

# CHARACTERIZED BY AN ABIDING SENSE OF JOY

## *Practical application of spiritual principles in everyday life*

Compiled by Erica Toussaint, 1987; revised 2002

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### CULTURAL INFLUENCES (*The effects of the outside world*)

- 1) “The American Bahá’í Community, the leaven destined to leaven the whole, cannot hope, at this critical juncture in the fortunes of a struggling, perilously situated, spiritually moribund nation, to either escape the trials with which this nation is confronted, nor claim to be wholly immune from the evils that stain its character.” ... Shoghi Effendi. *Citadel of Faith*, p.127.
- 2) “The decline of religious and moral restraints has unleashed a fury of chaos and confusion that already bears the signs of universal anarchy. Engulfed in the maelstrom, the Bahá’í world community pursuing with indefeasible unity and spiritual force its redemptive mission, inevitably suffers the disruption of economic, social and civil life which afflict its fellow men throughout the planet.” ... The Universal House of Justice, *The Seven Year Plan*, p.4.
- 3) “But, O my brother, when a true seeker determines to take the step of search in the path leading to the knowledge of the Ancient of Days, he must, before all else, cleanse and purify his heart, which is the seat of the revelation of the inner mysteries of God, from the obscuring dust of all acquired knowledge....” ... Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán* p.192.

## BAHÁ’Í DEFINITIONS: HOW OUR WORLD OPERATES

### THE NATURE OF MAN (*Just exactly what are we?*)

- 4) “Man is the supreme Talisman. Lack of a proper education hath, however, deprived him of that which he doth inherently possess.” ... Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 259.
- 5) “Noble have I created thee, yet thou hast abased thyself. Rise then unto that for which thou wast created.” ... Bahá’u’lláh, *Hidden Words*, p. 9 #22.
- 6) “For in him (man) are potentially revealed all the attributes and names of God to a degree that no other created being hath excelled or surpassed. All these names and attributes are applicable to him.” ... Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 177

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**Moribund:** dying, coming to an end.

**Indefeasible:** not feasible; not to be defeated; not to be made void.

7) “In man there are two natures; his spiritual or higher nature and his material or lower nature. In one he approaches God, in the other he lives for the world alone. Signs of both these natures are to be found in men. In his material aspect he expresses untruth, cruelty and injustice; all these are the outcome of his lower nature. The attributes of his Divine nature are shown forth in love, mercy, kindness, truth and justice, one and all being expressions of his higher nature. Every good habit, every noble quality belongs to man's spiritual nature, whereas all his imperfections and sinful actions are born of his material nature.” ...Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Reality of Man*, p. 24.

### **PURPOSE OF LIFE (*What are we doing here, anyway?*)**

8) “I bear witness, O my God, that Thou hast created me to know Thee and to worship Thee.”

...Bahá'u'lláh, *Bahá'í Prayers* p. 4 (U.S. 1982)

9) “He is, and hath ever been, veiled in the ancient eternity of His Essence, and will remain in His Reality everlastingly hidden from the sight of men...” ...Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 47.

10) “Knowing God, therefore, means the comprehension and the knowledge of His attributes, and not of His Reality.” ...Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 221.

### **SPIRITUAL LAWS (*What affects us besides gravity?*)**

11) “Wouldst thou that the mind should not entrap thee? Teach it the science of the love of God!”

...Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys*, p. 52.

12) “Just as there are laws governing our physical lives, requiring that we must supply our bodies with certain foods, maintain them within a certain range of temperatures, and so forth, if we wish to avoid physical disabilities, so also there are laws governing our spiritual lives.” ...The Universal House of Justice, *Messages from the Universal House of Justice*, p. 105.

13) “... the earth is the mirror of the Kingdom; the material world corresponds to the spiritual world.” ...Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 283.

14) “Think not that We have revealed unto you a mere code of laws. Nay, rather, We have unsealed the choice Wine with the fingers of might and power.” ...Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 21.

