

'ABDU'L-BAHĀ'S COMMENTARY ON THE ISLAMIC TRADITION: "I WAS A
HIDDEN TREASURE..."

During the course of research on Baha'i mysticism and metaphysics, I translated this work of 'Abdu'l-Baha which is one of the most important sources for this study. This is only a working translation but I felt that it was of a sufficient standard to be worth sharing.

In many ways it is suprising that this important work of 'Abdu'l-Baha has not previously been translated [1] as it is his clearest and fullest exposition of many important points. The treatise is all the more remarkable in that 'Abdu'l-Baha was only in his teens at the time that he wrote it while in Baghdad at the request of 'Alī Shawkat Pāshā. It takes the form of a commentary on a number of key expressions out of the famous Islamic Tradition: "I was a Hidden Treasure and loved to be known. Therefore I created the Creation that I might be known." This Tradition is one of that class of Traditions, called Hadīth-i Qudsī, wherein, although the Tradition itself is traced back to Muhammad, it appears to be God Himself who is speaking in the words of the Tradition. The four words or phrases chosen by 'Abdu'l-Baha are: "Hidden Treasure", "Love", "Creation", and "Knowledge". We can surmise that 'Alī Shawkat Pasha was a Sufi and an admirer of the writings of Ibn 'Arabī, for 'Abdu'l-Baha's commentary is replete with allusions to themes in the works of that famous Muslim mystic and philosopher.

In the first section on "Hidden Treasure", 'Abdu'l-Baha writes on the Essence of the Absolute and gives examples to demonstrate how the Attributes of God can be within the Essence and still not result in any deviation from Perfect Unity. Also within the "Hidden Treasure" is the Divine Intellect which is the first manifestation caused by the movement of love within the Divine Essence.

In the second section on "Love", 'Abdu'l-Baha writes of the four stages of Love. In the works of philosophers and mystics in Islam this theme is very common. Perhaps the most well-known work with this theme is the Four Journeys of the Rational Soul by Mullā Sadrā. Baha'u'llah also refers to this theme when he speaks of the four

1. After I had finished the first draft of this translation, I learned of another translation of this work. I am grateful to Hooper Dunbar for sharing with me a provisional translation made by Baharieh Ma'ani in collaboration with himself. It has been very useful in suggesting better alternative translations at several points. I am also grateful for the suggestions of Marzieh Gail and Steve Scholl

pathways of Love in the Seven Valleys (in the Valley of Unity). 'Abdu'l-Baha himself gave a talk on this theme in London in 1913 [2]. What is of particular interest in this treatise is 'Abdu'l-Baha's addition of a fifth stage to the usual four.

In the third section on "Creation", 'Abdu'l-Baha tackles one of the key issues that has divided philosophers (especially Islamic philosophers) over many centuries [3]. The issue at its simplest level revolves around whether the archetypal forms and the quiddities of all created things, being the objects of the knowledge of God, exist within the Knowledge of God (and therefore because the Knowledge of God is an unchangeable eternal attribute, these share in the Pre-existence of the Essence of the Absolute); or the Essence of the Absolute and Its Knowledge are independent of these archetypal forms which were therefore created and came into being (i.e. are not pre-existent). This issue that at first may appear inconsequential and merely a question of the point at which one limits one's definition of God, has in fact many deeper ramifications that have made it a key dividing point between philosophical systems. The first view that these quiddities and archetypal forms are co-eternal with the Essence of God (although at first they have no existence outside the Knowledge of God) is the position of the Peripatetic philosophers such as Aristotle, al-Fārābī, and Ibn Sīnā. It was also followed by Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī. From this view-point, God is totally outside His Creation and there is no resemblance nor any connection between the two. Thus His Essence and His Attributes (such as Seeing and Hearing) are not like our essence and our attributes and any resemblance is in name only. This view-point leads to a rigidly dualistic universe. Its social consequences are a tendency towards ritualism and legalism in ritual practice - i.e. that man's relationship to God is primarily concerned with worship and obedience to His law.

The second view regards all existence as emanating from God and all except God being absolute non-existence. Thus the archetypal forms and quiddities are regarded as having been created and come into being as a stage in emanation from the Absolute. This is the position of the philosophers of the Neo-Platonic School such as Porphyry and Ibn al-'Arabī. The relationship between God and man thus tends towards mutuality. True fulfillment for man from this point of view is to realise and return to his reality as an emanation from God. This is a movement away from strict dualism although many who follow this school cannot be regarded as monists.

2. Paris Talks, London, 1961, pp. 179-81

3. Harry A. Wolfson in "Extradeical and intradeical interpretations of Platonic ideals", Journal of the History of Ideas, Vol. 22 (1961) pp. 3-32, traces some of the history of this issue from Plato, through the medieval Christian and Islamic philosophers, to Descartes and Spinoza.

The social consequences of this are a tendency away from legalism and ritualism towards mysticism and theosophy.

The dichotomy between these two views is not however unique to Islam. The two differing paths of Knowledge (and its concomitant attitude of worship and devotion) and of Love (and the direct sapiential access to truth) are to be found to some extent in every religious tradition. In Hinduism, for example, the first is to be found in the Bakhti tradition and the second in the teachings of Sankara. In Buddhism, the respective parallels are the Zen and the Jodo tradition. In Judaism, Christianity and Islam, there is a strong mystical tradition that can be set against the main tradition of worship and legalism.

'Abdu'l-Baha's resolution of this difference is extremely interesting. Basically 'Abdu'l-Baha, having earlier in this treatise established that no absolute knowledge of God is possible for man, now states that these different philosophical opinions arise from differences within the observer. Some because of their essential constitution view the matter one way and others view it in what appears to be the opposite light (according to which of the Names of God is predominant in their nature). What 'Abdu'l-Baha appears to be saying is that all men's views on this metaphysical issue (and by implication all metaphysical issues) are inevitably and inescapably "coloured" by their essential constitution. This exposition of metaphysical relativism is an extremely important formulation, perhaps a key concept for Baha'i metaphysics. It can be applied to many metaphysical and other problems. There is of course the obvious application to the dichotomy between the monistic and the dualistic views of Reality. However, at another level, and perhaps to bring the issues raised here up to date, the two view-points being discussed here can be seen as to be essentially the same as the dichotomy between the heart and the mind; between intuition and reason as modes of obtaining knowledge; and even, in this day (because of the manner in which science is considered to have monopolised rationality) between religion and science. The idea of one of the Names of God being predominant within an individual is obviously of relevance for a Baha'i psychology. By implication, it may also have implications for a Baha'i sociology for it may be considered that certain cultures have one of the Names of God paramount within them (the West tending towards science and rationality; the East towards intuition and mysticism).

In the fourth section on "knowledge", 'Abdu'l-Baha gives a more detailed analysis of why it is impossible for man ever to attain knowledge of God. He then underlines the idea of metaphysical relativism by asserting that the most that man can ever hope to discern of God is to come to know more fully the signs of God within

himself. He quotes the Qur'anic verse: "Read your own book, your self is sufficient to give an account against you this day [4]". He states that this verse is like the point of a compass. However far man may travel in his search for knowledge of God, ultimately he is only travelling in a circle around the implications of this verse. These signs of God within man are best and most fully uncovered through the guidance of one of those Manifestations of the Divinity who appear upon the earth from time to time. Thus the Knowledge of God referred to in this tradition is the recognition of the Manifestation of God and, under the latter's guidance, fuller knowledge of the signs of God within each individual human being.

The following then is a translation of this treatise [5] beginning after the usual prolegomenon praising God, etc:

PRELUDE:

....And to continue: To him who looks at these lines and understands these indications, it is well known with respect to the request of that traveller upon the paths of guidance, that bondsman of the King of Divine Authority, that seeker of the hidden Divine secrets, that knower of the secret Heavenly signs, that lover of the household and family of his holiness Mustafa [i.e. Muhammad], the favoured friend of the wayfarers and he who has clung to the Firmest Handle of God [urwatu'llāh al-wuthqā] and to the Strongest Rope, 'Ali Shawkat Pasha son of the late Agha Husayn Pasha (may God designate for him whatever He wishes), that he has wished this wayfarer upon the Path to write a brief explanation and a short beneficial commentary upon the Holy Tradition [ḥadīth-i qudsī]: "I was a Hidden Treasure and loved to be known. Therefore I created the Creation that I might be known." In the pearl of each word of this divine song and this heavenly melody, there undoubtedly lie hid unnumbered pearls of hidden knowledge and in the existence of every letter of it, limitless oceans of meaning are concealed. But a sprinkling from that ocean of waves and a drop from that sea may be disseminated on account of the request of friends. And I hope that the explanation of these holy words and heavenly signs may contain the hidden confirmations of the Lord of Might and that His Assistance and unseen Mercy may be made manifest; verily He is the King, the Helper. In the hidden treasures and store-houses of these Heavenly words, the secrets of created things, the cause of the

4. Qur'an 17:14

5. Text used: Makātīb-i 'Abdu'l-Bahā, Vol. 2, Cairo, 1330, pp. 2-55

creation of existing things and the raising up of Contingent Being [6] lie concealed.

