

Day of the Covenant



The Appointment of
'Abdu'l-Bahá
as the
**Centre of the
Covenant**

*The setting of the Sun of Bahá gave rise
to the appearance of the Orb of the Covenant.*



Named after His grandfather

'Abbás

Called by contemporaries

'Abbás Effendi

Called by Bahá'u'lláh

Sirru'lláh

(the *Mystery of God*)

Ghusn' i' A'zam

(the *Most Great Branch*)

Áqá

(the Master)



He is, and should for all time be regarded, first and foremost, as

- the Centre and Pivot of Bahá'u'lláh's peerless and all-enfolding Covenant
- His most exalted handiwork
- the stainless Mirror of His light
- the perfect Exemplar of His teachings
- the unerring Interpreter of His Word
- the embodiment of every Bahá'í ideal
- the incarnation of every Bahá'í virtue
- the Most Mighty Branch sprung from the Ancient Root
- the Limb of the Law of God
- the Being "round Whom all names revolve,"
- the Mainspring of the Oneness of Humanity
- the Ensign of the Most Great Peace
- the Moon of the Central Orb of this most holy Dispensation



[These are] styles and titles that are implicit and find their truest, their highest and fairest expression in the magic name 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

He is, above and beyond these appellations, the

Mystery of God

an expression by which Bahá'u'lláh Himself has chosen to designate Him, and which, while it does not by any means justify us to assign to Him the station of Prophethood, indicates how in the person of 'Abdu'l-Bahá the incompatible characteristics of a human nature and superhuman knowledge and perfection have been blended and are completely harmonized.





Despite these lofty titles bestowed upon Him,
He insisted:



But if any soul asks concerning the station of the Servant, the answer is – ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

If he inquires after the meaning of the Branch, the answer is – ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

If he desires to know the significance of the verse regarding The Branch, the answer is – ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

If he insists upon the explanation of the meaning of the “Branch extended from the Ancient Root,” the answer is – ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

My name is – ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

My qualification is – ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

My reality is – ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

My praise is – ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

Thralldom to the Blessed Perfection is my glorious and refulgent diadem, and servitude to all human race my perpetual religion...

No name, no title, no mention, no commendation have I, nor will ever have, except – ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.



This is my longing.

This is my greatest yearning.

This is my eternal life.

This is my everlasting glory.



He chose to only be called:

'Abdu'l-Bahá

(the *Servant of Bahá*)



Descriptions by Contemporaries

There are many favorable descriptions of Him by His contemporaries. Here are just a few:



ENGLISH REPORTER ETHEL STEFANA STEVENS (Lady Drower)



Described Him as one who did not

“...confine himself to things spiritual or theoretical...”

but as One Who also

“...takes a lively interest in political, social, educational movements of the western world.

She advised her readers:

“Regard him well, my friends, for in him you behold one of the most significant figures in the religious world to-day...”



ELBERT HUBBARD
American Columnist



wrote there could be

“...no doubt among thinking people that this man represents, to a great degree, the growing and evolving spirit of our times.”



DAVID STARR JORDAN
President, Stanford University

believed:



“‘Abdu’l-Bahá will surely unite the East and the West for He treads the mystic way with practical feet.”



As to His physical appearance, attorney **Louis Gregory**, who met the Master during His visit to the United States in 1912 and who later was appointed as a Hand of the Cause of God in the Bahá'í Faith, penned the following description:



“Abdu’l-Bahá appeared about medium height, with a strong frame and symmetrical features. His face deeply furrowed and His color about that of parchment.

His carriage erect and His entire form strikingly majestic and beautiful.

His hands and nails shapely and pure.

His silver hair long enough to touch the shoulders.

