

Education

‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Original English



Chapter II

Education

Knowledge is one of the greatest benefits of God. To acquire knowledge is incumbent on all. These visible arts and present implements are from the results of his knowledge and wisdom, which have been revealed from the supreme pen. In this day the mysteries of this earth are unfolded and have become visible before the eyes. — (Bahá’u’lláh)

This is my second visit to Paris and I meet you with great joy. On a third visit to Europe I hope to see a brilliant flame — the signal of the paradise of Abhá. That this continent be flooded with rays streaming from veritable sons of light — this is my hope.

There was a time when the light of Christ shone in the world; when the proclamation of the kingdom was widespread and many spirits and hearts were drawn heavenward; but the law of this world is evanescent. That lamp is lighted and again it is extinguished. This flower starts with a sprout which day by day becomes more verdant, finally bursting into leaves and blossoms. But



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flowers fade and fruitage yields its seed which is kept and planted again, for the dead tree bears no more fruit. New seed must be sown and again trees and flowers will bloom.[pg 80]

The great splendor of the day of Christ has gradually merged into the night, so that in this age there is hardly a ray of that great spiritual luminary lighting the world; but after the drought of summer and the cold of winter comes the new life of spring. After each sunset comes a sunrise.

The spiritual light of the world has risen again from the eastern horizon. The night is finished; the day is come and the first rays of the dawn are destroying the shadows, dispersing the clouds, making the plants to grow, the trees to become verdant and ornamenting the flower-beds with roses. The sun of reality hath reappeared with tremendous power and soon the light of Bahá'u'lláh will be diffused throughout the world. See how the light of Christ's shining star took three hundred years to shed its rays on the world, whereas the light of Bahá'u'lláh has permeated all regions in less than half a century. His cause has been spread in every country and the mention of Bahá'u'lláh made in every tongue. In nearly every country there is an assembly of friends from Tíhrán to Paris, to San Francisco, to Japan. This is a different age and light is spreading with great rapidity.

In every language we find favorable criticisms except from those who have personal animosity against Bahá'u'lláh, and these cases are rare. Even those newspapers that are not universal in policy, have been favorable in criticism. In the universities, professors and students have listened while I expounded the principles of Bahá'u'lláh.[pg 81] Observe and realize the power of this cause. During the time of former prophets, have you ever heard of praise from those who were not disciples? The immediate followers of Christ spoke and wrote to the glorification of the Christ spirit, but others did not occupy themselves with the subject. Verily, what is happening in this day is an unheard-of thing! The like is not recorded in Greek, Roman or Egyptian history. Behold the sovereignty and brilliancy of this truth. Jews and Gentiles alike acknowledge its vitality and are astonished at the radiance of its light. A rabbi of America although he did not claim to be a follower of Bahá'u'lláh, nevertheless praised the precept of Bahá'u'lláh, and said, "We have been wrong in thinking that the light in the East is extinguished." Even those who deny the divinity of this cause do not contest Bahá'u'lláh's greatness, his extraordinary power, his universal wisdom; in a word, that he was a super-man.

Those who set themselves against him contended thus: "He refutes our religious customs, therefore we will have none of him — yet his teachings express the truth of the age."

Certain of the clergy in America said, "Many of the truths in our religion have been forgotten. Bahá'u'lláh has come to remind us of them." One clergyman said before a large congregation, "Bahá'u'lláh revises the old beliefs but he has brought us nothing new. These truths are already found in the sacred books." [pg 82]

Then I arose and said, "I am going to quote you some of Bahá'u'lláh's instructions for this day and you will show me in which sacred book they are to be found.

"Bahá'u'lláh exhorts men to free their minds from the superstitions of the past and to seek independently for truth putting aside all dogmas. Religions are one. Let us banish creeds that the reality may become unveiled. In which sacred book do you find this?

"He heralds the hour of unity which has dawned on all mankind. All are the children of one Father; all the inheritors of that future peace on earth. He admonishes men to banish prejudice; religious, patriotic, racial preconceptions must disappear, for they are the destroyers of human society. Where is this written? In which part of the Bible, Old or New Testament?

"Religion must be the cause of affection. It must be a joy-bringer. If it become the cause of difference, it were better to banish it. Should it become the source of hatred, or warfare, it were better that it should not exist. If a remedy produce added illness, it were far better to discard the remedy. A religion which does not conform with the postulates of science is merely superstition. In which sacred book do you find this thought? Tell me!

"Bahá'u'lláh declares the absolute equality of the sexes. The male and female in the mineral, vegetable and animal kingdoms share alike the material bestowals. Why should there be a [pg 83] difference in the human kingdom? Verily, they are equal before God, for so he created them. Why should woman be deprived of exercising the fullest opportunities offered by life? Whosoever serves humanity most is nearest God — for God is no respecter of gender. The male and female are like the two wings of a bird and when both wings are reinforced with the same

impulse the bird of humanity will be enabled to soar heaven-ward to the summit of progress. In which sacred book is this written?

“Education holds an important place in the new order of things. The education of each child is compulsory. If there is not money enough in a family to educate both the girl and the boy the money must be dedicated to the girl's education, for she is the potential mother. If there are no parents the community must educate the child. In addition to this widespread education each child must be taught a profession, art, or trade, so that every member of the community will be enabled to earn his own livelihood. Work done in the spirit of service is the highest form of worship. Where do you find this statement?

