

Talk at Home of Miss Juliet Thompson

'Abdu'l-Bahá

Original English



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Notes by Hooper Harris

I have spoken in the various Christian churches and in the synagogues, and in no assemblage has there been a dissenting voice. All have listened, and all have conceded that the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh are superlative in character, acknowledging that they constitute the very essence or spirit of this new age and that there is no better pathway to the attainment of its ideals. Not a single voice has been raised in objection. At most there have been some who have refused to acknowledge the mission of Bahá'u'lláh, although even these have admitted that He was a great teacher, a most powerful soul, a very great man. Some who could find no other pretext have said, "These teachings are not new; they are old and familiar; we have heard them before." Therefore, I will speak to you upon the distinctive characteristics of the manifestation of Bahá'u'lláh and prove that from every standpoint His Cause is distinguished from all others. It is distinguished by its didactic character and method of exposition, by its practical effects and application to present world conditions, but especially distinguished from the standpoint of its spread and progress.

When Bahá'u'lláh appeared in Persia, all the contemporaneous religious sects and systems rose against Him. His enemies were kings. The enemies of Christ were the Jews, the Pharisees; but the enemies of Bahá'u'lláh were rulers who could command armies and bring hundreds of thousands of soldiers into the arena of operation. These kings represented some fifty million people, all of whom under their influence and



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domination were opposed to Bahá'u'lláh. Therefore, in effect Bahá'u'lláh, singly and alone, virtually withstood fifty million enemies. Yet these great numbers, instead of being able to dominate Him, could not withstand His wonderful personality and the power and influence of His heavenly Cause. Although they were determined upon extinguishing the light in that most brilliant lantern, they were ultimately defeated and overthrown, and day by day His splendor became more radiant. They made every effort to lessen His greatness, but His prestige and renown grew in proportion to their endeavors to diminish [pg 432] it. Surrounded by enemies who were seeking His life, He never sought to conceal Himself, did nothing to protect Himself; on the contrary, in His spiritual might and power He was at all times visible before the faces of men, easy of access, serenely withstanding the multitudes who were opposing Him. At last His banner was upraised.

If we study historical record and review the pages of Holy Writ, we will find that none of the Prophets of the past ever spread His teachings or promulgated His Cause from a prison. But Bahá'u'lláh upheld the banner of the Cause of God while He was in a dungeon, addressing the kings of the earth from His prison cell, severely arraiging them for their oppression of their subjects and their misuse of power. The letter He sent to the Sháh of Persia under such conditions may now be read by anyone. His Epistles to the Sulṭán of Turkey, Napoleon III, Emperor of France, and to the other rulers of the world including the President of the United States are, likewise, current and available. The book containing these Epistles to the kings was published in India about thirty years ago and is known as the Súratu'l-Haykal ("Discourse of the Temple"). Whatever is recorded in these Epistles has happened. Some of the prophecies contained in them came to pass after two years; others were fulfilled after five, ten and twenty years. The most important prophecies relative to events transpiring in the Balkans are being fulfilled at the present time though written long ago. For instance, in the Epistle which Bahá'u'lláh addressed to the Sulṭán of Turkey, the war and the occurrences of the present day were foretold by Him. These events were also prophesied in the Tablet He addressed to the city of Constantinople, even to the details of happenings now being witnessed in that city.

While addressing these powerful kings and rulers He was a prisoner in a Turkish dungeon. Consider how marvelous it was for a prisoner under the eye and control of the Turks to arraign so boldly and severely the very king who was responsible for His imprisonment. What power this is! What greatness! Nowhere in history can the record of such a happening be found. In spite of the iron rule and absolute dominion of these kings, His function was to withstand them; and so constant and firm was He that He caused their banners to come down and His own standard to be upraised. For today the flags of both the Persian and the Ottoman Empires are trailing in the dust, whereas the ensign of Bahá'u'lláh is being held aloft in the world both in the East and in the West. Consider what a mighty power this is! What a decisive argument! Although a

prisoner in a fortress, He paid no heed to these kings, regarded not their [pg 433] power of life and death, but, on the contrary, addressed them in plain and fearless language, announcing explicitly that the time would come when their sovereignty would be brought low and His own dominion be established.

