

## PREVIEW OF THE UPCOMING COURSE ON THE PENTATEUCH

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### HOW TO SPEAK ABOUT THE BIBLE WITH JEWS, CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS (A FEW CLUES)

Dear Friends,

The topic that we will talk about today – and I very much look forward to your active participation after I make my initial remarks – is one of perennial importance to Baha'is, because it addresses our capacity to convey the Baha'i teachings in a manner that will be receptive to others. Obviously, if, as Baha'u'llah says in the Kitab-i-Iqan, “**reading without understanding is of no abiding profit**” then surely also *hearing without understanding is likewise of lasting importance...*and we certainly do not want our words to go in one ear and out the other. We want to be *understood and remembered*.

Then we have to consider the *capacity* of those who are hearing us speak to understand us, and Baha'u'llah advises us accordingly:

How great the multitude of truths which the garment of words can never contain! How vast the number of such verities as no expression can adequately describe, whose significance can never be unfolded, and to which not even the remotest allusions can be made! How manifold are the truths which must remain unuttered until the appointed time is come! Even as it hath been said: “**Not everything that a man knoweth can be disclosed, nor can everything that he can disclose be regarded as timely, nor can every timely utterance be considered as suited to the capacity of those who hear it.**” Of these truths some can be disclosed only to the extent of the capacity of the repositories of the light of Our knowledge, and the recipients of Our hidden grace. (Gleanings, LXXXIX)

Baha'u'llah elsewhere called this “wisdom” as when He wrote:

Teach thou the Cause of God with an utterance which will cause the bushes to be enkindled, and the call “Verily, there is no God but Me, the Almighty, the Unconstrained” to be raised therefrom. Say: Human utterance is an essence which aspireth to exert its influence and needeth moderation. As to its influence, this is conditional upon refinement which in turn is dependent upon hearts which are detached and pure. **As to its moderation, this hath to be combined with tact and wisdom as prescribed in the Holy Scriptures and Tablets.** (Tablet of Wisdom, in Tablets of Baha'u'llah)

Say: We have ordained that our Cause be taught through the power of utterance. Beware lest ye dispute idly with anyone. Whoso ariseth wholly for the sake of his Lord to teach His Cause, the Holy Spirit shall strengthen him and inspire him with that which will illumine the heart of the world, how much more the hearts of those who seek Him. O people of Bahá! **Subdue the citadels of men's hearts with the swords of *wisdom* and of utterance.** They that dispute, as prompted by their desires, are indeed wrapped in a palpable veil. Say: **The sword of *wisdom* is hotter than summer heat, and sharper than blades of steel, if ye do but understand.** (Tablet to Pope Pius IX, in The Summons of the Lord of Hosts)

Be thou steadfast in the Cause, and **teach the people with *consummate wisdom*.** (Most Holy Tablet, in Tablets of Baha'u'llah)

Say: We have ordained that our Cause be taught through the power of utterance. Beware lest ye dispute idly with anyone. Whoso ariseth wholly for the sake of his Lord to teach His Cause, the Holy Spirit shall strengthen him and inspire him with that which will illumine the heart of the world, how much more the hearts of those who seek Him. O people of Bahá! Subdue the citadels of men's hearts **with the swords of *wisdom* and of utterance.** (Tablet to Napoleon III, Tablet of the Temple, in The Summons of the Lord of Hosts)

**Indeed thou didst grasp the significance of rendering assistance unto God and didst arise to achieve this through the *power of wisdom* and utterance.** Say: To assist Me is to teach My Cause. This is a theme with which whole Tablets are laden. This is the changeless commandment of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future. Comprehend this, O ye men of insight. **They that have passed beyond *the bounds of wisdom* fail to understand the meaning of assisting God as set forth in the Book.** (Tablet to Síyyid-i-Mihdíy-i-Dahají, in Tablets of Baha'u'llah)

Strengthen Thou, O my Lord, the hearts of them that love Thee, that they may not be affrighted by the hosts of the infidels that are turned back from Thee, but may follow Thee in whatsoever hath been revealed by Thee. Aid them, moreover, to remember and to praise Thee, and to **teach Thy Cause with eloquence and *wisdom*.** (Gleanings, XXXI)

The Pen of the Most High hath decreed and imposed upon every one the obligation to teach this Cause....God will, no doubt, inspire whosoever detacheth himself from all else but Him, and **will cause the pure waters of *wisdom* and utterance to gush out and flow copiously from his heart.** (Gleanings, CXLIV)

Today, the greatest of all deeds is service to the Cause. **Souls that are well assured should, *with utmost discretion*, teach the Faith**, so that the sweet fragrances of the Divine Garment will waft from all directions. (Additional Tablets and Excerpts from Tablets revealed by Baha'u'llah)

