

Extracts from the Bahá'í Writings on Buddha, Krishna, Zoroaster and Related Subjects

Compilation of Compilations

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I.

From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

1. Blessed souls whether Moses, Jesus, Zoroaster, Krishna, Buddha, Confucius, or Muhammad were the cause of the illumination of the world of humanity. How can we deny such irrefutable proof? How can we be blind to such light?"

('Abdu'l-Bahá from a Tablet - translated from the Persian)

2. Thou hast written regarding Buddha and Confucius. Buddha was an illustrious personage. Confucius became the cause of civilization, advancement and prosperity for the people of China. Now it is not the time when we discuss concerning the stations and positions of those who are passed away. We must concentrate our attention upon the present. What hath transpired in a former time is past. Now is the time when we restrict our discussion to the Most Great Luminary of Peace and Salvation in this Age, to talk of the Blessed Perfection [Bahá'u'lláh] and to voice His exhortations, behests and teachings. Buddha and Confucius were kings in bygone ages who have disappeared. Their sovereignty in this world is ended and their cycle is completed. Now the Throne of the Kingdom of ABHA is established and the Blessed Perfection is sitting upon the Throne of Grandeur. We must raise this Call, promulgate the Word of God and live in accord with the teachings and advices of the Beauty of ABHA

("Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas", vol. 2 (Chicago: Bahá'í Publishing Society,

1915), pp. 469-70)

3. There are prophecies concerning this Manifestation in the Buddhistic books, but they are in symbols and metaphors, and some spiritual conditions are mentioned therein, but the leaders of religion do not understand. They think these prophecies are material things; yet those signs are foreshadowing spiritual occurrences.

("Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas", vol. 3 (Chicago: Bahá'í Publishing Society, 1916), p. 565)

4. Buddha also established a new religion, and Confucius renewed morals and ancient virtues, but their institutions have been entirely destroyed. The beliefs and rites of the Buddhists and Confucianists have not continued in accordance with their fundamental teachings. The founder of Buddhism was a wonderful soul. He established the Oneness of God, but later the original principles of His doctrines gradually disappeared, and ignorant customs and ceremonials arose and increased until they finally ended in the worship of statues and images" So it is with religions; through the passing of time they change from their original foundation, the truth of the Religion of God entirely departs, and the spirit of it does not stay; heresies appear, and it becomes a body without a soul. That is why it is renewed. The meaning is that the Buddhists and Confucianists now worship images and statues. They are entirely heedless of the Oneness of God and believe in imaginary gods like the ancient Greeks. But in the beginning it was not so; there were different principles and other ordinances.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, "Some Answered Questions", (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984), pp. 165-166)

5. "Thou hadst written that in the sacred books of the followers of Zoroaster it is written that in the latter days, in three separate Dispensations, the sun must needs be brought to a standstill. In the first Dispensation, it is predicted, the sun will remain motionless for ten days; in the second for twice that time; in the third for no less than one whole month. The interpretation of this prophecy is this: the first Dispensation to which it refers is the Muhammadan Dispensation during which the Sun of Truth stood still for ten days. Each day is reckoned as one century. The Muhammadan Dispensation must have, therefore, lasted no less than one thousand years, which is precisely the period that has elapsed from the setting of the Star of the Imamate to the advent of the Dispensation proclaimed by the Báb. The second Dispensation referred to in thi prophecy is the one inaugurated by the Báb Himself which began in the year 1260 A.H. and was brought to a close in the year 1280 A.H. As to the third Dispensation ö the Revelation proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh ö inasmuch as the Sun of Truth when attaining that station shineth in the plenitude of its meridian splendor its duration hath been fixed for a period of one whole month, which is the maximum time taken by the sun to pass through a sign of the Zodiac. From this thou canst imagine the magnitude of the Bahá'í cycle ö a cycle that must extend over a period of at least five hundred thousand years.

('Abdu'l-Bahá cited in Shoghi Effendi, "The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters", rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), pp. 101-2)

II.

From the Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

6. ...The real teaching of Buddha is the same as the teaching of Jesus Christ. The teachings of all the Prophets are the same in character. Now men have changed the teaching. If you look at the present practice of the Buddhist religion, you will see that there is little of the Reality left. Many worship idols although their

teaching forbids it.

