

The 'Irfán Colloquia, started in 1993, have since been held annually in North America and Europe and conducted in English, Persian and German. The aim and purpose of the 'Irfán activities are to foster systematic studies of the scriptures and theology of the world religions from a Bahá'í perspective and to promote scholarly studies in the sacred writings, verities, and fundamental principles of the belief system of the Bahá'í Faith.

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LIGHTS OF 'IRFÁN

Book Twelve



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Papers Presented at the 'Irfán  
Colloquia and Seminars

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Studies in the Principal Bahá'í Beliefs



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Colloquia and Seminars

Book Twelve



'Asr-i-Jadid Publisher  
Darmstadt, Germany

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*Lights of 'Irfán: Studies in the Principal Bahá'í Beliefs*  
Papers Presented at the 'Irfán Colloquia and Seminars  
Book Twelve

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**Sponsored by the Haj Mehdi Arjmand Memorial Fund**

General Editor Iraj Ayman

Manuscript Editors Omid Nolley and Jonah Winters

167 B.E. 2010 C.E.

ISBN 978-3-942426-08-4

Design & Layout:

Majid C. Nolley

[majidnolley.com](http://majidnolley.com)

*O My Name! The 'Day-Star of utterance,  
shining resplendent from the dayspring of divine  
'Revelation, hath so illumined the Scrolls and  
Tablets that the 'kingdom of utterance' and the  
exalted dominion of understanding vibrate  
with joy and ecstasy and shine forth with the  
splendour of His light, yet the generality of  
mankind comprehend not.*

*That which is conducive to the regeneration  
of the world and the salvation of the peoples  
and kindreds of the earth hath been sent down  
from the heaven of the utterance of Him Who  
is the 'Desire of the world. Give ye a hearing  
ear to the counsels of the Pen of Glory. Better  
is this for you than all that is on the earth.  
'Unto this beareth witness My glorious and  
wondrous 'Book.*

— *'Baha'u'llah*

Tablets Revealed After the  
Kitab-i-Aqdas pp. 199, 222

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## Preface

*Immerse yourselves in the ocean of My words, that ye may unravel its secrets, and discover all the pearls of wisdom that lie hid in its depths. Take heed that ye do not vacillate in your determination to embrace the truth of this Cause—a Cause through which the potentialities of the might of God have been revealed, and His sovereignty established. With faces beaming with joy, hasten ye unto Him. This is the changeless Faith of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future. (Kitáb-i-Aqdas ‘ 182)*

Bahá'u'lláh, in the above verses of the Most Holy Book, urges the believers to not only gladly embrace what has been revealed but to hasten to do so. The 'Irfán Colloquium and its publications are aimed at responding to this call by promoting and supporting deeper and more systematic studies in the Bahá'í texts and principal beliefs, as well as comparative studies of the religious traditions, schools of thought, scientific discoveries, and challenges facing humanity from the perspective of the Bahá'í Faith. A selection of the research papers presented and discussed at the annual sessions of the 'Irfán Colloquia convened in Europe and North America in English are published in the annual editions of the *Lights of 'Irfán*.

In 2008 on the occasion of the centenary celebration of the publication of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's *Some Answered Questions*, scholars were invited to prepare and present research papers on the topics and concepts that are elucidated in that book. So far, about seventy such presentations have been made at the 'Irfán Colloquia in English, Persian and German. Some of those papers written in English are gradually being published in the *Lights of 'Irfán*. In this volume the following articles belong to this category. "The Essence of Man: Towards a Bahá'í Understanding of Human Nature and Psychology"; and "The

Mystery of Divinity: A comparison of traditional views of Divinity to those in *Some Answered Questions*."

**"The Essence of Man: Towards a Bahá'í Understanding of Human Nature and Psychology"** is a commentary on a quotation taken from *"Gleanings of the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh,"* about *"the essence of man."* It attempts to provide an understanding of what is expressed by Bahá'u'lláh's announcement, in these few verses, that may change our understanding of the question "Who is Man?". Another paper in this category is **"The Mystery of Divinity: A comparison of traditional views of Divinity to those in *Some Answered Questions*,"** which is a comparative study on traditional views of Divinity and the elucidation found in *Some Answered Questions* by 'Abdu'l-Bahá'. It attempts to infer a new paradigm of spiritual evolution, and suggests a possible platform for philosophical dissertation regarding the influence of religion on secular matters in the modern world

In 2010 The 'Irfán Colloquium initiated a four-year program commemorating the centenary of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's travels to the West (1910-1913) by inviting presentations on the significance and impact of His visits in Egypt, Europe, and North America, as well as the themes and concepts elucidated by Him in His talks and press interviews. The papers presented in English on the occasion of this commemoration will be published in the *Lights of 'Irfán*. In this volume, the following articles are related to the travels and talks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá: **"The Travels of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and their Impact on the Press: A Survey"** and **"Preparing Bahá'í Communities in the East and West to Embrace Gender Equality."**

The presence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in western countries aroused great interest in the general public and in the media. Leading newspapers, journals, magazines and specialized periodicals paid considerable attention to the personality of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Bahá'í teachings that He was proclaiming. **"The Travels of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and**

**their Impact on the Press: A Survey**” is a preliminary survey of the news reports of the events related to His visit, and references to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá published in the Western press at that time. This survey also includes the impressions gained by His audiences, as well as the published accounts of private interviews and reports of His talks. The abandonment of racial, religious and nationalistic prejudices is one of the central issues in the talks delivered by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Paris. **“The duty of kindness and sympathy towards strangers and foreigners”** is an interesting comparative study of those talks as reflected in the recent Italian *“Charter on the Values and Significance of Citizenship and Integration,”* which upholds many of the concepts expounded by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá almost a century ago. **“Preparing Bahá’í Communities in the East and West to Embrace Gender Equality”** deals with one of the aspects of the impact of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s visits and talks in Europe and North America, i.e. equality of the rights of men and women. It attempts to describe the intricacies involved in, and the remarkable way He dealt with, this matter. It also examines some of His writings issued in honor of the Bahá’í women in Iran and North America, and the methods He used to utilize their energy and capabilities for the furtherance of the Cause of God. It further looks at the practical ways He educated the Bahá’í men of the time to accept women as their equals. Finally, it discusses the glowing results He achieved in a relatively short time.

The publication of studies on the comparison of various schools of philosophical thought and the Bahá’í teachings continues in this volume, in the second section of the paper on **“Neo-Platonism and the Bahá’í Faith.”** It summarizes and expands the ideas presented in **“Neo-Platonism and the Bahá’í Writings”** published in Book Eleven of the *Lights of ‘Irfán* in order to demonstrate how the work of Plotinus and his successors complements and offers new insights into the philosophy embedded in the Bahá’í Revelation. It aims at presenting the convergences and congruencies that improve our philosophical understanding of the Writings and concludes that in terms



of philosophical affinities, the philosophy embedded in the Bahá'í Writings is a unique type of objective idealism.

Publication of papers on the studies in the Writings of the Báb related to fine arts started in Book Eight of *Safíni-yi 'Irfán* (in Persian). Now, we are happy that the same topic is dealt with in English in **“Perfection and Refinement: Towards an Aesthetics of the Báb.”** It begins by describing what the author calls “composing arts,” that which artists produce in their mind and then transfer to paper, such as literature, both poetry and prose, and the composition of music. It describes how a rather large number of the Writings of the Báb were produced in a rapid and fluent manner which amazed those who witnessed it. The Báb as a performance artist, and the nature of some of His writings as pieces that are intended to be performed as much as read, as well as the concept of refinement that comes across very strong in both the person and the writings of the Báb, are delineated.

**“May flowers in the Ville Lumière: The dawning of Bahá'í history in the European continent”** is the account of the start of the Bahá'í community in Paris, which prepared the ground for 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visits to that city. It is written in a beautiful literary style and describes how a young American lady becomes the catalyst for the spiritual awakening of a group of early receptive believers. The paper emphasizes the mysterious ways through which they came to recognize the dawn of the new era on the European continent and in the whole world.

**“The Indispensability of Consultation for Ordering Human Affairs”** explains the unique features of Bahá'í Consultation. It was published in Book Eleven of the *Lights of 'Irfán* but in the process of forwarding it digitally certain sections were omitted in the text that was published. The complete text of the article is now included in this volume.

## Preface

The section entitled ELUCIDATIONS includes several items clarifying and elucidating issues and topics of interest to Bahá'í studies. The letter of the Bahá'í World Centre provides guidance regarding speaking on socio-political issues. The article by Mr. Ali Nakhjavani on **“Teaching the Cause of God -- A Double-Edged Sword”** is an enlightening explanation of one of the distinctive features of the Bahá'í Faith, that we cannot separate the spiritual life of the individual from the spiritual life of the community. **“A Commentary on Relativism and the Bahá'í Writings”** is further clarification on an article on the same subject, which was published in Book Nine of the *Lights of 'Irfán*. In comparing the two articles it is explained that in this debate we have two different conceptual worlds each perfectly self-consistent and understandable within itself but coming to different conclusions, using different criteria for what will count as evidence and what will count as decisive proof. In other worlds we have two universes of discourse, two paradigms, two realities or two different language games. Each side is looking at the subject from a different viewpoint and drawing different conclusions.

Appendix II presents a list of the topics of the papers published in previous volumes of the *Lights of 'Irfán*. It provides a preliminary familiarity with the range, types, methodological approaches and scope of the papers that are welcome to be presented at the 'Irfán Colloquia and be considered for publication in *The Lights of 'Irfán*. In addition to the papers presented at the 'Irfán Colloquia, research papers related to the main goals of the 'Irfán Colloquium are welcome to be directly submitted.

Starting with Book Six we have made two changes in the 'Irfán Colloquia's style guide. All “authoritative” publications are cited by an abbreviation; see Appendix I, “Bibliography of the Bahá'í Writings and Their Abbreviations Used in This Book.” Words of Prophets/

## Lights of 'Irfán Book Twelve

Manifestations, i.e. quotations from Sacred Writings, (not including statements by Shoghi Effendi or the Universal House of Justice), are italicized.

All papers in this volume present the views and understandings of their authors. The texts of the papers are published as provided by the authors. The writing styles and scholarly approaches are, therefore, different. Articles are published in this volume according to the alphabetical order of the author's surnames.

Iraj Ayman  
Chicago May 2010

# The Travels of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and their Impact on the Press

## A Survey

Amin Egea

The travels of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the West generated a great interest, not only among His followers but also in public opinion. Hundreds of personalities sought an opportunity to meet the Master in person and tens of thousands attained His presence at any of His many public addresses or read about Him in the press.

As part of an investigation of the first references to the Bábí and Bahá'í religions in the Western press, particular research has been carried out during the last decade on the attention that European and American journals dispensed to 'Abdu'l-Bahá and to the Bahá'í Faith during the period of His travels throughout the West.

So far, this research has brought to light nearly eleven hundred references made in journals, magazines and bulletins of the time. These documents offer indispensable insights into the impact of the figure of 'Abdu'l-Bahá on public opinion at the time, while comprising an important historical record of this momentous episode in the history of the Bahá'í Faith.<sup>1</sup>

It would be impossible, in the span of this article, to offer a complete review of all the references and accounts that have been gathered about 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Nevertheless, a few examples will be offered in the following pages.

Before proceeding, it is necessary to give a word of caution about the statements attributed to 'Abdu'l-Bahá in these accounts. It is impossible, except in a very few cases, to be certain that the words reproduced by the press were the actual ones expressed by the Master. On the one hand, it is impossible to know whether the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá were always translated with accuracy and precision; on the other, it is equally impossible to ascertain whether the notes taken by the journalists were a faithful transcription of what they had heard. Therefore, these documents, despite their interest and their coincidence, in many cases, with the general tone of the teachings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and of His communications, cannot, under any circumstance, be regarded as authoritative.

The references made in the press about 'Abdu'l-Bahá can be divided in the following categories, ordered from lowest to highest importance in terms of the information they can offer about the travels and their impact on public opinion.

## 1: General Reports on the Bahá'í Faith

The presence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the West generated many reports and articles devoted exclusively to describing and summarizing the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith and its history. These articles often included biographical notes about Him and were accompanied by His portrait. This category of references to 'Abdu'l-Bahá does not provide many insights into His travels but is very useful to estimate the volume of information about the Faith that the public received during His travels.

The length of these articles varies from full-page reports to brief texts such as this short article, sent through agencies under the title "Leader of Baháism Here", which offered a very brief description of

the lives of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, beginning with the following comments:

Abbas Effendi, known to his millions of followers as Abdul Baha, the leader of "Baháism," is now on a visit to America.

Never before in recorded history has one of the founders of an Oriental religious movement—since become world-wide—visited America. The personality and life history of one who has spent sixty years of his life in banishment, imprisonment and exile from his native land, makes a story of fascinating interest, vividly impressing upon the mind of the investigator the fact that the days of religious persecution are not ended, and that even in this modern age a drama has been, enacted which for human interest equals or surpasses Biblical history...<sup>2</sup>

## 2: Announcements and Advertisements

Some of the talks given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá were previously announced in the press. For instance, many of the talks that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was invited to give in churches were previously announced in the religious sections of local newspapers. At times, when a public meeting with 'Abdu'l-Bahá had been arranged by the Bahá'ís or by other organizations, paid advertisements were also inserted in local journals.

These kinds of references to 'Abdu'l-Bahá are of a very short extension. However, they contain important information such as the precise dates and times of some of His talks, the addresses of the places where He spoke, the title by which some of His talks were announced, the name of the pastor of the church or the chairman of the meeting that introduced the Master, and other details such as the names of others who may have shared the table with 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

For instance, on 5 May 1912, the *New York Times* published the following announcement of a talk that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was to deliver a week later to a meeting of the Peace Forum, in which Senator Towne appears as a co-speaker:

METHODIST EPISCOPAL

...

Grace 104<sup>th</sup>, near Columbus. 11- J. Campbell White speaks.  
8- Abdul Baha, Senator C. A. Towne, &c., speak.

### 3: General Accounts about 'Abdu'l-Bahá

Many were those who had the privilege of meeting the Master. Some of them later wrote vivid descriptions of their impressions about Him and, in some cases, reproduced parts of their conversations with Him. Of course, the accuracy and length of this kind of press references vary greatly.

This category comprises those accounts about the Master that do not focus on a particular event or episode during His travels but offer general descriptions about Him or about His impact on people.

For instance, the following notice published in the *Chicago Defender* about His first visit to Washington and His work for racial unity stands as an outstanding testimony of the extent of the transformation that 'Abdu'l-Bahá exerted on others:

**TO BREAK THE COLOR LINE.**

Abdul Baha, the Great Persian Philosopher and Teacher,  
Aims to Unite the Peoples of All Races and Creeds In One  
Great Bond of Brotherhood.

Washington, D. C. May—Abdul Baha (the servant of God), the great Persian philosopher and teacher, head of the Bahaists, will reach Chicago next Monday. He comes to bring hope to the colored people.

His visit to Washington has been a triumphal march. He has met and conquered Southern prejudices. He made addresses at Metropolitan A. M. E. church, at Howard University and at many of the white churches and halls and was listened to by many thousands of people of both races, who applauded his propaganda of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.

He was the guest of one of Washington's wealthiest women, one who moves in the most exclusive social circles at the capital, and yet her house has been thrown open to rich and poor and black and white. Southern people whose hearts were once filled with the most bitter prejudices against their brothers in black, have publicly acknowledged their change of heart and now they treat the colored people as brother indeed.<sup>3</sup>

#### 4: Accounts on Talks and Activities of the Master

Many of the articles published at the time offer us unique stories and accounts about some of the activities of the Master during His travels and particularly about His public addresses.

Newspaper representatives attended many of the public meetings at which 'Abdu'l-Bahá was invited, writing afterwards their chronicles for their journals. These chronicles offer interesting details about some of His talks, such as the number of participants at the meetings,



the reactions of the public, or the remarks made by the chairman to introduce the Master.

In some of the public meetings in which 'Abdu'l-Bahá took part, He shared the table with other lecturers, the names of whom are provided in some journals, along with a summary of their speeches, and sometimes their comments on the Master's words.

The accounts of the talks given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá range from reports of just a few lines summarizing what was said by the Master, to detailed articles quoting at length from His words or paraphrasing the entirety of His talk.

The following account published in the *Washington Bee*, for instance, gives us a vivid description about the reaction of the audience after His talk at Howard University:

#### **ABDUL BAHA**

##### Revolution in Religious Worship.

On Tuesday, April 23d, Abdul Baha, the venerable Persian, leader of the Baha movement, which has several millions of followers throughout the world, and is attracting considerable attention in Washington, addressed the student and faculty of Howard University. The occasion was impressive and most interesting, as in flowing Oriental robes this speaker gave his message. He was received with such fervor that the breathless silence during his address was followed by prolonged applause, causing him to bow his acknowledgments and give a second greeting.<sup>4</sup>

This account of the talk delivered at the Church of the Ascension on 14 April 1912, besides describing the general environment of the

moment, quoted from the words pronounced by Rev. Percy S. Grant in his introduction of the Master and paraphrased some of the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

**ABDUL BAHÁ PRAYS IN ASCENSION CHURCH**

Leader of Bahai Movement, Speaking in Persian, Pleads for  
the Oneness of Humanity.

**HIS APPEARANCE STRIKING**

Congregation Lingers After Service to See Him, In Oriental  
Robes, Enter a Modern Limousine.

In the Church of the Ascension, toward the close of the services, yesterday morning the big congregation knelt in the pews or stood in the aisle spaces with heads reverently bowed, and before the altar Dr. Percy Stickney Grant and his assistant, Mr. Underhill, knelt, while a venerable white-bearded Persian, clothed in his linen gaba and wearing his fez and his patriarch's tabouch, stood and offered up a prayer in his native tongue. This was Abbas Effendi, or, as his followers call him, Abdul Baha Abbas, the Persian philosopher and interpreter of the Bahai revelation, who has come to this country to speak at the Lake Mohonk Peace Conference the latter part of this month and to spread his gospel of the fundamental unity of all religions.

Dr. Grant was not the first clergyman to invite the Persian teacher, but his was the first invitation that Abdul Baha accepted, and there was little room left in Ascension Church when the 11 o'clock services began yesterday. As they progressed the venerable Persian took his place in the high-backed seat to the right of the altar, with Dr. Ameen Fareed, his nephew, standing by, ready to act as interpreter.

“It is to be our privilege this morning,” said Dr. Grant, “to hear one who has come out of the East, a new and great herald of good-will, one bearing a message of love to all mankind. Abdul Baha Abbas is a master of the things of the spirit. He comes from that part of the world where men meditate, where contemplation was born. He teaches the fundamental unity of all religions—a truth in which this congregation believes profoundly—and we welcome here one who may help the material fervor of the Occident to gain a new peace by the infiltration of the harmonies of the Orient.”

Abdul Baha spoke in Persian, with Dr. Fareed interpreting a phrase at a time. Our material civilization, the Persian teacher said, has progressed greatly with the perfection of the crafts and the forward steps of material science, but our spiritual civilization, that which is based on divine morals, has declined and become degraded. We should strive, he said, to make our material civilization the purest possible medium, the most unclouded glass, through which the light of our spiritual civilization must shine.

One of the things that supports a spiritual civilization is peace, he said, and the body politic is in need of universal peace, but the oneness of humanity, the human solidarity, which has been the message of all the prophets, will be achieved only through the spiritual power, for neither racial distinctions nor patriotism can further it. The oneness of humanity will come with the supremacy of the spiritual civilization, and not while, as now, we are submerged in a sea of materialism. The cause is progressing in the Orient, he concluded, and the heavenly civilization is daily making itself more manifest.

These things Abdul Baha said in the few moments that he spoke, before he returned to his seat beside the altar. While the offering was being taken those seated near the front could see him delving amid his robes, and finally his hand emerged with a bill that found its way to the plate. During the prayer he stood with his forearms extended, the palms of his hands turned upward, and as he finished he passed these over his eyes in a gesture that ended with the stroking of the patriarchal beard. A sense of the strangeness of the scene seemed to be with many in the congregation, and not a few lingered afterward to see the Persian philosopher, in his costume of the Orient, as he stepped into a modern Occidental limousine, to be whizzed uptown to his apartment at the Ansonia.<sup>5</sup>

There are also many descriptions of the impression that 'Abdu'l-Bahá left during His public appearances. A journalist who was present at the talk at the Ascension Church stated that "The venerable Oriental made a striking figure against the dark background of the chancel at the Church of the Ascension." A similar statement was made by a reporter present during the address that 'Abdu'l-Bahá delivered at the Church of Our Father in Washington on 21 April 1912: "The venerable Persian, with flowing white beard, his slender form enveloped in a long tail garment reaching to the floor; and his snow-white hair surmounted with a white turban-like head covering, made an impressive picture."<sup>6</sup> Introducing an article about the participation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá at the American Unitarian Conference held in Boston on 22 May 1912, the *Post* commented: "Attired in the flowing robes of his native land, the apostle of the Bahai movement made a great impression on his listeners, many of whom were clergymen from all over the United States and Canada. His remarkable face, long white beard and his expression of thought was in keeping with the universal principles of peace which the new religion stands for."<sup>7</sup>

Particularly important are those articles that give information about talks that were not transcribed by Bahá'ís and were therefore not included in any of the later volumes that compiled some of the talks delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the West. Thus for instance, thanks to an article published in the *Minneapolis Morning Tribune* on 23 September 1912, it is possible to conclude that the subjects touched by the Master in His talk at the Temple Shaari Tov were very similar to those expounded days later in the Temple Emanu-El in San Francisco.

It is important to note that sometimes more than one reporter wrote about a talk and thus sometimes different reports of the same event were published afterwards. This circumstance allows in some cases for a more complete and accurate perspective about what was said and what transpired during a certain meeting.

## 5: Talks of the Master.

In addition to offering accounts about the talks of the Master, some newspapers published complete transcripts of His lectures. For instance, the text of His address at the City Temple in London—the first public talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the West—was soon afterwards published in the *Christian Commonwealth* (London)<sup>8</sup> and then sent to America where it was published at least in the *Los Angeles Times*,<sup>9</sup> the *Buffalo Express*<sup>10</sup> and the *American* (Baltimore).<sup>11</sup> Another example of this is the talk given at the Emanu-El Temple in San Francisco, the transcript of which was published days later in a special number of the *Palo Alto*<sup>12</sup>—which also included the texts of other talks—and then sent to London where it was published in the *Christian Commonwealth*.<sup>13</sup>

Many other talks delivered in America, England, Scotland and France were published by the press, some of which remain unpublished in Bahá'í literature.

## 6: Interviews

The interviews granted by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to some journals and magazines are also an important repository of information about His travels. It would be very difficult to estimate the total number of interviews that 'Abdu'l-Bahá gave to the press, but it can be stated that He was asked to give interviews in almost every city He visited. In some cases, 'Abdu'l-Bahá would receive a group of journalists in a single meeting, answering all their questions at the same time. Thus, in the ensuing days, different journals would publish accounts of the same meeting and produce enough material to ascertain the reliability and accuracy of the accounts.

Some of those journalists who had the privilege of personally seeing 'Abdu'l-Bahá have left for posterity a broad range of descriptions of His appearance and personality, as well as the impression He left on them.

For instance, a reporter of the *Sun* of New York, who met 'Abdu'l-Bahá at Hotel Ansonia soon after His arrival in the city, described the Master in this way: "Abdul Baha is now nearly 68 years of age, but forty years in a Turkish prison have made him appear of greater age. He is of middle height, but has the appearance of a tall man because of his great carriage. His long gray hair flows over his shoulders. His broad beard and mustache are as gray as his hair. His forehead is broad, full and high and his nose is large and aquiline. Abdul Baha's eyes are blue and large, his glance is penetrating."<sup>14</sup>

A similar statement about His stature was made by Kake Carew (Mary Chambers)<sup>15</sup> in an article for the *New York Tribune*: “He is scarcely above medium height, but so extraordinary is the dignity of his majestic carriage that he seemed more than the average stature...”. Carew’s article was very sarcastic, as was her style. Besides a writer, Carew was best known for her caricatures and drawings of the personages she interviewed. As a matter of fact, the sarcastic and acid tone she employed in her articles made them also caricaturesque.

The first portions of her article about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá were a mockery of some of the people she met at the Ansonia, who were waiting to see ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. But in describing the moment she saw the Master and her meeting with Him, the tone of the articles changed radically. Her interview with the Master and her visit with Him to the Bowery Mission impressed her so highly that she concluded her article with the following statement: “as I went out into the starlight night I murmured the phrase of an Oriental admirer who had described him as *The Breeze of God*.”<sup>16</sup>

Another New York reporter, a representative of the *Times*, described the moment she entered ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s presence in this manner:

The reception room in his apartment was filled with flowers. There was not long to wait, for Abdul Baha is prompt and business like. In two minutes a young Persian opened a door and asked the reporter to enter.

A rather small man with a white beard and the kindest and gentlest face in the world held out a hand. In his brown habit he was extraordinarily picturesque, but one did not think long of that, for he smiled a charming smile and, walking before and holding his visitor’s hand, he led her to a chair. Then he seated himself in another chair, facing her, and spoke in Persian to the younger man, who interpreted.

And after reproducing some of the comments of the Master, she added:

The words delivered in this fashion, in short epigrams, took one miles and miles away from New York. Outside the window was Broadway; under the building the subway; downstairs was all the paraphernalia of a big hotel, but all these things were far less real than the picture the old teacher called up. The only things that seemed near were the mountains of Carmel, so near the Village of Nazareth, and the fields where the lilies grow more beautiful than Solomon in his glory.

The strangeness of it all, the manner of speaking, the curious language, the unfamiliar dress might well have made the listener awkward and ill at ease; but one does not feel awkward with Abdul Baha. The reporter had wondered just how to address him, but that seemed a foolish matter now. It really made no difference what you did or what you said, this kind old teacher would know that you meant well.<sup>17</sup>

A Washington reporter who was present at a reception held at the house of Mrs. Parsons described the Master as follows: "His features are finely cut, and as he talks he peers into the faces of his listeners to see if they comprehend his words. He chuckles to himself frequently, when he makes a good point. His brow is high, and he has every appearance of a deep thinker."<sup>18</sup>

A Chicago reporter describing His appearance stated: "His eyes, deep sunken beneath his shaggy eyebrows, flashed the vigor of a man who, despite his seventy years, might be said to have no age."<sup>19</sup>

Marion Brunot Haymaker, a columnist for the *Chronicle-Telegraph*, who met 'Abdu'l-Bahá at Pittsburgh stated: "And as you sit and watch him as he speaks, noting his sad, kind eyes, his body, old before



its time, his nervous hands, so full of sympathy, you cannot help but feel the personality of the teacher, and you believe, that truly he does represent hospitality, and truth, and that to be humble, to be reverent, to love all mankind are parts of him.”<sup>20</sup>

A reporter of the *Evening Standard* (London) also stated: “I was astonished that Abdul Baha Abbas notwithstanding the fact that he has passed the greater portion of his life in a prison, was able to show interest and sympathy about the details of the life of Englishmen. He asked me questions about my own life, and I described to him a journey which I had lately made to Russia. I found myself talking to him as to one who had been a friend always.”<sup>21</sup>

To some of journalists 'Abdu'l-Bahá offered His advice on journalism and the role of the media and its professionals. An article appeared in the Chicago *Daily News* describes in the following way the meeting of a group of journalists with the Master and His comments about the press:

Without the door of the Plaza hotel suite a dish of radishes and celery, sprinkled with water, was discovered. This was part of the breakfast of Abdul Baha, who has in company a Persian cook. On the door was a sign, which read:

“Don't ring the bell. Knock softly.”

One of the delegation knocked softly. Ameen Fareed opened the door and down a long corridor ushered the visitors to the room of “the master.”

“Marhaba!” said a voice from the sunshiny room, speaking the Persian word of welcome.

Abdul Baha looked at each of his visitors intently from under white, bushy eyebrows. His dark skin was interlaced with numberless fine wrinkles. He wore a gray-white beard. His forehead was high and surmounted by a fez turban of fawn and cream color. His rather long hair hung in a single curl over the nape of his neck and to his shoulder blades. He wore a fawn colored robe with a cream sash, striped with a simple delicate pink and blue stripe, over which was a black garment. On his feet were congress galsters.

He motioned his visitors to a seat and sat himself in a rocking chair near the bed. He allowed his glance to roam over the flower decorated room before he spoke through his interpreter...

“A reporter must be a purveyor of truth,” he said in Persian and Ameen Fareed translated. “The newspapers are leaders of the people and the people must be able to rely on what they read...”<sup>22</sup>

A representative of the *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia) described a conversation with the Master in which the subject of journalism was touched:

“Abdul Baha asks how many newspapers you have in this city?”

“Nine or ten, I think.” The information was transmitted.

The philosopher nodded and made a comment.

“Abdul Baha says that is very good,” volunteered the interpreter.

And there and then Abdul Baha, who is only a few months free from 40 long years imprisonment for the expression of

his progressive teachings in the fever-racked penal settlement at Akka, in Syria, delivered himself, of a series of maxims for American journals and journalists. They were punctuated by impressive pauses, and this is how interpreter Ahmed Sohrab passed them across from the vernacular:

“Newspapers are the mirrors that reflect the progression or the retrogression of the community.

“We may ascertain the progress or the retrogression of a nation by its journalism.

“If journalists should abide by their duties, they would be the promoters of many virtues, among the community. Truth and the virtues would be fostered. This would be so if they carried out the duties incumbent upon them.

“Journalists must serve truth.

“Newspapers must investigate the means for the progress of humanity, and publish them.

“Journalists must write significant articles, articles that shall foster the public welfare. If they so do they will be the first agents for the development of the community.

“From the days when newspapers were first published they have been the cause of progress; if they abide by their duties great will be the benefit forthcoming.

“Journalists must endeavor to make their organ a trustworthy agent, in order that their articles, may be effective in the hearts of the people and that the readers of these articles may be edified.”<sup>23</sup>

To the above mentioned Kate Carew 'Abdu'l-Bahá commented: "Remember, you press people are the servants of the public. You interpret our words and act to them. With you is a great responsibility. Please remember and please treat us seriously."<sup>24</sup> And to a *Christian Science Monitor* correspondent in London He said: "Those papers... which strive to speak only that which is truth, which hold the mirror up to truth, are like the sun, they light the world everywhere with truth, and their work is imperishable. Those who play for their own little selfish ends give no true light to the world and perish on their own futility. In carrying out the aims of your paper you are adding to the light. Go on, and let nothing stop you."<sup>25</sup>

Many times 'Abdu'l-Bahá was asked about His position on woman suffrage and His attitude towards the feminist movement. To a reporter of the New York City News Agency 'Abdu'l-Bahá said:

"The modern suffragette is fighting for what must be, and many of these are willing martyrs to imprisonment for their cause. One might not approve of the ways of some of the more militant suffragettes, but in the end it will adjust itself. If women were given the same advantages as men, their capacity being the same, the result would be the same. In fact, women have a superior disposition to men; they are more receptive, more sensitive, and their intuition is more intense. The only reason of their present backwardness in some directions is because they have not had the same educational advantages as men.

"All children should be educated, but if parents cannot educate both the boys and the girls, then it would be better to educate the girls, for they will be the mothers of the coming generation. This is a radical idea for the East, where I come from, but it is already taking effect there, for the Bahai women of Persia are being educated along with the men.

“We have only to look about us in nature,” ‘Abdul-Baha continued, “to see the truth of this. Is it not a fact that the females of many species of animals are stronger and more powerful than the male? The chief cause of the mental and physical inequalities of the sexes is due to custom and training, which for ages past have molded woman into the ideal of the weaker vessel.

“The world in the past has been ruled by force, and man has dominated over woman by reason of his more forceful and aggressive qualities both of body and mind. But the scales are already shifting—force is losing its weight and mental alertness, intuition, and the spiritual qualities of love and service, in which woman is strong, are gaining ascendancy. Hence the new age will be an ageless masculine, and more permeated with the feminine ideals—or, to speak more exactly, will be an age in which the masculine and feminine elements of civilization will be more properly balanced.”<sup>26</sup>

These comments were reproduced afterwards in many journals. To a representative of the *New York Tribune* ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said:

“If a mother is well educated, her children will also be well taught. If the mother is wise, the children will be wise; if the mother is religious, the children will also be religious. If the mother is a good woman, then the children will also be good. The future generation depends then on the mothers of today. Is not this a vital position of responsibility for women?

“Surely, God does not wish such an important instrument as woman to be less perfect than she is able to become! Divine Justice demands that men and women should have equal rights. There is no difference between them; neither sex is superior to the other in the sight of God.”<sup>27</sup>

In an interview for the *American* (New York), 'Abdu'l-Bahá was again questioned about the same subject:

Do you find men or women the more religious—quicker to accept the truths expounded by you?"

"Those who have intelligence and understanding accept our teachings no matter whether they are men or women. For they are all intellectual and logical principles, and they are for the good of all humanity.

"For instance, we say that the people of the world should love each other, should serve each other; they should become as members of one family; they should throw into the corner of oblivion national, religious, patriotic and commercial prejudices. They must put aside these narrow prejudices. They must become united, men and women; all.

"What do you think of the woman suffrage movement?"

Today women, on account of certain reasons, have not yet attained to the vigor of men. But these differences are only accounted for on lines of education. In reality there is no difference between men and women so far as their rights are concerned. They are all the children of one God. Both of them have capacities for progress.

"When we look upon the mineral, vegetable and animal kingdoms we see there both sexes. There is no difference between them in the animal and vegetable kingdom. Therefore, when the women are highly educated and cultivated, you will see that there will be no difference whatever in rights between the two sexes.

“Truly, America is facing toward progress. There is no question of this. America is also advancing wonderfully in spiritual and ethical principles.”<sup>28</sup>

Charlotte Despard, editor of the suffragist magazine *The Vote* (London), speaking about an address by 'Abdu'l-Bahá delivered at a meeting organized on London by the Women's Freedom League on 2 January 1913, stated:

It was a memorable occasion, which will leave its impress on all those who were present. Here we are not so much concerned with what was said then, or at other times, during the visit to London of this strange and beautiful human being who is called by his disciples “the Servant of God,” as with the spirit that, wherever he goes, seems to radiate from him.<sup>29</sup>

## 7: Articles and Letters by 'Abdu'l-Bahá

One aspect about the travels of 'Abdu'l-Bahá that is not fully known is the fact that, at the request of editors, 'Abdu'l-Bahá sometimes contributed to a publication with a letter or a tablet.

There are several instances of this in the *Christian Commonwealth* (London) but we can also find “articles” by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the *Independent* (New York), the *Asiatic Quarterly Review* (London), or the *International Psychic Gazette* (London) among others. Some of these texts were published along with photographs of the original Persian text.

Just before 'Abdu'l-Bahá's departure from America, Albert Dawson, the editor of *Christian Commonwealth* (London), requested from Him a contribution to be included in an special issue of the magazine

that contained several communications from religious leaders. The following was printed as a communication from 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

Convey my greetings to all your readers. I am extremely pleased and grateful for the attitude of The Christian Commonwealth, for its editor is indeed the servant of the world of humanity and the lover of universal peace. This noble editor is free from prejudice. Praise be to God that in America I established spiritual affinity between the hearts of various religions. It is my hope that through the favours of Baha'ollah contention and strife may be abandoned entirely by the followers of various religions. All of them may be welded together. In the Synagogue of the Jews I established the validity of his holiness Jesus Christ, and demonstrated the prophethood of his holiness Mohammed. The all listened most attentively. In brief, I said that the Christians did believe in Moses. They believe that Moses was the prophet of God. They believe that the Torah is the Book of God, and they all believe in the Prophets of Israel. Why should you not believe in Christ, acknowledging that Christ was the Word of God? What harm will come to you thereby? The result of this confession will be the entire disappearance of the prejudice which has been existing between the Christians and the Jews for the last two thousand years. When this address, delivered in the synagogue, is read, the reader will be most pleased and most enlightened.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to this, the press also reproduced or quoted from the text of the papers sent by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to international congresses to which He was invited—such as the Universal Races Congress held in London in 1911—or the texts of tablets sent to individuals like, for instance, the two letters sent to the businessman and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie.



\* \* \*

The references to 'Abdu'l-Bahá quoted previously are only a token of the type of references to the Master that were published during His travels. More than half of the known references were published in the United States. Many other references were published in Canada, France and the United Kingdom, totalling over three hundred. The references published in Germany and Hungary, although fewer in number, are also very interesting and illustrate other less known episodes of His travels.

However, it was not only the press of the countries blessed by the presence of the Master that echoed His travels. In practically all countries in Europe, from Spain to Russia, news were published about Him. In Latin America, articles were published in Argentina, Brazil and Mexico. Some journals in Australia and New Zealand reported on His visits to England. Even in Japan and South Africa mention was made of the Master in some publications.

NOTES

- 1 This research has been conducted in various public libraries like the British Library, the Bibliothèque Nationale of France or the Biblioteca Nacional of Spain as well as with documents received from the Library of Congress, the New York Public Library or the National Library of Canada, among others. It has also benefited from documents held in various private or institutional libraries like the Bahá'í Archives of the National Spiritual Assemblies of the United States, France, Canada and Germany and the Bahá'í World Centre International Library, as well as various Esperanto and Theosophical archives located in Spain and the United Kingdom. Different digitization projects and digital archives have also provided with an important number of documents related with this period in Bahá'í history.
- 2 The article was part of a section entitled "In the Limelight" and was published at least in the following journals: *National Democrat* (Des Moines, IA), 2 May 1912; *La Estrella* (Las Cruces, NM), 4 May 1912; *The Palo Alto Tribune* (Palo Alto, CA), 8 May 1912; *Marble Rock Journal* (Marble Rock, IA), 9 May 1912; *Gran Valley Times* (Moab, CO), 10 May 1912; *The Press* (Sheboygan, UT), 15 May 1912; *Cloverdale Reveille* (Cloverdale, CA), 15 June 1912; *The News* (Van Nuys, CA), 5 July 1912; *The Agitator* (Wellsboro, PA), 5 July 1912.
- 3 *The Chicago Defender*, 4 May 1912, p. 5, col. 1.
- 4 *Bee* (Washington, DC), 25 May 1912.
- 5 *The New York Times* (New York, NY), 15 April 1912, p. 9, col. 5.
- 6 *Washington Herald* (Washington, DC), 22 April 1912, Abdul Expounds Bahai Doctrine.'
- 7 *Boston Post* (Boston, MA), 23 May 1912.
- 8 *The Christian Commonwealth*, 13 September 1911, p. 850 (2)
- 9 *Los Angeles Times*, 1 October 1911, p. 21, col. 3, 'Persian Prophet Society Cult.'
- 10 *Buffalo Express*, 8 October 1911, p. 5, col. 4, Abdul Baha the Prophet.'
- 11 *American* (Baltimore, MD), 8 October 1911, p. 16, col. 2, 'London Bows at the Feet of a New Prophet.'
- 12 *Palo Altan* (Palo Alto, CA), 1 November 1912, p. 3, col. 1, 'Message to the Jews.'

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- 13 *The Christian Commonwealth*, 1 January 1913, pp. 263–264, col. 2, 'The Fundamental Unity of All Religions.'
- 14 *The Sun* (New York, NY), 12 April 1912, p. 5, col. 1, 'Disciples Hail Abdul Baha.' The article included a portrait of the Master in Paris.
- 15 Mary Chambers (1869–1960) is known for being one of the first female caricaturists in America. Her permanent section in the *New York World* and later in the *Tribune* and other newspapers became famous for her interviews with the personalities of the time. She used an incisive and sarcastic language and her texts were decorated with her drawings and caricatures of the personages interviewed.
- 16 *New York Tribune*, 5 May 1912, 1b.
- 17 *New York Times*, 21 April 1912, p. 14, "A Message from Abdul Baha, Head of the Bahais."
- 18 *Amerika Esperantisto* (Washington, DC), June 1912 (11:5), 'A Message from Abdul Baha,' pp. 19–20. The text was published years later in *Star of the West*, 7 February 1921 (11:18), p. 304, and later published in *Promulgation of Universal Peace*.
- 19 *The Chicago Examiner* (Chicago, IL), 1 May 1912.
- 20 *The Chronicle-Telegraph* (Pittsburgh, PA), 8 May 1912.
- 21 *The Evening Standard and St. James Gazette* (London, England), 8 September 1911.
- 22 *Daily News* (Chicago), 30 April 1912, 'Baha is Peace Herald.'
- 23 *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia), 10 June 1912, 'Persian Sage Pays Visit to this City.'
- 24 *New York Tribune*, 5 May 1912, 1b.
- 25 *The Christian Science Monitor* (Boston) 21 October 1911, p. 6, 'Leader of Bahaimism Talks about its Ethics.'
- 26 *Star of the West*, 28 April 1912 (3:3), p. 1
- 27 *The Woman Voter* (New York), June 1912 (3:5), 'Abdul Baha and Woman's Suffrage.'
- 28 *American* (New York), 14 April 1912. The interview was reproduced in *the Examiner* (San Francisco, CA), 20 April 1912.
- 29 *The Vote* (London), 10 January 1913 (7:168), 'Towards Unity,' p. 180.
- 30 *The Christian Commonwealth*, 11 December 1912, p. 206.

# The Essence of Man

## Towards a Bahá'í Understanding of Human Nature and Psychology

Wolfgang A. Klebel

### Towards Understanding Human Nature

This paper explores the new understanding of human nature promulgated by Bahá'u'lláh in the *Tablet to Mírzá Hádí*,<sup>1</sup> as translated by Shoghi Effendi in the *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*. In this passage, Bahá'u'lláh provides us with seminal insights into “*the essence of man*.” It begins with the following statement:

Consider the rational faculty with which God hath endowed the essence of man. Examine thine own self, and behold how thy motion and stillness, thy will and purpose, thy sight and hearing, thy sense of smell and power of speech, and whatever else is related to, or transcendeth, thy physical senses or spiritual perceptions, all proceed from, and owe their existence to, this same faculty. (GWB 163)

This paper will explore the philosophical and psychological consequences and implications of these verses.

It should be noted at the outset that towards the end of this passage, Bahá'u'lláh warns us that the soul, “*this divinely ordained and subtle Reality*”, which is endowed with the “*rational faculty*” cannot be understood at all and that “*thou wilt fail to comprehend its mystery or to appraise its virtue*.” (GWB 165) How, then, are we to examine the philosophical and psychological implications of Bahá'u'lláh's statements? The specific methodology used in this commentary follows

the principle of the hermeneutic circle, where the part is seen in the context of the whole and the whole seen in the context of the parts. This circular process of interpretation makes possible a tangential approach to the meaning of a certain passage and a fusion of the horizon of the text with the horizon of the interpreter.<sup>2</sup> The hermeneutic circle can be compared with putting together a jigsaw puzzle without ever having a final picture available and without ever finding a final solution. There is no final, definitive 'picture' or understanding of the soul, as is explained by Bahá'u'lláh when He said: *No understanding can grasp the nature of His Revelation, nor can any knowledge comprehend the full measure of His Faith* (KI 243). Therefore, our conclusions can only be temporary and provisional, even though they are able to shed light on the psychoanalytic and behaviorist understanding of man.

## The Essence of Man

The passage that we shall examine in detail starts with a statement about the essence of man:

*Consider the rational faculty with which God hath endowed the essence of man.*

This statement implies that the rational faculty is not the essence of man, but that the essence of man is *endowed* with the rational faculty. The rational faculty is one of the endowments or attributes of the essence of man. In philosophy, 'essence' refers to:

The basic or primary element in the being of a thing; the thing's nature, or that without which it could not be what it is.<sup>3</sup>

We will use the last of these definitions here. Essence is "that without which a thing could not be what it is." The word 'thing' does not only

refer to material things; it can also refer to non-material “intellectual realities” (SAQ 83) like ideas or love. The definition of essence as “that without which a thing cannot be what it is” underlies ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statement that

*Some think that the body is the substance and exists by itself, and that the spirit is accidental and depends upon the substance of the body, although, on the contrary, the rational soul is the substance, and the body depends upon it. If the accident—that is to say, the body—be destroyed, the substance, the spirit, remains. (SAQ 239)*

‘Abdu’l-Bahá shows the essential nature as well as the accidental—non-essential—nature of the body, making the soul the substance, i.e. that on which the body depends for its existence. It is clear that soul constitutes the body; without the soul, the body would not be human. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statement also implies a dualism between the physical and spiritual in man—and this is exactly what ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asserts elsewhere:

*The human body is, like animals, subject to nature’s laws. But man is endowed with a second reality, the rational or intellectual reality; and the intellectual reality of man predominates over nature. (FWU 51)*

Because the soul is not “subject to nature’s laws” but “predominates over nature,” the soul or essence of man cannot be defined or explained in material or bodily terms.

Elsewhere, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá clearly distinguishes the rational faculty from the essence of man by describing the three realities in man, describing first the outer or physical reality of the human body which we have in common with animals (FWU, 50). Then He describes the second reality, “the rational or intellectual reality; this

intellectual reality of man predominates over nature (FWU 51). Finally, in this passage, He adds a “third reality which Bahá'u'lláh has called the essence of man:

*Yet there is a third reality in man, the spiritual reality. Through its medium, one discovers spiritual revelations, a celestial faculty which is infinite as regards the intellectual as well as physical realms. That power is conferred upon man through the breath of the Holy Spirit. (FWU 50)*

In the following statement, 'Abdu'l-Bahá does give us an interpretation explaining the philosophical relationship between these different realities in man. What is called instrument of the essence or soul is seen as quality visible in the external side of man.

*The inner essence of man is unknown and not evident, but by its qualities it is characterized and known. Thus, everything is known by its qualities and not by its essence. Although the mind encompasses all things, and the outward beings are comprehended by it, nevertheless these beings with regard to their essence are unknown; they are only known with regard to their qualities. (SAQ 220)*

According to this statement, the soul or essence of man is unknowable in itself, but is characterized and known by its qualities. This allows us to know the soul through its attributes or qualities yet guards its essential nature by preventing us from knowing the soul-in-itself.

It is important to note that Bahá'u'lláh uses various names for this essence, such as spirit, mind or soul:

*Say: Spirit, mind, soul, and the powers of sight and hearing are but one single reality which hath manifold expressions owing to the diversity of its instruments. (SLH 154)*

In other words, spirit, mind or soul are words that refer to the essence of man. However, indirectly, so do other concepts such as the powers of hearing and sight, which means that the power essential to the senses and the rational faculty belong to the same single reality, which can also be called, mind, soul or human spirit. It is clear that Bahá'u'lláh means the "rational faculty" in the same sense as He uses the terms "Spirit, mind, soul, and the powers of sight and hearing," since later in our text He declares that "thy sight and hearing ... owe their existence to this same faculty."

Our next step in understanding what the Writings say about the rational soul requires us to recall that Bahá'u'lláh explains that the rational faculty belongs to the essence of man which is "one single reality." The necessity of a single reality underlying the human body is demonstrated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the following passage:

*For example, interaction and co-operation between the constituent parts of the human body are evident and indisputable, yet this does not suffice; an all-unifying agency is necessary that shall direct and control the component parts, so that these through interaction and co-operation may discharge in perfect order their necessary and respective functions. (TAF 21)*

From this, we may conclude that the essence of man is one single reality. All what we know about it are its qualities or the bodily instruments this essence uses. On the other hand, the essence's qualities and their names very often stand for the essence of man itself. Therefore, when we say mind, or the rational faculty or soul or spirit, we try to indicate with these words the essence of man, for which we have no real name, as it is unknowable. Spirit and soul seem to be the most appropriate terms for this essence as they do not indicate a very specific understanding, while the power of the senses, the mind, or the rational faculty are one step further away from the essence of man and closer to what 'Abdu'l-Bahá calls the qualities by which we



know the essence of man. It is important to keep this understanding in mind, and to apply it to all further statements about the essence of man. Of course, we must not confuse the plurality of instruments this single reality uses to express itself with the single reality-in-itself, nor must we forget that what Bahá'u'lláh calls "instruments" are called "qualities" by 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Bahá'u'lláh describes the relationships between soul and spirit when He says, "*Know, furthermore, that the life of man proceedeth from the spirit, and the spirit turneth to wheresoever the soul directeth it.*" (SLH 153) In this passage, spirit as well as soul are different names for the *essence of man*, which is *one single reality*. Furthermore, Bahá'u'lláh describes the functioning of this *one single reality* and uses the words soul and spirit in describing what this reality does, or, in other words, how it "inspires" and uses the instruments of the body by using the spirit. The spirit is the aspect of *this reality* that gives life to man, the soul is that aspect of *this one single reality* that directs this reality to different instruments and activities.

'Abdu'l-Bahá talks about the spirit more extensively: He refers to "*five divisions of the spirit.*" The first is the "*vegetable spirit which results from the combination of elements*"; the second is the "*animal spirit which also results from the mingling and combination of elements*" but is more complete; the third is the "*spirit of man*" which "*has two aspects: one divine, on satanic*" and may either acquire virtues or vices. The fourth division of spirit is the "*heavenly spirit*" which is the spirit of faith and the bounty of God; it comes "*from the breath of the Holy Spirit,*" and leads to acquiring perfections. Finally, there is the "*Holy Spirit*" which is the mediator between God and His creatures. (SAQ 153)

Note that the vegetable spirit and the animal spirit are a combination of elements; consequently, they are contingent and not lasting. Man in his body has the same animal spirit (SAQ 143). Therefore, the body is mortal, while the *one single reality*, the human soul and spirit,

is not. Of course, we must remember that Bahá'u'lláh clearly states that the body, in its senses, and mind, in its receptive and expressive functions, is inspired by the soul or human spirit.

Additionally, Abdu'l-Bahá makes clear that the rational faculty, the mind, the soul or the human spirit is not a material thing and cannot be physically located in the body.

*The rational soul, meaning the human spirit, does not descend into the body—that is to say, it does not enter it, for descent and entrance are characteristics of bodies, and the rational soul is exempt from this. (SAQ 239)*

Since the soul does not enter or leave the body, i.e. is exempt from the physical processes, it cannot be material. This undermines any concepts which portray the soul as entering or leaving the body in a 'materialistic' manner.

Based on the foregoing materials, we can draw five conclusions about the soul or spirit. First, all created reality is spiritual and material in different combinations. Atoms are held together by the power of attraction, which, according to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, is a spiritual quality.<sup>4</sup> On the vegetative and animal level of reality, the combination of elements is caused by the vegetable or animal spirit; in humans, the spiritual substance is primary and its physical aspect is an accidental emanation of this spiritual essence.

Second, in any higher organized spiritual reality there are the lower spiritual levels present, so that 'Abdu'l-Bahá can say that the human body is a result of the animal spirit. The unique distinction of the human reality is that it is substantially spiritual.

Third, the essence of man is unknowable; it is known by its qualities only and in its use of the bodily instruments.

Fourth, because the essence of man is unknowable we use the different qualities in a metaphorical sense to speak about this essence, using terms like mind, soul, spirit, rational faculty, power of the senses, power of speech and others.

Fifth, reality is primarily spiritual; physical reality is an emanation from spiritual reality.

### Examine Thine Own Self

After informing us that the essence of man is “endowed” with the rational faculty, Bahá'u'lláh invites the reader to discover more about the essence of man by self-examination. This self-examination is not conducted by studying modern psychology or philosophy; we are invited to look into ourselves by following Bahá'u'lláh's guidance:

*Examine thine own self, and behold how thy motion and stillness, thy will and purpose, thy sight and hearing, thy sense of smell and power of speech, and whatever else is related to, or transcendeth, thy physical senses or spiritual perceptions, all proceed from, and owe the existence to, this same faculty.*

Bahá'u'lláh here talks not about the essence of the self, but about its qualities which He enumerates as the qualities of the self. These qualities of the self are known by the instruments used by the essence of man or of that which is here called the rational faculty. The following qualities are what can be seen and observed: (a) *motion and stillness*; (b) *will and purpose*; (c) *sight and hearing, the sense of smell*; (d) *the power of speech*; and (e) *whatever else is related to or transcended, your physical sense or spiritual perception*.

This enumeration is representative and not exhaustive; the senses of touch and taste, for example, are omitted here but mentioned

elsewhere (GWB, 194). Note further that the faculties mentioned are of a different order. Sight, hearing, smell are receptive/passive senses while will and purpose are active. What could be the reasons for this?

In the following, we will first discuss the different opposites and their meaning and then try to relate them to each other.

## Motion and Stillness

The phrase “*thy motion and stillness*” deliberately uses a polarity in which words with opposite meanings are placed together to suggest a deeper meaning. While contradictory, these two concepts point towards unification in wholeness in a “Unity in Diversity.” The theme of “motion and stillness” occupies an important place in the Writings. In the following quote, for example, the active force is opposed to the recipient element, but both work together to generate reality, i.e. “the world of existence.”

*The world of existence came into being through the heat generated from the interaction between the active force and that which is its recipient. These two are the same, yet they are different.* (TB 140)

In this passage, the basic oppositional forces of the cosmos are different and the same, in other words, opposite yet integrated. Moreover, their difference and integration are constitutional principles of *the world of existence*.<sup>5</sup> If something is the same and different at the same time, that can only mean it appears as different from one viewpoint, yet is integrated from a different point of view, therefore, it can be called the same. The word integration indicates that both sides of the oppositional realities are preserved and thus still opposed to one another: they are integrated, not in spite of, but because they are *the same, yet they are different*.

Elsewhere, Bahá'u'lláh explains motion and stillness of all things in its relation to the *Divine Unity*, which is the *Object of Adoration*. Here the hearts of the righteous find *rest and composure*, in other words, their life's movement results in stillness of the heart.

*It is by virtue of their movement that all things are set in motion, and by reason of their stillness all things are brought to rest, would that ye might be assured thereof! Through them the believers in the Divine Unity have turned towards Him Who is the Object of the adoration of the entire creation, and by them the hearts of the righteous have found rest and composure, could ye but know it! (SLH 9)*

*“The hearts of the righteous have found rest and composure”* could mean that in all the motions of this world and in all the changes and chances of this life, stillness and motion are integrated in the heart. It is important to note that motion and stillness are both and equally signs of creation through the Word or the Divine Logos, and that both motion and stillness are endowments from the Creator.

Generally, only motion, the ability to move, to live, to work and to produce is regarded as a gift. This raises the question of what is meant when both the active and the passive side of man, i.e., the motion and stillness, are valued equally and come to rest in the heart of the believer. Further, what does it mean that the same motion and stillness are attributed by Bahá'u'lláh to the Manifestations or the Divine Messengers of God as Their “twofold nature?”

*Why remain despondent when the Pure and Hidden One hath appeared unveiled amongst you? He Who is both the Beginning and the End, He Who is both Stillness and Motion, is now manifest before your eyes. Behold how, in this Day, the Beginning is reflected in the End, how out of Stillness Motion hath been engendered. (GWB 168)*

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*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. (GWB 66)*

The polarity of motion and stillness is not only a sign of creation, it is also a gift, which all created beings receive from the Manifestations, Who participate in the same dynamic, and Who bestow it on the world of creation:

*Know thou moreover that all else besides Him have been created through the potency of a word from His presence, while of themselves they have no motion nor stillness, except at His bidding and by His leave. (TB 109)*

This dynamically integrated structure of motion and stillness is additionally a gift that enables us to participate in the Divine Pleasure whenever we accept the belief in the Manifestation and let our human motion and stillness be wholly directed by God.

While the integrated opposition of motion and stillness applies to all human beings, its quality changes drastically and substantially whenever the Light of the Manifestation is reflected—through faith in the Manifestation—in the mirror of the human heart. Bahá'u'lláh in a mystical description compares this event with a Master appearing in His home:

*For thus, the Master of the house hath appeared within His home, and all the pillars of the dwelling are ashine with His light. And the action and effect of the light are from the Light-Giver; so it is that all move through Him and arise by His will. (SVFV 22)*

This could be understood as indicating that the motion and stillness of men is elevated, or resurrected, i.e., they move, they arise when

touched by the Divine Light, by the Divine Spirit of the Revelation. This is caused when God's Revelation descends into the human heart, seen as the center of the rational faculty or soul of man.

Let us now examine these ideas in the light of modern psychology to see if we can find vestiges of these ideas. The fact that the human life is accentuated by its beginning motion and ending stillness, i.e., by life and death, was noted by Sigmund Freud as well. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Sigmund Freud discusses two principles fundamental to human nature: the "pleasure principle based on the life-drive (Lebenstrieb), or Eros, and the death-drive (Todestrieb), later called Thanatos after the Greek word for death. Obviously the life-drive is analogous to motion and the death-drive analogous to stillness. It is interesting to note that Freud could see these drives at work by analyzing his patients, but could not integrate them into his analytic psychology in any systematic fashion, so he called it a speculative assumption. The same failure recurs when Freud discusses the will and purpose. His scientific, i.e. materialistic, understanding of what he observed would not allow him to unite Eros and Thanatos into an integrated whole.

A similar interesting parallel has been found by the Institute of HeartMath,<sup>6</sup> where positive thoughts result in coherence of the body, and especially of the heart. During states of coherence the opposing systems – the sympathetic and parasympathetic branches of the Autonomous Nervous System – are united and this state can be measured by harmonious heartbeat variations. Coherence in these functions causes a strong and healing influence on the whole body. Such positive states of the heart can be induced deliberately by feelings and imaginations of love and acceptance. These findings, while scientific and experimental, correspond well with the above mentioned statements of Bahá'u'lláh:

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*It is by virtue of their movement that all things are set in motion, and by reason of their stillness all things are brought to rest, would that ye might be assured thereof! Through them the believers in the Divine Unity have turned towards Him Who is the Object of the adoration of the entire creation, and by them the hearts of the righteous have found rest and composure, could ye but know it! (SLH 9)*

The opposing dynamic of motion and stillness comes to rest through the belief in the Divine Unity, just like in the experiential practice of positive emotions the heart comes to rest in coherence of the Autonomic Nervous System, which influences the whole body.

### Will and Purpose.

Will and purpose are not basic structures of created beings like motion and stillness; rather they address another essential aspect of man, i.e. the purpose driven and will directed aspects of our progressive nature. This personal aspect has to be understood as a universal principle, in the sense that the whole universe has a purpose, is created and sustained by the Will of God. Contrary to the Darwinian vision of nature, the universe is not accidental and has meaning and purposes, despite superficial appearances. In short, Divine Providence is the basis of nature:

*Say: Nature in its essence is the embodiment of My Name, the Maker, the Creator. Its manifestations are diversified by varying causes, and in this diversity there are signs for men of discernment....*

*Nature is God's Will and is its expression in and through the contingent world. It is a dispensation of Providence ordained by the Ordainer, the All-Wise. Were anyone to affirm that it is the*



*Will of God as manifested in the world of being, no one should question this assertion.*<sup>7</sup> (TB 142)

This statement fully describes the essence of nature as being created by God's Will, and being diversified by "varying causes." It refers to both the overall meaning of the world as Creation as well as the development of creation, including all the diverse causes that promote progress and purpose of the universe. These causes include not only the efficient cause, which is the sole region in which science operates, but also Aristotle's formal, material and final causes; the last of these is the most important because it provides the goal and purpose of creation. Without knowing the final cause of things, we cannot really understand them or their meaning.

In *Some Answered Questions*, 'Abdu'l-Bahá refers to Aristotle's theory of four-fold causality: "the existence of everything depends upon four causes—the efficient cause, the matter, the form and the final cause" (SAQ 280); see also Aristotle (Metaphysics 1013a). These are also found in Bahá'u'lláh's Writings, albeit using different terminology. The material cause and the formal cause are described by Bahá'u'lláh when He talks about the world of existence and its origin:

*The world of existence came into being through the heat generated from the interaction between the active force and that which is its recipient. These two are the same, yet they are different.* (TB 140)

The *active force* can be compared to Aristotle's formal cause and its *recipient* would be the material cause. The interaction of these causes of existence creates heat, or energy, and this may well indicate that energy is part of the origin of being, as modern physics certainly would confirm. These two causes are as well described in our text when movement and stillness are mentioned; it is another way to describe this fundamental polarity of the world of existence.

In contemporary science only the efficient cause is recognized since that is what we study in the experiments and use in technology. Bahá'u'lláh was well aware of the role of the efficient cause in the material world:

*Every thing must needs have an origin and every building a builder. Verily, the Word of God is the Cause which hath preceded the contingent world—a world which is adorned with the splendours of the Ancient of Days, yet is being renewed and regenerated at all times. (TB 141)*

Here we observe that the Word of God is the efficient cause affecting the material world and that this efficient cause acts in continuously regenerating the world. The latter idea calls to mind quantum physics, which holds that particles constituting the atom are constantly flashing into and out of existence.

However, this process is not without purpose, or, as Aristotle called it, the final cause, which is what moves all things, including man, towards certain goals. This is the foundation for man's consciously deliberative nature, i.e. free will. In a deterministic and reductionistic worldview, of course, free will and purpose do not exist even for man. For example, in the Darwinian worldview, evolution has no purpose but is a product of accidental changes and the survival of the fittest. This mechanistic and deterministic understanding of man and his world has been the prevalent philosophical substructure, not only of science but also of the movements of the last century like Psychoanalysis and Behaviorism in psychology, materialism in philosophy, and Racism and Communism in politics. These latter two have amply demonstrated their destructive effects on all of humankind.

To the present writer it seems that Bahá'u'lláh teaches that human life is dominated by four principles: motion and stillness as the static underlying structure, and will and purpose as the dynamic element

in the contingent world of creation. An analogy could be made to space and time, in which all material things seem to be placed, even though in quantum mechanics space and time are a function of materiality, not the place where matter is. In this analogy, space would correspond to motion and stillness, almost like in scholastic philosophy form and matter, and will and purpose would correspond with time as the two dimensions of reality. Man is constituted and dominated by these two dimensions. Motion and stillness are the ever present and ultimately defining constituents of a created being, while will and purpose are the driving factors in this structure, giving life meaning and direction, from the beginning to the end.

It could be said that these four human states are qualities structuring the human soul; they are signs of creation and explain the essence of being human. In short, they are that “without which man could not be man.” One might even surmise that the biblical statement that man is created in the image of God has to do with this fourfold structure of the human soul, as will be shown below.

When comparing Bahá'u'lláh's understanding of man to Freud's, we find that Freud was deterministic and, therefore, excluded any concept of purpose. On the other hand, his actual experience in treating humans contradicted his world-view. This is evident in that freedom and sublimation are important concepts of psychoanalysis as the goal of treatment, and yet these concepts did not get any theoretical discussion in the Freudian system, as was described in this author's dissertation.<sup>8</sup>

It is important to recognize that according to Freud human freedom needs to be elicited during therapy so that “where id was ego shall be,” or in other words, the deterministic, instinctual and animalistic aspect of man has to be ordered and sublimated by the rational faculty of man, which in Freudian terminology is the ego. One could say that analytic therapy becomes a purpose-driven activity in which the

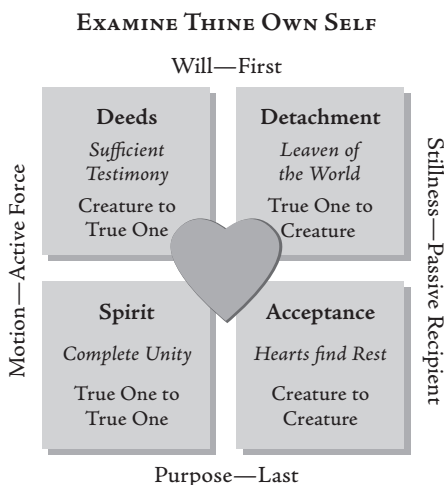
analyst helps the patient to replace the primitive instincts and their repressions and neurotic symptoms by a rational process to find a sublimation of the instincts on a higher and more spiritual level.

In behaviorist psychology, as presented by Skinner, the situation is even more radical. The existence of free will is totally denied and human action is described in the strict “scientific” sense of cause and effect. Aristotle’s concept of efficient cause was accepted as the only kind of cause existing in reality. Furthermore, Skinner claimed that there is nothing like mind or soul. These he swept aside into the “black box” of the brain of which nothing can be known. Man becomes a creature of his senses and strictly follows stimuli impinging on him. Re-organizing these stimuli is the only task of therapy. The paradigm for this process is the pigeon in the “Skinner box”. The question of why Skinner developed this theory and what stimulated him to this arduous process remains ignored by him, since there is no purpose or freedom in his system. While it is true that man is often determined by external stimuli and can be manipulated by them, is that really the whole reality of man, or even the highest of his faculties?

This question leads us to another: how can Freud’s and Skinner’s theories be understood from a Bahá’í perspective? In the words of Bahá’u’lláh, the tension between movement and stillness needs to be overcome by will and purpose; moreover, the higher level of sublimation is the Divine Spirit, or the gift of Revelation through the Manifestation as the Best Beloved of the human soul. What follows is an attempt to re-frame some of the ideas of the Freudian and of other therapeutic schools and to place them into the context of the Bahá’í Scriptures.

Below is a diagram, which unites the two opposites of stillness and motion in a whole, and a dynamic figure, which provides a possible solution to the problem of “What is the Self?” In this figure the four aspects of the self—Motion and Stillness, Will and Purpose—present

the organizing frame and determine the four quadrants into which four human attributes are placed, that is Deeds and Spirit on the side of Motion and Detachment and Acceptance on the side of Stillness.



Along with these four themes, some brief text from the Bahá'í Writings will explain them. The four lines from the Báb's "Remover of Difficulty Prayer" round out the picture. A similar picture has been presented in the previous papers of this author, for example based on the four states of man, as found in the Seven Valleys of Bahá'u'lláh. (SVFV 27)<sup>9</sup>

### Sight and Hearing, Sense of Smell

After having determined the four-fold structure of the self, we turn our attention to the senses. The traditional five senses are sight, hearing, touch, smell, taste: a classification attributed to Aristotle. Humans are considered to have at least five additional senses that include: nociception (pain), equilibrioception (balance), proprioception & kinesthesia (joint motion and acceleration), sense of time, thermoception (temperature differences), with possibly an additional weak magnetoception (direction), and six more if interoceptive senses are also considered.<sup>10</sup> Most recently, the heart has been counted among the sensory organs as well; it certainly is the center of the interoceptive senses monitoring the whole body, but seems to have additionally a perceptive function connecting the heart with much more than the body, being the seat of intuition.<sup>11</sup> All of this is presently in the state of exploration.

Bahá'u'lláh mentions only three of the senses here, but in His and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Writings the other of the five senses are mentioned as well, such as touch or taste.<sup>12</sup> We can conclude that this enumeration is not exhaustive but exemplary and includes all the senses of the human being, may they be counted as five, ten or even more. Bahá'u'lláh in his frequent references to the heart in His Writings does not describe the heart as a sensory organ directly, but speaks of the eye of the heart and the ear of the heart in a metaphorical sense. Yet, the possibility that some of these metaphorical statements are really related to some biological and sensory functions of the heart cannot be avoided.

