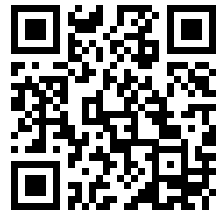

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MYSTICISM
AND THE BAHÁ'Í REVELATION

A CONTRAST

by Rubi Afrián



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INTRODUCTION

Bahá'u'lláh has revealed His message in a world full of conflicting ideas and philosophies. Some pertain to the field of religion and attempt to trace for man the course his soul has to follow in its flight towards its spiritual goal. Of these interpretations of religion some are too narrow to enhance that flight, others are too broad to deserve the appellation of religion or Faith.

Among these spiritual movements is mysticism which from time immemorial has kept abreast with orthodox religion and tried to lure its followers to its own fold.

It is therefore, of cardinal importance for every student of Bahá'í thought to know what Bahá'u'lláh has said on this vital subject which has captivated many of the greatest minds of the past. Being considered by the Bahá'ís as the Prophet of God to this glorious age every statement He makes contains for them the very essence of truth. His interpretation of the spiritual life is, therefore, the one that can be confidently followed; and according to this belief every word He utters is God's verdict on the subject.

In the words of Dean Inge "Mysticism is a very wide subject, and the name has been used more loosely even than socialism." (The Philosophy of Plotinus, Vol. 1, p. 1). In its broadest sense, mysticism includes every subject dealing with the spiritual life of man. According to this interpretation it will embrace the different religions and the Prophets would be considered the greatest mystics the race has produced. Taken in this sense every spiritual man is a mystic and the two terms are co-extensive and interchangeable. In pursuing our present discussion we shall not adopt this meaning of the word mystic.

In its narrower and more orthodox sense, however, it is defined by Dean Inge as follows: "Religious mysticism may be defined as the attempt to realize the presence of the living God in the soul and in nature, or more generally, as the attempt to realize in thought and feeling, the immanence of the temporal in the eternal and the eternal in the temporal." (Christian Mysticism pp. 4-5). Considering it in this sense Dean Inge says: "Thus it soon became clear to me that mysticism involves a philosophy and at bottom is a philosophy." (The Philosophy of Plotinus, Vol. I, p. 4). Thus in its narrower sense, mysticism is not co-extensive with religion and the spiritual life, but is a form of philosophy of religion which, having many similarities with religion proper as advocated by the Prophets, may also differ from it in various ways and have absolutely independent cardinal points of faith upon which its interpretation of the spiritual life is based. It is this narrower interpretation of mysticism that we will discuss in these pages—this especial philosophy of religion which is called mystic.

To render our points arresting and clear-cut we will take into consideration not the mild forms of mysticism where the mystic is conscientiously attempting to remain true to the teachings of the Prophets, but, due to erroneous philosophic conceptions he has inherited, is unwittingly led astray along certain lines. We will rather compare the Bahá'í teachings with those extreme forms where the mystic claims absolute identity with God, considers himself above the moral precepts prescribed by the Prophets and becomes quietistic and anti-social in tendency.

The value of such a distinction will become manifest when we consider the fact that the evils inherent in these philosophies imposed upon religion become revealed when they are carried to their logical conclusion and absolute extreme. In its mild form, mysticism is still too infused with the spiritual power, the true dynamic energy radiated by the Prophets, to show the least evil tendencies. In fact the less these men are swayed by the mystic philosophy and the more true they remain to the teachings of the Prophets, the more wonderful their life is and the more powerful

the influence they exert upon society. Men like St. Francis and Rumi might have unconsciously accepted certain wrong conceptions, but they were so imbued by the spirit of the Prophets that they overcame those handicaps and became powerful agencies in drawing their generation nearer to God and to the true spiritual life.

Mysticism is not peculiar to any particular religion; any faith can provide it a fertile soil on which it can flourish. Hence we find in the history of every religion the rise of such a movement. The basis of the mystic conceptions being the same, their principles are often akin and in some cases identical. So much so that in the words of Prof. Browne "many of the utterances of Eckart, Tauler, or St. Teresa would, if translated into Persian, easily pass current as the words of Sufi Shaykhs." (History of Persian Literature, Vol. I, p. 421).

Bahá'u'lláh has various epistles wherein He explains the Sufi teachings and states the points where they differ from the teachings of the Prophets. I have made the epistles which I have found—for these have not all been gathered and made accessible—the basis of my arguments and by quoting them extensively have tried to be faithful to His thought.

I have mentioned other writers such as E. Underhill and R. A. Nicholson to clarify the viewpoint of the mystics, both Christian and Islamic, and to corroborate the statements which Bahá'u'lláh makes concerning the basic beliefs of mysticism.

I have undertaken this task solely to clarify in my own mind the points of difference between Bahá'u'lláh and this other interesting conception of the spiritual life. My approach is therefore, that of a student who seeks knowledge rather than a teacher desiring to impart his learning.

I feel deep gratitude to the late Mrs. Ransom-Kehler for the kind and helpful suggestions she gave me as well as to some other friends who encouraged me in writing this essay.

Ruhi Afnán

MYSTICISM AND THE BAHÁ'Í REVELATION

I. THE TRINITY

“**A**MONG them (gnostics) being is limited to God and the creatures without any third. The reality is the sea and the form is the wave. Such is not the belief among the Prophets. Nay rather, they have proven the existence of a third world: the world of God, the world of the Divine Will and the world of the creatures.”

According to this Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá one of the basic distinctions between the teachings of the Prophets and the principles underlying mystic conceptions, is in the different stages of being. Whereas the mystics maintain the existence of two worlds: (1) the world of the Reality or Absolute and (2) the world of form or matter; the Prophets, and among them Bahá'u'lláh, attest the existence of three worlds: (1) the world of God, the Absolute or the Divine Essence; (2) the world of the Prophets which is called the world of the Word, or the world of the Divine Will; (3) the world of the creatures which is the world of human and physical being.

We cannot appreciate the full significance of this distinction unless we consider separately each point of these two classifications.

THE WORLD OF THE DIVINE ESSENCE

Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá emphasize repeatedly the transcendental nature of the Divine Essence. Neither through our rational powers nor through our feelings and experiences can we in any way attain a comprehension of what God is. The only aspect of His nature we can be sure of, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, is that upon

Him depends the existence and working of the whole universe. All the different conceptions we try to attribute to Him are creatures of our own imaginings. The Báb says that just as an ant, were it to try to describe God, would picture Him with a pair of huge antennæ, so does man attribute power and understanding to the Divine Essence for the mere reason that to himself these form the signs of greatness.

"In one sense," Bahá'u'lláh says, "the names (such as the Good, the Just) are garments for the attributes, for an attribute is created through an act done by the subject." In other words we speak of God as "the Good" or "the Just" because we attribute to him "goodness" and "justice" which in turn denote good and just acts done by Him. All the Divine Names and Attributes that we mention for the Divine Essence have, therefore, their origin in acts which we imagine God would perform as the source of all power and perfections. They all trace their origin to our own fancies and limited understanding.

This absolutely transcendent God is nevertheless, the source from which the other worlds or stages of being emerge, and upon which they rely for their dynamic power to pursue their course and fulfill their destiny. In "Some Answered Questions," 'Abdu'l-Bahá states in clear and unmistakable language the way these two worlds are revealed by God the Divine Essence.

"Know that proceeding is of two kinds: the proceeding and appearance through creation, and the proceeding and appearance through manifestation. The proceeding through creation is like the coming forth of the action from the actor, of the writing from the writer. Now the writing is created by the writer, and the discourse is created by the speaker, in the same way the human spirit is created by God. It is not that it manifests God—that is to say, no part has been detached from the Divine Reality to enter the body of man. No, as the discourse proceeds from the speaker, the spirit appears in the body of man.

"But the proceeding through manifestation is the manifestation of the reality of a thing in other forms: like the coming forth of the tree from the seed of the tree, or the coming forth of the

flower from the seed of the flower; for it is the seed itself which appears in the form of the branches, leaves and flowers. This is called the proceeding through manifestation. . . . Therefore, the proceeding of the human spirits from God is through creation.

“But the proceeding through manifestation (by this is meant the Divine Appearance, and not division into parts) we have said, is the proceeding and appearance of the Holy Spirit and the Word which is from God. As it is said in the Gospel of St. John: ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God:’ then the Holy Spirit and the Word are the appearance of God. . . .”

In these passages ‘Abdu’l-Bahá mentions two ways by which the Divine Essence reveals itself in the world. The first, which He terms manifestation, means that the same reality has assumed another form. It is like the rays of the sun reflected in the mirror. The reflected rays are only another form of the light that is shed by the sun. This method of Divine revelation pertains only to the Prophets.

The second form of Divine revelation is called creation. It means that a totally new reality is produced. Even though a table has its origin in the mind of a carpenter yet its reality is fundamentally different. This form of revelation comprises our universe and includes the rational soul which is the spiritual element in man.

II. THE PROPHETS

THE highest quest of the mystics has always been to attain God, the Divine Essence, and obtain a direct communion with Him. The realization of such a hope is absolutely denied to man. To that transcendental Being neither human intellect nor man's feelings and experience can ever approach. All that we may think or experience are imaginings of our own, creations of our own mind and passions and, therefore, fundamentally unlike His true nature. But God through His infinite bounty has not left His people in a condition of absolute deprivation. He has manifested His attributes in the Prophets and made the attainment unto Their presence the attainment to the presence of the Divine Essence Itself. Moreover, according to Bahá'u'lláh, God and His creatures, the eternal and the temporal worlds, the Absolute and the contingent could not be so completely and eternally separated. A link had to exist, and this link is the Word or Divine Will, which is the reality of the Prophets who have appeared throughout the ages.

The Prophets perform this function because they bear elements in common with God on the one hand and with man on the other. Their reality is the manifestation of the Word of God or the Divine Will and their outward appearance is human. Bahá'u'lláh explains these two aspects of their nature as follows:

"He has created this Pure Soul and Heavenly Reality from two elements: an outward element of clay and an inward Divine Nature. He is thus endowed with two stations; one is the station of reality, of 'He does not utter save about God His Lord,' which conforms to the tradition 'I have many conditions, with God I am He and He is I, save I am I and He is He.' Similarly He says: "There

is no distinction between you and They save They are your servants.' Their other station is human. Thus He says: 'I am not save a human like you. Say praise be to God my Lord, am I other than a human messenger?'"

Thus being Divine and connected with the world of the Absolute on the one hand, and human and in touch with the world of creation on the other, the Prophets occupy a position of peculiar significance and importance. It is through them that God reveals His powers to man, and man on his part comes to an understanding of the will of his Lord. It is through their teachings that we attain our highest good and comprehend the nature of the true ethical life.

"And know that the proceeding of the Word the Holy Spirit from God, which is the proceeding and appearance of manifestation, must not be understood to mean that the Reality of Divinity has been divided into parts, or multiplied, or that it has descended from the exaltation of holiness and purity. God forbid! If a pure, fine mirror faces the sun, the light and heat, the form and the image of the sun will be resplendent in it with such manifestation, that if a beholder says of the sun which is brilliant and visible in the mirror: 'This is the sun' it is true."

These Prophets who bear such a close relation with God do not manifest the Divine Essence, in the sense that a part of the Divinity resides in them. From the Bahá'í point of view it would be sheer blasphemy to maintain that the Absolute Essence has come down from its exalted position and taken a material form. The eternal cannot become subject to the temporal even if that temporal is the exalted person of a Prophet. The Prophets reveal only the Divine Attributes and never the Essence. We should bear this point in mind for it constitutes one of the basic features that distinguish the Bahá'í teachings from mystic philosophy.

The principal part the Prophets play in the universe is that of creating the ethical and spiritual atmosphere in which man has to develop and acquire perfections. They are the creators of the world of values in that through them we attain a true conception of what is good and evil. In this connection Bahá'u'lláh says:

"Know that God has united all essences and meanings and all

attributes and names and explanations in a woven cloth and covered with it that Holy and Divine Person, that he may in that garment represent the Beloved Joseph. If you desire to have the subject presented to you with greater clarity and basic proof, know that the station of this Divine letter is similar to a lamp. Should it be kindled in a lantern, the light would shed its rays upon the whole surrounding regions. Similarly the ancient letter 'H' (which stands for the Divine Essence) were it to be lighted in the lamp of the letter 'W' that is, the eternal temple, it will brighten the heavens with names and attributes, and all that is considered a thing—from the highest forms of creatures to the lowest forms of mentioned beings—all things will reflect this bright lamp in this lantern of Unity to the extent of their station and capacity."

With their appearance the Prophets breathe a new life into the world. Everything is thereby rejuvenated but the share of man is still greater. These messengers of God create for us the ethical and spiritual atmosphere in which we have our being. It is they who give birth to the civilizing power in history. They are the fountain heads from which spring all moral precepts so fundamental to the welfare of man. In "Some Answered Questions," and the "Mysterious Forces of Civilization," 'Abdu'l-Bahá definitely shows how, as the creators of our spiritual and ethical life, the Prophets have founded the greatest civilizations that history records.

We cannot reasonably maintain that this relation between the Absolute and the contingent, that is God and man, was sufficiently achieved in the history of the world with the earthly life of a single Prophet. To say that this connecting link appeared once and shall never again be made manifest is an affront to all idea of law and continuity. The only proper principle to maintain is that such manifestations of the Divine Attributes and such appearances of the Prophets of God are in conformity with the working of a basic and immutable law operating in the universe. We have to maintain that from the beginning for which there was no beginning, until the end for which there is no end, such Prophets have appeared and will appear in the world; and this is a basic principle of the

prophetic cycles which the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá constantly reiterated in their writings.

These uniting links between God and man, these great educators of humanity, appear when the need for them is the greatest, when the result of the disruption seems to be most devastating. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

"This infinite bounty and great chance shall end and this brilliant morn shall change into a dark night. When you find the world in this condition know and be sure that the morn of certainty has neared and the rising of the Manifestation of the Merciful from the horizon of the world of possibility and the coming of the Lord in the darkness of the clouds is at hand."

It is only when the cold of the winter has spent itself that the spring time is ushered in and all being is given new life. In the Bayán the Báb definitely states that the appearance of a new Prophet depends primarily upon the condition of society. It is the crying need of man that causes the sea of Divine Mercy to surge. Speaking generally, however, Bahá'u'lláh says in the Iqán that "once about a thousand years shall this city be renewed and adorned."

We should, however, bear in mind that every thing we attribute to the Prophets applies to all of them irrespective of what time they appeared or by what name they were known. All the Prophets are manifestations of the Divine Powers and Attributes and belong to the world of the Divine Will. Christ termed Himself Son of God, Muhammed called Himself Messenger of God, but they both reflected the same reality and occupied the same position in the Divine plan. As these Prophets appear in different periods and under different circumstances, they have to satisfy different needs. Sometimes what society lacks is purely spiritual teachings; at other periods the needs of man are also social and political. The message of these Prophets always conforms to the requirements of the day. In fact it is the existing needs of society that determine the laws and principles that the Prophet establishes. If, therefore, one Prophet reflects one certain power and Divine Attribute more than another, it means that the need of the day requires that the

emphasis be laid on this specific phase of human life and activity. For example, as the Báb was the precursor of Bahá'u'lláh and came to prepare the world for Him, His teachings are more emphatic upon the need of demolishing the idols of the past, while Bahá'u'lláh who came to bring about the reign of Peace which previous Prophets foretold, stresses more the need for unity and brotherhood. They were both manifestations of the Divine Will but different circumstances required the first to lay more emphasis upon demolishing old institutions and practices, and obliged the latter to teach international peace and goodwill. It is the difference of the environment in which they appear and of the ills they come to remedy that is the basis of the difference we find in their teachings.

