

A Tablet of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

O thou servant of God! Thou didst ask as to the education of children. Those children who, sheltered by the Blessed Tree, have set foot upon the world—those who are cradled in the Faith and are nurtured at the breast of grace—such must from the beginning receive spiritual training directly from their mothers. That is, the mother must continually call God to mind and make mention of Him, and tell of His greatness, and instill the fear of Him in the child, and rear the child gently, in the way of tenderness, and in extreme cleanliness. Thus from the very beginning of life every child will be refreshed by the gentle wafting of the love of God and will tremble with joy at the sweet scent of heavenly guidance. In this lieth the beginning of the process; it is the essential basis of all the rest.

And when the child hath reached the age where he can make distinctions, let him be placed in a Bahá’í school, in which, at the beginning, the Holy Texts are recited and religious concepts are taught. At this school the child is to study reading and writing as well as some fundamentals of the various branches of knowledge, such as can be learned by children.

At the start, the teacher must place a pen in the child’s hand, arrange the children in groups, and instruct each group according to its capacity. When the children have, in a given place, been seated in rows, and each holdeth a pen, and each hath a paper before him, and the teacher hath suspended a blackboard in front of the children, let him write thereon with his chalk and have the children copy what he hath written. For example, let the teacher write an alif (a) and say, “This is an alif.” Let the children then copy it and repeat: “This is an alif.” And so on, till the end of the alphabet. As soon as they properly recognize the letters, let the teacher make combinations of the letters, while the children follow his lead, writing the combinations on their paper, until, by this method, they come to recognize all the letters, singly and combined in words. Let the teacher then proceed to writing sentences, while the children copy what he hath written, each on his own sheet of paper. Let the teacher then explain the meaning of the sentence to the children.

And once they have become skilled in the Persian tongue, let the teacher first translate and write out single words and ask the students the meaning of those words. If a pupil hath grasped a little of this, and hath translated the word, let the teacher praise him; if all the students are unable to accomplish this, let the teacher write the foreign language translation beneath the given word. For example, let him write *samá* (heaven) in Arabic, and ask: “How do we say this in Persian?” If one of the children replieth, “The Persian translation of this word is *ásimán*”, let the teacher praise and encourage him. If they are unable to answer, let the teacher himself give the translation and write it down, and let the children copy it.

Later, let the teacher ask: “How do they say this in Russian, or French, or Turkish?” If they know the answer, excellent. If not, let the teacher say, “In Russian, or French, the translation is thus and so”, write the word on the board, and have the children copy it down. When the children have become skilled in translating single words, let the teacher combine the words into a sentence, write this on the board, and ask the children to translate it. If they are unable, let the teacher himself translate the sentence and write down the translation. It would of course be preferable for him to make use of several languages.

In this way, over a short period—that is, three years—the children will, as a result of writing the words down, become fully proficient in a number of languages, and will be able to translate a passage from one language to another. Once they have become skilled in these fundamentals, let them go on to learning the elements of the other branches of knowledge, and once they have completed this study, let each one who is able and hath a keen desire for it, enrol in higher institutions of learning and study advanced courses in the sciences and arts.

Not all, however, will be able to engage in these advanced studies. Therefore, such children must be sent to industrial schools where they can also acquire technical skills, and once the child becomes proficient in such a skill, then let consideration be given to the child’s own preference and inclinations. If a child hath a liking for commerce, then let him choose commerce; if industry, then industry; if for higher education, then the advancement of knowledge; if for some other of the responsibilities of humankind, then that. Let him be placed in the field for which he hath an inclination, a desire, and a talent.

But the indispensable basis of all is that he should develop spiritual characteristics and the praiseworthy virtues of humankind. This is the primary consideration. If a person be unlettered, and yet clothed with divine excellence, and alive in the breaths of the Spirit, that individual will contribute to the welfare of society, and his inability to read and write will do him no harm. And if a person be versed in the arts and every branch of knowledge, and not live a religious life, and not take on the characteristics of God, and not be directed by a pure intent, and be engrossed in the life of the flesh—then he is harm personified, and nothing will come of all his learning and intellectual accomplishments but scandal and torment.

If, however, an individual hath spiritual characteristics, and virtues that shine out, and his purpose in life be spiritual and his inclinations be directed toward God, and he also study other branches of knowledge—then we have light upon light: his outer being luminous, his private character radiant, his heart sound, his thought elevated, his understanding swift, his rank noble. Blessed is he who attaineth this exalted station. Greetings be unto thee, and praise.

—*‘Abdu’l-Bahá*