The natural question that will occur is “what is wisdom”? In English the word “wisdom” denotes that deep knowledge that is accumulated under normal circumstances over the course of many years of living experience. We often speak of someone having “wisdom beyond his years” or “precocious wisdom”, and there is the famous story of twelve year old Jesus regalling the rabbis in the Beit ha-Miqdash, the Temple in Jerusalem, who were astonished by His wisdom. If it was Baha'u'llah's intention that the believers He was calling to teach His Faith be endowed with *wisdom* in this sense, then presumably He would have asked elderly believers to respond to this calling, which would be in keeping with religious tradition. But His use of language in the passages cited above is unmistakable – He says “**To assist Me is to teach My Cause**” and “**The Pen of the Most High hath decreed and imposed upon every one the obligation to teach this Cause**” and “**Whoso ariseth wholly for the sake of his Lord to teach His Cause**” and “**Strengthen Thou, O my Lord, the hearts of them that love Thee, that they may...teach Thy Cause with eloquence and *wisdom***”, as well as “**Teach ye the Cause of God, O people of Bahá, for God hath prescribed unto every one the duty of proclaiming His Message, and regardeth it as the most meritorious of all deeds**” (Gleanings CXXVIII) and “**God hath made it incumbent upon all to teach His Cause to the extent of their ability**” (Tablet of the Branch, in Days of Remembrance #29) What is remarkable about these statements is that they affirm that the obligation of teaching is universal. It does not apply only to elderly men, the “men of wisdom” from amongst the members of the Universal House of Justice are to be elected...it applies to women, it applies to youths, it even applies to children.

What then is the *wisdom* to which Baha'u'llah refers, that every person, regardless of gender or age or formal education can count on to guide him in teaching the Faith, “**the most meritorious of all deeds**”?

Let us now consider this statement by 'Abdu'l-Baha, in The Secret of Divine Civilization:

Fifteen centuries after Christ, Luther...opposed the Pope on certain points of doctrine such as the prohibition of monastic marriage, the revering and bowing down before images of the Apostles and Christian leaders of the past, and various other religious practices and ceremonies which were accretional to the ordinances of the Gospel. Although at that period the power of the Pope was so great and he was regarded with such awe that the kings of Europe shook and trembled before him, and he held control of all Europe's major concerns in the grasp of his might—nevertheless **because Luther's position as regards the freedom of**

religious leaders to marry, the abstention from worshiping and making prostrations before images and representations hung in the churches, and the abrogation of ceremonials which had been added on to the Gospel, was demonstrably correct, and because the proper means were adopted for the promulgation of his views: within these last four hundred and some years the majority of the population of America, four-fifths of Germany and England and a large percentage of Austrians, in sum about one hundred and twenty-five million people drawn from other Christian denominations, have entered the Protestant Church. The leaders of this religion are still making every effort to promote it...Every community is toiling for the advancement of its people, and we (i.e., Muslims) sleep on!...Now if the illustrious people of the one true God, the recipients of His confirmations, the objects of His divine assistance, should put forth all their strength, and with complete dedication, relying upon God and turning aside from all else but Him, should adopt procedures for spreading the Faith and should bend all their efforts to this end, it is certain that His divine light would envelop the whole earth.

This book was written in 1875 and published in Persian in 1882. It was anonymous and it was addressed to the people of Iran, who were then as they are now almost universally adherents of the Ithna 'Ashari Shi'i Muslim community. But 'Abdu'l-Baha was not speaking only to them. He was speaking to us. He says that Christianity was spread by Protestant missionaries because of two causes – **“because Luther’s position...was demonstrably correct”** and **“because the proper means were adopted for the promulgation of his views”**.

We know that the teachings of Baha'u'llah are **“demonstrably correct”**, and yet so often Baha'is find themselves unsure of **“the proper means”** that need to be **“adopted for the promulgation”** of those divinely revealed teachings.

'Abdu'l-Baha wrote about what those **“proper means”** are in this same treatise. First, He refers to what the teacher needs to know:

The first attribute of perfection is learning and the cultural attainments of the mind, and this eminent station is achieved when the individual combines in himself a thorough knowledge of those complex and transcendental realities pertaining to God, of the fundamental truths of Qur'anic political and religious law, of the contents of the sacred Scriptures of other faiths, and of those regulations and procedures which would contribute to the progress and civilization of this distinguished country. He should in addition be informed as to the laws and principles, the customs, conditions and manners, and the material and moral virtues characterizing the statecraft of other nations, and should be well versed in all the useful branches of learning of the day, and study the historical records of bygone governments and peoples. For if a learned individual has no knowledge of the sacred Scriptures and the entire field of divine and natural

science, of religious jurisprudence and the arts of government and the varied learning of the time and the great events of history, he might prove unequal to an emergency, and this is inconsistent with the necessary qualification of comprehensive knowledge.