Every previous Prophet announces His own return or the advent of another messenger from God and makes a covenant with His followers to believe in His message and obey His laws. The appearance of the succeeding Manifestation is therefore a day of judgment for the followers of the previous dispensation, inasmuch as every person is judged by his acceptance of the new Prophet, whether or not he has remained true to that covenant and faithful to his promise. This is the significance of Christ's saying: "For judgment I am come into the world."

The appearance of a Prophet is also termed the Day of Resurrection. As already mentioned, man can never attain a true knowledge of the Absolute or reach His transcendent realm; that goal is forever barred unto him. Insofar as the Prophets are perfect Manifestations of the Divine Attributes, to know Them is to know God, to come into Their presence is to come into the presence of God, to obey Them is to obey God. Whenever, therefore, the Scriptures mention the Day of Re-union the meaning is the day of the appearance of the Prophets in the world when man is given the chance to attain Their Holy Presence which is the presence of God Himself. In the Iqán Bahá'u'lláh says:

"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. The knowledge of Him Who is the origin of all things, and attainment unto Him is impossible save through knowledge of, and attainment to, those 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 a presence is possible only in the Day of Resurrection, which is the day of the rise of God Himself through His all-embracing revelation."

Similarly, the Day of Resurrection means the dawn of a new dispensation; for the Holy Spirit which the Prophet breathes into the world, awakens man from his slumber and a new era is thereby inaugurated in the life of society. Previously man was spiritually dead; now he comes to life again. His mind is stimulated, therefore he can discover and comprehend more of the mysteries that exist around him, his spirit is revived, and therefore he can achieve greater deeds and attain higher stages of material development and spiritual perfections.

The question arises as to how we can distinguish the Prophets from other men and be sure that their claim is true. "The works that I do in my Father's name they bear witness of me." From their fruit ye shall know them. Do the teachings they bring and the spirit they manifest in their life prove that they are in contact with the Absolute Source of all knowledge? Does Their insight into the moral life and needs of man establish Their claim to be the source of goodness and of the ethical principles needed for the betterment of society and for the advancement of our spiritual life? It is not sufficient that They should claim the divine authority, They have also, through Their life and teachings, to vindicate that claim and establish Their authority.

III. THE WORLD OF CREATION

THE world of creation, as we have already seen, is not the Divine Reality assuming another form but a totally new reality that has from relative non-existence come into existence. It has the same relation to God that speech has to the speaker and a table has with the carpenter.

When we say that this world is a creation of God we do not mean that there was a time when it did not exist and then came into being. Such a conception would subject eternal attributes to the category of time. It would mean that at a certain period God was not a creator and did not possess His Divine Powers. Such affirmations are blasphemous for they deny to God the eternity of His attributes. In "Some Answered Questions" 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

"Therefore, as the Essence of Unity, that is the existence of God, is everlasting and eternal—that is to say it has neither beginning nor end—it is certain that this world of existence, this endless universe, has neither beginning nor end. Yet it may be that one of the parts of the universe, one of the globes for example, may come into existence, or may be disintegrated, but the other endless globes are still existing, the universe would not be disordered, not destroyed; on the contrary, existence is eternal and perpetual."

Creation is a continuous process involving constant and eternal activity on the part of the creator. It means that God is the original cause or impetus who brings into being all the different objects in the universe and controls their life and development through His laws which are the guiding principles that He has himself devised. Creation is, therefore, not an act done at a definite period in the history of the universe, but a mode of causation to which the very existence of the universe is due. In this process of becoming, the

first object that came into existence was the crude matter out of which all things are made. Just as all numbers trace themselves back to the original unit, so all things existing in the universe are moulded from one primitive raw material. All different objects that we perceive are forms into which this primitive matter has been moulded.

"Then it is evident that in the beginning matter was one, and that one matter appeared in different aspects in each element; thus various forms were produced, became permanent, and each element was specialized. But this permanence was not definite, and did not attain realization and perfect existence until after a very long time. Then these elements became composed, and organized and combined infinite forms; or rather from the combination and composition of these elements innumerable beings appeared."

In this universe of ours, therefore, there is one single primitive matter, and all the different objects we see are the different forms into which the original matter has been moulded. But this composition is not accidental, it is the result of God's infinite powers and wisdom. It is He who has caused such different compositions and guided these laws of evolution.

"From this it is evident that it is the creation of God, and is not a fortuitous composition and arrangement. This is why from every natural composition a being can come into existence, but from an accidental composition no being can come into existence. For example, if a man of his own mind and intelligence collects some elements and combines them, a living being will not be brought into existence, since the system is unnatural."

Thus with the different kinds of composition we obtain different species of being. These species were, however, not the result of a sudden *fiat*, nor did they all appear at the same time. It was a gradual process, and the last to appear on the scene was man, the highest and most perfect being in this terrestrial sphere.

"Thus it is evident and confirmed that the development and growth of man on this earth, until he reached his present perfection, resembled the growth and development of the embryo in the womb of the mother, by degrees it passes from condition to con-

dition, from form to form, from one shape to another for this is according to the requirement of the universal system and Divine law."

This passage should not mislead us into the belief that 'Abdu'l-Bahá sanctioned the prevailing theories of the origin of species. Even though man developed from a primitive form, yet even in that primitive state he was of the species of man. Man is a different order of being distinct from the animals with an origin peculiar to himself. The importance of man is in his spiritual life. His mind and intellect as well as the spiritual faculties he possesses are of such importance that his physical structure becomes of little significance. How could we, therefore, ignore this basic spiritual reality, and considering only his outward form, classify him with other mammals?

"As man in the womb of the mother passes from form to form, from shape to shape, changes and develops, and is still the human species from the beginning of the embryonic period—in the same way man, from the beginning of his existence in the matrix of the world, is also a distinct species, that is, man, and has gradually evolved from one form to another."

The reality of man resides in his spiritual element which Bahá-'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá call the *rational soul*. Our physical body is only the tool which our soul uses in making contact with this physical plane of existence. The part that benefits from our experiences and as a result develops is our rational soul which hears through our ears, speaks through our tongue and thinks through our mind.

As the rational soul is a creation of God, that is a totally new reality created by that source of all being, it has had a beginning. Were we to consider it otherwise we would have two eternal realities both co-existent and absolutely distinct, namely the spirit of God and the spirit of man. With this conception of "creation" that 'Abdu'l-Bahá presents us we have to consider man as subject to time, and conceive for him a beginning, otherwise we would fall into an essential dualism which is contradictory to the teachings of true religion. On this subject 'Abdu'l-Bahá says: "The physical

condition will certainly become decomposed, but the condition of the rational soul, though it has a beginning, has no end: nay, it is endowed with everlasting life." As we shall see later, on this point of the pre-existence of the rational soul we part company with the mystic philosophy which maintains that our spirit was, previous to its present life on earth, existing in God in an undifferentiated form.

Every object in the world reveals some one of God's infinite powers save man, in whom resides the capacity of reflecting them all. This potentiality remains dormant until he comes in contact with the spirit and teachings of the Prophets. It is only then that his understanding of the true moral life is developed, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, he can reflect the Divine Attributes in his own life. Such healthy growth of man's rational soul can be obtained only under the laws and precepts that the Prophets establish in the form of religion. It is only in the atmosphere of the Holy Spirit that man's capacities can unfold themselves and produce their highest fruits. Stimulated by the Holy Spirit, diffused by the Prophets, and conforming to their religious laws, man must lead an active life, for it is only by acquiring experiences that his rational soul develops. Constant activity in a social and spiritual environment created through the bounty of God is indispensable for the uplift of man and the development of his rational soul.

"The wisdom of the appearance of the spirit in the body is this: the human spirit is a Divine Trust, and it must traverse all conditions; for its passage and movement through the conditions of existence will be the means of acquiring perfections. . . . It is the same when the human spirit passes through the conditions of existence: it will become the possessor of each degree and station. Even in the condition of the body it will surely acquire perfections."

Through acquiring experiences the spirit of man develops and his potential capacities begin to reveal themselves. These experiences begin in this world when the rational soul through the senses and intellectual powers, comes in contact with this physical plane and starts on its road to infinite progress. Every handicap he overcomes, every difficulty he surmounts, every lesson of human behavior he learns, every good act he performs, leave an imperish-

able trace upon his rational soul and add to his store of experiences. And on the other hand, every unkind act he performs and every difficulty he fails to surmount are chances he has lost and a progress he has failed to achieve.

This progress is, however, infinite. There is no limit to our spiritual advancement. The higher we go in the realm of goodness the more we find fields yet unexplored. In this stage of our being, in this physical world of ours we only start to grow. Death does not impair our upward movement, it only transfers it from a physical to a spiritual plane. Bahá'u'lláh says that after this world there are many worlds through which the spirit of man has to develop. As to how that progress is achieved no one knows. Just as the child which is still in the matrix can never picture the form of progress it can make after its birth, so none of us can conceive how we shall continue to grow in the world to come, and what shall be the nature of our experiences.

IV. THE DUALISTIC ASPECT OF BEING

As we mentioned at the beginning of the previous chapter, the question of the duality and trinity of being constitutes, according to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, one of the main principles that distinguish the teachings of the Prophets from the tenets of the philosophical mystics. Whereas the former maintain the existence of three worlds—the world of God, the world of the Divine Will, and the world of creation—the mystics affirm the existence of only two—the world of God and the world of creation. We have already considered in detail the three worlds as explained in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Let us now consider the dualistic conception of being as explained by the mystics.

In its orthodox and basic sense mysticism is a religious philosophy that implies the possible attainment of man to an essential unity with the Absolute, or God. This unity is not merely ethical or moral. It does not merely imply that the true mystic conforms in his moral being with the will of God, but also that in his existent being he will become one with Him. Just as a drop of water that originally separated itself from the sea in the form of a cloud, traverses a whole circle of existence to merge again in the mother sea, so does the mystic believe that man who originates from God and is differentiated from that Absolute Being has to tread the mystic path to complete his journey and end his circle of existence by merging again in the Absolute. The moral unity of man with the will of God, as expressed in the dictates of religion, is considered by some mystics as essential for that existent unity. But some of the more pronounced ones, who take the logic of their arguments to its extreme, maintain that the existent unity is the

more essential and therefore over-rides in importance the moral unity. They maintain that this moral unity, this conformity to religious rites and laws, is necessary only for the common herd of man but not for the true mystic who is already one with God.

To attain this existent unity with the Absolute, to make the mystic path and its ultimate goal of unity with the Divine Essence logically possible, the mystic has to maintain a philosophy established upon two basic conceptions; first the idea of two realms of being, second the doctrine that a particle of the Divine Essence exists in man. Without these two fundamental principles the importance of the mystic path and its goal which is the unity of the mystic with the Absolute will fall to the ground. If the essential dualism of being is discarded, or if the incarnation of God in men is set aside, then the circling course of human life-process is impaired and mysticism in its narrow and orthodox interpretation will become abortive. The importance of this principle will dawn upon us as we proceed to study separately these two conceptions of dualism of being and of Incarnation.

Even though these two ideas are conspicuously clear in the writings of the more advanced mystics who follow their principles to their logical conclusions, yet they appear rather vaguely in the writings of those who are on the other hand fettered by their religious affinities. The great desire of these to conform with the writ of their Holy Scriptures, makes them evade such clear cut distinctions, but their endeavors are futile, for without these two precepts their whole mystic conception will fall to the ground, and the mystic path with its unitive goal will become meaningless.

With this in mind, let us begin by considering the dualism of being as explained by Evelyn Underhill in her "Mysticism."

"The first question, then, must be:—How many of such aspects are necessary to the complete presentment of the mystic's position? How many faces of Reality does he see? At the very least, as we have already seen, he must be aware of two aspects: (a) that Holy Spirit within, that Divine Life by which his own life is transfused and upheld; and of which he becomes increasingly conscious as his education proceeds; (b) that Transcendental Spirit without, the

'Absolute,' towards union with which the indwelling and increasingly dominant spirit of love pushes the developing soul. It is the function of ecstasy to fuse these two aspects of God—to bring back, in mystical language, the Lover to the Beloved—but it is no less the function of mystical philosophy to separate them. Over and over again the mystics and their critics acknowledge, explicitly or implicitly, the necessity of this act.

"Thus even the rigid monotheism of Israel and Islam cannot, in the hands of the Kabalists and the Sufis, get away from an essential dualism in the mystical experience. According to the Zohar, says Mr. A. E. Waite, its best modern student, 'God is considered as immanent in all that has been created or emanated, and yet is transcendental to all.' So too the Sufis. God, they say, is to be contemplated (a) outwardly, in the perfect beauties of the earth; (b) inwardly, by meditation. Further, since He is One, and in all things, to conceive oneself as separated from God is an error: yet only when one sees oneself as separate from God, can one reach out to God."

In his "Studies in Islamic Mysticism," R. A. Nicholson says: "Jili belongs to the school of Sufis who hold that Being is one, that all apparent differences are modes, aspects, and manifestations of reality, that the phenomenal is the outward expression of the real. He begins by defining essence as that to which names and attributes referred; it may be either existent or non-existent, *i.e.*, existing only in name, like the fabulous bird called Anqá. Essence that really exists is of two kinds: Pure Being, or God, and Being joined to not-being, *i.e.*, the world of created things. The essence of God is unknowable *per se*; we must seek knowledge of it through its names and attributes. It is a substance with two accidents, eternity and everlastingness; with two qualities, creativeness and creatureliness; with two descriptions, uncreatedness and origination in time; with two names, Lord and slave (God and Man); with two aspects, the outward or visible which is the present world, and the inward or invisible, which is the world to come; . . ."

Thus both the Sufi and the Christian mystics maintain this essential dualism, because without it the idea of a mystic way which

ends in unity with the Divine Essence will be impaired. The self or individuality of man, they say, is the result of the element of non-reality which has been added to his inner Divine nature. The object of the mystic way is to free this Pure Being from these illusions that cause its separation. In following it the mystic overcomes this element of unreality, regains his primitive pure state, and becomes ready to merge again into Pure Being. Were they to discard this essential dualism and, like 'Abdu'l-Bahá, maintain the existence of a third intermediary world of the Prophets, definite and separate from the other two, the perfect circle of the Divine life-process which forms the basis of their teachings, will crumble down. The mystic would no more be in direct touch with God to attain unity with Him. Unity would no more mean the mystic existent unity, but a mere moral conformity with the precepts of the Prophets.

Ruysbroeck classifies the universe into three orders of: Becoming, Being and God, and parallel to it "distinguishes three stages in the soul's achievement of complete reality: the Active, the Interior, and the Super-essential Life." But in the words of Underhill, "these . . . must be regarded rather as divisions made for convenience of description, answering to those divisions which thought has made in the indivisible fact of the universe, than as distinctions inherent in the reality of things . . ."

