

# The Prophets of God as "abstracted essences." The importance of abstract thought

The mind comprehendeth the *abstract* by the aid of the concrete, but the soul hath limitless manifestations of its own.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablet to August Forel*, p. 8



Rooted in Two Worlds, a painting by Hooper Dunbar, Haifa, Israel

The Birds of Divinity and Doves of Eternity have two utterances. One they reveal according to the outward, without allegory, covering or veil, that it may be a guiding lamp and beckoning light by which wayfarers may reach the summits of holiness, and seekers be led to the court of union. Such are the clear records and evident verses already mentioned. The other utterance they reveal in veil and covering to expose that which the malicious have concealed in their hearts and disclose their innermost beings. Therefore it is said by Sadek-Ibn-Muhammad, "God will purge them and sift them." This is the divine balance and the eternal touchstone wherewith He tests His servants. No one comprehendeth the meanings of these utterances except tranquil hearts, approved souls and *abstracted* minds. In similar utterances the literal meaning understood by people is not intended.

Compilations, *Bahá'í Scriptures*, p. 65

Regarding the use of symbolism in art, the following extracts from letters written to two individuals by the House of Justice may provide the answer you seek:

We see no objection to the use of natural phenomena as symbols to illustrate the significance of the three Central Figures, Bahá'í Laws, and Bahá'í Administration; and we also appreciate the suit-ability of using visual symbols to express *abstract* concepts.

29 July 1971

Compilations, *The Importance of the Arts in Promoting the Faith*

That celestial reality, the third reality of the microcosm, delivers man from the material world. Its power causes man to escape from nature's world. Escaping, he will find an illuminating reality, transcending the limited reality of man and causing him to attain to the infinitude of God, *abstracting* him from the world of superstitions and imaginations, and submerging him in the sea of the rays of the Sun of Reality.

This fact is proved from scientific as well as spiritual evidence.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Foundations of World Unity*, p. 51

It is evident then that each elemental atom of the universe is possessed of a capacity to express all the virtues of the universe. This is a subtle and *abstract* realization. Meditate upon it, for within it lies the true explanation of pantheism. From this point of view and perception, pantheism is a truth, for every atom in the universe possesses or reflects all the virtues of life, the manifestation of which is effected through change and transformation. Therefore the origin and outcome of phenomena is verily the omnipresent God for the reality of all phenomenal existence is through Him. There is neither reality nor the manifestation of reality without the instrumentality of God. Existence is realized and possible through the bounty of God, just as the ray or flame emanating from this lamp is realized through the bounty of the lamp from which it originates. Even so all phenomena are realized through the divine bounty, and the explanation of true pantheistic statement and principle is that the phenomena of the universe find realization through the one power animating and dominating all things; and all things are but manifestations of its energy and bounty. The virtue of being and existence is through no other agency. Therefore in the words of Bahá'u'lláh the first teaching is the oneness of the world of humanity.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Foundations of World Unity*, p. 58

also 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 285

We come to another aspect of our subject -- Are the workings and effects of love confined to this world or do they extend on and on to another existence? Will its influence affect our existence here only or will it extend to the life everlasting? When we look upon the

human kingdom we readily observe that it is superior to all others. In the differentiation of life in the world of existence, there are four degrees or kingdoms, -- the mineral, vegetable, animal, and human. The mineral kingdom is possessed of a certain virtue which we term cohesion. The vegetable kingdom possesses cohesive properties plus the power of growth or power augmentative. The animal kingdom is possessed of the virtues of the mineral and vegetable plus the powers of the senses. But the animal although gifted with sensibilities is utterly bereft of consciousness, absolutely out of touch with the world of consciousness and spirit. The animal possesses no powers by which it can make discoveries which lie beyond the realm of the senses. It has no power of intellectual origination. For example, an animal located in Europe is not capable of discovering the continent of America. It understands only phenomena which come within the range of its senses and instinct. It cannot *abstractly* reason out anything. The animal cannot conceive of the earth being spherical or revolving upon its axis. It cannot apprehend that the little stars in the heavens are tremendous worlds vastly greater than the earth. The animal cannot *abstractly* conceive of intellect. Of these powers it is bereft. Therefore these powers are peculiar to man and it is made evident that in the human kingdom there is a reality of which the animal is minus. What is that reality? It is the spirit of man. By it man is distinguished above all the other phenomenal kingdoms. Although he possesses all the virtues of the lower kingdoms he is further endowed with the spiritual faculty, the heavenly gift of consciousness.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Foundations of World Unity*, p. 90

