

‘ABDU’-BAHÁ

PARIS TALKS

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PART I

THE DUTY OF KINDNESS AND SYMPATHY TOWARDS STRANGERS AND FOREIGNERS

October 16th and 17th, 1911

When a man turns his face to God he finds sunshine everywhere. All men are his brothers. Let not conventionality cause you to seem cold and unsympathetic when you meet strange people from other countries. Do not look at them as though you suspected them of being evil-doers, thieves and boors. You think it necessary to be very careful, not to expose yourselves to the risk of making acquaintance with such, possibly, undesirable people.

I ask you not to think only of yourselves. Be kind to the strangers, whether come they from Turkey, Japan, Persia, Russia, China or any other country in the world.

Help to make them feel at home; find out where they are staying, ask if you may render them any service; try to make their lives a little happier.

In this way, even if, sometimes, what you at first suspected should be true, still go out of your way to be kind to them—this kindness will help them to become better.

After all, why should any foreign people be treated as strangers?

Let those who meet you know, without your proclaiming the fact, that you are indeed a Bahá'í.

Put into practice the Teaching of Bahá'u'lláh, that of kindness to all nations. Do not be content with showing friendship in words alone, let your heart burn with loving kindness for all who may cross your path.

Oh, you of the Western nations, be kind to those who come from the Eastern world to sojourn among you. Forget your conventionality when you speak with them; they are not accustomed to it. To Eastern peoples this demeanour seems cold, unfriendly. Rather let your manner be sympathetic. Let it be seen that you are filled with universal love. When you meet a Persian or any other stranger, speak to him as to a friend; if he seems to be lonely try to help him, give him of your willing service; if he be sad console him, if poor succour him, if oppressed rescue him, if in misery comfort him. In so doing you will manifest that not in words only, but in deed and in truth, you think of all men as your brothers.

What profit is there in agreeing that universal friendship is good, and talking of the solidarity of the human race as a grand ideal? Unless these thoughts are translated into the world of action, they are useless.

The wrong in the world continues to exist just because people talk only of their ideals, and do not strive to put them into practice. If actions took the place of words, the world's misery would very soon be changed into comfort.

A man who does great good, and talks not of it, is on the way to perfection.

The man who has accomplished a small good and magnifies it in his speech is worth very little.

If I love you, I need not continually speak of my love—you will know without any words. On the other hand if I love you not, that also will you know—and you would not believe me, were I to tell you in a thousand words, that I loved you.

People make much profession of goodness, multiplying fine words because they wish to be thought greater and better than their fellows, seeking fame in the eyes of the world. Those who do most good use fewest words concerning their actions.

The children of God do the works without boasting, obeying His laws.

My hope for you is that you will ever avoid tyranny and oppression; that you will work without ceasing till justice reigns in every land, that you will keep your hearts pure and your hands free from unrighteousness.

This is what the near approach to God requires from you, and this is what I expect of you.

THE POWER AND VALUE OF TRUE THOUGHT DEPEND UPON ITS MANIFESTATION IN ACTION

October 18th

The reality of man is his thought, not his material body. The thought force and the animal force are partners. Although man is part of the animal creation, he possesses a power of thought superior to all other created beings.

If a man's thought is constantly aspiring towards heavenly subjects then does he become saintly; if on the other hand his thought does not soar, but is directed downwards to centre itself upon the things of this world, he grows more and more material until he arrives at a state little better than that of a mere animal.

Thoughts may be divided into two classes:

(1st) Thought that belongs to the world of thought alone.

(2nd) Thought that expresses itself in action.

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 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 practise the corresponding heavenly virtues.

This state is impossible with Spiritual Philosophers, for they ever express their high and noble thoughts in actions.

GOD IS THE GREAT COMPASSIONATE PHYSICIAN WHO ALONE GIVES TRUE HEALING

October 19th

All true healing comes from God! There are two causes for sickness, one is material, the other spiritual. If the sickness is of the body, a material remedy is needed, if of the soul, a spiritual remedy.

If the heavenly benediction be upon us while we are being healed then only can we be made whole, for medicine is but the outward and visible means through which we obtain the heavenly healing. Unless the spirit be healed, the cure of the body is worth nothing. All is in the hands of God, and without Him there can be no health in us!

There have been many men who have died at last of the very disease of which they have made a special study. Aristotle, for instance, who made a special study of the digestion, died of a gastronomic malady. Aviseu was a specialist of the heart, but he died of heart disease. God is the great compassionate Physician who alone has the power to give true healing.

All creatures are dependent upon God, however great may seem their knowledge, power and independence.

Behold the mighty kings upon earth, for they have all the power in the world that man can give them, and yet when death calls they must obey, even as the peasants at their gates.

Look also at the animals, how helpless they are in their apparent strength! For the elephant, the largest of all animals, is troubled by the fly, and the lion cannot escape the irritation of the worm. Even man, the highest form of created beings, needs many things for his very life; first of all he needs air, and if he is deprived of it for a few minutes, he dies. He is also dependent on water, food, clothing, warmth, and many other things. On all sides he is surrounded by dangers and difficulties, against which his physical body alone cannot cope. If a man looks at the world around him, he will see how all created things are dependent and are captive to the laws of Nature.

Man alone, by his spiritual power, has been able to free himself, to soar above the world of matter and to make it his servant.

Without the help of God man is even as the beasts that perish, but God has bestowed such wonderful power upon him that he might ever look upward, and receive, among other gifts, healing from His divine Bounty.

But alas! man is not grateful for this supreme good, but sleeps the sleep of negligence, being careless of the great mercy which God has shown towards him, turning his face away from the light and going on his way in darkness.

It is my earnest prayer, that ye be not like unto this, but rather that ye keep your faces steadfastly turned to the light, so that ye may be as lighted torches in the dark places of life.