### **JOY AND PAIN (*How do they fit in?*)**

15) “In this world we are influenced by two sentiments, Joy and Pain. Joy gives us wings! In times of joy our strength is more vital, our intellect keener, and our understanding less clouded. We seem better able to cope with the world and to find our sphere of usefulness. But when sadness visits us we become weak, our strength leaves us, our comprehension is dim and our intelligence veiled. The actualities of life seem to elude our grasp, the eyes of our spirits fail to discover the sacred mysteries, and we become even as dead beings. There is no human being untouched by

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**Talisman:** An object cut or engraved with a sign or character under various superstitious observances or influences of the heavens and thought to act as a charm to avert evil and bring good fortune. Something that produces extraordinary or apparently magical or miraculous effect.

these two influences; but all the sorrow and the grief that exist come from the world of matter--the spiritual world bestows only the joy! If we suffer it is the outcome of material things, and all the trials and troubles come from this world of illusion.” ...Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Reality of Man*, p. 16.

16) “Life is a constant struggle,...” ... Shoghi Effendi, *Principles of Bahá'í Administration*, p. 85.

17) “The steed of this Valley (the Valley of Love) is pain; and if there be no pain this journey will never end.” ...Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys*, p. 8.

## **BAHÁ'Í DEFINITIONS: BEING HAPPY IN THIS WORLD**

### **FAITH (*The “mechanics” of relying on God*)**

18) “By faith is meant, first, conscious knowledge, and second, the practice of good deeds.” ...Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í World Faith*, p. 383.

“There was once a lover who had sighed for long years in separation from his beloved, and wasted in the fire of remoteness. From the rule of love, his heart was empty of patience, and his body weary of his spirit; he reckoned life without her as a mockery, and time consumed him away. How many a day he found no rest in longing for her; how many a night the pain of her kept him from sleep; his body was worn to a sigh, his heart's wound had turned him to a cry of sorrow. He had given a thousand lives for one taste of the cup of her presence, but it availed him not. The doctors knew no cure for him, and companions avoided his company; yea, physicians have no medicine for one sick of love, unless the favor of the beloved one deliver him.

“At last, the tree of his longing yielded the fruit of despair, and the fire of his hope fell to ashes. Then one night he could live no more, and he went out of his house and made for the marketplace. On a sudden, a watchman followed after him. He broke into a run, with the watchman following; then other watchmen came together, and barred every passage to the weary one. And the wretched one cried from his heart, and ran here and there, and moaned to himself: “Surely this watchman is 'Izra'il, my angel of death, following so fast upon me; or he is a tyrant of men, seeking to harm me.” His feet carried him on, the one bleeding with the arrow of love, and his heart lamented. Then he came to a garden wall, and with untold pain he scaled it, for it proved very high; and forgetting his life, he threw himself down to the garden.

“And there he beheld his beloved with a lamp in her hand, searching for a ring she had lost. When the heart-surrendered lover looked on his ravishing love, he drew a great breath and raised up his hands in prayer, crying; 'O God! Give Thou glory to the watchman, and riches and long life. For the watchman was Gabriel, guiding this poor one; or he was Israfil, bringing life to this wretched one!

“Indeed, his words were true, for he had found many a secret justice in this seeming tyranny of the watchman, and seen how many a mercy lay hid behind the veil. Out of wrath, the guard had led him who was athirst in love's desert to the sea of his loved one, and lit up the dark night of absence with the light of reunion. He had driven one who was afar, into the garden of nearness, had guided an ailing soul to the heart's physician.

“Now if the lover could have looked ahead, he would have blessed the watchman at the start, and prayed on his behalf, and he would have seen that tyranny as justice; but since the end was veiled to him, he moaned and made his plaint in the beginning. Yet those who journey in the garden land of knowledge, because they see the end in the beginning, see peace in war and friendliness in anger.” ···Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys*, p. 15.

