

# 'Abdu'l-Bahá on Divine Philosophy

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Original English



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At the suggestion of 'Abdu'l-Bahá these notes on Divine Philosophy, together with a short introductory history, have been compiled and published by Isabel Fraser (Soraya) Chamberlain

### Introduction

Why this great unrest[pg 4] wars and the rumors of wars, changing of dynasties, earthquakes, cataclysms? The people cry "Peace, peace;" when there is no peace! Are not these the outer sign that man has lost the inner truth? Students in every land who have stepped out of the stream of humanity remind us of the holy books of history — all of which fortell the coming of a great Messiah or world teacher. Once again the wheel has turned and brought man face to face with truth. Truth is the handmaid of the prophet. Can there be a handmaid without the prophet?

A movement comes from the East which claims to be the divine instrument for bringing unity into the world. For this reason, if for no other, it deserves attention. Its claims are too[pg 5] vital and important to be overlooked. The wonderful lives of its founders command interest. The courageous lives of its followers and their uncompromising sacrifice for this cause form a chapter that has no parallel in history.



ORIGINAL

During the last century three great seers or supermen have appeared in Persia — the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

The Báb was born in Shíráz, in the month of October, 1819. At the age of twenty-four he heralded the advent of a universal teacher whom God would manifest, and through whom the unity of all nations would be established. The Báb (door or gate) effected a reformation of Islám, opening the way for a broader movement — for always with earnestness and zeal he cried of one who was to come after him to illumine not only Islám, but the whole world. The young reformer made his declaration in 1844 at Shíráz and afterward at Mecca, where one hundred thousand people had congregated.

His teachings met with instant opposition on the part of the orthodox religionists of the day. After two years he was imprisoned and held a prisoner until 1850 when he was shot in the public square of Tabríz.

But physical torture and death were ineffectual to stop the on sweep of the reformation inaugurated by the Báb. When, some years later, Bahá'u'lláh arose as the one who was expected, thousands accepted him and at once came under his banner. Bahá'u'lláh was not personally related to the Báb, nor had he ever seen him, though he became one of the first disciples of the Báb's teachings.

Dreadful persecution ensued and more than twenty thousand martyrs joyfully gave up property and life rather than renounce the faith which they recognized as divine truth. At such variance were his teachings with the creed-bound world about him that Bahá'u'lláh, with his family and followers, was banished to Baghdád, to Constantinople, to Adrianople and finally to the penal colony of 'Akká in Syria.

Few people of the western world were fortunate enough to see Bahá'u'lláh, who was born in Tíhrán November 12, 1817. One who had journeyed afar, and who was finally ushered into his presence, described him thus: "The face of him on whom I gazed I can never forget, though I cannot describe it. Those piercing eyes seemed to read one's very soul; power and authority sat

on that ample brow... No need to ask in whose presence I stood, as I bowed myself before one who is the object of a devotion and love which kings might envy and emperors sigh for in vain!"

One of his followers in describing his power declares: "His proclamation was made with the certainty of immediate knowledge and a divine understanding of the needs of humanity for 'this gloomy and disastrous age!' Brilliant, spontaneous, mighty — he was like a conscious sun bursting on a dark, dead world. Verily, in the future these rays will be used 'for the healing of the nations.'" [pg 7]

The prison officials of 'Akká ultimately granted him the liberty of the fortified city and he pitched his tent upon the Mount of Carmel in the land of Sharon, the very spot where, according to the ancient prophecies, the Glory of God would be manifested in the latter days. The name of Bahá'u'lláh means the Glory of God, Bahá — Glory, and Alláh — God.

It will be noted that the divine teachers of all ages in their efforts to direct man's attention to God have assumed a spiritual title symbolic of their teachings.

Bahá'u'lláh unsealed the holy books and revealed laws through which mankind can attain to a high state of spiritual civilization. These new laws will go into effect after the great readjustment, when wars, cataclysms, famine, labor troubles, etc., have done their work of equalization!

From the prison of 'Akká, Bahá'u'lláh issued proclamations to the crowned heads of Europe, and to the Pope, exhorting them to cease from their injustice and oppression and hasten to the tent of unity and consultation — that the reality of each matter might become disclosed. These epistles (copies of which are to be found in the British Museum) were dispatched by personal messengers, volunteers from his little band of exiles.

