



## ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Science Proves the Human Spirit

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‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ RECEIVED A last-minute invitation just before dinner on July 24, 1912. He had already spoken to hundreds of people that day in Boston, in at least five different venues. Then the request came from the President of the American Theosophical Society. Although exhausted, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wasn’t one to say no, especially to a group devoted to the pursuit of spiritual matters.

“There is no religion higher than truth,” was the maxim of the Theosophical Society. Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, a Russian noblewoman, had founded the organization in New York in 1875. Madame Blavatsky traveled the world in order to glean truths from the belief systems of the East, then immigrated to the West to inspire Americans. The event in Boston that evening took place just a stone’s throw away from the Victoria Hotel where ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was staying.

“In the world of existence there is nothing so important as spirit,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá began. “The spirit of man is the animus of human life and the collective center of all human virtues.”

Theosophists emphasized mystical experience. They sought direct contact with a spiritual reality they believed they could access by intuition or meditation. But when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá stood before his audience, he approached the subject of “spirit” from a different perspective.

“The animal,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said, “is a captive of the world of nature and not in touch with that which lies within and beyond nature; it is without spiritual susceptibilities, deprived of the attractions of consciousness, unconscious of the world of God and incapable of deviating from the law of nature.”

“It is different with man. Man is possessed of the emanations of consciousness; he has perception, ideality and is capable of discovering the mysteries of the universe.”

Theosophists held that certain mysteries of existence required specialized knowledge and could only be accessed by a select few. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, on the

other hand, demonstrated that some of the most astounding proofs of the human spirit were rational, and had nothing to do with the occult.

As proof of humanity's superiority over the animal, 'Abdu'l-Bahá turned not to religious sensibilities, but to science and technology. "All the industries, inventions and facilities surrounding our daily life were at one time hidden secrets of nature, but the reality of man penetrated them and made them subject to his purposes." Electricity was a prime example: "Man has discovered this illimitable power and made it captive to his uses."

"Man has accurately determined that the sun is stationary while the earth revolves about it," 'Abdu'l-Bahá continued, "The animal cannot do this." "Man perceives the mirage to be an illusion. This is beyond the power of the animal." 'Abdu'l-Bahá argued that "abstract intellectual phenomena" were "human powers" – powers that manifested themselves in the physical world, but not by magic.

"[M]an wrests the sword of dominion from nature's hand and uses it upon nature's head," he said. "For example, it is a natural exigency that man should be a dweller upon the earth, but the power of the human spirit transcends this limitation, and he soars aloft in airplanes."

"Man transcends nature," 'Abdu'l-Bahá concluded, "while the mineral, vegetable and animal are helplessly subject to it. This can be done only through the power of the spirit, because the spirit is the reality."

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### **FOOTNOTE / ENDNOTE:**

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