

## EPISTEMOLOGY

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### *THE CRITERIA OF KNOWLEDGE: BEYOND INSPIRATION*

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‘Abdu’l-Bahá specifies four criteria of human knowledge: sense perception, intellect, tradition or Scripture and inspiration.<sup>1</sup> He explained this concept in two of the talks he delivered in the United States, specifically in Hotel Ansonia on 17 April 1912<sup>2</sup> and at the Green Acre Bahá'í School on 16 August 1912,<sup>3</sup> as well as in a talk he delivered on the occasion of his second visit to Europe, in 1913.<sup>4</sup> He also explained the same concept in one of his table-talks with Mrs. Laura Clifford Barney<sup>5</sup> (1879-1974), an early American Bahá'í. He said in this talk:

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1. See “Tablet to Dr Auguste Henri Forel,” in *The Bahá'í World*, vol.15, 1968–1973 (Haifa: The Universal House of Justice, 1976) 37-43; ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, trans. Laura Clifford-Barney (Wilmette, IL: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1957), pp. 297-99, sec. 83; Persian edition: *An Núr al-Abhá fi Mufávadát-i ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Table Talks*, collected by Laura Clifford Barney (New Delhi: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1983), pp. 207-08, hereafter *Mufávadár; The Promulgation of Universal Peace. Talks delivered by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá during His visit to the United States and Canada in 1912*, comp. Howard MacNutt (Wilmette, IL: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1982), pp. 20-22, 253-55, 355-57, hereafter *Promulgation*; ‘Abdu’l-Bahá *on Divine Philosophy* (Boston: Tudor Press, 1918), pp. 88-90 (hereafter *Divine Philosophy*). See also Udo Schaefer, *Bahá'í Ethics in Light of Scripture. An Introduction. Volume I. Doctrinal Fundamentals*, trans. from the German by Dr. Geraldine Schuckelt (Oxford: George Ronald, 2007), p. 273, Julio Savi, “Methods and Qualities of the Seeker of Reality,” *Lights of ‘Irfán*, vol. 10 (Papers presented at the ‘Irfán Colloquia and Seminars. Evanston, IL: Haj Mehdi Arjmand Memorial Fund, 2009), pp. 311-25, hereafter “Methods,” and Peter Terry, “Bahá'í Epistemology,” ([http://bahai-library.com/pdf/t/terry\\_abdulbaha\\_epistemology.pdf](http://bahai-library.com/pdf/t/terry_abdulbaha_epistemology.pdf), retrieved on 19 Oct. 2013).

2. *Promulgation*, pp. 20-22.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 252-55.

4. *Divine Philosophy* 88-90.

5. She is also known as Laura Dreyfus Barney.

There are only four accepted methods (*mízá*n) of comprehension – that is to say, the realities of things are understood by these four methods.<sup>6</sup>

Similar words are written in one of his Arabic Tablets,<sup>7</sup> sometimes entitled *Lawḥ-i-Fu'ad* (Tablet of the Inmost Heart), provisionally translated into English by Steven Phelps and William McCants in March 2000: “. . . know that all the peoples and kindreds possess four balances with which they weigh the realities, the significances, and the divine questions.”<sup>8</sup>

This list of criteria of knowledge is reminiscent of the following words ascribed to the Greek philosopher Plotinus (203-269/270 CE), the founder of Neoplatonism, by Robert Alfred Vaughan (1823-1857), Protestant minister and writer, in his book *Hours with the mystics; a contribution to the history of religious opinion* published in 1860<sup>9</sup>: “Knowledge has three degrees: opinion, science, illumination. The means or instrument of the first is sense; of the second dialectic; of the third, intuition.”<sup>10</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Bahá examines each of these four criteria and concludes that all of them are limited in their possibilities and fallible in their results. For example, he said: “Briefly, the point is that in the human material world of phenomena these four are the only existing criteria or avenues of knowledge, and all of them are faulty and unreliable.”<sup>11</sup>

The same concept is explained in his Tablet of the Inmost Heart:

. . . know that all the peoples and kindreds possess four balances with which they weigh the realities, the significances, and the divine questions. All of them are imperfect, unable to quench the burning thirst or heal the sick. We shall therefore make mention of each one and demonstrate its limitation and inaccuracy.<sup>12</sup>

In this paper we will only examine one of these four criteria of knowledge mentioned by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, inspiration.

6. *Some Answered Questions* (trans. 296, sec. 83; *Mufávaḍát* 207).

7. Letters or short writings.

8. *Makátíb-i-Ḥaḍrat-i-‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, vol. 1. (Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Iran, n.d.), p. 109, hereafter *Lawḥ-i-Fu'ad*; English provisional translation: [http://bahai-library.com/pdf/t/terry\\_abdulbaha\\_epistemology.pdf](http://bahai-library.com/pdf/t/terry_abdulbaha_epistemology.pdf), retrieved on 19 October 2013.

9. Its third edition, 1893, may be found at <http://archive.org/stream/hourswithmystics1893vaug#page/n35/mode/2up>, retrieved on 19 Oct. 2013.

10. Plotinus, “Letter to Flaccus,” [www.plotinus.com/who\\_was\\_plotinus.htm](http://www.plotinus.com/who_was_plotinus.htm), retrieved on 15 Oct. 2013.

11. *Promulgation* 22.

12. *Lawḥ-i-Fu'ad* 109.

### Inspiration<sup>13</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Bahá describes inspiration (*ilhám*) as “the suggestions of the heart (*khutúrátin qalbiyyatin*),”<sup>14</sup> “the influxes of the heart (*wáridátu’l-qalbíyyan*),”<sup>15</sup> “the influx of the human heart,”<sup>16</sup> “the promptings or susceptibilities of the human heart.”<sup>17</sup> The meanings of these definitions may be more easily understood, in the light of the meanings of the words *qalb*, *khutúrát* and *wáridát* in Islamic literature. The Italian Islamicist Alessandro Bausani (1921-1988) remarks in this regard that the Persian word *dil* (corresponding to the Arabic *qalb*) is “generally translated as ‘heart,’ but ‘brain’ or ‘intuition’ would be better.”<sup>18</sup> As to the definition “the suggestions of the heart (*khutúrátin qalbiyyatin*),” it could mean the “‘incoming thoughts (*khawāṭir*)’<sup>19</sup> which reach the heart,” mentioned by the Andalusian philosopher Muḥiyi’-d-Dín Ibn al-‘Arabí (1165-1240), sometimes considered the greatest Sufi philosopher.<sup>20</sup> And as to the definition “the influxes of the heart (*wáridátu’l-qalbíyyan*),” it could mean an “‘inrush (*wárid*) . . . which arrived at the heart without self-exertion,”<sup>21</sup> mentioned by the same philosopher.