The power of the understanding differs in degree in the various kingdoms of creation. The mineral, vegetable, and animal realms are each incapable of understanding any creation beyond their own. The mineral cannot imagine the growing power of the plant. The tree cannot understand the power of movement in the animal, neither can it comprehend what it would mean to possess sight, hearing or the sense of smell. These all belong to the physical creation.

Man also shares in this creation; but it is not possible for either of the lower kingdoms to understand that which takes place in the mind of man. The animal cannot realize the intelligence of a human being, he only knows that which is perceived by his animal senses, he cannot imagine anything in the *abstract*. An animal could not learn that the world is round, that the earth revolves round the sun, or the construction of the electric telegraph. These things are only possible to man. Man is the highest work of creation, the nearest to God of all creatures.

All superior kingdoms are incomprehensible to the inferior; how therefore could it be possible that the creature, man, should understand the almighty Creator of all?

That which we imagine, is not the Reality of God; He, the Unknowable, the Unthinkable, is far beyond the highest conception of man.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 24

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. To illustrate this, think of man as endowed with two kinds of sight; when the power of insight is being used the outward power of vision does not see.  
'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 175

Just as the animal is more noble than the vegetable and mineral, so man is superior to the animal. The animal is bereft of ideality -- that is to say, it is a captive of the world of nature and not in touch with that which lies within and beyond nature; it is without spiritual susceptibilities, deprived of the attractions of consciousness, unconscious of the world of God and incapable of deviating from the law of nature. It is different with man. Man is possessed of the emanations of consciousness; he has perception, ideality and is capable of discovering the mysteries of the universe. All the industries, inventions and facilities surrounding our daily life were at one time hidden secrets of nature, but the reality of man penetrated them and made them subject to his purposes. According to nature's laws they should have remained latent and hidden; but man, having transcended those laws, discovered these mysteries and brought them out of the plane of the invisible into the realm of the known and visible. How wonderful is the spirit of man! One of the mysteries of natural phenomena is electricity. Man has discovered this illimitable power and made it captive to his uses. How many of nature's secrets have been penetrated and revealed! Columbus, while in Spain, discovered America. Man has accurately determined that the sun is stationary while the earth revolves about it. The animal cannot do this. Man perceives the mirage to be an illusion. This is beyond the power of the animal. The animal can only know through sense impressions and cannot grasp intellectual realities. The animal cannot conceive of the power of thought. This is an *abstract* intellectual matter and not limited to the senses. The animal is incapable of knowing that the earth is round. In brief, *abstract* intellectual phenomena are human powers. All creation below the kingdom of man is the captive of nature; it cannot deviate in the slightest degree from nature's laws. But man wrests the sword of dominion from nature's hand and uses it upon nature's head. For example, it is a natural exigency that man should be a dweller upon the earth, but the power of the human spirit transcends this limitation, and he soars aloft in airplanes. This is contrary to the law and requirement of nature. He sails at high speed upon the ocean and dives beneath its surface in submarines. He imprisons the human voice in a phonograph and communicates in the twinkling of an eye from East to West. These are things we know to be contrary to the limitations of natural law. Man transcends nature, while the mineral, vegetable and animal are helplessly subject to it. This can be done only through the power of the spirit, because the spirit is the reality.  
'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 240

The station of man is great, very great. God has created man after His own image and likeness. He has endowed him with a mighty power which is capable of discovering the mysteries of phenomena. Through its use man is able to arrive at ideal conclusions instead of being restricted to the mere plane of sense impressions. As he possesses sense

endowment in common with the animals, it is evident that he is distinguished above them by his conscious power of penetrating *abstract* realities. He acquires divine wisdom; he searches out the mysteries of creation; he witnesses the radiance of omnipotence; he attains the second birth -- that is to say, he is born out of the material world just as he is born of the mother; he attains to everlasting life; he draws nearer to God; his heart is replete with the love of God. This is the foundation of the world of humanity; this is the image and likeness of God; this is the reality of man; otherwise, he is an animal. Verily, God has created the animal in the image and likeness of man, for though man outwardly is human, yet in nature he possesses animal tendencies.

