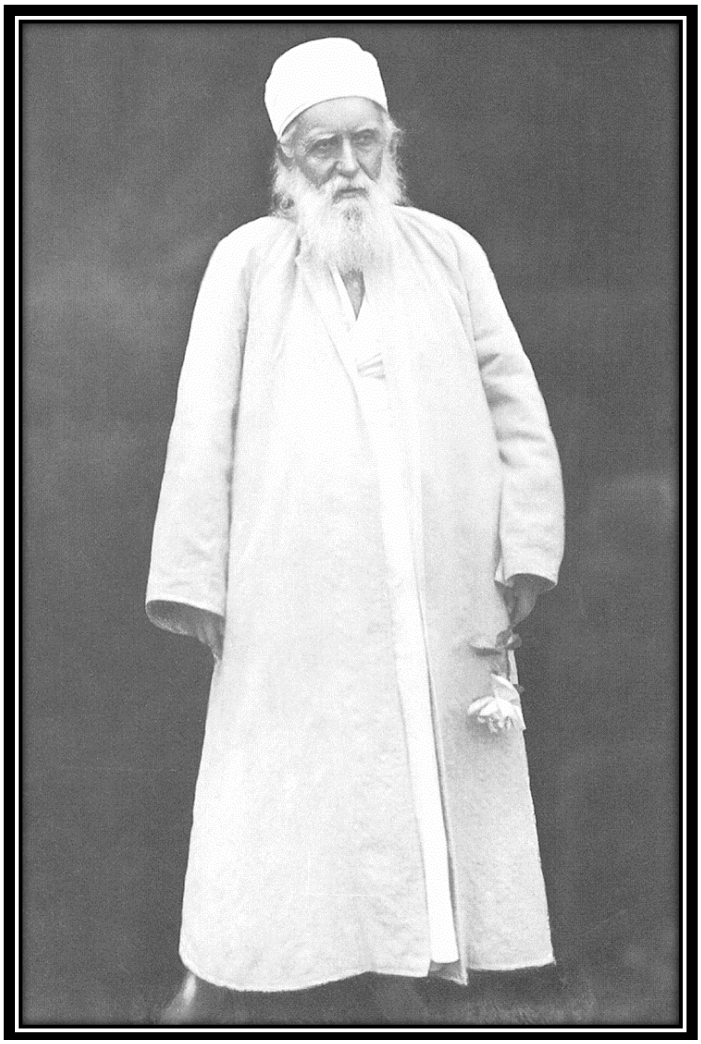
The Station of `Abdu'l-Bahá

INTRODUCTION: *Approaching the threshold…*

`Abdu'l-Bahá was the son of Bahá'u'lláh and is considered one of the three Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith. He was not a Prophet of God, yet he holds a position considered by Bahá'ís as "unapproached in the world's spiritual history."[1]

`Abdu'l-Bahá was asked by a believer: "Master, who art thou?"

"Verily," he replied, "I say unto thee, that I am indeed an humble, submissive and imploring servant of God; a servant of His Beloved; a messenger of the exaltation of His Word; a spreader of His Fragrances; an extoller of the banner of love and harmony; a promoter of the greatest peace among all nations and tribes; a kindler of the fire of the love of God in the hearts of the people; a runner to the place of martyrdom in the Cause of God; a yearner for every calamity in the love of God; a longer for suspension upon the cross for the love of the beloved; a herald of the Kingdom of God among the sects of all horizons. This is my station and condition; this is my blazing crown; this is my glorious throne; because my servitude to the Holy Threshold is my brilliant light, my shining star and my drawn sword; and beside this I have no other name."[2]



`Abdu'l-Bahá in Chicago, 1912

"My station is Abdul-Baha," he said, "my name is Abdul-Baha, my qualification is Abdul-Baha, my praise is Abdul-Baha, my title is Abdul-Baha."[3]

`Abdu'l in English simply means *servant*, and Bahá means *glory, splendor, or light*. Thus, the name `Abdu'l-Bahá means *servant of Bahá,* or *servant of Bahá'u'lláh*. `Abdu'l-Bahá took this name to himself after the passing of Bahá'u'lláh.

The following study examines the unique and superlative station of `Abdu'l-Bahá, that person whom all Bahá'ís extol and characterize as the Center of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant and the perfect example of a true Bahá'í.

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[1] Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), pp. 131-32.
[2] *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas*, (New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1916, 1930 printing), vol. III, pp. 658-59.
[3] *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas*, (Chicago: Bahá'í Publishing Society, 1915, 1919 printing), vol. III, p. 466.

