Mysticism, Science  
and Revelation

by

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*To my daughter*

*Betty*

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# Introduction

This book has a number of objectives. First of all I wish

to make it clear that the essential element of true religion

is that mystical feeling which, in some inexplicable manner,

unites man with God. Speaking rather broadly, anyone who

experiences this feeling is a mystic; but we shall be primarily

concerned with the type of mystic who believes that finite

man may attain the presence of the Absolute and become

one with the Absolute, and it will be necessary to show that

his claims are not valid. Some scientific inquiry must,

therefore, be made into the nature of mystical experience;

for without this experience the mystic would have insufficient

ground for his claims. It will also be necessary to investigate

the difference between mysticism and prophetic religion.

Finally I desire to make it clear that revealed truth is not

foreign to experience, if we evaluate it in terms of “total

experience” and not merely experience in the world of science.

The reader who has an analytical mind will probably be

interested in what the physicist has to say about mysticism,

and for this reason I have indicated, in a rather general way,

the viewpoint of the physicist.

Personally, I believe it is important to remember that

religion belongs to the *world of value* and that science

cannot make *value judgments*. The reader must also bear

in mind that the modern physicist is no longer completely

dominated by the mechanistic concept. As a scientist I

naturally have great sympathy for the “scientifically-minded”

man who is struggling with fundamental issues like mystical

experience and divine revelation.

In discussions concerning prophetic revelation I assume

that all the great historic religions, like Christianity and Islám,

are divine in origin. I have drawn freely on the Bahá’í Faith

for, as a serious student of religion, I realize that it is the

consummation of all the prophetic religions of the past.

Moreover, as we might expect, it is decidedly more explicit

on the subject of mysticism than any of the revelations which

preceded it. For those who are not familiar with the Bahá’í

Faith, a few remarks about its origin and its aims have been

included in the Epilogue.

Of all the books that I have consulted, *Das Gebet*, by

Friedrich Heiler, is the most stimulating and the most instruc-

tive. I have consequently used it freely.

I am very happy to express here my appreciation of the

work of the translator, Karl Schück. Not only has he taken

great care in the translation which, as one may imagine, was

no simple matter, but he has also made valuable suggestions.

I also wish to express my gratitude to Jane Lovely for typing

the manuscript.

G. A. Shook.

Eliot, Maine.

Chapter I  
God and His creation

The mystic, as we shall see, maintains that he can enter the

presence of the infinite God, or that he can experience God

*immediately*. Now the mystical philosopher, on the other

hand, is caught between two incompatible tendencies. He

would like to be scientific, and to treat mystical experiences

as he would treat the data of sense perception. He says, in

substance, that the mystic has had an extraordinary experience.

The mystic maintains that he has been in the presence of the

Infinite; and, while this does not sound plausible to *us*, *he* is

absolutely certain that he has been in the Divine Presence,

and we cannot doubt his sincerity nor his intellectual integrity.

Surely then, we can consider what he reports with an un-

biased mind.

On the other hand, the mystical philosopher knows that

the mystic can only report on a psychic experience, nothing

more. Any metaphysical doctrine the mystic may associate

with this experience is quite another matter.

But again (the mystical philosopher may argue), if the mystic

says he has been in the presence of God—and very many do

make this claim with good faith—can we completely ignore

his report? The mystical philosopher may continue: Is

not the world of value, the world of art, music and poetry,

just as much a part of our consciousness as the world of

sense impression? Is not the spiritual world more real than

the symbolic world of science? May we not assume that

the heart functions in the world of spirit as the mind functions

in the world of matter? May we not assume, moreover, that

God reveals himself to man through the ecstatic experience?

Every mystic who claims that he can enter the presence

of God also maintains that this ineffable experience transcends

every other experience in the religious life. Therefore he might

claim, and most of the mystics probably do claim, that for

him this ecstatic experience must be identified with the Infinite.

He may also add, and with some justification, that he is really

not concerned about the opinion of those who have never had

such an experience.

To be sure, we may define God as *that which* we experience

immediately, in contemplation. This would certainly simplify

the issue; but this kind of simplification is far from satis-

factory. Take, for example, the pantheistic concept. If we

define God as “the whole” and consider the world as a part

of “the whole,” then we do not have to explain the difference

between God and nature. While such a concept might appeal

to a few poets and a few scientists, it really, as we well know,

raises more questions than it answers.

Perhaps we can learn a lesson from the history of classical

physics. It introduced a simplification into our scientific

thinking that had never existed before. It began by making

man a potential God, capable of explaining almost anything,

natural or supernatural; but it ended by making him a mere

aggregation of particles devoid of free will.

Now the mystic realizes that this immediate knowledge

of the presence of God cannot rest upon experience alone;

nevertheless without this supernormal psychic experience he

would probably never claim that he could enter the presence

of, or become one with, the Infinite.

If, therefore, we are striving for a critical knowledge of

mysticism our first concern must be with epistemology.

Let us then review briefly the various kinds of knowledge

with which we are more or less familiar.

## Different kinds of knowledge

We do not have to prove that we are happy. Our own

unsupported testimony is quite sufficient. The cause of our

happiness is, however, quite another matter, a matter of

inference; and our inferential knowledge is not infallible.

We are never absolutely sure about the origin of our inner

experiences; but the experiences themselves are known to us

by direct cognition, that is, they are immediately apprehended.

If a man has an aversion to religion no argument will con-

vince him that the *feeling* of aversion is not real. It is real

and we can do nothing about it. But we might convince

him that the *reason* for this feeling is false.

The feeling of beauty, compassion, or love is just as *real*

to us as are external objects. In fact it is decidedly more

real, for the external world is known to us only by inference.

We see an object before us and we call it a stone merely

because it looks like other objects which are known to us as

stones. As a matter of fact this object may be a piece of

wood or plastic and not a stone. Strange as it may seem, the

world about us is not very real. People have thoughts and feel-

ings regarding it, and these are real; but the world is not.

Again, we know that in meditation, when the mental

activity is low, *insight* or *intuition* often suggest what is new.

In other words, there is a kind of knowledge that comes

through illumination, insight or intuition; something that

transcends mental activity and sense data. We cannot

ignore facts. Speaking of mystical philosophy, Russell says:

“There is, first, the belief in insight as against discursive

analytic knowledge; the belief in a way of wisdom, sudden,

penetrating, coercive, which is contrasted with the slow and

fallible study of outward appearance by a science relying

wholly upon the sense.”[1] The first step, Russell suggests,

1 Bertrand Russell, *Mysticism and Logic*. London, Allen & Unwin,

1936. p. 8.

is the feeling that beyond our daily experience there is a great

mystery. Then the belief comes that reality may be found

through illumination. Although he does not agree with the

mystic’s conclusions, he does maintain that there is something

to be gained from the mystical experience which could not be

obtained in any other way. But while the modern philosopher

realizes the beneficial result that may accrue from moments

of illumination, he is not misled, like the religious mystic,

by immediate experience. He distinguishes between mystical

experience and the metaphysical basis of experience. To

quote from Russell again: “Of the reality or unreality of

the mystic’s world I know nothing. I have no wish to deny it,

nor even to declare that the insight which reveals it is not

a genuine insight. What I do wish to maintain—and it is

here that the scientific attitude becomes imperative—is that

insight, untested and unsupported, is an insufficient guarantee

of truth, in spite of the fact that much of the most important

truth is first suggested by its means.”[1]

On the other hand, Russell shows that while reason and

intuition have their separate functions they are not antagon-

istic. “Reason is a harmonizing, controlling force rather

than a creative one. Even in the most purely logical realm it

is insight that first arrives at what is new.”[2]

Intuition may indicate the solution of a certain problem,

but it requires reason to confirm it; for immediate experience

is not knowledge, although it is necessary to it. Conversely,

if one did not use reason constantly to interpret intuition

(immediate experience), one would not be able to use one’s

intuition. That is, a meaningless experience such as a feeling

of well-being, mere exaltation, or depression, would probably

not lead to the solution of any problem.

1 Russell, ibid, p. 12.

2 ibid., p. 13.

The creative force of genius, then, is more akin to mystical

experience than to reason.

Philosophy in its search for transcendent values has passed

beyond the limitations of the mind while at the same time

realizing that there can be no real progress without the mind.

The quest of the philosopher is very like that of the mystic,

except that the philosopher realizes the function of the mind

while the mystic denies its place. Neither expects to reach

its goal through the aid of conventional religion. Perhaps

we should not call intuition knowledge, but since it is essential

to new knowledge we are justified in using the term *intuitive*

*knowledge*. We must remember, however, that intuition,

like all other human methods of acquiring knowledge, is

liable to error. Broadly speaking, then, there is a kind of

intuitive knowledge (as opposed to discursive knowledge),

which comes to us through an inexplicable, unselfconscious

process of thought. Science does not deny this kind of know-

ledge. In fact, no great creative work was ever accomplished

without intuitive knowledge.

We might distinguish between the intuitive knowledge

of the scientists and the kind that comes to the religious

genius, which is ostensibly of the higher order. The mystic

in a state of ecstasy or vision sometimes receives what he

calls *revealed knowledge*. The mystic believes that the

phenomenal psychic experience produces something that is

superior to any result of mental effort. Moreover, he is

inclined to believe that his intuitive or revealed knowledge is

more valid than the intuitive knowledge of the scientist. But

here again we must remember that the intuition of the mystic,

like the intuition of other artists, is not infallible.

Contrasted with intuitive knowledge there is the kind that

comes through experience, which we call *empirical knowledge*.

The scientist, as we all know, is concerned with empirical

knowledge, though not exclusively. He is also concerned

with the kind of knowledge that comes through mental

processes, logic, inductive and deductive reasoning. This

*inferential knowledge* is indispensable to science. Some of

the most important scientific truths are derived from known

laws and assumptions.

## Concepts of God

(1) *Immanence*: Immanence means indwelling. Accord-

ing to this concept God is intimately related to His creation,

His universe. When we say God is immanent in nature

we mean that there is a close relation between the creator

and the thing created, nature. In transcendence the creator

is separate and distinct from His creation, like the carpenter

and the table. The table is not in any way a part of the

carpenter. In immanence God is a kind of impersonal

order, and the world is an integral part of this order.

(2) *Transcendence*: God is a definite, individual entity.

He created the world, but He is entirely separate from it

just as the carpenter is separate from the table. God is

distinguished from His creation. He does not dwell in the

world nor in man; man is not a part of God.

(3) *Pantheism*: God is the totality of creation. God

is the whole; the world is a phase of the whole. God is

not other than the world, as in transcendence. According

to pantheism, man is a part of God or man contains a part of

God. Now if we admit the first concept we can maintain

that God is in us, while if we admit the third we can claim

that we are identical with God. Both are necessary for

mysticism in its extreme form.

(4) *Deism*: God created the world; He is the First

Cause. He is not in the world and has no concern for the

world. The God of deism is not a personal God as is the God

of prophetic revelation. When a scientist says he believes in

God, he generally means that he admits the universe is con-

trolled by an intelligent force and that he is willing to identify

this force with the God of religion. It does not mean that

this creator of man and the universe hears and answers prayers.

Usually the scientist is not concerned with a personal God,

a God who is interested in man’s daily welfare.

(5) *Theism*: The popular modern idea of this concept

is that God is other than nature but immanent in nature, in

every activity of nature. God created the world but is still

in the world. He is in the world but at the same time is

other than the world. In a sense He is both immanent and

transcendent.

## Man’s relation to God

Every prophetic revelation like Islám, Christianity or the

Bahá’í Faith has advanced some doctrine of man’s relation

to God, his creator. Now, if we assume that God is in some

way responsible for man’s existence, a number of questions

naturally come to mind. Was there ever a time when man

did not exist somewhere in the universe (we are certain that

there was a time when he did not exist on this earth)? Did

he evolve from some lower form? If so, when did the soul

and the mind appear? What is the connection between the

soul and the body? Is the soul immortal? Is God un-

knowable? If so, how can we obtain any knowledge of Him?

Finally, what is man’s relation to God? How did he proceed

or come forth from God?

Now the Bahá’í Faith is very explicit on all these questions.

They are discussed thoroughly in the book, *Some Answered*

*Questions*[1] by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the conclusions are compatible

1 *Some Answered Questions*, collected and translated from the Persian

of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá by Laura Clifford Barney. New York, Bahá’í

Publishing Committee, 1930.

with our modern scientific outlook. They are vital to our

subject, and we must discuss a few of them in detail later;

but for the present it will be sufficient to merely state the

answers given to some of them.

Man has always existed somewhere in the universe. This

earth evolved, and in its early stages man did not exist upon

it, but the species known as man did exist somewhere in the

universe. Man evolved from a lower form, but from the

beginning he was potentially man. He is a distinct species.

In the individual man, soul and mind existed from the begin-

ning. In the infancy of man, soul and mind appear, but

they are imperfect. When man becomes mature the soul and

mind attain some degree of perfection. The connection

between the soul of man and his body is somewhat like the

connection between the sun and a mirror. When we look in

the mirror we see the sun (that is, we see the *image* of the sun)

but we know the sun does not exist in the mirror. We speak

of the soul leaving the body, but it is understood that the soul

really does not enter nor leave the body. The body may be

impaired or completely destroyed but the soul is not affected.

The soul is immortal; it has a beginning but no end. Its

existence starts at the time of conception. God the Infinite

is unknowable; that is, the Divine Essence is unknowable.

Man cannot comprehend God, the Divine Essence, through

his intelligence nor through his feelings and inner experiences.

This transcendental nature of the Divine Essence is stressed

in the Bahá’í writings. (The God of mysticism, as we shall

see, is not an absolutely transcendental God). Our knowledge

of God comes to us through the Prophets, or Manifestations

of God.

We must now consider man’s relation to God in some detail.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells us there are two kinds of proceeding,

coming forth, or dependence: proceeding through creation,

or emanation, and proceeding through manifestation.

### The proceeding or appearance through emanation or creation

This kind of proceeding is like the coming forth of the

writing from the writer. The writing emanates from the

writer. It is a creation of the writer. The writing is not

a part of the writer. It is entirely different from the writer,

not the writer in a different form.[1] In a similar manner

the human spirit or soul emanates from God, or the soul

is a creation of God. It does not manifest Him; it is not

the Infinite in another form.

### Proceeding through manifestation

This kind of proceeding is like the coming forth of the tree

from the seed. The seed is a potential tree. We might say,

the tree proceeds or comes forth from the seed through

manifestation. The flower manifests the seed; the seed

appears in the form of the flower. The flower is not a creation

of the seed. It is, in a sense, not entirely different from the

seed. It is the same reality in a different form.

Now the Prophets manifest the attributes and perfections

of God, and not His Essence. The Prophet is like a perfect

mirror facing the sun.[2] Nevertheless, the sun is not identical

with the mirror. Just as a mirror reflects the light of the sun,

so do the Prophets reflect the attributes and perfections of

God, or we may say that the Prophets *manifest* the attributes

and perfections of God.

The rays of the sun which are reflected from the mirror

are only another form of the light which is emitted from the

sun. As we said above, the soul is not a manifestation of

God, it is not the Infinite in another form. We cannot

think of the Infinite God, the Unknown Essence as being

divided into parts. Some mystics, as we shall see, would

1 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 239.

2 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, ibid., p. 241.

like to believe that man contains a part of God or that some

of the Divine Reality resides within him, and this belief is

essential to their theory that man can enter the presence of

the Infinite God or that he can experience God immediately.

Chapter II  
God and His creation (*continued*)

## The three worlds of being

For the mystic there are two and only two realms of being,

(worlds or planes of existence); the world of God or the world

of the Divine Essence, and the world of creation which includes

man. The two-world doctrine leads to an essential dualism,

as we shall see later.

The Bahá’í Faith upholds the existence of three worlds:

the world of God (the Absolute or the Divine Essence), the

world of the Prophets, and the world of creation. This

doctrine is explicit in the Bahá’í Revelation and implicit in

most of the Prophetic Revelations.

## The world of the divine essence

Finite man cannot experience the Infinite God immediately,

nor can he gain knowledge of God through logical arguments.

We say that God is omnipotent or that He is merciful, but we

cannot comprehend His omnipotence nor His mercy. In

view of the suffering we witness to-day some find it rather

difficult to believe that He is both omnipotent and merciful.

The qualities we attribute to God have their origin in our

own limited understanding.

The transcendental nature of the Divine Essence is empha-

sized over and over again in the Bahá’í writings.

Bahá’u’lláh says: *“All that the sages and mystics have said*

*or written have never exceeded, nor can they ever hope to*

*exceed, the limitations to which man’s finite mind hath been*

*strictly subjected. To whatever heights the mind of the most*

*exalted of men may soar, however great the depths which the*

*detached and understanding heart can penetrate, such mind and*

*heart can never transcend that which is the creature of their*

*own conceptions and the product of their own thoughts. The*

*meditations of the profoundest thinker, the devotions of the*

*holiest of saints, the highest expressions of praise from either*

*human pen or tongue, are but a reflection of that which hath*

*been created within themselves, through the revelation of the*

*Lord, their God.”*[1]

The only way in which we can comprehend God is through

the Prophets or Manifestations of God. Bahá’u’lláh reminds

us, in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, that: *“These Prophets and chosen Ones*

*of God are the recipients and revealers of all the unchangeable*

*attributes and names of God. They are the mirrors that truly*

*and faithfully reflect the light of God. Whatsoever is applicable*

*to them is in reality applicable to God, Himself, Who is both*

*the Visible and the Invisible.”*[2]

## The world of the Prophets

The ultimate aim of the mystic is to attain the presence

of the Infinite God, and to become one with Him. Catherine

of Genoa (c. 1447–1510) declared: “My ‘I’ is God, and I

know no other ‘I’ but this My God;” and Madame Guyon

(1648–1717) made the same claim. Some mystics do not

go quite so far, that is they do not identify the “I” of man

with the Divine Essence, but they do maintain that they can

attain the presence of the Absolute, the Divine Essence.

Koepp says: “The mystic’s soul, turned inwards, experiences

God in itself in its innermost essence and deepest ground,”[3]

and Elsa of Neustadt: “God is in me and I am in Him;

He is mine and I am His.”[4]

Prophetic revelation has never held out such a hope to

man, and the Bahá’í Faith makes it quite clear that finite man

1 *Gleanings From The Writings Of Bahá’u’lláh*, translated by Shoghi

Effendi. New York, Bahá’í Publishing Committee, 1939, p. 317.

2 *Kitáb-i-Íqán, The Book of Certitude*, revealed by Bahá’u’lláh, translated

by Shoghi Effendi. New York, Bahá’í Publishing Committee, 1931

pp. 142, 143.

3 Quoted in Heiler, *Prayer*, p. 142.

4 ibid.

can never attain the presence of the Absolute, the Divine

Essence, nor become one with the Absolute. However, God

and man are not completely and eternally separated: the

Prophet is a link between the world of the Divine Essence

and the world of creation, which includes man. The Prophets

have a human and a divine side, they can reveal the divine

will to man and they can manifest the divine perfections to

man. In the words of Bahá’u’lláh: *“And since there can be*

*no tie of direct intercourse to bind the one true God with His*

*creation, and no resemblance whatever can exist between the*

*transient and the Eternal, the contingent and the Absolute, He*

*hath ordained that in every age and dispensation a pure and*

*stainless Soul be made manifest in the kingdoms of earth and*

*heaven. Unto this subtle, this mysterious and ethereal Being*

*He hath assigned a twofold nature; the physical, pertaining to*

*the world of matter, and the spiritual, which is born of the sub-*

*stance of God Himself.”*[1]

And again He says: *“The door of the knowledge of the*

*Ancient Beauty hath ever been, and will continue forever 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.”*[2]

They have a unique station, and no matter how far man

may advance he can never reach the station of Prophet.

1 *Gleanings*, p. 66.

2 ibid., p. 49.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá makes this clear many times. In one place He

says: *“However far the disciples might progress, they could*

*never become Christ.”*[1]

When the Prophet comes to the world He revives the

spiritual life of man and also establishes a new civilization.

The Prophet reflects the Holy Spirit as a mirror reflects the

light of the sun. We sometimes say, in symbolic language,

that the Prophet breathes the Holy Spirit into the world and

thereby creates a new spiritual and social order.

Man has capacities, but they are latent and they must be

released. As Bahá’u’lláh says: *“These energies with which*

*the Day Star of Divine bounty and Source of heavenly guidance*

*hath endowed the reality of man lie, however, latent within*

*him, even as the flame is hidden within the candle and the rays*

*of light are potentially present in the lamp. The radiance*

*of these energies may be obscured by worldly desires even*

*as the light of the sun can be concealed beneath the dust*

*and dross which cover the mirror. Neither the candle nor*

*the lamp can be lighted through their own unaided efforts, nor*

*can it ever be possible for the mirror to free itself from its*

*dross. It is clear and evident that until a fire is kindled the*

*lamp will never be ignited, and unless the dross is blotted out*

*from the face of the mirror it can never represent the image*

*of the sun nor reflect its light and glory.”*[2]

There are two points concerning the world of Prophets

that are emphasized repeatedly in the Bahá’í writings, namely:

(1) the day of revelation has not ceased and (2) no Prophet

is superior to the others.

Commenting on this first point, Bahá’u’lláh says: “*Can*

*one of sane mind ever seriously imagine that, in view of certain*

*words the meaning of which he cannot comprehend, the portal*

*of God’s infinite guidance can ever be closed in the face of men?*

1 *Some Answered Questions*, p. 271.

2 *Gleanings*, p. 65.

*Can he ever conceive for these Divine Luminaries, these*

*resplendent Lights either a beginning or an end? What out-*

*pouring flood can compare with the stream of His all-embracing*

*grace, and what blessing can excel the evidences of so great and*

*pervasive a mercy? There can be no doubt whatever that if*

*for one moment the tide of His mercy and grace were to be*

*withheld from the world, it would completely perish.”*[1]

Concerning the second point, He reminds us that: *“These*

*attributes of God are not, and have never been, vouchsafed*

*specially unto certain Prophets, and withheld from others.*

*Nay, all the Prophets of God, His well-favoured, His holy and*

*chosen Messengers are, without exception, the bearers of His*

*names, and the embodiments of His attributes. They only*

*differ in the intensity of their revelation, and the comparative*

*potency of their light.”*[2]

Finally, our concept of a personal God is derived from the

life of the Prophet. Having elements in common with men,

we can appreciate, to some extent, those attributes we associate

with a personal God, such as love, mercy and justice.

## The world of creation

The physical universe, including man, is a creation of the

Divine Reality, God. It is not a manifestation of the Divine

Reality, not the Divine Reality in another form.

The world of creation has always existed. If the existence

of God is eternal, surely this endless universe is eternal;

it had no beginning and will have no end. The earth had a

beginning and will have an end, but the universe has neither

beginning nor end. We must think of creation as a continuous

process; this is difficult for finite man because he cannot

think of creation without thinking of a beginning.

Before an author writes a book, he has the subject matter

in mind. He has some ideas more or less related to his

1 ibid., p. 68.

2 ibid., p. 48.

theme, but usually he does not see the theme as a whole.

Then he may put his thoughts on paper, in a more or less

orderly fashion. Being finite he must necessarily take some

preliminary steps before he actually starts writing the book.

But the Omnipotent Creator is certainly not limited in this

manner. We cannot comprehend this, but neither can we

comprehend the underlying reality in nature. We assume

there is an underlying reality in nature and we try to imitate

it by means of scientific models, but we cannot claim that we

really understand this underlying reality.

As we said before, the soul is a *creation* of God; it is not a

*manifestation* of God, not God in another form, but a new

reality, and it therefore has a beginning. If it had no beginning

then, so far as time goes, it would be in the same category as

God and this would compel us to consider two eternal realities,

God and man. To be sure, we may assume, as some mystics

do, that the soul existed in undifferentiated form with, or in,

God; but this also presents insurmountable difficulties, for

we would then have to assume that, in some inexplicable

manner, man shares a particle of the Divine Essence. This

however, would destroy the existent unity of the Infinite,

and modern man would probably hesitate to accept any

theory of man’s origin which would destroy this unity. As

we shall see, it is much simpler to assume that man’s soul

is a creation of God.

The mystics consider only two worlds, the world of the

Absolute, and the world of creation, which for them includes

man and the prophets; and they imagine moreover that the

world of creation is a manifestation of the Divine Essence.

This, of course, puts the world of creation in the same category

as the world of the Prophets. Whatever sanction this has it

certainly does not have the sanction of experience. Serious

study of a prophetic revelation, like Christianity or Islám,

would convince the student that the Founder of a world-

religion is inherently different from other men. The creative

genius is in a class by himself, and this surely applies to the

Prophet as well as to the artist or musician. There are cer-

tainly some religious philosophers, as well as mystics, who

regard man as a potential Prophet, but this is like regarding

every musician as a potential genius of the stature of Beethoven.

In practice it really does not work out that way.

Now the question may arise, why should the soul or spirit

be associated in any way with a material body? ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

tells us that the spirit acquires perfections by its associations

with the body, just as a man travelling in a foreign country

gains something from the habits and customs of its people.

And again, just as the spirit of man causes the life of the body

so man causes the life of the world. *“If there, were no man,*

*the perfections of the spirit would not appear, and the light*

*of the mind would not be resplendent in this world. This world*

*would be like a body without a soul.”*[1]

## Divine life process

The majority of mystics believe that the spiritual element

in man, the soul, prior to its association with the body on this

earth, existed in some indescribable form with God. This

is a logical consequence of the belief that God dwells in us or

that we are identical with God. We came from God, we

spend some time on this earth and then we return to God.

The mystic path that one must follow in order to return to,

and become one with God, necessarily constitutes a basic

element in all mystical philosophy. On the other hand

prophetic revelation, and the Bahá’í Faith in particular,

maintains that the only path for mortal man to follow is the

path that is laid down for us by the laws and precepts of the

Prophets of God, who create the spiritual life of man.

In the period of decline of a highly developed civilization,

1 *Some Answered Questions*, p. 234.

when society is dominated by a sensuous culture, spiritually-

minded people lose faith and interest in the world and what

it has to offer. The burning desire of the pious man is to

free himself from the outer world, the world of the senses,

and to attain the presence of the Unchangeable, the Immutable,

the Absolute. Not only must he free himself from the external

world but he must also free himself from his ego.

The path is, in reality, a negative process by which the

mystic is able to pass from the normal state of mind into a

supernormal state. In this state he is able to concentrate

upon the Infinite. In the words of Tauler (c. 1300–1361):

“Turn thyself in truth from thyself and from all created

things and centre thy mind wholly upon God.”[1]

From the state of concentration, where his chief concern

is to be free from all earthly feelings and desires, and to be

governed wholly by the Infinite, he passes to the state beyond

concentration and asking, to the state of complete passivity

where he contemplates the attributes of God, His love,

His mercy and His beauty. Plotinus (a.d. 09–270)[2]

describes this state as follows: “The spirit remains immovably

sunken in contemplation; it gazes on nothing else but Absolute

Beauty, it turns itself wholly to it and concentrates on it, and

at last is, as it were, filled with power.”

The various stages of the path such as purgation, illumin-

ation and union, need not concern us here. We are con-

cerned with the fundamental basic question, (which we will

discuss more fully in Chapter III)—Is the experience of

ecstasy, the experience of *eternal blessedness, deathless joy,*

*indescribable bliss*, proof that the mystic is in the presence

of the Infinite? Does it prove that he is one with the Infinite?

At this point it is sufficient to observe again that according

to the Bahá’í viewpoint the soul is a creation, and not an

incarnation nor a manifestation, of the Divine Essence.

1 Quoted in Heiler, *Prayer*, p. 180.

2 ibid., p. 184.