Senses are the physiological instruments of perception of the outside environment and inside world of the human body. We could add to these perceptive instruments the expressive instruments of the body, such as movement, odors, electromagnetic field of the human heart,<sup>13</sup> and other ways through which the human body communicates actively with the environment. At this point, the physical or physiological modes of perceptive and expressive communication are indicated. Bahá'u'lláh in other places includes expressive communication movement such as *man's power to comprehend, move, speak, hear and see*, in the following words:

*Say: Spirit, mind, soul, and the powers of sight and hearing are but one single reality which hath manifold expressions owing to the diversity of its instruments. As thou dost observe, man's power to comprehend, move, speak, hear, and see all derive from this sign of his Lord within him. (SLH 154)*

This human ability to move is not only used to communicate with other humans, but it also changes and restructures completely the human physical environment, and actively creates human culture and civilization. Through this ability, the human mind has totally changed the world in which we live through construction,

agriculture and other more subtle ways, at least as far as the civilized portions of the world are concerned. The other result of this activity is usually called the cultural realm, through which the inter-human relations are developed. This mainly happens through verbal and non-verbal communication.

Today all of these non-verbal communications are subsumed under the word "body language." This, together with speech, is mentioned by Bahá'u'lláh next when talking about "*the power of speech*," which can be described as the highest form of communication between humans.

### Power of Speech

The last of the enumerated instruments of the rational faculty is the power of speech or the Word. Not only does the word go from man to man, but the Word also goes from God into the world as stated in John 1:1: *In the beginning was the Word*. Bahá'u'lláh uses this quote from the Gospel in many places, as has the Báb and the interpreters of the Writings 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi.

The reason why the power of speech is mentioned seems to be in order to describe not only the highest function of the rational faculty in this physical world, but also to indicate where the connection of the human word with the Divine Word has to be placed. It is a function of the soul, but is expressed in man's power of speech, prayer and the praise of God.

This connection between the hearts of men and heaven is created by the Word, which unlocks the world of humanity to the revelation from heaven, as expressed in the following Word of Bahá'u'lláh:

*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. (TB 173)<sup>14</sup>*

Bahá'u'lláh follows this enumeration with an all-inclusive statement that everything which relates to *physical senses or spiritual perception* originates from the rational faculty or soul of man.

### Whatever else is related to, or transcendeth

Returning to the quotation from Bahá'u'lláh at the beginning of this paper, (GWB 163–166) and its recommendation to examine ourselves, we read:

*Whatever else is related to, or transcendeth, thy physical senses or spiritual perceptions, all proceed from, and owe their existence to, this same [rational] faculty.*

The main point in this rather difficult sentence is that all, not only the previously mentioned instruments and structures, proceeds from this rational faculty and owes their existence to it. This statement does not refer to the physical senses only, but also to what transcends these senses and perceptions.

In this passage, Bahá'u'lláh describes the importance of the human soul in a far-reaching way. The soul, the mind, the spirit or the rational faculty of man is the origin and the power creating, sustaining and animating all that is human. All senses, all powers of action and communication of man, all spiritual perception and all striving towards transcendence come from this rational faculty. Nothing, absolutely



nothing, in the human person is just physical, just material, just organic, or just biological. Consequently, everything human, even the human body, is much more than just material. The whole human person is animated by the soul and, as we will see in the next section, could not exist or function even for a moment without this animation.

We can only present some of the conclusions that may be drawn from Bahá'u'lláh's statement. For example, all that the Holistic movement strives to understand has already been expressed in the Bahá'í Revelation. Once again, we realize that it will take a total overhaul of philosophy, psychology, medicine, anthropology and a true revolution in science to incorporate these insights into a new understanding of ourselves.

## Unique Features of Human Nature and Soul

The next section of our initial quote from Bahá'u'lláh describes closer the connection of the soul with its bodily instruments.

*So closely are they related unto it, that if in less than the twinkling of an eye its relationship to the human body be severed, each and every one of these senses will cease immediately to exercise its function, and will be deprived of the power to manifest the evidences of its activity.*

At first view, it appears the various bodily instruments are closely connected with the soul. Closer examination, however, reveals something diametrically different from our initial impressions.

Usually, we regard the human senses as identical in nature to the senses of higher animals. In fact, biologically and physically, they are equal; no physical differences can be detected. They function the

same way, get sick the same way and research cannot find a substantial difference, even in the connection of the sense organs to the brain. Consequently, animal research can be used to understand human sensual functioning even though the animal sense organs are more capable than their human counterparts are. Sight in eagles and smell in dogs far surpasses human capacity.

But what does Bahá'u'lláh mean when He says that *each and every one of these senses will cease immediately to exercise its function* when the senses lose their relationship with their rational faculty? Does that not mean that when the soul, the human mind, or the rational faculty no longer animates these senses, they will immediately stop functioning? According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *This human body is purely animal in type and, like the animal...* (PUP 417) consequently this body dies when the animation ends. This fact suggests that the body, even though animal in nature in itself, is different from other animal bodies by virtue of being animated by the rational soul, which is the power behind all of the bodily senses and abilities of man.

Does it mean that the senses of man, while often inferior to the animal senses, have a property that distinguishes them essentially from the animal senses? Moreover, if so, what is this special quality that differentiates the senses of animals from the senses of man? Obviously, the difference is not in that part of the senses which is physical. This power of the senses must be a single, spiritual reality, which can be referred to by various terms depending on the bodily function this reality uses as instruments to express itself.

If this single reality uses, for example, the ear, the person hears; if the eye is used the person sees. Obviously, this power of the senses is not in the sense organ itself, neither is it in the brain, so it must be in the mind or, alternatively, we could say it must be in the soul. The difference between the eye or the ear of an animal and of a human person is in the activity of the human mind or in the rational faculty;

consequently it is not in the body at all. We might also say that the same instrument—the eye of the animal or human—is used by a different faculty, in the case of man by the rational faculty or human soul, and in the case of an animal by its sensual faculty or animal spirit. In both cases the instrument is the same, the users are different. This is comparable to the identical gun being used by a hunter, by a soldier, a murderer, or by a target shooter. The user's purpose, intention and the outcome are different even though the instrument used is the same.

For example, what is different when an animal or a human sees something? A simple household example illustrates the difference. One of the desert plates was chipped. Were I to use this plate to present food to my wife or to a guest they would immediately notice it and feel offended. If I use the same plate for my cat, the animal will not be able to notice the difference between a whole plate and a chipped plate at all.

In other words, animals see the same thing as man, but they see it only sensually. They do not see it as a whole or a part of a whole, placing it rationally in the different relationships of things and of their use in space and time. It would be interesting to follow this difference into other actions and perceptions of animals compared with humans; usually they are described by the difference of instinctual and reactive action of the animal compared with the intellectual and creative function of the same sense in a human person.

This difference could be described by the fact that the animal's senses are limited by their function and usefulness, while the human use of the senses includes this animal functions, but goes much farther, including relationships of many kinds, from the simple usefulness to the beauty and value of a thing. This can be further expanded into the intellectual use of the seen object, and even into philosophical considerations, as a being of a certain kind and as having meaning for

man in many different ways. The difficulty in this consideration is the fact that the human use of the sensual experience includes most of the animal uses as well, though most of the time we are not aware of the difference at all. Thus, it is difficult to point out this difference and explain it.

The difference between the animal body and its senses and the human body lies in this spiritual aspect of man, which `Abdu'l-Bahá in the following passage describes with the words *intellection* or *ideation* and the *process of reason*.

*It is an evident fact that the body does not conduct the process of intellection or thought radiation.<sup>15</sup> It is only the medium of the grossest sensations. This human body is purely animal in type and, like the animal; it is subject only to the grosser sensibilities. It is utterly bereft of ideation or intellection, utterly incapable of the processes of reason. (PUP 417)*

A very similar thought is expressed in the following quote of `Abdu'l-Bahá, where this single reality, called the *all-unifying agency* or *soul*, makes the continuation of life possible. The human body is described as being unconscious of this agency, but is subject to its influence, or in other words, is the instrument this reality uses, discharging its *functions according to its will*.

*For instance, the various organs and members, the parts and elements, that constitute the body of man, though at variance, are yet all connected one with the other by that all-unifying agency known as the human soul, that causeth them to function in perfect harmony and with absolute regularity, thus making the continuation of life possible. The human body, however, is utterly unconscious of that all-unifying agency, and yet acteth with regularity and dischargeth its functions according to its will. (TAF 13)*

We note that 'Abdu'l-Bahá describes the human soul as *all-unifying*; the difference between the animal and the human spirit or soul is the quality of unity. Animals are unified on a biological and sensual level, while man is unified on the physical level but also on a superior or spiritual level.

In the Tablet to August Forel 'Abdu'l-Bahá adds another important element, stating that the human body discharges the function of this spiritual reality according to its will. The human will is therefore described by 'Abdu'l-Bahá as part of the soul, or part of this single unified reality and *all-unifying* reality. According to this statement we can logically attribute the human will to the human soul, which is also called rational faculty, intellection, ideation or process of reason.

Even more concepts are unified in this *inner*, the soul as a single all-unifying reality. In the following statement the human mind and imagination are added to its powers in addition of those of the senses. The perceptive senses, such as the *ear* and *eye*, are mentioned along with the expressive senses which execute the human will, as for example the *hand* and *foot*. Our initial quote from Bahá'u'lláh mentions *speech* (GWB 166) as well.

*For instance, the hand, the foot, the eye, the ear, the mind, the imagination all help the various parts and members of the human body, but all these interactions are linked by an unseen, all-embracing power, that causeth these interactions to be produced with perfect regularity. This is the inner faculty of man, that is his spirit and his mind, both of which are invisible. (TAF 22)*

'Abdu'l-Bahá also tells us that the human spirit is independent from the body and its functioning. However, the body is unaware of this spiritual reality, as stated above by 'Abdu'l-Bahá where He says: *The human body, however, is utterly unconscious of that all-unifying agency.* Body and soul have to be differentiated:

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*This great power must evidently be differentiated from the physical body or temple in which it is manifested. Observe and understand how this human body changes; nevertheless, the spirit of man remains ever in the same condition. For instance, the body sometimes grows weak, it becomes strong or stout, sometimes it grows smaller or may be dismembered, but there is no effect upon the spirit. The eye may become blind, the foot may be amputated, but no imperfection afflicts the spirit. This is proof that the spirit of man is distinct from his body. (PUP 259)*

Several important conclusions can be drawn from these statements:

Biologically, the human body does not differ from the animal body. Since science only deals with and accepts physical and biological evidence, it cannot find any difference between the human and the animal body. Medical research on animals is applied to the human body.

All the physical laws governing the physical body apply equally to the human and animal body. Any difference between man and animal cannot be demonstrated by physical means.

Nevertheless, the difference between human and animal is not only accidental, but also substantial. Without the spirit or soul, which is responsible for these differences, the human body cannot exist.

In order to explain this situation we have to postulate that the spiritual realm is different from the physical realm. However, this does not negate or change the physical realm, but rather elevates it or sublimates it into a different sphere.

This fact can be compared with the situation of an atom in a molecule. The atom is not negated or even changed, but by being connected with other atoms and molecules it expresses different properties. Hydrogen and oxygen behave differently when they combine to form

H<sub>2</sub>O. When the combination is dissolved, the original atoms appear unchanged. This is true for every different area of life.

Science only explores the physical aspects of man. Medicine only deals with our biological aspects, as does psychology, which presents itself as dealing with behavioral health and not mental health. The mind is excluded. Indeed, the whole area of the spiritual, of the mind, the soul or the spirit of man is not only excluded from consideration but is flatly denied. One could apply 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement that human science "*is utterly unconscious of that all-unifying agency.*"

In conclusion, we may say that the unity of man essentially and metaphysically differs from the unity in the animal, vegetative or mineral world. The human unity, however, is more inclusive and includes the lower unities of the vegetable and animal.<sup>16</sup>

## Soul, Psyche, Psychology and the Human Body

In further discussion about the relationship between body and soul, the Bahá'í Writings assure us that the defects of the body do not affect the soul. Bahá'u'lláh explains what happens to consciousness and personality when the body is not functioning, as in *fainting*, or suffering *severe illness*. He relates these situations to death, where the body is permanently disintegrating into its physical parts. Answering a question, He first presents this rhetorical question:

*...how is it, thou hast observed, that whereas such slight injuries to his mental faculties as fainting and severe illness deprive him of his understanding and consciousness, his death, which must involve the decomposition of his body and the dissolution of its elements, is powerless to destroy that understanding and extinguish that consciousness? How can any one imagine that man's consciousness and personality will be maintained, when*

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*the very instruments necessary to their existence and function will have completely disintegrated? (GWB 153)*

The answer to this question is given in the next paragraph, where it is clearly stated that the fate of the body does not at all affect the soul or the spiritual part of man, i.e., the essence of man. Illness and dysfunction of the body is a hindrance interposed between soul and body, but does in no way affect the soul.

*Know thou that the soul of man is exalted above, and is independent of all infirmities of body or mind. That a sick person showeth signs of weakness is due to the hindrances that interpose themselves between his soul and his body, for the soul itself remaineth unaffected by any bodily ailments. (GWB 153)*

Here Bahá'u'lláh states that the soul is above and independent of all infirmities of *body or mind*. This raises the question of what is the mind. Mind can be understood here as memory and awareness, as expressed by Bahá'u'lláh in the following statement: *It behoveth every soul to consider and call to mind* (SLH 126). Psychologically, mind is used as that function of the soul that uses the mind as an instrument for memory and awareness. Therefore, the infirmities of the mind affect memory and awareness. Applying these ideas to psychology we need to ask what that means concerning mental illness. Does this statement of the soul not being affected by the infirmities of the body apply to the infirmities of the mind as well, especially infirmities which can be observed in mental illness?

According to a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi about psychiatry (which can be understood to include psychology and other mental health therapies) we read the following:

*Psychiatric treatment in general is no doubt an important contribution to medicine, but we must believe it is still a growing*



*rather than a perfected science.* (UD 248)

Reflection on the Guardian's statement leads us to ask, 'What is mental illness?' Is it physical, a biological dysfunction or something spiritual or mental? Different schools of psychology give different answers to this question, some even saying the question makes no sense. Another question concerns the moral or ethical dimension of mental illness. When this issue is examined it calls into question our understanding of human nature, of who we are essentially. Furthermore, we will inevitably have to reflect on the development of man and the function of learning and education during his development. Finally, we must also consider the issue of free will and moral responsibility. However, in the scope of this article, we can only present the issues concerned with free will, human development and learning.

'Abdu'l-Bahá dedicated significant portions of His writings to proper child-rearing and education and its influence on our lives. He differentiates between civilized and uncivilized people by the standard of knowledge and science, i.e., by education; He introduces divine civilization in this context:

*It has been ascertained that among civilized peoples crime is less frequent than among uncivilized—that is to say, among those who have acquired the true civilization, which is divine civilization—the civilization of those who unite all the spiritual and material perfections. As ignorance is the cause of crimes, the more knowledge and science increases, the more crimes will diminish.* (SAQ 272)

The reason for this difference is the level of education and virtue: "The reason is evident: it is because education and virtues prevent them". In the following quote, 'Abdu'l-Bahá goes further, comparing the soul and its powers with light coming from a lamp:

## The Essence of Man

*Consider the light of the lamp. Though an external object may interfere with its radiance, the light itself continueth to shine with undiminished power. In like manner, every malady afflicting the body of man is an impediment that preventeth the soul from manifesting its inherent might and power. When it leaveth the body, however, it will evince such ascendancy, and reveal such influence as no force on earth can equal. Every pure, every refined and sanctified soul will be endowed with tremendous power, and shall rejoice with exceeding gladness. (GWB 153)*

Two very important issues are mentioned. First, when there is an impediment between the lamp and the eye, the light itself is not affected. The soul is in the same position as the lamp; it is not affected by what happens to the body, and functions independently of the instrument it uses. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says,

*Defects in the body or its members do not imply defects in the spirit. This leads to the accurate conclusion that if the whole body should be subjected to a radical change, the spirit will survive that change; that even if the body of man is destroyed and becomes nonexistent, the spirit of man remains unaffected. (PUP 259)*

The soul's independence from the body is clearly established in these words.

The question remains, what does this mean practically in everyday life? First, it means that every human life is to be respected and valued, no matter if there is mental or physical illness. Furthermore, we should always respect everybody for the value of his or her soul, and not necessarily for his or her acts. This understanding of our essential spiritual identity is the basis of Christ's injunction to love our enemies. It equally sheds light on the behavior of Bahá'u'lláh

and `Abdu'l-Bahá in relating to the enemies of the faith and Their extensive tolerance and forbearance towards them.

We shall next describe how this new understanding of the soul can be applied to findings in psychology and in the treatment of mental disorders, at least in the treatment of a specific disorder.

### Towards Understanding Bahá'í Psychology

In this section a clinical case history of Dissociative Identity Disorder will be presented first, and then this understanding will be integrated into the Bahá'í understanding of the soul.

About psychology, the Universal House of Justice of the Bahá'í Faith states,

*Psychology is still a very young and inexact science, and as the years go by Bahá'í psychologists, who know from the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh the true pattern of human life, will be able to make great strides in the development of this science, and will help profoundly in the alleviation of human suffering. (MUHJ63)*

This paper attempts to make some cautious and preliminary steps towards the development of psychology, which, according to the Universal House of Justice, will make great strides in the future.

Before this writer presents a case from his practice—and this is done with permission of the patient and in appropriate disguise—some of the findings of this paper are recalled. According to Bahá'u'lláh, the rational faculty is an endowment of the essence of man. This essence can be called soul or spirit and is manifest only in the bodily instruments it uses or, as `Abdu'l-Bahá states, in its qualities. This essence of man is a single reality and is “*the splendour of God's Most Great Sign*

*in their heart.” (KA 176) Bahá’u’lláh reveals it is “a mystery among His mysteries,” (GWB 160) which is to say, it is unknowable.*

*Wert thou to ponder in thine heart, from now until the end that hath no end, and with all the concentrated intelligence and understanding which the greatest minds have attained in the past or will attain in the future, this divinely ordained and subtle Reality, this sign of the revelation of the All-Abiding, All-Glorious God, thou wilt fail to comprehend its mystery or to appraise its virtue.*

*Having recognized thy powerlessness to attain to an adequate understanding of that Reality which abideth within thee, thou wilt readily admit the futility of such efforts as may be attempted by thee, or by any of the created things, to fathom the mystery of the Living God, the Day Star of unfading glory, the Ancient of everlasting days.*

*This confession of helplessness which mature contemplation must eventually impel every mind to make is in itself the acme of human understanding, and marketh the culmination of man’s development.<sup>7</sup> (GWB 165)*

In these passages, the soul is called a “divinely ordained and subtle Reality” and further described as “this sign of the revelation of the All-Abiding, All-Glorious God” which we will “fail to comprehend its mystery or to appraise its virtue.” This failure to be able to comprehend is called helplessness, yet it is described as the “acme of human understanding, and marketh the culmination of man’s development.”

We must always keep this understanding of the essence of man in mind in psychology and especially in individual therapeutic cases.

We cannot know the soul in itself; we only know about it from what it manifests through the instruments of the body and in the qualities it exhibits.

## Psychological Identity or the Self

What does it mean to say that psychologically we consider a human person as having a unique identity, which is often called her/his personality? Every sane human person knows who she or he is and keeps that psychological identity throughout life.

The case material of a patient with Dissociate Identity disorder presented here will first be discussed according the presently available understanding of this mental disorder. After that it will be examined in light of the principles of the Bahá'í Faith, which, at least for this author, shed light on this aspect of psychology.

From the moment a child says "I" and can talk to another person as a "You," this knowledge of identity will not change. Before that age, the child is defined by others; he calls himself by the name he is called. Therefore, he is John or she is Susie; they do not know that they are a self; they are who they are called. Only when she discovers the self does she come to herself. The self has no meaning except when defined by and in contrast to others. Later in life, some mental diseases seem to make a person forget his or her identity or take on other identities, for example amnesia, where persons do not remember anything about themselves, yet if the amnesia is lifted, or the mental illness controlled through medication, the old identity returns, so it was there all along.

This leads to the question, 'What is it that gives a person his or her identity?' It is known that the human body changes over time, so

the atoms constituting the body are not the same after some years. Consequently, the identity or personality of the human person cannot be based on its physical constitution. If not the body, we have to look for another basis for this identity. Could it be memory? Alternatively, may it be its brain structure? Some have compared it with the software in the computer, but that does not seem possible since if the hardware changes, the software is usually lost. When amnesia or severe mental illness affects the mind, the identity is not destroyed—perhaps hidden or veiled—but it will come back as soon as the mind returns to its earlier functioning.

We could postulate that the self is based on the structure of the body, which can remain the same, even if the particles and cells constituting this structure change. Then the question remains, 'What gives the body this particular structure that we call human?' There is no solution to this question if we think in reductionist terms, which reduce everything to its parts. Since this is the methodological principle of science, science has not found a place for the self of human beings, and cannot find it as long as science remains bound to the reductionistic methodology, which works well in science but cannot prove anything that is beyond the scientific discourse.

One mental disorder could shed some light on this question. It is presently defined as Dissociative Identity Disorder, and was previously called Multiple Personality Disorder. This psychologist treated many patients with this disorder over many years, at times with full recovery. First, the psychiatric definition of this disorder will be presented here; then a special case will be described more extensively. This will assist in answering the question about the human nature and identity, which is the focus of this study.

Wikipedia defines Dissociative Identity Disorder in this way:

**Dissociative identity disorder (DID)** is a psychiatric diagnosis found in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM IV) that describes a condition in which a person displays multiple distinct identities or Alters (known as Alter Egos or Alters), each with its own pattern of perceiving and interacting with the environment.

In the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems the name for this diagnosis is **multiple personality disorder**. In both systems of terminology, the diagnosis requires that at least two personalities routinely take control of the individual's behavior with an associated memory loss that goes beyond normal forgetfulness; in addition, symptoms cannot be the temporary effects of drug use or a general medical condition. There is a great deal of controversy surrounding the topic.

### Case of Cathy

The case of Cathy (not her real name) will be presented here as an example of Dissociative Identity Disorder. The case is presented with her permission. It is selected because, during therapy, this patient demonstrated an unusual level of self-awareness and her different Alters (Alter egos) spoke freely about it. Other cases of this disorder will be mentioned for explanation of specific points. After several months of treatment of Cathy's depression, suicidal tendencies, anger and emotional instability, it was discovered that the young lady, who was in the process of finishing high school, had periods of time she could not remember, even though she continued to function.

Her family reported that during these times, which she could not remember later on, she was behaving childishly and sometimes like

a young teenager, and at other times got unusually angry and unreasonable. There was one suicide attempt reported and several times she had cut herself. At that time the therapist had already established a good working relationship with this patient and, suspecting dissociative identity disorder, he could, with a simple hypnotic procedure, elicit the different identities, Alter-Egos or Alters and talk with them. The goal was to unite them permanently.

Four Alters came out over time and talked to the therapist. A child of seven, whom we will call here Elsie, and the companion of Elsie, who is described as a "Zombie," who is eating herself up and this is understood quite literally. Then there is a young teenager about age thirteen, whom we will call Lucky, and her twin, whom we will call Anger. In fact, this last Alter told the therapist that she has no name. She is just the twin of Lucky, so the therapist called her Anger according to her prevailing emotional state, which name was accepted by all of them.

Cathy asked one of her parents to be present during the sessions and they were very surprised when they listened to this strange personality panorama. There is no way that this patient was pretending; too many incidents happened about which the different Alters spoke to the therapist but Cathy did not.

For example, Elsie told the therapist the name of her elementary school; later, after going back to the patient, she could not understand how he could know the name of the school, since it had never been mentioned in therapy. Another curious incident occurred: when the father during the session asked his daughter when and how she learned to swim, she had no memory and could not answer the question. When little Elsie was asked the same question by the therapist, she simply explained that her older brother had taught her to swim. When this was later told to the patient, she broke out in laughter and described how her older brother had thrown her into



the deep end of the pool and told her to swim if she wanted to survive, and she dog paddled to shore. Now she remembered the whole incident. Her surprise at this memory was obvious, the pleasure she got out of the story was apparent, and her exuberance about this memory was expressed in the style of a much younger child.

It needs to be noted here that, in approaching this case, the therapist had several advantages. The therapeutic alliance was well established with this patient, he had extensive experience in treating this disorder and his understanding of the human psyche was inspired by working on the issue of the soul in the Bahá'í Writings. When the history of this case was taken, it was found that there was no severe child abuse in this family, neither sexual nor physical; there was some harsh punishment and there was severe domestic violence between the parents.

Another important issue to be mentioned here is the fact that after several sessions dealing with the different Alters, their different personalities were more and more established; for example, it was found out that Anger functioned differently than the other two and that Zombie never talked but acted just like a zombie. When Elsie and Lucky were out, the patient afterwards did not remember anything that had happened. This changed during therapy where the Alters became more and more knowledgeable of each other and listened in on each other.

When Anger was active, Cathy was aware what she was doing in acting out, but Cathy felt like somebody else had taken over her body and acted, doing things like trying to throw herself bodily out of a window, or cutting her body with a knife. Obviously, she had not told anybody before about these feelings of some strange entity taking over her actions.<sup>17</sup> She did not want to be regarded as "crazy." Once she understood the situation better, she told the therapist and did not mind one of her parents listening to it as well.

As therapy developed, Elsie eventually revealed what was the starting point of her existence. At the age of seven at a big family gathering, her parents were arguing in front of all the guests. Her father wanted to her leave with him, but she wanted to stay with her mother and she screamed, refusing to go into the car. In front of all the guests, her father then forced her mother to leave with them, and sometime later the argument escalated to physical violence including bloodshed. Cathy had recurring nightmares about that event, which were detailed and explicit, and she never realized that this had really happened until Lucky told the therapist of the event. When Cathy was told she remembered the dreams.

At that point, Elsie separated in order to allow Cathy to continue functioning as “normal” in the family. The partner of Elsie, Zombie, seemed to have started at the same time, taking over the guilt for having caused this violent situation by her screaming, so Zombie is eating herself—a good metaphor for guilt feelings.

Lucky and her twin Anger separated at the age of about 14, after the husband of a cousin, who at that time lived with them, had made sexual advances to the teenager, who eventually had to take a knife and fight him off. The following are quotes from Lucky, who separated together with Anger at that moment and told this to the therapist. Her account is given almost verbatim.

“In 7<sup>th</sup> grade a husband of a cousin who lived with us always tried to be close to me, sniffing in my ear and touching me. One day he came closer, held me and I was afraid, so I bit him and hit him and took a knife.”

“Anger and I (Lucky) were together. We did not know that there was somebody else in the mind. Later we felt that there was somebody else around. We looked for her and found Elsie. So we started to build rooms in the mind, Elsie got

the room with the window, so she can see the world. We have different worlds in our mind—everything is different—we walk around, only coming out in the dreams of Cathy, we open doors, she can remember these things, which are mostly bad things.”

“When we found Elsie she was with Zombie, her hair was falling out; she was eating herself up and was beginning to deteriorate. Anger does not allow her to know how she really looks in the world we have created.”

“Anger feels if Zombie would know how she looks like inside of the brain, it would ruin the process of getting us together now. My job is to fix her up now.”

Actually, in the beginning, the therapist could convince Angry to promise to stop her self-destructive actions such as suicidal attempts and cutting. This promise was kept and no further intrusion in Cathy’s life happened from that Alter. Cathy reported in the next session that she had not gotten angry during the last week. Then the following scene developed.

During this session, when little Elsie was called upon, she talked about herself and when asked about Lucky, she stated that she cannot contact her. When asked about Anger, she said she is outside, behind the window and does not listen. She pointed at her head about the right temple to indicate where the window was. A graduating high school student would never say something like that, but a seven-year-old child can say such things and nobody would be surprised.

When she was asked if Zombie is outside too, she said no, she is in the room with me, but does not talk and behaves like a zombie. Additionally, she stated that she was sick because she has touched Cathy (meaning Zombie), who was sick also. Then Anger was

contacted and she did not open her eyes, because she could not see, stating that Cathy has taken her sight away. While these descriptions make no sense, they were similar to a dreamlike presentation, even though Zombie was described as sleeping, and Elsie the Alter was wide awake and telling this.

During the talk with Anger, something unusual happened. When Anger was asked to look at her father, she said she cannot see anything. Then Anger tried to explain what had happened to change the relationship between the different Alters. It should be remembered here that the therapist had in previous sessions explained to all of them and to the patient that they should unite, and had explained the benefits that they all would have, if the patient can use the strength and personality of all of them in a positive way, and better solve her problems in living. They all, especially the patient Cathy, had declared that they would like to do that, but did not know how.

What Anger said was remarkable. She tried to explain what it means that Cathy has taken from her the ability to see. She said:

“Cathy has broken up the soul and split the different parts, so that I have less now.”

It needs to be noted that this statement expresses a very important insight, namely, that Anger recognized that the Alters are parts of a “broken” whole. Before that time, every Alter believed itself to have a soul, or an independent identity. Here we have a change in the self-perception of this Alter.

Before this time, the Alters believed they are unique and independent, at least during the time they are out; they talk about the others as if they were different persons. They regard the others as totally different and not connected, or even as not existing. This was the situation Cathy had before, when she did not know what happened during the

time Elsie or Lucky were out, or who the identity was that made her angry and suicidal.

This dissociation can go so far, as in another case of this therapist, that all the Alters told the therapist that the prevailing Alter, which was the one being out most of the time, should kill herself, so they could get rid of her in order to get rid of her troubles. When the therapist tried to convince these Alters not to do that, because when one dies all would be dead, the Alters laughed at him and did not believe this. In fact, after the session this person tried to kill herself by running into oncoming traffic. Fortunately, this suicide could be prevented by warning the secretary of the precarious inner state of this patient.

This is mentioned to explain that the Alters perceive themselves as not physically connected with each other, and the insight of Anger in this case was a progress in the process of unification. They have a different body image of themselves, no matter what their eyes can see, and will not give up their self-perception as to age, looks and other physical properties in spite of evident differences.

Another important conclusion can be drawn from this discussion. The need for personal unity, for being one and having one identity, is extremely strong in the developing human child and remains strong throughout life. When the child cannot unify what happens to her, as in our case, this strong propensity, this natural tendency, will lead the child to develop more than one identity, and separate them from each other to save this predisposition of oneness, in spite of the impossibility to achieve this natural state. Our Alter, who talked about the soul being broken up, actually expressed its sadness over losing the identity she had before. She felt that now she was only a part, that she has lost her identity in the same way she lost her vision. This is especially true, because she does not know yet how to integrate with the other parts into a real identity and unity of herself.

While trying to explain that, the therapist responded and applied the newly gained understanding from the Words of Bahá'u'lláh, naturally without mentioning religion. He explained first to Anger and then to Cathy that the soul cannot be broken up, but the instruments, which the soul uses, can be broken up. The understanding that there is a unified and unifying principle on the basis of all the multiplicity of identity was presented first to the Alters and then later to the patient. In therapeutic terms, it became clear that this development was crucial in the reunification of the different alters and the establishment of a normal personality structure in this patient.

Some sessions later after talking with Elsie, *Zombie* came out. This was a frightening experience as the patient, seemingly unconscious, reclined as in a coma in her chair. When her mother tried to comfort her, she noticed that Cathy's body was cold. She stroked her and slowly woke her up, at which point Cathy came back out.

During the next session the patient reported her dreams and the story of the original trauma; subsequently, Elsie and Lucky were contacted and it was explained to them to convince *Zombie* that she—Cathy—was not guilty. Her mother, who was present, assured her of that also. During this session, Cathy (who was present also) was very upset; she cried and moaned and her face expressed anguish and guilt. After coming back, she calmed down. During the next week, Cathy was very upset and angry and the whole family noted this and experienced it as a big family problem.

After a family session, Cathy with her mother were seen in individual therapy. Cathy was still very angry and frustrated, she felt everybody was against her and could not help herself. When the therapist tried to contact the Alters (first Lucky and then Elsie), nobody came out. The conclusion could be made that the unification of all of the Alters had been successful, as soon as *Zombie* realized that she need not be guilty and can stop eating herself. It was explained to Cathy that

now she has the difficult problem to live with all of them as a whole person. No more dissociated Alters, only partial sub-personalities, like everybody else has.

It will take her some time to learn to organize her new personality structure and learn to live with it and function as an adult. She became unified soon after her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday after having spent many years existing in different selves, a problem which created periods of confusion, dissociation and problems not only for herself but also for her family. Her parents had to deal with their guilt of having caused such anguish and guilt in their child. One can easily understand that in future therapy sessions, the whole family had to learn to deal with these developments and find a more mature and healthy way of dealing with each other and themselves.

A few weeks later—in a session with her father present—Cathy had a dream in which all four Alters appeared, indicating the successful conclusion of this episode in the young person's life. All four Alters were changed. Anger was not angry anymore, not wearing military uniform. Zombie is described as the most beautiful of all of them; obviously, the guilt that was eating her up had disappeared. All four were wearing skirts, in a lady-like way, conforming to the new person they were forming together. Cathy had invited her father to this session and he was supportive and appreciative of his daughter.

### Bahá'í Principle of 'Unity in Diversity' in Psychology

Here we would like to leave the case history and analyze it for its meaning and for whatever else may become known. In his clinical work, this therapist has struggled with this disorder for a long time. The major question was always how these different identities function, what was their relationship with each other, and if there is anything unifying them in the face of apparent dissociation of the Alters.

Foremost in reflecting on these issues these words from Bahá'u'lláh come to mind:

*Say: Spirit, mind, soul, and the powers of sight and hearing are but one single reality which hath manifold expressions owing to the diversity of its instruments. (SLH 154)*

In order to understand this, one must remember that self-awareness is not the cause of the unity of a person; it is only the consequence of it. In other words, humans are not one because they are aware of themselves, but rather they are aware of themselves because they are fundamentally one. As Bahá'u'lláh states, our spirit and our mind or soul are *one single reality*. This principle could fundamentally change the understanding of psychology as it is known today.

The originality of this principle becomes evident when analyzing the Dissociative Identity Disorder discussed here and looking at the clinical findings. Initially, in most cases, the self-awareness of the different Alters has no awareness of the others; it is not that the others are different persons, but it is as if they do not exist, and when they come out, the other Alters do not exist in their awareness. Therefore, the time one Alter is out is lost for most of the others. This must be understood as a reaction to the original traumatic experience. The child in the process of unifying her personality had to suppress the existence of more than one self; had to forget the others. The child needed to do this in order to pretend that the pain and anxiety of the trauma did not exist, at least for the other functioning parts of the person, who needed to carry on the business of living normally in this abnormal situation.

In the process of reunification the therapist introduces the Alters to each other, thereby helping them to see the underlying unity, which is obvious to everyone but the patient. For the patient the unity of the therapist becomes a substitute for the missing unity in the patient.



This is just as in childhood, when the unity of the parenting people around the child is the beacon, around which the child is supposed to establish its own unity. Yet traumatic events have prevented this from happening in children with Dissociate Identity Disorder.

In the therapeutic process, the Alters must first learn that the other Alters are like different persons in the outside world. Usually, this is not difficult; eventually they have to learn that the Alters are inside, are really part of the whole person, which means that at that time the trauma of childhood has to be dealt with by the adult, in a rational manner. This is the real job of therapy. What the child could not do for itself, can be done by an adult in therapy.

Obviously, if this process is understood, unification becomes easier. In past treatment of different patients, this therapist had established communication between the different Alters, had encouraged them to unify and helped to remove obstacles and bad memories. This process was helpful, but we now have a better understanding of why it works, because we understand what is one and what is multiple in the human person. The one single reality is the soul or the spirit, which is endowed with the rational faculty. The multiple aspects of the person, which is therefore capable of dissociation, is expressed in the instruments this one spirit uses. This instrumentality includes all what is usually described as the self, or consciousness, such as memory, self-awareness, fantasy and imagination.

We also need to consider the fact that the relationship between the different identities is different from case to case. This is to be expected because this is not a normal developmental process, but a normal process gone awry. In every case of this illness, we find, therefore, a different way in which the normal unification of the personality has gone wrong. Usually, in these patients there is one identity, who claims that she or he is in charge of the whole system. However, it is never clear if even that powerful Alter is capable of uniting them. The

answer to this question concerns the emotional energy, which keeps these Alters separated: anxiety and guilt, with the need to suppress these fearful events of childhood. Before the Alters can unify, they have to recognize that they are only part and not the whole; they have to recognize that their separate and individual "soul", their dissociated unity, has to be broken up. This can be done by recognizing that they are not a whole identity, but only part of a whole person. This breaking up was described by Cathy when Anger said that the soul was broken up. Another issue is the question of the etiology, or the cause of the illness. This latter question is more clearly understood by psychologists.

It appears that during the normal forming of personal identity during childhood, certain traumatic events can create this multiple phenomenon, whereas ordinarily only one identity is present in one human adult. The events causing this abnormal development are always of a traumatic kind, like sexual or physical abuse or a severe disturbance in the family situation of the child, such as domestic violence or catastrophes affecting the family. When the adults, who are responsible for giving the child the ability to develop a unified personality, are not united in themselves and with each other, how can the child do her job in growing up as a unified person? Therefore, the child does the next best thing, repressing the traumatic event and growing up as several distinct, but in themselves unified, persons or personalities.

As the psychological literature clearly shows, what happens under those traumatic events is not so much dissociation, but rather the inability to associate. In other words, the child cannot bring together (associate) the different events impinging on him and formulate his or her own identity. In order to deal with the chaotic and violent events, the child achieves that goal only incompletely, by putting the disturbing events in one Alter and the good events into the other internal personality and thereby disassociating her from the bad experiences and achieving an imagined unity in each Alter. Consequently, we

refer to different identities, or Alters, with different self-awareness, memory and experience.

It needs to be stressed that the child cannot handle her problems otherwise and remain sane, i.e. this procedure helps the child to keep some sanity in her life by dealing with opposing family members or with a family member who acts in contradictory ways. Consider a loving father during daytime who is the sexual rapist at night, or parents who love each other at one time and fight to the death at other times, as it appears to the child in domestic violence situations. Consequently, the child develops different personalities with different internal awareness to deal with this chaotic environment. Once this system is established, the child learns to use it and often develops other different Alters as needed during other traumatic situations later on.

We need to consider in this context that the child cannot deal with these horrendous experiences rationally. It has not developed the level of rationality needed for that task at that age, especially if these things are done to her by the very family members, usually the parents or one parent, who should have helped the child to formulate her own identity under normal circumstances and develop adult rationality. After the age of twelve, when reason has sufficiently developed, the situation changes; the child's personality is established as a unity and dissociation cannot occur, except in extreme cases and for a short time. This dissociative disorder has not been found to have started after the age of twelve, no matter what the traumatic events were. For example, no Vietnam veteran has developed this disorder; instead, they developed other disorders under similar stressful circumstances, like Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

After describing this disorder and a clinical case of it, it remains to understand what all of that means and what it can teach us about the human nature and human psychology. Psychology accepts that we

can learn more about human nature from a mental disease than from normal psychological functioning. Often, the process of illness sheds light on the normally functioning psyche and personality structure. In other words, when the mental apparatus falls apart, its parts and functions become more visible. All therapists have learned this from experience and all knowledge of psychopathology becomes real only when seen in persons suffering from mental illness.

To understand these developments better, it is necessary to introduce the principle of "Unity in Diversity." It is postulated here that this is not only a principle of the Bahá'í Revelation, where it is called a "watchword" (WOB 41) for the Faith, but that it is an ontological and psychological principle underlying being and consequently it applies to all realities. This ontological principle will not further described here, except in its role in human development.<sup>18</sup>

What does this principle mean and how can it explain the situation at hand? Considering the early development of the child the following can be said, when this principle is applied:

The child starts out as a physical and biological unity of a plurality of molecules, complex organized cells, organs and different groupings of these units, constituting the body. Therefore, the early development of the fetus and newborn child is not significantly different from an animal fetus. Nevertheless, some inborn capacities will become activated during the child's growing years. It is the ability to communicate, to listen and speak, to think and eventually to be aware and reflect on the self.

During this process, there is a development from multiplicity to an increasing unity, from materiality and externality to an increasing internality. Teilhard de Chardin describes this as hominization. The different elements of the personality develop through this process and they are unified in their diversity. This is the way the soul, a single

reality without multiplicity, acquires its instruments of expression in this world of multiplicity. However, this only happens if the baby is exposed to other human beings, mainly the mother at first, or the mothering one, and then the father as well as sibling and relatives. Eventually this circle of familiar people expands to include friends, teachers and other loved figures. Studies have shown that this process starts before birth and continues during infancy and childhood.

The concept of “subpersonality” needs to be introduced here. Ken Wilber’s book “Integral Psychology”<sup>19</sup> describes that during development everybody develops multiple subpersonalities, which together form the adult personality. We all experience that we have a repertoire of behavior available in everyday life. When dealing with little children we can behave childlike, when angry other personality traits appear; these different structures make our adult personality complex and interesting, but unfortunately, sometimes dangerous or sick as well. In cases of mental illness, these illnesses may become a disturbing factor in some people, and their origin in childhood can often be detected. In all such cases the person presenting such subpersonalities is never losing his or her identity and is aware of who he is and can remember what happens. In the case of a patient with Identity Disorder, this awareness is absent and the memory of the one subpersonality is not available to the other personalities or Alters.

Historically this concept grows out of the Psychoanalysis, in Freud’s description of the human structure in its three states of id, ego and superego. Later, Transaction Analysis developed the ego states in similar ways of “child”, “adult”, and “parent” in their system, and most recently John G. Watkins developed the so-called “Ego State Therapy,” which is a dynamic reformulation of psychoanalytic principles and uses the “family in the self” to solve psychological problems. A similar approach was taken by Transpersonal Psychology, which attempts to include the spiritual dimension into psychology and developed the concept of sub-personalities. In this paper, we will use

the concept of sub-personalities in the way it is used by Transpersonal Psychology, especially by Ken Wilber, without agreeing with the basic ideas of this branch of psychology.<sup>20</sup>

When the concept of sub-personality is used in this paper, it is understood in the dynamic sense of the previously mentioned schools of psychology, without necessarily including their systems as a whole. A sub-personality is any structure of the mature personality which is a remnant of the developmental history of a person. The different sub-personalities of a person can be generalized into id, ego or superego, into child, adult, and parent, but are here understood in a general and non-specific way, as an internal personality panorama, which has developed during the developmental period of the child in its first years of life. The maturing process of the human person will then develop further these sub-personalities, will organize them, will give them different priorities and will improve them. This can be described as the growing process of the human person during his/her life. However, when a person suffers from Dissociative Identity Disorder these different subpersonalities could not be combined in the normal development. Seen dynamically, the energy which keeps these subpersonalities separated is the anxiety and guilt developed in the traumatized child.

During the process of developing a unified personality, the child develops subpersonalities, which are a reflection of the different relationships she developed in her early life. To the initial physical multiplicity and diversity of the different organs of the body, a new diversity is added in the sphere of the mind, a multiplicity of these subpersonalities that will continue with minor or major changes throughout life. The single reality of the soul uses these personalities as instruments and tries to unify them as best as possible, given the circumstances of its early social life.

Normally, this process of integration is completed around the age of twelve. In our case, where the environment provides only conflicting situations to the not yet fully rational child, the child is unable to achieve unification or only achieve partial unification. Parts become unified in themselves, but they remain disconnected from each other in order to achieve the only possible unity in separate identities.

We could compare this situation with the situation of a modern democracy, where the parties believe that they are independent and not connected with each other and where they think and act as if each of them is the whole of the state; none has to consider the others and tries to eliminate them. When one party succeeds by eliminating the others, we have a totalitarian state, which strangely enough still uses the term 'party' for the single leftover part, which now assumes to present the whole. This is the paradox of the one-party state; it remains partial, loses the qualities of the other parts, becomes sterile, and develops an ideology which tries to present itself as unified, when it really has achieved only artificial and forced uniformity, lacking true Unity in Diversity.

In the case of the multiple identities, the bad experiences which created the irresolvable conflicts in the child will be unified in one ego state or personality, the other in another ego state or personality, which will be the "normal" personality of this child. After this split of ego or of identity, more splits usually happen, because this splitting or dissociating has become the way of solving irresolvable problems. The child applies this coping mechanism to future experiences. It needs to be noted that the different alters perceive themselves and act age appropriately, i.e., act at the age level they were created. Only the prevailing personality grows older, the others are only growing when they are "out," which is usually very little.

What needs to be noted here is that all respective memories, reactions and coping mechanisms will be split as well. Self-awareness is

divided too, so that one identity is unaware of what the other identity does. The inter-awareness among identities can change. It is used in the process of unification by the therapeutic intervention.

Placing this observation into the description of the human nature or essence as presented in the Bahá'í Writings, a new picture of the human personality emerges, which is essentially different from all previous views. We have the soul, however we refer to it, which is unknowable and of which we are unaware. It is also described as spiritual, that is, not material yet being the essence of the human being. This unique and single reality expresses itself by using the human body and mind as instruments. Whatever is used as an instrument is physical, bodily, or related to the body, including all activity and perceptual ability as well as memory, in some ways the rational faculty, and awareness of self, i.e., the perceived identity of the person.

All these 'instruments' or faculties, which are innate in man as abilities to be activated during growing up, form the diversity of a human being. The soul or single unifying reality is the unifying principle in the human person. Seen this way, the unity in diversity principle is not only an ontological principle of all created beings but also a psychological and developmental principle that sheds a new light on these scientific endeavors. When this principle is accepted, these sciences will better explain the scientific facts found in the study of psychology.

Furthermore, introducing this principle into the understanding of man and of his development and psychological makeup will increase our understanding of the principle of 'unity in diversity' and will help to understand the essential role this principle plays in Bahá'í theology.



## Thoughts about the Development of the Human Soul

As described above, the unity of the human person is expressed by Bahá'u'lláh:

*Say: Spirit, mind, soul, and the powers of sight and hearing are but one single reality which hath manifold expressions owing to the diversity of its instruments. (SLH 154)*

*Consider the rational faculty with which God hath endowed the essence of man. (GWB 163)*

Again, we ask the question what does this mean. Only one single reality in man is typically called spirit, mind or soul and the power behind the senses and expressions of a person. This soul or essence of man is endowed with the rational faculty. Combining these two sources of knowledge, the Divine Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh and the science of psychology, especially as applied in psychotherapy, the following picture emerges about the nature of the human person.

In contrast to all other inanimate and animate beings, i.e., mineral, vegetable and animal, the human person has a unique and specific endowment, which is called soul—although it is called by different names according to the bodily instruments it uses. This essence of man or soul is present in every human being from the beginning to the end of life, but is in need of other humans, usually the parents and families, to develop and come to her/him-self, by developing first the sensual capacity and eventually the human ability of reason. This process is called human development and has been studied extensively during the last centuries.<sup>21</sup>

The human capacity to speak and listen, to use reason, to plan future action, to memorize and learn, to be aware of other humans and reflect on herself are all functions of the essence of man. The different

functions of this essence in the mind or body of man are described as the instrumentality of this essence. Starting as a hidden capacity in the newborn child, this soul becomes functional during the development period in the process of child rearing. Any illness or incapacity to function only affects the instruments, but not the essence of man, the soul.

In the beginning, the child passively accepts parental upbringing, but with growing self-awareness he/she starts developing what we call reasonable behavior and eventually she/he starts distinguishing between good and evil and develops virtues or vices. This happens first in following the parental environment, but eventually—in a slow process—everybody becomes responsible for herself or himself. Nobody knows exactly when this process starts, probably at different times in different people.

First we learn from our parents, eventually we take our development in our own hands and function independently, based on what we learned. Then we must develop our own personality. Since the moral behavior of the individual person is always a mixture of both, of what one learns in childhood and how one decides to use these talents, as given from family and society, nobody can make a true judgment of the morality of anybody, even of oneself.

Even in the biblical parable of the talents, everyone starts at a different level of what is given to him and he is only responsible for how he uses the talent given, not how much he was given.

*For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey. (Matthew 25:14–15)*

From this consideration, it follows that the development of the human civilization or culture is of utmost importance. Every child in a given culture will receive the values of that culture from his parents and cultural environment. If the culture progresses, the child will be given more and can therefore achieve a higher level of culture. Hence the Bahá'í emphasis on not only developing one's own life by moral behavior, but to work on developing human civilization through service to mankind as well.

Consequently, it is in our hands what kind of personality we will develop and if we will enhance what we got from our parents, or if we spoil and destroy the gift of being human. In the Bahá'í Writings this is described as having a pure heart and opening our heart to God's Revelation or following our own imagination towards the lower and animalistic part of our personality. In terms of ethics, following Aristotle, we can say that we choose virtues or vices.

Culturally, it can be said that this individual process will influence the society of man, human civilization as a whole, in many ways, in service and moral uprightness of its members. The Bahá'í Writings talk about that fact clearly, when stating that "*All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization.*" (GWB 214) This new understanding of the human predicament is based on the conviction that every life is meaningful, has a goal and purpose. It is up to every human being to use his will and effort towards good or bad, towards virtue or vice, towards fulfilling his God given destiny or towards resisting God by selfishly pursuing goals and aims that betray his own dignity and nobility. He may do this by selling out for material pleasure and enjoyment, for transient power and for futile dominance.

During personality development, a person develops different sub-personalities, which usually work together but may sometimes become the source of illness. This illness is caused by the failure of the parenting persons or events, by creating a trauma in the child

and disabling the child to bring these subpersonalities together. It is the function of a therapist to bring these Alters together in the same way, as the parenting persons would achieve this task in normal development. Mature life gives the person the ability and obligation to harmonize these subpersonalities and direct them towards the good, which is presented in any Revelation of God.

From these considerations, it becomes clear that the therapist can only succeed if he believes in the basic unity of the human soul and brings his own personality and conviction into therapy. He is not to direct or guide the patient, but to give her a model of a unified personality and allow the freedom to become that way herself and to achieve her highest aim, just as it is the job of the parents to set free their child and make her morally a self.

Many other and groundbreaking conclusions could be drawn from the ideas presented in this paper. It will take time to revisit these findings in the light of the Bahá'í Scriptures and this process, if coordinated with philosophical and psychological findings of Bahá'í psychologists and other psychologists, will produce what the Universal House of Justice expected, that psychology, when following the "teachings of Bahá'u'lláh," will explore "the true pattern of human life."

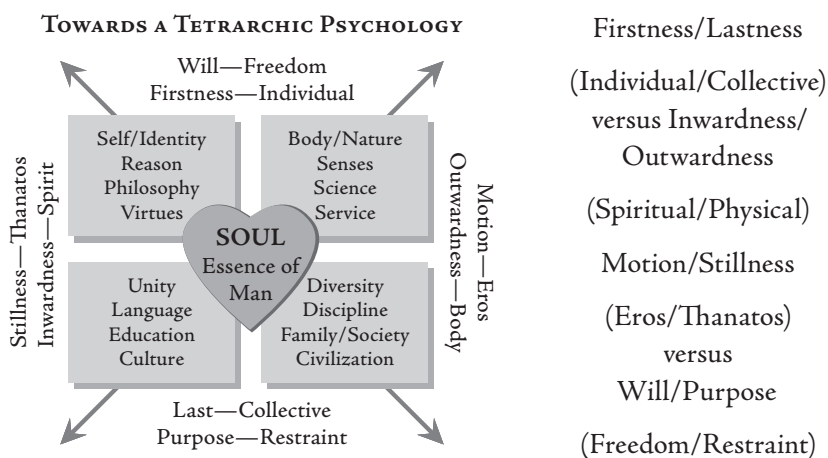
### Thoughts about dual and tetrarchic structures in the Bahá'í Faith

In the following pages, the adjective tetrarchic<sup>22</sup> is used from the Greek meaning four (tetra = four) princes governing a single kingdom, in contrast to monarchy, where there is only one (monos = one) ruler. As used here, tetrarchy refers to the four principles that constitute the whole; they all are independent principles, yet they are integrated in the whole and they contribute to the whole. In the Bahá'í Writings, these four principles are translated into English as the four states of man.

*And thus firstness and lastness, outwardness and inwardness are, in the sense referred to, true of thyself, that in these four states conferred upon thee thou shouldst comprehend the four divine states, and that the nightingale of thine heart on all the branches of the rosetree of existence, whether visible or concealed, should cry out: "He is the first and the last, the Seen and the Hidden...." (SVEV 27)*

With this passage in mind, we shall consider a Tetrarchic Developmental Psychology, which deals with how the human psyche develops and questions of a possible Tetrarchic Psychopathology. The latter considers how mental illness affects the human psyche. We shall also consider what this new approach may mean for a Tetrarchic approach to Psychotherapy.

In the figure below the fourfold or tetrarchic structure is shown to consist of a double tetrarchic paradigm: two opposite states are opposed and integrated with two other opposite states. In this paradigm, it is important to reconcile and integrate all the four or eight opposites into a whole, as an example of *Unity in Diversity*:



Leaving aside other four-fold principles in the Writings, we shall consider only these four, which depict the reality of life in this double tetrarchic structure. In these four states of man, the tetrarchic paradigm is applied to the different areas of psychology. Bahá'u'lláh indicates that this tetrarchic paradigm is essential to all reality by calling it to come from the “*rosetree of existence*” (SVFV 27). Another aspect of this structure needs to be emphasized: the total spiritual unity of the soul that is seen in our limited vision as a tetrarchic structure. Bahá'u'lláh expresses that clearly when talking in the same tablet about the different vision of reality:

*For some there are who dwell upon the plane of oneness and speak of that world, and some inhabit the realms of limitation, and some the grades of self, while others are completely veiled.*  
(SVFV 20)

Three different planes of vision of reality are described: one is the plane of oneness, the other the realm of limitation and grades of self, and finally, the realm of those who see nothing at all. What is described in this paper is the realm of “*limitation and self,*” which is the area of psychological studies. Yet the plane of oneness, of unity, and of the whole must never be overlooked and must be taken into account whenever the world is seen as it presents itself to our vision.

Therefore Bahá'u'lláh reminds us at the end of the Valley of Unity of this vision of oneness:

*These statements are made in the sphere of that which is relative, because of the limitations of men.*

*Otherwise, those personages who in a single step have passed over the world of the relative and the limited, and dwelt on the fair plane of the Absolute, and pitched their tent in the worlds of authority and command—have burned away these*

*relativities with a single spark, and blotted out these words with a drop of dew.*

*And they swim in the sea of the spirit, and soar in the holy air of light. Then what life have words, on such a plane, that “first” and “last” or other than these be seen or mentioned! In this realm, the first is the last itself, and the last is but the first.<sup>7</sup> (SVFV 27)*

In the original the above quote and the quote below are one paragraph, here the sentences are separated for easier analysis.

This vision of the *spirit... in the holy air of light* is what unifies the tetrarchic structure and what allows the four principles described above to be seen in their unity. Both of the contradictory aspects are integrated, or they are the same, so that the first is the last, as noted above. Both must always be in sight, which is why *seekers* must see with the eye of God:

*Then will the manifold favors and outpouring grace of the holy and everlasting Spirit confer such new life upon the seeker that he will find himself endowed with a new eye, a new ear, a new heart, and a new mind.*

*He will contemplate the manifest signs of the universe, and will penetrate the hidden mysteries of the soul.*

*Gazing with the eye of God, he will perceive within every atom a door that leadeth him to the stations of absolute certitude.<sup>7</sup> (GWB 267)*

When analyzing this we find that the tetrarchic structure is based on the integration of opposites, of a dual structure forming a whole. This is basically a dual and paradoxically opposing and integrated

structure. The dual nature of man was already indicated in the following verse of the Bible (Book of Sirach<sup>23</sup> 24):

*All things are double, one against another: and he hath made nothing imperfect.*

Here, too, we observe the basis of the fourfold structure described above which embraces the opposites of first and last, inwardness and outwardness. It needs to be noted that several of these tetrarchic structures can be superimposed on each other, as seen in the diagram given above which forms a panoramic picture of the human condition.

In this view of human nature, there are three levels of understanding. The first, as indicated by Bahá'u'lláh, is held by people who do not see any unity, who hold on to a materialistic, particularistic worldview that tries to explain everything by its physical parts. The second view is more open, seeing the whole in the parts and trying to find some meaning in the world. With this view in mind, we can recognize the paradigm presented here. This view leads to the third view, in which the seeker sees the whole and the parts, sees the spiritual and the material, and is in touch with the *rosetree of existence*.

## Tetrarchic Developmental Psychology

Bahá'u'lláh's description of the way children develop mainly focuses on the value of education.

*Man is the supreme Talisman. Lack of a proper education hath, however, deprived him of that which he doth inherently possess.*

*Through a word proceeding out of the mouth of God he was called into being; by one word more he was guided to recognize*

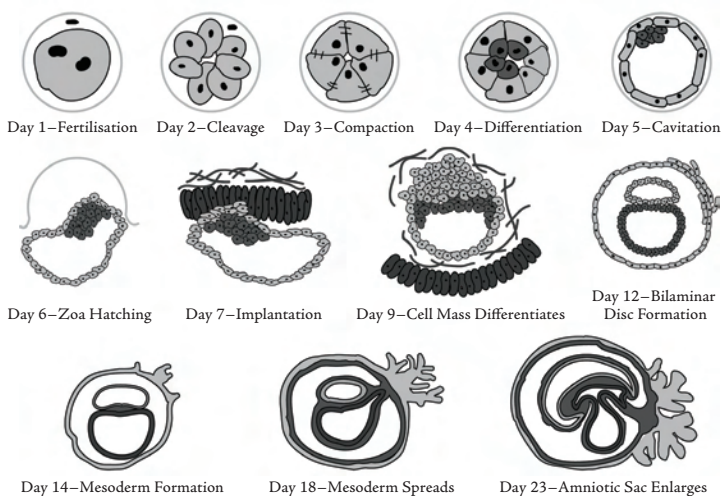


*the Source of his education; by yet another word his station and destiny were safeguarded.*<sup>7</sup> (TB 161)

His emphasis on education does not detract from the need of physical development but puts it in the right perspective.

The illustration<sup>24</sup> below depicts the first few days of the developing embryo. What is remarkable is that in a few days the cell differentiates into an inner and outer structure and develops a physical inwardness and outwardness. This biological process seems to anticipate the later development of an inner and outer state, as described in the Bahá'í Writings as the bodily and spiritual aspect of man:

#### HUMAN EMBRYOGENESIS



*Outwardness and inwardness are, in the sense referred to, true of thyself...* (SVFV 27)

This duality of inwardness and outwardness is preformed in the duality of the human body, where in five days the embryo develops

the inside from which the foetus and all the inner organs develop. The development of the nerves and eventually the brain follows a similar path. We need to get used to thinking in these terms and see the spiritual, non-physical aspect of man being a development of this inner and outer physical structure of all living beings and cells. Because they are developed to the highest form in man, we are capable of becoming the true Talisman and the noble creature described by Bahá'u'lláh. It could be said that from the very first days of human existence the basis for the later spiritual essence of man is laid in the developmental process in which animals participate as well, though without the development coming to the same acumen.

The outward or bodily aspects of human existence are studied in the individual by medicine and in the collective by sociology. The inward or spiritual aspects of the human development are studied by psychology and philosophy. They form the unity in diversity of the human nature. Contemporary psychology, with the exception of depth-, dynamic- and existential or humanistic psychology, attempts to be a natural science and therefore neglects this unity in diversity. When we study human development, it is important to see it in this tetrarchic sense, considering all four principles, and considering how these four aspects form a unity in diversity in every individual person.

The development of a unified self-concept and self-image is one of the most important achievements of healthy human development. Considering the structure presented above, we can easily recognize that in order for the child to develop this self-image, it is necessary that all four quadrants are considered. There is natural bodily development, which depends mainly on inheritance, on the right nutrition and physical environment. If this aspect is neglected, developmental problems occur. A fetus exposed to different drugs in the womb of the mother, for example, will not develop properly and some of these deficiencies can affect the mental health of the child.

The physical environment, and the society in which the child develops, also has a direct influence into the future human being. The many ways in which these aspects can influence the whole child is studied in medicine and psychology. The difficulty in describing these situations is the fact that any deficiency in any of the four areas affects all the other areas, so we always get a complex picture that cannot be sorted out perfectly.

*Through a word proceeding out of the mouth of God he was called into being; by one word more he was guided to recognize the Source of his education. (TB 161)*

Bahá'u'lláh mentions two different Divine actions in the above quote. Through the act of creation by the word of God, man *was called into being; by one word more he was guided to recognize the Source of his education*. This could mean that God is not only the creator giving life to every single human at conception, but everyone needs further education from the Word of God, Who is the true and ultimate source of all education.

The source of all education is God. This source is mediated to the growing child through the parents, especially if they believe in this Divine Source. It could also be mediated by the culture around the parents and the child, as far as this culture is influenced by the Word of God, and finally by the nature of God's creation itself. It needs to be understood that humans initiate and mediate the process. This is true for conception as well as in education. In each case, whatever the people do is dependent on the creative influence of God. Without this spiritual education, any human will be *deprived... of that which he doth inherently possess*. How these three sources operate in a specific time and country could be a rewarding study for future sociologists.

Approaching this process of education, it is evident that the development of a healthy person is dependent on the spiritual unity of

the individual and collective environment the child lives in. Here our society seems to be failing drastically and creating emotionally handicapped children who have difficulties in growing up as healthy adults. The case of Cathy is a good example of such faulty development. Education is how the collective aspects of society try to facilitate healthy development. The individual spiritual aspect of a particular child needs to be developed to form a positive identity and a virtuous life style so that the child can develop all the qualities which *he doth inherently possess*.

There is a seamless transition in the developing child from following the guidance of her parents to eventually constructing and developing her own moral rules and virtues. If this process is deficient, we have in extreme cases a person with a multiple personality structure or even more destructive diseases like psychosis or personality disorders, or in less destructive cases a person with a number of subpersonalities that are poorly integrated, causing neurotic symptoms and social problems for the adult. Another important issue to consider is the fact that during childhood the moral sense of the child develops, first in total dependency of the parenting figures, then this development becomes more and more directed by the awakening sense of morality in the growing child. Ken Wilber<sup>25</sup> has summarized the different stages of this development, showing a rather surprising conformity between different researchers.

The fundamental question of developmental psychology is, how does a human person come to be him/herself? When looking at the tetrarchic structure of the universe, the becoming-a-self process can be understood in this structure. What then is this self, this human being that has become a self?

Talking about the experience of one's self, Augustinus Karl Wucherer Huldenfeld has summarized what the self is and how it relates to the whole world (translation by this writer):

The Self is not somehow a spiritual nucleus in the center of the person, it is rather you, as you are present in your environment; this environment belongs to you and you belong to it. Your whole past belongs to this environment as well, not only your past, but also the past of the whole world belongs there. Moreover, all of your future, even the future of the whole world belongs to this your environment. All of this, to which you belong, is you, if you are yourself. The self of the person is in a certain way the whole of everything that is.<sup>26</sup>

Not surprisingly, as we have seen, when the environment of the child is severely disunited and disturbed, the child cannot develop herself; in the case of Cathy, there were four different selves developed. In such an environment, and in many other cases, the self that is developed will be a truncated, a disturbed, an angry or worthless self.

On the other hand, 'Abdu'l-Bahá stated that we are expressing and representing all bounties of life.

*Consider: We plant a seed. A complete and perfect tree appears from it, and from each seed of this tree another tree can be produced. Therefore, the part is expressive of the whole, for this seed was a part of the tree, but therein potentially was the whole tree.*

*So each one of us may become expressive or representative of all the bounties of life to mankind. This is the unity of the world of humanity. This is the bestowal of God. This is the felicity of the human world, and this is the manifestation of the divine favor.<sup>7</sup>*  
(PUP 16)

This interprets the word of Bahá'u'lláh:

*Ye are all the leaves of one tree and the drops of one ocean.* (TB 27)

## Tetrarchic Psychopathology

This is by far the most difficult area of application of this tetrarchic understanding of psychology. How do the different mental illnesses affect the four areas of a human person? The four principles constituting the whole person are affected in almost all mental disorders, to different degrees and in different ways. The modern classification of Mental Disorders in DSM IV is not made with any structure in mind; the psychoanalytic structure of previous DSMs was totally abandoned and a strictly behavioral structure was used, only looking at what is measurable and not what is meaningful. Fortunately, a new classification scheme for mental disorders has been developed recently, called PDM, which seems to integrate the analytic or dynamic perspective with the behavioral approach in DSM IV.

The Psychodynamic Diagnostic Manual (PDM) is a diagnostic framework that attempts to characterize the whole person—the depth as well as the surface of emotional, cognitive, and social functioning. ...

The PDM is based on current neuroscience, treatment outcome research, and other empirical investigations. Research on brain development and the maturation of mental processes suggests that patterns of emotional, social, and behavioral functioning involve many areas working together rather than in isolation.

Relying on oversimplification and favoring what is measurable over what is meaningful do not operate in the service of good science.<sup>27</sup>

This manual better describes the full dimension of mental health and illness.

The process of going from mental health to an exclusive behavioral health has consequences; the human person is seen less as a living

organism and more as an accidental conglomerate of behaviors. Consequently, any aberrant behavior can be classified as mental illness, even misbehavior of a child. Taking the corrections of the PDM into account allows the proposed tetrarchic structure to classify mental illness in a more appropriate and realistic way.

All mental disorders are a combination of spiritual and physical aspects. All are related to the individual and collective functioning of a person. Since modern classification only looks at the behavior of a mental ill patient, the classification becomes questionable. When for example Attention-Deficit-Hyperactivity Disorder is diagnosed, only the behavior of the child is taken into account and often it is assumed, without any scientific proof, that there is an underlying physical problem present. Since a good behavioral program can cure the majority of children with this disorder, one must assume the problem starts in the social and spiritual environment of the child and not in the biological structure. There might be some physical propensity to act out in this way, but this acting out can be controlled first by the parental environment and eventually by the child. There are some few cases where the physical structure of the child is too difficult to be controlled and, in such cases, medication might help to assist the child to control his disorder. In most cases, medication only covers up and does not cure.

When considering schizophrenia a similar but much more serious situation seems to exist. Here the expression of the spiritual or rational faculty is severely disturbed and the patient is unable to keep contact with social and often physical reality and behaves in a bizarre and irrational way, expressing his personal experiences in strange words and behaviors. What happens in regards to the tetrarchic structure of such a patient is the fact that the individual quadrant is not functioning, and cannot relate properly with other humans and society. It even affects the individual bodily structure of a person, as it is perceived by the affected patient, and that seems to have even

physical consequences for the body. We draw this conclusion because we cannot overlook the fact that all four quadrants are interconnected and influencing each other.