“Bahá'u'lláh's solution of the social question provides for new laws, but the different social classes are preserved. An artisan remains an artisan; a merchant, a merchant; a banker, a banker; a ruler, a ruler; the different degrees must persist, so that each can render service to the community. Nevertheless, every one has[pg 84] the right to a happy, comfortable life. Work is to be provided for all and there will be no needy ones to be seen in the streets. The vocational labor adjustment provided by Bahá'u'lláh precludes there being people too poor to have the necessities of life on the one hand, nor the idle rich on the other. In which sacred book do you find this provided for? Show me!

“In order to facilitate complete understanding between all people, a universal auxiliary language will be adopted and in the schools of the future two languages will be taught — the mother tongue and this international auxiliary tongue which will be either one of the existing language or a new language made up of words from all the languages — the matter is to be determined by a confederation met for the purpose which shall represent all tribes and nations. This international tongue will be used in the work of the parliament of man — a supreme tribunal of the world which will be permanently established in order to arbitrate international questions. The members of this arbitral court of justice will be representatives of all the countries. It is incumbent upon the nations to obey the commands of this tribunal, for such a tribunal will be under the power of God and for the protection of all men. In all the sacred books where do you find such a statement?

“The purpose of these new laws is to destroy antagonism by finding a point of agreement. We cannot induce men to lay down their arms by[pg 85] fighting with them. If two individuals dispute about religion both are wrong. The Protestants and Catholics, the Muḥammadans and Christians war over religion. The Nestorians claim that Christ was merely a slave, a man like the rest, but God put his spirit upon him. The Catholics say that he was one of the persons of the trinity. Both are wrong.”

These precepts were proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh many years ago. He was the first to create them in the hearts as moral laws. Alone and unaided he spread them. Writing to the sovereigns of the world he summoned them to universal brotherhood proclaiming that the hour for unity had struck — unity between countries, unity between religions.

In this period of its evolution the world of humanity is in danger. Every war is against the good pleasure of the Lord of mankind, for man is the edifice of God and war destroys the divine edifice. If an active, actual peace is brought about, the human world will attain to the utmost serenity and composure; wolves will be transformed into lambs, devils into angels, and terrors into divine splendors in less than a twinkling of an eye.

Bahá'u'lláh is the divine physician who diagnoses the world's malady; for the whole planet is ill and needs the power of a great specialist.

Bahá'u'lláh's teachings are the health of the world. They represent the spirit of this age,[pg 86] the light of this age, the well-being of this age, the soul of this cycle. The world will be at rest when they are put into practice, for they are reality.

Praise be to God, the doors of divine knowledge are flung wide, the infinite light is shining, and to such as believe and obey the divine mysteries are revealed.



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 live stock. 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[pg 87] 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.

The mother-in-law of Sulṭānu'ṣh-Ṣhuhadá (sulṭān of the martyrs) was at Iṣfahán when the Báb declared himself. She was in the company of that famous woman, the poet Qurratu'l-'Ayn, and together they were stoned in the streets. When her son-in-law was imprisoned, she was living with her brother and the day they martyred him she passed her time in prayer, crying, "O God, help him to remain firm!"

This noble woman witnessed his martyrdom and that of her husband. She passed through great trials. They pillaged her husband's belongings and left her without support. In deference to her brother who was highly respected they did not again attack her openly; but the prince, governor of Iṣfahán, when he heard that she was at her brother's house sent for her. She entered his presence alone and hardly had he set eyes on her than he fell upon her with blows and kicked her till she became unconscious. Calling to his wife he said, "Come and see to what a state I have reduced this woman"; then he threw her out into the street.[pg 88]

Later, when her brother found her, she was half dead. In spite of this, as with a new impulse, she spread the cause everywhere. Her brother said to her, "Are all these troubles not sufficient for you, that you being again?" "I cannot help it," she replied. "I must go forward; if, however, my actions are a source of danger to you I will go away," — but he would not allow this and they remained together at Işfahán.

Years afterward she came to 'Akká where she died. She was one of the those women to whom I refer — one of the most eloquent and cultured. She knew the text of the Qur'án and of the Gospels by heart. She understood them. She was free and unafraid. Wherever she went she spoke of what she knew. By this I wish to illustrate the influence of Bahá'u'lláh on the women. You of the West can hardly understand the extent of this progress.

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 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.[pg 89]



Although a man may progress in science and philosophy, if he does not take advantage of the power of the spirit, he is incomplete.

Moses was neither a philosopher nor a scientist. Outwardly he was but a simple shepherd, but he was able to instruct and develop a whole nation which had been in a state of demoralization; but which through his influence reached a very enlightened civilization. Jesus Christ did not come from the world of princes or scientists. Outwardly he was but an humble artisan, his disciples simple fishermen. Why were these disciples able to do what philosophers and scientists failed to accomplish? You have the example in Peter who was assisted by the Holy Spirit, as have been all those who have enlightened humanity — for universal education can be accomplished only through the Holy Spirit.

Muḥammad through his power was enabled to elevate a nation, for on his teachings a mighty civilization was constructed in the Arabian peninsula, the influence of which, as recorded in history, extended as far west as Spain. Let us be just. When a being, alone, in the midst of a savage tribe begins by teaching them and finally succeeds in raising them to a high degree of civilization, we must admit that he has an extraordinary power. What I mean is this — philosophy and science will not suffice to elevate and civilize a people who are in a bestial condition.

What philosophy has ever elevated a whole nation and influenced humanity? Philosophy[pg 90] of necessity is restricted to a small school and cannot have an essentially moral influence.

