

Ability to speak and communicate correctly and abstractly;

A social life which makes the process of socialization possible;

Ability to think and to make decisions (free will).

As a result man, in the absence of instinct, has to learn how to live and to solve the problems of his life. The sum total of all these learned and shared things is referred to as culture. Very briefly, culture consists of all that we know, all that we do, and all that we have. The two latter aspects or components of culture, namely, deeds (or norms) and possessions (or material things), depend primarily on the first, which is knowledge (or ideas). Knowledge therefore is the foundation of man's culture and way of life.

In order to explain the various types of knowledge we must examine the various elements of the human being. There are three major elements—the body, the mind (or soul), and the spirit.

The human body is a composition of material elements and forms the biological core. The human mind (or soul) is man's intelligence. It is the intermediary between the body and spirit. The human mind may be thought of as the tool through which the qualities of the spirit shine forth. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says " the mind is the power of human spirit. Spirit is the lamp, mind is the light which shines from the lamp. . . . Mind is the perfection of the spirit, and is its essential quality, as the sun's rays are the essential necessity of the sun."[1]

The human spirit is the most important element which distinguishes man from the rest of the animals. It is what many philosophers refer to as the "rational soul." It is the source of enlightenment and understanding. It is the human spirit, according to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, that "as far as human ability permits discovers the realities of things and becomes cognisant of their peculiarities and effects, and of the qualities and properties of beings."[2] Thus, what is peculiar to man is his spirit. This spiritual aspect of man by its nature belongs to a realm set apart from man's material side.

CONSIDERING THESE three aspects of man, man's knowledge may be divided into three areas—empirical, philosophical, and spiritual. The empirical or positivistic knowledge is based on experimentation through human senses. This material knowledge brings about progress in science, art, and the humanities in civilization.

Philosophical or metaphysical knowledge is reason and logic based on intelligence and the power of man's rational soul. This knowledge satisfies human needs at the intellectual level.

Spiritual or theological knowledge, also referred to as "the knowledge of God," in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words "is the cause of spiritual progress and attraction, and through it the perception of truth, the exaltation of humanity, divine civilisation, rightness of morals and illumination, are obtained."[3]

Religions are frequently considered the source of all spiritual knowledge. The

Manifestations of God and the Founders of religions are thought to be the divine Teachers. To attain spiritual knowledge, various methods have been suggested over the course of history. The two major areas of thought are the schools of "intellectualism," which is almost the same as what is referred to as philosophical, and the other one is that of "religious mysticism" or "Gnosticism." One of the major goals of religion is for its adherents to attain this mystic or spiritual knowledge. The terminology used to denote this knowledge is "Irfán," in Arabic, which is the equivalent of the word "Gnosis," in Greek. My purpose here is to study this particular form of knowledge.

'Irfán, from the root 'rf, is an Arabic word which, according to the dictionary, means to know; to recognize; to perceive; to be cognizant; to be aware; to be acquainted; to discover; to experience; to find out; to understand; to distinguish; to differentiate; etc.

Gnosis, of Greek origin, according to the dictionary means immediate knowledge of spiritual truth, especially such knowledge as professed by the ancient Gnostics and held to be attainable through faith alone; the act or process of cognition or knowing.

In almost all theistic religions this type of knowledge, or 'Irfán, has been more or less emphasized. It deals mainly with the spiritual or mystical aspect of religion where it has a broader meaning and a deeper effect on man's spiritual nature. It is knowledge of a divine nature dealing with a realm "beyond" the earthly, the mundane. It is on a higher plane referred to as the sphere of the "sacred" or "holy."

The sacred, by its nature, is entirely different from that which is worldly and utilitarian. Accordingly, knowledge in this realm is vastly different from the everyday knowledge that concerns itself with material, mundane things. This type of knowledge, like the "sacred" itself, is neither utilitarian nor empirical and therefore altogether different from the ordinary usage and meaning of the word. To clarify this matter the "sacred" should be defined and explained.