Chapter III  
The mystical experience

## Soul and mind

In the Bahá’í writings the spiritual element in man is

designated variously as *spirit*, *human spirit*, *soul* and *rational*

*soul*, but most commonly as the *soul*. Sometimes we think

of this collective reality as having three aspects which we

call soul, mind and spirit; but we must remember that after

all there is but one reality.

We cannot think of the soul of man as something quite

apart and distinct from his mind, something that is in conflict

with the mind. It is true that in the past many have felt

that there is an inherent conflict between the soul and the

mind, or to put it in another way, between the human spirit

and the intellect. There was a strong conviction that in

some mysterious way God is associated with man’s soul but

that He sustains no relation whatever to man’s mind. The

same idea is more often expressed in another way, namely

that God is connected with the heart or feelings, and when

we think of the heart we probably think of the emotional

side of man.

An important point should be stressed here, and it will be

developed more fully later in this chapter.. The heart is not

an infallible guide to spiritual truth. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in dis-

cussing the four methods of acquiring knowledge, shows that

the senses, the mind and tradition are all defective criteria

for arriving’ at the truth, and then He says: *“The fourth*

*criterion I have named is inspiration through which it is claimed*

*the reality of knowledge is attainable. What is inspiration? It*

*is the influx of the human heart. But what are satanic*

*promptings which afflict mankind? They are the influx of the*

*heart also. How shall we differentiate between them?”*[1]

The heart errs. For example, consider the matter of

prejudice. Experience shows that we cannot eliminate

prejudice with the mind alone, that is by merely investigating

the truth, nor with the heart unaided by the intellect. It is

from the heart that prejudices originate. It is the heart

and not the mind that causes man to love his own race or

nation, to the exclusion of all others. Simple-minded people

who live by their emotions, that is, those who are governed

entirely by the promptings of the heart, are not free from

animosity and hostility. The capacity for personal love,

without understanding or enlightenment, may be the cause of

strife. Conversely, without love and altruism, conflict and

misunderstanding will never cease. Through the intellect

man may discover that a particular religion is not inferior to

his own; but this fact does not, in itself, change indifference

into appreciation. It is highly probable that religion will

always be associated with emotion, for emotion is the drive of

life; but the heart and mind must work together, and when

they do these disintegrating forces will gradually disappear.

On the other hand, God does appeal to the heart. In the

words of Bahá’u’lláh: *“Earth and heaven cannot contain Me;*

*what can alone contain Me is the heart of him that believeth*

*in Me, and is faithful to My Cause.”*[2] Again: *“Give a hearing*

*ear, O people, to that which I, in truth, say unto you. The*

*one true God, exalted be His glory, hath ever regarded, and*

*will continue to regard, the hearts of men as His own, His*

*exclusive possession.”*[3]

Mysticism and prophetic revelation are agreed upon one

1 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Foundations of World Unity*. Compiled from Addresses

and Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. New York, World Unity Publishing Corp.,

1927. 2nd ed., p. 16.

2 Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 186.

3 ibid., p. 206.

essential point, namely, that without ardent, intense, and

even rapturous love for God, religion will become a dead

issue. But we must not imagine that man’s intellect will prevent

him from loving God; his learning may, but not his intellect.

Let us return to the three aspects of man’s collective

reality. In the words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *“When we speak of*

*the soul we mean the motive power of this physical body which*

*lives under its entire control in accordance with its dictates.*

*If the soul identifies itself with the material world it remains*

*dark … but if it becomes the recipient of the graces of the world*

*of mind, its darkness will be transformed into light, its tyranny*

*into justice ….”*

*“There is, however, a faculty in man which unfolds to his*

*vision the secrets of existence. It gives him a power whereby*

*he may investigate the reality of every object … This is the*

*power of the mind, for the soul is not, of itself, capable of*

*unrolling the mysteries of phenomena; but the mind can accom-*

*plish this and therefore it is a power superior to the soul.*

*“There is still another power which is differentiated from*

*that of the soul and mind. This third power is the spirit which*

*is an emanation from the divine bestower; it is the effulgence*

*of the sun of reality, the radiation of the celestial world, the*

*spirit of faith, the spirit His Holiness the Christ refers to when*

*He says, ‘Those that are born of the flesh are flesh, and those*

*that are born of the spirit are spirit.’”*[1]

This quickening spirit, or the spirit of faith which regenerates

man spiritually, is an emanation from the Divine Reality

and not a manifestation. When the human spirit is illumined

by the spirit of faith, or the heavenly spirit, when man is “born

of the spirit,” his collective reality takes on another aspect,

just as a clear mirror reflecting rays of light is not quite the

same as a clear mirror which is devoid of light.

1 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Reality of Man*. Excerpts from Writings of

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, New York, Bahá’í Publishing Committee, 1931. 1st

ed., p. 9–10.

We said in the second chapter that the Prophet or

Manifestation of God is a link between the infinite God,

the Divine Essence, and finite man. Now when the Mani-

festation of God comes to humanity He brings the power of

the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the mediator between

God, the Unknowable, and mortal man. The Divine Reality

is like the sun and the Holy Spirit like the rays.

*“The Holy Spirit it is, which through the mediation of the*

*Prophets of God, teaches spiritual virtues to man and enables*

*him to attain eternal life.*

*“It is evident that the souls receive grace from the bounty*

*of the Holy Spirit which appears in the Manifestations of God,*

*and not from the personality of the Manifestation.*

*“Every time it appears the world is renewed, and a new*

*cycle is founded. The body of the world of humanity puts on*

*a new garment. It can be compared to the spring; whenever*

*it comes the world passes from one condition to another.”*[1]

*“Likewise the Holy Spirit is the very cause of the life of*

*man; without the Holy Spirit he would have no intellect, he*

*would be unable to acquire his scientific knowledge by which*

*his great influence over the rest of creation is gained. The*

*illumination of the Holy Spirit gives to man the power of thought,*

*and enables him to make discoveries by which he bends the*

*laws of nature to his will.”*[2]

The effect of the Holy Spirit is expressed in different ways.

Just as we differentiate between the human spirit and the

animal spirit, so we differentiate between the heavenly spirit

and the human spirit. The heavenly spirit is spoken of as the

spirit of faith or the bounty of God. We say, for example, the

spirit of faith, which comes from the breath of the Holy Spirit,

is the cause of eternal life.[3]

1 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *The Divine Art of Living*, Wilmette, Bahá’í Publishing

Committee, 1944, pp. 44, 42.

2 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Reality of Man*, p. 37.

3 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 165.

When the human spirit is assisted by the spirit of faith it

can make discoveries in the world of spirit. So far as spiritual

realities go the human spirit without the spirit of faith is some-

what like a perfect mirror in a dark room.

The mind is the power of the human spirit, the perfection

of the human spirit.[1] Mental faculties (imagination, thoughts

and understanding) are the inherent properties of the soul.[2]

The soul may be likened to a lamp and the mind to the

rays of the lamp. Without the rays the lamp could not give

forth its light, and were there no lamp there would be no rays.

So we might say, without the mind there would be no evidence

of the soul’s existence and without the soul there would be no

mind, for it is through the soul that the mind comprehends.[3]

Furthermore, the temple of man (the body) is like a mirror,

his soul like the sun and his mind or mental faculties like the

rays. Now the mirror may be broken so that it cannot reflect

the rays, but surely we can not dissociate the rays from the

sun. In like manner we can not imagine that through some

infirmity of the body the mind is separated from the soul,

or that it is in any way affected by the infirmity.[4] An object

may be cut off from the rays of the sun, but the sun still shines.[5]

The soul is independent of the infirmities of the body.

Bahá’u’lláh says: *“That a sick person showeth signs of weak-*

*ness is due to the hindrances that interpose themselves between*

*his soul and his body, for the soul itself remaineth unaffected*

*by any bodily ailments.”*[6]

The soul is free of the body, but consciousness and person-

ality are associated with the body. In this earthly life the

soul of man manifests itself through the body, that is, through

1 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 209.

2 *The Bahá’í Peace Program*, from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. New

York, Bahá’í Publishing Committee, 1930. pp. 32, 44.

3 ibid., p. 32.

4 ibid., p. 44.

5 Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 155.

6 ibid., p. 154.

consciousness and personality. Souls retain their individu-

ality, consciousness and understanding after death.

The body is an instrument for the preparation of the soul

for the next world; we should not regard it as a wretched

prison as many extreme mystics have done.

## The knowledge of God through the heart

In this most decadent period of the world’s history, when

the old-established religions have failed to supply that spiritual

knowledge and certainty demanded by both the generality

of mankind and the intelligentsia, we are surrounded on all

sides by cults and philosophies which attempt to succeed where

religious institutions have apparently failed.

Speculation brings no satisfaction to the masses, and to

the intelligentsia it offers no stable, permanent foundation.

Serious-minded people, desiring some way to a higher life,

turn their thoughts inward, and as a result spirituality is

too often reduced to mere feeling. The will, which functions

in the realm of faith, is useless unless the world is illumined

with the spirit of a Prophet.

Outside the pale of religion, thoughtful people are weary

of philosophy and discouraged with the futility of their own

efforts. Those who manifest in their lives the true spirit of

religion by the alleviation of suffering are often the most

pessimistic. Consequently the majority of the religiously

minded, observing the failure of philosophy and science—

that is the intellect—to discover the way to God, fall back upon

the age-old illusion that through the heart and the heart alone

man may find the spiritual life, life eternal.

Somewhere in the deeper recesses of the heart, so the mystic

believes, the knowledge of God can be discovered. The

mind, he maintains, is of no value, since it functions in the

world of the senses and not in the world of the heart. Now

as we have said before, the heart is not an infallible guide to

spiritual truth. Bahá’u’lláh’s words are significant: *“How*

*often hath the human heart, which is the recipient of the light*

*of God and the seat of the revelation of the All-Merciful, erred*

*from Him Who is the Source of that light and the Wellspring*

*of that revelation. It is the waywardness of the heart that*

*removeth it far from God, and condemneth it to remoteness*

*from Him.”*[1]

The reason for this implicit faith in the heart or feelings

is obvious enough when we consider the religious background

of the race and its effect upon religious experience.

To primitive man and to man’s primitive nature, the most

potent factor in religion is emotion. The function of all

ritual is to reproduce some kind of emotion which is thought

to be effective. But his real concern is with emotion, for

to him every abnormal psychic experience is a message from

the gods. As he develops he begins to rationalize. Then

the ritual, as a thing in itself, may lose its significance because

it is external to him; but his psychic experiences, which are

an integral part of his real self, still have value for him. He

may lose faith in religious systems, philosophy and even

humanity, but not in what he experiences emotionally. He

needs no profound ratiocination to convince him that he has

experienced rapture and ecstasy, or fear and torment. And

because these things are more real to him than external objects

or logical deductions, he places them above everything in

life.

## Knowledge of God through vision

Vision, that state of illumination in which the spirit functions

without the senses, might seem more reliable; but the mystic

admits that not all mystical experiences are valid. Says

Underhill: “The perceptive power and creative genius of

the mystics as of other artists, sometimes goes astray.” And

1 Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 186.

then she suggests that some test be made. But we cannot

claim that through asceticism, detachment, and mortification

we may become one with the Absolute and then apply some

test to determine the validity of our experience. To what

higher court do we turn to test the experience? Is it higher

than our experience? Is it infallible? Concerning visions,

‘Abdu’l-Bahá says: *“Spiritual discoveries are of two kinds;*

*one kind is of the imagination and is only the assertion of a few*

*people; the other kind resembles inspiration, and this is real—*

*such are the revelations of Isaiah, of Jeremiah, and of St. John,*

*which are real.*

*“Reflect that man’s power of thought consists of two kinds.*

*One kind is true, when it agrees with a determined truth. Such*

*conceptions find realization in the exterior world; such are*

*accurate opinions, correct theories, scientific discoveries, and*

*inventions.*

*“The other kind of conceptions is made up of vain thoughts*

*and useless ideas which yield neither fruit nor result, and which*

*have no reality; no, they surge like the waves of the sea of*

*imaginations, and they pass away like idle dreams.*

*“In the same way, there are two sorts of spiritual discoveries.*

*One is the revelations of the Prophets, and the spiritual dis-*

*coveries of the elect. The visions of the Prophets are not*

*dreams; no, they are spiritual discoveries and have reality.*

*They say, for example: ‘I saw a person in a certain form,*

*and I said such a thing, and he gave such an answer.’ This*

*vision is in the world of wakefulness, and not in that of sleep.*

*Nay, it is a spiritual discovery which is expressed as if it were*

*the appearance of a vision.*

*“The other kind of spiritual discoveries is made up of pure*

*imagination; but these imaginations become embodied in such*

*a way that many simple-hearted people believe that they have*

*a reality.”*[1]

1 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 290.

And again He tells us: *“Know that the power and the*

*comprehension of the human spirit are of two kinds; that is*

*to say, they perceive and act in two different modes. One*

*way is through instruments and organs; thus with this eye it*

*sees, with this ear it hears, with this tongue it talks. Such is*

*the action of the spirit, and the perception of the reality of man,*

*by means of organs. That is to say, that the spirit is the seer,*

*through the eyes; the spirit is the hearer, through the ear; the*

*spirit is the speaker, through the tongue.*

*“The other manifestation of the powers and actions of the*

*spirit is without instruments and organs. For example, in the*

*state of sleep without eyes it sees, without an ear it hears, without*

*a tongue it speaks, without feet it runs. Briefly, these actions*

*are beyond the means of instruments and organs.”*[1]

But as we have observed before, the soul of man is a creation

of God. It is not a part of God, and there is no reason to

believe that it is infallible. When the soul functions through

the senses it makes blunders, and it is highly probable that

it will make blunders when it acts independently of the senses,

as it is certainly not perfect.

To be sure, the spiritual discoveries of a highly developed

soul will naturally be more valid than those of an immature

soul; but as the soul never reaches perfection, man’s visions

can never be absolutely valid. We can never clearly dis-

tinguish between our personal desires and the revelations of

the spirit.

If we cannot acquire knowledge of God through the heart

or through visions, if we cannot enter the presence of God,

what is the meaning of the promise of all the prophets of

old, that man shall in this earth-life attain the Divine

Presence? This is clearly explained by Bahá’u’lláh in the

*Kitáb-i-Íqán*.[2] To attain the presence of the Prophet in His

1 ibid., p. 263.

2 Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 142.

day, which is known as the Day of Resurrection, is to attain

the Divine Presence*. “The knowledge of Him, Who is the*

*Origin of all things, and attainment unto Him, are impossible*

*save through knowledge of, and attainment unto, these*

*luminous Beings who proceed from the Sun of Truth. By*

*attaining, therefore, to the presence of these Holy Luminaries,*

*the ‘Presence of God’ Himself is attained …. Attainment*

*unto such presence is possible only in the Day of Resurrection,*

*which is the Day of the rise of God Himself through His all-*

*embracing Revelation.”*[1]

## The epistemological approach

Although we have demonstrated that man cannot gain a

knowledge of God through the heart or through vision,

nevertheless there are those who will insist that the psychic

experience of ecstasy is sufficient proof that the presence of

God has been attained. The logical mystic, of course, will

not be content with experience, overpowering though it may

be; he will insist that to know God, a particle of the Divine

Essence must exist in him.

Let us examine the claims or experience from the epistemo-

logical standpoint. Since our inner experiences are more

real to us than the external world, as we said in the beginning,

it is only natural that the mystic should cling to the experience

of ecstasy. If the ecstasy he knows is not associated with

the Highest Good, the God of Religions, what is its origin?

If logic dims this vision does it not, he may ask, rob him of

God? Nevertheless in external matters he continues to use

his mind, and so a dualism is inevitable. The hard facts of

life do not remove the dilemma; for we observe that man

succeeds when he frees his intellect from feelings, as for

example in science and engineering, but fails miserably when

he allows his feelings to govern his reason, as in his social

relations.

1 Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, pp. 142–3.

When, however, he turns his mind inward, when he applies

reason to his emotional life, he begins to discover that what

he had considered naively as fundamental fact may be merely

inference. That is, the heart is about as infallible in dealing

with faith as is the mind in dealing with external objects.

The mystic has claimed always that when you are in the

presence of God you are cognizant of the fact and no one can

shake your conviction. But we cannot escape logic so readily.

What the mystic really knows is that he has had an extra-

ordinary experience, nothing more. Clearly he has not been

in the presence of the Omnipotent God, nor has he become

One with the Divine Essence.

Through the intellect, and not his awareness, he discovers

that he must distinguish between a psychic experience and

the interpretation of the experience. That is, he must

differentiate between sensations, emotions and feelings, and

that which causes them. If we are depressed no one can

convince us that we are not, but the cause to which we assign

the depression may not be valid. For example, if we are

depressed we may assume that God is displeased with us.

This thought in itself depresses us further. Finally we behold

our agitated state and then we are completely convinced of

God’s avenging hand. But in reality the depression may have

been caused by a number of things, having nothing to do with

religion.

A few philosophers maintain that the testimony of the

mystic concerning what he sees and feels in his moments of

illumination, should outweigh the arguments of the critics

who have never had such experiences. But Leuba has pointed

out that many of the things which are supposed to be peculiar

to mystical experiences such as rapture, unexpectedness,

sudden break in the train of thought and feelings, illumination

and ineffability are not peculiar to ecstasy with a religious

background. We must distinguish between experience and

any inference about the experience. We must not confuse

sensations, emotions and thoughts with casual explanations.

If we have experienced ecstasy no one can doubt the validity

of our experience: our testimony is quite sufficient. When,

however, we maintain that we were in the presence of God

and that our ecstasy proves it, this is manifestly only an infer-

ence. Naturally many mystics take refuge in ineffability,

but this might lead to absurd conclusions.

We recall the familiar argument which runs like this:

if one has seen light, let us say the light of the sun, no one

could convince him that he has not seen it. True, but the

mystic is not trying to prove that he has had an experience;

we accept his own testimony on this. What he is trying to

tell us is that he has been in the presence of God; but the

only evidence that he can adduce is his experience (ecstasy,

rapture), so that in reality what he is trying to convey to us

is that his experience proves that he was in the presence of

God. The analogy does not hold, however, because the man

who has seen the light is not trying to tell us what caused

the light. If he should maintain: “I have seen the light and

therefore the sun must be shining,” then he would be in the

position of the mystic. This is an inference about light

which he has seen.

A little reflection, therefore, will show that the experience

is not “immediate,” that is, the mystic does not “experience”

the Infinite, the Absolute or the Divine Essence immediately.

His immediate experience is of rapture, ecstasy, and his

union with the Absolute or Divine Essence is an inference.

The question then arises: if the revelations of the heart

are not the result of being in the presence of God, what

causes these revelations and how do we account for the fact

that they are so effective? Space does not permit even a

cursory explanation; the reader is referred to works on the

psychology of religious mysticism, especially that of Leuba.

Briefly, most of these psychological experiences which are

interpreted as divine revelations are the \_results of abnormal

suggestibility. Leuba shows that this plays an important

part in ritualistic, revivalistic, and non-religious types of

experience. Moreover some explanation may be advanced

for the effectiveness of these experiences. Briefly, valuable

ideas may come to one in a partial trance, a state of relaxation.

## Science and spiritual experience

Let us digress long enough to defend the spiritually-minded

individual who does not make extravagant claims for his

inner experiences.

From what we have said above we must not infer that all

those inner experiences which we associate with spirituality

are illusions, or projections of emotional wishes. Clearly

we cannot say that the love, the trust and the faith which we

experience in our devotion to God are purely subjective.

When the scientist tells us that the inner experiences which

we associate with our spiritual life have no objective validity,

he apparently forgets that he never worries about the validity

of other inner experiences. Should science question the

validity of aesthetic appreciation as it sometimes questions

the validity of religious experiences, we should have to con-

clude that the aesthetic feeling we experience when, for

example, we are uplifted by a great symphony, is a pure

illusion. The sight of a certain colour may evoke within us

an emotion which we can neither measure nor describe;

but we do not deny its reality. To be sure, in the analysis

of colour the physicist treats colour as he treats other objects

of sense perception; but while he is considering colour in

this way he is not thinking of aesthetic appreciation. The

beauty that is apprehended is beyond physics. On the

other hand, probably no scientist is so deficient in aesthetic

appreciation as to be entirely oblivious to the feeling of beauty.

It is true that there have been many attempts to establish

some kind of aesthetic measure, but it is also true that these

attempts have been severely criticized by creative artists who

have aesthetic appreciation and also scientific knowledge.

The reader probably will agree that values such as beauty,

justice and mercy, are in a category which is beyond the

space-time world of science. When we try to evaluate

spiritual experiences we must remember that they also may

be in a category which is beyond science. There are, to be

sure, many reasons why a sceptic would deny objective

validity to a spiritual experience and not deny it to a feeling

of beauty. One, certainly, is a tendency toward abnormality.

While theorists have grossly exaggerated this factor, often there

is just enough to discourage many healthy-minded individuals

from becoming spiritual. This is particularly true where

evangelistic piety is concerned. The most disturbing factor

is, of course, the conglomeration of superstitious and un-

warranted practices which we invariably associate with

religious orthodoxy. This is the obstacle that prevents the

majority of thinking people (as well as the scientists) from

investigating the reality of religion. Many years ago, speaking

of the history of religion, James said: “There is a notion in

the air about us that religion is probably only an anachronism,

a case of ‘survival,’ an atavistic relapse into a mode of

thought which humanity in its more enlightened examples

has outgrown ….”[1]

Even the old nomenclature, which we cannot wholly

discard, is often a barrier to many who are in search of a

rational religion, a religion that is compatible with a scientific

age. The spiritually-minded scientist (and perhaps the

creative genius) could accept the “numinous” of Rudolph

Otto more readily than the Holy Spirit of prophetic religion.

1 William James. *The varieties of religious experiences: a study in human nature*. p. 379.

Chapter IV  
The nature of mysticism

## Mysticism defined

In very general terms, mysticism is a form of communion

which unites man with God. In a sense every spiritual man

is a mystic. The fundamental element in all religions is that

feeling which unites man to God, and without this “mystic”

feeling, without this awareness of God’s Presence, religion

will finally be reduced to a lifeless organization incapable

of spiritual development.

The word “mysticism” has many meanings to-day, but we

shall have to restrict its meaning to man’s intercourse with

some higher power. A few illustrations will make our

position clear. The man who longs for the knowledge of God,

the love of God, and who strives to attain His Presence, is

a mystic. The one who sees God in the beauty of nature,

who feels the presence of God in the flower, the bush and

the meadow, is also a mystic. Again the scientist, in the

contemplation of that higher intelligence which is responsible

for this incomprehensible universe, is also a mystic in a very

real sense.

Some writers maintain that mysticism is a philosophy

and not a religion. While this is true of some types it is

hardly true of all. To be sure, this depends somewhat upon

the way in which you define religion as well as mysticism.

However, as the term is generally used it involves, I believe,

communion with some form of superrational, supernatural

being, some higher intelligence. Now it is only natural that

we should associate this form of communion with religion.

The God of religion, however, might be theistic, deistic or

pantheistic. If, however, a man denies the existence of a

superhuman being, a supreme intelligence, we would not

call him a mystic nor indeed would we say he is religious.

Again, we do use the terms “religious mystic” and “non-

religious mystic.” According to the sense in which we have

been using the term mystic, “non-religious mystic” would be

somewhat of a paradox, for if a man were in no sense religious

he would not be a mystic. However, it is sometimes con-

venient to designate one type of mysticism as “religious”

and another type as “non-religious;” the meaning will be

clear in each case.

Since, however, we are primarily concerned with the type

of mysticism which makes claims that are not compatible with

modern scientific thinking and the prophetic ideal, it will

be necessary for us to use a rather limited definition of

mysticism. In this restricted sense, mysticism is, in the

words of Heiler, “that form of intercourse with God in which

the world and self are absolutely denied, in which human

personality is dissolved, disappears and is absorbed in the

infinite unity of the Godhead.”[1]

Nevertheless, we should not forget that the word *mystic*

may also be applied to anyone who through prayer and

meditation is united with God, which is the sense attached to it

in prophetic religion. This kind of mysticism makes no claims

that are incompatible with prophetic religion or science.

We might simplify our discussion by the use of the term

“true” or “genuine” mysticism. True or genuine mysticism

then is that form of communion with God in which the

worshipper becomes united with Him, by turning to the

Prophet of God for divine inspiration and illumination.

True mysticism is sharply contrasted with occultism.

The occultist does not turn to the Prophet for guidance, nor

1 Heiler, *Prayer*, p. 136.

is he concerned primarily with the laws and precepts of the

Prophet.

## Contributions of mysticism

While there are many doctrines of mysticism we cannot

accept, we must not overlook the positive contributions that

have been made to humanity by great spiritual geniuses like

St. Francis of Assisi, Catherine of Genoa and Jalál-id Dín i

Rúmí. Surely their inspiration came from God and surely

they rendered distinguished services to mankind. They

laboured in a world that was, for the most part, materialistic

if not corrupt. Some of them, like Jalál-id Dín i Rúmí, had a

real gift for writing and left for posterity a wealth of literature

that was a source of inspiration for many generations. While

it is true that mysticism is non-social and that some of the

mystics lived in seclusion, it is also true that many were occu-

pied with humanitarian work; and a few took a lively interest

in political affairs.

St. Francis appeared in Italy when Christian Europe had

very nearly reached the lowest point of its decline. War

was in evidence everywhere. What could be more astounding,

and at the same time more uplifting, than the appearance

of a joyous saint who was willing to accept the Sermon on

the Mount literally? St. Francis was completely detached

from all worldly goods, but unlike most mystics he had great

love and appreciation for the beauty of nature and all living

creatures. For him all created things seemed to be endowed

with a supernatural charm, which created in him an ecstatic

joy not unlike the psychic experience of the aesthetic mystic.

He would work for anyone, and without pay; he associated

with all men, and (if we can believe tradition), with all animals

in a spirit of love and fellowship, and wherever he went he

radiated spiritual joy and light. Italy had seen nothing like

this for many a century. The saint’s progress was not without

pain, but joy was always victorious. St. Francis was never

involved in the endless controversies of his day: the only

criticism he knew was self-criticism. Over all humanity he

threw the mantle of his perfect charity. St. Francis made

many missionary journeys, and one carried him as far as the

court of Sultan Melek-el-Kamil in Egypt. As for his prayer-

life, one of his biographers said of him: “It was not merely

that he prayed so much, it was rather that he became prayer.”

The contrast between his tolerance and clemency, and the out-

look of the reformers of a later period, is as sharp as possible.

A century later we find Catherine of Siena, a spiritual

genius of great personal charm and beloved of all classes,

directing the affairs of whole municipalities in Italy. The

fathers of Siena, aware of her holiness and her ability to deal

with situations which they could not meet, did not hesitate

to send her on missions that would have paralysed the heart

of the most courageous. In time she became a veritable

symbol of Unity and Peace, and her influence extended as

far as the confines of Avignon where Gregory XI was living

in exile. The range of her correspondence was astounding—

from the tailor’s wife in Florence to the soldier of fortune in

England; and yet in spite of her many activities she found time

to develop inwardly. She did not carry asceticism to extremes

as many mystics did, and moreover she was very tolerant of

other mystics’ theories concerning spiritual advancement.

She once said: “We conceive virtues through God and bring

them to birth for our neighbour.”

It is true that some of the mystics made arrogant claims to

divinity, but other spiritual geniuses have made extravagant

claims to supernatural gifts. We must estimate the worth of

these mystics in terms of their concepts of truth, their theology

and philosophy. They were not entirely responsible for their

doctrines.