Buddha had disciples and he wished to send them out into the world to teach, so he asked them questions to see if they were prepared as he would have them be. "When you go to the East and to the West," said the Buddha, "and the people shut their doors to you and refuse to speak to you, what will you do?" ö The disciples answered and said; "We shall be very thankful that they do us no harm." ö "Then if they do you harm and mock, what will you do?" ö "We shall be very thankful that they do not give us worse treatment." ö "If they throw you into prison?" ö "We shall still be grateful that they do not kill us." ö "What if they were to kill you?" the Master asked for the last time. "Still," answered the disciples, "we will be thankful, for they cause us to be martyrs. What more glorious fate is there than this, to die for the glory of God?" And the Buddha said: "Well done!" The teaching of Buddha was like a young and beautiful child, and now it has become as an old and decrepit man. Like the aged man it cannot see, it cannot hear, it cannot remember anything"

(`Abdu'l-Bahá in London: Addresses, and Notes of Conversations", Commemorative ed. (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1987), pp. 63-64)

7. The Message of Krishna is the message of love. All God's prophets have brought the message of love....

("Paris Talks: Addresses given by `Abdu'l-Bahá in Paris in 1911-1912", 11th ed. (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1979), p. 35)

8. A star has the same radiance if it shines from the East or from the West. Be free from prejudice, so will you love the Sun of Truth from whatsoever point in the horizon it may arise! You will realize that if the Divine light of truth shone in Jesus Christ it also shone in Moses and in Buddha. The earnest seeker will arrive at this truth....

("Paris Talks: Addresses given by `Abdu'l-Bahá in Paris in 1911-1912", p. 137)

III.

From the Writings of Shoghi Effendi:

9. To Israel He was neither more nor less than the incarnation of the "Everlasting Father," the "Lord of Hosts" come down "with ten thousands of saints"; to Christendom Christ returned "in the glory of the Father," to Shí'ah Islám the return of the Imám Husayn; to Sunní Islám the descent of the "Spirit of God" (Jesus Christ); to the Zoroastrians the promised Sháh-Bahrám; to the Hindus the reincarnation of Krishna; to the Buddhists the fifth Buddha "To His Dispensation the sacred books of the followers of Zoroaster had referred as that in which the sun must needs be brought to a standstill for no less than one whole month. To Him Zoroaster must have alluded when, according to tradition, He foretold that a period of three thousand years of conflict and contention must needs precede the advent of the World-Savior Sháh-Bahrám, Who would triumph over Ahriman and usher in an era of blessedness and peace.

10. He alone is meant by the prophecy attributed to Gautama Buddha Himself, that "a Buddha named Maitreya, the Buddha of universal fellowship" should, in the fullness of time, arise and reveal "His boundless glory." To Him the Bhagavad-Gita of the Hindus had referred as the "Most Great Spirit," the "Tenth Avatar," the "Immaculate Manifestation of Krishna."

(Shoghi Effendi, "God Passes By", rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust,

1987), pp. 94-95)

IV.

From letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to individual believers unless otherwise noted:

11. Concerning the passage in "The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh" in which the Guardian quotes `Abdu'l-Bahá's interpretation of the prophecy referring to the times when the sun would stand still in the heavens he wishes me to explain that the days referred to in this prophecy have to be reckoned differently. In the Sacred Scriptures of various religions there are to be found frequent references to days, but these have been considered as indicating different periods of time, as for instance in the Qur'án a day is reckoned as one thousand years. The first ten days in the above-mentioned prophecy represent each a century, making thus a total of one thousand lunar years. As to the twenty days referring to the Bábí Dispensation, each of them represents only one lunar year, the total of twenty years marking the duration of the Revelation of the Báb. The thirty days in the last Dispensation should not be reckoned numerically, but should be considered as symbolizing the incomparable greatness of the Bahá'í Revelation, which, though not the final, is none the less thus far the fullest revelation of God to man. From a physical point of view, the thirty days represent the maximum time taken by the sun to pass through a sign of the zodiac. They thus represent a culminating point in the evolution of this star. So also from a spiritual standpoint these thirty days should be viewed as indicating the highest, though not the final stage in the spiritual evolution of mankind.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi - 7 August 1934 to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada)

12. As regards your study of the Hindu religion: The origins of this and many other religions that abound in India are not quite known to us, and even the Orientalists and the students of religion are not in complete accord about the results of their investigations in that field. The Bahá'í writings also do not refer specifically to any of these forms of religion current in India. So, the Guardian feels it impossible to give you any definite and detailed information on that subject. He would urge you, however, to carry on your studies in that field, although its immensity is wellnigh bewildering, with the view of bringing the Message to the Hindus. The task of converting this section of the Indian population is a most vital obligation, although the Guardian is fully aware of the many difficulties that it presents. Nevertheless the friends should do their best to make as many converts among the Hindus as they possibly can.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi - 17 April 1936)

13. The number nine, which in itself is the number of perfection, is considered by the Bahá'ís as sacred because it is symbolic of the perfection of the Bahá'í Revelation, which constitutes the ninth in the line of existing religions, the latest and fullest Revelation which mankind has ever known. The eighth is the Religion of the Báb, and the remaining seven are: Hinduism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islám and the religion of the Sabaeans. These religions are not the only true religions that have appeared in the world, but are the only ones which are still existing. There have always been divine prophets and messengers, to many of whom the Qur'án refers. But the only ones existing are those mentioned above.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi - 28 July 1936)

14. The nine religions to which you have referred include both the Bábí and the Bahá'í Dispensations, Bahá'u'lláh being the ninth Prophet in the series. The other Prophets included are Zoroaster, Krishna, Moses,

the Christ, Muhammad, Buddha, the Prophet of the Sabaeans Whose name is unrecorded, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh" Buddha appeared in the Adamic cycle"

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi - 13 July 1938)

15. Regarding Lao-Tse: the Bahá'ís do not consider him a prophet, or even a secondary prophet or messenger, unlike Buddha or Zoroaster, both of Whom were divinely appointed and fully independent Manifestations of God.