Some of the major figures in the fields of philosophy, anthropology, and sociology of religion—including Emile Durkheim, Bronislaw Malinowski, Max Weber, and others—have classified the contents of human life and its experience into two categories.[4] Durkheim refers to this dichotomy as "the profane" and "the sacred." The profane refers to man's earthly life and the routine experiences based on utilitarian needs and mundane purposes. The knowledge obtained in this sphere of life is referred to as "empirical," or to use Pareto's terminology, "logico-experimental," and it serves to solve empirical problems and attain empirical goals.

The sphere of the "sacred" or "holy" is altogether in a different realm. The "sacred" deals with problems beyond the reach of empirical knowledge obtained through the so-called scientific methods and based on the experience of the senses. It involves those areas of human life which represent the spiritual

aspect of religion, or the religious experience.

"Religion as an attitude toward the sacred," Thomas F. O'Dea says, "has no end or purpose extrinsic to itself. The attitude elicited by the symbols which represent the sacred is one of intense respect." [5] Durkheim in trying to define religion says:

One idea which generally passes as characteristic of all that is religious, is that of the supernatural. By this is understood all sorts of things which surpass the limits of our knowledge; the supernatural is the world of the mysterious, of the unknowable, of the un-understandable. Thus religion would be a sort of speculation upon all that which evades science or distinct thought in general. "Religions diametrically opposed in their overt dogmas," said Spencer, "are perfectly at one in the tacit conviction that the existence of the world, with all it contains and all which surrounds it, is a mystery calling for an explanation"; he thus makes them consist essentially in "the belief in the omnipresence of something which is inscrutable." In the same manner, Max Müller sees in religion "a struggle to conceive the inconceivable, to utter the unutterable, a longing after the Infinite." [6]

Durkheim in treating the subject of religion asserts, "C'est de la vie sérieuse." He attributes the following characteristics to the sacred aspect of religion:

It is superior to the profane in dignity and expresses a superior seriousness.

Its symbols represent an intense respect.

It involves power and/or force.

It is characterized by ambiguity. [7]

It is non-utilitarian.

It is non-empirical.

It does not involve knowledge.

It is supportive..

It is strength giving and sustaining.

It is demanding.

Rudolf Otto says: "Holiness—the holy—is a category of interpretation and valuation peculiar to the sphere of religion." [8] Otto has coined the word "numinous" from the Latin "numen" to denote "holy." He asserts that the holy is "the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*." "Mysterium" he uses to denote "that which is hidden and esoteric, that which is beyond conception of understanding, extraordinary and unfamiliar." "Tremendum" denotes the "awe and the 'natural' emotion of fear." "Fascinans" denotes not only the elements of "daunting" and "awefulness" but also the majesty which is at the same time "uniquely attractive and fascinating." [9] Thus "the holy" or "numinous" according to Otto is beyond rational knowledge. In short, he believes that the holy is:

The real innermost core of all religion;

An element of "awe" or "awefulness";

A living force;

An irreducible category of experience;

A specific feeling response;

A mystery and above all cultures;

Hidden and esoteric;

Wholly other and beyond the sphere of the usual, the intelligible, and the familiar;

Might, and absolute power;

The element of majesty or absolute overpowering.

A very close relationship can be observed in the treatment of the "sacred" by Durkheim and of the "holy" by Otto, with the notion of "charisma" introduced by Max Weber.

As mentioned before, the "sacred" belongs to the sphere of religion, and religions are founded by Prophets who are considered not ordinary persons but charismatic figures. In the treatment of charisma we can see this notion of "extraordinary" and "unusual." Weber defines charisma as

a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader.[10]

Here, also, are some of the expressions used by Weber as aspects of "charisma," which denote in O'Dea's words, "a definite breaking point in the world of everydayness":[11]

Out-of-the-ordinary;

A source of social change;

A source or element of authority;

Voluntarily respected, accepted, and followed;

Specifically foreign to economic considerations;

Alien to the established institutions of society;

Total or partial abnegator of the Old Orders—"It is written . . . , but I say unto you . . .";

Unusual;

Spontaneous;

Creative.