The mystics thus consider only two aspects for the world of existence and this is an inheritance that was bequeathed to them by Ancient Philosophy. The mystics gave that dualism a religious form and began to speak of the relation between the Infinite and the finite, between Being and Being joined to not-being, between God and man.

Besides the desire to conform with the prevailing thought, however, the Christian mystics wished to incorporate the doctrine of Trinity that formed a basic tenet of their Faith. Their writing is as a consequence full of that principle to which they take recourse in explaining the different aspects of their philosophy. "Mystical writers remind us over and over again, that life as perceived by the human mind shows an inveterate tendency to arrange

itself in triads: that if they proclaim the number three in the heavens, they can also point to it as dominating everywhere upon the earth." (*Mysticism*, by E. Underhill). Ruysbroeck mentions three phases for the nature of God, three properties for the soul, three stages in the soul's achievement of complete reality, and various other triads, but as we have seen he makes it a point not to include the conception of trinity in classifying the different orders of being that exist in the universe, for he knew well that such a triad would undermine the logic of his mystic experiences.

To the mystic the only Being is God, therefore, the highest form of trinity is the trinity of the Absolute. To use the words of E. Underhill, "Mystical Philosophy, then, has availed itself gladly of the doctrine of the Trinity in expressing its vision of the nature of that Absolute which is found, by those who attain the deep Abyss of the God-head, to be essentially One." The trinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, which the mystics repeatedly mention in their writings, and which is fully accepted by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, is a trinity that explains the different aspects of the Absolute or God. The other form of trinity in which 'Abdu'l-Bahá differs with the mystics, is a trinity of the world of existence, which is fundamentally different from the first. This latter triad with the distinction between the Bahá'í and mystic points of view will become clearer after we consider the mystic interpretation of the doctrine of Incarnation.

THE MYSTIC INTERPRETATION OF THE DOCTRINE OF INCARNATION

We could not consider the doctrine of the Trinity alone and by itself. "It is by the complementary Christian dogma of the Incarnation that it has best been able to describe and explain the nature of the inward and personal mystic experience." (Underhill.) The mystic philosopher not only explains the three phases of the Absolute but also relates it closely to an interpretation of the doctrine of the Incarnation, which gives to mysticism its essential characteristics.

The orthodox and original view of the Incarnation was that

the Divine Essence took form in the person of Jesus. There are two basic elements involved in this belief; First, that in Jesus there was a revelation of the Divine Essence; Second, that this Incarnation was an historical event that occurred about two thousand years ago.

The first of these principles suited the mystics admirably and fully conformed with the traditional dualistic philosophy they inherited. Their object was to justify two fundamental experiences which they thought were the final goal of all spiritual life. The first, that man could obtain, through his inward experiences, a direct knowledge of God. The second, that as a result of the mystic path he trod he could merge into the Divine Essence and become one with the Absolute.

"It is an axiom of the Sufis that what is not in a man he cannot know. The gnostic—man par excellence—could not know God and all the mysteries of the universe, unless he found them in himself." (Mystics of Islam.) The prevailing philosophy maintained that only like could know its like. The Divine Reality in Jesus, the mystic reasoned, could experience a direct communion with God because the particle of the Divine Essence which resided in Him was purified from earthly trammels and had truly become like God. To vindicate the truth of his direct experience of the Absolute, the mystic found it essential to presuppose the existence of the Divine Essence in himself. Once the existence of the Spark of True Being in himself was established, he could then proceed and show that with its purification from material interests he would reach the same station that Jesus attained and obtain a true and direct knowledge of God. This principle of the doctrine of the Incarnation, namely, that a Spark of the Divine Essence resided in man, was therefore essential for mystic philosophy if the direct experience of God, which he felt in the state of illumination were to be considered as true and authentic. "The son of God, the eternal Word of the Father, who is the glance or brightness, and the power of the light eternal," says Boehme, "must become man and be born in you, if you will know God: otherwise you are in the dark stable and go about groping." (Underhill).

Not only for proving that they can attain a direct knowledge of God, but also to establish the logic of the mystic path and the ultimate reunion with the Beloved, the mystics need the doctrine of the Incarnation. The "circling course of the Divine life process" means that man's reality or spirit pre-existed in God as a part of the Divine Essence; then from that exalted state he descended to this physical world; and by following the mystic path, he will return to his original abode and become again part of God. This is the object of the mystic path and the greatest principle of their philosophy. To establish such a truth the mystic philosopher had to show that in man resides an element of the Divine Essence, therefore they held fast to the doctrine of the Incarnation.

Even though the mystics differ in their ways, yet they all come to the same conclusion, namely, that the Prophets who are mystics par excellence, are the revelations of the Divine Essence. For example, whereas the Christian mystics maintain the incarnation of God in the ground of the soul, the Mohammedan mystic upholds the idea of God manifesting in the soul. It is inadequate, the Sufi says, to think that God enters man, for entrance pertains to material objects. The heart of man is rather like a mirror in which the Divine Essence is manifested. By being reflected in this mirror the Divine Essence becomes subject to form. But this form is mere illusion and unreality. Take away the form and the reality of the Divine Essence, will appear again. "Mohammed is the Logos who unites the Essence, the Attributes, and the Names in a single nature." (*Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, by Nicholson).

Although in this respect the mystics remain faithful to the orthodox Christian doctrine of Incarnation, they part with it in the second aspect, namely, that it was a historical event which occurred two thousand years ago. To explain the mystic experiences of all those who tread the path and attain the state of illumination, the doctrine had to be made applicable not only to Jesus and the few other Prophets, but to all those who are awakened spiritually, nay rather, to all humanity. The doctrine had to lose its historical aspect and become truly cosmic in nature.

"The Incarnation, which is for popular Christianity synony-

mous with the historical birth and early life of Christ, is for the mystic not only this but also a perpetual cosmic and personal process. It is an everlasting bringing forth, in the universe and also in the individual ascending soul, of the divine and perfect life, the pure character of God, of which the one historical life dramatized the essential constituents. Hence the soul, like the physical embryo, resumes in the upward progress the spiritual life-history of the race. 'The one secret, the greatest of all,' says Patmore, 'is the doctrine of the Incarnation, regarded not as a historical event which occurred two thousand years ago, but as an event which is renewed in the body of every one who is in the way to the fulfilment of his original destiny.'" (Underhill).

This same principle is in another form found in Sufism. The second Person or Christ is termed the Perfect man. He is described by Nicholson "as a man who has fully realized his essential oneness with the Divine Being in whose likeness he is made." This class of persons comprises all the Prophets and "walis" and an ecstatic feeling of oneness with God is what constitutes a "wali." There is, therefore, no essential difference between the Prophets and man. Every person who traverses the mystic path, cleanses his mind and heart from all earthly things, and attains that ecstatic condition when he experiences himself one with God, becomes a Perfect man and feels the presence of God within him. This basic principle of mysticism is clearly put by A. C. McGiffert in "The Rise of Modern Religious Ideas." "The deity of Christ," he says, "resides in the completeness of his consciousness of God. In a true sense all men are divine, for they are but manifestations of the one common reality which appears in nature as well as in humanity. Essentially Christ is no more divine than we are or than nature is. But he knows his oneness with God; he is fully awake to his own divinity; and his life is completely controlled by his realization of it. He is, therefore, divine in a sense which nature cannot be and in a sense which we are not yet but have eventually to become."

Thus, it is a cardinal principle among the eastern and the western mystics that there is no essential distinction between the Prophets and man. The only difference is that the former possess

actually the station that the latter have only potentially. The Prophets are not superhuman but mere Perfect Men. If we follow their example and tread the mystic path, we also can attain to the same exalted station and obtain an ample share of divinity.

Bahá'u'lláh parts company with the mystics on the question of the revelation of the Essence. The doctrine of the Incarnation of the Christian mystics and the principle of the manifestation of the Essence which the Sufis maintain, both these ideas involve the revelation of the Divine Essence. It is True Being Itself that has assumed form or come in contact with not-being. It is the same water though it has taken the form of ice. To Bahá'u'lláh this is absurd. How could the creator assume the body of the created? The Divine Essence, He says, will never be revealed in mortal form. The Essence of God is ever transcendental. What is revealed to us is merely His attributes. The world of the Prophets is not a revelation of the Essence but only the revelation of the Divine Attributes. It is not the Essence of the sun that is reflected in the mirror but its attributes which are light and warmth.

In an epistle to Salmán, explaining the meaning of the verse of Rumi: "When colourlessness became the captive of colour, a Moses came to war with a Moses," Bahá'u'lláh says, "O Salmán! The Gnostics have many such sayings. Some consider God as the sea and the creatures as waves. They attribute the difference between the waves to the difference of form. The forms are phenomenal, when they perish, all the waves return to the sea, for their reality is the sea. Concerning these forms they have made other affirmations which need not be mentioned here. Similarly they have considered the Creator as the pencil and all the other objects as the letters inscribed by it. They have maintained that the reality is the lead which has revealed itself in the form of the different letters. All these forms are in reality the self-same lead. They have compared the first station to the station of unity and the second station to the station of multiplicity. Similarly they have considered God as the unit and the different objects as the numbers; and the creator as water and the created things they have likened to ice. Thus it is said, 'Created objects are compared to ice

and Thou art the water from which it has been formed. When the ice melts, its characteristics will vanish and the qualities of the water will prevail.' Similarly, they have said: 'The sea has been a sea from eternity and the waves are accidents and phantoms.'

"In short, they consider all things the revelation of the Divine Essence. They have distinguished three forms of revelation: the revelation of the Essence, the revelation of the attributes, and the revelation of acts. And they have taken the revelation of things from God to be that of manifestation."

In this epistle, Bahá'u'lláh clearly states the Sufi belief to be (1) that it is the Divine Essence which is revealed in the world of creation; (2) that the relation this physical universe of ours bears towards the Absolute is that of manifestation.

The Bahá'í teachings differ with the Sufi on both of these issues. First, 'Abdu'l-Bahá categorically denies the possibility that the Divine Essence which is Pure Being may become one of the constituent elements of our physical world. How could Pure Being be joined to not-being? In this connection he says: "The Gnostics imagine that this Being is like a sea and all created objects like waves. This illustration is baseless, because if we consider the truth we shall find that the Ancient Wealth has to put on the garb of not-being, and the splendour of God take the form of earthly darkness."

The Prophets, therefore, who are the highest form of revelation of the Divinity, do not share of the Divine Essence which is ever in its exalted and transcendental station. It never comes in contact with anything human or physical. What is revealed in the Prophets is only the Divine Attributes. They are perfect mirrors that reflect the light and warmth of the sun. As Bahá'u'lláh states in the Iqán. "These Prophets and chosen ones of God are the recipients and revealers of all the unchangeable attributes and names of God."

This criticism applies to the teachings of the Christian mystics also, for they definitely maintain, as we have already considered, that God becomes incarnate in man. This doctrine implies primarily a revelation of the Divine Essence and not of attributes. It

is the Essence of God that becomes incarnated in man. Our physical body, the mystic says, is mere form, it is all illusion which misguides only those whose inward eye is blind. He who is of clear vision is not misguided by this outward form, but pierces through it and sees the reality which is True Being—the Spark of the Divine Essence. Naturally the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh deny the existence of such a Divine Spark or particular Essence in man. What is revealed perfectly in the Prophets and potentially in man are only the Divine Attributes.

The Bahá'í teachings are also clear in the second point, namely, whether the relation between the creator and the created is that of manifestation or of creation. In "Some Answered Questions" 'Abdu'l-Bahá says on the subject: "But the question of the Real Existence by which all things exist, that is to say, the reality of the Essence of Unity through which all creatures have come into the world, is admitted by every one. The difference resides in that which the Sufis say: 'The reality of things is the manifestation of the Real Unity.' But the Prophets say: 'It is created by the Real Unity;' and great is the difference between manifestation and creation. The appearance in manifestation means that a single thing possessing the vegetative perfections, manifests itself in infinite forms, resolving itself into branches, leaves, flowers, and fruits: whereas in the appearance through creation this Real Unity remains and continues in the exaltation of its sanctity, but the existence of creatures depends on creation, and is not a manifestation of the Essence. It can be compared to the sun from which emanates the light which pours forth on all the creatures; but the sun remains in the exaltation of its sanctity: it does not descend, and it does not resolve itself into luminous forms; it does not appear in the substance of things; the pre-existent does not become the phenomenal; independent wealth does not become enchained poverty; pure perfection does not become absolute imperfection."

We have already observed that the doctrine of Incarnation as maintained by the mystics comprises two basic principles, (1) that a Spark of the Divine Essence resides in man, (2) that every individual can by following the mystic path become conscious of and

attain true unity with that Reality. We have then considered the arguments of both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá denying the fact that the Divine Essence reveals itself in mortal objects. Let us now consider the second element in the Doctrine of the Incarnation which is the logical conclusion of the first, and see how the Bahá'í teachings differ from the mystics on that point also.

If, according to the mystics, the Divine Essence is revealed in man as much as in the Prophets, we cannot deny to the one a station we can rightly attribute to the other. If man has not attained the same station and manifested the same powers as they it is because he has been blinded by his physical environment and is not conscious of his reality. Let him follow the example of the Prophets and tread the same mystic path; then he will surely reach the same lofty station, obtain a direct knowledge of God and find himself truly united with Him. What the Prophet is, the mystic says, is what man can be, for there is no essential difference between them. The one has actually what the other has only potentially.

According to the Bahá'í point of view, no matter how much man may develop he will never acquire the station of the Prophets. We can mention the following reasons:

(1) The Prophets form a separate order of being from man. We should not let their human form blind us to the truth that they are supermen in reality. We are created by God, while they are manifestations of the Divine Attributes. The world of God, the world of the Prophets and the world of creation are three orders of being that will eternally remain separate. It is true that the last two had their *raison d'être* in the first, but a common origin does not mean that they are essentially one. Man has infinite ground to cover and can acquire unlimited perfections but he shall never be able to cross the limits of his own sphere and enter the world of the Prophets. In this connection 'Abdu'l-Bahá says: "Thus it is established that this movement is necessary to existence, which is either growing or declining. Now, as the spirit continues to exist after death, it necessarily progresses or declines; and in the other world, to cease to progress is the same as to decline; but it never leaves its own condition, in which it continues to develop. For ex-

ample, the reality of the spirit of Peter, however far it may progress, will not reach to the condition of the reality of Christ; it progresses only in its own environment."

(2) The Prophets create the spiritual life of man. In one of His Tablets, Bahá'u'lláh says that man is like a candle with a perfect wax and wick, which contains infinite powers to shed light. This force, however, will ever remain dormant within it, until some kindly hand sets it alight. This kindly hand is the Holy Spirit that is breathed by the Prophets. It is, therefore, the Prophets who make these potential powers, dormant in man, come into the sphere of actuality. Without them man will always remain on a level with the animals.

In one of His Tablets 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that there are two forms of creation: a physical and a spiritual creation. The physical creation is caused by God as the Ultimate Mover and Cause of all things. The spiritual creation, however, depends upon the Prophets. These are, therefore, the creators of the spiritual life of man. In His above mentioned epistle to Salmán, Bahá'u'lláh says: "Know that the author of Mathnawi in mentioning Moses and Pharaoh was merely giving an example. His purpose was not to identify their reality. God forbid! For Pharaoh and his like were created by the word uttered by Moses." How can man whose highest attainment is an infinite capacity to receive, attain the station of a Prophet whose essential quality is to send out the rays of guidance upon humanity?