Know, O bird of the flower-garden of Divine Unity and nightingale of the garden of detachment, that in order to comprehend this Tradition: "I was a Hidden Treasure and loved to be known. Therefore I created the Creation that I might be known", it is necessary to understand four stations. This Tradition is upon the tongues of all people, be they of the generality or of special rank [7], and is written in all the books and treatises. As for understanding these four stations, the first is "the Hidden Treasure"; the second is the stages and stations of "Love"; the third is the station of "Creation" and similar matters; and the fourth is the station of "Knowledge".

A. KANZ-I MAKHFĪ (THE HIDDEN TREASURE)

Know thou that in Sufi exegesis it is affirmed, with respect to the Unseen Essence [ghayb-i huwiyyat] in the station of Primal Oneness [8], that all names are far from the shore of Its Sanctity and It is

6. Possible Being (imkān or mumkin al-wujūd) is a term in Greek and Muslim philosophy used to distinguish all things that depend upon another for their existence (and the non-existence of which it is possible to postulate) from Necessary Being (wājib al-wujūd) which is the cause of the existence of all else (and the non-existence of which it is not possible to postulate, i.e. God)

7. Khawāss and 'awāmm are terms used by Shi'is to designate themselves and the generality of Muslims (i.e. Sunnis) respectively. If 'Ali Shawkat Pasha was a Shi'i, he would have understood it thus but it is more likely that it served to differentiate those within the mystical tradition of Islam (Sufis and theosophical Shi'is) from those whose principle interest was in the external forms of the religion (i.e. rituals and laws). It would in any case differentiate the learned from the common people

8. Ahadiyyat is throughout translated as Primal Oneness, the undifferentiated, unmanifested unity of the Unseen Essence of the Absolute, to differentiate it from wahidiyyat which is unity manifested in the realm of Divine Attributes

known without Name or Attribute. For the Names of the Absolute [9] are the reflections of [Its] Attributes and the Attributes of the Absolute in that station of Primal Oneness are the same as Its Essence [10] without a trace of difference or distinction - it is even as that King of the Court of Knowledge and Wisdom and that Monarch of the Kingdom of Divine Guidance, His Holiness 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (unto him be greetings and praise) has stated: "Perfect belief in Divine Unity consists in the denial of all His Attributes." Indeed the Essential and Eternal Names and Attributes are in no way to be separated from the Essence of the Absolute but rather, in that station, Names and Attributes are inseparable from one another, nor are they to be distinguished from that causeless Essence. And the realities of the Divine States are not differentiated either conceptually or substantially from one another nor from that undifferentiated [unmanifested] Essence.

For example, there is no [existential] differentiation between the Name 'the All-Knowing' and the [Names] 'the All-Seeing', 'the All-Hearing' and the other Names; nor between these Essential Attributes and the Essence itself; nor between the Realities and Forms [11], which are potential and passive, and these names and attributes. Indeed the Forms and Realities and Quiddities [12] of [all] things are, in this mighty station of Primary Oneness, but stages in that Essence without a trace of deviation [ghayriyyat] from perfect oneness and annihilation.

And that Essence of Primal Oneness, in that most great station in which it is said: "There was God and there was naught else besides Him", is called by the names: the Hidden Treasure, the Hidden Ipseity [Huwiyyat], the Absolute Unity, Pure Essence [dhāt], Absolute Non-specificity, the Hidden of the Hidden, the Primal Mystery, the Absolute Unknown, the Indescribable One, the Undiscoverable One and other Names. To mention what is intended and

9. Hagg - lit. the True One or Reality - although usually translated as God has here throughout been translated as "the Absolute" or the "True One" since Hagg refers to the plane of ahadiyyat (see previous note) whereas the term "God" implies the existence of a Creation (of which it is the God) and therefore refers to a plane of the self-manifestation of the Absolute. See T. Izutsu, Key Philosophical Concepts in Sufism and Taoism, Part 1, Tokyo, 1966, p. 17

10. Dhāt - the essence, that to which attributes [sifat] are attributed

11. A'yān - frequently means archetypes or ideal forms in the Platonic sense - see note 20

12. Māhiyyat - Quiddity; that which answers the question: "what is it?". All things are considered to consist of two aspects: quiddity to give them definition and wujūd (existence) to give them being

described in each of these expressions would unduly lengthen these words.

However, we will mention an example concerning this station so that it becomes clear and evident, although the reality of this station is such that no likeness can be made to that Essence of Primal Oneness for It is above all reasoning and understanding and is greater than anything which may be likened or compared to It.

In contemplating His Essence where is the capacity

So that any similarity can be contained in the
imagination [13]

And thus has it been said: "Naught is there like unto Him [14]." And there are many proofs and evidences thereof. But haply a breeze from the winds of the Sanctity of Primary Oneness and a zephyr from the Paradise of wisdom and understanding may be inhaled by the wayfarers on the path of guidance and the seekers of the mysteries of Reality and perchance the birds of reason and understanding may ascend from the nests of perplexity and bewilderment. For the life-giving wine of the mysteries of reality and understanding can be drunk from the illumined chalice of similes and the delicate goblet of metaphor by those who are athirst in the wilderness of confusion.

For example, consider the dot (or point); how letters and words are folded up and hidden within the essence (huwīyyat, ipseity) and reality of a dot with perfect effacement and annihilation so that no trace can be discerned of the existence of these letters and words nor is there any differentiation between them. Rather they are completely obliterated and utterly annihilated and have no existence except in the essence (dhat) of the point. In the same way the Names and Attributes of God and the Essential Dispositions [shu'ūnāt dhātiyya] [15] are completely and utterly annihilated in the station of Primary Oneness so that not a whiff can be inhaled from them of substantial or intellectual existence [16]. This original point is the 'Hidden Treasure' of these letters and words and they were incorporated and immersed within it and from it they appeared. As that Moon of the heavens of knowledge and understanding and that

13. Rūmī?

14. Qur'an 42:11

15. cf. 'Abdu'r-Razzāq al-Qāshānī, in his definition of ash-shu'ūn adh-dhātiyya, states that this represents the "traces of essences and realities within the Essence of Primary Oneness - like the tree and the branches and the leaves within the datestone." Istīlahāt as-Sūfiyya, Cairo, 1981, p. 154

16. See note 23

Point at the centre of the wheel of Divine Guidance, the all-conquering Lion of God, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, unto him be greetings and praise, has asserted: "All that is in the Torah and the Evangel and the Psalms is in the Qur'an; and all that is in the Qur'an is in the Fatiha [the first sura of the Qur'an]; and all that is in the Fatiha is in the Bismi'llah [the opening phrase of the Fatiha]; and all that is in the Bismi'llah is in the Ba [the first letter of Bismi'llah]; and all that is in the Ba is in the Point [the dot beneath the Ba]; and I am the Point."

And similarly consider the Unitary Concept [ahad]; how all the numbers appear from it and it is in no number since it is the point of origin of all numbers. And the first to be specified and to appear from it is the number 'one' [wahid] and from 'one' all other numbers come into being. So all these numbers are contained in the unitary concept in the most perfect simplicity and oneness. And so it is the 'Hidden Treasure' of all numbers and from it do they appear.

Therefore observe that although all letters and words appear from the point and all numbers from the unitary concept, neither does the primal point descend from its high station nor does the unitary concept come down from its abode of sanctity. Such is the station of the Hidden Treasure well-known and sung out by the Birds that dwell in the Rose-garden of Oneness and trilled by the Nightingales of the Flowering-fields of Detachment [ta'irid].

Within the Hidden Essence, the stirrings of love and the inner yearnings [mayl-i dhātī] necessitated Perfect Burnishing [17] and Clarification [istidlā] (- and the phrase 'Perfect Burnishing' among some of the mystic knowers is the manifesting of the Absolute to Itself in the archetypal forms [al-yān] and the word 'Clarification' is the gazing by the Unconditioned Beauty upon the effulgences of Its own Beauty in the mirrors of Realities and Forms). Therefore the

17. Jalā - polishing or burnishing - refers to one of Ibn 'Arabi's favorite images: the idea that the world of creation is a mirror in which God "sees" Himself; the appearance of man (the comprehensive being, al-kawn al-iāmi) is the polishing of the mirror. See Fuṣūṣ al-Hikam, (ed. A.A. Afifi, Cairo, 1946), p. 48-9; (trans. R.W.J. Austin, London, 1980), p. 86-7. Austin translates jālā as "the reflective characteristic" of the mirror or the "principle of reflection"; see also Izutsu, op. cit., 210-213

Essential Dispositions have, through the Divine Outpouring [18], manifested themselves out of the station of Essence into the station of Divine Knowledge [ḥadrat-i 'ilm] [19]. This is the first manifestation of the Absolute from the Hidden Treasure in the Divine Knowledge. And from this manifestation the Eternal Archetypes [20] came into intellectual being [21]. And each one, according to its inherent capacity, is distinguished from the others in the mirrors of the Divine Knowledge. [22]

And this secondary station is set up along the lines of the first stage, the stage of the Mystery of Primary Oneness. And this [second] stage is known as the Secondary Unknown, Manifested Oneness and the Eternal Archetypes. And the Eternal Archetypes are the Forms of the Divine Intellect, which have not inhaled the breezes of

18. Fayḍ aqdas (literally: most holy emanation); this is an expression particular to Ibn 'Arabi. By it he denotes the dawning of self upon the Absolute, the revelation of the Absolute to Itself in the form of the eternal archetypes. The second stage of this process, fayḍ muqaddas (holy emanation), is the dawning of self upon the archetypes resulting in the concrete actualisations of the Names and Attributes

19. 'Abdu'l-Baha, here and in the next few paragraphs appears, to be using the word 'ilm, Knowledge, in the same sense as 'aql, the Divine Intellect, the Nous

20. For Ibn 'Arabi, the Eternal Archetypes (a'yān thābita) are the first self-manifestation of the Absolute. They are the archetypal forms of all created things coming into the Divine Consciousness. Since their coming into being is an event within the Divine Consciousness, they are thus said to subsist within the Absolute rather than existing as concrete things - hence Ibn 'Arabi's famous dictum - see note 23. See Izutsu, op. cit., pp. 150-187. The Eternal Archetypes have obvious parallels with Platonic ideal forms.

