

# Talk at All Souls Unitarian Church

'Abdu'l-Bahá

Original English



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Today I wish to speak to you upon the subject of the oneness of humanity, for in this great century the most important accomplishment is the unity of mankind. Although in former centuries and times this subject received some measure of mention and consideration, it has now become the paramount issue and question in the religious and political conditions of the world. History shows that throughout the past there has been continual warfare and strife among the various nations, peoples and sects; but now — praise be to God! — in this century of illumination, hearts are inclined toward agreement and fellowship, and minds are thoughtful upon[pg 229] the question of the unification of mankind. There is an emanation of the universal consciousness today which clearly indicates the dawn of a great unity.

In the investigation of a subject the right method of approach is to carefully examine its premises. Therefore, we must go back to the foundation upon which human solidarity rests — namely, that all are the progeny of Adam, the creatures and servants of one God; that God is the Protector and Provider; that all are submerged in the sea of divine mercy and grace and God is loving toward all.

Humanity shares in common the intellectual and spiritual faculties of a created endowment. All are equally subject to the various exigencies of human life and are similarly occupied in acquiring the means of earthly subsistence. From the viewpoint of creation human beings stand upon the same footing in every respect, subject to the same requirements and seeking the enjoyment and comfort of earthly conditions.



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Therefore, the things humanity shares in common are numerous and manifest. This equal participation in the physical, intellectual and spiritual problems of human existence is a valid basis for the unification of mankind.

Consider how discord and dissension have prevailed in this great human family for thousands of years. Its members have ever been engaged in war and bloodshed. Up to the present time in history the world of humanity has neither attained nor enjoyed any measure of peace, owing to incessant conditions of hostility and strife. History is a continuous and consecutive record of warfare brought about by religious, sectarian, racial, patriotic and political causes. The world of humanity has found no rest. Mankind has always been in conflict, engaged in destroying the foundations, pillaging the properties and possessing the lands and territory of each other, especially in the earlier periods of savagery and barbarism where whole races and peoples were carried away captive by their conquerors. Who shall measure or estimate the tremendous destruction of human life resulting from this hostility and strife? What human powers and forces have been employed in the prosecution of war and applied to inhuman purposes of battle and bloodshed? In this most radiant century it has become necessary to divert these energies and utilize them in other directions, to seek the new path of fellowship and unity, to unlearn the science of war and devote supreme human forces to the blessed arts of peace. After long trial and experience we are convinced of the harmful and satanic outcomes of dissension; now we must seek after means by which the benefits of agreement and concord may be enjoyed. When such means are found, we must give them a trial.[pg 230]

Consider the harmful effect of discord and dissension in a family; then reflect upon the favors and blessings which descend upon that family when unity exists among its various members. What incalculable benefits and blessings would descend upon the great human family if unity and brotherhood were established! In this century when the beneficent results of unity and the ill effects of discord are so clearly apparent, the means for the attainment and accomplishment of human fellowship have appeared in the world. Bahá'u'lláh has proclaimed and provided the way by which hostility and dissension may be removed from the human world. He has left no ground or possibility for strife and disagreement.

First, He has proclaimed the oneness of mankind and specialized religious teachings for existing human conditions. The first form of dissension arises from religious differences. Bahá'u'lláh has given full teachings to the world which are conducive to fellowship and unity in religion. Throughout past centuries each system of religious belief has boasted of its own superiority and excellence, abasing and scorning the validity of all others. Each has proclaimed its own belief as the light and all others as darkness. Religionists have considered the world of humanity as two trees: one divine and merciful, the other satanic; they themselves the branches, leaves and fruit of the divine tree and all others who differ from them in belief the product of the tree which is

satanic. Therefore, sedition and warfare, bloodshed and strife have been continuous among them. The greatest cause of human alienation has been religion because each party has considered the belief of the other as anathema and deprived of the mercy of God.

The teachings specialized in Bahá'u'lláh are addressed to humanity. He says, "Ye are all the leaves of one tree." He does not say, "Ye are the leaves of two trees: one divine, the other satanic." He has declared that each individual member of the human family is a leaf or branch upon the Adamic tree; that all are sheltered beneath the protecting mercy and providence of God; that all are the children of God, fruit upon the one tree of His love. God is equally compassionate and kind to all the leaves, branches and fruit of this tree. Therefore, there is no satanic tree whatever — Satan being a product of human minds and of instinctive human tendencies toward error. God alone is Creator, and all are creatures of His might. Therefore, we must love mankind as His creatures, realizing that all are growing upon the tree of His mercy, servants of His omnipotent will and manifestations of His good pleasure.

