The Globality of Suffering:

Tokutomi Kenjirō Meets ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Palestine, 1919

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1. The Globality of Suffering

Suffering has a history.[1] The experience of it does and does not depend on time and space. The cultural and intellectual meaning ascribed to it has and has not changed over time and space.

If the present age is a global age, then it is an age in which suffering, too, has become global, painfully global, an age in which the entire world appears to suffer at the same time for the same root reasons, no matter how variegated the form that its suffering takes. Suffering thus occurs with consciousness that others across the world are also suffering, and this global consciousness of suffering, and the apparent impossibility of alleviating it, exacerbates and amplifies the original condition. The globality of suffering compounds suffering. It is a phenomenon perhaps unique to and characteristic of the modern and contemporary age.

That extant academic and intellectual frameworks have been found wanting at this global moment, battered and overwhelmed by crises whose scope is planetary, hardly needs mentioning. The globality of suffering deepens as foundational questions endure, unanswered. What does it mean to think and speak of the globalization of suffering, even the globality of suffering? How do we grapple with or apprehend suffering as a global phenomenon?

To contemplate this problem, let us turn to Tokutomi Kenjirō, perhaps the representative of Japanese suffering and Japan’s representative of suffering.[2] Let us turn back to one day in his life. And let us confront an essential question: Is the global condition, is globality itself, suffering? We then encounter an answer: On the contrary, it is the denial and rejection of the global condition that engender, that themselves constitute, suffering.

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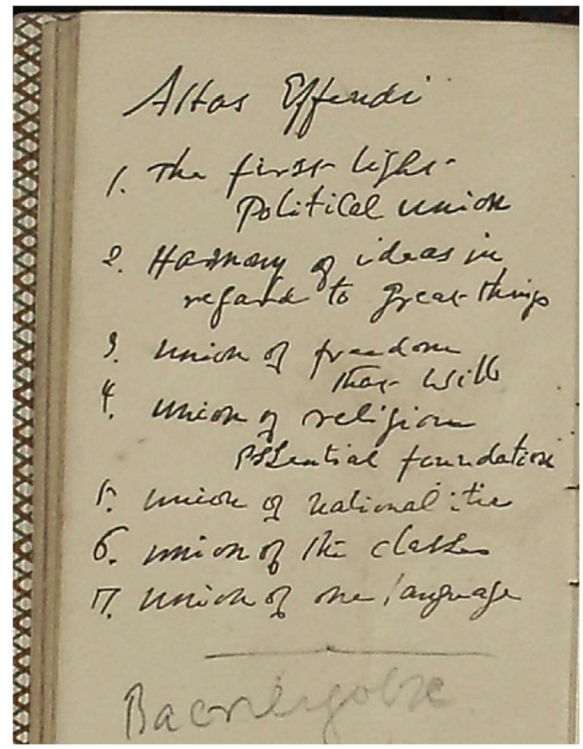
[1] This paper is the slightly expanded and adjusted, English-language version of Gademi Amin, “Kunō no gurōbarusei: Tokutomi Kenjirō to Abudoru Baha o chūshin ni,” forthcoming in *Gendai bunka no bōken*, ed. Kosugi Sei, Kimura Shigeo, and Yamaguchi Yūzō. Although the Japanese-language text will appear after this version, the Japanese is the original from which this text was adapted.

[2] e.g., Handō Hideaki, *Tokutomi Roka: Tensei ni shitagai, gankō ni irai seyo* (Kyoto: Mineruva shobō, 2022), 2.

2. Tokutomi Meets ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Known more commonly by his penname, Roka, Tokutomi Kenjirō was born in present-day Kumamoto prefecture in 1868, the first year of the Meiji era, the dawn of Japanese modernity. Tokutomi and modern Japan grew up together. “My *Life* is the history of the new Japan,” he wrote.[3]

Like the life of what Handō Hideaki, a biographer of Tokutomi, calls the “half-century of suffering” that was Meiji-era Japan, the life of Tokutomi was a life of suffering.[4] His torment, Handō continues, was quotidian, mundane, emerging from such unexceptional troubles as discord with his more famous, more influential brother Iichirō, or Sohō.[5] Kenjirō expressed his distress, especially the anguish of family strife and of the friction between modernity and tradition, in his fictional oeuvre, including in such notable works as *The Cuckoo*, which earned him considerable fame. “To learn from the suffering [of] Roka—that must be the significance of tracing his life,” Handō has asserted.[6] If indeed the purpose of studying Tokutomi Kenjirō is to contemplate suffering, then perhaps we should read his 1919 meeting with Abbas Effendi in Haifa, Palestine, in that light.



Kenjirō and his wife, Ai or Aiko, were circling the globe on a round-the-world voyage from January 1919 to March 1920 when they stopped at the home of Abbas Effendi, titled ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in Haifa, on May 3. Tokutomi had first heard of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in 1906 when visiting the home of Leo Tolstoy, of whom he was a devotee. Tolstoy had shown him, in Tokutomi’s account, a letter from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá that included a “several-point list of essential elements needed for the unification of the world.”[7] An extant notebook belonging to

[3] Handō, *Tokutomi Roka*, 180. Tokutomi’s Japanese writings include words in English script. I have rendered those English words in italics to differentiate them from translated text.

[4] Handō, *Tokutomi Roka,* 5.

[5] See, in English, e.g., Ken K. Ito, “The Family and the Nation in Tokutomi Roka’s Hototogisu,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 60.2 (2000): 489–536. On Sohō in English: John D. Pierson, *Tokutomi Sohō, 1863–1957*: *A Journalist of Modern Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); Kenneth B. Pyle, *The New Generation in Meiji Japan: Problems of Cultural Identity, 1885–1895* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969).

[6] Handō, *Tokutomi Roka*, 7.

[7] Tokutomi Kenjirō, *Nihon kara Nihon e: Dai ichi maki* [*Roka zenshū dai jūni maki*] (Tokyo: Roka zenshū kankōkai, 1929, 386. All references will be to this text. This is an anthologized version; an original, which is basically identical, is Tokutomi Kenjirō and Tokutomi Ai, *Nihon kara Nihon e Higashi no maki* (Tokyo: Kanao bun’endō, 1921). For an English rendering of the account from 1906, see Laurence Kominz,

Tokutomi and containing sundry notes and jottings shows his transcription of that list (see image).[8] More than a decade later, as Kenjirō was in Palestine for the second time on what he called "a leisure trip" with "no distinct purpose," he "felt a desire to go and see" this person whom "he had had in mind for a while."[9] He published his account of the visit in the "Volume on the Orient" of his 1921 travelogue *From Japan to Japan*, which depicted his entire round-the-world journey.

