

Introduction by the Translator

Though it appears to have been published anonymously, the author of this essay was a young psychology student by the name of Farideh Sobhani (now Dr. Farideh Sobhani-Matejko), and while he is never named explicitly, the professor to whom this tribute was dedicated is Dr. ‘Alí-Murád Dávúdí, a brilliant philosopher and intellectual giant of the Bahá’í Faith who was eventually kidnapped by the Islamic regime and never heard from again.

In this essay, the young Sobhani fondly recalls her then-recent experience as a student in one of Dr. Dávúdí’s classes, *shinásá’í va hastí* (“knowledge and existence”),¹ which he taught at the University of Tehran as an associate professor in the department of philosophy. Dr. Sobhani took this class in 1968, and she would go on to graduate from the university that same year.

This essay was originally published in *Áhang-i-Badí’*, a Persian-language Bahá’í magazine that was circulated in Iran from the mid-1940s up until the end of the 1970s with the advent of the Islamic Revolution. Dr. Sobhani was herself a member of the magazine’s editorial committee at the time and arranged for it to be printed in its July–August 1969 joint issue.²

I am grateful to Naeem Nabiliakbar for acquainting me with this article many years ago, and also for preparing the Persian typescript below, which served as the basis for this translation.

—Adib Masumian
27 July 2022

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¹ The focus of this class may have been *La connaissance: classe de philosophie et propédeutique*, a book written by Léon Meynard and published in 1963, which Dr. Dávúdí himself later translated into Persian under the same title of this course he taught at the University of Tehran.

² *Áhang-i-Badí’*, year 24, nos. 5 & 6 (Murdád–Shahrívar, 1348 Shamsí), pp. 169–170; available online here: <https://bahai-library.com/bahailib/1139.pdf#page=56>

I. English Translation

**Professor:
A Tribute to Dr. ‘Alí-Murád Dávúdí**

Farideh Sobhani
Translated by Adib Masumian

The school song begins to play. A heavy silence takes the place of the noise of the crowd. All of a sudden, a strange feeling washes over me. From behind the trembling curtain of tears that has welled up, I shoot a glance around me. As far as my eyes can see, the graduates are seated next to each other, dressed in their special uniforms. In this moment, their familiar faces seem a bit vague to me.

I look at myself again. “Am I part of this group, too?”

How very quickly these college years passed. Their final moments draw to a close with the conclusion of the ceremony. Gradually, I start to forget time and place. Familiar faces fade away from my sight, and I take flight to episodes from my past. The days and hours I have spent at college—their moments of dread and hope alike, all the things that both excited and agitated me—are brought back to life in my mind.

I think back to our friendships and mutual affections, to the things we have learned and the discussions we have had, and eventually to the students and professors. One by one, I bring the faces of the professors to mind; I conjure up their qualities and picture all the features that the passage of time has etched on their faces.

As I go through them, I stop at a certain familiar face. I call him to the forefront of my mind, with his silvery hair and immortal dignity.

I find him in the midst of his classroom. Our class of three hundred is bustling. Everyone is going from one direction to another, every group is engaged in conversation, and he quietly enters the room. The class rises to their feet. Still quietly, he heads to his desk. Absolute silence overtakes the class.

He begins. Not a sound can be heard now apart from pens being put to paper.

I look at him. When he speaks, he seems to grow distant from our world. Every now and then, he pauses for a moment and starts to walk to and fro once again.

I peer into his face. It is as if the words he is saying are rooted in the depths of his soul. His entire being has become a spirit personified from head to toe.

Now he has finished speaking. A wave of excitement comes over the students once again; their hands fly up to ask questions. As they erupt into discussion, he stays standing right where he is, serene as ever.

He listens carefully, responding with a refinement and majestic bearing that only he had. At times, the questions are so out of place, so far removed from what a sound mind would conceive, that shouts of objection start to be raised from every corner of the classroom—but he maintains his silence.

He waits until the person asking the question has settled down. Only then does he explain the matter at hand, and then offer his thanks with a short but meaningful sentence.

When speaking on philosophical subjects, he never gives any indication of finality. He always leaves room for subsequent discussion and inquiry, giving us an opportunity to think deeply.

Once he leaves the classroom, he can't be found again in the dense mass of students who have surrounded him. This is not just about school anymore; it concerns *everything*, in every possible respect. The course and purpose of their lives, their plans for the future, their views on philosophy and other thoughts—students talk to him about all these things because they consider him their close confidant and account him as their knowledgeable friend. He listens attentively to these kids as they vent, becoming more and more inquisitive and dispensing the guidance they seek.