We must now give some thought to their background.

## Philosophical background of mysticism

Many of the doctrines of the mystics which we have men-

tioned originated in the ancient world. The asceticism

which we find in Christian mysticism and Sufism, the idea

of a path and the belief that man is a part of the Divine

Essence, are all older than the Christian mysticism. For the

ancient Greek world, philosophy was simply love of wisdom.

Greek wisdom was based on speculation and contemplation.

It was not affected by science as our philosophy is to-day.

Its concern was with practical affairs, such as the conduct of

life, the organization of society, and abstract concepts like

justice, virtue and truth. Medieval philosophy, under

the influence of the church, was concerned primarily with

upholding ecclesiastical authority and theological doctrines.

By the seventeenth century science began to exert some

influence. It freed man from superstition and it taught

him to think clearly, but it threatened to overthrow revealed

truth. One of the greatest scientific contributions of this

period was Newtonian mechanics, which is the basis of

so-called classical physics. It had phenomenal success in

the world of matter, but it developed one idea that was almost

fatal to the world of spirit; namely the mechanistic concept

of life. This reduced man to a mere assemblage of atoms

and society to a lifeless machine incapable of development.

Only in recent years have physicists come to the conclusion

that this concept is no longer valid.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the intelligent

were fully convinced that science had an answer for most of

our questions, but the masses were not completely won over

to science. To-day, however, the masses believe that scientific

knowledge is the only reliable knowledge, while the intelli-

gentsia realize the limitations of science, and that it has

failed to create an ideal world of peace and happiness.

There are two antiquated notions which have some bearing

on the validity of mystical doctrines. From the beginning

of the medieval period to the seventeenth century philosophy

was not really free from theology. Strong religious feeling

and religious authority often prevented the philosopher from

investigating a new truth with an unfettered mind. The

history of science is replete with illustrations of this. The

philosopher of this period did not hesitate to say that a doctrine

might be true in philosophy and false in theology or true in

theology and false in philosophy. Moreover in the field of

religion there is usually a school of thought which maintains

that there is always an outward and an inward meaning to the

revealed Word of the Prophet. The generality of mankind

will be content with the outward meaning, but the mystic

must penetrate to the core of the Scriptures and take only

the inward. The Sufi is convinced that when he reads the

Qur’án with contemplative absorption the inward meaning

is revealed to him. The doctrine obtained in this manner

does not always agree with theology, but this does not trouble

the mystic; nor is he troubled by the fact that mystics do not

agree among themselves as to the true meaning of the Word.

He argues that since there are different kinds of mystical

experiences, why should there not be different kinds of

mystical truth? Christian mysticism and Sufism flourished

in an environment in which it was possible to establish the

validity of their doctrines on the semblance of a philosophical

basis.

Little wonder then that the mystics of the past formulated

doctrines that are incompatible with the tenets of prophetic

revelation and with modern scientific thinking. If they

erred in some of their beliefs, certainly the fault was not entirely

theirs. For many generations and in many places, the

only spiritual light that radiated was from the lives of the

mystics.

## The pre-suppositions of mysticism

In times of great stress and confusion, highly gifted people

turn to mysticism. Life must have meaning. The old-

established religious systems offer little consolation, philosophy

and science still less; but the seeker for ultimate reality may

always turn inward. Through the emotions, the heart, (so

the mystic believes) the true knowledge of God may be

obtained. Man may experience the Absolute directly.

The mystic believes that through asceticism, detachment and

meditation one may attain the Divine Presence and become

one with the Divine Essence. That is, man may enter the

presence of the infinite God and become absorbed in the

infinite unity of the Godhead. No logical thinker would

admit that finite man could ever become one with the Infinite,

and so it was necessary to assume that man is something

more than finite. As we have said before, the mystic assumes

that a *particle* of the Divine Essence exists in man. If a spark

of the Divine Essence exists in man, or if you prefer to put it

less crudely, if man’s reality is essentially divine, it follows

that he must be absolutely detached from his ephemeral self

and from all interest in the material world. He must also

be freed from the intellect, which comprehends only the

material world.

For the mystic there are two, and only two, realms of

being, the infinite God and the finite man. To explain how

finite man can understand the Infinite, the mystic assumes

that the Infinite is divided into parts .and that mortal man

possesses one of these parts. What is not in man he cannot

know. This is an axiom of the Sufis. He tacitly avoids the

term God in this connection. That the unity of the Infinite

is hereby destroyed did not apparently trouble the mystics

of the past—probably because they were familiar with contra-

dictions of this sort, as we have indicated above.

The two-world doctrine leads to a dualistic concept of

being. Man is a part of God, and yet man must strive to

become one with God. The three-world doctrine removes

the dilemma, but leaves no room for the *existent unity of the*

*mystic*. The unity it establishes, the kind the modern world

can accept, is moral conformity with the precepts of the

prophets; but that is not the goal of the mystic.

We must not overlook this important point. No mystic

who assumes that a particle of the Divine Essence exists in

him can escape this dualism. He may fall back upon experi-

ence, as some moderns do, and maintain that it is through

the heart and not the intellect that man knows God. This

sounds plausible, but the thoroughgoing mystic has always

realized that the *immediate* knowledge of the presence of God

cannot rest upon experience alone. There must be some

metaphysical reasons for identifying *experience* with the

Divine Presence.

In the three-world doctrine, implicit in most of the prophetic

religions and explicit in the Bahá’í Faith, the world of the

prophets stands between the Infinite God and the finite man.

While we cannot comprehend fully this intermediary world,

we can understand something of the life of the Prophet.

We can love Him, we can meditate upon the attributes of

God reflected in Him, and we can strive to follow His example.

Moreover we are familiar with the creative genius, who is an

intermediary between us and the unseen world of music and

art. We can expand our vision and comprehend to some

degree the Prophet.

On the other hand, we cannot, as thinking people, imagine

ourselves as one with God and at the same time separate

from God, reaching out to Him. In considering contemporary

mysticism we must remember that, if we assume that a spark

of the Divine exists in us, we must also accept this essential

dualism which is incomprehensible to the scientific mind.

The attitude of certain scholars toward contemporary

mysticism is ostensibly very fair and appears to exhibit

disinterested intellectual curiosity, but when we consider

the attitude of these same scholars toward revealed truth

we are prone to discredit their judgment. For such scholars

the voluminous writings of Bahá’u’lláh, incomparable in

scope and magnitude, unsurpassed by anything in the field

of religion, past or present, are as nothing compared to the

testimony of the average mystic who reveals for us no social

laws, no precepts nor principles for establishing that *oneness*

which has been the central theme of mystical philosophers

ever since the days of Parmenides. How diligently these

scholars have combed the writings of ancient philosophers

like Parmenides and Heraclitus for a mere handful of phrases

such as “Good and ill are one,” “Reality is one and indi-

visible.” Clearly these are they who are “content with that

which is like the vapour on a plain.”

There are undoubtedly many reasons why some scholars

ignore revealed truth and uphold mysticism, but its exclusive-

ness probably accounts for its popularity. The mystical

path is only for the few. Prophetic religion on the other hand

always tends to eliminate class distinctions.

The follower of the Prophet is a realist. For him sin

is a revolt against the God-ordained moral order and not

a mere wandering from the mystic path, or a desire for the

world. For him moral action has intrinsic value, it is

something more than a preliminary stage in the preparation

for ecstatic union with God. Finally, since God reveals

Himself directly to the mystic he is exalted above religious

authority.

There is a certain passive tolerance and flexibility about

mysticism which naturally appeals to those who have a strong

individualistic bias. Here is an esoteric religion which not

only guarantees peace and serenity but which admits us into

the very presence of God. Moreover it frees man from some

of the undesirable realities of life.

## Mysticism and the primitive church

Every reform movement tries to recapture the spirit of the

primitive church. From the viewpoint of mysticism the

outstanding characteristic of the “apostolic age” was the

consciousness of the Divine Presence. Men and women were

filled with the Spirit. While the primitive church was un-

doubtedly influenced by Hellenistic mysticism, it is highly

probable that the mysticism of the majority was what we have

called the “true mysticism” and not the saviour-mysticism

of the medieval period.

Contrary to popular opinion, this early church was not a

spiritual brotherhood free from any kind of organization

and ritual. The idea that, by an ordination service, a person

could be endowed with rights and prerogatives not enjoyed

by other people was certainly not foreign to this early church.

Moreover, a board of presbyters existed twenty years before

Mark’s gospel was written. It is a mistake to imagine that

the church started as a community of mystics and that gradu-

ally the inward experience of the consciousness of God

diminished, being finally replaced by faith in an ecclesiastical

organization.

The primitive church soon learned, as later movements like

the “Spiritual Franciscans” learned, that a spiritual brother-

hood cannot exist without some kind of organization to

safeguard its ideals and to solve the problems that must

necessarily arise in any group of human beings. The organ-

ization that evolved was certainly not perfect, and it failed

in many ways to perpetuate the ideals of the apostolic age;

we should not, however, conclude that any kind of organiza-

tion will suppress the “Spirit” to some degree. This would

be the equivalent of saying that, since we have always had

wars, therefore peace is impossible.

In the early days of the primitive church there was probably

no uniformity in organization or doctrine; but this did little

harm, for the first Christians looked upon themselves not

as a new society but as the “remnant of Israel.” As the

“Israel of God” they were all united, for they and they alone

had recognized Jesus as the Messiah. The important thing

was membership in the Ecclesia, the “Congregation of

Israel,” and when they were baptized in the name of the Lord

they became part of the ancient “People of God.”

In time, however, diversities naturally arose, and Streeter

says that “the history of Catholic Christianity during the

first five centuries is the history of a progressive standardiza-

tion of a diversity which had its origin in the Apostolic age.”[1]

To preserve some kind of unity the leaders of the Apostolic

church were forced to establish an organization. Let us

consider the three essential elements in this organization:

1. In a.d. 96 Clement makes a plea for the regular

ministry, and its derivation of authority from the apostolic

succession, for the preservation of unity in the local church.

2. In a.d. 115 Ignatius stresses the value of the

monarchical episcopate as the real bond holding the church

in unity, but says nothing about the apostles providing for a

regular succession. In the second century both of these

principles were united. That is, henceforth the church

favoured a monarchical bishop whose authority could be

traced to the apostolate.

Another important factor in the development of a strong

organization with episcopal authority was heresy. This

called for a final authority to decide the pressing question,

who are the representatives of the genuine apostolic tradition?

To decide some of the perplexing questions raised by heresy

1 Burnett Hillman Streeter, *The Primitive Church*, p. 50.

Irenaeus advanced the idea that the true apostolic tradition

is to be found only in those churches that can claim, for their

bishops, a continuous line of descent from apostolic times.

That is, true church doctrine is to be found in the episcopate

which is a continuation of the apostolic office.

3. In the third century, largely through the influence of

Cyprian, there was added a third factor of church order,

sacerdotalism, which was destined to have a profound, though

baneful effect upon the church. In the time of Irenaeus the

prophetic gift was still encouraged, a universal priesthood

still recognized; but now we pass into the period when the

external church becomes necessary to salvation. The bishop

becomes the essence of the church, Divine Grace comes

through the sacraments, and the sacraments must be dispensed

by the priest. The greatest harm, however, does not come

from a belief in the efficacy of sacraments, but rather from the

belief that the official who administers the sacraments is

different from the rest of mankind and that he possesses

powers and privileges not possessed by other men.

There are two serious objections to this form of absolutist

ecclesiastical system. In the first place, we are not sure of

the divine authority of the apostolic succession. In the

second place, we do not like to believe that an ordination

service, no matter how elaborate and impressive, or how

long it has been in use, can make a man *different in kind*,

something apart, spiritually superior to his fellows, and

endowed with divine authority.

Episcopal authority recognizes no superior power, and

when it is in a position to exercise its divine prerogative,

it is supreme, sovereign. Moreover history shows, plainly

enough, that episcopal authority may lead to corruption.

An absolute monarch is in reality never absolute. He must

consider public opinion to some extent and if, as is usually

the case, he is associated with a church state, he must consider

the wishes of the church.

It is only natural that individuals longing for the inward

life and desirous of spiritual freedom could not live happily

under the authority of an ecclesiastical order which main-

tained that the external church is necessary for salvation.

That is to say, the early Christian mystics who were intellectu-

ally honest could not subscribe to the complete body of

church doctrine. The inevitable happened. From the time

of the Montanists to the Reformation, groups arose who

rebelled against the authority of the church.

Nevertheless mystics did find refuge within the church,

and they did obey church authority. Great mystics like

St. Teresa, Eckhart, and Madame Guyon, when opposed by

the church authorities, strenuously maintained that they were

loyal to the church. They could do this without feeling

intellectually dishonest by regarding this sacrifice of personal

freedom as one of the burdens the ascetic must be prepared

to take up. In the ecstatic state, when he becomes one with

God, he has perfect freedom from all authority, and this is

his chief concern.

The mystical element in religion is necessary but not

sufficient. The spirit of the Prophet cannot influence man-

kind to any great extent unless and until it is clothed in a

visible order. Mysticism, without an effective administration,

cannot revive a harassed world; yet, on the other hand, the

world cannot be revived by any movement which lacks the

element of true mysticism.

Chapter V  
Types of mysticism

## Radical, absolute, or extreme mysticism

Only a brief consideration will be given to the various

types of mysticism: a psychological or a phenomenological

analysis is beyond the scope of this book. We are concerned,

however, with the fundamental psychic experience, the

philosophical basis of each type, the way in which each type

interprets the spiritual life and the influence each has had on

religious thinking. There are many schools of mysticism,

and while there is some agreement on fundamentals, it is not

always easy to determine just what each school really believes.

Radical, absolute or extreme mysticism as exemplified

by mystics like Plotinus, the pseudo-Dionysius and Eckhart;

it is cold, unemotional and monotonous in comparison to

Sufism and Augustinian mysticism, which exhibit some

warmth. Through severe discipline the absolute mystic is

able to attain a state of detachment which is conducive to

extreme suggestibility. In this condition, by following

prescribed rules which the mystics have inherited from the

past, it is possible to induce a state of rapture and ecstasy,

which the mystic identifies with the Divine Presence. How-

ever, this belief in the doctrine that one can attain the Divine

Presence is not peculiar to absolute mysticism; other types

also uphold this idea.

The first step in this mystical devotion is concentration.

Through concentration one is able not only to exclude all

irrelevant thoughts but to produce some degree of inner

unification. This is the experience of anyone who concen-

trates for some time. From concentration the mystic passes

to meditation, where the mental activity is low, and then to

the state of contemplation where there is no mental activity

but almost complete passivity. This is the state of inner

unity, blessed peace. There may, of course, be further stages

of advancement as one recedes from the normal life. In

general the stage of ecstasy is experienced in contemplation.

For the extreme mystic the condition of blessed peace

may be followed by a kind of “holy indifference.” This

cold, unemotional state, this dying from self, is not a surrender

to the highest value. In fact, in this state there is a complete

lack of values. We see this in Buddhistic and quietist

mysticism—absolute resignation without a positive ideal.

While most mystics are not concerned with any kind of

analysis of their own experiences, a few like .St. Teresa and

St. John of the Cross have left for us many details of the steps

which they have found useful in attaining the final stage of

ecstasy.

There is one significant element in this connection which

is relevant to our study, namely the idea that the stage of

contemplation where the soul experiences union is beyond

the mind. St. John of the Cross says: “The less a soul

understands, the further does it enter the night of the spirit,

through which it has to pass in order to be united with God,

in a way that surpasses all understanding.”[1] This erroneous

doctrine is based on the belief that what the mystic experiences

in contemplation belongs to the category of love. We can

agree with St. John when he says: “That soul has greater

communion with God which is more advanced in love …”,[2]

but we can hardly agree that the method of attaining this

communion with God is not subject to some kind of analytical

study.

If during contemplation, the mystic, in his existent being,

becomes one with God, the Absolute, the Divine Essence,

then naturally in this state the reason plays no part. Our

1 R. H. J. Steuart. *The Mystical Doctrine of St. John of the Cross*, p. 31.

2 ibid., p. 17.

love for God is not subject to analysis, that we will admit;

but the God of extreme mysticism is merely the speculative

interpretation of the ecstatic experience. The mystic assures

us that contemplation is an act of love; consequently, analysing

the ecstatic state which we experience in contemplation is

just like analysing the love we have for some individual.

This analogy, however, like other analogies used by the

mystic, does not apply here. Loving an individual is certainly

not like loving a metaphysical abstraction. . In prophetic

religion the suppliant turns to the Prophet who reflects the

attributes and perfections of God. The love we feel for

the Prophet has some objective validity; but the same cannot

be said for the feeling of love which the mystic experiences

in the state of contemplation. The Beloved with whom he

feels a spiritual marriage is simply a creation of his own mind

and emotions.

In radical mysticism the idea of God is derived from a

speculative interpretation of the experience of ecstasy. He

is non-personal, beyond all values, changeless, and static.

In prophetic religion the idea of God is derived solely from

the life and teachings of the Prophet. The Prophet is an

historical character. From age to age He comes to the world

with laws and precepts suitable to the changing needs of

mankind. Unlike the God of mysticism, the God of prophetic

religion maintains a vital relation with the world.

One more point will be stressed here, although it applies

to all those types of mysticism which claim that man can

comprehend the Absolute. The scientist, like the philosopher

and the mystic, has always desired to comprehend the under-

lying reality of his world, the world of nature; and up to the

twentieth century he believed that his quest had been realized.

For many generations he was convinced that the processes of

nature could be “explained” by scientific models, like the

atom and ether. At the turn of the century, however, he

began to realize that behind every mystery in the physical

world there is still another greater mystery. And then he

discovered that models could not really explain the underlying

reality.

To-day we know that we are dealing only with partial

aspects of scientific truth. We do not apprehend magnetic

force and electric force immediately as we apprehend values

like beauty and justice. In fact we are inclined to regard

scientific quantities like gravitational force, magnetic force,

and electric force as subjective mental products. As such

they are very useful, but we never lose sight of the fact we

are dealing with a world of appearance and not a world of

reality.

We see now that we cannot “explain” one of the simplest

phenomena of nature, namely the force of gravity. Newton’s

famous law of gravitation tells how the force depends upon

mass and distance, but gives us no insight into the nature of

the force; and Newton himself was fully aware of this.

Einstein’s theory of relativity only postpones the difficulty.

As Jeans suggests, “… it provides a new description, but not

a satisfying explanation, of the facts.”[1] Moreover the

physicists are confident to-day that we will *never* be able to

discover this underlying reality, this first cause. We see now

that man’s finite nature necessarily imposes certain limitations

upon him, limitations which we cannot remove.

If an exact science like physics can tell us nothing about

the underlying reality of the world of matter and energy,

which is manifestly the simplest with which we are concerned,

it seems highly improbable that the mystic could ever discover

the Absolute, the Infinite; for the world of the Absolute

necessarily encompasses all the world of being.

Finally, let us remember that the physicist has completely

given up his quest for the world of reality and is wasting no

time on theories and conjectures which must ultimately lead

1 James H. Jeans. *Physics and Philosophy*. p. 119.

to further confusion and not to a clarification of the physical

world.

The mystic would do well to reconsider his claims in the

light of modern scientific thinking. Indeed we might all

profit by this experience of the physicist in the quest for

ultimate reality. If the greatest minds of our age—and we

may consider outstanding physicists who have some phil-

osophical background for their theories as among the greatest

minds of our age—abandon long-cherished hopes and theories

concerning the ultimate reality of the physical world, we may

rest assured that they are impelled by well-founded convictions.

It is interesting to recall, in this connection, that many

years before the scientist realized the futility of his search

for ultimate reality, Bahá’u’lláh uttered these significant

words: *“Having recognized thy powerlessness to attain to*

*an adequate understanding of that Reality which abideth within*

*thee, thou wilt readily admit the futility of such efforts as may*

*be attempted by thee, or by any of the created things, to fathom*

*the mystery of the Living God.” And then He points out*

*man’s true goal: “This confession of helplessness, which*

*mature contemplation must eventually impel every mind to make,*

*is in itself the acme of human understanding, and marketh the*

*culmination of man’s development.”*[1]

## Personal mysticism

In contrast to the cold, unemotional mysticism we call

absolute, there is the so-called personal mysticism, or

Christian God-mysticism of men like Bernard of Clairvaux,

Thomas à Kempis and St. Francis, which shows personal

warmth. In Bernard the dread of the consequences of sin,

which, under the influence of Augustine dominated the first

half of the Middle Ages, is replaced by love for Christ. It is

1 Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 165.

the spirit of the neo-Platonic Augustine rather than the

theologian-statesman Augustine. This is the mysticism of

Philo and the Sufi mysticism of Islám.

Personal mysticism resulted largely from the fusion of

mysticism and prophetic religion. Augustine succeeded in

reconciling neo-Platonic mysticism with prophetic religion.

The Augustinian ideal exerted great influence on Christian

mystics in the Middle Ages such as Bernard of Clairvaux,

Albertus Magnus, Thomas à Kempis, St. Francis and St.

Thomas Aquinas.

The idea of God in personal mysticism is derived from the

ecstatic experience, but it is interpreted imaginatively. The

God of personal mysticism is not beyond all values. He

is the *highest* Value but this highest Value is identified with

a personality. As Heiler clearly indicates, in personal

mysticism the Infinite assumes an earthly form, the *summum*

*bonum* becomes a human Redeemer-God.[1] Nevertheless

in personal mysticism God is static, the changeless One, in

the words of à Kempis “the eternal Rest of the Saints.”[2]

The devotion to Christ is not, however, such as we see in the

Primitive church: the Saviour-mysticism is not the prophetic

ideal. In fact some writers are inclined to believe that the

true Augustine is the neo-Platonic Augustine.

The mystic values of the life of Christ, His suffering, His

radiant acquiescence, serve primarily as a model for the mystic

life. In the final stages of His ascent, however, he must

advance beyond the historical personality of Jesus. He can

reach the Infinite only by freeing himself of all images. In

prophetic religion there is no communion of man with God

except through the Prophet, the mediator between man and

God. In prophetic religion, the word of the Prophet is

final. There is no passing beyond the Prophet, beyond space

and. time into the realm of the Infinite.

1 Heiler, *Prayer*, p. 148.

2 Thomas à Kempis. *The Imitation of Christ*. p. 78.

## Greek mysticism and the church

There is one continuous line of development from Plato

to Plotinus, and another, sometimes called the “Hermaic

Chain,” from Plotinus to the close of the Athenian school of

philosophy with Justinian in a.d. 529. The writings of the

so-called pseudo-Dionysius, an anonymous individual, also

exerted considerable influence on all later Christian mystics.

He is called “the father of Christian mystics.” He is not to

be confused with Dionysius the Areopagite who, at least

according to tradition, was a convert of Paul. The author

of the writings of the pseudo-Dionysius was probably a pupil

of Proclus, the last leader of the Athenian school, for the

writings are predominantly neo-Platonic in thought. If this

is so, the writings must have appeared about the time Justinian

closed the Athenian school of philosophy. Manifestly he was

not entirely successful in suppressing the Greek philosophy,

for the source of inspiration of the writings was undoubtedly

the neo-Platonic mysticism of the Infinite of Plotinus.

We must remember that for several centuries before Plato,

philosophers had been speculating on the nature of the

physical world and the soul. Heraclitus (540–475 b.c.)

taught that the soul was immortal, but he did not believe that

it was immaterial. Pythagoras held a similar view. There

was much talk about *primary substances* out of which all

things could evolve. Parmenides adhered to monism; he

believed that there was just one primary substance, the

Parmenidean One, as it is sometimes called. He also denied

the reality of the world of senses, denied motion and change.

Later Anaxagoras and Empedocles abandoned monism for

pluralism, and Empedocles rejects the idea of Parmenides

that the senses are wholly misleading. We have here two

opposing ideas which were reconciled by Leucippus:

1. Our senses tell us that we are living in a world of change.

2. Our reason seems to tell us that there must be one

permanent substance underlying the world of change.

Now, for Leucippus the *unchanging One* was an aggregation

of particles (atoms) which were exempt from change. The

grouping and regrouping of the unchangeable atoms would

account for the changes we observe in the world of senses.

The atomic theory then opened, or reopened, the way for a

mechanistic concept of life. Later philosophers like

Democritus advanced the idea that the soul was made of

atoms: This crude idea was denied by thinkers like Socrates

and Plato.

It is not surprising therefore that Plato, for example, is

not always consistent, that he sometimes shifts his position.

The mind is not infallible and the intuition is not perfect;

but the Greek philosopher, as well as the medieval

philosopher, did not fully realize this. It was not until the

advent of the experimental method that science could check

some of the ancient Greek ideas of the physical world, and

it was not until the twentieth century that physicists abandoned

the hope of comprehending the reality underlying it.

We will indicate very briefly a few ideas of the Greek

mystics.

The mysticism of Plato (428–348 b.c.) naturally goes back

to Socrates—a man of extraordinary insight—who was always

conscious of an inner guide. He believed that the soul had

an inherent capacity for discovering the Divine Reality,

and this idea was expanded by Plato, who stressed the divine

origin of the soul. He believed that the soul could find the

eternal in the temporal, and this faculty he called Love.

By means of this mystic Love the soul gets a glimpse of the

world of reality through an object of beauty. One uses

objects of beauty in this material world as steps to mount

upward to the “Beautiful.” The goal is the Good, the

Ultimate Reality. The eternal world, however, is really

not another world to which we ascend by leaving this world;

it is, rather, a kind of immanent Reality. Later mystics

imply from his teachings that the Ultimate Reality is above

the mind, beyond knowledge; that it is found only in moments

of ecstasy, complete passivity. While we are not sure of all

of his ideas, we feel certain that he believed that the soul has

in itself an eye for Divine Reality and the mind a natural

capacity for direct vision of God.

Although Aristotle (384–322 b.c.) stressed the scientific

method, he did not overlook the essential value of contempla-

tion; in fact he exerted considerable influence on the mysticism

that prevailed from the third to the fifteenth century. He

separated God from the world. The Real transcends all

that is finite; through contemplation, however, man can

gain some knowledge of God. According to Aristotle, the

soul in its ascent must renounce all that is finite. When it

reaches the summit of its ascent it does not distinguish the

All from Nothing. This must be the case, for it has risen

above names and attributes, which define for us our world

of experience. In a sense Aristotle proposed a kind of

negative mysticism.

The most profound result of the impact of Greek thought on

Christian mysticism was neo-Platonism, and the outstanding

figure of this philosophy was Plotinus (born a.d. 205). In

the Middle Ages Plato came to the Christian world largely

through Plotinus, whose work is a kind of synthesis of that

Greek school of thought which reached its spiritual zenith

in Socrates and Plato. For Plotinus, God is not external to

us: the way to Him is within us. His system amounts roughly

to this:

There is a way down and a way up. There is a centre,

figuratively speaking, and God, the One, the Good is this

centre. The way down is an emanation of God from the

centre, so to speak. God the Absolute, the One, transcends

all finiteness, all thought. He is Unknowable, the Indescrib-

able. From this One, emanations radiate. The first is the

mind, which radiates from the Absolute as light radiates from

a lamp. From the mind there seems to come a kind of

secondary emanation, the Universal Soul, which encompasses,

as it were, individual souls. Further details need not concern

us here.

The mysticism of Proclus (a.d. 410–485), the last of the

Hermaic chain, is more complicated and that of the pseudo-

Dionysius still more so.

In spite of all the speculations of the mystics we really

do not know any more about the Infinite God than did Plato.

This is not surprising, for we derive our knowledge of God

from the Prophet and not from speculation. Neither through

speculation nor through inward experiences can we make the

doctrine of the mystics valid.