In his published travel account, Tokutomi introduces 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the religion he helmed in this way:

> *Bahaism* is a teaching that tells of brotherhood across the four seas and of absolute peace. It was first taught by *Bab*, a Persian youth. After *Bab* was killed, *Bahaollah*, a Persian nobleman, became the second generation, and for that reason, he was exiled from Persia and incarcerated in Akka, Syria, and for forty years, he promulgated love and peace from his place of incarceration. After his death, his son, *Abdul Baha* succeeded him as the third generation, and *Abdul Baha* is also known as *Abbas Effendi*.[10]

Tokutomi sang the praises of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and his religion inasmuch as they, in his depiction, sought to achieve peace as representatives of the "Orient." He wrote:

> In this day, when colored people remain subordinate to white people [lit., the heads of colored people (*iro aru hitobito*) do not rise before white people (*shiroi hitobito*)], the discernment of this black old man (*kurojii*), who is seeking to cast a wide net over existing religions, to build up a broad, unified group that transcends racial color, and to be enshrined over it, is no trifling matter. He seeks to incorporate both science and civilization; and in his capacity as the third generation, his audacity and ambition in trying to accomplish the spiritual unification of the entire world, and in any case, his placing of his abode at the bay of Akka, the place where the crusaders who tried to conquer the Orient in the past first landed, and from here seeking to go out all the way to Europe and America and, in reverse, to conquer the Occident—with this Eastern spirit of vigor (*tōhō kihaku*), he truly is an incredibly wonderful (*tsūkai*) old man.

But Tokutomi also cast acerbic aspersions. He had three general lines of attack. One came from the question of suffering. "It's because he hasn't suffered," Tokutomi conjectured about the reason for

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"Pilgrimage to Tolstoy: Tokutomi Roka's *Junrei Kikō*," *Monumenta Nipponica* 41.1 (1986), p. 93–94. On Tokutomi's first visit to Palestine that year, Susanna Fessler, *Musashino in Tuscany: Japanese Overseas Travel Literature, 1860–1912* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), ch. 4.

[8] Archival image reproduced with permission from the Roka Kōshun'en Service Center.

[9] Tokutomi, *Nihon kara Nihon e,* 375–376.

[10] Tokutomi, *Nihon kara Nihon e,* 375–376.

the "not powerful" impression left on him by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who, 75 years old at the time of their meeting, had been exiled from Persia to Palestine as a child with his father. Tokutomi wrote, in connection to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "the brilliance of the crown is in proportion to the degree of the cross. Indeed, he who does not bear a cross cannot declare that the cross is of no use."[11] The implication was that Tokutomi had suffered more than 'Abdu'l-Bahá, granting Tokutomi a degree of authority that 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in Tokutomi's reading, could not match.

Tokutomi's second vector of criticism was directed at 'Abdu'l-Bahá's attitude toward Jesus. Whether Tokutomi's idiosyncratic beliefs can meaningfully be categorized under institutional Christianity remains an important historiographical question, but Tokutomi was at least in name a Christian.[12] He asked 'Abdu'l-Bahá how he understood the person of Jesus. 'Abdu'l-Bahá replied, "Jesus is a mirror in which God has been manifested."[13] Tokutomi lashed out in his retrospective account:

> In past times, Paul asserted himself atop the cross still covered with the fresh blood of Jesus; *Abbas Effendi* has expropriated the outcome of 1900 years of Jesus and is blithely leaning on it, blithely tidying up Jesus and putting him in a corner by saying that Jesus himself was one divine mirror. And since no one objects, this old man is lounging cozily here and doing whatever he likes here in Haifa, not more than ten miles (*ri*) from the mountain village of Nazareth where the person of Jesus Christ lived some 1900 years ago—time will have to judge how much of a light he is against Jesus. Just as I told off Paul, I feel toward *Abbas*, too, this surging desire to bark, "Come off it!" (*zu ga takai*).[14]

Third was the question of "land" or "soil," or the allegation that 'Abdu'l-Bahá's religion was not adequately anchored in delimited national territory.[15] "*Bahaolla* was driven out of Persia, and his son *Abbas* should return to Persia but still has not done so," Tokutomi wrote. "Buddha was born of the soil of India. Jesus was a Jew. *Socrates* was a Greek, and Confucius was a Chinese. Muhammad, too, was born of the desert. There is no way a religion that is not born of soil can have power," he reasoned.

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[11] Tokutomi, *Nihon kara Nihon e,* 387.

[12] Abe Gunji, *Tokutomi Roka to Torusutoi: Nichi-Ro bungaku kōryū no sokuseki* (Tokyo: Sairyūsha, 1989), 287. Also on Tokutomi's Christianity: Tsujihashi Saburō, "Roka to Kirisuto-kyō," *Kirisuto-kyō shakai mondai kenkyū* 1 (1958): 7–23. On the circumstances of the Tokutomi family's encounter with Christianity: F. G. Notehelfer, *American Samurai: Captain L. L. Janes and Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), esp. ch.9.

[13] Tokutomi, *Nihon kara Nihon e,* 379.

[14] Tokutomi, *Nihon kara Nihon e,* 388.

[15] The idea of "soil" or "land" in Tokutomi's thought also has other, naturalistic resonances: under the deep influence of Tolstoy's agrarianism, Tokutomi himself moved to a remote part of Japan to engage with the land and become more connected with nature. The immediate context of this passage in the text makes no direct reference to those deeper ideological roots and remains confined to the question of geopolitical and culutrla territoriality, but it is necessary to bear that deeper context in mind.

"*Bahaism* is a castrated religion," he continued. "You can also call it a religion of vagabonds."[16]

Tokutomi concluded, to encompass these criticisms, "When the sun comes out, there is no need for a torch. *Bahaism* is a torch for the time until the sun comes out." That "sun" was Japan, he explained. 'Abdu'l-Bahá was a "forerunner" for Japan, and his task, Tokutomi asserted, was to "civilize and unify the Muslims" until Japan would come to take his place. "Thanks a lot, old man," Tokutomi wrote, closing his account with backhanded commendation. "The sun of Japan has already arisen. Hurry up and go on back to your country, Persia. We're counting on you to civilize the red-hats [i.e., Muslims]."[17]

If the point of studying Tokutomi is to learn from his suffering, then what do these broadsides tell us of the suffering of Tokutomi and of suffering and its history more generally? Let us consider the problem first from the perspective of Tokutomi himself.

Days before visiting Haifa, while they were staying in Jerusalem, Kenjirō's wife, Ai, had a "horrifying" dream in which someone, apparently Kenjirō, tried to murder her.[18] The dream prompted a long digression in Kenjirō's travel diary on what he described as the "curse" with which he was born. "After [an earlier book] *New Spring* came out," Kenjirō explained,

> my older sister came and explained to me the secret of my life. According to what she said, it was not that my mother's curse germinated when I was five years old, but rather that it started from the very night when I was conceived in my mother's womb. I lived in the womb of my mother's curse. After 51 years, I was for the first time given the key to the secret of my life, to the secret curse that constricted me.[19]

"I was," he continued,

> the child of the drunkenness of my father and the curse of my mother. My mother's hatred and contempt for my father burned ferociously, and at the moment it turned black with a curse against male sexual avarice, without even being conscious of herself, my mother became pregnant with me. A cursed womb welcomed me. I began a life enveloped in a curse, and that curse is, in other words, a cross. The curse of one's mother—can a child have any greater curse than this? My life began with the cross. That's why I say, 'The life of Jesus ended with the cross. Mine began with the cross.' I begin where Jesus left off. I am reliving what Jesus lived. My fifty years have been a life of the cross. I have borne the cross. And that is why I proclaim, 'The era of the cross is over.' Unless you have born the cross, you cannot proclaim 'the era of

