

LIGHTS OF 'IRFÁN



Papers Presented at the 'Irfán
Colloquia and Seminars

Book Fifteen

Lights of 'Irfán

Studies in the Principal Bahá'í Beliefs

*Papers Presented at the
'Irfán Colloquia and Seminars*



Book Fifteen



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What he wants the Bahá'ís to do is to study more, not to study less. The more general knowledge, scientific and otherwise, they possess the better. Likewise he is constantly urging them to really study the Bahá'í teachings more deeply.

– From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi by his secretary

It is hoped that all the Bahá'í students will follow the noble example you have set before them and will, henceforth, be led to investigate and analyze the principles of the Faith and to correlate them with the modern aspects of philosophy and science. Every intelligent and thoughtful young Bahá'í should always approach the Cause in this way, for therein lies the very essence of the principle of independent investigation of truth.

– From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a believer who had completed advanced studies in a subject related to the Bahá'í Teachings

We need very much the sound, sane, element of thinking which a scientifically trained mind has to offer. When such intellectual powers are linked to deep faith, a tremendous teaching potential is created.

– From a letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a scientist who had embraced the Bahá'í Faith

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Preface

Shoghi Effendi, in a letter written on his behalf, differentiates between Bahá'í scholarship and worldly scholarship. He emphatically recommends deeper and systematic study of the verities of the Bahá'í Faith, both for the purpose of teaching the Faith as well as for laying “a permanent foundation” in the hearts and minds of the believers that “tests and trials will not shake down.”¹ Organizing and conducting 'Irfán Colloquium sessions, in Europe and in North America, in English, Persian and German over the past twenty years, and publishing thirty volumes of compilations of the papers presented at those gatherings, as well as study guides and occasional research papers, were all aimed at promoting and facilitating the implementation of this strong recommendation of our beloved Guardian. Those engaged or interested in such studies are invited to share the results of their “spiritual scholarship” with other like-minded friends by making presentations and/or contributing research-based papers.

The present volume includes articles on a range of topics, either focused on a certain item in the Bahá'í Writings, or dealing with a subject related to the fundamental principles and teachings of the Bahá'í Faith.

Tablet of Patience (*Surih Şabr*): Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh and Selected Topics is an analytical presentation of a Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh revealed on the first day of Riḍván 1863, which is also named Tablet of Job (*Lawh-i-Ayyúb*). This paper explores the relationship between troubles in the path of God, divine tests and steadfastness during times of tests. It also provides the historical context for this Tablet and its contents. Tablet of Patience covers a range of topics mostly dealt with in more

detail in the *Book of Íqán*. The author argues that this Tablet is an indirect announcement of the Station of Bahá'u'lláh as the Promised One of *Kitáb-i-Bayán*.

The Inebriation of His Enrapturing Call (*Mast-and bulbulán*) is a provisional translation of one of Bahá'u'lláh's poems together with detailed analysis, verse by verse, giving meaning, structural specification and comparative references to well-known poems in Persian literature. This analytical translation provides a good specimen of the poems of Bahá'u'lláh. This poem by Bahá'u'lláh is an ecstatic poem, the fruit of the ecstatic experiences He had in Teheran. It is filled with mystical conditions.

Finding a Trace of the Traceless Friend is a reflection on Bahá'í scholarship as a journey in the Valley of Search. It attempts to shed some light on Bahá'í Scholarship as reflected in the first valley of the *Seven Valleys* of Bahá'u'lláh, the Valley of Search. The combination of finding a "trace" of a "traceless friend" indicates the mysteriousness and complexity of this task, and introduces us to the mystical realm. In this paper, topics such as prerequisites of search, independent investigation and the role of the heart, culture and tradition, how to deal with distractions, and the exclusivity of search and sacrificing everything for it are considered and discussed.

The Bahá'í Writings: A Meta-ethical Excursion pursues a philosophical examination of the Bahá'í Writings' ethical teachings, how they relate to the major ethical systems proposed in the past, and how they deal with some of the difficulties inherent in past systems. Among the topics discussed are virtue ethics, utilitarianism, existentialism, Kant's theories, natural law theory, ethical subjectivism and objectivism, relativism, intuitionism, Nietzschean ethics, and self-realization ethics. Special attention is made to Udo Schaefer's magisterial two volumes "Bahá'í Ethics in Light of Scripture" which is the first study to undertake a systematic review of Bahá'í ethical teachings.

Bahá'í Consultation and the Transformation of Society reviews the history of consultation in the Bahá'í Faith from the time of Bahá'u'lláh to the present time. It then looks at the ways in which in successive periods importance of consultation was emphasized and its use was promoted in the community. Finally, the paper deals with the role of consultation in the movement from the present established and customary practices in the world towards the practice that is envisaged in the new World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

The paper on **Origin of Creation** starts with posing the question of "Is there a God?" It deals with the profound implications, and indeed direct impact on the life of mankind and how it looks upon the very meaning and purpose of life. Various arguments presented during the history to prove or disprove the existence of God are briefly reviewed. The author follows 'Abdu'l-Bahá's approach that the existence of God can be proven and concludes that the ultimate source of pre-existence is God, and that the pre-existent properties are attributes of God.

The Greatest Holy Leaf's Unparalleled Role in Religious History – the Significance of the Arc, the Site of Her Resting Place is a description of the status and leadership role of the Greatest Holy Leaf, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's sister, in the history of the Bahá'í Faith. It also deals with the central location of her resting place among the edifices erected at the Bahá'í World Centre on Mount Carmel.

The Emergence and Organization of Chinese Religions is a fascinating attempt to present a bird's-eye-view of the structure, practices and basic ideologies of four different religious trends of Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, and Shenism, each of which reflecting an aspect of Chinese life. It also deals with various branches, sects, and schools within each of these religions with references to religious doctrines, symbols, ceremonies, and even deities of these religious trends that have been so intermingled in the course of time.

The ELUCIDATIONS section in the *Lights of 'Irfán* includes letters written by or on behalf of the Universal House of Justice and documents that have been issued by the Bahá'í World Centre concerning clarification or elaboration of specific subjects related to the aims and purposes of the 'Irfán Colloquium and its publications. Included in this book is the authorized translation from Persian of a letter written on behalf of Universal House of Justice on "Participation in politics and social activities".

The **In Memoriam** section in this volume pays tribute to dear supporters of the 'Irfán Colloquium who passed away in 2013. It includes short biographies of Mr. Houshmand Fatheazam, Dr. Amin Banani, and Ms. Mahboubeh Arjmand. Mr. Fatheazam was a sincere supporter of the colloquium and made enlightening presentations in some of the 'Irfán sessions in North America and Europe. Dr. Banani was one of the founders of, and presenters at, the 'Irfán Colloquium sessions at Bosch Bahá'í School. The texts of some of the presentations made by Mr. Fatheazam at the 'Irfán Colloquia are published in 'Irfán publications.² In the same year, 2013, Ms. Mahboubeh Arjmand, one of the supporters of Haj Mehdi Arjmand Memorial Fund, also passed away in San Diego, California.

Appendix I is the **Bibliography of Bahá'í Writings and Their Abbreviated Titles** used in the text of the papers published in this book, to facilitate referring to the sources of the quoted statements.

Appendix II is **Contents of Previous Volumes of *Lights of 'Irfán***. Listing the contents of previous volumes also shows the range, types, methodological approaches and scope of the papers that are presented, and are welcome to be presented, at the 'Irfán Colloquia. In addition to the papers presented at the 'Irfán Colloquia, research papers related to the main goals of the 'Irfán Colloquium are welcome to be directly submitted for publication in the *Lights of 'Irfán*.

Starting with Book Six, we have made two changes to the 'Irfán Colloquia's style guide. All "authoritative" publications are cited by an abbreviation; see Appendix II, "Bibliography of the Bahá'í Writings and Their Abbreviations Used in This Book." Words of Prophets/Manifestations, i.e. quotations from Sacred Writings, (not including statements by Shoghi Effendi or the Universal House of Justice), are italicized.

All papers published in this book present the views and understanding of their authors. The texts of the papers are published as provided by the authors. Their writing styles and scholarly approaches are, therefore, different. Articles are published in this volume according to the alphabetical order of the author's surnames.

Iraj Ayman

NOTE

¹ "He also urges you to study the teachings themselves more deeply. Bahá'í scholarship is needed really more than worldly scholarship, for one is spiritual, the other more or less transient. There is a real lack in the Cause of people who know the teachings thoroughly, especially their deeper truths, and who can consequently teach the souls properly and lay a permanent foundation, one that tests and trials will not shake down." (27 August 1951 on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, quoted in *A Compilation on Scholarship*, p. 76)

² See <http://irfancoolloquia.org/database/author/Fatheazam> .

The Emergence and Organization of Chinese Religions¹

Phyllis Ghim Lian Chew

There has never been a time in recorded history when leadership has not occupied a central place in people's views about politics, war, sport or business. In recent decades, there has been much research-based framework emphasizing sociological, psychological, behavioural and other theories of leadership. However, while there have been many studies on leadership, there has been very little interest on leadership and succession in religious organisations. For example, Weber (1993) has described the nature of bureaucracies but has shown little interest in the internal structure of religion. Likewise, the field of political science has many papers on democratic elections but they usually concentrate on policy outcomes. Economists pay a lot of attention to the internal structure of firms but not of religion.

Religions are organized in a variety of ways. They may resemble an elected autocracy, a parliamentary democracy, or something akin to a monarchy, where heredity plays a primary role. Mao and Zech (2002) show how doctrinal concerns put limits on the organisational forms that a religion may take. Giuriato (2009) in her study of the Catholic Church has written about an elected autocracy. Historians (Reese, 1996, Baumgarten 1998) have written about the struggle for power within a particular religion but their methodologies are not the same. For the most part, their studies are on Christianity and Islam and very little is known about the management structure of Chinese religion.

Archaeological discoveries in China have established that, from the earliest times, the Chinese people have had an awareness of the unseen power, felt it and worshipped it. Despite the fact that they had to endure repeated periods of upheaval, oppression and chaos, there is no questioning the close and pervading relationship of religion to the daily lives of the Chinese people. Even when religion was at its ebb during the time of Mao, Mao was called “the red sun in the heart of the people throughout the world” and was praised for “unlimited wisdom, courage and strength” and for “always being with us”. He was often the object of devotion in songs and rituals with a strongly religious character. Not surprisingly, since the death of Mao and while the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is avowedly atheist, it has been growing more tolerant of religious activities in the last three decades, not just because of the practical realization that religious impulses are too deeply embedded to be effectively eradicated, but also that the moral teachings of religion might be utilized for the running of the secular state. Hence, various religious forms such as Mazuism in southern China, Huandi worship, Black Dragon worship in Shaanxi and Caishen worship in various parts of China have received support by state officials.

This public resurgence of religious practice in China has encouraged burgeoning studies on post-Mao China: for example, Jing (1996), Lagerwey (2004), Huang and Yang (2005), and Jones (2010, 2011). In particular, Dean (2009), Yang (2000) and Flower (2004) have examined how a revival of traditional religious practices has enabled participants to construct frameworks of morality in their daily lives. Some preliminary work has even been done on the little known healers and shamans, for example, Fan (2003) and Cline (2010). Nevertheless most of this research has been on the history, philosophy, festivities and ritualistic practices of the Chinese religion, and there are still “enormous holes” (Dean 2003, 340), one of which must certainly be on that of temple management, and in

particular leadership and succession, which is the focus of this paper.

Research Methodology

Three research trips each about a month's duration to villages and townships in the vicinity of Tong'an and Zhangzhou, Fujian in 2010; Longnan and Tianshui, Gansu in 2011; and to Baoji and Xi'an, Shaanxi, in 2013 were undertaken by myself. During these periods, I was able to do ethnographic studies of temple festivities. Many interviews were conducted at religious sites and interviews and the interviewees included spirit mediums, temple managers, Taoist priests and priestesses, monks, nuns, lay temple staff and ordinary worshippers. Informal conversation was also undertaken with villagers, intellectuals and provincial cadres in the provincial religious bureaus. Some of these were tape-recorded or videoed for subsequent reflection and analysis. In my travels to rural areas of these provinces, I have found a temple in almost every village. I have witnessed a recycling of discontinued ritual practices and new construction of temples and, last but not least, listened to monks preaching the scriptures to ever-increasing numbers of devotees.

Three modes of research may be discerned: 1) participant observation at temple festivities and interviews with temple keepers; 2) case studies of the lives of spirit-mediums through a one-to-one interview; and 3) home visits to adherents of sectarian organisations. My research questions are concerned with leadership and succession; namely, the nature of the religious leadership such as appointment, tenure, and demise and the relationship between administrative procedures and religious practice.

The total amount of time I have spent on fieldwork is small compared with the amount of time ethnographers typically spend in the field, and I am aware of the limitations of my work. However, instead of waiting for fuller information, I

thought it prudent to share my research quickly in view of the dearth of studies on this topic. As the organizational structure of the Bahá'í Faith is already well known to the reader of the *Lights of 'Irfán*, this paper has placed its main focus on the Chinese religion through a description of its many temples, as a means to give a preliminary insight into its management structure and especially on leadership and succession. Only in the concluding section is there a commentary engaged on the main similarities and differences between the Chinese religion and the Bahá'í Faith, as gleaned from the research.

The “Chinese Religion”

The whole of China may be considered a sacred space, containing a continent of spirits, not all of which are metaphorical. Not surprisingly, Abdu'l-Bahá (1844–1921) has paid tribute to the Chinese people, describing them as “simple-hearted and truth-seeking”. “In China one can teach many souls and train and educate such divine personages that each one of them may become the bright candle of the world of humanity.”²

The term “Chinese religion” comprises Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, and Shenism, each of which reflects on an aspect of Chinese life. Confucianism is associated with the bureaucracy, the traditional educational system, and the collection of political-moral values drawn from Confucius' teachings (Chew 1993). Popular Daoism is essentially concerned with basic issues such as life, death and immortality and pragmatic issues related to health, wealth, business and marriage. Sinitic Mahayana Buddhism aims to teach the Buddhist scriptures as a means of attaining salvation. Finally, Shenism is a collection of ancient folk practices focusing on the worship of numerous gods and spirits, exorcism of demons, and the use of potions and spells for healing and good fortune.

To add to the tapestry, there are also various sects, subsets, and schools within each of these religions. For example, philosophical Taoism is quite different from religious Taoism.

Philosophical Taoism is represented by the philosophies of Lao-tzu (circa 600 B.C.E.) and Chuang-tzu (circa 370–319 B.C.E.), two influential Chinese sages, documented in texts ascribed to them – namely, the *Tao-teching* and the *Chuang-tzu* – as well as later materials such as the *Huainanzi* and the *Liezi*. Religious Taoism can be traced to Chang Tao-ling (circa second century C.E.), who claimed that he had a vision, whereby Lao-tzu gave him the authority to organize religious communities, to forgive faults and sins, to heal, and, more important, to exorcise ghosts, demons, and evil spirits. Over the centuries various schools of religious Taoism arose with different degrees of emphasis on revelations, healing, rituals, oracles, and other shamanistic practices, as evident in the Lushan rite, the Duangong ritual and theatrical traditions of Sichuan and the thunder rites of Hunan etc. (Dean 2009). Chinese Buddhism is predominantly of the Sinitic Mahayana variety and in itself have many subsets, such as the T'ien-t'ai, the Hua-yen, the Ch'an, the Pure Land, and Folk Buddhism, both in mainland China and the Chinese communities in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau and Southeast Asia.

Another layer is added to this complexity through syncretism in almost every possible combination. Often, statues of Confucius, Lao-tzu, and Buddha are set up as objects of veneration alongside those of traditional Chinese immortals. In religious ceremonies, Buddhist and Taoist priests and laymen of various beliefs are seen performing their rites together. Indeed, religious doctrines, symbols, ceremonies, and even deities have been so intermingled that it is difficult for even scholars to tell if they are of Confucian, Buddhist, or Taoist origin. For example, Caishen (财神), the God of Wealth, begun as a Chinese folk hero but today both Daoism and Mahayana Buddhism venerate him as a God. Similarly, while Guanyin (观音) is inspired from the male bodhisattva Avalokite vara, of India, “he” has now become a “she” and is venerated as a Chinese immortal.

In addition to the above variants of the Chinese religion, there are “charity temples” which are lay in character and which

meet in private homes. The religious bureau refer to them as *jihui* (集会) although they may be more aptly called *guohui* (过会) since they are variations on the theme of mutual help associations which have a long history both in and outside China. Their members recognize the validity of Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, and Judaism.

In this paper, the management structure of Chinese religion is discussed under five broad categories of “temples”, defined here as an edifice or place dedicated to the service or worship of a deity or deities. Under this broad definition, some Chinese homes may be considered temples to themselves since within their vicinity are altar(s) displaying gods such as Caishen (财神), Guanyin (观音), and Maitreya (弥勒佛). In Chinese, Miao (庙) is a word which refers to all kinds of Chinese temples especially non-Buddhist ones while those which are more Buddhist are called *si* (寺). While the subsequent discussion is presented under a typology of “temple structures”, namely: 1) home temple; 2) the small built temple; 3) committee temples; 4) the monastic temple; 5) tourist temple; and last but not least, 6) charity temples; in practice, they are often not as discrete as they are made out to be, and their varied physical manifestations could and should be more usefully construed as a continuum of religious practices, oftentimes overlapping.

The Home Temple

The “household idiom” (Chau 2010) of the Chinese religion is essentially a private residence. It happens when a member of the household begins to show gifts of divination, and unusual spiritual powers such as glossolalia or the performance of superhuman feats. Family members will then begin to realize their sibling’s “special talents” and begin to consult him or her with regards to their spiritual needs. The news of the divining “gift” of this member of the family soon spreads to the extended family and soon neighbours also begin to knock at the door. Family members may have to help if the initial trickle of

visitors turns into a stream. Eventually, frequent visitors may inconvenience the family and they may then try to “systematize” the visitation by delegating certain times or days of the week for consultation so that their own schedules may not be compromised. With time, a dedicated room may be assigned, an altar may be set up and a table purchased. Other religious paraphernalia such as a statue or picture of the deity(s), censors, joss-sticks, charm papers, candles, may then be added and what first began as a spontaneous “service” becomes a formal “occupation”. As seekers and a “clientele” begin to arrive from other villages or towns, family members may be pressed to consider the building of a separate structure near their abode and if none is available, they may look for a building either to rent, purchase or build.

There were two mediums, *shenpo* (神婆), Mdm Liu and Madam Yan, whom I visited in Western Shaanxi respectively. Mdm Liu operated from the upper floor of her home, which had little signs of religiosity from the exterior. However, as we climbed the stairs to the second floor there was an altar on which were heaped daily offerings of food, water, incense and appropriate language. She looked like any other person, was very pleasant but has been maimed since youth. When a small crowd of about 10 to 12 people started to form, she began to go into a trance by kneeling before Jiutian Xuannu (九天玄女 Mysterious Maid of the Highest Heavens) who would graciously descend at her request to do service. During the time of entry and exit of the deity, Mdm Liu shook violently and two male members of the household had to restraint her physically, one on either side, in case she fell. As Jiutian Xuannu and now seated on a heavily-built chair, Mdm Liu began to speak with a distinctly different accent to each person (neatly in queue) who knelt in front of her to ask their respective question(s). As she gave the advice, her two assistants would simultaneously scribble some writings on a talisman, made of either cloth or paper. For example, if the oracle responded to a query on illness, there usually would be a prescription given. The assistant

would then advise the client as to what to do with the prescription – either to bring it to the pharmacy, to burn it at the altar or to dilute part of it with the medicine prescribed.

As for Mdm Yan, she was “initially confused” when the “call” came in the 1990’s. She was the third child of five siblings, none of whom were particularly religious, visiting the neighboring temple only occasionally, and mostly during festivals. Before she became a medium at the age of 40, she had had recurring dreams that she was to give her body to Guanyin. These visions interfered with her work as a baker’s assistant. She was eventually dismissed from her job and a close friend then advised her on the vocation of mediumship. Her husband and two children were initially afraid and feared that she would be “lost”, but eventually she managed to overcome their objections. The family has now accepted her as she is, and even assists her during her trances, which take place twice weekly. Clients appear at her household waiting for advice with regards to problems related to money, education, children, etc.

Both mediums sat on specially designated chairs during the trance and meditated in front of altars replete with visuals and statues of deities. Both had low education, never held a steady job in their lives and could only speak in the vernacular. Although of low social status, their special abilities gave them a chance for “respectability” in the village. They did not appear to profess knowledge about religious scriptures or philosophy since what was important to them was not knowledge per se but a belief in the “spirit”, striving to do good, the accumulation of merit and the use of appropriate language. When I enquired about the financial aspect of the enterprise, they were puzzled and explained that money was not the main criteria but that what was important was sincerity, helpfulness and the appeasement of the gods.³ No fees were charged but clients were free to give a donation to offset the cost of maintaining the altar (food, fruits, candles, incense, etc.) if they felt disposed to do so. Clients could also, on their own volition, attend special intercession rituals on the 1st and 15th day of the lunar month.

Both mediums had assistants (family members, the occasional neighbor) to assist them in a trance state, and their helpful tasks included the handling of ritual objects, the wiping of the altar table, assisting in the translation of the oracle and instructing clients on appropriate behavior in the presence of the medium, etc.

The house temple remains alive as long as the divining power is existent. Its operational cost is low and a small number of local patrons is all that is required to keep it going. The temple is a law unto itself, without prior existing power structures, and there is no management pyramid to climb. Mediumship is not normally “taught” but “caught” and there are no liturgies or canonical precepts to imbibe. The medium’s success is based on his or her performance and a skilled medium will attract many, while an ineffective one will soon have to close his/her practice. Some mediums are known to lose their “power” as swiftly as they acquire it and if this be the case, the home ceases to be a temple. Some mediums also relocate and take their temples with them. As a home enterprise, succession is normally passed to a member of the family. However, this is only possible on condition that the predetermined successor has managed to cultivate an affinity with the spirit. If this is not possible, upon the medium’s death or retirement, the home temple may once again be return to private residency or left vacant, sold, or rented to another spirit-medium.

While such home temples are regarded as prime examples of ‘feudal superstition’ by the government, and hence “illegal”, many officials choose not to interfere and close one eye to their presence since they are small non-political concerns, especially if they or their family members happen to be clients of the medium as well. Indeed, during the height of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1971) when statues of deities were smashed or discarded, house temples continued their unobtrusive practices and through word-of-mouth, villagers continued to gather within to perform religious ceremonies.

Small Built (Spirit) Temple

When the home temple becomes too small for a growing clientele, a separate dedicated temple structure, the “small built (spirit) temple,” may be constructed. These have a humble beginning from mud and thatch and may look more like a shrine. Over time, it will have a concrete floor, or brick wall, built from the occasional largesse from grateful clients, and when this results, the place may no longer look like a nondescript residence but more like a “temple” (Overmyer 2009). For one, an altar will predominate on which are placed many visuals and statues of the deity (or deities). The walls, pillars and roof of the small building may be gifted with a paint of red and gold with carvings of mythological animals such as the *pixiu* and the *qilin*.⁴ If the incense burner is free standing, there will usually be a table in front of it with a lamp to light the incense. There may be more than one incense burner, depending on the number of visitors. Holders for stick candles and “wish candles” may also be placed in front of the incense burner.

Such small temples originating from spirit mediumship are owned by a family and may be classified as a small business, in which case they will have to be registered with the authorities. One member is usually chosen as the steward while another may function as the manager, or the two roles may reside in the same member. In Zhangzhou, I met the temple manager, Mr Chu, who informed me that he began his spirit-mediumship as a child of 5, when his grandparents, both of whom were themselves mediums, dreamt that Guangze Zunwang (广泽尊王), the ancestral God of filial piety, had designated him to take over the successorship.⁵ Hence, while his other siblings graduated from middle school, he was only educated up to Elementary Grade 3. On festivals, he took his role as a child medium in trance alongside his parents and grandparents and did his fair share as an altar-lad assistant. He is versed in chanting and ritualistic dance, and has some knowledge of herbal medicine. When his

parents died within a week of each other, he stepped into their shoes not just as the resident medium of the temple but also as its manager. He received help from family members especially on the first and fifteenth day of the lunar calendar when many visitors would visit the temple to pray.

Mr. Chu reported that he also had cousins who were mediums in other temples. While these temples may not be exactly identical in ideological practice to his, this is not so important as much as the fact that they are helpful to each other. At times, the clan may get together to hold bigger and more impressive commemorations of holy days for the villagers. On major festivals such as the birthday of the deity(s), they may enact a makeshift stage for a theatrical performance as well as other ritualistic ceremonies in honor of the deity(ies). In this way, a blood and spiritual bond is created and a “brotherhood” of many spirit-mediums in session together from neighboring temples is not uncommon.

These temples are sustained by donations from worshippers. The main act of worship is the lighting of incense or joss sticks, which are generally provided to worshipers in exchange for a small donation. As congregational membership is non-existent and worshippers are not required to have allegiance to any temple – indeed, many do not have allegiance to any temple at all, but visit different temples for different needs – the manager may also find it prudent to incorporate popular bodhisattvas into the temple such as the Milefo (弥勒佛), the future Buddha, and Shakyamuni (释迦牟尼), the historical Buddha, flanked by Jiayefo (迦叶佛) and Guanyin. There are also nature gods, e.g. gods of soil and grain, the dragon god who manage wind and rain, the five emperors of the five directions, the sun god, and the moon lady, the various powers of the planets and the northern dipper. Sometimes their statues are placed in glass-fronted cabinets, and wooden tables are placed in front of them to hold the religious offerings of fruits and food. Padded cushions for kneeling are usually placed in front of the altar. Each altar or hall of the deity has “merit boxes”

(*gongdexiang* 功德箱) where devotees may place a cash offering if they so desire.

With the growth of the temple, a shrine or two may be added and small appendages to the building constructed. A special room may be dedicated for families who wish to put tablets of their families on a dedicated altar. Here, initial or regular donations may be necessary to “maintain” the ancestral tablets through the offerings of food and prayers on special occasions.⁶ Indeed, some temples may be “private” ones dedicated only to these functions.

An additional service in many smaller temples, especially when the medium is not in attendance, is *qiuqian* (求簽), “seek the deity’s answers through fortune poems”. Here the worshipper uses a set of fortune poems which is done by shaking a container of numbered bamboo slips until one of the slips falls to the group. The number of the slip corresponds to the number of one of the fortune poems and the poem provides the god’s answers to the worshipper’s questions or problems. In busy temples, professional explainers provide explanations of the meaning of the poem, in relation to the worshipper’s problems, for a fee.

As the temple grows, more branches may be formed, some of which are breakaways rather than “legal” representative branches. Breakaways result after the passing of the patriarch and when there is a disagreement as to how a temple is to be run. Here, a sibling or partner in the family operation breaks away and builds another temple either in the same or neighbouring village to practice his or her own version of religiosity. This act, of course, engenders the inevitable acrimony between what are now two competing sects of the same temple. The viability of the new operation will depend not just on whether the breakaway will be able to draw adherents but also keep his own operation intact without generating additional breakaways from his own nascent group. In addition,

when the temple owner loses interest in his “business”, the temple may be abandoned or sold to other operators.

Larger Committee (Priestly) Temples

While the rural temple may be small family or clan-run concerns, larger temples in townships and counties are highly visible affairs where official registration with the authorities become important. Here, one may find prominently displayed on the temple’s noticeboard a certificate of authorization as a place of religious practice (宗教使用场所) alongside a set of regulations banning foreign intervention and control of religious activities and organizations. Such temples are more often run by a committee of unrelated members, most of whom are the elders or respected of the religion. They may run it themselves as a committee (comprising normally a chairperson, vice-chairperson, secretary, treasurer and sub-committee members) with the help of a full-time salaried “steward” to run the day-to-day operations. These committees are not to be taken lightly since they provide a growing range of social and cultural services and infrastructural improvement at the local level whenever central government control or intervention declined. They sponsor religious rites, manage popular communal operas and according to Dean (2009) are akin to “China’s second government”.

Such temples may also employ full or part-time Daoist priest(s). The payment for the priests usually goes to the Head Priest who will then allocate it among his subordinates. Unlike the spirit-mediums who are more concerned with faith, the priest is usually a literate and educated individual who is concerned in performing rituals with some orderliness. Here, priests perform daily rituals before the altar to the principal deity on a schedule that is determined by agreement with the temple managers. The priests are dressed in colorful robes, are involved in coordinated chanting, singing and bowing before the altar with occasional accompaniment by percussion

instruments. Their oratorio-like liturgical performance often provides a solemn and spiritual spectacle for viewers (Chau 2011). Their chanting, often in scriptural language incomprehensible to adherents, creates a calming and spiritual atmosphere which is soothing.

There is another advantage of engaging the clergy as most of them are registered with a branch of the official Daoist association to which they report. This then becomes a way for most temples to gain the necessary legitimacy with the state. Head priests may be expected to meet important visitors and government officials and they are normally appointed by the local Daoist association, which may also get a share of the annual payment paid to the priest. While their presence may be an expensive item in the temple's budget, this is often compensated by the fact that they may be commissioned to perform special "private" ceremonies by devotees. In such cases, the money earned will be split between the priest and the temple's general accounts.

There are a variety of ways to recruit the priests (Yang et al. 2005). One may engage them through a contract arranged through the local Daoist Association which is a sub-branch of the Chinese Daoist Association (CDA) (中国道教协会).⁷ Monks here are graduates of the Quanchen sect with their headquarters in Beijing (白云观, White Cloud Temple). CDA has branches all over China and Quanchen graduates work in state-sponsored institutions and government agencies, having been trained not only in Daoism but also Marxism. Another source of hire is from a local lineage which means that the priest in question has been trained under a specific ritual master and adopted into his or her lineage such as Celestial Masters (神仙). Daoist ritual masters transmit their liturgical texts and practices to their sons and disciples in discrete, local lines of transmission. Some ordination certificates make a reference to Longhushan (龙虎山), the hereditary center of the Zhengyi Tianshi Celestial Masters (正一天师). The system is not too regulated yet and some temple managers or entrepreneurs can move between

temples. Some also gain qualifications to serve in a temple with very minimal training (cf. Yang et al. 2005).

With the secularization of religious activities, there are further opportunities for income generation. For example, “temple fair” activities have recently become major fundraising events for temples. Such fairs are a form of both worship and entertainment and are recognized by provincial authorities as ‘immaterial cultural heritage’ (非物质文化遗产) worthy of preservation. The contents of the temple fairs are different from place to place but generally the following stable features may be discerned: the local opera, shadow-play and story-telling. Additional personages such as guest monks, spirit-mediums, a Chinese orchestra, acrobats and the Lion and Dragon dance troupes are also invited to complement the activities in the temple.

Monastic Temples

While the concept of “priest” is associated with Daoism, the concept of a “monk” is more akin to Buddhism. However, due to the syncretic nature of Chinese religion, it may at times be difficult to differentiate the two and the term may be used interchangeably. For example, some monks may be approached to perform exorcism and dispense charms, in which case he may actually function like a Daoist priest. On the other hand, I have witnessed state-licensed Daoist priests in Baoji performing healing sessions in Buddhist temples and functioning much like a *jitong* (乩童) but without the self-mortification which may accompany such events.

Some monastic temples are on faraway mountain cliffs therefore outside institutional control. However, others which are more accessible are well-known, for example, Mount Tai in the east (1545 m., near Confucius birthplace in Qufu), Hua in the west (2200 m., near Xian), Heng in the north (2017 m.), Nanyue (Hengshan) in the south (1290 m. near Changsha) and Song in the center (1440 m., near Luoyang, south of the Shaolin

monastery). Most of these mountains have multiple peaks and include large scale temples at the bottom as well as numerous hermitage and monasteries perched on mountain tops and built into cliffs. The monks in the mountainous region aim to pursue enlightenment through meditation and learning and in this regard they are different from the monks in the city, whose functions are more ceremonial and consultative.

Monastic temples are those which contain residency and schooling for Buddhist monks. The lowest rank is *shami* (沙弥) or acolyte (an inexperienced monk who has recently entered religion). The next rank is *biqiu* (比丘) (a Buddhist monk as he gains experience). The third is *zhuchi* (主持 or 方丈) or abbot (the superior of an abbey of monks). The administrative staff in a temple include *fangzhang* (方丈) or abbot, *jianyuan* (监院) or monastic manager and *shouzuozuo* (首座) or chief monk. The abbot runs the temple in a patriarchal and authoritarian manner as would the head of a typical Chinese household with a knowledge learnt through apprenticeship from a master which is in turn imparted to his disciples. He controls both the religious and administrative activities and assigns various tasks to his disciples and temple assistants. He is the spiritual guardian, the model of morality and personal behavior and he may be able to lecture on the dharma.

Monastic temples derived income from the provision of religious service. Substantial financial contributions may also be given by grateful worshippers or merchants who have benefitted from the temples as contractors of various services to the monastery. Generally, the temple's relationship to its adherent is based on mutual benefit — where the worshippers enjoy religious service and who in turn will donate some largesse should their prayers be granted. Income for temple maintenance is also available from the practices of purification, exorcism, healing and blessings (for marriages, houses, cars and businesses), as well as from the sale of talismans, amulets, and charms. Like Daoist priests, Mahayana monks are also hired not just for communal sacrifices (*jisi* 祭祀; *fahui* 法会) at local

temples dedicated to the gods of the local pantheon, but also at private funeral and requiem services and other minor rites for individuals and families from which they may receive a fee.

In the last decade, as part of the process of increasing legalization in China, there has been a gradual trend towards the need for fiscal oversight, legal property rights and a more formalized organization subjected to the rules and regulations spelled out in the Buddhist Association of China (中国佛教协会) which is under the Bureau of Religious Affairs.⁸ Hence, larger monastic temples have a part which is administrative and a part which is religious and while monks and nuns may be involved in administration, they are usually confined to the religious sphere. Such temples enjoy the managerial expertise of a lay committee. Here, the chairperson, who is also a Buddhist, is empowered to make decisions after consultations with committee members, subject to the local Buddhist/Daoist association, the first supervising body which is state-controlled and whose administrators include ordained clergy as well as supportive lay followers. In such a scenario, the daily running of the temple (correspondences, records, and coordination) is usually under the purview of the Vice-President and Secretary. The treasurer is concerned with the collection of subscriptions or donations from members. He/she holds the petty cash account and defrays small expenditures incurred by temple, while larger expenditure are approved by the main committee, which are audited. Numerous sub-committees, headed by a sub-leader, help with other tasks such as temple publications, fundraising, and charity work and temple restoration.

Tourist Temples

Tourist temples are managed and controlled by government or business instead of religionists and their religious dimension is overshadowed by other concerns (Chau 2011).⁹ Since the 1990's many new temples have been built, reconstructed or restored not just as a means of cultural self-assertion but also as

a means of revenue generation (Yang et al. 2005). The Shaolin temple in Henan is one temple that draws a steady stream of visitors, most arriving on tour buses, because of its historic significance and its uniqueness as a famous center for martial arts training. Other temples in the mountains are also able to attract visitors for similar reasons. Understandably, these temples are supervised not just by the Religious Affairs Bureau but also by the Department of Tourism. Not so much concerned with religious activities or the creation of a spiritual atmosphere, they are manned by a management interested mainly in revenue and the smooth entertainment of large crowds. Part of the profits are channeled towards restoration and expansion, so that many temples now have a revived and energized look, are open to the public, and offer a wide variety of religious resources (books, charms, herbs, teas, martial training). There are also state-run temples such as the Wild Goose Pagoda in Xi'an (西安市), where the government will tacitly choose the religious leaders who are schooled in the doctrine of Marxism and compliant with governmental supervision. While beautiful, without an active oracle and the mediumistic talents which was the beginning of the whole process, the gods remain lifeless, encased in their museum-like tombs.

Not all entrepreneurial ventures such as these are successful. For example the former home of Chinese saint, Huang Daxian, was originally erected in 1995 to draw tourists and overseas pilgrims (Chan and Lang 2007). As this was not successful, the township officials modified their efforts and tried to draw local visitors instead through the contract-responsibility system. Here, the temple is contracted to a head priest who would be required to pay an agreed rental annually to the committee in return for the right to operate the temple (and to keep surplus revenues). It now depends on the charisma and management skills of the head priest to keep the temple going through the organization of festivities and other religious activities. One popular way of generating a revenue stream for temples is

through the installation of light towers. These towers are circular structures, about three to six feet high placed near the main altar so that the deity's benevolence may radiate over them, implying the blessings and protection provided by the divine forces in the temple. The towers comprise ascending rows of electrically illuminated niches, each of which carries a person's name and date of birth and symbolically represents the presence of those who have purchased niches in the towers. The price for each niche in a light tower varies, depending on whether the niche is in a larger band of niches at the bottom, or a smaller band near the top.

In brief, tourist temples, such as Zhongnanshan Guanyin Chanyuan (终南山观音禅院/) at the foot of Qinling Mountain in Chang'an, are built at the expense of private entrepreneurs and therefore are accountable to the local business company. These are run along the guidelines of modern corporations and defer to the chief investor who has close ties with government officials.¹⁰ Indeed, more and more Chinese Buddhist and Taoist temples are passively packaged with tourist products and some are even listed on the stock market.¹¹

Charity Temples

Charity temples share features of secularity, sectarianism, benevolence and religiosity and are a traditional distinctive feature of traditional Chinese practice dating to the *shantang* (benevolent halls 善堂) and *shanhui* (benevolent associations 善会) of the Ming dynasty. They take place in homes or offices, and are relatively democratic as membership is non-hierarchical and without a central authority. Preferring spontaneity and innovation rather than stylized liturgies, they are basically lay gatherings with no professional clergy. They are opportunistic, non-dogmatic, consultative groups of spiritually-minded people. They have a pragmatic "do it because it works" and "seek spiritual guidance because it pays." While some have charismatic leaders, many do not. They are basically grassroots

movements, well-organized with members passing information to one another through an informal network. There is no national umbrella for such organizations as these are centered in homes and therefore do not require any registration with the authorities.¹² While some may be registered, most are not. For example, the Beijing-based *Yidanxuetang* (一耽学堂), a non-profit association, is legal and carries out a number of activities such as rites and ceremonies to honor Confucius, study tours in the countryside, editing word and charitable acts (Billoud 2011).¹³

Charity temples are basically mutual help organizations, philanthropic, and benevolent in nature. They share a set of Confucian ethical standards and moral obligations such as the Hall of Spreading Benevolence (广瑞堂) established by social elites in Tianjin in 1878 (cf. Laliberte 2011). The members are encouraged to follow morality practices such as the “five ethics” and “eight virtues” (from Confucianism), say daily prayer two or three times a day, attend religious classes, and chant scriptures. Their constitution lists objectives such as the promotion of morals and values irrespective of race, color and creed, and the worship and reverence of founders of all major religions. Good deeds are more important than priestly words and some of these temples have contributed to the building of schools, old folks home and the running of free clinics for the poor.

Charity temples are also religious in nature since their dedication to the common good stems basically from religious motives. Palmer (2011) terms them as “salvationist” while Duara (2003) refers to them as “redemptive societies” as they are influenced by an ancient millenarian and syncretistic tradition and advocate the salvation of both the self and the world. Rather than being world-denying or other-worldly, they are affirmative, multiracial and multi-religious. Many practice divination, spirit-writing, healing and ancestor veneration. On special occasions, an entranced medium may write out messages believed to originate from the patron saint of the association.

These messages include commentaries on Confucian and Daoist classics, stories of karmic retribution from Buddhism, descriptions of spirit-journeys to otherworldly realms, moral exhortations, and theoretical treatises on points of religious doctrine and cultivation. These commentaries may be discussed in regular group meetings that resemble a combination of Protestant preaching and Sunday school. Studied by group members, they may be collected and published for distribution to the public as “morality books” (善书).

The porous, essentially inclusive and undogmatic nature of charity temples attracts many adherents. While this may explain its strength in the several home gatherings I have attended, these associations are also highly sectarian in nature. Its openness and flexibility means that certain groups may add new ideas which may not agree well with all members, leading a section to break away, since in the very first instance, there are only very general principles to adhere to. For example, while the Xiantian Dao (先天道) sect claim to represent a Way (*dao* 道) that transcends and unites all other through the unity of the “five religions (Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam), the group is paradoxically divided into various “breakaway” subgroups with variations in liturgy, organizational structure and doctrine. Its deviational offsprings, such as the Tongshan She (同善社 “Society of Goodness”), Tian De (天德教 “Sacred Religion of Celestial Virtue”) and Tien Di (天帝教 “Religion of the Lord of Heaven”), Daoyuan (道院 “Sanctuary of the Tao”), and the Ci Hui Tang (慈惠堂 “Compassion Society”), continue to resemble the mother body through their non-ascriptive voluntary path of salvation; and an embodied experience through healing.¹⁴

Dissension commonly occurs at the passing of the founder or charismatic leader or sub-leader. For example, in the case of the Yiguan Dao (一贯道, “the Pervasive Truth”) at the time of its patriarch, Chang T’ien-jen’s death in 1947, the nominal leadership passed through the hands of the Matriarch Madam Sun Hui Ming.¹⁵ There were opposition to her leadership and the

group eventually split into a number of separate branches, all of them developing more or less independently with many making their way to Hong Kong, Taiwan, the United States and Southeast Asia establishing their own versions of the Yíguàn Dào. Today, Yíguàn Dào remains a family of closely related but autonomous branch associations.

These associations are not legally registered in China but many continue to exist in private homes and one must be invited to attend its private sessions since there are no public announcements of its meetings. It is not very clear how these associations are organized since ordinary members themselves often do not know how it is run, professing, when asked, that “names are unimportant” – it is only the teachings (and the good deeds) to be passed to others that are important. Indeed, most grassroots members do not know the official names of their groups or the names of the founder-members of the group. However, we may assume that among each active group are informally elected chairperson and secretary, treasurer, and a list of other sub-committee members, much as one may expect of a legally registered society. The owner of the home in which it is held is usually a leader or sub-leader of the group and “a descendant of famous masters.” The informal management usually comprises the largest donors and or the most successful teachers of the group.

Some of these groups may on special occasions elect to meet in a neighboring temple to worship. Sometimes, one group or several groups may combine their resources to build their own dedicated committee temple and in this way start life afresh as a legally registered entity.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to unravel the diversity and complexity in the emergence and organization of Chinese temples with particular focus on their leadership and succession procedures. It is clear that religiosity is alive and well in

mainland China and that China is, in reality, a religious state and Chinese society a religious one (cf. Lagerway 2010). While all local religious groups are monitored strictly by national and state organizations under the supervision of the Religious Affairs Bureau of the State Council, there is a great regional variation in the degree of support and cooperation between these agencies and religious institutions. In some provinces, such as Sichuan and Hubei, Chinese religionists are made very welcome and religious activities are supported with enthusiasm. In other provinces, such as Shaanxi and Hunan, politicians tend to be wary of religious organizations and a relatively restrictive mode prevails.

I will now conclude by drawing comparisons from other religions, not least to add scope to the discussion but also to illuminate the practice of leadership and succession in the field of comparative religion. Here, the Bahá'í Faith is given particular attention not least because it emphasizes the spiritual unity of all humankind, that diversity of race and culture are seen as worthy of appreciation and acceptance, and that all major religions stem from the same spiritual source; but also because this journal is centered on its scholarly study.

Succession is a problem with many religions and the Chinese religion is not an exception to the rule. In our survey, sectarian divisions abound, in various syncretic forms within the Chinese religion. While temples may be sold, restarted, closed down, and expanded, according to changing social-economic circumstances, the greatest test of viability usually comes at the time when the founder or patriarch/matriarch passes away. At such occasions, there is often a power struggle and the temple may be split into two or more factions. This phenomenon is not peculiar to Chinese religion but is common in all major religions. For example, Islam was split after the death of the Prophet Mohammad between the followers of Abu Bakr (Sunni) and those of Ali bin Abu Talib (Shia). Christianity has seen even more fractures even before the well-known split of Martin Luther from the Catholic fold in the 16th century.¹⁶ Chinese

religion has had a long history of factionalisms and disunity. Hence, the establishment of the Buddhist and Daoist associations by the Chinese government should not simply be seen as a measure of social control but also as a means to promote the public image of the Chinese religion. For example, both the Taoist and Buddhist associations aim to banish the superstitious, mystical magical elements of Chinese religion and to standardize and consolidate its teachings so as to allow it to move with the times.¹⁷ Successorship problems are often due to the lack of clearly written succession codes. In contrast, the Bahá'í Faith is predicated upon clear and detailed instructions within its own sacred text. Explicit instructions concerning successorship are also given. Bahá'u'lláh clearly named a successor in the *Book of the Covenant*, which also serves as his *Last Will and Testament*. There is no such authoritative document in the Chinese religion and, as we have already recounted, any individual who feels spiritually endowed can start his own home temple or join a religious order as a means of exercising religious power.

An examination of the management structure of Chinese religion shows it to be run much like a family firm. Hence, despite guidelines laid down by the Daoist and Buddhist Associations and the Bureau of Religious Affairs, Chinese temples are still not quite regarded as civic institutions with activities accountable to the public. Leadership remains basically patriarchal and based on the Confucian "familial" structure where the eldest member, usually male, prevails. In monastic temples, the clergy is organized like a family and promotion within the order depends on the whims and fancies of the chief monk, the patriarch. In committee temples, although the chairperson has to consult his committee before making a decision, more often than not the committee members will defer to his wishes or say what the "head" of the temple wishes to hear. While large temples may theoretically confine the Head monk to the role of religious specialist in line with modern management principles, it must be noted that many

monks continue to assume the status of the administrative chairperson, while nominating religious duties to others under his charge. Even when *de jure* power is held by an appointed lay member chair, it is the head monk who is the *de facto* head of the temple, as he is often regarded, deferentially, as the “grandfather”. Similarly, in the small built temple, the temple manager is the “patriarch” (or “matriarch”) of decision making whether or not he is the spirit medium or a manager of the spirit medium. It is often the tendency of the leader to elect a successor who will allow him or her to keep their influence and legacy. Even in relatively democratic charity temples, the elections of key “senior” members are done through prayers and planchette divination. The problem is that in most scenarios, these key senior members are themselves planchette mediums or have a relationship to planchette mediums through which they may easily influence nominations. In contrast to the above practice of familial autocratic leadership, the Bahá’í Faith is administered by a unique combination of freely elected councils and a complementary institution of appointed advisers which operates at the local, regional, national, and international levels. There is no class of ecclesiastics or clergy in the Bahá’í Faith.

According to Mao Zedong, “women hold up half the sky” (妇女能顶半边天), but I saw few women in leadership position in temples other than that of the home temple. There appears to be a glass ceiling for women temple leaders, be it in the small built, committee, monastic, tourist and/or charity temples. Yet temple women do a tremendous amount of background work, such as coordination with patrons and worshippers, administrative, secretarial and domestic duties and assisting the monks in ritual service. Bounkenborg (2012) has recounted a scenario where males are openly seen in “frontline roles” in the temple fair of a local dragon deity in Fanzhuang, Hebei, while female spiritual mediums are doing “background” ritualistic duties in the home. This “glass ceiling” amidst the rise of global feminism is not peculiar only to Chinese religion but also a current challenge faced by other major religions such as

Christianity, Islam and Hinduism where the patriarchal culture, social norms, economic marginalization and political inequalities pose barriers that affect women and reduce their access to employment opportunities and religious education (Madimbo 2012). In contrast, Bahá'u'lláh has exalted the status of women and allowed them to hold positions on both the local and national governing councils though a democratic electoral system. There are also women on its advisory arm, namely in their roles as Counselors and Auxiliary Board Members.

Both the Bahá'í and Chinese temples are alike in the sense that both have no pulpits where sermons by clerics can be given. There is no "congregation" such as those found in churches or mosques and no communal recitation of prayers. However, while worshippers who come to a Bahá'í temple may have simply come into the central hall to sit down quietly and reflect on their own thoughts or on the world's sacred scriptures, or on special occasions to listen to the singing of voices on scriptural passages, this is not the practice in Chinese temples. In visiting a Chinese temple, there are many "tasks" that a believer is supposed to perform, such as lighting the joss-sticks, the offering of food and flowers, the burning of talismans, and the worship and recitation of prayers and mantras at various altar tables. There may also be the consulting of Chinese fortune sticks and perhaps a queue to consult the temple medium.

Since there is a tendency of wholeness and a sense to look towards the relativity of particulars within the universal totality, one finds more tolerance than dogmatic determination and ideological opposition where membership criteria are concerned. There is, for example, no central figure as a point of reverence; instead there is an array of gods, deities, ghosts and demons which the believer may adopt according to his individual preference. Hence the individual is relatively free to believe what he or she chooses and is free to move from temple to temple according to his or her needs. In contrast, the Bahá'í community is predicated upon clear and detailed instructions which exist within its sacred text. Bahá'ís define their members

as those who have accepted Bahá'u'lláh as the messenger of God for this age, and this often requires that the member sign a declaration card to the effect for administrative purposes, including also the electoral roll of the annual election of their governing bodies.

The fact that the Chinese religion is generally non-exclusive and temples cannot bind worshippers to a particular temple nor their exclusion of worship at other temples, has led it to lose many of its members to other religions such as Christianity, in recent years in China. This is aggravated by the fact that there is little need to learn complex texts or rituals (or to relearn them when switching to another temple). There is a tendency in the Chinese religion to be ambiguous, ambivalent and indeterminate in the name of social harmony. In contrast, the Bahá'í Faith (like Christianity, Judaism and Islam), finds it important to organize schools and classes for their believers and the children of their believers as a means of familiarizing them with their religious texts and scriptures. Hence, there are a lot more social capital at stake in these religions, making it more difficult for adherents to leave the religion. In contrast, in Chinese temple worship, little or no attempt is made to entrench the adherent and his or her offspring within a particular temple or religious ideology.

I believe that it is inevitable that Chinese religionists will soon have to grapple seriously with problems of internal governance as a result of the increased demand for greater transparency brought about by mass education, modernization and technological advances. To ensure their continued viability, temple management will have to come to terms with managerial challenges that have become obvious in our discussion, namely, the challenge of unity in succession disputes; sectarian divisions in various syncretic forms within the Chinese religion; the limitations of patriarchal autocratic control and public accountability; of issues relating to gender equality; and the continued loss of significant numbers of youthful members to “external religions” such as Christianity.

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NOTES

- ¹ This research was made possible by a grant from the Centre of Chinese Studies, SIM University, Singapore, of which I am totally grateful.
- ² Abdu'l Bahá, Star of the West, vol 13, 185.
- ³ Laliberte et al. 2011 recalls the story of Lin Dong, a spiritual healer who had a vision of the 12th century deity Jigong (济公), a popular monk with magical powers who has been worshipped for generations in Chinese literature and legend. As a worshipper of Jigong, Lin Dong soon discovered that he had inherited the healing powers of the deity. He managed to cure many and his grateful clients contributed money which he used to help the poor.
- ⁴ The *pixiu* (貔貅) is a guardian animal standing for fair play and right while the *Qilin* (麒麟) is the Chinese unicorn. Other mythological creatures which decorate temple structures are the dragon and the phoenix.
- ⁵ This deity is traced to one Guo Zhong fun, born to a poor family in 923 CE in Shishan, Na'an, Fujian. Guangze Zunwang's filial piety and ability to do miraculous deeds as a child led to his deification after his death at the tender age of 16.
- ⁶ I have seen temples with altars with about 100 tablets belonging to about 10 families.
- ⁷ In Xian city, I was able to visit and interview temple personages in Ba Xian Au (八仙庵)

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- ⁸ It was founded in 1953 at the urging of followers of Taixu, (1890-1947) from the Linji school of Chan Buddhism in Xiao Jiùhuá Temple (小九華寺/小九华寺) in Suzhou.
- ⁹ This is not to say that my other categories of temple do not attract tourists. Indeed, the Shaolin temple, the Lingyin Temple in Puto and the Buddhist temple Nanputuo and Wudan, Qinchengshan on the Daoist side; as well as some large Mazu committee temples in Fujian also attract tourism
- ¹⁰ See <http://baike.baidu.com/view/2427500.htm#2>.
- ¹¹ See the following articles on tourist temples which are listed on the Chinese stock exchange:
http://360doc.com/content/12/0928/13/8209053_238616381.shtml and
http://mzb.com.cn/zgmzb/html/2012-08/14/content_87234.htm
- ¹² Some examples are The Red Swastika Society (世界紅卍字會), founded in China in 1922, as the philanthropic branch of the Daode she ((道德社)) or the Daoyuan Not legally registered in China, it is however thriving in the diasporic communities of Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore.
- ¹³ Their legality may be due to their more subdued call of a “cultural renaissance” rather than that of “salvation for the world”.
- ¹⁴ In brief, the sub-sects are variations on the same theme and one way to enhance their distinctiveness from one another is the use of different names to refer to the supreme mother deity. For example, in the *T’ung-shan She*, it is referred to as the “Venerable Mother of Limitless Heaven” (*Wuji Laomu*), in the *Tz’u-hui Tang* as the “Golden Mother of the Jasper Pool” (*Yao-ch’ih Chin-mu*), and as the “Unborn Sacred Mother” (*Wusheng Shengmu*) (cf. Palmer: 2011).
- ¹⁵ Yiguan Dao was founded in 1930 by Chang T’ien-jn (1889-1947) in Shantung. It incorporates elements not just from Confucianism, Daosim and Buddhism but also Christianity and Islam. Currently, it is banned in China but this has not kept it from practicing through different names such as The Confucius-Mencius Society, The Morality Society, etc. They have also been called the *Zhenli Tiandao* (真理天道, The True Celestial Tao).
- ¹⁶ Even more tightly knit Christian communities such as the Mormons found themselves embroiled in a succession dispute which resulted in several distinct branches of the congregation after the passing of their founder-prophet Joseph smith in 1844.
- ¹⁷ See <http://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/> (the Buddhist Association of China) and http://www.taoist.org.cn/webfront/webfront_frontPage.cgi (Chinese Taoist Association)

Finding the Trace of the Traceless Friend

Reflection on Bahá'í Scholarship as a Journey in the Valley of Search

Wolfgang A. Klebel

Introduction

In this paper the attempt is made to shed some light at Bahá'í Scholarship from the First Valley of the Seven Valleys of Bahá'u'lláh, the Valley of Search. This Valley ends with the words that were chosen as title for this paper:

From the Valley of Search:

And if, by the help of God, he findeth on this journey a trace of the traceless Friend, and inhaleth the fragrance of the long-lost Joseph from the heavenly messenger, he shall straightway step into THE VALLEY OF LOVE and be dissolved in the fire of love. (SVFV 7)¹

The combination of finding a “trace” of a “traceless friend” indicates the mysteriousness and complexity of this task, and introduces us into the mystical realm where words are used to describe what is impossible to define, and what can only be described in opposing concepts, which indicate an integral reality and unity behind these words. The friend is found when his fragrance is inhaled, when a trace is found and the finding is a process which never ends, a journey which cannot be concluded in a rational and factual way. It can only be a nearness that is ephemeral like a fragrance, yet it is real and even

more real than physical reality. It is described as finding a trace of somebody who does not leave a trace, who is traceless. It can easily be seen by this ending of the Valley of Search that we will have to be concerned to remain in the ambience of this mystical description when carefully finding one of the many possible interpretations and then translating these mystical concepts into common language.

Through this conundrum with no solution, in this question with no answer, a mystery is expressed that leads to a truth that transcends logic and reason. Yet, it is not unreasonable, neither is it illogical, actually, it is more and deeper and needs to be experienced, leading to a totally new vision of reality. The reflections presented here are certainly not comprehensive because they are exceedingly limited for two reasons, one is that the Words of Manifestations are inexhaustible, and the other is that these thoughts are subjective and only represent what this writer has experienced and found in an attentive reading of this Tablet. Another limitation of this paper is the fact that only selected passages of this text can be deeply reflected upon and other sentences will be commented on with less depth in order to stay within the frame of this investigation.

The introductory section of the Seven Valleys closes with the following words, indicating that the purpose of this Book is “*that every man may thereby win his way to the summit of realities, until none shall contemplate anything whatsoever but that he shall see God therein.*” (SVFV 1)²

Two considerations stand out here that will be guiding ideas for this paper. One is the fact that this Tablet is written so *that every man may thereby win his way to the summit of reality*. In other words, this Tablet will open for everybody a new and higher way to understand reality. The other thought is equally important namely that this reality is such that it is revealing God, so that God can be seen *therein*. Consequently, it should not be surprising that the reflections presented in this paper are

not necessarily consonant with modern ideas of scholarship; rather, they will present a new understanding of it.

This new understanding was presented in a letter about Bahá'í Scholarship, written on behalf of the Bahá'í Universal House of Justice, October 7, 1980, presented here in three parts:

The combination of absolute loyalty to the Manifestation of God and His Teachings, with the searching and intelligent study of the Teachings and history of the Faith which those Teachings themselves enjoin, is a particular strength of this Dispensation.

This searching after truth in the Teachings of the Faith is the first of the obligations of a Bahá'í scholar and it is combined with absolute loyalty to the Manifestation of God. This is distinguished from the theology of previous dispensations where extremes of blind literality are opposed by an extreme position of doubts.

In past Dispensations the believers have tended to divide into two mutually antagonistic groups: those who held blindly to the letter of the Revelation, and those who questioned and doubted everything. Like all extremes, both these can lead into error.

What most distinguishes the Bahá'í scholar from other theologians is the “unfettered search after truth,” which has to be executed with intelligence and understanding, it has to admit the possibility of error and consequently needs to be marked by maturity and forbearance. Disunity and discord must be avoided by a humble understanding of the limited ability of the scholar. The letter of the Universal House of Justice continues in quoting Shoghi Effendi.

The beloved Guardian has written that “The Bahá'í Faith ... enjoins upon its followers the primary duty of an unfettered search after truth...”. Bahá'ís are called upon

to follow the Faith with intelligence and understanding. Inevitably believers will commit errors as they strive to rise to this degree of maturity, and this calls for forbearance and humility on the part of all concerned, so that such matters do not cause disunity or discord among the friends.³

This statement raises the question how can the “unfettered search after truth” be combined with “absolute loyalty to the Manifestation of God.” This is a crucial question that will be dealt with throughout this paper. This is a question that all Bahá’í scholars have to face, the question if the search for unfettered truth must lead towards disloyalty to the Administrative Order of the Faith. A relative high number of Bahá’í scholars were unable to solve this problem and came to the tragic conclusion to have to leave the Faith; some even became outspoken enemies of the Faith. Bahá’u’lláh’s words in the Valley of Search are expected to give us the answer to this question, which deals with the philosophical, cultural and religious conviction of the seeker, and how that relates to the possibility of an unfettered search after truth.

How this unfettered search can be executed without conflict and in loyalty to the Manifestation will be answered briefly here and then explained at length. The answer is in the statement of the question, even an unfettered search depends on the preconditions and premises of the search. In simple words, if I search in a place where the item to be found is not, I cannot find it. In any search, in any travel, we must be at the right point of departure, in order to go where we wish to go. As will be explained below it is the issue of the hermeneutic circle, every question, and every search starts with a foreknowledge that determines its outcome. For example, if my understanding of the world is strictly materialistic, no matter how much I search I will never find God in this physical world, especially if I make the assumption that what cannot be placed in space and time and be counted, does not exist. In that case, any concept

of transcendence, of the spiritual or of God is excluded and cannot be found.

The following topics will be dealt with in this reflection on the Valley of Search. Throughout these investigations the question of unfettered search for truth versus loyalty to the faith will be constantly kept in mind and will form the background of these reflections.

1. Preconditions of search
2. Independent Investigation and the role of the heart, culture and tradition
3. How to deal with distractions
4. The standard of Majnún, *seek her everywhere*
5. The exclusivity of search and sacrificing everything for it
6. Seeking the truth in *every country*, in *every mind* and in *every soul*

This will lead the seeker into the next valley, the Valley of Love on the journey to find a *Trace of the Traceless Friend*. It is important that the scholar realizes that it is only a trace of the truth that he is able to communicate to others, and that makes his teaching valuable. On the other hand, this trace is the truth – even though it is not the absolute truth – it is only the truth that is available today, the truth that can be found in the investigation of the scholar.

Searching for the trace of somebody who leaves no trace, i.e., is traceless, is certainly testing the patience of any scholar which is indicated in the next paragraph where it is said; that *the steed of this Valley is patience*.

Even if he searches a *hundred thousand years* in patience and devotion, he never will reach the final truth, which can be compared with the description of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh as a limitless ocean. The scholar needs to ever be aware in

humility that he remains at the shores of this ocean; he can only step into it.

When considering that the Valley of Search is the first valley the wayfarer must pass to reach his goal, we must understand that the study of the Writings, that scholarship is only the first of the Seven Valleys, the first stride; a believer has to make in his path. Contrary to all other previous religions, the Bahá'í scholar is, therefore, not in a privileged position, he is not superior to any other believer. He is the one who starts on the first level in the Path of God like anybody else. He might be specialized and therefore especially able to find things others might miss. On the other hand he should never forget that it is not scholarship or human learning, but purity of the heart, which is needed to understand the Revelation, as Bahá'u'lláh has stated.

The understanding of His words and the comprehension of the utterances of the Birds of Heaven are in no wise dependent upon human learning. They depend solely upon purity of heart, chastity of soul, and freedom of spirit. This is evidenced by those who, today, though without a single letter of the accepted standards of learning, are occupying the loftiest seats of knowledge; and the garden of their hearts is adorned, through the showers of divine grace, with the roses of wisdom and the tulips of understanding. Well is it with the sincere in heart for their share of the light of a mighty Day! (KI 210)

Therefore, the scholar will never be the Priest or Mulláh like in the Islamic community or the Theologian like in Christianity, who stands above the regular believers because of his knowledge and understanding of the revelation. While doing more in this area of search than most people, as far as his scholarship is concerned, he is studying only in the first Valley and needs to progress personally through all the Seven Valleys. Otherwise his research might only be touching the surface. Keeping up the search but not proceeding through all the valleys could be

compared to the tinkling cymbal of St. Paul (1 Cor. 13; 1-3), who stresses the need for charity, just like here, after the valley of Search follows the Valley of Love.

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

Therefore, according to Bahá'u'lláh, after the Valley of Search the wayfarer must pass the Valley of Love in order to come to the Valley of Knowledge and only after that will he reach the Valley of Unity with the Friend. This process is an essential feature of the mystic path, which any seeker and any scholar must pursue; all these elements need to be considered when trying to reflect on any part of the Seven Valleys. Additionally, this process of seven steps should not be understood as a time bound process; it is an internal and spiritual process as Bahá'u'lláh stated at the end of the Seven Valleys, where he said:

These journeys have no visible ending in the world of time, but the severed wayfarer – if invisible confirmation descend upon him and the Guardian of the Cause assist him – may cross these seven stages in seven steps, nay rather in seven breaths, nay rather in a single breath, if God will and desire it. And this is of “His grace on such of His servants as He pleaseth.”⁴ (SVFV 41)

Bahá'u'lláh often describes the truth in its diversity because of the limitation of men, but when the wayfarer passes the world of denial he can reach the world of Unity and Diversity, the world of Limitation and Detachment as it is stated in the Book of Certitude:

Please God, that we avoid the land of denial, and advance into the ocean of acceptance, so that we may perceive, with an eye purged from all conflicting elements, the worlds of unity and diversity, of variation and oneness, of limitation and detachment, and wing our flight unto the highest and innermost sanctuary of the inner meaning of the Word of God. (KI 60)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá has interpreted this principle when He talked about the way of understanding the limited from the unlimited, or the lower level of reality from the higher.

Now as to the infinite Power that knoweth no limitations; limitation itself proveth the existence of the unlimited, for the limited is known through the unlimited, just as weakness itself proveth the existence of power, ignorance the existence of knowledge, poverty the existence of wealth. Without wealth there would be no poverty, without knowledge no ignorance, without light no darkness. Darkness itself is a proof of the existence of light for darkness is the absence of light.

(TAF 20)

Without spiritual Unity there could not be Diversity, or to say it philosophically, without the Whole there could not be any Parts. In the same way it can be stated that without parts there would not be any whole. Obviously, in this opposition the polar concepts constitute each other. Considering the Integral Whole (das “Integrale Ganze” in German⁵), one could say that unity in diversity is just the other side of the same coin. The consequences of this principle of Unity in Diversity, as

mentioned here, towards understanding philosophy and especially ontology cannot be pursued further here, but is certainly of great importance.

This consideration is extremely important, because every other kind of research which uses a methodology based on a materialistic and reductionistic understanding of reality will not find anything that is described in this tablet and is, therefore, not only useless but destined to fail. A scholar may use the methodology of material research in this area, because he is trained and educated that way, and he might not even be conscious of this. Often this will lead to consequences that are destructive and will unquestioningly come to results that contradict what is expressed in this Tablet. Therefore, the premises and presuppositions of any research need to be kept in mind and need to be further explored below.

Prerequisites of Search

In the first verse of this Valley of Search, Bahá'u'lláh presents the following preconditions required of the wayfarer who starts his search. The seeker must be aware of the following:

- He must use the steed of patience
- He needs to avoid downheartedness and faltering
- He should be strengthened by Service
- He will need to go from heedlessness to the realm of being
- He should not be held back by any bond
- He must not be deterred by counsel

In the beginning of the mystical writings of the Valleys of Search, Bahá'u'lláh begins with this remarkable statement giving the reader a trace of what to expect.

From the Valley of Search:

The steed of this Valley is patience; without patience the wayfarer on this journey will reach nowhere and attain no goal.

Patience is required for this enterprise of scholarship, of searching; patience is the vehicle, the steed and mount, which carries the wayfarer to his goal. It is interesting that patience and forbearance are here mentioned as accelerating the search, like the use of a horse will speed up any travel. Yet, patience is the opposite of impatient zeal and eagerness, which are seemingly the forces promoting speed. This seeming contradiction, that a patient approach will speed up the travel more than the speediest travel leads us patiently to the goal. On the other hand, extreme impatient behavior, will never lead anywhere.

Any eager and hasty attempt to reach his goal is excluded here. The zeal for scientific success and the anxious effort that creates competition among scholars must be avoided, as it would *reach nowhere and attain no goal*. This could be compared with the Freudian statement that warns the analyst not to be eager in striving for cure, since such “therapeutic zeal” does not lead to a successful therapy. It is, rather, counterproductive. The patience needed here is further explained in the next sentence from the Kitáb-i-Íqán, in His tablets and the Hidden Words:

He must never seek to exalt himself above any one, must wash away from the tablet of his heart every trace of pride and vain-glory, must cling unto patience and resignation, observe silence and refrain from idle talk.

(KI 193)

It behoveth whosoever hath set his face towards the Most Sublime Horizon to cleave tenaciously unto the

cord of patience, and to put his reliance in God, the Help in Peril, the Unconstrained. (TB 212)⁶

48. O SON OF MAN!

For everything there is a sign. The sign of love is fortitude under My decree and patience under My trials.
(HW)

From the Valley of Search:

Nor should he ever be downhearted; if he strive for a hundred thousand years and yet fail to behold the beauty of the Friend, he should not falter.

It could easily be seen that such an attitude is making a Bahá'í scholar unique in modern academic circles, where success is related to production and is judged by the prevailing philosophical and political prejudices, so that true and unfettered search is most of the time unacceptable and often censured, when it contradicts accepted standards. When patience is required not only as a precondition to search but also as the carrying supposition of the unfettered search of the scholar, the opposite condition becomes not only ineffective, but is most of the time an active hindrance, leading to impatience and to a superficial acceptance of something as truth, which is not properly and patiently researched. Consequently, any research without this steed of patience is suspect, is unscientific and leads nowhere, or most of the time this "nowhere" is error and falsity, is half-truth and delusion of truth.

Another quality, this patience gives the scholar, is the fact that he needs to avoid being downhearted, being depressed and giving up. As long as he rides his steed of patience he can go on forever with his search and never give up, because the traces of traceless friend will become manifest at the right time. This attitude required by Bahá'u'lláh for the search is based on trust, is based on the certitude that the search is not dependent on the

marginal ability of the researcher, but is supported and guided by the beauty of the Friend, Who has promised guidance on the path the scholarly pursuit is based on.

What this means in the practice of research is a trust in the divine providence, that the right ideas, the proper sources and the often accidental circumstances of researching will be guided and will neither depend on the ingenuity of the scholar nor on his effort and eagerness. What is required most of all is the ability to accept and listen to the sources and to the people and often to seemingly accidental happenings that inspire the student of wisdom.

Approaching scholarship when being carried along by patience is giving access and openness to the truth to appear, enables the student to see and notice the truth and allows him to see with the *new eye*, *the new ear*. The message he hears from the Word of God, the truth he sees in the world of Creations will penetrate into his *new heart* and then become conscious in his mind, giving him a *new mind*, a new ability to express the truth he has seen and heard.

Then will the manifold favors and outpouring grace of the holy and everlasting Spirit confer such new life upon the seeker that he will find himself endowed with a new eye, a new ear, a new heart, and a new mind.

That allows him to see the universe, nature and science in a new light and brings certitude of a new kind and station.

He will contemplate the manifest signs of the universe, and will penetrate the hidden mysteries of the soul. Gazing with the eye of God, he will perceive within every atom a door that leadeth him to the stations of absolute certitude. He will discover in all things the mysteries of Divine Revelation, and the evidences of an everlasting Manifestation. (GWB 267)

Another question is the length of this search and when the goal is reached. What could be the meaning of the statement of Bahá'u'lláh, when He wrote “*if he strive for a hundred thousand years and yet fail.*” What does Bahá'u'lláh mean when talking about 100,000 years of searching, yet failing?

It is clear that such a number is more than a hyperbole for a long search. Even saying for hundred years would be an exaggeration for what any scholar possibly could do, hundred thousand years are not simply an exaggeration, this number must be indicating something different. What is meant here? Is it talking about a search for eternity? Is it the progress of humanity and not the individual researcher? All of these interpretations and many others are possible, this writer prefers another one. Normally, in any material search we go from searching to finding and then having, possessing whatever we were searching for. Even in our life when we have a life-long search for example for a profession, for a spouse and other serious goals, we hopefully end up with finding what we looked for, with achieving our goals at work or finding a spouse we can love and behold.

Obviously, in the search proposed in the Seven Valleys there is no clear definable and reachable goal present. One reason is obvious, what we search for is beyond reaching, the Beauty of the Friend, the path to God does not have an end, is inexhaustible and in some ways unknown and unreachable.

What is the solution to this hundred thousand year of searching, which is explained as failing and not coming to an end? One answer that comes to mind is this: the searching is not a searching for a goal that would end the search, but that the search itself is the goal and, therefore, it cannot end; or in other words, the end is in the search and we are not expected to have a reachable goal, or the goal is so far away, even beyond any reach that we never can attain it and yet, searching for it is all what we must and can do.

This vision of an endless yet meaningful search will give the Bahá'í scholar a different approach to his final quest and all the studies and research efforts are then seen from a higher point of view. They become relative to the real search and the same happens to all findings the scholar might achieve; they will never become the source of pride and feeling of superiority over any fellow searcher, even of the non-scholarly type. When the final goal of search is the unknown, the infinite, or absolute, all of which is beyond reach, then the relative differences between searchers become minimal and must be neglected, because they make no difference in the search effort.

Other conditions for the true seeker are added in the first paragraph in the beginning of the valley of search. The scholar who searches for truth needs to do this in the way of service and he must stay away from heedlessness. Additionally, she needs to be independent and not held to anyone and should not be influenced by critical and bad counsel.

From the Valley of Search:

In their search, they have stoutly girded up the loins of service... (SVFV 3)

Here another thought is introduced into the process of search that is the value of service in the relation to the search. As stated before, usually searching ends in finding and then in sharing the findings with others, which is a service and the function of this process is what distinguishes the scholar. This sharing is the service the scholar provides. What about a search that does not have a determined finding, a search that is ongoing and never ending? How to share what is not yet or not definitely found? It appears that such a sharing requires humility because there is no pride in finding, there is only service in continuing searching and sharing and communicating this kind of searching to others.

What the scholar finds is only a new step forward in understanding; there is no absolute truth to be found and what is found is relative in relation of further searching and finding. With this attitude the scholar will communicate this ongoing searching to the pupil and will consequently elevate the pupil to the level of a fellow searcher, and the unity of searching is the goal, not the finding. Actually this unity of all fellow searchers requires that the scholar listens to everybody, as it is stated later on in this Valley of Search so eloquently.

The service of the scholar is not in teaching the uneducated, the nonprofessional, but in sharing this new form of search which elevates every student of the Writings into the state of a fellow searcher. In this way searching and scholarship becomes consultation, consultation with every fellow searcher and the true consultation consists in listening and accepting any opinion, without prejudice, especially not the prejudice of the learned towards the uneducated. This consideration is preparing us to understand what is said later about where to search and where to find.

From the Valley of Search:

In the next sentence the wayfarers

... seek at every moment to journey from the plane of heedlessness into the realm of being. No bond shall hold them back, and no counsel shall deter them. (SVFV 4)

It is remarkable that Bahá'u'lláh opposes the plane of heedlessness with the realm of being. Heedlessness is lack of care and negligence; both are not only moral concepts but attitudes that affect intellectual honesty and rational integrity. The search is not an “either/or”; it is a process, a journey, which everyone has to go through. We all are wayfarers in this Valley of Search that leads us from heedlessness, from carelessness and negligence into the realm of being, which is the realm of truth and verity, the realm of actuality and reality.

Any objective finding, knowing and recognizing what is, is a process, a vision; it is never a final position that can be reached, owned and defended. Contrary to that, it consists in the unification of polar opposites, which can only happen in the process of living and searching; therefore, Bahá'u'lláh warns us to not accept any bond and limit set from the outside and tells us to be independent in regards of counsel. In other words, we need to follow our own understanding, our own knowledge and vision, as is expressed in the Hidden Word about justice. As a matter of fact, this consideration will be repeated later on, indicating the importance of this aspect, not only in regards to the search for truth, but also about the search for justice, which is praised by Bahá'u'lláh as a gift to mankind. We always need to have before our eyes the following verse.

2. O SON OF SPIRIT!

The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice; turn not away therefrom if thou desirest Me, and neglect it not that I may confide in thee. By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbor. Ponder this in thy heart; how it behooveth thee to be. Verily justice is My gift to thee and the sign of My loving-kindness. Set it then before thine eyes. (HW Ar. 2)

From Carelessness to Reality

Heedlessness is here opposed to reality, when using the equivalent word carelessness for heedlessness, we realize what is required. It is the care for ourselves and for “the other”, because we cannot be a “self” if we do not understand ourselves with the other, if we are not part of and participant in the world of the other, in humankind. Developmentally, in the child, the self is developed in the relationship to the other, to the mother in the beginning and all other humans in the end. In

other words, we become a self when we learn to relate to another, and the self is always consisting in this relationship. Heedlessness and carelessness interrupt this relationship and therefore, it interrupts the self in understanding him/herself, the other and all other things. It is in this understanding that Heidegger talks about “Sorge” or care as a fundamental concept of ontology (“Dasein”), as comprehending self and others.

Ferdinand Ebner⁷ has described two ways of knowing, the personal and substantial and has indicated that ignoring the ‘I – Thou’ relationship of personally knowing the other, we lose ourselves and end in what he calls self-isolation (Ich-Einsamkeit), i.e. actually losing ourselves. This carelessness cannot find reality as it really is and ends up in substantial knowing, like knowing things and misses the value and meaning of the person, of oneself and of others. Carelessness leads to the loss of virtue, the loss of purpose in life and the loss of reality.

Be not careless of the virtues with which ye have been endowed, neither be neglectful of your high destiny.
(GWB 196)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá about the people of Bahá points out what this care can mean for the people of Bahá’í, when He stated:

And that by their freedom from enslavement, their knowledge, their self-control, they shall be first among the pure, the free and the wise. (SWAB 150)

Concluding these preconditions of search, the seeker must be aware of the following: This process of study, as it is laid out in front of the seeker traveling on the steed of patience, being a servant and caring will be examined further in the following chapters in an attempt of a reflection on the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh. These findings, which are here espoused in all humility, are given to the reader, and will have to be critiqued, corrected and extended in the sense of true consultation.

Independent Investigation and the role of the heart, culture and tradition

With the next Verse Bahá'u'lláh tells us how to search by describing what is required to have an independent investigation, and interestingly he concentrates his focus upon the heart and not the mind.