## The non-religious type

For the student of science and art there is what might be

called a non-religious mysticism, which is upheld by the

mystical philosopher, the spiritually-minded scientist and

to some degree by the inventor. The first step in the path

of this mystical philosophy is the belief that there is a kind of

wisdom, call it insight or intuition if you wish, which is

superior to empirical knowledge. It comes to the creative

worker through meditation. It is the creative force which

reveals new concepts and new relationships. By means of

insight and reason man makes discoveries in the world of

value and in the world of science. Both are essential but

their functions are complementary. Intuition discovers what

is new; reason organizes. This type of mysticism is not new;

it goes back to the days of Heraclitus and Parmenides, but it

is more widespread to-day than in the past. No assumption is

made about a personal God, but the non-religious mystic

believes that through meditation he is able to attain direct

communication with a higher intelligence. For him there is

another world more real than the phenomenal world, and his

first concern is to learn how to live and work in this world.

Although he may not believe in God or any kind of super-

rational or supernatural being, we cannot assume that what

he receives, in moments of meditation, comes solely from his

ego. The scientist who is primarily interested in creative

work and who believes that the universe is controlled by a

supreme being to whom he may turn in meditation, belongs

to this type. However, at times, he may have a feeling of

adoration and devotion towards this creator of the phenomenal

world which disposes us to classify him as an aesthetic mystic.

## Aesthetic mysticism

This type is somewhat different from all other types. It

is sharply contrasted with radical mysticism, and though it has

the warmth and fervour of personal mysticism, it does not

really resemble the latter in any other way. While it goes

back to ancient times, the best examples of it are to be found

among modern artists and poets. Some of the Persian

Sufis and a few mediaeval mystics like St. Francis of Assisi

lean in this direction. The distinguishing characteristics of

this type are love and appreciation of the best the world can

offer, and unrestrained enthusiasm for the beauty of nature,

the flowers, the trees, the sunset, the animals, and whatever

excites our admiration. For the aesthetic mystic, there is no

difficult path, no harsh asceticism, nor self-criticism. He is

concerned primarily with the joy of living and not with the

problem of evil. This is the mysticism of artists and poets who

have faith in mankind and in God’s mercy and love. It is often

a reaction against an intolerant Puritanism which is more

concerned with the depravity of man than with his good

qualities. Just as the philosophers of the seventeenth century

turned from a militant, bigoted ecclesiastical system to

natural law, in order to find some sanction for their political

and social theories, so creative personalities who long to be

at one with the creator of man and the universe, turn from a

narrow evangelical piety to the God of the “beautiful”

who is immanent in the world. In contemplative absorption

the aesthetic mystic feels at one with the creator of all that is

uplifting and beautiful. The experience of ecstasy and rapture

is, for the aesthetic mystic, proof of the existence of this

pantheistic God who reveals Himself in nature. He is not

concerned with any metaphysical basis for his belief, for faith

in God’s eternal goodness is as strong in him as it is in the

radical mystic,—perhaps stronger, for the radical mystic

often feels impelled to ignore the beautiful.

While we may distinguish between the mystical experience

of the radical mystic and that of the aesthetic mystic, one

is just about as valid as the other. The ultimate goal of each

type is, of course, quite different. One type is entranced

with the beauty of God’s creation, lives in the world, and

finds supreme satisfaction in creative work. The other

shuns the beautiful, flees from the world, and finds satisfaction

only in what will ultimately lead him to the Absolute. The

radical mystic can gaze at an enchanting landscape, listen

to a sublime symphony or look at an awe-inspiring work

of art and remain unmoved. He may even take some satis-

faction in the fact that he is oblivious to everything that evokes

sensuous pleasure.

The aesthetic mystic, on the other hand, sees God reflected

in everything that enhances life. In general, however, his

prayer is not communion with a personal God, but contem-

plative absorption centred on a subject of aesthetic value.

Nevertheless some of the prayers of the aesthetic mystics are

inspiring, uplifting and not without that personal inwardness,

that communion with God, which characterizes all genuine

prayers. The feeling of the immediate presence of the Divine

is not wanting in many of these prayers. Consider, for

illustration, this prayerful attitude of Rousseau: “I rose

every morning before the sun and passed through a neighbour-

ing orchard into a pleasant path which led by a vineyard and

along the hills towards Chambéry. While walking I prayed,

not by a vain motion of the lips, but with a sincere lifting up of

my heart to the Creator of this beautiful Nature whose charms

lay spread out before my eyes. I never like to pray in my

chamber; it is to me as if the walls and all the little works of

man come between God and myself. I like to contemplate

Him in His works, whilst my heart lifts itself up to Him.”[1]

While the scientist is not usually regarded as an aesthetic

mystic, nevertheless, as we indicated above, many scientists

in the contemplation of that supernatural wisdom which

governs the universe often glide into aesthetic moods not

unlike those experienced by the aesthetic mystic. Einstein

declares: “The most beautiful and profound emotion we

can experience is the sensation of the mystical. It is the sower

of all true science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger,

who can no longer wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good

as dead. To know that what is impenetrable to us really

exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most

radiant beauty which our dull faculties can comprehend only

in their most primitive forms this knowledge, this feeling is

at the centre of true religiousness.”

## Contemporary religious mysticism

There is also the religious type of mysticism which we

see in many popular movements of the day. This type is

concerned primarily with experience; nevertheless, experience

is interpreted pretty much as in the past. The contemporary

religious mystic is a pragmatist. If in moments of illumination

he experiences something which raises him above the normal

Heiler. *Prayer*. p. 289.

level of existence and which helps him in his individual develop-

ment, he assumes he has been in the presence of God. Now

since he can gain this immediate knowledge of the Divine

he assumes, with the older mystics, there must be a little of the

Divine within him. Naturally, this belief gives him hope and

courage in times of stress.

Chapter VI  
Prophetic religion and mysticism:  
a contrast

## Prophetic religion

Prophetic religion is dominated by the idea that the Divine

Will is revealed to mankind through a great spiritual genius,

or a Prophet like Christ or Muhammad. When the Prophet

appears the world is always revived spiritually. The Prophet

may also reveal new social laws, as in the case of Judaism,

or He may stress individual spiritual development as in the

case of Christianity. In either case the transcendent Divine

manifests Himself to man through the Prophet who is an

intermediary. He is the creator of the world of value. If ‘we

follow the precepts of the Prophet, try to understand Him,

try to become like Him, we shall be recreated; and without

this recreation, religion is of very little value.

## Mysticism

Mysticism, as we have said before, maintains that through

meditation and contemplation man may enter the presence

of the infinite God, and may be absorbed in the infinite unity

of the Godhead. In a broad sense anyone who is aware of

the indwelling Spirit of God is a mystic, but we must use the

term in a more restricted sense.

The modern mystic has completely discarded asceticism,

but he retains the doctrine that a particle of the Divine

Essence exists in man, and he believes that man may enter

the presence of God. He also believes that divine revelation

can come to humanity through the mystic as well as through

the Prophet; that is, the Divine Will may be revealed to man

as well as to the Prophet. For most of these modern mystics,

man differs from the Prophet only in degree and not in kind.

The majority of modern mystics are concerned primarily

with individual spiritual development, and we must allow

that they have succeeded where organized religion has failed.

It is true that by turning inward, men (a very few men) have

been able to improve their individual behaviour; but it is

equally true that mysticism has no solution for our baffling

social problems. A small minority feel that new social laws

can and will be revealed to gifted individuals and that in this

way a new world order will be created. Although mysticism

has exerted considerable influence upon prophetic religion,

history does not indicate that the creative force behind great

religious movements is due primarily to mysticism. The

combined effect of all the great mystics of Christianity is

surely small compared with the effect of the adherents of the

primitive church who were inspired by the Founder of

Christianity. The same may be said of Islám.

## The two paths

As we said in Chapter II, the Divine Life Process necessarily

leads to a path by means of which man’s spirit, which is

essentially divine, may return to God, the Divine Essence.

This, of course, involves some kind of transmutation of the

self whereby it becomes deified. In the language of Eckhart:

“If I am to know God directly I must become completely

He and He, I. so that this ‘He’ and this ‘I’ become and are

one ‘I.’”[1]

In the Bahá’í writings the path of the wayfarer in quest of

God is clearly outlined, but it differs substantially from that of

the mystic. We will, therefore, consider here briefly the

various stages of the mystic’s path and compare this path

with that outlined in the Bahá’í writings. We must acknow-

ledge the positive contributions of the mystics, past and present,

1 Thomas Steven Molnar. *God and the Knowledge of Reality*. p. 34, Meister Eckhart Sermon 94.

and we must appreciate their efforts to attain the higher life

which, after all, is the goal of the prophetic religion; but we

must part company with them on doctrines like incarnation,

and we cannot be in complete agreement with them on the

criterion of the spiritual life.

While mystics differ regarding the number and nature of

the various stages of the path, they are roughly as follows:

conversion, purgation, illumination and union. Some mystics

will also include the “dark night of the soul.”

*Conversion*. Conversion is that sudden or gradual realiza-

tion of some lofty, extraordinary state, transcending the level

of ordinary experience, or the awakening of some reality that

exists within us, some trend within us of which we are not fully

cognizant. Our awareness of this trend is, however, usually

sudden.

This more or less sudden realization of an overwhelming

force, something other than our normal self, which we call

conversion, may indicate that we are in touch with a divine

power; but this emotional disturbance may also be due to

abnormal suggestibility. Conversion in revivalistic religion

has been the subject of considerable study, and we are forced

to admit that ecstasy and rapture or similar psychic phe-

nomena cannot be taken as proof that the soul has experienced

rebirth. What we have said in Chapter III about the claims

for the psychic experience in mysticism, applies here.

From the standpoint of prophetic religion, of the Bahá’í

Faith in particular, spiritual rebirth or conversion takes place

when we realize the Prophet of God as the source of our

spiritual life, the creator of moral and ethical values. This

kind of conversion is not necessarily associated with any sort

of psychic experience. Conversion of this type, moreover,

involves the mind as well as the heart. We demonstrated in

Chapter III that the heart alone is not an infallible guide to

spiritual truth. Finally, the mystic’s anti-intellectualism and

his subjectivism very often lead to spiritual and even moral

anarchy, and the result may be, in fact it often is, social

disunity.

*Purgation*. When the wayfarer is awakened to his higher

self he realizes his limitations and the encumbrances that pre-

vent his spiritual progress. He must, therefore, purify the

self by “detachment” or “poverty.” The final result, at

least in extreme mysticism, is that man becomes merely an

insignificant *part* of the *whole*, devoid of all desires and rights.

The modern mystic, to be sure, does not go as far as this,

but he does realize the value of some kind of purification.

According to the Bahá’í Faith, the ultimate aim of our

spiritual progress is not to eradicate all our individual aspira-

tions, but rather to make them conform with the teachings

of the Prophets. All man’s faculties, mind as well as heart,

should be utilized in developing the soul. The “dying from

self” is not the complete destruction of human personality

but its spiritual perfection, the subordination of the ego to the

spiritual state of selflessness and sacrifice. It is not necessary

to stifle all the senses or material desires, but surely they should

be controlled and tempered. This kind of subordination and

transformation is necessarily slow. A man may suddenly

realize the significance of the Prophet’s message, but character

building is quite another matter.

All these ascetic conceptions and practices are based on

the assumption that human nature is depraved.

Bahá’u’lláh has established, for us, a fine balance between

the inner and the outer life, and He is very explicit concerning

the things that will advance our spiritual growth and the things

that will retard that growth. In the first place Bahá’u’lláh

makes it clear that there is no harm in the “world.” He says:

*“Should a man wish to adorn himself with the ornaments of*

*the earth, to wear its apparels, or partake of the benefits it*

*can bestow, no harm can befall him, if he alloweth nothing*

*whatever to intervene between him and God, for God hath*

*ordained every good thing, whether created in the heavens or*

*in the earth, for such of His servants as truly believe in Him.”*[1]

Let us observe, however, what He says about the “world.”

*“Know ye that by ‘the world’ is meant your unawareness of*

*Him Who is your Maker, and your absorption in aught else*

*but Him.”*[2] We must be thankful for the “world,” for this

outer or external life. He says: *“Render thanks and praise*

*unto Him, and be of them that are truly thankful.”*[3] We must

remember, however, that whatever prevents us from loving

God is the world, and we should flee from it. Bahá’u’lláh

does not say that we should not be wholly absorbed in the

world, on the contrary He says we should be absorbed in God

only. We do not divide our affections between God and the

world. In His own words: *“And as the human heart, as*

*fashioned by God, is one and undivided, it behoveth thee to take*

*heed that its affections be, also, one and undivided. Cleave thou,*

*therefore, with the whole affection of thine heart, unto His*

*love, and withdraw it from the love of any one besides Him,*

*that He may aid thee to immerse thyself in the ocean of His*

*unity ….”*[4] There must be a. balance between the inner

and the outer life, but there can be no balance of affections.

Again Bahá’u’lláh is very explicit in His renunciation of

the world. In unequivocal language He warns us that:

*“The world is but a show, vain and empty, a mere nothing,*

*bearing the semblance of reality. Set not your affections*

*upon it .... Verily I say, the world is like the vapour in a*

*desert, which the thirsty dreameth to be water and striveth*

1 Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 276.

2 ibid., p. 276.

3 ibid., p. 276.

4 ibid., pp. 237–8.

*after it with all his might, until when he cometh unto it, he*

*findeth it to be mere illusion.”*[1]

Here is a new conception of the world, sharply contrasted

with the old. The world is not inherently evil, but again it

is not what it appears to be; it is an illusion. According

to the old conception it was not only an illusion but an evil,

and man could not even live in it, much less have any apprecia-

tion for it.

This process of purification cannot be very successful,

however, without meditation or reflection. Meditation will

be discussed in more detail in Chapter IX; suffice it to say

here, that it is the state beyond concentration where mental

activity is low. It is not an abnormal condition, in fact

meditation is necessary for all creative work. In this sub-

jective state one can get a more comprehensive view of any

subject. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells us that without this faculty of

meditation man is a mere animal.

You are a stranger in this new world and you will necessarily

meet with conflicts. The object of purgation is to resolve

these conflicts.

*Illumination*. Through the process of purgation the

spiritual reality of man becomes freed from the self, and

he is then ready to enter the stage of illumination. In this

stage his intuitive powers are heightened, his power of per-

ception is enhanced and his energy is strangely increased.

He has greater capacity for comprehending, and dealing with,

the accidents of life. However, this increase of power to

understand and cope with the phenomenal world is not

peculiar to mysticism. Creative personalities in prophetic

religion, artists and poets experience the same.

It is only the mystic, however, who claims he can come

in direct contact with the Absolute, while in this stage of

1 ibid., p. 328.

illumination. This rapturous awareness of the Absolute

is sometimes called “ the practice of the Presence of God.”

Here again this experience is not peculiar to mysticism.

There is a normal religious joy, a majestic calm, which comes

to those who are influenced by the power of the Holy Spirit

and who are guided by the precepts of the Prophets. This

experience is accessible, not to a few gifted individuals, but to

everyone who humbly follows the Prophets, abides by their

laws and strives to reflect their attributes.

Most mystics distinguish between illumination and union.

In illumination the individuality and personality seem to

remain intact, while in union this is not so. In illumination

the wayfarer is still somewhat of a stranger, but in the state

of union, which few ever attain, he is no longer a stranger

but a traveller who has returned to his home.

As we have said before, the mystic does not believe that

the mind is of any value in this path. Some indeed would

go so far as to maintain that it is the mystic and not the

scientist who understands the underlying reality of nature.

At any rate to-day, the scientist, or at least the physicist,

admits that he cannot understand the underlying reality of

nature, and he would probably go farther and say that no

human could understand this reality. Whatever *a priori*

knowledge the mystic may possess, the fact still remains

that it is the scientist with his intellectual and intuitive powers

who has advanced science, and not the mystic. Finally,

had the mystic made freer use of this greatest of God’s gifts,

the intellect, he would not have been led to identify himself

with God.

The mystic claims that our awareness of God is more akin

to love than to any kind of intellectualism, and in this we can

readily concur. Prophetic religion makes a similar claim. No

mystic is more emphatic on this point than Bahá’u’lláh:

*“Only when the lamp of search, of earnest striving, of longing*

*desire, of passionate devotion, of fervid love, of rapture, and*

*ecstasy, is kindled within the seeker’s heart, and the breeze of*

*His loving-kindness is wafted upon his soul, will the darkness of*

*error be dispelled, the mists of doubts and misgivings be dissipated,*

*and the lights of knowledge and certitude envelop his being.”*[1]

Man’s destiny is clearly shown in the following words

of Bahá’u’lláh: *“Having created the world and all that liveth*

*and moveth therein, He, through the direct operation of His*

*unconstrained and sovereign Will, chose to confer upon man*

*the unique distinction and capacity to know Him and to love*

*Him—a capacity that must needs be regarded as the generating*

*impulse and the primary purpose underlying the whole of*

*creation. … Upon the inmost reality of each and every*

*created thing He hath shed the light of one of His names, and*

*made it a recipient of the glory of one of His attributes. Upon*

*the reality of man, however, He hath focussed the radiance*

*of all of His names and attributes, and made it a mirror of*

*His own Self. Alone of all created things man hath been*

*singled out for so great a favour, so enduring a bounty.”*[2]

We cannot infer from this, however, that our love for God

is possible only when we lay aside the mind.

Moreover, Bahá’u’lláh makes it very clear that love and

obedience cannot be separated. The man who follows the

Prophet has a twofold obligation. *“The first is steadfastness*

*in His love, such steadfastness that neither the clamour of*

*the enemy nor the claims of the idle pretender can deter him*

*from cleaving unto Him Who is the Eternal Truth, a steadfast-*

*ness that taketh no account of them whatever. The second*

*is strict observance of the laws He hath prescribed laws which*

*He hath always ordained, and will continue to ordain, unto men,*

*and through which the truth may be distinguished and separated*

*from falsehood.”*[3]

1 *Gleanings*., p. 267.

2 ibid., p. 65.

3 ibid., p. 289.

The meaning of the Divine Presence, which the mystic

believes he has attained in this stage, has been discussed in

Chapter III, so that we need not discuss it further.

*Union*. As the drop of water from the sea may ultimately

return to the sea, so the wayfarer may return to his original

home. This is union, and it implies some sort of deification

of man. It is clear by now that this doctrine of deification

is unwarrantable.

The teaching of Bahá’u’lláh on union with God is necessarily

sharply contrasted with the doctrines of the mystics. The

real union with God is complete and continual obedience to

the laws revealed by the Prophet. In his own words: *“By*

*self-surrender and perpetual union with God is meant that men*

*should merge their will wholly in the Will of God, and regard*

*their desires as utter nothingness beside His Purpose. Whatso-*

*ever the Creator commandeth His creatures to observe, the*

*same must they diligently, and with the utmost joy and eagerness,*

*arise and fulfil. They should in no wise allow their fancy to*

*obscure their judgment, neither should they regard their own*

*imaginings as the voice of the Eternal.”*[1] It is through the

Prophet that the Divine Will is revealed to man.

## The Seven Valleys of Bahá’u’lláh

This treatise was written by Bahá’u’lláh some time before

He declared to His followers that He was the One promised

by His Precursor, the Báb. He desired to encourage the

scattered followers of the Báb, who had rallied around Him,

to search diligently for the Promised One. We will consider

here very briefly, just a few points regarding the Seven Cities,

Seven Stages, or Seven Valleys through which the wayfarer

must pass in his journey *“… from the abode of dust to the*

*heavenly homeland.”*[2] The language, as well as the style, is similar

1 Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 337.

2 Bahá’u’lláh. *The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys*, p. 4.

to that used by the Sufis, and was therefore familiar to His

followers, who were mystically inclined. Many of the terms,

however, have a different connotation. For example, by the

“Beloved” He meant Himself and not the Divine Essence.

The reader is referred to the complete text[1] for details.

The Valley of Search

*“In this Valley, the wayfarer rides the steed of patience ….*

*It is requisite for such servants to purge the heart which is*

*the wellspring of divine treasure from every impression, to*

*forsake blind imitation inherited from their forebears and to*

*close the door of friendship or enmity to all upon the earth.”*

The Valley of Love

*“In this city the heaven of ecstasy is elevated, the all-*

*luminous sun of yearning shines forth and the fire of love is*

*aglow ….”*

The Valley of Knowledge

“He will perceive the secrets of resurrection in the regions

of creation and in the souls with inner and outer eyes, and,

with a spiritual heart, he will perceive the divine wisdom in the

infinite manifestations of God.”

After much suffering and patience the seeker will find his

Beloved and he will discover that all the Manifestations or

Prophets of God are really one.

*“After traversing the Valley of Knowledge, which is the last*

*plane of limitation, the wayfarer attains the first stage of*

The Valley of Unity

*whereupon he quaffs the chalice of abstraction and witnesses the*

*Manifestations of Oneness.”* The wayfarer now sees that all

1 *The Seven Valleys and The Four Valleys*, revealed by Bahá’u’lláh,

translated by Ali-Kuli Khan. New York. Bahá’í Publishing Committee,

1936.

things reflect the power and beauty of God. The self-cultivat-

ing life merges into the unitive life. Bahá’u’lláh makes it

clear that this Unity is not to be confused with the mystic’s

concept of unity. He sets forth three cardinal principles to

which the mystic could never subscribe: (1) man is not an

incarnation of God, (2) man cannot know the Divine Essence,

(3) man’s knowledge of God comes through the Prophet.

The remaining three Valleys outline the progressive develop-

ment of the soul which results from the wayfarer’s love for,

knowledge of, and obedience to the Prophet.

The Valley of Contentment

*“In this Valley, he will feel the breezes of divine contentment*

*wafting from the plane of the spirit; he will burn the veils of*

*want; and with inward and outward eyes, he will witness, within*

*and without all things, the meaning of the verse: ‘In that Day,*

*God will make all independent out of His abundance.’”*

The Valley of Wonderment

*“He witnesses a wondrous world and a new creation at every*

*instant, and adds wonderment to wonderment; and he is aston-*

*ished at the works of the Lord of Oneness.”*

The Valley of True Poverty and Absolute Nothingness

*“This state is that of dying from self and living in God,*

*and being poor in self and becoming rich in the Desired One.”*

In one of the concluding passages Bahá’u’lláh makes it

clear that the wayfarer must adhere to the laws and precepts

of the Prophets. *“During all these journeys, the wayfarer*

*must not deviate a hair’s breadth from the ‘Law’—which is*

*indeed the essence of the ‘Path’ and the very fruit of the tree*

*of ‘Truth’—and in all stages, he must show implicit obedience*

*to the Commandments, and firmly eschew all forbidden things*

*in order that he may be favoured with the cup of the Law and*

*be grounded in the mysteries of the Truth.”*

## Mysticism and fundamental concepts

Mysticism is usually a reaction against the superficiality

of a decadent civilization. It often reaches its highest point

when prophetic religion is at its lowest, and consequently

appears superior by comparison. Persons with a strong desire

for things spiritual are naturally, when civilization seems on

the verge of collapse, attracted toward a philosophy of escape,

and are also repelled by the incrustations of institutional

religion.

While mysticism has preserved for us the best in prophetic

piety, the contrasts cannot be overlooked. Heiler points out

the difference in a few significant phrases.[1] Prophetic religion

affirms personality, while mysticism denies it. One flees

from the world, denies the natural life and ignores history;

the other believes in life, values history and endeavours to

realize ideals and aims. Of course, pure or absolute mysticism

has always been modified by prophetic religion; consequently

the type most familiar to the western world possesses a warmth

and fervour foreign to that of the East.

The concept of God in either form, however, differs radically

from the prophetic ideal. To the mystic the concept of God

must be based upon his experience of ecstasy. He may be

non-personal, beyond all values, super-good or a loving,

personal God; but He is always static and outside of history.

God in extreme mysticism of the absolute type is merely the

speculative interpretation of the experience of ecstasy. The

difficulty, of course, lies in the interpretation of the ecstatic

experience, an experience in which there is a cessation of

normal consciousness. Parenthetically, this ecstatic experi-

ence is not to be confused with the normal experience of

1 Heiler, *Prayer*, Chapter VI.

religious values as in prophetic religion. As Heiler shows,

the God of mysticism is not a revelation in history; God

reveals Himself to every man who is prepared to apprehend

Him. The birth of Christ, His suffering, His death, indeed

the whole history of redemption, is valuable to the mystic

only in so far as it prepares him for the mystical experience.

A divinely-appointed mediator, then, becomes merely a symbol

of an infinite Deity. The mystic is, therefore, led to concepts

of God which are not only opposed to prophetic religion

but to history.

Heiler points out the limitations of mysticism in other

fields.[1] Since God reveals Himself to the mystic directly,

the mystic is exalted above religious authority. He main-

tains a similar attitude toward ethics; to the mystic, moral

action is not a thing good in itself. Little consideration is

given to the social order, since mysticism is an esoteric religion

designed for a few gifted persons. Neither is mysticism con-

cerned with world civilization, for pure mysticism is hostile to

all civilization. In the concept of immortality we see the same

non-social, static ideal: immortality is merely the ecstatic

vision of, and union with, God.

1 Heiler, *Prayer*, Chapter VI.

Chapter VII  
Science, revelation and mysticism

## Science and revelation

When we think of divine revelation we naturally think

of revealed or intuitive knowledge. The knowledge possessed

by the great creative personalities of prophetic religion,

or in the language of religion, the Prophets, like Muhammad,

is innate, immediate. We are fairly certain that they did

not attend schools, nor did they create eclectic systems out

of contemporary or ancient wisdom. There is, however,

this essential difference between the intuitive knowledge

which we associate with divine revelation and the kind which

we associate with science. The intuitive knowledge of the

scientist must be checked constantly by empirical knowledge,

while the intuitive knowledge of the Prophet needs no check.

This is rather difficult for the scientist to concede, but, as we

hope to show, the difference begins to vanish when we think

of revealed knowledge in terms of *total experience*, not merely

experience in the world of science.

We must admit, however, that the phenomenal success of

science in the physical world, the failure of religion to establish

peace and harmony in the world at large, and finally the

secularization of religion as well as society, all tend to create,

in the mind of the layman, the idea that the revealed knowledge

of the Prophet is not as reliable as the intuitive knowledge

of the scientist. Of course, many laymen feel that scientific

knowledge is the only certain knowledge we possess to-day.

They firmly believe that scientific knowledge is final and abso-

lute; but the modern scientist, or at least the modern physicist,

does not make this claim.

Ever since the decline of organized religion there have been

many attempts to create eclectic systems out of the salient

features of extant religions. So far as the world outlook

goes, some of these movements are superior to religious

systems, but they lack force to effect any large-scale reform

either in the individual or society.

Within the pale of any particular religious system there are

many who have faith in revealed knowledge, but they feel

constrained to regard the revealed knowledge of their own

religion as final and absolute. For the Christian the Divine

Will was revealed through Christ once and for all time. All

other Prophets are at least inferior, if not false. The follower

of Muhammad makes a similar claim for Islám. It has taken

man a long time to realize that creation is a mode of causation,

and it may take him some time to realize that divine revelation

is continuous.

For the scientist, however, the problem is not progressive

revelation, but simply revelation. How can we reconcile the

innate revealed knowledge of the Prophet with scientific

thinking? The intuitive knowledge of the mystic presents

some difficulties but, as we shall see, they are insignificant

when compared with the revealed knowledge of the Prophet.

In general, then, we are concerned with two types of re-

vealed knowledge: the kind that comes to the Prophet, which

is innate, independent of training and reflection, and the

kind that comes to the mystic in his moments of meditation,

particularly in the state of ecstasy or vision.