In his explanation of inspiration (*ilhám*) as the fourth criterion of knowledge, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá mentions the categories of people that usually uphold it. He said: “There is still another, a fourth criterion, upheld by religionists and metaphysicians who say that the source and channel of all human penetration into the unknown is through inspiration.”<sup>22</sup>

He said moreover:

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13. See ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Baha*, trans. Marzieh Gail (Haifa: Baha’i World Centre, 1978), pp. 37-38, sec. 18; *Some Answered Questions* 157, sec. 40, para. 4; *Paris Talks: Addresses Given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in 1911*. (London: Bahá’i Publishing Trust, 1995), pp. 83-84, sec. 28, para.14, 185-8, sec. 54, paras.1-19; *Divine Philosophy*, p. 122. See also Savi, “Methods,” pp. 316-21.

14. Lawḥ-i-Fu’ád 112.

15. *Makátib-i-Hadrat-i-‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, vol. 1 (Bahá’i Publishing Trust, Iran, n.d.) 153 and 397, hereafter *Makátib*.

16. *Promulgation*, p. 22.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 254.

18. Alessandro Bausani, *Religion in Iran*, trans. by J. M. Marchesi. New York: Bibliotheca Persica Press, 2000), p. 263.

19. *Khawāṭir* and *khutúrát* are two plural forms of *khāṭir*, “An opinion, or an idea, or object of thought, bestirring itself in the mind . . . a thing coming at random into the mind: or a cogitation which bestirs itself, or occurs, in the mind, with a view to the end, issue, or result, of a thing: [whence the phrase,] . . . *khatarátu ash-Sháyáṭin* the vain suggestions of the devil” (E. W. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* [London and Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1863–93]. CD-Rom edition published by Thesaurus Islamicus Foundation. Cairo: Tradigital, 2003), vol. 3, p. 401).

20. See William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-‘Arabí’s Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany, NY: State Univ. of New York Press, 1989), p. xiii, hereafter *Sufi Path*.

21. Chittick, *Sufi Path*, p. 266.

22. *Promulgation*, pp. 20-21.

The fourth standard is that of inspiration. In past centuries many philosophers have claimed illumination or revelation, prefacing their statements by the announcement that “this subject has been revealed through me” or “thus do I speak by inspiration.” Of this class were the philosophers of the Illuminati.<sup>23</sup>

In another circumstance, he explained: “Inspiration is the fourth criterion. Occultists say, “I have had a revelation. This truth has been revealed to me.” For them everything outside direct revelation is viewed with doubt.”<sup>24</sup>

And thus the categories of people who use inspiration as their preferred criterion of knowledge are, in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s words, “religionists and metaphysicians,” “the Illuminati,” whom he also calls “followers of the inner light,”<sup>25</sup> and “occultists.”

As to “religionists,” they could be those people whom the Islamic world calls “*ummat*.”<sup>26</sup> They are “the community of the believers . . . the mass of the believers.”<sup>27</sup>

As to “metaphysicians,” they could be philosophers who believe in God and deal with metaphysics intended as “something that deals with what is beyond the physical or the experiential,”<sup>28</sup> or “those informed with divine philosophy.”<sup>29</sup>

As to “the Illuminati,” they could be the *Ishráqiyyún*, who follow the philosophy of the Muslim mystic Shihábu’d-Dín Suhrawardí (1154-1191). Their school of thought holds

that the origin of philosophy is divine revelation and that this wisdom was handed down in ancient times to the Persians and the Greeks, creating two traditions that met again in Suhrawardí, who spoke explicitly of eternal wisdom or the perennial philosophy. This school believes that authentic philosophy must

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23. *Ibid.*, p. 254.

24. *Divine Philosophy*, pp. 93-94.

25. *Paris Talks*, p. 186, sec. 54, para. 2.

26. See ‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Selections*, p. 229, sec. 193, Persian text: *Muntakhabátí az Makátíb-i Ḥaḍrat-i ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* (Wilmette, IL: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1979), p. 222.

27. Marcello Perego, *Le parole del sufismo: Dizionario della spiritualità islamica* (Milan: Mimesis, 1998), p. 248.

28. Webster’s (1986), pp. 1420-21.

29. *Divine Philosophy*, p. 100. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains that divine philosophy studies and realizes “spiritual verities” (*Promulgation*, p. 138), “spiritual realities” (*ibid.*), “the mysteries of God . . . the wisdom of God, inner significances of the heavenly religions and foundation of the law” (*ibid.*), that is the “phenomena of the spirit” (*Promulgation*, p. 326). The Persian notes of the talk recorded in English in *Promulgation*, pp. 138-39 may be found in *Majmú’iy-i-Khaṭábát-i-Ḥaḍrat-i-‘Abdu’l-Bahá* (Langenhain: Bahá’í-Verlag, 1984), pp. 386-89, hereafter *Majmú’ih*.

combine the training of the mind with the purification of the heart and that all authentic knowledge is ultimately an illumination. The ishraqis always emphasized the unbreakable link between philosophy and spirituality and the salvific power of illuminative knowledge. They considered God to be the Light of lights and all degree of cosmic reality to be levels and grades of light.<sup>30</sup>

In other circumstances ‘Abdu’l-Bahá mentions the Illuminati as “the Society of the Friends, who gathered together for silent communion with the Almighty.”<sup>31</sup> Later he explained in a Tablet:

This Society was founded in the city of Hamadan six hundred years ago and has nothing to do with this [Bahá’í] movement. It is almost disbanded, but under different names and forms one may come across them in Persia. They were called the Society of Sokoutyoun, that is, the “Silent Ones.”<sup>32</sup>

As to “occultists,” occultism is “a belief in hidden or mysterious powers and the possibility of subjecting them to human control.”<sup>33</sup> He mentioned “occultists” in a talk delivered in Europe in 1913 and registered in *Divine Philosophy* 93. During his Western travels (1911-1913) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was in touch with members of the Theosophical Society. The initial objective of the Theosophical Society, officially formed in New York, in November 1875 by Helena Blavatsky (1831-1891) and others, was the “study and elucidation of Occultism, the Cabala etc.”<sup>34</sup> Therefore when he mentioned occultists, perhaps he also meant theosophists.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá takes into consideration the effectiveness of inspiration as a criterion of knowledge. He writes for example in his Tablet of the Inmost Heart:

And the whisperings (*wasáwis*) of Satan are also inclinations (*khuṭúráṭ*), which arrive successively upon the heart (*qalb*) by the agency of the soul (*nafs*). If there occureth to the heart a certain idea or question, how is it to be known whether it is an inspiration (*ilhámát*) of the All-Merciful or a whispering (*wasáwis*) of Satan?<sup>35</sup>

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30. “Ishraqi School,” Nov. 30, 2011, in *Islam Encyclopedia*, <http://islamweb.us/ishraqi-school.html>, retrieved on 15 Oct. 2013.

31. *Paris Talks*, p. 185, sec. 54, para. 1.

