



Lights of 'Irfán

Papers Presented
at the 'Irfán Colloquia
and Seminars

Book II

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Lights of 'Irfán
Papers Presented at the 'Irfán Colloquia and Seminars
Book Two
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*J*mmerse yourselves in the ocean of My words, that ye may unravel its secrets, and discover all the pearls of wisdom that lie hid in its depths. Take heed that ye do not vacillate in your determination to embrace the truth of this Cause — a Cause through which the potentialities of the might of God have been revealed, and His sovereignty established.

—Bahá'u'lláh

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 326

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Preface

'Irfán* Colloquium completed its eighth year of activities in the year 2000. During these eight years a total of 32 sessions of the colloquium were held in Europe and North America. 'Irfán colloquia and seminars are held separately in the English and Persian languages. During the year 2000 a total of 103 presentations on various aspects of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and on topics related to fundamental principles of the Bahá'í beliefs or comparative studies of religions were made at these gatherings.

The main aims and objectives of 'Irfán Colloquium activities and seminars are to promote better understanding of the fundamental principles of the Bahá'í beliefs, systematic and deeper study of the Bahá'í holy texts, and comparative studies of world religions in relation to the Bahá'í Faith.

Since its inception in 1993, 'Irfán Colloquium has been supported mainly by the Haj Mehdi Arjmand** Memorial Fund, which is administered through the Bahá'í National Center's Office of the Treasurer in the United States. In 1998 a scholarship fund donated in memory of Nadia Saadat*** was initiated to facilitate the participation of youth and people from financially less privileged countries.

Lights of 'Irfán, Book II contains texts of papers presented at the 'Irfán Colloquia and Seminars in the year 2000 that were received for publication by the end of that year. Four of the papers in this volume were presented at the 'Irfán Seminar and deal with the Bahá'í holy texts: "An Introduction to the Súratu'l-Haykal (Discourse of the Temple)" by Mohammad Ghasem Bayat; "Tablet of Unity (Lawḥ-i-Ittiḥád)—A Provisional Translation" by Moojan Momen; "A Short Poem by 'Darvish' Muḥammad, Bahá'u'lláh: Sáqí az ghayb-i-baqá burqa' bar afkan az 'idhár" by Frank Lewis; and "'Abdu'l-Bahá's Commentary on the Quránic Verses Concerning the Overthrow of the Byzantine: The Stages of the Soul" by Moojan Momen.

A second group of papers are related to various topics dealing with mysticism and the Bahá'í Faith: "The Mystic Cup: The Essential Mystical Nature of the Bahá'í Faith" by LeRoy Jones; "'What I Want to Say is Wordless': Mystical Language, Revelation and Scholarship" by Ismael Velasco; "The Firm Cord of Servitude" by Theo Cope; and "The Human Intellect: A Bahá'í-Inspired Perspective" by Adrian John Davis.

The last three papers deal with various subjects related to the principles of Bahá'í beliefs and the Faith's relationship with other world religions: "The Chain of Prophecy: Progressive Revelation as a Theory of Relativity" by Zaid Lundberg; "Perception Into Faith: A Radical Discontinuity Within Unity" by William Barnes; and "Keys to the Proper Understanding of Islám in The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh" by Brian Wittman.

Beginning with this volume a new section, titled ELUCIDATIONS has been added, containing information and explanatory notes and comments. The first item published in this section is "'Points' and 'Letters' in the Writings of the Báb" by Muhammad Afnan. We look forward to receiving additional submissions for this section in the future.

These papers present the views and understandings of their authors. The texts of the papers are published as provided by the authors without further editing; therefore, they do not follow the same styles or scholarly approaches. They are published in this volume according to the alphabetical order of the names of the authors. Abstracts of all the presentations made at the colloquia and seminars are published in separate booklets.

Iraj Ayman
Chicago, March 2001

* 'Irfán is a Persian-Arabic word referring to mystical, theological, and spiritual recognition and knowledge.

** Haj Mehdi Arjmand (1861-1941) was a distinguished Bahá'í scholar of the Biblical studies and a prominent teacher of the Bahá'í Faith in Iran.

*** Nadia Saadat (1956-1994) was a young Bahá'í deeply devoted to studies in the Bahá'í Faith and promotion of the Bahá'í teachings.

Perception Into Faith: A Radical Discontinuity Within Unity

by William Barnes

Anyone familiar with the New Testament synoptic Gospels knows that differences over the life and genealogy of Christ exist in their accounts. One curious example of this is their treatment of the events taking place around the crucifixion of Jesus. All four mention that two other individuals were strung up with Him, one to either side. John simply mentions them, except to report that late in the afternoon they had their legs broken so they might not linger into the following day and have their groans spoil everybody's Sabbath. Matthew, faithful to the earlier penned account of Mark, reports the additional piece of biography that these two individuals were thieves, and goes on to inform us that, blind to the last, these unrepentant souls went to their death jeering Christ. But Luke has a different version of what transpired between these three dying figures. Luke says that one thief truly recognized Christ and asked that Christ remember him when He came into His heavenly kingdom. His reward for this sincere eleventh-hour request is Christ's promise that the thief shall have eternal life alongside Christ in paradise.

Such a wide variance is, I think, a result not of sloppy reporting of the facts, but of the different meanings that the writers or compilers of each gospel wished to bring out of the events of the day. The modern skeptical temper tends to think that the accounts of Matthew or Mark probably have the essential facts of the story right. If such facts are the real interest of the crucifixion, then Luke, or whoever wrote the gospel with his name attached to it, is easily dismissed as just another propagandist for a lot of hokum about an afterlife. Yet Luke may have been telling another kind of story. His version means to get readers to look past a poor carpenter to see a Being so loving that even His own death agonies do not stop the flow of compassion to others, and that in the life and action of such a Being resides the key to everlasting life for all.

Maybe Christ did miraculously walk out of His tomb, but to give life to another at the moment of losing His own is the real miracle and the real message of His mission. To obtain this everlasting existence people must, like the thief, see past the expiring body called Jesus to the eternal Christ shining in unchangeable splendor. To see Him as he saw Himself is the necessary requirement to be with Him. The thief redeems himself and his whole sorry existence in this single, final act of revolutionary perception, and by this act this social misfit became an exemplar, not only of every man's search for true life but also of God's delight in bestowing that life to whomever sincerely asks for it, at any moment and under any set of circumstances, no matter what the life lived to that moment. Any discussion of the life-affirming mission of the Prophet and His Words must make stories like this the cornerstone of its argument. Being one of the central myths about humanity, Luke's account tells us about more than one man. It explicates the race.

Human Natures

The Holy Books tell us that the human being is a double-natured creature, where the word nature denotes the animating and organizing power behind a recognizable form of itself. Thus if the individual is two natures he has two forms. As far as this life is concerned human beings are composed of a body or outer form, which comes forth from earth, and a soul or inner form which is sent forth from eternity.¹ Each returns in some form to its original homeland at death.

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But though double natured, every individual is, nevertheless, one entity: a unity structured as a kind of polarity—we'll return to this word. Thus, as all the religions tell us, the human self is really two selves in relation. One part is the animal self, called the ego, the self building up around and concerning itself with bodily experiences and material life. The other is the spiritual self, the expressions of the awareness of eternity.

The animal spirit incarnate in the ego is the originator of everything selfish, narrow and beastly in man. Hence the ego is not a particularly happy, friendly or generous fellow. He is, in fact, what is meant by the traditional designations of Lucifer, the light-bringer rising at the dawn of every life to lead wayfarers astray into the path of self-love.²

And as another name for this execrable creature indicates, the ego is not really one personality but a "legion" of "multiple identities born of passion and desire:"³ a raucous pandemonium of contentious, contradictory, screaming monkeys which give the appearance of emanating from a single intelligence and holding together for some over-riding purpose only because they are associated with an object existing within conventionally known limits of space and time, namely, the body. He is the tendency to self-will, chaos and destruction: defensive, fretful, sulky and murderous. He sees the world as an anarchic scramble after material comfort and security which can only be obtained either by those strong enough to impose their will upon others, or by those who live in strict accordance with the strong man's wishes. In his largest form he is the Leviathan of Hobbes and the Bible, and he is huge only because his material appetites are insatiable. In his smallest form he is a whining, wheedling, hypochondriac playing on his supposed helplessness to get others sympathies. In either incarnation his concern is chiefly with hindering others freedom and purpose to maximize his own.

In any form this satanic self is obviously not what religious scripture means by man's true self, that part of every person said to be made in the image and likeness of God. This second part of man is called the eternal self and it, too, can be said to have two parts: an individuality, or soul, metaphorically inhabited by a greater creative spirit, called Holy. Thus 'Abdu'l-Bahá says that "man has a soul in which dwells the divine spirit."⁴ "The divine aspect or spiritual nature," He says, "consists of the breaths of the Holy Spirit."⁵ These "breaths of the Holy Spirit" are, in their broadest sense, Revelation from God. If this divine spirit is like the ocean, the individual souls are like its waves. We cannot conceive of an ocean without waves, and we cannot conceive of waves independently of the ocean.

The divine spirit animating man's eternal self is, according to Bahá'í teachings, the source of all noble thoughts and emotion, selfless acts and great visions. This eternal self is the tendency in human beings toward integrating and harmonizing the chaos of ego desires into unified, developing patterns. He is the urge toward infinity, all human aspirations to be God-like in thought and action.

The eternal self is exuberant, selfless, a lover of freedom, especially for others, and is unified within himself toward this end for his own freedom is guaranteed in this effort. He is concerned with eternal life and spiritual ideals. He is huge because he contains all things within himself.⁶

The eternal world is mostly hidden and religion is meant to inform humanity about it. The eternal self is, too, mostly hidden and the lives and words of the Prophets are meant to bring it to perception. Satan, the ego, being, in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words, "the product of human minds and of instinctive tendencies toward error"⁷ is the doubter of eternity and nobility. The Bible calls him, correctly, the "accuser,"⁸ and the Bahá'í Writings "the blamer,"⁹ because he points the finger at others to prevent his own and prior sins being noticed, and to prevent others from being inspired by nobility.

The ego is the first self we are aware of because we are first aware of material desires. Once established in the soul he loathes renouncing his privileged position to man's eternal self, who should rightfully sit there. The drama of human life is to decide which of these two selves will get the upper hand. This drama is played out by actors who have radically different ideas about the nature of the play itself. Thus the Master states: "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. Signs of both of these natures are to be found in men."¹⁰

Perception Into Faith

The ego opposes the eternal self not because it is created evil, but because it can't see eternity. It is a temporal selfhood bound by temporal constraints of thought and passion. To such a personality material comfort and power are the only things it makes any sense pursuing in a life dominated by the thought of impending extinction, in a world called by 'Abdu'l-Bahá "this vanishing world, this death in life."¹¹ Incapable by himself of experiencing anything other than the world and its laws, the ego thinks eternity is all a silly piece of imagination stemming from frustrated hopes in life. He works to keep human vision confined within the cramped, gloomy vault of space and time. In such ways he becomes in Bahá'u'lláh's words the "Evil One" that "hindereth the rise and obstructeth the spiritual progress of the children of men."¹²

As the embodiment of radically opposing spiritual conditions, the human soul is in the paradoxical position of being as close to and as far away from God as it is possible for any creature to be. 'Abdu'l-Bahá puts it this way:

Man is in the highest degree of materiality, and at the beginning of spirituality—that is to say, he is the end of imperfection and the beginning of perfection. He is at the last degree of darkness, and at the beginning of light; that is why it has been said that the condition of man is at the end of night and the beginning of day, meaning that he is the sum of all the degrees of imperfection, and that he possesses the degrees of perfection. He has the animal side as well as the angelic side, and the aim of the educator is to so train human souls that their angelic aspect may overcome their animal side. Then if the divine power in man, which is his essential perfection, overcomes the satanic power, which is absolute imperfection, he becomes the most excellent among creature; but if the satanic power overcome the divine power, he becomes the lowest of the creatures. That is why he is the end of imperfection and the beginning of perfection. Not in any other of the species in the world of existence is there such a difference, contrast, contradiction and opposition as in the species of man.¹³

'Abdu'l-Bahá is not saying here that within man is a graded moral continuum stretching from complete darkness to total light in which the "end of imperfection and the beginning of perfection" are contiguous points. This would make man single-natured and unconscious like the animal. He is saying that man is created morally double-natured, and that "the end of imperfection" and "the beginning of perfection" are polar and hierarchical opposites of light and dark structuring human nature. That is, they do not form a complementary polarity, but a contradictory one.¹⁴ Light and dark are symbols for absolute conditions of existence, and though they stand in a kind of conjunction in thought there can never be any transformational connection between and uniting them.

Spiritually we live in both conditions at once. Movement is toward one or the other pure condition. But this movement is like the rising movement from the world of sleep to the world of wakefulness and the setting decline of wakefulness to sleep. That is, one world simply and completely replaces another. There is no bridge. It is not a movement between sites on the same plane of existence, like the movement between the bedroom in which one awakens and the kitchen where one prepares breakfast. The two worlds of the soul express a radical ontological separation, which cannot on these premises be papered over by any epistemology of being. They are in "contrast, contradiction and opposition."

There is absolutely nothing positive about being in "the highest degree of materiality." This is "absolute imperfection." This is Satan the ego, the "lowest of creatures" because he intentionally commits evil and consciously leads others to do the same. The "sum of the degrees of imperfection" is its final degree. This is not the palest light of dawn, but the "last degree of darkness," "the end of night" or ultimate moral blackness.

There is everything positive about being the "beginning of spirituality." This is to be the "beginning of light," its origin and highest point from which all spiritual light in creation emanates. The "beginning of perfection" means to be the highest being in creation because one latently "possesses the degrees of perfection." This is "the beginning of day."

Spiritually, "light does not unite itself with darkness."¹⁵ This can only mean that, too, darkness wants no part of light. All action within the soul is therefore apocalyptic. It is life or death.¹⁶ All or nothing.

There is no both/and, only either/or at this level. Whoever is not with me is against me, says the Christ. There can be no fence sitters. The lukewarm are the most execrable. Those with “lifeless hearts” can never approach Him. The gradualists have no place.

In an apocalyptic world a person can be the incarnation of Satan his whole life, but on the cross of extinction he may see the Light, act and win eternal life. Likewise a person may have been the incarnation of pious devotion yet, as Bahá'u'lláh warns, “at the hour of his soul’s ascension, been so changed as to fall into the nethermost fire.”¹⁷ Because change is all or nothing at all in an apocalypse, spiritually the smallest is the same as the largest. Hence ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asserts that: “For no veil is greater than egotism and no matter how thin the covering may be, yet will it finally veil man entirely and prevent him from receiving his portion of the eternal bounty.”¹⁸ And Christ can tell His disciples of workers in a field where the last to arrive at the end of the day get the same pay as the first to work at the crack of dawn.¹⁹

Good Deeds Not Enough

The apocalyptic ontology of the Holy Books is the source of the Prophets continually pointing to the workings of the uncomfortable ethical principle that good actions performed without knowledge of God—which doesn’t mean acting solely with an eye to heavenly reward, but with the understanding that righteous acts are a praise of God and flow out from the promptings of an eternal Self—such good acts, however praiseworthy and helpful they may be, “cannot be the cause of eternal salvation” and “entrance into the Kingdom of God”²⁰ because they do not bring about a conscious perception of eternity.²¹

An act done without this dimension of awareness is not a perfect act, and one must be perfect “as your Father which is in heaven is perfect”²² if one is to enter eternity. Now perfection for humanity, whatever the moral philosophers tell us, can never mean without ethical blemish. If being stainless is the criteria we are all going to be roasted, so we might as well get on enjoying what time we have here. Neither can perfection mean to do as well as God does. Not being God all human acts are by definition imperfect. Here, the mechanical workings of an indifferent, abstract moral law would also automatically dispatch everyone to hell.