19) “My calamity is My providence, outwardly it is fire and vengeance, but inwardly it is light and mercy.” ···Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, p. 20 # 19.

20) “The fowls of the air and the beasts of the field receive their meat each day from Thee, and all beings partake of Thy care and loving-kindness.” ···Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í Prayers*, p.22.

21) “I swear by My life! Nothing save that which profiteth them can befall My loved ones.”  
···Bahá'u'lláh, quoted in *The Advent of Divine Justice* p.82.

22) “The more difficulties one sees in the world the more perfect one becomes. The more you plow and dig the ground the more fertile it becomes. The more you cut the branches of a tree the higher and stronger it grows. The more you put the gold in the fire, the purer it becomes. The more you sharpen the steel by grinding the better it cuts. Therefore, the more sorrows one sees the more perfect one becomes. That is why, in all times, the Prophets of God have had tribulations and difficulties to withstand. The more often the captain of a ship is in a tempest and difficult sailing the greater his knowledge becomes. Therefore I am happy that you have had great tribulations and difficulties. For this I am very happy—that you have had many sorrows. Strange it is that I love you and still I am happy that you have had sorrows.” ···Abdu'l-Bahá in *Fire and Gold* p.13 in *Star of the West* Vol. 14 #2 p. 41.

23) “Love is a light that never dwelleth in a heart possessed by fear.” ···Baha'u'llah, *The Four Valleys*, p. 59

### DETACHMENT (*The “key” to it all!*)

24) “When people said to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, “We are glad, oh so glad that you are free,” he replied: “Freedom is not a matter of place, but of condition. I was happy in that prison, for those days were passed in the path of service.

To me prison was freedom.

Troubles are a rest to me.

Death is life.

To be despised is honor.

“Therefore was I full of happiness all through that prison time. When one is released from the prison of self, that is indeed freedom! For self is the greatest prison. When this release takes place one can never be imprisoned.

“Unless one accepts dire vicissitudes, not with dull resignation, but with radiant acquiescence, one cannot attain this freedom.” ···Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Divine Art of Living*, p. 70. (1965 ed.)

· **Vicissitudes:** Irregular changes of circumstances, especially in life; ups and downs of fortune.

· **Acquiescence:** A quiet assent; a silent submission, or submission with apparent consent.

25) “Regarding the statement in *The Hidden Words*, that man must renounce his own self, the meaning is that he must renounce his inordinate desires, his selfish purposes and the promptings of his human self, and seek out the holy breathings of the spirit, and follow the yearnings of his higher self, and immerse himself in the sea of sacrifice, with his heart fixed upon the beauty of the All-Glorious.” ... ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 207

26) “Know ye that by “the world” is meant your unawareness of Him Who is your Maker, and your absorption in aught else but Him.” ... Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 276.

27) “Just as the earth attracts everything to the centre of gravity, and every object thrown upward into space will come down, so also material ideas and worldly thought attract man to the centre of self. Anger, passion, ignorance, prejudice, greed, envy, covetousness, jealousy and suspicion prevent man from ascending to the realms of holiness, imprisoning him in the claws of self and the cage of egotism. The physical man, unassisted by the divine power, trying to escape from one of these invisible enemies, will unconsciously fall into the hands of another. No sooner does he attempt to soar upward than the density of the love of self, like the power of gravity, draws him to the centre of the earth. The only power that is capable of delivering man from this captivity is the power of the breaths of the Holy Spirit.” ... ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í Readings*, p. 305 (January 6).

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### **RELATIONSHIPS (*The true test of what we've learned!*)**

28) “If we Bahá’ís cannot attain to cordial unity among ourselves, then we fail to realize the main purpose for which the Báb, Bahá’u’lláh and the Beloved Master lived and suffered.

