

FOREWORD

The present monograph brings together three essays related to Bahá'í scholarship. The first of these is entitled “The Purposes and Objectives of Bahá'í Scholarship” and is the principal essay (pp. 3-75). The two other essays are entitled “Attaining to the Knowledge of God” (pp. 76-106) and “The Study of Philosophy” (pp. 107-129).

On 7 July 2000, I completed the first draft of a listing of the purposes and specific objectives of Bahá'í scholarship as depicted in four compilations produced by the Research Department of the Bahá'í World Centre. On 11 September 2005, I began to revise this draft and add some commentary, completing the revision on 17 September. On 14 January 2006, I made some minor revisions, prior to sharing it with various interested parties. Finally, between September and November and December of 2008, I added many more citations from Bahá'í texts, and expanded some of the commentaries.

The numbers in [brackets] denote quotations from “Extracts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and ‘Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice on Scholarship” (1995)¹. The numbers in {whatever these are called} denote the compilation on scholarship prepared in 1979, and the numbers in <this sort of figure> denote that compiled in 1983². The numbers in (parentheses) denote quotations from the 1983 compilation entitled “The Importance of Deepening Our Knowledge and Understanding of the Faith”³. I should note that only the 1995 compilation has the quotations numbered, and, for the ease of identifying selections, I have numbered them in each of the other compilations, chronologically, from start to finish. All three compilations were prepared by the Research Department at the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa, Israel.

I find that in trying to categorize the Bahá'í teachings, there are often cases where a particular teaching can fit into more than one category, and others where any category that one tries to fashion just doesn't seem to fit! In any case, I have tried to organize these ideas, and I hope others will find this effort useful and that they will improve upon it.

Peter Terry
November 21, 2009

¹http://www.bahai-studies.ca/files/Scholarship_Compilation.pdf

²These compilations are not currently found online, but are found in Ocean under the title “1999 Dec 13, Two Compilations on Scholarship – 1979 and 1983”, with a cover letter dated 13 December 1999 and addressed to myself.

³http://bahai-library.org/file.php?file=compilation_importance_deepening

PURPOSES OF SCHOLARSHIP

1. to promote the well-being of the world [22], {1}, {7}, {16}, {21}
2. to establish the present-day requirements of society, in articles and books [23]
3. to defend the Faith [26], [29]
4. to protect the believers [27]
5. to raise up and make victorious the Word of God [27], [30], {6+}, {8}, (50)
6. to increase the number of believers [27]
7. to create teachers of the Faith [31], [33], {25}, <10>
8. to awaken the people, educate mankind, expand the consciousness of men {5}, (31), (37), (49)
9. to attain to knowledge of God {4}, {6}, {8}, {10}
10. to discover the truth [70], {9}, {11}, {19}, {27}, <1>, <2>, <4>, <5>, <12>, <14>

Each principle will now be examined, with the texts articulating that principle reproduced in full, accompanied by a Commentary authored by the compiler:

1. to promote the well-being of the world [22], {1}, {7}, {16}, {21}

True learning is that which is conducive to the well-being of the world, not to pride and self-conceit, or to tyranny, violence and pillage. (Bahá'u'lláh, from a Tablet, translated from the Persian) [22]

The learned of the day must direct the people to acquire those branches of knowledge which are of use, that both the learned themselves and the generality of mankind may derive benefits therefrom. Such academic pursuits as begin and end in words alone have never been and will never be of any worth. The majority of Persia's learned doctors devote all their lives to the study of a philosophy the ultimate yield of which is nothing but words. (Bahá'u'lláh, from a Tablet) {1}

They are busy by night and by day with meticulous research into such sciences as are profitable to mankind, and they devote themselves to the training of students of capacity. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization, pp. 21-22) {7}

The world is undoubtedly facing a great crisis and the social, economic and political conditions are becoming daily more complex. Should the friends desire to take the lead in reforming the world, they should start by educating themselves and understand what the troubles and problems really are which baffle the mind of man. (Shoghi Effendi, from a letter written on his behalf to an individual believer, dated 27 January 1932) {16}

The Cause needs more Bahá'í scholars, people who not only are devoted to it and believe in it and are anxious to tell others about it, but also who have a deep grasp of the Teachings and their significance, and who can correlate its beliefs with the current thoughts and problems of the people of the world. The Cause has the remedy for all the world's ills. The reason why more people don't accept it is because the Bahá'ís are not always capable of presenting it to them in a way that meets the immediate needs of their minds. (Shoghi Effendi, from a letter written on his behalf to an individual believer, dated 21 October 1943; in *Canadian Bahá'í News*, March 1967, p. 7) {21}

Commentary

This is indicative of the overall tenor of Bahá'í intellectual effort, which is meant to result in the upliftment of humanity, the improvement of human life, the promotion of an ever-advancing civilization. Our deeds are supposed to exceed our words and not the other way around, and we are enjoined to devote ourselves to learning and applying sciences that are of benefit rather than those which begin and end in words. Bahá'í scholarship is pragmatic, and since the root causes of most human ailments are spiritual, and its understanding of the spiritual is unitive rather than dualistic, its pragmatism embraces both the temporal and the supernatural dimensions of human existence.

2. to establish the present-day requirements of society, in articles and books [23]

It is therefore urgent that beneficial articles and books be written, clearly and definitely establishing what the present-day requirements of the people are, and what will conduce to the happiness and advancement of society. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, from The Secret of Divine Civilization, pp. 109-110) [23]

Commentary

There are two ways of understanding this imperative--the first is to perceive it as a call to be physicians to the body of humanity, which conforms to Bahá'u'lláh's vision of what His followers are to be doing. Hence, we are called upon to diagnose the "present-day requirements of society", in keeping with the principle that we are to be preoccupied with the needs of our own day rather than those of a past or future period of time. A second way of understanding this is that we should promulgate the Bahá'í teachings, as they pertain to the various problems encountered in contemporary society, inasmuch as these teachings constitute the sovereign remedy for the ills of mankind. These two ways of deconstructing the imperative are complementary, and both are in harmony with the Bahá'í teachings. The second part of the imperative is that we write about these matters, in articles and in books, and this presumes, I would argue, that we publish those articles and books, so that they have the potential of impacting the lives of others. Hence, Bahá'í scholarship should be intimately involved in gauging the needs of society and actively publishing treatises that address those needs.



3. to defend the Faith [26], [29]

If any man were to arise to defend, in his writings, the Cause of God against its assailants, such a man, however inconsiderable his share, shall be so honoured in the world to come that the Concourse on high would envy his glory. (Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings, CLIV) [26]

There is an answer in the teachings for everything; unfortunately the majority of the Bahá'ís, however intensely devoted and sincere they may be, lack for the most part the necessary scholarship and wisdom to reply to and refute the claims and attacks of people with some education and standing. (Shoghi Effendi, from a letter written on his behalf to an individual believer, dated 25 September 1942) [29]

The second of these spiritual standards which apply to the possessor of knowledge is that he should be the defender of his faith. [SDC:41]

Definition: It is obvious that these holy words do not refer exclusively to searching out the implications of the Law, observing the forms of worship, avoiding greater and lesser sins, practicing the religious ordinances, and by all these methods, protecting the Faith. [SDC:41]

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(201.0) They mean rather that the whole population should be protected in every way; [SDC:41]

(202.0) that every effort should be exerted to adopt a combination of all possible measures to raise up the Word of God, [SDC:41]

(203.0) increase the number of believers, [SDC:41]

(204.0) promote the Faith of God and exalt it [SDC:41]

(205.0) and make it victorious over other religions. [SDC:41]

If, indeed, the Muslim religious authorities had persevered along these lines as they ought to have done, by now every nation on earth would have been gathered into the shelter of the unity of God and the bright fire of "that He may make it victorious over every other religion" [Qur'án 9:33; 48:28; 61:9] would have flamed out like the sun in the midmost heart of the world. [SDC:41]

Now if the illustrious people of the one true God, the recipients of His confirmations, the objects of His Divine assistance, should put forth all their strength, and with complete dedication, relying upon God and turning aside from all else but Him, should adopt procedures for spreading the Faith and should bend all their efforts to this end, it is certain that His Divine light would envelop the whole earth. [SDC:43]

This cannot be effected through violence, or through fanaticism and unreasoning religious zeal, but rather through its avoidance:

Not through violence: If, however, they would carefully examine this question, they would see that in this day and age the sword is not a suitable means for promulgating the Faith, for it would only fill peoples' hearts with revulsion and terror. According to the Divine Law of Muhammad, it is not permissible to compel the People of the Book to acknowledge and accept the Faith. While [SDC:44] it is a sacred obligation devolving on every conscientious believer in the unity of God to guide mankind to the truth, the Traditions "I am a Prophet by the sword" and "I am commanded to threaten the lives of the people until they say, 'There is none other God but God'" referred to the idolaters of the Days of Ignorance, who in their blindness and bestiality had sunk below the level of human beings. A faith born of sword thrusts could hardly be relied upon, and would for any trifling cause revert to error and unbelief. After the ascension of Muhammad, and His passing to "the seat of truth, in the presence of the potent King," [Qur'án 54:55] the tribes around Medina apostatized from their Faith, turning back to the idolatry of pagan times.

As for the sword, it will only produce a man who is outwardly a believer, and inwardly a traitor and apostate. [SDC:46]

Not through fanaticism and unreasoning religious zeal:

Rather, the purpose of His consummate wisdom was to free the people from the chains of fanaticism which had bound them hand and foot, and to forestall those very objections which today confuse the mind and trouble the conscience of the simple and helpless. [SDC:29]

One of the principal reasons why people of other religions have shunned and failed to become converted to the Faith of God is fanaticism and unreasoning religious zeal. See for example the divine words that were addressed to Muhammad, the Ark of Salvation, the Luminous Countenance and Lord of Men, bidding Him to be gentle with the people and long-suffering: "Debate with them in the kindest manner." [Qur'án 16:126] That Blessed Tree Whose light was "neither of the East nor of the West" [Qur'án 24:35] and Who cast over all the peoples of the earth the sheltering shade of a measureless grace, showed forth infinite kindness and forbearance in His dealings with every one. In these words, likewise, were Moses and Áron commanded to challenge Pharaoh, Lord of the Stakes: [Dhu'l-Awtad is variously rendered by translators of the Qur'án as The Impaler, The Contriver of the Stakes, The Lord of a Strong Dominion, The One Surrounded by Ministers, etc. Awtad means pegs or tent stakes. See Qur'án 38:11 and 89:9] "Speak ye to him with gentle speech." [Qur'án 20:46]

Although the noble conduct of the Prophets and Holy Ones of God is widely known, and it is indeed, until the coming of the Hour, [Qur'án 33:63: "Men will ask Thee of 'the Hour.' Say: The knowledge of it is with God alone." Cf. also 22:1, "the earthquake of the Hour," etc. See also Matthew 24:36, 42, etc. To Bahá'ís, this refers to the Advent of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh.] in every aspect of life [SDC:54] an excellent pattern for all mankind to follow, nevertheless some have remained neglectful of and separated from these qualities of extraordinary sympathy and loving-kindness, and have been prevented from attaining to the inner significances of the Holy Books. Not only do they scrupulously shun the adherents of religions other than their own, they do not even permit themselves to show them common courtesy. If one is not allowed to associate with another, how can one guide him out of the dark and empty night of denial, of "there-is-no-God," into the bright morning of belief, and the affirmation, "but God." [Cf. the Islamic confession of faith, sometimes called the two testimonies: "I testify that there is no God but God and Muhammad is the Prophet of God."] And how can one urge him on and encourage him to rise up out of the abyss of perdition and ignorance and climb the heights of salvation and knowledge? Consider justly: had not Hanzala treated Nu'man with true friendship, showing him kindness and hospitality, could he have brought the King and a great number of other idolaters to acknowledge the unity of God? To keep aloof from people, to shun them, to be harsh with them, will make them shrink away, while affection and consideration, mildness and forbearance will attract their hearts toward God. If a true believer when meeting an individual from a foreign country should express revulsion, and [SDC:55] should speak the horrible words forbidding association with foreigners and referring to them as "unclean," the stranger would be grieved and offended to such a point that he would never accept the Faith, even if he should see, taking place before his very eyes, the miracle of the splitting of the moon. The results of shunning him would be this, that if there had been in his heart some faint inclination toward God, he would repent of it, and would flee away from the sea of faith into the wastes of oblivion and unbelief. And upon returning home to

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his own country he would publish in the press statements to the effect that such and such a nation was utterly lacking in the qualifications of a civilized people. [SDC:55]

To maintain his leadership, he will everlastingly direct the masses toward that prejudice and fanaticism which subvert the very base of civilization...O people of Persia! Open your eyes! Pay heed! Release yourselves from this blind following of the bigots, this senseless imitation which is the principal reason why men fall away into paths of ignorance and degradation. [SDC:104]

The primary means for this defense of his Faith is through the exalted character of his deeds:

In spite of this agonizing requital, the Christians continued to teach the Cause of God, and they never drew a sword from its scabbard or even so much as grazed a cheek. Then in the end the Faith of Christ encompassed [SDC:46] the whole earth, so that in Europe and America no traces of other religions were left, and today in Asia and Africa and Oceania, large masses of people are living within the sanctuary of the Four Gospels. It has now by the above irrefutable proofs been fully established that the Faith of God must be propagated through human perfections, through qualities that are excellent and pleasing, and spiritual behavior. If a soul of his own accord advances toward God he will be accepted at the Threshold of Oneness, for such a one is free of personal considerations, of greed and selfish interests, and he has taken refuge within the sheltering protection of his Lord. He will become known among men as trustworthy and truthful, temperate and scrupulous, high-minded and loyal, incorruptible and God-fearing. In this way the primary purpose in revealing the Divine Law--which is to bring about happiness in the after life and civilization and the refinement of character in this--will be realized. [SDC:46]

Observe how one individual, and he a man of the desert, to outward seeming unknown and of no station--because he showed forth one of the qualities of the pure in heart, was able to deliver this proud sovereign and a great company of others from the dark night of unbelief and guide them into the morning of salvation; to save them from the perdition of idolatry and bring them to the shores of the oneness of God, and to put an end to practices of the sort which blight a whole society and reduce the peoples to barbarism. One must think deeply over this, and grasp its meaning. [SDC:52]

Commentary

Apologetics has been a requirement of religious scholarship for many millennia, and Bahá'u'lláh strongly encourages His followers to defend the Faith against attacks in writing, so it will continue to be an integral part of Bahá'í scholarship in the future. 'Abdu'l-Bahá expands upon this theme of defending the Faith in SDC, and since it is of such vital importance, His remarks have been cited in their entirety.



4. to protect the believers [27]

The second of these spiritual standards which apply to the possessor of knowledge is that he should be the defender of his faith. It is obvious that these holy words do not refer exclusively to searching out the implications of the Law, observing the forms of worship, avoiding greater and lesser sins, practicing the religious ordinances, and by all these methods, protecting the Faith. They mean that the whole population should be protected in every way... ('Abdu'l-Bahá, SDC, p. 41) [27]

But acquired infallibility is not a natural necessity; on the contrary, it is a ray of the bounty of infallibility which shines from the Sun of Reality upon hearts, and grants a share and portion of itself to souls. Although these souls have not essential infallibility, still they are under the protection of God -- that is to say, God preserves them from error. Thus many of the holy beings who were not dawning-points of the Most Great Infallibility, were yet kept and preserved from error under the shadow of the protection and guardianship of God, for they were the mediators of grace between God and men. If God did not protect them from error, their error would cause believing souls to fall into error, and thus the foundation of the Religion of God would be overturned, which would not be fitting nor worthy of God. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, Chapter 45, p. 172)

I hope that through the bounty and favors of the Most Glorious Lord, in this new age, the regions of the West become the East of the Sun of Truth, the believers of God become the dawning-places of lights, the manifestors of the signs, be protected and guarded from the doubts of the heedless ones, remain firm and steadfast in the Covenant and Testament, and strive day and night in order to awaken those who are asleep, to make mindful those who are heedless, to make confident of the mysteries of the Kingdom those who are deprived, to confer a share from the never-ending outpouring upon those who are helpless, to become the heralds of the Kingdom and to call the inhabitants of this terrestrial world to the Celestial Realm.

O ye Cohorts of God! Today in the present world each community is wandering in a wilderness, moving in accord with some passion and desire, and running to and fro in pursuance of his own imagination. Among the communities of the world, this community of the "Most Great Name" is free from every thought, keeping aloof from every project and scheme, arising with the purest designs and intentions, and striving and endeavoring with the utmost hope to live in accordance with the divine teachings in order that the surface of the earth become the delectable paradise, the nether world become the mirror of the Kingdom, the universe become another universe, and the human race attain to higher morals, conduct and manners.

O ye Cohorts of God! Through the protection and help of the Blessed Perfection - may my life be a sacrifice to His beloved ones! - you must conduct and deport yourselves in such a manner that you may stand out among other souls distinguished by a brilliancy like unto the sun. If any one of you enters a city he must become the center of attraction because of the sincerity, faithfulness, love, honesty, fidelity, truthfulness and loving-kindness of his disposition and nature toward all inhabitants

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of the world, that the people of the city may all cry out: "This person is unquestionably a Bahá'í; for this manners, his behavior, his conduct, his morals, his nature and his disposition are of the attributes of the Bahá'ís." Until you do attain to this station, you have not fulfilled the Covenant and the Testament of God. For according to the irrefutable texts, He has taken from us a firm covenant that we may live and act in accord with the divine exhortations, commands and lordly teachings. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, v1, pp. 40-42)

O maid-servant of God! Verily, the tests and trials of God are very great and very violent. Beseech thou God to protect thee from all doubts and to guard thee from the interpretations of parabolical¹ verses, as made by those who know not in what valley they are roving, who speak according to their own selfish purposes and after their own evil inclinations; who accept and then reject; who believe in God and then deny Him; and who appear firm and then backslide; thus thou beholdest these oscillating daily.

"Leave them to amuse themselves with their own vain discourses," and turn thou to the light of the Testament, and rejoice at the bounty of the effulgence, and seek shelter under the shadow of the standard of the Covenant. Thou wilt soon find it fluttering on the highest summits of glory, surrounded by the valiant hosts of the angels of heaven and assisted by spiritual armies of great number that proceed from the Supreme Concurrence.

O my tender friend!

Verily, the union between myself and thee is on a solid foundation and a well made basis. Neither the winds can remove it nor the events of time annihilate it. It is everlasting and eternal, heavenly, spiritual and divine, and it is of no end or termination. Consequently be rejoiced at these words which cheer the hearts of the righteous and the souls of the pious when hearing them.

O thou lamp who art illuminated with the light of the Love of God!

Leave thou the world and abandon the people and turn unto the Kingdom of thy independent Lord. Beseech Him every morn and eve and supplicate to the Gate of His Oneness to make thee firm and steadfast in the Testament and to guard thee from all calamities, with the eye of His protection, and protect thee from the tests which are (so violent) as the whirlwinds which uproot trees. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, v1, pp. 72-73)

These bodies [Spiritual Assemblies] have the sacred obligation to help, advise, protect and guide the believers in every way within their power when appealed to -- indeed they were established must for the purpose of keeping order and unity and obedience to the law of God amongst the believers. You should go to them as a child would to its parents... (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, September 28, 1941: The Local Spiritual Assembly, compiled by the Universal House of Justice; in Lights of Guidance, p. 3)

The winds of test and trial have blown upon our Faith more than once, and he strongly feels that old believers like yourself should do everything in their power to protect the younger Bahá'ís, to strengthen their faith, deepen them in the Covenant, and enable them to take full refuge in the Will and Testament of the beloved Master, that impregnable fortress He built for our safety when He Himself should have gone

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from our sight. (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi dated 26 October 1941 to an individual believer; in The Compilation of Compilations, vol I, #2270, p. 430)

Commentary

The protection of the believers is a multi-faceted enterprise. The believers must be protected against the assault of the enemies of the Faith, in some cases from the unjust actions of governments, as in Iran and other Islamicate² societies; from religious communities, which oppression, while chiefly found in Islamicate societies at present, is predicted to spread to Christian and Hindu populations in the future; from prejudiced employers, teachers, neighbors, who may find some pretext for attacking the believers. This is a separate enterprise from defending the Faith, inasmuch as apologetics is aimed at responding to attacks in writing on the Faith itself, rather than attacks on the believers. Another dimension of protecting the believers is internal, and involves ministering to assaults upon the faith and peace of mind of the believers by the unwise and the malevolent among their co-religionists. The excommunication of a dissident and trouble-making adherent of the Faith is the most drastic of measures, and prior or in place of this step being taken, all other efforts must be made to protect the believers from the pernicious influence of the misguided one. Finally, 'Abdu'l-Bahá includes in His description of defence of the Faith, "that the whole population should be protected in every way" [SDC:41], and much thought must be given to this universal act of protection, to ways in which scholarship can protect all of humanity from harm of any kind. We return then to the metaphor cited by Bahá'u'lláh to describe the efforts of His followers, who are to be the true physicians to the ailing body of humankind, applying the remedy revealed by God.

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5. to raise up and make victorious the Word of God [27], [30], {6}, {8}, (50)

They mean rather that the whole population should be protected in every way; that every effort should be exerted to adopt a combination of all possible measures to raise up the Word of God, increase the number of believers, promote the Faith of God and exalt it and make it victorious over other religions. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, SDC, p. 41) [27] {6}

Pure souls, such as Mirza Abu'l-Fadl, upon him be the Glory of God, spend their nights and days in demonstrating the truth of the Revelation, by adducing conclusive and brilliant proofs and expanding the verities of the Faith, by lifting the veils, promoting the religion of God and spreading His fragrances. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet, translated from the Persian) [30]

Thou didst ask as to acquiring knowledge: read thou the Books and Tablets of God, and the articles written to demonstrate the truth of this Faith. Included among them are the Iqan, which hath been translated into English, the works of Mirza Abu'l-Fadl, and those of some other among the believers. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, from Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, pp. 190-191) {8} (50)

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Whoso ariseth to teach Our Cause must needs detach himself from all earthly things, and regard, at all times, the triumph of Our Faith as his supreme objective. This hath, verily, been decreed in the Guarded Tablet. And when he determineth to leave his home, for the sake of the Cause of his Lord, let him put his whole trust in God, as the best provision for his journey, and array himself with the robe of virtue. Thus hath it been decreed by God, the Almighty, the All-Praised. (Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 334-335)

I implore Thee, O my God, by Thy name whereby all the kindreds of the earth have wailed, except such as Thou hast safeguarded with Thine unerring protection and sheltered beneath the shadow of Thy transcendent mercy, to make us so firm in Thy Cause and steadfast in Thy love that were Thy servants to rise up against Thee and Thy people turn away from Thee, and no one would remain on earth to invoke Thy name or set his face toward the sanctuary of communion with Thee and the Kába of Thy sanctity, I would still arise singly and alone to render Thy Cause victorious, to exalt Thy word, to proclaim Thy sovereignty, and to celebrate the praise of Thine august Self. (Compilation on The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting)

Although the policy of Sultan Abdu'l-Hamid was harsher than ever; although he constantly insisted on his Captive's strict confinement -- still, the Blessed Beauty now lived, as everyone knows, with all power and glory. Some of the time Bahá'u'lláh would spend at the Mansion, and again, at the farm village of Mazra'ih; for a while He would sojourn in Haifa, and occasionally His tent would be pitched on the heights of Mount Carmel. Friends from everywhere presented themselves and gained an audience. The people and the government authorities witnessed it all, yet no one so much as breathed a word. And this is one of Bahá'u'lláh's greatest miracles: that He, a captive, surrounded Himself with panoply and He wielded power. The prison changed into a palace, the jail itself became a Garden of Eden. Such a thing has not occurred in history before; no former age has seen its like: that a man confined to a prison should move about with authority and might; that one in chains should carry the fame of the Cause of God to the high heavens, should win splendid victories in both East and West, and should, by His almighty pen, subdue the world. Such is the distinguishing feature of this supreme Theophany. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Memorials of the Faithful, p. 27)

Those "kindreds, people and nations" signify those who are gathered under the shadow of the Qur'án, not permitting the Cause and Law of God to be, in outward appearance, entirely destroyed and annihilated -- for there are prayer and fasting among them -- but the fundamental principles of the Religion of God, which are morals and conduct, with the knowledge of divine mysteries, have disappeared; the light of the virtues of the world of humanity, which is the result of the love and knowledge of God, is extinguished; and the darkness of tyranny, oppression, satanic passions and desires has become victorious. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, pp. 52-53)

But as to you, O ye firm and steadfast, be straightforward in the Cause of God, let your feet be firm in the Religion of God, and arise with every effort within your power to render victorious the Covenant of God. By God, the Truth, you will be assisted by

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a numerous army, and re-inforced by a cohort of the angels of God. Pay not the slightest attention to that which is said by these children, for their statements and sayings are nothing but confused dreams. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, v2, p. 351)

Verily I say, fear of God is the greatest commander that can render the Cause of God victorious, and the hosts which best befit this commander have ever been and are an upright character and pure and goodly deeds. (Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 222)

Erelong shall God raise up, through Thee, those with hands of indomitable strength and arms of invincible might, who will come forth from behind the veils, will render the All-Merciful victorious amongst the peoples of the world, and will raise so mighty a cry as to cause all hearts to tremble with fear. Thus hath it been decreed in a Written Tablet. Such shall be the ascendancy which these souls will evince that consternation and dismay will seize all the dwellers of the earth.

Beware lest ye shed the blood of anyone. Unsheathe the sword of your tongue from the scabbard of utterance, for therewith ye can conquer the citadels of men's hearts. We have abolished the law to wage holy war against each other. God's mercy, hath, verily, encompassed all created things, if ye do but understand. Aid ye your Lord, the God of Mercy, with the sword of understanding. Keener indeed is it, and more finely tempered, than the sword of utterance, were ye but to reflect upon the words of your Lord. Thus have the hosts of Divine Revelation been sent down by God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting, and thus have the armies of divine inspiration been made manifest from the Source of command, as bidden by God, the All-Glorious, the Best-Beloved. (Bahá'u'lláh, The Summons of the Lord of Hosts, pp. 23-24)

"Should a man all alone," He had clearly affirmed, "arise in the name of Bahá and put on the armor of His love, him will the Almighty cause to be victorious, though the forces of earth and heaven be arrayed against him." "Should any one arise for the triumph of Our Cause," He moreover had declared, "him will God render victorious though tens of thousands of enemies be leagued against him." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, cited by Shoghi Effendi, in God Passes By, p. 376)

Commentary

In Western Christian practice, apologetics is concerned not merely with defending the Faith against attacks, but with promulgating the Faith as well. 'Abdu'l-Bahá includes this dimension in His development of this theme in SDC, indicating "that every effort should be exerted to adopt a combination of all possible measures to raise up the Word of God...promote the Faith of God and exalt it and make it victorious over other religions. [SDC:41]" This vision is unapologetically triumphalist, and is corroborated by many other source texts in the Bahá'í Writings. The purpose of teaching and promulgating the Cause, in our deeds and our words, and, in the case of scholars, in speeches and publications, is to "raise up and make victorious the Word of God". 'Abdu'l-Bahá stipulates (and also Bahá'u'lláh), that this cannot be effected through violence or through fanaticism

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and unreasoning religious zeal, but through deeds of sterling character, through service to humanity, and through unparalleled and unsurpassed knowledge, wisdom and eloquence. Making the Faith victorious does not in itself increase the number of believers. This triumph may take many forms, in which the prestige of the Faith, the popularity of the Faith among men of learning and influence, the liberation of the Faith from onerous legal and social restrictions.

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6. to increase the number of believers [27]

"...every effort should be exerted to adopt a combination of all possible measures to raise up the Word of God, increase the number of believers..." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, SDC, p. 41) [27]

Hokkaido, the site of this Conference, first heard of the Teachings less than fifteen years ago, and the first aboriginal peoples of this land accepted Bahá'u'lláh just over a decade ago. Now you are the witnesses to the beginnings of a rapid increase in the number of believers. (Universal House of Justice, letter dated September 1971, in Japan Will Turn Ablaze, p. 111)

The increase in the number of the avowed adherents of the Faith... (Shoghi Effendi, Arohanui - Letters to New Zealand, p. 74)

The steady increase in the number of believers, of isolated centres, groups and assemblies evokes my deep and heartfelt admiration and gratitude. (Shoghi Effendi, Letters from the Guardian to Australia and New Zealand, p. 125)

I urge the Inter-America Committee to devote special attention and undertake prompt measures designed to increase the number of believers, establish local administrative headquarters, and multiply the subsidiary agencies indispensable to the maintenance of a flourishing community in the southern extremity of the western hemisphere. Praying ever increasing successes. (Cablegram April 21, 1945 in Shoghi Effendi, Messages to America, p. 80)

Renewed, determined, continued exertions by individuals aimed at an unprecedented increase in the number of enrolled believers is vital to the consolidation of activities undertaken by pioneers. Systematic, well-conceived, carefully coordinated plans, nationwide and intercontinental, devised by elected national representatives of the community, are likewise a necessary preliminary to a seed-sowing unexampled both in range and effectiveness in American Bahá'í history. The attainment of this threefold objective in North, Central and South America will signalize the initiation, in other continents, of the world mission constituting the sacred birthright of the American followers of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. Cablegram May 8, 1945, in Shoghi Effendi, Messages to America, p. 80)

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The birth of so weighty an institution, in a land which as the years go by will be called upon to play a vital role in the shaping of the destinies of a turbulent continent, must be signalized by the formula non of a subsidiary Six Year Plan whose primary objective must be a rapid and unprecedented increase in the number of believers of Muslim extraction, designed to reinforce the defences of the Administrative Order of the Faith now being erected in that land against the inevitable onslaught of the forces of Muslim orthodoxy that will sooner or later be leagued against it. Such a plan must, moreover, aim at the conversion of the members of the various Minorities residing within that State; at the steady multiplication of Bahá'í isolated centres, groups and Local Spiritual Assemblies... (Shoghi Effendi, Messages to the Indian Subcontinent, pp. 418-419)

The marvellous increase in the number of newly-enrolled believers... (Shoghi Effendi, The Light of Divine Guidance, v I, p. 137)

Parallel with these measures, destined to contribute so effectively to the rise and establishment of the Administrative Order of the Faith in both Germany and Austria, a systematic effort must be exerted by the national elected representatives of the Bahá'í communities in these two countries to multiply, as speedily as possible, the assemblies, groups and isolated centres, through a wider dispersal on the part of the believers, and the launching of an intensive campaign of teaching designed to increase, swiftly and steadily the number of the active supporters of the Faith. (Shoghi Effendi, The Light of Divine Guidance, v I, p. 219)

He was very pleased to see that there are now as many as 95 believers there, and he hopes this number will steadily and rapidly increase. (Shoghi Effendi, The Light of Divine Guidance, v I, p. 61)

He assures you all that he deeply appreciates your devoted labours; and he hopes that you will fulfill your objective of increasing the number of believers there. (Shoghi Effendi, The Unfolding Destiny of the British Bahá'í Community, p. 412)

Commentary

Although grouped with the foregoing purpose, of making victorious the Word of God, the imperative "to increase the number of believers" [SDC:41] has a separate trajectory. In order to win over the hearts and minds of individuals, and attract them to this Cause, and beyond that to nurture their commitment to the Cause so that they remain believers over the course of a lifetime, this is a distinct purpose of Bahá'í scholarship. There is no profit to simply signing up new believers so their names will be on some list and their numbers cited to bolster the confidence of the community and increase its prestige in the wider society. This is without substance. What Bahá'í scholars are called upon to do is to bring new believers into the community, and assist them to remain in the community and to live lives consecrated to the Bahá'í teachings.



7. to create teachers of the Faith [31], [33], [34], {25}, <10>

We had heard through various channels the wonderful way your children had grown to speak about the Cause in public. Shoghi Effendi's hope is that they will, the three of them, become able and devoted speakers on the Cause and subjects akin to it. To do this properly they will need a firm foundation of scientific and literary training which fortunately they are obtaining. It is just as important for the Bahá'í young boys and girls to become properly educated in colleges of high standing as it is to be spiritually developed. The mental as well as the spiritual side of the youth has to be developed before he can serve the Cause efficiently. (Shoghi Effendi, from a letter written on his behalf, dated 28 November 1926 to an individual believer) [31]

Young men and women in the Faith must be deep and thoughtful scholars of its teachings, so that they can teach in a way that will convince people that all the problems facing them have a remedy. They must grasp the Administration, so that they can wisely and efficiently administer the ever-growing affairs of the Cause; and they must exemplify the Bahá'í way of living. All this is not easy -- but the Guardian is always encouraged to see the spirit animating such young believers as yourself. He has high hopes of what your generation will accomplish. (Shoghi Effendi, from a letter written on his behalf, dated 12 May 1944 to an individual believer) [33]

If the Bahá'ís want to be really effective in teaching the Cause they need to be much better informed and able to discuss intelligently, intellectually, the present condition of the world and its problems. We need Bahá'í scholars, not only people far, far more deeply aware of what our teachings really are, but also well-read and well-educated people, capable of correlating our teachings to the current thoughts of the leaders of society. (Shoghi Effendi, from a letter written on his behalf, dated 5 July 1949 to an individual believer) [34] {25} <10>

Arise to aid thy Lord at all times and in all circumstances, and be thou one of His helpers. Admonish, then, the people to lend a hearing ear to the words which the Spirit of God hath uttered in this irradiant and resplendent Tablet. Say: Sow not, O people, the seeds of dissension amongst men, and contend not with your neighbor. Be patient under all conditions, and place your whole trust and confidence in God. Aid ye your Lord with the sword of wisdom and of utterance. This indeed well becometh the station of man. To depart from it would be unworthy of God, the Sovereign Lord of all, the Glorified. The people, however, have been led astray, and are truly of the heedless. (Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CXXXVI, p. 296)

The Pen of the Most High hath decreed and imposed upon every one the obligation to teach this Cause.... God will, no doubt, inspire whosoever detacheth himself from all else but Him, and will cause the pure waters of wisdom and utterance to gush out and flow copiously from his heart. Verily, thy Lord, the All-Merciful, is powerful to do as He willeth, and ordaineth whatsoever He pleaseth. (Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CXLIV, p. 313)

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They that have forsaken their country for the purpose of teaching Our Cause -- these shall the Faithful Spirit strengthen through its power. A company of Our chosen angels shall go forth with them, as bidden by Him Who is the Almighty, the All-Wise. How great the blessedness that awaiteth him that hath attained the honor of serving the Almighty! By My life! No act, however great, can compare with it, except such deeds as have been ordained by God, the All-Powerful, the Most Mighty. Such a service is, indeed, the prince of all goodly deeds, and the ornament of every goodly act. Thus hath it been ordained by Him Who is the Sovereign Revealer, the Ancient of Days.

Whoso ariseth to teach Our Cause must needs detach himself from all earthly things, and regard, at all times, the triumph of Our Faith as his supreme objective. This hath, verily, been decreed in the Guarded Tablet. And when he determineth to leave his home, for the sake of the Cause of his Lord, let him put his whole trust in God, as the best provision for his journey, and array himself with the robe of virtue. Thus hath it been decreed by God, the Almighty, the All-Praised. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CLVÍ, pp. 334-335)

God hath prescribed unto every one the duty of teaching His Cause. Whoever ariseth to discharge this duty, must needs, ere he proclaimeth His Message, adorn himself with the ornament of an upright and praiseworthy character, so that his words may attract the hearts of such as are receptive to his call. Without it, he can never hope to influence his hearers. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CLVÍ, p. 334)

God hath prescribed unto everyone the duty of teaching His Cause. Whoever ariseth to discharge this duty, must needs, ere he proclaimeth His Message, adorn himself with the ornament of an upright and praiseworthy character, so that his words may attract the hearts of such as are receptive to his call. Without it, he can never hope to influence his hearers. Thus doth God instruct you. He, verily, is the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Compassionate.

They who exhort others unto justice, while themselves committing iniquity, stand accused of falsehood by the inmates of the Kingdom and by those who circle round the throne of their Lord, the Almighty, the Beneficent, for that which their tongues have uttered. Commit not, O people, that which dishonoureth your name and the fair name of the Cause of God amongst men. Beware lest ye approach that which your minds abhor. Fear God and follow not in the footsteps of them that are gone astray. Deal not treacherously with the substance of your neighbour. Be ye trustworthy on earth, and withhold not from the poor the things given unto you by God through His grace. He, verily, will bestow upon you the double of what ye possess. He, in truth, is the All-Bounteous, the Most Generous.

Say: We have ordained that our Cause be taught through the power of utterance. Beware lest ye dispute idly with anyone. Whoso ariseth wholly for the sake of his Lord to teach His Cause, the Holy Spirit shall strengthen him and inspire him with that which will illumine the heart of the world, how much more the hearts of those who seek Him. O people of Bahá! Subdue the citadels of men's hearts with the swords of wisdom and of utterance. They that dispute, as prompted by their desires, are indeed wrapped in a palpable veil. Say: The sword of wisdom is hotter than summer heat, and sharper than blades of steel, if ye do but understand. Draw it forth

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in My name and through the power of My might, and conquer then with it the cities of the hearts of them that have secluded themselves in the stronghold of their corrupt desires. Thus biddeth you the Pen of the All-Glorious, whilst seated beneath the swords of the wayward. (Bahá'u'lláh, The Summons of the Lord of Hosts, pp. 78-79)

We heard that which the person in question hath mentioned regarding certain teachers of the Faith. Indeed he hath spoken truly. Some heedless souls roam the lands in the name of God, actively engaged in ruining His Cause, and call it promoting and teaching the Word of God; and this notwithstanding that the qualifications of the teachers of the Faith, like unto stars, shine resplendent throughout the heavens of the divine Tablets. Every fair-minded person testifieth and every man of insight is well aware that the One true God -- exalted be His glory -- hath unceasingly set forth and expounded that which will elevate the station and will exalt the rank of the children of men. (Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 58)

Restrain thou the inhabitants of those regions from provocative acts, from strife, dissension or aught else that would create trouble. That which is praiseworthy in these days is the promotion of the Cause. For instance if those people who pursue certain aims were to dedicate themselves to the teaching of the Cause, all the dwellers of those regions would, ere long, be invested with the mantle of faith.