But perfection in some sense must be achievable since Christ said we are to be perfect. A key to the whole question lies in the word holiness, which is wholeness. A perfect act is a completed one. This does not mean an act ending in time. It means any act predicated upon the perception of eternity.

Every kind of perception is through a faculty, sight through the eyes, hearing through the ears, abstract knowledge through the intellect. The perceptual faculty through which human beings perceive eternity is the human heart, which doesn’t mean the throbbing organ in the middle of the chest but the sensitive receiver at the center of being. The heart is the connection with eternity because Bahá'u'lláh says it is the “seat of the revelation of the inner mysteries of God.”²³

When Bahá'u'lláh says, “Our mission is to seize and possess the hearts of men,”²⁴ He means His Revelation will throw open “the doors of the hearts of men, which in reality are the doors of heaven”²⁵ so that latent spiritual powers and perceptions may awaken, enabling the soul to see eternal things and things eternally, and to do eternally effective actions.

The Manifestations have all been chiefly concerned with developing this faculty of faith, for faith which means knowledge of God or the recognition of His Manifestation and obedience to His laws,²⁶ depends upon its healthy functioning. Humankind has mostly ignored Them, and this failure to perceive what the Manifestations were telling us about our true Self has caused a decline in the power of this faculty to perceive, and this causes man to lose faith in himself.²⁷

The age-old dispute over salvation by faith or works alone is fallacious since it overlooks the fact that faith is an inner act, a form of perception. Both faith and works are necessary for salvation, but faith is first as a precondition for spiritual works. “By faith is meant, first, conscious knowledge, and second, the practice of good deeds,” says ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.²⁸ “Deeds are secondary to faith in Him and certitude in His Reality,” says the Báb.²⁹ Outer works are necessary as an expression and demonstration, that is a completing and perfecting, of inner faith. It is faith that inspires deeds, while deeds realize faith.

Perception Into Faith

Salvation by works alone says that, ideally, good works must lead up to faith and then lead out from it. This is true, but not in the sense of the moral continuum with the middle point separating the least evil act from the least good one. The soul, as we saw, is not on a moral continuum.³⁰ It is a conjunction of radically opposing conditions of being, one tending “towards moral sublimity and intellectual perfection, while the other turneth to bestial degradation and carnal imperfections.”³¹ The soul’s movements are apocalyptic. Faith is, initially, not a transforming but a transmuting act.³² It redeems and completes those imperfect acts leading up to it and informs those acts leading out from it. It completes life by recreating and renewing it, making it holy or whole, changing becoming into a form of being. Bahá’u’lláh states: “Whosoever acknowledged His truth and turned unto Him, his good works outweighed his misdeeds, and all his sins were remitted and forgiven. Thereby is the truth of these words concerning Him made manifest: ‘Swift is He in reckoning.’ Thus God turneth iniquity into righteousness, were ye to explore the realms of divine knowledge, and fathom the mysteries of His wisdom.”³³

Faith may come at any moment. Hence there can be no critical mass of accumulated good works, which by sheer weight will automatically swing open heaven’s doors. If eternal life could be won this way, then we may rightly revolt against heaven’s ways when a pathetically wrong individual like the thief wins the grand prize simply through the ludicrously good fortune of accidentally being in the right place at the right time and saying just the right thing. But more than this, salvation by works alone makes the Prophets and Their Message irrelevant to renewing and running human society.

What makes an action holy, or complete and perfect, is not, finally, any quality which the doer brings to the action, such as purity of intention or efficiency of execution. What makes an action holy is God’s acceptance of it.³⁴ For if we knew how to perform holy actions and did them, then God Himself would become irrelevant for spiritual growth and individual salvation.

Holiness, or completion by divine acceptance, is what separates an act of faith from a merely good act. Seeking divine acceptance is the essential aspect missing from good deeds performed by following “a mere code of laws” whether society’s or one’s own, since Bahá’u’lláh says “all things are dependent upon His Will, and the worth of all acts is conditioned upon His acceptance and pleasure.”³⁵

To say deeds lead up to faith is therefore technically misleading. One attains faith by opening a new center of perceptual awareness. And the perception which opens eternity to view was stated by Christ: “Whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it.”³⁶ Initially, faith is a connection of love not effort. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says:

*For faith, which is life eternal, is a sign of bounty, and not the result of justice. The flame of the fire of love, in this world of earth and water, comes through the power of attraction and not by effort and striving. Nevertheless, by effort and perseverance, knowledge, science and other perfections can be acquired; but only the light of the Divine Beauty can transport and move the spirits through the force of attraction.*³⁷

Of course any humanitarian deed is meritorious and is worthy of respect and reward. “For every act performed there shall be a recompense according to the estimate of God,” says Bahá’u’lláh.³⁸ But acts carried out with no real thought taken for the soul’s uplift express no conscious spirituality—that is, they express no attraction for God, only a form of socially-conditioned conscience. Thus even an infinity of movement toward “good” along the horizontal social axis of good and evil gains one not a millimeter of vertical lift toward eternity.³⁹ Further, the nearly perfect is as far away as the grossly imperfect, because both are part of a different internal order of being and awareness. Any attachment to this world is the limiting ego at work, and even attachment to the improvement of this world alone is a form of this attachment. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá puts the principle this way:

*The foundation of success and salvation is the knowledge of God, and the results of the knowledge of God are the good actions which are the fruits of faith. If man has not this knowledge, he will be separated from God, and when this separation exists, good actions will not have complete effect...the foundation is to know God, and the good actions result from this knowledge. (G)ood actions alone, without the knowledge of God, cannot be the cause of eternal salvation, everlasting success, and prosperity, and entrance into the Kingdom of God.*⁴⁰

The thief on the cross performed the one redemptive act an individual must perform to gain eternity. He saw Reality and gave himself over to it.⁴¹ In this act he purified (i.e., made holy) his entire existence because he attained the real purpose of every human life. He recognized that since the Prophet sees deepest into Reality, His Message alone defines the good. He defines the good as seeing as He does and seeking after eternity or the Kingdom of God, all other things “shall be added unto you” once this search gets up in earnest. It is to enable every seeking soul to find the Kingdom of God within him that the Prophets come into the world.

Hence we return to the hill of Calvary where the thief finds that Christ’s promise of eternal life follows immediately upon his just awakened perception of eternity embodied in Him, as it did just as suddenly upon Peter’s declaration of the Sonship of Christ. Some kind of revolutionary leap is indicated in this story, and it is worthwhile inquiring into what happened within the soul of that thief in that holy moment. This will provide us with some comprehension of the nature of faith and with some understanding of spiritual growth and resurrection. Too, we shall find that the contradictory polar opposition that constitutes human nature and that divided the ethical action also divides into levels of perception.

The Revolutionary Leap

Every human being is born into a dying world, and for as long as he identifies himself with that world and its limitations he, too, is a dying form of life, capable only of delaying but not overcoming the pull of nature toward extinction. To live eternally the individual must be granted the gift of faith, for the Master tells us that the “meaning of eternal life is the gift of the Holy Spirit.”⁴² It is obtaining the power of true vision. This is a vision, however incomplete, not of the future but of Reality—the kind of experience we mean when we say things like “the veil lifted” or “the scales fell from my eyes.” So far as perceiving eternity is concerned, Bahá’u’lláh informs us that “none discerneth in this day save those who have been granted vision by this sublime Beauty.”⁴³

The Bahá’í Writings call entering into conscious communion with the Holy Spirit entering into the spirit of faith. Being a connection between two sentient spirits, however radically different in essence, faith, then, is a higher way of perception and knowing, not a bottomless mental abyss into which one must blindly plummet so that Providence can demonstrate its ability to rescue human beings from their worst suicidal tendencies. Faith is a spiritual resurrection or move into a larger mental existence. Faith expands not demands the intellectual powers of the soul. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says some extraordinary things about souls in this state of existence:

*The fourth degree of spirit is the heavenly spirit; it is the spirit of faith and the bounty of God; it comes from the breath of the Holy Spirit, and by the divine power it becomes the cause of eternal life. It is the power which makes the earthly man heavenly, and the imperfect man perfect. It makes the impure to be pure, the silent eloquent; it purifies and sanctifies those made captive by carnal desires; it makes the ignorant wise.*⁴⁴

In another place He described this state more fully:

*But the spirit of faith which is of the Kingdom consists of the all-comprehending grace and the perfect attainment and the power of sanctity and the divine effulgence from the Sun of Truth on luminous light-seeking essences from the presence of the divine Unity. And by this Spirit is the life of the spirit of man, when it is fortified thereby, as Christ saith: ‘That which is born of the Spirit is Spirit.’ And this Spirit hath both restitution and return, inasmuch as it consists of the Light of God and the unconditioned grace. So, having regard to this state and station, Christ announced that John the Baptist was Elias, who was to come before Christ. And the likeness of this station is as that of lamps kindled: for these in respect to their glasses and oil-holders are different, but in respect to their light, One, and in respect to their lumination, One; nay, each one is identical with the other, without imputation of plurality, or diversity or multiplicity or separateness. This is the Truth and beyond Truth there is only error.*⁴⁵

The spiritually unenlightened human spirit, He says, “consists of the rational, or logical, reasoning faculty, which apprehends general ideas and things intelligible and perceptible.”⁴⁶ is part of the world and

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lives for it unless the spirit of faith is awakened and perceptions of the reality of eternity are opened. This occurs only when the soul voluntarily surrenders itself to the Prophet and His Message.

In the spirit of faith knowledge is a direct perception of realities, what traditional philosophers called knowledge of things, not knowledge about things.⁴⁷ With direct perception there is no need of logical or rational arguments, neither experiment nor hypothesis is required.⁴⁸ For these in relation to direct perception are themselves veils of knowledge, and not knowledge itself. In direct perception the individual sees behind an expiring body of things called the material world to perceive their revealed forms standing within it. Comprehension becomes apprehension, because knowledge is no longer conceptual but existential, that is, a permanent part of one's existence. Epistemologically, creation is no longer purely objective, i.e., an alien body of objects confronting the inquiring intelligence. But neither are these objects purely subjective. In faith, creation and reason form an identity—two parts of one unmediated unity, which is the basis of true understanding.

The soul in the spirit of faith is a living power. Such a soul, Christ said, was “a son of God” like Him, though to an incalculably lesser degree. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says: “The station which he who hath truly recognized this Revelation will attain is the same as the one ordained for such prophets of the house of Israel as are not regarded as Manifestations ‘endowed with constancy.’”⁴⁹ And Bahá’u’lláh says: “O My Servant! Obey Me and I shall make thee like unto Myself. I say ‘Be,’ and it is, and thou shalt say ‘Be,’ and it shall be.”⁵⁰ Such souls, the Book of Revelation tells us, “may have right to the tree of life.”⁵¹

Yet the soul that passes from the human spirit into the spirit of faith undergoes no change of nature or alteration of essence. It remains unchanged in its fundamental reality, yet experiences a tremendous and concentrated infusion of power. This causes the individual to resemble a fissioning atom, the inrushing force knocking him out of his established orbit of experience into another and larger one, transforming his ways of thought, perception and behavior and acting as the authority for later acts and statements. He becomes a satellite of a Greater Selfhood, orbiting the Manifestation of God.⁵²

In this new configuration of the psyche, what has occurred is not that a new center has come into being, but that the soul has come into awareness of the center of itself that has always been, the Power that is driving it. The experience of having touched one's essential humanity, the infinite Selfhood Bahá’u’lláh says is “standing within thee,”⁵³ is usually described as an ecstasy, a word carrying overtones of both connectedness and separation. It unites the individual within himself and with the humanity of all, but divides him from his fellow beings who have not had this experience. Yet the authentic experience of eternity does not divide the soul from his society by a quixotic withdrawal into a private utopia. No, he joins what Saint Augustine called the Commonwealth of the Saints, for at its highest intensity the true religious experience teaches or shows to the soul not just the reality of himself, but real humanity as a kingdom of power and glory of which faithful souls are its real members and the Prophets its real kings. This experience prepares the soul, is its initiation, for a spiritual world where souls “shall associate and commune intimately one with another, and shall be so closely associated in their lives, their aspirations, their aim and strivings as to be even as one soul.”⁵⁴

Every human being is born into the world at birth and borne out of it by death. The defining aim of the human spirit is the urge toward transcendence. This urge is fulfilled by a sacrificial offering of self, which means the deliberate attempt to make sacred some part of one's life, a turning of passion into compassion. What the soul has sacrificed of its life is what returns to eternity at death. The ultimate act of this kind is to sacrifice one's entire self; that is, to make one's entire life sacred, as the thief did. Only in this act does the soul transcend all human limitations and achieve real eternal life, which is the only kind of life that the Holy Books recognize.⁵⁵ It is this perception that both brings and begins faith.

Notes

- 1) “It is manifest that beyond this material body, man is endowed with another reality, which is the world of exemplars constituting the heavenly body of man...This other and inner reality is called the heavenly body, the ethereal form which corresponds to this body.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1982. *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*. Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, pp. 464-465.) The human soul, says Bahá’u’lláh, “is, in itself, a testimony that beareth witness to the existence of a world that is contingent, as well as to the reality of a world that hath neither beginning nor end.” (Bahá’u’lláh, 1976. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*. Second Revised Edition. Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, pp. 161-162.)