21. Wujūd-i 'ilmī, i.e. existence within the Divine Consciousness, the Divine Mind

22. This paragraph follows the classical stages of the self-manifestation of God. Firstly from the Hidden Essence of the Absolute (the stage of aḥadiyyat) to the stage of waḥdat (the dawning of self on the self) in which the shu'ūnāt dhātiyya (essential dispositions, internal modes of being of the Absolute) become manifest in the Knowledge of God. The third stage (waḥidiyyat) is the stage of the dawning of self on the shu'ūnāt and from this the a'yān thābita (eternal archetypes) become manifest in the Knowledge of God and this is the first stage of differentiation.

existence [23] but have come into being as intellectual existences [within the Divine Consciousness]. And they have become distinct from each other. And this secondary stage is also called the Hidden Treasure because the Archetypes and Realities which are the objects of the knowledge [ma'lūmāt] of the Absolute in the mirror of Divine Knowledge, are also incorporated in the Essence [of the Absolute] in the utmost state of concealment and of simplicity and oneness. For if they were in the state of plurality then one of two states must be extant:

Either they are constituent portions of the Essence or not. For them to be constituent portions then composition [synthesis] is necessary in the Essence of the Absolute. And composition entails contingency (for in order to exist there is a necessity for the constituent portions). And contingency is a condition of Possible Being. And the True One (praised be He) is independent in His Essence.

And if not constituent parts, they must be either pre-existent or created. If pre-existent, then the number of pre-existent beings must be increased and if created then this too is erroneous for knowledge is one of the pre-existent attributes, and knowledge without an object of knowledge is not possible. And so, these objects of knowledge have always existed in the mirror of the Divine Knowledge. And besides it would be necessary for the Essence [of the Absolute] to become the locus of accidental attributes and this also is erroneous.

But some of the mystic knowers, who have freed their gaze from the limitations of the similes and metaphors of the worlds of plurality and have burned away the luminous veils with the Divinely-kindled fire and with sharp sight and penetrating vision have seen the stations of oneness, consider all forms and quiddities and realities and potentialities to be far removed from the shore of sanctity of the Divine Knowledge which is identical to the Divine Essence. If God desires we shall deal with the stages and divisions of Creation in detail later in this treatise [24]. And so this is the stage and station of the Hidden Treasure which is mentioned. And when that Hidden Essence revealed Its Essence to Its Essence and showed forth Its Self to Its Self, the Maiden of Love, which was veiled within the canopy of the Essence of Unity, arose and came forth.

23. This phrase, that the eternal archetypes have not smelled or inhaled the breeze of existence is a famous dictum of Ibn 'Arabi; see Fuṣūṣ al-Hikam, (ed. Afifi) p. 76; (trans. Austin) p. 85; See also Izutsu, op. cit. p. 151-2

24. See Section C

B. MAHABBAT (LOVE)

Know, O thou who art inebriated with the wine of Divine Love and Affection and art intoxicated by the illumined cup of Divine Attraction and Companionship, that the station of Love and Affection soars above the world of computation and description. The birds of reason and thought fall short of understanding it and those who understand the hidden secrets and those who know the symbols of Primary Oneness have not breathed nor drunk one particle from the reality of this divine subtlety and this eternal mystery. For love and affection raised their banner within the Essence of the Absolute prior to the manifestation of the Essential Dispositions from the stage of Primal Unity to the stage of archetypal existence. (And the Hidden Essence became enraptured with Its own Beauty within Itself and this became the origin of all love and yearning and the source of all affection and ardour). This love and affection are identical to the Essence of the Absolute and are not separate from or additional to it. And the Essence of the Absolute is forever unknowable and indescribable. And no rational being, no matter how penetrating his understanding, can achieve knowledge of Its Reality and Being. And even if the birds of reason and thought were to fly in the heaven of the Knowledge of that Essence of Primal Oneness for countless ages, they would not make one inch of progress.

The intellect could penetrate the core of His Essence

If the straw could reach the depths of the ocean [25]

And love and affection which, as a result of the effulgences of this Hidden Divine Love, have been kindled in the heart and soul of the lovers of the Glorious Perfection Affection and have burned away all veils and hindrances with its radiant heat to the extent that nothing is left of the reality of these ones intoxicated with the wine of "Am I not [your Lord]? [26]" and these inebriated and perplexed ones except the remembrance of the Friend. And the banner of Power and Might: "When the Truth appears, error passes away[27]" is elevated upon the hills of these evanescent shadows.

Until a person has drunk from this revitalising divine cup, he cannot know its rapture and until a heart is illumined with this Divinely-kindled fire, he cannot imagine it: "He who has tasted not, knows not." For of course, how can the birds of reason and thought which have never flown up from the lowest abyss of the physical

25. Sand'i,

26. Qur'an 7:172

27. cf. Qur'an 17:81

world soar in the air of the sky of the Celestial Kingdom or in the exhilarating spaces of the Heavenly Court unless, encompassed by the wonders of Divine Mercy and the effulgences of the Grace of God and with the wings of the power of oneness, they fly in the fields of holy detachment until they attain this sweet spring [Kawthar] of the Euphrates and drink of the waters of life and feed upon the fruits of the holy gardens [Paradise].

Some of those who have plunged into the seas of meaning and sailed upon the ark of divine mystical wisdom out of affection for the seekers and out of love for the wayfarers have given a drop from the oceans of meaning and a sprinkling from the clouds of divine understanding on the stages and states of Love. And they have pierced the pearls of knowledge and wisdom with the diamonds of explanation and have designated the stages of Love as being four. And this servant will, in this treatise mention five stages although in the view of this evanescent drop, from one viewpoint, the stages of Love are limitless and countless in number while, from another, they are clearly seen clothed in the garment of oneness. For the variation in the stations of love are from differences of stations and stages and in each world of the worlds and in each stage of the stages there can be seen a magnetism of oneness. Within the grasp of its power is the mutual attraction of the reality of all things and the pulling [together] of the subtlety of Being. And this magnetism of oneness is the station of Love and Attraction (khullat).

If the worlds and stages had an end and could be numbered, Love would also have a fixed and limited number of stages and stations. And it is because of this also that the differences in the stations of love are from differences in stages not in essence or reality. Therefore if you look with a subtle vision, shielding your gaze from seeing numbers and plurality and looking to the greater vision of oneness, you would leave the deadly desert of limitation and attain the shore of the ocean of unity. The pen of possible being has not the power to write in this spiritual station nor does the tongue of the ephemeral world dare to speak in this divine station.

Furthermore some of those who gaze upon the secrets of oneness have sung this divine song and this heavenly sound in explaining the reality of Love: that Love is true attraction towards one's own beauty either in the state of unification [iam'] or separation [tafsil] [28]. That spiritual Love and Divine Attraction is either:

28. Tafsil presumably corresponds to tafriga; see 'Alī al-Jurjānī, Ta'rifāt where under al-iam' wa't-tafriga: at-tafriga is defined as "Whatever relates to man of the obligations of servitude and that which is associated with the condition of being a human being"; and al-iam' as "the manifestations of meanings and of loving-kindness and beneficence that lie within the power of the Absolute". See also the explanation of iam' and farg in T. Izutsu, The Concept and Reality of Existence, Tokyo, 1971, p.11

1. In the state of unification directed towards unification - and that is the Essence of Beauty witnessing Its own Beauty and Perfection within Its Essence, without the intermediation of a locus of manifestation or the mirror of Being. And this effulgence and manifestation of the Essence is within the Essence itself, in the same way that the realities [29] of lovers were concealed in the hiding-place of non-existence but the Essence of Primal Unity hoisted the banner of love and yearning; and the forms of the attracted ones were concealed within the Canopy of [Its] Essence [huwiyyat, ipseity] but the Loved One of Reality became lost in love with Its own Beauty and Perfection.
2. Or from the state of unification towards separation so that that Single Essence gazes upon unnumbered manifestations of the light of Its Beauty and that Hidden Unity visualises Its own peerless Visage in the brilliant mirrors and sanctified places of manifestation.
3. Or from the state of separation towards separation - thus most human beings can see the reflections of the Absolute Beauty in the mirrors of the realities of Possible Being and can see the dawning of the light of the Divine Morn in the places of Manifestation of existent beings. This is the station of which it is said: "We shall show them our signs on the horizons [30]". This is the station of certain knowledge.
 - 3.1. And know that this effulgence may break forth, on certain occasions, upon the lovers of the Beauty of the Peerless One and upon those attracted to the Mighty Presence within the places of manifestation and mirrors. Thus His Holiness Moses (may peace be upon our Prophet and upon Him) saw the glimmerings and gleamings of the effulgences of the Hidden Unity in the "Tree that belongs to neither East nor West" [31] and heard the revitalising call of the Essence of Ipseity from that Divinely-kindled fire. And from this soul-uplifting Divine call and this effulgence from the light of the Divine dawn, the lamp of Love and the light of companionship and affection was kindled in his heart and the veils of separation [ghayriyyat] and plurality between the Revealer and the revealed were burnt away.
 - 3.2. Thus does that King of the Throne of Might and that