From the Valley of Search:

It is incumbent on these servants that they cleanse the heart – which is the wellspring of divine treasures – from every marking, and that they turn away from imitation, which is following the traces of their forefathers and sires, and shut the door of friendliness and enmity upon all the people of the earth. (SVFV 4)

How do we understand this required cleansing of the heart? In many places Bahá'u'lláh speaks about “... *the human heart, which is the recipient of the light of God and the seat of the revelation of the All-Merciful ...*” (GWB 186). The relative new science of neurocardiology can give us some indication that even from a scientific point of view the heart is much more than a mechanical pump, but is also a neurological center that can function independently from the brain, as is known in heart transplants. In a previous paper of this writer the role of the heart was described⁸, here only some relevant points will be mentioned. According to neurocardiology

Recent work in the relatively new field of neurocardiology has firmly reestablished that the heart is a sensory organ and a sophisticated information encoding and processing center. Its circuitry enables it to learn, remember and make functional decisions independent of the cranial brain.⁹

There are several reports that after a heart transplant many basic preferences of the patient change.¹⁰ While not researched because of patient confidentiality these reports need to be taken seriously and it must be assumed that many more of what usually is called unconscious is placed in the heart and not in the brain. Whatever is known by the heart becomes conscious in the brain as knowledge, which is understood as certainty. This certitude distinguishes it from thought or opinion. Bahá'u'lláh then gives us a warning that the heart may be affected by markings, by some stain, in other words not be pure. Consequently, He redirects the seeker to “*turn away imitation, which is following the traces of their forefathers and sires.*” From this statement we can understand that the marking, which affects the purity of the heart, might be this imitation, this following in the traditional ways of thinking.

My personal understanding of this sentence is as follows. Following the traces of our intellectual ancestors or forefathers, or thinking in traditional ways, means being restricted by their way of thinking and unable to comprehend anything new. When Bahá'u'lláh talks here about fathers and sires, we need to take this at first in a concrete and practical way: everybody learns to talk and think from his parents. Everybody grows up in a specific cultural environment, first the environment of his family, then of his school and only much later the cultural environment of his time.

In the beginning the little child has no choice, but beginning with the teen years, the youth starts selecting and eventually will find his own understanding. We can say he is able to choose his own intellectual fathers and follows them in his thinking. But he never will totally shed the influence of his childhood. Consequently, we can take this turning away from imitations in a wider sense and include in it the whole cultural and philosophical environment of any seeker into this consideration.

That raises another question for the scholar. Since all thinking and searching happens in the context of the accepted

culture, how can we not think in the way of our forefathers? Can we ever totally avoid the thinking style, the cultural ideas and concepts that we have acquired throughout life? The word used for this change in this translation is “turn away”, which is equivalent with the word convert, which has the Latin root of turning as well. So when we turn away from this imitation, when we become converts to a new vision, what happens to the traditional thinking? What do we have to do, how do we convert to a new way of thinking? And how do we learn this new way of thinking that is required here?

An indication of what to do is in the next sentence, where Bahá'u'lláh requires us to “*shut the door of friendliness and enmity upon all the people of the earth.*” Avoiding friendliness and enmity, or love and hate for all people means, if nothing else, to not be influenced by any feelings, positive or negative towards people and their ideas and systems of thought.

We need to avoid a seemingly contradiction in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh. When He states here that we need to shut the door to *friendliness and enmity* He obviously means something different than when He said. *Consort with all men, O people of Bahá, in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship.* (GWB 288) The answer is, that the demonstration of a spirit of friendliness is mentioned when the talk is about how we should behave towards individual people we meet, there friendliness is of utmost importance. The other passage, about shutting the door to friendliness and enmity has to understood according to this statement

We have, moreover, commanded you to cleanse your hearts from every trace of the love or hate of the peoples of the world, lest aught should divert you from one course or impel you towards another. (SLH 1)

Here it is meant the love or hate, the emotional involvement, which leads us to accept one or the other side of an argument and makes us prefer one or the other side of an opposing

understanding. In other words, we need to be free from emotional attachment to certain ideas that are held by the peoples of the world.

The mind needs not only to be free of any traditional conventions and cultural influences, but the heart as well needs to be free, without stain and not influenced by feelings of love or hate towards anybody. One could state that this is an intellectual and emotional stance of independence and objectivity that is very difficult to achieve. This can only be reached in a tangential process, in slowly coming closer and closer to this ideal situation.

Additionally, we need to realize that this is a negative requirement. It is, so to speak, a detachment (“de-tachment”) from something negative, which requires necessarily a new attachment (“ad-tachment”) to something, i.e. to something positive and to a new way of thinking that is not yet mentioned in this section, but is a requirement for the true seeker. It does give a better understanding to the above mentioned fact that patience needs to be the steed of this travel, *from heedlessness to the realm of being*. Being detached we need to attach ourselves to the Beloved, the *fundamentals of His Faith* and then we can proclaim the new message, the Word of the Manifestation as it is said here:

So should be every one that claimeth to be a lover of the one true God. It behoveth him to fix his gaze upon the fundamentals of His Faith, and to labor diligently for its propagation. Wholly for the sake of God he should proclaim His Message, and with that same spirit accept whatever response his words may evoke in his hearer. He who shall accept and believe, shall receive his reward; and he who shall turn away, shall receive none other than his own punishment. (GWB 339)

The spirit of this service of teaching is indicated in the next statement of Bahá'u'lláh, we have to be unrestrained and free from any precondition when searching and teaching the faith.

Be unrestrained as the wind, while carrying the Message of Him Who hath caused the Dawn of Divine Guidance to break. Consider, how the wind, faithful to that which God hath ordained, bloweth upon all the regions of the earth, be they inhabited or desolate. Neither the sight of desolation, nor the evidences of prosperity, can either pain or please it. It bloweth in every direction, as bidden by its Creator. (GWB 339)

The question of basic assumptions in any scientific endeavor

The required loyalty to the Revelation of the Manifestation of God becomes for the Bahá'í scholar an important question. Logically, there should not be any difference in having basic assumption of different kind. For example, if I take the assumption of Neo-Darwinism and regard the writings of Darwin as the truth of evolution, or if I take the assumption of the Progressive Movement based on Marxism, or the assumption of Reductionism or the basic assumptions of any other ideology, why would it be less scientific to have assumptions that originate in a religious area, such as Christian, Islamic or Bahá'í Revelation, or basic ideas of Buddhism or Hinduism? Why is it regarded as less scientific to believe in the Bible, than to believe in the Writings of Marx or Darwin? In this case one could say that the Bible was written 2000 years ago, so there was scientific progress that abolished the biblical truth.

Obviously, this argument does not hold true when considering the Writings of the Bahá'í Faith, especially since Marx and Darwin, for example, were contemporaries to Bahá'u'lláh and the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi were written later. What other arguments can the scientific

community bring to show that religious assumptions are unscientific? Is it the fact that religious writers did not use the scientific method?

Shoghi Effendi has claimed that Bahá'ís believe that their Revelation is scientific in its method, and this claim would have to be disproven before scientists could be justified to call the Bahá'í Writings unscientific:

The Revelation proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh, His followers believe, is divine in origin, all embracing in scope, broad in its outlook, scientific in its method, humanitarian in its principles and dynamic in the influence it exerts on the hearts and minds of men.¹¹

This argument would lead us into the question about the scientific method, considering that Shoghi Effendi did study in Oxford and was familiar with this method and must have known what this statement implied.

Obviously, neither Bahá'u'lláh nor 'Abdu'l-Bahá had academic schooling but does that mean they were necessary uneducated and did not understand what they wrote? This would have to be proven first, before their Writings can be dismissed as unscientific. All of these issues need to be discussed first, but an off-handed refusal to accept assumptions because they are based on religion, is certainly unscientific, especially because science spends very little effort answering these questions for their respective fields. Moreover, most scientists take their basic assumptions for granted and argue from them, but never proof them.

This discussion raises the philosophical question, which is as old as the logic of Aristotle: how to proof the first premise in a deductive series of conclusions. Science cannot solve this problem. It is rather a question of the philosophy of science, but not a question of any particular science.

There are other first assumptions that cannot be proven by the scientific method. Issues like this: “Why is there something and not rather nothing?” or “Does reality exist?” or “What is real and what is not real?” are not scientific questions but belong into the philosophical area of discourse, where the scientific method is not applicable.

For example, the Darwinist explanation of evolution by accidental mutations and the survival of the fittest is one explanation, and is held as truth, especially if other explanations are excluded beforehand, such as a final goal of evolution or any kind of pre-design. Here the assumption is made that only mechanistic and material causes are existing in reality, and that everything can be reduced to its most common and simplest denominator. Typically, modern science assumes that reality is such that all can be explained by efficient causality and that there is no meaning and no goal-directed activity existing in reality; often science assumes, as well, that free will, value and spiritual meaning are all false and unscientific concepts. Under these assumptions, Darwinism is the only explanation for the evolution of the finches in the Galapagos, and in an unscientific and totally unproven generalization, these finches are taken as the example that has to be followed by everything in this world, including humanity. Darwinists declare this as a scientifically proven truth for all evolution in this world. This quick step from the Galapagos finches to humanity and eventually to God is neither scientific, nor logical, or rational and certainly has a motivation that is outside of the consideration of these scientists, but must be strong enough to let them overlook their irrationality.

On the other hand, these questions need to be answered before a scientific deduction can be made or any scientific hypothesis can be presented to the experiment. Usually, these questions are assumed, are accepted as common sense, and rarely are they questioned. So why are religious assumptions questioned, if common sense assumptions are accepted without questions? At least in religious assumptions we have an author

and have a documented history, common sense assumptions are taken for granted without that knowledge, but the whole system of science is based on them and only philosophers are interested in this issue.

If a Bahá'í scholar is confronted with this issue, he first must solve it for himself. When these issues come up in a discussion with other scientists, the basic issue needs to be discussed. It is unfortunately common, that most academics would not be ready for such a discussion and would refuse to accept anything that does not fit their preferred ideology. Then this ideology needs to be discussed first, and this becomes tedious. So for all practical purposes, these issues cannot be discussed in most academic circles.

Consequently, the Bahá'í scholar must avoid, if possible, to enter a discussion that would be a useless argument and he/she has to approach these issue in other ways. One way would be to follow the scientific practice of not questioning assumptions and presenting them as common sense and true. In this case, the scholar would not bring quotes from religious sources but present the truth in his argument that is obvious to him. Another way would be to quote honestly the source, but not get into the issue of its scientific quality, only answer if these assumptions are questioned.

On the other hand, it would not be honest if the religious affiliation of the scholar is dissimulated. So it might be stated somewhere that the scholar is of a certain faith and has a special relationship to these sources and when he presents them he needs to do it in a way that does not elicit contradiction. This is not easy, but certainly possible, and it fits the Bahá'í conviction of avoiding arguments and disunity. In any case, when confronted, he would have to answer, and then a discussion should take place. If the rejection of his assumption is never voiced and if he is blacklisted because of it, there is not much he can do, because usually this happens in secrecy and cannot be challenged. It should be different following the academic

tradition that these issues need to be open for discussion and not secretly pursued, but alas, this is the academic world we live in today.

The words of Jesus (Matthew 10:16) come to mind when considering the Bahá'í scholar in a modern academic setting.

*Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves:
be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.*

How to deal with distraction

Bahá'u'lláh has not overlooked this issue. In the next paragraph He makes an interesting observation, He talks about the fact that everybody is looking for truth, everybody is like the biblical patriarch Jacob looking for his lost son Joseph, who was sold to Egypt. He states that all created things are searching. Being created, means having to search and find.

From the Valley of Search:

In this journey the seeker reacheth a stage wherein he seeth all created things wandering distracted in search of the Friend. How many a Jacob will he see, hunting after his Joseph; he will behold many a lover, hasting to seek the Beloved, he will witness a world of desiring ones searching after the One Desired. (SVFV 5)

Freud, in his *Three Essays on Sexuality*, discusses what he has found in analytic praxis, i.e., “The finding of an object is in fact a re-finding of it.”¹² Talking about psychology, Freud does not have to go further and he explains this sentence by explaining that what we had in early childhood, in our relationship with mother, is what we look for later in life, so that the finding of a relationship is really a re-finding of this original relation. The need to search and to find is explained that way, but explaining a later experience by an earlier might be psychologically interesting, yet, the question remains about

the origin of this need to search and to find. What is it that everybody is looking for, is searching for? In what way is finding it the fulfillment of his life? Recently the same question was stated in a more profound way.

Everyone worships reality. Each person looks about him, listens a moment – listens as long as life will let him pause to listen – and then he falls down and worships whatever it is that looks like this is what it is all about.¹³

This is what – according Bahá'u'lláh – the seeker and a fortiori the scholar will observe, all of creation is distracted in this search, but the search is in all of them. Everyone is searching reality for truth; for this final answer, even if somebody might find that the final answer is in the understanding that there is no truth at all, he still is searching for that and whole philosophical theories have been built on this. Unfortunately, many look in the wrong direction for answers, distracted they follow their vain imagination, they develop ideologies and answers, that are not truthful and lead astray, but the searching is there, even when the finding is in error, when it is distorted by tradition or based on assumptions that are wrong.

Bahá'u'lláh gives us the answer in a metaphor: it is search for the Ka'bih, the goal for the Muslim pilgrim in Mecca, it is the final search for spiritual fulfillment, and He indicates that it needs the aid from this Invisible Realm, basically the help from the Creator.

Bahíyyih Nakhjavání raises an interesting issue when thinking about questions, especially final questions.

We naively perceive questions as 'doubt' and answers as 'certitude' and assume, rather glibly, that just by being Bahá'ís we have all the longed for answers to the imponderable questions of our age. We forget that it is the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh that has unleashed these questions upon us over the last century and a half. It is

actually His principles – of the relativity of truth and the progressive nature of spiritual evolution – that have caused such revolutions in men’s thinking and set into motion such questions in the minds of scientists and housewives alike.¹⁴

The alert scholar can easily follow these thoughts and find in the different ideologies that are today propagated and espoused, a distraction from the truth and it is additionally interesting to find which of the Bahá’í principle has caused the question and, unfortunately, the wrong answer that becomes a distraction for the seeker and scholar.

For example, could it not be that the concept of deconstruction, so popular in postmodern philosophy, is a failed attempt to deal with the fact that truth in the Bahá’í faith is called relative in the sense of being progressively renewed in every Revelation, so that this concept must be confronted with the idea of a progressive theology and philosophy, which is reaching for the truth, but is not ever reaching absolute truths? Naturally, when this possibility is considered, the causes for the need to deconstruct are changing. It has nothing to do with post-colonialism or the power imposed by a Western constructive narrative. While all these going explanations may have some aspect of truth, they really hide what is going on, i.e., the progressive change in understanding reality, which is the real event that is usually not seen by all the wise men of post modernism.

The English philosopher Bertrand Russell¹⁵ has called Communism and Nazism a religion. Shoghi Effendi, following Bahá’u’lláh (ESW 46), calls them a “religious irreligion.”¹⁶ One could say that they are substitute religions, substituting an imaginary reality for what is real and final in this world. The fact that even 70 years of this “religion” in Russia did not work and that communism did not do better in any other country where it was tried, even in East Germany, should convince the followers of this ideology. Yet, the fact that it is accepted as a

pseudo-religion can explain that it still finds many followers, especially in the Western “intelligentsia,” who accept this secularized religion in order to avoid any true religion.

Bahá'u'lláh gives us to think when he continues to talk what the seeker finds.

From the Valley of Search:

At every moment he findeth a weighty matter, in every hour he becometh aware of a mystery; for he hath taken his heart away from both worlds, and set out for the Ka'bih¹⁷ of the Beloved. At every step, aid from the Invisible Realm will attend him and the heat of his search will grow. (SVFV 5)

Bahá'u'lláh indicates something important here. When the seeker or the scholar sees the distractions that are presented today, he could find important issues and become aware of a mystery, as long as he has taken his heart away from *both worlds*. What could be the meaning of “both worlds?” The interpretation I would like to follow is to assume that these two worlds are, the world of the “seen” and the world of the “unseen”, the world of the manifest and the world of the hidden, or as it is stated in the Valley of Unity:

And thus firstness and lastness, outwardness and inwardness are, in the sense referred to, true of thyself, that in these four states conferred upon thee thou shouldst comprehend the four divine states, and that the nightingale of thine heart on all the branches of the rosetree of existence, whether visible or concealed, should cry out: “He is the first and the last, the Seen and the Hidden...” (SVFV 27)

These two worlds of outwardness and inwardness are both called “*true of thyself*” and are specifically described by Bahá'u'lláh, when he explained them:

In thine outward appearance thou tellest of the appearance of power in the realms of divine creation; in thine inward being thou revealest the hidden mysteries which are the divine trust deposited within thee. (SVFV 26)

It is clearly indicated that the outwardness is the physical, bodily aspect of the human person and that the inwardness presents the spiritual and inner aspect of man. The first is related to the physical creation, the other is called a hidden mystery deposited by God into men.

What is interesting here when this explanation is accepted, is the fact that Bahá'u'lláh requires that the seeker take his heart away from both worlds, in other words, the seeker must be detached from both, from false attachment to his body and his physical existence as well as from his mind, and his spiritual “vain imaginations”, which can equally be leading him astray, causing heedlessness and carelessness and looking into the wrong sources in the search for meaning in life and for finding the truth.

This is a clear distinction to the Christian tradition, where the spiritual was the solution and the material was the way leading to destruction. Where the world of nature was condemned but the world of “super-nature” was the goal. The Bahá'í understanding does not divide the world into nature as the realm of the devil and super-nature as the realm of God. There is the devil in both, to continue the metaphor, and both can be a source of finding God, or can be a source of wrong attachment leading away from God. This is expressed as well in the statement of 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

Briefly, all effort and exertion put forth by man from the fullness of his heart is worship, if it is prompted by the highest motives and the will to do service to humanity. This is worship: to serve mankind and to minister to the needs of the people. Service is prayer. (PT 176)

For the Bahá'í scholar and seeker, the world is no longer divided into the natural and the super-natural. The world has become one again and the direction the seeker needs to take is using both, the physical and spiritual, both the body and the mind to elevate himself on the Path of God, in search of the Ka'bih¹⁸ of the Beloved.

In doing so there is another aspect mentioned by Bahá'u'lláh. The seeker as well as the scholar, one might say, is promised that *“At every step, aid from the Invisible Realm will attend him and the heat of his search will grow.”* This promise is the Divine assurance that for the true seeker finding will eventually happen, as long as his heart is pure and as long as he is not directing his search towards vain imitations of culture and tradition and as long as he avoids heedlessness in his intellectual and physical life.

Bahá'u'lláh promises the seeker that *“At every moment he findeth a weighty matter, in every hour he becometh aware of a mystery.”* The question can be raised what are those weighty matters and those mysteries, if not the ultimate reality, the final goal and the truth of this world? To stay in the picture as presented by Bahá'u'lláh, in the verse before, the seeker

*will behold many a lover, hasting to seek the Beloved, he
will witness a world of desiring ones searching after the
One Desired.*

Bahá'u'lláh in the following verses continues to describe the search of the seeker and He presents us with an interesting comparison, the standard of Majnún.

The standard of Majnún,¹⁹ “seek her everywhere”

What is the standard of Majnún is the question here.

From the Valley of Search:

One must judge of search by the standard of the Majnún of Love. It is related that one day they came upon Majnún sifting the dust, and his tears flowing down. They said, "What doest thou?" He said, "I seek for Laylí." They cried, "Alas for thee! Laylí is of pure spirit, and thou seekest her in the dust!" He said, "I seek her everywhere; haply somewhere I shall find her."

The first consideration is following what was said above about both aspects of reality. To find the spiritual lover by sifting dust does not make sense in common understanding, yet, it indicates the unity of reality, the unity of the inward and outward aspect, of the manifest and the hidden. This could be a reminder to all seekers and scholars to not neglect the physical reality, and to take this world seriously without false attachment to it. Only in the unity between the spiritual and material can the seeker find the "beloved."

Yea, although to the wise it be shameful to seek the Lord of Lords in the dust, yet this betokeneth intense ardor in searching. "Whoso seeketh out a thing with zeal shall find it."²⁰

Here the ardor of searching is held against conventional wisdom, which would find it shameful to search in the material world for the spiritual, in the dust for the beloved. The question might be asked what is meant by sifting dust and seeking the Lord in the dust. Without doubt, at least in the English translation it is an allusion to the word of Genesis 2:7:

And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

Here it is stated that man was created from the dust of this world and that the spirit or breath was then given to him to make him a living soul.

The exclusivity of search and sacrificing everything for it

In the next two concluding paragraphs the main themes of this Valley of Search are repeated and summarized, yet, this is done in a very special way. These two paragraphs seem to contradict each other. This contradiction or opposition must be understood as a message that can only be expressed by stating polar opposites describing reality in two polar, yet complementary statements. This is not a unique example in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, who frequently makes such statements, for example, when talking about an end that has not end or describing God as the most hidden and the most manifest.

In the first paragraph, it is described how the seeker in his hunt for the Beloved One has to sacrifice everything, which seems to describe a person who leaves this world, like a hermit or monk, not only leaving the physical world but also the world of intellect and science by giving up everything he knows in order to reach the realm of the spirit.

In opposition to that, in the next paragraph, it is described that the seeker must not only go into every land and region, but also join every company and fellowship in order to find the secret of the Friend and the beauty of the Loved One. This reminds us of Majnún who seeks the spiritual Laylí in the dust of this world and who was described as an example of intensive search.

What does this arrangement tell us about the search described in this valley? It seems that in order to search and to find, a balance must be found between these two spiritual movements, a movement that is at the same time moving away from the world and into the world. First the movement away from this world and its temptation will be described.

Excursion on Vain Imagination / Idle Fancy

In the following section the attempt is made to correlate statements of the Bahá'í Writings with the concept of the seven deadly sins or the eight vices from the Christian tradition. This concept is linked to the works of the 4th century monk Evagrius Ponticus, who listed eight evil thoughts. The description of these eight vices as presented below, is taken mainly from the paper of Karl Wucherer:²¹ *Maskierte Depression und Trägheit in der klassischen Achtlasterlehre* (Masked Depression and Heedlessness in the Classical Doctrine of the Eight Vices), where the history of these teachings is explored and extensively analyzed according to modern psychological findings of “Daseinsanalyse” a special form of existential analysis developed in Austria.

Vain imagination and idle fancy are a recurring theme of the Bahá'í Writings and can be found in the Writings of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, as well as in the interpretation of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. This section will explore the meaning of these concepts and will attempt to correlate them with insights developed in the Christian tradition, especially as it was developed into the Eight Vices or Seven Capital Sins.

In these two statements of Bahá'u'lláh, the use of these two concepts is made first in explaining how His enemies are trying to hide him using vain imaginations and idle fancies.

For now, however, they have hidden Me behind a veil of darkness, whose fabric they have woven with the hands of idle fancy and vain imagination. (SLH 135)

Yet, the faithful is blessed to have been able to utterly abolish these dangerous attitudes, vices or idols of the self in his life with the help of God.

Blessed art thou for having utterly abolished the idol of self and of vain imagination, and for having rent asunder

the veil of idle fancy, through the power of the might of thy Lord, the Supreme Protector, the Almighty, the one Beloved. (GWB 291)

In the Valley of Knowledge, the wayfarer will be able to shut the doors to vain imaginations through the fear of God.

Come out of doubt into certitude, and turn from the darkness of illusion to the guiding light of the fear of God. His inner eyes will open and he will privily converse with his Beloved; he will set ajar the gate of truth and piety, and shut the doors of vain imaginings. (SVFV 10)

In the Kitáb-i-Íqán, Bahá'u'lláh describes another valley, the valley of arrogance and pride which is entered by petty-minded souls who follow the leaders of their faith and are lost in idles fancy.

Consequently, such behavior can be attributed to naught save the petty-mindedness of such souls as tread the valley of arrogance and pride, are lost in the wilds of remoteness, walk in the ways of their idle fancy, and follow the dictates of the leaders of their faith. (KI 14)

Previously, under the precondition of search, it was mentioned that cleansing the heart means to *turn away from imitation, which is following the traces of their forefathers and sires.*

It is incumbent on these servants that they cleanse the heart — which is the wellspring of divine treasures — from every marking, and that they turn away from imitation, which is following the traces of their forefathers and sires, and shut the door of friendliness and enmity upon all the people of the earth. (SVFV)

It appears from these statements above that the phrase idle fancy and vain imagination is both connected with ideologies that remain in the tradition of a culture and with the refusal to accept the new vision of a Manifestation. In the traditional doctrine of vices in Christian ethical tradition both of these statements, the idle fancy and vain imagination might be correlated to the first two vices of pride and vainglory. The eight vices are organized towards their location in the human body as described below.

Doctrine of the Eight Vices

This doctrine is presented here in a shortened form taken from the paper by Wucherer and every vice is correlated with statements from the Bahá'í Writings and a comment. They are headed by the respected faculty used or better abused during their execution.

Rational Faculty: Mind

1. Pride Ὑπερηφάνια (*hyperēphania*) – Hubris
2. Vainglory Κενοδοξία (*kenodoxia*) – Boasting

Idle Fancy and Vain Imagination

Know, moreover, that should one who hath attained unto these stations and embarked upon these journeys fall prey to pride and vainglory, he would at that very moment come to naught and return to the first step without realizing it. (GDM 65)

Like in the doctrine of the Eight Vices, the danger to succumb to these two vices is greatest for those who have successfully overcome all the other lower vices, and the statement of Bahá'u'lláh expresses this warning most clearly. Even a person who has reached the status of an academician or

scholar and has habitually overcome the lower forms of vices is not protected by his or her seemingly virtuous and moral life from these basic intellectual and spiritual vices. Therefore, it is important to have this possibility of pride and vainglory in front of our mind in all scholarly and academic efforts and to preserve a cautious attitude with humility and forbearance in all scholarly and personal enterprises. This was clearly stated by the Universal House of Justice as mentioned above in the introduction where it was stated:

Inevitably believers will commit errors as they strive to rise to this degree of maturity, and this calls for forbearance and humility on the part of all concerned, so that such matters do not cause disunity or discord among the friends.²²

Emotional Faculty: Heart

3. Heedlessness/Distraction Ἀκηδία (*akēdia*) – Lethargy, Carelessness

Thus did they wander in the paths of delusion and the ways of heedlessness, and return to their abode in that fire which feedeth on their own souls. These, verily, are numbered with the infidels whose names have been inscribed by the Pen of God in His holy Book. Nor have they ever found, or will ever find, a friend or helper.
(GDM 31)

Bahá'u'lláh makes here a very interesting remark, contending that persons given to heedlessness or carelessness will never find a friend. Clearly, friendship and love is based on an attitude of care and concern for others; a careless person will be a lonely person who has to fill his life with the other basic vices to find distraction and pleasure.

4. Anger Ὀργή (*orgē*) – Wrath, Anger

Most of the people are bewildered in their drunkenness and wear on their faces the evidences of anger. (PB 100)

Another interesting remark of Bahá'u'lláh here is the fact that anger is first shown in their faces, because it originates in the heart or in the emotional section, then becomes visible in the body, especially in the face, and only later becomes known intellectually to the angry person. Hence, we have the observation that outsiders can recognize that somebody gets angry, even when the angry person denies these feelings. When anger shows in the face the mind will then exaggerate this anger by self-talk and develop the anger into rage, unless the person manages and controls his anger properly.

5. Depression Λύπη (*lypē*) – Sorrow, Grief or Envy as Sadness at another's good fortune

I have, however, contented Myself with that which was mentioned, lest thou become wearied in thy journey or feel inclined to turn back, or lest thou be overtaken by sadness and sorrow and overcome with despondency, trouble and fatigue. (GDM 11-12)

This is the emotional aspects of a failed life where carelessness, anger and depression prevent the heart to be open to his fellowman and finally to the Revelation of God, especially when the self has not developed its potential and failed his purpose.

Instinctual Faculty: Abdomen or Gut

6. Money Addiction Φιλαργυρία (*philargyria*) – avarice, greed

Why, then, exhibit such greed in amassing the treasures of the earth, when your days are numbered and your

chance is well-nigh lost? Will ye not, then, O heedless ones, shake off your slumber? (GWB 127)

7. Sexual Addiction Πορνεία (*porneia*) – prostitution, fornication, lust

He should cleanse his heart from all evil passions and corrupt desires, for the fear of God is the weapon that can render him victorious, the primary instrument whereby he can achieve his purpose. (GWB 272)

8. Food Addiction Γαστριμαργία (*gastrimargia*) – gluttony

Is it on your food and your drink that ye pride yourselves, on the riches ye lay up in your treasuries, on the diversity and the cost of the ornaments with which ye deck yourselves? (PB 10)

It is rather remarkable to observe how failing in these lower regions of life is causing the higher capacities to fail as well, which was observed already before in the doctrine of the eight Vices in early Christianity, and which seems to be still true as described in psychology and ethics. A more advanced study of Bahá'í Ethic, which cannot be provided in this paper, could shed further light at this correlation and might help to develop this doctrine in the future. We are now returning back to the Seven Valleys after this excursion.

From the Valley of Search:

The true seeker hunteth naught but the object of his quest and the lover hath no desire save union with his beloved. Nor shall the seeker reach his goal unless he sacrifices all things. That is, whatever he hath seen, and heard, and understood, all must he set at naught, that he may enter the realm of the spirit, which is the City of

God. Labor is needed, if we are to seek Him; ardor is needed, if we are to drink of the honey of reunion with Him; and if we taste of this cup, we shall cast away the world. (SVFV 6)

In order to reach the union with his beloved, the wayfarer has to set aside and sacrifice everything he has seen, heard and understood. In other words, he has to be free from all prejudices, even those that come with his culture and tradition, especially the traditions that came from any previous religion. Additionally, he has to be free from any philosophical prejudice, any ideology no matter how prevalent and pervasive it is or how strongly it is presented in academia today.

Without this freedom from tradition, from what “is known”, from “what one has learned” and even from what is the accepted way of understanding and doing research, the wayfarer and scholar will not be able to find the beloved and come to reach the goal of unification, or, as it is said here, he would not enter *the realm of the spirit, which is the City of God.*

The realm of the spirit was explained by Bahá’u’lláh as the place from where the Manifestation come with their message to mankind.

The door of the knowledge of the Ancient of Days being thus closed in the face of all beings, the Source of infinite grace, according to His saying, “His grace hath transcended all things; My grace hath encompassed them all,” hath caused those luminous Gems of Holiness to appear out of the realm of the spirit, in the noble form of the human temple, and be made manifest unto all men, that they may impart unto the world the mysteries of the unchangeable Being, and tell of the subtleties of His imperishable Essence. (GWB)

The door of knowledge of God is closed to humanity unless and until it is opened by the Manifestation who comes from *this*

realm of the spirit as a human being and manifests unto all men the mysteries of God. He is described as the *unchangeable Being* and an *imperishable Essence*.

Giving up all knowledge in order to reach this realm of the spirit how is it possible for the seeker and especially the scholar, to function and what criteria can she use to promote her studies?

The question raised here is, “By what standard is a scholar to measure his research and studies, and how should she use the prevailing standard and methods, which are promoted today in academia?” How does she have to take the warning presented by Bahá’u’lláh when He stated:

Weigh not the Book of God with such standards and sciences as are current amongst you, for the Book itself is the unerring Balance established amongst men. (ESW 128)

One could assume that this warning is only useful in the science of theology and in interpreting religion, and that modern science being secular has its own standards and does not fall under this warning. While this could be true in some cases, where there is no interrelation between a particular science and religion, for most scientific enterprises it is not that simple, especially when we talk about basic scientific assumptions and premises, especially in the humanistic sciences like psychology, sociology, history and philosophy, which cannot be clearly separated in their standards and methods, because of the way these sciences are developed today. This precludes any opening towards the possibility of religion and leads directly towards atheism or agnosticism and their basic assumptions which are never discussed and which frequently exclude anything related to God or Religion.

The modern world, especially in its so-called post-modern development, is described by Bahá’u’lláh as being sick, as

languishing on its bed of sickness, sore-tried and disillusioned. Academia and schools of higher learning can be seen as the proponent of this malady, which has been described in the following quote.

We can well perceive how the whole human race is encompassed with great, with incalculable afflictions. We see it languishing on its bed of sickness, sore-tried and disillusioned. They that are intoxicated by self-conceit have interposed themselves between it and the Divine and infallible Physician. Witness how they have entangled all men, themselves included, in the mesh of their devices. They can neither discover the cause of the disease, nor have they any knowledge of the remedy. They have conceived the straight to be crooked, and have imagined their friend an enemy. (GWB 213)

Bahá'u'lláh clearly states in this passage that the reason for this world-wide affliction is the fact that their leaders are *intoxicated by self-conceit and have interposed themselves between it and the Divine and infallible Physician.* In other words, the leaders of today's humanity have replaced the religions of the past with new ideologies that can be described as substitute religions or irreligions. Since they neither know the cause of the problem nor the remedy for it, they promise solutions but do not deliver; in fact, what they deliver is worse than the problem they pretend to solve.

Whenever such an ideology was imposed with terror in any country from Germany, Russia and China to Cuba, the first result was a poorly functioning economy and in some cases like in the Ukraine and in China mass starvation. Even 70 years of Communism and Marxism in Russia, did not change this situation and all the terror of the regime did not improve the lot of the people. This is contrary to the hopes of Marx, who had predicted that a revolution based on his economic theory presented in the Communist Manifesto and developed in his book "the Capital" would change the fate of the workers

permanently and forever to a paradise-like state of final perfection.

Part of Germany, East-Germany, was occupied by Russia and placed under the same ideological rule, the once prosperous country became poor, while West-Germany regained its previous prosperity. This clearly demonstrates the inability and falseness of these ideologies; nevertheless, they are still pursued under different names today. Surprisingly, the same basic ideology is still active today and promoted by so-called "Progressives," becoming a substitute religion in the Western world.

The question is how does this consideration apply to the seeking Bahá'í scholar? Bahá'u'lláh requests that the *seeker sacrifices all things. That is, whatever he hath seen, and heard, and understood, all must he set at naught ...* Does that not mean that all ideologies, all false philosophies of modern thinking, even all accepted scientific ideologies in academia, need to be critically investigated by the Bahá'í scholar and seen from the Vision of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh? Obviously, a familiarity with this Vision is the condition sine qua non for such a process to be started.

The Universal House of Justice, in a letter written on December 10, 1992, reminds us of the statements written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi:

His secretary wrote, on another occasion, that:

Shoghi Effendi has for years urged the Bahá'ís (who asked his advice, and in general also) to study history, economics, sociology, etc., in order to be au courant with all the progressive movements and thoughts being put forth today, and so that they could correlate these to the Bahá'í teachings. What he wants the Bahá'ís to do is to study more, not to study less. The more general knowledge, scientific and otherwise, they possess, the

better. Likewise he is constantly urging them to really study the Bahá'í teachings more deeply.

This quote is followed up by further emphasizing that the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is the standard of truth for every believer.

In the simultaneous endeavor to pursue their studies and to delve deeply into the Bahá'í Teachings, believers are enjoined to maintain a keen awareness that the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is the standard of truth against which all other views and conclusions are to be measured.

This statement is followed up with a word from Bahá'u'lláh expressed in the Book of Certitude:

The heart must needs therefore be cleansed from the idle sayings of men, and sanctified from every earthly affection, so that it may discover the hidden meaning of divine inspiration, and become the treasury of the mysteries of divine knowledge... (KI 69)

The seeker, being a wayfarer in the Valley of Search, being an unstudied Bahá'í or a scholarly educated Bahá'í has to

... sacrifice all things. That is, whatever he hath seen, and heard, and understood, all must he set at naught, that he may enter the realm of the spirit...

This is not an easy task and requires a life-long effort and dedication. Actually, it is not a one time achievement, but a process that has to be always kept in mind as a guiding principle of all searching and studying. Only when this process is guiding the scholar he can precede to the other complementary side of his search, which is described in the next sentence of this tablet.

Beholding the beauty of the Loved One

On this journey the traveler abideth in every land and dwelleth in every region. In every face, he seeketh the beauty of the Friend; in every country he looketh for the Beloved. He joineth every company, and seeketh fellowship with every soul, that haply in some mind he may uncover the secret of the Friend, or in some face he may behold the beauty of the Loved One. (SVFV 7)

As described in the previous sentence, the seeker has to sacrifice everything and give all what he knows and what he has learned about this world, and in this following sentence it seems the opposite is recommended: the traveler in this journey is to live in every land and region and seek friendship with every soul. It needs to be noted that both of these movements are supposed to happen at the same time and they are not opposite but complementary. In other words the more the seeker gives up his previous knowledge, the better he can listen to the mind of others he meets and the more likely he can find the secret and beauty of the Bahá'í Revelation in the other.

In this movement away from what he knows and remembers about people and the world, he can better listen and find out about the truth that is in this world and can see the other as manifesting the sign of the creator, can see in him/her the beauty of the Loved One.

Now he can freely join every land, every country and can study every theory or ideology and is able to see and distinguish what is true and what is false. Having the standard of the Most Sublime Vision of Bahá'u'lláh and being established in the Covenant, he or she can benefit from many different ideas, correlate them with the revealed truth and find new understanding and new relationships in the thinking of today's scholars, they have a touchstone to sort out what is true and lasting and what is only temporary and passing.

In the previous section, where the wayfarer was encouraged to give up everything, even everything he knows, the traditional list of vices was mentioned. Especially the vices related to what are called in the Writings vain imagination and idle fancy. Here the virtues need to be mentioned which alone make it possible to follow the advice of Bahá'u'lláh to live in every land and join every company. There was developed in Christianity a list of virtues opposed by a list of vices by Felix Just, S.J., Ph.D.²³

Christian morality is not only based foundationally on the Ten Commandments (see Exod 20 & Deut 5), but also focuses traditionally on what are called the seven “Capital Sins” or “Deadly Sins,” often pairing and contrasting these with seven “Principal Virtues” which is presented below.

Virtue and Vice Lists

Capital Deadly Sins:	pride arrogance <i>superbia</i>	avarice greed <i>avaritia</i>	envy jealousy <i>invidia</i>	wrath anger <i>ira</i>
Principal Virtues:	humility modesty <i>humilitas</i>	generosity charity <i>liberalitas</i>	kindness gratitude <i>humanitas</i>	patience compassion <i>patientia</i>

Capital Deadly Sins:	lust impurity <i>luxuria</i>	gluttony voracity <i>gula</i>	sloth laziness <i>acedia</i>
Principal Virtues:	chastity purity <i>castitas</i>	temperance moderation <i>temperantia</i>	diligence fervor <i>industria</i>

It is not difficult to find Bahá'í Scriptures supporting this list, but this would be the task of a Bahá'í Ethic, which cannot be attempted in the frame of this paper.

Conclusion



The picture above is based on this statement of Bahá'u'lláh:

Consider the rational faculty with which God hath endowed the essence of man.

Examine thine own self, and behold how thy motion and stillness, thy will and purpose ... all proceed from, and owe their existence to, this same faculty. (GWB 163)

The self, the human psyche has, according to the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, four aspects, which are opposite to each other and yet connected and even existing through each other. So we have the Stillness on the one side where the detachment and acceptance is located and where the wayfarer “sacrifices all things.” This is explained by Bahá'u'lláh that he must give up, “whatever he hath seen, and heard, and understood, all must he set at naught, that he may enter the realm of the spirit, which is the City of God”. (SVFV 6) The realm of the spirit is this area of the self where the stillness of the spirit is located and where

Detachment and Acceptance are predominant. This must be balanced and harmonized with the other side, the side of **Movement**, where the wayfarer is outgoing, and where he “*joineth every company, and seeketh fellowship with every soul, that haply in some mind he may uncover the secret of the Friend, or in some face he may behold the beauty of the Loved One.*” (SVFV 7)

These two sides of the self are complementary and it is the art of living to find the right balance between these two sides so that one supports the other. Any one-sided approach will become extreme and distorts the self. The other complementary polarity between **Will** and **Purpose** is showing the balance between the individual and social aspect of the self, so that the social and general purpose needs to regulate the individual will, in order that the action of the person becomes meaningful. This structure of the self is called tetrarchic, which concept has been developed by this writer in several papers in the *Lights of ‘Irfán* publications during the last 10 years, especially in book 12, 2010 under the title “The Essence of Man, Towards a Bahá’í Understanding of Human Nature and Psychology.”²⁴

In the beginning of this paper the question was raised how the “unfettered search after truth” can be combined with “absolute loyalty to the Manifestation of God.” Not only in the finding of scholars, but also in their methodology any answer to this question presupposes that reality is seen as it is seen in the Bahá’í Revelation. Any other viewpoint will come in conflict with the absolute loyalty to the Manifestation. Therefore, any reductionistic, materialistic or positivistic understanding of science, especially of the humanistic sciences, will lead the scholar astray and bring him/her in conflict with the Bahá’í Revelation. Any viewpoint that excludes anything spiritual from science and restricts science to the Newtonian mechanistic understanding of reality or to Descartes dualistic understanding of the world does not fit in the standard of the Bahá’í Revelation. There is no balance or harmony possible between the Bahá’í Revelation and some of the modern scientific

assumption about reality; there is balance only in reality between complementary aspects of life like described above. It is important to have this distinction in mind whenever the scholar is confronted by this question between unfettered search after truth and loyalty to the Manifestation of God.

Not only the Bahá'í scholar but every Bahá'í, be he/she learned or not, needs to live in this balance of the self between stillness and Movement, or the spiritual and material aspect of life and of the world, as well as between Will and Purpose and the individual intentionality regulated by the collective human goal of life. The only way to find this balance is to accept the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh as the standard of truth, not only in theology, but also in the basic understanding of the world, in philosophy and psychology, in the methodology and philosophical assumptions that are fundamental to any science, especially of the humanistic sciences. This was expressed in a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi which will close these considerations:

His secretary wrote, on another occasion, that:

Shoghi Effendi has for years urged the Bahá'ís (who asked his advice, and in general also) to study history, economics, sociology, etc., in order to be au courant with all the progressive movements and thoughts being put forth today, and so that they could correlate these to the Bahá'í teachings. What he wants the Bahá'ís to do is to study more, not to study less. The more general knowledge, scientific and otherwise, they possess, the better. Likewise he is constantly urging them to really study the Bahá'í teachings more deeply. (The Universal House of Justice, 1992 Dec 10, Issues Related to Study Compilation)

This quote is followed up further emphasizing that the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is the standard of truth for every believer.

In the simultaneous endeavor to pursue their studies and to delve deeply into the Bahá'í Teachings, believers are enjoined to maintain a keen awareness that the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is the standard of truth against which all other views and conclusions are to be measured.

NOTES

- ¹ A list of all appreciations of the Bahá'í Writings used in this paper is attached as the appendix I at the end of this book (p. 425).
- ² All words and sentences of Holy Scriptures in this paper are presented in italics, when quoted as a paragraph or when quoted in a sentence.
- ³ International Teaching Centre, Bahá'í Scholarship, letter written August, 9 1984.
- ⁴ Qur'an 2:84.
- ⁵ Augustinus Karl Wucherer-Huldenfeld, *Philosophische Theologie im Umbruch*, (Philosophic Theology in Radical Renewal); Boehlau Verlag, Vienna, Cologne, Weimar, 2011. The idea of the "Integrale Ganze" is described especially in the Fourth Excursion, pages 469-556, and the principle of Unity in Diversity is mentioned in the same context.
- ⁶ It needs to be noted that this division of the text into separate lines is not in the original and has been made in order to facilitate its understanding.
- ⁷ Confer Wolfgang Klebel, in *Lights of Irfán*, Book Eight, 2007, Bahá'í National Center, Evanston IL 60201, "The Word is the Master Key for the Whole World. The Bahá'í Revelation and the Teaching and Spirit of the Cause in Dialogical and Personal Thinking," pp. 53-124
- ⁸ Wolfgang Klebel, *Light of 'Irfan*, Book Ten, "In the Pure Soil of Thy Heart; Heart in Bahá'í Writings and Neurocardiology" (2009), pp.107-148
- ⁹ Rollin McGray, Ph.D. and Doc Childre, *The Appreciative Heart, The Psychophysiology of Positive Emotions and Optimal Functioning*. Published by the Institute of HeartMath, 14700 West Par Avenue; Boulder Creek, CA 95006; 2003, p. 1
- ¹⁰ Mindshock, Channel Four TV on June 26, 2006:

This program featured the case of a heart transplant operation where the recipient underwent major changes after surgery. She woke up after the operation and said she would love a beer and yet she had never been a beer drinker ever. She suddenly developed a taste for green peppers

and Mexican food. Later she had a dream where she met the person whose heart she took. In the dream she knew his name as Tim L. The dream had a major effect on her and she believed that she had truly met the man who had donated the heart. Later she tried to pursue this but was refused because of patient confidentiality. But it became apparent that the heart was taken from a young man who loved to drink beer and eat Mexican food. His name was Tim Lamerande.

This amazing dream started a debate amongst some people involved in the medical profession. Many still refute their research. Yet the research seems quite strong. Professor Paul Pearsaul has collected several cases of similar organ transplants. Many people who have heart transplants seem to take on the personality of the donor. ...

Dr. Rollin McCray from California's HeartMath Institute has developed research started by Dr Andrew Armour. Dr Armour has claimed that there is a system of living neurons on the heart. McCray states that the heart must have a memory because such a function is vital to the organ. It must be able to store when the last heart beat occurred. Such a function is by its very nature a memory and therefore is a type of function normally associated with the brain.

¹¹ *U.S. Bahá'í News*, compilation of letters and extracts of writings from the Guardian published in the *Bahá'í news* of the United States [December 1924 – November 1934]

¹² *The complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud*, Standard Edition, London, Hogarth Press, 1966-1974, Volume 7, page 222

¹³ Evan Harris Walker, *The Physics of Consciousness, The Quantum Mind and the Meaning of Life*, Basic Books, Perseus Books Group, New York 2000, pp.327-328

¹⁴ Bahíyyih Nakhjavání, *Asking Questions, A Challenge to Fundamentalism*, George Ronald, Oxford 1990, p. 3

¹⁵ Bertrand Russell, who was by no means a friend of religion, stated in his book *Religion and Science* in the year 1935 the following:

“The older religion has thus become purified and in many ways beneficial, new religions have arisen, with all the persecuting zeal of vigorous youth, and with as great a readiness to oppose science as characterized the Inquisition in the time of Galileo. If you maintain in Germany that Christ was a Jew, or in Russia that the atom has lost its substantiality and become a mere series of events, you are liable to severe punishment.” (from a reprint by Oxford University Press, New York, Oxford, 1997, pages 247-248)

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- ¹⁶ “It is an economic theory, definitely harnessed to disbelief in God. It is a religious irreligion... It has a passionate sense of mission, and is carrying on its anti-God campaign ... (WOB 181)
- ¹⁷ The holy Sanctuary at Mecca. Here the word means “goal.”]
- ¹⁸ The holy Sanctuary at Mecca. Here the word means “goal.”]
- ¹⁹ Literally, Majnún means “insane.” This is the title of the celebrated lover of ancient Persian and Arabian lore, who’s beloved was Laylí, daughter of an Arabian prince. Symbolizing true human love bordering on the divine, the story has been made the theme of many a Persian romantic poem, particularly that of Nizami, written in 1188-1189 A.D
- ²⁰ Arabian proverb
- ²⁰ Augustinus Karl Wucherer-Huldenfeld “Befreiung und Gotteserkenntnis” (Liberation and Recognition of God), Böhlau Verlag, Wien, Köln, Weimar, 2009, pp. 71-101.
- ²² International Teaching Centre, 1984, Aug Bahá’í Scholarship
- ²³ Found on the internet under Virtues and Vices
- ²⁴ These papers are published electronically at irfancolloquia.org/database

The Bahá'í Writings: A Meta-ethical Excursion

Part I: Background and a First Dive into the Writings

Ian Kluge

1. Preface

This paper is part of an on-going project of studying the philosophic principles explicitly and implicitly embedded in the Bahá'í Writings and correlating them with other religions and/or philosophies. Shoghi Effendi recognized the necessity of such correlation work as early as 1933,¹ when he wrote,

It is hoped that all the Bahá'í students will follow the noble example you have set before them and will, henceforth, be led to investigate and analyse the principles of the Faith and to *correlate* them with the modern aspects of *philosophy* and science. Every intelligent and thoughtful young Bahá'í should always approach the Cause in this way, for therein lies the very essence of the principle of independent investigation of truth.²

In this statement, Shoghi Effendi not only asserts the importance of correlating philosophy with the Writings, but also provides a reason why such work is necessary. It is essential to one of the cardinal principles of the Bahá'í Faith *viz.* the independent investigation of truth, because comparing i.e. finding explicit or implicit similarities and differences is essential to all learning. This, in turn, helps us to understand the Bahá'í Writings in greater depth and also to appreciate how far

the Bahá'í teachings extend into other systems of thought and belief. Shoghi Effendi says,

The Cause needs more Bahá'í scholars, people who not only are devoted to it and believe in it and are anxious to tell others about it, but also who have a deep grasp of the Teachings and their significance, and who can *correlate* its beliefs with the current thoughts and problems of the people of the world.³

Such correlation work is an important part of bringing the Faith to the world's attention. When people see that the Writings are highly relevant and applicable to the inner psycho-spiritual and outer economic, socio-political and cultural problems of our time, they will be more open-minded and more inclined to investigate the Writings further. Correlating the Writings to contemporary intellectual and religious currents is a doorway to the Faith. Shoghi Effendi's encouragement of correlation studies is designed to encourage us to open more such doorways:

Shoghi Effendi has for years *urged the Bahá'ís* (who asked his advice, and in general also) to study history, economics, sociology, etc., in order to be au courant with all the progressive movements and thoughts being put forth today, and so that they could *correlate* these to the Bahá'í teachings.⁴

My on-going correlation studies aim at improving our philosophic understanding of the Bahá'í Writings and their relation to other systems of belief and/or thought. A philosophic understanding of the Writings must, of course, base itself on the Writings themselves and take them as the standard of truth. As Bahá'u'lláh says,

Weigh not the Book of God with such standards and sciences as are current amongst you, for the Book itself

is the unerring Balance established amongst men. [ESW
128]

The philosophic approach seeks to understand the Writings on the basis of the philosophic ideas explicitly and implicitly present in the Texts themselves. It also examines the philosophic language and terminology embedded in the Writings. Such understanding seeks to discover what the Writings say or imply about topics such as metaphysics, ontology, epistemology, ethics, philosophy of man, philosophy of history and political and social philosophy. It aims at elucidating the foundational principles which underlie and inform or shape the teachings on these (and other) subjects. The fact that the Writings have so much to say about these subjects encourages this approach.

The first and most obvious advantage of the philosophic approach is that it facilitates in-depth engagement with the divine Texts by training our minds in such essential skills as questioning, analysis, logic, evaluation, drawing inferences and identifying premises. This increases our understanding of the Writings, especially in those frequently encountered passages that are highly philosophical in nature such as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s argument for the immortality of the soul [SAQ 238] which reveals more of its depth when approached philosophically. The philosophical approach also helps us to identify the explicit and hidden connections that shed light on the meaning of a text and allow us to discern more of the underlying unity of the Writings, i.e. their organic, interdependent structure. When these implicit connections become evident we are better prepared to see the wider range of topics to which the Writings are relevant.

Understanding the Writings philosophically draws attention to the enormous importance of reason in the Writings and, thereby, demonstrates that reason and faith are not really in conflict. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá makes this clear when he states, “Reason is the first faculty of man, and the religion of God is in

harmony with it,” [PUP 231] and adds that humanity needs to attain “reasoning faith.” [PUP 321] Furthermore, he states,

*If religious belief and doctrine is at variance with reason, it proceeds from the limited mind of man and not from God; therefore, it is unworthy of belief and not deserving of attention; the heart finds no rest in it, and real faith is impossible. How can man believe that which he knows to be opposed to reason? Is this possible? Can the heart accept that which reason denies?*⁵

What is especially important here is the connection between reason and the heart, suggesting that to win hearts, we must also win minds. In a similar vein, he asks,

How can man believe that which he knows to be opposed to reason? Is this possible? [PUP 231]

However, reason is not just necessary for “real faith” in the heart, it is also necessary because “in this age “the peoples of the world need the arguments of reason.” [SAQ 7] This leads to another advantage of a philosophic understanding of the Writings.

Bahá’u’lláh says we should “*Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age [we] live in, and center [our] deliberations on its exigencies and requirements.*” [GWB CVI, 213] As we have seen above, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says that people today “need the arguments of reason.” A philosophic approach to the Writings helps us fulfill that need by increasing our ability to teach the Faith in a clear and rational manner. Clear, rational explication of the Writings makes them more attractive and persuasive because well-reasoned explications provide facilitate understanding and enhance credibility, especially in an age inclined to be very critical of religions. Carefully reasoned presentations inspire confidence in the teachings instead of perplexity and confusion.

A philosophic understanding of the Writings also facilitates dialogue with other religions, especially those, that, like Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism, have well developed philosophical traditions of their own. Without such understanding of the Bahá'í Writings, the opportunities for dialogue with such partners will be limited because they cannot be adequately understood without their philosophic aspects. Exploring philosophical correlations with other religions and/or systems of thought are also important teaching tools because they strengthen Bahá'u'lláh's revelation of the essential oneness of all religions, especially if these correlations go below surface similarities and deal with fundamental philosophic similarities. For example, no religion takes matter simply at face value; all invest the material world with an aspect that is super-natural or extra-material which is not reducible to matter. This fundamental unity shows that all religions are working from the same or similar ontological premises.

Finally, a philosophic understanding of the Writings is also essential for apologetics, for defending the Faith against misrepresentations of the teachings. According to Abdu'l-Bahá, "*the possessor of knowledge ... should be the defender of his faith.*" [SDC 39] As the Faith becomes increasingly better known, the importance of a rational, philosophically informed and dignified defense of the teachings will grow.

2: Introduction

Ethics, the analysis and evaluation of the systems of obligations by which people live or should live may be divided into four aspects. The first, called normative ethics, considers how we are obligated to act if we wish to be considered 'moral' according to an ethical code we and/or our society have adopted. Sometimes they are called "theories of obligation."⁶ *Normative* ethics are *prescriptive*, i.e. they tell us how to behave either by issuing specific injunctions such as 'Do not steal' or by prescribing a principle by which we must judge our

behaviors. One form of Kant's categorical imperative, for example, tells us that we must always treat other human beings as ends-in-themselves and must never use them as a means or tool to reach our own goals. While this statement does not impose any specific action, it does provide a standard by which we can judge whether our actions are moral or not. Using it, we can develop a clearer understanding of what we ought to do or what we ought to avoid.

The second aspect of ethics is *descriptive* ethics which is the empirical study of how different cultures deal with particular ethical issues. For example, while many Western and Far Eastern cultures regard it as 'moral' to care for aged parents, the Inuit of North America regard it as ethically meritorious to strangle them or abandon them in the snow. Living in one of the harshest environments on earth, they have adopted 'survival ethics' which make group survival the standard of right and wrong. Descriptive ethics remains strictly neutral and never passes judgment about the moral worth of the actions it studies. It all ethical system of equal worth.

The third aspect of ethics is *applied* ethics which examines ethical issues in regards to specific problems such as civil disobedience, privacy, physician assisted suicide and abortion. Almost all areas of professional studies now involve some examination of ethical problems. For example, doctors and nurses receive courses in medical ethics; teachers in teaching ethics; commerce students in commercial ethics and engineers in engineering ethics. Each of these areas has gradually become a specialty to itself and is often taught separately from philosophy in colleges and universities.

The fourth aspect is meta-ethics which analyzes the nature of ethics itself. Meta-ethics has little or nothing to say about particular moral problems such as the lying or theft. Rather, it is a second-order pursuit, i.e. it philosophizes about ethics by examining the terminology and arguments used by ethicists and

by seeking to clarify the pre-suppositions implicit in various moral positions. It explores such questions as

- What is goodness and what are its properties?";
- What pre-suppositions are necessary to establish an ethical system?";
- Can there be objective moral facts?";
- Can moral claims have cross-cultural validity?";
- Are moral judgment such as 'good' or 'evil' mind-independent?";
- Are moral judgments based on emotions or intellect?";
- Can ethics be derived from nature?"
- Can ethics be separated from religion?"

Meta-ethics also examines the theories of reality, i.e. the underlying assumptions about human nature and personhood as well as the nature and purpose of society since all of these influence our ethical views. The importance of these questions and issues can be readily illustrated. If, for example, we assume that humans are only physical processes, then it is difficult to defend free-will and the attendant concepts of moral responsibility for our acts. Without moral responsibility, it is hard to make any sense of the concept of ethics or even justice or social order. Nobody discusses the ethics of cars or sewing machines. They just do what they do without any attributable intent. (Of course a few philosophers espouse 'compatibilism' according to which "human actions can be caused, but still free,"⁷ but ethicists tend to agree with Kant that this is "wretched subterfuge"⁸ and "word jugglery."⁹) Another example of a meta-ethical question with enormous importance in today's globalized world is the issue of cross-cultural judgments. If we assert that moral claims cannot have any cross-cultural validity, i.e. that moral claims are not universal and only culture-specific, then we cannot pass judgment on – and prohibit –

such cultural practices as female genital mutilation, persecution of minority sexual orientations or persecution of certain ethnic or religious groups. As we can see, meta-ethics touches on some of the central issues of personal and collective existence.

Udo Schaefer's magisterial two volume study *Bahá'í Ethics in Light of Scripture* explores both the normative as well as some of the meta-ethical issues in the Bahá'í Writings. Nonetheless, despite Schaefer's excellent work, there remain various important meta-ethical subjects to be examined and correlated with other ethical views. Consequently, this paper focuses exclusively on the meta-ethical principles embedded in the Writings.

The most obvious reason for doing so is to widen and deepen our understanding of the ethics found in the Writings by making us aware of the principles on which these ethics are based. This, in turn, helps us correlate Bahá'í ethics with other ethical schools and understand how Bahá'í ethics are similar and different. Such knowledge creates opportunities for dialogue with other religions and/or systems of thought in which knowledge of the Faith can be spread. As we have already discussed, such knowledge facilitates teaching work, inter-faith dialogue as well as apologetics.

3: The Religious Foundationalism of Bahá'í Meta-ethics

Any study of Bahá'í meta-ethics must begin with the realization that Bahá'í epistemology – including ethical epistemology – exemplifies strong foundationalism, namely, the view that all knowledge has a

a two-tier structure: some instances of knowledge and justification are non-inferential or foundational; all other instances thereof are inferential and non-foundational in that they derive ultimately from foundational knowledge or justification ... radical [strong] foundationalism ... requires that foundational

beliefs be certain and able to guarantee the certainty of the non-foundational beliefs they support.¹⁰

In other words, knowledge “rests on a foundation of indubitable beliefs from which *further propositions can be inferred to produce a superstructure of known truths.*”¹¹

The Writings are foundational insofar as the ethical teachings are not deduced from any preceding human beliefs, premises, experience or experiments but rather, are based the revelation of the Manifestations of God. The Manifestations, of course, are infallible and their teachings are true *a priori* insofar as they do not depend on human experience or agreement for their truthfulness. Rather, because the Manifestations are on a higher plane of existence, they

surround the essence and qualities of the creatures, transcend and contain existing realities and understand all things, therefore, Their knowledge is divine knowledge, and not acquired – that is to say, it is a holy bounty; it is a divine revelation. [SAQ 157]

However, this does not mean God’s ethical teachings cannot be rationally explained *a posteriori* by gathering evidence to support them and thereby making them intelligible in different circumstances and cultures by using the “intelligence and reason whereby [man] is required to determine the verity of questions and propositions.” [PUP 181] Such explanations help to make the ethical teachings more intelligible for humankind; they help some people accept God’s will; they strengthen our own faith and facilitate inter-faith dialogue. However, the intrinsic truth of these teachings does not depend on such evidence. Only the Manifestation can guarantee that.

The Manifestations have this power because, in Bahá’í epistemology, higher beings can ‘surround’ or ‘comprehend’ lower ones [PUP 114; SAQ 146] and Manifestations are obviously higher beings.

Since Their knowledge is *a priori* it, therefore, is certain. If these truths depended on empirical research and evaluation, i.e. if they were dependent on gathered evidence, the revealed ethical teachings would run into the “induction problem” and, therefore, could not be certain. With induction from empirically gathered evidence we can never attain certainty because there can never be any guarantee that we have collected all the necessary evidence. Furthermore, because the higher ontological position of the Manifestations is structural, i.e. part of the structure of creation, the superiority – and certainty – of Their knowledge is also a structural aspect of creation. This makes foundationalism an integral and inescapable aspect of Bahá’í ethical thinking. Consequently, in the Bahá’í context, ethical thinking necessarily begins with deductions from the principles taught by the Manifestations. We may draw numerous inferences from these foundational principles but must always ensure our inferences are in harmony with the divine teachings which are the standard by which to judge our conclusions.

Because of their foundationalism, the Bahá’í Writings assert that there are absolute non-relative¹² ethical standards, i.e. the “eternal verities” [PDC 108] as Shoghi Effendi calls them, that are not mind-dependent, are given by a transcendental non-human agency, are universal in validity and obligatory on all humans. Consequently, there are ethical truths that are suited to our essential human nature both at the personal and collective level and that correspond to or represent eternal, divine truths.

4. The Three Foundation Stones

Bahá’í meta-ethics are built on three foundation stones: metaphysics or the theory of reality; philosophical anthropology or the theory of human nature; and the nature of the Manifestations. The teachings on these three subjects shape Bahá’í meta-ethics and, thereby, Bahá’í ethics. At some point or another, Bahá’í meta-ethics and ethics are justified by reference

to one or all of these three foundations. They are the ‘first premises’ of any deductions about ethics.

Metaphysics, the theory of reality, concerns itself with such questions as,

- What is the nature and structure of reality?
- What kinds of things exist?
- What is their nature?
- How do they relate to each other?
- Is matter all there is?
- Are there non-material realities?
- What is the ‘origin’ of the universe?
- Does the universe have order?
- Is the universe teleological in nature or is it random?

Bahá’í metaphysics views reality as originating with God in a process called “emanation” which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá likens to “*the coming forth of the action from the actor, of the writing from the writer*” [SAQ 205] as well as to the “*appearance of the rays from the luminary of the horizons [the sun].*” [SAQ 202] These metaphors are intended to make clear that the action of the actor, the writer’s writing and the sun’s rays are all absolutely dependent on their source for their existence and are also essentially distinct from their source. We might also think of a magnet and its surrounding magnetic field. Moreover, the source is not diminished by what it emanates or changes its condition in any way. [SAQ 205] We say “emanates” to distinguish it from ‘manifestation’ in which “*a single thing [the source] appears in infinite forms,*” [SAQ 294] like a seed appearing in branches, leaves and flowers. The impact of this teaching on meta-ethics is clear: because there is an absolute source of creation Bahá’í meta-ethics must be some form of cognitivism which implies that there are objective ethical

standards that can be known and constitute moral knowledge. Ethics are not merely subjective.

Furthermore, reality has three parts. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states that “*The Prophets ... believe that there is the world of God, the world of the Kingdom, and the world of Creation: three things.*” [SAQ 295] The ultimate Source of everything is the Divine or supernatural realm which as the absolutely independent origin of all other things, is unaffected by time, space and causality and is absolutely unrestricted His actions. Because no one but Himself can impose limits on Him, the Divine is absolutely free: “*He doeth what He pleaseth, and ordaineth what He willeth through the power of His sovereignty.*” [ESW 102] However, because God is absolutely free does not necessarily mean He acts capriciously or without reason (Shoghi Effendi refers to “the rational God” [WOB 112]), or does not limit his powers. For example, humans have free will to make moral choices – which means that God does not use His power to compel the right choices even though He could. Obviously, the Writings also assert the existence of non-material realities, the inherent order and teleological nature of creation and the dependence of all things on God.

At the other end of the ‘scale’ of being is the natural realm in which space, time, causality are operative and, therefore, freedom is limited to the spiritual or supernatural aspects of human nature: “And among the teachings of His Holiness Bahá’u’lláh is man’s freedom, that through the ideal power he should be free and emancipated from the captivity of the world of nature.”¹³ The purpose of humans is to free themselves from the influences of the natural and to actualize their spiritual potentialities to the fullest extent possible. Human nature is therefore, teleological, a fact which is reflected in Bahá’í meta-ethics and the normative ethics that grow out of them. It is also important to note that human nature has two aspects:

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 ... In his material aspect he expresses untruth, cruelty and injustice; all these are the outcome of his lower nature. The attributes of his Divine nature are shown forth in love, mercy, kindness, truth and justice, one and all being expressions of his higher nature... [PT 60]

Humanity's double-nature which implies that to one degree or another, we are always in conflict with ourselves, has tremendous implications for Bahá'í meta-ethics not the least of which is the endorsement of some forms of natural law theory. We shall discuss this in detail below.

Rationality is another essential attribute of human nature which must be taken into consideration in regards to ethics and meta-ethics.

The human spirit which distinguishes man from the animal is the rational soul, and these two names – the human spirit and the rational soul – designate one thing.¹⁴

Consequently, all revelations appeal to rationality though to different degrees according to humankind's stage of development in the process of progressive revelation. The extraordinary importance of the "human spirit" or "rational soul" is emphasized by 'Abdu'l-Bahá's declaration that "*the spirit of man is the most noble of phenomena ... the meeting between man and God.*" [PUP 239] This assertion shows the "rational soul" has a special place in phenomenal creation and even a special spiritual status. From this we may infer that rationality, as an essential attribute of the soul, holds an exalted place the gifts bestowed upon humankind. Furthermore, Shoghi Effendi's intriguing reference to the "invisible yet rational God" [WOB 112] also points to a close link between religion and reason, though it should be remembered that the 'rationality of God' is not assessable to human thought. We know from Shoghi

Effendi that God is rational, but as humans, we do not necessarily understand that rationality.

Bridging the “world of God” and the “world of Creation” or nature is what ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, calls “the Kingdom” i.e. the realm of the Manifestations of which Bahá’u’lláh says,

And since there can be no tie of direct intercourse to bind the one true God with His creation, and no resemblance whatever can exist between the transient and the Eternal, the contingent and the Absolute, He hath ordained that in every age and dispensation a pure and stainless Soul be made manifest in the kingdoms of earth and heaven. [GWB XXVII, 65]

The Manifestations reflect the creative power of God into the world, and, therefore have a two-fold station:

The Holy Manifestations of God possess two stations: one is the physical station, and one the spiritual. In other words, one station is that of a human being, and one, of the Divine Reality. If the Manifestations are subjected to tests, it is in Their human station only, not in the splendour of Their Divine Reality. [SWAB 55]

As we proceed through this paper we shall return to various aspects of this three-fold nature of existence which shapes Bahá’í meta-ethics.

5: Meta-ethics and Religion

One of the major questions in meta-ethics is whether or not ethics depends on religion. Those philosophers who call themselves secularists believe ethics is distinct and independent from revelation and can rely on reason alone.¹⁵ Others, however, such as Hume, believe that ethics is based on feeling and community agreement rather than reason, though they still agree that ethics and religion are not intrinsically connected.

From the foregoing discussions, it is clear that the ultimate basis for Bahá'í meta-ethics is the supernatural or the transcendent, i.e. God, Who, unlike creation, is not subject to change, time, place or causality, Who is absolutely independent of all other things and Who is absolutely free. The foundations of ethics are not in the evolving empirical world observed by the five senses which, by definition, exclude the non-material or the transcendent as part of its explanations. Such views exclude both God and personal soul. However, 'Abdu'l-Bahá rejects such total reliance on the empirical world, saying, "*the circle and range of perception by the five senses is exceedingly limited,*"¹⁶ since "*whatever falleth not under the power of the senses is either unreal or doubtful.*" [TAF 7] In the Bahá'í view, ethics cannot be separated from religion without being severely diminished; indeed, ethics depends on religion, as we shall see below, for its sustainability and coherence. Shoghi Effendi supports the connection between religion and ethics by writing,

The other statement reported to have been made by Dr. Einstein to the effect that the ethical behavior of man 'requires no support from religion' is incompatible with the Bahá'í viewpoint which emphatically stresses the fact that *no sound ethics can exist and become effective unless based on revealed religion.* To dissociate ethics from religion is to render the former not only *void of any firm foundation* but *without the necessary driving power.*¹⁷

It is important to note that Shoghi Effendi does not claim there no ethics at all without revealed religion but rather that "no *sound* ethics can exist and become effective unless based on revealed religion." Purely man-made ethics such as those offered by Kant, Marx and Sartre are possible but they are ineffective for a variety of reasons that will become apparent through this paper.

There are at least two reasons why ethics depends on revealed religion. First, it is difficult to see how ethics divorced from a

belief in God can provide consistent and coherent guidance on the basis of a constantly changing empirical world in which physical, social, economic, cultural and scientific change is ubiquitous. The resulting inconsistent, incoherent and frequently clashing ethical views result in either ethical relativism which claims that ethical rules depend on culture as well as other factors such as economics; or in skepticism in which we can never justify any ethical belief; or in extreme ethical nihilism, i.e. the denial of ethics altogether.¹⁸ Each of these positions undermines its own effectiveness since each makes internal consistency within itself and unity with others difficult to achieve. If, for example, we cannot justify ethical theories such as skepticism or error theory in which all ethical teachings are false (see below), then societal agreement on moral rules will be difficult if not impossible. Once seen as ‘arbitrary’ ethical rules have severely diminished power or “effectiveness.”

Second, it is obvious that reason alone cannot establish the degree of social agreement needed to make an ethical system effective in a society. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says about the rationalist philosophers,

They proved things by reason and held firmly to logical proofs; all their arguments are arguments of reason. Notwithstanding this, they differed greatly, and their opinions were contradictory. They even changed their views. [SAQ 296]

Such lack of consistency undermines the “effectiveness” of ethics. As already noted in regards to basing ethics on empirical data alone, basing it on reason alone leads to problems regarding internal consistency and consequently, social cohesion. This, in turn, undermines its effectiveness in ordering society by influencing human behavior. This lack of a “firm foundation” with reason rules out what Shoghi Effendi calls the “eternal verities on which alone a stable and flourishing civilization can be ultimately established.” [CF 125]

5.1 Attempts to Separate Meta-Ethics and Religion

Immanuel Kant is one of the most famous philosophers to maintain that ethics do not depend on religion. In his view, reason alone is a sufficient foundation for ethics.

for its own sake morality does not need religion at all (whether objectively, as regards willing, or subjectively, as regards ability [to act]); by virtue of pure practical reason it is self-sufficient.¹⁹

He also writes,

So far as morality is based upon the conception of man as a free agent who, just because he is free, binds himself through his reason to unconditioned laws, it *stands in need neither of the idea of another Being over him*, for him to apprehend his duty, nor of an incentive other than the law itself, for him to do his duty. At least it is man's own fault if he is subject to such a need; and if he is, this need can be relieved through nothing outside himself.²⁰

Kant takes the view that reason is sufficient to guide us to correct ethical action. In *The Critique of Practical Reason* he finds a role for God as a "regulative principle" but this role, which makes God 'useful' for morality, does not make ethics depend on religion. Revelation is not necessary as long as people adhere to rationality in their ethical deliberations. Religion may be linked to ethics by fortuitous historical circumstances but there is no necessary, i.e. logical connection between the two. As we have seen above, from a Bahá'í viewpoint, the problem with reliance on reason is highly problematical.

A highly influential modern philosopher who believes ethics do not rely on religion is the ethicist Peter Singer.²¹ For Singer, ethics must be autonomous. One of Singer's (and co-author

Hauser's) proofs is that atheists and agnostics share all the central moral principles of the major religion. Therefore, "atheists and agnostics do not believe less morally than religious believers."²² In short, 'Who needs religion?' Their argument has little to recommend it. No agnostics and atheists have ever lived in a society without religion as the basis for morals. Consequently, they internalized these religious teachings as young children and young adults and retained them as valuable even when they rejected the religious foundations. Having absorbed these teachings from their childhood and seeing them re-enforced in their dealings with other adults explains why the seeming lack of religion does not affect their moral behavior: the ethical teachings of religion have simply become part of their social and mental makeup. It is highly improbable that agnostics and atheists everywhere invented their own moralities which, for the most part, just happened to coincide with society's highest religious teachings.

In seeking to disengage religion from ethics Singer and Hauser also draw attention to the history of religious violence. Religion is so violent that ethics cannot be – or should not be – associated with it. Any association with religion undermines the credibility of ethics. This argument is highly problematic. First, it does not follow that because all wars in the past were fought by people with religion that the wars were about religion. Religious people can and have fought wars for resources necessary for survival; for "lebensraum" and other geographic advantages; or for strategic political reasons, or even just 'glory.' The fact that the combatants were also religious is accidental or fortuitous and not essential to the war itself.²³ Indeed, the number of wars fought specifically over religion is quite small in the five thousand years of recorded warfare. For example, very few if any wars in the ancient world were fought over religion. Even the wars presented in the Old Testament were not simply religious wars: they were wars about land, i.e. "lebensraum" and security against hostile tribes.

Yahweh's role in the Hebrew victories was essential but the wars were not primarily about belief in Yahweh.

Singer and Hauser also try to disengage ethics from religion by stating that moral rules are inherited responses from our evolutionary past. In other words, morality has an evolutionary not religious basis; humans are provided with a "moral faculty that guides our intuitive judgments of right and wrong"²⁴ on the basis of what has contributed to survival in the past. However, the most obvious question is whether biologically-based responses or instincts are 'ethics.' Instincts are automatic responses, i.e. they do not involve intentions – and the whole purpose of ethics is to train or reform our intentions. The instinct to eat is not an ethical decision – but the issue of when we eat, and what and how much can be ethical issues. Nevertheless, all of these are guided by intentions. Intentions do not affect a mother's biological drive to eat but they do affect her decision to give her food to her child. In effect, the 'evolutionary past' theory of ethics is not really about ethics at all because it leaves out the issue of 'intention' without which any discussion about ethics is moot.

Two giants of twentieth century philosophy, A.J. Ayer and Bertrand Russell, reject the view that ethics depends on religion. Ayer states,

I suspect that the widespread assumption that religious belief is necessary for the maintenance of moral standards arises not so much from any assessment of the empirical evidence as from a tacit or explicit acceptance of the proposition that if there is no God there is no reason to be moral.²⁵

This, of course, was Dostoyevsky's point when Ivan Karamzov says, "If God does not exist, everything is permitted."²⁶ (This is the most common paraphrase of the statement.) Ayer adds that in the last analysis, "Moral standards can never be justified

merely by an appeal to authority.”²⁷ This leaves us with the question of how to justify moral laws.

Bertrand Russell builds his opposition to any connection between ethics and religion on the principle that humans should be autonomous and not subservient to any God or divine revelation. Following divine commands is unworthy of us. He pursues what we might call ‘the argument from autonomy’ and even ‘the argument from pride.’ He writes,

In this lies Man’s true freedom: in determination to worship only the God created by our own love for the good, to respect only the heaven which inspires the insight of our best moments.²⁸

There is no intellectual argument here; rather, there is a ringing declaration of independence and even a suggestion of defiance against the very idea of a ‘God’ who is not of our manufacture. Only in this way can humans retain autonomy in their ethical lives. The underlying logical problem with Russell’s view is that we cannot identify which of the man-made ‘Gods’ is really the best and most inspirational since there is no non-human, objective standard by which to judge. Further, from a Bahá’í viewpoint, Russell’s view that we become the creators of God means that declare ourselves God’s equals or superiors and, thereby, “join partners” with Him, something which Bahá’u’lláh explicitly forbids: “*Beware, beware, lest thou be led to join partners with the Lord, thy God.*” [GWB XCIV, 192]

Elsewhere he elaborates,

Science can teach us, and I think our own hearts can teach us, no longer to look round for imaginary supports, no longer to invent allies in the sky but rather to look to our own efforts.²⁹

Here, too, Russell insists on human autonomy based on science, “our own hearts” and “our own efforts.” But, of

course, there are problems with this view as we shall see shortly. The insufficiency of “our own efforts” is precisely one of the reasons why ethics need a religious foundation. The same may be said about reliance on “our own hearts.” On this issues `Abdu'l-Bahá:

Inspirations are the promptings or susceptibilities of the human heart. The promptings of the heart are sometimes satanic. How are we to differentiate them? How are we to tell whether a given statement is an inspiration and prompting of the heart through the merciful assistance or through the satanic agency? [PUP 254]

Russell has no answer for this difficult challenge – yet, that is precisely the question that needs to be answered for the heart to be a trustworthy source of ethics and meta-ethics.

