

Tablet on the Inmost Heart

‘Abdu’l-Bahá

(from *Makatib ‘Abdu’l-Baha*, pp. 83-86)

provisional translation by William McCants and Steven Phelps

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He is God!

Praise be to God who hath shone upon the inmost heart [fu'ád] with the light of guidance [binúri ar-rashád] and illumined the hearts with tranquility and righteousness [sadád] through the radiance of the holy verses. With clear tokens He hath guided the sincere ones unto the wellspring of true understanding, as manifested in the inmost reality of the holy words and verses, and removed the seekers from the midst of darkness into the world of light. Salutations, blessings and praise be upon that light [of Muhammad] which hath shone within the globe of the sanctified heart, overflowing with glad tidings. The Faithful Spirit hath descended with clear verses upon His inmost heart and upon His pure and sanctified family, who are the primary testimonies and convincing proofs amidst all created things and the channels of the outpouring waters of truth amidst all beings.

O thou who standeth in the Path of God, turning unto Him and seeking wisdom from the lights of His knowledge! Know that in the blessed verse which hath been revealed in the Qur'án, by the truth of that exalted utterance, it is said: "The inmost heart [fu'ád] lies not about what it hath seen" [53:11]. It is a hidden mystery, a well-guarded symbol, a resplendent truth, an all-comprehending affair, a perspicuous token and a convincing proof unto those in the realm of existence who bow down and prostrate. In the exposition of its truth, we desire to unfold the details of the balances of discernment [mawázíni'l-'idrák] that the people possess, and to explain and refute them, so that it will be evident and clearly proven that the divine balance is the inmost heart, the fountain-head of guidance [ar-rashád].

Therefore, know that all the peoples and kindreds possess four balances with which they weigh the realities [al-Haqá'q], the significances [al-ma'ání], and the divine questions [al-masá'il]. All

of them are imperfect, unable to quench the burning thirst or heal the sick. We shall therefore make mention of each one and demonstrate its limitation and inaccuracy.

The first balance is the balance of the senses [mízánu'l-Hiss], which is the method of most of the European philosophers in this age. They say that it is a perfect and complete balance, and that whatever is decided by it, no doubt or misgiving is attached thereto. The truth, however, is that the proofs limiting this balance are as clear as the Sun at midday. Verily, if thou dost look at the mirage, thou wilt see refreshing and drinkable water. Further, if thou dost gaze upon mirrors, thou wilt see forms within it and wilt be certain that it is unquestionably real. In reality, however, the forms are reflections in the glass and are nonexistent. Moreover, if thou dost look at a whirling point in the darkness, thou wilt think that it is a circle or an extended line. The reality is that it is nonexistent, but only appears so to the vision. Furthermore, if thou dost look at the firmament and its sparkling stars, thou wilt see them as tiny bodies. In reality, however, each one of them is a thousand times larger than the earth. If thou dost gaze at a shadow it appears still, but is really in motion; spokes¹ appear unbroken but are actually disconnected; and the earth appears flat but is actually a sphere. Therefore, if it be established that the senses, of which the power of vision is, in itself, the most mighty sensory power, are a limited balance and an imperfect proof, then how can it be relied upon in ascertaining [ʿirfán] the divine truths, the heavenly signs, and the contingent phenomena?

As for the second balance, which the Illuminati and the peripatetics rely upon, it is the balance of reason [al-mízánu'l-`aqlí]. In like manner, the other schools of the first philosophers in the ancient and middle centuries depended upon it. They said that that which is judged by reason is firmly established, clear and indubitable, and that there is no doubt or defect either in its foundations or its outcomes. All of these schools, by virtue of their reliance upon the balance of reason, have differed on all questions [al-masá'il] and their opinions are divided on all truths [al-Haqá'iq]. If the balance of reason is a just, accurate, and firm balance, then they should not differ in truths and questions, and the opinions of the former and latter generations should not diverge. Because of their conflict and their differences, therefore, it is established that the balance of reason is imperfect. Verily, if we were to conceive of a perfect balance and if thou wert to assess the weight of a hundred thousand souls with it, there would be no difference among them. Their lack of consensus, however, is sufficient and irrefutable proof of the deficiency of the balance of reason.

The third balance is the balance of tradition [al-mízánu'n-naqlí]. This, too, is defective, and the people cannot rely upon it since tradition is understood through reason and weighed in its

¹ This could also be rendered as "rays of light."

balance. If the foundation of reason is deficient, how is it possible that the understanding of the tradition will be consistent with reality or lead to certitude? Verily, this matter is clear and manifest.

As for the fourth balance, it is the balance of inspiration [mízánu'l-'ilhám]. Verily, inspiration consisteth of inclinations of the heart [khuTúrátin qalbiyyatin]. And the whisperings of Satan are also inclinations which arrive successively upon the heart by the agency of the soul. If there occureth to the heart a certain idea or question, how is it to be known whether it is an inspiration of the All-Merciful or a whispering of Satan?

Therefore, it is evident that all of balances current among the people are defective and their conclusions are unreliable. Nay, they are confused dreams, doubts, and idle fancies that neither allay the sore athirst nor satisfy the seeker of knowledge [‘irfán].

As for the true, divine balance which never strayeth, and which ever apprehendeth the universal realities [al-Haqá’iq al-kulliyyah] and the sublime inner meanings [al-ma`ání al-`aTHímah], it is the balance of the inmost heart [mízánu'l-fu’ád], of which God hath made mention in the blessed verse. It is an effulgence of the brilliant lights of the Divine Outpouring [tajaliyyat suTu` anwár al-fayD al-iláhi], the secret of the All-Merciful [as-sirr ar-raHmání], the manifestation of consciousness [aTH-Thuhúr al-wijdání], and the lordly sign [ar-ramz ar-rabání]. Verily it is an ancient outpouring [fayD qadím], a manifest light and a mighty bounty. Should God favor with this gift one of His chosen ones [aSfiyá’ihi], showering it upon one of His loved ones possessing certitude, verily he will draw nigh unto that station of which 'Ali (upon him be peace) hath spoken, "If the veil be lifted, I would not increase in certitude!" Speculation and argumentation are the utmost degree of weakness and understanding, for the result is dependent upon the exigencies of the lesser and greater propositions, so that, however thou orderest these terms, an outcome is obtained which cannot be implicitly relied upon: hence the differing opinions of the philosophers. Therefore, O thou who hast turned towards God, purify thine inmost heart from all impediments to righteousness [as-sadád] in the reality of true guidance [ar-rashád], and weigh all divine questions with this just, accurate, and glorious balance which God hath elucidated in the unerring Qur'an and the Great Announcement, that thou mayest drink from the fount of certitude [‘ayn al-yaqín],² savor the truth of certitude [Haqq al-yaqín], be guided unto the Straight Path, and walk in the way of righteousness. Praise be to God, the Lord of the worlds!

² A play on the “eye of certitude” (‘ayn al-yaqín) and “truth of certitude” (haqq al-yaqín) of the Qur’an (see for example Suratu’l-Takkathur) which unfortunately must be lost in the translation.