The last three characteristics of charisma— "unusual," "spontaneous," and "creative" described by Weber—are probably the most important aspects of the "sacred." They are practically the same attributes which most theologians attribute to God. O'Dea, for example, has written that

these three characteristics coincide remarkably with the attributes which theologians in Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions have attributed to God. God is seen as radically different from his creation—"wholly other," to use Otto's term. He is seen as "the living God" in the terms of biblical theology, and in theologies affected by Aristotelian concepts as "Pure Act" (Actus Purus) in whom there is nothing unrealized, who has neither past nor future, but whose life is an eternal present, an infinite "now." And he is the creator of all other beings.[12]

IN THIS rather lengthy but precise examination of the notions of the "holy," the "sacred," and the "charismatic," we can see the importance of that which is referred to as "feeling" or the "religious experience."

'Irfán, in one of its major aspects in the sphere of the sacred, is referred to as "religious experience." It is understanding beyond the realm of so-called rational knowledge. It is to find, or at least to endeavor to find, the pathway leading to the sacred or the transcendent world and to understand or try to understand it. This type of knowledge closest to the deeper meaning of 'Irfán is, in O'Dea's words, "a transforming experience of inner illumination." [13]

As mentioned before what we are actually speaking of are the attributes of God. In most of the profound schools of mysticism and theology, God is a paradox. Is there such a thing as God? Yes, there is such a . . . as God (an Essence). Is there not such a thing as God? True, God is not a thing nor what we think He is.

It is believed that a God conceived by imagination is not any different from a God carved of stone. Each is created by man and therefore man's creature and not his "Creator." Thus it is concluded that God is an unknown and unknowable "Essence."

Further questions arise. Is God static? Yes, God is static in that He does not ascend nor descend. He is all the time on His Throne of Grandeur sanctified from all human attributes.

Is God dynamic? Yes, He is dynamic in that He reaches us through His Manifestations Who appear on earth and bring us guidance. The mere fact of the existence of such a thing as "dynamic" represents the existence of a source out of which all "dynamics" spring forth. Human finite ability of reasoning and rationality is confined to its own sphere of existence and unable to grasp the mysteries which man has no senses to feel and no means to grasp, except through his mystical aspect, which is as real as the manifest sense perceptions for

those who have experienced them. Therefore, it is logical to assume that there are ways to feel and/or understand the mystical aspects of existence which reasoning or empirical knowledge, as yet, has not been able to unravel and understand.

Otto believes that the understanding of the "holy" or "numinous" requires a "creative consciousness" which he defines as "the emotion of a creature, abased and overwhelmed by its own nothingness in contrast to that which is supreme above all creatures." [14] Otto invites the reader to

direct his mind to a moment of deeply-felt religious experience, as little as possible qualified by other forms of consciousness. Whoever cannot do this, whoever knows no such moments in his experience, is requested to read no further; for it is not easy to discuss questions of religious psychology with one who can recollect the emotions of his adolescence, the discomforts of indigestion, or say, social feelings, but cannot recall any intrinsically religious feelings. We do not blame such an one, when he tries for himself to advance as far as he can with the help of such principles of explanation as he knows, interpreting "Aesthetics" in terms of sensuous pleasure, and "Religion" as a function of the gregarious instinct and social standards, or as something more primitive still. But the artist, who for his part has an intimate personal knowledge of the distinctive element in the aesthetic experience, will decline his theories with thanks, and the religious man will reject them even more uncompromisingly. [15]

This quest to know God and the sphere of His Holiness probably began when homo (man) became sapiens (wise). The mythology and legends of old are full of this quest. So it is also with the burning desire of man to know his own soul or himself. This is "a consciousness" which Evelyn Underhill says "absorbs or eclipses all other centers of interest." She further claims:

It is said that St. Francis of Assisi, praying in the house of Bernard of Quintavalle, was heard to say again and again: "My God! my God! what art Thou? and what am I?" Though the words come from St. Augustine, they well represent his mental attitude. This was the only question which he thought worth asking; and it is the question which every mystic asks at the beginning and sometimes answers at the end of his quest. [16]

A knowledge designed to answer questions of this nature is referred to as "mystical knowledge," of which Max Weber says:

The unique character of mystical knowledge consists in the fact that, although it becomes more incommunicable the more strongly it is characterized by idiosyncratic content, it is nevertheless, recognized as knowledge. For mystical knowledge is not new knowledge of any facts or doctrines, but rather the perception of an overall meaning in the world. This usage of "knowledge" is intended wherever the term occurs in the numerous formulations of mystics; it denotes a practical form of knowledge. Such gnosis is basically a "possession" of something from which there may be derived a new practical orientation to the world, and under certain circumstances even new and communicable items of

knowledge. But even these items will constitute knowledge of values and nonvalues within the world.[17]

For a rational man with intellect and depth in reasoning it is probably much easier to see the many problems and questions whose answers cannot be found in the realm of reasoning and intellectualism. Empirical knowledge and science have already answered many of our material questions, but there are still many which remain in the realm of mystery. It is the answer to this type of question which may be found in the mystical or spiritual aspect of religion.

MYSTICAL or Divine Knowledge is an experience. Not every experience can be put into words, and there are many situations, conditions, and qualities which are simply unexplainable. How can you explain the taste of a mango to somebody who has never seen nor tasted one? How can you describe a rainbow and its beautiful colors to someone who was born blind? Howard Colby Ives says:

What is that mystery underlying human life which gives to events and to persons the power of mutation, of transformation? If one had never before seen a seed, nor heard of its latent life, how difficult to believe that only the cold earth, the warm sun, the descending showers and the gardener's care were needed to cause its miraculous transformation into the growing form, the budding beauty, the intoxicating fragrance of the rose!

Or who can understand the reason why a chance perusal of a book, the presence of a friend or the meeting with a stranger often alters a determined course of action, profoundly affects our attitude toward life, and, not seldom, so nearly reaches the roots of being and the springs of action that never after is life quite the same?[18]

Of course, there were and are those who believe they can reach the state of "knowing" and/or "recognition" of the realm of the "sacred" through the so-called intellectual rationalism. This school of thought is based on the old philosophy of Greece. Two of the major proponents of this school in the Islamic dispensation were the giants Ibn Siná (Avecinna), 980-1037, and Ibn Rushd (Averroes), 1126-1198. Ibn Siná tried "to reformulate the purely rational and intellectual tradition of Helenism, to which he was an eminent heir, for and, to an extent, within the religious system of Islam." [19]

On the opposite side were the Súfís, or the followers of the schools of mysticism and Gnosticism in Islám. The giants in this group include such figures as Saná'í, 'Attár, Rúmí, Ghazálí, and scores of others, who, while they may have had slight differences in their mystic thoughts, were all treading the path of mysticism and religious experience to attain the state of 'Irfán, or true understanding. The controversy between Islamic philosophers who relied upon human reason to explain metaphysical problems rationally and the Súfí-mystics who followed the path of faith and intuition is an historical fact. Each school believed it could attain its goal through its particular philosophy. An interesting story of an encounter between Ibn Siná and his contemporary Shaykh Abú Sa'íd Abi'l Khayr, who was a Súfí-mystic, sheds some light on the matter.

A debate was apparently suggested by the followers of Ibn Siná and Shaykh Abú Sa'íd in an attempt to justify the position of one versus the other—that of philosophy based on reason versus mysticism based on faith.

