

# ***BAHA'I EPISTEMOLOGY***

Peter Terry, 2004

The subject of epistemology, that is, the standards or criteria or modes of knowledge, is one which has, of yet, received relatively little attention by scholars of the Bahá'í Faith. The present essay will attempt to introduce the statements of 'Abdu'l-Bahá which seem to bear most unmistakably upon this topic and in such a manner as will hopefully be conducive to clear understanding on the part of the reader and not to any particular interpretation on the part of the compiler.

The sources consulted are the following:

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablet on the Inmost Heart, provisional translation by Steven Phelps and William McCants, March 2000; Persian text in "Min Makatib 'Abdu'l-Bahá," pp. 83-86

'Abdu'l-Baha, Tablet to Dr. Auguste Forel; translated by Shoghi Effendi and published in "Star of the West," XIV:4, p. 102; reprinted in "Baha'i World Faith," p. 336

'Abdu'l-Baha, "Mufavadat-i-'Abdu'l-Baha," chapter XL, p. 118; "Some Answered Questions," chapter XL, p. 180

'Abdu'l-Baha, "Mufavadat-i-'Abdu'l-Baha," chapter LXXXII, p. 219; "Some Answered Questions," chapter LXXXIII, p. 341

'Abdu'l-Baha interviewed by a reporter of the "Weekly Budget," 23 September 1911, reprinted in "'Abdu'l-Baha in London," pp. 120,121

'Abdu'l-Baha at 15 Rue Greuze, Paris, on 10 November 1911; Persian text in "Khitábát," pp. 148-157; in English translation, "Paris Talks," pp. 92-94

'Abdu'l-Baha at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Maxwell, Montreal, Canada, 2 September 1912; Persian text in "Star of the West," V:6, Persian section; in "Khitábát," 1984 edition, pp. 540-541; transcription of English translation published in "The Promulgation of Universal Peace," pp. 311-312

'Abdu'l-Baha at the Open Forum, San Francisco, California on 10 October 1912; Persian text in "Star of the West," V:3, Persian section; and in "Khitábát," 1984 edition, pp. 600-601, 609-610; transcription of English translation by Dr. Aminu'llah Farid published in "The Promulgation of Universal Peace," pp. 355-356,357,361

'Abdu'l-Baha at Hotel Ansonia, 17 April 1912, no Persian text; transcription of English translation by Dr. Aminu'llah Farid published in "Star of the West," III:10, pp. 10-11; VII:17, pp. 175-176; "The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 20

'Abdu'l-Baha at Green Acre, 16 August 1912; no Persian text; transcription of English translation by Dr. Aminu'llah Farid published in "The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 253

'Abdu'l-Baha at Green Acre, 17 August 1912; no Persian text; transcription of English translation by Dr. Aminu'llah Farid published in "Star of the West," VIII:7, pp. 76-80; in "The Promulgation of

Universal Peace," pp. 261-262

"Abdul-Baha on Divine Philosophy," pp. 93,94-95

'Abdu'l-Baha to pilgrims, notes of Miss Alma Albertson, 30 November 1900; no Persian text; in Rabb B6, National Baha'i Archives, Wilmette, Illinois; Barstow Collection #169A, in private hands (copy in possession of the compiler)

'Abdu'l-Baha to pilgrims, notes of Corinne True, 30 November 1900, in True B9, p. 16, National Bahá'í Archives, Wilmette, Illinois

'Abdu'l-Baha to Miss Ethel Rosenberg, February-March 1901, Notes of Miss Rosenberg, no Persian text; copy of notes in Rabb B7, National Baha'i Archives, Wilmette, Illinois; portion (in quotes) published in "Star of the West," VIII:9, pp. 114-15

## STANDARDS OF KNOWLEDGE INTRODUCED

"Knowledge has three degrees: opinion, science, illumination. The means or instrument of the first is sense; of the second dialectic; of the third, intuition."

**Plotinus, (Letter to Flaccus)**

[http://www.plotinus.com/who\\_was\\_plotinus.htm](http://www.plotinus.com/who_was_plotinus.htm)

To begin with, in these sources we find the [mízán], variously translated as the standards, balances, or criteria of knowledge, enumerated in a few different ways. In the Tablet of the Inmost Heart, 'Abdu'l-Baha says:

"Therefore, know that all the peoples and kindreds possess four balances with which they weigh the realities [al-Haqá'iq], the significances [al-ma`án'], and the divine questions [al-masá'il]. All of them are imperfect, unable to quench the burning thirst or heal the sick. We shall therefore make mention of each one and demonstrate its limitation and inaccuracy...."

He concludes this survey of the "four balances" with these words:

"Therefore, it is evident that all of balances current among the people are defective and their conclusions are unreliable. Nay, they are confused dreams, doubts, and idle fancies that neither allay the sore athirst nor satisfy the seeker of knowledge [irfán].

As for the true, divine balance which never strayeth, and which ever apprehendeth the universal realities [al-Haqá'iq al-kulliyyah] and the sublime inner meanings [al-ma`án' al-`aTH'mah], it is the balance of the inmost heart [mízánu'l-fu'ád], of which God hath made mention in the blessed verse."

It is thus evident that He has described five criteria of knowledge, four of which are possessed by the peoples of the world, all of which are unreliable; and one which is divine and infallible.

Likewise, in "Some Answered Questions" 'Abdu'l-Baha says:

"There are only four accepted methods of comprehension: that is to say, the realities of things are understood by these four methods..."

"Know then: that which is in the hands of people, that which they believe, is liable to error... Therefore there is no standard in the hands of people upon which we can rely. "But the bounty of the Holy Spirit gives the true method of comprehension which is infallible and indubitable. This is through the help of the Holy Spirit which comes to man, and this is the condition in which certainty can alone be attained." (chapter LXXXIII, p. 343)

In His talk at Hotel Ansonia on 17 April 1912 'Abdu'l-Baha said:

"Briefly then, these four criteria according to the declarations of men are: first, sense perception; second, reason; third, traditions; fourth, inspiration...

"Briefly, the point is that in the human material world of phenomena these four are the only existing criteria or avenues of knowledge, and all of them are faulty or unreliable. What then remains? How shall we attain the reality of knowledge? By the breaths and promptings of the Holy Spirit, which is light and knowledge itself. Through it the human mind is quickened and fortified into true conclusions and perfect knowledge. This is conclusive argument showing that all available human criteria are erroneous and defective, but the divine standard of knowledge is infallible." ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," pp. 21, 22)

In other talks, 'Abdu'l-Baha indicated that there were only four standards of knowledge all told, and that what He identified above as the fifth criterion was a form of the fourth. Speaking in Europe in 1913, 'Abdu'l-Baha said:

"There are four means of knowledge...

"So we have indicated the four criterions: the senses, reason, the sacred text, inspirations. There is no fifth...

"I supplicate to God that you may become inspired with a like spirituality. In the West you have not the same prejudices; you have not that fire of oppression, but have complete liberty of belief. Work, pray, day and night, and you will see the splendors of the kingdom of El-Abha descending upon you." ("Abdul Baha on Divine Philosophy," pp. 93, 94, 95)

Likewise, speaking to pilgrims in 'Akka on 30 November 1900, as recorded in the notes of Miss Alma Albertson, 'Abdu'l-Baha said:

"Knowledge is measured by four things, viz., first, sensation (that is, the things understood by the five senses); second, reason; third, revelation; fourth, inspiration...

"We have proven these three [sensation, reason, revelation] to be false, so there remains but one...

"The Jews relied upon revelation as the true test, and they took this to prove Him. And because they believed in revelation, that was the only veil that covered them (kept them from believing). As they were veiled from Christ, they did not understand the revelation of the Bible, but had they believed in the explanations given by Christ, and which were inspired, they would have understood the meanings of these prophecies. Had they believed in the power of inspiration they would not have been veiled from His Bounty. As they did not understand the meaning of the revelation given by Christ they did not understand the revelation given in the Book, and these same revelations caused them to crucify Him. That is the way of the Nakazeen [Covenant-breakers].

"They say we want only the Book of God, but as they are not understanding it, they lose the way, for it must be explained by one who is inspired to know its meaning." (Rabb B6; Barstow Collection #169A, pp. 9, 10)

This same talk is recorded by Miss Corinne True as follows:

"Intellect is measured by four things, one is feeling, the thing understood by the five senses. The second is understanding, the third revelation, and the fourth inspiration...

"When the intellect is not perfect that the thing found out by it cannot be so, these three things [feeling, understanding, revelation] therefore prove to be false and only one remains...

"The Jews said the best measure is revelation and they took this to prove Him, and it was their faith in revelation which caused them to be veiled from Him. Thus as they were veiled from Christ they didn't understand the revelations of the Bible, but had they listened to the explanations given by Christ, which were inspired, they would have found the meaning of the prophecies. Had they believed in the power of inspiration, they would not have been veiled from His Beauty. As they did not understand the revelation given by Christ, they didn't understand the revelations given in the books and these same revelations caused them to crucify Him. That is the way with the Nakazene [Covenant-breakers], they say we only want the Books of God, but as they do not understand them, they lose their way, for it must be explained by one who is inspired to know its meanings."  
(Corinne True B9, pp. 17, 18, 19)

In one of His talks with Miss Rosenberg, in winter of 1901, 'Abdu'l-Baha referred to three ways of apprehending truth [senses, reason, revelation] and then states that inspiration is the true standard for attainment to spiritual truth:

"There are three ways of apprehending Truth...

"As we have before said in the account of this miracle [of walking on water], the disciples of Jesus attempted to sail over the Sea of Creation and Existence in the Ark of Argument and Reasonings, finding great difficulty and danger in proving the Truth by so doing. But when Christ, the Light of the world, who knew all things by the Light of the inner spiritual illumination, came to them in their boat, walking by His knowledge over the Ocean of Existence, and having no need of the Ark of Argument, then immediately they were at their desired haven."

(Rabb B7, pp. 4,5)

In another of His talks, 'Abdu'l-Baha described knowledge as two-fold--this would appear to be a simplification of the four-fold model He employed in most of His talks:

"Knowledge is of two kinds: one is subjective ['ilm-i-wujudi {see Fourth Criterion: Intuition}], and the other objective ['ilm-i-Súri]; that is to say, an intuitive knowledge and a knowledge derived from perception ['ilm-i-taSSúri].

"The knowledge of things which men universally have, is gained by reflection {see Second Criterion: Reason} or by evidence: that is to say, either by the power of the mind the conception of an object is formed, or from beholding an object the form is produced in the mirror of the heart [maraat qalb]." ("Mufavadat-i-'Abdu'l-Baha," XL, p. 118; "Some Answered Questions," XL, p. 180)

In one of His talks, at Green Acre Baha'i School on 16 August 1912, 'Abdu'l-Baha indicated that perfect knowledge could be attained through agreement of the four standards:

"Proofs are of four kinds: first, through sense perception; second, through the reasoning faculty; third, from traditional or scriptural authority; fourth, through the medium of inspiration. That is to say, there are four criteria or standards of judgment by which the human mind reaches its conclusions...

"Consequently, it has become evident that the four criteria or standards of judgment by which the human mind reaches its conclusions are faulty and inaccurate. All of them are liable to mistake and error in conclusions. But a statement presented to the mind accompanied by proofs which the senses

can perceive to be correct, which the faculty of reason can accept, which is in accord with traditional authority and sanctioned by the promptings of the heart, can be adjudged and relied upon as perfectly correct, for it has been proved and tested by all the standards of judgment and found to be complete. When we apply but one test, there are possibilities of mistake. This is self-evident and manifest." ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," pp. 253, 255)

These sources are of different degrees of reliability, and the consistency between the most reliable sources seems to indicate that 'Abdu'l-Baha defined epistemology in the following terms: there are four standards employed by humanity, and all of them are faulty and fallible; there is one divine standard which is accessible to those human beings who are gifted with the breaths of the Holy Spirit, and this standard is perfect and infallible.

We will now consider the four human criteria, as described by 'Abdu'l-Baha in the sources consulted.

## FIRST CRITERION

In one of His talks, 'Abdu'l-Baha described knowledge as twofold, and the second kind of knowledge, what He calls "objective" knowledge is, in one of its two manifestations, "gained..by evidence...from beholding an object the form is produced in the mirror of the heart". This would seem to be the criterion of the senses in operation:

"Knowledge is of two kinds: one is subjective ['ilm-i-wujudi {see Fourth Criterion: Intuition}], and the other objective ['ilm-i-Súri]; that is to say, an intuitive knowledge and a knowledge derived from perception ['ilm-i-taSSúri].

"The knowledge of things which men universally have, is gained by reflection [see Second Criterion: Reason] or by evidence: that is to say, either by the power of the mind the conception of an object is formed, or from beholding an object the form is produced in the mirror of the heart [maraat qalb]." ("Mufavadat-i-'Abdu'l-Baha," XL, p. 118; "Some Answered Questions," XL, p. 180)

In the Tablet of the Inmost Heart and in most of His talks 'Abdu'l-Baha describes the first criterion of knowledge using specific terminology:

"The first balance is the balance of the senses [mízánu'l-Hiss], which is the method of most of the European philosophers in this age. They say that it is a perfect and complete balance, and that whatever is decided by it, no doubt or misgiving is attached thereto. The truth, however, is that the proofs limiting this balance are as clear as the Sun at midday. Verily, if thou dost look at the mirage, thou wilt see refreshing and drinkable water. Further, if thou dost gaze upon mirrors, thou wilt see forms within it and wilt be certain that it is unquestionably real. In reality, however, the forms are reflections in the glass and are nonexistent. Moreover, if thou dost look at a whirling point in the darkness, thou wilt think that it is a circle or an extended line. The reality is that it is nonexistent, but only appears so to the vision. Furthermore, if thou dost look at the firmament and its sparkling stars, thou wilt see them as tiny bodies. In reality, however, each one of them is a thousand times larger than the earth. If thou dost gaze at a shadow it appears still, but is really in motion; spokes appear unbroken but are actually disconnected; and the earth appears flat but is actually a sphere. Therefore, if it be established that the senses, of which the power of vision is, in itself, the most mighty sensory power, are a limited balance and an imperfect proof, then how can it be relied upon in ascertaining ['irfán] the divine truths, the heavenly signs, and the contingent phenomena?" ('Abdu'l-Baha, Tablet

on the Inmost Heart, provisional translation by Steven Phelps and William McCants, March 2000; Persian text in "Min Makatib 'Abdu'l-Baha," pp. 83-86)

"By materialists, whose belief with regard to Divinity hath been explained, is not meant philosophers in general, but rather that group of materialists of narrow vision that worship that which is sensed, that depend upon the five senses only, and whose criterion of knowledge is limited to that which can be perceived by the senses. All that can be sensed is to them real, whilst whatever falleth not under the power of the senses is either unreal or doubtful. The existence of the Divinity they regard as wholly doubtful." (Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Baha to Dr. Auguste Forel, published in "Star of the West," XIV:4, p. 102; reprinted in "Baha'i World Faith," p. 336)

"The first method [awwal miizaan] is by the senses [hiss], that is to say, all that the eye [ya'nii], the ear [gush], the taste [thaa'ifeh], the smell [shaammeh], the touch [laamseh] perceives, is understood by this method. Today this method is considered the most perfect by all the European philosophers, they say that the principal method of gaining knowledge is through the senses [miizaan hass]; they consider it supreme [muqaddas], although it is imperfect, for it commits errors." ("Mufavadat 'Abdu'l-Baha," 1908, p. 219; "Some Answered Questions," chapter 83, p. 341)

"The animal can neither recognize nor apprehend the spiritual power of man and makes no distinction between man and itself, for the reason that its susceptibilities are limited to the plane of the senses. It lives under the bondage of nature and nature's laws. All the animals are materialists. They are deniers of God and without realization of a transcendent power in the universe. They have no knowledge of the divine Prophets and Holy Books--mere captives of nature and the sense world. In reality they are like the great philosophers of this day who are not in touch with God and the Holy Spirit--deniers of the Prophets, ignorant of spiritual susceptibilities, deprived of the heavenly bounties and without belief in the supernatural power. The animal lives this kind of life blissfully and untroubled, whereas the material philosophers labor and study for ten or twenty years in schools and colleges, denying God, the Holy Spirit and divine inspirations. The animal is even a greater philosopher, for it attains the ability to do this without labor and study. For instance, the cow denies God and the Holy Spirit, knows nothing of divine inspirations, heavenly bounties or spiritual emotions and is a stranger to the world of hearts. Like the philosophers, the cow is a captive of nature and knows nothing beyond the range of the senses. The philosophers, however, glory in this, saying, 'We are not captives of superstitions; we have implicit faith in the impressions of the senses and know nothing beyond the realm of nature, which contains and covers everything.' But the cow, without study or proficiency in the sciences, modestly and quietly views life from the same standpoint, living in harmony with nature's laws in the utmost dignity and nobility." ('Abdu'l-Baha at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Maxwell, Montreal, Canada, 2 September 1912; Persian text in "Star of the West," V:6, Persian section; in "Khitabat," 1984 edition, pp. 540-541; transcription of English translation published in "The Promulgation of Universal Peace," pp. 311-312)

"The criterion of judgment in the estimation of western philosophers is sense perception [hiss]. They consider that which is tangible or perceptible to the senses to be a reality--that there is no doubt of its existence. For example, we prove the existence of this light through the sense of sight; we visualize this room; we see the sun, the green fields; we use our sense of sight to observe them. The opinion of these philosophers is that such perception is reality, that the senses are the highest standard of perception and judgment, in which there can neither be doubt nor uncertainty...  
"As to the animal: It is endowed only with sense perception. It is lacking the reasonable perception. It cannot apprehend ideal realities. The animal cannot conceive of the earth as a sphere. The intelligence of an animal located in Europe could never have planned the discovery of the continent of America. The animal kingdom is incapable of discovering the latent mysteries of nature--such as

electricity--and bringing them forth ;from the invisible to the plane of visibility. It is evident that the discoveries and inventions transcend the animal intelligence. The animal cannot penetrate the secrets of genesis and creation. Its mind is incapable of conceiving the verity of ether. It cannot know the mysteries of magnetism because the bestowals of abstract reason and intellect are absent in its endowment. That is to say, the animal in its creation is a captive of the senses. Beyond the tangibilities and impressions of the senses it cannot accept anything. It denies everything. It is incapable of ideal perception and, therefore, a captive of the senses...

"Notwithstanding this, some sagacious men declare: We have attained to the superlative degree of knowledge; we have penetrated the laboratory of nature, studying sciences and arts; we have attained the highest station of knowledge in the human world; we have investigated the facts as they are and have arrived at the conclusion that nothing is rightly acceptable except the tangible, which alone is a reality worthy of credence; all that is not tangible is imagination and nonsense.

"Strange indeed that after twenty years training in colleges and universities man should reach such a station wherein he will deny the existence of the ideal or that which is not perceptible to the senses. Have you ever stopped to think that the animal already has graduated from such a university? Have you ever realized that the cow is already a professor emeritus of that university? For the cow without hard labor and study is already a philosopher of the superlative degree in the school of nature. The cow denies everything that is not tangible, saying, 'I can see! I can eat! Therefore, I believe only in that which is tangible!'