- 2) “He truly is the false dawn, though believing himself to be the true one.” (Bahá’u’lláh, 1969. *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*. Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, p. 146) and “Satan, by which we mean the natural inclinations of the lower nature. This lower nature in man is symbolized as Satan—the evil ego within us, not an evil personality outside.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *Promulgation*. p. 287) And ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains the protean nature of “Satan” when he says: “Endeavor to the utmost to protect yourselves, because Satan appears in different robes and appeals to everyone according to each person’s own way, until he becomes like unto him (şatan), then he will leave him alone.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *Star of the West*, Vol. 13 #1 p. 20.
- 3) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1978. *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*. Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, p. 76.
- 4) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1969. *Paris Talks*. Eleventh British Edition. London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, p. 25.
- 5) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, p. 41.
- 6) “Do all ye can to become wholly weary of self, and bind yourselves to that Countenance of Splendours; and once ye have reached such heights of servitude, ye will find, gathered within your shadow, all created things.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *Selections*, pp. 76-77)
- 7) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *Promulgation*, p. 230.
- 8) The Book of Revelation 12:10.
- 9) “Be of them whom the tumult of the world, however much it may agitate them in the path of their Creator, can never sadden, whose purpose the blame of the blamer will never defeat.” (Bahá’u’lláh. *Gleanings*, p. 281) “Supply me, then, with what Thou hast written down for Thy chosen ones among Thy creatures, whom neither the blame of the blamer, nor the clamour of the infidel, nor the estrangement of such as have withdrawn from Thee, hath deterred from turning towards Thee.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Báb, Bahá’u’lláh, 1967. *Bahá’í Prayers: A Selection*. London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, #54 p. 59.
- 10) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *Paris Talks*, p. 60.
- 11) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *Selections*, p. 176.
- 12) Bahá’u’lláh, 1978. *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, p. 87.
- 13) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1981. *Some Answered Questions*. Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, pp. 235-236.
- 14) A complementary polarity is like that of humanity, where the complements, male and female, exist on the same plane, within the same Kingdom. Complements work together and are attracted to each other. As we say, “opposites attract.” In a contradictory polarity, the “poles” do not exist on the same plane, but are from different, i.e., higher and lower, Kingdoms of spirit. They do not work together, but against one another; each works to overcome the other. Here opposites repel. Transformation is the condition of mortality and the eternal does not become mortal and vice-versa. In another place ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states: “For the inner reality of man is a demarcation line between the shadow and the light, a place where the two seas meet; it is the lowest point on the arc of descent and therefore is capable of gaining all the grades above.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá quoted in *Bahá’í Education: A Compilation*. 1987. London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, p. 23)
- 15) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *Some Answered Questions*, p. 170.
- 16) See, for example, Deuteronomy 30: 15-19.
- 17) Bahá’u’lláh. *Gleanings*, p. 266.
- 18) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *Star of the West*, Vol. 10, No. 3, p. 27.
- 19) Matthew 20:16
- 20) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *Some Answered Questions*, p. 238.
- 21) The Bahá’í Writings call this seeing with the eyes of God. See, for example, Bahá’u’lláh, 1971. *The Hidden Words*. Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust. #44 Arabic.
- 22) Matthew 5: 48.
- 23) Bahá’u’lláh. *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*. Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, p. 192.
- 24) Bahá’u’lláh. *Gleanings*, p. 212.
- 25) Bahá’u’lláh. *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 173.
- 26) “The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the recognition of Him Who is the Day Spring of His Revelation and the Fountain of His laws, Who representeth the Godhead in both the Kingdom of His Cause and the world of creation. Whoso achieveth this duty hath attained unto all good; and whoso is deprived thereof, hath gone astray, though he be the author of every righteous deed. It behoveth every one who reacheth this most sublime station, this summit of transcendent glory, to observe every ordinance of Him Who is the Desire of the world. These twin duties are inseparable. Neither is acceptable without the other.” (Bahá’u’lláh. *Gleanings*, pp. 330-331) This two-fold obligation is, in reality, the two aspects of belief. For out from the act of recognition flow socially redeeming acts, the greatest of which is getting others to see Reality.
- 27) “Gracious God! It was intended that at the time of the manifestation of the One true God the faculty of recognizing Him would have been developed and matured and would have reached its culmination. However, it is now clearly demonstrated that in the disbelievers this faculty hath remained undeveloped and hath, indeed, degenerated.” (Bahá’u’lláh. *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 52-53.
- 28) *The Divine Art of Living: Selections from the Bahá’í Writings*. 1986. Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, p. 61.
- 29) Báb. 1976. *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*. Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, p. 133.
- 30) The works alone argument is really a works first argument. It grows from a deification of society. It hinges on the belief that the social law of right and wrong is a perfect image of the life and death dichotomy of the soul. It isn’t. Ever. Deeds without faith move the soul along the right or left side of the axial midpoint of social morality. But after faith deeds revolve the soul toward the center of being, so that by effort souls perfect the perfect state. In purely spiritual terms the

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point is not to perform enough good deeds to purchase a ticket to eternity, but to get free of the compulsive tyranny of the social law that always crucifies the prophets.

“The first and foremost duty prescribed unto men, next to recognition of Him Who is the Eternal Truth, is the duty of steadfastness in His Cause. Cleave thou unto it, and be of them whose minds are firmly fixed and grounded in God. No act, however meritorious, did or can ever compare unto it. It is the king of all acts, and to this thy Lord, the All-Highest, the Most-Powerful, will testify...” (Bahá'u'lláh. *Gleanings*, p. 290)

- 31) 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *Selections*, p. 288.
- 32) Transformation is changing the form of a thing into something else in the same kingdom of existence. Transmuting is changing the nature of the thing. That is, there is transformation within conditions of existence, but not between them. A progressive transformation within a condition or Kingdom of existence reveals more complexity within the possibilities (qualities) of development of that condition, but no number of transformations adds up to a transmutation. A transmutation reveals qualities that cannot be manifested within the possibilities of a lower condition. The lower is not evil, but simply constrained by inherent limitations from manifesting the qualities of the higher. Transmutation is a difference of not, not of degree. It is the kind of thing Bahá'u'lláh refers to when he says that the “task of converting satanic strength into heavenly power is one that We have been empowered to accomplish.” (Bahá'u'lláh. *Gleanings*, p. 200)
- 33) Bahá'u'lláh. *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, pp. 113-114.
- 34) “Man’s actions are acceptable after his having recognized (the Manifestation).” (Bahá'u'lláh. *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 61) In one clear instance Bahá'u'lláh writes, “For the doings of men are all dependent upon Thy good pleasure, and are conditioned by Thy behest. Shouldst Thou regard him who hath broken the fast as one who hath observed it, such a man would be reckoned among them who from eternity hath 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, and been far removed from the crystal waters of this living Fountain...the excellence of all things is dependent upon Thy bidding and Thy word, and the virtue of every act is conditioned by Thy leave and the good pleasure of Thy will, and may recognize that the reins of men’s doings are within the grasp of Thine acceptance and Thy commandment.” (*Bahá’í Prayers*. 1991 edition. Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust. pp. 262-263.)
- 35) Bahá'u'lláh. *Gleanings*, p. 293.
- 36) Matthew 16:25
- 37) 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *Some Answered Questions*, p. 130
- 38) Bahá'u'lláh. *Tablets*, p. 189. In another place, Bahá'u'lláh says: “He, verily, will pay the doer of good, whether man or woman, his due recompense, wert thou to follow what hath been sent unto thee by Him Who is the All-Knowing, the All-Informed.” (Bahá'u'lláh. *Epistle*, pp. 60-61)
- 39) See 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 300-305.
- 40) 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *Some Answered Questions*, p. 238.
- 41) “Know thou that faith is of two kinds. The first is objective faith that is expressed by the outer man, obedience of the limbs and senses. The other faith is subjective, the unconscious obedience to the will of God. There is no doubt that, in the day of a Manifestation such as Christ, all contingent beings possessed subjective faith and had unconscious obedience to His Holiness Christ.
“For all parts of the creational world are of one whole. Christ the Manifestor reflecting the divine sun represented the whole. All the parts are subordinate and obedient to the whole.... This condition of unconscious obedience constitutes subjective faith. But the discerning faith that consists of true knowledge of God and the comprehension of the divine words, of such faith there is very little in any age. That is why His Holiness Christ said to His followers, ‘Many are called but few are chosen.’” (*Bahá’í World Faith: Selections from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*. 1969. Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust. p. 364) Faith is recognition of the Manifestation.
- 42) 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *Some Answered Questions*, p. 242.
- 43) Bahá'u'lláh. *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. 1992. Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, p. 61, para. 116) “Vision,” said Bahá'u'lláh, “acteth as the agent and guide for true knowledge. Indeed in the estimation of men of wisdom keenness of understanding is due to keenness of vision.” (Bahá'u'lláh. *Tablets*, p. 35)
- 44) 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 144-145.
- 45) 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *Bahá’í World Faith*, p. 372.
- 46) *Ibid.*, p. 370.
- 47) Plato, for example makes this distinction in *The Republic*. Consider, too, Bahá'u'lláh’s warning to scholars: “Knowledge is a light which God casteth into the heart of whomsoever He willeth. It is this kind of knowledge which is and hath ever been praiseworthy, and not the limited knowledge that hath sprung forth from veiled and obscured minds. This limited knowledge they even stealthily borrow one from the other, and vainly pride themselves therein!” (Bahá'u'lláh. *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 46.)
- 48) “As to thy question regarding discoveries made by the soul after it hath put off its human form: certainly, that world is a world of perceptions and discoveries, for the interposed veil will be lifted away and the human spirit will gaze upon souls that are above, below, and on a par with it. It is similar to the condition of the human being in the womb, where the eyes are veiled, and all things are hidden away from him. Once he is born out of the uterine world and entereth this life, he findeth it, in relation to that of the womb, to be a place of perceptions and discoveries, and he observeth all things through his outer eye. In the same way, once he hath departeth this life, he will behold, in that world, whatsoever was hidden from him here: but he will look upon and comprehend all things with his inner eye.” ('Abdu'l-Bahá. *Selections*, pp. 170-171)

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- 49) 'Abdu'l-Bahá quoted in Shoghi Effendi. *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*. 1969 impression. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust. p. 111.
- 50) The Book of Revelation 22:14.
- 51) "Just as the conception of faith hath existed from the beginning that hath no beginning, and will endure till the end that hath no end, in like manner, will the true believer eternally live and endure. His spirit will everlastingly circle round the Will of God. He will last as long as God, Himself, will last." (Bahá'u'lláh. *Gleanings*, p. 141.)
- 53) Bahá'u'lláh. *The Hidden Words* #13 Arabic.
- 54) Bahá'u'lláh. *Gleanings*, p. 169-170.
- 55) "(W)hosoever 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' 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.'" (Bahá'u'lláh. *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 118.) And: "Observe: those who in appearance were physically alive, Christ considered dead; for life is eternal life, and existence is the real existence. Wherever in the Holy Books they speak of raising the dead, the meaning is that the dead were blessed with eternal life." ('Abdu'l-Bahá. *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 101-102.)

An Introduction to the Súratu'l-Haykal (Discourse of The Temple)

by Mohamad Ghasem Bayat

Background Information

Súratu'l-Haykal (Discourse of the Temple) is one of the most challenging¹ works of Bahá'u'lláh; it was first revealed in Adrianople, and later revealed again in 'Akká with minor differences. Upon Bahá'u'lláh's command His tablets to four kings and monarchs of His age and to Pope Pius IX were added to this Súrih and transcribed in the form of a pentacle, or five-pointed star.² A review of these tablets and their messages requires an in-depth analysis that is outside the scope of this article. A separate article will be devoted to an explanation of these tablets. Some of the stimulating aspects of this tablet, the significances of its title and the five-pointed star referred to earlier, will be discussed in this article.

The beloved Guardian included translations of extracts from this tablet in *God Passes By*,³ *The Promised Day Is Come*,⁴ and *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*,⁵ although it has not been formally translated into English in its entirety. Therefore, Anton Haddad's unofficial translation⁶ will be used in this article to convey some concepts. Unless taken from the published works of the beloved Guardian, these passages will be regarded as provisional, and any deviation from Haddad's translation will be denoted by parentheses.

The Title of the Súrih and its Significance

The opening passage of the tablet names the Súrih, and also reveals that the Temple refers to the person of Mírzá Ḥusayn-'Alí, Bahá'u'lláh, as God's Manifestation of His Names and the Sign of His remembrances on earth for this age:

This is the Súrih of the Temple (Whom) God has made the Mirror of His Names between the earth and heaven and the sign of His remembrances among the people of the world.⁷

This Temple is the physical person of Bahá'u'lláh, as confirmed by many other passages in the text of the tablet. For example, the tablet contains an address by the Most Great Spirit to the person of His Manifestation on earth, clearly intending Bahá'u'lláh:

O Thou Temple! We have made Thee a mirror for the Kingdom of the Names to speak of My Dominion among all the creatures and summon all the people to My meeting and Beauty and to be a Guide to My obvious and upright Path. We have elevated Thy Name among the servants as a Bounty, and adorned Thee with the embroidered Garment of Myself and cast upon Thee My Word to use the Authority in the Kingdom as it pleaseth Thee and to do what Thou willeth. We have ordained to Thee the good of the heaven and earth so that no good will be granted to anyone unless he enters Thy shadow, as a command on the part of Thy Lord, the Learned, the Informed. And We have given the rod of command and the divination of authority to enable Thee to distinguish the wisdom of every question. We have shown forth from Thy breast the seas of Knowledge and Revelation in the celebration of Thy Lord, the Merciful, in order that Thou

shouldst praise and be of the thankful. We have chosen Thee from amongst My creatures and made Thee the Manifestation of My Soul to whomsoever is in the heaven and earth. Send Thou forth by a permission on Our part, speaking mirrors and high letters to tell of Thy dominion and power and to indicate Thy might and greatness and be the manifestations of Thy Names among all the creatures. We have made Thee the origin of the mirrors and their originator just as We have originated them from Thee the first time....⁸

This passage explains that the Most Great Spirit has created His Manifestation, has chosen Him to be the Manifestation of His Soul and a Mirror for the Kingdom of His Names amongst His creatures. Throughout the Súrih the Most Great Spirit addresses the Temple and the limbs and organs of this Temple and the letters which make up the word Haykal (H, Y, K, and L), making a promise that each will become the progenitor of a new race of men to serve His Cause. These passages demonstrate the allegorical and symbolic nature of these pronouncements. This subject will be discussed in detail later in this article.

There is another significant aspect in the title of this Súrih, which is, outwardly, a reference to Jerusalem and the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem, and inwardly, a reference to His Manifestations. The following statement in relation to this title appears in the text of this Tablet and is interpreted by the Guardian as a reference to Old Testament prophecy:

...The most important of His Tablets, addressed to individual sovereigns, Bahá'u'lláh ordered to be written in the form of a pentacle, symbolizing the temple of man,...and indicate their direct association with the prophecy of the Old Testament:

*Thus have We built the Temple with the hands of power and might, could ye but know it. This is the Temple promised to you in the Book. Draw nigh unto it. This is that which profiteth you, could ye but comprehend it. Be fair, O peoples of the earth! Which is preferable, this, or a temple which is built of clay? Set your faces towards it. Thus have ye been commanded by God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting. Follow ye His bidding, and praise ye your God, your Lord, for that which He hath bestowed upon you. He, verily, is the Truth. No God is there but He. He revealeth what He pleaseth, through His words 'Be and it is.'*⁹

Although at first glance this passage appears to refer to the Súratu'l-Haykal itself as the promised Temple, the Temple is actually a reference to the person of God's Manifestation for this age, Bahá'u'lláh Himself, and not just the Tablet.

Old Testament prophecies about the rebuilding of the Temple can be found in Zechariah. According to the text in this book, the prophet Zechariah received the Word of God during the reign of Darius (521-486 BCE), the Persian King, about the time when the Jews had been liberated from Babylon by King Cyrus (580-529 BCE), and some had returned home from their exile. The words of Zechariah imply that the re-building of the Temple and Jerusalem was incomplete, and furthermore, the return of the Jews to the Holy Land was still only a promise. Chronological information on the events that led to the destruction of the Temple and its reconstruction, and the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá on the fulfillment of the prophecies of Daniel regarding the rebuilding of the Temple and the city of Jerusalem can be found in Appendices I and II, respectively.

Zechariah describes, firstly, God's wrath against the Jews as evidenced by the destruction of their Temple and their exile from Israel, and, secondly, the promise of the return of the Lord's favor and their prosperity. It demonstrates the interplay of symbolic and actual places, people, names and concepts. The frequent interchange of phrases referring to the physical and symbolic Temple of Jerusalem and the physical and spiritual sovereignty of the nation and its Deliverer is quite beautiful to see. For example, the book includes the following prophecy about the entry of the King into Jerusalem:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.¹⁰

Some five hundred years later this prophecy was interpreted by the Gospel writers (Matthew 21:1-5) as referring to His Holiness Jesus Christ's last visit to Jerusalem.¹¹

The Old Testament Book of Ezra is a chronology of edicts and decrees by the Persian Achaemenid kings (Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes) concerning the liberation of the Jews, their return to the Holy Land, and provisions for the rebuilding of their Temple, its beautification and decoration.¹² These accounts describe the literal fulfillment of the prophecies. However, the arrival of Jesus Christ in Jerusalem as a lowly individual and the rejection of Him and His Cause followed by a second destruction of the Jewish Temple and the city of Jerusalem and 2000 years of new exile for the Jewish people.

Therefore, in the context of Zechariah, the lasting Temple actually refers to the Person of Jesus and not the perishable building of the Temple of Solomon. Interestingly enough, even at the time of the Temple's apparent grandeur, Jesus commented that the Jerusalem Temple was being forsaken by God and laid waste. In other words, the people and their leaders had rejected Him Who was the true Temple.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.¹³

This declaration clearly and unambiguously shows that that the real living Temple was Jesus Christ and not that awe-inspiring building in Jerusalem. Jesus further clarified this theme in answer to Jewish leaders questioning His authority to clear the Temple of merchants.

Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body.¹⁴

The Book of Revelation makes the meaning of the temple even clearer by prophesying the descension of a New Jerusalem made of pure gold and precious stones with no temple inside and no need for the light of the sun and the moon, the sovereign Lord and the Lamb being its temple and giving it its light:

21:2 And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

21:3 And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

21:6 And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.

21:10 And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,

21:11 Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal;

21:12 And had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel:

21:18 And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass.

21:19 And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald;

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21:20 The fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysopterus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst.

21:21 And the twelve gates were twelve pearls: every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.

21:22 And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.

21:23 And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.

21:25 And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there.¹⁵

John saw no temple in the New Jerusalem, since he knew the Lord and the Lamb to be its temple. The “Holy of Holies” and the Qiblih (Point of Adoration) for the Bahá’ís in this Dispensation was Bahá’u’lláh during His earthly life, and His shrine after His passing. In the Tablet of Carmel, regarded by the Guardian as the Charter of the Bahá’í dispensation, Bahá’u’lláh states that He is the City of God and the celestial Kaaba descended from heaven.

*Call out to Zion, O Carmel, and announce the joyful tidings: He that was hidden from mortal eyes is come! His all-conquering sovereignty is manifest; His all-encompassing splendour is revealed. Beware lest thou hesitate or halt. Hasten forth and circumambulate the City of God that hath descended from heaven, the celestial Kaaba round which have circled in adoration the favoured of God, the pure in heart, and the company of the most exalted angels.*¹⁶

‘Abdu’l-Bahá explained the flourishing and position of honor of Jerusalem in His lifetime when He stated:

*The Holy City, is now beginning to become prosperous, populous and flourishing. Anyone who saw Jerusalem sixty years ago, and who sees it now, will recognize how populous and flourishing it has become, and how it is again honored.*¹⁷

He interpreted the symbolic meaning of “Holy City” or “New Jerusalem” as the outward form of the “Cause of God” and the “Holy of Holies” as the spiritual basis of “the Cause of God”:

*What is meant by the term Holy of Holies is that spiritual Law which will never be modified, altered or abrogated; and the Holy City means the material Law which may be abrogated; and this material Law, which is described as the Holy City, was to be trodden under foot for twelve hundred and sixty years.*¹⁸

Bahá’u’lláh takes up this theme in the Súratu’l-Haykal and challenges the Jews, Christians and the Moslems to regard Him as the lasting Temple and not that built of clay:

*Thus have We built the Temple with the hands of power and might, could ye but know it. This is the Temple promised to you in the Book. Draw nigh unto it. This is that which profiteth you, could ye but comprehend it. Be fair, O peoples of the earth! Which is preferable, this, or a temple which is built of clay? Set your faces towards it. Thus have ye been commanded by God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting. Follow ye His bidding, and praise ye your God, your Lord, for that which He hath bestowed upon you. He, verily, is the Truth. No God is there but He. He revealeth what He pleaseth, through His words ‘Be and it is.’*¹⁹

Zechariah also makes a reference to “the man whose name is ‘The Branch’ who shall build the Temple of the Lord”:

Thus speaketh the Lord of Hosts saying, behold the man whose name is THE BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord ... and they that are far off shall come and build in the temple of the Lord.²⁰

'Abdu'l-Bahá fulfilled this promise both physically and spiritually. He is the "Center of the Covenant" of the "Lord of Hosts," built the edifice of the Cause of God, and physically constructed the Bahá'í Shrines. Those who were 'far off' have come and have been building the Temple of the Lord.

The Jewish people rejected Jesus and refused to abandon their physical Temple. In the process, sadly, they lost both, their temple and their Deliverer, and suffered 2000 years of cruelty at the hands of other nations. The words "This is the Temple promised to you in the Book. Draw nigh unto it. This is that which profiteth you, could ye but comprehend it. Be fair, O peoples of the earth! Which is preferable, this, or a temple which is built of clay?"²¹ are Bahá'u'lláh's comments on the fate of former generations.

Furthermore, with His Coming, the promises and hopes of the Jewish people for the regaining of their sovereignty and nationhood have once more been fulfilled. What still remains unrealized, though, are the promises of peace and unity for the Jewish people, their neighbors and the world, and the realization of a majestic station for the Holy Land.

Almost 700 years after the destruction of the Temple and the City by the Romans, the Moslems conquered Jerusalem and built their Holy Mosques (circa. 691-701 AD) within the site of the Inner Sanctuary of the Temple ruins. Against that backdrop, can there be peace in Jerusalem while the Muslims and the Jews each claim the same part of the inner sanctuary of the Temple of Solomon? Through this struggle over sovereignty, the Jews, Christians, and Muslims may recognize Bahá'u'lláh as their true Temple, and His Cause and Teachings as their true "Holy of Holies" and "Holy City." Then, through His teachings on progressive revelation, they could achieve that peace promised in their respective Scriptures.

Structure and Summary of the Main Themes

This Tablet consists of a series of formal addresses and dialogues, rich in symbolism, parables, and references to the Scriptures of the past. This literary style with its meaningful and symbolic language makes this Tablet one of the most challenging and most beautiful works of Bahá'u'lláh; and with its wide range of theological topics, it can be regarded as a compendium to the Kitáb-i-Iqán.

The Súrih opens with a series of supplications and words of gratitude from Mírzá Husayn-'Alí to the Most Great Spirit Which has brought existence into being and is the source of life and guidance to all. He offers His gratitude for the calamities that He has suffered. This expression of contentment with the Will of the Lord is followed by the appearance of the Maid of Heaven who points to Him and declares Him to the world as the "Beloved of All," the "Beauty of God and His Sovereignty," and the "Mystery of God and His Cause."

The Most Great Spirit addresses His chosen Servant, the Person of Bahá'u'lláh, Who has been made the Manifestation of all of His attributes, with words of encouragement and promises of support. The Most Great Spirit describes the authority and majesty that Bahá'u'lláh possesses on earth and in heaven. Through Bahá'u'lláh He will raise up a new race of man who will assist Him and His Cause. He then addresses each of the limbs and organs of His servant—His eyes, ears, chest, heart, feet, hands, tongue and every letter of His Temple (H, Y, K, L), and promises that through them He will create people with pure hearts, minds, strong faith, courage, and steadfastness to promote His Cause.

The Most Great Spirit addresses the people of the Bayán, humankind, and the leaders of religions and invites them to recognize this Youth as their Deliverer and their Refuge. He warns them of the consequences of their disobedience.

Bahá'u'lláh responds to the Most Great Spirit with declarations of loyalty, obedience, and readiness to sacrifice His life in His path. He then addresses the people with challenges and promise of assistance should they recognize the truth of His Words. Furthermore, Bahá'u'lláh gives a short but moving and effective account of the way in which He raised His half-brother, educated him, given him a title and elevated his rank amongst men, and yet how he arose against Him and even made attempts on His life. The mighty Words of this Tablet provide a further insight into the relationship between the Most Great Spirit and His Manifestation on earth, which will be discussed in greater detail in this article.

A Selection from the Main Themes of the Súratu’l-Haykal

Since the themes and topics which appear in this Tablet are too numerous to cover in any depth, some highlights of a few of the main themes are offered here.

Identity and Relationship of Central Figures in this Tablet

Through His grace, the Manifestation of God on earth for this day has chosen to convey a few of His many Stations in measures appropriate to us. This is one of the reasons for His use of rich and symbolic language.

The principal Speaker in this Tablet identifies Himself as the Most Great Spirit Who is the First Creation of God, referred to elsewhere as the Primal Will, His Light, etc. It is this Most Great Spirit Who is the Creator of heaven and earth and all there was, is and ever will be. He is that same Spirit that has animated all of the Messengers of the past, and it is through this Spirit and His position that the unity of all the other Manifestations of God can be understood. This reference in the Gospel of John is intended for Him:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.²²

Based on this Tablet and on interpretations from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the expression “and the Word was God” is understood to mean that He was the Word of God. For the first two centuries of the Christian era, the meaning of this passage was hotly debated. With the spread of Christianity within the Roman Empire and the conversion and subsequent support of Emperor Constantine, and following the Council of Nicaea in 358 A.D., the “Word” came to be regarded as a part of the Trinity.²³

We learn in this Tablet that this Most Great Spirit creates the physical being of His Manifestations for every age and, through Them, educates, nourishes, and guides mankind towards Himself. His Manifestations are, therefore, true mirrors of His own attributes, qualities, names, beauty, majesty, and glory. Depending on the requirements of the age, each manifests as many of His qualities as He deems necessary for that age. Our relationship with His Manifestation is, therefore, in every aspect, identical to our relationship with Himself.

In this sense, His Mirrors are perfect individuals on earth who rule in His Name. These Manifestations have two Stations. In the Kingdom of His Cause, they are all one and the same, and in the world of man they are different persons separated by time and place. These are the twin Stations of the Manifestations of God, referred to in the opening passages of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas:

*In the Name of Him Who is the Supreme Ruler over all that hath been and all that is to be. The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the recognition of Him Who is the Dayspring of His Revelation and the Fountain of His laws, Who representeth the Godhead in both the Kingdom of His Cause and the world of creation.*²⁴

The “Kingdom of the Cause” is the dwelling-place of the Most Great Spirit, an intermediary world between man and the Essence of All Essences and the Hidden of the Hidden. Both are unknowable and unreachable to man. However, the Manifestations of the Most Great Spirit represent Him in both the world of man and the Kingdom of the Cause. Therefore, man’s ultimate goal is the recognition of His Manifestation for each age.

References to “This Servant,” “This Youth,” “This Wronged One” and similar titles in this Tablet refer to the person of the Manifestation for this age, Mírzá Ḥusayn-‘Alí, Bahá’u’lláh.

Manifestations of God have many stations. In *The Four Valleys*²⁵ Bahá’u’lláh grants us with a limited knowledge of four of His stations and attributes, i.e., His Self, His Wisdom, His Love, and His Spirit. Similarly, there are other aspects and stations of the Manifestations of Him, which can only be described in symbolic terms. In this category fall such creations as the Holy Spirit referred to abundantly in the Gospels, Qur’án, and the Bahá’í writings, the Angel Gabriel as referred to in the Qur’án, and the Maids

of Heaven referred to in Bahá'u'lláh's Writings, including the Súratu'l-Haykal. These different stations are all linked together by bonds of love, affection, admiration, loyalty and sacrifice. To understand this we may recall the words of Jesus, as a Manifestation of His age, when He declared that all sins and blasphemies against His person will be forgiven, but not those against the Holy Spirit.²⁶ When His Holiness, the Báb, declared Himself ready to sacrifice His life, this was the Path He intended. We are all asked to follow the example of the love of His Manifestations for Him.

References to the Station of Jesus in the Gospels can be understood in terms of these manifold Stations of a Manifestation of God, such as when He declared that "I and My Father are one,"²⁷ "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work,"²⁸ and "no man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day."²⁹ Christendom has struggled for millenia with these Gospel passages and, in the end, has created the concept of the Trinity, although this has never resolved its soul-searching.

The Súratu'l-Haykal also addresses Bahá'u'lláh by other titles, such as the Supreme Pen, the Pen of Eternity, the Supreme Word, the Blessed Beauty, the Ancient Beauty, the Sun of Eternity, all of which can be understood in light of the given explanations.

Words of Might

With Bahá'u'lláh's grace, we are now better able to understand the Words of former Messengers of God, as they relate to Their physical Beings and Divine Stations, such as when Jesus declines to be called "Good Master"³⁰ and yet later states that "My Father and I are One."³¹

Bahá'u'lláh makes numerous statements about His Authority, His Names and Attributes reflecting His Station as one with His Most Great Spirit. An example of such a statement, translated by the Beloved Guardian, will suffice.

*Naught is seen in My temple but the Temple of God, and in My Beauty is His Beauty, and in My being but His Being, and My self but His Self, and in My movement but His Movement, and in My acquiescence but His Acquiescence, and in My pen but His Pen, the Mighty, the All-Praised. There hath not been in My soul but the Truth, and in Myself naught could be seen but God.*³²

Bahá'u'lláh, in the Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, in addressing a Muslim Shaykh who had dismissed His divinity, describes the dual stations of God's Manifestations.³³ He quotes several examples from the Scriptures, and explains their meanings, concluding with these remarks about His person:

O Shaykh! This station is the station in which one dieth to himself and liveth in God. Divinity, whenever I mention it, indicateth My complete and absolute self-effacement. This is the station in which I have no control over mine own weal or woe nor over my life nor over my resurrection.

O Shaykh! How do the divines of this age account for the effulgent glory which the Sadrah of Utterance hath shed upon the Son of 'Imrán (Moses) on the Sinai of Divine knowledge? He (Moses) hearkened unto the Word which the Burning Bush had uttered, and accepted it;

What explanation can they give concerning that which the Seal of the Prophets (Muhammad)—may the souls of all else but Him be offered up for His sake—hath said?: "Ye, verily, shall behold your Lord as ye behold the full moon on its fourteenth night."

The Commander of the Faithful (Ímám 'Alí)—peace be upon him—moreover, saith in the Khutbiy-i-Tutúnjyyih: "Anticipate ye the Revelation of Him Who conversed with Moses from the Burning Bush on Sinai."

O Shaykh! No breeze can compare with the breezes of Divine Revelation, whilst the Word which is uttered by God shineth and flasheth as the sun amidst the books of men. Happy the man that hath discovered it, and recognized it, and said: "Praised be Thou, Who art the Desire of the world, and thanks be to Thee, O Well-Beloved of the hearts of such as are devoted to Thee!"

Men have failed to perceive Our purpose in the references We have made to Divinity and Godhood. Were they to apprehend it, they would arise from their places, and cry out: “We, verily, ask pardon of God!” The Seal of the Prophets—may the souls of all else but Him be offered up for His sake—saith: “Manifold are Our relationships with God. At one time, We are He Himself, and He is We Ourselves. At another He is that He is, and We are that We are.”

By the righteousness of God! Idle fancies have debarred men from the Horizon of Certitude, and vain imaginings withheld them from the Choice Sealed Wine. In truth I say, and for the sake of God I declare: This Servant, this Wronged One, is abashed to claim for Himself any existence whatever, how much more those exalted grades of being! Every man of discernment, while walking upon the earth, feeleth indeed abashed, inasmuch as he is fully aware that the thing which is the source of his prosperity, his wealth, his might, his exaltation, his advancement and power is, as ordained by God, the very earth which is trodden beneath the feet of all men. There can be no doubt that whoever is cognizant of this truth, is cleansed and sanctified from all pride, arrogance, and vainglory. Whatever hath been said hath come from God. Unto this, He, verily, hath borne, and beareth now, witness, and He, in truth, is the All-Knowing, the All-Informed.

With these explanations, we are able to comprehend the words of His Manifestations.

The Significance of the Words of the Maiden of Heaven

As mentioned earlier, the Maiden of Heaven quoted in the Súratu’l-Haykal is, in reality, another station of this Manifestation of the Most Great Spirit. Therefore, the significance of this episode is, as described in the Words of the Maiden, informing mankind about the station of this Beloved of All.

The beloved Guardian has translated this enchanting passage and, in particular, states that the Maiden symbolizes the “Most Great Spirit.”

