

Responses to questions of Mánikchí Şáhib

Bahá'u'lláh

Translated



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Responses to questions of Mánikchí Şáhib

from a Tablet to Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl

In regard to what thou hast written concerning his honour the learned Şáhib, upon him be the grace of God, his state of mind and disposition are clear and evident, as is further attested by that which he hath sent. Now, as to his questions, it was not deemed advisable to refer and reply to each one individually, for the response would have run counter to wisdom and been incompatible with that which is current amongst men. Even so, in that which was revealed in his honour from the heaven of divine favour, answers were provided in a language of marvellous concision and clarity. But it appeareth that he hath failed to consider the matter closely, for otherwise he would have readily admitted that not a single point was omitted, and would have exclaimed: "This is naught but a clear and conclusive utterance!" His questions were the following.

First: "The Prophets of Mahábád, together with Zoroaster, were twenty-eight in number. Each one of them sought to exalt, rather than abrogate, the faith and religion of the others. Each one that appeared bore witness to the truth and veracity of the former law and religion and breathed no word about abolishing them. Each declared: 'We are the bearers of a Revelation from God, which We deliver unto His servants.' Some of the Hindu Prophets, however, have declared: 'We are God Himself, and it is incumbent upon the entire creation to bear allegiance unto Us. Whensoever conflict and dissension appear amongst men, We arise to quench it.' Each one that appeared announced: 'I am the same One that appeared in the beginning.' The latter Prophets such as David, Abraham, Moses and Jesus confirmed the truth of the Prophets gone before them, but said: 'Such was the law in the past, but in this day the law is that which I proclaim.' The Arabian Prophet, however, hath said: 'Through My appearance



TRANSLATION



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every law hath proven to be unsound and no law holdeth but Mine.' Which of these creeds is acceptable and which of these leaders is to be preferred?"

It should first be noted that in one sense the stations of the Prophets of God differ one from another. For instance, consider Moses. He brought forth a Book and established ordinances, whilst a number of the Prophets and Messengers who arose after Him were charged with the promulgation of His laws, insofar as they remained consonant with the needs of the age. The books and chronicles annexed to the Torah bear eloquent testimony to this truth.

Regarding the statement ascribed to the Author of the Qur'án: "Through My appearance every law and religion hath proven to be unsound and no law holdeth but Mine", no such words were ever uttered by that Source and Fount of divine wisdom. Nay rather, He confirmed that which had been sent down before from the empyrean of the Divine Will unto the Prophets and Messengers of God. He saith, exalted be His utterance: "Alif. Lám. Mím. God! There is no God but Him, the Living, the Ever-Abiding. He it is Who hath sent down to Thee the Book through the power of truth, confirming those which preceded it. He revealed aforetime the Torah and the Evangel as a guidance unto men, and He hath now revealed the Qur'án..."¹ He, moreover, hath asserted that all the Prophets have proceeded from God and have returned unto Him. Viewed in this light, they are all as one and the same Being, inasmuch as they have not uttered a word, brought a message, or revealed a cause, of their own accord. Nay, all that they have said hath proceeded from the one true God, exalted be His glory. They have all summoned men unto the Supreme Horizon and imparted the tidings of eternal life. Thus the diverse statements recounted by his honour the Şáhib are to be seen as concordant letters, that is, letters that form a single word.

Concerning the question: "Which of these creeds is acceptable and which of these leaders is to be preferred?", this is the station wherein the following blessed words shine resplendent as the sun: "No distinction do We make between any of the Messengers",² while the verse "Some of the Apostles We have caused to excel the others"³ pertaineth to the other station of which We have already made mention. Indeed, the answer to all that his honour the Şáhib hath asked lieth enshrined within this all-embracing, this weighty and incomparable utterance, hallowed and exalted be His word: "As to thy question concerning the heavenly Scriptures: The All-Knowing Physician hath His finger on the pulse of mankind. He perceiveth the disease, and prescribeth, in His unerring wisdom, the remedy. Every age hath its own problem, and every soul its particular aspiration. The remedy the world needeth in its present-day

¹ Qur'án 3:1.

² Qur'án 2:285.

³ Qur'án 2:253.

afflictions can never be the same as that which a subsequent age may require. Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and centre your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements.”⁴ Every fair-minded soul will testify that these words are to be viewed as a mirror of the knowledge of God, wherein all that hath been inquired is clearly and conspicuously reflected. Blessed is he who hath been endowed with seeing eyes by God, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.

Another question raised by the distinguished Şáhib is the following: “There are four schools of thought in the world. One school affirmeth that all the visible worlds, from atoms to suns, constitute God Himself and that naught can be seen but Him. Another school claimeth that God is that Essence that must of necessity exist, that His Messengers are the intermediaries between Him and His creatures, and that their mission is to lead humanity unto Him. Yet another school holdeth that the stars were created by the Necessary Being,⁵ whilst all other things are their effect and outcome. These things continually appear and disappear, even as the minute creatures that are generated in a pool of water. A further school maintaineth that the Necessary Being hath fashioned Nature through whose effect and agency all things, from atoms to suns, appear and disappear without beginning or end. What need then for an account or reckoning? As the grass groweth with the coming of the rain and vanisheth thereafter, so it is with all things. If the Prophets and the kings have instituted laws and ordinances, the proponents of this school argue, this hath merely been for the sake of preserving the civil order and regulating human society. The Prophets and the kings, however, have acted in different ways: the former have said ‘God hath spoken thus’ that the people might submit and obey, whilst the latter have resorted to the sword and the cannon. Which of these four schools is approved in the sight of God?”