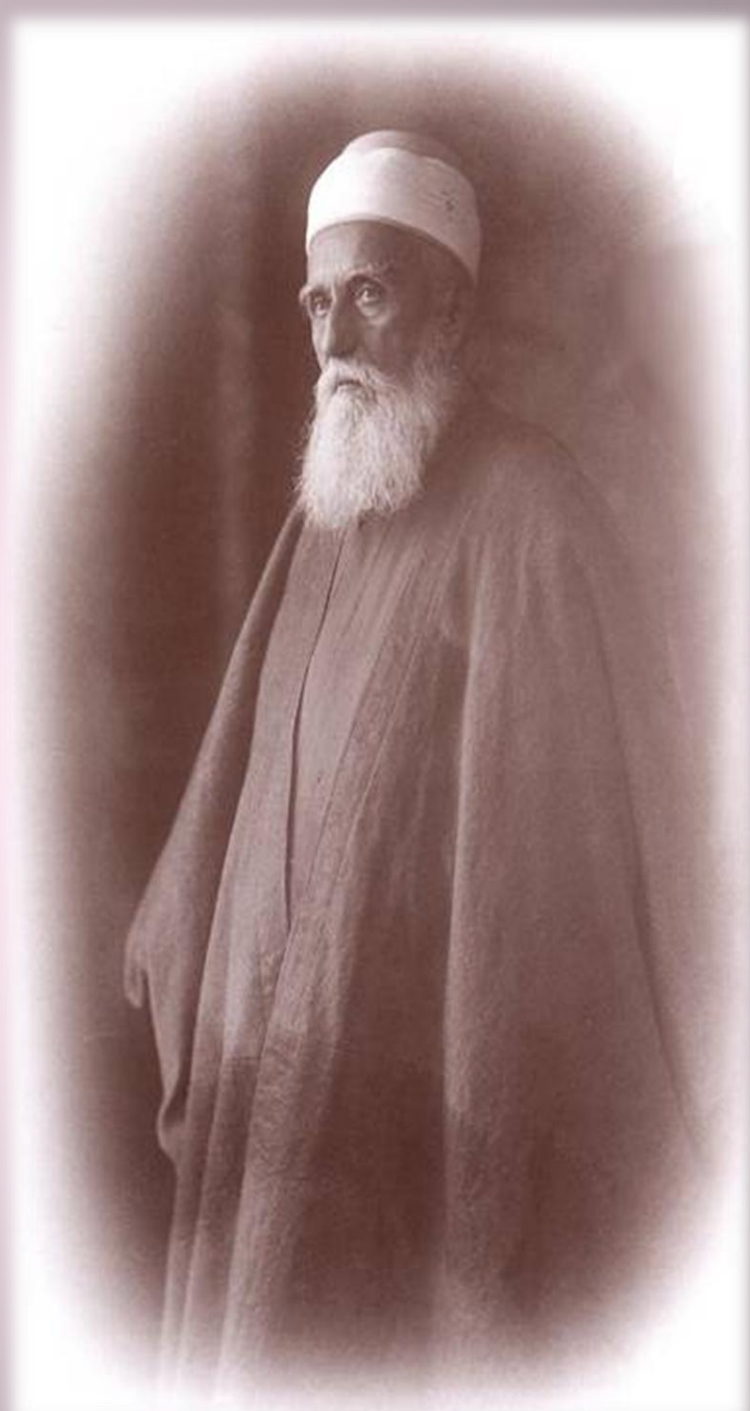
The beard snow white, eyes light blue and penetrating, the nose slightly aquiline, the voice powerful, but capable of infinite pathos, tenderness, and sympathy.

His dress was that of the Oriental gentleman of the highest classes, simple and neat and very graceful.

The color of His apparel was light, the outer robe being made of alpaca.

On His head rested a light fez, surrounded by a white turban.

The meekness of the servant, the majesty of the King, were in His brow and form.”





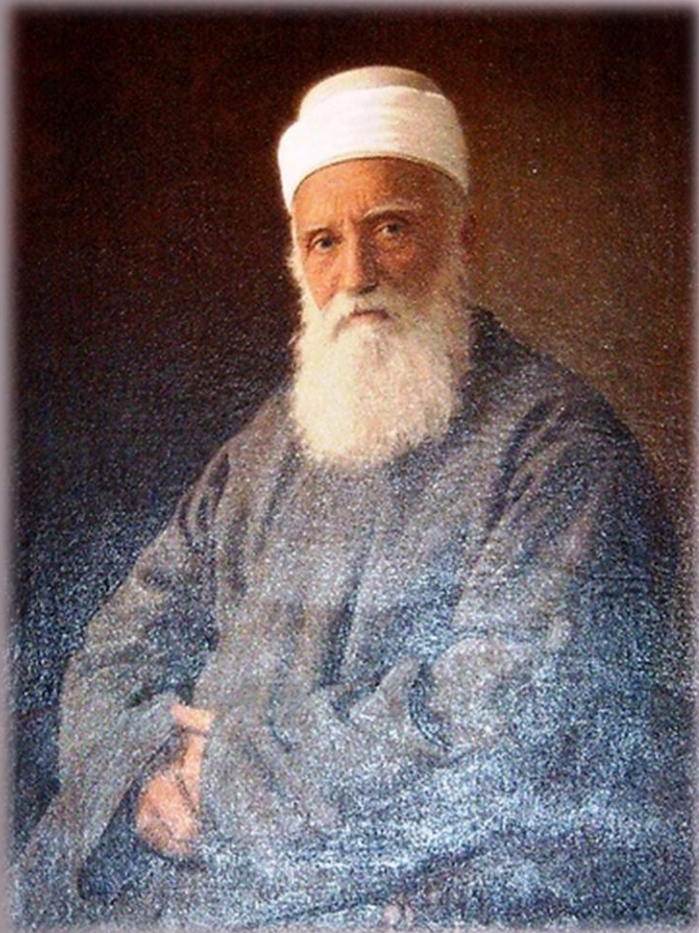
Kitáb-i-'Ahd
Book of the
Covenant

Bahá'u'lláh

In His Will and Testament, *Kitáb-i-'Ad*, (the *Book of the Covenant*), Bahá'u'lláh clearly appointed 'Abdu'l-Bahá, His eldest son, as His successor, identifying Him as

Him Whom God Hath Purposed

to whom all should turn after Bahá'u'lláh's passing.