 29. i.e. their eternal archetypes [a'yan thābita]

30. Qur'an 41:53

31. Qur'an 24:35

Monarch of the Court of Divine Guidance, His Holiness Imam Hasan (unto him be greetings and praise) say concerning this station:

I have the essence of a knowledge
which were I to reveal it

It would be said to me: this man
worships idols

3.3. And that bountiful cloud, Ibn Farid has said:

Each beauty [malih] is loaned its beauty
[husn] from His Beauty [jamal]

Yea, even the beauty of every fair maiden

3.4. Some of the mystic knowers have called this station metaphorical [ma'āzī] love but it is not that. For metaphorical love is a likeness and an image of this station, because this station is of one of essential singleness and the subtleties of Oneness. And in the terminology of the mystics and knowers has been called witnessed (shuhūdī [32]) oneness.

3.5. Thus it is related that a mystic knower who had a clear vision of this world and the Heavenly Kingdom was passing by a cemetery when someone asked him: "What are you doing?" He said: "The opposite of what people are doing for the people are searching for God and not finding Him and I am searching for something other than God and finding nothing."

4. Or yearning and love is from the state of separation towards unification, and that is the perception and affection of the lovers for the Beauty of that Essence of Unity and Loved One of Reality, purified from the dust polluted by intermediaries and mediators and freed from the turbidity of the places of manifestation and mirrors. The wayfarers in this station look from the plurality of being to True Unity. Therefore they become so immersed and so annihilated in the effulgences of the Ancient Beauty and in the splendours of the sun of the Countenance of the Beauteous Beloved that they become oblivious to all created beings and move away from the realm of Contingent Being until they choose their residence in the that soul-uplifting court of the beauteous presence of the Essence of Unity. From ephemeral drops they turn into eternal oceans. They extinguish the lamp

32. al-Jurjani (op. cit.) under shuhūd writes: "it is the seeing of the True One by the True One". This indicates the witnessing of the transcendent Divine by the immanent Divine manifested within the individual.

of limitation and kindle the torch of oneness. They keep their eyes sanctified from seeing the splendours and effulgences of the Sun of Reality upon the ground but rather they turn their gaze towards the Sun itself in the heavens. Their sight is detached from looking upon a body of water at the reflection of the earth-illuminating moon but rather they gaze upon that illumined orb itself which is in the heights of heaven with limitless light. This is the station whereof it is said: "I turned my face towards He who cleft the heavens and the earth as a true believer for I am not of the idolators [33]." This is the fourth stage of Love.

5. As for the fifth stage, it is that spiritual attraction and that ecstatic love of the lovers of the Beauteous One for the beauty within their own self. This is to be counted as a station and a stage of Affection from the state of unification towards unification because this station is created from Divine [lahuti] elements and has come into being from Heavenly [rabbani] subtleties.

5.1. The Angelic [malakūti] Realities and the Empyrean [iabarūti] Quiddities have no portion from this breeze of the Paradise of Unity and this fragrance of the rose-garden of Ipseity nor have earth-bound souls and limited spirits any share from this holy table. And in this station, the effulgences of pure self-subsistence and absolute freedom shine forth from the Monarch of Primal Oneness within the realities of the kings of the land of oneness. True independence and sovereignty: "A day in which God from His generous wealth makes all independent [34]," occurs in this most mighty and most high stage. And a wayfarer in this stage leaves the wilderness of annihilation and perplexed wandering and comes upon the shore of the boundless ocean and limitless sea: "And in yourselves do you not see? [35]" And he enters the rose-garden of the reality and the garden of the guidance of: "Read your own book, your self is sufficient to give an account against you today [36]." And he sees the glimmering of the effulgences of the Beauteous One shining from the dawn of his own beauty; and he finds the breezes of the Paradise of Reality blowing from the fields of oneness and the gardens of detachment which are green and verdant

33. Qur'an 6:79

34. cf. Qur'an 4:130

35. Qur'an 51:21

36. Qur'an 17:14

within his blessed heart. He has penetrated from pure and evident loss to eternal sovereignty and from complete poverty and destitution to true wealth and eternal possessions. He sees all the [Divine] Names appearing from the dawning-place of his name and he finds all the [Divine] Attributes dawning from the horizon of his essence [dhāt]. He sees his own beauty annihilated in the Beauty of the True One and finds the Beauty of the True One enduring in the beauty of his self. As that sun of the Heaven of Oneness and that moon of the Firmament of Singleness, His Holiness the Seal of the Prophets (may God praise him and give him peace), while in the course of his Night-Ascent [Mi'rāi] of Unity heard from the flute the soul-uplifting call of the Beloved of Reality and the Hidden Essence singing: "Stop! O Muhammad! For you are the lover and you the beloved!" And in the garden of the Earth and of the Angelic Realm and the Heavenly [lāhūtī] Court he sang this Divine melody: "I have with God states in which He is I and I am He except that He is He and I am I."

- 5.2. And in this station the star of limited existence and being is hidden in the setting point of nothingness and annihilation. And the sun of absolute existence raises its head from the dawn of Primal Oneness without a veil and rises. And the unity of the wine-pourer and the wine and the wine-drinker are made manifest. How well has it been said:

The Spirit of the Heart which is
intoxicated by the Holy Goblet

It itself is the wine and it the cup and
it the pourer[37]

- 5.3. Indeed, this most mighty, this most great station is, in the first stage, particular to the Suns of Reality which shine forth from the Divine Day-break - though their dawning is a sunrise that has no setting - and their setting is in the Divine West - and their dusk is not a setting or a descent for the light of their beauty shines forth ceaselessly from the Divine Morn upon the Temples of Oneness and the mid-afternoon sun of their Countenance continues to shine, bestowing spirit upon the realities of detachment. But the effulgences of this station shine forth from these Suns onto the mirrors of the realities of the way-farers and seekers. Thus if the mirrors of the heart be freed from the dust of the worlds of

plurality and limitations then the effulgences of this station will be imprinted upon it. And if the window of the soul and the lamp of the heart become purified and refined through the power of holy souls, the light of Divine Bounty will be kindled within it.

And so, O seeker of the path of guidance, make thy sight accurate and thy vision refined so that you may come to understand, in these five among the stations of Love which have been mentioned, the stations of Love which are incorporated and included among all the worlds, in the state of unification and separation, unification of unification, and separation of separation. And similarly, some of those who dwell among the sanctified signs consider that the Love of the True One for the creatures is the appearance of the effulgences of the Divinity [lulūhiyyat] and the continuance of the attributes of the Heavenly Realm [lāhūtiyyat] in the temples and places of manifestation of the physical world [nāsūtiyya]. The Love of the servant for the Absolute is the annihilation of the existence and the passing away of the attributes of the physical world in Heavenly Perpetuation [bagā-yi lāhūtiyya] and Divine Manifestations. As it has been said: "The love of God for the servant is the perpetuation of the Heavenly Realm in the passing away [fanā] of the physical world. And the love of the servant for God is the passing away of the physical world in Heavenly Perpetuation." And they have abbreviated matters to these two stages. The attribution of Love to the Lord of Might they recognise as reality but its relation to the servant they recognise as metaphorical. For the Love of the Absolute is fundamental and precedes the love of the servants - as it is said in the blessed verse: "And God will bring about a people whom He loves and they love Him [38]."

Furthermore even if this evanescent bird should sing the most wondrous songs in the rose-garden of Attraction upon the branches of yearning until the end of time, he will not reach the end of these stages and stations. Therefore the matter will be cut short at this point.

C. KHILQAT (CREATION)

And as for the station of creation, know thou that created things are of several kinds: some are the creation of the womb and are created in the womb; some are spontaneous creation without an apparent cause like the creatures that are found in fruits; and some come into being in an egg. These are the corporeal divisions of

38. Qur'an 5:54

created beings.