In depression, something else seems to happen. The balance between depression and mania seems to be located more in the tension between will and purpose, rather than inwardness and outwardness, so that the will is depressed in order to contain anger and hopelessness. Only in its opposite, in mania, the will becomes so strong that unusual feats are possible for such a person, such as living with little sleep and incessant action and talk.

In what used to be called neurotic disorders, it appears that the unification of the different subpersonalities has not been successful, so some of them, and often the most destructive, take over and induce self-destructive action in the patient.

### Tetrarchic Psychotherapy

It remains to be seen what might happen to psychotherapy if the four aspects, the four tetrarchic principles, are considered and therapy is structured in that way. The word 'therapy' in the Greek language originally meant veneration or service to the gods, and was then used for all service or care, especially care of the sick. If this is taken seriously, we could define psychotherapy as the care for the psyche, the spiritual essence of man, which is the Divine gift given to man and which needs protection and service, education and therapy to flourish, especially when ill and endangered. A new paradigm of therapeutic intervention needs to be envisioned and it might look something like this:

A good therapist, using the tools of his craft, might consider all four aspects of man in unity. Neither the physical body nor the social



environment, neither the individual spirit nor the spiritual unity of humankind, can be neglected in such a therapy. If these tetrarchic principles are considered as the fundamental structure of the patient, then all the different approaches can be used. Behavioral therapy would work for the bodily structure, social intervention for the problem the patient has with society. Insight therapy and dynamic approaches are for dealing with will and identity, and spiritual considerations will lead the therapist to consider the sense of unity and higher levels of connection with humanity and God.

It is certainly true what the Universal House of Justice said about the future of psychology and the contribution Bahá'í psychologists will make.

*Bahá'í psychologists, who know from the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh the true pattern of human life, will be able to make great strides in the development of this science, and will help profoundly in the alleviation of human suffering. (MUHJ63)*

## Conclusions

In conclusion, it needs to be said that this paper as presented is more of a heuristic initial exploration and that the practical application of its finding will take time. What we see today are only its first and tentative results. Several basic conclusions can already be drawn from the facts presented in this paper. These conclusions could be the beginning of a psychology according to the Bahá'í Revelation and need to be considered as a new paradigm of a psychology of the future.

1. The essence of man is in his spirituality, not in his body or anything related to the body. Spirituality in man is one single reality, non-local and non-material. Spirituality

## The Essence of Man

develops in relationship with other humans during childhood and it is the basis of man's moral and ethical behavior, as expressed in virtues or vices.

2. This spirituality or soul of man is unknown and man is not aware of it; it becomes noticed and observable in the instruments it uses. These instruments are all the rational powers of man, including the power of the senses and of the action of man
3. During childhood, all relationships of the growing human being result in different more or less unified subpersonalities, which are the vestiges of all early relationships of an individual; together they form the mature and maturing person.
4. It is up to the individual to develop these subpersonalities through virtues into an ever-advancing level; otherwise they will be functioning on a lower level of reduced spirituality, which can be called vice or evil. If not developed throughout life these spiritual ambitions of man are lacking and a failed life results.
5. The way the unification of the different subpersonalities can best be described is by using the concept of Unity in Diversity, in which the different parts support and express the whole and the whole supports the parts, and any increase in diversity promotes an increase in unity and vice versa.
6. The principle of Unity in Diversity can therefore be called an ontological principle as well as a psychological principle. Ontologically, all created realities are expressions of this

principle; they consist of parts forming a whole and they are equally parts to a higher whole, and the relationship between them is always that of Unity in Diversity.

7. Psychologically, it is the challenge and task of being human to integrate the original diversity into a higher and more valuable spiritual whole, which will at the same time improve the diverse parts of the individual. At the same time, this individual process will promote the integration of the whole of humanity into a higher level of Unity in Diversity.
8. This process of integration is inherent in the human predicament and is usually called culture, which is understood as a process that is happening in every individual human being and in humanity as a whole. It is dependent ontologically on the creative Word of God as presented in the Revelation of God in the progressive Revelation of the Manifestations of God throughout history.
9. The source of all education is God and the source of all healing is God, which means that all education by parents, teachers and even by nature is from God, that all healing of physical and mental illness is from God, that there is ultimately no *Remover of difficulties save God*. (SWB 216)

The history of psychology can be seen as demonstrating an increasing and complex progress towards the understanding of the essence of man, which is not without failures and regressions. This paper attempted to increase the understanding of the soul or psyche of man (i.e., of psychology) in the light of the Bahá'í Revelation, in order to move toward a Bahá'í Psychology of the future.

## The Essence of Man

Bahá'u'lláh has expressed this process in His Writings, especially in the following verse (the sentence is broken down by this writer for better understanding):

*Please God, that we avoid the land of denial, and advance into the ocean of acceptance, so that we may perceive, with an eye purged from all conflicting elements, the worlds of unity and diversity, of variation and oneness, of limitation and detachment, and wing our flight unto the highest and innermost sanctuary of the inner meaning of the Word of God.<sup>7</sup> (KI 160)*

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NOTES

- 1 Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation Of Bahá'u'lláh volume 2: Adrianople 1863–68*, George Ronald, Oxford 1977, page 144) comments on this passage of the Gleanings, which is taken from Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet to Mírzá Hádí: "Mirza Hadiy-i-Qazvini, one of the Letters of the Living, requested Bahá'u'lláh to explain among other things the meaning of this tradition for him. In a lengthy Tablet to Mírzá Hádí, Bahá'u'lláh explains that the soul of man, which He refers to as the rational faculty, is an emanation from the worlds of God. Every faculty in man, whether physical or spiritual, is a manifestation of the soul. For instance, each of the senses derives its power from the soul and every spiritual quality is due to it. Yet the sum total of all these faculties within a human being does not make the soul. So, we might ask, what is the soul? Bahá'u'lláh affirms that the soul is unknowable. Should one contemplate this theme till eternity, he will never be able to understand the nature of his soul, or fathom the mysteries enshrined in it. ..." p. 145: "Mírzá Hádí, who as mentioned was one of the Letters of the Living, failed at the end to remain loyal to the cause of Bahá'u'lláh. He followed Mírzá Yahyá and deprived himself of the bounties of God."
- 2 This concept of the hermeneutic circle was developed by Heidegger and his followers Ricoeur in France and Gadamer in Germany, although its beginnings are found in Aristotle's *De Interpretatione (On Interpretation)*.
- 3 This definition is taken from Simon Blackburn, *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, 1996.
- 4 Abdu'l-Bahá, *Foundations of World Unity*, p. 88: "As we look upon the universe we observe that all composite beings or existing phenomena are made up primarily of single elements bound together by a power of attraction. Through this power of attraction, cohesion has become manifest between atoms of these composing elements."
- 5 This passage from Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of Wisdom was discussed at length in a previous paper of this author in *Lights of 'Irfán*, Book Seven: Wolfgang Klebel, "Lawh-i-Hikmat, Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of Wisdom: Towards a Progressive Bahá'í Theology" pp. 127–138.
- 6 More about the power of the heart can be found in *The Light of 'Irfán*, *ibid.*, Book Ten, 2009, Wolfgang Klebel, pp. 107–131, "In the Heart of all that Is: 'Heart' in Bahá'í Writings and Science" and pp. 131–149, "In the Pure Soil of Thy Heart: 'Heart' in Bahá'í Writings and Neurocardiology".

- 7 In the original this quote is in one paragraph, here the sentences are separated for easier analysis.
- 8 The question of the Freudian lack of explanation for freedom, sublimation and religion in general was a topic of the dissertation of this writer, it even could be demonstrated that Freud avoided any meaningful explanation of these terms he only used when describing his analytic practice. Why did he have to use these concepts, whenever he was explaining what analysis can do for the patient? He could not understand that his system of psychology artificially excluded these very important human features because of his deterministic and materialistic prejudices. See Wolfgang Klebel: "Transference and Culture, Towards a New Understanding of this Concept of Depth-Psychology", *Dissertation*, Chapman College, Orange California, 1976.
- 9 Wolfgang Klebel: "True of Thyself, The Mystical Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and Ken Wilber as System of Integral Philosophy"; in *Lights of 'Irfán*, Book Six, Bahá'í National Center, Evanston, IL, 2000.
- 10 Compare Wikipedia under "senses".
- 11 See endnote 6.
- 12 "Consider the sense of touch. Witness how its power hath spread itself over the entire human body. Whereas the faculties of sight and of hearing are each localized in a particular center, the sense of touch embraceth the whole human frame." (GWB 194) 'Abdu'l-Bahá further accounts of these five senses when He said:  
"One is the knowledge of things perceptible to the senses — that is to say, things which the eye, or ear, or smell, or taste, or touch can perceive, which are called objective or sensible." (SAQ 83)
- 13 See endnote 6.
- 14 In a previous paper this understanding of the Word was compared with the philosophy of the personal dialogical thinkers such as Martin Buber and Ferdinand Ebner, presented in the paper "The Word is the Master Key for the Whole World: The Bahá'í Revelation and the 'Teaching and Spirit of the Cause' in Dialogical and Personal Thinking", in *Lights of 'Irfán*, Book Eight, 2007, pp. 53–125.
- 15 The concept of "*thought radiation*" cannot be found anywhere else in the translated tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá (as per *Ocean*); this indicates that the translation of the speech may not have been authenticated. It is quoted here because the other part of the section is consonant with other statements of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and seems to interpret the words of Bahá'u'lláh correctly.

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- 16 Wolfgang Klebel in *Lights of 'Irfán*, Book Five, Wilmette 2004, "Unity and Progressive Revelation: Comparing Bahá'í Principles with the Basic Concepts of Teilhard de Chardin", pp. 77–108, especially pp. 83–85 and note 28.
  - 17 From this experience one could draw a connection with the biblical description of possessions, which otherwise create a problem for the psychologist. This thought could be further developed and studied. When this is considered, Jesus was functioning as a healer, a therapist, albeit not with any procedure but by the power of His personality.
  - 18 Throughout all the 'Irfán papers of this author this word is quoted about a hundred times, indicating its importance.
  - 19 Ken Wilber, *Integral Psychology. Consciousness, Spirit, Psychology, Therapy*; Shambala; Boston & London, 2000, chapter Subpersonalities pages 100–102 and passim.
  - 20 Ken Wilber's system of psychology was described in *Lights of 'Irfán*, Book Six, Wolfgang Klebel *ibid.*, "True of Thyself: The Mystical Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and Ken Wilber's System of Integral Philosophy." The Critique of this system was presented with the concept of "Spiritual Materialism of Transpersonal Psychology and Ken Wilber, following Johannes Toegel in *Lights of 'Irfán*, Book Seven: Wolfgang Klebel, "Lawh-i-Hikmat, Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of Wisdom: Towards a Progressive Bahá'í Theology."
  - 21 See Ken Wilber, *Integral Psychology*, *ibid.*, especially the 23 Chart in appendix.
  - 22 Tetrarchy in the Roman Empire under Diocletian is described by Pliny the Elder as follows: *regnum instar singulae et in regna contribuuntur.*" (see Wikipedia under tetrarchy) "Each tetrarch is the equivalent of a singular ruler, and each is contributing to the rule of the whole." The term tetrarch is known from the Bible where the different tetrarchs, the sons of Herod the Great, who were ruling Israel are mentioned in the history of John the Baptist (Luke 3:1, 3:19), Jesus (Luke 9:7, Matt. 14:1) and then Paul (Acts 13:1). Herod the Great was a monarch (monos=single, arche=beginning, principle, prince, ruler), he divided the kingdom among his sons into four tetrarchies; the word tetrarch is similar to monarch, instead of one ruler there are four rulers or princes in one kingdom.

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- 23 The book of Sirach or Ecclesiasticus forms part of the Greek Bible though it does not appear in the Jewish Canon; it is therefore one of the deuterocanonical books. It was written in Hebrew. St. Jerome and the rabbis (who quote from it) knew the book in its original language. It is accepted as part of the Christian biblical canon by Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, and most Oriental Orthodox but not by most Protestants. (Cf. Wikipedia and the Introduction in "The Jerusalem Bible"; Doubleday and Company, Inc.; Garden City, New York, 1966).
- 24 From Wikipedia under Human Embryogenesis.
- 25 Ken Wilber, *Integral Psychology*, *ibid.*
- 26 Augustinus Wucherer-Huldenfeld, *Befreiung und Gotteserkenntnis* (Liberation and Knowing God), Böhlau Verlag Wien, Köln, Weimar, 2009, p. 270.
- 27 This description is taken from the website of the *Psychodynamic Diagnostic Manual*.



# Neoplatonism and the Bahá'í Writings

## Part 2

Ian Kluge

### 1: Introduction

In order to demonstrate how the work of Plotinus complements and offers new insights into the philosophy embedded in the Bahá'í Revelation, this paper expands and builds on some of the issues and ideas presented in "Neoplatonism and the Bahá'í Writings, Part 1."<sup>1</sup> A project like this immediately raises two issues. The first is, what is meant by referring to a philosophy embedded in the Bahá'í Writings? Does not Shoghi Effendi write that Bahá'u'lláh "has not merely enunciated certain universal principles, or propounded a particular philosophy, however potent, sound and universal these may be."<sup>2</sup> Does he not say that the Bahá'í Faith has "refus[ed] to be labeled a mere philosophy of life?"<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere he writes,

For the Cause is not a system of philosophy; it is essentially a way of life, a religious faith that seeks to unite all people on a common basis of mutual understanding and love, and in a common devotion to God.<sup>4</sup>

In light of these statements, is not a project like this in danger of reducing the Writings to a man-made philosophy? In our view, such is not the case because this study recognizes that studying the philosophical aspects of the Writings does not exhaust Their contents; there is obviously more to the Writings than philosophy. However, we must clearly recognize that these philosophical aspects exist; there are passages referring to metaphysics and ontology, epistemology, ethics, the

philosophy of man, social and political philosophy and philosophy of history. Furthermore, Shoghi Effendi indicates that philosophical characteristics of the Teachings exist when he refers to the “philosophy of progressive revelation”<sup>5</sup> and the “Bahá’í philosophy of social and political organization.”<sup>6</sup> Indeed, he encourages a questioner to correlate the Writings with contemporary developments in philosophy and only warns him or her away from what he calls “metaphysical hairsplitting.”

Philosophy, as you will study it and later teach it, is certainly not one of the sciences that begins and ends in words. Fruitless excursions into metaphysical hair-splitting is meant, not a sound branch of learning like philosophy.<sup>7</sup>

Correlation with other philosophical schools can only be done by focusing on the philosophic aspects of the Writings which is precisely what Shoghi Effendi is encouraging us to do. In addition, we have ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s use of philosophical knowledge, principles and arguments throughout His talks and letters, as, for example, in His proofs for the existence of God. In one such He proves the necessity of God by presenting the philosophical argument that the idea of an actual infinite regress of causes is “absurd.”<sup>8</sup> The impossibility of actual infinite regresses is a highly philosophical issue and brings in its train a variety of logical implications. Elsewhere ‘Abdu’l-Bahá proves the immortality of the soul with the argument that simple, i.e. noncomposite, things cannot decompose and die.<sup>9</sup> Such passages amply demonstrate that the Writings have well-developed philosophic features that require study.

The second issue raised by this project is what do we mean by a philosophical understanding of the Writings? In a nutshell, a philosophical understanding seeks rational knowledge of three things: what the Writings say explicitly or implicitly; the connections among various statements, and how they are related to other philosophies.

First, a philosophic understanding of the Writings seeks to discover what the Writings say explicitly or implicitly about a certain subject, and especially about subjects related to such branches of learning as metaphysics and ontology, epistemology, ethics, philosophy of man and philosophy of history and politics. Explicit statements on these subjects are easy to find but their hidden implications are not always readily apparent. For example, in regards to epistemology, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says that "the essence of a thing is known through its qualities; otherwise, it is unknown and hidden."<sup>10</sup> He adds, "everything is known by its qualities and not by its essence."<sup>11</sup> The explicit epistemological meaning of these statements is clear but the implicit implications are equally important. For example, they guarantee the ontological integrity of all things, and especially of the human soul which no one but God can know in and of itself. Our freedom and spiritual independence and freedom from undue interference are guarded in this way.

Second, a philosophical understanding seeks to identify and study how the explicit and hidden connections among the teachings, so that we can discern more of the underlying unity of the Writings, i.e. their organic, interdependent structure. In other words, a philosophic understanding can help us recognize the Writings as an integral whole. This is important because the inability to see the organic integral structure of the teachings inevitably causes us to underestimate the strength of their rational coherence. Difficulties on these matters inevitably undercuts our ability to explicate and defend the Writings and to carry on meaningful dialogue with other thought-traditions.

Third, a philosophical understanding of the Writings allows us to discover the relationship of the ideas in the Writings to those in other philosophical schools. For example, given the emanationist metaphysics starting from a non-material source as the ultimately real, it seems clear that the Writings have significant similarities to some forms of idealism. But if so, what kind of idealism do they resemble—the

subjective idealism of Berkeley or the objective idealism of Hegel or Schopenhauer? And how do they relate to other great traditions, such as Thomism, Transcendentalism, existentialism, phenomenology and neo-Aristotelianism? Philosophic understanding can also help us understand why the Writings are so difficult to harmonize rationally with dialectical materialism, logical positivism or postmodernism. Knowing which philosophic traditions the Writings resemble can help us expand our understanding of the Writings by widening our intellectual horizons, sharpening our thinking about important questions and studying the Writings from new perspectives.

As an addendum, we should say that, paradoxically, a philosophical understanding of the Writings also helps us to appreciate the inherent limits of rational thought. The Writings do not just promote rational understanding but also the “understanding heart.”<sup>12</sup> Not everything can be fully understood or comprehended by reason alone, such as the deepest inner motives that cause us to accept Bahá'u'lláh as the Manifestation for this Age or our fullest love for the Manifestation and His plan for the world. As Pascal said, “The heart has reasons which reason cannot know.”<sup>13</sup>

Finally, it should be explicitly noted that examinations of similarities between the Writings and philosophies that pre-dated them are emphatically not to be read as ‘influence studies’ and no statement made in this paper is intended in even the slightest degree to suggest any such influence. Influence studies and similarity studies are two different things. The mere notation and exploration of similarities as presented in a work or works is not the same thing as a study that traces the specific pathways by which one set of ideas affects another. This latter is an historical study involving questions of how, when, where, who, to what extent and even why, while the similarity study only takes note of the materials presented directly to the reader and explores whether they are alike or not. It should also be noted that there is no logical way to infer historical influence from similarity per

se. Many things are similar but are not, therefore, causally related or influenced either symmetrically or asymmetrically. Thus, it is clear that this similarity study offers no grounds whatever for inferences about influence.

## 2: The Theology of Aristotle

It is possible, of course, to study the agreements and convergences between the Bahá'í Writings and Neoplatonism from a strictly non-historical perspective, i.e. to study the two as separately developed and independent but strikingly similar systems of thought. In biology such a development is known as “convergent evolution.” However, in the case of the Bahá'í Writings and Neoplatonism, there is strong evidence that links the cultural world of late antiquity i.e. of Plotinus and Proclus to the cultural world of Bahá'u'lláh. This concerns the entry of Neoplatonic thought into the Muslim and, specifically, Persian world.

The first entry to Neoplatonism into Persia came in 529 AD when the Christian emperor Justinian I closed the School of Athens and the philosophers, the vast majority of them Neoplatonists, fled for protection to the Sassanid King Khosrau I. They brought with them numerous philosophical manuscripts including those of their master Plotinus. Their exile from Rome only lasted four years, but, at the very least, contact between Neoplatonism and the Persian cultural sphere had been established. Neoplatonist learning then continued in the Academy of Gundishapur which was an important Sassanid intellectual center.

However, there is a far more tangible link between Neoplatonism and the Muslim world, namely a text called *The Theology of Aristotle* which was “the most important direct source of Neoplatonic ideas in the Islamic world.”<sup>14</sup> This book, allegedly produced in Baghdad

in the Ninth Century CE, was actually a misattribution of Plotinus' *Enneads* to Aristotle. It was widely circulated and influenced generations of great Muslim philosophers including such Persians as al-Ghazzali, Ibn Sina (Avicenna), Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra. In other words, there is a clearly identifiable Neoplatonic influence in the cultural world in which Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá lived. Thus, it is understandable that Bahá'u'lláh sometimes expressed His revelation in a language recognizable to those familiar with this philosophical tradition.

In itself, the *Theology* was a paraphrase (it has even been called a 'forgery') with some additions of *Enneads* IV to VI. Some of the paraphrases are reasonably close to the original passages in the *Enneads*, but some in some cases the *Theology's* words stray far from the meaning of the original.<sup>15</sup> However, the Neoplatonic language used in the Writings is consistent with Plotinus' usages. The *Theology* was augmented by other, though less influential, Neoplatonic works such as the *Book of Causes* based on Proclus' *Elements of Theology*, as well as *The Letter on Divine Science* which also paraphrased portions of the *Enneads*. However, these other books lacked wide influence because they were not associated with Aristotle's prestige.<sup>16</sup>

The pervasive influence of *The Theology of Aristotle* also sheds a cultural and historical light on one of the interesting features of the Bahá'í Writings, viz. the mixture of elements that from a historical perspective can be called 'Platonic' and 'Aristotelian.' An idea which is historically associated with Plato is that the "the earth is the mirror of the Kingdom; the mental world corresponds to the spiritual world."<sup>17</sup> Plato, of course, taught that the material world was a reflection or shadow of the ideal spiritual world. Elements that are historically associated with Aristotle are four-fold causality<sup>18</sup>, actuality and potentiality<sup>19</sup> and arguments, such as the impossibility of an actual (as distinct from theoretical) infinite regress to prove the existence of a Prime Mover.<sup>20</sup> The co-existence of Platonic and Aristotelian

elements is significant because one of the major goals of Neoplatonists from Plotinus onward was to reconcile the ideas of the two Greek philosophical giants and fit them into a coherent whole. This harmonious use of both Plato and Aristotle points to another similarity between the Writings and Neoplatonism.

### 3. Discourse About God

In this section we shall examine Bahá'í and Neoplatonic discourse about God or the One. Our discussion will start with an observation by Eugene F. Bales that the *Enneads* employ “three modes of discourse”<sup>21</sup> about God.

The first mode of discourse is employed when he speaks of The One as though it transcends Being, Mind, Freedom, Will, Consciousness and Form and is thus void of all act and intelligible content. This mode of discourse I shall refer to as meontological.<sup>22</sup>

In this mode God is spoken of as transcending all the phenomenal attributes including not only the most fundamental one – being – but also form, which all phenomenal things must have to be particular things, as well as higher attributes such as mind and consciousness. The Writings, of course, warn us against any reduction of God to the level of a phenomenal being:

This appearance through manifestation [i.e. as a phenomenal being] would be for God, the Most High, simple imperfection; and this is quite impossible, for the implication would be that the Absolute Preexistent is qualified with phenomenal attributes. But if this were so, pure independence would become mere poverty, and true existence would become non-existence, and this is impossible.<sup>23</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá then goes on to say, "The preexistence of God is the preexistence of essence, and also preexistence of time."<sup>24</sup> In other words, God has "preexistence" and this "preexistence" is essentially His, i.e. it constitutes Him. This can be understood to mean that insofar as God is preexistent, He transcends 'being' or existence itself; He is the pre-condition needed for the being of created things to occur. For things to 'be,' they must be limited, i.e. have their own particular or limited being. However, since God is not limited in any way, He does not have being in this way. This is emphasized in the following statement:

To every discerning and illuminated heart it is evident that God, the unknowable Essence, the Divine Being<sup>25</sup>, is immensely exalted beyond every human attribute, such as corporeal existence, ascent and descent, egress and regress. Far be it from His glory that human tongue should adequately recount His praise, or that human heart comprehend His fathomless mystery. He is, and hath ever been, veiled in the ancient eternity of His Essence, and will remain in His Reality everlastingly hidden from the sight of men.<sup>26</sup>

Here, too, we observe how God transcends, "is immensely exalted beyond," phenomenal attributes, and, therefore, beyond human conception. Clearly, the word "Being" in the phrase "Divine Being" is not used in the same way as when it refers to created beings since it is qualified by the word "Divine." This passage draws the obvious conclusion that since God surpasses ordinary attributes of being, He also surpasses human understanding:

It is evident that the human understanding is a quality of the existence of man, and that man is a sign of God: how can the quality of the sign surround the creator of the sign?—that is to say, how can the understanding, which is a quality of the existence of man, comprehend God? Therefore, the Reality



of the Divinity is hidden from all comprehension, and concealed from the minds of all men. We see that everything which is lower is powerless to comprehend the reality of that which is higher.... Therefore, how can man, the created, understand the reality of the pure Essence of the Creator?<sup>27</sup>

The “lower” and “higher” refer to ontological dependence. That which is “lower” in the scale of being depends on that which is “higher,” and God, being independent of all things, is the highest and therefore, beyond comprehension by any created thing. Another way in which the Writings emphasize God’s transcendence of the ordinary attributes of being is by the use of such phrases as “the All-Bounteous, the Most Generous,”<sup>28</sup> “the Almighty, the All-Knowing.”<sup>29</sup> Phrases like this abound throughout the Writings. All of them indicate that God possess these attributes pre-eminently, in a way that surpasses the nature of all created things.

Perhaps the most dramatic statement of God’s transcendence vis-à-vis the created, phenomenal world is the following quotation:

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.<sup>30</sup>

A clearer and categorical statement of God’s transcendence is difficult to imagine, since there is “no direct intercourse” and “no resemblance whatever” between the Divine and creation. Implicit within this is the conclusion that none of the attributes that apply to phenomenal existence apply to God, i.e. that God’s mode of existence is utterly different in kind from ours.

Plotinus pursues this same line of thought from a more philosophical perspective. He writes,

The First must be without form, and if without form, then it has no Being. Being must have some definition and therefore be limited.; but The First cannot be thought of as having a definition and limit, for thus it would not be the Source [of form and limit] but the particular item indicated by the definition assigned to it.<sup>31</sup>

Here, too, we see the idea that the One transcends 'being' because 'being' implies existence as a particular thing and this, in turn, implies having limitation, i.e. definition and form. However, God surpasses definition and form and therefore exceeds the capacities of the human mind: "No vision taketh in Him..."<sup>32</sup> Because God exceeds form, limit and definition He cannot be merely one more thing among all the other thing. He is the pre-condition for their existence and consequently, He must transcend these attributes.

Furthermore, strange as it may seem, for Plotinus God transcends act or will in the ordinary human understanding of these terms (which will have to be amended later), because both of these imply deficiency or lack. We will something to be or to be done, we act in order to achieve goals because we do not yet have the thing, situation or condition for which we act. We are a subject acting to obtain a goal of some kind. However, since God is "self-subsisting,"<sup>33</sup> i.e. self-sufficient and lacks nothing, He transcends the ordinary sense of these terms. Another way of explaining this concept is to say that

the will of the One is not something which aims at an end, but [is] the end itself. There is no distinction of any kind between the will and its accomplishment.<sup>34</sup>

The logical basis for Rist's view is the absolute unity of the One or God which vitiates any distinction between intention (will) and act. In God, they are one.

Of course, the Writings refer to "the Divine Will that pervadeth all that is in the heavens and all that is on the earth"<sup>35</sup> but from our perspective, the qualifier "Divine" already indicates transcendence of any mere human conception of 'will.' To claim otherwise would be to posit deficiency in God. However, as Plotinus makes clear, in the case of the One, willing need not be motivated by lack or need for something; rather, the One wills and acts not out of need but from completeness and super-abundance.

In our view, this concept of superabundance is the ontological significance of some of the imagery in the Writings:

This is the Ocean out of which all seas have proceeded, and with which every one of them will ultimately be united. From Him all the Suns have been generated, and unto Him they will all return. Through His potency the Trees of Divine Revelation have yielded their fruits....<sup>36</sup>

We might characterize this as the 'imagery of superabundance,' emphasized by the capitalization of such words as "Ocean." Other examples are "Ocean of everlasting bounty,"<sup>37</sup> "the Most Great Ocean,"<sup>38</sup> and "the ocean of My eternal wealth."<sup>39</sup> These suggestions of super-abundance are also implicit in such epithets of God as "the All-Possessing,"<sup>40</sup> "the All-Bounteous, the Most Generous,"<sup>41</sup> and "the Great Giver."<sup>42</sup>

The language and imagery we have examined in the Writings and the *Enneads* suggests that God's actions are the consequence of His super-abundance and His transcendence of all merely phenomenal qualities.

### 3.1 The Second Mode of Discourse About God

In his article on the modes of discourse about God, Bales identifies a second mode of discourse [which] is employed when Plotinus speaks of The Good [i.e. the One or God] as though it is within Being rather than beyond it, the essence of Act, containing all things potentially, as having some kind of Consciousness, Will, Mind and as being the Transcendent Self. This mode of discourse I shall designate ontological.<sup>43</sup>

In other words, the second mode of discourse treats the Good, the One or God as having presence in the phenomenal world instead of only transcending it. He quotes Plotinus:

Hence the Good is not to be sought outside [of the Good]; it could not have fallen outside of what is; it cannot possibly be found in non-Being; within Being the Good must lie, since it is never a non-Being. If that Good has Being and is within the realm of Being, then it is present, self-contained, in everything; we, therefore, are not separated from Being; we are in it; nor is Being separated from us; therefore all beings are one.<sup>44</sup>

In Plotinus' view, the Good cannot be entirely divorced from the phenomenal world of being because it would be without presence within creation, and this absence would effectively be equivalent to "non-Being" within creation. This is impossible since the Good cannot be "non-Being" anywhere: such an absence of the Good would be a deficiency. In the language of the Writings, the Good would no longer be "omnipresent"<sup>45</sup> and, therefore, lacking an essential divine attribute. Because the Good is also present (somehow) in the world of being, we are not separated from the Good and are joined together by its presence.

However, we must not conclude that Plotinus means that the Good literally incarnates itself in specific objects; rather the Good is present pre-eminently, i.e. in a manner consistent with its own divine nature. The Writings also reject the belief that God's presence in creation means that God is somehow divided or distributed in the particular objects of the world. `Abdu'l-Bahá categorically denies the Sufi view which requires that the Independent Wealth should descend to the degree of poverty, that the Preexistent should confine itself to phenomenal forms, and that Pure Power should be restricted to the state of weakness, according to the limitations of contingent beings. And this is an evident error.<sup>46</sup>

Although the Bahá'í Writings disallow incarnation as a mode of God's presence in creation, they explicitly recognize God's presence in the phenomenal world. Bahá'u'lláh writes, "No thing have I perceived, except that I perceived God within it, God before it, or God after it."<sup>47</sup> Perceiving God "within" things is to see the presence of the Divine in them, and by extension, in the phenomenal world. Of course, the Divine is not present in the phenomenal world in the same way we are as incarnated beings. (The phrases "God before it" and, perhaps, "God after it" refer to the transcendence of God.) God's presence is also evident in the following quotation:

Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth is a direct evidence of the revelation within it of the attributes and names of God, inasmuch as within every atom are enshrined the signs that bear eloquent testimony to the revelation of that Most Great Light. Methinks, but for the potency of that revelation, no being could ever exist. How resplendent the luminaries of knowledge that shine in an atom, and how vast the oceans of wisdom that surge within a drop! To a supreme degree is this true of man.... Again He saith: "And also in your own selves: will ye not, then, behold the signs of God?"<sup>48</sup>

The concept of God's presence through the revelation of the "attributes and names of God" is clearly evident in this passage, which also asserts that this revelation is necessary for phenomenal things to exist. No kind of existence from the atoms to humankind is exempt from revealing signs of God. Furthermore, it is worth noting that humans have a privileged place for the divine presence to reveal itself: "And also in your own selves: will ye not, then, behold the signs of God?"<sup>49</sup> Elsewhere, God reveals that "We are closer to man than his life-vein."<sup>50</sup> A more dramatic way of emphasizing God's presence in humankind and in the phenomenal world is difficult to imagine.

The Neoplatonists recognize that God's "attributes and names" are present throughout creation. Proclus refines this insight into a universal principle of ontology:

Prop. 18. Everything which by its existence bestows a character on others itself primitively [originally] possess that character which it communicates to its recipients.<sup>51</sup>

Any cause, therefore, "communicates" some of its nature or character to what it causes and thus retains a presence in the effect. The operation of this principle is most readily evident in the creation of art, but it is really a principle that describes action at all levels of reality.

The Writings also portray God's presence in the phenomenal world through His Will and His actions:

"He doeth whatsoever He willeth in the kingdom of creation,"  
that thereby the sign of His sovereignty might be manifested  
in all things.<sup>52</sup>

Here we observe how God acts "in the kingdom of creation" rather than remaining transcendently distant from it; moreover, He does

so to manifest signs of His presence in the phenomenal world. In a similar vein, the Writings say,

...He doeth whatsoever He willeth and ordaineth whatsoever He pleaseth. Know thou moreover that all else besides Him have been created through the potency of a word from His presence, while of themselves they have no motion nor stillness, except at His bidding and by His leave.<sup>53</sup>

God wills and ordains, i.e. issues commands that lead to the creation of the phenomenal world among other things. Even more, nothing in creation has “motion” or “stillness” except by God’s “leave” or permission, i.e. all things depend on God’s permission to act or not. This emphasizes the extraordinary degree through which God’s power is present through the actions of all things. He actively operates within creation on an on-going basis in all our “motion ... or stillness.”

God is also portrayed as acting in the phenomenal world by means of progressive revelation according to which He takes part in human history by sending Manifestations to guide us through the next phase of our historical development. The Manifestation is the intermediary through which this is accomplished.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, God establishes a covenant with humankind and assists us in our troubles when He listens to or answers our prayers. He is portrayed as a “beneficent Father,”<sup>55</sup> which is another image involving presence-in-the-world, as is the image of God as the “compassionate physician,”<sup>56</sup> and “the Healer, the Preserver.”<sup>57</sup> These and other quotations make it clear that in addition to being utterly transcendent to the phenomenal world, God is also portrayed as having presence within it.

If the One or God has a will to cause specific acts in the phenomenal world, it seems logical to suppose that God, in some sense, has a self, i.e. an identity, desires<sup>58</sup> and a will. Otherwise, how, or why would it

act in creation? In this way, the One may be portrayed as being within the world. This is conclusion drawn by Bales, who claims that the Enneads' discourse about the Good proceeds "as though it is within Being rather than beyond it:"<sup>59</sup> the Good also is portrayed as having a 'self' which would, of course, make it the "Supreme Subject or Self."<sup>60</sup> Plotinus says, "He is what He is, the first self, transcendently The Self."<sup>61</sup> The One, therefore, has, to that extent, an identity and the will to express itself and its decrees, though to a greater degree than any created thing.<sup>62</sup> In the traditional language of theology, it has these attributes pre-eminently.

The Bahá'í Writings also seem to suggest—albeit more tenuously—that God has a self and refer to it in a number of passages. For example, in His discussion about the four kinds of love 'Abdu'l-Bahá says that the third kind of love

is the love of God towards the Self or Identity of God. This is the transfiguration of His Beauty, the reflection of Himself in the mirror of His Creation. This is the reality of love, the Ancient Love, the Eternal.<sup>63</sup>

Not only do we observe God's presence "in the mirror of His creation" but also we have an explicit reference to God's "Self" and "identity." Indeed, in this case, we have a self-reflexive action by God, one in which He is both subject-actor and object-recipient. Such internal division is difficult to fathom vis-à-vis a transcendent God and is conceivable only to an entity within the world of being. Furthermore, the Writings state that God "hath ordained the knowledge of these sanctified Beings to be identical with the knowledge of His own Self."<sup>64</sup> Moreover, some of God's actions are portrayed as being consistent with a being which has a sense of self:

He bestoweth His favor on whom He willeth, and from whom He willeth He taketh it away. He doth whatsoever He



chooseth... He hath, however, caused you to be entangled with its affairs, in return for what your hands have wrought in His Cause.<sup>65</sup>

Elsewhere, God “willeth, and ordaineth that which He pleaseth.”<sup>66</sup> Bestowing favor, willing, taking, causing and being pleased—these are the kinds of actions consistent with a self that is involved with creation. This raises the suggestion that God acts like a self or person insofar as He has an identity, conscious knowledge (“the All-knowing, the All-Wise”<sup>67</sup>), desires and will or intentionality. Of course, to say this is only to say that He does not lack these attributes, not that He is limited by them.<sup>68</sup> Nonetheless, the possession of these attributes allows us to conclude that God’s relationship to us involves a personal aspect; that God is a ‘person’ in some pre-eminent way. Conversely, we might say that it would be mistaken to claim that the Bahá'í view of God is impersonal or non-personal. He is not only a power or ground-of-being, though He is these things as well. The personal aspect of God’s relationship to us is also evident in the Manifestation Who, as we shall see below, reflects the personhood of God into the phenomenal world. It is through the Manifestation that we relate to God personally.

### 3.2 The Third Mode of Discourse about God

Bales refers to the third mode of discourse about the One or God as “paradoxical.”<sup>69</sup> By this he means that it joins and “shows the relationship between the first two modes of discourse,”<sup>70</sup> it exhibits traits of both the transcendent mode of discourse and the imminent mode of discourse that indicates the One’s actions in the world. Bales’ paradigm case for the third mode in Plotinus is self-causation.<sup>71</sup> The One is said to be self-caused—but how can this be? For something to cause itself it would have to exist in order to bring itself into existence. But how can it do this before it exists? The cause and the caused are

identical: “his [the One’s] self-making is to be understood as simultaneous with Himself; the being is one and the same with the making.”<sup>72</sup> This is logically untenable, or, to use Bales’ term, “paradoxical.” However, by means of this paradox, Plotinus unifies the discourse of God as transcendent to being, i.e. transcendent to the phenomenal world as we have seen in the first discussion and the discourse of God as imminent or acting within being as we saw in the second.

Can such paradoxical concepts be found in the Bahá’í Writings? In our view, they can, both implicitly and explicitly. For example, both Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá refer to God as the “Self-Subsisting.”<sup>73</sup> Self-subsistence means independence of anything outside itself, i.e. absolute self-sufficiency, i.e. complete transcendence over the conditions of phenomenal existence in which such uncompromised self-sufficiency is impossible. In the phenomenal world of being self-sufficiency means being one’s own final, formal, efficient and material cause<sup>74</sup>—something that no phenomenal thing can be. Yet God is exactly that from the phenomenal perspective. Thus, like the concept of self-causation in Plotinus, the concept of self-subsistence paradoxically unifies two contradictory perspectives and modes of discourse.

Another example of such paradoxical concepts is found in the phrase that God is “the most manifest of the manifest and the most hidden of the hidden!”<sup>75</sup> Unlike the previous example, the paradox is quite explicit here. As absolutely transcendent, God is “the most hidden of the hidden,” and yet as present throughout creation (God is seen in, before and after things as explained above), God is plainly manifest or visible if we have the desire to see. The transcendent and immanent modes of discourse are joined in this description of God as they are in the statement, “Nothing have I perceived except that I perceived God before it, God after it, or God with it” which we have already examined.<sup>76</sup> Here, too, God’s transcendence and immanence are joined in one paradoxical statement.

Perhaps the most important example of unifying the transcendent and immanent perspectives is found in the discourse about the Manifestation. It should be noted at this point that in the *Enneads* no counterpart to the concept of a Manifestation exists. The knowledge required to achieve freedom and salvation at the personal and social levels needs only individual effort and does not require guidance from someone through whom God speaks. Enlightenment comes to the individual seeker through mystical union with the One, which Plotinus describes as

the life of the gods and of the godlike and blessed among men, liberation from the alien that besets us here, a life taking no pleasure in the things of the earth, the passing of the solitary to [the] solitary.<sup>77</sup>

The “solitary,” of course, refers in the first instance to the human seeker who is alone in his quest for enlightenment, and in the second, to the One who has no peer or likeness and is, therefore, alone.

Discourse about the Bahá'í concept of the Manifestation includes and unifies transcendent and immanent elements. It may be objected that this subject has little or no connection to the transcendence and immanence of God; after all, the Manifestation is not God. While this is patently true of the Manifestation in His earthly station, the issue is more complex vis-à-vis His divine station. The following passage paradoxically joins both of these stations in the person of the Manifestation Himself:

When I contemplate, O my God, the relationship that bindeth me to Thee, I am moved to proclaim to all created things “verily I am God”; and when I consider my own self, lo, I find it coarser than clay!<sup>78</sup>

The transcendent aspect is in the Manifestation's statement, "I am God." As Baha'u'llah says,

Were any of the all-embracing Manifestations of God to declare: "I am God," He, verily, speaketh the truth, and no doubt attacheth thereto. For it hath been repeatedly demonstrated that through their Revelation, their attributes and names, the Revelation of God, His names and His attributes, are made manifest in the world<sup>79</sup>

However, Baha'u'llah's statement that when He considers Himself, He finds Himself "coarser than clay!" includes the immanent aspect of existence which His being also includes. Here is another example:

"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."<sup>80</sup>

The Manifestation embraces two contradictory identities, His own identity as a creation and His identity as God the Creator, and this duality-in-one necessarily requires paradoxical discourse as the foregoing passage illustrates. The second part of this passage also exemplifies the paradoxical discourse required by the Manifestation's duality-in-one. The "Beloved," of course, is God, "the Desire of the world"<sup>81</sup> and in this statement the lover and the "Beloved" are paradoxically one. We may, therefore, conclude that the Manifestation combines in one being both transcendent and immanent aspects and any discourse about the nature of the Manifestation is inevitably paradoxical. We observe this in the following selection:

Thus, viewed from the standpoint of their oneness and sublime detachment, the attributes of Godhead, Divinity,

Supreme Singleness, and Inmost Essence, have been, and are applicable to those Essences of Being [Manifestations], inasmuch as they all abide on the throne of Divine Revelation, and are established upon the seat of Divine Concealment.<sup>82</sup>

The Manifestation possess the “attributes of Godhead” and the “Inmost Essence,” i.e. the attributes of transcendence. It is worth noting that this passage contains another related paradox: the Manifestation is established both on the “throne of Divine Revelation” and “Divine Concealment”; He is both hidden and revealed, with the hidden referring to the transcendent aspect and the revealed to His worldly, immanent aspect.

Here is more evidence of the Manifestation’s possession of attributes of immanence in the world of being:

Viewed in the light of their second station—the station of distinction, differentiation, temporal limitations, characteristics and standards—they manifest absolute servitude, utter destitution, and complete self-effacement. Even as He saith: “I am the servant of God. I am but a man like you.”<sup>83</sup>

The attributes listed here are those of ordinary, limited beings: they are conditioned by time, have identifiable characteristics, have distinct form and, like all other contingent beings are “nothingness”<sup>84</sup> vis-à-vis God. This stands in sharp contrast to their transcendent attributes.

The dual nature of the Manifestations, the possession of both transcendent and immanent attributes, inevitably makes any discourse about Their nature paradoxical insofar as it must combine these inherently contradictory aspects. Efforts to avoid this paradox can only end in developing a distorted understanding of the nature of Manifestations. Hence, from a Bahá'í viewpoint, a purely humanistic or secular understanding of Manifestations is inherently false.

A clear concept of these three modes of discourse is useful in at least three ways. First, it defuses misunderstanding and/or possible critique of the Writings. The Baha'i Scriptures do not contradict themselves in Their various ways of speaking about God, saying first one thing and then the opposite. Rather, They discourse about God in three distinct modes appropriate to three distinct viewpoints: the viewpoint of absolute transcendence of the phenomenal world; the viewpoint of immanence or presence within the phenomenal world; and the viewpoint of the Manifestation Who exemplifies both transcendence and presence. Because the three modes are based on three different point of view, the Writings cannot be contradictory in their discourse about the divine. Second, awareness of the three modes of discourse and the viewpoints from which they originate helps us think more precisely about any statements the Writings make about God by relating the modes of discourse to particular points of view. It enhances our understanding of God as presented in the Writings.

Third, the shared three modes of discourse about the Divine suggest that the Writings and the *Enneads* share some commonalities in their way of understanding God's way of being and relating to the world. Of course, these commonalities do not constitute an equivalence since Neoplatonism has no exact counterpart to the concept of the Manifestation which is central to the Bahá'í concept of how God relates to the world. Furthermore, this discourse can only reflect what human capacity allows us to know and, therefore, reflects our understanding of God's way of being as related to us through the revelation of His Manifestations.<sup>85</sup> Nonetheless, we should not overlook the fact that this mode of understanding, while limited, is still genuine understanding that reflects the realities of our human situation. There are truths available to us. Forgetting this all too easily leads to a relativism, skepticism and, at its worst, nihilism.

#### 4: Human Being: Body and Soul

We shall begin our examination of human being in the Bahá'í Writings and the *Enneads* with a study of the relationship between the soul and body. According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the soul is not located within the body:

the rational soul, meaning the human spirit, does not descend into the body—that is to say, it does not enter it [the body], for descent and entrance are characteristics of bodies, and the rational soul is exempt from this. The spirit never entered this body so in quitting it, it will not be need of an abiding place.<sup>86</sup>

Time and space, ascent and descent and entrance and departure are attributes of material things and soul or “the human spirit is an intellectual, not sensible reality.”<sup>87</sup> Therefore, it does not enter or leave anything. This naturally raises the question of the soul's relationship to the body, about which 'Abdu'l-Bahá says,

Some think that the body is the substance and exists by itself, and that the spirit is accidental and depends upon the substance of the body, although, on the contrary, the rational soul is the substance, and the body depends upon it. If the accident—that is to say, the body—be destroyed, the substance, the spirit, remains.<sup>88</sup>

Because this explanation is couched in Aristotelian philosophical terminology, a few preparatory remarks are in order. A substance in Aristotle's philosophy is, primarily, anything that “exists by itself” as a distinct and individual entity, be it a sensible or intellectual reality.<sup>89</sup> Every substance has attributes which depend on it, just as 'Abdu'l-Bahá describes how, in one view, the soul “depends upon the substance of the body.” Attributes are of two kinds: essential attributes are

those which a substance needs to have to be the thing it is, e.g. watertightness in a cup, and, accidental attributes are those which it may have but does not need to be what it is, e.g. the color of the cup. In the materialist view, in which the “body is the substance... [and]... the spirit is accidental,” the non-essential soul need not be present for the body to exist as a body.

'Abdu'l-Bahá takes a diametrically opposite position. In His view the “rational soul is the substance,” i.e. exists independently and the body is the accident, i.e. non-essential to the existence of the soul. Therefore, the body may pass away but the soul will survive:

The rational soul—that is to say, the human spirit—has neither entered this body nor existed through it; so after the disintegration of the composition of the body, how should it be in need of a substance through which it may exist?<sup>90</sup>

This statement has at least three major consequences. First, it demonstrates the soul's independence from the body, and, thereby, its immortality, a viewpoint Plotinus shares.<sup>91</sup> Proclus elevates this idea to a basic principle of Neoplatonism: “Prop. 186. Every soul is an incorporeal substance and separable from body.”<sup>92</sup> This is only possible because the soul is the cause of the body, i.e. without the soul there would be no body at all. As an attribute, body is dependent and cannot exist without the soul, i.e. it takes a soul to make an actual body as distinct from a conglomeration of elements or a mechanical device. This relationship of dependence is not reciprocal.

Third, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's position is, in effect, a rejection of emergentism and reductionism. Emergentism is a group of philosophies based on the belief that new, irreducible and unpredictable attributes appear or emerge as material structures become more complex; while the 'emergents,' such as mind, consciousness or soul, cannot be reduced to their material substratum, they cannot exist without it either. This



is obviously not compatible with what 'Abdu'l-Bahá has written here since the soul is the independent substance and the body the dependent accident. Emergentism should not be confused with the following statement in *Some Answered Questions*:

Moreover, these members, these elements, this composition, which are found in the organism of man, are an attraction and magnet for the spirit; it is certain that the spirit will appear in it. So a mirror which is clear will certainly attract the rays of the sun.<sup>93</sup>

This differs from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's position insofar as in emergentism the very existence of the soul depends on its material substratum. In the foregoing quotation, the appearance or presence—but not the existence—of the soul or spirit in the phenomenal world depends on a certain level of physical complexity. Second, according to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the soul is 'external' to the complex organism insofar as it is attracted from a higher ontological level than matter, whereas emergentism (and reductionism) views the soul as on par or dependent on matter. Reductionism holds that only attributes present in the original components of the material substratum of a complex structure are real and that all phenomena such as life or mind can be explained by or reduced to the qualities of the underlying matter. In effect, the soul is a property of matter. Clearly, this, too, contradicts 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statements. Both emergentism and reductionism make the soul dependent on its material foundation and both reduce the soul to the same ontological plane as matter.

Fourth, the distinction between soul and body is not a distinction between two utterly different and independent substances, as in, for example, the philosophy of Descartes. In fact, there is only one substance—soul; the body is an attribute of that soul-substance when it appears in the material world. This, in effect, dissolves the mind-body problem since we are not dealing with two separate and unrelated

substances but with one substance—soul—and an accidental attribute—body. There is no ‘problem’ or ‘mystery’ about how a substance can communicate with or is linked to its own attributes; no ‘communication’—as if between two separate things—is necessary because attributes are essentially (permanently) or accidentally (temporarily) part of the substance. From the Bahá’í perspective, the so-called mind-body problem does not exist.

Let us now investigate the Neoplatonic view. According to Pauliina Remes, “given the overall causal and explanatory directions [of Neoplatonism], the body is not a separate substance but generated by the soul.”<sup>94</sup> Plotinus writes, “Soul on the contrary is that which engenders the Form residing within the Matter and therefore is not the Form.”<sup>95</sup> Leaving aside the philosophical technicalities regarding “Form,” this statement means that ultimately the soul causes the existence of the body, so the *Enneads*, like the *Writings*, reject emergentism and reductionism. This conclusion echoes ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statement about the soul as substance and the body as accident produced by the soul.

Furthermore, Plotinus shares the view that the soul is not in the body:

Neither the Soul entire nor any part of it may be considered to be within the body as in a space... the Soul is not a body and is no more contained than containing.<sup>96</sup>

Plotinus then proceeds to refine what he means by explaining that “the mode of the Soul’s presence to body is that of the presence of light to the air...”<sup>97</sup> He adds that this image is accurate because while the air constantly shifts, the light is “stable” and that “the air is in the light rather than the light in the air.”<sup>98</sup> Later, he adds, “a living body is illuminated by soul”<sup>99</sup> just as air is illuminated by light. For Plotinus, the body is ‘in’ the soul because the body is dependent on the soul for its existence; in his system of emanations, the spiritual is always

higher than the material if for no other reason than that the material is the lowest level of being. The physical depends on the spiritual to exist.<sup>100</sup> As William Inge puts it so aptly, “the Soul ‘is present’ with the Body, but not within it.”<sup>101</sup>

The analogous soul-body relationship in the Writings and the Enneads leads to some similar conclusions, the most obvious of which is the immortality of the soul.<sup>102</sup> Being spiritual makes the soul non-composite, and, therefore, immune to destruction. Another implication is that the soul is the active principle in its relationship to the body and that the body is passive. According to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “the soul as thou observest, whether it be in sleep or waking, is in motion and ever active.”<sup>103</sup> Soul, says Plotinus, is “act and creation”<sup>104</sup> and “is the starting point of motion and becomes the leader and provider of motion to all else.”<sup>105</sup> In other words, even physical motion is a symptom of, or, perhaps material metaphor for, spiritual action. This, in turn, suggests that the material derives its value from the spiritual,<sup>106</sup> illustrating, thereby, how intimately ontology and value are related both in the Writings and in the Enneads. The value of anything depends on its ontological position in the cosmic hierarchy in which God or the One is the most valuable at the apex and matter being the least valuable at the lowest level. Value in this instance is determined by the degree of creativity something has or, conversely, how many other things depend on it. Since everything depends on God or the One, He has supreme value.

## 5: Psychology or Ontology?

At this point an objection may be raised. When Plotinus speaks of the soul, he sometimes seems to be speaking about the World Soul i.e. about ontology, and sometimes he seems to be speaking about the souls of individual humans, i.e. about psychology. This brings us to

one of the distinguishing features of Plotinus and Neoplatonism in general, namely, that the ontological or metaphysical and the psychological reflect one another. Pauliina Remes refers to

the internalization of the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy. In some manner, a human being encompasses, or is fundamentally related to, the metaphysical levels. She is not an outside spectator.<sup>107</sup>

R.T. Wallis, for example, observes that in Neoplatonism, metaphysics and psychology “cannot be sharply separated.”<sup>108</sup>

Viewed as a metaphysical reality each level is real in its own right; viewed as states of consciousness, on the other hand, the lower levels become imperfect ways of viewing the true realities contemplated by the ‘higher’ ones.<sup>109</sup>

Emilsson agrees, writing that “at the intelligible level, being and knowledge, ontology and epistemology, are unified.”<sup>110</sup>

These two viewpoints—the ontological and the psychological—are not contradictory and exclusive, but rather they are complementary because each promotes understanding of different aspects of reality. We can adopt both understandings simultaneously since one is reflected in the other. Of course, the higher is always paradigmatic for the lower; the lower always reflects the higher to the limits of its capacity. Proclus, the great systematizer of the *Enneads*, succinctly sums up this idea when he writes, “For each principle participates its superiors in the measure of its natural capacity and not in the measure of their being.”<sup>111</sup> In other words, to the limits of its ability, all things, including the human soul reflect the nature and activities of the World Soul. Bahá’u’lláh states,

Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth is a direct evidence of the revelation within it of the attributes and names of God, inasmuch as within every atom are enshrined the signs that bear eloquent testimony to the revelation of that Most Great Light... To a supreme degree is this true of man... <sup>112</sup>

Each thing reveals the “attributes and names of God” to the limit of its capacity. In *The Elements of Theology*, Proclus writes, “All is in all but in each appropriately to its nature”<sup>113</sup> Every level of reality is present in every other but in a manner that is appropriate to its capacities and limitations. Because “all is in all” the psychological reflects or participates in the ontological and, therefore, by looking inward, we can learn a great deal about the ontological nature of reality. This teaching of the “all in all” opens up far-reaching possibilities for a ‘subjective science,’ i.e. a ‘science’ of subjectivity which explores reality by a rigorous study of subjective consciousness. Such a development has obvious affinities to modern phenomenology.

## 6: Humankind as Microcosm

The idea of the “all in all” implicitly contains the notion that humankind is a microcosm. Pauliina Remes writes,

A basic feature that metaphysics reveals about Neoplatonic anthropology is that to be human is to exist on and in a sense encompass all metaphysics levels: the sensible realm of time and matter, and the hypostases, that is, the Soul, the Intellect and the One.<sup>114</sup>

In a manner appropriate to our nature, humankind ‘contains’ the phenomenal realm and even the hypostases. Of course, the phrase

“in a sense” suggests that we cannot accept this claim literally. Rather, it seems to mean that the phenomenal realm and the hypostases have a presence as signs or images within us, or, as the principles operative in the rest of reality also operate in us. One might also call this a ‘holographic likeness.’ In a holographic picture, every portion reflects the whole to a degree proportional to its segment of the whole, i.e. to its nature.

This view of humankind as a microcosm is explicitly adopted by Plotinus:

For the Soul is many things, is all, is the Above and the Beneath to the totality of life: and each of us is an Intellectual Cosmos, linked to the world by what is lowest in us, but, by what is the Highest, [linked] to the Divine Intellect: by all that is intellective we are permanently in that higher realm, but by the fringe of the Intellectual, we are fettered to the lower.<sup>115</sup>

Metaphysically speaking, human beings live in various levels of reality or, to put it psychologically, in various states of mind. We are an “Intellectual Cosmos” because we reflect or ‘contain’ the principles at work throughout created reality; we touch on both the “higher” and “lower” realms although it must be emphasized again, we do so in a manner proportionate to the capacities and limitations of our essential nature.

The idea of humankind as a microcosm is also found in the Bahá'í Writings:

Man is the microcosm; and the infinite universe, the macrocosm. The mysteries of the greater world, or macrocosm, are expressed or revealed in the lesser world, the microcosm... Likewise, the greater world, the macrocosm, is latent and

miniatured in the lesser world, or microcosm, of man. This constitutes the universality or perfection of virtues potential in mankind. Therefore, it is said that man has been created in the image and likeness of God.<sup>116</sup>

Similarly, we read, "Man is said to be the greatest representative of God, and he is the Book of Creation because all the mysteries of beings exist in him."<sup>117</sup> This passage may be understood to mean that humankind expresses or discloses all the principles operative throughout the macrocosm. In us, these principles are "latent" which is to say, hidden or concealed—like "mysteries"—presumably until such time as human evolution allows us to become conscious of and reveal them. Since the universe is "infinite," this evolutionary unconcealing process within humankind will endure infinitely. In all likelihood, the reference to "virtues" here refers not so much to virtues in an ethical sense, but virtues in the sense of powers or capacities inherent in the rest of creation as well as in humankind. Because God also possesses these capacities to a pre-eminent degree, humankind is an image of God as stated above by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Indeed, Bahá'u'lláh clearly tells us that even atoms contain signs of the revelation of God and that

[t]o a supreme degree is this true of man, who, among all created things, hath been invested with the robe of such gifts, and hath been singled out for the glory of such distinction. For in him are potentially revealed all the attributes and names of God to a degree that no other created being hath excelled or surpassed.<sup>118</sup>

Here, too, we observe that humankind is a microcosm or image of God containing, at least potentially, "all the attributes and names of God." Of course, these attributes are present in us in a manner appropriate to our particular and limited human nature. Proclus' Proposition 103—"All things are in all things but in each according to its proper

nature”—appears to apply in the Bahá'í Writings as well not only vis-à-vis creation but also vis-à-vis the signs of God within us.

One of the logical consequences of the doctrine of the microcosm is that turning inward is one way for humankind to encounter the Divine. In the Arabic *Hidden Words* Bahá'u'lláh says,

Turn thy sight unto thyself, that thou mayest find Me standing within thee, mighty, powerful and self-subsisting.<sup>119</sup>

In our view, a literal reading of this passage presents so many logical obstacles as to make it untenable. At the very least, it violates 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement

It [the sun, i.e. God] does not appear in the substance of things through the specification and individualization of things; the Preexistent [God] does not become the phenomenal; independent wealth does not become enchained poverty; pure perfection does not become absolute imperfection.<sup>120</sup>

If Bahá'u'lláh's statement cannot be taken literally, then it is inevitable that the phrase “Me standing within thee” refers to the signs of God or of the Manifestation abiding within the human microcosm. This is why it is so important to attain self-knowledge, not just of our ego and conscious selves but of our spiritual human nature as microcosms:

In this connection, He Who is the eternal King—may the souls of all that dwell within the mystic Tabernacle be a sacrifice unto Him—hath spoken: “He hath known God who hath known himself.”<sup>121</sup>

Interpreting this passage literally instead of reading it as a reference to an inward sign of God adapted to our human capacities could lead—at its worst—to a potentially disastrous inflation of the human ego.



## 7: The Lower and Higher Aspects of Humankind

One of the consequences of being a microcosm is that human beings also have a higher and lower nature that corresponds to the general cosmic order with its higher, i.e. divine, and lower, i.e. material, aspects. This understanding of our dual or nature is evident in the Writings. For example, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states,

In man there are two natures; his spiritual or higher nature and his material or lower nature. In one he approaches God, in the other he lives for the world alone. Signs of both these natures are to be found in men. In his material aspect he expresses untruth, cruelty and injustice; all these are the outcome of his lower nature. The attributes of his Divine nature are shown forth in love, mercy, kindness, truth and justice, one and all being expressions of his higher nature.<sup>122</sup>

We might say that humans are “amphibious,”<sup>123</sup> i.e. they live in two worlds, though, of course, they must ultimately choose which of these worlds is to predominate and guide their development. This is made clear by 'Abdu'l-Bahá's foregoing statement which associates all positive virtues with our higher nature and negative attributes with our lower nature. Similar ideas are expressed in the following passage:

Man is in the highest degree of materiality, and at the beginning of spirituality—that is to say, he is the end of imperfection and the beginning of perfection. He is at the last degree of darkness, and at the beginning of light; that is why it has been said that the condition of man is the end of the night and the beginning of day, meaning that he is the sum of all the degrees of imperfection, and that he possesses the degrees of perfection. He has the animal side as well as the angelic side.<sup>124</sup>

This declaration takes an ontological perspective of humankind's duality, pinpointing our location in the hierarchy of being at the borderline between "materiality" and "spirituality." This borderline ontological location is reflected in our dual nature. It is noteworthy, too, that 'Abdu'l-Bahá associates "materiality" with imperfection and "spirituality" with perfection—a connection clearly made in the philosophy of Plotinus who not only associates the higher with the divine and the lower with the body but also holds that the soul occupies an intermediate position between higher and lower levels of reality:

But in spite of it all [being in a body] it has, for ever, something transcendent; by a conversion towards the intellectual act, it [the soul] is loosed from the shackles and soars... Souls that take this way have place in both spheres, living of necessity the life there and the life here by turns, the upper life reigning in those able to consort more continuously with the divine intellect, the lower dominant where character or circumstances are less favourable.<sup>125</sup>

Elsewhere He states that "every human Being is of two-fold character."<sup>126</sup> Pierre Hadot sums up the situation succinctly:

The human soul occupies an intermediate position between realities inferior to it—matter and the life of the body—and realities superior to it: purely intellectual life characteristic of divine intelligence and, higher still, the pure existence of the Principle of all things.<sup>127</sup>

According to Remes, Plotinus holds that "human beings are 'amphibious'—they live two kinds of life, those of the intellect and those of the composite."<sup>128</sup> The "composite"<sup>129</sup> refers to the view that the human body is matter and a form which endows it with animal life. 'Intellect,' of course, refers to the higher spiritual life of the *Nous* (translated as

'Spirit' by Inge) which finds its image in the human soul; 'intellect' does not simply mean the 'rational intellect.'

It is clear, therefore, that both the Writings and Plotinus position humankind between two contradictory types of reality, matter and intellect or spirit. This has some interesting philosophical consequences. Because humanity has two different natures we may conclude that humankind is inherently and constitutively self-contradictory, divided, paradoxical, or even absurd. Existentialism is, of course, the philosophy that has richly explored these aspects of our existence from both an atheist and theist perspective.<sup>130</sup> At the same time, in terms of process or dynamics, humankind might well be described as a dialectic since it would appear our entire lives are an on-going interaction of these two sides of ourselves as we evolve. This 'between' situation in which we find ourselves is an interesting connection point between the ancient philosopher Plotinus, the Writings and contemporary philosophy.

## 8: Actualizing Our Highest Potentials

The foregoing passages show that both the Writings and Plotinus maintain that our challenge as human beings is to actualize our higher potentials by cultivating that which is spiritual in us. 'Abdu'l-Bahá re-emphasizes this theme when He writes,

He has the animal side as well as the angelic side, and the aim of an educator is to so train human souls that their angelic aspect may overcome their animal side. Then if the divine power in man, which is his essential perfection, overcomes the satanic power, which is absolute imperfection, he becomes the most excellent among the creatures; but if the satanic power overcomes the divine power, he becomes the lowest of the creatures.<sup>131</sup>

He also says, “If a man’s Divine nature dominates his human nature, we have a saint”<sup>132</sup> whose spiritual condition is contrasted to that of a “mere animal.”<sup>133</sup>

Plotinus expresses similar views:

Our task, then, is to work for our liberation from this sphere [the material world], severing Ourselves from all that has gathered around us; the total man is to be something better than a body ensouled—the bodily element dominant with a trace of Soul running through it and resultant life-course mainly of the body. There is another life, emancipated, whose quality is progression towards the higher realm, towards the good and divine... [so we may become]... the higher, the beautiful, the Godlike... <sup>134</sup>

Both passages emphasize the importance of overcoming our lower nature so that human beings may free the full powers of their specifically human natures to become “saints”<sup>135</sup> or “Godlike.” In other words, both agree that human beings do not have a natural destiny but rather a supernatural destiny—a view which follows logically from the fundamentally spiritual nature of humankind.

However, we must not be deceived into thinking that Plotinus and the Bahá’í Writings completely disparage the body, let alone recommend ascetic practices. Our challenge is neither to over or underestimate the body and to keep it in control. Plotinus writes,

He [the sage] will give to the body all that he sees to be useful and possible, but he himself remains a member of another order... [the body is] the thing which he tends and bears with as a musician cares for his lyre, as long as it serves him... <sup>136</sup>

This is an eminently practical attitude; we must do our best to look after our body properly but must not become obsessed about catering to it. The Bahá'í view on this subject is perhaps best summarized by Shoghi Effendi, who categorically states,

We are not ascetics in any sense of the word. On the contrary, Bahá'u'lláh says God has created all the good things in the world for us to enjoy and partake. But we must not become attached to them and put them before the spiritual things.<sup>137</sup>

Quite clearly, both the Writings and Plotinus both adopt an attitude of moderation in regards to the body.

## 9: Free Will

Both the Writings and Plotinus agree that human beings have free will. Having accepted free will as a basic datum of human nature, Plotinus proceeds to define what this freedom is:

We think of our free act as one which we execute of our own choice, in no servitude to chance or necessity or overmastering passion nothing thwarting our will... everything will be 'voluntary' that is produced under no compulsion and with knowledge.<sup>138</sup>

Elsewhere he adds, "Where act is performed neither because of another nor at another's will, surely there is freedom."<sup>139</sup> In many respects his ideas are quite modern insofar as they present a 'negative freedom,' i.e. freedom from outside interference. Furthermore, he requires knowledge for informed consent to an act. Interestingly enough, he requires not being in the grip of an "overmastering passion" as a criterion for a free act. That which hinders us from implementing "our own choice" may well come from within yet nonetheless, it is not

really 'us' and we could find ourselves as "slaves of passion."<sup>140</sup> This concept of negative freedom is also evident when he writes,

Effort is free once it is towards a fully recognized good; the involuntary [unfree] is, precisely, motion away from the good and towards the enforced, towards something not recognized as good; servitude lies in being powerless to move towards one's good, being debarred from the preferred path in menial obedience. Hence the shame of slavery is that... [is when] the personal good must be yielded in favour of another's.<sup>141</sup>

Freedom requires that we are not forced away or deterred by others from our desired good and that we have the capacity or power to achieve our good. Anything else is "servitude" or lack of freedom. However, Plotinus' view of free will is not limited to 'negative freedom' of non-interference. Absence of interference is a necessary condition for exercising our free will but it is not, by itself, sufficient. Plotinus writes,

Soul becomes free when it moves without hindrance, through Intellectual Principle [Nous], towards The Good: what it does in that spirit is its free act... That principle of Good is the sole object of desire and the source of self-disposal to the rest.<sup>142</sup>

According to Plotinus, full freedom requires a lack of external or internal hindrance but also requires that our acts be towards the Good. If they are not, then our so-called freedom is deficient or incomplete and we, in effect, are not entirely free. However, Plotinus' view goes further. Because he believes that all things naturally seek to approach the good in a way befitting their nature, he also thinks that anything which takes us away from the Good is, in effect, "enforced," "involuntary" and "servitude." Hence, insofar as we move towards the Good, we are fully free.