32. “A question answered. [From a Tablet of ‘Abdu’l-Baha to Ella G. Cooper, translated and mailed from Haifa, Syria, March 19, 1916],” *Star of the West* (The first Bahá’í magazine in the Western world, published from 1910 to 1935. Issues 1910 to 1924, RP 8 vols. (Oxford: George Ronald, 1978), vol. 8, no. 14 (23 Nov. 1917), p. 204.

33. Webster’s, p. 1560.

34. See <http://hpb.narod.ru/EarlyDaysTheosophyAPS.htm>, retrieved on 19 Oct. 2013.

35. Lawḥ-i-Fu’ád, p. 112.

He writes in another Tablet:

Verily, inspiration, as people understands it, consisteth of the insights (*wáridát*) of the heart and of the intimations (*khuṭúrátin*) and whispers (*wasavis*) of Satan. And when this occureth in the heart, how is it to be known whether it is a divine inspiration (*ilhámát*) or a whispering (*wasáwis*) of Satan?<sup>36</sup>

As to the whisperings of Satan, this locution has its origin in the Surih of Men, which says:

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. Say: I betake me for refuge to the Lord of Men, The King of men, The God of men, Against the mischief of the stealthily withdrawing whisperer (*al-waswási*), Who whispereth in man's breast – Against djinn and men. (114:1-6)

This critique of inspiration also is expounded in two of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's talks:

But what are satanic promptings, which afflict mankind? They are the influx of the heart also. How shall we differentiate between them? The question arises: How shall we know whether we are following inspiration from God or satanic promptings of the human soul?<sup>37</sup>

The promptings of the heart are sometimes satanic. How are we to differentiate them? How are we to tell whether a given statement is an inspiration and prompting of the heart through the merciful assistance or through the satanic agency?<sup>38</sup>

These words by 'Abdu'l-Bahá reflect a specific vision of human beings, which is summarized in his following words:

. . . the spirit of man (*ruḥ-i-insání*) has two aspects: one divine (*rahmaní*), one satanic (*shaytání*) – that is to say, it is capable of the utmost perfection, or it is capable of the utmost imperfection. If it acquires virtues, it is the most noble of the existing beings; and if it acquires vices, it becomes the most degraded existence.<sup>39</sup>

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36. *Makátíb*, p. 153.

37. *Promulgation*, p. 22.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 254.

39. *Some Answered Questions*, p. 144, sec. 36, para.4; *Mufávaḍát*, p. 102

. . . . . the evil spirit, Satan or whatever is interpreted as evil, refers to the lower nature in man. This baser nature is symbolized in various ways. In man there are two expressions: One is the expression of nature; the other, the expression of the spiritual realm.<sup>40</sup>

Satan . . . [is meant as] the natural inclinations of the lower nature. This lower nature in man is symbolized as Satan – the evil ego within us, not an evil personality outside.<sup>41</sup>

Moreover all these passages are reminiscent of the ancient wisdom of Sufi philosophers and poets. The French Islamicist Louis Gardet (1904-1986) writes that in Islamic thought the heart

is not only the faculty of knowing, it is also the seat of all moral impulses, both evil desires and instincts and the struggle to be free of them and attentive to divine teaching . . . Salvation comes only from the heart's purified knowledge in its dual and inseparable aspects, speculative and actual. Thus it is a complete education of the "heart" that spiritual teachers must constantly develop and enrich in themselves and their disciples.<sup>42</sup>

In this vein Ibn al-'Arabí distinguishes "the incoming thoughts' which reach the heart<sup>43</sup> into four categories: divine (*ilāhī*), spiritual (*rūhānī*), ego-centric (*nafsānī*) and satanic" (*shayṭānī*).<sup>44</sup> He also distinguishes "the influxes of the heart (*wāridātu'l-qalbīyyan*)"<sup>45</sup> into "four species . . . Lordly (*Rabbānī*), angelic (*Malākī*), arising from the soul [ego-centric] (*Nafsī*), satanic (*Shayṭānī*)."<sup>46</sup> Moreover Jalálu'd-Dín Rúmí (1207-1273), the greatest poet in the Persian language, writes: ". . . both (Satanic) suggestion (*vasvasih*) and Divine inspiration are intelligible, and yet there is a (great) difference (between them)."<sup>47</sup>

He is echoed by the great Sufi poet Shamsu'd-d-Dín Ḥáfīz (1315-1390): "In

40. *Promulgation*, pp. 294-95.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 286.

42. Louis Gardet, "Ḳalb. I. Mysticism," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (CD-ROM edition v. 10 (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 1999).

43. See "the suggestions of the heart (*khuṭūrātīn qalbiyyatīn*)" in Lawḥ-i-Fu'ád, p. 112.

44. Chittick, *Sufi Path*, p. xiii.

45. *Makātīb*, pp. 153 and 397.

46. Ibn al-'Arabí, quoted in Perego, *Parole del sufismo*, p. 255, s.v. Wāridāt.

47. Rúmí, *The Mathnawí of Jalálu'Ddín Rúmí, edited from the oldest manuscripts available: with critical notes, translation and commentary by Reynold A. Nicholson . . .*, vol. 3 (Warminster, Wiltshire: Trustees of the E.J.W. Gibb Memorial Series, 1926), p. 3490; Persian text: *Mathnavíy-i-Ma'naví*. Available at <http://rira.ir/rira/php/?page=view&mod=classicpoems&obj=book&id=50>, retrieved on 19 Oct. 2013.

love's path, Ahriman's [the Zoroastrian God of evil] temptations (*vasvasih*) are many: Sense keep; and to Surush's [the Zoroastrian angel of obedience] message the ear of the heart put."<sup>48</sup>

In one of his talks delivered in London in 1913 'Abdu'l-Bahá suggested meditation as a path towards divine inspiration. He remarks that there is in man a faculty which "frees man from the animal nature, discerns the reality of things, puts man in touch with God,"<sup>49</sup> independently of the deductive or inductive processes of his mind. Through it "man attains to eternal life . . . he receives the breath of the Holy Spirit."<sup>50</sup> It is "the faculty of meditation."<sup>51</sup> While explaining the nature of this faculty. He quotes the school of "the Illuminati or followers of the inner light."<sup>52</sup> He said about them: "Meditating, and turning their faces to the Source of Light, from that central Light the mysteries of the Kingdom were reflected in the hearts of these people. All the Divine problems were solved by this power of illumination."<sup>53</sup>

Most people think that such a faculty can only be used in the mystic field. Yet it is well known that several great scientists have initially discovered physical laws through this "faculty of meditation" rather than reasoning and deduction: Newton, with his famous apple; Galileo, with the well-known episode of the swinging chandelier in the Cathedral of Pisa. The Bahá'í writings urge us to train ourselves in the use of divine inspiration by a daily practice of meditation and to use it in our endeavours to understand both physical and spiritual reality, for meditation – like a mirror – faithfully reflects whatever is placed in front of it. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says in this regard:

The meditative faculty is akin to the mirror: if you put it before earthly objects it will reflect them. Therefore if the spirit of man is contemplating earthly subjects he will be informed of these. ¶But if you turn the mirror of your spirits heavenwards, the heavenly constellations and the rays of the Sun of Reality will be reflected in your hearts, and the virtues of the Kingdom<sup>54</sup> will be obtained.<sup>55</sup>

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48. *The Dīvān-i-Hāfīz*, trans. by H. Wilberforce Clarke (Bethesda, MD: Ibex Publishers, 1997), p. 744, n. 444, v. 6; Persian text: *The Divan of Hafiz* (Teheran: Aban Book Publication, 1387 [2008-2009]), p. 411, n. 398, v. 2.