After a three-day session, Abú Sa'íd's disciples hastened to Ibn Siná and asked, "How did you find our master?" Ibn Siná replied, "Whatever I know he sees." Abú Sa'íd's response to the same question, posed by Ibn Siná's disciples, was "Whatever we see he knows." The Súfí master then reportedly went on to add, "Wherever we glided with ease on the wings of faith we could see your master stumbling to the peak of the mount with the cane of reason." [20]

The Bahá'í Approach

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH says:

Man is the supreme Talisman. Lack of a proper education hath, however, deprived him of that which he doth inherently possess. Through a word proceeding out of the mouth of God he was called into being, by one word more he was guided to recognize the Source of his education; by yet another word his station and destiny were safeguarded. The Great Being saith: Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom. If any man were to meditate on that which the Scriptures, sent down from the heaven of God's holy Will, have revealed, he will readily recognize that their purpose is that all men shall be regarded as one soul, so that the seal bearing the words "The Kingdom shall be God's" may be stamped on every heart, and the light of Divine bounty, of grace, and mercy may envelop all mankind. [21]

One of the meanings of "Talisman" is something producing extraordinary, mysterious, magical, or miraculous effects. The "supreme Talisman" appears to refer to the potentialities, capacities, and abilities of man. These potentialities are the gift of God to man. If the potential is developed through education and used in the proper way, this is man's expression of gratitude to God, which is considered worship. [22] So actually what man does in developing his God-given abilities is his gift to God.

The foundation of man's creation, according to Bahá'u'lláh, is based on knowing and loving God. Knowing and loving God in its broadest meaning is knowledge and love in its greatest sense. Does man have the ability and capacity to attain divine knowledge? Bahá'u'lláh's answer to this question is in the affirmative, for He has written:

Having created the world and all that liveth and moveth therein, He, through the direct operation of His unconstrained and sovereign Will, chose to confer upon man the unique distinction and capacity to know Him and to love Him—a capacity that must needs be regarded as the generating impulse and the primary purpose underlying the whole of creation. [23]

He further asserts that:

Upon the inmost reality of each and every created thing He hath shed the light of one of His names, and made it a recipient of the glory of one of His attributes. Upon the reality of man, however, He hath focused the radiance of all of His names and attributes, and made it a mirror of His own Self. Alone of all created things man hath been singled out for so great a favor, so enduring a bounty.[24]

The latent, potential existence and capacity need, however, to be developed in order to show forth their actuality and become realized, for Bahá'u'lláh tells us:

These energies with which the Day Star of Divine bounty and Source of heavenly guidance hath endowed the reality of man lie, however, latent within him, even as the flame is hidden within the candle and the rays of light are potentially present in the lamp. The radiance of these energies may be obscured by worldly desires even as the light of the sun can be concealed beneath the dust and dross which cover the mirror. Neither the candle nor the lamp can be lighted through their own unaided efforts, nor can it ever be possible for the mirror to free itself from its dross. It is clear and evident that until a fire is kindled the lamp will never be ignited, and unless the dross is blotted out from the face of the mirror it can never represent the image of the sun nor reflect its light and glory.[25]

The removal of dross from the face of the mirror, to which Bahá'u'lláh refers, is beautifully demonstrated in a parable from Jalalu'd Dín-i-Rúmí, one of the great Islamic mystic poets. In his mystic masterwork, the *Mathnaví*, Rúmí speaks of two groups of artists, the Greeks and the Chinese. The Greeks in this story represent the mystics and the Chinese the theologians or rational philosophers. Each group claimed to be superior to the other. The king, hearing their claim, put them to the test. He ordered a large hall partitioned down the middle by a wall. He commanded one group to paint one end of the hall and the other group the other.

The Chinese asked for a hundred colors, which were furnished by the king. The Greeks asked for nothing. They said all they needed to do was "to get rid of the rust." So while the Chinese were using the one hundred colors in their painting, the Greeks shut their door and set to polishing the walls by smoothing and removing all the soil and tarnish.