OBJECTIVE: *A look to the horizon…*

Facilitator Review the following objective with the participants:

The objective of this study is to understand the fundamental verities or basic truths regarding the unique station of `Abdu'l-Bahá.

THE STUDY PROCESS: *Attaining the water of life…*

Facilitator Review the following study process with the participants. Then study the numbered quotations that follow, one at a time as described below.

1. **READING:** *A drink from the cup of guidance…*
   A. **Read the quotation** out loud in its entirety.
2. **CONFIRMING MEANING:** *A spray from the fountain of light…*
   To better understand certain words used in the quotation, take turns with the following:
   A. Each participant **choose a word** from the quotation and **state it** for the whole group to hear. (Like a fun game – pick a word!) Then…
   B. Read out loud the sentence that contains the **word** you selected, **while substituting for that word**, its given phrase, definition, or synonym from the boxes below the quotation.
   C. Repeat A and B above until everyone is satisfied with their understanding of the words.
3. **FINDING VALUE:** *Mining the gems of truth…*
   A. **Read the quotation** out loud again in its entirety.
   B. Take turns **stating each basic fact or truth** you can find in the quotation about **the station of `Abdu'l-Bahá**.

QUOTATIONS: *Within the meadows of Thy nearness…*

1. He is, and should for all time be regarded, first and foremost, as the Center and Pivot of Bahá'u'lláh's peerless and all-enfolding Covenant, His most exalted handiwork, the stainless Mirror of His light, the perfect Exemplar of His teachings, the unerring Interpreter of His Word, the embodiment of every Bahá'í ideal, the incarnation of every Bahá'í virtue, the Most Mighty Branch sprung from the Ancient Root, the Limb of the Law of God, the Being *"round Whom all names revolve,"* the Mainspring of the Oneness of Humanity, the Ensign of the Most Great Peace, the Moon of the Central Orb of this most holy Dispensation — styles and titles that are implicit and find their truest, their highest and fairest expression in the magic name `Abdu'l-Bahá. He is, above and beyond these appellations, the *"Mystery of God"* — an expression by which Bahá'u'lláh Himself has chosen to designate Him, and which, while it does not by any means justify us to assign to Him the station of Prophethood, indicates how in the person of `Abdu'l-Bahá the incompatible characteristics of a human nature and superhuman knowledge and perfection have been blended and are completely harmonized. **—Shoghi Effendi**

The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), p. 134.

all-enfolding: encompassing and enveloping everything
Ancient Root: Manifestation of God, Bahá'u'lláh [one of His titles]
appellations: designated titles or names
blended: combined into one whole
Center: Person who is the most important and the central focus
Central Orb: Source at the center [Bahá'u'lláh]
characteristics: distinguishing traits and qualities
Covenant: binding agreement [with the Bahá'ís to turn to and accept `Abdu'l-Bahá on all matters pertaining to the Faith]
designate: call by a distinctive title
Dispensation: religious System that administers human affairs under divine authority for a particular period of time
embodiment: representative in human form
Ensign: One who is as a sign or symbol
exalted: highly praised, elevated, and glorified
Exemplar: One who serves as an ideal model or image
foremost: of the highest importance
handiwork: personally produced masterpiece
harmonized: resolved and brought into a pleasing agreement
human nature: frail and fallible disposition and traits of self-interests as people
ideal: standard of moral excellence and perfection
implicit: inferred or implied without doubt
incarnation: person showing a trait or typical character to a marked degree
incompatible: not capable of existing together in the same person
Interpreter: One who explains or expounds the meaning

light: emanating spiritual knowledge and goodness
Limb: active Branch or Agent
magic: spellbinding and enchanting
Mainspring: chief or most powerful agent
Mirror: true representative
Moon: Light is the symbol of knowledge and goodness. The Sun is the brightest source of light and often symbolizes the Manifestation. The moon is the greatest reflection of the sun and therefore symbolizes the greatest possible likeness or reflection of the Manifestation.
Most Great Peace: condition of permanent peace and unity in the world based on the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh
Most Mighty Branch: the title given by Bahá'u'lláh to `Abdu'l-Bahá, as His descendant
Mystery: incomprehensible and supernatural One
names: glorious spiritual perfections and attributes
Oneness: unity, harmony, and agreement of mind, feeling, and purpose
peerless: unequaled; matchless; incomparable
perfection: the highest possible attainment of spiritual qualities, attributes, and virtues
Pivot: the crucial person
Prophethood: One who reveals divinely inspired revelations of God
revolve: relate to as a central point
stainless: morally unblemished
station: rank or position
styles: identifying terms
superhuman: greater than human
titles: names of honor
unerring: exact, flawless, and error free
virtue: commendable spiritual quality, trait, or attribute