(3) The station of Prophethood is not conferred upon a soul because of any special striving on his part. His appearance is in accordance with a definite law of spiritual cycles that affects the life of society as a whole. This law is that when the teachings of the previous Prophets are forgotten or cease to be applicable to the new needs of society, when material interests blind man to his higher spiritual needs, when the spirit of true religion dies out, God sends a Prophet to the world. These Prophets, both the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh say, appear about once every one thousand years. Such being the nature and mission of the Prophets how can we maintain that man, through mystic experiences, is able to attain

their station and like them come into direct relation with the Divine Essence?

Having considered the mystic interpretation of the doctrine of Incarnation we can better appreciate the twofold form of being mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. This dualism would have been averted if (1) they had not considered the appearance of man and the physical universe to be that of manifestation instead of creation as 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains it. (2) Considering the world of creation as a manifestation of God's Essence they put it on an essentially equal footing with the Prophets and made them to be included within the same world.

To sum up, both religion—according to its Bahá'í interpretation—and mysticism maintain that the source of all being, spiritual and physical, is God. They are both strictly monistic in dealing with the state of the universe before its devolution. They begin to part company only when the idea of creation is introduced. The mystic maintains that the Divine Essence manifests itself upon not-being and thereby creates the physical world. Every object in the universe is, therefore, a manifestation of the Divine Essence and contains of that Reality according to the measure of its capacity. The difference between the physical universe and the Prophets is therefore only a difference of the degree of receptivity. The mystics thus have two worlds: (1) the world of God and (2) the world of the manifestation of the Divine Essence which includes the Prophets as well as the physical universe.

Religion as it is interpreted in the literature of the Bahá'í Faith, maintains (1) the world of God or of the Divine Essence. (2) The world of the manifestation of the Divine Attributes which pertains only to the Prophets. Its rôle is to create the spiritual life of man who belongs to the inferior world of creation. (3) The world of creation which includes man and his rational soul as much as the physical universe. It is the world of creation in the sense that it is created of a reality totally different from the Divine Essence. Every one of these worlds has a distinct entity and will never merge into the other.

V. THE CIRCLING COURSE OF THE DIVINE LIFE-PROCESS

“**T**HERE from the embrace of the Father and Son and the outflowing of the spirit in ‘waves of endless love,’ all created things are born; and God, by His grace and His death, re-creates them, and adorns them with love and goodness, and draws them back to their source. This is the circling course of the Divine life-process ‘from goodness, through goodness, to goodness,’ described by Dionysius the Areopagite.” (Ruysbroeck, by E. Underhill p. 63.)

This circle of the Divine life-process is the basic tenet of mysticism. According to it the spiritual element in man, which is a spark of the Divine Essence, originally existed in an undifferentiated form in God. Then proceeding from that spiritual realm, and being joined to material elements which are essentially non-being and unreal, it entered the stage of separation and differentiation. But this was not to be its final goal. Being essentially Divine the spiritual reality of man had to complete its circular course and be rejoined to the Divine Essence. This last stage in which man loses his self and material aspect to regain his true reality is termed the “Mystic Way,” the “path” or the “valleys” that the traveler has to tread in the course of his spiritual advancement. Let us now consider this life-process in greater detail and see in what points it differs from the Bahá’í teachings.

The first question to deal with is the pre-existence of all things in God in a synthetic form. This theory can be maintained on two grounds:

(1) If the reality in man was a particle of the Divine Essence, before it assumed the physical form, it undoubtedly existed in God in an undifferentiated form. In other words the doctrine of

incarnation implies this higher form of existence of man before its present earthly life. In His Tablet to Salmán Bahá'u'lláh refers to this Sufi belief and quotes one of them saying: "The reality of things was in His exalted Essence in a nobler form, then He sent it forth." Then Bahá'u'lláh proceeds to say that the Sufis "cannot consider the giver of a thing to be deprived of that thing."

(2) The theory of knowledge that the Sufis maintained necessitated this pre-existence of the world of creation in the mind of God. Explaining this point Jili says: "The way to the illumination of the Name, Al-Qadim, (the eternal) is through a Divine revelation whereby it is shown to any one that he existed in the knowledge of God before the creation, inasmuch as he existed in God's knowledge through the existence of that knowledge, and that knowledge existed through the existence of God: the existence of God is eternal and the knowledge is eternal and the object of knowledge is inseparable from the knowledge and is also eternal, inasmuch as knowledge is not knowledge unless it has an object which gives to the subject the name of Knower. The eternity of existent beings in the knowledge of God necessarily follows from this induction, and the (illuminated) man returns to God in respect of His Name, the Eternal. At the moment the Divine Eternity is revealed to him from his essence, his temporality vanishes and he remains eternal through God, having passed away from (consciousness of) his temporality." (Studies in Islamic mysticism p. 128)

The Bahá'í teachings refute both of these forms of reasoning in denying to the spirit of man a previous life which is superior to our earthly existence:

(1) In as much as the world of creation is neither an incarnation nor a manifestation of the Divine Essence there is no logical necessity to uphold the theory that man had a pre-existence in God. The rational soul as well as the other material objects in the universe are evidences of creation, in other words they have a reality absolutely different from the Divine Essence and therefore had no existence in God.

(2) It may be that for human understanding a conceptual existence of the object in the mind of man is indispensable, it may

be true that we ought to have the idea of the object already existing in our mind if we desire to comprehend the thing we perceive but we cannot be justified in attributing such human forms of understanding to God without falling into the grave errors of creating our God in our own image. In discussing this whole theory 'Abdu'l-Bahá in "Some Answered Questions" (p. 337) ends by saying:

"Briefly, with regard to this theory that all things exist by the Unity, all are agreed—that is to say, the philosophers and the Prophets. But there is a difference between them; the Prophets say: 'The knowledge of God has no need of the existence of beings, but knowledge of the creature needs the existence of things known; if the knowledge of God had need of any other thing, then it would be the knowledge of the creature and not that of God.' For the pre-existent is different from the phenomenal, and the phenomenal is opposed to the pre-existent; that which we attribute to the creature—that is the necessity of contingent beings—we deny for God; for purification, or sanctification from imperfections, is one of the necessary properties."

Not only do the Bahá'í teachings refute such form of reasoning but both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá definitely state that the rational soul, which is the name they give to the spirit of man, is phenomenal and therefore is preceded by a cause, that even though its future is of an infinite duration and therefore, eternal, it had a definite beginning. In a Tablet addressed to 'Abdu'l-Wahhab, Bahá'u'lláh says that the existence of man is "a contingent existence and not an essential existence, because contingent existence is proceeded by a cause while essential existence is not. This latter pertains only to God." This belief in the phenomenal existence of man is the result of Bahá'u'lláh's doctrine of "creation." If man is created by God, that is, if he has a reality which is totally new and created by God, he would naturally have a beginning in his Cause, which is God's creative power, but not such a beginning as the reality of the Prophets who are manifestations, and have Their origin in the Divine Essence. Just as much as manifestation implies a pre-existent and essential being, the idea of creation involves a

beginning and therefore a phenomenal existence.

The same principle is maintained by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in "Some Answered Questions" (p. 173) where He says: "Know that, although the human soul has existed on the earth for prolonged times and ages, yet it is phenomenal. As it is a divine sign, when once it has come into existence it is eternal. The spirit of man has a beginning, but it has no end; it continues eternally."

The rational soul is the result of a gradual growth. It exists as a potentiality until a certain stage in the matrix when that reality emerges into an actuality. This second stage is so superior to the first stage that we can rightly consider it as the dawn of the individual life. In His Tablet to Ra'is, Bahá'u'lláh says: "The soul which is common to all the people, comes into existence after the interaction of things and their maturity. It is like the child in the matrix which after its development to its destined stage, God reveals in it the soul which previously was hidden in it."

This conception of the sudden emergence of the rational soul from an inferior stage of existence differs substantially from the Sufi idea that "the reality of things was in His exalted Essence in a nobler form and then He sent it forth." The first expresses an evolution from an inferior potential existence towards perfection while the second implies a circular course from a perfect state to imperfection and then back to perfection.

THE MYSTIC PATH

In due course we shall consider in detail the basic difference between the mystic and the Bahá'í interpretation of the doctrine of unity with God. It suffices to state here that whereas the former conceives it as an existent union—of a part merging again into the whole—the latter interpret it as a mere moral conformity of our will with the will of the Prophets who are the vicegerents of God upon the earth. The circling course of the Divine life-process logically necessitates that man's spirit which originally emerged and was separated from the ocean of the Divine Essence, of which he was a part, should again flow into It and thus repair to his real

Home. The mystic Path would, therefore, be the course man should follow for attaining that existent unity with God. It would entail stages of development whereby the causes of separation are overcome and an inner essential likeness with God is established.

"If we are to allow that the mystics have ever attained the object of their quest," Underhill says, (*Mysticism* p. 502) "I think we must also allow that such attainment involves the transmutation of the self to that state which they call, for want of exact language, 'Deified.' The necessity of such transmutation is an implicit of their first position: the law that 'we behold that which we are and are that which we behold.' Eckhart, in whom the language of deification assumes its most extreme form justifies it upon this necessity: 'If,' he says, '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.'"

As Bahá'u'lláh denies the possibility for man's spirit to merge into the ocean of the Divine Sea and considers the goal of human progress a moral conformity with the spirit and teachings of the Prophets, the purpose of His path or Seven Valleys substantially differs from the mystic interpretation. The object of the road which the traveler is to tread is not to enable his mergence into the ocean of the Essence but an easier and fuller recognition and acceptance of the messengers of God once they appear upon the earth. The truth of this distinction will gradually dawn upon us as we proceed with our discussion of the different stages of the mystic path and then, as a contrast mention the Seven Valleys which Bahá'u'lláh says the wayfarer has to tread to attain the Valley of Baqá or Abiding, which is union with God.

All human beings are in a state of separation but only a few, according to the mystics, are conscious of it, and are desirous of achieving true unity with the Absolute from which they originated. The preponderant majority of the people are immersed in their material pursuits and blind to their own true reality. Were they to forget and discard their selfish desires and rend asunder the veils that blind them they would behold their Divine origin and bear remembrance of their original state of union with their Beloved.

Such a consciousness is not, however, awarded to every person. It is only a very few who due to some past experience or gradual inner fermentation are awakened to this glorious feeling, and begin their journey on what the mystics term the Path or Valleys. Almost no two mystics fully agree as to the stages of this path that the pilgrim has to tread. Even though like a Persian Sufi he may have a Pir or teacher, he will never be able to follow a path except one that his inner feelings trace for him. As the purpose is to free his reality from his self, and the final goal is unity with the Godhead, there is nevertheless a certain general similarity that characterises the Path of all mystics both Eastern and Western. Considering such similarities Underhill gives the following arbitrary classification of the different stages that form the mystical life: (1) Conversion (2) Purgation (3) Illumination (4) The dark night of the soul (5) Union.

(1) "When man first feels upon his soul the touch of the Divine Light, at once and in a moment of time, his will is changed; turned in the direction of Reality and away from the unreal objects of desire. He is, in fact, 'converted' in the highest and most accurate sense of that ill-used word." (Ruysbroeck, p. 79.)

This awakening of man which we term conversion is in most cases sudden. An experience or a thought suddenly assails our imagination, leaves a lasting impression on our mind and operates as a turning point in our life. Sometimes the change is very gradual and man grows to appreciate the reality of his spiritual calling. Be it sudden or gradual this awakening of the self is due to some previous change in our subconscious life. A tendency that has already existed in us, but of which we were not aware emerges without conscious preparation into our field of consciousness and we feel its presence. As Underhill says: "It is a disturbance of the equilibrium of the self, which results in the shifting of the field of consciousness from lower to higher levels, with a consequent removal of the centre of interest from the subject to the object now brought into view: the necessary beginning of any process of transcendence." (Mys. p. 213.)

In some of His writings among them His Tablet to the Shah

of Persia, Bahá'u'lláh mentions such a sudden awakening which he experienced while in prison in Teheran. Explaining its true significance 'Abdu'l-Bahá says in "Some Answered Questions" (p. 97):

"We come to the explanation of the words of Bahá'u'lláh when he says: 'O King, verily I was like any other man sleeping upon my couch; breezes of the Most Glorious passed over me, and taught me the knowledge of all that has been. This is not from me, but from the Powerful, the Wise.' This is the state of manifestation; it is not sensible, it is an intellectual reality, exempt and free from time, from past, present and future; it is an explanation, a simile, a metaphor, and is not to be accepted literally; it is not a state that can be comprehended by man. Sleeping and waking is passing from one state to another. Sleeping is the condition of repose, and wakefulness is the condition of movement, sleeping is the state of silence, wakefulness is the state of speech; sleeping is the state of mystery, wakefulness is the state of manifestation

"Briefly, the Holy Manifestations have ever been and ever will be, Luminous Realities; no change or variation takes place in their essence. Before declaring their manifestations they speak and are illumined, like one who is awake."

On another occasion, referring to the same subject, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says: "Verily from the beginning that Holy Reality is conscious of the secret of existence, and from the age of childhood signs of greatness appear and are visible in Him. Therefore how can it be that with all these bounties and perfections He should have no consciousness?" ("Some Answered Questions" p. 178.)

If by conversion is meant an awakening to a reality that already exists in us, this experience of Bahá'u'lláh may rightly be called conversion. But this experience involves other truths that can in no wise be attributed to the act of Divine Revelation. Whereas conversion can be psychologically explained as the emergence of a feeling from the subconscious across the threshold into the conscious life and is due "to a sudden disturbance in the equilibrium of our self," the other is the revelation of a truth hidden in the Prophet and which appears in accordance with a Divine law far beyond the mental activities of His person. In the

life of the Prophets this awakening is in accordance with the law of spiritual cycles which as we have already mentioned depends upon the condition of society and its need for spiritual guidance. It depends upon objective reasons and not upon purely subjective activities of his mind.

The psychological experience which the mystics explain as the awakening of the self or conversion may be very true, but it can in no wise be associated with that act of manifestation of which Bahá'u'lláh or any of the Prophets may speak. Referring to humanity at large, conversion, according to the Bahá'í teachings, means the full consciousness of the station and teachings of the Prophet of that age. The experience that the mystics term conversion may be a true and potent factor in the moulding of our life and the awakening of our soul, but it differs substantially from the Bahá'í view of conversion.

Man's paramount position among God's creatures is due to his moral and spiritual life which he owes entirely to the Prophets of God. They are the creators of all his higher standards of behavior. It is only by entering under the rays of the Holy Spirit they shed upon the world that man begins to appreciate the truly good and noble things in life. It is only when man accepts their authority and follows their precepts that he steps from the sphere of animality and enters a spiritual and moral atmosphere. This entrance into the spiritual and moral life created by the Prophets is what Bahá'u'lláh terms a rebirth and what we consider as conversion, irrespective of any psychological experience that may or may not accompany it.

