

# MYSTICISM, SCIENCE AND REVELATION

by

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*To my daughter*  
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## INTRODUCTION

This book has a number of objectives. First of all I wish to make it clear that the essential element of true religion is that mystical feeling which, in some inexplicable manner, unites man with God. Speaking rather broadly, anyone who experiences this feeling is a mystic; but we shall be primarily concerned with the type of mystic who believes that finite man may attain the presence of the Absolute and become one with the Absolute, and it will be necessary to show that his claims are not valid. Some scientific inquiry must, therefore, be made into the nature of mystical experience; for without this experience the mystic would have insufficient ground for his claims. It will also be necessary to investigate the difference between mysticism and prophetic religion. Finally I desire to make it clear that revealed truth is not foreign to experience, if we evaluate it in terms of "total experience" and not merely experience in the world of science.

The reader who has an analytical mind will probably be interested in what the physicist has to say about mysticism, and for this reason I have indicated, in a rather general way, the viewpoint of the physicist.

Personally, I believe it is important to remember that religion belongs to the *world of value* and that science cannot make *value judgments*. The reader must also bear in mind that the modern physicist is no longer completely dominated by the mechanistic concept. As a scientist I naturally have great sympathy for the "scientifically-minded" man who is struggling with fundamental issues like mystical experience and divine revelation.

In discussions concerning prophetic revelation I assume that all the great historic religions, like Christianity and Islám, are divine in origin. I have drawn freely on the Bahá'í Faith for, as a serious student of religion, I realize that it is the consummation of all the prophetic religions of the past. Moreover, as we might expect, it is decidedly more explicit on the subject of mysticism than any of the revelations which preceded it. For those who are not familiar with the Bahá'í Faith, a few remarks about its origin and its aims have been included in the Epilogue.

Of all the books that I have consulted, *Das Gebet*, by Friedrich Heiler, is the most stimulating and the most instructive. I have consequently used it freely.

I am very happy to express here my appreciation of the work of the translator, Karl Schüek. Not only has he taken great care in the translation which, as one may imagine, was no simple matter, but he has also made valuable suggestions. I also wish to express my gratitude to Jane Lovely for typing the manuscript.

G. A. SHOOK.

ELIOT, MAINE.



## CHAPTER I

### GOD AND HIS CREATION

The mystic, as we shall see, maintains that he can enter the presence of the infinite God, or that he can experience God *immediately*. Now the mystical philosopher, on the other hand, is caught between two incompatible tendencies. He would like to be scientific, and to treat mystical experiences as he would treat the data of sense perception. He says, in substance, that the mystic has had an extraordinary experience. The mystic maintains that he has been in the presence of the Infinite; and, while this does not sound plausible to *us*, *he* is absolutely certain that he has been in the Divine Presence, and we cannot doubt his sincerity nor his intellectual integrity. Surely then, we can consider what he reports with an unbiassed mind.

On the other hand, the mystical philosopher knows that the mystic can only report on a psychic experience, nothing more. Any metaphysical doctrine the mystic may associate with this experience is quite another matter.

But again (the mystical philosopher may argue), if the mystic says he has been in the presence of God—and very many do make this claim with good faith—can we completely ignore his report? The mystical philosopher may continue: Is not the world of value, the world of art, music and poetry, just as much a part of our consciousness as the world of sense impression? Is not the spiritual world more real than the symbolic world of science? May we not assume that the heart functions in the world of spirit as the mind functions

in the world of matter? May we not assume, moreover, that God reveals himself to man through the ecstatic experience?

Every mystic who claims that he can enter the presence of God also maintains that this ineffable experience transcends every other experience in the religious life. Therefore he might claim, and most of the mystics probably do claim, that for him this ecstatic experience must be identified with the Infinite. He may also add, and with some justification, that he is really not concerned about the opinion of those who have never had such an experience.

To be sure, we may define God as *that which* we experience immediately, in contemplation. This would certainly simplify the issue; but this kind of simplification is far from satisfactory. Take, for example, the pantheistic concept. If we define God as "the whole" and consider the world as a part of "the whole," then we do not have to explain the difference between God and nature. While such a concept might appeal to a few poets and a few scientists, it really, as we well know, raises more questions than it answers.

Perhaps we can learn a lesson from the history of classical physics. It introduced a simplification into our scientific thinking that had never existed before. It began by making man a potential God, capable of explaining almost anything, natural or supernatural; but it ended by making him a mere aggregation of particles devoid of free will.

Now the mystic realizes that this immediate knowledge of the presence of God cannot rest upon experience alone; nevertheless without this supernormal psychic experience he would probably never claim that he could enter the presence of, or become one with, the Infinite.

If, therefore, we are striving for a critical knowledge of mysticism our first concern must be with epistemology. Let us then review briefly the various kinds of knowledge with which we are more or less familiar.

### Different Kinds of Knowledge

We do not have to prove that we are happy. Our own unsupported testimony is quite sufficient. The cause of our happiness is, however, quite another matter, a matter of inference; and our inferential knowledge is not infallible. We are never absolutely sure about the origin of our inner experiences; but the experiences themselves are known to us by direct cognition, that is, they are immediately apprehended. If a man has an aversion to religion no argument will convince him that the *feeling* of aversion is not real. It is real and we can do nothing about it. But we might convince him that the *reason* for this feeling is false.

The feeling of beauty, compassion, or love is just as *real* to us as are external objects. In fact it is decidedly more real, for the external world is known to us only by inference. We see an object before us and we call it a stone merely because it looks like other objects which are known to us as stones. As a matter of fact this object may be a piece of wood or plastic and not a stone. Strange as it may seem, the world about us is not very real. People have thoughts and feelings regarding it, and these are real; but the world is not.

Again, we know that in meditation, when the mental activity is low, *insight* or *intuition* often suggest what is new. In other words, there is a kind of knowledge that comes through illumination, insight or intuition; something that transcends mental activity and sense data. We cannot ignore facts. Speaking of mystical philosophy, Russell says: "There is, first, the belief in insight as against discursive analytic knowledge; the belief in a way of wisdom, sudden, penetrating, coercive, which is contrasted with the slow and fallible study of outward appearance by a science relying wholly upon the sense."<sup>1</sup> The first step, Russell suggests,

<sup>1</sup>Bertrand Russell, *Mysticism and Logic*. London, Allen & Unwin, 1936. p. 8.

is the feeling that beyond our daily experience there is a great mystery. Then the belief comes that reality may be found through illumination. Although he does not agree with the mystic's conclusions, he does maintain that there is something to be gained from the mystical experience which could not be obtained in any other way. But while the modern philosopher realizes the beneficial result that may accrue from moments of illumination, he is not misled, like the religious mystic, by immediate experience. He distinguishes between mystical experience and the metaphysical basis of experience. To quote from Russell again: "Of the reality or unreality of the mystic's world I know nothing. I have no wish to deny it, nor even to declare that the insight which reveals it is not a genuine insight. What I do wish to maintain—and it is here that the scientific attitude becomes imperative—is that insight, untested and unsupported, is an insufficient guarantee of truth, in spite of the fact that much of the most important truth is first suggested by its means."<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, Russell shows that while reason and intuition have their separate functions they are not antagonistic. "Reason is a harmonizing, controlling force rather than a creative one. Even in the most purely logical realm it is insight that first arrives at what is new."<sup>2</sup>

Intuition may indicate the solution of a certain problem, but it requires reason to confirm it; for immediate experience is not knowledge, although it is necessary to it. Conversely, if one did not use reason constantly to interpret intuition (immediate experience), one would not be able to use one's intuition. That is, a meaningless experience such as a feeling of well-being, mere exaltation, or depression, would probably not lead to the solution of any problem.

<sup>1</sup>Russell, *ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.*, p. 13.

The creative force of genius, then, is more akin to mystical experience than to reason.

Philosophy in its search for transcendent values has passed beyond the limitations of the mind while at the same time realizing that there can be no real progress without the mind. The quest of the philosopher is very like that of the mystic, except that the philosopher realizes the function of the mind while the mystic denies its place. Neither expects to reach its goal through the aid of conventional religion. Perhaps we should not call intuition knowledge, but since it is essential to new knowledge we are justified in using the term *intuitive knowledge*. We must remember, however, that intuition, like all other human methods of acquiring knowledge, is liable to error. Broadly speaking, then, there is a kind of intuitive knowledge (as opposed to discursive knowledge), which comes to us through an inexplicable, unselfconscious process of thought. Science does not deny this kind of knowledge. In fact, no great creative work was ever accomplished without intuitive knowledge.

We might distinguish between the intuitive knowledge of the scientists and the kind that comes to the religious genius, which is ostensibly of the higher order. The mystic in a state of ecstasy or vision sometimes receives what he calls *revealed knowledge*. The mystic believes that the phenomenal psychic experience produces something that is superior to any result of mental effort. Moreover, he is inclined to believe that his intuitive or revealed knowledge is more valid than the intuitive knowledge of the scientist. But here again we must remember that the intuition of the mystic, like the intuition of other artists, is not infallible.

Contrasted with intuitive knowledge there is the kind that comes through experience, which we call *empirical knowledge*. The scientist, as we all know, is concerned with empirical knowledge, though not exclusively. He is also concerned

with the kind of knowledge that comes through mental processes, logic, inductive and deductive reasoning. This *inferential knowledge* is indispensable to science. Some of the most important scientific truths are derived from known laws and assumptions.

### Concepts of God

(1) *Immanence*: Immanence means indwelling. According to this concept God is intimately related to His creation, His universe. When we say God is immanent in nature we mean that there is a close relation between the creator and the thing created, nature. In transcendence the creator is separate and distinct from His creation, like the carpenter and the table. The table is not in any way a part of the carpenter. In immanence God is a kind of impersonal order, and the world is an integral part of this order.

(2) *Transcendence*: God is a definite, individual entity. He created the world, but He is entirely separate from it just as the carpenter is separate from the table. God is distinguished from His creation. He does not dwell in the world nor in man; man is not a part of God.

(3) *Pantheism*: God is the totality of creation. God is the whole; the world is a phase of the whole. God is not other than the world, as in transcendence. According to pantheism, man is a part of God or man contains a part of God. Now if we admit the first concept we can maintain that God is in us, while if we admit the third we can claim that we are identical with God. Both are necessary for mysticism in its extreme form.

(4) *Deism*: God created the world; He is the First Cause. He is not in the world and has no concern for the world. The God of deism is not a personal God as is the God of prophetic revelation. When a scientist says he believes in

God, he generally means that he admits the universe is controlled by an intelligent force and that he is willing to identify this force with the God of religion. It does not mean that this creator of man and the universe hears and answers prayers. Usually the scientist is not concerned with a personal God, a God who is interested in man's daily welfare.

(5) *Theism*: The popular modern idea of this concept is that God is other than nature but immanent in nature, in every activity of nature. God created the world but is still in the world. He is in the world but at the same time is other than the world. In a sense He is both immanent and transcendent.

### Man's Relation to God

Every prophetic revelation like Islám, Christianity or the Bahá'í Faith has advanced some doctrine of man's relation to God, his creator. Now, if we assume that God is in some way responsible for man's existence, a number of questions naturally come to mind. Was there ever a time when man did not exist somewhere in the universe (we are certain that there was a time when he did not exist on this earth)? Did he evolve from some lower form? If so, when did the soul and the mind appear? What is the connection between the soul and the body? Is the soul immortal? Is God unknowable? If so, how can we obtain any knowledge of Him? Finally, what is man's relation to God? How did he proceed or come forth from God?

Now the Bahá'í Faith is very explicit on all these questions. They are discussed thoroughly in the book, *Some Answered Questions*<sup>1</sup> by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the conclusions are compatible

<sup>1</sup>*Some Answered Questions*, collected and translated from the Persian of 'Abdu'l-Bahá by Laura Clifford Barney. New York, Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1930.

with our modern scientific outlook. They are vital to our subject, and we must discuss a few of them in detail later; but for the present it will be sufficient to merely state the answers given to some of them.

Man has always existed somewhere in the universe. This earth evolved, and in its early stages man did not exist upon it, but the species known as man did exist somewhere in the universe. Man evolved from a lower form, but from the beginning he was potentially man. He is a distinct species. In the individual man, soul and mind existed from the beginning. In the infancy of man, soul and mind appear, but they are imperfect. When man becomes mature the soul and mind attain some degree of perfection. The connection between the soul of man and his body is somewhat like the connection between the sun and a mirror. When we look in the mirror we see the sun (that is, we see the *image* of the sun) but we know the sun does not exist in the mirror. We speak of the soul leaving the body, but it is understood that the soul really does not enter nor leave the body. The body may be impaired or completely destroyed but the soul is not affected. The soul is immortal; it has a beginning but no end. Its existence starts at the time of conception. God the Infinite is unknowable; that is, the Divine Essence is unknowable. Man cannot comprehend God, the Divine Essence, through his intelligence nor through his feelings and inner experiences. This transcendental nature of the Divine Essence is stressed in the Bahá'í writings. (The God of mysticism, as we shall see, is not an absolutely transcendental God). Our knowledge of God comes to us through the Prophets, or Manifestations of God.

We must now consider man's relation to God in some detail. 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us there are two kinds of proceeding, coming forth, or dependence: proceeding through creation, or emanation, and proceeding through manifestation.



### The Proceeding or Appearance Through Emanation or Creation

This kind of proceeding is like the coming forth of the writing from the writer. The writing emanates from the writer. It is a creation of the writer. The writing is not a part of the writer. It is entirely different from the writer, not the writer in a different form.<sup>1</sup> In a similar manner the human spirit or soul emanates from God, or the soul is a creation of God. It does not manifest Him; it is not the Infinite in another form.

### Proceeding Through Manifestation

This kind of proceeding is like the coming forth of the tree from the seed. The seed is a potential tree. We might say, the tree proceeds or comes forth from the seed through manifestation. The flower manifests the seed; the seed appears in the form of the flower. The flower is not a creation of the seed. It is, in a sense, not entirely different from the seed. It is the same reality in a different form.

Now the Prophets manifest the attributes and perfections of God, and not His Essence. The Prophet is like a perfect mirror facing the sun.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the sun is not identical with the mirror. Just as a mirror reflects the light of the sun, so do the Prophets reflect the attributes and perfections of God, or we may say that the Prophets *manifest* the attributes and perfections of God.

The rays of the sun which are reflected from the mirror are only another form of the light which is emitted from the sun. As we said above, the soul is not a manifestation of God, it is not the Infinite in another form. We cannot think of the Infinite God, the Unknown Essence as being divided into parts. Some mystics, as we shall see, would

<sup>1</sup>A bdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 239.

<sup>2</sup>A bdu'l-Bahá, *ibid.*, p. 241.

like to believe that man contains a part of God or that some of the Divine Reality resides within him, and this belief is essential to their theory that man can enter the presence of the Infinite God or that he can experience God immediately.

## CHAPTER II

### GOD AND HIS CREATION (*continued*)

#### **The Three Worlds of Being**

For the mystic there are two and only two realms of being, (worlds or planes of existence); the world of God or the world of the Divine Essence, and the world of creation which includes man. The two-world doctrine leads to an essential dualism, as we shall see later.

The Bahá'í Faith upholds the existence of three worlds: the world of God (the Absolute or the Divine Essence), the world of the Prophets, and the world of creation. This doctrine is explicit in the Bahá'í Revelation and implicit in most of the Prophetic Revelations.

#### **The World of the Divine Essence**

Finite man cannot experience the Infinite God immediately, nor can he gain knowledge of God through logical arguments. We say that God is omnipotent or that He is merciful, but we cannot comprehend His omnipotence nor His mercy. In view of the suffering we witness to-day some find it rather difficult to believe that He is both omnipotent and merciful. The qualities we attribute to God have their origin in our own limited understanding.

The transcendental nature of the Divine Essence is emphasized over and over again in the Bahá'í writings. Bahá'u'lláh says: "*All that the sages and mystics have said or written have never exceeded, nor can they ever hope to exceed, the limitations to which man's finite mind hath been strictly subjected. To whatever heights the mind of the most exalted of men may soar, however great the depths which the*

*detached and understanding heart can penetrate, such mind and heart can never transcend that which is the creature of their own conceptions and the product of their own thoughts. The meditations of the profoundest thinker, the devotions of the holiest of saints, the highest expressions of praise from either human pen or tongue, are but a reflection of that which hath been created within themselves, through the revelation of the Lord, their God.”<sup>1</sup>*

The only way in which we can comprehend God is through the Prophets or Manifestations of God. Bahá'u'lláh reminds us, in the Kitáb-i-Iqán, that: “*These Prophets and chosen Ones of God are the recipients and revealers of all the unchangeable attributes and names of God. They are the mirrors that truly and faithfully reflect the light of God. Whatsoever is applicable to them is in reality applicable to God, Himself, Who is both the Visible and the Invisible.*”<sup>2</sup>

### **The World of the Prophets**

The ultimate aim of the mystic is to attain the presence of the Infinite God, and to become one with Him. Catherine of Genoa (c. 1447—1510) declared: “My ‘I’ is God, and I know no other ‘I’ but this My God;” and Madame Guyon (1648—1717) made the same claim. Some mystics do not go quite so far, that is they do not identify the “I” of man with the Divine Essence, but they do maintain that they can attain the presence of the Absolute, the Divine Essence. Koepf says: “The mystic’s soul, turned inwards, experiences God in itself in its innermost essence and deepest foundation,” and Elsa of Neustadt: “God is in me and I am in Him; He is mine and I am His.”

Prophetic revelation has never held out such a hope to man, and the Bahá’í Faith makes it quite clear that finite man

<sup>1</sup>*Gleanings From The Writings Of Bahá'u'lláh*, translated by Shoghi Effendi. New York, Bahá’í Publishing Committee, 1939, p. 317.

<sup>2</sup>*Kitáb-i-Iqán, The Book of Certitude*, revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, translated by Shoghi Effendi. New York, Bahá’í Publishing Committee, 1931 pp. 142, 143.

can never attain the presence of the Absolute, the Divine Essence, nor become one with the Absolute. However, God and man are not completely and eternally separated: the Prophet is a link between the world of the Divine Essence and the world of creation, which includes man. The Prophets have a human and a divine side, they can reveal the divine will to man and they can manifest the divine perfections to man. In the words of Bahá'u'lláh: *“And since there can be no tie of direct intercourse to bind the one true God with His creation, and no resemblance whatever can exist between the transient and the Eternal, the contingent and the Absolute, He hath ordained that in every age and dispensation a pure and stainless Soul be made manifest in the kingdoms of earth and heaven. Unto this subtle, this mysterious and ethereal Being He hath assigned a twofold nature; the physical, pertaining to the world of matter, and the spiritual, which is born of the substance of God Himself.”*<sup>1</sup>

And again He says: *“The door of the knowledge of the Ancient Beauty hath ever been, and will continue forever to be, closed in the face of men. No man's understanding shall ever gain access unto His holy court. As a token of His mercy, however, and as a proof of His loving-kindness, He hath manifested unto men the Day Stars of His divine guidance, the Symbols of His divine unity, and hath ordained the knowledge of these sanctified Beings to be identical with the knowledge of His own Self. Whoso recognizeth them hath recognized God. Whoso hearkeneth to their call, hath hearkened to the Voice of God, and whoso testifieth to the truth of their Revelation, hath testified to the truth of God Himself.”*<sup>2</sup>

They have a unique station, and no matter how far man may advance he can never reach the station of Prophet.

<sup>1</sup>Gleanings, p. 66.

<sup>2</sup>ibid., p. 49.

'Abdu'l-Bahá makes this clear many times. In one place He says: "*However far the disciples might progress, they could never become Christ.*"<sup>1</sup>

When the Prophet comes to the world He revives the spiritual life of man and also establishes a new civilization. The Prophet reflects the Holy Spirit as a mirror reflects the light of the sun. We sometimes say, in symbolic language, that the Prophet breathes the Holy Spirit into the world and thereby creates a new spiritual and social order.

Man has capacities, but they are latent and they must be released. As Bahá'u'lláh says: "*These energies with which the Day Star of Divine bounty and Source of heavenly guidance hath endowed the reality of man lie, however, latent within him, even as the flame is hidden within the candle and the rays of light are potentially present in the lamp. The radiance of these energies may be obscured by worldly desires even as the light of the sun can be concealed beneath the dust and dross which cover the mirror. Neither the candle nor the lamp can be lighted through their own unaided efforts, nor can it ever be possible for the mirror to free itself from its dross. It is clear and evident that until a fire is kindled the lamp will never be ignited, and unless the dross is blotted out from the face of the mirror it can never represent the image of the sun nor reflect its light and glory.*"<sup>2</sup>

There are two points concerning the world of Prophets that are emphasized repeatedly in the Bahá'í writings, namely: (1) the day of revelation has not ceased and (2) no Prophet is superior to the others.

Commenting on this first point, Bahá'u'lláh says: "*Can one of sane mind ever seriously imagine that, in view of certain words the meaning of which he cannot comprehend, the portal of God's infinite guidance can ever be closed in the face of men?*

<sup>1</sup>*Some Answered Questions*, p. 271.

<sup>2</sup>*Gleanings*, p. 65.

*Can he ever conceive for these Divine Luminaries, these resplendent Lights either a beginning or an end? What outpouring flood can compare with the stream of His all-embracing grace, and what blessing can excel the evidences of so great and pervasive a mercy? There can be no doubt whatever that if for one moment the tide of His mercy and grace were to be withheld from the world, it would completely perish.”<sup>1</sup>*

Concerning the second point, He reminds us that: “*These attributes of God are not, and have never been, vouchsafed specially unto certain Prophets, and withheld from others. Nay, all the Prophets of God, His well-favoured, His holy and chosen Messengers are, without exception, the bearers of His names, and the embodiments of His attributes. They only differ in the intensity of their revelation, and the comparative potency of their light.*”<sup>2</sup>

Finally, our concept of a personal God is derived from the life of the Prophet. Having elements in common with men, we can appreciate, to some extent, those attributes we associate with a personal God, such as love, mercy and justice.

### **The World of Creation**

The physical universe, including man, is a creation of the Divine Reality, God. It is not a manifestation of the Divine Reality, not the Divine Reality in another form.

The world of creation has always existed. If the existence of God is eternal, surely this endless universe is eternal; it had no beginning and will have no end. The earth had a beginning and will have an end, but the universe has neither beginning nor end. We must think of creation as a continuous process; this is difficult for finite man because he cannot think of creation without thinking of a beginning.

Before an author writes a book, he has the subject matter in mind. He has some ideas more or less related to his

<sup>1</sup>ibid., p. 68.

<sup>2</sup>ibid., p. 48.

theme, but usually he does not see the theme as a whole. Then he may put his thoughts on paper, in a more or less orderly fashion. Being finite he must necessarily take some preliminary steps before he actually starts writing the book. But the Omnipotent Creator is certainly not limited in this manner. We cannot comprehend this, but neither can we comprehend the underlying reality in nature. We assume there is an underlying reality in nature and we try to imitate it by means of scientific models, but we cannot claim that we really understand this underlying reality.

As we said before, the soul is a *creation* of God; it is not a *manifestation* of God, not God in another form, but a new reality, and it therefore has a beginning. If it had no beginning then, so far as time goes, it would be in the same category as God and this would compel us to consider two eternal realities, God and man. To be sure, we may assume, as some mystics do, that the soul existed in undifferentiated form with, or in, God; but this also presents insurmountable difficulties, for we would then have to assume that, in some inexplicable manner, man shares a particle of the Divine Essence. This however, would destroy the existent unity of the Infinite, and modern man would probably hesitate to accept any theory of man's origin which would destroy this unity. As we shall see, it is much simpler to assume that man's soul is a creation of God.

The mystics consider only two worlds, the world of the Absolute, and the world of creation, which for them includes man and the prophets; and they imagine moreover that the world of creation is a manifestation of the Divine Essence. This, of course, puts the world of creation in the same category as the world of the Prophets. Whatever sanction this has it certainly does not have the sanction of experience. Serious study of a prophetic revelation, like Christianity or Islám, would convince the student that the Founder of a world-



religion is inherently different from other men. The creative genius is in a class by himself, and this surely applies to the Prophet as well as to the artist or musician. There are certainly some religious philosophers, as well as mystics, who regard man as a potential Prophet, but this is like regarding every musician as a potential genius of the stature of Beethoven. In practice it really does not work out that way.

Now the question may arise, why should the soul or spirit be associated in any way with a material body? 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us that the spirit acquires perfections by its associations with the body, just as a man travelling in a foreign country gains something from the habits and customs of its people. And again, just as the spirit of man causes the life of the body so man causes the life of the world. "*If there were no man, the perfections of the spirit would not appear, and the light of the mind would not be resplendent in this world. This world would be like a body without a soul.*"<sup>1</sup>

### **Divine Life Process**

The majority of mystics believe that the spiritual element in man, the soul, prior to its association with the body on this earth, existed in some indescribable form with God. This is a logical consequence of the belief that God dwells in us or that we are identical with God. We came from God, we spend some time on this earth and then we return to God.

The mystic path that one must follow in order to return to, and become one with God, necessarily constitutes a basic element in all mystical philosophy. On the other hand prophetic revelation, and the Bahá'í Faith in particular, maintains that the only path for mortal man to follow is the path that is laid down for us by the laws and precepts of the Prophets of God, who create the spiritual life of man.

In the period of decline of a highly developed civilization

<sup>1</sup>*Some Answered Questions*, p. 234.

when society is dominated by a sensuous culture, spiritually-minded people lose faith and interest in the world and what it has to offer. The burning desire of the pious man is to free himself from the outer world, the world of the senses, and to attain the presence of the Unchangeable, the Immutable, the Absolute. Not only must he free himself from the external world but he must also free himself from his ego.

The path is, in reality, a negative process by which the mystic is able to pass from the normal state of mind into a supernormal state. In this state he is able to concentrate upon the Infinite. In the words of Tauler (c. 1300—1361): "Turn thyself in truth from thyself and from all created things and centre thy mind wholly upon God."