You must endeavor to understand the mysteries of God, attain the ideal knowledge and arrive at the station of vision, acquiring directly from the Sun of Reality and receiving a destined portion from the ancient bestowal of God.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 262

The conclusion is irresistible that the splendors of the Sun of Truth, the Word of God, have been the source and cause of human upbuilding and civilization. The world of nature is the kingdom of the animal. In its natural condition and plane of limitation the animal is perfect. The ferocious beasts of prey have been completely subject to the laws of nature in their development. They are without education or training; they have no power of *abstract* reasoning and intellectual ideals; they have no touch with the spiritual world and are without conception of God or the Holy Spirit. The animal can neither recognize nor apprehend the spiritual power of man and makes no distinction between man and itself, for the reason that its susceptibilities are limited to the plane of the senses. It lives under the bondage of nature and nature's laws. All the animals are materialists. They are deniers of God and without realization of a transcendent power in the universe. They have no knowledge of the divine Prophets and Holy Books -- mere captives of nature and the sense world. In reality they are like the great philosophers of this day who are not in touch with God and the Holy Spirit -- deniers of the Prophets, ignorant of spiritual susceptibilities, deprived of the heavenly bounties and without belief in the supernatural power. The animal lives this kind of life blissfully and untroubled, whereas the material philosophers labor and study for ten or twenty years in schools and colleges, denying God, the Holy Spirit and divine inspirations. The animal is even a greater philosopher, for it attains the ability to do this without labor and study. For instance, the cow denies God and the Holy Spirit, knows nothing of divine inspirations, heavenly bounties or spiritual emotions and is a stranger to the world of hearts. Like the philosophers, the cow is a captive of nature and knows nothing beyond the range of the senses. The philosophers, however, glory in this, saying, "We are not captives of superstitions; we have implicit faith in the impressions of the senses and know nothing beyond the realm of nature, which contains and covers everything." But the cow, without study or proficiency in the sciences, modestly and quietly views life from the same standpoint, living in harmony with nature's laws in the utmost dignity and nobility.

This is not the glory of man. The glory of man is in the knowledge of God, spiritual susceptibilities, attainment to transcendent powers and the bounties of the Holy Spirit. The glory of man is in being informed of the teachings of God.  
'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 311

Likewise the revealed Words which have descended from the clouds of the eternal power and from the realm of divine might are beyond the limit of the knowledge and comprehension of the servants. This is allotted to *abstracted* souls from the holy eternal Table sent down from Heaven. Should ye become aware of the affliction of the Prophets and the motive and reason of the contradiction of those Divine Suns by the servants, ye will be cognizant of many things. The more ye consider the contradictions of the Day-springs of the suns of the attributes of Oneness by the people, the more firm and strong ye will become in your religion and in the Cause of God. Accordingly some of the stories of the Prophets are briefly recorded in these Tablets, to demonstrate and make evident that in all times and ages, they inflicted upon the Appearances of Power and Dawning-places of Might that which the pen is ashamed to relate. Perchance these statements may enable some of the people to avoid the perplexity arising from contradiction and denial by the learned and ignorant of the age, and thus increase their assurance and faith.  
Compilations, *Bahá'í Scriptures*, p. 4