PURGATION

Conversion, or the awakening of the self, forms, however, only the first stage in the long and arduous journey of the pilgrim towards his true and final union with his Beloved or his re-emersion into the Divine Essence. At this stage he merely becomes conscious of his separation and yearns for that glorious realm of which he merely possesses a memory. In his descent, his real being was joined to not-being which is the material environment and selfish

desires. To attain his ancient form therefore, man has to throw away this unreal element and purify his spirit from these superimposed encumbrances. In fact this losing of the self forms a cardinal principle of mysticism and is the pivot upon which many other tenets revolve. To use the words of Nicholson (*Mysticism of Islam*, p. 59) "The whole of Sufism rests on the belief that when the individual self is lost, the universal self is found, or, in religious language, that ecstasy affords the only means by which the soul can directly communicate and become united with God. Ascetism, purification, love, gnosis, saintship—all the leading ideas of Sufis—are developed from this cardinal principle."

Standing on the threshold of a new life and attracted by a deep love and longing for this supreme attainment, the pilgrim begins to prepare himself for the spiritual betrothal or illumination. In this stage of Purgation man sees his own illusions and limitations as well as the great distance he has to traverse before reaching the object of his quest. Therefore, he starts by eliminating these hindrances, by overcoming these imperfections and tearing down these illusions. Seeing a sham world, he seeks to set it aside and work for reality.

This stage of purification of self which is termed Purgation, has according to Underhill (*Mysticism*, p. 247) both a negative and positive aspect. The negative aspect, which is called "detachment" or the state of "poverty" is to strip or purge the self from those encumbrances that hinder the spirit on its upward progress. The positive aspect termed "mortification" is to strengthen and purify those abiding elements that are indispensable. Poverty has two departments, chastity and obedience, Underhill says: (*Mysticism*, p. 247.)

"By 'Poverty' the mystic means an utter self-stripping, the casting off of immaterial as well as material wealth, a complete detachment from all finite things. By 'chastity' he means an extreme and limpid purity of soul, virgin to all but God; by 'obedience' that abnegation of selfhood, that mortification of the will which results in a complete humility, a 'holy indifference' to the accidents of life. These three aspects of perfection are really one; linked

together as irrevocably as the three aspects of the self. Their common characteristic is this: they tend to make the subject regard itself, not as an isolated and interesting individual possessing desires and rights, but as a scrap of the cosmos, an ordinary bit of the universal life, only important as a part of the All, an expression of the Will Divine. Detachment and purity go hand in hand, for purity is but detachment of the heart; and where these are present they bring with them that humble spirit of obedience which expresses detachment of the will. We may therefore treat them as three manifestations of one thing: which thing is Inward Poverty."

There are two elements in man (1) his reality, the abiding and permanent element which is essentially divine, and (2) a crust of unreality, his ephemeral self, which is his physical nature as well as his sensuous and selfish desires. The object of mortification is to strengthen the first, while the purpose of detachment is to eliminate the latter. It is only when man's spirit is developed and also the cage that hinders its flight broken that it can soar to its real abode and attain a true state of illumination.

Inasmuch as the goal of spiritual progress in the Bahá'í teachings is different, its idea of purgation is substantially different. The object of detachment in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh is not to make man "a scrap of the cosmos, an ordinary bit of the universal life," but to cleanse his heart and mind from all prejudices and idle imaginings that may hinder him from knowing and accepting the Prophets of God when They appear in the world. In the Seven Valleys Bahá'u'lláh says:

"First is the Valley of Search and its steed is patience. In this journey, without patience, the traveller will never reach his destination, nor ever attain his goal. . . . It is incumbent upon such men to cleanse their heart, which is the treasurehouse of God, from all imaginings and imitations which are traces left by their forebears. They should close the door of love and hate towards all the people of the world. . . . The seeker will never attain this goal except by sacrificing all that exists, that is, all that he has seen, or heard or learned."

Asked concerning the true meaning of detachment Bahá'u'lláh

answered in one of His Tablets saying: "You asked concerning detachment. It is evident to your honour that the purpose of detachment is the severance of self from all save God; that is he should raise himself to such an exalted station that nothing between the heavens and the earth bar him from the Truth. The love of an object should not detain him from the love and praise of God. . . . In short the purpose of detachment has never been prodigality and wastefulness of wealth."

The knowledge of God referred to so often in the sacred writings, means, according to Bahá'u'lláh, the knowledge of His Manifestations who are His Representatives upon the earth. True detachment is therefore severance from all things that prejudice our mind and detain us from appreciating the mission of the Prophets when They appear in the world. Wealth becomes an evil only when it detains us from acknowledging the truth of the Divine Manifestations and hinders us from arising to serve Their Cause. Otherwise wealth is a gift from God, a certain additional power capable of being used for the good of society, and a further opportunity to its possessor for expressing his humanitarian and spiritual qualities.

Medieval conceptions of true religion might have justified the act of St. Francis of Assisi in giving away all his possessions and living in a state of absolute poverty, it might have been right for the early Franciscans to secure their means of livelihood by begging, but this is contrary to the teaching of Bahá'u'lláh who has brought to the world new standards of detachment and a new conception of what constitutes the true spiritual life. In the Book of Aqdas He definitely states that "it is forbidden to ask, and should a person be asked it is forbidden unto him to give. It is incumbent upon every person to possess an occupation" and should a person be incapable of work it is the duty of the state to maintain him and his family. He permits us to be clothed in the best of attire and to use silver and gold implements if we can possibly afford to have them. Even the desire of possessing wealth is not an evil if that does not hinder us from knowing the Prophets and obeying their commands.

As the mystics conceived true detachment to be the elimination of that crust of unreality that envelopes our spirit and fetters its growth, they often took recourse to an ascetic life and subjected their body to severe chastisement. The hermit life often formed an indispensable stage of the Purgative Way and the renunciation of the world formed an essential element in acquiring spirituality. In this connection Bahá'u'lláh says in the "Beshárát": "The acts of the hermits and priests of the people of Christ—upon Him be God's praise and glory—are accepted in the sight of God. Today, however, they should forsake their solitude, and coming among the public, busy themselves with whatsoever profits them and is also useful to humanity. We have also permitted them to marry."

It is not however sufficient that this temporary physical crust be eliminated. Poverty does not constitute the sole element of the Purgative Way. That spiritual and abiding reality has to be enhanced through mortification which is "The positive aspect of purification: the re-making in relation to reality of the permanent elements of character. These elements, so far, have subserved the interests of the old self, worked for it in the world of sense. Now they must be adjusted to the needs of the new self, the lower centre of consciousness; and the object of mortification is to kill that old self, remove that lower centre, in order that the higher centre, the new man, may live and breathe." (Mysticism by Underhill, p. 261.)

Many of the practices used by the mystics in this stage of their spiritual development are to bring about that passing away of the self which is essential to the process of mortification. The Sufi "dhikr" or recollection, and constant prayer and reading of the Quran are considered indispensable for achieving the ascendancy of that abiding reality in man. Abu Sa'id ibn Abi'l-Khayr, one of the great mystics of Islam, recounts his acts of mortification as follows:

"I abandoned my studies and came home to Mahana and retired into the niche of the chapel in my own house. There I sat for seven years, saying continually, "Allah! Allah! Allah!" Whenever drowsiness or inattention arising from the weakness of human

nature came over me, a soldier with a fiery spear—the most terrible and alarming figure that can possibly be imagined—appeared in front of the niche and shouted at me, saying, “O Abū Sa’id, say Allah!” The dread of that apparition used to keep me burning and trembling for whole days and nights, so that every atom of me began to cry aloud, “Allah! Allah! Allah!”

Nicholson remarks on this practice saying: “As regards the perpetual iteration of the name Allah, I need hardly remind my readers that this is a method everywhere practised by Moslem mystics for bringing about faná, *i.e.*, the passing away from self.” (Studies in Islamic Mysticism, p. 8-9)

In another connection Abu Sa’id also says: “When I was a novice, I bound myself to do eighteen things: I fasted continually; I abstained from unlawful food; I practised recollection uninterruptedly; I kept awake at night; I never reclined on the ground; I never slept but in a sitting posture Every four and twenty hours I completed a recitation of the Koran” (Studies in Islamic Mysticism, p. 15.)

In the Book of Aqdas Bahá’ulláh says: “Let not the excess of reading and practices in day and night tempt you. If a person should read one verse of the Scriptures with sincerity and devotion it is preferable for him than if he were to read wearily all the books of God, the Powerful, the Supreme. Read the Divine verses to the extent that would not weary and depress you. Do not impose upon the spirit what will weary and weigh down upon it; nay rather feed it with what will make it lighter, so that it may soar with the wings of verses to the dawning-place of proofs. This is nearer to God if only you should think.”

The true purpose of the spiritual life, according to Bahá’u’lláh, is not to lose our self or individuality that separates us from the Divine Essence, and thus to merge into that Infinite Ocean; nay rather, it is to enhance the development of our soul which starts on its journey in the physical plane and begins to grow as an individual to a fuller reflection of the Divine Attributes. Prayer and the reading of the Holy Scriptures render, therefore, a two-fold service. On the one hand they remind us of our true calling and

prescribe for us the way to attain it and on the other they feed and stimulate our spirit to better face the battle and more nobly achieve that progress. They therefore fulfill their purpose only to the extent that they influence our behavior, shape our life, arouse us to nobler deeds, and imbue us with the spirit of serving our fellow men and of withstanding the difficulties and surmounting the obstacles we find on our way of spiritual progress and attainment of our goal. A single act done in the spirit of service, a single verse read with a full determination to follow its purport, is, therefore, far superior to constant devotional acts and hours of prayer and meditation. The true criterion for the efficacy of prayer or a certain devotional act is therefore, not the measure to which we pass away from the self, but the extent to which we come under the power of the Holy Spirit, or under the light of those moral teachings radiated by the Prophets; who are the creators of our ethical and spiritual life, for it is through the light of their guidance that our highest spiritual progress is attained.

ILLUMINATION OF THE SELF

“When by purgation the Self has become detached from the ‘things of sense,’ and acquired the ‘ornaments of the spiritual marriage,’ its joyful consciousness of the Transcendent Order returns in an enhanced form. Like the prisoners in Plato’s ‘Cave of Illusion,’ it has awakened to knowledge of Reality, has struggled up the hard and difficult path to the mouth of the cave. Now it looks upon the sun. This is illumination: a state which includes in itself many of the stages of contemplation, ‘degrees of orison,’ visions and adventures of the soul described by St. Teresa and other mystical writers. . . .” (Mysticism, by E. Underhill, p. 205)

When through the process of purgation the spiritual reality of man becomes purified and freed from the trammels of self he starts to enter the state of illumination, not only his intuitive powers are heightened, but also he comes to obtain a true and direct contact with the Absolute. The senses whose object is to make contact with the physical world encumber man’s spiritual

vision and bar him from a true understanding of Reality. The purgative way with its many practices tends to eliminate that retarding influence of the senses and enhances the inherent powers of the spirit. In the state of illumination the Spark of the Soul can stand with a clear vision before the Absolute, of which it is a particle, and contemplate its beauty. Having become God-like it can comprehend God, and feel a sense of the Divine Presence.

We should, from the start, bear in mind the basic difference between the state of illumination and the final stage of Union which is awarded to only the few mystics who have traversed the mystic path to its very end. To use the word of E. Underhill, "The real distinction between the illuminative and the Unitive Life is that in Illumination the individuality of the subject—however profound his spiritual consciousness, however close his communion with the Infinite—remains separate and intact. His heightened apprehension of reality governs rather than obliterates the rest of his life: and may even increase his power of dealing adequately with the accidents of normal existence." (*Mysticism*, p. 295.) Many of the experiences that pertain to this stage of mystic development are common among poets and artists, but none save the true mystics who have traversed the path and fully acquired spiritual ascendancy attain real union with the Absolute. To use mystic symbolic language, Illumination is the stage of betrothal while Union is the final spiritual marriage. In the first, the Lover obtains a glance of his Beloved, in the latter, they are united in an eternal bond and they find the consumation of all their ardent love and longing.

According to Underhill three categories of experiences can be mentioned under Illumination: "(1) A joyous apprehension of the Absolute: that which many ascetic writers call 'the practice of the Presence of God' ". . . . (2) This clarity of vision may also be enjoyed in regard to the phenomenal world. The actual physical perceptions are strangely heightened, so that the self perceives an added significance and reality in all natural things: is often convinced that it knows at last 'the secret of the world'. . . . (3) Along with this two-fold extension of consciousness, the energy of the

individual or transcendental self is enormously increased. The psychic upheavals of the Purgative Way have tended to make it central for life: to eliminate from the character all those elements which checked its activity. Now it seizes upon the ordinary channels of expression; and frequently shows itself in such forms as (a) auditions, (b) dialogues between the surface consciousness and another intelligence which purports to be divine, (c) in automatic writing. . . ."

DIVINE PRESENCE

An essential feature of this state of illumination is that, while in it, the mystic obtains a true understanding of God or the Absolute; a privilege which, they say, all others are denied. Let us, therefore, consider in detail this most important subject and compare it with the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.

Spiritually minded people, irrespective of their philosophical, mystical or religious tendencies, have always craved to know the Absolute, the only Reality, the One and Living God. Their method of approach to this most vital of all subjects has undoubtedly been divergent and often conflicting. The philosopher through his intellect and rational deductions has been constantly laboring in quest of that truth. Even though pessimism has often ravaged the ranks of philosophy and many of its votaries have thrown up their hands as a mark of impotence in unraveling that mystery, still we find that the more persevering and tireless among them advocate every now and then a new path and expound a new theory or system for reaching that goal.

The mystic, observing the inability of intellect and hence of philosophers, to attain their aim, maintains that it is only through the emotions, through the heart, which is the seat of that Reality, through direct experience alone, that we can obtain the clue to that Divine Secret. The naturalist who seeks the attainment of the Absolute in the objective world, can never obtain more than a picture of it, colored and framed by whatsoever his personality or mind imposes upon that object. Without the action of the mind

that object will remain meaningless; with the collaboration of the mind, the Absolute still fails to vindicate its virgin purity. Such is the position Mysticism occupies in opposing Realistic philosophies. A similar attitude is taken by the mystic in refuting the claims of the Idealists. He does admit an ideal world above and beyond the material world of the senses—a world in the image of which our physical world was made—but he rebukes the idealist for failing to provide a means of attaining the Absolute. To quote E. Underhill: "When we ask the idealist how we are to attain communion with the reality which he describes to us as 'certainly there,' his system suddenly breaks down, and discloses itself as a diagram of the heavens, not a ladder to the stars." (Mysticism, p. 15).

Thus, the mystic denounces as futile any human striving in the quest of the Absolute when the road that is followed is purely intellectual, when the mind is only a bridge between man and Reality. Man's intellect may be the best available means for appreciating the world of sense; the knowledge it obtains and the guidance it provides for satisfying our physical needs may be of immeasurable value, but it can never claim to provide more than a relative truth. It is the human heart, the mystic says, it is man's deeper sentiments, when freed from their sensuous incumbrances, that can alone make contact with the truth and finally merge into it. To revert again to E. Underhill: "Under whatsoever symbols they may have objectified their quest, none of these seekers have ever been able to assure the world that they have found, seen face to face, the Reality behind the veil. But if we may trust the reports of the mystics—and they are reports given with a strange accent of certainty and good faith—they have succeeded where all these others have failed in establishing immediate communication between the spirit of man, entangled as they declare amongst material things, and that 'only Reality,' that immaterial and final Being which some philosophers call the Absolute, and most theologians call God." (Mysticism, p. 4).

