

STAR OF THE WEST

"We desire but the good of the world and the happiness of the nations; that all nations shall become one in faith and all men as brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men shall be strengthened, that diversity of religion shall cease and differences of race be annulled. So it shall be; these fruitless strifes; these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the 'Most Great Peace' shall come."—BAHA'O'LLAH.

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The House of Spirituality in Persia

Talk by JENABI FAZEL MAZANDARANI, given at the Twelfth Annual Mashrekol-Azkar Convention, New York City, April 29, 1920. Interpreted by Manucher Khan. Stenographically reported by Harris & Stacy, N. Y.

WE thank God, friends, for the bounties which He has bestowed upon us. For what He has done for us let us express our thanks. We have come at a befitting time, when the Bahais are working in the beautiful time and day of the Rizwan.*

Praise be to God, you have undertaken great services, one of the most important of which is the raising of the fund for the Mashrekol-Azkar. We have been reading about the Mashrekol-Azkar and this news has been heralded throughout the world, the Bahais everywhere praying earnestly and watching its progress. Praise be to God, that sufficient funds have already been collected to start the work of building.

Having heard Abdul-Baha speak of the Mashrekol-Azkar and having read his writings, we know how he feels about the matter. The Bahais throughout the world have not only heard about the other Mashrekol-Azkars, but also about the one that is to be built in America. Many Tablets have been written about

*The Feast of Rizwan (Paradise) commemorates the Declaration of BAHA'O'LLAH in the Garden of El-Rizwan in Bagdad, April 21st, 1863. The season of feasting lasts twelve days—April 21st to May 2d, inclusive. April 21st, April 28th and May 2d, are especially celebrated.—Editors.

the Mashrekol-Azkar in Ishkabad. In the *Book of Akdas* it is commanded that Mashrekol-Azkars be built. There should be a Mashrekol-Azkar in every city. It is Abdul-Baha's wish that the Mashrekol-Azkar be as grand as it is possible to make it, for the more beautiful it is, the more attention it will attract, and by this, the outward manifestation of the spiritual temple, will many be drawn to the Revelation of BAHA'O'LLAH.

Praise be to God, that you are going to build a grand Mashrekol-Azkar. There is no doubt that it will require a large sum of money to erect such a structure, but the sincerity of the Bahais will remove all difficulties, and when the effort is made every obstacle will be overcome.

During the past year a number of Mashrekol-Azkars have been built in Persia. There is one in Hamadan, Persia. First, a large tract of ground was acquired and a building was erected thereon. They are adding to the building from time to time, so as to make it grand and impressive. Other buildings have been placed around it, such as a school for boys and a school for girls, a Bahai library and a guest house for the Bahais. The Bahais of Hamadan thought it impossible to erect such a building because of the great expense, but after they had started it, everything worked out right.

It seems that new life has entered into the Bahais of the world for many institutions have already been started. For instance, the house where BAHÁ'O'LLAH resided during his sojourn in Baghdad is to be rebuilt, as it is a place that will be visited by people from all parts of the world and should be preserved. The Bahais have started to rebuild it. When you undertake to do anything, no matter how difficult its accomplishment may seem, it will work out right.

Another thing that has greatly pleased us is the committee of teachers. Nothing is as important as teaching. Everything else comes after this. The more the teachings are spread and the Bahais are increased in number, the greater will be the possibility of their accomplishment. The more we do, the sooner will we attain the goal. That is why Abdul-Baha has said repeatedly that this time is the springtime of teaching. He has repeatedly emphasized that we must do our best to teach and he has said that the Bahais should hold meetings to consult about this matter.

We will tell you about the Eastern method of teaching, as it may throw some light on the matter: In accordance with the commands of Abdul-Baha, they have established a Spiritual Meeting (House of Spirituality) in every town of Persia. They elect, that is to say, all the Bahais elect, at least nine men out of their number. Sometimes it is nine, sometimes twice as many and sometimes even three, four, five or even six times as many. This Spiritual Meeting is like a fountain-head from which flows instructions for all the committees and sub-committees—that is to say, it has the authority. This Spiritual Meeting has many sub-committees and many sub-meetings are held. Every branch of the work is referred to one of these committees. For instance, one of these committees is specified as the committee of teaching; that is, teachers are elected, a separate committee is appointed, of

which all the members are teachers. A report of their work is made every week to the Spiritual Meeting. Meetings for teaching are held in every part of the city or town and the people are informed thereof. The time is appointed and the Bahais attend such meetings, taking their friends with them who are not Bahais, the one who addresses such a meeting being the teacher who has been appointed by the committee. The teacher informs the committee of his work and the committee makes a report of the work of all the teachers to the Spiritual Meeting. To bring people to a teaching meeting once may not be sufficient, for the words may not have taken effect, so they should be brought a second and even a third time. Another meeting is held which is called the encouraging meeting, that is, those who have been partly convinced are encouraged after they have passed the meeting of the teachers. Then they are taken to another meeting, where fuller information is given them and everything possible is done for them.

Much work is accomplished by the Spiritual Meeting and great responsibility rests upon it. In addition to the work of teaching, their duty is to keep the Bahais together, to unite them and to remove all cause of difference and dissension. They do everything they can to interest and do not allow anything to enter that will cause dissension and difference. Thus spirituality always prevails. This is of the utmost importance. Abdul-Baha has repeatedly emphasized the importance of unity. It is Abdul-Baha's wish that we should all enter the Kingdom of God, but it is hard to be firm and steadfast therein. We must all strive to keep unity and harmony.

