

Memories of Abdu'l-Bahá

Following are notes of a grateful reader on the book Memories of Nine Years in Akká by Dr. Youness Afroukhteh,

At the end of his book the author Dr. Afroukhteh summarizes his efforts in “describing the indescribable” (p. 416-419). These notes on his book will be presented according to that outline, although you may wish to outline differently as you read this wonderful book:

1. Manners of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá
2. Bearing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá
3. Burdens of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá
4. Love of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá
5. Generosity of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá
6. Helping the poor
7. Effect of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s glance

I. Manners of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

A. In conversations with Baha’is:

Page 15: In His conversations with Baha’is, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s first inquired about them, speaking kindly, and alluding to the greatness of the Cause of God and divine tests and difficulties, offering loving counsel.

Page 16: He shared prophecies of Baha’u’llah regarding the future victories of the Faith.

Page 32. “His words of assurance and the glad tidings of the ultimate victory of the Faith created such an atmosphere of attraction and enthusiasm that one would utterly lose oneself and become wholly absorbed in the Master.”

Pages 383-84: “One day as He walked in the streets of ‘Akká, talking to me with great gentleness about the manners one should observe in dealing with people, His voice suddenly rose to a higher pitch as He revealed the following: ‘You must conduct yourself in such a way that your silence will serve as your highest reproach of any opponent.’”

“... He admonished me, ‘If you hear with your own ears that they are insulting me, do not allow into your heart any hatred for them.’”

B. Habits of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in His daily tasks and services:

pp. 178-179: “It was ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s habit to find relief from one tiring occupation by engaging Himself in another. For example, whenever He grew tired of writing, He would turn to the dictation of Tablets, and when He grew weary of this, He would summon the pilgrims and impart to them words of counsel and admonition. Once He felt tired out by writing, dictation or speaking, He would take long walks in the narrow winding streets of the Most Great Prison, and if in the process He encountered a believer or a non-believer, friend or foe, He would stop and spend a few minutes talking to him of matters of interest to that person. Thus, as He simply strolled down the streets of ‘Akká, ‘Abdu’l-Baha actually performed the important task of attending to great many side issues.

If He felt any weariness, He visited the sick and the poor. The sick received His prayers and blessings, and the needy the contents of his moneybag. As soon as the famous moneybag emerged from His pocket, the whole household would circle around that heavenly Personage like moths. The older ones received *majidis* and *beshliks* and the younger ones a few *metliks*.

As soon as the moneybag was empty He would return home. If there was any daylight left, He would summon Mirza Nuru'd-Din and pick up where He had left off. If it was early evening, and the chanter of the Qur'an was already in the *biruni* reception area, He would listen to the chant and permit some of the friends and certain others to attain His presence at the same time. If it were late at night, He would visit those pilgrims and residents who were gathered in the *biruni* area waiting for Him to come, and bestow upon them the expressions of His loving-kindness. He would then ask someone to chant a prayer, and afterwards he would retire to the *andaruni* where He busied Himself with managing the affairs of the house and attending to the education of each member of the blessed household.

After a short rest, He would be up before the first light of dawn and engaged in prayer and the revelation of divine verses until sunrise, when He would begin His busy day. Thus the only temporary respite and comfort for 'Abdu'l-Bahá was the time He spent at the dinner table – and even that time was taken up by the many questions of the Western friends. These required a variety of answers ranging from philosophical explanations to logical proofs, from abstract and traditional references to theological topics. Mr. Phelps's book, Some Answered Questions, and many others were revealed at the dinner table.

C. “One task does not distract Him from another” pp. 185-87:

“In the many years of my residence at the threshold of the Master's presence, I often wondered how and by what means was that Blessed Personage able to solve the manifold problems created by the raging storms of adversity and hardship? How was He able, in matters large and small, to act with such dignity, composure and unwavering focus as to appear as though He had absolutely nothing else to do? . . .

One dark night, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá paced up and down the long front hallway of the reception room, relaxing and easing the stresses of a busy day, He asked me the following question. . . . ‘Do you know how I administer this Faith?’ . . .

Then He said, ‘I pull the sails of the ship firmly and fasten the ropes tight. I locate my destination and then by the power of my will I hold the wheel and head out. No matter how strong the storm, no matter how dangerous the threat to the safety of the ship, I do not change course. I do not become agitated or disheartened; I persevere until I reach my goal. If I were to hesitate or change direction at the sight of every danger, the Ark of the Cause of God would surely fail to reach its destination.’

D. The manner of revealing verses: pp. 195-199

“Once 'Abdu'l-Bahá was freed from His many daily engagements, He would call Aqa Mirza Nuru'd-Diin and begin dictating divine verses. At the same time, previously revealed Tablets were presented to 'Abdu'l-Baha for His review, correction and signature. Here, He wrote in His own hand while simultaneously dictating verses, for He was the essential reality of the phrase ‘One task does not distract Him from another’; mental confusion had no meaning at that threshold.

However, it was also necessary at this hour for the many pilgrims – who were scattered all over 'Akká, some at the pilgrim house, some in the reception room downstairs and yet others in the streets and bazaars, all longingly waiting – to be given the opportunity of attaining the presence of

‘Abdu’l-Bahá. In this way, while relishing the joys of reunion they could also benefit from the wisdom of His words revealed in response to various complex questions.

Having been summoned to His presence, they would arrive and take their seats. After bestowing on each His expressions of love and greeting, He would again begin to reveal divine verses, at times uttering the words simply and distinctly in a powerful and commanding voice, at other times chanting the verses in that same melodious and heavenly tone which He used to chant Baha’u’llah’s Tablet of Visitation.