In His Súratu’l-Haykal (the Súrih of the Temple) He thus describes those breathless moments when the Maiden, symbolizing the “Most Great Spirit” proclaimed His mission to the entire creation:

While engulfed in tribulations I heard a most wondrous, a most sweet voice, calling above My head. Turning My face, I beheld a Maiden—the embodiment of the remembrance of the name of My Lord—suspended in the air before Me. So rejoiced was she in her very soul that her countenance shone with the ornament of the good-pleasure of God, and her cheeks glowed with the brightness of the All-Merciful. Betwixt earth and heaven she was raising a call which captivated the hearts and minds of men. She was imparting to both My inward and outer being tidings which rejoiced My soul, and the souls of God’s honored servants. Pointing with her finger unto My head, she addressed all who are in heaven and all who are on earth, saying: “By God! This is the Best-Beloved of the Worlds, and yet ye comprehend not. This is the Beauty of God amongst you, and the power of His sovereignty within you, could ye but understand. This is the Mystery of God and His Treasure, the Cause of God and His glory unto all who are in the kingdoms of Revelation and of creation, if ye be of them that perceive.”³⁴

The principal function of this encounter and the role of the Maiden is to declare to the world that the Best-Beloved of all has come. Compare this encounter and the words of this Maiden, to those uttered by a dove at the commencement of Jesus Christ’s Mission after His encounter with John the Baptist.

And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.³⁵

It is noteworthy that Bahá’u’lláh calls this Maiden “the embodiment of the remembrance of the name of My Lord”³⁶ and that the Gospel of Matthew describes this dove as “the Spirit of God descending like a dove.”³⁷ Although employing different symbols, both descriptions convey the same idea. Also note that the “Spirit of God” is a title used in the Islámic and Bahá’í scriptures for Jesus Christ.

The symbol of the Maiden appears multiple times in this Tablet, and, on each occasion, the Maiden makes a different but equally effective declaration about Bahá'u'lláh's station to humanity, for example:

*O Houri of Paradise! Come out of the chambers of the Garden and say to the inhabitants of the universe, "By God, He hath appeared, the Beloved of the world, the Intended of the Knowers, the Worshipped of whomsoever is in the heaven and the earth and the adored of the Ancients and Moderns. Beware of hesitating to accept this Beauty, after the Ruler of Might, Power and Glory hath appeared."*³⁸

The Most Great Spirit on these occasions, on Mounts Sinai and Harra, by the banks of the River Jordan, and in the Siyáh-Chál, made the declaration of the station of His Manifestations to mankind. Although the Most Great Spirit's Manifestations in the human world exist from their conception, Their Missions and Stations are declared at specific times in their lives, so as to provide a physical explanation that people can easily understand. Therefore, the appearance of the Burning Bush to Moses, the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove to Jesus, Muhammad's dialogue with the Angel Gabriel, the Báb's dream of witnessing the martyrdom of the Ímám Husayn, and Bahá'u'lláh's vision of the Maiden are all symbolic and should be understood as such.

'Abdu'l-Bahá explains why some passages in the Scriptures imply as though these Holy Souls are appointed as Manifestation of the All Merciful at a specific stage in their lives.³⁹

We come to the explanation of the words of Bahá'u'lláh when He says: "O king! I was but a man like others, asleep upon My couch, when lo, the breezes of the All-Glorious were wafted over Me, and taught Me the knowledge of all that hath been. This thing is not from Me, but from One Who is Almighty and All-Knowing." This is the state of manifestation: it is not sensible; it is an intellectual reality, exempt and freed from time, from past, present and future; it is an explanation, a simile, a metaphor and is not to be accepted literally; it is not a state that can be comprehended by man. Sleeping and waking is passing from one state to another. Sleeping is the condition of repose, and wakefulness is the condition of movement. Sleeping is the state of silence; wakefulness is the state of speech. Sleeping is the state of mystery; wakefulness is the state of manifestation.

For example, it is a Persian and Arabic expression to say that the earth was asleep, and the spring came, and it awoke; or the earth was dead, and the spring came, and it revived. These expressions are metaphors, allegories, mystic explanations in the world of signification.

*Briefly, the Holy Manifestations have ever been, and ever will be, Luminous Realities; no change or variation takes place in Their essence. Before declaring Their manifestation, They are silent and quiet like a sleeper, and after Their manifestation, They speak and are illuminated, like one who is awake.*⁴⁰

The Reason for Man's Ignorance of the Lord's Grace

His grace surrounds us all throughout our lives. In spite of this, the question regarding man's lack of awareness of His presence has always been asked. Bahá'u'lláh in this Súrih answers this dilemma using analogies from everyday life. He states that mankind's life and existence depend on His Grace as much as leaves depend on roots and fish depend on water:

Nothing can move between the heaven and earth without My permission and no soul can ascend to the Kingdom without My Command; but My creatures veiled themselves from My power and authority and were of those who are negligent. Say, nothing can be seen in My Manifestation but the Manifestation of God nor in My power but the power of God, were ye of those who know! Say, the maxim of My creatures is likened unto that of the leaves of a tree they appear and feel themselves independent but of their root they are neglectful. Thus we propounded a proverb unto Our servants, the wise, perhaps they will elevate themselves from the vegetable degree and attain the station of accomplishment in this confirmed and valid matter. Say, they are likened

unto a whale in the water; verily the water is its source of life but it indeed does not know that the source of life is from the Presence of the Precious, the Wise; it is veiled from it to such an extent that if asked about the water and its qualities, it does not know. Thus We propound proverbs; perhaps the people will advance to the Koblá (Manifested God) of whomsoever is in the heaven and earth.⁴¹

A Reference to Mírzá Yaḥyá and Addresses to Bábí Communities

Bahá'u'lláh makes a short but moving and effective reference to His half-brother, Mírzá Yaḥyá and his opposition to the Cause. Considering the time at which this Tablet was revealed, this reference in the Súratu'l-Haykal had an important impact on the transformation and successful conversion of the Bábí communities to His Cause.

Bahá'u'lláh states His love and devotion to the training of His half-brother, his appointment and protection, and speaks of Mírzá Yaḥyá's aggression, opposition, and attempts on His life.

O thou Countenance of Unity! Shouldst thou find them [those whom God will make appear on earth and by them He elevateth His mention, spreadeth His traces, confirmeth His Word and promulgateth His Signs in spite of those who denied and contradicted, and were of those who Abjured His Words], and be able to meet them, relate thou to them that which this Page is relating to thee from the stories of Himself and what has befallen Him that they may peruse that which was written in a preserved tablet. Tell them the news of this Page and how He was smitten with misfortune and injuries in order that they may remember My calamities and be of those who comprehend. Then mention to them that, verily We have chosen one of our brothers and showed to him a small drop of the high sea of science, and clothed him with the garment of one Name of the Names, and elevated him to a rank whereby every one rose to praise him, and protected him from the injury of the owner of injuries in such a manner that the powerful failed to affect him. Verily We were before the faces of whomsoever is in the heaven and earth in the days when all the servants arose to kill Me, and verily We were among them uttering the mention of God and His praise and sustaining His matter until the Word of God became ascertained amongst His creatures, His Traces famous, His Power High, and His Dominion Spread, and to this the noble servants will bear witness. Verily when my brother saw that the matter became notorious he found in himself pride and delusion, and accordingly went forth from behind the veils and fought with Myself, disputed My signs, falsified My proof, and denied My traces; but the belly of the greedy was not satisfied until he desired to eat My flesh and drink My blood. To this, the servants will bear witness who fled into exile with God, also the servants who are near (to God). In this he consulted one of My servants and instigated him to acquiescence (to that deed). But lo! God assisted Me with the hosts of the Seen and the Unseen and preserved Me with the truth and caused to descend upon Me that which prevented him from accomplishing that which he desired, and stopped the craftiness of those who denied the signs of the Merciful; were they not indeed people of cunning and deceit?

When that which his mind had enticed him to do became divulged and the exiles were cognizant of his wile, the noise of tumult was raised by these people, who attained to such a degree as to become known almost throughout the city; then We prevented them and bestowed upon them the word of patience that they should indeed be of those who forbear.

By God who is the only God and there is no God but He! Verily We were patient and truly We commanded the servants to practice endurance and forbearance. We went out from amongst those people and settled in another house in order that the fire of violent hatred might be quenched in his breast and he be of those who are guided. We did not object to him, neither did We see him after that; We sat in the house waiting for the bounty of God, the Protector, the Self-existent. Verily when he knew that the matter had become notorious, he took the pen of lies and wrote to the servants attributing all that which he committed, to My Beauty, the Oppressed, the One, for the purpose of creating discord among the servants, and sowing hatred in the breasts of those who believed in God, the Precious, the beloved.

By the life of Him in whose hand My soul is, We were astonished at his deceit and all the creation of both the Seen and Unseen were astonished by him. Notwithstanding that which was in his heart abated not until he committed that which the pen dare not write, and by which he destroyed My reverence; the reverence of God, the Mighty, the Precious, the Praiseworthy. Were I to mention that which he did, such deeds could not be fulfilled and classified even were all the seas of the earth reduced to ink and all the things of the earth transformed into pens. Thus do We dictate that which has befallen Myself; were ye of those who know.⁴²

Unity within the Cause and the transformation and conversion of the Bábí believers to His Faith at that point in time were so important that a large number of moving addresses in this Tablet are directed to the Bábí communities and their leaders. The themes of the addresses in the Súratu'l-Haykal recall to mind the content of the Kitáb-i-Badí which together were widely circulated and eagerly read by the believers, bringing about a major transformation of the newly born Bahá'í communities. Examples of such addresses are numerous in this Súrih:

O People of el-Beyan! Should ye not assist Him, God will assist Him by the hosts of earth and heaven and those of the Unseen, through His Command which is "Be" and it is! And He will send forth by His Will certain people who are unknown to anyone but Himself, the Protector, the Self-existent, and purify them from the strain of surmise and passion, and elevate them to the rank of sanctity, and by them He will cause to appear the traces of the Glory of His Kingdom on earth: thus was it decreed on the part of God, the Mighty, the Beloved.

O People of El-Bayán! Do ye deny the One for whose meeting ye were created, and still ye are of those who sit in your place and rejoice? Do ye object to Him, the one hair of whose head is, before God, better than all there is in heaven and earth and still do ye scoff at Him?

O People of El-Bayán! Show forth that which ye have, that I may know by what proof ye have believed in the manifestation of the Command of God in the past, and today by what evidence do ye magnify yourselves?

By the One who hath created Me from the Light of His Beauty, I have never found among the neglectful, one of such negligence, or among the ignorant, one of such ignorance, as ye are. Ye take as an evidence for your belief in God, the Tablets which ye have in your possession, but when the Signs came down and the Lamp gave Light, ye denied the One through whose Pen all matters were decreed in a Preserved Tablet. Do ye read the signs and deny their Originator and Revealer? Thus hath God seized (deprived) your sight as a punishment for your actions; were ye of those who perceive: Do ye write the verses at eventide and dawn, and from the One who caused them to descend ye conceal yourselves? And today the Supreme Assembly will see you in the mischief of your deeds and disavow you whilst ye are of those who do not hear; and the one will ask, and then another: "What do these ignorant people say, and in what vale do they rest? Do they close their eyes, while yet they see?" By God, O people, the inhabitants of the Cities of Names, became perplexed by your actions, and still in the barren valley ye are bewildered, and do not conceive.⁴³

Names, Titles and Stations were Created by Bahá'u'lláh

Names, titles and stations for all were created by Him and should not become veils between Him and those who search after Him. This theme runs through a number of Tablets and major works of Bahá'u'lláh such as the Kitáb-i-Íqán and is repeated in this Súrih with similar force and clarity. The premise is that the Most Great Spirit at various times in man's history has manifested His Names and Attributes in a chosen pure soul, conferring on each a specific name and title. Each of these Dispensations has chosen to name a successor and assign titles to the people of their age. They have nominated places of worship and elevated the ranks of their chosen people and places above all others.

Examples of these names and titles are Moses, Jesus Christ, Mohammad and the Báb for prophets; Haron, Peter, 'Alí, and Yahyá for appointees; Jerusalem, Mecca, synagogues, churches, temples and

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mosques for places of worship; and the Torah, Gospels, Qur'án, and Bayán for Scriptures. It remains for every man to recognize the Author of these appointments, and not to let attachment to any of these deter him from recognizing Him in His New Name and Title whenever and wherever He chooses to manifest Himself again.

Bahá'u'lláh refers to this common theme and points to the status of two places of honor and worship, the 'Al-Aqsá Mosque in Jerusalem and the Black Stone in the House of Mecca, and asks a novel question about the source of honor for these places.

Verily should we take a handful of dust and embroider it with the embroidered garment of the Names, we are indeed able and this is a bounty on my part upon it and not according to its deserts. Thus hath it descended of a truth from the Presence of the abode of the Omniscient.

Look to the Blackstone of Caaba, Mecca, which God hath made the object of pilgrimage to the people; is this bounty from the stone itself? No, by My Soul!

And is this glory from itself? No, by Myself, which the knowledge of every learned and wise man failed to comprehend. Again look to the Masjid el-Aksa (a mosque built upon the site of the Temple of Jerusalem) and others which we have made places of circuit to the people of all sides and regions; such honor is not to be attributed unto them, but unto Our Manifestations which we have made the rising places of Our Revelation among the servants, were ye of those who know. Verily there is wisdom in all this which no one knoweth but God. Ask that God may point out unto you that which He willeth, verily He is the Omniscient.⁴⁴

He then commands man to purify his heart and soul from all attachments, love, and hate, in order to sanctify himself for His recognition:

O people! Cut yourselves from the world and its gold, and do not look to those who denied God and associated other things with Him; but look to the horizon of the Revelation (Beyan) for the purpose of celebrating your Lord, the Merciful. This is what God hath willed, blessed are those who know.

Say, O people! We have commanded you in the tablets to sanctify yourselves on that occasion of the Appearance, from all the names, and that which was created in earth and heaven, in order that the transfiguration of the Sun of Truth from the horizon of the will of your Lord the Powerful, the Great, be printed upon your souls. Also, we have commanded you to purify your hearts from the love and detestation of those who are upon the earth, lest anything will prevent you from one direction and enforce you to another, and this is of my greatest advice unto you in a perspicuous Tablet. He who adhereth to either the one or the other verily he cannot know the Command as it is, unto this will bear witness every just and informed one. Ye have forgotten the Promise of God, and violated His Covenant in such a manner that ye turned away from the One by whose Appearance the eyes of the Unitarians were consoled. Purify your sight from the hidden and the veiled, then look to the evidences of the Prophets and Messengers, that ye may know the Matter of God in these days wherein the Promised One hath come with great sovereignty.

Fear God and deprive not yourselves from the Rising-Place of the signs; this is that whereby you will be profited; verily your Lord is the Rich, and He is sufficient for all the world. Verily He everlastingly was, and there was nothing beside Him.⁴⁵

He makes detachment from names His greatest advice to man:

We have commanded you to purify your hearts from the love and detestation of those who are upon the earth, lest anything will prevent you from one direction and enforce you to another, and this is of my greatest advice unto you in a perspicuous Tablet. He who adhereth to either

the one or the other verily he cannot know the Command as it is, unto this will bear witness every just and informed one. Ye have forgotten the Promise of God, and violated His Covenant in such a manner that ye turned away from the One by whose Appearance the eyes of the Unitarians were consoled. Purify your sight from the hidden and the veiled, then look to the evidences of the Prophets and Messengers, that ye may know the Matter of God in these days wherein the Promised One hath come with great sovereignty.

*Fear God and deprive not yourselves from the Rising-Place of the signs; this is that whereby you will be profited; verily your Lord is the Rich, and He is sufficient for all the world. Verily He everlastingly was, and there was nothing beside Him.*⁴⁶

Teachings Enshrined Within This Súrih

This Tablet also contains a great number of the teachings of the Faith on a variety of subjects. Some examples of these teachings are briefly described below:

- i) Man's happiness lies in his submission to the Will of his Lord. There is neither refuge nor savior for him except his Lord's grace.
- ii) Strict avoidance of any misrepresentation or changes to the Words of the Scriptures.
- iii) All the meaning and wisdom of the Scriptures of the past are connected to this mighty Ocean of Revelation and all that was promised in the past is fulfilled in this lofty Word that has dawned from the Abhá horizon.
- iv) Bloodshed in the path of the Lord is forbidden. The promotion and promulgation of the Cause of God are only acceptable through the force of reason and pure deeds.
- v) The Words of God do not resemble the words of man, as His Words are the king of Words, as the Manifestation of God is the King of the age.
- vi) Pure hearts, minds, and sight are needed for one to recognize Him in His new manifestation.
- vii) Abstinance from all has been forbidden, but one should neither deprive oneself from what is lawful nor exert hardship on oneself.