“In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, and later in His Will Bahá'u'lláh named 'Abdu'l-Bahá Head of the Faith, Centre of the Covenant, *sole Interpreter* of the revelation and upon Him He conferred absolute authority, whatsoever He would decide having the same validity as the word of Bahá'u'lláh Himself.”



Unique in religious history,
Bahá'u'lláh appointed
'Abdu'l-Bahá
as the



Centre of the Covenant.



And what is this Covenant
to which Bahá'u'lláh refers?



There are

...two forms of Covenant, both of which are explicitly mentioned in the literature...

of the Bahá'í Faith.



First

is the Covenant that every Prophet makes with humanity or, more definitely, with His people, that they will

accept and follow the coming Manifestation
who will be the reappearance of His reality.



“The second form of covenant

is such as the one Bahá'u'lláh made with His followers:

for them to

accept the Master”

as the head of their Faith.



In this Dispensation, in this

“day which shall not be followed by night”

we have in addition to the

Greater, or Major Covenant

the one in which God promises never to leave mankind without guidance, a

Lesser Covenant

unique in religious history, whereby the Manifestation left written guidance in regard to successorship.



The Lesser Covenant has been described as:

The divinely-ordained ‘instrument’ provided
by Bahá’u’lláh

*“to direct and canalize these forces let
loose by this Heaven-sent process*

[the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh]

*and to ensure their harmonious and
continuous operation after His ascension.”*



Shoghi Effendi

Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith

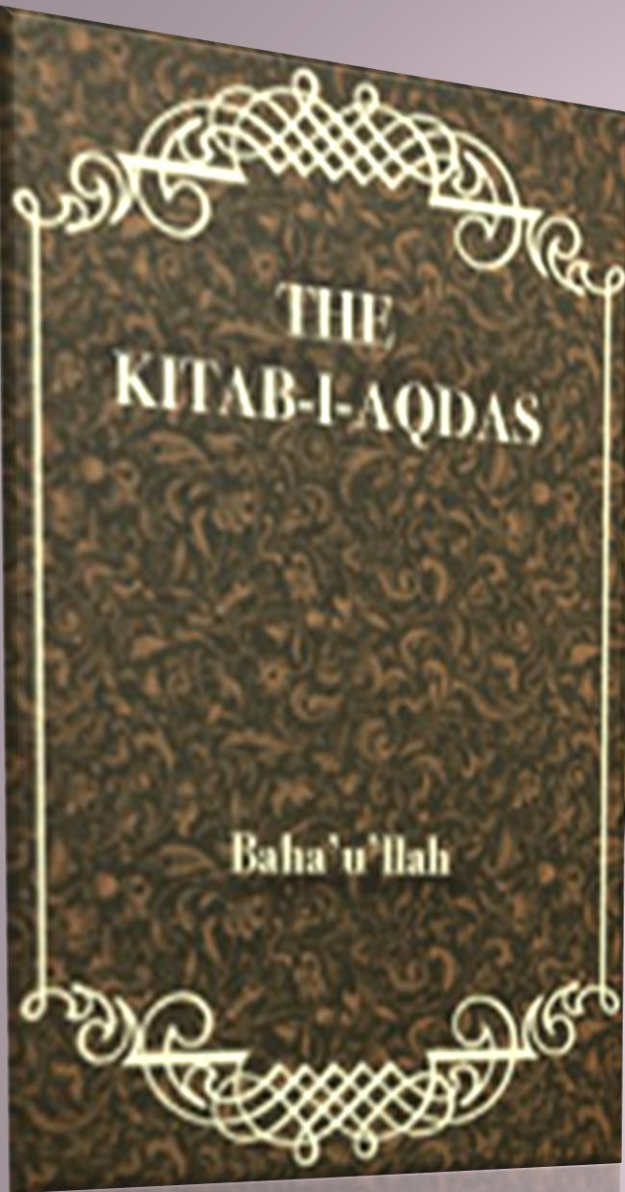
asserts:

*“Written entirely in His own hand ... this unique and epoch-making Document..., designated by Baha'u'llah as His "**Most Great Tablet**"...can find no parallel in the Scriptures of any previous Dispensation...”*