Should anyone perceive the sweetness of the following passage in the Tablet revealed in honour of Nabil of Qa'in³, he would readily comprehend the significance of assistance: Human utterance is an essence which aspireth to exert its influence and needeth moderation. As to its influence, this is conditional upon refinement, which in turn is dependent upon hearts which are detached and pure. As to its moderation, this hath to be combined with tact and wisdom as prescribed in the Holy Scriptures and Tablets.

O My Name! Utterance must needs possess penetrating power. For if bereft of this quality it would fail to exert influence. And this penetrating influence dependeth on the spirit being pure and the heart stainless. Likewise it needeth moderation, without which the hearer would be unable to bear it, rather he would manifest opposition from the very outset. And moderation will be obtained by blending utterance with the tokens of divine wisdom which are recorded in the sacred Books and Tablets. Thus when the essence of one's utterance is endowed with these two requisites it will prove highly effective and will be the prime factor in transforming the souls of men. This is the station of supreme victory and celestial dominion. Whoso attaineth thereto is invested with the power to teach the Cause of God and to prevail over the hearts and minds of men. (Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 198-199)

Now is the moment in which to cleanse thyself with the waters of detachment that have flowed out from the Supreme Pen, and to ponder, wholly for the sake of God, those things which, time and again, have been sent down or manifested, and then to strive, as much as lieth in thee, to quench, through the power of wisdom and the force of thy utterance, the fire of enmity and hatred which smouldereth in the hearts of the peoples of the world. (Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 12)

And in another connection: "O peoples of the earth! Haste ye to do the pleasure of God, and war ye valiantly, as it behooveth you to war, for the sake of proclaiming His

resistless and immovable Cause. We have decreed that war shall be waged in the path of God with the armies of wisdom and utterance, and of a goodly character and praiseworthy deeds. Thus hath it been decided by Him Who is the All-Powerful, the Almighty. There is no glory for him that committeth disorder on the earth after it hath been made so good. Fear God, O people, and be not of them that act unjustly." (Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 24)

And further We have said: "Deal not treacherously with the substance of your neighbor. Be ye trustworthy on earth, and withhold not from the poor the things given unto you by God through His grace. He, verily, will bestow upon you the double of what ye possess. He, in truth, is the All-Bounteous, the Most Generous. O people of Bahá! Subdue the citadels of men's hearts with the swords of wisdom and of utterance. They that dispute, as prompted by their desires, are indeed wrapped in a palpable veil. Say: The sword of wisdom is hotter than summer heat, and sharper than blades of steel, if ye do but understand. Draw it forth in My name and through the power of My might, and conquer, then, with it the cities of the hearts of them that have secluded themselves in the stronghold of their corrupt desires. Thus biddeth you the Pen of the All-Glorious, whilst seated beneath the swords of the wayward. If ye become aware of a sin committed by another, conceal it, that God may conceal your own sin. He, verily, is the Concealer, the Lord of grace abounding. O ye rich ones on earth! If ye encounter one who is poor, treat him not disdainfully. Reflect upon that whereof ye were created. Every one of you was created of a sorry germ." (Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, pp. 54-55)

Bahá'u'lláh makes reference to the "learned in Bahá" without defining the precise nature of these persons and their learning:

Abase not the station of the learned in Bahá and belittle not the rank of such rulers as administer justice amidst you. Set your reliance on the army of justice, put on the armour of wisdom, let your adorning be forgiveness and mercy and that which cheereth the hearts of the well-favoured of God.⁴

Who are "the learned among the people of Bahá"?

Blessed are the rulers and the learned among the people of Bahá. They are My trustees among My servants and the manifestations of My commandments amidst My people. Upon them rest My glory, My blessings and My grace which have pervaded the world of being. In this connection the utterances revealed in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas are such that from the horizon of their words the light of divine grace shineth luminous and resplendent.⁵

Happy are ye, O ye the learned ones in Bahá. By the Lord! Ye are the billows of the Most Mighty Ocean, the stars of the firmament of Glory, the standards of triumph waving betwixt earth and heaven. Ye are the manifestations of steadfastness amidst

⁴Bahá'u'lláh, Lawh-i-Hikmat, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 138-139

⁵Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-'Ahd, in Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 221

men and the daysprings of Divine Utterance to all that dwell on earth. Well is it with him that turneth unto you, and woe betide the froward. This day, it behoveth whoso hath quaffed the Mystic Wine of everlasting life from the Hands of the loving-kindness of the Lord his God, the Merciful, to pulsate even as the throbbing artery in the body of mankind, that through him may be quickened the world and every crumbling bone.⁶

This passage, now written by the Pen of Glory, is accounted as part of the Most Holy Book: The men of God's House of Justice have been charged with the affairs of the people. They, in truth, are the Trustees of God among His servants and the daysprings of authority in His countries.⁷

Endowments dedicated to charity revert to God, the Revealer of Signs. None hath the right to dispose of them without leave from Him Who is the Dawning-place of Revelation. After Him, this authority shall pass to the Aghsan, and after them to the House of Justice -- should it be established in the world by then -- that they may use these endowments for the benefit of the Places which have been exalted in this Cause, and for whatsoever hath been enjoined upon them by Him Who is the God of might and power. Otherwise, the endowments shall revert to the people of Bahá who speak not except by His leave and judge not save in accordance with what God hath decreed in this Tablet -- lo, they are the champions of victory betwixt heaven and earth -- that they may use them in the manner that hath been laid down in the Book by God, the Mighty, the Bountiful.⁸

Should the deceased leave no offspring, their share shall revert to the House of Justice, to be expended by the Trustees of the All-Merciful on the orphaned and widowed, and on whatsoever will bring benefit to the generality of the people, that all may give thanks unto their Lord, the All-Gracious, the Pardoner.

Should the deceased leave offspring, but none of the other categories of heirs that have been specified in the Book, they shall receive two thirds of the inheritance and the remaining third shall revert to the House of Justice. Such is the command which hath been given, in majesty and glory, by Him Who is the All-Possessing, the Most High.

If the deceased should leave none of the specified heirs, but have among his relatives nephews and nieces, whether on his brother's or his sister's side, two thirds of the inheritance shall pass to them; or, lacking these, to his uncles and aunts on both his father's and his mother's side, and after them to their sons and daughters. The remaining third of the inheritance shall, in any case, revert to the Seat of Justice. Thus hath it been laid down in the Book by Him Who ruleth over all men. Should the deceased be survived by none of those whose names have been recorded by the Pen of the Most High, his estate shall, in its entirety, revert to the aforementioned Seat that it may be expended on that which is prescribed by God. He, verily, is the Ordainer, the Omnipotent.⁹

⁶Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas, K173

⁷Bahá'u'lláh, Eighth Ishráq, from Ishráqát, in Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 128

⁸Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas, K42

⁹Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas, K21-24

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From this we might conclude that “the learned ones in Bahá” are the members of the House of Justice...but, according to the Kitáb-i-‘Ahd, there are “the rulers and the learned in Bahá”, and it appears that these are not one and the same. The House of Justice is distinguished from **“the people of Bahá who speak not except by His leave and judge not save in accordance with what God hath decreed in this Tablet -- lo, they are the champions of victory betwixt heaven and earth”** so we should not be surprised if the “learned in Bahá” are not identical with the members of the House of Justice.

The Guardian defined the meaning of this appellation “learned in Bahá” in a letter written in Persian to the Bahá'ís of Iran and dated 4 November 1931:

In this holy cycle the 'learned' are, on the one hand, the Hands of the Cause of God, and, on the other, the teachers and diffusers of His teachings who do not rank as Hands, but who have attained an eminent position in the teaching work. As to the 'rulers' they refer to the members of the Local, National and International House of Justice. The duties of each of these souls will be determined in the future.¹⁰

This interpretation was further elucidated by the Universal House of Justice as follows:

The Hands of the Cause of God, the Counsellors and the members of the Auxiliary Boards fall within the definition of the 'learned' given by the beloved Guardian. Thus they are intimately interrelated and it is not incorrect to refer to the three ranks collectively as one institution. "However, each is also a separate institution in itself...."¹¹

It should however be affirmed that Bahá'u'lláh's words often have multiple meanings, and that the Guardian did not indicate that the exclusive meaning of the “learned in Bahá” is embodied in the Hands of the Cause, the Counselors and the members of their Auxiliary Boards. The Guardian said that this appellation also means, **“the teachers and diffusers of His teachings who do not rank as Hands, but who have attained an eminent position in the teaching work.”** What is clear is that these “learned in Bahá” are not religious professionals¹², trained in religious sciences (and arts) and possessed of prerogatives and powers like the clerical orders that have existed and continue to

¹⁰From letter of the Universal House of Justice to the Continental Boards of Counsellors and National Spiritual Assemblies, April 24, 1972: Messages from The Universal House of Justice, 1968-1973, p. 92; in Lights of Guidance, pp. 320

¹¹From letter of the Universal House of Justice to the Continental Boards of Counsellors and National Spiritual Assemblies, April 24, 1972: Messages from The Universal House of Justice, 1968-1973, p. 92; Lights of Guidance, pp. 320-321

¹²“...possessing no professional clergy...” (Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p. 403); “Regarding the question of paid teachers: As we have no clergy or priests there is no paid career open to Bahá'í teachers.” (Shoghi Effendi, Messages to the Indian Subcontinent, p. 248)

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exist in other religious communities. These are divine physicians¹³, they are teachers of the Cause of God¹⁴, they are servants of humanity¹⁵, and they are teachers of the Faith.

Commentary

While the Bahá'í Writings do not envision the creation of a professional ecclesiastical elite, either to administer sacraments, to elaborate and rule upon points of law, to evangelize the general population, or to guide the spiritual life of the individual and the community, they do articulate the need for universal learning (the result of universal education), for professional educators, and for individuals who are proficient in sciences and arts and crafts. Finally, it endorses a model of comprehensive learning, in SDC, which will be the ideal and the model for Bahá'í scholarship for centuries and perhaps millennia. Inasmuch as Bahá'u'lláh calls upon every Bahá'í to teach the Faith and every Bahá'í to be schooled and become learned, this purpose of Bahá'í scholarship is not specialized to professional scholars. The Universal House of Justice has pointed out tirelessly that there are no formal arrangements made for professional scholars which would set them apart from the Bahá'í population as a whole. On the other hand, one of the most honorable and praised professions is that of educator, and education about the Faith must begin at the start of life, with the parents having this responsibility unless they cannot discharge it in which case it defaults to those appointed for the purpose by the House of Justice; as children mature, while their parents continue to bear the principal responsibility for their education, it becomes increasingly likely that this responsibility will be delegated to professional educators. Such educators are singled out by Bahá'u'lláh for a share of inheritance,

¹³ "O ye friends of God! True friends are even as skilled physicians, and the Teachings of God are as healing balm, a medicine for the conscience of man. They clear the head, so that a man can breathe them in and delight in their sweet fragrance. They waken those who sleep. They bring awareness to the unheeding, and a portion to the outcast, and to the hopeless, hope. If in this day a soul shall act according to the precepts and the counsels of God, he will serve as a divine physician to mankind, and like the trump of Israfil, he will call the dead of this contingent world to life; for the confirmations of the Abha Realm are never interrupted, and such a virtuous soul hath, to befriend him, the unfailing help of the Company on high. Thus shall a sorry gnat become an eagle in the fullness of his strength, and a feeble sparrow change to a royal falcon in the heights of ancient glory." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 23)

¹⁴ Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, C, p. 200; Ibid., CXXVIII, pp. 277-278; Ibid., CXLIV, p. 314; Ibid., CLVII, p. 334; Ibid., CLVIII, p. 335

¹⁵ "That one indeed is a man who, today, dedicateth himself to the service of the entire human race. The Great Being saith: Blessed and happy is he that ariseth to promote the best interests of the peoples and kindreds of the earth." (Bahá'u'lláh, Lawh-i-Maqsud, in Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 167; Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CXVII, p. 250); "...true servants of the world of humanity and as bright candles in the assemblage of mankind..." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, #112, p. 138); "Ye who are servants of the human race, strive ye with all your heart to deliver mankind out of this darkness and these prejudices that belong to the human condition and the world of nature, so that humanity may find its way into the light of the world of God." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, #202, p. 249)

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which, apart from this profession, is devoted entirely to family members. Finally, teaching the Faith is a responsibility of those who are learned in the sciences, arts and crafts, and indeed, such spiritual education is envisioned by Bahá'u'lláh as complementing practical knowledge, and the capacity to apply spiritual principles to the solution of temporal problems. Hence, one of the aims of Bahá'í scholarship is to train educators, not in seminaries and for ecclesiastical careers, but in institutions of higher learning and for careers in education, in the sciences and arts and crafts--instructors, professors, trainers, who will be teaching the Faith through their professions.

We haven't yet considered the actual content of programs which will create teachers of the Faith. Bahá'u'lláh has written regarding the prerequisites of Bahá'í teachers, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá has reiterated these principles and elaborated upon them. He also speaks of the methodology of how we can convey the Bahá'í teachings to others in such a way that their hearts and minds will be touched and they will become our friends and even our fellow believers. For example, in His talks, which are models in themselves of how to teach Westerners, He speaks of needing to marshal rational as well as traditional and spiritual proofs in support of the Bahá'í teachings. Likewise, Shoghi Effendi advised Bahá'í teachers to employ certain methodologies, for example, he urged them to learn the language of the target audience (and this applies even to the mode of verbal expression of particular professions and cultural sub-groups as well as to the actual tongue of preference), and in most cases to proceed gradually and without shocking their listeners, from the familiar to the new, from the simple to the challenging, from the particular interests and issues of the individual or collective to the overall vision of reality found in the teachings. These counsels are integral to the preparation of Bahá'í teachers.



8. to awaken the people, educate mankind, expand the consciousness of men {5}, (31), (37), (49)

If it were possible that in every city a few of the awakened ones, when opportunity offered, could hold a meeting and therein habitually present the proofs and arguments of God, this would do much to expand the consciousness of men; provided, however, that the discourse be kept to this one theme. (From a translation of a Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá) {5}

In truth thou art now rendering a great service to the basic foundations of the Cause of God, inasmuch as the cornerstone of its structure is the promotion of His Faith, the awakening of the people, the diffusion of the divine teachings and the education of mankind; all this dependeth on instructing the friends in the teaching work. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, in an unidentified Tablet) (31)

If it were possible that in every city a few of the awakened ones, when opportunity is offered, could hold a meeting, and therein habitually present the proofs and arguments of God, this would do much to expand the consciousness of men;

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provided, however, that the discourse be kept to this one theme. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, in an unidentified Tablet) (37)

There are certain pillars which have been established as the unshakeable supports of the Faith of God. The mightiest of these is learning and the use of the mind, the expansion of consciousness, and insight into the realities of the universe and the hidden mysteries of Almighty God. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 126) (49)

The education of mankind is, above all, a spiritual imperative, and here are some references to this principle:

The beloved of the Merciful must show forth such character and conduct among His creatures, that the fragrance of their holiness may be shed upon the whole world, and may quicken the dead, inasmuch as the purpose of the Manifestation of God and the dawning of the limitless lights of the Invisible is to educate the souls of men, and refine the character of every living man -- so that blessed individuals, who have freed themselves from the murk of the animal world, shall rise up with those qualities which are the adornings of the reality of man. The purpose is that earthlings should turn into the people of Heaven, and those who walk in darkness should come into the light, and those who are excluded should join the inner circle of the Kingdom, and those who are as nothing should become intimates of the everlasting Glory. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, pp. 10-11)

O ye dear friends of 'Abdu'l-Bahá! A blessed letter hath been received from you, telling of the election of a Spiritual Assembly. It hath rejoiced my heart to know that, God be praised, the friends in that area, with absolute unity, fellowship and love, have held this new election and were successful in voting for souls who are sanctified, are favoured at the Holy Threshold and are well known amongst the friends to be staunch and firm in the Covenant.

Now must those elected representatives arise to serve with spirituality and joy, with purity of intent, with strong attraction to the fragrances of the Almighty, and well supported by the Holy Spirit. Let them raise up the banner of guidance, and as soldiers of the Company on high, let them exalt God's Word, spread abroad His sweet savours, educate the souls of men, and promote the Most Great Peace. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 77)

Meetings organized with the utmost holiness and piety, wherein those who are present engage in the mention and thought of God, and wherein the verses of Oneness are chanted and the prayers of the Threshold of the Lord of Verses are offered and the exhortations and counsels of the Blessed Beauty recited, such meetings are illumined, spiritual, divine and heavenly. They are the means of training the world of humanity.

I am, night and day, engaged in remembering you, and happy with your thought, and ask the Lord of the Kingdom for confirmation, that He may make each one of you a sign of guidance and the means of educating and guiding other women and men. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, v3, p. 675)

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One who is wise in the ways of God sees that his words and deeds reflect the glory of God. I hope that the light of this glory may shine forth from each one of you, for this is the decisive proof - for this Bahá'o'llah suffered - that he might educate men to become the educators of the world and spread truth abroad. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Divine Philosophy, p. 42)

You have the example in Peter who was assisted by the Holy Spirit, as have been all those who have enlightened humanity -- for universal education can be accomplished only through the Holy Spirit. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Divine Philosophy, p. 88)

Thus, the divine Manifestations of God had a universal and all-inclusive conception. They endeavoured for the sake of everyone's life and engaged in the service of universal education. The area of their aims was not limited -- nay, rather, it was wide and all-inclusive. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 69)

As befitting thanks for such a bounty, stand ye staunch and strong in the Covenant and, following the precepts of God and the holy Law, suckle your children from their infancy with the milk of a universal education, and rear them so that from their earliest days, within their inmost heart, their very nature, a way of life will be firmly established that will conform to the divine Teachings in all things. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 125)

Praise be to God that you have come here and have met the servants of God! Have you perceived in them anything except the fragrance of the pleasure of God? Indeed, no. You have seen with your own eyes that day and night they endeavor and strive, and that they have no aim except the exaltation of the word of God, the education of men, the improvement of the masses, spiritual progress, the promulgation of universal peace, goodwill to all mankind, and kindness toward all nations. Sacrificing themselves for the good of humanity, they are detached from material advantages, and labor to give virtues to mankind. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 168)

Therefore, the world of humanity must be confirmed by the breath of the Holy Spirit in order to receive universal education. Through the infusion of divine power all nations and peoples become quickened, and universal happiness is possible. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 170)

The education of mankind is also a social principle of Bahá'u'lláh, Who called for universal education of all people. 'Abdu'l-Bahá articulated this principle early on in The Secret of Divine Civilization and throughout His talks in the West:

It is, furthermore, a vital necessity to establish schools throughout Persia, even in the smallest country towns and villages, and to encourage the people in every possible way to have their children learn to read and write. If necessary, education should even be made compulsory. Until the nerves and arteries of the nation stir into life, every measure that is attempted will prove vain; for the people are as the human body, and determination and the will to struggle are as the soul, and a soulless body

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does not move. This dynamic power is present to a superlative degree in the very nature of the Persian people, and the spread of education will release it. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization, pp. 111-112)

To accept and observe a distinction which God has not intended in creation is ignorance and superstition. The fact which is to be considered, however, is that woman, having formerly been deprived, must now be allowed equal opportunities with man for education and training. There must be no difference in their education. Until the reality of equality between man and woman is fully established and attained, the highest social development of mankind is not possible. Even granted that woman is inferior to man in some degree of capacity or accomplishment, this or any other distinction would continue to be productive of discord and trouble. The only remedy is education, opportunity; for equality means equal qualification. In brief, the assumption of superiority by man will continue to be depressing to the ambition of woman, as if her attainment to equality was creationally impossible; woman's aspiration toward advancement will be checked by it, and she will gradually become hopeless. On the contrary, we must declare that her capacity is equal, even greater than man's. This will inspire her with hope and ambition, and her susceptibilities for advancement will continually increase. She must not be told and taught that she is weaker and inferior in capacity and qualification. If a pupil is told that his intelligence is less than his fellow pupils, it is a very great drawback and handicap to his progress. He must be encouraged to advance by the statement, "You are most capable, and if you endeavor, you will attain the highest degree."

It is my hope that the banner of equality may be raised throughout the five continents where as yet it is not fully recognized and established. In this enlightened world of the West woman has advanced an immeasurable degree beyond the women of the Orient. And let it be known once more that until woman and man recognize and realize equality, social and political progress here or anywhere will not be possible. For the world of humanity consists of two parts or members: one is woman; the other is man. Until these two members are equal in strength, the oneness of humanity cannot be established, and the happiness and felicity of mankind will not be a reality. God willing, this is to be so. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, pp. 76-77)

Among other teachings and principles Bahá'u'lláh counsels the education of all members of society. No individual should be denied or deprived of intellectual training, although each should receive according to capacity. None must be left in the grades of ignorance, for ignorance is a defect in the human world. All mankind must be given a knowledge of science and philosophy -- that is, as much as may be deemed necessary. All cannot be scientists and philosophers, but each should be educated according to his needs and deserts. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 108)

Furthermore, the education of woman is more necessary and important than that of man, for woman is the trainer of the child from its infancy. If she be defective and imperfect herself, the child will necessarily be deficient; therefore, imperfection of woman implies a condition of imperfection in all mankind, for it is the mother who rears, nurtures and guides the growth of the child. This is not the function of the

father. If the educator be incompetent, the educated will be correspondingly lacking. This is evident and incontrovertible. Could the student be brilliant and accomplished if the teacher is illiterate and ignorant? The mothers are the first educators of mankind; if they be imperfect, alas for the condition and future of the race. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, pp. 133-134)

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. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 174)

Eighth, education is essential, and all standards of training and teaching throughout the world of mankind should be brought into conformity and agreement; a universal curriculum should be established, and the basis of ethics be the same. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 182)

Bahá'u'lláh has announced that inasmuch as ignorance and lack of education are barriers of separation among mankind, all must receive training and instruction. Through this provision the lack of mutual understanding will be remedied and the unity of mankind furthered and advanced. Universal education is a universal law. It is, therefore, incumbent upon every father to teach and instruct his children according to his possibilities. If he is unable to educate them, the body politic, the representative of the people, must provide the means for their education. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 300)

Seventh, the necessity of education for all mankind is evident. Children especially must be trained and taught. If the parent cannot afford to do this owing to lack of means, the body politic must make necessary provision for its accomplishment. Through the broadening spirit of education illiteracy will disappear, and misunderstandings due to ignorance will pass away. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 317)

All are human beings. Why have the people of America advanced to a high degree of civilization while the tribes of central Africa remain in extreme ignorance and barbarism? The difference and distinction between them is the degree of education. This is unquestioned. The people of Europe and America have been uplifted by education and training from the world of defects and have ascended toward the realm of perfection, whereas the people of Africa, denied educational development, remain in a natural condition of illiteracy and deprivation, for nature is incomplete and defective. Education is a necessity. If a piece of ground be left in its natural and

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original state, it will either become a thorny waste or be covered by worthless weeds. When cleared and cultivated, this same unproductive field will yield plentiful harvests of food for human sustenance.

This same difference is noticeable among animals; some have been domesticated, educated, others left wild. The proof is clear that the world of nature is imperfect, the world of education perfect. That is to say, man is rescued from the exigencies of nature by training and culture; consequently, education is necessary, obligatory. But education is of various kinds. There is a training and development of the physical body which ensures strength and growth. There is intellectual education or mental training for which schools and colleges are founded. The third kind of education is that of the spirit. Through the breaths of the Holy Spirit man is uplifted into the world of moralities and illumined by the lights of divine bestowals. The moral world is only attained through the effulgence of the Sun of Reality and the quickening life of the divine spirit. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, pp. 329-330)

Bahá'u'lláh declares that all mankind should attain knowledge and acquire an education. This is a necessary principle of religious belief and observance, characteristically new in this dispensation. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 455)

Education holds an important place in the new order of things. The education of each child is compulsory. If there is not money enough in a family to educate both the girl and the boy the money must be dedicated to the girl's education, for she is the potential mother. If there are no parents the community must educate the child. In addition to this widespread education each child must be taught a profession, art, or trade, so that every member of the community will be enabled to earn his own livelihood. Work done in the spirit of service is the highest form of worship. Where do you find this statement? ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Divine Philosophy, p. 83)

Commentary

What a wonderful imperative to inspire scholars for the coming millennia! The scholar as agent of awakening, of education, of expanding consciousness is very attractive because it underlines the spiritual dynamic involved in learning. Learning is not a passive, mechanical process with no profound influence upon the learner. Learning changes us, for the better or for the worse, and if the for better, potentially for the best. Central to this expansion of consciousness is for humanity to become awakened to its unity, not just intellectually but emotionally and volitionally, so that increasing number of people live daily in the awareness of this unity and connectedness of all humanity. Be as one body in one soul, counsels Bahá'u'lláh. Also integral to this awakening is to usher in the ever-expanding consciousness of the continuity of human identity and existence, from birth to maturity, and from this world to the spiritual worlds that lie outside of our sensory perception but within the intuition of our hearts and the rational recognition of our minds. This purpose of scholarship calls for adoption of those means that will best effect this awakening and for leaving aside the methods which are not conducive to this end, and which may have resulted in the heedlessness of

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humanity in the past and present. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, for instance, that many moderns have rejected religion because religion rejects science. Bahá'í scholars must not reject science, and must find ways of bringing the sciences into their work of awakening consciousness.

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9. to attain to knowledge of God {4}, {6}, {8}, {10}

...when a true seeker determines to take the step of search in the path leading to the knowledge of the Ancient of Days... (Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Iqán, p. 192) {4}

The first attribute of perfection is learning and the cultural attainments of the mind, and this eminent station is achieved when the individual combines in himself a thorough knowledge of those complex and transcendental realities pertaining to God... ('Abdu'l-Bahá, SDC, p. 35) {6}

Likewise, ask thou of God that the magnet of His love should draw unto thee the knowledge of Him. Once a soul becometh holy in all things, purified, sanctified, the gates of the knowledge of God will open wide before his eyes. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, SWAB, pp. 190-191) {8}

If, then, the pursuit of knowledge lead to the beauty of Him Who is the Object of all Knowledge, how excellent that goal; but if not, a mere drop will perhaps shut a man off from flooding grace, for with learning cometh arrogance and pride, and it bringeth on error and indifference to God. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, SWAB, p. 110) {10}

Commentary

Attaining to the knowledge of God is one of the purposes of human life. As the Short Obligatory Prayer of Bahá'u'lláh states: "Thou hast created me to know Thee and to worship Thee." Knowledge and recognition of the Manifestation is, for the human being, the summit of knowledge and recognition of God: "The door of the knowledge of the Ancient Being hath ever been, and will continue for ever to be, closed in the face of men. No man's understanding shall ever gain access unto His holy court. As a token of His mercy, however, and as a proof of His loving-kindness, He hath manifested unto men the Day Stars of His divine guidance, the Symbols of His divine unity, and hath ordained the knowledge of these sanctified Beings to be identical with the knowledge of His own Self. Whoso recognizeth them hath recognized God. Whoso hearkeneth to their call, hath hearkened to the Voice of God, and whoso testifieth to the truth of their Revelation, hath testified to the truth of God Himself. Whoso turneth away from them, hath turned away from God, and whoso disbelieveth in them, hath disbelieved in God. Every one of them is the Way of God that connecteth this world with the realms above, and the Standard of His Truth unto every one in the kingdoms of earth and heaven." (Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 49-50) Hence, one of the purposes of Bahá'í scholarship is to know the Manifestations of God, not just Bahá'u'lláh but all of

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the Manifestations Who have preceded Him of which there is an historical record. It might be observed that while many of the purposes of scholarship articulated here are pragmatic, while this purpose does not appear to be pragmatic, to lead to the improvement of human life in any discernable way. However, I would answer, that one of the very purposes of human life is to know God, and to fulfill a purpose for which we have been created is useful to us in ways that far transcend mere pragmatic values, inasmuch as they resonate with the core of our existence. We are not just of value because of what we do, but also because of who we are. We are creations of God and one of the purposes of our creation is that we recognize and know that to be true, and to be aware of that relationship at all times, "I bear witness, at this moment" we say in the Short Obligatory Prayer. Every moment is potentially filled with this consciousness, just such chosen sacred moments when we choose to honor our relationship to God. As Bahá'u'lláh writes, every atom has been created for our education, and the names and attributes of God are reflected in every atom...our recognition of them is integral to our being authentic, because recognition of God is requisite for recognition of our true nature, our authentic identity. This theme is more fully explored in an essay appended to this study.

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10. to discover the truth [70], {9}, {11}, {19}, {27}, <1>, <2>, <4>, <5>, <12>, <14>

While it may often be the part of wisdom to approach Individuals or an audience from a standpoint of current knowledge, it should never be overlooked that the Revelation of the Manifestation of God is the standard for all knowledge, and scientific statements and theories, no matter how close they may come to the eternal principles proclaimed by God's Messenger, are in their very nature ephemeral and limited. Likewise, attempting to make the Bahá'í Faith relevant to modern society is to incur the grave risk of compromising the fundamental verities of our Faith in an effort to make it conform to current theories and practices. (7 June 1983 to an individual believer) [70] <14>

Among these teachings was the independent investigation of reality so that the world of humanity may be saved from the darkness of imitation and attain to the truth... ('Abdu'l-Bahá, SWAB, p. 298) {9}

Your letters were received. They showed that ye have investigated the truth and have been freed from imitations and superstitions, that ye observe with your own eyes and not with those of others, hearken with your own ears and not with the ears of others, and discover mysteries with the help of your own consciences and not with those of others. For the imitator saith that such a man hath seen, such a man hath heard, and such a conscience hath discovered; in other words he dependeth upon the sight, the hearing and the conscience of others and hath no will of his own. Now, praise be to God, ye have shown will-power and have turned to the Sun of Truth. (Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 29) {11}

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He does not ask us to follow Him blindly; as He says in one of His Tablets, God has endowed man with a mind to operate as a torchlight and guide him to the truth. Read His words, consider His Teachings and measure their value in the light of contemporary problems and the truth will surely be revealed to you. Read books such as the *Íqán*, *Some Answered Questions*, *Nabil's Narrative*, and you will appreciate the truth of His Mission, as well as the true spirit He creates in whosoever follows His ways. (From letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, February 26, 1933: *Bahá'í News*, No. 80, p. 5 January 1934) {19} <5>

We must turn aside from these vain imaginings and suppositions and philosophizings of the world, and fix our eyes upon the clear stream of the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. (Shoghi Effendi, from a letter written on his behalf dated 22 April 1954 to an individual believer) {27} <12>

If you read the utterances of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá with selflessness and care and concentrate upon them, you will discover truths unknown to you before and will obtain an insight into the problems that have baffled the great thinkers of the world. (Shoghi Effendi, from a letter dated 30 January 1925 to an individual believer) <1>

I urge them to study profoundly the revealed utterances of Bahá'u'lláh and the discourses of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and not to rely unduly on the representation and interpretation of the Teachings given by Bahá'í speakers and teachers. (Shoghi Effendi, from a letter dated 20 March 1929) <2>

There is no limit to the study of the Cause. The more we read the writings the more truths we can find in them and the more we will see that our previous notions were erroneous. (Shoghi Effendi, from a letter written on his behalf dated 25 August 1926 to an individual believer) <4>

Commentary

This may be the summary of all purposes for scholarship, for the investigation of reality, the discovery of truth is the constant aim of the rational soul, the distinguishing characteristic of the human being. Scholarship, through the sciences, through material philosophy, through the arts and crafts, is occupied with discovering the truth of the empirically perceived world. Scholarship, through religion, through divine philosophy, through meditation and prayer, is occupied with discovering the truth of the spiritual worlds. These two are wings of one bird of existence, facets of one integrated whole, inasmuch as both realms are real, both are essential for the during of this life. The scholar must be uncompromising the search for truth, and ever ready to recognize and integrate new dimensions to this search, which cannot be confined by the received strictures of any cultural dynamic. Whether these be institutionalized in the mystical brotherhoods of Islam or Christianity, or in the scientific faculties of Harvard or Oxford, or in the corporate offices of New York or Tokyo, they must give way to new discoveries in this age of light.



SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF SCHOLARSHIP

1. to become informed of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh [24], [73], {8}, {15}, {19}, {20}, {21}, {24}, {25}, {26}, {28}, <1>, <2>, <4>, <6>, <11>, <13>, (43), (44), (45), (50), (68)
2. to become informed about the Qur'án and the history and tenets of Islam [73], {6}, {20}
3. to become informed of the contents of the sacred Scriptures of other Faiths {6}, (57), (62), (68)
4. to become informed about history [37], [74], {6}, {24}, <9>
5. to become informed about economics, sociology, etc. [37], [50], [74], {24}, <9>
6. to become informed of the laws, principles, customs, conditions and manners, material and moral virtues characterizing the statecraft of nations {6}
7. to become informed about psychology [38]
8. to become informed about all the progressive movements of the day [50], {24}, <9>
9. to be informed about the present condition of the world and its problems [24], {16}, {21}, {25}
10. to formulate and learn proofs of the Faith [70], {5}, <16>, (28), (29), (30), (31), (32), (33), (36), (37), (61), (65)

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11. to acquire useful sciences [2], [21], [55], {1}, {6}, {7}
12. to become informed of the mysteries of the Holy Words (28), (35), (36), (41), (43), (47), (48), (49), (58), (62), (63), (64)
13. to become a fluent public speaker [31], {21}, (31), (35)
14. to memorize passages from the Writings (33), (39)
15. gain a mastery of such books as the “Gleanings”, “The Dawn-Breakers”, “God Passes By”, the “Íqán”, “Some Answered Questions” and the more important Tablets [74]; investigation of those institutions and circumstances that are directly connected with the origin and birth of their Faith, with the station claimed by its Forerunner, and with the laws revealed by its Author [73]
16. focus on the needs, the principles and the purpose of Bahá'í Administration
17. study of philosophy

As attempted above with regards to the purposes of scholarship, in this section each of the specific objectives identified will be presented with the source texts provided and a short commentary.