THE NEED FOR UNION BETWEEN THE PEOPLES OF THE EAST AND WEST

Friday, October 20th

‘Abdu’l-Bahá said:

In the past, as in the present, the Spiritual Sun of Truth has always shone from the horizon of the East.

Abraham appeared in the East. In the East Moses arose to lead and teach the people. On the Eastern horizon arose the Lord Christ. Muḥammad was sent to an Eastern nation. The Báb arose in the Eastern land of Persia. Bahá’u’lláh lived and taught in the East. All the great Spiritual Teachers arose in the Eastern world. But although the Sun of Christ dawned in the East the radiance thereof was apparent in the West, where the effulgence of its glory was more clearly seen. The divine light of His Teaching shone with a greater force in the Western world, where it has made a more rapid headway than in the land of its birth.

In these days the East is in need of material progress and the West is in want of a spiritual idea. It would be well for the West to turn to the East for illumination, and to give in exchange its scientific knowledge. There must be this interchange of gifts.

The East and the West must unite to give to each other what is lacking. This union will bring about a true civilization, where the spiritual is expressed and carried out in the material.

Receiving thus the one from the other the greatest harmony will prevail, all people will be united, a state of great perfection will be attained, there will be a firm cementing, and this world will become a shining mirror for the reflection of the attributes of God.

We all, the Eastern with the Western nations, must strive day and night with heart and soul to achieve this high ideal, to cement the unity between all the nations of the earth. Every heart will then be refreshed, all eyes will be opened, the most wonderful power will be given, the happiness of humanity will be assured.

We must pray that by the Bounty of God, Persia will be enabled to receive the material and mental civilization of the West, and by Divine Grace to give in return her spiritual light. The devoted energetic work of the united peoples, occidentals and orientals, will succeed in establishing this result, for the force of the Holy Spirit will aid them.

The principles of the Teachings of Bahá’u’lláh should be carefully studied, one by one, until they are realized and understood by mind and heart—so will you become strong followers of the light, truly spiritual, heavenly soldiers of God, acquiring and spreading the true civilization in Persia, in Europe, and in the whole world.

This will be the paradise which is to come on earth, when all mankind will be gathered together under the tent of unity in the Kingdom of Glory.

GOD COMPREHENDS ALL: HE CANNOT BE COMPREHENDED

Friday evening, October 20th

‘Abdu'l-Bahá said:

Numerous meetings are held in Paris every day for different purposes, to discuss politics, commerce, education, art, science and many other subjects.

All these meetings are good: but this assembly has met together to turn their faces towards God, to learn how best to work for the good of humanity, to seek how prejudices may be abolished, and the seed of love and universal brotherhood sown in the heart of man.

God approves of the motive of our gathering together and gives us His blessing.

In the Old Testament we read that God said, ‘Let us make man in Our own image’. In the Gospel, Christ said, ‘I am in the Father, and the Father in Me’.¹ In the Qur’án, God says, ‘Man is my Mystery and I am his’. Bahá’u’lláh writes that God says, ‘Thy heart is My home; purify it for My descent. Thy spirit is My place of revelation; cleanse it for My manifestation’.

All these sacred words show us that man is made in God’s image: yet the Essence of God is incomprehensible to the human mind, for the finite understanding cannot be applied to this infinite Mystery. God contains all: He cannot be contained. That which contains is superior to that which is contained. The whole is greater than its parts.

Things which are understood by men cannot be outside their capacity for understanding, so that it is impossible for the heart of man to comprehend the nature of the Majesty of God. Our imagination can only picture that which it is able to create.

The power of the understanding differs in degree in the various kingdoms of creation. The mineral, vegetable, and animal realms are each incapable of understanding any creation beyond their own. The mineral cannot imagine the growing power of the plant. The tree cannot understand the power of movement in the animal, neither can it comprehend what it would mean to possess sight, hearing or the sense of smell. These all belong to the physical creation.

Man also shares in this creation; but it is not possible for either of the lower kingdoms to understand that which takes place in the mind of man. The animal cannot realize the intelligence of a human being, he only knows that which is perceived by his animal senses, he cannot imagine anything in the abstract. An animal could not learn that the world is round, that the earth revolves round the sun, or the construction of the electric telegraph. These things are only possible to man. Man is the highest work of creation, the nearest to God of all creatures.

All superior kingdoms are incomprehensible to the inferior; how therefore could it be possible that the creature, man, should understand the almighty Creator of all?

That which we imagine, is not the Reality of God; He, the Unknowable, the Unthinkable, is far beyond the highest conception of man.

All creatures that exist are dependent upon the Divine Bounty. Divine Mercy gives life itself. As the light of the sun shines on the whole world, so the Mercy of the infinite God is shed on all creatures. As the sun ripens the fruits of the earth, and gives life and warmth to all living beings, so shines the Sun of Truth on all souls, filling them with the fire of Divine love and understanding.

The superiority of man over the rest of the created world is seen again in this, that man has a soul in which dwells the divine spirit; the souls of the lower creatures are inferior in their essence.

There is no doubt then, that of all created beings man is the nearest to the nature of God, and therefore receives a greater gift of the Divine Bounty.

¹ St. John xiv, II.

The mineral kingdom possesses the power of existing. The plant has the power of existing and growing. The animal, in addition to existence and growth, has the capacity of moving about, and the use of the faculties of the senses. In the human kingdom we find all the attributes of the lower worlds, with much more added thereto. Man is the sum of every previous creation, for he contains them all.

To man is given the special gift of the intellect by which he is able to receive a larger share of the light Divine. The Perfect Man is as a polished mirror reflecting the Sun of Truth, manifesting the attributes of God.

