llah, however, has illumined that land and will surely raise her high in the eyes of all the world. That country shall

so advance and develop as to excite the envy and admiration of the East and the West.

"The land of Hedjaz, though deserted and sterile in its soil and its tribes ignorant and barbarous, yet the power of the Cause of God has made of such a spot a Point of Adoration and the Focal-centre of world devotion. How foolish are the people of the East to have incarcerated for well-nigh fifty years the like of this glorious personage! But for His chains and prison, Baha'u'llah by this time would have gained absolute ascendancy over the minds and thoughts of the peoples of Europe, would have made of Persia the Garden of Paradise, would have raised its sons in the esteem of mankind, nay He would have made it such that all peoples and governments would seek enlightenment from its people.

"Consider and reflect upon the result of my few days stay in London and the profound effect it has had here and in the surrounding regions. Ponder then in your heart, what the coming of Baha'u'llah would have achieved! Had He appeared in Europe, its people would have seized their opportunity, and His Cause, by virtue of the freedom of thought, would by this time have encompassed the earth. But alas! This Cause, though it first appeared in Persia, yet eventually it shall be seen how the peoples of Europe have wrestled it from its hands! Take note of this and remember it in future. Ultimately you shall see how it has come to pass. And yet behold! how the Baha'is are still persecuted by the people of Persia! "

Here, then, are some observations about this Tablet: The reference to "the Land of Hedjaz" may require a brief explanation: Known as al-Hajaz or Hijaz, it is Saudi Arabia; a desolate coastal desert region along the Red Sea in which the holy places of Mekka and Medina are situated.

Since everything authored by the Master, whether it was spoken or was in writing, is significant, it is a pity that the Guardian was unable to establish when 'Abdu'l-Baha wrote these observations.

However, the wording, especially the use of the word “*here*”, suggests that He wrote this Tablet while He visited London, England. ‘Abdu’l-Baha wrote: “*Consider and reflect upon the result of my few days stay in London and the profound effect it has had here and in the surrounding regions.*” He must have pondered what a huge influence Baha;ullah would have had on Western audiences had He been able to address them as He, ‘Abdu’l-Baha, had just done. The vital point ‘Abdu’l-Baha is making and which should be remembered when teaching the Faith, is: “*His Cause, by virtue of the freedom of thought, would by this time have encompassed the earth.*” Freedom of thought which alone promotes an independent investigation of truth is a pre-condition for spreading the Cause of God.

‘Abdu’l-Baha laments, “*Alas! This Cause, though it first appeared in Persia, yet eventually it shall be seen how the peoples of Europe have wrestled it from its hands! Take note of this and remember it in future. Ultimately you shall see how it has come to pass.*”

Equally significant is His prophecy that “*A thousand years must elapse before Persia can, by the aid of material power, rise to the height of the peoples and governments of Europe.*” Here one notices three things: He refers in the same breath to “*peoples and governments,*” clearly implying that it is the people who shape their governments. He then asserts that progress will be achieved “*by the aid of material power,*” meaning by science and technology. It reminds us of the bird of humanity which can only fly using both wings, the wing of religion and that of science. Religious fervor alone will not establish the Kingdom of God on Earth.

Elsewhere in His writings ‘Abdu’l-Baha has referred to science as “*the first emanation of God towards man*” and “*the means by which man finds a pathway to God.*” His warning that a thousand years will pass “*before Persia can....rise to the height of the peoples and governments of Europe*” seems to indicate that Persia’s deeply

entrenched opposition to the Cause of God and to the spiritual renewal it alone can bring the world, places a severe handicap on the country's future development. The great irony is that as a result of the persecution of the Baha'i Faith in Iran, the new powers this Faith has released for humanity are least reflected in the land of its origin. The fact that spiritual enlightenment is withheld from the persecutors seems confirmed by the following passage found in the Koran:

*“O ye who believe! make not your alms void by reproaches and injury, like him who spendeth his substance to be seen of men, and believeth not in God and in the latter day. The likeness of such an one is that of a rock with a thin soil upon it, on which a heavy rain falleth but leaveth it hard: No profit from their works shall they be able to gain; for God guideth not the unbelieving people.”*  
- The Qur'an (Rodwell translation), Sura 2.

Unwelcome as some of these thoughts may be, a slow and protracted development of humanity which the Tablet seems to be alluding to, corresponds entirely with pilgrim's notes that were taken in Haifa by Mr. William Allison in 1957. He was the last pilgrim before the Guardian travelled to London where he passed away in November of that year. The notes can be found in the Baha'i Library On-Line. The passage that records the Guardian's explanation seems to run exactly parallel to 'Abdu'l-Baha's mention of a period of one thousand years. It reads: “....Now the Baha'is are in the formative phase of establishing the administrative order of the „Plan“.....Near the end of the formative period the nations will unite of their own volition and with a non-concomitant expansion of the Cause become merged into the fabric of the World Order of Baha'u'llah. There will be another Manifestation before this will happen...”

One would have to assume that neither Iran nor any other nation would be left out when the nations of the world eventually “will

unite of their own volition.” But we are also told in the Baha’i Writings that “another Manifestation” will not appear before the lapse of at least one thousand years counted from the time Baha’u’llah had the first intimation of His Mission in Teheran’s Siyah Chal dungeon in 1852.

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