Relying on science also has insurmountable difficulties as seen which we shall explore in one of the most recent efforts to make science the basis of ethics, Sam Harris’s *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values*. According to Harris,

science can, in principle, help us understand what we *should* do and *should* want – and, therefore, what *other people* should do and want in order to live the best lives possible.³⁰

Difficulties arise as soon as we ask how science can do this. In the first place the scientific method, only studies phenomena that

- are physical/material
- are susceptible to empirical direct or indirect observation by the humans senses or instruments
- are measurable or quantifiable
- are results of repeatable experiments or observations

- are observer independent
- are falsifiable, i.e. disprovable by observation and/or experiment

This brings us to a simple question: ‘Can we solve moral questions this way?’ How, for example, can we identify what we “*should* want” as Harris claims? The scientific method is not designed to deal with obligations, duties, prohibitions, good, evil and other values.

Take, for example, the morality of feeding starving children. We can measure necessary calorie and protein intakes; we can measure results in survival rates, we can quantify all this scientific data – but we can never use this method to prove that we are morally obligated to feed these children. Moral evaluations are not scientifically testable because moral values are not physical, measurable, physically observable, observer independent, objective or disprovable.’ No coroner’s report will say that certain physical evidence shows the moral evil of this death. The fact that they are starving is an empirical fact but there is nothing in this fact itself that obligates us to do anything for them. Such obligations must come from elsewhere – but the question is, where? Harris frequently refers to brain-scans – which not actually tell us which human brain activity is good or evil. A positive scan may be correlated with acts of kindness – in a Mother Teresa – or with acts of terror – in Dr. Josef Mengele. The scan itself shows no preference. The inescapable conclusion is that moral values are simply not proper scientific objects, i.e. they are not suited to discovery or exploration by the scientific method. In sum, there is no intrinsic and necessary connection between ethics and science.

Curiously enough Harris admits as much: “Science *cannot tell* us why, *scientifically*, we should value health.”³¹ In effect, he concedes that science has nothing to say about moral valuations or obligations and, thereby, he undermines his own thesis. If “scientifically” speaking there is no reason to value something as self-evidently important as health, then there is not much

hope of building an ethical system – with all its complex questions – on science alone. Because science and the scientific method are irrelevant to ethical questions, it is impossible to base meta-ethical principles and ethical rules on them.

To separate ethics from religion, Harris also tries to set aside the ‘is-ought’ problem, claiming it as “another dismal product of Abrahamic religion.”³² The modern formulation of this difficulty came from David Hume who objected to the way some moral treatises moved from an ‘is’ or ‘is not,’ i.e. from a matter of fact to an ‘ought’ or ‘ought’ not, i.e. from an empirical fact to a moral prescription.³³ According to Hume – and numerous other philosophers since then – a description of facts cannot logically lead to moral prescriptions obligating us to accept certain acts as ‘good.’ Violating the ‘is-ought’ distinction is precisely the error of social Darwinism which believes that because we observe a struggle for existence in nature, our society, which is embedded in nature, *ought* to be modeled on this struggle. Yet this supposed obligation to imitate the struggle for existence is not inherent in the facts themselves; rather, it is something we bring or attach to the facts externally.

According to Harris, once the ‘is-ought’ distinction is removed, science can become a basis of value. In an effort to show the intimate connection between ‘is’ and ‘ought’ or facts and values, he says that even a truth-claim about the composition of water appeals “to the values of empiricism and logic.”³⁴ This argument has two problems. First, if, as Harris claims, there is no real distinction between fact and value or ‘is’ and ‘ought,’ then the values must be inherent in the facts i.e. they must be empirically discoverable and meet the criteria of being proper objects of scientific study. Values are self-evidently not scientific insofar as they are non-physical and cannot be quantified, are not material or physical, are not objective and cannot be falsified or verified by experimentation. In short, there is no reason to believe in necessary, intrinsic, scientific or logical connections between

facts and values. It is we who make the decision to connect them, i.e. it is *our* judgment, externally applied, that gives them value and nothing else. Hume's 'is-ought' distinction is valid – at least for all non-theistic metaphysics and ontologies.

Second, the scientific or epistemological value assigned by Harris to “empiricism and logic” is obviously a different kind of value from the moral values discussed in meta-ethics and ethics which concern judgments of right and wrong, good and evil, as well as obligations and permissibility. The decision to value scientifically based knowledge bears no significance resemblance to such issues as child abuse or helping the poor to alleviate their condition. Harris is comparing apples and oranges. In what is really a desperate attempt to support his case about against the 'is-ought' disjunction, he quotes Dennett – a fellow believer in basing meta-ethics on science – who writes, “If ‘ought’ cannot be derived from ‘is,’ just what *can* it be derived from?”³⁵

Dennett's question is exactly the heart of the problem for empiricists – if the empirical facts of nature cannot logically serve as the foundation of morals, what can?

6. Why Meta-ethics Needs a Religious Foundation

There are at least four major problems with any attempt to establish a strictly empirical meta-ethics. The first of these is the ubiquitous flux of creation. This leads to the old platonic question applied to meta-ethical principles and the resulting ethics: how can we actually know anything in a world that is totally unstable? Meta-ethical principles must lead us to ethical decisions that are not absolutely time-bound but are applicable consistently throughout the passage of time though it may appear in various external forms. The “golden rule,” for example, has a variety of expressions, but the underlying principle remains the same. Such constancy or stability, such “eternal verities on which alone a stable and flourishing civilization can be ultimately established,” [CF 125] are necessary

lest humans become ethically confused and lose their sense of value, meaning and purpose and possibly even the wish and/or will to be ethical. Therefore, we must conclude that ethical systems which accept the limits of materialism or empiricism are inherently deficient, i.e. incomplete and not adequately grounded precisely because they cannot provide ethical stability.

The second reason why divorcing ethics from religion is problematical concerns the crucial meta-ethical issue of authority which in turn affects the “necessary driving power”³⁶ of a civilization. Without rational and logically coherent answers to questions of authority, no ethical system can be securely grounded. There are two aspects to the authority issue – legitimacy and power. Both are needed, and, as the following discussion shall make clear, no empirical source can supply them.

The first aspect of authority concerns ‘legitimacy,’ which deals with the questions, ‘Who – if anyone – has the legitimacy or the right to lay down moral principles and precepts for the human race? Who or what – if anything – has the knowledge, understanding and goodness necessary to legitimize a demand for obedience? Who – or what – is inherently entitled to make obedience a condition for attaining ‘rightness,’ or true value and appropriate worth as a human being?’ It is virtually self-evident that no human and no collection of human beings inherently possess such legitimacy by virtue of their human nature. The reasons are obvious: humans are fallible, are fickle, have personal interests, lack absolute independence from all things, i.e. are susceptible to outside influence, interference and coercion. Thus, humans cannot guarantee objectivity and justice. They also lack the unlimited knowledge needed to dispense perfect justice, understanding and compassion. Another problem is that strictly empirical knowledge gives no evidence to establish one definitive standard by which to judge various ethical claims. On strictly empirical bases, the only way to establish a decisive standard of ethics is by social or political

convention, or by force. However, this is not the ethical legitimacy we seek but rather political, social or legal legitimacy. God, on the other hand, is not only unaffected by the aforementioned deficiencies, but He is also the actual maker of the world and the nature of everything in it. Given His knowledge, it is difficult to imagine who else could have genuine ethical legitimacy since His knowledge is the only reliable guide to ‘the good.’

The second aspect of authority is the question of power. Without legitimacy, power is tyranny and forceful enslavement but without power, legitimacy remains purely theoretical, i.e. impotent. Thus, to see how legitimacy is actually put into practice we must ask ‘Who – if anyone – has the power necessary to enable people to follow these rules despite their short-comings and weaknesses?’ ‘Who – if anyone – has the power to impose His will and His ethical judgments on humankind? Who – if anyone – can impose both obligations or laws and consequences for committed or omitted acts? Here, too, theistic and non-theistic meta-ethical systems part company since the former believe that only God can adequately fulfill that role. God has the power, i.e. is omnipotent and has the legitimacy to rule humankind. God-substitutes such as governments, priesthoods or ideologies lack this power because they are subject to the vicissitudes of ubiquitous change and they lack the legitimacy and the power to make their ethical requirements effective. Inherent human limitations prevent this.

The third aspect of authority is ‘universality.’ Here, the most fundamental question is, ‘Is there such a thing as a universal human nature?’ Answering this will tell us whether the limits of authority are defined by time, culture, economics or political ideology. The Bahá’í Writings answer this question affirmatively. Moreover, they show that a universal ethical standard follows from a universal human nature. One of their key principles is the essential oneness of humankind:

*When we observe the human world, we find various collective expressions of unity therein. For instance, man is distinguished from the animal by his degree, or kingdom. This comprehensive distinction includes all the posterity of Adam and constitutes one great household or human family, which may be considered the fundamental or physical unity of mankind.*³⁷

God has created human nature as it is, and the teaching of the oneness of humankind affirms that this nature is universal even though different cultures may actualize different aspects at different times. The teaching of the oneness of humankind starts with the “physical unity of mankind.” Furthermore, all humans possess a “*human spirit which distinguishes man from the animal [this] is the rational soul, and these two names – the human spirit and the rational soul – designate one thing.*” [SAQ 208] Regardless of culture, time, place or circumstance, all people share one human nature because they have a rational soul. We also share a higher, spiritual nature and a lower animal nature which the higher nature must control. [SAQ 118] In addition, we all possess “spiritual susceptibilities” [PUP 339] which must be cultivated in order to make spiritual progress possible. Since there is a universal human nature, then it logically follows that a universal ethic is possible, i.e. at least some ethical rules apply to everyone at all times and in all places. Since God is the creator of human nature, no one is better qualified than God to establish what this ethic is. Consequently, there are ethical standards valid across all cultures, places, times and circumstances and that cross-cultural moral judgments are possible. Shoghi Effendi writes,

He [Bahá'u'lláh] insists on the unqualified recognition of the unity of their purpose, *restates the eternal verities* they enshrine, coordinates their functions, *distinguishes the essential and the authentic from the nonessential and spurious* in their teachings, separates the God-given truths from the priest-prompted superstitions, and on

this as a basis proclaims the possibility, and even prophecies the inevitability, of their *unification*, and the *consummation* of their highest hopes.³⁸

The core of this statement is that Bahá'u'lláh “restate[d] the eternal verities” which means (1) that certain truths – including ethical truths – are not bound to one time and (2) that these “verities” which Bahá'u'lláh “restated” are the same as those taught by previous Manifestations in other times and places. In effect, Shoghi Effendi confirms a meta-ethical perennialism for those morals that are not “priest-prompted superstitions” and “nonessential and spurious.” His dismissive description of those religious teachings that deviate from the “eternal verities” clearly de-legitimizes them. The underlying assumption is that the “eternal verities” are suited to a universal human nature and what is best therein. This suggests an important conclusion: ethical relativism does not apply to the “eternal verities” or “fundamental verities”³⁹ but it applies to the superstructural cultural adaptations. The former are universal and the latter are particular.

It is also important to ask, ‘Can a man-made ethical system claim to be universally valid for all human beings?’ On the basis of the foregoing arguments, the answer is clearly negative: man-made ethical systems lack authority in the form of legitimacy; authority in the form of power and authority in the form of universality.

The latter is inescapably deficient in this regard is because humans only have access to incomplete knowledge conditioned by time, location and circumstances, and, therefore, cannot, even in principle, have the insight into human nature to make their knowledge universal. This limitation is recognized by all systems of meta-ethics and is the source of much debate and controversy. Various types of meta-ethical skepticism and nihilism find their basis here.⁴⁰ The fact that this deficiency still causes so much debate suggests that emphatic denials to the contrary, theistic meta-ethics cannot just be ignored.

6.1: Contrary Views About Authority and Universality

Non-theistic meta-ethical systems, of course, reject God and basically set the question of God's authority aside as meaningless, irrelevant or insoluble. Some reject God not on metaphysical grounds but rather, on principle: His very existence as Creator undermines human freedom and with it, the very foundation of morality. One such is Jean-Paul Sartre who argues that if God is the Creator of all things, then our essence precedes our existence. Humans are compared to paper dolls that God cuts out.⁴¹ This means that human nature or essence is pre-given by God, and, consequently, we are not truly free to make or "define"⁴² ourselves by means of our own ethical choices. Hence Sartre adopts his "postulatory atheism"⁴³ to safeguard absolute human freedom. He states, "if God does not exist then there is at least one being in whom existence precedes essence,"⁴⁴ i.e. one being who makes himself by his own actions. Sartre believes that our choices are only legitimate for ourselves, have no genuine power over others and are universal only insofar as they exemplify everyone's right to choose for themselves. Our specific personal moral rules and choices apply only to ourselves. In short, the problems of authority and universality are simply denied beyond the individual sphere.

Denying authority i.e. legitimacy, power and universality beyond the individual obviously creates problems in regards to the social aspects of human existence. No society can exist without at least some minimal universal ethical standards applicable to all. In a constitutional democracy, there is, of course, some room for individual diversity in ethics. Among them are the notoriously hard issues of abortion and physician assisted suicide as well as simple issues like tipping and offering bus seats to pregnant ladies. However, for society to function effectively, there must be certain fundamental ethical injunctions that everyone is expected to obey: honesty in regards to income tax and other legitimate financial obligations; respect for the sanctity of life and other people's bodies as well

as truthfulness in our dealings with others. Without general adherence to such rules, moral and legal anarchy will result. The problem with Sartre is the question of who or what will have this authority. If the whole point of his existentialism is that we must make ourselves by our own ethical choices and standards, then there is no legitimate rule that can be applied to everyone. The closest Sartre comes to such a universal rule is the requirement that we must all live in “good faith” i.e. be true to ourselves, ideas and feelings – but this does not solve the authority problem. Many evil things have been done in “good faith.” Besides, who arbitrates what “good faith” is for each person? In the last analysis, there is simply no room for a legitimate and universal authority in Sartre’s philosophy which fails to recognize that we are not only individuals choosing for ourselves alone but individuals whose identity and well-being is not entirely in our own hands. The challenge for Sartre’s existentialism is how to maintain a society in which people refuse to be defined by anything except their own choices. Sartre’s later turn to Marxism – generally regarded as poorly integrated with his existentialism – was an attempt to solve this problem.

Communism is probably the most wide-spread man-made meta-ethic in human history even though, since the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe and Russia, and its gradual abandonment in China, it is now in eclipse as a practical basis of government and society. The foundation of Marxist meta-ethics is the principle that ethics are no more than the “idealistic superstructure”⁴⁵ that arises from the relations of material production. As Marx and Engels say,

The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life. Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of men, appear at this stage as the direct efflux of their material behaviour. The same applies to

mental production as expressed in the language of politics, laws, *morality*, religion, metaphysics, etc. of a people. Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc. – real, active men, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these, up to its furthest forms.⁴⁶

In other words, ethical beliefs simply reflect the relations of production, i.e. the relations all people must enter to survive in a given economic system, be it slavery, feudalism, capitalism or Communism. These relations shape our consciousness and with it our meta-ethical and ethical views. These views are not grounded in any transcendental power; consequently, there is no transcendental or divine basis for the legitimacy, power and universality of any ethical rules. The aim of Marxist philosophy is

to explain all the different theoretical products and forms of consciousness, religion, philosophy, ethics, etc. etc. and trace their origins and growth from that [material] basis.⁴⁷

Materialist explanations are the only way to free people from being enslaved by their masters who use religious beliefs – “render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s”⁴⁸ – to oppress them, or better yet, make them willingly subservient. With materialist explanations the spell of religion will be broken. The Communist ethics will prevail and humans shall live in a society that meets their true needs.

In this struggle, the most advanced section of the proletariat is the communist movement “which pushes forward all the others”⁴⁹ and which has

over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of *clearly understanding the line of march*, the conditions, and the *ultimate general results of the proletarian movement*.⁵⁰

In other words, the Communist movement – and later, in Marxist-Leninism and Marxist-Maoism, the Communist Party – has special insight about “the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement,” i.e. the future result of the class struggle and its social consequences. Such knowledge may be fairly described as ‘extra-empirical.’ This ‘extra-empirical’ knowledge of the ultimate results of the revolution and the “line of march” by which it will get there is Marxism’s way of providing legitimacy to the decisions of the communist movement or party. Like God, their decisions about everything from strategy to ethics are legitimated by their superior insight. The problem for Marxism on this issue is that its empiricist materialism notwithstanding, there is more than a ‘touch of the transcendental’ in its basis for legitimacy. It seems to recognize – albeit it tentatively – that ethical legitimacy requires an ‘extra-empirical’ foundation. Without such a special foundation, its claim to be the ‘vanguard’ (later spelled out more fully by Lenin⁵¹) that “pushes forward all others”⁵² is open to counter-claims by political rivals.

It seems clear that to establish its special legitimacy for leadership – including moral leadership – Communism puts the movement, or later, the Party, into the place of God and the Manifestations. Somebody or something has got to be special to determine what is or is not ethical. In Communism, morality is based on whatever the Party decrees – it decides what is good and bad. This shows that, in the case of Marxism at least, the effort to build ethics on a purely empirical basis fails. Consequently, the example of Marxism re-affirms – albeit by contrast – that meta-ethical principles and the ethical consequences thereof cannot be purely empirical. God, i.e. a final ‘extra-empirical’ or transcendental foundation for ethics is unavoidable.

In addition to undermining its own self-portrayal as strictly empirical, Marxism has a problem with ethical consistency. If the same act can be good or evil depending on what the movement or the Party decides is best for the struggle against

the ruling classes, how can there be any ethical knowledge, how can a society and personal relations function from one day, week or year to the next? Under such circumstances, it is simply impossible for anyone to know right from wrong and good from evil. In fact, such a view inevitably undermines having ethical standards at all and encourages mere adaptation to the latest pronouncements. This cannot be remedied by turning to the underlying meta-ethical principle according to which what is moral is whatever furthers the struggle against the ruling class. That meta-ethical principle is precisely the source of the problem. This view stands in sharp contrast to the Bahá'í ethical teaching that the foundation of religious truth are the unchanging “eternal verities” [PDC 108] whose expression and practice may vary from culture to culture or epoch to epoch but whose core principles remain the same. This balances adaptation to fluid situations with stability.

6.2: Kant and the Authority Problem

Unlike Sartre, Kant is not blind to the authority problem. Kant is fully aware of how important it is. That is why in *The Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant tries to remedy this problem in a way that actually (but inadvertently) supports the Writings by an appeal to a ‘postulatory theism.’ Since Kant denied we could prove God’s existence rationally and, therefore, we must postulate or assume His existence if we are to attain the “*summum bonum*” i.e. the greatest good for humankind. According to Kant,

the supreme cause of nature, which must be presupposed as a condition of the *summum bonum* is a being which is the cause of nature by intelligence and will, consequently its author, that is God ... *Therefore, the summum bonum is possible in the world only on the supposition of a Supreme Being having a causality corresponding to moral character ... the supreme cause of nature, which must be presupposed as a condition of the summum*

bonum is a being which is the cause of nature by intelligence and will, consequently its author, that is God. It follows that *the postulate of the possibility of the highest derived good (the best world) is likewise the postulate of the reality of a highest original good*, that is to say, of the existence of God. Now it was seen to be a *duty for us to promote the summum bonum ... and as this is possible only on condition of the existence of God*, it inseparably connects the supposition of this with duty; that is, it is morally necessary to assume the existence of God.⁵³

Kant states that a morally good life is possible only on the “presupposition” of a “Supreme Being” Who has the legitimacy and the power to be the “supreme cause of nature” and Who also acts morally and is the pre-condition for our moral action. Kant claims that a “postulatory theism” is needed to lead a good life. God – even if He is merely “postulatory” – is necessary for ethical principles to have authority, i.e. legitimacy and power/effectiveness and universality. He recognizes that a viable meta-ethics cannot be built on strictly empirical principles because empiricism offers no way to identify a definitive standard by which to judge competing ethical claims. Without such a definitive standard, all meta-ethical principles and ethical viewpoints are, in effect, equal, i.e. none can be proven or disproven by empirical appeals alone. Only politics, social customs or force can establish one claim over another, but this, of course, only grounds political, not ethical or intellectual, legitimacy. As we saw previously, Marxism tried to solve the same by giving the Party ‘extra-empirical’ insight and understanding and, thereby, ethical legitimacy and power.

Interestingly enough, Kant criticizes various Greek philosophers for thinking the ‘greatest good’ could be achieved strictly by human will and intelligence and without an appeal to God:

From this deduction it is now intelligible why the Greek schools could never attain the solution of their problem of the practical possibility of the summum bonum, because they made the rule of the use which *the will of man makes of his freedom the sole and sufficient ground of this possibility, thinking that they had no need for that purpose of the existence of God.*⁵⁴

Clearly, like the Bahá'í Writings, Kant recognizes that a purely empirical and humanistic ethic is theoretically and practically untenable. In other words, Kant adopts a deistic meta-ethical foundation for his ethical thinking at least as far as practical reason is concerned. On this matter, he is compatible with the Bahá'í Writings.

7. Divine Command Ethics and the Euthyphro Dilemma

The foregoing discussion makes it abundantly clear that the Bahá'í Writings exemplify what is called the “divine command theory of moral goodness,”⁵⁵ i.e. a meta-ethical theory in which God or a transcendent power is the origin and foundation of moral truth which may be revealed through special individuals and/or through nature and history. Furthermore,

[w]hat divine command theory holds is that God's will is necessary and sufficient in determining the content of morality – it actually defines it [morality]. Thus, for an act to be “right” it is both necessary and sufficient that the act be performed in compliance with God's will ... God's will is sufficient in that all that is required for an act to be “right” is that God wills it is right.⁵⁶

God's will is sufficient for ethical “rightness” because as we have seen above, only God as the Creator of all things has the capacity and the legitimacy to legislate for the benefit of His creation. As we shall see below, divine command meta-ethics also commit the Writings to moral realism, a meta-ethical

theory according to which “our moral judgments can be true or false”⁵⁷ This connects the Writings with other realist meta-ethical theories such as Platonism or Thomism. God’s will is not a Platonic Idea but it is equally as real. From this it follows that a realist meta-ethics precludes ethical relativism since an absolute ethical standard exists and, through God’s Manifestations, can be known by mankind.

Divine command meta-ethics faces several challenges, the most famous of which is the Euthyphro Dilemma.⁵⁸ In Plato’s dialogue, *Euthyphro*, Socrates asks,

The point which I should first wish to understand is whether the pious or holy is beloved by the gods because it is holy, or holy because it is beloved of the gods.⁵⁹

Does God approve certain actions because they are good, or are certain things good because God approves them? This leads to the two horns of the Euthyphro dilemma. On one hand, if God approves them because they are good, then they are good prior to or without God’s approval, i.e. their goodness is independent of God. This negates God’s universal sovereignty. On the other hand, if actions are good because God approves them then moral good is simply a matter of God’s arbitrary approval. This starts a vicious circle: if God’s approval is not arbitrary but based on inherent goodness then this goodness is independent of God, but if this goodness is not independent of God, then His approval is arbitrary. Furthermore, if God is omnipotent, any command – or its opposite – could become good or true simply because God says so. This – so it is claimed – undermines the importance of reason in ethics, gives ethics an arbitrary foundation and raises questions about why we are obligated to obey such arbitrary selections.

The Bahá’í Writings’ adherence to divine command theory is beyond question. They make it clear that there are no external constraints on God’s absolute will in the oft repeated claim that of “*He doeth what He willeth, and ordaineth what He pleaseth.*”

[ESW 67] There can be no clearer expression of the consequences of meta-ethical divine command theory than the following:

Shouldst Thou [God] regard him who hath broken the fast as one who hath observed it, such a man would be reckoned among them who from eternity had been keeping the fast. And shouldst Thou decree that he who hath observed the fast hath broken it, that person would be numbered with such as have caused the Robe of Thy Revelation to be stained with dust. [PM 67]

In the words of Christian philosophers, J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, “God *could* have willed that cruelty be good and love evil and we should be obliged to hate others and seek to do them harm.”⁶⁰ Of course, the fact that He *could* have does not mean that He *has or would*. These are simply statements about God’s power, not about His actions or intentions.

The Euthyphro Dilemma claims that either God has this power and is an omnipotent and arbitrary tyrant or He does not and, therefore is not omnipotent. In neither case is He worthy of worship. The underlying assumption is that we should not worship a tyrant or a God Who is not omnipotent.

There are at least three problems with the Euthyphro Dilemma. First and most obvious is the logical category mistake which confuses and conflates God – the universal creator – with a human tyrant. The ‘tyranny of God is not the same kind of thing as the ‘tyranny’ of a human dictator. Decrees given by the omnipotent and omniscient creator of the universe Who knows all possible outcomes of all possible alternatives cannot be compared with decrees by a tyrant who lacks such knowledge and, therefore, cannot foresee the results of his orders. A tyrant’s lack of knowledge undermines his legitimacy and, thereby, his right to claim absolute power. Furthermore, if we add God’s inherent goodness to our description of God, the problem is even more apparent. Calling God a “tyrant” because

He insists on arranging His creation for the maximum goodness is an arbitrary misuse of the word “tyrant” which is usually defined as a ruler who uses his power in a “cruel and unfair way.”⁶¹ This is not the God mentioned by the Manifestations.

Furthermore, there is another category mistake insofar as God cannot be ‘measured’ or judged by the same standard as His creations. Given His omniscience, what appears as caprice to our lesser knowledge may be nothing less than reasons we cannot comprehend. To conclude God has no reasons, i.e. His choice is arbitrary is unwarranted just because we humans do not know the reasons. After all He knows all the possibilities and all their outcomes which is a knowledge no contingent being has.

Second, if God is the Creator of all things, there simply are no objects that are inherently good independently of God. Whatever good they have is from God. Because there are no things that exist and are good independently of God, there are no objects that can compel God’s choice in the way outlined by the Euthyphro Dilemma. Thus, from a Bahá’í perspective, the Euthyphro Dilemma is a pseudo-dilemma perhaps based on confusing God as the universal Creator and a pagan ‘god’ who is not a universal creator and therefore can be confronted by something he did not create. The Euthyphro Dilemma does not apply to God as the Bahá’í Writings understand Him.

Of course, if God did not make all things including their natures, then He is not God – at least as the Bahá’í Writings understand Him – which makes the Euthyphro Dilemma irrelevant to Bahá’í philosophy and Christian, Jewish and Muslim philosophy as well. The Euthyphro Dilemma and the various revelations are discussing two different concepts of God. In the last analysis, it is a pseudo-dilemma based on ambiguous usage of the term ‘God.’

7.1 Ideal Observer Theory (IOT)

The divine command theory bears significance resemblances to a contemporary meta-ethical theory known as ideal observer theory.⁶² In fact, one might say that the IOT is, in its basic position, a secularized version of divine command theory. Some ethicists such as Shelly Kagan recognize this, saying,

Thus, when presented in theological terms, the ideal observer theory becomes the *divine command theory*: valid moral rules are valid by virtue of the fact that God commands them.⁶³

The convergence of the two meta-ethical theories is evident in the following description:

an ideal observer must be omniscient; omnipercipient, i.e. having the ability to imagine vividly any possible events or states of affairs, including the experiences and subjective states of others; disinterested, i.e. having no interest or desires that involve essential reference to any particular individuals or things; dispassionate; consistent; and otherwise a “normal” human being.⁶⁴

True ethical propositions, i.e. propositions that are morally legitimate, authoritative and universal can be made by an observer who fits these criteria and is perfectly rational and has all the necessary information.

Ideal Observer Theory asserts that right and wrong are determined by an ideal observer’s reaction to a given act. That is, any act X is morally permissible if an ideal observer would approve of X; conversely, any act Y is morally blameworthy if an ideal observer would disapprove of Y.⁶⁵

Of course, for the IOT in its modern secular form as revived by Roderick Firth, God is not the ideal observer, nor need He

be. The capacity to make such ideal judgments can be attained by asking ourselves how such an ideal being would judge or by imagining ourselves in the ideal observer's position. This requires mental discipline but it is not impossible. So the IOT claims. From a Bahá'í perspective, however, there is no way for humans to transcend our inherent limitations. No human can possibly meet the standards laid out by Firth and others — omniperception, omniscience, pure dispassionate objectivity and so on. If making absolutely just ethical judgments requires these attributes, then IOT itself demonstrates the need for God and the divine command theory. Anything less will merely result in endless clashes of opinions among less than ideal observers. This is, of course, precisely what we wish to avoid since it undermines the entire Bahá'í mission of emphasizing the oneness of humankind and the unification of humanity into one global commonwealth.

7.2: Weak Compatibilism: A Modern Version of Natural Law Meta-Ethics

The Bahá'í Writings harmonize with a contemporary variation of natural law theory known as “weak compatibilism”⁶⁶ which holds that

God would not create a natural or moral order that is opposed to the divine or a human reason that is contradicted by revelation. Yet even though they are not in conflict, revelation ... may tell us more than reason is able to disclose ... Although this content does not contradict reason, it does go beyond it.⁶⁷

In other words, God would not create a world in which His reason, mankind's reason, the order of nature and revelation are out of harmony or in conflict with one another. There is no intrinsic conflict between them and whatever conflicts arise are problems with human perception and understanding. Of course, the inherent limits of human reason prevent it from grasping

God's reasoning which transcends and exceeds ours. However, the fact that we cannot follow God's reasoning does not mean it does not exist. Science itself suggests this. Everything in nature is orderly and follows rules/laws that can be understood by human reasoning. If such were not the case, science would be impossible. Consequently, since reason is universally evident in nature, there are no grounds to suppose that God's reason 'suddenly stops' just because it reaches a point at which our understanding ends.

At this point a note of clarification is necessary. In regards to reason, weak compatibilism represents what I have called "moderate rationalism" in several previous papers.⁶⁸ Moderate rationalism contrasts with 'extreme' rationalism which asserts that only rational/logical knowledge and empirical knowledge are true knowledge. It also contrasts with irrationalism which says that reason cannot give us any true knowledge, a position held by Nietzsche and the postmodernists. Moderate rationalism lies between these two extremes claiming that reason can give us knowledge up to a point, but after that point it must be augmented by revelation or the guidance of the "spirit of faith." Reason and revelation are not intrinsically in conflict; there are truths that cannot be fully articulated by human reason because the divine reason transcends the human mind. Revelation, therefore, "may tell us more than reason is able to disclose."

Both the Bahá'í Writings and weak compatibilism support their adherence to a natural law meta-ethic with a 'platonic' theory of reality. If the "natural or moral order" is in harmony with the divine reason, then the divine reason is somehow reflected in the natural order which God has created and of which humanity is a part. In short, the spiritual has a presence in the material realm. Metaphysical theories that advocate such a two-part view of a heavenly model reflected in earthly images or shadows are called 'platonic' because Plato is the first known explicator of this view. In Plato's theory of reality, the physical world is a reflection or copy of a non-physical Ideal world which contains models for everything we see in the material

realm. This clearly harmonizes with the Bahá'í Writings which state,

The spiritual world is like unto the phenomenal world. *They are the exact counterpart of each other. Whatever objects appear in this world of existence are the outer pictures of the world of heaven.*⁶⁹

Elsewhere he says,

*For physical things are signs and imprints of spiritual things; every lower thing is an image and counterpart of a higher thing.*⁷⁰

When the spiritual has a presence in the material, when there are signs and intimations of a superior world in nature, then nature is obviously functioning in a teleological manner insofar as it encourages our awareness of a transcendental world and our “supernatural vocation.” This teleological function of nature encourages us to understand the material in terms of the spiritual. Failure to do so, i.e. interpreting the higher in terms of the lower, as for example understanding love in terms of physical lust, distorts our understanding. This inevitably leads to the animalization of man and the failure to achieve his supernatural destiny. However, we must raise our existence above the material. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says, “*Strive that your high ideals may be realized in the Kingdom of God on earth, as they will be in Heaven.*” [PT 43]

BIBLIOGRAPHY

See at end of Part 2, following.

NOTES

- ¹ 6 August 1933, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer in Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice, *Science and Technology*, http://bahai-library.com/compilation_science_technology
- ² Compilations, *Bahá'í Scholarship*, p. 17.
- ³ Letter to an individual believer, 21 October, 1943 in *Compilations, Scholarship*, p. 4.
- ⁴ 5 July, 1947 on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer in Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice, *Science and Technology*, http://bahai-library.com/compilation_science_technology; emphasis added.
- ⁵ PUP 231; emphasis added.
- ⁶ Carl Wellman, *Morals and Ethics*, p. 30.
- ⁷ Nicholas Bunnin, Jiyuan Yu, *The Blackwell Dictionary of Western Philosophy*, p. 123.
- ⁸ Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. by Thomas Kingswill Abbott, p. 74.
- ⁹ Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 74.
- ¹⁰ Robert Audi, editor, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, p. 321.
- ¹¹ Ted Honerich editor, *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, p. 289; emphasis added.
- ¹² This does not contradict Shoghi Effendi's statement that "religious truth is not absolute but relative" (WOB 57). The context of Shoghi Effendi's assertion is progressive revelation according to which religious truth changes its outward presentation depending on time and place without sacrificing the "eternal verities" (PDC 108) which are absolute and taught by all Manifestations.
- ¹³ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablet to the Hague*, p. 7.
- ¹⁴ SAQ 208; emphasis added.
- ¹⁵ Louis P Pojman, *Ethics: Discovering Right and Wrong*, p. 202.
- ¹⁶ PUP 63; emphasis added.
- ¹⁷ From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, December 6, 1939 in *Compilations, Lights of Guidance*, p. 505; emphasis added.
- ¹⁸ Gilbert Harman, *The Nature of Morality*, p. 11.

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- ¹⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, Preface to the First Edition. <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/ethics/kant/religion/religion-within-reason.htm>
- ²⁰ Immanuel; Kant, *Preface to Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. by Theodore M Greene and Hoyt M Hudson, <http://www.hkbu.edu.hk/ppp/rbbr/toc.html>
- ²¹ Marc Hauser and Peter Singer, “*Morality Without Religion.*” Op-ed in *Free Inquiry*, <http://www.centerforinquiry.net/uploads/attachments/HauserSinger.pdf>
- ²² Marc Hauser and Peter Singer, “*Morality Without Religion.*” Op-ed in *Free Inquiry*,
- ²³ The number of wars fought specifically over religion are quite small in the 5,000 year history of human warfare. In the West there are the Crusades (off and on from 1095 – 1272); the Albigensian Crusades (1208 – 1241); the Northern Crusades (off and on from 1147 – 1290) and the Thirty Years War (1618 – 1648). These were overtly religious wars largely, though not entirely, always about religion since politics and was not separate from religion. Since 1648, no war anywhere has been chiefly motivated by religion and issues of faith with the possible of the Taiping Rebellion (1850 – 1864) in China.
- ²⁴ Marc Hauser and Peter Singer, “*Morality Without Religion.*” Op-ed in *Free Inquiry*. [centerforinquiry.net/uploads/attachments/HauserSinger.pdf](http://www.centerforinquiry.net/uploads/attachments/HauserSinger.pdf)
- ²⁵ A. J. Ayer, *The Central Questions of Philosophy*, p. 225.
- ²⁶ Fyodor Dostoyevsky *The Brothers Karamzov*, p. 272. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/28054/28054-h/28054-h.html>
- ²⁷ A. J. Ayer, *The Central Questions of Philosophy*, p. 226.
- ²⁸ Bertrand Russell, “*A Free Man’s Worship*” in *The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell*, p. 68.
- ²⁹ Bertrand Russell, “*Why I Am Not a Christian*” in *The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell*, p. 598.
- ³⁰ Sam Harris, *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values*, p. 28; original emphasis
- ³¹ Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, p. 37; original emphasis
- ³² Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, p. 38. This is a strange accusation against David Hume, the founding figure of modern empiricism who also did not think that ethics have a religious basis.
- ³³ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book III, Part I, Section 1.
- ³⁴ Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, p. 203.
- ³⁵ Daniel Dennett, quoted in Sam Harris, *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values*, p. 196; original emphasis.

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- ³⁶ From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, December 6, 1939 in *Compilations, Lights of Guidance*, p. 505.
- ³⁷ PUP 190; emphasis added.
- ³⁸ PDC 107; emphasis added.
- ³⁹ Message from the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the world Ridvan 1966. *Compilations, Lights of Guidance*, p. 594)
- ⁴⁰ Gilbert Harman, *The Nature of Morality*, p. 11.
- ⁴¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Essays in Existentialism*, p. 35.
- ⁴² Jean-Paul Sartre, *Essays in Existentialism*, p. 35.
- ⁴³ James Collins, *The Existentialists*, p. 40.
- ⁴⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Essays in Existentialism*, p. 35.
- ⁴⁵ Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, p. 6.
- ⁴⁶ Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, p. 47.
- ⁴⁷ Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, p. 58.
- ⁴⁸ *Matthew*, 22:21.
- ⁴⁹ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, Chp. II. <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/61/pg61.html>
- ⁵⁰ Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, Chp. II (emphasis added).
- ⁵¹ In Vladimir Lenin, *What Is To Be Done?*
- ⁵² Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, Chp. II.
- ⁵³ Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, Chp. II, V; emphasis added.
- ⁵⁴ Kant, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, Chp. II, V; emphasis added.
- ⁵⁵ Lawrence M Hinman, *Ethics: A Pluralistic Approach to Moral Theory*, p. 86.
- ⁵⁶ Julia Driver, *Ethics: The Fundamentals*, p. 25.
- ⁵⁷ Andrew Fisher, *Metaethics: An Introduction*, p. 77.
- ⁵⁸ Plato, *Euthyphro*. <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/euthyfro.html>
- ⁵⁹ Plato, *Euthyphro*, Trans by Benjamin Jowett.
- ⁶⁰ J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations of a Christian Worldview*, p. 530; emphasis added.
- ⁶¹ *Miriam-Webster Dictionary*, merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tyrant
- ⁶² Roderick Firth is generally recognized as the contemporary originator of ideal observer theory although its roots lie with Adam Smith.
- ⁶³ Shelly Kagan, *Normative Ethics*, p. 279.
- ⁶⁴ Robert Audi, general editor, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, p. 415. See also Karri-Jaakko Liikkanen, *Ideal Observer Theory*, University

of Helsinki, Master's Thesis, 2013. <https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/40964/Liikkanen%20Masters%20Thesis.pdf>

⁶⁵ Nancy Rankin, "A Substantive Revision of Firth's Ideal Observer Theory" in *Stance*, Vol. 3, April 2010, http://www.bsu.edu/libraries/virtualpress/stance/2010_spring/idealobservertheory.pdf

⁶⁶ Lawrence M. Hinman, *Ethics: A Pluralistic Approach to Moral Theory*, p. 106.

⁶⁷ Hinman, *Ethics: A Pluralistic Approach to Moral Theory*, p. 106.

⁶⁸ See for example Ian Kluge, "Reason and the Bahá'í Writings"; "Bahá'í Ontology: An Initial Reconnaissance"; "Some Answered Questions: A Philosophic Perspective," all published in the *Lights of Irfan* series.

⁶⁹ PUP 10; emphasis added. See also ABL 46.

⁷⁰ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablet of the Universe*; emphasis added. Original Tablet in *Makatib-i 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, vol. 1, pp 13-32. Anonymous provisional translation: http://bahai-library.com/abdulbaha_lawh_aflakiyyih

The Bahá'í Writings: A Meta-ethical Excursion

Part II: Deeper into the Writings

Ian Kluge

8. Teleology: the Foundation of Natural Law

Another major issue in studying the meta-ethics of the Bahá'í Writings is the question of whether or not the Writings exemplify or are consistent with a natural law meta-ethic. This study finds that such is, indeed, the case albeit it in a variant version. To explain why, it is necessary to briefly outline the relevant theory and history of natural law meta-ethics.

Teleology is the foundational concept in any natural law meta-ethic. It means that everything, especially all living things, have an innate purpose or final cause that guides their development and that they must actualize in order to be genuinely themselves. This final cause, these inherent goals constitute the nature or essence of every particular being. Moreover, this final cause is the standard by which we judge whether or not a thing “is functioning well or appropriately.”¹ Insofar as things fail to actualize their final cause, they are incomplete and not authentically themselves, i.e. not authentically what they are intended to be. Such a deficient condition negatively affects the behavior of any living being, but especially humans, in whom these imperfections inevitably affect their ethical behavior because humans have a spiritual nature that should be actualized.

To begin, natural law, which must be distinguished from man-made positive or conventional law, is “usually understood as involving a superhuman legislator,”² i.e. God Who embeds these laws in the intrinsic nature or essence of minerals, vegetables, animals and humans. [FWU 48] Each of these essentially different kinds of being has its own “prescribed ways”³ of being and flourishing. This leads us to the key concept in any natural law meta-ethic: teleology. All beings have an intrinsic goal, a final cause or purpose and can only achieve well-being if they strive towards these goals. For example, regardless of culture, a human child must learn to communicate and/or understand some language if its well-being is our goal. Tadpoles have no such requirements since they are intrinsically, i.e. essentially, different from humans. In other words, ‘the good’ for any kind of being consists in fulfilling its goals, its final cause or teleology. The ‘good’ is self-actualization according to our own particular nature which in humankind includes our spiritual aspect. Any activity that prevents or harms the pursuit of the intrinsic ‘good’ is evil to that particular being. Because humans have free will, they can also be evil to themselves insofar as they can reject or misuse their teleological nature. This is an important issue because identifying ‘the good’ is one of the chief functions of any meta-ethical theory.

The earliest known statement about teleology – Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* – is also one of precise and compact:

Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit, is thought to *aim at some good*; and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim. But a certain *difference is found among ends...*⁴

This means that every being and every action is for the sake of a particular ‘good,’⁵ which means that they have a goal, a final cause and are, therefore, teleological in nature. To this, Aristotle adds, “Each animal is thought to have its proper pleasure, as it has a proper function; viz., that which

corresponds to its activity.”⁶ This is its ‘good.’ For humans, ‘good’ means acting according to our spiritual potentials i.e. in harmony with the divinely given virtues which exist as capacities or potentials within us. As Aristotle says, “human good turns out to be activity of soul *in accordance with virtue*.”⁷ For the Bahá’í Writings, such virtuous action occurs when we realize our teleological nature. In other words, every kind of creation has its own proper or appropriate happiness based on its essential nature; from this it follows logically that what is appropriate for one kind of being is not necessarily appropriate for another.

Aristotle’s statement about living “in accordance with virtue” harmonizes with the Bahá’í Writings for the obvious reason that it locates the basis of true happiness in our spiritual and not our physical nature. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá declares,

*As for the spiritual perfections they are man’s birthright and belong to him alone of all creation. Man is, in reality, a spiritual being, and only when he lives in the spirit is he truly happy. This spiritual longing and perception belongs to all men alike.*⁸

In this statement, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá confirms that this final cause or “spiritual longing” is universal, i.e. intrinsic to human nature – is unique to man and, therefore, defines him and his essence.

St. Thomas Aquinas, the great medieval philosopher and theologian developed the concept of natural law in more detail than any other thinker. He writes,

all things partake somewhat of the eternal law, insofar as, namely, from its being *imprinted upon them, they derive their respective inclinations to their proper acts and ends*. Now among all others, the rational creature is subject to divine providence in a more excellent way, insofar as it partakes of a share of providence, by being provident for itself and for others. Wherefore it has a

share of the eternal reason, whereby it has a *natural inclination to its proper act and end, and this participation of the eternal law in the rational creature is called the natural law.*⁹

The “proper acts” referred to by Aquinas are those acts which are in harmony with our God-given essential nature, our goal or purpose; they are ‘proper’ or ‘appropriate’ to our nature. Moreover, Aquinas’s “natural inclination[s]” correspond to the “spiritual susceptibilities” [PUP 7] of the Writings because both incline us to correct moral action but neither can compel it, thereby safe-guarding humankind’s free will. Both in the Writings and in Aquinas, these inclinations or susceptibilities are oriented to or ‘aimed’ at achieving our divinely given final cause, purpose or end or what is known in Catholic philosophy as our “supernatural vocation.”¹⁰ This supernatural end is intended to guide our actions in this world and lead to our happiness or well-being.

8.1: Objections to Natural Law Theory

The first and most obvious objection to natural law theory is Hume’s ‘is-ought’ problem according to which we cannot assume that because a certain situation *is* the factual case that it *ought* to be the case, i.e. we must not suppose that the facts of nature place a moral obligation on human action.¹¹ According to Hume, facts and values are two distinct kinds of things and to confuse them is a logical category error that mixes up *descriptive* statements, which tell us what is the case, with *prescriptive* statements which tell us what ought to be the case. Besides, no empirical analysis can show us any ethical imperative in living things. Consequently, it is argued, natural law meta-ethics is impossible because nature cannot be claimed as the basis for any prescriptions, i.e. any ethics at all.

One problem with “Hume’s Guillotine” as it is sometimes called, is that it only applies to a strictly empiricist and materialist concept of nature in which values have no place.

However, it does not apply if nature, i.e. living things and humans, are teleological, and, therefore, have an inherent goal for which they strive. Having such a purpose necessarily means that values are at work in the form of preferences or requirements for optimal development of living things. A plant must seek water to grow, an animal must reach maturity to reproduce its kind. Some possibilities have greater value than others in reaching optimal results for a living being and, therefore, are more valuable, better, good, natural and so on. At the most basic level, 'good' is what enables a living thing to attain its optimal condition, and, therefore, has utilitarian value. For animals, of course, there is no point in asking if they *should* strive for optimal development – they have no choice and that is what they just do. *Should* a human do the same, i.e. is there a *moral* obligation to do so? In our view, the answer is clear: if the purpose of morality is not to attain optimal well-being, then the concept of 'morality' is meaningless and any discussions about whether or not there is a moral obligation for optimal development are futile.

Moreover, there is a third, unintended consequence to "Hume's Guillotine." If empirical facts can tell us nothing about morals, if 'is' cannot lead to 'ought,' then it follows that science is irrelevant to ethics. There is no way to establish a scientific ethic to guide human kind because values cannot be tested by the scientific method. They do not meet the criteria of being objects for scientific study insofar as they are not physical, cannot be measured, they cannot be predicted and tested for truth or falsity. Sam Harris recognizes this difficulty in his book *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Values*, in which he tries to undo Hume's 'is-ought' conundrum by claiming it as "another dismal product of Abrahamic religion."¹² However, pointing out the – in his view – unrespectable origin of the problem does not prove that the problem is unreal. His claim is an example of the genetic fallacy which tries to disprove an idea by referring to allegedly 'unrespectable' origins.¹³

Hume's is-ought problem has one other weakness: it cannot be universally applied but only works with an empirical and materialist view of nature. However, if nature is teleological and, as in 'platonic' theories, there is a spiritual presence in nature, it is not at all difficult to derive an 'ought' from an 'is.' We can see why such is the case in of Bahá'u'lláh's statement,

*Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth is a direct evidence of the revelation within it of the attributes and names of God, inasmuch as within every atom are enshrined the signs that bear eloquent testimony to the revelation of that Most Great Light.*¹⁴

From a Bahá'í perspective, nature is inherently value-laden first, by virtue of its origin with God and second, because each thing reflects the values of God in the material realm. If nature is value-laden, then obviously we can draw conclusions about values, including moral values from it. These values are imperative insofar as they are sanctioned or authorized by God and are obligatory for the kinds of beings to which they pertain. A human, for example, has spiritual capacities that must be developed (unless distortions in our development are to occur) whereas a horse does not.

There is one other famous and often-used argument against natural law meta-ethics. Sartrean existentialism rejects the concept that humans have a 'ready-made' essence or nature given to them, a view often encapsulated in the phrase "existence precedes essence." In practice, this means that humans make themselves and have no nature or essence given to them 'ready-made' by God or anyone else. As Sartre puts it, "Human freedom precedes essence in man,"¹⁵ meaning, we are not constrained by a pre-established essence and are free to make our own. Simone de Beauvoir, author of the archetypal feminist text, *The Second Sex*, applies this Sartre's idea to women in her statement "One is not born a woman; one becomes a woman."¹⁶ Some schools of feminism (as well as post-modern philosophy¹⁷) have also adopted the meta-ethical belief

that there is no given human essence or sexuality, and that we personally and/or collectively construct human nature as we find it. Michele M. Schumacher writes, “[A] majority of academic and western feminist assume that whatever nature is, it is not human. There is ... no such ‘thing’ as specifically *human* nature.”¹⁸ According to these philosophers, we could reconstruct human nature – or sexuality – in some other way if we choose to do so. Our ethics and our nature is in our hands because we have no intrinsic teleological nature.

8.2 The Basis for Natural Law Meta-Ethic in the Bahá’í Writings

In our view, the Bahá’í Writings adhere to a variation of a natural law meta-ethic. The convergences with Aristotle’s and Aquinas’ views are obvious and need no further elaboration. Bahá’u’lláh shows humanity’s teleological nature when He affirms,

*It is for thee to direct thyself towards the Ultimate Goal, and the Supreme End, and the Most Sublime Pinnacle, that thou mayest hear and behold what hath been revealed by God, the Lord of the worlds.*¹⁹

This passage shows that in order to fulfill our teleological nature or final cause and “supernatural vocation,” we must develop our “spiritual susceptibilities” [PUP 7] so we can “hear and behold,” i.e. comprehend and follow God’s new revelation and harmonize our lives with God’s Will. Harmonizing our will with God’s Will in daily practice is precisely what ethics is all about.

The Universal House of Justice expressly identifies human nature as teleological and asserts that certain attributes are “intended by God for human nature.” These attributes constitute our essence and, thereby, define us as human beings. Any attribute that contradicts our essence is “unnatural”:

The Bahá'í concept of human nature is *teleological*; that is, there are certain *qualities intended* by God for “*human nature*”, and qualities which do not accord with these are described as “*unnatural*.”²⁰

The consequences of this statement are clear: any attributes not in harmony with God's will for human nature are “unnatural” and, thereby, not ethical. This is because going against God's goodness and His good will for us cannot, by definition, be ethically good. Actualizing our God-given teleological nature, i.e. acting on the basis of our spiritual aspects means that we at least strive to act ethically. In other words, what accords with our true spiritual nature and what is ethical are one and the same thing.

As previously noted, because our teleological nature is from God, this “Ultimate Goal” or final cause is real, objective and mind-independent. It is ‘the good’ towards which we are all striving, either unconsciously or consciously. From this, along with the guidance given by Bahá'u'lláh, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice, it follows logically that some actions are more suited to attaining that “Ultimate Goal” than others i.e. not all actions are equally suited to attaining ‘the good.’ This suggests that our divinely given human nature establishes an objective standard by which to evaluate and choose our actions from an ethical standpoint. Consequently, moral relativism is negated since it lacks such an objective standard and, therefore, reduces all moral choices to subjective preferences. However, we must also recall that a diversity of appropriate choices may well exist in some cases and that the range of appropriate choices is not necessarily reduced to one. In other words, humanity's teleological nature does not violate the Bahá'í principle of unity in diversity.

Moreover, because these laws originate with God, they are mind-independent and objective and, therefore, they are not determined by human perceptions, wishes or cultural agendas. For example, we can (somewhat) shape the basic communication

needs of human beings – as by using sign language – but we cannot eliminate them. They are needs that must be fulfilled. In addition, natural laws are unchangeable because they are based on the intrinsic nature of a being and as long as that particular kind of being exists, the applicable natural laws will also exist. This idea is implicit in the concept of progressive revelation which divides laws into two parts, the temporary and the eternal:

Each of the divine religions embodies two kinds of ordinances. The first is those which concern spiritual susceptibilities, the development of moral principles and the quickening of the conscience of man. These are essential or fundamental, one and the same in all religions, changeless and eternal – reality not subject to transformation ... The second kind of ordinances ... relate to the material affairs of mankind.²¹

The “essential or fundamental” laws do not change because human nature does not change; hence, they are “the same in all religions” which, in effect, means the same in all places and at all times. Only the actualization of human potentials changes as we progress spiritually, culturally, economically and so on. Once again, it is important to note that if collective/societal or individual acts coincide with natural law, we may legitimately call it ‘just’ or morally ‘good’ and if they do not, the individual act or the positive/conventional law is unjust and “unnatural”²² and will degrade our well-being. According to natural law theory, man-made, i.e. conventional law must either be based on or at least not be in conflict with natural law if we are to gain true benefit from legislation. In this sense, the theological laws revealed by the Manifestation take precedence over positive man-made law.

At this point, it must be emphasized that references to natural law do not refer to the physical laws of nature or the behavior of animals in nature. Therefore, the Writings explicitly reject the concept that human behavior should model itself on

animal behaviors in the natural world. Our ethics are derived from our essential nature and the Bahá'í theory of human nature includes our rational and spiritual aspects which do not exist in animals. This issue is especially relevant in light of vigorous contemporary debate about homosexuality. For example, the Bahá'í Faith sees homosexual acts as “unnatural”²³ which, of course, is a reference to our God-given rational and spiritual nature. The Bahá'í view cannot be scientifically disproven by cataloging alleged homosexual acts in the animal kingdom and then arguing that the acts found in nature give legitimacy to the same actions among humans. Bruce Bagemihil famously tried this in his book *Natural Exuberance*.²⁴ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá makes clear that what is natural and appropriate for animals is not necessarily so for humans: “*the fact that some species eat their young does not mean that it is acceptable for human beings to do so.*”²⁵ Actions that violate our higher natures are not appropriate for us and violate our nature.

This is why Bahá'í meta-ethics cannot uncritically accept beliefs that nature is a moral exemplar for us to follow. The aspects of nature that orient us towards ‘the good’ are in harmony with our essence and, above all, are sanctioned by or in harmony with the Writings themselves. Bahá'u'lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá often illustrate their teachings with reference to nature — “*Doves are of many colors; nevertheless, they live in utmost harmony*” [PUP 45] — but we must remember that using nature to illustrate a divinely ordained principle is not the same as basing a moral teaching on what we find in nature. The Writings reveal God’s teachings and illustrate them with selected examples from nature; the starting point is God, not nature. Nature alone can never be a self-sufficient foundation of our ethical principles which can only have their legitimacy, authority and universality from God. Perhaps the fastest way to illustrate this is to point out some especially horrible habits among animals: dogs packing, chickens pecking a deformed chick to death, or gang rape among dolphins. Naturalist ethical systems avoid examples like this for obvious reasons. Taoism, European Romanticism,

and various modern nature ‘spiritualities’ are examples of such thinking that look towards the co-operative aspects of nature as a moral model. However, nature also has brutal competition which was the focus of Darwinism and Social Darwinism and their Fascist descendents. Nature alone is not a reliable guide to morals.

We must be very clear in our minds that applying animal behaviors to judge human actions is also irrational for the simple reason that humans are not merely animals; we are, as the Writings teach, essentially different. To behave like something we are not, is irrational because it is against our own best interests. From the perspective of Bahá’í meta-ethics, irrational behavior is deeply problematic because it violates our essential nature as “rational souls” [SAQ 208-209] which distinguish us from animals. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes:

The human spirit which distinguishes man from the animal is the rational soul, and these two names – the human spirit and the rational soul – designate one thing. This spirit, which in the terminology of the philosophers is the rational soul, embraces all beings, and as far as human ability permits discovers the realities of things ... But the human spirit, unless assisted by the spirit of faith, does not become acquainted with the divine secrets and the heavenly realities. [SAQ 208-209]

Here, too, we find convergence between the Bahá’í Writings and Aristotle, who said that the highest virtue for humans is the exercise of reason which is “something divine.”²⁶

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statement indicates that without the “rational soul” either in actuality or in potential, we are seriously defective as humans. Something that should be there is not or is not functioning as it should. However, the “rational soul” while necessary is not sufficient because to fully actualize ourselves we must “awaken spiritual susceptibilities” [PUP 7] to receive inspiration and guidance of the “spirit of faith.” Furthermore,

humans are constituted by two natures, i.e. a physical, bodily nature and a spiritual nature “born from the bounty to the Holy Spirit.” [SAQ 118] From this it follows that in Bahá’í meta-ethics, ethical decisions must harmonize with both our physical and spiritual natures as well as with our inherent rationality.

Of course, humans also have free will in regards to moral matters and, therefore, can violate their own natures i.e. act irrationally and unnaturally but this results in their own detriment. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, for example, regards racial prejudice as “unnatural” [PUP 287] which is to say, against our own spiritual and rational natures. Indulging in this irrational and “unnatural” behavior damages us individually and socially.

8.3: Udo Schaefer’s Rejection of Natural Law Meta-ethics

On the subject of a natural law meta-ethic in the Bahá’í Writings, it is important to specifically examine Udo Schaefer’s discussion of this subject in his *Bahá’í Ethics In Light of Scripture*. In the discussion below, we shall endeavor to show that alternative understandings of this issue are possible and should also be considered.

In this work, Schaefer accepts that “Insofar as the virtues have a *telos*, or purpose, that of right being Bahá’í ethics may be called *teleological*.”²⁷ Despite this statement, he vigorously rejects the concept of a natural law meta-ethics in the Bahá’í Writings. However, the matter may be understood differently than he does. Once we accept teleology, i.e. purposive, goal oriented behavior, it is, in our view, difficult to avoid the conclusion that this goal is a standard by which all action must be judged, and that all ‘virtues’ are by definition those acts that advance our way to the goal. The necessity of performing these acts to attain the goal constitutes natural law, i.e. the requirements we must meet to actualize our essence. In short, there are desirable and undesirable results that we strive for. This also throws doubt on the deontologic aspects of Bahá’í ethics²⁸ for the simple reason that commands obeyed for the

sake of attaining our teleologic goal or for the love of God cannot be deontologic, i.e. done for their own sake. We shall have more to say about this below.

In regards to teleology, our view is that the Writings seem to follow a middle-path between the outright rejection of natural law meta-ethics in its traditional form and a complete acceptance of the traditional or conventional natural law theory. In other words, there is another, alternative way to understand this topic and its associated issues.

According to Udo Schaefer, “The Bahá’í Faith does not support the idea of an innate, natural law, moral law inscribed by God in human nature;”²⁹ he adds that “Neither Bahá’í scripture nor the Qur’an contain even a hint at natural law.”³⁰ The key point in Schaefer’s understanding is the belief that the

highest criterion in moral judgment is recourse to *God’s arbitrary will* and to the infallibility of the divine Messenger who mediates this will to humanity ... *To this will which is arbitrary, absolute, not bound by principles* ... man owes absolute obedience . . . [The moral order] is *not anchored in preceding Platonic ideas of good and evil*, in eternal truths immanent in nature and identifiable by reason, nor in a rational concept of human nature ... nor in a rationally recognizable ‘nature of things’ (*rerum natura*). Rather morality proceeds from the decisions of God’s arbitrary will.... *His will has no reason to will as he wills other than that he wills it so.*³¹

In other words, the basis of Schaefer’s rejection is that God’s will cannot be limited by anything external to Himself, such as “preceding Platonic ideas of good and evil” that would limit His power of choice in any way. Moreover, God’s Will is non-rational and “arbitrary,” i.e. He “has no reason to will as he wills.” Such is the case because the

existence of a *preceding idea of the moral good, the existence of a natural moral order, of a natural law*, binding upon God would make it ‘an associate of his [God’s] judgment ... and would thus limit God’s sovereignty.’³²

The view that anything can precede God or limit His Will is, of course, unacceptable according to the Bahá’í Writings. In addition, contrary to the traditional theory of natural law, Schaefer maintains that human reason alone cannot identify these moral values:

[a] basic proposition of all natural law is that moral norms are recognized as such by human reason. The question then arises as to the place assigned to reason in Bahá’í ethics. Can human beings distinguish between right and wrong, good and evil, virtue and vice by means of reason alone, without the aid of scripture. Is reason an independent, primary or supplementary source of values?³³

This, of course, brings us to the crucial question of moderate rationalism and what can be known and how.³⁴ Finally, we should note that natural law,

is based on the idea that [t]here is an ‘eternal and unchangeable law that encompasses all peoples and all ages’, a law that is ‘in accord with right reason (*recta ratio*) and shared by all human beings. Thus the rules of conduct are inherent in all human nature and are based upon eternal, rational ideas of justice, upon an imagined *a priori* nature of the human being and its innate moral sense. According to this philosophy the basic principles of ethics, the *magna principia*, are *recognizable by reason*.³⁵

Let us examine Schaefer’s argument to see if there are alternate ways of understanding the points he raises.

As we have seen, Schaefer outlines and rejects what may be called the ‘standard’ or traditional view of natural law meta-ethics. We do not deny that this is one way to understand the subject, but we do not believe this is the only way to understand to do so. We shall outline an alternative viewpoint by examining the key issues involved. There are four major issues in natural law meta-ethics: (a) the power of God; (2) teleology; (3) intrinsic moral knowledge. We shall examine these and some of the issues that grow out of them and (d) the role of reason.

First of all, contrary to what Schaefer seems to claim, a natural law meta-ethics does not necessarily limit the power of God by subordinating them to preceding morals that exist independently of God like Platonic Ideas. Such subordination is, of course, one of the horns of the Euthyphro Dilemma we have already discussed. Bahá’í, Jewish, Christian or Muslim versions of natural law meta-ethic reject the concept that anything can precede God because God is the Creator of all things. Such a view is logically absurd. Furthermore, to believe that anything can precede God and exist independently denies God’s omnipotence – but such a notion of God is simply not relevant to the Bahá’í Writings. In the last analysis, there is absolutely nothing in the idea of a natural law meta-ethic that denigrates God by requiring Him to choose among pre-existing, independent values for humankind. All that a natural law meta-ethic requires is that moral laws, moral knowledge or moral capacities be intrinsic to human nature and that in some way play a role in our ethical evolution. Consequently, Schaefer’s objection on this matter need not hinder the development of an alternative view to natural law ethics in the Writings.

In order to emphasize God’s omnipotence and, thereby, sharpen his argument against the slightest hint of pre-existing or Platonic Ideas, Schaefer portrays God as “arbitrary, absolute and not bound by principles: “His will has no reason to will as he wills other than that he wills it so.”³⁶ God’s omnipotence is, of course, the basis of a natural-law meta-ethic because without

an omnipotent God, humanity and nature could not be universally endowed with their inherent capacities and the values these embody in unactualized, ‘embryo’ form. However, it is not necessary that God’s “arbitrary” Will be understood in the human sense of the word, i.e. random, whimsical or capricious. Nor do we need to claim that He necessarily acts non-rationally, i.e. that He has no reasons to act. In fact, to over-emphasize God’s arbitrariness not only falls onto one of the horns of the Euthyphro dilemma but seems more aligned with certain interpretations of Protestant Christianity such as Lutheranism and Calvinism.³⁷

We do not need to deny God’s omnipotent and “arbitrary” power to realize that just because God *could* act in any way He chooses with or without any reason, it does not necessarily mean that He *would* act in a capricious and irrational manner. Being all-powerful does not prevent God from choosing to act consistently with reason or His own laws. Indeed, God can even choose to limit the use of His power – as He does in bestowing free will on human beings. He certainly knows when we make a moral mistake, but He limits His power by not interfering. Doing this is logically consistent with the freedom He has given us and avoids the logical contradiction of taking with one hand the freedom He has given with the other. If God constantly interferes with human action to ensure that we make the right moral choice, true moral progress would be impossible because humans would, in effect, not be tested and reduced to robots. Morality itself would be abolished. After all, morality depends on the possibility of free choice. Here, too, we observe that omnipotent God chooses to act in a manner consistent with the laws of reason He created. In that sense he acts like Shoghi Effendi’s “rational God.” [WOB 112]

There are two important caveats on the foregoing discussion. First, it must be emphasized that our discussion does not allow us to conclude that God in His essence is rational. God’s essence is simply unknowable to His creations. However, the fact that God’s essence is absolutely unknowable does not prevent us

from observing that God's Will has revealed itself in way that is consistent with human reason at least in this 'corner of creation.' Furthermore, making the human essence the "rational soul" suggests that we are being 'fitted' or adapted to a creation that is fundamentally rational. Otherwise, the mismatch between the "rational soul" and a capricious creation would make intellectual and moral development impossible. Science would also become impossible in a mismatch between the rational human soul and a non-rational creation. Second, it is important to note that because God chooses to reveal His Will in a way consistent with human reason does not mean that God Himself reasons in the human way. In fact, we cannot know if God 'reasons' at all. All we can say is that in creation, He reveals His Will in manner *consistent* with our reasoning processes and consequently, there is no intrinsic conflict between reason and religion. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, "*Reason is the first faculty of man and the religion of God is in harmony with it.*" [PUP 231]

The second and third pillars of natural law meta-ethics are teleology and the existence of inherent moral knowledge. Although distinct in themselves, they are intertwined and so we shall discuss them together. Teleology is the belief that all things, but especially all living things and most especially human beings have an intrinsic purpose that guides their development. Although we have already discussed this above, there is more to say specifically vis-à-vis the Bahá'í Writings and Udo Schaefer's presentation of this issue. We shall begin with a quotation from the Universal House of Justice:

The Bahá'í concept of human nature is teleological; that is, there are certain qualities intended by God for "human nature", and qualities which do not accord with these are described as "unnatural."³⁸

This passage confirms humanity's teleological nature — thereby agreeing with the bed-rock principle of natural law meta-ethics as we have seen above. Moreover, the teleological

nature or final cause must be within us i.e. within nature, since otherwise it could not be our goal as human beings. Finally, this passage asserts that there are “certain qualities intended by God for ‘human nature’” which means that certain qualities are deemed by God as good and, therefore, desirable for humanity. If God considers such qualities desirable for human nature, then obviously these qualities are part of human nature because of His endowment. Moreover, among these good qualities is the orientation (or ‘vector’) towards God Who is “the Desire of all things.” [PM 58] The desire for God is in “all things” though “all things” may not be conscious of it as humans should be. Obviously, if God is the goal or “the Desire of all things” then all things, humans included, have an intrinsic teleological nature to seek Him in a way appropriate to their essence. Here, too, we see that these qualities are within human nature, and that there is something in each individual which orients us towards the good and the true, i.e. our “supernatural vocation.” In addition, these qualities “intended by God” are an objective standard by which humans can evaluate whether our actions have lived up to God’s intentions or not. In other words, we have within us an objective and universal divine standard to judge our conduct. We shall explore this issue further below.

There is additional evidence that mankind’s nature is teleological, and specifically oriented towards moral knowledge and the desire for God. The Writings speak of “the universality or perfection of virtues *potential in mankind*. Therefore, it is said that man has been created in the image and likeness of God.”³⁹ This implies that if these potentials were not present in mankind, we would not be made in God’s image which, in effect, means we would not be human. In short, these potentials are part of our essence as human beings. A similar line of argument develops from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s frequent references to the “spiritual susceptibilities”⁴⁰ *within* human beings and his calls on us to “to awaken spiritual susceptibilities in the hearts of mankind.”⁴¹ How could one awaken what is not there? If these susceptibilities are to be awakened, then they must exist —

at least, in potential – be within us, waiting for actualization by the Manifestation. Indeed, these “spiritual susceptibilities” distinguish humans from animals which are “utterly lacking spiritual susceptibilities, ignorant of divine religion and without knowledge of the Kingdom of God.” [PUP 177] In our view, these “spiritual susceptibilities” are a moral sense *in potentia*. The Bahá’í International Community also sees moral potentialities as inherent to humankind:

It not only sees the individual as a spiritual being, a “rational soul”, but also insists that the entire enterprise that we call civilization is itself a spiritual process, one in which the human mind and heart have created progressively more complex and efficient means to *express* their *inherent moral* and intellectual *capacities*.⁴²

What could “express[ing] their inherent moral and intellectual capacities” refer to if not expressing the moral truths and understandings that have been awakened from potentiality by the Manifestation? This, at least, is our understanding of the matter.

We can also observe the intrinsic nature of these qualities. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says,

*The holy Manifestations of God come into the world to dispel the darkness of the animal, or physical, nature of man, to purify him from his imperfections in order that his heavenly and spiritual nature may become quickened, his divine qualities awakened, his perfections visible, his potential powers revealed and all the virtues of the world of humanity latent within him may come to life.*⁴³

It should be pointed out that here, too, that moral virtues are potential within us: “the virtues of the world of humanity [are] latent within [us].” Moreover, our “divine qualities” cannot be “awakened,” our “perfections [made] visible” and our “potential powers revealed” if they are not within us, i.e.

inherent. These inherent attributes – whether in potential or in actuality – are necessary for an natural law meta-ethic. Without them and without a teleological nature, a natural law meta-ethic is impossible.

The existence of potential moral knowledge raises the question of whether or not reason alone can help us discover the virtues entailed in our final cause. Aquinas, for example, accepts that at least some of these ethical precepts can be known by “the light of natural reason alone⁴⁴ (although revelation is needed for faith) whereby we discern what is good and what is evil.⁴⁵ However, the Bahá’í Writings disagree. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá makes it clear that reason alone is not sufficient for true knowledge: “*But the human spirit [rational soul], unless assisted by the spirit of faith, does not become acquainted with the divine secrets and the heavenly realities.*” [SAQ 208] Reason is necessary but not sufficient to awaken our “spiritual susceptibilities” which are a moral sense *in potentia*. The matter could not be more clear: our spiritual and moral knowledge cannot develop without assistance from “the spirit of faith.” [SAQ 208] Elsewhere ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says,

How shall we attain the reality of knowledge? By the breaths and promptings of the Holy Spirit, which is light and knowledge itself. Through it the human mind is quickened and fortified into true conclusions and perfect knowledge. [PUP 22]

Furthermore, the Writings make it clear that humanity’s spiritual and moral evolution cannot occur without the Manifestations; consequently, reason is not sufficient. It requires the aid of the Manifestations. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes,

*It is evident that the holy Manifestations and divine dawning points are necessary, for these blessed and glorious Souls are the foremost Teachers and Educators of mankind, and all human souls are developed through Them by the bounty of the Holy Spirit of God.*⁴⁶

It is, of course, obvious that if reason alone were sufficient to acquire spiritual and moral knowledge and to carry on humanity's evolution, the Manifestations would not be needed. Indeed, this is exactly what such philosophies as Humanism claim. Humanity is sufficient to itself.⁴⁷ Unfortunately, daily experience and history prove otherwise. As Schaefer says,

Human beings cannot recognize the moral order *by reason alone*; they are dependent on divine revelation on a God-given standard, a hierarchy of supreme values, on fixed point constituting an immovable yardstick and not subject to reason.⁴⁸

However, the fact that reason is not sufficient, does not automatically mean that reason is not necessary for humans to know, understand and apply our moral knowledge in daily life. Reason is unavoidable when dealing with morals. First of all, we must use reason to understand precisely what the divine guidance means, i.e. we must interpret it in a way that does not fall into logical absurdity, into self-contradiction and into contradiction with the rest of the Writings. As Schaefer says, we must interpret it 'in accord with right reason.' Furthermore, if we find ourselves in a situation in which there is no explicit textual guidance, we must reason our way to a solution on the basis of the Writings. There is not always time or opportunity to consult with others or the Universal House of Justice. Finally, we must evaluate whether or not our actions harmonize with the Writings and why. In other words, God establishes the ideal moral standards and reveals them in a manner consistent with reason but humanity applies them in creation in a rational way within the guidelines of the Writings. We cannot judge God's choices of moral principles but we must understand and apply them rationally. Thus, as we can see, reason is necessary in our moral lives. This, of course, is a modification of traditional natural law meta-ethics.

Such an essential role for reason in our ethical lives is not surprising, given the emphasis on reason in the Writings. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states,

that which is found to be real and conformable to reason must be accepted, and whatever science and reason cannot support must be rejected as imitation and not reality. [PUP 175]

and,

God has endowed man with intelligence and reason whereby he is required to determine the verity of questions and propositions ... If a question be found contrary to reason, faith and belief in it are impossible, and there is no outcome but wavering and vacillation. [PUP 181]

In addition, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says God

*has bestowed upon him [man] the power of intellect so that through the attribute of reason, when fortified by the Holy Spirit, he may penetrate and discover ideal realities and become informed of the mysteries of the world of significances.*⁴⁹

Reason is even applicable to matters related to faith and knowledge that does not pertain to the world of matter. Hence ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statement that

*In divine questions we must not depend entirely upon the heritage of tradition and former human experience; nay, rather, we must exercise reason, analyze and logically examine the facts presented so that confidence will be inspired and faith attained.*⁵⁰

Further emphasizing the importance of reason in all aspects of human life is the fact that the essential human feature is the

“rational soul” which is universal. It distinguishes us from animals. Consequently, there are no good grounds to doubt the applicability of reason to moral issues since we cannot exclude our essential nature from anything we do. If we could, it would no longer be essential.

To emphasize: according to the Writings, the Manifestations are necessary to activate our inherent potentials.⁵¹ However, this does not contradict natural law since natural law does not logically require that our moral knowledge be awakened in any specific way. Recognizing moral laws by reason alone is a Thomistic teaching but the Bahá’í Writings reject this view for the obvious reason that if humankind can recognize the moral laws by itself, there is no reason for the Manifestations to exist. Moreover, the Manifestations are necessary to motivate humanity to do what is right; knowledge alone is not enough, i.e. necessary but not sufficient. This is the great weakness in the Socratic view of ethics, namely, the belief that people will naturally do the right thing once they know what the right thing is. This is a charming delusion. By itself, knowledge does not make people ethical – there must also be motivation or willingness to do the right thing and the strength to do it. Providing willingness and strength is one of the irreplaceable roles of the Manifestation.

According to Schaefer, natural law meta-ethics

is based on the idea that [t]here is an ‘eternal and unchangeable law that encompasses all peoples and all ages’, a law that is ‘in accord with right reason (*recta ratio*) and shared by all human beings. Thus the rules of conduct are inherent in all human nature and are based upon *eternal, rational ideas of justice*, upon an imagined *apriori* nature of the human being and its innate moral sense. According to this philosophy the basic principles of ethics, the *magna principia*, are *recognizable by reason*.⁵²

Once again, there are alternative ways of understanding these ideas. In our view, it seems clear that the Bahá'í Writings also advocate an “*a priori* nature of human being and its innate moral sense” that is “shared by all human beings.” Because this issue is so essential to a natural law meta-ethic, a review is worthwhile. In the first place, human nature universally shares the same final cause – to know and worship God. It is teleological, i.e. it shares the same final cause. Therefore, humankind is not only physically but spiritually one. Shoghi Effendi states that “In origin and intention of creation mankind is one” [ADJ 37] which is to say, we originate from God and have the same teleological nature of evolving towards God. All human beings, regardless of culture, time, place or historical circumstance share the same essence which is the “rational soul” distinguishing us from animals. The Bahá'í International Community which states, “The rational soul, in the Bahá'í view, is a phenomenon with limitless potentialities: intellectual, spiritual, emotional and *moral*.⁵³ Furthermore, all humans have a double nature, a physical ‘animal’ nature and a spiritual nature which draws them towards God. This human nature is endowed with latent potentials, including moral potentials and “spiritual susceptibilities.” Thus, from our perspective, the Writings clearly advocate an identifiable view of a universal human nature.

In addition, in our view the Bahá'í Writings accept that there is, as Schaefer puts it,

an ‘eternal and unchangeable law that encompasses all peoples and all ages’, a law that is ‘in accord with right reason (*recta ratio*) and shared by all human beings.’⁵⁴

Given the existence of a universal human nature, it is only rational that such a law should exist. Indeed, how else could humanity be essentially one as the Writings teach? How else shall humankind be unified? Without an essentially unchangeable law based on what Shoghi Effendi calls the “eternal verities” passed on from one revelation to another, mankind would remain so badly diversified that conflict would

remain inevitable. There would still be adaptations to different cultures – but these adaptations would still embody the “eternal verities.” Moral standards would be superficially or accidentally different but essentially the same.

9. Motivation: Happiness: Eudaimonian Ethics

One of the key meta-ethical questions concerns motivation, i.e. why we should be good – especially when it is to our advantage not to be? Are the reasons to be good entirely intrinsic or extrinsic or are they a combination of both? Is personal satisfaction even necessary or can dedication to a greater cause be sufficient? Is such dedication to a greater cause necessary? These are some of the questions that arise.

