

Talk to Japanese Young Men's Christian Association

'Abdu'l-Bahá

Original English



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Notes by Bijou Straun

It is a great happiness to be here this evening, especially for the reason that the members of this Association have come from the region of the Orient. For a long time I have entertained a desire to meet some of the Japanese friends. That nation has achieved extraordinary progress in a short space of time — a progress and development which have astonished the world. Inasmuch as they have advanced in material civilization, they must assuredly possess the capacity for spiritual development. For this reason, I have an excessive longing to meet them. Praise be to God! This pleasure is now afforded me, for here in this city I am face to face with a revered group of the Japanese. According to report the people of the Japanese nation are not prejudiced. They investigate reality. Wherever they find truth, they prove to be its lovers. They are not attached tenaciously to blind imitations of ancient beliefs and dogmas. Therefore, it is my great desire to discourse with them upon a subject in order that the unity and blending together of the nations of the East and the nations of the West may be furthered and accomplished. In this way religious, racial and political prejudice, partisan bias and sectarianism will be dispelled amongst men. Any kind of prejudice is destructive to the body politic.



ORIGINAL



AUDIO

When we review history from the beginning of human existence to the present age in which we live, it is evident all war and conflict, bloodshed and battle, every form of sedition has been due to some form of prejudice — whether religious, racial or national — to partisan bias and selfish prejudice of some sort. Even today we witness an upheaval in the Balkans, a war of religious prejudice. Some years ago when I was living in Rumelia, war broke out among the religious peoples. There was no attitude of justice or equity whatever amongst them. They pillaged the properties of each other, burning each others' homes and houses, slaughtering men, women and children, imagining that such warfare and bloodshed was the means of drawing near to God. This clearly proved that prejudice [pg 344] is a destroyer of the foundations of the world of humanity, whereas religion was meant to be the cause of fellowship and agreement.

Religion must be the cause of love. Religion must be the cause of justice, for the wisdom of the Manifestations of God is directed toward the establishing of the bond of a love which is indissoluble. The bonds which hold together the body politic are not sufficient. These bonds may be mentioned — for instance, the bond of patriotism. This is evidently not a sufficient bond, for how often it happens that people of the same nation wage civil war amongst themselves. The bond of fellowship may be racial, but history proves this is not sufficiently strong, for tremendous wars have broken out between peoples of the same racial lineage. Again, the bond holding men together may be political. How often it happens that the diplomacy of nations makes a treaty of peace one day and on the morrow a declaration of war! It is historically evident and manifest that these bonds are not self-sufficient.

The real bond of integrity is religious in character, for religion indicates the oneness of the world of humanity. Religion serves the world of morality. Religion purifies the hearts. Religion impels men to achieve praiseworthy deeds. Religion becomes the cause of love in human hearts, for religion is a divine foundation, the foundation ever conducive to life. The teachings of God are the source of illumination to the people of the world. Religion is ever constructive, not destructive.

The foundation of all the divine religions is one. All are based upon reality. Reality does not admit plurality, yet amongst mankind there have arisen differences concerning the Manifestations of God. Some have been Zoroastrians, some are Buddhists, some Jews, Christians, Muslims and so on. This has become a source of divergence, whereas the teachings of the holy Souls Who founded the divine religions are one in essence and reality. All these have served the world of humanity. All have summoned souls to peace and accord. All have proclaimed the virtues of humanity. All have guided souls to the attainment of perfections, but among the nations certain imitations of ancestral forms of worship have arisen. These imitations are not the foundation and essence of the divine religions. Inasmuch as they differ from the reality and the essential teachings of the Manifestations of God, dissensions have arisen, and prejudice has developed. Religious prejudice thus becomes the cause of warfare and battle.

If we abandon these timeworn blind imitations and investigate reality, all of us will be unified. No discord will remain; antagonism[pg 345] will disappear. All will associate in fellowship. All will enjoy the cordial bonds of friendship. The world of creation will then attain composure. The dark and gloomy clouds of blind imitations and dogmatic variances will be scattered and dispelled; the Sun of Reality will shine most gloriously.

Verily, we should consider the divine Prophets as the intermediaries, but mankind has made use of Them as causes of dissension and pretexts for warfare and strife. In reality, They were the intermediaries of love and reconciliation. If They were not sources of love and fellowship amongst men, then undoubtedly They were not true, for the divine wisdom and purpose in sending the Prophets was the manifestation of love in human hearts. Therefore, we must investigate reality. First of all, let us determine whether these Prophets were valid or not by using rational proofs and shining arguments, not simply by quoting traditionary evidences, because traditions are divergent and the source of dissension.

Among the holy, divine Manifestations of God was Moses. The sending of Prophets has ever been for the training of humanity. They are the first Educators and Trainers. If Moses has developed the body politic, there is no doubt that He was a true Teacher and Educator. This will be proof and evidence that He was a Prophet. We shall consider how He was sent to the children of Israel when they were in the abyss of despair, in the lowest degree of ignorance and heedlessness, degraded and under conditions of bondage. Moses rescued these degraded people of Israel from that state of bondage. He raised them from that condition of ignorance, saved them from barbarism and led them into the Holy Land. He educated them, endowed them with sagacious instincts, made them worthy and honorable. He civilized them, raised them to a higher plane of existence until they were enabled to establish a national sovereignty, the great kingdom of Solomon. This proves that Moses was a Teacher and an Educator. He had neither army nor dominion; neither did He possess wealth. It was only through an idealistic power that He cemented them together, proving that He was a Prophet of God, an Educator and Trainer.