49. *Paris Talks*, pp. 187-88, sec. 54, para. 14.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 187, sec. 54, para. 11.

51. *Ibid.*

52. *Ibid.*, p. 185, sec. 54, para. 2.

53. *Ibid.*

54 The concept of "Kingdom" is very similar to the concept of "kingdom of heaven" in Matthews.

55. *Paris Talks*, p. 188, sec. 54, paras.17-18. The locution "Sun of Reality" denotes the Holy Spirit.



‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains that among the prerequisites to obtain the benefits of meditation are purification and detachment. He writes in an above-mentioned Tablet:

. . . if thy mind become empty and pure from every mention and thought and thy heart attracted wholly to the Kingdom of God, forget all else besides God and come in communion with the Spirit of God, then the Holy Spirit will assist thee with a power which will enable thee to penetrate all things, and a Dazzling Spark which enlightens all sides, a Brilliant Flame in the zenith of the heavens, will teach thee that which thou dost not know of the facts of the universe and of the divine doctrine.<sup>56</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Bahá and, later on, Shoghi Effendi offered a number of suggestions for a better use of inspiration as a source of knowledge. Certainly, testing through the senses, the intellect and the Holy Scripture data received through inspiration and checking them against facts will help us to distinguish tinsel from gold. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote in this regard: “As to the difference between inspiration and imagination: inspiration is in conformity with the Divine Texts, but imaginations do not conform therewith.<sup>57</sup> And Shoghi Effendi said on the same issue: ”The inspiration received through meditation is of a nature that one cannot measure or determine . . . We cannot clearly distinguish between personal desire and guidance, but if the way opens, when we have sought guidance, then we may presume God is helping us.”<sup>58</sup>

He also said:

With regard to your question as to the value of intuition as a source of guidance for the individual; implicit faith in our intuitive powers is unwise, but through daily prayer and sustained effort one can discover, though not always and fully, God’s Will intuitively. Under no circumstances, however, can a person be absolutely certain that he is recognizing God’s Will, through the exercise of his intuition. It often happens that the latter results in completely misrepresenting the truth, and thus becomes a source of error rather than of guidance.<sup>59</sup>

And thus even the fourth criterion of knowledge, inspiration, is limited and fal-

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56. *Tablets*, pp. 706-07.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 195. In this case inspiration could be interpreted as divine inspiration and imagination as the whisperings of our ego.

58. On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 25 Jan. 1943, quoted in *Bahá’i Institutions. A Compilation* (New Delhi: Bahá’i Publishing Trust, 1973), p. 111, see also *ibid.*, pp. 111-12.

59. On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 29 Oct. 1938, quoted in *Bahá’i Institutions*, p. 109.

lible. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes very clearly: “all the peoples and kindreds possess four balances with which they weigh the realities, the significances, and the divine questions. All of them are imperfect, unable to quench the burning thirst or heal the sick.”<sup>60</sup>

And thus one could think that human beings have no possibility of knowing any kind of truth. However, at the end of his talk on “the four methods of acquiring knowledge” in *Some Answered Questions*, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states: “But the bounty (*fayḍ*) of the Holy Spirit (*ruḥu’l-quds*) gives the true method of comprehension which is infallible and indubitable. This is through the help of the Holy Spirit (*ruḥu’l-quds*) which comes to man, and this is the condition in which certainty can alone be attained.”<sup>61</sup>

The same statement is recorded in the talk he delivered in Hotel Ansonia on 17 April 1912:

Briefly, the point is that in the human material world of phenomena these four are the only existing criteria or avenues of knowledge, and all of them are faulty and unreliable. What then remains? How shall we attain the reality of knowledge? By the breaths and promptings of the Holy Spirit, which is light and knowledge itself.<sup>62</sup>

### **The inmost heart as the fifth criterion of knowledge**

‘Abdu’l-Bahá seems thus to suggest a fifth criterion of knowledge through which “certainty can alone be attained.”<sup>63</sup> He specifically mentions this criterion in two of his Tablets. In one of them, the above-mentioned Tablet of the Inmost Heart or Lawḥ-i-Fu’ád, he quotes a Koranic verse: “His heart falsified not what he saw.”<sup>64</sup> And he remarks that while explaining this verse he will unfold the details of the balances of discernment (*mawázini’l-idrāk*) that the people possess, and . . . explain and refute them, so that it will be evident and clearly proven that the divine balance (*al-mizani’l-ilāhī*) is the inmost heart (*fu’ád*), the fountain-head of guidance (*rashad*).<sup>65</sup>

Then he adds in the same Tablet:

. . . it is evident that all of [the] balances current among the people are defective and their conclusions are unreliable. Nay, they are confused dreams, doubts, and idle fancies that neither allay the sore athirst nor satisfy the seeker of knowledge (*‘irfān*). As for the true,

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60. Lawḥ-i-Fu’ád, p. 110.

61. *Some Answered Questions*, p. 296, sec. 83; *Mufāviḍāt*, p. 208.

62. *Promulgation*, p. 22.

63. *Some Answered Questions*, p. 296, sec. 83; *Mufāviḍāt*, p. 208.

64. Koran 53:11, Rodwell trans.

65. Lawḥ-i-Fu’ád, p. 110.

divine balance which never strayeth, and which ever apprehendeth the universal realities and the sublime inner meanings, it is the balance of the inmost heart (*mizánu 'l-fu 'ád*), of which God hath made mention in the blessed verse.<sup>66</sup>

The meaning of the criterion of the inmost heart (*mizánu 'l-fu 'ád*) will be better understood, if one remembers that in the Islamic world the inmost heart (*fu 'ád*) is the abode of the light of gnosis (*ma 'rifah*), which the ancient Sufi master Ḥakím al-Tirmidhí (820-932 CE circa) defines “a bounty which God gives to His servant.”<sup>67</sup> It is the repository of the vision of reality, “for the inner heart (*fu 'ád*) sees and the heart (*qalb*) knows.”<sup>68</sup> Al-Tirmidhí writes, “as long as the inner heart does not see, the heart cannot make use of its knowledge.”<sup>69</sup> Those whose hearts do not see “are veiled by their own selves from the subtleties of the truth because of their preoccupation with their own deeds.”<sup>70</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes that the inmost heart:

. . . is an effulgence (*tajallíyát*) of the brilliant lights of the Divine Outpouring (*al-fayḍu 'l-ilahí*), the secret of the All-Merciful, the manifestation of sincere faith, and the lordly sign. Verily it is an ancient Outpouring (*fayḍu qadím*), a manifest light and a mighty bounty. Should God favor with this gift one of His chosen ones, showering it upon one of His loved ones possessing certitude, verily he will draw nigh unto that station (*maqám*) of which ‘Alí (upon him be peace) hath spoken, “If the veil be lifted, I would not increase in certitude!”<sup>71</sup>

These concepts re-echo in the above quoted words recorded in *Some Answered Questions*:

But the bounty (*fayḍ*) of the Holy Spirit (*riḥu 'l-quḍs*) gives the true method of comprehension which is infallible and indubitable. This is

66. *Ibid.*, p. 112. The “blessed verse” is Koran 53:11, see above.