In regards to the various schools of meta-ethics, the Writings and Aristotle’s “eudaimonic ethics” seem to converge. Aristotle’s “*eudaimonia*” which is often translated as “happiness,” “well-being” and “flourishing” is also linked to “*arête*” or personal virtue. In both the *Eudemian Ethics* and *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle asserts that happiness is the final goal, ‘the good’ for which all human beings strive, the motivation that energizes them: “Happiness is at once the pleasantest and the fairest and best of all things whatever.”⁵⁵ To achieve it, we must strive to exist in the most perfect and complete state possible; in other words, all things strive to self-actualize, to move from potency to act, or, to make their potentials actual. Striving for this ‘good’ is their true happiness. Aristotle notes that happiness comes in “activities in accordance with our human estate”⁵⁶ or nature, and connects actualization with happiness in his claim that “philosophic wisdom”⁵⁷ produces happiness by being actualized within a person. This activity actualizes our highest, specifically human, potential and, thereby, cannot help but bring supreme happiness. Both the Bahá’í and Aristotelian concepts of happiness are process concepts of happiness, i.e. happiness is found in the process of

drawing nearer to God or the universal “object of desire” and, thereby, actualizing one’s potentials.

In our view, the Writings see the deepest motivation is to attain happiness but, as we shall see, the Bahá’í concept of happiness must not be confused with comfort and lazy contentment or immediate, short-term pleasure or avoidance of unpleasant and challenging undertakings. Regarding happiness, Bahá’u’lláh asserts “*whatsoever are the effective means for safeguarding and promoting the happiness and welfare of the children of men have already been revealed by the Pen of Glory.*” [TB 220] Elsewhere, He says, “*We desire but the good of the world and the happiness of the nations.*” [PB, n.p.] “Abdu’l-Bahá declares,

The primary purpose, the basic objective, in laying down powerful laws and setting up great principles and institutions dealing with every aspect of civilization, is human happiness; and human happiness consists only in drawing closer to the Threshold of Almighty God. [SDC 60]

These beliefs are succinctly encapsulated in the assertion that “*Bahá’u’lláh has brought you divine happiness.*” [PUP 188] In regards to the individual ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says,

The purpose of these statements is to make it abundantly clear that the Divine religions, the holy precepts, the heavenly teachings, are the unassailable basis of human happiness, and that the peoples of the world can hope for no real relief or deliverance without this one great remedy.⁵⁸

He also advises individuals to

Seek ye divine happiness through the hardships and sorrows of this physical world, and behold spiritual well-being in the struggles of this fleeting existence. Distill

*sugar and honey from the bitter poison of suffering. Recognize the caress of divine favor in the arrows of misfortune.*⁵⁹

In other words, the kind of happiness envisaged by the Writings is not the secular happiness of comfort or even calm and contented stasis. In fact, every revelation at least to some extent, is intended to bring a certain amount of ‘divine discomfort’ and to awaken us from our moral and spiritual complacency and slumbers; to encourage us to make greater efforts to actualize our spiritual potentials, and to attain spiritual happiness even amidst physical and worldly discomfort. [PUP 341] Of course, the happiness we seek must be the happiness of our spiritual nature which can only be attained by pursuing ‘the good.’ In other words, the Writings require the dynamic happiness of growth and developmental struggle and actualizing our intrinsic human nature as we seek ‘the good,’ i.e. God. In regards to its final cause, such happiness is found in drawing nearer to God. In other words, happiness and well-being lie in the struggle itself. It is not a happiness and well-being that can be achieved once and for all because the effort itself – no matter at what spiritual level – is the happiness we seek. The surest way to lose this happiness is to stop trying.

10: Virtue Ethics

As Udo Schaefer demonstrates in *Bahá’í Ethics in Light of Scripture, Volume 2*, the Bahá’í Writings espouse a form of virtue ethics. Virtue ethics have a long and rich tradition beginning with Aristotle⁶⁰ in the West but also developed in Islamic and Buddhist ethics.⁶¹ In addition, it has a substantial history in Chinese Confucian philosophy.⁶² Consequentially, virtue ethics may serve as a bridge from the Bahá’í Writings to other religious and philosophical traditions in various parts of the world. After several centuries of decline in the West, virtue ethics have undergone a growing revival since the last half of the twentieth century, thanks especially to three women

philosophers, G.E.M. Anscombe, Philippa Foot and Rosalind Hursthouse.⁶³

Virtue ethics differ from other meta-ethical systems because of the belief that good, i.e. virtuous, behavior can only be expected from a good character who pursues happiness in the appropriate way.

[I]t is generally agreed that virtue ethics maintains that character, human excellences, virtues are the basic mode of evaluation in the theory, as opposed to act evaluations such as “right” and “wrong.” It is important to note that many virtue ethicists do not believe the theory to be incompatible with act evaluation at all. Rather, act evaluation is to be understood in terms of character evaluation.⁶⁴

The key to good ethical behavior is for us to acquire the virtues that are suitable to us as human beings, i.e. “rational souls” with both a material and spiritual aspect, whose prime purpose is to “know God and to love Him.” In the words of Philippa Foot, one of the modern revivers of virtue ethics,

Natural goodness as I define it, which is attributable only to living things themselves and to their parts, characteristics and operations is intrinsic or ‘autonomous’ goodness in that it depends directly on the relation of the individual to the ‘life form’ of its species.⁶⁵

In other words, “natural goodness” is based on how well we actualize the essential attributes of our species, i.e., of the kind of creatures we are. For humans, building a good character who can be relied upon to act virtuously and with the right motivations is thought to be more effective in dealing with a constantly changing world than trying to determine the right action by assessing the greatest good for the greatest number or the applicability of categorical imperatives or developing one’s

own unique scheme of values. “Not the rule follower, then, but the person disposed by character to be generous, caring, compassionate ... is the one we will hold up as a moral model.”⁶⁶ Virtue ethics contrast “with modernist attempts to ground morality in subjective preference or in abstract principles of reason.”⁶⁷ We know what the necessary virtues are because we know human nature and what it needs to flourish, not only for ourselves alone but as members of society, and, as the Writings would point out, as a spiritual and immortal being made in the image of God. The result of actualizing especially our highest potentials will keep us in harmony with natural law and will bring us the right kind of happiness. In other words, we need only follow our teleological nature.

As the foregoing description shows, the virtue ethics depends on the underlying theory of human nature, and on this score, Bahá'í virtue theory, while similar to Aristotle's in many important respects as we have just seen, also differ from him on a crucial issue of human nature. In fact, on the issue of feeling and sympathy, the Bahá'í view converges with some Confucian Chinese philosophers who put a great emphasis on sympathy and “connectedness with others”⁶⁸ and overcoming the false view that we are ‘atomic,’ i.e. completely separate individuals. Consequently, having a somewhat different view of human nature means that the virtues to be cultivated differs.

There is no need to go into detail about the importance of character in the Bahá'í Writings. The following advice from ‘Abdu'l-Bahá urges mothers to train their children “*to have a goodly character and good morals, guide them to all the virtues of humankind, prevent the development of any behaviour that would be worthy of blame.*”⁶⁹ Similarly, he says,

Training in morals and good conduct is far more important than book learning. A child that is cleanly, agreeable, of good character, well-behaved – even though he be ignorant – is preferable to a child that is rude, unwashed, ill-natured, and yet becoming deeply

*versed in all the sciences and arts. The reason for this is that the child who conducts himself well, even though he be ignorant, is of benefit to others, while an ill-natured, ill-behaved child is corrupted and harmful to others, even though he be learned. If, however, the child be trained to be both learned and good, the result is light upon light.*⁷⁰

The issue could not be stated more clearly.

In our view, there is no point in reviewing Udo Schaefer's magnificent categorization of the Bahá'í virtues in *Bahá'í Ethics in Light of Scripture, Volume 2*. Given the nature of this survey paper, there is nothing to add at this point. The case for virtue ethics in the Bahá'í Writings could not be made more clearly.

11: Consequentialism and Utilitarianism

Among modern meta-ethical theories, consequentialism and its main representative, utilitarianism also share the Bahá'í Writings' goal of happiness. In this sense, there is a convergence between the Writings and consequentialism and utilitarianism. We shall examine the differences below.

For consequentialism itself, happiness is one possible outcome by which we may evaluate the morality of an action. It is not focused solely on happiness; it is focused on achieving the "right kinds of overall consequences"⁷¹ even if these do not always lead to unadulterated happiness, e.g. a root canal or victory in WW II. The "right kinds of consequences" are those leading to the goals we wish to or need to achieve. Morality is identified with these results. Tom. L Beauchamp adds,

Consequentialism asserts that actions are right or wrong according to their consequences, rather than because of any intrinsic features they may have such as truthfulness or beauty. There are several types of utilitarian theory, but they hold in common that the rightness or wrongness

of actions and practices is determined solely by their consequences; what makes an action morally right or wrong is the total good or evil it produces. This contention distinguishes utilitarianism from ethical theories maintaining that the act itself has moral value part from the good or evil produced.⁷²

Utilitarianism, on the other hand, is concerned only with the consequence of happiness or pleasure. According to John Stuart Mill, the best known proponent of utilitarianism,

The creed which accepts, as the foundation of morals, Utility, or the *Greatest-happiness Principle*, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to *promote happiness*, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By *happiness is intended pleasure and the absence of pain*; by unhappiness, pain and privation of pleasure.⁷³

Mill's idea obviously implies that actions must be judged by their consequences for happiness and unhappiness.

From a Bahá'í perspective, consequentialism and utilitarianism put the cart before the horse: an action is not good because it leads to positive results and/or makes us happy but it leads to positive results and/or makes us happy because God's authority makes it good. The rightness or goodness of moral injunctions is ensured by the inherent legitimacy, authority, universality bestowed by God's commands. These are precisely the "intrinsic features" which make an act good. If moral commands do not exemplify harmony with God's Will, i.e. if they are not based on God's legitimacy, authority and universality, they are not right or good regardless of their seemingly positive consequences and/or happiness to which they lead. (Once again, we recall the "hospital scenario.") In other words, positive, happy consequences alone – even if they benefit a majority – are not sufficient to make a command or an action moral. The moral

rightness of an act is not intrinsic to it but comes from God's Will.

Because actions must reflect the intrinsic goodness of God's commands in addition to producing happiness, Bahá'í ethics also avoid the problem of the end justifying the means. No matter how much happiness or supposed positive results an action may bring, it is not moral if it violates God's command. Indeed, there may be actions society considers socially good or acceptable that do not agree with God's commands, and, therefore, even though they appear to bring happiness at least in the short-run, will not bring "the greatest good for the greatest number" in the long run. These seemingly positive actions may be spiritually bad.

This means that from a Bahá'í perspective, the positive social utility or consequences are not sufficient to make an action good. Furthermore, the utilitarian and consequentialist view is incomplete because it only concerns itself with one aspect of human nature and society — namely our material and not our spiritual well-being. However, the Bahá'í Writings indicate such an incomplete understanding of human nature inevitably leads to negative results and/or unhappiness for individuals and societies. Such truncated views of human nature are unrealistic because, in this case, the spiritual nature of man will eventually demand its due and if this is not forthcoming, serious problems will arise. For their part, the Bahá'í Writings recognize that both our material as well as spiritual natures must be satisfied and developed.

Of course, because God's moral commands reflect His love for His creation, they also benefit humankind and bring happiness. However, happiness may not always conform to our pre-conceptions; positive results may take unexpected forms. This is where the Bahá'í Writings distinguish themselves from utilitarianism in particular: the Writings do not necessarily regard suffering — be it physical or spiritual — as always inherently bad. This puts them at odds with utilitarian ethics

which see happiness as the standard for morality. In regards to suffering, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states,

The labourer cuts up the earth with his plough, and from that earth comes the rich and plentiful harvest. The more a man is chastened, the greater is the harvest of spiritual virtues shown forth by him. [PT 51]

As Bahá’u’lláh says,

O Thou Whose tests are a healing medicine to such as are nigh unto Thee, Whose sword is the ardent desire of all them that love Thee ... I implore Thee, by Thy divine sweetness and by the splendors of the glory of Thy face, to send down upon us from Thy retreats on high that which will enable us to draw nigh unto Thee. [PM 220]

In the *Arabic Hidden Words*, God states, “*My calamity is My providence, outwardly it is fire and vengeance, but inwardly it is light and mercy.*”⁷⁴ Events that feel bad “outwardly” i.e. in a worldly sense, are not necessarily bad because they lead to positive spiritual results. The negative outward experiences may be the means to a greater, i.e. happier spiritual goal.

A worldly illustration of this is a training camp for a hockey team. Recruits are put through strenuous even ‘unfair’ physical and psychological suffering but in the process of suffering they actualize and develop their skills, they acquire the discipline of being part of a team and they develop an all important ‘team-spirit’ necessary for success. Are they happy? Indeed, they are, even when they are uncomfortable – because we should never confuse comfort with happiness. They are happy because they are doing what it is in their nature to do i.e. they have a teleological happiness (despite the distress and anxiety) that is not in the utilitarian world-view. In this sense, they have Aristotle’s well-being or *eudemonia* which is foreign to Bentham and Mill’s utilitarianism. A consequentialist might be able to accept such a concept of teleological happiness up to a point –

but s/he will not be able to accept the spiritual results which must also count as consequences to be evaluated. In our view, the Bahá'í view of happiness is, theologically speaking, closeness to God and philosophically speaking the fullest possible actualization of our spiritual and physical capacities. This becomes clearer when we distinguish between being comfortable and contented and having growing pains which inevitably move us closer towards completion and maturity.

In the Bahá'í view, there is, ultimately, really only one way to attain happiness in its fullest measure and that is to fulfill our final cause which is know God and to worship Him as sated by the Noonday Prayer. Without fulfilling our final cause we cannot truly be our true selves, i.e. we cannot fulfill our own purpose and destiny and, therefore, remain deeply alienated from our own lives. In that case, how can we be anything but incomplete, unfulfilled – in a word, unhappy? If we are unhappy at such a fundamental level, it is difficult to see how we can bring genuine happiness to others. Thus, the prime or foundational motivation is intrinsic, i.e. spiritual self-actualization, i.e. knowing and worshipping God, which is the necessary and sufficient condition for carrying out the mandate to help spiritual healing to the world. This second motivation is extrinsic. Both kinds of motivation are necessary and present but the order is architectonic: knowing and worshipping God is the foundation from which other motives must develop. To actualize our final cause we must follow the Manifestation for our age.

12. Kant's Deontology and the Bahá'í Writings

In *Groundwork of a Metaphysic of Morals* (1797), Immanuel Kant presents his theory of deontological meta-ethics according to which morals must be based solely on a *priori* reasoning about duty or obligations. He defines duty as “the necessity to act out of reverence for the law.”⁷⁵ Moreover, in contradiction to consequentialism, utilitarianism or pragmatism, he believes

that “Empirical principles are always unfitted to serve as a ground for moral laws”⁷⁶ because of ever-changing circumstances. He also wants to avoid any dependence on religious revelation as a basis of ethics. His final position is simple: only when we do our duty for the sake of doing our duty can we be moral. A good act performed out of fear or ambition or even love may be ‘right’ but it is not moral.⁷⁷ Kant writes,

Therefore, *nothing but the idea of the law in itself*, which admittedly is present on in a rational being ... can constitute that pre-eminent good which we call moral, a good which is already present in the person acting on this idea and has not to be awaited merely from the result.⁷⁸

A few comments are in order before going further. From a Bahá’í perspective, Kant’s meta-ethic is built on poor foundations insofar as the Writings do not regard human reason alone as a sufficient basis for morals. Because of its inherent limitations, reason cannot meet the problems of legitimacy and power that we have explored above. What human being can claim to have the legitimacy, i.e. the complete knowledge, the infallible understanding and the infinite goodness to make absolute judgments about moral acts and to demand our adherence to his/her laws? Moreover, since legitimacy without power is impotent, what human being can claim to have the power to impose his/her moral rules in one way or another by means of consequences?⁷⁹ Who has the power necessary to enable people everywhere to follow these rules despite their short-comings and weaknesses? At this point it is already clear that the Bahá’í Writings are at odds with Kant’s deontological meta-ethics.

Another reason for the difference between the Writings and Kant’s deontology is the teleological foundation of the Bahá’í meta-ethic. The teleological nature of humankind means that our actions are aimed at achieving a certain goal and for this

reason alone are not done strictly for the sake of duty itself as required by Kant's ethics. Acting for love of God – as advised in the Noonday Prayer – also prevents action purely for the sake of duty itself.

At this point it is important to avoid confusing the good will which Kant posits as the foundation of truly moral action and deontologic ethics. According to Kant, "It is impossible to conceive anything at all in the world, or even out of it which can be taken as good without qualification, except a good will."⁸⁰ All other virtues depend on good will. In the *Arabic Hidden Words*, Bahá'u'lláh states

O SON OF SPIRIT!

*My first counsel is this: Possess a pure, kindly and radiant heart, that thine may be a sovereignty ancient, imperishable and everlasting.*⁸¹

This is the foundation in which our actions and moral reasoning should rest. On this matter the Writings and Kant are in agreement. However, saying that actions must be based on good will and a "pure, kindly and radiant heart" is not the same as saying that an action must be performed for its own sake and not for any other goal, teleologic or otherwise. Basing actions on good will does not lead to a deontologic view of ethics in the Bahá'í case.

Kant's statement about the foundation of good will reveals another deficiency in Kant's meta-ethics. Just how is good will or purity of heart to be attained? What are the necessary and sufficient conditions for acquiring it? Kant is silent on this issue – and for that reason his deontological meta-ethic lacks a solid foundation which it cannot explain. The Bahá'í Writings, on the other hand, do not have this problem in as much as good will towards our fellow man is generated by our love for God.

Love the creatures for the sake of God and not for themselves. You will never become angry or impatient if you love them for the sake of God. Humanity is not perfect ... if you look toward God, you will love them and be kind to them, for the world of God is the world of perfection and complete mercy. [PUP 92]

It is worth noting that this fits in well with divine command theory which makes God, not humanity, the center and basis of all ethics.

Kant has three rules or categorical imperatives, i.e. rules without exceptions, in order to help us identify what our duty is. We already know that it cannot be the consequences of an act since an action is good in and of itself whatever the consequences might be. In other words,

Certain kinds of acts are intrinsically right and other kinds intrinsically wrong. The rightness or wrongness of any particular act is thus not (or not wholly) determined by the goodness or badness of its consequences.⁸²

The first form of the categorical imperative states, “Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.”⁸³ In everyday language, we appeal to this form of the imperative when we ask about a behavior, “What if everybody else did that?” The obvious implication is that if an act is not all right for everyone, it is not all right for any individual. As common sense guidance this form of the categorical imperative is good – as long as universal good will remains foundational. From a Bahá’í perspective, the first form of the categorical imperative is not so much ‘wrong’ as insufficient because it is ‘empty,’ i.e. it prescribes nothing in particular, and even worse, as a standard for judging moral acts it only rules out hypocrisy. Any action can pass this test as long as we are willing to allow others to do the same. Indeed, like some revolutionaries – Lenin for example, we can convince ourselves that our harsh deeds were

examples of good will in the long run. A moral maxim that, in the last analysis, only rules out hypocrisy is not specific enough to genuinely practical. It is just too wishy-washy.

The second of Kant's categorical imperatives states,

Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means but always at the same time as an end.⁸⁴

In short, we should not use people only for our own advantage. Of course, we all use people in some way by hiring them to work for us, but by paying them fairly, we also treat them as ends. The second form of the categorical imperative is clearly in agreement with the Writings insofar as everyone is an 'end' and, therefore, innately valuable and to be cherished. This harmonizes with the Bahá'í belief that all humans are made in the image of God, although, of course, Kant does not say so. Moreover, the harmonization with the Writings is clear vis-à-vis treating each individual as an "end," in a way that is conducive to their spiritual growth and actualization of their "spiritual susceptibilities" as well as other gifts.

The third form of the categorical imperative states,

A rational being must always regard himself as making laws in a kingdom of ends which is possible through freedom of the will – whether it be as a member or as a head.⁸⁵

The "kingdom of ends" refers to a mental construct of a kingdom, "a systematic union of rational beings under common objective law"⁸⁶ in which members are both means and ends in their relation to one another. In the "kingdom of ends" the three forms of the categorical imperative are the common rational laws by which people judge their own and each others' actions. From our perspective on the Bahá'í Writings, the

concept of the “kingdom of ends” is interesting because it invites people to think of themselves as members of an ideal community and to act as if such were real in the here and now. In short, it helps us to improve or ‘idealize’ our behavior and speech. This – in our view – is exactly what we strive for in our Bahá’í communities: an idealized community which encourages us to practice speech and action in accordance with the Writings.

In our view, the major problem with Kant’s meta-ethical approach is its absolute reliance on reason. The Writings obviously reject the concept that reason alone is a sufficient basis for meta-ethics since that would obviate any need for God or the Manifestations in humanity’s ethical life. Another problem is the non-teleological view of human nature. Kant’s presentation of his meta-ethical theory in *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* lacks any mention or even hint that humanity has as natural and super-natural vocation, and, therefore, leaves out significant aspects of human nature that must be accounted for in ethics. In short, while Kant’s theory is clear and logically coherent, it has a tendency to be a Procrustes’ Bed that oversimplifies ethical issues as we have already seen vis-à-vis good will and the first form of the categorical imperative.

13. A Non-Naturalist Meta-ethic

In 1903, G.E. Moore published *Principia Ethica*, one of the key texts in modern and contemporary ethics. Moore’s “mode of inquiry was later to be known as metaethic – the philosophizing about the very terms of ethics and considering the structure of ethics as an object of inquiry.”⁸⁷ Moore had a startlingly simple suggestion: ethics is “the general enquiry into what is good.”⁸⁸ The ‘good,’ however, turns out to be more difficult to identify than we might think. Moreover, he rejected as “the naturalist fallacy” any attempt to reduce or explain the meaning of ‘the good’ in such empirical or natural terms as the

practical, or the greatest good for the greatest number, or conformity to natural law or any other empirical terms. This because we cannot reduce ethical terms to non-ethical terms without falling into a logical category mistake, i.e. conflating and confusing two different kinds of things, such as horse shoes and sea cucumbers. Doing so leads to mistaken conclusions. Moore writes,

My point is that good is a simple notion, just as yellow is a simple notion; that, just as you cannot, by any manner of means, explain to anyone who does not already know it, what yellow is, so you cannot explain what good is.⁸⁹

The ‘good’ is a simple fact and cannot be broken down and explained in simpler terms. Like the color yellow, it is either apprehended it is not. No amount of explanation can make a blind man understand what yellow is, and no naturalist, empirical explanation can inform us what the good is. Moore identifies the attempt to offer such empirical accounts of the ‘good’ as “the naturalistic fallacy.”⁹⁰ Such accounts are fallacious because they confuse and conflate (1) what is empirical with (2) what is ethical. Like Hume, Moore maintains these two orders or kinds of things are not and cannot be related. Unless we are working in a theistic system ‘is’ cannot lead to ‘ought.’ Thus, even though an action has positive consequences, is desirable and/or pragmatic we cannot necessarily conclude that an action is ‘good.’

According to Moore, our understanding of ‘the good’ must come by strictly non-natural, non-empirical means, such as an insight into Platonic Ideas. Moore himself seems to take such a Platonic position, stating,

The Ethics of Plato are distinguished by upholding, far more clearly and consistently than any other system, the view that intrinsic value belongs exclusively to those

states of mind which consist in love of what is good or hatred of what is evil.⁹¹

The Bahá'í Writings both agree and disagree with Moore. The fact that Moore's 'good' transcends empirical knowledge corresponds to the fact that in the Writings God, Who is the good, also transcends empirical knowledge. Because the 'good' is transcendent, it is obvious that no empirical and naturalistic characterizations of it will be adequate. That is why God is essentially unknowable. Moore's intuitionism – the sense of knowing directly without empirical explanation of evidence – finds its counterpart in the Bahá'í teaching that inspiration from the "spirit of faith" is necessary to attain true knowledge. This applies not just to the things we can reason about but to spiritual truths as well. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says,

*But the human spirit [the rational soul], unless assisted by the spirit of faith, does not become acquainted with the divine secrets and the heavenly realities. It is like a mirror which, although clear, polished and brilliant, is still in need of light. Until a ray of the sun reflects upon it, it cannot discover the heavenly secrets.*⁹²

Knowledge of 'the good' may be reasonably seen as part of the "divine secrets and the heavenly realities." Until reason is augmented by the spirit of faith, we are "veiled souls" [SAQ 239] unable to recognize or intuit the good or intuit the good to our fullest capacity. In other words, there comes a point at which humans simply have to recognize or intuit the existence of the good the way they recognize the sun – not by argument but by looking. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá says about the immortality of the soul:

*if the inner sight becomes opened, and the spiritual hearing strengthened, and the spiritual feelings predominant, he will see the immortality of the spirit as clearly as he sees the sun.*⁹³

Similarly, when our spiritual sight is opened, we will ‘see’ or intuit the existence of God Who is also the ultimate good. We will do so without benefit of inferential reasoning. Although by different paths, the Bahá’í Writings and Moore’s moral intuitionism converge.

However, the Bahá’í position incorporates both Moore’s intuitionist view and naturalistic ethics, a position made possible by theism. The created empirical world is totally suffused with the signs and signatures of God’s Will which in itself is a sign of ‘the good.’

*Such is their virtue that not a single atom in the entire universe can be found which doth not declare the evidences of His might, which doth not glorify His holy Name, or is not expressive of the effulgent light of His unity.*⁹⁴

With such a proliferation of evidence of God’s Will, it is hard to resist the conclusion that we also gain some idea of ‘the good’ by observation and reason. Such conceptions of ‘the good’ are, of course, limited but they are able to tell us something about ‘the good.’ However, such knowledge of the good is tentative, incomplete and inadequate for the evolution of humankind. It may be described as a ‘lure’ to direct our thoughts and feelings in a spiritual direction but in itself, is not adequate as knowledge of ‘the good.’ For such knowledge, and even better knowledge of the signs of God’s Will in nature, our “spiritual susceptibilities” must be awakened and our reasoning must be inspired as we have discussed above.

Several important consequences follow from the foregoing discussion. First, the Bahá’í Writings are able to form a bridge between Moore’s non-cognitivist meta-ethics and various moral cognitivist theories. Second, the transcendent nature of ‘the good’ ensures that this value is objective and mind-independent in itself; it does not depend on us for its existence or nature and in that sense, it is like a Platonic Idea of which humans only

grasp fleeting images. Finally, ‘the good’ itself is changeless, like the “eternal verities.” Of course, our perspective on ‘the good’ changes – but the change is in us, not in ‘the good.’

14. Moral Cognitivism (Ethical Realism) or Non-cognitivism

Perhaps the most basic division in meta-ethics is between cognitive and non-cognitive theories. All ethical theories advocate or tend towards one or the other. Moral cognitivism (or moral realism) refers to

Ethical theories that hold that there is knowledge of moral facts and that normative ethical judgments can be said to be true or false. Cognitivism includes the majority of traditional ethical theories. In contrast, non-cognitivism, represented by emotivism and prescriptivism, holds that moral statements do not possess truth-values and cannot be known.⁹⁵

Another way of approaching this subject is to ask,

Is there moral knowledge? (And also, do moral statements make knowledge claims?) [as well as] Is there moral truth? (And also, do moral judgments make truth claims?)⁹⁶

In both of these descriptions of cognitive meta-ethics the key issue is whether or not moral truths exist mind-independently, or whether all moral statements are merely subjective opinions with no objective content. If such truths are objective, then they are obviously mind-independent and their essences not determined by human observers. (Human observers may have different perspectives on such truths but that does not affect the essence or nature of the truth itself.) As Andrew Fisher says, “To be a moral realist is to think that moral properties are real and that these properties are in some sense independent of what

people think.”⁹⁷ Neither individual thought nor collective cultural beliefs can make or negate objective moral truths. Furthermore, cognitivism holds there are objectively real moral properties, qualities or attributes that we can associate with such terms as ‘good,’ ‘evil,’ ‘true’ or ‘false.’ This, of course, is at odds with G.E. Moore’s central claim that ‘the good’ cannot be related to anything else. Finally, according to moral cognitivism, moral judgments can be true or false, which means that moral judgments can assert truth claims.

In the Bahá’í Writings, it is clear that humans are not the creators of their own morals. We receive our morals from God, which, of course, makes them completely mind-independent as well as ontologically real and objective. In this sense, the Bahá’í Writings converge with Plato’s theory that ‘goodness’ or ‘the good’ has objective existence in the supersensible world of Ideas just as the moral teachings revealed by the Manifestations reflects God’s knowledge about what is ethically good for humankind. What God knows to be true and best for us (as revealed by the Manifestations) cannot help but be real and objective, i.e. cannot help but exist independently from human perception, belief and judgment. How could we rely on ourselves to invent morals when we inherently lack the divine omnipotence which enables God to know what moral standards are best suited to the human nature He has created?

In sharp contrast to cognitivism, non-cognitivism rejects all of the foregoing assertions. Non-cognitivism maintains that the truth (or falsity) of moral propositions is mind-dependent, i.e. depends on the individual or collective making the proposition. Truth or falsity are not objective and cannot be proven true or untrue. There are no real i.e. mind-independent moral qualities or attributes that can be used to prove or disprove a moral judgment. One of the most famous non-cognitive meta-ethical theories is A. J. Ayer’s emotivism according to which ethical statements do not describe anything, i.e. they do not tell us what something is like and they do not prescribe anything i.e. they do not show us any obligation. According to Ayer’s

emotivism, moral ‘statements’ really only express feelings. “Murder is bad” really means nothing more than “Murder – Boo! Hiss!” Obviously such statements cannot be judged as either true or false because there is no way to verify them, they are purely subjective i.e. mind-dependent, and have no real moral content. All they tell us is that someone disapproves of murder – which is not in itself an ethical statement. There is no possibility here of identifying good and evil in the acts themselves because such moral content must be extraneously by us. Clearly, the meaning of ‘good’ has been reduced to an exclamation without any intellectual content about the nature of ‘good’ or its distinction from ‘evil.’

In our view, Bahá’í meta-ethics exemplify ethical cognitivism. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá points out that

[e]ach of the divine religions embodies two kinds of ordinances. The first is those which concern spiritual susceptibilities, the development of moral principles and the quickening of the conscience of man. These are essential or fundamental, one and the same in all religions, changeless and eternal – reality not subject to transformation. [PUP 106]

Nothing here suggests that humans create or invent these fundamental moral values on their own or, indeed, have any kind of influence on them. They are ‘platonic’ insofar as they transcend the phenomenal realm although they should not be understood as Platonic Ideas present in their own realm. However, there is no question that they are mind-independent, are real and objective and have real content in and of themselves.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá declares that the first of two kinds of ordinances

constitute essential, or spiritual, teachings of the Word of God. These are faith in God, the acquirement of the

*virtues which characterize perfect manhood, praiseworthy moralities, the acquisition of the bestowals and bounties emanating from the divine effulgences – in brief, the ordinances which concern the realm of morals and ethics.*⁹⁸

It should be noted that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá refers to the virtues we need as “*the ordinances which concern the realm of morals and ethics.*”⁹⁹ These, he tells us, come from God. Moreover, to attain “perfect manhood” – a concept which also implies an objective standard by which to judge – we must *acquire* certain attributes and ethical qualities. The key is that we must *acquire* them from the “Word of God,” not that we should invent or choose them for themselves. Humans have no role in deciding the nature of “perfect manhood” or of “praiseworthy moralities.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá also makes it clear that humanity is completely dependent on the Manifestations for our knowledge of ethics. They are the “divine Educators” [PUP 345] of humankind.

*The holy Manifestations of God come into the world to dispel the darkness of the animal, or physical, nature of man, to purify him from his imperfections in order that his heavenly and spiritual nature may become quickened, his divine qualities awakened, his perfections visible, his potential powers revealed and all the virtues of the world of humanity latent within him may come to life. These holy Manifestations of God are the Educators and Trainers of the world of existence, the Teachers of the world of humanity. They liberate man from the darkness of the world of nature, deliver him from despair, error, ignorance, imperfections and all evil qualities. They clothe him in the garment of perfections and exalted virtue ... Man is base, treacherous and mean; the Manifestations of God uplift him into dignity, nobility and loftiness.*¹⁰⁰

The values brought by the Manifestations are remedies for *our* “despair, error, ignorance, imperfections and all evil qualities,” i.e. it is the Manifestations and not human beings who bring these values. The fact that “[m]an is base, treacherous and mean” shows that we lack the ability to identify, awaken, actualize and establish the values that are appropriate for us. That is why the Manifestations are necessary. This, too, shows that humans do not invent their fundamental values.

For his part, Shoghi Effendi also refers to objective, mind-independent ethics when he writes, “But when true religion is combined with *true ethics*, then moral progress becomes a possibility and not a mere ideal.”¹⁰¹ He also says, “We should take our stand on a *higher plane of moral and spiritual life* and, setting for them *the true example*, urge them up to our level.”¹⁰² Here, too, we observe both directly and by implication that there are, indeed, moral truths and even a hierarchy of moral development about which we can have genuine knowledge.

These and other statements make it clear that humans are not the creators of their own morals. We receive our morals from God, which, of course, makes them completely mind-independent as well as ontologically real and objective. In this sense, the Bahá’í Writings converge with Plato’s theory that ‘goodness’ or ‘the good’ has objective existence in the supersensible world of Ideas just as the moral teachings revealed by the Manifestations reflects God’s knowledge about what is ethically good for humankind. What God knows to be true and best for us (as revealed by the Manifestations) cannot help but be real and objective, i.e. cannot help but exist independently from human perception, belief and judgment. How could we rely on ourselves to invent morals when we inherently lack the divine omnipotence which enables God to know what moral standards are best suited to the human nature He has created?

14.1 Subjectivity and Relativism

It may be argued that subjectivity and, in that sense, non-cognitivism enters Bahá'í ethics insofar as people are entitled to their own understanding of the Manifestation's moral pronouncements or the declarations of His authorized interpreters. Everyone has a right to such personal understanding and no individual has the right to insist on the acceptance of his or her viewpoints. However, it is just as important to remember that having rights does not make our opinions immune from analysis or critique as indicated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement that "*The shining spark of truth cometh forth only after the clash of differing opinions.*" [SWAB 87] In other words, while we all have the right to our own understandings, there is no necessary expectation to exemption from respectful analysis. Moreover, having a right to a certain understandings does not guarantee that all understandings are equally well supported by the Writings or equally well reasoned or equally relevant to a passage.¹⁰³ In other words, the Writings do not forbid clashing opinions but they do forbid an insistence that others must accept our views. Finally, it should be noted that not all understandings are cognitive — some may be emotive or may express attitudes instead of making declarative propositions about ethics or the world. Since such understandings or interpretations are not cognitive, they cannot be declared to be true or false.

The right to hold our own understandings is a *de jure* right belonging to the person and not to the argument s/he is making. This should not be confused with relativism which asserts that all view are true or must be regarded as true from some perspective and that we have no standard by which to judge moral actions. If that were the case, we would have to reject 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement that "*we must train the immature to proper or true moral standards: Some have unworthy morals; we must train them toward the standard of true morality.*"¹⁰⁴ There are objective, "changeless and eternal" [PUP 106] moral rights

and wrongs, i.e. the “eternal verities” which the Manifestations provide for our use. Declaring some people to be “immature” in a moral sense also implies that there exists an object, mind-independent standard by which to make a judgment. The existence of “true” morals is a claim that negates any notion that all moral positions can be considered correct from some particular point of view. If values had no objective and real status and could not be known with some degree of accuracy, then the Writings would be useless in providing moral guidance since all such guidance would be reduced to conflicting opinions that would only revive the tower of Babel.¹⁰⁵

From the foregoing, it seems clear that we should not confuse the right to personal opinion about the Writings with relativism which is position about the truth-value of our opinions. The first is unchallengeable insofar as it grows out of the independent search for truth while the second is a logically dubious position that makes ethical knowledge and unity impossible and, as we have seen, is flatly contradicted by the Writings. In ethics, relativism is especially dangerous because it abolishes the difference between servants to humanity such as Mother Teresa and servants of evil ideologies such as Dr. Mengele – a problem also present in non-cognitivist ethics where ethics are simply feelings or attitudes. The idea that the differences between them are only a matter of perspective seems perverse. Such a confusion is incompatible with the whole purpose of the Writings which is to lift our morality above those of Josef Mengele.

To conclude: the meta-ethics of Writings exemplify a foundational cognitivism although there is some room for subjectivity in the interpretation of moral guidance.

14.2 Two Opponents to Bahá'í Cognitivism

Naturally, there are various non-cognitive or antirealist meta-ethical theories that disagree with the Bahá'í Writings about the truth and falsity of ethical propositions. One of these is the

influential meta-ethical view known as “error theory”¹⁰⁶ which asserts that without exception all ethical propositions, judgments and injunctions are false. They report nothing about the world, i.e. they are not knowledge, and, therefore, have no truth value. They can neither be falsified nor confirmed. J.L. Mackie, the main proponents of error theory writes,

But the denial of objective values will have to be put forward ... as an ‘error theory,’ a theory that although most people in making moral judgments implicitly claim ... to be pointing to something objectively descriptive, these claims are all false. It is this that makes ‘moral scepticism’ appropriate.¹⁰⁷

The most obvious consequence of J.L. Mackie’s statements is that if moral propositions and judgments “are all false,” then ethics ceases to exist as a subject. There is simply no point in pursuing such so-called ‘knowledge’ and there is no validity in trying to teach these judgments to others. Since error theory is unable to say that any action is either moral or immoral, some writers have identified it as a form of ethical nihilism,¹⁰⁸ a viewpoint with which we concur. Of course, this does not mean that error theorists or ethical nihilists cannot judge whether an action is socially useful, or pleasure-giving or convenient in a utilitarian sense but those judgments would have to be made on non-ethical grounds, and, therefore, are not really ethical in nature. For example, we can say ‘Feeding the poor is good’ for ethical reasons because it is morally positive to treat God’s children well, or, we can say it is ‘good’ for law-and-order reasons because it prevents food riots. The first statement is untenable for Mackie, the second, non-ethical statement is acceptable.

Error theory negates the purpose of the Manifestations to teach us how to distinguish good from evil. Bahá’u’lláh exhorts us to “*Forsake all evil, hold fast that which is good*” [TB 138] — an impossible task if good and evil did not have objective existence and if we cannot distinguish the two. The same can be

said of the statement that “*the choice of good or evil belongs to the man himself.*” [SAQ 249] Indeed, if there were no objective distinctions between good and evil, why would humans need a Manifestation to reveal ethical rules to help our individual and collective progress? How could we even believe in ethical progress, i.e. advancement from lower to higher moral development? There could be no “eternal verities” [PDC 108] for successive Manifestations to reaffirm. In short, meta-ethical error theory negates the very foundations of Bahá’í ethical teachings and cannot be harmonized with them. Even if error theory were to allow the Manifestations a special kind of ethical knowledge, error theory still has to maintain that the way humans interpret these exceptional pronouncements is inherently false. Consequently, practicing ethics is impossible.

Postmodernism, in all its various forms, is another philosophical movement that rejects the ethical cognitivism and realism found in the Bahá’í Writings.¹⁰⁹ In general terms, this philosophy represents an

an anti- (or post) epistemological standpoint; anti-essentialism; anti-foundationalism; opposition to transcendental arguments and transcendental standpoints; rejection of the picture of knowledge as accurate representation; rejection of truth as correspondence to reality; rejection of the very idea of canonical descriptions, rejection of final vocabularies, i.e. rejection of principles, distinctions, and descriptions that are thought to be unconditionally binding for all times, persons, and places; and a suspicion of grand narratives, metanarratives of the sort perhaps best illustrated by dialectical materialism.¹¹⁰

This description shows why postmodernism is not compatible with the Bahá’í Writings except in accidental features.¹¹¹ Their positions on various fundamental issues are antithetical and, therefore, any similarities are coincidental rather than the products of harmonious basic principles. The teleological view

of humanity and the definition of the human spirit as the “rational soul” show that, postmodernism to the contrary, the Writings clearly espouse essentialism, as does the natural law meta-ethic. The Writings have a well-developed theory of man. The Manifestations are not only privileged knowers but also introduce “transcendental standpoints” into our ethical discourse. The “eternal verities” and the “changeless and eternal” guidance from the Manifestations is – postmodernism notwithstanding – “binding for all times, persons, and places.” Furthermore, ‘progressive revelation’ is exactly the kind of grand or metanarrative that postmodernism rejects. Furthermore, the tremendous emphasis on reason and the rationality of religion and science in the Writings both in empirical and spiritual matters has no counterpart in postmodern literature. Finally, the Bahá’í Writings are committed to finding the truth which corresponds to reality as seen in the following declaration:

*It means that man must forget all hearsay and examine truth himself, for he does not know whether statements he hears are in accordance with reality or not. Wherever he finds truth or reality, he must hold to it, forsaking, discarding all else; for outside of reality there is naught but superstition and imagination.*¹¹²

Elsewhere, he says, “we discover the realities of all things,” [PUP 264] which means that our discoveries correspond to what is ‘out there.’ In addition, he asserts, “He has endowed him [man] with mind, or the faculty of reasoning, by the exercise of which he is to investigate and discover the truth, and that which he finds real and true he must accept.”¹¹³ The very purpose of reason is the discovery of truth: “God has created man in order that he may perceive the verity of existence and endowed him with mind or reason to discover truth.”¹¹⁴

Discovering the truth in the Writings includes discovering the truth about ethics. This is precisely what Richard Rorty, one of the quintessential postmodern philosophers, rejects. He sees

no value in objectivity which he dismisses as wanting a “sky-hook provided by some contemporary yet-to-be-developed science”¹¹⁵ to free us from the biases of being culture-bound because he does not think we can ever escape being imprisoned in our cultures. Therefore,

[t]hose who wish to reduce objectivity to *solidarity* – call them “pragmatists” – do not require either a metaphysics or an epistemology. They view truths as, in William James’ phrase, what is good for *us* to believe. So they do not need an account of a relation between beliefs and objects called ‘correspondence’ nor an account of human cognitive abilities which ensures that our species is capable of entering into that relation ... For pragmatists, the desire for objectivity is not the desire to escape the limitations of one’s community but simply the desire to for as much intersubjective agreement as possible.¹¹⁶

When the idea of replacing the quest for truth in ethics is replaced with the quest for solidarity – which is not an ethical category but a political one, we have, perhaps reached the end of ethics. In short, politics is to replace ethics since there is really nothing to know – only a consensus to negotiate. On Rorty’s view, philosophy cannot be a quest for ‘truth’ or ‘true understanding’ since the most we can do is redescribe things to our individual and/or collective liking and converse about our various descriptions. In other words, the purpose of philosophy is to be edifying: “I shall is ‘edification’ to stand for this project of finding new, better, more interesting more fruitful ways of speaking.”¹¹⁷ Edifying philosophy “takes its point of departure from suspicion about the pretensions of epistemology,”¹¹⁸ i.e., edifying philosophy is not longer interested in attaining truth.¹¹⁹ Thus, rather than take part in an inquiry for the ‘knowledge,’ “we just might be *saying something*”¹²⁰ simply in order to “keep the conversation going rather than to find objective truth.”¹²¹ This, for Rorty is “a sufficient aim of philosophy.”¹²²

The concept that ethics is merely “edifying” conversation that just goes on – until we attain, for now, anyway – solidarity, is wholly incompatible with the serious business of ethics as seen in the Bahá’í Writings. The problem is that it is incredibly dangerous. As people who have lived under the most brutal dictatorships of the last century know, sometimes solidarity with crowd is treason to humanity. Sometimes solidarity with injustice is the last thing we want and is simply unethical to the roots. Yet, by Rorty’s standards, we cannot know which choice to make. Transforming the epistemological and ethical into the political is not only a huge logical category mistake, it is also a huge ethical mistake because it assumes that ethics can be negotiated and bargained with in order to achieve some compromise satisfactory to all. This kind of ‘solidarity’ should not be mistaken for the ‘unity’ taught by the Writings which is based on commitment and obedience to God’s law and guidance instead of a quest for an edifying conversation.

15: Conclusion

Our survey of the major meta-ethical theories makes it clear that Bahá’í meta-ethics form a logically coherent and consistent whole. While there is doubtlessly much more to be added as all kinds of implications and inferences are pursued, the outlines of Bahá’í meta-ethics are plainly visible. These ally the Writings with foundationalism, natural law meta-ethics, non-consequentialism, virtue ethics, ethical realism and objectivism, divine command theory, eudaimonian ethics, cognitivism and non-relativism.

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NOTES

- ¹ Douglas Rasmussen in Henry B Veatch, *Rational Man*, p. xi.
- ² Robert Audi, general editor, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, p. 599.
- ³ Louis J Pojman, *Ethics*, p. 45.
- ⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, 1, 1094a; emphasis added.
- ⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, 1094a.
- ⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, 1097a,b.
- ⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X, 7, 1098a.
- ⁸ PT 72; emphasis added.
- ⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I – II Q 90 A1; emphasis added.
- ¹⁰ Frederick Copleston, S.J., *A History of Philosophy*, Vol. 2, Part 1, p. 272. Also Joseph Constanzo S.J., “*Papal Magisterium, Natural Law and Humanae Vitae*,” <http://ewtn.com/library/DOCTRINE/PMHV.TXT>
- ¹¹ David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature*, III, 1, part 1.
- ¹² Sam Harris, *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values*, p. 38.
- ¹³ For a full discussion of Harris’ book, see Ian Kluge, “*Ethics Based on Science Alone?*” in *Journal of Bahá’í Philosophy*; forthcoming
- ¹⁴ GWB XC, p. 177; emphasis added.
- ¹⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 30.
- ¹⁶ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, in “*The Nature of Nature in Feminism Old and New*” in *Women in Christ* ed. Michele Schumacher, p. 23.
- ¹⁷ See Ian Kluge, “*Postmodernism and the Bahá’í Writings*” in *Lights of Irfan*, Volume 9, 2008.
- ¹⁸ Michelle M. Schumacher, “*The Nature of Nature in Feminism Old and New*” in *Women in Christ* ed. by Michele M. Schumacher, p. 26.
- ¹⁹ ESW 115; emphasis added.
- ²⁰ The Universal House of Justice, 1993 Jun 05, *Homosexuality*, p. 2; emphasis added.
- ²¹ PUP 106; emphasis added.
- ²² The Universal House of Justice, 1993 June 05, *Homosexuality*, p. 2.
- ²³ The Universal House of Justice, 1993 June 05, *Homosexuality*, p. 1.
- ²⁴ The main criticism of Bagemihil’s book is that he mistakes dominance behaviors in animals – which often involve mounting the submissive one – for sexual in nature. Anyone who has lived on a farm and seen a ‘boss

cow' "bulling" other cows will see this behavior is not sexual in nature. Bagemihil's flawed analysis of dominance behaviors severely undermines the value of his book.

²⁵ The Universal House of Justice, 1993 June 05, *Homosexuality*, p. 2.

²⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X, 7, 1178a.

²⁷ Udo Schaefer, *Bahá'í Ethics In Light of Scripture: An Introduction*, Vol. II, p. 2; original emphasis.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 148-149; emphasis added.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 152; emphasis added.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

³⁴ See Ian Kluge, "Reason and the Bahá'í Writings," forthcoming publication in the *Lights of Irfan* series.

³⁵ Schaefer, *Bahá'í Ethics In Light of Scripture*, p. 144' emphasis added.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 148 – 149.

³⁷ Alister MacGrath, "McGrath's Intellectual Origins," Part 1.

<http://threehierarchies.blogspot.ca/2005/08/mcgraths-intellectual-origins-part-i.html>

³⁸ The Universal House of Justice, 1993 Jun 05, *Homosexuality*, p. 2; emphasis added.

³⁹ PUP 69; emphasis added.

⁴⁰ PUP 240. Also *Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, Vol. 2. p. 286.

⁴¹ PUP 7; see also 339.

⁴² Bahá'í International Community, 1999 Feb, *Who is Writing the Future?*

⁴³ PUP 465; emphasis added.

⁴⁴ The truths of faith such as the Trinity must come from revelation.

⁴⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Question 91, article 2.

<http://www.newadvent.org/summa/2091.htm#article2>

⁴⁶ PUP 330; emphasis added.

⁴⁷ Paul Kurtz, *Forbidden Fruit: The Ethics of Secularism*; Corliss Lamont, *Philosophy of Humanism*.

⁴⁸ Schaefer, *Bahá'í Ethics In Light of Scripture*, p. 153; emphasis added.

⁴⁹ PUP 303; emphasis added.

⁵⁰ PUP 327; emphasis added.

⁵¹ This, too, confirms one of Aristotle's insights into the nature of reality: only actualized things can awaken ,activate or actualize a potential. See

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- Ian Kluge, “*The Aristotelian Substratum of the Bahá’í Writings*,” in *Lights of Irfan*, Vol. 4, 2003.
- ⁵² Schaefer, *Bahá’í Ethics In Light of Scripture*, p. 144’ emphasis added.
- ⁵³ Bahá’í International Community, 1989 Feb 09, *Right to Development*; emphasis added.
- ⁵⁴ Schaefer, *Bahá’í Ethics In Light of Scripture*, p. 144’ emphasis added.
- ⁵⁵ Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, I, 1, 1214a. Unlike the better known *Nicomachean Ethics*, the *Eudemian Ethics* are more religious in nature.
- ⁵⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, X, 8, 1178a.
- ⁵⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI, 13, 1144a.
- ⁵⁸ SDC 98; emphasis added.
- ⁵⁹ Compilations, *Bahá’í Scriptures*, 439; emphasis added.
- ⁶⁰ See Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*.
- ⁶¹ Richard Wade, “*Bridging Christianity, Islam and Buddhism with Virtue Ethics*,” http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007%2F978-1-4020-9260-2_19
- ⁶² Philip J. Ivanhoe, “*Virtue Ethics and the Chinese Confucian Tradition*,” in Daniel C. Russell, editor, *The Cambridge Companion to Virtue Ethics*, p 49-69.
- ⁶³ Timothy Chappell, “*Virtue Ethics in the Twentieth Century*,” in Daniel C. Russell, editor, *The Cambridge Companion to Virtue Ethics*.
- ⁶⁴ Julia Driver, *Ethics*, p. 137.
- ⁶⁵ Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness*, p. 27.
- ⁶⁶ Tom Beauchamp, *Philosophical Ethics*, p. 227.
- ⁶⁷ Robert Audi, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd ed., p. 961.
- ⁶⁸ Philip J. Ivanhoe, “*Virtue Ethics and the Chinese Confucian Tradition*,” in Daniel C. Russell, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Virtue Ethics*, p 58.
- ⁶⁹ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 124; emphasis added.
- ⁷⁰ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 135; emphasis added.
- ⁷¹ Consequentialism in *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/conseque/>
- ⁷² Tom L. Beauchamp, *Philosophical Ethics*, p. 129 – 130; emphasis added
- ⁷³ John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* in *The Ethical Life* ed. by Russ Shafer-Landau, p. 17; emphasis added.
- ⁷⁴ Bahá’u’lláh, *The Arabic Hidden Words*, # 51; emphasis added.
- ⁷⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. by H. J. Paton, p. 68.

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- ⁷⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. by H. J. Paton, p. 109.
- ⁷⁷ Tom Beauchamp, *Philosophical Ethics*, p. 179.
- ⁷⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. by H. J. Paton, p. 69; emphasis added.
- ⁷⁹ GWB CXII, p. 218:
- “The structure of world stability and order hath been reared upon, and will continue to be sustained by, the twin pillars of reward and punishment.”
- ⁸⁰ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. by H. J. Paton, p. 61.
- ⁸¹ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Arabic Hidden Words*, # 1; emphasis added.
- ⁸² *Concise Rutledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, p. 202.
- ⁸³ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. by H. J. Paton, p. 88.
- ⁸⁴ Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 96.
- ⁸⁵ Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 101.
- ⁸⁶ Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 101.
- ⁸⁷ Louis P. Pojman, *Ethics*, p. 213.
- ⁸⁸ G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, Chpt. I, Section 2. <http://fair-use.org/g-e-moore/principia-ethica>
- ⁸⁹ G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, Chpt. I Section 7.
- ⁹⁰ G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, Chpt. I, Section 10.
- ⁹¹ G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, Chpt. V, Section 107.
- ⁹² SAQ 208; emphasis added.
- ⁹³ SAQ 225; emphasis added.
- ⁹⁴ Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XXVI, p. 60.
- ⁹⁵ Nicholas Bunnin and Jiyuan Yu, *The Blackwell Dictionary of Western Philosophy*, p. 117.
- ⁹⁶ Tom L Beauchamp, *Philosophical Ethics*, p. 101.
- ⁹⁷ Andrew Fisher, *Metaethics: An Introduction*, p. 55.
- ⁹⁸ PUP 403; emphasis added.
- ⁹⁹ PUP 403; emphasis added.
- ¹⁰⁰ PUP 465; emphasis added.
- ¹⁰¹ Shoghi Effendi, From a letter Written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, April 17, 1926, *Bahá'í Youth*, pp. 8-9) in *Compilations, Lights of Guidance*, p. 630; emphasis added.

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- ¹⁰² Shoghi Effendi, Letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, October 26, 1932: Bahá'í Youth, pp. 4-5 in *Compilations, Lights of Guidance*, p. 632; emphasis added.
- ¹⁰³ See Ian Kluge, "Reason and the Bahá'í Writings," in *Lights of Irfan*, forthcoming.
- ¹⁰⁴ PUP 66; emphasis added.
- ¹⁰⁵ Ian Kluge, "Postmodernism and the Bahá'í Writings," in *Lights of Irfan*, Vol. 9, 2008. Postmodernism tries to make a virtue of this problem.
- ¹⁰⁶ Julia Driver, *Ethics*, p. 170.
- ¹⁰⁷ J.L. Mackie, from *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, in Beauchamp, *Philosophical Ethics*, p. 42.
- ¹⁰⁸ Julia Driver, *Ethics*, p. 171.
- ¹⁰⁹ Ian Kluge, "Postmodernism and the Bahá'í Writings," in *Lights of Irfan*, Vol. 9, 2008.
- ¹¹⁰ Robert Audi, editor, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*.
- ¹¹¹ Ian Kluge, "Reason and the Bahá'í Writings," in *Lights of Irfan*, forthcoming.
- ¹¹² PUP 62; emphasis added.
- ¹¹³ PUP 291; emphasis added.
- ¹¹⁴ PUP 287; emphasis added.
- ¹¹⁵ Richard Rorty, "Introduction" in *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth*, p.13.
- ¹¹⁶ Richard Rorty, "Solidarity or Objectivity" in *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth*, p. 22-23.
- ¹¹⁷ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 360.
- ¹¹⁸ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 366.
- ¹¹⁹ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 370.
- ¹²⁰ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 371.
- ¹²¹ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 377.
- ¹²² Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 378.

The Greatest Holy Leaf's Unparalleled Role in Religious History and the Significance of the Arc, the Site of Her Resting Place

Baharieh Rouhani Ma`ani

The year 2013 marks the hundredth anniversary of `Abdu'l-Bahá's return to the Holy Land from His historic trip to Egypt and the West. He left Haifa for Egypt in September 1910 and returned there three years later. The person "invested ... with the responsibility" to attend "to the multitudinous details arising out of His protracted absence from the Holy Land" (*Bahíyyih Khánum, the Greatest Holy Leaf* [henceforth, "BK"], p. 39) was His honoured sister, Bahá'íyyih Khánum,¹ the Greatest Holy Leaf. In the words of Shoghi Effendi: "At the time of His [*Abdu'l-Bahá's*] absence in the western world, she was His competent deputy, His representative and vicegerent, with none to equal her" (BK 28).

The centenary of `Abdu'l-Bahá's return to the Holy Land after His protracted absence coincides with the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the Universal House of Justice. As we gather to celebrate these landmarks, we take time to ponder upon the life of a most remarkable woman in the history of religion, focus attention on the outstanding services she rendered and on the significance of the site Shoghi Effendi chose for her burial place. It was his choice of a specific spot on Mount Carmel that determined the location of the Arc, around which are built the institutions of the world administrative

centre of the Faith, the Seat of the Universal House of Justice occupying its centre top.

The Greatest Holy Leaf

Born in Tihran to Bahá'u'lláh and Ásíyih Khánum in 1846, she was named Fatimih at birth. She was later called Bahá'íyyih. In a Tablet revealed in her honour, Bahá'u'lláh confirms that she appeared in His name. *“Verily she is a leaf that hath sprung from this preexistent Root. She hath revealed herself in My name and tasted of the sweet savours of My holy, My wondrous pleasure”* (BK p. v). The full text of Bahá'u'lláh's original Arabic of the above is inscribed around the circular dome of the Greatest Holy Leaf's monument on Mount Carmel (*Ibid*).

Varaqiy-i-'Ulya is the original Arabic title Bahá'u'lláh bestowed on Bahá'íyyih Khánum's mother. After Ásíyih Khánum passed away, He bestowed the title on their daughter, Bahá'íyyih Khánum. To avoid confusion, Shoghi Effendi translated the title as the Most Exalted Leaf for Ásíyih Khánum, and the Greatest Holy Leaf for Bahá'íyyih Khánum.

During Bahá'u'lláh's Ministry

Bahá'íyyih Khánum's life of service began at the age of six, when Bahá'u'lláh was imprisoned in the Siyah Chal in late 1852. At that time His House in Tihran was plundered. His wife, Ásíyih Khánum with her three children took refuge in two rented rooms in an obscure corner of the city. To obtain news of Bahá'u'lláh and His condition, she was forced to leave early in the morning and return after dark. Her son, `Abbas, who later adopted `Abdu'l-Bahá as His title, then eight years old, would accompany His mother. The six-year old Bahá'íyyih Khánum would stay behind together with her two-year old brother, Mírzá Mihdi, later titled the Purest Branch. This is how she describes those frightful days:

How well I remember cowering in the dark, with my little brother, Mírzá Mihdi, the Purest Branch, at that time two years old, in my arms, which were not very strong, as I was only six. I was shivering with terror, for I knew of some of the horrible things that were happening, and was aware that they might have seized even my mother. (*The Chosen Highway*, pp. 42-3)

Referring to this episode, Shoghi Effendi says:

As far back as the concluding stage of the heroic age of the Cause, which witnessed the imprisonment of Bahá'u'lláh in the Siyah-Chal of Tihiran, the Greatest Holy Leaf, then still in her infancy, was privileged to taste of the cup of woe which the first believers of that Apostolic Age had quaffed. (BK 3-4)

After four months imprisonment in the Siyah Chal (Black Pit), Bahá'u'lláh was released on condition that He leave His homeland. Bahá'íyyih Khánum was among the members of the family who accompanied Him. She had to part with the beloved brother whom she had carried in her delicate arms during Bahá'u'lláh's four-month imprisonment and to whom she was so attached. She also left her extended family and the country she so loved, never to see it again.

During a ten-year sojourn in Baghdad, "she grew into a beautiful girl, very much like her lovely mother in grace of body and character, a gentle, slender maiden with large grey-blue eyes, golden-brown hair, and warm, ivory-colored skin. Her sense of humour was keen and her intelligence remarkable." (*Chosen Highway* 69)

Lady Blomfield who interviewed Bahá'íyyih Khánum writes about her decision to remain unmarried and the reason behind it: "As she grew up, she implored her father to allow her to remain unmarried, that she might the better devote herself to her three dearly loved ones.² And so it was." Lady Blomfield

then recounts what she had heard from an old man, a friend of Bahá'u'lláh, Who had once said to him: “*I know no man worthy to marry such purity as my daughter.*” In response to her question, “*Khánum must have been very lovely?*” The man had said: “*I have been told so; naturally, I never saw her.*” (*Chosen Highway* 69)

The human perfections that Bahá'íyyih Khánum exemplified, the heavenly attributes that she embodied, the laudable services that she rendered during the ministry of Bahá'u'lláh and her tremendous capacity for selfless service throughout her life won her from the Supreme Pen the appellation of the Most Distinguished Heroine of the Bahá'í dispensation:

Verily, we have elevated thee to the rank of one of the most distinguished among thy sex and granted thee, in My court, a station such as none other woman hath surpassed. Thus have We preferred thee and raised thee above the rest, as a sign of grace from Him Who is the Lord of the throne on high and earth below ... How high is the testimony of the Sadratu'l-Muntaha for its leaf; how exalted the witness of the Tree of Life unto its fruit! (BK 3-4)

Life in exile for a sensitive and conscientious child like Bahá'íyyih Khánum, who was deeply concerned about the difficulties that her parents faced, was particularly onerous. She was ever ready to help in whatever manner she could.

The responsibilities that she undertook at a young age amazed everyone. She was so busy with acts of service that she had little or no time to receive instructions in the arts of reading and writing. Her conversation with Lady Blomfield confirms this:

‘My mother,’ she said, ‘sometimes gave lessons to my brother `Abbas, at other times Mírzá Musa would teach

Him, and on some occasions he would be taught by His father.'

'And *your* lessons? I asked.

'But I never had any time for studies,' she said, in a tone which spoke volumes of absolute self-effacement, and this is the keynote of her whole life, no thought of her unselfishness entered her mind. (*Chosen Highway* 69).

Yet her communications with Bahá'ís throughout the world, when she was required to step forward and take on a leadership role, testify how well she met the challenge. Her letters in Persian have been published in *Dastkhathay-i-Hadrat-i-Varaqiy-i-'Ulya*. The English translation of a large selection of her letters was published in 1982 in *Bahíyyih Khánum, the Greatest Holy Leaf* on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of her passing.

What we know of Bahá'íyyih Khánum's services during the ministry of Bahá'u'lláh is confined to her spoken chronicles recorded by Lady Blomfield and Shoghi Effendi's messages. The situation of the women in the nineteenth century Middle East, historians' focus on the Person of the Manifestation of God and the events revolving around Him, His sons and male followers, to which they had easy access, as well as their respect for tradition, which generally excluded women and their services from historical treatment, are responsible for the dearth of information about her and other early prominent women related to Bahá'u'lláh and the Bab.

Shoghi Effendi makes it clear that Bahá'íyyih Khánum

shared the imprisonment, the grief, the banishment of the Abha Beauty, and in the storm which broke out in Iraq – because of the plotting and the treachery of the prime mover of mischief, the focal centre of hate – she bore, with complete resignation and acquiescence, uncounted ordeals.³ (BK 26-7)

He confirms that when she was in her teens, Bahá'u'lláh entrusted her “with missions that no girl of her age could, or would be willing to, perform.” He also explains how with “spontaneous joy she seized her opportunity and acquitted herself of the task with which she had been entrusted!” (BK 33)

Extolling Bahá'íyyih Khánúm's outstanding attributes that distinguished her from others and which manifested themselves after arrival in `Akká, Shoghi Effendi says:

Not until ... she had been confined in the company of Bahá'u'lláh within the walls of the prison-city of `Akká did she display, in the plenitude of her power and in the full abundance of her love for Him, those gifts that single her out, next to `Abdu'l-Bahá, among the members of the Holy Family as the brightest embodiment of that love which is born of God and of that human sympathy which few mortals are capable of evincing.

Banishing from her mind and heart every earthly attachment, renouncing the very idea of matrimony, she, standing resolutely by the side of a Brother whom she was to aid and serve so well, arose to dedicate her life to the service of her Father's glorious Cause. Whether in the management of the affairs of His Household in which she excelled, or in the social relationships which she so assiduously cultivated in order to shield both Bahá'u'lláh and `Abdu'l-Bahá, whether in the unfailing attention she paid to the everyday need of her Father, or in the traits of generosity, of affability and kindness, which she manifested, the Greatest Holy Leaf had by that time abundantly demonstrated her worthiness to rank as one of the noblest figures intimately associated with the life-long work of Bahá'u'lláh. (BK 34-35)

During the Ministry of `Abdu'l-Bahá

The ascension of Bahá'u'lláh on 29 May 1892 brought to the fore deep-rooted resentment in the heart of Mírzá Muhammad-`Ali, the half-brother of `Abdu'l-Bahá and the Greatest Holy Leaf. Mírzá Muhammad-`Ali, envious of `Abdu'l-Bahá's matchless personality and His high standing in the Bahá'í community, also in society, had tried to undermine Him through various schemes even during their Father's lifetime. Now that Bahá'u'lláh had passed away, Mírzá Muhammad-`Ali imagined vainly that he could enjoy a station on par with `Abdu'l-Bahá and share with Him the authority bestowed on Him in Bahá'u'lláh's Book of the Covenant.

Before His Ascension, Bahá'u'lláh had entrusted a sealed document written in His own hand to `Abdu'l-Bahá. In that document, known as the Book of His Covenant, Bahá'u'lláh had appointed His Most Great Branch (`Abdu'l-Bahá), His Successor and the authorized Interpreter of His Writings. In the same document He had made it clear that the station of Mírzá Muhammad-`Ali, the Greater Branch, was beneath that of `Abdu'l-Bahá's. When the document was unsealed and its contents read in the presence of selected believers including some family members, Mírzá Muhammad-`Ali's hopes were shattered. Therefore he resorted to mischief and treachery to achieve his goal. He and his supporters, including almost all members of Bahá'u'lláh's family, started a campaign to undermine `Abdu'l-Bahá, to confuse the faint in heart and divide the community. The Greatest Holy Leaf during that crucial juncture in the early history of the Bahá'í Faith stood firmly by the side of her illustrious Brother and fearlessly lent Him her full support. In the words of Shoghi Effendi, "in the midst of that storm of violation, the countenance of that rare treasure of the Lord shone all the brighter, and throughout the Bahá'í community, her value and high rank became clearly perceived" (BK 28). He also says:

With the passing of Bahá'u'lláh and the fierce onslaught of the forces of disruption that followed in its wake, the Greatest Holy Leaf, now in the hey-day of her life, rose to the height of her great opportunity and acquitted herself worthily of her task ... but for her sleepless vigilance, her tact, her courtesy, her extreme patience and heroic fortitude, grave complications might have ensued and the load of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's anxious care would have been considerably increased. (BK 37-8)

When the Covenant-breakers' widespread activities climaxed and affected 'Abdu'l-Bahá's health, He withdrew to Tiberias, where He stayed for weeks. During that time the Greatest Holy Leaf for the first time in her life had to shoulder the kind of responsibility never before she had been required to undertake. A significant event took place during 'Abdu'l-Bahá's absence from 'Akká in 1895. The marriage of Diya'iyyih Khánum, the eldest daughter of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Munírih Khánum, with Mírzá Hadi, a great nephew of Khadijih Bagum, who had come from Iran for the purpose took place at that time. Mírzá Hadi had been to the Holy Land toward the end of Bahá'u'lláh's ministry and his proposal to marry Diya'yyih Khánum had received His approval. His return to the Holy Land for the purpose of finalizing arrangements for the wedding coincided with the time 'Abdu'l-Bahá had withdrawn to Tiberias. His approval for the marriage to take place at that time was sought and received. However, He was not physically present at the ceremony. A Tablet He revealed at that time lays open the depth of His sorrow occasioned by the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh and the immense hardships sustained by members of His family:

Now because it is the day of separation, and the time of mourning, the fire of anxiety is flaming, the heat of burning sorrow is, as it were, shriveling up the universe!

The calamities of my family are beyond endurance, and the troubles of those sorrowful leaves (sister, wife, daughters) are without end.

From all directions the arrows of hardship are being showered upon them, like rain-drops in spring, and the spears of the unfaithful are being hurled upon them without ceasing....

Oh, family of this sorrowful one, all is sacrifice. No pleasure is desired by you.

I know your sorrows.

The Mufti may be asked to chant the Marriage Chant at the Holy Shrine on Sunday. (Chosen Highway 113-114)

Despite the immense suffering that the sedition and mischief-making of Mírzá Muhammad-`Ali and his kindred had caused the Centre of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant and His family, the Greatest Holy Leaf, the person in charge in `Abdu'l-Bahá's absence, invited them to the wedding. Tuba Khánum⁴ says: "My aunt invited the family of Muhammad-`Ali to come in the evening. They came and jeered at the simplicity of the wedding with great ridicule." (*Ibid* 114)

The stringent restrictions imposed upon women prevented them to personally carry out functions outside the home. By doing so they would have risked being seen by men who were not their close blood relatives. Women of good repute did not appear in public in those days without an immediate male relative. The marriage of Diya'iyih Khánum and Mírzá Hadi during `Abdu'l-Bahá's absence in Tiberias was fortuitous in that the family now had a close male relative, who could undertake what needed to be done beyond the confines of the house. This arrangement made it possible for the Greatest Holy Leaf to discharge her responsibilities inside and outside the home until `Abdu'l-Bahá returned to `Akká.

Another trip of weeks' duration that 'Abdu'l-Bahá undertook for health reasons was when He visited Haifa and stayed in the cave of Elijah. The presence of Bahá'íyyih Khánum in 'Akká made it possible for 'Abdu'l-Bahá to take such trips, when it was necessary.

The Covenant-breakers' constant agitation and intrigues caused the Central Government, whose seat was Constantinople (Istanbul of today), to dispatch twice a Commission of Enquiry, to investigate fabricated charges against 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and submit a report. "In the days of the Commission of Investigation," Shoghi Effendi says, "she [Bahá'íyyih Khánum] was a staunch and trusted supporter of the peerless Branch of Bahá'u'lláh, and a companion to Him beyond compare." (BK 28)

When His life was in imminent danger, 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote His Will and Testament. In it He appointed Shoghi Effendi, then a child, as the Guardian of the Cause of God. His situation being very grim and investigators most intent on keeping everything under surveillance, He buried the document under ground, lest it be discovered and its contents disclosed prematurely. It was to Bahá'íyyih Khánum, His well-beloved sister and confidant, that He divulged the secret of Shoghi Effendi's appointment to lead the Bahá'í world after Him.

There is yet another instance pointing to the complete trust 'Abdu'l-Bahá had in the Greatest Holy Leaf's ability to discharge delicate responsibilities. When the casket containing the remains of the Bab and His fellow-martyr reached the shores of the Holy Land, she was the person entrusted with that precious trust. The remains were kept in her room in the House of 'Abdu'lláh Pasha until a safe venue could be found.

Then came the revolution of the Young Turks, which was the outward cause of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's release from years of confinement in 1908. Instead of enjoying with members of His family a life of relative ease, He first completed the Mausoleum He was building on Mount Carmel since 1900. On Naw-Ruz 1909, He entombed the remains of the Bab, and immediately

began preparations for His historic trip that “in pursuance of God’s inscrutable Wisdom”, He had conceived “in the darkest hours of His confinement...” (BK 39) In a Tablet revealed in honor of the Greatest Holy Leaf on the day He embarked on His historic trip, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says:

O thou my sister, my dear sister!

Divine wisdom hath decreed this temporary separation, but I long more and more to be with thee again. Patience is called for, and long-suffering, and trust in God, and the seeking of His favour. Since thou art there, my mind is completely at rest.

In recent days, I have made a plan to visit Egypt, if this be God’s will. Do thou, on my behalf, lay thy head on the sacred Threshold, and perfume brow and hair in the dust of that Door, and ask that I may be confirmed in my work; that I may, in return for His endless bounties, win, if He will, a drop out of the ocean of servitude. (BK 13)

Referring to the magnitude of responsibilities that the Greatest Holy Leaf discharged during ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s trip to the West, Shoghi Effendi says:

And when ... the ban on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s confinement was lifted ... He with unhesitating confidence, invested His trusted and honoured sister with the responsibility of attending to the multitudinous details arising out of His protracted absence from the Holy Land. (BK 39)

The responsibilities that the Greatest Holy Leaf discharged at various stages of her life, especially during ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s protracted absence in the western world, achieved purposes far beyond what was considered the need of the hour: Serving as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s ‘competent deputy, representative and vicegerent’ (BK 28) familiarized the Bahá’í world with her unique

personality and leadership ability. As a result, the believers turned to her unhesitatingly, when He passed away unexpectedly after a brief illness. It also prepared her to fill an apparent void immediately after `Abdu'l-Bahá's ascension and discharge even greater responsibilities several times during Shoghi Effendi's ministry.

After `Abdu'l-Bahá's Ascension and During Shoghi Effendi's Ministry

`Abdu'l-Bahá passed away very early in the morning of 28 November 1921. Shoghi Effendi, the person He had appointed in His Will and Testament as the Guardian of the Cause of God, was then studying at Oxford University in Great Britain, completely unaware that he had been chosen to lead the Bahá'í world after His Grandfather's ascension. Equally unaware were the believers that Shoghi Effendi was the distinguished Branch appointed by `Abdu'l-Bahá to lead the Bahá'í world after Him. Mírzá Muhammad-'Ali, whose opposition to the Centre of the Covenant, had cost him the loss of the right to succeed Him, was hard at work to present himself as the leader of the Bahá'í community. At that crucial juncture in the history of the Faith, the Greatest Holy Leaf, `Abdu'l-Bahá's competent deputy during His protracted absence from the Bahá'í World Centre, stepped forth and guided the believers throughout the world until Shoghi Effendi returned to the World Centre, exactly one month after `Abdu'l-Bahá's ascension.

Shoghi Effendi received the news of his Grandfather's ascension at about noon on 29 November. The Greatest Holy Leaf had sent a cable to the address of Major Tudor Pole in London. It reached that office at 9:30 in the morning on 29 November. It read: "His Holiness `Abdu'l-Bahá ascended Abha Kingdom. Inform friends" (BK 114). Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum believes Major Pole "must have telephoned Shoghi Effendi, asking him to come at once to his office..." (*The Priceless Pearl*, p. 39). When Shoghi Effendi learned the shocking news, he

began preparations for the voyage to Haifa. Heartbroken and grief-stricken he travelled by boat to Alexandria, Egypt, then by train to Haifa, where he arrived a month later. The Covenant-breakers during this time had renewed intense activity to install Mírzá Muhammad-`Ali as the rightful successor of `Abdu'l-Bahá. The Greatest Holy Leaf, fully aware of their schemes, despite the tremendous loss she had suffered, prevented Mírzá Muhammad-`Ali from entering `Abdu'l-Bahá's House where mourners were received, and ensured that the Covenant-breakers' efforts and propaganda were in vain. She warned the friends in America on 14 December 1921:

Now is period of great tests. The friends should be firm and united in defending the Cause. Nakeseens [Covenant-breakers] starting activities through press other channels all over world. Select committee of wise cool heads to handle press propaganda in America. (BK 114)

Bahá'íyyih Khánúm's acute alertness, constant vigilance and ceaseless efforts during that short critical period after `Abdu'l-Bahá's ascension, when He was gone and the person He had appointed as the Guardian of the Cause of God and authorized interpreter of Holy Writings was away, protected the believers from the mischief of evil-doers and their fresh intrigues.

On 21 December 1921, Bahá'íyyih Khánúm assured the Persian and American believers that `Abdu'l-Bahá had left "full instructions in His Will and Testament" (*Ibid*). On 29 December, though herself bereaved and heart-broken, she received the grief-stricken 24-year old Guardian of the Cause of God. Referring to the boundless love with which she received him and the tender way she treated him, he says:

After the ascension of `Abdu'l-Bahá to the realm of the All-Glorious, that Light of the Concourse on High enfolded me, helpless as I was, in the embrace of her love, and with incomparable pity and tenderness,

persuaded, guided, and urged me on to the requirements of servitude. The very elements of this frail being were leavened with her love, refreshed by her companionship, sustained by her eternal spirit. (BK 29)

On 7 January 1922, Bahá'íyyih Khánum sent two cables to Iran, announcing the dispatch of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament and of Shoghi Effendi's appointment as Centre of the Cause (*Priceless Pearl* 47). On 16 January 1922, she informed the friends in the United States: "In Will Shoghi Effendi appointed Guardian of Cause and Head of House of Justice." (*Ibid* 48)

Legal Challenge to Shoghi Effendi's Authority

A month after his return to the Holy Land, Shoghi Effendi faced a legal challenge to his authority as the Guardian of the Cause of God. Mírzá Muhammad-'Ali, the Greater Branch, had he not brought himself to naught through active opposition to the Centre of the Covenant, would have succeeded 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Most Great Branch, according to the Book of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant. However, he had lost his legacy due to his misdeeds and wicked doings, and been excommunicated during the ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Who, in His Will and Testament appointed Shoghi Effendi as the Guardian of the Cause of God. Mírzá Muhammad-'Ali nonetheless tried to establish his authority through legal action. According to Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum,

... [Mírzá Muhammad-'Ali] applied to the civil authorities to turn over the custodianship of Bahá'u'lláh's Shrine to him on the grounds that he was 'Abdu'l-Bahá's lawful successor. The British authorities refused on the grounds that it appeared to be a religious issue; he then appealed to the Muslim religious head and asked the Mufti of 'Akká to take formal charge of Bahá'u'lláh's Shrine; this dignitary, however, said he did

not see how he could do this as the Bahá'í teachings were not in conformity with Shariah law. All other avenues having failed he sent his younger brother, Badiulláh, with some of their supporters, to visit the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh where, on Tuesday, 30 January, they forcibly seized the keys of the Holy Tomb from the Bahá'í caretaker, thus asserting Muhammad-'Alí's right to be the lawful custodian of his Father's resting place. This unprincipled act created such a commotion in the Bahá'í Community that the Governor of Akká ordered the keys to be handed over to the authorities, posted guards at the Shrine, but went no further, refusing to return the keys to either party. (*Priceless Pearl* 53-4)

The shock of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's sudden departure from this world, the immense grief occasioned by not having been with Him during the last days of His ministry, the utter surprise of being required to take on the mantle of leadership of the Bahá'í world, and the intensity of opposition by the Covenant-breakers to his appointment, all of which affected his health, convinced Shoghi Effendi of the necessity to spend some time in a quiet place to recuperate, also to gain "strength, self-confidence and spiritual energy." (BK 21) Therefore, just over three months after his arrival, he appointed the Greatest Holy Leaf as his representative and head of a committee established to look after the affairs of the worldwide Bahá'í community, both at home and abroad, and left the Holy Land. The letters that he wrote to the Bahá'ís of the world in English and Persian conveyed this information. In effect, as Bahá'íyyih Khánum had deputized for 'Abdu'l-Bahá during His travels in the West, she was now called upon to deputize for His Chosen Branch. As we will see, she performed this task with competence, self-abnegation and absolute loyalty. Indeed, the members of that committee, except for the Greatest Holy Leaf, at various stages during the ministry of Shoghi Effendi broke the Covenant. She stood firm till the last breath. No other woman in religious history has played a comparable role.