"Then why should we go to the colleges? Let us go to the cow." ('Abdu'l-Baha at the Open Forum, San Francisco, California on 10 October 1912; Persian text in "Star of the West," V:3, Persian section; and in "Khitabat," 1984 edition, pp. 600-601, 609-610; transcription of English translation by Dr. Aminu'llah Farid published in "The Promulgation of Universal Peace," pp. 355-356,357,361)

"Materialists say, 'Where is the soul? What is it? We cannot see it, neither can we touch it.'

"This is how we must answer them: However much the mineral may progress, it cannot comprehend the vegetable world. Now, that lack of comprehension does not prove the non-existence of the plant!

"To however great a degree the plant may have evolved, it is unable to understand the animal world; this ignorance is no proof that the animal does not exist!

"The animal, be he never [even] so highly developed, cannot imagine the intelligence of man, neither can he realize the nature of his soul. But, again, this does not prove that man is without intellect, or without soul. It only demonstrates this, that one form of existence is incapable of comprehending a form superior to itself.

"This flower may be unconscious of such a being as man, but the fact of its ignorance does not prevent the existence of humanity.

"In the same way, if materialists do not believe in the existence of the soul, their unbelief does not prove that there is no such realm as the world of spirit...

"Materialists who reason in this way, and contend that we are unable to see the world of spirit, or to perceive the blessings of God, are surely like the animals who have no understanding; having eyes they see not, ears they have, but do not hear. And this lack of sight and hearing is a proof of nothing but their own inferiority; of whom we read in the Qur'an, 'They are men who are blind and deaf to the Spirit.' They do not use that great gift of God, the power of the understanding, by which they might see with the eyes of the spirit, hear with spiritual ears and also comprehend with a Divinely enlightened heart.

"The inability of the materialistic mind to grasp the idea of the Life Eternal is no proof of the non-existence of that life.

"The comprehension of that other life depends on our spiritual birth.

"My prayer for you is that your spiritual faculties and aspirations may daily increase, and that you

will never allow the material senses to veil from your eyes the glories of the Heavenly illumination." ('Abdu'l-Baha in Paris, 10 November 1911; in Persian transcription, "Khitaabaat," pp. 148-157; in English translation, "Paris Talks," pp. 92-94)

"During my visit to London and Paris last year I had many talks with ;the materialistic philosophers of Europe. The basis of all their conclusions is that the acquisition of knowledge of phenomena is according to a fixed, invariable law--a law mathematically exact in its operation through the senses. For instance, the eye sees a chair; therefore, there is no doubt of the chair's existence. The eye looks up into the heavens and beholds the sun; I see flowers upon this table; I smell their fragrance; I hear sounds outside, etc. This, they say, is a fixed mathematical law of perception and deduction, the operation of which admits of no doubt whatever; for inasmuch as the universe is subject to our sensing, the proof is self-evident that our knowledge of it must be gained through the avenues of the senses. That is to say, the materialists announce that the criterion and standard of human knowledge is sense perception." ('Abdu'l-Baha at Hotel Ansonia, 17 April 1912, no Persian text; transcription of English translation by Dr. Aminu'llah Farid published in "Star of the West," III:10, pp. 10-11; VII:17, pp. 175-176; "The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 20)

"In cities like New York the people are submerged in the sea of materialism. Their sensibilities are attuned to material forces, their perceptions purely physical. The animal energies predominate in their activities; all their thoughts are devoted to the attractions of this world, without aspiration beyond the life that is vanishing and mortal. In schools and temples of learning knowledge of the sciences acquired is based upon material observations only; there is no realization of Divinity in their methods and conclusions--all have reference to the world of matter. They are not interested in attaining knowledge of the mysteries of God or understanding the secrets of the heavenly Kingdom; what they acquire is based altogether upon visible and tangible evidences. Beyond these evidences they are without susceptibilities; they have no idea of the world of inner significances and are utterly out of touch with God, considering this an indication of reasonable attitude and philosophical judgment whereof they are self-sufficient and proud.

"As a matter of fact, this supposed excellence is possessed in its superlative degree by the animals. The animals are without knowledge of God; so to speak, they are deniers of Divinity and understand nothing of the Kingdom, they are utterly ignorant of spiritual things and uninformed of the supernatural world. Therefore, if it be a perfection and virtue to be without knowledge of God and His Kingdom, the animals have attained the highest degree of excellence and proficiency. Then the donkey is the greatest scientist and the cow an accomplished naturalist, for they have obtained what they know without schooling and years of laborious study in colleges, trusting implicitly to the evidence of the senses and relying solely upon intuitive virtues. The cow, for instance, is a lover of the visible and a believer in the tangible, contented and happy when pasture is plenty, perfectly serene, a blissful exponent of the transcendental school of philosophy. Such is the status of the material philosophers, who glory in sharing the condition of the cow, imagining themselves in a lofty station. Reflect upon their ignorance and blindness." ('Abdu'l-Baha at Green Acre, 17 August 1912; no Persian text; transcription of English translation by Dr. Aminu'llah Farid published in "Star of the West," VIII:7, pp. 76-80; in "The Promulgation of Universal Peace," pp. 261-262)

"First, through sense perception...This is a standard still held by the materialistic philosophers of the world. They believe that whatever is perceptible to the senses is a verity, a certainty and without doubt existent. For example, they say, 'Here is a lamp which you see, and because it is perceptible to the sense of sight, you cannot doubt its existence. There is a tree; your sense of vision assures you of its reality, which is beyond question. This is a man; you see that he is a man; therefore, he exists.' In a word, everything confirmed by the senses is assumed to be as undoubted and unquestioned as the product of five multiplied by five; it cannot be twenty-six nor



less than twenty-five. Consequently, the materialistic philosophers consider the criterion of the senses to be first and foremost." ('Abdu'l-Baha at Green Acre, 16 August 1912; no Persian text; transcription of English translation by Dr. Aminu'llah Farid published in "The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 253)

"Among scientists and philosophers a method of attaining knowledge is through the senses, principally through observation. Light shows us that light exists. Reality is limited to the perceptible thing; all that is not perceptible is subject to doubt." ("Abdul Baha on Divine Philosophy," p. 93)

"Knowledge is measured by four things, viz., first, sensation (that is, the things understood by the five senses)...The European philosopher in this century is judging everything by sensation. He says the feeling is the right measure, that is, he says the sun exists, because he feels its heat; the lamp is burning because he sees its light." ('Abdu'l-Baha to pilgrims, notes of Miss Alma Albertson, 30 November 1900, in Rabb B6, National Baha'i Archives, Wilmette, Illinois)

"The European philosophers in this century are judging everything by the feelings. They say feeling is the right meaning, i.e. the sun exists, from the fact that one can feel its heat; the lamp is burning, because you can see its light." ('Abdu'l-Baha to pilgrims, notes of Corinne True, 30 November 1900, in True B9, p. 16)

"'First, the earthly way, by means of the five senses...The ancient philosophers and indeed the philosophers of all times have taught that the first method, that is by means of the five senses, was the one certain way of knowing truth.' For example, when we see a large mass of water, you know that it is the sea and nothing can contradict that fact." ('Abdu'l-Baha to Miss Ethel Rosenberg, February-March 1901, in Rabb B7, National Baha'i Archives, Wilmette, Illinois; portion ('in single quotation marks') published in "Star of the West," VIII:9, pp. 114-15)

## **LIMITATIONS OF THE FIRST CRITERION**

This first standard, this first criterion and method of attaining to knowledge, to truth is recognized by all of us humans, and regarded by some of us as the only true standard. 'Abdu'l-Baha asserts that there are three other human standards and a divine standard beyond these which are significant paths to knowledge of the real. He discusses some of the inherent problems with this first criterion:

"The truth, however, is that the proofs limiting this balance are as clear as the Sun at midday. Verily, if thou dost look at the mirage, thou wilt see refreshing and drinkable water. Further, if thou dost gaze upon mirrors, thou wilt see forms within it and wilt be certain that it is unquestionably real. In reality, however, the forms are reflections in the glass and are nonexistent. Moreover, if thou dost look at a whirling point in the darkness, thou wilt think that it is a circle or an extended line. The reality is that it is nonexistent, but only appears so to the vision. Furthermore, if thou dost look at the firmament and its sparkling stars, thou wilt see them as tiny bodies. In reality, however, each one of them is a thousand times larger than the earth. If thou dost gaze at a shadow it appears still, but is really in motion; spokes appear unbroken but are actually disconnected; and the earth appears flat but is actually a sphere. Therefore, if it be established that the senses, of which the power of vision is, in itself, the most mighty sensory power, are a limited balance and an imperfect proof, then how can it be relied upon in ascertaining [*irfán*] the divine truths, the heavenly signs, and the contingent phenomena?"

(Tablet of the Inmost Heart)

"Today this method is considered the most perfect of all by all the European philosophers, they say that the principal method of gaining knowledge is through the senses; they consider it supreme, although it is imperfect, for it commits errors. For example, the greatest of the senses is the power of sight. The sight sees the mirage as water, and it sees images reflected in mirrors as real and existent; large bodies which are distant appear to be small, and a whirling point appears as a circle. The sight believes the earth to be motionless, and sees the sun in motion, and in many similar cases it makes mistakes. Therefore we cannot trust it." ("Mufavadat 'Abdu'l-Baha," p. 219; "Some Answered Questions," p. 341)

"If the world of nature were perfect and complete in itself, there would be no need of such training and cultivation in the human world--no need of teachers, schools and universities, arts and crafts. The revelations of the Prophets of God would not have been necessary, and the heavenly Books would have been superfluous. If the world of nature were perfect and sufficient for mankind, we would have no need of God and our belief in Him. Therefore, the bestowal of all these great helps and accessories to the attainment of divine life is because the world of nature is incomplete and imperfect. Consider this Canadian country during the early history of Montreal when the land was in its wild, uncultivated and natural condition. The soil was unproductive, rocky and almost uninhabitable--vast forests stretching in every direction. What invisible power caused this great metropolis to spring up amid such savage and forbidding conditions? It was the human mind. Therefore, nature and the effect of nature's laws were imperfect. The mind of man remedied and removed this imperfect condition, until now we behold a great city instead of a savage unbroken wilderness. Before the coming of Columbus America itself was a wild, uncultivated expanse of primeval forest, mountains and rivers--a very world of nature. Now it has become the world of man. It was dark, forbidding and savage; now it has become illumined with a great civilization and prosperity. Instead of forests, we behold productive farms, beautiful gardens and prolific orchards. Instead of thorns and useless vegetation, we find flowers, domestic animals and fields awaiting harvest. If the world of nature were perfect, the condition of this great country would have been left unchanged.

"If a child is left in its natural state and deprived of education, there is no doubt that it will grow up in ignorance and illiteracy, its mental faculties dulled and dimmed; in fact, it will become like an animal. This is evident among the savages of central Africa, who are scarcely higher than the beast in mental development.

"The conclusion is irresistible that the splendors of the Sun of Truth, the Word of God, have been the source and cause of human upbuilding and civilization. The world of nature is the kingdom of the animal. In its natural condition and plane of limitation the animal is perfect. The ferocious beasts of prey have been completely subject to the laws of nature in their development. They are without education or training; they have no power of abstract reasoning and intellectual ideals; they have no touch with the spiritual world and are without conception of God or the Holy Spirit. The animal can neither recognize nor apprehend the spiritual power of man and makes no distinction between man and itself, for the reason that its susceptibilities are limited to the plane of the senses. It lives under the bondage of nature and nature's laws. All the animals are materialists. They are deniers of God and without realization of a transcendent power in the universe. They have no knowledge of the divine Prophets and Holy Books--mere captives of nature and the sense world. In reality they are like the great philosophers of this day who are not in touch with God and the Holy Spirit--deniers of the Prophets, ignorant of spiritual susceptibilities, deprived of the heavenly bounties and without belief in the supernatural power. The animal lives this kind of life blissfully and untroubled, whereas the material philosophers labor and study for ten or twenty years in schools and colleges, denying God, the Holy Spirit and divine inspirations. The animal is even a greater

philosopher, for it attains the ability to do this without labor and study. For instance, the cow denies God and the Holy Spirit, knows nothing of divine inspirations, heavenly bounties or spiritual emotions and is a stranger to the world of hearts. Like the philosophers, the cow is a captive of nature and knows nothing beyond the range of the senses. The philosophers, however, glory in this, saying, 'We are not captives of superstitions; we have implicit faith in the impressions of the senses and know nothing beyond the realm of nature, which contains and covers everything.' But the cow, without study or proficiency in the sciences, modestly and quietly views life from the same standpoint, living in harmony with nature's laws in the utmost dignity and nobility.

"This is not the glory of man. The glory of man is in the knowledge of God, spiritual susceptibilities, attainment to transcendent powers and the bounties of the Holy Spirit. The glory of man is in being informed of the teachings of God. This is the glory of humanity. Ignorance is not glory but darkness. Can these souls who are steeped in the lower strata of ignorance become informed of the mysteries of God and the realities of existence...?" ('Abdu'l-Baha at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Maxwell, Montreal, Canada, 2 September 1912; Persian text in "Star of the West," V:6, Persian section; in "Khitabat," 1984 edition, pp. 540-541; transcription of English, "The Promulgation of Universal Peace," pp. 310-312)

"In the estimation of the philosophers of the Orient, especially those of Greece and Persia, the standard of judgment is the intellect. They are of the opinion that the criterion of the senses is defective, and their proof is that the senses are often deceived and mistaken. That which is liable to mistake cannot be infallible, cannot be a true standard of judgment.

"Among the senses the most powerful and reliable is that of sight. This sense views a mirage as a body of water and is positive as to its character, whereas a mirage is nonexistent. The sense of vision, or sight, sees reflected images in a mirror as verities, when reason declares them to be nonexistent. The eye sees the sun and planets revolving around the earth, whereas in reality the sun is stationary, central, and the earth revolves upon its own axis. The sense of sight sees the earth as a plane, whereas the faculty of reason discovers it to be spherical. The eye views the heavenly bodies in boundless space as small and insignificant, whereas reason declares them to be colossal suns. The sense of sight beholds a whirling spark of fire as a circle of light and is without doubt as to it, whereas such a circle is nonexistent. A man sailing in a ship sees the banks on either side as if they were moving, whereas the ship is moving. Briefly, there are many instances and evidences which disprove the assertion that tangibilities and sense impressions are certainties, for the senses are misleading and often mistaken. How, then, can we rightly declare that they prove reality when the standard or criterion itself is defective?" ('Abdu'l-Baha at the Open Forum, San Francisco, California on 10 October 1912; Persian text in "Star of the West," V:3, Persian section; and in "Khitábát," 1984 edition, pp. 600-601, 609-610; transcription of English translation by Dr. Aminu'llah Farid, in "The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 356)

"In Europe I told the philosophers and scientists of materialism that the criterion of the senses is not reliable. For instance, consider a mirror and the images reflected in it. These images have no actual corporeal existence. Yet if you had never seen a mirror, you would firmly insist and believe that they were real. The eye sees a mirage upon the desert as a lake of water, but there is no reality in it. As we stand upon the deck of a steamer, the shore appears to be moving, yet we know the land is stationary and we are moving. The earth was believed to be fixed and the sun revolving about it, but although this appears to be so, the reverse is now known to be true. A whirling torch makes a circle of fire appear before the eye, yet we realize there is but one point of light. We behold a shadow moving upon the ground, but it has no material existence, no substance. In deserts the atmospheric effects are particularly productive of illusions which deceive the eye. Once I saw a mirage in which a whole caravan appeared traveling upward into the sky. In the far North other deceptive phenomena appear and baffle human vision. Sometimes three or four suns,

called by scientists mock suns, will be shining at the same time, whereas we know that the great solar orb is one and that it remains fixed and single. In brief, the senses are continually deceived, and we are unable to separate that which is reality from that which is not." ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 21)

"But in the estimation of the divine philosophers this proof and assurance is not reliable; nay, rather, they deem the standard of the senses to be false because it is imperfect. Sight, for instance, is one of the most important of the senses, yet it is subject to many aberrations and inaccuracies. The eye sees the mirage as a body of water; it regards images in the mirror as realities when they are but reflections. A man sailing upon the river imagines that objects upon the shore are moving, whereas he is in motion, and they are stationary. To the eye the earth appears fixed, while the sun and stars revolve about it. As a matter of fact, the heavenly orbs are stationary, and the earth is turning upon its axis. The colossal suns, planets and constellations which shine in the heavens appear small, nay, infinitesimal to human vision, whereas in reality they are vastly greater than the earth in dimension and volume. A whirling spark appears to the sight as a circle of fire. There are numberless instances of this kind which show the error and inaccuracy of the senses. Therefore, the divine philosophers considered this standard of judgment to be defective and unreliable." ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," pp. 253-254)

"Let us speak of the first criterion--that of the senses. Contemporary philosophers say, 'We have spent our time in universities and laboratories analyzing composition. We have not encountered the spirituality of God, or any sign of the soul's existence. We are people of truth; intelligent, learned men, but we can find no proof of the existence of a divine being.'

"The senses mistake a mirage for water; the eyes see the sun move; your train or boat seems immobile and the landscape seems to pass by; planets look like fixed points of light; but they have measurable dimensions. A lighted point set in rotation appears like a circle. These examples show the senses subject to error. How can we put our trust in them?" ("Abdul Baha on Divine Philosophy," p. 94)

"It is no proof of intelligence to reject everything which does not strike the senses. Nay, rather, such a one is brother to the animal. The cow has no idea of God; she does not know the soul. So the only difference between her highness the cow and a materialistic philosopher is that the latter takes a great deal of trouble! It is not a special or exclusive privilege to be the prisoner of one's senses; the cow is the example of this theory." (Abdul Baha on Divine Philosophy, pp. 94-95)

"If you want to go by feeling we find upon examining it that it is not perfect. Why? Because the sight, which is the greatest of all the senses, and judges better than all the other senses, is sometimes mistaken. The sight judges the mirage to be water; when looking at the shadows judges it to be changeless; finds the mirage to be an ideal picture; when looking at a spark revolving in a circle thinks it is a circle of fire; when looking at the stars thinks they are very small, yet in reality they are larger than the earth; judges the earth on which we are living to be motionless, while the sun, which is motionless, seems to be revolving. Consequently, the measure of sensation is not true, for we find in its greatest agent so many defects that we can not but judge of the imperfections of the other senses." ('Abdu'l-Baha to pilgrims, notes of Miss Alma Albertson, 30 November 1900; both sources identical)

"If you want to go by feeling, you will find when looking at a thing that it is not perfect. Why? Because the sight, the greatest of all senses, is sometimes mistaken. The sight judges a mirage to be water, the shadow to be the thing itself, and an image to be an ideal picture; also when looking at a revolving spark that it is a circle of fire, at the stars that they are very small, when in reality some of

them are larger than the earth and when we look at this earth upon which we live, we judge it to be motionless, while the sun which is motionless seems to be revolving. Consequently the measure of the senses, feeling, is not true, for if we find in its greatest agent so many defects that we can but judge of the imperfections of other senses which go to make up the feeling (five senses)." ('Abdu'l-Baha to pilgrims, notes of Corinne True, 30 November 1900; see above.)