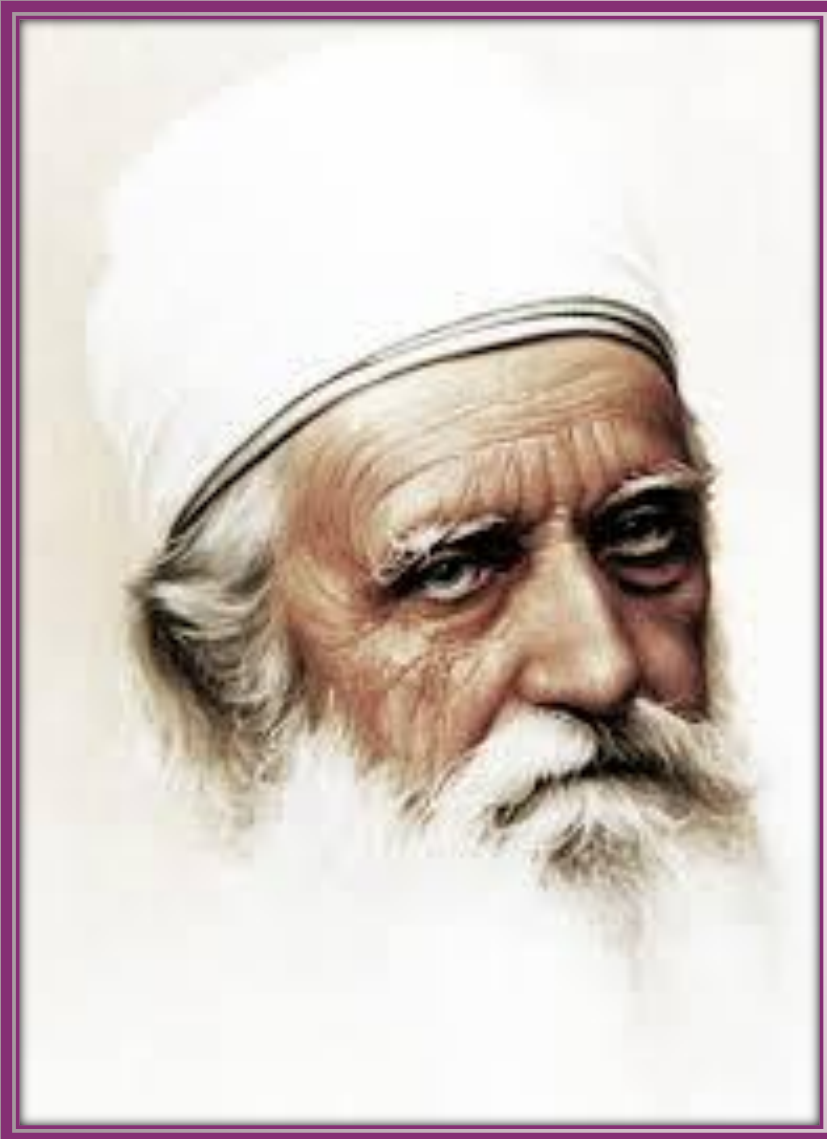
In this unique and weighty Tablet, Bahá'u'lláh wrote:

*“It is incumbent upon the Aghsán [family of Bahá'u'lláh],
the Afnán [family of the Báb]
and My kindred
to turn, one and all, their faces towards the Most Mighty Branch.
Consider that which we have revealed in Our Most Holy Book:”*



*“When the ocean of My presence hath ebbed
and the Book of My Revelation is ended, turn
your faces toward Him Whom God hath
purposed, Who hath branched from this
Ancient Root.”*



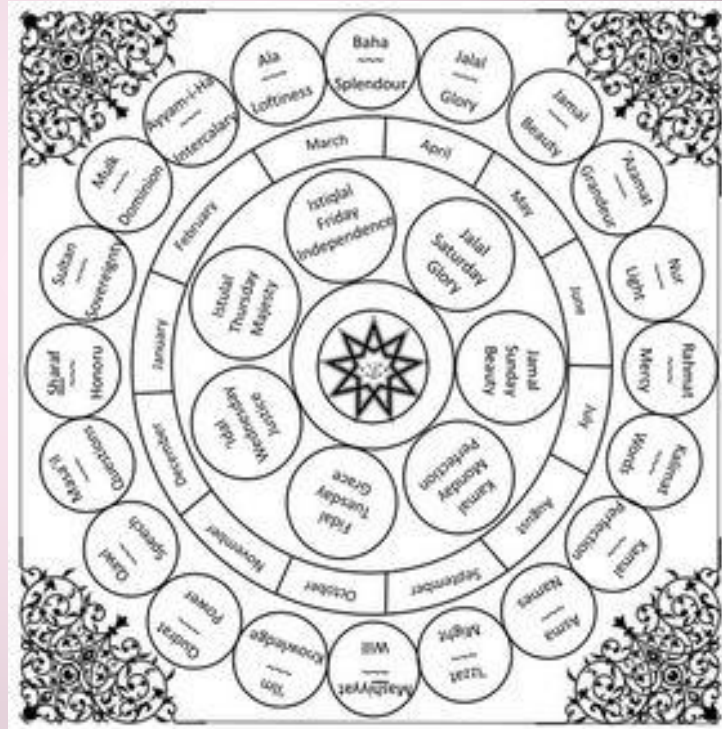


***“The object of
this sacred verse
is none other
except the
Most
Mighty Branch”
(‘Abdu’l-Bahá)***



So humble was 'Abdu'l-Bahá that when the Bahá'ís wanted to celebrate His birthday, He refused.