The issue of the legal custodianship of the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh had not been resolved when Shoghi Effendi left on 5 April 1922. On that day, he wrote to Colonel Symes, the Governor of Phoenicia:

As I am compelled to leave Haifa for reasons of health, I have named as my representative during my absence, the sister of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahíyyih Khánum. To assist her to conduct the affairs of the Bahá'í Movement in this country and elsewhere, I have also appointed a committee of the following Bahá'ís [eight men of the local community, three of them the sons-in-law of 'Abdu'l-Bahá] ... The Chairman of this Committee, to be soon elected by its members, with the signature of Bahíyyih Khánum has my authority to transact any affairs that may need to be considered and decided during my absence. I regret exceedingly to be unable to see you before my departure, that I may express more adequately the satisfaction that I feel to know that your sense of justice will safeguard the interests of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh whenever called upon to act. (*Priceless Pearl* 276)

The legal action that Mírzá Muhammad-'Ali took resulted in Bahá'íyyih Khánum being declared by Shoghi Effendi in his official communication with the governor of the area as his representative with the right of signature. This was no doubt the first time in his career that the governor had to deal with a woman at the head of a religious community, in a land revered by several religions and among people so steeped in tradition. Had anything like it happen previously in the annals of religion?

In the first letter that Bahá'íyyih Khánum sent in April 1922 to the believers after Shoghi Effendi's departure, she said:

According to a letter written by his own hand, which is enclosed, he has appointed this prisoner to supervise and manage the affairs of the Cause, through consultation

with the Holy Family, during his absence. Therefore, this perishable one, temporarily, has organized an assembly to act according to the advice of the souls who were appointed and nominated by him – His Holiness Shoghi Effendi. (Quoted in *Leaves of the Twin Divine Trees*, p. 189)

The enclosure mentioned in Bahá'íyyih Khánum's letter, a letter written in Shoghi Effendi's hand, reads:

This servant, after that grievous event and great calamity, the ascension of His Holiness 'Abdu'l-Bahá to the Abha Kingdom, has been so stricken with grief and pain and so entangled in the troubles created by the enemies of the Cause of God, that I consider that my presence here, at such a time and in such an atmosphere, is not in accordance with the fulfillment of my important and sacred duties.

For this reason, unable to do otherwise, I have left for a time the affairs of the Cause both at home and abroad, under the supervision of the Holy Family and the headship of the Greatest Holy Leaf until, by the Grace of God, having gained health, strength, self-confidence and spiritual energy, and having taken into my hands, in accordance with my aim and desire, entirely and regularly the work of service I shall attain to my utmost spiritual hope and aspiration. (BK 21)

In May 1922, Bahá'íyyih Khánum informed the believers throughout the world of the incessant activities of the Covenant-breakers, apprised them of the details of the seizure of the key of Bahá'u'lláh's Shrine and directed them to send requests to the British authorities in Jerusalem confirming that Shoghi Effendi was the legitimate leader of the Bahá'í world community, appointed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Will and Testament. This course of action was based on what the

government had suggested. The full text of the letter is quoted in *Bahíyyih Khánum, the Greatest Holy Leaf*, pages 117-120.

Several months passed and there was no response. Wishing to know what actions the governor had taken regarding the restoration of the key to the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh to its original caretaker, Bahá'íyyih Khánum in a letter dated 15 October 1922 enquired from him about the case. In response she received a letter, dated 30 October. It reads:

Dear Madam,

In reply to your letter of the 15th instant I regret that I cannot throw any very new light on the subject. As has been stated publicly the Government feel that the custody of the Shrine at Acre as well as other important questions affecting the Bahá-ist organization should if possible be settled by a Congress of representatives of Bahá'í opinion throughout the World. To judge from messages received from a number of Bahá-ist Centres it would appear that they endorse and uphold the provisions of the Will of the late Sir Abdul Bahá Abbas, and as soon as the Congress aforementioned has actually met and given its decision the Government will be prepared to entertain its final recommendations. In the meantime if it is possible to find an individual whose provisional custody of the Key of the Shrine will be offensive to no section of Bahais I shall be only too glad to hand over the key to him until such time as the Congress has met and made its final recommendations in the matter. (*Leaves*, p. 193)

Shoghi Effendi returned to the Holy Land in mid-December 1922 and continued efforts to satisfy the requirements and convince the authorities to return the key of the Most Holy Tomb to its original caretaker. Finally, fourteen months after the key had been forcibly seized, the Sub-Governor at Acre was instructed by the District Governor, G.S. Symes, 'to return the

key of the Tomb of Bahá'Ulláh to Es Saiyid Abu'l-Kassim', the original caretaker of the Shrine. The date of that letter is 14 March 1923. (*Leaves*, p. 193)

The Eruption of Hostilities in Iran

While dealing with the issue of the seizure of the key to the Most Holy Shrine by the Covenant-breakers, another significant crisis erupted. The fanatical elements in Iran, vainly imagining that with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's ascension the friends in that land had been left defenseless, took advantage of political instability in the country, stirred up trouble and incited the inhabitants to renew their attacks on the Bahá'ís in that land. Bahá'íyyih Khánum's letter of 20 July 1922 to the Bahá'ís of America explains:

Sad news has come to us out of Iran in recent days, and it has intensely grieved the entire Bahá'í world: they have, in most parts of that land, set bonfires of envy and malevolence, and hoisted the banner of aggression against this much wronged community; they have left no means untried, no plot or strategy neglected, and have arisen with extreme hostility and spite to pull out by their very roots the trees of this garden of God. (BK 165)

In the same letter she asks that assemblies act urgently, contact the Iranian embassy in their country and seek justice on behalf of their persecuted Bahá'í brothers and sisters in Iran. She explains what the petition was to include, even asks the assemblies to "make this same representation through your own ambassador in Tihran, so that he may direct the attention of the Iranian authorities to these persecutions, and awaken that government to the possibility of divine retribution and to the shameful stigma occasioned by such actions directed against this innocent community by the heedless and ignorant amongst the mass of the people..." (BK 169)

The beloved Guardian, after his return to the Bahá'í World Centre on 22 December 1922, left again for health reasons in early summer 1923 and in 1924, each time for several months. The Greatest Holy Leaf's presence in Haifa to supervise the work of the Faith in his absence was indispensable. Every time she performed most conscientiously and faithfully the responsibilities entrusted to her, and each time after Shoghi Effendi returned, she bowed before his authority and continued supporting his work to the end of her life. What she did stands in clear contrast to other members of the family, most of whom at various stages of Shoghi Effendi's ministry turned against him and broke the Covenant.

For a glimpse of the scope of the services Bahá'íyyih Khánúm rendered joyfully to the community at large during World War I, we have this testimony from Shoghi Effendi:

The outbreak of the Great War gave her yet another opportunity to reveal the true worth of her character and to release the latent energies of her heart. The residence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Haifa was besieged, all throughout that dreary conflict, by a concourse of famished men, women and children whom the maladministration, the cruelty and neglect of the officials of the Ottoman Government had driven to seek an alleviation to their woes. From the hand of the Greatest Holy Leaf, and out of the abundance of her heart, these hapless victims of a contemptible tyranny, received day after day unforgettable evidences of a love they had learned to envy and admire. Her words of cheer and comfort, the food, the money, the clothing she freely dispensed, the remedies which, by a process of her own, she herself prepared and diligently applied — all these had their share in comforting the disconsolate, in restoring sight to the blind, in sheltering the orphan, in healing the sick, and in succouring the homeless and the wanderer. (BK 40)

And the following from Dr. Habib Mu'ayyad, who at 'Abdu'l-Bahá's behest, served in the Holy Land for some time:

Poor and shelterless orphans were the recipients of her special care and affection. She sheltered them in the house of the Master and loved them dearly ... regardless of whether they were Arab or non-Arab, black or white, Bahá'í or non-Bahá'í. She taught them good manners, the art of relating to others, dawn prayers, reading and writing, home management, embroidery, sewing, cooking, studying the verses of God, fear of God and human perfections. She adorned them with the ornament of knowledge, good character, perfection and fear of God. She turned them into fruitful trees, led them to the highway of guidance, prepared them for living the life, made them prosperous and delivered them to society. (Translated from Dr. Habib Mu'ayyad's memoirs in *Payam-i-Bahá'í*, no. 33, p. 12.)

The Greatest Holy Leaf's Station and the Significance of the Arc, the Site of Her Resting Place

Bahá'íyyih Khánúm passed away in Haifa on 15 July 1932. In a cable sent on the day of her passing, Shoghi Effendi says: "Humanity shall ere long recognize its irreparable loss." In the same cable he refers to her as his 'sole earthly sustainer', his 'affectionate comforter', 'the joy and solace' of his life. Regarding her burial place, He says, "Her sacred remains will repose vicinity Holy Shrines." As an evidence of the unique station she occupies and a mark of appreciation for the unprecedented services she rendered during her life, Shoghi Effendi had chosen a significant spot on Mount Carmel as the site for her resting place. In the same cable he says: "So grievous a bereavement necessitates suspension for nine months throughout Bahá'í world every manner religious festivity."⁵ He directs "Local Assemblies and Groups hold befitting manner memorial gatherings, extol a life so laden sacred experiences, so

rich imperishable memories...” He further advises that “additional commemoration service of strictly devotional character” be held “Auditorium Mashriqu’l-Adhkar.”⁶ (BK 22-3)

Shoghi Effendi had made the decision to bury Bahá’íyyih Khánúm’s remains in a specific spot on Mount Carmel, before she passed away. The instructions he had left for her burial, if she winged her flight to the world beyond while he was away, make this conclusion clear. The spot he had chosen was in close proximity to the Mausoleum built by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá for the Bab, where ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s body has also been entombed. Certain known factors help us grasp the significance of his choice:

Bahá’íyyih Khánúm’s unique station as the Most Outstanding Heroine of Bahá’u’lláh’s dispensation warranted a burial place that symbolized her exalted rank. It was also to be a place, to which the remains of her mother and martyred brother, the Purest Branch, could be transferred. For they, too, enjoy special station bestowed upon them by Bahá’u’lláh, and the Greatest Holy Leaf had expressed the wish to be buried close to her mother.

The spots on Mount Carmel ennobled by Bahá’u’lláh’s footsteps during His several visits to Haifa were, as far as we know, confined to an area facing ‘Akká, the Qiblih of the people of Bahá. The most favored spot was the one He had chosen for the Bab’s Sepulcher. The areas surrounding that exalted edifice are regarded sacred precincts.

In the Lawh-i Karmil (the Tablet of Carmel), the charter for the development of the Bahá’í World Centre, addressing the mountain of the Lord, Bahá’u’lláh has revealed: “*Ere long will God sail His Ark upon thee, and will manifest the people of Bahá who have been mentioned in the Book of Names*” (TB 5). This statement clearly designates Mount Carmel as the place where the Seat of the Universal House of Justice, “the supreme legislative body of the Bahá’í world” (*Messages to the Bahá’í World, 1950-1957*, p. 21), would be established. However, it does not specify a specific area of Mount Carmel.

The three significant sites identified on Mount Carmel are: The site for the Shrine of the Bab chosen by Bahá'u'lláh Himself, the site where He revealed the Tablet of Carmel, designated by Shoghi Effendi as the site for the future Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, and a site on Mount Carmel for sailing of the Ark of God (the Seat of the Universal House of Justice). The determination of the exact spot on Mount Carmel for the Seat of the Universal House of Justice seems to have been made by Shoghi Effendi. That determination has a direct link to his choice of a spot for the Greatest Holy Leaf's resting place.

The Significance of Mount Carmel Arc and Its Link to the Ark of God Revealed in the Tablet of Carmel

Shoghi Effendi envisaged an Arc in the heart of Mount Carmel, upon which the Ark of God was destined to sail. He considered the base of that Arc a most befitting place for the resting place of the Greatest Holy Leaf. The link between 'Ark' (ship) and 'Arc' (a semi-circle, or bow-shaped) goes back to the time of Noah: The rebelliousness of his followers caused a devastating flood and threatened everyone's life. Noah built an ark (ship), which saved from annihilation those who entered it. When the storm and flood subsided, a rainbow appeared "As a sign that the earth will no longer be destroyed by flood" (Gen. 9:8-16; Ezekiel 1:28). Rainbow is "the token of the covenant which God made with Noah when he came forth from the ark." (Smith's Bible Dictionary) What links ark meaning ship to arc meaning bow-shaped or semi-circle, is the rainbow that appeared when the storm subsided. Rainbow has since become the sign of the covenant that God will protect from destructive storms and flood those who enter His Ark and abide therein. Shoghi Effendi has referred to the Universal House of Justice as "the last refuge for a tottering civilization."

When Shoghi Effendi determined the site of the Greatest Holy Leaf's resting place, he clearly had in mind an elaborate plan, which included transferring the remains of Ásíyih Khánum, the Most Exalted Leaf, and Mírzá Mihdi, the Purest

Branch, from `Akká to the same spot on the slope of Mount Carmel. This plan materialized in December 1939, seven years after the passing of Bahá'íyyih Khánúm. When all was done, he conveyed the exhilarating news by cable to the friends in North America:

BLESSED REMAINS PUREST BRANCH AND
 MASTER'S MOTHER SAFELY TRANSFERRED
 HALLOWED PRECINCTS SHRINES MOUNT
 CARMEL. LONG INFLICTED HUMILIATION WIPED
 AWAY. MACHINATIONS COVENANT-BREAKERS
 FRUSTRATE PLAN DEFEATED. CHERISHED WISH
 GREATEST HOLY LEAF FULFILLED. SISTER
 BROTHER MOTEHR WIFE `ABDU'L-BAHA
 REUNITED ONE SPOT DESIGNED CONSTITUTE
 FOCAL CENTRE BAHÁ'Í ADMINISTRATIVE
 INSTITUTIONS AT FAITH'S CENTRE.⁷ SHARE
 JOYFUL NEWS ENTIRE BODY AMERICAN
 BELIEVERS. (BK 60-61)

Referring to the significance of what had been accomplished, he writes in his history of the first Bahá'í century:

The conjunction of these three resting-places, under the shadow of the Bab's own Tomb, embosomed in the heart of Carmel, facing the snow-white city across the bay of `Akká, the Qiblih of the Bahá'í world, set in a garden of exquisite beauty, reinforces, if we would correctly estimate its significance, the spiritual potencies of a spot, designated by Bahá'u'lláh Himself the seat of God's throne. It marks, too, a further milestone in the road leading eventually to the establishment of that permanent world Administrative Centre of the future Bahá'í Commonwealth, destined never to be separated from, and to function in the proximity of, the Spiritual Centre of that Faith, in a land already revered and held

sacred alike by the adherents of three of the world's outstanding religious systems. (GPB 348)

In several of his messages Shoghi Effendi explains the significance of conjoining the resting-places of the Greatest Holy Leaf with those of her brother and mother. In a message to America, after the transfer of the remains of Ásíyih Khánum and the Purest Branch from `Akká to Mount Carmel, he says:

... the conjunction of the resting-place of the Greatest Holy Leaf with those of her brother and mother incalculably reinforces the spiritual potencies of that consecrated Spot which, under the wings of the Bab's over-shadowing Sepulcher, and in the vicinity of the future Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, which will be reared on its flank, is destined to evolve into the focal center of those world-shaking, world embracing, world-directing administrative institutions, ordained by Bahá'u'lláh and anticipated by `Abdu'l-Bahá, and which are to function in consonance with the principles that govern the twin institutions of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice. Then, and then only, will this momentous prophecy which illuminates the concluding passages of the Tablet of Carmel be fulfilled: "*Ere long will God sail His Ark upon thee (Carmel), and will manifest the people of Bahá who have been mentioned in the Book of Names.*" (*Messages to America 1932-1946*, 32-3)

And speaking of the link between the site of the resting-places of the Greatest Holy Leaf, her mother and brother on Mount Carmel in Haifa and the Mother Temple of the West in North America, he says:

And now, while the Bahá'í world vibrates with emotion at the news of the transfer of the precious remains of both the Purest Branch and of `Abdu'l-Bahá's mother to a spot which, watched over by the Twin Holy Shrines

and in the close neighbourhood of the resting-place of the Greatest Holy Leaf, is to become the focus of the administrative institutions of the Faith at its world centre, the mere act of linking the destiny of so far-reaching an undertaking with so significant an event in the Formative Period of our Faith will assuredly set the seal of complete triumph upon, and enhance the spiritual potentialities of, a work so significantly started and so magnificently executed by the followers of Bahá'u'lláh in the North American continent.⁸ (*Ibid*, p. 37)

In designing the beautiful monument built over the resting-place of the Greatest Holy Leaf, Shoghi Effendi had in mind for it not only “to evolve into the focal centre of those world-shaking, world-embracing, world-directing administrative institutions, ordained by Bahá'u'lláh” (MA 32) but also for it to symbolize the institutions of the Administrative Order: the steps symbolize Local Spiritual Assemblies, the pillars the National Spiritual Assemblies and the dome the Universal House of Justice.

By a happy coincidence, the construction of the Seat of the Universal House of Justice was complete by the time the Bahá'í world commemorated the Fiftieth anniversary of the passing of the Greatest Holy Leaf on 15 July 1982. At the Bahá'í World Centre the friends visited her resting place at the early hours of that morning, the exact time when she had passed away. Later that day the friends residing in the Holy Land gathered in the Reception Concourse of the Seat of the Universal House of Justice for a memorial gathering with a program befitting her station. Her memorial service was the first gathering to be held in the Reception Concourse of the Seat.

The significance of Bahá'íyyih Khánum's high station and the uniqueness of the services she has rendered are eloquently described in Shoghi Effendi's statements about her. The following is a sampling:

Only future generations and pens abler than mine can, and will, pay a worthy tribute to the towering grandeur of her spiritual life, to the unique part she played through the tumultuous stages of Bahá'í history, to the expressions of unqualified praise that have streamed from the pen of both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Centre of His Covenant, though unrecorded, and in the main unsuspected by the mass of her passionate admirers in East and West, the share she had in influencing the course of some of the chief events in the annals of the Faith, the sufferings she bore, the sacrifices she made, the rare gifts of unfailing sympathy she so strikingly displayed – these, and many others stand so inextricably interwoven with the fabric of the Cause itself that no future historian of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh can afford to ignore or minimize. (BK 32)

To this bear witness the Company on High, and beyond them God Himself, the Supreme Lord of all the heavens and the earths: that during all thy days, from thine earliest years until the close of thy life, thou didst personify the attributes of thy Father, the Matchless, the Mighty. Thou wert the fruit of His Tree, thou wert the lamp of His love, thou wert the symbol of His serenity, and of His meekness, the pathway of His guidance, the channel of His blessings, the sweet scent of His robe, the refuge of His loved ones and His handmaidens, the mantle of His generosity and grace. (BK 56)

O thou solace of mine eyes, and beloved of my soul! Thy grace to me was plenteous, it can never be concealed; thy love for me was great, it can never be forgotten. Blessed, a thousand times blessed, is he who loves thee, and partakes of thy splendours, and sings the praises of thy qualities, and extols thy worth, and follows in thy footsteps; who testifies to the wrongs thou didst suffer, and visits thy resting-place, and circles around thine

exalted tomb, by day and by night. Woe unto him, retribution be his, who disputes thy rank and station, and denies thine excellence, and turns himself aside from thy clear, thy luminous and straight path. (BK 57)

Conclusion

Religion has always been heavily dependent on women for its promotion and for the salvation of human beings. Through their adherence to revealed laws and principles, they have passed on cherished values and instilled in future generations standards of decency necessary for carrying forward an ever-advancing civilization. This pattern is traceable in all religions in spite of religious history largely ignoring their services. One of the unfortunate outcomes of the restrictions imposed on women in the past has been making it impossible for them to scale summits readily available to men. Among the handful of women whose names religious history has recorded none played a leading role through a mandate conferred on her by the center of authority. Bahá'íyyih Khánum, the Greatest Holy Leaf, is the first woman in religious history deputizing for the Person Bahá'u'lláh appointed as the Centre of His Covenant. She played a crucial role during 'Abdu'l-Bahá's absence in the western world. She also played a vital part after His Ascension, and served as Shoghi Effendi's representative during his early absences from the World Centre of the Faith in the Holy Land.

The site of her resting place is a significant spot on Mount Carmel, as stated in a cable from Shoghi Effendi:

DESIGNED CONSTITUTE FOCAL CENTRE BAHÁ'Í
ADMINISTRATIVE INSTITUTIONS AT FAITH'S
CENTRE. (BK 60-61)

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NOTES

- ¹ The name engraved on the seal, with which the Greatest Holy Leaf sealed her letters, is *Bahá'íyyih*. This may be the reason the Iranian friends refer to her as Bahá'íyyih Khánum and, as a sign of respect, do not use it to name their daughters. In his messages to the western friends Shoghi Effendi used *Bahíyyih* as the Greatest Holy Leaf's name, probably because it is easier to pronounce and is used as a proper noun. Bahá'íyyih and Bahíyyih are derivatives of the Arabic root *Bahá'*, which means "glory."
- ² Her parents, Bahá'u'lláh and Ásíyih Khánum, and her brother, 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

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- ³ After Bahá'u'lláh's departure from Iran, His half-brother, Mírzá Yahyá, on his own accord left Iran for Baghdad in disguise, lived in Bahá'u'lláh's House as a guest, stirred up mischief and caused the holy family, particularly Bahá'íyyih Khánum, untold suffering. See *The Chosen Highway* for details.
- ⁴ The second eldest daughter of `Abdu'l-Bahá and Munírih Khánum.
- ⁵ It is remarkable that for the first and probably only time in the history of the Faith, the friends throughout the world were urged to suspend for nine months every manner of religious festivity. In another message Shoghi Effendi asks the friends, if possible, to even postpone celebrations of personal nature.
- ⁶ In 1932, the construction of the Mother Temple of the West was not yet complete. The edifice was dedicated twenty years later in 1953. Therefore, the commemorative service for Bahá'íyyih Khánum was, it seems, the first gathering of its nature held in the Auditorium of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar.
- ⁷ By the time this project was complete, Munírih Khánum, the wife of `Abdu'l-Bahá had passed away and buried in an area close to the resting place of the Greatest Holy Leaf, but at a lower elevation.
- ⁸ Referring to the construction of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar of America, the Mother Temple of the West.

Origins of Creation

Farjam Majd

Abstract

Probably the most ancient and fundamental question of all times on the individual's and the collective mind is: "Is there a God?"

The answer to this question has profound implications, and indeed direct impact on the life of mankind and how it looks upon the very meaning and purpose of life. It can change what we strive for, how we look at ourselves and others, what goals we set, and how we live.

In regards to proof of existence of God, opinions range from "there is no god," to "the existence of God cannot be proven or disproven," to "the existence of God can be proven." Abdu'l-Baha was of the latter mind, and this paper follows His lead.

The meaning of proof, types of proof, and conditions of the existence of a proof are explored. A few of the classical proofs of the existence of God are briefly examined. Some of the modern reasons believed by some to show why God is not needed to explain the universe are also reviewed.

The proof of existence of God is pursued on two levels, which have been the traditional stomping grounds of those examining this question: the phenomenal world and its fundamental laws and properties, and the evolution of species on earth. The approaches chosen are necessarily extra-scientific, that is, beyond the domain of science, but not beyond the domain of rational discourse. More specifically, it is shown that

“something cannot result from nothing,” or put metaphorically, “there is no free lunch.” This pre-existence principle is applied to the physical world itself and the properties embedded therein.

The pre-existence principle is also applied to the phenomenon of evolution by examining information contents at various organizational levels of living organisms. A second approach applied to evolution is based on probabilities. A simplified model of DNA permutation is presented and argued that low level organizations cannot spontaneously assemble into higher level organizations by a purely random process.

It is concluded that the ultimate source of pre-existence is God, and that the pre-existent properties are attributes of God. It is further suggested, as one possibility, that the DNA molecule is endowed with pre-existent potentials and configurations of life gradually triggered to be revealed over the course of time under particular circumstances and stimuli, which is outwardly observed as evolution.

Introduction

We make mention of thee for the sake of God, and desire that thy name may be exalted through thy remembrance of God, the Creator of earth and of heaven. He, verily, is witness unto that which I say. [ESW 60]

Far from being an esoteric question, the origins of creation, and by some implications, the existence of God, is probably the oldest question on the collective mind of humanity and individuals, and the most important. Even though inquiry into the origins of creation may not seem like a concern that affects the daily life, but it does, in direct and indirect ways. Our world view, the model we assume when we think what life is all about, is clearly affected by our views of God, where He fits in that world view, and how He is related to us and our lives.

This is a complex and multi-faceted subject matter. Many classical arguments and counter-arguments exist for and against the existence of God. These arguments are largely concerned with finding an explanation for the origins and nature of the universe we observe. More recently, however, and most notably since the early twentieth century, the focus has become the search of plausible scientific explanations for the origins and nature of the universe, largely divorced from the concept of a god. But such science-based endeavors have not been limited to finding explanations for the origins of the universe, but also to explain many of the phenomena within the universe, and most notably, the evolution of species on earth.

It is important to briefly recount some of the most notable arguments for and against the existence of God and His role in creation. The survey of these arguments serves to lay to rest basic classical questions and approaches that have already been asked, discussed, answered, countered, and reasserted many times and in many forms in the course of human history, and open the way for new ways of looking at these questions and consider new interpretations of aspects of some of these old arguments.

To better understand both the old questions and their new interpretations, basic concepts in logic, probability, and the DNA molecule are reviewed as foundational principles needed in this discourse. The gist of the arguments presented in this paper is not anti-scientific, but extra-scientific, based on the notion that science is a subset of rational discourse, and not the other way around.

The scope of this paper is limited to exploring the origins of existence and the meaning and requirements of proof of such origins. This paper is not directed to the technical details of cosmology or evolution, even though enough of the relevant science is presented to allow a common and unambiguous understanding of the assertions and arguments.

The proof of existence of God, or alternatively, the origins of the universe or other major phenomena such as life, define two areas for our exploration. These two areas of inquiry have been the traditional stomping grounds of those examining these questions and include the phenomenal world and its fundamental laws and properties, and the evolution of species on earth. Indeed, these two areas have been fertile grounds for and subjects of many recent books about how the universe came to be, how life began, and what drives the evolution of species on earth. Some of these well-known books include *A Brief History of Time* (1988) by Steven Hawking, *The Selfish Gene* (1976) and *The God Delusion* (2006) by Clinton Richard Dawkins, and *The God Argument* (2013) by A.C. Grayling.

Why Do We Care?

Generally, we are only curious about things which are intriguing and interesting, but care about things that affect us in real ways. The question of origins of creation is both intriguing and affects us in real ways through world view, cultural norms, artistic expressions, social interactions, psychological disposition, political discourse, and the establishment and operation of civil laws.

Our world view, although not an everyday concern, plays a very important role in how we live our lives, whom we befriend, our politics, our goals in life, and other long-term considerations. Those who believe in God often also believe in an afterlife and some sort of reward and punishment in that afterlife. They also find certain meanings for life as part of a grand cosmological plan. Conversely, those who do not believe in God have less definitive views on life and related subjects. Of course, none of these observations prove or disprove the existence of God and no claims of superiority of one view over another is intended. They merely show that it does matter whether we believe in God or not.

Our world view in turn affects our belief system and the cultural norms and artistic expressions we adopt or subscribe to. For example, the art arising out of cultures with a significant presence of religion, such as in 17th and 18th century Europe, show this presence in their paintings, sculptures, and music.

Our world view and belief system also affect the laws that reflect the social and moral values of the society through the political system. There are clear distinctions between laws supported and promoted by political parties more closely affiliated with a religion, than those supported by less religious parties. Again, the point here is not to claim superiority one way or another but to show differences.

And of course, the effects of belief or non-belief in God do not end with culture, art, or law and carry onto almost all aspects of our lives such as education, diet, family, and many others.

Methodologies of Acquisition of Knowledge

How do we come to acquire new knowledge or discover a truth about something and know that it is the truth? One way is the rational proof, which is closely related to the scientific method: we make some observations and hypothesize a theory. If we can prove the theory, then we have arrived at the truth. Although similar, but this process is not the same as the scientific method.

The scientific method may be generally formulated as follows:¹

1. Make observations
2. Formulate a hypothesis to explain the observations
3. Test or prove the hypothesis using controlled experiments

The scientific method is an inductive process: we go from specific observations to general conclusions. Inductive reasoning is by nature, strictly speaking, inconclusive and evolutionary. The conclusion is only as good as the current collection of observations allows. The next observation may alter the conclusion. For example, if one observes a sequence of numbers such as 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, ..., and is then asked to predict what the next number in the sequence would be, he may present the hypothesis that this pattern is defined by the sequence of even numbers, and thus the next number should be 14. However, if the next number revealed in the observed sequence happens to be 25, then the assumed hypothesis turns out to be wrong and a different hypotheses will be needed. This inductive phenomenon is well known in the history of science and is behind all scientific progress: as new data are discovered, scientific explanations evolve to explain the old and the new data.

The inductive process is markedly different from the deductive process. In contrast to the inductive process, the deductive process, which is a main component of rational reasoning, is conclusive and fixed. Once a truth is deductively proven, it will never change, in contrast to scientific discoveries and theories. That's why ancient mathematical theories in geometry and algebra, or other areas of mathematics, once proven, have never been "improved." The area of a circle, A , represented as πr^2 , where r is the radius of the circle and π is a constant (3.14...), was discovered and proven deductively, not scientifically. They did not cut out an assortment of circular discs and measure their areas in a laboratory to come up with this formula. Samples or observed circles, although examined for insight, did not play a pivotal or necessary role in proving this formula; deductive reasoning did. As a matter of fact, this formula for the area of a circle may be derived by dividing a circle into an infinite number of slices, like a pizza. But since no physical object, such as sample discs, can be divided

infinitely, the proof is abstract and purely rational, not scientific, strictly speaking.

A closely related question is what does it mean to prove something? How do we know we have proven what we set out to prove? Having a “proof” generally means a valid conclusion is reached about a statement. Mathematically, the proof of a theorem means that the theorem, as defined, is true and that it contains no errors. For example, a theorem in geometry may state that the sum of internal angles of a triangle is 180° . Given the definitions of a triangle, angle, and sum, it can be mathematically proven that this theorem is true. Proof is based on the deductive process. In contrast, a scientific theory is only inductively verified, not proved, as discussed above.

The existence of a proof requires two main elements: facts and principles. The process of deduction, also known as reasoning, is the application of known principles or rules, which are themselves previously proven theorems, to facts to prove a new theorem. Thus, for a proof of the existence of God, facts related to the origins of existence are needed that require an explanation and principles are needed to show the new theorem is consistent with other known principles. In his many discourses about God, Abdul-Bahá did not shy away from propounding rational proofs of the existence of God based on facts and principles, some of which are briefly recounted here.

A few words are in order about what does not constitute proof. Stories, personal experiences, conjectures, and other similar evidence about various theorems, including the existence of God, even if true, do not rise to the level of proof. This assertion is not meant to belittle such evidence or aver their invalidity, but rather to distinguish them from a logical proof.

Who is the Expert?

With the ubiquitous success of science and scientific theories, especially over the last couple of centuries or so, many

people have adopted the idea that “scientific” is synonymous with “valid,” and even further, that science is the only path to the truth. That is, a theory is only valid if it is scientific and anything that is not scientific is invalid. However, based on our brief discussion of the scientific method above, science is chiefly generated using inductive reasoning. A whole class of rational activity based on deductive reasoning fundamentally lies outside the domain of science. Simply put, science is a subset of the rational faculty, not vice versa. Hence, everything valid is not necessarily scientific and anything that is not scientific is not necessarily invalid. Of course, scientific discovery is a complex business involving all manners of rational activity at different stages, including deductive reasoning. Nevertheless, the main rational ingredient of scientific endeavor is inductive reasoning.

The quest for origins of creation, and the question of existence of God, is multi-faceted and necessarily involves a good deal of every rational discipline and technique, including science, philosophy, mathematics, inductive and deductive reasoning, abductive reasoning, common sense, and other rational approaches. Non-rational approaches, such as inspiration, dream, revelation, prayer, and other similar approaches may result in even stronger personal beliefs in the existence of God, but they are based on personal experience and are only valid for the person experiencing such feelings. They are not transferrable to others like rational techniques are. Hence, we are not concerned with personal experiences here, only rational techniques.

Thus the “expert” in this endeavor is one who is familiar with and reasonably versed in rational discourse, sciences, and philosophy and can best combine the rational techniques and scientific knowledge in creative ways to explain the facts and data related to the origins of creation based on logic.

The Primacy of Logic

Logic is the glue that binds together other knowledge to come up with valid conclusions and is the one indispensable tool of rational discourse. As such, logic has precedence over science, laws of physics, biology, the brain, and any other area of human endeavor. Let's see why.

Logic is, at its very core, a specification of the existential requirements of any conclusion or result. Mathematically, three necessary and sufficient logical operators exist to specify any logical statement: AND, OR, and NOT. There is a mathematically equivalent single operator, NAND, that may serve the same purpose, but the original set of three operators is more intuitive. The AND operator specifies *all* the requirements (among those elements being considered) for a true conclusion, the OR operator specifies *one or more* of the requirements (all are not necessary) for a true conclusion, and NOT specifies an element that *must not be true* for a conclusion to be true. Simple examples can illustrate the concept: *water* **AND** *soil* are needed for a flower to grow; you can go to the store by *bicycle* **OR** *on foot*; **NOT** being *locked* allows a door to be opened. In each of the foregoing examples, the operator is shown in underlined bold font, the requirements are shown in italics, and the conclusion or effect resulting from the requirements is shown in normal text. Thus, as we initially observed, the logical operators specify the requirements of existence of the result (or a true conclusion, in the context of information processing).

Logic is also like an information pipe, to use a metaphor. It is content-invariant and knowledge-agnostic. Logic is not concerned with what specific subject we are reasoning about. It also is not concerned about the correctness of the knowledge we use in our reasoning. For example, if we state that “an elephant fits in a tea cup; a tea cup fits in my pocket, therefore, an elephant fits in my pocket,” we are using perfectly *valid* logic and correct reasoning, but with faulty knowledge. This is known

as valid but *unsound* logic (or reasoning) due to the incorrect data or knowledge.

However, logic is not quite as simple as one may be lead to believe from the foregoing examples. What we briefly discussed above is *propositional* logic, dealing with logical constants. Higher order *predicate logic*, such as the first order predicate logic, the second order predicate logic, etc., deal with logical functions and quantifiers and are well-known subjects in the field of mathematical logic. The difference between propositional logic and predicate logic, apart from technical mathematical criteria such as whether or not they are “consistent” and “complete” systems, is that propositional logic is concerned with logical constants whose truth values are fixed, while predicate logic deals with logical variables and functions. This is loosely analogous to arithmetic and algebra, where arithmetic is used to operate on constant numbers and algebra is used to deal with variable numbers and functions of numbers.

Just as the complexity of advanced mathematics does not change the fact that it is basically a study of quantities and how they are related to each other, the complexity level of logic does not change the fact that it is about existential conditions of rational conclusions.

How does all this show the primacy of logic over science and the laws of physics? It is a question of dependence: for any entities A and B, if B depends on A, then A *must* exist first and B can only exist afterwards. Existence of an entity precedes every property of the entity, because no other property of the entity can exist before the entity itself exists. Since logic defines the existential conditions of any entity, it comes first. That includes all physical phenomena and laws of nature. We may have gotten a bit too abstract here, so let’s come back to earth, to a more concrete and practical level. As far as we know at this point of human advancement, the laws of nature, such as the laws of thermodynamics, gravity, quantum physics, and other such fundamental laws clearly underlie the physical reality

we perceive. Our understanding of these laws changes over time, yet the logical rules we use in our reasoning to rationally understand and analyze these very laws of nature remain unchanged. Conversely, no matter how our scientific understanding of the laws of physics or nature change, our logical methods do not. Thus, as far as our cognition is concerned, our understanding of natural phenomena through science is dependent upon logic, but the rules of logic are not dependent on our understanding of the laws of nature. Hence, the priority and primacy of logic.

A Survey of Classical Arguments for the Existence of God

A few of the classical proofs of the existence of God are briefly examined below. Some of the modern reasons believed by some to show why God is not needed to explain the universe are also reviewed. This survey helps us avoid redundant discussions and also focuses our attention on new approaches which overcome the objections to the classical arguments. This survey is by no means comprehensive or an exhaustive treatment of the classical arguments. It only describes the best known arguments to avoid covering the grounds already covered many times by others.

The classical arguments may be classified into several categories as follows. Even though one argument is presented under each category, there are many variations of these arguments in each category, which are not treated in any detail here.

Cosmological Arguments

Presumably Aristotle and Plato, the famed Greek philosophers, were the first ones to propose the cosmological, or First Cause, arguments to explain the origins of creation and, by implication, prove the existence of God. Over the ages and even to the present, there have been many variations of this proof with various levels of details. For example, Abdul-Bahá

uses a similar argument to show the existence of God [SAQ 202-204]. In one of his books², William Hatcher, the Canadian mathematician, goes through a rigorous mathematical treatment of this subject using logic and set theory.

The basic outline of this theory is based on the concept of causality, which defines a temporal cause-and-effect chain. Each link in this chain is both an effect of the previous cause and a cause to the next effect. For example, a cloud is an effect caused by the sun, and it is also the cause of rain. Rain is the effect of a cloud and the cause of plant growth, and so on. Tracing the causality chain backwards through time must get us to a “First Cause” which is not itself the effect of anything else. The First Cause is necessary because otherwise we would be dealing with an infinite temporal chain, which seems like a futile effort for explaining the creation.

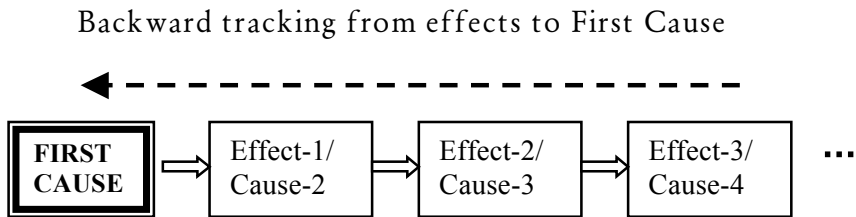


Figure 1: The chain of Cause-and-Effect, and the First Cause

The most compelling objection to this proof is that why this “First Cause” needs to be a god? Why can’t the laws of nature, or the big bang be this First Cause? There are responses to this objection, but none seem to be very convincing because they only explain some aspects of this proof while other aspects remain unexplained. For example, Hatcher shows that the chain of causality, though it can start out as multiple branches or an infinite number of parallel chains, must end in a single First Cause. That is, each chain cannot have its own First Cause. This point shows that there exists a single First Cause or a single God. However, this does not explain why the First Cause has to

be a willful, intelligent, and conscious being as the notion of a god normally implies.

Teleological Arguments

Teleological arguments for the existence of God are based on the idea of purposeful design. This argument, which is most commonly but not exclusively applied to explain the evolution of species on earth, avers that complex systems, such as living organisms, cannot come into being without an intelligent designer who has purposefully designed them.

Abdul-Bahá uses a similar argument. He expounds that a combination (for example, a system) is made possible only by three different means: inherence, accident, and design [PUP 423]. A combination exists by inherence if its components are inherently associated with each other, such as flame and heat. Since combinations of animal organs and parts are not inherent, this method cannot be responsible for a new species. A combination exists by accident if its components are associated accidentally, such as wind blowing a leaf into a room. But animal species are too complex to be explained by blind luck. So, only the design option remains to explain complex live organisms and species.

However, the modern evolution theory purports to explain how blind luck can actually create organisms of arbitrary complexity from lower forms. As further described below in more detail, the modern evolution theory describes the appearance of a new species as a result of the operation of two major processes: random mutation and natural selection. During the random mutation phase variations appear in existing species, and during the natural selection phase the organisms or animals fittest for a particular environment survive and other variations vanish over time, hence the common phrase “survival of the fittest.”

Thus, the counter argument for creation by design is that the appearance of new and complex species, including homo sapiens or the modern human, is explained by the theory of evolution without resorting to a god or purposeful design.

Anthropic Arguments

Anthropic refers to human-centric elements. Based on observations of laws of nature, some have come to believe that the whole of universe has been designed to make the existence of humans possible. A brief summary of some of these observations follows.

It has been calculated that the density of matter in the universe must be almost exactly at a critical density needed to preclude the “Big Crunch,” the complement of the Big Bang, later described. Recent measurements suggest that the observed density of matter augmented with theoretical predictions of the amount of dark matter account for only about 30% of this critical density. The balance is contributed by a cosmological constant, the energy density of the vacuum of space. The Nobel Laureate in Physics Steven Weinberg provided an anthropic explanation for this phenomenon. He remarked that the cosmological constant has a very low value, amounting to 120 orders of magnitude smaller than the value predicted by particle physics, dubbed the “worst prediction in physics.” The point is that if the cosmological constant were only one order of magnitude larger than its observed value, the universe would suffer a catastrophic inflation (described below), which would preclude the formation of stars, and in turn life itself.

Similarly, the observed values of the dimensionless physical constants, such as the coupling constant which characterizes the strength of the electromagnetic interaction, governing the four fundamental forces of nature (macroscopic gravity and electromagnetic forces, and subatomic strong and weak forces) are balanced as if fine-tuned to permit the formation of commonly found matter and subsequently the emergence of life.

For example, even a slight increase in the strong nuclear force would bind the dineutron and the diproton particles such that nuclear fusion would have converted all hydrogen in the early universe to helium. Under such conditions, water and stable stars, both essential for the emergence of life, would not exist. More generally, small changes in the relative strengths of the four fundamental forces and their interactions can greatly affect the universe's age, structure, and capacity for life.

The anthropic principle is not a complete proof of the existence of a designer for the universe in a mathematical sense. Rather, it is a highly precise observation that provides some strong evidences and points to the likely existence of such designer. The current argument against the anthropic principle is the concept of a multi-verse, or multiple universes, which spontaneously pop into existence out of utter nothingness, each with its own random set of laws and parameters. The one we are currently in just happens to have the exact makeup required to support life and, voilà, here we are discussing it; very convenient arrangement indeed.

Ontological Arguments

Probably the most common types of classical "proofs" for the existence of God, and the least compelling in view of our modern knowledge, are based on ontological arguments. Many such arguments border on sophistry and paradoxical excursions. A few examples that follow should make it clear that most ontological arguments are inadequate, and indeed, misleading paths to the truth.

Ontology is the study of being or existence. Many of the arguments have little basis in proven or scientific facts and instead depend on presumptions about the nature of being, the structure of universe, and how nature works. These presumptions are used to prove that God must exist.

By most accounts, the earliest ontological argument is attributed to Anselm of Canterbury in the 11th century A.D. Anselm based his argument on his definition of God as the greatest thing that can be imagined or conceived. He then argued that this being could exist in the mind. He suggested that, if the greatest possible being exists in the mind, it must also exist in reality. If it only exists in the mind, a greater being is possible—one which exists in the mind and in reality. This argument is based on many presumptions which at best are not very plausible, such as imagining the greatest thing, and also has logical flaws such as if something exists in one's mind it must also exist in reality based on the presumed meaning of the "greatest possible being".

Other ontological arguments have been proposed throughout the ages by some renowned thinkers and philosophers such as the 17th century French philosopher René Descartes and the 20th century Austrian mathematician Kurt Gödel. Gödel proposed a more elaborate and mathematically rigorous version of Anselm's arguments, but in essence it is still closer to presumptuous sophistry than proof.

Thermodynamics Arguments

Thermodynamics is a very basic science, which studies the relationships between various forms of energy in a system. It includes a number of basic laws. Thermodynamics has four fundamental laws, zero through three. The zeroth law is related to thermal equilibrium of systems; the first law is related to thermal energy; the second law, and the one that concerns us here, is related to system entropy; and the third law is also related to entropy.

More precisely, the second law states: the entropy of a closed system not in thermal equilibrium increases. Closed systems spontaneously move towards thermal equilibrium, which is also the state of maximum entropy of the closed system. This law has profound physical and also philosophical implications. These

implications originate from and revolve around the concept of entropy.

Entropy is a measure of the number of ways a system and its components may be arranged, the components being any and all parts of the system including atomic, sub-atomic, and quantum particles. Indeed, at the most fundamental quantum levels, the laws of thermodynamics, like most quantum concepts, are expressed in terms of the probabilities of particles behaving in a particular way. Another interpretation, or implication, of entropy is that it is a measure of disorder in the system. This behavior of entropy implies that in a closed system disorder increases. In other words, a closed system cannot spontaneously become more organized, unless an energy source external to the system interferes (which then violates the “closed” system condition).

As we’ll see later, the concept of spontaneous organization plays an important role in the discourse on the existence of God. Some have argued that the second law precludes the spontaneous evolution of species from lower forms to higher ones, and their arguments are not entirely without merit. However, the second law in and of itself is insufficient for this purpose as many have pointed out. For one thing, the second law is about energy, not everything else, at least not directly. Extending the second law to cover the evolution of species and formation of the universe itself at which time no laws of nature existed, including the laws of thermodynamics, is not without substantial difficulties.

Limits-based Arguments

One of the apparently simplest, and at the same time deepest proofs of God, or at least one of His most essential attributes, the attribute of being unlimited, is propounded by Abdul-Bahá:

Now as to the infinite Power that knoweth no limitations; limitation itself proveth the existence of the

unlimited, for the limited is known through the unlimited, *just as weakness itself proveth the existence of power, ignorance the existence of knowledge, poverty the existence of wealth. Without wealth there would be no poverty, without knowledge no ignorance, without light no darkness. Darkness itself is a proof of the existence of light for darkness is the absence of light.*

[TAF 20; emphasis added.]

Unfortunately, the explanation left to posterity by Abdul-Bahá is rather brief. He explained that the very concept or essence of “limit” implies the limitless. Perhaps, this approach can be understood as a hierarchy of containments. Every limit defines a boundary or a container that contains its contents, and the container itself is contained in a yet bigger container. If this abstract containment relationship is extended to infinity, at the end which has no end, one may find traces of God.

However, this approach is different from the approach of this paper and it is only covered here for completeness.

Current Scientific Belief: The Big Bang and Inflation Theories

The science of physics has undergone not only constant evolutionary changes throughout the ages, but also several major revolutionary changes, most notably since the early Twentieth century. Physics has come a long way since its humble beginnings in ancient times as a collection of basic uninstrumented observations and corresponding explanations and theories. Galileo was one of the early scientists to start the scientific method by using actual observations and measurements instead of philosophical presumptions to explain natural phenomena such as the free falling of objects. Sir Isaac Newton followed in the footsteps of Galileo in the Seventeenth century and formalized physics with his laws of motion and gravitation force between large bodies. More recently, Albert Einstein, the famed physicist of German origin, revolutionized our understanding of the laws of nature by his special and then

general theories of relativity. Quantum physics added its interpretations of physical laws at microscopic levels, which introduced some tensions with the theories of Einstein. Most recently, a family of theories most commonly recognized under the label of *Superstring Theory*, or *M-Theory* (a set of several variations of the superstring theory) proposed new interpretations of the structure of universe to reconcile the apparent inconsistencies between the relativity theories and the quantum theory.³

However, all of the above theories are descriptive in nature and neither provide an explanation for the origins of the universe, nor do they claim to do so. A theory that does purport to explain how the universe started is the theory of big bang, further described below.

The big bang theory is the heart of the standard cosmological model and is grounded in Einstein's general theory of relativity and the idea of expansion of universe, first proposed in 1927 by the Belgian physics professor Georges Lemaître, and later supported by the observations of Edwin Hubble, the American astronomer, in 1929. In 1964, the detection of cosmic microwave background radiation further added to the pile of evidence supporting the occurrence of such an event in the early life of the universe. The cosmic microwave background radiation is significant because it is consistent across vast stretches of the observable universe, and thus suggests a common origin in an ever expanding universe. Tracking the accelerating rate of expansion of the universe backwards in time, arrives at an age of about 13.8 billion years, the birthday of the universe.⁴

The inflation theory provides an explanation for what is known as the horizon problem associated with the cosmic microwave background radiation. Simply stated, the horizon problem observes that highly distant regions of the universe have the same temperature and other physical properties despite not being in physical communication. Such physical

communications are precluded across the distances encountered, which are far greater than even light could travel during the age of the universe, because the transfer of information (including energy, heat, and other effects and influences) cannot take place faster than the speed of light. The size of the universe is estimated at about 92 billion light years in diameter, while its age is only 13.8 billion years. So, how is it possible that locations in the universe farther apart than even light could travel in the entire age of the universe have such precisely similar characteristics without being able to influence each other? Hence, the horizon problem. The inflation theory proposes a solution: a hyper expansion of the universe in the first moments after the big bang and then a slower expansion rate afterwards to this date; thus explaining how vastly separated points in space can have very similar background radiation characteristics.⁵

According to the standard model of cosmology, with the big bang and the inflation theories at its heart, at the initial moment of creation, all of time, space, and matter were rolled up into an unimaginably concentrated and dense point, a state called singularity. The big bang released all that in a spark, starting an ever expanding distribution of time, space, and matter to form the universe. An important concept to note is that according to the standard model, time and space are not static dimensions for the matter to grow into, like an empty room into which furniture is moved. Rather, the very fabric of universe is composed of time and space, which is stretching out and expanding, like a balloon, at an accelerating rate. Hence, the universe is not static but constantly changing, and eventually, in a distant future billions of years away, it will end in a dark, cold death. At least that's what the currently accepted standard model of cosmology predicts.

The big bang theory, which explains a great deal of observed phenomena in existence today, is consistently and supported by precise experimentations. However, it fails to explain where the "unimaginably concentrated and dense point made up of time,

space, and matter” came from prior to the big bang. It merely pushes the question of the origin of creation back to a supposed “starting point.” A recent response to the question of “what was there *before* the big bang?” is that there was no “before” because there was no dimension of time and thus the question is meaningless! Similarly, a response to the question of “what caused the big bang?” is that the laws of universe including cause-and-effect did not exist and therefore, the question is, again, meaningless!

And of course, things do not end with the big bang, but quite literally start with it, including the evolution of complex life on earth billions of years later. The same basic questions that apply to the origin of creation as a whole apply to the origin of species as a more specific case. The evolution of species is addressed later on.

However, the clever responses to these questions mentioned above may be more of a sophisticated scientific dodge than real answers. These answers merely push the question of origin one step back, to a supposed “beginning,” without explaining where this beginning and all the potential phenomena, properties, and characteristics such as matter, energy, laws of physics, etc. that flowed from it came from. Below, an alternative explanation is proposed for the origins of creation.

A New Theory: The Pre-Existence Argument

In the Tablet of Wisdom (*Lawh-i Hikmat*), Baha’u’llah explains:

Every thing must needs have an origin and every building a builder. Verily, the Word of God is the Cause which hath preceded the contingent world. [TB 141]

In the same Tablet He further expounds:

As regards thine assertions about the beginning of creation, this is a matter on which conceptions vary by reason of the divergences in men's thoughts and opinions. Wert thou to assert that it hath ever existed and shall continue to exist, it would be true; or wert thou to affirm the same concept as is mentioned in the sacred Scriptures, no doubt would there be about it, for it hath been revealed by God, the Lord of the worlds. Indeed He was a hidden treasure. This is a station that can never be described nor even alluded to. And in the station of 'I did wish to make Myself known', God was, and His creation had ever existed beneath His shelter from the beginning that hath no beginning, apart from its being preceded by a Firstness which cannot be regarded as firstness and originated by a Cause inscrutable even unto all men of learning.

That which hath been in existence had existed before, but not in the form thou seest today. The world of existence came into being through the heat generated from the interaction between the active force and that which is its recipient. These two are the same, yet they are different. Thus doth the Great Announcement inform thee about this glorious structure. Such as communicate the generating influence and such as receive its impact are indeed created through the irresistible Word of God which is the Cause of the entire creation, while all else besides His Word are but the creatures and the effects thereof. Verily thy Lord is the Expounder, the All-Wise.

Know thou, moreover, that the Word of God – exalted be His glory – is higher and far superior to that which the senses can perceive, for it is sanctified from any property or substance. It transcendeth the limitations of known elements and is exalted above all the essential and recognized substances. It became manifest without any

syllable or sound and is none but the Command of God which pervadeth all created things. It hath never been withheld from the world of being. It is God's all-pervasive grace, from which all grace doth emanate. It is an entity far removed above all that hath been and shall be. [TB 140]

We explore the explanations Baha'u'llah left to posterity about the nature and origin of creation in a modern context and from different perspectives.

“Something cannot come from nothing” is the essence of the pre-existence argument. Before going further, we first need to understand some foundational principles and then come back and continue with this line of analysis.

The Notion of Continuity Across a Boundary

We live in a world of limits. Everything is defined or specified based on limits or boundaries. Without boundaries, nothing can be distinguished from another. For example, we can distinguish sea from land because each is limited by its boundary: at some point sea water ends and dry land begins. If the sea water never ended, dry land would never start and thus could not be defined. Boundaries have certain basic properties regardless of their specific nature or functions in a system or organism. One such basic property is the notion of continuity across boundaries.

But to be consistent and faithful to the claimed properties of boundaries, which sets them apart from other concepts, let's first define what a boundary itself is: a boundary is an interface that separates two sets of different entities A and B, as shown in Figure 2, below. These “entities” may be any objects, materials, properties, conditions, relationships, etc.; anything at all, which may be members of a set. It is noteworthy that some of these entities may be abstract, such as causation in which no material may cross the boundary, but only influence or

information in various forms. The interface is specified by the very difference between sets A and B. For example, a bicycle and a motorcycle are different sets of objects, and the interface that separates them is defined by the differences, such as the motor in the motorcycle.

The notion of continuity may be loosely characterized as something having to pass across the boundary to establish a relationship between or connect the two sides. This relationship has several distinct aspects embodied in several major concepts of change or transformation of one set into another across the boundary. These concepts include conservation laws, causality, and flow of contents and are pivotal to the pre-existence argument.

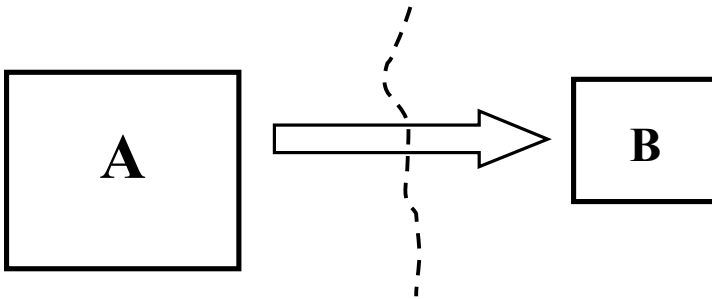


Figure 2: Notion of continuity across a boundary

The Existential Conservation Principle

One form of cross-boundary continuity is embodied in the laws of conservation. These laws generally state that a particular quantity of interest is neither created nor destroyed, but rather it is transformed from one form into another. There are many laws of conservation depending on a quantity of interest. For example, some of the basic laws of nature are laws of conservation such as the law of conservation of energy and the law of conservation of matter. These laws state, respectively, that energy or matter is not created or destroyed, but are merely transformed from one form into another.

In every law of conservation the quantity of interest crosses an abstract boundary defined by the differences between its initial state and its final state in the course of a transformation. For example, according to the law conservation of matter, if a log is burned, it changes from solid wood into charcoal and smoke. It is transformed; it is not destroyed. During the transformation, the material that makes up the wood crosses the abstract boundary that separates and distinguishes between solid wood and charcoal (and also the smoke), the abstract boundary being defined by these differences.

We now introduce a new and very general law of conservation: the law of conservation of existence, or existential conservation principle. This law states that the very existence of an entity cannot come from non-existence or absolute nothingness; it must be transformed from another state, a state of pre-existence. Or put more casually, “there is no free lunch.” To see why this law is true, that is, to prove this principle, we’ll need the differential principle introduced below.

The Differential Principle

Another form of cross-boundary continuity is embodied in causality, which has been called one of the most, or even the most, fundamental law of nature. It is a necessary prerequisite to all scientific and rational inquiry, without which “laws” would not be meaningful. This is because, generally, a law is a statement of a specific type of causation. For example, Newton’s third law of motion states that “for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.” Here, “action” is the cause and “reaction” is the effect. The principle of causality is verified by the special theory of relativity in which the space-time continuum and the constant speed of light provide a consistent frame-work that shows that cause must always precede effect. Cause and effect are different sets of entities, as discussed with respect to Figure 2. Hence, for the cause to create the effect, the influence it exerts, in whatever form, must

needs cross the boundary between the two, establishing a continuity across the boundary.

The differential principle is related to causality. It may be considered a particular type of abstract causality without the physical connotations that we associate with the latter, such as time. The differential principle states that a set A may be transformed to a set B or a set C if and only if there is a differentiating element that directs A to change to B or to C. For example, a set of wooden parts may be transformed into either a chair or a coffee table but the construction procedure differentiate whether they are transformed into one or the other. Even in a random process something must differentiate one result from another.

A little set theory can help us in better understanding and proving the differential principle. Anything, any entity, can be represented as a set of attributes. The attributes are called the members of the set and may also be anything, any objects, any relationship, or another set. Members can also be tangible or abstract entities. Two sets are equal if and only if their members are exactly the same. Every set has three main elements: set members, operations defined on the set, and procedures for applying the operations to the set members. The procedures define the order of application of operations to the members and may be intentional and intelligent or random.

A few examples of sets should make these abstract concepts more tangible. A bicycle can be represented as the set of the parts and interrelationships that make up the bicycle. The set of even integers includes all integers divisible by 2. Addition is an operation defined on the set of even integers. The procedure of adding 1 to every member of the set of even integers creates the set of all odd integers.

To change one set to another, or to generate a new set from an existing one, the three differentiating elements (differentiators) of sets are needed: members, operations, and procedures (information). The resulting set cannot be generated

if one of these elements is missing. Additionally, two different sets generated must be different in at least one of these differentiators, otherwise the two sets will be one and the same. Hence, a single set cannot be transformed into two different sets if there is nothing to differentiate one outcome from another. Hence, the differential principle.

Now, let's get back to the existential conservation principle. The differential principle may be used to show that the existential conservation principle is true. A new set cannot be generated from nothing, because the three differentiators are required to generate it. Let's look at this in a bit more detail.

The empty set contains no members, there are no operations defined on it, and no procedure exist to do anything with the non-existent operations and members. An interesting fact about the empty set is that there can be only one empty set because the members of two empty sets are exactly the same: nothing! And when two sets have the same members, they are the same set. A new set, which contains some members, cannot result from an empty set. For the empty set to turn into or to generate the new set, the three elements of the set (members, operations, procedures) must exist, but by definition they do not exist in the empty set. Therefore, the new set cannot be generated, unless a non-empty set precedes it on the other side of the boundary. Hence, the existential conservation principle.

The High-to-Low Flow Principle

Bahá'u'lláh writes that nature reflects the “*names and attributes of God*”. It is the expression of “*God's Will ... in ... the contingent world*”.

Say: Nature in its essence is the embodiment of My Name, the Maker, Creator. Its manifestations are diversified by varying causes, and in this diversity there are signs for men of discernment. Nature is God's Will and is its expression in and through the contingent

world. It is a dispensation of Providence ordained by the Ordainer, the All-Wise. [TAB 142]

In the above passage, Baha'u'llah teaches that the properties seen in nature are deposited by God. Below, we will examine particular aspects of this utterance from particular points of view.

The high to low flow is another principle that revolves around the notion of continuity across a boundary and is an important principle with many tangible instances in science and everyday life for the astute observer. It is also related to the existential conservation principle.

Based on the differential principle, the flow of content across a boundary requires something to drive the flow of content from one side to another. The other side of the boundary is generated by application of operations to members of the existing set.

Based on the existential principle, something must exist on one side of the boundary before the other side can be created. If we apply the existential principle to a part of the set, we can come up with an interesting conclusion. The essence of the existential conservation principle is that from an existing set, and only from an existing set, a new set may be generated. This means that the existing set has something more than the non-existent one, namely, all the set members, operations, and procedures. With reference to Figure 3 (below), the existing set A has something more than the new set B. Subset B' is a portion of set B. The difference between subset B' and set A is less than all, but there is a partial difference that is needed to generate subset B'. The dotted lines signifies a partial generation of the new set B from existing set A. There is a deceptively simple reason for this, as pronounced by Abdul-Bahá in the context of natural laws:

But when you look at Nature itself, you see that it has no intelligence, no will. For instance, the nature of fire is to burn; it burns without will or intelligence. ... Man is able to resist and to oppose nature; ... all the inventions he has made are due to his discovery of the constitution of things. ... Now, when you behold in existence such organization, arrangements and laws, can you say that all these are the effect of Nature, though Nature has neither intelligence nor perception? [SAQ 3]

Abdul-Bahá is indicating, in the context of nature in general, that what nature does not possess itself (i.e., will and intelligence), it cannot give to man, who does possess both. He further alludes to the fact that the organization and laws evident in nature must have come from another source, namely, from God. To appreciate the significance of Abdu'l-Baha's statements above, it is helpful to put it in the context of boundaries, in which everything that flows into the new set must come from an existing one.

We can see how the pre-existence conservation principle is applicable not only to the whole sets A and B, but also to the partial subset B' by examining the process of generation of set B. Starting from a non-existent set B, a portion of set B is constructed by flow of contents, physical or abstract, emanating from set A, we proceed portion by portion to build the set B. During this construction process, set A must always have more content than subset B' to supply the additional subset B' with its new contents. Additionally, the contents of A may be embedded in its members, its operations, or its procedure. Hence, for each partial step of construction of set B, that is, for each additional subset B', set A must have something extra. In other words, "how can you give something you don't have?" The giver must always have more than the receiver. We will call this the *partial* existential conservation principle.

This phenomenon is clearly visible in physical sets, and also in abstract sets. For example, in a physical set such as a building, the material used in the building must come from a source which has more material than the building itself. As an abstract example, we can look at a set A containing the integer 2 as a member. If we define an operation “multiply by N ,” where N is any integer, we can generate a set B of all even integers. It seems like set B including all even integers is generated by set A , yet it is far greater than set A containing only the integer 2. However, set A actually includes all integers, not just 2. The rest of the integers, odd and even, are embedded in “ N ” within the definition of the operation “multiply by N .” Thus, set A still has more than set B . Hence the high-to-low flow principle.

Now, we are ready for a more accurate and practical statement of the high to low flow principle based on the partial existential conservation principle: in a closed system, which implies no external interference and thus spontaneity, content always flows from a high content level to a low content level across a boundary. This is a very significant principle with profound implications, as we shall see later.

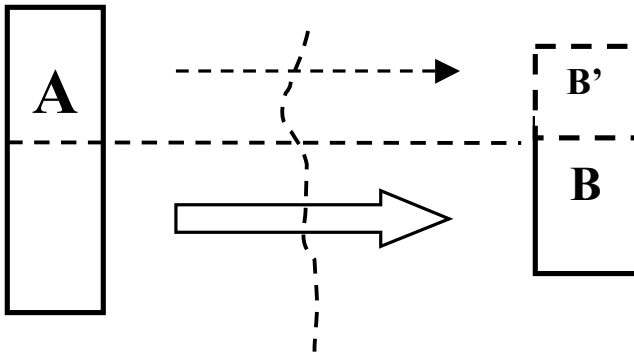


Figure 3: Partial existential conservation principle

The high to low flow principle can be seen in several well-known scientific fields as well. We will briefly consider two of these fields, the field of thermodynamics and the field of information theory.

With reference to Figure 4 (below), energy always flows from high density to low density. This is demonstrated most prominently by the second law of thermodynamics, which provides that in a closed system heat (thermal energy) flows spontaneously from a high-temperature body to a low-temperature one. To make the heat flow in reverse, that is, from a low to a high temperature, an external source of energy is needed. Figure 4(a) shows the external source of energy E_x reversing the flow of energy from a low level, E_L , to a high level, E_H . A practical example of this is the common refrigerator which moves heat from a cold space inside the refrigerator (low temperature) and expels it outside the refrigerator (high temperature), with the aid of a refrigeration pump (external energy source). This is similarly true about potential energy, which is the energy in a gravitation field, such as mass raised above ground (high energy state). It can spontaneously fall (to low energy state) but cannot spontaneously rise up, unless an external energy source (like your hand) lifts it up.

Figure 4b (below) illustrates the flow of information across a boundary from a low state to a high state. Information can be spontaneously lost, but it cannot be spontaneously increased without external effort. A low information state, I_L , can only be transformed to a high information state, I_H , if an external source of information, I_x , is applied. As an example of information flow, again consider a house. It includes information embedded in its structure. It contains information about its own geometry, its construction, its material, etc. If the house is ruined over time, the information contained in it will be lost. It goes from high information state to a low information state spontaneously. However, construction materials left alone do not spontaneously assemble into a building, unless an external source of information, such as the architect or the builder, supplies the information needed to assemble the material into a building. This is true even if a random source of energy, such as the wind, is available. The available energy does not cure the lack of information.

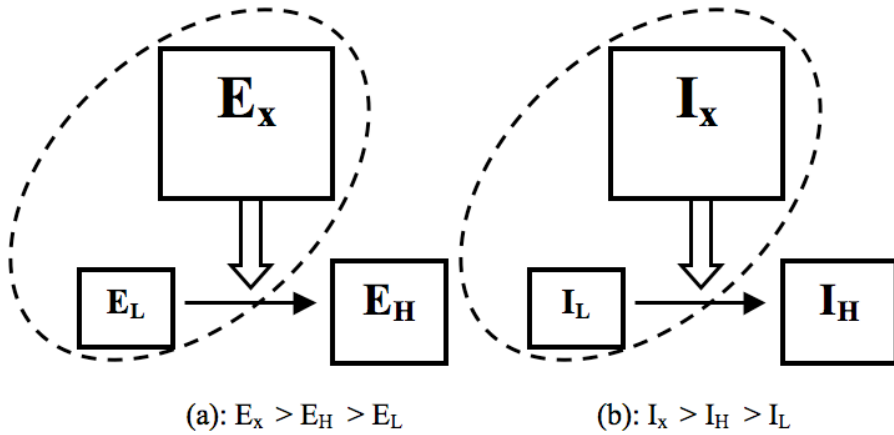


Figure 4: Examples of High-to-Low Flow: (a) Energy, (b) Information

There are no counter-examples of the high-to-low flow principle unless an external factor or system is forcing the backward flow. Such external system when combined with the low content level system must create a higher content level than the high-content level system, still upholding the principle of high-to-low flow, as signified by the dotted enclosure in Figure 4.

Application of Pre-Existence to Creation of Universe

We have laid the foundations of the pre-existence argument in the form of several principles including the existential conservation principle, the differential principle, and the high to low flow principle. We now apply these principles to the creation of existence.

The story of the big bang is that out of non-existence, that is, utter nothingness, came the world of existence. Nothingness is, by definition, the empty set. Then, let's imagine the state of nothingness. The empty set can maintain this state and stay the empty set, or it can change into the set of all things. Why would the empty set cease to be the empty set and become the set of all things? According to the existential conservation and the

differential principles discussed above, in this scenario, the empty set has two choices: remain the empty set or become the set of all things. But something must differentiate between these two outcomes. And randomness does not change anything because still something must exist to be random. That “something,” the differentiator, must exist in the state of nothingness. Hence, nothingness must contain something! It must contain the differentiator, which is the same as at least one of the three set elements discussed above. We have shown a contradiction with our initial assumption of nothingness, which means before we got something (e.g., the universe), there was something else.

As demonstrated above, mathematically-based proofs often depend on showing a contradiction with an initial assumption, proving that the opposite of the assumption must be true. We started with the assumption that before the creation nothing existed. We only had the empty set. But we showed a contradiction with this initial assumption, proving the opposite of nothingness, and specifically proving that even though the physical universe may have been in a different form prior to big bang, some form of pre-existence preceded it. Not necessarily in a chronological sense, but in some ordered sequence realm. A realm in which there is a “first” and a “next,” a “before” and an “after,” with respect to that ordered sequence; a sort of an abstract time concept.

The current physical existence resulted from a transformation of a pre-existence across a boundary separating the two; the pre-existence being a realm that may be totally different and alien to our perception and the way we think about our physical existence. Hence, the pre-existence argument proves two points: one, there was “something” “before” the big bang, something that was transformed by the big bang into its current physical form. But that “something” was not necessarily in forms we are familiar with and the “before” is not necessarily in a chronological sense. And two, we are back to square one in terms of explaining where the whole of creation came from,

since the big bang only pushed the question back, as initially suggested above. The big bang is not an explanation for the origins of creation, but a description of the process, or at least parts of it.

Application of Pre-Existence to Evolution of Species

We addressed one of the two fertile grounds for the discussion of creation and God, namely, the creation of the universe and how the big bang cannot be an explanation, but a description. The second favorite arena for this discussion is evolution of species on earth. Misconceptions and half-truths abound in this field among non-experts. As such it is important to first cover the basics of the modern theory of evolution.

A Brief Primer on Evolution

The theory of evolution itself did not start with Darwin. It goes back, in one form or another, to ancient times as philosophers and thinkers tried to make sense of their observations regarding various animals, life forms, and their relationships to each other. Some of the better known philosophers who developed some thoughts and theories regarding the evolution of species include Plato (427 B.C.), Aristotle (384 B.C.), Descartes (1628), Buffon (1707), Linnaeus (1707), Kant (1790), Cuvier (1796), Lamarck (1744), and others.

However, the seeds of the modern theory of evolution, which is widely accepted today, were planted by Charles Darwin's 1859 book *On the Origin of Species*. Although Darwin did not know about DeoxyriboNucleic Acid (better known as "DNA") molecule and genes, he meticulously observed that species change over time based on the demands of their environment. He proposed the theory that this change is due to natural selection (we will revisit this concept a bit later). But this is not the whole story of evolution. When we think about the concept of natural selection, the question that naturally and inevitably comes up is: selection among what options? Where did these

options come from in the first place to select from? Let's briefly see how evolution works.

The DNA

To understand how the theory of evolution explains the change and diversification of species, we need to have a basic understanding of the building blocks of life. DNA is a very long molecule that holds the information or code for building living organisms. This information is in the form of encoded genetic instructions. DNA has a particular structure, a double-stranded helical ladder composed of a backbone made of alternating sugar molecules (deoxyribose) and phosphate molecules, and nucleotides made of four nucleobase molecules attached to the sugars. Each nucleotide is composed of one nucleobase, including Guanine (G), Adenine (A), Thymine (T), and Cytosine (C).⁶

Notwithstanding other details, DNA's most prominent feature is that it is essentially a structure for stringing together a combination of A, C, G, and T, such as T-T-G-T-C-C-A-C-T-A-A-A-G-G The two strands in the double helix are mirror images of each other and every nucleotide has a fixed complement: across (not adjacent to) the ladder, A and T always go together, as do G and C. The pairs A-T and G-C are also called base pairs. So, if one strand has T at one point, the other strand has an A at the same point opposite this strand; and the same for C and G. That's how DNA molecule reproduces itself, which happens every time a cell divides. The double helix "unzips" down the middle into two single strands. Each single strand chemically binds to its mirror image nucleotide one at a time to reconstruct a double helix. Thus, two double helix strands result via this process from the original one.

For most part, DNA sequences may be divided into encoding and non-encoding. The encoding DNA is used to encode and synthesize proteins, which make up the physical body of living organisms. The non-encoding DNA sequences are mostly

functional structures, such as transfer RNAs and regulatory RNAs. The human DNA is about 98% non-encoding. Other species have different proportions of encoding and non-encoding sequences.

Whether encoding or non-encoding, DNA sequence combinations play a critical role in the formation and function of life. This assertion becomes obvious when we realize that the difference between a bee, an elephant, an octopus, and a human is the particular combination of their respective DNA. If the DNA of an elephant is rearranged in exactly the right way, an octopus will result, not an elephant. That's the miracle of the DNA: one mechanism, almost unlimited designs.

The DNA is further organized into functional segments called genes, each of which performs one or more functions such as synthesize particular types of proteins. The human genome contains about 30,000 genes on 46 chromosomes. A chromosome is a structure composed of a large segment of the DNA molecule containing hundreds or thousands of genes. With each gene having an average of about 100,000 base pairs, the whole human DNA contains about 3,000,000,000 (3 Billion or 3B) base pairs. In addition to the structure of DNA briefly described here, the genes can switch on and off, which controls the performance and timing of gene expressions and their respective functions.

In summary, the sequence or combination of base pairs and the combination of genes and their switching control the production, function, and behavior of every animal and every part or organ of that animal. The functions and behaviors include internal functions such as physiology, immune system, digestion, reproduction, and the like, and external functions such as various instincts, locomotion, mating habits, and the like. When the combinations change, so do the characteristics or the very identity of the animal the new combination produces.

The Nuts and Bolts of Evolution

We can now get back to the business of evolution. The evolution of species includes two major processes: mutation and natural selection. These twin processes are not rare events and occur in all living organisms on a constant basis. Mutation means rapid change or transformation, and it is the true engine of evolution. In the context of evolution, mutation means a change of the DNA sequence, or arrangement of base-pairs. Other effects of mutation may include changes in the makeup and the switching characteristics of genes. Mutation is believed to occur randomly as a result of various factors, some internal and some external. The most important internal factor is DNA replication error. During DNA replication, the wrong nucleotide may be copied altering the DNA sequence and the biological characteristics that flow from it in the resulting animal. Since cells constantly divide to keep our bodies renewed and functioning, mutations happen all the time due to replication errors. External sources of mutation include radiation, chemicals, and cosmic rays.

What mutation does for evolution is to create variations in species. When an animal's DNA changes by mutation, the offspring of that animal will have different DNA and different characteristics than its parent. And from then on, a new variation of that animal, or even a new species starts. So, as more mutations happen more variations in the species occur also. But every different characteristic of an animal allows a different interaction with the environment in which the animal lives. For example, if a mutation causes the legs of a deer to grow a bit longer, then the deer can run faster, but longer lanky legs may also be less nimble and maneuverable. So, depending on the deer's environment, terrain, and types of predators the longer legs may help or hurt its survival. This is where natural selection comes in, the second process of evolution.

Natural selection is as much a brilliant idea as it is simple. It is almost common sense, once you know it. It simply means that

the animal with the characteristics that make it the fittest for the particular environment in which the animal lives, has the best chance of survival and reproduction. Hence, the fittest animal flourishes while the animals with characteristics that makes them less fit for that particular environment eventually die out. From this simple definition a few important points may be gleaned.

One, natural selection is based on fitness relative to the environment. There is no such thing as fitness in a vacuum. The concept of fitness is relative to how well certain animal characteristics help the animal survive in a particular environment. The same exact characteristic that may be a liability in one environment, may be a valuable asset in another. The slender legs of a deer make it a fast runner, but not a fast swimmer, just as the flippers of a seal make it fast swimmer, but not a fast runner.