“In order to achieve this cordial unity one of the first essentials insisted on by Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is that we resist the natural tendency to let our attention dwell on the faults and failings of others rather than on our own. Each of us is responsible for one life only, and that is our own. Each of us is immeasurably far from being “perfect as our heavenly father is perfect” and the task of perfecting our own life and character is one that requires all our attention, our will-power and energy. If we allow our attention and energy to be taken up in efforts to keep others right and remedy their faults, we are wasting precious time. We are like ploughmen each of whom has his team to manage and his plough to direct, and in order to keep his furrow straight he must keep his eye on his goal and concentrate on his own task. If he looks to this side and that to see how Tom and Harry are getting on and to criticize their ploughing, then his own furrow will assuredly become crooked.

“On no subject are the Bahá’í teachings more emphatic than on the necessity to abstain from faultfinding and backbiting while being ever eager to discover and root out our own faults and overcome our own failings.

“If we profess loyalty to Bahá’u’lláh, to our Beloved Master and our dear Guardian, then we must show our love by obedience to these explicit teachings. Deeds not words are what they

demand, and no amount of fervour in the use of expressions of loyalty and adulation will compensate for failure to live in the spirit of the teachings.” ... (From a letter dated 12 May 1925 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) *Living the Life: a Compilation*, p. 10 (British Publishing Trust) also in *Compilation of Compilations vol. II p. 3-4*.

29) “He ('Abdu'l-Bahá) was asked, ‘How shall I overcome seeing the faults of others – recognizing the wrong in others?’, and He replied: ‘I will tell you. Whenever you recognize the fault of another, think of yourself! What are my imperfections?- and try to remove them. Do this whenever you are tried through the words or deeds of others. Thus you will grow, become more perfect. You will overcome self, you will not even have time to think of the faults of others...’

“You are quite correct in your understanding of the importance of avoiding backbiting; such conduct strikes at the very unity of the Bahá’í community. In a letter written to an individual believer on behalf of the Guardian it is stated: “If we are better, if we show love, patience, and understanding of the weakness of others, if we seek to never criticize but rather encourage, others will do likewise, and we can really help the Cause through our example and spiritual strength.”

\*\*\*Universal House of Justice, *Lights of Guidance* p. 89.

30) “Be not grieved if thou performest it thyself alone. Let God be all-sufficient for thee. Commune intimately with His Spirit, and be thou of the thankful.” ... Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* p.280.

31) “His Holiness, the blessed Báb, mentions in his book that every one must consider at the end of each day what have been his actions. If he finds something which would please God, he must thank Him and pray to be strengthened to do this good act throughout his life; but if his actions have not been approvable or honest, he must earnestly ask God for strength to do better.” ... Attributed to 'Abdu'l-Bahá in *Fire and Gold* p. 219, in *Star of the West* Vol. 9, no. 8 p.96

32) “...the Cause of the Ancient Beauty is the very essence of love,...existing only that all may... become servants one to another,  
adore one another,  
bless one another,  
praise one another;  
that each one may loose his tongue and extol the rest without exception,  
each one voice his gratitude to all the rest;  
that all should lift up their eyes to the horizon of glory, and remember that they are linked to the Holy Threshold;  
that they should see nothing but good in one another,  
hear nothing but praise of one another,  
and speak no word of one another save only to praise.” ...'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 229-230.

33) “One must see in every human being only that which is worthy of praise. When this is done, one can be a friend to the whole human race. If, however, we look at people from the standpoint of their faults, then being a friend to them is a formidable task.” ...'Abdu'l-Bahá: , *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 169.

34) “Act in such a way that your heart may be free from hatred. Let not your heart be offended with anyone. If someone commits an error and wrong toward you, you must instantly forgive him. Do not complain of others. Refrain from reprimanding them, and if you wish to give admonition

or advice, let it be offered in such a way that it will not burden the bearer. Turn all your thoughts toward bringing joy to hearts. Beware! Beware! lest ye offend any heart.” ... ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace* p. 453.