“ . . . this warm and tender gathering, this retreat of love, was often disrupted by the arrival of non-Baha’is, for the door of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s house was open to all: no doorkeeper or watchman blocked the way to any guest.

Suddenly two or more guests would enter. If they were not enemies of the Cause, they would be received warmly by the Master with the words, ‘Welcome, welcome. How are you?’ After imparting His expressions of love and greeting to each, the revelation of verses would begin again and that spiritual state would return. However, if they were not worthy, or if the number of people exceeded the capacity of the room, then with the words, ‘Go in the care of God,’ ‘Abdu’l-Baha would give permission for the friends to leave and would then return to His work. This is how Tablets were revealed when dictated to a secretary.

But more often than not, the Tablets were revealed in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s own hand and under the circumstances already described. When He found some free time and a private setting, He would take up the pen and begin to write. Yet He did not wish to abandon the pilgrims to themselves, or to leave them in a state of expectation, anticipation and weariness, and so when He brought out batches of incoming letters from His pocket and began to read them and write replies, He also remembered the pilgrims. Some of them might have been the originators of some of the letters, while a number of others might have been the couriers of these letters on behalf of other friends from various Eastern countries. In any case, when the Pen of ‘Abdu’l-Baha was in motion and no guests were in attendance, it was a good time for them to come in, sit down and be enraptured by the pleasure of nearness to Him.

As soon as they had been summoned and entered His presence they were greeted by His loving words, ‘Welcome, welcome, welcome’. But while His words of loving greeting flowed uninterruptedly, His pen was in motion all the time. Sometimes He would enunciate the revealed words as He wrote them; at other times, silence dominated the room. Sometimes He would break the silence and urge the friends, ‘Go ahead and talk, I can hear you.’ . . .

It is also interesting that while the act of witnessing the revelation of divine verses enthralled the devoted believers, it generated in non-believers and even those mischief-makers who might be present a state of humility and lowliness. . . .”

E. Protection of the Faith was paramount.

p. 48-49: “At such a time, when the Faith of God was the target of the darts of disbelief and dissension, when the winds of test and trial were blowing with great intensity, when the ark of the Cause of God was surrounded by devastating storms, the rudder of the ship rested in the mighty grasp of the Centre of the Covenant, Who with the power of His utterance and Writings guided the ship towards the shores of deliverance and directed humankind towards the highway of salvation.”

His Writings were revealed in response to the prevailing circumstances. For example, He compared the challenges of the days of Muhammad and Christ and their subsequent triumph to the present days of challenges. “He regarded the final victory of the Cause as an absolute reality and enabled us to visualize the ultimate ascendancy of the religion of God and the hoisting of the

banner of this divinely ordained Dispensation upon the world's highest peaks . . . Past, present and future were not different times, but one unchanging dimension.”

F. Themes of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s utterances:

p. 54: “awakening of souls in the face of the many machinations of the Covenant-breakers. . .”

p. 56: “the necessity of deepening and consolidating the newly-enrolled believers, which warranted at least temporarily a higher priority than even the duty of teaching itself.”

p. 57: “moral education and training . . and more particularly on the subject of detachment from all things save God.”

p. 58: His power of expression: “in language of such simplicity, sublimity and precision that it could be likened to a stream of crystal-clear water flowing gently and quenching the burning thirst of the true seeker’s longing for truth, or like a flash of electricity penetrating and illuminating the hearts of the believers, and whose magnetic quality captivated their souls and elevated them to the highest paradise.”

“Another subject of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s talks were the expression of his yearning for martyrdom. As His calamities and afflictions multiplied, so increased His zeal and longing to bear the pain. The names of the great martyrs of the Faith flowed from His lips in glorious terms. . . “

p. 404: Luck or Fortune: *Strive to become worthy of divine confirmation:*

“A young, illiterate, simple Parsi Baha’i, who apart from his qualities of total sincerity and complete honesty had no claim to learning or wisdom,” said to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “May my life be a sacrifice for You, what is this luck? Is it real or just an invention?” the Master replied, “In Baha’i philosophy, luck is the same as divine confirmation, which is ceaseless and continuous, never subject to interruption or suspension. It is not limited to some to the exclusion of others. The capacity for its manifestation must be created. Showers of divine bounty and confirmation are always falling; if any spot experiences a suspension or delay, other areas shall receive these effusions. The clouds of divine bounty bestow blessings on all. It is sanctified of exclusivity. The significant point is that he who sows a seed or plants a sapling becomes the recipient of bounty, he becomes the possessor of good fortune, otherwise he remains deprived. The sun of mercy is eternal and ever-abiding; it is not specific to some. The loved ones of God must strive to become worthy of divine confirmations. Misfortune has no true existence. It is simply deprivation of divine bounty. Darkness is the absence of light; otherwise darkness has no outer reality. Darkness should be eliminated through the light of the recognition of God. For example, a storm is a universal blessing. It is a prelude to cool and temperate weather. It is one of nature’s features, an essential part of natural phenomena. However, if it strikes a ship which is incapable of resisting its force, this is not due to the ship’s misfortune. The storm did not come to sink the ship but to follow its own natural course. Now, the more substantial and sturdy the ship, the better it can endure the force of the storm. Tests of the world of nature are of the same kind.

So good fortune, or luck, is the ceaseless bounty of God, and misfortune is a chance event that represents its absence. Praise be to God that all of you are fortunate. What fortune is greater than divine knowledge? What fortune is greater than the love of God, which is the source of all divine effusions?”