67. Nicholas Heere, “A Šūfī Psychological Treatise,” in *The Muslim World* (a quarterly journal dedicated to the promotion and dissemination of scholarly research on Islam and Muslim societies and on historical and current aspects of Christian-Muslim relations (Hartford, CT: Wiley-Blackwell publishing, 1911-), vol. 51, no.1 (Jan. 1961): 31.

68. Nicholas Heere, “A Šūfī Psychological Treatise,” in *The Muslim World*, no. 3 (July 1961): 163, hereafter Heere.

69. Heere, p. 166.

70. *Ibid.*

71. Lawḥ-i-Fu’ád, p. 113. As to the quotation in the quotation, see Abú Ja’far Ibn Šahráshúb (d. 1192), *Al-Manáqib al-‘Alí Talib*, I, 317. <http://thearrived.hashemstudios.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Al-Mutashabihat-Allegories-Volume-1.pdf>, retrieved on 19 Oct. 2013.

through the help of the Holy Spirit (*rúḥu'l-quds*) which comes to man, and this is the condition in which certainty can alone be attained.<sup>72</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Bahá also mentions this fifth criterion of truth in another Tablet.<sup>73</sup> After having written that the four common criteria of knowledge are limited and fallible, he writes: “Therefore only unveiling (*al-mukáshifát*) and contemplation (*ash-shuhúd*) remain. . . .” These two words are very well known in the Sufi world, but deserve an explanation in the Western world, which is not usually well versed in that tradition. The Italian essayist and expert in Sufism Paolo Urizzi explains in his Introduction to his translation of the treatise *Mahásin al-Majális*, translated into English by William Elliot and Adnan K. Abdulla as *The Attractions of Mystical Sessions*,<sup>74</sup> composed by the Sufi Andalusian philosopher Abú'l-Abbás Ibn al-‘Aríf (1088-1141) that according to a number of Sufis the seeker obtains “a direct and real knowledge” of the spiritual verities “by virtue of an intuitive unveiling (*kashf*)<sup>75</sup> or of a theophanic radiation (*tajallî*) in the moment in which the individual intellect is wholly absorbed in a contemplative state (*mushâhada*).”<sup>76</sup>

Therefore it seems that this fifth criterion implies two elements: on the one hand, a theophanic radiation (*tajallî* and *mukáshifa*), or divine illumination, on the other, a contemplative state (*shuhúd* or *mushâhada*). As to the theophanic irradiation (or divine illumination), it is reminiscent of the description of the fifth criterion of knowledge as “inmost heart” given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in his Tablet of the Inmost Heart: “an effulgence (*tajallíyât*) of the brilliant lights of the Divine Outpouring (*al-faiḍu'l-ilahî*) . . . an ancient outpouring (*fayḍu qadîm*), a manifest light (*núru mubínu*) and a mighty bounty.”<sup>77</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said in this regard:

But the human spirit, unless assisted by the spirit of faith (*rúḥ-i-ímání*), does not become acquainted with the divine secrets and the heavenly realities. It is like a mirror which, although clear, polished and brilliant, is still in need of light. Until a ray of the sun reflects upon it, it can-

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72. *Some Answered Questions*, p. 296, sec. 83; *Mufáviḍát*, p. 208.

73. See *Makátíb*, pp. 151-55.

74. England: Awebury, 1980.

75. The word *kashf* comes from the same root as the word *mukáshifát*.

76. Ibn al-‘aríf, *Sedute mistiche. Mahásin al majális* traduzione dall’arabo, con introduzione e note a cura di Paolo Urizzi (Giarre, Catania: L’Ottava Edizioni, 1995), p. 53). The word *mushâhada* comes from the same root, from which also *shuhúd* derives.

77. Lawḥ-i-Fu’ád, p. 113. As to the quotation in the quotation, see Abú Ja’far Ibn Shahráshúb (d. 1192), *Al-Manáqib al-‘Alí Talib*, I, 317. <http://thearrived.hashemstudios.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Al-Mutashabihat-Allegories-Volume-1.pdf>, retrieved on 19 Oct. 2013.

not discover the heavenly secrets.<sup>78</sup>

As to the spirit of faith, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains that:

. . . the spirit of faith (*rúh-i-ímání*) . . . comes from the breath of the Holy Spirit (*rúhu’l-quds*), and by the divine power it becomes the cause of eternal life. It is the power which makes the earthly man heavenly, and the imperfect man perfect. It makes the impure to be pure, the silent eloquent; it purifies and sanctifies those made captive by carnal desires; it makes the ignorant wise.<sup>79</sup>

Shoghi Effendi compares the spirit of faith to a seed planted in the heart of the seeker, when he comes to recognize the Manifestation of God.<sup>80</sup> He explains:

This seed must be watered by the outpourings of the Holy Spirit. These gifts of the spirit are received through prayer, meditation, study of the Holy Utterances and service to the Cause of God. The fact of the matter is that service in the Cause is like the plough which ploughs the physical soil when seeds are sown. It is necessary that the soil be ploughed up, so that it can be enriched, and thus cause a stronger growth of the seed. In exactly the same way the evolution of the spirit takes place through ploughing up the soil of the heart so that it is a constant reflection of the Holy Spirit. In this way the human spirit grows and develops by leaps and bounds.<sup>81</sup>

As to the contemplative state, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá seems to describe it in this passage:

I now assure thee, O servant of God, that, if thy mind become empty and pure from every mention and thought and thy heart attracted wholly to the Kingdom of God, forget all else besides God and come in communion with the Spirit of God, then the Holy Spirit will assist thee with a power which will enable thee to penetrate all things, and a Dazzling Spark which enlightens all sides, a Brilliant Flame in the zenith of the

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78. *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 208-09, sec. 55; *Mufávidát*, p. 148.

79. *Ibid.*, pp. 144-45; *Mufávidát*, p. 102.