This may seem like an impossible task for the average adult to accomplish, let alone a youth or child; but He continues:

**If for example a spiritually learned Muslim is conducting a debate with a Christian and he knows nothing of the glorious melodies of the Gospel, he will, no matter how much he imparts of the Qur’án and its truths, be unable to convince the Christian, and his words will fall on deaf ears. Should, however, the Christian observe that the Muslim is better versed in the fundamentals of Christianity than the Christian priests themselves, and understands the purport of the Scriptures even better than they, he will gladly accept the Muslim’s arguments, and he would indeed have no other recourse.**

There are many passages in the writings of Baha’u’llah, ‘Abdu’l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi where the believers are encouraged to read, study, and become thoroughly acquainted with the scriptures of other Faiths, and in particular, with the Bible. You can find them for yourselves, or wait until my book is written...Ishallah. Nowhere have I found a more convincing explanation for **WHY** we should study those scriptures, apart from our own spiritual edification – they are necessary for effective teaching, they are among **“the proper means”** that must be **“adopted for the promulgation”** of the Baha’i teachings.

No one should feel that this is an impossible task. To cite Baha’u’llah again: **“God hath made it incumbent upon all to teach His Cause to the extent of their ability.”** We are not being asked to do something that is beyond our ability. **“Unto each one hath been prescribed a preordained measure, as decreed in God’s mighty and guarded Tablets.** All that which ye potentially possess can, however, be manifested only as a result of your own volition.” (Gleanings LXXVII)

Lest we should think that this is not the case, that we all have the same capacity, because of other statements made in the writings, Baha’u’llah says the following: **“The whole duty of man in this Day is to attain that share of the flood of grace which God poureth forth for him. Let none, therefore, consider the largeness or smallness of the receptacle. The portion of some might lie in the palm of a man’s hand, the portion of others might fill a cup, and of others even a gallon-measure.”** (Gleanings V)

Knowledge, in the case of teaching the knowledge of the scriptures of whomsoever we are speaking with, is one component of wisdom, but it is not the only component. Another of the “proper means” and another characteristic of *wisdom* is to align our behavior with the revealed Will of God, to teach through our actions and not just by our words:

**Whoso ariseth to teach Our Cause must needs detach himself from all earthly things**, and regard, at all times, the triumph of Our Faith as his supreme objective. This hath, verily, been decreed in the Guarded Tablet. And when he determineth to leave his home, for the sake of the Cause of his Lord, let him **put his whole trust in God, as the best provision for his journey, and array himself with the robe of virtue**. Thus hath it been decreed by God, the Almighty, the All-Praised.

**If he be kindled with the fire of His love, if he forgoeth all created things, the words he uttereth shall set on fire them that hear him**. Verily, thy Lord is the Omniscient, the All-Informed. Happy is the man that hath heard Our voice, and answered Our call. He, in truth, is of them that shall be brought nigh unto Us. (Gleanings CLVII)

**God hath prescribed unto every one the duty of teaching His Cause. Whoever ariseth to discharge this duty, must needs, ere he proclaimeth His Message, adorn himself with the ornament of an upright and praiseworthy character, so that his words may attract the hearts of such as are receptive to his call. Without it, he can never hope to influence his hearers.** (Gleanings CLVIII)

Baha'u'llah's emphasis on deeds over words, what many of us Americans call “walking the walk” and not just “talking the talk” is one of His most emphatic prescriptions, applying to all people and all circumstances. Here are a few of His statements on the subject:

O brethren! **Let deeds, not words, be your adorning**. (Arabic Hidden Words #5)

**Guidance hath ever been given by words, and now it is given by deeds**. Everyone must show forth deeds that are pure and holy, for words are the property of all alike, whereas such deeds as these belong only to Our loved ones. **Strive then with heart and soul to distinguish yourselves by your deeds**. (Persian Hidden Words #76)

It behooveth the people of Bahá to render the Lord victorious through the power of their utterance and to admonish the people by their goodly deeds and character, inasmuch as **deeds exert greater influence than words**. (Words of Paradise, in Tablets of Baha'u'llah)

The essence of faith is **fewness of words and abundance of deeds**; he whose words exceed his deeds, know verily his death is better than his life. (Words of Wisdom, in Tablets of Baha'u'llah)

Another element of this *wisdom* is that while Baha'u'llah advocated for the adoption of a single language by all of mankind, He permitted and even encouraged the acquisition of multiple languages for the purpose of teaching His Faith. This would certainly include learning those languages in which the Baha'i scriptures are originally written – Arabic and Persian – as well as the language of whatever country the individual believer may travel to **“that he may deliver the Message of the Cause of God”**:

**The Lord hath granted leave to whosoever desireth it that he be instructed in the divers tongues of the world that he may deliver the Message of the Cause of God throughout the East and throughout the West, that he make mention of Him amidst the kindreds and peoples of the world in such wise that hearts may revive and the moldering bone be quickened.** (Kitab-i-Aqdas #118)

Another element which is integral to the *wisdom* that is one of the **“proper means”** is prayer. Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha referred to this in many passages of their Writings and here only one will be cited from each...first Baha'u'llah:

Intone, O My servant, the verses of God that have been received by thee, as intoned by them who have drawn nigh unto Him, that the sweetness of thy melody may kindle thine own soul, and attract the hearts of all men. Whoso reciteth, in the privacy of his chamber, the verses revealed by God, the scattering angels of the Almighty shall scatter abroad the fragrance of the words uttered by his mouth, and shall cause the heart of every righteous man to throb. Though he may, at first, remain unaware of its effect, yet the virtue of the grace vouchsafed unto him must needs sooner or later exercise its influence upon his soul. Thus have the mysteries of the Revelation of God been decreed by virtue of the Will of Him Who is the Source of power and wisdom. (Gleanings CXXXVI)

In the Tablets of the Divine Plan, 'Abdu'l-Baha wrote:

Whoever sets out on a teaching journey to any place, let him recite this prayer day and night during his travels in foreign lands:

O God, my God! Thou seest me enraptured and attracted toward Thy glorious kingdom, enkindled with the fire of Thy love amongst mankind, a herald of Thy kingdom in these vast and spacious lands, severed from aught else save Thee, relying on Thee, abandoning rest and

comfort, remote from my native home, a wanderer in these regions, a stranger fallen upon the ground, humble before Thine exalted threshold, submissive toward the heaven of Thine omnipotent glory, supplicating Thee in the dead of night and at the break of dawn, entreating and invoking Thee at morn and at eventide to graciously aid me to serve Thy Cause, to spread abroad Thy teachings and to exalt Thy Word throughout the East and the West.

O Lord! Strengthen my back, enable me to serve Thee with the utmost endeavor, and leave me not to myself, lonely and helpless in these regions.

O Lord! Grant me communion with Thee in my loneliness, and be my companion in these foreign lands.

Verily, Thou art the Confirmer of whomsoever Thou wilt in that which Thou desirest, and, verily, Thou art the All-Powerful, the Omnipotent.

Another element of this *wisdom*, and with this one I will conclude my remarks, is inspiration from the Holy Spirit and the angels of the Concourse on High:

**Arise ye, under all conditions, to render service to the Cause, for God will assuredly assist you through the power of His sovereignty which overshadoweth the worlds.** (Kitab-i-Aqdas, #74)

**Verily, We behold you from Our realm of glory, and shall aid whosoever will arise for the triumph of Our Cause with the hosts of the Concourse on high and a company of Our favored angels.”** (Gleanings LXXII)

**By the righteousness of God! Whoso openeth his lips in this Day and maketh mention of the name of his Lord, the hosts of Divine inspiration shall descend upon him from the heaven of My name, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. On him shall also descend the Concourse on high, each bearing aloft a chalice of pure light.** Thus hath it been foreordained in the realm of God's Revelation, by the behest of Him Who is the All-Glorious, the Most Powerful. (Gleanings CXXIX)

**Proclaim, then, that which the Most Great Spirit will inspire thee to utter in the service of the Cause of thy Lord, that thou mayest stir up the souls of all men and incline their hearts unto this most blessed and all-glorious Court...** (Gleanings CXXXIX)

**O ye servants of the Blessed Beauty!...It is clear that in this day, confirmations from the unseen world are encompassing all those who deliver the divine Message. Should the work of teaching lapse, these confirmations would be entirely cut off, since it is impossible for the loved ones of God to receive assistance unless they teach.** (Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, #209, pp. 264-265)



I beg of God through the confirmation and assistance of the True One thou mayest show the utmost eloquence, fluency, ability and skill in teaching the real significances of the Bible. **Turn toward the Kingdom of ABHA and seek the bounty of the Holy Spirit. Loosen the tongue and the confirmation of the Spirit shall reach thee.** (Abdu'l-Baha, Tablets of Abdu'l-Baha v2, p. 243)

To return to our original theme, we must avail ourselves of the means promised to us by God in order to convey the teachings of the Pentateuch in such a way that hearts are illumined and minds are convinced. The purpose of the upcoming course on the first five books of the Holy Bible is to equip you and other friends to teach the progressive revelation of Baha'u'llah to Jews – be they Reform, Conservative or Orthodox; and Christians – be they Roman Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants, Quakers, Mennonites, Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses – with an understanding of how Baha'u'llah has carried out His mission, as the Lord of Hosts, as the Spirit of Truth, to reveal the true meaning of the Words revealed by God for the guidance of all people.