At this point, an obvious question arises: 'Does freedom not include the ability to do wrong?' Plotinus inclines to a negative answer because, in his view, the ability to make negative choices is not necessarily a virtue.

But when our Soul holds to its Reason-Principle, to the guide, pure and detached and native to itself, only then can we speak of personal operations, of voluntary act. Things so done may truly be described as our doing, for they have no other source; they are the issue of the unmingled Soul.<sup>143</sup>

R.T. Wallis writes,

Freedom for Plotinus consists in tending spontaneously and with full knowledge towards realization of one's true good, and thus contrasts with actions performed under compulsion or under constraint from man's irrational nature.<sup>144</sup>

Pauliina Remes summarizes Plotinus' position by saying,

Freedom is based on knowledge of universal good and intelligible principles that govern the universe, and is thus not primarily personal or subjective but tied strongly with the intelligible order.<sup>145</sup>

This constitutes a significant difference from modern concepts which closely associate freedom with personal, i.e. subjective, choice and action no matter how arbitrary it might seem. On this issue, John Rist writes, "in Plotinus' view true freedom is a direction of the soul to its source in the One."<sup>146</sup> Elsewhere, Rist points out,

Freedom then for Plotinus is not simply equivalent to the power of choice. Rather it is freedom from that necessity of choice which the passions impose. The soul that hesitates between good and evil is not free, nor is such a choice godlike.<sup>147</sup>

R.T. Wallis explains Plotinus' position like this:

Clearly, Plotinus does not accept the idea that freedom necessarily requires the possibility of choice among opposites. He writes, the "ability to produce opposites is inability to hold by the perfect good; that self-making must be definite once for all since it is the right."<sup>148</sup>

He seems to be saying that having the ability to do the bad also means being unable to hold to the good, i.e. being unable to achieve the perfection that is natural to us. Until we can hold to the good so closely that the bad is not even an option for us we are still enslaved, to one degree or another, to our passions. In this quest we are assisted by the fact that the good is natural to us because "[t]he spring of freedom is the activity of the Intellectual-Principle, the highest in our being; the proposals emanating thence are freedom."<sup>149</sup> As humans, the highest aspect of our being is our reflection of the Nous or "Intellectual-Principle" and consequently, our real freedom lies there. It is what we really want even though we may think we want something else. In the words of Lloyd P. Gerson, "We are only in control and therefore free when we identify ourselves as agents of rational desire."<sup>150</sup>

In short, we humans may pursue the pseudo-freedoms of our own desires or the genuine freedom offered by the quest for the One. The former seems genuine but is really restrictive and the latter may feel restrictive but is actually true freedom. This conclusion follows from our human nature which, in Plotinus's view, is an objectively real and with which we can live in harmony, i.e. freedom, or in disharmony i.e. slavery. Even though we choose to delude ourselves that slavery is freedom, it is slavery nonetheless.

The Bahá'í Writings clearly support the belief that humankind has free will. 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes that



[s]ome things are subject to the free will of man, such as justice, equity, tyranny and injustice, in other words, good and evil actions; it is evident and clear that these actions are, for the most part, left to the will of man. But there are certain things to which man is forced and compelled, such as sleep, death, sickness, decline of power, injuries and misfortunes.<sup>151</sup>

Elsewhere, He writes, “But in the choice of good and bad actions he is free, and he commits them according to his own will.”<sup>152</sup> What these passages make clear is that moral decisions are within human power but a large number of physical necessities are not. Ethical freedom exists, but freedom in other matters may be non-existent, such as the need to sleep or eat, or severely circumscribed. According to the Writings, we also have freedom of thought – which includes the freedom to think mistakenly, as indicated by Shoghi Effendi:

There is, unfortunately, no way that one can force his own good upon a man. The element of free will is there and all we believers—and even the Manifestation of God Himself—can do is to offer the truth to mankind.<sup>153</sup>

Because of free will, belief cannot be compelled even if it is for our own good. Shoghi Effendi also advises an inquirer that “The exercise of our free will to choose to do the right things is much more important [than speculation in astrology],”<sup>154</sup> thereby again drawing attention to free will in matters of morality. In the teaching of the independent investigation of truth the Writings clearly advocate freedom of thought for each individual, a freedom which is predicated on our ability to think and to exercise free choice. On this issue ‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes,

When freedom of conscience, liberty of thought and right of speech prevail—that is to say, when every man according

to his own idealization may give expression to his beliefs—  
development and growth are inevitable.<sup>155</sup>

From the foregoing discussion it is plainly evident that the Bahá'í Writings value the importance of free will, free choice and free thought.

### 9.1: The Limits of Liberty

Like Plotinus, the Bahá'í Writings do not embrace without qualification the concept that humans are well served by unlimited freedom or that everything which humans choose to call 'freedom' really is freedom in the truest sense of the word. The fact that we have free will as individuals does not necessarily mean that we should follow our inclinations in any direction or that the exercise of free will can, by itself, justify almost anything. Our freedom in the world—which is predicated on our free will—can easily be misused. As Bahá'u'lláh writes,

Consider the pettiness of men's minds. They ask for that which injureth them, and cast away the thing that profiteth them. They are, indeed, of those that are far astray. We find some men desiring liberty, and priding themselves therein. Such men are in the depths of ignorance.

Liberty must, in the end, lead to sedition, whose flames none can quench. Thus warneth you He Who is the Reckoner, the All-Knowing. Know ye that the embodiment of liberty and its symbol is the animal... Liberty causeth man to overstep the bounds of propriety, and to infringe on the dignity of his station. It debaseth him to the level of extreme depravity and wickedness.<sup>156</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh makes it clear that not everything we call “liberty” is necessarily “true liberty”<sup>157</sup>—a position similar to that adopted by Plotinus. False understanding of liberty may mislead us into forgetting “Noble have I created thee”<sup>158</sup> and thereby lead to harm, or even to “depravity and wickedness” that disgraces our higher nature. Certainly Bahá'u'lláh rejects the notion that liberty for its own sake can justify negative and self-destructive acts. That is why He says,

We approve of liberty in certain circumstances, and refuse to sanction it in others. We, verily, are the All-Knowing.

Say: True liberty consisteth in man's submission unto My commandments, little as ye know it. Were men to observe that which We have sent down unto them from the Heaven of Revelation, they would, of a certainty, attain unto perfect liberty.<sup>159</sup>

This passage reemphasizes that Bahá'u'lláh denies any purely subjective concepts of freedom: an act is not necessarily free or not free because we personally think it is. Subjectivity alone does not determine what is or is not free. One of the other objective factors that must be taken into consideration are the Manifestation's commandments, which reflect what is best for human nature and development whether we personally like it or not. That is why Bahá'u'lláh says freedom is submission to His commands, “little as ye know it,” meaning that although we may not recognize a condition as being truly free, it may be free despite our subjective disagreement.

Concrete examples help to clarify His concept. For example, if people drive their cars on the basis of subjective freedom, the roads would be a worse carnage than they are. Ultimately, this kind of purely subjective freedom is no freedom at all because everyone would be stalled amidst the wreckage. The freest driving is made possible by everyone's submission to the rules of the road because there are objective laws

of physics that must be obeyed. The same is true in other areas of life. Are people who are compulsive shoplifters or eaters free even though they inflict untold harm on themselves and others? Subjectively, they might claim to make their decisions freely, but are they really? Ultimately, would they not be more free if they submitted to the laws forbidding shoplifting and the medical guidelines providing rules for healthy eating? After all, the 'laws' of physiology are as rigorously objective as the laws of physics as are the facts of our human nature.

To fully understand the second example, we must remember that both Bahá'u'lláh and Plotinus agree that human nature includes higher and lower aspects, and that our real or essential self is associated with our higher nature. Consequently, our "true liberty" is to do whatever strengthens our higher self, and 'false liberty' or unfreedom advances our animal nature. We cannot violate our essential nature and claim to be free in any but the most subjective meaning of the word.

Of course, such a line of argument raises an obvious question: 'What are we free from in the kind of freedom advocated by Bahá'u'lláh?' As with Plotinus, the answer is that we are free from slavery to our passions, to our lower animal nature and to the vagaries of the world. In other words, Bahá'u'lláh's pronouncement is on a convergent course with Plotinus' insofar as both recognize the distinction between true and false liberty and both advocate that submission to divine commandments and to our noble human nature gives us more genuine freedom than the arbitrary exercise of human preferences. It is obvious, of course, that approaching the Good in Plotinus and submitting to Bahá'u'lláh's "commandments" are virtually the same actions. After all, the divine commandments are intended to bring us to the Good.

Both Bahá'u'lláh and Plotinus seem to agree that liberty is not an end-in-itself and its own self-justification but rather is a means to

achieve the goals of developing the intellectual and spiritual nature of humankind, of liberating our higher selves. Modern sensibilities are likely to find this unsatisfactory because we think of subjective freedom of choice as the ultimate freedom. Appearances to the contrary, these two concepts of freedom are not necessarily mutually exclusive if we place them in a hierarchy. At the basic level there is freedom of choice, at which people have to make all kinds of choices regarding good and ill, their emotions, their values, purpose and goals and so on. This is the level of freedom as generally discussed in our society. However, at a higher level, we find what Emile Brehier calls "radical freedom,"<sup>160</sup> the kind of freedom apparent in Plotinus and the Writings, i.e. a freedom from the kind of choices that mark the first level and where individuals are no longer slaves of "passion." Such freedom is greater than its predecessor because the individual "is not a prisoner of any of the forms of reality."<sup>161</sup> This "true liberty" is achieved by following the divine commandments or, in Plotinus' terms, participating in our higher spiritual nature. 'Abdu'l-Bahá seems to be thinking of this kind of freedom when He says people must be educated so

that they will avoid and shrink from perpetrating crimes, so that the crime itself will appear to them as the greatest chastisement, the utmost condemnation and torment.<sup>162</sup>

When this level of sensitivity and awareness has been attained, the individual no longer experiences crimes or other human weaknesses as possible choices or temptations, and, thereby, no longer a matter of choice. Such individuals have transcended freedom-as-choice to a higher level where freedom finds its fullest expression in likeness to God by recognizing the Manifestation and by obeying His commands and, thereby, evolving to participating more fully in His attributes.

## 10: Who/What is the Self?

The issue of free will brings us directly to the subject of 'self,' i.e. the individual who acts and experiences subjectivity. We know that we share a universal human nature with other people, but what about our specific 'selves' who make decisions, have feelings, take actions and are particular, i.e. different from others? What about the "historical personality,"<sup>163</sup> the self-aware person whom I identify as 'me'? What is its origin? How is it related to our universal human nature?

To discuss this matter clearly vis-à-vis the Bahá'í Writings, it is first necessary to review what is said about the soul. According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "the essence of man is the soul"<sup>164</sup> which is to say, the soul is our unique distinguishing feature as human beings; the essence of a thing is precisely what gives it its identity as the kind of thing it is, in this case man. This is confirmed when 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, "the human spirit which distinguishes man from the animal is the rational soul, and these two names—the human spirit and the rational soul—designate one thing."<sup>165</sup> Rationality is one of the divine gifts as indicated when Bahá'u'lláh tells us to "Consider the rational faculty with which God hath endowed the essence of man."<sup>166</sup> This, in turn, suggests that the essence of man and rationality are strictly correlated, i.e. rationality is an essential attribute. The human soul cannot be human without it.

In Plotinus, the situation is similar. The rational soul is the human essence, i.e. what makes us the kind of being we are.<sup>167</sup> Plotinus states,

The true man is the other, going pure of the body, natively endowed with the virtues which belong to the Intellectual Activity... This Soul constitutes the human being.<sup>168</sup>

In Plotinus' philosophy, the human soul is an emanation or projection of the Nous or Intellect and thus reflects its rational nature; John

Deck calls it an “emissary from the Nous [Intellect].”<sup>169</sup> A similar line of reasoning is at work when Plotinus says “the soul is a rational soul by the very same title by which the All-Soul is called rational.”<sup>170</sup> The All-Soul is that aspect of the third hypostasis, i.e. Soul from which the human soul is emanated; since the hypostasis is rational by nature, so is the human soul. According to Pauliina Remes, “For Plotinus, every person has a single, rational and self-aware soul;<sup>171</sup> Plotinus identifies “the self primarily with the core self, the reasoning capacity.”<sup>172</sup> Like the Writings, he also associates the rational self with the ‘higher self’ that will “illuminate the life of the lower self.”<sup>173</sup> This, by implication makes the rational soul the higher self.<sup>174</sup> In Plotinus’ words, “the We (the authentic human principle) loftily presides[s] over the Animate,<sup>175</sup> i.e. our animal nature.

At this point it is already clear that the Writings and Plotinus agree on two issues: the identification of the soul as humankind’s essence and the essential rationality of the soul. However, these are the universal aspects of the soul that apply to all human beings, but this does not tell us anything about our individual identity or ‘personality.’ How does this arise? What are its foundations and what is its ultimate destiny?

### 10.1: The Descent in Plotinus

For Plotinus, the origin of our personal existence is the inevitable result of the soul’s fall into the imperfect phenomenal world. The following passages from Pauliina Remes summarizes Plotinus’ position:

Our home and origin in the intelligible universe, gazing closely at the One or God, yet becoming a human being with a personality, individual characteristics and body, as well as a place and a task in the universe, unrelentingly ties us to the realm below perfection. Thus belonging to something high and perfect, without any individualizing characteristics, is

contrasted with being an individual with one's particular existence and personal features. Personality and individuality are understood as essential to our nature, yet connected to imperfection.<sup>176</sup>

The "intelligible universe" is, of course, the Nous (sometimes translated as Intellect or Spirit) which contains all potentially existing things: "the Intellectual-Principle [Nous] is the authentic existences and contains them all – not as in a place but as possessing itself and being one thing with this content."<sup>177</sup> The "intelligible objects" or the "Authentic Beings" are, akin to Plato's Ideas, i.e. models which nature, a lower level of reality, aspires to and imitates in concrete individual examples. This is "intelligible realm" from which the soul descends; our personality is a consequence of this descent. From this, it is clear that personality or individuality begins with the soul's existence as a separate entity.

According to Plotinus, the association of personality with the imperfection of material existence happens because

[t]he evil that has overtaken them has its source in self-will, in the entry into the sphere of process and in the primal differentiation with the desire for self-ownership. They [the potential souls] conceived a pleasure in this freedom and largely indulged their own motion;... they came to lose even the thought of their origin in the Divine.<sup>178</sup>

Once again, we observe the correlation of the descent into the phenomenal world and the desire for "self-ownership" and "self-will," both of which are attributes of personality. The soul becomes so entranced by these desires that it forgets its divine origin. Plotinus' word for this is *tolma* which means audacity with a suggestion of hubris. This casts the descent of the soul in a decidedly negative light. He also believes that the soul enters phenomenal reality to actualize its potentials "by



exhibiting those activities and productions, which remaining merely potential... might as well have never been...<sup>179</sup> While this is a more positive reason for the descent, it is not the explanation emphasized by Plotinus. Finally, Plotinus claims the soul descends partly to “bring order to its next lower [level],”<sup>180</sup> i.e. to act as a form for lower levels of reality. This may be called the soul’s cosmic function. The Bahá'í Writings share these views, though not this attitude towards phenomenal existence.

## 10.2: The Descent in the Writings

How well Plotinus’ doctrine of *tolma* coincides with the Writings depend on how it is understood. If we interpret *tolma* metaphysically, i.e. as an actual choice made by a pre-existing soul, then there is no correspondence. In the Writings, the soul makes no such choice before coming into existence on the “material plane.” However, if it is interpreted psychologically, as a person’s self-assertion towards God, i.e. as an exertion of self-will and hubris, then there is a correspondence. This fall occurs not before birth but can happen at any time in our lives whenever we over-value the blessings of the material world and obey our physical instead of our spiritual impulses.

According to the Writings, self-actualization of potential capacities is the reason for our appearance in the phenomenal world.

The wisdom of the appearance of the spirit in the body is this: the human spirit is a Divine Trust, and it must traverse all conditions, for its passage and movement through the conditions of existence will be the means of its acquiring perfections. So when a man travels and passes through different regions and numerous countries with system and method, it is certainly a means of his acquiring perfection... It is the same when the human spirit passes through the conditions

of existence: it will become the possessor of each degree and station. Even in the condition of the body it will surely acquire perfections.<sup>181</sup>

As in the *Enneads*, the soul may use its life in the phenomenal world to actualize potentials, or acquire “perfections.” However, unlike the *Enneads*, the Bahá'í Writings view self-actualization as the major cause for our appearance in the material world, and, thereby, retain a more positive outlook on this event. It is not a result of audacity (*tolma*) or any other defect as with Plotinus.

the journey of the soul is necessary. The pathway of life is the road which leads to divine knowledge and attainment. Without training and guidance the soul could never progress beyond the conditions of its lower nature, which is ignorant and defective.<sup>182</sup>

It is evident that the Writings and Plotinus have different emphases in their explanations for the appearance of the soul in the phenomenal world. As we have already seen, for Plotinus, the appearance in the world is a fall, the self's desire to exert its own unique powers even though this will separate us from the higher realm of the Nous. Although it is an issue of contention whether or not Plotinus thinks that earthly existence degrades the soul, it is apparent that his attitude is ambivalent, being neither whole-hearted embrace nor complete rejection. The following quote illustrates this:

Under the stress of its powers and of its tendency to bring order to its next lower, it penetrates to this sphere in a voluntary plunge; if it [the soul] turns back quickly all is well; it will have taken no hurt by acquiring knowledge of evil and coming to understand what sin is, by bringing its forces into manifest play by exhibiting those activities and productions,

which remaining merely potential... might as well have never been...<sup>183</sup>

We observe both positive and negative elements here. On one hand, all will be well if the soul “turns back quickly” so it will “take no hurt by acquiring knowledge of evil and... sin.” Clearly existence in the phenomenal world is not an unalloyed gift nor a necessary phase in the actualization of human capacities. On the positive side of the ledger, Plotinus thinks the soul also provides order to the lower levels of reality, and also actualizes its latent abilities in the phenomenal world. However, Plotinus’ belief that matter is the ontological foundation of evil<sup>184</sup> casts a lugubrious shadow over his view of the material world.

The Bahá'í Writings differ from the *Enneads* insofar as they are not tinged with any ambivalence about the value of our bodily existence or about our exposure to sin and evil. In regards to the latter, Bahá'u'lláh teaches us to pray, “O Thou Whose tests are a healing medicine to such as are nigh unto Thee.”<sup>185</sup> The exposure to worldly evil is conceived as a positive challenge to stimulate the growth of the soul. Only when the soul becomes too attached to the physical world does material existence become “a prison for heavenly souls.”<sup>186</sup> Similar statements can be found in Plotinus, but, as noted before, they are overshadowed by his belief that matter is characterized by inherent ontological evil, a belief not shared by the Bahá'í Writings which see the ‘evil’ of matter as relative and not absolute.<sup>187</sup>

Plotinus also mentions that the soul descends partly to “bring order to its next lower [level],”<sup>188</sup> an idea that is similar to what the Bahá'í Writings say about humankind’s cosmic role: “For the enlightenment of the world dependeth upon the existence of man. If man did not exist in this world, it would have been like a tree without fruit.”<sup>189</sup> Even more dramatically, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says,

This world is also in the condition of a fruit tree, and man is like the fruit; without fruit the tree would be useless.<sup>190</sup>

Without humankind, the phenomenal world would lack its highest possible development or purpose, i.e. its final cause, and would, thereby, remain incomplete. Of course, in the four-fold causality accepted by 'Abdu'l-Bahá,<sup>191</sup> if the final cause is missing, there can be no formal cause and, therefore, no order. This is virtually identical to Plotinus' idea that without man, the lower world would lack "order" or form since man is the formal cause bringing order. In each case, the human soul has a cosmic function.

According to Plotinus, the soul undertakes a "voluntary plunge." As Gerard O'Daly says, for Plotinus "Human existence is willed, it is a decision;"<sup>192</sup> "historical human existence is willed by a good soul – it is a realization of essence on a lower level."<sup>193</sup> This view, which somewhat lightens the typically gloomy outlook Plotinus has on material existence, has no counterpart in the Bahá'í Writings. According to the Writings we do not choose our existence here, although we do choose how to conduct ourselves once we have arrived. Plotinus believes in this choice to re-enter the material world because he advocates re-incarnation, in which souls have to decide when and how to return. The Writings reject this option.<sup>194</sup>

## 11: Given Attributes Not a Blank Slate

What the Writings and the Enneads have to say about the soul has relevance for a long-standing debate between those who believe humans are a blank slate and those who think that humans arrive with certain characteristics or structures pre-given. In our view, there can be no question that for the Writings and Plotinus, humans are not blank slates but rather pre-determined in some essential ways. It is worth recalling here that both the

Bahá'í Writings and Plotinus agree that it is the soul which “generates” and individuates the body and not vice versa as is so often assumed.<sup>195</sup> In other words, the body cannot be “a part of us in any essential way,”<sup>196</sup> which implies that the personality is original to the soul itself. Furthermore, the soul is the essential human being, not the body: “the authentic man will be as Form to this Matter or as agent to this instrument, and thus, whatever the relationship be, the Soul is the man.”<sup>197</sup> A survey of both the Writings and the *Enneads* makes it clear that both reject the ‘blank slate’ theory of human nature.

In the case of Plotinus, this is evident from passages such as the following:

One Reason-Principle cannot account for distinct and differing individuals: one human being does not suffice as the exemplar for many distinct each from the other not merely in material constituents but by innumerable variations of ideal type: this is no question of various pictures or images reproducing an original Socrates; the beings produced differ so greatly as to demand distinct Reason-Principles.<sup>198</sup>

Every soul has its own reason-principle or forming-principle, i.e. it is given its individuality from the very beginning. (The World Soul or Soul of All Things contains—albeit not in any spatial sense—all possible reason-principles.) No one individual can be the model for all others of its type and account for all the diversity within a type. This implies that, in the last analysis, our individuality is not a product of the physical body or of historical and/or cultural circumstances or choices. Our individuality has ontological foundations and is given to us.

The same is clear when 'Abdu'l-Bahá says,

*The personality of the rational soul is from its beginning; it is not due to the instrumentality of the body, but the state and the personality of the rational soul may be strengthened in this world; it will make progress and will attain to the degrees of perfection, or it will remain in the lowest abyss of ignorance, veiled and deprived from beholding the signs of God.*<sup>199</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá clearly rejects the idea that the personality or individuality is caused by the “instrumentality of the body.” As with Plotinus, our existence as persons is not dependent on the body or on our physical condition. Instead, our “personality” or individuality is an inherent aspect of the human soul; it is absolutely correlated with our existence<sup>200</sup> and, in that sense, is ‘given’ to us. Soul, not matter, individuates. Thus we are individual, particular persons from the very start of our journey through the phenomenal world. From our very beginnings, we have a unique, given ‘self’ although it may take a life-time of development to actualize even a portion of its infinite potentials.

This inherent aspect of ourselves is also referred to as the “inmost true self”, as, for example, in the following statement from Bahá'u'lláh:

Through the Teachings of this Day Star of Truth every man will advance and develop until he attaineth the station at which he can manifest all the potential forces with which his inmost true self hath been endowed.<sup>201</sup>

Like the soul and “innate character,” the “inmost true self” is endowed with divine bestowals which suggests that humans are not blank slates but rather come into being with certain divinely given structures and potentials or capacities. These form both our species-essence as human beings and our individual-essence as particular persons.

In addition, these various statements strongly imply that the terms “inmost true self,” “rational soul,” and the “innate character” refer to the divinely given essence of man.

Another feature of humankind's given or pre-determined nature is our location in the ontological scale of being. Plotinus tell us that

Humanity, in reality, is poised midway between gods and beasts and inclines now to the one order, now to the other; some men grow like to the divine, others to the brute and the greater number stand neutral.<sup>202</sup>

One of the innate, essential, human attributes is that we “are revealed as the medial and mediating tensions between conflicting and diverging opposites.”<sup>203</sup> These words could also apply to the following statement by `Abdu'l-Bahá:

Man is in the highest degree of materiality, and at the beginning of spirituality—that is to say, he is the end of imperfection and the beginning of perfection. He is at the last degree of darkness, and at the beginning of light.<sup>204</sup>

In both the Writings and Plotinus our ontological position as the meeting point of “gods and beasts” and “materiality” and “spirituality” determines an essential aspect of our nature as human beings. This nature is given, i.e. it is not decided by personal will or culture, and cannot be eradicated or amended by fiat or legislation; indeed, this ontological position is pre-determined by the One or God as one of the essential attributes of our being. It is the ontological pre-condition for our existence as beings endowed with moral choice. All we can do is choose which of these two aspects of our nature we shall develop.

In the Bahá'í Writings, the ambiguity concerning the soul's ontological position at the border between the material and the spiritual is, as we have seen in a previous section, also reflected in our dual nature.

In man there are two natures; his spiritual or higher nature and his material or lower nature. In one he approaches God, in the other he lives for the world alone. Signs of both these natures are to be found in men. In his material aspect he expresses untruth, cruelty and injustice; all these are the outcome of his lower nature. The attributes of his Divine nature are shown forth in love, mercy, kindness, truth and justice, one and all being expressions of his higher nature.<sup>205</sup>

We are constituted by two contradictory natures and this gives us a certain ambiguity; Pauliina Remes describes humankind as “amphibious.”<sup>206</sup> Lest we disparage this ambiguous or amphibious state, it should be noted again that this ambiguity is the ontological pre-condition for our freedom of choice and is, thereby, one of the pre-conditions of our existence as humans. In any case, our “higher nature” is what we have inherited from God. This rational soul, our original personality or “inmost true self,” always remains in us and is always available if we turn our lives towards God or the One.

the state and the personality of the rational soul may be strengthened in this world; it will make progress and will attain to the degrees of perfection, or it will remain in the lowest abyss of ignorance, veiled and deprived from beholding the signs of God.<sup>207</sup>

The narrative that is constructed by the history of our choices may be called our ‘historical self.’ When the rational soul chooses to turn to God, we may become one of the “angels.”<sup>208</sup> However, when the rational soul chooses to turn towards phenomenal, material reality, we develop an “ego.”<sup>209</sup> and give in to “the natural inclinations of



the lower nature”<sup>210</sup> which “is symbolized as Satan—the evil ego within us.”<sup>211</sup> Shoghi Effendi says,

The ego is the animal in us, the heritage of the flesh which is full of selfish desires. By obeying the laws of God, seeking to live the life laid down in our teachings, and prayer and struggle, we can subdue our egos. We call people “saints” who have achieved the highest degree of mastery over their egos.<sup>212</sup>

It appears that the term ‘ego’ (as used here) describes the rational soul, self or personality when it turns away from God and the Manifestation.<sup>213</sup> Because it is a consequence of our turning away from God, we might say that the ‘ego’ is a construct of the rational soul which has become too attracted to and dependent on phenomenal reality. In this condition, we confuse our “inmost true self” and our rational soul with the ego, the “idol of self and vain imagination,”<sup>214</sup> a confusion which impedes spiritual progress. Blinded by this “idol” we no longer are aware of our higher nature and our higher potentials.

## 12: The Hierarchical Self

The inherently ambiguous nature of the human soul complicates the matter of personal identity insofar as the relationship between the lower and higher self is concerned. In Plotinus, the lower aspects of the soul are associated with its connection to the animal body and the material world. However, the soul has not completely fallen into physical existence. Plotinus writes,

Even our human Soul has not sunk entire; something of it is continuously in the Intellectual Realm, though if that part, which is in this sphere of sense hold mastery, or rather be mastered here and troubled, it keeps us blind to what the upper phase holds in contemplation.<sup>215</sup>

In other words, even though the soul exists in the phenomenal world, one aspect of the soul remains in the Nous (Intellect or Spirit). The higher self never enters or falls into the phenomenal world where the other, lower aspects of self are to be found. This leaves the self in an ambiguous situation, divided or perhaps even torn between these two aspects and, thereby, inevitably conflicted to one degree or another. The conflict about which facet of self to favor or develop constitutes the narrative of our lives as ethical beings.

Does Plotinus' doctrine of the higher self remaining in the Nous (the intelligible realm) have a counterpart in the Bahá'í Writings? Initially, the answer appears to be negative, but further reflection suggests that there may be a line of reasoning that could at least close the distance between the two viewpoints. According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Know thou that the Kingdom is the real world, and this nether place is only its shadow stretching out."<sup>216</sup> This statement leads to a crucial question: if the phenomenal world is a shadow of the Kingdom, do human beings also have their 'heavenly counterpart'? If such is the case – and that remains to be proven – then one could, indeed, claim that there is a higher version of ourselves in the Kingdom, i.e. a 'higher self' that is has not fallen into phenomenality. This higher self could be interpreted as the ego with which we converse in inward consultation:

A man may converse with the ego within him saying: "May I do this? Would it be advisable for me to do this work?" Such as this is conversation with the higher self.<sup>217</sup>

If we interpret the "higher self" as the "higher nature"<sup>218</sup> of the rational soul, there is little agreement with Plotinus' position. In this case, our interpretation might be called psychological because it concerns an aspect of our inner constitution. However, if we read these passages ontologically, one could make a case that a 'heavenly' version of ourselves exists in the Kingdom even though we currently dwell in the phenomenal world; this "higher self" is what we consult

in inner deliberations. This view would be closer to Plotinus' position. In the last analysis, however, the extremely abstract nature of this issue makes it doubtful that any final resolution can be reached even by further study.

There seems little doubt that in the Bahá'í Writings our true self is our "higher nature" or the personalized "rational soul." This is the self that should be in control of our embodied lives. However, in the phenomenal world, the given, personalized "rational soul" operates in the phenomenal world through the instrumentality of the body, i.e. the soul's accidental physical attribute.<sup>219</sup> Of course, our spiritual, higher nature should be in control, allowing the soul's physical nature its due, but no more.

Consequently, the Bahá'í Writings seem to present our identity in the phenomenal world as a two-fold hierarchical structure. The foundation of this structure is the rational soul, or "inmost true self" with its divinely bestowed personality. This foundation is given to us by God. The second level consists of what the "rational soul" chooses to make of itself through its powers such as the mind<sup>220</sup> as well as its other gifts and potencies. This might be called the 'historical self' or acquired self. It is constituted by our decisions to move towards or away from God by the way we live. If we have chosen to turn away from our higher selves and God, we develop an 'ego' in (the negative sense) which keeps us focused on the material world and keeps us veiled from the Kingdom. With such an 'ego' we develop a false consciousness which supports a false identity often based on being under control of our "lower nature." Finally, such a false identity inevitably causes inner dissonance for individuals, an inherent and contradiction between the higher potentials which are always available, and the lower choices that betray these potentials in one way or another. This conflict cannot be resolved without turning towards God. On the other hand, if we choose to turn towards our higher selves and God, our 'historical' self' and our rational soul will be in harmony with

each other to one degree or another. We will be more like polished mirrors and, we might say, we will also be 'genuine' because are one with our highest self. In either case—genuine or false—the 'historical self' is the self we bring into the next world.

As to the soul of man after death, it remains in the degree of purity to which it has evolved during life in the physical body, and after it is freed from the body it remains plunged in the ocean of God's Mercy.<sup>221</sup>

A similar idea can be found in the *Enneads*:

the entire form, man, takes rank by the dominant [part of ourselves which has ruled our lives], and when the Life-Principle leaves the body it is what it is, what it most intensely lived.<sup>222</sup>

In other words, the identity we take into the next life is the one we have created on the "material plane."

With Plotinus, the situation regarding identity is similar but not identical. He holds that human existence has three degrees or levels: first, there is the person as found in the Nous or intelligible realm; second, this higher self illuminates the person who lives by sensation; third is the lowest part of the vegetative functions of growth and reproduction. These three are unified under the form of the highest, i.e. humanity.<sup>223</sup> We take our identity from that aspect of ourselves which we choose to develop: "each person is that by which he acts, though he is all as well."<sup>224</sup> That is to say, even though we are human beings, our acquired identity is shaped by the degree according to which we habitually choose to act. Some people act mainly on the vegetative, i.e. the lowest biological level; others live in the materialist world of sensations and tangible realities; and still others actualize their uniquely human potentials. It is important to remember that

each person contains all of these levels to the degree appropriate to our nature but of these three, the real self, is the “higher soul... [which]... constitutes the man,”<sup>225</sup> i.e. the soul at its highest level which faces the ethical task of freeing itself from entrapment in the material world:

Our task then is to work for our liberation from this sphere...the total man is to be something better than a body ensouled...there is another life, emancipated, whose quality is progression towards the higher realm towards the good and divine...<sup>226</sup>

These words, which harmonize well with the Writings, describe the challenge confronting the real self of “Authentic Man.”<sup>227</sup> The history of meeting these challenges and making ethical decisions<sup>228</sup> constitutes the ‘historical’ self. Here, too, we observe the two-part hierarchy of self that we found in the Bahá'í Writings. At the foundation is the ‘pure’ person as existing in the Nous or intelligible realm, who must then choose and act in the material world, and through choices and actions develop a ‘historical self.’ This ‘historical self’ is the second stage of this hierarchy. Moreover, as with the Writings, this historical self can be in harmony or disharmony with its higher original; it can be an ego or false consciousness, or, to use a Bahá'í metaphor, a polished mirror.

### 13: A Normative Ethical Telos

The Bahá'í Writings and the *Enneads* share another important attribute: they both hold to

a normative telos: not just any kind of life, choices and actions count as self-constitution. The normative ideal, the inner self understood as the wholly actualized and integrated reason is

supposed to regulate the process... unified by the active and goal-directed self-constitution on the part of the agent. Nor is the rationality in question just any kind of exercise of one's cognitive capacities. It involves understanding the essential structures of the intelligibly ordered cosmos... <sup>229</sup>

The “normative telos” referred to by Remes is a goal or end-state that is appropriate for all humans since, in varying degrees, we share the same basic nature and, therefore, the same ultimate good, i.e. resemblance to the One or God, and rational freedom from domination by the material realm whether it be the external world or their own bodies. Our actions must be in conformity with the nature of the cosmos and our own human nature. Contrary to prevailing attitudes,

[w]hat is sought is not an individual identity with worldly ties and personal experiences but something over and above it, a free self-determination not bound by the restrictions of the phenomenal realm.<sup>230</sup>

Not any action will do, no matter how sincerely motivated it may be. To achieve the desired effects, it is imperative that our actions accommodate themselves to the objective criteria and requirements of cosmic and human nature. In the Bahá'í Writings, this “normative telos” makes itself apparent in the virtues that we are expected to strive for to the best of our ability. No consideration whatever is given to our personal preferences or agreement:

O SON OF SPIRIT!

My first counsel is this: Possess a pure, kindly and radiant heart, that thine may be a sovereignty ancient, imperishable and everlasting.<sup>231</sup>

In this passage, Bahá'u'lláh informs us that if we wish certain things—“sovereignty ancient, imperishable and everlasting”—we are

required to achieve certain virtues. Nothing in the content nor in the tone of this categorical statement suggests that our preferences are even slightly relevant. Because we have a certain nature as human beings, certain virtues are objectively necessary for us to achieve our goals; moreover, because these virtues are objectively necessary, there is an imperative to achieve them.

A similar outlook prevails in Plotinus. The operation of a “normative telos” is evident even in the *First Ennead*, which informs us that certain virtues are necessary in order to actualize our highest human aspects. There is no choice about what these virtues are; they are made necessary by the facts of our human nature. In particular, Plotinus emphasizes *sophrosyne*, i.e. self-control and moderation acquired through self-knowledge. If we wish to be fully human, then we must know our own nature as human beings and as individuals. This knowledge makes the actualization of these virtues possible. (Bahá'u'lláh expresses a similar idea when He says that “man should know his own self and recognize that which leadeth unto loftiness or lowliness, glory or abasement.”<sup>232</sup>) For Plotinus, to be virtuous as human beings and escape the evils of embodied existence we must strive to resemble the One.<sup>233</sup>

it would be good, it [the soul] would be possessed of virtue if it threw off the body's moods and devoted itself to its own Act—the state of Intellection and Wisdom—never allowed the passions of the body to affect it—the virtue of Sophrosyny [moderation guided by self-knowledge]—knew no fear at the parting from the body—the virtue of Fortitude—in which state is Righteousness.<sup>234</sup>

We observe that Plotinus prescribes certain actions in order to acquire certain virtues; both of these are normative for all human beings simply because we share a universal human nature. Our actions are not

virtuous because they are sincere or express us but because they are appropriate to the kind of beings we are.

## 14: Sculpting the Self

Plotinus uses the analogy of the sculptor to explain how we must proceed to acquire the virtues we seek in order to be at our best:

Withdraw into yourself and look. And if you do not find yourself beautiful yet, act as does the creator of a statue that is to be made beautiful: he cuts away here, he smooths there... never cease chiseling your statue until there shall shine out on you from it the godlike splendour of virtue...<sup>235</sup>

In other words, we must consciously undertake to reform ourselves in such a way as to let our highest potentials appear. This, of course, requires us to know not just ourselves and our human nature, but also what beauty is. That beauty becomes apparent when “[we] find yourself wholly true to [our] essential nature,”<sup>236</sup> i.e. when our acquired historical self harmonizes with our divinely given higher self. Moreover, Plotinus believes that our philosophical knowledge and insight depend on the kind of lives we live and the kind of people we are: “first, let each become godlike and each beautiful who cares to see God and Beauty.”<sup>237</sup> Our understanding of God or the One and the universe, our cognition of reality, depends on the virtues we have acquired.

The Bahá'í Writings have much the same emphasis in associating personal virtue and cognitive knowledge. 'Abdu'l-Bahá summarizes the remarks of Galen, a non-Christian philosopher and medical scientist:

In our time there is a certain people called Christians, who, though neither philosophers nor scholastically trained, are



superior to all others as regards their morality. They are perfect in morals. Each one of them is like a great philosopher in morals, ethics and turning toward the Kingdom of God.<sup>238</sup>

The Christians' cognitive knowledge of ethics depends on the moral condition they have achieved. To appreciate the full significance of this, we must recall that 'ethics' in this context means the objective knowledge of what actions are objectively appropriate to human nature and not merely rationalized preferences, acting in 'good faith' or sincere self-expression. We also see this more objective outlook when Bahá'u'lláh says, "man should know his own self and recognize that which leadeth unto loftiness or lowliness, glory or abasement, wealth or poverty."<sup>239</sup> This self-knowledge is a pre-condition for following the "straight path [which] is the one which guideth man to the dayspring of perception and to the dawning-place of true understanding."<sup>240</sup> This emphasis on the connection between attaining personal virtue and cognitive philosophical knowledge is a typical feature of classical Greco-Roman philosophy with its recognition of philosophy as a way of life and not just a matter of theoretical knowledge.<sup>241</sup>

Furthermore, the Bahá'í Writings, albeit in different language, have a concept parallel to Plotinus' image of the sculptor of self. Just as the sculptor chisels away and smoothes over unacceptable aspects of his art work, Bahá'ís are told to sacrifice, i.e. give up those aspects of self that impede making moral progress. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states,

Until a being setteth his foot in the plane of sacrifice, he is bereft of every favour and grace; and this plane of sacrifice is the realm of dying to the self, that the radiance of the living God may then shine forth. The martyr's field is the place of detachment from self, that the anthems of eternity may be upraised. Do all ye can to become wholly weary of self...<sup>242</sup>

It is through sacrifice that we ‘carve’ or ‘sculpt’ ourselves, removing undesirable attributes as a sculptor removes unwanted marble from a statue. Such removal is the “dying to self.” We also have to practice “detachment from self” by looking and judging ourselves objectively, not by our personal preferences but by the criteria provided by the divinely revealed Writings. Another statement by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá emphasizes these points:

With reference to what is meant by an individual becoming entirely forgetful of self: the intent is that he should rise up and sacrifice himself in the true sense, that is, he should obliterate the promptings of the human condition, and rid himself of such characteristics as are worthy of blame and constitute the gloomy darkness of this life on earth—not that he should allow his physical health to deteriorate and his body to become infirm.<sup>243</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s injunction tells us to “obliterate” the unwanted aspects of ourselves, just as Plotinus’ sculptor chisels away unwanted marble. (Of course, neither the Writings nor Plotinus approve of asceticism, as we have already discussed above.) The underlying idea in both cases is the same: we must exercise our free will and our power to shape ourselves according to a standard that appropriately adapts us to the ontological structure of reality and to the eternal spiritual realm instead of merely to our temporary residence in material reality.

Pauliina Remes’ statement about the *Enneads* is equally true of the Bahá’í Writings:

In contrast to modern accounts of selfhood as a process or a story in time, for Plotinus the end is – or should be – fixed. Only a process leading towards what is good and beautiful counts as true self-constitution. The normative ideal acts also as a regulative principle. Embodied selfhood is always a

process towards ideal unity, rationality and virtue, a lifelong exercise in becoming what we are... What is sought is not an individual identity with worldly ties and personal characteristics but something over and above it.<sup>244</sup>

In other words, the Bahá'í Writings and the *Enneads* share a common understanding of what constitutes true or genuine selfhood. We should not give unqualified assent to the notion that 'genuine' selfhood is merely any life-story whatever; every person inevitably has a life-story but every life-story does not constitute a genuine, true self according to the criteria laid down by the Writings or the *Enneads*.<sup>245</sup> Bahá'u'lláh's injunction to know ourselves clearly indicates that self-deception about ourselves is possible,<sup>246</sup> as do the countless passages about being led "astray." For the Writings and the *Enneads* the goal is to seek an identity that does not exclude but transcends material and worldly considerations. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, "become yourselves the saints of the Most High!"<sup>247</sup> In this sense, both the Writings and the *Enneads* share what may be called the 'perennialist' concept of self, i.e. the concept that genuine selfhood requires trying to meet certain ethical and spiritual standards in order to prepare us for a better lives in the future. These standards are almost universal and re-appear in all of the world's major religions. The re-appearance of these generally similar concepts of self in various forms are, of course, one of the implications of the essential unity of religions.

## 15: Union with God

The ultimate human goal according to the Bahá'í Writings and the *Enneads* is nearness to or unity with God, but what this actually means must be carefully explored in each case. Both agree that the closer we are to God or the One, the more truly we are ourselves, the more authentic we become; in other words, we become more like our

essential, spiritual selves and achieve our higher destiny. The Bahá'í Writings tell us that

The greatest attainment in the world of humanity is nearness to God. Every lasting glory, honor, grace and beauty which comes to man comes through nearness to God. Every lasting glory, honor, grace and beauty which comes to man comes through nearness to God. All the Prophets and apostles longed and prayed for nearness to the Creator.<sup>248</sup>

The matter could not be stated more clearly; this “attainment” has no equal in the phenomenal world, meaning that no amount of knowledge, technological progress, creative cultural sophistication or political wisdom can compensate for its lack. This goal is irreplaceable. However, in the Bahá'í Writings, “nearness to God” does not imply even the slightest suggestion that human beings can in any way or from any perspective become ontologically one with God.<sup>249</sup>

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.<sup>250</sup>

The ontological difference between an absolutely independent God and an absolutely dependent human is unalterable. Proclus seems to suggest the same idea when he writes,

Prop. 9. All that is self-sufficient either in its existence or in its activity is superior to that which is not self-sufficient but dependent upon another existence which is the cause of its completeness.<sup>251</sup>

Things cannot be superior or even equal to that on which they depend as long as the dependency relationship lasts. In the case of the One,

or God, this is bound to be eternal. It is, therefore, inconceivable that humans and God could become ontologically one and any such assertions must be rejected as mistaken understandings. To assume such a union has taken place, is, in effect, to elevate ourselves to the rank of the Manifestations.<sup>252</sup> A mergence of self and God may be experienced psychologically, but, as the foregoing passage shows, this experience must not be interpreted ontologically. Consequently, for Bahá'ís, “nearness to God” means, for example, something like a mergence of our individual wills into the will of the Manifestation, or a psychological loss of self-consciousness in a vision of the Divine splendour, or our ecstasy of spiritual insight and knowledge of the mysteries of creation,<sup>253</sup> or our elation at escaping from the prison of the ego. (This is not, of course, intended as a complete list of possibilities.) In each of these examples, there is a loss of self/ego, i.e. a psychological state which is not to be confused with an actual, i.e. ontological, union with God. On this matter, psychology—the experience of union with the Divine—does not reflect itself in ontology.

The mediator between God and humankind is the Manifestation Whose “double station”<sup>254</sup> enables Him to represent God as “One Whose voice is the voice of God Himself” as well as the human station. Given the impossibility of ontological union with God, the only way to achieve “nearness to God” is through our relationship to the Manifestation:

In all the Divine Books the promise of the Divine Presence hath been explicitly recorded. By this Presence is meant the Presence of Him Who is the Dayspring of the signs, and the Dawning-Place of the clear tokens, and the Manifestation of the Excellent Names, and the Source of the attributes, of the true God, exalted be His glory. God in His Essence and in His own Self hath ever been unseen, inaccessible, and unknowable. By Presence, therefore, is meant the Presence of the One Who is His Vicegerent amongst me.<sup>255</sup>

The Báb states,

[t]here is no paradise more wondrous for any soul than to be exposed to God's Manifestation in His Day, to hear His verses and believe in them, to attain His presence, which is naught but the presence of God, to sail upon the sea of the heavenly Kingdom of His good-pleasure, and to partake of the choice fruits of the paradise of His divine Oneness.<sup>256</sup>

These passages leave no doubt that attaining the presence of the Manifestation is what the Writings mean by attaining the presence of or "nearness to God." This concept obviously affects the Bahá'í understanding or interpretation of concepts such as 'union' with God, 'mystical' experiences of God as well as cataphatic as well as apophatic theology. For example, if attaining the "Divine Presence" means attaining the presence of the Manifestation, what is involved in the latter, especially for those Who never knew Bahá'u'lláh personally? In what sense and to what extent is a Bahá'í cataphatic theology possible since the Manifestation can be known, at least to some extent? Or, conversely, must Bahá'í theology necessarily be apophatic? These and other questions await further exploration.

In Plotinus, the issue of "nearness to God" is less clear than in the Bahá'í Writings. Whether or not the human soul merges with the One ontologically or only psychologically by losing consciousness of itself is not easily settled. For example, it is possible to argue that the following passages show that there is complete ontological union.

In this seeing [of the One], we neither hold and object nor trace distinction; there is no two. The man is changed, no longer himself nor self-belonging; he is merged with the Supreme, sunken into it, one with it...<sup>257</sup>

Even more dramatically, Plotinus writes,

she [the soul] has seen that presence [of the One] suddenly manifesting within her, for there is nothing between; there is no longer a duality but a two in one; for, so long as the presence holds, all distinction fades; it is the lover and the beloved here... the soul has now no further awareness of being in a body and will give herself no foreign name, not man, not living being not being... <sup>258</sup>

When the soul becomes united with the One, it does not lose consciousness of being a separate identity but rather it loses its separate existence and thus become indistinguishable from the One. It has, so to speak, been ontologically 'up-graded' from a dependent and contingent to an independent and non-contingent. This situation raises questions about how this identity can be regained after the moment of union is over. If the self is lost ontologically, how can it be regained without continuing to exist in some way? Questions of this kind prompt scholars such as J.M. Rist reject the notion of the soul's 'obliteration' in the One.

while the soul as a spiritual substance can be enveloped by the One, enraptured, surrendered, wholly characterized so as to become infinite and not finite, it is neither obliterated nor revealed as the One itself... <sup>259</sup>

In some way, the distinct soul continues to exist even while new hitherto unimaginable potentials become actualized in this state of union; however, the soul does not disappear or become the One. This position is strengthened by its logical consistency with Plotinus' characterization of the One. For example, Plotinus states that "the Supreme as containing no otherness is ever present with us,"<sup>260</sup> meaning that even though the One is always with us, it does not, thereby,

contain any “otherness,” i.e. other substances or individuals. “We are ever before the Supreme”<sup>261</sup> says Plotinus; we can contemplate it and lose ourselves in the contemplation but we can never be it. If we could, the One would contain ‘otherness.’ Pauliina Remes takes a similar position.

The problem with the idea that the human soul could *unite* with the One is the fact that the One is supposed to be complete and self-sufficient. If it were possible to ‘add’ something to it, its completeness and uniqueness might be compromised... The One remains beyond substance and human soul.<sup>262</sup>

In other words, the concept that the union of self and the One is ontological contradicts the essential, self-sufficient nature of the One as well as its being beyond the category of “substance.” Indeed, if the One is infinite in its self-sufficiency, how can anything be added to that which is infinite? Remes also claims that “[t]here is no danger of getting lost in the One”<sup>263</sup> because the formless and limitless nature of the One is inherently incompatible with the nature of the rational soul which “grasps things through limits and definitions—through rational or intellectual activity.”<sup>264</sup> If the soul loses its inherent, essential nature, it would no longer exist, and that, once again, raises extremely difficult questions about how the limited rational soul could return to existence after the end of its union with the One. Plotinus himself recognizes this difficulty:

yet, there comes the moment of descent... and after that sojourn in the divine, I ask myself how it happens that I can now be descending, and how the Soul ever enter into my body...<sup>265</sup>

There are no obvious answers to the many questions surrounding the question of union with the One. For example, is the body the ‘anchor’ during the time of union? How can the individual soul or higher self



re-constitute itself after it has lost its distinguishing essential and personal attributes in the One? Re-constituting oneself after the self has been ontologically eliminated seems contradictory since it requires one to exist when one does not! Or is there a remnant of self? But if the latter is the case, the union is not fully ontological but at least partly psychological since a remnant remains even though it may not be conscious of itself as different from the One.

While this difficult issue in Neoplatonic studies is one for specialists to solve, if, indeed, that is possible, we can say that the Bahá'í Writings are only compatible with the psychological interpretation of the union with the One. From the Bahá'í perspective, any suggestion that the created can attain the ontological status of the Creator is inadmissible because the absolutely dependent can never become absolutely independent. Such an assertion would be equivalent to claiming the same ontological status as God:

*Beware, beware, lest thou be led to join partners with the Lord, thy God. He is, and hath from everlasting been, one and alone, without peer or equal, eternal in the past, eternal in the future, detached from all things, ever-abiding, unchangeable, and self-subsisting.*<sup>266</sup>

In short, the Bahá'í Writings do not allow us to change our ontological status. The claim that we can unite with God ontologically violates the principle that God is "one and alone" since such a claim makes it possible for us to 'end' God's aloneness and His 'one-ness.' It also means that God is no longer "detached from all things" and "unchangeable" since the mergence with the human soul suggests that something has been 'added' to the Divine. This, in turn, undermines the concept of God as "self-subsisting" since the very possibility of 'adding' anything to God means that God was in some way 'deficient' before the addition was made, and, therefore, dependent on

the addition to be complete. A similar point can be made for “ever-abiding.” If it is possible to ‘add’ anything to God, He cannot be “ever-abiding;” nor can He be “eternal” in the past and future because there would a ‘before’ and ‘after’ the union. Finally, if a soul, i.e. a dependent creation can raise its ontological status to ‘independent’ from ‘dependent,’ then obviously God is not “without peer or equal.”

## 16: Sympathy

One of the key principles of Plotinian thought is that of ‘sympathy,’ i.e. “the view that since the world is a living organism, whatever happens in one part of it must produce a sympathetic reaction in ever other part.”<sup>267</sup> In other words, creation is a unity made up of inter-active parts none of which exist or can exist in isolation. The Stoics called this view “cosmic sympathy;”<sup>268</sup> it was a point of agreement among all ancient philosophies except the materialists and atheists. According to Plotinus, every created thing

while executing its own function, works in with every other member of the All from which its distinct task has by no means cut it off; each performs its act, each receives something from the others, each one at its own moment bringing its touch of sweet or bitter.<sup>269</sup>

In short, directly or indirectly, everything influences everything else in some way and thereby helps make the world what it is. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá teaches the same idea:

For all beings are connected together like a chain; and reciprocal help, assistance and interaction belonging to the properties of things are the causes of the existence, development and growth of created beings. It is confirmed through

evidences and proofs that every being universally acts upon other beings, either absolutely or through association.<sup>270</sup>

The concept of a “chain” reminds us of the ancient concept of the “great chain of being”<sup>271</sup> which holds all elements of creation together in a coherent order based on ontological levels. In ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statement, reciprocal interactions are the “causes of existence” which means that nothing can exist or come into existence in isolation. Such interactions are also necessary for “development and growth,” suggesting thereby that self-actualization of all latent potentials requires the presence of a community of beings and is not something that can be done alone – or for oneself alone. In one way or another, at least some actions must be adapted to the community context in which things find themselves.

However, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá does not think that the interactive process in the phenomenal, material world is self-directed but rather requires guidance:

a universal power inevitably existeth, which encompasseth all, directing and regulating all the parts of this infinite creation; and were it not for this Director, this Co-ordinator, the universe would be flawed and deficient. It would be even as a mad-man... every separate part of it performing its own task with complete reliability... Thus it is clear that a Universal Power existeth, directing and regulating this infinite universe. Every rational mind can grasp this fact.<sup>272</sup>

It is evident, therefore, that the powers of sympathy and influence in the phenomenal, material world do not function randomly or capriciously; their actions are necessary but are not sufficient to explain the order we observe. To provide a complete, adequate explanation a “Universal Power” is needed which cannot only provide cosmic order

by guiding the interactive processes through law, but can also help explain the origin of physical laws, and the origin of the capacity to influence and be influenced. Obviously, such a power must transcend the phenomenal world.

Plotinus agrees. In the *Enneads*, he compares things of the universe to members of a “dance-play”<sup>273</sup> in which each dancer plays a part in order that is “the coordinating All.”<sup>274</sup>

The Circuit does not go by chance but under the Reason-Principle of the living whole; therefore, there must be a harmony between cause and caused; there must be some order ranging things to each other's purpose or in due relations to each other.<sup>275</sup>

Change and motion, the interactive process of things, (“the Circuit”) creates a rational order through influence or sympathy, i.e. the “harmony between cause and caused.” Without that harmonized sympathy or influence, the cosmic process would be random and capricious and the Universe could not be a “living whole” let alone a rational order.

## 17. Conclusion

In the two parts this paper, we have focussed on major areas of similarity between the Bahá'í Writings and the *Enneads* in regards to ontology, epistemology, ethics and philosophical anthropology. Naturally, this study is not complete, but it does provide an initial foray into this hitherto largely unexplored field of studies. From this investigation we are able to draw three conclusions.

First, the similarities between the Writings and the *Enneads* are numerous and far-reaching on the foremost issues. In this sense, the philosophy embedded in the Writings and the philosophy explicated

by the *Enneads* are 'sister-philosophies,' i.e. they bear a close family resemblance to one another.

Second, these foundational similarities open new worlds to explore in regards to the philosophy embedded in the Writings and classical Neoplatonic and Greco-Roman philosophy, a field that is currently subject to dramatically increased interest. The relevance is not limited to specific teachings but also includes such issues as the nature of philosophy and how philosophy should be pursued.

Third, the similarities between the Writings and the *Enneads* form a solid foundation for in-depth philosophical dialogue with three major religious traditions whose philosophical expression over the centuries has been heavily influenced by Neoplatonism: Christianity, Islam and Judaism. Such dialogue is important because it concerns the intellectual basis on which their teachings and attitudes are built.

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NOTES

- 1 Lights of 'Irfán volume 11 (2010), pp. 149–202.
- 2 Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha'u'llah*, p. 19.
- 3 Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha'u'llah*, p. 196.
- 4 Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, #201.
- 5 Shoghi Effendi, *Unfolding Destiny*, p. 432.
- 6 Shoghi Effendi, *The Lights of Divine Guidance Vol. 1*, p. 55.
- 7 Shoghi Effendi, *Unfolding Destiny*, p. 445; emphasis added.
- 8 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablet to August Forel*, p. 18.
- 9 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, 91.
- 10 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 220.
- 11 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 220.
- 12 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gems of Divine Mysteries*, p. 52.
- 13 This is why I believe the Writings advocate a moderate rationalism, as philosophically opposed to an extreme rationalism/positivism for which only rational knowledge is true knowledge, or irrationalism in which there is ultimately no real knowledge at all but only a plethora of competing relative opinions.
- 14 Peter Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus*, p. 1.
- 15 Peter Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus*, p.
- 16 R.T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, p. 163.
- 17 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Question*, p. 283.
- 18 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 280.
- 19 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 219.
- 20 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablet to August Forel*, p. 18.
- 21 Eugene F. Bales, "Plotinus' Theory of the One" in *The Structure of Being: A Neoplatonic Approach*, ed. by R. Baines Harris, p. 41.
- 22 Eugene F. Bales, "Plotinus' Theory of the One," p. 41.
- 23 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 203.
- 24 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 203.
- 25 The significance of this use of "Being" will be discussed below.



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- 26 Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, XIX, p. 46–47; emphasis added.
- 27 `Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 146–147; emphasis added.
- 28 Bahá'u'lláh, Prayers and Meditations, p. 13.
- 29 Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, XIV, p. 35.
- 30 Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, XXVII, p. 66; emphasis added.
- 31 Enneads, V, 5, 6.
- 32 Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, XIX, p. 47.
- 33 Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, X, p. 13.
- 34 J M Rist, Plotinus: The Road to Reality, p. 78.
- 35 Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, II, p. 5.
- 36 Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, LI, p. 104; emphasis added.
- 37 Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, XII, p. 24.
- 38 Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, XXIX, p. 71.
- 39 Bahá'u'lláh, Hidden Words, From the Persian, #11.
- 40 Bahá'u'lláh, Prayers and Meditations, p. 41.
- 41 Bahá'u'lláh, Prayers and Meditations, p. 13.
- 42 Bahá'u'lláh, Prayers and Meditations, p. 5.
- 43 Bales, "Plotinus' Theory of the One," in The Structure of Being, p. 41.
- 44 Enneads, VI, 5, 1 in Bales, "Plotinus' Theory of the One," in The Structure of Being, p. 41.
- 45 `Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 286.
- 46 `Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 295.
- 47 Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 102; emphasis added.
- 48 Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, XC, p. 177; emphasis added.
- 49 Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, XC, p. 177; emphasis added.
- 50 Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, XCIII, p. 185.
- 51 Proclus, The Elements of Theology, Prop. 18; see also Prop. 27.
- 52 Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CXXXVI, p. 295; emphasis added.
- 53 Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 110; emphasis added.
- 54 Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, XXVII, p. 66.

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- 55 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 66.
- 56 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 19; *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 56.
- 57 *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXLVIII, p. 237.
- 58 *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, L, p. 103; *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 36; *The Hidden Words*, (Persian) #19.
- 59 Bales, "Plotinus' Theory of the One," in *The Structure of Being*, p. 41.
- 60 Bales, "Plotinus' Theory of the One," in *The Structure of Being*, p. 45.
- 61 *Enneads*, VI, 8, 14 in Bales, "Plotinus' Theory of the One," in *The Structure of Being*, p. 45.
- 62 *Enneads*, VI, 8.
- 63 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 180.
- 64 *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XXI, p. 50; *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, LXXXVIII, p. 175.
- 65 *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CIII, p. 209.
- 66 *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXXXIV, p. 291.
- 67 *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XIV, p. 35.
- 68 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 148.
- 69 Bales, "Plotinus' Theory of the One," in *The Structure of Being*, p. 41.
- 70 Bales, "Plotinus' Theory of the One," in *The Structure of Being*, p. 41.
- 71 *Enneads*, VI, 8, 20.
- 72 *Enneads*, VI, 8, 20 in Bales, "Plotinus' Theory of the One," in *The Structure of Being*, p. 47.
- 73 *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, X, p. 13; *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 192.
- 74 *The Writings* accept the four-fold analysis of causality; see *Some Answered Questions*, p. 280.
- 75 Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations*, p. 248.
- 76 *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, XC, p. 178.
- 77 *Enneads*, VI, 9, 11.
- 78 Baha'u'llah, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 234.
- 79 *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, XXII, p. 53.

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- 80 Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, XXVII, p. 66–67; emphasis added.
- 81 Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, LV, p. 109.
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- 89 `Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 84.
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- 91 Enneads I, 1, 1.
- 92 Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, Prop. 186.
- 93 `Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 200.
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- 97 Enneads, IV, 3, 22.
- 98 Enneads, IV, 3, 22; emphasis added.
- 99 Enneads, IV, 3, 23.
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- 103 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablet to August Forel*, p. 8.
- 104 Enneads, IV, 7, 8.5.
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- 110 Eyjolfur Kjalar Enilsson, *Plotinus on Intellect*, p. 2
- 111 Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, Prop. 172.
- 112 Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, XC, p. 177; *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 270.
- 113 Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, Prop. 103; see also Prop. 195.
- 114 Pauliina Remes, *Plotinus on Self*, p. 25.
- 115 *Enneads*, III, 4, 3; emphasis added.
- 116 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 69; emphasis added.
- 117 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 236.
- 118 Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, XC, p. 177; emphasis added.
- 119 Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words (Arabic) #13*, p. 7.
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- 121 Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 101.
- 122 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 60.
- 123 Pauliina Remes, *Neoplatonism*, p. 106.
- 124 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 235.
- 125 *Enneads*, IV, 8, 4; see also III, 4, 2.
- 126 *Enneads*, II, 3, 9.
- 127 Pierre Hadot, *Plotinus, or the Simplicity of Vision*, p. 26.
- 128 Pauliina Remes, *Neoplatonism*, p. 106.
- 129 *Enneads*, IV, 7, 1.
- 130 Sartre is the best known representative of atheist existentialism, Kierkegaard of theist existentialism. Heidegger has been interpreted as being in both camps.
- 131 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 235; emphasis added.
- 132 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 60.
- 133 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 60.
- 134 *Enneads*, II, 3, 9.
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- 136 *Enneads*, I, 4, 16.
- 137 Shoghi Effendi, *The Lights of Divine Guidance*, Vol. 2, p. 69.

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- 138 Enneads, VI, 8, 1.  
139 Enneads, VI, 8, 4.  
140 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, III, 2; also Lily Campbell, *Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes, Slaves of Passion*.  
141 Enneads, VI, 8, 4.  
142 Enneads, VI, 8, 7; emphasis added.  
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- 205 `Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 60.
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- 208 `Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablets of `Abdu'l-Bahá, v 1, p. 145.
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243 Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 180; emphasis added.  
244 Pauliina Remes, Plotinus on Self, p. 211.  
245 This is not to say that individuals have the insight or right to make  
these judgments about others.  
246 Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 35.  
247 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks 61.  
248 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 147; emphasis added.  
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- 264 Pauliina Remes, *Plotinus on Self*, p. 253.
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- 267 R.T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, p. 70.
- 268 This concept is often associated with Stoic philosopher Posidonius (135 BCE to 51 BCE).
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- 270 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 178–179.
- 271 Most famously explicated on A.O. Lovejoy's *The Great Chain of Being* (1936).
- 272 *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 48–49
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- 274 *Enneads*, IV, 4, 33.
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# Preparing Bahá'í Communities in the East and West to Embrace Gender Equality

Baharieh Rouhani Ma`ani

## Introduction

The oneness of humankind is the pivotal principle of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation. Its realization is impossible without restoring to women the human rights denied them since time immemorial. Gender equality, a principle revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, is an essential prerequisite of the unity of humankind and one of the most difficult to achieve worldwide. Inequality goes back many centuries. Its practice is rooted in time-honored traditions and condoned in almost all past religions. Eradicating a practice so long upheld and accepted by both men and women as the way God had intended it to be requires patience, painstaking effort and supreme wisdom. The principle of gender equality was revealed by Bahá'u'lláh; the ground for its meaningful achievement was laid by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during His ministry. This paper deals with the intricacies involved and the remarkable way He dealt with the matter. It examines some of His writings revealed in honor of the Bahá'í women in Iran and North America, and the methods He used to utilize their energy and capabilities for the furtherance of the Cause of God. The paper also looks at the practical ways He educated Bahá'í men to accept women as their equal. Finally, it discusses the glowing result He achieved in a relatively short time.

## The Establishment of Bahá'í Communities: Historical Background

### 1. The Establishment of Bahá'í Communities in the East

The arenas of Bábí activities, which began with the declaration of the Báb in Shiraz, Iran in May 1844, were Iran and Iraq. The Báb was born in Shiraz in 1819 and executed in Tabriz in 1850. During His ministry, many embraced His Cause and Bábí communities were established in numerous centers in the two countries where His Faith spread.

Bahá'u'lláh, for Whose Advent The Báb had come to prepare the people, was also a native of Iran. He was born in Tihran in 1817 and embraced the Bábí Faith shortly after The Báb declared His Mission. Bahá'u'lláh's active involvement in promoting the Bábí Faith and His leadership of the community, after the martyrdom of The Báb, made Him a target for severe persecution leading to His banishment from Iran. He left for Baghdad in January 1853. Ten years later, as He was leaving Baghdad for Constantinople (Istanbul) in spring 1863, Bahá'u'lláh declared that He was the One promised by all past religions, Whose advent the Báb had heralded, and for Whom He had sacrificed His life. Those who embraced Bahá'u'lláh's Cause became known as Bahá'ís. Bahá'u'lláh was further exiled to Adrianople (Edirne) and 'Akká, where He passed away in 1892. During His ministry (1863–1892), His Cause spread to more than a dozen countries where Bahá'í communities were established.

### 2. The Establishment of Bahá'í Communities in the West

Shortly after Bahá'u'lláh's Ascension, Ebrahim Kheirallah, the first Bahá'í of Syrian origin who had embraced the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh in Cairo, Egypt around 1890, set foot on American soil.<sup>1</sup> His settlement in Chicago in February 1894 marked the beginning of the establishment of a Bahá'í community in that city. Gradually the

teachings of the nascent Faith spread and Bahá'í communities were established in different parts of North America, whence it spread to Europe and other parts of the western hemisphere.

