

Notes of a conversation with 'Abdu'l-Bahá

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Original English



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A COLOURED man from South Africa who was visiting 'Abdu'l-Bahá, said that even now no white people really cared very much for the black man.

'Abdu'l-Bahá replies: Compare the present time and the feeling towards the coloured people now, with the state of feeling two or three hundred years ago, and see how much better it is at present. In a short time the relationship between the coloured and white people will still further improve, and by and by no difference will be felt between them. White doves and purple doves exist, but both kinds are doves.

Bahá'u'lláh once compared the coloured people to the black pupil of the eye surrounded by the white. In this black pupil you see the reflection of that which is before it, and through it the light of the Spirit shines forth.

In the sight of God colour makes no difference at all, He looks at the hearts of men. That which God desires from men is the heart. A black man with a good character is far superior to a white man with a character that is less good.

Ideals of East and West

One of the organizers of the Races Congress present spoke of the Western ideals of Bahá'u'lláh as differing from those of former prophets which were tinged with the ideas and civilization of the East. He then asked whether Bahá'u'lláh had made a special study of Western writings, and founded his teachings in accordance with them.

'Abdu'l-Bahá laughed heartily, and said that the books of Bahá'u'lláh, written and printed sixty years ago, contained the ideals now so familiar to the West, but, at that time, they had not been printed or thought of in the West. Besides, he continued, supposing that a very advanced thinker from the West had gone to visit Bahá'u'lláh and to teach Him, would the name of such a great man and the fact of his visit have been unknown and unrecorded? No! In former days, in the time of the Buddha and Zoroaster, civilization in Asia and in the East was very much higher than in the West and ideas and thoughts of the Eastern peoples were much in advance of, and nearer to the thoughts of God than those of the West. But since that time superstitions had crept into the religion and ideals of the East, and from many differing causes the ideals and



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characters of the Eastern peoples had gone down and down, lower and lower, while the Western peoples had been constantly advancing and struggling towards the Light. Consequently, in these days, the civilization of the West was much higher than that of the East, and the ideas and thoughts of the people of the West were much nearer to the thought of God than those of the East. Therefore, the ideals of Bahá'u'lláh had been more quickly realized in the West.

'Abdu'l-Bahá showed further how Bahá'u'lláh had exactly described in one of his books what has since been carried out in the International Council of Arbitration, describing its various functions, some of which have not yet been realized and he ('Abdu'l-Bahá) would describe them to us now, so that when they were fulfilled, as they would be in the near future, we might know that they had been prophesied by Bahá'u'lláh.

War was the greatest calamity that could overtake the nations, because the people usually employed in agriculture, trades, commerce, and other useful arts, were taken away from their various occupations and turned into soldiers, so that there was great waste and loss, in addition to the destruction and carnage of war.

Bahá'u'lláh had said that the functions of the International Court would be to settle disputes that arose from time to time between the nations; to define the exact boundaries of the different countries, and to decide what number of soldiers and guns should be maintained by each nation, according to its population, in order to preserve internal order. For instance, one country might have ten thousand soldiers, another twenty thousand, another fifteen thousand, and so on, in accordance with the size and population of the nation; also if any people rebelled against the decision of the Court and rejected it, the Court would empower the others to join their forces and to endorse their decision, if need be, by united action.

We had not seen any of these things actualized as yet, but we should do so in the future.

Science and Faith

The gentleman then put a question which he said he considered of very great importance in connection with a religious movement, claiming to be universal. What position he asked, if any, did Bahá'u'lláh give to the modern ideas and conceptions of Science in his teachings. The whole structure of modern civilization is based upon the results and the knowledge obtained through laborious and patient observation of facts collected by men of Science: in some cases through hundreds of years of painstaking investigation. To make his meaning clearer, he instanced the ethic, and the moral teachings of the Chinese philosophers, than which he could conceive nothing higher. However, these teachings had very little effect outside of China, for the reason he considered, that they were not primarily based on the teachings of Science.

'Abdu'l-Bahá replied that a very great importance was given to Science and knowledge in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, who wrote that, if a man educated the children of the poor, who could not themselves afford to do so, it was, in the sight of God, as if he had educated the Son of God.

If any religion rejected Science and knowledge, that religion was false. Science and Religion should go forward together; indeed, they should be like two fingers of one hand.