How to Attract Divine Confirmations, (P. 334)

“...the Master expounded His approach and began to give specific instructions on how to attract divine confirmations and strengthen the powers of perseverance.

Regarding the power created by the concentration of forces on a single point and the application of a single idea uncluttered by any other, He gave wonderful examples which I now find myself incapable of remembering. However, regarding the importance of perseverance in the performance of any task, I heard Him reiterate an exhortation which I had heard frequently from His lips; now again, as a reminder He repeated those words, reviving and awakening me.

‘In any and all endeavours, divine confirmation is wholly dependent on action. Persevere, so that the hosts of divine bounty may assist you,’ were his words. I even remember that once in the course of His utterances, taking God as witness He said, ‘The hosts of divine blessings are poised behind this very window waiting for you to act. If you do not enter the arena of service, of what use are the hosts of heavenly confirmation? If the commander of the army remains idle and passive, how can the army achieve victory?’”

p. 272: “While ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s manner of speaking was every pleasant and delightful, yet when it came to **humour** His anecdotes left such an effect in the hearts that His listeners were beside themselves with joy and delight, especially when He told a story to illustrate a point. And however commonplace such a story might be, His manner of presentation was such that it seemed as though a sublime and holy Tablet was being revealed. This is why stories told by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá cannot have the same effect when repeated by anyone else.”

G. Example of stories of the days of Baha’u’llah that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá used to illustrate a point:

“advice, so that in times of hardship and calamity the friends might be reminded to rely on the will of God”. p. 400

(i) Such an example of courage and audacity was Mirza Asadu’llah, “who had the responsibility of sweeping the floors of His [Baha’u’llah’s] house.” ‘Abdu’l-Baha said, “Aqa Asadu’llah is a very small man, but he possesses a brave heart. He used to carry a broadsword and act as a guard at Baha’u’llah’s house. In Baghdad, when whispers were heard that a plot was afoot by the enemies of Bahá’u’lláh to attack His house, the Blessed Beauty responded, ‘I will send Aqa Asadu’llah who will take care of the lot of them.’”

(ii) Story of “one of the Ottoman officials in ‘Akká, who once planned to extract a large bribe from Baha’u’llah. To do so he began to create a great deal of trouble. Failing in his purpose, he summoned the Blessed Beauty to the Government House. When Baha’u’llah arrived, the officer intensified the pressure by threatening Him with a variety of ultimatums and penalties. Losing patience with the man, Baha’u’llah suddenly stood up and there and then began to perform the Obligatory Prayer, as the officer looked on incredulously. Once the prayer was completed He beckoned the officer. As he approached, suddenly the Blessed Beauty raised His hand, slapped him hard across the face and said, ‘I have telegraphed you the money,’ and walked out. The poor man, petrified, stood there like a statue. It so happened that that very evening he received a telegram from the Sublime Porte relieving him of his duties and summoning him to the capital. That night he presented himself at Baha’u’llah’s door, threw himself at His feet and asked for forgiveness and blessing.”

II. Bearing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

A. His unique gait:

p. 125: When shots were fired near where ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was walking, His “gait did not change. He strolled along with the same dignity and stateliness that were the distinguishing characteristics of that radiant and heavenly Being. Unperturbed, He continued His steady strides without paying the least attention to what had just transpired. He seemed to be praying and I did not wish to disturb Him with my expressions of concern and anxiety at a time when the whole of His attention was focused on the world of the spirit.”

p. 270-271: “...’Abdu’l-Bahá’s bearing and gait was not something that pen or tongue can describe. For example, His way of walking – the simplest of physical movements – did not in any shape or form resemble the walk of any other human being. This had become an established fact; the resident believers bore witness to having heard the Blessed Beauty remark, ‘Look how the Master walks. No one in the world has a more sublime gait.’ The friends in those days used to say that when the Blessed Beauty resided in the Mansion of Bahji, He used to gaze at the fields from the balcony of the building and as soon as the blessed figure of the Master appeared, approaching the Mansion, Baha’u’llah would invite all who were in His presence, saying, ‘Come and see the Master walking.’ In brief, the same applied to His eating, drinking, sitting and rising, all of which were in their way unique and matchless.”

B. Interaction with officials of the government, p. 361-3:

In the midst of the “deception, craftiness, corruption and distortion” of the tyrannical rule of ‘Abdu’l-Hamid as officials sought to investigate charges against ‘Abdu’l-Baha, “the Master paid no attention to the officials and conducted Himself with supreme dignity, serenity, majesty and power; all the while withholding the slightest demonstration of welcome or hospitality to these men, all of whom were officers of the highest rank and the direct representatives of the Royal Court. This lack of regard on the part of ‘Abdu’l-Baha increased their indignation, astonishment and consternation to such an extent that losing all patience they found one of ‘Akká’s Islamic scholars, known as Shaykh Muhammad-i-Nabihani – who outwardly appeared as a proponent of the Faith but was in fact a mischief-maker – instructed him appropriately and sent him to the sanctified presence of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. He arrived feigning humility, trepidation and concern, yet beheld the Master in a state of tranquility, composure and grandeur, as if nothing had happened. And since he was only too aware of the deceptions and trickery of the Commission of Enquiry, he was astonished. He thought the Master’s dignity, power and magnanimity to be due to His ignorance of the cruel plans they had in store for Him and the vicious practices of the people of tyranny. Otherwise surely this Lion of the Covenant would, like a fox at bay, adopt the ways of flattery, praise and appeasement of the Commission, if only for the sake of appearances, and would cease to evince such a disinterested and unconcerned attitude.