80. The Manifestations of God are, according to the Bahá’í teachings, the Prophets-Founders of the revealed world religions: Hindu religions, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, the Bábí Faith and the Bahá’í Faith.

81. On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 6 Oct. 1954, quoted in *The Compilation of Compilations*. Prepared by the Research Department of The Universal House of Justice 1963–1990, vol. 2 (Inglewood, NSW, Australia: Bahá’í Publications Australia, 1991), pp. 24-25, sec. 1334.

heavens, will teach thee that which thou dost not know of the facts of the universe and of the divine doctrine.<sup>82</sup>

Finally 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes in another Tablet:

Nothing can demonstrate to a man that what happens in his heart is a divine inspiration, beside the Effusion of Merciful. It is demonstrated by the following passage: "And thou shalt surely guide into the right way" [Koran 42:52]. The intermediary is the Supreme Intermediary, and the niche of the light of guidance, and any inspiration is a ray emanating from this lodestar, which guides and enlightens [coming] from this Luminary.<sup>83</sup>

Similar words echo in another Tablet: "O thou maid-servant of God! The aim of the theosophists is to attain to Truth, but the Truth is unattainable except through the favor of the Holy Spirit. The light hath a center and if one desire to seek it otherwise but from the center, he can never attain to it."<sup>84</sup>

These words seem to imply that without the assistance of the Intermediary, that is the Manifestation of God, it is very difficult for a human being to be divinely inspired. They are reminiscent of Augustine of Hippo (354-530 AD), considered as one of the greatest Christian thinkers of all times, who in the 4th century AD set forth a very similar concept in his well-known doctrine of enlightenment: God is Light that enables man to know.

In another Tablet 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains how this fifth criterion of truth works:

A real, spiritual connection between the True One and the servant is a luminous bounty, which causeth an ecstatic (or divine) flame, passion and attraction. When this connection is secured (or realized) such an ecstasy and happiness become manifest in the heart that man doth fly away (with joy) and uttereth melody and song. Just as the soul bringeth the body in motion, so that spiritual bounty and real connection likewise moveth (or cheereth) the human soul.<sup>85</sup>

All these words are reminiscent of words ascribed to Plotinus by Vaughan:

You ask, how can we know the Infinite? I answer, not by reason. It is the office of reason to distinguish and define. The Infinite, therefore, cannot be ranked among its objects. You can only apprehend the Infinite by a

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82. *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas*, 3 vols. (New York: Bahá'í Publishing Society, 1909-1915), pp. 706-07, hereafter *Tablets*.

83. *Makátíb*, p. 398.

84. *Tablets*, p. 592.

85. *Ibid.*, p. 196.

faculty superior to reason, by entering into a state in which you are your finite self no longer – in which the divine essence is communicated to you. This is ecstasy [Cosmic Consciousness]. It is the liberation of your mind from its finite consciousness. Like only can apprehend like; when you thus cease to be finite, you become one with the Infinite. In the reduction of your soul to its simplest self, its divine essence, you realize this union – this identity.<sup>86</sup>

It does not seem that the fifth criterion of knowledge may be developed through a mere intellectual effort. Rather it seems that it is the result of a process of inner transformation, depending on the achievement of that which the Bahá'í texts conceive as spirituality. 'Abdu'l-Bahá said that spirituality is “the awakening of the conscious soul of man to perceive the reality of Divinity,” made possible “through the breathes of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>87</sup>

Knowledge is always a divine bounty. It becomes “certainty” on the one hand “through the help of the Holy Spirit which comes to man”<sup>88</sup> and bestows upon man the spirit of faith, on the other, through the effort exerted by the seeker who strives to acquire the capacity of recognizing this bounty out of his “love of reality.”<sup>89</sup> These concepts are summarized in the following passage of the Seven Valleys:

And if, confirmed by the Creator, the lover escapes from the claws of the eagle of love, he will enter the Valley of Knowledge and come out of doubt into certainty, and turn from the darkness of illusion to the guiding light of the fear of God. His inner eyes will open and he will privily converse with his Beloved; he will set ajar the gate of truth and piety, and shut the doors of vain imaginings.<sup>90</sup>

### **The intuitive knowledge of the Manifestations of God**

This fifth criterion of knowledge is reminiscent of the “intuitive” knowledge, or “knowledge of being . . . [which] is like the cognizance and consciousness that man has of himself,” and which “is not the outcome of effort and study. It is an existing thing; it is an absolute gift,” mentioned by 'Abdu'l-Bahá,<sup>91</sup> as typical of the Manifestations of God. 'Abdu'l-Bahá describes it as follows:

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86. Plotinus, “Letter to Flaccus,” [www.plotinus.com/who\\_was\\_plotinus.htm](http://www.plotinus.com/who_was_plotinus.htm), retrieved on 15 Oct. 2013.

87. *Promulgation*, p. 142. The Persian notes of this talk are recorded in *Majmú'ih*, p. 378.

88. *Some Answered Questions*, p. 296, sec. 83; *Mufávidát*, p. 208.

89. *Promulgation*, p. 49.

90. Baha'u'llah, *The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys*, trans. by Marzieh Gail in consultation with Ali-Kuli Khan (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991), p. 11, hereafter *Seven Valleys*.

91. *Some Answered Questions* p. 156, sec. 40, paras. 4 and 5.

But the universal divine mind, which is beyond nature, is the bounty of the Preexistent Power. This universal mind is divine; it embraces existing realities, and it receives the light of the mysteries of God. It is a conscious power, not a power of investigation and of research. The intellectual power of the world of nature is a power of investigation, and by its researches it discovers the realities of beings and the properties of existences; but the heavenly intellectual power, which is beyond nature, embraces things and is cognizant of things, knows them, understands them, is aware of mysteries, realities and divine significations, and is the discoverer of the concealed verities of the Kingdom. This divine intellectual power is the special attribute of the Holy Manifestations and the Dawning-places of prophethood; a ray of this light falls upon the mirrors of the hearts of the righteous, and a portion and a share of this power comes to them through the Holy Manifestations.<sup>92</sup>

This passage explains that “the universal divine mind” is “the special attribute of the Holy Manifestations and the Dawning-places of prophethood,” but does not exclude that human beings may have a limited share of it: “a ray of this light falls upon the mirrors of the hearts of the righteous, and a portion and a share of this power comes to them through the Holy Manifestations.” In the Manifestations of God this power is inborn and perfect. In human beings it is potential and limited and can be progressively and partially quickened through the divine confirmations and the efforts exerted by seekers, while struggling to acquire capacity and preparedness. As to the divine confirmations, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote that they are “the rain of the bounties of God . . . and the heat of the Sun of Reality.”<sup>93</sup> He explains that they “change a gnat into an eagle, a drop of water into rivers and seas, and an atom into lights and suns;”<sup>94</sup> make “the weak strong, the lowly mighty, the child grown, the infant mature and the small great;”<sup>95</sup> they “dilate . . . [human] breasts through the fragrances of joy and happiness;”<sup>96</sup> bestow “the utmost eloquence, fluency, ability and skill in teaching;”<sup>97</sup> give the power to “withstand all who inhabit the earth”<sup>98</sup> and to “quicken the souls.”<sup>99</sup> Through those confirmations “tongues . . . become fluent . . . hearts like clear mirrors flooded with the rays of the Sun of Truth . . . thoughts expanded . . . comprehension more vivid and . . .