The day of His birth, May 23, 1844, coincides with the date of the Declaration of the Báb, the Prophet of the dispensation immediately preceding that of Bahá'u'lláh, the glorious date from which the Bahá'í calendar begins.





‘Abdu’l-Bahá was loath to allow anything to interrupt or compete with the celebrations of that auspicious Holy Day. Instead, He suggested, if the friends wished to have something to commemorate in relation to Him, it should address His station—not His person, therefore,



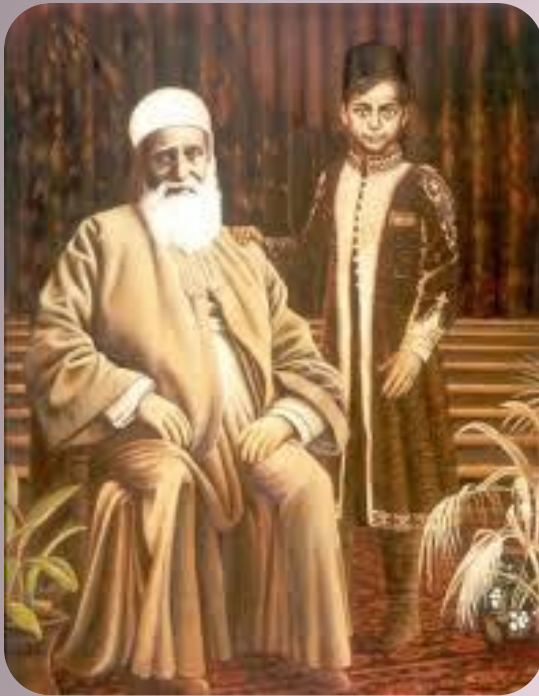
He chose the 4th day
of the Bahá'í month of Qawl (Speech),
the date on which that covenant
was revealed to the world,
as the

Day of the Covenant



As the Covenant is the guarantee against schism, therefore, it follows that this Covenant must be continuous.

Thus, 'Abdu'l-Bahá also left His own Will and Testament in which he, too, named His own successor: His eldest grandson, Shoghi Rabbani, who became known as



Shoghi Effendi

Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith



The Guardian is described in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's *Will and Testament* as.



- *the youthful branch branched from the two hallowed and sacred Lote-Trees (the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh)*
- *the fruit grown from the union of the two offshoots of the Tree of Holiness*
- He is the *Sign of God*
- *the Chosen Branch*
- *The Guardian of the Cause of God*
- *The Interpreter of the Word of God*
- He refers to him as *sacred*
- as that primal branch of the Divine and Sacred Lote-Tree
- and as *a unique and priceless pearl*



Believers without exception are to show
their obedience,
submissiveness
and subordination unto



The Guardian



It is interesting to note that:

“Obliged by the Will to protect his own rank, Shoghi Effendi still insisted on being treated as our



'true brother' and 'co-worker'

and did not care for either the obsequiousness of some Persians or the off-handedness of some Americans.”



“The intention of the Covenant, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains, is the protection of the unity of the Bahá’í Faith:

*“The purpose of the **Blessed Beauty** [Bahá’u’lláh] in entering into this Covenant and Testament was to gather all existent beings around one point so that the thoughtless souls, who in every cycle and generation have been the cause of dissension, may not undermine the Cause.”*



To elucidate further on the appointment of the Centre of the Covenant,
'Abdu'l-Bahá said:

“By this appointment and provision He has safeguarded and protected the religion of God against differences and schisms, making it impossible for anyone to create a new sect or faction of belief.

“To ensure unity and agreement He has entered into a Covenant with all the people of the world including the Interpreter and Explainer of His teachings so that no one may interpret or explain the religion of God according to his own view or opinion and thus create a sect founded upon his individual understanding of the divine words.

“The Book of the Covenant or Testament of Bahá'u'lláh is the means of preventing such a possibility, for whosoever shall speak from the authority of himself alone shall be degraded. Be ye informed and cognizant of this.”



No covenant is one-sided. For
every promise,
every blessing,
every bounty made by God to the people of the World,
made by His Manifestations to their followers,
there are reciprocal duties and obligations on the part of
those people.



COVENANTAL DUTIES

The covenantal duties expected for the people of Bahá (followers of Bahá'u'lláh) have been summarized by the Universal House of Justice, their international governing body:



“The recital each day of one of the
Obligatory Prayers
with pure-hearted devotion.”