The Lord Christ said, 'He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father'—God manifested in man.

The sun does not leave his place in the heavens and descend into the mirror, for the actions of ascent and descent, coming and going, do not belong to the Infinite, they are the methods of finite beings. In the Manifestation of God, the perfectly polished mirror, appear the qualities of the Divine in a form that man is capable of comprehending.

This is so simple that all can understand it, and that which we are able to understand we must perform accept.

Our Father will not hold us responsible for the rejection of dogmas which we are unable either to believe or comprehend, for He is ever infinitely just to His children.

This example is, however, so logical that it can easily be grasped by all minds willing to give it their consideration.

May each one of you become a shining lamp, of which the flame is the Love of God. May your hearts burn with the radiance of unity. May your eyes be illumined with the effulgence of the Sun of Truth!

The city of Paris is very beautiful, a more civilized and well-appointed town in all material development it would be impossible to find in the present world. But the spiritual light has not shone upon her for a long time: her spiritual progress is far behind that of her material civilization. A supreme power is needed to awaken her to the reality of spiritual truth, to breathe the breath of life into her dormant soul. You must all unite in this work of arousing her, in reanimating her people by the help of that Superior Force.

When an illness is slight a small remedy will suffice to heal it, but when the slight illness becomes a terrible disease, then a very strong remedy must be used by the Divine Healer. There are some trees that blossom and bear fruit in a cool climate, others there are which need the hottest rays of the sun to bring them to perfect maturity. Paris is one of those trees for whose spiritual unfoldment a great flaming Sun of the Divine Power of God is needed.

I ask you all, each one of you, to follow well the light of truth, in the Holy Teachings, and God will strengthen you by His Holy Spirit so that you will be enabled to overcome the difficulties, and to destroy the prejudices which cause separation and hatred amongst the people. Let your hearts be filled with the great love of God, let it be felt by all; for every man is a servant of God, and all are entitled to a share of the Divine Bounty.

Especially to those whose thoughts are material and retrograde show the utmost love and patience, thereby winning them into the unity of fellowship by the radiance of your kindness.

If you are faithful to your great work, following the Holy Sun of Truth without swerving, then will the blessed day of universal brotherhood dawn on this beautiful city.

THE PITIFUL CAUSES OF WAR, AND THE DUTY OF EVERYONE TO STRIVE FOR PEACE

October 21st

‘Abdu’l-Bahá said:

I hope you are all happy and well. I am not happy, but very sad. The news of the Battle of Benghazi grieves my heart. I wonder at the human savagery that still exists in the world! How is it possible for men to fight from morning until evening, killing each other, shedding the blood of their fellow-men: And for what object? To gain possession of a part of the earth! Even the animals, when they fight, have an immediate and more reasonable cause for their attacks! How terrible it is that men, who are of the higher kingdom, can descend to slaying and bringing misery to their fellow-beings, for the possession of a tract of land!

The highest of created beings fighting to obtain the lowest form of matter, earth! Land belongs not to one people, but to all people. This earth is not man’s home, but his tomb. It is for their tombs these men are fighting. There is nothing so horrible in this world as the tomb, the abode of the decaying bodies of men.

However great the conqueror, however many countries he may reduce to slavery, he is unable to retain any part of these devastated lands but one tiny portion—his tomb! If more land is required for the improvement of the condition of the people, for the spread of civilization (for the substitution of just laws for brutal customs)—surely it would be possible to acquire peaceably the necessary extension of territory.

But war is made for the satisfaction of men’s ambition; for the sake of worldly gain to the few, terrible misery is brought to numberless homes, breaking the hearts of hundreds of men and women!

How many widows mourn their husbands, how many stories of savage cruelty do we hear! How many little orphaned children are crying for their dead fathers, how many women are weeping for their slain sons!

There is nothing so heart-breaking and terrible as an outburst of human savagery!

I charge you all that each one of you concentrate all the thoughts of your heart on love and unity. When a thought of war comes, oppose it by a stronger thought of peace. A thought of hatred must be destroyed by a more powerful thought of love. Thoughts of war bring destruction to all harmony, well-being, restfulness and content.

Thoughts of love are constructive of brotherhood, peace, friendship, and happiness.

When soldiers of the world draw their swords to kill, soldiers of God clasp each other’s hands! So may all the savagery of man disappear by the Mercy of God, working through the pure in heart and the sincere of soul. Do not think the peace of the world an ideal impossible to attain!

Nothing is impossible to the Divine Benevolence of God.

If you desire with all your heart, friendship with every race on earth, your thought, spiritual and positive, will spread; it will become the desire of others, growing stronger and stronger, until it reaches the minds of all men.

Do not despair! Work steadily. Sincerity and love will conquer hate. How many seemingly impossible events are coming to pass in these days! Set your faces steadily towards the Light of the World. Show love to all; ‘Love is the breath of the Holy Spirit in the heart of Man’. Take courage! God never forsakes His children who strive and work and pray! Let your hearts be filled with the strenuous desire that tranquillity and harmony may encircle all this warring world. So will success crown your efforts, and with the universal brotherhood will come the Kingdom of God in peace and goodwill.

In this room today are members of many races, French, American, English, German, Italian, brothers and sisters meeting in friendship and harmony! Let this gathering be a foreshadowing of what will, in very truth, take place in this world, when every child of God realizes that they are leaves

of one tree, flowers in one garden, drops in one ocean, and sons and daughters of one Father, whose name is love!

THE SUN OF TRUTH

October 22nd

‘Abdu’l-Bahá said:

It is a lovely day, the sun shines brightly upon the earth, giving light and warmth to all creatures. The Sun of Truth is also shining, giving light and warmth to the souls of men. The sun is the life-giver to the physical bodies of all creatures upon earth; without its warmth their growth would be stunted, their development would be arrested, they would decay and die. Even so do the souls of men need the Sun of Truth to shed its rays upon their souls, to develop them, to educate and encourage them. As the sun is to the body of a man so is the Sun of Truth to his soul.