1. to become informed of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh [24], [73], {8}, {15}, {19}, {20}, {21}, {24}, {25}, {26}, {28}, <1>, <2>, <4>, <6>, <11>, <13>, (43), (44), (45), (50), (68)

The news of the co-operation of the Bahá'í young men and women in Montreal, their establishment of a group for study and discussion, the sane and sober expression of their methods as expressed in the programme you had enclosed, and their thoughtful and enthusiastic outlook upon the future, all these have helped to create the liveliest hopes and the deepest satisfaction in the heart of our Guardian. It is indeed with no little pleasure that he welcomes the active co-operation of his young friends in Montreal, and he sincerely trusts that with an adequate study of the proper teachings and their spiritual significance coupled with a sufficient knowledge of the problems and perplexities that the world is beset with, you will be able to render great services to the Cause and therefore to humanity. (20 March 1929 to an individual believer) [24]

In their efforts to achieve this purpose they must study for themselves, conscientiously and painstakingly, the literature of their Faith, delve into its teachings, assimilate its laws and principles, ponder its admonitions, tenets and purposes, commit to memory certain of its exhortations and prayers, master the essentials of its administration, and keep abreast of its current affairs and latest developments. They must strive to obtain, from sources that are authoritative and unbiased, a sound knowledge of the history and tenets of Islam -- the source and background of their Faith -- and approach reverently and with a mind purged from preconceived ideas the study of the Qur'án which, apart from the sacred scriptures of the Bábí and Bahá'í Revelations, constitutes the only Book which can be regarded as an absolutely authenticated Repository of the Word of God. They must devote special attention to the investigation of those institutions and circumstances that are directly connected with the origin and birth of their Faith, with the station claimed by its Forerunner, and with the laws revealed by its Author. (25 December 1938 by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of the West, published in "The Advent of Divine Justice" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990), p. 49) [73], {19}

He also urges you to study the teachings themselves more deeply. Bahá'í scholarship is needed really more than worldly scholarship, for one is spiritual, the other more or less transient. There is a real lack in the Cause of people who know the teachings thoroughly, especially their deeper truths, and who can consequently teach the souls properly and lay a permanent foundation, one that tests and trials will not shake down. (27 August 1951 on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [76], {26}, <11>

Thou didst ask as to acquiring knowledge: read thou the Books and Tablets of God, and the articles written to demonstrate the truth of this Faith. Included among them are the Íqán, which hath been translated into English, the works of Mirza Abu'l-Fadl, and those of some others among the believers. In the days to come a great number of holy Tablets and other sacred writings will be translated, and thou shouldst read these as well. Likewise, ask thou of God that the magnet of His love

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should draw unto thee the knowledge of Him. Once a soul becometh holy in all things, purified, sanctified, the gates of the knowledge of God will open wide before his eyes. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, SWAB, pp. 190-191) {8}

The youthful and eager workers for the Cause ... occupy a warm place in my heart. I will remember their hopes, their plans, their activities in my hours of prayer at the Holy Shrine. I urge them to study profoundly the revealed utterances of Bahá'u'lláh and the discourses of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and not to rely unduly on the representation and interpretation of the Teachings given by Bahá'í speakers and teachers. May the Almighty sustain you and guide you in your work. (In the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter dated 20 March 1929 written on his behalf to an individual believer) {15}

He does not ask us to follow Him blindly; as He says in one of His Tablets, God has endowed man with a mind to operate as a torchlight and guide him to the truth. Read His words, consider His Teachings and measure their value in the light of contemporary problems and the truth will surely be revealed to you. Read books such as the *Íqán*, *Some Answered Questions*, *Nabil's Narrative*, and you will appreciate the truth of His Mission, as well as the true spirit He creates in whosoever follows His ways. (From letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, February 26, 1933: *Bahá'í News*, No. 80, p. 5 January 1934) {19}

The Cause needs more Bahá'í scholars, people who not only are devoted to it and believe in it and are anxious to tell others about it, but also who have a deep grasp of the Teachings and their significance, and who can correlate its beliefs with the current thoughts and problems of the people of the world. The Cause has the remedy for all the world's ills. The reason why more people don't accept it is because the Bahá'ís are not always capable of presenting it to them in a way that meets the immediate needs of their minds. Young Bahá'ís like yourself must prepare themselves to really bring the Message to their generation, who need it so desperately and who can understand the language it speaks so well. He would advise you among other books to study the Talks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as His method of approaching the mind of the public cannot be surpassed... He also advises you to develop yourself as a public speaker so you will be increasingly able to teach the Cause....(From a letter dated 21 October 1943, written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer. Published in *Canadian Bahá'í News*, March 1967, p. 7) {21}

Likewise he is constantly urging them to really study the Bahá'í teachings more deeply. One might liken Bahá'u'lláh's teachings to a sphere; there are points poles apart, and in between the thoughts and doctrines that unite them. We believe in balance in all things; we believe in moderation in all things -- we must not be too emotional, nor cut and dried and lacking in feeling, we must not be so liberal as to cease to preserve the character and unity of our Bahá'í system, nor fanatical and dogmatic. Very few people, as you as a psychologist know, have attained perfect equilibrium in their minds or their lives -- their acts -- the same is certainly true of the Bahá'ís, for anyone who believes in our teachings can become a Bahá'í and they represent all elements of the population. (From a letter dated 5 July 1947 written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer) {24}

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We should concentrate on the Cause, because it is what is needed to cure the world. This is a sound attitude, for if we don't devote ourselves to the Bahá'í work and teaching, who will? (From a letter dated 5 July 1949 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) {25}

The Bahá'ís should seek to be well informed on the Teachings, but not waste too much time trying to understand everything, especially as some of the material we have is not well translated, and meanings are occasionally ambiguous. The main point is to understand the Faith, and be able to convey it to others, and not waste too much time on details. (From a letter dated 31 January 1955 written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer) {28}

If you read the utterances of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá with selflessness and care and concentrate upon them, you will discover truths unknown to you before and will obtain an insight into the problems that have baffled the great thinkers of the world. (From a letter dated 30 January 1925 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) <1>

I urge them to study profoundly the revealed utterances of Bahá'u'lláh and the discourses of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and not to rely unduly on the representation and interpretation of the Teachings given by Bahá'í speakers and teachers. May the Almighty sustain you and guide you in your work. (In the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter dated 20 March 1929 written on his behalf to an individual believer) <2>

There is no limit to the study of the Cause. The more we read the writings the more truths we can find in them and the more we will see that our previous notions were erroneous. (From a letter dated 25 August 1926 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) <4>

The Cause needs more Bahá'í scholars, people who not only are devoted to it and believe in it and are anxious to tell others about it, but also who have a deep grasp of the teachings and their significance, and who can correlate its beliefs with the current thoughts and problems of the people of the world. The Cause has the remedy for all the world's ills. The reason why more people don't accept it is because the Bahá'ís are not always capable of presenting it to them in a way that meets the immediate needs of their minds. (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer dated 21 October 1943; published in *Canadian Bahá'í News*, March 1967, p. 7) <6>

The Bahá'ís should seek to be well informed on the Teachings, but not waste too much time trying to understand everything, especially as some of the material we have is not well translated, and meanings are occasionally ambiguous. The main point is to understand the Faith, and be able to convey it to others, and not waste too much time on details. (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer dated 31 January 1955) <13>

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Read ye The Hidden Words, ponder the inner meanings thereof, act in accord therewith. Read, with close attention, the Tablets of Tarazát (Ornaments), Kalímát (Words of Paradise), Tajallíyát (Effulgences), Ishráqát (Splendours), and Bishárát (Glad Tidings), and rise up as ye are bidden in the heavenly teachings. Thus may each one of you be even as a candle casting its light, the centre of attraction wherever people come together; and from you, as from a bed of flowers, may sweet scents be shed. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, SWAB, pp. 35-36) (43)

Direct thine attention to the holy Tablets; read thou the Ishráqát, Tajallíyát, the Words of Paradise, the Glad Tidings, the Tarazát, the Most Holy Book. Then wilt thou see that today these heavenly Teachings are the remedy for a sick and suffering world, and a healing balm for the sores on the body of mankind. They are the spirit of life, the ark of salvation, the magnet to draw down eternal glory, the dynamic power to motivate the inner self of man. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, SWAB, p. 61) (44)

We hear that the Tablets of Ishráqát (Splendours), Tarazát (Ornaments), Bishárát (Glad Tidings), Tajallíyát (Effulgences), and Kalímát (Words of Paradise) have been translated and published in those regions. In these Tablets will ye have a model of how to be and how to live. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, SWAB, p. 79) (45)

Thou didst ask as to acquiring knowledge: read thou the Books and Tablets of God, and the articles written to demonstrate the truth of this Faith. Included among them are the Íqán, which hath been translated into English, the works of Mirza Abu'l-Fadl, and those of some others among the believers. In the days to come a great number of holy Tablets and other sacred writings will be translated, and thou shouldst read these as well. Likewise, ask thou of God that the magnet of His love should draw unto thee the knowledge of Him. Once a soul becometh holy in all things, purified, sanctified, the gates of the knowledge of God will open wide before his eyes. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, SWAB, pp. 190-191) (50)

The first thing to do is to acquire a thirst for Spirituality, then Live the Life! Live the Life! Live the Life! The way to acquire this thirst is to meditate upon the future life. Study the Holy Words, read your Bible, read the Holy Books, especially study the Holy Utterances of Bahá'u'lláh; Prayer and Meditation, take much time for these two. Then will you know this Great Thirst, and then only can you begin to Live the Life! ('Abdu'l-Bahá, in *Star of the West*, Vol. 19, No. 3, p. 69) (68)

The ambition of every young Bahá'í should be, indeed, to become a well-informed and competent teacher. For this very purpose the institution of [the] Bahá'í Summer School has been established, and its importance so strongly and repeatedly emphasized by the Guardian. (21 June 1935 to an individual believer; in The Compilation of Compilations, vol I, p. 425)

Commentary

This objective of Bahá'í scholarship should be obvious to everyone and require no commentary. However, we might enquire as to what it means to "become informed of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh". Is it sufficient to read a few introductory books, to understand Bahá'u'lláh through the eyes of His

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followers? Not likely. Is it sufficient to read only selections from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, ignoring many of His works that are accessible in a language one can read? Not likely. Is it sufficient to become apprized of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh through His Writings alone and without consulting the interpretations of those teachings by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi? Or to read the Master but not the Guardian? Or the Guardian and not the Master? Or either of them and not Bahá'u'lláh? Not likely at all. The Guardian pointed out that the Bahá'í teachings are like a sphere, and one must become apprized of the whole sphere in order to comprehend the connection between points on a sphere. With a consciousness of the whole, we can understand the part. This calls for a systematic and balanced study of the Bahá'í Revelation, inasmuch as the literature is vast, the linguistic challenges are many, and the opportunities for misjudgment legion.

▲

2. to become informed about the Qur'án and the history and tenets of Islam

[73], {6}, {20}

They must strive to obtain, from sources that are authoritative and unbiased, a sound knowledge of the history and tenets of Islam --the source and background of their Faith-- and approach reverently and with a mind purged from preconceived ideas the study of the Qur'án which, apart from the sacred scriptures of the Bábí and Bahá'í Revelations, constitutes the only Book which can be regarded as an absolutely authenticated Repository of the Word of God. They must devote special attention to the investigation of those institutions and circumstances that are directly connected with the origin and birth of their Faith, with the station claimed by its Forerunner, and with the laws revealed by its Author. (25 December 1938 by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of the West, published in The Advent of Divine Justice (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990), p. 49) [73], {20}

The first attribute of perfection is learning and the cultural attainments of the mind, and this eminent station is achieved when the individual combines in himself a thorough knowledge of those complex and transcendental realities pertaining to God, of the fundamental truths of Qur'anic political and religious law... ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization, p. 35) {6}

It is certainly most difficult to thoroughly grasp all the Surihs of the Qur'án, as it requires a detailed knowledge of the social, religious and historical background of Arabia at the time of the appearance of the Prophet. The Believers cannot possibly hope, therefore, to understand the Surihs after the first or even second or third reading. They have to study them again and again, ponder over their meaning, with the help of certain commentaries, and explanatory notes as found, for instance in the admirable translation made by Sale, endeavor to acquire as clear and correct understanding of their meaning and import as possible, This is naturally a slow process, but future generations of believers will certainly come to grasp it. For the present, the Guardian agrees, that it would be easier and more helpful to study the book according to subjects, and not verse by verse and also in the light of Báb,

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Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's interpretations which throw such floods of light on the Whole of the Qur'án. (From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, August 22, 1939: *Bahá'í News*, No. 134, pp. 2-3, March 1940; in Lights of Guidance, pp. 496-497)

With regard to the School's programme for the next summer: the Guardian would certainly advise, and even urge the friends to make a thorough study of the Qur'án, as the knowledge of this Sacred Scripture is absolutely indispensable for every believer who wishes to adequately understand, and intelligently read the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh. Although there are very few persons among our Western Bahá'ís who are capable of handling such a course in a scholarly way yet, the mere lack of such competent teachers should encourage and stimulate the believers to get better acquainted with the Sacred Scriptures of Islam. In this way, there will gradually appear some distinguished Bahá'ís who will be so well versed in the teaching of Islam as to be able to guide the believers in their study of that religion. (From a letter dated 2 December 1935 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the Central States Summer School Committee and an individual believer; in The Compilation of Compilations, vol. I, p. 33)

Shoghi Effendi wishes me also to express his deep-felt appreciation of your intention to study the Qur'án. The knowledge of this revealed holy Book is, indeed, indispensable to every Bahá'í who wishes to adequately understand the writings of Bahá'u'lláh. And in view of that the Guardian has been invariably encouraging the friends to make as thorough a study of this Book as possible, particularly in their Summer Schools. Sale's translation is the most scholarly we have, but Rodwell's version is more literary, and hence easier for reading. (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer dated 23 November 1934; in The Compilation of Compilations, vol. I, p. 221)

Commentary

This is a specific objective of Bahá'í scholarship whose importance cannot be discounted even to the slightest degree. This is not without conditions however. The Universal House of Justice has pointed out many academic scholars and Muslim and Christian apologists have mischaracterized the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh as Muslim reformers, philosophers or mystics. This failure to represent their prophetic claims has resulted in the erroneous assumption on the part of many of the learned of our time that the Bábí and Bahá'í religions are schismatic and heretical movements within Islam, and that the ideas found in these religions are derivative of Islamic models which can be readily traced within the course of Islamic history and often discovered among the associates of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. This perhaps inevitable mischaracterization is to be assiduously avoided by Bahá'ís and countered with a forthright representation of the prophetic missions of the Founders.

Hence, while a sound understanding of Islam is indispensable to a sophisticated understanding of the Faith, the Faith cannot be reduced to an update and a restatement of Islamic teachings. On the contrary, we should strive to see Islam, not through the eyes of academic historians or Muslim commentators but through the eyes of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh.

▲

3. to become informed of the contents of the sacred Scriptures of other Faiths {6}, (57), (62), (68)

The first attribute of perfection is learning and the cultural attainments of the mind, and this eminent station is achieved when the individual combines in himself a thorough knowledge of those complex and transcendental realities pertaining to God, of the fundamental truths of Qur'anic political and religious law, of the contents of the sacred Scriptures of other faiths... ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization, p. 35) {6}

God sent His Prophets into the world to teach and enlighten man, to explain to him the mystery of the Power of the Holy Spirit, to enable him to reflect the light, and so in his turn, to be the source of guidance to others. The Heavenly Books, the Bible, the Qur'án, and the other Holy Writings have been given by God as guides into the paths of Divine virtue, love, justice and peace.

Therefore I say unto you that ye should strive to follow the counsels of these Blessed Books, and so order your lives that ye may, following the examples set before you, become yourselves the saints of the Most High! ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, pp. 61-62) (57)

I have been informed that the purpose of your class meeting is to study the significances and mysteries of the Holy Scriptures and understand the meaning of the divine Testaments. It is a cause of great happiness to me that you are turning unto the Kingdom of God, that you desire to approach the presence of God and to become informed of the realities and precepts of God. It is my hope that you may put forth your most earnest endeavor to accomplish this end, that you may investigate and study the Holy Scriptures word by word so that you may attain knowledge of the mysteries hidden therein. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, pp. 458-459) (62)

Study the Holy Words, read your Bible, read the Holy Books, especially study the Holy Utterances of Bahá'u'lláh... ('Abdu'l-Bahá in SW, vol. 19, No. 3, p. 69) (68)

Commentary

This requirement of Bahá'í scholars is reiterated in countless passages in the Bahá'í source texts. In some cases the emphasis is put on the Scriptures of Islam or Judaism and Christianity, but overall the imperative is that Bahá'í scholars become familiar with the contents of the Scriptures of Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths.

This is a daunting task, inasmuch as each of these religions has an immense sacred literature, and scholars are actively engaged in editing and translating and analyzing each of these text anthologies. There are certainly short-cuts which can be taken, if we can rely on the specialists in each religious tradition to compile what they conceive of as the most important texts for a clear understanding of that religion. However, the bias of the specialist has to be considered, and Bahá'í scholars must be awake

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to the tendency of many contemporary specialists to emphasize the distinctions between religious traditions which appear to make them incompatible with one another rather than the common ground amongst them which would make them intelligibly compatible. A systematic interpretation of all authentic Scriptures in light of the principle of progressive revelation will enable the Bahá'í scholar to contribute to interfaith understanding while accurately and authentically articulating a Bahá'í perspective on the teachings contained in those Scriptures and the relative authority of those texts. There is, in effect, a sort of Bahá'í exegetical method which is historical and critical but not in the materialistic and humanistic fashion developed in Western Europe since the 18th century. It depicts the revelation of religious truth and also of textual accuracy as steadily increasing over the course of time, so that the depiction of that truth is more complete and more authentic in the Gospels than in the Tanakh, in the Qur'án than in the Gospels, in the Writings of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh than in the Qur'án. Hence, it is imperative, if we are to apply this historical-critical method, to examine the former in the light of the latter.



4. to become informed about history [37], [74], {6}, {24}, <9>

Regarding the advice you requested from him concerning what studies you should specialize in with a view to teaching in the future: He would suggest either History, Economics or Sociology, as these are not only fields in which Bahá'ís take a great interest but also cover subjects which our teachings cast an entirely new light upon. (Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer dated 13 March 1944) [37]

The Guardian feels that a sound knowledge of history, including religious history, and also of social and economic subjects, is of great help in teaching the Cause to intelligent people... (4 May 1946 on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [74]

He should in addition be informed as to the laws and principles, the customs, conditions and manners, and the material and moral virtues characterizing the statecraft of other nations, and should be well versed in all the useful branches of learning of the day, and study the historical records of bygone governments and peoples...the great events of history... ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization, pp. 35-36) {6}

Shoghi Effendi has for years urged the Bahá'ís (who asked his advice, and in general also) to study history, economics, sociology, etc., in order to be au courant with all the progressive movements and thoughts being put forth today, and so that they could correlate these to the Bahá'í teachings. (From a letter dated 5 July 1947 written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer) {24}, <9>

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Commentary

History is perhaps the most controversial of all fields of study, inasmuch as no history is written without a bias, without an axe to grind, without predispositions and presuppositions, and it is often impossible or at least very difficult to distinguish between the commentary of the historian and the facts he has compiled, for the simple reason that he collects the facts that support his view of history, he cites the facts that he considers historical, and the facts which might undermine or contradict his thesis are conveniently left out of the picture. It has been observed that history is often more fictive than fiction itself. In any case, being informed about history, including religious history is one of the specific objectives of the Bahá'í scholar, and in order not to become a convert to the worldview of the histories he studies, he must understand how to read history. In His own historical works, in A Traveler's Narrative and Memorials to the Faithful, as well as in His references to history in The Secret of Divine Civilization and in various of His talks and Tablets, 'Abdu'l-Bahá demonstrates that history from a Bahá'í perspective is not composed primarily of events within an empirical time, space and cultural frame. Rather, history is the unfoldment of the divine plan for the education and development of humankind, not in its potentiality, which is revealed in the Scriptures, but rather in its actuality, in its human actuality in the temporal world. This paradigm is further developed in God Passes By and The Promised Day is Come of Shoghi Effendi. Hence, the Bahá'í scholar who seeks to become informed about history, including religious history, must translate all he absorbs from whatever source he consults into the framework revealed in the Writings. Otherwise, he is likely to become unwittingly seduced by a humanist, Marxist, capitalist, liberal, conservative, Christian, Muslim or some other particular and biased viewpoint, which will result not in him becoming informed about history, but rather becoming informed about one interpretation of what has happened. If he pays attention he can learn to distinguish fact from fiction, but in order to do so, he must grasp the point of view of the historian. Reading history is always an act of translation, from the mind and viewpoint of the historian to the mind and viewpoint of the reader. In this case, the Bahá'í will be wise to remain grounded at all times in the teachings of his Faith.



5. to become informed about economics, sociology, etc. [37], [50], [74], {24}, <9>

Regarding the advice you requested from him concerning what studies you should specialize in with a view to teaching in the future: He would suggest either History, Economics or Sociology, as these are not only fields in which Bahá'ís take a great interest but also cover subjects which our teachings cast an entirely new light upon. Your knowledge would be of use to the Cause in teaching it in the future, and you could also perhaps introduce the Bahá'í ideas into your lectures as an educator. (13 March 1944 to an individual believer) [37]

Shoghi Effendi has for years urged the Bahá'ís (who asked His advice, and in general also) to study history, economics, sociology, etc., in order to be au courant

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with all the progressive movements and thoughts being put forth today, and so that they could correlate these to the Bahá'í teachings. What he wants the Bahá'ís to do is to study more, not to study less. The more general knowledge, scientific and otherwise, they possess, the better. Likewise he is constantly urging them to really study the Bahá'í teachings more deeply. One might liken Bahá'u'lláh's teachings to a sphere; there are points poles apart, and in between the thoughts and doctrines that unite them.... (5 July 1947 to an individual believer) [50], {24}, <9>

The Guardian feels that a sound knowledge of history, including religious history, and also of social and economic subjects, is of great help in teaching the Cause to intelligent people... (4 May 1946 on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [74]

The Guardian has always advised young people to study deeply such subjects as History, Economics and Sociology as they are all related to the teachings and aid in understanding the Faith. (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, May 12, 1944; in Lights of Guidance, p. 629)

Commentary

Shoghi Effendi encouraged Bahá'í scholars to become familiar with economics and sociology, and, as indicated on this list of specific objectives, the Guardian also approved of the study of psychology and political science. In general, the Guardian advised the believers "to make detailed inquiry into the various branches of contemporary learning -- arts and sciences alike" (Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 30 January 1926 to the Spiritual Assemblies in Iran, translated from the Persian; in the 1995 Compilation on Scholarship, p. 7, [20])



6. to become informed of the laws, principles, customs, conditions and manners, material and moral virtues characterizing the statecraft of nations {6}

He should in addition be informed as to the laws and principles, the customs, conditions and manners, and the material and moral virtues characterizing the statecraft of other nations, and should be well versed in all the useful branches of learning of the day, and study the historical records of bygone governments and peoples...the great events of history... (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization, pp. 35-36) {6}

Commentary

This is, properly speaking, political history and political science, and follows the same principles as the social science content discussed above. One of the purposes of studying this statecraft of nations is to be able to compare these various "laws, principles, customs, conditions and manners, material and moral virtues" with the Bahá'í teachings, and to be facilitated in our unflinching efforts to attract the minds of the leaders of nations to the principles of the New World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.



7. to become informed about psychology [38]

Psychology is still a very young and inexact science, and as the years go by Bahá'í psychologists, who know from the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh the true pattern of human life, will be able to make great strides in the development of this science, and will help profoundly in the alleviation of human suffering. (Letter dated 6 February 1973, published in Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1968-1973 (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976), pp. 111-112) [38]

Commentary

The Universal House of Justice wrote about another of the social sciences: "Psychology is still a very young and inexact science, and as the years go by Bahá'í psychologists, who know from the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh the true pattern of human life, will be able to make great strides in the development of this science, and will help profoundly in the alleviation of human suffering." (Letter dated 6 February 1973, published in Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1968-1973 (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976), pp. 111-112; in 1995 Scholarship Compilation, [38]) In general this is the manner in which we are encouraged to approach the social sciences, recognizing that they may have usefulness in their current configuration, but also recognizing that there are many truths enshrined in the Bahá'í Writings which will ultimately transform these social sciences by expanding the awareness of human nature in its individual and collective, spiritual and material dimensions and manifestations.



8. to become informed about all the progressive movements of the day [50], {24}, <9>

Shoghi Effendi has for years urged the Bahá'ís (who asked His advice, and in general also) to study history, economics, sociology, etc., in order to be au courant with all the progressive movements and thoughts being put forth today, and so that they could correlate these to the Bahá'í teachings. What he wants the Bahá'ís to do is to study more, not to study less. The more general knowledge, scientific and otherwise, they possess, the better. Likewise he is constantly urging them to really study the Bahá'í teachings more deeply. One might liken Bahá'u'lláh's teachings to a sphere; there are points poles apart, and in between the thoughts and doctrines that unite them.... (5 July 1947 to an individual believer) [50], {24}, <9>

Commentary

In various talks and writings, the Bahá'ís have been encouraged at least from the ministry of the Master to collaborate with and support the progressive movements of the day, those with which our world-embracing values are in harmony. The Bahá'í vision of what is progressive and modern is

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decidedly distinct from that of many self-described progressives and modernists. In one of His talks, 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote: " At such a time as this Bahá'u'lláh appeared among them like a luminary in the heavens. He flooded the East with light. He proclaimed new principles and teachings. He laid a basis for new institutions which are the very spirit of modernism, the light of the world, the development of the body politic and eternal honor." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 402) In another talk He said: " This reformation and renewal of the fundamental reality of religion constitute the true and outworking spirit of modernism, the unmistakable light of the world, the manifest effulgence of the Word of God, the divine remedy for all human ailment and the bounty of eternal life to all mankind." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 439) Shoghi Effendi contrasted this authentic "spirit of modernism" with " the prevailing spirit of modernism, with its emphasis on a purely materialistic philosophy, which, as it diffuses itself, tends increasingly to divorce religion from man's daily life." (Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 183) 'Abdu'l-Bahá gave a list of "teachings, which embody the divine spirit of the age and are applicable to this period of maturity in the life of the human world" which included the "oneness of the world of humanity...protection and guidance of the Holy Spirit...foundation of all religion is one...Religion must be the cause of unity...Religion must accord with science and reason...Independent investigation of truth...Equality between men and women...abandoning of all prejudices among mankind...Universal peace...Universal education...A universal language...Solution of the economic problem...An international tribunal". ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 440) Modernism, in its general meaning and apart from the specific cultural trends that are widely described by this term, has been associated with a great variety of phenomena including, alphabetically, alienation, bureaucracy, decontextualization, centralization, chaos, commodification, consumerism, decontextualism, democratization, disenchantment with the world, diversification, homogenization, hybridization, individuation and individualism, linear-progression, mass society, mechanization, objectivism, reductionism, subjectivism, and universalism, is, as a descriptive term for the ideological malaise of the Western world, which has infected most of the planet over the course of the 20th century, primarily the result of "a purely materialistic philosophy, which, as it diffuses itself, tends increasingly to divorce religion from man's daily life." (Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, 183) It is obviously not with movements which reflect this kind of progressivism, namely, the triumph of materialistic philosophy over all religions, that is meant by these encouraging words, but rather the life-affirming progressive spirit exhibited in the aforementioned principles, that is, in the social teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.

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**9. to be informed about the present condition of the world and its problems
{24}, {16}, {21}, {25}**

It is indeed with no little pleasure that he welcomes the active co-operation of his young friends in Montreal, and he sincerely trusts that with an adequate study of the proper teachings and their spiritual significance coupled with a sufficient knowledge

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of the problems and perplexities that the world is beset with, you will be able to render great services to the Cause and therefore to humanity. (20 March 1929 to an individual believer) [24]

The world is undoubtedly facing a great crisis and the social, economic and political conditions are becoming daily more complex. Should the friends desire to take the lead in reforming the world, they should start by educating themselves and understand what the troubles and problems really are which baffle the mind of man. It is in these Summer Schools that this training should be provided for the friends. (From a letter dated 27 January 1932 written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer) {16}

The Cause needs more Bahá'í scholars, people who not only are devoted to it and believe in it and are anxious to tell others about it, but also who have a deep grasp of the teachings and their significance, and who can correlate its beliefs with the current thoughts and problems of the people of the world. The Cause has the remedy for all the world's ills. The reason why more people don't accept it is because the Bahá'ís are not always capable of presenting it to them in a way that meets the immediate needs of their minds. (From a letter dated 21 October 1943, written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer. Published in "Canadian Bahá'í News", March 1967, p. 7) {21}

If the Bahá'ís want to be really effective in teaching the Cause they need to be much better informed and able to discuss intelligently, intellectually, the present condition of the world and its problems. (From a letter dated 5 July 1949 written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer) {25}

Commentary

Bahá'u'lláh advises: "The remedy the world needeth in its present-day 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 center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements." (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 213) In order apply the divine remedy revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, we must become "informed about the present condition of the world and its problems".



10. to formulate and learn proofs of the Faith [70], {5}, <16>, (28), (29), (30), (31), (32), (33), (36), (37), (61), (65)

From your letter the House of Justice understands that you desire to find ways of conveying spiritual truths in logical ways and demonstrating their validity through scientific proofs. There can be no objection to such an attitude. 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself used such a method. The danger Bahá'í scholars must avoid is the distortion of religious truth, almost forcibly at times, to make it conform to understandings and perceptions current in the scientific world. True Bahá'í scholars

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should guard against this. In a letter to a National Spiritual Assembly dated 21 July 1968, the House of Justice wrote:

While it may often be the part of wisdom to approach individuals or an audience from a standpoint of current knowledge, it should never be overlooked that the Revelation of the Manifestation of God is the standard for all knowledge, and scientific statements and theories, no matter how close they may come to the eternal principles proclaimed by God's Messenger, are in their very nature ephemeral and limited. Likewise, attempting to make the Bahá'í Faith relevant to modern society is to incur the grave risk of compromising the fundamental verities of our Faith in an effort to make it conform to current theories and practices. (7 June 1983 to an individual believer) [70], <16>

If it were possible that in every city a few of the awakened ones, when opportunity offered, could hold a meeting and therein habitually present the proofs and arguments of God, this would do much to expand the consciousness of men; provided, however, that the discourse be kept to this one theme. (From a translation of the Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá) {5}

The attainment of the most great guidance is dependent upon knowledge and wisdom, and on being informed as to the mysteries of the Holy Words. Wherefore must the loved ones of God, be they young or old, be they men or women, each one according to his capabilities, strive to acquire the various branches of knowledge, and to increase his understanding of the mysteries of the Holy Books, and his skill in marshalling the divine proofs and evidences. (From a Tablet - translated from the Arabic) (28)

When your hearts are wholly attracted to the one true God you will acquire divine knowledge, will become attentive to the proofs and testimonies and will commit to memory the glad-tidings concerning the Manifestation of the Beauty of the All-Merciful, as mentioned in the heavenly Scriptures. Then ye shall behold how wondrous are His confirmations and how gracious is His assistance. (From a Tablet - translated from the Persian) (29)

It is imperative to acquire the knowledge of divine proofs and evidences, and to acquaint oneself with convincing testimonies which demonstrate the revelation of God's resplendent Light. The study group thou didst organize hath imparted much joy and happiness to the heart of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Thou must exert much effort and show forth perseverance and constancy that, God willing, through the reviving breaths of His mercy, souls may be so educated as to become like radiant candles shining in the assemblage of divine knowledge and understanding. This matter is highly important. It is binding on every one and must be regarded as an obligation.... (From a Tablet - translated from the Persian) (30)

In truth thou art now rendering a great service to the basic foundations of the Cause of God, inasmuch as the cornerstone of its structure is the promotion of His Faith, the awakening of the people, the diffusion of the divine teachings and the education of mankind; and all this dependeth on instructing the friends in the teaching work. I beseech God that within a short time thou mayest be able to acquaint the children of

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the Abha Paradise with the divine mysteries and truths and to rend asunder the veils of idle imaginings, that each one of them may become a fluent speaker and be able to guide many others to the Cause of God. Then will the outpourings of the heavenly bounties become manifest and the invisible hosts of the Kingdom, armed with conclusive proofs and evidences, will conquer the realms of the inner realities and domains of the hearts of men, even as a single seed developing into seven ears of grain. (From a Tablet - translated from the Persian) (31)

In this day there is nothing more important than the instruction and study of clear proofs and convincing, heavenly arguments, for therein lie the source of life and the path of salvation.... (From a Tablet - translated from the Persian) (32)

The method of instruction which ye have established, beginning with proofs of the existence of God and the oneness of God, the mission of the Prophets and Messengers and Their teachings, and the wonders of the universe, is highly suitable. Keep on with this. It is certain that the confirmations of God will attend you. It is also highly praiseworthy to memorize the Tablets, divine verses and sacred traditions. Ye will surely exert every effort in teaching, and in furthering understanding. (From a Tablet - translated from the Persian) (33)

Wherefore, O ye illumined youth, strive by night and by day to unravel the mysteries of the mind and spirit, and to grasp the secrets of the Day of God. Inform yourselves of the evidences that the Most Great Name hath dawned.... (From a Tablet - translated from the Persian) (36)

If it were possible that in every city a few of the awakened ones, when opportunity offered, could hold a meeting, and therein habitually present the proofs and arguments of God, this would do much to expand the consciousness of men; provided, however, that the discourse be kept to this one theme. (From a Tablet - translated from the Persian) (37)

Day and night you must strive that you may attain to the significances of the heavenly Kingdom, perceive the signs of Divinity, acquire certainty of knowledge and realize that this world has a Creator, a Vivifier, a Provider, an Architect -- knowing this through proofs and evidences and not through susceptibilities, nay, rather, through decisive arguments and real vision -- that is to say, visualizing it as clearly as the outer eye beholds the sun. In this way may you behold the presence of God and attain to the knowledge of the holy, divine Manifestations.

You must come into the knowledge of the divine Manifestations and Their teachings through proofs and evidences. You must unseal the mysteries of the supreme Kingdom and become capable of discovering the inner realities of things. Then shall you be the manifestations of the mercy of God and true believers, firm and steadfast in the Cause of God. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, pp. 227-228; in Foundations of World Unity, p. 65) (61)

It is very good to memorize the logical points and the proofs of the Holy Books. Those proofs and evidences which establish the fact that Bahá'u'lláh is the fulfillment of the Promises of the Holy Books. These proofs ought to be collected

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and memorized. As soon as someone will ask you -- What are your proofs? -- you may cry out at the top of your voice and say: 'Here they are!' (*Star of the West*, Vol 3, No. 1, p. 4) (65)

Commentary

There are a very large number of proofs presented in the authentic Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as well as in the talks of the Master⁴. These proofs do not appear to be of marginal significance in the scheme of the Bahá'í teachings. Indeed, the Bahá'í teachings assert that true religion is in harmony with science and reason, that it must be in harmony with science and reason, and if it isn't in harmony with science and reason, it cannot be true religion at all. Such a religion would be fanatical, superstitious, and such it does not belong in this new age, of learning and science and universality. There are proofs for the existence of God, for the unity of God, for the existence of Prophethood, for the validity of individual Prophets, for the existence of the human soul, for the eternal life of the human soul, for the nature of the created world, and these are not to be found tucked away in dusty attics, in rare manuscripts, but rather front and center, accessible to all. But often invisible, both to believers and to non-believers. In any case, this aspect of Bahá'í learning is emphasized in multiple texts, and if we chuck out this teaching then we jettison a large body of the Bahá'í teachings which are based upon proofs.