In any case, this insincere scholar pleadingly put forth his case: ‘O my Master, this Commission is exceedingly ruthless and is currently plotting many schemes. Its members have stated, ‘We had heard that, regardless of rank and standing, whenever an official arrives in ‘Akká the exalted ‘Abbas Effendi treats him with deference and shows him hospitality and kindness. We, however, who have come directly from the Sultan, each possessing high rank and position, and have now been in Akká for a number of days, have been totally disregarded, while all the city leaders as well as people of prominence and wealth have already paid their courtesy visits.’ This has so outraged them that they are intent on harming ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and there is a fear of great danger to His well-being. Therefore, it may be better for the Master to pay them a visit and show them kindness and

consideration, so as to dispel hurt feelings and quench the fire of enmity which rages in their hearts.’

‘Abdu’l-Bahá smiled and replied, ‘Yes, this is true. I have always been the first to offer hospitality to a newly-arrived official, regardless of rank, and you yourself know well my gentle and loving nature. But this Commission has come to prove the false accusations made in those testimonials against me, and therefore if I express any greetings and or welcome them, or offer hospitality and friendliness, they may mistakenly consider my motive to be fear, flattery and appeasement, whereas we are innocent of these accusations. It is not befitting for me to express such sentiments, for they should be allowed to conduct their investigation free from all influences. ‘We rely on none but God.’”

Astonished by such forthright words uttered with such supreme power, the enquirer received permission to take his leave.”

C. In relation to the Covenant-breakers:

p. 339: “I recalled that personification of supreme sacrifice, remembered His patience, serenity, tranquility and dignity, and His bearing and demeanour in the face of all those unpleasant events and the wicked actions of the Covenant-breakers.”

p. 346: “On another occasion, one day when the friends were besieged by fear and agitation, [thinking that the Master would be taken prisoner] ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, with a bearing dignified and serene, slowly began to stroll towards the port. He walked out of the gate of the city to take a look at the sea. He threw a glance at the warship anchored at some distance from the shore and then came back. A few hours later, the ship pulled anchor and departed.”

p. 354: “The Covenant-breakers were so completely confident of their imminent success and final victory that they spread these rumours undaunted, until the friends too heard of their intentions. However, the utterances of ‘Abdu’l-Baha at this time revolved around the necessity of patience, calmness and perseverance, so that unseen confirmations and divine mercy might reach us.”

D. The Master’s habits and health: pp. 273-276

He ate little, adhered to absolute cleanliness and simplicity and thereby “complied perfectly with the requirements of nature” and “was hardly ever ill”.

p. 273-4: “The harmful effects of eating meat and the benefits of vegetarianism were made clear by the Master”. He said, “. . . man has accustomed himself to such a life [carnivorous] and now it has become routine and acceptable. That is why its prohibition is not advisable at present.” “When there were no guests, there were no particular arrangements for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s meals. However, washing the hands before eating and brushing the teeth afterwards were customary and definite practices. Small portions of food, and regular change in the type of food served at each meal, were customary. For example, bread and cheese, or bread and olives, or merely bread, were at times quite usual. Sometimes He would take a small serving of kebab and would explain at the dinner table the reason for His choice. . . . Whenever ‘Abdu’l-Bahá sat at the dinner table He spoke of happy things, and if Western believers were present the answers to their questions were also presented in a state of joy and gaiety. In such cases dinnertime would last a long time.

Regarding clothing: p. 275: “. . . the Master changed his shirt twice daily. This did not take much time, for it was not difficult to remove the ‘*aba* and *qaba* and then put them on again, for they were comfortably loose and conveniently devoid of any superfluous buttons. The brightness

and delicacy of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s shirts and headgear dazzled the eyes. Most of the Master’s clothes were made of cotton, and quite inexpensive, and since the clothes were loose, His blessed body was always free. The shawl that He wore around His waist was soft and loosely held in place. The colour of His clothes was generally beige or a bit darker.”

p. 276: “He was the very embodiment of joy and cheerfulness.”

E. Humility and Detachment and Obedience:

In relation to the Universal House of Justice: (pp. 170-71)

“Nothing causes me more unhappiness than disunity, and this can only be remedied by obedience to the command of the Universal House of Justice. Even before the establishment of the House of Justice, the friends must be obedient to the existing Spiritual Assemblies even if they know of a certainty that their judgment is flawed. If this were not complied with, the mighty citadel of the Faith of God would not be safeguarded. All must obey the Universal House of Justice. Obedience to it is obedience to the Cause. Opposition to it is opposition to the Blessed Beauty. Denial of it is denial of God, the True One. Renouncing any word of the House of Justice is like unto the renunciation of a word from the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. Observe how important this matter is! The Blessed Beauty has ordained the House of Justice as the law-maker: If the votes of the members are not unanimous and there are differences of views, then the vote of the majority is the vote of the Blessed Beauty.’

“...Take this very moment. Should the Universal House of Justice be operating, by the one True God, beside Whom there is no God I would have been the first to obey its decree, even if it should be against me. It is true that that Body does not possess inherent infallibility, but it is under the shadow of the protection and shelter of the Blessed Beauty. Its command is the Blessed Command. Discuss this matter amongst yourselves, so that it may not be forgotten. Speak of it to one another; even, make a written note of it.”

Regarding Himself in relation to the believers: (p.394): “He would say, ‘I don’t claim sinlessness. I am the first of sinners (God forbid!) but the Ancient Beauty has bestowed upon me a station, and therefore whatever I say is what will be.’”