From the state of concentration, where his chief concern is to be free from all earthly feelings and desires, and to be governed wholly by the Infinite, he passes to the state beyond concentration and asking, to the state of complete passivity where he contemplates the attributes of God, His love, His mercy and His beauty. Plotinus (A.D. 209—270) describes this state as follows: "The spirit remains immovably sunken in contemplation; it gazes on nothing else but Absolute Beauty, it turns itself wholly to it and concentrates on it, and at last is, as it were, filled with power."

The various stages of the path such as purgation, illumination and union, need not concern us here. We are concerned with the fundamental basic question, (which we will discuss more fully in Chapter III)—Is the experience of ecstasy, the experience of *eternal blessedness, deathless joy, indescribable bliss*, proof that the mystic is in the presence of the Infinite? Does it prove that he is one with the Infinite? At this point it is sufficient to observe again that according to the Bahá'í viewpoint the soul is a creation, and not an incarnation nor a manifestation, of the Divine Essence.

## CHAPTER III

### THE MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE

#### Soul and Mind

In the Bahá'í writings the spiritual element in man is designated variously as *spirit*, *human spirit*, *soul* and *rational soul*, but most commonly as the *soul*. Sometimes we think of this collective reality as having three aspects which we call soul, mind and spirit; but we must remember that after all there is but one reality.

We cannot think of the soul of man as something quite apart and distinct from his mind, something that is in conflict with the mind. It is true that in the past many have felt that there is an inherent conflict between the soul and the mind, or to put it in another way, between the human spirit and the intellect. There was a strong conviction that in some mysterious way God is associated with man's soul but that He sustains no relation whatever to man's mind. The same idea is more often expressed in another way, namely that God is connected with the heart or feelings, and when we think of the heart we probably think of the emotional side of man.

An important point should be stressed here, and it will be developed more fully later in this chapter. The heart is not an infallible guide to spiritual truth. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in discussing the four methods of acquiring knowledge, shows that the senses, the mind and tradition are all defective criteria for arriving at the truth, and then He says: "*The fourth criterion I have named is inspiration through which it is claimed the reality of knowledge is attainable. What is inspiration? It is the influx of the human heart. But what are satanic*

*promptings which afflict mankind? They are the influx of the heart also. How shall we differentiate between them? "*<sup>1</sup>

The heart errs. For example, consider the matter of prejudice. Experience shows that we cannot eliminate prejudice with the mind alone, that is by merely investigating the truth, nor with the heart unaided by the intellect. It is from the heart that prejudices originate. It is the heart and not the mind that causes man to love his own race or nation, to the exclusion of all others. Simple-minded people who live by their emotions, that is, those who are governed entirely by the promptings of the heart, are not free from animosity and hostility. The capacity for personal love, without understanding or enlightenment, may be the cause of strife. Conversely, without love and altruism, conflict and misunderstanding will never cease. Through the intellect man may discover that a particular religion is not inferior to his own; but this fact does not, in itself, change indifference into appreciation. It is highly probable that religion will always be associated with emotion, for emotion is the drive of life; but the heart and mind must work together, and when they do these disintegrating forces will gradually disappear.

On the other hand, God does appeal to the heart. In the words of Bahá'u'lláh: "*Earth and heaven cannot contain Me; what can alone contain Me is the heart of him that believeth in Me, and is faithful to My Cause.*"<sup>2</sup> Again: "*Give a hearing ear, O people, to that which I, in truth, say unto you. The one true God, exalted be His glory, hath ever regarded, and will continue to regard, the hearts of men as His own, His exclusive possession.*"<sup>3</sup>

Mysticism and prophetic revelation are agreed upon one

<sup>1</sup>Abdu'l-Bahá, *Foundations of World Unity*. Compiled from Addresses and Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. New York, World Unity Publishing Corp., 1927. 2nd ed., p. 16.

<sup>2</sup>Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 186.

<sup>3</sup>*ibid.*, p. 206.

essential point, namely, that without ardent, intense, and even rapturous love for God, religion will become a dead issue. But we must not imagine that man's intellect will prevent him from loving God; his learning may, but not his intellect.

Let us return to the three aspects of man's collective reality. In the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá: "*When we speak of the soul we mean the motive power of this physical body which lives under its entire control in accordance with its dictates. If the soul identifies itself with the material world it remains dark . . . but if it becomes the recipient of the graces of the world of mind, its darkness will be transformed into light, its tyranny into justice . . .*"

*"There is, however, a faculty in man which unfolds to his vision the secrets of existence. It gives him a power whereby he may investigate the reality of every object. . . . This is the power of the mind, for the soul is not, of itself, capable of unrolling the mysteries of phenomena; but the mind can accomplish this and therefore it is a power superior to the soul.*

*"There is still another power which is differentiated from that of the soul and mind. This third power is the spirit which is an emanation from the divine Bestower; it is the effulgence of the sun of reality, the radiation of the celestial world, the spirit of faith, the spirit His Holiness the Christ refers to when He says, 'Those that are born of the flesh are flesh, and those that are born of the spirit are spirit.'"<sup>1</sup>*

This quickening spirit, or the spirit of faith which regenerates man spiritually, is an emanation from the Divine Reality and not a manifestation. When the human spirit is illumined by the spirit of faith, or the heavenly spirit, when man is "born of the spirit," his collective reality takes on another aspect, just as a clear mirror reflecting rays of light is not quite the same as a clear mirror which is devoid of light.

<sup>1</sup>'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Reality of Man*. Excerpts from Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, New York, Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1931. 1st ed., p. 9-10.

We said in the second chapter that the Prophet or Manifestation of God is a link between the infinite God, the Divine Essence, and finite man. Now when the Manifestation of God comes to humanity He brings the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the mediator between God, the Unknowable, and mortal man. The Divine Reality is like the sun and the Holy Spirit like the rays.

*"The Holy Spirit it is, which through the mediation of the Prophets of God, teaches spiritual virtues to man and enables him to attain eternal life.*

*"It is evident that the souls receive grace from the bounty of the Holy Spirit which appears in the Manifestations of God, and not from the personality of the Manifestation.*

*"Every time it appears the world is renewed, and a new cycle is founded. The body of the world of humanity puts on a new garment. It can be compared to the spring; whenever it comes the world passes from one condition to another."<sup>1</sup>*

*"Likewise the Holy Spirit is the very cause of the life of man; without the Holy Spirit he would have no intellect, he would be unable to acquire his scientific knowledge by which his great influence over the rest of creation is gained. The illumination of the Holy Spirit gives to man the power of thought, and enables him to make discoveries by which he bends the laws of nature to his will."<sup>2</sup>*

The effect of the Holy Spirit is expressed in different ways. Just as we differentiate between the human spirit and the animal spirit, so we differentiate between the heavenly spirit and the human spirit. The heavenly spirit is spoken of as the spirit of faith or the bounty of God. We say, for example, the spirit of faith, which comes from the breath of the Holy Spirit, is the cause of eternal life.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Abdu'l-Bahá, in *The Divine Art of Living*, Wilmette, Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1944, pp. 44, 42.

<sup>2</sup>Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Reality of Man*, p. 37.

<sup>3</sup>Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 165.

When the human spirit is assisted by the spirit of faith it can make discoveries in the world of spirit. So far as spiritual realities go the human spirit without the spirit of faith is somewhat like a perfect mirror in a dark room.

The mind is the power of the human spirit, the perfection of the human spirit.<sup>1</sup> Mental faculties (imagination, thoughts and understanding) are the inherent properties of the soul.<sup>2</sup>

The soul may be likened to a lamp and the mind to the rays of the lamp. Without the rays the lamp could not give forth its light, and were there no lamp there would be no rays. So we might say, without the mind there would be no evidence of the soul's existence and without the soul there would be no mind, for it is through the soul that the mind comprehends.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, the temple of man (the body) is like a mirror, his soul like the sun and his mind or mental faculties like the rays. Now the mirror may be broken so that it cannot reflect the rays, but surely we can not dissociate the rays from the sun. In like manner we can not imagine that through some infirmity of the body the mind is separated from the soul, or that it is in any way affected by the infirmity.<sup>4</sup> An object may be cut off from the rays of the sun, but the sun still shines.<sup>5</sup>

The soul is independent of the infirmities of the body. Bahá'u'lláh says : "*That a sick person showeth signs of weakness is due to the hindrances that interpose themselves between his soul and his body, for the soul itself remaineth unaffected by any bodily ailments.*"<sup>6</sup>

The soul is free of the body, but consciousness and personality are associated with the body. In this earthly life the soul of man manifests itself through the body, that is, through

<sup>1</sup>Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 244.

<sup>2</sup>*The Bahá'í Peace Program*, from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. New York, Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1930. . pp. 32, 44.

<sup>3</sup>ibid., p. 32.

<sup>4</sup>ibid., p. 44.

<sup>5</sup>Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 155.

<sup>6</sup>ibid., p. 154.

consciousness and personality. Souls retain their individuality, consciousness and understanding after death.

The body is an instrument for the preparation of the soul for the next world; we should not regard it as a wretched prison as many extreme mystics have done.

### **The Knowledge of God through the Heart**

In this most decadent period of the world's history, when the old-established religions have failed to supply that spiritual knowledge and certainty demanded by both the generality of mankind and the intelligentsia, we are surrounded on all sides by cults and philosophies which attempt to succeed where religious institutions have apparently failed.

Speculation brings no satisfaction to the masses, and to the intelligentsia it offers no stable, permanent foundation. Serious-minded people, desiring some way to a higher life, turn their thoughts inward, and as a result spirituality is too often reduced to mere feeling. The will, which functions in the realm of faith, is useless unless the world is illumined with the spirit of a Prophet.

Outside the pale of religion, thoughtful people are weary of philosophy and discouraged with the futility of their own efforts. Those who manifest in their lives the true spirit of religion by the alleviation of suffering are often the most pessimistic. Consequently the majority of the religiously minded, observing the failure of philosophy and science—that is the intellect—to discover the way to God, fall back upon the age-old illusion that through the heart and the heart alone man may find the spiritual life, life eternal.

Somewhere in the deeper recesses of the heart, so the mystic believes, the knowledge of God can be discovered. The mind, he maintains, is of no value, since it functions in the world of the senses and not in the world of the heart. Now as we have said before, the heart is not an infallible guide to



spiritual truth. Bahá'u'lláh's words are significant: "*How often hath the human heart, which is the recipient of the light of God and the seat of the revelation of the All-Merciful, erred from Him Who is the Source of that light and the Wellspring of that revelation. It is the waywardness of the heart that removeth it far from God, and condemneth it to remoteness from Him.*"<sup>1</sup>

The reason for this implicit faith in the heart or feelings is obvious enough when we consider the religious background of the race and its effect upon religious experience.

To primitive man and to man's primitive nature, the most potent factor in religion is emotion. The function of all ritual is to reproduce some kind of emotion which is thought to be effective. But his real concern is with emotion, for to him every abnormal psychic experience is a message from the gods. As he develops he begins to rationalize. Then the ritual, as a thing in itself, may lose its significance because it is external to him; but his psychic experiences, which are an integral part of his real self, still have value for him. He may lose faith in religious systems, philosophy and even humanity, but not in what he experiences emotionally. He needs no profound ratiocination to convince him that he has experienced rapture and ecstasy, or fear and torment. And because these things are more real to him than external objects or logical deductions, he places them above everything in life.

### **Knowledge of God through Vision**

Vision, that state of illumination in which the spirit functions without the senses, might seem more reliable; but the mystic admits that not all mystical experiences are valid. Says Underhill: "The perceptive power and creative genius of the mystics as of other artists, sometimes goes astray." And

<sup>1</sup>Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 186.

then she suggests that some test be made. But we cannot claim that through asceticism, detachment, and mortification we may become one with the Absolute and then apply some test to determine the validity of our experience. To what higher court do we turn to test the experience? Is it higher than our experience? Is it infallible? Concerning visions, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says: "*Spiritual discoveries are of two kinds; one kind is of the imagination and is only the assertion of a few people; the other kind resembles inspiration, and this is real—such are the revelations of Isaiah, of Jeremiah, and of St. John, which are real.*"

"*Reflect that man's power of thought consists of two kinds. One kind is true, when it agrees with a determined truth. Such conceptions find realization in the exterior world; such are accurate opinions, correct theories, scientific discoveries, and inventions.*

"*The other kind of conceptions is made up of vain thoughts and useless ideas which yield neither fruit nor result, and which have no reality; no, they surge like the waves of the sea of imaginations, and they pass away like idle dreams.*

"*In the same way, there are two sorts of spiritual discoveries. One is the revelations of the Prophets, and the spiritual discoveries of the elect. The visions of the Prophets are not dreams; no, they are spiritual discoveries and have reality. They say, for example: 'I saw a person in a certain form, and I said such a thing, and he gave such an answer.' This vision is in the world of wakefulness, and not in that of sleep. Nay, it is a spiritual discovery which is expressed as if it were the appearance of a vision.*

"*The other kind of spiritual discoveries is made up of pure imagination; but these imaginations become embodied in such a way that many simple-hearted people believe that they have a reality.*"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 290.

And again He tells us: "Know that the power and the comprehension of the human spirit are of two kinds; that is to say, they perceive and act in two different modes. One way is through instruments and organs; thus with this eye it sees, with this ear it hears, with this tongue it talks. Such is the action of the spirit, and the perception of the reality of man, by means of organs. That is to say, that the spirit is the seer, through the eyes; the spirit is the hearer, through the ear; the spirit is the speaker, through the tongue.

"The other manifestation of the powers and actions of the spirit is without instruments and organs. For example, in the state of sleep without eyes it sees, without an ear it hears, without a tongue it speaks, without feet it runs. Briefly, these actions are beyond the means of instruments and organs."<sup>1</sup>

But as we have observed before, the soul of man is a creation of God. It is not a part of God, and there is no reason to believe that it is infallible. When the soul functions through the senses it makes blunders, and it is highly probable that it will make blunders when it acts independently of the senses, as it is certainly not perfect.

To be sure, the spiritual discoveries of a highly developed soul will naturally be more valid than those of an immature soul; but as the soul never reaches perfection, man's visions can never be absolutely valid. We can never clearly distinguish between our personal desires and the revelations of the spirit.

If we cannot acquire knowledge of God through the heart or through visions, if we cannot enter the presence of God, what is the meaning of the promise of all the prophets of old, that man shall in this earth-life attain the Divine Presence? This is clearly explained by Bahá'u'lláh in the *Kitáb-i-Iqán*.<sup>2</sup> To attain the presence of the Prophet in His

<sup>1</sup>ibid., p. 263.

<sup>2</sup>Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Iqán*, p. 142.

day, which is known as the Day of Resurrection, is to attain the Divine Presence. *"The knowledge of Him, Who is the Origin of all things, and attainment unto Him, are impossible save through knowledge of, and attainment unto, these luminous Beings who proceed from the Sun of Truth. By attaining, therefore, to the presence of these Holy Luminaries, the 'Presence of God' Himself is attained. . . . Attainment unto such presence is possible only in the Day of Resurrection, which is the Day of the rise of God Himself through His all-embracing Revelation."*

### **The Epistemological Approach**

Although we have demonstrated that man cannot gain a knowledge of God through the heart or through vision, nevertheless there are those who will insist that the psychic experience of ecstasy is sufficient proof that the presence of God has been attained. The logical mystic, of course, will not be content with experience, overpowering though it may be; he will insist that to know God, a particle of the Divine Essence must exist in him.

Let us examine the claims or experience from the epistemological standpoint. Since our inner experiences are more real to us than the external world, as we said in the beginning, it is only natural that the mystic should cling to the experience of ecstasy. If the ecstasy he knows is not associated with the Highest Good, the God of Religions, what is its origin? If logic dims this vision does it not, he may ask, rob him of God? Nevertheless in external matters he continues to use his mind, and so a dualism is inevitable. The hard facts of life do not remove the dilemma; for we observe that man succeeds when he frees his intellect from feelings, as for example in science and engineering, but fails miserably when he allows his feelings to govern his reason, as in his social relations.

When, however, he turns his mind inward, when he applies reason to his emotional life, he begins to discover that what he had considered naively as fundamental fact may be merely inference. That is, the heart is about as infallible in dealing with faith as is the mind in dealing with external objects. The mystic has claimed always that when you are in the presence of God you are cognizant of the fact and no one can shake your conviction. But we cannot escape logic so readily. What the mystic really knows is that he has had an extraordinary experience, nothing more. Clearly he has not been in the presence of the Omnipotent God, nor has he become One with the Divine Essence.

Through the intellect, and not his awareness, he discovers that he must distinguish between a psychic experience and the interpretation of the experience. That is, he must differentiate between sensations, emotions and feelings, and that which causes them. If we are depressed no one can convince us that we are not, but the cause to which we assign the depression may not be valid. For example, if we are depressed we may assume that God is displeased with us. This thought in itself depresses us further. Finally we behold our agitated state and then we are completely convinced of God's avenging hand. But in reality the depression may have been caused by a number of things, having nothing to do with religion.

A few philosophers maintain that the testimony of the mystic concerning what he sees and feels in his moments of illumination, should outweigh the arguments of the critics who have never had such experiences. But Leuba has pointed out that many of the things which are supposed to be peculiar to mystical experiences such as rapture, unexpectedness, sudden break in the train of thought and feelings, illumination and ineffability are not peculiar to ecstasy with a religious background. We must distinguish between experience and

any inference about the experience. We must not confuse sensations, emotions and thoughts with casual explanations. If we have experienced ecstasy no one can doubt the validity of our experience: our testimony is quite sufficient. When, however, we maintain that we were in the presence of God and that our ecstasy proves it, this is manifestly only an inference. Naturally many mystics take refuge in ineffability, but this might lead to absurd conclusions.

We recall the familiar argument which runs like this : if one has seen light, let us say the light of the sun, no one could convince him that he has not seen it. True, but the mystic is not trying to prove that he has had an experience; we accept his own testimony on this. What he is trying to tell us is that he has been in the presence of God; but the only evidence that he can adduce is his experience (ecstasy, rapture), so that in reality what he is trying to convey to us is that his experience proves that he was in the presence of God. The analogy does not hold, however, because the man who has seen the light is not trying to tell us what caused the light. If he should maintain: "I have seen the light and therefore the sun must be shining," then he would be in the position of the mystic. This is an inference about light which he has seen.

A little reflection, therefore, will show that the experience is not "immediate," that is, the mystic does not "experience" the Infinite, the Absolute or the Divine Essence immediately. His immediate experience is of rapture, ecstasy, and his union with the Absolute or Divine Essence is an inference.

The question then arises: if the revelations of the heart are not the result of being in the presence of God, what causes these revelations and how do we account for the fact that they are so effective? Space does not permit even a cursory explanation; the reader is referred to works on the psychology of religious mysticism, especially that of Leuba.

Briefly, most of these psychological experiences which are interpreted as divine revelations are the results of abnormal suggestibility. Leuba shows that this plays an important part in ritualistic, revivalistic, and non-religious types of experience. Moreover some explanation may be advanced for the effectiveness of these experiences. Briefly, valuable ideas may come to one in a partial trance, a state of relaxation.

### Science and Spiritual Experience

Let us digress long enough to defend the spiritually-minded individual who does not make extravagant claims for his inner experiences.

From what we have said above we must not infer that all those inner experiences which we associate with spirituality are illusions, or projections of emotional wishes. Clearly we cannot say that the love, the trust and the faith which we experience in our devotion to God are purely subjective.

When the scientist tells us that the inner experiences which we associate with our spiritual life have no objective validity, he apparently forgets that he never worries about the validity of other inner experiences. Should science question the validity of aesthetic appreciation as it sometimes questions the validity of religious experiences, we should have to conclude that the aesthetic feeling we experience when, for example, we are uplifted by a great symphony, is a pure illusion. The sight of a certain colour may evoke within us an emotion which we can neither measure nor describe; but we do not deny its reality. To be sure, in the analysis of colour the physicist treats colour as he treats other objects of sense perception; but while he is considering colour in this way he is not thinking of aesthetic appreciation. The beauty that is apprehended is beyond physics. On the other hand, probably no scientist is so deficient in aesthetic appreciation as to be entirely oblivious to the feeling of beauty.

It is true that there have been many attempts to establish some kind of aesthetic measure, but it is also true that these attempts have been severely criticized by creative artists who have aesthetic appreciation and also scientific knowledge.

The reader probably will agree that values such as beauty, justice and mercy, are in a category which is beyond the space-time world of science. When we try to evaluate spiritual experiences we must remember that they also may be in a category which is beyond science. There are, to be sure, many reasons why a sceptic would deny objective validity to a spiritual experience and not deny it to a feeling of beauty. One, certainly, is a tendency toward abnormality. While theorists have grossly exaggerated this factor, often there is just enough to discourage many healthy-minded individuals from becoming spiritual. This is particularly true where evangelistic piety is concerned. The most disturbing factor is, of course, the conglomeration of superstitious and unwarranted practices which we invariably associate with religious orthodoxy. This is the obstacle that prevents the majority of thinking people (as well as the scientists) from investigating the reality of religion. Many years ago, speaking of the history of religion, James said: "There is a notion in the air about us that religion is probably only an anachronism, a case of 'survival,' an atavistic relapse into a mode of thought which humanity in its more enlightened examples has outgrown. . . ."

Even the old nomenclature, which we cannot wholly discard, is often a barrier to many who are in search of a rational religion, a religion that is compatible with a scientific age. The spiritually-minded scientist (and perhaps the creative genius) could accept the "numinous" of Rudolph Otto more readily than the Holy Spirit of prophetic religion.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE NATURE OF MYSTICISM

#### **Mysticism Defined**

In very general terms, mysticism is a form of communion which unites man with God. In a sense every spiritual man is a mystic. The fundamental element in all religions is that feeling which unites man to God, and without this "mystic" feeling, without this awareness of God's Presence, religion will finally be reduced to a lifeless organization incapable of spiritual development.

The word "mysticism" has many meanings to-day, but we shall have to restrict its meaning to man's intercourse with some higher power. A few illustrations will make our position clear. The man who longs for the knowledge of God, the love of God, and who strives to attain His Presence, is a mystic. The one who sees God in the beauty of nature, who feels the presence of God in the flower, the bush and the meadow, is also a mystic. Again the scientist, in the contemplation of that higher intelligence which is responsible for this incomprehensible universe, is also a mystic in a very real sense.

Some writers maintain that mysticism is a philosophy and not a religion. While this is true of some types it is hardly true of all. To be sure, this depends somewhat upon the way in which you define religion as well as mysticism. However, as the term is generally used it involves, I believe, communion with some form of superrational, supernatural being, some higher intelligence. Now it is only natural that we should associate this form of communion with religion. The God of religion, however, might be theistic, deistic or

pantheistic. If, however, a man denies the existence of a superhuman being, a supreme intelligence, we would not call him a mystic nor indeed would we say he is religious. Again, we do use the terms "religious mystic" and "non-religious mystic." According to the sense in which we have been using the term mystic, "non-religious mystic" would be somewhat of a paradox, for if a man were in no sense religious he would not be a mystic. However, it is sometimes convenient to designate one type of mysticism as "religious" and another type as "non-religious;" the meaning will be clear in each case.

Since, however, we are primarily concerned with the type of mysticism which makes claims that are not compatible with modern scientific thinking and the prophetic ideal, it will be necessary for us to use a rather limited definition of mysticism. In this restricted sense, mysticism is, in the words of Heiler, "that form of intercourse with God in which the world and self are absolutely denied, in which human personality is dissolved, disappears and is absorbed in the infinite unity of the Godhead."<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, we should not forget that the word *mystic* may also be applied to anyone who through prayer and meditation is united with God, which is the sense attached to it in prophetic religion. This kind of mysticism makes no claims that are incompatible with prophetic religion or science. We might simplify our discussion by the use of the term "true" or "genuine" mysticism. True or genuine mysticism then is that form of communion with God in which the worshipper becomes united with Him, by turning to the Prophet of God for divine inspiration and illumination.

True mysticism is sharply contrasted with occultism. The occultist does not turn to the Prophet for guidance, nor

<sup>1</sup>Heiler, *Prayer*, p. 136.

is he concerned primarily with the laws and precepts of the Prophet.

### Contributions of Mysticism

While there are many doctrines of mysticism we cannot accept, we must not overlook the positive contributions that have been made to humanity by great spiritual geniuses like St. Francis of Assisi, Catherine of Genoa and Jalál-id Dín i Rúmí. Surely their inspiration came from God and surely they rendered distinguished services to mankind. They laboured in a world that was, for the most part, materialistic if not corrupt. Some of them, like Jalál-id Dín i Rúmí, had a real gift for writing and left for posterity a wealth of literature that was a source of inspiration for many generations. While it is true that mysticism is non-social and that some of the mystics lived in seclusion, it is also true that many were occupied with humanitarian work; and a few took a lively interest in political affairs.

St. Francis appeared in Italy when Christian Europe had very nearly reached the lowest point of its decline. War was in evidence everywhere. What could be more astounding, and at the same time more uplifting, than the appearance of a joyous saint who was willing to accept the Sermon on the Mount literally? St. Francis was completely detached from all worldly goods, but unlike most mystics he had great love and appreciation for the beauty of nature and all living creatures. For him all created things seemed to be endowed with a supernatural charm, which created in him an ecstatic joy not unlike the psychic experience of the aesthetic mystic. He would work for anyone, and without pay; he associated with all men, and (if we can believe tradition), with all animals in a spirit of love and fellowship, and wherever he went he radiated spiritual joy and light. Italy had seen nothing like this for many a century. The saint's progress was not without

pain, but joy was always victorious. St. Francis was never involved in the endless controversies of his day: the only criticism he knew was self-criticism. Over all humanity he threw the mantle of his perfect charity. St. Francis made many missionary journeys, and one carried him as far as the court of Sultan Melek-el-Kamil in Egypt. As for his prayer-life, one of his biographers said of him: "It was not merely that he prayed so much, it was rather that he became prayer." The contrast between his tolerance and clemency, and the outlook of the reformers of a later period, is as sharp as possible.