2. Inasmuch as great differences and divergences of denominational belief had arisen throughout the past, every man with a new idea attributing it to God, Bahá'u'lláh desired that there should not be any ground or reason for disagreement among the Bahá'ís. Therefore, with His own pen He wrote the Book of His Covenant, addressing His relations and all people of the world, saying, *"Verily, I have appointed One* [`Abdu'l-Bahá] *Who is the Center of My Covenant. All must obey Him; all must turn to Him; He is the Expounder of My Book, and He is informed of My purpose. All must turn to Him. Whatsoever He says is correct, for, verily, He knoweth the texts of My Book. Other than He, no one doth know My Book."* The purpose of this statement is that there should never be discord and divergence among the Bahá'ís but that they should always be unified and agreed. **—`Abdu'l-Bahá**

The Promulgation of Universal Peace, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), no. 104.6, pp. 322-23.

appointed: officially named or selected
attributing: thinking it originated from or belonged
Book: sacred Writings
Center: Person that is the most important and the central focus
Covenant: binding agreement [with the Bahá'ís]
denominational: religious sectarian
discord: the absence of unity producing active disagreement or conflict
divergence(s): separating or branching off

Expounder: Explainer, Interpreter, and Clarifier in detail
ground: basis for belief, action, or argument
inasmuch as: in view of the fact that
informed: well-versed and knowledgeable
obey: carry out or submit to instructions or orders from
texts: exact or actual words, content, and meaning
turn to: go to or defer to
unified: peacefully joined together

3. In accordance with the explicit text of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas Bahá'u'lláh hath made the Center of the Covenant the Interpreter of His Word — a Covenant so firm and mighty that from the beginning of time until the present day no religious Dispensation hath produced its like. **—`Abdu'l-Bahá**

Quoted by Shoghi Effendi, published in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), p. 136.

accordance: agreement or conformity
Center: Person who is the most important and the central focus
Covenant: binding agreement [He made with the Bahá'ís]
Dispensation: religious System that administers human affairs under divine authority for a particular period of time
explicit: so clearly expressed there is no question as to meaning or intent
firm: securely fixed
Interpreter: One who explains or expounds the meaning
its like: anything like it
Kitáb-i-Aqdas: Literally, *"The Most Holy Book"* of Bahá'u'lláh.

4. ...His [`Abdu'l-Bahá's] words are not equal in rank, though they possess an equal validity with the utterances of Bahá'u'lláh... **—`Abdu'l-Bahá**

Quoted by Shoghi Effendi, published in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), p. 139.

rank: official standing, grade, or degree
utterances: oral or written expressions
validity: authorization as truthful and factual

5. ...My station is the station of servitude — a servitude which is complete, pure and real, firmly established, enduring, obvious, explicitly revealed and subject to no interpretation whatever ... I am the Interpreter of the Word of God; such is my interpretation. **—`Abdu'l-Bahá**

Quoted by Shoghi Effendi, published in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), p. 133.

enduring: lasting and unyielding in hardship
established: settled and confirmed
explicitly: so clearly expressed there is no question as to meaning or intent [as]
firmly: securely; immovably
interpretation: explanation of meaning
Interpreter: One who explains or expounds the meaning
obvious: easily seen and understood
pure: free and clean of moral defilement or ⇗ corruption
real: genuine; void of pretense
revealed: made known [by Bahá'u'lláh]
servitude: devotion in which one voluntarily gives up the freedom to determine one's course of action or way of life to serve another
station: rank or position
subject: being open or susceptible
Word of God: Revelation of God, today Bahá'u'lláh's Writings.

6. *We have made Thee a shelter for all mankind, a shield unto all who are in heaven and on earth, a stronghold for whosoever hath believed in God, the Incomparable, the All-Knowing. God grant that through Thee He may protect them, may enrich and sustain them, that He may inspire Thee with that which shall be a wellspring of wealth unto all created things, an ocean of bounty unto all men, and the dayspring of mercy unto all peoples*. **—Bahá'u'lláh**

From a Tablet to Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted by Shoghi Effendi, published in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), pp. 135-36.