A man may have attained to a high degree of material progress, but without the light of truth his soul is stunted and starved. Another man may have no material gifts, may be at the bottom of the social ladder, but, having received the warmth of the Sun of Truth his soul is great and his spiritual understanding is enlightened.

A Greek philosopher living in the days of the youth of Christianity, being full of the Christian element, though not a professing Christian, wrote thus: ‘It is my belief that religion is the very foundation of true civilization’. For, unless the moral character of a nation is educated, as well as its brain and its talents, civilization has no sure basis.

As religion inculcates morality, it is therefore the truest philosophy, and on it is built the only lasting civilization. As an example of this, he points out the Christians of the time whose morality was on a very high level. The belief of this philosopher conforms to the truth, for the civilization of Christianity was the best and most enlightened in the world. The Christian Teaching was illumined by the Divine Sun of Truth, therefore its followers were taught to love all men as brothers to fear nothing, not even death! To love their neighbours as themselves, and to forget their own selfish interests in striving for the greater good of humanity. The grand aim of the religion of Christ was to draw the hearts of all men nearer to God’s effulgent Truth.

If the followers of the Lord Christ had continued to follow out these principles with steadfast faithfulness, there would have been no need for a renewal of the Christian Message, no necessity for a re-awakening of His people, for a great and glorious civilization would now be ruling the world and the Kingdom of Heaven would have come on earth.

But instead of this, what has taken place! Men turned away their faces from following the divinely illuminated precepts of their Master, and winter fell upon the hearts of men. For, as the body of man depends for life upon the rays of the sun, so cannot the celestial virtues grow in the soul without the radiance of the Sun of Truth.

God leaves not His children comfortless, but, when the darkness of winter overshadows them, then again He sends His Messengers, the Prophets, with a renewal of the blessed spring. The Sun of Truth appears again on the horizon of the world shining into the eyes of those who sleep, awaking them to behold the glory of a new dawn. Then again will the tree of humanity blossom and bring forth the fruit of righteousness for the healing of the nations. Because man has stopped his ears to the Voice of Truth and shut his eyes to the Sacred Light, neglecting the Law of God, for this reason has the darkness of war and tumult, unrest and misery, desolated the earth. I pray that you will all strive to bring each child of God into the radiance of the Sun of Truth, that the darkness may be dissipated by the penetrating rays of its glory, and the winter’s hardness and cold may be melted away by the merciful warmth of its shining.

THE LIGHT OF TRUTH IS NOW SHINING UPON THE EAST AND WEST

Monday, October 23rd

When a man has found the joy of life in one place, he returns to that same spot to find more joy. When a man has found gold in a mine, he returns again to that mine to dig for more gold.

This shows the internal force and natural instinct which God has given to man, and the power of vital energy which is born in him.

The West has always received spiritual enlightenment from the East. The Song of the Kingdom is first heard in the East, but in the West the greater volume of sound bursts upon the listening ears.

The Lord Christ arose as a bright Star in the Eastern sky, but the light of His Teaching shone more perfectly in the West, where His influence has taken root more firmly and His Cause has spread to a greater degree than in the land of His birth.

The sound of the Song of Christ has echoed over all the lands of the Western World and entered the hearts of its people.

The people of the West are firm, and the foundations on which they build are of rock; they are steadfast, and do not easily forget.

The West is like a strong sturdy plant; when the rain falls gently upon it to give it nourishment and the sun shines upon it, then does it blossom in due time and bring forth good fruit. It is a long time since the Sun of Truth mirrored forth by the Lord Christ has shed its radiance upon the West, for the Face of God has been veiled by the sin and forgetfulness of man. But now again, praise be to God, the Holy Spirit speaks anew to the world! The constellation of love and wisdom and power is once more shining from the Divine Horizon to give joy to all who turn their faces to the Light of God. Bahá'u'lláh has rent the veil of prejudice and superstition which was stifling the souls of men. Let us pray to God that the breath of the Holy Spirit may again give hope and refreshment to the people, awakening in them a desire to do the Will of God. May heart and soul be vivified in every man: so will they all rejoice in a new birth.

Then shall humanity put on a new garment in the radiance of the love of God, and it shall be the dawn of a new creation! Then will the Mercy of the Most Merciful be showered upon all mankind and they will arise to a new life.

My earnest desire is that you will all strive and work for this glorious end; that you will be faithful and loving workers in the building of the new spiritual civilization; the elect of God, in willing joyful obedience carrying out His supreme design! Success is truly near at hand, for the Flag of Divinity has been raised aloft, and the Sun of the Righteousness of God appeareth upon the horizon in the sight of all men!

THE UNIVERSAL LOVE

October 24th

An Indian said to 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

'My aim in life is to transmit as far as in me lies the message of Krishna to the world.'

'Abdu'l-Bahá said: The Message of Krishna is the message of love. All God's prophets have brought the message of love. None has ever thought that war and hate are good. Every one agrees in saying that love and kindness are best.

Love manifests its reality in deeds, not only in words—these alone are without effect. In order that love may manifest its power there must be an object, an instrument, a motive.

There are many ways of expressing the love principle; there is love for the family, for the country, for the race, there is political enthusiasm, there is also the love of community of interest in service. These are all ways and means of showing the power of love. Without any such means, love would be unseen, unheard, unfelt—altogether unexpressed, unmanifested! Water shows its power in various ways, in quenching thirst, causing seed to grow, etc. Coal expresses one of its principles in gas-light, while one of the powers of electricity is shown in the electric light. If there were neither gas nor electricity, the nights of the world would be darkness! So, it is necessary to have an instrument, a motive for love's manifestation, an object, a mode of expression.