A century later we find Catherine of Siena, a spiritual genius of great personal charm and beloved of all classes, directing the affairs of whole municipalities in Italy. The fathers of Siena, aware of her holiness and her ability to deal with situations which they could not meet, did not hesitate to send her on missions that would have paralysed the heart of the most courageous. In time she became a veritable symbol of Unity and Peace, and her influence extended as far as the confines of Avignon where Gregory XI was living in exile. The range of her correspondence was astounding—from the tailor's wife in Florence to the soldier of fortune in England; and yet in spite of her many activities she found time to develop inwardly. She did not carry asceticism to extremes as many mystics did, and moreover she was very tolerant of other mystics' theories concerning spiritual advancement. She once said: "We conceive virtues through God and bring them to birth for our neighbour."

It is true that some of the mystics made arrogant claims to divinity, but other spiritual geniuses have made extravagant claims to supernatural gifts. We must estimate the worth of these mystics in terms of their concepts of truth, their theology and philosophy. They were not entirely responsible for their doctrines.

We must now give some thought to their background.

### **Philosophical Background of Mysticism**

Many of the doctrines of the mystics which we have mentioned originated in the ancient world. The asceticism which we find in Christian mysticism and Sufism, the idea of a path and the belief that man is a part of the Divine Essence, are all older than the Christian mysticism. For the ancient Greek world, philosophy was simply love of wisdom. Greek wisdom was based on speculation and contemplation. It was not affected by science as our philosophy is to-day. Its concern was with practical affairs, such as the conduct of life, the organization of society, and abstract concepts like justice, virtue and truth. Medieval philosophy, under the influence of the church, was concerned primarily with upholding ecclesiastical authority and theological doctrines.

By the seventeenth century science began to exert some influence. It freed man from superstition and it taught him to think clearly, but it threatened to overthrow revealed truth. One of the greatest scientific contributions of this period was Newtonian mechanics, which is the basis of so-called classical physics. It had phenomenal success in the world of matter, but it developed one idea that was almost fatal to the world of spirit; namely the mechanistic concept of life. This reduced man to a mere assemblage of atoms and society to a lifeless machine incapable of development. Only in recent years have physicists come to the conclusion that this concept is no longer valid.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the intelligent were fully convinced that science had an answer for most of our questions, but the masses were not completely won over to science. To-day, however, the masses believe that scientific knowledge is the only reliable knowledge, while the intelligentsia realize the limitations of science, and that it has failed to create an ideal world of peace and happiness.

There are two antiquated notions which have some bearing on the validity of mystical doctrines. From the beginning of the medieval period to the seventeenth century philosophy was not really free from theology. Strong religious feeling and religious authority often prevented the philosopher from investigating a new truth with an unfettered mind. The history of science is replete with illustrations of this. The philosopher of this period did not hesitate to say that a doctrine might be true in philosophy and false in theology or true in theology and false in philosophy. Moreover in the field of religion there is usually a school of thought which maintains that there is always an outward and an inward meaning to the revealed Word of the Prophet. The generality of mankind will be content with the outward meaning, but the mystic must penetrate to the core of the Scriptures and take only the inward. The Sufi is convinced that when he reads the Qur'án with contemplative absorption the inward meaning is revealed to him. The doctrine obtained in this manner does not always agree with theology, but this does not trouble the mystic; nor is he troubled by the fact that mystics do not agree among themselves as to the true meaning of the Word. He argues that since there are different kinds of mystical experiences, why should there not be different kinds of mystical truth? Christian mysticism and Sufism flourished in an environment in which it was possible to establish the validity of their doctrines on the semblance of a philosophical basis.

Little wonder then that the mystics of the past formulated doctrines that are incompatible with the tenets of prophetic revelation and with modern scientific thinking. If they erred in some of their beliefs, certainly the fault was not entirely theirs. For many generations and in many places, the only spiritual light that radiated was from the lives of the mystics.

### The Pre-Suppositions of Mysticism

In times of great stress and confusion, highly gifted people turn to mysticism. Life must have meaning. The old-established religious systems offer little consolation, philosophy and science still less; but the seeker for ultimate reality may always turn inward. Through the emotions, the heart, (so the mystic believes) the true knowledge of God may be obtained. Man may experience the Absolute directly.

The mystic believes that through asceticism, detachment and meditation one may attain the Divine Presence and become one with the Divine Essence. That is, man may enter the presence of the infinite God and become absorbed in the infinite unity of the Godhead. No logical thinker would admit that finite man could ever become one with the Infinite, and so it was necessary to assume that man is something more than finite. As we have said before, the mystic assumes that a *particle* of the Divine Essence exists in man. If a spark of the Divine Essence exists in man, or if you prefer to put it less crudely, if man's reality is essentially divine, it follows that he must be absolutely detached from his ephemeral self and from all interest in the material world. He must also be freed from the intellect, which comprehends only the material world.

For the mystic there are two, and only two, realms of being, the infinite God and the finite man. To explain how finite man can understand the Infinite, the mystic assumes that the Infinite is divided into parts and that mortal man possesses one of these parts. What is not in man he cannot know. This is an axiom of the Sufis. He tacitly avoids the term God in this connection. That the unity of the Infinite is hereby destroyed did not apparently trouble the mystics of the past—probably because they were familiar with contradictions of this sort, as we have indicated above.

The two-world doctrine leads to a dualistic concept of being. Man is a part-of God, and yet man must strive to become one with God. The three-world doctrine removes the dilemma, but leaves no room for the *existent unity of the mystic*. The unity it establishes, the kind the modern world can accept, is moral conformity with the precepts of the prophets; but that is not the goal of the mystic.

We must not overlook this important point. No mystic who assumes that a particle of the Divine Essence exists in him can escape this dualism. He may fall back upon experience, as some moderns do, and maintain that it is through the heart and not the intellect that man knows God. This sounds plausible, but the thoroughgoing mystic has always realized that the *immediate* knowledge of the presence of God cannot rest upon experience alone. There must be some metaphysical reasons for identifying *experience* with the Divine Presence.

In the three-world doctrine, implicit in most of the prophetic religions and explicit in the Bahá'í Faith, the world of the prophets stands between the Infinite God and the finite man. While we cannot comprehend fully this intermediary world, we can understand something of the life of the Prophet. We can love Him, we can meditate upon the attributes of God reflected in Him, and we can strive to follow His example. Moreover we are familiar with the creative genius, who is an intermediary between us and the unseen world of music and art. We can expand our vision and comprehend to some degree the Prophet.

On the other hand, we cannot, as thinking people, imagine ourselves as one with God and at the same time separate from God, reaching out to Him. In considering contemporary mysticism we must remember that, if we assume that a spark of the Divine exists in us, we must also accept this essential dualism which is incomprehensible to the scientific mind.



The attitude of certain scholars toward contemporary mysticism is ostensibly very fair and appears to exhibit disinterested intellectual curiosity, but when we consider the attitude of these same scholars toward revealed truth we are prone to discredit their judgment. For such scholars the voluminous writings of Bahá'u'lláh, incomparable in scope and magnitude, unsurpassed by anything in the field of religion, past or present, are as nothing compared to the testimony of the average mystic who reveals for us no social laws, no precepts nor principles for establishing that *oneness* which has been the central theme of mystical philosophers ever since the days of Parmenides. How diligently these scholars have combed the writings of ancient philosophers like Parmenides and Heraclitus for a mere handful of phrases such as "Good and ill are one," "Reality is one and indivisible." Clearly these are they who are "content with that which is like the vapour on a plain."

There are undoubtedly many reasons why some scholars ignore revealed truth and uphold mysticism, but its exclusiveness probably accounts for its popularity. The mystical path is only for the few. Prophetic religion on the other hand always tends to eliminate class distinctions.

The follower of the Prophet is a realist. For him sin is a revolt against the God-ordained moral order and not a mere wandering from the mystic path, or a desire for the world. For him moral action has intrinsic value, it is something more than a preliminary stage in the preparation for ecstatic union with God. Finally, since God reveals Himself directly to the mystic he is exalted above religious authority.

There is a certain passive tolerance and flexibility about mysticism which naturally appeals to those who have a strong individualistic bias. Here is an esoteric religion which not only guarantees peace and serenity but which admits us into

the very presence of God. Moreover it frees man from some of the undesirable realities of life.

### **Mysticism and the Primitive Church**

Every reform movement tries to recapture the spirit of the primitive church. From the viewpoint of mysticism the outstanding characteristic of the "apostolic age" was the consciousness of the Divine Presence. Men and women were filled with the Spirit. While the primitive church was undoubtedly influenced by Hellenistic mysticism, it is highly probable that the mysticism of the majority was what we have called the "true mysticism" and not the saviour-mysticism of the medieval period.

Contrary to popular opinion, this early church was not a spiritual brotherhood free from any kind of organization and ritual. The idea that, by an ordination service, a person could be endowed with rights and prerogatives not enjoyed by other people was certainly not foreign to this early church. Moreover, a board of presbyters existed twenty years before Mark's gospel was written. It is a mistake to imagine that the church started as a community of mystics and that gradually the inward experience of the consciousness of God diminished, being finally replaced by faith in an ecclesiastical organization.

The primitive church soon learned, as later movements like the "Spiritual Franciscans" learned, that a spiritual brotherhood cannot exist without some kind of organization to safeguard its ideals and to solve the problems that must necessarily arise in any group of human beings. The organization that evolved was certainly not perfect, and it failed in many ways to perpetuate the ideals of the apostolic age; we should not, however, conclude that *any* kind of organization will suppress the "Spirit" to some degree. This would

be the equivalent of saying that, since we have always had wars, therefore peace is impossible.

In the early days of the primitive church there was probably no uniformity in organization or doctrine; but this did little harm, for the first Christians looked upon themselves not as a new society but as the "remnant of Israel." As the "Israel of God" they were all united, for they and they alone had recognized Jesus as the Messiah. The important thing was membership in the Ecclesia, the "Congregation of Israel," and when they were baptized in the name of the Lord they became part of the ancient "People of God."

In time, however, diversities naturally arose, and Streeter says that "the history of Catholic Christianity during the first five centuries is the history of a progressive standardization of a diversity which had its origin in the Apostolic age."<sup>1</sup> To preserve some kind of unity the leaders of the Apostolic church were forced to establish an organization. Let us consider the three essential elements in this organization:

1. In A.D. 96 Clement makes a plea for the regular ministry, and its derivation of authority from the apostolic succession, for the preservation of unity in the local church.

2. In A.D. 115 Ignatius stresses the value of the monarchical episcopate as the real bond holding the church in unity, but says nothing about the apostles providing for a regular succession. In the second century both of these principles were united. That is, henceforth the church favoured a monarchical bishop whose authority could be traced to the apostolate.

Another important factor in the development of a strong organization with episcopal authority was heresy. This called for a final authority to decide the pressing question, who are the representatives of the genuine apostolic tradition? To decide some of the perplexing questions raised by heresy

<sup>1</sup>Streeter, *The Primitive Church*, p. 50.

Irenaeus advanced the idea that the true apostolic tradition is to be found only in those churches that can claim, for their bishops, a continuous line of descent from apostolic times. That is, true church doctrine is to be found in the episcopate which is a continuation of the apostolic office.

3. In the third century, largely through the influence of Cyprian, there was added a third factor of church order, sacerdotalism, which was destined to have a profound, though baneful effect upon the church. In the time of Irenaeus the prophetic gift was still encouraged, a universal priesthood still recognized; but now we pass into the period when the external church becomes necessary to salvation. The bishop becomes the essence of the church, Divine Grace comes through the sacraments, and the sacraments must be dispensed by the priest. The greatest harm, however, does not come from a belief in the efficacy of sacraments, but rather from the belief that the official who administers the sacraments is different from the rest of mankind and that he possesses powers and privileges not possessed by other men.

There are two serious objections to this form of absolutist ecclesiastical system. In the first place, we are not sure of the divine authority of the apostolic succession. In the second place, we do not like to believe that an ordination service, no matter how elaborate and impressive, or how long it has been in use, can make a man *different in kind*, something apart, spiritually superior to his fellows, and endowed with divine authority.

Episcopal authority recognizes no superior power, and when it is in a position to exercise its divine prerogative, it is supreme, sovereign. Moreover history shows, plainly enough, that episcopal authority may lead to corruption. An absolute monarch is in reality never absolute. He must consider public opinion to some extent and if, as is usually

the case, he is associated with a church state, he must consider the wishes of the church.

It is only natural that individuals longing for the inward life and desirous of spiritual freedom could not live happily under the authority of an ecclesiastical order which maintained that the external church is necessary for salvation. That is to say, the early Christian mystics who were intellectually honest could not subscribe to the complete body of church doctrine. The inevitable happened. From the time of the Montanists to the Reformation, groups arose who rebelled against the authority of the church.

Nevertheless mystics did find refuge within the church, and they did obey church authority. Great mystics like St. Teresa, Eckhart, and Madame Guyon, when opposed by the church authorities, strenuously maintained that they were loyal to the church. They could do this without feeling intellectually dishonest by regarding this sacrifice of personal freedom as one of the burdens the ascetic must be prepared to take up. In the ecstatic state, when he becomes one with God, he has perfect freedom from all authority, and this is his chief concern.

The mystical element in religion is necessary but not sufficient. The spirit of the Prophet cannot influence mankind to any great extent unless and until it is clothed in a visible order. Mysticism, without an effective administration, cannot revive a harassed world; yet, on the other hand, the world cannot be revived by any movement which lacks the element of true mysticism.

## CHAPTER V

### TYPES OF MYSTICISM

#### **Radical, Absolute, or Extreme Mysticism**

Only a brief consideration will be given to the various types of mysticism: a psychological or a phenomenological analysis is beyond the scope of this book. We are concerned, however, with the fundamental psychic experience, the philosophical basis of each type, the way in which each type interprets the spiritual life and the influence each has had on religious thinking. There are many schools of mysticism, and while there is some agreement on fundamentals, it is not always easy to determine just what each school really believes.

Radical, absolute or extreme mysticism as exemplified by mystics like Plotinus, the pseudo-Dionysius and Eckhart; it is cold, unemotional and monotonous in comparison to Sufism and Augustinian mysticism, which exhibit some warmth. Through severe discipline the absolute mystic is able to attain a state of detachment which is conducive to extreme suggestibility. In this condition, by following prescribed rules which the mystics have inherited from the past, it is possible to induce a state of rapture and ecstasy, which the mystic identifies with the Divine Presence. However, this belief in the doctrine that one can attain the Divine Presence is not peculiar to absolute mysticism; other types also uphold this idea.

The first step in this mystical devotion is concentration. Through concentration one is able not only to exclude all irrelevant thoughts but to produce some degree of inner unification. This is the experience of anyone who concentrates for some time. From concentration the mystic passes

to meditation, where the mental activity is low, and then to the state of contemplation where there is no mental activity but almost complete passivity. This is the state of inner unity, blessed peace. There may, of course, be further stages of advancement as one recedes from the normal life. In general the stage of ecstasy is experienced in contemplation.

For the extreme mystic the condition of blessed peace may be followed by a kind of "holy indifference." This cold, unemotional state, this dying from self, is not a surrender to the highest value. In fact, in this state there is a complete lack of values. We see this in Buddhistic and quietist mysticism—absolute resignation without a positive ideal.

While most mystics are not concerned with any kind of analysis of their own experiences, a few like St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross have left for us many details of the steps which they have found useful in attaining the final stage of ecstasy.

There is one significant element in this connection which is relevant to our study, namely the idea that the stage of contemplation where the soul experiences union is beyond the mind. St. John of the Cross says: "The less a soul understands the further does it enter the night of the spirit, through which it has to pass in order to be united with God, in a way that surpasses all understanding." This erroneous doctrine is based on the belief that what the mystic experiences in contemplation belongs to the category of love. We can agree with St. John when he says: "That soul has greater communion with God, which is more advanced in love . . ." but we can hardly agree that the method of attaining this communion with God is not subject to some kind of analytical study.

If during contemplation, the mystic, in his existent being, becomes one with God, the Absolute, the Divine Essence, then naturally in this state the reason plays no part. Our

love for God is not subject to analysis, that we will admit; but the God of extreme mysticism is merely the speculative interpretation of the ecstatic experience. The mystic assures us that contemplation is an act of love; consequently, analysing the ecstatic state which we experience in contemplation is just like analysing the love we have for some individual. This analogy, however, like other analogies used by the mystic, does not apply here. Loving an individual is certainly not like loving a metaphysical abstraction. In prophetic religion the suppliant turns to the Prophet who reflects the attributes and perfections of God. The love we feel for the Prophet has some objective validity; but the same cannot be said for the feeling of love which the mystic experiences in the state of contemplation. The Beloved with whom he feels a spiritual marriage is simply a creation of his own mind and emotions.

In radical mysticism the idea of God is derived from a speculative interpretation of the experience of ecstasy. He is non-personal, beyond all values, changeless, and static. In prophetic religion the idea of God is derived solely from the life and teachings of the Prophet. The Prophet is an historical character. From age to age He comes to the world with laws and precepts suitable to the changing needs of mankind. Unlike the God of mysticism, the God of prophetic religion maintains a vital relation with the world.

One more point will be stressed here, although it applies to all those types of mysticism which claim that man can comprehend the Absolute. The scientist, like the philosopher and the mystic, has always desired to comprehend the underlying reality of his world, the world of nature; and up to the twentieth century he believed that his quest had been realized. For many generations he was convinced that the processes of nature could be "explained" by scientific models, like the atom and ether. At the turn of the century, however, he



began to realize that behind every mystery in the physical world there is still another greater mystery. And then he discovered that models could not really explain the underlying reality.

To-day we know that we are dealing only with partial aspects of scientific truth. We do not apprehend magnetic force and electric force immediately as we apprehend values like beauty and justice. In fact we are inclined to regard scientific quantities like gravitational force, magnetic force, and electric force as subjective mental products. As such they are very useful, but we never lose sight of the fact we are dealing with a world of appearance and not a world of reality.

We see now that we cannot "explain" one of the simplest phenomena of nature, namely the force of gravity. Newton's famous law of gravitation tells how the force depends upon mass and distance, but gives us no insight into the nature of the force; and Newton himself was fully aware of this. Einstein's theory of relativity only postpones the difficulty. As Jeans suggests, ". . . it provides a new description, but not a satisfying explanation, of the facts." Moreover the physicists are confident to-day that we will *never* be able to discover this underlying reality, this first cause. We see now that man's finite nature necessarily imposes certain limitations upon him, limitations which we cannot remove.

If an exact science like physics can tell us nothing about the underlying reality of the world of matter and energy, which is manifestly the simplest with which we are concerned, it seems highly improbable that the mystic could ever discover the Absolute, the Infinite; for the world of the Absolute necessarily encompasses all the world of being.

Finally, let us remember that the physicist has completely given up his quest for the world of reality and is wasting no time on theories and conjectures which must ultimately lead

to further confusion and not to a clarification of the physical world.

The mystic would do well to reconsider his claims in the light of modern scientific thinking. Indeed we might all profit by this experience of the physicist in the quest for ultimate reality. If the greatest minds of our age—and we may consider outstanding physicists who have some philosophical background for their theories as among the greatest minds of our age—abandon long-cherished hopes and theories concerning the ultimate reality of the physical world, we may rest assured that they are impelled by well-founded convictions.

It is interesting to recall, in this connection, that many years before the scientist realized the futility of his search for ultimate reality, Bahá'u'lláh uttered these significant words: "*Having recognized thy powerlessness to attain to an adequate understanding of that Reality which abideth within thee, thou wilt readily admit the futility of such efforts as may be attempted by thee, or by any of the created things, to fathom the mystery of the Living God.*" And then He points out man's true goal: "*This confession of helplessness, which mature contemplation must eventually impel every mind to make, is in itself the acme of human understanding, and marketh the culmination of man's development.*"<sup>1</sup>

### Personal Mysticism

In contrast to the cold, unemotional mysticism we call absolute, there is the so-called personal mysticism, or Christian God-mysticism of men like Bernard of Clairvaux, Thomas à Kempis and St. Francis, which shows personal warmth. In Bernard the dread of the consequences of sin, which, under the influence of Augustine dominated the first half of the Middle Ages, is replaced by love for Christ. It is

<sup>1</sup>Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 165.

the spirit of the neo-Platonic Augustine rather than the theologian-statesman Augustine. This is the mysticism of Philo and the Sufi mysticism of Islám.

Personal mysticism resulted largely from the fusion of mysticism and prophetic religion. Augustine succeeded in reconciling neo-Platonic mysticism with prophetic religion. The Augustinian ideal exerted great influence on Christian mystics in the Middle Ages such as Bernard of Clairvaux, Albertus Magnus, Thomas à Kempis, St. Francis and St. Thomas Aquinas.

The idea of God in personal mysticism is derived from the ecstatic experience, but it is interpreted imaginatively. The God of personal mysticism is not beyond all values. He is the *highest* Value but this highest Value is identified with a personality. As Heiler clearly indicates, in personal mysticism the Infinite assumes an earthly form, the *summum bonum* becomes a human Redeemer-God.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless in personal mysticism God is static, the changeless One, in the words of à Kempis "the eternal Rest of the Saints." The devotion to Christ is not, however, such as we see in the Primitive church: the Saviour-mysticism is not the prophetic ideal. In fact some writers are inclined to believe that the true Augustine is the neo-Platonic Augustine.

The mystic values of the life of Christ, His suffering, His radiant acquiescence, serve primarily as a model for the mystic life. In the final stages of His ascent, however, he must advance beyond the historical personality of Jesus. He can reach the Infinite only by freeing himself of all images. In prophetic religion there is no communion of man with God except through the Prophet, the mediator between man and God. In prophetic religion, the word of the Prophet is final. There is no passing beyond the Prophet, beyond space and time into the realm of the Infinite.

<sup>1</sup>Heiler, *Prayer*, Chapter vi.

### Greek Mysticism and the Church

There is one continuous line of development from Plato to Plotinus, and another, sometimes called the "Hermaic Chain," from Plotinus to the close of the Athenian school of philosophy with Justinian in A.D. 529. The writings of the so-called pseudo-Dionysius, an anonymous individual, also exerted considerable influence on all later Christian mystics. He is called "the father of Christian mystics." He is not to be confused with Dionysius the Areopagite who, at least according to tradition, was a convert of Paul. The author of the writings of the pseudo-Dionysius was probably a pupil of Proclus, the last leader of the Athenian school, for the writings are predominantly neo-Platonic in thought. If this is so, the writings must have appeared about the time Justinian closed the Athenian school of philosophy. Manifestly he was not entirely successful in suppressing the Greek philosophy, for the source of inspiration of the writings was undoubtedly the neo-Platonic mysticism of the Infinite of Plotinus.

We must remember that for several centuries before Plato, philosophers had been speculating on the nature of the physical world and the soul. Heraclitus (540—475 B.C.) taught that the soul was immortal, but he did not believe that it was immaterial. Pythagoras held a similar view. There was much talk about *primary substances* out of which all things could evolve. Parmenides adhered to monism; he believed that there was just one primary substance, the Parmenidean One, as it is sometimes called. He also denied the reality of the world of senses, denied motion and change. Later Anaxagoras and Empedocles abandoned monism for pluralism, and Empedocles rejects the idea of Parmenides that the senses are wholly misleading. We have here two opposing ideas which were reconciled by Leucippus:

1. Our senses tell us that we are living in a world of change.

2. Our reason seems to tell us that there must be one permanent substance underlying the world of change.

Now, for Leucippus the *unchanging One* was an aggregation of particles (atoms) which were exempt from change. The grouping and regrouping of the unchangeable atoms would account for the changes we observe in the world of senses. The atomic theory then opened, or reopened, the way for a mechanistic concept of life. Later philosophers like Democritus advanced the idea that the soul was made of atoms. This crude idea was denied by thinkers like Socrates and Plato.

It is not surprising therefore that Plato, for example, is not always consistent, that he sometimes shifts his position. The mind is not infallible and the intuition is not perfect; but the Greek philosopher, as well as the medieval philosopher, did not fully realize this. It was not until the advent of the experimental method that science could check some of the ancient Greek ideas of the physical world, and it was not until the twentieth century that physicists abandoned the hope of comprehending the reality underlying it.

We will indicate very briefly a few ideas of the Greek mystics.

The mysticism of Plato (428—348 B.C.) naturally goes back to Socrates—a man of extraordinary insight—who was always conscious of an inner guide. He believed that the soul had an inherent capacity for discovering the Divine Reality, and this idea was expanded by Plato, who stressed the divine origin of the soul. He believed that the soul could find the eternal in the temporal, and this faculty he called Love. By means of this mystic Love the soul gets a glimpse of the world of reality through an object of beauty. One uses objects of beauty in this material world as steps to mount upward to the "Beautiful." The goal is the Good, the Ultimate Reality. The eternal world, however, is really

not another world to which we ascend by leaving this world; it is, rather, a kind of immanent Reality. Later mystics imply from his teachings that the Ultimate Reality is above the mind, beyond knowledge; that it is found only in moments of ecstasy, complete passivity. While we are not sure of all of his ideas, we feel certain that he believed that the soul has in itself an eye for Divine Reality and the mind a natural capacity for direct vision of God.

Although Aristotle (384—322 B.C.) stressed the scientific method, he did not overlook the essential value of contemplation; in fact he exerted considerable influence on the mysticism that prevailed from the third to the fifteenth century. He separated God from the world. The Real transcends all that is finite; through contemplation, however, man can gain some knowledge of God. According to Aristotle, the soul in its ascent must renounce all that is finite. When it reaches the summit of its ascent it does not distinguish the All from Nothing. This must be the case, for it has risen above names and attributes, which define for us our world of experience. In a sense Aristotle proposed a kind of negative mysticism.