"But when you reflect deeply you will see that this means of knowing is not to be absolutely relied upon. For instance, when you see a steamer, sailing along rapidly, the evidence of your sight tells you that the shore is moving, but you know this to be false. If you look at the sun your eyes assure you that it rises every day and travels across the sky, but science has disproved this. If you take a lighted stick, attached to a string and whirl it around very fast the appearance is that of a circle of fire--again 'people in the desert often see a most beautiful mirage of trees and water, but the nearer you approach this appearance [to this phantom], the more it fades away, and you begin to perceive its unreality. All this proves that the evidence of the senses alone is not to be relied on for conveying [conceiving] the truth.'" ('Abdu'l-Baha to Miss Ethel Rosenberg, in Rabb B7, National Baha'i Archives, Wilmette, Illinois; portion (in quotations and with changes in brackets) published in "Star of the West," VIII:9, p. 114)

After presenting all of these arguments and proofs of the inaccuracy and limitations of this standard of knowledge, 'Abdu'l-Baha concludes:

"Therefore, if it be established that the senses, of which the power of vision is, in itself, the most mighty sensory power, are a limited balance and an imperfect proof, then how can it be relied upon in ascertaining [irfān] the divine truths, the heavenly signs, and the contingent phenomena?" (Tablet of the Inmost Heart)

"The sight...makes mistakes. Therefore we cannot trust it." ("Some Answered Questions," p. 341)

"That which is liable to mistake cannot be infallible, cannot be a true standard of judgment...Briefly, there are many instances and evidences which disprove the assertion that tangibilities and sense impressions are certainties, for the senses are misleading and often mistaken. How, then, can we rightly declare that they prove reality when the standard or criterion itself is defective?" ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 356)

"In brief, the senses are continually deceived, and we are unable to separate that which is reality from that which is not." ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 21)

"There are numberless instances of this kind which show the error and inaccuracy of the senses. Therefore, the divine philosophers have considered this standard of judgment to be defective and unreliable." ("The Promulgation of Peace," pp. 253-254)

"These examples show the senses subject to error. How can we put our trust in them?" ('Abdu'l-Baha on Divine Philosophy," p. 94)

"If you want to go by feeling we find upon examining it that it is not perfect. Why? Because the sight, which is the greatest of all the senses, and judges better than all the other senses, is sometimes mistaken...Consequently the measure of sensation is not true, for we find in its greatest agent so many defects that we can not but judge of the imperfections of the other senses." ('Abdu'l-Baha to pilgrims, notes of Miss Alma Albertson, 30 November 1900; identical in both sources)

"Consequently the measure of the senses, feeling, is not true, for we find in its greatest agent so many defects that we can but judge of the imperfections of the other senses which go to make up the feeling (five senses)." ('Abdu'l-Baha to pilgrims, notes of Corinne True, 30 November 1900; see above)

"All this proves that the evidence of the senses alone is not to be relied upon for conveying [conceiving] the Truth." ('Abdu'l-Baha to Miss Ethel Rosenberg; see above)

Both Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha characterize materialists, those who cleave to the evidence of the senses and deny the validity of other criteria for human knowledge, as misguided and out of touch with reality:

"Those who have rejected God and firmly cling to Nature as it is in itself are, verily, bereft of knowledge and wisdom. They are truly of them that are far astray. They have failed to attain the lofty summit and have fallen short of the ultimate purpose; therefore their eyes are shut and their thoughts differed..."

"When the eyes of the people of the East were captivated by the arts and wonders of the West, they roved distraught in the wilderness of material causes, oblivious of the One Who is the Causer of Causes, and the Sustainer thereof..." (Baha'u'llah, "Lawh-i-Hikmat," Tablets of Baha'u'llah, pp. 143-144)

"Materialists who reason in this way, and contend that we are unable to see the world of spirit, or to perceive the blessings of God, are surely like the animals who have no understanding; having eyes they see not, ears they have, but do not hear. And this lack of sight and hearing is a proof of nothing but their own inferiority; of whom we read in the Qur'an, 'They are men who are blind and deaf to the Spirit.' They do not use that great gift of God, the power of the understanding, by which they might see with the eyes of the spirit, hear with spiritual ears and also comprehend with a Divinely enlightened heart." ('Abdu'l-Baha in Paris; transcribed in Persian, "Khitaabaat," pp. 148-157; translated into English, "Paris Talks," p. 94)

## **COMMENTARY ON THE FIRST CRITERION**

A brief comment may be in order. One of the Baha'i teachings is the harmony of science and religion. Another teaching is that true religion is in agreement with science and reason. And yet here we find 'Abdu'l-Baha indicating that most of Western science, which is largely based upon the evidence of the senses, falls short of constituting a true criterion for knowledge, and infallible guide to reality. It seems from this discussion of material science, that it is not necessarily compatible with the teachings of religion. Are we to conclude therefore that 'Abdu'l-Baha is referring to another science and another reason? Perhaps the science that is in harmony with religion is that science which is informed by divine guidance, and governed by spiritual principle?

If so, then that science may be the divine philosophy of the East rather than the materialistic science of the West. Hence, if true religion is in agreement with science and reason, this need not imply that true religion must be conformable to whatever conclusions have been reached by those who employ the apparatus of materialistic science and materialistic reason, that is, the current sciences and philosophies that categorically deny the existence or the relevance of a revealed truth. Rather, it seems that the dominant influence of materialistic science and materialistic philosophy in the West have had consequences harmful to humanity:

"When the eyes of the people of the East were captivated by the arts and wonders of the West, they roved distraught in the wilderness of material causes, oblivious of the One Who is the Causer of Causes and the Sustainer thereof..." (Baha'u'llah, "Lawh-i-Hikmat," Tablets, p. 144)

"The civilization, so often vaunted by the learned exponents of arts and sciences, will, if allowed to overleap the bounds of moderation, bring great evil upon men. Thus warneth you He Who is the All-Knowing. If carried to excess, civilization will prove as prolific a source of evil as it had been of goodness when kept within the restraints of moderation. Meditate on this, O people, and be not of them that wander distraught in the wilderness of error." (Baha'u'llah, "Lawh-i-Zayn al-Muqarabin," Gleanings, CLXIII, pp. 342-343)

In what may be a related statement, 'Abdu'l-Baha writes:

"All the peoples of Europe, notwithstanding their vaunted civilization, sink and drown in this terrifying sea of passion and desire, and this is why all the phenomena of their culture comes to nothing...

"A superficial culture, unsupported by a cultivated morality, is as 'a confused medley of dreams,' [Qur'an 12:44,21:5] and external lustre without inner perfection is 'like a vapor in the desert which the thirsty dreameth to be water.' [Qur'an 24:39] For results which would win the good pleasure of God and secure the peace and well-being of man, could never be fully achieved in a merely external civilization.

"The peoples of Europe have not advanced to the higher planes of moral civilization, as their opinions and behavior clearly demonstrate." ('Abdu'l-Baha, "The Secret of Divine Civilization," pp. 60-61)

## SECOND CRITERION

In one of His talks, 'Abdu'l-Baha described knowledge as two-fold, and He noted that one of the forms of objective knowledge [*'ilm-i-Suuri*] is what He called "reason" [*'aql*] in other sources:

"Knowledge is of two kinds: one is subjective [*'ilm-i-wujudi* {see Fourth Criterion: Intuition}], and the other objective [*'ilm-i-Súri*]; that is to say, an intuitive knowledge and a knowledge derived from perception [*'ilm-i-taSSúri*].

"The knowledge of things which men universally have, is gained by reflection {see Second Criterion: Reason} or by evidence {see First Criterion: Senses}: that is to say, either by the power of the mind [*'aql*] the conception of an object is formed, or from beholding an object the form is produced in the mirror of the heart [*maraat qalb*]." ("Mufavadat-i-'Abdu'l-Baha," XL, p. 118; "Some Answered Questions," XL, p. 180)

'Abdu'l-Baha indicates that reason [*'aql*] is the distinctive attribute of the human being, which sets him apart from the animal kingdom:

"As for the second balance, which the Illuminati and the peripatetics rely upon, it is the balance of reason [*al-mízánu'l-'aql*']. In like manner, the other schools of the first philosophers in the ancient and middle centuries depended upon it. They said that that which is judged by reason is firmly established, clear and indubitable, and that there is no doubt or defect

either in its foundations or its outcomes." (Tablet of the Inmost Heart)

"The knowledge of things which men universally have, is gained by reflection {see Second Criterion: Reason} or by evidence {see First Criterion: Senses}: that is to say, either by the power of the mind [bi-quwwat-i-'aqliyyih] the conception of an object is formed [taSSuur aan shay namAyand], or from beholding an object the form is produced [mashaahand shay Suurati] in the mirror of the heart [dar maraat-i-qalb]." ("Mufavadat-i-'Abdu'l-Baha," XL, p. 118; "Some Answered Questions," XL, p. 180)

"The human spirit [ammaa ruuh insaani] which distinguishes man from the animal [keh maabeh al-amtayaaz insaan az hayawaanist] is the rational soul [hamaan nafs naaTaqeh ast]; and these two names--the human spirit and the rational soul [ruuh insaani va nafs naaTaqeh]--designate one thing. This spirit, which in the terminology of the philosophers [hukamaa] is the rational soul [nafs naaTaqeh], embraces all beings, and as far as human ability permits discovers the realities of things and becomes cognisant of their peculiarities and effects, and of the qualities and properties of beings. But the human spirit, unless assisted by the spirit of faith [ruuh iimaani], does not become acquainted with the divine secrets [asraar ilaahiyyeh] and the heavenly realities [haqaa'iq lahuutiyyeh]. It is like a mirror which, although clear, polished, and brilliant, is still in need of light. Until a ray of the sun reflects upon it, it cannot discover the heavenly secrets.

"But the mind [ammaa 'aql] is the power of the human spirit [quvveh ruuh insaani ast]. Spirit is the lamp [ruuh bemanzaleh saraaj ast]; mind is the light which shines from the lamp ['aql bemanzaleh anvaar keh az saraaj saaTe' ast]. Spirit is the tree [ruuh bemanzaleh shakhrast], and the mind is the fruit [va 'aql bemathaabeh shmar]. Mind is the perfection of the spirit ['aql kamaal ruuh ast], and is its essential quality [va Safat matlaazemeh aanast], as the sun's rays are the essential necessity of the sun." ("Mufavadat 'Abdu'l-Baha," p. 159; "Some Answered Questions," LV, pp. 243-244)

"The first condition [avvaliyyeh] of intelligence in the world of nature [dar 'aalam Tabi'at] is the intelligence [idaraakaat] of the rational soul [nafs naaTaqeh]. In this intelligence and this power all men are sharers, whether they be neglectful or vigilant, believers or deniers. This human rational soul is God's creation; it contains and excels other creatures; as it is more noble and distinguished, it contains things. The power of the rational soul can discover the realities of things, comprehend the peculiarities of beings, and penetrate the mysteries of existence. All sciences, knowledge, arts, wonders, institutions, discoveries, and enterprises, come from the exercised intelligence of the rational soul. There was a time when they were unknown, preserved mysteries, and hidden secrets; the rational soul gradually discovered them and brought them out from the plane of the invisible and the hidden, into the realm of the visible. This is the greatest power of intelligence [iin a'zham quvveh idaraak] in the world of nature [dar 'aalam Tabii'at ast], which in its highest flight and soaring comprehends the realities [haqaaiiq], the properties [khavaaS], and the effects [aathaar] of the contingent beings [muhudaat amakaaniiyyeh]...The intellectual power of the world of nature [quvaai ma'nuuyyeh 'aalam Tabiyy'at] is a power of investigation [quvaai matajasseh ast], and by its researches it discovers the realities of beings, and the properties of existences..." ("Mufavadat 'Abdu'l-Baha," p. 165; "Some Answered Questions," LVIII, 252-253)

"Man [insaan] is distinguished above the animals [hayawaan] through his reason ['aql]. The perceptions [idaraakaat] of man [insaan] are of two [duu] kinds [qasim]: tangible, or sensible [mahissuus], and reasonable [mi'aquul], whereas the animal [hayawaan] perceptions are limited to the senses [ahsaasaat], the tangible only. The tangible perceptions may be likened to this candle, the reasonable perceptions [mi'aquul] to the light. Calculations of mathematical problems and determining the spherical form of the earth are through the reasonable perceptions [mi'aquul]. The center of gravity is a hypothesis of reason. Reason itself is not tangible, perceptible to the senses.



Reason ['aql] is an intellectual verity or reality [haqiqat]. All [jami'a]l qualities [Safaat] are ideal verities [haqaaiiq], not tangible realities [mehissuus niist]. For instance, we say this man is a scholarly man. Knowledge ['ilm] is an ideal attainment [haqiqat me'aquuleh ast] not perceptible to the senses. When you see this scholarly man, your eye does not see his knowledge, your ear cannot hear his science, nor can you sense it by taste. It is not a tangible verity. Science ['ilm] itself is an ideal verity [haqiqat me'aquuleh ast]. It is evident, therefore, that the perceptions [idaraakaat] of man [insaan] are twofold [duu nuu' ast]: the reasonable [me'aquuleh] and the tangible, or sensible [mehisuuseh]...

"Virtue, or perfection, belongs to man [insaan], who possesses both the capacity of the senses [idaraak mehisuusaat] and ideal perception [idaraak me'aquulaat]. For instance, astronomical discoveries are man's accomplishments. He has not gained this knowledge through his senses. The greater part of it has been attained through intellect, through the ideal senses. Man's inventions have appeared through the avenue of his reasonable faculties. All his scientific attainments [jami'a iin 'uluum] have come through the faculty of reason [quwwat 'aqliyyat]. Briefly, the evidences of intellect or reason ['aql] are manifest [zhaahir] in man [insaan]. By them he is differentiated from the animal. Therefore, the animal kingdom ['aalam hayawaan] is distinct and inferior to the human kingdom ['aalam insaan]. ("Khitaabaat 'Abdu'l-Baha," pp. 601-603,604; "The Promulgation of Universal Peace," pp. 356-358 passim.)

"On the other hand, it is evident and true, though most astounding, that in man there is present this supernatural force or faculty which discovers the realities of things and which possesses the power of idealization or intellection. It is capable of discovering scientific laws, and science we know is not a tangible reality. Science ['ilm] exists in the mind of man as an ideal reality. The mind itself, reason [nafs 'aql] itself, is an ideal reality [haqiqat me'aquuleh ast] and not tangible [mehisuuseh nist]." (Ibid., p. 609; Ibid., p. 360)

"Proofs are of four kinds...second, through the reasoning faculty." ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 253)

"God has bestowed the gift of mind upon man in order that he may weigh every fact or truth presented to him and adjudge whether it be reasonable. That which conforms to his reason he may accept as true, while that which reason and science cannot sanction may be discarded as imagination and superstition, as a phantom and not reality. Inasmuch as the blind imitations or dogmatic interpretations current among men do not coincide with the postulates of reason, and the mind and scientific investigation cannot acquiesce thereto, many souls in the human world today shun and deny religion. That is to say, imitations, when weighed in the scales of reason, will not conform to its standard and requirement. Therefore, these souls deny religion and become irreligious, whereas if the reality of the divine religions becomes manifest to them and the foundation of the heavenly teachings is revealed coinciding with facts and evident truths, reconciling with scientific knowledge and reasonable proof, all will acknowledge them, and irreligion will cease to exist. In this way all mankind may be brought to the foundation of religion, for religion is true reason and science, while all that is not conformable thereto is mere superstition..." ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 374)

'Abdu'l-Baha identifies this second method of attaining to knowledge as that of the ancient philosophers:

"As for the second balance, which the Illuminati and the peripatetics [followers of Aristotle] rely upon, it is the balance of reason [al-mízánu'l-'aql]. In like manner, the other schools of the first philosophers in the ancient and middle centuries depended upon it. They said that that which is

judged by reason is firmly established, clear and indubitable, and that there is no doubt or defect either in its foundations or its outcomes." ('Abdu'l-Baha, Tablet on the Inmost Heart, provisional translation by Steven Phelps and William McCants, March 2000; Persian text in "Min Makatib 'Abdu'l-Baha," pp. 83-86)

"It is as thou hast written, not philosophers in general but narrow-minded materialists that are meant. As to deistic philosophers, such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, they are indeed worthy of esteem and of the highest praise, for they have rendered distinguished services to mankind..." "We regard knowledge and wisdom as the foundation of the progress of mankind, and extol philosophers that are endowed with broad vision..." (Tablet to Dr. Forel, in "Star of the West," XIV:4, p. 102)

"Now concerning philosophers, they are of two schools. Thus Socrates the wise believed in the unity of God and the existence of the soul after death; as his opinion was contrary to that of the narrow-minded people of his time, that divine sage was poisoned by them. All divine philosophers and men of wisdom and understanding, when observing these endless beings, have considered that in this great and infinite universe all things end in the mineral kingdom, that the outcome of the mineral kingdom is the vegetable kingdom, the outcome of the vegetable kingdom is the animal kingdom and the outcome of the animal kingdom the world of man. The consummation of this limitless universe with all its grandeur and glory hath been man himself, who in this world of being toileth and suffereth for a time, with diverse ills and pains, and ultimately disintegrates, having no trace and no fruit after him. Were it so, there is no doubt that this infinite universe with all its perfections has ended in sham and delusion with no result, no fruit, no permanence and no effect. It would be utterly without meaning. They (the philosophers) were thus convinced that such is not the case, that this Great Workshop with all its power, its bewildering magnificence and endless perfections, cannot eventually come to naught. That still another life should exist is thus certain, and, just as the vegetable kingdom is unaware of the world of man, so we, too, know not of the Great Life hereafter that followeth the life of man here below. Our non-comprehension of that life, however, is no proof of its non-existence. The mineral world, for instance, is utterly unaware of the world of man and cannot comprehend it, but the ignorance of a thing is no proof of its non-existence. Numerous and conclusive proofs exist that go to show that this infinite world cannot end with this human life." ("Star of the West," XIV:4, p. 104)

"The second is the method [miizaan 'aql] of reason, which was that of the ancient philosophers, the pillars of wisdom [hikmat], that is the method [miizaan] of the understanding [adaraak]. They proved things by reason [be-aql], and held firmly to logical proofs [be-dalaa'il 'aqliyyeh], all their arguments were arguments of reason ['aqliiast]." ("Mufavadat 'Abdu'l-Baha," p. 219; "Some Answered Questions," pp. 341-42)