Detachment to place of residence: (p. 414-16). With the revolution of the Young Turks the Sublime Porte had issued a decree freeing all political prisoners. “The believers began to anticipate the departure of the Master from ‘Akká to the city of Haifa, while in that city, friends and non-Baha’is alike awaited His arrival with great eagerness.” The believers asked Dr. Afroukhteh to present their petition and entreaty to ‘Abdu’l-Baha to come to Haifa. The Master came and entered His residence. “Observing the unfinished building, He remarked, ‘We are not of this world, and have no need of such a house. But man has the duty to develop and cultivate God’s earth.’”

III. Burdens of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

A. From Covenant-breakers: (see references as listed in the Index)

Allegations against ‘Abdu’l-Bahá;

Bribery by Covenant-breakers to officials;

Schemes of Covenant-breakers to paralyze and ruin work on the Shrine of the Báb;

Strategies including spreading false rumors, denouncing friends close to ‘Abdu’l-Baha;

Writings containing lies, half-truths and accusations.

Although the residents of ‘Akká and Haifa appreciated the kindness and were recipients of the generosity of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and the Governor of ‘Akká was loath to enforce such severe regulations, yet the machinations of the Covenant-Breakers caused His reincarceration.

p. 134: “...the Master bore the full burden and hardship of the incarceration in the Most Great Prison. He never left the city until ‘Abdu’l-Hamid was deposed from the office of Caliph.

B. From the believers:

p. 391-92: *Signing contributions of the believers*: “When He asked the resident friends to contribute, no matter how little, towards the construction of the Mashriq’-Adkar in Ishqabad, the late Aqa Riday-i-Qannad was assigned to collect all such contributions and send them. Since there were troublemakers in our midst and Aqa Rida wished to make sure that they would not find an opportunity to stir up conflict and disunity, he humbly asked that all receipts for such contributions be signed by ‘Abdu’l-Baha. This was to ensure that the Covenant-breakers would not be able to use this as a pretext for their mischievous purposes. The receipts were signed and sealed by the master.

When the news reached Iran, the Persian friends in envy implored that their receipts too might be so adorned. Several thousand receipts in the amounts of 9 *shah*, 19 *shahi* and 9 *geran* arrived in ‘Akká, and all of them, one by one, received His signature and seal. There was so much of it that the insignia of the Master’s seal wore out completely, and the Master’s fingers could no longer function at times. One day I was going up the stairs as ‘Abdu’l-Baha was coming out of His office. Suddenly He stopped and leaning against the door remarked, ‘Jinab-i-Khan, I am exhausted. Let us go for a walk. Today I have signed and sealed a thousand receipts for contributions to the Mashriq’l-Adhkar.’ The extreme fatigue so evident in His face was heartrending.”

p. 393: With the political turmoil in Iran each side of the struggle would accuse Baha’is of belonging to the wrong camp. News of such conflicting petitions and entreaties would reach ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Also the activities of the Covenant-breakers was at their peak. “Now you can see what ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was going through. ‘Refrain from involvement in politics, even to the extent of uttering a single word,’ was continuously on His lips; similar words formed the opening passages of His Tablets.”

p. 394: “... we, lovers of God, firm and steadfast in His Covenant, having weathered the tests and difficulties caused by the uprising of the Covenant-breakers . . . we who could recite the Tablet of the Covenant by heart, manifesting intense devotion and depth of faith, nevertheless constantly presented ‘our’ opinions and expressed our ‘selves’ at that sanctified threshold. And this is one category of hardship we imposed on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Many a time He would say, ‘I don’t claim sinlessness. I am the first of sinners (God forbid!) but the Ancient Beauty has bestowed upon me a station, and therefore whatever I say is what will be.’”

What brought sadness to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá?

“My wellbeing and its opposite are in the hands of the friends”: pp. 298-301:

- i. Disunity among the friends in the Cause of God

ii. “the injustice of the enemies and the utter submissiveness of the friends – so much so that whenever the Persian friends suffered injury at the hands of their enemies, signs of deep sorrow could be detected on His blessed face for a long time.” [See Chapter 3]

iii. “the misconduct and misdeeds of those who claimed attachment to the Faith. And conversely, the good deeds of any of the friends were a source of joy and happiness to the Master. . . .

“...He never took to bed when He was unwell; whenever He developed a fever He would simply endure the discomfort, not disclosing the matter to anyone; by adopting certain diets He was usually able to cure himself. Only by the way He ate and drank at the dinner table with the Western pilgrims – or abstained from food and drink could we tell that He was not feeling well.

One day we heard that the Master was ill in bed and had not left the *andaruni*. . . . After some eight or nine days I presented myself at the Master’s House very early one morning, before the rising of the sun. . . . Suddenly I heard the sound of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s finger rapping on the windowpane of His study. . . . He beckoned me. . . . ‘So you are here to enquire after my health? Praise God, I am quite well,’ He said. Then He told me to take a seat. As He began to write, the following utterances were revealed: ‘Nothing affects me more than the actions and conduct of the friends. The main reason I was ill over the last few days was a letter I had received from Persia describing the misdeeds and misconduct of one of the believers. The news brought me such pain and sorrow that I fell ill and had to stay in bed until last night, when Mirza Haydar-‘Ali delivered a letter from ‘Ishqabad bearing news of the good deeds of one of the friends. It made me so happy that I became well. So if the believers wish for my happiness, they must adorn themselves with heavenly character and conduct. . . It is because of this that I have always said that my wellbeing and its opposite are in the hands of the friends.’”