Some of the translated references to proofs are here cited, to demonstrate just how widely this terminology is used by both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and to legitimize it thereby in the eyes of their present-day adherents, for whom the rational arguments disproving such proofs, including the philosophical arguments of Karl Popper (1902-1994), may bear considerable weight.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

I bear witness, O friends! that the favor [na'mat] is complete, the argument [hujjat] fulfilled, the proof [burhán] manifest and the evidence [dalíl] established. (PHW:postlude)

I beg of Thee, by that Word through which Thy proof was perfected among Thy creatures and Thy testimony was fulfilled amidst Thy servants, to strengthen Thy people in that whereby the face of the Cause will radiate in Thy dominion, the standards of Thy power will be planted among Thy servants, and the banners of Thy guidance will be raised throughout Thy dominions. (BP:172)

Having thus conclusively demonstrated that no day is greater than this Day, and no revelation more glorious than this Revelation, and having set forth all these weighty and infallible proofs which no understanding mind can question, and no man of learning overlook, how can man possibly, through the idle contention of the people of doubt and fancy, deprive himself of such a bountiful grace? (KI:143-144)

Therefore, it hath been said: "To seek evidence, when the Proof hath been established is but an unseemly act, and to be busied with the pursuit of knowledge when the Object of all learning hath been attained is truly blameworthy." (KI:147)

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We beseech God to strengthen thee with His power, and enable thee to recognize Him Who is the Source of all knowledge, that thou mayest detach thyself from all human learning, for, "what would it profit any man to strive after learning when he hath already found and recognized Him Who is the Object of all knowledge?" Cleave to the Root of Knowledge, and to Him Who is the Fountain thereof, that thou mayest find thyself independent of all who claim to be well versed in human learning, and whose claim no clear proof, nor the testimony of any enlightening book, can support. (GL:176-177)

The saying: "Knowledge is one point, which the foolish have multiplied" is a proof of Our argument, and the tradition: "Knowledge is a light which God sheddeth into the heart of whomsoever He willeth" a confirmation of Our statement. (KI:183)

They that valiantly labour in quest of God's will, when once they have renounced all else but Him, will be so attached and wedded to that City [City of Certitude] that a moment's separation from it would to them be unthinkable. They will hearken unto infallible proofs from the Hyacinth of that assembly, and receive the surest testimonies from the beauty of its Rose and the melody of its Nightingale. Once in about a thousand years shall this City be renewed and re-adorned. (KI:198-199; GL:268)

Behold, how lofty is the station, and how consummate the virtue, of these verses which He hath declared to be His surest testimony, His infallible proof, the evidence of His all-subduing power, and a revelation of the potency of His will. He, the divine King, hath proclaimed the undisputed supremacy of the verses of His Book over all things that testify to His truth. For compared with all other proofs and tokens, the divinely-revealed verses shine as the sun, whilst all others are as stars. To the peoples of the world they are the abiding testimony, the incontrovertible proof, the shining light of the ideal King. (KI:205)

They cleave to the obscure intricacies of knowledge, when He, Who is the Object of all knowledge, shineth as the sun. They see the sun with their own eyes, and yet question that brilliant Orb as to the proof of its light. They behold the vernal showers descending upon them, and yet seek an evidence of that bounty. The proof of the sun is the light thereof, which shineth and envelopeth all things. (KI:208-209)

Each one of these verses is unto all the peoples of the world an unfailing testimony and a glorious proof of His truth. Each of them verily sufficeth all mankind, wert thou to meditate upon the verses of God. In the above-mentioned verse itself pearls of mysteries lie hidden. Whatever be the ailment, the remedy it offereth can never fail. (KI:209-210)

Amongst the proofs demonstrating the truth of this Revelation is this, that in every age and Dispensation, whenever the invisible Essence was revealed in the person of His Manifestation, certain souls, obscure and detached from all worldly entanglements, would seek illumination from the Sun of Prophethood and Moon of divine guidance, and would attain unto the divine Presence. (KI:221; GL:179)

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Their very deeds are a sufficient testimony, and an irrefutable proof unto all the peoples of the earth, were men to ponder in their hearts the mysteries of divine Revelation. (KI:226-227; GL:182)

Another proof and evidence of the truth of this Revelation, which amongst all other proofs shineth as the sun, is the constancy of the eternal Beauty in proclaiming the Faith of God. (KI:230)

Wert thou to ponder a while, thou wilt recognize that, apart from all these established truths and above-mentioned evidences, the repudiation, cursing, and execration, pronounced by the people of the earth, are in themselves the mightiest proof and the surest testimony of the truth of these heroes of the field of resignation and detachment. (KI:236-237)

Verily I say, this is the Day in which mankind can behold the Face, and hear the Voice, of the Promised One. The Call of God hath been raised, and the light of His countenance hath been lifted up upon men. It behoveth every man to blot out the trace of every idle word from the tablet of his heart, and to gaze, with an open and unbiased mind, on the signs of His Revelation, the proofs of His Mission, and the tokens of His glory. (GL:10-11)

I have manifested Myself among men, and have sent down Him Who is the Day Spring of the signs of My Revelation...He Who is everlastingly hidden from the eyes of men can never be known except through His Manifestation, and His Manifestation can adduce no greater proof of the truth of His Mission than the proof of His own Person. (GL:49)

My Pen groaneth, and all created things weep with a great weeping, as a result of the woes He suffered at the hands of them that have broken the Covenant of God, violated His Testament, rejected His proofs, and disputed His signs. Thus recount We unto thee the tale of that which happened in days past, haply thou mayest comprehend. (GL:57)

Consider this wronged One. Though the clearest proofs attest the truth of His Cause; though the prophecies He, in an unmistakable language, hath made have been fulfilled; though, in spite of His not being accounted among the learned, His being unschooled and inexperienced in the disputations current among the divines, He hath rained upon men the showers of His manifold and Divinely-inspired knowledge; yet, behold how this generation hath rejected His authority, and rebelled against Him! (GL:58)

Say: The first and foremost testimony establishing His truth is His own Self. Next to this testimony is His Revelation. For whoso faileth to recognize either the one or the other He hath established the words He hath revealed as proof of His reality and truth. (GL:105)

He accused Us, in his letter to thee, and thou didst believe him and followed in his way, without seeking any proof or trustworthy evidence from him. Thou didst ask for no explanation, nor didst thou attempt either to investigate or ascertain the matter, that the truth might be distinguished from falsehood in thy sight, and that thou mightest be

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clear in thy discernment. Find out for thyself the sort of man he was by asking those Ministers who were, at that time, in Iraq, as well as the Governor of the City (Baghdad) and its high Counsellor, that the truth may be revealed to thee, and that thou mayest be of the well-informed. (GL:229-230)

Say: The verses We have revealed are as numerous as those which, in the preceding Revelation, were sent down upon the Báb. Let him that doubteth the words which the Spirit of God hath spoken seek the court of Our presence and hear Our divinely-revealed verses, and be an eye-witness of the clear proof of Our claim. (GL:259)

Let thine ear be attentive, O Nabil-i-A'zam, to the Voice of the Ancient of Days, crying to thee from the Kingdom of His all-glorious Name. He it is Who is now proclaiming from the realms above, and within the inmost essence of all created things: "I truly am God, there is none other God but Me. I am He Who, from everlasting, hath been the Source of all sovereignty and power, He Who shall continue, throughout eternity, to exercise His kingship and to extend His protection unto all created things. My proof is the greatness of My might and My sovereignty that embraceth the whole of creation."... (GL:302)

Although His signs have encompassed the world and His proofs and testimonies are shining forth and manifest as the light, yet the ignorant appear heedless, nay rather, rebellious. (TB:33)

I beg of Thee, by that Word through which Thy proof was perfected among Thy creatures and Thy testimony was fulfilled among Thy servants to strengthen Thy people in that whereby the face of the Cause will radiate in Thy dominion, the standards of Thy power will be planted among Thy servants, and the banners of Thy guidance will be raised throughout Thy dominions. (TB:34)

Truly this Wronged One desireth not to demonstrate His Own Cause with proofs produced by others...One wondereth by what proof or reason the disbelievers among the people of the Bayan have turned away from the Lord of being. (TB:74)

They have rejected the bounty of God and His proofs and have repudiated the testimony of God and His signs. (TB:107)

Verily, the Inevitable is come, and He, the True One, hath appeared with proof and testimony. (TB:117)

They have denied the testimony of God and His proof, after he came from the heaven of power with the kingdom of His signs. (TB:120)

Say, O concourse of divines! Be fair in your judgement, I adjure you by God. Produce then whatever proofs and testimonies ye possess, if ye are to be reckoned among the inmates of this glorious habitation. Set your hearts towards the Dayspring of divine Revelation that We may disclose before your eyes the equivalent of all such verses, proofs, testimonies, affirmations and evidences as ye and other kindreds of the earth possess. (TB:245)

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ

Heroes are they, O my Lord, lead them to the field of battle. Guides are they, make them to speak out with arguments and proofs. (BP:176)

These are servants of Thine that have heard Thy Voice, given ear to Thy Word and hearkened to Thy Call. They have believed in Thee, witnessed Thy wonders, acknowledged Thy proof and testified to Thine evidence. (BP:202)

Never would the Pharisees have been emboldened to calumniate Him and charge Him with that grievous sin, but for their ignorance of the inner core [haqíqat] of mysteries and the fact that they paid no heed to His splendours and regarded not His proofs [al-áthár]. (SWAB:#19:40-41; Makátíb:#19:38)

The existence of the Divine Being hath been clearly established, on the basis of logical proofs [be-dala'il 'aqliyyeh], but the reality [haqíqat] of the Godhead [al-wahiyat] is beyond the grasp of the mind. (SWAB:#21:46; Makátíb:#21:44)

Verily, 'Abdu'l-Bahá inhalet the fragrance of the love of God from every meeting-place where the Word of God is uttered and proofs [al-hujaj] and arguments [wa'l-buráhín] set forth that shed their rays across the world, and where they recount the tribulations of 'Abdu'l-Bahá at the evil hands of those who have violated the Covenant of God. (SWAB:#53:92; Makátíb:#53:89)

This gathering must be completely spiritual. That is, the discussions must be confined to marshalling clear and conclusive proofs [hujaj bálagheh va-buráhín vaDaheh va-dalli'eh qáTa'eh] that the Sun of Truth hath indeed arisen. (SWAB:#94:123-124; Makátíb:#94:121)

Set ye forth His arguments [hujaj] and proofs [va-buráhín]. (SWAB:#95:124; Makátíb:#95:121)

If their task is to be confined to good conduct and advice, nothing will be accomplished. They must speak out, expound the proofs [burhán], set forth clear arguments [áqámeh adlle'h], draw irrefutable conclusions [va-Daheh ve-hujjat qáTa'eh] establishing the truth of the manifestation of the Sun of Reality. (SWAB:#212:268; Makátíb:#212:268)

Therefore it must be our task to prove to the thoughtful by reasonable arguments the prophethood of Moses, of Christ, and of the other Divine Manifestations. And the proofs and evidences which we give must not be based on traditional but on rational arguments. (SAQ:ÍI:13)

Now we must prove from the Holy Books that these two Manifestations have come, and we must divine the meaning of the words of the Prophets; for we wish for proofs drawn from the Holy Books. A few days ago, at table, we put forth logical proofs establishing the truth of these two Manifestations. (SAQ:X:47)

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There are no clearer proofs than this in the Holy Books for any Manifestation. For him who is just, the agreement of the times indicated by the tongues of the Great Ones is the most conclusive proof. There is no other possible explanation of these prophecies. Blessed are the just souls who seek the truth. (SAQ:XII:82)

These are conclusive and evident facts. But the arguments which these European philosophers have used raise doubtful proofs and are not conclusive. (SAQ:XLVI:208)

This is a spiritual proof, but one which we cannot at the beginning put forth for the benefit of the materialists; first we must speak of the logical proofs, afterwards the spiritual proofs. (SAQ:L:229)

Therefore as long as signs of existence appear, they are a proof that the possessor of the sign is existent. (SAQ:LX:261-262; BWF:325)

This is a rational proof which we are giving, so that the wise may weigh it in the balance of reason and justice. But if the human spirit will rejoice and be attracted to the Kingdom of God, if the inner sight becomes opened, and the spiritual hearing strengthened, and the spiritual feelings predominant, he will see the immortality of the spirit as clearly as he sees the sun, and the glad tidings and signs of God will encompass him. (SAQ:LX:262)

When the prophets of God appear on this earth, their validity is established by means of certain proofs. (ABDP:43)

Praise be to God! You have heard the call of the Kingdom. Your eyes are opened; you have turned to God. Your purpose is the good pleasure of God, the understanding of the mysteries of the heart and investigation of the realities. Day and night you must strive that you may attain to the significances of the heavenly Kingdom, perceive the signs of Divinity, acquire certainty of knowledge and realize that this world has a Creator, a Vivifier, a Provider, an Architect--knowing this through proofs and evidences and not through susceptibilities, nay, rather, through decisive arguments and real vision--that is to say, visualizing it as clearly as the outer eye beholds the sun. In this way you may behold the presence of God and attain to the knowledge of the holy, divine Manifestations.

You must come into the knowledge of the divine Manifestations and Their teachings through proofs and evidences. You must understand unseal the divine mysteries of the supreme Kingdom and become capable of discovering the inner realities of things. Then shall you be the manifestations of the mercy of God and true believers, firm and steadfast in the Cause of God. (PUP:227-228)

The intellectual proofs of Divinity are based upon observation and evidence which constitute decisive argument, logically proving the reality of Divinity, the effulgence of mercy, the certainty of inspiration and the immortality of the spirit. (PUP:326)

In this day there is nothing more important than the instruction and study of clear proofs and convincing, heavenly arguments, for therein lie the source of life and the path of salvation. (The Importance of Deepening our Knowledge and Understanding

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of the Faith, p. 9; quoted in Hugh Motlagh, Teaching: The Crown of Immortal Glory, p. 200)

If thou wishest the divine knowledge and recognition, purify thy heart from all beside God, be wholly attracted to the ideal, beloved One; search for and choose Him and apply thyself to rational and authoritative arguments. For arguments are a guide to the path and by this the heart will be turned unto the Sun of Truth. And when the heart is turned unto the Sun, then the eye will be opened and will recognize the Sun through the Sun itself. Then man will be in no need of arguments (or proofs), for the Sun is altogether independent, and absolute independence is in need of nothing, and proofs are one of the things of which absolute independence has no need. (BWF:384)

Told of the study of the Ighan in the Wednesday night meetings in Washington, his [‘Abdu'l-Bahá's] comment was, 'Very good! Very good! It is very good to memorize the logical points and the proofs of the Holy Books. Those proofs and evidences which establish the fact that Bahá'u'lláh is the fulfillment of the Promises of the Holy Books. These proofs ought to be collected and memorized. As soon as someone will ask you--What are your proofs?--you may cry out at the top of your voice and say: "Here they are!"' (SW:II:11, p. 4: from conversation in Dublin, New Hampshire, 31 July 1912)

O ye illumined youth, strive by night and by day to unravel the mysteries of the mind and spirit, and grasp the secrets of the Day of God. Inform yourselves of the evidences that the Most Great Name hath dawned. Open your lips in praise. Adduce convincing arguments and proofs. Lead those who thirst to the fountain of life. (Letter from the International Teaching Centre, 12/5/1988; quoted: Hugh Motlagh, Teaching: The Crown of Immortal Glory, p.200)

The attracted leaves should not, when associating with each other, talk merely about the temperature of the weather, the coldness of the water, the beauty of the flowers and gardens, the freshness of the grass and the flowing water. They should rather restrict their discussions to glorification and praise and the uttering of proofs and reasons, to quoting verses and traditions and putting forth clear testimonies, so that all the homes of the loved ones will be converted into gathering places for lessons on teaching the Cause. (The Compilation of Compilations, vol. I, p. 396, quoted in Hugh Motlagh, Teaching: The Crown of Immortal Glory, p. 201)

Those who would have men believe that religion is their own private property once more bring their efforts to bear against the Sun of Truth: they resist the Command of God; they invent calumnies, not having arguments against it, neither proofs. They attack with masked faces, not daring to come forth into the light of day.

Our methods are different, we do not attack, neither calumniate; we do not wish to dispute with them; we bring forth proofs and arguments; we invite them to confute our statements. They cannot answer us, but instead, they write all they can think of against the Divine Messenger, Bahá'u'lláh. (PT:103)

When I was in America I used to go to churches to speak. When I entered they were engaged in worshipping. I also used to stand up and turn to the Kingdom of God. After they had finished their prayer I used to give the Divine Glad Tidings. I used to give the

proofs and evidences of God. I gave the teachings of the Blessed Beauty. All listened. There was no opposition. (*Star of the West*, XI:16, p. 268-269)

As to the proofs and arguments of the Beauty of Abha, these are manifest like the sun. If thou wishest a discerning eye and seekest for a hearing ear, set thou aside that which thou hast heard from fathers and ancestors, for such things are imitation--and then seek for the truth with the utmost attention until the divine confirmation may reach thee and the matter may be properly disclosed unto thee. (BWF:387)

Every subject presented to a thoughtful audience must be supported by rational proofs and logical arguments. Proofs are of four kinds: first, through sense perception; second, through the reasoning faculty; third, from traditional or scriptural authority; fourth, through the medium of inspiration. That is to say, there are four criteria or standards of judgment by which the human mind reaches its conclusions. We will first consider the criterion of the senses. This is a standard still held to by the materialistic philosophers of the world. They believe that whatever is perceptible to the senses is a verity, a certainty and without doubt existent. For example, they say, 'Here is a lamp which you see, and because it is perceptible to the sense of sight, you cannot doubt its existence. There is a tree; your sense of vision assures you of its reality, which is beyond question. This is a man; you see that he is a man; therefore, he exists.' In a word, everything confirmed by the senses is assumed to be as undoubted and unquestioned as the product of five multiplied by five; it cannot be twenty-six nor less than twenty-five. Consequently, the materialistic philosophers consider the criterion of the senses to be first and foremost.

But in the estimation of the divine philosophers this proof and assurance is not reliable; nay, rather, they deem the standard of the senses to be false because it is imperfect. Sight, for instance, is one of the most important of the senses, yet it is subject to many aberrations and inaccuracies. The eye sees the mirage as a body of water; it regards images in the mirror as realities when they are but reflections. A man sailing upon the river imagines that objects upon the shore are moving, whereas he is in motion, and they are stationary. To the eye the earth appears fixed, while the sun and stars revolve about it. As a matter of fact, the heavenly orbs are stationary, and the earth is turning upon its axis. The colossal suns, planets and constellations which shine in the heavens appear small, nay, infinitesimal to human vision, whereas in reality they are vastly greater than the earth in dimension and volume. A whirling spark appears to the sight as a circle of fire. There are numberless instances of this kind which show the error and inaccuracy of the senses. Therefore, the divine philosophers have considered this standard of judgment to be defective and unreliable.

The second criterion is that of the intellect. The ancient philosophers in particular considered the intellect to be the most important agency of judgment. Among the wise men of Greece, Rome, Persia and Egypt the criterion of true proof was reason. They held that every matter submitted to the reasoning faculty could be proved true or false and must be accepted or rejected accordingly. But in the estimation of the people of insight this criterion is likewise defective and unreliable, for these same philosophers who held to reason or intellect as the standard of human judgment have differed widely among themselves upon every subject of investigation. The statements of the Greek philosophers are contradictory to the conclusions of the Persian sages. Even among the Greek philosophers themselves there is continual variance and lack of agreement

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upon any given subject. Great difference of thought also prevailed between the wise men of Greece and Rome. Therefore, if the criterion of reason or intellect constituted a correct and infallible standard of judgment, those who tested and applied it should have arrived at the same conclusions. As they differ and are contradictory in conclusions, it is an evidence that the method and standard of test must have been faulty and insufficient.

The third criterion or standard of proof is traditional or scriptural--namely, that every statement or conclusion should be supported by traditions recorded in certain religious books. When we come to consider even the Holy Books--the Books of God--we are led to ask, 'Who understands these books? By what authority of explanation may these Books be understood?' It must be the authority of human reason, and if reason or intellect finds itself incapable of explaining certain questions, or if the possessors of intellect contradict each other in the interpretation of traditions, how can such a criterion be relied upon for accurate conclusions?

The fourth standard is that of inspiration. In past centuries many philosophers have claimed illumination or revelation, prefacing their statements by the announcement that 'this subject has been revealed through me' or 'thus do I speak by inspiration.' Of this class were the philosophers of the Illuminati [Ishraqiyyun]. Inspirations are the promptings or susceptibilities of the human heart. The promptings of the heart are sometimes satanic. How are we to differentiate them? How are we to tell whether a given statement is an inspiration and prompting of the heart through the merciful assistance or through the satanic agency?

Consequently, it has become evident that the four criteria or standards of judgment by which the human mind reaches its conclusions are faulty and inaccurate. All of them are liable to mistake and error in conclusions. But a statement presented to the mind accompanied by proofs which the senses can perceive to be correct, which the faculty of reason can accept, which is in accord with traditional authority and sanctioned by the promptings of the heart, can be adjudged and relied upon as perfectly correct, for it has been proved and tested by all the standards of judgment and found to be complete. When we apply but one test, there are possibilities of mistake. This is self-evident and manifest.

We will now consider the subject of love which has been suggested, submitting it to the four standards of judgment and thereby reaching our conclusions... (PUP:253-255)

The Guardian also referred to the proofs of Bahá'u'lláh, often citing Bahá'u'lláh's Tablets:

To this same Sultan He, moreover, as attested by the Suriy-i-Ra'is, transmitted, while in Gallipoli, a verbal message through a Turkish officer named Umar, requesting the sovereign to grant Him a ten minute interview, "so that he may demand whatsoever he would deem to be a sufficient testimony and would regard as proof of the veracity of Him Who is the Truth," adding that "should God enable Him to produce it, let him, then, release these wronged ones and leave them to themselves." (GPB:172)

He, moreover, in that same Tablet, demonstrated the validity of His Mission; expressed the wish to be "brought face to face with the divines of the age, and produce proofs and testimonies in the presence of His Majesty," which would establish the truth of His Cause; exposed the perversity of the ecclesiastical leaders

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in His own days, as well as in the days of Jesus Christ and of Muhammad; prophesied that His sufferings will be followed by the "outpourings of a supreme mercy" and by an "overflowing prosperity"; drew a parallel between the afflictions that had befallen His kindred and those endured by the relatives of the Prophet Muhammad; expatiated on the instability of human affairs; depicted the city to which He was about to be banished; foreshadowed the future abasement of the ulamas; and concluded with yet another expression of hope that the sovereign might be assisted by God to "aid His Faith and turn towards His justice." (GPB:173-174)

Finally, mention must be made of His Epistle to Shaykh Muhammad-Taqi, surnamed "Ibn-i-Dhi'b" (Son of the Wolf), the last outstanding Tablet revealed by the pen of Bahá'u'lláh, in which He calls upon that rapacious priest to repent of his acts, quotes some of the most characteristic and celebrated passages of His own writings, and adduces proofs establishing the validity of His Cause. (GPB:219)

These proofs and evidences are not an end in themselves...they serve a purpose, which is to attract the heart and mind, and thereby the soul to a receptivity to the Truth. Once the inner faculties are awakened and one perceives Truth for oneself, proofs are no longer necessary:

It is incumbent upon thee, by the permission of God, to cleanse the eye of thine heart from the things of the world, that thou mayest realize the infinitude of divine knowledge, and mayest behold Truth so clearly that thou wilt need no proof to demonstrate His reality, nor any evidence to bear witness unto His testimony. (KI:90)

These obvious arguments are adduced for weak souls; but if the inner perception be open, a hundred thousand clear proofs become visible. (SAQ:Í:7)

This is a rational proof which we are giving, so that the wise may weigh it in the balance of reason and justice. But if the human spirit will rejoice and be attracted to the Kingdom of God, if the inner sight becomes opened, and the spiritual healing strengthened, and the spiritual feelings predominant, he will see the immortality of the spirit as clearly as he sees the sun, and the glad tidings and signs of God will encompass him. (SAQ:LX:262; BWF:325-326)

The Guardian imbued the rank and file believers, particularly those who worked alongside him with the spirit of faith that transcends proof, for how otherwise can we understand what his secretaries wrote on his behalf to Bahá'ís in Germany and the British Isles:

Mere intellectual understanding of the teachings is not enough. Deep spirituality is essential. (Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated 31 March 1949, in The Light of Divine Guidance, v. I, p. 81)

An intellectual grasp of the teachings is purely superficial; with the first real test such believers are shaken from the bough! (Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated 11 April 1949, in The Light of Divine Guidance, v. I, p. 81)

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There is very little Divine love in the world to-day, but a great deal of intellectual reasoning, which is an entirely different thing, and springs from the mind and not the heart. The Martyrs -- most of them died because of their love for the Báb, for Bahá'u'lláh, and through Them for God. The veil between the inner and outer world was very thin, and to tear it, and be free to be near the Beloved, was very sweet. But it takes love, not reason to understand these things. We must also remember the Martyrs were called upon to deny their faith or die, as men of principle they preferred to die. (Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated 28 July 1950, in The Unfolding Destiny of the British Bahá'í Community, p. 406)

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11. to acquire useful sciences [2], [21], [55], {1}, {6}, {7}

Knowledge is as wings to man's life, and a ladder for his ascent. Its acquisition is incumbent upon everyone. The knowledge of such sciences, however, should be acquired as can profit the peoples of the earth, and not those which begin with words and end with words. Great indeed is the claim of scientists and craftsmen on the peoples of the world....In truth, knowledge is a veritable treasure for man, and a source of glory, of bounty, of joy, of exaltation, of cheer and gladness unto him. Thus hath the Tongue of Grandeur spoken in this Most Great Prison. (Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, pp. 51-52) [2]

The Great Being saith: The learned of the day must direct the people to acquire those branches of knowledge which are of use, that both the learned themselves and the generality of mankind may derive benefits therefrom. Such academic pursuits as begin and end in words alone have never been and will never be of any worth. The majority of Persia's learned doctors devote all their lives to the study of a philosophy the ultimate yield of which is nothing but words. (Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 169) [21], {1}

In response to your letter of ... in which you seek guidance on the question of chosen professions vis-a-vis the statement of Bahá'u'lláh concerning sciences which begin in words and end in mere words and the pursuit of study in pure mathematics and the classics, the Universal House of Justice has instructed us to share with you an excerpt from a letter to an individual believer written in 1947 on behalf of the beloved Guardian: Philosophy, as you will study it and later teach it, is certainly not one of the sciences that begins and ends in words. Fruitless excursions into metaphysical hair-splittings is meant, not a sound branch of learning like philosophy. In these words the Guardian has enunciated the general principle. Turning to the specific instance of the science of pure mathematics, the reference in the Eleventh Glad Tidings (BWF, p. 195) regarding such sciences as are profitable, which lead and conduce to the elevation of mankind¹⁶, must be placed in the context of the meaning

¹⁶Note from the compilation: Cf. "Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas", p. 26

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of sciences as employed by the Manifestation. Bahá'u'lláh's comment about sciences which begin and end in mere words does not apply to the systematic study of natural phenomena in order to discover the laws of order in the physical universe, an order which mathematics seeks to explore. Pure mathematics frequently has application in practical matters, such as, for example, group theory or the study of fundamental particles.

As for classical studies, we are to share with you the following excerpt from a letter dated 30 November 1932 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual who had asked a question about the skills of story writing and whether such occupation would be classed as those sciences that begin and end in words". What Bahá'u'lláh meant primarily with "sciences that begin and end in words" are those theological treatises and commentaries that encumber the human mind rather than help it to attain the truth. The students would devote their life to their study but still attain no where. Bahá'u'lláh surely never meant to include story-writing under such a category; and shorthand and typewriting are both most useful talents, very necessary in our present social and economic life. (24 May 1988 to an individual believer) [55]

The first attribute of perfection is learning and the cultural attainments of the mind, and this eminent station is achieved when the individual combines in himself a thorough knowledge of those complex and transcendental realities pertaining to God, of the fundamental truths of Qur'anic political and religious law, of the contents of the sacred Scriptures of other faiths, and of those regulations and procedures which would contribute to the progress and civilization of this distinguished country. He should in addition be informed as to the laws and principles, the customs, conditions and manners, and the material and moral virtues characterizing the statecraft of other nations, and should be well versed in all the useful branches of learning of the day... ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization, p. 35) {6}

They are busy by night and by day with meticulous research into such sciences as are profitable to mankind... ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization, p. 21) {7}

The third Tajalli is concerning arts, crafts and sciences. Knowledge is as wings to man's life, and a ladder for his ascent. Its acquisition is incumbent upon everyone. The knowledge of such sciences, however, should be acquired as can profit the peoples of the earth, and not those which begin with words and end with words. Great indeed is the claim of scientists and craftsmen on the peoples of the world. (Bahá'u'lláh, Tajalliyát, in Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 51-52)

The eleventh Glad-Tidings

It is permissible to study sciences and arts, but such sciences as are useful and would redound to the progress and advancement of the people. Thus hath it been decreed by Him Who is the Ordainer, the All-Wise. (Bahá'u'lláh, Bishárát, in Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 26)

Unveiled and unconcealed, this Wronged One hath, at all times, proclaimed before the face of all the peoples of the world that which will serve as the key for unlocking

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the doors of sciences, of arts, of knowledge, of well-being, of prosperity and wealth. (Bahá'u'lláh, Lawh-i-Dunya, in Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 96)

Of all the arts and sciences, set the children to studying those which will result in advantage to man, will ensure his progress and elevate his rank. Thus the noisome odours of lawlessness will be dispelled, and thus through the high endeavours of the nation's leaders, all will live cradled, secure and in peace. (Bahá'u'lláh, Lawh-i-Maqsud, in Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 168-169)

By "arts and sciences" is meant those which begin with words and end with words. Such arts and sciences, however, as are productive of good results, and bring forth their fruit, and are conducive to the well-being and tranquility of men have been, and will remain, acceptable before God. (Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 19)

In the third Tajalli (effulgence) of the Book of Tajalliyát (Book of Effulgences) We have mentioned: "Arts, crafts and sciences uplift the world of being, and are conducive to its exaltation. Knowledge is as wings to man's life, and a ladder for his ascent. Its acquisition is incumbent upon everyone. The knowledge of such sciences, however, should be acquired as can profit the peoples of the earth, and not those which begin with words and end with words. Great indeed is the claim of scientists and craftsmen on the peoples of the world. Unto this beareth witness the Mother Book in this conspicuous station. (Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 26)

Should the Will of God assist Us, there would flow out from the Pen of the Divine Expounder a lengthy exposition of that which hath been mentioned, and there would be revealed, in the field of arts and sciences, what would renew the world and the nations. (Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 32)

Commentary

Bahá'u'lláh, particularly in His later Tablets, emphasizes the importance of acquiring useful sciences, and enjoins this acquisition not only upon His followers, but upon the whole of humanity. In one text He says that knowledge of geometry is preferable to a mastery of all the mystical literature of Islam.

This principle cannot be overemphasized, as it is related to His counsel that words are more important than deeds, and that great ideas must be realized in great actions in order to be of any real value. On the other hand, we must be careful not to judge the sciences too critically, and must allow that there may be usefulness in sciences which at first blush may appear to begin and end in words. The sciences of textual analysis associated with higher criticism, the social sciences such as sociology, anthropology, political science and economics, these are not as firmly grounded in empirical method as the hard sciences. However, it is certain that they may be of value, inasmuch as they inform and discipline our study of human behavior and human self-expression. On the other hand, Bahá'u'lláh points out that the endless disputations of clerics and mystics are without utility, as they pertain to things which, in many cases, do not exist except in the imaginations of their votaries.



12. to become informed of the mysteries of the Holy Words (28), (35), (36), (41), (43), (47), (48), (49), (58), (62), (63), (64)

The attainment of the most great guidance is dependent upon knowledge and wisdom, and on being informed as to the mysteries of the Holy Words. Wherefore must the loved ones of God, be they young or old, be they men or women, each one according to his capabilities, strive to acquire the various branches of knowledge, and to increase his understanding of the mysteries of the Holy Books, and his skill in marshalling the divine proofs and evidences. (From a Tablet - translated from the Arabic) (28)

There is no doubt that thou art assiduously engaged in serving the Cause, giving eloquent talks at the meetings of the friends, and elucidating divine mysteries. (From a Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá translated from the Persian) (35)

Wherefore, O ye illumined youth, strive by night and by day to unravel the mysteries of the mind and spirit, and to grasp the secrets of the Day of God. Inform yourselves of the evidences that the Most Great Name hath dawned.... (From a Tablet - translated from the Persian) (36)

The Hidden Words is a treasury of divine mysteries. When thou ponderest its contents, the doors of the mysteries will open. (From a Tablet - translated from the Persian) (41)

Read ye The Hidden Words, ponder the inner meanings thereof, act in accord therewith. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, SWAB, p. 35) (43)

Whensoever a company of people shall gather in a meeting place, shall engage in glorifying God, and shall speak with one another of the mysteries of God, beyond any doubt the breathings of the Holy Spirit will blow gently over them, and each shall receive a share thereof. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, SWAB, p. 94) (47)

O thou true friend! Read, in the school of God, the lessons of the spirit, and learn from love's Teacher the innermost truths. Seek out the secrets of Heaven, and tell of the overflowing grace and favour of God. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, SWAB, p. 110) (48)

There are certain pillars which have been established as the unshakable supports of the Faith of God. The mightiest of these is learning and the use of the mind, the expansion of consciousness, and insight into the realities of the universe and the hidden mysteries of Almighty God. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, SWAB, p. 126) (49)

Seek with all your hearts this Heavenly Light, so that you may be enabled to understand the realities, that you may know the secret things of God, that the hidden ways may be made plain before your eyes. This light may be likened unto a mirror, and as a mirror reflects all that is before it, so this Light shows to the eyes of our

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spirits all that exists in God's Kingdom and causes the realities of things to be made visible. By the help of this effulgent Light all the spiritual interpretation of the Holy Writings has been made plain, the hidden things of God's Universe have become manifest, and we have been enabled to comprehend the Divine purposes for man. I pray that God in His mercy may illumine your hearts and souls with His glorious Light, then shall each one of you shine as a radiant star in the dark places of the world. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, pp. 69-70) (58)

I have been informed that the purpose of your class meeting is to study the significances and mysteries of the Holy Scriptures and understand the meaning of the divine Testaments. It is a cause of great happiness to me that you are turning unto the Kingdom of God, that you desire to approach the presence of God and to become informed of the realities and precepts of God. It is my hope that you may put forth your most earnest endeavor to accomplish this end, that you may attain knowledge of the mysteries hidden therein. Be not satisfied with words, but seek to understand the spiritual meanings hidden in the heart of the words.... (The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912, 2nd. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), p. 458-9) (62)

May your souls be illumined by the light of the Words of God, and may you become repositories of the mysteries of God, for no comfort is greater and no happiness is sweeter than spiritual comprehension of the divine teachings. If a man understands the real meaning of a poet's verses such as those of Shakespeare, he is pleased and rejoiced. How much greater his joy and pleasure when he perceives the reality of the Holy Scriptures and becomes informed of the mysteries of the Kingdom! I pray that the divine blessings may descend upon you day by day, that your hearts may be opened to perceive the inner significances of the Word of God.... ('Abdu'l-Bahá, PUP, p. 460) (63)

...Divine things are too deep to be expressed by common words. The heavenly teachings are expressed in parable in order to be understood and preserved for ages to come. When the spiritually minded dive deeply into the ocean of their meaning they bring to the surface the pearls of their inner significance. There is no greater pleasure than to study God's Word with a spiritual mind. ('Abdu'l-Bahá in London, p. 80) (64)

Commentary

How does one "become informed of the mysteries of the Holy Words"? Is this not a private endeavor, to be pursued in the intimacy of one's home, of one's bed chamber, or if in public in the sanctified space of a synagogue, church or mosque? Bahá'u'lláh would have us continue to pray and meditate in private and in sanctuaries, but He would also have us study the Holy Words in our schools and universities, and consult them in our workplaces and centers of civic life. To become so informed is not only an intuitive exercise calling for purity of heart and submission of self, it is also an intellectual enterprise requiring a sharp enquiring logic and a ready and facile tongue. It is not just a private pursuit but also a public activity, and in the latter case it calls for consultation, for the participation of

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each searching soul in dialogue to ferret out the truth. It is then both a feminine and a masculine process, requiring humility and listening and sensitivity and association on the one hand and self-confidence and speaking and courage and analysis on the other hand.

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13. to become a fluent public speaker [31], {21}, (31), (35)

We had heard through various channels the wonderful way your children had grown to speak about the Cause in public. Shoghi Effendi's hope is that they will, the three of them, become able and devoted speakers on the Cause and subjects akin to it. To do this properly they will need a firm foundation of scientific and literary training which fortunately they are obtaining. It is just as important for the Bahá'í young boys and girls to become properly educated in colleges of high standing as it is to be spiritually developed. The mental as well as the spiritual side of the youth has to be developed before he can serve the Cause efficiently. (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi dated 28 November 1926 to an individual believer) [31]

Young Bahá'ís like yourself must prepare themselves to really bring the Message to their generation, who need it so desperately and who can understand the language it speaks so well. He would advise you among other books to study the Talks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as His method of approaching the mind of the public cannot be surpassed... He also advises you to develop yourself as a public speaker so you will be increasingly able to teach the Cause... (21 October 1943 to an individual believer; in The Compilation of Compilations, vol I, p. 431) {21}

In truth thou art now rendering a great service to the basic foundations of the Cause of God, inasmuch as the cornerstone of its structure is the promotion of His Faith, the awakening of the people, the diffusion of the divine teachings and the education of mankind; and all this dependeth on instructing the friends in the teaching work. I beseech God that within a short time thou mayest be able to acquaint the children of the Abha Paradise with the divine mysteries and truths and to rend asunder the veils of idle imaginings, that each one of them may become a fluent speaker and be able to guide many others to the Cause of God. Then will the outpourings of the heavenly bounties become manifest and the invisible hosts of the Kingdom, armed with conclusive proofs and evidences, will conquer the realms of the inner realities and domains of the hearts of men, even as a single seed developing into seven ears of grain. (From a Tablet - translated from the Persian; in The Compilation of Compilations, vol. I, pp. 194-195) (31)

There is no doubt that thou art assiduously engaged in serving the Cause, giving eloquent talks at the meetings of the friends, and elucidating divine mysteries. These exertions will cause the outpourings of His invisible assistance to descend, and, as a magnet, will attract divine bounties. I earnestly hope that through the vitalizing breath of the Holy Spirit thou mayest be strengthened day by day, and be empowered to deliver more eloquent addresses. (From a Tablet - translated from the Persian, in The Compilation of Compilations, vol. I, pp. 195-196) (35)

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Strengthen Thou, O my Lord, the hearts of them that love Thee, that they may not be affrighted by the hosts of the infidels that are turned back from Thee, but may follow Thee in whatsoever hath been revealed by Thee. Aid them, moreover, to remember and to praise Thee, and to teach Thy Cause with eloquence and wisdom. (Bahá'u'lláh, Prayers and Meditations, XXXI, p. 38)

Endeavour to the utmost of thy powers to establish the word of truth with eloquence and wisdom and to dispel falsehood from the face of the earth. (Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 139)

Drink your fill from the well-spring of wisdom, and walk ye in the garden of wisdom, and soar ye in the atmosphere of wisdom, and speak forth with wisdom and eloquence. (Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 212)

He hath, moreover, ordained that His Cause be taught through the power of men's utterance, and not through resort to violence. (Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CXXVII, p. 278)

Aid ye your Lord with the sword of wisdom and of utterance. (Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CXXXVI, p. 296)

Know thou that We have annulled the rule of the sword, as an aid to Our Cause, and substituted for it the power born of the utterance of men. (Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CXXXIX, p. 303)

Walk thou steadfastly in the love of God, and keep straight on in His Faith, and aid Him through the power of thine utterance. (Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CXLII, p. 312)

The Pen of the Most High hath decreed and imposed upon every one the obligation to teach this Cause.... God will, no doubt, inspire whosoever detacheth himself from all else but Him, and will cause the pure waters of wisdom and utterance to gush out and flow copiously from his heart. (Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CXLIV, p. 313)

He that wisheth to promote the Cause of the one true God, let him promote it through his pen and tongue, rather than have recourse to sword or violence. (Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CLIV, pp. 329-330)

O ye loved ones of God! Drink your fill from the wellspring of wisdom, and soar ye in the atmosphere of wisdom, and speak forth with wisdom and eloquence. (Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 99)

And when thy distinguished guests have assembled, speak to them about the Cause. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet translated from the Persian, in The Compilation of Compilations, vol I, p. 268)

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The teacher should not see in himself any superiority; he should speak with the utmost kindness, lowliness and humility, for such speech exerteth influence and educateth the souls. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, SWAB, Sec 15, p. 30)

They must speak out, expound the proofs, set forth clear arguments, draw irrefutable conclusions establishing the truth of the manifestation of the Sun of Reality. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, SWAB, Sec. 212, p. 268)

When a speaker's brow shineth with the radiance of the love of God, at the time of his exposition of a subject, and he is exhilarated with the wine of true understanding, he becometh the centre of a potent force which like unto a magnet will attract the hearts. This is why the expounder must be in the utmost enkindlement. (From a Tablet - translated from the Persian; in The Compilation of Compilations, vol. I, p. 299)

Speak, therefore; speak out with great courage at every meeting. When you are about to begin your address, turn first to Bahá'u'lláh and ask for the confirmations of the Holy Spirit, then open your lips and say whatever is suggested to your heart; this, however, with the utmost courage, dignity and conviction....('Abdu'l-Bahá, SWAB, Sec. 216 p. 269)

Teaching individually is of great importance, and often enables you to confirm people, whereas public speaking, while it carries the Message to more people, does not confirm very many. You can do both. (From a letter dated 5 August 1949 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer; in The Compilation of Compilations, vol I, p. 315)

Now is the time to speak forth and to deliver speeches, the time to teach and to give testimony. Loosen thy tongue, expound the truths, and establish the validity of the verse: "The All-Merciful hath taught the Qur'án." [Qur'án 55:2] The Holy Spirit speaketh through the innermost essence of the human tongue, God's Spirit which desireth communion with the human soul unfoldeth the truths, the Faithful Spirit writeth down and the Spirit of the Ancient of Days confirmeth. I swear by that Peerless Beauty, Who is in the Unseen Kingdom, that when the leaves loose their tongues in praise and glorification of the All-Loving Lord, and in teaching the Cause of the Kind Lord, the concourse of the Kingdom and the inmates of the Unseen Realms will give ear, and cry out with exclamations of extreme joy and jubilation. Glory be upon thee and upon every handmaiden who is steadfast in the Covenant. (From a Tablet - translated from the Persian; in The Compilation of Compilations, vol I, p. 398)

It ill beseemeth thee to turn thy gaze unto former or more recent times. Make thou mention of this Day and magnify that which hath appeared therein. It will in truth suffice all mankind. Indeed expositions and discourses in explanation of such things cause the spirits to be chilled. It behoveth thee to speak forth in such wise as to set the hearts of true believers ablaze and cause their bodies to soar. Teach thou the Cause of God with an utterance which will cause the bushes to be enkindled, and the call "Verily, there is no God but Me, the Almighty, the Unconstrained" to be raised

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therefrom. Say: Human utterance is an essence which aspireth to exert its influence and needeth moderation. As to its influence, this is conditional upon refinement which in turn is dependent upon hearts which are detached and pure. As to its moderation, this hath to be combined with tact and wisdom as prescribed in the Holy Scriptures and Tablets. (Bahá'u'lláh, Lawh-i-Hikmat, in Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, pp. 142-43)

The youth should be encouraged to train themselves in public speaking while they are still pursuing their studies in schools or colleges. (7 December 1931 to an individual believer, published in *Bahá'í News*, No. 64 (July 1932), p 4; in The Compilation of Compilations, vol I, p. 420)

Commentary

Most of our communications with others are spoken, not written. In speech we are able to communicate our emotions, and to stir emotions in others that are virtually inaccessible to the writer. If we are possessed of the most exquisite thought but do not find the words to clothe that thought and convey it to others, there are only two who will know this thought--the one whose mind it alights into, and God. God knows our thoughts before we act, so He also must know our thoughts before we speak. But in order for our thoughts to be shared and not reside unaccompanied within our minds, we must speak. The art of rhetoric, much neglected in the formal schooling of most young people and adults, is highly regarded by Bahá'u'lláh and this art will be revived with great confidence and beauty and power in our educational institutions. For this is the first Dispensation in which eloquence is so highly praised, in which the silence of the child, the woman, the unlettered, the poor, the powerless is to be broken.