Two, the threshold of natural selection is death because death prevents the reproduction and continuation of a particular variation of a species. Natural selection may take shorter or longer time to complete, but if the characteristic that is less suitable for a particular environment does not result in the death, and thus, the non-reproduction of the animal, then that variation will simply survive and become another animal in the environment. For example, Indian lions and tigers, which are variations of a big cat, have different markings and different hunting behaviors, but both survive in the forests of India. This is because their variations in that particular environment do not rise to the threshold of death for either species and so both species continue to survive.

Three, natural selection for the same animal can come about because of a change in the animal or a change in its environment. This is because natural selection is based not just on the characteristics of the animal, but on the interactions between these characteristics and its environment. For example, polar bears thrive in the cold winters of the north pole, but if

the temperature of the pole rises beyond a certain threshold, then even though the bears have not changed, they may be selected by nature for extinction due to the shortage of food and hunting grounds.

In summary, evolution continues when the process of mutation creates random variation of species and the process of natural selection selects the fittest ones. This way, new species evolve and change by accumulating little changes over time and the animal species increase in number and diversity.

This all sounds very plausible and of course there are literally tons of science and data supporting change, survival, and extinction of species due to the process of evolution. So, what's wrong with this theory or belief, the plausibility of random mutations? To answer this question, we first need to understand large numbers and the probabilities associated with them.

Abdul-Bahá briefly explains the sources of formation of various entities, including species of animals. He explains:

On this account the materialists are of the opinion that life is the mere conjoining of elemental substances into myriad forms and shapes. The materialist comes to the conclusion that life, in other words, means composition; that wherever we find single elements combined in aggregate form, there we behold the phenomena of organic life; that every organic composition is organic life. Now if life means composition of elements, then the materialist may come to the conclusion of the non-necessity of a composer, the non-necessity of a creator; for composition is all there is to it, and that is accomplished by adhesion or cohesion. In response to this we say that composition must needs be of three kinds: One form of composition is termed philosophically the accidental, another the involuntary, and a third the voluntary. As to the first, or accidental, composition: This would signify that certain elements

through inherent qualities and powers of attraction or affinity have been gathered together, have blended, and so composed a certain form, being or organism. This can be proven to be false; for composition is an effect, and philosophically no effect is conceivable without causation. ... It is self-evidently false. [PUP 423]

Below, we take a closer and more modern look at what Abdul-Bahá terms “accidental.” We explore the reasons why Abdul-Bahá stated, with regard to accidental composition, that “*It is self-evidently false.*”

A Brief Primer on Probability and Large Numbers

For our purposes, the discussion of probabilities and their application to random mutation in an evolutionary context, requires a clear understanding of large numbers and the associated probabilities. So, we dedicate a few paragraphs to each of these related topics.

Large Numbers

Size matters! Just as a glass of water from the ocean, even though identical in composition, cannot contain a whale, does not generate waves, and does not support the development of a hurricane, when large numbers are involved, questions of probabilities transform into questions of possibilities.

We can talk about Quadrillion (10^{15}), Googol (10^{100}), and Googolplex (10^{Googol}), to name a few famous large numbers, but to truly understand the significance and impact of large numbers, we have to look elsewhere. An important key to understanding large numbers is growth rate. Generally, a change in a cause creates a corresponding, but not necessarily proportional change in its effect. We can appreciate the impact of the change in a cause-and-effect context. For example, the speed of a car before an accident is the cause of its impact (zero speed = zero impact). Observing the difference in damages

between impacts resulting from a speed of 10 m.p.h. and a speed of 25 m.p.h., can tell us something more about the effect of speed than observing just one instance of damage. It tells us about the relationship between the cause and effect. In many phenomena encountered in nature, the relationship between cause and effect is not linear. That is, doubling the cause may change the effect less or more than double.

Another important key to appreciating size is comparison to a well-understood quantity. A poignant example is the number of electrons in the universe. One would think this number should be unimaginably large, and it is, but it doesn't look like it. The number of *electrons* in the known *universe* is estimated by the Eddington Number ($N_{\text{Edd}} = \text{number of protons} = \text{number of electrons} = 1.57 \times 10^{79}$), which is less than only 10^{80} ! Compare this to the number of grains of sand on all the beaches on earth. If one is asked about the number of grains of sand, chances are he would estimate it to be more than 10^{80} , or something of this order, without understanding the truly gigantic size of this number. So, let's start by noting that the earth itself is smaller than a grain of sand in comparison to the whole universe, and that each real grain of sand has trillions of trillions of electrons within it.

To fully understand and appreciate the size of this number, let's get some help from growth rate. Avagadro's number specifies the number of atoms in a gram-atom (atomic mass number in grams) of a material. For example, a gram-atom of the element Iron (Fe) is 56, which means a gram-atom of Iron is 56 grams. The Avagadro's number is numerically equal to 6.022×10^{23} . Imagine a 56 gram piece of iron, such as a 4-inch nail. It literally contains 6.022×10^{23} actual Iron atoms. Now let's grow this number from about 10^{23} to 10^{80} . All of a sudden we go from a humble 4-inch nail which fits in the palm of your hand to the size of the entire universe! We can begin to see the immensity of 10^{80} , and even further, the immensity of exponential growth, because by increasing the exponent of Avagadro's number, 23, merely by 57 (to get to 80), we grow from the size of a nail to

the size of the universe. And the growth is even greater than it appears here, because 10^{80} is the number of electrons which are much more numerous than atoms and molecules specified by the Avagadro's number.

Probability

With our new and improved understanding of large numbers, we can now turn our attention to the basics of probabilities. Probability is the field of mathematics for the study of "ignorance," or put more delicately, imperfect knowledge. At its heart, probability is a counting game. We count an outcome or event of interest (E_i) among all possible outcomes or events (E_a) in a process. We say the probability (P) of an outcome of interest is the ratio of the outcomes of interest to all possible outcomes: $P(E_i) = E_i/E_a$.

A few simple examples should make this concept clear. As a first example, a coin has two sides, heads and tails. So, the number of possible outcomes of a coin toss (the process) is 2. If our outcome of interest is heads, the probability of getting heads is: $P(\text{heads}) = \text{heads}/[\text{heads or tails}] = 1/2 = 0.5 = 50\%$, which is intuitively obvious.

As a second example, consider a deck of playing cards, which has 52 cards including four different suits, red and black colors, and 13 different ranks of each suit. So, each card is unique in rank and suit. As such the probability of a particular card, such as 10 of Diamonds, is $P(10 \text{ of Diamonds}) = 1/52$. The probability of a red card is $P(\text{red}) = 26/52 = 1/2 = 50\%$. And the probability of a face is $P(\text{face}) = (3 \text{ faces} \times 4 \text{ suits})/52 = 12/52$.

To be sure, the mathematics of probabilities can get quite complex, including conditional and Bayesian probabilities, various types of density and distribution functions, discrete and continuous density functions, random variables, and many other concepts. However, all of the complexity encountered is in the service of counting or quantifying the number of events of

interest and the number of total possible outcomes. But these complicated counting techniques for complicated processes do not alter the basic nature of probability as a simple ratio defined above.

Two of the most common and useful counting techniques include combinations and permutations. A combination of N objects is the number of ways the N objects can be combined regardless of the order of the objects. For example, given three object A, B, and C, the combination ABC and CAB are considered to be the same combination.

For the analysis of probabilities governing DNA mutations, we need permutations, which is defined as N objects selected for P positions. A familiar example of permutation is found in combination locks. Imagine a three-dial padlock with 10 digits on each dial. For each of the 10 digits on the first dial, there are 10 digits on the second dial, and for each of the 10 digits on the second dial, there are 10 digits on the third one. Thus, the number of permutations possible is $10 \times 10 \times 10 = 1,000$. In general, the number of permutations of N objects arranged in P positions is N^P . In permutations, order is important, so ABC and CAB are two different permutations.

Possibility of Random Evolution

As a probability model, permutation is perfectly suited for the structure of DNA. Applied to DNA, N = the number of nucleobase = 4 (i.e., A, C, G, and T), and P = number of positions = 3 Billion, because each of four nucleobase are arranged in three billion positions on the DNA molecule. Thus, the number of possible permutations of the human DNA is $4^{3,000,000,000} = 10^{1,807,000,000} = 10^{1.8B}$.

In the context of evolution based on random mutations, a desired probability event is a DNA combination that results in a useful trait of a living organism, a “useful trait” being any part of the anatomy, physiology, or behavior of the organism that

enhances its chances of survival in its environment. For example, thick white fur for the polar bear are traits that enhance its chances of survival in its polar environment by providing warmth and camouflage. Similarly, large ears serve the African elephant by providing cooling in the hot desert climate. But these traits are generated by particular combinations of the nucleobases forming the genes of these animals. A variation in the genes of the African elephant may result in ears like a cat instead of an elephant, ears growing out of its rump, or worse yet, no ears at all. The point is that very few combinations of nucleobases may result in a trait optimized for survival in a particular environment.

Generally, in any system, and particularly complex systems, there is a very small subset of the combinations of its components that would create a functional system. This is a rather obvious point when considering a concrete example, such as a computer, an electronic circuit board, or an industrial machine. For example, even in a relatively simple system such as a bicycle, the components, such as the handlebar, wheels, chain, pedal, seat, etc. must be assembled in a particular configuration for the bicycle to function. Maybe the left and right pedals could be interchanged, or the handlebar can be assembled backwards, constituting various functional configurations, but the wheel and the seat cannot be interchanged to create a working configuration.

A living organism is many orders of magnitude more complex than any human-made “complex” system. Compared with the total number of permutations in the DNA molecule, $10^{1.8B}$, the number of permutations that may result in useful traits is miniscule, as is the probability of it happening randomly. Actually, the probability of a random mutation of a large DNA molecule resulting in a useful change in an animal would be close to mathematical zero. To show how this result works out, let's examine some numbers. Since the beginning of life on earth, it is estimated that about two Billion animal species have *ever existed* on earth (estimates range from 1 to 4 Billion), with

about 8.7 million existing on earth today. Let's assume *each* species on the average has one Billion characteristics or traits created by the genetic code. Such characteristics include anatomical features, physiological characteristics, behavioral adaptations, instincts, cellular and organ processes, and any other type of trait that is embodied in the animal. The probability of any one of these features occurring randomly is:

$$\begin{aligned} P(\text{one useful trait}) &= [\text{number of all traits ever created}] / \\ &[\text{total DNA permutations}] \\ &= [2 \times 10^9 \times 10^9] / 10^{1.8B} \\ &= [2 \times 10^{18}] / 10^{1.8B} = 0 \end{aligned}$$

Equation 1.

Well, this probability is actually not zero, strictly and mathematically speaking, but there isn't enough paper in a stationary store to write all the zeros after the decimal point: 0.0000...2. The number of zeros after decimal point is 1.8 Billion minus 18! that's *1.8 Billion zeros* before the 2. This number, representing the probability, is zero in any context and for any purpose. And just for fun, if there were one Billion mutations per second for the last 4.5 billion years (approximate age of earth), we would cover only about 1.4×10^{26} combinations out of the $10^{1.8B}$ possible DNA combinations, which can be shown in a manner similar to equation (1) above, is equivalent to a zero portion of the total combinations.

And the above is the probability of only a single useful trait, randomly selected. This means that this probability is repeated for every one of the 2×10^{18} traits. So, the probability of all of these traits having resulted from a random process since the beginning of life on earth is represented by the fraction $[2 \times 10^{18}] / 10^{1.8B}$ multiplied by itself 2×10^{18} times! That makes the denominator unimaginably large and the probability unimaginably small. Even a description of the size will be

difficult to manage, let alone showing the number itself. In short, random evolution is an impossible proposition.

Microevolution

To get around the obviously impossible odds of random mutation to create even a single trait of a single organism, let alone the millions of traits of each of the two Billion species, the mechanism of microevolution has been proposed. Simply put, microevolution is identical to the process of evolution described above, which is a description of macroevolution, but it is limited to small mutations (small changes) within a species. Over time, accumulated microevolutions may result in a macroevolution differentiating a new species from an original or existing species. So, microevolution and macroevolution are the same process at different time (and change) scales.

The purported benefit of this theory to get around the non-existent probability of random mutation is that a small mutation is much more probable than a single big mutation. Sure enough, this is a true statement, but its scope is limited to a single microevolution, not a series of them that collectively result in the same macro evolution. You cannot cheat mathematics or get around it by intellectual parlor tricks.

Let's look at the probabilities of microevolution more closely. This examination will show that the probability of a big change is the same as the collective probability of a cumulative series of small changes that result in the same big change. With reference to Figure 5 below, imagine a string of nine nucleobases, each position on the string having a choice of the four nucleobase A, C, G, and T. The number of combinations possible for the whole string is thus $N^p = 4^9$. So, the total probability of a new combination obtained by random mutation for the whole string is based on this number (as the probability denominator). Now, let's see how the probabilities change if only a subset of the whole string is mutated. Consider three subsets defined by positions 1-4, 5-6, and 7-9. The respective

probabilities for these three subsets are based on 4^4 , 4^2 , and 4^3 , as the total number of combinations possible for the respective subsets. But, the total probability, namely, the probability that particular events happen in the three subsets separately, but that collectively yield a desirable trait is calculated as: $4^4 \times 4^2 \times 4^3 = 4^{4+2+3} = 4^9$, which is the same as the probability of the whole string changing at once, as pointed out above.

Whether the subsets above are defined in time or space, that is, whether they belong to the same DNA molecule (defined over space) or belong to different DNA molecules, which are combined over time (defined over time), the probabilities work out the same.

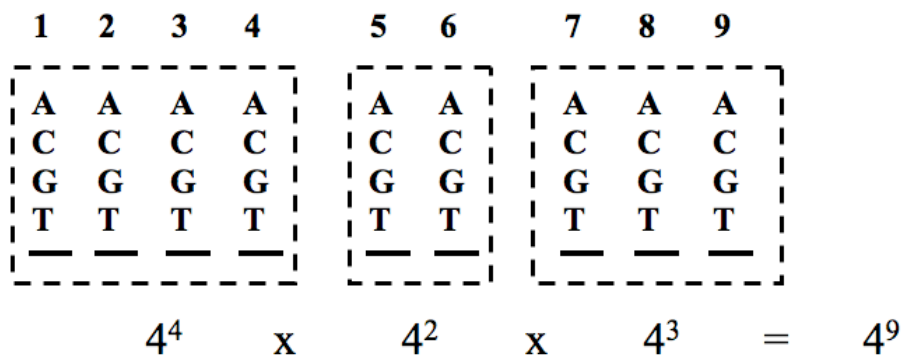


Figure 5: Equivalence of Micro probabilities and overall probability

Another point that merits attention is that even though, as shown above, the probabilities of random mutation ending up in any useful trait is zero, those probabilities were calculated based on the full human DNA with 3 Billion nucleobases. The DNA molecules of the earlier life forms were much smaller, so the probabilities of generating useful traits by chance would have been more realistic, relatively speaking. However, probabilities still decrease exponentially as complexity rises. How probabilities decrease as a function of complexity can be

better understood when described in more detail using illustrative examples.

In a probabilistic system, starting with simple components, simple subassemblies may be formed by chance that happen to be useful. Simple components by nature have simple requirements to combine with other simple components to form subassemblies. We will call these level-1 subassemblies. For example, consider children's building blocks (like Lego blocks) that can be assembled into various structures, vehicles, and the like. Individual blocks can be combined randomly to build simple subassemblies such as a right angle corner, a simple staircase-like structure, a curved section, and the like. Next level of combination will involve combining these level-1 subassemblies into level-2 subassemblies. However, the requirements to do so will be more complex also because level-1 subassemblies can only be combined in more peculiar ways with other level-1 subassemblies to produce a useful level-2 subassembly. For example, to form a circle as a level-2 subassembly, two or more curved sections must be connected end to end to form the circle. If they are combined end to middle, or the curvature is backwards, then a circle will not result.

Hence, as we get more complex subassemblies from simpler ones, the probability of randomly forming the next level also decreases exponentially. This exponential decrease of probability is due to two factors: one, the increased number of subassemblies at each level, creating a larger total number of outcomes (i.e., increasing the probability ratio denominator), and two, the particular ways and limited ways that complex subassemblies can combine with each other to create useful higher-level subassemblies, creating a smaller number of useful combinations (i.e., decreasing the probability ratio numerator). In effect, as the subassemblies become more numerous and more complex, a wall of probability rises very quickly against forming the next level of subassemblies by chance. For example, the building blocks are very unlikely to form a complex

structure, such as a house with multiple rooms, windows, and doors, by random combination from successively more complex subassemblies. Thus, clearly this wall of probability will preclude the random creation of complex systems, such as living organisms, from simpler forms beyond the very elementary stages. This is another aspect of the discussion we had above with respect to Figure 5 regarding combined probabilities of smaller subsets.

The above discussions covered the probabilistic aspect of the high-to-low flow principle. It showed that in probabilistic systems in which randomness plays a role, combinations having *low* probability (complex systems with *high* content level) cannot result from simpler components having *high* probability (simple systems with *low* content level). It also means that the high-level contents of a complex system must preexist within the simple components or augment them from another external source.

Alternative Models of Evolution

So, if the species did not come about by random mutation, how did the two billion or so species, each with millions of complex and optimized attributes, appear on earth during the past few billion years? In light of the above principles, there are at least two major possibilities. One, each mutation was directed or guided by God in a transcendental manner, which precludes direct and complete scientific observation because one end of such interaction, namely God's end, is in non-observable realms. And two, the potential for each mutation that results in useful traits is already built into the DNA molecule and is only triggered by various events or stimuli, which may be random (such as cosmic rays) or regular (such as seasonal or climate changes) in nature. As a hypothetical example, the potential of color change in the arctic fox that allows a change of color in its coat to pure white in the winter and to dark and light patches in the summer, may have been built into the DNA of its ancestor prior to the development of

the arctic species. At some point, the intense cold might have triggered this built-in potential to change the DNA in a very specific way in response to such external stimuli.

Such design is similar to the design of a software system in which various logical input conditions cause the program to behave differently because the logic to respond to each type of input is already designed and built into the program. In the absence of a particular input type, the appropriate response to it is hidden and is not externally visible. But once that input type is applied, the corresponding program behavior is triggered. As a specific example, consider the software behavior on a modern smart phone, which is designed to respond to both voice and text data. If all you receive are voice calls, then the phone simply rings like old telephones to alert the user and provide voice communications. But if it receives a text message, then it displays the message and allows the user to enter text in response. No voice communication is established. The point is that both behaviors are built into the software of the phone, but each one appears only when the appropriate input type is applied. Similarly, if all useful animal attributes for each species are already designed into the DNA of the species, then it only takes an external trigger to genetically transform the animal to a new species (or a different and better adapted version of the existing species) revealing new attributes and behaviors. Even though such attributes give the illusion of being completely new and randomly occurring, actually, they might already have been designed in.

Hence, whether God actively guides each mutation as it happens or He has already built in the potential in the DNA from the beginning, the mutation process cannot be purely random. A point that merits mentioning here is that a process may be random in some regards, yet purposeful in others. For example, if one walks a mile from home to work, each step that he takes is random as he does not purposefully select each exact spot on the ground on which he sets foot in each step. Yet, his destination is not random. If he repeats this exercise every day,

he always ends up at his work place, not some random destination like the grocery store, or the park. Hence, in the process of walking, we see that both elements of randomness and purposefulness can coexist without being contradictory. So it is with evolution. There may well be random elements in the evolutionary process, such as various internal or external events, climate change, etc., but the end-to-end process cannot be random in its entirety.

An Alternative View of the Origins of Creation

We saw that the big bang was more of a description rather than an explanation of creation. Even at that, it is probably just a partial description of some aspects of the process of creation. The pre-existence principle requires that something pre-exists everything, including the universe itself. That something is in another realm, the realm of pre-existence, which by implication contains the universe and all its potentials. So, pre-existence was there *before* the existence of the universe. But, part of the big bang and inflation theory is that time itself came into existence at the moment of the big bang and there was no “*before*” prior to the big bang. So, how do we reconcile the concept of “pre-existence,” which implies “before,” with the concept of no time prior to the big bang in the realm of pre-existence?

Order and Priority

To answer this question we need to examine the concept of “priority.” Time may be represented by a sequence of ordered values akin to integers: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, The concepts of “before” and “after” are meaningful in the context of this sequence. For example, with respect to time = 4, times 1, 2, and 3 are “before” and times 5 and 6 are “after.” But, time is not the only sequence imaginable. Many sequences are possible. Any variable that represents a quantity and which can take on ordered values defines a sequence. And in every ordered

sequence we have a “before” and an “after” with respect to each value in the sequence. For example, if there are 10 trees in a row numbered from 1 to 10, a sequence is defined, which is independent of time. Traversing the trees from 1 to 10, the 6th tree in the sequence is always “before” the 8th tree and “after” the third one, regardless of time. Hence, in the realm of pre-existence a sequence different from our familiar time may define and dictate events. In this context, pre-existence came before the universe in an abstract sequence, not in time.

Types of Causality

Closely related to the concept of sequence is the concept of causality we reviewed in relation to Figure 1 above. The causality with which we are familiar is defined by the material world and operates in time: cause always precedes effect chronologically. We will call this chronological causality. Next we will introduce another type of causality: the Relational Causality. The relational causality is defined by relationships, not by the material world, and operates in an abstract sequence, not in time. For example, a triangle “causes” the sum of its internal angles to equal 180 degrees. In this example, we say that the triangle “causes” the sum of its angles to be 180 degrees because the existence of the triangle always comes first, not in time, but in sequence. This means three angles the sum of which add up to 180 degrees do not necessarily define a triangle. They may be created by several intersecting lines in various configurations, such as four intersecting lines which do not create a closed loop as shown in Figure 6, below:

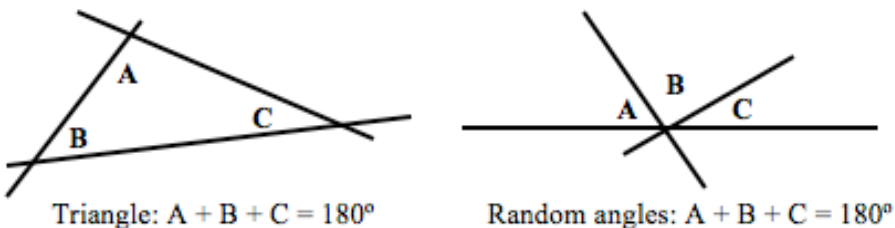


Figure 6: Illustration of Relational Causality

Thus, the triangle takes precedence and has priority, in a relational sense, over its angles, but not vice versa. There is no chronological distance, that is, no time passes between the creation of a triangle and the emergence of its internal angles, which add up to 180 degrees. It is literally instantaneous. Mathematically, at the moment of the creation of the triangle, the three internal angles are also formed and add up to 180 degrees. This is relational causality: no time is needed, but there is still a cause-and-effect relationship.

An important property of relational causality is that the relational cause is permanently needed to sustain the relational effect. Thus, not only there is a causation relationship between the relational cause and effect, there is also a sustaining relationship between the two: the cause creates the effect and then must sustain it during its existence. If the cause is removed, the effect will automatically and instantaneously cease to exist. For example, the moment a triangle is formed, it causes the sum of its angles to be 180 degrees. And the moment the triangle is taken apart, the sum of its angles ceases to be 180 degrees. Hence, not only the triangle creates the angle configuration, but also it is needed to sustain it. This is in contrast to chronological causality that once the effect is created the cause can go away without affecting the effect. For example, if a rock is thrown and causes a glass to break, the rock can be removed and the glass remains broken. The rock is not needed anymore to keep the glass broken.

Properly defined, relational causality is the inherence relationship between two entities. Inherence is not a two-way street. If A and B are inherent, that is, if they always appear together, still one entity always has precedence. One entity is always “first” in the sense of an abstract sequence, and the other one is “next.” Inherence is shown in logical terms using a propositional logic operation called implication or *modus ponens*. The reason that inherence is one-way is found in the properties of implication:

If $[A \Rightarrow B \text{ AND } B \Rightarrow A]$, Then $A = B$;⁷

Equation 2.

The above is a well-known and easily proven result of logical implication. This means if A and B both imply each other, that is, if the inherence relationship between A and B was two-way, then A and B would be identical, one, and *the same*. Therefore, an inherence relationship between A and B, as *different* entities, must be one-way with A taking precedence over B.

Realms of Existence

After this necessary excursion into the alternate concepts of “before” and “after” in the context of non-time sequences, and relational causality, we can now get back to the alternate view of creation.

Based on the principle of pre-existence, a realm outside of our physical universe must exist to provide the universe with its pre-existing seed, the potential for all that is contained in the universe including its matter, energy, laws of nature, etc. all before the big bang happened.

Based on the principle of high to low flow, the contents, in whatever form, must originate from a high level to a low level. The question that naturally comes up is: where did the pre-existing seed come from? And the causality saga continues backwards towards the ultimate source, the First Cause. If we are to finally break the causality chain, terminating it with the First Cause, we must understand the requirements of being the First Cause.

The first requirement of being the First Cause is that it cannot have any boundaries, because a boundary necessitates a supply on the other side, continuing the chain of causality. By definition of a boundary, the only way a boundary can be avoided is if the First Cause is infinite in every sense, which is also a prime part of the attributes of what God is. This

requirement also precludes the multiplicity of god. If He has no boundaries, then God never “ends” for another god to “begin.”

Another requirement is that the First Cause must contain, in some form, all attributes, properties, and contents of everything subordinate to it, because all of these entities must originate from the First Cause. Therefore, being the ultimate origin of mind and intellect (and everything else), the First Cause cannot be a simple or mindless law, like the laws of nature we observe. It cannot simply be some mindless property that causes other forms of existence to come into being. Because such mindless properties cannot contain the more advanced attributes, as discussed above with respect to high to low flow principle. In one of His prayers, the Bab bears ample witness to this truth:

Whatever God hath willed hath been, and that which He hath not willed shall not be. There is no power nor strength except in God, the Most Exalted, the Most Mighty. [BP 131]

And the third requirement is that the First Cause must be homogeneous and elemental, that is, it cannot be composed of any components or parts. Because as soon as it has parts, then it is conceivable that the parts can be separated, decomposing the First Cause. Moreover, having components introduce internal limits that violate the first requirement above.

A few points are noteworthy here. Even though a “requirement” smacks of “limitations,” the above three requirements are anything but constraints or limitations on God. To the contrary, they are His attributes, the descriptions of His limitless and unconstrained nature: being *infinite* and having *no boundaries, containing everything* conceivable in some form, and *not having any parts* that create internal boundaries and limitations, are all descriptions of His absolute and utter independence and self-sufficiency. Another important point is that these attributes (or “requirements”) set Him apart

from His creation, making him categorically different from the other ordinary links in the causal chain. None of his creation at any point has any of these attributes as described above. None of these are true about the physical existence and none are true about the realm of pre-existence. So, God must dwell in a realm all His own, as confirmed in Bahá'í Writings: “*God singly and alone abideth in His own place which is holy above space and time, mention and utterance, sign, description, and definition, height and depth.*” [TN 64]

Considering the above points collectively, a conception of the First Cause emerges as an infinite, unchanging, inexhaustible reservoir of existence and its attributes which flows downward into the creation in whatever form it may assume. There may be one or an infinite number of layers between the creation we see as this physical universe and the First Cause, but ultimately the chain must terminate to provide an explanation of the origins of creation because infinite regression is not an explanation. This conception of the First Cause or God, as we commonly refer to Him, is consistent with a willful, purposeful, omniscient, all powerful, all knowing, and intelligent being as the creator, as opposed to a dumb, purposeless, and mindless set of natural laws that just happens to be out there.

An analogy which may be illuminating about the nature of the relationship between God and His creation is that of a human being and his shadow. The shadow of a person *seems* to have a separate existence from him, seems to have its own attributes and behaviors, and more or less reflects the nature of the person, while all the time the shadow is an emanation of that person. It is *not a part* of that person, it has no true independence from him, and is utterly dependent on the person. If the person ceases to exist, so will the shadow. Similarly, the creation and every creature in it, in some sense, may be a shadow of God, reflecting His attributes, to the extent it can. A mineral reflects such attributes at its own level, as does a plant, an animal, and a human.

The Bahá'í Writings teach this verity in numerous tablets. For example, Baha'u'llah expounds:

Say: Nature in its essence is the embodiment of My Name, the Maker, the Creator. Its manifestations are diversified by varying causes, and in this diversity there are signs for men of discernment. Nature is God's Will and is its expression in and through the contingent world. It is a dispensation of Providence ordained by the Ordainer, the All-Wise. [TB 141]

And Abdul-Bahá states, in *Some Answered Questions*,

... all beings and all existences are the centers from which the glory of God is reflected - that is to say, the signs of the Divinity of God are apparent in the realities of things and of creatures. ... Nothing is deprived of this benefit. [SAQ 195]

An interesting implication of this view of the creation is that it necessitates one of two models of the physical universe. One is that once created, as a result of the big bang, the physical universe will eventually die out in a cold death, where no energy differential, thermal or otherwise, remains between any of the material bodies in the universe and thus no interactions of any kind can take place. This is a direct result of the principle of high to low flow in general, and the second law of thermodynamics, in particular. In this scenario, since creation is inherent with the existence of God, another universe must pop out from the realm of pre-existence. Potentially infinitely many universes can pop out from the pre-existence. This is the same result as what is professed in the multi-verse theory of creation, which tries to explain the anthropic nature of this universe and the suitability of its natural laws and constants for life, as explained above. We have arrived at the same conclusion, but for very different reasons. In a sense, existence is like a garden of creation in which God continuously plants new universes

which grow to their perfection and then stay their course until their end.

Another model is that there is only one infinite physical universe, ours, which is somehow replenished with high levels of energy and information by God, may be through more localized big bangs coming out of the quantum fabric underlying the structure of the physical universe. But science has not found any evidence of such process or similar ones so far.

The Greatest Name

A calligraphic representation of the symbol known by Bahá'ís as the "Greatest Name" is shown below in Figure 7. This sacred Bahá'í symbol is related to a number of Tablets by the Bab and Abdul-Bahá that describe its meanings and significance. Briefly, of the three parallel horizontal lines, the lower one represents humanity and the world of creation, the upper line represents the realm of God, and the middle line represents the special station of Manifestations of God or the realm of revelation. The vertical line represents the Primal Will or Holy Spirit proceeding from God through the Manifestations to humanity. The position of Manifestation of God in this symbol is said to be the linking point to God. The two stars or Haykals represent Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb, the twin Manifestations of God.⁸



Figure 7: The Greatest Name

There is a remarkable parallel between the symbolism embedded in the Greatest Name symbol, described above, and

the dictates of logic discussed in this paper. The Greatest Name symbolizes the inherently and permanently separate realms of God, revelation, and creation by parallel lines that never intersect. These are structurally similar and semantically analogous to the realms of God, pre-existence, and physical universe, respectively, discussed in this paper. Additionally, the parallel lines indicate all three realms have always had this relationship with each other and that there was no chronological beginning to one or the other. The vertical line indicates the connection between God and His creation via His Primal Will, consistent with the principle of high to low flow. The similarity between the Greatest Name symbol and the theories developed here is not contrived as we did not start with the Greatest Name symbol or any of its meanings and allusions. Yet, the structure of existence that emerged based on a science-based rational discourse turned out to have a striking similarity to the Greatest Name. We take this as a very welcome confirmation, at least regarding the major points, if not the details.

Conclusion

The question of the origin of creation is very simple. The answer is not. The question simply poses the query “where did all this creation, matter, energy, laws, time, space, natural constants, life, etc., come from?” To attempt to answer this question, in every age, man has depended on his level of knowledge at the time to come up with different theories and explanations. Of course, various religions have provided different stories of creation, which were rooted in truth but were tailored to the understanding of man during their dispensations. As humanity gained knowledge and experience, these explanations were cast aside one by one. In time, a tangled web of detailed information, scientific and cultural, emerged. This tangled web is like the proverbial trees that hide the forest. Thus, what used to be common sense all of a sudden came under question. An outstanding example of the trees hiding the forest, is the theory of evolution that purports to fully explain how

fantastically complex and well-adapted living organisms, billions of them over the ages, came to be through a completely random and mindless process. What seems to be common sense that complex systems cannot spontaneously arise from simpler ones, was suddenly thrown out in favor of complicated explanations that serve to hide the plain truth. Similarly, elaborate theories confirming the big bang and inflation theories also serve the purpose of pushing this question one step back without resolving it.

Far from seeking to discredit or deride the past or present theories and explanations, this paper acknowledges their contributions and uses some of their ideas, but suggests that they do not paint a complete picture and leave important questions unanswered. The lack of comprehensive coverage of these theories is in part due to the discovery of new facts and ideas that create new questions or pose the old questions in a new light.

Aided by modern scientific knowledge, such as the big bang and evolution theories, and modern mathematical logic and probability theory, this paper attempted to answer the unanswered questions based on rational arguments that sort the trees without losing the forest in the process. Some novel approaches, viewpoints, and principles were developed, partially based on similar existing concepts, including the pre-existence principle, the differential principle, the high to low principle, and relational causality. These principles are partly based on science and partly based on rational arguments, and paint a picture considerably different from those before them. This picture includes the observable universe, preceded by or contained in a pre-existent realm, all created by God Who is the relational cause of His creation, its sustainer, and the provider of all its attributes, which flow down from Him. At the same time, the results and conclusions are remarkably consistent with the Bahá'í conception of creation and the relationship between God and His creation.

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- ⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 81-83, 346-370.
- ⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 355-356.
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Bahá'í Consultation and the Transformation of Society

Moojan Momen

Abstract: This paper looks at consultation in the Bahá'í Faith. It starts from the mention of this process in the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* and the manner in which this was initially put into practice in Iran in the late 1870s. It then looks at the ways in which each of the successive leaders of the Bahá'í Faith — Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi emphasized the importance of consultation and promoted its use in the community. Finally, the paper looks at the role of consultation in the transformation of society from the present established and customary practices in the world towards the new World Order that Bahá'u'lláh envisaged.

Consultation in Tribal Societies and in the Bible

The concept of consultation is a very important one sociologically since it signals a move away from authoritarianism towards a situation where the leaders ask the opinions of others before taking decisions. It seems to be common in tribal societies that the elders consult when an important decision is to be made, even if in many cases, it is the leader who makes the final decision. It is possible to find this type of consultation referred to in the Bible for example: "Then King Rehoboam consulted the elders who had served his father Solomon during his lifetime. 'How would you advise me to answer these people?' he asked." (1 Kings 12:6)

There is also advice on consulting in the Book of Proverbs:

A wise man will hear and increase in learning, and a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel. (Proverbs 1:5)

Prepare plans by consultation, and make war by wise guidance. (Proverbs 20:18)

Without consultation, plans are frustrated, but with many counselors they succeed. (Proverbs 15:22)

Consultation in Islam

The Arabic for consultation comes from the root *shin-waw-ra* – root form *shára* means to extract honey from a hive, or from a hollow or from other places where it has been placed by wild bees. From this derived the meaning of extracting or making known a matter (e.g. making known one's thoughts about a matter) and hence in the mutual forms of the verb, the third and sixth forms, the meaning of mutually making known one's thoughts – and hence the meaning of consultation emerges.

In Islam, there has been a general idea that consultation is a good thing. This is based on the authority of the Qur'an where Muhammad is commanded by God to consult with the people whom he rules over in Mecca: "It is part of the Mercy of God that thou dost deal gently with them. Werd thou severe or harsh-hearted, they would have broken away from about thee: so pass over (their faults), and ask for (God's) forgiveness for them; and consult them in affairs (of moment). Then, when thou hast Taken a decision put thy trust in God. For God loves those who put their trust (in Him)" (Qur'an 3:159). Those who order their affairs by mutual consultation are commended (42:38). Consultation is also exhorted upon the Muslims in the family; for example, the parents are urged to consult abut weaning a baby (2:233).

However, these injunctions are vague as to the details of who should be consulted and about what. There is a little more specificity in the Traditions. For example: “‘Ali asked, ‘O Prophet! If we have a matter in which we do not find a command or prohibition then what is your advice?’ He said, ‘Consult the righteous wise people and do not depend upon individual opinion.’”

In the strongly patriarchal and hierarchical society of early Islam, the role of consultation was more or less immediately relegated to the process of choosing a leader, but once the leader was chosen, there seems to have been little idea that he should use consultation in his rule over the people. The first caliph, Abú Bakr, was chosen by a general consultation of those Muslims at the portico of the Banú Sa`d immediately after the death of the prophet. However, important elements of Islamic society were missing from that consultation, in particular `Alí and the family of the Prophet. The second caliph was appointed by the first caliph. The third caliph was appointed by a consultative assembly of six people chosen by the second caliph. The fourth caliph, `Alí, was chosen by general acclamation of the people of Medina and many elements of the Muslim community were not consulted. After this, Mu`áwiyah seized the caliphate and the succession to the caliphate became either hereditary or seized by force down to 1924 when it was abolished. While the classical Sunni jurists continued to recommend consultation (*shúrah*) in the process of electing a caliph, they do not appear to have thought that it played a role in the administration of an Islamic state. Thus, in Sunni Islam, the principle of consultation, while talked about in principle, was largely ignored in practice until modern times which we will consider shortly. Since the consultations that were held to decide the first and third caliph resulted in decisions against `Alí, consultation has never been held in high regard among Shi`i Muslims.

Many Islamic tribal societies have ruled their affairs by calling consultative councils of elders but it is not clear whether

this practice arose out of Islam or was part of the tribe's customary practice even before the conversion to Islam. In modern times, Islamic reformers have argued that the Quranic injunction to consult is the equivalent of modern democracy. And so decisions arrived at through parliamentary processes can be considered to be in accordance with the Qur'an. Conservative scholars reject this idea and say that *shúrah* was only intended as a means for giving advice to the ruler and not for making decisions. Even then it is not obligatory for the ruler to pay attention to the advice given. Moreover, there is no place for non-Muslims in the *shúrah* process.

Modern Democracy

Interestingly, the processes that led to modern democracy do not seem to have been much influenced by any of the calls to consult described above in Judaism, Christianity and Islam. There are two main forms of democracy, direct and representative. Direct democracy stems from ancient Greece and involves convocations of all of the citizenry (which excluded women, slaves, foreigners, non-landowners, and males under 20 years old) who voted on important matters. The main surviving examples of this form of democracy in the modern world is the town meetings in small towns in New England in the United States and in the smaller Swiss municipalities. For obvious reasons, this form of democracy cannot be scaled up for communities of much more than 6-10,000. However, some people have considered that binding referenda are a comparable phenomenon, although limited in that they are typically only organized for major decisions and thus only occur rarely.

Representative democracy, although commonly stated to have originated in Rome, stems more from the struggles in the Middle Ages by the barons to limit the power of the king, which led in England to the Magna Carta in 1215, in which the king's absolute authority was constrained by the concept of due process and there were provisions that taxation could not be

imposed without “common counsel of our realm” (Clauses 12 and 14) – thus establishing a need for a parliament which was first called in 1265. After the English Civil War and the Glorious Revolution of 1688, the English Bill of Rights of 1689 was enacted, and this together with the Reform Act of 1832 established Parliamentary representative democracy as it is known in England. The vote was finally given to women in 1928. Thus at first the barons and aristocrats obtained a say in the running of the country, then propertied males, then all males, then women. The same general process can be described in other countries – none of which had any involvement of the religious principles of consultation.

History of Bahá'í consultation – Bahá'u'lláh

The history of consultation in the Bahá'í Faith starts with the Kitáb-i-Aqdas in which there is a verse establishing Houses of Justice in every locality and instructing that the members should take counsel together:

The Lord hath ordained that in every city a House of Justice be established wherein shall gather counsellors to the number of Bahá, and should it exceed this number it doth not matter. They should consider themselves as entering the Court of the presence of God, the Exalted, the Most High, and as beholding Him Who is the Unseen. It behoveth them to be the trusted ones of the Merciful among men and to regard themselves as the guardians appointed of God for all that dwell on earth. It is incumbent upon them to take counsel together and to have regard for the interests of the servants of God, for His sake, even as they regard their own interests, and to choose that which is meet and seemly. Thus hath the Lord your God commanded you. Beware lest ye put away that which is clearly revealed in His Tablet. Fear God, O ye that perceive. (KA v. 30)

But in Questions and Answers there is also advice on how consultation could take place in other circumstances (and the Universal House of Justice has confirmed that this approach may be used for example in resolving personal problems):

99. QUESTION: Concerning consultation.

ANSWER: If consultation among the first group of people assembled endeth in disagreement, new people should be added, after which persons to the number of the Greatest Name, or fewer or more, shall be chosen by lot. Whereupon the consultation shall be renewed, and the outcome, whatever it is, shall be obeyed. If, however, there is still disagreement, the same procedure should be repeated once more, and the decision of the majority shall prevail. He, verily, guideth whomsoever He pleaseth to the right way. (KA 13)

Towards the end of his life, Bahá'u'lláh became more and more insistent on the importance of consultation. For example in the Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd, he states:

The Great Being saith: The heaven of divine wisdom is illumined with the two luminaries of consultation and compassion. Take ye counsel together in all matters, inasmuch as consultation is the lamp of guidance which leadeth the way, and is the bestower of understanding. (TB 168)

There are many other quotations from Bahá'u'lláh about consultation, stating that “*in all things, it is necessary to consult,*” (CC1 93) and that “*No welfare and no well-being can be attained except through consultation.*” (CC1 93)

There are also examples from history that demonstrate the importance that Bahá'u'lláh attached to consultation:

1. When the Kitáb-i-Aqdas first came to Iran, the Bahá'ís there started to try to implement its provisions. Mírzá

Asadu'lláh Işfahání who was then in Tehran tried to implement some of the administrative instructions in the book. With regard to verse 30, he had no guidance beyond what was in the text and so he applied his own cultural norms to this. He called together, in 1294/1877, some of the prominent Bahá'ís and called this gathering the Assembly of Consultation (*majlis-i shawr*) and the house in which they met the House of Justice. The cultural norms of that society and that time (and indeed of the whole world at that time) was that it was only the elite whose opinions were worth hearing and who should therefore be invited to the consultation.

This group consulted about the affairs of the community, in secret. The minutes of their meetings exist and show that it was decided in 1880 to send three of their number on journeys though Iran to spread the practices of dawn prayers, assemblies of consultation and communal funds. Ibn-i Aşdaq and Mírzá Asadu'lláh Işfahání travelled to Mázandarán and Khurásán, with the latter going on to Yazd and Işfahán, while Hájí Mírzá Háydar `Alí Işfahání went to Hamadán.¹ When Ibn-i Aşdaq informed Bahá'u'lláh of the above-mentioned decision of the assembly of consultation that he and Mírzá Asadu'lláh should proceed to Khurásán, Bahá'u'lláh replied that although he had previously indicated his wish that Ibn-i Aşdaq should remain in the Tehran area, since the decision to go to Khurásán had been arrived at through consultation, He accepted (*maqbúl*) the decision.²

2. When Ibn-i Abhar was forced to leave his hometown of Abhar, he travelled to `Akká. While there he asked Bahá'u'lláh where he should take up his residence. Although Bahá'u'lláh was perhaps better informed about the conditions of the various Bahá'í communities in Iran and elsewhere and could easily have given instructions, he replied that Ibn-i Abhar should return to Iran and consult with the Bahá'ís there about this matter.³

So these appear to be examples of the importance that Bahá'u'lláh attached to the process of consultation and the

manner in which He indicated its importance by subordinating His own guidance to that arrived at by consultation.

`Abdu'l-Bahá

`Abdu'l-Bahá wrote a great deal about consultation. He stated that “*consultation is one of the most fundamental elements of the divine edifice*” (CC1 97) and laid out the spiritual prerequisites for those taking part (CC1 99), emphasising that it should be used for both personal matters (“*Without prior consultation, take no important step in your own personal affairs*” [CC1 98]), that individuals should consult the Bahá’ís administrative institutions (CC1 94) and that the Bahá’í administrative institutions should themselves conduct their affairs and make their decisions through consultation. (CC1 95)

From the early days of his ministry, `Abdu'l-Bahá established the Tehran Assembly (in 1897) through instructing the four Hands of the Cause to select a number of other individuals and form this assembly. He sent individuals such as Ibn-i Abhar around Iran with instructions to set up assemblies of consultation wherever there were Bahá’í communities of a sufficient size. At first in Iran these were appointed bodies but gradually, starting in America, these became elected bodies.

When `Abdu'l-Bahá was in Chicago and had just laid the foundation stone of the House of Worship there and the convention of the Bahá’í Temple Unity was still in session, he declined to speak about the House of Worship. Later he said that if he had spoken, he would have said that the building of the House of Worship should take place immediately, but it should be a matter for the consultative assembly.⁴

Shoghi Effendi

Shoghi Effendi was greatly concerned during his ministry with building up the Bahá’í administration and with issuing guidance regarding Bahá’í consultation. As part of this, he

frequently emphasised the importance of the process of consultation for arriving at decisions in the administrative order and also the importance of Bahá'ís obeying such decisions. In only his second letter to the North American Bahá'ís, Shoghi Effendi related the story that when Shaykh Faraju'lláh al-Kurdí had submitted his Arabic translation of the *Ishráqát* to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the latter, although he was perhaps the best person to judge the quality of the translation, nevertheless instructed the Shaykh to submit his translation to the Spiritual Assembly of Cairo for their approval before publication:

So great is the importance and so supreme is the authority of these assemblies that once 'Abdu'l-Bahá after having himself and in his own handwriting corrected the translation made into Arabic of the *Ishráqát* (the *Effulgences*) by Sheikh Faraj, a Kurdish friend from Cairo, directed him in a Tablet to submit the above-named translation to the Spiritual Assembly of Cairo, that he may seek from them before publication their approval and consent. These are His very words in that Tablet:- “His honor, Sheikh Faraju'lláh, has here rendered into Arabic with greatest care the *Ishráqát* and yet I have told him that he must submit his version to the Spiritual Assembly of Egypt, and I have conditioned its publication upon the approval of the above-named Assembly. This is so that things may be arranged in an orderly manner, for should it not be so any one may translate a certain Tablet and print and circulate it on his own account. Even a non-believer might undertake such work, and thus cause confusion and disorder. If it be conditioned, however, upon the approval of the Spiritual Assembly, a translation prepared, printed and circulated by a non-believer will have no recognition whatever.” (BA 23)

And Shoghi Effendi himself set an example to all Bahá'ís of the need to submit to the results of the consultation of the

assemblies of the administrative order. When he had completed his translation of the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, he sent it to the United States NSA for publication together with a letter from his secretary saying:

As Shoghi Effendi has been emphasizing the need of submitting all publications to the Reviewing Committee, he wants to be the first to abide by that rule, though he hopes that they will not make unnecessary delay.⁵

So what has been presented so far in this article are examples of all three of the central figures in the Bahá'í Faith emphasizing the importance of consultation in their writings and underlining its importance and setting an example for all Bahá'ís by being willing to subordinate their own guidance and decisions and work to the decisions arrived at through consultation by Bahá'ís and Bahá'í institutions.

Theoretical considerations – the Bahá'í transformation of society

In the survey above, examples were given of the use of consultation in religions historically. But as mentioned there, these examples relate to religion giving approval to the practice by leaders of consulting with the elders and the elite, before making a decision. It is really only through secular democratic processes that the power to choose their own leaders has been extended to all adults. Even so, by their hegemonic control of the media and education and the ability that this gives them to shape the norms of society, it is still white wealthy males who occupy most of the higher positions in Western societies and are thus the ones making the decisions for everyone else.

What we appear to see in the Bahá'í Faith is an attempt to end the present hierarchical structures of society – where power is constructed in a pyramid and only a few at the top of the pyramid hold power – and create a more egalitarian society – where every individual is encouraged to form and express

opinions in a consultative process that can then play a meaningful role in the decision-making process.

In doing this, the Bahá'í system can be seen as a fusion of the traditional religious concept of consultation with the secular concepts of both direct and representative democracy. The overall result is, ideally, the involvement of all adult Bahá'ís (and to an extent youth⁶) in the process of decision making both directly in the matter of local affairs and also through representatives in the national and global Bahá'í administrative order. It is easiest to discuss these three elements in the order in which they became applied historically in the Bahá'í community:

1. Representative democracy. Bahá'ís directly elect a local spiritual assembly in every locality where there is a sufficiently large community to do so. They indirectly (through elected representative at a national convention) elect a national spiritual assembly, which in turn directly elects the Universal House of Justice. This is a system of representative democracy – although it differs somewhat in that the elected members of the institutions are not answerable to their electors. These Bahá'í elected institutions make their decisions through consultation and 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that *"It is incumbent upon every one not to take any step without consulting the Spiritual Assembly, and they must assuredly obey with heart and soul its bidding and be submissive unto it..."* (CC1 94)

The institutions elected through this process have ultimate authority over a Bahá'í community. But at the same time, are exhorted to consult with the Bahá'ís under their jurisdiction so that the right balance between this authority and the rights of the individual can be maintained:

Let us also bear in mind that the keynote of the Cause of God is not dictatorial authority but humble fellowship, not arbitrary power, but the spirit of frank and loving consultation. Nothing short of the spirit of a true Bahá'í can hope to reconcile the principles of mercy and

justice, of freedom and submission, of the sanctity of the right of the individual and of self-surrender, of vigilance, discretion and prudence on the one hand, and fellowship, candour, and courage on the other. (BA 63)

2. Consultation. Both Bahá'u'lláh and `Abdu'l-Bahá wrote about the importance of consultation and Shoghi Effendi provided the structure and the principles by which Bahá'í consultation should occur. The important point about Bahá'í consultation is that it is not a consultation of the elite. When there is consultation at the Nineteen-Day Feast, for example, all of those present may participate and if a vote is taken on a resolution to send to the local spiritual assembly, then all voting members vote. The chairman has no casting vote and does not dictate the agenda, but is responsible for ensuring that the consultation is not dominated by aggressive or dominating individuals and that even those who may be reticent are encouraged to speak.

In the Bahá'í authoritative texts, it is emphasized that Bahá'í method of consultation is a skill to be learned. (CC2 96) In the last decade, Bahá'ís have been going through a sequence of courses. Part of the training imparted in these courses is to enable people to think about issues and to express their thoughts in consultation with others. This training is very important for the large numbers of people in any community who have been relegated to the lowest level in the power pyramid, sometimes because of their lack of education or intellectual capacity, but also often because of their gender, race, religion or class. Such individuals have experienced all their lives the fact that their opinions do not matter, have been told what to think about issues by the newspapers and television and have learned to remain silent when those higher up the pyramid have been present. They need to be trained to think for themselves about issues (and not just to repeat what they have been told to think) and to have the confidence to express those thoughts in the consultation setting.

3. Direct Democracy. The most recent element in the present complex of Bahá'í decision making is the local Reflection Meeting. Here all those interested meet to consider the needs of the locality and to consult about both what has happened in the previous period (and what lessons may be drawn from this) and also to draw up a plan of action for the forthcoming period. The focus of the consultation is to promote the welfare and prosperity of the local area. At a minimum this involves organising children's classes, junior youth empowerment programmes and devotional meetings as well as the sequence of training courses mentioned above. But as the community develops, then other needs of the community can be addressed and plans for action drawn up.

All present at Reflection Meetings may engage in the consultation and thus be part of the decision-making process regarding the plans of action. This may include individuals who are not Bahá'ís but are interested to carry forward this programme of action; this group of people are called the "community of interest". This is an important development since not only are the voiceless gender, racial, and class elements in society being given a voice but also, probably for the first time in religious history, the boundary between believer and non-believer is also being broken down. This development means a change towards a situation where everyone in a locality really can be "*one spirit, one soul, leaves of one tree, flowers of one garden, waves of one ocean*" (PUP 23). In addition, a number of groups of people who may feel excluded from the Bahá'í community because they do not feel able to keep the laws of Bahá'u'lláh in particular areas, or they want to remain as members of their existing religious community because of family pressures or they cannot accept certain of the Bahá'í teachings, can nevertheless participate in the Reflection Meetings and the programme of action. Also included in the consultations at the Reflection Meetings may be members of the elected Bahá'í institutions, the local spiritual assembly, and the members of the appointed arm of the administration

(Auxiliary Board members and their assistants), whose responsibilities focus on the encouragement and guidance of the community. These participants are able to feed in the learning from other localities as well as providing guidance on the best way forward.

The Reflection Meetings and the sequence of courses that is designed to enable people to consult and thus to participate in the Reflection Meetings appear adequately to take care of the problems associated with delivering simultaneously what James Fiskin regards as the three desirable but usually incompatible characteristics of a system of direct democracy – the Democratic Reform Trilemma:⁷

Participation – universal participation in the decision-making process by the people affected. This is achieved in the Bahá'í mechanism by motivating and giving people the skills in the sequence of courses to become involved in community action and giving them the confidence and skills to participate in the consultative process.

Deliberation – thoughtful and rational discussion where all major points of view are weighted according to evidence. This is achieved by training all members of the community in the sequence of course to engage meaningfully in the consultation process. The Bahá'í consultation process itself involves gathering the facts, then applying the relevant spiritual and moral principles to the subject under discussion and lastly formulating a plan.

Equality – all members of the population on whose behalf decisions are taken have an equal chance of having their views taken into account. This is again achieved through the consultation process where all are encouraged to put forward their opinions and these are then discussed without reference to the personalities of those who put forward the proposal. The sequence of courses is designed to empower the disempowered and enable them to take part in the process on an equal footing with others.

In a letter of 1 October 1969, the Universal House of Justice wrote that: "Authority and direction flow from the Assemblies, whereas the power to accomplish the tasks resides primarily in the entire body of the believers" (MUHJ68-73 30). As a result of the developments of the last two decades in the Bahá'í world, we seem to be moving to a situation where the ultimate authority to set the framework of action of the Bahá'í community rests with the administrative institutions established through a system of representative democracy. But the immediate plans of action and day-to-day activities of the Bahá'í community and its wider community of interest proceed in accordance with a system of direct democracy at the Reflection Meeting. Thus the power to create the programmes of action that will carry forward these processes resides with the individual Bahá'ís who attend the Reflection Meeting and carry out the plans decided there. And both the decision making by the institutions of the representative democracy and the decision making in the Reflection Meetings is done through a consultative process, as is the interaction between the elected institutions and the community of Bahá'ís. Consultation is thus the oil that keeps the whole machine running and thus the quality of consultation is an important element in the success of the system.

The Bahá'í world is still at a very early stage in the development of this system of combined representative and direct democracy. The exact nature of the relationship between the Bahá'í institutions and the direct democracy of the Reflection Meetings has not yet been fully worked out. Questions such as: what happens when a Reflection Meeting takes a decision that the local assembly disapproves of? What will happen if the community of interest attending Reflection Meetings outnumber the Bahá'ís and start to take decisions that are against Bahá'í principles, such as taking off in a party political direction? Regarding such matters, the Universal House of Justice envisages the consultations that go on at the Reflection Meetings as a fluid, open, inclusive system where

experimentation and flexibility are encouraged as part of an ongoing learning process involving all individuals, communities, and institutions:

It should be remembered that the aim of such consultations, beyond addressing certain practical considerations, is to maintain a high level of enthusiasm and to create a spirit of service and fellowship among those present. Discussions should not become bogged down by undue concern for procedural issues, but should focus on what can be achieved and on the joy of witnessing the fruits of hard work and diligent effort.⁸

The Bahá'í programme would thus appear to be a very radical attempt to restructure society away from its present hierarchal, patriarchal, hegemonic form into a new form that is more egalitarian, allowing many who are currently powerless and cowed into silence to be empowered. In a way, this parallels a movement in the wider society that is also tending to bring down the hierarchical structures in society by bypassing them through social networking and electronic communications. This movement can be seen in the Arab Spring, the anti-globalization movement, and the spontaneous unorganized street revolts that are occurring in many countries where the people are protesting the actions of their government.

Neither the Bahá'í process or the street movements can be categorised in the old political framework of Left and Right Wing politics. They contain elements of both Left (in their move towards a more egalitarian society) and Right (in their desire to decentralize and empower the individual). The nearest analogy that can be drawn is in an example from the Internet. The old internet, the so-called Web 1.0, consisted of webpages where the flow of information was one-way – from the owner of the web-page to the viewer. This corresponds to the present political system with its hierarchy where orders come down to the masses, who have little control over what happens to them, partly as a result of the manipulation and control of

information by the hierarchy. Web 2.0 refers to pages where the content is created by the viewers – such sites as Wikipedia, blogs, Facebook, etc. With Web 2.0, the owner of the web-pages is only responsible for setting the subject and controlling excesses. This corresponds to the mechanism that Bahá'ís are creating, where everyone is encouraged to participate in community action and in the consultative decision-making process, while the authority for setting the agenda and controlling excesses rests with the local assembly.

Lastly, the question arises as to whether we can see all of this foreshadowed in the writings of the founder of the Bahá'í Faith. Bahá'u'lláh wrote in the framework of a highly hierarchical, traditional society, for which the norms were completely different to those operating today. Furthermore, he needed to be diplomatic in what he wrote so that his words would not become a source of problems for the Bahá'í community by appearing to align them with elements in Iran who were advocating radical measures of reform and causing alarm to the government. However, one possible meaning of the following quotation could refer to the present developments in the Bahá'í Faith. This passage is from the *Lawḥ-i-Ittiḥád*, which has not yet been officially translated. In this tablet, Bahá'u'lláh describes six types of unity. A provisional translation of the first unity is:

Thou hast asked about unity (ittiḥád). The first kind of unity is unity in religion. This unity has always been the cause of the victory of the Faith of God in every age and century. Togetherness is the mystic sword of God.

For example, should a government see that most of the people of the country have rent asunder the veils and are turning towards the horizon of Divine revelation, it should remain silent and should listen to what is said. Each person who is attentive attains to the knowledge of God, except those who are utterly distant from the Mercy of God.⁹

When I first translated this tablet more than a decade ago, the way I had translated this passage was rejected by a number of Persian speakers. The issue was around the interpretation to be given to the words rendered above as “it [the government] should remain silent and listen to what is said (*sákit shavad va ánchih guftih shavad bishnavad*)”. They thought (and I later discovered that Mr Adib Taherzadeh when discussing this tablet summarizes this tablet in this way also) that this sentence should be read as though “what is said” means “what is said by the Divine Revelation” – that is to say that if the majority of a nation became Bahá’ís, then the government should be silent and pay heed to the words of the Bahá’í revelation. Or in the paraphrase of Mr Taherzadeh: “when the majority of the people in a country embrace His Cause, then the government will be able to put into practice His teachings and commandments.”¹⁰

Given the recent developments in the Bahá’í Faith described above, I now think that my original translation may well have been correct and that “what is said” refers to “what is said by the people”. In other words that once the people were following the path laid down by God, the government should allow the people to take control of their own affairs and should listen to what they say; in other words that they would be able to steer their own path and would need little control and direction from the centre.¹¹ If this second reading is correct, it points to the path that Shoghi Effendi indicated when he laid down the principle that the Bahá’í community should, as far as possible operate in a decentralised manner.¹² This is also the path that the Universal House of Justice has taken as it has gradually devolved responsibility for the creation and execution of expansion plans from the international level to the national level and increasingly to the local level, as the communities have matured and gained experience. It also points to the evolution of the Reflection Meeting where once the people in an area have had the necessary training through the sequence of courses and have understood the Bahá’í system of consultation, they can be

allowed to plan and execute programmes of action. In the words of the Universal House of Justice:

Specifically, a space has been created, in the agency of the reflection meeting, for those engaged in activities at the cluster level to assemble from time to time in order to reach consensus on the current status of their situation, in light of experience and guidance from the institutions, and to determine their immediate steps forward.¹³

NOTES

- ¹ Asadu'lláh Işfahání, *Yád-dásht-há* (Photocopy of mss. Completed c. 1300/1882), p. 7; Rúḥu'lláh Mihrábkhání, "Maḥáfil-i Shawr dar 'Ahd-i Jamál-i Aqdas-i Abhá," *Payám-i Bahá'í* no. 28 (Feb. 1982) 9-11; no. 29 (March 1982) 8-9. Strangely, Hájí Mírzá Ḥaydar 'Alí Işfahání, although he describes this journey in his narrative, does not mention encouraging the Bahá'ís to set up these practices. It may be that this matter had less importance for Hájí Mírzá Ḥaydar 'Alí than it did for Mírzá Asadu'lláh Işfahání. See *Bihjat us-Şudúr* (Hofheim: Bahá'í-Verlag, 2002), pp. 160-61).
- ² Vahid Rafati, *Payk-i Rástán* (Darmstadt: 'Aşr-i Jadíd, 2005), p. 77.
- ³ 'Abdu'l-'Alí 'Alá'í, *Mu'assasih-yi Ayádí-yi Amru'lláh* (Tehran: Mu'assasih Maṭbú'át Millí Amrí, 130 B.E./1973), pp. 425-6.
- ⁴ Maḥmúd Zarfání, *Badáyi' al-Áthár* vol. 1 (2 vols., reprint, Hofheim-Langenhain: Bahá'í-Verlag, 1982), p. 67; trans. by Mohi Sobhani as *Maḥmúd's Diary* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1998), p. 76.
- ⁵ *Bahá'í News*, No. 46, November 1930, p. 2.
- ⁶ Youth can take part in the local Reflection meetings. The present definition of adult Bahá'ís as being those over 21 years of age was imposed by Shoghi Effendi in the 1920s for the sake of uniformity throughout the Bahá'í world because assembly incorporation would have been impossible if people under the age of 21, who in most countries at that time were regarded as minors, had been elected onto local assemblies. It seems likely that in due course, the age for being eligible to vote and be voted for will go down, perhaps in stages, to the age that Bahá'u'lláh has declared to be the age of maturity — fifteen (*Kitab-i-Aqdas*, Questions and Answers, question no 20). There is some question as to exactly what is meant by fifteen in this text. Since the Persian reckoning of the age of fifteen is

when someone enters the fifteenth year, which in most Western customary ways of reckoning age is the age of fourteen.

⁷ James S. Fishkin, *When the People Speak: Deliberative Democracy and Public Consultation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), chap. 2; and James Fiskin, “Deliberative Democracy and Constitutions”, in Ellen Frankel Paul, Fred D. Miller Jr, and Jeffrey Paul (eds), *What Should Constitutions Do?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 248-260.

⁸ The Universal House of Justice quoted in International Teaching Centre, *Building Momentum*, section 3.3

⁹ *Ad'iyiyih-yi Ḥaḍrat-i Maḥbúb* (reprint Germany 1980), pp. 388-389.

¹⁰ Adib Taherzadeh, *Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, vol. 4 (Oxford: George Ronald, 1987), p. 191.

¹¹ When this paper was presented at the `Irfan Colloquium in Acuto in June 2013, Mr Ali Nakhjavani communicated to me his personal understanding of this passage. He believes that it refers to the situation when the Bahá'í Faith is a state religion and the majority of the people are Bahá'ís. At that time, Bahá'u'lláh is stating, in a diplomatic manner, that the government, which may not at this stage be composed of Bahá'ís, should listen to what the people are saying.

¹² Shoghi Effendi, quoted in *Lights of Guidance*, no. 568, p. 172. See also *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 41-2.

¹³ Universal House of Justice, message addressed to the Bahá'ís of the World, Riqdán 2010.

The Inebriation of His Enrapturing Call

(mast-and bulbulán)¹

Julio Savi

Nightingales Are Inebriated²

He is the Glorious

Nightingales are inebriated by the melody of His enrapturing Call,³ [8.1]

And spirit lovers by one draught of His enrapturing Call.

In a fit of ecstasy, souls conjoin with the Adored One,

As soon as they hear a cry of His enrapturing Call.

Spirit lovers fly away to the remote Tree of Love,

If they are assisted by the melody of His enrapturing Call.

The world of Being is intoxicated as a lover by beauty,

If the Cup-bearer hands round the wine of His enrapturing Call.

The Moses of Spirit faints on the Mystic Mount, [8.5]

If the Sinai is lit with the spark of His enrapturing Call.

The Sinai of the heart shines and the soul dances,

If the earth echoes with a warbling of His enrapturing Call.

Any shade of strangeness disappears from the pages of the world,

If a breeze wafts from the locks of His enrapturing Call.

As He arises, you see the lovers resurrected, and hear

Sarafiel's trumpet from the blow of His enrapturing Call.

Spirit lovers fly towards the Heavenly Throne, and beyond it,

When they are drawn to love in their ecstasy of His enrapturing Call.

Lovers eagerly forfeit their lives, if in the world [8.10]

The splendour is unveiled of His enrapturing Call.

The breeze of eternity wafts in this Day from the mortal kingdom,

'Cause a fragrant scent breathes from the musk of His enrapturing Call.

The Maids in the glorious chambers go into raptures,

If they hear the melody of His enrapturing Call.

New designs are drawn in the world of water and clay,

If from the East the features arise of His enrapturing Call.

The earthly world and the holy and glorious bowers catch fire,

If heaven resounds with a sigh of His enrapturing Call.

Mortal ears forget what they heard in the world, [8.15]

If they just enter the circle of His enrapturing Call.

Life comes to naught, nothingness takes on eternity's hues,

If the things unseen emerge from the veil of His enrapturing
Call.

Craving hearts vanish into utter self-effacement,

If they catch one glimpse of the flame of His enrapturing
Call.

How could have the Messiah crossed the heavenly vault,

Shouldn't He have been guided by the roar of His
enrapturing Call?

Besides Him, no one could set his foot into the world of being,

So earnest is the watcher of His enrapturing Call.

No mortal eye could see any hue of existence, O son, [8.20]

If, for an instant, the eye would close of His enrapturing
Call.

O thirsty ones, plunge into the holy, and sanctified waters,

As the fountain is flowing of His enrapturing Call.

O Dervish, stop setting the fire of meanings to the world:

His enrapturing Call is entangled with His enrapturing Call.

The Inebriation of His Enrapturing Call

Mast-and bulbulán is a 22 distiches poem composed by Bahá'u'lláh, whose *radíf* is *yá Húy-i-ú*. While commenting upon the use of *radíf* in Rúmi's *Díván*, Johann Christoph Bürgel, an expert in literatures of the Middle East, writes:

in Rúmi's ghazals the *radíf* is not a mere ornament, and also not just a formal factor that imparts unity to the poem, but a strong vehicle of meaning which intensifies the message and the symbolism. ("Speech is a ship" 50)

These words also apply to this poem by Bahá'u'lláh in which the *radíf*, *yá Húy-i-ú*, His *Yá Hú*, translated "His enrapturing Call," does not meet only formal exigencies, but is a kind of *basso ostinato* that reproduces, in its sound and meaning, the ecstatic atmospheres of the meetings of Sufi brotherhoods. During those meetings the Sufis perform two rites that sometimes carry them to parasensory experiences: *dhikr* and *samá'*.

Dhikr, recollection or mention of God, is a particular, very often repetitive, form of prayer. At the time of his initiation, each aspirant Sufi is taught by his master a particular formula, sometimes the *Shahádá* (there is no other god but God), sometimes the *Tasbīḥ* (*subhána'lláh*, Glory to God), sometimes one of the so called ninety-nine "Names Most beautiful (*al-asmá'u'l-ḥusná*)" of God, sometimes the invocation *yá Hú*. Usually these formulas are repeated according to certain techniques: choral chanting, certain gestures and movements, and particular respiratory techniques, all of them instruments through which Sufis aim at obtaining particular states of consciousness which they define as ecstatic. The German Orientalist Annemarie Schimmel (1922–2003) writes about the *dhikr*:

The *dhikr* could be loud or silent; the loud one is generally used in the meetings of Sufi brotherhoods and

ends in the repetition of the last *h* of *Alláh* after every other sound has slowly disappeared; this last stage resembles a deep sigh. The silent *dhikr* too has been described as a journey through the letters of the word *Alláh* until the meditating person is, so to speak, surrounded by the luminous circle of this final *h*, the greatest proximity that one could hope to reach. (*Deciphering* 148)

Bahá'u'lláh calls *dhikr* His *Lawḥ-i-Halih-Halih-Halih-Yá-Bishárat*.

As to *samá'*, the audition, the French ethnomusicologist Jean During explains that the word *samá'*

generally denotes the hearing of music, the concert, and in its particular sense, the Ṣúfí tradition of spiritual concert, in a more or less ritualised form. *Samá'* is then considered to be the “nourishment of the soul,” in other words, a devotional practice which, according to Ṣúfí authors, can induce intense emotional transports (*tawádjúd*), states of grace (*aḥwál*), of trance or of ecstasy (*wádj*, *wudjúd*) and even revelations. These manifestations are often accompanied by movements, physical agitation or dance which are of set form or otherwise, individual or collective, of which Persian miniatures have left numerous testimonies and of which certain forms are still in use. (“*Samá'*”)

This is its poetical description by the celebrated Sufi poet Núr ad-Dín ‘Abdu’r-Raḥmán Jámí (1414–1492), the last of the great Persian poets, in a translation by William C. Chittick, the author of important books on Islamic thought, Sufism, Shi’ism, and Persian literature:

Do you know what it is – the sound of lute and rebec?

“You are my sufficiency, You are my all, O loving God!”

The dry and dismal have no taste of *sama'* – otherwise, that song has seized the world.

Oh that Minstrel! One tune and every atom of being began to dance.

The ascetic stands on the shore of imagination and fantasy, the gnostic's soul is drowned in the sea of Being.

The holy threshold of Love has no form, but in every form It shows Itself alone.

It displayed Itself in the clothing of Layla's beauty,

It stole patience and ease from Majnún's heart.

It tied the veil of Adhra to Its own face,

It opened the door of heartache on Wamiq's cheek.⁴

In reality, It played love with Itself –

Wamiq and Majnún are nothing but names.

Jami saw the reflection of the Cupbearer,

then fell to prostration, a pitcher before the cup. (*Diwan* 301; quoted in Chittick, *Sufism* 79-80)

As to the locution *yá Húy-i-ú*, His *Yá Hú*, literally “His ‘O He!’,” *Hú* corresponds to the Arabic *Huwa*. In Sufi literature the third-person singular pronoun, *Huwa*, is often used to denote God in His hidden, unmanifested Essence. It means Alláh, His Uniqueness ... [It] refers to the spiritual, abstract, and bodiless entity of Alláh's divinity and to His Ipseity. It also symbolizes an advanced degree of ecstatic transport” (Chebel, *Dictionnaire* 204). As has been just said, *Yá Hú* is a common invocation among the Sufis, who use it as a *dhikr* in their ecstatic sessions. Schimmel compares this invocation to the Hindu *Om* and writes that

nobody who has heard the long-drawn-out call *Huuu* (literally “He”) at the end of a dervish ceremony such as

the Mevlevi *samá‘* can forget this sound, whose vibrations move body and mind equally. Listening to such sounds, one understands why “sound” could be regarded as Creative Power, and it becomes perfectly clear why musical therapy with sacred, *baraka*-loaded sounds was well known in Islamic culture and is still practised among certain Sufi groups. (*Deciphering* 114)

According to Bausani the invocation *yá Hú* hints at the “Man of God,” as “the sign of divine unity ... the absolute Reality concentrated in a single very luminous point, God’s Personality” (“Nota introduttiva e note” 21). He quotes an ode by Rúmí that recites:

My place is the Placeless, my trace is the Traceless;

‘Tis neither body nor soul, for I belong to the soul of the Beloved.

I have put duality away, I have seen that the two worlds are one;

One I seek, One I know, One I see, One I call.

He is the first, He is the last, He is the outward, He is the inward;

I know none other except “Yá Hú” and “Yá man Hú”
(Nicholson, *Selected Poems* 127, no.125, vv. 6-8)

In his translation of one of Rúmí’s ghazals Nicholson leaves this call in the original language “Yá Hú” (*Selected Poems* 127, XXXI.8; see also Rúmí, *Mystical Poems* 64, no.72, v. 8). However, since the word “yahoo” is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary “A name invented by Swift in *Gulliver’s Travels* for an imaginary race of brutes having the form of men; frequently in modern use, a person lacking cultivation or sensibility; a philistine; a lout; a hooligan” (20:687),⁵ we have preferred to convey its meaning through the locution “enrapturing call,” which describes how this call is perceived in the Muslim world.

Another translation of this locution could be “His call of ‘O God’.” In this poem by Bahá’u’lláh the locution “His enrapturing Call (*yá-Húy-i-ú*)” could denote the announcement of the revelation of the Beloved, therefore this whole poem could be a description of the Most Great Spirit and of Its impact on Bahá’u’lláh and on the world.

8.0

Huva’l-‘Azíz

He is the Glorious

Muslim writers often open their writing with an invocation of God.

8.1

Mast-and bulbulán⁶ zī⁷ naghmiy-i-yá Húy-i-ú,

Ham ján-i-‘áshiqán zī⁸ jur‘iy-i-yá Húy-i-ú.

Nightingales are inebriated by the melody of His enrapturing Call,

And spirit lovers by one draught of His enrapturing Call.

This verse announces the inebriation of the nightingales and the lovers, the former when they hear the song of the Beloved, the latter when they quaff His wine. Both motifs seem to denote the Revelation of the Most Great Spirit. The joy caused by the announcement of His Revelation is a recurring theme in Bahá’u’lláh’s Writings. For example He wrote in one of His Tablets:

Proclaim unto every longing lover: “Behold, your Well-Beloved (Yár) hath come among men!” and to the messengers of the Monarch of love impart the tidings: “Lo, the Adored One (Nigár) hath appeared arrayed in the fullness of His glory!” O lovers of His beauty! Turn

the anguish of your separation from Him into the joy of an everlasting reunion, and let the sweetness of His presence dissolve the bitterness of your remoteness from His court. (GWB 320, sec. CLI, para.1, Lawḥ-i-‘Áshiq va Ma‘shúq; Muntakhabátí 206)

8.2

*Ján bi-Jánán mí-rasad bá vajd-u ḥálat dar damí,
Gar bi-gúsh-i-ú rasad⁹ yik ṣayḥiy-i-yá Húy-i-ú.*

*In a fit of ecstasy, souls conjoin with the Adored One,
As soon as they hear an echo of His enrapturing Call.*

This distich introduces the concepts of *vajd* and *ḥálat*, two words that denote ecstasy. As to *vajd*, it means: “being transported, in an ecstasy of love; ecstasy, excessive love” (Steingass 1457). Shaykh Abú Ismá‘íl ‘Abd’Alláh Anṣarí (1006–1088), one of the earliest Persian mystical poets, lists 100 stations in his first work, *Sad Maydán* (lit. A Hundred Fields), centred on love for God. He writes about *vajd*:

Ecstasy is the eight-ninth field and arises from the field of mystical perception. God, the most high, has said, “We made their hearts firm when they stood forth and said, ‘Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth.’” (XVIII: 14).

Ecstasy is a fire which is kindled from striking the stone of freewill against the iron of spiritual need. It possesses three aspects: an ecstasy of the psyche (*nafs*), an ecstasy of the heart (*del*), and an ecstasy of the soul (*jan*).

The psyche’s ecstasy overpowers the intellect, puts patience to flight, and reveals the invisible. This ecstasy is spiritual (*ma‘nawí*) in nature.

The heart's ecstasy, however, puts such a strain on one's endurance that one is driven to move, to cry out and rend one's clothes. This ecstasy is also spiritual in nature.

But the ecstasy which befalls the soul, (*jan*) bestows delight in the vision of God, drowns the psyche (*nafs*) in Truth-Reality, and beckons the soul towards severance from the body. One who experiences this ecstasy is the object of God's regard. (*Şad Maydán* 428-29, quoted in Nurbakhsh 1:185)

Bahá'u'lláh mentions "a fit of ecstasy (*vajd-u ḥálat*)" (v.2) and writes that "the Maids (*Húryán*) ... go into raptures (*vajd*), | If they hear the melody of His enrapturing Call" (v.12).

As to *ḥálat*, it means "state, quality, condition ... one of the stages of the mystical progress of the Súfis, ecstasy" (Steingass 409). In the Sufi world *ḥál*, another form of the word *ḥálat*, is defined as follows:

Literally, state [*ḥál*] denotes the end of the past and the beginning of the future. From the point of view of the people of God, however, it is a spiritual reality that occurs to the heart without the hearts claiming to possess it or seeking to acquire it, whether it be rapture, sorrow, contraction, expansion or awe. With the re-emergence of the attributes of the *nafs* it disappears, whether to be followed by another state similar to it or not. Whenever it lasts, becoming permanent, it is known as a station. States are gifts, while stations are acquired. The former comes from the wellspring of God's Generosity, while the latter are attained through effort and spiritual striving (*mojáhada*). (Nurbakhsh 8:84-5)

This poem by Bahá'u'lláh is an ecstatic poem, the fruit of the ecstatic experiences He had in Teheran. It is filled with this mystical condition.