C. Effect of difficulties and sorrows on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (pp. 180-81):

“... while seemingly in the grasp of the fire of Nimrod and assailed by the hatred of His enemies, the reality of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s being remained cheerful and happy; at the emergence of adversity and tribulation, He even desired more. This is attested by the fact that all the most captivating verses and exhilarating Tablets, those which revive and rejuvenate melancholy souls, were revealed at this times. . . .

I could give many examples to show that the pain and sorrow that afflicted ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, while weakening His body, had no effect on His heavenly powers; and that it was precisely at such times that the emanations of His pen infused a fresh spirit in the hearts of the devoted souls. Each Tablet or prayer revealed in this time of sorrow brought great happiness to the hearts of the friends; while His utterances generated feelings of hope and joy in His audience.

... And if faithful servants beseeched ‘Abdu’l-Bahá for relief from the calamities, and a renewal of calm and tranquility, He would with a gesture and a word create such feelings in the hearts that one found oneself afire with the desire for more calamity and a longing for more adversity.”

Example: To the author Dr. Youness Afroukhteh who expressed deep sorrow at the tribulations and entreated ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to end it, the Master replied, “Jinab-i-Khan, this is what is intended. If it were not for this, the friends would lose their fire and the Cause of God would cease to progress. Now what do you want me to do? Do you want me to pray that the cup of calamity may not overflow?” And then He uttered words which filled my heart with such happiness and contentment that I longed to be in Yazd so that I could take a single gulp from that elixir of sacrifice.”

...”And indeed, while all such calamities and tragedies had no effect on the reality of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s being, whenever He observed any trace of sorrow or distress in the friends He spoke about happy things and told delightfully humorous stories, changing their mood. The spiritual humour of that sanctified and heavenly being demonstrates those sentiments expressed by Baha’u’llah in His Tablet which opens with humour and ends in such a way as to fill the heart with delight and joy.”

In the story which follows as an example, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in response to an emotional plea from an older believer Aqa Riday-i-Qannad, said, “Yes, in the path of the Blessed Beauty one must drink heartily from the overflowing cup of difficulties and afflictions in order to experience its consummate intoxicating effect. One type of adversity only does not have the same effect; it does not bestow that inebriating pleasure. Wines of diverse flavours must be consumed in this divine banquet, until one is utterly intoxicated.”

He uttered these words with such joy and ardour that every atom of our beings soared with a sense of ecstasy and rapture. Then He added, ‘But you have never attended a drinking party. To get completely drunk and ultimately lose all sense of himself, a drinker mixes his drinks. . . . We, too, must drink various tastes from the cup of tribulation. . . .’

IV. Love of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

A. Towards Persian believers:

p. 395. “...the Master told the Americans, ‘Wherever you encounter Iranian Baha’is embrace them on my behalf, like this, and kiss them.’ ‘What should I do?’ asked the American lady. ‘You can do the same with the ladies!’ was ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s response.”

B. Love shown to children and believers and non-Baha’is:

pp. 204-205: On Fridays, after ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has visited the poor and generously bestowed on them His love and generosity, He makes “time for the celebration of the Baha’i children. But ‘Abdu’l-Baha has not as yet found an opportunity to rest.

The schoolchildren are standing in line according to their height, holding their completed handwriting exercises and waiting for ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s arrival so that they too may receive His heart-warming attention, His generous favours and gifts, and His spiritual teachings. First, ‘Abdu’l-Baha walks quickly to the nearby sink to wash away the effects of the many blemishes and marks left on His hands by the hasty assaults of the poor, eager to extract their share from His hands. Then He prepares to meet the children.

Here, some twenty-two or –three children are standing in line. After bestowing upon them words of affection and love, He first enquires from their teacher after their manner of conduct and behaviour. Then, He takes the completed exercise sheet from an older child and reviews it. The reed pen, already cut to a suitable tip, is ready in the hand of the student, who gives it to the Master.

‘This must be written this way. This letter should be written somewhat higher. The straight lines have not been adhered to.’ In short, He reviews each one, praising some and giving proper instruction to others. ‘This time you have written better,’ or ‘Your handwriting has got worse!’ When He reaches the younger children He treats them with special affection and shares with them a few humorous words. Then at random, He takes their English homework and asks some of the students a few questions. He paces up and down the line, paying attention to the details of their lessons. He even examines the cleanliness of their hands. Finally, He offers some advice

regarding certain general topics such as one's manners and conduct, then He talks about turning to God and about the nature of religion. Gradually His words gain momentum, and the pilgrims and residents who are standing some distance away move closer. As He paces up and down, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words become so moving that one feels transformed, finding oneself in a different world. . . . God be praised, for the sake of these children the bounty of utterance has surged to such lofty heights, carrying His listeners to heavenly worlds beyond. . . .

As soon as the talk ends, out comes the moneybag. There are plenty of quarter-majidi and two-qurushi pieces to go around. He starts with the top student and works down to the smaller children. What makes it more wonderful is that as He passes out the coins He continues to entertain the children with humorous remarks and funny stories. Having completed the task, He takes a seat in the *biruni* reception room, and along with the rest of the friends enjoys a round of sweet coffee. He spends a few more minutes attending to the pilgrims. Suddenly He notices that His pockets are heavy. It is the letters from the friends that are as yet unanswered. He rises immediately, summons one of His secretaries and climbs the stairs to the upper floor. But Friday is a public holiday, and non-Baha'is, too, wish to see him. They come in groups. And so the dictation of Tablets will have to wait for another time. In the afternoon, the pilgrims and residents arrive together to visit 'Abdu'l-Bahá and visit Bahji in accordance with His command, some on foot and others using carriages.