"In the estimation of the philosophers [falaasafeh] of the Orient [sharq], especially those of Greece [yunaan] and Persia [iiraan], the standard of judgment [miizaan adaraak] is the intellect ['aql]..." "The philosophers of the East consider the perfect criterion [miizaan] to be reason or intellect ['aql], and according to that standard [miizaan 'aql] the realities of all objects [haqiqat har shay'i] can be proved; for, they say, the standard [miizaan] of reason and intellect ['aql] is perfect, and everything provable through reason [mi-'aquul] is veritable [haqiqat]. Therefore, those philosophers consider all philosophical deductions to be correct when weighed according to the standard [miizaan] of reason ['aql], and they state that the senses [hiss] are the assistants and instruments of reason ['aql], and that although the investigation [taharrii] of realities [haqaa'iiq] may be conducted through the senses [hiss], the standard [miizaan] of knowing and judgment is reason ['aql] itself. In this way the philosophers of the East and West differ and disagree. The materialistic philosophers [falaasafeh] of the West [gharb] declare that man [insaan] belongs to the animal [haywaan] kingdom, whereas the

philosophers [falaasafeh] of the East [sharq]--such as Plato [afLaatuun], Aristotle [arisTuu] and the Persians [falaasafeh iiraan]--divide the world ['aalam] of existence [wujud] or phenomena of life into two general categories or kingdoms ['aalam]: one [yekii] the animal kingdom ['aalam hayawaanii], or world ['aalam] of nature [Tabii'at], the other the human kingdom ['aalam insaanii], or world ['aalam] of reason ['aql]." ("Khitaabaat 'Abdu'l-Baha," pp. 601-603; "The Promulgation of Universal Peace," pp. 356-357)

"Among the Greeks and Romans the criterion of knowledge was reason--that whatever is provable and acceptable by reason must necessarily be admitted as true." ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 20)

"The second criterion is that of the intellect. The ancient philosophers in particular considered the intellect to be the most important agency of judgment. Among the wise men of Greece, Rome, Persia and Egypt the criterion of true proof was reason. They held that every matter submitted to the reasoning faculty could be proved true or false and must be accepted or rejected accordingly." ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 254)

"God has created man and endowed him with the power of reason whereby he may arrive at valid conclusions. Therefore, man must endeavor in all things to investigate the fundamental reality. If he does not independently investigate, he has failed to utilize the talent God has bestowed upon him. I am pleased with the American people because, as a rule, they are independent seekers of the truth; their minds are actively employed instead of remaining idle and unproductive. This is most praiseworthy..." ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," pp. 312-313)

"Among the ancient philosophers the infallible way to knowledge was through logic. The different schools of logic weighed everything in the scales of cold scholasticism." ("Abdu'l-Baha on Divine Philosophy," p. 93)

"The Greeks (Plato, Aristotle, etc.) believe in the second way of measuring, viz., by the mind...  
"The old Greeks and Persians judged everything by the measure of the intellect." ('Abdu'l-Baha to pilgrims, 30 November 1900, notes of Miss Alma Albertson, Rabb B6, National Baha'i Archives, Wilmette, Illinois)

"Plato and Aristotle believed in the second, the mind or understanding...As to the measure of the intellect, the old Greek and Persians judged everything by this measure..." ('Abdu'l-Baha to pilgrims, 30 November 1900, notes of Corinne True, True B9, National Baha'i Archives, Wilmette, Illinois)

"Second, 'the way by [of] argument and reasoning and all philosophers have taught that it was [is] possible to reach the knowledge of [all] Truth by this method...  
"'The ancient philosophers have also taught that by the Intellect (the second method of argument and reasoning) accurate and absolute knowledge of everything can be obtained.' They said that they could prove the existence of God by the existence of forces and motion, that is to say the mover and the thing moved. They explained that motion is impossible without one who causes movement."  
( 'Abdu'l-Baha to Miss Ethel Rosenberg, February-March 1901, Rabb B7, National Baha'i Archives, Wilmette, Illinois; published with changes in brackets and in quotation marks, "Star of the West," VIII:9, p. 114)

## LIMITATIONS OF THE SECOND CRITERION

While the divine philosophers acknowledge the importance of reason as an approach to the investigation of reality, they also point out some of its blind spots and fault lines. Baha'u'llah Himself indicates some of its limitations:

"God, the Exalted, hath places these signs in men, to the end that philosophers [muhaqiqiin] may not deny the mysteries of the life beyond nor belittle that which hath been promised them. For some hold to reason ['aql] and deny whatever reason comprehendeth not, and yet weak minds ['aqul-i-Da'iifih] can never grasp the matters which we have related, but only the Supreme, Divine Intelligence ['aql kulli rabbAni] can comprehend them..." (SV:33)

'Abdu'l-Baha confirms the above statement made by Baha'u'llah:

"All of these schools, by virtue of their reliance upon the balance of reason, have differed on all questions [al-masá'il] and their opinions are divided on all truths [al-Haqá'iq]. If the balance of reason is a just, accurate, and firm balance, then they should not differ in truths and questions, and the opinions of the former and latter generations should not diverge. Because of their conflict and their differences, therefore, it is established that the balance of reason is imperfect. Verily, if we were to conceive of a perfect balance and if thou wert to assess the weight of a hundred thousand souls with it, there would be no difference among them. Their lack of consensus, however, is sufficient and irrefutable proof of the deficiency of the balance of reason." ('Abdu'l-Baha, Tablet on the Inmost Heart, provisional translation by Steven Phelps and William McCants, March 2000; Persian text in "Min Makatib 'Abdu'l-Baha," pp. 83-86)

"The circle of this knowledge is very limited, because it depends upon effort and attainment." ("Mufavadat 'Abdu'l-Baha," p. 118; "Some Answered Questions," XL, p. 180)

"Notwithstanding this, they differed greatly, and their opinions were contradictory. They even changed their views; that is to say, during twenty years they would prove the existence of a thing by logical arguments [be-dalaa'il 'aqliyyeh], and afterwards they would deny it by logical arguments. So much so, that Plato at first logically proved [be-dalaa'il 'aqliyyeh] the immobility of the earth and the movement of the sun; later by logical arguments [be-'aqliyyeh] he proved that the sun was the stationary centre, and that the earth was moving. Afterwards the Ptolemaic theory was spread abroad, and the idea of Plato was entirely forgotten, until at last a new observer again called it to life. Thus all the mathematicians disagreed, although they relied upon arguments of reason. In the same way, by logical arguments [be-dalaa'il 'aqliyyeh], they would prove a problem at a certain time, then afterwards by arguments of the same nature [be-dalaa'il 'aqliyyeh] they would deny it. So, one of the philosophers would firmly uphold a theory for a time with strong arguments and proofs to support it, which afterwards he would retract and contradict by arguments of reason [be-daliil 'aqlii]. Therefore it is evident that the method [miizaan] of reason ['aqlii] is not perfect; for the differences of the ancient philosophers, the want of stability and the variations of their opinions, prove this. For if it were perfect, all ought to be united in their ideas and agreed in their opinions." ("Mufavadat 'Abdu'l-Baha," pp. 219-220; "Some Answered Questions," pp. 341-42)

"They observed the heavens and the motion of the chief planets, which they conceived to be caused by the movement of eight successive crystalline spheres enclosed within a ninth and outer one, which, by its action caused the others to move. But later philosophers have said that these crystalline spheres are non-existent, and that the planets are suspended by the force of gravitation,

attraction, etc., thus utterly contradicting ancient theories. These ancient philosophers also said that as they could observe no movement or change in the heavens, they were therefore pre-existent and eternal. All these statements have been refuted. It is therefore evident that we cannot rely on this second method of obtaining knowledge, to ensure absolute accuracy. 'Successive philosophers are always contradicting each other, and propounding diverse theories. If absolute knowledge were to be obtained by this means, the wisest philosophers would agree in saying the same things.'" ('Abdu'l-Baha to Miss Ethel Rosenberg, Rabb B7, National Baha'i Archives, Wilmette, original capitalizations and wording not found in published version [in brackets]; "Star of the West," VIII:9, pp. 114-115)

"As to the second criterion--reason--this likewise is unreliable and not to be depended upon. This human world is an ocean of varying opinions. If reason is the perfect standard and criterion of knowledge, why are opinions at variance and why do philosophers disagree so completely with each other? This is a clear proof that human reason is not to be relied upon as an infallible criterion. For instance, great discoveries and announcements of former centuries are continually upset and discarded by the wise men of today. Mathematicians, astronomers, chemical scientists continually disprove and reject the conclusions of the ancients; nothing is fixed, nothing final; everything is continually changing because human reason is progressing along new roads of investigation and arriving at new conclusions every day. In the future much that is announced and accepted as true now will be rejected and disproved. And so it will continue ad infinitum." ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 21)

"But in the estimation of the people of insight this criterion is likewise defective and unreliable, for these same philosophers who held to reason or intellect as the standard of human judgment have differed widely among themselves upon every subject of investigation. The statements of the Greek philosophers are contradictory to the conclusions of the Persian sages. Even among the Greek philosophers themselves there is continual variance and lack of agreement upon any given subject. Great difference of thought also prevailed between the wise men of Greece and Rome. Therefore, if the criterion of reason or intellect constituted a correct and infallible standard of judgment, those who tested and applied it should have arrived at the same conclusions. As they differ and are contradictory in conclusions, it is an evidence that the method and standard of test must have been faulty and insufficient." ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 254)

"While they were thinking they became of different opinions. Discord and differences only show the measure of intellect to be untrue, for they all had the same intellect, and were this the true standard they would never have disagreed. Another reason which disproves this is that the philosopher first agreed that the atom could not be divided, but now it is believed that it can be divided. At first it was believed that the firmament was divided into spheres, and that all the stars moved together, but now it is believed that each has its own orbit. The proof of today is that the theory of the ancient philosophers was based on an incorrect foundation. One of the disproofs is that it was formerly believed that the sun revolved around the earth and caused day and night, but now it is believed that the earth revolves around the sun. Both have judged this by their intellect; consequently this proves the measure of intellect to be incorrect." ('Abdu'l-Baha to pilgrims, November 1900, notes of Miss Alma Albertson, National Baha'i Archives, Wilmette, Illinois)

"As to the measure of intellect, the old Greek and Persians judged everything by this measure and while they are thinking that this is the only way, they themselves begin to differ and disagree, and this fact only shows that the measure of intellect is not true, for they all have the same intellect, and were this the true standard they would have never disagreed. Another reason which disproves this is that the philosophers first agreed that the atoms could not be divided; now it is believed they can be

divided. At first it was believed the firmament was divided into spheres, and is that it was formerly believed that the sun revolved around the earth to cause the day, but now that the earth revolves around the sun. While all the philosophers have intellect for their standard, the change of their opinions and basis proves that it is not the true one to go by." ('Abdu'l-Baha to pilgrims, 30 November 1900, notes of Corinne True, National Baha'i Archives, Wilmette, Illinois)

To reiterate and summarize, 'Abdu'l-Baha plainly states that reason, the special faculty of the rational soul or human spirit, is fallible, and, divisive:

"Therefore it is evident that the method of reason is not perfect; for the differences of the ancient philosophers, the want of stability and the variations of their opinions, prove this. For if it were perfect, all ought to be united in their ideas and agreed in their opinions." ("Some Answered Questions," p. 342)

"If reason is the perfect standard and criterion of knowledge, why are opinions at variance and why do philosophers disagree so completely with each other? This is a clear proof that human reason is not to be relied upon as an infallible criterion." ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 21)

"Therefore, if the criterion of reason or intellect constituted a correct and infallible standard of judgment, those who tested and applied it should have arrived at the same conclusions. As they differ and are contradictory in conclusions, it is an evidence that the method and standard of test must have been faulty and insufficient." ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 254)

"The proof of today is that the theory of the ancient philosophers was based on an incorrect foundations...consequently this proves the measure of intellect to be incorrect." ('Abdu'l-Baha to pilgrims, 30 November 1900, notes of Miss Alma Albertson, National Baha'i Archives, Wilmette, Illinois)

"The proof of today is that the ancient philosophy was based on an incorrect foundation...While all the philosophers have intellect for their standard, the change of their opinions and basis proves that it is not the true one to go by." ('Abdu'l-Baha to pilgrims, 30 November 1900, notes of Corinne True, National Baha'i Archives, Wilmette, Illinois)

"All these statements have been refuted. '[But] It is therefore [omitted in publication] evident that we cannot rely on this second method of obtaining knowledge, to ensure absolute accuracy.'" ('Abdu'l-Baha to Miss Ethel Rosenberg, February-March 1901, Rabb B7, National Baha'i Archives, Wilmette, Illinois)

## **COMMENTARY ON THE SECOND CRITERION**

Why should the conclusions of the philosophers, the logicians, the scientists agree? Because there is only one reality--reality is created by God not constructed by human beings. This has been discussed in the statement of principles related to Baha'i epistemology, at the outset of this study.

A brief comment may be in order. One of the teachings of Baha'u'llah indicates that science and religion are and should be in harmony with one another. Another related teaching proclaims that true religion is in agreement with science and reason. It has already been suggested that "science" in

this context may not refer to the methodologies and hypotheses of the physical and social sciences as currently conceived, those based on atheistic, materialistic assumptions and principles. The science which is undoubtedly in harmony with religion is that science which is called divine philosophy [hikmat ilahi] in the Baha'i Writings.

Baha'u'llah appears to distinguish two varieties of intellect/reason which inform our consciousness, one of which is not only fallible but an insufficient instrument for the investigation of the metaphysical, while the other is the ideal means for that attainment:

"God, the Exalted, hath placed these signs in men, to the end that philosophers [muhaqiqin] may not deny the mysteries of the life beyond, nor belittle that which hath been promised them. For some hold to reason ['aql] and deny whatever reason ['aql] comprehendeth not, and yet weak minds ['aql da'ifeh] can never grasp the matters which we have related, but only the Supreme, Divine Intelligence ['aql kulli rabbani] can comprehend them:

How can feeble reason ['aql jaz'i]  
encompass the Qur'an,  
Or a spider snare a phoenix in her web?"

(Baha'u'llah, "Haft Vadi," Persian text in "Athar-i-Qalam-i-A'la," volume III, pp. 126-127; English translation in "Seven Valleys," p. 33)

"Here reason ['aql] signifieth the divine, universal mind ['aql kulli rabbani], whose sovereignty enlighteneth all created things--nor doth it refer to every feeble brain ['aql naaqS]; for it is as the wise Sana'i hath written:

How can feeble reason ['aql jaz'i]  
encompass the Qur'an,  
Or a spider snare a phoenix in her web?"

(Baha'u'llah, "Chahar Vadi," Persian text in "Athar-i-Qalam-i-A'la," volume III, pp. 144-145); English translation in "Four Valleys," p. 53)

"We entreat the learned men of the Bayan not to follow in such ways, not to inflict, at the time of Mustaghath, upon Him Who is the divine Essence, the heavenly Light, the absolute Eternity, the Beginning and the End of the Manifestations of the Invisible, that which hath been inflicted in this day. We beg them not to depend upon their intellect, their comprehension and learning, nor to contend with the Revealer of celestial and infinite knowledge." (Baha'u'llah, "Kitab-i-Iqan," English translation, p. 248)

'Abdu'l-Baha also explained this teaching of Baha'u'llah:

"But the universal divine mind [ammaa 'aql kulli ilaahi] which is beyond nature [keh maavara' Tabbi'at ast], is the bounty of the Pre-existent Power. This universal mind is divine ['aql kulli ilaahiiast]; it embraces existing realities, and it receives the light of the mysteries of God. It is a conscious power [aan quvveh 'aalameh ast], not a power of investigation and of research [nah quvveh majajasseh matahasseh]...the heavenly intellectual power [ammaa quvveh 'aaqleh malakuutiyyeh] which is beyond nature [keh maavaraa' Tabiyy'at ast], embraces things and is cognisant of things, knows them, understands them, is aware of mysteries, realities, and divine significations, and is the discoverer of the concealed verities of the Kingdom. This divine intellectual power [iin quvveh 'aqliyyeh ilaahiyyeh] is the special attribute of the Holy Manifestations and the Dawning-places of prophethood [makhSuuS bemazhaahar meqaddaseh va maTaale' nubuvvat ast]; a ray of this light [partuvi azin anvaar] falls upon the mirrors of the hearts of the righteous [bar maraayaai quluub abraar zand], and a portion and a share of this power comes

to them through the Holy Manifestations [keh naSib va bahreh azin quvveh nuvaasTeh mazhaahar muqaddaseh baran]." ("Mufavadat 'Abdu'l-Baha," p. 165; "Some Answered Questions," LVIII, p. 253)

## THIRD CRITERION

Having considered the way of the senses and the way of the intellect we next come to the way of "tradition":

"The third balance is the balance of tradition [al-mízánu'n-naql']. This, too, is defective, and the people cannot rely upon it since tradition is understood through reason and weighed in its balance. If the foundation of reason is deficient, how is it possible that the understanding of the tradition will be consistent with reality or lead to certitude? Verily, this matter is clear and manifest." ('Abdu'l-Baha, Tablet on the Inmost Heart, provisional translation by Steven Phelps and William McCants, March 2000; Persian text in "Min Makatib 'Abdu'l-Baha," pp. 63-66)

"The third method [miizaan] of understanding is by tradition [naqal], that is, through the text [naSuuS] of the Holy Scriptures [kitab muqaddaseh]; for people say: in the Old and New Testaments, God spoke thus." ("Mufavadat 'Abdu'l-Baha," p. 220; "Some Answered Questions," p. 342)

"A third standard nor criterion is the opinion held by theologians that traditions or prophetic statement and interpretations constitute the basis of human knowing...For religious traditions are the report and record of understanding and interpretation of the Book." ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 20, 22)

"Proofs are of four kinds:...third, from traditional or scriptural authority...