The answer to all this falleth under the purview of the first utterance that hath streamed forth from the tongue of the All-Merciful. By God! It embraceth and comprehendeth all that hath been mentioned. He saith: “Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and centre your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements”. For in this day He Who is the Lord of Revelation hath appeared and He Who spoke on Sinai is calling aloud. Whatsoever He may ordain is the surest foundation for the mansions reared in the cities of human knowledge and wisdom.

⁴ See “Tablet to Mánikchí Şáhib (Lawḥ-i-Mánikchí-Şáhib)”, paragraph beginning “As to thy question concerning the heavenly Scriptures...”.

⁵ The “Necessary Being”

(vájibu'l-vujúd)

refers to God; this term was used by Muslim philosophers such as al-Farabi and can be traced to Aristotle.

Whoso holdeth fast unto it will be reckoned in the eyes of the Almighty among them that are endued with insight.

These sublime words have streamed forth from the Pen of the Most High. He saith, exalted be His glory: "This is the day of vision, for the countenance of God is shining resplendent above the horizon of Manifestation. This is the day of hearing, for the call of God hath been raised. It behoveth everyone in this day to uphold and proclaim that which hath been revealed by Him Who is the Author of all scripture, the Dayspring of revelation, the Fount of knowledge and the Source of divine wisdom." It is thus clear and evident that the reply to his question hath been revealed in the kingdom of utterance by Him Who is the Exponent of the knowledge of the All-Merciful. Happy are they that understand!

As to the four schools mentioned above, it is clear and evident that the second standeth closer to righteousness.⁶ For the Apostles and Messengers of God have ever been the channels of His abounding grace, and whatsoever man hath received from God hath been through the intermediary of those Embodiments of holiness and Essences of detachment, those Repositories of His knowledge and Exponents of His Cause. One can, however, provide a justification for the tenets of the other schools, for in a sense all things have ever been and shall ever remain the manifestations of the names and attributes of God.

As to the Şáhib's reference to the kings, they are indeed the manifestations of the name of God "the Almighty" and the revealers of His name "the All-Powerful". The vesture that beseemeth their glorious temples is justice. Should they become adorned therewith, mankind will partake of perfect tranquillity and infinite blessings.

Whoso hath quaffed of the wine of divine knowledge will indeed be able to answer such questions with clear and perspicuous proofs from the world without and with manifest and luminous evidences from the world within. A different Cause, however, hath appeared in this day and a different discourse is required. Indeed, with the inception of the year nine the time for questions and answers came to an end. Thus He, hallowed and magnified be His name, saith: "This is not the day for any man to question his Lord. When thou hearest the call of God voiced by Him Who is the Dayspring of grandeur, cry out: 'Here am I, O Lord of all names! Here am I, O Maker of the heavens! I testify that Thou hast revealed Thyself and hast revealed whatsoever Thou didst desire at Thine Own behest. Thou, in truth, art the Lord of strength and might.'"

⁶ *Taqvâ*,

translated here as "righteousness", has further connotations of piety, fear of God, and right conduct that cannot all be conveyed with a single word in English.

The answer to all that the distinguished Şáhib hath asked is clear and evident. The intent of that which was sent down in his honour from the heaven of divine providence was that he might give ear to the wondrous melodies of the Dove of Eternity and the gentle murmuring of the inhabitants of the most exalted Paradise, and that he might perceive the sweetness of the call and set foot upon the path.

One day the Tongue of Glory uttered a word in regard to the Şáhib indicating that he may ere long be aided to perform a deed that would immortalize his name. When his letter was received in His holy and exalted Court, He said: "O Servant in attendance! Although his honour Mánikchí hath written only to ask concerning the sayings of others, yet from His letter We inhale the sweet savours of affection. Beseech the one true God to graciously aid him to do His will and pleasure. His might, in truth, is equal to all things." From this utterance of the All-Merciful there wafteth a fragrant breath. He, verily, is the All-Knowing, the All-Informed.

Another inquiry made by him is the following: "The laws of Islam are based on religious principles and jurisprudence,⁷ but in the Mahábád and Hindu religions there are only principles, and all laws, even those regarding the drinking of water or giving and taking in marriage, are considered a part of these principles, as are all other matters of human life. Kindly indicate which view is acceptable in the sight of God, exalted be His mention."

Religious principles have various degrees and stations. The root of all principles and the cornerstone of all foundations hath ever been, and shall remain, the recognition of God. And these days are indeed the vernal season of the recognition of the All-Merciful. Whatsoever proceedeth in this day from the Repository of His Cause and the Manifestation of His Self is, in truth, the fundamental principle unto which all must bear allegiance.