So this is Friday's schedule. On Sundays, however, which is a Christian holiday, most of the visitors are Christians. On Sunday mornings 'Abdu'l-Bahá visits only the Christian poor, and in the evenings the Christian dignitaries come to visit Him."

C. Towards those who showed enmity towards the Faith and 'Abdu'l-Bahá: pp. 303-07

"...He could never allow anyone either to think of or mention the misdeeds of anyone else in His presence, or utter any words of criticism, lest the pure stream of love become sullied. It frequently happened that under the influence of His love and compassion disagreements between friends melted away." P. 305.

P. 336-7: "Loving the friends is of no major merit. In this journey you must become a lover of your enemies, so that the purity of your love may attract the hearts. . . . You must put this thought into your heart, that that poor individual does not know me. How can he be held responsible? You must pray for him. He who knows me as you do, and he who does not know me at all, are not the same. Let's assume you quarrel with him or allow yourself to hate him. Of what benefit is that to you, or to the Faith, or to me? However, if your heart is free from rancour and responds with kindness, it is possible that you may touch his heart. For the sake of God and for His pleasure as well as mine, you must not on this journey allow the hatred of anyone to enter your heart; so you may succeed in your purpose. On the other hand, consider: what damage can the calumny of the foolish inflict on my work? What difference can such words make to me? I pray for all of them. You must look at me and strive to gain my good pleasure. And my wish is that you do not take offence at anyone. When I am happy with you, how can you be unhappy?"

V. Generosity of 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

pp. 79-80: "...if a hundred pilgrims were in His presence and 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke on certain issues of His own choosing (completely unrelated to the personal questions or problems of any of the pilgrims), each pilgrim would discover the answer to his own problems or questions in His words, and would consequently consider himself to have been the intended addressee of 'Abdu'l-

Bahá's remarks and the sole recipient of His bounty and blessing. And if that gathering of one hundred souls could have revealed to each other their inner thoughts and secrets, and in that light examine and explore the true meaning of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words, they would have discovered in those words the same life-giving spirit which when imparted by raindrops and sunlight causes each seedling to become strong, verdant, fragrant and fruitful, each in accordance with its own latent capacities. For instance, a mystic or a poet or an historian or an artisan or a champion wrestler or a simple labourer all have different natures, tastes, thoughts and talents. Yet regardless of their talents and capacities, this rain of bounty and sun of generosity would cause each one to grow into full bloom. The seed of knowledge would produce the fruits of knowledge; the seed of courage and strength would produce the fruits of courage and strength."

pp. 283-287: The meaning of generosity – learn from nature, become signs of divine generosity. "Abdu'l-Bahá would offer the example of nature's greatest gifts such as the sun, the moon, the heavenly rain and the celestial breeze, and express His desire that the friends should learn from nature, bestowing boundless favour upon all and under no circumstances allowing the slightest hint of partiality to influence their judgement, never considering merit or worthiness; in this way they would become signs of divine generosity. . . .

What was unusual was that regardless of the size of His gift, He Himself was never satisfied with the offering and would increase it. All the non-Baha'is, therefore, had noticed that in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's charitable hands material means and wealth had no value, regardless of their worth. And so the greedy and the avaricious – especially the ever-acquisitive Arabs – were always drifting around 'Abdu'l-Bahá. . . ."

VI. Helping the poor:

pp. 202-207: "It is Friday morning, and in the area in front of the *biruni* of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's house there is a commotion. Crowds of hopeful poor and disabled people from neighbouring villages have come to town and have filled every available inch of space in the courtyard. Young, old, children, adults, men, women – all in a variety of worn-out clothes, all disabled and sickly, downtrodden, helpless and downcast, sighing and lamenting, await the return of the Master of the house. Having had their breakfasts, the pilgrims too have come to view the spectacle. The small children, the pupils of a modest school in 'Akká, each carrying their notebooks, their completed writing exercises, and their pens and ink pots, enter the area and run to the front yard. The servants have already swept the yard and watered the lawns and are busy with other things. But all impatiently await the arrival of the Master.

No one knows where He might have gone so early on a Friday morning, before the rising of the sun. Unlike Haifa, the fortress of 'Akká is devoid of open spaces and wide beaches where He might have repaired for prayer and meditation. Possibly, He has gone to visit those of the poor who rise early to perform their obligatory prayers and await the coming of their beneficent and noble guest. Anyone who has ever accompanied 'Abdu'l-Baha on such days to the humble dwellings of this group of the needy, knows that these are people have encountered misfortune in their lives and have fallen from a position of wealth to the depths of poverty. And since they have never asked for a helping hand, they have gained a special place in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's heart. It is related that the Prophet Muhammad counseled: 'Have pity on the wealthy who have fallen on hard times.'

Now, in those homes, the Master is caring for the needy: giving counsel to one, praying for another, offering hope of material success to a third, prescribing medical remedies for yet another,

and giving glad tidings of the confirmations of the Holy Spirit to all. Then, as He begins to take His leave, with a radiant and happy face, He hands each a sum of money that will cover his expenses for the week.

On His return He enters through the front gate. The waiting poor press forward to reach Him, extending their hands; each according to his own beliefs begins to praise and glorify the name of the Lord. These poor people, usually numbering around sixty to seventy souls, have not come here only for money. One wants a prayer, one implores healing, one desires success in earning a livelihood. In short, whatever ails them, they confide in ‘Abdu’l-Baha and ask for a remedy. The crowd is unruly and troublesome as they press forward. With kind words, He consoles all and as He begins to disburse money, since there is no particular order or queue some stand up twice, and some pry out more than they deserve. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s command, therefore, is firm and loud: ‘Sit down, everyone sit down. Whoever refuses to sit down will miss out and whoever rises out of turn will not receive a share.’