He is also a master of witty humor, and in this regard, too, one would be hard-pressed to find someone that rivals him. Although he never makes any pretensions to love, he *does* love his students from the bottom of his heart and show them that love—and in spite of all this, not once does he give preferential treatment to any of them. Even in special cases where he wishes to help a student or a group of them, he makes it so that the rest of the class benefits just as much from his kindness—a kindness that extends to everyone under all circumstances.

His anger is seldom seen and never directed universally. Only rarely does he become angry and excited while speaking, and even then he quickly returns to his normal state and modulates his tone accordingly.

He never shies away from a debate with his students, and no one has ever seen him ridicule a single one of them.

Perhaps one of his most significant characteristics is his humility. He is kind and humble toward everyone, and his name is always associated with this uniquely distinct trait.

When it comes to his exams, he has been known to give a failing grade, but few have heard anyone object to it or not be given a logical explanation if they do protest.

To sum up, it is in this way that they truly love him with all their hearts and regard him as their professor—possibly one of those rare professors at whose impending separation students weep as they say their goodbyes.

I sense the salty taste of tears in my mouth. The school song has been over for some time now; the sound of prolonged applause has broken the silence.

I look at the crowd one last time. Though there is joy in their faces, there is also a conspicuous question: “The future . . . what am I to do in the future? Which goal should I pursue, and why?” I feel a sense of pride and good fortune because I know my path forward and rest assured of the future.

I look once more to where the professors are standing. Their faces are radiant and instill confidence. A smile signaling my discernment of the truth forms on my lips. It seems to me there is just one face missing from among them, a palpable absence—he with his silvery hair and immortal dignity.³ Under my breath, I say to myself, “a Bahá’í professor.”

³ The author of this essay has told me she never asked Dr. Dávúdí why he was not present that day. Her personal speculation is that, in all likelihood, there wasn’t any special reason for his absence, considering that, while these ceremonies were obviously momentous occasions for the thousands of students who were graduating, they were routine occurrences for the professors, and it was not as if all the faculty members at the University of Tehran attended each and every graduation ceremony. Dr. Dávúdí’s absence from the ceremony has nothing to do with his martyrdom, which took place eleven years later.

II. Original Persian

استاد

نوشته فریده سبحانی

سرود دانشگاه نواخته می شود. سکوت سنگینی جایگزین همه‌ جمعیت می گردد. در یک لحظه احساس عجیبی می کنم. از پشت پرده لرزان اشک نیم‌نگاهی به اطراف می افکنم. تا چشم کار می کند فارغ‌التحصیلان با انفورم‌های مخصوص خود کنار هم نشسته‌اند. چهره‌های آشناشان اینک اندکی مبهم بنظر می رسد.

یکبار دیگر به خود می نگرم؛ آیا من هم جزو این دسته هستم؟

راستی سال‌های دانشکده چه زود سپری شد. آخرین لحظات آن هم با اتمام جشن به پایان می رسد. کم کم زمان و مکان را از یاد می برم. چهره‌های آشنا از نظرم محو می شود و به گذشته‌ها پرواز می کنم. روزها و ساعاتی را که در دانشکده گذرانیده‌ام؛ لحظات بیم و امید و تمامی هیجان‌ها و اضطراب‌ها در خاطر من جان می گیرد.

به دوستی‌ها و محبت‌ها، به آموخته‌ها به بحث‌هایی که داشته‌ایم و بالاخره به شاگردان و به استادها می اندیشم. قیافه استادان را یک یک به خاطر می آورم، با تمام خصوصیاتشان و با تمام آنچه که گذشت زمان بر سیمای آن‌ها نقش کرده.

و از آن میان در مقابل یک چهره آشنا متوقف می مانم. او را به خاطر می آورم با موهای خاکستری و وقار همیشگیش.

او را در جمع کلاس می‌یابم. کلاس سیصد نفری ما در تب و تاب است. هر کس از جانبی به سمتی می‌رود و هر دسته سرگرم بحث و گفتگوئی است؛ و او آرام وارد می‌شود. جمعیت به پا می‌خیزند. همچنان آرام به سمت میز خود می‌رود. سکوت محض کلاس را فرا می‌گیرد.

او آغاز می‌کند. دیگر جز صدای سائیده شدن قلم بر کاغذ صدای دیگری شنیده نمی‌شود. به او نگاه می‌کنم. وقتی که سخنرانی می‌کند، گوئی از دنیای ما فاصله می‌گیرد. گاه لحظه‌ای مکث می‌کند و باز به راه رفتن آغاز می‌کند.

