

Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Baha: An Overview

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He Wrote for Some Sixty Years

- A recent informed record of His available works reports that over **38,000 unique works** of His have been identified, where by ‘unique works’ is meant **unrepeated** written materials ‘from brief acknowledgements conveying greetings to weighty Tablets on spiritual and social matters, from cables of a few words to extensive letters and lengthy books, as well as numerous utterances.’

Types

- **Books**
- **Treatises**
- **Tablets**
 - Addressed to groups**
 - Addressed to individuals**
 - Addressed to societies**
- **Utterances reviewed and approved by Him (three volumes of *Khiṭábát; Some Answered Questions; Memorials of the Faithful*)**
- **Prayers**
- **Poems**

Themes

- 1. Spiritual (including moral/ethical)
- 2. Theological
- 3. Philosophical
- 4. Mystical
- 5. Social
- 6. Historical
- 7. Exegetical
- 8. Scientific
- 9. Psychological
- Note: Issues related to the Administrative Order encompass both spiritual and social.

Languages

- **Persian**: 82% in Persian or mixed Arabic and Persian
- **Arabic** : 16%
- **Turkish** : 2%

General Considerations:

- Every concept in the writings and speeches of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has its roots in the **Writings of Bahá’u’lláh**.
- Almost all of His writings contain a **Qur’anic** reference or allusion of some kind.
- Another characteristic of His writings is His frequent use of poems, tales, parables, and similitudes.

On How to Study His Writings:

- Shoghi Effendi's assessment of the position occupied by any piece of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's writings in the Bahá'í canon determines that piece's status.

Periodization

- 1. During the Ministry of Bahá'u'lláh (ca. 1860–1892)
- 2. From the beginning of His own Ministry to the time of His travels to the West (1892-1910)
- 3. His travels to the West (1910-1913)
- 4. From His return to the Holy Land to the end of His life (1913–1921)



(Acting as the de facto deputy
of Bahá'u'lláh in social
interactions)

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- I. 1863–1892:
**Writing at
Bahá'u'lláh's
Instruction**





The Earliest Recorded and Published Writing of His

Written during the
twelve-day sojourn of
Bahá'u'lláh and His
companions in the
garden of Najíb Páshá
(later known as the
garden of Ridván)



His writings during this period include—but are by no means limited to:

- **Several commentaries** on Qur'anic chapters or verses, a number of *hadiths*, and two verses of the Báb's Qayyúmu'l-Asmá.
- ***The Secret of Divine Civilization.***
- ***A Traveller's Narrative.***

Commentaries

- The commentaries 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote on the sacred texts of other religions not only reflected the fundamental Bahá'í belief in the **unity of all religions** but also sought to unravel the hidden meanings of these texts and relate them to Bahá'u'lláh's revelation.

The Secret of Divine Civilization

- Shoghi Effendi described it as:
‘Abdu’l Bahá’s
‘outstanding
contribution to the
future reorganization
of the world’

SDC

- Written anonymously
- The second Baha'i book to be published (1882 in Bombay)

A Traveler's Narrative

- Abdu'l-Bahá Himself describes it as '*the correct and brief' history of the new religion that will last'*
- When the British Iranologist E. G. Browne (d. 1926) visited Bahá'u'lláh in 'Akká in 1890, a copy of the book was given to him.

II. 1892–1910



- **Protecting the Faith and its unity**
- **(the central themes: the Covenant and the Protection of the Faith).**

The Treatise on Politics (Risáliy-i-Síyásiyyih)

- Historical Context
- The core message of the *The Treatise on Politics*, 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself clarified, is that the interference of the ulama in political affairs leads to dire outcomes

The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá (*Alváḥ-i-Vaṣáyá*)

- The **most significant** writing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá is His *Will and Testament*, known in Persian as *Alváḥ-i-Vaṣáyá*. Shoghi Effendi describes this document as **'His greatest legacy to posterity', 'the brightest emanation of His mind', 'the Charter of a future world civilization', and 'the Charter of Bahá'u'lláh's New World Order'**

Supplementary to the Kitáb-i-Aqdas

- The Guardian also considers the *Will and Testament* 'in some of its features' as **supplementary to the Kitáb-i-Aqdas**, the Mother Book of Bahá'u'lláh's Dispensation

The Timing of Its Writing

- The Will and Testament is entirely written in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's own hand and composed of three sections. As inferred from clues in the text, the first part was likely written in late 1905 or early 1906, and the second and third parts sometime around 1907, at a time when His life was in danger.

