

Transcript of Dr. Khan's Talk
Friday June 29, 2001
Kingdom Conference in Milwaukee, WI
Tape KCM - Day 2 Program 1

Dr. Khan: Dear friends, we who are gathered here from all parts of the United States, and indeed from many corners of the world, are the descendents of countless generations who over thousands of years have held alive the hope and expectation that the day would come when the Kingdom of God would be established on the Earth. In some religious traditions, this was associated with God coming down and dwelling with his people. In all expectations there was the realization the day would appear when God would intervene in human affairs and the long promised age of harmony, unity and peace throughout the world would be established. This expectation was diminished in the secular age we have experienced. But the expectation has been revived in recent years in light of the changes which have occurred in the world and also by the realization of the magnitude of the problems with which humanity is now confronted. It is, as many or all of you realize, the central message of the Bahá'í Faith that we are today living in the time of the fulfillment of this ancient promise: The establishment of the Kingdom of God on Earth. [applause]

We see wherever we look the forces of change moving relentlessly through all areas of human thought and activity, bringing about the changes appropriate to this objective. Those of us who have chosen to identify ourselves as members of the Bahá'í Faith have voluntarily taken on the responsibility to play a vital role in the spiritualization of what is occurring in the world and in its establishment on an enduring foundation. This is our privilege. This is our responsibility. This is our right. [applause]

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In considering what we mean by the Kingdom of God on Earth I want to draw your attention to my understanding that the Bahá'í view on this subject differs in three important ways from the conventional perception prevalent in the world around us.

Firstly, we as Bahá'ís do not believe that it will be an event occurring instantaneously. The intervention of God in human affairs we see to be a continuing process. We do not envisage a dramatic end to history; a dramatic transformation instantaneously and the Kingdom of God descending on the Earth. Rather we see the Kingdom of God as coming into being through a process of great and strenuous endeavor over a long period of time, a period not measured in decades but rather in centuries. We believe the coming of the Kingdom of God on this Earth begins with apparently insignificant actions which are of great spiritual consequence as becomes apparent with the passage of time. We believe that individuals find their deepest fulfillment, their greatest satisfaction, their most profound realization of the meaning of their lives through their commitment to engage in the process of building the kingdom. [applause] And we are called upon to build this kingdom firstly within ourselves, within our hearts, within the very core of our being.

Secondly to build this kingdom in the worldwide Bahá'í community. And thirdly, through the spread of this community to build the kingdom throughout all corners of the Earth. [applause] That's one of the unusual features about the Bahá'í perception of the kingdom, that it will come gradually through great effort, through sacrifice and devotion by people from all nations, races and backgrounds.

Secondly, my understanding is that our perception of the building of the kingdom involves a transcendent act of creation unprecedented in human history: a radical

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transformation in collective human endeavor in the pursuit of group objective. My understanding is that Bahá'u'lláh has ordained the creation of organic units. An element of human activity and behavior, unprecedented in history. These organic units are composed of groups of individuals sharing a common belief as Bahá'ís. These organic units have a capability far beyond that of the individual constituents. We call them Local Spiritual Assemblies, National Spiritual Assemblies, Houses of Justice. They are in a very real sense super-human. They have capabilities far beyond the sum of their component parts. They have an enduring existence beyond the life of the individuals who comprise at any time the members of these organic units. They are impelled by profound spiritual forces. And they evolve in strength and capability from an initial condition which is often, as we realize, semi-helpless. We see before us, often, Local Spiritual Assemblies which are almost inert. Which have trouble meeting, which have trouble making the most basic of decisions, which have trouble in the fundamental elements of their consultative function. And we look at these institutions, semi-helpless, and we look at them with a great deal of love and confidence, because we know that from these humble beginnings is coming, through the process of spiritual evolution over decades and centuries, great organic units the like of which history has never scene.

[applause] If we would condemn these Spiritual Assemblies for their present lack of capability, let us also condemn newly born babies for their apparent lack of capability.

[applause] If we decline to engage in the process of nurturing and love and development of these spiritual assemblies, let us also neglect newly born children, and leave them to themselves, and let them founder or die. These organic units, local and national throughout the world, join together in a worldwide organic entity, which ensures that the

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Bahá'í community proceeds most efficiently in the use of our limited resources for the establishment of the Kingdom of God on Earth.