These Suns of Truth are the Universal Manifestations of the Divinity in the world of His attributes and names. As by the command of the real Adored One the development of material things such as fruits, trees, colors, minerals and whatever exists in the phenomenal world is through the assistance of the phenomenal sun, so the trees of unity, the fruits of oneness, the leaves of *abstraction*, the flowers of knowledge and assurance and the myrtles of wisdom and utterance appear through the training of the Ideal Suns. Therefore when these Suns arise, the world is renewed, the rivers of life flow, the seas of beneficence move, the clouds of grace gather and the breezes of bounty blow upon the temples of beings. Through the heat of these Divine Suns and Ideal Fires the heat of the love of God is produced in the pillars of the world; and through the favor of these *abstracted* Spirits the immortal spirit of life is conferred upon the bodies of the mortal dead.  
Compilations, *Bahá'í Scriptures*, p. 13

Therefore it is shown and confirmed that the Prophets and chosen ones of God are daysprings of the manifestation and emanation of all these exalted attributes and infinite names, although some of these attributes may or may not outwardly appear in those luminous Temples. Even if a certain quality is not outwardly manifested from those *abstracted* Spirits, it cannot be denied that those repositories of divine attributes and mines of supreme names possess that quality. Therefore all these brilliant Beings and wonderful Countenances are declared to be endowed with all the attributes of God, such as dominion, grandeur and the like, though they may not apparently appear with outward

dominion and other similar powers. This point is evident and certain to every possessor of perception and in no need of argument.

20. All the former Prophets who have announced to the people a subsequent Manifestation have also spoken of the dominion of that Manifestation, as is recorded in the former Books. Dominion and all the names and attributes are certain and evident concerning all those preceding and subsequent Manifestations, for they are the appearances of the invisible attributes and dawning-places of divine mysteries, as already mentioned.

Compilations, *Bahá'í Scriptures*, p. 30

From the fact that these *abstracted* Essences are the first, the last, the manifest, and the hidden, it is proved of that Sun of Truth, that He is verily, "the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden," and likewise the other exalted names and lofty attributes. Therefore, whosoever is favored by these shining and glorious Lights and hath attained to these luminous and radiant Suns during every Manifestation hath attained the "Meeting of God," and entered the city of eternal and immortal life. This "Meeting" can not be realized by any except in the Resurrection Day, which is the rise of the Self of God in His Universal Manifestation.

Compilations, *Bahá'í Scriptures*, p. 37

...in this most obvious Manifestation and most mighty Dominion, many of the rightly guided theologians were favored with the cup of nearness and meeting, and attained to the most great favor, abandoning the world for the sake of the Beloved One.

All these confessed, obeyed and were guided to that Sun of Manifestation Bab, to such an extent that most of them abandoned property and family, and joined themselves to the good pleasure of the Professor of Glory. They sacrificed their lives for the sake of the Beloved One and expended all they possessed. Their breasts became targets for the arrows of the adversaries and their heads adorned the lances of the infidels. No land remained which did not drink the blood of these *abstracted* souls and no sword that did not touch their necks. Their deeds are a sufficient proof of the truth of their words. Is not the testimony of these holy souls who in this manner gave life in the way of the Friend, and at the sacrifice of whose heart and soul the whole world was astonished, sufficient for these servants?

Compilations, *Bahá'í Scriptures*, p. 56

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 condition he is immersed in the ocean of spiritual life and can unfold the secrets of things in themselves. To illustrate this, think of man as endowed with two kinds of sight: when the power of insight is being used the power of outward vision does not function.

644. This faculty of meditation frees man from the animal nature, discerns the reality of things, puts man in touch with God.

This faculty brings forth the sciences and arts from the invisible plane. Through the meditative faculty inventions are made possible, colossal undertakings are carried out. Through it governments can run smoothly. Through this faculty man enters into the very Kingdom of God.

Compilations, *Bahá'í Scriptures*, p. 323

That celestial reality, the third reality of the microcosm, delivers man from the material world. Its power causes man to escape from nature's world. Escaping, he will find an illuminating reality, transcending the limited reality of man and causing him to attain to the infinitude of God, *abstracting* him from the world of superstitions and imaginations, and submerging him in the sea of the rays of the Sun of Reality. This fact is proved from scientific as well as spiritual evidence.

Compilations, *Bahá'í Scriptures*, p. 400

The Divine Reality is far removed from man. It is absolutely remote and independent in Its essence; *abstract*, limitless, impersonal beyond human comprehension.