All-Knowing: sole One completely informed, knowledgeable, and understanding
bounty: generous gifts and favors
dayspring: beginning of a day or new era
enrich: increase their knowledge and capacities
Incomparable: One eminent beyond comparison; matchless
inspire: divinely influence and motivate
men: people
mercy: kindness and compassion toward the condemned, the distressed, and the unfortunate
ocean: figuratively — greatest source
shelter: refuge that provides protection or defense
shield: guard, protector, or defender
stronghold: powerful defense and security
sustain: give support, relief, strength, comfort, and sustenance to
We: used by one in authority to denote himself
wealth: that which is good and valuable
wellspring: source of abundant and continual supply

SHARING EXERCISE: *A breath from the spirit of inspiration…*

Facilitator

Ask the participants to complete the statements below. When everyone has finished, have each person share, in a round, one thing that was outstanding or inspiring and what spiritual feelings it enkindled. Please remind everyone not to remark on the comments of others.

One thing from the quotations that was outstanding or inspiring to me was _____

_____

It made me feel _____

_____

I felt this way because _____

_____

SOME QUESTIONS: *A cup from the showers of confirmation…*

Facilitator

Ask the participants to answer the following questions. They can usually find answers in the quotations just studied or in the introduction. When everyone has finished, review the questions, then share and discuss the answers.

1. A binding agreement between God and humanity is called a…
- ☐ a. covenant.
- ☐ b. contract.
- ☐ c. constitution.

2. `Abdu'l-Bahá is the perfect _____ of His Father's teachings.
- ☐ a. image
- ☐ b. model

3. `Abdu'l-Bahá is described as the "unerring Interpreter" of Bahá'u'lláh's Word. Unerring means that `Abdu'l-Bahá's interpretations of the Word of God are _____

_____

4. Conflict and contention within a religion often result in division into different sects. There are no significant sects in the Bahá'í Faith because Bahá'u'lláh made a historic and unique provision for _____ to speak as the unquestioned Head and Authority of the Faith after His passing, clarifying any questions or disagreements that might arise among the believers.

5. Was `Abdu'l-Bahá a Manifestation of God? _____

6. What makes `Abdu'l-Bahá's station unique in religious history?
- ☐ a. He was an obedient servant to the Manifestation.
- ☐ b. He was appointed by the Manifestation as the Interpreter of the Word of God.
- ☐ c. He was a real nice person.

7. Are the words of `Abdu'l-Bahá equal in rank to those of Bahá'u'lláh? _____

8. `Abdu'l-Bahá is most often referred to as the _____ of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant.

9. There is a unique condition in which one voluntarily gives up the personal freedom or liberty to determine one's own course of action or way of life, yet spiritual liberty and freedom are gained. `Abdu'l-Bahá considered His station an example of this condition. What is this station called?

_____

10. The three "Central Figures" of the Bahá'í Faith include the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and _____

11. Was `Abdu'l-Bahá's station greater than that of the Báb? _____

12. Bahá'u'lláh said that `Abdu'l-Bahá was a shelter for all humankind — from what, do you think?

_____

_____

_____

CLOSING MEDITATION: *A heart song…*

The following story was recorded by Howard Colby Ives, a Unitarian Clergyman, who, before becoming a Bahá'í, had the wonderful opportunity of meeting `Abdu'l-Bahá.

One day I was walking with Mountfort near his home on West End Ave. It was in February and the winter winds were chill. We walked briskly talking of the ever enthralling subject, `Abdu'l-Bahá's approaching visit; what He looked like; what effect His meeting had on souls; stories of contacts with Him in `Akká and Paris. Impulsively I said:

"When `Abdu'l-Bahá arrives I would like very much to have a talk with Him alone, without even an interpreter."

He smiled sympathetically but remarked:

"I fear you couldn't get very far without an interpreter, for `Abdu'l-Bahá speaks little English and you, I imagine, less Persian."

I would not be dissuaded. "If He at all approaches in spiritual discernment what I hear and read of Him," I said, "we would get closer together, and I might have a better chance of understanding, even if no words were spoken. I am very tired of words," I concluded rather lamely.

This was about six weeks before `Abdu'l-Bahá came, two months perhaps. We never referred to the subject again nor did Mountfort speak of my wish to anyone, as he afterwards assured me.

Finally the day arrived….

I remember as if it were yesterday the scene and my impressions. I did not want to talk to anyone. In fact I would not. I withdrew to the window overlooking Broadway and turned my back upon them all. Below me stretched the great city but I saw it not. What was it all about? Why was I here? What did I expect from the coming interview: indeed how did I know there was to be any interview at all? I had no appointment. Plainly all these other folk had come expecting to see and talk with Him. Why should I expect any attention from such an evident personage?