As to the religion of the Sabaeans, very little is known about the origins of this religion, though we Bahá'ís are certain of one thing, that the founder of it has been a divinely-sent Messenger. The country where Sabaeism became widespread and flourished was Chaldea, and Abraham is considered as having been a follower of that Faith.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi - 10 November 1939)

16. With reference to your question concerning the Sabaeian and Hindu religions: there is nothing in the Teachings that could help us in ascertaining which one of these two Faiths is older. Neither history seems to be able to provide a definite answer to this question. The records concerning the origin of these religions are not sufficiently detailed and reliable to offer any conclusive evidence on this point.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi - 9 November 1940)

17. Your question concerning Brahma and Krishna: such matters, as no reference occurs to them in the Teachings, are left for students of history and religion to resolve and clarify.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi - 14 April 1941)

18. Zoroaster lived about a thousand years before Christ. There is no exact date in the teachings regarding the beginning of His Dispensation. The personages in Zenda-Avesta cannot be absolutely relied upon, as the Avesta is not to be regarded as the authentic compilation of the writings of the Prophet.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi - 30 July 1941 to a National Committee and an individual believer)

19. Confucius was not a Prophet. It is quite correct to say he is the founder of a moral system and a great reformer. The Buddha was a Manifestation of God, like Christ, but His followers do not possess His authentic writings.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi - 26 December 1941 to the National Spiritual Assembly of Australia and New Zealand)

20. In the Bahá'í teachings it states that all the Prophets have foretold a Promised One Who is Bahá'u'lláh. We cannot be sure of the authenticity, word for word, of any of the past Holy Scriptures except the Qur'án, as they were either not written down during the Prophet's lifetime or have been changed in the course of time and the originals lost; what we can be sure of is that when Bahá'u'lláh or the Master stated that Zoroaster foretold a Promised One's coming, it is correct. The Zoroastrians have no way of contradicting this assertion of ours, as they themselves know their scriptures are not in the original form, and therefore not absolutely authentic.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi - 22 June 1943)

21. There is no mention in the Bahá'í writings of any connection between the Near Eastern and Far Eastern

Prophets. There are a very few references made to Buddha, which you have evidently seen. In "God Passes By" you will find that Bahá'u'lláh is the return of the Fifth Buddha, etc., and this is all the information the Guardian has, on this subject of Bahá'u'lláh's fulfilling Buddhistic prophecies, at present.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi - 24 June 1947)

22. Regarding your questions: the only reason there is not more mention of the Asiatic Prophets is because Their names seem to be lost in the mists of ancient history. Buddha is mentioned, and Zoroaster, in our Scriptures of both non-Jewish Prophets or non Semitic Prophets. We are taught there always have been Manifestations of God, but we do not have any record of Their names.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi - 4 October 1950)

23. We cannot be sure of the authenticity of the scriptures of Buddha and Krishna, so we certainly cannot draw any conclusions about virgin birth mentioned in them. There is no reference to this subject in our teachings, so the Guardian cannot pronounce an opinion.

There are no dates in our teachings regarding the actual dates of the Prophets of the Adamic Cycle, so we cannot give any. Tentatively we can accept what historians may consider accurate. Naturally the dates referring to Muhammad, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh we are sure of.

As our teachings do not state Zoroaster is the connecting link between the Euphrates and the Prophets in India we cannot assert this. Abraham and Krishna are two separate individuals, with no connection that we know of.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi - 25 November 1950)

24. Regarding the question of days referring in some cases to years, and in some cases to centuries in the Tablet to a Zoroastrian follower of the Faith: The only answer we can give people who lack the faith to accept the words of the Master as being divinely inspired interpretations of the truth, is that the language of prophecy has always in the past been veiled in meaning, and that allusions are found in all the Holy Books which cannot be accepted literally, and have not been satisfactorily interpreted until the appearance of this Revelation when, we believe, the books of the past and their mysteries have been at last unsealed. Could anybody find a more logical interpretation of this allusion in the Zoroastrian literature than that given by `Abdu'l-Bahá, or one which fits a coherent interpretation of religious history as well as the Master's words do?

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi - 16 April 1951)

25. As there were no followers of the Báb or Bahá'u'lláh derived from the religions of the Far East in Their days, this may be the reason that They did not address any Tablets directly to these people. Also we must remember that every religion springs from some root, and just as Christianity sprang from Judaism, our own religion sprang from Islám, and that is why so many of the teachings deduce their proofs from Islám.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi - 5 March 1957)

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