[16] Tokutomi, *Nihon kara Nihon e,* 389.
[17] Tokutomi, *Nihon kara Nihon e,* 389–390.
[18] Tokutomi, *Nihon kara Nihon e,* 307.
[19] Tokutomi, *Nihon kara Nihon e,* 308.

the cross is over.'"[20]

Tokutomi continued, "The reason my mother later came to believe in Jesus, and the reason she tried to guide me to believe in Jesus, was for no other reason than to overturn this curse."[21] And he wondered, "Did Mary curse Jesus when she became pregnant with him in the same way I was cursed by my mother? We know that Mary did not curse him by the way Jesus was able to abandon his mother."[22] After amplifying on this topic, Tokutomi arrived at a broader explication of this notion of the cross:

> But when I think about it carefully, I have been in the thrall of the past, bearing the cross for fifty years already now, and my time in service of my mother's curse should be over … [My wife and I] are done our past service, and we are Adam and Eve left in the creation of a new heaven and earth. The things of old are dead. 'Let the dead bury the dead.' Let he who clings to the cross perish with the cross. Let Adam and Eve begin their new life in the new heaven and earth. Yes, that's right. 'The era of the cross is over.' Jesus has resurrected. His mother Mary has returned to his father Joseph. And his wife Mary is by his side.[23]

This notion that "the era of the cross" is over and that Tokutomi has resurrected as a new Jesus, perhaps, or as Adam, forms the central argument of *From Japan to Japan*; indeed, in its opening pages, Tokutomi declared that the year 1919 is "Year One of the New Era." He wrote,

> The "New Spring" has already come. Adam and Eve have already been born. The creation of a new heaven and a new earth is right now in progress. What need is there for an old, rotting cross? With Jesus, there was already plenty by way of the cross. Did Jesus not declare 'We have already prevailed over the world' two-thousand years ago? Originally, the cross, for Jesus, who bore it, was not a happy thing in the least. For the man who then bears it, there is nothing more humiliating than it. That wretched cross—we've already had plenty.[24]

This renunciation of the cross led to an attack on the very notion of the cross itself and offers background for Tokutomi's hostility toward Paul especially.[25] "Why do Christians cling so

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[20] Tokutomi, *Nihon kara Nihon e,* 308.
[21] Tokutomi, *Nihon kara Nihon e,* 309.
[22] Tokutomi, *Nihon kara Nihon e,* 310.
[23] Tokutomi, *Nihon kara Nihon e,* 313.
[24] Tokutomi, *Nihon kara Nihon e,* 10.
[25] On Paul, see, e.g., Nakano Yoshio, *Roka Tokutomi Kenjirō dai 3 bu* (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1973), 279–280: Tokutomi claimed, "Paul was the main culprit who kept Jesus suspended on the cross for almost two-thousand years. In this way, Paul was a Jew in disguise. The sin of Paul was far greater than that of

fastidiously to the cross?" he asked.

> Why do they look only to the bloodied Jesus and not to Jesus as a source of vigor shining in the glory of his resurrection? The new era of humanity should not begin with an emphasis on the cross. I have already decided that I will no longer have any attachment to the cross.[26]

Tokutomi closed with this declaration: "The era of the cross is now entirely over." He declared his "solarism" (*taiyōshugi*): "We lost the cross and gained the sun," he wrote, a reference, it seems, to a universalism and nationalism rooted in Japan. "The standard of humanity in the new heaven and earth must not be the cross. It must be that great sun that illuminates all places, that shares liberally, that burns the rootless, that melts the frozen, that gives life, that vitalizes, that is brilliant, fiery, bounteous, heat-giving."[27] And he forgave himself, as he wrote in Jerusalem:

> Sins have all vanished. In the days of forgiveness, they have vanished. The Judgment has passed, and today is the day of forgiveness and joy. In the half-century tragedy that has centered on me, I have lived through many, many difficult things, and ugly things, and shameful things. But those things, as Jesus said, 'are not the sins of the father, not the sins of the mother, not the sins of myself, but they are the means by which the glory of the Heavenly Father might be made manifest.[28]

Interpreting what all this is supposed to mean is no easy task. Itō Yahiko, a scholar of Roka's life, focuses on these and other writings of Tokutomi immediately before *From Japan to Japan* to conjecture that Tokutomi suffered sexual abuse when he was five years old and struggled with the psychological aftereffects of that trauma for the rest of his life. The "new era" and the "end of the cross" from this perspective imply Tokutomi's determination to overcome the sexual trauma that tormented him through adulthood. And they suggest his commitment to reconciling with his wife, Ai, who had plunged into depression and teetered close to suicide when a seemingly abusive Kenjirō wrote a former-love-life tell-all *Black Eyes and Brown Eyes*, humiliating her.[29] Writing from the perspective of Tokutomi's intellectual and personal relationship with Tolstoy, Abe Gunji emphasizes Tokutomi's loss of his father in the 1910s and his ferocious discord with his brother, which led him to abandon Tolstoyan thought to a large extent and to turn toward self-gratification, an intellectual shift Abe

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Judas Iscariot." "Jesus liked women. It was Paul who was scared of women." The apparent antisemitism here cannot go without mention.

[26] Tokutomi, *Nihon kara Nihon e,* 11.

[27] Tokutomi, *Nihon kara Nihon e,* 12.

[28] Tokutomi, *Nihon kara Nihon e,* 314.

[29] Itō Yahiko, *Meiji shisōshi no ichidanmen: Niijima Jō, Tokutomi Roka, soshite Sohō* (Kyoto: Kōyō shobō, 2010), 172–174.

summarizes as "a negation of pacifism and popular enlightenment and an affirmation of all sorts of indulgence, including sexual indulgence."[30] The departure from Tolstoyan spiritualism offers another way of interpreting the abandoning of the cross.