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14. to memorize passages from the Writings (33), (39)

Memorizing the texts of the holy Tablets, and of perspicuous words and statements in highly praiseworthy. (From a Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá) (33)

We should memorize the Hidden Words, follow the exhortations of the Incomparable Lord, and conduct ourselves in a manner which befitteth our servitude at the threshold of the one true God. (From a Tablet - translated from the Persian; in The Compilation of Compilations, vol. I, p. 197) (39)

The sanctified souls should ponder and meditate in their hearts regarding the methods of teaching. From the texts of the wondrous, heavenly Scriptures they should memorize phrases and passages bearing on various instances, so that in the course of their speech they may recite divine verses whenever the occasion demandeth it, inasmuch as these holy verses are the most potent elixir, the greatest and mightiest talisman. So potent is their influence that the hearer will have no cause for vacillation. I swear by My life! This Revelation is endowed with such a power that it will act as the lodestone for all nations and kindreds of the earth. Should one

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pause to meditate attentively he would recognize that no place is there, nor can there be, for anyone to flee to. (Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 200)

The Master used to attach much importance to the learning by heart of the Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh an the Báb. During His days it was a usual work of the children of the household to learn Tablets by heart' now, however, those children are grown up and do not have time for such a thing. But the practice is most useful to implant the ideas and spirit those words contain into the mind of the children. (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the Spiritual Assembly of West Englewood, October 19, 1932; in Lights of Guidance, p. 150)

Commentary

The capacity of the human mind to store and organize words is a phenomenon that was appreciated in former centuries, before the invention of those technologies which store information for our use, and before the utilization of educational methods that reward a quick response to a variety of stimuli over the settled methodical application of enduring principles. In the West we have not been asked to memorize texts, not since early childhood, if at all. We've been required to memorize facts, dates, names, formulae, equations, processes, but our memories are bereft of poetry, of drama, of Scripture. We have not internalized any of the classics of our culture or of any other culture...our memory of lyrics is reduced to reciting pop songs and television ads. Bahá'u'lláh does not ask us to memorize the Bible, or the Qur'an, or His voluminous Tablets and Books. But He does enjoin His followers to so familiarize themselves with His utterances that we remember them intact and without alteration, and are thus able to cite them at will, when we would refer to His teachings rather than to our own very imperfect understanding of those teachings. When we are immersed in the Word from early childhood and throughout our adult lives, it is inevitable that we will memorize much of the Word, and thereby it is brought inside, thereby we are able to meditate upon it without having to refer to a printed volume, without having to search through a database, without having to rely upon any intermediary, to see the Self of God standing within us.

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15. gain a mastery of such books as the “Gleanings”, “The Dawn-Breakers”, “God Passes By”, the “Íqán”, “Some Answered Questions” and the more important Tablets [74]; investigation of those institutions and circumstances that are directly connected with the origin and birth of their Faith, with the station claimed by its Forerunner, and with the laws revealed by its Author [73]

The Guardian feels that a sound knowledge of history, including religious history, and also of social and economic subjects, is of great help in teaching the Cause to intelligent people; as to what subjects within the Faith you should concentrate on he feels that the young Bahá'ís should gain a mastery of such books as the "Gleanings", "The Dawn-Breakers", "God Passes By", the "Íqán", "Some Answered Questions" and the more important Tablets. All aspects of the Faith should be deeply studied

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-- and ... they need to know more about the Administration. (4 May 1946 on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [74]

They must strive to obtain, from sources that are authoritative and unbiased, a sound knowledge of the history and tenets of Islam -- the source and background of their Faith -- and approach reverently and with a mind purged from preconceived ideas the study of the Qur'án which, apart from the sacred scriptures of the Bábí and Bahá'í Revelations, constitutes the only Book which can be regarded as an absolutely authenticated Repository of the Word of God. They must devote special attention to the investigation of those institutions and circumstances that are directly connected with the origin and birth of their Faith, with the station claimed by its Forerunner, and with the laws revealed by its Author. (25 December 1938 by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of the West, published in The Advent of Divine Justice (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990), p. 49) [73]

In anticipation of its forthcoming appearance Shoghi Effendi cabled American in October 1931: "Urge all English speaking believers concentrate study Nabil's immortal narrative as essential preliminary to renewed intensive Teaching Campaign necessitated by completion Mashriqu'l-Adhkar. Strongly feel widespread use of its varied rich and authentic material constitutes most effective weapon to meet challenge of a critical hour. Unhesitatingly recommend it to every prospective visitor of Bahá'u'lláh's native land." (Ruhiyyih Khanum, The Priceless Pearl, p. 217) Feel impelled appeal entire body American believers to henceforth regard Nabil's soul-stirring Narrative as...source of inspiration in all literary and artistic pursuits... (Shoghi Effendi, cablegram dated June 21, 1932, Messages to America 1932-1946, p. 1)

I would strongly urge you to utilize, to the utmost possible extent, the wealth of authentic material gathered in Nabil's stirring Narrative and to encourage the youth to master and to digest the facts recorded therein as a basis for their future work in the teaching field, and as a sustenance to their spiritual life and activities in the service of the Cause. (Shoghi Effendi, from a letter dated 9 November 1932 to an individual believer)

Shoghi Effendi hopes that you will exert all your efforts to deepen your knowledge of the literature of the Movement, until you become fully acquainted with its spirit and tenets. Unless you do obtain such a firm hold you will never be able to teach others and render real service to the promulgation of the Faith. Of special importance is the Book of the Iqán which explains the attitude of the Cause towards the prophets of God and their mission in the history of society. Besides this there is Some Answered Questions of the Master and Dawn-Breakers of Nabil. Every Bahá'í should master these books and be able to explain their contents to others. Besides their importance, they are interesting and most absorbing. (From a letter dated 9 February 1932 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

Shoghi Effendi undertook the translation of the Dawn-Breakers only after being convinced that its publication will arouse the friends to greater self-sacrifice and a more determined way of teaching. Otherwise he would not have devoted so much time to it. Reading about the life and activities of those heroic souls is bound to

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influence our mode of living and of the importance we attach to our services in the Cause. Shoghi Effendi therefore hopes that the friends will read, nay rather study that book, and encourage their young people to do that as well...

It is also very important to hold study classes and go deep in the teachings. A great harm is done by starting to teach without being firmly grounded in the literature. "Little knowledge is dangerous" fully applies to the teaching work. The friends should read the Writings to be able to quote from the Tablets when discussing subjects pertaining to the Faith. (From a letter dated 9 May 1932 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

He fully approves the idea of holding study classes, for the deeper the friends go in their understanding of the teachings the more firm and steadfast they will become and more unwavering in their support of the institutions of the Faith. Books such as the Iqán, Some Answered Questions and The Dawn-Breakers should be mastered by every Bahá'í. The first two books will reveal the significance of this divine revelation as well as the unity of all the Prophets of old. The last book will show how the Faith was ushered into the world and how its early adherents heroically faced martyrdom and suffering in their desire to establish the Cause throughout the world. Knowing the life of those heroes will create in us the urge to follow their footsteps and achieve the same. (From a letter dated 9 June 1932 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi an individual believer)

Books such as the Iqán, Some Answered Questions, the Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, Nabil's Narrative and Dr. Esslemont's book should be read and read over again by every soul who desires to serve the Movement or considers himself an active member of the group. (From a letter dated 9 November 1932 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

Shoghi Effendi found great pleasure and spiritual upliftment while working on the translation of Nabil's Narrative. The life of those who figure in it is so stirring that every one who reads those accounts is bound to be affected and impelled to follow their footsteps of sacrifice in the path of the Faith. The Guardian believes, therefore, that it should be studied by the friends, especially the youth who need some inspiration to carry them through these troubled days. (From a letter dated 11 March 1933 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi an individual believer)

The Guardian sincerely hopes and prays that the study of the Dawn-Breakers will inspire the friends to greater activity and more exerted energy in serving the Cause and spreading its message in that town. (From a letter dated 16 April 1933 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in The Light of Divine Guidance, vol. I, p. 24)

I certainly advise you to concentrate next year on the Dawn-Breakers, as well as on the needs, the principles and the purpose of Bahá'í Administration. The Cause in your land is still in its formative period. It needs men and women of vision, of capacity and understanding. May your newly-established school render inestimable services in this as well as in other fields of activity. I will pray for your high endeavours from the depths of my heart. Rest assured and persevere. (Shoghi Effendi, from a letter dated 25 September 1933 to an individual believer)

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The Guardian feels particularly appreciative of the emphasis your Committee has laid on the study of the "Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh" -- which book, he believes, should be the continued guide and companion of every believer, especially those who are actively engaged in teaching the Cause. It is his fervent hope that this book will kindle in the heart of all the friends a new light, whereby they will receive a fuller guidance and a greater measure of inspiration in their labours for the Cause. (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi dated 28 January 1936; in The Compilation of Compilations, vol. I, #484, p. 222)

He is particularly pleased to realize that the book of "Gleanings" is of such a tremendous inspiration to the Bahá'í youth, and that they all are making a careful study of its contents with the view of preparing themselves for proper teaching work. His hope is that this volume will enable them to gain a fuller consciousness of their functions and responsibilities, and to arise and set the example before the rest of the believers, not only in the field of teaching, but in all the other fields of Bahá'í activity as well. He is ardently supplicating Bahá'u'lláh on your behalf, and on behalf of the whole body of young Bahá'ís throughout the States, and especially the National Youth Committee, that you may be given the inspiration, knowledge and guidance to press forward to efficient and loyal service. (From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian dated 2 February 1936; in The Compilation of Compilations, vol. I, #485, pp. 222-223)

Commentary

Bahá'í learning must have some fundamentals, and among these fundamentals are "mastery of such books as" listed above. In our own time, it would no doubt include, by Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Iqán, Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, Tablets revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Gems of Divine Mysteries, The Summons of the Lord of Hosts; by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablet to Dr. Forel, Tablets of the Divine Plan, The Secret of Divine Civilization, Memorials of the Faithful, Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá; by Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, The Citadel of Faith, The Advent of Divine Justice, The Promised Day is Come. Of the thousands of Tablets and letters written by the Central Figures and Guardian, it is essential that this core selection be mastered in order for the Bahá'í scholar to be intimately and profoundly well informed about the teachings and history of the Faith. All of these volumes manifest these teachings and this history from the perspective of its Authors and its Interpreters. This is not the human face of the Faith, it is the divine face of the Faith. Without seeing Bahá'u'lláh through His own eyes, without seeing the Faith through the infallibly guided vision of the Master and Guardian, how can we possibly make sense of what others have said about it? How shall we differentiate between truth and falsity, between right and wrong? This is the balance, and in its all things are weighed...if we weigh it in the balance of all things, we have no truth and only a million opinions. Truth is one point, which the ignorant have multiplied...and multiplied...

16. focus on the needs, the principles and the purpose of Bahá'í Administration

I certainly advise you to concentrate next year on "The Dawn-Breakers" as well as on the needs, the principles and the purpose of Bahá'í Administration. The Cause in your land is still in its formative period. It needs men and women of vision, of capacity and understanding.... (From a letter dated 25 September 1933 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to two believers, published in *Bahá'í News*, 78 November 1933), p. 4; in The Compilation of Compilations, vol. I, p. 33)

The teaching of the Administration should, indeed, be considered as forming a permanent and vital feature of every Bahá'í summer school. For upon its thorough and intelligent understanding by the entire community of the believers must inevitably depend the effectiveness and continued expansion of Bahá'í activities throughout the world. (From a letter dated 6 November 1934 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer; in The Compilation of Compilations, vol. I, p. 33)

...fully acquaint themselves, not only by mere study but through whole-hearted and active collaboration in various Bahá'í activities, with the essentials of the Administration and in this way enable them to become efficient and able promoters of the Cause ... (From a letter on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, September 25, 1933: *Centers of Bahá'í Learning*, p. 8, a compilation of the Universal House of Justice, Wilmette, 1980 ed.; in Lights of Guidance, p. 558)

... To accept the Cause without the administration is like to accept the teachings without acknowledging the divine station of Bahá'u'lláh. To be a Bahá'í is to accept the Cause in its entirety. To take exception to one basic principle is to deny the authority and sovereignty of Bahá'u'lláh, and therefore is to deny the Cause. The administration is the social order of Bahá'u'lláh. Without it all the principles of the Cause will remain abortive. to take exception to this, therefore, is to take exception to the fabric that Bahá'u'lláh has prescribed, it is to disobey his law. (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, May 30, 1930: *Bahá'í News*, No. 43, August 1930, p. 3; in Lights of Guidance, p. 2)

Commentary

While not incumbent upon the new believer, knowledge of the Administrative Order is indispensable to the Bahá'í who would be of service to the community and through it the world. It is particularly important for Bahá'í scholars to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the New World Order of Bahá'u'lláh inasmuch as it is precisely due to a lack of such understanding that a number of Bahá'í scholars have strayed from the unity of the community, strayed so far that they ultimately broke their covenant with Bahá'u'lláh, either by leaving His body, the ark of His spiritual family, or by being cut off from that body because of the malignancy of their disease. On the other hand, a profound comprehension and application of principles from this Order will result in masterpieces of scholarship, of spiritual science, such as the planet has never experienced. The Bahá'í scholar will not comprehend

the unity of this Order with the spiritual and social teachings of Bahá'u'lláh unless he is as fully conversant with all three aspects of the Faith.



17. study of philosophy

Philosophy, as you will study it and later teach it, is certainly not one of the sciences that begins and ends in words. Fruitless excursions into metaphysical hair-splitting is meant, not a sound branch of learning like philosophy. We have no historical proof of the truth of the Master's statement regarding the Greek philosophers visiting the Holy Land, etc. but such proof may come to light through research in the future. As regards your own studies: he would advise you not to devote too much of your time to the abstract side of philosophy, but rather to approach it from a more historical angle. As to correlating philosophy with the Bahá'í teachings; this is a tremendous work which scholars in the future can undertake. We must remember that not only are all the teachings not yet translated into English, but they are not even all collected yet. Many important Tablets may still come to light which are at present owned privately. (Shoghi Effendi, Letter written on behalf of the Guardian, dated 15 February 1947; in The Unfolding Destiny of the British Bahá'í Community, p. 445)

...it is recognized that the contemporary men of learning are highly qualified in philosophy, arts and crafts... (Bahá'u'lláh, Lawh-i-Hikmat, in Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 144)

The essence and the fundamentals of philosophy have emanated from the Prophets. (Bahá'u'lláh, Lawh-i-Hikmat, in Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 145)

Commentary

Notwithstanding the undeniable encouragement which Bahá'í students of philosophy have received from the Faith, the Guardian was at pains nevertheless to make certain clarifications with regard to the relationship between the philosophical writings of Bahá'u'lláh and the science of ideas. He wrote: "For Bahá'u'lláh, we should readily recognize, has not only imbued mankind with a new and regenerating Spirit. He has not merely enunciated certain universal principles, or propounded a particular philosophy, however potent, sound and universal these may be." (Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 19; Shoghi Effendi, in USBN, No. 59, February 1932, pp. 6-7) At other time his secretary wrote on his behalf: "The Guardian hopes this will better enable you to understand our wonderful Faith -- for a living religion it is, and not merely a philosophy!" (Extract, letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, June 7th, 1946) And on another occasion: "For the Cause is not a system of philosophy; it is essentially a way of life, a religious faith that seeks to unite all people on a common basis of mutual understanding and love, and in a common devotion to God." (Shoghi Effendi, Directives from the Guardian, p. 76)

Nor was Bahá'u'lláh an unreserved admirer of philosophy. In the *Kalímát-i-Firdawsíyyih* He writes regarding Haji Mulla Hadi Sabzivarí (d. 1873), a renowned philosopher and poet of Iran contemporary with Himself: "Christ saith: 'Thou hast granted to children that whereof the learned and the wise are deprived.' The sage of Sabzivar bath said: 'Alas! Attentive ears are lacking, otherwise the whisperings of the Sinaic Bush could be heard from every tree.' In a Tablet to a man of wisdom who had made enquiry as to the meaning of Elementary Reality, We addressed this famous sage in these words: 'If this saying is truly thine, how is it that thou hast failed to hearken unto the Call which the Tree of Man hath raised from the loftiest heights of the world? If thou didst hear the Call yet fear and the desire to preserve thy life prompted thee to remain heedless to it, thou art such a person as hath never been nor is worthy of mention; if thou hast not heard it, then thou art bereft of the sense of hearing.' In brief, such men are they whose words are the pride of the world, and whose deeds are the shame of the nations." (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 61) In the *Lawh-i-Maqsud*, He writes: "The majority of Persia's learned doctors devote all their lives to the study of a philosophy the ultimate yield of which is nothing but words." (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 169) Hence it is evident that He did not have a high regard for those who turned to philosophy rather than recognizing divine Revelation as the ultimate source of truth.

'Abdu'l-Bahá echoes the same concern in a number of His treatises and talks, including in those in which He describes His epistemology. Reason is the criterion of knowledge employed by philosophers, and while it has yielded fruit and will continue to do so, He observes that philosophers do not agree, and concludes thereby that this is not an infallible path to truth. He makes some rather pointed comments about materialistic philosophy in one of His talks while sojourning in Europe: "Is the materialistic philosophy of this Europe, so much praised by contemporary agnostics and atheists, a philosophy to be admired? Are these people wooers of the spirit? Nay, they have drowned that capacity and are out of touch with the kingdom of reality. Is this an enviable goal to which humanity may aspire? Is this a system of philosophy through which people may become glorified? No, by God, the philosophy of glory needs no scholastic curriculum." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Divine Philosophy*, p. 140)

Conclusions

This study represents a step in the direction of defining and developing a text-based and intellectually and spiritually coherent approach to fruitful learning in the light of the Bahá'í teachings. The Research Department has prepared a series of compilations related to Bahá'í scholarship, and these have been mined and their contents correlated with each other and with other passages related to the subject. The choice and organization of these passages has been carried by one person and with one purpose in mind, namely, to make the purposes and objectives of Bahá'í scholarship as clearly intelligible to a broad readership as could be expected. I have provided commentary without attempting to comprehensively examine any of these topics, but simply to express some personal thoughts and to provoke further discussion. While others will focus on specific topics, what has been essayed here is an overview of all topics. While others will

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express their emotions, their enthusiasm for, their faith in, or their struggle with particular aims set forth here, I have attempted to cite and describe what is in the Bahá'í texts and not to burden the reader with my emotions. My personal response to the material certainly has included strong emotions, and these have changed over time, as emotions have a way of doing; but my conviction is that a rational and objective discussion of the ideas set forth here is of greater value than the sharing of how we feel about them. In any case, others will no doubt write about these topics with their emotions in plain display and for readers who were expecting such from me, I encourage you to find other authors who will more readily satisfy your inclinations.

There are a great number of texts which have not been cited, and which have not been included in this study. There are no conclusions that the present compiler would draw from this survey, other than those that are articulated in the texts cited. Much more research and analysis needs to be carried out before it will be possible to identify all of the characteristics of an authentic and inclusive Bahá'í vision of scholarship based upon the source texts of the Faith. This effort is offered to all those interested in the spirit of search.

II. Attaining to the Knowledge of God

One of the purposes of Bahá'í scholarship (#9 in the foregoing study) is to attain to the knowledge of God. Indeed, this is one of the fundamental purposes for the very existence of human beings according to explicit statements of Bahá'u'lláh:

I bear witness, O my God, that Thou hast created me to **know Thee and to worship Thee**. (Short Obligatory Prayer)

The purpose of God in creating man hath been, and will ever be, to enable him **to know his Creator and to attain His Presence**. (Gleanings, XXIX, p. 70)

He hath called into being His creatures, that they may **know Him**, Who is the Compassionate, the All-Merciful. (Gleanings, LXXVI, pp. 144-145)

Thou didst bring mankind into being **to know Thee and to serve Thy Cause, that their station might thereby be elevated upon Thine earth and their souls be uplifted** by virtue of the things Thou hast revealed in Thy Scriptures, Thy Books and Thy Tablets. (Ishráqát, in TB:111)

I testify, O my God, and my King, that Thou hast created me **to remember Thee, to glorify Thee, and to aid Thy Cause**. (ESW:3)

In this essay we will seek to discover this knowledge of God through a close examination of the Kitáb-i-Íqán and related passages from other works by Bahá'u'lláh. This search will be conducted with the following principles in mind:

...the reading of the scriptures and holy books is for no other purpose except to enable the reader to apprehend their meaning and unravel their innermost mysteries. Otherwise reading, without understanding, is of no abiding profit unto man. (Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 172)

If any of the utterances of this Servant may not be comprehended, or may lead to perturbation, the same must be inquired of again, that no doubt may linger, and the meaning be clear... (Bahá'u'lláh, Seven Valleys, p. 40)

Bahá'u'lláh refers to the state of being which will alone enable one to attain to the knowledge of God:

With fixed and steady gaze, born of the unerring eye of God, scan for a while the horizon of divine knowledge, and contemplate those words of perfection which the Eternal hath revealed, that haply the mysteries of divine wisdom, hidden ere now beneath the veil of glory and treasured within the tabernacle of His grace, may be made manifest unto you. (KI:16-17)

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In order to understand these verses we must comprehend Bahá'u'lláh's expression "eye of God". In Kitáb-i-Íqán there is another use of this expression: "then will the manifold favours and outpouring grace of the holy and everlasting Spirit confer such new life upon the seeker that he will find himself endowed with a new eye, a new ear, a new heart, and a new mind. He will contemplate the manifest signs of the universe, and will penetrate the hidden mysteries of the soul. Gazing with the eye of God, he will perceive within every atom a door that leadeth him to the stations of absolute certitude. He will discover in all things the mysteries of divine Revelation and the evidences of an everlasting manifestation." (KI:196) In His Seven Valleys we find these verses: "In this station [maqAm] he pierceth the veils of plurality, fleeth from the worlds of the flesh, and ascendeth into the heaven of singleness. With the ear of God he heareth, with the eye of God he beholdeth the mysteries of divine creation." (SV:17) The "station" is [maqám-i-tawhíd], which is translated as "Valley of Unity". In another Tablet, translated and cited by Shoghi Effendi in The Advent of Divine Justice, Bahá'u'lláh affirms: "Verily I say! No one hath apprehended the root of this Cause. It is incumbent upon everyone, in this day, to perceive with the eye of God, and to hearken with His ear. Whoso beholdeth Me with an eye besides Mine own will never be able to know Me. None among the Manifestations of old, except to a prescribed degree, hath ever completely apprehended the nature of this Revelation." (ADJ:77) In Kalímát-i-Firdawsiiyyih Bahá'u'lláh also writes: "Certain wrong-doers who profess allegiance to the Cause of God committed such deeds as have caused the limbs of sincerity, of honesty, of justice, of equity to quake. One known individual to whom the utmost kindness and favour had been extended perpetrated such acts as have brought tears to the eye of God." (TB:59) Among the Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in English translation, one was found which refers to this expression: "Know verily, that the Ocean is waving, the Sun shining, the Stars dawning. (Understand what I say!) The tree will grow, the earth will send forth hyacinths and give blessings, and man will become the heavenly angels. Feed on the light of guidance and impart light to the people. The bird will warble melodies unknown save by the birds of heaven; then tear asunder the veil and see the realities of things with the eye of God. Verily, thy Lord guideth whomsoever He willeth unto the Straight Path!" (TAB:II:560) This expression seems to refer to that state of consciousness which the believer may attain, wherein he so empties himself of his personal opinions, his attachments and desires, his worldly loves and hates, that he can perceive with a pure heart. With a pure heart he sees with the eye of God, hears with the ear of God, that is to say, he sees and hears what is real rather than the imaginations which have been created by his own faculties and by the faculties of his fellows.

Both these sayings have but one meaning, were you to ponder upon the Manifestations of the Unity of God with divine insight. (KI:20)

It is implicit in this statement that human beings are able to "ponder...with divine insight." As truly as human beings can of themselves only attain to human perception, through their recognition of the Manifestation of God, they can attain to "divine insight."

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Had they sought with a humble mind from the Manifestations of God in every Dispensation the true meaning of these words revealed in the sacred books--words the misapprehension of which hath caused men to be deprived of the recognition of the Sadratu'l-Muntaha, the ultimate Purpose--they surely would have been guided to the light of the Sun of Truth, and would have discovered the mysteries of divine knowledge and wisdom. (KI:28)

In order to be "guided to the light of the Sun of Truth," and discover "the mysteries of divine knowledge and wisdom" we must seek with a humble mind the true meaning of the Sacred Texts from the Manifestations of God. The "Sun of Truth" is one of the names of the Manifestation of God. This not only associates that "divine knowledge and wisdom" with the teachings of the Manifestations, but it also indicates that the soul which wishes to attain to this knowledge must be humble and must turn to the Manifestations for guidance. The Manifestation has therefore the role of teaching "true knowledge and wisdom" to the humble soul.

If these divines be illumined by the light of the latter Revelation they will be acceptable unto God, and will shine with a light everlasting. Otherwise, they will be declared as darkened, even though to outward seeming they be leaders of men, inasmuch as belief and unbelief, guidance and error, felicity and misery, light and darkness, are all dependent upon the sanction of Him Who is the Day-star of Truth. Whosoever among the divines of every age receiveth, in the Day of Reckoning, the testimony of faith from the Source of true knowledge, he verily becometh the recipient of learning, of divine favour, and of the light of true understanding. Otherwise, he is branded as guilty of folly, denial, blasphemy, and oppression. It is evident and manifest unto every discerning observer that even as the light of the star fadeth before the effulgent splendor of the sun, so doth the luminary of earthly knowledge, of wisdom, and understanding vanish into nothingness when brought face to face with the resplendent glories of the Sun of Truth, the Daystar of divine enlightenment. (KI:36-37)

Bahá'u'lláh has explained that "the Day of Reckoning" is the time of the appearance of the Manifestation of God: "It is evident that every age in which a Manifestation of God hath lived is divinely ordained, and may, in a sense, be characterized as God's appointed Day." (GL:XXV:60) The Manifestation is here called "the Day-star of Truth", "the Source of true knowledge", "the Sun of Truth" and "the Day-star of divine enlightenment." He states here that the learned and powerful leaders of men are counseled to turn towards the Manifestation at the time of His appearance, for it is attainment to His knowledge, the true knowledge that is incumbent upon all. If a leader turns towards the Manifestation, he is accounted among the truly learned, otherwise, he is accounted among the ignorant and deprived.

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If they be in the likeness of the Sun of Truth, they will surely be accounted as the most exalted of all luminaries; otherwise, they are to be recognized as the focal centres of hellish fire. (KI:37)

Were the earth of their hearts to remain unchanged, how could such souls who have not been taught one letter, have seen no teacher, and entered no school, utter such words and display such knowledge as none can apprehend? Methinks they have been moulded from the clay of infinite knowledge, and kneaded from the water of divine wisdom. Therefore, hath it been said: 'Knowledge is a light which God casteth into the heart of whomsoever He willeth.' It is this kind of knowledge which is and hath ever been praiseworthy, and not the limited knowledge that hath sprung forth from veiled and obscured minds. This limited knowledge they even stealthily borrow one from the other, and vainly pride themselves therein! (KI:46)

True knowledge is from God, not from our own selves. It is found in our own hearts, not in the borrowings we receive from others. This knowledge is attained, first and foremost, through the recognition of the Manifestation of God, and through the observance of whatsoever He reveals. This recognition is not an acquired learning; it is an inner awakening which can not be borrowed, "one from the other" and which engenders humility rather than "pride".

Were the eye of the heart to open, it would surely perceive that the words revealed from the heaven of the will of God are at one with, and the same as, the deeds that have emanated from the Kingdom of divine power. (KI:57-58)

Here the spiritual perception required for the apprehension of true knowledge is called the "eye of the heart".

If the eye of justice be opened, it will readily recognize, in the light of that which hath been mentioned, that He, Who is the Cause and ultimate Purpose of all these things, is made manifest in this day. (KI:58-59)

Likewise, in this passage the "eye of justice" is associated with the spiritual perception necessary for apprehension of true knowledge. The Manifestation of God is called the Cause and ultimate Purpose of all these things.

Know verily that Knowledge is of two kinds: Divine and Satanic. The one welleth out from the fountain of divine inspiration; the other is but a reflection of vain and obscure thoughts. The source of the former is God Himself; the motive-force of the latter the whisperings of selfish desire...From the sayings of those Masters of holy utterance, Who have expounded the meaning of true knowledge, the odour of these dark teachings, which have obscured the world, can in no wise be detected. (KI:69)

Bahá'u'lláh is speaking of knowledge of spiritual matters here, and He indicates that this knowledge is either revealed by God or is inspired by the selfish animal nature of

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human beings--that nature which is not transformed by the Revelation of the Manifestation of God. The Manifestations are called "the Masters of holy utterance".

Our hope is that, God willing, the breeze of mercy may blow, and the divine Springtime clothe the tree of being with the robe of new life; so that we may discover the mysteries of divine Wisdom, and, through His providence, be made independent of the knowledge of all things. We have, as yet, desried none but a handful of souls, destitute of all renown, who have attained unto this station. Let the future disclose what the Judgment of God will ordain, and the Tabernacle of His decree reveal. In such wise We recount unto thee the wonders of the Cause of God, and pour out into thine ears the strains of heavenly melody, that haply thou mayest attain unto the station of true knowledge, and partake of the fruit thereof. (KI:129-130)

Here Bahá'u'lláh makes allusion to His own prophetic mission, to the imminence of "the divine Springtime" which He will usher into existence. Throughout His Writings, "the divine Springtime" refers to that period of time when the new Manifestation of God appears, signaling the commencement of a new Dispensation, a new cycle of divine civilization. It is only through His Revelation during this "divine Springtime" that "we may discover the mysteries of divine Wisdom" and "be made independent of the knowledge of all things"--that is, independent of all human learning. It is only if the reader of these words recognizes Bahá'u'lláh that he can hear "the strains of heavenly melody" and "attain unto the station of true knowledge, and partake of the fruit thereof."

Although the sole and fundamental purpose of all learning, and the toil and labour thereof, is attainment unto, and the recognition of, this station, yet they are all immersed in the pursuit of their material studies. They deny themselves every moment of leisure, and utterly ignore Him, Who is the Essence of all learning, and the one Object of their quest. Methinks, their lips have never touched the cup of divine Knowledge, nor do they seem to have attained even a dewdrop of the showers of heavenly grace. (KI:145)

The "purpose of all learning" is "attainment unto, and recognition of" the Manifestation of God, Who is here called "the Essence of all learning, and the one Object of their quest."

And how many of the ignorant who, by reason of their acceptance of the Faith, have soared aloft and attained the high summit of knowledge, and whose names have been inscribed by the Pen of Power upon the Tablet of divine knowledge. (KI:146)

Notwithstanding the obviousness of this theme, in the eyes of those that have quaffed the wine of knowledge and certitude, yet how many are those who, through failure to understand its meaning, have allowed the term "Seal of the Prophets" to obscure their understanding, and deprive them of the grace of all His manifold bounties! (KI:161-162)

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We have consumed this densest of all veils, with the fire of the love of the Beloved--the veil referred to in the saying: "The most grievous of all veils is the veil of knowledge." Upon its ashes, We have reared the tabernacle of divine knowledge. We have, praise be to God, burned the "veils of glory" with the fire of the beauty of the Best-Beloved. We have driven from the human heart all else but Him Who is the Desire of the world, and glory therein. We cleave to no knowledge but His Knowledge, and set our hearts on naught save the effulgent glories of His light. (KI:188)

Bahá'u'lláh here alludes to His prophetic station, and indicates that whatever He reveals is from God rather than from himself. Even as He calls upon His readers to trust in the divine knowledge of the Manifestation rather than in their own acquired knowledge, He indicates that He Himself is detached from all knowledge but the knowledge revealed to Him by God.

Upon detached souls they bestow the gift of Unity, enrich the destitute, and offer the cup of knowledge unto them who wander in the wilderness of ignorance. All the guidance, the blessings, the learning, the understanding, the faith, the certitude, conferred upon all that is in heaven and on earth, are hidden and treasured within these Cities. (KI:200)

These Cities are "the Word of God revealed in every age and dispensation. In the days of Moses it was the Pentateuch; in the days of Jesus the Gospel; in the days of Muhammad the Messenger of God the Qur'án; in this day the Bayan; and in the dispensation of Him Whom God will make manifest His own Book..." (KI:199) True knowledge is to be derived only from the Word of God, and this brings the soul of the true believer to a state of unity with God through unity with His Manifestation. The seeker need look nowhere else for true knowledge of spiritual realities--it is all to be found in the Word of God, the Sacred Texts. In the Writings of the Báb we find a statement differentiating the value of the knowledge of God revealed by the Manifestation from the value of human knowledge as found in human beings:

Verily on that Day the learning of the learned shall prove of no avail, neither the accomplishments of the exponents of knowledge, nor the pomp of the highly honoured, nor the power of the mighty, nor the remembrance of the devout, nor the deeds of the righteous, nor the genuflexion of the kneeling worshipper, nor his prostration or turning towards the Qiblih, nor the honour of the honoured, nor the kinship of the highly born, nor the nobility of those of noble descent, nor the discourse of the eloquent, nor the titles of the prominent—none of these shall be of any avail unto them—inasmuch as all these and whatever else ye have known or comprehended were created by His word of command 'Be' and it is. Indeed if it be His Will He can assuredly bring about the resurrection of all created things through a word from Himself. He is, in truth, over and above all this, the All-Powerful, the Almighty, the Omnipotent.

Beware, O concourse of Mirrors, lest on that Day titles make you vainglorious. Know ye of a certainty that ye, together with all those who stand above you or below you, have been created for that Day. Fear ye God and commit not that which would grieve His heart, nor be of them that have gone astray. Perchance He will appear invested with the power of Truth while ye are fast asleep on your couches, or His messengers will bring glorious and resplendent Tablets from Him while ye turn away disdainfully from Him, pronounce sentence against Him—such sentence as ye would never pass on yourselves—and say, ‘This is not from God, the All-Subduing, the Self-Existent’. (Selections from the Writings of the Báb, pp. 165-166)

This same principle is found in one of the Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh:

O ye wise men of the City and philosophers of the world! Beware lest human learning and wisdom cause you to wax proud before God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting. Know ye that true wisdom is to fear God, to know Him, and to recognize His Manifestations. This wisdom, however, can be attained only by those who detach themselves from the world, and who walk in the ways of the good pleasure of their Lord. Are ye possessed of greater wisdom than the one who contrived a moon which would rise from one well and set in another, and whose light was visible at a distance of three leagues? God, verily, blotted out every trace of his works and returned him unto dust, as ye have already heard or are now informed.

How many the sages and philosophers who equalled or surpassed him in learning and wisdom! And how vast the number of those who equalled or surpassed yourselves! Some of them believed in God, while others disbelieved and joined partners with Him. The latter were at last cast into the Fire, there to take up their abode, while the former returned unto the mercy of their Lord, therein to abide. For God doth not ask you of your sciences, but of your faith and of your conduct. Are ye greater in wisdom than the One Who brought you into being, Who fashioned the heavens and all that they contain, the earth and all that dwell upon it? Gracious God! True wisdom is His. All creation and its empire are His. He bestoweth His wisdom upon whomsoever He chooseth amongst men, and withholdeth it from whomsoever He desireth. He, in truth, is the Bestower and the Withholder, and He, verily, is the All-Bountiful, the All-Wise.

O ye learned of the world! Ye failed to seek Our presence, that ye might hearken unto the sweet melodies of the Spirit and perceive that which God in His bounty hath pleased to bestow upon Me. Verily, this grace hath now escaped you, did ye but know. Had ye sought Our presence, We would have imparted unto you a knowledge that would have rendered you independent of all else. But this ye failed to do, and thus hath the decree of God been fulfilled. Now have I been forbidden to disclose it, since We stand accused of sorcery, if ye perceive Our meaning. The same words were uttered by the deniers of old, men whom death hath long since overtaken and who now dwell in the fire bewailing their plight. The deniers of this day shall likewise meet their doom. Such is the irrevocable decree of Him Who is the All-Powerful, the Self-Sufficient.