Appendix I—History of Jerusalem

14th Century BCE	The name Jerusalem appear in diplomatic correspondence as Urusalim in the Amarna Letter.
1010-970 BCE	The reign of King David
1003	King David establishes Jerusalem as the capital of the United Kingdom of Israel.
970-931	The reign of King Solomon
950	King Solomon commences construction of the First Temple.
931	The Division of the Kingdom into Israel and Judah.
721	Assyrians conquer the Northern Kingdom of Israel and place ten of the twelve tribes of Israel in slavery and eventually disperse them.
597	Babylonians capture Jerusalem.
586	Third invasion of Nebuchadnezzar, and the destruction of Jerusalem, its Temple and the exile of the Jews to Babylon.
539	Fall of Babylon.
538	The edict of Cyrus
537	The return of about 50,000 Jews from Babylon by edict of Cyrus.
520	Work begins on rebuilding of the Temple

Lights of 'Irfán

515	Completion and re-dedication of the Second Temple (The 6th year of the reign of Darius)
458	Ezra the Scribe comes from Babylon—Law revived.
445	Nehemiah appointed governor of Judea by Artaxerxes, returns from Babylon—rebuilds the city walls.
332	Alexander the Great defeats Darius and captures Jerusalem.
320	Egyptian Ptolemy captures Jerusalem.
169	Seleucid king, Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-163) outlaws Judaism and on December 25th, profanes the Temple.
164	Judah Maccabee captures Jerusalem and restores the Temple.
63	General Pompey captures Jerusalem for Rome.
40	Rome appoints Herod King of Judea (reigned 40-A.D. 4)
37	King Herod captures Jerusalem.
18	Herod starts actual rebuilding of the Temple.
10	Although not complete until A.D. 63, Temple is dedicated.
B.C.E. to C.E./A.D.	
31	Crucifixion of Jesus Christ
41-44	Agrippa, king of Judea build new city wall (The Third Wall)
63	Temple completed
66-73	The great Revolt—The war of the Jews against the Romans.
70	Fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the second Temple by Titus.
132-135	Bar Kochba's war of freedom—Jerusalem the Jewish Capital.
135	Emperor Hadrian's total destruction of Jerusalem. Rebuilding of new walls and new city renamed Aelia Capitolina. Jews not allowed in Jerusalem.
326	Queen Helena, mother of Emperor Constantine the Great, visits Jerusalem, determines locations of events associated with the last days of Jesus, and causes the churches to be built to commemorate them.
438	Empress Eudocia permits Jews to live in Jerusalem.
638	Six years after Mohammed's death, the Caliph Omar enters Jerusalem and Jews are re-admitted to Jerusalem.
691	Dome of the Rock completed by Caliph Abd al-Malik
701	The construction of the al-Aqsa mosque completed by caliph al-Walid.
1099	Crusaders, led by Godfrey de Bouillon, capture Jerusalem following Pope Urban's call in 1096. Baldwin I declared King of Jerusalem.
1187	Kurdish general Saladin captures Jerusalem. He permits Jews and Muslims to return and settle in the city.
1192	Richard the Lion Heart fails to capture Jerusalem. Treaty with Saladin permitting Christians to worship at their Holy sites.
1219	City walls razed by Sultan Malik-al-Muattam.
1244	Khawarizmian Turks capture Jerusalem.
1244	Mameluk Sultan defeats the Ayyubids and rule Jerusalem.

1260	The Mameluk of Egypt capture Jerusalem.
1267	Rabbi Moshe Ben Nahman arrives from Spain, revives the Jewish congregation and establishes synagogues and center of learning.
1348	The Black Plague hits Jerusalem.
1517	Ottomans effect peaceful takeover of Jerusalem.
1537-1541	Unwalled since 1219, Sultan Suleiman ("The Magnificent") rebuilds the city walls including the present day 7 gates and the Tower of David, the Damascus gate in 1542.
1838	First consulate (British) opened in Jerusalem.
1860	First Jewish settlement outside walls of the city.
1917	British conquest and General Allenby's entry into Jerusalem.
1948	British Mandate ends and the State of Israel proclaimed.
1949	Israel declares Jerusalem as its capital.
1967	Israel captures the Old City and reunites Jerusalem.

Appendix II—Some of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Interpretations

'Abdu'l-Bahá's interpretation of some chapters of the Old Testaments books of Daniel and Isaiah, and the New Testament Revelation of St. John recorded in *Some Answered Questions* provides the basis for understanding the symbolism of these books. Few related sections from *Some Answered Questions* that provide dates and events surrounding the fate of Jerusalem and its Temple as has been prophesied in the Bible and their fulfillment in the Bahá'í Faith are reproduced here (SAQ, pp. 40-55):

To conclude: in the Book of Daniel, from the rebuilding of Jerusalem to the martyrdom of Christ, seventy weeks are appointed; for by the martyrdom of Christ the sacrifice is accomplished and the altar destroyed. This is a prophecy of the manifestation of Christ. These seventy weeks begin with the restoration and the rebuilding of Jerusalem, concerning which four edicts were issued by three kings.

The first was issued by Cyrus in the year 536 B.C.; this is recorded in the first chapter of the Book of Ezra. The second edict, with reference to the rebuilding of Jerusalem, is that of Darius of Persia in the year 519 B.C.; this is recorded in the sixth chapter of Ezra. The third is that of Artaxerxes in the seventh year of his reign—that is, in 457 B.C.; this is recorded in the seventh chapter of Ezra. The fourth is that of Artaxerxes in the year 444 B.C.; this is recorded in the second chapter of Nehemiah.

But Daniel refers especially to the third edict, which was issued in the year 457 B.C. Seventy weeks make four hundred and ninety days. Each day, according to the text of the Holy Book, is a year. For in the Bible it is said: "The day of the Lord is one year." Therefore, four hundred and ninety days are four hundred and ninety years. The third edict of Artaxerxes was issued four hundred and fifty-seven years before the birth of Christ, and Christ when He was martyred and ascended was thirty-three years of age. When you add thirty-three to four hundred and fifty-seven, the result is four hundred and ninety, which is the time announced by Daniel for the manifestation of Christ.

But in the twenty-fifth verse of the ninth chapter of the Book of Daniel this is expressed in another manner, as seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; and apparently this differs from the first saying. Many have remained perplexed at these differences, trying to reconcile these two statements. How can seventy weeks be right in one place, and sixty-two weeks and seven weeks in another? These two sayings do not accord.

But Daniel mentions two dates. One of these dates begins with the command of Artaxerxes to Ezra to rebuild Jerusalem: this is the seventy weeks which came to an end with the ascension of Christ, when by His martyrdom the sacrifice and oblation ceased.

The second period, which is found in the twenty-sixth verse, means that after the termination of the rebuilding of Jerusalem until the ascension of Christ, there will be sixty-two weeks: the seven weeks are the duration of the rebuilding of Jerusalem, which took forty-nine years. When you add these seven weeks to the sixty-two weeks, it makes sixty-nine weeks, and in the last week (69-70) the ascension of Christ took place. These seventy weeks are thus completed, and there is no contradiction.

Now that the manifestation of Christ has been proved by the prophecies of Daniel, let us prove the manifestations of Bahá'u'lláh and of the Báb. Up to the present we have only mentioned rational proofs; now we shall speak of traditional proofs.

In the eighth chapter of the Book of Daniel, verse thirteen, it is said: "Then I heard one saint speaking, and another saint said unto that certain saint which spake, How long shall be the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, and the transgression of desolation, to give both the sanctuary and the host to be trodden under foot?" Then he answered (v. 14): "Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed"; (v. 17) "But he said unto me ... at the time of the end shall be the vision." That is to say, how long will this misfortune, this ruin, this abasement and degradation last? meaning, when will be the dawn of the Manifestation? Then he answered, "Two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed." Briefly, the purport of this passage is that he appoints two thousand three hundred years, for in the text of the Bible each day is a year. Then from the date of the issuing of the edict of Artaxerxes to rebuild Jerusalem until the day of the birth of Christ there are 456 years, and from the birth of Christ until the day of the manifestation of the Báb there are 1844 years. When you add 456 years to this number it makes 2300 years. That is to say, the fulfillment of the vision of Daniel took place in the year A.D. 1844, and this is the year of the Báb's manifestation according to the actual text of the Book of Daniel. Consider how clearly he determines the year of manifestation; there could be no clearer prophecy for a manifestation than this.

In Matthew, chapter 24, verse 3, Christ clearly says that what Daniel meant by this prophecy was the date of the manifestation, and this is the verse: "As He sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto Him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world?" One of the explanations He gave them in reply was this (v. 15): "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand)." In this answer He referred them to the eighth chapter of the Book of Daniel, saying that everyone who reads it will understand that it is this time that is spoken of. Consider how clearly the manifestation of the Báb is spoken of in the Old Testament and in the Gospel.

To conclude, let us now explain the date of the manifestation of Bahá'u'lláh from the Bible. The date of Bahá'u'lláh is calculated according to lunar years from the mission and the Hejira of Muhammad; for in the religion of Muhammad the lunar year is in use, as also it is the lunar year which is employed concerning all commands of worship.

In Daniel, chapter 12, verse 6, it is said: "And one said to the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, How long shall it be to the end of these wonders? And I heard the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand unto heaven, and swore by Him that liveth for ever that it shall be for a time, times, and a half; and that when He shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished."

As I have already explained the signification of one day, it is not necessary to explain it further; but we will say briefly that each day of the Father counts as a year, and in each year there are twelve months. Thus three years and a half make forty-two months, and forty-two months are twelve hundred and sixty days. The Báb, the precursor of Bahá'u'lláh, appeared in the year 1260 from the Hejira of Muhammad, by the reckoning of Islám.

Afterward, in verse 11, it is said: "And from the time that the daily sacrifice shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolation be set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days. Blessed is he that waiteth, and cometh to the thousand three hundred and five and thirty days."

The beginning of this lunar reckoning is from the day of the proclamation of the prophethood of Muhammad in the country of Hijáz; and that was three years after His mission, because in the beginning the prophethood of Muhammad was kept secret, and no one knew it save Khadíjah and Ibn Nawfal. After three years it was announced. And Bahá'u'lláh, in the year 1290 from the proclamation of the mission of Muhammad, caused His manifestation to be known.

Commentary on the Eleventh Chapter of St. John

In the beginning of the eleventh chapter of the Revelation of St. John it is said:

"And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein.

"But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months."

This reed is a Perfect Man Who is likened to a reed, and the manner of its likeness is this: when the interior of a reed is empty and free from all matter, it will produce beautiful melodies; and as the sound and melodies do not come from the reed, but from the flute player who blows upon it, so the sanctified heart of that blessed Being is free and emptied from all save God, pure and exempt from the attachments of all human conditions, and is the companion of the Divine Spirit. Whatever He utters is not from Himself, but from the real flute player, and it is a divine inspiration. That is why He is likened to a reed; and that reed is like a rod—that is to say, it is the helper of every impotent one, and the support of human beings. It is the rod of the Divine Shepherd by which He guards His flock and leads them about the pastures of the Kingdom.

Then it is said: "The angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein"—that is to say, compare and measure: measuring is the discovery of proportion. Thus the angel said: compare the temple of God and the altar and them that are praying therein—that is to say, investigate what is their true condition and discover in what degree and state they are, and what conditions, perfections, behavior and attributes they possess; and make yourself cognizant of the mysteries of those holy souls who dwell in the Holy of Holies in purity and sanctity.

"But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles."

In the beginning of the seventh century after Christ, when Jerusalem was conquered, the Holy of Holies was outwardly preserved—that is to say, the house which Solomon built; but outside the Holy of Holies the outer court was taken and given to the Gentiles. "And the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months"—that is to say, the Gentiles shall govern and control Jerusalem forty and two months, signifying twelve hundred and sixty days; and as each day signifies a year, by this reckoning it becomes twelve hundred and sixty years, which is the duration

of the cycle of the Qur'án. For in the texts of the Holy Book, each day is a year; as it is said in the fourth chapter of Ezekiel, verse 6: "Thou shalt bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days: I have appointed thee each day for a year."

This prophesies the duration of the Dispensation of Islám when Jerusalem was trodden under foot, which means that it lost its glory—but the Holy of Holies was preserved, guarded and respected—until the year 1260. This twelve hundred and sixty years is a prophecy of the manifestation of the Báb, the "Gate" of Bahá'u'lláh, which took place in the year 1260 of the Hejira of Muhammad, and as the period of twelve hundred and sixty years has expired, Jerusalem, the Holy City, is now beginning to become prosperous, populous and flourishing. Anyone who saw Jerusalem sixty years ago, and who sees it now, will recognize how populous and flourishing it has become, and how it is again honored.

This is the outward meaning of these verses of the Revelation of St. John; but they have another explanation and a symbolic sense, which is as follows: the Law of God is divided into two parts. One is the fundamental basis which comprises all spiritual things—that is to say, it refers to the spiritual virtues and divine qualities; this does not change nor alter: it is the Holy of Holies, which is the essence of the Law of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Christ, Muhammad, the Báb, and Bahá'u'lláh, and which lasts and is established in all the prophetic cycles. It will never be abrogated, for it is spiritual and not material truth; it is faith, knowledge, certitude, justice, piety, righteousness, trustworthiness, love of God, benevolence, purity, detachment, humility, meekness, patience and constancy. It shows mercy to the poor, defends the oppressed, gives to the wretched and uplifts the fallen.

These divine qualities, these eternal commandments, will never be abolished; nay, they will last and remain established forever and ever. These virtues of humanity will be renewed in each of the different cycles; for at the end of every cycle the spiritual Law of God—that is to say, the human virtues—disappears, and only the form subsists.

Thus among the Jews, at the end of the cycle of Moses, which coincides with the Christian manifestation, the Law of God disappeared, only a form without spirit remaining. The Holy of Holies departed from among them, but the outer court of Jerusalem—which is the expression used for the form of the religion—fell into the hands of the Gentiles. In the same way, the fundamental principles of the religion of Christ, which are the greatest virtues of humanity, have disappeared; and its form has remained in the hands of the clergy and the priests. Likewise, the foundation of the religion of Muhammad has disappeared, but its form remains in the hands of the official ùlamá.

These foundations of the Religion of God, which are spiritual and which are the virtues of humanity, cannot be abrogated; they are irremovable and eternal, and are renewed in the cycle of every Prophet.

The second part of the Religion of God, which refers to the material world, and which comprises fasting, prayer, forms of worship, marriage and divorce, the abolition of slavery, legal processes, transactions, indemnities for murder, violence, theft and injuries—this part of the Law of God, which refers to material things, is modified and altered in each prophetic cycle in accordance with the necessities of the times.

Briefly, what is meant by the term Holy of Holies is that spiritual Law which will never be modified, altered or abrogated; and the Holy City means the material Law which may be abrogated; and this material Law, which is described as the Holy City, was to be trodden under foot for twelve hundred and sixty years.

“And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and three-score days, clothed in sackcloth.” These two witnesses are Muhammad the Messenger of God, and ‘Alí, son of Abú Tálíb.