The third and perhaps most arresting element of the Bahá'í approach and understanding of the Kingdom of God on Earth is the Bahá'í understanding that the ideal state of being within the kingdom is dynamic and not static. [applause] This is in total contrast to the conventional religious view that the ideal state is paradisiacal in the sense of static, unchanging, indeed sybaritic. We see the ideal state as that of change, growth, development. That to us is the perfect world, not a static, unchanging, sybaritic creation. [applause] Our perspective is that a condition of continuing change and growth is necessary for the fulfillment of individual human beings and social entities. Why? Because human beings are creative. It is for this reason that our aim and endeavor as Bahá'ís is that our religion be an agent of creativity and not an intellectual straight jacket. [applause] We seek to combine the immutability of foundational beliefs with a flexibility of applications. We seek to create an ever learning, ever developing, ever expanding community in which all individuals of diverse backgrounds, talents, abilities and interests, can find their deepest fulfillment. We seek to holistically combine elements which are usually held to be antithetical. We are creating a kingdom in which the pursuit of happiness is legitimized and is consistent with sacrificial endeavor. We create a kingdom in which freedom combines harmoniously with discipline. In which the flourishing of individuality is fostered and harmonizes with obedience to the authority of collective institutions. We seek to create a kingdom in which certitude of belief is consistent with a spirit of inquiry and a respect for differing opinions. [applause]

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Much will be said during the course of this conference about the means of bringing into being the Kingdom, and tomorrow the National Spiritual Assembly will share with us its wonderful plan, which is a major step forward in this process. Let me however add a few remarks on the subject of bringing into being the kingdom. I believe one of our greatest and most fundamental needs is the cultivation of vision. Let us create in our minds the vision of what we want, where we are going, and how we are going to get there. We can achieve this principally through immersion in the Bahá'í Writings, in Bahá'í community life and the various projects to which our institutions summon us from time to time. Let us not delude ourselves into feeling that this vision will come easily – will come to us as a gift, simply through occasional dipping in to the Bahá'í Writings. Occasional participation in Bahá'í community life. Occasional involvement in the various projects of the endeavor of the American Bahá'í community. This vision will come about through no less than immersion in these various activities. Through the acquisition of this vision, we will acquire something precious, rare and, indeed, unique. We will acquire an expanded perspective which encompasses the operation of spiritual and material forces and processes in the world brining about the kingdom. We will find ourselves endowed with a new understanding, a new eye, a new heart, a new ear and, indeed, a new voice. A vision which embraces spiritual and material forces at work in the world changing and transforming it in accord with the ordained Will of God. [applause]

We will also, through this enhanced vision, acquire a sense of community. A sense of community of multi-dimension. A sense of community that transcends space. A sense of

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oneness and unity, not only with our fellow Bahá'ís in the United States, in North America, in the Continent of the Americas, but across the entire world. We will feel as we do today in this gathering though we are part of a very real family, a family of incredible diversity, united by bonds of love that are beyond perception or assessment. We will acquire also a sense of community across time. We will feel in community with those who went before us. We will draw upon the inspiration of the heroism of the early Bahá'ís in Iran, the Dawn Breakers. We will feel in community with these heroic souls, and we will be inspired and we will fulfill the expectation of Shoghi Effendi, that the Bahá'ís of the United States regard themselves as the spiritual descendants of the Dawn Breakers. [applause] Beyond that, our sense of community will not only extend in space, will not only include those of times past, but we'll also, we will be in communion with those yet to come. We will become deeply conscious of the millions who are in the future, who are proceeding in the stream of time towards their existence on this earth, who are marching towards us from the future, who will take up the reigns, who will come to assist us in this work, and will see our endeavors as laying the foundation for the unity and harmony they will experience in decades and centuries ahead. [applause]

And through this vision, and through this sense of community, we will understand how deeply responsible we are for the welfare of generations yet unborn. Our needs now, at this time, in the building of the kingdom are to revive the sense of heroism. We live in an age of cynicism, an age of the pursuit of comfort, an age of greed and self-centeredness. We who are here today are summoned to the challenge to revive those elements which were central to American life and to the life of the Bahá'í community of Iran and in the