Let us consider the revealed knowledge of the mystic first,

since it is more akin to the intuitive knowledge of the scientist.

To begin with, as we have shown, Bahá’u’lláh refutes the claim

that man is a part of the Divine Essence, and that man can

experience *immediately* the presence of God. This removes

two formidable stumbling blocks of the scientist, for certainly

no scientist would admit that man is a part of God, nor that

man could experience immediately the Infinite, that is, enter

into the presence of God. Bahá’u’lláh also reminds us that

man’s insight or intuition is not infallible. This applies to the

revealed knowledge of the mystic as well as to the intuitive

knowledge of the scientist. The mystic and the mystic phil-

osopher realize this.

Now we must consider the revealed knowledge of the

Prophet, which is of a different order. The knowledge of

the Prophet, being infallible, requires no test. As we have

said, the scientist is sceptical about this kind of knowledge.

For him and for the layman who tries to follow him,

there is simply nothing in our scientific *experience* that corres-

ponds to the innate revealed knowledge of the Prophet. In a

very real sense perhaps this is true, but there is still another

approach to the problem.

First, however, let us bear in mind that a scientific search

for revealed truth might be about as useless as a scientific

search for beauty. One should *experience* a feeling of beauty

before beginning to look for it: values are antecedent to dis-

cussions about them. For this reason, one should have

some awareness or appreciation of revealed truth before start-

ing on the search for it.

It is sometimes maintained that if the scientist would pursue

his search far enough (whatever that means), he would discover

God. This may be true, but the God he finds will not be the

historic God of prophetic religion, who reveals Himself to

man through a Prophet, like Bahá’u’lláh. Should he investi-

gate secular and religious history he might fare better, but the

chances are really against him. He might arrive at the con-

clusion that all religions are equally true and none really

false. By the time he reaches this stage of his quest, however,

the divine element will probably have disappeared. At least

that is what usually happens. He might conceivably conclude

that all religions are divine in origin, but that is really asking

too much of a scientist, even an hypothetical scientist.

The case is not hopeless, however, for two reasons. In the

first place, revealed knowledge has come to mankind in our

day. In the second place, I believe we can demonstrate that

revealed truth is not foreign to our experience. The historical

fact that Bahá’u’lláh did bring to our age a divine Faith com-

mensurate with our scientific advancement, enables us to

reconstruct our analysis along easier paths. If the scientist

will investigate the tenets of this Faith, which has now encircled

the globe; if he will study the lives of the founders with an

unbiased mind, he will discover that divine revelation is not

incompatible with scientific thinking.

Let us now consider the problem of experience. To be

more specific, we might say the problem of total experience or

all experience.

## Revelation and experience

The average intelligent thinker who is influenced by the

method of science finds it difficult if not impossible to believe

that a Manifestation of God or a Prophet could completely

change the consciences, the patterns of thought, or the thinking

habits of the generality of mankind. He also finds it difficult

to believe that laws and principles for a new social order could

ever be *revealed* to mankind through a religious genius. At

the same time he is, at least dimly, aware that the existing

ideologies can never establish any kind of peace and harmony.

The dilemma may be due to a restricted view of *experience*. If

we limit ourselves to the scientific approach, in evaluating the

Prophet, we may find nothing in our experience that corres-

ponds to revealed truth. And yet in a very real sense, there

is nothing in our *experience* that corresponds to scientific

truth. Science has failed to explain the underlying reality of

nature in terms of mechanical models, which is equivalent

to saying that science has failed to explain nature in terms of

experience. Moreover, for the average reader, the symbolism

of mathematics is just as irrelevant, to his *experience*, as the

concept of revelation.

To be sure, we assume that there is an underlying reality

in the physical world and we draw diagrams and construct

models to represent it, but we cannot prove that these pictorial

representations really correspond to this reality. We may

build, in our imagination, a scientific model to imitate a given

phenomenon but, to-day at least, we do not claim that the

model really explains the phenomenon. Science is concerned

with a world of appearance, and the best we can do is to

express our knowledge of this world in a sort of symbolic

language which is unfamiliar to most of us. As we have

indicated, the external world is known to us only by inference.

Scientific laws and concepts are not immediately apprehended

as are values like beauty, justice and goodness.

The idea of revealed truth is not wholly incomprehensible

to us if we think in terms of *all* experience and not merely

experience in the *world of science*. When we turn to the world

of value, the world of art, music and literature, we see that

creations and standards come to us through inspired individ-

uals and not through any scientific procedure. These creative

personalities *reveal* aesthetic values to us. The language

of the world of value is not the unfamiliar symbolic language

of science but the more intimate language of colour, form,

rhythm and harmony.

We are all familiar with this sort of revealed knowledge.

It is not really *foreign* to our experience. We know,

moreover, the futility of applying any kind of scientific

analysis to aesthetic values. To be sure, it has been done,

but the results are certainly not very convincing. We do not

evaluate the art of Leonardo, the music of Beethoven nor the

style of Shakespeare, in terms of our experience in the world

of science. Can we not evaluate the revealed knowledge of

the Prophet as we evaluate the revealed knowledge of the

artist or musician? It is true that in the realm of aesthetic

values men do not resort to the sword or the torch, but it is

also true that in the realm of aesthetic values a complete

transformation of society is not effected. To illustrate, in

the realm of art we are now suffering a relapse, but there is

no indication that there will be any bloodshed. Should a

great creative genius appear and establish new art values it is

highly improbable that he would be persecuted. However,

if at the same time, he should attempt a few social reforms

we all know what would happen. A literary genius may not

have an exemplary character, in fact he may have a very bad

character, but we usually accept his contributions for their

intrinsic worth.

The Prophet must necessarily deal with man’s grosser, as

well as his finer nature. Everything that is small, contemptible

and ferocious, comes to the surface, but surely that does not

mean that his work is less meritorious than that of the revealer

of art values. Should the Prophet overlook the despicable

characteristics of a declining social order and preach only

individual spiritual development, he would never be persecuted;

but neither would he establish social justice. In eliminating

racial animosity, national hatreds, and class distinctions, the

Bahá’í Faith has succeeded where humanitarian movements

and older faiths have failed. Moreover, the Bahá’í Faith

has transformed the individual lives of its adherents. How-

ever, all this was not accomplished without the sacrifice of

over twenty thousand martyrs.

The proof of a creative artist’s message is the artist himself

and his creation; but the same can be said of the Prophet.

Bahá’u’lláh says: *“The first and foremost testimony establishing*

*His truth is His own Self. Next to this testimony is His*

*Revelation.”*[1] The advent of a Manifestation of God in our

day is an historical event which cannot be overlooked, but

we will not attempt here even a cursory glance at this world-

embracing Faith. Our purpose is to show that the concept

of divine revelation is not wholly foreign to our experience

provided we take a comprehensive, inclusive view of experience.

In fact, all new knowledge is a matter of revelation, but

revelation in its completeness is seen only in prophetic religion.

## Science and mysticism

Let us return to mysticism. We have observed that the

experience of the religious mystic is not unique. Rapture

and ecstasy are not invariably associated with a religious

background. Moreover, the mystics themselves agree that

some test is necessary to determine the validity of an immediate

experience. Since it is the mind that determines and applies

this test, the experience cannot be absolutely authoritative

over the individual.

But there are still other considerations that limit the methods

of the mystic. He is unable to transmit to others that which

he experiences. When we go to him, he tells us that we also

must tread the mystical path. However, in practice, this is

only possible for a few gifted individuals. When one goes to

the Prophet or to the Divine Word, he does not come away

empty-handed. The early history of Christianity or Islám

shows very clearly that the Prophet has something to give to

every class of society. Even though the mystic has much to

tell us about individual development, the possibilities of any

kind of religious unity through mysticism are too incon-

siderable to be practical. How can mysticism with its personal

authority eradicate national, political, or religious prejudice

when it has no central figure to whom all classes may turn?

If the nations and races of a distracted and deluded world

1 Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 105.

could be united by any such man-made discovery, they would

have been united long ago.

We may now inquire, can science come to the aid of

mysticism? Can science make the revelations of the mystic

any more authoritative or valid? Somewhere in the mystical

state, perhaps, just beyond the point where there is no object

of contemplation, there seems to be a release of new energy.

Can some specialized science control this phenomenon

so that mysticism can produce something that transcends

the work of the mind? It seems unlikely, because science as

a whole agrees that the mystical experience is not knowledge.

The experience, while an aid to creation, does not create.

The farther we go from contemplation, that is, the point

where there is no object for reflection, the more we depend

upon mere feeling; and feeling alone cannot lead us to universal

truth.

Ostensibly, reason should lead us to universal truth; but

as we know, in reality it does not. The human mind has its

limitations and thinkers are never entirely free from feeling.

Finally we must remember that even science yields universal

truths only in fields where verification is possible. The

speculations of mathematical physics are far from universal.

Science is of inestimable value to religious thinking in that it

frees us from superstition, but when science takes a hand at

fundamental religious concepts, it is in a field of speculation,

a field in which its results cannot be verified. The so-called

proofs for the existence of God are certainly not universally

accepted. The same applies to such attributes as omnipotence

and immanence.

It seems highly improbable therefore that science and

mysticism will produce anything that can replace religion.

However, there is still another path for the foresighted

adventuresome soul who has a little spiritual perception and

intellectual courage. A comprehensive view of history shows

that the higher values come to humanity not by philosophical

speculations nor scientific research nor even through some

inner urge, but rather through great personalities. Art,

music and poetry have been given to the world by creative

geniuses. Harmony and counterpoint do not produce great

music, nor does theology create revelation.

Now if we are free from bias we must admit that we have

no grounds for believing that divine knowledge, prophetic

revelation, has ceased. On the contrary, unparalleled

confusion in the world to-day might signalize the birth of

a new revelation, a revelation suited to the maturity of this age.

To be sure, the methods and aims of such a religion would

not necessarily be in agreement with the limited knowledge

of contemporary thinkers. Indeed, we should be sceptical

of any proposed revival of divine grace which conforms with

our finite understanding. A man is not being superstitious

nor limited in his comprehension when he admits there is an

unfathomable mystery about all revelation.

That which man can conceive by his own powers is, in

the very nature of the case, not equivalent to Divine Revelation.

Our duty and responsibility compel us to investigate.

If a man claims to be the bearer of a divine message the

validity of his claims can be established readily enough.

The real difficulty is not in establishing a proof of his message

or his claim, but lies in freeing our minds and hearts from

prejudice. History proves this. Man rejects revelation

not because he is unable to establish the truth of the Prophet’s

message but because he refuses to examine the evidence.

Chapter VIII  
The creative word

## The style of the creative word

All creative art has its origin in some extraordinary spiritual

experience. The painter, the musician, the poet must use

a medium of expression that is best suited to his par-

ticular creation. If the prose writer indulges in verse, his

style may become ornate and involved. There is no virtue

in relating a simple, straightforward fact by the indirect

method of poetic imagery.

As we tramp through the country in quest of unusual

things, our attention may be arrested by a distant mountain;

but if there is nothing worth seeing on top of the mountain,

that is really all we need to know about it. When the native

tells you: “It’s just flat country up there,” he is using effective

prose. If, however, the view from the mountain top is

enchanting, if it produces a feeling of ecstasy, then our native

cannot express this fact effectively without resorting to verse.

Prose is limited to thoughts about things, and while it can

engender emotion, it cannot adequately describe it.

The poet must use words, and words that help the reader

to visualize. He never uses an abstract term when a concrete

one will express his meaning. The figures and analogies

he uses are familiar to his readers. An analogy that is foreign

to the reader or more incomprehensible than the thing to be

described is necessarily useless—more correctly, worse than

useless. The terms must be concrete and simple, but the

style must be suited to spiritual truths.

It is the poetical style and not “average prose” that is

capable of expressing emotion and beauty.

Let us consider a familiar passage in Shakespeare’s *As*

*You Like It*. The banished duke, finding himself in the

forest of Arden far removed from the superficialities of

court life, desires to express his gratitude. Now in real

life, what would the duke have to say? He might say,

“Isn’t it fine?” That is plain prose; there is nothing

flowery about it, but what does it convey to you regarding

the duke’s feelings? Well, let us see what Shakespeare has

to say:

“And this our life exempt from public haunt

Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,

Sermons in stones and good in everything.”

The meaning is clear to everyone although taken literally

the sentence is meaningless. Moreover, it would be absurd

to suggest that the writer did not convey the duke’s emotion

concretely.

Now the position of the spiritual genius is somewhat

similar to that of the poet. The Prophet must use familiar

terms, terms that can be understood by everyone, but his

“style” must transcend that used in unemotional narrative.

Consider this exquisite passage from the Qur’an: “God is the

light of heaven and earth; the similitude of His light is a

niche in the wall, wherein a lamp is placed, and the lamp

enclosed in a case of glass; the glass appears as if it were

a shining star. It is lighted with the oil of a blessed tree,

an olive neither of the East, nor of the West; it wanteth

little but that the oil thereof would give light although no

fire touched it. This is the light added unto light. God

will direct unto His light whom He pleaseth.”

The message of the Prophet is not concerned with simple

things but rather with the most profound problems of human

existence, moral and spiritual development, faith, hope and

life eternal.

The direct prose style or average prose is adequate for

conveying intellectual ideas and for narrative but useless when

it comes to a great emotion or a spiritual experience. The

emotional state cannot be expressed directly.

Of course we might indulge in a long minute description

of an emotional reaction, but at best that kind of prose

description pales before the poetical method. Those who

are more familiar with prose than verse might find it profitable

to turn to some real master of verse and study the way in

which he portrays complex emotional experiences. Let us

consider the famous speech of Macbeth on the death of Lady

Macbeth.

For the sake of Lady Macbeth he has become hopelessly

involved in intrigue and murder, and now the affairs of state

press heavily upon him, absorbing his whole thought. At

this critical moment comes the tragic news. It is an inoppor-

tune time to think about’ this irreparable loss and, as if this

were not enough, the panorama of past events begins to

unfold rapidly before him. What would Macbeth say, in

real life? Probably nothing, but Shakespeare must describe

his state and his audience will not tolerate a long description,

so Macbeth says:

“She should have died hereafter:

There would have been a time for such a word.

To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,

Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,

To the last syllable of recorded time;

And all our yesterdays have lighted fools

The way to dusty death. Out, out brief candle!

Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player

That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,

And then is heard no more; it is a tale

Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,

Signifying nothing.”

Sometimes the poetical style seems somewhat involved,

but there are complicated moods of the soul which cannot

be expressed directly but which become recognizable when

they are expressed in poetic imagery. Consider the following

lines from Shakespeare:

“Or as a snail whose tender horns being hit

Shrinks backward in his shelly cave with pain,

And there, all smother’d up, in shade doth sit,

Long after fearing to creep forward again ….”

Now Marlowe has a similar passage which is possibly

more philosophical, but less concrete. Marlowe says:

“It lies not in our power to love or hate,

For will in us is over-ruled by fate.”

However, let us observe that while Marlowe’s description

seems more profound it certainly does not give us a picture

of the emotional state. Unlike Shakespeare, Marlowe uses

too many abstract terms. In this short passage he uses three

abstract terms, *power*, *will* and *fate*, and while the use of such

terms may appeal to our ego they do not convey the emotional

state like the description of the little snail who “… all

smother’d up, in shade doth sit.”

We must never lose sight of this important fact in dealing

with the revealed Word. The human mind has a peculiar

faculty which, for the lack of a better term, we might call

“ selective appreciation.” A writer may express himself so

vigorously in verse that he has no poetry in his soul. Again

a musician may become so involved in the beauty of music

that he fails to see any beauty in art or poetry. This may

explain why the erudite sometimes fail to see the beauty

that is hidden and yet not hidden in a new revelation.

When we turn to the writings of Bahá’u’lláh, we observe

that He expresses great spiritual laws by this indirect method.

The terms He uses are always concrete but the style, in the

very nature of His mission, is not the simple style used in

ordinary conversation nor the involved style of the philosopher.

The things we love may be harmless in themselves, but

they may have no permanence and moreover they may prevent

us from attaining eternal life. Now this direct statement,

although true, has no force that will overcome our spiritual

inertia; but consider the following very effective lines

from the pen of Bahá’u’lláh: *“Will ye be content with that*

*which is like the vapour in a plain, and be willing to forego the*

*Ocean Whose waters refresh, by virtue of the Will of God, the*

*souls of men?”*[1]

In another passage Bahá’u’lláh elaborates the same theme

in still more forceful language. *“Clothe thyself with the*

*essence of righteousness, and let thine heart be afraid of none*

*except God. Obstruct not the luminous spring of thy soul*

*with the thorns and brambles of vain and inordinate affections,*

*and impede not the flow of the living waters that stream from*

*the fountain of thine heart. Set all thy hope in God, and cleave*

*tenaciously to His unfailing mercy. Who else but Him can*

*enrich the destitute, and deliver the fallen from his abasement?”*[2]

There is no doubt here as to the ultimate outcome of useless

and extravagant affections. The spring is a symbol of life,

a real mystery, for the origin or source is never apparent.

But though we may be ignorant of the source we can readily

obstruct the flow, and this is done most effectively by thorns

and brambles since they are not easily dislodged.

On a higher plane we sometimes discover that we may

impede the “living waters” by undue anxiety, anxiety as

to the outcome of our efforts to promote the Faith of God.

In this condition we receive fresh hope and confidence from

such passages as: *“Be unrestrained as the wind, while carrying*

*the Message of Him Who hath caused the Dawn of Divine*

*Guidance to break. Consider, how the wind, faithful to that*

1 Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 293.

2 ibid., p. 323.

*which God hath ordained, bloweth upon all the regions of the*

*earth, be they inhabited or desolate. Neither the sight of desola-*

*tion, nor the evidences of prosperity, can either pain or please it.*

*It bloweth in every direction, as bidden by its Creator. So*

*should be every one that claimeth to be a lover of the one true*

*God.”*[1]

The East is inherently more poetical and spiritual than the

West; but the language of the spirit is universal, and the

laws of the spirit can be expressed only in the universal

language of the spirit and of the heart. *“Would’st thou seek*

*the grace of the Holy Spirit, enter into fellowship with the*

*righteous, for he hath drunk the cup of eternal life at the hands*

*of the immortal Cup-bearer and even as the true morn doth*

*quicken and illumine the hearts of the dead.”*[2]

## Prayer as an expression of the creative word

As we said in Chapter IV, mysticism is non-social. The

mystic is primarily concerned with his own relation to God

and not with the common spiritual experience of the group.

The expression of a common longing for God’s love, mercy

and forgiveness, as found in public worship, is therefore

quite foreign to mysticism; but prophetic revelation with

its social feeling necessarily encourages the expression of this

common longing. To be sure, the spirit which animates the

prayer in congregational worship has its origin in the private

prayers of great religious personalities. Prophetic revelation

is therefore not only concerned with private prayer but also

with common prayer.

Let us consider, very briefly, the problem of prayer in

general, and then in a little more detail the more complex

problem of common prayer. Prayer is apparently a very

simple matter, but the history of religion shows that, like the

1 Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 339.

2 Bahá’u’lláh, *The Hidden Words*, No. 57, Persian.

concept of God or the belief in immortality, it has slowly

evolved.

Its development might be divided into three stages.

(1) Primitive prayer is free, spontaneous and vigorous,

but it is always dominated by the idea that man can change

God’s will.

(2) Highly civilized man realizes that God’s will is more

important than his own, but he still believes that man knows

how to approach God through prayer. In this stage, man

has discovered that formulated prayers of highly gifted

people are more effective for public worship than spontaneous

prayers. Since the Reformation, however, there has been no

uniformity of belief on this critical point.

(3) As we study the revealed prayers in the Bahá’í writings

we become cognizant of a much higher stage of devotion.

Man’s approach to God in this day is through the revealed

Word. *“Intone, O My servant, the verses of God that have*

*been received by thee …”*[1]

There are two elements of our prayer life which are necessary

but not sufficient in themselves. Too often they are confused

with prayer but in reality they have a much wider application.

These elements are adoration and devotion.

Adoration means a surrender to some supreme good,

but this supreme good may be nature, our country, or an

individual. A personal God is not essential to adoration,

which needs only an ideal object.

Devotion, on the other hand, is concerned not with objects

but with values, ethical, intellectual, aesthetic or religious.

It is a mood of the soul, still, exalted, consecrated. We see

it in art, music, and even science. Devotion is subjective

while adoration is objective.

Prayer is something more than adoration or devotion—

it is more than a feeling of exaltation or a hallowed mood.

1 Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 295.

*“‘Prayer,’* says ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *‘is conversation with God.’”*[1]

Too often the modern world sees in prayer only the devotional

attitude and contemplation. Prayer involves adoration,

that is, the holding to an ideal object, and also devotion,

the feeling of exaltation, but it is more inclusive than either.

It is the Prophet and the Prophet alone who can restore for

us the true meaning of prayer.

Revelation never destroys but rather fulfils the deepest

aspirations of man, and yet it is never eclectic. The Bahá’í

writings are replete with prayers which cover the entire range

of human longing and devotion. As we read and meditate

upon these prayers we are forced to admit that we, creatures

of God, do not know how to supplicate God. In the

obligatory prayers, which are recited daily, we find affirma-

tions like the following: *“Too high art Thou for the praise*

*of those who are nigh unto Thee to ascend unto the heaven of*

*Thy nearness, or for the birds of the hearts of them who are*

*devoted to Thee to attain to the door of Thy gate.”*[2]

The most effective supplication is manifestly that which

has been revealed for us. *“I render Thee thanks, O Thou*

*Who hast lighted Thy fire within my soul, and cast the beams of*

*Thy light into my heart, that Thou hast taught Thy servants*

*how to make mention of Thee, and revealed unto them the ways*

*whereby they can supplicate Thee, through Thy most holy and*

*exalted tongue, and Thy most august and precious speech.”*[3]

If we are unable to express ourselves adequately in our

private devotions how can we presume to offer a public

prayer?

## Origin of common prayer

Before the Babylonian exile public worship in Israel was

not unlike that found among the primitive peoples, but

1 J. E. Esslemont, *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, p. 88.

2 Bahá’u’lláh, *Prayers and Meditations*, trans. Shoghi Effendi.

New York, Bahá’í Publishing Committee, 1938, p. 320.

3 ibid., p. 283.

Prophets like Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Jeremiah were con-

stantly demanding reforms. Restricting the offering of

sacrifice to Jerusalem eliminated polytheism, but it did not

do away with the old sacrificial cult; indeed, it emphasized it.

When, however, the Israelites found themselves in a foreign

land, far removed from their beloved city with its central

sanctuary, the offering of sacrifice was out of the question.

But the desire to worship the God of their fathers was no

less great. Out of this apparent calamity emerged a pure

spiritual congregational worship free from ritual. This

simple service consisted of the reading of Scripture and prayer.

To be sure, after the exile there was a return to ritual more

complicated than before, but the idea of a “ house of prayer “

in which the common prayer was central was never lost.

For a time then the old sacrificial cult and the new spiritual

worship existed side by side.

The early Christians worshipped in the synagogue, but

they also had their own eucharistic service in the houses of

the believers. The break with the Palestinian church finally

led to a Christian liturgy. The Scripture reading and prayer

were combined with the eucharistic meal, and out of this

fusion came the Christian mass.

The early Christians were, however, not bound by formulae.

## The idea of common prayer

It is interesting to note here that in this common prayer

of the primitive church one member of the congregation prays

and the rest follow with devotion. That is, prayer is recited

by one person.

At first anyone might offer the prayer, and the prayers

were free and spontaneous. However, the personal religious

experience of an individual can never be valid for the group.

Only a very few gifted people ever approach the ideal of

pure and spontaneous prayer, and so in time officials, bishops

and presbyters, recited the prayer in the name of the assembled

congregation. Here again, in the beginning the prayer of

the official or liturgist was quite free and spontaneous, but

fixed forms began to appear in the third century and by the

fifth century we find obligatory forms of prayer.

But the spirit lived on for many centuries, for these fixed

forms were really very effective and they awakened in the

devout soul the feeling of fellowship. As mentioned above,

the spontaneity which the individual feels in his private

devotions cannot be carried over to the group. For as

individuals we are not pure channels of divine revelation,

and our enthusiasm, -unless it is the result of careful thought

and meditation, is not necessarily valuable for the group.

Under great stress, of course, many members of a group may

be inspired, but we are speaking here of a form of worship.

We have discovered, as the early church discovered, that the

personal experience even of those “possessors of the spirit,”

those endowed with charismatic gifts, cannot be the *raison*

*d’être* for regular meetings of prayer. The experience gradu-

ally weakens. The liturgical prayer, however, after it has

become a part of the religious life of the community, has great

stability.

We should observe another point about common prayer

in the early church. The reading of Scripture and the sermon

were designed to prepare the congregation for the prayer.

When public worship became a matter of education and in-

struction, prayer became secondary.

Common prayer, like the private prayer, is a communion

with God. It is something more than the combined prayers

of the many. The congregation is in communion with God.

Every member of this spiritual brotherhood is an integral

part of an ideal fellowship, and it is the fellowship that is

calling upon God. And yet, in its effect upon the individual

it is something more than a collective religious experience.

The main purpose of common prayer was edification or

awakening, and this was accomplished by expressions of

adoration, praise and thanksgiving. The congregation,

however, is not only grateful for the blessings of God; it is

ever mindful of His majesty and power.

## Common prayer and the reform movements

Every reform movement has tried to recapture the spon-

taneity of the early church. The Reformation naturally

rebelled against the prescribed rules for prayer, and the

English Independents went so far as to maintain that a

formulated prayer was blasphemous. The Evangelical sects

did, of course, liberate public worship from all sensuous

symbols, but the sobriety and austerity of many of these

reformers, unwittingly, perhaps, did about as much to “im-

prison the spirit” as did the statutory liturgy. After all,

the return was not so much to the primitive church as to the

synagogic worship of Judaism.

The reform sects overlooked two important points:

The average individual needs something objective to uplift

him. Devotion, while not prayer, is necessary to prayer,

and lofty, majestic architecture, the most impersonal of all

the arts, is a great stimulus to devotion. Images must go,

but not temples.

Again, the spirit of man, which they desired to free from

formulated prayer, needs discipline and guidance; and these

must come through the revealed Word.

This brief sketch may help us to realize that for a long,

a very long time, man has been struggling to establish an

ideal of congregational worship. In general there are two

schools. One believes that we should adhere to the liturgy

of the church Fathers, which has been hallowed by tradition,

and, the other stands for free, spontaneous prayer.

How can we have common prayer that is free both from the

sterility of formulization and from the apathy that invariably

results from unrestrained spontaneity?

## The ideal of common prayer

As we observe the unfoldment of the Bahá’í Dispensation

we see that it is progressing toward an ideal of public worship.

In the Bahá’í Temple the “ house of prayer “ has been

realized. In this temple only the revealed Word will be

heard. Even now in the Bahá’í communities all over the

world the revealed prayers from the Bahá’í writings are used

exclusively in the group meetings. One member of the

group reads while the rest follow with devotion.

The creative Word of the Prophet of God is the highest

source of edification and awakening, and naturally it is free

from all those elements that have engendered apathy and

indifference.

*“None can befittingly praise Thee except Thine own Self*

*and such as are like unto Thee.”*[1]

1 Bahá’u’lláh, *Prayers and Meditations*, p. 297.

Chapter IX  
Meditation

The Bahá’í Faith, like all prophetic religions, is funda-

mentally mystic in character. Without this mystic feeling,

which unites man with God, religion would degenerate into

a mere organization devoid of spiritual life. For it is through

meditation and prayer that man is able to establish and

maintain this spiritual communion.