This theory of knowledge maintained by the mystics is based upon the principle that only like can know its like. He believes

that when the reality of man is freed from the fetters of sense, that when the intellect, which can comprehend only the physical world, steps aside and makes room for man's divine nature to reveal itself in its perfect form, then, becoming God-like, man can know God and perceive His Reality. It is in accordance with such a principle that Eckhart says: "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." (*Mysticism*, by E. Underhill, p. 502). Similarly Nicholson says: "It is an axiom of the Sufis that what is not in man he cannot know. The Gnostic—man par excellence—could not know God and all the mysteries of the universe unless he found them in himself." (*Mystics of Islam*, p. 84.). We should bear in mind that this knowledge of God is not through any rational power but through a feeling more akin to love; a certain attraction that would naturally exist between the part and the whole and which we may term inspiration or intuition.

In the opening pages of his book on Christian Mysticism, Dean Inge sums up this mystic theory of knowledge into four basic propositions or articles of Faith: (1) "The soul (as well as the body) can see and perceive." (2) "Since we can only know what is akin to ourselves, man, in order to know God, must be a partaker of the Divine nature." (3) "Without holiness no man can see God." (4) "Purification removes the obstacles to our union with God, but our guide on the upward path, the true hierophant of the mysteries of God, is love."

In discussing the Bahá'í point of view two fundamental questions present themselves: first, whether man can through his inward perception or vision attain the Absolute, and second, in case he cannot, what is meant by coming into the Divine Presence of which all the Prophets of the past have spoken.

'Abdu'l-Bahá in "Some Answered Questions" (p. 255) says: "Know that there are two kinds of knowledge: the knowledge of the essence of a thing, and the knowledge of its qualities. The essence of a thing is known through its qualities, otherwise it is unknown and hidden. As our knowledge of things, even of created and limited things, is knowledge of their qualities and not of

their essence, how is it possible to comprehend in its essence the Divine Reality, which is unlimited?" In one of His Tablets (Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá published in Egypt, Vol. I p. 180) He says: "And there is nought for us but to turn under all circumstances to that promised centre, awaited manifestation and resplendent orb. Otherwise we would be worshipping an imaginary Reality residing in our own conception, which is created and unreal—a sample of imagery bereft of all existence in the world of man. This is greater than idol-worshipping, for idols have at least an existence in the world of being while Divine Reality which is imagined is nought save imagination and falsehood. The infinite Divine Reality which is beyond any attribute cannot penetrate our understanding that may be able to comprehend Him."

Of the many methods whereby, in the state of illumination, the mystics attain absolute truth, the most important is surely vision or that state of ecstasy wherein the soul comes in direct touch with the source of being and attains a complete knowledge of the Divine Secret. But as Underhill admits: "The perceptive power and creative genius of the mystics as of other artists, sometimes goes astray." (Mysticism, p. 325). "Some test then, must be applied, some basis of classification discovered, if we are to distinguish the visions and voices which seem to be symptoms of real transcendental activity from those which are only due to imagination raised to the *n*th power, to intense reverie, or even to psychic illness. That test, I think, must be the same as that which we shall find useful for ecstatic states, namely, their life-enhancing quality." (Mysticism, p. 323).

Explaining the efficacy of visions 'Abdu'l-Bahá in "Some Answered Questions" (p. 290), 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 we 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 imaginations; but these imaginations become embodied in such a way that many simple-hearted people believe that they have a reality. That which proves it clearly is that from this controlling of spirits no result or fruit has ever been produced: no, they are but narratives and stories."

Thus we observe that both 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Underhill admit that the mere perceiving a certain proposition in the form of vision does not prove it to be an absolute truth. The principle has to be tested by other criteria. 'Abdu'l-Bahá considers that criterion to be its usefulness for humanity. The mystic who returns from his state of ecstasy or vision with a beautiful narrative of his experience without any definite principle serviceable to man, therefore, falls short of attaining that standard. He cannot say, "I have found the truth, should you desire it, seek it independently." He who has attained the Absolute would not return with an empty hand. He should, like all the Prophets, bring to man a message that would further his social and therefore spiritual progress.

The mere fact, however, that visions have to be tested before they can establish their truth, shows that they are not absolute criteria nor perfect means of obtaining true knowledge. Like all the other means of acquiring knowledge they are defective and have in turn to be tested by a higher criterion.

"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 ears it hears, without a tongue it speaks, without feet it runs. Briefly, these actions are beyond the means of instruments and organs." ("Some Answered Questions," p. 263).

We can rightly consider visions as activities of the spirit when the organs of the senses are not used. But the mere fact that it is an activity of the spirit does not establish its validity. Our spirit is no part of God to share of His infallibility. It errs while operating through the senses; it may just as well err when acting independently of them. The cause of the mistakes man commits are not only the senses, but the imperfections of the spirit which has to develop under the guidance of the Prophets to mature and acquire perfections. The more the soul develops the surer will its discoveries be, but being incapable of attaining absolute perfection, at least in this plane of existence, it can never claim to reach the stage of absolute knowledge. Just as man can never become a Prophet, his knowledge can never attain the absolute validity of prophetic revelation, which is the true and final criterion for us.

Man cannot be left in the dark, he should have an access to Absolute Truth to constitute it as the authority upon which his basic beliefs as well as social and spiritual laws have to be established. If our rationality falls short and our sentiments often lead us astray, then to what criterion should we take recourse?

Explaining the verse of the Quran: "My heart never errs in what it sees," 'Abdu'l-Bahá refutes the senses, the mind and tradition as defective criteria for discerning absolute truth. Then He

proceeds: "The fourth criterion is inspiration. Inspiration is the vision of the heart. But satanic fancies also constitute visions that appear to the heart from the self. If, therefore, a certain explanation or proposition appears to man's heart how could he discern whether it is a Divine inspiration? It may just as well be a satanic fancy.

"Then, it has been established that the criteria existing among the people are all defective, unreliable, dreams, suppositions and imaginings that fail to quench the thirst and satisfy the seeker for knowledge.

"The true criterion which is always true and ever established, which comprehends universal realities and great truths, is the heart which is mentioned by God in that blessed verse for it is the revelation of the pouring rays of God's blessings, it is the Divine Secret, inner manifestation. . . ." (Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá printed in Egypt Vol. I, p. 112).

The basis of the claim the mystics make to have attained the Absolute is the principle that man shares of the Divine Essence. But we have already seen, man's spirit is a creation of God. As he has no share in the Divine nature, the whole theory that in the state of illumination he becomes God-like and seeing his counterpart in the Absolute can apprehend It, therefore, falls to the ground. The highest attainment man can reasonably claim is the knowledge of the Prophets who are the perfect revealers of God's attributes, for the realm of the Absolute or Essence is for ever barred unto him. If the essence of physical objects is beyond our comprehension, how much more is the Divine Essence which is an infinitely superior plane of existence. Our highest attainment is the comprehension of the attributes, that is, the world of the Prophets who are perfect mirrors reflecting the light of that transcendental and Hidden Being.

It is true that all the more moderate mystics, both Christian and Muhammedan, consider themselves subject to the religious laws vouchsafed by the Prophets, but to many this belief in direct communion with the Absolute is a standing ground for what we may term spiritual anarchy. If the mystic can come in direct con-

tact with the Absolute and obtain a first hand knowledge of the spiritual truths, why sit at the feet of a Prophet or seek guidance from what he has prescribed in His Scriptures? Religious laws might be essential for the common herd of men but not for the mystics who are immersed in the sea of the Absolute and who have attained the truth in all its perfection. In this connection Nicholson says (*The Mystic of Islam*, p. 73): "The gnostic need not be dismayed if his inner experience conflicts with the religious law. The contradiction is only apparent. Religion addresses itself to the common herd of men who are veiled by their minds, by logic, tradition, and so on; whereas gnosis regards the all-embracing Unity. Hence the same act is good in religion, but evil in gnosis—a truth which is briefly stated thus: 'The good deeds of the pious are the ill deeds of the favorites of God'."

Such a spiritual anarchy is naturally foreign to the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh who, in the Seven Valleys, says: "The way-farer should in all these journeys not deviate a hair's breadth from religious law which is truly the secret of the path and the fruit of the tree of Reality. In all the different stages he should cling fast to the commands and shun all that is forbidden."

The Prophets, as we have seen, are the creators of our spiritual and moral life. It is through them that we obtain our re-birth and attain our highest moral development. How could we, therefore, maintain that we can progress to a station where we become completely independent of such spiritual guidance? What the mystics claim for themselves, in reality belongs to the Prophets by virtue of their position as spiritual creators. Being the creators they are beyond any laws prescribed for humanity; but that position belongs solely to them. No human can claim to share that right.

If the comprehension of the Absolute is so completely barred to man; if that Divine Reality is so transcendental that neither human thought nor feeling can attain it, how are we to interpret the definite promise given by all the Prophets of the past, and mentioned in their Holy Scriptures, that man shall attain the Divine Presence? Surely that was a solemn promise to be realized on this earth and not in some future plane of existence.

In the Persian Bayán the Báb says (7.3):

"All that has been revealed concerning the attainment of God's Divine Presence refers to 'Him whom God will make manifest.' For God in His Essence is beyond human reach." Similarly, in the Iqán, Bahá'u'lláh says: "These Prophets and Chosen Ones of God are 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. The knowledge of Him, who is the origin of all things, and attainment unto Him, are impossible save through the knowledge of, and attainment unto, those 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 illumination of self together with its different practices, such as vision and ecstasy, are often considered as criteria of spiritual attainment. Were the mystic theories true no one could deny this logical conclusion, for a vision would then mean that the Spark of the Soul has truly freed itself from the fetters of self and has taken its flight into the realm of the spirit. But such is not the Bahá'í standpoint. In the opening passages of the Book of Aqdas Bahá'u'lláh says: "The first duty laid by God upon man is the knowledge of the dawning-place of His revelation and law, who represents Him in the world of command and creation. He who attains to Him attains to all good, and he who is deprived verily is of the people of error though he produces the noblest deeds. Should you reach to this high position and supreme horizon, it is incumbent upon you all to observe what has been ordained by God. These two are inseparable. Neither is accepted without the other. Such is the command of the sources of revelation."

The Bahá'í criterion of spiritual progress is therefore the knowledge of the Manifestation of God as well as the extent of obedience to His commands. This is in full conformity with our

previous reasoning, for it is only by knowing the Prophets that we obtain a re-birth and by conforming to Their laws that we can develop spiritually. All forms of vision, rapture and spiritual experience would be of no avail, if we fail to appreciate the light of guidance the Prophets shed upon the world and refuse to follow Their councils and abide by Their laws.

“UNION—THE GOAL OF THE MYSTIC QUEST”

The circling course of the Divine life-process which began with the individuation of man and his separation from the sea of the Divine Essence, and then led to his existence in this physical world of differentiation, has logically, according to the mystics, to complete its course and bring man back into the source from which it originally sprang. The drops of water that emerge from the sea may follow a varied course but ultimately they will return to the sea from which they were separated. This return to the original home is termed Union, or deification of man.

“The Christian mystics justify this dogma of the deification of man, by exhibiting it as the necessary corollary of the Incarnation—the humanizing of God. They can quote the authority of the Fathers in support of this argument. ‘He became man that we might be made God,’ says St. Athanasius.” (*Mysticism*, by E. Underhill, p. 502).

The logical conclusion of the mystic belief regarding the pre-existence of man in God and the doctrine of Incarnation is that were man’s reality, which is a Spark of the Divine Essence, to be freed from the limitations of self he would immediately regain his pristine divinity and merge back into the sea of the Essence from which he originally came. The cause of his individuality and separateness is the shell of self in which his reality has been imprisoned. Let man through effort break away from that shell and he would immediately find himself again a part of the sea, sharing in that universal life which forms his real abode.

“If we are to allow that the mystics have ever attained the object of their quest, I think we must also allow that such attain-

ment involves the transmutation of self to that state which they call, for want of exact language, 'deified.' The necessity of such transmutation is an implicit of their first position: the law that 'we behold that which we are, and are that which we behold.'" (Mysticism, by Underhill, p. 502).

When the mystic gains that state of Unity he does not feel a stranger but a traveler that has returned to his home. "The mystic in the unitive state is living in and of his native land; no exploring alien, but a returned exile, now wholly identified with it, part of it, yet retaining his personality intact." (Mysticism, by E. Underhill, p. 502).

Even though all mystics, due to the logic of their argument, are bound to maintain a certain degree of deification or becoming part of the sea of the Divine Essence, they differ considerably amongst themselves as to the measure and kind of deification that is achieved. A complete annihilation of individuality and personality, as some of the more advanced mystics of the East believe, necessitates the logical conclusion of pantheism and tend to destroy the benefit of a moral life, for if all men, virtuous and non-virtuous alike would end by being again indistinguishable parts of God what would be the reward of a virtuous life? The course that a drop of water has passed through makes little difference when it has become again part of the sea. If on the other hand, we consider that both individuality and personality will be retained, then the conception of Unity which is the goal of mysticism will be impaired and the circling course of the Divine life-process will remain incomplete. A natural and reasonable compromise would be to distinguish between individuality and personality and maintain that even though the latter is lost the former is kept and enhanced.

"The first thing which emerges from these reports, and from the choice of symbols which we find in them, is that the great mystics are anxious above all things to establish and force on us the truth that by 'deification' they intend no arrogant claim to identification with God, but as it were a transfusion of their selves by His Self: an entrance upon a new order of life, so high and so harmonious with Reality that it can only be called divine. Over and over

again they assure us that personality is not lost, but made more real." (Mysticism, by E. Underhill, p. 503).

Nicholson expressing the view of the Eastern mystics says: "Does personality survive in the ultimate union with God? If personality means a conscious existence distinct, though not separate, from God, the majority of advanced Moslem mystics say 'No' as the raindrop absorbed in the ocean is not annihilated but ceases to exist individually so the disembodied soul becomes indistinguishable from the universal Deity." (Mystics of Islam, p. 167).

The mystics are caught between two conflicting tendencies; the tendency of making man a part of God and the tendency of keeping him separate. On the one hand, desirous to be loyal to their reasoning, they have to make man complete the circle of his individual life with his return to God as an indistinguishable part of Him; and on the other hand they fear the absurdities involved in the complete deification of man.

As we have considered in detail, the Bahá'í teachings deny the pre-existence of man in God, the doctrine of Incarnation, and the existence of a Divine Spark in man which being originally separated from God, will of necessity have to return and become part of him again. Hence we are not involved in a logical necessity to deify man and make him to become an indistinguishable part of the Absolute. We are not entangled in such discussions as to the persistence of personality or complete annihilation of man in God. Whereas the mystics define Union as an existent fact involving a merging of the individual in the Essence, the Bahá'ís conceive it solely as a moral conformity with the will or spirit and teaching of the Prophets. To be united with God, therefore, means to obey their commands and be infused with the Holy Spirit which they shed upon the world. In His Tablet to Salmán, Bahá'u'lláh says:

"Through His word all that is in the heavens and earth have been created, and from utter not-being brought into the realm of being. How is it possible that a creature who has been created by a word ascend to the Essence of pre-existence. O Salmán! To the pre-existent Essence the path of every one is closed. Through His bounty and blessing He has manifested among men the Rising

Suns of the horizon of Oneness (*i.e.* the Prophets) and made the knowledge of these Holy Souls the knowledge of Himself. He who knows them knows God, and he who has heard their words has heard the words of God."