Bahá'u'lláh had also in His writings given a most important place to Art, and the practice of skilled trades. He had stated that the practice of an Art or Trade in the true spirit of service was identical with the worship of God.

A gentleman connected with the work of a Settlement then asked what was the best method of raising up and civilizing the very lowest and most degraded and ignorant of the people and would their education come about gradually through the enlightenment of the Spirit, or was there any special means we could adopt to further this end?

'Abdu'l-Bahá replied that the best way was to give them spiritual teachings and enlightenment. He also remarked that the way to broaden the outlook of the very narrow-hearted and prejudiced, and to make them listen to a wider teaching, was by showing towards them the greatest kindness and love. The example of our lives was of more value than words.

Converse with Departed Persons

The question was asked if it were possible to establish communication with the dead, and whether it was wise or advisable to attend séances or to engage in table-turning, spirit-rapping, etc.

The Master said these rappings, etc., were all material things, and of the body. What is needed is to rise above the material to the realms of the purely Spiritual. Table-turning and such like were material, a natural result, and not spiritual.

But it was possible to communicate with the dead through the condition of the character and the heart.

Are Superstitions Useful

A lady enquired whether some superstitions might not be good for ignorant people, who, if they were without them might perhaps be without beliefs of any kind?

'Abdu'l-Bahá replied that superstitions were of two kinds; those that were harmful and dangerous, and those that were harmless and produced certain good effects.

For example, there were some poor people who believed that misfortunes and punishments were caused by a Great Angel with a sword in his hand, who struck down those who stole, and committed murder and crimes.

They thought the flashes of lightning were the weapons of this angel, and that if they did wrong they would be struck by lightning. This belief caused them to refrain from evil actions.

The Chinese held a superstition that if they burn certain pieces of paper this will drive the devils away; they sometimes burnt these pieces of paper on board ships when they were travelling in order to drive away devils, and by so doing they set fire to the ships and destroyed many lives. This was a type of dangerous and harmful superstition.

The Life After Death

Mrs. S. asked some questions with reference to the conditions of existence in the next world, and the life after death; she said that having recently lost a very near relative, she had given much thought to this subject. Many thought that re-union with those we had loved, and who had passed on to the future life, would only take place after a long period of time had elapsed. She wished to know whether one would be re-united with those who had gone before immediately after death.

'Abdu'l-Bahá answered that this would depend upon the respective stations of the two. If both had the same degree of development, they would be re-united immediately after death. The questioner then said, how could this state of development be acquired? 'Abdu'l-Bahá replied, by unceasing effort, striving to do right, and to attain spiritual qualities.

The questioner remarked that many differing opinions were held as to the conditions of the future life. Some thought that all would have exactly the same perfections and virtues; that all would be equal and alike.

'Abdu'l-Bahá said there would be variety, and differing degrees of attainment, as in this world.

The question was then asked as to how it would be possible with no material bodies or environment to recognize different entities and characters, when all would be in the same conditions and on the same plane of existence.

'Abdu'l-Bahá said if several people look into a mirror at the same moment, they behold all the different personalities, their characteristics and movements; the glass of the mirror into which they look is one. In your mind you have a variety of thoughts, but all these thoughts are separate and distinct. Also you may perhaps have hundreds of friends; but when you call them before your memory you do not confuse them one with another: each one is separate and distinct, having their own individualities and characteristics.

Replying to another questioner, he said that when two people, husband and wife for instance, have been completely united in this life their souls being as one soul, then after one of them has passed away, this union of heart and soul would remain unbroken.

Spiritual Relationship

In the evening of September 28th, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was with a number of assembled guests.

He said all of you here are sisters. Bodily relationships may pass; even two sisters may be inimical to each other, but the spiritual relationship is eternal, and brings about mutual love and service.

Be always kind to everyone and a refuge for those who are without shelter.

Be daughters to those who are older than you.

Be sisters to those who are of your own age.



Be mothers to those who are younger than yourselves.

Be nurses to the sick, treasurers for the poor, and supply heavenly food to the hungry.

A Persian doctor from Qazvín said this was a great work of God that the East and the West had become so united, and we must always thank God that the Bahá'í cause had produced such great harmony and union between us. The result of this visit of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to the West would be very great.