But the inner spiritual creation and the hidden divine emanation is a different creation and another emanation. That creation is of sanctified spirits in the bodies of the believers in the Divine Unity and in the innermost being of the mystic knowers. It is the creation of forms and realities in the kingdoms of heaven and earth. However some of the mystic knowers do not recognise these forms, potentialities [39], realities and quiddities as being created and fashioned for several reasons:

1. Firstly they say that created and fashioned things are originated and originated things are those that do not exist at one point in time and then come into being. But these realities and forms have always been in existence in the mirror of the Knowledge of the Lord of Might. For knowledge without an object of knowledge (the thing known) is not possible. And yet Knowledge is one of the essential attributes [of the Absolute] which is identical to the Essence [of the Absolute] and is pre-existent. Therefore if we were to say that these realities and potentialities have a beginning then we would - God forbid! - be asserting ignorance within the Essence of Necessary Being [the Absolute]. For the existence of knowledge is dependent on the existence of objects of knowledge, and if these latter are originated, it would necessarily follow that knowledge did not exist in the Essence of the Absolute before the creation of objects of knowledge and this is sheer blasphemy.
2. Secondly that by means of rational and traditional proofs it is established and proven that [the concept of] Predestination is erroneous and would require that the Absolute cause oppression and compulsion in Its Creation whereas the complete justice of God is firmly established. Therefore if we say that the True One (may He be praised) has created one being [kaynūnāt] for happiness and another for adversity, then duress and compulsion would be necessary in creation and this despite the fact that, in relation to that King of Existence, the fashioning and creation of all contingent beings are alike. Thus has He said: "You will not see in the creation of the All-Merciful any

39. Qabiliyyāt (literally: receptivities) refers to the eternal archetypes (a'yān thābita) which, as mentioned in note 20, only subsist in the Divine Consciousness but have the potential to receive existence and become concrete existing things, thus they are existents in potentia. It is a term usually associated with the thought of Ibn 'Arabi although he, in fact, rarely used it. It is used in particular by 'Abdu'r-Razzāq al-Qāshānī, one of Ibn 'Arabi's main commentators. Ibn 'Arabi himself tends to use the word isti'dād (preparedness) to describe the same concept. Qabiliyyāt is here translated as potentialities throughout.

40. Qur'an 67:3

difference. [40] And similarly: "He has not created you nor raised you up save as one soul. [41] And since it is clear that the Lord of Might has not created Existence and Contingent Beings through the use of compulsion and duress, therefore He must have created them with whatever is consistent with their potentialities so that there would be no diminution in the complete Justice of God nor in the stage of granting every person his just due. Therefore it is not permissible [to say] that the potentialities exist and the quiddities did not exist and were then brought into being and sought their essential exigencies from either happiness or adversity. For if these quiddities and potentialities are not [existing] things but are pure non-existence, how then can they become recipients of existence when non-existence is not capable of coming into being? For it is not possible for something to be endowed with its opposite.

Therefore by this rational proof, these realities that are sometimes called quiddities, potentialities and archetypes have always had an intellectual existence and are incorporated within the mirror of the Essence of the Absolute in a state of absolute simplicity and unity and not in a state of plurality. For the existence of plurality in the Essence of Necessary Being would be a defect for the reasons that have previously been given.

But some of those who are informed of the hidden signs and ascend to the heights of oneness hold to the opinion that realities and potentialities are created and formed and that archetypes and quiddities are originated and are the effect of prior causes which have not inhaled the fragrances of the sanctified breezes of pre-existence nor smelled the zephyrs of the Gardens of Ancient Might. And in the Paradise of Oneness upon the branches of detachment and the twigs of unity, they have sung this Heavenly [Lahūtī] song and this Angelic [Malakūtī] refrain in discerning the difficulties and removing the obstacles mentioned above concerning the connection of knowledge and the objects of knowledge. They have clung to firm proofs and convincing evidences to demonstrate that Divine Knowledge does not call for nor depend upon objects of knowledge.

1. The first evidence is this that they assert that the essential and enduring names and attributes such as the All-Knowing, the All-Seeing, the All-Hearing, and the other essential attributes are, in the World of Primary Unity, identical to the Essence of the Absolute without a trace of difference or distinction between these attributes and the Essence. This is to such a degree that in the station of Essence, there is no Knowledge without Essence and no Essence without Knowledge. Thus in this station, Knowledge is identical to Essence; Essence is identical to Hearing; Hearing to Seeing; Seeing to Life; and Life is

41. Qur'an 31:28

identical to Essence. There are many references to this exalted matter in the books of the Most Great Shaykh [Ibn al-'Arabi] such as the Futūḥāt al-Makiyya and the Fuṣūṣ al-Hikam.

- 1.1. These numerous and diverse references to that Essence of Unity such as All-Hearing, All-Seeing, All-Knowing are expressions of perfection and designations of one and the same thing. Otherwise in that great and most mighty station no attributes exist apart from the Essence. Thus does that King of the Court of Divine Guidance and that Phoenix of the Dawning-Place of Knowledge and Wisdom, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, may God exalt him, say: "Perfect belief in Divine Unity is the denial of all His Attributes". For if between the Attributes and that Essence of Oneness there were any difference it would be either that they were part of the Essence or they were outside the Essence. If they were constituent parts then composition would be required and that would, according to proofs derived from reason and from the Traditions, be erroneous [42]. And if they were not constituent parts that would require a multiplicity of pre-existent beings and that is also erroneous from both reason and the Traditions. Therefore it is clearly shown that all enduring Attributes are identical to the Essence of Oneness without any distinction or separation and that no-one has understood its innermost Being nor comprehended that Essence of Essences. Eternally, It has been, in the Heights of Sanctity and the Heavens of Glorification, above the understanding of existent beings and sanctified from being comprehended by the minds of creatures. Thus the Sun of the Heaven of Singleness and the Candle of the Night of Oneness, the Quintessence of the Messengers, the Seal of the Prophets [43] (unto Him be salutations and peace) concerning the station of understanding that Essence of Oneness has sung in the expanses of heaven and earth the song of: "We have not known Thee as thou shouldst be known" and on the branches of the Tree of Existence has chanted the refrain: "O Lord! Increase my wonder at Thee".

- 1.2. For knowledge of a thing requires one to encompass that thing and until a person encompasses a thing, he cannot understand its reality. Thus has he said: "They have not been able to encompass anything of His Knowledge" and similarly: "Indeed they lied about what they did not encompass of His Knowledge". And it

42. This point has already been elaborated on page 13

43. i.e. Muhammad

is abundantly clear and evident that no being is capable of encompassing that Essence of Unity.

- 1.3. Since it has been established that knowing the Essence of the Absolute is impossible then knowing the Knowledge which is identical to the Essence of the Absolute is also impossible since [we have already shown that] no difference whatsoever exists between the Essence and the Attributes. And so in this respect no-one can penetrate that Knowledge which is identical to the Essence in order to be able to determine the relationship between the Knowledge of the Absolute and things, whether it calls for objects of knowledge or not; whether it is dependent on the realities and potentialities of things or not. Certainly knowledge without an object of knowledge is not possible in the contingent world, but no-one knows [how the matter stands within] the Essence [of the Absolute]. And concerning the impossibility of knowing the stations and attributes that are identical to the Essence of the Absolute, that Nightingale of the Garden of Glorification and that song-bird of the Rose-Garden of Detachment, the all-conquering lion of God, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (may God honour him) has, with the most perfect and eloquent exposition, disclosed and explained the reality of this lofty matter in a few refined words as follows: "Whoever asks concerning the [Divine] Unity is ignorant and whoever answers is an idolator; whoever has acknowledged this Unity is a heretic and whoever has not acknowledged it is an unbeliever." This means that if anyone asks about the [Divine] Unity which is identical to the Essence of the Absolute and the Unknown Ipseity, this is evidence of the ignorance of the asker. For to ask about something the understanding of which is impossible and unacheivable is evidence of ignorance. While whoever answers this question has created a partner and produced a comparison for that Unique One. For whatever thought or imagination is in his mind is a mere figment of his thinking and imagination and that Mystery of Mysteries cannot be known by anyone or understood by any learned person. Therefore whatever it is that he has understood or imagined, he has made it a partner to the Absolute [and is therefore an idolator]. And whoever claims to have acknowledged that Unity which is identical to the Essence of the Absolute is a heretic for whatever it is that he has acknowledged, it is not the Essence of the Absolute and so in acknowledging it, he has committed heresy. And whoever does not acknowledge the Unity of that Unique Essence after looking at Its traces and works is an unbeliever for if you look at the atoms of the heavens and the earth, you will see all of it as

signs proving the Unity of that King of Oneness.

2. And as for the Second Proof of the fact that the Knowledge of the True One (exalted and praised be He) is not dependent upon objects of knowledge, it is that, according to proofs that have previously been stated, it has been established and proved that Knowledge is identical to the Essence of the Absolute without trace of distinction or difference. This means that the Essence is in Its entirety All-Knowing; the Essence is in Its entirety All-Hearing and so on for all the Essential Attributes.

- 2.1. Some learned persons have said that it is neither the same as the Essence nor other than the Essence for if we say it is identical to the Essence without distinction, this necessitates the negation of knowledge and this is imperfection. But the intention is not that for the worlds of God are infinite and, in each world, the Names and Attributes have a specific effect [hukm]. In the World of Primal Oneness [ahadiyyat], they are identical to the Essence. In the World of Manifested Oneness [wahidiyyat], they are distinguished. These stations of Primal Oneness and pillars of Manifested Oneness and Divinity have always remained and will continue to endure. Thus someone once, in the presence of one of the saints of God, mentioned the Tradition: "There was God and there was naught else besides Him." When that knower of hidden secrets heard this he said: "He is now the same as He has always been."