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West in years gone by. The sense of the heroic. We require also the consecration to noble objectives. We are called upon to revive the best in human nature — that element of human nature which is sacrificial, which holds noble objectives as the highest pursuit for human beings. And we are called upon to revive in our hearts the element of perseverance in the face of those difficulties which may exist today and which undoubtedly arise in the future in the pursuit of the building of the kingdom. These characteristics, heroism, consecration and perseverance, are indispensable in the pursuit of our personal spiritual development, building the kingdom within ourselves. It will not be easy. It will not happen quickly. It will not happen through casual activity. It will require constant, persistent activity to acquire those spiritual attributes of the kingdom within ourselves. We will acquire in that way an enhanced sense of devotion. We will acquire a new adherence to the spiritual practices which are the foundation of our religion: the practices of prayer, of meditation, of fasting, of the development of character. And we will be called upon to apply these characteristics of heroism, consecration and perseverance to an energetic involvement in the Bahá'í Administrative Order. So that new patterns of collective activity and interaction are formed and institutionalized. And so that the administration is able to accomplish its objective of enhancing the personal and social development of the Bahá'í community. [applause]

I have only one more point to make. But I regard it as very important. The history of humanity is a record of failed aspirations, of noble ideals unrealized, of great hopes dashed, of uplifting objectives not realized. The history of humanity shows that there have been, over the centuries, great ideals which have come to be labeled as utopian.

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Human beings have yearned for days of wonder, days of peace, days of harmony. They have devoted their lives to the pursuit of these high objectives and they have failed. So in the currency of human history, there is a record of the failed utopian ideal. Analysts have examined why is it that human endeavors to create on an enduring basis a new world, have invariably failed. They have concluded that there are a variety of reasons. The corruption of those in authority. The worldliness of leaders — materialistic, egotistic. The divisive effect of malicious external antagonists. Internal division into bitterly antagonistic elements within the community. All these are part of the tragic record of failure, of noble objectives and high ideals to which humanity has summoned itself over many centuries and indeed millennia.

The Bahá'í perspective is that in this age history will not repeat itself. [applause] It is of little value to argue this point in terms of sentiment. Can we claim that our motives are purer than those of the past? That our characters are more refined than those in past ages who yearned to improve the condition of mankind? I think not. Our perspective that history will not repeat itself must carry with it the implication that we believe that there is at this time a unique, new feature, never before apparent in human religious or social history, and sufficient to overturn the pattern of history of many thousands of years. If that unique powerful new feature does not exist, we are doomed to the same failure as afflicted humanity in the past. It stands or falls on this point. We believe that this unique new feature is what we call the Bahá'í Covenant. Without it we will not succeed. With the Bahá'í Covenant, our success is assured. [applause] Because it is the Bahá'í Covenant that provides a unity of authority. It provides cohesion. It insures the retention

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of the purity of our teachings. And it is the guarantor for the maintenance of flexibility and dynamism in the growing, expanding and developing Bahá'í community. The Covenant curbs our innate tendency to egotistic behavior. The Covenant has iron clad provisions to avoid permanent damage to the Bahá'í community from the persistence of extreme behaviors of individuals. It protects us against the violation of the oneness of mankind through individuals asserting a sense of superiority. It preserves us from the damage of addiction to the desire for leadership and power and authority. The Covenant has given us as the greatest gift of all from God in this Dispensation, the Covenant has given us an administrative order that people may well wonder at and marvel at in its balance, in its intricacy, in the spiritual gifts it conveys. Elected bodies with collective authority, wise and loving individuals appointed for encouragement, council, stimulus and protection. All working together with love, mutual support and for a common objective.

The point I make and it is my final point, it is this. If we are here today committed to work for the emergence of the Kingdom of God on Earth, if we here resolve that this is to be the central purpose of our lives, if we decide that it is in this way that we will find the deepest fulfillment of our highest aims and endeavors, then we are required to give our fullest support to the institutions of the administrative order which are the derivative of the Covenant. [applause] This is the only way in which we will protect this new creation from ultimate deterioration. It is not protected by fervent appeals to sentiment. By the loud proclamation of our devotion to high ideals. It is preserved from deterioration by the record of our total commitment to the support of the institutions of the administrative

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order. This is our protection. This is our way forward. This is the means to progress.

This is the only way in which we can achieve our ideals, our hopes, our yearnings and

our aspirations. [applause]