As these and more scholars further indicate, the laying down of the cross meant more than just overcoming personal despair. In *From Japan to Japan*, Tokutomi wrote that the year before the New Era began, "suddenly, his eyes opened to self-identity as Adam and Eve." He also wrote, "We give thanks that we were born in Japan, whose standard is the sun. We are the Sun-Child and Sun-Daughter born of the source of the sun [i.e., Japan]."[31] Nakano Yoshio, the foremost authority on and biographer of Tokutomi, points to blurbs in advertisements for *From Japan to Japan* in which Tokutomi wrote, "Remember this: the previous incarnation of Jesus was born and died as a Jew, but the resurrected version of Him is a Japanese person born in Japan," implying, as Nakano suggests, that Tokutomi saw himself as Jesus reincarnate.[32] And indeed, as Abe indicates, in a diary entry from May 1916, Tokutomi wrote, "I live and I suffer. And I suffer and bear more sufferings. That makes me *Christ*. No, I am the *Christ* of the present age."[33]

"Honestly, there's pretty much nothing as confusing and difficult as this"; "I, for one, have absolutely no idea what is going on," writes Nakano, gobsmacked at Tokutomi.[34] As many scholars do, he questions the mental state of Tokutomi, turning to words Tokutomi wrote semi-facetiously in 1919 about a hospital he had gone to: "In the past, my qualification for admission was 'depression.' From now, I guess my qualification is megalomania [or, delusions of grandeur]."[35] Nakano takes this and other pieces of evidence as an indication that Tokutomi turned, at this juncture around 1919, from self-abnegation to self-aggrandizement, from one form of mental distress to another.[36]

These apparent upheavals in the mind of Tokutomi over problems of gender and sexuality, family, emotional stability, and faith, inasmuch as they represented an intellectual and visceral shift to "self-affirmation" or even "delusions of grandeur" amid his declared "Year One of a New Era," extended to expression in political thought. Tokutomi's reckoning with his wife's dream of being murdered and with his "curse" came during an effort to dispatch, from Jerusalem, at the moment of the Paris Peace Conference, a series of messages to heads of state and other leaders across the world, not least Woodrow Wilson of the United States. In those messages, Tokutomi proposed the adoption of a new worldwide calendar marking his New Era "to begin the history of mankind anew": "The West shall cease the use of A.D., while The East shall renounce its Taishō, Hegira, etc., thus adopting universal calendar [*sic*] for all the world." He called, too, for the implementation of a single

30 Abe, *Tokutomi Roka to Torusutoi,* 232.
31 Tokutomi, Nihon kara Nihon e, 4, 9.
32 Nakano, *Roka*, 301.
33 Abe, *Tokutomi Roka to Torusutoi,* 249.
34 Nakano, *Roka*, 274–275.
35 Nakano, *Roka,* 276.
36 Nakano, *Roka,* 274.

international currency, disarmament, economic unification, and decolonization. And as a dimension of that decolonization, he proclaimed a principle in which people should necessarily affiliate with the land in which they were born, a principle he called "each to his own place": "On the Earth, possession and dominion of land shall be based on the natural right of position; I. E., the fact of his or her being born and living there."[37] Tokutomi's notion that a religion must be based on soil, his criticism that 'Abdu'l-Bahá cannot have any power or vigor if he is an exile from his homeland, appears to be related to this theory. But this theory does not in itself explain Tokutomi's own notion of "solarism," the seemingly evangelical, aggressive Japanese nationalism he then espoused. This ostensibly contradictory belief in anticolonial universalism and in Japanese nationalism was, of course, hardly unique to Tokutomi in this era.

When we consider Tokutomi's ostensibly deviant, "confusing" notion of a new world era and the end of global suffering from this vantage point of global political thought, and not narrowly from the standpoint of his emotional and mental state or of Japanese literary history, he appears not confusing or deviant but utterly typical, even mundane.[38] Tokutomi was but one among many activists and thinkers across the world after the Great War and at the start of the Paris Peace Conference to write to world leaders, most of all Wilson, demanding national autonomy and global reconciliation. Toktuomi's fixation on territory and territorial national autonomy, and his vehement anti-imperialism, appear to be but an expression of the worldwide Wilsonian moment, as Erez Manela has influentially called it.[39] The analytical potential of positioning Tokutomi and his visit to Palestine in broader intellectual and cultural history has been opened up by Usuki Akira and his pioneering scholarship, which suggests vast unexplored intellectual terrain.[40] Indeed, although the encounter between Tokutomi and 'Abdu'l-Bahá is not unknown to other scholars of Tokutomi, Usuki appears to be the first scholar to examine it in depth.[41]

In any case, for our purposes here, this perplexing context suggests that we would do well to read Tokutomi's account of his visit to Haifa and to 'Abdu'l-Bahá as postcolonial scholars might read any travelogue: to tell us what it says about the author, not the authored. It seems clear that Tokutomi seeks to situate his encounter with 'Abdu'l-Bahá within the broader argument of his travel diary, which of course, like any written text, is not simply a description but indeed an argument: a triumphal,

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[37] Tokutomi, *Nihon kara Nihon e,* 328–330.

[38] See also Minegishi Hideo, "Daiichiji sekai taisen no 'kioku' to Nihonjin: Tokutomi Roka 'Nihon kara Nihon e' no haikei," *Kōhyō* 50.9 (2013): 26–33.

[39] Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[40] E.g., Usuki Akira, "Jerusalem in the Mind of the Japanese: Two Japanese Christian Intellectuals on Ottoman and British Palestine," *Annals of Japan Association for Middle East Studies* 19.2 (2004): 35–47.

[41] Usuki Akira, *Nihonjin ni totte Erusaremu to wa nani ka: Seichi junrei no kingendaishi* (Kyoto: Mineruva shobō, 2019), 47–64. See also Usuki Akira. "Dōjidainin toshite no Naruse Jinzō: Amerikan bōdo, Bahāī-kyō, Puragumatizumu to no kanren de," in *Naruse Jinzō to Nihon joshi daigakkō no jidai,* ed. Kira Yoshie (Tokyo: Nihon kaizai hyōronsha, 2021), 261–292.

personal proclamation that the era of suffering is over, that a new moment in world history has arrived, that that new moment enables or demands the global leadership of Japan but also the nationalization of sovereignty, and that Tokutomi himself, because of his experience of suffering, represents a matchless, Jesus-like prophetic inaugurator of this new moment. Tokutomi's remarks about cultural territory; about Japan itself, as the source of glory and prosperity; about the station of Jesus; about his own suffering; and about 'Abdu'l-Bahá's failure, in his interpretation, to return to Persia despite being an Iranian all signal his own understanding of his own life course and indeed the course of Japanese and global history. In this sense, his criticisms tell us more about himself than about anything else.

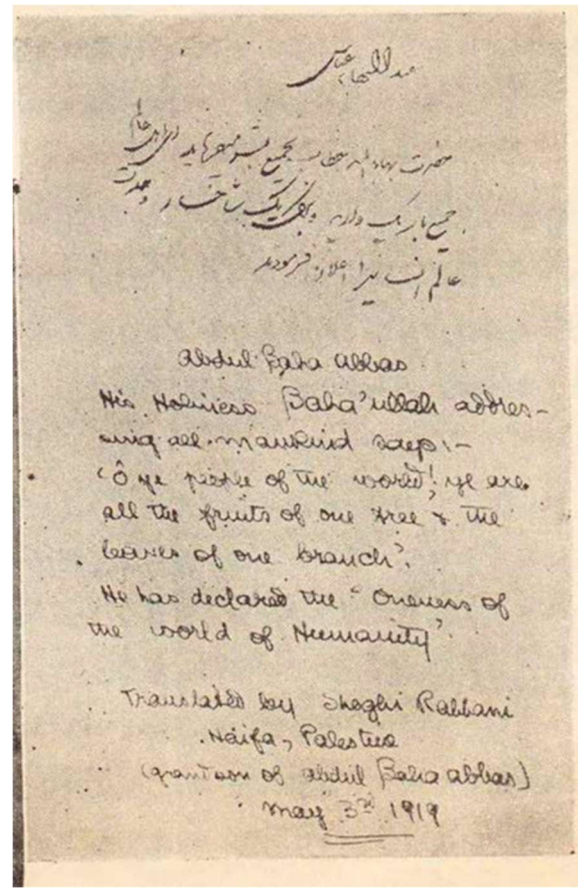
But this reading seems inadequate. If the point of learning about Tokutomi is to learn from his suffering, it seems unsatisfactory to truncate further analysis by dismissing Tokutomi's commentary as the outburst of a troubled individual and a reflection of his historical moment, even if that is what it is. If Tokutomi took this particular configuration of concerns all the way from Japan to the doorstep of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Palestine, we surely must also ask what this moment of cultural encounter, if we choose to describe it in that way, tells us, what it reveals, about the thought of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