"The third criterion or standard of proof is traditional or scriptural--namely,, that every statement or conclusion should be supported by traditions recorded in certain religious books..." ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," pp. 253,254)

"As to religious people their criterion has ever been the sacred text which must be accepted as final. One is not allowed the slightest reflection. 'The word of God,' they say, 'is truth.' For them everything outside direct revelation is viewed with doubt." ("Abdul Baha on Divine Philosophy," pp. 93-94)

"The agnostics are those who do not believe in revelation, and the religious nations are those who do believe in revelation...The religious nations base their belief upon revelation...When the religious nations want to judge they say it should be judged by Moses, by Christ, by Mohammed; that is, they determine all things by the heavenly revelation." ('Abdu'l-Baha to pilgrims, 30 November 1900, notes of Miss Alma Albertson, Rabb B6, National Baha'i Archives, Wilmette, Illinois)

"The Agnostics are those who do not believe in Revelation, and religious nations are those who are believing in Revelation. As to the religious nations, they are based upon revelation...As to the religious nations, when they want to judge, they do so by the heavenly revelations given by Moses, Christ and Mohammed." ('Abdu'l-Baha to pilgrims, 30 November 1900, notes of Corinne True, True B9, pp. 16,17)



""There is yet a third method of acquiring knowledge,--by revelation, or the Inspired Books;""  
(‘Abdu’l-Baha to Miss Ethel Rosenberg, Rabb B7, National Baha’i Archives, Wilmette, Illinois;  
published in "Star of the West," VIII:9, p. 115)

It is the interpretation of the Holy Book rather than the Holy Book "in itself" which is being considered as a criterion, and this standard is not without flaws:

"All of these schools, by virtue of their reliance upon the balance of reason, have differed on all questions [al-masá’il] and their opinions are divided on all truths [al-Haqá’iq]. If the balance of reason is a just, accurate, and firm balance, then they should not differ in truths and questions, and the opinions of the former and latter generations should not diverge. Because of their conflict and their differences, therefore, it is established that the balance of reason is imperfect. Verily, if we were to conceive of a perfect balance and if thou wert to assess the weight of a hundred thousand souls with it, there would be no difference among them. Their lack of consensus, however, is sufficient and irrefutable proof of the deficiency of the balance of reason." (Tablet of the Inmost Heart)

"This method equally is not perfect, because the traditions [naqal] are understood [idaraak] by the reason [‘aql]. As the reason itself [nafs-i-‘aql] is liable to err, how can it be said that in interpreting the meaning of the traditions it will not err, for it is possible for it to make mistakes, and certainty cannot be attained. This is the method of the religious leaders; whatever they understand and comprehend from the text of the books, is that which their reason understands [idaraakaat ‘aqliyyat] from the text, and not necessarily the real truth [haqiqat]; for the reason [‘aql] is like a balance [mithal], and the meanings contained in the text of the Holy Books are like the thing which is weighed [mithal]. If the balance is untrue, how can the weight be ascertained?" ("Mufavadat ‘Abdu’l-Baha," p. 220; "Some Answered Questions," pp. 342-43)

"When we consider the third criterion--traditions--upheld by theologians as the avenue and standard of knowledge, we find this source equally unreliable and unworthy of dependence. For religious traditions are the report and record of understanding and interpretation of the Book. By what means has this understanding, this interpretation been reached? By the analysis of human reason. When we read the Book of God, the faculty of comprehension by which we form conclusions is reason. Reason is mind. If we are not endowed with perfect reason, how can we comprehend the meanings of the Word of God? Therefore, human reason, as already pointed out, is by its very nature finite and faulty in conclusions. It cannot surround Reality Itself, the Infinite Word. Inasmuch as the source of traditions and interpretations is human reason, and human reason is faulty, how can we depend upon its findings for real knowledge?" ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," pp. 21-22)

"The third criterion or standard of proof is traditional or scriptural--namely, that every statement or conclusion should be supported by traditions recorded in certain religious books. When we come to consider even the Holy Books--the Books of God--we are led to ask, "Who understands these books? By what authority of explanation may these Books be understood?" It must be the authority of human reason, and if reason or intellect finds itself incapable of explaining certain questions, or if the possessors of intellect contradict each other in the interpretation of traditions, how can such a criterion be relied upon for accurate conclusions?" ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 254)

"The test of logic is just as imperfect, for were this criterion perfect there would never have been the continual clash of opinion as to the sacred texts. How can they be interpreted by logic if the means be at fault?" ("Abdul Baha on Divine Philosophy," p. 94)

"As the third measure, that of revelation: This is known by the intellect, and when the intellect is not perfect, how can the thing found out be perfect." ('Abdu'l-Baha to pilgrims, 30 November 1900, notes of Miss Alma Albertson, Rabb B6, National Baha'i Archives, Wilmette)

"As to the third measure, Revelation, it is known by understanding. When the intellect is not perfect that the thing found out by it cannot be so..." ('Abdu'l-Baha to pilgrims, 30 November 1900, notes of Corinne True, True B9, National Baha'i Archives, Wilmette)

"...but the difficulty in this case is that every person's interpretation of the Book is colored by his own individuality. In the time of Jesus Christ, the Jews were prevented from accepting Him, by clinging to the literal interpretation of their Book.' They searched their Scriptures and Prophecies and said, \*What we find in these writings does not agree with what we know of this man of Nazareth, but it is rather against His claim.\*" ('Abdu'l-Baha to Miss Ethel Rosenberg, Rabb B7, National Baha'i Archives, Wilmette, Illinois; published version in SW:VIII:9, p. 115, noted in quotation marks with changes in brackets)

## **LIMITATIONS OF THE THIRD CRITERION**

Again we find that the failure of human beings to reach agreement in their perceptions of one reality is the cause of the insecurity and unreliability of this standard. Three stumbling blocks to such clear judgment are noted, all originating in human nature, each one capable of perverting the truth--individuality, literalism and the finite and faulty nature of reason--whereby Scripture is interpreted. One is reminded in considering this standard of a number of Baha'u'llah's statements, some of which are cited below:

"It is incumbent on these servants that they cleanse the heart--which is the wellspring of divine treasures--from every marking, and that they turn away from imitation [taqliid], which is following the traces [athaar] of their forefathers and sires, and shut the door of friendliness and enmity upon all the people of the earth." ("Seven Valleys," p. 5)

"...man can never hope to attain unto the knowledge of the All-Glorious, can never quaff from the stream of divine knowledge and wisdom, can never enter the abode of immortality, nor partake of the cup of divine nearness and favour, unless and until he ceases to regard the words and deeds of mortal men as a standard for the true understanding and recognition of God and His Prophets." ("Kitab-i-Iqan," pp. 3-4)

"Inasmuch as it hath been clearly shown that only those who are initiated into the divine mysteries can comprehend the melodies uttered by the Bird of Heaven, it is therefore incumbent upon every one to seek enlightenment from the illumined in heart and from the Treasuries of divine mysteries regarding the intricacies of God's Faith and the abstruse allusions in the utterances of the Daysprings of Holiness. Thus will these mysteries be unraveled, not by the aid of acquired learning, but solely through the assistance of God and the outpourings of His grace. 'Ask ye, therefore, of them that have the custody of the Scriptures, if ye know it not.' [Qur'an 16:43]

"But, O my brother, when a true seeker determines to take the step of search in the path leading to the knowledge of the Ancient of Days, he must, before all else, cleanse and purify his heart, which is the seat of the revelation of the inner mysteries of God, from the obscuring dust of all acquired knowledge, and the allusions of the embodiments of satanic fancy. He must purge his breast, which is the sanctuary of the abiding love of the Beloved, of every defilement, and sanctify his soul from

all that pertaineth to water and clay, from all shadowy and ephemeral attachments. He must so cleanse his heart that no remnant of either love or hate may linger therein, lest that love blindly incline him to error, or that hate repel him away from the truth. Even as thou dost witness in this day how most of the people, because of such love and hate, are bereft of the immortal Face, have strayed far from the Embodiments of the divine mysteries, and shepherdless, are roaming through the wilderness of oblivion and error." ("Kitab-i-Iqan," pp. 191-193)

Likewise, in many Tablets and talks, 'Abdu'l-Baha refers to this standard as "dogmatic beliefs" and "blind imitations of ancestral forms and the influence of mere human opinion":

"The first is the independent investigation [taharrii] of truth [haqiqat]; for blind imitation [taqliid] of the past will stunt the mind. But once every soul inquireth into truth [taharrii haqiqat], society ['aalam insaanii] will be freed from the darkness [zhalamaat] of continually repeating [taqliid] the past." ("Mantakhabaatii az makaatiib haDrat 'Abdu'l-Baha," #202, p. 240; "Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha," #202, p. 248)

"Among these teachings was the independent investigation [taharrii] of reality [haqiqat] so that the world of humanity ['aalam insaanii] may be saved from the darkness [zhalamaat] of imitation [taqliid] and attain to the truth [be-haqiiqat]..." ("Mantakhabaatii," #227, p. 287; "Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha," #227, p. 298)

"But by religion [diin] is meant that which is ascertained by investigation [diin tahqiqii] and not that which is based on mere imitation [taqliidii], the foundations [asaas] of Divine Religions [adyaan ilahii] and not human imitations [taqliid basharii]." ("Mantakhabaatii," #227, p. 292; "Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha," #227, p. 303)

"But inasmuch as this century ['aSar] is the century ['aSar] of the revelation [zhuhuur] of reality [haqiqat] --praise be to God! [al-hamdu'lillah]--the thoughts [afkaar] of men are being directed toward the welfare and unity [wahdat] of humanity ['aalam insaanii]. Daily the mirage of imitations [taqliid] is passing away, and the ocean of truth [yaay haqiqat] is surging more tumultuously. All the existing nations had a divine foundation of truth or reality [haqiqat] originally, which was intended to be conducive to the unity and accord of mankind, but the light of that reality gradually became obscured. The darkness [zhalamaat] of superstitions [avhaam] and imitations [taqliid] came and took its place, binding the world of humanity ['aalam bashar] in the chains and fetters of ignorance. Enmity arose among men, increasing to such an extent that nation strove against nation in hatred and violence. War has been a religious and political human heritage.

"Now it is enough! We must investigate [taharrii] reality [haqiqat]. We must put away these superstitions [avhaam]." ("Khitaabaat 'Abdu'l-Baha," p. 337; "The Promulgation of Universal Peace," pp. 39-40)

"The first teaching of Baha'u'llah is the investigation [taharrii] of reality [haqiqat]. Man must seek reality [taharri haqiqat] himself, forsaking imitations [taqliid] and adherence to mere hereditary forms. As the nations are following imitations [taqliid] in lieu of truth and as imitations [taqliid] are many and various, differences of belief have been productive of strife and warfare. So long as these imitations [taqliid] remain, the oneness [wahdat] of the world of humanity ['aalam insaanii] is impossible." ("Khitaabaat 'Abdu'l-Baha," pp. 447-448; "The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 180)

"We will investigate independently, free from the restrictions of dogmatic beliefs [bayaniim], blind imitations of ancestral forms [taqliid cheh agar] and the influence of mere human opinion [taqliid

bashad har yek]...("Khitaabaat 'Abdu'l-Baha," p. 611; "The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 361)

"Although the divine teachings are truth and reality, yet with the passage of time thick clouds envelop and obscure them. These clouds are imitations and superstitions; they are not the fundamentals...

"The first teaching of Baha'u'llah is the duty incumbent upon all to investigate reality. What does it mean to investigate reality? It means that man must forget all hearsay and examine truth himself, for he does not know whether statements he hears are in accordance with reality or not. Wherever he finds truth or reality, he must hold to it, forsaking, discarding all else; for outside of reality there is naught but superstition and imagination." ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 62)

"Now the people of religion have lost sight of the essential reality of the spiritual springtime. They have held tenaciously to ancestral forms and imitations, and because of this there is variance, strife and altercation among them. Therefore, we must now abandon these imitations and seek the foundation of the divine teachings..." ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 127)

"In view of this, shall blind imitations of ancestral forms and theological interpretations continue to guide and control the religious life and spiritual development of humanity today? Shall man, gifted with the power of reason, unthinkingly follow and adhere to dogma, creeds and hereditary beliefs which will not bear the analysis of reason in this century of effulgent reality?" ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," pp. 140-141)

"First, investigate reality. Man must leave imitation and seek reality. The contemporaneous religious beliefs differ because of their allegiance to dogma. It is necessary, therefore, to abandon imitations and seek their fundamental reality." ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 169)

"God has not intended man to imitate blindly his fathers and ancestors. He has endowed him with mind, or the faculty of reasoning, by the exercise of which he is to investigate and discover the truth, and that which he finds real and true he must accept. He must not be an imitator or blind follower of any soul. He must not rely implicitly on the opinion of any man without investigation; nay, each soul must seek intelligently and independently, arriving at a real conclusion and bound only by that reality. The greatest cause of bereavement and disheartening in the world of humanity is ignorance based upon blind imitation." ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 291)

"God has created man and endowed him with the power of reason whereby he may arrive at valid conclusions. Therefore, man must endeavor in all things to investigate the fundamental reality. If he does not independently investigate, he has failed to utilize the talent God has bestowed upon him. I am pleased with the American people because, as a rule, they are independent seekers of the truth; their minds are actively employed instead of remaining idle and unproductive. This is most praiseworthy...

"First, man must independently investigate reality, for the disagreements and dissensions which afflict and affect humanity primarily proceed from imitations of ancestral beliefs and adherences to hereditary forms of worship. These imitations are accidental and without sanction in the Holy Books. They are the outcomes of human interpretations and teachings which have arisen, gradually obscuring the light of divine meaning and causing men to differ and dissent." ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," pp. 312-313, 314)

"The attainment of these virtues, both material and ideal, is conditioned upon intelligent investigation of reality, by which investigation the sublimity of man and his intellectual progress is

accomplished. Forms must be set aside and renounced; reality must be sought. We must discover for ourselves where and what reality is. In religious beliefs nations and peoples today are imitators of ancestors and forefathers. If a man's father was a Christian, he himself is a Christian; a Buddhist is the son of a Buddhist, a Zoroastrian of a Zoroastrian. A gentile or an idolator follows the religious footsteps of his father and ancestry. This is absolute imitation. The requirement in this day is that man must independently and impartially investigate every form of reality." ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 327)

"The first teaching is that man should investigate reality, for reality is contrary to dogmatic interpretations and imitations of ancestral forms of belief to which all nations and peoples adhere to tenaciously. These blind imitations are contrary to the fundamental basis of the divine religions, for the divine religions in their central and essential teaching are based upon unity, love and peace, whereas these variations and imitations have ever been productive of warfare, sedition and strife. Therefore, all souls should consider it incumbent upon them to investigate reality." ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 372)

"In past centuries the nations of the world have imagined that the law of God demanded blind imitation of ancestral forms of belief and worship...There has been no investigation of the essential underlying basis of reality." ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 443)

## COMMENTARY ON THE THIRD CRITERION

It is evident to the unbiased reader of these comments, that Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha regarded this third standard, the criterion of human knowledge, to be unreliable. Further confirmation of this point is found in the Persian and Arabic meanings of the actual term employed by 'Abdu'l-Baha in the original texts, to describe this criterion--"naql". In Arabic "naql" has many meanings, but those which seem to apply here are "tradition; report, account" (Weir, p. 1166). In Persian "naql," a loan word from Arabic, also has a considerable variety of meanings, including "history, narrative, relation, report, account, theme, tale, story" (Steingass, p. 1420). Also, "naql" in Persian can mean "imitating" (Steingass, p. 1420). When 'Abdu'l-Baha speaks of "blind imitation" He uses the term "taqliid" and this Arabic word means "imitation; copying; blind, unquestioning adoption (of concepts or ideas); uncritical faith" (Weir, p. 920), and "investing with authority; investiture; imitation, representation; mimicry; counterfeiting; religious show, without real piety; hypocrisy" (Steingass, p. 316). Hence, there is a direct connection between the terms "naql" and "taqliid" and both are used by 'Abdu'l-Baha to refer to a standard of knowledge which He and Baha'u'llah repudiate as a source for authoritative understanding of reality.

## FOURTH CRITERION

"Knowledge is of two kinds: one is subjective ['ilm-i-wujudi {see Fourth Criterion: Intuition}], and the other objective ['ilm-i-Súri]; that is to say, an intuitive knowledge and a knowledge derived from perception ['ilm-i-taSSúri].

"The knowledge of things which men universally have, is gained by reflection {see Second Criterion: Reason} or by evidence: that is to say, either by the power of the mind the conception of an object is formed, or from beholding an object the form is produced in the mirror of the heart [maraat qalb]." ("Mufavadat-i-'Abdu'l-Baha," XL, p. 118; "Some Answered Questions," XL, p. 180)

We arrive at the fourth criterion, which is recognized by an even smaller group of human beings, including the so-called psychics, occultists, witches, mystics and other esoterics. The faculty of intuition is described by 'Abdu'l-Baha:

"As for the fourth balance, it is the balance of inspiration [mi'zAnu'l-'ilhAm]. Verily, inspiration consisteth of inclinations of the heart [khuT'Atin qalbiyyatin]. And the whisperings of Satan are also inclinations which arrive successively upon the heart by the agency of the soul. If there occureth to the heart a certain idea or question, how is it to be known whether it is an inspiration of the All-Merciful or a whispering of Satan?" ('Abdu'l-Baha, Tablet on the Inmost Heart, provisional translation by Steven Phelps and William McCants, March 2000; Persian text in "Min Makatib 'Abdu'l-Baha," pp. 83-86)

"Knowledge is of two kinds: one is subjective ['ilm vujuudi], and the other objective [see First Criterion: Senses and Second Criterion: Reason]; that is to say, an intuitive knowledge ['ilm tahqiqiqi] and a knowledge derived from perception...the knowledge of being ['ilm vujuudi], is intuitive [tahqiqiqi ast], it is like the cognisance and consciousness that man has of himself.

"For example, the mind and the spirit of the man ['aql insaan va ruuh insaan] are cognisant of the conditions and states of the members and component parts of the body, and are aware of all the physical sensations; in the same way they are aware of their power, of their feelings, and of their spiritual conditions. This is the knowledge of being ['ilm vujuudiist] which man realises and perceives; for the spirit surrounds the body, and is aware of its sensations and powers. This knowledge is not the outcome of effort and study ['ilm beaktasaab va tahSiil niist]; it is an existing thing [amriist], it is an absolute gift [vujuudi muuhabat mahaD ast]." ("Mufavadat 'Abdu'l-Baha," pp. 118-119; "Some Answered Questions," XL, pp. 180-181)

"There is still another, a fourth criterion, upheld by religionists and metaphysicians who say that the source and channel of all human penetration into the unknown is through inspiration." ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," pp. 20-21)

"The fourth criterion I have named is inspiration through which it is claimed the reality of knowledge is attainable. What is inspiration? It is the influx of the human heart." (The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 22)

"Proofs are of four kinds: fourth, through the medium of inspiration

"The fourth standard is that of inspiration. In past centuries many philosophers have claimed illumination or revelation, prefacing their statements by the announcement that 'this subject has been revealed through me' or 'thus do I speak by inspiration.' Of this class were the philosophers of the Illuminati [Ishraqiyyun]. Inspirations are the promptings or susceptibilities of the human heart." ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," pp. 253, 254)

"Inspiration is the fourth criterion. Occultists say, 'I have had a revelation. This truth has been revealed to me.' For them everything outside direct revelation is viewed with doubt." ("Abdul Baha on Divine Philosophy," pp. 93-94)

"As to the measure of inspiration, it is said that the subject has been revealed by inspiration; that is, it has been understood by the power of inspiration..." ('Abdu'l-Baha to pilgrims, 30 November 1900, notes of Miss Alma Albertson, Rabb B6, NBA, Wilmette)

"As to inspiration, it is said that the subject has been revealed by inspiration, i.e. by a power outside of oneself..." ('Abdu'l-Baha to pilgrims, 30 November 1900, notes of Corinne True, True B9, NBA,

Wilmette)

"...the spiritual way, by which man receives knowledge from the inner light or inspiration...the disciples of Jesus attempted to sail over the Sea of Creation [and Existence] in the Ark of Argument and Reasoning[s], finding great difficulty and danger in proving the Truth by so doing. But when Christ, the Light of the world, who knew all things by the light of [the] inner spiritual illumination, came to them in their boat, walking by His Knowledge over the Ocean of Existence, and having no need of the Ark of Argument, then immediately they were at their desired haven." (Abdu'l-Baha to Miss Ethel Rosenberg, Rabb B7, National Baha'i Archives, Wilmette, original capitalizations and wording not found in published version [in brackets]; "Star of the West," VIII:9, 115)

There is a highly descriptive reference to the Illuminati [Ishraqiyyun] by 'Abdu'l-Baha, in His address before the Society of Friends in London, on 12 January 1913:

"The second kind of philosophy was that of the Illuminati, or followers of the inner light. The schools of this philosophy were held in silence. Meditating, and turning their faces to the Source of Light, from that central Light the mysteries of the Kingdom were reflected in the hearts of these people. All the Divine problems were solved by this power of illumination...When they assemble in their meeting-house they sit silently and contemplate; their leader opens with a certain proposition, and says to the assembly 'You must meditate on this problem.' Then, freeing their minds from everything else, they sit and reflect, and before long the answer is revealed to them. Many abstruse divine questions are solved by this illumination.