We must find a way of spreading love among the sons of humanity.

Love is unlimited, boundless, infinite! Material things are limited, circumscribed, finite. You cannot adequately express infinite love by limited means.

The perfect love needs an unselfish instrument, absolutely freed from fetters of every kind. The love of family is limited; the tie of blood relationship is not the strongest bond. Frequently members of the same family disagree, and even hate each other.

Patriotic love is finite; the love of one's country causing hatred of all others, is not perfect love! Compatriots also are not free from quarrels amongst themselves.

The love of race is limited; there is some union here, but that is insufficient. Love must be free from boundaries!

To love our own race may mean hatred of all others, and even people of the same race often dislike each other.

Political love also is much bound up with hatred of one party for another; this love is very limited and uncertain.

The love of community of interest in service is likewise fluctuating; frequently competitions arise, which lead to jealousy, and at length hatred replaces love.

A few years ago, Turkey and Italy had a friendly political understanding; now they are at war!

All these ties of love are imperfect. It is clear that limited material ties are insufficient to adequately express the universal love.

The great unselfish love for humanity is bounded by none of these imperfect, semi-selfish bonds; this is the one perfect love, possible to all mankind, and can only be achieved by the power of the Divine Spirit. No worldly power can accomplish the universal love.

Let all be united in this Divine power of love! Let all strive to grow in the light of the Sun of Truth, and reflecting this luminous love on all men, may their hearts become so united that they may dwell evermore in the radiance of the limitless love.

Remember these words which I speak unto you during the short time I am amongst you in Paris. I earnestly exhort you: let not your hearts be fettered by the material things of this world; I charge you not to lie contentedly on the beds of negligence, prisoners of matter, but to arise and free yourselves from its chains!

The animal creation is captive to matter, God has given freedom to man. The animal cannot escape the law of nature, whereas man may control it, for he, containing nature, can rise above it.

The power of the Holy Spirit, enlightening man's intelligence, has enabled him to discover means of bending many natural laws to his will. He flies through the air, floats on the sea, and even moves under the waters.

All this proves how man's intelligence has been enabled to free him from the limitations of nature, and to solve many of her mysteries. Man, to a certain extent, has broken the chains of matter.

The Holy Spirit will give to man greater powers than these, if only he will strive after the things of the spirit and endeavour to attune his heart to the Divine infinite love.

When you love a member of your family or a compatriot, let it be with a ray of the Infinite Love! Let it be in God, and for God! Wherever you find the attributes of God love that person, whether he be of your family or of another. Shed the light of a boundless love on every human being whom you meet, whether of your country, your race, your political party, or of any other nation, colour or shade of political opinion. Heaven will support you while you work in this in-gathering of the scattered peoples of the world beneath the shadow of the almighty tent of unity.

You will be servants of God, who are dwelling near to Him, His divine helpers in the service, ministering to all Humanity. All Humanity! Every human being! never forget this!

Do not say, he is an Italian, or a Frenchman, or an American, or an Englishman, remember only that he is a son of God, a servant of the Most High, a man! All are men! Forget nationalities; all are equal in the sight of God!

Remember not your own limitations; the help of God will come to you. Forget yourself. God's help will surely come!

When you call on the Mercy of God waiting to reinforce you, your strength will be tenfold.

Look at me: I am so feeble, yet I have had the strength given me to come amongst you: a poor servant of God, who has been enabled to give you this message! I shall not be with you long! One must never consider one's own feebleness, it is the strength of the Holy Spirit of Love, which gives the power to teach. The thought of our own weakness could only bring despair. We must look higher than all earthly thoughts; detach ourselves from every material idea, crave for the things of the spirit; fix our eyes on the everlasting bountiful Mercy of the Almighty, who will fill our souls with the gladness of joyful service to His command 'Love One Another'.

THE IMPRISONMENT OF ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ

4 Avenue de Camöens,
Wednesday, October 25th

I regret much that I have kept you waiting this morning, but I have so much to do in a short time for the Cause of the love of God.

You will not mind having waited a little to see me. I have waited years and years in prison, that I might come to see you now.

Above all, God be praised, our hearts are always in unison, and with one aim are drawn to the love of God. By the Bounty of the Kingdom our desires, our hearts, our spirits, are they not united in one bond? Our prayers, are they not for the gathering together of all men in harmony? Therefore are we not always together?

Yesterday evening when I came home from the house of Monsieur Dreyfus I was very tired—yet I did not sleep, I lay awake thinking.

I said, O God, Here am I in Paris! What is Paris and who am I? Never did I dream that from the darkness of my prison I should ever be able to come to you, though when they read me my sentence I did not believe in it.

They told me that ‘Abdu’l-Ḥamíd had ordered my everlasting imprisonment, and I said, ‘This is impossible! I shall not always be a prisoner. If ‘Abdu’l-Ḥamíd were immortal, such a sentence might possibly be carried out. It is certain that one day I shall be free. My body may be captive for a time, but ‘Abdu’l-Ḥamíd has no power over my spirit—free it must remain—that can no man imprison’.

Released from my prison by the Power of God I meet here the friends of God, and I am thankful unto Him.

Let us spread the Cause of God, for which I suffered persecution.

What a privilege it is for us to meet here in freedom. How happy for us that God has so decided that we may work together for the coming of the Kingdom!

Are you pleased to receive such a guest, freed from his prison to bring the glorious Message to you? He who never could have thought such a meeting possible! Now by the Grace of God, by His wonderful Power, I, who was condemned to perpetual imprisonment in a far off town of the East, am here in Paris talking with you!