The most profound result of the impact of Greek thought on Christian mysticism was neo-Platonism, and the outstanding figure of this philosophy was Plotinus (born A.D. 205). In the Middle Ages Plato came to the Christian world largely through Plotinus, whose work is a kind of synthesis of that Greek school of thought which reached its spiritual zenith in Socrates and Plato. For Plotinus, God is not external to us: the way to Him is within us. His system amounts roughly to this:

There is a way down and a way up. There is a centre, figuratively speaking, and God, the One, the Good is this centre. The way down is an emanation of God from the centre, so to speak. God the Absolute, the One, transcends

all finiteness, all thought. He is Unknowable, the Indescribable. From this One, emanations radiate. The first is the mind, which radiates from the Absolute as light radiates from a lamp. From the mind there seems to come a kind of secondary emanation, the Universal Soul, which encompasses, as it were, individual souls. Further details need not concern us here.

The mysticism of Proclus (A.D. 410—485), the last of the Hermaic chain, is more complicated and that of the pseudo-Dionysius still more so.

In spite of all the speculations of the mystics we really do not know any more about the Infinite God than did Plato. This is not surprising, for we derive our knowledge of God from the Prophet and not from speculation. Neither through speculation nor through inward experiences can we make the doctrine of the mystics valid.

### **The Non-Religious Type**

For the student of science and art there is what might be called a non-religious mysticism, which is upheld by the mystical philosopher, the spiritually-minded scientist and to some degree by the inventor. The first step in the path of this mystical philosophy is the belief that there is a kind of wisdom, call it insight or intuition if you wish, which is superior to empirical knowledge. It comes to the creative worker through meditation. It is the creative force which reveals new concepts and new relationships. By means of insight and reason man makes discoveries in the world of value and in the world of science. Both are essential, but their functions are complementary. Intuition discovers what is new; reason organizes. This type of mysticism is not new; it goes back to the days of Heraclitus and Parmenides, but it is more widespread to-day than in the past. No assumption is made about a personal God, but the non-religious mystic

believes that through meditation he is able to attain direct communication with a higher intelligence. For him there is another world more real than the phenomenal world, and his first concern is to learn how to live and work in this world. Although he may not believe in God or any kind of super-rational or supernatural being, we cannot assume that what he receives, in moments of meditation, comes solely from his ego. The scientist who is primarily interested in creative work and who believes that the universe is controlled by a supreme being to whom he may turn in meditation, belongs to this type. However, at times, he may have a feeling of adoration and devotion towards this creator of the phenomenal world which disposes us to classify him as an aesthetic mystic.

### **Aesthetic Mysticism**

This type is somewhat different from all other types. It is sharply contrasted with radical mysticism, and though it has the warmth and fervour of personal mysticism, it does not really resemble the latter in any other way. While it goes back to ancient times, the best examples of it are to be found among modern artists and poets. Some of the Persian Sufis and a few mediaeval mystics like St. Francis of Assisi lean in this direction. The distinguishing characteristics of this type are love and appreciation of the best the world can offer, and unrestrained enthusiasm for the beauty of nature, the flowers, the trees, the sunset, the animals, and whatever excites our admiration. For the aesthetic mystic, there is no difficult path, no harsh asceticism, nor self-criticism. He is concerned primarily with the joy of living and not with the problem of evil. This is the mysticism of artists and poets who have faith in mankind and in God's mercy and love. It is often a reaction against an intolerant Puritanism which is more concerned with the depravity of man than with his good qualities. Just as the philosophers of the seventeenth century



turned from a militant, bigoted ecclesiastical system to natural law, in order to find some sanction for their political and social theories, so creative personalities who long to be at one with the creator of man and the universe, turn from a narrow evangelical piety to the God of the "beautiful" who is immanent in the world. In contemplative absorption the aesthetic mystic feels at one with the creator of all that is uplifting and beautiful. The experience of ecstasy and rapture is, for the aesthetic mystic, proof of the existence of this pantheistic God who reveals Himself in nature. He is not concerned with any metaphysical basis for his belief, for faith in God's eternal goodness is as strong in him as it is in the radical mystic,—perhaps stronger, for the radical mystic often feels impelled to ignore the beautiful.

While we may distinguish between the mystical experience of the radical mystic and that of the aesthetic mystic, one is just about as valid as the other. The ultimate goal of each type is, of course, quite different. One type is entranced with the beauty of God's creation, lives in the world, and finds supreme satisfaction in creative work. The other shuns the beautiful, flees from the world, and finds satisfaction only in what will ultimately lead him to the Absolute. The radical mystic can gaze at an enchanting landscape, listen to a sublime symphony or look at an awe-inspiring work of art and remain unmoved. He may even take some satisfaction in the fact that he is oblivious to everything that evokes sensuous pleasure.

The aesthetic mystic, on the other hand, sees God reflected in everything that enhances life. In general, however, his prayer is not communion with a personal God, but contemplative absorption centred on a subject of aesthetic value. Nevertheless some of the prayers of the aesthetic mystics are inspiring, uplifting and not without that personal inwardness, that communion with God, which characterizes all genuine

prayers. The feeling of the immediate presence of the Divine is not wanting in many of these prayers. Consider, for illustration, this prayerful attitude of Rousseau: "I rose every morning before the sun and passed through a neighbouring orchard into a pleasant path which led by a vineyard and along the hills towards Chambéry. While walking I prayed, not by a vain motion of the lips, but with a sincere lifting up of my heart to the Creator of this beautiful Nature whose charms lay spread out before my eyes. I never like to pray in my chamber; it is to me as if the walls and all the little works of man come between God and myself. I like to contemplate Him in His works, whilst my heart lifts itself up to Him."

While the scientist is not usually regarded as an aesthetic mystic, nevertheless, as we indicated above, many scientists in the contemplation of that supernatural wisdom which governs the universe often glide into aesthetic moods not unlike those experienced by the aesthetic mystic. Einstein declares: "The most beautiful and profound emotion we can experience is the sensation of the mystical. It is the sower of all true science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead. To know that what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty which our dull faculties can comprehend only in their most primitive forms—this knowledge, this feeling is at the centre of true religiousness."

### **Contemporary Religious Mysticism**

There is also the religious type of mysticism which we see in many popular movements of the day. This type is concerned primarily with experience; nevertheless, experience is interpreted pretty much as in the past. The contemporary religious mystic is a pragmatist. If in moments of illumination he experiences something which raises him above the normal

level of existence and which helps him in his individual development, he assumes he has been in the presence of God. Now since he can gain this immediate knowledge of the Divine he assumes, with the older mystics, there must be a little of the Divine within him. Naturally, this belief gives him hope and courage in times of stress.

## CHAPTER VI

### PROPHETIC RELIGION AND MYSTICISM: A CONTRAST

#### **Prophetic Religion**

Prophetic religion is dominated by the idea that the Divine Will is revealed to mankind through a great spiritual genius, or a Prophet like Christ or Muhammad. When the Prophet appears the world is always revived spiritually. The Prophet may also reveal new social laws, as in the case of Judaism, or He may stress individual spiritual development as in the case of Christianity. In either case the transcendent Divine manifests Himself to man through the Prophet who is an intermediary. He is the creator of the world of value. If we follow the precepts of the Prophet, try to understand Him, try to become like Him, we shall be recreated; and without this recreation, religion is of very little value.

#### **Mysticism**

Mysticism, as we have said before, maintains that through meditation and contemplation man may enter the presence of the infinite God, and may be absorbed in the infinite unity of the Godhead. In a broad sense anyone who is aware of the indwelling Spirit of God is a mystic, but we must use the term in a more restricted sense.

The modern mystic has completely discarded asceticism, but he retains the doctrine that a particle of the Divine Essence exists in man, and he believes that man may enter the presence of God. He also believes that divine revelation can come to humanity through the mystic as well as through the Prophet; that is, the Divine Will may be revealed to man

as well as to the Prophet. For most of these modern mystics, man differs from the Prophet only in degree and not in kind.

The majority of modern mystics are concerned primarily with individual spiritual development, and we must allow that they have succeeded where organized religion has failed. It is true that by turning inward, men (a very few men) have been able to improve their individual behaviour; but it is equally true that mysticism has no solution for our baffling social problems. A small minority feel that new social laws can and will be revealed to gifted individuals and that in this way a new world order will be created. Although mysticism has exerted considerable influence upon prophetic religion, history does not indicate that the creative force behind great religious movements is due primarily to mysticism. The combined effect of all the great mystics of Christianity is surely small compared with the effect of the adherents of the primitive church who were inspired by the Founder of Christianity. The same may be said of Islám.

### **The Two Paths**

As we said in Chapter II, the Divine Life Process necessarily leads to a path by means of which man's spirit, which is essentially divine, may return to God, the Divine Essence. This, of course, involves some kind of transmutation of the self whereby it becomes deified. In the language of Eckhart: "If I am to know God directly I must become completely He and He, I: so that this 'He' and this 'I' become and are one 'I.'"

In the Bahá'í writings the path of the wayfarer in quest of God is clearly outlined, but it differs substantially from that of the mystic. We will, therefore, consider here briefly the various stages of the mystic's path and compare this path with that outlined in the Bahá'í writings. We must acknowledge the positive contributions of the mystics, past and present,

and we must appreciate their efforts to attain the higher life which, after all, is the goal of the prophetic religion; but we must part company with them on doctrines like incarnation, and we cannot be in complete agreement with them on the criterion of the spiritual life.

While mystics differ regarding the number and nature of the various stages of the path, they are roughly as follows: conversion, purgation, illumination and union. Some mystics will also include the "dark night of the soul."

*Conversion.* Conversion is that sudden or gradual realization of some lofty, extraordinary state, transcending the level of ordinary experience, or the awakening of some reality that exists within us, some trend within us of which we are not fully cognizant. Our awareness of this trend is, however, usually sudden.

This more or less sudden realization of an overwhelming force, something other than our normal self, which we call conversion, may indicate that we are in touch with a divine power; but this emotional disturbance may also be due to abnormal suggestibility. Conversion in revivalistic religion has been the subject of considerable study, and we are forced to admit that ecstasy and rapture or similar psychic phenomena cannot be taken as proof that the soul has experienced rebirth. What we have said in Chapter III about the claims for the psychic experience in mysticism, applies here.

From the standpoint of prophetic religion, of the Bahá'í Faith in particular, spiritual rebirth or conversion takes place when we realize the Prophet of God as the source of our spiritual life, the creator of moral and ethical values. This kind of conversion is not necessarily associated with any sort of psychic experience. Conversion of this type, moreover, involves the mind as well as the heart. We demonstrated in Chapter III that the heart alone is not an infallible guide to

spiritual truth. Finally, the mystic's anti-intellectualism and his subjectivism very often lead to spiritual and even moral anarchy, and the result may be, in fact it often is, social disunity.

*Purgation.* When the wayfarer is awakened to his higher self he realizes his limitations and the encumbrances that prevent his spiritual progress. He must, therefore, purify the self by "detachment" or "poverty." The final result, at least in extreme mysticism, is that man becomes merely an insignificant *part* of the *whole*, devoid of all desires and rights. The modern mystic, to be sure, does not go as far as this, but he does realize the value of some kind of purification.

According to the Bahá'í Faith, the ultimate aim of our spiritual progress is not to eradicate all our individual aspirations, but rather to make them conform with the teachings of the Prophets. All man's faculties, mind as well as heart, should be utilized in developing the soul. The "dying from self" is not the complete destruction of human personality but its spiritual perfection, the subordination of the ego to the spiritual state of selflessness and sacrifice. It is not necessary to stifle all the senses or material desires, but surely they should be controlled and tempered. This kind of subordination and transformation is necessarily slow. A man may suddenly realize the significance of the Prophet's message, but character building is quite another matter.

All these ascetic conceptions and practices are based on the assumption that human nature is depraved.

Bahá'u'lláh has established, for us, a fine balance between the inner and the outer life, and He is very explicit concerning the things that will advance our spiritual growth and the things that will retard that growth. In the first place Bahá'u'lláh makes it clear that there is no harm in the "world." He says:

*"Should a man wish to adorn himself with the ornaments of*

*the earth, to wear its apparels, or partake of the benefits it can bestow, no harm can befall him, if he alloweth nothing whatever to intervene between him and God, for God hath ordained every good thing, whether created in the heavens or in the earth, for such of His servants as truly believe in Him.*"<sup>1</sup>

Let us observe, however, what He says about the "world." "*Know ye that by 'the world' is meant your unawareness of Him Who is your Maker, and your absorption in aught else but Him.*"<sup>2</sup> We must be thankful for the "world," for this outer or external life. He says: "*Render thanks and praise unto Him, and be of them that are truly thankful.*"<sup>3</sup> We must remember, however, that whatever prevents us from loving God is the world, and we should flee from it. Bahá'u'lláh does not say that we should not be *wholly* absorbed in the world, on the contrary He says we should be absorbed in God only. We do not divide our affections between God and the world. In His own words: "*And as the human heart, as fashioned by God, is one and undivided, it behoveth thee to take heed that its affections be, also, one and undivided. Cleave thou, therefore, with the whole affection of thine heart, unto His love, and withdraw it from the love of any one besides Him, that He may aid thee to immerse thyself in the ocean of His unity. . . .*"<sup>4</sup> There must be a balance between the inner and the outer life, but there can be no balance of affections.

Again Bahá'u'lláh is very explicit in His renunciation of the world. In unequivocal language He warns us that: "*The world is but a show, vain and empty, a mere nothing, bearing the semblance of reality. Set not your affections upon it. . . . Verily I say, the world is like the vapour in a desert, which the thirsty dreameth to be water and striveth*

<sup>1</sup>Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 276.

<sup>2</sup>ibid., p. 276.

<sup>3</sup>ibid., p. 276.

<sup>4</sup>ibid., p. 237.



*after it with all his might, until when he cometh unto it, he findeth it to be mere illusion.*"<sup>1</sup>

Here is a new conception of the world, sharply contrasted with the old. The world is not inherently evil, but again it is not what it appears to be; it is an illusion. According to the old conception it was not only an illusion but an evil, and man could not even live in it, much less have any appreciation for it.

This process of purification cannot be very successful, however, without meditation or reflection. Meditation will be discussed in more detail in Chapter IX; suffice it to say here, that it is the state beyond concentration where mental activity is low. It is not an abnormal condition, in fact meditation is necessary for all creative work. In this subjective state one can get a more comprehensive view of any subject. 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us that without this faculty of meditation man is a mere animal.

You are a stranger in this new world and you will necessarily meet with conflicts. The object of purgation is to resolve these conflicts.

*Illumination.* Through the process of purgation the spiritual reality of man becomes freed from the self, and he is then ready to enter the stage of illumination. In this stage his intuitive powers are heightened, his power of perception is enhanced and his energy is strangely increased. He has greater capacity for comprehending, and dealing with, the accidents of life. However, this increase of power to understand and cope with the phenomenal world is not peculiar to mysticism. Creative personalities in prophetic religion, artists and poets experience the same.

It is only the mystic, however, who claims he can come in direct contact with the Absolute, while in this stage of

<sup>1</sup>ibid., p. 328.

illumination. This rapturous awareness of the Absolute is sometimes called "the practice of the Presence of God." Here again this experience is not peculiar to mysticism. There is a normal religious joy, a majestic calm, which comes to those who are influenced by the power of the Holy Spirit and who are guided by the precepts of the Prophets. This experience is accessible, not to a few gifted individuals, but to everyone who humbly follows the Prophets, abides by their laws and strives to reflect their attributes.

Most mystics distinguish between illumination and union. In illumination the individuality and personality seem to remain intact, while in union this is not so. In illumination the wayfarer is still somewhat of a stranger, but in the state of union, which few ever attain, he is no longer a stranger but a traveller who has returned to his home.

As we have said before, the mystic does not believe that the mind is of any value in this path. Some indeed would go so far as to maintain that it is the mystic and not the scientist who understands the underlying reality of nature. At any rate to-day, the scientist, or at least the physicist, admits that he cannot understand the underlying reality of nature, and he would probably go farther and say that no human could understand this reality. Whatever *a priori* knowledge the mystic may possess, the fact still remains that it is the scientist with his intellectual and intuitive powers who has advanced science, and not the mystic. Finally, had the mystic made freer use of this greatest of God's gifts, the intellect, he would not have been led to identify himself with God.

The mystic claims that our awareness of God is more akin to love than to any kind of intellectualism, and in this we can readily concur. Prophetic religion makes a similar claim. No mystic is more emphatic on this point than Bahá'u'lláh: "*Only when the lamp of search, of earnest striving, of longing*

*desire, of passionate devotion, of fervid love, of rapture, and ecstasy, is kindled within the seeker's heart, and the breeze of His loving-kindness is wafted upon his soul, will the darkness of error be dispelled, the mists of doubts and misgivings be dissipated, and the lights of knowledge and certitude envelop his being."*<sup>1</sup>

Man's destiny is clearly shown in the following words of Bahá'u'lláh: "*Having created the world and all that liveth and moveth therein, He, through the direct operation of His unconstrained and sovereign Will, chose to confer upon man the unique distinction and capacity to know Him and to love Him—a capacity that must needs be regarded as the generating impulse and the primary purpose underlying the whole of creation. . . . Upon the inmost reality of each and every created thing He hath shed the light of one of His names, and made it a recipient of the glory of one of His attributes. Upon the reality of man, however, He hath focussed the radiance of all of His names and attributes, and made it a mirror of His own Self. Alone of all created things man hath been singled out for so great a favour, so enduring a bounty."*<sup>2</sup>

We cannot infer from this, however, that our love for God is possible only when we lay aside the mind.

Moreover, Bahá'u'lláh makes it very clear that love and obedience cannot be separated. The man who follows the Prophet has a twofold obligation. "*The first is steadfastness in His love, such steadfastness that neither the clamour of the enemy nor the claims of the idle pretender can deter him from cleaving unto Him Who is the Eternal Truth, a steadfastness that taketh no account of them whatever. The second is strict observance of the laws He hath prescribed—laws which He hath always ordained, and will continue to ordain, unto men, and through which the truth may be distinguished and separated from falsehood."*<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>ibid., p. 267.

<sup>2</sup>ibid., p. 65.

<sup>3</sup>ibid., p. 289.

The meaning of the Divine Presence, which the mystic believes he has attained in this stage, has been discussed in Chapter III, so that we need not discuss it further.

*Union.* As the drop of water from the sea may ultimately return to the sea, so the wayfarer may return to his original home. This is union, and it implies some sort of deification of man. It is clear by now that this doctrine of deification is unwarrantable.

The teaching of Bahá'u'lláh on union with God is necessarily sharply contrasted with the doctrines of the mystics. The real union with God is complete and continual obedience to the laws revealed by the Prophet. In his own words: "*By self-surrender and perpetual union with God is meant that men should merge their will wholly in the Will of God, and regard their desires as utter nothingness beside His Purpose. Whatsoever the Creator commandeth His creatures to observe, the same must they diligently, and with the utmost joy and eagerness, arise and fulfil. They should in no wise allow their fancy to obscure their judgment, neither should they regard their own imaginings as the voice of the Eternal.*"<sup>1</sup> It is through the Prophet that the Divine Will is revealed to man.

### **The Seven Valleys of Bahá'u'lláh**

This treatise was written by Bahá'u'lláh some time before He declared to His followers that He was the One promised by His Precursor, the Báb. He desired to encourage the scattered followers of the Báb, who had rallied around Him, to search diligently for the Promised One. We will consider here very briefly, just a few points regarding the Seven Cities, Seven Stages, or Seven Valleys through which the wayfarer must pass in his journey "*. . . from the earthly abode to the heavenly home.*" The language, as well as the style, is similar

<sup>1</sup>Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 337.

to that used by the Sufis, and was therefore familiar to His followers, who were mystically inclined. Many of the terms, however, have a different connotation. For example, by the "Beloved" He meant Himself and not the Divine Essence.

The reader is referred to the complete text<sup>1</sup> for details.

#### THE VALLEY OF SEARCH

*"In this Valley, the wayfarer rides the steed of patience. . . . It is requisite for such servants to purge the heart—which is the wellspring of divine treasure—from every impression, to forsake blind imitation inherited from their forebears and to close the door of friendship or enmity to all upon the earth."*

#### THE VALLEY OF LOVE

*"In this city the heaven of ecstasy is elevated, the all-luminous sun of yearning shines forth and the fire of love is aglow. . . ."*

#### THE VALLEY OF KNOWLEDGE

*"He will perceive the secrets of resurrection in the regions of creation and in the souls with inner and outer eyes, and, with a spiritual heart, he will perceive the divine wisdom in the infinite manifestations of God."*

After much suffering and patience the seeker will find his Beloved and he will discover that all the Manifestations or Prophets of God are really one.

*"After traversing the Valley of Knowledge, which is the last plane of limitation, the wayfarer attains the first stage of*

#### THE VALLEY OF UNITY

*whereupon he quaffs the chalice of abstraction and witnesses the Manifestations of Oneness."* The wayfarer now sees that all

<sup>1</sup>The Seven Valleys and The Four Valleys, revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, translated by Ali-Kuli Khan. New York. Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1936.

things reflect the power and beauty of God. The self-cultivating life merges into the unitive life. Bahá'u'lláh makes it clear that this Unity is not to be confused with the mystic's concept of unity. He sets forth three cardinal principles to which the mystic could never subscribe: (1) man is not an incarnation of God, (2) man cannot know the Divine Essence, (3) man's knowledge of God comes through the Prophet. The remaining three Valleys outline the progressive development of the soul which results from the wayfarer's love for, knowledge of, and obedience to the Prophet.

#### THE VALLEY OF CONTENTMENT

*"In this Valley, he will feel the breezes of divine contentment wafting from the plane of the spirit; he will burn the veils of want; and with inward and outward eyes, he will witness, within and without all things, the meaning of the verse: 'In that Day, God will make all independent out of His abundance.'"*

#### THE VALLEY OF WONDERMENT

*"He witnesses a wondrous world and a new creation at every instant, and adds wonderment to wonderment; and he is astonished at the works of the Lord of Oneness."*

#### THE VALLEY OF TRUE POVERTY AND ABSOLUTE NOTHINGNESS

*"This state is that of dying from self and living in God, and being poor in self and becoming rich in the Desired One."*

In one of the concluding passages Bahá'u'lláh makes it clear that the wayfarer must adhere to the laws and precepts of the Prophets. *"During all these journeys, the wayfarer must not deviate a hair's breadth from the 'Law'—which is indeed the essence of the 'Path' and the very fruit of the tree of 'Truth'—and in all stages, he must show implicit obedience to the Commandments, and firmly eschew all forbidden things—*

*in order that he may be favoured with the cup of the Law and be grounded in the mysteries of the Truth."*

### **Mysticism and Fundamental Concepts**

Mysticism is usually a reaction against the superficiality of a decadent civilization. It often reaches its highest point when prophetic religion is at its lowest, and consequently appears superior by comparison. Persons with a strong desire for things spiritual are naturally, when civilization seems on the verge of collapse, attracted toward a philosophy of escape, and are also repelled by the incrustations of institutional religion.

While mysticism has preserved for us the best in prophetic piety, the contrasts cannot be overlooked. Heiler points out the difference in a few significant phrases.<sup>1</sup> Prophetic religion affirms personality, while mysticism denies it. One flees from the world, denies the natural life and ignores history; the other believes in life, values history and endeavours to realize ideals and aims. Of course, pure or absolute mysticism has always been modified by prophetic religion; consequently the type most familiar to the western world possesses a warmth and fervour foreign to that of the East.

The concept of God in either form, however, differs radically from the prophetic ideal. To the mystic the concept of God must be based upon his experience of ecstasy. He may be non-personal, beyond all values, super-good or a loving, personal God; but He is always static and outside of history. God in extreme mysticism of the absolute type is merely the speculative interpretation of the experience of ecstasy. The difficulty, of course, lies in the interpretation of the ecstatic experience, an experience in which there is a cessation of normal consciousness. Parenthetically, this ecstatic experience is not to be confused with the normal experience of

<sup>1</sup>Heiler, *Prayer*, Chapter VI.

religious values as in prophetic religion. As Heiler shows, the God of mysticism is not a revelation in history; God reveals Himself to every man who is prepared to apprehend Him. The birth of Christ, His suffering, His death, indeed the whole history of redemption, is valuable to the mystic only in so far as it prepares him for the mystical experience. A divinely-appointed mediator, then, becomes merely a symbol of an infinite Deity. The mystic is, therefore, led to concepts of God which are not only opposed to prophetic religion but to history.

Heiler points out the limitations of mysticism in other fields.<sup>1</sup> Since God reveals Himself to the mystic directly, the mystic is exalted above religious authority. He maintains a similar attitude toward ethics; to the mystic, moral action is not a thing good in itself. Little consideration is given to the social order, since mysticism is an esoteric religion designed for a few gifted persons. Neither is mysticism concerned with world civilization, for pure mysticism is hostile to all civilization. In the concept of immortality we see the same non-social, static ideal: immortality is merely the ecstatic vision of, and union with, God.

<sup>1</sup>Heiler, *Prayer*, Chapter VI.



## CHAPTER VII

### SCIENCE, REVELATION AND MYSTICISM

#### Science and Revelation

When we think of divine revelation we naturally think of revealed or intuitive knowledge. The knowledge possessed by the great creative personalities of prophetic religion, or in the language of religion, the Prophets, like Muhammad, is innate, immediate. We are fairly certain that they did not attend schools, nor did they create eclectic systems out of contemporary or ancient wisdom. There is, however, this essential difference between the intuitive knowledge which we associate with divine revelation and the kind which we associate with science. The intuitive knowledge of the scientist must be checked constantly by empirical knowledge, while the intuitive knowledge of the Prophet needs no check. This is rather difficult for the scientist to concede, but, as we hope to show, the difference begins to vanish when we think of revealed knowledge in terms of *total experience*, not merely experience in the world of science.

We must admit, however, that the phenomenal success of science in the physical world, the failure of religion to establish peace and harmony in the world at large, and finally the secularization of religion as well as society, all tend to create, in the mind of the layman, the idea that the revealed knowledge of the Prophet is not as reliable as the intuitive knowledge of the scientist. Of course, many laymen feel that scientific knowledge is the only certain knowledge we possess to-day. They firmly believe that scientific knowledge is final and absolute; but the modern scientist, or at least the modern physicist, does not make this claim.