In his yearning for peace and demilitarization, for the economic standardization of the world, and for a host of other means to bring about the unification of the planet, Tokutomi had little theoretical reason for dissent from 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Tokutomi himself was struck by the correspondence between their worldviews, writing, "I was stunned. I was totally blindsided (*ashimoto kara tobi ga tatta*). No, it was as if the thing that blindsided us had made it to our destination and was scoping it out before we did (*iya tori ga watashidomo yori sakimawari shiteita no da*)."[42] The same resonance holds for Tokutomi's view of the inadequacy of received religions, including Christianity, in meeting the challenges of the global age: "Old religions must die away with the old age, and a new religion of the new heaven and earth must, like the sun, shed its light universally," he wrote.[43] The father of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'u'lláh, proclaimed the advent of a new global religious dispensation to supersede all that came before it: the basic idea does not seem different.

Despite these seeming similarities, or precisely because of them, Tokutomi found differences to stress. Difference came primarily in the intellectual notion of "land." During his visit, Tokutomi turned to Shoghi Effendi, who was 'Abdu'l-Bahá's grandson, and Azizullah Bahadur, whom Tokutomi identified as a young believer who studied in Beirut, and described 'Abdu'l-Bahá to them as "a *Spokesperson* of the *East* who is speaking to the *West*."[44] He noticed that "the two youths appeared dissatisfied" with this characterization and countered that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was "a light of the world."[45] In Tokutomi's own "*Autograph book*," 'Abdu'l-Bahá left but one short message, translated by Shoghi Effendi into English: "His Holiness Baha'ullah addressing all mankind says: - 'Ô ye people the world!,

[42] Tokutomi, *Nihon kara Nihon e,* 382.
[43] Tokutomi, *Nihon kara Nihon e,* 386; quoted in Abe, *Tokutomi Roka to Torusutoi,* 267.
[44] Tokutomi, *Nihon kara Nihon e,* 377, 382.
[45] Tokutomi, *Nihon kara Nihon e,* 382.

ye are all the fruits of one tree & the leaves of one branch'. He has declared the 'Oneness of the world of Humanity.'" (See image to the right.)[46] (As 'Abdu'l-Bahá himself makes explicit in this short message, the "thought of 'Abdu'l-Bahá" cannot be dissociated from or discussed in isolation from that of his father; this paper refers to the "thought of 'Abdu'l-Bahá," but that is a rather inaccurate shorthand.) In any case, it seems clear from both sides that there appeared between them a difference of perspective on this question of "land" or "earth," on the problem of geopolitical and cultural space.


Abdul Baha Abbas
His Holiness Baha'ullah advertising all mankind says:-
'O ye pride of the world! ye are all the fruits of one tree & the leaves of one branch'.
He has declared the 'Oneness of the world of Humanity'.
Translated by Shoghi Rabbani
Haifa, Palestine
(grandson of Abdul Baha Abbas)
May 3rd 1919

These particular concerns that Tokutomi raised—the problem of land, together with the problem of the station and identity of Jesus and the problem of suffering—indeed had a perhaps less-than-obvious internal geometry or logical order within 'Abdu'l-Bahá's intellectual universe. Tokutomi might have chanced on this divergence in thought and this intellectual geometry rather unwittingly or even accidentally, purely as a consequence of his own subjective concerns, but that does not vitiate the significance of what we can consequently glean from it. So let us ask: In the context of Tokutomi's after-the-fact criticisms about suffering, Jesus, and land, what does the message 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote to Tokutomi mean? What is the intellectual dialogue that is implied or enabled?

To begin to answer that question, to begin to interpret this encounter in 1919 Palestine, let us turn to the deeper background of the encounter: to what 'Abdu'l-Bahá said during what Tokutomi called 'Abdu'l-Bahá's "reverse conquest" of the "Occident," when he, in the words of Tokutomi, went from Akka "all the way to Europe and America" for the "spiritual unification of the entire world."

3. Jesus and Suffering

Let us depart, then, from a consideration of Tokutomi's first two concerns, Jesus and suffering, and let us link those to the question of "oneness." Let us consider how suffering, in the public discourse of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, functions as an epistemological mechanism, a means by which humans recognize that they are "fruits of one tree" and that humanity is "one." And let us see how Jesus relates to this

[46] Tokutomi, *Nihon kara Nihon e,* image from insert between 380–381.

epistemology. It is only from here that we can then take on the central problem of "land" that Tokutomi raises.

In Paris, on November 1, 1911, 'Abdu'l-Bahá expatiated on the ontology of the human and on the means by which this ontology can be known. "In man there are two natures; his spiritual or higher nature and his material or lower nature. In one he approaches God, in the other he lives for the world alone," he explained. That "every good habit, every noble quality belongs to man's spiritual nature, whereas all his imperfections and sinful actions are born of his material nature," as he put it, appears as a logical corollary of this notion of the dual natures inherent to the human.[47] We might enter this logic in the opposite direction, departing not from being but from knowing. If we can know the duality of human nature through the empirical experience of "good habits" and of "imperfections and sinful actions," if those function as products of the higher and lower natures of the human, respectively, then a question arises: how do we know what "good habits" and "sinful actions" are?

It is here that suffering can come in as an epistemological expedient. On November 22, 'Abdu'l-Bahá explained: "[A]ll the sorrow and the grief that exist come from the world of matter—the spiritual world bestows only the joy! If we suffer it is the outcome of material things, and all the trials and troubles come from this world of illusion."[48] We develop here a syllogism: the lower nature = imperfections = the material world = the world of illusion = the source of suffering. Suffering, as an experiential mode of knowing, enables us to enter this chain equation. And if we follow this equation, then there rather obviously appears a solution to the problem of suffering: 'Abdu'l-Bahá states, "Let us turn our hearts away from the world of matter and live in the spiritual world!"[49]

To put the matter another way, then, without suffering, there appears no reason to "turn our hearts away from the world of matter." Humans have little reason even to imagine the world of the spirit, which is, by definition, a world free from suffering. And so humans have no reason to seek to know a world beyond the material world—to know, in a word, themselves.