The Chinese completed their work and reported to the king. "How about the Greeks?" the king asked. Their answer was, "Ours is ready too." The king came to see the paintings of the Chinese—excellent masterpieces without doubt. The king admired them and ordered the intervening partition removed. At first glance the king thought the Greeks had copied the Chinese, which they were not allowed to do. It did not take him long to realize that their work was but a reflection of the Chinese work, which showed up more beautifully upon the clean, polished walls of the Greeks who had only removed the rust from the walls and made it a mirror-like surface. Rúmí's conclusion of this parable as translated by A. J. Arberry is as follows:

The Greeks, my father, are the Sufis; without repetition and books and learning, yet they have scoured their breasts clean of greed and covetousness, avarice and malice. The purity of the mirror without doubt is the heart, which receives images innumerable. The reflection of every image, whether numbered or without number, shines forth for ever from the heart alone, and for ever every new image that enters upon the heart shows forth within it free of all imperfection. They who have burnished their hearts have escaped from scent and colour; every moment, instantly, they behold Beauty.[26]

Now a few words to clarify the notion of "Knowledge." There are many different types of knowledge in various degrees of existence and different aspects of human life. Fundamentally, however, according to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "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." [27] He further refines this thought and asserts that "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?" [28]

Bahá'ís believe that God is an unknown and unknowable essence and, in Bahá'u'lláh's words, "Immeasurably exalted in His Essence above the descriptions of His creatures. He, alone, occupieth the Seat of transcendent majesty, of supreme and inaccessible glory. The birds of men's hearts, however high they soar, can never hope to attain the heights of His unknowable Essence." [29] Therefore it is only through His manifestations that we may know Him. Actually to know the manifestation of God is to know God. This kind of "knowledge," "recognition," or "understanding" in the Arabic language, is referred to as "Irfán."

The word 'Irfán appears in the first sentence of the original text of two of the most important books revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, the Kitáb-i-Íqán and the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. In the Kitáb-i-Íqán Shoghi Effendi translates 'Irfán as "true understanding," and in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas as "recognition." Both translations are correct.

The "Kitáb-i-Íqán"

IN THE BEGINNING of the Kitáb-i-Íqán (The Book of Certitude) Bahá'u'lláh says:

No man shall attain the shores of the ocean of true understanding except he be detached from all that is in heaven and on earth. Sanctify your souls, O ye peoples of the world, that haply ye may attain that station which God hath destined for you and enter thus the tabernacle which, according to the dispensations of Providence, hath been raised in the firmament of the Bayán.[30]

To acquire a knowledge of this kind and to "attain the shores of the ocean of true understanding" a prerequisite is necessary, which is a burning desire to

seek in order to kindle the fire of love. This fire must burn the veils of "self" and purify and cleanse the spirit to enable the seeker to see the truth with the eye of his heart.[31] Bahá'u'lláh hastens to explain "detachment" in a paragraph following the above quoted passage:

The essence of these words is this: they that tread the path of faith, they that thirst for the wine of certitude, must cleanse themselves of all that is earthly—their ears from idle talk, their minds from vain imaginings, their hearts from worldly affections, their eyes from that which perisheth. They should put their trust in God, and, holding fast unto Him, follow in His way. Then will they be made worthy of the effulgent glories of the sun of divine knowledge and understanding, and become the recipients of a grace that is infinite and unseen, inasmuch as man can never hope to attain unto the knowledge of the All-Glorious, can never quaff from the stream of divine knowledge and wisdom, can never enter the abode of immortality, nor partake of the cup of divine nearness and favour, unless and until he ceases to regard the words and deeds of mortal men as a standard for the true understanding and recognition of God and His Prophets.[32]

Needless to say, not only can the words and deeds of men not be the standard for attaining divine Knowledge, but even the human methods used to acquire knowledge of reality are liable to error.[33] Moreover, "true understanding and recognition of God and His Prophets" need a pure and shining heart, the light of which has not been obscured by clouds of prejudice and superstition and defiled by materialistic greeds and carnal desires.