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92. *Ibid.*, p. 217, sec. 58, para. 4.

93. *The Tablets of the Divine Plan: Revealed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to the North American Bahá’ís* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1997), p. 64, sec. 9, para. 8.

94. *Ibid.*, p. 73, sec. 10, para. 13.

95. *Tablets*, p. 274.

96. *Ibid.*, p. 367.

97. *Ibid.*, p. 243.

98. *Ibid.*, p. 460.

99. *Ibid.*, p. 674.



[human beings] progress in the plane of human perfections.”<sup>100</sup> As to capacity and preparedness, we are reminded of the following words by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

The Sun of Reality is shining upon you, the cloud of mercy is pouring down, and the breezes of providence are wafting through your souls. Although the bestowal is great and the grace is glorious, yet capacity and readiness are requisite. Without capacity and readiness the divine bounty will not become manifest and evident. No matter how much the cloud may rain, the sun may shine and the breezes blow, the soil that is sterile will give no growth . . . Therefore, we must develop capacity in order that the signs of the mercy of the Lord may be revealed in us. We must endeavor to free the soil of the hearts from useless weeds and sanctify it from the thorns of worthless thoughts in order that the cloud of mercy may bestow its power upon us. The doors of God are open, but we must be ready and fitted to enter . . . Unless the eyes of perception be opened, the lights of the sun will not be witnessed . . . Therefore, we must endeavor night and day to purify the hearts from every dross, sanctify the souls from every restriction and become free from the discords of the human world. Then the divine bestowals will become evident in their fullness and glory. If we do not strive and sanctify ourselves from the defects and evil qualities of human nature, we will not partake of the bestowals of God.<sup>101</sup>

### Final remarks

The fifth criterion of knowledge described by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá deserves a number of observations. First, it seems that in our days very few persons think that their inmost heart may be important in their search. And yet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains that “through the faculty of meditation man . . . receives the breath of the Holy Spirit – the bestowal of the Spirit is given in reflection and meditation.”<sup>102</sup> He explains that “You cannot apply the name ‘man’ to any being void of this faculty of meditation; without it he would be a mere animal, lower than the beasts.”<sup>103</sup> These words are reminiscent of the following warning by Bahá’u’lláh: “we must labor to destroy the animal condition, till the meaning of humanity shall come to light.”<sup>104</sup> May we deduct from these words that the inmost heart is especially developed in a spiritually progressed human being?

Second, it seems that the development of the inmost heart, as the fifth criterion of knowledge, is a gradual process related to the purification of the heart from the

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100. *Promulgation*, p. 458.

101. *Ibid.*, pp. 195-96.

102. *Paris Talks*, p. 187, sec. 54, para. 11.

103. *Ibid.*, para. 10.

104. *Seven Valleys*, p. 34.

“whispers (*wasáwis*) which are influxes of the ego (*khutúrátin nafsiyyatin*),”<sup>105</sup> or, metaphorically, of Satan intended as “the evil ego within us, not an evil personality outside.”<sup>106</sup> However, Shoghi Effendi remarks that:

The only people who are truly free of the “dross of self” are the Prophets, for to be free of one’s ego is a hall-mark of perfection. We humans are never going to become perfect, for perfection belongs to a realm we are not destined to enter. However, we must constantly mount higher, seek to be more perfect.<sup>107</sup>

And thus human beings are invited to strive towards “perfection,” even if they are aware that they will never reach it, in the awareness that this struggle will yield a rich harvest of personal and collective progress. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá may have mentioned this concept when he said:

The confirmations of the Spirit are all those powers and gifts which some are born with (and which men sometimes call genius), but for which others have to strive with infinite pains. They come to that man or woman who accepts his life with radiant acquiescence.<sup>108</sup>

Third, it seems that “unveiling (*al-mukáshifat*)” and “contemplation (*ash-shuhúd*),” resulting from the development of one’s inmost heart, may be sometimes accompanied by mystical experiences. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá mentions “ecstasy and happiness,” born of the “spiritual connection between the True One and the servant.”<sup>109</sup> Shoghi Effendi clarifies the nature and meaning of these kinds of experiences. He says that these experiences “are very rare,”<sup>110</sup> come “to an individual through the grace of God, and not through the exercise of any of the human faculties,”<sup>111</sup> and that “[i]t is very difficult to distinguish between true visions which are true spiritual experiences of the soul and imaginations which have no reality in spiritual truths.”<sup>112</sup> Therefore, as precious as such experiences may be

105. *Makátib*, p. 397.

106. *Promulgation*, p. 286.

107. On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 8 Jan. 1949, *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference File* Compiled by Helen Basset Hornby (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1996), p. 114, no. 389. Prophets may be intended as the Manifestations of God.

108. *‘Abdu’l-Bahá in London Addresses and notes of Conversations*. Rpt. (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), p. 120; see also *Divine Philosophy*, p. 22.

109. *Tablets*, p. 196, see above.

110. On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 25 Oct. 1942, *Bahá'í News* (A monthly news journal published by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States. Wilmette, IL: National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, 1924–), no. 152 (April 1942): 2.

111. On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 6 May 1952, quoted in *Bahá'í Institutions*, p. 114.

112. On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 26 Nov. 1939, *Bahá'í News*, no. 152 (April 1942): 2.

considered by the individual who had them, they “should under no circumstances, be construed as constituting an infallible source of guidance, even for the person experiencing them.”<sup>113</sup> He warns his addressees not to “place much importance on” them,<sup>114</sup> and not “to go groping about in the darkness of . . . [one’s] imagination after the true thing,”<sup>115</sup> since “[i]f we are going to have some deeply spiritual experience we can rest assured God will vouchsafe it to us without our having to look for it.”<sup>116</sup> He says: “[w]hen a person endeavors to develop faculties so that they might enjoy visions, dreams etc., actually what they are doing is weakening certain of their spiritual capacities; and thus under such circumstances, dreams and visions have no reality, and ultimately lead to the destruction of the character of the person’.”<sup>117</sup>

Therefore, “through the grace of God, and not through the exercise of any of the human faculties,”<sup>118</sup> a person may have meaningful personal mystical experiences, that is, “ecstasy and happiness,” born of the “spiritual connection between the True One and the servant,”<sup>119</sup> and “that mystic feeling which unites Man with God,”<sup>120</sup> which are quite different from the sorts of dreams, visions, and psychic experiences about which Shoghi Effendi said, as it was mentioned above, that they “should under no circumstances, be construed as constituting an infallible source of guidance, even for the person experiencing them.”<sup>121</sup> And the mystic search after holiness, enjoined upon each human being, is not intended as aiming to achieve these experiences, but to acquire virtues and spiritual powers, which may be used at the service of the cause of the commonweal of humankind. Likewise, unveiling and contemplation, seemingly the result of the development of one’s inmost heart, are not a goal we should consciously and willingly pursue. It seems that they will be the spontaneous fruit, which will gradually come to maturation, as the sincere seeker will earnestly struggle on the path of search. This search is not an abstract and intellectual effort, it is an ongoing attitude of service to the common good of humankind.