I counsel you, in the end, not to overstep the bounds of God, nor to heed the ways and habits of men, for these can neither “fatten nor appease your hunger”. Fix, rather, your gaze upon the precepts of God. Whosoever desireth, let him accept this

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counsel as a path leading unto his Lord, and whosoever desireth, let him return to his own idle imaginings. My Lord, verily, is independent above all who are in the heavens and on the earth, and above all that they say and do. (Bahá'u'lláh, The Summons of the Lord of Hosts, pp. 233-235)

Your sciences shall not profit you in this day, nor your arts, nor your treasures, nor your glory. Cast them all behind your backs, and set your faces towards the Most Sublime Word through which the Scriptures and the Books and this lucid Tablet have been distinctly set forth. Cast away, O people, the things ye have composed with the pen of your idle fancies and vain imaginings. By God! The Daystar of Knowledge hath shone forth above the horizon of certitude. (Bahá'u'lláh, TB, p. 211; Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, pp. 97-98)

This true learning of the Manifestation of God is affirmed in another context:

O Temple of Holiness! We, verily, have made Thine inmost heart the treasury of all the knowledge of past and future ages, and the dawning-place of Our own knowledge which We have ordained for the dwellers of earth and heaven, that all creation may partake of the outpourings of Thy grace and may attain, through the wonders of Thy knowledge, unto the recognition of God, the Exalted, the Powerful, the Great. In truth, that knowledge which belongeth unto Mine own Essence is such as none hath ever attained or will ever grasp, nor shall any heart be capable of bearing its weight. Were We to disclose but a single word of this knowledge, the hearts of all men would be filled with consternation, the foundations of all things would crumble into ruin, and the feet of even the wisest among men would be made to slip.

'Within the treasury of Our Wisdom there lieth unrevealed a knowledge, one word of which, if we chose to divulge it to mankind, would cause every human being to recognize the Manifestation of God and to acknowledge His omniscience, would enable every one to discover the secrets of all the sciences, and to attain so high a station as to find himself wholly independent of all past and future learning. Other knowledges We do as well possess, not a single letter of which We can disclose, nor do We find humanity able to hear even the barest reference to their meaning. Thus have We informed you of the knowledge of God, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.' [translated and cited by Shoghi Effendi in WOB:109] Were We to find worthy vessels, We would deposit within them the treasures of hidden meanings and impart unto them a knowledge, one letter of which would encompass all created things.

O Inmost Heart of this Temple! We have made thee the dawning-place of Our knowledge and the dayspring of Our wisdom unto all who are in heaven and on earth. From thee have We caused all sciences to appear, and unto thee shall We cause them to return. And from thee shall We bring them forth a second time. Such, indeed, is Our promise, and potent are We to effect Our purpose. Erelong shall We bring into being through thee exponents of new and wondrous sciences, of potent and effective crafts, and shall make manifest through them that which the heart of none of Our servants hath yet conceived. Thus do We bestow upon whom We will whatsoever We desire, and thus do We withdraw from whom We will what We had once bestowed. Even so do We ordain whatsoever We please through Our behest.

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(Bahá'u'lláh, The Summons of the Lord of Hosts, pp. 34-46)

True knowledge is not circumscribed--it is infinite. Bahá'u'lláh affirms the limitless riches of divine wisdom and knowledge in a number of His Tablets:

Notwithstanding all that We have mentioned, how innumerable are the pearls which have remained unpierced in the shell of Our heart! How many huris of inner meaning that are as yet concealed within the chambers of divine wisdom! (KI:70)

The "huris of inner meaning" refers the beauty of spiritual meanings who are like the "húrun" of the Qur'án (56:22-23): "with eyes like pearls" who are promised to the believers in Islam. Just as these "maidens" are concealed in the "mansions" of Paradise, so also, the inner meanings are "concealed within the chambers of divine wisdom".

Behold, how many are the mysteries that lie as yet unravelled within the tabernacle of the knowledge of God, and how numerous the gems of His wisdom that are still concealed in His inviolable treasuries! Shouldst thou ponder this in thine heart, thou wouldst realize that His handiwork knoweth neither beginning nor end. The domain of His decree is too vast for the tongue of mortals to describe, or for the bird of the human mind to traverse; and the dispensations of His providence are too mysterious for the mind of man to comprehend. His creation no end hath overtaken, and it hath ever existed from the "Beginning that hath no beginning"; and the Manifestations of His Beauty no beginning hath beheld, and they will continue to the "End that knoweth no end." Ponder this utterance in thine heart, and reflect how it is applicable unto all these holy Souls. (KI:167)

Immeasurably exalted is the celestial Melody above the strivings of human ear to hear or mind to grasp its mystery! How can the helpless ant step into the court of the All-Glorious? And yet, feeble souls, through lack of understanding, reject these abstruse utterances, and question the truth of such traditions. Nay, none can comprehend them save those that are possessed of an understanding heart. (KI:168)

By God! This Bird of Heaven, now dwelling upon the dust, can, besides these melodies, utter a myriad songs, and is able, apart from these utterances, to unfold innumerable mysteries. Every single note of its unpronounced utterances is immeasurably exalted above all that hath already been revealed, and immensely glorified beyond that which hath streamed from this Pen. Let the future disclose the hour when the Brides of inner meaning, will, as decreed by the Will of God, hasten forth, unveiled, out of their mystic mansions, and manifest themselves in the ancient realm of being. Nothing whatsoever is possible without His permission; no power can endure save through His power, and there is none other God but He. His is the world of creation, and His the Cause of God. All proclaim His Revelation, and all unfold the mysteries of His Spirit. (KI:175-176)

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The "Bird of Heaven" is Bahá'u'lláh, and here He alludes to His prophetic station. The "Brides of inner meaning" are also called the "huris of inner meaning" (KI:70), namely, those inner meanings which will, in due course, become manifest. Not until the designated "hour" is come will His station be fully disclosed, and the spiritual teachings latent within His consciousness be revealed to the world.

All that I have revealed unto thee with the tongue of power, and have written for thee with the pen of might, hath been in accordance with thy capacity and understanding, not with My state and the melody of My voice. (Arabic Hidden Words: #67)

This citation from the Arabic Hidden Words -- revealed some years prior to the Kitáb-i-Íqán -- denotes the infinite capacity of the Manifestation of God to reveal truths, as well as the revelation of those truths according to limited human capacity.

How great the multitude of truths which the garment of words can never contain! How vast the number of such verities as no expression can adequately describe, whose significance can never be unfolded, and to which not even the remotest allusions can be made! How manifold are the truths which must remain unuttered until the appointed time is come! Even as it hath been said: "Not everything that a man knoweth can be disclosed, nor can everything that he can disclose be regarded as timely, nor can every timely utterance be considered as suited to the capacity of those who hear it." (GL:LXXXIX:176)

In this citation from "Tafsir Súrat va'l-Shams" Bahá'u'lláh indicates that divine knowledge and wisdom is infinite, but that it is revealed according to the exigencies of humanity's spiritual development. He also states that many truths cannot be expressed in words. In "Seven Valleys" He refers to this theme:

The tongue faileth in describing these three Valleys, and speech falleth short. The pen steppeth not into this region, the ink leaveth only a blot. In these planes, the nightingale of the heart hath other songs and secrets, which make the heart to stir and the soul to clamor, but this mystery of inner meaning may be whispered only from heart to heart, confided only from breast to breast. (SV:30)

The three Valleys which words cannot describe are, the Valley of Contentment [madínih-i-istighná], the Valley of Wonderment [vadí-i-hayrat] and the Valley of True Poverty and Absolute Nothingness [vadí-i-faqir haqíqí va fanáí así]. This subject, of the limitations of human language, and of "others songs and secrets" is treated in a separate monograph entitled "Language of the Spirit."

Notwithstanding the limitations of words, Bahá'u'lláh states unequivocally that the Word of God, the source of divine knowledge, is meant to be understood by human beings:

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They have even failed to realize, all this time, that, in every age, the reading of the scriptures and holy books is for no other purpose except to enable the reader to apprehend their meaning and unravel their innermost mysteries. Otherwise reading, without understanding, is of no abiding profit unto man. (KI:172)

In certain verses of the Seven Valleys and also in the Arabic Hidden Words Bahá'u'lláh states that the words He has revealed are meant to be understood:

If any of the utterances of this Servant may not be comprehended, or may lead to perturbation, the same must be inquired of again, that no doubt may linger, and the meaning be clear as the Face of the Beloved One shining from the "Glorious Station." [maqám-i-mahmúd, Qur'án 17:81] (SV:40)

All that I have revealed unto thee with the tongue of power, and have written for thee with the pen of might, hath been in accordance with thy capacity and understanding, not with My state and the melody of My voice. (Arabic Hidden Words: #67)

Bahá'u'lláh also explains that the common people can understand the Word of God, not just an elite, whether they be the "learned" or the "mystics":

Heed not the idle contention of those who maintain that the Book and the verses thereof can never be a testimony unto the common people, inasmuch as they neither grasp their meaning nor appreciate their value. And yet, the unfailing testimony of God to both the East and the West is none other than the Qur'án. Were it beyond the comprehension of men, how could it have been declared as a universal testimony unto all people? If their contention be true, none would therefore be required, nor would it be necessary for them to know God, inasmuch as the knowledge of the divine Being transcendeth the knowledge of His Book, and the common people would not possess the capacity to comprehend it.

Such contention is utterly fallacious and inadmissible. It is actuated solely by arrogance and pride. Its motive is to lead the people astray from the Ridvan of divine good-pleasure and to tighten the reins of their authority over the people. And yet, in the sight of God, these common people are infinitely superior and exalted above their religious leaders who have turned away from the one true God. (KI:210-211)

In this context, those religious leaders "who have turned away from the one true God" are those Muslim (and other) clerics who have rejected the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, while "these common people" who "are infinitely superior and exalted above" those clerics are the Bábis and subsequently the Bahá'ís who have recognized the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh.

...the wine of renunciation must needs be attained, and the meditation referred to in the words "One hour's reflection is preferable to seventy years of pious worship" must needs be observed, so that the secret of the wretched behavior of the people might be discovered, those people who, despite the love and yearning for truth which

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they profess, curse the followers of Truth when once He hath been made manifest. (KI:238)

Bahá'u'lláh indicates that one hour of reflection, of thought is of more value than seventy years (a whole lifespan) of pious worship without such reflection. For one hour of reflection may result in recognizing the new Manifestation of God and subsequently following His teachings, while pious worship in itself may result in the rejection of the new Manifestation. In "Seven Proofs" the Báb affirms that many Muslims have failed to recognize His prophethood because they are too devoted to religious practice, because they imitate the thoughts as well as the practices of their forebears rather than investigating the truth for themselves. This seems to be akin to the Socratic saying: The unexamined life is not worth living. Bahá'u'lláh refers to the insight which may result from reflection upon the truth in other passages of His Writings:

Wert thou, for the sake of God, to ponder, though it be but for an hour, upon the things which have occurred in former times and more recently, thou wouldst turn away from the things thou dost possess unto the things which belong unto God, and wouldst become a means for the exaltation of His Word. (ESW:92)

Bahá'u'lláh is addressing here Shaykh Muhammad Taqiy-i-Najafí, a violent enemy of the Bahá'í Faith resident in the city of Isfahan. Just as He counselled Haji Mirza Siyyid Muhammad, one of the maternal uncles of the Báb, in Kitáb-i-Íqán in circa 1861, so also He counseled Ibn-i-Dhi'b (the Shaykh whom He denominated the "Son of the Wolf") in circa 1891, to take one hour to reflect upon the way things are and to consider His claims and those of the Báb.

It is evident that nothing short of this mystic transformation could cause such spirit and behaviour, so utterly unlike their previous habits and manners, to be made manifest in the world of being. For their agitation was turned into peace, their doubt into certitude, their timidity into courage. Such is the potency of the Divine Elixir, which, swift as the twinkling of an eye, transmutheth the souls of men!

For instance, consider the substance of copper. Were it to be protected in its own mine from becoming solidified, it would, within the space of seventy years, attain to the state of gold. There are some, however, who maintain that copper itself is gold, which by becoming solidified is in a diseased condition, and hath not therefore reached its own state.

Be that as it may, the real elixir will, in one instant, cause the substance of copper to attain the state of gold, and will traverse the seventy-year stages in a single moment. Could this gold be called copper? Could it be claimed that it hath not attained the state of gold, whilst the touch-stone is at hand to assay it and distinguish it from copper? Likewise, these souls, through the potency of the Divine Elixir, traverse, in the twinkling of an eye, the world of dust and advance into the realm of holiness; and with one step cover the earth of limitations and reach the domain of the Placeless. (KI:156-157)

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In this passage, Bahá'u'lláh uses the imagery and terminology of alchemy in order to make the same point. In Seven Valleys He also alludes to the potency of the transformative moment:

These journeys have no visible ending in the world of time, but the severed wayfarer...may cross these seven stages in seven steps, nay rather in seven breaths, nay rather in a single breath, if God will and desire it. (SV:40-41)

We human beings are meant to understand the Word of God, and this understanding is not limited to the learned but is accessible to the "common people". But Bahá'u'lláh does not indicate that human understanding of the Word of God is bestowed upon every individual equally, and that the gift of understanding is distributed in equal measure to each person. On the contrary, He indicates that the capacity of each person is unique, and that each must seek to understand according to his own capacity rather than according to the capacity of others:

Thereupon, We imparted unto him, according to the measure of his capacity and understanding, certain truths of science and ancient Wisdom. (KI:173)

We have variously and repeatedly set forth the meaning of every theme, that perchance every soul, whether high or low, may obtain, according to his measure and capacity, his share and portion thereof. Should he be unable to comprehend a certain argument, he may, thus, by referring unto another, attain his purpose. "That all sorts of men may know where to quench their thirst." [Qu'ran 6:127] (KI:175)

In fact, all the Scriptures and the mysteries thereof are condensed into this brief account. So much so, that were a person to ponder it a while in his heart, he would discover from all that hath been said the mysteries of the Words of God, and would apprehend the meaning of whatever hath been manifested by that ideal King. As the people differ in their understanding and station, We will accordingly make mention of a few traditions, that these may impart constancy to the wavering soul, and tranquillity to the troubled mind. Thereby, will the testimony of God unto the people, both high and low, be complete and perfect. (KI:237-238)

The "ideal King" is, in this context, Muhammad, the Messenger of God. Elsewhere, this appellation may refer either to the Manifestation of God, or to God Himself. The "traditions" to which Bahá'u'lláh refers are called "hadith" and they represent sayings of Muhammad which were allegedly reported and written down during His lifetime or shortly thereafter but which are not part of the Qur'án; and sayings of the twelve Imams who are recognized by Ithna 'Ashari Shí'í Muslims (in Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria and elsewhere) as the authentic interpreters of the teachings of Muhammad.

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Of these truths some can be disclosed only to the extent of the capacity of the repositories of the light of Our knowledge, and the recipients of Our hidden grace. (GL:LXXXIX:176)

In "Tafsir Súrat va'l-Shams" Bahá'u'lláh is here referring to the followers of the Manifestations, not to the Manifestations Themselves. If His intention had been to indicate the Manifestations, this would have been reflected in the Guardian's translation, and "repositories" and "recipients" would have been capitalized.

The essence and the fundamentals of philosophy have emanated from the Prophets. That the people differ concerning the inner meanings and mysteries thereof is to be attributed to the divergence of their views and minds. (TB:145)

We have seen that according to Bahá'u'lláh, human learning is not necessary for recognition of divine knowledge and wisdom. We have also learned that divine knowledge is unlimited and that which is revealed to us does not represent its riches but rather our capacity to understand those riches; that many truths cannot be conveyed in words; that the Word of God can be understood by common people; that the capacity for its understanding differs in each individual human being. What then is required of the human being, in order to attain to this divine knowledge?

They should put their trust in God, and holding fast unto Him, follow in His way. Then will they be made worthy of the effulgent glories of the sun of divine knowledge and understanding, and become the recipients of a grace that is infinite and unseen, inasmuch as man can never hope to attain unto the knowledge of the All-Glorious, can never quaff from the stream of divine knowledge and wisdom, can never enter the abode of immortality, nor partake of the cup of divine nearness and favour, unless and until he ceases to regard the words and deeds of mortal men as a standard for the true understanding and recognition of God and His Prophets. (KI:3-4)

There is no way to attain to this "stream of divine knowledge and wisdom" except by purifying the heart:

Unto every discerning observer it is evident and manifest that had these people in the days of each of the Manifestations of the Sun of Truth sanctified their eyes, their ears, and their hearts from whatever they had seen, heard, and felt, they surely would not have been deprived of beholding the beauty of God, nor strayed far from the habitations of glory. (KI:14-15)

This is the food that conferreth everlasting life upon the pure in heart and the illumined in spirit. (KI:22-23)

O my brother! Take thou the step of the spirit, so that, swift as the twinkling of an eye, thou mayest flash through the wilds of remoteness and bereavement, attain the

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Ridvan of everlasting reunion, and in one breath commune with the heavenly Spirits. For with human feet thou canst never hope to traverse these immeasurable distances, nor attain thy goal. Peace be upon him whom the light of truth guideth unto all truth, and who, in the name of God, standeth in the path of His Cause, upon the shore of true understanding. (KI:43)

Would that the hearts of men could be cleansed from these man-made limitations and obscure thoughts imposed upon them! haply they may be illumined by the light of the Sun of true knowledge, and comprehend the mysteries of divine wisdom. (KI:47)

The "Sun of true knowledge" is the Manifestation of God.

The heart must needs therefore be cleansed from the idle sayings of men, and sanctified from every earthly affection, so that it may discover the hidden meaning of divine inspiration, and become the treasury of the mysteries of divine knowledge. (KI:70)

It is incumbent upon thee, by the permission of God, to cleanse the eye of thine heart from the things of the world, that thou mayest realize the infinitude of divine knowledge, and mayest behold Truth so clearly that thou wilt need no proof to demonstrate His reality, nor any evidence to bear witness unto His testimony. (KI:91)

Shouldst thou ponder these words in thine heart, thou wilt of a certainty find the doors of divine wisdom and infinite knowledge flung open before thy face. (KI:102)

Wert thou to attain to but a dewdrop of the crystal waters of divine knowledge, thou wouldst readily realize that true life is not the life of the flesh but the life of the spirit. For the life of the flesh is common to both men and animals, whereas the life of the spirit is possessed only by the pure in heart who have quaffed from the ocean of faith and partaken of the fruit of certitude. This life knoweth no death, and this existence is crowned by immortality. (KI:120)

Only those will attain to the knowledge of the Word of God that have turned unto Him, and repudiated the manifestations of Satan. (KI:122-123)

Strive, therefore, O my brother, to grasp the meaning of "Resurrection," and cleanse thine ears from the idle sayings of these rejected people. Shouldst thou step into the realm of complete detachment, thou wilt readily testify that no day is mightier than this Day, and that no resurrection more awful than this Resurrection can ever be conceived. (KI:144)

Ponder this in thine heart, that the sweet gales of divine knowledge, blowing from the meads of mercy, may waft upon thee the fragrance of the Beloved's utterance, and cause thy soul to attain the Ridvan of understanding. (KI:149)

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The "Beloved" is the Manifestation of God.

...cleanse the darkened self with the waters of mercy flowing from the Source of divine knowledge; that perchance thou mayest, through the power of God and the light of divine guidance, distinguish the Morn of everlasting splendour from the darksome night of error. (KI:151-152)

The "Source of divine knowledge" and the "Morn of everlasting splendour" are references to the Manifestation of God.

And yet, feeble souls, through lack of understanding, reject these abstruse utterances, and question the truth of such traditions. Nay, none can comprehend them save those that are possessed of an understanding heart. Say, He is that End for Whom no end is all the universe can be imagined, and for Whom no beginning in the world of creation can be conceived. Behold, O concourse of the earth, the splendours of the End, revealed in the Manifestations of the Beginning! (KI:168)

Thus the peoples of the world are judged by their countenance. By it, their misbelief, their faith, and their iniquity are all made manifest. Even as it is evident in this day how the people of error are, by their countenance, known and distinguished from the followers of divine Guidance. Were these people, wholly for the sake of God and with no desire but His good-pleasure, to ponder the verses of the Book in their heart, they would of a certainty find whatsoever they seek...No man, however, can comprehend this except he who is possessed of an understanding heart. (KI:173-174)
Whoso desireth to fathom the mystery of this "Mi'raj," and craveth a drop from this ocean, if the mirror of his heart be already obscured by the dust of these learnings, he must needs cleanse and purify it ere the light of this mystery can be reflected therein. (KI:187)

We have driven from the human heart all else but Him Who is the Desire of the world, and glory therein. (KI:188)

"Him Who is the Desire of the world" is the Manifestation of God.

O my brother! A divine Mine only can yield the gems of divine knowledge, and the fragrance of the mystic Flower can be inhaled only in the ideal Garden, and the lilies of ancient wisdom can blossom nowhere except in the city of a stainless heart. "In a rich soil, its plants spring forth abundantly by permission of its Lord, and in that soil which is bad, they spring forth but scantily." [Qur'án 7:57] (KI:191)

A "divine Mine" and "the mystic Flower" are references to the Manifestation of God.

But, O my brother, when the true seeker determines to take the step of search in the path leading to the knowledge of the Ancient of Days, he must, before all else, cleanse and purify his heart, which is the seat of the revelation of the inner mysteries of God, from the obscuring dust of all acquired knowledge, and the allusions of the embodiments of satanic fancy. He must purge his breast, which is the sanctuary of

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the abiding love of the Beloved, of every defilement, and sanctify his soul from all that pertaineth to water and clay, from all shadowy and ephemeral attachments. He must so cleanse his heart that no remnant of either love or hate may linger therein, lest that love blindly incline him to error, or that hate repel him away from the truth. Even as thou dost witness in this day how most of the people, because of such love and hate, are bereft of the immortal Face, have strayed far from the Embodiments of the divine mysteries, and, shepherdless, are roaming through the wilderness of oblivion and error. (KI:192-193)

The "immortal Face" and the "Embodiments of the divine mysteries" are references to the Manifestation of God.

With unswerving vision, with pure heart, and sanctified spirit, consider attentively what God hath established as the testimony of guidance for His people in His Book, which is recognized as authentic by both the high and lowly. (KI:202)

In this context, "His Book" is the Qur'án, but generally it refers to the Scriptures associated with all of the Manifestations of God.

The understanding of His words and the comprehension of the utterances of the Birds of Heaven are in no wise dependent upon human learning. They depend solely upon purity of heart, chastity of soul, and freedom of spirit. This is evidenced by those who, today, though without a single letter of the accepted standards of learning, are occupying the loftiest seats of knowledge; and the garden of their hearts is adorned, through the showers of divine grace, with the roses of wisdom and the tulips of understanding. Well is it with the sincere in heart for their share of the light of a mighty Day! (KI:211)

Human learning here refers to the human arts and sciences, and, in particular, to those Islamic sciences which pertained to esoteric matters. The criteria and content of divine knowledge and wisdom are set forth in the Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, as well as in the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi.

In fact, all the Scriptures and the mysteries thereof are condensed into this brief account. So much so, that were a person to ponder it a while in his heart, he would discover from all that hath been said the mysteries of the Words of God, and would apprehend the meaning of whatever hath been manifested by that ideal King. (KI:237)

None apprehendeth the meaning of these utterances except them whose hearts are assured, whose souls have found favour with God, and whose minds are detached from all else but Him. (KI:255)

Bahá'u'lláh refers to this teaching in many of His Tablets, including in the following passages from the Hidden Words and Seven Valleys:

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My first counsel is this: Possess a pure, kindly and radiant heart, that thine may be a sovereignty ancient, imperishable and everlasting. (AHW:#1)

Thy heart is My home; sanctify it for My descent. Thy spirit is My place of revelation; cleanse it for My manifestation. (AHW:#59)

It is incumbent on these servants that they cleanse the heart--which is the wellspring of divine treasures--from every marking, and that they turn away from imitation, which is following the traces of their forefathers and sires, and shut the door of friendliness and enmity upon all the people of the earth. (SV:5)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in the course of His Western tour, gave some addresses which specifically touched upon this theme, one of which is cited here:

It is easy to read the Holy Scriptures, but it is only with a clean heart and a pure mind that one may understand their true meaning. Let us ask God's help to enable us to understand the Holy Books. Let us pray for eyes to see and ears to hear, and for hearts that long for peace. (PT:56-57)

There are two kinds of verses in the Scriptures: those which are meant to be understood literally, and those which are symbolic in nature. Bahá'u'lláh refers to this theme in Kitáb-i-Íqán:

It is evident unto thee that the Birds of Heaven and Doves of Eternity speak a twofold language. One language, the outward language, is devoid of allusions, is unconcealed and unveiled; that it may be a guiding lamp and a beaconing light whereby wayfarers may attain the heights of holiness, and seekers may advance into the realm of eternal reunion. Such are the unveiled traditions and the evident verses already mentioned. (KI:254-255)

This passage refers to Súrat al-'Imrán (3:7) in the Qur'án: "He it is Who has sent down unto thee the Book; in it there are verses that are decisive in meaning [ayatun muhkamatun] --they are the basis of the Book-- and there are others that are susceptible of different interpretations [mutashabihatun]. But those in whose hearts is perversity pursue such thereof as are susceptible of different interpretations, seeking discord and seeking wrong interpretation of it. And none knows the right interpretation except God and those who are firmly grounded in knowledge; they say, 'We believe in it; the whole is from our Lord.' And none heed except those gifted with understanding." Bahá'u'lláh cites a verse of His own Book which is meant to be interpreted literally, in Kitáb-i-Aqdas:

Whoso layeth claim to a Revelation direct from God, ere the expiration of a full thousand years, such a man is assuredly a lying impostor...Whosoever interpreteth this verse otherwise than its obvious meaning is deprived of the Spirit of God and of

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His mercy which encompasseth all created things. Fear God, and follow not your idle fancies. (K37)

In Kitáb-i-Íqán Bahá'u'lláh continues with a description of the second kind of Scriptural language:

The other language is veiled and concealed, so that whatever lieth hidden in the heart of the malevolent may be made manifest and their innermost being be disclosed. Thus hath Sadiq, son of Muhammad, spoken: "God verily will test them and sift them." This is the divine standard, this is the Touchstone of God, wherewith He proveth His servants. None apprehendeth the meaning of these utterances except them whose hearts are assured, whose souls have found favour with God, and whose minds are detached from all else but Him. In such utterances, the literal meaning, as generally understood by the people, is not what hath been intended. (KI:255)

There are many references in Kitáb-i-Íqán to this symbolic language and to its role in testing the hearts of men, a sampling of which are cited here:

This is the purpose underlying the symbolic words of the Manifestations of God...Hence, it is clear and manifest that by the words "the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven" is intended the waywardness of the divines, and the annulment of laws firmly established by divine Revelation, all of which, in symbolic language, have been foreshadowed by the Manifestations of God. None except the righteous shall partake of this cup, none but the godly shall share therein. "The righteous shall drink of a cup tempered at the camphor fountain." [Qur'án 76:5] (KI:41)

Know verily that the purpose underlying all these symbolic terms and abstruse allusions, which emanate from the Revealers of God's holy Cause, hath been to test and prove the peoples of the world; that thereby the earth of the pure and illuminated hearts may be known from the perishable and barren soil. From time immemorial such hath been the way of God amidst His creatures, and to this testify the records of the sacred books. (KI:49)

Yea, such things as throw consternation into the hearts of all men come to pass only that each soul may be tested by the touchstone of God, that the true may be known and distinguished from the false. (KI:52)

But inasmuch as the divine Purpose hath decreed that the true should be known from the false, and the sun from the shadow, He hath, therefore, in every season sent down upon mankind the showers of tests from His realm of glory. (KI:53)

Wert thou to cleanse the mirror of thy heart from the dust of malice, thou wouldst apprehend the meaning of the symbolic terms revealed by the all-embracing Word of God made manifest in every Dispensation, and wouldst discover the mysteries of divine knowledge. Not, however, until thou consumest with the flame of utter

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detachment those veils of idle learning, that are current amongst men, canst thou behold the resplendent morn of true knowledge. (KI:68-69)

Notwithstanding the warning which, in marvelously symbolic language and subtle allusions, hath been uttered in days past, and which was intended to awaken the peoples of the world and to prevent them from being deprived of their share of the billowing ocean of God's grace, yet such things as have already been witnessed have come to pass! (KI:75)

The All-Glorious hath decreed these very things, that are contrary to the desires of wicked men, to be the touchstone and standard whereby He proveth His servants, that the just may be known from the wicked, and the faithful distinguished from the infidel. (KI:76; see KI:227,228)

Little perception is required to enable them to gather from the symbolic language of these two verses all that We have purposed to propound, and thus to attain, through the grace of the All-Merciful, the resplendent morn of certitude. (KI:78)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá makes reference to the symbolic language of the Scriptures in one of His talks in New York:

I have been informed that the purpose of your class meeting is to study the significances and mysteries of the Holy Scriptures and understand the meaning of the divine Testaments. It is a cause of great happiness to me that you are turning unto the Kingdom of God, that you desire to approach the presence of God and to become informed of the realities and precepts of God. It is my hope that you may put forward your most earnest endeavor to accomplish this end, that you may investigate and study the Holy Scriptures word by word so that you may attain knowledge of the mysteries hidden therein. Be not satisfied with words, but seek to understand the spiritual meanings hidden in the heart of the words...The divine Words are not to be taken according to their outer sense. They are symbolical and contain realities of spiritual meaning...

All the texts and teachings of the holy Testaments have intrinsic spiritual meanings. They are not to be taken literally. I, therefore, pray in your behalf that you may be given the power of understanding these inner real meanings of the Holy Scriptures and may become informed of the mysteries deposited in the words of the Bible so that you may attain eternal life and your hearts may be attracted to the Kingdom of God. May your souls be illumined by the light of the Words of God, and may you become repositories of the mysteries of God, for no comfort is greater and no happiness is sweeter than spiritual comprehension of the divine teachings. (PUP:459-460)

How, then, are we to understand the symbolic language of Scripture? Do we only need to purify our hearts--then will all of the inner meanings of this "other language" become evident to us? Bahá'u'lláh affirms that our true guide in understanding these symbolic verses of Scripture are the Manifestations of God. It is precisely so that we

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do not turn in any direction except towards the Manifestations that He stresses the importance of purity of heart, detachment of mind, and reflection. The Manifestation, and whomsoever the Manifestation may appoint as His successor and interpreter, is the only divine authority able to unravel these inner meanings of the symbolic language of Scripture:

With fixed and steady gaze, born of the unerring eye of God, scan for a while the horizon of divine knowledge, and contemplate those words of perfection which the Eternal hath revealed, that haply the mysteries of divine wisdom, hidden ere now beneath the veil of glory and treasured within the tabernacle of His grace, may be made manifest unto you...

It is obvious and manifest that the true meaning of the utterances of the Birds of Eternity is revealed to none except those that manifest the Eternal Being, and the melodies of the Nightingale of Holiness can reach no ear save that of the denizens of the everlasting realm...Even as He saith: 'None knoweth the meaning thereof except God and them that are well grounded in knowledge.' [Qur'án 3:7] And yet, they have sought the interpretation of the Book from those that are wrapt in veils, and have refused to seek enlightenment from the fountainhead of knowledge. (KI:16-17)

This passage speaks both of those who attain to true knowledge, who are "those that manifest the Eternal Being" and "the denizens of the everlasting realm", and of the "fountainhead of knowledge", the Manifestation of God.

In God We put our trust, and to Him We cry for help, that haply there may flow from this pen that which shall quicken the souls of men, that they may all arise from their beds of heedlessness and hearken unto the rustling of the leaves of Paradise, from the tree which the hand of divine power hath, by the permission of God, planted in the Ridvan of the All-Glorious. (KI:19-20)

The "pen" is that of Bahá'u'lláh, and "the tree which the hand of divine power hath, by the permission of God, planted in the Ridvan of the All-Glorious" is Bahá'u'lláh Himself.

Make haste, O my brother, that while there is yet time our lips may taste of the immortal draught, for the breeze of life, now blowing from the city of the Well-Beloved, cannot last, and the streaming river of holy utterance must needs be stilled, and the portals of the Ridvan cannot for ever remain open. The day will surely come when the Nightingale of Paradise will have winged its flight away from its earthly abode unto its heavenly nest. Then will its melody be heard no more, and the beauty of the rose cease to shine. Seize the time, therefore, ere the glory of the divine springtime hath spent itself, and the Bird of Eternity ceased to warble its melody, that thy inner hearing may not be deprived of hearkening unto its call. This is My counsel unto thee and unto the beloved of God. (KI:23-24)

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The "Nightingale of Paradise" and "Bird of Eternity" are references to His own prophethood.

And yet they bear witness to this well-known tradition: "Verily Our Word is abstruse, bewilderingly abstruse." In another instance, it is said: "Our Cause is sorely trying, highly perplexing; none can bear it except a favorite of heaven, or an inspired Prophet, or he whose faith God hath tested." These leaders of religion admit that none of these three specified conditions is applicable to them. The first two conditions are manifestly beyond their reach; as to the third, it is evident that at no time have they been proof against those tests that have been sent by God, and that when the divine Touchstone appeared, they have shown themselves to be naught but dross. (KI, pp. 82-83)

O my beloved! Immeasurably exalted is the celestial Melody above the strivings of human ear to hear or mind to grasp its mystery! How can the helpless ant step into the court of the All-Glorious? And yet, feeble souls, through lack of understanding, reject these abstruse utterances, and question the truth of such traditions. Nay, none can comprehend them save those that are possessed of an understanding heart. Say, He is that End for Whom no end in all the universe can be imagined, and for Whom no beginning in the world of creation can be conceived. Behold, O concourse of the earth, the splendours of the End, revealed in the Manifestations of the Beginning! (KI, p. 168)

Inasmuch as it hath been clearly shown that only those who are initiated into the divine mysteries can comprehend the melodies uttered by the Bird of Heaven, it is therefore incumbent upon every one to seek enlightenment from the illumined in heart and from the Treasuries of divine mysteries regarding the intricacies of God's Faith and the abstruse allusions in the utterances of the Day-springs of Holiness. Thus will these mysteries be unravelled, not by the aid of acquired learning, but solely through the assistance of God and the outpourings of His grace. "Ask ye, therefore, of them that have the custody of the Scriptures, if ye know it not." [Qur'án 16:43] (KI, pp. 191-192)

The people, therefore, must not allow such utterances to deprive them of the divine bounties, but should rather seek enlightenment from them who are the recognized Expounders thereof, so that the hidden mysteries may be unravelled, and be made manifest unto them.

We perceive none, however, amongst the people of the earth who, sincerely yearning for the Truth, seeketh the guidance of the divine Manifestations concerning the abstruse matters of his Faith. (KI, p. 255)

In Seven Valleys and also in Persian Hidden Words Bahá'u'lláh informs His reader that the divine inspiration which flows from His pen will not be manifest indefinitely:

O My friend, listen with heart and soul to the songs of the spirit, and treasure them as thine own eyes. For the heavenly wisdoms, like the clouds of spring, will not rain down on the earth of men's hearts forever; and though the grace of the All-

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Bounteous One is never stilled and never ceasing, yet to each time and era a portion is allotted and a bounty set apart, this in a given measure. "And no on thing is there, but with Us are its storehouses; and We send it not down but in settled measure." [Qur'án 15:21] The cloud of the Loved One's mercy raineth only on the garden of the spirit, and bestoweth this bounty only in the season of spring. The other seasons have no share in this greatest grace, and barren lands no portion of this favor.

O Brother! Not every sea hath pearls; not every branch will flower, nor will the nightingale sing thereon. Then, ere the nightingale of the mystic paradise repair to the garden of God, and the rays of the heavenly morning return to the Sun of Truth--make thou an effort, that haply in this dustheap of the mortal world thou mayest catch a fragrance from the everlasting garden, and live forever in the shadow of the peoples of this city. And when thou hast attained this highest station and come to this mightiest plane, then shalt thou gaze on the Beloved, and forget all else. (SV:37-38)

These two paragraphs make allusion to the divine springtime in which Bahá'u'lláh is manifesting His prophethood. He calls Himself "the nightingale of the mystic paradise" and the "city" is the Valley of True Poverty and Absolute Nothingness, the seventh of the "Seven Valleys".

The time cometh, when the nightingale of holiness will no longer unfold the inner mysteries and ye will all be bereft of the celestial melody and of the voice from on high. (PHW:#15)

Here Bahá'u'lláh refers to Himself as "the nightingale of holiness" who not only reveals the "inner mysteries" but Who is the source of the "celestial melody" and the "voice from on high"--the Voice of God amongst men. We continue now with the passages in which Bahá'u'lláh clearly identifies the Manifestation of God as the source of divine knowledge and the true interpretation of the Word of God in every Age:

Had they sought with a humble mind from the Manifestations of God in every Dispensation the true meaning of these words revealed in the sacred books--words the misapprehension of which hath caused men to be deprived of the recognition of the Sadratu'l-Muntaha, the ultimate Purpose--they surely would have been guided to the light of the Sun of Truth, and would have discovered the mysteries of divine knowledge and wisdom. (KI:28)

The "Sadratu'l-Muntaha" and "Sun of Truth" are references to the new Manifestations of God Who appear in every Age.

Thus We instruct thee in the interpretation of the traditions, and reveal unto thee the mysteries of divine wisdom, that haply thou mayest comprehend the meaning thereof, and be of them that have quaffed the cup of divine knowledge and understanding. (KI:32-33)

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Bahá'u'lláh has the authority to instruct His reader in the interpretation of these symbolic verses, inasmuch as He is a Manifestation of God.