⁷ In Islamic law, religious principles (

uṣúl;

lit. "roots"), concern the sources of the law that can be explicitly derived from the Qur'án and the Ḥadīth, whereas secondary laws and ordinances (

furú

' ; lit. "branches") are deduced from the former through the discipline of jurisprudence (

fiqh).

The answer to this question is also embodied in these blessed, these weighty and exalted words: “Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and centre your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements”. For this day is the Lord of all days, and whatsoever hath been revealed therein by the Source of divine Revelation is the truth and the essence of all principles. This day may be likened to a sea and all other days to gulfs and channels that have branched therefrom. That which is uttered and revealed in this day is the foundation, and is accounted as the Mother Book and the Source of all utterance. Although every day is associated with God, magnified be His glory, yet these days have been singled out and adorned with the ornament of intimate association with Him, for they have been extolled in the books of the Chosen Ones of God, as well as of some of His Prophets, as the “Day of God”. In a sense this day and that which appeareth therein are to be regarded as the primary principles, while all other days and whatsoever appeareth in them are to be viewed as the secondary ordinances deduced therefrom, and which as such are subordinate and relative. For instance, attending the mosque is secondary with respect to the recognition of God, for the former is dependent upon and conditioned by the latter. As to the principles current amongst the divines of this age, these are merely a set of rules which they have devised and from which they infer, each according to his own opinions and inclinations, the ordinances of God.

Consider for example the question of immediate compliance or postponement. God, exalted be His glory, saith: “Eat and drink...”⁸ Now, it is not known whether this ordinance must be complied with immediately or if its execution may be justifiably postponed. Some believe that it may be decided by external circumstances. Once one of the distinguished divines of Najaf set out to visit the Shrine of Imám Ḥusayn, peace be upon Him, accompanied by a number of his pupils. In the course of their journey they were waylaid by a group of Bedouin. The aforementioned divine immediately handed over all his possessions. Whereupon his pupils exclaimed: “Your eminence hath always favoured postponement in such matters. What prompteth you now to act with such haste?” Pointing to the spears of the Bedouin, he replied: “The force of external circumstances, my friends!”

The founder of the principles of Islamic jurisprudence was Abú-Ḥanífih, who was a prominent leader of the Sunnis. Such principles had existed in former times as well, as hath already been mentioned. In this day, however, the approval or rejection of all things dependeth wholly upon the Word of God. These differences are not worthy of mention. The eye of divine mercy casteth its glance upon all that is past. It behoveth us to mention them only in favourable terms, for they do not contradict that which is

⁸ Possible reference to Qur’án 2:187, which contains instructions regarding the Fast: “Eat and drink until ye can discern a white thread from a black thread by the daybreak.” (Rodwell trans.)

essential. This servant testifieth to his ignorance and beareth witness that all knowledge is with God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting.

Whatsoever runneth counter to the Teachings in this day is rejected, for the Sun of Truth is shining resplendent above the horizon of knowledge. Happy are they who, with the waters of divine utterance, have cleansed their hearts from all allusions, whisperings and suggestions, and who have fixed their gaze upon the Dayspring of Glory. This, indeed, is the most gracious favour and the purest bounty. Whosoever hath attained thereunto hath attained unto all good, for otherwise the knowledge of aught else but God hath never proven, nor shall it ever prove, profitable unto men.

That which was mentioned in connection with religious principles and secondary ordinances referreth to the pronouncements which the divines of various religions have made, each according to his own capacity. At present, however, it behoveth us to follow His injunction to “leave them to their vain disputes”.⁹ He, verily, speaketh the truth and leadeth the way. The decree is God’s, the Almighty, the All-Bounteous.

Another of his questions: “Some maintain that whatsoever is in accordance with the dictates of nature and of the intellect must needs be both permissible and compulsory in the divine law, and conversely that one should refrain from observing that which is incompatible with these standards. Others believe that whatsoever hath been enjoined by the divine law and its blessed Author should be accepted without rational proof or natural evidence and obeyed without question or reservation, such as the march between Şafá and Marwah, the stoning of the pillar of Jamrah,¹⁰ the washing of one’s feet during ablutions, and so on. Kindly indicate which of these positions is acceptable.”

Intellect hath various degrees. As a discussion of the pronouncements made by the philosophers in this connection would pass beyond the scope of our discourse, we have refrained from mentioning them. It is nonetheless indisputably clear and evident that the minds of men have never been, nor shall they ever be, of equal capacity. The Perfect Intellect alone can provide true guidance and direction. Thus were these sublime words revealed by the Pen of the Most High, exalted be His glory, in response to this question: “The Tongue of Wisdom proclaimeth: He that hath Me not is bereft of all things. Turn ye away from all that is on earth and seek none else but Me. I am the Sun of Wisdom and the Ocean of Knowledge. I cheer the faint and revive the dead. I am the guiding Light that illumineth the way. I am the royal Falcon on the arm of the

⁹ Qur’án 6:91.