This distich seemingly announces the reunion of the soul with the Beloved, when the Beloved sings *Yá Hú*, that is reveals Himself through “His enrapturing Call.” This reunion can be seen at least in two perspectives. The first is the reunion of the Manifestation of God with the Most Great Spirit. This concept has been described by Bahá’u’lláh through a Muslim Tradition:

Arise, O Muḥammad, for lo, the Lover (Ḥabíb) and the Beloved (Maḥbúb) are joined together and made one in Thee. (GWB 64, sec. XXVII, para.4; Muntakhabátí 51)

The second aspect is the reunion of all the souls with the soul of the Manifestation of God. This concept is described by Bahá’u’lláh in the following words:

Hear Me, ye mortal birds! In the Rose Garden of changeless splendor a Flower hath begun to bloom, compared to which every other flower is but a thorn, and before the brightness of Whose glory the very essence of beauty must pale and wither. Arise, therefore, and, with the whole enthusiasm of your hearts, with all the eagerness of your souls, the full fervor of your will, and the concentrated efforts of your entire being, strive to attain the paradise of His presence, and endeavor to inhale the fragrance of the incorruptible Flower, to breathe the sweet savors of holiness, and to obtain a portion of this perfume of celestial glory. Whoso followeth this counsel will break his chains asunder, will taste the abandonment of enraptured love, will attain unto his heart’s desire, and will surrender his soul into the hands of his Beloved. Bursting through his cage, he will, even as the bird of the spirit, wing his flight to his holy and everlasting nest. (GWB 320-1, sec. CLI, para.3, Lawḥ-i-‘Áshiq va Ma‘shúq)

8.3

*Ján-i-‘áshiq bar-parad tá Sidriy-i-Aqşáy-i-‘Ishq,
Gar madadkár-ash buvad yik naghmiy-i-yá Húy-i-ú.*

*Spirit lovers fly away to the remote Tree of Love,
If they are assisted by the melody of His enrapturing Call.*

The first hemistich mentions “the remote Tree of Love (*Sidriy-i-Aqşáy-i-‘Ishq*).” Bahá’u’lláh uses the term *sidrih* with two different acceptations. In other poems it is a reference to the Burning Bush from which Moses heard God’s voice calling Him and announcing His Prophetic mission. However, *Sidrih* also is a Koranic term, used in the locution “the Sidrah-tree, which marks the boundary (*al-Muntahá*)” (53:14). This tree “could represent the boundary which human knowledge cannot surpass, marked by a mysterious Lote-tree” (Bausani, “Introduzione e commento” 667n14-15). Persian mystic poets use the following locutions: “*sidratu’l-muntahá*, *sidra’it túbá*, A lote-tree in Paradise; the heavenly mansion of the angel Gabriel; – *ţá’iri sidra*, The bird of the heavenly lote-tree, i.e. Gabriel” (Steingass 663). Therefore this word could also denote the *Sadratu’l-Muntahá*, a term that “is often used in the Bahá’í Writings to designate the Manifestation of God Himself” (“Preface and Notes” 220n128) and “to designate Bahá’u’lláh” (ibid. 220n164). It is the station of the Manifestation of God. Therefore this distich could hint at Bahá’u’lláh accepting His Prophethood, when the Most Great Spirit sings *Yá Hú*, that is reveals Itself to Him through “His enrapturing Call.”

8.4

*Mast gardad ‘álam-i-Hastí, chih¹⁰ ‘áshiq az jamál,
Gar bi-dawr uftad zi Sáqí bádiy-í yá Húy-i-ú.*

The world of Being is intoxicated as a lover by beauty,

If the Cup-bearer hands round the wine of His enrapturing Call.

The Cup-bearer seems to be the Manifestation of God, the wine of His enrapturing Call seems to be Its Revelation. When the Most Great Spirit reveals Itself, through His Manifestation, the world of being is filled with joy. This hemistich is reminiscent of the Tablet of Carmel:

Seized with transports of joy, and raising high her voice, she [Mount Carmel] thus exclaimed: "May my life be a sacrifice to Thee, inasmuch as Thou hast fixed Thy gaze upon me, hast bestowed upon me Thy bounty, and hast directed towards me Thy steps. Separation from Thee, O Thou Source of everlasting life, hath well nigh consumed me, and my remoteness from Thy presence hath burned away my soul. All praise be to Thee for having enabled me to hearken to Thy call, for having honored me with Thy footsteps, and for having quickened my soul through the vitalizing fragrance of Thy Day and the shrilling voice of Thy Pen, a voice Thou didst ordain as Thy trumpet-call amidst Thy people. And when the hour at which Thy resistless Faith was to be made manifest did strike, Thou didst breathe a breath of Thy spirit into Thy Pen, and lo, the entire creation shook to its very foundations, unveiling to mankind such mysteries as lay hidden within the treasuries of Him Who is the Possessor of all created things." (TB 3, para.2, Lawḥ-i-Karmil)

8.5

Músiy-i-Ján munṣa'iq dar Ṭúr-i-Ma'ní uftad,¹¹

Gar bar afrúzád bi-Síná jadhvīy-i-yá Húy-i-ú.

The Moses of Spirit faints on the Mystic Mount,

If the Sinai is lit with the spark of His enrapturing Call.

In this verse Bahá'u'lláh refers to Moses through the image of Mount Sinai, and uses the words *Túr*, “A mountain, especially mount Sinai” (Steingass 821) and *Síná*, “Mount Sina” (Steingass 718). The image used in this verse is drawn from the story of Moses as narrated in the Koran. When God revealed Himself to Moses on Mount Sinai, He swooned, that is He became annihilated. Lambden remarks:

Celebrating the spiritually intoxicating and eschatological consequences of the Divine Beloved's rhythmic chant “O He!” (*yá hú*), Bahá'u'lláh ... associates the burning of the “firebrand” (*jadhwa*) of this invocation on Sinai with the “Moses of the soul” (*músáyi ján*) falling into a swoon on the “Mystic Mount” (*túr-i ma'aní*). (“Sinaitic Mysteries” 116-7)

It seems a reference to the “Sinai' of Moses' 'bosom' (or interior self)” (Lambden, “Sinaitic Mysteries” 5:109-10, cf. Koran 27:12), purified by the quickening influence of the Beloved. And thus this distich seemingly hints at the annihilation of the human qualities of Bahá'u'lláh in front of the Most Great Spirit, when He received the Intimation of His Divine Mission.

As to the word spark (*jadhvih*), it seems to denote an emanation of Spirit. Also Western mystics used the term spark to denote a spiritual reality. For example the German Dominican preacher, theologian and mystic Meister Johannes Eckhart (ca. 1260–1327) calls the inner self “*scintilla animae* (the spark of the soul).” He wrote:

I have occasionally said that there is a power in the spirit that alone is free. Occasionally, I've said that there is a shelter of the spirit. Occasionally, I've said there is a light of the spirit. Occasionally, I've said there is a little spark. Now, however, I say it is neither this nor that. All the same, it is a something, which is more elevated above this and that than heaven is over earth. For this reason I name it now in a more noble way than I have ever named

it in the past ... It is free of all names and bare of all forms, totally free and void just as God is void and free in himself. It is totally one and simple, just as God is one and simple, so that we can in no manner gaze into it ... For the Father really lives in this power, and the Spirit gives rise along with the Father to the same only begotten Son. (*Passion for Creation* 277)

8.6

*Ṭúr-i-dil gardad munír-u ján bi-raḡş áyad hamí,
Gar dar-uftad dar jáḡán yik ḡhunniy-i-yá Húy-i-ú.*

*The Sinai of the heart shines and the soul dances,
If the earth echoes with the warbling of His enrapturing
Call.*

The image of the Sinai is also used in this distich, which seems to describe the light and the joy brought by the new Revelation. Bahá'u'lláh adopts the locution “the Sinai of the heart (*Ṭúr-i-dil*)” in other Writings as well:

The light hath shone on thee from the horizon of the sacred Mount and the spirit of enlightenment hath breathed in the Sinai (síná') of thy heart (qalb). (Arabic Hidden Words, no.63; Al-Kalimátu'l-Maknúnat 29)

Verily, I say, so fierce is the blaze of the Bush of love, burning in the Sinai of the heart (sínáy-i-ḡubb), that the streaming waters of holy utterance can never quench its flame. (KI 61, para.65, KMI47)

As has been said, both the two words *Ṭúr* and *Síná* denote Mount Sinai. As to the sentence “the soul dances,” the place of dance in mystic writings is variously explained. Javad Nurbakhsh (1926–2008), the master of the Ni'matu'lláhi Sufi

Order from 1953, a psychiatrist and a prolific writer, explains that dance is “rapture of the spirit” (1:179). He also writes:

Abo'l-Hasan Kharāqani¹² said, “Dancing is the activity of one who, as he stamps his feet on the ground, sees through the earth, and as he flings up his hands, beholds the divine throne. All dancing besides this is disrespectful to the character of Bāyazīd Bastāmi, Jonaid, and Shebli.”¹³ (1:180)

Ḥāfīz writes:

Come, let us under the sword go merrily dancing (*raqṣ*) together;

Fortunate he at last whom thou, Beloved, has slain!
(Quoted in Nicholson, “Notes” 243.XVI.9; see *Divan* 117, “Ghazalyát,” no.111, v.9)

He writes moreover:

On the sky, – what if, of Ḥāfīz utterances

Zuhra’s singing should bring to dancing (*raqṣ*) the Masīḥá (Christ). (*Diván* 44, “Ghazalyát,” no.9, v.9; see *Divan* 8, “Ghazalyát,” no.4, v.8)

Dance as an expression of spiritual joy is not foreign to Western tradition. Titus Burckhardt (1908–1984), the Swiss master of the spiritualist tradition, writes:

A Psalm in the Bible says: “Let them praise His Name in the dance: let them sing praises unto him with the timbrel and the harp” [see Psalms 149:3]. It is known that the sacred dance exists in Jewish esotericism, finding its model in the dancing of King David before the ark of the covenant [see 2 Kings 6:14]. The apocryphal Gospel of the Childhood speaks of the Virgin as a child dancing on

the altar steps [see Book of James or Protevangelium 7:3], and certain folk customs allow us to conclude that these models were imitated in mediaeval Christianity. St Theresa of Avila and her nuns danced to the sound of tambourines. (*Introduction* 104n6)

One remembers the story of David:

And David danced before the Lord with all his might; and David was girded with a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet ... And they brought in the ark of the Lord, and set it in his place, in the midst of the tabernacle that David had pitched for it: and David offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord. And as soon as David had made an end of offering burnt offerings and peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord of hosts. (2 Kings 6:14-6, 17-8)

8.7

*Maḥv gardad rang-i-ghayríyyat zi şafḥiy-i-rúzgar,
Gar nasímí bar-vazad az ja'diy-i-yá Húy-i-ú.*

Any shade of strangeness disappears from the pages of the world,

If a breeze wafts from the locks of His enrapturing Call.

This distich uses the image of the perfume exhaling from a scented lock to describe the disappearance of “otherness (*ghayríyat*)” from the world.

The word *ghayríyat*, “Change, alteration; strangeness, unreality; jealousy” (Steingass 901), means in theological contexts to be *ghayr*, and *ghayr* in its turn means “other, different” (Steingass 900), that is different from God or unrelated to God. Toshihiko Izutzu (1914–1993), a leading figure in the fields of

Islamic, Far Eastern and comparative philosophy, explained that in “the ordinary empirical state”

things are separated and distinguished first from each other, and then from the Absolute. In this dimension man normally sees only the phenomenal world, and considers the Absolute – if man at all becomes aware of the existence of something beyond the phenomenal world – as the entirely “other” (*ghayr*). (*Creation* 54)

However, he adds, in the state of unification called by the Sufis *baqá'* or *jam'*,

all the separate things are seen reduced to their original existential unity. All things, beginning with the self-consciousness of the mystic, disappear from awareness. The light of the phenomenal world is extinguished. There remains only absolute unity. There is not even the consciousness of the unity, for there is no trace here of any consciousness. The whole universe *is* unity. And the unity is light, but at the same time it is the darkness of the phenomenal world. (*ibid.*)

It is the mystic unitive ecstasy that Sufis believed to be accessible to the great mystics.

Bahá'u'lláh seems to explain the concepts of alterity and unification in a different way. He relates these concepts with a verse of the Koran saying:

All on the earth shall pass away, But the face (wajh) of thy Lord shall abide resplendent with majesty and glory.
(55:26-7, Rodwell)

He writes:

Canst thou discover any one but Me (ghayrí), O Pen, in this Day? What hath become of the creation and the manifestations thereof? What of the names and their

kingdom? Whither are gone all created things, whether seen or unseen? What of the hidden secrets of the universe and its revelations? Lo, the entire creation hath passed away! Nothing remaineth except My Face (wajhí), the Ever-Abiding, the Resplendent, the All-Glorious. (GWB 29, sec. XIV, para.4, Lawḥ-i-Riḍván; Muntakhabátí 28)

He adds elsewhere:

I know not how long they shall spur on the charger of self and passion and rove in the wilderness of error and negligence! Shall either the pomp of the mighty or the wretchedness of the abased endure? Shall he who reposes upon the loftiest seat of honour, who hath attained the pinnacle of might and glory, abide forever? Nay, by My Lord, the All-Merciful! All on earth shall pass away, and there remaineth alone the face (wajh) of My Lord, the All-Glorious, the Most-Bountiful. (SLH 133, sec. 1, para.269, Súriy-i-Haykal: Náṣiri'd-Din Sháh; Áthár 1:86)

This passage seems to convey a concept of alterity as referred to the Manifestation of God, and not to God Himself. All human beings are nothing in front of Him, and are expected to totally surrender to Him, so that nothing of their will should remain that is not identified with His Will.

Another explanation of the concept of alterity among the Sufis is given by Chittick:

“Otherness” is a veil over our eyes woven by our own imagination. Neither we ourselves nor the things we perceive outside of ourselves are truly other than God. (*Sufi Path of Love* 304)

Rúmí writes in this regard:

Oh Life of the spirit! Since Thou hast a home in this world, why does the dirt in the road not speak? Why are stones unaware?

Why does poison taste bitter? Why are thorns sharp? Why does anger display violence? Why are nights dark?

One day in the garden of His Face I kept wondering how in this world, during His reign, a thorn could be a thorn.

Has that Presence out of jealousy (*ghayrat*) masked His own Face? Does He maintain His “otherness (*ghayrí*)” so that “others (*ághyari*)” cannot see Him?

Or is the very eye of the world so coarse and gross and perverted that it can perceive nothing of the Gentleness of that Radiant face. (*Díván*, “*Ghazalyát*” 2555, v.1-5, quoted in Chittick, *Sufi Path of Love* 307)

Bahá’u’lláh uses the term *ghayríyat* in the following context:

Any shade of strangeness (ghayríyat) disappears from the pages of the world,

If a breeze wafts from the locks of His enrapturing Call.

This verse seems to convey all the above explained meanings. When the Beloved becomes manifest in the world, showing His unique qualities, all veils seem to fall and His lovers become annihilated in Him. Bahá’u’lláh seems to state in this verse that when He becomes manifest in the world, everything vanishes, only His sovereign Word remains. And whoever is willing to love Him has the possibility of not being deprived of the bountiful Grace of that Word. This distich may also mean that the new Revelation has given to all human beings the opportunity to understand the concept of Divine Unity:

The essence of belief in Divine unity consisteth in regarding Him Who is the Manifestation of God and Him Who is the invisible, the inaccessible, the unknowable Essence as one and the same. By this is meant that whatever pertaineth to the former, all His acts and doings, whatever He ordaineth or forbiddeth, should be considered, in all their aspects, and under all circumstances, and without any reservation, as identical with the Will of God Himself. This is the loftiest station to which a true believer in the unity of God can ever hope to attain. (GWB 166, sec. LXXXIV, para.4)

Finally, since *ghayríyat* also means “strangeness” (Steingass 901), this sentence could also hint at the spirit of brotherhood, that is the contrary of “strangeness,” amongst human beings brought by the new Revelation.

8.8

*Az qyám-ash tu qyámat bín míyán-i-‘áshiqán,
Ham shínú á váz-i-Şúr az nafkhiy-i-yá Húy-i-ú.*

*As He arises, you see the lovers resurrected, and hear
Sarafiel’s trumpet from the blow of His enrapturing Call.*

This distich uses the language of eschatology, referring to the Day of judgment or resurrection through the words resurrection, *qyámat*, “The resurrection, last day” (Steingass 997), Sarafiel’s trumpet, *Şúr*, “A trumpet, clarion, horn; the trumpet of Isráfíl summoning mankind to resurrection” (Steingass 796), and the word *nafkhih*, “One blow; [*nafkhatu’l-ba‘ş*, The trumpet-blast of resurrection; – *nafkha’i rúh*, The Holy Spirit which the angel Gabriel blew into the sleeve of Mary according to Muhammadan belief]” (Steingass 1415), used in the Koran to refer to the trumpet-blast or horn-blast of resurrection (Koran 6:73, 23:101, 39:68, 69:13, etc.).

Resurrection can be seen in two different perspectives, personal and eschatological. As to the personal perspective, the key to read this metaphor is in the Kitáb-i-Íqán:

Such things have come to pass in the days of every Manifestation of God. Even as Jesus said: "Ye must be born again [1 John 3:7]." Again He saith: "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit [2 John 3:5-6]." The purport of these words is that whosoever in every dispensation is born of the Spirit and is quickened by the breath of the Manifestation of Holiness, he verily is of those that have attained unto "life" and "resurrection (ba'ath)" and have entered into the "paradise" of the love of God. And whosoever is not of them, is condemned to "death" and "deprivation," to the "fire" of unbelief, and to the "wrath" of God. In all the scriptures, the books and chronicles, the sentence of death, of fire, of blindness, of want of understanding and hearing, hath been pronounced against those whose lips have tasted not the ethereal cup of true knowledge, and whose hearts have been deprived of the grace of the holy Spirit in their day. Even as it hath been previously recorded: "Hearts have they with which they understand not [Koran 7:178]." (KI 118-9, para.125; KMI90)

As to the eschatological perspective, Bahá'u'lláh concisely writes:

the Day of Resurrection (qyámat) ... is the Day of the rise of God Himself through His all-embracing Revelation. (KI 143, para.151; KMI111)

According to the Koranic descriptions of the Day of Judgment or Resurrection, this Day will be announced by the

blast of the trumpet of the Angel Seraphiel (*śúr*), the Angel of death, mentioned in verse 8. The motif of the Koranic horn is explained by Bahá'u'lláh in His *Kitáb-i-Íqán*. He writes, referring to the Muḥammadic Dispensation, that “by ‘trumpet (*śúr*)’ is meant the trumpet-call of Muḥammad’s Revelation, which was sounded in the heart of the universe, and by ‘resurrection’ is meant His own rise to proclaim the Cause of God” (KI 116, para.123; KMI89). Then He explains that “resurrection” is the day of the advent of each Manifestation of God. In this hemistich Bahá'u'lláh may allude to the beginning of His Own Dispensation.

8.9

*Ján-i-‘áshiq bar-parad tá ‘arsh-u zán ham bu-gudharad,
Chún shavad majdhúb-i-‘ishq az jadhbiy-i-yá Húy-i-ú.*

*Spirit lovers fly towards the Heavenly Throne, and beyond it,
When they are drawn to love in their ecstasy of His
enrapturing Call.*

This distich describes the lover falling a prisoner of Love through the revelation of the Most Great Spirit and winging his flight towards the “Heavenly Throne (*‘Arsh*).”

In the language of the Sufis the Throne (*‘Arsh*) is always associated with Divine power. In the hierarchy of the Divine worlds typical of Sufism, to which Bahá'u'lláh sometimes referred (see Savi, *Towards the Summit* 31-5, 270-88), the throne is variously interpreted as the world of *Háhút*, or of *Láhút*, or of *Jabarút*. The Throne, *‘Arsh*, of God is often mentioned in the Bahá'í Writings, and it usually denotes the sovereignty of God. As to the “Heavenly Throne (*‘Arsh*),” mentioned in verse 9, it could hint at the lofty station of the Manifestation of God. For further comments upon the concept of throne in the Bahá'í Writings, see Savi, *Towards the Summit* 88-9 and 1.14.

In the light of what has been said, this distich seems to explain in poetical terms that the Manifestation of God reaches the apex of the heavenly hierarchy because of His deep love for the Most Great Spirit.

8.10

*Dast bar-dárad zi ján jánán bi-jahd,*¹⁴

Gar futad dar mulk-i-hastí jilviy-i-yá Húy-i-ú.

Lovers eagerly forfeit their lives, if in the world

The splendour is unveiled of His enrapturing Call.

When the Most Great Spirit reveals Itself, the Manifestation of God, and with Him all the lovers of God, lay down their all, even their life. Bahá'u'lláh has exposed this concept in many passages. For example He wrote:

Every moment of my life my head crieth out to Thee and saith: "Would, O my Lord, that I could be raised on the spear-point in Thy path!" while my blood entreateth Thee saying: "Dye the earth with me, O my God, for the sake of Thy love and Thy pleasure!" Thou knowest that I have, at no time, sought to guard my body against any affliction, nay rather I have continually anticipated the things Thou didst ordain for me in the Tablet of Thy decree. (PM 106, sec. 66, para.7)

By God! Mine head yearneth for the spear out of love for its Lord. I never passed a tree, but Mine heart addressed it saying: "O would that thou wert cut down in My name, and My body crucified upon thee, in the path of My Lord!," for I see the people wandering distraught and unconscious in their drunken stupor. (SLH 132, sec. 1, para.266, Súriy-i-Haykal: Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh)

8.11

Bád-i-báqí bar-vazad az mulk-i-fání in Zamán,

Chún vazídih búy-i-mishg az náfiy-i-yá Húy-i-ú.

The breeze of eternity wafts in this Day from the mortal kingdom,

'Cause a fragrant scent breathes from the musk of His enrapturing Call.

The stage of annihilation (*faná'*) implies a denial and subjugation of all one's personal attributes, a goal that seekers must reach, if they want to attain their subsistence in God (*baqá'*), that is, the affirmation and acquisition of the divine qualities. The term *faná'* denotes among the Sufis "extinction of individual limitation in the state of Union with God" (Burckhardt, *Introduction* 116). It means the abandonment of personal attributes, required so that subsistence in God, *baqá'*, that is, the acquisition of the divine qualities, may be attained. *Fání* is "(in the parlance of the Sufís) one who has reached the state of *faná'*, or annihilation" (Steingass 905). In the Bahá'í Writings this term seems to denote a person who increasingly subordinates his animal nature to his spiritual nature, through his submission to the will of God as voiced by His Manifestation (see Savi, *Towards the Summit* 366-7). The locution "mortal kingdom (*mulk-i-fání*)" seems to describe not only the human world, but also that human condition whereby the flesh keeps longer and longer silence, that condition which Sufis call *faná'*.

These verses allude to the victory over the self that love requires.

The locution "in this Day (*in Zamán*)" is not a mere temporal indication, it may also refer to the Day of God (*Yawm-i-Khudá*), which Bahá'u'lláh calls both with the Persian-Arabic words *zamán* and *yawm*. Bahá'u'lláh explains its meaning in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*:

This is the Day of God (Yawm Alláh), the Day on which naught shall be mentioned save His own Self, the omnipotent Protector of all worlds. (KA80, para.167; Arabic 160)

He also explains it in the Súriy-i-Haykal:

the Day of God (Yawm Alláh) is none other but His own Self, Who hath appeared with the power of truth (SLH, Súriy-i-Haykal 27, sec. 1, para. 63; Áthár 1:20)

The Day of God (*Yawm-i-Khudá*), one of the leitmotifs of Bahá'u'lláh's Writings, is extensively described by Bahá'u'lláh as a Day

[that] eclipseth all other created Days (SLH 80, 1, para.154, Súriy-i-Haykal: Napoleon III),

which the Pen of the Most High hath glorified in all the holy Scriptures (GWB 13, sec. X, para.2);

[alluded to] in all the sacred Scriptures¹⁵ (GWB 11, sec. VII, para.2, Lawḥ-i-Karmil);

which God hath announced through the tongue of His Apostle [Muḥammad] (ESW 101);

the purpose underlying all creation ... the Day which all the Prophets, and the Chosen Ones, and the holy ones, have wished to witness (Quoted in Shoghi Effendi, ADJ 77);

[for which] the soul of every Prophet of God, of every Divine Messenger, hath thirsted ... All the divers kindreds of the earth have, likewise, yearned to attain (GWB 10, sec. VII, para.2, Súriy-i-Qamís),

[when] He, the Ancient of everlasting days is come, girded with majesty and power (GWB 36, sec. XV, para.1);

of God Himself ... [when] the Lord alone shall be exalted
(GWB 13, sec. X, para.2);

*on which naught shall be mentioned save His own Self,
the omnipotent Protector of all worlds* (KA 80, para.167);

*which God hath exalted above all other days, and
whereon the All-Merciful hath shed the splendor of His
effulgent glory upon all who are in heaven and all who
are on earth* (SLH 68, par. 133, Lawh-i-Haykal: Napoleon III);

*in which God's most excellent favors have been poured
out upon men, the Day in which His most mighty grace
hath been infused into all created things* (Quoted in Shoghi
Effendi, ADJ 77);

*in which the fragrances of mercy have been wafted over
all created things, a Day so blest that past ages and
centuries can never hope to rival it, a Day in which the
countenance of the Ancient of Days hath turned towards
His holy seat* (TB 3, Lawḥ-i-Karmil).

*whereon the Ocean of God's mercy hath been manifested
unto men* (GWB 7),

*[in which] the potentialities inherent in the station of
man, the full measure of his destiny on earth, the innate
excellence of his reality, must all be manifested* (GWB 340,
sec. CLXII, para.1);

*[when] "God will satisfy everyone out of His
abundance"* (TB 67, Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih, quoting Koran
4:129);

*that God hath ordained to be a blessing unto the
righteous, a retribution for the wicked, a bounty for the
faithful and a fury of His wrath for the faithless and the
forward* (TB 103, Ishráqát).

The Day of God is described by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as the Day when

the Sun of Reality will arise ... with the utmost warmth
and splendor (SAQ 57, sec. 11, para.44).

Many passages by Bahá’u’lláh on the greatness of this Day are quoted by Shoghi Effendi in his *Advent* (ADJ 77-80).

The “breeze of immortality (*bád-i-báqí*)” hints not only at the renewed spirituality brought by the new Revelation, but also at that condition which Sufis called *baqá’* and which has been described above as “the affirmation and acquisition of the divine qualities.” The “musky scent (*búy-i-mishg*)” could describe the effusion of spiritual bounties bestowed by the new Revelation. The image of the “musk-pod (*náfih*),” “A bag or bladder of musk; the belly, or skin of the belly of any animal” (Steingass 1376), is commonly used by Sufi poets. Ḥáfiz writes:

Of the musk (*mushk*) of Khutan and of musk-pod (*náfih*)
of Chín none hath seen

What, from the fragrant morning breeze (of the east)
every morning I see. (*Díván* 671, “*Ghazalyát*,” no.392, v. 5;
Divan 370, no.357, v. 6)

Verse 11 could hint at the spiritual transformation that takes place in all the seekers that inhale the scents of the Revelation of the Spirit in this new Day of God.

8.12

Húriyán dar ghurfíy-i-‘izzat bi-vajd áyand, agar
*Bar-vazad bar gúsh-ishán*¹⁶ *yik ranniy-i-yá Húy-i-ú.*
The Maids in the glorious chambers go into raptures,
If they hear the melody of His enrapturing Call.

This distich describes, with the typical hyperbolic language characterizing the Sufi descriptions of the Beloved, the

exultation of the spiritual worlds for the advent of the new Day. The “Maids (*Húriyán*)” in their “glorious chambers (*ghurfíy-i-‘izzat*)” are reminiscent of the Tablet of the Holy Mariner, when it says:

Whereupon the maid of heaven (Húriyata’r-Rúh) looked out from her exalted chamber (ghurfáta’l-a‘lá) (BP 224; Ma’idih 4:336)

8.13

*Ṭarhí az naw bi-fíkanad andar jahán-i-áb-u gil,
Gar ṭulú‘ árad¹⁷ zi mashriq vajhiy-i-yá Húy-i-ú.*

*New designs are drawn in the world of water and clay,
If from the East the features arise of His enrapturing Call.*

This distich hints at the renewal of the world brought by the parousia of the Beloved. It is reminiscent of the following sentence in one of the Tablets of Riḍván:

Verily, We have caused every soul to expire by virtue of Our irresistible and all-subduing sovereignty. We have, then, called into being a new creation, as a token of Our grace unto men. (GWB 29-30, sec. XIV, para.5, Lawḥ-i-Riḍván)

Bahá’u’lláh writes moreover:

Through the movement of Our Pen of glory We have, at the bidding of the omnipotent Ordainer, breathed a new life into every human frame, and instilled into every word a fresh potency. All created things proclaim the evidences of this world-wide regeneration. (TB 84, Lawḥ-i-Dunyá)

The second hemistich is reminiscent of the following words written by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

From the beginning of time until the present day ... the light of Divine Revelation hath risen in the East and shed its radiance upon the West. The illumination thus shed hath, however, acquired in the West an extraordinary brilliancy ... In the books of the Prophets ... certain glad-tidings are recorded which are absolutely true and free from doubt. The East hath ever been the dawning-place of the Sun of Truth. In the East all the Prophets of God have appeared ... The West hath acquired illumination from the East but in some respects the reflection of the light hath been greater in the Occident.
(quoted in WOB 74-5)

8.14

*‘Álam-i-ímkán bi-súzád ham khiyám-i-‘izz-i-quds,
Gar bar-áyad bar¹⁸ samá yik náliy-i-yá Húy-i-ú.*

*The earthly world and the holy and glorious bowers catch fire,
If heaven resounds with a sigh of His enrapturing Call.*

This verse seems to hint at the beneficial effects of the new Revelation on all the world, even the supernal worlds. The image of the “holy and glorious bowers (khiyám-i-‘izz-i-quds)” also is used in the Kitáb-i-Íqán where it could describe the spiritual worlds whence the Manifestations of God descend on earth:

The significance and essential purpose underlying these words is to reveal and demonstrate unto the pure in heart and the sanctified in spirit that they Who are the Luminaries of truth and the Mirrors reflecting the light of divine Unity, in whatever age and cycle they are sent down from their invisible habitations of ancient glory (khiyám-i-ghayb-huwiyyih) unto this world, to educate the souls of men and endue with grace all created things, are invariably endowed with an all-compelling power,

and invested with invincible sovereignty. (KI 97, para.103; KMI73)

*Thou art surely aware of their idle contention, that all Revelation is ended, that the portals of Divine mercy are closed, that from the day-springs of eternal holiness no sun shall rise again, that the Ocean of everlasting bounty is forever stilled, and that out of the Tabernacle of ancient glory (*khiyám-i-ghayb-i-rabbání*) the Messengers of God have ceased to be made manifest.* (KI 137, para.148; KMI107)

8.15

*Gúsh-i-‘álam pák gardad zán-chih bi-shníd az jahán,
Gar dar-áyad yik damí dar ḥalqiy-i-yá Húy-i-ú.*

*Mortal ears forget what they heard in the world,
If they just enter the circle of His enrapturing Call.*

This verse seems to hint that the new Revelation implies the abandonment of whatever had been learnt from the past culture. The locution “the circle of His enrapturing Call (*ḥalqiy-i-yá Húy-i-ú*)” is better understood in the light of the Sufi explanations of the term *ḥalqih*, which Steingass also defines “an assembly, circle of friends, fraternity” (Steingass 428):

The sitting together of the Sufis in an assembly for the purpose of the remembrance of God is called a circle. The symbolism is that of links in a chain, all joined to one another and forged into a single unit. Likewise, the hearts of the Sufis in the circle of *samá‘* are so closely conjoined that they form a single heart. (Nurbakhsh 1:175)

The wording of this verse resembles what Bahá’u’lláh writes in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*:

They that tread the path of faith, they that thirst for the wine of certitude, must cleanse themselves of all that is earthly – their ears (gúsh) from idle talk ... (KI 3, para. 2; KMI2)

This concept is explained in doctrinal terms in the same book:

As He hath said: “When the heaven shall be cloven asunder [Koran 82:1].” By “heaven” is meant the heaven of divine Revelation, which is elevated with every Manifestation, and rent asunder with every subsequent one. By “cloven asunder” is meant that the former Dispensation is superseded and annulled. I swear by God! That this heaven being cloven asunder is, to the discerning, an act mightier than the cleaving of the skies! Ponder a while. That a divine Revelation which for years hath been securely established; beneath whose shadow all who have embraced it have been reared and nurtured; by the light of whose law generations of men have been disciplined; the excellency of whose word men have heard recounted by their fathers; in such wise that human eye hath beheld naught but the pervading influence of its grace, and mortal ear hath heard naught but the resounding majesty of its command – what act is mightier than that such a Revelation should, by the power of God, be “cloven asunder” and be abolished at the appearance of one soul? Reflect, is this a mightier act than that which these abject and foolish men have imagined the “cleaving of the heaven” to mean? (KI 44-5, para. 46)

Shoghi Effendi explained the same concept in the following words:

If long-cherished ideals and time-honored institutions, if certain social assumptions and religious formulae have ceased to promote the welfare of the generality of

mankind, if they no longer minister to the needs of a continually evolving humanity, let them be swept away and relegated to the limbo of obsolescent and forgotten doctrines. Why should these, in a world subject to the immutable law of change and decay, be exempt from the deterioration that must needs overtake every human institution? For legal standards, political and economic theories are solely designed to safeguard the interests of humanity as a whole, and not humanity to be crucified for the preservation of the integrity of any particular law or doctrine. (WOB 42)

8.16

*Níst gardad hast-u¹⁹ ham rang-i-qidam gardad ‘adam,
Gar bar-áyad Ghayb-há az pardiy-i-yá Húy-i-ú.*

*Life comes to naught, nothingness takes on eternity’s hues,
If the things unseen emerge from the veil of His enrapturing
Call.*

This distich could hint at the reversal of the values brought by the new Revelation. Bahá’u’lláh refers to this concept in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas:

Behold, the “mystery of the Great Reversal in the Sign of the Sovereign” hath now been made manifest ... How many the outwardly pious who have turned away, and how many the wayward who have drawn nigh, exclaiming: “All praise be to Thee, O Thou the Desire of the worlds!” In truth, it is in the hand of God to give what He willeth to whomsoever He willeth, and to withhold what He pleaseth from whomsoever He may wish. He knoweth the inner secrets of the hearts and the meaning hidden in a mocker’s wink. How many an embodiment of heedlessness who came unto Us with purity of heart have We established upon the seat of

Our acceptance; and how many an exponent of wisdom have We in all justice consigned to the fire. We are, in truth, the One to judge. He it is Who is the manifestation of “God doeth whatsoever He pleaseth,” and abideth upon the throne of “He ordaineth whatsoever He chooseth.” (KA 75-6, para.157)

This verse is explained in the “Notes” as follows:

Bahá’u’lláh in one of His Tablets refers to the “symbol and allusion” of the “mystery of the Great Reversal in the Sign of the Sovereign.” He states: “Through this reversal He hath caused the exalted to be abased and the abased to be exalted,” and He recalls that “in the days of Jesus, it was those who were distinguished for their learning, the men of letters and religion, who denied Him, whilst humble fishermen made haste to gain admittance into the Kingdom.” (“Preface and Notes” 239n171)

8.17

*Maḥv-i-muṭlaq gardad án-kash²⁰ árzú’í dar dil²¹ ast,
Gar bi-bínad yik nazar án shu’liy-i-yá Húy-i-ú.*

*Craving hearts vanish into utter self-effacement,
If they catch one glimpse of the flame of His enrapturing
Call.*

The first part of the distich is reminiscent of a distich by Majdúd Saná’í (ca.1045-ca.1141) quoted by Bahá’u’lláh in the Four Valleys:

*Never the covetous heart (dil bá árzú) shall come to the
stealer of hearts,*

Never the shrouded soul unite with beauty’s rose. (FV 60;
CV152)

When the seeker meets the Beloved, he falls in love and love “yieldeth no remedy but death, he walketh not save in the valley of the shadow (*vádíy-i-‘adam*, literally valley of nothingness)” (SV10; HV102). Therefore the lover must renounce his “covetous heart,” that is his own lower self, to mirror forth the divine attributes of the Beloved.

8.18

Kay tavánistí Masíh az gunbad-i-a‘lá gudhasht,
Gar na-búdí rah-bar-ash yik na‘riy-i-yá Húy-i-ú.

How could have the Messiah crossed the heavenly vault,
Shouldn't He have been guided by the roar of His
enrapturing Call?

This distich seemingly hints at the image of Jesus descended from heaven, in which Jesus says: “For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me” (John 6:38, KJV). This reference is also present in other passages. For example Bahá’u’lláh wrote in His Tablet to Pius IX: “*He, verily, hath again come down from Heaven even as He came down from it the first time*” (SLH 55, sec. 1, para.102, Súriy-i-Haykal: Pope Pius IX). Jesus came down from heaven, guided by the revelation of the Most Great Spirit. In another perspective, it could hint at the image of a Jesus ascended into the Highest Heaven through His ecstasy.

8.19

Kay tavánad ghayr-i-ú dar mulk-i-hastí pá-nihád,
Zan-kih báshad bas ghayúr án shahniy-i-yá Húy-i-ú.

Besides Him, no one could set his foot into the world of
being,
So earnest is the watcher of His enrapturing Call.

The concept of the jealousy of God, the central element of this verse, has been explained while commenting upon verse 7:

*Any colour of strangeness (ghayríyyat) disappears from
the pages of the world,*

*If a breeze wafts, exhaling the perfume of the lock of His
enrapturing Call.*

Shahñih means “A viceroy, vicegerent, representative, lieutenant; head of the police; a prefect; a mayor, provost; an ambassador; a peon or servant of a tax-gatherer” (Steingass 736) and Henri Wilberforce-Clarke (1840-1905), an officer in the British India corps, first translator of the *Bústán* of Sa’dí and of the *Sikandar Námih* by Nízamí, translated it as “watchman” (Háfiz, *Díván* 158, “Ghazalyát,” no.64, v.10; *Divan* 54, “Ghazalyát,” no.47, v.8). Therefore this verse could denote that the Most Great Spirit – “the watchman of His enrapturing Call (*shahñiy-i-yá Húy-i-ú*)” – reveals the Oneness of God in the world of Existence through the Manifestation of God, “*He ... in Whose name the standard of Divine Unity hath been planted upon the Sinai of the visible and invisible worlds, proclaiming that there is none other God but Me, the Peerless, the Glorious, the Incomparable*” (SLH 49, sec. 1, para.93, *Súriy-i-Haykal*). And thus the Manifestation of God is the only One Who sets “his foot in the world of being,” going beyond the barrier of otherness or alterity (ghayríyyat).

8.20

*Rang-i-hastí-rá na-bínad chashm-i-imkán, ay pisar,
Gar ravad bar ham damí án dídiy-i-yá Húy-i-ú.*

*No mortal eye could see any hue of existence, O son,
If, for an instant, the eye would close of His enrapturing
Call.*

This verse could hint that existence is kept in life by the Most Great Spirit. Without it nothing would exist. This concept is exposed by Bahá'u'lláh in the following words:

There can be no doubt whatever that if for one moment the tide of His mercy and grace were to be withheld from the world, it would completely perish. (GWB 68, sec. XXVII, para.6)

Consider, for instance, the revelation of the light of the Name of God, the Educator. Behold, how in all things the evidences of such a revelation are manifest, how the betterment of all beings dependeth upon it ... Were this revelation to be withdrawn, all would perish. (GWB 189-90, sec. XCIII, para.13, Commentary on a verse from Sa'dí)

I can have no doubt that should the holy breaths of Thy loving-kindness and the breeze of Thy bountiful favor cease, for less than the twinkling of an eye, to breathe over all created things, the entire creation would perish, and all that are in heaven and on earth would be reduced to utter nothingness. (PM 89, sec. 58, para.4)

It is the concept of continuous creation, typical of the Bahá'í Faith, better explained in later Writings, as for example *Lawḥ-i-Ḥikmat*. Bahá'u'lláh envisages a creation ruled by natural laws which are expressions of the Word of God, intended both as “*the Cause which hath preceded the contingent world*” and “*the Command of God which pervadeth all created things*” (TB 140, *Lawḥ-i-Ḥikmat*), that is, the creative impulse which brings into existence physical reality, but also the universal law pervading the entire creation.

8.21

Tishnagán, bar Salsabíl-i-quds-i-rabbání zaníd,

Kih shudih járí hamí án chashmiy-i-yá Húy-i-ú.

*O thirsty ones, plunge into the holy, and sanctified waters,
As the fountain is flowing of His enrapturing Call.*

The lovers are thirsty, *tishnagán*, plural of *tishnih*, “Thirsty, parched with thirst; eager, greedy, insatiable” (Steingass 303), of the Water of Life, which Bahá’u’lláh calls in this verse *Salsabíl*, explained by Steingass (693) as “Name of a fountain in Paradise; mellow wine; anything soft, tender, digestible.” Shoghi Effendi translates *Salsabíl-i-quds* as “sanctified waters” (GWB 323, sec. CLIII, para.1; *Muntakhabátí* 208). The lovers are here invited to allay their thirst at the fountain of Revelation, here called *chashmih*, “a fountain, source, spring” (Steingass 394). Bahá’u’lláh often mentions the thirst of human beings and the capacity of the Word of God to allay that thirst:

O banished and faithful friend! Quench the thirst (‘atash) of heedlessness with the sanctified waters of My grace, and chase the gloom of remoteness through the morning-light of My Divine presence. (GWB 323, sec. CLIII, para.1, Lawḥ-i-Aḥmad bi-Fársí; Muntakhabátí 208)

Verily I say, the world is like the vapor in a desert, which the thirsty (ṣáhibán-i-‘atash) dreameth to be water and striveth after it with all his might, until when he cometh unto it, he findeth it to be mere illusion. (GWB 328-9, sec. CLIII, para.8; Lawḥ-i-Aḥmad bi-Fársí; Muntakhabátí 211)

Thou well knowest, O my God, my Best-Beloved, that naught can quench the thirst (zamá’) I suffer in my separation from Thee except the waters of Thy presence ... (PM 58, sec. 41, para.3; Munáját 44)

My remembrance of Thee, O my God, quencheth my thirst (‘atash), and quieteth my heart ... (PM 195, sec. 114, para.6; Munáját 132)

Out of the pure milk, drawn from the breasts of Thy loving-kindness, give me to drink, for my thirst (al-

*a‘tásh) hath utterly consumed me. (PM 234, sec. 145, para.1;
Munâjât 157)*

*The attainment of this City quenbeth thirst (‘atash)
without water, and kindleth the love of God without
fire. (KI 198, para.217; KMI153)*

*O Lord! Dire thirst (ẓamá‘) hath seized us, and with Thee
are the soft-flowing waters of eternal life. (SLH 155, sec. 2,
para.41, Súriy-Ra‘ís; Majmú‘iy-i-Alváḥ-i Mubárah 101)*

8.22

Darvish, zín bish ma-zan nár-i-ma‘ání dar jahán,²²

Kih shudih yá Húy-i-ú áshuftiy-i-yá Húy-i-ú.

O Dervish, stop setting the fire of meanings to the world:

His enrapturing Call is entangled with His enrapturing Call.

Another *maqṭa‘*, final verse, calling the poet to silence. At the vision of the Beloved in love with Himself, the highest form of love we as human beings can conceive, all things are silent. This verse is reminiscent of many passages in the Bahá‘í Writings that describe the greatness of God’s revelation “*whose power hath caused the foundations of the mightiest structures to quake, every mountain to be crushed into dust, and every soul to be dumbfounded*” (GWB 196, sec. XCVI, para.3):

*In this day the breeze of God is wafted, and His Spirit
hath pervaded all things. Such is the outpouring of His
grace that the pen is stilled and the tongue is speechless.
(KI 180-1, para.197)*

*Reveal then Thyself, O Lord, by Thy merciful utterance
and the mystery of Thy divine being, that the holy
ecstasy of prayer may fill our souls – a prayer that shall
rise above words and letters and transcend the murmur
of syllables and sounds – that all things may be merged*

into nothingness before the revelation of Thy splendor.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, quoted in BP 69)

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NOTES

- ¹ For a general introduction to this and other poems by Bahá'u'lláh see Julio Savi, "Bahá'u'lláh's Persian poems written before 1863," *Lights of Irfan*, volume 13 (2012), pp. 317-361.
- ² (*mast-and bulbulán*) A poem composed by Bahá'u'lláh. The Persian text used for this translation is published in *Ishráq Khávarí, Má'iday-i-Ásmání* 4:194-96. The poem also is published in *Majmú'iy-i-Áthár* 30:169-71. This translation has been done with the precious assistance of Ms. Faezeh Mardani Mazzoli, lecturer of Persian language at the University of Bologna, translated by Julio Savi.
- ³ Another translation of this locution could be "His call of 'O God'."
- ⁴ Vámiq and 'A^{dh}râ, literally, the lover and the virgin, are two lovers of Islamic poetry often mentioned together with Majnún and Laylí. The best-known version of their story is that of the Persian poet Abu'l-Qásim 'Unşurí (d. ca. 1039).
- ⁵ See also "a member of a race of brutes in Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* who have the form and all the vices of humans ... a boorish, crass, or stupid person" (Merriam-Webster online); "One of an imaginary race of brutes

having the form of men in *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) by Jonathan Swift ... an uncouth or rowdy person" (Webster's 2646).

⁶ *Majmú'ih* 30 writes Bulbulán mast-and.

⁷ *Majmú'ih* 30 writes *az yik*.

⁸ *Majmú'ih* 30 writes *ján-i-'ushsháqán ham az yik*.

⁹ *Majmú'ih* 30 writes *rasad*.

¹⁰ *Majmú'ih* 30 writes *chú*.

¹¹ *Majmú'ih* 30 writes *úftad*.

¹² Abu'l-Ḥassan 'Alí ibn Aḥmad ibn Salmán al-Kharaqáni or Shaykh Abu'l-Ḥassan Kharaqáni (963-1033), sometimes written as Khirqání, is one of the Persian Khurasani Sufi masters. 'Aṭṭár called him the King of the kings of Sufi Masters.

¹³ Shaykh Abu Bakr Shiblí (861-946) is a famous Sufi born in Baghdad from a Persian family. He was a disciple of al-Junayd.

¹⁴ *Majmú'ih* 30 writes bi-jahd-i-khíshtan.

¹⁵ See "Looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?" (2 Peter 3:12, KJB).

¹⁶ *Majmú'ih* 30 writes bi-shinavand az gúsh-i-khúd.

¹⁷ *Majmú'ih* 30 writes *ṭáli' ar áyad*.

¹⁸ *Majmú'ih* 30 writes *az*.

¹⁹ *Majmú'ih* 30 writes *hast*.

²⁰ *Majmú'ih* 30 writes *án-kas*.

²¹ *Majmú'ih* 30 writes *sar*.

²² *Majmú'ih* 30 writes *Bísh az ín, Darvish, ín tár-i-ma'ání-rá ma-zan*, that is "Stop playing, of Darvish, the lute of inner meanings."

Tablet of Patience (Surih Şabr): Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh and Selected Topics

Foad Seddigh

Abstract

This paper takes a closer look at Surih Şabr (Súriy-i-Şabr) – a Tablet which is sometimes referred to by other names. This Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh, which was revealed on the first day of Riḍván 1863 and has great significance among the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, is the subject of study in this paper. In order to better understand the contents of this Tablet, it is helpful to review events in the life of Bahá'u'lláh during the last few weeks prior to his exile to Istanbul (Constantinople) and Adrianople (Edirne).

Şabr is an Arabic word meaning patience, and Surih Şabr (Súriy-i-Şabr) derives its name from the attribute of 'patience,' which is the starting theme of this Tablet. In life, troubles might strike a person as a test for which patience is needed. In such occasions, one needs to be steadfast and loyal to one's Lord. This paper explores the relationship between troubles in the path of God, divine tests and steadfastness during times of tests. Ayyúb (Job) is one of the prophets of Israel who has exhibited these qualities, having lived a life synonymous with patience. Bahá'u'lláh, while stating the story of the life of Ayyúb (Job) in this Tablet, writes some passages which may be interpreted as a statement of His own revelation from the tongue of Ayyúb. These statements are identified in this paper. In the Tablet, the life history of Ayyúb is briefly reviewed. Ayyúb is also a name which has been conferred by Bahá'u'lláh

on an individual who showed the attribute of patience in the path of God and was steadfast in allegiance to his Lord, the Báb. The Tablet immortalized the life of Hájí Muḥammad-Taqí Nayrízí, who was no longer living when the Tablet was revealed. This paper touches upon the sacrifices of this devoted believer. Significance of the devotion and heroic acts of Siyyid Yaḥyá Dárábi, Vaḥíd, in Nayríz has been discussed, and offering his life for his beloved, the Exalted One, the Primal Point, has been compared to the martyrdom of the Imám Ḥusayn, to which a reference has been made in the Tablet. Similarities between the lives of these two spiritual towers have been drawn.

The Tablet covers a range of topics such as: Seal of Prophets, Beholding the Countenance of God, Appearance of God in the Shelter of Clouds, attaining the presence of God, Great Announcement, the Hour, Day of Resurrection, the Trumpet Call, and clarification of other puzzling references in the past scriptures, particularly the holy Qur’án, etc. Most of these topics have been dealt with in greater details, in books such as the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, Book of Certitude, and Gems of Divine Mysteries, which were revealed before this Tablet. However, topics such as these which are presented in the Tablet, important as they may seem, may not constitute the primary significance of this Tablet. Rather, in my view, the primary significance of this Tablet lies in clarifying the manner of announcement of Bahá’u’lláh’s station, when He left Baghdád, and in references made to His station as the Promised One of the Dispensation of the Báb. The Tablet does not include explicit phrases stating: I am ‘Him Whom God shall make manifest’ – phrases which would clearly proclaim and pronounce that He is “the Promised One of the Bayán.” However, in the Tablet, Bahá’u’lláh announces that a new Light is being shed upon the world and a new Song is being sung. It would appear the time may not have been ripe for making the announcement openly, clearly and widely. This paper also discusses and analyzes the Tablet’s references to His station and the new religion of God. There are several passages in the Tablet

which clearly indicate that those pure souls who expected Him to put a claim to a station needed to wait and be patient. He also stresses that once He has made this announcement, it is not proper for them to hesitate for a moment, and if they stop for a moment, despite their long patience, the pronouncement of ‘patient one’ can no longer be applied to them.

The Tablet also makes reference to the Qayyúmu’l-Asmá. In this paper, Qayyúmu’l-Asmá has been discussed and the references made in the Tablet regarding ‘two names’, ‘two dawning places’, ‘two mysteries’, etc. have been traced and identified in Qayyúmu’l-Asmá. The Tablet does not explicitly mention the name of the arch enemy of the ‘Light of God’, the half-brother of Bahá’u’lláh, Yaḥyá Azal. However, the Tablet includes several references to Yaḥyá such as the “Calf” and “Sámirí”. These references are identified and explained. At the end of the Tablet, Bahá’u’lláh bids farewell to the friends in elevating and exalting words, in a manner which could be interpreted that as a result of this separation, something profound is bound to happen. However, the Tablet does not pinpoint the nature of the occurrence. This may be considered the announcement of His station as the Promised One of the Bayán in an unequivocal manner in Adrianople – an action which led to the rebellion of His half-brother, Yaḥyá Azal.

In this paper, Bahá’u’lláh’s parting words and their meanings are also analyzed. The Tablet includes a prophecy and warning regarding the ‘birds of darkness’ which will start flying in the absence of the light – a reference which may be considered the ‘Light of His Countenance’. These passages have been identified and their meanings explored.

Introduction and Background

In the few years prior to Bahá’u’lláh’s departure from ‘Iráq, three processes were unfolding. (1) The first was the increasing reverence which the Bábís felt for and showed towards Bahá’u’lláh as well as the great respect with which some high

ranking officials of the Government and Iranians treated Him. (2) The second was the envy of the half-brother of Bahá'u'lláh, Mírzá Yaḥyá, the Nominee of the Báb, whose jealousy and lust for leadership was burning within his heart and consuming him day by day. Mírzá Yaḥyá could manage to attract to himself only those corrupt Bábís who desired leadership for themselves, and whose selfish inclinations prompted them to lust after the benefits of the material world. (3) The third was the enmity and hatred towards Bahá'u'lláh which was initiated and aggravated by the Muslim clergy, and accepted blindly by those fanatical elements who considered that He had violated the established norms of Islám.

In order to demonstrate the particulars of the first process, we may recall two stories from this period – for details, one may refer to the history books: *Bahá'u'lláh King of Glory*, or *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, vol. I. The first story is concerning Siyyid Ismá'íl of Zavárih who, after hearing some thrilling words of spiritual significance from Bahá'u'lláh, was so intoxicated with His love that he was unable to restrain himself from his strong desire to leave the material world.¹ The second story concerns the incident when both Mullá Şádiq-i-Khurásání and Nabíl-i-Akbar were in the House of Bahá'u'lláh, when suddenly He entered the room where they were sitting. Mullá Şádiq instantly prostrated himself before Bahá'u'lláh. After Bahá'u'lláh withdrew from the room, Nabíl-i-Akbar being conscious of the great standing that Mullá Şádiq had in the Bábí community, felt that Mullá Şádiq's humility towards Bahá'u'lláh was quite inappropriate and protested in strong language. Mullá Şádiq's response was: "You don't know Him."² These two stories were not isolated instances, and one can recount many more which clearly show the standing of Bahá'u'lláh in the Bábí community. Despite this, Bahá'u'lláh did not deem the time ripe to lay bare His own station, and the Fire which had been kindled in His soul. He was actually trying to conceal this Fire. Bahá'u'lláh has mentioned that the light within Him could show dimly beyond seventy thousand veils (in some other writings He

mentions a thousand veils) enwrapped around Him in order to cover this Fire and Light.

The second process is a direct result of the respect of the Bábí community towards Bahá'u'lláh, which produced envy and jealousy in the heart of Mírzá Yaḥyá, who was devoid of any spiritual qualities himself. This inadequacy made him incapable of instilling spiritual qualities in others. This situation led to his jealousy and ill-feeling towards Bahá'u'lláh.

The third process which had derived its intensity from the first process, but in an opposite direction, hoped to extinguish that Fire combining all the forces of opposition from the mischief-makers. It included the corrupt cleric known as "Shaykh 'Abdu'l-Ḥusayn Ṭīhrání," the Consul General of Iran in Baghdád, the Persian Ambassador to the Government of Ottoman Empire, the Iranian Foreign Minister and his counterpart in Istanbul, and finally two powerful monarchs of the time. These combined forces of opposition led to the decision to banish Bahá'u'lláh and His companions from 'Iráq to a remote land beyond the Iranian borders.

On the other hand, the exile from 'Iráq was the intervention of a divinely ordained decree to partially remove the veils which had concealed the Spiritual Light within Bahá'u'lláh, a Light that had illumined the horizon of 'Iráq and had dazzled the eyes of so many believers who gathered around him, and had become vivified and sanctified from the stains of this world. This was at a time when the Faith of the Báb was on the verge of extinction as a result of the heavy blows dealt by the combined forces of the government and clerics. So, the departure of Bahá'u'lláh from 'Iráq was as a result of the combination of both divinely ordered decree and the forces of opposition. It has been recorded that Bahá'u'lláh finally left the "Most Great House" in Baghdád in the afternoon of Wednesday, 22 April 1863 and crossed the river Tigris by boat with only a few of his family members around him. He stayed in the garden of Najíb Páshá for twelve days in order to make preparations for the long

journey ahead, and also to say good-bye to a large number of visitors. He had arrived in Baghdád, on April 8, 1853 and resided in ‘Iráq for ten (solar) years and fourteen days.

Tablet of Job and Its Particulars

On the first day of His stay in the garden of Najíb Páshá, known as the Garden of Ridván, Bahá’u’lláh revealed the Tablet of the Medina of Patience or Tablet of the Secured City of Patience. In numerous instances in this Tablet, He refers to the Fire and Light within Him and encourages his companions to explore it and to approach it – though it is not an all-out declaration of His Mission. His “public declaration” took place a year later in Adrianople (Edirne). This Tablet is quite lengthy and is entirely in Arabic. There is no authorized translation of this Tablet made into English yet. However, there is a provisional translation made by Dr. Khazeh Fananapazir which is being used in this paper. One can find this work in the web site of the Bahá’í Library Online, www.bahai-library.com, under the heading of Provisional Translations.³ A few sentences or phrases of the Tablet quoted in this paper are the translation of the present author; these are identified by an asterisk: *.

Start of the Tablet

The Tablet starts in the following manner:

*This is the City of Patience. Strive ye to enter it, O
concourse of the patient ones!*

*In His name, the Exalted One, He Who is the Most
Exalted*

*This is the remembrance of God in the City of Patience
regarding Job, Our servant; Whom We sheltered under
the shade of that Holy Tree planted in His heart, to
Whom We demonstrated the fire ignited in His Own
Essence....*

This Tablet is also known by other names such as: Súriy-i-Şabr, Tablet of Job, Tablet of Şabr, Surih Şabr, Lawh-i-Ayyúb. It was revealed in the honor of Hájí Muḥammad-Taqí surnamed Ayyúb who was not alive at the time of the revelation of the Tablet. Hereafter, in this paper, we will refer to this Tablet as Surih Şabr.

Medina of Patience: the City of Patience

Medina is an Arabic word meaning “city” which is protected and fortified, making it safe to inhabit because it is guarded against attackers and invaders. So the “Medina of Patience” conveys the concept of a dwelling-place of patience which is safe and secure. In other words, it conveys the idea that dwelling in patience provides some security for one’s soul. Bahá’u’lláh has revealed a number of tablets in which He invites people to enter the Medina of the theme of the tablet. Examples: Tablet of Medina of Unity of God, and Tablet of Medina of Good Pleasure of God.

The Exalted One

The word Exalted and its derivations (exalted means “high”, “lofty”) is one of the Names of God. In Arabic it is *A‘lá*. Believers matched the number for the name of the Báb, “‘Alí Muḥammad” which has the numerical value of 202 in the Abjad system, with “Rabb” which means “Lord”, and called Him “Rabb-i-A‘lá.” Most often in the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá whenever there is a reference made to the “Exalted Lord” or Exalted One”, or “Exalted”, it refers to His Holiness the Báb. ‘Alí, which is the first name of the Báb, is also a derivation from the same word, meaning “Exalted,” and Muḥammad, which is the second part of His name, means “Praised”.

The Remembrance of God

In the Holy Qur'án, the word “Remembrance” or “Calling to Mind” is a reference to the Qur'án itself and also to the Prophet Muḥammad. In this Holy Dispensation, the Báb has referred to Himself as “Remembrance of God”. Bahá'u'lláh has referred to the Báb as the “Most Great Remembrance of God.”

The Burning Tree and Sacred Spot

Divine Lote Tree planted in His heart, and made Him to witness the Fire which is ignited and sheds its radiance

This part of the Tablet is also a reference to the Tree which gives light and is burning. The historical reference for the “Tree” and “Fire” is the story of the prophet Moses who saw a fire from a distance and when approached it and came near it, he found a tree which was burning but the fire was not consuming it. The tree has been referred to as the “Divine Lote Tree”, “The Tree which is neither of the East nor of the West”, “Sadratu'l-Muntahá”, “Divine and Holy Tree”. They have been interpreted as being the Word of God within the Manifestation of God.

In the Tablet there is a reference to “the Sacred Spot” and “the Tree” and “the Fire”. These are used quite frequently in the Writings of this Holy Dispensation, and in the Qur'án as well. As an example, consider this verse of Qur'án:

And when he reached it, he was called from the right side of the valley in the blessed field, from the tree: O Moses! Lo! I, even I, am Alláh, the Lord of the Worlds. (Surih Al-Qasas, Surih 28, Verse 30)

The above verse is related to the story of Moses. Now, we may take a look at the verse in the Tablet: “*We called Job from this sacred Spot whose environs are sanctified with this call, ‘Verily, He is God, Thy Lord and the Lord of all things. He is All-*

Powerful over all things, the Self-Subsisting One.” There are great similarities between these two expressions as follows: “The Spot” is that same place where Moses stood and was “the right side of the valley in the blessed field” which is a reference to the realm of “Manifestation of God” appearing within Him and within other Manifestations of God. The Fire may be taken as the Word of God which is expressed by the Manifestation of God.

Job, the Prophet

*Noah’s flood is but the measure of the tears I have shed,
and Abraham’s fire an ebullition of My soul. Jacob’s
grief is but a reflection of My sorrows, and Job’s
afflictions a fraction of my calamity. (Qasídiy-i-Varqá’iyyih,
The Ode of Dove)*

The Tablet starts with the explanation of the life of Job. Job is one of the most mysterious figures in the Bible. The era in which Job lived, the location of his native land and his teachings are all shrouded in mystery. Some Jewish scholars even have gone so far as to deny his existence and consider his life as a fable. Due to the fact that his book and life story appear in the Old Testament, and in the light of references made to him in the New Testament, one can consider him as one of the prophets, but not within the religion of Moses. The Qur’án and Islám regard Him a prophet. On the basis of Islám, which brought the latest spiritual teachings to mankind before the Teachings of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh, there is no doubt regarding Job’s identity as a Prophet of God. His life story is one of patience and is associated with gratitude to whatever comes one’s way, whether it bode well or ill. Certainly Job demonstrated this quality. Bahá’u’lláh has chosen Job in the tablet of “Medina of Patience” to teach us some spiritual truths, while recalling the events of his life, based mostly on the Islamic traditions. If we look carefully, some of those qualities and events match Bahá’u’lláh’s life; He uses the story of the biblical Job as the

basis to expound His own message. Also, we should remember that this Tablet was revealed in the honor of Hájí Muḥammad-Taqí of Nayríz who endured great hardships in the path of his Lord and was no longer alive at the time of the revelation of this tablet.

From the Book of Job in the Old Testament, chapter 1, verses 1-3, it is stated:

*There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless, upright, fearing God, and turning away from evil. And seven sons and three daughters were born to him. His possessions also was 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 female donkeys, and very many servants; so that man was the greatest of all the men of the east.*⁴

And chapter 1, verses 8-10, from the same book:

*And the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him in the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil." Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, "Does Job fear God for nothing? Hast thou not made a hedge about him and about his house and all that he has, on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land..."*⁵

After all his substance and health were taken away from him, he thanked his Lord; chapter 1, verses 20-22, from the same book:

*Then Job arose, and tore his robe, and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground, and worshipped. And he said, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb. And naked shall I return there. The LORD gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.' Through all this Job did not sin, nor did he blame God.*⁶

Then God restores wealth to Job after had taken away from him, chapter 42: verses 10-12 from the same book:

And the Lord restored the fortunes of Job when he prayed for his friends, and the Lord increased all that Job had twofold. Then all his brothers, and all his sisters, and all who had known him before, came to him and they ate bread with him in his house, and they consoled him and comforted him for all the evil that the Lord had brought on him. And each one gave him one piece of money, and each a ring of gold. And the Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning, and he had 14,000 sheep, and 6,000 camels, and a 1,000 yoke of oxen, and 1,000 female donkeys.⁷

Major Themes of the Tablet

We may identify nine major themes in the Tablet and nearly one hundred themes which can be considered as secondary themes, as well as many other references which require reflection and elaboration. While any of the large number of themes could serve as the focus for a study, we list some of these themes below:

1. Life of Job and how He endured calamities,
2. Patience and the reward for patient ones,
3. The events of Nayríz and sacrifice of the believers and Vaḥíd,
4. Fundamental religious truths: First and Last, resurrection, day of Judgments, etc.,
5. References to religious leaders and divines,
6. References to the statements of the Báb concerning Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation,
7. References regarding His own revelation,
8. References to the Calf, Sámirí, Satan, and Birds of Night,

9. Farewell and Separation.

In this paper, we will discuss themes 1, 2, 5, 7, 8 and will briefly consider themes 3, 6 and 9. Theme number 4, despite its significance, and the number of pages devoted to this theme in the Tablet, will not be considered here.

Patience and Being Thankful under Calamities

The life of Job is an embodiment of endurance under calamities and being content with whatever befell him in the path of God, while exhibiting contentment with the will of God. In the Tablet Bahá'u'lláh states:

Loss engulfed Him as had been ordained by the Mighty, the Self-Subsisting One. We burnt what He had planted by the hands of the angels of God's command and everything was utterly lost. When We had cleansed Him of earthly ornaments and material pollution, and had purified Him of physical possessions, then, as a further test, We caused the angels of divine wrath to blow poisonous air on His skin, making His body weaken, His temple tremble, and His limbs quiver so much that no portion of His being was left uncovered by wounds, and yet, in all these states, His gratitude increased daily. He remained patient and did not complain. We thus accounted Him of those who trust and are patient and grateful.

The book of Job, in minute details, describes how misfortunes struck Job. However, it does not discuss why these troubles are essential for spiritual growth. It is left entirely to the reader of this book to deduce it for himself. However, Bahá'u'lláh reveals in the Tablet that these difficulties are tests and no one can claim rightly to be a Servant of God and lover of God if he does not pass the tests. Furthermore, Bahá'u'lláh states that:

1. "O peoples of the earth! Be patient and persevering in the path of God and do not sorrow about that which will befall you in these "Days of the Spirit".
2. "Soon ye shall see the recompense of the patient ones in the transcendent and holy Garden:
 - In truth God has created a Paradise in the retreats of immortality and has named it "patience". Its name was treasured in the immaculate treasures of God up to the present Day. And in it was ordained what was not ordained in all other gardens and We have at this moment unveiled it for you and caused it to be remembered by you as a mercy on Our part to all the worlds. And in this paradise there are rivers of the providence of God and God has forbidden it from anyone except those who have persevered in calamities seeking thereby the good pleasure of God. None shall enter these gardens except such as have not perverted the bounty of God in themselves and flew with the wings of might in the atmosphere of patience.
 - These are they who have been long-suffering in all tribulations and the more the tribulations increased their love for their Lord waxed greater and with their entire being they turned to the exalted and holy One.
 - The ecstasies of desire grew intense in their hearts and the breaths of enthusiasm became great in their being so much so and they gave of their wealth and they gave all that vouchsafed by God to them and in all those states they were grateful to their Lord and they did not seek help from any one and God inscribed the names of the patient ones in His holy and irrevocable tablets."
3. "Truly blessed is the one who arrays himself with the garment of patience and equanimity and who does not change in afflictions and whose footsteps do not slip when the tempests of wrath blow and remains acquiescent at all times and relies on God at all times"

4. "O People of the Bayan! Be patient in these passing days and do not complain that your abject ornaments have been lost and do not bemoan of the afflictive trials that have been ordained in the Mighty Scrolls of God."
5. "Further know ye that for all good deeds there is ordained a limited reward in the Book of God with the exception of patience. This is the point that was made by God unto Muhammad, the Apostle of God. 'Those who patiently persevere will truly receive a reward without measure.' ..."
6. "Further know ye that God has ordained patience to be the garment of all the Messengers and no Prophet or Messenger has been sent but his temple has been ordained with the robe of patience. Thus has been taken God's Covenant with every Prophet sent by Him."
7. "It behoveth in the beginning for the patient person:
 - to persevere in himself so that he will withhold himself from all wickedness, evil, and desires, and from all that God has forbidden in His Book and so will his name be inscribed in the Tablets as a patient one.
 - And further he shall be persevering despite the afflictions that shall descend on him in the path of his Fashioner and that he be not shaken when the tempestuous winds of divine decree blow and when the ocean of God's destiny billows in the dominion of His irrevocable Plan and that he remain steadfast in the Faith of God .
 - And further that he should be patient with what the friends of God bring upon him and that he should be forbearing with the believers for the love of God and the pleasure of His Religion."

As stated in these passages, calamities in the path of God are spiritual tests and that is why God sent these troubles to Job. Five years before revealing this Tablet, Bahá'u'lláh revealed in His Hidden Words a number of passages regarding calamities which we should regard inwardly as light and life:

“O SON OF MAN! For everything there is a sign. The sign of love is fortitude under My decree and patience under My trials.” [HW]

“O SON OF MAN! The true lover yearneth for tribulation even as doth the rebel for forgiveness and the sinful for mercy.” [HW]

“O SON OF MAN! If adversity befalls thee not in My path, how canst thou walk in the ways of them that are content with My pleasure? If trials afflict thee not in thy longing to meet Me, how wilt thou attain the light in thy love for My beauty?” [HW]

“O SON OF MAN! My calamity is My providence, outwardly it is fire and vengeance, but inwardly it is light and mercy. Hasten thereunto that thou mayest become an eternal light and an immortal spirit. This is My command unto thee, do thou observe it.” [HW]

Upheaval of Nayríz

The major theme with which the Tablet starts is the life of Job who was patient under tribulations and God’s decree. Essentially, the three themes in the Tablet (the life of Job, tribulations, and patience) all served the purpose of introducing the events in Nayríz. The embodiment of patience is Ḥájí Muḥammad-Taqí whose virtues Bahá’u’lláh has recounted and extoled in this Tablet. He is a native of Nayríz, a small town to the south east of Shíráz at a distance of about one hundred and fifty km. Nayríz is very close to, and in the proximity of, another small town called “Dáráb”. Were it not for Vaḥíd, Nayríz would have been forgotten by historians, in the same manner as has been the fate of many other small towns in the world. If we refer to the text of the Tablet, we find that many blessings are conferred on this land, its people, its vegetation, and its air. It is clear then that Nayríz has a unique position in the history of the world.

Dáráb is the birth place of Vaḥíd (Yazd also has been mentioned), whose given name is Yaḥyá. By the virtue of the fact that he was from the lineage of Muḥammad, his full name was Siyyid Yaḥyá Dárábi. Vaḥíd's father was an eminent clergy and a man of great knowledge and was a fellow-pilgrim at the time of the pilgrimage of the Báb. The Báb has honored him by making mention of him in the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá*. At the time of the declaration of the Báb, Vaḥíd's father was living in one of the western cities of Iran. At this time, Siyyid Yaḥyá Dárábi had reached a degree of knowledge and fame in the capital city of Iran which resulted in Muḥammad Sháh having great confidence in him. The monarch of the time charged him with the responsibility of travelling to Shíráz, in order to investigate the message of the Báb. It is stated that he had three interviews with the Báb, which are well documented, after which he became a firm believer. For further details refer to the *Dawn Breakers*.⁸ The Báb revealed a commentary on the Surih of Kawthar (one of the surih of Qur'án) for him.

The following text is an extract from *A Traveler's Narrative*, a brief history of the Faith by 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

When the above-mentioned Siyyid arrived at Shíráz he interviewed the Báb three times. In the first and second conferences questioning and answering took place; in the third conference he requested a commentary on the Súrih called Kawthar, and when the Báb, without thought or reflection, wrote an elaborate commentary on the Kawthar in his presence, the above-mentioned Siyyid was charmed and enraptured with Him, and straightaway, without consideration for the future or anxiety about the results of this affection, hastened to Burújird to his father Siyyid Ja'far, known as Kashfí, and acquainted him with the matter. And, although he was wise and prudent and was wont to have regard to the requirements of the time, he wrote without fear or care a detailed account of his observations to Mírzá Lutf-'Alí

*the chamberlain in order that the latter might submit it to the notice of the late king, while he himself journeyed to all parts of Persia, and in every town and station summoned the people from the pulpit-tops in such wise that other learned doctors decided that he must be mad, accounting it a sure case of bewitchment.*⁹

The Báb gave him the title of Vaḥíd. This word numerically is equivalent to the number of his first name, Yaḥyá, and means “unique.” Bahá’u’lláh in the Book of Certitude (*Kitáb-i-Íqán*) pronounced him the unique and peerless: “Among them also was Siyyid Yaḥyá, that unique and peerless figure of his age”. [KI 223] Also, the Báb had testified to his unique qualities in His *Dalá’il-i-Sab’ih* (Seven Proofs): “high attainments in the realm of science and philosophy.” In short, Vaḥíd was an accomplished cleric and man of great capacity with unbounded love for the Báb.

For the spiritual exploits of Vaḥíd and further explanation and details, refer to *Dawn Breakers*¹⁰ and *Awakening*.¹¹ While the Báb was still imprisoned in a fortress in the mountains of *Ádhirbayján* (in the fortress of *Chihriq*), Vaḥíd travelled to the south eastern city of Yazd and made an open proclamation of the Faith of the Báb to the people of that city who responded to his call instantly. This caused much uproar in the city. Because of his public proclamation of the Cause of the Báb, great agitations and open confrontation ensued, which placed his life and the lives of many others in great danger. Therefore, Vaḥíd had to leave the city of Yazd for his native land of *Dáráb* and eventually for *Nayríz*. The time of his arrival to this area was about two months before the martyrdom of the Báb, on 27 May 1850.¹²

The conflagration at *Nayríz* is a direct result of the courage, faith and self-sacrifice of Vaḥíd with his public proclamation of the New Cause of God to the public at large in the villages and towns on the way from Yazd to *Nayríz*. As a result of his efforts, thousands of the inhabitants of *Nayríz* and the

surrounding villages and towns embraced the Cause of God, including Hájí Muḥammad-Taqí, whose name has been mentioned in the Tablet and in whose honor the Tablet was revealed. The conversion of a large number of people to the Cause of the Báb led to strong action by the governor of the town, Zaynu'l-Ábidín Khán, and eventually confrontation between the companions of Vaḥíd and the army of the governor. The army surrounded the believers who had gathered in an abandoned fort outside of the town (fort of Khájih), and started establishing fortification of the fort for their own defense. Therefore, the fort of Khájih became the storm-center of the conflagration in Nayríz. It is stated that Hájí Muḥammad-Taqí was quite wealthy, and he decided to sacrifice his wealth by providing provisions for those who had taken refuge in the fort. Despite heavy artillery assistance which the governor of Nayríz received from the Governor of the province of Fárs, Prince Fírúz Mírzá, his troops were defeated three times by Bábís gathered in the fort.

Since they realized that they could not win this conflict with the sheer force of guns and soldiers, the Governor and his men decided to resort to treachery and craftiness. They made a solemn oath on the holy Qur'án and sealed it to indicate that they would honor their statements and asked Vaḥíd to visit their army headquarters. Vaḥíd was well aware of their intention, but due to his respect for their oath on the Qur'án, he said that he would go there to see what God had decreed. After his arrival in the army camp the Prince and his men showed initial respect towards Vaḥíd. However, this was a scheme, as eventually, they laid their hands on Vaḥíd and killed him. Many of the believers in the fort were also killed and the women and children captured and their properties plundered. In particular the governor captured and imprisoned Hájí Muḥammad-Taqí (along with several others) in the basement of his residence and tortured him for nine months.¹³ At the end, the Hájí gained his freedom in a miraculous way and after recovering from his wounds and gaining his health he went to Baghdád to meet Bahá'u'lláh.

The following are extracts from the Tablet regarding Vaḥíd, believers and Nayríz:

- Days passed until a group of people from the town ... gathered around Vaḥíd
- These people:
 - Obeyed the commands of God,
 - Circled around his cause,
 - Sacrificed their wealth,
 - Gave up everything they had of the treasures of this world
 - Were not frightened of anyone
 - Their hearts were like iron in the aim to render victory to God,
 - No blame from the blamer attached to them, no objection prevented them,
 - Rather they were exalted in the cities of God like holy and uplifted ensigns.
- Chieftain of the army of tyranny: was the most wicked man of the earth,
- He chooses to confer His mercy upon those who have detached themselves of all earthly things,
- If the station of anyone of you (believers Nayríz) should become clear all the peoples will give their lives in their desire for this station created by the hand of God. But this station is hidden from the eyes of men
- They decided to send to Vaḥíd an envoy with a tongue of falsehood and deception
- When they were impotent to defeat the party of God and His loved ones, they engaged in many deliberations and arranged a deception

- We admit that you (Vaḥíd) have the dignity and honor above us
- Address of Vaḥíd to the chiefs of army and his wise counsel to them and his reasoning with them:
 - If you admit that I am a descendent of the Prophet of God, why have you attacked me?
 - Why have you encircled our people?
 - Why have you turned away from the cause of God and rebelled against him?
 - O People! Fear God
 - Do not perpetrate mischief in God's earth
 - Do not abandon the true religion of God behind your backs
 - Fear God who has created you and nourished you
 - The world will pass away, your armies will disappear
 - Consider what happened to the nations of the past
 - I am nothing but a servant who has believed in God
 - If you are not pleased with me, I shall travel away from you
 - Fear God and do not shed the blood of His lovers
 - Do not take in vain the property of people
 - Do not disbelieve after your claims of belief.