به چهره او نگاه می‌کنم. گوئی سخن از عمق جاننش ریشه می‌گیرد؛ وجودش سراپا روح مجسم شده

اکنون سخن او به اتمام رسیده. یک بار دیگر جنب و جوش دانشجویان از سر گرفته می‌شود و انگشت‌ها برای پرسش بالا می‌رود. بحث‌ها آغاز می‌شود و او همچنان متین و آرام بر جای ایستاده. با دقت گوش فرا می‌دهد و با ادب و وقار مخصوص خود پاسخ می‌گوید. گاه پرسش‌ها آنقدر بی‌مناسبت و دور از ذهن سلیم است که از هر سوی کلاس بانگ اعتراض برمی‌خیزد، ولی او همچنان سکوت می‌کند.

آنقدر صبر می‌کند تا پرسش‌کننده آرام بماند. آنگاه به توضیح مطلب می‌پردازد و با یک جمله کوتاه و پرمعنی تشکر می‌کند.

در بحث‌های فلسفی هیچ‌گاه مطلب را به پایان رسیده نشان نمی‌دهد. همیشه جایی برای بحث‌ها و پرسش‌های بعدی باقی می‌گذارد و مجالی برای تفکر ایجاد می‌کند.

وقتی کلاس را ترک می‌کند، در انبوه شاگردان دیگر نمی‌توان او را یافت. دیگر اینجا تنها مسئله درس مطرح نیست. از همه چیز و از همه جا، از راه و هدف زندگی، از نقشه‌های آینده خود، از افکار

فلسفی و اندیشه‌های خویش با او می‌گویند، زیرا که او را محرم و همراز خود می‌دانند و آشنای دانای خود محسوب می‌دارند. به درد دل بچه‌ها گوش فرا می‌دهد و بیشتر و بیشتر جویا می‌شود و راه می‌نماید.

در بذله‌گوئی و شوخ‌طبعی نیز استاد است و در این جهت نیز کمتر می‌توان نظیر او را یافت. با اینکه هیچ‌گاه تظاهر به محبت نمی‌کند، اما از صمیم قلب شاگردان خود را دوست دارد و به آنها مهر می‌ورزد، و با این همه هرگز بین آنها تبعیض قائل نمی‌شود، حتی اگر موردی استثنائی پیش آید که بخواهد به یکی یا دسته‌ای از آنها کمک کند، دیگران را نیز به همان نسبت از لطف خود بهره‌مند می‌سازد. لطفش در هر حال شامل حال است و خشمش به ندرت دیده می‌شود و هرگز تعمیم نمی‌یابد. به هنگام سخن گفتن به ندرت عصبانی می‌شود و حالت هیجانی پیدا می‌کند، اما به سرعت به حالت عادی باز می‌گردد و لحن خود را تغییر می‌دهد.

هرگز از زیر بار بحث شانه خالی نمی‌کند و هیچ‌گاه دیده نشده که کسی را مورد تمسخر قرار دهد. شاید یکی از مهم‌ترین خصوصیات او تواضع و فروتنی است. نسبت به همه متواضع و مهربان است و نام او همیشه با این صفت مشخصه همراه است.

در امتحانات او نمرات مردودی نیز به چشم می‌خورد اما کمتر شنیده می‌شود که کسی اعتراض کند و یا اگر اعتراض کند، جواب منطقی به او داده نشود.

خلاصه آن‌گونه است که به راستی و از صمیم قلب دوستش دارند و استادش می‌دانند و شاید از اساتید نادری است که به هنگام وداع دانشجویان از جدائیش می‌گریند....

مزه شور اشک را در دهانم حس می‌کنم. سرود دانشگاه مدتی است به پایان آمده. صدای کف‌زدن‌های ممتد سکوت را در هم شکسته.

یکبار دیگر به جمعیت نگاه می‌کنم. در چهره همه آنها در عین شادی و سرور یک سؤال مشخص است آینده... در آینده چه باید کرد؟ به سوی کدامین هدف باید رفت و چرا؟ احساس غرور و خوشبختی می‌کنم. آخر من راه خود را می‌دانم و به آینده مطمئن هستم.

یکبار دیگر به جایگاه اساتید نگاه می‌کنم. چهره‌شان روشن است و اطمینان‌بخش. لبخندی حاکی از حق‌شناسی روی لبانم نقش می‌بندد. تنها جای یک چهره در آن میان خالی به نظر می‌آید - جای او با موهای خاکستری و وقار همیشگی‌اش. زیر لب زمزمه می‌کنم «یک استاد بهائی».