- 2.2. And so if the Knowledge of the True One (may He be praised) required and called for objects of knowledge and necessitated the potentialities of things, Its Essence would also require that and this is erroneous because exigency and requirements necessarily involve need and need is an attribute of Possible Being and not of Necessary Being and the True One (praised be He) is self-sufficient in Its Essence.

3. And as for the Third Proof, it is that they have said that the knowledge of Possible Being is necessarily dependent on objects of knowledge and is impossible without them. And if the Knowledge of Necessary Being were also dependent on objects of knowledge, it would be the knowledge of Possible Being. It is clear and evident that what is Possible Being cannot be part of the Absolute for no similarity, likeness, comparison or resemblance can there be between Creator and creature, between Necessary Being and Possible Being, and between the Absolute and the creation. For the attributes of the Absolute have always been Absolute Power, Might and Self-Sufficiency while the station of creatures and of Possible Being is that of lowliness, neediness and poverty. And whatever essential attributes are clearly proven for contingent and existent beings, that Essence of Essences and that Reality of Realities is free from them in

the loftiness of Its Purity and the exalted heights of Its Sanctity. What relationship can there be then between Necessary Being and Possible Being, between the Absolute and the creation? Therefore the Knowledge of the Absolute is not dependent on objects of knowledge for it is the knowledge of Possible Being which requires these.

4. And as for the Fourth Proof, they have said that if the forms and potentialities of things exist within the Essence of the Absolute, they must be identical to the Essence of the Absolute and therefore they would not be potentialities or realities because it is clear and proven that the knower is distinct from the object of knowledge. Certainly the knower may be identical to the object of knowledge if this is knowledge by an entity of itself. But if it is not [knowledge] of itself then [the knower] must be distinct from the object of knowledge. And so if these realities and substances are identical to the Essence without any plurality or difference, they cannot be objects of knowledge. In what manner then can they be seeking existence when the Essence of the Absolute exists and has no separate need of existence.

Thus these proofs that have been mentioned show and make evident that the Knowledge of the Absolute is not dependent on objects of knowledge so that people (who believe that it is) cannot maintain that realities and archetypes are not created nor are they the effects of causes (for these latter have brought evidences forward to show that Knowledge is a pre-existent Attribute and objects of knowledge have existed in an intellectual existence within the Divine Knowledge; and pre-existence cannot be associated with the act of creation since something that is brought into being necessitates creation in time).

In brief [44], the matter is that there are two considerations concerning knowledge. The first is its essence and reality and the second is its action. Therefore in mentioning knowledge, the intention might be that Knowledge which is identical to the Essence of the Absolute or the knowledge that is dependent on and pertains to objects of knowledge. The first is pre-existent and identical to the Essence of the Absolute; the second is originated and is identical to created things. Many proofs have been advanced for this matter but this treatise cannot contain them all. Thus in the same way that they consider that knowledge which pertains to objects of knowledge to be originated, they consider the objects of knowledge which are the realities and potentialities of things to be also originated and created. Similarly they have said that the potentialities [qābiliyyāt] and the recipients of the potentialities

44. In the following four paragraphs, 'Abdu'l-Baha expounds on the second of the two positions outlined above at greater length and deals with some of the objections to the second position that were raised under the proofs for the first position.

[magbūlāt] came into being and were created simultaneously. For example it has been stated that all things are composed of two elements: the "Fashioner" [qābil] and the "Fashioned" [magbūl]. By "Fashioned" is meant substance [mādda] and primary matter [huyūlā] and by "Fashioner" is meant the form and shape which confines and limits the primary matter from its state of indefiniteness and freedom to the courtyard of limitation and definite form. For example, letters and words are composed of two things: The first is the substance which is ink and pencil-lead and is the "Fashioned" while the second is the forms and features of the letters and words which are the "Fashioner". Now this specific substance and this specific form were created simultaneously although the general substance was created before the specific form. It is clear that, before the existence of this specific form and shape, the ink had an external existence which had no specific form or shape and had the ability and potential to assume the shape of any letter or word and was not restricted or specified to a particular shape or form. Similarly, the general shape and form had an existence before substance specified them since before being specified by substance (which is ink or pencil-lead) the general shape and form of letters and words had a mental existence in the mind of the writer. Moreover, general form and general substance were also created simultaneously. For it is not possible for a thing to have an external existence and not to be formed into a shape because substance and primal matter in order to exist need shape and form; while shape and form in order to appear need substance. Thus has it been said:

Substance needs form to endure

In attaining shape it has imprisoned form

This is not a false circular argument. It is usually known as an interdependent [mutasādiqān] or connected [mutadāyifān] argument. For a false circular argument is one where one thing is dependent on another which is in turn dependent on the first in one or two stages. Since it has been shown that specific substance and specific form were created simultaneously as also were general substance and general form, therefore potentialities and their recipients come into being at one and the same time and neither precedes the other except in essence.

And as for [the objection] that has been mentioned previously concerning the fact that if [the concepts of] bringing into being and origination become attached to realities and potentialities, it becomes necessary to postulate compulsion and force in the creation of the True and Self-Sufficient One [45]. And this would deny the complete Justice and all-embracing Mercy of God. For if the Absolute were to create one potentiality from Sijjin [the substance of Hell]

45. See p. 21

and another from 'Aliyyin [the substance of Heaven], the Divine Justice would not be manifested. This is perfectly true but those who maintain that realities and potentialities are originated hold that the creation and bringing into being and action of the Absolute is the same with respect to all originated and created things without any difference or distinction. But originated things and done things [actions] have each accepted a degree of existence according to their own pleasure and desire. For example with respect to the sun and its rays, the degree of its effusion and action with respect to its rays is identical. And yet the rays according to their own desire and pleasure can be found hundreds and thousands of miles from the sun while some encircle close to the sun. Therefore notice that the fact that rays are scattered from the sun to far and near does not mean that the sun has arranged some of them to be near and some of them to be distant but rather in bestowing existence it makes no distinction or augmentation with respect to any. It has manifested all with the same effulgence. But each, according to its own desire, has accepted a particular station and status.

Similarly for [the objection] that has been mentioned above [46] that the realities of existing things were absolutely non-existent, how could they have come into being. For non-existence has no potential to exist just as it is impossible for something to be described by its opposite. They have replied that these realities and potentialities were not absolutely non-existent but were in a state of contingent existence, having potential existence but not having substantial existence. The difference between substantial existence and possible existence is great. To mention it further would prolong the matter unduly.

Thus some of the mystic knowers who have ascended to the Heaven of meanings have recognised forms, realities and potentialities as pre-existent and unoriginated. And some of those informed of the path of knowledge and wisdom consider quiddities and realities to be originated and created. And this servant has given the expositions and evidences of both parties in the clearest possible manner in this treatise. But to this servant all these expositions and questions, stations and states are complete in their own station without defect or flaw. For although the object being viewed is the same, nevertheless the viewpoints and stations of these mystic knowers are different. Each viewpoint, with respect to the person who is in that station is perfect and complete.

Know thou, O lover of the All-Glorious Beauty, that differences between the statements of the saints is on account of differences in the effulgences of the Names of the Absolute and variations in Their places of manifestation. For in the being of every one of the mirrors of the Attributes of the Absolute and in the reality of each locus of the manifestation of Absolute Self-Sufficiency, one of the

46. See p. 22

Names of the Absolute is King over the rest of the Names. Moreover humanity is honoured by the cloak of: "We have created mankind in the best of forms [47]" and has put on the spiritual garment of: "And praised be to God the best of Creators. [48]"

The True One (praised be He) has manifested every created thing through one of His Names. Thus some of the mystic knowers have said that the angels are the manifestations of the Praiseworthy One and the Holy One while devils are the manifestations of He who leads astray and He who is proud. Similarly everything else is each one under the revelation of one of the Absolute's Names. And if this Divine Subtlety and this Heavenly Refinement be separated for one instant from a thing, it would become absolute nothingness and complete non-existence.

But humanity is the dawning of light, which is to say that it is the beginning of the Day of Oneness and Guidance and the end of the night of plurality and loss. It is the mirror with the disposition to reflect all of the conflicting and opposing Names and is the source of the revelation of all of the Attributes of Divinity and Lordship. For the world of humanity is the world of the perfection of the words. Thus it is that it has been said: "God created Adam in His image"; that is to say in the form of His Names and Attributes. However although he is the dawning-place of the manifestation of all the Names and Attributes, one of the Divine Names is manifested most strongly and appears most intensely [in each person]. Thus his being originates from this Name and returns to it. The summary of the matter is that some of the saints of God, since they have seen the rays of the light of the Eternal Beauty with the eye of perpetuity in the heights of transcendence [tanzih] and the heaven of sanctity [tagdis], praise and sanctify the Essence of Absolute Unity above all of the stages [shu'unat] that pertain to the world. For in the being of these heavenly figures, the Names of "Sanctity" and "Transcendence" have shone forth. And some of the knowers of the Hidden Secrets are the manifestations of the names "Divinity" and "Lordship". Thus it is that in this station, they do not see the Lord of Lords without His subject creatures, nor the Creator without a Creation, nor the All-Knowing without an object of knowledge.

