

Our Covenant with 'Abdu'l-Bahá

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The human race is immersed in the ocean of the spirit. Bahá'u'lláh is universal, and He has surrounded humanity with all the blessings of the Day of God. You and I are aware of the fact that we are immersed in the ocean of the spirit, but the majority of the people are not yet aware, and when we are not aware of the spirit that surrounds and penetrates us, and tries to act upon a reluctant heart and a mind that is full of the shadows of the past, the individual encased in this unawareness is fearful of the spirit because the spirit, to him, is something that threatens what he thinks is the basis of his human personality. It is as though he were constantly being threatened by death—not physical death—but the extinction of what he considers to be his security. Those who *are* aware of the spirit, and know it can do nothing but bless those who become aware of it, have laid upon themselves the mission of the ages, to remove the obstacles from human personality, which shut people out from the Spirit of Bahá'u'lláh.

In this great Day of God there is no *one* way to free all souls. The number of ways which are necessary to learn is exactly the number of the Bahá'ís themselves, which means that every Bahá'í has a mission, and if any of us fail to do our part in the quickening of souls, it means we have left certain people in the prison of their human personality, because we have thrown away the keys that would open the doors and make them Bahá'ís.

When Bahá'ís meet together—and they always meet, whatever the intention of the programme—they meet on three levels of experience. Bahá'ís *meet*—but other people in a room or gathering do not meet because the meeting of human beings today is only possible on the basis of the worship of the One True God. It is in the world of Prayer and Devotion that human beings meet. Otherwise they encounter one another, and make some kind of a partial impression, but they really do not *meet*. Bahá'ís meet on the level of *prayer* and *devotion*, and therefore it is a true meeting. Bahá'ís meet also on the level of *consultation*, because we are all not merely interested in the activities of the Faith, but each of us is charged with his particular concern. Finally, we meet in the spirit of *action*, because no matter how illumined we feel we are, or how pleased we are with the beauty of the Teachings, if we do not give them action, the spirit does not flow through us, and that portion of the spirit which has entered us becomes stagnant, and the Holy Spirit itself can be our doom if it is not always

¹ [Mr Holley was, at the time of this talk, the Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States. He was elevated to the rank of Hand of the Cause by the Guardian in 1951. The article was published March, 1949
The talk was sent by Reggie Newkirk, former Secretary of the Canadian NSA, to Ernie Barkes.]

renewed. This is a mystical experience, the meeting of the Bahá'ís on the three great levels of human experience.

Since entering this hall, it has been close to my heart to try and speak of a certain attitude of the creative nature of this Faith, and I turn my heart to the time when Bahá'u'lláh, in the flesh, manifested the bounty of God, Bahá'u'lláh came to connect man with God. He delivered His message to mankind whether He was in meditation in the prison, or whether He was speaking to those with whom He walked in the garden, or by the bank of the river, or whether He was revealing a Tablet to an individual Bahá'í or one of the kings of the earth. Bahá'u'lláh was addressing Mankind, but *there was no mankind to hear*. There were the people of Persia, but they were not "mankind"; they were a race, or a nation. There were the people of 'Iráq, and Turkey, but they did not constitute "mankind". They were separated from mankind, and therefore we have this illimitable mystery of God's comprehension of the human race and speaking with the utterance of the Infinite to mankind before mankind had become one being.

Now a message from God must be delivered, and there was no mankind to hear this message. Therefore, God gave the world 'Abdu'l-Bahá. 'Abdu'l-Bahá received the message of Bahá'u'lláh on behalf of the human race. He heard the voice of God; He was inspired by the spirit; He attained complete consciousness and awareness of the meaning of this message, and He pledged the human race to respond to the voice of God. My friends, to me that is the covenant—that there was on this earth some one who could be a representative of an as yet uncreated race. There were only tribes, families, creeds, classes, etc., but there was no man except 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as man, took to Himself the message of Bahá'u'lláh and promised God that He would bring the people into the *oneness of mankind*, and create a humanity that could be the vehicle for the laws of God. It is because 'Abdu'l-Bahá was 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and because He could be this Hearing Ear, this Answering Heart, this Consecrated Will, that an Eternal Covenant was made, and because of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, you and I are here as Bahá'ís. You and I are here as parts of the Mankind that has to be, because man is not man until he is imbued with the qualities and life of the Merciful, and there is no humanity until this one Spirit of Truth, and the guidance of the Divine Will, enters into the consciousness of all human beings to such an extent that each individual is not only drawn nearer to God, but he becomes *one* with all other men.