Consider now, had the people of the Gospel recognized the meaning of the symbolic terms 'sun' and 'moon,' had they sought, unlike the forward and perverse, enlightenment from Him Who is the Revealer of divine knowledge, they would surely have comprehended the purpose of these terms, and would not have become afflicted and oppressed by the darkness of their selfish desires. Yea, but since they have failed to acquire true knowledge from its very Source, they have perished in the perilous vale of waywardness and misbelief. They still have not awakened to perceive that all the signs foretold have been made manifest, that the promised Sun hath risen above the horizon of divine Revelation, and that the 'sun' and 'moon' of the teachings, the laws, and learning of a former Dispensation have darkened and set. (KI:41-42)

The "Revealer of divine knowledge" and "its very Source" as well as "the promised Sun" is the Manifestation of God.

From the sayings of those Masters of holy utterance, Who have expounded the meaning of true knowledge, the odour of these dark teachings, which have obscured the world, can in no wise be detected. (KI:69)

The "Masters of holy utterance" are the Manifestations of God.

Little perception is required to enable them to gather from the symbolic language of these two verses all that We have purposed to propound, and thus to attain, through the grace of the All-Merciful, the resplendent morn of certitude. Such are the strains of celestial melody which the immortal Bird of Heaven, warbling upon the Sadrih of Bahá, poureth out upon thee, that, by the permission of God, thou mayest tread the path of divine knowledge and wisdom. (KI:78)

The "Bird of Heaven" and "Sadrih of Bahá" (Tree of Splendour) are both references to Bahá'u'lláh and to His prophetic station and "divine knowledge and wisdom."

And yet they bear witness to this well-known tradition: "Verily Our Word is abstruse, bewilderingly abstruse." In another instance, it is said: "Our Cause is sorely trying, highly perplexing; none can bear it except a favorite of heaven, or an inspired Prophet, or he whose faith God hath tested." These leaders of religion admit that none of these three specified conditions is applicable to them. The first two conditions are manifestly beyond their reach; as to the third, it is evident that at no time have they been proof against those tests that have been sent by God, and that when the divine Touchstone appeared, they have shown themselves to be naught but dross. (KI:82-83)

Yea, inasmuch as the peoples of the world have failed to seek from the luminous and crystal Springs of divine knowledge the inner meaning of God's holy words, they

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therefore have languished, stricken and sore athirst, in the vale of idle fancy and waywardness. (KI:105)

The Manifestations of God are the "luminous and crystal Springs of divine knowledge".

As they understood not the significance of these noble sayings, nor sought enlightenment from the recognized expounders of the Faith, that these might confer a sprinkling of the Kawthar of divine knowledge upon them, therefore such fires of mischief were kindled amongst men. (KI:122)

"The "recognized expounders of the Faith" are, in this case, the twelve Imams. If they were the Manifestations of God, the Guardian would have capitalized "Expounders".

Inasmuch as these undiscerning and wretched souls have failed to apprehend the true meaning of "Resurrection" and of the "attainment unto the divine Presence," they therefore have remained utterly deprived of the grace thereof. Although the sole and fundamental purpose of all learning, and the toil and labour thereof, is attainment unto, and the recognition of, this station, yet they are all immersed in the pursuit of their material studies. They deny themselves every moment of leisure, and utterly ignore Him, Who is the Essence of all learning, and the one Object of their quest. Methinks, their lips have never touched the cup of divine Knowledge, nor do they seem to have attained even a dewdrop of the showers of heavenly grace. (KI:145)

The Manifestation of God is "Him, who is the Essence of all learning, and the one Object of their quest."

Those words uttered by the Luminaries of Truth must needs be pondered, and should their significance be not grasped, enlightenment should be sought from the Trustees of the depositories of Knowledge, that these may expound their meaning, and unravel their mystery. For it behooveth no man to interpret the holy words according to his own imperfect understanding, nor, having found them to be contrary to his inclination and desires, to reject and repudiate the truth. For such, today, is the manner of the divines and doctors of the age, who occupy the seats of knowledge and learning, and who have named ignorance knowledge, and called oppression justice. Were these to ask the Light of Truth concerning those images which their idle fancy hath carved, and were they to find His answer inconsistent with their own conceptions and their own understanding of the Book, they would assuredly denounce Him Who is the Mine and Wellhead of all Knowledge as the very negation of understanding. Such things have happened in every age. (KI:181-182)

The "Luminaries of Truth" and "Trustees of the depositories of Knowledge" as well as the "Light of Truth" and "Him Who is the Mine and Wellhead of all Knowledge" are all references to the Manifestation of God.

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Should a touchstone be found, however, it would instantly distinguish truth from falsehood, light from darkness, and sun from shadow. (KI:189)

The "touchstone" is defined in earlier-cited passages as the Word of God, and, in particular, the symbolic verses of the Word.

Would that this unlearned and humble Servant, who never laid any pretension to such things, nor even regarded them as the criterion of true knowledge, might undertake the same task, that thereby the truth might be known and distinguished from falsehood. But of what avail! All this generation could offer Us were wounds from its darts, and the only cup it proffered to Our lips was the cup of its venom. On Our neck We still bear the scar of chains, and upon Our body are imprinted the evidences of an unyielding cruelty. (KI:189-190)

O my brother! A divine Mine only can yield the gems of divine knowledge, and the fragrance of the mystic Flower can be inhaled only in the ideal Garden, and the lilies of ancient wisdom can blossom nowhere except in the city of a stainless heart. "In a rich soil, its plants spring forth abundantly by permission of its Lord, and in that soil which is bad, they spring forth but scantily." [Qur'án 7:57] Inasmuch as it hath been clearly shown that only those who are initiated into the divine mysteries can comprehend the melodies uttered by the Bird of Heaven, it is therefore incumbent upon every one to seek enlightenment from the illumined in heart and from the Treasuries of divine mysteries regarding the intricacies of God's Faith and the abstruse allusions in the utterances of the Daysprings of Holiness. Thus will these mysteries be unravelled, not by the aid of acquired learning, but solely through the assistance of God and the outpourings of His grace. "Ask ye, therefore, of them that have the custody of the Scriptures, if ye know it not." [Qur'án 16:43] (KI:191-192)

The Manifestation of God is a "divine Mine", "the mystic Flower", "the Bird of Heaven", the "Treasuries of divine mysteries" and "Daysprings of Holiness." Bahá'u'lláh indicates that the knowledge of the Manifestations of God is not "acquired learning" and that it is attained "through the assistance of God and the outpourings of His grace."

To this testimony we both, as well as all the peoples of the world must cling, that through its light we may know and distinguish between truth and falsehood, guidance and error. Inasmuch as Muhammad hath confined His testimonies to His Book and to His Family, and whereas the latter hath passed away, there remaineth His Book only as His one testimony amongst the people. (KI:202)

In this passage, Bahá'u'lláh asserts that after the passing of the Manifestation of God, it is His Book and His appointed successors which remain as the divine standard of knowledge and wisdom. And upon the passing of His successors, there remains the Book. He reiterates this point in Kitáb-i-Aqdas:

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Should differences arise amongst you over any matter, refer it to God while the Sun still shineth above the horizon of this Heaven and, when it hath set, refer ye to whatsoever hath been sent down by Him. This, verily, is sufficient unto the peoples of the world. (K53)

During His lifetime, all differences among believers must be referred to the Manifestation of God, to Bahá'u'lláh Himself. After His passing, they must be referred to His Book. And in His Book, He has indicated that whatever His followers do not understand in the Book must be referred to His appointed successor:

When the ocean of My presence hath ebbed and the Book of My Revelation is ended, turn your faces toward Him Whom God hath purposed, Who hath branched from this Ancient Root. (K121)

When the Mystic Dove will have winged its flight from its Sanctuary of Praise and sought its far-off goal, its hidden habitation, refer ye whatsoever ye understand not in the Book to Him Who hath branched from this mighty Stock. (K174)

The capacity of the Manifestation to explain the inner meanings of the symbolic verses of Scripture is limitless:

Were We to expound its inner meanings and unfold its hidden mysteries, eternity would never suffice to exhaust their import, nor would the universe be capable of hearing them! God verily testifieth to the truth of Our saying! (KI:204)

Even as thou dost witness how the people of the Qur'án, like unto the people of old, have allowed the words "Seal of the Prophets" to veil their eyes. And yet, they themselves testify to this verse: "None knoweth the interpretation thereof but God and they that are well-grounded in knowledge." [Qur'án 3:7] And when He Who is well-grounded in all knowledge, Who is the Mother, the Soul, the Secret, and the Essence thereof, revealeth that which is the least contrary to their desire, they bitterly oppose Him and shamelessly deny Him. (KI:213)

The Manifestation of God, in this case the Báb, is "He Who is well-grounded in all knowledge, Who is the Mother, the Soul, the Secret, and the Essence thereof".

For whatsoever hath come to pass, hath been prophesied by them who are the Mines of divine knowledge, and Recipients of God's eternal law. (KI:237)

The Manifestations are the "Mines of divine knowledge, and Recipients of God's eternal law."

We entreat the learned men of the Bayán not to follow in such ways, not to inflict, at the time of Mustaghath, upon Him Who is the divine Essence, the heavenly Light, the Absolute Eternity, the Beginning and the End of the Manifestations of the

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Invisible, that which hath been inflicted in this day. We beg them not to depend upon their intellect, their comprehension and learning, nor to contend with the Revealer of celestial and infinite knowledge. (KI:248)

In the Persian Bayán of the Báb, He states that His successor, "Him Whom God shall make manifest" will appear before the time of "Mustaghath". This word, being rendered into numbers through gematria (called abjad, hurufat and jafar in Arabic) comes to 2001. Hence, "Him Who is the divine Essence, the heavenly Light, the Absolute Eternity, the Beginning and the End of the Manifestations of the Invisible" and the "Revealer of celestial and infinite knowledge" is non other than "Him Whom God shall make manifest"--the Promised One of the Báb.

None apprehendeth the meaning of these utterances except them whose hearts are assured, whose souls have found favour with God, and whose minds are detached from all else but Him. In such utterances, the literal meaning, as generally understood by the people, is not what hath been intended. Thus it is recorded: 'Every knowledge hath seventy meanings, of which one only is known amongst the people [the literal one]. And when the Qa'im shall arise, He shall reveal unto men all that which remaineth [all of the symbolic meanings].' He also saith: 'We speak one word, and by it we intend one and seventy meanings; each one of these meanings we can explain.' (KI:255)

While the first portion of this citation is familiar to us, as it refers to the spiritual requirements of those who aspire to understand the symbolic verses, the second portion refers to the divine knowledge of the Manifestations of God. Only the Manifestations are capable of explaining these esoteric meanings. The first quotation cited by Bahá'u'lláh refers to the Qa'im, and He is the first Promised One of Islam, and a Manifestation of God according to Bahá'u'lláh. The second quotation is voiced by Muhammad, and as such refers to the capacity of the Manifestations to explain the myriad inner meanings of the symbolic verses of Scripture.

The people, therefore, must not allow such utterances to deprive them of the divine bounties, but should rather seek enlightenment from them who are the recognized Expounders thereof, so that the hidden mysteries may be unravelled, and be made manifest unto them. We perceive none, however, amongst the people of the earth who, sincerely yearning for the Truth, seeketh the guidance of the divine Manifestations concerning the abstruse matters of his Faith. All are dwellers in the land of oblivion, and all are followers of the people of wickedness and rebellion. God will verily do unto them that which they themselves are doing, and will forget them even as they have ignored His Presence in His day. (KI:256)

The "recognized Expounders" are the "divine Manifestations".

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Know assuredly that just as thou firmly believest that the Word of God, exalted be His glory, endureth for ever, thou must, likewise, believe with undoubting faith that its meaning can never be exhausted. They who are its appointed interpreters, they whose hearts are the repositories of its secrets, are, however, the only ones who can comprehend its manifold wisdom. (GL:LXXXIX:176)

In this passage from "Tafsir Súrat va'l-Shams" Bahá'u'lláh affirms that true interpretation of the symbolic language of Scripture can only be effected by those "who are its appointed interpreters". Inasmuch as the Guardian has not capitalized "interpreters" it seems to refer to the chosen ones of the Manifestations of God, the twelve Imams in the Dispensation of Muhammad, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi in the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh.

To conclude, the divine knowledge of the Manifestation of God is wholly independent of the approval of humanity. He delivers His message, and each human being is free to accept or reject that message, and neither its acceptance nor its rejection can deter the Manifestation from saying and doing what He is sent by God to say and do:

This is My counsel unto thee and unto the beloved of God. Whosoever wisheth, let him turn thereunto; and whosoever wisheth, let him turn away. God, verily, is independent of him and of that which he may see and witness. (KI:24)

We have shown thee these two ways; walk thou the way thou chooseth. This verily is the truth, and after truth there remaineth naught but error. (KI:221)

Thus doth the Nightingale utter His call unto you from this prison. He hath but to deliver this clear message. Whosoever desireth, let him turn aside from this counsel and whosoever desireth let him choose the path to his Lord. (Tablet of Ahmad, BP:210-211)

This Wronged One calleth aloud for the sake of God. Whosoever wisheth, let him turn thereunto; whosoever wisheth, let him turn away. Verily God can well afford to dispense with all things, whether of the past or of the future. (Tarazát, TB:41)

We exhort, wholly for the sake of God, His servants. Let him who wisheth turn unto Him, and him who wisheth turn aside. Our Lord, the Merciful, is verily the All-Sufficing, the All-Praised. (Lawh-i-Burhan, TB:211)

Truly this Wronged One desireth not to demonstrate His Own Cause with proofs produced by others. He is the One Who embraceth all things, while all else besides Him is circumscribed. Say, O people, peruse that which is current amongst you and We will peruse what pertaineth unto Us. I swear by God! Neither the praise of the peoples of the world, nor the things that the kindreds of the earth possess are worthy of mention before the remembrance of His Name. Unto this beareth witness He Who under all conditions proclaimeth, 'Verily He is God, the sovereign Ruler of the

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Day of Reckoning and the Lord of the Mighty Throne.' (Kalímát-i-Firdawsiiyyih, TB:74)

Who can ever believe that this Servant of God hath at any time cherished in His heart a desire for any earthly honor or benefit? The Cause associated with His Name is far above the transitory things of this world. Behold Him, an exile, a victim of tyranny, in this Most Great Prison. His enemies have assailed Him on every side, and will continue to do so till the end of His life. Whatever, therefore, He saith unto you is wholly for the sake of God, that haply the peoples of the earth may cleanse their hearts from the stain of evil desire, may rend it s veil asunder, and attain unto the knowledge of the one true God--the most exalted station to which any man can aspire. Their belief or misbelief in My Cause can neither profit nor harm Me. We summon them wholly for the sake of God. He, verily, can afford to dispense with all creatures. (GL:XXXV:85)

We exhort, wholly for the sake of God, His servants. Let him who wisheth turn unto Him, and him who wisheth turn aside. (Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 97)

Let him who wisheth turn thereunto, and let him who wisheth turn aside. (Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, pp. 110-111)

Not only is the Manifestation of God independent of the approval of humanity, but He exhorts His followers to be independent as well:

If your hearer respond, he will have responded to his own behoof, and if not, turn ye away from him, and set your faces towards God's sacred Court, the seat of resplendent holiness. (SURat al-BayAn, GL:CXXVII:279)

He would object within himself, voice protests, and would be among the rebellious. Such is the state of this people. Leave them unto themselves, saying: Unto you be that which ye desire and unto us that which we desire. Wretched indeed is the plight of the ungodly. (Suriy-i-Vafa, TB:186)

As general characterization of the Bahá'í approach, we might conceptualize the process of attainment to divine knowledge as composed of two sets of polarities. In the "Lawh-i-Hikmat" (Tablet of Wisdom) Bahá'u'lláh writes:

The world of existence came into being through the heat generated from the interaction between the active force and that which is its recipient. These two are the same, yet they are different. Thus doth the Great Announcement inform thee about this glorious structure. Such as communicate the generating influence as such as receive its impact are indeed created through the irresistible Word of God which is the Cause of the entire creation, while all else besides His Word are but the creatures and effects thereof. (TB:140)

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Based upon this paradigm, we might see the Manifestation of God and His Revelation as the "active force" and the "generating influence" and "Cause" and the human heart as the "recipient", "such as receive" the "impact" of the "active force", and the "creature" and effect of the "Word". The heart is in receptive mode, hence the need for it to be purified, emptied, readied to receive. The Manifestation of God is in active mode, hence the need for Him to speak and to write and to impress upon the hearts His teachings and spiritual motivation for their realization, the Kingdom of God on earth. This would represent one set of polarities. In order to become pure, the heart must be purified, and this requires an "active force" and the application of that force upon the heart. In order for the Manifestation of God to generate influence, He must receive truth from God, that is, His heart must be receptive to the truths revealed to Him. Hence, in the second set of polarities, the heart is "active" and the Manifestation of God is "receptive". These two polarities seem to represent the ideal relationship between the human heart and the Manifestation of God. The actual relationship may not represent true polarity, and inasmuch as it is the polarity which generates the "magnetic field", the attraction which binds the heart and the Manifestation together, imperfect polarity may result in the estrangement of the heart from the Manifestation. This represents a fundamental disequilibrium in the nature of things, and it is this lack of authentic relationship and consequent disharmony which is found in the fragmentation of the individual personality and of the community at all levels. On the other hand, God has so designed the universe that human hearts are granted freedom of choice. Hence, what appears to be dis-equilibrium and disharmony actually embodies a higher and more inclusive equilibrium and harmony which is inherent in the very structure of reality. Regardless of how the heart with free will chooses to act, that choice is in harmony with the spiritual law which permits free will to exist. The higher level equilibrium and harmony which represent the potential and, in the course of progressive evolution, the future of humanity, requires that these two polarities be balanced and functioning in an organic relationship.

III. The Study of Philosophy

The study of philosophy has been identified (#17) in the first essay as one of the specific objectives of Bahá'í scholarship. In order to elucidate the meaning intended by this reference to philosophy, we will begin with a definition of terms as they are used in the Bahá'í source texts. 'Abdu'l-Bahá defines philosophy in Some Answered Questions:

Philosophy consists in comprehending the reality of things as they exist, according to the capacity and the power of man. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, Chapter 59, p. 221)

And He reiterates that definition in one of His talks:

Philosophy develops the mind. Christ and the Word of God are revealed through the Spirit. Plato says, "The mental conclusions are so and so." Christ says, "Be led of the Spirit." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 212)

In one of His Tablets to an American believer He writes:

In the Tablets of His Holiness BAHÁ'ULLAH, there are many philosophic questions. For example, the Tablet of Wisdom, but it has not yet been translated. It may be found that his honor Fazel Mazindarani gave this Tablet to a Persian expert to translate into English. In His Tablets He has encouraged and rather urged (the people) to study philosophy. Therefore, in the religion of BAHÁ'ULLAH philosophy is highly esteemed.

"As to life, however, it has had no beginning, nor will it have any end. The eternal grace of God has always been the cause of life. It has had no starting point and it will not approach any end. But concerning the degrees through which the soul has gone, these degrees are spiritual. Consider all the advancement of the word of humanity which is at present manifest and known. This has been realized through the spirit. The manifestation of the will of the Omnipotent, in the universe, means the manifestation of the divine laws and disciplines which are essential to the realities of beings, and in the world of the Kingdom they are ideals which in the appearance of the holy Manifestations (of God) are realized.

The fruits of the deeds of man, i.e. the harvest of the reward of man's conduct, is gathered in the heavenly realm.

But as to evolution, it is true of both the body and the spirit. Consider how many sciences, arts, discoveries and achievements have come into existence since the days of Moses till the present time through the progress of the human soul in knowledge and perfections. Similarly, how much the soul has evolved from the moral point of view. From the material standpoint, you can see also how much civilization has progressed. (Tablet addressed to Mr. Alwyn J. Baker, Berkeley, California, translated December 2, 1920, by Aziz'ullah Bahádur; published in SW, Vol. 12, p. 194)

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In His Tablets He has encouraged and rather urged (the people) to study philosophy. Therefore, in the religion of BAHÁ'ULLAH philosophy is highly esteemed. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, in a Tablet translated by Aziz 'Ullah S. Bahádur, Mount Carmel, Palestine, December 2, 1920; in SW, Vol. 12, p. 194)

'Abdu'l-Bahá recommends that all be educated in philosophy:

Among other teachings and principles Bahá'u'lláh counsels the education of all members of society. No individual should be denied or deprived of intellectual training, although each should receive according to capacity. None must be left in the grades of ignorance, for ignorance is a defect in the human world. All mankind must be given a knowledge of science and philosophy—that is, as much as may be deemed necessary. All cannot be scientists and philosophers, but each should be educated according to his needs and deserts. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, 108)

Shoghi Effendi reiterated that point in one of the letters written by his secretary on his behalf:

It is hoped that all the Bahá'í students will ... be led to investigate and analyze the principles of the Faith and to correlate them with the modern aspects of philosophy and science. Every intelligent and thoughtful young Bahá'í should always approach the Cause in this way, for therein lies the very essence of the principle of independent investigation of truth. (6 August 1933, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer; published in many compilations of scholarship and in 1997 Aug 13, Letter on Science and Religion, p. 2)

Philosophy, as you will study it and later teach it, is certainly not one of the sciences that begins and ends in words. Fruitless excursions into metaphysical hair-splitting is meant, not a sound branch of learning like philosophy...

As regards your own studies: he would advise you not to devote too much of your time to the abstract side of philosophy, but rather to approach it from a more historical angle. As to correlating philosophy with the Bahá'í teachings: this is a tremendous work which scholars in the future can undertake. We must remember that not only are all the teachings not yet translated into English, but they are not even all collected yet. Many important Tablets may still come to light which are at present owned privately. (From a letter dated 15 February 1947 written on behalf Guardian to an individual believer; in The Unfolding Destiny of the British Bahá'í Community, p. 445; and in Letters, 1999 Dec 13, Two Compilations on Scholarship - 1979 and 1983)

In the Tablet of Wisdom and other Writings, Bahá'u'lláh indicates that the origin of philosophy is not to be found in the Golden Age of the ancient Greeks, but in the Prophets of God:

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The sages aforetime acquired their knowledge from the Prophets, inasmuch as the latter were the Exponents of divine philosophy and the Revealers of heavenly mysteries. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Lawh-i-Hikmat*, TB, pp. 144-145)

The essence and the fundamentals of philosophy have emanated from the Prophets. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Lawh-i-Hikmat*, in TB, p. 145)

He reiterates an Islamic tradition, that the father of philosophy was Idris, called a prophet in the Qur'án (19:56-57). He identifies Idris with Hermes, considered the founder of philosophy in the Hermetic tradition:

'The first person who devoted himself to philosophy was Idris. Thus was he named. Some called him also Hermes. In every tongue he hath a special name. He it is who hath set forth in every branch of philosophy thorough and convincing statements. After him Balinus derived his knowledge and sciences from the Hermetic Tablets and most of the philosophers who followed him made their philosophical and scientific discoveries from his words and statements...' (Bahá'u'lláh, *Lawh al-Basit al-Haqiqah*; cited in TB, Note 1, p. 148)

...the theories put forward by the Father of Philosophy regarding the mysteries of creation as given in his chrysolite tablets... (Bahá'u'lláh, *Lawh-i-Hikmat*, in TB, p. 147)

While it may be surmised that in its origins, philosophy was integrated, inasmuch as the Father of Philosophy "set forth in every branch of philosophy thorough and convincing statements," philosophy was at some point differentiated into two branches. In some of His talks He refers to these two branches of the primordial philosophy as two kinds of philosophy:

Philosophy is of two kinds: natural and divine. Natural philosophy seeks knowledge of physical verities and explains material phenomena, whereas divine philosophy deals with ideal verities and phenomena of the spirit. The field and scope of natural philosophy have been greatly enlarged, and its accomplishments are most praiseworthy, for it has served humanity. But according to the evidence of present world conditions divine philosophy—which has for its object the sublimation of human nature, spiritual advancement, heavenly guidance for the development of the human race, attainment to the breaths of the Holy Spirit and knowledge of the verities of God—has been outdistanced and neglected. Now is the time for us to make an effort and enable it to advance apace with the philosophy of material investigation so that awakening of the ideal virtues may progress equally with the unfoldment of the natural powers. In the same proportion that the body of man is developing, the spirit of man must be strengthened; and just as his outer perceptions have been quickened, his inner intellectual powers must be sensitized so that he need not rely wholly upon tradition and human precedent. In divine questions we must not depend entirely upon the heritage of tradition and former human experience; nay, rather, we must exercise reason, analyze and logically examine the facts presented so that confidence will be inspired and faith attained. Then and then only the reality of things will be revealed to us. The philosophers of Greece—such as

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Aristotle, Socrates, Plato and others—were devoted to the investigation of both natural and spiritual phenomena. In their schools of teaching they discoursed upon the world of nature as well as the supernatural world. Today the philosophy and logic of Aristotle are known throughout the world. Because they were interested in both natural and divine philosophy, furthering the development of the physical world of mankind as well as the intellectual, they rendered praiseworthy service to humanity. This was the reason of the triumph and survival of their teachings and principles. Man should continue both these lines of research and investigation so that all the human virtues, outer and inner, may become possible. The attainment of these virtues, both material and ideal, is conditioned upon intelligent investigation of reality, by which investigation the sublimity of man and his intellectual progress is accomplished. Forms must be set aside and renounced; reality must be sought. We must discover for ourselves where and what reality is. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, address given in a private home on 20 September 1912; The Promulgation of Universal Peace, pp. 326-327)

This endowment is the most praiseworthy power of man, for through its employment and exercise the betterment of the human race is accomplished, the development of the virtues of mankind is made possible and the spirit and mysteries of God become manifest. Therefore, I am greatly pleased with my visit to this university. Praise be to God that this country abounds in such institutions of learning where the knowledge of sciences and arts may readily be acquired.

As material and physical sciences are taught here and are constantly unfolding in wider vistas of attainment, I am hopeful that spiritual development may also follow and keep pace with these outer advantages. As material knowledge is illuminating those within the walls of this great temple of learning, so also may the light of the spirit, the inner and divine light of the real philosophy glorify this institution. The most important principle of divine philosophy is the oneness of the world of humanity, the unity of mankind, the bond conjoining East and West, the tie of love which blends human hearts. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, address given at Columbia University on 19 April 1912; in The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 31; Foundations of World Unity, p. 45)

In another talk, He refers to the two kinds of philosophy as two kinds of sciences:

Scientific knowledge is the highest attainment upon the human plane, for science is the discoverer of realities. It is of two kinds: material and spiritual. Material science is the investigation of natural phenomena; divine science is the discovery and realization of spiritual verities. The world of humanity must acquire both. A bird has two wings; it cannot fly with one. Material and spiritual science are the two wings of human uplift and attainment. Both are necessary--one the natural, the other supernatural; one material, the other divine. By the divine we mean the discovery of the mysteries of God, the comprehension of spiritual realities, the wisdom of God, inner significances of the heavenly religions and foundation of the law. (Talk at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Francis W. Breed, Cambridge, Massachusetts, on 23 May 1912; in PUP:138)

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Bahá'u'lláh taught that in all schools and colleges sciences, both divine and material, should be taught, in order that the students may discover material realities and the realities of the Kingdom, for material realities and sciences are as the body and divine sciences are as the spirit. The body must live by the spirit. If the spirit does not exist the body then is dead. Though the body be in utmost beauty, yet, if deprived of the outpourings of the spirit, it will be fruitless and of benefit to no one, nay, rather its non-existence were better than its existence. ("Two Kinds of Education," address of 'Abdu'l-Bahá at Unitarian Church, Dublin, New Hampshire, United States, 11 August 1912, published in SW:XIV:2, (May 1923), p. 44)

Some philosophers have devoted themselves to both kinds of philosophy, the material and the divine:

The philosophers of Greece -- such as Aristotle, Socrates, Plato and others -- were devoted to the investigation of both natural and spiritual phenomena. In their schools of teaching they discoursed upon the world of nature as well as the supernatural world. Today the philosophy and logic of Aristotle are known throughout the world. Because they were interested in both natural and divine philosophy, furthering the development of the physical world of mankind as well as the intellectual, they rendered praiseworthy service to humanity. This was the reason of the triumph and survival of their teachings and principles. Man should continue both these lines of research and investigation so that all the human virtues, outer and inner, may become possible. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 327)

He points out that some philosophers, notably some amongst the ancient Greeks, and many in the modern West, are materialists, and deny the existence of the spiritual:

The people of the world are divided into two classes. One class is the materialistic philosophers who deny the spirit and its immortality. The second class comprises the divine philosophers the wise men of God, the wise illuminati. They believe in the spirit and its immortality. Some of the Greek philosophers declared man to consist of simply the material elements. These material elements compose the cellular elements of the human organism, and when this composition is subjected to disintegration, the life of man becomes extinct. They taught that other than the body there is no spirit. It is body and body only. From these elements these human emanations have come. To them the eye and the ear are due; by them the sense of taste, smell and touch are caused; and when these element are decomposed, these senses are likewise decomposed. This is the statement of the materialistic philosophers.

But the philosophers of God say, No! the spirit does exist; the spirit is living and eternal. Because of the objections of the materialistic philosophers, therefore, the wise men of God have advanced rational proofs in regard to the validity of the spirit. The materialistic philosophers do not believe in the books of God, and, hence, for them traditional proofs are no evidence; materialistic proofs are necessary. Consequently, the philosophizers and wise men of God have said that it is firmly established that existing phenomena may be resolved into grades; that is to say, the

mineral, vegetable or animal kingdoms. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Talk at the Theosophical Society, Boston, on July 24, 1912; in SW IV:7, pp. 115-117; VII:7, pp. 85-86)

The philosophers of the world are divided into two classes: materialists, who deny the spirit and its immortality, and the divine philosophers, the wise men of God, the true illuminati who believe in the spirit and its continuance hereafter. The ancient philosophers taught that man consists simply of the material elements which compose his cellular structure and that when this composition is disintegrated the life of man becomes extinct. They reasoned that man is body only, and from this elemental composition the organs and their functions, the senses, powers and attributes which characterize man have proceeded, and that these disappear completely with the physical body. This is practically the statement of all the materialists.

The divine philosophers proclaim that the spirit of man is ever-living and eternal, and because of the objections of the materialists, these wise men of God have advanced rational proofs to support the validity of their statement. Inasmuch as the materialistic philosophers deny the Books of God, scriptural demonstration is not evidence to them, and materialistic proofs are necessary. Answering them, the men of divine knowledge have said that all existing phenomena may be resolved into grades or kingdoms, classified progressively as mineral, vegetable, animal and human... ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Talk at the Theosophical Society, Boston, on July 24, 1912; in edited version, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 239)

In schools and temples of learning knowledge of the sciences acquired is based upon material observations only; there is no realization of Divinity in their methods and conclusions -- all have reference to the world of matter. They are not interested in attaining knowledge of the mysteries of God or understanding the secrets of the heavenly Kingdom; what they acquire is based altogether upon visible and tangible evidences. Beyond these evidences they are without susceptibilities; they have no idea of the world of inner significances and are utterly out of touch with God, considering this an indication of reasonable attitude and philosophical judgment whereof they are self-sufficient and proud.

As a matter of fact, this supposed excellence is possessed in its superlative degree by the animals. The animals are without knowledge of God; so to speak, they are deniers of Divinity and understand nothing of the Kingdom and its heavenly mysteries. As deniers of the Kingdom, they are utterly ignorant of spiritual things and uninformed of the supernatural world. Therefore, if it be a perfection and virtue to be without knowledge of God and His Kingdom, the animals have attained the highest degree of excellence and proficiency. Then the donkey is the greatest scientist and the cow an accomplished naturalist, for they have obtained what they know without schooling and years of laborious study in colleges, trusting implicitly to the evidence of the senses and relying solely upon intuitive virtues. The cow, for instance, is a lover of the visible and a believer in the tangible, contented and happy when pasture is plenty, perfectly serene, a blissful exponent of the transcendental school of philosophy. Such is the status of the material philosophers, who glory in sharing the condition of the cow, imagining themselves in a lofty station. Reflect upon their ignorance and blindness. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, pp. 261-262)

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All the animals are materialists. They are deniers of God and without realization of a transcendent power in the universe. They have no knowledge of the divine Prophets and Holy Books -- mere captives of nature and the sense world. In reality they are like the great philosophers of this day who are not in touch with God and the Holy Spirit -- deniers of the Prophets, ignorant of spiritual susceptibilities, deprived of the heavenly bounties and without belief in the supernatural power. The animal lives this kind of life blissfully and untroubled, whereas the material philosophers labor and study for ten or twenty years in schools and colleges, denying God, the Holy Spirit and divine inspirations. The animal is even a greater philosopher, for it attains the ability to do this without labor and study. For instance, the cow denies God and the Holy Spirit, knows nothing of divine inspirations, heavenly bounties or spiritual emotions and is a stranger to the world of hearts. Like the philosophers, the cow is a captive of nature and knows nothing beyond the range of the senses. The philosophers, however, glory in this, saying, "We are not captives of superstitions; we have implicit faith in the impressions of the senses and know nothing beyond the realm of nature, which contains and covers everything." But the cow, without study or proficiency in the sciences, modestly and quietly views life from the same standpoint, living in harmony with nature's laws in the utmost dignity and nobility. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, pp. 311-312)

Therefore, I have thought it expedient to discourse upon the subject of philosophy, which is alike interesting to the East and the West, enabling us to consider the analogies and differences between the philosophical teachings of the Orient and Occident.

The criterion of judgment in the estimation of western philosophers is sense perception. They consider that which is tangible or perceptible to the senses to be a reality—that there is no doubt of its existence. For example, we prove the existence of this light through the sense of sight; we visualize this room; we see the sun, the green fields; we use our sense of sight to observe them. The opinion of these philosophers is that such perception is reality, that the senses are the highest standard of perception and judgment, in which there can neither be doubt nor uncertainty. In the estimation of the philosophers of the Orient, especially those of Greece and Persia, the standard of judgment is the intellect. They are of the opinion that the criterion of the senses is defective, and their proof is that the senses are often deceived and mistaken. That which is liable to mistake cannot be infallible, cannot be a true standard of judgment... ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, pp. 355-356)

He compares the approach of the Western materialist with that of the “philosophers of the Orient” to the question of evolution, first summing up the Western philosophical view and then turning to the Eastern philosophy:

These statements and demonstrations express the substance of western philosophy upon the question of human evolution.

The philosophers of the Orient in reply to those of the western world say... ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 358)

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These two philosophies, the Western and the Eastern, represent two criteria of human judgment, namely empiricism and reason. In other talks and Tablets, which will be discussed in my talk on Bahá'í Epistemology, three other criteria are described and compared with these two. Mirza Mahmud Zarqani was present at this talk, before the Open Forum in San Francisco and he describes the event as follows:

Another meeting was held at the Open Forum in San Francisco. Although the audience was composed mostly of philosophers and professors, they were all humbled by the talk. The Master's profound words contrasted the philosophy of the East with that of the West, elucidated the power beyond nature and explained the inherent distinction between mankind and other creatures. He concluded with the assertion that if philosophers believed that the highest perfection was not to believe in abstract and spiritual truth, it would be preferable to go to the cow, who, without any formal training, already had this attribute. When the Master uttered these words, everyone burst into laughter. This kind of humor, delivered in such a light-hearted manner, is popular and accepted by the Americans and so brought smiles and joy to the audience. At the conclusion of the Master's talk, when a philosopher stood up, several were heard to say to one another that the cow takes the lead in not believing in intellectual thought.

[http://Baháí-library.com/?file=zarqani_mahmuds_diary.html&chapter=8]

In this talk He critiqued the Western reliance upon the senses, that is upon empirical standards for advancing human knowledge and development. In another talk He referred to the same principle:

In these days there are new schools of philosophy blindly claiming that the world of nature is perfect. If this is true, why are children trained and educated in schools, and what is the need of extended courses in sciences, arts and letters in colleges and universities? What would be the result if humanity were left in its natural condition without education or training? (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 309)

That the forces of irreligion, of a purely materialistic philosophy, of unconcealed paganism have been unloosed, are now spreading, and, by consolidating themselves, are beginning to invade some of the most powerful Christian institutions of the western world, no unbiased observer can fail to admit. (From a letter written by the Guardian and dated 11 March 1936 to the Bahá'ís of the West, published in The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters, pp. 180-81)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá praised the benefits accruing from the development of science and philosophy, but also critiqued the development of one wing of philosophy to the neglect of the other wing:

No matter how far the material world advances, it cannot establish the happiness of mankind. Only when material and spiritual civilization are linked and coordinated will happiness be assured. Then material civilization will not contribute its energies

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to the forces of evil in destroying the oneness of humanity, for in material civilization good and evil advance together and maintain the same pace. For example, consider the material progress of man in the last decade. Schools and colleges, hospitals, philanthropic institutions, scientific academies and temples of philosophy have been founded, but hand in hand with these evidences of development, the invention and production of means and weapons for human destruction have correspondingly increased. In early days the weapon of war was the sword; now it is the magazine rifle. Among the ancients, men fought with javelins and daggers; now they employ shells and bombs. Dreadnoughts are built, torpedoes invented, and every few days new ammunition is forthcoming. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 109)

The teacher of material principles is limited. The philosophers who claimed to be the educators of mankind were at most only able to train themselves. If they educated others, it was within a restricted circle; they failed to bestow general education and development. This has been conferred upon humanity by the power of the Holy Spirit.