His commands, like a resonant call upraised from a land of oppression to the confused and sorrowful world — stern, irrefutable, immutable — stand out against the bloody background of Europe. Those who are following this call [pg 8] declare that the soundless voice will be heard throughout the ages, for they believe the words to be creative, and affirm that, notwithstanding this banishment and incarceration, Bahá'u'lláh has been able to impress

every nation on earth with a glory and universality of thought that promises the loosening of the shackles which have held mankind in the political, ecclesiastical and financial slavery of the times.

When a great force is liberated by the entrance of a divine being into the world arena, it must of necessity express itself through the vehicle of a human temple, and the objective expression of this force manifests itself in thoughts of different grades and degrees according to the capacity of the people. The master-teachers are the expounders of divine common sense which is the pathway to a knowledge of universal law, the result of which will be a harmonious humanity. Man confines his consciousness to this material plane. This new force will liberate him and he will become conscious of many planes and of the ultimate oneness of them all.

Tolstoi in one of his books says that we spend our lives attempting to unravel the mystery of life, but adds, "There is a Persian, a Turkish prisoner, who knows the secret." Tolstoi was one of those who was in communication with Bahá'u'lláh. With him he held that a life uncompromisingly sacrificed to the ideals is the life of the superman.

Bahá'u'lláh continually urges man to free[pg 9] himself from the superstitions and traditions of the past and become an investigator of reality, for it will then be seen that God has revealed his light many times in order to illumine mankind in the path of evolution, in various countries and through many different prophets, masters and sages.

Life must hold as its primary foundation the opportunity of a knowledge of the divine law. The great ones come, primarily, to remind man of this law which remains the same in all ages — immutable, unchangeable, eternal, and which deals with man attaining immortality. The mundane laws, these governing human conduct and regulating the Sabbath, divorce, capital punishment, etc., vary with each age according to the capacity of the people. "These diversities are established out of regard for the times, seasons, ages and epochs."

Before his ascension from the prison of 'Akká, in 1892, Bahá'u'lláh commanded his followers to look to his eldest son, 'Abbás Effendi, whose spiritual title is 'Abdu'l-Bahá (Servant of God), as the expounder of his teachings and the one through whom the new kingdom on earth would

eventually be established. The mantle of glory descended upon this beloved son in order that the divine decrees might be fulfilled. Bahá'u'lláh was the great lawgiver. 'Abdu'l-Bahá is the law establisher, as he was the first to live these laws. He was born in the city of Ṭíhrán, Persia, May 23, 1844.

A year after the departure of Bahá'u'lláh,[pg 10] mention was made of this cause at the Chicago World's Fair, in 1893, by Dr. Harvey Harris Jessup, President of the American College of Beirut, Syria, who sent a paper to be read before the congress of religions. This address was read during the afternoon session of the thirteenth day of the congress, September 23, 1893. Dr. Jessup closed his address thus: — "In the place of Bahjí, or Delight, just outside the fortress of 'Akká, on the Syrian Coast, there died, a few months since, a famous Persian sage named Bahá'u'lláh — the Glory of God.

"Three years ago he was visited by a Cambridge scholar to whom he uttered sentiments so noble, so Christ-like that we repeat them as our closing words — 'We desire but the good of the world and the happiness of the nations — that all nations should become one in faith and all men as brothers; that all bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men should be strengthened; that diversity of religion should cease and differences of race be annulled — and so it shall be; these fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away and the most great peace shall come. Is not this that which Christ foretold? Let not a man glory in this, that he loves his country; let him rather glory in this, that he loves his kind.'"

Interest was enkindled in America and as there was no English literature on the subject at that time, a party was formed to journey to the Syrian city to get information of Bahá'u'lláh at first[pg 11] hand from his son. They brought back graphic accounts from the prison philosopher. Meetings were held and a correspondence was begun with 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Soon from all parts of the world people journeyed to 'Akká. They wrote accounts of their visits and these, with the letters or tablets from 'Abdu'l-Bahá, were widely distributed. The city of 'Akká became a center of pilgrimage. Around the board of 'Abdu'l-Bahá gathered all races and creeds — it was the only place on earth where Christians, Moslems, Jews, Zoroastrians, Buddhists and Hindus met and ate together in perfect harmony and understanding.

The above are mere facts of history, but present history without the setting of the background of time has no perspective to our clay-laden eyes. We are ever looking for some miracle, some proof — for the Christ life as viewed from the outside seems so simple; yet could there be anything more dramatically miraculous than this: to establish peace in the hearts in the midst of a warring world? This kind of peace Bahá'u'lláh calls the “most great peace.” To establish this kingdom in the hearts — verily, it is the unrealized dream of the planet!