In the Qur’án it is said that God addressed Muhammad, the Messenger of God, saying: “We made You a Witness, a Herald of good news, and a Warner”—that is to say, We have established Thee as the witness, the giver of good tidings, and as One bringing the wrath of God. The meaning of “a witness” is one by whose testimony things may be verified. The commands of these two witnesses were to be performed for twelve hundred and sixty days, each day signifying a year. Now, Muhammad was the root, and Alí the branch, like Moses and Joshua. It is said they “are clothed in sackcloth,” meaning that they, apparently, were to be clothed in old raiment, not in new raiment; in other words, in the beginning they would possess no splendor in the eyes of the people, nor would their Cause appear new; for Muhammad’s spiritual Law corresponds to that of Christ in the Gospel, and most of His laws relating to material things correspond to those of the Pentateuch. This is the meaning of the old raiment.

Then it is said: “These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth.” These two souls are likened to olive trees because at that time all lamps were lighted by olive oil. The meaning is two persons from whom that spirit of the wisdom of God, which is the cause of the illumination of the world, appears. These lights of God were to radiate and shine; therefore, they are likened to two candlesticks: the candlestick is the abode of the light, and from it the light shines forth. In the same way the light of guidance would shine and radiate from these illumined souls.

Then it is said: “They are standing before God,” meaning that they are standing in the service of God, and educating the creatures of God, such as the barbarous nomad Arab tribes of the Arabian peninsula, whom they educated in such a way that in those days they reached the highest degree of civilization, and their fame and renown became worldwide...

The people forfeited all that these two persons had established, which was the foundation of the Law of God, and destroyed the virtues of the world of humanity, which are the divine gifts and the spirit of this religion, to such a degree that truthfulness, justice, love, union, purity, sanctity, detachment and all the divine qualities departed from among them. In the religion only prayers and fasting persisted; this condition lasted for twelve hundred and sixty years, which is the duration of the cycle of the Furqán. It was as if these two persons were dead, and their bodies were remaining without spirit.

“And after three days and a half the spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them that saw them.” Three days and a half, as we before explained, is twelve hundred and sixty years. Those two persons whose bodies were lying spiritless are the teachings and the law that Muhammad established and Alí promoted, from which, however, the reality had departed and only the form remained. The spirit came again into them means that those foundations and teachings were again established. In other words, the spirituality of the Religion of God had been changed into materiality, and virtues into vices; the love of God had been changed into hatred, enlightenment into darkness, divine qualities into satanic ones, justice into tyranny, mercy into enmity, sincerity into hypocrisy, guidance into error, and purity into sensuality. Then after three days and a half, which by the terminology of the Holy Books is twelve hundred and sixty years, these divine teachings, heavenly virtues, perfections and spiritual bounties were again renewed by the appearance of the Báb and the devotion of Jináb-i-Quddús.

The holy breezes were diffused, the light of truth shone forth, the season of the life-giving spring came, and the morn of guidance dawned. These two lifeless bodies again became living,

and these two great ones—one the Founder and the other the promoter—arose and were like two candlesticks, for they illumined the world with the light of truth.

Appendix III—The Council of Nicea and The Birth of Trinity

There are different views on the implications of this Council. Three different presentations of this subject are quoted here:

1) The Council of Nicea - In June 325 the council opened and continued for two months, with Constantine attending. The bishops modified an existing creed to fit their purposes. The creed, with some changes made at a later fourth century council, is still given today in many churches. The Nicene Creed, as it came to be called, takes elaborate care by repeating several redundancies to identify the Son with the Father rather than with the creation:

“We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only-begotten of his Father, of the substance of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father. By whom all things were made...Who...was incarnate and was made human...”

Only two bishops, along with Arius, refused to sign the creed. Constantine banished them from the empire, while the other bishops went on to celebrate their unity in a great feast at the imperial palace.

The creed is much more than an affirmation of Jesus' divinity. It is also an affirmation of our separation from God and Christ. It takes great pains to describe Jesus as God in order to deny that he is part of God's creation. He is “begotten, not made,” therefore totally separate from us, the created beings. As scholar George Leonard Prestige writes, the Nicene Creed's description of Jesus tells us “that the Son of God bears no resemblance to the...creatures.”

The description of Jesus as the only Son of God is carried forward in the Apostles' Creed, which is used in many Protestant churches today. It reads: “I believe in God, the Father Almighty... I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.” But even that language—calling Jesus God's only Son—denies that we can ever attain the sonship that Jesus did.

Christians may be interested to know that many scholars analyzing the Bible now believe that Jesus never claimed to be the only Son of God. This was a later development based on a misinterpretation of the gospel of John.

There is further evidence to suggest that Jesus believed all people could achieve the goal of becoming Sons of God. But the churches, by retaining these creeds, remain in bondage to Constantine and his three hundred bishops.

Some of the bishops who attended the council were uncomfortable with the council's definition of the Son and thought they might have gone too far. But the emperor, in a letter sent to the bishops who were not in attendance at Nicea, required that they accept “this truly Divine injunction.”

Constantine said that since the council's decision had been “determined in the holy assemblies of the bishops” the Church officials must regard it as “indicative of the Divine will.”

The Roman god Constantine had spoken. Clearly, he had concluded that the orthodox position was more conducive to a strong and unified Church than the Arian position and that it therefore must be upheld.

Constantine also took the opportunity to inaugurate the first systematic government persecution of dissident Christians. He issued an edict against “heretics,” calling them “haters and enemies of truth and life, in league with destruction.”

Even though he had begun his reign with an edict of religious toleration, he now forbade the heretics (mostly Arians) to assemble in any public or private place, including private homes, and ordered that they be deprived of “every gathering point for [their] superstitious meetings,” including “all the houses of prayer.” These were to be given to the orthodox Church.

There, heretical teachers were forced to flee and many of their students were coerced back into the orthodox fold. The emperor also ordered a search for their books, which were to be confiscated and destroyed. Hiding the works of Arius carried a severe penalty—the death sentence.

Nicea, nevertheless, marked the beginning of the end of the concepts of both preexistence, reincarnation, and salvation through union with God in Christian doctrine. It took another two hundred years for the ideas to be expunged.

Source: <http://www.neardeathexperience>

The Council of Nicea

When Constantine defeated Emperor Licinius in 323 A.D. he ended the persecutions against the Christian church. Shortly afterwards Christians faced a trouble from within: the Arian controversy began and threatened to divide the church. The problem began in Alexandria, it started as a debate between the bishop Alexander and the presbyter (pastor, or priest) Arius.

Arius proposed that if the Father begat the Son, the latter must have had a beginning, that there was a time when he was not, and that his substance was from nothing like the rest of creation. The Council of Nicea, a gathering similar to the one described in Acts 15: 4-22, condemned the beliefs of Arius and wrote the first version of the now famous creed proclaiming that the Son was “one in being with the Father” by use of the Greek word “homoousius.”

How Controversial was the Arian Controversy?

There were some three hundred bishops gathered at the Council of Nicea from all around the world. Eusebius lists many of them and their country of origin in his writings. It should be remembered that many of those present had, because of the recent persecutions, suffered and had faced threat of death for their faith. These were not wishy-washy men. It might also be remarked, that they were extremely sensitive to details of doctrine. As evidence of this, the second major concern of the Council of Nicea was to address the hotly debated question of what the proper day was to celebrate the resurrection.

The bishops of the Council stopped their ears on hearing the words of Arius and immediately rejected his teaching as distant and alien from the belief of the Church. They tore to pieces a letter of Eusebius of Nicomedia containing Arius' teaching, as well as an Arian confession of faith (see the appendix on the Council of Nicea in Baker Book House's, “Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History”).

Originally seventeen of those bishops gathered at the council were unwilling to sign the Creed penned by the Council, and all but three of these were convinced to sign by the end. It is thus apparent that the Arians were a distinct minority among the bishops. Initially there was some resistance to the Nicene Creed, not because of what it said but because of how it said it. Many objected to the use of the word “homoousias” in an official document because it was not used in Scripture, despite their agreement with the meaning it conveyed.

The Council interrogated Arius using Scripture, only to find that he had a new way of interpreting every verse they brought before him. Finally, they used the argument that Arius' view had to be wrong because it was new. Athanasius says, “But concerning matters of faith, they [the bishops assembled at Nicea] did not write: ‘It has been decided,’ but ‘Thus the Catholic Church believes.’ And thereupon confessed how they believed. This they did to show that their judgement was not of more recent origin, but was in fact of Apostolic times...” (*Faith of the Early Fathers*, Volume 1, p. 338). In this regard also, Athanasius asks rhetorically, “... how many fathers [in other words, the writings of the early Christians] can you cite for your phrases?” (Ibid., p. 325)

It must be concluded, then, that the controversy was between a great majority who held the belief that the doctrine expressed by the Nicene Creed was ancient and Apostolic, and a minority who believed that Arius' new interpretation of the faith was correct.

The Word Homoousious

The Nicene Creed introduced the word “homoousious” or “consubstantial” meaning “of one substance.” This word was not invented at the Council. Eusebius writes that some of the “most learned and distinguished of the ancient bishops had made use of consubstantial in treating of the divinity of the Father and the Son” (See document E in the Appendix, Baker). We do not have the sources that Eusebius must have had regarding the use of this word. Today, the only source is Origen who used the word in what seems the orthodox way (Johannes Quastren, “Patrology,” Volume 2, p. 78). However, this phrase of Eusebius stands as a witness to the existence of wider use.

The bishops assembled at Nicea were careful to explain how they used the word, and what it meant. This is because it had been misused by Paul of Samosta. Regarding this unorthodox usage, St. Hilary and St. Basil say that it was said to be “unfit to describe the relation between the Father and the Son” at a council that met in Antioch (Ibid., p. 14). Apparently Paul of Samosta applied the word in a manner that implied division of nature, as several coins are from the same metal (Baker, p. 21).

The Role of Constantine

The controversy greatly agitated Emperor Constantine, and he sent a letter to Arius and Alexander in an attempt to persuade them to lay aside their differences. He wrote, “This contention has not arisen respecting any important command of the law, nor has any new opinion been introduced with regard to the worship of God; but you both entertain the same sentiments, so that you may join in one communion. It is thought to be not only indecorous, but altogether unlawful, that so numerous a people of God should be governed and directed at your pleasure, while you are thus emulously contending with each other, and quarrelling about small and very trifling matters.”

It has been suggested that because Constantine referred to the issue as “trifling” that he did not really understand it. Strangely, it is recorded in a letter by Eusebius of Caesarea that the Emperor suggested the key word “homoousious” that appears in the Nicene Creed. He says the Emperor explained the term as well, showing its difference from the heretical usage by Paul of Samosta. It has been speculated that the Emperor made his suggestion at the prompting of Hosius of Cordova, the Emperor’s advisor and a man who was persecuted under Maximian.

Constantine did play an important role at the Council. Eusebius of Caesarea reports that he played an key part in calming, convincing, and bringing all to agreement on contested points. The account of Eusebius fairly glows in regard to the Emperor, and he is portrayed as a key figure. It is nowhere suggested, however, that he was permitted to vote with the bishops nor that he used any form of force to obtain an outcome.

It may be that the eloquence and glory of the Emperor had sway with some, however it should be remembered that he did eventually (years after the Council) support the Arian party. A few years after the Council of Nicea, Arius discovered a new way to interpret the word “homoousius” that agreed with his doctrines. He then asked to be readmitted to communion, but the Church refused. Arius then appealed to the Emperor. Emperor Constantine’s favorite sister, Constantia, on her deathbed, implored Constantine to support Arius and he did so. A date was set for the forcing of the Church to readmit Arius, but while he was waiting for Constantine to arrive Arius stopped to relieve himself and his bowels burst and he died. (See *Arians of the 4th Century*, Chapter III, Section II by John Henry Newman.)

It is hard to imagine how a man who had supposedly argued with eloquence for the Nicene Creed and who supposedly formulated the key phrase and explained it would simply abandon it for a mere submission to the words and not the meaning of the Creed. It is also hard to imagine how the account of Eusebius can be reconciled to the Emperor’s apparent failure to grasp the issue apparent in his letter. It is also hard to imagine how a man who had been such a humble servant of the Church at Nicea would attempt to force the Church to accept his decisions at this later date. It seems reasonable on these grounds to suppose that Eusebius of Caesarea wrote a less than accurate account designed to give credit and flattery to the emperor.

Nor was Constantine the last emperor to side with the Arians. Athanasius writes concerning this in “The Monks’ History of Arian Impiety” (A.D. 358) saying, “When did a decision of the Church receive

its authority from the emperor?” and “never did the fathers seek the consent of the emperor for them [councilar decrees of the Church], nor did the emperor busy himself in the Church.” He goes on to say that the heretics banded with the emperor. (See *Faith of the Early Fathers*, Volume I, by William Jurgens.)

The Church was willing to accept the help of an emperor, to listen to what he had to say, but not to accept the rule of an emperor in matters of faith. However one describes the role of Constantine at the Council of Nicea, it must be remembered that the Creed of Nicea expressed what the great majority of bishops at the council found to be traditional, Biblical, and orthodox of the Christian faith, a faith in which they believed so firmly that they were willing to die for it.

Source: <<http://www.columbia.edu>>

The First Council of Nicea in 325 C.E.

The path to Nicea was paved by the affairs of state. We have seen how Licinius, co-emperor in the east, tried to deal with Church conflicts, especially those involving Arianism. But there were other matters to be discussed. The Emperor Constantine now tried a new tack, the conciliar one. Thereby he opened a long tradition for the Church.

The Work of the Council

Unfortunately we do not have the text of the letter from Constantine, which convoked the Council of Nicea. Eusebius tells us that the emperor sent each bishop a very respectful letter requesting that he come to Nicea. Since it was an imperial request it was difficult to disregard. Nevertheless, not all sees were represented by their bishops. Rome, for instance, sent delegates to represent the Pope.

Traditions differ as to the number of bishops who actually attended. The one most commonly accepted is 318. Apparently all parts of the empire were represented, including Persia. Hosius of Cordova (Spain) was the most senior bishop present, although those from the apostolic sees of Jerusalem and Alexandria were the most eminent.

We are not sure whether the Council actually opened on May 20 or June 19, 325. According to Eusebius the emperor not only convoked the council. He presided, appearing regal in golden attire covered with jewels. The emperor remained as honorary president while the bishops ruled over the actual debates. Quite obviously the major conflict was over Arianism. At the end of the council a creed was ratified, one which forms the antecedent to the statement of faith usually called the Nicene Creed. (The Nicene Creed which is used in worship today was amended later and is better called the Nicene-Constantinople Creed.)

The Ecthesis or Creedal Statement of the Synod at Nicea

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Creator of all things visible and invisible; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, only begotten of the Father, that is, of the substance of the Father, God of God, light of light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of the same substance with the Father, by whom all things were made in heaven and on earth, who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, was incarnate, was made man, suffered, rose again the third day, ascended into the heavens, and He will come to judge the living and the dead. And in the Holy Ghost. Those who say, “There was a time and He was not, and He was not before He was begotten, and He was made of nothing (He was created), or who say that He is of another hypostasis, or of another substance (than the Father’s), or that the Son of God is created, that He is mutable, or subject to change,” The Catholic Church anathematizes.

When the bishops in attendance signed the creed they hoped that matters were finally put to rest. Such was not the case. Arianism, which this creed clearly condemns, recurred again and again. While the other matters decided at the council did not form part of the creed, we still possess the synodical (sent to the dioceses from synods) letters and the Canons of Nicea. These show that the emperor and the Church used this event to attempt a settlement for a number of vexing issues.