The "Kitáb-i-Aqdas"

THE Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh's Most Holy Book, begins with these words:

The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the recognition of Him Who is the Day Spring of His Revelation and the Fountain of His laws, Who representeth the Godhead in both the Kingdom of His Cause and the world of creation. Whoso achieveth this duty hath attained unto all good; and whoso is deprived thereof, hath gone astray, though he be the author of every righteous deed. It behooveth every one who reacheth this most sublime station, this summit of transcendent glory, to observe every ordinance of Him Who is the Desire of the World. These twin duties are inseparable. Neither is acceptable without the other. Thus hath it been decreed by Him Who is the Source of Divine inspiration.[34]

Besides its spiritual and mystical meanings, a commandment of this magnitude has many aspects and ramifications worthy of close attention. To fathom the depth of a statement of this nature with its divine connotation is beyond our ability. As far as the limited understanding of this writer can comprehend, however, some of its theological and sociological aspects are as follows:

From the theological point of view, the duty of "recognition" of the Manifestation of God is prescribed to all. There is no distinction. Every person is made responsible for recognizing Him, individually and independently.

It implies a challenge of independent and unfettered search for truth which introduces a sense of meaning into the spiritual life of every human being. It also advocates a sense of purpose and implies a sense of justice and freedom. Justice in its deeper meaning has been repeatedly and emphatically mentioned by Bahá'u'lláh as one of the most important aspects of His dispensation; He speaks of it in the following words:

O Son of Spirit!

The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice; turn not away therefrom if thou desirest Me, and neglect it not that I may confide in thee. By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbor. Ponder this in thy heart; how it behooveth thee to be. Verily justice is My gift to thee and the sign of My loving-kindness. Set it then before thine eyes.[35]

Thus to "see with thine own eyes" and to "know of thine own knowledge" bring about an unprecedented freedom in the area of religion which connects all human beings with the Manifestation and with God without an intermediary, such as clergy or priest. Freedom of this nature is the freedom of using all God-given faculties, talents, and abilities—and includes the freedom of thought. Thus a freedom to think and to choose brings an unprecedented dignity which includes the spiritual freedom of man from man.

From the sociological point of view, the command is to know the charismatic Figure Who claims His charisma comes from the highest possible source (God) and to comply with the norms and values promulgated by Him, these being considered sacred norms and values. Another sociological ramification of this commandment is the abolition of religious aristocracy which existed in most, if not all, religions of the past. It is the religious stratification (clergy-laity) based on religious knowledge of which Max Weber says:

In a church organized as an institution, it works out in practice that the requirement of *fides explicita* is limited to priests, preachers, and theologians, all of whom have been trained in dogmatics. Such an aristocracy of those trained and knowledgeable in dogmatics arises within every religion that has been systematized into a theology. These persons presently claim, in different degrees and with varying measures of success, that they are the real carriers of the religion. The view that the priest must demonstrate his capacity to understand more and believe more than is possible for the average human mind is still widely diffused today, particularly among the peasantry. This is only one of the forms in which there comes to expression in religion the class qualification resulting from special education that is found in every type of bureaucracy. . . .[36]

This has been true in all religions of the past, including Islám, which is the latest before the Bahá'í Dispensation. Ibn Rushd (Averroes), the famous Muslim savant, divided members of society into three strata—the philosophers, the theologians, and the common people.[37]

Considering the situation of the world and the illiteracy of the masses in the past, particularly "among the peasantry" to which Weber refers, an aristocracy based on religious knowledge was probably unavoidable. With regard to the ability of the people of the world to understand the Words of God, Bahá'u'lláh, however, asserts that

The understanding of His words and the comprehension of the utterances of the Birds of Heaven are in no wise dependent upon human learning. They depend solely upon purity of heart, chastity of soul, and freedom of spirit. This is evidenced by those who, today though without a single letter of the accepted standards of learning, are occupying the loftiest seats of knowledge; and the garden of their hearts is adorned, through the showers of divine grace, with the roses of wisdom and the tulips of understanding. Well is it with the sincere in heart for their share of the light of a mighty Day![38]

Thus we may conclude that to attain every type of knowledge one must have a proper education. Attaining the spiritual knowledge, which we referred to as "Irfán," "Gnosis," or "mystical knowledge," of the Manifestation of God and His words, one must have "purity of heart, chastity of soul, and freedom of spirit."

