



What Can the Hypocrite Know?

By Robert Sockett

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WHILE IN AMERICA ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ spoke to a wide variety of public audiences, including peace societies, church congregations, women’s groups, and social justice organizations. But he also spoke directly to groups of Bahá’ís — followers of his father’s religion — and often when he did so, his tone changed.

“I am expecting results from this visit,” he told them on July 25, 1912, at the Hotel Victoria in Boston, “and hope that my coming may not be fruitless. The results I expect are these: that the individual soul shall be released from self and desire and freed from the bondage of satanic suggestions.” By “satanic” he meant “the natural inclinations of the lower nature,” and not some independent evil spirit.

“Man possesses two kinds of susceptibilities,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said, “the natural emotions, which are like dust upon the mirror, and spiritual susceptibilities, which are merciful and heavenly characteristics.” It was an analogy he had used many times before — the soul as a mirror reflecting divine qualities and virtues, and the constant struggle to keep it pure.

“What is the dust which obscures the mirror?” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asked. “It is attachment to the world, avarice, envy, love of luxury and comfort, haughtiness and self-desire,” he said. The “natural emotions,” he argued, are the “rust which deprives the heart of the bounties of God.” He contrasted these emotions with what he called “spiritual susceptibilities,” a list which included “sincerity, justice, humility, severance, and love for the believers of God.”

Then he laid out the standard he expected from the Bahá’ís. “It is my hope that you may consider this matter, that you may search out your own imperfections and not think of the imperfections of anybody else. Strive with all your power to be free from imperfections. Heedless souls are always seeking faults in others. What can the hypocrite know of others’ faults when he is blind to his own?”

“As long as a man does not find his own faults,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá emphasized, “he can never become perfect. Nothing is more fruitful for man than the knowledge of his own shortcomings.” It was, he said, “a guide for human conduct.” He

ended his short talk by quoting his father, Bahá'u'lláh: “I wonder at the man who does not find his own imperfections.”

At 4 p.m. that afternoon, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said farewell to his friends and well-wishers in Boston and headed eighty miles northwest into the countryside. He arrived in Dublin, New Hampshire, at 7 p.m.

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FOOTNOTE / ENDNOTE:

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