Man is limited, weak, without power, helpless. The Divine Reality represents power absolute, capacity for all things, fulfilment for all the needs of man.

The Divine Reality is to man what the sun is to the earth. The sun is life, radiance, heat, power, energy. The earth is dead, inert, helpless, incapable of initiative or change.

The sun in its remoteness could never reach the earth -- and the earth, wretched, helpless -- could never attain to the glory and splendor of the sun. An intermediary there must be. In some way the radiant, life-giving power of the sun must be brought to the darkened earth, and this becomes possible through the media of light and heat. Through their means this dark ball of earth becomes the home of fragrant, blooming life.

As there must be an intermediary to transmit to the earth the life-giving power of the sun, so must there be an intermediary to bring God to man; and this is realized through the ever-present power of the Holy Spirit. As the media of light and heat carry fragrance and bloom to the earth, so the Holy Spirit brings to man perfection and inspiration. The earth alone is but a senseless clod -- touched by the sun it becomes life and energy. So the Holy Spirit touches the heart of man and awakens him to eternal life. It gives to man all possibilities. The cause of life widens before his eyes; eternity opens to him and becomes his, and every moment it is his inviolable possession. Limitations disappear, and he becomes more and more sensitive to the teachings of the Holy Spirit. All things are his own.

Without the intermediary of the Holy Spirit, man would remain dull, helpless and deprived of attainment. But touched by that Divine Elixir he becomes tender, loving, responsive, and capable of every perfection of existence.

Compilations, *Bahá'í Scriptures*, p. 451

### Our Speculations on the Nature of Life After Death Have Little Validity

"The Guardian feels that, while there is no harm in speculation on these *abstract* matters, one should not attach too much importance to them. Science itself is far from having resolved the question of the nature of matter, and we cannot, in this physical world, grasp the spiritual one more than in a very fragmentary and inadequate manner."

From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, January 19, 1942

Compilations, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 209

There is, however, one case in which one can criticize the present social and political order without being necessarily forced to side with or oppose any existing regime. And this is the method adopted by the Guardian in his 'Goal of a new World Order'. His criticisms of the world conditions beside being very general in character are *abstract*; that is, instead of condemning existing institutional organizations it goes deeper and analyzes the basic ideas and conceptions which have been responsible for their establishment. This being a mere intellectual and philosophical approach to the problem of world political crisis, there is no objection if you wish to try such a method, which immediately carries you from the field of practical politics to that of political theory. But in view of the fact that no clear cut line can be drawn between theory and practice you should be extremely careful not to make too free a use of such method."

Compilations, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 451

Fruitless sciences is what Bahá'u'lláh, refers to, like metaphysical hair splittings, and other *abstract* things carried to the extreme.

"The friends should be encouraged not to waste time on such things as astrology, etc., which you mention. They cannot be forbidden to do so. The exercise of our free will to choose to do the right things is much more important."

From a letter written on behalf of Guardian, dated July 30, 1956, to an individual believer, Bahá'í News, No.230, p. 1, April 1950

Compilations, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 516

'They that have forsaken their country,' is Bahá'u'lláh's own testimony, 'for the purpose of teaching Our Cause -- these shall the Faithful Spirit strengthen through its power .... By My

life! No act, however great, can compare with it, except such deeds as have been ordained by God, the All-Powerful, the Most Mighty. Such a service is indeed the prince of all goodly deeds, and the ornament of every goodly act.' Such a reward, it should be noted, is not to be regarded as purely an *abstract* blessing confined to the future life, but also as a tangible benefit which such courage, faith and perseverance can alone confer in this material world.