Ever since the decline of organized religion there have been many attempts to create eclectic systems out of the salient features of extant religions. So far as the world outlook goes, some of these movements are superior to religious systems, but they lack force to effect any large-scale reform either in the individual or society.

Within the pale of any particular religious system there are many who have faith in revealed knowledge, but they feel constrained to regard the revealed knowledge of their own religion as final and absolute. For the Christian the Divine Will was revealed through Christ once and for all time. All other Prophets are at least inferior, if not false. The follower of Muhammad makes a similar claim for Islám. It has taken man a long time to realize that creation is a mode of causation, and it may take him some time to realize that divine revelation is continuous.

For the scientist, however, the problem is not progressive revelation, but simply *revelation*. How can we reconcile the innate revealed knowledge of the Prophet with scientific thinking? The intuitive knowledge of the mystic presents some difficulties but, as we shall see, they are insignificant when compared with the revealed knowledge of the Prophet.

In general, then, we are concerned with two types of revealed knowledge: the kind that comes to the Prophet, which is innate, independent of training and reflection, and the kind that comes to the mystic in his moments of meditation, particularly in the state of ecstasy or vision.

Let us consider the revealed knowledge of the mystic first, since it is more akin to the intuitive knowledge of the scientist. To begin with, as we have shown, Bahá'u'lláh refutes the claim that man is a part of the Divine Essence, and that man can experience *immediately* the presence of God. This removes two formidable stumbling blocks of the scientist, for certainly no scientist would admit that man is a part of God, nor that

man could experience immediately the Infinite, that is, enter into the presence of God. Bahá'u'lláh also reminds us that man's insight or intuition is not infallible. This applies to the revealed knowledge of the mystic as well as to the intuitive knowledge of the scientist. The mystic and the mystic philosopher realize this.

Now we must consider the revealed knowledge of the Prophet, which is of a different order. The knowledge of the Prophet, being infallible, requires no test. As we have said, the scientist is sceptical about this kind of knowledge. For him and for the layman who tries to follow him, there is simply nothing in our scientific *experience* that corresponds to the innate revealed knowledge of the Prophet. In a very real sense perhaps this is true, but there is still another approach to the problem.

First, however, let us bear in mind that a scientific search for revealed truth might be about as useless as a scientific search for beauty. One should *experience* a feeling of beauty before beginning to look for it: values are antecedent to discussions about them. For this reason, one should have some awareness or appreciation of revealed truth before starting on the search for it.

It is sometimes maintained that if the scientist would pursue his search far enough (whatever that means), he would discover God. This may be true, but the God he finds will not be the historic God of prophetic religion, who reveals Himself to man through a Prophet, like Bahá'u'lláh. Should he investigate secular and religious history he might fare better, but the chances are really against him. He might arrive at the conclusion that all religions are equally true and none really false. By the time he reaches this stage of his quest, however, the divine element will probably have disappeared. At least that is what usually happens. He might conceivably conclude

that all religions are divine in origin, but that is really asking too much of a scientist, even an hypothetical scientist.

The case is not hopeless, however, for two reasons. In the first place, revealed knowledge has come to mankind in our day. In the second place, I believe we can demonstrate that revealed truth is not foreign to our experience. The historical fact that Bahá'u'lláh did bring to our age a divine Faith commensurate with our scientific advancement, enables us to reconstruct our analysis along easier paths. If the scientist will investigate the tenets of this Faith, which has now encircled the globe; if he will study the lives of the founders with an unbiassed mind, he will discover that divine revelation is not incompatible with scientific thinking.

Let us now consider the problem of experience. To be more specific, we might say the problem of *total experience* or *all experience*.

### Revelation and Experience

The average intelligent thinker who is influenced by the method of science finds it difficult if not impossible to believe that a Manifestation of God or a Prophet could completely change the consciences, the patterns of thought, or the thinking habits of the generality of mankind. He also finds it difficult to believe that laws and principles for a new social order could ever be *revealed* to mankind through a religious genius. At the same time he is, at least dimly, aware that the existing ideologies can never establish any kind of peace and harmony. The dilemma may be due to a restricted view of *experience*. If we limit ourselves to the scientific approach, in evaluating the Prophet, we may find nothing in our *experience* that corresponds to revealed truth. And yet in a very real sense, there is nothing in our *experience* that corresponds to scientific truth. Science has failed to explain the underlying reality of nature in terms of mechanical models, which is equivalent

to saying that science has failed to explain nature in terms of experience. Moreover, for the average reader, the symbolism of mathematics is just as irrelevant, to his *experience*, as the concept of revelation.

To be sure, we assume that there is an underlying reality in the physical world and we draw diagrams and construct models to represent it, but we cannot prove that these pictorial representations really correspond to this reality. We may build, in our imagination, a scientific model to imitate a given phenomenon but, to-day at least, we do not claim that the model really explains the phenomenon. Science is concerned with a world of appearance, and the best we can do is to express our knowledge of this world in a sort of symbolic language which is unfamiliar to most of us. As we have indicated, the external world is known to us only by inference. Scientific laws and concepts are not immediately apprehended as are values like beauty, justice and goodness.

The idea of revealed truth is not wholly incomprehensible to us if we think in terms of *all* experience and not merely experience in the *world of science*. When we turn to the world of value, the world of art, music and literature, we see that creations and standards come to us through inspired individuals and not through any scientific procedure. These creative personalities *reveal* aesthetic values to us. The language of the world of value is not the unfamiliar symbolic language of science but the more intimate language of colour, form, rhythm and harmony.

We are all familiar with this sort of revealed knowledge. It is not really *foreign* to our experience. We know, moreover, the futility of applying any kind of scientific analysis to aesthetic values. To be sure, it has been done, but the results are certainly not very convincing. We do not evaluate the art of Leonardo, the music of Beethoven nor the style of Shakespeare, in terms of our experience in the world

of science. Can we not evaluate the revealed knowledge of the Prophet as we evaluate the revealed knowledge of the artist or musician? It is true that in the realm of aesthetic values men do not resort to the sword or the torch, but it is also true that in the realm of aesthetic values a complete transformation of society is not effected. To illustrate, in the realm of art we are now suffering a relapse, but there is no indication that there will be any bloodshed. Should a great creative genius appear and establish new art values it is highly improbable that he would be persecuted. However, if at the same time, he should attempt a few social reforms we all know what would happen. A literary genius may not have an exemplary character, in fact he may have a very bad character, but we usually accept his contributions for their intrinsic worth.

The Prophet must necessarily deal with man's grosser, as well as his finer nature. Everything that is small, contemptible and ferocious, comes to the surface, but surely that does not mean that his work is less meritorious than that of the revealer of art values. Should the Prophet overlook the despicable characteristics of a declining social order and preach only individual spiritual development, he would never be persecuted; but neither would he establish social justice. In eliminating racial animosity, national hatreds, and class distinctions, the Bahá'í Faith has succeeded where humanitarian movements and older faiths have failed. Moreover, the Bahá'í Faith has transformed the individual lives of its adherents. However, all this was not accomplished without the sacrifice of over twenty thousand martyrs.

The proof of a creative artist's message is the artist himself and his creation; but the same can be said of the Prophet. Bahá'u'lláh says: "*The first and foremost testimony establishing His truth is His own Self. Next to this testimony is His*

*Revelation.*"<sup>1</sup> The advent of a Manifestation of God in our day is an historical event which cannot be overlooked, but we will not attempt here even a cursory glance at this world-embracing Faith. Our purpose is to show that the concept of divine revelation is not wholly foreign to our experience provided we take a comprehensive, inclusive view of experience. In fact, all new knowledge is a matter of revelation, but revelation in its completeness is seen only in prophetic religion.

### Science and Mysticism

Let us return to mysticism. We have observed that the experience of the religious mystic is not unique. Rapture and ecstasy are not invariably associated with a religious background. Moreover, the mystics themselves agree that some test is necessary to determine the validity of an immediate experience. Since it is the mind that determines and applies this test, the experience cannot be absolutely authoritative over the individual.

But there are still other considerations that limit the methods of the mystic. He is unable to transmit to others that which he experiences. When we go to him, he tells us that we also must tread the mystical path. However, in practice, this is only possible for a few gifted individuals. When one goes to the Prophet or to the Divine Word, he does not come away empty-handed. The early history of Christianity or Islám shows very clearly that the Prophet has something to give to every class of society. Even though the mystic has much to tell us about individual development, the possibilities of any kind of religious unity through mysticism are too inconsiderable to be practical. How can mysticism with its personal authority eradicate national, political, or religious prejudice when it has no central figure to whom all classes may turn? If the nations and races of a distracted and deluded world

<sup>1</sup>Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 105.

could be united by any such man-made discovery, they would have been united long ago.

We may now inquire, can science come to the aid of mysticism? Can science make the revelations of the mystic any more authoritative or valid? Somewhere in the mystical state, perhaps, just beyond the point where there is no object of contemplation, there seems to be a release of new energy. Can some specialized science control this phenomenon so that mysticism can produce something that transcends the work of the mind? It seems unlikely, because science as a whole agrees that the mystical experience is not knowledge. The experience, while an aid to creation, does not create. The farther we go from contemplation, that is, the point where there is no object for reflection, the more we depend upon mere feeling; and feeling alone cannot lead us to universal truth.

Ostensibly, reason should lead us to universal truth; but as we know, in reality it does not. The human mind has its limitations and thinkers are never entirely free from feeling. Finally we must remember that even science yields universal truths only in fields where verification is possible. The speculations of mathematical physics are far from universal. Science is of inestimable value to religious thinking in that it frees us from superstition, but when science takes a hand at fundamental religious concepts, it is in a field of speculation, a field in which its results cannot be verified. The so-called proofs for the existence of God are certainly not universally accepted. The same applies to such attributes as omnipotence and immanence.

It seems highly improbable therefore that science and mysticism will produce anything that can replace religion.

However, there is still another path for the foresighted adventuresome soul who has a little spiritual perception and intellectual courage. A comprehensive view of history shows



that the higher values come to humanity not by philosophical speculations nor scientific research nor even through some inner urge, but rather through great personalities. Art, music and poetry have been given to the world by creative geniuses. Harmony and counterpoint do not produce great music, nor does theology create revelation.

Now if we are free from bias we must admit that we have no grounds for believing that divine knowledge, prophetic revelation, has ceased. On the contrary, unparalleled confusion in the world to-day might signalize the birth of a new revelation, a revelation suited to the maturity of this age. To be sure, the methods and aims of such a religion would not necessarily be in agreement with the limited knowledge of contemporary thinkers. Indeed, we should be sceptical of any proposed revival of divine grace which conforms with our finite understanding. A man is not being superstitious nor limited in his comprehension when he admits there is an unfathomable mystery about all revelation.

That which man can conceive by his own powers is, in the very nature of the case, not equivalent to Divine Revelation.

Our duty and responsibility compel us to investigate. If a man claims to be the bearer of a divine message the validity of his claims can be established readily enough. The real difficulty is not in establishing a proof of his message or his claim, but lies in freeing our minds and hearts from prejudice. History proves this. Man rejects revelation not because he is unable to establish the truth of the Prophet's message but because he refuses to examine the evidence.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE CREATIVE WORD

#### **The Style of the Creative Word**

All creative art has its origin in some extraordinary spiritual experience. The painter, the musician, the poet must use a medium of expression that is best suited to his particular creation. If the prose writer indulges in verse, his style may become ornate and involved. There is no virtue in relating a simple, straightforward fact by the indirect method of poetic imagery.

As we tramp through the country in quest of unusual things, our attention may be arrested by a distant mountain; but if there is nothing worth seeing on top of the mountain, that is really all we need to know about it. When the native tells you: "It's just flat country up there," he is using effective prose. If, however, the view from the mountain top is enchanting, if it produces a feeling of ecstasy, then our native cannot express this fact effectively without resorting to verse. Prose is limited to thoughts about things, and while it can engender emotion, it cannot adequately describe it.

The poet must use words, and words that help the reader to visualize. He never uses an abstract term when a concrete one will express his meaning. The figures and analogies he uses are familiar to his readers. An analogy that is foreign to the reader or more incomprehensible than the thing to be described is necessarily useless—more correctly, worse than useless. The terms must be concrete and simple, but the style must be suited to spiritual truths.

It is the poetical style and not "average prose" that is capable of expressing emotion and beauty.

Let us consider a familiar passage in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. The banished duke, finding himself in the forest of Arden far removed from the superficialities of court life, desires to express his gratitude. Now in real life, what would the duke have to say? He might say, "Isn't it fine?" That is plain prose; there is nothing flowery about it, but what does it convey to you regarding the duke's feelings? Well, let us see what Shakespeare has to say:

"And this our life exempt from public haunt  
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,  
Sermons in stones and good in everything."

The meaning is clear to everyone although taken literally the sentence is meaningless. Moreover, it would be absurd to suggest that the writer did not convey the duke's emotion concretely.

Now the position of the spiritual genius is somewhat similar to that of the poet. The Prophet must use familiar terms, terms that can be understood by everyone, but his "style" must transcend that used in unemotional narrative. Consider this exquisite passage from the Qur'an: "God is the light of heaven and earth; the similitude of His light is a niche in the wall, wherein a lamp is placed, and the lamp enclosed in a case of glass; the glass appears as if it were a shining star. It is lighted with the oil of a blessed tree, an olive neither of the East, nor of the West; it wanteth little but that the oil thereof would give light although no fire touched it. This is the light added unto light. God will direct unto His light whom He pleaseth."

The message of the Prophet is not concerned with simple things but rather with the most profound problems of human existence, moral and spiritual development, faith, hope and life eternal.

The direct prose style or average prose is adequate for

conveying intellectual ideas and for narrative but useless when it comes to a great emotion or a spiritual experience. The emotional state cannot be expressed directly.

Of course we might indulge in a long minute description of an emotional reaction, but at best that kind of prose description pales before the poetical method. Those who are more familiar with prose than verse might find it profitable to turn to some real master of verse and study the way in which he portrays complex emotional experiences. Let us consider the famous speech of Macbeth on the death of Lady Macbeth.

For the sake of Lady Macbeth he has become hopelessly involved in intrigue and murder, and now the affairs of state press heavily upon him, absorbing his whole thought. At this critical moment comes the tragic news. It is an inopportune time to think about this irreparable loss and, as if this were not enough, the panorama of past events begins to unfold rapidly before him. What would Macbeth say, in real life? Probably nothing, but Shakespeare must describe his state and his audience will not tolerate a long description, so Macbeth says:

“ She should have died hereafter:  
There would have been a time for such a word.  
To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,  
To the last syllable of recorded time;  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The way to dusty death. Out, out brief candle!  
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,  
And then is heard no more; it is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing.”

Sometimes the poetical style seems somewhat involved, but there are complicated moods of the soul which cannot be expressed directly but which become recognizable when they are expressed in poetic imagery. Consider the following lines from Shakespeare:

“ Or as a snail whose tender horns being hit  
Shrinks backward in his shelly cave with pain,  
And there, all smother'd up, in shade doth sit,  
Long after fearing to creep forward again. . . . ”

Now Marlowe has a similar passage which is possibly more philosophical, but less concrete. Marlowe says:

“ It lies not in our power to love or hate,  
For will in us is over-ruled by fate.”

However, let us observe that while Marlowe's description seems more profound it certainly does not give us a picture of the emotional state. Unlike Shakespeare, Marlowe uses too many abstract terms. In this short passage he uses three abstract terms, *power*, *will* and *fate*, and while the use of such terms may appeal to our ego they do not convey the emotional state like the description of the little snail who . . . “ all smother'd up, in shade doth sit.”

We must never lose sight of this important fact in dealing with the revealed Word. The human mind has a peculiar faculty which, for the lack of a better term, we might call “selective appreciation.” A writer may express himself so vigorously in verse that he has no poetry in his soul. Again a musician may become so involved in the beauty of music that he fails to see any beauty in art or poetry. This may explain why the erudite sometimes fail to see the beauty that is hidden and yet not hidden in a new revelation.

When we turn to the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, we observe that He expresses great spiritual laws by this indirect method. The terms He uses are always concrete but the style, in the very nature of His mission, is not the simple style used in

ordinary conversation nor the involved style of the philosopher.

The things we love may be harmless in themselves, but they may have no permanence and moreover they may prevent us from attaining eternal life. Now this direct statement, although true, has no force that will overcome our spiritual inertia; but consider the following very effective lines from the pen of Bahá'u'lláh: "*Will ye be content with that which is like the vapour in a plain, and be willing to forego the Ocean Whose waters refresh, by virtue of the Will of God, the souls of men?*"<sup>1</sup>

In another passage Bahá'u'lláh elaborates the same theme in still more forceful language. "*Clothe thyself with the essence of righteousness, and let thine heart be afraid of none except God. Obstruct not the luminous spring of thy soul with the thorns and brambles of vain and inordinate affections, and impede not the flow of the living waters that stream from the fountain of thine heart. Set all thy hope in God, and cleave tenaciously to His unfailing mercy. Who else but Him can enrich the destitute, and deliver the fallen from his abasement?*"<sup>2</sup>

There is no doubt here as to the ultimate outcome of useless and extravagant affections. The spring is a symbol of life, a real mystery, for the origin or source is never apparent. But though we may be ignorant of the source we can readily obstruct the flow, and this is done most effectively by thorns and brambles since they are not easily dislodged.

On a higher plane we sometimes discover that we may impede the "living waters" by undue anxiety, anxiety as to the outcome of our efforts to promote the Faith of God. In this condition we receive fresh hope and confidence from such passages as: "*Be unrestrained as the wind, while carrying the Message of Him Who hath caused the Dawn of Divine Guidance to break. Consider, how the wind, faithful to that*

<sup>1</sup>Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 293.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.*, p. 323.

*which God hath ordained, bloweth upon all the regions of the earth, be they inhabited or desolate. Neither the sight of desolation, nor the evidences of prosperity, can either pain or please it. It bloweth in every direction, as bidden by its Creator. So should be every one that claimeth to be a lover of the one true God.”<sup>1</sup>*

The East is inherently more poetical and spiritual than the West; but the language of the spirit is universal, and the *laws of the spirit* can be expressed only in the universal language of the spirit and of the heart. “*Would'st thou seek the grace of the Holy Spirit, enter into fellowship with the righteous, for he hath drunk the cup of eternal life at the hands of the immortal Cup-bearer and even as the true morn doth quicken and illumine the hearts of the dead.*”<sup>2</sup>

### **Prayer as an Expression of the Creative Word**

As we said in Chapter IV, mysticism is non-social. The mystic is primarily concerned with his own relation to God and not with the common spiritual experience of the group. The expression of a common longing for God's love, mercy and forgiveness, as found in public worship, is therefore quite foreign to mysticism; but prophetic revelation with its social feeling necessarily encourages the expression of this common longing. To be sure, the spirit which animates the prayer in congregational worship has its origin in the private prayers of great religious personalities. Prophetic revelation is therefore not only concerned with private prayer but also with common prayer.

Let us consider, very briefly, the problem of prayer in general, and then in a little more detail the more complex problem of common prayer. Prayer is apparently a very simple matter, but the history of religion shows that, like the

<sup>1</sup>Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 339.

<sup>2</sup>Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, No. 57, Persian.

concept of God or the belief in immortality, it has slowly evolved.

Its development might be divided into three stages.

(1) Primitive prayer is free, spontaneous and vigorous, but it is always dominated by the idea that man can change God's will.

(2) Highly civilized man realizes that God's will is more important than his own, but he still believes that man knows how to approach God through prayer. In this stage, man has discovered that formulated prayers of highly gifted people are more effective for public worship than spontaneous prayers. Since the Reformation, however, there has been no uniformity of belief on this critical point.

(3) As we study the revealed prayers in the Bahá'í writings we become cognizant of a much higher stage of devotion. Man's approach to God in this day is through the revealed Word. "*Intone, O My servant, the verses of God that have been received by thee . . .*"<sup>1</sup>

There are two elements of our prayer life which are necessary but not sufficient in themselves. Too often they are confused with prayer but in reality they have a much wider application. These elements are adoration and devotion.

Adoration means a surrender to some supreme good, but this supreme good may be nature, our country, or an individual. A personal God is not essential to adoration, which needs only an ideal object.

Devotion, on the other hand, is concerned not with objects but with values, ethical, intellectual, aesthetic or religious. It is a mood of the soul, still, exalted, consecrated. We see it in art, music, and even science. Devotion is subjective while adoration is objective.

Prayer is something more than adoration or devotion—it is more than a feeling of exaltation or a hallowed mood.

<sup>1</sup>Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 295.



"Prayer," says 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "*is conversation with God.*" Too often the modern world sees in prayer only the devotional attitude and contemplation. Prayer involves adoration, that is, the holding to an ideal object, and also devotion, the feeling of exaltation, but it is more inclusive than either. It is the Prophet and the Prophet alone who can restore for us the true meaning of prayer.

Revelation never destroys but rather fulfils the deepest aspirations of man, and yet it is never eclectic. The Bahá'í writings are replete with prayers which cover the entire range of human longing and devotion. As we read and meditate upon these prayers we are forced to admit that we, creatures of God, do not know how to supplicate God. In the obligatory prayers, which are recited daily, we find affirmations like the following: "*Too high art Thou for the praise of those who are nigh unto Thee to ascend unto the heaven of Thy nearness, or for the birds of the hearts of them who are devoted to Thee to attain to the door of Thy gate.*"<sup>1</sup>

The most effective supplication is manifestly that which has been revealed for us. "*I render Thee thanks, O Thou Who hast lighted Thy fire within my soul, and cast the beams of Thy light into my heart, that Thou hast taught Thy servants how to make mention of Thee, and revealed unto them the ways whereby they can supplicate Thee, through Thy most holy and exulted tongue, and Thy most august and precious speech.*"<sup>2</sup>

If we are unable to express ourselves adequately in our private devotions how can we presume to offer a public prayer?

### Origin of Common Prayer

Before the Babylonian exile public worship in Israel was not unlike that found among the primitive peoples, but

<sup>1</sup>*Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh*, translated by Shoghi Effendi. New York, Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1938, p. 320.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.*, p. 283.

Prophets like Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Jeremiah were constantly demanding reforms. Restricting the offering of sacrifice to Jerusalem eliminated polytheism, but it did not do away with the old sacrificial cult; indeed, it emphasized it. When, however, the Israelites found themselves in a foreign land, far removed from their beloved city with its central sanctuary, the offering of sacrifice was out of the question. But the desire to worship the God of their fathers was no less great. Out of this apparent calamity emerged a pure spiritual congregational worship free from ritual. This simple service consisted of the reading of Scripture and prayer.

To be sure, after the exile there was a return to ritual more complicated than before, but the idea of a "house of prayer" in which the common prayer was central was never lost. For a time then the old sacrificial cult and the new spiritual worship existed side by side.

The early Christians worshipped in the Synagogue, but they also had their own eucharistic service in the houses of the believers. The break with the Palestinian church finally led to a Christian liturgy. The Scripture reading and prayer were combined with the eucharistic meal, and out of this fusion came the Christian mass.

The early Christians were, however, not bound by formulae.

### **The Idea of Common Prayer**

It is interesting to note here that in this common prayer of the primitive church one member of the congregation prays and the rest follow with devotion. That is, prayer is recited by one person.

At first anyone might offer the prayer, and the prayers were free and spontaneous. However, the personal religious experience of an individual can never be valid for the group. Only a very few gifted people ever approach the ideal of pure and spontaneous prayer, and so in time officials, bishops

and presbyters, recited the prayer in the name of the assembled congregation. Here again, in the beginning the prayer of the official or liturgist was quite free and spontaneous, but fixed forms began to appear in the third century and by the fifth century we find obligatory forms of prayer.

But the spirit lived on for many centuries, for these fixed forms were really very effective and they awakened in the devout soul the feeling of fellowship. As mentioned above, the spontaneity which the individual feels in his private devotions cannot be carried over to the group. For as individuals we are not pure channels of divine revelation, and our enthusiasm, unless it is the result of careful thought and meditation, is not necessarily valuable for the group. Under great stress, of course, many members of a group may be inspired, but we are speaking here of a form of worship. We have discovered, as the early church discovered, that the personal experience even of those "possessors of the spirit," those endowed with charismatic gifts, cannot be the *raison d'être* for regular meetings of prayer. The experience gradually weakens. The liturgical prayer, however, after it has become a part of the religious life of the community, has great stability.

We should observe another point about common prayer in the early church. The reading of Scripture and the sermon were designed to prepare the congregation for the prayer. When public worship became a matter of education and instruction, prayer became secondary.

Common prayer, like the private prayer, is a communion with God. It is something more than the combined prayers of the many. The congregation is in communion with God. Every member of this spiritual brotherhood is an integral part of an ideal fellowship, and it is the fellowship that is calling upon God. And yet, in its effect upon the individual it is something more than a collective religious experience.

The main purpose of common prayer was edification or awakening, and this was accomplished by expressions of adoration, praise and thanksgiving. The congregation, however, is not only grateful for the blessings of God; it is ever mindful of His majesty and power.

### **Common Prayer and the Reform Movements**

Every reform movement has tried to recapture the spontaneity of the early church. The Reformation naturally rebelled against the prescribed rules for prayer, and the English Independents went so far as to maintain that a formulated prayer was blasphemous. The Evangelical sects did, of course, liberate public worship from all sensuous symbols, but the sobriety and austerity of many of these reformers, unwittingly, perhaps, did about as much to "imprison the spirit" as did the statutory liturgy. After all, the return was not so much to the primitive church as to the synagogic worship of Judaism.

The reform sects overlooked two important points:

The average individual needs something objective to uplift him. Devotion, while not prayer, is necessary to prayer, and lofty, majestic architecture, the most impersonal of all the arts, is a great stimulus to devotion. Images must go, but not temples.