35) “See ye no strangers; rather see all men as friends, for love and unity come hard when ye fix your gaze on otherness.... Wherefore must the loved ones of God associate in affectionate fellowship with stranger and friend alike, showing forth to all the utmost loving-kindness, disregarding the degree of their capacity, never asking whether they deserve to be loved.... If others hurl their darts against you, offer them milk and honey in return; if they poison your lives, sweeten their souls; if they injure you, teach them how to be comforted; if they inflict a wound upon you, be a balm to their sores; if they sting you, hold to their lips a refreshing cup.” ... ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p24.

36) “Remember how Adam and the others once dwelt together in Eden. No sooner, however, did a quarrel break out between Adam and Satan than they were, one and all, banished from the Garden, and this was meant as a warning to the human race, a means of telling humankind that dissension--even with the Devil--is the way to bitter loss. This is why, in our illumined age, God teacheth that conflicts and disputes are not allowable, not even with Satan himself.” ... ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 275.

37) “Do not quarrel with anybody, and shun every form of dispute. Utter the Word of God. If he accepteth it the desired purpose is attained, and if he turneth away leave him to himself and trust to God. Such is the attribute of those who are firm in the Covenant.” ... ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 210.

38) “...When a difficulty is brought out into the daylight and freely discussed by a duly authorized and responsible group of people who are sincerely desirous of finding the best solution and are free from prejudice or personal motive, then there is a good chance of overcoming it, but discussions of the faults of others, behind their backs by unauthorized people who have no authority to take action in the matter, is surely one of the most fertile causes--probably THE most fertile cause--of disunity, and the importance of putting an end to this practice should be impressed on all Bahá’is.”

\* On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance*, p.89.

## CONSULTATION (The spiritual “Trick” to Problem Solving)

39) “In all things it is necessary to consult. This matter should be forcibly stressed by thee, so that consultation may be observed by all. The intent of what hath been revealed from the Pen of the Most High is that consultation may be fully carried out among the friends, inasmuch as it is and will always be a cause of awareness and of awakening and a source of good and well-being.”

... ‘Bahá’u’lláh, *Consultation: a Compilation*, p. 3. also in *Compilation of Compilations Vol. I*, p. 93.

40) “Consultation bestoweth greater awareness and transmuteth conjecture into certitude. ... ‘Bahá’u’lláh, *Consultation: a Compilation*, p. 3. also in *Compilation of Compilations Vol. I*, p. 93

41) “. . . Therefore true consultation is spiritual conference in the attitude and atmosphere of love. Members must love each other in the spirit of fellowship in order that good results may be forthcoming. Love and fellowship are the foundation.” ... ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 72

42) “The prime requisites for them that take counsel together are:

- purity of motive,
- radiance of spirit,
- detachment from all else save God,
- attraction to His Divine Fragrances,
- humility and lowliness amongst His loved ones,
- patience and long-suffering in difficulties
- and servitude to His exalted Threshold.

“Should they be graciously aided to acquire these attributes, victory from the unseen kingdom of Bahá shall be vouchsafed to them....The members thereof must take counsel together in such wise that no occasion for ill-feeling or discord may arise. This can be attained when every member expresseth with absolute freedom his own opinion and setteth forth his argument. Should any one oppose, he must on no account feel hurt for not until matters are fully discussed can the right way be revealed.” ...Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in the Guardian's letter dated 5 March 1922 to the Friends in America. *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 21, also: *Consultation: a Compilation*, p. 5.(emphasis added)

43) “Bahá’í consultation is not an easy process. It requires love, kindness, moral courage and humility. Thus no member should ever allow himself to be prevented from expressing frankly his view because it may offend a fellow member; and realizing this, no member should take offense at another member’s statements.” ... from a letter of the **Universal House of Justice** to the National Spiritual Assembly of Italy, August 26 1965, *Lights of Guidance* p. 180.