And some of those who know the secrets of Primal Unity, although in their reality and innermost being one of the Divine Names is strongest yet in their being a reflection exists and a light is apparent of every Name of the Absolute and every Attribute of the Self-Sufficient One. For these, in the station of absolute transcendence and complete sanctity whereof it is said: "There was God and there was nothing besides Him", see that Essence of Primal Unity as being pre-existent in both Essence and Attributes, free

47. Qur'an 95:4

48. Qur'an 23:14

from the existence of objects of knowledge and from the realities of existent beings. In this station, they consider all except God to be absolute non-existence and complete nothingness. Thus it is that, in this station, they regard realities, existent beings and contingent beings as originated and do not consider anything as pre-existent except the Essence of the Absolute. In another station which is the station of the manifestation of the Name "All-Knowing" and the Names of "Divinity" and "Lordship", the realities of things are considered to be pre-existent and knowledge dependent on objects of knowledge.

O Wayfarer in the Paths of Guidance! Conceal yourself in the setting-place of annihilation and self-effacement [fanā] so that from the dawning-place of existence and perpetuation [bagā], you may shine forth; don the garment of poverty and dearth in all save God so that you may emerge adorned with the robe of the Mercy of the All-Mighty; fly in the air of love and attraction so that you may ascend to the heaven of knowledge and wisdom; cleanse your eyes from the dark dust of earth and heaven and with sharp sight and the All-Seeing Eye of God, look upon the new and wondrous Divine Creation so that you may see these hidden secrets and concealed Divine mysteries without veils and impediments and may enter the Paradise of Primal Unity, which is the station of the unification of all plurality, seeking to return to true oneness. This is the portion of those have associated with holy souls. Therefore open up your self, your soul, your heart and your innermost being to this spring from which flows the Salsabil of the Wisdom of God the King, the Mighty, the Bounteous.

D. MA'RIFAT (KNOWING)

As for what is intended by Knowing, know thou, O wayfarer upon the path of guidance that the path to knowing the innermost Essence of the Absolute is closed to all beings and seeking and hoping for this station is not acceptable. Never will the spiders of vain imaginings weave their web upon the branches of the knowledge of the reality of the Almighty, Omniscient One; nor will the flea in the dust circle about the stars of the heavenly spheres. How can the reality of non-existence ever understand the ipseity of being? How can utter annihilation [fanā] be informed of the essence of eternity [bagā]? For the subtleties of the realities of essences of existent beings and the wonders of the immaterial essences of Possible Being have been created by a word of His Command and one of His Verses and have come into being through one ray of the effulgences of the Sun of His Will. And if those who wish to ascend to the heaven of mystic knowledge and climb to the kingdom of wisdom and certitude were to fly towards the eternity of that Essence of Primal Oneness in the never-ending air of the knowledge of the being of that Essence of

Essences, they would not advance one cubit nor penetrate to the reality:

All understanding on lame donkeys [travels]

While the True One rides the wind, flying like an arrow

This is why the Lord of the First and Last [Muhammad] has considered that expressions of inability and poverty concerning this matter are perfect knowledge and the apex of wisdom. He has counted this ignorance as the essence of knowledge. Thus has he said: "We have not known Thee as thou shouldst be known" and similarly: "O Lord! Increase my wonder at Thee!".

In this station, no truth can be found except utter bewilderment and absolute confusion. Because for one thing to understand another depends on two things:

First is encompassment. This means that until one thing encompasses another, it cannot understand its inner nature. And it is well-known that no-one can encompass the Essence of the Absolute in such a way as to penetrate Its true nature or to inhale a fragrance from the garden of the knowledge of the reality of Its Essence. Knowledge and understanding can never be achieved without encompassment.

Secondly is similarity and likeness. Until one thing can be likened to something else its reality can never be imagined. For if one lacks its stages and worlds, how can one think or imagine it. For example, animals, vegetables and minerals can never imagine the reality of man. For with regard to [their] realities, there is not nor has ever been any similarity or comparison between mankind and these types of matter. And this is sufficiently clear and evident proof that, for the Essence of the Absolute, there is not nor ever has been any likeness or similarity. For according to the philosophers, similarity is when there is identity of qualities. And until two things agree with respect to their qualities, they cannot be said to be similar. For example, bright shining day can not be likened to dark gloomy night and a bright burning fire cannot be compared to frozen waters. For they are not similar in any quality such as their brightness and darkness, their burning or their crystallisation. But if you were to say that this red ruby glitters like a lighted lamp, this similarity holds for they match each other in their quality of shining. Moreover qualities are accidents which are conditions and non-essentials of bodies. And it is clear and evident that the Essence of the Absolute is not a body that can become the locus for accidents. Nor can a correspondence in Its qualities be imagined so that any similarity can be discovered to It and that similarity bring about an understanding of the true nature of the Essence of the True One (praised be He) and penetrate His reality. Exalted be the True One above what those that describe Him have said of His Loftiness and Greatness!

Therefore the meaning of Knowing in this noble Tradition is not and never has been the knowledge of the true nature of the Absolute for that is beyond the province of Possible Being. Rather it is the knowledge of the traces and effulgences of that Most Holy and Forbidden Mystery. For however much detached minds and pure souls seek to penetrate the worlds of Inner Knowledge, their understanding will never penetrate more than that station which is a sign pointing towards the Monarch of Primal Oneness which He has placed as a trust within the reality of man. And however much they may fly with triumphant wings in the limitless space of what is knowable and observable, they will read naught but the letters of the book of their own selves. Thus it is that He has said: "Read your own book, your self is sufficient to give an account against you today [49]." For example, consider a circle; however much a compass moves, it can only move around the point which is the centre of the circle. This illumined verse, in the reality of angelic souls, has the same role as that point, for all of the senses and understanding of man revolve around that Divine verse. But this verse, shining forth from the Sun of essence, this trust from the Monarch of Primal Unity is hidden and concealed within the veils and clouds of the self just as the luminous flame is hidden and concealed invisible within the candle or lamp before it is lit. And so while this light of the firmament of Unity is concealed beneath the horizon of the reality of man, no-one is aware of the Divine states which are hidden beneath of the reality of man.

Thus it is that when the Sun of Divine Essence rises and shines forth from the dawning-places of eternity [gayyūmiyyat], those souls who have attained the knowledge of the rising-places of Oneness and the Dawning-places of the Divine Morn will be educated under the shadow of their instruction [50] until that verse of the All-Merciful shall, like the dawning of light, raise its head from out of the reality of those assured souls and raise its banner atop the flag-pole of the heart. And these Dawning-Places are the Prophets and Holy Ones of the Absolute; from this horizon, the Sun of Reality shines out over all things with unlimited light.

And the wayfarer, when he attains this most mighty and most lofty station, becomes the place of manifestation of the hidden Divine secrets and the dawning-place of the concealed Heavenly light. At each instant he enters a wondrous paradise and at every second he is fortified with a new blessing. He observes within his joyful breast, the Hidden Guarded Tablet within which is concealed the secrets of what has been and what will be. His illumined heart shall become a pure mirror reflecting the images of all the worlds. All the veils of the worlds of plurality and oppression he will burn away with one flame from the fire of the love of God.

49. Qur'an 17:14. See Section B.

50. i.e. when the Prophets or Messengers of God appears, those souls who recognise them will be educated by their teachings

And so the meaning of Knowing in this Holy [qudsī] Tradition is recognising the Manifestation of the Absolute in the holy Dawning-Places of Primal Unity, that is to say the Prophets and Holy Ones. Otherwise the true nature of Its Essence has never been nor will ever be knowable to any soul.

O thou wayfarer upon the path of the Beloved, know thou that the fundamental purpose of this Holy Tradition is to mention the stages of the appearance and concealment of the Absolute within the thrones of Reality which are the Dawning-Places of the Grandeur of Its Essence [huwīyyat]. For example, before the kindling and manifestation of the fire of Primal Unity by itself and for itself, the totality of the manifestations are within the Invisible Essence. This is the station of the "Hidden Treasure". And when that blessed tree is lighted by itself and for itself and that Divinely-kindled fire is alight by its essence [dhāt] for its essence, this becomes the station of "and I desired to be known." And when there has shone forth, with all the limitless Divine Names and Attributes, from the Dawning Place of Creation [ibda'] upon and for the sake of Possible Being, that is the station of the appearance of a wondrous creation and a new handiwork which is the station of "and so I created the Creation." And when holy souls have burned away the veils of all worlds and the trappings of all degrees and have hastened to the station of witness and attainment and have achieved knowledge of the Place of Manifestation and come to the most great sign of God within the core of their being, at that instant, they bear witness to the cause of the creation of all Contingent Being, the knowledge of God.

Therefore it is clearly proven that the meaning of Knowledge is the recognition of the Manifestations of Primal Unity for all stages and stations are made attainable by the favours of these Holy Figures. These gates have always been open to the faces of the servants but the people have deprived themselves of the bounties of the day of reunion through their pre-occupation with false matters. Thus in these days the Sun of Spiritual Guidance [or Spiritual Dominion, vilāyat] is dawning forth and is resplendent from the All-Glorious [abḥā] Horizon and is speaking these Divine words: "The Primal Point has been cut off and the Divine Alif has arisen and the Dominion of God, the Help-in-Peril, the Self-Subsisting has appeared." But all are heedless of Him and are pre-occupied with their own desires.