He said in substance, "Erelong you will find yourselves in manifest loss. Your sovereignties will be laid waste; your empires will become a wilderness and a heap of ruins; hosts from without will invade and subdue your lands; lamentation and mourning will rise from your homes. There will be no throne; there will be no crown; there will be no palace; there will be no armies. Nay, rather, all these will be brought low; but the standard of the Cause of God will be held aloft. Then will you see that hosts and hosts will enter the Cause of God and that this mighty revelation will be spread throughout the world." Read the prophecies contained in the Súratu'l-Haykal and ponder carefully over them.

This is one of the characteristics of Bahá'u'lláh's message and teachings. Can you find events and happenings of this kind in any other prophetic dispensation? If so, in what cycle have similar things taken place? Do you find such specific prophecies and explicit statements concerning the future in the Holy Books of the past? We will now compare the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh with the Holy Words which have descended in the former cycles.

First among the great principles revealed by Him is that of the investigation of reality. The meaning is that every individual member of humankind is exhorted and commanded to set aside superstitious beliefs, traditions and blind imitation of ancestral forms in religion and investigate reality for himself. Inasmuch as the fundamental reality is one, all religions and nations of the world will become one through investigation of reality. The announcement of this principle is not found in any of the sacred Books of the past.

A second characteristic principle of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh is that which commands recognition of the oneness of the world of humanity. Addressing all mankind, He says, "Ye are all the leaves of one tree." There are no differences or distinctions of race among you in the sight of God. Nay, rather, all are the servants of God, and all are submerged in the ocean of His oneness. Not a single soul is bereft. On the contrary, all are the recipients of the bounties of God. Every human creature has a portion of His bestowals and a share of the effulgence of His reality. God is kind to all. Mankind are His sheep, and He is their real Shepherd. No other scriptures contain such breadth and universality of statement; no other teachings proclaim this unequivocal principle of the solidarity [pg 434] of humanity. As regards any possible distinctions, the utmost that Bahá'u'lláh says is that conditions among men vary, that some, for instance, are defective. Therefore, such souls must be educated in order that they may be brought to the degree of perfection. Some are sick and ailing; they must be treated

and cared for until they are healed. Some are asleep; they need to be awakened. Some are immature as children; they should be helped to attain maturity. But all must be loved and cherished. The child must not be disliked simply because it is a child. Nay, rather, it should be patiently educated. The sick one must not be avoided nor slighted merely because he is ailing. Nay, rather, he must be regarded with sympathy and affection and treated until he is healed. The soul that is asleep must not be looked upon with contempt but awakened and led into the light.

Bahá'u'lláh teaches that religion must be in conformity with science and reason. If belief and teaching are opposed to the analysis of reason and principles of science, they are not worthy of acceptance. This principle has not been revealed in any of the former Books of divine teaching.

Another fundamental announcement made by Bahá'u'lláh is that religion must be the source of unity and fellowship in the world. If it is productive of enmity, hatred and bigotry, the absence of religion would be preferable. This is a new principle of revelation found only in the utterances of Bahá'u'lláh.

Again, Bahá'u'lláh declares that all forms of prejudice among mankind must be abandoned and that until existing prejudices are entirely removed, the world of humanity will not and cannot attain peace, prosperity and composure. This principle cannot be found in any other sacred volume than the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.

Another teaching is that there shall be perfect equality between men and women. Why should man create a distinction which God does not recognize? In the kingdoms below man sex exists, but the distinction between male and female is neither repressive nor restrictive. The mare, for instance, is as strong and often more speedy than the horse. Throughout the animal and vegetable kingdoms there is perfect equality between the sexes. In the kingdom of mankind this equality must likewise exist, and the one whose heart is purest, whose life and character are highest and nearest to the divine standard is most worthy and excellent in the sight of God. This is the only true and real distinction, be that one man or woman.

Bahá'u'lláh has announced the necessity for a universal language which shall serve as a means of international communication and thus remove misunderstandings and difficulties. This [pg 435] teaching is set forth in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas ("Most Holy Book") published fifty years ago.

He has also proclaimed the principle that all mankind shall be educated and that no illiteracy be allowed to remain. This practical remedy for the need of the world cannot be found in the text of any other sacred Books.