¹⁰ Among the rites performed by Muslim pilgrims during the Hajj.

Almighty. I unfold the drooping wings of every broken bird and start it on its flight.”¹¹

Consider how clearly the answer hath been revealed from the heaven of divine knowledge. Blessed are those who ponder it, who reflect upon it, and who apprehend its meaning! By the Intellect mentioned above is meant the universal divine Mind. How often hath it been observed that certain human minds, far from being a source of guidance, have become as fetters upon the feet of the wayfarers and prevented them from treading the straight Path! The lesser intellect being thus circumscribed, one must search after Him Who is the ultimate Source of knowledge and strive to recognize Him. And should one come to acknowledge that Source round Whom every mind doth revolve, then whatsoever He should ordain is the expression of the dictates of a consummate wisdom. His very Being, even as the sun, is distinct from all else beside Him. The whole duty of man is to recognize Him; once this hath been achieved, then whatsoever He may please to ordain is binding and in full accordance with the requirements of divine wisdom. Thus have ordinances and prohibitions of every kind been laid down by the Prophets of the past, even unto the earliest times.

Certain deeds that are undertaken in this day are intended to emblazon the name of God, and the Pen of the Most High hath fixed a recompense for those who perform them. Indeed, should any soul breathe but a fleeting breath for the sake of God, his recompense will become manifest, as attested by this mighty verse which was sent down from the empyrean of the Divine Will to the Lord of Mecca,¹² blessed and glorified be He: “We did not appoint that which Thou wouldst have to be the Qiblih, but that We might know him who followeth the Apostle from him who turneth on his heels.”¹³

Were anyone to meditate upon this blessed and transcendent Revelation and to ponder the verses that have been sent down, he would readily bear witness that the one true God is immeasurably exalted above His creatures, and that the knowledge of all things hath ever been and shall ever remain with Him. Every fair-minded soul, moreover, will testify that whosoever faileth to embrace the truth of this most great Revelation will find himself powerless and incapable of establishing the validity of any other cause or creed. And as to those who have deprived themselves of the robe of justice and arisen to promote the cause of iniquity, they shall give voice to that which the exponents of hatred and fanaticism have uttered from time immemorial. The knowledge of all things is with God, the All-Knowing, the All-Informed.

¹¹ See “Tablet to Mánikchí Şáhib (Lawḥ-i-Mánikchí-Şáhib)”, paragraph beginning “The Tongue of Wisdom proclaimeth...”.

¹² Muḥammad.

¹³ Qur’án 2:143.

One day when this servant was in His presence, I was asked: "O servant in attendance! Wherewith art thou engaged?" "I am penning a reply", I answered, "to his honour Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl". I was bidden: "Write to Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl, may My glory be upon him, and say: 'Matters have come to such a pass that the people of the world have grown accustomed to iniquity and flee from fair-mindedness. A divine Manifestation Who hath extolled and magnified the one true God, exalted be His glory, Who hath borne witness to His knowledge and confessed that His Essence is sanctified above all things and exalted beyond every comparison — such a Manifestation hath been called at various times a worshipper of the sun or a fire-worshipper. How numerous are those sublime Manifestations and Revealers of the Divine of Whose stations the people remain wholly unaware, of Whose grace they are utterly deprived, nay, God forbid, Whom they curse and revile!'

'One of the great Prophets Whom the foolish ones of Persia in this day reject uttered these sublime words: "The sun is but a dense and spherical mass. It deserveth not to be called God or the Almighty. For the almighty Lord is He Whom no human comprehension can ever conceive, Whom no earthly knowledge can circumscribe, and Whose Essence none hath ever been or shall ever be able to fathom". Consider how eloquently, how solemnly He hath affirmed the very truth that God is proclaiming in this day. And yet He is not even deemed a believer by these abject and foolish ones, let alone seen as possessed of a sublime station! In another connection He said: "All existence hath appeared from His existence, and were it not for God, no creature would have ever existed and been attired with the raiment of being". May the Lord shield us all from the wickedness of such as have disputed the truth of God and of His loved ones and turned away from that Dayspring whereunto all the Books of God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting, have testified.'"

From that which hath been mentioned, it is clear that not every intellect can be the criterion of truth. The truly wise are, in the first place, the Chosen Ones of God, magnified be His glory — they Whom He hath singled out to be the Treasuries of His knowledge, the Repositories of His Revelation, the Daysprings of His authority and the Dawning-places of His wisdom, they Whom He hath made His representatives on earth and through Whom He revealeth that which He hath purposed. Whoso turneth unto them hath turned unto God, and whoso turneth away shall not be remembered in the presence of God, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.

The universal criterion is that which hath just been mentioned. Whosoever attaineth thereunto, that is, who recognizeth and acknowledgeth the Dawning-place of God's Revelation, will be recorded in the Book of God among them that are endued with understanding. Otherwise he is naught but an ignorant soul, though he believe himself to be possessed of every wisdom. Now, were a person to see himself standing in the presence of God, were he to sanctify his soul from earthly attachments and evil intentions, and reflect upon that which hath been revealed in this most great

Revelation from its inception to this day, he would readily testify that every detached soul, every perfect mind, sanctified being, attentive ear, penetrating eye, eloquent tongue, and joyous and radiant heart circleth round and boweth down, nay prostrateth itself in submission, before the mighty throne of God.

