

A Brief Discussion of the Primal Will in the Bahá'í Writings.

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Following Moojan Momen's introduction and beautiful translation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tafsír-i-Kuntu Kanzan Makhfiyyan (Commentary upon the Hadíth-i-Qudsí: "I was a Hidden Treasure and loved to be known. Therefore I created the Creation that I might be known."),<sup>1</sup> I would like to share some additional Tablets and comments in this area of study. In the Tafsír 'Abdu'l-Bahá has comprehensively dealt with the tradition of the "Hidden Treasure" by explaining the differing viewpoints of the Muslim mystics and philosophers, in particular the school of Ibn al-'Arabí, and presenting the Bahá'í viewpoint that the real meaning of knowledge in this holy tradition is the recognition of the station of the Manifestation of God in every age and that no access is possible in attaining to a knowledge of God's reality or existence. Referring to those mystics who believed that they could attain to a mystical union with the Absolute, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states: "They have desired with petty, divided minds to understand stages and stations that are concealed even from the Universal Mind."<sup>2</sup> It is in investigating what is meant by the "Universal Mind," alias the "Primal Will"--the metaphysical reality of the Manifestations of God--that we may come closer to the Bahá'í understanding of the oneness of existence (wahdat-i-wujúd).

As is exemplified by the Bahá'í ringstone symbol, Bahá'ís believe in three levels of existence. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has explained this in His chapter on the oneness of existence in Some Answered Questions: "The Prophets... believe that there is the world of God, the world of the Kingdom, and the world of Creation: three things."<sup>3</sup> Despite this truth of the Prophets, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says in another Tablet: "The mystics, in general, believe that existence is limited to two conditions: one is God and the other Creation. They believe that God in the inner existence of things and Creation the appearance of things. As for the people

of Truth, existence hath three degrees: God and Command, which is the Primal Will, and Creation. The Primal Will, which is the world of Command, is the inner reality of things and all existing things are the manifestations of the Divine Will, not the manifestations of the Divine Reality and Identity. As to the station of the Godhead, it is independent and sanctified from the understanding and comprehension of created things, leave alone that it penetrateth and is absorbed by the realities of things. His Holiness, the Báb, may my life be a sacrifice unto Him, sayeth that the testimony of this verse: 'The Sea (of existence) is the same as it hath ever been from eternity and the accidents are (its) waves and apparitions,' is complete in the Primal Will, not in the Essence of God." <sup>4</sup>

The Şúfís of the school of Ibn al-'Arabí and the philosophers who have followed in the path of Mullá Şadrá and other Muslim sages have believed fundamentally that God, the Absolute in its absoluteness, has become differentiated into the forms of the creatures, albeit through a series of mirage-like self-manifestations (tajallí). Ibn 'Arabí makes this point in his Fusús al-Hikam: "Everything you perceive is the Being of the Absolute as it appears through the archetypal essences of possible things." <sup>5</sup> In explaining in what manner the Şúfís maintain the "oneness of God" with this apparent contradiction 'Abdu'l-Bahá says: "They believe that God has two aspects: one is the state of absolute sanctity and holiness to which nothing is comparable, and the other is the state of similarity and resemblance." <sup>6</sup> These two aspects of God, as understood by the mystics, correspond to the stages of Ahadíyyat (primary oneness) and Wahidíyyat (unity)--this second stage being that wherein the Divine Names and Attributes come into intelligible existence. It is this second stage wherein "God," as one of the Divine Names, is dependent upon creatures as the objects of knowledge. The Şúfís agree with the Bahá'ís in this respect by maintaining that God in the station of Ahadíyyat has no dependence upon the creatures; however, the difference resides in the fact

that whereas the Bahá'ís believe these two stages to be fundamentally different, the Súfís believe them to be fundamentally the same. They believe that the "Essence" of God is the same as the "essence" of the creatures as a locus for God's self-manifestation, whereas the Bahá'ís believe that the Primal Will, not God, stands in this position.