Henceforward we shall always be together, heart and soul and spirit, pressing forward in the work till all men are gathered together under the tent of the Kingdom, singing the songs of peace.

GOD'S GREATEST GIFT TO MAN

Thursday, October 26th

God's greatest gift to man is that of intellect, or understanding.

The understanding is the power by which man acquires his knowledge of the several kingdoms of creation, and of various stages of existence, as well as of much which is invisible.

Possessing this gift, he is, in himself, the sum of earlier creations—he is able to get into touch with those kingdoms; and by this gift, he can frequently, through his scientific knowledge, reach out with prophetic vision.

Intellect is, in truth, the most precious gift bestowed upon man by the Divine Bounty. Man alone, among created beings, has this wonderful power.

All creation, preceding Man, is bound by the stern law of nature. The great sun, the multitudes of stars, the oceans and seas, the mountains, the rivers, the trees, and all animals, great or small—none is able to evade obedience to nature's law.

Man alone has freedom, and, by his understanding or intellect, has been able to gain control of and adapt some of those natural laws to his own needs. By the power of his intellect he has discovered means by which he not only traverses great continents in express trains and crosses vast oceans in ships, but, like the fish he travels under water in submarines, and, imitating the birds, he flies through the air in airships.

Man has succeeded in using electricity in several ways—for light, for motive power, for sending messages from one end of the earth to the other—and by electricity he can even hear a voice many miles away!

By this gift of understanding or intellect he has also been able to use the rays of the sun to picture people and things, and even to capture the form of distant heavenly bodies.

We perceive in what numerous ways man has been able to bend the powers of nature to his will.

How grievous it is to see how man has used his God-given gift to frame instruments of war, for breaking the Commandment of God 'Thou shalt not kill', and for defying Christ's injunction to 'Love one another'.

God gave this power to man that it might be used for the advancement of civilization, for the good of humanity, to increase love and concord and peace. But man prefers to use this gift to destroy instead of to build, for injustice and oppression, for hatred and discord and devastation, for the destruction of his fellow-creatures, whom Christ has commanded that he should love as himself!

I hope that you will use your understanding to promote the unity and tranquillity of mankind, to give enlightenment and civilization to the people, to produce love in all around you, and to bring about the universal peace.

Study the sciences, acquire more and more knowledge. Assuredly one may learn to the end of one's life! Use your knowledge always for the benefit of others; so may war cease on the face of this beautiful earth, and a glorious edifice of peace and concord be raised. Strive that your high ideals may be realized in the Kingdom of God on earth, as they will be in Heaven.

THE CLOUDS THAT OBSCURE THE SUN OF TRUTH

4 Avenue de Camöens,

Morning of Friday, October 27th

The day is fine, the air is pure, the sun shines, no mist nor cloud obscures its radiance.

These brilliant rays penetrate into all parts of the city; so may the Sun of Truth illumine the minds of men.

Christ said, 'They shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of Heaven'.² Bahá'u'lláh said, 'When Christ came for the first time He came upon the clouds'.³ Christ said that He had come from the sky, from Heaven—that He came forth from God—while He was born of Mary, His Mother. But when He declared that He had come from Heaven, it is clear that He did not mean the blue firmament but that He spoke of the Heaven of the Kingdom of God, and that from this Heaven He descended upon the clouds. As clouds are obstacles to the shining of the sun, so the clouds of the world of humanity hid from the eyes of men the radiance of the Divinity of Christ.

Men said, 'He is of Nazareth, born of Mary, we know Him and we know his brethren. What can He mean? What is He saying? That He came forth from God?'

The Body of Christ was born of Mary of Nazareth, but the Spirit was of God. The capacities of His human body were limited but the strength of His spirit was vast, infinite, immeasurable.

Men asked, 'Why does He say He is of God?' If they had understood the reality of Christ, they would have known that the body of His humanity was a cloud that hid His Divinity. The world only saw His human form, and therefore wondered how He could have 'come down from Heaven'.

Bahá'u'lláh said, 'Even as the clouds hide the sun and the sky from our gaze, even so did the humanity of Christ hide from men His real Divine character'.

I hope that you will turn with unclouded eyes towards the Sun of Truth, beholding not the things of earth, lest your hearts be attracted to the worthless and passing pleasures of the world; let that Sun give you of His strength, then will not the clouds of prejudice veil His illumination from your eyes! Then will the Sun be without clouds for you.

Breathe the air of purity. May you each and all share in the Divine Bounties of the Kingdom of Heaven. May the world be for you no obstacle hiding the truth from your sight, as the human body of Christ hid His Divinity from the people of His day. May you receive the clear vision of the Holy Spirit, so that your hearts may be illumined and able to recognize the Sun of Truth shining through all material clouds, His splendour flooding the universe.

Let not the things of the body obscure the celestial light of the spirit, so that, by the Divine Bounty, you may enter with the children of God into His Eternal Kingdom.

This is my prayer for you all.

² St Matthew xxiv, 30. St Matthew xvi, 27.

³ St John iii, 13

RELIGIOUS PREJUDICES

October 27th

The basis of the teaching of Bahá'u'lláh is the Unity of Mankind, and his greatest desire was that love and goodwill should live in the heart of men.

As He exhorted the people to do away with strife and discord, so I wish to explain to you the principal reason of the unrest among nations. The chief cause is the misrepresentation of religion by the religious leaders and teachers. They teach their followers to believe that their own form of religion is the only one pleasing to God, and that followers of any other persuasion are condemned by the All-Loving Father and deprived of His Mercy and Grace. Hence arise among the peoples, disapproval, contempt, disputes and hatred. If these religious prejudices could be swept away, the nations would soon enjoy peace and concord.