Another of his questions is this: “Among the Manifestations of the past one hath, in His time, allowed the eating of beef while another hath forbidden it; one hath permitted the eating of pork whereas another hath proscribed it. Thus do their ordinances differ. I entreat the True One, exalted be His name, to graciously specify the appropriate religious prohibitions.”

A direct reply and detailed explanation of this matter would have overstepped the bounds of wisdom, inasmuch as people of diverse faiths associate with the distinguished Şáhib and a direct reply would have contravened the laws of Islam. The answer was therefore sent down from the heaven of the Divine Will in an implicit manner. Indeed the statement in the first passage where He saith: “The All-Knowing Physician hath His finger on the pulse of mankind” was, and remaineth, the answer to his question. He further saith: “Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and centre your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements.” That is, fix your gaze upon the commandments of God, for whatsoever He should ordain in this day and pronounce as lawful is indeed lawful and representeth the very truth. It is incumbent upon all to turn their gaze towards the Cause of God and to observe that which hath dawned above the horizon of His Will, since it is through the potency of His name that the banner of “He doeth what He willeth” hath been unfurled and the standard of “He ordaineth what He pleaseth” hath been raised aloft. For instance, were He to pronounce water itself to be unlawful, it would indeed become unlawful, and the converse holdeth equally true. For upon no thing hath it been inscribed “this is lawful” or “this is unlawful”; nay rather, whatsoever hath been or will be revealed is by virtue of the Word of God, exalted be His glory.

These matters are sufficiently clear and require no further elaboration. Even so, certain groups believe that all the ordinances current amongst them are unalterable, that they have ever been valid, and that they will forever remain so. Consider a further passage, glorified and exalted be He: “These words are being uttered in due measure, that the newly born may thrive and the tender shoot flourish. Milk must be given in suitable proportion, that the children of the world may attain to the station of maturity and abide in the court of oneness.”¹⁴ For instance, some believe that wine hath ever been and shall remain forbidden. Now, were one to inform them that it might one day be made lawful, they would arise in protest and opposition. In truth, the people of the world have yet not grasped the meaning of “He doeth whatsoever He willeth”, nor have

¹⁴ See “Tablet to Mánikchí Şáhib (Lawḥ-i-Mánikchí-Şáhib)”, paragraph beginning “O friend! As hearing ears are scarce to find...”.

they comprehended the significance of Supreme Infallibility. The suckling child must be nourished with milk. If it be given meat it will assuredly perish, and this would be naught but sheer injustice and unwisdom. Blessed are they that understand. Supreme Infallibility, as I once heard from His blessed lips, is reserved exclusively to the Manifestations of the Cause of God and the Exponents of His Revelation. This matter is mentioned but briefly, for time is short and as scarce as the legendary phoenix.

Yet another question: "According to the teachings of the Mahábád and Hindu religions, should a person of whatever faith or nation, of whatever colour, appearance, character or condition, be disposed to associate with you, ye should show forth kindness and treat him as a brother. But in other religions this is not so: their followers ill-treat and oppress the adherents of other faiths, consider their persecution as an act of worship, and regard their kindred and their possessions as lawful unto themselves. Which approach is acceptable in the sight of God?"

The former statement hath ever been and will continue to be true. It is not permissible to contend with anyone, nor is it acceptable in the sight of God to ill-treat or oppress any soul. Time and again have these sublime words streamed from the Pen of the Most High, blessed and exalted be He: "O ye children of men! The fundamental purpose animating the Faith of God and His Religion is to safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the human race, and to foster the spirit of love and fellowship amongst men. Suffer it not to become a source of dissension and discord, of hate and enmity". This subject hath already been set forth and explained in various Tablets.

It behoveth him who expoundeth the Word of God to deliver it with the utmost goodwill, kindness, and compassion. As to him that embraceth the truth and is honoured with recognizing Him, his name shall be recorded in the Crimson Book among the inmates of the all-highest Paradise. Should a soul fail, however, to accept the truth, it is in no wise permissible to contend with him. In another connection He saith: "Blessed and happy is he that ariseth to promote the best interests of the peoples and kindreds of the earth." Likewise He saith: "The people of Bahá should soar high above the peoples of the world." In matters of religion every form of fanaticism, hatred, dissension and strife is strictly forbidden.