### The Principle of Gender Equality and Its Impact on the Evolution of Bahá'í Institutions in the West

As the number of new adherents in the United States swelled and their thirst for receiving more elaborate and clear guidance regarding the Bahá'í Faith intensified, it became clear that they needed assistance from seasoned and knowledgeable Bahá'ís to deepen their understanding of the tenets of the Bahá'í Faith. To provide for this need, 'Abdu'l-Bahá sent emissaries consisting of Bahá'í men of recognized ability from the Middle East to visit North America. Among them was Mírzá Asadu'lláh-i-Isfahání.<sup>2</sup> During his visit to the United States at the turn of the twentieth century, elected consultative bodies comprising of adult male Bahá'ís were elected. Whether this was a coincidence or happened by design, Mírzá Asadu'lláh has been credited with helping to organize the Bahá'í communities administratively. Although renowned and knowledgeable, he was not free from the influences of time-honored traditions and gender-based biases of the Middle Eastern countries. When preparations were being made for consultative bodies to be elected, he supported the view that women were not allowed to serve on them. It is interesting to note that at that time American women had not yet gained the right to vote and gender equality still remained a distant dream. Therefore, Mírzá Asadu'lláh's understanding of the law must have seemed reasonable and in accord with what was the norm. That development, however, set in motion a long process of education by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the aim of which was to prepare Bahá'í communities in the west to embrace the principle of gender equality. Although He did not interfere with what had happened and did not annul the body which excluded women from its membership, He steered the

affairs in a manner that led to the Bahá'í women gaining the right to be elected and the men to accept them as their equal in every respect.

As an authorized translation of the text of the Most Holy Book was unavailable, the western believers initially depended for their knowledge of the laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas on the understanding of male Bahá'ís from the Middle East.<sup>3</sup> One of the laws of the Most Holy Book says: "The Lord hath ordained that in every city a House of Justice be established wherein shall gather counselors to the number of Bahá..."<sup>4</sup> This verse refers to the establishment of Local Houses of Justice and makes no reference to the gender of the members. In the same Book, Bahá'u'lláh speaks of the "Seat of Justice", admonishes "its men to observe pure justice...", and also addresses the "Men of Justice!"<sup>5</sup> In the early stages of the development of the Faith and until 'Abdu'l-Bahá made the intent of the law clear, although Bahá'ís in the east and the west were aware of the principle of gender equality, they generally believed that all Houses of Justice excluded women from their membership. Considering the heightened level of gender bias, which had traditionally kept women outside the arena of decision-making institutions, this was not surprising. The erroneous understanding of the Bahá'í law was, however, challenged by some western women believers during the ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. With supreme wisdom He gradually disclosed the intent of the law which made it possible for women to serve on all the institutions of the Faith save that of the Universal House of Justice.

The first "House of Justice", later named the "House of Spirituality", was elected in Chicago in early 1900. The election took place during the prolonged visit of Mírzá Asadu'lláh. This institution as well as the Council Board formed in New York later that year excluded women from their membership.<sup>6</sup>

According to Nathan Rutstein, author of *Corinne True*, "They had seen a copy of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, which mentions the development of

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*Houses of Justice. So, even though the Master didn't request the believers to organize administratively, some prominent Chicago Bahá'ís felt they should. After all, He hadn't said they couldn't... people like Thornton Chase believed that organizing the Faith would protect it from confusion and schism.*"<sup>7</sup> For reasons of prudence, 'Abdu'l-Bahá advised that it be not called the House of Justice, therefore it was called the 'House of Spirituality.' As already stated, women were initially excluded from its membership. Some women, prominent among them Corinne True, felt uneasy about the exclusion of women. Rutstein writes:

Corinne True followed the development of the House of Spirituality keenly. It bothered her that women weren't allowed to serve on the body. She didn't protest, but instead made a commitment to try to change the membership to include women...she was sure that Bahá'u'lláh had inaugurated a new era, in which women would realize equal status with men. But many of the early Bahá'ís ... didn't subscribe to Corinne True's beliefs.<sup>8</sup>

Corinne True referred the matter to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Successor of Bahá'u'lláh and the authorized Interpreter of His Writings.<sup>9</sup> Her missive is unavailable, but it is not difficult to surmise from the response she received what the contents of her letter were. A part of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's response reads:

... in the sight of Bahá, women are accounted the same as men, and God hath created all humankind in His own image, and after His own likeness. That is, men and women alike are the revealers of His names and attributes, and from the spiritual viewpoint there is no difference between them. Whosoever draweth nearer to God, that one is the most favoured, whether man or woman. How many handmaids, ardent and devoted, hath, within the sheltering shade of Bahá, proved superior to the men, and surpassed the famous of the earth.

In the same Tablet, He says

The House of Justice, however, according to the explicit text of the Law of God, is confined to men; this for a wisdom of the Lord God's, which will ere long be made manifest as clearly as the sun at high noon.<sup>10</sup>

The contents of this Tablet praising the ardent and devoted women believers who, He says, had proved superior to the men and surpassed the famous of the earth came to them as a real surprise. How do we know this? A Tablet revealed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in honor of Thornton Chase makes this clear. The Tablet reads:

It may be that letters addressed to the women believers do indeed contain certain passages written by way of encouragement, but the purpose of such passages is to show that, in this new age, some of the women have outshone some of the men – not that all women have excelled all men! The members of the Spiritual Assembly should do all they can to provide encouragement to the women believers. In this dispensation one should not think in terms of “men” and “women”[,] all are under the shadow of the Word of God and, as they strive the more diligently, so shall their reward be the greater – be they men or women or the frailest of people.<sup>11</sup>

The second part of the Tablet to Corinne True refers to the “explicit text of the Law of God”<sup>12</sup> according to which, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, “[t]he House of Justice ... is confined to men.” He also speaks of “a wisdom of the Lord God's, which will ere long be made manifest as clearly as the sun at high noon.” It is most significant that 'Abdu'l-Bahá speaks not of a reason, but a “wisdom” for the exclusion of women from membership on the House of Justice. Had He spoken of “a reason”, men would have been confirmed in their belief that something inherent in women makes them unfit to serve on the

House of Justice. `Abdu'l-Bahá speaks of a “wisdom”, but provides no clue to help humanity to unravel it. He actually defers its manifestation to a future date. He also speaks of the “explicit text of the Law” without identifying it. Moreover, He does not make the intent of the Law clear.

## Wisdom, Its Role and Significance in Scripture

Wisdom is a word repeatedly used in Bahá'í Writings. To understand its different meanings to the best degree possible, we need to examine the concept as it has been used in the Writings, which is outside the scope of this discussion. Suffice it to say here that one kind of wisdom is inscrutable to all but God. Another is the kind that only appointed interpreters comprehend. A third is the kind that is within the realm of possibility for human beings to understand, but requires time. The wisdom of which `Abdu'l-Bahá speaks in His Tablet to Corinne True does not fall under the first two categories, for He says ere long it will be made manifest very clearly, like the sun at high noon. Corinne True was eager to know the reason for women's exclusion from membership on the House of Justice. `Abdu'l-Bahá did not provide a reason. Instead, He spoke of a wisdom. Why? One may observe:

Reason requires a premise. A premise is “a statement of fact or a supposition made or implied as a basis of argument.” Reason is “a statement offered in explanation or justification.” It requires “due exercise of the faculty of logical thought.”<sup>13</sup>

By contrast, wisdom does not require a premise. It is defined as “(possession of) experience and knowledge together with the power of applying them critically or practically.”<sup>14</sup>

As stated earlier, had `Abdu'l-Bahá used the word “reason”, it would have caused everyone to look for something inherently wrong with



women to justify their exclusion from membership on the elective arm of the Administrative Order. Were there a reason, 'Abdu'l-Bahá would have pronounced it when the world was ready and eager to hear and accept it. In His Writings and discourses 'Abdu'l-Bahá says that lack of education had kept women backward and in the background. Women had not chosen to be uneducated; this injustice, like many others, had been imposed upon them by a patriarchal society. Moreover, the removal of the cause should remove the effect, which is not the case here.

The term “wisdom” shifted the believers’ attention from centering focus and dwelling on women’s inferiority, which they thought had made women unsuitable to serve on decision-making institutions, to something they were incapable of comprehending. The focus on “reason” had traditionally led to the degradation of women’s status in religion. The focus on “wisdom” was the first step in implementing the principle of gender equality. Bahá'u'lláh had already dealt with men’s perceived superiority when He revealed: “[T]he Pen of the Most High hath lifted distinctions from between His servants and handmaidens ... hath broken the back of vain imaginings with the sword of utterance and hath obliterated the perils of idle fancies through the pervasive power of His might.”<sup>15</sup>

Fully aware of the social requirements of the time and the incapacity of a society utterly unprepared for grasping the significance of the principle of gender equality, 'Abdu'l-Bahá dealt with a persistent question in a way that did not disrupt the progress of the Faith at that early stage of its development. He focused on educating the community by encouraging women to forge ahead in the teaching field. He guided them to found Spiritual Assemblies. Addressing the women believers, He said:

...O ye...handmaids who are enamored of the heavenly fragrances, arrange ye holy gatherings, and found ye Spiritual

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Assemblies, for these are the basis for spreading the sweet savors of God, exalting His Word, promulgating His religion and promoting His Teachings, and what bounty is there greater than this...<sup>16</sup>

At the same time, He made it known to all that male superiority was caused by physical force and the exigency of the primitive age of the human race, that distinction based on gender was not in God's plan for creation, that the injustices women had suffered as a result of their unequal status with men had to be rectified. He emphasized that women, too, were made in the image of God, affirmed that in the sight of God men and women are the same, and prepared the men to accept women as their equal. Had He explained at the outset what the intent of the Law was, had He overruled the men whose misunderstanding of the intent of the Law had caused the confusion, those men and their supporters would have been startled, nay dismayed, and chaos would have ensued. Divine wisdom dictated that the intent of the Law be gradually disclosed, and that the believers be given ample time to be educated to accept the outcome. This conjecture is confirmed by the contents of a Tablet revealed in honor of one or more female believers in Tihiran, which will be discussed later in this paper.

The events that took place following the revelation of the Tablet to Corinne True unravel how 'Abdu'l-Bahá prepared the community for women's membership on National and Local Houses of Justice in a way that when the time came, the transition was smooth and the outcome was accepted by all. The key to the smooth transition was the women's obedience to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's directives. They did as He had advised and focused their energies more than ever before on teaching the nascent Faith and spreading the Cause of God in the United States and abroad. They founded an "Assembly of Teaching" and outdid the men in the arena of promoting the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh. For a while the House of Spirituality and the Assembly

of Teaching operated as parallel institutions. This anomaly, which was causing confusion, was dealt with successfully with the cooperation of the women. However, the question of the exclusion of women from membership on the House of Spirituality did not go away. In response to further questions, 'Abdu'l-Bahá confirmed the eligibility of women for membership on local and national Bahá'í institutions. This was contrary to the understanding of those who had initially thought otherwise. By this time, the process of educating the believers to understand the implications of gender equality had taken root; the believers understood and accepted the intent of the Law, as explained by 'Abdu'l-Bahá':

According to the ordinances of the Faith of God, women are the equals of men in all rights save only that of membership on the Universal House of Justice, for as hath been stated in the text of the Book, both the head and the members of the House of Justice are men.

He further stated:

in all other bodies, such as the Temple Construction Committee, the Teaching Committee, the Spiritual Assembly, and in charitable and scientific associations, women share equally in all rights with men.<sup>17</sup>

In this Tablet 'Abdu'l-Bahá not only reveals the intent of the Law by confirming women's eligibility for membership on all institutions "save only that of membership on the Universal House of Justice", but He also identifies "the text of the Book," according to which, He says, "both the head and the members of the House of Justice are men."

In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh alludes to the institution of Guardianship.<sup>18</sup> In His Will and Testament 'Abdu'l-Bahá delineates the manner of the election of the Universal House of Justice

and designates the Guardian of the Cause of God as “its sacred head and the distinguished member for life of that body.”<sup>19</sup> The text of the Book mentioned in this context may, therefore, be a reference to His Will and Testament.

In the initial Tablet to Corinne True, the ineligibility of women for membership on the “House of Justice”, which was understood to include all Houses of Justice, was linked to a wisdom of Lord God’s. For that wisdom to be made manifest in a way that everyone would see it clearly, time was needed to prepare the ground for women’s membership on all the institutions of the Faith, save that of the Universal House of Justice. To prove to the men that women had the ability to enter all fields of service and excel in what they did, and also to prove to the women that they were up to the task, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá encouraged some capable women to undertake responsibilities that until then had been reserved for men. For example, it was through His encouragement that Corinne True became involved with looking for land and with the finances of the Mother Temple of the West. Her active involvement and success was instrumental in her membership on the Temple Unity Board, a prelude to the election of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States and Canada. Her dedicated services to the Faith, which were demonstrated most ably, were widely recognized and revealed to skeptics among the believers that, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had stated, when women and men are given equal opportunities, they prove equal to the task. At the first National Bahá’í Convention of North America, two women were elected to the National Spiritual Assembly, Corinne True being one of them. Everyone accepted the outcome without hesitation. Women’s eligibility for election on decision-making bodies had by then become an established fact.

The question of the ineligibility of women for membership on the Universal House of Justice, however, persisted. It was raised again during the ministry of Shoghi Effendi and has been raised since the

establishment of the Universal House of Justice. The responses have been invariably based on 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablets on the subject, especially the one quoted above. In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated 28 July 1930, it is stated:

...[T]here is a Tablet from 'Abdu'l-Bahá in which He definitely states that the membership of the Universal House is confined to men, and that the wisdom of it will be fully revealed and appreciated in the future. In the local as well as the national Houses of Justice, however, women have the full right of membership. It is, therefore, only to the International House that they cannot be elected."

In the same letter, the Bahá'ís are advised to "accept this statement of the Master in a spirit of deep faith, confident that there is a divine guidance and wisdom behind it which will be gradually unfolded to the eyes of the world."<sup>20</sup>

### The Response of the Bahá'ís of Iran to the Principle of Gender Equality

The genesis of organized Bahá'í activity in Iran is not as clearly described and documented as that in the West. Once a general history of the Faith in the land of its birth becomes available, it will explain how it all started. For the time being what is known is this: the first group of believers who, in their rudimentary understanding of Bahá'u'lláh's commandment in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* "that in every city a House of Justice be established"<sup>21</sup> came together and formed an Assembly for the purpose of looking after the affairs of the community, were all men and initially self-appointed. The membership continued to be all-male long after it became an elected institution.

The women's exclusion from membership on elected Bahá'í institutions was not initially an issue in Iran. Based on traditional practices, everyone accepted the notion that women were excluded from decision-making institutions, as though it was the intent of the Law revealed in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. As a result of social conditioning, also because of the prejudices that had kept women in a degraded state, women's exclusion from membership on elected Bahá'í institutions in Iran continued for several decades. In his Ten Year global Plan (1953-1963) Shoghi Effendi made the eligibility for election of the Iranian Bahá'í women a goal of that Plan for Iran to achieve. At the end of the first year of that Plan, i.e. during Ridván 1954, women, who until then had the right to elect, for the first time enjoyed the right to be elected as well. Even then the mental block, which considered Iranian women unworthy of serving on elected Bahá'í institutions, made it most difficult for women to be elected. The first woman elected to the National Spiritual Assembly of Iran was Adelaide Sharpe, an American Bahá'í woman serving in Iran. Many Local Assemblies had only one, or no female member, for quite a while after 1954. Therefore, the process of educating the masses about gender equality had to continue much longer. For those who wonder why no Iranian Bahá'í woman was ever appointed a Hand of the Cause of God, or why none has served as a Counselor in the land of Bahá'u'lláh's birth, this should provide at least a partial answer.

While 'Abdu'l-Bahá was preparing the friends in the West for the implementation of the principle of gender equality, He was also laying the ground for its realization in the East. In numerous Tablets, He encouraged the women to emulate the example of the Bahá'í women in America and Europe, and even outdo them in the arena of service. In one of His Tablets we read:

O ye leaves who have attained certitude! In the countries of Europe and America the maidservants of the Merciful have won the prize of excellence and advancement from the arena

of men, and in the fields of teaching and spreading the divine fragrances they have shown a brilliant hand. Soon they will soar like the birds of the Concourse on high in the far corners of the world and will guide the people and reveal to them the divine mysteries. Ye, who are the blessed leaves from the East, should burn more brightly, and engage in spreading the sweet savors of the Lord and in reciting the verses of God. Arise, therefore, and exert yourselves to fulfill the exhortations and counsels of the Blessed Beauty, that all hopes may be realized and that the plain of streams and orchards may become the garden of oneness.<sup>22</sup>

When the initial stirrings of collective consciousness moved the women believers in Tihiran to action, their initiative showed promise when some men of goodwill offered their wholehearted support. At that crucial juncture, 'Abdu'l-Bahá encouraged some western women to go to Iran and extend to the women and their supporters a helping hand.

Although the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh had sparked in the hearts of the women believers the fire of hope and although they knew that one day they would achieve equality of status with men, that glorious future seemed to them very distant. With Tahirih (Qurratu'l-'Ayn) the process of gender equality had begun, but the road to its realization seemed thorny and filled with hazards. The Iranian women needed concrete examples and living role models to turn their dreams into reality; they needed all the support they could get. They had seen the glimmerings of organized Bahá'í community life and activities in Tihiran where men had spontaneously formed institutions that looked after the affairs of the community. They had also witnessed the establishment of a Bahá'í Boys School in 1900 that was successfully educating the boys. They wished to establish a school for the girls. Some even initiated private enterprises with the help of some men of goodwill, but the progress was painfully slow because resources were scarce and community support negligible.

The first to respond to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's call was Dr. Susan Moody. She settled in Tihran in early 1909, and began working in earnest to improve the health condition of women. She also provided crucial help in establishing a Bahá'í girls school, similar to that of the Tarbíyat Boys School, albeit on a much smaller scale. About a year after her arrival in Tehran, she wrote to the American Bahá'ís in February 1910 and conveyed this joyous news:

...The girls' school is assured. They will start with accommodations for fifty pupils... Please tell any who want to help that it will take only \$1.50 per month to educate a girl. There are many here too poor to pay and this is the way to help lift Persia from her otherwise hopeless condition.<sup>23</sup>

Dr. Moody was instrumental in seeking 'Abdu'l-Bahá's approval for recruiting the services of Ms. Lillian Kappes, an American Bahá'í educator, to teach in the Girls School.

Before going to Iran, Lillian Kappes was aware of the plight of women in that country. She knew that men dominated over the affairs of women and did not think much of their education. She was aware of the challenges that she was going to face in carrying out her work. What she did not know was that her male colleagues would stand in the way of her effectiveness in providing for the education of girls. Fortunately, on her way to Iran, she had met 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Switzerland and had been to some degree prepared for the challenges ahead. Nonetheless, at times she found the situation unbearable. For example, she had to administer the girls' school almost single-handedly yet without any autonomy. The school had been initially established as a department of the boys' school and the education committee, composed of male Bahá'ís, was principally concerned with the needs of the boys' school. Miss Kappes was circumscribed in her efforts and could not make much progress. The prolongation of this difficult situation affected her health. In 1916 Dr. Sarah Clock,



another American Bahá'í who had gone to Iran to help Dr. Moody's work, sent a letter to some Bahá'í women in the United States, and disclosed the reality of the situation:

Yesterday Miss K [Kappes] was simply abused by the meeting of 5 men, came home in perfect nervous collapse & was awake all night from sheer nervousness & worry...., Not long ago a tablet came to a Persian here praising Miss K & her work in the school ... she has the moral support of many of the best men, all the women who in an excited meeting all stood y her. ....if Miss Kappes were not a Bahai or not less than a saint she would not have put up with all she has, for five years her hands have been tied, that is they have not allowed her to use her own advanced ideas as to a school. ... some of the good men are entirely with her. They offer to open another school for her & several of the nicest of the girls will teach for nothing.<sup>24</sup>

In a country tightly held in the grip of male domination, where women could not and did not actively participate in any decision-making process, the presence of a few women, who posed a challenge to the traditional way of life, was a mighty tool in exposing the prejudices that had led to women's degraded status. Unlike an early emissary to the west who had informed the nascent Bahá'í community of the United States to exclude women from membership on elected institutions, the American Bahá'í women taught the women in Iran how to achieve equal status with men and prepare to serve with them on Bahá'í institutions. They taught by example that, given opportunities for advancement, women could do as well as their male counterparts. Encouraged by the achievements of their Bahá'í sisters, some Iranian female believers learned to become assertive and to claim their God-given rights. By doing so, they became entangled in a controversial issue for which the generality of men in Iran had no sympathy, even tolerance. When their petitions for equal treatment met resistance, a

group of women wrote to 'Abdu'l-Bahá and complained.<sup>25</sup> And they were not the only ones whose petitioning letters reached 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Some men wrote and complained as well, but the nature of the complaints differed. Women sought equality. Men regarded their perceived superiority a birthright and could not understand the women's demand. Although the texts of the petitioning letters are unavailable, the contents of one of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's responses provide enlightening insights. They also show the way that 'Abdu'l-Bahá, through a process of education, prepared both men and women to embrace the principle of gender equality in Iran. While approving "the establishment of a women's assemblage for the promotion of knowledge," He said, "discussions must be confined to educational matters."<sup>26</sup> He further explained: "It should be done in such a way that differences will, day by day, be entirely wiped out, not that, God forbid, it will end in argumentation between men and women."<sup>27</sup> He then provided an example, something that had been done contrary to the dictates of wisdom and it had to do with the veil. He said: "As in the question of the veil, nothing should be done contrary to wisdom."<sup>28</sup> He then exhorted the women:

The individual women should, today, follow a course of action which will be the cause of eternal glory to all womankind, so that all women will be illumined. And that lieth in gathering to learn how to teach, in holding meetings to recite the verses, to offer supplications to the kingdom of the Lord of evident signs, and to institute education for the girls. Ponder the manner in which Jináb-i-Táhirih used to teach. She was free from every concern, and for this reason she was resplendent. Now the world of women should be a spiritual world, not a political one, so that it will be radiant. The women of other nations are all immersed in political matters. Of what benefit is this, and what fruit doth it yield? To the extent that ye can, ye should busy yourselves with spiritual matters which will be conducive to the exaltation of the Word of

God and of the diffusion of His fragrances. Your demeanour should lead to harmony amongst all and to coalescence and the good-pleasure of all....<sup>29</sup>

That the atmosphere between the men and women in Tihiran was tense causing concern, and that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was trying with His loving counsels to calm the situation, in order to hasten the implementation of the principle of gender equality, is evident from what He said next:

I am endeavouring, with Bahá'u'lláh's confirmations and assistance, so to improve the world of the handmaidens that all will be astonished. This progress is intended to be in spirituality, in virtues, in human perfections and in divine knowledge.

To make the women conscious of a unbecoming behaviour, 'Abdu'l-Bahá refers to the situation of the women in America and remarks:

In America, the cradle of women's liberation, women are still debarred from political institutions because they squabble. They are yet to have a member in the House of Representatives.<sup>30</sup>

It must be stated here that 'Abdu'l-Bahá did not spare men from engaging in unbecoming behavior either. During His visit to North America, He related what He had experienced in France, which exposed a similar or worse characteristic in men. He said: "In France I was present at a session of the senate, but the experience was not impressive." After explaining the object of true consultation, He says: "In the parliamentary meeting mentioned, altercation and useless quibbling were frequent; the result, mostly confusion and turmoil; even in one instance a physical encounter took place between two members. It was not consultation but comedy."<sup>31</sup>

In His Tablet to the Bahá'í women in Tíhran, 'Abdu'l-Bahá makes reference to Bahá'u'lláh addressing the "men of the House of Justice" which suggests that membership of Bahá'í institutions was one of the points covered in the communications He had received. He says: "Also Bahá'u'lláh hath proclaimed: 'O ye men of the House of Justice.'" It is interesting to note that in this Tablet, He does not explain the intent of the Law. Could it be that the process of education in Iran was incomplete and the ground was not yet ready for making the intent of the Law clear? What comes next seems to confirm this conjecture:

Ye need to be calm and composed, so that the work will proceed with wisdom, otherwise there will be such chaos that ye will leave everything and run away. "This newly born babe is traversing in one night the path that needeth a hundred years to tread." In brief, ye should now<sup>32</sup> engage in matters of pure spirituality and not contend with men. 'Abdu'l-Bahá will tactfully take appropriate steps. Be assured. In the end thou wilt thyself exclaim, "This was indeed supreme wisdom!" I appeal to you to obliterate this contention between men and women ....<sup>33</sup>

He ends the Tablet thus:

No one can on his own achieve anything. 'Abdu'l-Bahá must be well pleased and assist.<sup>34</sup>

The theme of gender equality was time and again addressed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during His travels in North America and Europe. His utterances have been compiled and published in "The Promulgation of Universal Peace," "Paris Talks," "Abdu'l-Bahá on Divine Philosophy", and so forth. His statements on the subject have been included in the Compilation on Women. I quote here one statement, which

describes vividly the status of women at the time of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, and the progress made thereafter:

The woman of the East has progressed. Formerly in India, Persia and throughout the Orient, she was not considered a human being. Certain Arab tribes counted their women in with the livestock. In their language the noun for woman also meant donkey; that is, the same name applied to both and a man's wealth was accounted by the number of these beasts of burden he possessed. The worst insult one could hurl at a man was to cry out, "Thou woman!"

From the moment Bahá'u'lláh appeared, this changed. He did away with the idea of distinction between the sexes, proclaiming them equal in every capacity.

In former times it was considered wiser that woman should not know how to read or write; she should occupy herself only with drudgery. She was very ignorant. Bahá'u'lláh declares the education of woman to be of more importance than that of man. If the mother be ignorant, even if the father have great knowledge, the child's education will be at fault, for education begins with the milk. A child at the breast is like a tender branch that the gardener can train as he wills.

The East has begun to educate its women. Some there are in Persia who have become liberated through this cause, whose cleverness and eloquence the 'ulamá cannot refute. Many of them are poets. They are absolutely fearless....

I hope for a like degree of progress among the women of Europe – that each may shine like unto a lamp; that they may cry out the proclamation of the kingdom; that they may truly assist the men; nay, that they may be even superior to

## Preparing Bahá'í Communities to Embrace Gender Equality

the men, versed in sciences and yet detached, so that the whole world may bear witness to the fact that men and women have absolutely the same rights. It would be a cause of great joy for me to see such women. This is useful work; by it woman will enter into the kingdom. Otherwise, there will be no results.<sup>35</sup>

When 'Abdu'l-Bahá was in the United States, many newspaper reporters and journalists interviewed Him. In some interviews He responded to questions about gender equality and woman suffrage. Almost a century ago, a newspaper in San Francisco published an interview titled "Abdul Baha Suffrage Advocate – Sex Equality Need for Progress." One of the questions the interviewer asked was "How about woman suffrage?" 'Abdu'l-Bahá responded:

The world of humanity is possessed of two wings, one represented by the male, the other by the female. Both must be strong in order that the world of humanity may fly. Equality of rights and prerogatives of men and women is finding foothold in America faster than in other parts. Until suffrage is established, the body-politic will not achieve its progress. Women are the first educators of men. Hence womankind must be educated until they reach the level of man.<sup>36</sup>

## Conclusion

The principle of gender equality revealed by Bahá'u'lláh in the mid-Nineteenth Century is an essential prerequisite for the realization of the unity of humankind, which is the ultimate goal of His revelation. The principle was revealed when the world was steeped in prejudices that had subjugated women and kept them under the thumb of the authority of men. To restore to women the rights denied them for many centuries, it was crucial to educate Bahá'í communities and

allow them sufficient time to gradually embrace the principle of gender equality. This process began on a wide scale during the ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and gained momentum when some awaked women questioned the validity of the status quo which the generality of the male believers wished to maintain. The strides taken to overcome traditional barriers and gender biases which began during 'Abdu'l-Bahá's ministry have been more successful in countries where women have had the freedom to exercise their rights and prove their worth. The process is destined to continue until full equality is achieved on a worldwide scale.

NOTES

- 1 Ibrahim Kheirallah arrived in New York City on 20 December 1892. (The Bahá'í Faith in America, Vol. 1, p. 26.)
- 2 Mírzá Asadu'llah, a seasoned believer from Isfahan, was related to 'Abdu'l-Baha through marriage. He was married to a younger sister of Minirih Khanum, 'Abdu'l-Baha's wife. Mírzá Asadu'llah lived in the Holy Land with his family. His son, Dr. Ameen Farid, served as 'Abdu'l-Bahá's translator during His travels in the west. He later broke the Covenant and caused the spiritual demise of His parents and sister.
- 3 At the turn of the twentieth century, Mr. Anton Haddad, an Arabic-speaking believer living in the United States began work on translating to English the text of the Kitab-i-Aqdas. His translation was informal and never published.
- 4 Kitab-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book, K 30
- 5 Ibid, K 52
- 6 For further information, see the initial chapters of The Bahá'í Bahá'í Faith in America, Vol. 2.
- 7 Corinne True, Faithful Handmaid of 'Abdu'l-Baha, pp. 30–31
- 8 Ibid, p. 31
- 9 Ibid, p. 32
- 10 Women. Comp. UK Bahá'í Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990 edition, #14.
- 11 Ibid, #19
- 12 In the Compilation on Women a footnote appears after above Tablet which reads:  
"From other extracts it is evident that the limitation of membership to men applies only to the Universal House of Justice, and not to the National and Local Houses of Justice."
- 13 The Concise Oxford Dictionary.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Women, #2
- 16 Corinne True, p. 32
- 17 Women, #15
- 18 Kitab-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book, K 42.



## Lights of 'Irfán Book Twelve

- 19 The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha. US Bahá'íBahá'í Publishing Trust 1971 edition, p. 14
- 20 Women, # 31.
- 21 Kitab-i-Aqdas, K 30.
- 22 Women, #100
- 23 Start of the West 1:2:11, quoted in "The Interdependence of Bahá'íBahá'í Communities, Services of North American Bahá'íBahá'í Women to Iran", The Journal of Bahá'íBahá'í Studies, 4:1:25.
- 24 In Iran. Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í History series, Vol. 3, p. 190, quoted in "The Interdependence of Bahá'íBahá'í Communities", The Journal of Bahá'íBahá'í Studies, 4:1:31.
- 25 Compared with the number of men who wrote to 'Abdu'l-Baha, the number of women was negligible. For that reason, the number of Tablets revealed in honour of Iranian Bahá'íBahá'í women is far less than those revealed in honour of the men.
- 26 Women, #13.
- 27 Ibid
- 28 Ibid. ]Bahá'í men and women did not meet together in one place. To enable everyone to enjoy the program, women sat in an adjacent room separated from the men's room by a curtain, or a wall. To break away with the tradition of segregation based on gender, at a meeting attended by visitors from the west, the curtain was drawn back. Startled by this action, some men took offense and reported the event to 'Abdu'l-Baha.
- 29 Women, # 13.
- 30 Ibid. When 'Abdu'l-Baha was in the United States, women did not yet have the right of vote. They gained the right in 1920.
- 31 Consultation. Comp. #20.
- 32 Emphasis added.
- 33 Women, #13.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 'Abdu'l-Baha on Divine Philosophy, pages 81–3
- 36 San Francisco Examiner, Friday 4 October 1912

## **Perfection and Refinement: Towards an Aesthetics of the Bab**

**by Moojan Momen**

2010

The Bab was the title taken by Sayyid `Ali Muhammad Shirazi (1819-1850) when he began a religious movement in Iran in 1844. Over the next 6 years, this movement was to convulse Iran. In the first place, the movement spread rapidly throughout Iran with the formation of Babi groups in most major Iranian cities and many villages too. It met, however, hostility from the religious leaders of Shi`i Islam, the predominant form of Islam in Iran. Within eight months of the start of the movement, senior Shi`i and Sunni clerics were calling for the death of the founder of the movement and anyone who was spreading it.<sup>1</sup> For the first four years, the opposition to the movement was confined to religious debate and denunciations from the pulpit. In 1848, however, with the accession to the throne of a new shah, Nasiru`d-Din Shah, and the installation of a new Prime Minister, the religious leaders succeeded in getting the state involved in the conflict on a military level. There ensued three major armed conflicts in which militia and the national army surrounded groups of Babis. After besieging them for months, the Babis were finally, in one case, defeated militarily and, in two cases, given false assurances of amnesty and then massacred. The Bab himself, after three years of imprisonment, was executed by firing squad in 1850 at the height of these upheavals.<sup>2</sup>

As a result of these three conflicts and a further severe round of persecution that erupted in 1852 after a failed attempt on the life of the shah by a small group of Babis, the Babi movement was driven underground. It was to re-emerge years later in the 1870s as the Baha'i movement. The Bab had prophesied the coming of another even greater religious figure called "He whom God would make manifest". In 1863, privately to a small group of Babis and, from 1866, more publically, Mirza Husayn `Ali Nuri, who took the title Baha'u'llah (1817-1892), claimed to be this figure and his followers were known as Baha'is. An estimated 95% of Babis became Baha'is and, although a small number of Babis have survived to the present day and some of them have had a significant impact on Iranian society, the movement as a functioning community effectively ended in the 1870s.

The Babi movement may seem a very unpromising place to look for inspiration for the arts or a system of aesthetics. It was after all a community that was severely persecuted during the short course of its existence. It never succeeded in establishing a stable community that could operate freely; it therefore never had the opportunity to promote and patronize the arts in the way that other religions have done. There was certainly never a Babi-inspired school of art and one would be hard pressed even to name any Babi artists.

What I hope to show is that despite the apparently unpromising circumstances there is

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<sup>1</sup> See Moojan Momen, "The Trial of Mulla `Ali Bastami: a combined Sunni-Shi`i fatwa against the Bab." *Iran: Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies* vol. 20 (1982) pp. 113-43.

<sup>2</sup> Nabil [Zarandi]. *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation*. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1970; Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran 1844-1850*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989.

potential material for inspiring the artist in both the life and writings of the Bab. This potential has not thus far been actualized but since the Bab is considered a co-founder of the Baha'i Faith, it is probable that Baha'i artists in the future may gain inspiration from this material. In this paper, I divide the arts into three major divisions: the plastic arts, those arts produced by using materials that can be moulded or changed in some way, such as painting, sculpture, architecture, wood- and metal- working, pottery, etc.; the performing arts, those arts where artists use their own body to express themselves, such as dance, theatre, and the performance of music; and the composing arts, that which artists produces in their mind and then transfer to paper, such as literature, both poetry and prose, and the composition of music.

I will deal a little with the literary qualities below but, although it is obviously of great importance in considering the Bab as an artist, I will not be dealing at length with the Bab as a composing artist in this paper, partly because it has already been dealt with in a masterly fashion by Todd Lawson.<sup>3</sup> Rather I will concentrate on the other two areas, the plastic arts and the performing arts. In this paper I will concentrate on three main points: some of the writings of the Bab have implications about the nature of the material with which those who are in the plastic arts work. The second area that I want to explore concerns the performing arts: the Bab himself as a performance artist and the nature of some of his writings as pieces that are intended to be performed as much as read. The third area that appears to me to have relevance to artists whether engaged in the plastic arts or the performance arts is the concept of refinement that comes across very strongly in both the person and the writings of the Bab.

## 1. The Bab and the Composing Arts

The Bab produces a vast mass of this category of the arts in the form of a large number of writings, most of which have not even been properly examined and catalogued as yet. He was known to produce his writings in a rapid, fluent manner which amazed those who witnessed it. For example on one occasion in the presence of the Governor of Isfahan, he wrote a work of 2,000 verses (about a third of the length of the Qur'an, which had taken Muhammad forty years to reveal) in a single evening (see below). It was not just the rapidity and quantity of what the Bab produced that attracted people, it was also the literary qualities and the content. The rhymes and rhythm of the text, the vivid imagery evoked, and the rich intertextuality all combined to produce a range of works which inspired a large number of his contemporaries. In this literary output, the Bab did what every great creative artist does – he took what was known and familiar and he presented it to us in a new way that made us see in it what we had never seen before – what he created was both familiar and radically new. For example, in his his first book after the declaration of his mission, the *Qayyum al-Asma*, he took the two most central and sacred elements of the Islamic world, the Qur'an and the Arabic language, and he moulded these into a new creation,. It was both familiar in that it was recognizably the Arabic language that he used and the whole book has the literary structure of the Qur'an and uses innumerable passages of the Qur'an. And yet it is radically different in that the Bab feels free to break the rules of Arabic grammar and to create new words and he weaves his own words in between those of the Qur'an so as reveal a radically new meaning to the words of the

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<sup>3</sup> See Todd Lawson, *Gnostic Apocalypse and Islam: Qur'an, exegesis, messianism, and the literary origins of the Babi Religion*, London and New York: Routledge, 2011; Todd Lawson, "Interpretation as Revelation: The Qur'an Commentary of Sayyid 'Ali Muhammad Shirazi, the Bab," in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an* (ed. A. Rippin), Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1988, pp. 223-253.

Qur'an – in all it was a new creation. He was in effect saying to Muslims that although they had been reading the Qur'an for a thousand years, they had never really understood the deeper meanings of that book. The composing artistry of the Bab is well brought out by Todd Lawson:

For the Bab it seems that the sacred text represents a kind of musical score or even a scale (*maqam*) which in good eastern style is meant to be improvised upon. It is the stunning quality of his improvisation that impressed his audience. The Bab's minute attention to the text, the desire to encounter the charisma of the holy word by literally deconstructing it, is remarkably intense.<sup>4</sup>

Muslims believe, based on a verse of the Qur'an, that the Qur'an, since it was the Word of God, is inimitable. By producing a book that is so obviously in imitation of the Qur'an, he was sending a clear message to Muslims; no mere human being could produce such a work. Both by implication and explicitly in the text, he was asserting that this was Divine revelation, in effect claiming to be of the same station as the prophet Muhammad (for in the Islamic worldview, only prophets can reveal the words of God); while at the same time his apparent claim was to be only the agent of the Hidden Imam. Thus his work could be read at a number of different levels according to the receptivity of the reader.

Incidentally, the reaction to this work of the Bab was not dissimilar to the reaction that occurs when any artist produces a radically new work, the reaction is initially mostly hostile: most decry it and say it is not art at all, some say that even my child can produce better art than this, while others adduce base motives to the production of such a work; only a few recognize the true genius of the work at first. The Bab received exactly the same reaction to his writings: most decried them, they were scandalized, some said even my child can write better Arabic than this, while others attributed base motives to the Bab. Only a few recognized and appreciated it; only a few could look beyond the scandalous impact of the work and understand what lay behind this; only a few had a vision broad enough to put their understanding of reality aside and appreciate the new reality that was being presented to them.<sup>5</sup>

## 2. The Writings of the Bab and the Plastic Arts

The writings of the Bab contain some statements about inanimate material objects that appear to accord with the way that artists in many native and primal traditions view the world. For the Bab (and Baha'u'llah) everything in the physical world manifests one or more of the names and attributes of God and it is through this that the gift of existence has been bestowed upon it by God. This manifesting of the names and attributes of God is not all at the same

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<sup>4</sup> Todd Lawson "Qur'an Commentary as Sacred Performance," in *Iran im 19 Jahrhundert und die Entstehung der Baha'i Religion* (ed. by Johann-Christoph Burgel and Isabel Schayani), Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1998, pp.145-58, see p. 152.

<sup>5</sup> This section of the paper owes a great deal to the work of Todd Lawson who has not only brought out some of the meaning of the Bab's *Qayuum al-Asma*, but he has also helped us to understand the poetics of the Bab; see Lawson, *Gnostic Apocalypse and Islam* and Lawson, "Interpretation as Revelation".

level, however. The Bab describes how there is an ascent of matter from earth to stone to crystal; and when the stone turns into crystal, it manifests the name of God "the Eternal":

The fruit of this command is that when the return of All [Things] is approaching its manifestation, it glorifies God inasmuch as the element earth is mentioned therein; and the highest point of the ascent of 'earth' is the lowest point of 'stone' - till that terminates in the highest degree of purity, which is crystal, whereupon the name 'the Eternal (*samad*)' is manifest in it.<sup>6</sup>

The Bab, in several places in the Persian Bayan, states that perfection in anything is when it manifests the names and attributes of God most perfectly. And the Bab gives examples of this *B* for example the perfection of a stone is when it is polished and becomes a crystal. He calls this state of perfection of the stone the "paradise of the stone":

No created thing shall ever attain its paradise unless it appeareth in its highest prescribed degree of perfection. For instance, this crystal representeth the paradise of the stone whereof its substance is composed. Likewise there are various stages in paradise for the crystal itself . . . So long as it was stone it was worthless, but if it attaineth the excellence of ruby *B* a potentiality which is latent in it *B* how much a carat will it be worth? Consider likewise every created thing.<sup>7</sup>

In many places in the writings of the Bab "paradise" is defined as being near to God or in the Presence of God. And so, the Bab states that there is a yearning in all matter to achieve its state of perfection, which is its paradise *B* because it is in the state of perfection that 'All Things' can attain to the Divine Presence:

. . .there is no doubt that All Things attain to the Presence of God in whatever is the highest state of perfection that it is possible for them to achieve.<sup>8</sup>

As well as the example of a stone yearning to be a crystal, the Bab gives the example of a piece of paper upon which some words have been inscribed. The paradise of that paper is to be adorned with gold illumination and patterns, as was the custom with calligraphy in Iran. And it is in relation to this point that the Bab lays a weighty responsibility on owners of such a text and on artists. He says that any person who has the ability to bring a thing to its state of perfection and fails to do so is to held accountable for their failure:

[W]hoever possesseth power over anything must elevate it to its uttermost perfection that it not be deprived of its own paradise. For example, the paradise of a sheet of paper on which a few excellent lines are inscribed is that it be refined with patterns of gold illumination, adornment, and excellence that are customary for the most exalted parchment scrolls. Then the possessor of that paper hath elevated it to its utmost

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<sup>6</sup> Persian Bayan, vahid 5, chapter 12. Adapted from the translation of E.G. Browne in Moojan Momen (ed.), *Selections from the Writings of E.G. Browne* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1987), pp. 369-70.

<sup>7</sup> Persian Bayan, vahid 5, chapter 4. Translated in *Selections from the Writings of the Bab*, pp. 88-9; cf. E.G. Browne in Momen (ed.), *Selections from the Writings of E.G. Browne*, p. 89.

<sup>8</sup> Persian Bayan, Exordium, p. 3. Provisional translation by the author.

degree of glory.<sup>9</sup>

The task of the artist is thus to elevate the materials that he or she works with to the highest state of their perfection. The Bab himself was an artist in that he produced calligraphy of great beauty and technically of the highest standard. He also liked to design his calligraphy so that it was often produced in the form of a five-pointed star, which was call "The Temple" (*haykal*) or in a circular pattern (*dá'irih*); prayers for men were written in the form of the *haykal* and those for women in the form of the *dá'irih*. The Bab also produced talismanic forms of calligraphy that were designed for symmetry and beauty and he gives the instructions for the creation of such forms in his writings. In the society in which the Bab lived, calligraphy was considered the highest of the arts. The Bab therefore calls upon his followers to make copies of his writings in as beautiful a manner as possible and gives detailed instructions about this, as in the following example:

That which remains amongst the people from the Tree of Truth [i.e. the Bab] is His words, and the spirits attached to them. Therefore the more they strive to preserve, honour, and exalt His Words, the more will these words be manifest in their spirits. Even small epistles must be bound . . . for [the Bayan] must not become like the Qur'an, fragments of which are sold in every corner of the mosques in an unseemly manner<sup>10</sup> . . . And to whatever extent an effort is made in elevating the production of this [copy of the Bayan], in making its weight as light as possible, in the grandeur of the calligraphy and the illumination of its leaves, the more loved by God it is than something that is produced to a lower standard. It is not appropriate that notes be made in the margins of it . . . The summary of what has been said in this chapter is this that the Bayan belonging to each person should, in his own domain, be incomparable . . . and it is not permissible that it be in anything other than the most beautiful of calligraphy.<sup>11</sup>

This exalted task given to artists to produce work of the highest quality carries with it a heavy responsibility that if they fail to live up to, they are held accountable. For example, the passage above that calls upon a person having some lines of calligraphy to beautify this to the best of his ability continues thus:

Should he know of a higher degree of refinement and fail to manifest it upon that paper, he would deprive it of its paradise, and he would be held accountable, for why hast thou, despite the possession of the means, withheld the effusion of grace and favour?<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Persian Bayan, Vahid 4, Chapter 11. Translated in Nader Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart* ([Waterloo, ONT]: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2008, p. 255.

<sup>10</sup> The Qur'an is divided into 30 parts, call *juz'* (plural, *ajzá*), which are often sold separately for the use of students and devout.

<sup>11</sup> Persian Bayan, Vahid 3, chapter 14, pp. 97-8; provisional translation by the author, using part of the translation of this by E.G. Browne in Momen (ed.), *Selections from the Writings of E.G. Browne*, p. 347.

<sup>12</sup> Persian Bayan, Vahid 4, Chapter 11. Translated in Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart*, p. 255.

This is a very interesting statement of the Bab and I think it is of the utmost significance for artists (especially those that work with materials), craftsmen (or should that now be craftspeople?) or artisans and even labourers. For the Persian Bayan lays upon everyone who produces anything the responsibility to produce that thing in the most perfect way possible or to be held accountable for failing to do so:

It is forbidden to people to cause anything that is defective to appear if they have the power to perfect that thing. For example if someone were to build a house and not bring it to whatever perfection it is capable of achieving, then there will not be an instant that the angels will not calling out to God for his punishment, even the atoms of that building will also do this. For every thing within its own limits desires to attain to the highest point of its limits. And if a person has the ability to do this for it but does not, then he will be held responsible by it.<sup>13</sup>

Thus the Bab conceives of every thing in creation as having a spirit and being a manifestation of one or more of the names of God. The spirit of each thing yearns for the perfection that it is capable of within its due limitations because perfection is the paradise of each thing, and paradise is being in the Presence of God. And so each thing yearns for its paradise. Human beings are capable of helping each thing towards its paradise by perfecting its qualities. This idea obviously has wide implications but artists can perfect each type of material that they work with by rendering it to be as beautiful as they can possibly make them. Artisans and labourers can work with materials to bring the things they create to the perfection that those things crave. If they fail to do this and create things that are less perfect than they could make them, then they are held responsible.

The Bab's book, *Kitab al-Asma*, the Book of Names, carries this line of thought one stage further when, in discussing the name of God "the most perfect" (*al-atqan*), he points out that in trying to bring all things to a state of perfection, an artist or craftsman or any other human being is replicating the work of God, who brought into being the whole of creation in a state of perfection. The work of the human being becomes then a work of God:

Say! We verily have perfected Our handiwork in the creation of the heavens, earth, whatever lieth between them, and in all things; will ye not then behold? . . . Perfect ye then your own handiwork in all that ye produce with your hands working through the handiwork of God. Then would this indeed be a handiwork of God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting. Waste ye not that which God createth with your hands through your handiwork; rather, make manifest in them the perfection of industry or craft, be it a large and mass product or a small and retail one. For verily one who perfecteth his handiwork indeed attaineth certitude in the perfection of the handiwork of God within his own being.<sup>14</sup>

However, in all this, the Bab does not lay a burden on the artist and artisan that is beyond their capacity. In copying the writings of the Bab for example, he states:

It is not permitted to anyone to write a single letter of the Bayan except in the most beautiful of handwritings. 'Most beautiful' here means the best that each individual is

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<sup>13</sup> Persian Bayan, Vahid 6, chapter 3, p. 192 (provisional translation by the author).

<sup>14</sup> *Kitab al-Asma*, INBA 29:621-25; translated in Saeidi, *Gate of the Heart*, p. 316.

capable of; not beyond that, but not less than that either. This is so that the spirit that is attached to every letter of the Bayan may be raised to the highest level that is possible in this contingent world within its limitations such that nothing may be seen among the believers in the Bayan except that that thing be in the highest state of perfection possible for it.<sup>15</sup>

While we should strive towards producing things in the most perfect state that we are capable of achieving, we should also recognize our limits and not be anxious if we fail to achieve complete perfection nor should we put ourselves into distress while striving in this path. The Bab continues the above passage by limiting his injunctions that we should seek to produce perfection in our handiwork:

However, all this is on the condition that one keeps within one's capacity, not that one should put oneself in hardship on account of anything. For God desires not to look upon a believer in grief or distress. No! Rather everyone should carry out these obligations according to their ability.<sup>16</sup>

Thus the Bab clearly has a great deal to say to those engaged in the plastic arts, challenging them to regard their work as a sacred act of bring material things to a state of their perfection.

### 3. The Bab and the Performing Arts

The writings of the Bab are composed in such a manner that they invite one to recite them aloud rather than just to read them to oneself. Much of his writings, especially his Arabic, is written in the literary style known as *saj`*, which is usually translated as rhyming prose. This translation does not fully reflect this literary form as some may imagine that this means that there is rhyme but no rhythm in the verses. In fact there is both rhyme and rhythm present. The only reason that it is not possible to call it poetry, in the classical literary meaning of this word, is the fact that the rhyme and rhythm do not follow any uniform or regular pattern and there are short passages of prose linking parts of the text. The writings of the Bab also contain other literary devices. There is much alliteration in the text. Most of the *Qayyum ul-Asma*, the first work composed by the Bab after he declared his mission, for example rhymes with the ending "-an". Both rhyme and alliteration can be discerned in the following verse from the last chapter of this book. The translation of this verse is as follows:

O People of the Realm of the Unseen! Listen to my call from this illumined moon, the face of which I did not wish to be eclipsed by the countenance of this Youth who is of both the East and the West, whom you will find in every tablet as a concealed secret recorded upon a line, written in red, which has, in truth, been hidden around the Fire.

The last part of the verse "in every tablet . . ." can be transliterated thus in order to pick up the rhyme ending in "-an" and the alliteration of "s" and "t":

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<sup>15</sup> Persian Bayan, Vahid 3, chapter 17, p. 103, provisional translation by the author.

<sup>16</sup> Persian Bayan, Vahid 3, chapter 17, p. 103, provisional translation by the author. Cf translations of part of this passage by E.G. Browne in Momen (ed.), *Selections from the Writings of E.G. Browne*, p. 349 and by Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart*, pp. 317-8.



*fi kulli l-alwáh sirran mustasirran  
`ala 's-satr musattaran  
`ala 's-satr al-muhammir  
qad kána bi'l-haqq hawl an-nár mastúran.*<sup>17</sup>

Passages of this book go even beyond this and appear to be purely for performative effect. In Chapter 108 of the book, the Surat adh-Dhikr (the Surah of the Remembrance), there is a passage that is introduced with the following words:

O people of the Lights! Listen to my call from this bird that is singing, raised in the atmosphere of heaven in accordance with the melody (*`ala al-lahn*) of David the prophet.

What follows is almost untranslatable and it is difficult to make sense of it. The following is an attempt to translate it:

To me, to me is the judgement of the two waters (*al-má'ayn*).  
And to me, to me is the judgement of the two airs (*al-hawá'ayn*) in the two worlds.  
And to me, to me are four of the two letters in the two names.  
And to me, to me are four of the two airs in the two lines from the two secrets.  
And to me, to me is the bearer of the Throne of seven and one (*sab `i wáhidí* or *wa ahadí*).  
And to me, to me are the eight heavens, narrated and concealed.  
And to me, to me is the judgement of the two first lights upon the two mountains.  
And to me, to me is the judgement of the two shining lights (*al-nayyirayn*, sun and moon) on the two last lines from those two inner depths (*al-batnayn*).  
And to me, to me is the judgement of the two heavens concerning the eight of the Bab, in this Báb there are two Bábs.  
And to me, to me is the judgement of the two earths concerning the seven of the Báb by the two letters.  
And to me, to me is the command and the judgement and there is no God but He, our Lord alone. He has no partner and He is God the Exalted, the Great.<sup>18</sup>

If we read the passage in the original Arabic, however, we form the impression that the Bab is trying to convey something of the actual melody of the "this bird that is singing, raised in the atmosphere of heaven in accordance with the melody of David the prophet"; he is imitating the sound of the bird in the Arabic words. Here is the transliteration of the first four lines:

*illayya illaya hukm al-má'ayn  
wa illaya illaya hukm al-hawá'ayn fi'l-ardayn  
wa illaya illaya arba `al-harfayn fi'l-ismayn*

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<sup>17</sup> Qayyum al-Asma, Surah 111, vv. 25-26. Photocopy of manuscript completed 28 Jamádi I, 1261 (4 June 1845) written in a neat *naskh* hand by Muhammad Mahdí ibn Karbalá'í Sháh Karam for Mulla Husayn Bushru'í and sent by him through Mirza Habibu'llah Cháhí to "Sarkár Amír" (possibly the Amir of Qá'inát). Entered Iranian National Baha'i Archives, Rabí` al-Awwal 1298, INBA vol. 3, f. 447.

<sup>18</sup> Qayyum al-Asma, Surah 111, vv. 39-40. Same manuscript as previous note, ff. 224-5. Provisional translation by the author.

*wa illaya illaya arba` al-hawá'ayn fi's-satrayn min sirrayn*

If this assumption is correct, then we can say that this text may have been intended as much for recitation as study, in that several elements of it are clearly intended to be heard rather than read. It is thus a performative text as much as a cognitive one. It is as much meant to be experienced as understood. The same can be said for many other passages of the writings of the Bab. Many of them are clearly intended to be chanted in a mantra-like fashion.

In studying the life of the Bab, one cannot escape the conclusion that the Bab was himself a composing artist (in that he produced literary works as noted above), a plastic artist (in that he produced calligraphy as noted above) and a performing artist.<sup>19</sup> There are many stories recorded about the Bab that testify to his artistic temperament. He is recorded as composing his writings at great speed and as he was writing, he would chant what he was composing in an enchanting and melodious voice. On occasions he did this in the presence of others and the effect is said to have been mesmerizing, leading some to declare their belief in the Bab simply from having witnessed the speed of composition and the beauty of what was composed as well as the performance of the Bab in composing it. One of the most important occasions on which the Bab composed in public was at the home of the Imam-Jum`ih of Isfahan, the highest Muslim religious leader in the most important seat of religious learning in Iran, and with a crowd of learned scholars and religious leaders looking on:

One night, after supper, the Imam-Jum`ih, whose curiosity had been excited by the extraordinary traits of character which his youthful Guest had revealed, ventured to request Him to reveal a commentary on the Surih of Va'l-`Asr [a chapter of the Qur'an]. His request was readily granted. Calling for pen and paper, the Bab, with astonishing rapidity and without the least premeditation, began to reveal, in the presence of His host, a most illuminating interpretation of the aforementioned Surih. It was nearing midnight when the Bab found Himself engaged in the exposition of the manifold implications involved in the first letter of that Surih . . . The Bab soon after began to chant, in the presence of His host and his companions, the homily with which He had prefaced His commentary on the Surih. Those words of power confounded His hearers with wonder. They seemed as if bewitched by the magic of His voice. Instinctively they started to their feet and, together with the Imam-Jum`ih, reverently kissed the hem of His garment. Mulla Muhammad-Taqi-y-i-Harati, an eminent mujtahid, broke out into a sudden expression of exultation and praise. "Peerless and unique," he exclaimed, "as are the words which have streamed from this pen, to be able to reveal, within so short a time and in so legible a writing, so great a number of verses as to equal a fourth, nay a third, of the Qur'an, is in itself an achievement such as no mortal, without the intervention of God, could hope to perform. Neither the cleaving of the moon nor the quickening of the pebbles of the sea can compare with so mighty an act."<sup>20</sup>

There are many similar accounts of the effect that the Bab had on other occasions on which

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<sup>19</sup> On the Bab as a performance artist, see Todd Lawson "Qur'an Commentary as Sacred Performance".

<sup>20</sup> Nabil [Zarandi], *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil's Narrative* (trans. and ed. Shoghi Effendi, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1970) pp. 201-2.

he composed his writings.<sup>21</sup> The net effect of the poetics of his writings, their contents and the performance of them by the Bab produced a remarkable effect on many who experienced it. As Todd Lawson has commented:

The scriptural tradition to which the Bab belonged heard not only the Prophet [Muhammad] in the words of the Holy Book [the Qur'an], but also the chorus of the remaining thirteen members of the Family of God, the Infallible Immaculates [Fatimah and the twelve Imams]. . . It is suggested that this chorus was made present during the Bab's improvisation upon the Quranic score before an initially sceptical but eventually receptive audience. The charismatic content of the text was released in the musical explosion as an affective charge. The sensibility was one in which beauty of expression and other aesthetic considerations were seen to supplement the actual or discursive meaning being expressed – the one was a vehicle for the other.<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps also revealing of the artistic temperament of the Bab was an episode that occurred in Urumiyyih. The Bab was being taken from his prison in Chihriq in north-west Iran to Tabriz the provincial capital, in order to be interrogated. Although he was a prisoner of the government, no-one could restrain the enthusiasm of the crowds that pressed to see him as he entered the city. He was taken to the governor's court. Among those in the audience at the court was an artist Aqa Bala-Big Naqqash-bashi (the chief painter). The following is an account of what then happened as recounted by Aqa-Bala Big himself years later:

The people of Urúmiyyih . . . flocked, day after day, to the governor's residence to see the Báb. One of them was Aqá-Bálá, the Chief Painter. He told Varqá, all those years later, that on his first visit, as soon as the Báb noticed him, He gathered His `aba [cloak] round Him, as if sitting for His portrait. The next day He did the same. It was then that Aqá-Bálá Bag understood it to be a signal to him to draw His portrait. On his third visit, he went to the residence of Malik-Qasim Mirzá [the governor] with the equipment of his art. He made a rough sketch or two at the time, from which he later composed a full-scale portrait in black and white.<sup>23</sup>

The Bab as a performing artist was restricted by the social conventions of his environment to chanting as he composed his writings, but even this limited performance had a great effect on those who witnessed this.

#### 4. The Concept of Refinement

The word “refinement” is used in English to mean fineness of taste, or thought or elegant and cultured manners; it has connotations of upper class life. However, here in this next section, I am using it with a somewhat different meaning. The Arabic and Persian adjective *latíf* is given a wide range of dictionary definitions including, thin, delicate, gentle, light, polite, refined, graceful and witty. The associated noun *latáfat* has a parallel set of meanings. In

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<sup>21</sup> See for example, [Zarandi], *Nabil's Narrative*, pp. 174-6, 202-3.

<sup>22</sup> Todd Lawson “Qur'an Commentary as Sacred Performance,” p. 158.

<sup>23</sup> Hasan Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahá'is in the Time of Bahá'u'lláh: with some Historical Background* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1985), p. 87.

Islamic mysticism, however, it has been used to denote that point at which the physical becomes so refined and delicate that it becomes spiritual. For this reason, Shoghi Effendi translates the word in various contexts translates it as light and untrammelled, subtle, subtle, pure, discriminating, and ethereal. It is this word that I will translated as “refinement” in this section.

Perhaps no other word is more distinctive of the Bab than this word. He himself embodied it. Those who met the Bab commented upon his delicate and dignified appearance and character. Dr Cormick, an Anglo-Irish doctor who met him described him thus: "He was a very mild and delicate looking man, rather small in stature and very fair for a Persian, with a melodious soft voice, which struck me much . . . In fact his whole look and deportment went far to dispose one in his favour."<sup>24</sup> Lady Sheil, the wife of the British minister resident in Tehran in the time of the Bab wrote: "Bab possessed a mild and benignant countenance, his manners were composed and dignified, his eloquence was impressive, and he wrote rapidly and well."<sup>25</sup>

The Bab, in line with the above-mentioned use of the word in Islamic mysticism, seems to have regarded this word as signifying the closest that physical reality can come to spiritual reality. As physical reality ascends and becomes closer to spiritual reality, it loses its qualities of thickness, denseness and impurity *B* all signified by the word *katháfat* (adjective *kathíf*) *B* and acquires the qualities of delicacy, purity and refinement *B* all signified by the word *laṭáfat*. Thus the two concept of *katháfat* (*kathíf*) and *laṭáfat* (*laṭíf*) are contrasted and opposed to one another. Human beings should in their spiritual progress lose the qualities of the former and acquire the qualities of the latter. The word *laṭáfat* is from the same root in Arabic as *lutf* which means "grace". And so the Bab says that the appearance of refinement in the world is out of the Grace of God

For whatever refinement (*laṭáfat*) appears in the world is from the bounty of a drop from the ocean of his Grace (*lutf*).<sup>26</sup>

The Bab therefore calls upon his followers to acquire this characteristic. He says for example that: "Nothing in the Bayan is more loved by God than purity, refinement and cleanliness."<sup>27</sup> And in another place that: "In this religion, no other command is as firmly enjoined as that of refinement."<sup>28</sup>

There are laws regarding purity in most religions. Islam had a large number of things that

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<sup>24</sup> Edward G. Browne, *Materials for the Study of the Babi Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1918), pp. 260-62, quoted in Moojan Momen, *The Babi and Baha'i Religions 1844-1944: some contemporary western accounts* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1981), p. 75.

<sup>25</sup> Lady Sheil, *Life and Manners in Persia*, p. 178, quoted in Momen, *Babi and Baha'i Religions*, p. 75.

<sup>26</sup> Persian Bayan vahid 5, chapter 7, p. 162. Provisional translation by the author.

<sup>27</sup> Persian Bayan, vahid 5, chapter 14. Provisional translation by the author. Cf translation in *Selections from the Writings of the Bab*, p. 80.

<sup>28</sup> Persian Bayan, Vahid 6, chapter 3, p. 192. Provisional translation by the author.

were regarded as making a person ritually impure (blood, animal hair and bone, silk clothing, gold and silver vessels, dogs, anything touched by infidels, etc.), such that if one were to come into contact with them, one would not be fit to say the prayers, until a ritual ablution had been performed. The Bab cancelled most of these ritual causes of impurity<sup>29</sup> and instead substituted a number of laws that are more in line with modern concepts of purity and impurity, such as requiring a person to bath every four days, that soiled and sweaty clothes should be changed, that tobacco not be used and so forth.<sup>30</sup> He says moreover that "it is desirable that the believer should use pleasant scents and perfume."<sup>31</sup>

Most of the laws of the Bayan are related in some way to the coming of He whom God shall make manifest, the figure prophesied by the Bab. The law regarding purity and refinement is no exception in this regard:

This command [of purity and refinement] is only so that on the Day of the Manifestation of God, no-one should present themselves before God in a state other than that of refinement such that that which is displeasing to God should not appear from them. Therefore in the Bayan whatever veils one from refinement has been forbidden.<sup>32</sup>

But the Bab did not just mean physical purity and refinement. He also indicated the necessity of the qualities in the spiritual sense. For example he calls upon his followers not to be like Muslims and maintain an outward purity. Indeed, if it were just physical cleanliness that were meant, then Christians would be superior to Muslims in this respect:

O people of the Bayan! Be not like the people of the Qur'an who purify their outward bodies so carefully with water, but do not purify their Essential [inner] Bodies with the water of Unity, for no heart in which there is love of aught other than God is pure. Were it otherwise no nation is externally more clean than Christians. Similarly at the time of the appearance of He whom God shall make manifest, you should purify yourself through belief in him, for otherwise, even if you immerse yourselves a thousand times in water each day, it would not fulfill the obligation of purity. You should take the utmost care neither to be veiled from the outer, nor from the inner reality, you should hold to both to the utmost perfection. So also with the believer, naught can render him impure. The command to purity is solely so that people should be so trained as to the state of refinement and purity that no soul should detect anything repulsive within themselves let alone that others should detect it . . .<sup>33</sup>

In the last chapter of the Persian Bayan, the Bab summarises all of his injunctions on purity and cleanliness, saying that all things have a purification in the knowledge of God and all are

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<sup>29</sup> See, for example, the cancellation of the prohibition on silk clothing, gold and silver in the Persian Bayan vahid 6, chapter 9.

<sup>30</sup> Persian Bayan vahid 8, chapter 6; vahid 9, chapter 7.

<sup>31</sup> Persian Bayan vahid 6, chapter 2. Provisional translation by the author.

<sup>32</sup> Persian Bayan vahid 8, chapter 6. Provisional translation by the author.

<sup>33</sup> Persian Bayan vahid 6, chapter 2. Provisional translation by the author.

purified by the mention of God if they become believers in Him whom God shall make manifest. This purification must encompass in turn the heart, the spirit, the soul and body, such that:

. . . cleanse thine ear from hearing aught but the mention of God, and thine eye from seeing, thy breast from witnessing, thy tongue from speaking, thy hand from writing, thy knowledge from understanding and thy heart from settling upon, and similarly all of your faculties so that you may be nourished in the pure paradise of love. Haply you may recognize He whom God shall make manifest with a purity loved by Him.<sup>34</sup>

The connection between art and the concept of refinement becomes clearer as we move from Western art, to Middle Eastern art and on to Chinese and Japanese art where this quality become paramount. To what extent does the Bab's desire to bring purity and refinement to the world find resonance with art?

## Conclusion

Of course everything that has been mentioned above that the Bab writes about the arts can be related to the arts of Iran. The striving for perfection and refinement can be seen in many of the arts such as the drawing of Persian miniatures and the crafts that produce cloths, tiles, bronzeware and copperware and many other finely made objects. Rhyme and rhythm are seen, of course, in Persian poetry, that plays a much larger role in Iranian culture compared to many other cultures. Nevertheless, the concerns that the Bab highlights in relation to the arts seem to relate to artists of other cultures also.

It seems to me that in what he writes about the spirit within material things yearning for perfection and the work of the artist and craftsperson being to enable a thing to reach its perfection, its paradise, the Bab approaches the ideas in many native or primal religions, such as that of the Aboriginal peoples of Australia and the native peoples of the Americas, that also consider that all objects have a spirit or soul and that human beings must enter in a correct relationship with all the things that surround them. And so I would ask: to what extent does the injunction of the Bab to work with materials in order to bring these to the highest level of perfection that these things are capable of achieving accord with the way that native artists and craftspeople engage in their work?

Similarly in relation to the performing arts, the concept that I have put forward in this paper that the Bab was concerned with both content and form in his writings; the idea that his works are intended to be both cognitive and affective, to appeal to both the heart and the mind, to be both for reading and performance opens up a discourse with most of those in the performing arts. In particular, although some may consider it a trivialization and diminution of the works of the Bab, I would like to put forward that the suggestion that the Bab's concern with the rhyme and rhythm and even the musicality of his writing seems to approach the patterns and musicality of much African speech and song, as manifested for example in rap music.

The third area that I have written about in this paper is that of the concept of refinement.

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<sup>34</sup> Persian Bayan vahid 9, chapter 10, p. 327. Provisional translation by the author.

While it is true that this concern reflects much of the history of Iranian art, I think it also opens up a discourse with the arts of the Far East, China and Japan, which are also very much concerned with this same area of refinement and attempt to approach the boundary where the physical becomes so refined as to merge into the spiritual.