That such an experiential and rather stark epistemological entryway into the dual nature or ontology of the human is necessary is because the human, inasmuch as it belongs partly to the world of matter or the material world, cannot fully know the spiritual realm or its own spiritual being. This, too, appears to be a necessary corollary to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's notion of spiritual being. 'Abdu'l-Bahá defined the spiritual nature of the human on November 1 as "approaching God." But then what is "God"? The previous day, October 31, he stated: "The Divine Reality is Unthinkable, Limitless, Eternal, Immortal and Invisible," whereas "the world of creation is bound by natural law, finite and mortal."[50] This depiction necessarily reflects the distinction between the dual natures inherent in the

[47] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Paris Talks," Bahá'í Reference Library, accessed May 21, 2024, https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdul-baha/paris-talks/paris-talks.pdf, 19.
[48] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Paris Talks," pdf 37.
[49] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Paris Talks," pdf 38.
[50] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Paris Talks," pdf 18.

human. Yet because "God" or "the Divine Reality" is an absolute, noncontingent reality, it is not possible for that reality itself to inhere in the human, a contingent being, and the human can therefore do little more than "approach," in a metaphorical sense, that divine reality. The divine reality thus exceeds the limits of human, finite representation and "cannot be described in terms which apply to the phenomenal sphere of the created world" inasmuch as the human itself belongs to that sphere.[51] Only signs of the divine reality can appear.

To summarize, then: the material world is limited and transient; the spiritual world is unlimited and eternal. Both natures or both realities inhere in the human, who, by its own volition, can choose which nature to tend toward. Suffering compels the human, which bears the characteristics of the imperfect, contingent material world, to "approach" the "divine reality," which is noncontingent, unlimited, and therefore inscrutable to humans. This means, then, that suffering compels humans to think earnestly about the possibility of a realm of "good" free from suffering and to choose that realm consciously.

It is from this departure point that we can then move to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's characterization of Jesus as "one mirror in which the Divine manifested itself," which seemed to infuriate Tokutomi. Within the context of the above logic, "a mirror in which the Divine has manifested itself" suggests an entity that is material and thus, in its materiality, transient and limited, yet that reflects the attributes of limitlessness and eternity associated with the Divine. Of course, as we have just seen, because it is not possible for the absolute, noncontingent Divine to appear as a material form within the material and contingent mirror, the reflection is a reflection of but attributes. By reflecting the attributes of absoluteness, eternity, and perfection, the mirror renders metaphorically "visible" or, more precisely, thinkable or imaginable, the existence of those qualities. And if we pursue the logic above, then it must follow that inasmuch as it renders imaginable the eternal and the unlimited, the mirror also illuminates the possibility of an emancipation from suffering. That Jesus was "one" such mirror is a characterization, as Tokutomi seemed to recognize, that at once sacralizes and universalizes Jesus. That Jesus was a mirror means he was capable of reflecting these attributes of nonmateriality more clearly than any regular human could. But that Jesus was one mirror suggests that other mirrors could and did exist.

'Abdu'l-Bahá himself spoke in detail in Paris about the relationship between this dual meaning of the notion of "one mirror" and the question of suffering. Jesus "suffer[ed] the fearful death on the cross"; Muhammad bore "persecutions"; the Báb made "the supreme sacrifice"; Bahá'u'lláh passed "the years of His life in prison"—"Why should all this suffering have been, if not to prove the everlasting life of the spirit?" he asked. "Christ suffered, He accepted all His trials because of the immortality of His spirit," 'Abdu'l-Bahá averred, referring equally to other "mirrors" with the same

[51] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Paris Talks," pdf 18.

function as Jesus.[52] The suffering of these mirrors is integral to their function as mirrors, which is to lift the human up from the transient material world, mired in suffering, to the eternal spiritual world, which abounds in joy. That the physical dimensions of the "mirrors" or the material reality and historical contingency of Jesus and Muhammad and Bahá'u'lláh differ is obvious. This variegation is a consequence of their material existence in time and space. But inasmuch as they reflect a reality that is noncontingent, nonmaterial, immortal and absolute, that materiality is ancillary if nonetheless real. The absolute quality comes prior in significance to any contingent differences. It is to this realm of prior significance that suffering directs the human, from the "lower" nature of the material to the "higher" nature of the spirit.

And here we arrive at the critical point. If the higher nature of the human tends toward the nonphenomenal, nonmaterial, noncontingent, or, in a word, the "spiritual," then the higher nature of the human, though it is not God itself, bears the qualities associated with "God," which then means that the higher nature cannot be delimited by time and space and is universal. Therefore, all humanity is in its essence of one nature. If suffering and the mirrors who experience it point to the higher nature of the human, they also necessarily point to the essential oneness of humanity.

It is from the "therefore" above that a real exploration of Tokutomi and the distinctiveness of his encounter with and criticisms of 'Abdu'l-Bahá at his particular historical juncture can at last begin. There is very little novel or original in the foregoing description of the duality of human nature or of the function of Jesus and his suffering as a mirror. The concepts are not unique to Bahá'í thought; they appear in intellectual systems from millennia ago to the present. Tokutomi himself long anguished over this duality: having pledged, under the influence of Tolstoy, to depart from what he called his "*Animal Ego*" to the "*Spiritual*," he declared, just before departing on his round-the-world voyage, "I was incapable of bearing the heavy burden of the spirit even more than that of the flesh. And so I set the flesh free."[53] It is the next step that reveals something novel, at least in Tokutomi's specific historical context.

4. Land

We have now explored the relationship in the worldview of 'Abdu'l-Bahá between suffering as an epistemological means and the identity of Jesus, two aspects of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's thought that Tokutomi's encounter with him subjects to scrutiny. What, then, does this relationship have to do with the third aspect of Tokutomi's criticism, which concerns the problem of "land" or "soil"?

In the thought of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "land," here meaning a geopolitically and culturally demarcated span of territory that commands or solicits primary and exclusive allegiance, can function as a contingent material phenomenon that obstructs apprehension of the noncontingent, necessary

[52] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Paris Talks," pdf 32.
[53] Abe, *Tokutomi Roka to Torusutoi*, 261, 264

oneness of the human spiritual essence, and inasmuch as land functions as this epistemological obstruction, it has the potential to abase or degrade the human from its higher, spiritual nature to its lower, material nature. Land thus potentially functions as a source of suffering.

Having transferred from Europe to the United States, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá visited Stanford University on October 8, 1912, where he delivered a searing lecture on, among other themes, the geopolitical and historical implications of his concept of the spiritual. He expatiated on what he called “the fundamental principle of the teaching of Bahá’u’lláh,” that is, “the oneness of the world of humanity” or “the intrinsic oneness of all phenomena,” the same point he made to Tokutomi.[54] ‘Abdu’l-Bahá embarked from the premise that human beings are, biologically, “members of one great universal family” and “belong to one progeny”; he made the ostensibly simple remark, “We are all human.”[55] He linked this organic unity of the human species —“unity” in the sense of being a single unit—to the spiritual notion that “we are all servants of God,” tracing the origins of organic human unity to humans having been created by an absolute, non-contingent source. From here, he asked, “Why, then, all these fallacious national and racial distinctions?” and provided an answer: “These boundary lines and artificial barriers have been created by despots and conquerors who sought to attain dominion over mankind, thereby engendering patriotic feeling and rousing selfish devotion to merely local standards of government.”[56] ‘Abdu’l-Bahá thus suggested a contradiction between the historical contingency of the nation-state or of territorial boundedness and the essential, immortal non-contingency that inheres in the human being inasmuch as it is created by and endowed with that quality by a non-contingent being. The historical contingency of territory acts as a “barrier” to seeing the non-contingency of the human essence. He offered, thus, a critique of “land” based on the problem of time, a contrast between the historically contingent quality of human geopolitics and the extrahistorical quality of human spiritual identity.

