

Talk at Unitarian Church

'Abdu'l-Bahá

Original English



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Notes by Edna McKinney

I have come from distant countries of the Orient where the lights of heaven have ever shone forth, from regions where the Manifestations of God have appeared and the radiance and power of God have been revealed to mankind. The purpose and intention of my visit is that, perchance, a bond of unity and agreement may be established between the East and West, that divine love may encompass all nations, divine radiance enlighten both continents and the bounties of the Holy Spirit revivify the body of the world. Therefore, I supplicate the threshold of God that the Orient and Occident may become as one, that the various peoples and religions be unified and souls be blended as the waves of one sea. May they become as trees, flowers and roses which adorn and beautify the same garden.

The realm of Divinity is an indivisible oneness, wholly sanctified above human comprehension; for intellectual knowledge of creation is finite, whereas comprehension of Divinity is infinite. How can the finite comprehend the infinite? We are utter poverty, whereas the reality of Divinity is absolute wealth. How can utter poverty understand absolute wealth? We are utter weakness, whereas the reality of Divinity is absolute power. Utter weakness can never attain nor apprehend absolute power. The phenomenal beings, which are captives of limitations, are ever subject to transformation and change in condition. How can such phenomenal beings ever grasp the heavenly, eternal, unchanging reality? Assuredly this is an absolute impossibility, for when we study the creational world, we see that the difference of degree is a barrier to such knowing. An inferior degree can never comprehend a higher degree or kingdom.



ORIGINAL



AUDIO

The mineral, no matter how far it may advance, can never attain knowledge of the vegetable. No matter how the plant or vegetable may progress, it cannot perceive the reality of the animal kingdom — in other words, it cannot grasp a world of life that is endowed with the power of the senses. The animal may develop a wonderful degree of intelligence, but it can never attain the powers of ideation and conscious reflection which [pg 173] belong to man. It is evident, therefore, that difference in degree is ever an obstacle to comprehension of the higher by the lower, the superior by the inferior. This flower, so beautiful, fresh, fragrant and delicately scented, although it may have attained perfection in its own kingdom, nevertheless cannot comprehend the human reality, cannot possess sight and hearing; therefore, it exists unaware of the world of man, although man and itself are both accidental or conditional beings. The difference is difference of degree. The limitation of an inferior degree is the barrier to comprehension.

This being so, how can the human reality, which is limited, comprehend the eternal, unmanifest Creator? How can man comprehend the omniscient, omnipresent Lord? Undoubtedly, he cannot, for whatever comes within the grasp of human mind is man's limited conception, whereas the divine Kingdom is unlimited, infinite. But although the reality of Divinity is sanctified beyond the comprehension of its creatures, it has bestowed its bounties upon all kingdoms of the phenomenal world, and evidences of spiritual manifestation are witnessed throughout the realms of contingent existence. The lights of God illumine the world of man, even as the effulgences of the sun shine gloriously upon the material creation. The Sun of Reality is one; its bestowal is one; its heat is one; its rays are one; it shines upon all the phenomenal world, but the capacity for comprehending it differs according to the kingdoms, each kingdom receiving the light and bounty of the eternal Sun according to its capacity. The black stone receives the light of the material sun; the trees and animals likewise are recipients of it. All exist and are developed by that one bounty. The perfect soul of man — that is to say, the perfect individual — is like a mirror wherein the Sun of Reality is reflected. The perfections, the image and light of that Sun have been revealed in the mirror; its heat and illumination are manifest therein, for that pure soul is a perfect expression of the Sun.

These mirrors are the Messengers of God Who tell the story of Divinity, just as the material mirror reflects the light and disc of the outer sun in the skies. In this way the image and effulgence of the Sun of Reality appear in the mirrors of the Manifestations of God. This is what Jesus Christ meant when He declared, "the father is in the son," the purpose being that the reality of that eternal Sun had become reflected in its glory in Christ Himself. It does not signify that the Sun of Reality had descended from its place in heaven or that its essential being had effected an entrance into the mirror, for there is neither entrance nor exit for the reality of Divinity; there is no ingress or egress; it is sanctified above all things and ever occupies [pg 174] its own holy station. Changes and

transformations are not applicable to that eternal reality. Transformation from condition to condition is the attribute of contingent realities.

At a time when warfare and strife prevailed among nations, when enmity and hatred separated sects and denominations and human differences were very great, Bahá'u'lláh appeared upon the horizon of the East, proclaiming the oneness of God and the unity of the world of humanity. He promulgated the teaching that all mankind are the servants of one God; that all have come into being through the bestowal of the one Creator; that God is kind to all, nurtures, rears and protects all, provides for all and extends His love and mercy to all races and people. Inasmuch as God is loving, why should we be unjust and unkind? As God manifests loyalty and mercy, why should we show forth enmity and hatred? Surely the divine policy is more perfect than human plan and theory; for no matter how wise and sagacious man may become, he can never attain a policy that is superior to the policy of God. Therefore, we must emulate the attitude of God, love all people, be just and kind to every human creature. We must consider all as the leaves, branches and fruit of one tree, children of one household; for all are the progeny of Adam. We are waves of one sea, grass of the same meadow, stars in the same heaven; and we find shelter in the universal divine Protector. If one be sick, he must be treated; the ignorant must be educated; the sleeping must be awakened; the dead must be quickened with life. These were principles of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.