There are many ramifications of these concepts deriving from the person and writings of the Bab. One could look for example at the concept of the desire of the Bab for everything to be clean and pure in relation to the present problems with environmental pollution. Also to a great extent, this ethos of bringing things to their perfection and of refinement has been taken forward by the Baha'i Faith. It seems to me that when Baha'is build buildings and gardens at the Baha'i World Centre and the Houses of Worship, that are the utmost state of beauty, they can be said to be helping the stones and the plants on those sites to achieve their paradise - for they are then manifesting the name of God "the Beauteous".

While spiritual communion with God and with each other is very good, the Baha'i teachings are asking us to take this one step further and build a paradise on earth (the "Kingdom of God on earth") and that is something that certainly involves a transformation of the relationship of human beings with one another but it also involves a transformation of their relationship with the rest of the created world *B* it involves them in trying to bring beauty and perfection to all of the world, the human world and the world of nature.

In the same section of the Kitab al-Asma as the one quoted previously, discussing the name of God "the most perfect", the Bab composes a prayer in which he reiterates the point that in producing handiwork that is as perfect as possible, the action of a human being is a reflection of the action of God. He then goes on to ask God to educate the people of the Bayan that they may produce only what manifests the utmost perfection – it may be said to be a prayer for artists. He says that in this way, human beings can build the earth anew:

O my God! Thy handiwork hath always been complete, all-encompassing, perfect, and unfailing, and it will always continue to be perfect, unfailing, complete, and all-encompassing. . . . Thou hast commanded Thy servants, from the beginning that hath no beginning, till the end that hath no end, to produce handiwork with the utmost perfection, for this is verily the reflection of the perfection of Thy handiwork Educate then, O my God, the people of the Bayan in such wise that no product may be found amongst them but that the very utmost perfection of industry shall be manifest therein. . . . For verily Thou hast desired, by this law, to build the earth anew by virtue of Thy glorious handiwork through the hands of Thy servants.<sup>35</sup>

Furthermore, the Bab states that this endeavour to bring all things to a state of perfection and refinement is a way of attracting people to the Babi religion:

Thus, just as today the letters of the Gospel are distinguished amongst other communities in the art of ornament, the believers in the Bayan should likewise reflect in their handiwork naught but perfection within the limits of each endeavour, in such wise that a faithful believer in the Bayan in the East of the earth should be beloved in his station on account of his beauty and the beauty of all that he possesseth. And this is the most mighty path for attracting the people of other religions to the true Cause of

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<sup>35</sup> Kitab al-Asma, INBA 29:626; translated in Saeidi, *Gate of the Heart*, p. 316.

the all-merciful God.<sup>36</sup>

Thus artists and artisans are encouraged to perfect their handiwork and so to become well-known on account of this, thereby attracting people to the Babi religion.

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<sup>36</sup> Persian Bayan vahid 3, chapter 17; translated in Saeidi, *Gate of the Heart*, p. 317.



## The Duty of Kindness and Sympathy Towards Strangers and Foreigners

as recommended by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and as reflected in the recent Italian  
"Charter on the Values and Significance of Citizenship and Integration."

Julio Savi

*The abandonment of racial, religious and nationalistic prejudice is one of the central issues in the talks 'Abdu'l-Bahá delivered during His travels in the West. A ground-breaking concept in those days when the Western world was still "heaving with the explosive forces of a blind and triumphant nationalism," the idea of integrating immigrants into the culture of the country where they have moved is slowly becoming a part of the policy of a number of Western states. In 2007 the Italian government issued a "Charter on the Values and Significance of Citizenship and Integration," which upholds many of the concepts expounded by 'Abdu'l-Bahá almost a century ago.*

The abandonment of racial, religious and nationalistic prejudice in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's talks

'Abdu'l-Bahá's first speech in Paris, on the 16th and 17th of October 1911, recorded in Paris Talks, was entirely devoted to the subject of "The duty of kindness and sympathy towards strangers and foreigners." He asked His audience:

Let not conventionality cause you to seem cold and unsympathetic when you meet strange people from other countries. Do not look at them as though you suspected them of being

evil-doers, thieves and boors... be kind to the strangers... help to make them feel at home... Put into practice the Teaching of Bahá'u'lláh, that of kindness to all nations.(PT 1-2, sec. 1, para. 2, 3, 7)

This recommendation was a first step towards the explanation of one of the central issues of His Western talks: the abandonment of racial, religious and nationalistic prejudice.<sup>1</sup> A few weeks later, in a speech to Paris' Theosophical Society, He explained that "All the divisions in the world, hatred, war and bloodshed, are caused by one or other of these prejudices"(PT 134, sec. 40, para. 20). On other occasions He said that prejudice is "the destroyer of the body politic"(PUP 124, 13 May 1912)<sup>2</sup> and "an obstacle to realization"(PUP 115, 12 May 1912).<sup>3</sup> And on the 13th of November 1911, He devoted a whole speech to "the abolition of prejudices... whether of religion, race, politics or nation," presented as "the fifth principle" of "the Teaching of Bahá'u'lláh"(PT 151-6, sec. 45).<sup>4</sup> In that circumstance He presented prejudice as "a grave malady which, unless arrested, is capable of causing the destruction of the whole human race"(ibid. 151, sec. 45, para. 1). In North America He repeatedly mentioned this principle, sometimes as "the fifth principle or teaching of Bahá'u'lláh... the abandoning of religious, racial, patriotic and political prejudices, which destroy the foundations of human society"(PUP 107, 7 May 1912, see 316).<sup>5</sup> On the 1st of September 1912, at the Church of the Messiah, in Montreal, Canada, He delivered another whole talk on this subject(PUP 297-302).<sup>6</sup> He said that all prejudices are "opposed to reality... [and] against the will and plan of God"(ibid. 299), that they are "nothing but superstition... as they are against the plan and purpose of reality, they are false and imaginary"(ibid.), "falsehoods and violations of the will of God"(ibid. 300).

As to religious prejudice, which He described in a talk wholly devoted to this issue and delivered in Paris on the 27th of October 1911 as

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the consequence of “the misrepresentation of religion by the religious leaders and teachers”(PT 37, sec. 13, para. 2),<sup>7</sup> He said:

The Prophets of God have been inspired with the message of love and unity. The Books of God have been revealed for the upbuilding of fellowship and union. The Prophets of God have been the servants of reality; Their teachings constitute the science of reality. Reality is one; it does not admit plurality. We conclude, therefore, that the foundation of the religions of God is one foundation.(PUP 295, 29 August 1912)

All the wars and enmities that have ravaged the world throughout the centuries among the followers of the various religions are also the consequence of the ignorance and waywardness of human beings, who have turned a deaf ear to the teachings of God. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explained on that occasion:

All the Prophets have promulgated the law of love. Man has opposed the will of God and acted in opposition to the plan of God. Therefore, from the beginning of history to the present time the world of humanity has had no lasting rest; warfare and strife have continuously prevailed, and hearts have manifested hatred toward each other.(PUP 297–8, 1 September 1912)

As to racial prejudice, “the worst of all” prejudices(ABL 55), it is a denial of the principle of the oneness of humankind, “created... from the dust of earth... fashioned... from the same elements... descended from the same race”(PUP 297). This principle is an undeniable truth: “There can be no multiplicity of races, since all are the descendants of Adam. This signifies that racial assumption and distinction are nothing but superstition”(PUP 298).

As to “patriotic prejudices”(PUP 12),<sup>8</sup> that He also described as “political prejudice”(PT 154, sec. 45, para. 15), He said:

This is one globe, one land, one country. God did not divide it into national boundaries. He created all the continents without national divisions. Why should we make such division ourselves? These are but imaginary lines and boundaries. Europe is a continent; it is not naturally divided; man has drawn the lines and established the limits of kingdoms and empires. Man declares a river to be a boundary line between two countries, calling this side French and the other side German, whereas the river was created for both and is a natural artery for all.(PUP 299–300)

The only division among human beings that `Abdu'l-Bahá recognizes as “real” is that “there are heavenly men and earthly men”(PT 154, sec. 45, para. 15). Then He adds: “If these are God’s divisions, why should we invent others?”(ibid.).

`Abdu'l-Bahá' said : “It is evident that prejudices... have hindered the progress of humanity thousands of years”(PUP 39, 21 April 1912).<sup>9</sup> And in another occasion He added: “until national and international prejudices are effaced in the reality of this spiritual brotherhood, true progress, prosperity and lasting happiness will not be attained by man”(PUP 142–3, 24 May 1912). It is time to forsake all prejudices, “our own small trivial notions”(PT 139, sec. 41, para. 7). He suggested several remedies against prejudice. The first remedy is search after truth. He said in this regard:

Man must cut himself free from all prejudice and from the result of his own imagination, so that he may be able to search for truth unhindered... Being one, truth cannot be divided, and the differences that appear to exist among the nations only result from their attachment to prejudice.

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If only men would search out truth, they would find themselves united.(PT 131, sec. 40, paras. 8, 9)

Other remedies are “training and instruction”(PUP 300, 1 September 1912) and sowing “the seed of love and universal brotherhood in the heart of man”(PT 10, sec. 5, para. 2). However, the greatest remedy is the assistance “of a superior power to overcome human prejudices, a power which nothing in the world of mankind can withstand and which will overshadow the effect of all other forces at work in human conditions. That irresistible power is the love of God”(PUP 68, 30 April 1912).<sup>10</sup>

These were ground-breaking concepts in those days when the Western world was still “heaving with the explosive forces of a blind and triumphant nationalism,”(ADJ 47). As to racism, in those years, Tommaso Carletti, the Italian governor of Benadir(the old name of Italian Somaliland), wrote to the Italian Ministry of Exterior: “There are races(I am sorry for not agreeing with the old Aristotle) that, either for an inborn intellectual inferiority, or for their historical development, seem destined to be slaves or at least to be unable of enjoying an unconditioned freedom”(19 July 1907, qtd. in Del Boca, *Italiani* 805). As to religious prejudice, Christianity was still steeped in the atmosphere of an age-long, intransigent exclusivism. *The Catechism of Saint Pius X*, issued in 1905, said: “Can one be saved outside the Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Church?... No, no one can be saved outside the Catholic, Apostolic Roman Church, just as no one could be saved from the flood outside the Ark of Noah, which was a figure of the Church”(ninth article, 27 Q). As to nationalism, on the 8th of October 1911, a few weeks before ‘Abdu’l-Bahá lamented “the sad picture of Italy carrying war into Tripoli”(PUP 6, 12 April 1912) and the fact that people remained “cold and indifferent to the fact that thousands of Italians, Turks, and Arabs... [were] killed in Tripoli!”(PT 116, sec. 37, para. 1, 24 November 1911),<sup>11</sup> the Italian poet Gabriele D’Annunzio(1863–1938), considered “the leading

writer of Italy in the late 19th and early 20th centuries”(Encyclopædia Britannica), published in the most important Italian newspaper “Corriere della sera” a poem entitled “La canzone d’oltre mare [Song from overseas].” In this poem he sang the praises of that war that, in his opinion, was opening a “wonderful season” and a “holy springtime,” in which a song was raised for a renewed and glorious Italy “from the round muzzle of the gun.” On the 30th of June 1952 Shoghi Effendi still described the inhabitants of towns and cities of the Western world as “either immersed in crass materialism,” or breathing “the fetid air of an aggressive racialism,” or finding themselves “bound by the chains and fetters of a haughty intellectualism,” or having “fallen a prey to the forces of a blind and militant nationalism or... steeped in the atmosphere of a narrow and intolerant ecclesiasticism”(MBW 36).

The second half of the twentieth century has seen the gradual decline of nationalism and racism in many parts of the world. As to religious exclusivism, Christianity is slowly moving towards inclusivism and interreligious dialogue. At the beginning of the new century, the mounting tide of immigration is obliging a sometimes reluctant European population to take people of different color, religion and culture into account. Globalization has forced their governments to issue special laws for previously unknown minorities. In the wake of these events, the Italian government has recently issued a Charter on the Values and Significance of Citizenship and Integration.

### What is the Charter on the Values and Significance of Citizenship and Integration?

The website of the Ministry of the Interior presents this Charter<sup>12</sup> as a document “essentially of a programmatic nature setting out guidelines for the Ministry of the Interior” aiming at expounding “the values and principles for all those wishing to have permanent residence in Italy irrespective of whatever religious, ethnic and/or

cultural group or community they may belong to”(Charter, “Introduction”) and “also intended as a useful instrument for immigrants, religious communities, and Italian citizens, especially the young, in order to spread a better understanding of the problems concerning immigration and religious freedom”(ibid.). Giuliano Amato, who as the Minister of the Interior has set in motion, in the second half of 2006, the process from which the Charter was born in a framework of initiatives aiming at integration and social cohesion, writes that the document shows the foundations of the rights and duties of immigrants in the Italian identity and in the Constitution of the Italian Republic; establishes a relation between the history of the Italian nation and the principles upon which its Republic has today its foundations; assists new and old immigrants and Italian citizens to find a practical relation between the Constitution of the Republic and the Italian legislation in force, on the one hand, and their daily life as to the issues of integration. Therefore, the Charter illustrates the rights and duties of the immigrants, opens a discussion and a dialogue “between old and new Italians on the issue about which they are called sometimes simply to understand one other, sometimes to accept each other, sometimes to change their reciprocal attitudes” and, last but not least, points to the road towards practical integration(Amato, “Prefazione” 2–3).

### When and by whom was it written?

Approved by a decree issued on the 23rd of April 2007, the Charter on the Values is the second document of this type issued in Europe after the *Contrat d'accueil et d'intégration*, Welcome and Integration Contract, passed in France on July 2003. It was written by a scientific committee, formed by Carlo Cardia, professor of Philosophy of Law of the Jurisprudence Faculty of the Roma Tre University, who was its president, Roberta Aluffi Beck Peccoz, lecturer of Muslim Law at the University of Turin, Khaled Fouad Allam, lecturer of Sociology

of the Muslim World and History and Institutions of the Islamic Countries at the University of Urbino and a member of the Italian Parliament, Adnane Mokrani, Muslim theologian and lecturer of Islamic Studies at the Gregorian University of Rome and Francesco Tannini, lecturer of Arabic Studies at the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies (PISAI) in Rome. The work of the scientific committee has been also followed by Mr. Franco Testa and Ms. Maria Patrizia Paba, prefect and prefect deputy respectively at the Ministry of the Interior. The committee has also consulted several religious, social, trade-unions, and civil society associations and organizations of the world of immigration. Specifically it has consulted the Council of Italian Islam, an exclusively consultative body formed by 16 members, among which are some of the most significant voices of the many-sided Italian Islamic world, and the Youth Council for Cultural and Religious Pluralism Issues, a body created by the Ministry of the Interior together with the Ministry for Juvenile Politics to promote dialogue among youth of different faiths and cultures.

### Which are its themes?

The Charter on the Values comprises seven sections. The first and the last ones describe the identity of the Italian nation on the ground of its ancient and more recent history and of its geographical position and mention the seminal values of Italian society as expounded in its Constitution and its present international commitment. The other five sections deal with very important issues described in their respective titles: "Dignity of the Individual, Rights and Duties, Social Rights," "Employment and Health, Social Rights," "School, Education and Information," "Family, New Generations and Laicity" and "Religious Freedom."



### By which documents was it inspired?

The Charter on the Values is inspired in the first place by the Constitution of the Italian Republic of 1947, which the Charter defines as “the great divide from the totalitarianism and anti-Semitism trend which poisoned twentieth century Europe with the persecution of the Jews and their culture”(Charter, sec. 1). It also refers to other contemporary international documents, mentioned by Cardia in his commentary on the Charter(see Table 1). Finally, it also reflects other Italian laws, like for example the Legislative Decree 25 July 1998, no. 286, Consolidated text of the law on immigration and provisions governing the status of foreigners(Charter, art. 1 n5).

The Charter on the Values, “firmly anchored in the Constitution and European and international charters”(Cardia, “Introduzione” 6) as it is, reflects the best human rights culture of the contemporary world. It also is founded upon the four pillars upon which, according to René Cassin(1887–1976), the French jurist who was one of the leading drafters of the Universal Declaration of 1948, the “temple” of human rights is founded:(1) personal rights and liberties,(2) individual rights in one’s relations with his social groups and the affairs of the outer world(3), spiritual faculties, public liberties and fundamental political rights and(4) economic, social and cultural rights(Agi, René Cassin 232). Its 31 articles also reflect the “three main ideas that,” according to the Norwegian Johan Galtung, the father of peace studies, “are a gift by the West to humankind”: “the sacredness of the body,” “the sacredness of the human spirit” and “the equality in front of the law”(“Lo stato nazionale” 300). It complies with all the most important principles mentioned in the International Bill of Human Rights(see Table 2). Finally, the Charter runs again through the road of the three generations of human rights, civil and political rights, economic and social rights and cultural rights, in which Karel Vasak, the French[Czech] jurist, former director of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization(UNESCO’s

Division of Human Rights and Peace, saw in 1979 an achievement of the three great watchwords of the French Revolution: *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité* [Liberty, Equality, Fraternity](see Table 3).

**Table 1**

<b>International documents to which the Charter refers</b>
Universal Declaration of Human Rights, signed in Paris on the 10th of December 1948, whose writing was promoted by the United Nations so that it may be applied by all Member States(Charter on the Values, art. 12 n15, art. 16 n22, art. 17 n24, art. 23 n35, art. 28 n41),
Declaration of the Rights of the Child, adopted by the UN General Assembly on the 20th of November 1959(íbid., art. 13 n18, art. 16 n23),
International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, adopted by the UN General Assembly on the 21st of December 1965(íbid., art. 14 n20),
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopted by the UN General Assembly on the 16th of December 1966 and entered into force on the 23rd of March 1976(íbid., art. 16 n22, art. 16 n23, art. 17 n24, art. 31 n44),
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, adopted by the UN General Assembly on the 18th of December 1979(íbid., art. 4 n7, art. 16 n23),
International Covenant against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, adopted by the UN General Assembly on the 10 of December 1984 and entered into force on the 27th of June 1987(íbid., art. 28 n41),
Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the UN General Assembly on the 20th of November 1989(íbid., art. 12 n16, art. 15 n21, art. 16 n23, art. 19 n28, art. 25 n38, art. 28 n41).
<b>European documents to which the Charter refers</b>
Framework Convention of the Protection of National Minorities, signed by the Council of Europe on the 1st of February 1995 and entered into force on the 1st of February 1998(Charter on the Values, art. 25 n38),
Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, signed and proclaimed by the Presidents of the European Parliament in the occasion of the European Council in Nice on the 7th of December 2000(íbid., art. 12 n17),
A Common Agenda for Integration, Framework for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals into the European Union, written by the European Commission on the 1st of September 2005(íbid., art. 5 n8),
European Parliament Resolution of the 24th of October 2006 on equality between women and men(íbid., art. 4 n7, art. 17 n25, art. 18 n26, art. 19 n29).

Table 2

<b>Principles mentioned in the Bill of Human Rights and reflected in the Charter on Values</b>	
1.	the principle of the “dignity of the human person”(Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 1)
2.	“the principle of equal rights... universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion”(Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, 14 December 1960)
3.	“the principle of the dignity and equality of all human beings”(Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, 20 November 1963)
4.	the “principle of freedom of expression”(Declaration on race and racial prejudices adopted by the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization(UNESCO), 27 November 1978)
5.	“the principle of non-discrimination”(Convention against Discrimination in Education, 14 December 1960)
6.	the “principle of equality of men and women”(Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 18 December 1979)
7.	“the principle of equal remuneration for men and women workers for work of equal value”(Equal Remuneration Convention, 29 June 1951)
8.	the principle of “compulsory primary education, free of charge” for all(International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights)
9.	the “Social and Legal Principles relating to the Protection and Welfare of Children”(Convention on the Rights of the Child, 20 November 1989)
10.	the “principle of self-determination of peoples,”(United Nation Charter, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights)
11.	the “Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary”(UN General Assembly, 13 December 1985)

Table 3

<b>Three Generations of Human Rights(Vasak)</b>		
Civil and political rights	Liberty	Rights to liberty Freedom <i>from</i> the state Liberties <i>within</i> the state Liberties <i>through</i> the State
Economic and social rights	Equality	Rights to work Rights to education Rights to health
Cultural rights	Fraternity	

## A Bahá'í point of view on the Charter on the Values and Significance of Citizenship and Integration

The Bahá'ís are particularly sensitive to this document whose text is reminiscent of many of the teachings that Bahá'u'lláh has set forth throughout the years of His Mission (1853–1892). The Bahá'í Faith, born in the second half of the nineteenth century when the modern idea of human rights had already begun to flourish at the national level in some parts of the world, not only offers principles of interpersonal morality central to human rights, as the other religions (see Henkin, *Age of Rights* 183–4), but has a straightforward relation with human rights. Its copious Writings<sup>13</sup> explicitly and repeatedly mention them, explain and uphold virtually all the principles upon which the modern human rights system is built, and expound other principles wherefrom that system could get good ideas for future agendas. The Bahá'í Writings illustrate human rights in at least four different perspectives: as “an element of the soul’s search for God,” as “a divine obligation imposed on the rulers of society,” as “foundational elements of the ordering of the ‘divine’ society,” and as “aspirations for the future,” for “the healing of society’s ills and the redemption of humanity” (Curtotti, ‘Human Rights’ 67–8). These are some of the reasons why a document that takes constantly into account the great European and international Charters on Human Rights as the Italian Charter on the Values cannot but meet the full approval of the Bahá'ís. A few considerations on this modern document will now be offered in the light of the Bahá'í teachings.

### **The Charter on Values and its laicity**

The first section of the Charter on values, “Italy, a community of peoples and values,” immediately clarifies that Italy is a lay country. The issue is then resumed in Section 6, “Laicity and religious freedom,” in which the Charter on Values states that “the lay state recognizes the positive contribution that religions bring to

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the community and intends to emphasize the moral and spiritual patrimony of each one of them”(art. 21). Cardia comments upon Section 6, art. 21, as follows:

The principles stated in this article describe the positive and friendly character of the Italian laicity, which thus distinguishes itself from the laicity prevailing in the nineteenth century that considered religion as a “private affair” and refused to acknowledge its public and social role. The friendly and positive aspect of the Italian laicity has several applications. The Constitutional Court, for example, stated that the lay character of the State is one of the supreme principles of the constitutional order, but has also added that our order recognizes the role that religion plays in the society and in the community. In harmony with this approach, the Charter on the Values states that Italy founds its laicity on two essential points: the recognition of the moral and spiritual patrimony of each religion, as a positive factor in community life, and the promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue to support the respect for human dignity and the exhaustion of any form of prejudice and intolerance. Therefore, religion is an active component of society and can converse with the state in several ways.(Cardia, “Note” 22–3, art 21 n32)

This position places the Italian legislative order, in its laicity, that is in its total autonomy from the various religious confessions existing in Italy, in the van on the international theatre because of its high consideration of religion and makes its laicity a guarantor of equal rights and opportunities for all its citizens and a form of respect for all religious conceptions, since it does not favor anyone above the others.

The Bahá’í teachings totally agree with the two above mentioned points: “the recognition of the moral and spiritual patrimony of each

religion, as a positive factor in community life, and the promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue to support the respect for human dignity and the exhaustion of any form of prejudice and intolerance". The Bahá'í International Community(BIC),<sup>14</sup> is working with the United Nations so that they may recognize the role religions deserve, at least in the promotion of the human rights culture(see BIC 97-0401), on the ground of a number of important observations. All religions teach "people who they are and why they are here and call them to transcendence and service"(BIC 97-0401). They "teach love, and... are intended to promote the well-being of the human family"(BIC 93-0612) and this teaching "could be viewed as a goal common to them all"(BIC 95-0110). They educate "individuals to confront their own character defects"(BIC 97-0401), to "root out undesirable behavior"(BIC 97-0401), "to discipline their baser propensities"(BIC 99-0112), "to cultivate such virtues as truthfulness, compassion, trustworthiness, and generosity"(BIC 97-0401), "courage, and willingness to sacrifice for the common good"(BIC 99-0112), guiding them to respect such "universal spiritual principles" as "tolerance... love, justice, humility... dedication to the well-being of others, and unity"(BIC 97-0401). All these virtues and principles, inculcated by all religions are "conducive to nobility and to respect for the rights of others"(BIC 97-0401) and imply "social order and cultural advancement"(BIC 99-0112). Since these virtues and principles are the core of all religions, every religion has a vital role in promoting "unity among all the peoples of the world" and in outlawing "war and violence in human affairs"(BIC 87-0303).

The numerous religious conflicts that obscure the world seem to disqualify the world's religions for this delicate task, however the Bahá'í International Community invites us "to look to the remarkable development of interfaith relations and the expansion of interfaith initiatives," and points out the many initiatives undertaken by the various religious and spiritual traditions, with the intention of fostering "friendliness, fellowship and understanding among their diverse

communities,” and of “working together on policies, programs and initiatives with secular bodies ranging from private enterprises and organizations of civil society, to governments and international institutions”(BIC 01–0430). In the theoretic field, this shared commitment of religions has produced “numerous joint declarations and agreements in which the religions have articulated a common vision of humanity’s future based on such universal principles as love, justice, compassion, moderation, humility, sharing, service, peace and the oneness of the human family”(BIC 01–0430). In practice, “the recent trend towards interfaith dialogue around the globe offers a positive example of how disparate communities can work together to broaden vision and shape public discourse in a unifying way”(BIC 01–1123). An undoubtedly “increasing interchange among spiritual leaders and their followers, especially children, will no doubt lead to new understandings of what is possible for human beings and how peaceful patterns of collective life can be nurtured”(BIC 01–1123). These results, beside the previously mentioned virtues and principles inculcated by religions, denote that religions can provide a “values-centered education” that is indispensable in view of the promotion of human rights(BIC 96–0315).

Although the Charter on Values recognizes the Italian lay legacy from “the cultures of Ancient Greece and Rome”(Charter 1), from which Italy has drawn “its enunciation of the principle of liberty”(Cardia, “Note” 10 n1), it does not forget “Italy grew and developed within a Christian framework which dominated its history and together with Judaism prepared the way for its opening towards modernity and the principles of freedom and justice”(ibid.). Rich in this twin legacy, the Charter on the Values states that Italy undertakes, in the noblest spirit of modernity, to realize “an international order based on human rights, equality and solidarity among peoples”(Charter 11) and offers “all that which makes up the patrimony of Italy, its artistic and natural beauty, its economic and cultural resources, and its democratic institutions... to serve the men, women and the young

not only of this but also of future generations,” safeguarding and promoting “inalienable human rights so as to sustain the weak, and to guarantee the development of every individual not only with regard to work possibilities and aptitude but also with regard to the moral and spiritual disposition of each one”(ibid.).

The Charter on the Values meets, also in this respect, the prerequisites of the Bahá'í teachings that suggest their own concept of the relation between the state and its citizens. On the one hand, Bahá'u'lláh enjoins “obedience unto them that are in authority”(GWB 206, sec. cii) and denies “the right to act in any manner that would run counter to the considered views of them who are in authority”(Lawḥ-i-Dhabíh, 241, para. 3), because, He explains, “The instruments which are essential to the immediate protection, the security and assurance of the human race have been entrusted to the hands, and lie in the grasp, of the governors of human society”(GWB 206, sec. cii). On the other, He writes to the rulers of the world: “your subjects are God’s trust amongst you. Watch ye, therefore, over them as ye watch over your own selves”(Súriy-i-Haykal 75, para. 143). They “that are in authority” are expected to be as loyal as all their subjects. The good governance is born from this reciprocal loyalty. The ideal rulers should be “protectors of the people and dispensers of Divine justice... powerful champions of the people’s rights,” they should “give no thought to amassing enormous fortunes for themselves,” they should rather be eager to enrich “their subjects” and “take no pride in gold and silver, but rather in their enlightenment and their determination to achieve the universal good”(SDC 20). Both rulers and ruled ones should aim at becoming “a source of social good” and consider this as their most cherished honor and highest distinction”(ibid. 2).

### **The seven sections of the Charter**

The first section of the Charter also refers to concept of “service,” when it states that “All that which makes up the patrimony of Italy, its artistic and natural beauty, its economic and cultural resources,



and its democratic institutions are there to serve the men, women and the young not only of this but also of future generations”(Charter 2). The concept of service occupies a central place in the Bahá’í conception of life. Bahá’u’lláh writes: “*Man’s merit lieth in service and virtue and not in the pageantry of wealth and riches*”(Lawḥ-i-Ḥikmat 138).

The contents of the second section, “Dignity of the Individual, Rights and Duties,” confirms the Bahá’í persuasion that the principle of the oneness of humankind, according to which “*all men are the sheep of God, and God is their loving Shepherd, caring most tenderly for all without favouring one or another*”(SWAB 248, sec. 202), the central principle of their Faith, is gradually becoming established in the world, because of the intrinsic force deriving from its being a fundamental part of human sociality. The principle of the oneness of humankind implies at least four important corollaries, that may be summarized as follows: first, all human beings have the same spiritual origin, and thus are equal; secondly, the human person has a priceless value; thirdly, the highest moral imperative is service to humanity; and fourthly, all human beings are united to one another by close bonds(see Curtotti 66–7). In the light of these implications, “each member of the human race is born into the world as a trust of the whole” and this relationship between the individual and the collective, on the one hand “constitutes the moral foundation of most of the human rights,” on the other, defines “an overriding purpose for the international order in establishing and preserving the rights of the individual”(BIC 95–1001, *Turning* 247; see BIC 95–0303, *Prosperity* 281).

The contents of the third section, “Social Rights. Employment and Health,” is reminiscent for the Bahá’ís of a talk delivered by Abdu’l-Bahá in 1911 in Paris:

Every human being has the right to live; they have a right to rest, and to a certain amount of well-being. As a rich man is able to live in his palace surrounded by luxury and the greatest comfort, so should a poor man be able to have the necessaries of life. Nobody should die of hunger; everybody should have sufficient clothing; one man should not live in excess while another has no possible means of existence.(PT 134, sec. 40, para. 23)

The fourth section, “Social Rights. School, Education and Information,” is related to one of the main principles of the Bahá’í Faith, “Universal education is a universal law”(PUP 300, 1 September 1912). The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the book of Bahá’í laws, explains this principle in details. For example:

*Unto every father hath been enjoined the instruction of his son and daughter in the art of reading and writing and in all that hath been laid down in the Holy Tablet. He that putteth away that which is commanded unto him, the Trustees are then to take from him that which is required for their instruction if he be wealthy and, if not, the matter devolveth upon the House of Justice. Verily have We made it a shelter for the poor and needy. He that bringeth up his son or the son of another, it is as though he hath brought up a son of Mine; upon him rest My glory, My loving-kindness, My mercy, that have compassed the world.(37, para. 48)*

The fifth section, “Family, New Generations,” is a source of encouragement and assurance for the Bahá’ís. We certainly cannot say that the health condition of the institution of the family is good in the West. A document that “considers family education a necessary tool for the upbringing of new generations”(Charter art. 16) inspires great confidence. This confidence is strengthened by the emphasis placed by the Charter on the Values “on the equality of duties and

obligations between husband and wife”(Charter art. 17) and on “the freedom of minors in developing their own personality”(Charter art. 19). The Bahá’í family is founded on bonds of love and loyalty among all its components. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said about the family on the 2nd of June 1912 while He was in the United States:<sup>15</sup>

According to the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh the family, being a human unit, must be educated according to the rules of sanctity. All the virtues must be taught the family. The integrity of the family bond must be constantly considered, and the rights of the individual members must not be transgressed. The rights of the son, the father, the mother—none of them must be transgressed, none of them must be arbitrary. Just as the son has certain obligations to his father, the father, likewise, has certain obligations to his son. The mother, the sister and other members of the household have their certain prerogatives. All these rights and prerogatives must be conserved, yet the unity of the family must be sustained. The injury of one shall be considered the injury of all; the comfort of each, the comfort of all; the honor of one, the honor of all.(PUP 168, 2 June 1912)<sup>16</sup>

The sixth section, “Laicity and Religious Freedom,” has been previously analyzed.

The seventh section, “Italy’s International Commitment,” confirms Italy’s commitment to carry out “a policy of peace and respect towards all people in the world to promote the peaceful coexistence between nations and defeat war and terrorism” and to safeguard “the environment and wealth of life on the planet”(Charter art. 27), to reject “war as a means for resolving international disputes, weapons of mass destruction, as well as any form of torture and punishment that degrades human dignity”(Charter art. 28), to reject “any form of xenophobia”(ibid.), with a view to finding “a peaceful resolution

to the main international crises”(Charter art. 30), to promoting “respect for human rights and the dignity of man throughout the world” and to encouraging “the success of political democracy as the form of State government that allows citizens to take part in matters of public interest and the ever-increasing respect for the rights of the person”(Charter art. 31).

In this commitment Italy is catching the best of Western civilization and modernity. Among the merits ascribed by the Bahá'í writings to Western civilization the most important is that it gave birth to “a philosophical culture,” which has liberated “the energies of its populations,” produced “a revolutionary impact throughout the entire world,” nurtured “constitutional government,” and prized “the rule of law and respect for the rights of all of society’s members”(Century of Light 5, cf. 72–3). The Bahá'ís therefore ascribe to the West the merit of having established for the first time in human history “the minimum standards for conduct by a government towards its people”(BIC 95–1001, Turning 255) and promoted an international debate that is gradually producing a “new culture conducive to the universal enjoyment of human rights”(BIC 96–0315). The positive aspects of the Western civilization are thus summarized by the Universal House of Justice, the supreme governing body of the Bahá'í Community, in a message “To the Believers in the Cradle of the Faith [Iran]” of the 26th of November 2003: “constitutional and democratic government, the rule of law, universal education, the protection of human rights, economic development, religious tolerance, the promotion of useful sciences and technologies and programmes of public welfare”(2). All these features are reflected in the last section of the Charter on the Values and the Bahá'ís wholeheartedly agree.

The Charter on the Values speaks about peace and respect towards all people and the Bahá'ís remember 'Abdu'l-Bahá's encouragement: “Consort with all the peoples, kindreds and religions of the world with the

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*utmost truthfulness, uprightness, faithfulness, kindness, good-will and friendliness*"(WT 14).

The Charter speaks of "safeguarding the environment and wealth of life on the planet"(art. 27) and the Bahá'ís think of the call by the Universal House of Justice in its message "To the Bahá'ís of the World, Ridván 1989" to assist "in endeavors to conserve the environment in ways which blend with the rhythm of life of our community"(para. 12), in the name of the strong ties between human beings and the environment, described in a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi(1897–1957), the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, in 1933, as follows:We cannot segregate the human heart from the environment outside us and say that once one of these is reformed everything will be improved. Man is organic with the world. His inner life moulds the environment and is itself deeply affected by it. The one acts upon the other and every abiding change in the life of man is the result of these mutual reactions.(qtd. in *Valuing* 249, BIC 98–0218)

And with a view to its improvement, as recommended by 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

*The Lord of all mankind hath fashioned this human realm to be a Garden of Eden, an earthly paradise. If, as it must, it findeth the way to harmony and peace, to love and mutual trust, it will become a true abode of bliss, a place of manifold blessings and unending delights. Therein shall be revealed the excellence of humankind, therein shall the rays of the Sun of Truth shine forth on every hand.*(SWAB 275, sec. 220)

The Charter speaks of rejecting war and weapons of mass destruction. And the Bahá'ís remember the hope voiced by Bahá'u'lláh "that through the earnest endeavours of such as are the exponents of the power of God... the weapons of war throughout the world may be converted into

*instruments of reconstruction and that strife and conflict may be removed from the midst of men”(Bishárát 23).*

The Charter speaks of rejecting any form of torture and punishment that degrades human dignity. And this rejection echoes the following words written by 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

material civilization, through the power of punitive and retaliatory laws, restraineth the people from criminal acts; and notwithstanding this, while laws to retaliate against and punish a man are continually proliferating, as ye can see, no laws exist to reward him. In all the cities of Europe and America, vast buildings have been erected to serve as jails for the criminals.

*Divine civilization, however, so traineth every member of society that no one, with the exception of a negligible few, will undertake to commit a crime.(SWAB 132, sec. 105)*

Italy is determined to defeat xenophobia. And the Bahá'ís agree, according to the guidance received by 'Abdu'l-Bahá Who wrote:

*do all in your power to be as one, to live in peace, each with the others: for ye are all the drops from but one ocean, the foliage of one tree, the pearls from a single shell, the flowers and sweet herbs from the same one garden... Call none a stranger; think none to be your foe.(SWAB 279, sec. 221)*

A similar guidance is given in a Talk He delivered in Paris on the 16th and the 17th of October 1911:

I ask you not to think only of yourselves. Be kind to the strangers, whether come they from Turkey, Japan, Persia, Russia, China or any other country in the world.

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Help to make them feel at home; find out where they are staying, ask if you may render them any service; try to make their lives a little happier.

In this way, even if, sometimes, what you at first suspected should be true, still go out of your way to be kind to them—this kindness will help them to become better.(PT 1, sec. 1, paras. 1–4)

Italy “is committed to seeing a peaceful resolution to the main international crises”(art. 30). And the Bahá’ís think that Italy also, like other countries, is beginning to fulfill the following auspice expressed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in 1875:

*True civilization will unfurl its banner in the midmost heart of the world whenever a certain number of its distinguished and high-minded sovereigns—the shining exemplars of devotion and determination—shall, for the good and happiness of all mankind, arise, with firm resolve and clear vision, to establish the Cause of Universal Peace. They must make the Cause of Peace the object of general consultation, and seek by every means in their power to establish a Union of the nations of the world.*(SDC 64)

The Charter states that Italy works “to encourage the success of political democracy as the form of State government that allows citizens to take part in matters of public interest and the ever-increasing respect for the rights of the person”(art. 31). And the Bahá’ís applaud, because they themselves believe in democracy. Bahá’u’lláh emphasized the importance of the participation of people to the management of the government when, at the end of the years 1860, He exalted Victoria, Queen of England, for having “entrusted the reins of counsel into the hands of the representatives of the people”(Súriy-i-Haykal 90, para. 173) and praised, in another Writing, “the system of government which the British people have adopted in London appeareth... for it is adorned with

*the light of both kingship and of the consultation of the people*"(Lawḥ-i-Dunyá 93). `Abdu'l-Bahá exalted "unity in freedom"(SWAB 32, sec. 15) for all the people of the world and on the 2nd of June 1912, when He was asked: "Is it not a fact that universal peace cannot be accomplished until there is political democracy in all the countries of the world?"; He answered that "Under an autocratic government the opinions of men are not free, and development is stifled, whereas in democracy, because thought and speech are not restricted, the greatest progress is witnessed"(PUP 167). He also said that "To cast aside centralization which promotes despotism is the exigency of the time. This will be productive of international peace"(PUP 167). Shoghi Effendi wrote that the Bahá'í Administrative Order is inclined "to democratic methods in the administration of its affairs"(World Order 153). *Century of Light*, commissioned by the Universal House of Justice, recognizes that "the process leading [in 1963] to the election of the Universal House of Justice... very likely constituted history's first global democratic election"(92, sec. 8, para. 15). The Bahá'í International Community remarks that "in many parts of the world, the first exercises in democratic activity have occurred within the Bahá'í community"(BIC 01-0528).

As to democracy, the Bahá'ís suggest it to be perfected, through a change in a number of features that in their opinion weaken modern democracy. A first aspect is "the political theater of nominations, candidature, electioneering, and solicitation," which should be replaced, as people "become progressively educated," by "electoral procedures that will gradually refine the selection of their decision-making bodies"(BIC 95-0303, *Prosperity* 294). Other reprehensible aspects are "the culture of protest... debate, propaganda, the adversarial method, the entire apparatus of partisanship that have long been such familiar features of collective action," which "are all fundamentally harmful to its purpose: that is, arriving at a consensus about the truth of a given situation and the wisest choice of action among the options open at any given moment"(ibid. 283) and last but not least "the adversarial



structure of civil government, the advocacy principle informing most of civil law”(ibid. 287). All these aspects of modern democracy show that in the West “conflict is accepted as the mainspring of human interaction”(BIC 95–0303, *Prosperity* 277), and even mistakenly “dignified... by institutionalizing such concepts as the ‘loyal opposition’ which attach to one or another of the various categories of political opinion—conservative, liberal, progressive, reactionary, and so forth”(The Universal House of Justice, ‘Individual Rights and Freedoms’ 515).

### A “unitary concept of citizenship”

While presenting all these noble concept to citizens and immigrants, the Charter on the Values offers, in Cardia’s words,

a unitary concept of citizenship and coexistence among the different national, ethnic and religious communities, that took root in the latest years in the Italian territory, and can be considered as a covenant between Italian citizens and immigrants in view of an integration determined to reconcile respect of legitimate and positive differences of culture and behavior and respect of shared values. (“Introduzione” 4)

This concept of citizenship is a reality for the Bahá’ís throughout the world, who are committed everywhere to create this new citizen of the world, a citizen heedful of the following words of Bahá’u’lláh:

*All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization. The Almighty beareth Me witness: To act like the beasts of the field is unworthy of man. Those virtues that befit his dignity are forbearance, mercy, compassion and loving-kindness towards all the peoples and kindreds of the earth.*(GWB 214, sec. CIX, para. 2)

## The Bahá'ís and the cultural diversity of the world

Bahá'u'lláh describes cultural diversity as a great wealth. He wrote: "Ye are all the leaves of one tree" (Bishárát 26), "Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch" (Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd 163), "regard ye not one another as strangers" (Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd 163), "Deal ye one with another with the utmost love and harmony, with friendliness and fellowship... So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth" (ESW 14). 'Abdu'l-Bahá interpreted this metaphor offered by Bahá'u'lláh in three different perspectives. The first is that of the oneness of humankind. When Bahá'u'lláh says "Ye are all the fruits of one tree, the leaves of one branch" He likens "this world of being to a single tree, and all its peoples to the leaves thereof, and the blossoms and fruits. It is needful for the bough to blossom, and leaf and fruit to flourish, and upon the interconnection of all parts of the world-tree, dependeth the flourishing of leaf and blossom, and the sweetness of the fruit" (SWAB 1, sec. 1). The second aspect is that of the beauty of diversity:

*Consider the flowers of a garden. Though differing in kind, color, form, and shape, yet, inasmuch as they are refreshed by the waters of one spring, revived by the breath of one wind, invigorated by the rays of one sun, this diversity increaseth their charm, and addeth unto their beauty... Diversity of hues, form and shape, enricheth and adorneth the garden, and heighteneth the effect thereof. In like manner, when divers shades of thought, temperament and character, are brought together under the power and influence of one central agency, the beauty and glory of human perfection will be revealed and made manifest. (TDP 103)*

The third aspect is that of harmony among the followers of the different religions. In the past, because of the different conditions of the world, certain systems of religious belief have "boasted of... [their] superiority and excellence, abasing and scorning the validity of all the others" (PUP 230, 14 July 192), and have expressed this

concept stating that humankind is divided into “two trees: one divine and merciful, the other satanic”(ibid.).<sup>17</sup> But Bahá'u'lláh says: “‘Ye are all the leaves of one tree’. He does not say, ‘Ye are the leaves of two trees, one divine, the other satanic’”(ibid.). Therefore, “all are the children of God, fruit upon the one tree of His love... all are growing upon the tree of His mercy, servants of His omnipotent will and manifestations of His good pleasure”(ibid.). The division of humankind into two trees has implied in the past that certain systems of belief heaped “execration and abuse upon each other”(ibid. 266, 17 August 1912).<sup>18</sup> But Bahá'u'lláh, explaining that there is but one “Adamic tree,” and that “there is no satanic tree whatever – Satan being a product of human minds and of instinctive human tendencies towards error”(ibid. 230), teaches that ‘we have no right to look upon any of our fellow-mortals as evil’(PT 153, ch.45, para.10, 10 November 1911), and that

it is not becoming in man to curse another... it is not meet that one human being should consider another human being as bad... There are no people of Satan; all belong to the Merciful. There is no darkness; all is light. All are the servants of God, and man must love humanity from his heart. He must, verily, behold humanity as submerged in the divine mercy. (PUP 266, 17 August 1912)

The Bahá'í International Community mentions “the right of every person to expect that those cultural conditions essential to his or her identity enjoy the protection of national and international law.” This right is specifically explained as follows:

Much like the role played by the gene pool in the biological life of humankind and its environment, the immense wealth of cultural diversity achieved over thousands of years is vital to the social and economic development of a human race experiencing its collective coming-of-age. It represents

a heritage that must be permitted to bear its fruit in a global civilization. On the one hand, cultural expressions need to be protected from suffocation by the materialistic influences currently holding sway. On the other, cultures must be enabled to interact with one another in ever-changing patterns of civilization, free of manipulation for partisan political ends.(BIC 95–0303, Prosperity 281–2)

In the light of these statements, it is evident that all cultures are entitled to their own identity, but also have the responsibility of re-examining those aspects of their beliefs and customs that are in conflict with the above mentioned unifying vision, which is confirmed by the system of human rights and by reason itself.

Integration and interreligious dialogue have a long way to go to fully achieve the oneness of humankind. However, such documents as the Charter on the Values and Citizenship denote that this goal will be gradually attained.

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## The Duty of Kindness and Sympathy Towards Strangers

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NOTES

- 1 See for example 'Abdu'l-Bahá, PT 36; 134, 40:19-21; 151-6, 45:121; PUP 107, 287, 316, 455; ADP 24, 25, 82; ABL 28, 55, 59-60; Isabel Fraser. "Abdul-Baha at Clifton, England," in *Star of the West* 4.1(21 March 1913): 4-6.
- 2 See also "Reception to Abdul-Baha by the New York Peace Society at Hotel Astor, May 13 1912. Dr. Stephen S. Wise, Rabbi. Mrs. Anna Garland Spencer, Ethical Society. Rev. Percy Stickney Grant, Church of Ascension. Mr. Topakyan, Persian Consul General. Prof. William Jackson, Columbia University. Mr. W. H. Short, Sec'y. New York Peace Society. Stenographic Notes by E. Foster," in *Star of the West* 3.8(1 August 1912): 10-5:
- 3 See also "Abdul-Baha at Unity Church, Montclair New Jersey (Rev. Edgar S. Wiers, Pastor). Sunday, May 12, 1912, 11 A. M. Stenographic Notes by E. Foster," in *Star of the West* 3.7(13 July 1912): 12-14.
- 4 The Persian notes taken during His speech are recorded in *Majmú'ih* 164-9.
- 5 See also "Address by Abdul'Baha at Hotel Schenley, Pittsburgh, Pa.," in *Star of the West* 3. 6(24 June 1912): 2-4, 8.
- 6 The Persian notes taken during His speech are recorded in *Star of the West* 5.5(5 June 1914): 80(Persian section 1) and *Majmú'ih* 224-33.
- 7 The Persian notes taken during His speech are recorded in *Majmú'ih* 85-93.
- 8 See also "Address by Abdul-Baha at Church of the Ascension, Fifth Avenue and Tenth Street, New York City. Rev. Percy Stickney Grant, Rector, April 14, 1912. Compiled from the Persian Notes by Mirza Ahmad Sohab(sic) and Mr. Howard MacNutt," *Star of the West* 4.1(21 March 1913): 7-8.
- 9 See also "Report of Meeting at Universalist Church, 4 P. M. Sunday, April 21, 1912," in *Star of the West* 3.3(28 April 1910): 10-2.
- 10 See also "Address of Abdul-Baha at Hull House, Chicago, April 30, 1912. Translated by Dr. Ameen U. Fareed and taken stenographically by Joseph H. Hannen," in *Star of the West* 3.3(28 April 1910): 29-30.
- 11 See also "Talk by Abdul-Baha given in Paris, France, November 23, 1911, during the war between Italy and Tripoli. Translated by Dr. Zia Bagdadi, June, 19 1916, Chicago, Ill." *Star of the West* 7. 11(27

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- September 1916): 106-7. The Persian notes taken during His speech are recorded in *Majmú'ih* 210-3.
- 12 An English text has been published by the Italian Ministry of Interior. Its text will be used in this paper and denoted as Charter. The numbers in() refer to its paragraphs.
  - 13 In this paper the author has adopted the Bahá'í habit of writing whatever pertains God or His Manifestations, i.e. the Founders of revealed religions, with the capital letter as a sign of reverence and respect.
  - 14 The acronym BIC is used to indicate a document by the Bahá'í International Community(BIC). The first group of two numbers indicates the year in which the document was published and the second group of four numbers indicates the order number of the document. The text of all the documents by the Bahá'í International Community may be retrieved on the Internet in the "Bahá'í International Community Statement Library" at < [www.bic-un.bahai.org/list.cfm](http://www.bic-un.bahai.org/list.cfm) >.
  - 15 See also "Address of Abdul-Baha at Protestant Episcopal Church of the Ascension, Fifth Ave. and 10St., New York City, Sunday, June 2, 1912, 8 P.M., Rev. Doc. Percy Strickney Grant, Rector," *Star of the West* 3.10(8 September 1912): 24-9.
  - 16 See also "Address of Abdul-Baha at Protestant Episcopal Church of the Ascension, Fifth Ave. and 10th St. New York City, Sunday, June 2, 1912, 8 P.M., Stickney Grant, Rector," in *Star of the West* 3.10(8 September 1912): 24-9.
  - 17 See also "Address of Abdul Baha at All Souls Unitarian Church, Fourth Ave. and Twentieth St., New York City, Rev. Leon Harvey, Pastor, Sunday, July 14, 1912. Translated by Dr. Ameen U. Fareed; notes by Messrs. John G. Grundy and Howard MacNutt," *Star of the West* 3.11(4 November 1912): 12-6.
  - 18 See also "'Baha'u'llah has proclaimed the promise of the Oneness of Humanity.' Address by Abdul-Baha at Green Acre, Maine, August 17, 1912," *Star of the West* 8.7(13July 1917): 76-80.

## Mayflowers in the *Ville Lumière*: the Dawning of Bahá'í History in the European Continent<sup>1</sup>

Julio Savi

*Against the background of the Paris of the fin de siècle and of the Belle Époque, with its magnificent intellectual and artistic efflorescence, a young American lady becomes the catalyst for the spiritual awakening of a group of early God-intoxicated believers. The paper emphasizes their human characters and the mysterious ways through which they, lovingly steered by a subtle, omnipresent and all-guiding Will, came to recognize the dawn of the new era on the European continent and on the whole world.*

The nineteenth century of the Christian era was drawing to a close when a young woman from the town of Englewood, New Jersey, on the outskirts of New York City, arrived in Paris, on the banks of the Seine. Her family name was Bolles and her name was Mary Ellis (1870–1940), but she was known as May, a name evoking the thought of advanced springtime, multicolored roses, mild breezes, refreshing showers.

Randolph, her brother, had decided to study architecture and his family had chosen for him the *École des Beaux Arts* in Paris. Therefore in 1892–93, May, Randolph and their mother Mary Martha moved to the French capital. A subtle, omnipresent and all-guiding Will had decreed that their choice would open to the young woman a road, which would lead her to a great destiny, comprising “the priceless honor of a martyr’s death” in Argentina in 1940 (Shoghí Effendí, qtd. in Holley, “May Ellis Maxwell” 642), if only she would understand the true meaning of events and seize her God-given

opportunities. And through her Paris, that ancient town of material and intellectual glories, would witness the earliest dawning of a new age of light—whose fruits only the future will reveal—for the old European continent.

Paris: a magical name that—in the people of Europe, so proud of their heritage of culture and history—still evokes mixed feelings of confident admiration and consuming longing. In the *Belle Époque* (1871–1914)—an echo of whose sounds may still be enjoyed in Jacques Offenbach's (1819–1880) most renowned melodies, like his *galop infernal* known as *Cancan*—the French capital well deserved to be called *la Ville Lumière*, the City of Lights, for the blaze of its nocturnal lamps and shining minds in a continent just entering a modern age, seemingly filled with infinite promises. After 1889 the *Tour Eiffel*, with its futuristic profile of iron pillars and girders stood above the Seine with its 320 meters, a promise of future achievements, unimaginable only a few decades before. With its two and half million people, renowned *boulevards*, *quays* and *places*, intense city traffic, industrious economic and commercial activities, brilliant society life and intellectual audacity, Paris was indeed the capital of an Europe, which was in those days more than ever convinced of its invincible supremacy over the world, a supremacy which no one would ever expect to be so soon undermined.

The meaning of those days is as yet not fully grasped, possibly because the extraordinary Power that, after 1844, is mysteriously shaping the course of human history is not yet sufficiently known and understood. Unknown is the real source of the Romantic ideas of a century that, after the cloying doltishness of Arcadia and Rococo, was obscurely craving after a perfect Ideal, a century that was eager to break with a recent past, perceived as narrow and empty, and was yearning after the Infinite with impetuous thrust and adolescent blindness. The greatest minds of those years felt an irrepressible

longing for a greatness that they themselves could not define. Their intense longing brought them to an outburst of passions, whose pulse can be perceived in their sculptures, paintings, novels, poems, melodies, sometimes in their ideals of life and in their open rebellion to a widespread, dull acquiescence to the dictates of a venerable tradition by that time divested of any meaning and truth.

This enthusiastic search, which had manifold expressions in the course of the nineteenth century, was manifest in the Paris of the *fin de siècle* more than anywhere else in the Western world. In that city, Claude Debussy(1862–1918), “*le gamin de Paris* [the Paris urchin],” as Nadejda von Meck(1831–1894), Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky’s Egeria called him(qtd. in Brockway and Weinstock, *Men of music* 529), was expressing unusual sounds and harmonies, disregarding most of the canons of European musical tradition after Bach. Edouard Manet(1832–1883) had already completed his pictorial work under the banner of “a spontaneous and lively transcription of the first glance”(Daydí, “Éduard Manet” 218), openly defying the rhetoric triumphalism of the academic official painting style upheld by the powerful *Académie de Beaux Arts* and represented by such artists as Jean-Leon Gérôme(1824–1903) and Alexandre Cabanel(1823–1889). The Impressionists—Edgar Degas(1834–1917), Claude Monet(1840–1926) and Pierre Auguste Renoir(1841–1919)—had already finished their aesthetical revolution based upon the primacy of light. They had already transfigured physical beauty into a symbol which, as earthly as it was, spoke of a spiritual dimension, which nevertheless most of them ignored in their lives. Stéphane Mallarmé(1842–1898), Paul Verlaine(1844–1896), and Arthur Rimbaud(1854–1891) had already depicted, through their verses, a world wherefrom a remote scent of Eternity is wafting. It was the Eternity that they, atheistic and immersed in a sensuous, sometimes perverted, life as they were—described in the numerous Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec’s(1864–1901) canvases, watercolors, prints, posters and drawings—were unconsciously seeking. Their

sensuousness was aspiring to impossible heights of material perfection and beauty. And in every height a man is struggling to scale, he fancies that he will at long last discover his real self, i.e., that same Eternity he so often wants to deny. As a nineteen-year-old Rimbaud wrote in 1873 in his *Une Saison en Enfer* (A Season in Hell):

Finally, O reason, O happiness, I cleared from the sky the blue which is darkness, and I lived as a golden spark of this light Nature. In my delight, I made my face look as comic and as wild as I could:

It is recovered.  
What?—Eternity.  
In the whirling light  
Of the sun in the sea.  
O my eternal soul,  
Hold fast to desire  
In spite of the night  
And the day on fire.  
You must set yourself free  
From the striving of Man  
And the applause of the World  
You must fly as you can...  
—No hope forever  
No orietur.  
Science and patience,  
The torment is sure.  
The fire within you,  
Soft silken embers,  
Is our whole duty  
But no one remembers.  
It is recovered.  
What? Eternity.  
In the whirling light  
Of the sun in the sea. (< [www.mag4.net/Rimbaud/poesies/  
Alchemy.htm](http://www.mag4.net/Rimbaud/poesies/Alchemy.htm) >)

In this town, where peaks of knowledge, refinement, beauty and art arose above abysses of moral and spiritual decay, our young American lady was waiting for an answer to many questions stirring her heart. What was that light which, a long time before in her home in Greenwood, had shined so luminous in her dream as to leave her, an

eleven years old child, blinded for a whole day? And moreover, why had those angels brought her so far through space, showing, from those remote distances, the earth overflowing with light, and upon the earth an inscription, only two letters of which—B and H—she could read? What was the meaning of those letters, which—she was absolutely certain—had a world-transforming power? And, last but not least, who was the Man—clad in a loose Oriental robe, His face framed by flowing silvery hair and a long white beard, deep blue eyes, a kind, fatherly smile—Who was calling her to Himself beyond the shores of a cerulean sea? May could not explain those strange visions, which had left a mysterious feeling in her heart. Her life could not be described as wholly happy. She was surrounded by love. Her mother and brother were fond of her. But when she was about 20 years-old she fell ill of a strange ailment that no doctor could ever diagnose and that made her body very weak. And thus she was often bedridden, her days spent in rest were long, and at the same time her spirit was thirsty, she felt an incomprehensible, unappeased yearning within her heart.

But the subtle Will—Whose Love and Loving Kindness cradle each human being even before his human parents become the joyous instruments of his entry into this privileged level of creation—was mysteriously weaving the threads of her life, so that at the right time she could change from a chrysalis into a moth through her efforts blessed by the divine confirmations. Mrs. Phoebe Apperson Hearst(1842–1919), the affluent American philanthropist, offered to Mrs. Mary Martha Bolles her apartment on the Quay d’Orsay in Paris, “in exchange for the minor inconvenience of assisting with the management of the suite when its mistress was absent”(Hogenson, *Lighting* 58).

It was the beginning of October 1898 when one fine day Mrs. Phoebe Hearst came to Paris, with a group of friends. They were bound—she said—for Egypt, where they intended to go up the Nile. But May



was so sensitive and so keen were the instruments of her insight, that she could not fail to perceive the reflection of a mysterious fire, hidden in those hearts, especially in that of the beautiful, brown-haired, blue-eyed, ivory-skinned Lua Moore Getsinger (1871–1916), later appointed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá' Himself as “the Herald of the Covenant.”<sup>2</sup>

The details of their conversations are unknown. We only know that, through the words uttered by Lua, May could at long last understand the meaning of her visions. The longing that induced others—more renowned than her today in the world—to scale the heights of art and, in their ignorance of their real Moving Power, to lose themselves in alluring meanders of sensuous and intellectual dreams, that same longing led her to the one Object of her love and to the real self-realization. She discovered the path towards the Infinite in her service to the Glory of God that had just revealed Itself to the world.

The magnanimous Phoebe Hearst could not depart and leave May on the Seine. Her longing well deserved to be satisfied. Beyond the shores of the azure Mediterranean Sea the One Who could disclose the essence of that precious soul in all its beauty was waiting for her. And Phoebe, who intended to visit Him, brought May with her.

It was the 17th of February 1899 when, at long last appeased, May met her Master and understood, because she herself experienced them, the words of Christ: “Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God” (Bolles, *An Early Pilgrimage* 22).

Many years later, 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote about her: “that maidservant of God is ablaze with the fire of the love of God. Whosoever meets her feels from her association the susceptibilities of the Kingdom. Her company uplifts and develops the soul” (“Recent Tablets” 247).<sup>3</sup>

### Edith MacKay

A middle-aged widow, Marie-Louise MacKay, and her young daughter, Edith(1878–1959) had been living in Paris for a few years. Edith who had a beautiful voice frequented Paris's *Conservatoire*, where she “began her singing career with Madame Marie Roge of the Opera”(de Bons, “Edith de Bons” 878) and was also instructed by the French Jules Massenet(1842–1912) and the Italian Ruggero Leoncavallo(1858–1919), the composer of the opera “Pagliacci [Players, or Clowns]”.

The same subtle omnipresent Will that had lovingly guided the young May kindly watched over this brown-haired, sweetly singing, girl. This Will chose a solemn day, the day that Christian tradition has associated throughout the centuries with the birth of their Savior, Christmas Day, to guide her to her predestined goal. She was 21 years-old.

That day in the house of Edith's godfather there was a party, as in all other houses. She had been invited. She had meticulously prepared herself—we can well imagine—for that happy event. She had chosen an elegant and decent dress. She had carefully fixed her hair. The roads were busy. There was a great coming and going of happy people. The air was cold and pungent. There was a Christmas smell. Edith was captured by that sweet, merry atmosphere.

As she entered the elegant hall, brightened by Christmas decorations and enlivened by a small crowd of merry guests, a glimpse was enough for her to identify, among all, a presence that immediately took on a special meaning in her eyes. That presence was a young lady, with soft brown hair, delicate features, clear blue eyes, and a mysterious inner flame, hidden from any other eye but Edith's. “She comes from the United States,” they told her. “She is here with her mother and brother, a student at the School of Architecture.

Her name is May Ellis Bolles." A mysterious power guided Edith to the presence of the young woman. Almost unaware, Edith looked for a long time at May's crystal-clear eyes that revealed unknown depths of feelings and inner awareness, and whispered: "I believe that you have something to tell me!" "Yes," May answered in a breath. And slowly, over the course of three days, she revealed to Edith, with measured wisdom, the extraordinary secret enshrined in her heart.

Edith soon believed—the second one in Paris, after May. She did not take a long time to offer that priceless gift to her mother as well, and, together, in 1901 they themselves went to the Holy Land and sat at the feet of their newly discovered Master(see de Bons, "Edith de Bons" 878–81).

### **Laura Clifford Barney**

Laura Clifford Barney(1879–1974) was among those children of American "good families" who came from the United States to Paris to refine their culture, attending the renowned Sorbonne University, the *École des Beaux Arts* or the *Conservatoire*, listening to concerts, visiting museums and, last but not least, frequenting the Parisian high society. Thus she and her sister Natalie(1876–1972) moved from the United States to live in a college at Fontainebleau, aux Ruches. Natalie later became playwright, novelist, poet, memoirist and epigrammatist, as well as a muse and inspiration of other writers, like her good friend, the famous French novelist Colette(1873–1954).

Laura came from a family of scholars and artists—her mother was Alice Pike Barney(1857–1931), the famous American painter, poet, writer and architect, some of whose paintings are hanging in the National Museum of Washington D.C. Gifted with a "keen

intelligence, [a] logical mind and [an] investigating nature”(Giachery, “Laura Clifford Dreyfus-Barney” 535), she was barely in her twenties when, about 1900, she also met the young May Ellis Bolles. Unfortunately her precious, detailed diaries, which she jealously guarded “in a mahogany secretaire” in her home in 74, rue Raynouard in Paris, were confiscated by the Gestapo during the Nazi occupation of Paris(Giachery, “Laura Dreyfus-Barney” 12). And thus we do not know her intimate experiences of those days. We can, however, imagine that her ideals of world peace, the brotherhood of man and the oneness of humankind that she—“a true pioneer in this field... at a time when the world was still geographically and politically divided and quite insensible to the call of spiritual unity”(Giachery, “Laura Clifford Dreyfus-Barney” 535)—strongly felt in her mind and heart even as a teen-ager, had found at last a clear expression. And after an early visit to the Master she enrolled in the new Faith. Her repeated visits to the Master “became the centre of.. [her] life and inspiration” and, whenever she related their many details, “an expression of rapture and wonderment”(Giachery, “Laura Clifford Dreyfus-Barney” 535) appeared on her face.

We owe to her spiritual and intellectual curiosity the famous collection of utterances by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá known as *Some Answered Questions*. Between 1904 and 1906, during repeated visits to ‘Akká, at table, in the dining room of ‘Abdu’lláh Páshá’s House, where ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had transferred His residence in October 1896, the Master kindly and thoughtfully answered, in His “tired moments,” as He Himself told her(quoted in Dreyfus Barney, “Introduction” v),the manifold questions which the young American lady asked on such deep topics as the origin and nature of man, his material, intellectual and spiritual powers, the origin of creation, its relationship with its Creator and many others. She carefully recorded His answers. And since she believed that what had been “so valuable” to her might “be of use to others, since all men, notwithstanding their difference, are united in their search for reality”(Dreyfus

Barney, "Introduction" vi), she later presented her notes to Him for His approval. She finally had them published in London in 1908, leaving to posterity a book "unique" in the "entire field" of "religious history"(MUH J63 282). Humankind will never be grateful enough to her for this gift, which Shoghí Effendí defined as her "imperishable service"(GPB 260). In that book the fundamental tenets of the divine philosophy of 'Abdu'l-Bahá are expounded, a philosophy which will be the basis of any future philosophy in the entire world(see Giachery, "Laura Clifford Dreyfus-Barney" 536-7).

However, her accomplishments also included a focus on "humanitarian and social activities in her work for world peace", that she pursued with "undaunted zeal"(Giachery, "Laura Clifford Dreyfus-Barney" 535). As early as 23 July 1925, she was appointed *Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur* and in 1937 she was elevated to the rank of *Officier de la Légion d'Honneur*. Mona Khademi comments upon the life of this precious lady as follows:

proper recognition has eluded Laura Dreyfus Barney both within the Bahá'í community as well as the world. One reason may be the lack of her diaries or memoirs. Another factor may be that she still stands in the shadow of her prominent and accomplished spouse, Hippolyte Dreyfus-Barney. Yet another might be that she divided her time between two countries, which was uncommon in those days. Therefore her heroism has been lost in unexamined history.("Glimpse" 73-4)

### **Thomas Breakwell**

Having a lucrative job in a cotton mill in the south of the United States, Thomas Breakwell(1872-1902), a cultured, refined English-born man, could afford to visit every summer his country and to take long vacations in the old Europe(see Lakshiman-Lepain, *Life of*

*Thomas Breakwell*). That year, 1901, he had come to Europe for other reasons, as well:

His conscience tormented him because his employment afforded numerous opportunities to witness at first hand abuse of workers—especially the child labourers... Troubled, he had taken a leave of absence from his work and headed for Europe hoping to forget the injustices that gnawed him, by visiting his British family and touring that continent. Perhaps another more ominous reason for the journey was to seek treatment for his recurring tuberculosis. (Hogenson, *Lighting* 185)

While crossing the Channel on a boat bound to France, he met a certain Mrs. Milner. Mrs. Milner, so clever, passionate and charming for her interest in the most unusual aspects of human life, was considered by the young Thomas as a most pleasant interlocutor. Among many other things, they also discussed theosophy, the new spiritual science which for many people was only fashion, while for others it was a way of nourishing a longing for the Infinite that they could not otherwise express. The more familiar Mrs. Milner became with the young man, the more convinced she was that she should arrange a meeting for him with that young Bahá'í American lady, who lived in Paris and was so deep in her knowledge of spiritual topics, Miss May Ellis Bolles. Yes, in Paris she would arrange a meeting for them. And the unaware Thomas did not yet realize that in the French capital that young American lady would clarify certain precious feelings he had been concealing in his heart. Not so long ago, for three consecutive months, he had felt as though he was soaring through a rarefied atmosphere of love and harmony, while his heart was burning in its love for an unknown and mysterious Supreme Beauty, in peace, in perfect unity with all humankind.