For example, Christ educated and developed mankind universally. He rescued nations and peoples from the bondage of superstition and idolatry. He summoned them all to the knowledge of the oneness of God. They were dark, they became illumined; they were material, they became spiritual; earthly they were, they became heavenly. He enlightened the world of morality. This general, universal development is not possible through the power of philosophy. It is only attainable through the pervading influence of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, no matter how far the world of humanity advances, it fails to attain the highest degree unless quickened by the education and divine bestowals of the Holy Spirit. This ensures human progress and prosperity. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, pp. 205-206)

It is my hope that you may be the means of changing this wild jungle of materialism into a fruitful orchard, this thorny thicket into a rose garden. May Europe become the divine university wherein heavenly sciences and divine arts are taught and learned! By heavenly sciences I mean divine philosophy and spiritual teachings; by the songs and fragrances of the rose garden I mean the mysteries of the kingdom of kingdoms, the secrets of the degrees of existence and the knowledge of the results of human life. This universe is not created through the fortuitous concurrences of atoms; it is created by a great law which decrees that the tree bring forth certain definite fruit. Verily, this universe contains many worlds of which we know nothing. Is the materialistic philosophy of this Europe, so much praised by contemporary agnostics and atheists, a philosophy to be admired? Are these people wooers of the spirit? Nay, they have drowned that capacity and are out of touch with the kingdom of reality. Is this an enviable goal to which humanity may aspire? Is this a system of philosophy through which people may become glorified? No, by God, the philosophy of glory needs no scholastic curriculum. Strive so that these people may be released from their nature worship and become like sons of wisdom from the city of light. We speak one word and by it we intend one and seventy meanings. (BAHÁ'O'LLAH IN THE IGHAN) ('Abdu'l-Bahá on Divine Philosophy, pp. 139-141)

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I have cited a number of passages which refer to divine sciences, spiritual sciences and divine philosophy. But what do these terms mean? The material sciences and material philosophies are well known to us, but we don't know how to identify the other wing. 'Abdu'l-Bahá helps us by describing divine philosophy in some of His talks:

Some one has asked this question, "What are the proofs through which one can establish the existence of God?"

Humanity is divided into two classes:—one is satisfied with the knowledge of divinity through its attributes and the other strives to understand the mysteries of divinity and be informed of the fundamental principles of divine philosophy. I will speak to you of the scientific proofs which establish the existence of God and I will not quote the scriptural proofs from the Old and New Testaments, or the Koran, with which you are more or less familiar. (Abdu'l-Bahá on Divine Philosophy, pp. 103-104)

Material virtues have attained great development, but ideal virtues have been left far behind. If you should ask a thousand persons, "What are the proofs of the reality of Divinity?" perhaps not one would be able to answer. If you should ask further, "What proofs have you regarding the essence of God?" "How do you explain inspiration and revelation?" "What are the evidences of conscious intelligence beyond the material universe?" "Can you suggest a plan and method for the betterment of human moralities?" "Can you clearly define and differentiate the world of nature and the world of Divinity?"—you would receive very little real knowledge and enlightenment upon these questions. This is due to the fact that development of the ideal virtues has been neglected. People speak of Divinity, but the ideas and beliefs they have of Divinity are, in reality, superstition. Divinity is the effulgence of the Sun of Reality, the manifestation of spiritual virtues and ideal powers. The intellectual proofs of Divinity are based upon observation and evidence which constitute decisive argument, logically proving the reality of Divinity, the effulgence of mercy, the certainty of inspiration and immortality of the spirit. This is, in reality, the science of Divinity. Divinity is not what is set forth in dogmas and sermons of the church. Ordinarily when the word Divinity is mentioned, it is associated in the minds of the hearers with certain formulas and doctrines, whereas it essentially means the wisdom and knowledge of God, the effulgence of the Sun of Truth, the revelation of reality and divine philosophy. (Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 326) But according to the evidence of present world conditions divine philosophy—which has for its object the sublimation of human nature, spiritual advancement, heavenly guidance for the development of the human race, attainment to the breaths of the Holy Spirit and knowledge of the verities of God—has been outdistanced and neglected. Now is the time for us to make an effort and enable it to advance apace with the philosophy of material investigation so that awakening of the ideal virtues may progress equally with the unfoldment of the natural powers. In the same proportion that the body of man is developing, the spirit of man must be strengthened; and just as his outer perceptions have been quickened, his inner intellectual powers must be sensitized so that he need not rely wholly upon tradition and human precedent. In divine questions we must not depend entirely upon the

heritage of tradition and former human experience; nay, rather, we must exercise reason, analyze and logically examine the facts presented so that confidence will be inspired and faith attained. Then and then only the reality of things will be revealed to us...The attainment of these virtues, both material and ideal, is conditioned upon intelligent investigation of reality, by which investigation the sublimity of man and his intellectual progress is accomplished. Forms must be set aside and renounced; reality must be sought. We must discover for ourselves where and what reality is. In religious beliefs nations and peoples today are imitators of ancestors and forefathers. If a man's father was a Christian, he himself is a Christian; a Buddhist is the son of a Buddhist, a Zoroastrian of a Zoroastrian. A gentile or an idolator follows the religious footsteps of his father and ancestry. This is absolute imitation. The requirement in this day is that man must independently and impartially investigate every form of reality...

The purport of our subject is that, just as man is in need of outward education, he is likewise in need of ideal refinement; just as the outer sense of sight is necessary to him, he should also possess insight and conscious perception; as he needs hearing, at the same time memory is essential; as a body is indispensable to him, likewise a mind is requisite; one is a material virtue, the other is ideal. As human creatures fitted and qualified with this dual endowment, we must endeavor through the assistance and grace of God and by the exercise of our ideal power of intellect to attain all lofty virtues, that we may witness the effulgence of the Sun of Reality, reflect the spirit of the Kingdom, behold the manifest evidences of the reality of Divinity, comprehend irrefutable proofs of the immortality of the soul, live in conscious at-one-ment with the eternal world and become quickened and awake with the life and love of God. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, pp. 326-327, 328)

While 'Abdu'l-Bahá honors the contributions of philosophers, He also sets forth the limitations of philosophy:

The influence of the wisest philosophers, without this Spirit Divine, has been comparatively unimportant, however extensive their learning and deep their scholarship.

The unusual intellects, for instance, of Plato, Aristotle, Pliny and Socrates, have not influenced men so greatly that they have been anxious to sacrifice their lives for their teachings; whilst some of those simple men so moved humanity that thousands of men have become willing martyrs to uphold their words; for these words were inspired by the Divine Spirit of God! The prophets of Judah and Israel, Elijah, Jeremiah, Isaiah and Ezekiel, were humble men, as were also the apostles of Jesus Christ. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 164)

The greatest philosophers without this Spirit are powerless, their souls lifeless, their hearts dead! Unless the Holy Spirit breathes into their souls, they can do no good work. No system of philosophy has ever been able to change the manners and customs of a people for the better. Learned philosophers, unenlightened by the Divine Spirit, have often been men of inferior morality; they have not proclaimed in their actions the reality of their beautiful phrases.

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The difference between spiritual philosophers and others is shown by their lives. The Spiritual Teacher shows His belief in His own teaching, by Himself being what He recommends to others. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 165)

The will of every sovereign prevaieth during his reign, the will of every philosopher findeth expression in a handful of disciples during his lifetime, but the Power of the Holy Spirit shineth radiantly in the realities of the Messengers of God, and strengtheneth Their will in such wise as to influence a great nation for thousands of years and to regenerate the human soul and revive mankind. Consider how great is this power! It is an extraordinary Power, an all-sufficient proof of the truth of the mission of the Prophets of God, and a conclusive evidence of the power of Divine Inspiration. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablet to August Forel, pp. 27-28)

In reality they are like the great philosophers of this day who are not in touch with God and the Holy Spirit—deniers of the Prophets, ignorant of spiritual susceptibilities, deprived of the heavenly bounties and without belief in the supernatural power. The animal lives this kind of life blissfully and untroubled, whereas the material philosophers labor and study for ten or twenty years in schools and colleges, denying God, the Holy Spirit and divine inspirations. The animal is even a greater philosopher, for it attains the ability to do this without labor and study. For instance, the cow denies God and the Holy Spirit, knows nothing of divine inspirations, heavenly bounties or spiritual emotions and is a stranger to the world of hearts. Like the philosophers, the cow is a captive of nature and knows nothing beyond the range of the senses. The philosophers, however, glory in this, saying, "We are not captives of superstitions; we have implicit faith in the impressions of the senses and know nothing beyond the realm of nature, which contains and covers everything." But the cow, without study or proficiency in the sciences, modestly and quietly views life from the same standpoint, living in harmony with nature's laws in the utmost dignity and nobility. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, pp. 311-312)

Teachers are of two kinds: universal and special. The universal Instructors are the Prophets of God, and the special teachers are the philosophers. The philosophers are capable of educating and training a limited circle of human souls, whereas the holy, divine Manifestations of God confer general education upon humanity. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, pp. 400-401)

The philosophers of old had the strongest resolve to improve human morals and strove to the utmost in this regard, but at most they succeeded in refining their own characters, not the virtues of all mankind. Refer to history and you will find that this is clear and evident. But the power of the Holy Spirit brings forth the universal virtues with which man is potentially endowed, illuminates the human world, bestows true exaltation, and trains all people. Thus, the well-wishers of the world must endeavor to attract by this attractive power the confirmations of the Holy Spirit. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Lawh-i-Tanazu'-i-Baqa; published in Khitabat, pp. 711-713; posted to: <http://Baháí-library.com/provisionals/tanazu.baqa.html> as translated by Keven Brown)

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...The Bible and the Gospel are most honored in the estimation of all the Baháís. One of the spiritual utterances of his holiness Christ in his sermon on the mount is to me preferable to all the writings of the philosophers. It is the religious duty of every Baháí to read and comprehend the meanings of the Old and New Testaments. (July 19, 1914, in *Diary of Mirza Ahmad Sohrab*; in SW VI:4, 27)

Bahá'u'lláh considers those philosophers who believe in God to be superior to those who do not:

Verily, the philosophers have not denied the Ancient of Days. Most of them passed away deploring their failure to fathom His mystery, even as some of them have testified. Verily, thy Lord is the Adviser, the All-Informed. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Lawh-i-Hikmat*, in TB, p. 145)

The majority of the truly wise and learned have, throughout the ages, as it hath been recorded by the Pen of Glory in the Tablet of Wisdom, borne witness to the truth of that which the holy Writ of God hath revealed. Even the materialists have testified in their writings to the wisdom of these divinely-appointed Messengers, and have regarded the references made by the Prophets to Paradise, to hell fire, to future reward and punishment, to have been actuated by a desire to educate and uplift the souls of men. (Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 157)

While 'Abdu'l-Bahá praises both kinds of philosophy, He favors the conclusions of the divine philosophers over those of the material philosophers:

Now concerning philosophers, they are of two schools. Thus Socrates the wise believed in the unity of God and the existence of the soul after death; as his opinion was contrary to that of the narrow-minded people of his time, that divine sage was poisoned by them. All divine philosophers and men of wisdom and understanding, when observing these endless beings, have considered that in this great and infinite universe all things end in the mineral kingdom, that the outcome of the mineral kingdom is the vegetable kingdom, the outcome of the vegetable kingdom is the animal kingdom and the outcome of the animal kingdom the world of man." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablet to August Forel, pp. 13-14)

...some of the philosophers of Europe think that one species evolves into another species. For example, that the animal evolved until it became a human being. But the prophets teach that this theory is unacceptable, as we have explained already in the book 'Some Answered Questions'. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, "Commentary on *Lawh-i-Hikmat*"; in Ma'idiy-i-Asmani, I, pp. 68-70; Amr va Khalq, Volume I, pp. 168-169; translated by Keven Brown; published in *Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 2:3 (1989-1990), p. 28)

The philosophers of the world are divided into two classes: materialists, who deny the spirit and its immortality, and the divine philosophers, the wise men of God, the true illuminati who believe in the spirit and its continuance hereafter...The divine philosophers proclaim that the spirit of man is ever-living and eternal, and because

of the objections of the materialists, these wise men of God have advanced rational proofs to support the validity of their statement. Inasmuch as the materialistic philosophers deny the Books of God, scriptural demonstration is not evidence to them, and materialistic proofs are necessary. Answering them, the men of divine knowledge have said that all existing phenomena may be resolved into grades or kingdoms, classified progressively as mineral, vegetable, animal and human, each of which possesses its degree of function and intelligence. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 240)

Consequently, the materialistic philosophers consider the criterion of the senses to be first and foremost.

But in the estimation of the divine philosophers this proof and assurance is not reliable; nay, rather, they deem the standard of the senses to be false because it is imperfect. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 253)

The materialists hold to the opinion that the world of nature is complete. The divine philosophers declare that the world of nature is incomplete. There is a wide difference between the two. The materialists call attention to the perfection of nature, the sun, moon and stars, the trees in their adornment, the whole earth and the sea—even unimportant phenomena revealing the most perfect symmetry. The divine philosophers deny this seeming perfection and completeness in nature's kingdom, even though admitting the beauty of its scenes and aspects and acknowledging the irresistible cosmic forces which control the colossal suns and planets. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 329)

The philosophers of the East consider the perfect criterion to be reason or intellect, and according to that standard the realities of all objects can be proved; for, they say, the standard of reason and intellect is perfect, and everything provable through reason is veritable. Therefore, those philosophers consider all philosophical deductions to be correct when weighed according to the standard of reason, and they state that the senses are the assistants and instruments of reason, and that although the investigation of realities may be conducted through the senses, the standard of knowing and judgment is reason itself. In this way the philosophers of the East and West differ and disagree. The materialistic philosophers of the West declare that man belongs to the animal kingdom, whereas the philosophers of the East—such as Plato, Aristotle and the Persians—divide the world of existence or phenomena of life into two general categories or kingdoms: one the animal kingdom, or world of nature, the other the human kingdom, or world of reason. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, pp. 356-357)

Some men and women glory in their exalted thoughts, but if these thoughts never reach the plane of action they remain useless: the power of thought is dependent on its manifestation in deeds. A philosopher's thought may, however, in the world of progress and evolution, translate itself into the actions of other people, even when they themselves are unable or unwilling to show forth their grand ideals in their own lives. To this class the majority of philosophers belong, their teachings being high above their actions. This is the difference between philosophers who are Spiritual Teachers, and those who are mere philosophers: the Spiritual Teacher is the first to

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follow His own teaching; He brings down into the world of action His spiritual conceptions and ideals. His Divine thoughts are made manifest to the world. His thought is Himself, from which He is inseparable. When we find a philosopher emphasizing the importance and grandeur of justice, and then encouraging a rapacious monarch in his oppression and tyranny, we quickly realize that he belongs to the first class: for he thinks heavenly thoughts and does not practice the corresponding heavenly virtues.

This state is impossible with Spiritual Philosophers, for they ever express their high and noble thoughts in actions. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 18)

Consequently, the great divine philosophers have had the following epigram: All things are involved in all things. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, in Foundations of World Unity (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1972), pp. 51-52; in Letters, 1992 June 08, Gaia Concept, Nature, p. 5)

Is the materialistic philosophy of this Europe, so much praised by contemporary agnostics and atheists, a philosophy to be admired? Are these people wooers of the spirit? Nay, they have drowned that capacity and are out of touch with the kingdom of reality. Is this an enviable goal to which humanity may aspire? Is this a system of philosophy through which people may become glorified? No, by God, the philosophy of glory needs no scholastic curriculum.

Strive so that these people may be released from their nature worship and become like sons of wisdom from the city of light. We speak one word and by it we intend one and seventy meanings. [BAHÁ'O'LLAH IN THE IGHAN] ('Abdu'l-Bahá on Divine Philosophy, pp. 116-141)

Why would 'Abdu'l-Bahá favor divine philosophers and philosophers of the East over material philosophers and philosophers of the West? Does He regard all philosophers of the West to be materialists?

We must not take many of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statements as dogmatic finalities, for there are other points which when added to them round out the picture. For instance, when He calls Aristotle and Plato Philosophers of the East, He is obviously placing them in that category because He believes they belong more correctly to Eastern culture than to Central European and the New World cultures of the West. When He calls the philosophers of the West materialistic this does not for a moment mean He includes all Western philosophers for, as you truly point out, many of them have been very spiritual in their concepts.... (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated 7 June 1946; published in Arohanui - Letters to New Zealand, p. 88)

'Abdu'l-Bahá likewise asserts that the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is a higher and more complete standard of truth than is found in the scientists and philosophers:

Bahá'u'lláh says, "The universe hath neither beginning nor ending." He has set aside the elaborate theories and exhaustive opinions of scientists and material philosophers by the simple statement, "There is no beginning, no ending." The theologians and religionists advance plausible proofs that the creation of the universe

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dates back six thousand years; the scientists bring forth indisputable facts and say, "No! These evidences indicate ten, twenty, fifty thousand years ago," etc. There are endless discussions pro and con. Bahá'u'lláh sets aside these discussions by one word and statement. He says, "The divine sovereignty hath no beginning and no ending." By this announcement and its demonstration He has established a standard of agreement among those who reflect upon this question of divine sovereignty; He has brought reconciliation and peace in this war of opinion and discussion. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 220)

No, not all Western philosophers are materialists...but those Western philosophers who have adhered to the standard of the senses, to empiricism are limited in the scope of their awareness of reality, for reality has spiritual as well as material dimensions, dimensions which can not be perceived by the senses as well as dimensions which can be perceived by the senses. What do divine philosophers, philosophers from the East have access to which material Western philosophers deny? Consider the origins, the foundations, the fundamentals, the essentials of divine philosophy, as described by Bahá'u'lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

The sages aforetime acquired their knowledge from the Prophets, inasmuch as the latter were the Exponents of divine philosophy and the Revealers of heavenly mysteries. (Bahá'u'lláh, Lawh-i-Hikmat, TB, pp. 144-145)

The essence and the fundamentals of philosophy have emanated from the Prophets. (Bahá'u'lláh, Lawh-i-Hikmat, in TB, p. 145)

...the theories put forward by the Father of Philosophy regarding the mysteries of creation as given in his chrysolite tablets... (Bahá'u'lláh, Lawh-i-Hikmat, in TB, p. 147)

‘The first person who devoted himself to philosophy was Idris. Thus was he named. Some called him also Hermes. In every tongue he hath a special name. He it is who hath set forth in every branch of philosophy thorough and convincing statements. After him Balinus derived his knowledge and sciences from the Hermetic Tablets and most of the philosophers who followed him made their philosophical and scientific discoveries from his words and statements...’ (Bahá'u'lláh, Lawh al-Basit al-Haqiqah; cited in Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, Note 1, p. 148)

In keeping with the principle set forth in “Lawh-i-Hikmat”, that "the essence and the fundamentals of philosophy have emanated from the Prophets", the Guardian reiterates that point, writing, "Nor should a review of the outstanding features of Bahá'u'lláh's writings during the latter part of His banishment to ‘Akká fail to include a reference to the “Lawh-i-Hikmat” (Tablet of Wisdom), in which He sets forth the fundamentals of true philosophy..." (Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p. 219)

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The "essence and fundamentals" of divine philosophy in the Bahá'í Dispensation and Cycle may be considered therefore to have "emanated from" Bahá'u'lláh and His chosen ones. In Kitáb-i-Íqán, Bahá'u'lláh refers to the principle of progressive revelation and applies it to His own Book:

That city is none other than the Word of God revealed in every age and dispensation. In the days of Moses it was the Pentateuch; in the days of Jesus the Gospel; in the days of Muhammad the Messenger of God the Qur'án; in this day the Bayan; and in the dispensation of Him Whom God will make manifest His own Book—the Book unto which all the Books of former Dispensations must needs be referred, the Book which standeth amongst them all transcendent and supreme. (Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Íqán, pp. 199-200)

In the Most Holy Book of Bahá'u'lláh, He advises the leaders of religion, and beyond them all of humanity:

Weigh not the Book of God with such standards and sciences as are current amongst you, for the Book itself is the unerring Balance established amongst men. In this most perfect Balance whatsoever the peoples and kindreds of the earth possess must be weighed, while the measure of its weight should be tested according to its own standard, did ye but know it. (K99)

In another of His Tablets He writes: "Weigh it with the just Balance that ye possess, the Balance of the testimony of the Prophets and Messengers of God." (Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 281) If the "Book of God", the "testimony of the Prophets and Messengers of God" is the "most perfect Balance", the "just Balance" then surely the Book of Bahá'u'lláh, "the Book unto which all the Books of former Dispensations must needs be referred, the Book which standeth amongst them all transcendent and supreme" is the superlative Balance. Hence, we may look to His Book as the source for the divine philosophy of the present and future alike. Indeed, the Guardian has written that, in the "Lawh-i-Hikmat", Bahá'u'lláh "sets forth the fundamentals of true philosophy" (God Passes By, p. 219).

Bahá'u'lláh indicates that the Prophets of God "speak a twofold language" (Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 254). "One language, the outward language, is devoid of allusions, is unconcealed and unveiled; that it may be a guiding lamp and a beaconing light whereby wayfarers may attain the heights of holiness, and seekers may advance into the realm of eternal reunion." (Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Íqán, pp. 254-255) While this "outward language" prescribes specific counsels and commandments meant to serve as the foundations of human belief and behavior, "the other language is veiled and concealed" (Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 255) and no one "apprehendeth the meaning of these utterances except them whose hearts are assured, whose souls have found favour with God, and whose minds are detached from all else but Him. In such

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utterances, the literal meaning, as generally understood by the people, is not what hath been intended." (Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 255) Furthermore, "if the Sun of Truth were suddenly to reveal, at the earliest stages of its manifestation, the full measure of the potencies which the providence of the Almighty hath bestowed upon it, the earth of human understanding would waste away and be consumed; for men's hearts would neither sustain the intensity of its revelation, nor be able to mirror forth the radiance of its light. Dismayed and overpowered, they would cease to exist." (Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, XXXVII, p. 87)

It hath been decreed by Us that the Word of God and all the potentialities thereof shall be manifested unto men in strict conformity with such conditions as have been foreordained by Him Who is the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. We have, moreover, ordained that its veil of concealment be none other except its own Self. Such indeed is Our Power to achieve Our Purpose. Should the Word be allowed to release suddenly all the energies latent within it, no man could sustain the weight of so mighty a Revelation. Nay, all that is in heaven and on earth would flee in consternation before it.

Consider that which hath been sent down unto Muhammad, the Apostle of God. The measure of the Revelation of which He was the bearer had been clearly foreordained by Him Who is the Almighty, the All-Powerful. They that heard Him, however, could apprehend His purpose only to the extent of their station and spiritual capacity. He, in like manner, uncovered the Face of Wisdom in proportion to their ability to sustain the burden of His Message. No sooner had mankind attained the stage of maturity, than the Word revealed to men's eyes the latent energies with which it had been endowed—energies which manifested themselves in the plenitude of their glory when the Ancient Beauty appeared, in the year sixty, in the person of Ali-Muhammad, the Báb. (Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, XXXII, pp. 76-77)

The revelation of truth is gradual according to the development of mankind, and while the overall process of that development is progressive and inexorable, the pace of the unfolding is not. Bahá'u'lláh writes:

We now perceive that veils thicker than the ones We have already torn asunder have intervened, obstructing the vision and causing the light of understanding to be obscured." (Bahá'u'lláh, Tarazát, in TB, p. 41)

It was intended that at the time of the manifestation of the One true God the faculty of recognizing Him would have been developed and matured and would have reached its culmination. However, it is now clearly demonstrated that in the disbelievers this faculty hath remained undeveloped and hath, indeed, degenerated. (Bahá'u'lláh, Tajalliyát, in TB, pp. 52-53)

This humble servant is filled with wonder, inasmuch as all men are endowed with the capacity to see and hear, yet we find them deprived of the privilege of using these faculties. (Bahá'u'lláh, Lawh-i-Maqsud, in TB, p. 171)

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Methinks people's sense of taste hath, alas, been sorely affected by the fever of negligence and folly, for they are found to be wholly unconscious and deprived of the sweetness of His utterance. How regrettable indeed that man should debar himself from the fruits of the tree of wisdom while his days and hours pass swiftly away. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Lawh-i-Maqsud*, in TB, pp. 173-174)

The Guardian reiterated this principle in one of his letters:

Yet, if we but call to mind the practice generally adopted by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, we cannot fail to perceive the wisdom, nay the necessity, of gradually and cautiously disclosing to the eyes of an unbelieving world the implications of a Truth which, by its own challenging nature, it is so difficult for it to comprehend and embrace.

It was He, our beloved 'Abdu'l-Bahá, our true and shining Exemplar, who with infinite tact and patience, whether in His public utterances or in private converse, adapted the presentation of the fundamentals of the Cause to the varying capacities and the spiritual receptiveness of His hearers. He never hesitated, however, to tear the veil asunder and reveal to the spiritually ripened those challenging verities that set forth in its true light the relationship of this Supreme Revelation with the Dispensations of the past. Unashamed and unafraid when challenged to assert in its entirety the stupendous claim of Bahá'u'lláh, Bahá'ís, whether laboring as individuals or functioning as an organized community, feel certain that in the face of the apathy, the gross materialism, and the superficiality of society today, a progressive disclosure of the magnitude of the claim of Bahá'u'lláh would constitute the most effective means for the attainment of the end so greatly desired by even the staunchest and most zealous advocate of the Faith. (Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 125)

This application of divine teachings revealed by the Prophets of God to the questions that perplex humanity is hence not a process fixed in time and reserved for the Prophets and their chosen ones alone. 'Abdu'l-Bahá describes the process whereby the spiritually attuned in divine philosophy in the Islamic Dispensation were able to solve the problems posed to them:

They divided Divine philosophy into two parts: one kind is that of which the knowledge can be acquired through lectures and study in schools and colleges. The second kind of philosophy was that of the Illuminati, or followers of the inner light. The schools of this philosophy were held in silence. Meditating, and turning their faces to the Source of Light, from that central Light the mysteries of the Kingdom were reflected in the hearts of these people. All the Divine problems were solved by this power of illumination.

This Society of Friends increased greatly in Persia, and up to the present time their societies exist. Many books and epistles were written by their leaders. When they assemble in their meeting-house they sit silently and contemplate; their leader opens with a certain proposition, and says to the assembly 'You must meditate on this problem'. Then, freeing their minds from everything else, they sit and reflect, and before long the answer is revealed to them. Many abstruse divine questions are solved by this illumination.

Some of the great questions unfolding from the rays of the Sun of Reality upon the mind of man are: the problem of the reality of the spirit of man; of the birth of the spirit; of its birth from this world into the world of God; the question of the inner life of the spirit and of its fate after its ascension from the body.

They also meditate upon the scientific questions of the day, and these are likewise solved.

These people, who are called 'Followers of the inner light', attain to a superlative degree of power, and are entirely freed from blind dogmas and imitations. Men rely on the statements of these people: by themselves—within themselves—they solve all mysteries.

If they find a solution with the assistance of the inner light, they accept it, and afterwards they declare it: otherwise they would consider it a matter of blind imitation. They go so far as to reflect upon the essential nature of the Divinity, of the Divine revelation, of the manifestation of the Deity in this world. All the divine and scientific questions are solved by them through the power of the spirit.

Bahá'u'lláh says there is a sign (from God) in every phenomenon: the sign of the intellect is contemplation and the sign of contemplation is silence, because it is impossible for a man to do two things at one time—he cannot both speak and meditate.

It is an axiomatic fact that while you meditate you are speaking with your own spirit. In that state of mind you put certain questions to your spirit and the spirit answers: the light breaks forth and the reality is revealed.

You cannot apply the name 'man' to any being void of this faculty of meditation; without it he would be a mere animal, lower than the beasts.

Through the faculty of meditation man attains to eternal life; through it he receives the breath of the Holy Spirit—the bestowal of the Spirit is given in reflection and meditation.

The spirit of man is itself informed and strengthened during meditation; through it affairs of which man knew nothing are unfolded before his view. Through it he receives Divine inspiration, through it he receives heavenly food.

Meditation is the key for opening the doors of mysteries. In that state man abstracts himself: in that state man withdraws himself from all outside objects; in that subjective mood he is immersed in the ocean of spiritual life and can unfold the secrets of things-in-themselves. To illustrate this, think of man as endowed with two kinds of sight; when the power of insight is being used the outward power of vision does not see.

This faculty of meditation frees man from the animal nature, discerns the reality of things, puts man in touch with God.

This faculty brings forth from the invisible plane the sciences and arts. Through the meditative faculty inventions are made possible, colossal undertakings are carried out; through it governments can run smoothly. Through this faculty man enters into the very Kingdom of God.

Nevertheless some thoughts are useless to man; they are like waves moving in the sea without result. But if the faculty of meditation is bathed in the inner light and characterized with divine attributes, the results will be confirmed.

The meditative faculty is akin to the mirror; if you put it before earthly objects it will reflect them. Therefore if the spirit of man is contemplating earthly subjects he will be informed of these.

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But if you turn the mirror of your spirits heavenwards, the heavenly constellations and the rays of the Sun of Reality will be reflected in your hearts, and the virtues of the Kingdom will be obtained.

Therefore let us keep this faculty rightly directed—turning it to the heavenly Sun and not to earthly objects—so that we may discover the secrets of the Kingdom, and comprehend the allegories of the Bible and the mysteries of the spirit.

May we indeed become mirrors reflecting the heavenly realities, and may we become so pure as to reflect the stars of heaven. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, pp. 173-176)

Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá left it to the House of Justice to respond to the specific requirements of the times and situations in which the people of the future would exist:

Inasmuch as for each day there is a new problem and for every problem an expedient solution, such affairs should be referred to the Ministers of the House of Justice that they may act according to the needs and requirements of the time. (Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 27)

Unto the Most Holy Book every one must turn, and all that is not expressly recorded therein must be referred to the Universal House of Justice. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Will and Testament, p. 19)

Shoghi Effendi expresses confidence that Bahá'ís will solve problems posed to them the specific answers for which are not found in the Writings of the Faith:

We must turn aside from these vain imaginings and suppositions and philosophizings of the world, and fix our eyes upon the clear stream of the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. Out of these Teachings, and the society which they will create on this planet, will come a solution to all of the problems of men. Gradually, greater scholars, more deeply spiritual thinkers, will be able to answer from a Bahá'í standpoint many of these questions. It is not necessary that they should be in the divine text; they can be studied and learned in the future; but at present we have not had time to evolve the Bahá'í scholars who can deal with these subjects in detail, and take upon themselves to answer the abstruse points and the many unfounded doctrines which are advanced by modern philosophers. (From a letter dated 22 April 1954 written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer; published in Letters, 1999 Dec 13, Two Compilations on Scholarship - 1979 and 1983)

As to correlating philosophy with the Bahá'í teachings: this is a tremendous work which scholars in the future can undertake. We must remember that not only are all the teachings not yet translated into English, but they are not even all collected yet. Many important Tablets may still come to light which are at present owned privately. (From a letter dated 15 February 1947 written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer; published in Letters, 1999 Dec 13, Two Compilations on Scholarship - 1979 and 1983, p. 2)

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The field of divine philosophy is not synonymous with the study of metaphysical questions in the Jewish yeshiva, the Christian seminary, the Muslim madrasa. It is a field of knowledge that has its antecedents, going back to the philosopher Idris/Hermes/Enoch, to Empedocles and Pythagoras, Socrates, Hippocrates, Plato and Aristotle, according to Bahá'u'lláh in the “Lawh-i-Hikmat” and “Lawh al-Basit al-Haqiqá”. It is a field of knowledge associated by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá with the Persian Islamic philosophers, which included the forerunners of the Báb, Shaykh Ahmad-i-Ahsa’i and Siyyid Kazim-i-Rashti. But it is also a field renewed and redefined by none other than the Founder and Expounder of the Bahá'í Revelation, and hence reborn in this new Age and Cycle.

It is clear that Bahá'u'lláh does not wish His followers to preoccupy themselves with the philosophical musings of past philosophers, particularly those famous Persian philosophers whom He describes as follows:

The Great Being saith: The learned of the day must direct the people to acquire those branches of knowledge which are of use, that both the learned themselves and the generality of mankind may derive benefits therefrom. Such academic pursuits as begin and end in words alone have never been and will never be of any worth. The majority of Persia’s learned doctors devote all their lives to the study of a philosophy the ultimate yield of which is nothing but words. (“Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas”, p. 169)

Those familiar with the Writings of the Báb have observed that He is severely critical of both Mulla Sadr al-Din al-Shirazi (Mulla Sadra), the most outstanding philosopher of the School of Isfahan, and Muhammad Ibn 'Ali Ibnu'l-'Arabi (Ibn 'Arabi), the most famous and influential Islamic mystical writer. Bahá'u'lláh strongly critiques the leading exponent of Iranian philosophy of His own day, Haji Mulla Hadi Sabzivari, writing:

The sage of Sabzivar hath said: ‘Alas! Attentive ears are lacking, otherwise the whisperings of the Sinaic Bush could be heard from every tree.’ In a Tablet to a man of wisdom who had made enquiry as to the meaning of Elementary Reality [Lawh al-Basit al-Haqiqá], We addressed this famous sage in these words: ‘If this saying is truly thine, how is it that thou hast failed to hearken unto the Call which the Tree of Man hath raised from the loftiest heights of the world? If thou didst hear the Call yet fear and the desire to preserve thy life prompted thee to remain heedless to it, thou art such a person as hath never been nor is worthy of mention; if thou hast not heard it, then thou art bereft of the sense of hearing.’ In brief, such men are they whose words are the pride of the world, and whose deeds are the shame of the nations. (Bahá'u'lláh, Kalímát-i-Firdawsiyyih, in Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 61)

Nor does Bahá'u'lláh focus His critique upon select individuals:

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Each sect hath picked out a way for itself and is clinging to a certain cord. Despite manifest blindness and ignorance they pride themselves on their insight and knowledge. Among them are mystics who bear allegiance to the Faith of Islam, some of whom indulge in that which leadeth to idleness and seclusion. I swear by God! It lowereth man's station and maketh him swell with pride. Man must bring forth fruit. One who yieldeth no fruit is, in the words [Matthew 3:10, 7:19, 13:40] of the Spirit [Jesus Christ], like unto a fruitless tree, and a fruitless tree is fit but for the fire [SLH, p. 70; KA, Q&A, #105, p. 139; TB, pp. 60, 257; SWAB, p. 223; ABDP, p. 110]. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Kalímát-i-Firdawsíyyih*, in TB, p. 60)

Do thou beseech God to enable thee to remain steadfast in this path, and to aid thee to guide the peoples of the world to Him Who is the manifest and sovereign Ruler, Who hath revealed Himself in a distinct attire, Who giveth utterance to a Divine and specific Message. This is the essence of faith and certitude. They that are the worshipers of the idol which their imaginations have carved, and who call it Inner Reality, such men are in truth accounted among the heathen. To this hath the All-Merciful borne witness in His Tablets. (Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CLX, p. 338)

¹Footnote from the original edition: Texts relating to parables and which are veiled in symbols and have esoteric meanings.

²Expression used by Marshall Hodgson, historian of Islam, to refer to characteristics of societies the majority of whose adherents are Muslims.

³Nabíl-i-Akbar. See p. 135

FINAL WORDS

The compilations cited so copiously in this monograph have been accessible in print and online for many years...one might expect that the distinctive characteristics of Bahá'í scholarship would have become a hot topic among Bahá'í scholars, and even generally in the Bahá'í community. This is not the case, notwithstanding the many attempts of Bahá'í administrators to jump-start engagement with this theme. We might well wonder why...and while no proof can be mustered here for the causes identified, nevertheless the topic is worthy of our consideration. Based on observation and rational deduction, one cause of this reluctance to engage with the Bahá'í texts that pertain to this theme is the status quo, that is, the established scholarly methodologies in the academy, which are various but nevertheless emblematic of theological and philosophical paradigms which differ, in some cases fundamentally, with the Bahá'í teachings. The methodologies employed in the seminary derive from Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions, rooted in a distant past, a past that was pre-industrial, pre-global and pre-scientific. Of course, in making this allegation I am not denying the existence of industrial, global and scientific antecedents in that distant past, only affirming that industrialization as we know it, globalism as we know it, and science as we know it did not exist 1400, 2000 and 3000 years ago. All three of these present characteristics of human society began to emerge in full force barely 200 years ago. The methodologies which have become dominant in the secular academy, which have become the predominant form of scholarship over the course of these two centuries are also formally unrelated to the Bahá'í teachings. While there may well be a hidden relationship between these two phenomena, it is evident that no formal and outwardly demonstrable and empirical linkage can be demonstrated between the two. Bahá'í scholarship is “the Other”, not either a branch of classical ancient scholarship, nor of the same family as modern scholarship as we know it in the academy. When we attempt to discern the characteristics of Bahá'í scholarship, we are always inclined to try to put new wine in old wineskins. The other danger is that we might suppose that Bahá'í scholarship is entirely original, in which case we may attempt to reinvent the wheel. Neither of these solutions, as indicated by their cliché status are adequate engagements with the ideas contained in Bahá'í texts. Those ideas need to be contextualized, and also projected out of the box and into the future, rather than tied to past understandings and present inclinations. Bahá'í scholars would be well-advised to take up the study of this topic in earnest, and to encourage young people in their communities to do so. The leadership of the Universal House of Justice, which has provided fine compilations of source texts, and a number of letters to scholars and about scholarship, this leadership, and that of the National Spiritual Assemblies and Associations for Bahá'í Studies is not only to be commended by Bahá'í scholars but heeded with energy and determination. Only the taking to heart and mind of these

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Bahá'í teachings by the Bahá'í community at all levels can result in the integration and implementation of this new paradigm, and its application to the myriad fields of knowledge, craft and art as they are presently configured.

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