Even though we find a defective branch or leaf upon this tree of humanity or an imperfect blossom, it, nevertheless, belongs to this [pg 231] tree and not to another. Therefore, it is our duty to protect and cultivate this tree until it reaches perfection. If we examine its fruit and find it imperfect, we must strive to make it perfect. There are souls in the human world who are ignorant; we must make them knowing. Some growing upon the tree are weak and ailing; we must assist them toward health and recovery. If they are as infants in development, we must minister to them until they attain maturity. We should never detest and shun them as objectionable and unworthy. We must treat them with honor, respect and kindness; for God has created them and not Satan. They are not manifestations of the wrath of God but evidences of His divine favor. God, the Creator, has endowed them with physical, mental and spiritual qualities that they may seek to know and do His will; therefore, they are not objects of His wrath and condemnation. In brief, all humanity must be looked upon with love, kindness and respect; for what we behold in them are none other than the signs and traces of God Himself. All are evidences of God; therefore, how shall we be justified in debasing and belittling them, uttering anathema and preventing them from drawing near unto His mercy? This is ignorance and injustice, displeasing to God; for in His sight all are His servants.

Another cause of dissension and disagreement is the fact that religion has been pronounced at variance with science. Between scientists and the followers of religion there has always been controversy and strife for the reason that the latter have proclaimed religion superior in authority to science and considered scientific announcement opposed to the teachings of religion. Bahá'u'lláh declared that religion is in complete harmony with science and reason. If religious belief and doctrine is at variance with reason, it proceeds from the limited mind of man and not from God;

therefore, it is unworthy of belief and not deserving of attention; the heart finds no rest in it, and real faith is impossible. How can man believe that which he knows to be opposed to reason? Is this possible? Can the heart accept that which reason denies? Reason is the first faculty of man, and the religion of God is in harmony with it. Bahá'u'lláh has removed this form of dissension and discord from among mankind and reconciled science with religion by revealing the pure teachings of the divine reality. This accomplishment is specialized to Him in this Day.

Still another cause of disagreement and dissension has been the formation of religious sects and denominations. Bahá'u'lláh said that God has sent religion for the purpose of establishing fellowship among humankind and not to create strife and discord, for all[pg 232] religion is founded upon the love of humanity. Abraham promulgated this principle, Moses summoned all to its recognition, Christ established it, and Muḥammad directed mankind to its standard. This is the reality of religion. If we abandon hearsay and investigate the reality and inner significance of the heavenly teachings, we will find the same divine foundation of love for humanity. The purport is that religion is intended to be the cause of unity, love and fellowship and not discord, enmity and estrangement. Man has forsaken the foundation of divine religion and adhered to blind imitations. Each nation has clung to its own imitations, and because these are at variance, warfare, bloodshed and destruction of the foundation of humanity have resulted. True religion is based upon love and agreement. Bahá'u'lláh has said, "If religion and faith are the causes of enmity and sedition, it is far better to be nonreligious, and the absence of religion would be preferable; for we desire religion to be the cause of amity and fellowship. If enmity and hatred exist, irreligion is preferable." Therefore, the removal of this dissension has been specialized in Bahá'u'lláh, for religion is the divine remedy for human antagonism and discord. But when we make the remedy the cause of the disease, it would be better to do without the remedy.

Other sources of human dissension are political, racial and patriotic prejudices. These have been removed by Bahá'u'lláh. He has said, and has guarded His statement by rational proofs from the Holy Books, that the world of humanity is one race, the surface of the earth one place of residence and that these imaginary racial barriers and political boundaries are without right or foundation. Man is degraded in becoming the captive of his own illusions and suppositions. The earth is one earth, and the same atmosphere surrounds it. No difference or preference has been made by God for its human inhabitants; but man has laid the foundation of prejudice, hatred and discord with his fellowman by considering nationalities separate in importance and races different in rights and privileges.

Diversity of languages has been a fruitful cause of discord. The function of language is to convey the thought and purpose of one to another. Therefore, it matters not what language man speaks or employs. Sixty years ago Bahá'u'lláh advocated one language as the greatest means of unity and the basis of international conference. He wrote to

the kings and rulers of the various nations, recommending that one language should be sanctioned and adopted by all governments. According to this each nation should acquire[pg 233] the universal language in addition to its native tongue. The world would then be in close communication, consultation would become general, and dissensions due to diversity of speech would be removed.

Another teaching of Bahá'u'lláh is in relation to universal peace: that all mankind must be awakened to and become conscious of the harm of war, that they should be brought to realize the benefits of peace and know that peace is from God while warfare is satanic. Man must emulate the merciful God and turn away from satanic promptings in order that universal inclination shall be toward peace, love and unity and the discord of war vanish.