In Paris May was waiting for him, albeit she was not aware. At the beginning of that summer, when Mary Martha Bolles was going to leave for the French coast of Brittany, as she did every year, for a vacation with her children, 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself had suggested that May should not follow her, that she should not leave Paris until a word came from Him. Mary Martha was so disappointed, maybe even disturbed: May was so frail, she needed sunshine and sea-air. Paris was too warm and muggy in the summer for her health. Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl, the Persian believer later designated by the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith as one of the nineteen "Apostles of Bahá'u'lláh," sent by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to Europe so that he may deepen that early handful of believers, wrote to the Master about Mrs. Bolles's apprehensions for her daughter. But He did not change His mind. And May was inflexible in her determination to comply with His wish. Mary Martha had to give up. And Mrs. Edith Tewksbury Jackson, a wealthy American lady that had known and accepted the Faith through May, gave May hospitality in a flat connected to her luxurious residence, so that she should not remain alone. The apartment in 100 Rue du Bac, not far from the Bon Marché department store, where the Bolles had moved in June of 1899, was closed.

It was a bright summer's day. When May welcomed her newly arrived guests, she was pleasantly surprised to see Mrs. Milner, who "knew nothing of the Bahá'í teaching and had closed her ears to its message"(Maxwell, "A Brief Account" 707), accompanied by a young man, "of medium height, slender, erect and graceful, with intense eyes and an indescribable charm"(Maxwell, "A Brief Account" 707). His deep dark eyes reminded her of a "veiled light"(Maxwell, "Letter" 298). That ardent and thirsty soul was still enfolded in "the veil which is over every soul until it is rent asunder by the power of God in this day," the veils of its ignorance of God(Maxwell, "Letter" 298). They talked for a long time, touching many topics of common interest, theosophy, spirituality. And during their conversation, she studied him

with great attention, coming to consider him “a very rare person of standing and culture, simple, natural, intensely real in his attitude toward life and his fellowmen”(Maxwell, “A Brief Account” 707). May was not surprised when, saying goodbye, he asked permission to meet her again.

The day after, when Thomas came to her, his face was glowing, his voice was vibrant. His radiant soul was now unveiled, a new light shone from him. May made him comfortable. And immediately he told her of the mysterious experience he had the evening before. When he had left May’s house, he had gone to the *Champs Élysées*. “The air was warm and heavy, not a leaf was stirring.” And yet all of a sudden he had been invested by a gust of wind, which for a long time had continued to whirl around his body. A very sweet voice emerged from that whirl: “Christ has come again! Christ has come again!” Then the wind had died down. And a sweet peace had pervaded his heart as well. He stared at her, “with wide startled eyes”(Maxwell, “A Brief Account” 707), and asked her whether she thought he was crazy. No, it was not craziness; it was the beginning of a new wisdom. And May kindly and patiently disclosed to him the doors through which he could at long last reach that Truth that had always been in wait for him. In three days the young Thomas got rid of all previous shackles. His soul, at long last freed, dived into the boundless ocean of the Faith of God. His “veiled light” shone now in its meridian splendor. Although his life was very short, he passed away in June 1902 at the age of 30, Shoghi Effendí mentioned him, with George Townshend and John Ebenezer Esslemont, as one of “three luminaries shedding brilliant luster on annals of Irish, English and Scottish Bahá’í communities”(MBW 173). Soon a cable arrived from the Master, “You may leave Paris at any time”(Maxwell, “A Brief Account” 709). The following morning May joined her anxious mother in her vacation in Brittany(see Maxwell, “A Brief Account” 707–11).



### Edith Sanderson

Edith Sanderson(1870–1955) too had come to Paris by the end of the nineteenth century. She had arrived in the French capital soon after the death of her father, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of California, together with her mother and three sisters. One of her sisters, Sybil(1864–1903), a girl of unusual beauty, was endowed with a voice of an extraordinary range(from low G to contre sol) and thus the family wanted her to study at the Paris' *Conservatoire*. In 1887 Sybil met Massenet and became his favored soprano and one of the most famous operatic sopranos during the Parisian *Belle Époque*. She debuted in Massenet's *Manon* and had enormous success in his *Thaïs* in 1894. Massenet had written for her the title role. The French composer also dedicated to her two of his celebrated *Mélodies* [Songs], "Pensée d'automne [Autumn Thought]" after a poem by Armand Silvestre(1887) and "Beaux yeux que j'aime [Beautiful eyes which I love]" after a poem by Thérèse Maquet(1891).

Edith met May in 1901 and soon accepted the Faith. From that moment on she devoted all her qualities to the diffusion of the Bahá'í message. The Master used to call her "My daughter." Although "fragile in appearance," she had an exceptional will-power. She studied the Writings in depth and, in her love for the holy Word, she became conversant in Persian. Her spiritual sensitivity, her love for nature—flowers, trees, the sea, the beauty of the clouds—the "rarified atmosphere" that surrounded her made of her a point of attraction for many seekers of truth. She was in touch with famous personalities of her time, like the French scholar Louis Alphonse Daniel Nicolas(1864–1939), an authority on the Bábí movement, the Jesuit philosopher Pierre Teilhard de Chardin(1881–1955) and Simone Weil(1909–1943), the French philosopher and mystic, and "groups who were interested in social and spiritual questions"(Dreyfus Barney, "Edith Sanderson" 889).

### Hippolyte Dreyfus-Barney

The Sandersons were the instruments through which that same Will, Who was lovingly taking care of those early Bahá'í lights in the old European continent, presented Hippolyte Isidore Dreyfus(1873–1928) with the opportunity of fulfilling his high spiritual destiny: “kindling the torch which is destined to shed eternal illumination upon his native land and its people”(Shoghí Effendí, “Hippolyte Dreyfus-Barney” 210). They were women of great charm: beautiful, clever, cultured, refined and gifted with a rare spirituality. Hippolyte Dreyfus was “strong in appreciation of life and all that it has to offer... a well balanced and independent person”(Dreyfus-Barney, “Hippolyte Dreyfus-Barney”), who “combined a rare sweetness of nature with great firmness and strength”(Maxwell, “Hippolyte Dreyfus Barney” 27) and inspired “confidence with his frankness”(Natalie Clifford Barney, qtd. in *Hippolyte Dreyfus*, sec. 7). An “agnostic”(Maxwell, “Hippolyte Dreyfus-Barney” 26) in those days, when he was still preparing himself for his future life, he was gifted with a “questing mind” that “led him onward to ever-vaster horizons,” with a “generous heart” that enabled him to “understand the difficulties of human life and to be close to people”(Dreyfus-Barney, “Hippolyte Dreyfus-Barney”) and with the “rare quality of being more interested in others than in himself”(ibid.). Thus he also felt in the depth of his heart that something else exists beyond material life. And, like many others of his generation, this feeling initially drew him towards occult sciences; however, occult sciences disappointed him.<sup>4</sup>

Hippolyte met the Sandersons in the summer of 1900 in the salon of his mother, Lea Marie Sophie Inés Cardozo Meyer(1848–1913), who “used to give musicales frequented by people of taste, including many artists”(Dreyfus-Barney, “Hippolyte Dreyfus-Barney”). At that time Sybil Sanderson was a well-known singer of Paris’ Opera. The Sandersons and Hippolyte, we can well imagine, felt an immediate and reciprocal attraction. Thus the American ladies could not refrain

from introducing him to the person whom they, like the entire group of their "Parisian" friends in love with the new Faith, considered as their "spiritual guide, who started the Baha'i group in France"(Dreyfus-Barney, "Hippolyte Dreyfus-Barney"), May Ellis Bolles.

Born into a well-known French Jewish family—his father Georges Arthur Lucien(1840–1911) was a wealthy stock-broker—Hippolyte "had all the advantages that could be obtained from a happy home and from an intellectual and artistic center such as Paris at the height of its culture"(Dreyfus-Barney, "Hippolyte Dreyfus-Barney"). He "liked both thought and action. He could sit at his desk and translate and read all day and late into the night. Or he could go for a swim or horseback ride with friends or alone"(ibid.). His sister-in-law Natalie Clifford Barney said about him: "He loved good eating... He liked riding through the woods of St. Cloud or St. Cucupha. He could make tractable, even gentle, the worst horse. He was a marvelous swimmer"(qtd. in *Hippolyte Dreyfus*, sec. 7). Surrounded by "the whirl of a Parisian life" as he was, his sincere altruism and love for his fellow-human beings lead him to found, together with a friend, "a welfare society for home visiting," the *Société des Visiteurs*, and to be "untiring in his support of those who had so little of that of which he had so much"(Dreyfus-Barney, "Hippolyte Dreyfus-Barney"). Thus, the words which the ardent May told him could but immediately attract him. Hippolyte used to speak little of himself and of the past. Therefore we do not know the details of their conversation. The only thing we know is that very soon he accepted that Faith, which he had already met through the writings of such distinguished French scholars, as Huart Clément, Count Joseph Arture de Gobineau, Louis Alphonse Daniel Nicolas and Joseph Ernest Renan(see Dreyfus-Barney, "Hippolyte Dreyfus-Barney"). Now he finally also met, on the one hand, its soul-transforming power and, on the other, its revolutionizing principles, first among them oneness in its threefold expression: "There is one God; mankind is one; the foundations of religion are one"(ABL 19). The young Hippolyte took at once the

opportunity that a generous Destiny was offering to him. And in that group of American expatriates he became the first French Bahá'í. As May Bolles wrote about him: "Although he had never believed in any force transcending nature, nor had he received intimations of the possible existence of a Supreme Being, yet after hearing of the advent of Baha'u'llah his inner susceptibilities became unfolded" ("Hippolyte Dreyfus Barney" 26). About ten years later, in London, at the end of "a remarkable cosmopolitan gathering... [that ] filled the large ball at the Westminster Palace Hotel, Friday evening, December 20th [1912], to listen to an address by Abdul Baha" (Fraser, "Abdul Baha in London" 5) on the topic of peace, he himself said as part of his concise closing remarks:

everything in the world manifests God to a greater or less degree. We can find the divine in the beautiful melodies that are sung by the birds in the forests, the divine in nature, but we find it specially in man, who is at the summit of creation, and especially in those supreme beings who are called the prophets. It is in understanding their teaching that we can reach the knowledge of God. (qtd. in Fraser, "Abdul Baha in London" 10)

After May had acquainted him with the Bahá'í message, he straight away addressed a letter to 'Abdu'l-Bahá: he was determined to devote his whole life and his talents to the achievement of the ideal his newly-found Faith had revealed to him. Soon after, in 1902, he left together with his friend Sydney Sprague (1875–1943) for Haifa to meet the Master. And after a second visit to 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1903 he "gave up his legal career" (Bilani, "Hippolyte Dreyfus"), as "the secretary of one of the most prominent barristers in France" (Dreyfus-Barney, "Hippolyte Dreyfus-Barney"), and decided "to devote himself to oriental studies, enrolling in the religious-studies section of the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris, where he studied Arabic and Persian with Hartwig Derenbourg and Clément Huart" (Bilani,

“Hippolyte Dreyfus”). It was thus that he became “the only Western Bahai of his generation who received such formal training”(ibid.).

Very soon Hippolyte’s father and mother, his sister, Yvonne Mayer-May, and his brother-in-law, Paul Meyer-May, also joined the Cause. Laura Dreyfus-Barney writes that “their gracious home was a center for inquirers and followers. Their summer house, ‘Daru’l-Salam’ on Mont Pelèrin, Switzerland, was also open wide to people of many lands and many beliefs”(“Hippolyte Dreyfus-Barney”).

Thus began the unique spiritual adventure of the first French Bahá’í, who, in Shoghi Effendí’s words, “by his brilliant gifts of mind and heart as well as by the divers achievements of his life, has truly enriched the annals of God’s immortal Faith”(“Hippolyte Dreyfus-Barney” 210). Active in the defense of the Faith in its earliest days—in 1902 he met, together with Lua Getsinger, the Shah of Persia to plead the cause of the persecuted Bahá’ís in Iran—a travel teacher in Burma and India with his friend Sidney Sprague as early as 1904(see Sprague, *Year*), he was among the first translators in a Western language of the Bahá’í Writings, such as the Aqdas, the Íqán, the Súrih of the Temple, the Súratu’l-Bayán(not yet wholly authoritatively translated), the Will and Testament of `Abdu’l-Bahá, and the celebrated *Leçons de St Jean d’Acre*(known in English as *Some Answered Questions*). It was while translating this latter book into French together with Laura Clifford Barney that the two, who had been close friends for several years, discovered their reciprocal love. In 1910 they married and he added her surname to his own, changing it into “Dreyfus-Barney.”

As early as 26 October 1903, just at the beginning of Hippolyte’s Bahá’í career, `Abdu’l-Bahá had written about him:

As to Dreyfus, in truth he is a bird among the birds of Paradise. Very soon such melodies shall appear from him as the

## Mayflowers in the Ville Lumière

souls will be amazed and God will make him a propagator of His breezes in those regions.(qtd. in *Hippolyte Dreyfus*, sec. 12)

And on 21 December 1928, shortly after his passing Shoghí Effendí penned the following words in a private letter to Laura Dreyfus-Barney, Hippolyte's his widow:

None, I can confidently assert, among the Bahá'ís of the East and of the West, combined to the extent that he did the qualities of genial and enlivening fellowship, of intimate acquaintance with the manifold aspects of the Cause, of sound judgment and distinctive ability, of close familiarity with the problems and conditions of the world—all of which made him such a lovable, esteemed and useful collaborator and friend.(21 December 1928, to Laura Khanum)

On the same day Shoghí Effendí wrote to the Bahá'í world:

His gifts of unfailing sympathy and penetrating insight, his wide knowledge and mature experience, all of which he utilized for the glory and propagation of the Message of Bahá'u'lláh, will be gratefully remembered by future generations who, as the days go by, will better estimate the abiding value of the responsibilities he shouldered for the introduction and consolidation of the Bahá'í Faith in the Western world.("Hippolyte Dreyfus-Barney" 210)

### **Agnes Baldwin Alexander**

Although this spring flower of the Faith did not bloom in Paris, she deserves to be mentioned here because of the close friendship that bound her to that Parisian group of God-intoxicated believers. Agnes

Baldwin Alexander(1875–1971) was born in the Hawaii Islands on the 21st of July 1875, from a family of deep faith who in 1831 went to those remote Pacific islands as Christian missionaries and was 25 years old when she left the country where she was born bound for the old European continent. In autumn 1900, in Rome, where she had gone to visit an aunt who had married an Italian gentleman, the benign, omnipresent Will had prepared for her an opportunity, which, if but she would seize it, as she did, would completely change the course of her earthly and spiritual life.

When she arrived in Rome, she settled in a *pensione* at 57 Via Sistina, just a stone's throw from *Trinità dei Monti*, where she met an American lady, with her two daughters. She immediately felt a strange fascination for that unknown lady. Grown up as she had on a remote island, very far from the European continent, Agnes was very shy. However, so strong was the attraction she felt toward that lady, that she managed to overcome her own bashfulness and to approach her, so that she may come to know her better. She herself said about that meeting with that American lady and her two daughters:

Across the long table in the dining-room I saw them. They seemed to have a radiance and happiness different from others and I could hardly take my eyes from them. A few days later as I sat in the parlor I overheard the mother in conversation with a lady who had heard in Paris of the Baha'i Message from Mr. Mason Remey. Little did I comprehend what it was they were talking about, but my heart was stirred and the realization came to me that it was the Truth.(Linard, *Autobiographical Materials*, see also Alexander, "Comment je devins baha'i")

The opportunity to talk to her arose when Agnes met them in the elevator. Agnes took the hand of the unknown lady in hers and told her: "You hide a secret, share it with me." The lady, not at all

surprised by her words, answered that they could meet after dinner, in the back parlor.

She told Agnes that her name was Charlotte Emily Brittingham Dixon (1852–1920 c.). She did not mention that she was a descendant from one of the oldest families of European settlers in New England and had accepted the Bahá'í Faith in 1897. For the whole evening she pleasantly entertained Agnes, touching on several arguments. While saying goodbye, Mrs. Dixon gave her a small sheet of paper, with a short hand-written prayer. When Agnes was alone in her room, she eagerly read it. "It answered all the longings of my heart," she said later, speaking of that script. They had arranged to meet the evening of the day after. Agnes went to the meeting-place in great expectation. But the secret was not yet revealed. Nothing happened for three subsequent evenings. Every night, Agnes retired to her room, a prey of such emotions that made her sleepless. It was the night of the 26th of November 1900, when, unable to rest in her anxiety, she suddenly felt within herself the certitude that Mrs. Dixon's mystery was that Christ had returned to earth.

Next morning, as soon as she got up, she immediately went to Mrs. Dixon to share her new insight with her. Mrs. Dixon then felt finally free to speak openly of Bahá'u'lláh, of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, of the Bahá'í Faith—she had just arrived from the Holy Land where she had met the Master. And Agnes immediately promised her enduring allegiance to that Faith.

When Mrs. Dixon left Rome, Agnes remained alone. No one was willing to share her enthusiasm for the Faith she had just discovered. She often met indifference, sometimes indignation and even hostility. Mrs. Dixon had given her the address of an American believer who lived in Paris. Agnes wrote to this person. The letter she received in answer said among other things: "Please God we may soon welcome you in our midst in Paris and that you may then receive the



full Revelation, and much help and instruction”(quoted in Linard, *Autobiographical Materials*, see also Alexander, “Comment je devins baha’i”). In March 1901 Agnes went to the French capital, where in 100 Rue du Bac she finally met that long-awaited friend, May Ellis Bolles, who appeared to her as an angel of light “filled with a consuming love which the Master said was divine”(ibid.)

May introduced her into the hall where the Bahá’í friends in Paris—Laura Barney, Thomas Breakwell, Hippolyte Dreyfus, Emogene Hoagg, Herbert Hopper, Marion Jack, Edith MacKay, Edith Sanderson, Sidney Sprague and others, most of them expatriates—gathered for their meetings. She saw faces beaming with peace and light and light was everywhere in that blessed hall. She said: “Such an atmosphere of pure light pervaded... that one was transported, as it were, from the world of man to that of God”( *Personal Recollections* 8). Later on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote about those friends: “All men are asleep; you are awake. All eyes are blind; yours are seeing. All ears are deaf; your hearing is clear. All tongues are mute; you are eloquent. All humanity is dead; and you are full of life, vigor and force through the benefits of the Holy Spirit”(qtd. in de Bons, “Edith de Bons” 878–79, see Marsella, “Agnes Baldwin Alexander” 423–30).

In June 1901 she received in Paris a Tablet from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. It said:

Be... a divine bird, proceed to thy native country, spread the wings of sanctity over those spots and sing and chant and celebrate the Name of thy Lord, that thou mayest gladden the Supreme Concourse and make the seeking souls hasten unto thee as the moths hasten to the lamp, and thus illumine that distant country by the Light of God.(quoted in Linard, *Autobiographical Materials*, see also Alexander, “Comment je devins baha’i”)

Responsive to His call, on the 26th of December 1901 she returned home to Hawaii. Her life had been completely changed. That shy girl had already become a great teacher of this modern message of oneness and peace, a person whom the Guardian would choose, on the 27th of March 1957, as one of the Hands of the Cause of God.

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It was late 1902 when May, married now to the Canadian architect William Sutherland Maxwell (1874–1951)—who later was honored with seeing his project for the marble superstructure of the Shrine of the Báb on Mount Carmel realized—left Paris and moved to Montreal, Canada.<sup>5</sup>

Today—as to its spiritual life—Paris is still as the Master described it, “*silent... exceedingly dispirited and is in a state of torpor*”(SWAB 102–3). As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote, “*although the French nation is an active and lively one... the world of nature hath fully stretched its pavilion over Paris and hath done away with religious sentiments*”(SWAB 102–3). And yet, as He wrote, a day will come when the “*power of the Covenant shall heat every freezing soul, shall bestow light upon everything that is dark and shall secure for the captive in the hand of nature the true freedom of the Kingdom*”(SWAB 102–3). On that day the deep meaning of these short stories will become manifest. And the European continent—

which has been the cradle of a civilization to some of whose beneficent features the pen of Bahá’u’lláh has paid significant tribute; on whose soil both the Greek and Roman civilizations were born and flourished; which has contributed so richly to the unfoldment of American civilization; the fountainhead of American culture; the mother of Christendom, and the scene of the greatest exploits of the followers of Jesus

Christ; in some of whose outlying territories have been won some of the most resplendent victories which ushered in the Golden Age of Islam; which sustained, in its very heart, the violent impact of the onrushing hosts of that Faith, intent on the subjugation of its cities, but which refused to bend the knee to its invaders, and succeeded in the end in repulsing their assault(CF 26)

—this continent will be able to bequest the most precious legacy of his ancient civilization to the whole world. It is not the materialistic and unspiritual civilization, that seems today on the point of invading the whole world, but the fruit of the spiritual vivification of its unquenchable and fearless spirit of search that has always characterized it from the time when the legendary Ulysses crossed the Pillars of Hercules.

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## NOTES

- 1 The author thanks Ms. Leila Mesbah Sabéran and Ms. Parivash Ardeh-Amini, archivist of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of France, for their precious assistance in finding documents relating to Hippolyte and Laura Dreyfus Barney and Agnes Baldwin Alexander.
- 2 See Shoghi Effendí, *Messages to America* 58 and Thompson, *Diary* 313.
- 3 See Holley, “May Ellis Maxwell” 631–42.
- 4 See Jean Lefranc, “Le Temps” 3 November 1911, qtd. in *Hippolyte Dreyfus*, sec. 3
- 5 See Holley “May Ellis Maxwell” 631–42.

## The Indispensibility of Consultation for Ordering Human Affairs<sup>1</sup>

Ian Semple

It is sometimes difficult for the world at large to understand why we Bahá'ís place so much emphasis on the subject of consultation, because at first glimpse, it may seem to be just another word for discussion, with which all people think they are very familiar. The same illusion can also affect Bahá'ís and prevent them from using consultation as it should be used. We must realize that consultation is not just a technique to be learned, but requires a development of the character of the individuals who are involved in it. This is a striking metaphor used by C.S. Lewis. He says that it may seem very difficult for an egg to change into a bird, but it would be still more difficult for it to learn to fly while remaining an egg!

If one considers what Bahá'u'lláh says about consultation, one can see that it is infinitely more far-reaching than just an up-to-date method of discussion. He says:

*No welfare and no well-being can be attained except through consultation.* (HDW p. 3)

This series of lectures and discussions is centered on the Universal House of Justice's statement "The Promise of World Peace", from which the title of this talk is a quotation. But in considering consultation I feel it will be helpful to proceed from the more familiar aspect to the less familiar ones. I proposed, therefore, to refer to three uses:

1. In Bahá'í Administration
2. In the individual life
3. In the non-Bahá'í world.

## In Bahá'í Administration

The use of consultation in Bahá'í administrative work is the one with which we are all most familiar, but I believe we think we are more familiar with true consultation than we really are. Let us read that well-known passage from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá on the requisites of true consultation. (You can find it in 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, #45)

*The first condition is absolute love and harmony amongst the members of the assembly. They must be wholly free from estrangement and must manifest in themselves the Unity of God, for they are the waves of one sea, the drops of one river, the stars of one heaven, the rays of one sun, the trees of one orchard, the flowers of one garden. Should harmony of thought and absolute unity be nonexistent, that gathering shall be dispersed and that assembly be brought to naught. The second condition is that the members of the assembly should unitedly elect a chairman and lay down guidelines and by-laws for their meetings and discussions. The chairman should have charge of such rules and regulations and protect and enforce them; the other members should be submissive, and refrain from conversing on superfluous and extraneous matters. They must, when coming together, turn their faces to the Kingdom on high and ask aid from the Realm of Glory. They must then proceed with the utmost devotion, courtesy, dignity, care and moderation to express their views. They must in every matter search out the truth and not insist upon their own opinion, for stubbornness and persistence in one's views will lead ultimately to discord and wrangling and the truth will remain hidden. The honoured members must with all freedom express their own thoughts, and it is in no wise permissible for one to belittle the thought of another, nay, he must with moderation set forth the truth, and should differences of opinion arise a majority of voices must prevail, and all must obey and submit to the majority.*



It is salutary, I think, to extract from that passage certain qualities that the individual consultants must evince:

- purity of motive
- radiance of spirit
- detachment from all save God
- attraction to His Divine Fragrance
- humility and lowliness amongst His loved ones
- patience and long-suffering in difficulties
- servitude to His exalted Threshold

‘Abdu’l-Bahá says that the members of an Assembly must consult in such a way that “*no occasion for ill-feeling or discord may arise*” and that this can be attained if:

- every member expresses his opinion and sets forth his argument with “absolute freedom” and
- does not allow himself to feel hurt if anyone opposes.

He also says that each member should express his views with the utmost:

- devotion
- courtesy
- dignity
- care and
- moderation
- In every matter the members must search out the truth and not insist on their own opinions,
- and it is forbidden to belittle the thought of another.

In every case where an Assembly or group of Bahá’ís is facing problems of disunity or unfruitful consultation one can point to one or more of the above requisites which are not being followed.

The essence of consultation is that it is a key to the reconciliation of opposites, and this is a characteristic of the Cause of God. In the words of the beloved Guardian:

Let us also bear in mind that the keynote of the Cause of God is not dictatorial authority but humble fellowship, nor arbitrary power, but the spirit of frank and loving consultation. Nothing short of the spirit of a true Bahá'í can hope to reconcile the principles of mercy and justice, of freedom and submission, of the sanctity of the right of the individual and of self-surrender, of vigilance, discretion and prudence on the one hand, and fellowship, candour, and courage on the other. (PBA, p. 43)

This passage reads like a catalogue of the problems that have beset human philosophy throughout the ages, and it gives us the key to answering those opponents of the Faith who accuse us of aiming to set-up a world-wide totalitarian state with the Universal House of Justice at its head. There are, of course, many other elements which should go into the answer to this challenge, but that is not our subject at the moment. It is, however, important for us to remember the degree to which the beloved Guardian stressed the function of consultation outside the ranks of Assembly members. For example:

Their function is not to dictate, but to consult, and consult not only among themselves, but as much as possible with the Friends whom they represent. (PBA, p. 43)

and the following very familiar passage:

They must, at all times, avoid the spirit of exclusiveness, the atmosphere of secrecy, free themselves from a domineering attitude, and banish all forms of prejudice and passion from their deliberations. They should, within the limits of wise discretion, take the Friends into their confidence, acquaint them with their plans, share with them their problems and anxieties, and seek their advice and counsel. (PBA, p. 44)

We should continually read and re-read these passages because sometimes one finds that an Assembly is reluctant to share its real problems with the friends for fear of losing face or undermining the believers' confidence in the Assembly. And yet we can see that it is the very Assemblies who follow the Guardian's advice which most earn the love and respect of their communities.

## In the Individual Life

The impact of consultation on the lives of individual Bahá'ís is manifold. It involves them intimately in the functioning of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, whether or not they are members of institutions. It is also, as Bahá'u'lláh makes absolutely clear, a method to which they should continually resort in the conduct of their private lives, consulting, as need be, with members of their families, with friends, with people for whose opinions they have regard. Together with study of the Writings, meditation and prayer it is the primary means for solving problems and for smoothing the interrelationships between people.

It is, however, more even than this. It has a direct effect on the development of the individual's soul. It is shot through and through with the development of individual characteristics which should suffuse one's whole life and behaviour. It is a school of personal development as, in a similar way, is the institution of marriage and of the family, in which consultation plays a special part.

Let us consider again the qualities which 'Abdu'l-Bahá calls for. Which one of these would we not apply in every aspect of our individual lives? If the members of Spiritual Assemblies, whom Bahá'u'lláh has referred to as the "Trustees of the Merciful" and even as the "Deputies of God" must evince these characteristics in the performance of their duties as "rulers" of mankind, how should they not characterise the daily life of every believer:

- purity of motive
- radiance of spirit

- detachment from all save God
- attractive to His Divine Fragrance
- humility and lowliness amongst His loved ones
- patience and long-suffering in difficulties
- servitude to His exalted Threshold
- absolute freedom in expressing one's opinion
- not feeling hurt if one's views are opposed
- devotion
- courtesy
- dignity
- care and moderation in expressing one's ideas
- refraining from belittling the views of others

There is an age-old controversy as to whether one needs a perfect society in order to breed perfect individuals or whether one must first train perfect individuals before one can have a perfect society. This is resolved in the Bahá'í Faith by the proposition that the fostering of the spiritual growth of individuals and that of society must go hand in hand and are mutually supportive processes. This is specially apparent in the area of consultation, since it promotes harmony and moderation.

It is a great problem in individual spiritual growth for the aspiring follower of the Way to distinguish between moderation and mediocrity. We are called to heights of perfection higher than we can comprehend, but are exhorted to moderation in all things. How can this be?

It is, I believe, but one aspect of the need for the individual to promote in himself the growth of all virtues and capacities, but in due balance one with another. When they get out of balance, a distortion of character is produced.

The problems caused by inadequacy are obvious to us all: carelessness in carrying out important work; lack of attention

to detail; laziness or excessive diffidence that allow golden opportunities to pass us by; lack of dignity in the presentation of the Faith; permitting a Bahá'í centre to fall into a state of disrepair and dirtiness which shames the Faith in the eyes of the public. Sometimes such problems arise because the believers concerned are just not conscious of the standards that they should uphold; they may have had in their upbringing no training in good taste, cleanliness or hard work. Consultation can draw out these aspects and help the community as a whole to overcome them. Consultation, in other words, can bring home to the individual the importance of excellence in all things and the need for continued improvement. To return to C.S. Lewis's egg metaphor; he points out that the whole purpose of an egg is for it to become a bird. It cannot just remain for ever a nice, decent, wholesome egg – it must either hatch, or go bad!

The problems caused by inordinately high standards are not easy to see. Sometimes the cause of disunity is simply the position of pride and lack of forbearance on the part of a believer whose skills and accomplishments have turned his head; if so, the situation may be a painful one but it is comparatively easy to detect and to cope with, for every Bahá'í knows that pride is a sin and forbearance a virtue.

We all know from experience, however, that it is sometimes a devoted, self-sacrificing pioneer, or one of the most active believers with the highest standards, who becomes the centre of disunity and disruption in a community, without any element of pride distorting his nature. The reason may simply be the ardour of the believer for nothing less than the best to be accomplished for the Cause of God. Having such high standards himself he finds it excruciatingly difficult to submit to consultative decisions which thinks are less than the best, or to leave the newer believers to fumblingly carrying out actions that he himself can execute with far greater despatch and efficiency.

I think one of the most salutary teachings of Bahá'u'lláh is that, for the creature, perfection is an unattainable goal. This, properly understood, should not cause us to despair, but should give us the enthralling prospect that, however far we develop our capacities, there is still greater progress ahead;

however great the joy we attain, greater joy is in store. There is no stagnation in the Bahá'í concept of heaven. It should also cause us to accept the imperfection of our own characters and understanding. We must recognize that what we may see as the perfect answer to a problem must, by definition, be imperfect, because it is we who see it. It can, at most, be a step on the way towards perfection and, if we could see the whole of the journey, we might see that it would be the wrong step at that time, even if correct in itself.

This recognition of permanent imperfection should have two results. It should prevent us from ever being satisfied with our progress. It should also free us from the crippling effects of that "perfectionism" which has been a blight on many puritanical societies. By this I don't mean a person's determination to do the very best he can in every task – which is admirable – but the extreme condition wherein a person comes to believe that he must perform every task with 100% perfection or be disgraced in his own eyes and the eyes of others. This is a far from uncommon disability in western society and produces the very opposite of what the individual aims at. It is, I think, a condition against which all Bahá'ís must be alert, because the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh hold before us such high standards. It is a largely subconscious condition and not at all easy to overcome.

Firstly, since it is absolutely impossible for any person to do everything perfectly all the time, or even most of the time, this compulsion is doomed to failure from the outset. Such a person, therefore, subconsciously knows this, avoids failure by refusing to undertake tasks or, if he does undertake them, often unconsciously programs himself to fail, so that he will have a good excuse for not succeeding. Remember that in this context "failure" is anything less than 100%, so that such a person may, in the eyes of his friends, be achieving all sorts of excellent work, but in his own eyes each one is a failure. Encouragement helps little, because it is just not believed. Since it is intolerable for a soul to accept that he is so much of a failure, this compulsion also causes him subconsciously to seek for reasons for his failures in the actions of other people, and breeds in him a tendency to criticize all around for everything they do. This, alas, produces the reaction that they then get back at him by

criticizing him unduly, which feeds his original fear that he is an utter failure and exacerbated the paralysis and depression that he feels.

Bahá'u'lláh's teachings enable us to strive for the highest goals, confident in His confirming help, but being uncrushed by our frequent fallings-short, because we know that it is in the nature of the creature to fall short. We can, I think, apply to the whole of our life the encouraging words that the beloved Guardian wrote for the members of Spiritual Assemblies:

*If we turn our gaze to the high qualifications of the members of Bahá'í Assemblies ... we are filled with feelings of unworthiness and dismay, and would feel truly disheartened but for the comforting thought that if we rise to play nobly our part every deficiency in our lives will be more than compensated by the all-conquering spirit of His grace and power. (BA, p. 88)*

This is where consultation comes in, not merely in helping us to make a balanced decision in a particular instance, but in daily demonstrating to a perceptive person the limitations of his or her own understanding, the fallibility of his or her own opinions. If approached in the proper spirit, consultation can be a liberating and educating process for the individual in his own life, apart altogether from being a guide to conduct.

If I may inject a personal note, I should say that one of the most enriching experiences I have enjoyed as a member of the Universal House of Justice has been in relation to those decisions of which, at the time I could see neither the reason nor the sense. I have known instances where, to my mind, a certain course of action seemed to be both obvious and essential, but the House of Justice has decided differently. In every instance, of course, it has become apparent in time how right the decision of the House of Justice was; and coming to see this as events unfold is a thrilling and illuminating process.

Of course, one can understand this happening in relation to a body which is divinely guided in its decisions, but, one may ask, can one be sure that the consultative decisions of spiritual Assemblies and committees will, likewise, produce true moderation and balanced wisdom, and not merely that

mediocrity which is the lowest common denominator of a collection of private opinions. You are no doubt aware of the crack that a camel is a horse designed by a committee.

There is in the Faith, of course, ample scope for private initiative and thought and action. It is a vital element not only in the life of the individual but in the administration of the community and must never be underestimated. In itself it could be the subject for a lecture, but today we are concerned not with individual action but with consultation and its indispensability. History is full of evidence of both the benefits and drawbacks of individual action; our experience with truly consultative action on a worldwide scale is only just beginning; it is a characteristic of the stage of human development which we have now reached. Bahá'u'lláh has brought mankind to a new leap forward in its evolution, and consultation is an integral part of this advance. It can help us sometimes, I think, if we look at such matters from the point of view and in the words of a non-Bahá'í philosopher who has perceived the same truth. I want to read to you two extracts from the writings of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. The first is from pages 243 to 244 of *The Phenomenon of Man*:

But why should there be unification in the world and what purpose does it serve?

To see the answer to this ultimate question, we have only to put side by side the two equations which have been gradually formulating themselves from the moment we began trying to situate the phenomenon of man in the world.

Evolution = Rise of consciousness

Rise of consciousness = Effect of union.

The general gathering together in which, by correlated actions of the without and the within of the earth, the totality of thinking units and thinking forces are engaged — the aggregation in a single block of a mankind whose fragments weld together and interpenetrate before our eyes in spite of ((indeed in proportion to) their efforts to separate — all this becomes intelligible from top to bottom as soon as we perceive the natural culmination of a cosmic process of organisation



which has never varied since those remote ages when our planet was young.

First the molecules of carbon compounds with their thousands of atoms symmetrically grouped; next the cell which, at the very smallest, contains thousands of molecules linked in a complicated system; then the metazoa in which the cell is no more than an almost infinitesimal element; and later the manifold attempts made by the metazoa to enter into symbiosis and raise themselves to a higher biological condition.

And now, as a germination of planetary dimensions, comes the thinking layer which to its full extent develops and intertwines its fibres, not to confuse and neutralise them but to reinforce them in the living unity of a single tissue.

Really I can see no coherent, and therefore scientific, way of grouping this immense succession of facts but as a gigantic psycho-biological operation, a sort of mega-synthesis, the 'super-arrangement' to which all the thinking elements of the earth find themselves today individually and collective subject.

You see what he is saying: that the theme of evolution is the rise of consciousness, and that this is produced as a result of ever more complex unions of elements. At the present stage in evolution it is we individual human beings who are the elements, and by our combination into one united mankind, we produce, the next level of evolved complexity which gives birth to a higher level of consciousness. He develops this point on page 251 of the same book:

We are faced with a harmonised collectivity of consciousness equivalent to a sort of super-consciousness. The idea is that of the earth not only becoming covered by myriads of grains of thought, but becoming enclosed in a single thinking envelope so as to form, functionally, no more than a single vast grain of thought on the sidereal scale, the plurality of individual reflections grouping themselves together and reinforcing one another in the act of a single unanimous reflection.

Does this not give us new insights into Bahá'u'lláh's tremendous statement: *"For everything there is and will*

*continue to be a station of perfection and maturity. The maturity of the gift of understanding is made manifest through consultation."*

Far from being a process of obscuring understanding or reducing individual insights to a level of mediocrity, consultation makes manifest the "maturity of the gift of understanding." Through it the puny mind of each of us is linked with the minds of our fellows and, through the institutions of the Administrative Order with all Bahá'ís on earth. Should we wonder that it is through the Assemblies, the House of Justice, that Bahá'u'lláh has ordained the government of the world?

Consultation is a tremendously exciting process. It links us all to one-another and to God in one vast organism that enables us to rise above ourselves while, at the same time, developing our own individual natures to their fullest capacities.

## **In the non-Bahá'í World**

This brings us to the third use of consultation, in the non-Bahá'í world. Clearly, if it is a basic element of the next stage in human evolution it should be a fundamental tool to assist all human beings to resolve their problems. Even though, since they do not accept Bahá'u'lláh, non-Bahá'ís will lack certain vital elements of the spiritual attitudes which should characterize true consultation, they can well accept and practice most of its principles to great advantage. Indeed, by what other method are they to resolve their disagreements and find answers to the problems facing a disordered world?

There are many schemes for a perfect world around, and have been for centuries. There are many people nowadays who see essential goals that mankind must achieve. The stumbling block is what we are to do to attain them.

I recall in this connection a story that may be familiar to many of you, but it's rather striking here.

A man on a hiking holiday one day found himself lost in a country lane, and coming upon a countryman asked him how to get to Gloucester. The man thought for a while and then

said: "Well, you could go down this lane, turn left by the pub and then right – no, that wouldn't do it. I tell you, go across this field by the footpath through yon wood until you come to Baker's farm – no, that wouldn't help either. No, you have to go back the way you came to the main road and catch the next bus to Plumpington – no, that wouldn't help you either. I tell 'ee, if I wanted to get to Gloucester I wouldn't start from here!"

That's a bit like the problem of those who want world peace now. It would be so much easier if we didn't have to start from here!

This is where the twin principles of consultation and the independent investigation of truth show us the way out.

Let us inflict upon you one more quotation from Teilhard de Chardin. This time from pages 74-75 of *The Future of Man*:

Gloriously situated by life at this critical point in the evolution of Mankind, what ought we to do? We hold Earth's future in our hands. What shall we decide?

In my view, the road to be followed is clearly revealed by the teaching of all the past.

We can progress only by uniting: this, as we have seen, is the law of life. But unification, through coercion leads only to a superficial pseudo-unity. It may establish a mechanism, but it does not achieve any fundamental synthesis; and in consequence it engenders no growth of consciousness. It materializes, in short, instead of spiritualising. Only unification through unanimity is biologically valid. This alone can work the miracle of causing heightened personality to emerge from the forces of collectivity. It alone represents a genuine extension of the psychogenesis that gave us birth.

Therefore it is inwardly that we must come together, and in entire freedom.

But this brings us to the last question of all. To create this unanimity, we need the bond, as I said, the cement of a favouring influence. Where shall we look for it; how shall we

conceive of this principle of togetherness, this soul of the Earth?

Is it to be in the development of a common vision, that is to say, the establishment of a universally accepted body of knowledge, in which all intelligences will join in knowing the same facts interpreted the same way?

Or will it rather be in common action, in the determination of an Objective universally recognised as being so desirable that all activity will naturally converge towards it under the impulse of a common fear and a common ambition?

These two kinds of unanimity are undoubtedly real, and will, I believe, have their place in our future progress. But they need to be complemented by something else if they are not to remain precarious, insufficient, and incomplete. A common body of knowledge brings together nothing but the geometrical point of intelligences. A common aspiration, no matter how ardent, can only touch individuals indirectly and in an impersonal way that is depersonalising in itself.

It is not a tête-à-tête or corps-à-corps that we need; it is a heart-to-heart.

This being so, the more I consider the fundamental question of the future of the earth, the more it appears to me that the generative principle of its unification is finally to be sought, not in the sole contemplation of a single Truth or in the sole desire for a single Thing, but in the common attraction exercised by a single Being. For on the one hand, if the synthesis of the Spirit is to be brought about in its entirety (and this is the only possible definition of progress) it can only be done, in the last resort, through the meeting, centre to centre, of human units, such as can only be realised in a universal, mutual love. And on the other hand there is but one possible way in which human elements, innumerable diverse by nature, can love one another; it is by knowing themselves all to be centered upon a single 'super-centre' common to all, to which they can only attain, each at the extreme of himself, through their unity.

I am sure that everyone of us can immediately see that in the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh we have the God-given requirements of a common vision, a united course of action and, above all

that Being Who is the mainspring and central point of attraction of all.

In our collaboration with our fellow human beings it is above all in the fields of common action that we shall be able to impart to them the common vision and thence to lead them to the knowledge of the Being of Bahá'u'lláh.

We cannot just say that Communism, Racialism, Nationalism and all the other manmade ideologies should go away, any more than we can wish away the centuries-old structures raised by mankind on the bases of the ancient Revelations of God. But, in view of the great and terrible perils which can no longer be ignored, we shall find more and more people of all views and opinions who are willing to sit down and consult upon specific actions to be taken to overcome specific problems. As this process advances, as they learn through experience the benefits of consultation, as they see the Bahá'í teachings in operation, problem after problem will be overcome and mankind will have started on the road to the total restructuring of human society.

Consultation, therefore, is indispensable for the ordering of human affairs in three areas.

It is the most vital technique that Bahá'ís must learn for the efficient and Bahá'í-like running of Bahá'í communities, which together form the nucleus and pattern of the new World Order; it is one of the most potent means for the learning of those virtues which are essential for the spiritual development of individual human beings and their harmonious inter-relationship; and it is one of the most strikingly beneficial of the Bahá'í teachings to which we can introduce our non-Bahá'í friends and fellow-workers in every field. It is a tool that they can use to solve problems at every level, it is an avenue by which they can come to appreciate the truth of the Bahá'í way of life, and it is the only way by which minds raised in different traditions can find a common meeting-place.

As we began with a quotation from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, I would like to finish by reading three, for in these three short passages alone is inspiration for whole courses of study:

*The Great Being saith: The heaven of divine wisdom is illumined with the two luminaries of consultation and compassion. Take ye counsel together in all matters, inasmuch as consultation is the lamp of guidance which leadeth the way, and is the bestower of understanding.*

*Say: no man can attain his true station except through his justice. No power can exist except through unity. No welfare and no well-being can be attained except through consultation.*

*Consultation bestoweth greater awareness and transmuteth conjecture into certitude. It is a shining light which, in a dark world, leadeth the way and guideth. For everything there is and will continue to be a station of perfection and maturity. The maturity of the gift of understanding is made manifest through consultation.*

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> A talk given by Ian Semple on 1985.12.20 and 1986.01.03 at Seminars held in the multipurpose room of the Seat of the Universal House of Justice)

# The Mystery of Divinity

## a Comparison of Traditional Views of Divinity to Those in Some Answered Questions

James B. Thomas

### Introduction

In the normal course of events we share an endless chain of ideas with the use of definitive terms in efforts to get our points across, whether metaphorical or real. And we do this with great confidence in our own understanding of such terms. Even the parameters of uncertainty can be described with clarity in terms of probability when dealing with a myriad of statistical information, ranging from human affairs to nuclear physics. Yet in matters of the spirit we often do not have a clue as to what words such as soul, God, heaven and others that we use so frequently really mean. Generally they are described in a most superfluous manner in order to at least have some kind of transitory grasp of their relationship. Such a term is Divinity, one that truly relates to a realm of deep mystery. This paper approaches an understanding of this subject in four stages: [1] Sources of knowledge relating to divinity are reviewed with reference to the Greco-Roman, Medieval and modern periods; [2] Applications of meanings provided by these sources are evaluated in terms of current understanding; [3] Societal impacts of such applications are examined; [4] New thoughts and proofs are introduced in light of the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Finally, a conclusion is drawn that infers a new paradigm of spiritual evolution, and suggests a possible platform for philosophical dissertation regarding religious influence on secular matters in the modern world.

## 1: Sources of Knowledge

Choice sources for researching knowledge are the authentic experts in various fields of expertise, but in most fields, such as astronomy, physical sciences, mathematics, sociology, philosophy, political science, economics, engineering, electronics or education, the notion of divinity is utterly absent. Perhaps in the fields of advertising and of music, a cursory accolade to a product or performer may be made with use of the term 'divine' with little inference as to its true meaning. Even in psychology and medicine the word is rarely if ever mentioned. So, for one to understand divinity requires reflection on a different level. For example, a quality of divinity is called providence where benevolent intervention occurs based on faith. This infers that in the field of theology the ramifications of divinity may be determined.

In one view the concept of Providence, divine care of man and the universe, can be called the religious answer to man's need to know that he matters, that he is cared for, or even that he is threatened, for in this view all religions are centered on man, and man is individually and collectively in constant need of reassurance that he is not an unimportant item in an indifferent world; if he cannot be comforted, to be threatened is better than to be alone in an empty void of nothingness.<sup>1</sup>

This comment from an overview article in the Encyclopedia Britannica on divinity with respect to Providence provides a general understanding of ancient and current views of the subject; these will be extolled in this section. Following is a summary in paraphrase of the concepts and views from the article.

A second view of Providence involves a cosmic order wherein mankind has a proper place of a divine nature that is intended for its wellbeing. But it is incumbent that man not pervert the order or upset it by rebellion. However, the degree of firmness of this order, if



too extreme, may invoke the possibility of degenerating into fatalism such that man might then drift powerless on the path of an impersonal destiny. Most religions combine both views.

### **Greco-Roman Times**

The etymology of Providence as a special quality of divinity began in the five or so centuries preceding the Common Era when philosophers and statesmen exercised the terminology with respect to what is now considered to be pagan religious notions. The first Greek author to use the term was Herodotus, a fifth-century BCE historian, who mentioned that Divine Providence was the source of wisdom that keeps nature in balance. Others, like Xenophon and Plutarch, referenced the word in connection with the watchful care of the gods over mankind and the world. Cicero referred to the "Providence of the gods" and the Stoics wrote treatises on the subject. Around the Third Century BCE the Greek poet/philosopher Cleanthes wrote a hymn in glorification of the god Zeus as a benevolent and foreseeing ruler of the world and of man: "For thee this whole vast cosmos, wheeling round the earth, obeys, and where thou leadest it follows, ruled willingly by thee."<sup>2</sup>

Seneca said man should believe "that Providence rules the world and that God cares for us." Further, the Stoic school to which he belonged rejected blind fate and maintained that everything happens according to a benevolent divine plan, which they preferred to call Providence. It was this concept that influenced Christianity. In the Latin world the word Providence was used as a designation of the deity. In fact it was Seneca again who wrote that it is proper to apply the term Providence to God.

### Early Middle Ages

With the fall of Rome in 476 CE, the Christian Church in the west continued its long ascendancy to power. Philosophy was then influenced by the late Roman thinkers Augustine and Boethius, among others. Augustine's philosophical ideas were shaped by Neoplatonism, which helped him understand the realm of truth that lies beyond the senses. It is a spiritual realm that becomes the goal of human striving that Augustine identified with the God of Christianity. Though Divinity is not specifically mentioned, he maintained that truths associated with mathematics and ethics are eternal and immutable but cannot come from the contingent world nor even from the mind, which is also contingent, but are due to the illuminating presence in the mind of eternal Truth, or God.<sup>3</sup> In modern terminology this would appear to be an example of Divine Providence.

Boethius is considered to be an important channel through which Greek Philosophy would later be made available in the middle ages. His untimely death at the behest of the Ostrogoth king, Theodoric, cut short his plan to translate Greek Philosophy into Latin, but he was able to translate the logical writings of Porphyry and Aristotle. The Aristotelian doctrine of universals (terms that can be applied to more than one particular thing) are presented as innate ideas (from Plato) that are remembered from a previous existence. "This book was widely discussed in the Middle Ages. It contains not only a Platonic view of knowledge and reality but also a lively treatment of providence, divine foreknowledge, chance, fate, and human happiness."<sup>4</sup>

From the Eastern Church, the Greek Fathers provided another means by which Greek Philosophy would be embraced in the Middle Ages. Again it was Neoplatonic concepts that would provide a synthesis of Christian thought. John Scotus, of Ireland, translated the writings of some of the Greek theologians into Latin. In his own extensive treatise *On The Division Of Nature* he developed an interesting concept regarding divinity.

God is the primal unity, unknowable and un-nameable in Himself, from which the multiplicity of creatures flows. He so far transcends his creatures that he is most appropriately called super-real and super-good. Creation is the process of division whereby the many derive from the One. The One descends into the manifold of creation and reveals himself in it. By the reverse process, the multiplicity of creatures will return to their unitary source at the end of time, when everything will be absorbed in God.<sup>5</sup>

With the writings of the great thinkers of the early Middle Ages, concepts of divinity began to take on new meanings. As philosophers of the period moved away from what was considered pagan beliefs, they integrated secular logic of the early Greeks with a Judeo-Christian stance such that the idea of Divine Providence became central to the basic belief system of Christianity.

### **Medieval Period**

Western philosophy was profoundly influenced by a cultural revolution in the Twelfth Century. New approaches to education emphasized logic, dialectic and early scientific discipline in place of grammar and the reading of classics in Latin, as witnessed by the scholar John of Salisbury (c. 1115–1180):

Behold, everything was being renovated: grammar was being made over, logic was being remodeled, rhetoric was being despised. Discarding the rules of their predecessors, [the masters] were teaching the quadrivium (arithmetic, music, geometry, astronomy) with new methods taken from the very depths of philosophy.<sup>6</sup>

Platonism was diminished while a renewed interest in Aristotle emerged. His methods of disputation and science were embraced especially by Thomas Aquinas and his mentor Albertus Magnus. There was also great esteem for Arabic and Jewish thinkers, all of whom contributed to a knowledge explosion in Western Europe. Aquinas felt that the philosopher seeks the first cause of things based on data supplied by the senses, whereas the theologian finds truth about God as revealed in sacred scriptures. He thought Aristotelianism to be a useful tool for Christian thought, along with Platonism to some extent. It was Aristotle's proof of a primary unmoved mover that Aquinas deepened or expanded to mean God in the Judeo-Christian context.

The eminent Islamic philosopher Avicenna (Ibn Sina) had a profound impact on these medieval Schoolmen whose theological and philosophical teachings in the universities were referred to as Scholasticism. "His analysis of many metaphysical terms, such as being, essence, and existence, and his metaphysical proof of the existence of God were often quoted, with approval or disapproval, in Christian circles. Also influential were his psychology, logic, and natural philosophy."<sup>7</sup>

Among Jewish scholars was Moses Maimonides, who helped the Schoolmen to reconcile Greek Philosophy with revealed religion. He felt that there could be no conflict between reason and faith because both come from God. In deference to Aquinas' view, he thought that Aristotle's arguments for a world eternal were not valid because they disregarded the omnipotence of God.<sup>8</sup>

In sum, the primary philosophy in the Western world during the Middle ages was Christian in the way that it complemented divine revelation. It was the churchmen who developed the philosophical arguments through the Fourteenth Century and who were also theologians at the Universities of Oxford and Paris. But from this

period forward, the importance of divinity and providence gave way to profound changes in the arena of philosophy.

As secular authority replaced ecclesiastical authority and as the dominant interest of the age shifted from religion to politics, it was natural that the rivalries of the national states and their persistent crises of internal order should raise with renewed urgency philosophical problems, practically dormant since pre-Christian times, about the nature and the moral status of political power. This new preoccupation with national unity, internal security, state power, and international justice stimulated the growth of political philosophy in Italy, France, England, and Holland.<sup>9</sup>

As the late middle ages deferred to the Renaissance there burst forth a revival of interest in medicine, classic literature and mathematics. Discoveries in mathematics impelled the scientific revolution in the Sixteenth Century and the impetus of Classical literature provided a philosophical foundation of humanism that emphasized the centrality of human beings in the universe with their supreme value. It was Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) who put forth three propositions that were so pertinent to the times:

Here are enunciated respectively (1) the principle of empiricism, (2) the primacy of mechanistic science, and (3) faith in mathematical explanation. It is upon these three doctrines, as upon a rock, that Renaissance and early modern science and philosophy were built. From each of Leonardo's theses descended one of the great streams of Renaissance and early modern philosophy: from the empirical principle the work of Bacon, from mechanism the work of Hobbes, and from mathematical explanation the work of Descartes.<sup>10</sup>

## Modern Era

In approaching the Modern Era with its materialistic bent, it becomes evident that we must depart philosophy in order to find any further influence of Divinity on the modern mind. The remaining track for study is religion for whatever it might reveal in those changing times. Indeed the Protestant Reformation provided a “sea change” in western civilization.

What was central to Protestantism throughout its history was the belief that humans are justified before God by grace through faith. It was this that separated the early Christian reformers from Roman Catholicism and its concern with sin, atonement and good works. Justification is concerned with the desire to find oneself on good terms with God:

Aware of its shortcomings, its ignorance, its sin, and its guilt, humankind saw itself standing before a bar of justice presided over by God. Without help, individuals could expect nothing but God’s wrath and condemnation. This meant that they would perish everlastingly, and their present life would be full of torment. Yet the Bible also presented humankind with a picture of a loving and gracious God, who desires happiness for all.<sup>11</sup>

But the question remained as to how one could be sure that God would not reveal His wrathful side instead of His graciousness. In other words, “how could one be confident that they would be the recipient of God’s positive loving action?”<sup>12</sup>

The answer to this lingering question must somehow depend upon a deeper understanding of Divinity and the source of its Providence. And, it is apparent that the understanding of divinity is inescapably bound up with the Revelation or Enlightenment associated with any religion under question. Some theologians reject revelation on the

basis of mythological conceptions connected with it. With others there have been moments of ecstatic experience that bring the sense of internal revelation and with it some degree of wisdom. But how is it confirmed?<sup>13</sup> To understand this aspect we will need to know how the meanings inherent to Divinity have historically been applied to the life of human kind.

## 2: Applications of Meanings

Comments were made that further characterize the nature of divinity with respect to the application of the qualities associated with Providence. For example, the belief in a concept of Providence as a quality of divinity entails the existence of a powerful, wise and benevolent deity. These three attributes are essential and the primary requirement is benevolence. This does not exclude the possibility however of punishment when one transgresses. Yet the divine being is understood to be well intentioned toward man. What's more, Providence does not have to be direct as it may operate through various intermediary beings, such as ancestors or spirits in non literate religions or angels in Christian and Muslim belief. Providence on the other hand can be expressed by a world order that makes life possible and guarantees future existence. Further, it may exist as a principle of cosmic order that is maintained by a divine being. But if the connection between that being and justice is lost, then Providence degenerates into a concept of fate where divinity would be inconsequential.

This idea of cosmic order does have a profound effect on the general picture of Providence as divine care for mankind but does not rule out the introduction of intermediary beings in the process. However, if the cosmic order is considered to be benevolent where man can feel safe, it is markedly different from a personal relationship between man and his god or gods. A personal god can be influenced by prayer and sacrifice to influence events whereas a fixed world can not be so influenced.<sup>14</sup>

Although the introduction of intermediary beings brings no essential change in the idea of Providence as the divine watchful care for the benefit of mankind, the notion of a cosmic order changes the picture profoundly. Even if the cosmic order is conceived as a benevolent order in which man is able to feel safe and whose very existence reassures him, such an order is different from the personal relationship between man and his god or gods. The concept of an unchangeable world order requires a different reaction. A personal god may, perhaps, be moved by prayer and sacrifice to give or to prevent events; when the order of the world is fixed, however, the course of events cannot be changed by these or any other means.<sup>15</sup>

One can see that such a conflict in precepts opens the door to a confusing array of ideas about providence, divinity and cosmic order where on the one hand one may be attracted to a deity that would have compassion for the individual and where on the other hand one may lean in a rational fashion toward a cosmic order that is under the purview of a distant impersonal Creator no longer involved in the order itself. It could be said that the impact of philosophical arguments on the daily course of human affairs are rarely acknowledged except for those that are in agreement with religious notions of the day. In other words, it does seem that mountains of words, however logical they may be, do not really move people unless they somehow touch the hearts, and for this to happen belief systems must be brought into play, as for instance in the application of prayer in moments of crisis or joy. Hence, when a concept of God is introduced through a revelatory process, the idea of a cosmic order seems logical with its foundation based on faith instead of words alone. That is perhaps why the impact of ideas upon the society of man take hold in the sweeping course of history. But this notion requires a deeper look into the implications of faith in the life of man and of how civilization is constantly tested.



### 3: Social Impacts

Although the names of the founders of the world's great religions are mentioned in scholarly studies, a point that is generally overlooked is the process associated with Divine Revelation. Simply put, the process of revelation from a Divine Prophet introduces knowledge and wisdom in an utterly different way than those derived by philosophers in a material world. Such knowledge is from a divine source and must be addressed on its own terms that might ultimately require unequivocal faith. Therein lies a problem for many who waffle between certitude and doubt in their pursuit of truth. This is not easy to reconcile, often resulting in a fall-back to an earlier time that might seem more safe and comfortable, as suggested by a phrase in a favorite song "give me that old time religion, it's good enough for me..." Such imagery might produce a sense of solace and peace but in reality a return to an earlier time would remind one of hardships long forgotten. Nevertheless, ideas of the past do linger in various forms as they weave through the cultural psyche. The concepts of the ancients regarding divinity and providence mentioned in Section I are still with us in fragmented forms and, though nameless, do influence our thinking today.

Mention is made of predestination as a possibility for combining the idea of a personal divine will with a cosmic fixed order that man is expected to work within as governed by a set of rules. The Deists in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries believed that "God created the world and the cosmic order in such a manner that to a great extent the course of the world is fixed from the first beginning and he is no longer involved in it."<sup>16</sup> Even now, in the Twenty-first Century, this thought is held by some very accomplished scientists who question the existence of a God that would create a universe and then leave it alone with no apparent further involvement. On the other hand, opposing views

are made: The fact of creation helps man to believe in Providence because it would be inconsistent for the creator god or gods not to care for the further existence of the created world. Only persistent disobedience and open rebellion can then furnish a reason for the Creator to abandon or destroy the world. This situation is expressed in the myths of a great flood or some other form of destruction sent as a punishment. There is, however, never a total destruction of the world in these myths, although this final solution may be threatened for the eschatological (ultimate end) future. It may also be promised, if the eschatological events are construed as the definitive institution of a world order that is perfect for all eternity and will never deteriorate.<sup>17</sup>

Additionally, in the Zoroastrian Faith there is among its concepts one of determined order that is natural and ethical as well. Founded around 650 BCE in Persia and later expanded into India, the religion refers to Asha that is identified with the sacred element of fire. His counterpart, Drug, represents evil and deceit, whereas the Indian Rta fills the same role as Drug. Providence, on the other hand, has particular objectives whereas the cosmic order in a general sense embraces the world and, by extension, the universe and all it contains.

The benevolent aspect of Providence may be confined to a special group of people or at least be specially related to that group; or a number of patron gods or saints may watch over some specific activity or smaller group. This accounts for the idea of a chosen people watched over and led by a just and loving God. The ancient people of Israel is, perhaps, the best known example; the concept, however, is widespread. Patron gods and patron saints who are particularly charged with caring for some small group, craft, or activity or who operate in special circumstances, such as during illness or war, occur in most religions and are popular in many.<sup>18</sup>

It was suggested that we are left with certain critical problems. "In monotheistic religions, Providence is a quality of the one divinity; in polytheistic religions it may be either a quality of one or more gods or it may be conceived as an impersonal world order on which the gods, too, more or less depend."<sup>19</sup> The consequence of the latter may be chance instead of benevolence all of which reflects a sense of ambivalence for fate and Providence. Lastly, the reconciliation of a provident God with the existence of evil in the world may constitute the most difficult problem associated with Providence and therefore with divinity itself.

#### 4: New Thoughts

'Abdu'l-Bahá puts a question: What connection has the Reality of Divinity with the Lordly Rising-places and the Divine Dawning-points? (SAQ 46) This question alone opens a whole new paradigm for inquiry apart from what has been addressed so far. For instance one might want to know what is meant by Lordly Rising-places. And what are Divine Dawning-points? To answer these questions, certain other considerations deserve attention.

To begin, He infers that the Reality of Divinity is the Essence of Oneness, that it is absolute holiness, and further, it is exempt from all praise because it is pure sanctity above all accessibility in the world of man. He then offers a surprising clarification of supreme attributes with reference to this human plane of existence. He points out that they exist only in our imaginations. In other words, this pure essence of sanctity that is beyond description, that is incomprehensible, that is invisible, and that is inaccessible still surrounds all things. He further makes a point of logic that whatever is being surrounded is necessarily less than that which surrounds. Moreover, that which is being surrounded is limited to its internal reference points but by nature, remains oblivious to the outer reality that surrounds it. No

matter how far evolution may take us, the extent of knowledge that man may acquire will always face the limitations of his own reality.

However far mind may progress, though it may reach to the final degree of comprehension, the limit of understanding, it beholds the divine signs and attributes in the world of creation and not in the world of God. For the essence and the attributes of the Lord of Unity are in the heights of sanctity, and for the minds and understandings there is no way to approach that position. "The way is closed, and seeking is forbidden." (SAQ 146)

The beauty of this is that, though one might not be a part of that sanctified essence, one may be made aware of spiritual reality through the numerous examples of its effects in human interaction in spite of such limitations. For instance, when people commit acts of kindness without expectations of reward, they are exhibiting attributes of a non material order, e.g. kindness, sharing, concern for others and benevolence, to name a few. What's more, these attributes are learned through the study of revelation or by examples of others who have so learned. Philosophical dissertations have their place but they appear to be unable to escape the dichotomy of contending ideas in a kingdom of words when describing divinity as shown in Section I. The approach offered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá goes far beyond any play of words because His logic is unremitting in the pursuit of truth regarding Divinity.

He observes that human understanding is a quality of man's existence and that man being so endowed is one of the signs of God. Then He asks a provocative question: "How can the quality of the sign surround the creator of the sign?" In other words, a quality of man such as understanding is incapable of comprehending God. Thus Divinity is hidden from all comprehension. Being concealed from the minds of men, it is on a plane impossible to attain. The reasoning here is

that everything of a lower reality is powerless to comprehend that of a higher reality. He gives the example of a tree that, no matter how evolved, cannot comprehend the functions of sight, of hearing and of other functions, and yet “man and tree are alike in that they were created. Therefore, how can man, the created, understand the reality of the pure Essence of the Creator?”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá elaborates further on the bewildering challenge facing anyone who attempts to understand, much less explain, the unapproachable plane of God. There is simply no sufficient explanation for its comprehension. Indeed, in the mind of man there is no way to identify an indication of it.

Consequently, with reference to this plane of existence, every statement and elucidation is defective, all praise and all description are unworthy, every conception is vain, and every meditation is futile. But for this Essence of the essences, this Truth of truths, this Mystery of mysteries, there are reflections, auroras, appearances and resplendencies in the world of existence. (SAQ 146)

This quote about auroras and appearances sequels the question put earlier by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá regarding Divine Dawning points. He explains that these mysterious reflections related to the Essence of essences are associated with the Holy Dawning-places for the rising of Divine Messengers of God. They are the true mirrors of the sanctified Essence of God and appear to us in visible form. They are like clear polished mirrors that reflect the splendor of the Sun but in Their own essence reflect the splendor of God. He is quick to point out that the sun is not the same as its image in the mirror and that it never becomes part of it. Similarly, the “Unlimited Reality” is not limited to the place of appearance. In other words it is not anthropomorphic. “No; all the praises, the descriptions and exaltations refer to the Holy Manifestations...” He adds that all the attributes and

qualities mentioned return to the Divine Manifestations although they are beyond human description since no one has attained to the Essence of Divinity. "Therefore, all that the human reality knows, discovers and understands of the names, the attributes and the perfections of God refer to these Holy Manifestations." (SAQ 148)

Yet, concurrently we do voice the attributes and names of the Divine Reality and while, in our praise, attribute to Him the familiar five senses as well as knowledge, life and power. To do so affirms that He is incapable of imperfections. In this light a contrast is drawn between perfection and its opposite, imperfection. For example, ignorance is imperfection whereas knowledge is perfection. Thus, the Essence of God is wisdom. Weakness is imperfection but power is the opposite; "consequently, we say that the sanctified Essence of God is the acme of power." (SAQ 148) But all these attributes, though they may have the same names as our own, are beyond human comprehension for they are identical with His Essence. 'Abdu'l-Bahá logically maintains that there would be multiple preexistences if the attributes are not identical with His Essence. And since Preexistence of God is necessary for consideration of the reality of creation, this would mean that there would be an infinite sequence of preexistences. Such a condition is considered to be impossible in a universe of finite entities. That is, if each had an infinite sequence of preexistences then they would no longer be finite and Divine Messengers would be infinite in number and for that matter, the same would apply to God, an obvious error. Thus, His attributes must be identical with His Essence and therefore beyond our comprehension.

At this point 'Abdu'l-Bahá reinforces an extraordinary concept that lies at the root of spiritual belief with a quote from a Hadith. "All that you have distinguished through the illusion of your imagination in your subtle mental images is but a creation like unto yourself, and returns to you." (SAQ 149) He makes it clear that all of these

## The Mystery of Divinity

eulogies, praises, names and attributes really apply to the Places of Manifestation. Further, it is pure imagination to think of anything beside them because we are unable to comprehend the invisible or the inaccessible.

