

'Abdu'l-Baha — the Master: Warwick Leaflets

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Who was `Abdu'l-Bahá?

‘Abdu’l-Bahá was the eldest son of Bahá’u’lláh, Who was the Founder of the Bahá’í Faith. His Father gave him the name Abbás but often referred to him as “the Master”. However, he always referred to himself as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, which means the servant of Bahá. The object of his life was to serve his Father. He said:

“My station is `Abdu’l-Bahá, my name is `Abdu’l-Bahá, my qualification is `Abdu’l-Bahá, my praise is `Abdu’l-Bahá, my title is `Abdu’l-Bahá.”

Before Bahá'u'lláh announced His Mission, a young man called the Báb (meaning Gate) came to prepare the way for Bahá'u'lláh. `Abdu'l-Bahá was born in Iran in 1844 on the very night that the Báb announced His Mission to His first follower.

`Abdu'l-Bahá was born into a wealthy family, but his life changed forever when his Father became a follower of the Báb, and, like many others, was persecuted for His beliefs. When `Abdu'l-Bahá was eight years old, his Father was put into a dungeon and the family were left with nothing. The rest of their lives were spent in exile, often in prison or under house arrest. When Bahá'u'lláh was released from the dungeon, they were moved to Iraq and then to Turkey and finally to Palestine, which was then part of the Turkish empire. `Abdu'l-Bahá never saw his home country again.

Leader, Interpreter, Example

‘Abdu’l-Bahá is a very special person to Bahá’ís. His position is unique in any religion – he is often described as “The Mystery of God”. In 1863 his Father, Bahá’u’lláh, announced that He was the Promised One of all religions. At this time ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was still in his teens. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá learned everything from his Father and helped Him as much as he could.

Bahá'u'lláh appointed `Abdu'l-Bahá to lead the Bahá'í Faith after His death in 1892. Bahá'u'lláh also made `Abdu'l-Bahá the authorised interpreter of His Writings. Therefore everyone could trust that what `Abdu'l-Bahá said was correct. Bahá'u'lláh said that if everyone followed `Abdu'l-Bahá then the new Faith would stay united and would not split into sects.

`Abdu'l-Bahá was also the perfect example of how a Bahá'í should behave. He spent his life in serving others. Bahá'ís try to follow his example.

Freedom at Last

`Abdu'l-Bahá continued his Father's work, drawing together people from different religious and ethnic backgrounds, but he remained in Palestine as a prisoner of the Turkish empire until 1908 when he was released as a result of the Young Turk revolution. In the few years before the First World War, he was able to travel abroad. Although 67 years old, and in poor health from the long years of prison and house arrest, he embarked upon two major tours of Europe and North America where he told many people about the Faith's teachings. Many of these were quite revolutionary for the time, such as a world government, the equality of men and women and the equality of people of all colours and backgrounds. Many people were so impressed by him that they thought he was the return of Jesus Christ, but he explained that it was Bahá'u'lláh Who was the promised Return.

`Abdu'l-Bahá never accepted any money for himself – on the contrary, he was always giving it away. He was quite selfless. For example, when he was in the USA, he saw a man on the street with ragged trousers, so he stepped into the shadows, pulled his cloak around him, took off his own trousers and gave them to the man.

Visits to Britain

`Abdu'l-Bahá first visited Britain in 1911. He arrived in London on 4th September and stayed at the house of Lady Blomfield, at 97 Cadogan Gardens. Every day, streams of visitors of different nationalities and religions came to the house. Philosophers, poets, clergymen, politicians, ordinary working people, academics, tramps, journalists, all were received with the same heartfelt love by `Abdu'l-Bahá. In addition to the meetings he had in this house, he gave several public talks to large numbers of people. There were also newspaper articles. Having made a great impact on the British Bahá'ís, their friends, and the public at large, `Abdu'l-Bahá left for Paris after just a month.

He returned to the Middle East and rested there for a while before setting out again, in March 1912, for an even longer trip, across North America and back through Europe. He arrived in Liverpool in December of that year. He again stayed in London, but was also able to visit Edinburgh, Oxford and Bristol.

`Abdu'l-Bahá left Britain again on 21st January, 1913, and visited other countries in Europe before returning home. One of the subjects on which he

frequently spoke was the high level of armaments held in Europe, and the need to make great efforts to avoid war. Unfortunately his words were not heeded and the First World War followed. Indeed, it was that very war which prevented him from making further visits abroad.

In 1917, Allied troops began to capture parts of Palestine. The Turkish general in charge of Haifa threatened to crucify `Abdu'l-Bahá. The British authorities sent a telegram to General Allenby, who was in charge of the attack, asking him to ensure `Abdu'l-Bahá's safety. When the Allied troops captured Haifa, General Allenby cabled London with the message: "Have today taken Palestine. Notify the world that `Abdu'l-Bahá is safe."

`Abdu'l-Bahá had organised food supplies for the poor during the war, and even fed the British army when it arrived in Haifa. For these services he was knighted by the British government in 1920, though he never used the title.

`Abdu'l-Bahá passed away, after a lifetime of service, in 1921. The next morning the funeral took place; such a funeral had never been seen before. It brought together ten thousand people, of all different religions and races. There were dignitaries and diplomats, leaders of all religions, Christian and Muslim boy scouts with their banners, and Bahá'ís of all colours and backgrounds. They were all united in weeping over the loss of `Abdu'l-Bahá. He had spent many years looking after the poor and the sick in and around Haifa and was much loved. `Abdu'l-Bahá's body was laid to rest within the Shrine of the Báb on Mount Carmel. A hundred years after his passing, a separate shrine for `Abdu'l-Bahá has been built between Haifa and Akká. This unique building is shown on the cover of this leaflet. It is a place of pilgrimage and remembrance for Bahá'ís.

After `Abdu'l-Bahá

`Abdu'l-Bahá led the Bahá'í Faith through some very difficult times, from 1892 to 1921. He always stressed that the Bahá'ís should be united and should unite others. He appointed his grandson, Shoghi Effendi, as the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith after his passing. Shoghi Effendi followed the example of his beloved Grandfather. Thanks to his encouragement, the Bahá'í Faith spread across the world. In 1963, the time was right for the world body, the Universal House of Justice, to be elected. The Bahá'í Faith therefore has continuing guidance and a focal point of unity. And the memory of `Abdu'l-Bahá's shining example of love and kindness lives on.

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