"Some of the great questions unfolding from the rays of the Sun of Reality upon the mind of man are: the problem of the reality of the spirit of man; of the birth of the spirit; of its birth from this world into the world of God; the question of the inner life of the spirit and of its fate after its ascension from the body.

"They also meditate upon the scientific questions of the day, and these are likewise solved.

"These people, who are called 'Followers of the inner light,' attain to a superlative degree of power, and are entirely freed from blind dogmas and imitations. Men rely on the statements of these people; by themselves--within themselves--they solve all mysteries.

"If they find a solution with the assistance of the inner light, they accept it, and afterwards they declare it: otherwise they would consider it a matter of blind imitation. They go so far as to reflect upon the essential nature of the Divinity, of the Divine revelation, of the manifestation of the Deity in this world. All the divine and scientific questions are solved by them through the power of the spirit." (Abdu'l-Baha, "Paris Talks," pp. 173-174 passim.)

The opening of this talk was corrected by 'Abdu'l-Baha in a Tablet cited in "Star of the West":

About one thousand years ago a society was formed in Persia called the Society of the Friends, who gathered together for silent communion with the Almighty. [This talk opens with the words, "About 600 years ago." This Society was founded in the city of Hamadan six hundred years ago and has nothing to do with this {Baha'i} movement. It is almost disbanded, but under different names and forms one may come across them in Persia. They were called the Society of Sokouttyoun, that is, the "Silent Ones." --from a Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Baha to Ella G. Cooper, translated and mailed from Haifa 3/19/1916 and published in SW:VIII:14, p. 204]

## **LIMITATIONS OF THE FOURTH CRITERION**

As we have seen, the divine philosophers have a very high regard for this method of knowing, this standard of truth. However, there is one very serious pitfall to this criterion as well. 'Abdu'l-Baha

explains the nature of the fourth criterion, and this pitfall in these passages:

"As for the fourth balance, it is the balance of inspiration [mízānu'l-'ilhām]. Verily, inspiration consisteth of inclinations of the heart [khuṭ'arātin qalbiyyatin]. And the whisperings of Satan are also inclinations which arrive successively upon the heart by the agency of the soul. If there occureth to the heart a certain idea or question, how is it to be known whether it is an inspiration of the All-Merciful or a whispering of Satan?" (Tablet of the Inmost Heart)

"What is inspiration? It is the influx of the human heart. But what are satanic promptings which afflict mankind? They are the influx of the heart also. How shall we differentiate between them? The question arises: How shall we know whether we are following inspiration from God or satanic promptings of the human soul?" ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 22)

"Inspirations are the promptings or susceptibilities of the human heart. The promptings of the heart are sometimes satanic. How are we to differentiate them? How are we to tell whether a given statement is an inspiration and prompting of the heart through the merciful assistance or through the satanic agency?" ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 254)

"Inspiration, what is it? Whence comes it? Is that which reaches our heart divine or satanic? How can we judge?" ("Abdul Baha on Divine Philosophy," p. 94)

In some of the Tablets of Baha'u'llah and the addresses of 'Abdu'l-Baha, two kinds of intuitive and inspired knowledge are referred to:

"Know verily that Knowledge is of two kinds: Divine and Satanic. The one welleteth out from the fountain of divine inspiration; the other is but a reflection of vain and obscure thoughts. The source of the former is God Himself; the motive-force of the latter the whisperings of selfish desire. The one is guided by the principle: 'Fear ye God; God will teach you;' the other is but a confirmation of the truth: 'Knowledge is the most grievous veil between man and his Creator.' The former bringeth forth the fruit of patience, of longing desire, of true understanding, and love; whilst the latter can yield naught but arrogance, vainglory and conceit." ("Kitab-i-Iqan," p. 69)

"But the spirit of man has two aspects: one divine, one satanic; that is to say, it is capable of the utmost perfection, or it is capable of the utmost imperfection." ("Some Answered Questions," XXXVI, pp. 164-165)

"Man has two aspects: the physical, which is subject to nature, and the merciful or divine, which is connected with God. If the physical or natural disposition in him should overcome the heavenly and merciful, he is, then, the most degraded of animal beings; and if the divine and spiritual should triumph over the human and natural, he is, verily, an angel." ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 41)

"The reality underlying this question is that the evil spirit, Satan or whatever is interpreted as evil, refers to the lower nature in man. This baser nature is symbolized in various ways. In man there are two expressions: One is the expression of nature; the other, the expression of the spiritual realm." ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," pp. 294-295)

"It is evident that human personality appears in two aspects: the image or likeness of God, and the



aspect of Satan. The human reality stands between these two: the divine and the satanic." ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 464)

Baha'u'llah critiques this standard of knowledge in other Tablets:

"And among the people is he who layeth claim to inner knowledge, and still deeper knowledge concealed within this knowledge. Say: Thou speakest false! By God! What thou dost possess is naught but husks which We have left to thee as bones are left to dogs." ("Kitab-i-Aqdas," #36)

"Whatsoever the Creator commandeth His creatures to observe, the same must they diligently, and with the utmost joy and eagerness, arise and fulfil. They should in no wise allow their fancy to obscure their judgment, neither should they regard their own imaginings as the voice of the Eternal... They that are the worshipers of the idol which their inner imaginations have carved, and who call it Inner Reality, such men are in truth accounted among the heathen. To this hath the All-Merciful borne witness in His Tablets. He, verily, is the All-Knowing, the All-Wise." (GL:CLX:337, 338)

**To summarize, inasmuch as man is susceptible to satanic as well as divine inspiration, this fourth criterion is not entirely reliable, not infallible. Is man doomed to imperfect knowledge? Is the human condition relegated to uncertainty?**

## FIFTH CRITERION

**To reiterate, 'Abdu'l-Baha clearly states that all human standards of knowledge are faulty and fallible:**

"Therefore, know that all the peoples and kindreds possess four balances with which they weigh the realities [al-Haqá'q], the significances [al-ma`án'], and the divine questions [al-masá'il]. All of them are imperfect, unable to quench the burning thirst or heal the sick. We shall therefore make mention of each one and demonstrate its limitation and inaccuracy... Therefore, it is evident that all of balances current among the people are defective and their conclusions are unreliable. Nay, they are confused dreams, doubts, and idle fancies that neither allay the sore athirst nor satisfy the seeker of knowledge [irfán]." ('Abdu'l-Baha, Tablet of the Inmost Heart, provisional translation by William McCants and Steven Phelps, March 2000; Persian text in "Min Makatib 'Abdu'l-Baha," pp.83-86)

"Know then: that which is in the hands of people, that which they believe, is liable to error. For, in proving or disproving a thing, if a proof is brought forward which is taken from the evidence of our senses, this method, as has become evident, is not perfect; if the proofs are intellectual the same is true, or if they are traditional such proofs also are not perfect. Therefore there is no standard in the hands of people upon which we can rely." ("Some Answered Questions," LXXXIII, p. 343)

"Briefly, the point is that in the human material world of phenomena these four are the only existing criteria or avenues of knowledge, and all of them are faulty and unreliable." ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 22)

"Consequently, it has become evident that the four criteria or standards of judgment by which the human mind reaches its conclusions are faulty and inaccurate. All of them are liable to mistake and error in conclusions." ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 255)

"We have proven these three to be false." ('Abdu'l-Baha to pilgrims, 30 November 1900, notes of Miss Alma Albertson, Rabb B6, National Baha'i Archives, Wilmette, Illinois)

**Likewise, Baha'u'llah indicates the fallibility of all human learning:**

"Amongst the people is he whose learning hath made him proud, and who hath been debarred thereby from recognizing My Name, the Self-Subsisting; who, when he heareth the tread of sandals following behind him, waxeth greater in his own esteem than Nimrod. Say: O rejected one! Where now is his abode? By God, it is the nethermost fire. Say: O concourse of divines! Hear ye not the shrill voice of My Most Exalted Pen? See ye not this Sun that shineth in refulgent splendour above the All-Glorious Horizon? For how long will ye worship the idols of your evil passions? Forsake your vain imaginings, and turn yourselves unto God, your Everlasting Lord." (Baha'u'llah, "Kitab-i-Aqdas," #41)

"Therefore, hath it been said: 'Knowledge is a light which God casteth into the heart of whomsoever He willeth.' It is this kind of knowledge which is and hath ever been praiseworthy, and not the limited knowledge that hath sprung forth from veiled and obscured minds. This limited knowledge they even stealthily borrow one from the other, and vainly pride themselves therein!" (Baha'u'llah, "Kitab-i-Iqan," p. 46)

**Is there a standard of human knowledge which is entirely reliable, under all circumstances? As a matter of fact, 'Abdu'l-Baha answers this question, and in the affirmative. He indicates the existence of a fifth standard of knowledge, a fifth criterion of truth. His answer is found in these numerous references:**

"O thou who standeth in the Path of God, turning unto Him and seeking wisdom from the lights of His knowledge! Know that in the blessed verse which hath been revealed in the Qur'ān, by the truth of that exalted utterance, it is said: "The inmost heart [fu'ád] lies not about what it hath seen" [53:11]. It is a hidden mystery, a well-guarded symbol, a resplendent truth, an all-comprehending affair, a perspicuous token and a convincing proof unto those in the realm of existence who bow down and prostrate. In the exposition of its truth, we desire to unfold the details of the balances of discernment [mawáz'ni'l-'idrák] that the people possess, and to explain and refute them, so that it will be evident and clearly proven that the divine balance is the inmost heart, the fountain-head of guidance [ar-rashád]...As for the true, divine balance which never strayeth, and which ever apprehendeth the universal realities [al-Haqá'iq al-kulliyyah] and the sublime inner meanings [al-ma`ẓín al-'aTH'mah], it is the balance of the inmost heart [m'zānu'l-fu'ád], of which God hath made mention in the blessed verse. It is an effulgence of the brilliant lights of the Divine Outpouring, the secret of the All-Merciful, the manifestation of sincere faith, and the lordly sign. Verily it is an ancient outpouring, a manifest light and a mighty bounty. Should God favor with this gift one of His chosen ones, showering it upon one of His loved ones possessing certitude, verily he will draw nigh unto that station of which 'Ali (upon him be peace) hath spoken, "If the veil be lifted, I would not increase in certitude!" Speculation and argumentation are the utmost degree of weakness and understanding, for the result is dependent upon the exigencies of the lesser and greater propositions, so that, however thou orderest these terms, an outcome is obtained which cannot be implicitly relied upon: hence the differing opinions of the philosophers. Therefore, O thou who hast turned towards God, purify thine inmost heart from all impediments to righteousness [as-sadád] in the reality of true guidance [ar-rashád], and weigh all divine questions with this just, accurate, and glorious balance which God hath elucidated in the unerring Qur'an and the Great Announcement, that thou mayest drink from the fount of certitude,

savor the truth of certitude, be guided unto the Straight Path, and walk in the way of righteousness. Praise be to God, the Lord of the worlds!" ('Abdu'l-Baha, Tablet of the Inmost Heart, provisional translation by William McCants and Steven Phelps, March 2000; Persian text in "Min Makatib 'Abdu'l-Baha," pp. 83-86)

**Baha'u'llah used the same term in some of His Writings to refer to the human seat of certain knowledge:**

"Thy heart [fu'ad] is My home; sanctify it for My descent. Thy spirit [ruh] is My place of revelation; cleanse it for My manifestation." (Baha'u'llah, Arabic Hidden Word #59)

"Such are the mysteries of the Word of God, which have been unveiled and made manifest, that haply thou mayest apprehend the morning light of divine guidance, mayest quench, by the power of reliance and renunciation, the lamp of idle fancy, of vain imaginings, of hesitation, and doubt, and mayest kindle, in the inmost chamber of thine heart [fu'ad], the new-born light of divine knowledge and certitude." (Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Iqan, p. 49)

"Therefore, O brother! kindle with the oil of wisdom the lamp of the spirit within the innermost chamber of thy heart [fu'ad], and guard it with the globe of understanding, that the breath of the infidel may extinguish not its flame nor dim its brightness. Thus have We illuminated the heavens of utterance with the splendours of the Sun of divine wisdom and understanding, that thy heart may find peace, that thou mayest be of those who, on the wings of certitude, have soared unto the heaven of the love of their Lord, the All-Merciful." (Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Iqan, p. 61)

**In another context, 'Abdu'l-Baha speaks of this certain knowledge which transcends the need for arguments:**

"These obvious arguments are adduced for weak souls; but if the inner perception be open, a hundred thousand clear proofs become visible. Thus, when man feels the indwelling spirit, he is in no need of arguments for its existence..." ("Some Answered Questions," II, p. 7)

"The descent of the Holy Spirit is not like the entrance of air into man; it is an expression and a simile, rather than an exact or a literal image. No, rather it is like the entrance of the image of the sun into the mirror; that is to say, its splendour becomes apparent in it." ("Some Answered Questions," XXIV, p. 122)

"But if the human spirit will rejoice and be attracted to the Kingdom of God, if the inner sight becomes opened, and the spiritual hearing strengthened, and the spiritual feelings predominant, he will see the immortality of the spirit as clearly as he sees the sun, and the glad tidings of God will encompass him." ("Some Answered Questions," LX, p.262)

"But the bounty of the Holy Spirit [ruuh al-quds] gives the true method of comprehension [miizaan Sahaj] which is infallible and indubitable. This is through the help of the Holy Spirit [ruuh al-quds] which comes to man, and this is the condition [maqaam] in which certainty [yaqiin] can alone be attained." ("Mufavadat 'Abdu'l-Baha," p. 220; "Some Answered Questions," LXXXIII, p. 343)

"Then our life will be revived, we shall enjoy eternal existence, be refreshed with the breath of the Holy Spirit and become informed of the mysteries of creation. Then we shall be inspired to upraise the standard of the oneness of humanity; we shall take a portion of the divine grace and become resplendent with the rays of the heavenly luminary; then the human race will mirror forth

the attributes of the eternal kingdom and will move like a peaceful sea and each individual will appear as a wave. As we look upon the sea, we will comprehend it as the sea of God; as we look upon the waves, we will realize that they are the souls of humanity. The sun is one; all light is one; the rays are one; it shines on all." ('Abdu'l-Baha, Divine Philosophy, pp. 171-172)

"I hope that through the breath of the Holy Spirit the mysteries may become disclosed to thee, for without this channel it is impossible and unattainable. Turn thine attention to the days of His Highness the Christ; some people imagine that without the Messianic outpourings, it is possible to attain to Truth, but this very imagination became the cause of their deprivation.

"O thou maid-servant of God! Whenever thou art desiring to talk and answer questions, turn thy face toward the Kingdom of ABHA and beseech for assistance; then loosen thy tongue. Thou wilt behold at that time how thou art able to answer all the questions!

"O thou maid-servant of God! The aim of the theosophists is to attain to Truth, but the Truth is unattainable except through the favor of the Holy Spirit. The light hath a center and if one desire to seek it otherwise but from the center, he can never attain to it." ("Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas," volume III, p. 592)

"I now assure thee, O servant of God, that, if thy mind become empty and pure from every mention and thought and thy heart attracted wholly to the Kingdom of God, forget all else besides God and come in communion with the Spirit of God, then the Holy Spirit will assist thee with a power which will enable thee to penetrate all things, and a Dazzling Spark which enlightens all sides, a Brilliant Flame in the zenith of the heavens, will teach thee that which thou dost not know of the facts of the universe and of the divine doctrine. Verily, I say unto thee, every soul which of safety and infuse in them the Spirit of Life, the Holy Spirit will inspire that soul with evidences, proofs and facts and the lights will shine upon it from the Kingdom of God." ("Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas," volume III, pp. 706-707)

"The reading of history brings us to the conclusion that all truly great men, the benefactors of the human race, those who have moved men to love the right and hate the wrong and who have caused real progress, all these have been inspired by the force of the Holy Spirit [be-ruuh al-quds]...

"The unusual intellects, for instance, of Plato, Aristotle, Pliny and Socrates, have not influenced men so greatly that they have been anxious to sacrifice their lives for their teachings; whilst some of those simple men so moved humanity that thousands of men have become willing martyrs to uphold their words; for these words were inspired by the Divine Spirit of God [ruuh al-quds]...

"We understand that the Holy Spirit is the energizing factor in the life of man. Whosoever receives this power is able to influence all with whom he comes into contact.

"The greatest philosophers without this Spirit are powerless, their souls lifeless, their hearts dead! Unless the Holy Spirit breathes into their souls, they can do no good work. No system of philosophy has ever been able to change the manners and customs of a people for the better. Learned philosophers, unenlightened by the Divine Spirit, have often been men of inferior morality; they have not proclaimed in their actions the reality of their beautiful phrases...

"An humble man without learning, but filled with the Holy Spirit, is more powerful than the most nobly-born profound scholar without that inspiration. He who is educated by the Divine Spirit can, in his time, lead others to receive the same Spirit." ('Abdu'l-Baha, talk in Paris, 18 November 1911, "Khitaabaat-i-'Abdu'l-Baha," pp. 179-181; "Paris Talks," pp. 163-165 passim.)

"Freedom is not a matter of place. It is a condition. I was thankful for the prison, and the lack of liberty was very pleasing to me, for those days were passed in the path of service, under the utmost difficulties and trials, bearing fruits and results.

"Unless one accepts dire vicissitudes, he will not attain. To me prison is freedom, troubles rest me,

death is life, and to be despised is honour. Therefore, I was happy all that time in prison. When one is released from the prison of self, that is indeed release, for that is the greater prison. When this release takes place, then one cannot be outwardly imprisoned. When they put my feet in stocks, I would say to the guard, 'You cannot imprison me, for here I have light and air and bread and water. There will come a time when my body will be in the ground, and I shall have neither light nor air nor food nor water, but even then I shall not be imprisoned.' The afflictions which come to humanity sometimes tend to centre the consciousness upon the limitations, and this is a veritable prison. Release comes by making of the will a Door through which the confirmations of the Spirit come...

"The confirmations of the Spirit are all those powers and gifts which some are born with (and which men sometimes call genius), but for which others have to strive with infinite pains. They come to that man or woman who accepts his life with radiant acquiescence." ("Abdu'l-Baha in London," pp. 120,121)

"What then remains? How shall we attain the reality of knowledge? By the breaths and promptings of the Holy Spirit, which is light and knowledge itself." ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 22)

"The only true Explainer of the Book of God is the Holy Spirit, for no two minds are alike, no two can comprehend alike, no two can speak alike. That is to say, from the mere human standpoint of interpretation there could be neither truth nor agreement." ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 212)

"These are the interpretations of Christ Himself. Reflect upon them, and the meanings of the Holy Books will become clear as the sun at midday.