Compilations, *Quickeners of Mankind*, p. 22

Just as there is a fundamental difference between divine Revelation itself and the understanding that believers have of it, so also there is a basic distinction between scientific fact and reasoning on the one hand and the conclusions or theories of scientists on the other. There is, and can be, no conflict between true religion and true science: true religion is revealed by God, while it is through true science that the mind of man "discovers the realities of things and becomes cognizant of their peculiarities and effects, and of the qualities and properties of beings" and "comprehendeth the *abstract* by the aid of the concrete". However, whenever a statement is made through the lens of human understanding it is thereby limited, for human understanding is limited; and where there is limitation there is the possibility of error; and where there is error, conflicts can arise. For example, at the present time many people are convinced that it is unscientific to believe in God, but, as human enlightenment progresses, the scientists and philosophers of the future will not be, in the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "deniers of the Prophets, ignorant of spiritual susceptibilities, deprived of the heavenly bounties and without belief in the supernatural".

26 December 1975 to an individual believer

Compilations, *Scholarship*, p. 16

Philosophy, as you will study it and later teach it, is certainly not one of the sciences that begins and ends in words. Fruitless excursions into metaphysical hair-splittings is meant, not a sound branch of learning like philosophy....

As regards your own studies: he would advise you not to devote too much of your time to the *abstract* side of philosophy, but rather to approach it from a more historical angle. As to correlating philosophy with the Bahá'í teachings; this is a tremendous work which scholars in the future can undertake.

Shoghi Effendi, *The Unfolding Destiny of the British Bahá'í Community*, p. 445

also *Compilations, Scholarship*, p. 19

It is an axiomatic fact that while you meditate you are speaking with your own spirit. In that state of mind you put certain questions to your spirit and the spirit answers: the light breaks forth and the reality is revealed. You cannot apply the name 'man' to any being void of this faculty of meditation; without it he would be a mere animal, lower than the beasts. Through the faculty of meditation man attains to eternal life; through it he receives the breath of the Holy Spirit -- the bestowal of the Spirit is given in reflection and

meditation. 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, through it he receives heavenly food. 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. To illustrate this, think of man as endowed with two kinds of sight; when the power of insight is being used the outward power of vision does not see. This faculty of meditation frees man from the animal nature, discerns the reality of things, puts man in touch with God. 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; through it governments can run smoothly. Through this faculty man enters into the very Kingdom of God.

Nevertheless some thoughts are useless to man; they are like waves moving in the sea without result. But if the faculty of meditation is bathed in the inner light and characterized with divine attributes, the results will be confirmed. The meditative faculty is akin to the mirror; if you put it before earthly objects it will reflect them. Therefore if the spirit of man is contemplating earthly subjects he will be informed of these. But if you turn the mirror of your spirits 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. Therefore let us keep this faculty rightly directed -- turning it to the heavenly Sun and not to earthly objects -- so that we may discover the secrets of the Kingdom, and comprehend the allegories of the Bible and the mysteries of the spirit. May we indeed become mirrors reflecting the heavenly realities, and may we become so pure as to reflect the stars of heaven.

*"Paris Talks: Addresses given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Paris in 1911-1912", pp. 174-76*  
Compilations, The Compilation of Compilations vol II, p. 234

Shoghi Effendi said to a believer recently in Haifa that "by 'Oneness of Mankind' is meant an organized unification, not mere brotherhood. It is not a humanitarian principle, it does not imply a theoretical *abstract* conception, but a promise that the world is going to be unified politically, socially, economically and religiously."  
Shoghi Effendi, *Extracts from the USBN*

The value placed on service, and the elevation of work to an act of worship when it is done in the spirit of service, helps programs achieve a balance between working with one's hands and acquiring *abstract* knowledge. The student's attention is focused from the beginning on needs and aspirations of the local community, and curricula seek to develop those skills and capacities that render acts of service meaningful and effective.  
Bahá'í International Community, 1989 Jan 02, *Position Statement on Education*

I mean to say that whatever concerns one's inward feelings, spiritual perceptiveness, inner enlightenment, and all that pertains to the realms of divinity, is far removed from, and exalted above, nature, material things, place, time, form and substance. For example, no one can explain the state of maturity or the mental faculties of a mature person to a child who has not come of age, even though these relate to the world of nature. For the child has not yet acquired the capacity to understand. How much less is it possible, then, to explain a spiritual matter, an *abstract* condition, to an individual.