In proclaiming the oneness of mankind He taught that men and women are equal in the sight of God and that there is no distinction to be made between them. The only difference between them now is due to lack of education and training. If woman is given equal opportunity of education, distinction and estimate of inferiority will disappear. The world of humanity has two wings, as it were: One is the female; the other is the male. If one wing be defective, the strong perfect wing will not be capable of flight. The world of humanity has two hands. If one be imperfect, the capable hand is restricted and unable to perform its duties. God is the Creator of mankind. He has endowed both sexes with perfections and intelligence, given them physical members and organs of sense, without differentiation or distinction as to superiority; therefore, why should woman be considered inferior? This is not according to the plan and justice of God. He has created them equal; in His estimate there is no question of sex. The one whose heart is purest, whose deeds are most perfect, is acceptable to God, male or female. Often[pg 175] in history women have been the pride of humanity — for example, Mary, the mother of Jesus. She was the glory of mankind. Mary Magdalene, Ásíyih, daughter of Pharaoh, Sarah, wife of Abraham, and innumerable others have glorified the human race by their excellences. In this day there are women among the Bahá'ís who far outshine men. They are wise, talented, well-informed, progressive, most intelligent and the light of men. They surpass men in courage. When they speak in meetings, the men listen with great respect. Furthermore, the education of women is

of greater importance than the education of men, for they are the mothers of the race, and mothers rear the children. The first teachers of children are the mothers. Therefore, they must be capably trained in order to educate both sons and daughters. There are many provisions in the words of Bahá'u'lláh in regard to this.

He promulgated the adoption of the same course of education for man and woman. Daughters and sons must follow the same curriculum of study, thereby promoting unity of the sexes. When all mankind shall receive the same opportunity of education and the equality of men and women be realized, the foundations of war will be utterly destroyed. Without equality this will be impossible because all differences and distinction are conducive to discord and strife. Equality between men and women is conducive to the abolition of warfare for the reason that women will never be willing to sanction it. Mothers will not give their sons as sacrifices upon the battlefield after twenty years of anxiety and loving devotion in rearing them from infancy, no matter what cause they are called upon to defend. There is no doubt that when women obtain equality of rights, war will entirely cease among mankind.

Bahá'u'lláh promulgated the fundamental oneness of religion. He taught that reality is one and not multiple, that it underlies all divine precepts and that the foundations of the religions are, therefore, the same. Certain forms and imitations have gradually arisen. As these vary, they cause differences among religionists. If we set aside these imitations and seek the fundamental reality underlying our beliefs, we reach a basis of agreement because it is one and not multiple.

Among other principles of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings was the harmony of science and religion. Religion must stand the analysis of reason. It must agree with scientific fact and proof so that science will sanction religion and religion fortify science. Both are indissolubly welded and joined in reality. If statements and teachings of religion are found to be unreasonable and contrary to science, they are outcomes of superstition and imagination. Innumerable[pg 176] doctrines and beliefs of this character have arisen in the past ages. Consider the superstitions and mythology of the Romans, Greeks and Egyptians; all were contrary to religion and science. It is now evident that the beliefs of these nations were superstitions, but in those times they held to them most tenaciously. For example, one of the many Egyptian idols was to those people an authenticated miracle, whereas in reality it was a piece of stone. As science could not sanction the miraculous origin and nature of a piece of rock, the belief in it must have been superstition. It is now evident that it was superstition. Therefore, we must cast aside such beliefs and investigate reality. That which is found to be real and conformable to reason must be accepted, and whatever science and reason cannot support must be rejected as imitation and not reality. Then differences of belief will disappear. All will become as one family, one people, and the same susceptibility to the divine bounty and education will be witnessed among mankind.

O Thou forgiving Lord! Thou art the shelter of all these Thy servants. Thou knowest the secrets and art aware of all things. We are all helpless, and Thou art the Mighty, the Omnipotent. We are all sinners, and Thou art the Forgiver of sins, the Merciful, the Compassionate. O Lord! Look not at our shortcomings. Deal with us according to Thy grace and bounty. Our shortcomings are many, but the ocean of Thy forgiveness is boundless. Our weakness is grievous, but the evidences of Thine aid and assistance are clear. Therefore, confirm and strengthen us. Enable us to do that which is worthy of Thy holy Threshold. Illumine our hearts, grant us discerning eyes and attentive ears. Resuscitate the dead and heal the sick. Bestow wealth upon the poor and give peace and security to the fearful. Accept us in Thy kingdom and illumine us with the light of guidance. Thou art the Powerful and the Omnipotent. Thou art the Generous. Thou art the Clement. Thou art the Kind.