And by God besides Whom there is no other God, if anyone were to inhale a breath from this garden, he would strive to obtain a portion from this limitless ocean. But not in these days. So much are people veiled from the Essence of the Desired One that it is beyond mention. No pre-eminence do they recognise except in the acquisition of ephemeral, worldly goods and no glory do they desire save in collecting perishable trifles. Far have they fled from the mighty and secure fortress and in the den of the spider - the flimsiest of homes - have they sought refuge. For a putrid drop of brackish water, they have left behind billowing oceans of sweet

water. From the shining of the most mighty, the most lofty Light, they have turned heedless to the darkness of blackest night. And this despite the fact that at every instant they can clearly see the worthlessness of this heap of dust. And, by God, if for less than a twinkling of an eye, they were to reflect, assuredly they would pass like bright lightening beyond this created world and what is in it.

And besides this they have desired with petty, divided minds to understand stages and stations that are concealed even from the Universal Mind. And when these stages cannot be contained in the narrow defiles of their infirm minds, they deny them and this despite the fact that their limbs, organs and all their component parts testify to the truth of these stages and stations.

God willing, we are hopeful that from the holy breaths of the All-Merciful which are manifest from the Right Hand of Praise, souls will be gathered under the shelter of the True One who will, with one step, pass beyond the Sadratu'l-Muntahā of the worlds of Mystic Knowledge. "And that is no great matter for God [51]."

How pitiful and unfortunate is it for mankind that it has remained bereft of the most great bounty in this season of the Divine Springtime when the Trees of Paradise are adorned with the leaves and buds of wisdom and the nightingales of the gardens of reality are singing with the most wondrous melodies upon the branches of the Tree of Tuba and the Universal Monarch is rending the veils and burning away the trappings in the gathering of the nightingales of the Sun. Well is it with those who have attained!

O Friend! Cast off these broken and mud-encased wings that from ancient times have mimicked the world so that with the wings of the power of unity you may fly upwards into the wide-open spaces and the inaccessible heavens. Strive that you might benefit from the wondrous table that has descended from the heaven of Reality and eat from the holy fruits of the Tree that is neither of the East nor of the West. These birds of the nests of perplexity are occupied with another bewilderment and these wanderers in the path of the Beloved have another attraction in their hearts.

Give four invocations for what was and what is to be and resolve upon the city of hearts. Close the eye to all but the Friend and gaze upon the Beauty; purify the hearing from all utterance so that you may hear a wondrous tune from the flute of the family of David.

O God of giving and of grace!

O Knower of the secrets of my heart and soul!

At dawntide, my soul's companion Thou

Knowing my failures and my searing griefs

51. Qur'an 35:17

Who hath but for a moment turned to Thee
Save Thee no other comforter can see

That heart that does not burn for Thee will turn to blood
Better blind that eye that weeps not for Thee

O Mighty One! in the dark and gloomy night
The thought of Thee is a bright lamp in my heart

Out of Thy Bounty breathe in my soul a breath
Until nothingness becomes eternal life through Thy Grace

Look not upon my lack of worth and use
Look only upon Thy Grace, O Bounteous One

Upon these birds with broken wings and plumes
Bestow strong pinions and feathers new [52]

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Third Draft
26 October 1985

52. Prayer of 'Abdu'l-Baha

SOURCES OF QUOTATIONS IN 'ABDU'L-BAHA'S COMMENTARY ON THE
ISLAMIC TRADITION: "I WAS A HIDDEN TREASURE..."

I am grateful to Dr. Vahid Rafati who has provided the following further information regarding the sources of some of the quotations and passages of poetry cited by 'Abdu'l-Baha in his commentary on the Islamic tradition: "I was a Hidden Treasure..."

p. 7: "I was a Hidden Treasure...." - see Badi'u'z-Zaman Furuzanfar, Ahadith-i Mathnavi, Tihiran 1347, p. 29 [1].

p. 8, 1.7: "Perfect Belief in Divine Unity..." - This tradition is given in a slightly variant form by Shaykh-i Baha'i in his Kashkul, Rum, n.d., vol. 2, p. 450: "Complete (tamam) Belief in Divine Unity..." [2].

p. 9, 1.6 up: "There was God..." - Muhyi'ud-Din Ibn al-'Arabi gives this Tradition in a slightly variant form; Futuhat Makkiyya, Cairo 1972, vol. 1, p. 53.

p. 10, verse: "In contemplating..." - Jalalu'd-Din Rumi, Mathnavi, Tihiran 1357, p. 13 [3].

p. 11, 1.3: "All that is in the Torah..." - Sayyid Kazim quotes this in a slightly variant form: "All that is the [Surin of] al-Hamd is in the Bismillah..." in Sharh al-Gasida al-Lamiyya, Tabriz 1272, p. 78.

p. 14, verse: "The intellect could penetrate..." - from Sans'i

p. 14, 1.3 up: "He who has tasted not..." - Arab proverb, see A. Dihkhuda, Antbal wa Hikam, Tihiran 1363, vol. 4, p. 1748.

p. 17, verse: "I have the essence..." - Shaykh-i Baha'i gives this verse in a variant form and attributes it to Imam Zaynu'l-'Abidin; Kashkul, Vol. 2, p. 149.

p. 17, verse: "Each beauty..." - Ibn al-Farid, Diwan Ibn al-Farid, Beirut 1962, p. 70.

1. Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i also comments on this Tradition in Sharh ar-Zivara al-Jami'a al-Kabira, Kirman, n.d., vol.4, p. 245-6.

2. Yet another variant occurs, quoted by Ibn Babuya in Kitab al-Tawhid as part of a lengthy oration by Imam ar-Rida: "Conformity with (nizam) Belief in Divine Unity...". Cited in Jawad Tana, Rushd-i Hikmat dar Islam, Tihiran, n.d., p. 271-3, 304-308.

3. R.A. Nicholson, The Mathnawi of Jalalu'ddin Rumi, Cambridge, 1925, Text: vol. 1, p.10; Translation: vol. 2, p. 10. He translates it thus: Where is room in the imagination for His essence, that the like of Him should come into the imagination.

p. 19, 1.20: "I have with God states..." - see A. Ishraq-Khavarī, Gamūs-i Inan, Tihiran 122, vol. 4, pp. 1202-3. [4].

p. 23, 1.12-13: "Perfect belief in Divine Unity..." - see supra, p. 9.

p. 23, 1.10 up: "We have not known Thee..." - Fadil Mazandarani in Amr wa Khalf, Tihiran 122, vol. 1, p. 35 states that Shaykh-i Baha'i cites this in his Arba'in as being from Sayyid al-Bishr.

p. 23, 1.8 up: "O Lord! Increase my wonder..." - 'Ali ibn 'Uthman al-Hujwiri, Kashf al-Mahjub, Tihiran 1979, p. 353. Also Hakim Sana'i Ghaznawi, Mathnawiha-yi Hakim Sana'i, Tihiran 1360, p. 247.

p. 25, end of para. 2.1: "There was God..." - see supra, for p. 9.

p. 25, end of para. 2.1: "He is now..." - Muhyi'u'd-Din Ibn al-Arabi, gives this Tradition in a variant form; Futuhat Makiyya, Cairo 1972, vol. 1, p. 129 [5].

p. 29, 1.20: "God created Adam..." - 'Abdu'r-Rahman Jami quotes this tradition in a variant form in Naqd an-Nusus fi sharh Naqsh al-Fusus, Tihiran 1308, pp. 3, 93.

p. 29, 1.3 up: "There was God..." - see supra, for p. 9.

p. 31, verse: "All understanding..." - Jalalu'd-Din Rumi, Mathnawi, Tihiran 1360, p. 582.

p. 31, 1.8: "We have not known Thee..." - see supra, for p. 23.

p. 31, 1.9: "O Lord! Increase my wonder..." - see supra, for p. 23.

p. 33, 1. 15 up: "The Primal Point has been cut off..." - from the writings of Baha'u'llah similar to what is in the Commentary on the Surah of Wa'l-Shams, see Majmu'a Alwah Mubarakah Hadrat-i Baha'u'llah, Cairo 1920, reprinted Wilmette 1978, p. 4.

M. Momen

31st March 1986

4. On this and the previous Tradition: "Stop! O Muhammad!...", see also "Tablet" of Baha'u'llah in Majmu'a Alwah Mubarakah Hadrat-i Baha'u'llah, Cairo 1920, reprinted Wilmette 1978, p. 340-41; also to be found in Gleanings from the writings of Baha'u'llah (trans. Shoghi Effendi), London 1949, p. 66; Wilmette 1963, p. 66-7; Persian text: Muntakhabat az Athar-i Hadrat-i Baha'u'llah, Langenheim 141, p. 51.

5. On this and the previous Tradition quoted, see also Gleanings from the writings of Baha'u'llah, (trans. Shoghi Effendi), London 1949, p. 150; Wilmette 1963, p. 150; Persian text: Muntakhabat az Athar-i Hadrat-i Baha'u'llah, Langenheim 141, p. 102.