Inasmuch as this temporal incongruity produces a barrier to knowing inherent oneness, it becomes a source of suffering. “God created one earth and one mankind to people it,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá continued:

> Man has no other habitation, but man himself has come forth and proclaimed imaginary boundary lines and territorial restrictions, naming them Germany, France, Russia, etc. And torrents of precious blood are spilled in defense of these imaginary divisions of our one human habitation, under the delusion of a fancied and limited patriotism.[57]

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[54] ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “The Promulgation of Universal Peace,” Bahá’í Reference Library, accessed May 21, 2024, https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdul-baha/promulgation-universal-peace/promulgation-universal-peace.pdf, pdf 212.
[55] ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “Promulgation,” pdf 215.
[56] ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “Promulgation,” pdf 215.
[57] ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “Promulgation,” pdf 215.

Thus the "delusion" of clinging to imaginary divisions, imaginary in the sense that they are a product of the contingent world, produces suffering to the extent of spilling "torrents of precious blood." To 'Abdu'l-Bahá, there is tragic irony in humans disregarding the essential, supramaterial quality endowed in them by the absolute, illimitable good, "God," and instead attaching themselves to transient, delusory, "limited" forms and "restrictions" created by, as he stated, "despots and conquerors who sought to attain dominion over mankind," even murdering each other for the forms that their conquerors created for them, for the very people who made them suffer in the first place.[58]

And thus, if we follow the foregoing logic, the contradiction between, on the one hand, the historical and metaphysical contingency of nations and territories and, on the other, the essential oneness of humankind necessarily maps onto, indeed originates in, a contradiction between the contingency of the material world and the noncontingency of the spiritual world. It necessarily follows, too, that the contingency of the national being relates to the metaphysical contingency and transience of the material dimensions of the human being as well. And to turn insistingly to the contingency or transience of this material realm engenders suffering, necessarily. "After all, a claim and title to territory or native land is but a claim and attachment to the dust of earth," 'Abdu'l-Bahá stressed: "We live upon this earth for a few days and then rest beneath it forever. So it is our graveyard eternally. Shall man fight for the tomb which devours him, for his eternal sepulcher? What ignorance could be greater than this? To fight over his grave, to kill another for his grave! What heedlessness! What a delusion!"[59] In Paris, as we have seen, 'Abdu'l-Bahá referred to the material realm as the world of "illusion"; here, to submit to the "delusion" of fighting over the dust of the earth is, it follows, a consequence of the epistemological obstruction that that "dust" or "illusion" creates before the realm of the spirit. And as we have seen, 'Abdu'l-Bahá asserted that the meaning of the suffering of Jesus and Muhammad was to demonstrate the eternity of the spirit and the transience of material life. It appears, in that context, that his reference here to the foolishness of suffering and rancor over the dust of the earth, as represented by national land, forces in a similar way a contemplation of the need to transcend, epistemologically, the world of contingency and contemplate the inherent oneness of all phenomena.

'Abdu'l-Bahá in fact discussed this conception of suffering rooted in the epistemological obstruction of excessive nationalism with explicit reference to Japan. In his encounter with Tokutomi, he expressed his wish to visit Japan in person, but he died two years after that meeting. The visit did not occur. But 'Abdu'l-Bahá did speak to a group of Japanese people, or people with roots in Japan, at the Japanese YMCA at the Japanese Independent Church in Oakland just the day before his address at Stanford. At that gathering, 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke of Japan and explored the relationship between suffering and the nation through the epistemological problem of "prejudice." And indeed, he spoke of

[58] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Promulgation," pdf 215.
[59] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Promulgation," pdf 216.

precisely another issue that preoccupied Tokutomi: the question of Jesus, his station, and his suffering.

"Ye must shine as stars radiating the light of love toward all mankind. May you be the cause of love amongst the nations," 'Abdu'l-Bahá enjoined his Japanese listeners; he deployed the sun as a metaphor for a universalism not bounded by territory; associated that universalism with the concept of "joy"; and contrasted that joy and universalism with prejudice, which he then, necessarily, associated with suffering. "I am joyous and happy, for here in these western regions I find Orientals seeking education and who are free from prejudice," 'Abdu'l-Bahá stated to conclude his remarks.[60] In context, the statement does not appear merely as words of flattery or encouragement. Rather, 'Abdu'l-Bahá appears to be reaffirming his definition of the concepts of "joy" and "happiness." Joy means "education" and "freedom from prejudice." During the speech, which came about three months after the death of the Meiji Emperor, 'Abdu'l-Bahá remarked, "For a long time I have entertained a desire to meet some of the Japanese friends," describing the fulfilment of that desire as "a great happiness." He continued, "According to report the people of the Japanese nation are not prejudiced. They investigate reality. Wherever they find truth, they prove to be its lovers. They are not attached tenaciously to blind imitations of ancient beliefs and dogmas," referring implicitly but clearly to the Meiji era and offering a historical appraisal of what he described as "extraordinary progress in a short space of time—a progress and development which have astonished the world."[61] Asserting elsewhere in his speech that if "we abandon these timeworn blind imitations and investigate reality, all of us will be unified,"[62] 'Abdu'l-Bahá explained that it was "therefore"—meaning, because of the "reported" successes of the Meiji era and the lack of prejudice that appeared to underlie it—that he sought to "discourse with them [Japanese people] upon a subject in order that the unity and blending together of the nations of the East and the nations of the West may be furthered and accomplished." Inferring that "inasmuch as they have advanced in material civilization, they [Japanese of the era] must assuredly possess the capacity for spiritual development," 'Abdu'l-Bahá suggested, then, that "spiritual development" itself is the "blending together of the nations."[63] The sun, a metaphor for freedom from prejudice and love for all nations, implies an investigation of reality unfettered by national or historical impediments; that investigation and that blending of nations induce, in turn, universalism and unity and produce joy.

