

Professor: A Tribute to Dr. 'Ali-Murad Davudi

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[illegible]

Introduction by the Translator

Though it appears to have been published anonymously, the author of this essay was a young

psychology student by the name of Farideh Sobhani (now Dr. Farideh Sobhani-Matejko), and

while he is never named explicitly, the professor to whom this tribute was dedicated is Dr. 'Alí-

Murád Dávúdí, a brilliant philosopher and intellectual giant of the Bahá'í Faith who was eventually kidnapped by the Islamic regime and never heard from again.

In this essay, the young Sobhani fondly recalls her then-recent experience as a student in one of

Dr. Dávudí's classes, *shinásá'í va hastí* ("knowledge and existence"),¹ which he taught at the

University of Tehran as an associate professor in the department of philosophy.

Dr. Sobhani took

this class in 1968, and she would go on to graduate from the university that same year.

This essay was originally published in Áhang-i-Badí‘, a Persian-language Bahá’í magazine that

was circulated in Iran from the mid-1940s up until the end of the 1970s with the advent of the

Islamic Revolution. Dr. Sobhani was herself a member of the magazine's editorial committee at

the time and arranged for it to be printed in its July–August 1969 joint issue.²

I am grateful to Naeem Nabiliakbar for acquainting me with this article many years ago, and also

for preparing the Persian typescript below, which served as the basis for this translation.

—Adib Masumian

27 July 2022

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The focus of this class may have been *La connaissance: classe de philosophie et propédeutique*, a

book written by Leon Meynard and published in 1963, which Dr. Dávúdí himself later translated into

Persian under the same title of this course he taught at the University of Tehran.

Áhang-i-Badí‘, year 24, nos. 5 & 6 (Murdád–Shahrívar, 1348 Shamsí), pp. 169–170; available online

here: <https://bahai-library.com/bahailib/1139.pdf#page=56>

I. English Translation

Professor:

A Tribute to Dr. ‘Alí-Murád Dávúdí

Farideh Sobhani

Translated by Adib Masumian

The school song begins to play. A heavy silence takes the place of the noise of the crowd. All

of a sudden, a strange feeling washes over me. From behind the trembling curtain of tears that

has welled up, I shoot a glance around me. As far as my eyes can see, the graduates are seated

next to each other, dressed in their special uniforms. In this moment, their familiar faces seem

a bit vague to me.

I look at myself again. “Am I part of this group, too?”

How very quickly these college years passed. Their final moments draw to a close with the

conclusion of the ceremony. Gradually, I start to forget time and place.

Familiar faces fade

away from my sight, and I take flight to episodes from my past. The days and hours I have

spent at college—their moments of dread and hope alike, all the things that both excited and

agitated me—are brought back to life in my mind.

I think back to our friendships and mutual affections, to the things we have learned and the

discussions we have had, and eventually to the students and professors. One by

one, I bring
the faces of the professors to mind; I conjure up their qualities and picture
all the features
that the passage of time has etched on their faces.

As I go through them, I stop at a certain familiar face. I call him to the
forefront of my mind,
with his silvery hair and immortal dignity.

I find him in the midst of his classroom. Our class of three hundred is
bustling. Everyone is
going from one direction to another, every group is engaged in conversation,
and he quietly
enters the room. The class rises to their feet. Still quietly, he heads to his
desk. Absolute silence
overtakes the class.

He begins. Not a sound can be heard now apart from pens being put to paper.

I look at him. When he speaks, he seems to grow distant from our world. Every
now and then,
he pauses for a moment and starts to walk to and fro once again.

I peer into his face. It is as if the words he is saying are rooted in the
depths of his soul. His
entire being has become a spirit personified from head to toe.

Now he has finished speaking. A wave of excitement comes over the students once
again; their
hands fly up to ask questions. As they erupt into discussion, he stays standing
right where he
is, serene as ever.

He listens carefully, responding with a refinement and majestic bearing that
only he had. At
times, the questions are so out of place, so far removed from what a sound mind
would
conceive, that shouts of objection start to be raised from every corner of the
classroom—but
he maintains his silence.

He waits until the person asking the question has settled down. Only then does
he explain the
matter at hand, and then offer his thanks with a short but meaningful sentence.

When speaking on philosophical subjects, he never gives any indication of
finality. He always
leaves room for subsequent discussion and inquiry, giving us an opportunity to
think deeply.

Once he leaves the classroom, he can't be found again in the dense mass of
students who have

surrounded him. This is not just about school anymore; it concerns everything, in every possible respect. The course and purpose of their lives, their plans for the future, their views on philosophy and other thoughts—students talk to him about all these things because they consider him their close confidant and account him as their knowledgeable friend. He listens attentively to these kids as they vent, becoming more and more inquisitive and dispensing the guidance they seek.

He is also a master of witty humor, and in this regard, too, one would be hard-pressed to find someone that rivals him. Although he never makes any pretensions to love, he does love his students from the bottom of his heart and show them that love—and in spite of all this, not once does he give preferential treatment to any of them. Even in special cases where he wishes to help a student or a group of them, he makes it so that the rest of the class benefits just as much from his kindness—a kindness that extends to everyone under all circumstances.

His anger is seldom seen and never directed universally. Only rarely does he become angry and excited while speaking, and even then he quickly returns to his normal state and modulates his tone accordingly.

He never shies away from a debate with his students, and no one has ever seen him ridicule a single one of them.

Perhaps one of his most significant characteristics is his humility. He is kind and humble toward everyone, and his name is always associated with this uniquely distinct trait.

When it comes to his exams, he has been known to give a failing grade, but few have heard anyone object to it or not be given a logical explanation if they do protest.

To sum up, it is in this way that they truly love him with all their hearts and regard him as their professor—possibly one of those rare professors at whose impending separation students weep as they say their goodbyes.

I sense the salty taste of tears in my mouth. The school song has been over for some time now;
the sound of prolonged applause has broken the silence.

I look at the crowd one last time. Though there is joy in their faces, there is also a conspicuous
question: “The future . . . what am I to do in the future? Which goal should I pursue, and why?”
I feel a sense of pride and good fortune because I know my path forward and rest assured of
the future.

I look once more to where the professors are standing. Their faces are radiant and instill
confidence. A smile signaling my discernment of the truth forms on my lips. It seems to me
there is just one face missing from among them, a palpable absence—he with his silvery hair
and immortal dignity.³ Under my breath, I say to myself, “a Bahá’í professor.”

3 The author of this essay has told me she never asked Dr. Dávudí why he was not present that day. Her

personal speculation is that, in all likelihood, there wasn’t any special reason for his absence, considering
that, while these ceremonies were obviously momentous occasions for the thousands of students who
were graduating, they were routine occurrences for the professors, and it was not as if all the faculty
members at the University of Tehran attended each and every graduation ceremony. Dr. Dávudí’s
absence from the ceremony has nothing to do with his martyrdom, which took place eleven years later.

??II. Original Persian??

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