May the following prayer of Bahá'u'lláh help us all attain this goal:

I ask Thee, O Ruler of Existence and King of Creation, to transmute the brass of existence into gold by the elixir of Thy Revelation and Wisdom; then reveal unto men by a comprehensive Book that which will enrich them by Thy Riches.[39]

Notes:

1. Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, trans. Laura Clifford Barney, rev. ed. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1964), p. 244.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*, p. 344.
4. Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. Joseph Ward Swain (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1954); Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion, and Other Essays* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1954); Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, trans. A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons (New York: The Free Press, 1947).
5. Thomas F. O'Dea, *The Sociology of Religion* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1966), p.20.
6. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, pp. 24-25.
7. Sacred things and forces, in O'Dea's words, are both physical and moral, human and cosmic, positive and negative; and they are characterized by fear and love, terror and attraction, horror and fascination.
8. Rudolph Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1928), p. 5.

9. Ibid., pp. 12-41.
10. Weber, *Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, pp. 358-59.
11. O'Dea, *Sociology of Religion*, p. 22.
12. Ibid., pp. 23-24.
13. W. Richard Comstock et al, *Religion and Man: An Interaction* (New York: Harper, 1971), p. 444.
14. Otto, *Idea of the Holy*, p. 10.
15. Ibid., p. 8.
16. Evelyn Underhill, *The Essentials of Mysticism and Other Essays* (New York: Dutton, 1960), p. 3.
17. Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, trans. Ephraim Fischoff (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), pp. 169-70.
18. Howard Colby Ives, *Portals to Freedom*, rev. ed. (London: George Ronald, 1962), p. 13.
19. M. M. Sharif, *A History of Muslim Philosophy with Short Accounts of Other Disciplines and the Modern Renaissance in Muslim Lands, I* (Weisbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1963), 480.
20. Muhammad ibn Monavver ibn Abi-Sa'id Abi Taher ibn Abi Sa'id Meyhani, *Asrar-al Tawhid Fi Maghamat-al Shaikh Abou Sa'id*, ed. Z. A. Safa (Tehran: Amir Kabir Publishing Company, 1952), p. 210. The translation of this quotation appears in an unpublished paper by K. Mostofi.
21. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi, rev. ed. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1952), pp. 259-60.
22. For more detail on this subject see Daniel C. Jordan, "In Search of the Supreme Talisman: A Bahá'í Perspective on Education," *World Order*, 5, No. 1 (Fall 1970), 12-20.
23. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 65.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid., pp.65-66.
26. A. J. Arberry, *Tales from the Masnavi* (London: George Allen, 1961), p. 78.
27. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 255.
28. Ibid.
29. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 193.
30. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán: The Book of Certitude*, trans. Shoghi Effendi, rev. ed. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1950), p. 3.

31. For a comprehensive essay on human endeavor and achievement in the realm of mystical experience, see Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys*, trans. Ali-Kuli Khan and Marzieh Gail, rev. ed. (Wilmette, Ill: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1952), pp. 5-36.
32. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, pp. 3-4.
33. For a comprehensive analysis of the methods of acquiring knowledge, see 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 341-43.
34. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, pp. 330-31.
35. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi, rev. ed. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1954), pp. 3-4.
36. Weber, *Sociology of Religion*, p. 195.
37. Sharif, *History of Muslim Philosophy*, pp. 544-47.
38. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 211.
39. Bahá'u'lláh, quoted in Howard Colby Ives, *Portals to Freedom*, p. 13.

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