Should a person be enabled to acquire, through the bounty and assistance of God and His Manifestations, an inner spiritual feeling [as a result of attaining the presence of Bahá'u'lláh], letting it penetrate his soul, not in the form of a temporary flash or vain imagining, but as imbuing his very being, then such an attainment will pave the way for his progress in the realms of spirit, provided it does not become mixed with self-glorification and egotism...

The import of these words is that it is impossible to describe the effusions of the grace [of Bahá'u'lláh] experienced in His presence or to recount the effulgent glories of the Speaker on the Mount[1]...9

[1 Bahá'u'lláh.]

Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh v 2, p. 8*

Jesus Himself told the story of His experience, and according to His usual practice He made mental images and *abstract* things more clear by shaping them into concrete form and presenting them as a parable.

George Townshend, *The Heart of the Gospel, p. 92*

He swept the room with a glance at once enfolding and *abstracted*. He raised His hands, palm upwards, level with His waist. His eyes closed and He chanted a prayer for the souls united by Him and by me. By Him that morning according to the Laws of the New World Order in which the spirit of man is to be trained to function harmoniously with its brief material environment; by me this evening as the representative of the passing regime in which ancient superstitions and outworn shibboleths often tinge the most sacred observances, yet which, being customary, are to be observed "lest offense be given to any soul." This prayer of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, chanted in tones to me unequalled in all experience, mellifluous honey-like, is the nearest descriptive word, but how inadequate, is the keenest of all my memories of that evening. In spite of the fact that the language was Persian, and so, of course, unfamiliar to me, the impression I received was that of understanding.

Howard Colby Ives, *Portals to Freedom, p. 97*

'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that 'When reality envelops the soul of man love is possible,'[4] and by reality is intended the Word of God as revealed through the great teachers who appear among men when hearts have faded and minds have crystallized in cruelty. He says, regarding human relations, 'Never become angry with one another... Love the creatures for the sake of God and not for themselves. You will never become angry or impatient if you love them for the sake of God ... the imperfect eye beholds imperfections,'[5] and

again '...if you have an enemy, consider him not as an enemy. Do not simply be long-suffering, nay, rather, love him... Do not even say that he is your enemy. Do not see any enemies.' [6] This love, this centrifugal power by which hostility will be destroyed is impelling to its service people of every religion and belief. This love is neither a pasty sentimentality nor an hysteria, but an unfaltering practice of waiting on humanity; and humanity is not a vague *abstract* with a capital 'H,' it is the family, and the man going by in the street, and the chance acquaintance. Such a service is not exercised with any hypocritical hope of reward either in this world or the next -- one does not accept pay in exchange for love. The offering it, is considered a privilege, like a tree's privilege of blossoming when the spring comes.

[4. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, Discourses by Abdul Baha Abbas During His Visit to the United States in 1912, 2 Vols., Bahá'í Publishing Society, Chicago, 1922-5, Vol. 1, p. 229]

[5. *The Divine Art of Living*, Selections from Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, compiled by Mabel Hyde Paine, Bahá'í Publishing Committee, Wilmette, 1944, pp. 115-16 [DAL]]

[6. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, Discourses by Abdul Baha Abbas During His Visit to the United States in 1912, 2 Vols., Bahá'í Publishing Society, Chicago, 1922-5, Vol. 1, p. 261]

Marzieh Gail, *Dawn Over Mount Hira*, p. 124

By and by He spoke: "Excuse me for writing," He said, "it was very important. You asked me concerning visions. Sometimes the thought becomes *abstracted*, enters the World of Reality, and there makes discoveries."

*The Diary of Juliet Thompson*

Refreshingly human after this intense experience, was the relaxation of our walk and talk in the gardens. Here the evidences of love, devotion and service were as concrete and as practical and as human as inside the shrines they had been mystical and *abstract* and superhuman. Shoghi Effendi is a master of detail as well as of principle, of executive foresight as well as of projective vision.

Ugo Giachery, *Shoghi Effendi - Recollections*, p. 190

This document was compiled by Cary Enoch Reinstein  
<http://www.enochsvision.com/>



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