"The Holy Books have their special terminologies which must be known and understood. Physicians have their own peculiar terms; architects, philosophers have their characteristic expressions; poets have their phrases; and scientists, their nomenclature." ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 246)

"We have proven these three to be false, so there remains but one. There is no nation among the religious nations but that is waiting for the appearance of some one. The Jews for the Messiah. There are many happy references in the Bible and in the prophecies showing the coming of the Messiah. He is to have a sword. He will rule all the land from east to west. He will spread the religion of the Bible. At His appearance all will believe in Moses, and also during His reign there will be justice; viz., the justice will be so great that a wolf and lamb will be friends, the eagle and dove will feed in the same nest, and the mouse and the serpent will live together, the lion and the lamb shall lie down together' and when we compare the revelations and our intellect we find them incorrect. The Jews, while waiting the coming of Jesus, found not the sword, nor the throne, and He did not even have a mat to sit upon, and they saw that, instead of dominating the earth, He did not possess two feet of earth. Then they found the prophecies were not fulfilled, for the commands were not circulated upon the earth. As to justice and fairness, there was no sign of it, for they made Jesus ride on a donkey, and at last they crucified Him. The Jews relied upon revelation as the true test, and they took this to prove Him. And because they believed in revelation, that was the only veil that covered them (kept them from believing). As they were veiled from Christ, they did not understand the revelation of the Bible, but had they believed in the explanations given by Christ, and which were inspired, they would have understood the meanings of these prophecies. Had they believed in the power of inspiration they would not have been veiled from His Bounty. As they did not understand the meaning of the revelation given by Christ they did not understand the revelation given in the Book, and these same revelations caused them to crucify Him. That is the way with the

Nakazeen.

"They say we want only the Book of God, but as they are not understanding it, they lose the way, for it must be explained by one who is inspired to know its meaning. It is promised in the Gospel that the Paraclete will come and that He (Christ) will come again. There will be some signs.

Mohammed came according to the Gospels. As the Christians looked only to the literal meaning, they did not believe in Him. The believers in Christ were veiled from knowing Mohammed by the misunderstanding of the prophecies, just as the Jews were veiled from knowing Christ..." ('Abdu'l-Baha to pilgrims, 30 November 1900, notes of Miss Alma Albertson, Rabb B6, NBA, Wilmette)

"When the intellect is not perfect that the thing found out by it cannot be so, these three things therefore prove to be false and only one remains.

"There is no nation among the religious nations who are not waiting for some one, i.e. the Jews are waiting for the Messiah, for there are many references which show this in the Bible, and many prophecies which show His coming. He will have a sword in His hand. He will rule all nations from East to West. He will spread the religion of the Bible. All will believe in Moses and justice will be so mighty manifest that a wolf and a lamb will be friends. The eagle and the dove will feed in the same nest and the mouse and the serpent will live together in peace. But when we compare this revelation to our intellect we find it will be impossible. The Jews while awaiting the coming of Christ didn't find Jesus thus. He didn't have even a mat to sit upon and they saw that instead of dominating the earth, he hadn't two feet of earth to call His own and then they found the prophecies were not literally fulfilled, the commands of Moses were not circulated upon the earth, for Jesus changed the law (the Sabbath) and as to justice, they found no signs of it, for they made Jesus ride on a donkey, and at last they killed Him. The Jews said the best measure is revelation and they took this to prove Him, and it was their faith in revelation which caused them to be veiled from Him. Thus as they were veiled from Christ they didn't understand the revelations of the Bible, but had they listened to the explanations given by Christ, which were inspired, they would have found out the meaning of the prophecies. had they believed in the power of inspiration, they would not have been veiled from His Beauty. As they did not understand the revelation given by Christ, they didn't understand the revelations given in the books and these same revelations caused them to crucify Him. That is the way with the Nakazeen, they say we only want the Books of God, but as they do not understand them, they lose their way, for it must be explained by one who is inspired to know its meanings. And it is also promised in the Gospels that the Advocate will come and there would be signs of His Advent. But when Mohammed came (as the Christians' own Gospel foretold), they would not accept Him, because they held to the literal meaning. The believers in Christ were held from accepting Mohammed by misinterpreting the proofs in the same way that the Jews were veiled from Christ..." ('Abdu'l-Baha to pilgrims, 30 November 1900, notes of Corinne True, True B9, NBA, Wilmette)

**How are we to tell the difference between divine inspiration and animal intuition, or the influx of the satanic spirit? 'Abdu'l-Baha wrote, in a Tablet to an American correspondent:**

"As to the difference between inspiration and imagination: Inspiration is in conformity with the Divine Texts, but imaginations do not conform therewith. A real, spiritual connection between the True One and the servant is a luminous bounty which causeth an ecstatic (or divine) flame, passion and attraction. When this connection is secured (or realized) such an ecstasy and happiness become manifest in the heart that man doth fly away (with joy) and uttereth melody and song. Just as the soul bringeth the body in motion, so that spiritual bounty and real connection likewise moveth (or cheereth) the human soul." ("Tablets of Abdu'l-Baha Abbas," volume I, 1908, p. 195)

**In one of His talks He gave substantially the same answer:**

I have been asked a question: "How can we know when our actions meet with the approval of God?" Sometimes passion incites us to action; the laws of nature attract us, we obey our senses; the other incentive is the comprehension of the direction of God. We must find out if our actions are divinely inspired and if they do not conform, then it is our sensations which speak. Let us ever weigh our deeds in the scales of the divine teaching.  
(Abdu'l-Baha, Divine Philosophy, p. 102)

**Baha'u'llah alludes to the same standard in many of His Tablets, including the following:**

"O thou who hast surrendered thy will to God! By self-surrender and perpetual union with God is meant that men should merge their will wholly in the Will of God, and regard their desires as utter nothingness beside His Purpose. Whatsoever the Creator commandeth His creatures to observe, the same must they diligently, and with the utmost joy and eagerness, arise and fulfil. They should in no wise allow their fancy to obscure their judgment, neither should they regard their own imaginings as the voice of the Eternal. In the Prayer of Fasting We have revealed: 'Should Thy Will decree that out of Thy mouth these words proceed and be addressed unto them, 'Observe, for My Beauty's sake, the fast, O people, and set no limit to its duration,' I swear by the majesty of Thy glory, that every one of them will faithfully observe it, will abstain from whatsoever will violate Thy law, and will continue to do so until they yield up their souls unto Thee.' In this consisteth the complete surrender of one's will to the Will of God. Meditate on this, that thou mayest drink in the waters of everlasting life which flow through the words of the Lord of all mankind, and mayest testify that the one true God hath ever been immeasurably exalted above His creatures. He, verily, is the Incomparable, the Ever-Abiding, the Omniscient, the All-Wise. The station of absolute self-surrender transcendeth, and will ever remain exalted above, every other station.

"It behoveth thee to consecrate thyself to the Will of God. Whatsoever hath been revealed in His Tablets is but a reflection of His Will. So complete must be thy consecration, that every trace of worldly desire will be washed from thine heart. This is the meaning of true unity.

"Do thou beseech God to enable thee to remain steadfast in this path, and to aid thee to guide the peoples of the world to Him Who is the manifest and sovereign Ruler, Who hath revealed Himself in a distinct attire, Who giveth utterance to a Divine and specific Message. This is the essence of faith and certitude. They that are the worshipers of the idol which their imaginations have carved, and who call it Inner Reality, such men are in true accounted among the heathen. To this hath the All-Merciful borne witness in His Tablets. He, verily, is the All-Knowing, the All-Wise."  
(GL:CLX:337-338)

**Baha'u'llah has referred to inspiration by the Holy Spirit as the manifestation of the Divine Intellect:**

"God, the Exalted, hath placed these signs in men, to the end that philosophers may not deny the mysteries of the life beyond nor belittle that which hath been promised them. For some hold to reason and deny whatever reason comprehendeth not, and yet weak minds ['aqlul-i-D'a'ifeh] can never grasp the matters which we have related, but only **the Supreme, Divine intelligence** ['aql kulli rabbaani] can comprehend them:

How can feeble reason encompass the Qur'an,  
Or the spider snare a phoenix in her web?"

(Baha'u'llah, "Haft Vadi," in "Athar-i-Qalam-i-'Ala," volume II, pp. 126-127; "Seven Valleys," p. 33)

"If the wayfarer's goal be the dwelling of the Praiseworthy One [mahmuud], this is the station of

primal reason [maqaaam be-'aql miishuud] which is known as the Prophet and the Most Great Pillar [maqaaam-i-mahmuud]. Here reason signifieth **the divine, universal mind** ['aql kulli rabbaani], whose sovereignty enlighteneth all created things--nor doth it refer to every feeble brain ['aql naaqS]; for it is as the wise Sana'i hath written:

How can feeble reason encompass the Qur'an,  
Or the spider snare a phoenix in her web?  
Wouldst thou that the mind should not entrap thee?  
Teach it the science of the love of God!"

(Baha'u'llah, "Chahar Vadi," in "Athar-i-Qalam-i-'Ala," volume II, pp. 144-145; "Four Valleys," p. 52)

**'Abdu'l-Baha explains this divine mind and distinguishes it from the rational mind of man:**

"But **the universal divine mind** [ammaa 'aql kulli ilaahi] which is beyond nature [keh maavaraa' Tabii'at ast], is the bounty of the Pre-existent Power. This universal mind is divine ['aql kulli ilaahiist]; it embraces existing realities, and it receives the light of the mysteries of God. It is a conscious power [aan quvveh 'aalameh ast], not a power of investigation and of research [nah quvveh matajasseh matahasseh]...This divine intellectual power [iin quvveh 'aqliyyeh ilaahiyyeh] is the special attribute of the Holy Manifestations and the Dawning-places of prophethood [makhsuus bemazhaahar meqaddaseh va maTaale' nubuvvat ast]; **a ray of this light** [partuvi aziin anvaar] **falls upon the mirrors of the hearts of the righteous** [bar maraayaai quluub abraar zand], **and a portion and a share of this power comes to them from the Holy Manifestations** [keh naSib va bahreh aziin quvveh nuvaasTeh mazhaahar muqaddaseh barand]." ("Mufavadat 'Abdu'l-Baha," p. 145; "Some Answered Questions," LVIII, p. 253)

**'Abdu'l-Baha also indicates that through the Baha'is, the peoples of the world will be enabled to draw upon the divine mind:**

"God hath chosen the friends, and He hath favoured them with His guidance and boundless grace. His purpose is this, that we, all of us, should strive with our whole hearts to offer ourselves up, guide others to His path, and train the souls of men—until these frenzied beasts change to gazelles in the meadows of oneness, and these wolves to lambs of God, and these brutish creatures to angelic hosts; till the fires of hatred are quenched, and the flame coming out of the sheltered vale of the Holy Shrine doth shed its splendours; till the foul odour of the tyrant's dunghill is blown away, and yieldeth to the pure, sweet scents that stream from the rosebeds of faith and trust. On that day will the weak of intellect draw on the bounty of the **divine, Universal Mind**, and they whose life is but abomination will seek out these cleansing, holy breaths." ('Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha, p. 271)

**In another passage, 'Abdu'l-Baha calls this divine mind--as manifested in the human being--the spirit of faith, distinguishing it thereby from the human spirit:**

"Know that, generally, there are five divisions of the spirit...But the spirit of man has two aspects: one divine, one satanic; that is to say, it is capable of the utmost perfection, or it is capable of the utmost imperfection. If it acquires virtues it is the most noble of the existing beings, and if it acquires vices it becomes the most degraded existence.

"The fourth degree of spirit is **the heavenly spirit**; it is **the spirit of faith** [ruuh-i-iimAni] and the bounty of God; it comes from the breath of the Holy Spirit, and by the divine power it becomes the cause of eternal life. It is the power which makes earthly man heavenly, and the imperfect man



perfect. It makes the impure to be pure, the silent eloquent; it purifies and sanctifies those made captive by carnal desires; it makes the ignorant wise." ("Mufavadat 'Abdu'l-Baha," p. XX; "Some Answered Questions," XXXVI, p. 165)

"It has been explained that spirit is universally divided into five categories...But the human spirit, unless assisted by **the spirit of faith** [ruuh-i-imaani], does not become acquainted with the divine secrets and the heavenly realities. It is like a mirror which, although clear, polished, and brilliant, is still in need of light. *Until a ray of the sun reflects upon it, it cannot discover the heavenly secrets.*" ("Mufavadat 'Abdu'l-Baha," p. 159; "Some Answered Questions," LV, p. 244)

**The dependency of ordinary human beings upon the Manifestations is reiterated in other passages:**

*All else besides them are to be regarded as mirrors capable of reflecting the glory of these Manifestations Who are themselves the Primary Mirrors of the Divine Being*, if ye be not devoid of understanding. No one hath ever escaped them, neither are they to be hindered from achieving their purpose. (Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 74)

**'Abdu'l-Baha refers to this kind of knowledge in yet another way:**

"Since the Sanctified Realities, the universal Manifestations of God, surround the essence and qualities of the creatures, transcend and contain existing realities and understand all things, therefore their knowledge is divine knowledge [ilm ilaahi ast], and not acquired [nah aknasaabi]: that is to say, it is a holy bounty [ya'ni fayD qudsi ast], it is a divine revelation [va ankashaaf rahmaani]." ("Mufavadat 'Abdu'l-Baha," pp. 118-119; "Some Answered Questions," XL, pp. 180-181)

**Baha'u'llah refers to this divine intuitive knowledge of the Manifestations of God in these passages, among others, of His Writings:**

"Were the earth of their hearts to remain unchanged, how could such souls who have not been taught one letter, have seen no teacher, and entered no school, utter such words and display such knowledge as none can apprehend? Methinks they have been molded from the clay of infinite knowledge, and kneaded with the water of divine wisdom. Therefore, hath it been said: 'Knowledge is a light which God casteth into the heart of whomsoever He willeth.' It is this kind of knowledge which is and hath ever been praiseworthy, and not the limited knowledge that hath sprung forth from veiled and obscured minds. This limited knowledge they even stealthily borrow one from the other, and vainly pride themselves therein!" (Baha'u'llah, "Kitab-i-Iqan," p. 46)

"Yea, inasmuch as the peoples of the world have failed to seek from the luminous and crystal Springs of divine knowledge the inner meaning of God's holy words, they therefore have languished, stricken and sore athirst, in the vale of idle fancy and waywardness." (Baha'u'llah, "Kitab-i-Iqan," p. 105)

"Consider, how can he that faileth in the day of God's Revelation to attain unto the grace of the 'Divine Presence' and to recognize His Manifestation, be justly called learned, though he may have spent aeons in the pursuit of knowledge, and acquired all the limited and material learning of men? It is surely evident that he can in no wise be regarded as possessed of true knowledge. Whereas, the most unlettered of all men, if he be honored with this supreme distinction, he verily is accounted as one of those divinely-learned men whose knowledge is of God; for such a man hath attained the acme of knowledge, and hath reached the furthestmost summit of learning." (Kitab-i-Iqan, pp. 145-

"Nay, whatsoever proceedeth from these Mines of divine Wisdom and these Treasuries of eternal knowledge is truth, and naught but the truth. The saying: 'Knowledge is one point, which the foolish have multiplied' is a proof of Our argument, and the tradition: 'Knowledge is a light which God sheddeth into the heart of whomsoever He willeth' a confirmation of Our statement." (Kitab-i-Iqan, p. 184)

"Secrets are many, but strangers are myriad. Volumes will not suffice to hold the mystery of the Beloved One, nor can it be exhausted in these pages, although it be no more than a word, no more than a sign. 'Knowledge is a single point, but the ignorant have multiplied it.'" (Baha'u'llah, "Seven Valleys," pp. 24-25)

"O Essence of Negligence! Myriads of mystic tongues find utterance in one speech, and myriads of hidden mysteries are revealed in a single melody; yet, alas, there is no ear to hear, nor heart to understand." (Baha'u'llah, "Persian Hidden Words," #16)

"That which is preeminent above all other gifts, is incorruptible in nature, and pertaineth to God Himself, is the gift of Divine Revelation. Every bounty conferred by the Creator upon man, be it material or spiritual, is subservient unto this. It is, in its essence, and will ever so remain, the Bread which cometh down from Heaven. It is God's supreme testimony, the clearest evidence of His truth, the sign of His consummate bounty, the token of His all-encompassing mercy, the proof of His most loving providence, the symbol of His most perfect grace. He hath, indeed, partaken of this highest gift of God who hath recognized His Manifestation in this Day.