Let us recapitulate the logic of why—that is, why spiritual development means the blending together of the nations and the elimination of "prejudice" and thus "joy." As we saw above, in a different context, 'Abdu'l-Bahá explained the concept of spiritual development as "approaching God," which means to approach an absolute, non-contingent entity, which in turn means, like the metaphorical sun, to transcend the contingent divisions that separate the essentially united

60 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Promulgation," pdf 211–212.
61 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Promulgation," pdf 209.
62 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Promulgation," pdf 210.
63 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Promulgation," pdf 209.

phenomenon that is human existence. In this way, the "spiritual" or "higher nature" of the human demands that knowledge and truth, too, be necessarily sought and shared universally, and their pursuit or investigation must therefore necessarily be free from obstructions of "land." That Meiji Japanese had "according to report" transcended the epistemological obstruction of territory in this pursuit of truth and proved to be the lovers of reality, in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's phrasing, wherever they found it, meant, in other words, an escape, through "education" in a broad sense, from narrow confines of prejudice and toward progress and development. This is an act, if we follow the logic, befitting of the transcendental spiritual nature of humans, and inasmuch as the spirit is the world of joy, whereas the material is the source of illusion and suffering, as we saw in the previous section, then the pursuit of knowledge free from prejudice must also be a source of joy, or perhaps it is joy itself. To state the point otherwise, joy is to abandon the prejudices emerging from contingent divisions or "delusions" in the material world and thus to abandon the suffering that they necessarily produce and, instead, to investigate reality free from "blind imitations" and "prejudices" through an educational process. This educational pursuit generates a phenomenal unity that reflects the nonphenomenal ontological unity of the spiritual realm. And thus, in the realms of both thought and geopolitics, to strive for the "blending of nations" means an escape from prejudice and necessarily an escape from suffering, particularly in war, perhaps its most egregious manifestation. It is this point, it appears, that 'Abdu'l-Bahá made to his Japanese audience using the case of Japan.

To 'Abdu'l-Bahá, this was not merely a matter of theory or philosophy but also a matter of history. In the same speech at the YMCA, he asserted, "all war and conflict, bloodshed and battle, every form of sedition has been due to some form of prejudice."[64] And he took what he described as "thirteen hundred years" of "warfare and hostility" between Muslims and Christians as evidence. He exposed what he deemed the irony of the followers of various prophets—"mirrors"—hating and killing each other when Muhammad himself praised Jesus. The "joy," then, of becoming lovers of reality wherever it may be found applied to religious concepts in history, and the rejection of that joy, turning not to the light in the mirror but only to the physical mirror itself, is the historical source, in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's reasoning, of various forms of suffering.

We have thus returned to the question of Jesus as a "mirror." In this same Japanese address, 'Abdu'l-Bahá contrasted prejudice, "destructive to the body politic," to religion, which he described as "the cause of love in human hearts," "conducive to life," and "ever constructive, not destructive."[65] He implied, then, that religion and prejudice are antonyms. We find here again perhaps not an ideal but a definition in the thought of 'Abdu'l-Bahá: "religion indicates the oneness of the world of humanity," he explained, a notion which again follows from the conception of the spiritual nature of the human approaching an absolute, unitary God. And so any system of thought that interrupts truth,

[64] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Promulgation," pdf 209.
[65] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Promulgation," pdf 209.

and interrupts the inherent oneness of humanity, by segregating it into territorial pieces or into material divisions cannot be religion. That ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asserted, “If religion becomes the cause of enmity and bloodshed, then irreligion is to be preferred,” follows, too, from this logic: if it causes enmity and bloodshed, it is not religion; it is prejudice.[66] To cling to the illusory division of the terriotiral frame without seeing the universal oneness of humans within that frame is the same, intellectually, as clinging to the illusory division that is the material frame of “Jesus” without seeing the universal light that Jesus reflected. It is, in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s reading, “blind imitation” and “prejudice,” an act that contradicts the inherent spiritual nature of the human and thus induces suffering. Conversely, to investigate reality through education, and to understand that inherent oneness, is joy.

The very fact that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá invoked “the Orient” and even Japan itself in his address suggests that his critique of “land” as an epistemological obstruction and a source of suffering does not imply a wholesale condemnation or rejection of the nation or of a sense of national belonging individuals might carry. Rather, the notion of approaching “God,” or that universal entity that metaphorically sheds light on all humanity, demands a subordination of territorial partiality to a greater unity, an effort to prevent boundedness from becoming an obstruction. And here, we at last move from thought to the history of thought. For even if the “sun” that appears in the “mirror” that is Jesus and the “mirror” that is Bahá’u’lláh is the same sun, the world that that sun is illuminating is, in each case, patently not the same.

As we have seen, the reason Tokutomi visited ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the first place was that Tolstoy had shown him, in 1906, a letter from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá delineating a series of points needed for the unification of humanity. The same set of points that appears in Tokutomi’s personal notebook is extant in published records as a letter ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote to a Christian woman from Scotland around the same time. It is not clear if the content of that exchange reached Tolstoy, who then showed it to Tokutomi, or if ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote a separate letter with similar content to Tolstoy. In the Scotland communications, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asserted, “In cycles gone by, though harmony was established, yet, owing to the absence of means, the unity of all mankind could not have been achieved,” and indeed, “even among the peoples of one and the same continent association and interchange of thought were wellnigh impossible.”[67] The global universalism ‘Abdu’l-Bahá suggested was not possible because of practical, perhaps technological limitations. Yet because, in the modern era, “the five continents of the earth have virtually merged into one,” the unchanging and absolute “spirit” is able to take a new, different form in a new era. “All the members of the human family … have become increasingly interdependent,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá observed. “Hence the unity of all mankind can in this day be achieved.

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[66] ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “Promulgation,” pdf 211.

[67] ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá,” Bahá’í Reference Library, accessed May 21, 2023, https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdul-baha/selections-writings-abdul-baha/selections-writings-abdul-baha.pdf, p. 14. H. M. Balyuzi, *‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The Center of the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1972), 355–362.

Verily this is none other but one of the wonders of this wondrous age, this glorious century."[68] In a world in which the global condition had already become a lived reality, he suggested, to eliminate the prejudice of "land" and to renounce the suffering that emerges from material contingency, rising instead to a spiritual supraterritoriality, is to rise to joy. Suffering impels that ascent.

5. Conclusion

Humans have suffered at all times and in all places, but at in an era in which suffering, like so many other historical phenomena, bears a global quality that seems without precedent, we have here turned back a century to an encounter between Tokutomi and 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Palestine, a land of historical suffering, a land to which the experience of suffering itself propelled Tokutomi. And we have explored this idea: that the negation of global oneness is suffering, whereas the unfettered pursuit of the truth of the inherent oneness of all phenomena and the transcendence out of prejudice enabled by the global condition of the present day are joy. Of course, many problems remain here unresolved. We have stopped at an exploration of the logic of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's thought, and we have not considered its origins or its relationship to other systems of thought or its positioning within intellectual history. Nor have we directly linked the full range of Tokutomi's personal experience of suffering with the thought of Abdu'l-Bahá, although matters of family and gender, from which Tokutomi's "quotidian" suffering emerged, are indeed addressed elsewhere in the public remarks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. And we have not directly explored the problem of imperialism and colonialism implicit in some of the remarks of Tokutomi. Yet for now, perhaps it suffices at least to have begun looking at the global problem of suffering and land through the eyes of a, or the, representative of Japanese suffering, who departed from his own land and from his own suffering to visit another land of suffering, one where historical suffering has engendered ever deeper, ever wider suffering. For indeed, the globality of suffering endures.

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[68] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Selections," pdf 14.

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