

Tell Me About Bahá'u'lláh¹

Hossain Danesh

I will share with you some thoughts about Bahá'u'lláh as though in response to a seeker's request, "Tell me about Bahá'u'lláh."

In 1852 a unique personage announced that a new era in the spiritual and physical development and the evolution of humanity had begun. Furthermore, this personage announced that He Himself was the inaugurator of this new era. Events of this nature occur only rarely in history. In recorded history we have only a few individuals who have started a new era in the history of humanity. Abraham, Moses, Buddha, Krishna, Zoroaster, Christ, Muhammad, and the Báb are the only figures comparable to this personage, who in 1852 let the world know that the new era had begun. These personages, as we know, are founders of the world's major religions. They inaugurate new epochs of consciousness and civilization in history. They bring to humanity a new way of thinking, a new way of relating, a new way of communicating. As a result of their teachings, a whole new way of life develops, and the whole purpose of life changes. These individuals are usually called Messengers and Prophets: Messengers meaning that they are bringing us a message from the Creator, from the Great Spirit, from One Who has caused us and everything else to be, whether it is called God or any other name. Fundamentally, these personages are saying that they have a message from the Source of all that exists, and as such they are Messengers. They come in order to bring that message and to establish a covenant between them (on behalf of the Creator) and humanity. As such, Christ, Buddha, or Muhammad were Messengers, who brought a divine message to humanity.

These individuals were also Prophets, meaning that they came here to prophesize the coming of the day of fulfillment when humanity will experience wholeness, when the time of reunion is come, when the time of togetherness is come, when the time of peace is come. All of these Prophets talked of that time. None of these Messengers and Prophets claimed that they actually brought fulfillment. They all said that this is something that would occur in the future. In essence they were saying in many different ways that their era, their age was like the night season and that the day had yet to come, or that this is like the era of childhood and the coming of age would come later.

Therefore, throughout history, humanity has been waiting. There is a profound yearning in humanity. The soul of humanity has been yearning for the day of union, the day of fulfillment, the day of peace, the day of joy, the day of felicity. This is the quest of humanity, in poems, in myths, in stories, in music, in all mystical writings; humanity has been waiting for that time, for that era, for that age.

That era began in the summer of 1852. The place was a black pit in Tehran, in far-off Persia. God could not have chosen a more symbolic or more remote place. Another phenomenon that occurred here for the first time was that while in the past we have had Messengers and Prophets, this new personage is called the Manifestation of God, and the word *manifestation* has a different characteristic than either *messenger* or *prophet* because a

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manifestation manifests and clarifies; a manifestation makes things that are not known, known, makes hidden things obvious. That's the work of a manifestation--to clarify things, to manifest things, to bring them out of darkness.

So in the summer of 1852 in the black pit, this personage appeared. His name was Bahá'u'lláh. The word *Bahá'u'lláh* is composed of two words--*Bahá* and *Alláh*. *Alláh* means God. *Bahá* has several meanings, the two most prominent of which are light and glory. Here, I will focus only on the first meaning of the name *Bahá*, light. Bahá'u'lláh therefore is the light of the world, the personage who brightens this world, brings to light the mysteries of the past, fulfills the expectations of the past. The light rises out of the black pit, the *Síyáh-Chál*, out of the total darkness in which the soul of humanity was engulfed. This light comes, but the light comes very gradually in the same way that when the sun begins to rise, it comes very gradually. If it were to rise suddenly, it would cause people to close their eyes, turn away from the light, and flee from it. So the light comes very, very slowly. First, glimpses of the light come from the black pit; few see it. Then, the light goes into obscurity for eleven years. Very few people have any idea that this light has come. Just as the dawn has two phases (first in the early hours of the morning, the light comes, and then again there is a period of darkness; then again light comes, and the second dawn starts), well, this was exactly the same thing that happened in the spiritual world and in this physical world. Bahá'u'lláh's light first came in the black pit and then went into the darkness of being unknown during the Baghdad years and the Sulaymaniyih years, which were the darkest years of Bahá'u'lláh's life. Then in 1863, Bahá'u'lláh announced publicly that this is the era of fulfillment. This is the age of fulfillment. This phenomenon was remarkable because Bahá'u'lláh this time announced who He was and why He had come.

This was similar to our discussion about haiku and its connection with the seasons and the time of the year. In the time of short days and darkness, all of us are waiting, our souls wanting Spring to come. This was the way the world of humanity was at that time, and Bahá'u'lláh therefore told humanity in 1863 that the springtime had come. He said,

The Divine Springtime is come, O Most Exalted Pen, for the Festival of the All-Merciful is fast approaching. Bestir thyself, and magnify, before the entire creation the name of God, and celebrate His praise, in such wise that all created things may be regenerated and made new. Speak, and hold not thy peace" (Gleanings 27-28).

A new era has begun--the era of the appearance of God to humanity. Then this light, the Sun of Bahá, rose with greater brightness when Bahá'u'lláh was put further away in the remote prison in Adrianople because it was there that He wrote letters to the kings and the rulers of the earth announcing who He was and the nature of His mission. Finally, that light came at its most manifest time when Bahá'u'lláh was in the most great prison, which was in `Akká. The remarkable dynamic here is that while the world tries to keep the light hidden, the light comes despite these efforts. First, it is in the dark dungeon, the black pit; then it is in the years of banishment in Baghdad, in Iraq, then, in the most remote prison in Adrianople, then in the most great prison in `Akká. Humanity is doing everything not to see the light, but the character of the light is that it nonetheless emerges; it shows; it manifests.