Lack of equality between man and woman is, likewise, a cause of human dissension. Bahá'u'lláh has named this as an important factor of discord and separation, for so long as humankind remains unequally divided in right and importance between male and female, no unity can be established. In a perfect human body it is not possible for one organ to be complete and another defective. In the great body of human society it is impossible to establish unity and coordination if one part is considered perfect and the other imperfect. When the perfect functions of both parts are in operation, harmony will prevail. God has created man and woman equal as to faculties. He has made no distinction between them. Woman has not reached the level of man in human accomplishment because of the lack of opportunity and education. If educational opportunities were made equal and similar, the two parts, man and woman, would equalize in attainment. God has intended no difference between them that should be productive of discord. He has endowed all with human faculties, and all are manifestations of His mercy. If we say man and woman differ in creational endowment, it is contrary to divine justice and intention. Both are human. If God has created one perfect and the other defective, He is unjust. But God is just; all are perfect in His intention and creative endowment. To assume imperfection in the creature is to presuppose imperfection in the almighty Creator. The soul that excels in attainment of His attributes and graces is most acceptable before God.

We are considering the divine plan for the reconciliation of the religious systems of the world. Bahá'u'lláh has said that if one intelligent member be selected from each of the varying religious systems, and these representatives come together seeking to investigate the reality of religion, they would establish an interreligious body before which all disputes and differences of belief could be presented for consideration and settlement. Such questions[pg 234] could then be weighed and viewed from the standpoint of reality and all imitations be discarded. By this method and procedure all sects, denominations and systems would become one.

Do not question the practicability of this, and be not astonished. It has been accomplished and effected in Persia. In that country the various religionists have conjoined in investigating reality and have united in complete fellowship and love. No traces of discord or differences remain among them; now affection and unity are manifest instead. They live together in harmony and accord like a single family. Antagonism and strife have passed away; love and agreement have taken the place of hatred and animosity. Furthermore, those souls who have followed Bahá'u'lláh and attained this condition of fellowship and affiliation are Muslims, Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, Buddhists, Nestorians, Sunnites, Shiites and others. No discord exists among them. This is a proof of the possibility of unification among the religionists of the world through practical means. Imitations and prejudices which have held men apart have been discarded, and the reality of religion envelops them in a perfect unity. When reality envelops the soul of man, love is possible. The divine purpose in religion is pure love and agreement. The Prophets of God manifested complete love for all. Each One announced the glad tidings of His successor, and each subsequent One confirmed the teachings and prophecies of the Prophet Who preceded Him. There was no disagreement or variance in the reality of Their teaching and mission. Discord has arisen among Their followers, who have lost sight of reality and hold fast to imitations. If imitations be done away with and the radiant shining reality dawn in the souls of men, love and unity must prevail. In this way humanity will be rescued from the strife and wars which have prevailed for thousands of years; dissensions will pass away and the illumination of unity dawn. Consider how all the Prophets of God were persecuted and what hardships They experienced. Jesus Christ endured affliction and accepted martyrdom upon the cross in order to summon mankind to unity and love. What sacrifice could be greater? He brought the religion of love and fellowship into the world. Shall we make use of it to create discord, violence and hatred among mankind?

Moses was persecuted and driven out into the desert, Abraham was banished, Muḥammad took refuge in caves, the Báb was killed and Bahá'u'lláh was exiled and imprisoned forty years. Yet all of Them desired fellowship and love among men. They endured hardships, suffered persecution and death for our sakes that we [pg 235] might be taught to love one another and be united and affiliated instead of discordant and at variance. Enough of these long centuries which have brought such vicissitudes and hardships into the world through strife and hatred. Now in this radiant century let us try to do the will of God that we may be rescued from these things of darkness and come forth into the boundless illumination of heaven, shunning division and welcoming the divine oneness of humanity. Perchance, God willing, this terrestrial world may become as a celestial mirror upon which we may behold the imprint of the traces of Divinity, and the fundamental qualities of a new creation may be reflected from the reality of love shining in human hearts. From the light and semblance of God in us may it be, indeed, proved and witnessed that God has created man after His own image and likeness.

O my God! O my God! Verily, I invoke Thee and supplicate before Thy threshold, asking Thee that all Thy mercies may descend upon these souls. Specialize them for Thy favor and Thy truth.

O Lord! Unite and bind together the hearts, join in accord all the souls, and exhilarate the spirits through the signs of Thy sanctity and oneness. O Lord! Make these faces radiant through the light of Thy oneness. Strengthen the loins of Thy servants in the service of Thy kingdom.

O Lord, Thou possessor of infinite mercy! O Lord of forgiveness and pardon! Forgive our sins, pardon our shortcomings, and cause us to turn to the kingdom of Thy clemency, invoking the kingdom of might and power, humble at Thy shrine and submissive before the glory of Thine evidences.

O Lord God! Make us as waves of the sea, as flowers of the garden, united, agreed through the bounties of Thy love. O Lord! Dilate the breasts through the signs of Thy oneness, and make all mankind as stars shining from the same height of glory, as perfect fruits growing upon Thy tree of life.

Verily, Thou art the Almighty, the Self-Subsistent, the Giver, the Forgiving, the Pardoner, the Omniscient, the One Creator.[pg 236]