“The **regular reading** of the **Sacred Scriptures**, specifically at least each morning and evening, with reverence, attention, and thought,.”



“**Prayerful meditation** on the teachings, so that we may understand them more deeply, fulfill them more faithfully, and convey them more accurately to others.”



“Striving every day to bring our **behavior** more into accordance with the high standards that are set forth in the teachings.”



“**Teaching** the Cause of God.”



“**Selfless service** in the work of the Cause and in the carrying on of our trade or profession.”



Living according to the laws and obligations of the Faith may not be easy. We are warned frequently in the Writings that our faith shall be tested.

These tests may come from within as well as without the Faith. But we are promised that we shall not receive tests for which we do not have the strength to overcome. Bahá'u'lláh explains that we are to welcome our tests and difficulties as challenges – opportunities – for spiritual growth.



Bahá'u'lláh wrote:

“O SON OF MAN!

My calamity is My providence,

outwardly it is fire and vengeance,

but inwardly it is light and mercy.

Hasten thereunto that thou mayest

become an eternal light and an immortal

spirit. This is My command unto thee, do

thou observe it.”



This concept is evident in Alma F Engels poem,

The Promise of Stones



The stones of Bahá'u'lláh must first pass through the fire of the Love of the Beloved until so totally consumed with love for the Beloved that nothing remains but a black lumpish mass.

They next face the test of rejection, suppression until pressure makes them pure refractors of light.

Only then can these diamonds cut through darkness descending return all Bahá'ís to the Splendour of God.

Friends, now is the time to pray for such stones.



When undergoing our own trials and tribulations, it helps to bear in mind the sufferings of Those blessed souls Who brought us these most precious teachings for the day in which we live. And that includes the Master.

Shoghi Effendi wrote:



“To the mounting tide of trials which laid low the Báb,
to the long-drawn-out calamities which rained on
Bahá'u'lláh,
to the warnings sounded by both the Herald and the Author
of the Bahá'í Revelation,
must be added the sufferings which, for no less than seventy
years, were endured by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as well as His pleas and
entreaties, uttered in the evening of His life, in connection with
the dangers that increasingly threatened the whole of mankind.”



- Born in the very year that witnessed the inception of the Bábí Revelation;
- baptized with the initial fires of persecution that raged around that nascent Cause;
- an eyewitness, when a boy of eight, of the violent upheavals that rocked the Faith which His Father had espoused;
- sharing with Him, the ignominy, the perils, and rigors consequent upon the successive banishments from His native land to countries far beyond its confines;
- arrested and forced to support, in a dark cell, the indignity of imprisonment soon after His arrival in 'Akká;
- the object of repeated investigations and the target of continual assaults and insults under the despotic rule of Sultan Abdu'l-Hamid— and later under the ruthless military dictatorship of the suspicious and merciless Jamal Pasha—



“He, too, the Centre and
Pivot of Bahá'u'lláh's peerless
Covenant and the perfect
Exemplar of His teachings,

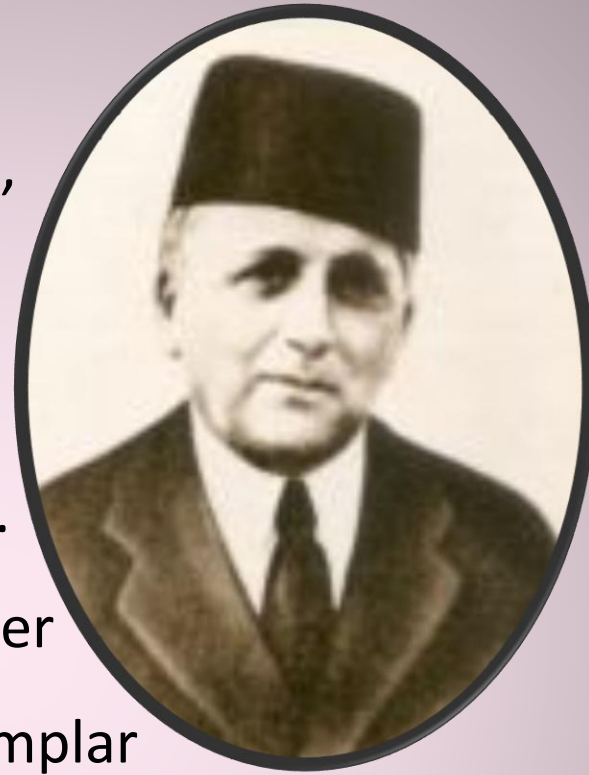
was made to taste, at the hands of potentates,
ecclesiastics, governments and peoples, the cup of
woe which the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, as well as so
many of their followers, had drained.”