This process has begun. 'Abdu'l-Bahá came to this very city in pursuance of His sacred mission to create the soul and mind of man, and you who are here are the servants of the Divine Covenant. When 'Abdu'l-Bahá left this earth He laid upon the Bahá'ís the mission of fulfilling His promise to God, and He did not charge us with anything beyond the capacity of faith. He charged us with something that is impossible without faith; something that could not be attained, or something if attempted could not be carried out by division and fear, but gave to us the capacity to fulfil the promise He made to Bahá'u'lláh, and He told us the way to enter into this capacity is to *serve*.

'Abdu'l-Bahá never turned to any Bahá'í and said, "My son, or daughter, I want you to study fifty-eight volumes of psychology, or thirty-three volumes of history and science." He said: "I

charge you to serve—to be active.” And with every step you take on the path of the Covenant, the qualities you need will be given you.

Faith is the basic characteristic of the Bahá'í in that it is not “I” nor “you” but that it is the Faith we have in God through the Covenant that will give us the capacity to do the thing that is impossible, so that the unlettered Bahá'í can be a servant of God to a degree that the greatest ecclesiastical dignitary on earth does not possess.

It seems to me that we have to continually draw back into that experience of the mysterious meeting with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the renewal of the Covenant, because I know, perhaps as well as any one here, the feeling of utter incapacity, of complete discouragement and bewilderment that overtakes the souls of men if for even a moment they turn away from the Covenant. We are given that which is impossible for human beings to do, but *not* that which is impossible for faith, and we will not be measured in the Kingdom in accordance with any human standard of failure or success, but I think the Master will face each one of us as we walk over the threshold into the other side of the wall, and He will just simply ask one question: “Did you help *Me* fulfil *My* promise to Almighty God?”

Now that is something that should raise us up out of the very gutter of discouragement, from the feeling of personal inadequacy, and charge us with a conviction that despite ourselves, we are qualified to serve *if we serve*, but that no matter what remarkable human qualities we may have, if we do not serve, we will lose them, one by one.

You and I are members of a World Faith, and from day to day that World Faith is growing more and more potent and decisive in the destiny of the human race. O, if we could be increase our *service*—do things—*dare* things! Is there a man with whom we are seated on a train? Is there some one we meet in the normal daily experiences of life? We have been too hesitant; I do not mean we can assail another soul.

I wonder if it would not be a good teaching technique for the individual Bahá'í to begin to figure two or three very simple questions about world conditions, or about certain spiritual attitudes reflected by the present, with a view to testing the response from the individual we meet for the first time? Try such questions out. We are making an effort to contact the *inner* man. If we do that and fail nine or ninety-nine times, do not let us be discouraged, because our one task is to learn how to meet the *inner spirit* of the people, and not just revolve around and around their outer personality. The person in this room, who may feel the least qualified, may prove to be, on the actual field of service, the most brilliant and successful exponent of the power of the Covenant. The only Bahá'í who need really worry is the Bahá'í who is vain—not the Bahá'í who is humble. But humility can be a screen if we use it as a reason for not serving, so remember the dividing line is not *how much* we know—not how many books we have studied—but whether we passed from *inaction* to *action*, because we are pledged to serve, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has pledged to serve us if we serve Him.

We are just about to begin constructing the interior ornamentation of the Temple, and we know the Guardian has said this is the holiest Bahá'í House of Worship that will ever be constructed in *this world*, because it was blessed by the Covenant. Now it was a great

achievement to lay the foundation; a great achievement to raise the superstructure; a tremendous achievement to apply the exterior ornamentation, but the building is still only an empty shell—it is not yet the Voice of the Holy Spirit. Not until the interior is completed and the public meetings begin—the doors thrown open to seeking souls—will the Master’s assurance about that Temple appear in its fullness, because the meetings conducted in that Temple will *revolutionize religion on this continent*.