Such is the true meaning of the Union that the mystics hope to achieve in this world. Not a partaking of the Divine Nature but a conformity with the will of the Prophets that represent that Divine Nature in the world. Even in the world to come the unity with the Essence is not obtained. Man's rational soul will, as an individual, distinct spirit continue to progress through worlds we cannot conceive and conditions far beyond our comprehension, ever achieving more perfections and acquiring more of the Divine Attributes. But all this development is conditioned upon a moral union with the Prophet of that cycle, and that is attained by a conforming to His precepts and reflecting His spirit.

VI. THE SEVEN VALLEYS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

SUCH being the Bahá'í point of view on the basic mystic conceptions, how are we to interpret the significance of the Seven Valleys which seems so mystic both in form and language. In those pages Bahá'ulláh surely traces for His disciples a definite path which every soul has to tread in the process of his spiritual development. He also calls it the "Seven Valleys," a term so familiar to the Sufis, and quotes many poems peculiar to their literature.

Sufism has played such an important part in the literature of Persia and has produced so many poets and religious philosophers of note, that its terms have been adopted in high literary style. Were therefore, a student to be guided by these expressions, he would soon find himself committing the most glaring errors in classifying the different thinkers. He has to penetrate beyond the actual form to the beliefs expressed to discover the Sufi tendencies of any writer.

Both the Persian "Seven Valleys" and the Arabic one—which is more detailed and clearer but less known among the Bahá'ís—were written by Bahá'u'lláh prior to His declaration in Bagdad. The Báb had been martyred after promising His followers the advent of "He whom God would make manifest," a Manifestation for which He was the Precursor. The followers of the Báb, at least those consciencious seekers among them, were therefore anxiously awaiting the Promised One. Bahá'u'lláh who was the center around which this small and persecuted band of followers clustered, constantly counselled them to be firm and to prepare for the acceptance of the coming Manifestation.

Both texts on the "Seven Valleys" which date with that period are written with that spirit of arousing the people to search for the

Beloved. By Beloved He meant not the Divine Essence which is beyond human reach, but Himself who was a Manifestation of the Attributes as well as the Promised One of all the past dispensations. Being written to persons who were mystically bent He chose that form to express His theme.

As previously considered, the goal of mysticism is unity with the Absolute, while the object of the Bahá'í Path is acceptance of and conformity with, the spirit and teachings of the Prophet of the day. The coming Prophet of this cycle was Bahá'u'lláh, therefore, the goal of the Path He traced for His followers was the acceptance of His message and conformity to His law. Having not yet declared Himself He set His followers searching, lest when the day of His proclamation came they would fail to perceive His reality or having perceived it linger behind and refuse His guidance.

To clarify this I could do no better than quote from the Persian "Seven Valleys," especially those parts wherein He expresses in definite terms the object of each stage.

"The course the way-farer has to tread while proceeding from his earthly abode to the Divine Realm has been divided into seven stages. Some have called them seven valleys, others have termed them seven cities. They have maintained that unless the traveler forsakes his self and traverses these journeys he will never attain the sea of nearness and union nor taste from that peerless wine.

"First is the valley of search and its steed is patience. In this journey, without patience, the traveler will never reach his destination nor attain his goal. He should never be disheartened. He should not be discouraged even though after a thousand years of constant search he fail to behold the beauty of the Beloved . . . It is incumbent upon such souls to cleanse their heart, that is the treasure-house of God, from all imaginings and imitations which are traces left by their forebears. They should close the doors of love and hate towards all the people of the world. The traveler should in this journey reach a station where he will find all beings in search of the Beloved. . . The seeker will never attain this goal except by sacrificing all that exists, that is, all that he has seen, or heard or comprehended. . . (This signifies abolition of prejudice).

"The traveler in this journey should live in every land and seek from every countenance the beauty of the Beloved. He should search in every city to find his Friend. He should sit with every group and converse with every soul, perchance he will discover in some heart the secret of the Beloved, or behold in some face the beauty of His countenance. Were he in this journey, through the help of God, to find a trace from the traceless Friend and inhale the fragrance of the lost Joseph from the Divine Messenger, he would immediately step into the *valley of love*, and burn in its fire. . . . (This means constant search until we find the Prophet).

"The steed for this valley is suffering, without it this journey would never end The fire of love should burn the veils of the satanic self, that the spirit may be cleansed to comprehend the station of its Lord

"If the lover, through the bounties of God, emerge safe from the clutches of love, he would enter the *realm of knowledge* and his doubts would be changed into assurance With the inner and outward eye he would see in the worlds of being and in the souls of men, the mysteries of the Return (The seeker would recognize the Prophet as the return of the previous ones.)

"This is the station of the travelers in this and the previous valley. They consider the first the same as the last. They behold Him who is without beginning or end. The people of the city of eternity who are residents of the Verdant Garden do not even behold a first and a last. They fly away from the first and are at war with the last, for they have traversed the worlds of names and have passed like a dart through the world of the Attributes—for it is said 'The perfection of unity is the negation of all attributes from Him'—they have sought refuge under the shadow of the Essence."

Having sought for his Beloved in all the world and after such suffering and patience found Him and being consumed in his love, the traveler would comprehend the mystery of the Return; that is he would understand that the Prophets are in reality one and the same; the time in which they appear, the name they assume, the circumstances under which they reveal their mission would no more blind him who has attained the valley of knowledge. He would see

them all as mirrors reflecting the light and beauty of God, the Divine Essence, who is behind Them all, spiritualizing man through Their medium.

"The way-farer, after traversing the valley of knowledge, which is the last station of limitation, will reach the first stage of Unity". . . . After understanding the reality of all the Prophets, the position they occupy, and the existence of God behind them all, the traveler would observe unity in all creation. He would see all things reflect the power and beauty of God. The greater the spiritual capacity, the more resplendent would be the effulgence of that Divine Light. But Bahá'u'lláh guards us from attributing to this conception any mystic interpretation. He proceeds saying:

"Be careful not to interpret these words to mean incarnation or the descent of the worlds of God to the station of creatures; for the Divine Essence is exalted above ascent or descent, ingress or egress. It has ever been, and will ever be sanctified from the attributes of the creature. No one has ever known Him, and to His Essence no soul has found an access. All gnostics have erred in the valley of His knowledge and all 'Walis' (*i.e.* mystics) are confused in their desire to comprehend His Essence. He is exalted above the comprehension of every man of discernment and sanctified from the gnosis of every gnostic. 'Every road is blocked, every demand is refused. His proofs are His words and His being is His confirmation.' . . . What has been mentioned concerning the stages of knowledge pertains to the knowledge of the revelations of that Sun of Truth which is reflected in the mirrors. . . . Thus it has become evident that even for the Revelators there is no egress or ingress, how much more for that Essence of Being and Desired Secret. . . ."

In this passage Bahá'u'lláh removes any misunderstanding, concerning the true significance of the Seven Valleys, which its outward form might have created. In clear and unmistakable language He repudiates three of the cardinal principles underlying mystic teachings. He denies the doctrine of the Incarnation and therefore of a Divine Spark in man; He renounces any theory that may claim our comprehension of God, the Divine Essence; and lastly asserts

that knowledge of the Prophets, who are the manifestations of the Divine Attributes, constitutes the highest possible attainment of human understanding.

After reaching the stage of Unity, the way-farer proceeds to the Valley of Detachment, Astonishment, the passing away of self and abiding in God. Having already explained in detail the true significance of Detachment and Poverty, we need not mention them further. It suffices to say that they together with these other last mentioned valleys are the result of knowledge and communion with the Prophets, especially Bahá'u'lláh Himself, rather than stages of development in the process of losing one's individuality to be merged in the sea of the Divine Essence. Once man attains the promised Manifestation he would no more be attracted by worldly objects. He would marvel at God's work, forsake all other pursuits save the service of his Lord and abide for ever under His Sovereignty. Having conformed to all these the traveler would enter the City of the Heart which is the goal of all his quest and the greatest reward for all his strivings.

"The traveler could traverse, with God's help and the assistance of the 'wali' of command, all these seven stages—for which no end might be seen in the world of Time—in seven strides, nay with seven breaths, nay with one breath,—should God so desire."

CONCLUSION

TRUE, I have endeavored in the preceding pages to show in clear language the basic differences between mystic conceptions and the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, but in no way have I attempted to censure those heavenly souls. To depreciate the worth of such noble men as St. Francis and Jalaluddin Rumi, for example, means only our own blindness to the nobler and more altruistic aspects of life, and will reflect most unfavorably upon our sense of appreciation. They were men, inspired by God to render distinguished services to a society steeped in selfish pursuits and completely void of spirituality. Those among them who were also endowed with the gift of writing have left indelible traces in the history of literature, and have been a source of inspiration to all their readers. No poet is so repeatedly quoted in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh as Jalaluddin Rumi. His *Masnawi* was a constant companion of 'Abdu'l-Bahá during His very few moments of leisure. To the Bahá'ís such interest proves beyond all doubt that those verses treasure great spiritual truths. No, even though some of the mystics made arrogant claims to divinity, the shining lights among them were persons whose life was a source of inspiration and therefore should command our deepest respect.

Notwithstanding the paramount position some of the great mystics occupy in the spiritual life of the race, and even though they set aside certain ingrained customs of the people among whom they lived, they were human and therefore subject to the prevailing philosophies and social conceptions. In the days of St. Francis, for example, true spirituality meant other-worldliness with its different aspects of poverty, mortification, and constant prayer and meditation, hence the practices he followed in his life and the duties he prescribed for his disciples. Just as the criteria of our

social life differ from age to age, the religious values society creates for itself progress and are constantly modified. Man is born in the atmosphere of those values and naturally conforms to them. He may discard one set of values for another, but he can scarcely ever free himself completely. That absolute freedom belongs only to the Prophets of God who are our spiritual and moral creators. Humans may claim it but they can truly achieve it only to a limited extent.

Properly to judge such mystics, therefore, we should measure them in accordance to the standards of their own time and in relation to the religious and philosophic conceptions that pervaded the atmosphere they breathed. Viewed in that light the true mystics would stand above any reproach. Many of them were animated with the spirit of service and what some accomplished has left traces that are still to be marvelled at. If by chance they have erred in certain doctrines, the fault was not theirs. They were subject to the theories bequeathed to them by their forebears.

We should admit that some minds are more apt to be mystic and to be ravished with visions and similar experiences, but this does not forbid mystic philosophy's being basically eclectic as Prof. Browne maintains in regard to Sufism (*Literary History of Persia*, Vol. I, p. 421). Both Christian mysticism and Sufism flourished in an atmosphere which was already laden with philosophic conceptions useful in establishing the validity of their practices. It was therefore natural for them to make contact with this environment and be influenced by it.

"Let us train our attention upon some points of likeness between Plotinus and St. Augustine. The latter's teachings contain much platonism; and with this greatest of Latin Fathers, who did not read much Greek, Platonism was inextricably mingled with Neo-Platonism. It is possible to search the works of Augustine and discover this, that, or the other statement reflecting Plato or Plotinus. Yet their most interesting effect on Augustine will not be found in Platonic theorems consciously followed or adjoined by the latter. Platonism was 'in the air,' at least was in the air breathed by St. Augustine. He knew little of Plato's writings. But Plato had lived; his thoughts had influenced many generations, and in

their diffusion had been modified, and had lost many a specific feature. Thereafter Plotinus had constructed Neo-Platonism; that too had permeated the minds of many, itself loosened in the process. These views, these phases of thought and mood, were held or felt by many men, who may not have known their source. And Augustine was only part of all this, but in mind and temper was Platonically inclined." (*The Medieval Mind*, by H. O. Taylor, vol. I, p. 55). Having inherited these Hellenic conceptions St. Augustine and the other Fathers of the Church bequeathed them to later generations and among them were the mystics. To quote Underhill, "The influence of Plotinus upon later Christian mysticism was enormous though indirect. During the patristic period all that was best in the spirit of Neo-Platonism flowed into the veins of the Church. St. Augustine and Dionysius the Areopagite are amongst his spiritual children." (*Mysticism*, p. 544-5).

We could similarly trace the origin of Sufi doctrines to extraneous sources. In his introduction to the "Mystics of Islam" R. A. Nicholson mentions Christianity, Neo-Platonism, Gnosticism, and Buddhism as schools of thought that had some influence in shaping Sufi conceptions.

Many of the doctrines which we have mentioned in the foregoing pages could, therefore, be really traced to these more ancient sources. The dualistic conception of the objective world formed a basic recognized principle to which many of the Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle devoted much attention. The mystic interpretation of emanation as a form of progressive devolution of the Divine Reality was an essential element in the philosophy of Plotinus; similarly the corollaries of that doctrine, namely, the pre-existence of man in the Essence and the Divine nature of the Ground of the Soul. The principle that only like can know its like, which is the logical basis of many of the mystic practices, was the prevailing theory of knowledge. The ascetism which from an early date crept into Sufism and was often practised by the Christian mystics had a foreign origin. Even the idea of a path had an earlier history than Christian Mysticism. To use the words of H. O. Taylor: "In the third and fourth centuries the common yearning of the Graeco-Roman world was for an approach

to God; it was looking for the anagogic path, the way up from man and multiplicity to unity and God." (*The Medieval Mind*, vol. I, p. 54).

Thus neither Christian Mysticism nor Sufism is the pure teaching of Jesus or Muhammad. In fact we can easily maintain that mysticism as a whole is a religious philosophy which has imposed itself upon the religions of the past, and to achieve that it has interpreted the Scriptures to fit its own philosophic conceptions. In certain cases where the writings of the founders of religion were scarce and the meaning vague, the task was not difficult. In other instances such as Islam, more talent had to be used to achieve that impossible reconciliation.

In most of the different religions there is a school of thought—and the mystics are generally among them—which considers the outward meaning of the Revealed Words as good only for the common herd of men. The people of reality, they maintain, should penetrate beyond the outward form to the very core of the Scriptures and take only their esoteric meaning. In Islam these people were called *Bátinis* (from 'Bátin' which means inner). These discarded the literal interpretation of the Quran completely and claimed a knowledge of the inner significances, which naturally they considered to be the only valid one, meant by the Prophet Himself. Taking this mode of interpretation, the Sufis fall under this school of thought, for they too sought the esoteric meaning of the Holy Verses. Explaining this method of the Sufis, Nicholson says: "As he reads the Quran with studious meditation and rapt attention, lo, the hidden meanings—infinite, inexhaustible—of the Holy Word flash upon his inward eye. This is what the Sufis call 'instinbát,' a sort of intuitive deduction; the mysterious inflow of divinely revealed knowledge into the hearts made pure by repentance and filled with the thought of God, and the outflow of that knowledge upon the interpreting tongue. Naturally, the doctrines elicited by means of 'instinbát' do not agree very well either with Muhammadan theology or with each other, but the discord is easily explained. Theologians, who interpret the letter, cannot be expected to reach the same conclusions as mystics, who interpret the spirit; and if both classes differ amongst themselves, that is a mer-

ciful dispensation of divine wisdom, since theological controversy serves to extinguish religious error, while the variety of mystical truth corresponds to the manifold degrees and modes of mystical experience." (*The Mystics of Islam*, p. 23-4). With such a right of interpretation given to the individual, naturally the whole teachings of the Prophets could be set aside and their religion distorted.