After his liberation, in 1908, at the earnest solicitation of friends, 'Abdu'l-Bahá made an extensive tour of Europe and America, bringing the message of the new creational day from shore to shore; speaking in churches of every denomination, in the synagogues, before many [pg 12] clubs, societies, universities and congresses. So swiftly has this cause spread that it has encircled the globe within a few years.

In America will be reared a material symbol standing for unity between the races, unity between the classes and equality between the sexes. In Chicago an imposing temple is to be erected by the voluntary contributions from all the people of the earth. Every race, creed and color will be represented.

The temple wherein each may worship God in his own way is to be surrounded by such accessories as a hospital, pilgrim-house, school for orphans and university for the study of higher sciences.

The people of universal mind recognize in this plan the symbol of assurance that we are at the beginning of the golden age that prophets and poets have depicted in song and fable. The people who have come in contact with this spirit of the age hold that the time has come when the highest concepts of man are to be realized and become part and parcel of every nation's fabric. With glowing faces these people tell of future ideals based on justice. They speak of international laws as yet untranslated into our language which are to govern the world after wars have ceased.

A new chapter in the life of the planet has been opened. Humanity has attained its maturity, and the race consciousness has awakened to the fact that it must put away the childish things

which seemed necessary in the day of the [pg 13] “survival of the fittest.” This day “wherein the feet of the people deviate” is to be followed by a glorious to-morrow; for — “This is a new cycle of human power. All the horizons of the world are luminous and the world will become indeed as a garden and a paradise. It is the hour of unity of the sons of men and of the drawing together of all races and all classes.

“The gift of God to this enlightened age is the knowledge of the oneness of mankind and the fundamental oneness of religion. War shall cease between the nations and by the will of God the most great peace shall come; the world will be seen as a new world and all men will live as brothers.”

The hour has struck — soon the vibrations will be felt on this material plane; for as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá so beautifully puts it — “Does not the dawn of a new day arouse the sleeping ones from their couches of negligence and awaken all those who are not dead?” Speaking of the temple of the future, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says — *“Every country has a hundred thousand gigantic temples, but what results have they yielded? The important point is this — from a temple of worship must go forth not only the spiritual but the material needs. Verily, the founding of this temple will mark the inception of the Kingdom of God on earth. It is the evident standard waving in the center of the great continent of America.*

“The doors will be open to all sects — no [pg 14] differentiation; and by God’s help this temple will prove to be to the body of human society what the soul is to the body of man. For when these colleges for the study of higher sciences, the hospital, the orphanage and the hospice are built, its doors will be opened to all nations, races and religions, with no line of demarkation and its charities will be dispensed without regard to race or color. Its gates will be flung wide to mankind; prejudice toward none, love for all. The central building will be dedicated to prayer and worship and thus for the first time religion will become harmonized with science and science will be the handmaid of religion — both showering their spiritual gifts on all humanity. In this way the people will be lifted out of the quagmires of slothfulness and bigotry.”

All of which would seem to verify the prediction of the great world thinkers of our time, one of whom says: “Abdu'l-Bahá will surely unite the East and West, for he treads the mystic way with practical feet.”

It was while 'Abdu'l-Bahá was in Paris that a group composed of different sects awaited an audience to argue their various faiths. Suddenly this divine teacher of men swept into the room and pointing out of the window, exclaimed: “The sun of truth rises in each season from a different point of the horizon — to-day it is here, yesterday it was there, and to-morrow it will appear from another direction. Why do you keep your eyes eternally fixed on the same point? Why[pg 15] do you call yourselves Christians, Buddhists, Muḥammadans, Bahá'ís? You must learn to distinguish the sun of truth from whichever point of the horizon it is shining! People think religion is confined in an edifice, to be worshipped at an altar. In reality it is an attitude toward divinity which is reflected through life.”

“This movement eludes organization — it is the realization of a new spirit. The foundation of that spirit is the love of God; and its method, the love and service of mankind. Many who have never heard of this revelation teach its laws and spiritual truths. These people are performing what Bahá'u'lláh hath commanded though they never heard of him. The power of Bahá'u'lláh's words is compelling — therefore, you must know and love them. For instance, in the spring season trees burst forth into verdure, though they are not conscious of the sunshine, of the falling rain or the gentle breeze — nevertheless, the power of nature urges them on to yield forth their fruits.”

Soon after his release as a prisoner of the Turkish Government, 'Abdu'l-Bahá journeyed from the little fortified town of 'Akká to Egypt and thence to London. While in London he gave the following interview to the writer. It was published in one of the leading journals, under date of September 23, 1911.[pg 16]