Again, the spirit of man, which they desired to free from formulated prayer, needs discipline and guidance; and these must come through the revealed Word.

This brief sketch may help us to realize that for a long, a very long time, man has been struggling to establish an ideal of congregational worship. In general there are two schools. One believes that we should adhere to the liturgy of the church Fathers, which has been hallowed by tradition, and the other stands for free, spontaneous prayer.

How can we have common prayer that is free both from the sterility of formulization and from the apathy that invariably results from unrestrained spontaneity?

### **The Ideal of Common Prayer**

As we observe the unfoldment of the Bahá'í Dispensation we see that it is progressing toward an ideal of public worship. In the Bahá'í Temple the "house of prayer" has been realized. In this temple only the revealed Word will be heard. Even now in the Bahá'í communities all over the world the revealed prayers from the Bahá'í writings are used exclusively in the group meetings. One member of the group reads while the rest follow with devotion.

The creative Word of the Prophet of God is the highest source of edification and awakening, and naturally it is free from all those elements that have engendered apathy and indifference.

*"None can befittingly praise Thee except Thine own Self and such as are like unto Thee."*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations*, p. 297.

## CHAPTER IX

### MEDITATION

The Bahá'í Faith, like all prophetic religions, is fundamentally mystic in character. Without this mystic feeling, which unites man with God, religion would degenerate into a mere organization devoid of spiritual life. For it is through meditation and prayer that man is able to establish and maintain this spiritual communion.

#### **Supplication, Prayer and Meditation**

*Supplication.* Supplication, prayer and meditation are often used interchangeably and when this is done they are regarded as mere variants of the word *prayer*, but it is convenient sometimes to distinguish between them. Supplication means earnest entreaty, asking. This is, of course, implied in the German word for prayer, *Gebet*. Supplication is one of the motives of primitive prayer, but primitive man and man on his primitive side is somewhat of an egotist in his offering of prayer. As he advances, however, the egotistic gives way to reverence and humility and sometimes he goes so far as to consider "asking" quite unworthy of him.

To the medieval mystic, supplicating for material things is irreligious. Augustine says: "Ask nothing from God except God Himself." "Ask for the blessed life." The extreme or radical mystic, like Eckhart, and the quietists of the seventeenth century go further and reject not only requests for earthly goods but requests for spiritual blessings.

The philosopher also feels that man should be beyond supplicating, asking. Epictetus says: "Ask from the gods, not what you crave, but that you may be free from all

craving;" and Kant tells us that "it is at once an absurd and presumptuous delusion to try by the insistent importunity of prayer, whether God might not be deflected from the plan of His wisdom to provide some momentary advantage for us." The acquisition of moral values and not worldly goods is the first concern of the philosopher. Pythagoras and Socrates would have us supplicate only for what is good, leaving all personal wishes to God. This Stoic ideal, this surrender of the human will to the Divine, is expressed by outstanding philosophers of the Enlightenment. "Not what I will, but what Thou wilt," is the prayer of Rousseau. Diderot prayed: "O God, I ask nothing from Thee, for if Thou art not, the course of nature is an inner necessity, and if Thou art, it is Thy command." Voltaire prays in a similar vein.

These prayers ostensibly express a high ideal, but at the same time they betray considerable ignorance concerning the nature of God's loving-kindness and mercy as revealed to us by His Prophets. We should therefore not be misled by this type of devotion or reverence.

'Abdu'l-Bahá reminds us that : "*When one supplicates to his Lord, turns to Him and seeks bounty from His ocean, this supplication is by itself a light to his heart, an illumination to his sight, a life to his soul and an exaltation to his being.*"<sup>1</sup> In the sense that supplication means mere asking it is probably the lowest form of prayer, but it is surely better than no prayer. In supplicating we acknowledge our dependence upon God and our faith in His mercy and His concern for our welfare. This concept of a personal God, so essential to prophetic religion and mysticism and so foreign to Stoic philosophy, is always renewed when religion is revived as in the coming of a Prophet like Christ or Bahá'u'lláh.

<sup>1</sup>*Divine Art of Living*, p. 26.

*Prayer.* Prayer in the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá is "conversation with God," and we cannot improve very much on this definition. There is a "language of the Spirit" by which the Prophet continues to hold communion with the faithful after His departure from this world. In all genuine prayer there is faith in a living personal God and also faith in His immediate presence. Without these two essential elements, which the Bahá'í Faith has restored for us in this day, prayer becomes a lifeless abstraction. After all there is a mystery in prayer, and the mystery lies in the relation between the finite man and the infinite Spirit.

For the mystic this experience of the Presence of God in prayer is, of course, fundamental. The supreme goal of meditation is the realization of the Divine Presence, and while we cannot allow that the mystic attains this goal, we must admit that mystical prayer is vital and free from egotism. There is something very profound and at the same time very tender in the mystic's serene contemplation of the *summum bonum*. Nevertheless, the prayers of the mystic, like the prayers of other men of religious genius, are not in the same category as the revealed prayers of the Prophet. The prayers of the mystic are not divine creations and cannot, therefore, inspire us as can the revealed prayers of the Prophet. Again, for complete assurance of eternal verities like immortality we cannot turn to the writings of the mystics. Finally, the creativeness we find in the revealed Word of the Prophet is lacking in mystical philosophy. This is not surprising, for any attempt to standardize methods of meditation or ascetic practices naturally results in a uniformity of experience. In the Bahá'í Faith, as we shall see, meditation is strongly advised, but there are no set forms of meditation; in fact, the manner of meditating is left entirely to the individual.

The voluminous writings of Bahá'u'lláh are replete with examples of this creative force. Consider for illustration



the unique promise that is clearly indicated in this remarkable passage from the pen of Bahá'u'lláh: "*Whoso reciteth, in the privacy of his chamber, the verses revealed by God, the scattering angels of the Almighty shall scatter abroad the fragrance of the words uttered by his mouth, and shall cause the heart of every righteous man to throb.*"<sup>1</sup>

The fact that mysticism cannot make a universal appeal does not, of course, disturb the mystic, for he admits that the mystic path is only for a few highly-gifted individuals. The position of the mystic is very like that of the philosopher. The philosopher is also able to educate a few people in morals and ethics, and also to inspire them to live an integrated life of useful activity. He does not contribute as much to individual spiritual development as does the mystic; but on the other hand he does not indoctrinate his followers with a metaphysic that is incompatible with clear thinking, nor does he underestimate the intrinsic value of moral action.

Just as science has freed empirical religion, or man's interpretation of divine revelation, from superstition, so philosophical criticism has purified traditional and cultural prayer from anthropomorphic concepts. The tendency has been to create a positive ideal, based upon ethical values, contrasted with spontaneous as well as ritualistic prayer. Contrary to popular belief, idealistic philosophy has something in common with religion in that it believes in an underlying reality behind the world of appearance and in an ethical and moral world above the world of everyday experience.

Again, we must admit that some of the prayers of the Enlightenment exhibit a universal as well as a humanitarian outlook. Voltaire's penetrating intellect surely anticipates the baneful effect of prejudice, as is shown in the following prayer: "Thou hast not given us a heart that we may hate one another, nor hands that we may strangle one another,

<sup>1</sup>Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 295.

but that we may help each other to bear the burden of a wearisome and transitory life; that the small distinctions in the dress which covers our weak bodies, in our inadequate languages, in our absurd usages, in all our imperfect laws, in all our senseless opinions, in all our social grades, which to our eyes are so different and to Thine so alike, that all the fine shades which differentiate the atoms called 'men' may not be occasions for hate and persecution." While there is no force in philosophy to advance religion, as history plainly shows, nevertheless many of the philosophers of this period did more to foster the spirit of true religion than did the contemporary religious systems.

*Meditation.* All creative work requires some kind of meditation. It is practised by the scientist in discovering new theories, new concepts and new laws. As a matter of fact no great scientific discovery was ever made without reflection. The history of science is replete with illustrations of this. Newton's concept of the force of gravity came to him when he was sitting alone in a garden. According to one of his friends, ". . . he fell in a speculation on the power of gravity." The inventor also uses meditation. It is used by the modern mystic to integrate life, to eliminate inharmony, disunity and fear. Through meditation the mystic is able to differentiate between the real and the apparent. For the radical mystic, meditation is just one step along the path that enables him to enter the presence of the Absolute. The aesthetic mystic, with his faith in values and a feeling for nature, believes that through meditation and contemplative devotion he can experience the immediate presence of the Divine as revealed in the beauty of nature. Goethe says: "Do you not see God? By every quiet spring, under every blossoming tree, He meets me in the warmth of His love."

In general there are three stages in this process: concentration, in which the mind is active; meditation, in which mental

activity is low; and contemplation, in which there is almost complete cessation of mental effort.

One begins by thinking in the usual way, or more correctly in the unusual way. That is, we start by concentrating upon the problem or concept with which we are concerned. Of course, all extraneous thoughts must be excluded. We consider all the facts that may have some bearing upon the concept, then we may find it advisable to diminish the mental activity in order to obtain a more comprehensive view of the concept. That is, we pass from the stage of concentration to the stage of meditation. It is in this subjective stage, this stage of abstraction, that new ideas, new relationships seem to emerge. Naturally there is some oscillating between the two stages and usually we pass from one to the other by imperceptible steps. Ordinarily one is hardly conscious that there is any boundary between the two stages.

The modern mystic and the aesthetic mystic, as well as the radical mystic, sometimes pass into the third stage of greater mental simplification, that is, the stage of almost complete passivity. The scientist, however, is not interested in complete absorption, passing away, and therefore he never reaches this stage.

To return to the subject of concentration; it requires severe mental discipline, but every successful creative person knows the unifying effect that can result from concentration. One must hold the attention against all invasion. There is no short cut; we begin by beginning. Take any familiar concept like God's mercy, love or justice and concentrate upon it a few minutes. If the mind wanders, if you find it practically impossible to hold your attention, then you may be sure you do not possess complete control over your mind. By practising concentration, however, you will be able to organize your thoughts and to get the most out of your thinking. In the beginning, do not try to concentrate for a long time;

and remember, the more frequently you concentrate, the easier it will be for you to hold your attention.

The question is often asked, is there any special technique one should follow in meditating? Apparently there is no standard technique. Certainly none is stressed in the Bahá'í writings. Sometimes you may feel like sitting motionless, or again you may feel like walking. Bahá'u'lláh revealed the *Hidden Words* while He was walking along the banks of the Tigris. There are no standard forms; the individual is quite free.

There may be an advantage in assuming some particular posture during reflection. We should show tolerance in such matters, refusing to lay down rules for others. Necessarily we should avoid everything that looks like superstition.

We should be silent, relaxed and never impatient nor discouraged. Sometimes it is desirable to drop the problem and pick it up again. Experience alone can tell us when this is desirable. If irrelevant ideas intrude, just ignore them. Others have this experience and it does not indicate that you are abnormal.

For most people concentration is very difficult, but experience shows that if one has patience and a desire to be master of his intellect, one can learn to concentrate. For the trained mind, the philosopher the writer or the scientist, it is just a question of restricting the attention to a limited field; self-examination and self-discipline do not enter in. While the goal of the mystic is not the same as that of the scientist or the creative artist, nevertheless he belongs to a class of gifted people. Whatever his vocation, he has a degree of spiritual awareness and some capacity for intellectual activity, otherwise he would not be so successful in the matter of meditation.

Finally, there are several points about meditation which we should not overlook.

The thoughts that come to us during reflection are not necessarily valuable; they may be useless or even destructive.

While there may be little mental activity during meditation, it is the *direction* of the mind, prior to this state, that determines the value of the meditation. The mere act of diminishing mental activity does not of itself yield anything profitable.

There are pseudo-scientists who believe that the air is "charged" with wonderful ideas and all you have to do is to "tune in." The true scientist does some hard thinking before he meditates, and it is the true scientist and not the pseudo-scientist that contributes to society.

### Theories of Meditation

Concerning the efficacy of meditation and the force that makes it efficient, there are three theories, three schools of thought.

(1) One school maintains that the effectiveness of meditation is due merely to mental relaxation. After a long period of mental effort, if one relaxes he will make fewer "false" guesses and the mind has a better chance to function. During the period of relaxation when the mental activity is low, one can obtain a more comprehensive view of any subject, scientific, moral or ethical, so this school believes. Some writers tell us that a solution of an intricate problem often comes to an inventor or scientist after he has dismissed it from his mind. However, dismissing a problem from our mind is not quite the same as meditating upon it. Experience also shows that very often we do not completely dismiss a problem from our mind. The factor of meditation undoubtedly enters into all creative thinking. Meditation is something more than concentration. As we said in Chapter I, the creative force is intuition and not reason. In this subjective state the intuition becomes effective. As a matter of fact

it is very easy to glide from concentration to meditation and back again to concentration.

Inventors and scientists probably belong to this class, if indeed they belong to any class.

The meditation of scientists and creative personalities who are not mystically inclined is, however, somewhat different from the meditation of the religious mystic, or the aesthetic mystic. The scientist—and this applies to other creative geniuses—is primarily concerned with new ideas, new relationships. He is not, at least while he is working on a scientific problem, concerned with the awakening of the self or self-examination. He is, for the moment, not interested in becoming one with the Absolute, but rather in solving a more or less definite problem. This does not mean that he could not learn something about concentration from the mystic; he probably could. The mystic could undoubtedly tell him how to improve his technique of meditation; he could also tell him how to avoid wasteful tensions.

(2) Another school believes that through meditation one is able to utilize powers which seem to be supernatural. This second school is further divided on the origin of the power evoked. For some, this power is latent within us and can only be brought out by mental discipline. Many philosophers and scientists belong to this class. Others hold that the power is external to us, but that we must follow prescribed rules for meditating if we wish to utilize this power. Most modern mystics belong to this class. Since they are concerned with the regeneration of character, self-knowledge and self-control, concentration must be followed by self-discipline or what the mystics call "poverty." While the aesthetic mystic believes in an external power, he does not take a negative view of life. The ascetic element is entirely absent from his attitude; he is interested in joy and not in renunciation. Nevertheless, in his moments of meditation

and contemplation he experiences a feeling of unity with God, the creator of the "beautiful," that is not unlike the ecstatic experience of the genius-mystic. The power he acknowledges is a pantheistic God who reveals Himself in nature—in all the works of nature, although this is not always explicit.

The mystic, like the philosopher, is inclined to regard his outlook as more universal than that of the theologian or scientist. He speaks of the One, the Infinite or the Absolute as an entity which he alone can comprehend. True, he often identifies this Reality with the God of religion, but it is always understood that it is the mystic and not the philosopher or theologian who has any real knowledge of this Reality whom the theologian calls God. Nevertheless, the philosopher and the theologian might learn something from the modern mystic in the matter of spiritual unfoldment.

(3) The third school believes that the power which makes meditation effective is divine. Prophetic personalities, men of religious genius and many creative artists belong to this class. We said in the last chapter that every reform movement tries to recapture the spontaneity of the early church. Unfortunately reformers are not very creative. When they want some kind of sanction for their novel ideas they usually turn toward the past. Had the reformers of the past studied meditation as they studied the free prayer of popular religions and the prayer of primitive man, they would have contributed something to the life of prayer more enduring than spontaneity. While we cannot accept all the presuppositions of mysticism we can use meditation in our prayer life and in the perusal of the creative word of the Prophet. We will probably all agree that our spiritual life would be enhanced by reading the words of the Prophet with rapt attention and then meditating upon what we read. The soul of man must be fed with the nourishment of prayer and meditation.

As we shall see, from the Bahá'í viewpoint meditation is indispensable, but it has now been freed from those metaphysical doctrines that are incompatible with scientific thinking. Moreover, in all its forms it is available to anyone who wishes to make use of it. Even in its highest form, where it is concerned with divine illumination, it is not the exclusive possession of a few gifted people. Rather it is available to all who are willing to turn to the Prophet as the source of divine inspiration.

### The Bahá'í Viewpoint

We said in Chapter III that the soul is like the sun and mental faculties like the rays of the sun, or that the mind is the power of the soul. Now 'Abdu'l-Bahá reminds us that the sign or the mark of the intellect is meditation. The importance of meditation is clearly expressed in His words: "*You cannot apply the name 'man' to any being devoid of the faculty of meditation; without it man is a mere animal, lower than the beasts.*"<sup>1</sup> It appears, then, that the thing which really differentiates man from the animal is this faculty of meditation; but we must remember that in meditation the function of the mind cannot be ignored. The mystic is inclined to overlook this important fact.

Let us consider in a little more detail the scope of meditation from the Bahá'í viewpoint. The quotations in the following paragraphs (1) to (7) are taken from the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.<sup>2</sup>

(1) "*Through the faculty of meditation man attains to eternal life; through it he receives the breath of the Holy Spirit—the bestowals of the Spirit are given during reflection and meditation.*" It is clear from this and also from other paragraphs, that meditation is essential to our spiritual development. The relative value of meditation may be

<sup>1</sup>Talk given at Friends' Meeting House, London, Jan. 12th, 1913.

<sup>2</sup>ibid.



judged from words referred to by Bahá'u'lláh: "One hour's reflection is preferable to seventy years of pious worship."<sup>1</sup>

(2) "The spirit of man is itself informed and strengthened during meditation; through it affairs of which man knew nothing are unfolded before his view. Through it he receives divine inspiration, and through it he partakes of heavenly food." Here we have assurance from the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Interpreter of the Prophet of God, that meditation can bring to man something which is beyond the power of mere thinking, beyond mental activity.

(3) "Meditation is the key for opening the doors of mysteries. In that state man abstracts himself; in that state man withdraws himself from all outside objects; in that subjective mood he is immersed in the ocean of spiritual life and can unfold the secrets of things in themselves." Just as we distinguish between meditation and thinking, we may also distinguish between meditation and prayer. It is clear from the above that in our prayer life there must be moments in which we dwell "in that subjective mood."

(4) "This faculty of meditation frees man from the animal nature, discerns the reality of things, puts man in touch with God." The mystic, we will concede, has realized the significance of this truth to a remarkable degree. So far all these statements are probably in conformity with our notion of spiritual development, but unless we have a rather comprehensive view of meditation the next paragraph may be a bit of a surprise.

(5) "This faculty brings forth from the invisible plane the sciences and arts. Through the meditative faculty inventions are made possible, colossal undertakings are carried out. . . ." A few modern mystics will undoubtedly agree with this broader concept, but to the older mystics it would probably be incomprehensible. This broader concept of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's helps

<sup>1</sup>Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Iqán*, p. 238.

us to realize that revelation is concerned with every aspect of life and not merely with acts of devotion.

(6) "*The meditative faculty is akin to a mirror; if you put before it earthly objects, it will reflect them. Therefore if the spirit of man is contemplating earthly objects he will become informed of them.*" Let us observe, first of all, that there is nothing in this statement to indicate that man should *not* turn "the mirror of his soul" toward earthly objects. Moreover, it does throw some light on the very significant question, what is the difference between the meditation of the scientist or inventor, and the meditation of the seeker for spiritual truth? The inventor may not turn to God, he may not even believe in God, but we cannot say that the inspiration he receives is merely from his own ego. What applies to the inventor applies also to other creative men. The aesthetic mystic or the artistic type of creative genius turns the mirror of his soul to artistic values, such as the beauty of nature.

In moments of meditation, as we said above, an aesthetic feeling of unity takes possession of his soul and he feels at one with Nature or the Whole. In his contemplation of the "beautiful" he experiences ecstasy and rapture as does the religious mystic. The experience is *immediate*, and moreover we cannot deny its value. To be sure, he may think of God as immanent in nature, but this is irrelevant to the experience and its value. Whatever cause we may assign to the experience we cannot deny its validity. Again in moments of devotional contemplation discords and confusion are often replaced by joy and peace; life becomes unified, as we have seen.

(7) "*But if you turn the mirror of your spirit heavenwards, the heavenly constellations and the rays of the Sun of Reality will be reflected in your hearts, and the virtues of the Kingdom will be obtained.*" This applies to the religious mystic, or indeed to anyone interested in individual spiritual develop-

ment. While it is true that a person may make considerable progress toward unifying his spiritual life by meditating upon the rather nebulous All, Whole, or One, the most effective results are obtained however, when the mirror of the soul is turned toward the Prophet. He is the source of our spiritual life, and naturally if we meditate upon His creative words or His attributes our progress will be decidedly more rapid than if we meditate upon the somewhat elusive Absolute or Infinite.

There is an underlying unity in all meditation in that he who meditates, whether religious genius, creative artist or inventor, turns the mirror of his soul toward the object of his meditation.

## CHAPTER X

### OCCULTISM

Occultism has so many meanings that it is very difficult to define; we will not, therefore, start with a definition. We are concerned here with the essential difference between occultism and mysticism, especially personal mysticism.

We are also concerned with the attitude of occultism toward science.

#### **Mysticism and Occultism**

Many people who are casually interested in the mystical life are not aware of the difference between mysticism and occultism. A few of these differences will now be considered. We will confine our discussion, however, to personal mysticism, since the majority of those who are attracted to the mystical way of life would not be interested in the cold, unemotional, non-personal mysticism of the Absolute.

First, let us consider the goal of each. The goal of every mystic is the life of higher piety. He is primarily concerned with spiritual development. Communion with God is, of course, vital to this goal. As we have said, the mystic believes that through the heart, unimpaired by the mind, the true knowledge of God may be obtained. The occultist is not interested in spiritual development in quite this sense. He is concerned with man's development, but he believes that this development can be brought about through a knowledge of God and man which must be acquired through metaphysical speculation rather than through an ecstatic experience, a knowledge available to the occultist but not to the philosopher and scientist.

Let us now consider the idea of God in each. As we have seen, the idea of God in extreme mysticism is a kind of specula-

tive interpretation of an ecstatic experience. In personal mysticism the experience is interpreted imaginatively rather than speculatively. Speaking broadly (and we can only speak broadly), the God of occultism is derived, partly from a speculative interpretation of an inner experience and partly from occult doctrines on the nature of God. The God of occultism is non-personal, static and outside of history, somewhat like the God of extreme mysticism. The inner experience of the occultist, however, can hardly be called mystical. The occultist knows no loving God. For him contemplation is not an act of love, as with the mystic. We might almost say that he believes the true knowledge of God can be obtained through the mind unimpaired by the heart. In some ways occultism is similar to radical mysticism, but it is opposed to personal mysticism.

Love of God and man is the one element, if indeed there is just one element, that differentiates prophetic religion and mysticism from occultism. This element is certainly not stressed in occultism.

It should be obvious to anyone who is, even superficially, acquainted with the prophetic religions, that no movement, which lacks the essential elements of true religion, can ever regenerate the individual or transform society.

There is one doctrine of the occultist which might disarm the seeker for reality. This is the idea that in everything that has come down to us concerning the sayings of a great teacher like Christ, there is a hidden meaning which the layman cannot grasp. The occultist and the occultist alone, however, can grasp the hidden meaning. By this procedure a person could prove almost anything he wished to prove and refute anything to which he did not wish to subscribe. The fact that he can call to his aid endless propositions from the so-called "ancient wisdom" does not make him any more intelligible, although it may enhance his prestige with the

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superficial thinker. Also, we should not overlook the fact that scholars usually do not attack ideas like this, not because they may contain an element of truth but because they are too fantastic to merit any attention. Should an occultist tell a scholar, trained in the philosophy of religion, that Christ's knowledge was not innate, that He was taught by some Eastern school of occultism, the scholar would probably not take the trouble to dissuade him. In this critical hour, however, we should make it clear that nothing less than a divine power can ever succeed in laying a foundation upon which a new spiritual and social order can be built.

If man-made theories of the Godhead could resuscitate a distracted world it would have been resuscitated in the days of Dionysius, or in the days of Meister Eckhart.

Let no one be deluded by a counter-argument which might run somewhat as follows: "The love of which the Prophet speaks is not the love with which you are familiar. In fact you can get nothing from the Gospels except an emotional reaction. The occultist alone can elucidate the Gospels for you."

Ever since the days of Montanism, groups have appeared which claim supernatural powers, superrational knowledge. Many of these groups maintained that they were the spiritual successors of the inspired class in the Primitive Church. The occultist is in a similar position; he can bring to the world the "lost wisdom," which he believes is superior to anything we have now.

Referring once more to the element of love, the writings of Bahá'u'lláh are replete with admonitions like the following, from the Arabic *Hidden Words*:

(4) *O Son of Man!*

*I loved thy creation, hence I created thee. Wherefore, do thou love Me, that I may name thy name and fill thy soul with the spirit of life.*



(5) *O Son of Being!*

*Love Me, that I may love thee. If thou lovest Me not, My love can in no wise reach thee. Know this, O servant!*

(9) *O Son of Being!*

*My love is My stronghold; he that entereth therein is safe and secure, and he that turneth away shall surely stray and perish.*

(10) *O Son of Utterance!*

*Thou art My stronghold; enter therein that thou mayest abide in safety. My love is in thee, know it, that thou mayest find Me nigh unto thee.*

We should not, however, overlook the fact that the occultist, like the mystic, has made some positive contributions to society. He has reacted against materialism, and many typical representatives of occultism have stood for the brotherhood of man and human solidarity. Nevertheless, as with the mystic, we cannot accept some of his doctrines, which are opposed both to prophetic religion and to science.

Like the radical mystic he is concerned with the nature of the Divine Essence, and like him he believes he can discover the Divine Essence, but his approach is different. Some occultists claim that they can receive supernatural revelations, while others maintain that their wisdom is merely the result of speculation.

The philosopher, when he inquires into the nature of God, usually starts with an analysis of the phenomenal world. The occultist usually begins with God and, from his presuppositions concerning the Divine Nature, arrives at conclusions regarding observed facts in the phenomenal world.