In this day a Luminary hath dawned above the horizon of divine providence, upon whose brow the Pen of Glory hath inscribed these exalted words: "We have called you into being to show forth love and fidelity, not animosity and hatred." Likewise, on another occasion, He — exalted and glorified be His name — hath revealed the following words in the Persian tongue, words through which the hearts of the well-favoured and the sincere amongst His servants are consumed, the manifold pursuits of men are harmonized, and mankind is illumined by the light of divine unity and enabled to turn towards the Dayspring of divine knowledge: "The incomparable Friend saith: The path to freedom hath been outstretched; hasten ye thereunto. The wellspring of

wisdom is overflowing; quaff ye therefrom. Say: O well-beloved ones! The tabernacle of unity hath been raised; regard ye not one another as strangers. Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch.” ¹⁵

Justice, which consisteth in rendering each his due, dependeth upon and is conditioned by two words: reward and punishment. From the standpoint of justice, every soul should receive the reward of his actions, inasmuch as the peace and prosperity of the world depend thereon, even as He saith, exalted be His glory: “The structure of world stability and order hath been reared upon, and will continue to be sustained by, the twin pillars of reward and punishment.” In brief, every circumstance requireth a different utterance and every occasion calleth for a different course of action. Blessed are they that have arisen to serve God, who speak forth wholly for His sake, and who return unto Him.

Another of his questions: “Hindus and Zoroastrians do not admit or welcome outsiders who wish to join their ranks. Christians welcome those who decide of their own accord to embrace their religion, but make no effort and exert no pressure to this end. Muslims and Jews, however, insist upon it, enjoin it upon others, and, should anyone refuse, grow hostile and regard it as lawful to seize his kindred and possessions. Which approach is acceptable in the sight of God?”

The children of men are all brothers, and the prerequisites of brotherhood are manifold. Among them is that one should wish for one’s brother that which one wisheth for oneself. Therefore, it behoveth him who is the recipient of an inward or outward gift or who partaketh of the bread of heaven to inform and invite his friends with the utmost love and kindness. If they respond favourably, his object is attained; otherwise he should leave them to themselves without contending with them or uttering a word that would cause the least sadness. This is the undoubted truth, and aught else is unworthy and unbecoming.

The distinguished Şáhib, may God graciously aid him, hath written that the Hindus and Zoroastrians do not permit or welcome outsiders who wish to join their ranks. This runneth counter to the purpose underlying the advent of the Messengers of God and to that which hath been revealed in their Books. For those Who have appeared at God’s behest have been entrusted with the guidance and education of all people. How could they debar a seeker from the object of his quest, or forbid a wayfarer from the desire of his heart? The fire-temples of the world stand as eloquent testimony to this truth. In their time they summoned, with burning zeal, all the inhabitants of the earth to Him Who is the Spirit of purity.

¹⁵ See “Tablet to Mánikchí Şáhib (Lawḥ-i-Mánikchí-Şáhib)”, paragraph beginning “The incomparable Friend saith: The path to freedom hath been outstretched...”.

He hath moreover written that Christians welcome those who decide of their own accord to embrace their religion, but make no effort and exert no pressure to this end. This, however, is a misconception. For the Christians have exerted and continue to exert the utmost effort in teaching their faith. Their church organizations have an expenditure of about thirty million. Their missionaries have scattered far and wide throughout the globe and are assiduously engaged in teaching Christianity. Thus have they compassed the world. How numerous the schools and churches they have founded to instruct children, yet their unavowed aim is that these children, as they acquire an education, may also become acquainted in their early years with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and that the unsullied mirrors of their hearts may thus reflect that which their teachers have purposed. Indeed the followers of no other religion are as intent upon the propagation of their faith as the Christians.

In brief, what is right and true in this day and acceptable before His Throne is that which was mentioned at the outset. All men have been called into being for the betterment of the world. It behoveth every soul to arise and serve his brethren for the sake of God. Should a brother of his embrace the truth, he should rejoice that the latter hath attained unto everlasting favour. Otherwise he should implore God to guide him without manifesting the least trace of animosity or ill-feeling towards him. The reins of command are in the grasp of God. He doeth what He willeth and ordaineth as He pleaseth. He, verily, is the Almighty, the All-Praised.

We beseech the one true God, magnified be His glory, to enable us to recognize Him Whose unerring wisdom pervadeth all things and that we may acknowledge His truth. For once one hath recognized Him and borne witness to His Reality, one will no longer be troubled by the idle fancies and vain imaginings of men. The divine Physician hath the pulse of mankind within His almighty grasp. At one time He may well deem fit to sever certain infected limbs, that the disease may not spread to other parts of the body. This would be the very essence of mercy and compassion, and to none is given the right to object, for He is indeed the All-Knowing, the All-Seeing.

Another of his questions: "In the Mahábád and Zoroastrian religions it is said: 'Our faith and religion is superior to every other. The other Prophets and the religions they have instituted are true, but they occupy different stations before God, even as, in the court of a king, there is a gradation of ranks from the prime minister to the common soldier. Whosoever wisheth, let him keep the precepts of his religion.' Nor do they impose upon any soul. The Hindus claim that whosoever partaketh of meat, for whatever reason or under whatever circumstances, shall never catch a glimpse of Paradise. The followers of Muḥammad, Jesus and Moses maintain that a similar fate awaiteth those who fail to bear allegiance to their religions. Which belief is favoured by God, glorified be His mention?"