44) “Blessed are they who are the means of making unity among the friends, and pity on those who in the right or wrong are the cause of discord. For instance: when one is in the right in a case in dispute, and his minority prevents him from establishing this rightful matter, instead of agitating the subject, if he will humbly submit to sacrifice his position for the sake of unity and peace, God will accept that sacrifice and ere long the rightful matter will be established without any further dispute, by the Divine assistance; whereas without such sacrifice and submissiveness great harm might ensue. The friends must be prepared to efface themselves at all times. Seeking the approval of men is many times the cause of imperiling the approval of God.” ...Abdu'l-Bahá, in *Star of the West*, Vol. 6, no. 6, p. 45.

45) “Your letter of 14 February 1973 enquiring about the uses of Bahá’í consultation has been received.

“This is, of course, a matter in which rigidity should be avoided.

“When a believer has a problem concerning which he must make a decision, he has several courses open to him. If it is a matter that affects the interests of the Faith he should consult with the appropriate Assembly or committee, but individuals have many problems which are purely personal and there is no obligation upon them to take such problems to the institutions of the Faith; indeed, when the needs of the teaching work are of such urgency it is better if the friends will not burden their Assemblies with personal problems that they can solve by themselves.

“A Bahá’í who has a problem may wish to make his own decision upon it after prayer and after weighing all the aspects of it in his own mind; he may prefer to seek the counsel of individual friends or of professional counselors such as his doctor or lawyer so that he can consider such advice when making his decision; or in a case where several people are involved, such as a family



situation, he may want to gather together those who are affected so that they may arrive at a collective decision. There is also no objection whatever to a Bahá'í's asking a group of people to consult together on a problem facing him.

“It should be borne in mind that all consultation is aimed at arriving at a solution to a problem and is quite different from the sort of group baring of the soul that is popular in some circles these days and which borders on the kind of confession that is forbidden in the faith. On the subject of confession the Guardian's secretary wrote on his behalf to an individual believer:

'We are forbidden to confess to any person, as do the Catholics to their priests, our sins and shortcomings, or to do so in public, as some religious sects do. However, if we spontaneously desire to acknowledge we have been wrong in something, or that we have some fault of character, and ask another person's forgiveness or pardon, we are quite free to do so. The Guardian wants to point out, however, that we are not obliged to do so. It rests entirely with the individual.'” ...*Universal House of Justice, Consultation: a Compilation, p. 23. also in The Compilation of Compilations Vol. I, p. 109.*

46) “Indeed the believers have not yet fully learned to draw on each other's love for strength and consolation in time of need. The Cause of God is endowed with tremendous powers, and the reason the believers do not gain more from it is because they have not learned to fully draw on these mighty forces of love and strength and harmony generated by the Faith.” ...*On behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, Living the Life: a Compilation, p. 18. also in The Compilation of Compilations Vol. II, p. 9.*

47) “Soon will your swiftly-passing days be over, and the fame and riches, the comforts, the joys provided by this rubbish-heap, the world, will be gone without a trace. Summon ye, then, the people to God, and invite humanity to follow the example of the Company on high. Be ye loving fathers to the orphan, and a refuge to the helpless, and a treasury for the poor, and a cure for the ailing. Be ye the helpers of every victim of oppression, the patrons of the disadvantaged. Think ye at all times of rendering some service to every member of the human race. Pay ye no heed to aversion and rejection, to disdain, hostility, injustice: act ye in the opposite way. Be ye sincerely kind, not in appearance only. Let each one of God's loved ones centre his attention on this: to be the Lord's mercy to man; to be the Lord's grace. Let him do some good to every person whose path he crosseth, and be of some benefit to him.... In this way, the light of divine guidance will shine forth, and the blessings of God will cradle all mankind: for love is light, no matter in what abode it dwelleth; and hate is darkness, no matter where it may make its nest.” ...*Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá p.3*