He teaches that it is incumbent upon all mankind to become fitted for some useful trade, craft or profession by which subsistence may be assured, and this efficiency is to be considered as an act of worship.

The teachings of Bahá'u'lláh are boundless and without end in their far-reaching benefit to mankind. The point and purpose of our statement today is that they are new and that they are not found in any of the religious Books of the past. This is in answer to the question, "What has Bahá'u'lláh brought that we have not heard before?" Therefore, it is conclusive and evident that the Manifestation of God in this day is distinguished from all former appearances and revelations by His majesty, His power and the efficacy and application of His Word.

All the Prophets of God were scorned and persecuted. Consider Moses. The people called Him a murderer. They said, "You killed a man and fled from punishment and retribution. Is it possible after your former deeds that you could become a Prophet?"

Many similar experiences are recorded concerning the holy, divine Messengers. How bitter and severe was the persecution to which They were subjected! Consider how they endeavored to efface and belittle Christ. They placed upon His head a crown of thorns and paraded Him through the streets and bazaars in mockery crying, "Peace be upon thee, thou king of the Jews!" Some would bow to Him backward, saying in scornful tones, "Thou king of the Jews!" or "Lord of lords, peace be upon thee!" Still others would spit upon His blessed countenance. In brief, the persecutions which Christ suffered during the time of His manifestation are mentioned in the books of the old cycle, Jewish, Roman or Greek. No praises were bestowed upon Him. The only recognition and acceptance offered Him was from His believers and followers. Peter, for instance, was one who praised Him; and the other disciples spoke in His behalf. Numerous books were written against Him. In the history of the Church you will find record of the hatred and antagonism manifested by the Roman, Greek and Egyptian philosophers, attributing calumnies and ascribing imperfection to Him.

But during the manifestation of Bahá'u'lláh, from the day of His appearance to the time of His departure, the people of all nations [pg 436] acknowledged His greatness, and even those who were His most bitter enemies have said of Him, "This man was truly great; his influence was mighty and wonderful. This personage was glorious; his power was tremendous, his speech most eloquent; but, alas, he was a misleader of the people." This was the essence of their praise, eulogy and denial. It is evident that the authors of such statements, although His enemies, were profoundly impressed by His greatness and majesty. Some of His enemies have even written poems about Him, which though intended for satire and sarcastic allusion, have in reality been praise. For instance, a certain poet opposed to His Cause has said, "Beware! Beware! lest ye approach this person, for he is possessed of such power and of such an eloquent tongue that he is a sorcerer. He charms men, he drugs them; he is a hypnotizer.

Beware! Beware! lest you read his book follow his example and associate with his companions because they are the possessors of tremendous power and they are misleaders.” That is to say, this poet used such characterizations, believing them to be terms of belittlement and disparagement, unaware that they were in reality praises, because a wise man, after reading such a warning, would say, “The power of this man must unquestionably be very great if even his enemies acknowledge it. Undoubtedly, such a power is heavenly in its nature.” This was one of the reasons why so many were moved to investigate. The more His enemies wrote against Him, the more the people were attracted and the greater the number who came to inquire about the truth. They would say, “This is remarkable. This is a great man, and we must investigate. We must look into this cause to find out what it all means, to discover its purpose, examine its proofs and learn for ourselves what it signifies.” In this way the malign and sinister statements of His enemies caused the people to become friendly and approach the Cause. In Persia the mullás went so far as to proclaim from the pulpits against the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh casting their turbans upon the ground — a sign of great agitation — and crying out, “O people! This Bahá’u’lláh is a sorcerer who is seeking to mesmerize you; he is alienating you from your own religion and making you his own followers. Beware! lest you read his book. Beware! lest you associate with his friends.”

Bahá’u’lláh, speaking of these very ones who were attacking and decrying Him, said, “They are My heralds; they are the ones who are proclaiming My message and spreading My Word. Pray that they may be multiplied, pray that their number may increase and that they may cry out more loudly. The more they abuse Me by their words and the greater their agitation, the more potent and [pg 437] mighty will be the efficacy of the Cause of God, the more luminous the light of the Word and the greater the radiance of the divine Sun. And eventually the gloomy darkness of the outer world will disappear, and the light of reality will shine until the whole earth will be effulgent with its glory.”