Regarding their statement that “our faith and religion is superior to every other”, by this is meant such Prophets as have appeared before them. Viewed from one perspective these holy Souls are one: the first among them is the same as the last, and the last is the same as the first. All have proceeded from God, unto Him have they summoned all men, and unto Him have they returned. This theme hath been set forth in the Book of Certitude, which is indeed the cynosure of all books, and which streamed from the Pen of Glory in the early years of this Most Great Revelation. Blessed is he that hath beheld it and pondered its contents for the love of God, the Lord of creation.

Concerning the remark attributed to the Hindus that whosoever partaketh of meat shall never catch a glimpse of Paradise, this runneth counter to their other assertion that all the Prophets are true. For if their truth be established, then it is absurd to claim that their followers will not ascend unto Paradise. One fain would ask what they intend by Paradise and what they have grasped thereof. In this day whosoever attaineth the good pleasure of the one true God, magnified be His glory, shall be remembered and accounted among the inmates of the all-highest Heaven and the most exalted Paradise, and shall partake of its benefits in all the worlds of God. By Him Who is the Desire of all men! The pen is powerless to portray this station or to expound this theme. How great the blessedness of him who hath attained unto the good-pleasure of God, and woe betide the heedless! Once the validity of a divinely appointed Prophet hath been established, to none is given the right to ask why or wherefore. Rather is it incumbent upon all to accept and obey whatsoever He saith. This is that which God hath decreed in all His Books, Scriptures and Tablets.

A further question that he hath asked: “The Hindus assert that God fashioned the Intellect in the form of a man named Brahma, Who came into this world and was the cause of its progress and development, and that all Hindus are His descendants. The followers of Zoroaster say: ‘God, through the agency of the Primal Intellect, created a man whose name is Mahábád and who is our ancestor.’ They believe the modes of creation to be six in number. Two were mentioned above; the others are creation from water, earth, fire, and from bears and monkeys. The Hindus and Zoroastrians both say that they are begotten of the Intellect, and thus do not admit others into their folds. Are these assertions true or not? That wise Master is requested to indicate that which he deemeth appropriate.”

The entire creation hath been called into being through the Will of God, magnified be His glory, and peerless Adam hath been fashioned through the agency of His all-compelling Word, a Word which is the source, the wellspring, the repository, and the dawning-place of the intellect. From it all creation hath proceeded, and it is the channel of God’s primal grace. None can grasp the reality of the origin of creation save God, exalted be His glory, Whose knowledge embraceth all things both before and after they come into being. Creation hath neither beginning nor end, and none hath

ever unravelled its mystery. Its knowledge hath ever been, and shall remain, hidden and preserved with those Who are the Repositories of divine knowledge.

The world of existence is contingent, inasmuch as it is preceded by a cause, while essential preexistence hath ever been, and shall remain, confined to God, magnified be His glory. This statement is being made lest one be inclined to conclude from the earlier assertion, namely that creation hath no beginning and no end, that it is preexistent. True and essential preexistence is exclusively reserved to God, while the preexistence of the world is secondary and relative. All that hath been inferred about firstness, lastness and such hath in truth been derived from the sayings of the Prophets, Apostles, and Chosen Ones of God.

As to the “realm of subtle entities”¹⁶ which is often referred to, it pertaineth to the Revelation of the Prophets, and aught else is mere superstition and idle fancy. At the time of the Revelation all men are equal in rank. By reason, however, of their acceptance or rejection, rise or fall, motion or stillness, recognition or denial, they come to differ thereafter. For instance, the one true God, magnified be His glory, speaking through the intermediary of His Manifestation, doth ask: “Am I not your Lord?” Every soul that answereth “Yea, verily!” is accounted among the most distinguished of all men in the sight of God. Our meaning is that ere the Word of God is delivered, all men are deemed equal in rank and their station is one and the same. It is only thereafter that differences appear, as thou hast no doubt observed.

It is clearly established from that which hath been mentioned that none may ever justifiably claim: “We are begotten of the Intellect, while all others stem from another origin.” The truth that shineth bright and resplendent as the sun is this, that all have been created through the operation of the Divine Will and have proceeded from the same source, that all are from Him and that unto Him they shall all return. This is the meaning of that blessed verse in the Qur’án which hath issued from the Pen of the All-

¹⁶ The “realm of subtle entities”

(‘álam-i-dharr)

is an allusion to the Covenant between God and Adam mentioned in Qur’án 7:172. In a Tablet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has written: “The realm of subtle entities that is alluded to referreth to the realities, specifications, individuations, capacities and potentialities of man in the mirror of the divine knowledge. As these potentialities and capacities differ, they each have their own particular exigency. That exigency consisteth in acquiescence and supplication.”

(Má’idiy-i-Ásmání,

vol. 2, (New Delhi: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1984), p. 30)

Merciful: "Verily, we are God's, and to Him shall we return".¹⁷

As is clear and evident to thee, the answer to all of the questions mentioned above was embodied in but one of the passages revealed by the Pen of the Most High. Blessed are they who, freed from worldly matters and sanctified from idle fancies and vain imaginings, traverse the meads of divine knowledge and discern in all things the tokens of His glory.