While the mystic is satisfied with theories of the "Soul and God," the field of the occultist is much broader. At various periods in history, such as the Renaissance, natural philosophers have tried to fuse scientific ideas with speculative theories which have their origin in scholastic theology. We

see something like this in some forms of occultism. For example, one type of occultist does not hesitate to use some of the concepts of physics to explain spiritual experiences. When the particle theory of light was replaced by the wave theory, it was necessary to imagine all space filled with an elastic medium, called the ether. For the nineteenth century physicist this ether was very "real," but now it is regarded only as a fabrication of the mind if indeed it is regarded at all. To-day, however, we know that light has a particle aspect as well as a wave aspect. In fact we admit that we do not possess a very satisfactory theory of light.

Now, many occultists have been intrigued with physical quantities like waves, the ether, and vibrations; and they use these to explain inner experiences which lie beyond the field of physics. For example, you may be aware of disagreeable influences which you cannot explain but for which the occultist feels he can give you an explanation. Your uncomfortable feeling, he tells you, is due to disturbing vibrations. Just what it is that vibrates we are not always told. Again some occultists will go so far as to maintain that "spirit" is merely matter of extremely low density. If air becomes, progressively, more and more attenuated it will finally, *ipso facto*, become spirit.

We need hardly add that no serious thinker with any spiritual or aesthetic feeling could accept such a mechanistic view of the world of values. The more enlightened occultist would probably not indulge in such crude speculations, but he has indulged, at times, in theories that are as far removed from modern scientific thinking as they are.

### Science and Occultism

The occultist believes that the ancient philosopher has much to contribute to modern civilization. In fact most of his theories are based on the so-called "ancient wisdom."

As the Greek philosopher relied almost exclusively on deductive reasoning, so the occultist to-day stresses deductive thinking. He believes that the true science can be discovered only by turning back to the ancient wisdom.

With his aversion to sound scholarship and scientific training, and his fascination for the "occult," he naturally overlooks facts that might help him to differentiate between the true and the false.

One illustration will suffice. It is true that Aristotle used the deductive method almost exclusively, and it is also true that most of his contributions to physics and astronomy are of very little value. He did practically no experimental work in his early life. He wrote on a variety of subjects, and for many people he is an authority on each.

To understand the positive contributions of Aristotle, however, we should remember that the first fifty years of his life were devoted to clarifying his philosophical ideas, while the last twelve were dedicated to independent investigation. His work on physics and astronomy belongs to the first period—hence the logical contradictions.<sup>1</sup> It is in the second period that he carried out his positive researches in biology which, of course, required considerable experimental work. In fact, without experimentation he would have accomplished very little. It is true that, for him, the heavens are a sphere because the sphere is a perfect figure, and it rotates in a circle because circular motion is eternal—no end, no beginning. But let us remember that these ideas developed when he was dominated by the Socratic outlook.

The occultist's attitude toward science and scholarship in general is somewhat like the mystic's attitude toward revealed truth. The occultist believes that he is, in a way, superior to the scientist. He has behind him the infallible ancient

<sup>1</sup>Benjamin Farrington, *Science in Antiquity*, London, Thornton Butterworth, 1936, p. 142.

wisdom, which he alone can understand, and also a superior insight. One sometimes wonders why the occultist, with his superior equipment, does not make some positive contribution to the world of philosophy and science. Possibly he feels that the world is too immature for the contributions he is able to make.

In view of what we have said concerning man's inability to comprehend the Infinite, we need not dwell on the occultist's concepts of God.

However, the reader may feel that, after all, the occultist may discover something in the ancient wisdom that has value for us to-day. A long view of history should convince anyone that progress is made by looking backward and forward.

Let us consider, very briefly, our philosophical and our scientific background.

### **Our Philosophical Background**

Perhaps the first intimation that all was not well with Aristotelian philosophy was the result of the famous experiment of Galileo, when he demonstrated to sceptical observers that a light iron ball and a heavy one would fall to the ground in the same time, contrary to the explicit statement of Aristotle that the heavier ball would reach the ground first. From our modern scientific position we naturally ask, why did Aristotle not try the experiment himself, or why did not some of his more curious followers try it in the sixteen centuries that elapsed between Aristotle and Galileo? But that was not a pertinent question either with Aristotle or his followers. From the standpoint of classical philosophy, something might have happened to the experiment; the world of matter is a world of accident—nothing is certain. The world of the mind is free from such limitations, and therefore its deductions are infallible.

Herein lies the weak point of the classical traditions of philosophy. Like the classical physics of the nineteenth century, it underestimated its limitations.

The Greek thinkers distinguish between knowledge that comes to us by reasoning about ideas, and the kind that we obtain by experience. The latter is inferior since there is always some probability of error. Truth obtained from observation and experiment—and this kind must include the exact sciences—can never be universal. The function of knowledge is to discover what is “real” in the sense of being unchangeable, immutable. This kind of truth is pre-existent, antecedent. The world of practical affairs is a world of change and therefore an unreal world, unworthy of the attention of the thinker. This doctrine necessarily leads us to some theory of escape. For his highest development man should not try to solve existing problems nor to better his material condition. Action and doing belong to a lower realm than thinking; theory is elevated above and separated from practice.

Nevertheless it was philosophy that taught man to look to reason and not custom as a guide to conduct. Unfortunately, however, the classical tradition was limited in this direction. Dewey says, “As far as it occupied itself at all with human conduct, it was to superimpose upon acts ends said to flow from the nature of reason. It thus diverted thought from inquiring into the purposes which experience of actual conditions suggest and from concrete means of their actualization. It translated into a rational form the doctrine of escape from the vicissitudes of existence by means of measures which do not demand an active coping with conditions. For deliverance by means of rites and cults, it substituted deliverance through reason. This deliverance was an intellectual, a theoretical affair constituted by a knowledge to be attained apart from practical activity.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty*, p. 17.

One is impressed by the similarity between the doctrine of escape in philosophy and in absolute mysticism, in spite of the fact that philosophy stresses the mind while mysticism rejects the mind and relies upon feeling.

The classical tradition assumes that the highest satisfaction comes from the kind of knowledge which is free from doing and acting; but in a sense the validity of this doctrine depends to some extent upon experience. The intellectual satisfaction, the exaltation that the rational and empirical philosopher experiences is taken as evidence, if not proof, that he has become one with the Highest Good, the Divine. His experience we cannot deny, but the interpretation of his experience is another matter. It is an inference and must be regarded as such. To be sure, to the classical philosopher no such criticism could be made, but—in terms of our wider knowledge to-day, the inconsistency is obvious. Here again the classical philosopher in his assumption concerning the “real” is not unlike the mystic who interprets his ecstasy as a proof of his union with the Absolute.

This is not surprising when we recall that both radical mysticism and mystical philosophy have much of the same tradition. Both rest upon the assumption that ultimate reality is to be found by reflection, and both reject revelation.

The rise of modern science showed that the elevation of the mind above experience was unwarranted. Modern philosophy has shown also that the classical tradition cannot persist in the face of facts, but the popular mind is still influenced by this ancient doctrine.

### **Our Scientific Background**

Science had its inception in a world in which thinking was elevated above doing, even of the kind that might aid thinking. In this atmosphere the highest and most perfect knowledge was free from the world of matter.

Let us see why the mind, freed from all experience with external objects might lead us to ultimate reality, universal truth. A very simple illustration may indicate the origin of this classical tradition concerning the validity of the mind. By means of common drawing instruments one might discover most of the propositions in geometry, but he would never be absolutely sure of any of them. By measurement we might show that if a triangle has two equal sides, the angles opposite the equal sides are equal. One might try it for a number of cases and assume that it would hold for all others. It looks reasonable, but we are not absolutely sure; for there is always an error in every physical measurement. If we prove the proposition formally by logic rather than by measurement, then we are reasonably sure that it will hold for all cases.

In the realm of mathematics, which is purely rational knowledge, the mind needs very few tools. A pointed stick and some sand will answer. Ostensibly then, its progress does not depend upon any kind of experimentation: it can be developed without reference to material objects. In fact, some philosophers maintain that it would have advanced had there been no practical use for it. To the ancient philosopher there were other kinds of knowledge, not purely rational, that could be acquired without experimental investigation. If we look about us in nature and observe carefully, we can make considerable progress, as did the Greeks; nevertheless, as we all know, without controlled experiments we would require centuries to obtain as much information as we now obtain in a single day with apparatus and laboratory technique. But that is not all. We would probably not make much progress in higher mathematics, and without higher mathematics we would have no modern science.

Greek science was limited by two things: its failure to appreciate the value of experimental work, and its lack of powerful mathematical tools. The two are interdependent.

In the long run mathematics has not developed without the directing hand of experience. The calculus was developed or invented by Newton and Leibnitz to solve problems that resulted from observation, that is, experience. In other words, the progress of pure mathematics depends upon the progress of experimental science. Not only did the Greek philosophers fail to make progress where experimentation was required directly, but they were limited in the very field which, according to their assumption, was free from any kind of experimentation—namely, mathematics.

However, we should not conclude that Greek science was a failure—far from it. Certainly the Greek philosophers have been misunderstood: sometimes they are underestimated, but more often they are overestimated. Again, we must not overlook the unfavourable political and economic conditions in the latter part of the golden era of Greece.

Speaking broadly, history has shown that science cannot make much progress unless it is supported by society.

Experimental science demonstrated that its success could be achieved only by adding to the Greek deductive method that of induction. True advancement can be made only by experimenting and theorizing.

Contrary to the view of traditional philosophy, without sense data the human mind is limited. As a matter of fact, the two processes of observation or experiment, and theorizing go hand in hand to a certain extent. Aristotle would not have assumed that a heavy object would fall to the ground sooner than a light one had he not observed that light objects like leaves and feathers do fall more slowly. Greek thinking was not balanced by practical experience; this is the weak point of Greek philosophy. The success of modern science is due to a more perfect balance between mathematical theory and experiment. Galileo succeeded, not because he was intellectually superior to the Greek philosophers or his



contemporaries, but rather because he had utilized a method that the Aristotelian school ignored. Unconsciously perhaps, Galileo laid the foundation for a new theory of knowledge.

But the new experimental method had another far-reaching effect, it put authority in a new light. When we remember that by the time of Galileo a feeling of discontent with authority was not unusual in scientific circles, it is not surprising that the traditional view clashed with the new. The real conflict raged around fundamental methods of thinking and the place of authority. The occultist has not fully grasped this new theory of knowledge.

## CHAPTER XI

### REVEALED PRAYERS

#### **Man's Offering of Prayer and the Creative Word**

We pointed out in Chapter V that the mystic, the philosopher and the scientist have always longed for a knowledge of the immutable essence which underlies the world of appearance. Plato once said: "The true lover of knowledge is always striving after *being* . . . He will not rest at those multitudinous phenomena whose existence is appearance only." However, as we have said repeatedly, finite man cannot comprehend the infinite God. The only knowledge of God we can attain comes to us through the Prophet. He reveals to us the attributes and perfections of God, but not His essence.

Parenthetically we might learn something from the physicist, as was suggested in Chapter V. He realizes to-day the futility of the quest for an understanding of the ultimate reality behind the phenomenal world. Surely then no serious thinker would go so far as to maintain that he could understand the nature of the creator of the universe.

If we must turn to the Prophet for an understanding of God, it is reasonable to conclude that we should also turn to the Prophet for an understanding of prayer. It is true that man has always prayed to God, even in his primitive state, but the God of primitive man was never without anthropomorphic characteristics. The more we think of the transcendental nature of God, the less inclined we are to assume that we know how to pray to Him. But we are not without knowledge of prayer. Our knowledge of prayer, like our knowledge of God, comes to us through the Prophet.

The revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, His followers believe, is the consummation of past prophetic religions, and as such more complete in the matter of prayer than any revelation that has gone before it. In the Writings we may find prayers for every human need, material as well as spiritual. Even in a very low state the suppliant may pray for divine gifts. Consider, for illustration, the following prayer, which requires no comment. *“ My God, my God! If none be found to stray from Thy path, how, then, can the ensign of Thy mercy be unfurled, or the banner of Thy bountiful favour be hoisted? And if iniquity be not committed, what is it that can proclaim Thee to be the Concealer of men's sins, the Ever-Forgiving, the Omniscient, the All-Wise? May my soul be a sacrifice to the trespasses of them that trespass against Thee, for upon such trespasses are wafted the sweet savours of the tender mercies of Thy Name, the Compassionate, the All-Merciful. May my life be laid down for the transgressions of such as transgress against Thee, for through them the breath of Thy grace and the fragrance of Thy loving-kindness are made known and diffused amongst men. May my inmost being be offered up for the sins of them that have sinned against Thee, for it is as a result of such sins that the Day Star of Thy manifold favours revealeth itself above the horizon of Thy bounty, and the clouds of Thy never-failing providence rain down their gifts upon the realities of all created things.”* As the suppliant prays, however, he rises to a higher level for soon he says : *“ Aid me, O my Lord, to surrender myself wholly to Thy Will, and to arise and serve Thee, for I cherish this earthly life for no other purpose than to compass the Tabernacle of Thy Revelation and the Seat of Thy Glory. Thou seest me, O my God, detached from all else but Thee, and humble and subservient to Thy Will. Deal with me as it beseemeth Thee, and as it befitteth Thy highness and great glory.”*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, pp. 310, 311.

If we turn to the revealed prayers in the Bahá'í writings, one of the first things that impresses us is a clear exposition of man's relation to God in the matter of prayer. Bahá'u'lláh declares:<sup>1</sup> “. . . *None can befittingly praise Thee except Thine own Self and such as are like unto Thee. Thou hast, verily, been at all times, and wilt everlastingly continue to remain, immensely exalted beyond and above all comparison and likeness, above all imagination of parity or resemblance. Having, thus, recognized Thee as One Who is incomparable, and Whose nature none can possess, it becometh incontrovertibly evident that whosoever may praise Thee, his praise can befit only such as are of his own nature, and are subject to his own limitations, and it can in no wise adequately describe the sublimity of Thy sovereignty, nor scale the heights of Thy majesty and holiness. How sweet, therefore, is the praise Thou givest to Thine own Self, and the description Thou givest of Thine own Being! . . .*” (p. 297).

Nevertheless in His mercy for us, God is willing to accept our praise. Bahá'u'lláh says, stressing again man's inability to know Him: “. . . *The glory of Thy might beareth me witness! Whoso claimeth to have known Thee hath, by virtue of such a claim, testified to his own ignorance; and whoso believeth himself to have attained unto Thee, all the atoms of the earth would attest his powerlessness and proclaim his failure. Thou hast, however, by virtue of Thy mercy that hath surpassed the kingdoms of earth and heaven, deigned to accept from Thy servants the laud and honour they pay to Thine own exalted Self, and hast bidden them celebrate Thy glory, that the ensigns of Thy guidance may be unfurled in Thy cities and the tokens of Thy mercy be spread abroad among Thy nations, and that each and all may be enabled to attain unto that which Thou hast destined for them by Thy decree, and ordained unto them through thine irrevocable will and purpose. . . .*” (p. 123).

<sup>1</sup>All the following prayers are from *Prayers and Meditations*. In some cases the complete prayer is not quoted.

As we read and meditate upon the revealed prayers we begin to comprehend, to some degree, the true meaning of prayer. We learn how man, in his longing for spiritual perfection, may approach God. To illustrate, let us consider one phase of prayer, namely the type of appeal that man is permitted to make. In the following prayers it is clear that man can appeal to God's mercy, he can also appeal to His attributes in general, and finally he can plead that having bestowed favour upon him God cannot, in His mercy, forsake him.

#### AN APPEAL TO GOD'S MERCY

*"... I am a sinner, O my Lord, and Thou art the Ever-Forgiving. As soon as I recognized Thee, I hastened to attain the exalted court of Thy loving-kindness. Forgive me, O my Lord, my sins which have hindered me from walking in the ways of Thy good-pleasure, and from attaining the shores of the ocean of Thy oneness.*

*"There is no one, O my Lord, who can deal bountifully with me to whom I can turn my face, and none who can have compassion on me that I may crave his mercy. Cast me not out, I implore Thee, of the presence of Thy grace, neither do Thou withhold from me the outpourings of Thy generosity and bounty. Ordain for me, O my Lord, what Thou hast ordained for them that love Thee, and write down for me what Thou hast written down for Thy chosen ones. My gaze hath, at all times, been fixed on the horizon of Thy gracious providence, and mine eyes bent upon the court of Thy tender mercies. Do with me as beseemeth Thee. No God is there but Thee, the God of power, the God of glory, Whose help is implored by all men. . ." (p. 29).*

*"... In Thee I have placed my whole confidence, unto Thee I have turned my face, to the cord of Thy loving providence I have clung, and towards the shadow of Thy mercy I have hastened. Cast me not as one disappointed out of Thy door, O my God, and withhold not from me Thy grace, for Thee alone*

*do I seek. No God is there beside Thee, the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Bountiful.*

*"Praise be to Thee, O Thou Who art the Beloved of them that have known Thee!" (p. 220).*

*". . . Potent art Thou to do what pleaseth Thee. None can withstand the power of Thy sovereign might. From everlasting Thou wert alone, with none to equal Thee, and wilt unto everlasting remain far above all thought and every description of Thee. Have mercy, then, upon Thy servants by Thy grace and bounty, and suffer them not to be kept back from the shores of the ocean of Thy nearness. If Thou abandonest them, who is there to befriend them; and if Thou puttest them far from Thee, who is he that can favour them? They have none other Lord beside Thee, none to adore except Thyself. Deal Thou generously with them by Thy bountiful grace.*

*"Thou, in truth, art the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Compassionate." (p. 73).*

*". . . Cast me not from Thy presence, O my Lord, neither do Thou drive me away from the shores of Thy love and Thy good-pleasure. For the poor can find no refuge unless he knocketh at the door of Thy wealth, and the outcast can find no peace until he be admitted to the court of Thy favour.*

*"Magnified be Thy name, O my Lord, for Thou hast enabled me to recognize the Manifestation of Thine own Self, and hast caused me to be assured of the truth of the verses which have descended upon Thee. Empower me, I implore Thee, to cling steadfastly unto whatsoever Thou hast bidden me observe. Help me to guard the pearls of Thy love which, by Thy decree, Thou hast enshrined within my heart. Send down, moreover, every moment of my life, O my God, that which will preserve me from any one but Thee, and will set my feet firm in Thy Cause . . ." (p. 176).*

*"I am he, O my Lord, that hath set his face towards Thee, and fixed his hope on the wonders of Thy grace and the revela-*

tions of Thy bounty. I pray Thee that Thou wilt not suffer me to turn away disappointed from the door of Thy mercy, nor abandon me to such of Thy creatures as have repudiated Thy Cause . . ." (p. 221).

" . . . Do Thou destine for me, O my God, what will set me, at all times, towards Thee, and enable me to cleave continually to the cord of Thy grace, and to proclaim Thy name, and to look for whatsoever may flow down from Thy pen. I am poor and desolate, O my Lord, and Thou art the All-Possessing, the Most High. Have pity, then, upon me through the wonders of Thy mercy, and send down upon me, every moment of my life, the things wherewith Thou hast recreated the hearts of all Thy creatures who have recognized Thy unity, and of all Thy people who are wholly devoted to Thee.

"Thou, verily, art the Almighty, the Most Exalted, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise." (p. 242).

" . . . Every existence, whether seen or unseen, O my Lord, testifieth that Thy mercy hath surpassed all created things, and Thy loving-kindness embraced the entire creation. Look upon them, I entreat Thee, with the eyes of Thy mercy. Thou art the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Compassionate. Do with them as beseemeth Thy glory, and Thy majesty, and Thy greatness, and Thy bounteousness and Thy grace. Deal not with them according to the limitations imposed upon them, or the manifold vicissitudes of their earthly life . . ." (p. 113).

" . . . Deal Thou, therefore, O my God, my Beloved, my supreme Desire, with Thy servants and with all that were created by Thee as would beseem Thy beauty and Thy greatness, and would be worthy of Thy generosity and gifts. Thou art, in truth, He Whose mercy hath encompassed all the worlds, and whose grace hath embraced all that dwell on earth and in heaven. Who is there that hath cried after Thee, and whose prayer hath remained unanswered? Where is he to be found who hath reached forth towards Thee, and whom Thou hast

*failed to approach? Who is he that can claim to have fixed his gaze upon Thee, and toward whom the eye of Thy loving-kindness hath not been directed? I bear witness that Thou hadst turned toward Thy servants ere they had turned toward Thee, and hadst remembered them ere they had remembered Thee. All grace is Thine, O Thou in Whose hand is the kingdom of Divine gifts and the source of every irrevocable decree . . ."* (p. 253).

#### AN APPEAL TO OTHER ATTRIBUTES

*" . . . I swear by Thy might, O my God! Wert Thou to regard Thy servants according to their deserts in Thy days, they would assuredly merit naught except Thy chastisement and torment. Thou art, however, the One Who is of great bounteousness, Whose grace is immense. Look not down upon them, O my God, with the glance of Thy justice, but rather with the eyes of Thy tender compassions and mercies. Do, then, with them according to what beseemeth Thy generosity and bountiful favour. Potent art Thou to do whatsoever may please Thee. Incomparable art Thou. No God is there beside Thee, the Lord of the throne on high and of earth below, the Ruler of this world and of the world to come . . ."* (p. 137).

*" . . . Cast not away, O my Lord, him that hath turned towards Thee, nor suffer him who hath drawn nigh unto Thee to be removed far from Thy court. Dash not the hopes of the suppliant who hath longingly stretched out his hands to seek Thy grace and favours, and deprive not Thy sincere servants of the wonders of Thy tender mercies and loving-kindness. Forgiving and Most Bountiful art Thou, O my Lord! Power hast Thou to do what Thou pleasest. All else but Thee are impotent before the revelations of Thy might, are as lost in the face of the evidences of Thy wealth, are as nothing when compared with the manifestations of Thy transcendent sovereignty, and are destitute of all strength when face to face with the signs*



*and tokens of Thy power. What refuge is there beside Thee, O my Lord, to which I can flee, and where is there a haven to which I can hasten? Nay, the power of Thy might beareth me witness! No protector is there but Thee; no place to flee to except Thee, no refuge to seek save Thee. Cause me to taste, O my Lord, the divine sweetness of Thy remembrance and praise. I swear by Thy might! Whosoever tasteth of its sweetness will rid himself of all attachment to the world and all that is therein, and will set his face towards Thee, cleansed from the remembrance of any one except Thee . . ."* (p. 82).

*" . . . The tenderness of Thy mercy, O my Lord, surpasseth the fury of Thy wrath, and Thy loving-kindness exceedeth Thy hot displeasure, and Thy grace excelleth Thy justice. Hold Thou, through Thy wondrous favours and mercies, the hands of Thy creatures, and suffer them not to be separated from the grace which Thou hast ordained as the means whereby they can recognize Thee. The glory of Thy might beareth me witness! Were such a thing to happen, every soul would be sore shaken, every man endued with understanding would be bewildered, and every possessor of knowledge would be dumbfounded, except those who have been succoured through the hands of Thy Cause, and have been made the recipients of the revelations of Thy grace and of the tokens of Thy favours . . ."* (p. 136).

*" . . . Cast not out, I entreat Thee, O my Lord, them that have sought Thee, and turn not away such as have directed their steps towards Thee, and deprive not of Thy grace all that love Thee. Thou art He, O my Lord, Who hath called Himself the God of Mercy, the Most Compassionate. Have mercy, then, upon Thy handmaiden who hath sought Thy shelter, and set her face towards Thee.*

*"Thou art, verily, the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Merciful."* (p. 148).

*" . . . Thou art He, O my Lord, Whose bounty hath surpassed*

*all things, and Whose power hath transcended all things, and Whose mercy hath encompassed all things. Look, then, upon Thy people with the eyes of Thy tender mercies, and leave them not to themselves and to their corrupt desires in Thy days. How farsoever they may have strayed from Thee, and however grievously they have turned back from Thy face, yet Thou, in Thine essence, art the All-Bountiful, and, in Thine inmost spirit, art the Most Merciful. Deal with them according to the unrevealed tokens of Thy bounty and Thy gifts. Thou art, verily, the One to the power of Whose might all things have testified, and to Whose majesty and omnipotence the whole creation hath borne witness.*

*"No God is there but Thee, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting." (p. 244).*

*"... Look not on my state, O my God, nor my failure to serve Thee, nay rather regard the oceans of Thy mercy and favours and the things that beseem Thy glory and Thy forgiveness and befit Thy loving-kindness and bounties. Thou art, verily, the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Generous." (p. 167).*

#### GOD CANNOT FORSAKE US

*"... Since Thou hast guided them, O my Lord, unto the living waters of Thy grace, grant, by Thy bounty, that they may not be kept back from Thee; and since Thou hast summoned them to the habitation of Thy throne, drive them not out from Thy presence, through Thy loving-kindness. Send down upon them what shall wholly detach them from aught else except Thee, and make them able to soar in the atmosphere of Thy nearness, in such wise that neither the ascendancy of the oppressor nor the suggestions of them that have disbelieved in Thy most august and most mighty Self shall be capable of keeping them back from Thee." (p. 117).*

*"Glory be to Thee, O Lord my God! Abase not him Whom Thou hast exalted through the power of Thine everlasting sovereignty,*

*and remove not far from Thee him whom Thou hast caused to enter the tabernacle of Thine eternity. Wilt Thou cast away, O my God, him whom Thou hast overshadowed with Thy Lordship, and wilt Thou turn away from Thee, O my Desire, him to whom Thou hast been a refuge? Canst Thou degrade him whom Thou hast uplifted, or forget him whom Thou didst enable to remember Thee?*

*“Glorified, immensely glorified art Thou! Thou art He who from everlasting hath been the King of the entire creation and its Prime Mover, and Thou wilt to everlasting remain the Lord of all created things and their Ordainer. Glorified art Thou, O my God! If Thou ceasest to be merciful unto Thy servants, who, then, will show mercy unto them; and if Thou refuseth to succour Thy loved ones, who is there that can succour them? . . .”* (p. 261).

*“. . . Now that Thou hast guided them unto the door of Thy grace, O my Lord, cast them not away, by Thy bounty; and now that Thou hast summoned them unto the horizon of Thy Cause, keep them not back from Thee, by Thy graciousness and favour. Powerful art Thou to do as Thou pleasest. No God is there but Thee, the Omniscient, the All-Informed.”* (p. 112).