Before a Bahai teacher arrives in a city of Persia, the friends are notified of his coming and are given full information about him. Plans for his coming are made and are sent to the committee

of teaching. That is the best way to spread the teachings. The Bahais living in a town and understanding the conditions there, are in a better position to know how to spread the Cause than would a stranger coming to the town. The plan should, therefore, be drawn by the Bahais of the town and should be carried out by the teacher.

That is the way meetings and sub-meetings are held in the East. If you have Spiritual Meetings like those in the East, it will be very advantageous to you and it will also be beneficial to have a committee of teaching. I hope that ere long you will have Spiritual Meetings everywhere, so that wherever we go we will find the plans have been made and we can proceed with our work.

MR. LUNT: I think in the minds of many there has been a doubt as to just what is intended by the term "Spiritual Meeting" as used by our brother Jenabi Fazel, and with his permission I want to ask a question as to what qualifications, in the Orient, are required of those believers who elect what we call the House of Spirituality.

JENABI FAZEL: The House of Spirituality is the same as the Spiritual Meeting. That is the mode of procedure in Persia. You can do likewise. In every town of Persia they have a House of Spirituality, or a Spiritual House or a Spiritual Meeting, which are all the same. The members of the Spiritual Meeting are elected by the Bahais, those receiving the majority of votes being elected. The Bahais elect certain ones of their own number and those elected become electors who choose the House of Spirituality. These are the conditions for choosing the House of Spirituality. There are numerous Tablets on this subject and one of the conditions is that the Bahais chosen as members of the House of Spirituality should be firm in the Covenant and well known for their steadfastness; that is to say, those who are sincere and are well known

to the others. After such members have been chosen, they proceed according to a plan determined by Abdul-Baha as to what they should do. For instance, they should consult about teaching. The assemblies that the teachers are to visit should communicate with them and they should be consulted beforehand. They should consult how to spread the Bahai literature and every step taken must be a matter of consultation. Of course, everything cannot be discussed at the meetings of the House of Spirituality. There should be sub-committees to do the work. One of the committees is the committee of teaching. The only subject discussed at these meetings is how to promote the Cause. These teachers should not sacrifice all of their time in teaching. If it is necessary to do that, the work should be divided among different ones, so that only a part of their time will be required in teaching. These teachers are versed in the prophetic books, can make a good address and can afford to spend part of their time at these meetings. A teacher is sent to every one of these meetings, in whatever place or home it is held, he being informed beforehand what meeting he is to attend and the appointed time, and the Bahais invite their friends to these meetings of teaching. The subject is chosen and the teacher goes to the meeting and gives his lecture. The teacher informs the teaching committee and the latter reports to the House of Spirituality. Those who were invited, who have read the words and have been impressed by the teacher, are invited to other meetings where they are given more information and a deeper insight into the teachings. That is the way the Bahais in Persia have their sub-committees work. If you think it feasible, it would be very good to select nine members to look after such matters—nine or more, twice as many as nine does not matter. They should have full authority and should hold a meeting of consultation at least once a

week about spreading the Cause, and of course they should make it a point to ascertain what has already been decided upon.

Another important thing is that all these meetings should work together in harmony and unity. The mission of the Bahai is one of service and there is nothing besides that. Our greatest desire is to render service. Consultation is one of the explicit commands of Abdul-Baha, but the time and place can be of your own choosing.

MR. LUNT: Just one point. I wish to clarify one point: How is the membership of the friends who elect the House of Spirituality to be determined, who determines that membership, and what are the qualifications of those who elect the House of Spirituality?

JENABI FAZEL: The members (of the assembly) should elect those who choose the (nine) members (of the House of Spirituality).

MR. LUNT: How are we to determine the qualifications, the conditions, how do we determine the membership, the general membership which elects these nine—I mean the whole body of the assembly?

JENABI FAZEL: The first condition is sincerity and firmness in the Cause—this is the law—and of course this should be carefully considered. This is more important than anything else because it is the center of the Cause. The center should be clear and pure. It is like a source from which all the streams spring. If the source is not clear, how can the stream be clear? It must be pure. If it is not, it will be of no use. The first condition is sincerity and firmness, and they should be firm in the Center of the Covenant, sincere in every way and be ready to sacrifice their lives for the Cause. One should have no will except the will of God. He should not be tenacious and persist in his own opinion. If somebody has a better opinion, he must change his opinion at once.

What aim do we have except servitude? This position is a very important one and carries with it much responsibility. In the Tablets revealed by Abdul-Baha these conditions are mentioned in detail. You have all heard of the important position which such a Spiritual Meeting holds. They are the chosen representatives of Abdul-Baha in every city and town.

MR. WINDUST: I should like to have it clearly defined if there is any difference between the Spiritual Meeting and the Spiritual Assembly and the House of Spirituality?

JENABI FAZEL: So far as I know, the House of Spirituality and the Spiritual Assembly (and Spiritual Meeting) are exactly the same.

MR. LUNT: Suppose new people come to a meeting today (or have been) coming for a number of months. Suppose they say, "We believe we are Bahais." Suppose we have a meeting called to elect the House of Spirituality, shall we notify these people, who say they believe, to come and help elect the House of Spirituality, or shall we have some committee pass upon their qualifications?

JENABI FAZEL: All those who are Bahais have the right to vote. They should elect a number of people, and those who are elected should choose the nine (constituting the House of Spirituality). *The Bahais are known everywhere. They could not be anything else.*

MRS. HOAGG: Just one question: In choosing the members of the House of Spirituality, should the committee be larger than the number chosen; do you usually have a larger committee to choose the House of Spirituality?

JENABI FAZEL: Naturally, a larger committee should choose a smaller committee; of course they cannot be nine themselves and choose eighteen. They must choose out of their own members.