I was once at Tiberias where the Jews have a Temple. I was staying in a house just opposite the Temple, and there I saw and heard a Rabbi speaking to his congregation of Jews, and he spoke thus:

‘O Jews, you are in truth the people of God! All other races and religions are of the devil. God has created you the descendants of Abraham, and He has showered His blessings upon you. Unto you God sent Moses, Jacob and Joseph, and many other great prophets. These prophets, one and all, were of your race.

‘It was for you that God broke the power of Pharaoh and caused the Red Sea to dry up; to you also He sent manna from above to be your food, and out of the stony rock did He give you water to quench your thirst. You are indeed the chosen people of God, you are above all the races of the earth! Therefore, all other races are abhorrent to God, and condemned by Him. In truth you will govern and subdue the world, and all men shall become your slaves.

‘Do not profane yourselves by consorting with people who are not of your own religion, make not friends of such men.’

When the Rabbi had finished his eloquent discourse, his hearers were filled with joy and satisfaction. It is impossible to describe to you their happiness!

Alas! It is misguided ones like these who are the cause of division and hatred upon earth. Today there are millions of people who still worship idols, and the great religions of the world are at war among themselves. For 1,300 years, Christians and Mussulmans have been quarrelling, when with very little effort their differences and disputes could be overcome and peace and harmony could exist between them and the world could be at rest!

In the Qur’án we read that Muḥammad spoke to his followers, saying:

‘Why do you not believe in Christ, and in the Gospel? Why will you not accept Moses and the Prophets, for surely the Bible is the Book of God? In truth, Moses was a sublime Prophet, and Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit. He came to the world through the Power of God, born of the Holy Spirit and of the blessed Virgin Mary. Mary, His mother, was a saint from Heaven. She passed her days in the Temple at prayer and food was sent to her from above. Her father, Zacharias, came to her and asked her from whence the food came, and Mary made answer, “From on high.” Surely God made Mary to be exalted above all other women.’

This is what Muḥammad taught His people concerning Jesus and Moses, and He reproached them for their lack of faith in these great Teachers, and taught them the lessons of truth and tolerance. Muḥammad was sent from God to work among a people as savage and uncivilized as the wild beasts. They were quite devoid of understanding, nor had they any feelings of love, sympathy and pity. Women were so degraded and despised that a man could bury his daughter alive, and he had as many wives to be his slaves as he chose.

Among these half animal people Muḥammad was sent with His divine Message. He taught the people that idol worship was wrong, but that they should reverence Christ, Moses and the Prophets.

Under His influence they became a more enlightened and civilized people and arose from the degraded state in which He found them. Was not this a good work, and worthy of all praise, respect and love?

Look at the Gospel of the Lord Christ and see how glorious it is! Yet even today men fail to understand its priceless beauty, and misinterpret its words of wisdom.

Christ forbade war! When the disciple Peter, thinking to defend his Lord, cut off the ear of the servant of the High Priest, Christ said to him: 'Put up thy sword into the sheath'.⁴ Yet, in spite of the direct command of the Lord they profess to serve—men still dispute, make war, and kill one another, and His counsels and teaching seem quite forgotten.

But do not therefore attribute to the Masters and Prophets the evil deeds of their followers. If the priests, teachers and people, lead lives which are contrary to the religion they profess to follow, is that the fault of Christ or the other Teachers?

The people of Islám were taught to realize how Jesus came from God and was born of the Spirit, and that He must be glorified of all men. Moses was a prophet of God, and revealed in His day and for the people to whom He was sent, the Book of God.

Muhammad recognized the sublime grandeur of Christ and the greatness of Moses and the prophets. If only the whole world would acknowledge the greatness of Muhammad and all the Heaven-sent Teachers, strife and discord would soon vanish from the face of the earth, and God's Kingdom would come among men.

The people of Islám who glorify Christ are not humiliated by so doing.

Christ was the Prophet of the Christians, Moses of the Jews—why should not the followers of each prophet recognize and honour the other prophets also? If men could only learn the lesson of mutual tolerance, understanding, and brotherly love, the unity of the world would soon be an established fact.

Bahá'u'lláh spent His life teaching this lesson of Love and Unity. Let us then put away from us all prejudice and intolerance, and strive with all our hearts and souls to bring about understanding and unity between Christians and Mussulmans.

⁴ St John xviii, 11.

THE BENEFITS OF GOD TO MAN

4 Avenue de Camöens,

October 27th

God alone ordereth all things and is all-powerful. Why then does He send trials to His servants?

The trials of man are of two kinds. (a) The consequences of his own actions. If a man eats too much, he ruins his digestion; if he takes poison he becomes ill or dies. If a person gambles he will lose his money; if he drinks too much he will lose his equilibrium. All these sufferings are caused by the man himself, it is quite clear therefore that certain sorrows are the result of our own deeds. (b) Other sufferings there are, which come upon the Faithful of God. Consider the great sorrows endured by Christ and by His apostles!

Those who suffer most, attain to the greatest perfection.

Those who declare a wish to suffer much for Christ's sake must prove their sincerity; those who proclaim their longing to make great sacrifices can only prove their truth by their deeds. Job proved the fidelity of his love for God by being faithful through his great adversity, as well as during the prosperity of his life. The apostles of Christ who steadfastly bore all their trials and sufferings—did they not prove their faithfulness? Was not their endurance the best proof?

These griefs are now ended.

Caiaphas lived a comfortable and happy life while Peter's life was full of sorrow and trial; which of these two is the more enviable? Assuredly we should choose the present state of Peter, for he possesses immortal life whilst Caiaphas has won eternal shame. The trials of Peter tested his fidelity. Tests are benefits from God, for which we should thank Him. Grief and sorrow do not come to us by chance, they are sent to us by the Divine Mercy for our own perfecting.