*“. . . Since Thou hast revealed Thy grace, O my God, deter not Thy servants from directing their eyes towards it. Consider not, O my God, their estate, and their concerns and their works. Consider the greatness of Thy glory, and the plenteousness of Thy gifts, and the power of Thy might, and the excellence of Thy favours. I swear by Thy glory! Wert Thou to look upon them with the eye of justice, all would deserve Thy wrath and the rod of Thine anger. Hold Thou Thy creatures, O my God, with the hands of Thy grace, and make Thou known unto them what is best for them of all the things that have been created in the kingdom of Thy invention . . .”* (p. 31).

*“. . . Wilt Thou withhold, O my God, from such as love Thee the wonders of Thine ascendancy and triumph? Wilt Thou*

*shatter, O my Beloved, the hopes which they who are devoted to Thee have fixed on Thy manifold bounties and gifts? Wilt Thou keep back, O my Master, those that have recognized Thee from the shores of Thy sanctified knowledge, or wilt Thou cease to rain down upon the hearts of such as desire Thee the showers of Thy transcendent grace? No, no, and to this Thy glory beareth me witness! I testify this very moment that Thy mercy hath surpassed all created things, and Thy loving-kindness encompassed all that are in heaven and all that are on earth. From everlasting the doors of Thy generosity were open to the faces of Thy servants, and the gentle winds of Thy grace were wafted over the hearts of Thy creatures, and the overflowing rains of Thy bounty were showered upon Thy people and the dwellers of Thy realm . . .”* (p. 332).

*“ . . . Wilt Thou keep back from Thee the stranger whom Thou didst call unto his most exalted Home beneath the shadow of the wings of Thy mercy, or cast away the wretched creature that hath hastened to attain the shores of the ocean of Thy wealth? Wilt Thou shut up the door of Thy grace to the face of Thy creatures after having opened it through the power of Thy might and of Thy sovereignty, or close the eyes of Thy people when Thou hast already commanded them to turn unto the Day-Spring of Thy Beauty and the Dawning-Place of the splendours of Thy countenance?*

*“ Nay, and to this Thy glory beareth me witness! Such is not my thought of Thee, nor the thought of those of Thy servants that have near access to Thyself, nor that of the sincere amongst Thy people . . .”* (p. 270).

## CHAPTER XII

### PRAYERS FOR SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

Out of the voluminous Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, we have selected a few for spiritual unfoldment. They will serve as a source of divine inspiration for meditation. The classification is more or less arbitrary, but it may assist the reader in selecting the prayer most suited to his spiritual status. The following prayers are taken from *Prayers and Meditations* by Bahá'u'lláh. In some cases the complete prayer is not quoted.

#### TURNING TOWARD GOD

*“Suffer me, O my God, to draw nigh unto Thee, and to abide within the precincts of Thy court, for remoteness from Thee hath well-nigh consumed me. Cause me to rest under the shadow of the wings of Thy grace, for the flame of my separation from Thee hath melted my heart within me. Draw me nearer unto the river that is life indeed, for my soul burneth with thirst in its ceaseless search after Thee. My sighs, O my God, proclaim the bitterness of mine anguish, and the tears I shed attest my love for Thee.*

*“I beseech Thee, by the praise wherewith Thou praisest Thyself and the glory wherewith Thou glorifiest Thine own Essence, to grant that we may be numbered among them that have recognized Thee and acknowledged Thy sovereignty in Thy days. Help us then to quaff, O my God, from the fingers of mercy the living waters of Thy loving-kindness, that we may utterly forget all else except Thee, and be occupied only with Thy Self. Powerful art Thou to do what Thou willest. No God is there beside Thee, the Mighty, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting.*

"Glorified be Thy name, O Thou Who art the King of all Kings!" (p. 30).

"I beseech Thee, O my Lord, by that Remembrance of Thee through which all things have been raised to life, and through which all faces have been made to shine, not to frustrate the hopes I have set on the things Thou dost possess. Cause me, then, by Thy mercy, to enter beneath Thy shadow that shadoweth all things.

"Be Thou, O my Lord, my sole Desire, my Goal, mine only Hope, my constant Aim, my Habitation and my Sanctuary. Let the object of mine ardent quest be Thy most resplendent, Thine adorable, and ever-blessed Beauty. I implore Thee, O my Lord, by whatsoever is of Thee, to send, from the right hand of Thy might, that which will exalt Thy loved ones and abase Thine enemies.

"No God is there beside Thee, Thou alone art my Beloved in this world and in the world which is to come. Thou alone art the Desire of all them that have recognized Thee.

"Praised be God, the Lord of the worlds." (p. 178).

"We testify, O my God, that Thou art God, and that there is no God besides Thee. From eternity Thou hast existed with none to equal or rival Thee, and wilt abide for ever the same. I beseech Thee, by the eyes which see Thee stablished upon the throne of unity and the seat of oneness, to aid all them that love Thee by Thy Most Great Name, and to lift them up into such heights that they will testify with their own beings and with their tongues that Thou art God alone, the Incomparable, the One, the Ever-Abiding. Thou hast had at no time any peer or partner. Thou, in truth, art the All-Glorious, the Almighty, Whose help is implored by all men." (p. 31).

". . . Having testified, therefore, unto mine own impotence and the impotence of Thy servants, I beseech Thee, by the brightness of the light of Thy beauty, not to refuse Thy creatures

*attainment to the shores of Thy most holy ocean. Draw them, then, O my God, through the Divine sweetness of Thy melodies, towards the throne of Thy glory and the seat of Thine eternal holiness. Thou art, verily, the Most Powerful, the Supreme Ruler, the Great Giver, the Most Exalted, the Ever-Desired.*

*“Grant, then, O my God, that Thy servant who hath turned towards Thee, hath fixed his gaze upon Thee, and clung to the cord of Thy mercifulness and favour, may be enabled to partake of the living waters of Thy mercy and grace. Cause him, then, to ascend unto the heights to which he aspireth, and withhold him not from that which Thou dost possess. Thou art, verily, the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Bountiful.” (p. 124).*

*“... I entreat Thee, O my God, by Thy name through which the clouds have rained down their rain, and the streams have flowed, and the fire of Thy love hath been kindled throughout Thy dominion, to assist Thy servant who hath turned towards Thee, and hath spoken forth Thy praise, and determined to help Thee. Fortify, then, his heart, O my God, in Thy love and in Thy Faith. Better is this for him than all that hath been created on Thine earth, for the world and whatsoever is therein must perish, and what pertaineth unto Thee must endure as long as Thy most excellent names endure. By Thy Glory! Were the world to last as long as Thine own kingdom will last, to set their affections upon it would still be unseemly for such as have quaffed, from the hands of Thy mercy, the wine of Thy presence; how much more when they recognize its fleetingness and are persuaded of its transience. The chances that overtake it, and the changes to which all things pertaining unto it are continually subjected, attest its impermanence...” (p. 116).*

*“... Thou knowest, O my God, that I have severed every tie that bindeth me to any of Thy creatures except that most exalted tie that uniteth me with whosoever cleaveth unto Thee, in this the day of the revelation of Thy most august Self, that hath appeared in Thy name, the All-Glorious. Thou knowest*

*that I have dissolved every bond that knitteth me to any one of my kindred except such as have enjoyed near access to Thy most effulgent face.*

*"I have no will but Thy will, O my Lord, and cherish no desire except Thy desire. From my pen floweth only the summons which Thine own exalted pen hath voiced, and my tongue uttereth naught save what the Most Great Spirit hath itself proclaimed in the kingdom of Thine eternity. I am stirred by nothing else except the winds of Thy will, and breathe no word except the words which, by Thy leave and Thine inspiration, I am led to pronounce . . ." (p. 108).*

#### DIVINE BOUNTY

*" . . . Do Thou preserve me beneath the shadow of Thy Supreme Sinlessness, and enable me to magnify Thine own Self amidst the concourse of Thy creatures. Withhold not from me the Divine fragrance of Thy days, and deprive me not of the sweet savours wafting from the Day-Spring of Thy Revelation. Bestow on me the good of this world and of the next, through the power of Thy grace that hath encompassed all created things and Thy mercy that hath surpassed the entire creation. Thou art He Who holdeth in His grasp the kingdom of all things. Thou doest what Thou willest through Thy decree, and chooseth, through the power of Thy might, whatsoever Thou desirest. None can resist Thy will; naught can exhaust the impelling force of Thy command. There is no God but Thee, the Almighty, the All-Glorious, the Most Bountiful." (p. 100).*

*" . . . I beseech Thee, O Thou Who art my Companion in my lowliness, to rain down upon Thy loved ones from the clouds of Thy mercy that which will cause them to be satisfied with Thy pleasure, and will enable them to turn unto Thee and to be detached from all else except Thee. Ordain, then, for them every good conceived by Thee and predestined in Thy Book.*



*Thou art, verily, the All-Powerful, He Whom nothing whatsoever can frustrate. From everlasting Thou hast been clothed with transcendent greatness and power, with unspeakable majesty and glory. There is no God beside Thee, the Almighty, the All-Glorious, the Ever-Forgiving.*

*“Glorified be Thy name, Thou in Whose hand are the kingdoms of earth and heaven.” (p. 17).*

*“Praised be Thou, O Lord my God! This is Thy servant who hath quaffed from the hands of Thy grace the wine of Thy tender mercy, and tasted of the savour of Thy love in Thy days. I beseech Thee, by the embodiments of Thy names whom no grief can hinder from rejoicing in Thy love or from gazing on Thy face, and whom all the hosts of the heedless are powerless to cause to turn aside from the path of Thy pleasure, to supply him with the good things Thou dost possess, and to raise him up to such heights that he will regard the world even as a shadow that vanisheth swifter than the twinkling of an eye.*

*“Keep him safe also, O my God, by the power of Thine immeasurable majesty, from all that Thou abhorrest. Thou art, verily, his Lord and the Lord of all worlds.” (p. 15).*

*“. . . By the glory of Thy might, O my God! Wert Thou to set me king over Thy realms, and to establish me upon the throne of Thy sovereignty, and to deliver, through Thy power, the reins of the entire creation into my hands, and wert Thou to cause me, though it be for less than a moment, to be occupied with these things and be oblivious of the wondrous memories associated with Thy most mighty, most perfect, and most exalted Name, my soul would still remain unsatisfied, and the pangs of my heart unstilled. Nay, I would, in that very state, recognize myself as the poorest of the poor, and the most wretched of the wretched . . .” (p. 93).*

*“. . . I beseech Thee, O Thou Who art the Lord of all names, to guard Thy loved ones against Thine enemies, and to strengthen them in their love for Thee and in fulfilling Thy pleasure. Do*

*Thou protect them, that their footsteps may slip not, that their hearts may not be shut out as by a veil from Thee, and that their eyes may be restrained from beholding anything that is not of Thee. Cause them to be so enraptured by the sweetness of Thy divine melodies that they will rid themselves of all attachment to any one except Thee, and will turn wholly towards Thee, and extol Thee under all conditions, saying: 'Praised be Thou, O Lord our God, inasmuch as Thou hast enabled us to recognize Thy most exalted and all-glorious Self. We will, by Thy mercy, cleave to Thee, and will detach ourselves from any one but Thee. We have realized that Thou art the Beloved of the worlds and the Creator of earth and heaven.'*

*"Glorified be God, the Lord of all creation." (p. 98).*

*"Glorified art Thou, O Lord my God! I pray Thee, by Him Who is the Day-Spring of Thy signs and the Manifestation of Thy names, and the Treasury of Thine inspiration, and the Repository of Thy wisdom, to send upon Thy loved ones that which will enable them to cleave steadfastly to Thy Cause, and to recognize Thy unity, and to acknowledge Thy oneness, and to bear witness to Thy divinity. Raise them up, O my God, to such heights that they will recognize in all things the tokens of the power of Him Who is the Manifestation of Thy most august and all-glorious Self.*

*"Thou art He, O my Lord, Who doeth what He willeth, and ordaineth what He pleaseth. Every possessor of power is forlorn before the revelations of Thy might, and every fountain of honour becomes abject when confronted by the manifold evidences of Thy great glory . . ." (p. 164).*

*" . . . How sweet to my taste is the savour of woes sent by Thee, and how dear to my heart the dispositions of Thy providence! Perish the soul that fleeth from the threats of kings in its attempt to save itself in Thy days! I swear by Thy glory! Whoso hath quaffed the living waters of Thy favours can fear no trouble*

*in Thy path, neither can he be deterred by any tribulation from remembering Thee or from celebrating Thy praise . . .”* (p. 154).

#### GOD'S PROTECTION

*“ . . . I beseech Thee, O God of bounty and King of all created things, to guard Thy servants from the imaginations which their hearts may devise. Raise them up, then, to such heights that their footsteps may slip not in the face of the evidences of Thy handiwork, which the manifold exigencies of Thy wisdom have ordained, and whose secrets Thou hast hid from the face of Thy people and Thy creatures. Withhold them not, O my Lord, from the ocean of Thy knowledge, neither do Thou deprive them of what Thou didst destine for such of Thy chosen ones as have near access to Thee, and those of Thy trusted ones as are wholly devoted to Thy Self. Supply them, then, from Thy sea of certainty with what will calm the agitation of their hearts . . .”* (p. 283).

*“ . . . Do Thou ordain, moreover, for every one who hath turned towards Thee what will make him steadfast in Thy Cause, in such wise that neither the vain imaginations of the infidels among Thy creatures, nor the idle talk of the froward amidst Thy servants will have the power to shut him out from Thee. Thou, verily, art the Help in Peril, the Almighty, the Most Powerful.”* (p. 70).

*“ . . . Make steadfast Thou, O my God, Thy servant who hath believed in Thee to help Thy Cause, and keep him safe from all dangers in the stronghold of Thy care and Thy protection, both in this life and in the life which is to come. Thou, verily, rulest as Thou pleasest. No God is there save Thee, the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Generous.”* (p. 159).

*“ . . . Thy glory is my witness! At each daybreak they who love Thee wake to find the cup of woe set before their faces, because they have believed in Thee and acknowledged Thy signs. Though I firmly believe that Thou hast a greater com-*

*passion on them than they have on their own selves, though I recognize that Thou hast afflicted them for no other purpose except to proclaim Thy Cause, and to enable them to ascend into the heaven of Thine eternity and the precincts of Thy court, yet Thou knowest full well the frailty of some of them, and art aware of their impatience in their sufferings.*

*“ Help them through Thy strengthening grace, I beseech Thee, O my God, to suffer patiently in their love for Thee, and unveil to their eyes what Thou hast decreed for them behind the Tabernacle of Thine unfailing protection, so that they may rush forward to meet what is preordained for them in Thy path, and may vie in hasting after tribulation in their love towards Thee . . . ”* (p. 158).

*“. . . Shield, I pray Thee, O my Beloved, my heart’s Desire, Thy servant who hath sought Thy face, from the darts of them that have denied Thee and from the shafts of such as have repudiated Thy Truth. Cause him, then, to be wholly devoted to Thee, to declare Thy name, and to fix his gaze upon the sanctuary of Thy Revelation. Thou art, in truth, He Who, at no time, hath turned away those who have set their hopes in Thee from the door of Thy mercy, nor prevented such as have sought Thee from attaining the court of Thy grace. No God is there but Thee, the Most Powerful, the All-Highest, the Help in Peril, the All-Glorious, the All-Compelling, the Unconditioned.”* (p. 160).

### THE LIVING WATERS

*“ Many a chilled heart, O my God, hath been set ablaze with the fire of Thy Cause, and many a slumberer hath been wakened by the sweetness of Thy voice. How many are the strangers who have sought shelter beneath the shadow of the tree of Thy oneness, and how numerous the thirsty ones who have panted after the fountain of Thy living waters in Thy days!*

*“Blessed is he that hath set himself towards Thee, and hastened to attain the Day-Spring of the lights of Thy face. Blessed is he who with all his affections hath turned to the Dawning-Place of Thy Revelation and the Fountain-Head of Thine inspiration. Blessed is he that hath expended in Thy path what Thou didst bestow upon him through Thy bounty and favour. Blessed is he who, in his sore longing after Thee, hath cast away all else except Thyself. Blessed is he who hath enjoyed intimate communion with Thee, and rid himself of all attachment to any one save Thee. . .”* (p. 33).

*“ . . . I pray Thee, O Thou Who causest the dawn to appear, by Thy Name through which Thou hast subjected the winds, and sent down Thy Tablets, that Thou wilt grant that we may draw near unto what Thou didst destine for us by Thy favour and bounty, and to be far removed from whatsoever may be repugnant unto Thee. Give us, then, to drink from the hands of Thy grace every day and every moment of our lives of the waters that are life indeed, O Thou Who art the Most Merciful! . . .”* (p. 37).

*“O God! The trials Thou sendest are a salve to the sores of all them who are devoted to Thy will; the remembrance of Thee is a healing medicine to the hearts of such as have drawn nigh unto Thy court; nearness to Thee is the true life of them who are Thy lovers; Thy presence is the ardent desire of such as yearn to behold Thy face; remoteness from Thee is a torment to those that have acknowledged Thy oneness, and separation from Thee is death unto them that have recognized Thy truth!*

*“I beseech Thee by the sighs which they whose souls pant after Thee have uttered in their remoteness from Thy court, and by the cries of such of Thy lovers as bemoan their separation from Thee, to nourish me with the wine of Thy knowledge and the living waters of Thy love and pleasure . . .”* (p. 78).

*“ . . . Behold, then, O my God, my loneliness among Thy servants and my remoteness from Thy friends and Thy chosen ones.*

*I beseech Thee, by the showers of the clouds of Thy mercy, whereby Thou hast caused the blossoms of Thy praise and utterance and the flowers of Thy wisdom and testimony to spring forth in the hearts of all them that have recognized Thy oneness, to supply Thy servants and my kindred with the fruits of the tree of Thy unity, in these days when Thou hast been established upon the throne of Thy mercy. Hinder them not, O my Lord, from attaining unto the things Thou dost possess, and write down for them that which will aid them to scale the heights of Thy grace and favour. Give them, moreover, to drink of the living waters of Thy knowledge, and ordain for them the good of this world and of the world to come. . ."* (p. 109).

*" . . . I implore Thee to supply whosoever hath sought Thee with the living waters of Thy bounty, that they may rid him of all attachment to any one but Thee. Thou art, verily, the Omniscient, the All-Glorious, the Almighty."* (p. 152).

*" . . . We entreat Thee, O Thou Who art the Cloud of Bounty and the Succourer of the distressed, that Thou wilt aid us to remember Thee, and to make known Thy Cause, and to arise to help Thee. Though all weakness, we yet have clung to Thy Name, the Most Powerful, the Almighty.*

*" Bless Thou, O my God, them that have stood fast in Thy Cause, and whom the evil suggestions of the workers of iniquity have failed to deter from turning towards Thy face, and who have hastened with their whole hearts toward Thy grace, until they finally quaffed the water that is life indeed from the hands of Thy bounty.*

*" Potent art Thou to do Thy pleasure. No God is there save Thee, the Mighty, the Most Generous."* (p. 239).

*" I give praise to Thee, O my God, that the fragrance of Thy loving-kindness hath enraptured me, and the gentle winds of Thy mercy have inclined me in the direction of Thy bountiful favours. Make me to quaff, O my Lord, from the fingers of Thy bounteousness the living waters which have enabled every*

*one that hath partaken of them to rid himself of all attachment to any one save Thee, and to soar into the atmosphere of detachment from all Thy creatures, and to fix his gaze upon Thy loving providence and Thy manifold gifts.*

*“ Make me ready, in all circumstances, O my Lord, to serve Thee and to set myself towards the adored sanctuary of Thy Revelation and of Thy Beauty. If it be Thy pleasure, make me to grow as a tender herb in the meadows of Thy grace, that the gentle winds of Thy will may stir me up and bend me into conformity with Thy pleasure, in such wise that my movement and my stillness may be wholly directed by Thee. . .”* (p. 240).

*“. . . I swear by Thy glory, O Thou the Lord of all being and the Enlightener of all things visible and invisible! Whoso hath quaffed from the hands of Thy bounteousness the living waters of Thy love will never allow the things pertaining to Thy creatures to keep him back from Thee, neither will he be dismayed at the refusal of all the dwellers of Thy realm to acknowledge Thee. Before all who are in heaven and on earth such a man will cry aloud, and announce unto the people the tumult of the Ocean of Thy bounty and the splendours of the Luminaries of the heaven of Thy bestowals.*

*“ Happy indeed is the man that hath turned towards the sanctuary of Thy presence, and rid himself of all attachment to any one except Thyself. He is truly exalted who hath confessed Thy glory, and fixed his eyes upon the Day-Star of Thy loving-kindness. He is endued with understanding who is aware of Thy Revelation and hath acknowledged Thy manifold tokens, Thy signs, and Thy testimonies. . .”* (p. 268).

## EPILOGUE

The unity of mankind is an inevitable stage in human evolution. World citizenship associated with world civilization and world culture signalizes humanity's coming of age. This is the core of the Bahá'í Teaching. The mission of Bahá'u'lláh, the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, started about the middle of the nineteenth century in 'Irán. He brought to the world a body of spiritual and humanitarian teachings suited to the needs of present-day society. The revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, like the revelation of Christ or Muhammad, is divine in origin. Unlike the times of Christ or Muhammad, however, this is the day of the fulfilment of the promises of past dispensations. 'Irán, noted for its fanaticism and appalling degradation, was wholly unprepared for a fresh outpouring of divine grace; nevertheless His universal ideals spread from this inhospitable region to all parts of the globe. To-day there are Bahá'ís in over 300 countries and islands.

His logic was incomparable, His love irresistible; but the masses responded with barbaric cruelty. In fact no less than twenty thousand martyrs sacrificed their lives to promote the laws and principles of this world-embracing Faith. Lord Curzon, speaking of the courage displayed in this persecution, says that it was not surpassed by that evoked by the fires of Smithfield; and Professor Carpenter of Oxford was constrained to ask, ". . . has Persia, in the midst of her miseries, given birth to a religion which will go round the world?"

Church and State conspired against Him until in 1853 He, His family and a few of His followers were exiled to Baghdád, and eventually to 'Akká, where He passed away in 1892. Exile, persecution and imprisonment were His lot for over forty years. While the masses exhibited only unrelenting



hatred and animosity, a few men of eminence like Sir Arnold Burrows Kemball (Consul-General in Baghdád), Tolstoy, and Professor Browne of Cambridge, displayed a tolerant and sympathetic attitude.

Bahá'u'lláh appointed His eldest son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as the authoritative Interpreter of His Teachings. In the years 1911-1913 'Abdu'l-Bahá, though nearly seventy and suffering from ill-health, travelled in Egypt, Europe and America, proclaiming the universal principles of his father's Faith in church, synagogue, university, college and also to small groups interested in world peace and human welfare. Everywhere He was received with enthusiasm. His first public address in the Western world was in a Christian house of worship, the City Temple in London. He also addressed the congregation of the Church of St. John the Divine, at Westminster, had breakfast with the Lord Mayor of London, and spoke to an academic audience at Manchester College, Oxford. He met all classes, and upon all he conferred a blessing never to be forgotten. In the United States, he travelled from coast to coast, addressing large and representative audiences interested in spiritual unfoldment or a new social order.

During the British occupation in Haifa many representative officials, such as General Allenby and Sir Herbert Samuel, sought His presence. For His humanitarian work a knighthood of the British Empire was conferred upon Him. He passed from this life in 1921.

In His Will He appointed His eldest grandson, Shoghi Effendi, as Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith. During Shoghi Effendi's ministry, 1921-1957, the Administrative Order delineated in Scripture was firmly established. To-day, the Universal House of Justice, the world legislative body ordained by Bahá'u'lláh, which was first elected in 1963 by the Bahá'í communities of East and West, directs the affairs of the Faith. From Haifa,

the World Centre, the integrity of the laws and precepts, and the unity of the believers, are safeguarded and fully maintained.

The Faith brings to a distracted world, which has lost its anchor, the spiritual power that will regenerate the individual, and principles upon which a new social order can be built.

A few of the basic teachings of Bahá'u'lláh are the following: the oneness of mankind, the independent investigation of truth, the fundamental reality of all religions is one, the necessity that religion be the cause of unity and be in accord with science and reason, equality between men and women, the elimination of prejudices of all kinds, universal peace, universal education, the spiritual solution of the economic problem, a universal language and an international tribunal.

For progressive movements to-day these Teachings are not new, but they were new when given to the world. There are many principles in the Bahá'í Teachings, however, which are not universally accepted to-day. Take, for example, progressive revelation. The idea that divine revelation has ceased, that God cannot or will not reveal His will again to mankind through a Prophet like Bahá'u'lláh is, of course, absurd.

The most striking aspect of the failure of scholars and statesmen to appreciate the message of Bahá'u'lláh, is the fact that to-day we are doing some of the things He told us to do three-quarters of a century ago. To illustrate, He said: "*The well-being of mankind, its peace and security are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established.*" After indulging in two global wars we get this interesting statement from the atomic physicists: "As long as the causes for war exist, aggressor nations can challenge the international controls. Only in a unified world community can peace exist in the world." Again, foreshadowing the tentative efforts to unite the rulers of the world for the purpose of discussing world peace, He said: "*The time must come, when*

*the imperative necessity for the holding of a vast, an all-embracing assemblage of men will be universally realized."*

And just a few years ago the editors of *One World or None* made the following suggestion: "The statesmen, the experts in international affairs, in government . . . must speak out, and their proposals must be discussed and weighed in a great public debate."

It is too early to anticipate the outcome of the efforts that are now being made to establish peace, but modern theorists would do well to consider rather carefully a Faith that has encircled the globe, that has been highly successful in assimilating diverse races, nations and religions, that has preserved the purity of its laws and precepts, and that has maintained its unity against relentless foes for one hundred years.