When we talk about light in terms of Bahá'u'lláh, we mean not only that He became known as a person to larger groups of people but, rather, that He brightened the consciousness of humanity. He brought a new level of consciousness, a new level of understanding of who we are and what we are. This is the most important issue.

When we talk about Manifestations of God, we are talking about periodic impulses in the

history of evolution of humanity, impulses that have further advanced the level of consciousness of humanity. In historical terms, we have evidence that as early as a hundred-thousand years ago humanity was preoccupied with issues of spirituality. We have to remember that the human brain in its current form appeared some 250 thousand years ago. Therefore, human consciousness in the way that we know it began to make its expression some 250 thousand years ago; however, language and the ability to speak only appeared some 40 thousand years ago. But even before humanity was able to speak, humanity was preoccupied with issues of life, of death, and of burials, the evidences of which are found in anthropological and archeological documents. The role of the Prophets and Messengers in raising the consciousness of humanity is a different story. In my talk today I only wish to speak about what Bahá'u'lláh did for this era.

The first issue that He shed light on was in respect to the evolution of humanity. He said that humanity evolves along the parameters of consciousness in a progressive manner. He called this Progressive Revelation. The concept of Progressive Revelation is unique because it resolves for the first time the dilemma of having many religions and shows that religion, like science, is one and that religious truth, like scientific truth, is progressive and not absolute and that the main characteristic and quality of a religious person is openmindedness, that a truly religious person is one who searches for truth. A religious person is one who does not accept superstition, who does not accept prejudice, who is willing to accept any new idea or new concept in accordance with truth. This was a remarkable, revolutionary way of looking at religion. What is happening in the world today is that the world of humanity is denied religion exactly because religion today is not scientific in its approach; it does not make sense; it causes disunity; it encourages superstition; it discourages progress of the human mind. It causes people to be separate rather than united, and this religion, this kind of religious thinking, Bahá'u'lláh says is better not to have at all. What humanity is rejecting today is that kind of superstitious, disunifying religion, and people have every right to reject it. What Bahá'u'lláh showed is that religious truth is one and that the spiritual development of humanity of progressive.

The other issue that Bahá'u'lláh shed light on was the issue of human nature. One of the fundamental problems that we have in the world today is correctly defining human nature. Basically, we have three concepts about human nature: Humans are animals; humans are machines; and humans are sinful, bad people. If we believe that humans are animals, then we create an animalistic way of life. That's what we have in fact created, and the human habitat has become a jungle. If we go to New York, Delhi, Johannesburg, or many other cities around the world, we will see the jungles of animalistic life.

If we believe that humans are machines, then we create a mechanistic life, a life devoid of nature, devoid of beauty, devoid of flexibility, devoid of growth. If we go to the Tokyos of this world, the Los Angeles of this world, and the Londons of this world, we will see that there is a combination of both the animalistic perspective and the mechanistic perspective of human nature.

The concept that people are bad, that there is something inherently wrong with them, is also widely applied. In Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and Jewish societies, we find that the people either define themselves or others as sinful, and usually do both. So the whole of humanity is either perceived to be sinful directly or indirectly. No one escapes. Even some scientific concepts of our age correspond to this misperception. Freud says that human beings have been created with basically two instincts: sexual and aggressive. The purpose of this life is to experience pleasure and to express aggression. Isn't that what we are doing? Marx said human society is based on struggle. Life is a struggle between different classes. Therefore,

Marxists created societies characterized by power struggles; whoever has power controls and when in control must control firmly because as soon as one loosens control, everything is lost. History documents this process.

Then Bahá'u'lláh comes and says human nature is spiritual in its essence. He also says that at the core of human spiritual nature are three capacities, three powers. These are the powers to know, to love, and to will (to choose). He said that these are the three qualities, powers that distinguish human beings from animals, from machines, and from sinful beings. Note that one of the three powers is the power of choice. Therefore, sinful or not sinful, machine or not machine, animal or not animal is all fundamentally a matter of choice. He said, however, that the purpose of human life is to ennoble our existence. We need to focus on the development of these three qualities so that we will be able to use our knowledge in the pursuit of truth, our love to create unity, and our will to bring about justice. Bahá'u'lláh says that the purpose of human life is to know and to worship God. Worship has the dual qualities of love and service. The fruit of human life must be truth, unity, and service. These are the ethics or ethos of the new world order.

Bahá'u'lláh also shed light on other issues such as the process of evolution of human society. He said that the whole development and direction of human society has a purpose, direction, and logic. If we understand that logic, we would understand what is happening, why it is happening, and what we can do about it. Basically, Bahá'u'lláh said that humanity collectively goes through the same stages of evolution as do individuals and that now we are approaching the age of human maturity. The problems of the world today are those related to the adolescent stage of life.

I just mentioned three areas of among hundreds and hundreds of areas on which Bahá'u'lláh shed light. Remember *Bahá* means light, and what Bahá'u'lláh did was to shed light on the realities of existence. When we say that we are Bahá'ís, it means that we connect ourselves to the source of light so that our consciousness is expanded; our ability to see is a thousand, a million-fold expanded. We can see reality in a new light; we can approach it in a new way. Not only that, we can see new realities that we would not have previously been able to see. So this is one aspect of the name of Bahá'u'lláh, but Bahá'u'lláh has many, many names. There are several hundred titles of Bahá'u'llah. If we were to talk about those, we would need several hundred half-hours.