British Orientalist E.G. Browne posited,
“Perhaps it was His remarkable understanding and grasp of human suffering and misery and discord and hatred, His patience, long and enduring, His most lucid and penetrating insight, the depth of His knowledge and wisdom rivaled only by His own spiritual way of life, and His humility so compelling and so mighty—perhaps these were some of the attributes that made of 'Abdu'l-Bahá the perfect Exemplar of the quintessence of creation—Man.”



The Guardian, Shoghi Effendi,
explained to the believers,
“We must be careful not to
teach in a fanatical way.



We should teach as the Master
taught. He was the perfect Exemplar
of the Teachings. He proclaimed the universal
truths, and, through love and wise
demonstration of the universal verities of the
Faith, attracted the hearts and the minds.”





Lua Getsinger, an ardent American believer, loved the Master, yet she had a difficult time being obedient to Him. When He visited the United States, her great desire to ever be in His presence caused her to develop creative scenarios that would prevent her from having to leave. He wished her to travel to California to announce His appointment as the Centre of the Covenant and to prepare the friends for His arrival. She balked, but only because it would take her away from her Beloved. He patiently and lovingly taught her why it was important to heed His advice and she wrote a poem to illustrate the lesson she learned. She titled it:



Discipline

A block of marble caught the glance
Of Buonarrotti's eyes;
Which brightened in their deeps
Like meteor-lighted skies.

And one who stood beside him
Listened smiling as he heard
For —"I will make an angel of it,"
Was the sculptor's word.

Soon mallet hard and chisel sharp
the stubborn block assailed;
And blow by blow, and pang by pang
The fairy form unveiled.

A brow was lifted high and pure,
The waking eyes outshone;
And as the Master fiercely wrought,
A smile broke through the stone.

Beneath the chisel's edge, the hair
escaped in floating rings;
And plume by plume was slowly freed
In the sweep of half-furled wings.





Discipline



The stately bust and graceful limbs
Their marble fetters shed;
And where the shapeless block had been
An Angel stood instead.

O blows that smite! O hurts that pierce
This shrinking heart of mine;
What are ye but the Master's tools
Forming a work divine?

O hopes that crumble at my feet!
O joys that mock and flee!
Ye only are the mists that hide
God's greatest gift from me.

Sculptor of souls! I lift to thee
Bound hands and burdened heart;
Spare not Thy chisel. Set me free,
However great the hurt.

How blest if all these seeming ills,
Which drew my thoughts to Thee,
Should only prove that Thou wilt make
An Angel out of me.



Artist **Juliet Thompson**,
who painted a portrait of the
Master, and was very close
to Lua, shared her
eyewitness account of the
moment when 'Abdu'l-Bahá
announced to Lua her task:



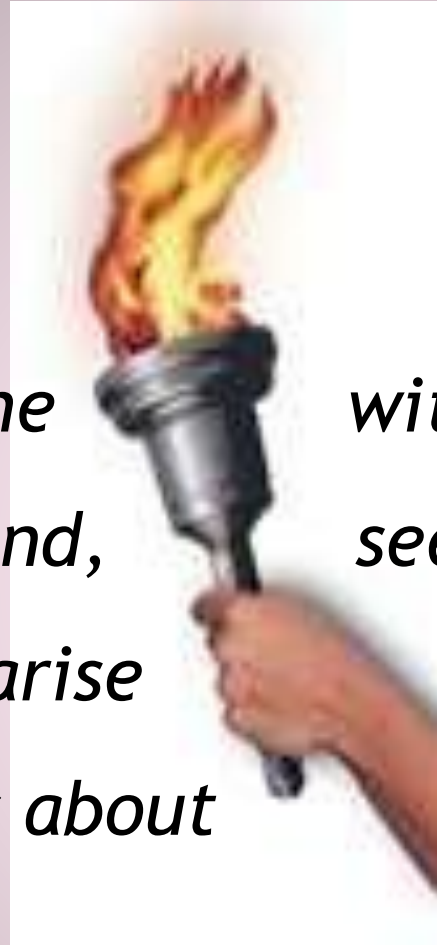


“Never shall I forget that moment, the flashing eyes of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the reverberations of His Voice, the Power that still rocked the room. God of lightning and thunder! I thought.

“I appoint you, Lua, the Herald of the Covenant. And I AM THE COVENANT, appointed by Bahá'u'lláh. And no one can refute His Word. This is the Testament of Bahá'u'lláh. You will find it in the Holy Book of Aqdas. Go forth and proclaim, 'This is THE COVENANT OF GOD in your midst.'””



We, too, should honor the exhortations of
'Abdu'l-Bahá Who once said to the believers:



*“I have come with a torch
in my hand, seeking out
those who will arise and help me
to bring about the*

Most Great Peace”



And these words,
written toward the end of His life,



“I am now growing old. O very old! All through my life I have carried on my back, gladly, the burdens of the believers; but now I ever anticipate hearing the good news of service actually accomplished by them. Save this, I have no other joy in the world.

Will they not make me happy?