"Render thanks unto thy Lord for having vouchsafed unto thee so great a bounty. Lift up thy voice and say: All praise be to Thee, O Thou, the Desire of every understanding heart!" (Baha'u'llah, "Lawh-i-Na'matu'llah," in "Gleanings," XCV, p. 195)

"It hath already been abundantly demonstrated that in that divinely-appointed Day the majority of them that have sought and attained His holy court have revealed such knowledge and wisdom, a drop of which none else besides these holy and sanctified souls, however long he may have taught or studied, hath grasped or will ever comprehend. It is by virtue of this power that the beloved of God have, in the days of the Manifestation of the Day Star of Truth, been exalted above, and made independent of, all human learning. Nay, from their hearts and the springs of their innate powers hath gushed out unceasingly the inmost essence of human learning and wisdom." (Baha'u'llah, "Lawh-i-Hadi," in "Gleanings," CXXIV, pp. 263-264)

**In various of His Tablets, Baha'u'llah has written of the station in which certitude is reached:**

"And if, confirmed by the Creator, the lover escapes from the claws of the eagle of love, he will enter the Valley of Knowledge [malakut ma'rifat] and come out of doubt [shakab] into certainty [yaqiin], and turn from the darkness [Zalamat] of illusion to the guiding light of the fear of God. His inner eyes [chashm-i-baSir] will open and he will privily converse with his Beloved; he will set ajar the gate of truth [haqiqat] and piety, and shut the doors of vain imaginings." (Baha'u'llah, AQA:III:102; "Seven Valleys," p. 11)

"O fleeting shadow! Pass beyond the baser stages of doubt [bigadhar] and rise to the exalted heights of certainty [yaqiin]. Open the eye of truth [chashm-i-haqq], that thou mayest behold the veilless Beauty and exclaim: Hallowed be the Lord, the most excellent of all creators!" (Baha'u'llah, "Persian Hidden Words," #9)

"O son of desire! Give ear unto this: Never shall mortal eye [chashm-i-fAnii] recognize the everlasting beauty [jamAl-i-bAqii], nor the lifeless heart [dil-i-mardih] delight in aught but in the withered bloom. For like seeketh like, and taketh pleasure in the company of its kind." (Baha'u'llah, "Persian Hidden Words," #10)

"O son of dust! Blind thine eyes, that thou mayest behold My beauty; stop thine ears, that thou mayest hearken unto the sweet melody of My voice; empty thyself of all learning, that thou mayest partake of My knowledge; and sanctify thyself from riches, that thou mayest obtain a lasting share from the ocean of My eternal wealth. Blind thine eyes, that is, to all save My beauty; stop thine ears to all save My word; empty thyself of all learning save the knowledge of Me; that with a clear vision [chashm-i-pAk], a pure heart [dil-i-Tayyab] and an attentive ear [gUsh-i-laTiif] thou mayest enter the court of My holiness." (Baha'u'llah, "Persian Hidden Words," #11)

"O man of two visions [dU chashm]! Close one eye [chashmii barband] and open the other [chashm-i-bargushA]. Close one to the world [barband ya'nii az 'Alam] and all that is therein, and open the other [bargushA ya'nii] to the hallowed beauty of the Beloved." (Baha'u'llah, "Persian Hidden Words," #12)

"Such are the mysteries of the Word of God, which have been unveiled and made manifest, that haply thou mayest apprehend the morning light of divine guidance, mayest quench, by the power of reliance and renunciation, the lamp of idle fancy, of vain imaginings, of hesitation, and doubt, and mayest kindle, in the inmost chamber of thine heart, the new-born light of divine knowledge." (KI:49)

"Were the eye of the heart to open, it would surely perceive that the words revealed from the heaven of the will of God are at one with, and the same as, the deeds that have emanated from the Kingdom of divine power." (KI:57-58)

"Therefore, O brother! kindle with the oil of wisdom the lamp of the spirit within the innermost chamber of thy heart, and guard it with the globe of understanding, that the breath of the infidel may extinguish not its flame nor dim its brightness. Thus have We illuminated the heavens of utterance with the splendours of the Sun of divine wisdom and understanding, that thy heart may find peace, that thou mayest be of those who, on the wings of certitude, have soared unto the heaven of the love of their Lord, the All-Merciful." (KI:61)

"Only when the lamp of search, of earnest striving, of longing desire, of passionate devotion, of fervid love, of rapture, and ecstasy, is kindled within the seeker's heart, and the breeze of His loving-kindness is wafted upon his soul, will the darkness of error be dispelled, the mists of doubts and misgivings be dissipated, and the lights of knowledge and certitude envelop his being. At that hour will the mystic Herald, bearing the joyful tidings of the Spirit, shine forth from the City of God resplendent as the morn, and, through the trumpet-blast of knowledge, will awaken the heart, the soul, and the spirit from the slumber of negligence. Then will the manifold favours and outpouring grace of the holy and everlasting Spirit confer such new life upon the seeker that he will find himself endowed with a new eye, a new ear, a new heart, and a new mind. He will contemplate the manifest signs of the universe, and will penetrate the hidden mysteries of the soul. Gazing with the eye of God, he will perceive within every atom a door that leadeth him to the stations of absolute certitude." (KI:195-196; BWF:107)

"When the channel of the human soul is cleansed of all worldly and impeding attachments, it will

unfailingly perceive the breath of the Beloved across immeasurable distances, and will, led by its perfume, attain and enter the City of Certitude. Therein he will discern the wonders of His ancient wisdom, and will perceive all the hidden teachings from the rustling leaves of the Tree--which flourisheth in that City. With both his inner and outer ear he will hear from its dust the hymns of glory and praise ascending unto the Lord of Lords, and with his inner eye will he discover the mysteries of "return" and "revival." How unspeakably glorious are the signs, the tokens, the revelations, and splendours which He Who is the King of names and attributes hath destined for that City! The attainment of this City quencheth thirst without water, and kindleth the love of God without fire. Within every blade of grass are enshrined the mysteries of an inscrutable wisdom, and upon every rosebush a myriad nightingales pour out, in blissful rapture, their melody." (Kitab-i-Iqan, pp. 197-198)

"Do thou beseech God to enable thee to remain steadfast in this path, and to aid thee to guide the peoples of the world to Him Who is the manifest and sovereign Ruler, Who hath revealed Himself in a distinct attire, Who giveth utterance to a Divine and specific Message. This is the essence of faith and certitude." (GL:CLX:338)

**Baha'u'llah indicates that the measure of all things is not human, but divine:**

"Say: O leaders of religion! Weigh not the Book of God with such standards and sciences as are current amongst you, for the Book itself is the unerring Balance established amongst men. In this most perfect Balance whatsoever the peoples and kindreds of the earth possess must be weighed, while the measure of its weight should be tested according to its own standard, did ye but know it." (Baha'u'llah, "Kitab-i-Aqdas," #99)

"Give ear unto the verses of God which He Who is the sacred Lote-Tree reciteth unto you. They are assuredly the infallible balance, established by God, the Lord of this world and the next. Through them the soul of man is caused to wing its flight towards the Dayspring of Revelation, and the heart of every true believer is suffused with light." (Ibid., #148)

"Say: This is the infallible Balance which the Hand of God is holding, in which all who are in the heavens and all who are on the earth are weighed, and their fate determined, if ye be of them that believe and recognize this truth." (Ibid., #183)

**Furthermore, Baha'u'llah does not leave the question of the interpretation of His Writings unresolved:**

"Whoso interpreteth what hath been sent down from the heaven of Revelation, and altereth its evident meaning, he, verily, is of them that have perverted the Sublime Word of God, and is of the lost ones in the Lucid Book." (Baha'u'llah, "Kitab-i-Aqdas," #105)

"O people of the world! When the Mystic Dove will have winged its flight from its Sanctuary of Praise and sought its far-off goal, its hidden habitation, refer ye whatsoever ye understand not in the Book to Him Who hath branched from this mighty Stock." (Ibid., #174)

"The Will of the divine Testator is this: It is incumbent upon the Aghsan, the Afnan and My Kindred to turn, one and all, their faces towards the Most Mighty Branch. Consider that which We have revealed in Our Most Holy Book [#121]: 'When the ocean of My presence hath ebbed and the Book of My Revelation is ended, turn your faces toward Him Whom God hath purposed, Who hath branched from this Ancient Root.' The object of this sacred verse is none other except the Most

Mighty Branch." (Baha'u'llah, "Kitab-i-'Ahd," Tablets, p. 221)

**'Abdu'l-Baha, the Most Mighty Branch (Ghusn-i-A'zam) has elaborated on this theme:**

"The only true Explainer of the Book of God is the Holy Spirit, for no two minds are alike, no two can comprehend alike, no two can speak alike. That is to say, from the mere human standpoint of interpretation there could be neither truth nor agreement." ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 212)

"Inasmuch as great differences and divergences of denominational belief had arisen throughout the past, every man with a new idea attributing it to God, Baha'u'llah desired that there should not be any ground or reason for disagreement among the Baha'is. Therefore, with His own pen He wrote the Book of His Covenant, addressing His relations and all people of the world, saying, 'Verily, I have appointed One Who is the Centre of My Covenant. All must obey Him; all must turn to Him; He is the Expounder of My Book, and He is informed of My purpose. All must turn to Him. Whatsoever He says is correct, for, verily, He knoweth the texts of My Book. Other than He, no one doth know My Book.'..."

"Therefore, you must read the Tablets of Baha'u'llah. You must read the Tablet of the Branch and regard that which He has so clearly stated. Beware! Beware! lest anyone should speak from the authority of his own thoughts or create a new thing out of himself. Beware! Beware! According to the explicit Covenant of Baha'u'llah you should care nothing at all for such a person. Baha'u'llah shuns such souls. I have expounded these things for you, for the conservation and protection of the teachings of Baha'u'llah, in order that you may be informed, lest any souls shall deceive you and lest any souls shall cause suspicion among you." ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," pp. 323-324)

"Inasmuch as there was no appointed explainer of the Book of Christ, everyone made the claim to authority, saying, 'This is the true pathway and others are not.' To ward off such dissensions as these and prevent any person from creating a division or sect the Blessed Perfection, Baha'u'llah, appointed a central authoritative Personage, declaring Him to be the expounder of the Book. This implies that the people in general do not understand the meanings of the Book, but this appointed One does understand. Therefore, Baha'u'llah said, 'He is the explainer of My Book and the Center of My Testament.' In the last verses of the Book instructions are revealed, declaring that, 'After Me,' you must turn toward a special Personage and 'whatsoever He says is correct.' In the Book of the Covenant Baha'u'llah declares that by these two verses this Personage is meant...Many utterances are directed against the violators of the Covenant, the purpose being that no dissension should arise in the blessed Cause; that no one should say, 'My opinion is this'; and that all may know Who is the authoritative expounder and whatsoever He says is correct." ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 382)

"Any opinion expressed by the Center of the Covenant is correct, and there is no reason for disobedience by anyone. Be watchful, for perchance there may be violators of the Covenant among you. Do not listen to them. Read the Book of the Covenant. All have been commanded to obey the Covenant, and the first admonition is addressed to the sons of Baha'u'llah, the Branches: 'You must turn to the appointed Center; He is the expounder of the Book.'" ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 386)

"To ensure unity and agreement He has entered into a Covenant with all the people of the world, including the interpreter and explainer of His teachings, so that no one may interpret or explain the religion of God according to his own view or opinion and thus create a sect founded upon his individual understanding of the divine Words. The Book of the Covenant or Testament of

Baha'u'llah is the means of preventing such a possibility, for whosoever shall speak from the authority of himself alone shall be degraded...Praise be to God! Baha'u'llah left nothing unsaid. He explained everything. He left no room for anything further to be said. Yet there are some who for the sake of personal interest and prestige will attempt to sow the seeds of sedition and disloyalty among you." ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 456)

**'Abdu'l-Baha appointed Shoghi Effendi to interpret the Writings of Baha'u'llah and His own Writings after His passing:**

"After the passing away of this wronged one, it is incumbent upon the Aghsan, the Afnan of the Sacred Lote-Tree, the Hands of the Cause of God and the loved ones of the Abha Beauty to turn unto Shoghi Effendi the youthful branch branched from the two hallowed and sacred Lote-Trees "The sacred and youthful branch, the guardian of the Cause of God as well as the Universal House of Justice, to be universally elected and established, are both under the care and protection of the Abha Beauty, under the shelter and unerring guidance of His Holiness, the Exalted One (may my life be offered up for them both). Whatsoever they decide is of God." ("Will and Testament," p. 11)

**And Shoghi Effendi wrote, concerning the infallibility of 'Abdu'l-Baha in the interpretation of Baha'u'llah's Writings:**

"That 'Abdu'l-Baha is not a Manifestation of God, that He gets His light, His inspiration and sustenance from the Fountain-head of the Baha'i Revelation; that He reflects even as a clear and perfect Mirror the rays of Baha'u'llah's glory, and does not inherently possess that indefinable yet all-pervading reality the exclusive possession of which is the hallmark of Prophethood; that His words are not equal in rank though they possess an equal validity with the utterances of Baha'u'llah." ("World Order of Baha'u'llah," Wilmette: BPT, 1991, p. 139)

**Likewise, in a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi in 1956, which was supplied to the author by the Research Department of the Baha'i World Centre:**

"The Guardian's infallibility covers interpretation of the revealed word, and its application. Likewise any instructions he may issue having to do with the protection of the Faith, or its well-being, must be closely obeyed, as he is infallible in the protection of the Faith. He is assured the guidance of both Baha'u'llah and the Bab, as the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha clearly reveals."

## **COMMENTARY ON THE FIFTH CRITERION**

How are we human beings to attain to perfect knowledge which is suitable to our station? According to Baha'u'llah, 'Abdu'l-Baha, and Shoghi Effendi, there are FOUR ways:

1. Through the minds and hearts of the believers, informed through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, whereby the faithful souls reflect a ray of light from the Sun of Reality manifest in the prophetic station of Baha'u'llah--in the footsteps of the Illuminati [Ishraqiyyun]:

"If they find a solution with the assistance of the inner light, they accept it, and afterwards they declare it: otherwise they would consider it a matter of blind imitation. They go so far as to reflect upon the essential nature of the Divinity, of the Divine revelation, of the manifestation of the Deity

in this world. All the divine and scientific questions are solved by them through the power of the spirit...

"Through the faculty of meditation man attains to eternal life; through it he receives the breath of the Holy Spirit--the bestowal of the Spirit is given in reflection and meditation.

"The spirit of man is itself informed and strengthened during meditation; through it affairs of which man knew nothing are unfolded before his view. Through it he receives Divine inspiration, through it he receives heavenly food." ('Abdu'l-Baha, "Paris Talks," pp. 174,175)

2. Through our knowledge of the most recent Word of God, that is, the recorded words of Baha'u'llah, and, His infallible depiction of the Persons and Teachings of all previous Manifestations of God.

3. Through the infallible interpretations of the Word of God by 'Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi; and the infallible elucidations of the Baha'i teachings by the Universal House of Justice.

4. Through perfect agreement between the four human criteria of knowledge, as stated by 'Abdu'l-Baha in one of His talks:

"But a statement presented to the mind accompanied by proofs which the senses can perceive to be correct, which the faculty of reason can accept, which is in accord with traditional authority and sanctioned by the promptings of the heart, can be adjudged and relied upon as perfectly correct, for it has been proved and tested by all the standards of judgment and found to be complete." ("The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 255)

This statement seems to be confirmed in the following citation from 'Abdu'l-Baha' Tablet to Dr. Auguste Forel:

"Thus man cannot grasp the Essence of Divinity, but can, by his reasoning power, by observation, by his intuitive faculties and the revealing power of his faith, believe in God, discover the bounties of His Grace." ('Abdu'l-Baha, Tablet to August Forel, p. 15)

There are also many counsels from 'Abdu'l-Baha enjoining consultation, which is a bringing together of differing points of view, which may be analogous to the reconciliation of four standards of truth:

"Therefore, if the religions investigate reality and seek the essential truth of their own foundations, they will agree and no difference will be found. But inasmuch as religions are submerged in dogmatic imitations, forsaking the original foundations, and as imitations differ widely, therefore, the religions are divergent and antagonistic. These imitations may be likened to clouds which obscure the sunrise; but reality is the sun. If the clouds disperse, the Sun of Reality shines upon all, and no difference of vision will exist. The religions will then agree, for fundamentally they are the same. The subject is one, but predicates are many." (PUP:126)

"Inasmuch as human interpretations and blind imitations differ widely, religious strife and disagreement have arisen among mankind, the light of true religion has been extinguished and the unity of the world of humanity destroyed. The Prophets of God voiced the spirit of unity and agreement. They have been the Founders of divine reality. Therefore, if the nations of the world forsake imitations and investigate the reality underlying the revealed Word of God, they will agree and become reconciled. For reality is one and not multiple." (PUP:141)

"We are considering the divine plan for the reconciliation of the religious systems of the world. Baha'u'llah has said that if one intelligent member be selected from each of the varying religious systems, and these representatives come together seeking to investigate the reality of religion, they would establish an interreligious body before which all disputes and differences of belief could be presented for consideration and settlement. Such questions could then be weighed and viewed from the standpoint of reality and all imitations be discarded. By this method and procedure all sects, denominations and systems would become one." (PUP:233-234)

"When you assemble, you must reflect the lights of the heavenly Kingdom. Let your hearts be as mirrors in which the radiance of the Sun of Reality is visible. Each bosom must be a telegraph station--one terminus of the wire attached to the soul, the other fixed in the Supreme Concourse--so that inspiration may descend from the Kingdom of Abha and questions of reality be discussed. Then opinions will coincide with truth; day by day there will be more progression, and the meetings will become more radiant and spiritual. This attainment is conditioned upon unity and agreement. The more perfect the love and agreement, the more the divine confirmations and assistance of the Blessed Perfection will descend. May this prove to be a divine meeting, and may boundless bestowals come down upon you. Strive with all your hearts and with the very power of life that unity and love may continually increase. In discussions look toward the reality without being self-opinionated. Let no one assert and insist upon his own mere opinion; nay, rather, let each investigate reality with the greatest love and fellowship. Consult upon every matter, and when one presents the point of view of reality itself, that shall be acceptable to all." (PUP:183)

Inasmuch as 'Abdu'l-Baha repeatedly affirmed the oneness of reality, the oneness of truth, it seems that these four ways to infallible knowledge may be regarded as facets of one standard of unitive knowledge. Hence, the agreement of the four human criteria, in order to be entirely reliable, must be in agreement with the teachings of Baha'u'llah, and with the divinely-inspired interpretations of 'Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi as well as the infallibly-guided elucidations of the Universal House of Justice. This unitive knowledge may be related to the advice given by Shoghi Effendi to believers in their attempts to understand the Baha'i teachings:

"These various statements must be taken in conjunction with all the Bahá'í teachings; we cannot get a correct picture by concentrating on just one phrase." (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated 7 June 1946, quoted in "Arohanui: Letters to New Zealand," p. 85)

"He feels that many of the perplexities that arise in your mind could be dissipated if you always conceived of the teachings as one great whole with many facets. Truth may, in covering different subjects, appear to be contradictory, and yet it is all one if you carry the thought through to the end...." (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated 24 February 1947, quoted in "The Importance of Deepening," p. 228)

"Likewise he is constantly urging them to really study the Bahá'í teachings more deeply. One might liken Bahá'u'lláh's teachings to a sphere; there are points poles apart, and in between the thoughts and doctrines that unite them..." (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated 5 July 1947, quoted in "The Importance of Deepening," pp. 228-229)

"We must not take many of 'Abdu'l-Baha's statements as dogmatic finalities, for there are other points which when added to them round out the picture." (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 7 June 1946; Arohanui: Letters to New Zealand, no.80, p.88; Messages to the Antipodes, p.241)



## CONCLUSIONS

This survey clearly indicates that, according to Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the evidence of the sciences, and the claims of the physical and social sciences are not to be relied upon or regarded as of certain reality. Likewise is this true of theology, philosophy, mathematics and linguistics--among other fields which represent the systematic study of non-material phenomena. Finally, intuition and inspiration are also not to be entirely trusted. In all things, we must refer to the divine standard. In conclusion, the compiler is reminded of two passages from Bahá'u'lláh's Writings, both of which remind us of the essentially humble position of the man or woman of true learning:

"Consider, how can he that faileth in the day of God's Revelation to attain unto the grace of the 'Divine Presence' and to recognize His Manifestation, be justly called learned, though he may have spent aeons in the pursuit of knowledge, and acquired all the limited and material learning of men? It is surely evident that he can in no wise be regarded as possessed of true knowledge. Whereas, the most unlettered of all men, if he be honoured with this supreme distinction, he verily is accounted as one of those divinely-learned men whose knowledge is of God; for such a man hath attained the acme of knowledge, and hath reached the furthestmost summit of learning." (Baha'u'llah, "Kitab-i-Iqan," pp. 145-146)

"This confession of helplessness which mature contemplation must eventually impel every mind to make is in itself the acme of human understanding, and marketh the culmination of man's development." (Bahá'u'lláh, "Lawh-i-Hadi," in "Gleanings," LXXXIII, pp. 165-166)

"The station of absolute self-surrender transcendeth, and will ever remain exalted above, every other station." (Bahá'u'lláh, "Gleanings," CLX, p. 338)