It is clear that if we wish to imagine the Reality of Divinity, this imagination is the surrounded, and we are the surrounding one; and it is sure that the one who surrounds is greater than the surrounded. From this it is certain and evident that if we imagine a Divine Reality outside of the Holy Manifestations, it is pure imagination, for there is no way to approach the Reality of Divinity which is not cut off to us, and all that we imagine is mere supposition. (SAQ 149)

Though not aware of it, people everywhere are caught up in a myriad of imaginations. They have become worshipers of the idols of conjectures that are considered to be the ultimate Reality that, contrarily, is actually purified from all descriptions. And they regard themselves as unified with others being worshipers of idols. At least idols have a material composition whereas the imaginations of man are nothing more than fancies that do not even have a mineral content.

It is affirmed that all the Holy Manifestations of God have attributes of perfection and divine bounties and that from Them lights of inspiration emanate. It is emphasized further that Christ and Baha'u'llah show evidence that is beyond human imagination. It is given that They possess attributes of the former Manifestations but in addition They possess some perfections that other Prophets depend upon. The example is given regarding the Prophets of Israel who were, in themselves, centers of inspiration. Mentioned were Isaiah, Jeremiah and Elijah to, name a few, but as profound and influential as their utterances were, there remains a vast difference in them when compared

to the inspiration of the Word of God as spoken by Manifestations of God such as Christ and Baha'u'llah.

We are asked to reflect upon the way light radiates and stimulates the nerves in the eye to produce sight. The light emanating from a lamp does so in a like manner as the sun but is vastly inferior in power. He further comments that when the spirit of man appears, it does so in the embryonic state. It then progresses to the state of childhood and then to maturity. As such it does so in a condition of perfection. He states the spirit is one, but that in the embryonic condition, hearing and sight are undeveloped but in the state of maturity it appears in splendor and brilliance.

In the same way the seed in the beginning becomes leaves and is the place where the vegetable spirit appears; in the condition of fruit it manifests the same spirit—that is to say, the power of growth appears in the utmost perfection; but what a difference between the condition of the leaves and that of the fruit! For from the fruit a hundred thousand leaves appear, though they all grow and develop through the same vegetable spirit. Notice the difference between the virtues and perfections of Christ, the splendors and brilliance of Bahá'u'lláh, and the virtues of the Prophets of Israel, such as Ezekiel or Samuel. All were the manifestations of inspiration, but between them there is an infinite difference. (SAQ 150)

## Conclusion

Philosophy notwithstanding, it was religion that ultimately promulgated a deeper appreciation of Providence with respect to divinity



or, in other words, Divine Providence. In the early period of the Hellenic world, fatalistic belief was strong, as expressed in astrology where man is governed by the stars and planets, while the Talmud of Jewish tradition taught that Israel is subject only to God, not to any of the stars. Later the Christian sense of Providence was shown in the Gospel according to Matthew: "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father's will. But even the hairs of your head are numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows."<sup>20</sup>

This infers Divine intervention and possibly represents the most meaningful concept of Divinity that remains with us in the Western and Islamic civilizations today in spite of all the later developments. As the ideas regarding Providence evolved from what are sometimes called pagan beliefs, through the many rational arguments from the early middle ages to the Medieval period, through the Renaissance with certain Islamic influences, and through the Reformation regarding proofs of God, we find throughout a cross pollination of religion and philosophy. After all these centuries the Protestant world clings to fundamental concepts of an earlier time mixed with a strong impulse toward individuality.

That is all well and good but a new age is upon us with a spiritual reach heretofore undisclosed. Philosophers are challenged once again to investigate a new vision as presented to us in the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Evidence and proofs in the context of His commentary rise above previous assumptions by the ancients and modern thinkers as well. For instance, He stated in so many words that the Reality of Divinity is the Essence of Oneness, that it is pure sanctity above all accessibility in the world of man. (SAQ 146) But He assures us that we, even with our imperfections, are still capable of recognizing the attributes of supreme felicity by the effects that they exhibit in the material world. "Know that the attributes of perfection, the splendor of the divine bounties, and the lights of inspiration are visible and evident

in all the Holy Manifestations;...” (SAQ 149) Finally, the mystery of Divinity may be resolved with the very title of Section 37 in *Some Answered Questions*, “Divinity can only be comprehended through the Divine Manifestations.”

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## Speaking on Socio-Political Order

23 December 2008

Transmitted by email: ...

Dr...  
U.S.A.

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

Your email letter dated 26 June 2008, in which you inquire about the extent to which a Bahá'í, particularly one who is a social scientist or academic, may speak publicly on sociopolitical issues, has been received by the Universal House of Justice. We have been asked to convey the following reply.

You are, of course, well aware of the principle of noninvolvement in politics enunciated by Shoghi Effendi. Bahá'ís are to “refrain from associating themselves, whether by word or by deed, with the political pursuits of their respective nations, with the policies of their governments and the schemes and programs of parties and factions.” They “assign no blame, take no side, further no design, and identify themselves with no system prejudicial to the best interests” of the Faith and eschew “the entanglements and bickerings inseparable from the pursuits of the politician”. They are to “rise above all particularism and partisanship, above the vain disputes, the petty calculations, the transient passions that agitate the face, and engage the attention, of a changing world”. This principle, which demands strict avoidance of any type of partisan political activity, must be scrupulously upheld. However, as society and its political processes evolve and as the Faith grows, the interaction between the two becomes increasingly

complex. The House of Justice will provide the necessary guidance over time to apply this principle to existing circumstances.

The term “politics” can have a broad meaning, and therefore it is important to distinguish between partisan political activity and the discourse and action intended to bring about constructive social change. While the former is proscribed, the latter is enjoined; indeed, a central purpose of the Bahá'í community is social transformation. `Abdu'l-Bahá's treatise *The Secret of Divine Civilization* amply demonstrates the Faith's commitment to promoting social change without entering into the arena of partisan politics. So too, innumerable passages in the Bahá'í Writings encourage the believers to contribute to the betterment of the world. “Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in,” Bahá'u'lláh states, “and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements.” `Abdu'l-Bahá urges the friends to “become distinguished in all the virtues of the human world—for faithfulness and sincerity, for justice and fidelity, for firmness and steadfastness, for philanthropic deeds and service to the human world, for love toward every human being, for unity and accord with all people, for removing prejudices and promoting international peace.” Further, in a letter written on his behalf, Shoghi Effendi explains that “much as the friends must guard against in any way seeming to identify themselves or the Cause with any political party, they must also guard against the other extreme of never taking part, with other progressive groups, in conferences or committees designed to promote some activity in entire accord with our teachings”. In another letter written on his behalf in 1948, when racial inequality was enshrined in the laws of many states in the United States, he indicates that there is “no objection at all to the students taking part in something so obviously akin to the spirit of our teachings as a campus demonstration against race prejudice.” Bahá'ís must, therefore, be tireless in addressing, through word and deed, a range of social issues.

When the Bahá'í community was small, its contribution to social well-being was naturally limited. In 1983 the House of Justice announced that the growth of the Faith had given rise to the need for a greater involvement in the life of society. Bahá'ís began to engage more systematically in the work of social and economic development through activities of varying degrees of complexity. Efforts to contribute to social transformation also include participation in the public discourse on issues of concern to humanity, such as peace, the elimination of prejudices of all kinds, the spiritual and moral empowerment of youth, and the promotion of justice. These two types of activity have steadily increased over the past twenty-five years and will grow in scope and influence in the future.

The organized endeavors of the Bahá'í community in these areas are reinforced by the diverse initiatives of individual believers working in various fields—as volunteers, professionals, and experts—to contribute to social change. The distinctive nature of their approach is to avoid conflict and the contest for power while striving to unite people in the search for underlying moral and spiritual principles and for practical measures that can lead to the just resolution of the problems afflicting society. Bahá'ís perceive humanity as a single body. All are inseparably bound to one another. A social order structured to meet the needs of one group at the expense of another results in injustice and oppression. Instead, the best interest of each component part is achieved by considering its needs in the context of the well-being of the whole.

Involvement in social discourse and action will at times require that Bahá'ís become associated with the development of public policy. In this regard, the term “policy,” like the term “politics,” has a broad meaning. While refraining from discussion of policies pertaining to political relations between nations or partisan political affairs within a country, Bahá'ís will no doubt contribute to the formulation and implementation of policies that address certain social concerns.

Examples of such concerns are safeguarding the rights of women, extending effective education to all children, curbing the spread of infectious disease, protecting the environment, and eliminating the extremes of wealth and poverty.

It is evident, then, that as a Bahá'í who is a political scientist you have a great deal of latitude to comment on social issues. Yet it is also possible to participate in the generation and application of knowledge in your field by dealing with topics that are more directly political in nature. You are no doubt aware of the general advice, written on behalf of the Guardian, that one way to criticize the social and political order of the day without siding with or opposing an existing regime is to offer a deeper analysis on the level of political theory rather than practical politics. Another approach would be to contribute to scientific inquiry and shed light on differing viewpoints to seek common understanding and effective solutions without succumbing to partisan advocacy and obfuscation. Bahá'u'lláh states that "every matter related to state affairs which ye raise for discussion falls under the shadow of one of the words sent down from the heaven of His glorious and exalted utterance." You have the opportunity to mine the gems of His Revelation and to prepare and present them in a manner that is attractive to those seeking new insights. You will have to learn over time how to find a balance between the principles and concepts you hold as true that come from the Teachings of the Faith and from your discipline.

Challenges will inevitably arise. For example, you may find that an issue pertaining to social action has been co-opted by the political debate among competing factions, and wisdom will be required to determine whether to adjust your approach or let the matter rest for a time. In some cases it may be necessary to forgo opportunities that would thrust you into political debate or criticism of partisan policies of governments. In other instances there may be special sensitivities, such as topics related to countries where the Bahá'í community faces

## Speaking on Socio-Political Order

hardship or oppression, when comments could create the impression that the friends are engaged in political activity against the interests of a particular government. These same considerations arise when evaluating invitations from the media to comment or engage in discussion on the political affairs of the day. Your National Spiritual Assembly is available to assist you in clarifying particular questions should the need arise.

Be assured of the prayers of the House of Justice at the Sacred Threshold that your efforts to reflect the principles of the Faith in your professional activities may attract the blessings and confirmations of the Ancient Beauty.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat  
Baha'i World Center



## Teaching the Cause of God: A Two-Edged Sword

Ali Nakhjavani

In one of his letters Shoghí Effendí has explained to us that one of the distinctive features of our Faith is that we cannot separate the spiritual life of the individual from the spiritual life of the community. Mutual reactions exist between the two. Under the influence of the divine teachings, the hearts of the individual believers bring into being and shape the community. In turn, the community provides an atmosphere where the individual believers develop and grow spiritually. Our teachings are designed so that the spiritual life of the individual Bahá'í, and the collective life of the community, complement each other. Let us look at some examples:

- Bahá'u'lláh calls on Bahá'ís to observe individual obligatory prayers, but at the same time He ordains that Houses of Worship for community prayers be established.
- We see that Bahá'u'lláh calls on parents to be the first educators of their children, but at the same time He anticipates that every local Bahá'í House of Worship will have a school, and He praises the work of teachers.
- He calls on the individual believer to teach His Cause and protect Its interests, but simultaneously Bahá'í institutions are given parallel assignments to provide for the teaching and protection of His Faith.

In the messages of the Universal House of Justice we read that the time has come for all Bahá'í communities to develop with greater confidence and self-reliance a culture of thinking which is fundamentally different from the community activities of other religions. Unlike other religions, there is no professional clergy in the Faith to lead the community. Leadership and authority are vested in elected institutions. Thus leadership is self-generated and home-grown through democratic methods, and every individual member of the community should be concerned with its welfare and healthy growth.

In 1996 when the Universal House of Justice was working on the goals and objectives of its New Plan, which became the Four Year Plan, it became clear that the percentage of individual Bahá'ís active in the teaching field was very low; that teaching activities were almost entirely the work of individuals, and very little resulted from group collaboration among local Bahá'ís; that opportunities for collective study of the teachings, apart from summer schools, were too few and were randomly organized; and that by and large, because of these facts on the ground, a methodical and workable system of training and education, especially for collective action, was necessary in order to meet these needs. Future Teaching Plans issuing from the World Centre, therefore, had to address these problems progressively, thoroughly and effectively.

In other words, the Bahá'í world had to realize that while the two duties of studying the Faith and teaching the Cause, as personal responsibilities, will always remain vital concerns of individual Bahá'ís, a simple and easy program had also to be adopted by Bahá'í communities everywhere that would encourage group study of the teachings as well as joint and collaborative efforts to teach the Cause.

Among the initial directives that the Universal House of Justice issued was that every National Spiritual Assembly should endeavour, in consultation with the Counsellors on each Continent, to create a

Training Institute, which it described as an “engine of growth.” This was followed by the creation of a new institution, which was named the Regional Bahá’í Council, to be established, as the Universal House of Justice deemed it necessary, either as an appointed body or an elected one, to be an intermediary administrative body between the National Assembly and Local Assemblies and their communities. Detailed advice from the World Centre was then issued for the initiation of core activities, such as study circles, devotional meetings, home visits, children and junior youth activities, as well as the division of each country into clusters, with the aim of raising up Bahá’í communities soundly and evenly throughout each territory.

Today after over fourteen years what do we see? My purpose is not to give you statistics. Any observer will testify that it is true that similar needs continue to exist, but the world-wide community has made a great deal of progress. A new culture has come into being in the hearts and minds of the friends. We have become a stronger community, the number of new believers has increased, our Nineteen Day Feasts are better attended, and the activities of the Faith have become more consolidated and united. Under the guidance of the Supreme Body all these activities are being conducted with dignity and in a spirit of moderation and friendliness.

Bahá’ú’lláh makes a clear distinction between methods of teaching and the obligation to teach. Methods of teaching change with conditions and circumstances, and such changes are formulated and directed by the institutions. While such methods are being implemented, the duty of the individual to teach has not been ignored or under-rated. It has been supplemented by group activities. The teaching work has been designed like a two-edged sword. One edge is for individual activity, and the other edge is for group and collaborative activity.

We need now to consider the guidance we find in the writings on how we should approach our individual duty to teach the Cause. In one of

his letters to the friends in the East, Shoghí Effendí likens the individual isolated believer to a point, a group less than nine to a letter, a local Spiritual Assembly to a word, a National Spiritual Assembly to a sentence, and the Universal House of Justice to the Book.

Let us each consider ourselves to be a point. Bahá'u'lláh in one of His Tablets has written that each devoted and sincere believer should consider himself or herself to be the only and sole believer in the world. In other words there is no one else, each one of us should consider himself or herself to be a Mullá Husayn, the only believer on the planet having embraced God's Holy Faith for today. What do we do? How can we become each an instrument in God's hands? Where do we find receptive souls and how do we introduce the Faith to them? With what attitude should we teach the Cause? These are the points that I will deal with briefly, based on the explicit teachings of our Faith.

I have gleaned for you from Bahá'í Writings 18 major themes and subjects which give us guidance in our independent efforts individually to teach the Faith. Group teaching has its own dynamics; individual teaching also has its own principles. If we allow these personal guidelines to sink into our hearts and souls, they will transform our spiritual lives under the shadow of the Covenant. None of the points I will present to you are my own. They are all based on exhortations found in the inspired Writings of our Faith.

1. We should teach with detachment and with a pure and radiant heart, and when speak we should do so with tact and wisdom. When we show our love to others we should do so because we are true lovers of God and of humanity, not because we are expecting others to accept the Faith through us. Our love for others must be pure, true and selfless.

2. We must remember that God has created all of us, He loves all of us, and He would want all of humanity to accept His Cause, but, alas, the inner eyes of a large majority are at this time veiled and do not see the truth, nor are there too many ready ears to appreciate His divine melody.
3. We should not deliver the message if we clearly see that the hearer is uneasy, apprehensive or uncomfortable to listen to us on the subject of the Faith.
4. When we speak about Bahá'u'lláh and His Cause we should speak with confidence, courage, enthusiasm and with a tone which conveys our own convictions.
5. We should associate with people in all walks of life and mix and mingle with them with sincere love and in a kindly manner, as such attitudes enable them to have confidence in us. We should be willing to develop friendly relationships with our associates, our neighbours, and acquaintances.
6. We should try to associate with members of societies which are non-political but are known to be social, cultural, humanitarian, charitable, and educational associations and organizations, in order to find among them receptive souls.
7. In our conversation we should encourage the hearer to express his general thoughts and beliefs, and we should listen carefully and patiently to them before we start expressing gradually our own views and opinions. We should speak with humility, without giving proudly the impression that the seeker is ignorant and we are the learned.
8. There is a difference between being blindly fanatical and being faithful to principle. When speaking we should never appear to be fanatical in any sense of the word. As Bahá'ís we should be seen as liberal enough to listen to and consider the other person's point of view.

9. We should remember that every Bahá'í is a potential teacher. If we wait until we are fully qualified, the teaching work will stop. We should forget ourselves, and put our trust and reliance upon God. When we act in this way, we will see how eloquence and the power to change human hearts will come to us in a very natural way. We become like an empty reed, and the Holy Spirit will use us to quicken and confirm souls.
10. Quoting sentences or brief extracts from the Words of Bahá'u'lláh that would be useful in teaching has a tremendous effect on the hearers. Therefore it will be very helpful if we could memorize a few such sentences from His Writings and use them in our teaching work.
11. There are very few souls who become Bahá'ís immediately, as soon as they hear of the Faith. There are other precious souls, however, who are seeking after the truths of our Faith, but for them it may take a little longer to become Bahá'ís. And then in the majority of cases, we must remember, conversion to a new Faith is a slow process, and therefore we should not lose heart quickly, but instead persevere in our efforts.
12. We can of course show the inadequacy and inability of existing religions in bringing about world unity and peace, but we should not attack past religions, nor should we be drawn into hair-splitting and unnecessary discussions and arguments.
13. Devotional meetings with Bahá'ís and their seekers are important. At such meetings, appropriate extracts from the Writings could also be shared.
14. We should pray that Bahá'u'lláh may assist and guide us when teaching the Faith. In addition we should also pray that God may send us the souls that are ready.

15. Teaching in the atmosphere of our own homes and offering hospitality has a great effect. Living the Bahá'í way of life greatly influences the minds and hearts of observers. We should have such meetings in our homes once every nineteen days.
16. We should never allow a day to pass without sharing some aspect of the Faith with some soul. Nor should we allow a year to pass without guiding at least one soul to accept the Faith.
17. We should not only engage ourselves in teaching the Faith, but we should wisely and lovingly be a source of inspiration to our fellow believers, so that they too would be encouraged by us radiantly to carry out their spiritual obligation in the teaching work.
18. Teaching the Cause should become the dominating passion of our lives. We must be aware that if we do not teach, divine confirmations will be cut off, and we will be depriving ourselves from seeing the signs of divine assistance guiding us and enriching our spiritual lives.

## Relativism, A Theological and Cognitive Basis for Bahá'í Ideas about God and the Spiritual World

Moojan Momen

*The essence and the fundamentals of philosophy have emanated from the Prophets. That the people differ concerning the inner meanings and mysteries thereof is to be attributed to the divergence of their views and minds.*

The Tablet of Wisdom

In *Lights of 'Irfan*, vol. 9 (2008), Ian Kluge has published a response to my earlier paper "Relativism: A Basis for Bahá'í Metaphysics."<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank him for a clear and informative description of the background and the various elements that go towards relativism. From the start of this response, I would like to make it clear that I have never regarded my paper as a definitive exposition of Bahá'í theology or philosophy. I recognize that future Bahá'í scholars will develop understandings of the Bahá'í teachings that will make what I have written seem naive, ill-judged or simply wrong. At such an early stage in the development of the Bahá'í Faith, it would be foolish to imagine that we can make definitive statements when so much of the Bahá'í scriptures remain unpublished and inaccessible. Indeed since the publication of that first paper, I have modified my position as described below.

According to the Bahá'í view of where we are in humanity's development, Bahá'u'lláh has not come merely as a further Manifestation



of God, he is a Universal Manifestation coming at the close of one cycle and the start of another cycle. To me this means that what he has brought is so revolutionary that the new world that will come into being will be unrecognisable to the people of the past or present generation. When people in several thousand years time look at the process he has initiated, they will see it as the building of an entirely new world psychologically, socially, economically and, yes, even philosophically; in other words, that the cessation of war and creation of a peaceful united world will just be the surface effect of a much more radical change that has occurred in human minds and souls; that he has not just come to bring about world unity but to construct a new vision of reality itself.

I would maintain therefore that Bahá'u'lláh is not a proponent of Enlightenment philosophy who wishes to extend the liberal democratic values of the West to the rest of the world as some have suggested; he has not come to tinker at the edges of philosophy; he is not merely seeking to put right a few problems with the way the world is organized economically and socially; he has not come just to add a new international layer to the local and national institutions that we already possess. His aim is a radical change much more radical than any envisaged by any of the philosophies of the past. Unfortunately the word "radical" has been used of such political movements as communism and thus to call Bahá'u'lláh "radical" appears to put him into a category with the likes of Marx, but what Bahá'u'lláh aims at is something much deeper than anything that Marx wanted to achieve. The only effect of the Communist revolution was to replace one hierarchical oppressive social structure with another one (cf Orwell's *Animal Farm*). What Bahá'u'lláh is seeking to change is the very structure of society that has been the norm for some 7,000 years. This change can only be effected on the basis of changes in politics, economy, social structures and also in our conceptual and philosophical models. This change, the Bahá'í teachings maintain cannot be brought about by legislation and social policy. It also requires individuals who

are spiritually transformed so as to be less self-centred and more other-centred; and it requires social processes at a community level that can replace the present hierarchical social processes.

My critique of Kluge's response has four main points, which I will discuss in turn:

1. Along with others who have criticised my article on relativism, I feel that Kluge has simply taken the word "relativism" and reproduced all of the usual criticisms of this philosophical concept without taking into account that I have in fact used the word in a very limited way and in relation to a limited area of Bahá'í teachings. Thus most of what he writes in his article may well be true but is simply not relevant to my article.
2. Kluge has not taken into account the fact that this article was written some 30 years ago and published more than 20 years ago and that I have modified my position since then. Following the publication of my original article, Keven Brown pointed out to me an un-translated passage in the writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha which indicates that the metaphysical relativism in the Bahá'í scriptures applies at the level of the Prime Intellect (Primal Will or Primal Manifestation) and that nothing at all can be said about the level of the Absolute Reality of the Divinity Itself. Subsequently I modified my view and published this in my article "The God of Bahá'u'lláh",<sup>2</sup> a paper which Kluge appears not to have read.
3. In both articles, I have constructed an argument drawing conclusions from three quotations of Bahá'u'lláh and a quotation from 'Abdu'l-Baha. Kluge has not engaged with the argument that I have presented nor addressed any of

these quotations and has merely commented on a quotation from Shoghi Effendi that I appended as supporting evidence. It seems to me that if he is going to refute my paper, he should at least point out where the interpretation of the Bahá'í scripture that I have presented is faulty.

4. Point 3 in fact highlights a much more fundamental problem that I tackle at the end of this article—that the debate itself is evidence of my point. Since this is in many ways the crux of the matter, I would suggest that those who do not want to get buried in the details of my responses to the points that Kluge makes should just go to this last section (“4. The Relativism of the Debate”).

## **1: Relativism and relativism**

Kluge has given a very extensive description of relativism in its widest scope of meaning. In my article, it may be that I was not sufficiently clear or emphatic but I did state there that I have confined my argument to a specific area of relativism, cognitive relativism, and applied it to a limited area of Bahá'í teaching, that of metaphysics. Thus much of what Kluge writes about ontological relativism (p. 187), moral relativism (p. 184), cultural relativism (p. 181, 186–7), legal relativism (p. 181, 187), etc., interesting as it may be, has no relevance to my article. Of course I do not think that the Bahá'í Faith advocates moral relativism. Bahá'u'lláh inculcates a moral code that by today's standards is even considered traditional or old-fashioned and is the very antithesis of moral relativism. Of course I do not think that the Bahá'í teachings advocate an ontological relativism (i.e. that the existence of all entities is context-dependent and determined by individual and/or cultural beliefs). Bahá'u'lláh clearly considers that there is an Absolute Reality which exists independently of every human point of view.

Relativism does not apply to most areas of the Bahá'í teachings, only to a limited area. In relation to ethics, Bahá'u'lláh restates the moral laws of previous religions (although there are changes in social ethics as these are part of the social teachings); in relation to social teachings, the Bahá'í scriptures advocate the principle of progressive revelation that the teachings brought by the Manifestations of God develop in accordance with human social progress. Paul Lample in his excellent treatment of the area of social action in the Bahá'í teachings, has suggested that the nonfoundationalism of Richard Bernstein is the best theoretical model for the Bahá'í teachings in the area of social action.<sup>3</sup> It is only in the narrowly-defined area of metaphysics that I am suggesting that a cognitive relativism applies.

What I am suggesting is that the relativism that applies to the Bahá'í teachings relates to metaphysics and is cognitive. I am defining metaphysics as that which is beyond this physical world in other words, God and the spiritual world. Cognitive means that it applies, not to "what is" but to what we are capable of knowing about "what is". Thus my contention is that, although we believe that there is an Absolute Reality (God) in the metaphysical realm (the spiritual world beyond the physical), what we can know or comprehend about this entity that we call God is relative and not absolute. It is relative to our viewpoint, our psychological, spiritual, cultural and other limitations that confine our viewpoint and prevent us from comprehending the totality of God.

In explaining Shoghi Effendi's statement that "religious truth is not absolute but relative", Kluge writes:

"From this we conclude that relativism does not apply to the "eternal verities" (universal, objective and foundational) but only to the way they may be expressed outwardly, or historically." (p. 209)

But my contention is that we human beings do not know what these “eternal verities” are in relation to metaphysics (and even in the area of ethics for the most part), we only have access to “the way they may be expressed outwardly, or historically”. Since we only have access to the historical expression of the “eternal verities”, then our knowledge of them is relative. This is true even in the area of ethics. Both the Bible and the Qur’an appear to consider slavery and holy war to be permissible yet Bahá’u’lláh now forbids these. Presumably the “eternal verities” have not changed and yet there has been a profound change in their historical expression. We however only have access to that historical expression. The same degree of change has occurred with many social structures and institutions such as the position of women in society and the position of the clerical class. For all we know there are aspects of our society that we regard as permissible and normal and fondly consider to be “eternal verities” which future Manifestations of God will change.

Of course when we are dealing with ethical relativism, we are treading on thin ice and it would be easy for some to take our words out of context and apply to them a meaning we did not intend (which is why I have not dwelt at any length on this aspect in my papers). The concept of ethical or moral relativism enshrined in the Bahá’í teaching is not one of “anything goes” in the present day which is what this term connotes to most people. Rather it is one that states that, over a long period of history, ethical ideals and values have changed as human society has changed and some of what was considered permissible in a past age is not considered permissible today.

Furthermore Kluge’s asserts that:

“Of course, it is evident that we do, in fact, have *some* knowledge of these “eternal verities” or other absolute truths... Thus, throughout history, we attain *partial glimpses* of the essential truths, the “eternal verities”. (p. 210)

I would ask the question: how do we know what are the “eternal verities” and what are those aspects of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation that are not eternal and which future Manifestations of God will change? Perhaps if we had lived in the 12th century, we might have fondly imagined that the institution of slavery or holy war and those ethical values that underlie these practices were part of the “eternal verities”. Even today there are many who think that war is an “eternal verity” of the human condition. The teachings of future Manifestations of God are hidden from us precisely because we cannot “bear them now” (cf John 16:12). This in itself seems to me a convincing argument that we cannot know what the “eternal verities” are in any exhaustive or definitive sense in the area of ethics. We can only know them in the more general sense of spiritual qualities such as love, justice etc. In fact, the “*partial glimpses*” that Kluge refers to are precisely the cognitive relativism imposed on human beings (and indeed on all creatures) by the fact that they are incapable of comprehending the levels of reality above their own level.

Kluge has a section “Relativism versus Relationalism” deals with ontological questions whether things exist or do not - this again has nothing to do with the cognitive relativism that my two relativism papers are concerned with. However even in this section there are suggestive sentences that point to the position that I am suggesting. For example, Kluge states that:

Again we observe that in these statements the attributes of existence and nonexistence are not simply matters of opinion or viewpoint in the relativistic sense of our being able to hold the opposite view with equal validity. There is, for example, no standpoint from which creation is not contingent and dependent upon God, nor is there a standpoint from which God Himself depends on creation. (This should not be confused with the claim that humans may

devise various concepts of God; the concepts, but not God Himself are dependent on man.) (p. 214)

But as 'Abdu'l-Baha states all of our concepts of God are creations of our minds. He does not exclude the Bahá'ís from this statement:

Consider then, how all the peoples of the world are bowing the knee to a fancy of their own contriving, how they have created a creator within their own minds, and they call it the Fashioner of all that is—whereas in truth it is but an illusion. Thus are the people worshipping only an error of perception.<sup>4</sup>

All of us, whether Bahá'ís or not, cannot have any concepts of God that are independently true that occupy an Archimedean point. So the fact that God exists is an assertion that we affirm (i.e. a statement of belief) as soon as we try to conceptualise what “God exists” means (i.e. try to bring it to the level of cognition), we are in the realm of relative truths, each of us conceptualises that ontological truth in different ways in accordance with our worldview, our culture, our previous intellectual and social experiences.

But that Essence of Essences, that Invisible of Invisibles, is sanctified above all human speculation, and never to be overtaken by the mind of man. Never shall that immemorial Reality lodge within the compass of a contingent being. His is another realm, and of that realm no understanding can be won. No access can be gained thereto; all entry is forbidden there. The utmost one can say is that Its existence can be proved, but the conditions of Its existence are unknown.<sup>5</sup>

I cannot see that there is much difference between this concept of relative truth and the concept of perspectivism that Kluge approves of in his paper thus it may be that our difference in relation to this part of his paper is merely that of terminology.

Kluge writes that as a result of relativism:

...there is no common reality or world for all people. As seen immediately above, this leads to the impossibility of developing an even minimally coherent metaphysic theory of reality or general world-view (*Weltanschauung*). Even more, it also makes the entire Bahá'í project impossible. The mission of the Bahá'í Faith is to provide a spiritual framework in which all the religious dispensations can find their place and be elevated to a new level,<sup>6</sup> and in which the dream of a unified world order can be achieved. Such unity requires that to a considerable degree we share a common reality, that at least a sufficient number of people agree about the nature of reality, the nature of man and the world we live in. (p. 224)

I would disagree profoundly with what Kluge has written here. It is the insistence on a single truth that has led the Western world towards its intellectual, religious and cultural imperialism in which it has insisted on its truth to the exclusion of all other perspectives. In reaction to this other groups such as Islamic fundamentalists are insisting that they have sole access to the truth. It is by allowing various viewpoints of the truth to co-exist within the Bahá'í framework, and thus giving dignity and value to these different frameworks, that we can have truly have unity on an equal basis and lessen the appeal of extremist positions.

## 2: At What Level Does Cognitive Relativism Apply?

Kluge takes up a great deal of his response in refuting the idea that the Bahá'í Faith believes in any form of monism (pp. 219–222). Firstly, I would like to say that everything that he writes is correct. He appears to think, however, that by refuting monism, he has refuted my thesis.



This shows a misunderstanding of my thesis. My articles are not saying that monism is the Bahá'í understanding of metaphysics. The position advanced in my articles is that both monism and theism are equally correct if they are taken as *an* understanding of God but they are equally incorrect if they are taken as *the* absolute understanding of God. Each understanding is correct from its own standpoint but wrong from the other standpoint. To be more specific, they are correct when understood at the level of the manifestation of the names and attributes of God but are incorrect as understandings of the Essence of God. This is an important point as much blood has been spilt over this difference in human history<sup>7</sup> and resolving the conflict would therefore be a significant element in Bahá'í attempts to bring unity.

Both monists and theists regard their understandings as *the* absolute understanding of the Essence of God. By refuting this standard understanding of monism from the Bahá'í viewpoint, Kluge has in fact given half of the proof of my argument. To complete the proof of my position, I need only to refute the standard understanding of theism from a Bahá'í viewpoint and establish that these two positions are in fact both correct as relative understandings of the manifestations of the names and attributes of God (but not of God Himself). This I need to do in three stages:

- A. to refute, from a Bahá'í perspective, the standard understanding of theism;
- B. secondly to demonstrate that both theism and monism apply to the Manifestation of God only and not to the Essence; and
- C. to demonstrate that the Bahá'í scriptures advocate a cognitive relativism in order to explain how both theism and monism can apply to the Manifestation of God.

A. Refutation of Theism. Theism posits a God that can be known and described. Foremost among the statements made about God is that He is the Creator of all that exists. Many other attributes and actions are attributed to Him in the scriptures of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In the Bahá'í scriptures, we find however that God is unknowable: "'The way is barred, and all seeking rejected.' The minds of the favourites of heaven, however high they soar, can never attain this station, how much less the understanding of obscured and limited minds."<sup>8</sup> Even the attributes of God that we think we understand are, in reality, beyond our comprehension.

It is not that we can comprehend His knowledge, His sight, His power and life, for it is beyond our comprehension; for the essential names and attributes of God are identical with His Essence, and His Essence is above all comprehension.<sup>9</sup>

In the Bahá'í scriptures, however, we find evidence that these descriptions of God and His attributes refer not to the Essence of God but in fact all of them refer to the Manifestations of God. Bahá'u'lláh asserts that all pathways to the Ultimate Reality, whether that of mystics (*adh-dhákírún*) or of the learned (*al-'árifún*) are in reality pathways to the Manifestations of God—these two pathways can be considered as allusions to the two pathways of monism (the mystics) and theism (the learned). More specifically, Bahá'u'lláh denies that either the pathway of the mystic (*yadhkaraka*) or that of learning and esoteric knowledge (*ya'raja ilá hawá' `irfánika*) yields knowledge of Ultimate Reality; it yields knowledge only of the Manifestation:

The loftiest sentiments which the holiest of saints (*adh-dhákírún*) can express in praise of Thee (*yadhkaraka*), and the deepest wisdom which the most learned of men (*al-'árifún*) can utter in their attempts to comprehend Thy nature (*ya'raja ilá hawá' `irfánika*), all revolve around that Centre Which is wholly subjected to Thy sovereignty, Which adoreth Thy

Beauty, and is propelled through the movement of Thy Pen  
[i.e. the Manifestation of God].<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, in his Tablet of the Uncompounded Reality (Lawh-i Basit al-Haqíqa), Bahá'u'lláh states that “whatever wondrous references and powerful descriptions have appeared from the mouth and pen refer to the sublime Word [of God], the most exalted Pen, the primal Summit, the true Homeland, and the Dawning-place of the manifestation of mercy [i.e. the Manifestation of God].”<sup>11</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh states that he himself is the one whom in the Hebrew Bible is called Jehovah (Yahweh, YHWH)<sup>12</sup> and this is confirmed by Shoghi Effendi.<sup>13</sup> Bahá'u'lláh also claims to be the Speaker on Sinai.<sup>14</sup> Jehovah and the Speaker on Sinai are of course considered to have been God Himself in Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Similarly, Bahá'u'lláh refers to Himself as the “Word” and as the “Father”,<sup>15</sup> again being terms associated in the Christian Bible with God Himself. And similarly, the crowning attribute of God as the Creator is in fact, attributed in the Long Obligatory Prayer to the Manifestation of God: “He Who hath been manifested is the Hidden Mystery, the Treasured Symbol, through Whom the letters B and E (Be) have been joined and knit together.”

Bahá'u'lláh states that even such attributes as “Godhead, Divinity, Supreme Singleness, and Inmost Essence”, which we would normally think of only in relationship to the Ultimate Reality, are in fact attributable to the Manifestations of God.

Viewed from the standpoint of their oneness and sublime detachment, the attributes of Godhead, Divinity, Supreme Singleness, and Inmost Essence, have been, and are applicable to those Essences of Being, inasmuch as they all abide on the throne of Divine Revelation, and are established upon the seat of Divine Concealment. Through their appearance

the Revelation of God is made manifest, and by their countenance the Beauty of God is revealed. Thus it is that the accents of God Himself have been heard uttered by these Manifestations of the Divine Being.<sup>16</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá confirms this, asserting that everything that is attributed to God in the scriptures is in reality attributed to the Manifestation of God and that anything else that human beings may think they attribute to God is pure imagination.

Accordingly all these attributes, names, praises and eulogies apply to the Places of Manifestation; and all that we imagine and suppose beside them is mere imagination, for we have no means of comprehending that which is invisible and inaccessible... From this it is certain and evident that if we imagine a Divine Reality outside of the Holy Manifestations, it is pure imagination, for there is no way to approach the Reality of Divinity which is not cut off to us, and all that we imagine is mere supposition.<sup>17</sup>

Even when we talk of the Oneness of God (*at-Tawhid*), we are in reality, so Bahá'u'lláh asserts, talking of the Unity of the Manifestations:

Beware, O believers in the Unity of God, lest ye be tempted to make any distinction between any of the Manifestations of His Cause, or to discriminate against the signs that have accompanied and proclaimed their Revelation. This indeed is the true meaning of Divine Unity, if ye be of them that apprehend and believe this truth.<sup>18</sup>

So the Bahá'í Faith, as well as refuting classical monism as Kluge demonstrates, also refutes classical theism, as laid out by the theologians of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

B. Both theism and monism apply to the Manifestation of God only and not to the Essence of God. As demonstrated in the previous section, all of these positions taken in the Bahá'í scriptures specifically and categorically deny the traditional theism of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Since the Bahá'í scriptures also specifically and categorically deny traditional monism, as Kluge has shown, what then are we left with? I would suggest that what we are left with is affirmation in the Bahá'í scriptures that both the theism and monism are true if applied to the Manifestation of the names and attributes of God. Thus for example, 'Abdu'l-Baha in *Some Answered Questions* denies a literal oneness of existence (*wahdat al-wujúd*) between the Creator and the creation, wherein God becomes resolved into (*munhall*, dispersed among) the forms of created things (as some Sufis and other monists assert). But of course both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Baha maintain that all things manifest at least some of the names and attributes of God. Thus names and attributes of God, the signs of God, are dispersed among all created things:

...whatever I behold I readily discover that it maketh Thee known unto me, and it remindeth me of Thy signs, and of Thy tokens, and of Thy testimonies. By Thy glory! Every time I lift up mine eyes unto Thy heaven, I call to mind Thy highness and Thy loftiness, and Thine incomparable glory and greatness; and every time I turn my gaze to Thine earth, I am made to recognize the evidences of Thy power and the tokens of Thy bounty. And when I behold the sea, I find that it speaketh to me of Thy majesty, and of the potency of Thy might, and of Thy sovereignty and Thy grandeur. And at whatever time I contemplate the mountains, I am led to discover the ensigns of Thy victory and the standards of Thine omnipotence.<sup>19</sup>

Similarly, Bahá'u'lláh asserts, as the above quotations have demonstrated, that theism is also true at the level of the Manifestation of God

and not at the level of the Essence of God. Indeed the Bahá'í scriptures assert that we can say nothing about God. The only valid statement that we can say about God is that He/She/It exists, nothing else:

But that Essence of Essences, that Invisible of Invisibles, is sanctified above all human speculation, and never to be overtaken by the mind of man. Never shall that immemorial Reality lodge within the compass of a contingent being... The utmost one can say is that Its existence can be proved, but the conditions of Its existence are unknown.<sup>20</sup>

We have seen above that the statements about God made in theistic traditions are related in the Bahá'í scriptures to the manifestation of God. The statements in Monism asserting unity between the individual and Absolute reality are also related by 'Abdu'l-Baha to the Manifestation of God, or rather to the Primal Will which is the Reality of the Manifestation of God. In describing the monist position, 'Abdu'l-Baha makes use of the analogy of the ocean as the Absolute Reality and of the waves of that ocean as the individual human beings. He asserts in *Some Answered Questions* that this position that the individual is emerges from and is absorbed back into the ocean of the Absolute Reality is wrong.<sup>21</sup> 'Abdu'l-Baha explains however that between the World of the Absolute Reality and the physical world, there is an intermediate world, the World of Command (*'alam al-amr*), wherein the Primal Will emanates from God. This is the world of the Manifestation of God. He explains that "the Primal Will is the inner reality of all things and all existent entities are the manifestations of the Primal Will";<sup>22</sup> and in another passage that the above concept of the waves that resolve into the ocean of Reality applies at this level of the Primal Will, the Manifestation of God.<sup>23</sup>

In this way, both the theistic concept of God (and humanity's absolute separation and distinction from God) and the monistic concept

of the Absolute Reality (and humanity being resolved into and being inseparable from this Reality) are related in the Bahá'í scriptures to the concept of the Manifestation of God, who is in fact the Manifestation of the Primal Will and exists at the intermediary level of the World of Command.

C. The Bahá'í scriptures advocate a cognitive relativism in order to explain how both theism and monism can apply to the Manifestation of God. In my paper "The God of Bahá'u'lláh", I suggest that Bahá'u'lláh has tackled this split between theism and monism in five different ways, each of which is in its own right correct. This, incidentally, is itself a response to Kluge's contention (p.202) that the statement that Relativism is a basis for Bahá'í metaphysics is self-refuting, since it can only be relatively true. Yes, relativism is itself only relatively true; there are four other ways of looking at this question that are also relatively true. In this paper however, rather than repeating what is said in my other paper about the other four, I will just concentrate on relativism.

In the Tablet of the Uncompounded Reality, Bahá'u'lláh describes the Manifestation of God thus: "even though outwardly He is given a name and appears to be bound by limitations, He is, in His inner reality, uncompounded (*basít*), sanctified from limitations. This uncompounded state is relative and attributive (*idáfi wa nisbi*) and not uncompounded in an absolute sense (*min kull al-jihát*)."<sup>24</sup>

The Manifestation of God is humanity's contact or link with the Absolute. He has a privileged, Archimedean standpoint and is thus able to make pronouncements that are normative for all of humankind. But he is limited in what he can bring to us of Absolute Reality. He is confined by the limitations of human understanding, of human language and of the stage of development that humanity has reached. Thus although in theory, he could bring us Absolute Truth and "eternal verities", in practice he only brings us a truth that is compatible

with and relative to human limitations and our stage of development. The best that we as human beings can do is to study the scriptures that the Manifestation brings and form our own understandings of God and of the spiritual world. Of course this means that once one of the Manifestations of God, such as Moses and Muhammad, had made a strong statement against idolatry, it would no longer have been correct for Jewish and Islamic theologians and philosophers to have viewed spiritual reality in a way that included multiple gods. Similarly, since in the Bahá'í scriptures, there is a strong statement that reincarnation is not literally true, it would be wrong for Bahá'ís to construct theologies and philosophies that include this concept (although the Bahá'í scriptures do give us hints that such concepts might have some relative truth to them<sup>25</sup>).

Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Baha have removed God out of our arena of discourse completely and assert that all references either to a theistic God or a monistic Absolute Reality are in fact references to the Manifestation of God. How then can we reconcile the idea that both theism and monism are true at the level of the Manifestation of God? The Bahá'í scriptures themselves indicate the way. Bahá'u'lláh asserts that any conceptions that human beings have of God are in reality the products of their own mind; that human beings are unable to:

...fathom the mystery of Him Who is the Day Star of Truth, Who is the invisible and unknowable Essence. The conceptions of the devoutest of mystics, the attainments of the most accomplished amongst men, the highest praise which human tongue or pen can render *are all the product of man's finite mind and are conditioned by its limitations.*<sup>26</sup>

Exalted, immeasurably exalted, art Thou above the strivings of mortal man to unravel Thy mystery, to describe Thy glory, or even to hint at the nature of Thine Essence. For whatever



such strivings may accomplish, *they can never hope to transcend the limitations imposed upon Thy creatures...*<sup>27</sup>

Since human minds are incapable of transcending these limitations and conceptualising the Absolute Reality, Bahá'u'lláh states that the concepts that human beings have are thus necessarily a reflection of the viewpoint of that person:

The meditations of the profoundest thinker, the devotions of the holiest of saints, the highest expressions of praise from either human pen or tongue, are but *a reflection of that which hath been created within themselves...*<sup>28</sup>

Similarly as we have seen above, 'Abdu'l-Baha says that:

All the people have formed a god in the world of thought, and that form of their imagination they worship...

Therefore consider: All the sects and people worship their own thought; they create a god in their own minds and acknowledge him to be the creator of all things, when that form is a superstition thus people adore and worship imagination.<sup>29</sup>

'Abdu'l-Baha explains this further in his Commentary on the Islamic tradition "I was a Hidden Treasure... ". Here in explaining the differences between those philosopher-mystics who incline to monism and those who incline to theism, 'Abdu'l-Baha asserts that these differences in the viewpoints arise from differences in the fundamental natures (i.e., the Divine attributes predominant within the soul/psyche complex) of the observers. The fundamental nature of one individual inclines him to see Reality in a dualist mode, while another will see Reality in a monist mode (see below for a more detailed explanation of this point).<sup>30</sup>

In summary then, both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Baha are saying that the differences that occur between those who see God in a theistic mode and those who are inclined to seeing the Absolute Reality in a monistic mode are due to the viewpoint of these different observers; in other words that this is a matter of cognitive relativism. What they understand of the Absolute is relative to their viewpoint.

To express all of this in the language of post-modernism and deconstruction, we can say that the Bahá'í scriptures indicate that when scripture (whether Bahá'í or those of other religions) refers to God, the signifier "God cannot refer to an Absolute Entity, since there is nothing that can be said about that Absolute Reality. Instead, what is signified by the word "God" is that which is manifest of God in this world. At the highest level this is of course the Manifestation of God who is the perfect manifestation of all of the Names and Attributes of God, but the Names and Attributes of God are also manifest in every human being and even in Nature. In exactly the same way, the person hearing or reading the word "God" in the scripture will impose upon that a meaning drawn from a network of meanings in the person's mind and the culture in which the word is used. Thus ultimately the meaning of the word "God" rests upon a network of texts that form the background of the psyche and culture of the person using the word. We as human beings are inescapably caught within this web or net of meaning, to which the term "intertextuality" is applied. The "signifier" (which is usually a word, but may be an image, sound or action, invested with meaning) can truly represent the "signified" for a given individual person, but not generically for all.<sup>31</sup>

### **3: What is to count as proof and evidence?**

In the two articles that I have written on this subject, I have constructed my arguments drawing conclusions from three quotations of Bahá'u'lláh and a quotation from 'Abdu'l-Baha. Kluge has not

engaged with the argument that I have presented nor addressed any of these quotations and has merely commented on a quotation from Shoghi Effendi that I appended as supporting evidence. It seems to me that if he is going to refute my paper, he should at least point out where the interpretation of the Bahá'í scripture that I have presented is faulty.

What Kluge has done in arguing against the conclusions of my paper is to bring forward logical and philosophical arguments. He appeals to the rational. He takes up much of his article with trying to prove that the position of relativism is “self-undermining and self refuting” and “logically incompatible” with the Bahá'í teachings (p. 180, 202; see pp. 204–211).

This appeal to logic and to rationalism is where I must part company with Kluge. Indeed in my first paper I made it clear that I realize that the position that I am putting forward may appear contrary to Aristotelean standards of logic. But I would contend that these Aristotelean standards are themselves not tenable when we are considering matters that relate to anything outside our every-day physical world. Even in science, it has become clear that Aristotelean logic and the construction of reality based on Newton's laws applies only to our every-day level of physical existence. As we move away from this, either towards the very small, where quantum theory appears to be the best explanation of reality, or towards the very large, where relativity theory appears to be the best explanation of reality, our common-sense and logical constructions (such as maintaining that a proposition and its opposite expression cannot both be true—Aristotle's Law of the Excluded Middle) become less and less “true”. Even Aristotle's laws of causality are called into question by 20<sup>th</sup> century science. The Newtonian construction of reality falls down and is replaced by a reality in which propositions and their opposites can both be true; in which a thing can be in two opposite states at once. If this is true in the realm of science as we move away

from the every-day physical world towards the very large and the very small in the physical world, I would maintain that it is also true as we move away from our everyday level of physical reality towards spiritual reality. Here too, as mystics have been saying for centuries, the laws of logic and our common-sense construction of reality break down. As Bahá'u'lláh writes in the Seven Valleys:

The story is told of a mystic knower, who went on a journey with a learned grammarian as his companion. They came to the shore of the Sea of Grandeur. The knower straightway flung himself into the waves, but the grammarian stood lost in his reasonings, which were as words that are written on water. The knower called out to him, "Why dost thou not follow?" The grammarian answered, "O Brother, I dare not advance. I must needs go back again." Then the knower cried, "Forget what thou didst read in the books of Sibavayh and Qawlavayh, of Ibn-i-Hajib and Ibn-i-Malik, and cross the water."

The death of self is needed here, not rhetoric:

Be nothing, then, and walk upon the waves.<sup>32</sup>

Kluge rejects the epistemological position of relativism that says "man, not the object of knowledge, determines what is true or false about what is perceived . . . Ontologically, it is man who determines whether something or some situation or state of affairs is or is not." (p. 189) But I would ask whether the following quotation from 'Abdu'l-Baha is not in fact an expression in relation to God of the position that Kluge has rejected: "All the people have formed a god in the world of thought, and that form of their imagination they worship."<sup>33</sup> As I have commented above, 'Abdu'l-Baha does not exclude Bahá'ís from this. "All the people", he says, determine for themselves what they consider to be "true or false".

Again Kluge rejects the relativist position that “you and I have different truths simply because we are different individuals with different points of view.” (p. 190) But I would ask: is this not the clear implication of ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s exposition of the Islamic Tradition “I was a Hidden Treasure...”. In this exposition, ‘Abdu’l-Baha explains that human beings do see reality differently because the various names and attributes of God are manifested in each individual to different degrees:

For the world of humanity is the world of the perfection of the words. Thus it is that it has been said: “God created Adam in His image”; that is to say in the form of His Names and Attributes. However although he is the dawning-place of the manifestation of all the Names and Attributes, one of the Divine Names is manifested most strongly and appears most intensely [in each person]. Thus his being originates from this Name and returns to it. The summary of the matter is that some of the saints of God, since they have seen the rays of the light of the Eternal Beauty with the eye of perpetuity in the heights of transcendence [*tanziḥ*] and the heaven of sanctity [*taqdis*] praise and sanctify the Essence of Absolute Unity above all of the stages [*shu’unat*] that pertain to the world. For in the being of these heavenly figures, the Names of “Sanctity” and “Transcendence” have shone forth. And some of the knowers of the Hidden Secrets are the manifestations of the names “Divinity” and “Lordship”. Thus it is that in this station, they do not see the Lord of Lords without His subject creatures, nor the Creator without a Creation, nor the All-Knowing without an object of knowledge.

And some of those who know the secrets of Primal Unity, although in their reality and innermost being one of the Divine Names is strongest yet in their being a reflection

exists and a light is apparent of every Name of the Absolute and every Attribute of the Self-Sufficient One. For these, in the station of absolute transcendence and complete sanctity whereof it is said: "There was God and there was nothing besides Him", see that Essence of Primal Unity as being pre-existent in both Essence and Attributes, free from the existence of objects of knowledge and from the realities of existent beings. In this station, they consider all except God to be absolute non-existence and complete nothingness. Thus it is that, in this station, they regard realities, existent beings and contingent beings as originated and do not consider anything as pre-existent except the Essence of the Absolute. In another station which is the station of the manifestation of the Name "All-Knowing" and the Names of "Divinity" and "Lordship", the realities of things are considered to be pre-existent and knowledge dependent on objects of knowledge.<sup>34</sup>

Thus each individual sees reality differently in accordance with how strongly each of the names of God is manifested within him or her. For human beings, there is no Archimedean point for seeing reality correctly in any absolute way. All that is available are the individual understandings that each human being has. These understandings should of course be based on our reading of the scriptures but ultimately even our understanding of what we read is shaped by the factors which 'Abdu'l-Baha describes as the relative balance of the expression of the different Names of God in each individual.

Some in whom "the Names of 'Sanctity' and 'Transcendence' have shone forth" are more inclined to separate God from His creation, to separate truth from error; theirs is an analytic mind that seeks to separate and define precisely, a mind that does not tolerate ambiguity and contradiction. They favour reductive, empiricist, determinist or positivist approaches to constructing reality. This

frame of mind is favoured in the world of Newtonian science and Aristotlean philosophy.

Others whom 'Abdu'l-Baha describes as "the manifestations of the names 'Divinity' and 'Lordship'" are more inclined to see God in relation to His creation; they look to truths that encompass all positions and are more comfortable with ambiguity and contradictions, considering these to be an inherent, inescapable part of the human condition. They prize inclusiveness and synthetic, integrative or holistic constructions of reality. This frame of mind is favoured among mystics and many modern scientists.

Since this relative balance in the expression of the different Names of God in each individual affects how we see reality, it will also affect how we assess and determine what proofs and what evidence we accept in this debate. Those in whom 'Abdu'l-Baha says "the Names of 'Sanctity' and 'Transcendence' have shone forth" will be more strongly inclined to accept logical proofs and rational argumentation. Others whom 'Abdu'l-Baha says are "the manifestations of the names 'Divinity' and 'Lordship'" will prize argumentation that is holistic and inclusive. Thus the fact that Kluge sees Absolute Reality in a dualist form and I see it in a relativist mode indicates nothing at all about the Absolute Reality but does indicate something about the difference in our two psyches. Perhaps this then is the "knowledge" of our "own selves" that Bahá'u'lláh is referring to in his statement:

Far, far from Thy glory be what mortal man can affirm of Thee, or attribute unto Thee, or the praise with which he can glorify Thee! Whatever duty Thou hast prescribed unto Thy servants of extolling to the utmost Thy majesty and glory is but a token of Thy grace unto them, that they may be enabled to ascend unto the station conferred upon their own inmost being, the station of the knowledge of their own selves.<sup>35</sup>

#### 4: The Relativism of the Debate

Finally, I would like to make a more general point about what is going on in this debate, a point that is in many ways much more important than any specific detailed comments. If we look at Kluge's response we find the following points within it:

It is philosophical, and deals with truth as defined within a particular sphere of philosophy that favours logical, analytical argument. It has not responded to any of the quotations that I have given in my argument.

Similarly, if you examine my line of argument you will find that:

It is based on scripture and is principally theological in its argument. It deals with truth in a holistic and synthetic manner. Kluge will no doubt think that it has not dealt adequately with the specifically philosophical points in his argument.

What we have here then are two different conceptual worlds each perfectly self-consistent and understandable within itself but coming to different conclusions, using different criteria for what will count as evidence and what will count as decisive proof. In other worlds we have two universes of discourse, two paradigms, two realities or, to use a phrase from the philosopher Wittgenstein, two different language games.

Each universe of discourse is complete within itself and each seems consistent with reality and with the Bahá'í scriptures as long as one remains within it. While reading Kluge's paper all of his arguments are perfectly consistent and convincing. I would hope that the reader finds that my arguments are also consistent and convincing.



This picture that I have drawn of what his happening in the debate between myself and Kluge is in a way a much more powerful argument for the truth of the position of relativism than any of the detailed arguments I have made above. It demonstrates the reality of the human position. We are all trapped inside realities that we human beings have created communally, in this case, one a reality created within the world of philosophy and another created within a more theological setting. Although these realities are created by us, we lose sight of this fact and think of them as reality itself. We think that this is how things actually are whereas in fact they are just the reality that we have constructed. As long as we remain within one reality, the picture that it draws is consistent and believable. We, as human beings, have no way of standing outside of these constructions of reality and judging what is absolute truth. We only have access to our visions of truth that are limited and contingent.

## Conclusion

In brief then, the position that I think is closest to what the Bahá'í scriptures say is one that is built up along the following lines:

1. Human beings because of the limited nature of their minds can have no knowledge of the Absolute Reality, God (no "Archimedean point" for understanding). The most we can say is an affirmation of belief that He/She/It exists. This inability of human minds to have knowledge of God extends to the rest of the metaphysical realm, since Bahá'ú'lláh asserts that we cannot even have knowledge of that aspect of the metaphysical realm that is closest to us, our own souls.
2. All that human beings have knowledge of are the Names and Attributes of God.

3. These Names and Attributes are most perfectly manifested in the Manifestations of God, the founders of the world religions, They are humanity's point of contact with the Absolute. They have a privileged, Archimedean standpoint, Therefore it is to the person and writings of these Manifestations that we must turn to obtain the best knowledge.
4. But we, as human beings are two stages away from being able to understand that Archimedean point. The first stage of remove is that, although the Manifestation has access to the Absolute Truth, He is limited in what He can bring to us of Absolute Reality. He is confined by the limitations of human understanding, of human language and of the stage of development that humanity has reached. Thus although in theory, He could bring us Absolute Truth, in practice he only brings us a truth that is compatible with and relative to human limitations and our stage of development. And so although He is able to make pronouncements that are normative for all of humankind, these are not statements of Absolute Truth but statements that are what we are able to understand of that truth at our stage of development.
5. The second stage of remove from Absolute Truth is that we, as human beings have no direct access to the mind of the Manifestation; we can only study the scriptures that the Manifestation brings and form our own understandings of God and of the spiritual world. But these understandings will be shaped by the limitations imposed upon us by our individual cultural and educational background and our own personal life history. They will be limited, partial or relative truths. Others from a different culture and life history will understand what they read in the same scriptures differently and will form their own understandings

of God, His attributes and of the spiritual world. The teachings of the Manifestation do give certain social and moral teachings and laws. Humanity must act on these as though they are absolutes until the coming of a future Manifestation of God, but in fact even these are relative truths and a future Manifestation may change these in ways that we cannot anticipate. Only a Manifestation of God, however, has the authority to change these social and moral laws and teachings or to interpret them in anything other than their obvious sense.

I would maintain that the pathway taken by Kluge is the one that Western thought has always traditionally taken and which necessarily results in one approach being triumphant over all other approaches. In this line of thought, there can only be one correct exposition of truth and only one understanding of reality. One result of this approach historically has been the neo-colonialism that seeks to impose one conceptual world (that of the West that is based on these philosophical concepts) on the rest of the world. The approach that I am suggesting in this paper enables Bahá'ís to explore the truths within the Bahá'í Faith from many different perspectives without prejudging what is the correct understanding of the Bahá'í scriptures. Humanity has a rich history of spiritual traditions stretching back thousands of years. Over time, these traditions have developed different ways of looking at the world. The approach that I am putting forward here enables Bahá'ís to explore this rich spiritual history and see what light these different approaches throw on the Bahá'í scriptures and what is in them about God and the spiritual world (the realm of metaphysics). The Bahá'í scriptures are full of gems but, I would maintain, that we will not succeed in discovering all of those gems if we restrict ourselves to looking with just the conceptual world of the Western philosophical tradition. We need to harness all of the world's spiritual and philosophical traditions if we are to succeed in finding all of these gems.

NOTES

- 1 In M. Momen (ed.), *Studies in Honor of the Late Hasan M. Balyuzi*, (Studies in the Bábí and Bahá'í religions, vol. 5, Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1988), pp. 185–217
- 2 In M. Momen (ed.) *The Bahá'í Faith and World's Religions* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2003) 1–38
- 3 Paul Lample, *Revelation and Social Action* (West Palm Beach, FL: Palabra, 2009), pp. 170–74. In this book, Lample broadly support the concept of cognitive relativism for metaphysics, pp. 177–8.
- 4 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978), pp. 53–4. Cf older translation at 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Japan Will Turn Ablaze* (Japan: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), p. 15 and *Bahá'í World Faith* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2nd ed. 1976), pp. 381–2.
- 5 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978), p. 54. An alternative translation of this passage may be found in 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Japan Will Turn Ablaze*, p. 15–16 and *Bahá'í World Faith* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2nd ed. 1976), pp. 381–2.
- 6 “Verily I say, in this most mighty Revelation, all the Dispensations of the past have attained their highest, their final consummation.” *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983), no. 161, p. 340.
- 7 See Momen, *Understanding Religion* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), p. 41
- 8 Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i Íqán* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1989), p. 141
- 9 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Some Answered Questions* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981), p. 148; see also *Some Answered Questions*, p.221, and Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, no. 1, pp. 3–4
- 10 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, no. 1, pp. 4-5
- 11 Provisional translation by the present author. The original text for these translated passages can found in *Alváh-i Mubarakih Hadrat Bahá'u'lláh: Iqtidárát wa chand lawh digár* (reprint of Bombay 1310 AH./1892-3, no place of publication: no publisher, no date), pp. 108–9

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- 12 See Translation of two passages from the writings of Baha'u'llah in Lambden, *Sinaitic Mysteries: Notes on Moses/Sinai Motifs in Bábí and Bahá'í Scripture* in M. Momen (ed.), *Studies in Honor of the Late Hasan M. Balyuzi*, (Studies in the Bábí and Bahá'í religions, vol. 5, Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1988, pp. 65–183), p. 157–8.
- 13 Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1955) p. 104
- 14 See for example Súriy-i Haykal, para 133, in *Summons of the Lord of Hosts* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 2002), p. 68
- 15 Súriy-i Haykal, para 112, 113, in *Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, p. 59.
- 16 Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, pp. 177-8
- 17 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 149. There is also 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement: 'no one hath any access to the Invisible Essence. The way is barred and the road is impassable. In this world all men must turn their faces toward "Him-whom God-shall-Manifest." He is the "Dawning-place of Divinity" and the "Manifestation of Deity." He is the "Ultimate Goal," the "Adored One" of all and the "Worshipped One" of all. Otherwise, whatever flashes through the mind is not that Essence of essences and the Reality of realities; nay, rather it is pure imagination woven by man and is surrounded, not the surrounding. Consequently, it returns finally to the realm of suppositions and conjectures.' (*Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas*, vol. 3, New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1930, p. 485)
- 18 *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, no. 24, p. 59.
- 19 Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1987), no. 176, pp. 271-2
- 20 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 54. An alternative translation of this passage may be found in 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Japan Will Turn Ablaze*, pp. 15–16 and *Bahá'í World Faith*, pp. 381–2.
- 21 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 290, 295–6
- 22 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Makátíb-i 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, (vols. 1–3 Cairo, 1910–22), vol. 3, p. 356
- 23 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Makátíb*, vol. 2, p. 141
- 24 Provisional translation by the present author. The original text for these translated passages can be found in *Alváb-i Mubarakih Hadrat Bahá'u'lláh: Iqtidárát wa chand lawh digár*, pp. 108–9

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- 25 See 'Abdu'l-Baha's discussion of reincarnation in *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 282–89.
- 26 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, no. 83, pp. 165–6 (italics added).
- 27 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, no. 1, pp. 3–5; cf. No. 19, pp. 46–7 (italics added).
- 28 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, no. 148, pp. 317–8 (italics added).
- 29 I have preferred to use an older translation at 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Japan Will Turn Ablaze* (Japan: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), p. 15 and *Bahá'í World Faith* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2nd ed. 1976), pp. 381–2, rather than the more recent translation at 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978), pp. 53–4, because the older translation better conveys the sense that the opening phrase (*in khalq jamí'an*) refers to all people. The more recent translation reads: "This people, all of them, have pictured a god in the realm of the mind, and worship that image which they have made for themselves... Consider then, how all the peoples of the world are bowing the knee to a fancy of their own contriving, how they have created a creator within their own minds, and they call it the Fashioner of all that is—whereas in truth it is but an illusion. Thus are the people worshipping only an error of perception."
- 30 On this work of 'Abdu'l-Baha, see Moojan Momen, "'Abdu'l-Baha's Commentary on the Islamic Tradition: 'I Was A Hidden Treasure ...'(A Provisional Translation)," *Bulletin of Bahá'í Studies*, vol. 3, no. 4 (Dec. 1985), pp. 4–64; also available at <http://www.northhill.demon.co.uk/relstud/kkm.htm>
- 31 For an analysis of a Bahá'í or rather Babi, text from this viewpoint, see Vahid Brown, *Textual Resurrection: Book, Imam and Cosmos in the Qur'an Commentary of the Bab*, *Bahá'í Studies Review*, vol. 12 (2005) 59–73
- 32 Bahá'u'lláh, *Seven Valleys and Four Valleys* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991), pp. 51-2
- 33 *Bahá'í World Faith*, p. 381.
- 34 See note 30
- 35 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, no. 1, pp. 4–5

# APPENDICES

## Abbreviations Used in this Book

DGE	Hans Küng. <i>Declaration Towards a Global Ethic</i>
ESW	Bahá'u'lláh. <i>Epistle to the Son of the Wolf</i>
FWU	`Abdu'l-Bahá. <i>Foundations of World Unity</i>
GPB	Shoghi Effendi. <i>God Passes By</i>
GWB	Bahá'u'lláh. <i>Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh</i>
HW	Bahá'u'lláh. <i>Hidden Words</i>
KA	Bahá'u'lláh. <i>Kitáb-i-Aqdas</i>
KI	Bahá'u'lláh. <i>Kitáb-i-Íqán</i>
LQ	Bahá'u'lláh. <i>Lawḥ-i qiná'</i>
PB	Bahá'u'lláh. <i>The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh</i>
PBA	Compilation, <i>Principles of Bahá'í Administration</i>
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SWB	Báb, The. <i>Selections from the Writings of the Báb</i>
TAB	`Abdu'l-Bahá. <i>Tablets of Abdul-Bahá Abbas, volumes 1–3</i>
TB	Bahá'u'lláh. <i>Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas</i>
WOB	Shoghi Effendi. <i>World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters</i>

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## Abbreviations Used in this Book

DGE	Hans Küng. <i>Declaration Towards a Global Ethic</i>
ESW	Bahá'u'lláh. <i>Epistle to the Son of the Wolf</i>
FWU	`Abdu'l-Bahá. <i>Foundations of World Unity</i>
GPB	Shoghi Effendi. <i>God Passes By</i>
GWB	Bahá'u'lláh. <i>Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh</i>
HW	Bahá'u'lláh. <i>Hidden Words</i>
KA	Bahá'u'lláh. <i>Kitáb-i-Aqdas</i>
KI	Bahá'u'lláh. <i>Kitáb-i-Íqán</i>
LQ	Bahá'u'lláh. <i>Lawḥ-i qiná'</i>
PB	Bahá'u'lláh. <i>The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh</i>
PBA	Compilation, <i>Principles of Bahá'í Administration</i>
Q	<i>Qur'án</i>
SAQ	`Abdu'l-Bahá. <i>Some Answered Questions</i>
SLH	Bahá'u'lláh. <i>Summons of the Lord of Hosts</i>
SV	Bahá'u'lláh. <i>Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys</i>
SWAB	`Abdu'l-Bahá. <i>Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá</i>
SWB	Báb, The. <i>Selections from the Writings of the Báb</i>
TAB	`Abdu'l-Bahá. <i>Tablets of Abdul-Bahá Abbas, volumes 1–3</i>
TB	Bahá'u'lláh. <i>Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas</i>
WOB	Shoghi Effendi. <i>World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters</i>

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See a complete list of abbreviations at <http://bahai-library.com/?file=abbreviations>

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