Will they not answer my call, when the shadow of the last night of my earthly life is falling slowly across my path?

Will they not arise with superhuman energy and united effort to spread the Cause and impart to me new vigour?

Will they not listen to me?

How my heart leaps with joy when I hear the friends love each other, always overlooking one another’s small mistakes; and that they are forgiving their enemies!”



CENTURY OF
LIGHT

Let us consider this excerpt from
Century of Light
by the
Universal House of Justice:



“No phenomenon in any way comparable to His appearance had accompanied any of the Divine Revelations that had given birth to the other great religious systems in recorded history; all of these had been essentially stages preparing humanity for its coming of age. 'Abdu'l-Bahá was Bahá'u'lláh's supreme Creation, the One that made everything else possible.”

“An understanding of this truth moved a perceptive American Bahá'í to write:



‘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.



“...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.’”



The reason it was – and still is – important to heed the Master's appeals is that He is considered to be

The Perfect Exemplar

after Whose life we should attempt to
pattern our own.

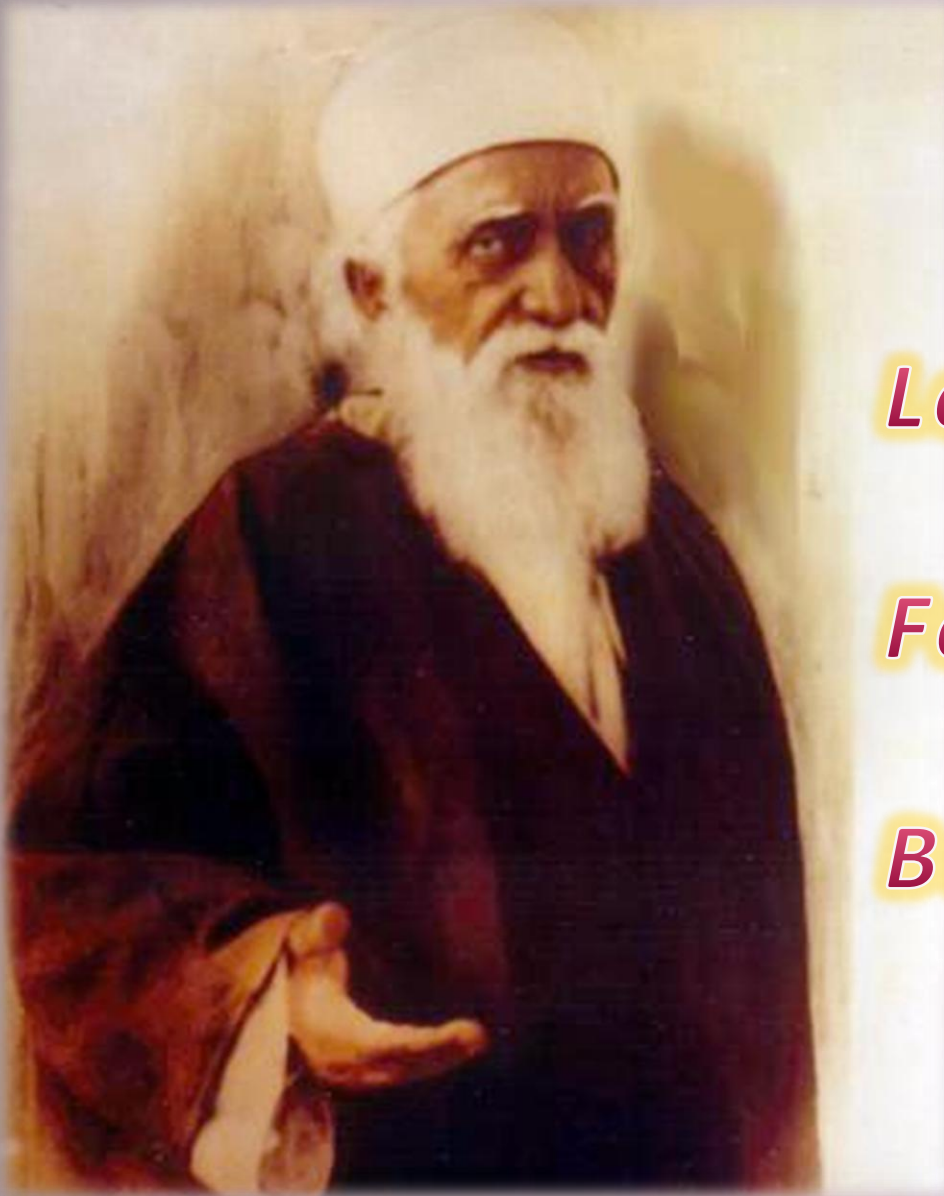


When we find ourselves in difficult situations –

When we wonder what our response to them should be –

When we need to make any decisions in our lives –

We should heed the Master's call:



Look at me.

Follow me.

Be as I am.