When we asked the Guardian to give us a clearer picture than what we have of the meetings to be held in the Temple, he said: “Only readings from the Holy Books.” Now, he did not say read only the worlds of Báb, Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. We can read words of all the Manifestations of God, but we cannot read anything else. Furthermore, the Guardian said even a non-Bahá’í can be invited to be one of the readers.

Let us visualize a public meeting conducted in the Temple, which seats about 1,650 persons. An individual who enters and stands under the central dome will see something that is not on the exterior—he will see colour. There is a different feeling in the interior than the exterior because the interior is the shell in which the mystery of worship will be conducted. This non-Bahá’í will find a place to sit and will remain through the service. Supposing he is a Jew. He will hear the words of Moses read with the greatest reverence. “Ah!” he will say, “this is of the essence of my ancestral faith.” A few moments later he will hear a reading from the New Testament, and he will say, “Apparently this religion is not only *my* ancestral faith, but others also.” Next to him a Christian, after rejoicing that the Bahá’ís have proven their religion by reading from the New Testament, will listen to the words of Muhammad. And while this Jew and Christian, seated side by side, are still indulging in a certain awareness of perplexity, they will then hear the words of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh. That experience is going to be infinitely more potent than our outer teaching word can ever be, because they are listening to the Voice of God, and that experience, when they stop to reflect upon it, will not only demonstrate to them that on earth there is a religion which does not descend below the level of the Prophet, but they will then become aware of the fact that those who serve this ministry are just ordinary human beings. There isn’t a clergyman, or a Rabbi, or a Muslim priest, or a Bishop among them. And the words they hear will not be encased in a husk of theological abstraction. It is the flower from the seed of Truth—the fruit.

Through the heart of this Covenant there is a power being generated now by our devotion to the Temple, that, God willing, will be sufficient to hold back the forces of evil released in our age, and demonstrate the victory of the Army of the Almighty.

Now religion to a childish soul is a joy—a personal joy—but religion to an adult has to be more than a personal joy. It has to be a contribution to the great, ultimate battle between lightness and darkness on earth. Why is the world so filled with destructive ideas—ideas that make human beings cruel—that blind them to every human consideration—that dehumanize them? Because this is the time of the last great struggle between lightness and darkness, and you and I, with every penny that we can sacrifice to send to the treasurer, will help that construction fund; will produce the outer expression of the potency of the Spirit, which the

Spirit needs before it will free its force. Otherwise we could all sit down and dream, if the Spirit did our work for us. But the sacrifice of completing the Temple discharges our obligation to the Covenant, and therefore the Holy Spirit can become vocalized in a way that is audible to other human beings. We know of many instances—but what are words? You cannot throw a net and raise up the running water—you cannot use words that really contain the essence of anything, but it is because our *hearts meet*, as Bahá'ís that something happens, and it is better to forget everything any Bahá'í may say if we can recall the spirit of meeting of the hearts.

You have a particular and magnificent opportunity. You live in one of the great metropolitan areas of the human race. Where is the metropolis of London today? [World War II had recently ended; there was much devastation of London and the other cities mentioned.] It is spiritually helpless. And Berlin? Paris? Where are they all? Darkness has overtaken them and they cannot convey the Voice of God. You not only live in one of the great vital free metropolitan centres where you still are able to decide whether you will go down or up, day by day, but you live also in a state which 'Abdu'l-Bahá said would be the *first civil embodiment of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh on this continent*. What has happened to me in making this visit here is the realisation that you are not too far from that great event. That is, we cannot say it is far or it is near because there is a time for everything, but it is near enough to quicken and enlarge our hopes not just something written in a book in 1912. It is an actual social situation. You are on the fringes of that social situation and it is unfolding and can only unfold as the Master foretold thirty-six years ago.

Forgive me if I have spoken too much, but really, my friends, all I wanted to say is if we could just open our hearts to the love and spirit of the Faith, and realize that when the Guardian gives us terrible jobs he is only measuring how much higher we have to grow, and can grow. If you want to make a man a dwarf you give him a succession of easier and easier tasks, and eventually he will crawl on the ground, his task will be so small. But the Guardian does not make us dwarfs. He puts the task up so high we break our necks trying to touch it. He wants us to be giants of the spiritual world.