While a man is happy he may forget his God; but when grief comes and sorrows overwhelm him, then will he remember his Father who is in Heaven, and who is able to deliver him from his humiliations.

Men who suffer not, attain no perfection. The plant most pruned by the gardeners is that one which, when the summer comes, will have the most beautiful blossoms and the most abundant fruit.

The labourer cuts up the earth with his plough, and from that earth comes the rich and plentiful harvest. The more a man is chastened, the greater is the harvest of spiritual virtues shown forth by him. A soldier is no good General until he has been in the front of the fiercest battle and has received the deepest wounds.

The prayer of the prophets of God has always been, and still is: Oh God, I long to lay down my life in the path to Thee! I desire to shed my blood for Thee, and to make the supreme sacrifice.

BEAUTY AND HARMONY IN DIVERSITY

October 28th

The Creator of all is One God.

From this same God all creation sprang into existence, and He is the one goal, towards which everything in nature yearns. This conception was embodied in the words of Christ, when He said, 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end'. Man is the sum of Creation, and the Perfect Man is the expression of the complete thought of the Creator—the Word of God.

Consider the world of created beings, how varied and diverse they are in species, yet with one sole origin. All the differences that appear are those of outward form and colour. This diversity of type is apparent throughout the whole of nature.

Behold a beautiful garden full of flowers, shrubs, and trees. Each flower has a different charm, a peculiar beauty, its own delicious perfume and beautiful colour. The trees too, how varied are they in size, in growth, in foliage—and what different fruits they bear! Yet all these flowers, shrubs and trees spring from the self-same earth, the same sun shines upon them and the same clouds give them rain.

So it is with humanity. It is made up of many races, and its peoples are of different colour, white, black, yellow, brown and red—but they all come from the same God, and all are servants to Him. This diversity among the children of men has unhappily not the same effect as it has among the vegetable creation, where the spirit shown is more harmonious. Among men exists the diversity of animosity, and it is this that causes war and hatred among the different nations of the world.

Differences which are only those of blood also cause them to destroy and kill one another. Alas! that this should still be so. Let us look rather at the beauty in diversity, the beauty of harmony, and learn a lesson from the vegetable creation. If you beheld a garden in which all the plants were the same as to form, colour and perfume, it would not seem beautiful to you at all, but, rather, monotonous and dull. The garden which is pleasing to the eye and which makes the heart glad, is the garden in which are growing side by side flowers of every hue, form and perfume, and the joyous contrast of colour is what makes for charm and beauty. So is it with trees. An orchard full of fruit trees is a delight; so is a plantation planted with many species of shrubs. It is just the diversity and variety that constitutes its charm; each flower, each tree, each fruit, beside being beautiful in itself, brings out by contrast the qualities of the others, and shows to advantage the special loveliness of each and all.

Thus should it be among the children of men! The diversity in the human family should be the cause of love and harmony, as it is in music where many different notes blend together in the making of a perfect chord. If you meet those of different race and colour from yourself, do not mistrust them and withdraw yourself into your shell of conventionality, but rather be glad and show them kindness. Think of them as different coloured roses growing in the beautiful garden of humanity, and rejoice to be among them.

Likewise, when you meet those whose opinions differ from your own, do not turn away your face from them. All are seeking truth, and there are many roads leading thereto. Truth has many aspects, but it remains always and forever one.

Do not allow difference of opinion, or diversity of thought to separate you from your fellow-men, or to be the cause of dispute, hatred and strife in your hearts.

Rather, search diligently for the truth and make all men your friends.

Every edifice is made of many different stones, yet each depends on the other to such an extent that if one were displaced the whole building would suffer; if one is faulty the structure is imperfect.

Bahá'u'lláh has drawn the circle of unity, He has made a design for the uniting of all the peoples, and for the gathering of them all under the shelter of the tent of universal unity. This is the work of the Divine Bounty, and we must all strive with heart and soul until we have the reality of unity in our midst, and as we work, so will strength be given unto us. Leave all thought of self, and strive only

to be obedient and submissive to the Will of God. In this way only shall we become citizens of the Kingdom of God, and attain unto life everlasting.

THE TRUE MEANING OF THE PROPHECIES CONCERNING THE COMING OF CHRIST

October 30th

In the Bible there are prophecies of the coming of Christ. The Jews still await the coming of the Messiah, and pray to God day and night to hasten His advent.

When Christ came they denounced and slew Him, saying: 'This is not the One for whom we wait. Behold when the Messiah shall come, signs and wonders shall testify that He is in truth the Christ. We know the signs and conditions, and they have not appeared. The Messiah will arise out of an unknown city. He shall sit upon the throne of David, and behold, He shall come with a sword of steel, and with a sceptre of iron shall He rule! He shall fulfil the law of the Prophets, He shall conquer the East and the West, and shall glorify His chosen people the Jews. He shall bring with Him a reign of peace, during which even the animals shall cease to be at enmity with man. For behold the wolf and the lamb shall drink from the same spring, and the lion and the doe shall lie down in the same pasture, the serpent and the mouse shall share the same nest, and all God's creatures shall be at rest'.

According to the Jews, Jesus the Christ fulfilled none of these conditions, for their eyes were holden and they could not see.

He came from Nazareth, no unknown place. He carried no sword in His hand, nor even a stick. He did not sit upon the Throne of David, He was a poor man. He reformed the Law of Moses, and broke the Sabbath Day. He did not conquer the East and the West, but was Himself subject to the Roman Law. He did not exalt the Jews, but taught equality and brotherhood, and rebuked the Scribes and Pharisees. He brought in no reign of peace, for during His lifetime injustice and cruelty reached such a height that even He Himself fell a victim to it, and died a shameful death upon the cross.

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