## Supplication, prayer and meditation

*Supplication*. Supplication, prayer and meditation are

often used interchangeably and when this is done they are

regarded as mere variants of the word *prayer*, but it is

convenient sometimes to distinguish between them. Supplica-

tion means earnest entreaty, asking. This is, of course,

implied in the German word for prayer, *Gebet*. Supplication

is one of the motives of primitive prayer, but primitive man

and man on his primitive side is somewhat of an egotist in

his offering of prayer. As he advances, however, the egotistic

gives way to reverence and humility and sometimes he goes

so far as to consider “asking” quite unworthy of him.

To the medieval mystic, supplicating for material things

is irreligious. Augustine says: “Ask nothing from God

except God Himself.” “Ask for the blessed life.”[1] The

extreme or radical mystic, like Eckhart and the quietists

of the seventeenth century go further and reject not only

requests for earthly goods but requests for spiritual blessings.

The philosopher also feels that man should be beyond

supplicating, asking. Epictetus says: “Ask from the gods,

not what you crave, but that you may be free from all

1 Heiler, *Prayer*, p. 191.

craving;”[1] and Kant tells us that “it is at once an absurd and

presumptuous delusion to try by the insistent importunity

of prayer, whether God might not be deflected from the

plan of His wisdom to provide some momentary advantage

for us.”[2] The acquisition of moral values and not worldly

goods is the first concern of the philosopher. Pythagoras

and Socrates would have us supplicate only for what is good,

leaving all personal wishes to God. This Stoic ideal, this

surrender of the human will to the Divine, is expressed by

outstanding philosophers of the Enlightenment. “Not

what I will, but what Thou wilt,”[3] is the prayer of Rousseau.

Diderot prayed: “O God, I ask nothing from Thee, for if

Thou art not, the course of nature is an inner necessity,

and if Thou art, it is Thy command.”[4] Voltaire prays in a

similar vein.

These prayers ostensibly express a high ideal, but at the

same time they betray considerable ignorance concerning

the nature of God’s loving-kindness and mercy as revealed

to us by His Prophets. We should therefore not be misled

by this type of devotion or reverence.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá reminds us that: *“When one supplicates*

*to his Lord, turns to Him and seeks bounty from His ocean,*

*this supplication is by itself a light to his heart, an illumination*

*to his sight, a life to his soul and an exaltation to his being.”*[5]

In the sense that supplication means mere asking it is probably

the lowest form of prayer, but it is surely better than no prayer.

In supplicating we acknowledge our dependence upon God and

our faith in His mercy and His concern for our welfare.

This concept of a personal God, so essential to prophetic

religion and mysticism and so foreign to Stoic philosophy, is

always renewed when religion is revived as in the coming of a

Prophet like Christ or Bahá’u’lláh.

1 Heiler, *Prayer*, p. 89.

2 ibid.

3 ibid., p. 92.

4 ibid.

5 *Divine Art of Living*, p. 26.

*Prayer*. Prayer in the words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is *“con-*

*versation with God,”* and we cannot improve very much

on this definition. There is a *“language of the Spirit”*[1]

by which the Prophet continues to hold communion with the

faithful after His departure from this world. In all genuine

prayer there is faith in a living personal God and also faith

in His immediate presence. Without these two essential

elements, which the Bahá’í Faith has restored for us in this

day, prayer becomes a lifeless abstraction. After all there

is a mystery in prayer, and the mystery lies in the relation

between the finite man and the infinite Spirit.

For the mystic this experience of the Presence of God in

prayer is, of course, fundamental. The supreme goal of

meditation is the realization of the Divine Presence, and

while we cannot allow that the mystic attains this goal, we

must admit that mystical prayer is vital and free from egotism.

There is something very profound and at the same time very

tender in the mystic’s serene contemplation of the *summum*

*bonum*. Nevertheless, the prayers of the mystic, like the

prayers of other men of religious genius, are not in the same

category as the revealed prayers of the Prophet. The prayers

of the mystic are not divine creations and cannot, therefore,

inspire us as can the revealed prayers of the Prophet. Again,

for complete assurance of eternal verities like immortality we

cannot turn to the writings of the mystics. Finally, the

creativeness we find in the revealed Word of the Prophet

is lacking in mystical philosophy. This is not surprising,

for any attempt to standardize methods of meditation or

ascetic practices naturally results in a uniformity of experience.

In the Bahá’í Faith, as we shall see, meditation is strongly

advised, but there are no set forms of meditation; in fact,

the manner of meditating is left entirely to the individual.

The voluminous writings of Bahá’u’lláh are replete with

examples of this creative force. Consider for illustration

1 J. E. Esslemont, *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, p. 88.

the unique promise that is clearly indicated in this remarkable

passage from the pen of Bahá’u’lláh: “*Whoso reciteth, in the*

*privacy of his chamber, the verses revealed by God, the scattering*

*angels of the Almighty shall scatter abroad the fragrance of the*

*words uttered by his mouth, and shall cause the heart of every*

*righteous man to throb.”*[1]

The fact that mysticism cannot make a universal appeal

does not, of course, disturb the mystic, for he admits that

the mystic path is only for a few highly-gifted individuals.

The position of the mystic is very like that of the philosopher.

The philosopher is also able to educate a few people in morals

and ethics, and also to inspire them to live an integrated life

of useful activity. He does not contribute as much to in-

dividual spiritual development as does the mystic; but on the

other hand he does not indoctrinate his followers with a

metaphysic that is incompatible with clear thinking, nor does

he underestimate the intrinsic value of moral action.

Just as science has freed empirical religion, or man’s

interpretation of divine revelation, from superstition, so

philosophical criticism has purified traditional and cultural

prayer from anthropomorphic concepts. The tendency has

been to create a positive ideal, based upon ethical values,

contrasted with spontaneous as well as ritualistic prayer.

Contrary to popular belief, idealistic philosophy has something

in common with religion in that it believes in an underlying

reality behind the world of appearance and in an ethical and

moral world above the world of everyday experience.

Again, we must admit that some of the prayers of the

Enlightenment exhibit a universal as well as a humanitarian

outlook. Voltaire’s penetrating intellect surely anticipates

the baneful effect of prejudice, as is shown in the following

prayer: “Thou hast not given us a heart that we may hate

one another, nor hands that we may strangle one another,

1 Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 295.

but that we may help each other to bear the burden of a

wearisome and transitory life; that the small distinctions

in the dress which covers our weak bodies, in our inadequate

languages, in our absurd usages, in all our imperfect laws,

in all our senseless opinions, in all our social grades, which to

our eyes are so different and to Thine so alike, that all the fine

shades which differentiate the atoms called ‘men’ may not

be occasions for hate and persecution.”[1] While there is no

force in philosophy to advance religion, as history plainly

shows, nevertheless many of the philosophers of this period

did more to foster the spirit of true religion than did the

contemporary religious systems.

*Meditation*. All creative work requires some kind of

meditation. It is practised by the scientist in discovering

new theories, new concepts and new laws. As a matter of

fact no great scientific discovery was ever made without

reflection. The history of science is replete with illustrations

of this. Newton’s concept of the force of gravity came to

him when he was sitting alone in a garden. According to

one of his friends, “… he fell in a speculation on the power

of gravity.”[2] The inventor also uses meditation. It is used

by the modern mystic to integrate life, to eliminate inharmony,

disunity and fear. Through meditation the mystic is able to

differentiate between the real and the apparent. For the

radical mystic, meditation is just one step along the path

that enables him to enter the presence of the Absolute. The

aesthetic mystic, with his faith in values and a feeling for

nature, believes that through meditation and contemplative

devotion he can experience the immediate presence of the

Divine as revealed in the beauty of nature. Goethe says:

“Do you not see God? By every quiet spring, under every

blossoming tree, He meets me in the warmth of His love.”[3]

In general there are three stages in this process: concentra-

tion, in which the mind is active; meditation, in which mental

1 Heiler, *Prayer*, pp. 90–1.

2 For an explanation, see Alberto A. Martiníz, *Science Secrets*, Chapter 3.

3 Heiler, *Prayer*, pp. 288–9.

activity is low; and contemplation, in which there is almost

complete cessation of mental effort.

One begins by thinking in the usual way, or more correctly

in the unusual way. That is, we start by concentrating upon

the problem or concept with which we are concerned. Of

course, all extraneous thoughts must be excluded. We

consider all the facts that may have some bearing upon the

concept, then we may find it advisable to diminish the mental

activity in order to obtain a more comprehensive view of the

concept. That is, we pass from the stage of concentration

to the stage of meditation. It is in this subjective stage,

this stage of abstraction, that new ideas, new relationships

seem to emerge. Naturally there is some oscillating between

the two stages and usually we pass from one to the other

by imperceptible steps. Ordinarily one is hardly conscious

that there is any boundary between the two stages.

The modern mystic and the aesthetic mystic, as well as

the radical mystic, sometimes pass into the third stage

of greater mental simplification, that is, the stage of almost

complete passivity. The scientist, however, is not interested

in complete absorption, passing away, and therefore he never

reaches this stage.

To return to the subject of concentration; it requires severe

mental discipline, but every successful creative person knows

the unifying effect that can result from concentration. One

must hold the attention against all invasion. There is no

short cut; we begin by beginning. Take any familiar concept

like God’s mercy, love or justice and concentrate upon it a

few minutes. If the mind wanders, if you find it practically

impossible to hold your attention, then you may be sure

you do not possess complete control over your mind. By

practising concentration, however, you will be able to organize

your thoughts and to get the most out of your thinking.

In the beginning, do not try to concentrate for a long time;

and remember, the more frequently you concentrate, the easier

it will be for you to hold your attention.

The question is often asked, is there any special technique

one should follow in meditating? Apparently there is no

standard technique. Certainly none is stressed in the Bahá’í

writings. Sometimes you may feel like sitting motionless,

or again you may feel like walking. Bahá’u’lláh revealed the

*Hidden Words* while He was walking along the banks of the

Tigris. There are no standard forms; the individual is quite

free.

There may be an advantage in assuming some particular

posture during reflection. We should show tolerance in such

matters, refusing to lay down rules for others. Necessarily

we should avoid everything that looks like superstition.

We should be silent, relaxed and never impatient nor

discouraged. Sometimes it is desirable to drop the problem

and pick it up again. Experience alone can tell us when

this is desirable. If irrelevant ideas intrude, just ignore them.

Others have this experience and it does not indicate that you

are abnormal.

For most people concentration is very difficult, but experi-

ence shows that if one has patience and a desire to be master

of his intellect, one can learn to concentrate. For the trained

mind, the philosopher the writer or the scientist, it is just a

question of restricting the attention to a limited field; self-

examination and self-discipline do not enter in. While the

goal of the mystic is not the same as that of the scientist or

the creative artist, nevertheless he belongs to a class of gifted

people. Whatever his vocation, he has a degree of spiritual

awareness and some capacity for intellectual activity, other-

wise he would not be so successful in the matter of meditation.

Finally, there are several points about meditation which

we should not overlook.

The thoughts that come to us during reflection are not

necessarily valuable; they may be useless or even destructive.

While there may be little mental activity during meditation,

it is the *direction* of the mind, prior to this state, that determines

the value of the meditation. The mere act of diminishing

mental activity does not of itself yield anything profitable.

There are pseudo-scientists who believe that the air is

“charged” with wonderful ideas and all you have to do is

to “tune in.” The true scientist does some hard thinking before

he meditates, and it is the true scientist and not the pseudo-

scientist that contributes to society.

## Theories of meditation

Concerning the efficacy of meditation and the force that

makes it efficient, there are three theories, three schools of

thought.

(1) One school maintains that the effectiveness of

meditation is due merely to mental relaxation. After a long

period of mental effort, if one relaxes he will make fewer

“false” guesses and the mind has a better chance to function.

During the period of relaxation when the mental activity

is low, one can obtain a more comprehensive view of any

subject, scientific, moral or ethical, so this school believes.

Some writers tell us that a solution of an intricate problem

often comes to an inventor or scientist after he has dismissed

it from his mind. However, dismissing a problem from our

mind is not quite the same as meditating upon it. Experience

also shows that very often we do not completely dismiss a

problem from our mind. The factor of meditation un-

doubtedly enters into all creative thinking. Meditation is

something more than concentration. As we said in Chapter I,

the creative force is intuition and not reason. In this subjec-

tive state the intuition becomes effective. As a matter of fact

it is very easy to glide from concentration to meditation and

back again to concentration.

Inventors and scientists probably belong to this class, if

indeed they belong to any class.

The meditation of scientists and creative personalities

who are not mystically inclined is, however, somewhat

different from the meditation of the religious mystic, or the

aesthetic mystic. The scientist—and this applies to other

creative geniuses—is primarily concerned with new ideas,

new relationships. He is not, at least while he is working

on a scientific problem, concerned with the awakening of the

self or self-examination. He is, for the moment, not interested’

in becoming one with the Absolute, but rather in solving a

more or less definite problem. This does not mean that he

could not learn something about concentration from the

mystic; he probably could. The mystic could undoubtedly

tell him how to improve his technique of meditation; he could

also tell him how to avoid wasteful tensions.

(2) Another school believes that through meditation one

is able to utilize powers which seem to be supernormal.

This second school is further divided on the origin of the

power evoked. For some, this power is latent within us

and can only be brought out by mental discipline. Many

philosophers and scientists belong to this class. Others hold

that the power is external to us, but that we must follow

prescribed rules for meditating if we wish to utilize this power.

Most modern mystics belong to this class. Since they are

concerned with the regeneration of character, self-knowledge

and self-control, concentration must be followed by self-

discipline or what the mystics call “poverty.” While the

aesthetic mystic believes in an external power, he does not

take a negative view of life. The ascetic element is entirely

absent from his attitude; he is interested in joy and not in

renunciation. Nevertheless, in his moments of meditation

and contemplation he experiences a feeling of unity with

God, the creator of the “beautiful,” that is not unlike the

ecstatic experience of the genius-mystic. The power he

acknowledges is a pantheistic God who reveals Himself in

nature—in all the works of nature, although this is not always

explicit.

The mystic, like the philosopher, is inclined to regard his

outlook as more universal than that of the theologian or

scientist. He speaks of the One, the Infinite or the Absolute

as an entity which he alone can comprehend. True, he often

identifies this Reality with the God of religion, but it is always

understood that it is the mystic and not the philosopher or

theologian who has any real knowledge of this Reality whom

the theologian calls God. Nevertheless, the philosopher and

the theologian might learn something from the modern mystic

in the matter of spiritual unfoldment.

(3) The third school believes that the power which makes

meditation effective is divine. Prophetic personalities, men

of religious genius and many creative artists belong to this

class. We said in the last chapter that every reform movement

tries to recapture the spontaneity of the early church. Un-

fortunately reformers are not very creative. When they want

some kind of sanction for their novel ideas they usually turn

toward the past. Had the reformers of the past studied

meditation as they studied the free prayer of popular religions

and the prayer of primitive man, they would have contributed

something to the life of prayer more enduring than spontaneity.

While we cannot accept all the presuppositions of mysticism

we can use meditation in our prayer life and in the perusal

of the creative word of the Prophet. We will probably all

agree that our spiritual life would be enhanced by reading the

words of the Prophet with rapt attention and then meditating

upon what we read. The soul of man must be fed with the

nourishment of prayer and meditation.

As we shall see, from the Bahá’í viewpoint meditation is

indispensable, but it has now been freed from those meta-

physical doctrines that are incompatible with scientific

thinking. Moreover, in all its forms it is available to anyone

who wishes to make use of it. Even in its highest form, where

it is concerned with divine illumination, it is not the exclusive

possession of a few gifted people. Rather it is available to

all who are willing to turn to the Prophet as the source of

divine inspiration.

## The Bahá’í viewpoint

We said in Chapter III that the soul is like the sun and

mental faculties like the rays of the sun, or that the mind

is the power of the soul. Now ‘Abdu’l-Bahá reminds us

that the sign or the mark of the intellect is meditation. The

importance of meditation is clearly expressed in His words:

*“You cannot apply the name ‘man’ to any being devoid of the*

*faculty of meditation; without it man is a mere animal, lower*

*than the beasts.”*[1] It appears, then, that the thing which really

differentiates man from the animal is this faculty of medita-

tion; but we must remember that in meditation the function

of the mind cannot be ignored. The mystic is inclined to

overlook this important fact.

Let us consider in a little more detail the scope of meditation

from the Bahá’í viewpoint. The quotations in the following

paragraphs (1) to (7) are taken from the words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.[2]

(1) *“Through the faculty of meditation man attains to*

*eternal life; through it he receives the breath of the Holy*

*Spirit—the bestowals of the Spirit are given during reflection*

*and meditation.”* It is clear from this and also from other

paragraphs, that meditation is essential to our spiritual

development. The relative value of meditation may be

1 Talk given at Friends’ Meeting House, London, Jan. 12th, 1913.

2 ibid.

judged from words referred to by Bahá’u’lláh: *“One hour’s*

*reflection is preferable to seventy years of pious worship.”*[1]

(2) *“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, and through it he partakes of heavenly food.”*

Here we have assurance from the words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá,

the Interpreter of the Prophet of God, that meditation can

bring to man something which is beyond the power of mere

thinking, beyond mental activity.

(3) “*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 sub-*

*jective condition he is immersed in the ocean of spiritual life and*

*can unfold the secrets of things in themselves.”* Just as we

distinguish between meditation and thinking, we may also

distinguish between meditation and prayer. It is clear from

the above that in our prayer life there must be moments in

which we dwell “in that subjective mood.”

(4) *“This faculty of meditation frees man from the animal*

*nature, discerns the reality of things, puts man in touch with*

*God.”* The mystic, we will concede, has realized the signifi-

cance of this truth to a remarkable degree. So far all these

statements are probably in conformity with our notion of

spiritual development, but unless we have a rather compre-

hensive view of meditation the next paragraph may be a bit

of a surprise.

(5) *“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 ...”*

A few modern mystics will undoubtedly agree with this broader

concept, but to the older mystics it would probably be incom-

prehensible. This broader concept of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s helps

1 Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 238.

us to realize that revelation is concerned with every aspect of

life and not merely with acts of devotion.

(6) *“The meditative faculty is akin to a mirror; if you put*

*before it earthly objects, it will reflect them. Therefore if the*

*spirit of man is contemplating earthly objects he will become*

*informed of them.”* Let us observe, first of all, that there is

nothing in this statement to indicate that man should not

turn “ the mirror of his soul “ toward earthly objects. More-

over, it does throw some light on the very significant question,

what is the difference between the meditation of the scientist or

inventor, and the meditation of the seeker for spiritual truth?

The inventor may not turn to God, he may not even believe

in God, but we cannot say that the inspiration he receives is

merely from his own ego. What applies to the inventor

applies also to other creative men. The aesthetic mystic

or the artistic type of creative genius turns the mirror of his

soul to artistic values, such as the beauty of nature.

In moments of meditation, as we said above, an aesthetic

feeling of unity takes possession of his soul and he feels at

one with Nature or the Whole. In his contemplation of

the “beautiful” he experiences ecstasy and rapture as does

the religious mystic. The experience is *immediate*, and

moreover we cannot deny its value. To be sure, he may

think of God as immanent in nature, but this is irrelevant

to the experience and its value. Whatever cause we may

assign to the experience we cannot deny its validity. Again

in moments of devotional contemplation discords and con-

fusion are often replaced by joy and peace; life becomes

unified, as we have seen.

(7) *“But if you turn the mirror of your spirit 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.”* This applies to the religious mystic, or

indeed to anyone interested in individual spiritual develop-

ment. While it is true that a person may make considerable

progress toward unifying his spiritual life by meditating upon

the rather nebulous All, Whole, or One, the most effective

results are obtained however, when the mirror of the soul

is turned toward the Prophet. He is the source of our

spiritual life, and naturally if we meditate upon His creative

words or His attributes our progress will be decidedly more

rapid than if we meditate upon the somewhat elusive Absolute

or Infinite.

There is an underlying unity in all meditation in that he

who meditates, whether religious genius, creative artist

or inventor, turns the mirror of his soul toward the object

of his meditation.

Chapter X  
Occultism

Occultism has so many meanings that it is very difficult

to define; we will not, therefore, start with a definition.

We are concerned here with the essential difference between

occultism and mysticism, especially personal mysticism.

We are also concerned with the attitude of occultism

toward science.

## Mysticism and occultism

Many people who are casually interested in the mystical

life are not aware of the difference between mysticism and

occultism. A few of these differences will now be con-

sidered. We will confine our discussion, however, to personal

mysticism, since the majority of those who are attracted to

the mystical way of life would not be interested in the cold,

unemotional, non-personal mysticism of the Absolute.

First, let us consider the goal of each. The goal of every

mystic is the life of higher piety. He is primarily concerned

with spiritual development. Communion with God is, of

course, vital to this goal. As we have said, the mystic believes

that through the heart, unimpaired by the mind, the true

knowledge of God may be obtained. The occultist is not

interested in spiritual development in quite this sense. He

is concerned with man’s development, but he believes that

this development can be brought about through a knowledge

of God and man which must be acquired through metaphysical

speculation rather than through an ecstatic experience, a

knowledge available to the occultist but not to the philosopher

and scientist.

Let us now consider the idea of God in each. As we have

seen, the idea of God in extreme mysticism is a kind of specula-

tive interpretation of an ecstatic experience. In personal

mysticism the experience is interpreted imaginatively rather

than speculatively. Speaking broadly (and we can only

speak broadly), the God of occultism is derived, partly from

a speculative interpretation of an inner experience and partly

from occult doctrines on the nature of God. The God of

occultism is non-personal, static and outside of history,

somewhat like the God of extreme mysticism. The inner

experience of the occultist, however, can hardly be called

mystical. The occultist knows no loving God. For him

contemplation is not an act of love, as with the mystic. We

might almost say that he believes the true knowledge of God

can be obtained through the mind unimpaired by the heart.

In some ways occultism is similar to radical mysticism, but

it is opposed to personal mysticism.

Love of God and man is the one element, if indeed there

is just one element, that differentiates prophetic religion and

mysticism from occultism. This element is certainly not

stressed in occultism.

It should be obvious to anyone who is, even superficially,

acquainted with the prophetic religions, that no movement,

which lacks the essential elements of true religion, can ever

regenerate the individual or transform society.

There is one doctrine of the occultist which might disarm

the seeker for reality. This is the idea that in everything

that has come down to us concerning the sayings of a great

teacher like Christ, there is a hidden meaning which the layman

cannot grasp. The occultist and the occultist alone, however,

can grasp the hidden meaning. By this procedure a person

could prove almost anything he wished to prove and refute

anything to which he did not wish to subscribe. The fact

that he can call to his aid endless propositions from the so-

called “ancient wisdom” does not make him any more

intelligible, although it may enhance his prestige with the

superficial thinker. Also, we should not overlook the fact

that scholars usually do not attack ideas like this, not because

they may contain an element of truth but because they are

too fantastic to merit any attention. Should an occultist

tell a scholar, trained in the philosophy of religion, that

Christ’s knowledge was not innate, that He was taught by

some Eastern school of occultism, the scholar would probably

not take the trouble to dissuade him. In this critical hour,

however, we should make it clear that nothing less than a

divine power can ever succeed in laying a foundation upon

which a new spiritual and social order can be built.

If man-made theories of the Godhead could resuscitate

a distracted world it would have been resuscitated in the days

of Dionysius, or in the days of Meister Eckhart.

Let no one be deluded by a counter-argument which

might run somewhat as follows: “The love of which the

Prophet speaks is not the love with which you are familiar.

In fact you can get nothing from the Gospels except an

emotional reaction. The occultist alone can elucidate the

Gospels for you.”

Ever since the days of Montanism, groups have appeared

which claim supernatural powers, superrational knowledge.

Many of these groups maintained that they were the spiritual

successors of the inspired class in the Primitive Church.

The occultist is in a similar position; he can bring to the world

the “lost wisdom,” which he believes is superior to anything

we have now.

Referring once more to the element of love, the writings

of Bahá’u’lláh are replete with admonitions like the following,

from the Arabic *Hidden Words*:

(4) *O Son of Man!*

*I loved thy creation, hence I created thee. Wherefore, do*

*thou love Me, that I may name thy name and fill thy soul*

*with the spirit of life.*

(5) *O Son of Being!*

*Love Me, that I may love thee. If thou lovest Me not,*

*My love can in no wise reach thee. Know this, O servant!*

(9) *O Son of Being!*

*My love is My stronghold; he that entereth therein is safe*

*and secure, and he that turneth away shall surely stray and*

*perish.*

(10) *O Son of Utterance!*

*Thou art My stronghold; enter therein that thou mayest*

*abide in safety. My love is in thee, know it, that thou mayest*

*find Me nigh unto thee.*

We should not, however, overlook the fact that the occultist,

like the mystic, has made some positive contributions to

society. He has reacted against materialism, and many

typical representatives of occultism have stood for the brother-

hood of man and human solidarity. Nevertheless, as with

the mystic, we cannot accept some of his doctrines, which are

opposed both to prophetic religion and to science.

Like the radical mystic he is concerned with the nature of

the Divine Essence, and like him he believes he can discover

the Divine Essence, but his approach is different. Some

occultists claim that they can receive supernatural revelations,

while others maintain that their wisdom is merely the result

of speculation.

The philosopher, when he inquires into the nature of God,

usually starts with an analysis of the phenomenal world.

The occultist usually begins with God and, from his pre-

suppositions concerning the Divine Nature, arrives at con-

clusions regarding observed facts in the phenomenal world.

While the mystic is satisfied with theories of the “Soul

and God,” the field of the occultist is much broader. At

various periods in history, such as the Renaissance, natural

philosophers have tried to fuse scientific ideas with speculative

theories which have their origin in scholastic theology. We

see something like this in some forms of occultism. For

example, one type of occultist does not hesitate to use some

of the concepts of physics to explain spiritual experiences.

When the particle theory of light was replaced by the wave

theory, it was necessary to imagine all space filled with an

elastic medium, called the ether. For the nineteenth century

physicist this ether was very “real,” but now it is regarded

only as a fabrication of the mind if indeed it is regarded at all.

To-day, however, we know that light has a particle aspect

as well as a wave aspect. In fact we admit that we do not

possess a very satisfactory theory of light.

Now, many occultists have been intrigued with physical

quantities like waves, the ether, and vibrations; and they

use these to explain inner experiences which lie beyond the

field of physics. For example, you may be aware of dis-

agreeable influences which you cannot explain but for which

the occultist feels he can give you an explanation. Your

uncomfortable feeling, he tells you, is due to disturbing

vibrations. Just what it is that vibrates we are not always

told. Again some occultists will go so far as to maintain

that “spirit” is merely matter of extremely low density.

If air becomes, progressively, more and more attenuated it

will finally, *ipso facto*, become spirit.

We need hardly add that no serious thinker with any

spiritual or aesthetic feeling could accept such a mechanistic

view of the world of values. The more enlightened occultist

would probably not indulge in such crude speculations, but

he has indulged, at times, in theories that are as far removed

from modern scientific thinking as they are.

## Science and occultism

The occultist believes that the ancient philosopher has

much to contribute to modern civilization. In fact most

of his theories are based on the so-called “ancient wisdom.”

As the Greek philosopher relied almost exclusively on deduc-

tive reasoning, so the occultist to-day stresses deductive

thinking. He believes that the true science can be discovered

only by turning back to the ancient wisdom.

With his aversion to sound scholarship and scientific

training, and his fascination for the “occult,” he naturally

overlooks facts that might help him to differentiate between

the true and the false.