Some semblance of order returns. Now they are seated in two rows with a narrow space between them. And so, in an orderly fashion, from one side He begins to hand out money. After receiving it, no-one has the right to move, so that the Master may not confuse the one already rewarded with a newcomer.

He sends away unrewarded the strong-bodied, lazy individuals. He refuses the children so that they may not develop the habit of begging. To those who are disabled, with whom He is better acquainted, He is more generous. In the meantime the pilgrims, standing around in corners leaning against the wall with their arms crossed on their chests, observe the proceedings with wonder and receive a lesson in true service, learning the meaning of kindness and compassion. The festival of the poor has come to an end. ...”

VII. Effect of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s glance: (pp. 417-418)

- a. anger (“for which ‘I seek refuge in God from His wrath’”)
- b. love and compassion (“His permanent and all-encompassing glance, bringing joy and delight”)
- c. “that magnetic, captivating and all-conquering gaze” (non-Baha’is irresistibly attracted)
- d. satisfaction (“which meant ‘I am well-pleased with you’. Same look for obedient and rebellious.
- e. “the gaze which perceives through divine power the desire of the one beheld. . . Under its influence, one desires suffering in the path of God.”
- f. The “searching glance, so that the one beheld realized that everything in his heart and mind, from past to future, was laid bare before Him.”
- g. “. . .above all, the look that bestows knowledge and understanding.”

VIII. Some Counsels of Baha’u’llah exemplified by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

Please Note: Add more counsels that come to your mind as you read this book.

“Be generous in prosperity and thankful in adversity . . .” see paragraph 1 below)

“The essence of true safety is to observe silence, to look at the end of things and to renounce the world.”

“My calamity is My providence. . .”

“My first counsel is this: Possess a pure, kindly, and radiant heart...”

“Be thou content with Me and seek no other helper...”

“Guard against idleness and sloth...”

“Ye were created to show love one to another...”

“Man’s merit lieth in service and virtue...”

“It is Our wish and desire that every one of you may become a source of all goodness unto men, and an example of uprightness to mankind. . . .” (see paragraph 2 below)

“Be ye as a mountain in the Cause of your Lord . . .”

“It beseemeth you to fix your gaze under all conditions upon justice and fairness.”

“Trustworthiness is in truth the best of vestures for your temples...”

“The essence of faith is fewness of words and abundance of deeds . . .”

“Let your acts be a guide unto all mankind . . .”

“But for the tribulations that have touched Me in the path of God, life would have held no sweetness for Me, and Mine existence would have profited Me nothing. For them who are endued with discernment, and whose eyes are fixed upon the Sublime Vision, it is no secret that I have been most of the days of My life, even as a slave, sitting under a sword hanging on a thread, knowing not whether it would fall soon or late upon him. And yet, notwithstanding all this We render thanks unto God, the Lord of the worlds, and yield Him praise at all times and under all conditions. He, verily, standeth witness over all things.”

Baha’u’llah (The Summons of the Lord of Hosts, p. 136)

“It is Our wish and desire that every one of you may become a source of all goodness unto men, and an example of uprightness to mankind. Beware lest ye prefer yourselves above your neighbors. Fix your gaze upon Him Who is the Temple of God amongst men. He, in truth, hath offered up His life as a ransom for the redemption of the world. He, verily, is the All-Bountiful, the Gracious, the Most High. If any differences arise amongst you, behold Me standing before your face, and overlook the faults of one another for My name’s sake and as a token of your love for My manifest and resplendent Cause. We love to see you at all times consorting in amity and concord within the paradise of My good-pleasure, and to inhale from your acts the fragrance of friendliness and unity, of loving-kindness and fellowship. Thus counsellethe you the All-Knowing, the Faithful. We shall always be with you; if We inhale the perfume of your fellowship, Our heart will assuredly rejoice, for naught else can satisfy Us. To this beareth witness every man of true understanding.” (Baha’u’llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha’u’llah, p. 315)

“I wish the friends of God to give forth light like this lamp. The Sun of the Abha Beauty has set, so the beloved of God must shine brightly as the lamp.”

(‘Abdu’l-Baha, quoted on p. 13)

OUTLINE SUMMARY:

I. Manners of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

a. In conversations with Baha’is:

b. Habits of ‘Abdu’l-Baha in His daily tasks and services:

c. “One task does not distract Him from another”

d. The manner of revealing verses

e. Protection of the Faith was paramount

f. Themes of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s utterances

g. Example of stories of the days of Baha’u’llah that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá used to illustrate a point

II. Bearing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

- a. His unique gait
- b. Interaction with officials of the government
- c. In relation to the Covenant-breakers
- d. The Master's habits and health
- e. Humility and Detachment and Obedience:
 - In relation to the Universal House of Justice
 - Regarding Himself in relation to the believers
 - Detachment to place of residence

III. Burdens of 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

- a. From Covenant-breakers
- b. From the believers
 - What brought sadness to 'Abdu'l-Baha?
- c. Effect of difficulties and sorrows on 'Abdu'l-Baha

IV. Love of 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

- a. Towards Persian believers:
- b. Love shown to children and believers and non-Baha'is
- c. Towards those who showed enmity towards the Faith and 'Abdu'l-Baha

V. Generosity of 'Abdu'l-Baha

VI. Helping the poor

VII. Effect of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's glance

[Reflections added by compiler of these notes:]

VIII. Some Counsels of Baha'u'llah exemplified by 'Abdu'l-Bahá