Some Answered Questions

- His answers to questions that the young American Bahá'í Laura Clifford Barney (d. 1974) posed to 'Abdu'l-Bahá during her visits to 'Akká during the difficult years between 1904 and 1906. During the brief moments He could spare while they ate lunch in the midst of hectic days, Barney asked questions and received answers

Tablets or Makátíb

- Correspondence with individuals, groups of people, and institutions—both Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í—constitutes a significant portion of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's writings. Shoghi Effendi referred to these works as *alváḥ* (singular: *lawḥ*), which he translated into English as 'tablets'
- 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote or dictated tablets almost every day.
- In 1983, the number of His available tablets was estimated to be 27,000 (Bahá'í World Centre 1986: 98).

Some Particularly Important Tablets

- The two Tablets of **A Thousand Verses** (On the Covenant, 1897, 1898)
- Tablets pertaining to the Iranian Constitutional Revolution (1905-11)
- **'Two Calls to Success and Prosperity'** also known as the 'Tablet of the East and the West' (1908, **universal message, material and spiritual civilization**, Selections 296-309)

III. 1910–1913:

- Expounding Bahá'u'lláh's principles in the West



Significance of His Travels to the West

- He described the results of this trip as being so great that **no other event in the history of the Bahá'í religion up to that time could rival it.** He added that the value of His travels was not befittingly known at the time, and that it would become known only in the future

The significance of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's formal talks is evident from a statement made by Shoghi Effendi.

- In one of his major Persian letters, he defined the 'warp and woof' of the New World Order to consist of the laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas and the spiritual and administrative principles expressed in the tablets and talks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

His Speeches

- can be considered the ultimate crystallization of His role as the Authorized Interpreter of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh.
- Source of teachings and principles

Authentication

- ‘Abdu’l-Bahá authenticated the transcripts of some His talks, hence conferring on them the same status as His tablets. This was not the case with. other talks

IV. 1913–1921:

- Expanding the horizons; on peace, propagation, and philosophy



The call for universal peace (Şawt-i-salám-i-‘Ámm)

- Two months after the beginning of World War I, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, sorrowed by the war, wrote a tablet that can perhaps best be described as an **urgent and universal summons to peace** (*Promulgation* 154–156).
- It is reported that He sent this tablet to *The Times of London* for publication on 1 October 1914
- An English translation of the tablet was published in the 9 December 1914 issue of *The Christian Commonwealth*. Some three weeks later, the 31 December issue of *The Star of the West* (vol. 6, no. 16, pp. 243–245)

In the isolation caused by the war:

- immortalizing the memory of some faithful believers
- devising a plan for the propagation of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings—a theme on which He wrote fourteen highly significant tablets, which Bahá'ís consider as amongst His most significant legacies for posterity.
- As the war drew to a close, He issued two tablets on the requirements for the establishment of world peace.

Memorials of the Faithful

- Speeches on the life of more than seventy early believers to weekly gatherings of Bahá'ís at His home in Haifa (the latter half of 1915)
- These talks were transcribed, compiled, and authorized by Him.

The Tablets of the Divine Plan (Farámín-i-Tablígí)

- From 26 March 1916 to 8 March 1917, 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote fourteen tablets to the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, exhorting them to spread the Bahá'í teachings both to all parts of their own countries and to the rest of the world.

The Tablets to The Hague

- ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote these two tablets, on 17 December 1919 and 1 July 1920, in response to letters addressed to Him by the Executive Committee of the Central Organization for a Durable Peace in The Hague.
- These two tablets encapsulate Bahá’í ideas on the requirements for the establishment of world peace.

Tablet to Professor Auguste Forel

- On **21 September 1921**, sixty-seven days before His passing, in response to questions posed in a letter from the well-known Swiss entomologist and psychiatrist, Professor Auguste-Henri Forel (d. 1931), 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote a tablet **that can be considered His last significant philosophical work.**