One illustration will suffice. It is true that Aristotle used

the deductive method almost exclusively, and it is also true

that most of his contributions to physics and astronomy

are of very little value. He did practically no experimental

work in his early life. He wrote on a variety of subjects,

and for many people he is an authority on each.

To understand the positive contributions of Aristotle,

however, we should remember that the first fifty years of his

life were devoted to clarifying his philosophical ideas, while

the last twelve were dedicated to independent investigation.

His work on physics and astronomy belongs to the first

period hence the logical contradictions.[1] It is in the second

period—that he carried out his positive researches in biology

which, of course, required considerable experimental work.

In fact, without experimentation he would have accomplished

very little. It is true that, for him, the heavens are a sphere

because the sphere is a perfect figure, and it rotates in a circle

because circular motion is eternal—no end, no beginning.

But let us remember that these ideas developed when he was

dominated by the Socratic outlook.

The occultist’s attitude toward science and scholarship in

general is somewhat like the mystic’s attitude toward revealed

truth. The occultist believes that he is, in a way, superior

to the scientist. He has behind him the infallible ancient

1 Benjamin Farrington, *Science in Antiquity*, London, Thornton

Butterworth, 1936, p. 142.

wisdom, which he alone can understand, and also a superior

insight. One sometimes wonders why the. occultist, with

his superior equipment, does not make some positive con-

tribution to the world of philosophy and science. Possibly

he feels that the world is too immature for the contributions

he is able to make.

In view of what we have said concerning man’s inability

to comprehend the Infinite, we need not dwell on the occultist’s

concepts of God.

However, the reader may feel that, after all, the occultist

may discover something in the ancient wisdom that has

value for us to-day. A long view of history should convince

anyone that progress is made by looking backward and for-

ward.

Let us consider, very briefly, our philosophical and our

scientific background.

## Our philosophical background

Perhaps the first intimation that all was not well with

Aristotelian philosophy was the result of the famous experi-

ment of Galileo, when he demonstrated to sceptical observers

that a light iron ball and a heavy one would fall to the ground

in the same time, contrary to the explicit statement of Aris-

totle that the heavier ball would reach the ground first. From

our modern scientific position we naturally ask, why did Aris-

totle not try the experiment himself, or why did not some of

his more curious followers try it in the sixteen centuries that

elapsed between Aristotle and Galileo? But that was not a

pertinent question either with Aristotle or his followers.

From the standpoint of classical philosophy, something might

have happened to the experiment; the world of matter is a

world of accident—nothing is certain. The world of the

mind is free from such limitations, and therefore its deductions

are infallible.

Herein lies the weak point of the classical traditions of

philosophy. Like the classical physics of the nineteenth

century, it underestimated its limitations.

The Greek thinkers distinguish between knowledge that

comes to us by reasoning about ideas, and the kind that we

obtain by experience. The latter is inferior since there is

always some probability of error. Truth obtained from

observation and experiment—and this kind must include

the exact sciences—can never be universal. The function of

knowledge is to discover what is “real” in the sense of

being unchangeable, immutable. This kind of truth is pre-

existent, antecedent. The world of practical affairs is a world

of change and therefore an unreal world, unworthy of the

attention of the thinker. This doctrine necessarily leads us to

some theory of escape. For his highest development man should

not try to solve existing problems nor to better his material

condition. Action and doing belong to a lower realm than

thinking; theory is elevated above and separated from practice.

Nevertheless it was philosophy that taught man to look

to reason and not custom as a guide to conduct. Unfor-

tunately, however, the classical tradition was limited in this

direction. Dewey says, “As far as it occupied itself at

all with human conduct, it was to superimpose upon acts

ends said to flow from the nature of reason. It thus diverted

thought from inquiring into the purposes which experience

of actual conditions suggest and from concrete means of their

actualization. It translated into a rational form the doctrine

of escape from the vicissitudes of existence by means of

measures which do not demand an active coping with condi-

tions. For deliverance by means of rites and cults, it sub-

stituted deliverance through reason. This deliverance was

an intellectual, a theoretical affair constituted by a knowledge

to be attained apart from practical activity.”[1]

1 Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty*, p. 17.

One is impressed by the similarity between the doctrine of

escape in philosophy and in absolute mysticism, in spite of

the fact that philosophy stresses the mind while mysticism

rejects the mind and relies upon feeling.

The classical tradition assumes that the highest satisfaction

comes from the kind of knowledge which is free from doing

and acting; but in a sense the validity of this doctrine depends

to some extent upon experience. The intellectual satisfaction,

the exaltation that the rational and empirical philosopher

experiences is taken as evidence, if not proof, that he has

become one with the Highest Good, the Divine. His experi-

ence we cannot deny, but the interpretation of his experience

is another matter. It is an inference and must be regarded

as such. To be sure, to the classical philosopher no such

criticism could be made, but—in terms of our wider knowledge

to-day, the inconsistency is obvious. Here again the classical

philosopher in his assumption concerning the “real” is not

unlike the mystic who interprets his ecstasy as a proof of his

union with the Absolute.

This is not surprising when we recall that both radical

mysticism and mystical philosophy have much of the same

tradition. Both rest upon the assumption that ultimate

reality is to be found by reflection, and both reject revelation.

The rise of modern science showed that the elevation

of the mind above experience was unwarranted. Modern

philosophy has shown also that the classical tradition cannot

persist in the face of facts, but the popular mind is still in-

fluenced by this ancient doctrine.

## Our scientific background

Science had its inception in a world in which thinking

was elevated above doing, even of the kind that might aid

thinking. In this atmosphere the highest and most perfect

knowledge was free from the world of matter.

Let us see why the mind, freed from all experience with

external objects might lead us to ultimate reality, universal

truth. A very simple illustration may indicate the origin

of this classical tradition concerning the validity of the mind.

By means of common drawing instruments one might discover

most of the propositions in geometry, but he would never be

absolutely sure of any of them. By measurement we might

show that if a triangle has two equal sides, the angles opposite

the equal sides are equal. One might try it for a number of

cases and assume that it would hold for all others. It looks

reasonable, but we are not absolutely sure; for there is always

an error in every physical measurement. If we prove the

proposition formally by logic rather than by measurement,

then we are reasonably sure that it will hold for all cases.

In the realm of mathematics, which is purely rational

knowledge, the mind needs very few tools. A pointed stick

and some sand will answer. Ostensibly then, its progress

does not depend upon any kind of experimentation: it can

be developed without reference to material objects. In fact,

some philosophers maintain that it would have advanced had

there been no practical use for it. To the ancient philosopher

there were other kinds of knowledge, not purely rational,

that could be acquired without experimental investigation.

if we look about us in nature and observe carefully, we can

make considerable progress, as did the Greeks; nevertheless, as

we all know, without controlled experiments we would require

centuries to obtain as much information as we now obtain in a

single day with apparatus and laboratory technique. But

that is not all. We would probably not make much progress

in higher mathematics, and without higher mathematics we

would have no modern science.

Greek science was limited by two things: its failure to

appreciate the value of experimental work, and its lack of

powerful mathematical tools. The two are interdependent.

In the long run mathematics has not developed without the

directing hand of experience. The calculus was developed

or invented by Newton and Leibnitz to solve problems that

resulted from observation, that is, experience. In other

words, the progress of pure mathematics depends upon the

progress of experimental science. Not only did the Greek

philosophers fail to make progress where experimentation

was required directly, but they were limited in the very field

which, according to their assumption, was free from any

kind of experimentation—namely, mathematics.

However, we should not conclude that Greek science was

a failure—far from it. Certainly the Greek philosophers have

been misunderstood: sometimes they are underestimated,

but more often they are overestimated. Again, we must not

overlook the unfavourable political and economic conditions

in the latter part of the golden era of Greece.

Speaking broadly, history has shown that science cannot

make much progress unless it is supported by society.

Experimental science demonstrated that its success could

be achieved only by adding to the Greek deductive method

that of induction. True advancement can be made only by

experimenting and theorizing.

Contrary to the view of traditional philosophy, without

sense data the human mind is limited. As a matter of fact,

the two processes of observation or experiment, and theorizing

go hand in hand to a certain extent. Aristotle would not have

assumed that a heavy object would fall to the ground sooner

than a light one had he not observed that light objects like

leaves and feathers do fall more slowly. Greek thinking

was not balanced by practical experience; this is the weak

point of Greek philosophy. The success of modern science

is due to a more perfect balance between mathematical theory

and experiment. Galileo succeeded, not because he was

intellectually superior to the Greek philosophers or his

contemporaries, but rather because he had utilized a method

that the Aristotelian school ignored. Unconsciously perhaps,

Galileo laid the foundation for a new theory of knowledge.

But the new experimental method had another far-reaching

effect, it put authority in a new light. When we remember

that by the time of Galileo a feeling of discontent with

authority was not unusual in scientific circles, it is not sur-

prising that the traditional view clashed with the new. The

real conflict raged around fundamental methods of thinking

and the place of authority. The occultist has not fully

grasped this new theory of knowledge.

Chapter XI  
Revealed prayers

## Man’s offering of prayer and the creative word

We pointed out in Chapter V that the mystic, the philosopher

and the scientist have always longed for a knowledge of the

immutable essence which underlies the world of appearance.

Plato once said: “The true lover of knowledge is always

striving after *being* … He will not rest at those multi-

tudinous phenomena whose existence is appearance only.”

However, as we have said repeatedly, finite man cannot

comprehend the infinite God. The only knowledge of God

we can attain comes to us through the Prophet. He reveals to

us the attributes and perfections of God, but not His essence.

Parenthetically we might learn something from the physicist,

as was suggested in Chapter V. He realizes to-day the

futility of the quest for an understanding of the ultimate

reality behind the phenomenal world. Surely then no serious

thinker would go so far as to maintain that he could under-

stand the nature of the creator of the universe.

If we must turn to the Prophet for an understanding of

God, it is reasonable to conclude that we should also turn to

the Prophet for an understanding of prayer. It is true that

man has always prayed to God, even in his primitive state,

but the God of primitive man was never without anthropo-

morphic characteristics. The more we think of the tran-

scendental nature of God, the less inclined we are to assume

that we know how to pray to Him. But we are not without

knowledge of prayer. Our knowledge of prayer, like our

knowledge of God, comes to us through the Prophet.

The revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, His followers believe, is

the consummation of past prophetic religions, and as such

more complete in the matter of prayer than any revelation

that has gone before it. In the Writings we may find prayers

for every human need, material as well as spiritual. Even

in a very low state the suppliant may pray for divine gifts.

Consider, for illustration, the following prayer, which requires

no comment. *“My God, my God! If none be found to stray*

*from Thy path, how, then, can the ensign of Thy mercy be*

*unfurled, or the banner of Thy bountiful favour be hoisted?*

*And if iniquity be not committed, what is it that can proclaim*

*Thee to be the Concealer of men’s sins, the Ever-Forgiving,*

*the Omniscient, the All-Wise? May my soul be a sacrifice to*

*the trespasses of them that trespass against Thee, for upon such*

*trespasses are wafted the sweet savours of the tender mercies*

*of Thy Name, the Compassionate, the All-Merciful. May*

*my life be laid down for the transgressions of such as transgress*

*against Thee, for through them the breath of Thy grace and*

*the fragrance of Thy loving-kindness are made known and*

*diffused amongst men. May my inmost being be offered*

*up for the sins of them that have sinned against Thee, for it is as*

*a result of such sins that the Day Star of Thy manifold favours*

*revealeth itself above the horizon of Thy bounty, and the clouds*

*of Thy never-failing providence rain down their gifts upon the*

*realities of all created things.”* As the suppliant prays,

however, he rises to a higher level for soon he says: *“Aid*

*me, O my Lord, to surrender myself wholly to Thy Will, and to*

*arise and serve Thee, for I cherish this earthly life for no other*

*purpose than to compass the Tabernacle of Thy Revelation and*

*the Seat of Thy Glory. Thou seest me, O my God, detached*

*from all else but Thee, and humble and subservient to Thy Will.*

*Deal with me as it beseemeth Thee, and as it befitteth Thy*

*highness and great glory.”*[1]

1 Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings*, pp. 310, 311.

If we turn to the revealed prayers in the Bahá’í writings,

one of the first things that impresses us is a clear exposition

of man’s relation to God in the matter of prayer. Bahá’u’lláh

declares:[1] *“… None can befittingly praise Thee except Thine*

*own Self and such as are like unto Thee. Thou hast, verily,*

*been at all times, and wilt everlastingly continue to remain,*

*immensely exalted beyond and above all comparison and*

*likeness, above all imagination of parity or resemblance.*

*Having, thus, recognized Thee as One Who is incomparable,*

*and Whose nature none can possess, it becometh incontrovertibly*

*evident that whosoever may praise Thee, his praise can befit*

*only such as are of his own nature, and are subject to his own*

*limitations, and it can in no wise adequately describe the*

*sublimity of Thy sovereignty, nor scale the heights of Thy*

*majesty and holiness. How sweet, therefore, is the praise*

*Thou givest to Thine own Self, and the description Thou givest*

*of Thine own Being!” (*p. 297)

Nevertheless in His mercy for us, God is willing to accept

our praise. Bahá’u’lláh says, stressing again man’s inability to

know Him: *“The glory of Thy might beareth me witness!*

*Whoso claimeth to have known Thee hath, by virtue of such*

*a claim, testified to his own ignorance; and whoso believeth*

*himself to have attained unto Thee, all the atoms of the earth*

*would attest his powerlessness and proclaim his failure. Thou*

*hast, however, by virtue of Thy mercy that hath surpassed the*

*kingdoms of earth and heaven, deigned to accept from Thy*

*servants the laud and honor they pay to Thine own exalted*

*Self, and hast bidden them celebrate Thy glory, that the ensigns*

*of Thy guidance may be unfurled in Thy cities and the tokens*

*of Thy mercy be spread abroad among Thy nations, and that*

*each and all may be enabled to attain unto that which Thou*

*hast destined for them by Thy decree, and ordained unto them*

*through Thine irrevocable will and purpose.”* (p. 123)

1 All the following prayers are from *Prayers and Meditations*. In some

cases the complete prayer is not quoted.

As we read and meditate upon the revealed prayers we

begin to comprehend, to some degree, the true meaning of

prayer. We learn how man, in his longing for spiritual

perfection, may approach God. To illustrate, let us consider

one phase of prayer, namely the type of appeal that man is

permitted to make. In the following prayers it is clear

that man can appeal to God’s mercy, he can also appeal to

His attributes in general, and finally he can plead that having

bestowed favour upon him God cannot, in His mercy, forsake

him.

## An appeal to God’s mercy

*“I am a sinner, O my Lord, and Thou art the Ever-Forgiving.*

*As soon as I recognized Thee, I hastened to attain the exalted*

*court of Thy loving-kindness. Forgive me, O my Lord, my*

*sins which have hindered me from walking in the ways of Thy*

*good-pleasure, and from attaining the shores of the ocean of*

*Thy oneness.*

*“There is no one, O my Lord, who can deal bountifully with*

*me to whom I can turn my face, and none who can have com-*

*passion on me that I may crave his mercy. Cast me not out,*

*I implore Thee, of the presence of Thy grace, neither do Thou*

*withhold from me the outpourings of Thy generosity and bounty.*

*Ordain for me, O my Lord, what Thou hast ordained for them*

*that love Thee, and write down for me what Thou hast written*

*down for Thy chosen ones. My gaze hath, at all times, been*

*fixed on the horizon of Thy gracious providence, and mine eyes*

*bent upon the court of Thy tender mercies. Do with me as*

*beseemeth Thee. No God is there but Thee, the God of power,*

*the God of glory, Whose help is implored by all men.”* (p. 29)

*“In Thee I have placed my whole confidence, unto Thee I*

*have turned my face, to the cord of Thy loving providence I*

*have clung, and towards the shadow of Thy mercy I have*

*hastened. Cast me not as one disappointed out of Thy door,*

*O my God, and withhold not from me Thy grace, for Thee alone*

*do I seek. No God is there beside Thee, the Ever-Forgiving,*

*the Most Bountiful.*

*“Praise be to Thee, O Thou Who art the Beloved of them*

*that have known Thee!”* (p. 220)

*“Potent art Thou to do what pleaseth Thee. None can*

*withstand the power of Thy sovereign might. From everlasting*

*Thou wert alone, with none to equal Thee, and wilt unto ever-*

*lasting remain far above all thought and every description of*

*Thee. Have mercy, then, upon Thy servants by Thy grace*

*and bounty, and suffer them not to be kept back from the shores*

*of the ocean of Thy nearness. If Thou abandonest them, who*

*is there to befriend them; and if Thou puttest them far from*

*Thee, who is he that can favour them? They have none other*

*Lord beside Thee, none to adore except Thyself. Deal Thou*

*generously with them by Thy bountiful grace.*

*“Thou, in truth, art the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Com-*

*passionate.”* (p. 73)

*“Cast me not from Thy presence, O my Lord, neither do*

*Thou drive me away from the shores of Thy love and Thy good-*

*pleasure. For the poor can find no refuge unless he knocketh*

*at the door of Thy wealth, and the outcast can find no peace until*

*he be admitted to the court of Thy favour.*

*“Magnified be Thy name, O my Lord, for Thou hast enabled*

*me to recognize the Manifestation of Thine own Self, and hast*

*caused me to be assured of the truth of the verses which have*

*descended upon Thee. Empower me, I implore Thee, to cling*

*steadfastly unto whatsoever Thou hast bidden me observe.*

*Help me to guard the pearls of Thy love which, by Thy decree,*

*Thou hast enshrined within my heart. Send down, moreover,*

*every moment of my life, O my God, that which will preserve*

*me from any one but Thee, and will set my feet firm in Thy*

*Cause.”* (p*.* 176)

*“I am he, O my Lord, that hath set his face towards Thee,*

*and fixed his hope on the wonders of Thy grace and the revela-*

*tions of Thy bounty. I pray Thee that Thou wilt not suffer me*

*to turn away disappointed from the door of Thy mercy, nor*

*abandon me to such of Thy creatures as have repudiated Thy*

*Cause.”* (p. 221)

*“Do Thou destine for me, O my God, what will set me,*

*at all times, towards Thee, and enable me to cleave continually*

*to the cord of Thy grace, and to proclaim Thy name, and to*

*look for whatsoever may flow down from Thy pen. I am poor*

*and desolate, O my Lord, and Thou art the All-Possessing,*

*the Most High. Have pity, then, upon me through the wonders*

*of Thy mercy, and send down upon me, every moment of my life,*

*the things wherewith Thou hast recreated the hearts of all Thy*

*creatures who have recognized Thy unity, and of all Thy people*

*who are wholly devoted to Thee.*

*“Thou, verily, art the Almighty, the Most Exalted, the*

*All-Knowing, the All-Wise.”* (p. 242)

*“Every existence, whether seen or unseen, O my Lord,*

*testifieth that Thy mercy hath surpassed all created things,*

*and Thy loving-kindness embraced the entire creation. Look*

*upon them, I entreat Thee, with the eyes of Thy mercy.*

*Thou art the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Compassionate. Do*

*with them as beseemeth Thy glory, and Thy majesty, and Thy*

*greatness, and Thy bounteousness and Thy grace. Deal not*

*with them according to the limitations imposed upon them,*

*or the manifold vicissitudes of their earthly life.”* (p. 113)

*“Deal Thou, therefore, O my God, my Beloved, my supreme*

*Desire, with Thy servants and with all that were created by*

*Thee as would beseem Thy beauty and Thy greatness, and*

*would be worthy of Thy generosity and gifts. Thou art, in*

*truth, He Whose mercy hath encompassed all the worlds, and*

*whose grace hath embraced all that dwell on earth and in*

*heaven. Who is there that hath cried after Thee, and whose*

*prayer hath remained unanswered? Where is he to be found*

*who hath reached forth towards Thee, and whom Thou hast*

*failed to approach? Who is he that can claim to have fixed*

*his gaze upon Thee, and toward whom the eye of Thy loving-*

*kindness hath not been directed? I bear witness that Thou*

*hadst turned toward Thy servants ere they had turned toward*

*Thee, and hadst remembered them ere they had remembered*

*Thee. All grace is Thine, O Thou in Whose hand is the kingdom*

*of Divine gifts and the source of every irrevocable decree.”*

(p. 253)

## An appeal to other attributes

*“I swear by Thy might, O my God! Wert Thou to regard*

*Thy servants according to their deserts in Thy days, they*

*would assuredly merit naught except Thy chastisement and*

*torment. Thou art, however, the One Who is of great bounteous-*

*ness, Whose grace is immense. Look not down upon them,*

*O my God, with the glance of Thy justice, but rather with*

*the eyes of Thy tender compassion and mercies. Do, then,*

*with them according to what beseemeth Thy generosity and*

*bountiful favour. Potent art Thou to do whatsoever may*

*please Thee. Incomparable art Thou. No God is there beside*

*Thee, the Lord of the throne on high and of earth below, the*

*Ruler of this world and of the world to come.”* (p. 137)

*“Cast not away, O my Lord, him that hath turned towards*

*Thee, nor suffer him who hath drawn nigh unto Thee to be*

*removed far from Thy court. Dash not the hopes of the*

*suppliant who hath longingly stretched out his hands to seek*

*Thy grace and favours, and deprive not Thy sincere servants*

*of the wonders of Thy tender mercies and loving-kindness.*

*Forgiving and Most Bountiful art Thou, O my Lord! Power hast*

*Thou to do what Thou pleasest. All else but Thee are impotent*

*before the revelations of Thy might, are as lost in the face*

*of the evidences of Thy wealth, are as nothing when compared*

*with the manifestations of Thy transcendent sovereignty, and*

*are destitute of all strength when face to face with the signs*

*and tokens of Thy power. What refuge is there beside Thee,*

*O my Lord, to which I can flee, and where is there a haven to*

*which I can hasten? Nay, the power of Thy might beareth me*

*witness! No protector is there but Thee; no place to flee*

*to except Thee, no refuge to seek save Thee. Cause me to*

*taste, O my Lord, the divine sweetness of Thy remembrance*

*and praise. I swear by Thy might! Whosoever tasteth of its*

*sweetness will rid himself of all attachment to the world and all*

*that is therein, and will set his face towards Thee, cleansed from*

*the remembrance of any one except Thee.”* (p. 82)

*“The tenderness of Thy mercy, O my Lord, surpasseth*

*the fury of Thy wrath, and Thy loving-kindness exceedeth*

*Thy hot displeasure, and Thy grace excelleth Thy justice.*

*Hold Thou, through Thy wondrous favours and mercies, the*

*hands of Thy creatures, and suffer them not to be separated*

*from the grace which Thou hast ordained as the means whereby*

*they can recognize Thee. The glory of Thy might beareth*

*me witness! Were such a thing to happen, every soul would*

*be sore shaken, every man endued with understanding would*

*be bewildered, and every possessor of knowledge would be*

*dumbfounded, except those who have been succoured through*

*the hands of Thy Cause, and have been made the recipients*

*of the revelations of Thy grace and of the tokens of Thy*

*favours.”* (p. 136)

*“Cast not out, I entreat Thee, O my Lord, them that have*

*sought Thee, and turn not away such as have directed their*

*steps towards Thee, and deprive not of Thy grace all that love*

*Thee. Thou art He, O my Lord, Who hath called Himself*

*the God of Mercy, the Most Compassionate. Have mercy,*

*then, upon Thy handmaiden who hath sought Thy shelter, and*

*set her face towards Thee.*

*“Thou art, verily, the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Merciful.”*

(p. 148)

*“Thou art He, O my Lord, Whose bounty hath surpassed*

*all things, and Whose power hath transcended all things, and*

*Whose mercy hath encompassed all things. Look, then,*

*upon Thy people with the eyes of Thy tender mercies, and leave*

*them not to themselves and to their corrupt desires in Thy*

*days. How farsoever they may have strayed from Thee, and*

*however grievously they have turned back from Thy face, yet*

*Thou, in Thine essence, art the All-Bountiful, and, in Thine*

*inmost spirit, art the Most Merciful. Deal with them according*

*to the unrevealed tokens of Thy bounty and Thy gifts. Thou*

*art, verily, the One to the power of Whose might all things*

*have testified, and to Whose majesty and omnipotence the whole*

*creation hath borne witness.*

*“No God is there but Thee, the Help in Peril, the Self-*

*Subsisting.”* (pp. 244–5)

“… Look not on my state, O my God, nor my failure to serve

Thee, nay rather regard the oceans of Thy mercy and favours

and the things that beseem Thy glory and Thy forgiveness

and befit Thy loving-kindness and bounties. Thou art, verily,

the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Generous.” (p. 167)

## God cannot forsake us

*“Since Thou hast guided them, O my Lord, unto the living*

*waters of Thy grace, grant, by Thy bounty, that they may not*

*be kept back from Thee; and since Thou hast summoned them*

*to the habitation of Thy throne, drive them not out from Thy*

*presence, through Thy loving-kindness. Send down upon*

*them what shall wholly detach them from aught else except*

*Thee, and make them able to soar in the atmosphere of Thy*

*nearness, in such wise that neither the ascendancy of the*

*oppressor nor the suggestions of them that have disbelieved in*

*Thy most august and most mighty Self shall be capable of*

*keeping them back from Thee.”* (pp. 117–8)

*“Glory be to Thee, O Lord my God! Abase not him Whom Thou*

*host exalted through the power of Thine everlasting sovereignty,*

*and remove not far from Thee him whom Thou hast caused to*

*enter the tabernacle of Thine eternity. Wilt Thou cast away,*

*O my God, him whom Thou hast overshadowed with Thy Lord-*

*ship, and wilt Thou turn away from Thee, O my Desire, him to*

*whom Thou hast been a refuge? Canst Thou degrade him whom*

*Thou hast uplifted, or forget him whom Thou didst enable to*

*remember Thee?*

*“Glorified, immensely glorified art Thou! Thou art He*

*who from everlasting hath been the King of the entire creation*

*and its Prime Mover, and Thou wilt to everlasting remain*

*the Lord of all created things and their Ordainer. Glorified*

*art Thou, O my God! If Thou ceasest to be merciful unto*

*Thy servants, who, then, will show mercy unto them; and if*

*Thou refusest to succour Thy loved ones, who is there that*

*can succour them?”* (p. 261)

*“Now that Thou hast guided them unto the door of Thy*

*grace, O my Lord, cast them not away, by Thy bounty; and now*

*that Thou hast summoned them unto the horizon of Thy Cause,*

*keep them not back from Thee, by Thy graciousness and favour.*

*Powerful art Thou to do as Thou pleasest. No God is there*

*but Thee, the Omniscient, the All-Informed.”* (p. 112)

*“Since Thou hast revealed Thy grace, O my God, deter not*

*Thy servants from directing their eyes towards it. Consider*

*not, O my God, their estate, and their concerns and their works.*

*Consider the greatness of Thy glory, and the plenteousness of*

*Thy gifts, and the power of Thy might, and the excellence of*

*Thy favours. I swear by Thy glory! Wert Thou to look upon*

*them with the eye of justice, all would deserve Thy wrath and*

*the rod of Thine anger. Hold Thou Thy creatures, O my God,*

*with the hands of Thy grace, and make Thou known unto them*

*what is best for them of all the things that have been created*

*in the kingdom of Thy invention.”* (p. 31)

*“Wilt Thou withhold, O my God, from such as love Thee*

*the wonders of Thine ascendancy and triumph? Wilt Thou*

*shatter, O my Beloved, the hopes which they who are devoted*

*to Thee have fixed on Thy manifold bounties and gifts? Wilt*

*Thou keep back, O my Master, those that have recognized Thee*

*from the shores of Thy sanctified knowledge, or wilt Thou*

*cease to rain down upon the hearts of such as desire Thee*

*the showers of Thy transcendent grace? No, no, and to this*

*Thy glory beareth me witness! I testify this very moment*

*that Thy mercy hath surpassed all created things, and Thy*

*loving-kindness encompassed all that are in heaven and all*

*that are on earth. From everlasting the doors of Thy generosity*

*were open to the faces of Thy servants, and the gentle winds*

*of Thy grace were wafted over the hearts of Thy creatures,*

*and the overflowing rains of Thy bounty were showered upon Thy*

*people and the dwellers of Thy realm.”* (p. 332)

*“Wilt Thou keep back from Thee the stranger whom Thou*

*didst call unto his most exalted Home beneath the shadow of*

*the wings of Thy mercy, or cast away the wretched creature*

*that hath hastened to attain the shores of the ocean of Thy*

*wealth? Wilt Thou shut up the door of Thy grace to the face*

*of Thy creatures after having opened it through the power of*

*Thy might and of Thy sovereignty, or close the eyes of Thy*

*people when Thou hast already commanded them to turn unto*

*the Day-Spring of Thy Beauty and the Dawning-Place of the*

*splendours of Thy countenance?*

“Nay, and to this Thy glory beareth me witness! Such

*is not my thought of Thee, nor the thought of those of Thy*

*servants that have near access to Thyself, nor that of the sincere*

*amongst Thy people.”* (p. 270)

Chapter XII  
Prayers for spiritual development

Out of the voluminous Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, we have

selected a few for spiritual unfoldment. They will serve

as a sour of divine inspiration for meditation. The classify-

cation is more or less arbitrary, but it may assist the reader

in selecting the prayer most suited to his spiritual status.