So I was somewhat withdrawn from the others when my attention was attracted by a rustling throughout the room. A door was opening far across from me and a group was emerging and `Abdu'l-Bahá appeared saying farewell. None had any eyes save for Him. Again I had the impression of a unique dignity and courtesy and love. The morning sunlight flooded the room to center on His robe. His fez was slightly tilted and as I gazed, His hand, with a gesture evidently characteristic, raised and, touching, restored it to its proper place. His eyes met mine as my fascinated glance was on Him. He smiled and, with a gesture which no word but "lordly" can describe. He beckoned me.

Startled gives no hint of my sensations. Something incredible had happened. Why to me, a stranger unknown, unheard of, should He raise that friendly hand? I glanced around. Surely it was to someone else that gesture was addressed, those eyes were smiling! But there was no one near and again I looked and again He beckoned and such understanding love enveloped me that even at that distance and with a heart still cold a thrill ran through me as if a breeze from a divine morning had touched my brow!

Slowly I obeyed that imperative command and, as I approached the door where still He stood, He motioned others away and stretched His hand to me as if He had always known me. And, as our right hands met, with His left He indicated that all should leave the room, and He drew me in and closed the door. I remember how surprised the interpreter looked when he too was included in this general dismissal. But I had little thought then for anything but this incredible happening. I was absolutely alone with `Abdu'l-Bahá. The halting desire expressed weeks ago was fulfilled the very moment that our eyes first met.

Still holding my hand `Abdu'l-Bahá walked across the room towards where, in the window, two chairs were waiting. Even then the majesty of His tread impressed me and I felt like a child led by His father, a more than earthly father, to a comforting conference. His hand still held mine and frequently His grasp tightened and held more closely. And then, for the first time, He spoke, and in my own tongue: Softly came the assurance that I was His very dear son.

What there was in these simple words that carried such conviction to my heart I cannot say. Or was it the tone of voice and the atmosphere pervading the room, filled with spiritual vibrations beyond anything I had ever known, that melted my heart almost to tears? I only know that a sense of verity invaded me. Here at last was my Father. What earthly paternal relationship could equal this? A new and exquisite emotion all but mastered me. My throat swelled. My eyes filled. I could not have spoken had life depended on a word. I followed those masterly feet like a little child.

Then we sat in the two chairs by the window: knee to knee, eye to eye. At last He looked right into me. It was the first time since our eyes had met with His first beckoning gesture that this had happened. And now nothing intervened between us and He looked at me. He looked at me! It seemed as though never before had anyone really seen me. I felt a sense of gladness that I at last was at home, and that one who knew me utterly, my Father, in truth, was alone with me.

As He looked such play of thought found reflection in His face, that if He had talked an hour not nearly so much could have been said. A little surprise, perhaps, followed swiftly by such sympathy, such understanding, such overwhelming love — it was as if His very being opened to receive me. With that the heart within me melted and the tears flowed. I did not weep, in any ordinary sense. There was no breaking up of feature. It was as if a long-pent stream was at last undammed. Unheeded, as I looked at Him, they flowed.

He put His two thumbs to my eyes while He wiped the tears from my face; admonishing me not to cry, that one must always be happy. And He laughed. Such a ringing, boyish laugh. It was as though He had discovered the most delightful joke imaginable: a divine joke which only He could appreciate.

I could not speak. We both sat perfectly silent for what seemed a long while, and gradually a great peace came to me. Then `Abdu'l-Bahá placed His hand upon my breast saying that it was the heart that speaks. Again silence: a long, heart-enthralling silence. No word further was spoken, and all the time I was with Him not one single sound came from me. But no word was necessary from me to Him. I knew that, even then, and how I thanked God it was so.

Suddenly He leaped from His chair with another laugh as though consumed with a heavenly joy. Turning, He took me under the elbows and lifted me to my feet and swept me into his arms. Such a hug! No mere embrace! My very ribs cracked. He kissed me on both cheeks, laid His arm across my shoulders and led me to the door.

That is all. But life has never been quite the same since.

Howard Colby Ives, *Portals to Freedom,* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, 1937), pp. 27-33.

ANSWERS: *Affirming treasures…*

1. a
2. a and b; both are synonyms of Exemplar
3. exact, flawless, and free from error
4. `Abdu'l-Bahá
5. no
6. b
7. no
8. Center
9. servitude
10. `Abdu'l-Bahá
11. no, the Báb was a Manifestation of God, `Abdu'l-Bahá was not
12. all answers are valuable

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