The Báb in His Risáliy-i-Dhahabíyyih makes this distinction clear:

"They (Mullá Sadrá and the Súfís) have been mistaken. They have taken the effulgence of the Essence upon the existences to be the very being of God. This is why they have erred when they say that the realities are fixed in the Essence. And this they have said to establish the knowledge of God. They say that the Reality of existence is simple to establish the causality of the Essence; and they speak of the relation between the Essence and the acts and attributes, and the unity of existence between the Creator and the created. But all of this, for the people of God, is naught but absolute association.... Even as God hath no need for another besides Himself, likewise He hath no need in His knowledge for the existence of objects of knowledge. In truth, the Essence hath no connection with anything. Verily, the cause of the contingent existences is one creation of God, and it is the Will. God created the Will from itself without a fire coming to it from the Divine Essence. All of the existences were created by the intermediary of this Will, and this Will always telleth of God's own Being and reflecteth nothing but Him. In the contingent existences, however, there is not a single sign which demonstrateth the essence of God, for the Reality of God alienateth all of the contingent existences from His knowledge and the Essence of God rendereth impossible comprehension by all the essences. In truth, the relation of the Will with God is like that of the House (the Ka'bih) with the Supreme Being. This relation is a relation of honor for the creature, but not for the Essence, for God is pure." <sup>7</sup>

In another Tablet of the Báb, the Súriy-i-Tawhíd, this question is further elucidated:

"The third question thou didst pose is about the meaning of the

saying of the philosophers who say: 'From one naught can be created but one.' The essence of this saying is false when the cause referreth to the eternal and absolute essence of God. God hath no connection with anything and never does aught leave His Being. This quality of God (of not engendering and in not being engendered) is proven in all states. If the meaning of the cause is the First Remembrance, that is to say Him Whom God created Himself, then this saying becometh true. What is other than one cannot explain the action of the Essence to be unique. This is the religion of the pure Imáms.

It is in this way that God, in the Hadíth-i-Qudsí, summoned Jonas: 'O Jonas! Dost thou know the Will?' Jonas answered, 'No.' God said: 'The Will is the First Remembrance.' It is not possible that God create a thing from nothing except that thing be unique, for the first rank of the Remembrance is to demonstrate the unity of God. In the beginning of the degree of unity it is not possible to be other than one. Thus the saying of the philosophers that 'the cause of all the existences is the essence of God' is a falsehood. There is no connection between God and His creatures. It is not admissable that the essence of God be a place of change. To be so there must be a similitude between the cause and the effect. Therefore, the truth is this: The cause of things is the First Remembrance that God created from nothing. And He made in it the cause of all the creatures. As the Imám revealeth, upon Him be blessings, 'The cause of things is the Handiwork of God and this Handiwork hath no cause.'" <sup>8</sup>

So far the terms "Universal Mind," the "First Remembrance," the "Will," the "Primal Will," and the "Cómmand of God" have been used to designate that universal reality by which God causes the existence of all things. It has many synonyms in the Bahá'í Writings. In an epistle to Muḥammad Sháh, the Báb declares: "I am the Primal Point from which have been generated all created things." <sup>9</sup> The term "Point," used in this sense, frequently occurs in the Persian Bayán. At the beginning of Váhid III, Báb 12, the Báb confirms that the meaning of the word "Point" is the very being of the

Primal Will (gharad az dhikr-i-Nuqtih, Kaynúníyyat-i-Mashíyyat Avvalíyyih ast). The term "Primal Will" is probably more common. Bahá'u'lláh uses it in the Kitáb-i-Íqán: "...by His wish, which is the Primal Will itself, all have stepped out of utter nothingness into the realm of being, the world of the visible." <sup>10</sup> It is also referred to as "the Word of God, which is the Cause of the entire creation," and "the Command of God which pervadeth all created things." <sup>11</sup> In other words, these various designations all describe what 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in Some Answered Questions, calls "the universal reality," being "the first thing which emanated from God." <sup>12</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá goes on to explain that this "First Mind" or "First Will" precedes time but does not share the essential pre-existence of God, being "nothingness" in relation to God.

As in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Commentary upon the tradition of the "Hidden Treasure" it was shown that the Manifestation of God is the focal point of knowledge, similarly the Manifestation of God is the focal point for the perfect reflection of the Primal Will. "It is the Primal Will which appeareth resplendent in every Prophet and speaketh forth in every revealed Book." <sup>13</sup>

#### Notes

1. See Bahá'í Studies Bulletin, Vol. 3, no. 4.
2. Provisional translation, Makátíb-i-'Abdu'l-Bahá, Vol. 2, p. 52.
3. Some Answered Questions, (1981 US ed.), p. 295.
4. Provisional translation, Makátíb, Vol. 3, pp. 355-56.
5. Cited in Sufism and Taoism by T. Izutsu, p. 93.
6. Provisional translation, Makátíb, Vol. 3, p. 357.
7. Provisional translation from Nicolas' French translation in Le Beyan Arabe, pp. 10-12.
8. *ibid.* pp. 26-27.
9. Selections from the Writings of the Báb, p. 12.
10. Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 98.
11. Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 140-141.
12. Some Answered Questions, p. 203.
13. Selections from the Writings of the Báb, p. 126.