Numerous passages have been revealed in the name of his honour the Şáhib. Were he to appreciate their value and avail himself of their fruits, he would experience such joy that all the sorrows of the world would be powerless to afflict him. God grant that he may be enabled to sincerely voice, and to act in accordance with, the following words: "Say: It is God; then leave them to entertain themselves with their cavilings."¹⁸ May he endeavour to guide those deprived souls who remain secluded in darkness and obscurity towards the light of the Sun. May he seize, through the potency of the Most Great Name, the banner that speaketh of naught save His Revelation and march at the forefront of the people of the former religions, that perchance the darkness of the world may be dispelled and the effulgent rays of the Sun of Truth may shine upon all mankind. This, in truth, is the most perfect bounty and the highest calling. Should man fail to attain unto this sublime station, where then can he find comfort and joy? What will sustain and animate him? With whom will he commune at the hour of repose, and whose name will he invoke when he riseth from slumber? Again: "Verily, we are God's, and to Him shall we return."

His last question. "Most of the Tablets that we have seen are in Arabic. However, since the Beloved in this age is of Persian descent, the Arabic tongue should be abandoned and discarded. For to this day the Arabs themselves have not understood the meaning of the Qur'án, whereas the Persian language is highly prized, lauded and admired among the dwellers of the inhabited quarter of the globe. And just as the Persian of the present day is superior to Arabic, so too is Old Persian, which is greatly favoured by the people of India and others. It would therefore be preferable if the words of God, magnified be His mention, were hereafter mainly delivered in pure Persian, since it attracteth the hearts to a greater degree. It is moreover requested that the reply to these questions be graciously written in pure Persian."

The Persian tongue is in truth exceedingly sweet and pleasing, and ever since this request was submitted in His most blessed and exalted court, numerous Tablets have been revealed in that language. As to the statement concerning the Qur'án implying that its outward meaning hath not been understood, in reality it hath been interpreted

¹⁷ Qur'án 2:156.

¹⁸ Qur'án 6:91.

in numerous ways and translated into countless languages. That which men have been unable to grasp are its hidden mysteries and inner meanings. And all that they have said or will say is limited in scope and should be seen as commensurate with their rank and station. For none can fathom its true meaning save God, the One, the Incomparable, the All-Knowing.

In this day He Who is the Lord, the Ruler, the Fashioner, and the Refuge of the world hath appeared. Let every ear be eager to hearken unto that which will be revealed from the kingdom of His will; let every eye be expectant to gaze upon that which will shine forth from the Daystar of knowledge and wisdom. By Him Who is the Desire of the world! This is the day for eyes to see and for ears to hear, for hearts to perceive and for tongues to speak forth. Blessed are they that have attained thereunto; blessed are they that have sought after and recognized it! This is the day whereon every man may accede unto everlasting honour, for whatsoever hath streamed forth from the Pen of Glory in regard to any soul is adorned with the ornament of immortality. Again, blessed are they that have attained thereunto!

The distinguished Şáhib hath written: "Since the Beloved in this age is of Persian descent, the Arabic tongue should be abandoned and discarded." In this connection these sublime words issued from the Pen of the Most High, magnified and exalted be His glory: "Both Arabic and Persian are laudable. That which is desired of a language is that it convey the intent of the speaker, and either language can serve this purpose. And since in this day the Orb of knowledge hath risen in the firmament of Persia, this tongue deserveth every praise."

The light of truth is indeed shining resplendent above the horizon of divine utterance, and hence no further elaboration is required from this evanescent soul or from others like unto him. Although there can be no question or doubt as to the sweetness of the Persian tongue, yet it hath not the scope of the Arabic. There are many things which have not been expressed in Persian, that is to say, words referring to such things have not been devised, whilst in Arabic there are several words describing the same thing. Indeed there existeth no language in the world as vast and comprehensive as Arabic. This statement is prompted by truth and fairness; otherwise it is clear that in this day the world is being illumined by the splendours of that Sun which hath dawned above the horizon of Persia, and that the merits of this sweet language can scarcely be overestimated.

All the questions of his honour the Şáhib have herewith been mentioned and duly answered. If it be deemed appropriate and advisable, there would be no harm in his perusing these answers himself, and likewise they may be read by the beloved friends in that land, such as Jináb-i-'Alí-Akbar, upon him be the glory of God, the Supreme Ordainer, and Jináb-i-Áqá Mírzá Asadu'lláh, upon him be the Glory of Glories.

This servant beseecheth the one True God — exalted be His glory — to graciously adorn the world of humanity with justice and fair-mindedness, although in truth the latter is but one of the expressions of the former. Verily, justice is a lamp that guideth man aright amidst the darkness of the world and shieldeth him from every danger. It is indeed a shining lamp. God grant that the rulers of the earth may be illumined by its light. This servant further imploreth God to graciously aid all men to do His will and pleasure. He, in truth, is the Lord of this world and of the world to come. No God is there but Him, the Almighty, the Most-Powerful.