Likewise, must we set aside prejudice in considering other divine Educators by investigating reality. For instance, let us take Christ. He achieved results greater than Moses. He educated the body politic, trained mighty nations. There is no doubt whatever that such Souls were Prophets, for the mission of Prophethood is education, and these wondrous Souls trained and educated mankind.[pg 346]

Christ was a unique Personage, without helper or assistant. Single and solitary He arose to train great and mighty nations; the Romans, Greeks, Egyptians, Syrians, Chaldeans and Assyrians came under His influence. He was able to bind together many nations, melting them together, as it were, and pouring them into one mold, changing their enmity into love, war into peace. Under His influence satanic souls became veritable

angels, tyrannical rulers became just, the human moral standard was raised. This proves that Christ was an Educator, a Teacher and Trainer of nations. If we deny this, it is nought but injustice.

Blessed souls — whether Moses, Jesus, Zoroaster, Krishna, Buddha, Confucius or Muḥammad — were the cause of the illumination of the world of humanity. How can we deny such irrefutable proof? How can we be blind to such light? How can we dispute the validity of Christ? This is injustice. This is a denial of reality. Man must be just. We must set aside bias and prejudice. We must abandon the imitations of ancestors and forefathers. We ourselves must investigate reality and be fair in judgment.

The old nation of Persia denied all these facts, harboring the utmost hatred and enmity toward other religious beliefs besides their own. We have investigated reality and found that these holy souls were all sent of God. All of them have sacrificed life, endured ordeals and tribulations in order that They might educate us. How can such love be forgotten? The light of Christ is evident. The candle of Buddha is shining. The star of Moses is sparkling. The flame ignited by Zoroaster is still burning. How can we deny Them? It is injustice. It is a denial of complete evidence. If we forsake imitations, all will become united, and no differences will remain to separate us.

We entertain no prejudice against Muḥammad. Outwardly the Arabian nation was instrumental in overthrowing the Pársí dominion, the sovereignty of Persia. Therefore, the old Pársí nation manifested the utmost contempt toward the Arabs. But we deal justly and will never abandon the standard of fairness. The Arabians were in the utmost state of degradation. They were bloodthirsty and barbarous, so savage and degraded that the Arabian father often buried his own daughter alive. Consider: Could any barbarism be lower than this? The nation consisted of warring, hostile tribal peoples inhabiting the vast Arabian peninsula, and their business consisted in fighting and pillaging each other, making captive women and children, killing each other. Muḥammad appeared among such a people. He educated and unified these barbarous tribes, put an end to their shedding of blood. Through His education they reached[pg 347] such a degree of civilization that they subdued and governed continents and nations. What a great civilization was established in Spain by the Muslims! What a marvelous civilization was founded in Morocco by the Moors! What a powerful caliphate or successorship was set up in Bagḥdád! How much Islám served and furthered the cause of science! Why then should we deny Muḥammad? If we deny Him, we awaken enmity and hatred. By our prejudice we become the cause of war and bloodshed, for prejudice was the cause of the tremendous storm which swept through human history for thirteen hundred years and still continues. Even now in the Balkans a commotion is apparent, reflecting it.

The Christian people number nearly three hundred millions and the Muslims about the same. It is no small task to do away with such numbers. And furthermore, why should they be obliterated? For these are all servants of the one God. Let us strive to establish peace between Christians and Muslims. Is it not better? What is the benefit of war? What is its fruitage? For thirteen hundred years there has been warfare and hostility. What good result has been forthcoming? Is it not folly? Is God pleased with it? Is Christ pleased? Is Muḥammad? It is evident that They are not. The Prophets have extolled each other to the utmost. Muḥammad declared Christ to be the Spirit of God. This is an explicit text of the Qur'án. He declared Christ to be the Word of God. He eulogized the disciples of Christ to the utmost. He bestowed upon Mary, the mother of Christ, the highest praise. Likewise, Christ extolled Moses. He spread broadcast the Old Testament, the Torah, and caused the name of Moses to reach unto the East and the West. The purpose is this: that the Prophets Themselves have manifested the utmost love toward each other, but the nations who believe and follow Them are hostile and antagonistic among themselves.

The world was in this condition of darkness when Bahá'u'lláh appeared upon the Persian horizon. He hoisted the banner of the oneness of the world of humanity. He proclaimed international peace. He admonished the Persian nation to investigate reality, announced that religion must be the cause of unity and love, that it must be the means of binding hearts together, the cause of life and illumination. If religion becomes the cause of enmity and bloodshed, then irreligion is to be preferred, for religion is the remedy for every ailment, and if a remedy should become the cause of ailment and difficulty, it is better to abandon it. Today in Persia you will see the Muslims, Christians, Zoroastrians, Buddhists assembled together in the same meeting, living in accordance with the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, manifesting utmost love and accord. Rancor, [pg 348] hatred, antagonism and violence have disappeared; they live together as one family.

And ye who are the people of the Orient — the Orient which has ever been the dawning point of lights from whence the Sun of Reality has ever shone forth, casting its effulgence upon the West — ye, therefore, must become the manifestations of lights. Ye must become brilliant lamps. Ye must shine as stars radiating the light of love toward all mankind. May you be the cause of love amongst the nations. Thus may the world become witness that the Orient has ever been the dawning point of illumination, the source of love and reconciliation. Make peace with all the world. Love everybody; serve everybody. All are the servants of God. God has created all. He provideth for all. He is kind to all. Therefore, must we be kind to all.

I am greatly pleased with this meeting. I am joyous and happy, for here in these western regions I find Orientals seeking education and who are free from prejudice. May God assist you!