In the Book of Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh safeguards His Faith by denouncing this method of the Bâtinis in clear and unmistakable language. He says: "And some of them claim the knowledge of the inner significance (bátin), and the meaning of the inner significance. Say! O liar! By God! what you possess is merely the shells which We have left for you as they leave bones for dogs." In another of His Tablets He says: "Know that he who takes the outward significance and sets aside the inward is ignorant; and he who takes the inward meaning and leaves the outward is erring; but he who takes the inward and superimposes upon it the outward significance, verily he is the accomplished, the wise." In these words Bahá'u'lláh repudiates the method followed by both the theologians who take the exoteric meaning, and the Bâtinis who follow the esoteric. How could we ignore either the spirit or the letter of the Revealed Words? Either when followed alone, will prevent us from attaining the truth. The only reasonable attitude is the one advocated by Bahá'u'lláh, namely, to take them both into consideration.

With such philosophies in the air they breathed, such scanty teachings in their Scriptures bearing on those points and such a loose principle of interpretation with which they could make the Holy Utterances suit their purpose, it was easy for the mystics to err and unwittingly create a system of thought wholly alien to the orthodox and pure teachings of the Prophets. In the Tablet of Wisdom Bahá'u'lláh states clearly the way such misconceptions crept into philosophy and became a cardinal principle of its belief. "The basis and foundation of philosophy," He says, "is from the Prophets. The variety of belief we find in it is due to the difference of viewpoint and intelligence of the philosophers. We will mention to you what occurred on a certain day when one of the Prophets was proclaiming among men what He was taught by God

the All-Mighty; for thy Lord is the Inspirer, the Precious and the Exalted. And when the fountains of wisdom and learning started to flow from His utterances and all who were in His presence became enraptured and intoxicated with the wine of His knowledge He exclaimed 'Now I am filled with the spirit.' Some of the people attributed to these words the meaning of incarnation and entrance and corroborated it with other sayings, whereupon a school of thought followed them."

This theory of incarnation and immanence which forms a basic doctrine of some schools of philosophy gradually found its way into mystic thought and became the pivot of their faith. But such a mistake regarding their belief cannot in any way reflect upon the purity of their purpose and the sincerity of their endeavor to fathom the mysteries of the spiritual life and become a source of guidance to humanity around them. Individually many of them were blameless, they were spiritual geniuses before whom we should bow in reverence, but they were human and therefore apt to be swayed by the prevailing conceptions and philosophies. It is those conceptions that we have tried to assail and not their individual lives or the wonderful record they have left on the pages of the history of the spiritual evolution of man.

In these days we find great interest in mystic teachings. The reaction against modern materialism seems to throw many spiritually-minded souls into an ecstatic admiration of the mystic life. In it they hope to find their highest calling, the source at which they can quench their thirst and the spiritual world in which they can obtain the counterpart of that material progress which modern civilization has so fully provided.

Their enthusiasm seems to be redoubled when they see that some of the mystic conceptions, unlike certain basic beliefs of the revealed religions, do not go counter to prevailing philosophic thought. But what are these basic points upon which many philosophers agree with mysticism? Both consider the appearance of a certain Prophet at a certain period in history as not a vital part of religion. They set aside the historical aspect of religion. The Prophet, to them, is not the founder of a religion and a creator of moral precepts to be necessarily followed by a wayfarer who

seeks spiritual progress and a more abundant life. Jesus and Muhammad were mere exemplars. Their life was a mere example of high spiritual attainment. Should we follow their way and reach the same extent of severance we would also become perfect like Jesus and Muhammad and could rightly consider ourselves to have attained the Beloved and become divine.

Thus in considering the historical aspect of religion as unimportant and the Prophets as mere human creatures, the mystics join hands with many philosophers. Not so with the followers of the revealed religions who regard the historical aspect indispensable to their Faith. To these the coming of the Prophets is the period for social redemption. Jesus and Muhammad were not mere exemplars of the spiritual life but also its creators. They were superhuman, the only representatives of God upon the earth. The highest stage of development man can attain is to become their humble follower, abide by their law and, like a mirror, reflect their beauty and divine attributes.

This affinity between mysticism and modern thought, this discarding of the historical element of religion is the reason why those who are dissatisfied with our materialism revert to the writings of the mystics and seek their spiritual guidance from them; this is why some of them go to the extent of considering mysticism the religion of the future.

But will the world accept mysticism as the religion of the future? The spiritually-minded feel a repulsion from modern civilization because of the existence of three classes of evil in the world: (1) the disruption of our moral standards and the anarchy that has ensued in our ethical life; (2) the baffling social and international problems that darken our future and threaten our civilization; and (3) the lack of those factors necessary for our spiritual development.

Can mysticism, especially in its advanced forms, answer to these needs and overcome these threatening evils? It can secure its future only if it succeeds in bringing reform along these lines. But the fact is that in all of these mysticism fails to provide the necessary remedy. It fails to create for us a moral atmosphere suited to our requirements; it is completely bankrupt in producing solutions

for the problems under which humanity is groaning; and the spiritual enhancement it advocates is far from being the kind we need.

In fact, as we have already seen, mysticism in its extreme form ignores the moral life. What it seeks is an existential union with the Godhead and not a moral conformity with the Prophets. The moral conformity helps the novice and is, therefore, essential for that stage of spiritual development, but once the novitiate is ended then the mystic is above moral precepts. He becomes divine, why therefore follow human ways? Thus mysticism in its extreme forms leans toward a state of moral anarchy rather than moral conformity. It tends to destroy the sanctity and absolute binding powers of our moral precepts rather than create for us a moral atmosphere in which we can develop and secure our spiritual life.

This is unlike the revealed religions whose primary object is to create that atmosphere and which consider conformity with the moral precepts of the Prophets an indispensable requirement for the spiritual development of man upon this earth. While mysticism therefore fails, revealed religions, and among them the Bahá'í Faith, satisfy that crying need of society. What Bahá'u'lláh has done in His precepts is to create for us a moral standard suited to our present requirements and to make it absolutely binding upon every soul that seeks spiritual progress and a fuller and more abundant life.

But quietistic philosophies, when imposed upon religion, make it lay the emphasis not upon the life of man in this world and the duties he bears towards the society of which he is a member, but rather upon a freedom from earthly bonds and a renunciation of worldly desires and individual interests. According to mysticism, spirituality can be achieved not by developing our own individuality in the right direction, but by killing that feeling of separateness, overcoming our individual needs, and considering ourselves as a mere "speck of the cosmos." Human needs, physical attractions, beauties that seem to allure us, all are hindrances to the attainment of our goal. It is true that some of the Christian mystics, after attaining the state of Unity, took an active part in bettering the world they lived in, but they were only the exceptions, and not full fledged in the theories of mysticism. Even these while follow-

ing the path that led them to that goal, had to mortify their flesh and renounce all the beauties of life. St. Francis, who later in his life became so active in reforming the character of the people, had, during earlier stages while preparing himself, to give up his wealth, renounce the world, force himself to do the most menial acts, and go to the extent of embracing lepers, all to achieve that calm indifference towards this earthly life. Of all the desires that still lingered in the heart of St. Teresa, before she attained her stage of union, was the joy of meeting the members of her family once a week. Even that, she considered to be a bond holding her to the world, therefore she had to forsake it. The whole tendency of the mystic life is to cut man away from society and not to make him recognize himself a part of that organic whole, bound by the social requirements that express themselves in the form of moral precepts.

Mysticism similarly fails to present a solution for the baffling social and international problems that seem to threaten our very existence. How are the international problems to be solved? How are the excesses of poverty and wealth to be eliminated? How are wars to be replaced by arbitration? Should a super-state be advocated? Man cannot be divorced from his environment. In such an environment that breeds war, hatred, distrust, jealousy and destitution our spirit can never find an atmosphere in which it can progress. A fortunate person with all his material needs well secured can give up the trammels of the world and in an environment all his own, seek an inward peace; but the mass of the people are not so favorably situated. World conditions are vital problems to them, they can find no other sanctuary than their slums, they are forced to go to war and slaughter their brethren, they are taught to hate their fellow-men that happen to reside across the frontier. How can they in such an environment obtain peace and help the development of their soul?

Mysticism, especially in its extreme forms, tends to be blind to these facts. Its attitude is to give up hope in earthly life and seek instead spiritual poise. If outward life is hopelessly muddled, seek the inward. It applies a spiritual palliative rather than faces the real occasion. It is the philosophy of a man who has lost hope

in ever bettering his earthly life rather than the attitude of a soul alive to the evils of the day and fully prepared to face them and conquer them.

This latter is in fact the attitude of Bahá'u'lláh. He knows the world problems, is conscious of their magnitude and fully provides for their solution. At least He sets forth the guiding principles that if applied in their entirety will make the world a better place to live in and a more suitable atmosphere in which to develop our spiritual life. The more the mystic discards the quietistic tendencies of his philosophy and becomes attuned with the reforming and socializing spirit of the Prophets, the more he will become a real force, active in the betterment of the group to which he belongs.

Moral conformity to the precepts of the Prophets and social reforms are not the sole elements of the spiritual life. These two only provide the outward atmosphere wherein the inner spirituality of man has to develop. Without morality no true religion can exist or serve a useful purpose, with morality alone only an ethical life is secured, but there is still nothing to account for spiritual progress. We have, therefore, to consider the purely spiritual element of religion as well and compare it with the mystic conception if we desire to render our thesis complete.

In this phase of our life mysticism is naturally rich in information and clear in the path it prescribes for the wayfarer. But is its conception true and the form of spirituality it advocates the type that will make it the religion of the future?

Stated briefly, mysticism seeks a certain form of psychological experience, a certain state of consciousness wherein man finds himself merged into the Sea of the Divine Essence. In pursuance of this goal, during his novitiate, he seeks to renounce those elements that bar his way and encumber his course.

As we have considered in detail, Bahá'u'lláh refutes the efficacy of the goal that the mystic seeks and also the stages of the path that leads to it. Man, He says, can neither attain a knowledge of, nor experience union with, the Divine Essence. What the mystic experiences is mere imagination, and the Beloved with whom he feels a spiritual marriage is nothing but a creation of his own mind and emotions. The stages of the path that lead to that goal are

psychological forces used to produce that final experience and make it sound true.

Moreover, were such experiences to be true they would be the privilege of a few spiritual aristocrats. Not every soul that seeks can attain that goal. If redemption applies to such experiences then surely redemption is an exclusive and fortuitous affair relying upon psychological factors and emotional powers. It can never apply to the mass of the people and secure a spiritualization of humanity as a whole. At best there will be only a few in every generation who will be saved and the rest will remain subject to the evil forces so rampant in the world. Should this be the spiritual life advocated it will surely fail to appeal to the mass of mankind and secure their allegiance.

In contrast to this mystic view of the spiritual life let us consider the Bahá'í conception and the appeal it makes to the generality of mankind.

The real and abiding part of man is his rational soul. This starts its existence upon this earth and begins a process of constant development—that is in case the environment within which it lives is favorable to such a development. This progress does not end with death. When he breathes his last man drops this material shell and assumes some other form which is beyond our comprehension. He enters another world and then another, always progressing, always acquiring more abundant life.

But how is this progress secured? Within that germ of the human soul God has deposited, in a potential form, infinite powers and capacities, and man's task is to cause these qualities to come to the field of actuality and thereby reflect fully the beauty of his Lord. An essential requirement for that is a proper social and moral environment; but there is also the need for an inner urge onward. The Prophets of God supply all these factors for they are the great and Divine educators. On the one hand They rehabilitate the world by creating a new social order and a set of moral precepts suited to the requirements of the age, and on the other They impart a new life to the rational soul, They quicken man.

Being perfect mirrors reflecting the light of God, the Prophets give color and beauty to our life when we turn our hearts towards

Them. With Their tender touch They raise us from the dead and imbue us with the burning desire to seek Their ways and reflect Their Divine Attributes. The more we pray to these Prophets and make the spirit we thereby obtain shape our activities; the more we meditate upon Their life and make Their example direct our life; the more we purify our heart and make it reflect the attributes of God as manifested by Them; the more we will obtain that inner urge so essential for our onward march in this world and in the worlds to come—for in all the worlds Prophets appear to educate man and help him to bring forth to perfect actuality those potential powers inherent in him.

The Bahá'í conception of the goal of our spiritual life, therefore, is to bring into actuality those divine powers inherent in our soul, it is to attain an unlimited perfection, it is to secure an ever growing of our personality. To become the likeness of God by acquiring His attributes, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says "is the supreme goal of the world of humanity." God has treasured in our soul pearls of ineffable beauty, it is our task to produce them, and with God's grace, granted by His Prophets, we shall vindicate our calling if we only will to do it.

This goal is not imaginary, it is no mere psychological experience. It is not the privilege of the few. The doors of this heaven are open to all. It is the salvation that all humanity can seek and attain. Through it a spiritualization of the whole race can be achieved without in the least impairing the social and intellectual progress of man. In fact, the social, moral, intellectual and spiritual factors are so vitally connected that we cannot help one without enhancing the operation of the others. These factors are the environment in which our personality is to develop. They form the air it breathes, and the food it consumes. Let us have this form of spirituality permeate our life and we shall see how our civilization, even in its material aspect, will leap forward and achieve miracles.

According to the Bahá'ís, Bahá'u'lláh has come to the world with the true interpretation of spirituality, and what He declares, He claims to be the pure teachings of all the Prophets of old, free from any man-made additions. Understand Him, they say, and

you will understand the words of Jesus before their defilement at the hands of pagan philosophers; read Him and you will appreciate the true interpretation of the Quran. Being a Prophet of God He was in touch with the Absolute, the source of all truth, and therefore, could direct us to the true meaning of spirituality. What He demands is not a renunciation of the world, but a healthy life as an active member of society—a task to begin at the very start, and not after attaining the stage of Unity. For it is only by being active and healthy members of society that we can achieve spirituality. He asks us to enjoy the beauties of the world but not to be attached to them; to seek them but not to let them retard our moral and spiritual development. Salvation is not the life of renunciation but of healthy participation in our social duties. While living in this world we are meant to be human; and our highest form of humanity can be achieved while following the directions prescribed by the Prophets.

Man has long desired to attain these truths and feel confident that his deeds in this world would prepare him for sharing the glories of the world to come. Mysticism and all the other forms of religious philosophies have been means created by man for the realization of that goal. Being all man-made they have their deficiencies.

God has now sent us a Prophet with a store-house of Divine knowledge. His writings are a mine of infinite wealth. He gives life to all who seek it. All these stand within our humble reach, let us not lose the chance and fail to partake of this wealth of revelation. Bahá'u'lláh surely had in mind the mystics and philosophers when He revealed in the *Hidden Words*:

“O Son of Desire! The learned and the wise have for long years striven and failed to attain the presence of the All-Glorious; they have spent their lives in search of Him, yet did not behold the beauty of His countenance. Thou without the least effort didst attain the goal, and without search hast obtained the object of thy quest. Yet, notwithstanding, thou didst remain so wrapt in the veil of self, that thine eyes beheld not the beauty of the Beloved, nor did thy hand touch the hem of His robe. Ye that have eyes, behold and wonder.”



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