The following prayers are taken from *Prayers and Meditations*

by Bahá’u’lláh. In some cases the complete prayer is not

quoted.

## Turning toward God

*“Suffer me, O my God, to draw nigh unto Thee, and to*

*abide within the precincts of Thy court, for remoteness from*

*Thee hath well-nigh consumed me. Cause me to rest under*

*the shadow of the wings of Thy grace, for the fame of my*

*separation from Thee hath melted my heart within me. Draw*

*me nearer unto the river that is life indeed, for my soul burneth*

*with thirst in its ceaseless search after Thee. My sighs, O my*

*God, proclaim the bitterness of mine anguish, and the tears I*

*shed attest my love for Thee.*

*“I beseech Thee, by the praise wherewith Thou praisest*

*Thyself and the glory wherewith Thou glorifies: Thine own*

*Essence, to grant that we may be numbered among them that*

*have recognized Thee and acknowledged Thy sovereignty in Thy*

*days. Help us then to quaff O my God, from the fingers of*

*mercy the living waters of Thy loving-kindness, that we may*

*utterly forget all else except Thee, and be occupied only with*

*Thy Self. Powerful art Thou to do what Thou wiliest. No*

*God is there beside Thee, the Mighty, the Help in Peril, the Self-*

*Subsisting.*

*“Glorified be Thy name, O Thou Who art the King of all*

*Kings!”* (p. 30)

*“I beseech Thee, O my Lord, by that Remembrance of Thee*

*through which all things have been raised to life, and through*

*which all faces have been made to shine, not to frustrate the*

*hopes I have set on the things Thou dost possess. Cause me,*

*then, by Thy mercy, to enter beneath Thy shadow that shadoweth*

*all things.*

*“Be Thou, O my Lord, my sole Desire, my Goal, mine only*

*Hope, my constant Aim, my Habitation and my Sanctuary. Let*

*the object of mine ardent quest be Thy most resplendent, Thine*

*adorable, and ever-blessed Beauty. I implore Thee, O my*

*Lord, by whatsoever is of Thee, to send, from the right*

*Thy might, that which will exalt Thy loved ones and abase*

*Thine enemies.*

*“No God is there beside Thee, Thou alone art my Beloved*

*in this world and in the world which is to come. Thou alone art*

*the Desire of all them that have recognized Thee.*

*“Praised be God, the Lord of the worlds.”* (p. 178)

*“We testify, O my God, that Thou art God, and that there*

*is no God besides Thee. From eternity Thou hast existed*

*with none to equal or rival Thee, and wilt abide for ever the*

*same. I beseech Thee, by the eyes which see Thee stablished*

*upon the throne of unity and the seat of oneness, to aid all*

*them that love Thee by Thy Most Great Name, and to lift*

*them up into such heights that they will testify with their*

*own beings and with their tongues that Thou art God alone,*

*the Incomparable, the One, the Ever-Abiding. Thou hast had*

*at no time any peer or partner. Thou, in truth, art the All-*

*Glorious, the Almighty, Whose help is implored by all men.”*

(pp. 31–2)

*“Having testified, therefore, unto mine own impotence and the*

*impotence of Thy servants, I beseech Thee, by the brightness*

*of the light of Thy beauty, not to refuse Thy creatures*

*attainment to the shores of Thy most holy ocean. Draw them,*

*then, O my God, through the Divine sweetness of Thy melodies,*

*towards the throne of Thy glory and the seat of Thine eternal*

*holiness. Thou art, verily, the Most Powerful, the Supreme*

*Ruler, the Great Giver, the Most Exalted, the Ever-Desired.*

*“Grant, then, O my God, that Thy servant who hath turned*

*towards Thee, hath fixed his gaze upon Thee, and clung to the*

*cord of Thy mercifulness and favour, may be enabled to partake*

*of the living waters of Thy mercy and grace. Cause him, then,*

*to ascend unto the heights to which he aspireth, and withhold*

*him not from that which Thou dost possess. Thou art, verily,*

*the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Bountiful.”* (p. 124)

*“I entreat Thee, O my God, by Thy name through which the*

*clouds have rained down their rain, and the streams have flowed,*

*and the fire of Thy love hath been kindled throughout Thy*

*dominion, to assist Thy servant who hath turned towards Thee,*

*and hath spoken forth Thy praise, and determined to help Thee.*

*Fortify, then, his heart, O my God, in Thy love and in Thy*

*Faith. Better is this for him than all that hath been created*

*on Thine earth, for the world and whatsoever is therein must*

*perish, and what pertaineth unto Thee must endure as long*

*as Thy most excellent names endure. By Thy Glory! Were*

*the world to last as long as Thine own kingdom will last, to set*

*their affections upon it would still be unseemly for such as*

*have quaffed, from the hands of Thy mercy, the wine of Thy*

*presence; how much more when they recognize its fleetingness*

*and are persuaded of its transience. The chances that overtake*

*it, and the changes to which all things pertaining unto it are*

*continually subjected, attest its impermanence.”* (p. 116)

*“Thou knowest, O my God, that I have severed every tie*

*that bindeth me to any of Thy creatures except that most exalted*

*tie that uniteth me with whosoever cleaveth unto Thee, in this*

*the day of the revelation of Thy most august Self, that hath*

*appeared in Thy name, the All-Glorious. Thou knowest*

*that I have dissolved every bond that knitteth me to any one of*

*my kindred except such as have enjoyed near access to Thy*

*most effulgent face.*

*“I have no will but Thy will, O my Lord, and cherish no*

*desire except Thy desire. From my pen floweth only the summons*

*which Thine own exalted pen hath voiced, and my tongue*

*uttereth naught save what the Most Great Spirit hath itself*

*proclaimed in the kingdom of Thine eternity. I am stirred by*

*nothing else except the winds of Thy will, and breathe no word*

*except the words which, by Thy leave and Thine inspiration,*

*I am led to pronounce.”* (p. 108)

## Divine bounty

*“… Do Thou preserve me beneath the shadow of Thy Supreme*

*Sinlesssness, and enable me to magnify Thine own Self amidst*

*the concourse of Thy creatures. Withhold not from me the*

*Divine fragrance of Thy days, and deprive me not of the sweet*

*savours wafting from the Day-Spring of Thy Revelation.*

*Bestow on me the good of this world and of the next, through*

*the power of Thy grace that hath encompassed all created*

*things and Thy mercy that hath surpassed the entire creation.*

*Thou art He Who holdeth in His grasp the kingdom of all*

*things. Thou doest what Thou wiliest through Thy decree,*

*and choosest, through the power of Thy might, whatsoever*

*Thou desirest. None can resist Thy will; naught can exhaust*

*the impelling force of Thy command. There is no God but*

*Thee, the Almighty, the All-Glorious, the Most Bountiful.”*

(p. 100)

*“I beseech Thee, O Thou Who art my Companion in my*

*lowliness, to rain down upon Thy loved ones from the clouds*

*of Thy mercy that which will cause them to be satisfied with*

*Thy pleasure, and will enable them to turn unto Thee and to*

*be detached from all else except Thee. Ordain, then, for them*

*every good conceived by Thee and predestined in Thy Book.*

*Thou art, verily, the All-Powerful, He Whom nothing what-*

*soever can frustrate. From everlasting Thou hast been clothed*

*with transcendent greatness and power, with unspeakable*

*majesty and glory. There is no God beside Thee, the Almighty,*

*the All-Glorious, the Ever-Forgiving.*

*“Glorified be Thy name, Thou in Whose hand are the kingdoms*

*of earth and heaven.”* (p. 17)

*“Praised be Thou, O Lord my God! This is Thy servant*

*who hath quaffed from the hands of Thy grace the wine of Thy*

*tender mercy, and tasted of the savour of Thy love in Thy*

*days. I beseech Thee, by the embodiments of Thy names whom*

*no grief can hinder from rejoicing in Thy love or from gazing*

*on Thy face, and whom all the hosts of the heedless are powerless*

*to cause to turn aside from the path of Thy pleasure, to supply*

*him with the good things Thou dost possess, and to raise him*

*up to such heights that he will regard the world even as a shadow*

*that vanisheth swifter than the twinkling of an eye.*

*“Keep him safe also, O my God, by the power of Thine*

*immeasurable majesty, from all that Thou abhorrest. Thou*

*art, verily, his Lord and the Lord of all worlds.”* (p. 15)

*“By the glory of Thy might, O my God! Wert Thou to*

*set me king over Thy realms, and to establish me upon the*

*throne of Thy sovereignty, and to deliver, through Thy power,*

*the reins of the entire creation into my hands, and wert Thou*

*to cause me, though it be for less than a moment, to be occupied*

*with these things and be oblivious of the wondrous memories*

*associated with Thy most mighty, most perfect, and most*

*exalted Name, my soul would still remain unsatisfied, and the*

*pangs of my heart unstilled. Nay, I would, in that very state,*

*recognize myself as the poorest of the poor, and the most*

*wretched of the wretched.”* (p. 93)

*“I beseech Thee, O Thou Who art the Lord of all names,*

*to guard Thy loved ones against Thine enemies, and to strengthen*

*them in their love for Thee and in fulfilling Thy pleasure. Do*

*Thou protect them, that their footsteps may slip not, that their*

*hearts may not be shut out as by a veil from Thee, and that their*

*eyes may be restrained from beholding anything that is not of*

*Thee. Cause them to be so enraptured by the sweetness of*

*Thy divine melodies that they will rid themselves of all attachment*

*to any one except Thee, and will turn wholly towards Thee, and*

*extol Thee under all conditions, saying: ‘Praised be Thou,*

*O Lord our God, inasmuch as Thou hast enabled us to recognize*

*Thy most exalted and all-glorious Self. We will, by Thy mercy,*

*cleave to Thee, and will detach ourselves from any one but Thee.*

*We have realized that Thou art the Beloved of the worlds and*

*the Creator of earth and heaven.’*

*“Glorified be God, the Lord of all creation.”* (p. 98)

*“Glorified art Thou, O Lord my God! I pray Thee, by*

*Him Who is the Day-Spring of Thy signs and the Manifestation*

*of Thy names, and the Treasury of Thine inspiration, and the*

*Repository of Thy wisdom, to send upon Thy loved ones that*

*which will enable them to cleave steadfastly to Thy Cause, and to*

*recognize Thy unity, and to acknowledge Thy oneness, and to*

*bear witness to Thy divinity. Raise them up, O my God, to*

*such heights that they will recognize in all things the tokens*

*of the power of Him Who is the Manifestation of Thy most*

*august and all-glorious Self.*

*“Thou art He, O my Lord, Who doeth what He willeth, and*

*ordaineth what He pleaseth. Every possessor of power is*

*forlorn before the revelations of Thy might, and every fountain*

*of honour becomes abject when confronted by the manifold*

*evidences of Thy great glory.”* (pp. 164–5)

*“How sweet to my taste is the savour of woes sent by Thee.*

*and how dear to my heart the dispositions of Thy providence!*

*Perish the soul that fleeth from the threats of kings in its attempt*

*to save itself in Thy days! I swear by Thy glory! Whoso hath*

*quaffed the living waters of Thy favours can fear no trouble*

*in Thy path, neither can he be deterred by any tribulation from remembering Thee or from celebrating Thy praise.”* (p. 154)

## God’s protection

*“I beseech Thee, O God of bounty and King of all created*

*things, to guard Thy servants from the imaginations which*

*their hearts may devise. Raise them up, then, to such heights*

*that their footsteps may slip not in the face of the evidences*

*of Thy handiwork, which the manifold exigencies of Thy wisdom*

*have ordained, and whose secrets Thou hast hid from the face*

*of Thy people and Thy creatures. Withhold them not, O my Lord,*

*from the ocean of Thy knowledge, neither do Thou deprive*

*them of what Thou didst destine for such of Thy chosen ones*

*as have near access to Thee, and those of Thy trusted ones*

*as are wholly devoted to Thy Self. Supply them, then, from*

*Thy sea of certainty with what will calm the agitation of their*

*hearts.”* (p. 283)

*“Do Thou ordain, moreover, for every one who hath turned*

*towards Thee what will make him steadfast in Thy Cause,*

*in such wise that neither the vain imaginations of the infidels*

*among Thy creatures, nor the idle talk of the froward amidst*

*Thy servants will have the power to shut him out from Thee.*

*Thou, verily, art the Help in Peril, the Almighty, the Most*

*Powerful.”* (p. 70)

*“Make steadfast Thou, O my God, Thy servant who .hath*

*believed in Thee to help Thy Cause, and keep him safe from*

*all dangers in the stronghold of Thy care and Thy protection,*

*both in this life and in the life which is to come. Thou, verily,*

*rulest as Thou pleasest. No God is there save Thee, the Ever-*

*Forgiving, the Most Generous.”* (p. 159)

*“Thy glory is my witness! At each daybreak they who*

*love Thee wake to find the cup of woe set before their faces,*

*because they have believed in Thee and acknowledged Thy*

*signs. Though I firmly believe that Thou hast a greater com-*

*passion on them than they have on their own selves, though*

*I recognize that Thou hast afflicted them for no other purpose*

*except to proclaim Thy Cause, and to enable them to ascend*

*into the heaven of Thine eternity and the precincts of Thy*

*court, yet Thou knowest full well the frailty of some of them,*

*and art aware of their impatience in their sufferings.*

*“Help them through Thy strengthening grace, I beseech*

*Thee, O my God, to suffer patiently in their love for Thee,*

*and unveil to their eyes what Thou hast decreed for them behind*

*the Tabernacle of Thine unfailing protection, so that they may*

*rush forward to meet what is preordained for them in Thy path,*

*and may vie in basting after tribulation in their love towards*

*Thee.”* (p. 158)

*“Shield, I pray Thee, O my Beloved, my heart’s Desire,*

*Thy servant who hath sought Thy face, from the darts of them*

*that have denied Thee and from the shafts of such as have*

*repudiated Thy Truth. Cause him, then, to be wholly devoted*

*to Thee, to declare Thy name, and to fix his gaze upon the*

*sanctuary of Thy Revelation. Thou art, in truth, He Who,*

*at no time, hath turned away those who have set their hopes*

*in Thee from the door of Thy mercy, nor prevented such as*

*have sought Thee from attaining the court of Thy grace. No*

*God is there but Thee, the Most Powerful, the All-Highest,*

*the Help in Peril, the All-Glorious, the All-Compelling, the*

*Unconditioned.”* (p. 160)

## The living waters

*“Many a chilled heart, O my God, hath been set ablaze*

*with the fire of Thy Cause, and many a slumberer hath been*

*wakened by the sweetness of Thy voice. How many are the*

*strangers who have sought shelter beneath the shadow of the*

*tree of Thy oneness, and how numerous the thirsty ones who have*

*panted after the fountain of Thy living waters in Thy days!*

*“Blessed is he that hath set himself towards Thee, and hasted*

*to attain the Day-Spring of the lights of Thy face. Blessed*

*is he who with all his affections hath turned to the Dawning-*

*Place of Thy Revelation and the Fountain-Head of Thine*

*inspiration. Blessed is he that hath expended in Thy path*

*what Thou didst bestow upon him through Thy bounty and favour.*

*Blessed is he who, in his sore longing after Thee, hath cast*

*away all else except Thyself. Blessed is he who hath enjoyed*

*intimate communion with Thee, and rid himself of all attachment*

*to any one save Thee.”* (pp. 33–3)

*“I pray Thee, O Thou Who causest the dawn to appear, by*

*Thy Name through which Thou hast subjected the winds, and*

*sent down Thy Tablets, that Thou wilt grant that we may draw*

*near unto what Thou didst destine for us by Thy favour and*

*bounty, and to be far removed from whatsoever may be repugnant*

*unto Thee. Give us, then, to drink from the hands of Thy grace*

*every day and every moment of our lives of the waters that are*

*life indeed, O Thou Who art the Most Merciful!”* (p. 37)

*“O God! The trials Thou sendest are a salve to the sores*

*of all them who are devoted to Thy will; the remembrance*

*of Thee is a healing medicine to the hearts of such as have*

*drawn nigh unto Thy court; nearness to Thee is the true life*

*of them who are Thy lovers; Thy presence is the ardent desire*

*of such as yearn to behold Thy face; remoteness from Thee*

*is a torment to those that have acknowledged Thy oneness, and*

*separation from Thee is death unto them that have recognized*

*Thy truth!*

*“I beseech Thee by the sighs which they whose souls pant*

*after Thee have uttered in their remoteness from Thy court,*

*and by the cries of such of Thy lovers as bemoan their separation*

*from Thee, to nourish me with the wine of Thy knowledge and*

*the living waters of Thy love and pleasure.”* (p. 78)

*“Behold, then, O my God, my loneliness among Thy ser-*

*vants and my remoteness from Thy friends and Thy chosen ones.*

*I beseech Thee, by the showers of the clouds of Thy mercy,*

*whereby Thou hast caused the blossoms of Thy praise and*

*utterance and the flowers of Thy wisdom and testimony to*

*spring forth in the hearts of all them that have recognized Thy*

*oneness, to supply Thy servants and my kindred with the fruits*

*of the tree of Thy unity, in these days when Thou hast been*

*established upon the throne of Thy mercy. Hinder them not,*

*O my Lord, from attaining unto the things Thou dost possess,*

*and write down for them that which will aid them to scale the*

*heights of Thy grace and favour. Give them, moreover, to*

*drink of the living waters of Thy knowledge, and ordain for*

*them the good of this world and of the world to come.”* (p. 109)

*“I implore Thee to supply whosoever hath sought Thee*

*with the living waters of Thy bounty, that they may rid him*

*of all attachment to any one but Thee. Thou art, verily, the*

*Omniscient, the All-Glorious, the Almighty.”* (p. 152)

*“We entreat Thee, O Thou Who art the Cloud of Bounty*

*and the Succourer of the distressed, that Thou wilt aid us to*

*remember Thee, and to make known Thy Cause, and to arise to*

*help Thee. Though all weakness, we yet have clung to Thy*

*Name, the Most Powerful, the Almighty.*

*“Bless Thou, O my God, them that have stood fast in Thy*

*Cause, and whom the evil suggestions of the workers of iniquity*

*have failed to deter from turning towards Thy face, and who*

*have hastened with their whole hearts toward Thy grace, until*

*they finally quaffed the water that is life indeed from the hands*

*of Thy bounty.*

*“Potent art Thou to do Thy pleasure. No God is there*

*save Thee, the Mighty, the Most Generous.”* (p. 239)

*“I give praise to Thee, O my God, that the fragrance of*

*Thy loving-kindness hath enraptured me, and the gentle winds*

*of Thy mercy have inclined me in the direction of Thy bountiful*

*favours. Make me to quaff, O my Lord, from the fingers of*

*Thy bounteousness the living waters which have enabled every*

one that hath partaken of them to rid himself of all attachment

to any one save Thee, and to soar into the atmosphere of detach-

ment from all Thy creatures, and to fix his gaze upon Thy

loving providence and Thy manifold gifts.

“Make me ready, in all circumstances, O my Lord, to serve

Thee and to set myself towards the adored sanctuary of Thy

Revelation and of Thy Beauty. If it be Thy pleasure, make me

to grow as a tender herb in the meadows of Thy grace, that the

gentle winds of Thy will may stir me up and bend me into

conformity with Thy pleasure, in such wise that my movement

and my stillness may be wholly directed by Thee.” (p. 240)

*“I swear by Thy glory, O Thou the Lord of all being and*

*the Enlightener of . all things visible and invisible! Whoso*

*hath quaffed from the hands of Thy bounteousness the living*

*waters of Thy love will never allow the things pertaining to Thy*

*creatures to keep him back from Thee, neither will he be dis-*

*mayed at the refusal of all the dwellers of Thy realm to acknow-*

*ledge Thee. Before all who are in heaven and on earth such a*

*man will cry aloud, and announce unto the people the tumult of*

*the Ocean of Thy bounty and the splendours of the Luminaries*

*of the heaven of Thy bestowals.*

*“Happy indeed is the man that hath turned towards the*

*sanctuary of Thy presence, and rid himself of all attachment*

*to any one except Thyself. He is truly exalted who hath*

*confessed Thy glory, and fixed his eyes upon the Day-Star of*

*Thy loving-kindness. He is endued with understanding who is*

*aware of Thy Revelation and hath acknowledged Thy manifold*

*tokens, Thy signs, and Thy testimonies.”* (p. 268)

# Epilogue

The unity of mankind is an inevitable stage in human

evolution. World citizenship associated with world civiliza-

tion and world culture signalizes humanity’s coming of age.

This is the core of the Bahá’í Teaching. The mission of

Bahá’u’lláh, the Founder of the Bahá’í Faith, started about

the middle of the nineteenth century in Írán. He brought to

the world a body of spiritual and humanitarian teachings

suited to the needs of present-day society. The revelation

of Bahá’u’lláh, like the revelation of Christ or Muhammad,

is divine in origin. Unlike the times of Christ or Muhammad,

however, this is the day of the fulfilment of the promises of

past dispensations. Írán, noted for its fanaticism and

appalling degradation, was wholly unprepared for a fresh

outpouring of divine grace; nevertheless His universal ideals

spread from this inhospitable region to all parts of the globe.

To-day there are Bahá’ís in over 300 countries and islands.

His logic was incomparable, His love irresistible; but the

masses responded with barbaric cruelty. In fact no less than

twenty thousand martyrs sacrificed their lives to promote the

laws and principles of this world-embracing Faith. Lord

Curzon, speaking of the courage displayed in this persecution,

says that it was not surpassed by that evoked by the fires of

Smithfield; and Professor Carpenter of Oxford was constrained

to ask, “… has Persia, in the midst of her miseries, given

birth to a religion which will go round the world?”[1]

Church and State conspired against Him until in 1853 He,

His family and a few of His followers were exiled to Baghdád,

and eventually to ‘Akká, where He passed away in 1892.

Exile, persecution and imprisonment were His lot for over

forty years. While the masses exhibited only unrelenting

1 Dr J. Estlin Carpenter, *Comparative Religions*, p. 71.

hatred and animosity, a few men of eminence like Sir Arnold

Burrows Kemball (Consul-General in Baghdád), Tolstoy,

and Professor Browne of Cambridge, displayed a tolerant

and sympathetic attitude.

Bahá’u’lláh appointed His eldest son, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, as

the authoritative Interpreter of His Teachings. In the years

1911–1913 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, though nearly seventy and suffering

from ill-health, travelled in Egypt, Europe and America,

proclaiming the universal principles of his father’s Faith in

church, synagogue, university, college and also to small

groups interested in world peace and human welfare. Every-

where He was received with enthusiasm. His first public

address in the Western world was in a Christian house of

worship, the City Temple in London. He also addressed the

congregation of the Church of St. John the Divine, at West-

minster, had breakfast with the Lord Mayor of London,

and spoke to an academic audience at Manchester College,

Oxford. He met all classes, and upon all he conferred a

blessing never to be forgotten. In the United States, he

travelled from coast to coast, addressing large and repre-

sentative audiences interested in spiritual unfoldment or a

new social order.

During the British occupation in Haifa many representative

officials, such as General Allenby and Sir Herbert Samuel,

sought His presence. For His humanitarian work a knight-

hood of the British Empire was conferred upon Him. He

passed from this life in 1921.

In His Will He appointed His eldest grandson, Shoghi Effendi,

as Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith. During Shoghi Effendi’s

ministry, 1921–1957, the Administrative Order delineated in

Scripture was firmly established. To-day, the Universal House

of Justice, the world legislative body ordained by Bahá’u’lláh,

which was first elected in 1963 by the Bahá’í communities of

East and West, directs the affairs of the Faith. From Haifa,

the World Centre, the integrity of the laws and precepts, and

the unity of the believers, are safeguarded and fully maintained.

The Faith brings to a distracted world, which has lost its

anchor, the spiritual power that will regenerate the individual,

and principles upon which a new social order can be built.

A few of the basic teachings of Bahá’u’lláh are the following:

the oneness of mankind, the independent investigation of

truth, the fundamental reality of all religions is one, the

necessity that religion be the cause of unity and be in accord

with science and reason, equality between men and women,

the elimination of prejudices of all kinds, universal peace,

universal education, the spiritual solution of the economic

problem, a universal language and an international tribunal.

For progressive movements to-day these Teachings are

not new, but they were new when given to the world. There

are many principles in the Bahá’í Teachings, however, which

are not universally accepted to-day. Take, for example,

progressive revelation. The idea that divine revelation has

ceased, that God cannot or will not reveal His will again to

mankind through a Prophet like Bahá’u’lláh is, of course,

absurd.

The most striking aspect of the failure of scholars and

statesmen to appreciate the message of Bahá’u’lláh, is the fact

that to-day we are doing some of the things He told us to do

three-quarters of a century ago.\* To illustrate, He said:

*“The well-being of mankind, its peace and security are un-*

*attainable unless and until its unity is firmly established.”*[1]

After indulging in two global wars we get this interesting

statement from the atomic physicists: “As long as the causes

for war exist, aggressor nations can challenge the international

controls. Only in a unified world community can peace

exist in the world.”[2] Again, foreshadowing the tentative

efforts to unite the rulers of the world for the purpose of

discussing world peace, He said: *“The time must come, when*

\* In the 1870’s.

1 Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 286.

2 *The Scientific Worker*, 1945, p. 6; *World Order*, Vol. 13 (1945), p. 117.

*the imperative necessity for the holding of a vast, an all-*

*embracing assemblage of men will be universally realized.”*[1]

And just a few years ago the editors of *One World or None*

made the following suggestion: “The statesmen, the experts

in international affairs, in government … must speak out,

and their proposals must be discussed and weighed in a great

public debate.”[2]

It is too early to anticipate the outcome of the efforts that

are now being made to establish peace, but modern theorists

would do well to consider rather carefully a Faith that has

encircled the globe, that has been highly successful in assimilat-

ing diverse races, nations and religions, that has preserved

the purity of its laws and precepts, and that has maintained

its unity against relentless foes for over one hundred years.

1 Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 249.

2 *One World or None*, 1946; *World Order*, vol. 13, p. 116.