



BICENTENARY CELEBRATION OF
BIRTHDAY OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH
REMARKS BY
WILLIAM DAVIS, OCTOBER 22, 2017



William E. Davis

CELEBRATION OF BICENTENARY

RENO, NEVADA OCTOBER 22, 2017

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We join millions of Bahá'ís in over 130 countries who are celebrating the birthday of Bahá'u'lláh today.

It has been 200 years since he was born in Persia.

Coming from a family of distinguished lineage, He nevertheless, rejected the life of politics and material well-being. Beginning with his embrace of a new religious movement calling to the end of the Islamic cycle and the beginning of a new stage in humankind. He was imprisoned for His support and while in prison the Maid of Heaven came to him telling him He had a great mission to fulfill.

“I was but a man like others, asleep on my couch, when lo, the breezes of the All Glorious were wafted over me, and taught me the knowledge of all that had been. This thing is not of Me but from the One Who is Almighty and All Knowing. And He bade Me lift up My Voice between earth and heaven, and for this there befell Me what hath caused the tears of every man of understanding to flow.”

For the next 40 years, deprived of all worldly comforts and material support, He was exiled by two despotic monarchs, and finally imprisoned in the fortress of Akka in Palestine.

Throughout His life, He bore His suffering willingly with forbearance, and with compassion for his tormentors.

The appearance of a prophetic figure has given rise to ferocious opposition from those in power. In spite of hardships, He was never silenced and His words spoke the voice of insight, diagnosing the worlds ills, He would warn the rulers of the world about forces that would ultimately sweep them from their thrones, words that leave one's soul uplifted, awed, and transformed.

He addressed the worlds concerns about justice and poverty, established the equality of men and women as a spiritual principle and a foundational dimension of all human development, and He insisted that prejudice in all forms must be replaced with the recognition of the oneness of humanity as

the anchor to all future human development. He stated that science and religion are fundamentally in harmony.

Bahá'u'lláh diagnosed the major ills of modern civilization as materialism. Materialism has displaced the recognition of our true nature. We are not human beings having a spiritual experience rather we are spiritual beings having a human experience.

Materialism blots out our willingness to see our fellow human beings as members of the same family. Materialism compels us to see that our purpose in life is to seek our own enjoyment. It blinds us to the needs of others.

Bahá'u'lláh raises to the status of worship deeds done to assist others. He says work done in the spirit of service to others is also worship.

He calls on all peoples to embrace as the single most important organizing principle for all human affairs the establishment of the oneness of humankind. He says the purpose of religion in this day is to establish the oneness of humankind. The unification of the whole of mankind is the hall mark of the stage of maturity which human society is now approaching. Unity of family, of tribe, of city state, and nation have successfully been established. World unity is the goal towards which a harassed humanity is striving.

In a passage in Ezekiel in the Bible, it says "I will give them one heart". Bahá'u'lláh says the well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until unity is established.

How can we continue to have a world with such great disparities? Why should self-interest continue be the dominant characteristic of our age? Are we not able to see the horrors in the faces of the children, mothers and families who have suffered so much in fleeing their war-torn countries. Or, not recognize the plight of those who do not even have water to drink as a result of the hurricane?

He asks us to see the world through the eyes of others. His plea is for humankind to look for those things that bind us together not divide us. In fact, He says, if in the name of religion, hatred and strife are promoted, it is better to not have it at all. True religion can be known by its fruits, its capacity to inspire, to transform, to unite, to foster peace and prosperity. "The best beloved of all things in My sight is justice, turn not away

therefrom if thou desirest Me.”

Deep in the words of Bahá'u'lláh are discovered a new set of laws and moral imperatives to liberate the human spirit from the tyranny of worldly instincts. He says” Noble have I created thee, why does thou abase thyself?”

Bahá'u'lláh says God's purpose for Him was to bring about a new civilization, a civilization that is inclusive of all religions, all peoples. The diverse religions of the world are shown to be expressions of a single underlying truth, related to one another by a common origin, and a common purpose namely to transform humanity's inner life and outer conditions.

Bahá'u'lláh calls on us to engage in the affairs of this world. We are to be active participants in the development of a world to be increasingly characterized by its promotion of the oneness of human kind, active voices against all forms of prejudice and racism in every dimension, and promoters of the equality of women and men.

Attempts at social change through political intrigue, sedition, vilification of other groups, or outright conflict are condemned by Bahá'u'lláh. He champions other instruments of a different sort. He calls on good deeds, kind words, and upright conduct. He enjoins service to others and collaborative action to bring about the creation of a more just world.

It has been 41 years since I came to know Bahá'u'lláh. I end my remarks today by telling you about my spiritual journey to find my own true self.

Growing up a Christian and being active in my church was an integral part of my life. It was when I began my service as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Chile in the early 1960's where I came to understand the oneness of humanity. While many of the people I worked with were not Christian, yet nevertheless, they were devoted to building a better life for their community. Surely God would recognize their good deeds, I concluded.

Later as I returned to the US and began my legal studies, my wife introduced me to a disabled farmworker who wanted to run for the Governor of Kentucky. No one would take him seriously. I volunteered to assist him. For the next 3 months, we campaigned across the State of Kentucky. His message was focused on those being left behind in the name of progress. He received several hundred thousand votes.

Some years later, when I was facing a crisis of conscience and experiencing uncertainty about my personal and professional development, I came to the point of asking who was Bahá'u'lláh. My wife had become a Bahá'í some years earlier and she had attempted to persuade me to investigate the Faith.

It was not until I had reached a point of recognition of my own inability and incapacity to figure out what to place my trust and confidence in, that I was open to becoming a seeker.

As I opened books written by Bahá'u'lláh, my first inclination was to look for areas of disagreement. After all this was a very unusual name and his style of writing was dramatically different from anything I had ever seen.

These became the reasons for creating obstacles and doubt.

It wasn't until I began my own research that I came faced with the most critical decision in my life.

As a Christian, I had been taught Christ would return. The teachings about his return were never really elucidated. So, I looked up many of the references to find out what had been prophesied.

In Revelation 21:1-3 we find the following passage

And I John saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride, adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven, Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.”

Bahá'u'lláh explains what is meant by the holy city, New Jerusalem... “that city is none other than the word of God revealed in every age and dispensation. In the days of Moses it was the Pentateuch; in the days of Christ it was the Gospel, in the days of Muhammad the Messenger of God it was the Koran; in this day the Bayan, and in the dispensation of Him Whom God will make manifest His Own book-the Book unto which all former dispensations must needs be referred, the Book which standeth amongst all of them transcendent and supreme.”

In this brief quote, I found solace that all peoples of the Book had a home in this new revelation. No religion is denied.

Bahá'u'lláh forbids involvement in partisan politics. My earlier experiences in Kentucky had been instructive in my understanding about the limits of politics.

I could not on my own figure out how we as human beings living all over this planet would rise above our own limitations of understanding about the true nature of ourselves. How could we possibly move beyond the limitations of thought about economic models, political processes, hate and prejudice, religious conflict?

What role will my country that I love so deeply have in a future world? No previous dispensation from God had knowledge of America yet Bahá'u'lláh specifically mentions America and its spiritual destiny.

The Bahá'í writings say “The splendors of His light shall be revealed, where the mysteries of His Faith shall be unveiled, and as a nation will lead all nations spiritually.”

It is these teachings that opened my heart to embrace Bahá'u'lláh and shape the course of my life.