Fourth, it seems that today most people are interested in attaining a kind of limited knowledge, a kind of knowledge, which is achieved through sense perception, reason, and quite seldom inspiration. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s words sound as a call to pursue the path of inner perfection, trusting that it will assist us to develop the required capacities and preparedness so that our “inmost heart” may gradually become our fifth criterion of knowledge, and we may achieve “unveil-

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113. On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 1 Nov. 1940, *Bahá’í News*, no. 152 (April 1942): 2.

114. On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 9 April 1948, quoted in *Bahá’í Institutions*, p. 113.

115. On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 25 Oct. 1942, *Bahá’í News*, no. 152 (April 1942): 2.

116. On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 25 Oct. 1942, *Bahá’í News*, no. 152 (April 1942): 2.

117. On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 6 May 1952, quoted in *Bahá’í Institutions*, p. 114.

118. *Ibid.*

119. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets*, p. 196.

120. On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 8 Dec. 1935, *Bahá’í News*, no. 102 (Aug. 1936): 3.

121. On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 1 Nov. 1940, in *Bahá’í News*, no. 152 (April 1942): 2.

ing” and “contemplation.” In this case the range of our knowledge will be greatly widened; our interest will not be limited to the material world, but will be extended to the spiritual worlds. And this expansion is very important, because human beings are not only physical bodies, they also, and especially, are spirits. Therefore human beings should understand both worlds, if they want their lives on earth to be conducive to personal and collective progress. They should finally find a balance between science and religion. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said:

Religion and science are the two wings upon which man’s intelligence can soar into the heights, with which the human soul can progress. It is not possible to fly with one wing alone! Should a man try to fly with the wing of religion alone he would quickly fall into the quagmire of superstition, whilst on the other hand, with the wing of science alone he would also make no progress, but fall into the despairing slough of materialism.<sup>122</sup>

Perhaps a deeper awareness of this fifth criterion of truth and a wider use of it may be one of the features of the “new race of men”<sup>123</sup> that is gradually arising in this day of “the coming of age of the human race”<sup>124</sup> announced by Bahá’u’lláh.<sup>125</sup>

Last but not least, the development of the inmost heart depends on spiritual progress. Spiritual progress or spirituality, intended as “the awakening of the conscious soul of man to perceive the reality of Divinity,” made possible “through the breaths of the Holy Spirit,”<sup>126</sup> is characterized by a progressively deeper consciousness of one’s divine nature.<sup>127</sup> This deeper consciousness implies for our intellect and insight to become keener, embracing both the material and spiritual worlds. It also implies for our understanding of tradition or Scripture to become deeper, and immune from superstition, fanaticism and exclusivism. We will thus acquire a kind of knowledge that will make the heart fearful and mindful of its Creator, submitted to His will, as it is revealed in His Scripture. That knowledge is

122. *Paris Talks*, p. 147, sec. 44, para.15. The Persian notes of this talk are recorded in *Majmú’ih*, pp. 161-64.

123. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of the Divine Justice* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1984), p. 16.

124. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh: Selected Letters* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1955), p. 206.

125. See Julio Savi, “The newly born babe of that Day.” *Mysticism in the age of the maturity of humankind. Lights of ‘Irfán. Papers Presented at the ‘Irfán Colloquia and Seminars*. Book Seven (Evanston, IL: Haj Mehdi Arjmand Memorial Fund, 2006), pp. 201-20.

126. *Promulgation*, p. 142.

127. The divine nature of man is his power of expressing in the material plane of existence the divine attributes engraved in his soul. See Julio Savi, *The Eternal Quest for God. An Introduction to the Divine Philosophy of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1989), pp. 91-93, 96-9 etc.

the knowledge of God and of one's true self, that is, the recognition of the image of God engraved in one's soul. There is but one Teacher from whom such knowledge is to be learned and who manifests the primal reason, the divine, universal mind: the Manifestation of God. His school is the best one, because it teaches "the science of the love of God."<sup>128</sup> And when a human being has learnt that science, he will adopt a correct standard of behaviour. Life will be easier for him, because he will more easily accept the divine decrees and recognize tests as opportunities. Otherwise, intellectual knowledge alone, with the sense of accomplishment and superiority that it sometimes implies, can be a real trap for the heart that is deceived by it, a great test for a person and for those about him. Bahá'u'lláh dwells on the theme of knowledge at length in His writings, explaining how both intellectual and inner knowledge are praiseworthy, but that as far as results are concerned intellectual knowledge is subordinate in importance to spiritual knowledge. For example He writes:

That which is of paramount importance for the children, that which must precede all else, is to teach them the oneness of God and the laws of God. For lacking this, the fear of God cannot be inculcated, and lacking the fear of God an infinity of odious and abominable actions will spring up, and sentiments will be uttered that transgress all bounds. . . parents must exert every effort to rear their offspring to be religious, for should the children not attain this greatest of adornments, they will not obey their parents, which in a certain sense means that they will not obey God. Indeed, such children will show no consideration to anyone, and will do exactly as they please.<sup>129</sup>

As to the children:

We have directed that in the beginning they should be trained in the observances and laws of religion; and thereafter, in such branches of knowledge as are of benefit, and in commercial pursuits that are distinguished for integrity, and in deeds that will further the victory of God's Cause or will attract some outcome which will draw the believer closer to his Lord. We beg of God to assist the children of His loved ones and adorn them with wisdom, good conduct, integrity and righteousness. He, verily, is the Forgiving, the Clement.<sup>130</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Bahá commented on this theme:

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128. *Seven Valleys*, p. 52.

129. Bahá'u'lláh, quoted in *Compilation of Compilations* 1: 248, no. 565.

130. Bahá'u'lláh, quoted in *Compilation of Compilations* 1: 250-51, no. 575.

Training in morals and good conduct is far more important than book learning. . . . The reason for this is that the child who conducts himself well, even though he be ignorant, is of benefit to others, while an ill-natured, ill-behaved child is corrupted and harmful to others, even though he be learned. If, however, the child be trained to be both learned and good, the result is light upon light.<sup>131</sup>

In the light of such knowledge the satanic whispers will abate; the divine inspiration will be stronger and more easily recognized.

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131. *Selections*, pp. 135-36, sec.110.