Some quotes from the Tablet concerning the episode of Nayríz are given below:

Those who assist God with their wealth and their lives and who are patient under all conditions of hardship for the purpose of attracting God's good pleasure these are the ones who shall attain victory for all eternity. Such people even if they are killed or burned because they have been created of the spirit shall always soar in the

spiritual atmosphere through God's permission. These shall not attend to their bodies in this world and these seek sufferings in the path of God as a sinner seeks forgiveness, as a babe seeks the breast milk given to it by the mercy of God thus does the nightingale remind you with spiritual recollections so that men may detach themselves from their own self, their money and wealth and to return to the holy and clear presence....

O people of Nayríz! Thank ye God your creator who vouchsafed His bounty upon you, preferred you upon the peoples of the earth, honored you with attaining His presence, made you aware of His own self, nourished you from the fruits of the Tree of paradise at a time when all were depriving themselves of it. God gave you the bounty of appreciating His Days, God sent you the breezes of holiness and turned you to the right hand of divine unity and enabled you to get close to the holy Vale. Thus does God vouchsafe unto whomever He wishes and He chooses to confer His mercy upon those who have detached themselves of all earthly things. Thus cheer yourselves and pride yourselves over all the peoples of the earth. Know you that God has written your names upon Holy Tablets and has ordained for you a praiseworthy station in paradise. I swear by God! If the station of anyone of you should become clear all the peoples will give their lives in their desire for this station created by the hand of God. But this station is hidden from the eyes of men that the good may be distinguished from the corrupt and thus does God test the people in this world that what is in their hearts may become manifest and you have been a witness to all that....

Blessed are ye the people of Nayríz in that you are patient in your suffering and afflictions in these times ordained by God and in all you heard with your ears and as all you witnessed soon God will reward you with the

best reward and He shall give you what shall be pleasing to your souls and what shall establish your names in his hidden and holy Book. Strive therefore that you do not waste your fortitude with complaints and be ye acquiescent with what God has ordained unto you and what He shalt ordain in the future....

It is a historical fact that the atrocities in Nayriz against the believers did not end in 1850 with the martyrdom of Vaḥíd and his companions. There were two other episodes of great proportion in which hundreds of lives were lost, one in 1852/53 and another one in 1909. However, in between these major episodes, animosities existed at much lower intensity. For this reason, statements in the Tablet reflect this reality. Baha'u'llah refers to the persecution of the believers in Nayríz as something which happened year after year. For details refer to the book *Awakening*.

References to Religious Leaders, Divines and Learned

Bahá'u'lláh, in the Kitáb-i-Íqán and other tablets, has rebuked religious leaders for a variety of charges. This includes lack of understanding the Scriptures, interpreting the Scriptures without having authority according to their own limited understanding, greed and attachment to the worldly desires, misleading people for their own benefits and killing the Manifestations of God, etc. The Báb was also critical of the learned men of religion. He wrote:

It is recorded in a tradition that of the entire concourse of the Christians no more than seventy people embraced the Faith of the Apostle of God. The blame falleth upon their doctors, for if these had believed, they would have been followed by the mass of their countrymen. Behold, then, that which hath come to pass! The learned men of Christendom are held to be learned by virtue of their safeguarding the teaching of Christ, and yet consider

how they themselves have been the cause of men's failure to accept the Faith and attain unto salvation! [SWB 123]

In this Tablet, Bahá'u'lláh has called learned men the worst kind of people, to the extent that the quintessence of evil runs away from them. If we study the schemes of Shaykh 'Abdu'l-Ḥusayn Ṭihrání, and troubles that he created for Bahá'u'lláh in Baghdád which led to His exile, this would clearly demonstrate why such a pronouncement has been made against "learned men" as a whole. Bahá'u'lláh in other tablets has referred to this learned mujtahid as: "scoundrel," the "schemer," the "wicked one," who "drew the sword of his self against the face of God," "in whose soul Satan hath whispered," and "from whose impiety Satan flies," the "depraved one," "from whom originated and to whom will return all infidelity, cruelty and crime." [GPB 141] Unfortunately, many such references describe a large number of the learned men at the time of Bahá'u'lláh. The history of the faith of God has recorded the names of hundreds, nay thousands, of such men of learning in the garb of divines who were the essence of ignorance, impiety and injustice. There are always exceptions to this rule. Bahá'u'lláh, for example, has praised the fairness of Shaykh Murtaḍáy-i-Ansárí. Shaykh Maḥmúd-i-Álúsí, the Muftí of Baghdád, was also one of Bahá'u'lláh's great admirers.

A summary of some of the statements in the Surih Şabr regarding the learned divines is given below:

- They whom you have taken to be lords beside the One True God do not have names or essences mentionable in the sight of God
- They to whom you attribute knowledge and have accepted them as your divines they are in the sight of God the worst of men
- We testify that they have not drunk from the fountains of knowledge

- Nothing of rejection and denial against a prophet or a successor of a prophet has come to pass except after their permission.
- “Learned men” are not well grounded in knowledge.
- You have shed the blood of people whom the eyes of existence have not seen like them.
- You have followed those who are not prepared to lose an atom of their prestige in the path of God.
- Their greatest endeavor in this world is to eat of the peoples’ property and to sit at the high place in the assemblies of people and in all of this is their sole glory upon the peoples of the world.
- Say to them, by God, if only you could have any awareness in yourselves even less than a moment, you would erase all your books that you have written without God’s permission and you would hit your heads and you would flee from your own homes and you would live in mountains and you would feed yourselves only the dust of the earth.
- Do not rejoice in your deeds for you shall soon return to God and you shall face the resurrection in the mighty arena on a day which will result in the quaking of the limbs of all creation.
- Soon will these wrongdoers say while sunk in the lowest grades of hellfire would to God that we had not taken these divines to be friends for us.

We should note that the passages addressed to the clergy and men of learning are scattered throughout the Tablet. Each such passage is connected to a particular theme in which the clergy played a role. In a number of instances in the Tablet, Bahá’u’lláh refers to divines and learned men as follows:

Say I swear by God! They to whom you attribute knowledge and have accepted them as your divines they are in the sight of God the worst of men nay the quintessence of evil flees from them....

We testify that they have not drunk from the fountains of knowledge and they have not attained unto a word of Wisdom and have not become aware of the mysteries of Revelation and have been racing in the land of their selfish desires....

O people! Fear God and take not knowledge from muddied fountains that flow from a source of self and ignorance. Take ye your portion from sweet flowing, unsullied, waters that flow from the right hand of the throne and which God has apportioned for the righteous....

Those who are not prepared to lose an atom of their prestige in the path of God. Their greatest endeavor in this world is to eat of the peoples' property and to sit at the high place in the assemblies of people and in all of this is their sole glory upon the peoples of the world....

References of The Báb Concerning Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation

The Báb referred to the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh in His first Book, Qayyúmu'l-Asmá, using the expression "Baqiyat'u'lláh" meaning "Remnant of God." In Surih of Huzn (Surih of Grief which is Surih 58 or chapter 58 of the book: Qayyúmu'l-Asmá), He wrote:

O THOU Remnant of God! I have sacrificed myself wholly for Thee; I have accepted curses for Thy sake, and have yearned for naught but martyrdom in the path of Thy love. Sufficient witness unto me is God, the Exalted, the Protector, the Ancient of Days... [SWB 59]

In the early stages of His mission, Siyyid ‘Alí Muḥammad referred to Himself as the Báb. Those who were endowed with spiritual perception knew exactly what he meant by the word “Báb”. Those who were deprived of this bounty thought that He was a point of connection with the Twelfth Imam of Shí’ah Islam who had disappeared in what was known as the “Major Occultation.” Some others thought that He was a “Fourth Support” of the “Perspicuous Religion” according to Shaykhí belief. In this regard ‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes:

He began to speak and to declare the rank of Báb-hood. Now what He intended by the term Báb [Gate] was this, that He was the channel of grace from some great Person still behind the veil of glory, Who was the possessor of countless and boundless perfections, by Whose will He moved, and to the bond of Whose love He clung. And in the first book which He wrote in explanation of the Súrih of Joseph, He addressed Himself in all passages to that Person unseen from Whom He received help and grace, sought for aid in the arrangement of His preliminaries, and craved the sacrifice of life in the way of His love... [TN 4]

By the fourth year in His mission, the Báb revealed the *Bayán*, the book of laws for His own dispensation – one in Persian and another one in Arabic, and both remained incomplete. At this point in time, it was quite clear that His religion was an independent religion from Islam. At this time, he wrote extensively about the “unseen Person” from Whom he received help and called him “Him Whom God shall make manifest” who was the promised one of the dispensation of the *Bayán* – a reference to no other person than Bahá’u’lláh. Compared to previous references to the promised one of *Bayán* which were unclear and wrapped in mystery, the reference to “Him Whom God shall make manifest” in His writings which were written in Máh-Kú and onwards, were very clear.

In the Bayán, the Báb says that the Bayán “...is, from beginning to end, the repository of all of His attributes, and the treasury of both His fire and His light.” In the Persian Bayán, Arabic Bayán, Seven Proofs, Kitab-i-Asmá and other Writings of the Báb, there are considerable references to “Him Whom God shall make manifest”. There are numerous references to the “year nine” when the advent of “Him Whom God shall make manifest” will come to fruition. Mírzá Yaḥyá Azal wrongly interpreted and promoted the time of the appearance of the promised one of the Bayán to be the year 2001 from the start of the Báb’s mission¹⁴ – based on the number for the name “Mustagháth.” While in Chihríq, the Báb revealed the Lawḥ-i-Hurúfat (Tablet of the Letters) in honor of Dayyán, unraveled the mystery of the Mustagháth, and alluded to the year nineteen which would separate the Declaration of the Báb and that of Bahá’u’lláh. In short, references to “Him Whom God shall make manifest” in the Writings of the Báb are so vast that it would be impossible to refer to a tiny fraction of it in this paper.

In the Surih Şabr, Bahá’u’lláh makes mention of the singing of His praise in Qayyúmu’l-Asmá. This is a quote from the Tablet:

O Thou Quintessence of truth! Sing and chant with the most beauteous melodies for all the maidens of paradise have come out of their assemblies and their tents of purity that they may hear Your own melody, the melody that has been sung in the pages of God in the book, Qayyúmu’l-Asmá.

Bahá’u’lláh refers to “Qayyúmu’l-Asmá” among the writings of the Báb as “the first, the greatest and mightiest of all books.” [KI 231] Qayyúmu’l-Asmá is a commentary on the Surih of Joseph in the Qur’án. The Báb has written one chapter for each verse of this surih, a total of 111 chapters in all. He has interpreted the reality of Joseph in an entirely new and breath-taking manner, with numerous references to Bahá’u’lláh in the

book. This is why Bahá'u'lláh mentions the name of the Book in the above passage.

It was not accidental that the Báb revealed the Qayyúmu'l-Asmá at the start of His mission. The designation of the promised one according to the Shí'ah is the Qá'im (He who arises). The name "Qayyúm" is a derivation from the name Qá'im, with a slight difference, having the meaning: "the one who is standing." The numerical value of Yousof (Joseph) and Qayyúm is the same and is equal to 156. Therefore, it was providential for the Blessed Báb to write a commentary on the Surih of Joseph on that eventful night when He declared His mission to Mullá Ḥusayn and declared Himself in reality to be the promised Qá'im.

In the Tablet, Bahá'u'lláh further mentions:

Thou knowest that I have now become afflicted between the unbelievers from two parties and Thou commandest in both Revelations and overseest both Dispensations and Thou art manifest in the Twin garments and Thou art resplendent through the Two Suns and have been mentioned with the Twin Names, possessest the Twin Dawning-places, commandest the secret of the Twin Mysteries in these Two Lines and God is fully aware beyond all this.

In the above passage, there are several references to some words in the "Qayyúmu'l-Asmá" which the Báb has used to refer to Himself and His own Revelation as well as that of Bahá'u'lláh and His Revelation. For example, the Báb uses the word "Twin Names". It might mean that the name of Bahá'u'lláh consists of two names "Ḥusayn" and "Alí" in the same way that Báb's name also consists of two names "Alí" and "Muḥammad". It might also mean that the name of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh are two names but one reality. Bahá'u'lláh refers, in His Lawḥ-i-Maryam, to the Báb as His first name: "The wrongs which I suffered, have blotted out the wrongs suffered by My

First Name (the Báb) from the Tablet of creation.” Similarly, in the Surih Şabr there is a mention of “Twin Dawning-places” which have been also used quite frequently in “Qayyúmu’l-Asmá”, and it refers to both the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh. In all likelihood, the word “Twin Mysteries” widely repeated in the Tablet, has been used more than any other word in the “Qayyúmu’l-Asmá”. Not only the “Báb,” Himself was a mystery, rather, there was another mystery who was Bahá’u’lláh. One can refer in particular to Surih of Zikr (Surih of Remembrance which is surih 108 or chapter 108) for the above references in the Tablet. For further information regarding the “Qayyúmu’l-Asmá”, refer to the book *Gate of the Heart*.¹⁵

In addition to the above passage, there are a few more references in the Tablet regarding the “Qayyúmu’l-Asmá.” Consider the following passage:

*O Thou blood soaked Garment! Do not heed the
misgivings of mankind rather burn asunder their veils
and appear with thy divine ornament amongst earth and
heaven ...*

“Blood soaked Garment” which is used in this passage, seems to refer to Bahá’u’lláh Himself, as, it brings to mind the story of Joseph and his brothers. In the Tablet, Bahá’u’lláh, without using the name of His brother, Mírzá Yaḥyá Núrí, refers to the oppression of His brother, because “blood soaked Garment” has a prominent place in the story of Joseph and denotes the cruel action of Joseph’s brothers towards him. The Báb also used this same expression in his commentary on the surih of Joseph which is “Qayyúmu’l-Asmá.”

Another set of words used in the Tablet, whose origins can be traced to the Qayyúmu’l-Asmá, is “crimson and ruby.” For example one can find this expression in this passage of the Tablet: “*Handmaidens of eternity may return to their seats in the crimson and ruby laden chambers.*” One can find this word in numerous places in the Báb’s Writings. For example, for the

people of Bahá, he uses “Companions of the crimson-colored ruby Ark,” which clearly refers to the followers of the Ancient Beauty.

References Regarding His Own Revelation

As indicated earlier in this paper, Bahá'u'lláh received intimation of His mission in 1853 in the Sýyáh-Chál (Black Pit). It was the birth of His Mission and we might refer to this event as His “concealed declaration”. When He lived, as an exile, in 'Iráq, He did not mention His experience in this regard in the Sýyáh-Chál to anyone. It was pre-ordained to conceal the light within Him. However, in reviewing His Writings from this period, it is quite evident that He is speaking with divine spirit and authority. Earlier, it was mentioned that there were many who were aware of His station, and even some of them were awaiting His open claim to be the promised one of Bayán.¹⁶ Two names were mentioned earlier and now we can add a few more among the believers; whose names were listed by the Guardian:

Four of the Báb's cousins and His maternal uncle, Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Muḥammad; a grand-daughter of Fath-'Alí Sháh and fervent admirer of Ṭáhirih, surnamed Varáqatu'r-Riḍván; the erudite Mullá Muḥammad-i-Qá'ini, surnamed Nabil-i-Akbar; the already famous Mullá Šádiq-i-Khurásání, surnamed Ismu'lláhu'l-Ašdaq, who with Quddús had been ignominiously persecuted in Shiráz; Mullá Bāqir, one of the Letters of the Living; Siyyid Asadu'lláh, surnamed Dayyán; the revered Siyyid Javád-i-Karbilá'í; Mírzá Muḥammad-Ḥasan and Mírzá Muḥammad-Ḥusayn, later immortalized by the titles of Sulṭánu'sh-Shuhudá and Maḥbúbu'sh-Shuhadá (King of Martyrs and Beloved of Martyrs) respectively; Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí-i-Nahrí, whose daughter, at a later date, was joined in wedlock to 'Abdu'l-Bahá; the immortal Siyyid Ismá'il-i-Zavari'í; Hájí Shaykh

Muḥammad, surnamed Nabíl by the Báb; the accomplished Mírzá Áqáy-i-Munír, surnamed Ismu'lláhu'l-Múníb; the long-suffering Ḥájí Muḥammad-Taquí, surnamed Ayyúb; Mullá Zaynu'l-Ábidín, surnamed Zaynu'l-Muqarrabín, who had ranked as a highly esteemed mujtahid – all these were numbered among the visitors and fellow-disciples who crossed His threshold, caught a glimpse of the splendor of His majesty, and communicated far and wide the creative influences instilled into them through their contact with His spirit. Mullá Muḥammad-i-Zarandí, surnamed Nabíl-i-'Aẓam, who may well rank as His Poet-Laureate, His chronicler and His indefatigable disciple, had already joined the exiles, and had launched out on his long and arduous series of journeys to Persia in furtherance of the Cause of his Beloved. [GPB 130]

Among the learned men who were fair minded, we can name the renowned Ibn-i-Álúsí, the Muftí of Baghdád, Shaykh 'Abdu's-Salám, Shaykh 'Abdu'l-Qádir and Siyyid Dáwúdí. All of them sought Bahá'u'lláh's presence, and can be regarded among His admirers. Among the Government officials, foremost was 'Abdu'lláh Páshá and his lieutenant Maḥmúd Áqá, and Mullá 'Alí Mardán, a well-known Kurd. Among the distinguished Persians, who lived in Baghdád or its nearby towns and or temporarily were visiting Baghdád and became attracted to the inner Light of Abhá Beauty there were princes of the royal blood, amongst whom were the Ná'ibú'l-Iyálih, the Shuja'u'd-Dawlih, the Sayfu'd-Dawlih, and Zaynu'l-Ábidín Khán, the Fakhru'd-Dawlih. [GPB 134-135] The following statement, describing the atmosphere of the reception room of Bahá'u'lláh, has been attributed to Prince Zaynu'l-Ábidín Khán, the Fakhru'd-Dawlih: “were all the sorrows of the world to be crowded into my heart they would, I feel, all vanish, when in the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. It is as if I had entered Paradise itself.” [GPB 135]

Bahá'u'lláh's return from Sulaymáníyyih to Baghdád is regarded as a turning point in the fortunes of the Bábí community and a significant event in the history of the first Bahá'í century. At that point in time, the tide of the Bábí community in 'Iráq had reached its lowest ebb and with the return of Bahá'u'lláh, it started to surge back and continued to move upward, through the wise counsels of Bahá'u'lláh. This trend continued until His exile to Constantinople took place, when He made an "open declaration" of His Mission in the garden of Najíbíyyih.

The Riḍván period, which is generally known as the "open declaration" of the Mission of Bahá'u'lláh, requires clarification. We need to distinguish between "open declaration" and "public declaration." The declaration during the Riḍván period 1863 certainly was not a "public declaration". However, we may refer to it by "open declaration" which signifies that Bahá'u'lláh mentioned to some individuals that He was in fact the object of prophecies of the Báb in the Bayán and His other Writings. Wearing of the Táj (tall felt head-dress) on the day of His departure from the Most Great House for the garden of Najíbíyyih is another indication of His imminent assumption of the prophetic office stipulated by the Báb, "Him Whom God shall make manifest." Historians of the Faith have written very little about the nature of the "open declaration" of Bahá'u'lláh in the garden of Riḍván because the details were not recorded and are not known. In this regard, the Guardian writes:

Of the exact circumstances attending that epoch-making Declaration, we, alas, are but scantily informed. The words Bahá'u'lláh actually uttered on that occasion, the manner of His Declaration, the reaction it produced, its impact on Mírzá Yaḥyá, the identity of those who were privileged to hear Him, are shrouded in an obscurity which future historians will find it difficult to penetrate. The fragmentary description left to posterity by His

chronicler Nabil is one of the very few authentic records we possess of the memorable days He spent in that garden. [GPB 153]

In *Bahá'u'lláh King of Glory*, similar sentiments are expressed:

While writers and chroniclers have left copious accounts of the throngs of people, their expression of sorrow, the excellence of the skilled work of the gardeners, nothing is said of how Bahá'u'lláh made His long awaited Declaration.¹⁷

The significance of this event is that the period of concealment ended and a new Era started.

In addition, the community of the “Most Great Name”, the “companions of the Crimson Colored Ark,” mentioned in the *Qayyumu'l-Asmá*, had finally emerged. The Guardian calls Mírzá Áqá Ján *Khádimu'lláh* as the “first to believe” in Him [GPB 115]. We note that ‘Abdu'l-Bahá was present in the garden of Najíbíyyih (Garden of Riḍván) during the period of Riḍván. Only some of the believers of the Bayán, living in ‘Iráq or Írán, had the capacity to receive His Message. Bahá'u'lláh has referred to some of the ambitious and corrupt Bábís as idol worshipers. [GPB 119] Perhaps it was a rule rather than exception. In order to receive His message, an entirely new race of men needed to be created and brought to existence. So, those who were thinking in terms of the station of prophet-hood or successor-ship of the Báb and the like were not worthy of hearing his message. Bahá'u'lláh after reaching Edirne started sending “Teachers,” like Nabil Zarandí and Mírzá Áqáy-i-Muníb with the *Surih-i-Aṣḥab* (Tablet of Companions), to Írán to find Bábís who had enough conviction and understanding to receive the Message of Bahá'u'lláh, which was accomplished in the first and second year of His stay in Edirne. At this juncture, He had to formally inform Mírzá Yaḥyá Núrí that he should discontinue his claims to prophet-hood and embrace the new Cause, something that Azal rejected squarely. We may refer to this

stage of unfolding of His Message as the “public declaration.” Again, His “public declaration” was not an isolated event. Rather, as stated by the Guardian, it started and continued for a long time. In *God Passes By*, the Guardian dedicates an entire chapter (chapter 10) to the “The Rebellion of Mírzá Yaḥyá and the Proclamation of Bahá’u’lláh’s Mission in Adrianople.” [GPB 163]

In the Surih Ṣabr, Bahá’u’lláh makes many references concerning His Mission and the new dispensation, but He never used the designation of “Him Whom God shall make manifest,” – a term reserved by the Báb for the Promised One of the Bayán. Statements regarding His Mission are scattered throughout the Tablet. Rather, in the Tablet, Bahá’u’lláh hints to disclosure of His Light and the burning of all veils enwrapped around Him which had stopped the light within Him from reaching the eyes of men. Bahá’u’lláh also expresses the fact that people are not ready for the Message yet and this has to happen sometime in the future. He uses words like “soon” and “anticipate” which denote events in the future.

Below are some of the passages in the Tablet which refer to Bahá’u’lláh’s Mission:

I swear by God! Soon will God cause him to be manifested within the canopy of grandeur with a luminous garment which will scintillate like unto the scintillation of light above the spiritual horizon and eyes will be dazzled upon beholding him and above his head there will be a caller from God saying, “This is verily the one who was long suffering for God in the vain and futile world and in all that the unbelievers did unto him. The concourse on high will seek blessing from him and the occupiers of God’s pavilions will seek to meet him as well as the holy maidens in the sacred and beautiful tabernacles.”

Anticipate ye therefore the Day when the clouds of patience shall be uplifted and the immortal Bird shall warble, and the Peacock of holiness shall be made manifest with the ornament of Revelation in the kingdom of His reunion, and the stammering tongues shall be freed singing the accents of the Nightingale, and the Dove of paradise shall sing betwixt earth and heaven and the Trumpet shall be sounded and bodies of existence shall all be renewed, and the Divine Fire shall be ignited, and God in His transcendent and glorious Beauty shall come in the clouds of the Spirit. Then haste ye to Him O peoples of the earth! And do not heed anything else of this world, and let nothing impede you, and let the affairs of learning should not hinder you and the matters of wisdom should not lock you out haste with all haste to the holy and uplifted Precinct. For if you had been of the patient ones from all eternity but if ye tarry on that Day less than a moment the quality of true patience shall not be yours. This has been revealed by the pen of the Omniscient One.

The above passage can be broken down to the following expressions:

Anticipate ye therefore the Day when:

The clouds of patience shall be uplifted

Immortal Bird shall warble

Peacock of holiness shall be made manifest with the ornament of Revelation in the Kingdom of His reunion

Stammering tongues shall be freed singing the accents of the Nightingale

And the Dove of paradise shall sing betwixt earth and heaven

Trumpet shall be sounded;

Bodies of existence shall all be renewed

Divine Fire shall be ignited

*God in His transcendent and glorious Beauty shall come
in the clouds of the Spirit;*

Then haste ye to Him O peoples of the earth

Let nothing impede you

Let the affairs of learning should not hinder you

*Matters of wisdom (philosophical matters, philosophical
thoughts and knowledge) should not lock you out*

*The matters of wisdom: Philosophical matters,
philosophical thoughts, and knowledge*

*For if you had been of the patient ones from all eternity
but if ye tarry on that Day less than a moment the
quality of true patience shall not be yours*

*O Solace of the Eyes of Eternity! Witness what the
unbelievers report about this verdant and blessed Tree
that is upraised on the musk-laden mount. So high have
its Branches grown that They have reached a place hidden
beyond the Tabernacles of holiness. And these
unbelievers have purposed to cut its twigs. * Say: it is
protected in the fortress of God and is guarded in His
loving providence and yet God has prevented the hands
of the unbelievers and hypocrites from molesting it,
such that their hands will never reach it. Soon will God
gather under its shade all who are in the kingdom of
existence and this is what God has written for His own
Self to accomplish and all that has been irrevocable in
the Tablets of might written with the Pen of knowledge.*

*O Holy Countenance! Waft unto all existent things what
God has vouchsafed in His munificence unto Thee that
all things may rise from the sepulchers of their bodies
and that they may all be cognizant of that Revelation
that has come in all truth. Then send upon all beings*

musk-laden breezes that have been fragrant from thee from the source of immortality that haply moldering bones may be revived by them and that people may not deprive themselves from this Spirit that has been breathed by this pre-existent, eternal, and timeless Pen and thereby they, endowed with the most beautiful form, may attain resurrection in this holy and blest land.

Although the theme of patience was expressed at the beginning of the Tablet when the story of the life of Job was presented, Bahá'u'lláh at other occasions in the Tablet refers back to the theme of patience. As an example, towards the end of the Tablet, Bahá'u'lláh reverts back to the theme of the Tablet concerning patience and starts shedding light on the nature of His own Mission. In reviewing these paragraphs carefully, we realize that Bahá'u'lláh is making reference to His own revelation several times, and in different ways, some of which are quite startling. In addition, He warns the believers to be vigilant and to be careful not to be attracted to the manifestations of evil and selfish interests. Two passages are listed below:

O Solace of the eye of eternity! Change your tone and chant upon the melodies of those nightingales singing in the tabernacle of divine names and in the dominions of divine attributes that the birds of the throne may detach themselves from the dust of themselves, and may therefore turn back to their original homeland which is sanctified beyond transcendence. O Thou Quintessence of truth! Sing and chant with the most beautiful melodies for all the maidens of paradise have come out of their assemblies and their tents of purity that they may hear Your own melody, the melody that has been sung in the pages of God in the book, Qayyúmu'l-Asmá. Do not deprive these of what they have desired to hear of Thy new and wondrous melodies and loving kindness for Thou art indeed the most generous One in the

highest grades of immortality and in truth Thou art indeed the most generous One in the dominion of eternity and Thy Name is well known amongst the concourse on high as the Generous One.

O Thou most holy Beauty! The unbelievers do not respite Thee that a breath should be exhaled from Thy chest for as My voice wishes to leave My mouth, they place the hand of hatred over My mouth and yet with all your knowledge of this matter you command Me to raise My call in this atmosphere for Thou art the doer in truth, Thou art the commander in justice. Thou dost what Thou wish and Thou art wise over all things. If Thou hearkenest to the call of Thy servant, if Thou fulfilllest his wish then forgive them with the utmost kind word and delicate utterance that those handmaidens of eternity may return to their seats in the crimson and ruby laden chambers.

This section of the Tablet (the last few paragraphs) looks like a divine play. Bahá'u'lláh, after making a previous statement that the time is not ripe for making a declaration, in here He states that He should come out of His veil and should disclose His station. It seems these words indicate that if the time is not ripe to make mention of His station in a clear manner, then, He should come out of the veil so that they can see the light within Him.

References to Calf, Sámirí, Satan and Birds of Night

In the Surih Şabr there is no mention of the name of Mírzá Yaḥyá Núrí known as Azal, half-brother of Bahá'u'lláh, but there are several references to Calf, Sámirí and Satan which most probably refer to him. Mírzá Yaḥyá Núrí was a child when his father passed away, and Bahá'u'lláh took it upon Himself to raise him up. At the time of the Declaration of the Báb, he was barely an adult. Several years later when the Báb was

incarcerated, Bahá'u'lláh was well known as the leader of the Bábí community. In order that Bahá'u'lláh does not attract more undue attention than he already received, it was prudent to nominally appoint a figurehead point of contact with the Báb. This person happened to be Mírzá Yaḥyá Núrí. This selection was not on the basis of any merits or particular talents. Bahá'u'lláh has written that only four people knew about this arrangement and selection as a strategy only. They were: The Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, Mírzá Músá Kalím (brother of Bahá'u'lláh) and Mullá 'Abdu'l-Karím-i-Qazvíní, surnamed Mírzá Aḥmad (Mírzá Aḥmad Kátib).¹⁸ This nominal figure was not intended to have the status of a prophet but was only a figurehead. After the Martyrdom of the Báb, particularly when Bahá'u'lláh was exiled to 'Iráq, Mírzá Yaḥyá Núrí came to Baghdád under great guise and cover and lived there with much isolation in order not to be seen in public.

At this point and with the encouragement from certain Bábís who, at that time were considering themselves learned among the much oppressed Bábí community, Mírzá Yaḥyá thought he had a status in the Bayán Dispensation as a "Successor" to the Báb. He prided himself on high sounding titles such as Mir'atu'l-Azalíyyih (Everlasting Mirror), of Şubḥ-i-Azal (Morning of Eternity), and of Ismu'l-Azal (Name of Eternity). Mírzá Yaḥyá and those individuals who circled around him were jealous of the reverence with which Bahá'u'lláh was treated by the great majority of the Bábí community. At this point they still did not know He was the object of adoration in the Bayán and the actual person referred to by the Báb as "Him Whom God shall make manifest." Mírzá Yaḥyá and a small band of followers considered him to be the "Successor of the Báb," despite the fact that there was no such provision in the Bayán Dispensation. Apart from his shallow knowledge and a disposition which could not impress anyone, Mírzá Yaḥyá started promoting the idea that the advent of "Him Whom God shall make manifest" would occur at a distant time in the future (the year 2001 from the start of the Bábí Dispensation) –

despite the fact that it had already come to pass in “Year Nine” in the person of Bahá’u’lláh. During this time, Bahá’u’lláh contained within Himself the Mission with which He was invested, pending an appropriate time to mention it openly. The pre-ordained time finally arrived and it was the period of Ridván 1863 on the eve of His journey to far-away lands. Bahá’u’lláh knew well that His Declaration will bring opposition from His half-brother and will cause separation within the Bábí community. He had tried to educate and prepare the Bábí community to come to terms with this reality. This can be seen through references in the Tablet.

In the Tablet there are references to Calf and Sámirí which bring to mind the events during the time of Moses when He went to Mt. Sinai to have a conversation with God. A person by the name of Sámirí in the Qur’án (there is no mention of the name of Sámirí in the Old Testament) rose in opposition to Moses and made a “Calf” from the gold of the Israelis and called it as their God which they worship. Therefore, in the writings of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh whenever there is a mention of these two names (Calf and Sámirí) they may mean those individuals from among the believers who promote untrue and false ideas which are very much opposed to the religion of God. In this dispensation, in particular, two individuals are named: Mírzá Yaḥyá and Siyyid Muḥammad-i-Iṣfáhání. To the latter in particular, Bahá’u’lláh had referred in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, several years later, as the one who had “led astray” Mírzá Yaḥyá, and stigmatized him, in one of His Tablets, as the “source of envy and the quintessence of mischief.”

In anticipation of His “public declaration” which would start in Edirne, Bahá’u’lláh has warned the believers in Baghdád, who were left behind, against the noise of the “Calf” which was in fact what Mírzá Yaḥyá would say, write and distribute among the believers. In addition, references to “Satan” have been made in the Tablet in which similarities between “Satan” and Mírzá Yaḥyá could be drawn in two different ways. We recall the story of the creation of Adam in which God asked Satan, the

archangel, to bow down before Adam, which he refused. In Edirne, Bahá'u'lláh revealed Surih-i-Amr in which He clearly called Himself “Him Whom God shall make manifest” without leaving any room for misunderstanding, and invited Mírzá Yaḥyá to embrace His Mission [GPB 166] – the response of Mírzá Yaḥyá unfortunately was negative. So, Mírzá Yaḥyá, followed the footsteps of “Satan” who refused to show humility and submission to Adam, rebelled against Bahá'u'lláh under the pretext that he was a successor to the Báb in like-manner that “Satan” thought he had been created from fire while Adam had been created from mud and therefore he was superior to Adam. In this way Mírzá Yaḥyá waxed proud before the Manifestation of God. In the story of “Satan”, there is a second perspective to consider where Satan said he will mislead the Adam and his descendants. In like-manner, Mírzá Yaḥyá as the embodiment of “Satan” in character tried to mislead the Bábís concerning the New Dispensation and the “public declaration” of Bahá'u'lláh. In addition, in the Surih Şabr, Bahá'u'lláh refers to the “Birds of Night”. Birds of Night are creatures like “bats” which are deprived of the ability of vision to see and enjoy the world around them in the light of the sun – they start flying when there is much darkness. In this context, Bahá'u'lláh refers to His absence from Baghdád, as disappearance of the Sun of Reality and setting in the “Spiritual Darkness”. In such an environment, Birds of Night may have been Mírzá Yaḥyá and his associates who would start moving about and spreading false teachings. In the Tablet, Bahá'u'lláh warns the believers against them and advises the believers not to pay any attention to them.

Another reference to Mírzá Yaḥyá and his associates can be found in statements in the Tablet such as “those who joined partners with God,” and also “idol worshipers.” This discussion regarding some passages in the Tablet concerning Mírzá Yaḥyá and his associates would be incomplete without mention of the views expressed by individuals, who were un-informed at best or ill-intentioned at worst, in their perspective on the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. Individuals such as E.G. Browne tried

to wrongly advance the idea that the Azalí and Bahá'í groups were two divisions within the Bábí community and favored the idea that Azal's views were closer to the teachings of the Báb, and further, that Bahá'u'lláh usurped power from the legitimate successor (vicegerent) of the Báb. In addition, they translated into English (particularly E.G. Browne), a much discredited history book allegedly written by Ḥájí Mírzá Jání Káshání called *Nuqṭatu'l-Káf*, and along with the original book in Persian and a foreword by E.G. Browne printed and distributed it in the wider western circles (E.G. Browne attached much significance to his finding of this book). 'Abdu'l-Bahá countered these misgivings by directing Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl to refute the falsehood of all the claims advanced in that book so called "Nuqṭatu'l-Káf." Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl started on the task in earnest, and half-way through the writing of the book, he passed away to Abhá Kingdom in Cairo, Egypt. Finally this book was completed by a group of Bahá'í scholars in Ṭíhrán with the assistance from Mírzá Siyyid Mihdí Gulpaygání and was called "Kashf ul-Ghita." This book was finally printed but was not distributed widely.¹⁹

Some of the passages in the Surih Ṣabr which contain references to Calf, Sámirí, Satan and Birds of Night include:

The earth shall be inherited by those servants who are wholly consecrated unto God, have not imbibed the love of the "Calf" in their hearts, and who turn away from those who continue to disbelieve despite clear evidences presented to them. Thus have the fingers of might upon the tablets of light inscribed the divine behest.

*But O people of the Bayan! Strive with the utmost striving that ye may not disagree * about the Cause of God and be ye as steadfast as the mountain in all truth in such wise that the whisperings of the Evil One may not cause you to slip and that nothing on earth may pervert you. All this is that which the Dove of Revelation counseleth you at the time of departure from 'Iráq*

because of what the hands of unbelievers have wrought. Furthermore know ye, O concourse of chosen ones, that when the Sun sets, the birds of night will move about in the darkness, but you ought not pay heed to them. Rather turn your faces in this well-beloved and holy direction. Beware lest ye follow the “Sámiri” in your souls; beware lest ye fall behind the “Calf” when it bleats amongst you. This is my best counsel unto you and unto all created things. You shall hear the call of Sámirí after Me and he will summon you to the Evil One. Go ye not therefore to him, rather turn to this Hidden and Glorious Beauty. At this point We address all who are in heaven and on earth from this City that haply all things may attain to what has been ordained for them from the Wise, the Omniscient One.

Ere long will the cause of God be manifested and truth shall be distinguished from falsehood. The standards of guidance will be uplifted and all traces of those who have joined partners with God obliterated.

Farewell to the Believers

Bahá'u'lláh left Baghdád with His family and 26 individuals whom He selected to accompany Him (there were a few more who joined the travelers middle of the way). The vast majority of those who loved Him were left behind and it weighed heavily on their hearts to see Him move away from their midst. In the last few paragraphs in the Tablet, Bahá'u'lláh bids farewell to the believers in glowing terms and with language full of imagery, makes use of terms such as the “bird”, “tree”, “branches”, “Sheba”, “Sinai” and “fragrant and musk laden breeze.” Leaving the “City of God” or “the Abode of Peace” on the day of departure has been recorded in great detail from the “Pen of the Most High” in other tablets, and by historians and by eye-witnesses of the events of that day who penned down what they saw for posterity. Bahá'u'lláh calls this event as “the

day of Great Terror” in this Tablet which is quoted below. For this phrase, there may be two different explanations.

*Say: this Tablet enjoins upon you, patience on this day of the Great Terror and commands you to show forbearance *in this Most Great Agitation*

The use of this terminology “day of the Great Terror” has two-fold significance. First, the usage of the word: day of the “Great Terror” which is in fact one of the references to the “Day of Judgement.” “Most Great Terror” is one of the references in the Qur’án describing the time of the end.

The Supreme Horror will not grieve them, and the angels will welcome them, (saying): This is your Day which ye were promised. (Surah Al-Anbiya, Surih number 21, verse 103)

The interpretation of the day of Great Terror in the Writings is the time of appearance of the Manifestation of God. So, in this regard when Bahá’u’lláh is referring to day of Great Terror in the Tablet as quoted above, it is likely to refer to both meanings. The first one is His own appearance in the fulfillment of the prophecies in the Qur’án. Also, it might refer to his actual departure from the “Most Great House” in Baghdád, for the garden of Najíbíyyih, to which He never returned. On that day, even the trees and stones moaned their separation from Him. The second meaning of this word is its actual physical meaning and in fact if we notice what has been reported about that day and all the commotion, wailing and crying of the people, even non-believers, it was indeed the day of great terror.

In describing His departure from Baghdád, Bahá’u’lláh has used the term “Dove of Hijáz flies from ‘Iráq.” There is a mystery in this statement and there may be a few interpretations or explanations for calling Himself “Dove of Hijáz.” Hijáz is the land of Arabia and the region around Mecca and Medina. As far as we know, neither His ancestry is rooted in Arabia and

Hijáz to warrant the usage of such word for Himself in this manner, unlike the Báb whose lineage was from Hijáz and thus his self-reference as the Arabian Youth (He was a Siyyid), nor did Bahá'u'lláh travel to this region for pilgrimage or a visit. One could possibly interpret Bahá'u'lláh's usage of this term as being due to having revealed the Surih Şabr in Arabic which is the language of Hijáz. In addition, Hijáz and Hijází are a music system of notes, and singing in the Hijází system or melody of Hijáz. The reference to the "Dove of Hijáz," could denote prophet-hood and being a Manifestation of God. It could mean singing in a similar manner as Muḥammad did, who was in reality a "Dove of Hijáz." In other words, by using this terminology, Bahá'u'lláh could be stating indirectly that He is a Manifestation of God.

Other imagery used by Bahá'u'lláh in His parting words in the Surih Şabr is *"The Bird of Immortality has flown from the Horizon of Eternity and has purposed the Sheba of the Spirit in the Sinai of holiness."* This passage is very complex to understand it correctly, while connecting the elements mentioned in the verse. After all, it is mentioned in the following passage that "this is but one of God's hidden secrets." The following may be one of several explanations: The Bird of Immortality is Bahá'u'lláh who has flown from the Horizon of Eternity for spiritual Sheba. Sheba was the kingdom of the Queen of Sheba who had a message for King Solomon and vice versa, and a bird was a messenger between them (this is why He uses the metaphor "The Bird of Immortality" in here). However, this Sheba of Spirit is in the Sinai of holiness. The Sinai of Holiness brings to mind the conversation of Moses with God and the revelation and religion that Moses brought to the people exemplified in the form of the Ten Commandments. In other words, this Bird of Immortality who is Bahá'u'lláh has flown from the Horizon of Eternity in order to bring a spiritual message to the people in the Sinai of holiness. In short, this is again another statement that the disclosure of His station to the people is imminent.

Abode of Peace is a reference to paradise and is also a title for “Baghdád” in Islamic literature and history. There is a prophecy in the Qur’án regarding the call of God which will go out of “Abode of Peace” which is Baghdád – this refers to the revelation of Bahá’u’lláh. Muslim scholars and men of learning have interpreted the “Abode of Peace” as Paradise.

And Allah summoneth to the abode of peace, and leadeth whom He will to a straight path. (Súrah Yunus, Súrah 10, verse 25)

In some of the Tablet’s passages he discusses His departure from Baghdád and comforts those who stay behind:

*Say: this Tablet enjoins upon you patience on this day of the Great Terror and commands you to show forbearance * in this Most Great Agitation when this Dove of Hijáz flies from ‘Iráq and sheds upon all contingent beings the fragrances of separation and on the face of heaven appears the color red for thus is the matter decreed in the Mother Book.*

Say: The Bird of Immortality has flown from the Horizon of Eternity and has purposed the Sheba of the Spirit in the Sinai of holiness so that in the Mirror of divine destiny the commands of His decree may be reflected and this is but one of God’s hidden secrets. Say: The Bird of Glory has flown from one branch and has sought the Branch of holiness planted in the land of exile. Say: the Breeze of Divine Unity has dawned from the Abode of Peace and has sought to blow over the city of separation as mentioned in the scrolls of divine Revelation. Say: O concourse in the heavens and on earth! Throw ye ashes on your faces and on your heads because the Beauty of God disappears from these near cities and intends to dawn from the horizon of a remote heaven. All this has been decreed in truth and We are

thankful to God in that He has caused to descend on Us tribulation after tribulation and at this moment too He rains upon Us from the Clouds of His Decree down-pouring of well-known sorrows.

Conclusion

The Tablet of Patience (Súrih-i-Şabr) is a mighty Tablet revealed at a critical time in the history of the Bahá'í Faith. For better understanding of this Tablet, in this article, several key concepts were explored and discussed, with consideration of the historical context or the spiritual principles behind them. It is hoped that exploration of the key themes provides a basis for a study of the Tablet's contents in greater detail. The Tablet's key themes explored in this paper include patience and calamities, life of Job, events of Nayríz and Vaḥíd, status of religious leaders in the sight of God, prophecies of the Báb regarding Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, open and public declarations of Bahá'u'lláh, meaning of Calf, Sámirí, and the parting words of Bahá'u'lláh.

NOTES

¹ Balyuzi, H.M., *Bahá'u'lláh The King of Glory*, George Ronald Publisher, Oxford, 1980, pp. 132-134.

² Taherzadeh, Adib, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Vol. I, George Ronald Publisher, Oxford, 1974, pp. 92-93

³ Refer to the following link: http://bahai-library.com/bahaullah_surih_sabr

⁴ Holy Bible, Lockman Foundation, 1973, Canada, p. 368.

⁵ Holy Bible, *ibid*, p. 368.

⁶ Holy Bible, *ibid*, p. 369.

⁷ Holy Bible, *ibid*, p. 393.

⁸ Nabil-i-'Azam, *The Dawn Breakers, Translated from the original Persian and Edited by Shoghi Effendi*. Wilmette, 1970, pp. 173-177.

⁹ TN 7-8.

¹⁰ *The Dawn Breakers*, pp. 465-476.

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- ¹¹ Ahdieh, Hussein and Chapman, Hillary; *A wakening, A History of the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths in Nayriz*, Bahá'í Pub. Trust, Wilmette, 2013, pp. 53-76.
- ¹² *The Dawn Breakers*, pp. 477- 499.
- ¹³ *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Vol. I, *ibid*, pp. 141-142.
- ¹⁴ Schaefer, Udo; Towfigh, Nicola; Gollmer, Ulrich; *Making the Crooked Straight, a Contribution to Bahá'í Apologetics*, trans. from German by Dr. Geraldine Schuchelt, George Ronald Publisher, Oxford, 2002, pp. 603-604.
- ¹⁵ Nader Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart, Understanding the Writings of the Báb*, Wilfred Laurier University Press, Canada, 2nd printing, 2010.
- ¹⁶ *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Vol. I, pp 84-85.
- ¹⁷ Balyuzi, H.M., *Bahá'u'lláh The King of Glory*, *ibid*, p. 173.
- ¹⁸ *The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh*, 1992, p. 61.
- ¹⁹ *Making the Crooked Straight*, pp 496-528.

Elucidations

Non-Involvement in Politics

Universal House of Justice

[Authorized translation from the Persian]

(Department of the Secretariat)

24 December 2013

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

Kindly convey the following to

Your letter dated 5 October 2013, in which you raise a number of questions related to the discussions that took place at the recent conference of the Association of Friends of Persian Culture in Chicago, was received by the Universal House of Justice. It has asked us to convey the following.

The House of Justice noted with appreciation your concern for safeguarding the interests of the Cause. In response to your questions, it should be noted that non-involvement in politics is one of the principles of the Bahá'í Faith and cannot be disregarded by any individual or institution. The House of Justice has repeatedly, and most recently in its message of 12 Isfand 1392 [2 March 2013] addressed to the believers in the

Cradle of the Faith, elaborated a framework within which Bahá'ís may participate in constructive social activities and interactions without deviating a hair's breadth from this law of Bahá'u'lláh.

Concerning the contents of the talk given by one of the prominent believers at this conference, no doubt you have by now seen his response to the open letter.

You ask whether collaboration with, support for, and approval of political parties that are in opposition to a government are considered a form of involvement in politics. This is indeed the case. The House of Justice, in the same 12 Isfand [2 March] message, reminds the community of the Greatest Name that the believers must learn how, on the one hand, to participate in civil activities and a wide range of endeavors for the spiritual and social transformation of humanity and, on the other, to strictly abstain, by word and deed, from involvement in partisan politics. Collaboration with movements, organizations, groups, and individuals, whose goals are compatible with the ideals of the Faith and whose approaches are in line with the Bahá'í community's approach, can assist with this learning. However, the believers should never compromise the fundamental principles of the Faith or deviate from their own path for any reason. At the same time they should learn from occasional mistakes, modify and correct their actions, avoid criticizing one another, and preserve the unity of the community at all times.

Rest assured of the supplications of the House of Justice at the Sacred Threshold for the continued success and confirmation of your endeavors.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

In Memoriam

The passing of three staunch and dear supporters of `Irfán Colloquium, Mr. Hushmand Fatheazam, Dr. Amin Banani, and Ms. Mahboubeh Arjmand, in 2013, is greatly regrettable and a great loss to the organizers, participants and friends of the `Irfán Colloquium. May the radiant souls of these three valued friends be richly rewarded in the Abhá Kingdom.

Mr. Hushmand Fatheazam, from the start of the `Irfán Colloquium and its publications, was a constant encourager, inspirer and patron of the services rendered through this project. We greatly benefited from his guidance and collaboration. Whenever it was feasible for him, Mr. Fatheazam and his dear wife Shafigheh Fatheazam were participating at the `Irfán Colloquium sessions. Mr. Fatheazam's presentations immensely enriched our programs and we greatly enjoyed their presence. Our publications contain the texts of some of his presentations.

Dr. Amin Banani was one of the founders and patrons of the `Irfán Colloquium program in Northern California, at Bosch Bahá'í School. As long as his health condition allowed it, he, together with his dear wife Sheila Banani, was regularly participating at the `Irfán Colloquium sessions, where he made scholarly presentations, while Sheila coordinated the program of the sessions conducted in English. He is especially missed at our sessions convened at Bosch Bahá'í School.

Ms. Mahboubeh Arjmand, who passed away in San Diego, was one of the supporters of the `Irfán Colloquium and was regularly making contributions to Haj Mehdi Arjmand

Memorial Fund that sponsors `Irfán Colloquium services. Ms. Arjmand passed away in San Diego. She was fondly remembered as a devoted participant at various Bahá'í youth activities in Iran.

Iraj Ayman

`Irfán Publications

Hushmand Fatheazam¹

(1924-2013)



We begin by borrowing these stellar words from one of Mr. Fatheazam's closest friends and contemporaries who declared, soon after his passing, that he was "...a majestic figure with a legacy of spirituality, of humility, of scholarship, and of steadfastness that will endure the tests of time and will inspire generations to come."² Such an illustrious portrayal is not ungentle nor an ideal distant from the realm of possibility. It is an eager accolade justified in a life indissoluble from the religious faith which nourished it.

The opening scene is literally the dawning of the Day of God, the earliest years of the new-born Revelation and the date is 1845. "One day, crowds of people gathered in the streets of

Shiraz to watch a procession. The cruel and impious Husayn Khán, the Nizámu'd-Dawlih, ruler of the town had reviled and cursed three men, stripped them of their clothes, burned their beards, scourged one of them with one thousand lashes, and pierced their noses and through the incisions cords were passed with which the three men were led through the town. These three heroes were: Quddus, Mulla Sadiq Muqaddas and Mulla Ali Akbar Ardestani.”³ The first three Bábís known to have suffered persecution for their faith on Persian soil. Hushmand Fatheazam, born on January 8th, 1924, in Teheran, Iran, was the great grandson of Mulla ‘Ali Akbar Ardestani, and his wife Shafiqih Farzar, the great granddaughter of his fellow sufferer, Mulla Sadiq Muqaddas (or Ismu’lláhu’l-Asdaq). As destiny would have it, these two graceful sweethearts, married in 1948, were already conjoined by their forebears some hundred years earlier...

Such may be the auspicious beginning but these lives do not go unchallenged, nor are they spared pain. Hushmand Fatheazam was only 28, and alone in India (his wife and newly born son, Shahab, to join him later in their pioneering post) when he received news of the cruel murder of his father, Nureddin Fatheazam, then Chairman of the National Spiritual Assembly of Iran. Irresponsible farmers of a certain village near Tihran attacked him most ferociously and tore him into pieces. No voice was raised against these atrocities and no signs of justice were ever manifested in the whole country. Only one honor emerged from this horrific episode of martyrdom and that was when Shoghi Effendi instructed that a tomb, in honor of Nureddin Fatheazam, was to be erected on his behalf. Another painful, unexpected loss would occur several years later in the life of Hushmand Fatheazam with the passing away of his youngest son, Shafiq, in Canada, in 1994. Historical reporting of these particularly disconsolate events in more than a century of suffering to one family is not to create pathos but to show that even religiously dedicated and passionate men and women, on the deepest personal level, are not spared ‘sorrow

and anxiety, regret and tribulation...the lot of every loyal servant of God'. (BK 7)

Such unqualified allegiance to the Cause of God began when Hushmand Fatheazam, at only 18 years of age, requested permission from his father, Nureddin, to pioneer to Iraq. His father responded that at such an age, under 21 years of age (the age which makes Bahá'ís eligible for administrative posts), not even his physical presence would assist in the formation of any Local Spiritual Assembly. Hushmand, in his defense, mentioned the story of a young pioneer whom Shoghi Effendi had praised some years earlier for having formed Local Assemblies even himself being unable to serve for similar age restrictions. Hushmand, the eldest of four children, was granted his father's permission to leave Iran on this noble quest.

After a brief home-front pioneering later in Shiraz as a married man (1950), Hushmand Fatheazam lived his first memorable and glorious episode, as a pioneer in that land of constellations we know as India at the onset of the Ten Year Crusade of the beloved Guardian in 1953.

After completing the requirements of a doctoral degree program in Persian Literature at Tehran University, Hushmand Fatheazam won a special scholarship offered by the Indian government for graduate studies at Tagore's Visva Bharati University, in Shantiniketan, West Bengal, today known as Peace University. Mr. Fatheazam then earned an M.A degree in Sanskrit Language and Literature from that University. He was the only known Persian scholar in this particular field of study. Although he was fully qualified to seek a faculty position back in his home country, Iran, the young couple decided to remain in India as pioneers of the Ten Year Plan. Dorothy Baker, the Hand of the Cause of God visiting India in the early '50s, after having given a series of lectures at the same University, encouraged the Fatheazams to move to New Delhi, the capital, to better serve the Faith. In 1955 Mr. Fatheazam was elected as a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of

India and served as its Executive Secretary until 1963. He performed that duty on a voluntary basis and had to support his family with income earned from three part-time jobs. Among these, was serving as program developer for the Persian section of All India Radio. In addition to his expertise in Persian language and literature he also did translation work for the Iranian Embassy. Shafiqih, while taking care of their three very young children, also engaged in dress-making to supplement their limited income. Mr. Fatheazam would work all day at the National Bahá'í Center and would conduct his work in the evening at All India Radio from 9:00 p.m. to 12:00 a.m. with translation work being completed at the weekends. This is how Hushmand Fatheazam managed to offer his services as full-time Secretary of the National Assembly without burdening the National Fund.

In early 1960 following the Rampur conference a year before, the Hand of the Cause of God Dr. Mohajer met with the National Assembly of India and advised them to focus their teaching activities on the rural areas sensing that the time was propitious to begin mass teaching. A small team of volunteers, led by Shirin Boman Meherabani, was recruited and contact was made with the Bhilala tribal village, some fifty miles from Indore, in the State of Madhya Pradesh. Thus began an activity that spread as a fire that *'blazeth and rageth in the world...'*⁴ The National Office, however, did not have the manpower nor the financial resources to produce Bahá'í literature in various languages fast enough to accompany the rate with which multitudes were embracing the Faith. There was the imminent need to recruit, train and send travelling teachers to the newly opened localities and deepen the new believers and consolidate newly developed Bahá'í communities. Managing the national affairs of the Bahá'í community of India was so overwhelming and so demanding that its execution seemed quite an impossible job.

Under the pressure of so many heavy responsibilities, Mr. Fatheazam introduced some very original, not to mention

innovative, measures. He would publish small postcards with pictures of a fruit or a flower accompanied by a selected quotation from the Writings in different Indian languages. Bahá'í teachers would then give such cards to every family who would embrace the Faith. Mr. Fatheazam later used the notes of the courses he had given at Bahá'í summer schools to author a book called *The New Garden*, first published in 1963, which introduced the main verities of the Bahá'í Faith in a simple and sweet language, and which acted as a kind of standard textbook for new believers. This book is unique and has become an international best seller, today translated into one hundred and nine languages and continually being reprinted and published in new editions worldwide.

These achievements were undertaken by Mr. Fatheazam in the true spirit of voluntary service to the Cause, that is, without remuneration. He never did receive, or wish to receive, any royalty from the many books he published in his life. He did make sure, however, that the monies drawn from these books were donated to one of the many Bahá'í projects. Both Mr. Fatheazam and his wife, Shafiqih, were content to lead a very simple life, but their simple home was always open to entertain both Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í visitors alike.

Destiny articulates itself unbidden and the ensuing chapter in the life of Hushmand Fatheazam can only be labeled as dramatic. The daughter of no less a person than Mulla 'Ali Akbar Ardestani was amongst the 6,000 Bahá'ís who were attending the World Congress in London in 1963 where the first historic Universal House of Justice was formally presented to the Bahá'í world. Hushmand, her grandson, was standing, with eight others, with his hands clasped and head bowed, before a cheering multitude gathered in the Royal Albert Hall. Protagonists of a fascinating period of Bahá'í history, these very first '*passion-wingèd Ministers of thought*'⁵ faced an immense challenge representing not only an institution with no precedent or history but a world-wide community struggling to be born. Their summons was larger in that these nine men had to

ensure the welfare not just of the community it was created to protect but “...to foster that which is conducive to the... advancement and betterment of the world.”⁶ A momentous era in human history was fused with a life-shaking personal transition of nine individuals. Surely this cannot be confined to a singular expression. The moment speaks more than its own historical situation.

However, it was not his membership on the Universal House of Justice, which was to last 40 years – a value in itself – which providentially earns Hushmand his place among God’s heirs. This is not enough to endear him. Sires of an immortal strain, what makes him and his fellow-members exceptional in these early years of the birth and functioning of the House of Justice, was the inestimable and privileged seating from which to witness historic undertakings and deliberations associated with that august body, be they legislative, as enshrined in the Constitution signed on the Day of the Covenant 1972, be they significant enunciations (for example, *The Promise of World Peace*, distributed to many politicians and prominent individuals since its writing in 1985, is the first, and still only, official public statement made by the Universal House of Justice since its inception), be they Holy Sites developments and ever-extending gardens along the perennial designs laid down by the beloved Guardian, be they the completion of almost all of the buildings of the Arc (there only remains the International Bahá’í Library yet to be constructed), the formation of institutions anticipated by Shoghi Effendi, such as the International Teaching Centre established in 1973, a paradigm shift in modes of thinking by raising collective consciousness that led to “...a change in the culture of the community,”⁷ and so many other stupendous developments and triumphs in any of the many spheres of the supreme institution’s responsibility. It would not be wrong to say that these men lay their heads on stone, and sleep waking, fixing their gaze by day and by night unable to flee the business of the world or the heavy burden of work. Self-sacrifice is their proper

end – a sacrifice particularly hard felt by an adamant Hushmand in his shouldering “almost single-handedly the day-to-day tasks and anguish and sheer exhaustion of being the link of communication between the House of Justice and the friends in Iran”⁸ during the fierce and continuing onslaught of the modern persecution of this Bahá’í community since 1980.

In May 2003, Hushmand and Shafiqih left Haifa, never to return. One curious fact was that Hushmand never went on pilgrimage. Such a glaring omission living in such proximity to the Holy Sites was as much imposed by his tenure as by the circumstances prior to his election to the House of Justice. He always wanted to visit Shoghi Effendi but was deprived. He made his pilgrimage, though, through life – a life with more of the qualities of a folktale in its humor and witty, realistic observations about the world than a soberly biblical prose.

Hushmand Fatheazam’s departure from Haifa and its solemn obligations was never seen as emancipation. His final ten years spent in Vancouver, Canada, plunged him into feverish, creative activity, such as being a regular radio broadcaster in *Payam-e-Doost* where more than 400 weekly talks have been recorded in the Persian language, reaching his fellow citizens in Iran and where many declared themselves as Bahá’ís. Listeners are numbered in the hundreds of thousands. These talks are now being assembled in several volumes to be re-published with the heading *Afkar-i-Naw, Goftar-i-Naw*. He translated the books of Shoghi Effendi into Persian from the original English, namely, *The Advent of Divine Justice* and *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*. He also translated into Persian voluminous biographical works, such as *Mr. Faizi* and the *Maxwells of Montreal* (the first volume). He published his book *Introduction to the Bahá’í Faith* in Persian which to date has sold 35 thousand copies mostly distributed in Iran. His book of poems was published in 2005 and a new edition is being planned as the entire stock has long since been sold. He recently began his book on the Persian writings of Shoghi Effendi, entitled *Bahr-i-Por Gohar*, but managed to complete only three chapters,

having begun writing the fourth when the die cast of scholarship was interrupted from the spirit which was molding it. Hushmand Fatheazam's capacity for work was undeniably extraordinary and his literary output of the rarest quality. Mojtaba Minavi (1903–1976), the well-known Iranian historian, literary scholar and professor of Tehran University, praised Hushmand, then only 21 years of age, for his outstanding translation of Tolstoy's "*A Confession*" offering it as an absolute model for its writing style and interpretative potential as well as linguistic patterns. His distinct style of writing is worthy of study and emulation. If we were to identify a constant in Hushmand Fatheazam's literary output it would be this: his writings, his poems, his public talks, the ethical structure of his life pinned on the sovereign idea of transience not to demean the world or to mock it – he never wished for anyone to crave for finality – but to impel us to step into eternity while still on excursion here on earth. Hushmand's prodigious literary production rested on the firm belief that to survive the vicissitudes of fortune one must make 'the leap of faith', a personal commitment to the kind of life not dependent on the contingencies of success or human love which always make life unsatisfactory but on a life which rests upon a relationship with God. Hushmand Fatheazam's intellectual and literary endowment, despite his call to onerous, uninterrupted Bahá'í service, will give the world another heart and other pulses.

His very last service to the Faith was his participation in the Youth Conference in Vancouver, on Sunday morning, August 4th, 2013. "His stirring talk at that event called by the Universal House of Justice was truly a gift of encouragement to those gathered there. His spiritual life, which began as a youth in Teheran all those years ago, bore its final sweet fruit among these youth in Canada. How lucky they were to hear him and how blessed he was to die with his boots on..."⁹ That afternoon, he suffered a heart attack and was taken to hospital never to

fully regain consciousness. He passed away just before midday, August 13th.

This final act really depicts Mr. Fatheazam's life as a serpentine verse. It began with the word faithfulness and ended with it. His life was accomplished because it was harmoniously unified. He consistently obeyed his inner self open to the world and its objects but molded, paradoxically, by institutions, traditions, and all the social regulators shunned by modern man. Therein lay his self-sufficiency and self-reliance because these were spiritually guided not by an inner law but by a law which was the province of established religion. He showed us that to respect authority is not servility but stability and more, love. Indeed, he materialized in its essence 'Abdu'l-Bahá's injunction: "*Obedience is the rod by which I measure the love of the friends.*"¹⁰ His was the tenderest 'radiant heart that exuded an all-embracing love',¹¹ making no difference between feeling for someone (sympathy) and feeling as them (empathy), all the time recognizing that while qualities common to the human species went into the making of it, ego is born only because humanity is suppressed and unloved.

In any context within this delightful or alarming, disheveled world, Hushmand Fatheazam was unchangeable, consistent and never self-divided because he lived in an attitude of prayer, an attitude which enacted a personal history in which coherent evolution was shown to be possible and why it inevitably leads to felicity. His particular greatness was his humility. "He combined humility and nobility to perfection."¹² Once, on being asked as a member of the Universal House of Justice, how he assessed his role in the worldwide development of the Bahá'í Faith, Hushmand replied: "Individual's role always gets amalgamated in any institution of the Bahá'í Faith. I firmly believe that each Bahá'í reflects the will of God in all his undertakings, though he plays his role relative to his level of consciousness, no matter where he is placed."¹³ Hushmand was really saying that individuals on the House disappear in membership, a similar disposition shared by his contemporary

and colleague since the earliest days Mr. Ian Semple, himself the longest serving member of the House and who passed away in 2011. On those early years, he wrote:

There was, from the very first, an extraordinary feeling of unity and love among the members, and also of absolute dependence on the strength and guidance of Bahá'u'lláh. The image which came to my mind at that time was that we were a handful of pebbles in the palm of God.¹⁴

We end this brief outline as we began, with another written remembrance, but this tribute is more poignant, marching, distinctly relevant, and infinite:

We have learned, with profound sadness, of the passing of our dearly cherished, greatly esteemed former colleague Hushmand Fatheazam. Tenderness of spirit, profound knowledge, noble humility, and tireless endeavour characterized his highly valued services rendered over the course of many decades, whether as a member of the Universal House of Justice for forty years beginning in 1963, as Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of India, or as an enkindled pioneer, avid proponent of teaching among the masses, and inspired author. His wholehearted and resolute defence of the community of the Greatest Name was unwavering, and his determination in the face of adversity unyielding. Gifted with a unique eloquence in Persian prose and verse, he leaves a remarkable legacy of deploying the power of that language in service to the Cause. Beyond a distinguished record of consecrated exertion in the path of the Blessed Beauty, he will also be remembered for his manifold outstanding personal qualities, for his delightful humour, and for his kindly and radiant heart that exuded an all-embracing love.

We extend our deep condolences to his dear wife, Shafiqih, and to his bereaved sons and other family members and assure them of our ardent supplications at the Sacred Threshold that his illumined soul may reap a rich reward in the Abhá Kingdom. The friends throughout the world are called upon to hold memorial meetings in his honour, including befitting commemorative gatherings in all Houses of Worship.

The Universal House of Justice

14th August 2013

NOTES

- ¹ This article is authored, at the request of *Irfán Publications*, by Shahbaz Fatheazam
- ² Soheil Bushrui, letter of condolence to the family, dated August 14, 2013
- ³ A.Q. Faizi, *Bahá'í Journal* (UK), June 1963
- ⁴ Bahá'u'lláh, *Bahá'í Prayers*, UK Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1975, page 29.
- ⁵ Percy B. Shelley, from his poem "Adonais"
- ⁶ The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice, Declaration of Trust
- ⁷ Universal House of Justice, Ridván Message 2000, Bahá'í Era 157
- ⁸ Ian Semple, deceased member of the Universal House of Justice, in a letter to the family dated April 16th, 2003
- ⁹ Alí Nakhjavaní, retired member of the Universal House of Justice, in his delivered eulogy on Hushmand Fatheazam.
- ¹⁰ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in J. Thompson's *Diary*, pp. 369-72.
- ¹¹ The Universal House of Justice, in its message to all National Spiritual Assemblies, dated August 14th, 2013
- ¹² Nakhjavaní, *ibid.*
- ¹³ Hushmand Fatheazam, in a published interview in *Bahá'í North*, a publication by the Bahá'í community of Punjab, India, 1987.
- ¹⁴ Ian Semple, *ibid.*, page 21.

Amin Banani

(1926-2013)



Amin Banani¹ was born in Tehran on September 23, 1926. He received his elementary education at Jamshid Jam Primary School and completed the first three years of high school at the Alborz Secondary School. In 1943, in the midst of the Second World War, he joined a number of young Persian Bahá'ís who came to the United States on board a U.S. troopship arriving in February 1944 to complete their education. Due to the more advanced curriculum of the Persian schools at the time, he was able to graduate from high school by June of 1944 as the valedictorian of his class. In September 1944 he was admitted to

Stanford University and graduated in 1947 with a major in history. He obtained his M.A. from Columbia University in 1949 and returned to Stanford University to receive his Ph.D. in 1959.

His academic career began with teaching history at the Overseas Program of the University of Maryland in Athens, Greece, in 1956-58. Then he taught for one year as an Instructor at Stanford University, 1958-59; two years as an Assistant Professor of Humanities at Reed College, 1959-61; two years as Research Fellow and Assistant Professor at Harvard University, 1961-63. In September 1963 he was invited to UCLA by Professor Gustave von Grunebaum to start the program of Persian studies. From the start his teaching was not narrowly focused but covered both history and literature. This broad encompassing of Persian cultural history was reflected in his research and scholarship. From his first book, *The Modernization of Iran*, published in 1961, to his latest contribution to the volume published by the Danish Academy of Sciences in 2008 entitled *Religious Texts in Iranian Languages*, he concerned himself with vital aspects of a living and continuing cultural tradition.

Some of the more significant writings of Amin Banani are chapters entitled "Ferdowsi and the Art of Tragic Epic" in *Islam and its Cultural Divergence* (1971); "The Conversion of a Self-Conscious Elite" in *Individualism and Conformity in Classical Islam* (1977); "Ahmad Kasravi and Purification of Persian: A Study in Nationalist Motivation" in *Nation and Ideology* (1982); and "Rumi, The Poet" in *Mysticism and Poetry in Islam* (1988). His collaborative translation with Jascha Kessler of the poetry of Forough Farrokhzad was published in 1982 under the title *Bride of Acacias*. The same collaborative effort in 2005 yielded a beautiful volume of translation of the poems of Tahereh, the nineteenth century heroine of the Bábí movement, who sounded the clarion call of emancipation of women and equality of rights of men and women, entitled *Tahereh: A Portrait in Poetry*.

In the course of more than thirty years of teaching at UCLA he laid the foundation of a broad and integrated program of Iranian Studies culminating in establishment of the first Undergraduate Major in Iranian Studies at any American university.

Amin Banani served on the Board of Directors of the Middle East Studies Association of North America, the Executive Council of the Society for Iranian Studies and as Vice President of the American Association of Iranian Studies.

Unlike some academicians who seek their fulfillment exclusively in their academic career, Amin Banani from the beginning led a rich life of service in the Bahá'í community world-wide. His global-level Bahá'í service began in the 1940s, when he accepted assignments to represent the Bahá'í community at a UN conference of nongovernmental organizations and a human rights commission. In the early 1950s he also served as a member of National Bahá'í Youth Committee in the United States.

In 1953 he and his wife, Sheila Wolcott, responded to the call of Shoghi Effendi to move to countries and territories without Bahá'ís. They moved with their first child to Greece, where they spent five years fostering the beginnings of the Bahá'í community. His first university teaching post was in Athens with the Overseas Program of the University of Maryland.

During this time Amin was called by Shoghi Effendi for further work in the United Nations to protect the rights of Bahá'ís in Iran, ultimately being appointed in 1956 to an international committee for defense of the Faith.

After the family's return to the United States in 1958, the National Spiritual Assembly appointed Amin at various times, from the 1960s through the 2000s, to serve on the Community Development Committee, Publishing Committee, Persian Reviewing Board and *Payam-e-Doost* Governing Board. He was

a delegate to the Bahá'í National Convention several times in the 1950s and 1970s.

Over the years he was elected to Local Spiritual Assemblies serving Bahá'í communities in California, Greece, Oregon, Massachusetts and California again. He taught at various sessions at Bosch, Louhelen and Green Acre Bahá'í schools; of summer schools in the United States, England, Iran, Ireland, Italy, Switzerland and Germany; and of the 'Irfán Colloquium.

He was elected to the Bahá'í Assemblies of Palo Alto, California; Athens, Greece; Portland, Oregon; Cambridge, Massachusetts; and Santa Monica, California. He made presentations at the 'Irfán Colloquium sessions held at Bosch and Louhelen Bahá'í Schools in North America and at Acuto Center for Bahá'í Studies, Italy, in Europe. He also taught at the Bahá'í Summer Schools in the United States, England, Iran, Ireland, Italy, Switzerland and Germany. From 1980 to 2006 he served as the Deputy Trustee of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, a global Bahá'í philanthropic fund.

Amin Banani was a passionate lover of music both eastern and western, and found much of his spiritual fulfillment in enjoyment of that art.

He passed away on Sunday, July 28, 2013, in Santa Monica and is buried in the Woodlawn Cemetery, Santa Monica.

The Universal House of Justice in a message of tribute praising Amin Banani's services says:

Whether in the pioneering or administrative fields, he served with distinction — a service that was ever characterized by humility and self-effacement. ... [W]e recall with heartfelt admiration and gratitude his staunch and effective defense of the Faith, the signal contributions he made to the advancement of both Bahá'í and Iranian studies, and his twenty-six years of service to the institution of Ḥuqúqu'lláh. In all respects,

his was a life that exemplified unwavering devotion to the Cause and abiding commitment to its high ideals.

NOTE

¹ For more information on the life history and academic achievements of Professor Amin Banani see Professor Ehsan Yarshater's article on Amin Banani, *Journal of Iranian Studies*, Vol. 47, 2014.

Mahboubeh Arjmand

(d. 2013)



Mahboubeh Arjmand was born in the City of Hamedan in Iran. She was the second child of Mr. Habiboullah Arjmand and Mrs. Monireh Khanum Mobin Arjmand. Unfortunately, she lost her mother at the age of ten and soon became the surrogate mother of all her siblings. One can imagine how difficult this must have been at a time when young children became seriously ill frequently. She did not have any children of her own, but she took care of all the children in the family as if they were her own children. All the children in the family have very fond memories of her, especially of the gifts and souvenirs she would bring them every time she travelled.

Mahboubeh was a very talented person. She was a dress designer and her specialty was bridal gowns, for which she had earned a good reputation in Tehran. She studied hair styling and skin care in Italy and had a good working knowledge of Italian

and French languages. She was extremely hospitable and generous. Her home was always open to everyone. Family and friends would often gather there, where there was always an open invitation to enjoy her delicious Persian cuisine and her pastry. She had a good sense of humor and often entertained the family with her witty remarks.

Mahboubeh was a very devoted Bahá'í and, in her youth, was actively engaged in Bahá'í activities in Tehran. She was proud of her grand-father Haji Mehdi Arjmand who was a prominent teacher of the Bahá'í Faith. She had memorized many of the Tablets revealed in honor of her grandfather and would recite them often. Mahboubeh Arjmand, after a period of failing health, passed away peacefully in her own home in San Diego, California, on September 14 2013.

Appendices

Bibliography of the Bahá'í Writings and Their Abbreviations used in this book

ABL	'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>'Abdu'l-Bahá in London</i>
ADJ	Shoghi Effendi, <i>Advent of Divine Justice</i>
BA	Shoghi Effendi, <i>Bahá'í Administration</i>
BK	<i>Bahíyyih Khánum, the Greatest Holy Leaf</i>
BP	Compilation, <i>Bahá'í Prayers</i>
BWF	Compilation, <i>Bahá'í World Faith</i>
CC1	<i>Compilation of Compilations</i> , vol.1
CF	Shoghi Effendi, <i>Citadel of Faith</i>
ESW	Bahá'u'lláh, <i>Epistle to the Son of the Wolf</i>
FWU	'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>Foundations of World Unity</i>
GDM	Bahá'u'lláh, <i>Gems of Divine Mysteries</i>
GPB	Shoghi Effendi. <i>God Passes By</i>
GWB	Bahá'u'lláh, <i>Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh</i>
HW	Bahá'u'lláh, <i>Hidden Words</i>
KA	Bahá'u'lláh, <i>Kitáb-i-Aqdas</i>
KI	Bahá'u'lláh, <i>Kitáb-i-Íqán</i>
MUHJ68	<i>Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1968-1973</i>
PB	Bahá'u'lláh, <i>The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh</i>
PDC	Shoghi Effendi, <i>Promised Day is Come</i>
PM	Bahá'u'lláh, <i>Prayers and Meditations</i>
PT	'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>Paris Talks</i>
PUP	'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>Promulgation of Universal Peace</i>
SAQ	'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>Some Answered Questions</i>
SDC	'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>Secret of Divine Civilization</i>
SLH	Bahá'u'lláh, <i>Summons of the Lord of Hosts</i>
SVFV	Bahá'u'lláh, <i>Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys</i>
SWAB	'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá</i>
SWB	The Báb, <i>Selections from the Writings of The Báb</i>
TAB	'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>Tablets of Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas</i> , volumes 1-3
TAF	'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>Tablet to Auguste Forel</i>
TB	Bahá'u'lláh, <i>Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas</i>
TN	'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>Traveler's Narrative</i>
WOB	Shoghi Effendi, <i>World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters</i>

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Vision and Objectives

The Haj Mehdi Arjmand Memorial Fund was established in 1992 to honor Haj Mehdi Arjmand (1861-1941) and is dedicated to promoting the scholarly study of the Bahá'í Faith. Haj Mehdi Arjmand was a Persian scholar and teacher of the Bahá'í Faith who became well known in Iran for his profound knowledge of the Bible, Qur'an, and Bahá'í scriptures. The primary activity of the Fund is sponsoring `Irfán Colloquium and its publications.

In 2012, benefiting from the guidance received from the Universal House of Justice, a management board was appointed for this fund by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States to function as a Bahá'í agency and sponsor `Irfán Colloquia, presently held in North America and Western Europe in English, Persian and German languages.

The `Irfán Colloquium aims at promoting and supporting systematic studies of fundamental principles of the Bahá'í beliefs, the Writings of the Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith, the interface of the Bahá'í Faith with intellectual schools of thought and religious traditions, and looking at current challenges in human society from the Bahá'í perspective. *`Irfán* is a Persian word referring to mystical, theological and spiritual knowledge.

As of October 2013 one hundred and twenty one sessions of colloquia have been held. Papers in English presented or received at the `Irfán Colloquia are annually published in a series of volumes of the *Lights of `Irfán*.