Source: <<http://www.sewanee.edu>>

Notes

- 1) Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, 1938, p. 109: "In the Súratu'l-Haykal, one of the most challenging works of Bahá'u'lláh...."
- 2) Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come*, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, 1939, rev. edn. 1963, pp. 47-48: "The most important of His Tablets, addressed to individual sovereigns, Bahá'u'lláh ordered to be written in the form of a pentacle, symbolizing the temple of man...."
- 3) Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, 1944, pp. 101-102.
- 4) Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come*, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, 1939, rev. edn. 1963, pp. 47-48.
- 5) Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, 1938, p. 109-110; p. 117; pp. 138-139; and p. 169.
- 6) Translation by Anton Haddad, Copyright, 1900, by Bahá'is Supply and Publishing Board of Chicago, Hollister Brothers, Printers and Engravers, Chicago.
- 7) Ibid
- 8) Ibid.
- 9) Ibid.
- 10) Zechariah 9:9.
- 11) Matthew 21:1-5.
- 12) Relevant passages of Ezra: 5:13, 6:15, 7:8, 7:13, 7:20, 7:27, 9:9
- 13) Matthew 23:37-39.
- 14) John 2:19-21.
- 15) Revelation 21:2-27.
- 16) Tablet of Carmel
- 17) See Appendix II.
- 18) Ibid.
- 19) Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1944, pp. 101-102.
- 20) .Zechariah 6:12.
- 21) Translation by Anton Haddad, Copyright, 1900, by Bahá'is Supply and Publishing Board of Chicago, Hollister Brothers, Printers and Engravers, Chicago.
- 22) John 1:1-3.
- 23) See Appendix III.
- 24) *Kitáb-I-Aqdas*, opening passage.
- 25) *The Four Valleys*.
- 26) Matthew 12:31-32
- 27) John 10:30.
- 28) John 4:34.
- 29) John 6:44.
- 30) Matthew 19:16-17.
- 31) John 10:30.
- 32) Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 98.
- 33) Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, pp. 41-44.
- 34) Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 97-98.
- 35) Matthew 3:16-17.
- 36) Look at footnote 33.
- 37) Matthew 3:16.
- 38) Anton Haddad, p. 59.
- 39) 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 85.
- 40) 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 98.
- 41) Bahá'í Scriptures, Horace Holley, p. 218.
- 42) Anton Haddad, p. 16-18.
- 43) Anton Haddad, p. 4-5.
- 44) Anton Haddad, p. 52-53.
- 45) Anton Haddad, p. 53-54.
- 46) Anton Haddad, p. 54.

The Firm Cord of Servitude

by Theo Cope

The idea of mysticism, what the word means, how we envision it, what experience the word describes, is understood in a myriad of manners. Persons who investigate or grasp to understand the field or experience called “mysticism” realize the complexity and history involved. Like all ideas, mysticism seems to have a strongly emotional component that is inherent in its dynamic. Many books have been written on the topic of mystical experience from philosophical, neurological, sociological, historical, psychological, and of course religious perspectives. In the directives offered by Bahá’u’lláh, when one considers any undertaking, one needs ask the question: Is the study I am to undertake one that will be beneficial to humanity, or will it begin and end in mere words that cannot be proven? To reflect upon the study of mysticism implies much; to attempt to re-vision it in light of current scientific methodologies demands much. Of what value is another conference, or another view on mysticism?

Perhaps we can restate this question and by so doing re-orient our ideas. A “practical mysticism” that does not lead to ascetic living is one that contributes to “an ever advancing civilization.” We note that in the early days of Islam, mystics established many social institutions and were very active in social reform, yet later degenerated into ascetic styles. So, let us ask instead: “Do we have the psychological tools necessary to begin a re-vision of the phenomena referred to as mysticism, and connect it with daily life?” The answer to this must be an unconditional “Yes!” A beginning re-vision is where we will focus our attention. Re-vision entails a re-focusing and a re-ideating, a re-framing and a re-thinking. Viewed psychologically, it is inherently valuable to reconsider this domain of human experience, for humanity must embark more consciously upon its mandated journey towards maturity. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá informs us that those who wish to teach the Bahá’í Faith “...must be embodied spirit, (and) personified intellect” as well as “incarnate light and personified spirit.”¹ Mysticism has heretofore been considered the domain of a few, or the result of ascetic practices, or defined by encounter with God, or Nature. The permutations upon this theme are varied. We are now given to know that all of us are to be and live as embodied spirit and incarnate light; this is an embodied approach to mysticism, contrary to the dominant manner of expression of experience that has often been forged in the crucible of ascetic and monastic practices.

This work is an introductory piece, to present some very basic ideas offered by the late Swiss psychologist, Carl Jung (1875–1961), that may enable us to approach an understanding of mystical ideas from a psychological view, while not limiting our understanding to psychology. It is intended to serve as a catalyst, a petition in a sense, for others to join a serious dialogue of the value of Jung’s ideas for approaching a spiritual psychology.

Ideas about mysticism, it is purported, have been constrained by their historical ancestors. Every thought or idea has attached to it a history, a genealogy. When one investigates the influences of these genealogies in the thought and writings of another, it is easy to interpret these writings according to the known genealogies of the investigator. If one knows Sufi thought in depth, Christian mystical thought, or Buddhist, Chán (Zen), Hindu, or Jewish, etc., it is likely that one will read passages in the Bahá’í Writings and see in them views that in some cases clarifies some misunderstandings (such as union with God, faná’), and in others verify the positions articulated before. What would happen if we radically re-vision these ideas in light of psychological approaches? Would we thereby somehow denigrate what mysticism is about? Would we be reducing mystical experience to psychological experiences? Would it be an affront to the cherished ideas we hold about mystic experience? We must here assert unequivocally that the response is “No!” All we do if we explore these mystical claims in the light of psychology is to return

these experiences and imaginal creations to their proper places, in the human psyche—the soul—as used psychologically. In this way we bring these within the realm of daily, embodied experience, that is within the realm of psychology.

This work takes an approach from Jungian psychology, the Bahá'í and Sufi teachings, in the hopes of providing ideas and methods we can use to re-think mysticism in light of the spirit of the age, as well as the mandate for an essential harmony of science and religion imposed upon the followers of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings. It will not encompass the domains of a scientific delimitation on the topic, and as such will not focus on neurobiological determinants, nor the genetic, nor biochemical considerations. This being said, an acknowledgement is made about the value of these approaches, yet the need to create a dialogue with the work of Carl Jung and his successors is one thrust of this work. However, any scientific approach which attempts to reduce "mystic experience" to a biological foundation must be seen as that: reductionistic. Likewise, to reduce these experiences to "merely psychological," with the current understanding of psychology, is reductionistic. Both of these approaches will be avoided in this work. The human reality is far too complex to entertain any notions of reductionism.

The concept of "mystic experience" needs some immediate clarification, and an operational definition for our purposes. This definition will be seen to have limits imposed upon it, and may be controversial thereby. Yet, to place a limitation upon the interpretation of experience is not unusual, in fact it is the only way humanity has available to understand. This limiting by defining is akin to what the Cheshire Cat expresses in *Alice in Wonderland*: a word means exactly what I say it means. Each individual's experience is limited by the particular world-view, that is, the *Weltanschauung* one espouses. Thus, for one who adheres to a strictly Jungian view of mystic experience, one may interpret such an experience as originating in the collective unconscious and conclude that it is the experience of an archetypal complex. On the other hand, for one who is limited by a strictly Sufistic view, or any Western or Eastern theistic view, it is likely that such interpretation will be of "union with God," "union with the Logos," "existential monism," "union with the Self" where "my Atman is Brahman," etc. There are many different ways this can be viewed and has been done so by many authors in this field. Mention is made here to highlight how one's view colors one's understanding of experience. It "frames" it, so to speak. Experience is one thing, interpretation of it is quite another. This seems to be the assertion of Bahá'u'lláh in the *Seven Valleys* as well when He expresses: "...that all the variations which the wayfarer in the stages of his journey beholdeth in the realms of being, proceed from his own vision."²

The limit we shall place upon "mystic experience" in this current work goes beyond these attitudes and consideration of *Weltanschauungen*. The departure point we shall embrace finds its grounding in the Bahá'í Writings:

For whatsoever can be conceived by man is a reality that hath limitations and is not unlimited; it is circumscribed, not all-embracing. It can be comprehended by man, and is controlled by him. Similarly it is certain that all human conceptions are contingent, not absolute; that they have a mental existence, not a material one. Moreover, differentiation of stages in the contingent world is an obstacle to understanding. How then can the contingent conceive the Reality of the absolute? As previously mentioned, differentiation of stages in the contingent plane is an obstacle to understanding.³

O Salman! All that the sages and mystics have said or written have never exceeded, nor can they ever hope to exceed, the limitations to which man's finite mind hath been strictly subjected. To whatever heights the mind of the most exalted of men may soar, however great the depths which the detached and understanding heart can penetrate, such mind and heart can never transcend that which is the creature of their own conceptions and the product of their own thoughts. The meditations of the profoundest thinker, the devotions of the holiest of saints, the highest expressions of praise from either human pen or tongue, are but a reflection of that which hath been created within themselves, through the revelation of the Lord, their God. Whoever pondereth this truth in his heart will readily admit that there are certain limits which no human being can possibly transgress.⁴

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These two passages will serve as the focal points of our meditation. Indeed, this will be a meditation, for we pursue it in the temple humility, seeking to re-think what mysticism refers to.

Let us define mysticism, then, as an experience of ecstasy, where ecstasy follows its linguistic roots: “to stand outside of.” Mystic experience has traditionally been defined as union with God, with Nature, or with the higher Self in the individual. For our purposes we shall refer to it as a manner of union, the embodiment of spiritual qualities and attributes. Thus mysticism becomes “an embodied approach to life that experiences the profound mystery of creation, and the symbolic manifestations of the psyche, the soul, and perceives and lives with the belief that all existence is a reflection of the Unknowable Essence we call God.” This definition compels one to “stand outside” the normal views of daily mundane and biologically oriented life. In this definition, it is the perception and its concomitant effects upon lifestyle that becomes the focus.

This paper proposes that until the advent of psychological approaches to human experience, what has heretofore been interpreted to be mystic union with the Deity, or Brahman, is, in fact, a profound realization of the individual divine Self, and a progressive embodiment of the characteristics of this Self. This proposal is based upon many passages from the Bahá’í Writings. Besides those cited above, we find:

In this connection, He Who is the eternal King—may the souls of all that dwell within the mystic Tabernacle be a sacrifice unto Him—hath spoken: ‘He hath known God who hath known himself.’

...From that which hath been said it becometh evident that all things, in their inmost reality, testify to the revelation of the names and attributes of God within them. Each according to its capacity, indicateth, and is expressive of, the knowledge of God.⁵

In one of His Tablets, Bahá’u’lláh informs us that, “...the primary intent of knowing the self in this station is the knowledge of the Self of God in every era and age. For the pre-existent essence and the ocean of reality is exalted above the knowledge of all else but Him. Therefore, the insight attained by all the mystics actually hath reference to their insight into the Manifestations of His Cause.”⁶

Interwoven into the core of our being, our psyche, is what Jung called the “God archetype.”

The heritage of this “He hath known God who hath known himself” is well known in Christian and Islamic circles, and we find it mentioned first in the works of “Clement of Alexandria [who] says in the *Paedagogus* (III, 1): ‘Therefore, as it seems, it is the greatest of all disciplines to know oneself; for when a man knows himself, he knows God.’”⁷ Clement lived from 150–215 A.D. Many have misunderstood Jung to be reductionistic or a metaphysical thinker by proposing this concept, overlooking that he was always speaking as a psychologist, not a metaphysician. He asserted, in a manner that appears to be harmonious with comments by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “I am therefore of the opinion that, in general, psychic energy or libido creates the God-image by making use of archetypal patterns, and that man in consequence worships the psychic force active within him as something divine. We thus arrive at the objectionable conclusion that, from the psychological point of view, the God-image is a real but subjective phenomenon.”⁸ Many find it objectionable that Jung could assert such a thing, and he even acknowledged this since it flies in the face of our long-cherished assumption that we could experience God in the depths of our being. It is important to note that Jung was speaking psychologically, not metaphysically. Jung knew the controversy that would erupt when he or anyone asserted that our image or experience of “God” is created by psychic energy. In part this is because our notions of the psyche are far too limited, and even “soul” is a personal construct. Let’s compare this psychological view with a passage from the Master:

Accordingly all these attributes, names, praises and eulogies apply to the Places of Manifestation; and all that we imagine and suppose beside them is mere imagination, for we have no means of comprehending that which is invisible and inaccessible. This is why it is said: ‘All that you have distinguished through the illusion of your imagination in your subtle mental images is but a creation like unto yourself, and returns to you.’

It is clear that if we wish to imagine the Reality of Divinity, this imagination is the surround-

ed, and we are the surrounding one; and it is sure that the one who surrounds is greater than the surrounded. From this it is certain and evident that if we imagine a Divine Reality outside of the Holy Manifestations, it is pure imagination, for there is no way to approach the Reality of Divinity which is not cut off to us, and all that we imagine is mere supposition.

*Therefore, reflect that different peoples of the world are revolving around imaginations and are worshipers of the idols of thoughts and conjectures. They are not aware of this; they consider their imaginations to be the Reality which is withdrawn from all comprehension and purified from all descriptions. They regard themselves as the people of Unity, and the others as worshipers of idols; but idols at least have a mineral existence, while the idols of thoughts and the imaginations of man are but fancies; they have not even mineral existence. 'Take heed ye who are endued with discernment.'*⁹

We here learn as well that the soul creates “subtle mental images” and that whatever we may imagine, or imagine that we experience, beyond the Manifestations, is “pure imagination.” To one versed in Shi'ite Islamic (NeoPlatonic) philosophy of the Ishraqi strain, and has a sense of the development of “imagination/khayal,” imagination as creative is exalted as the faculty of mystic knowledge par excellence. In Bahá'í thought, however, we note a cautious attitude towards these imaginal creations. We note this as well in Bahá'u'lláh's “Commentary on ‘He who knows himself knows his Lord’”: “Therefore, the insight attained by all the mystics actually hath reference to their insight into the Manifestations of His Cause.”¹⁰ These names and attributes, those “that we recount of the Divine Essence, ...have derived from the existence and observation of beings, and it is not that we have comprehended the essence and perfection of God.”¹¹ In this passage we are given to see that even these names and attributes are our categories, derived from our observation of created beings, attributed to the cosmic order; psychologically we could say that they are projected into the cosmos, or perceived by the human psyche.

The power of the soul, the psyche, to create has often been overlooked in works on mysticism in the West. In Islamic mysticism, it has been often a central concern, especially in the Ishraqi tradition where imagination became “imaginal,” under the exegetic work of Henry Corbin. Yet, to assert in any mystical heritage that the soul creates a “God archetype” is anathema; as much an affront as it is to orthodox religious views that the soul can experience union with God. In Western mystical traditions, it is categorically asserted that the soul experiences some sort of union with God. This is in part determined and conditioned by the NeoPlatonic or monistic heritage and assertion that “like can be known and experienced by like” of Plotinus. Thus, since the human reality is like that of God, we can have such an experience. But perhaps it is imagination...but what a power imagination is! Let us not belittle it.

There exist many works on imagination, and in the NeoPlatonic tradition imagination is lauded as a faculty of immense potentiality. In Islam beginning with Avicenna, developed by successive Islamic philosophers, cultivated by Suhrawardi and the Ishraqi tradition, and bearing fruit in many minds and hearts, notably Ibn 'Arabi, Mulla Şadra, and eventually Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsa'i, imagination transcends the psychological heritage proposed by Aristotle in *DeAnima*, and progresses into ontology in the notion of *'alam al-mithal*, the “world of similitudes/exemplars” also referred to as *'alam al-khayal*, the “world of imagination,” or *hurqalya*. This is well known in Ishraqi mystical thought, delineated by Fazlur Rahman, Henry Corbin, and many other commentators.

What is not well known is how this concept becomes “Westernized” and returned to its imaginal-psychological heritage in the heart of James Hillman and his brand of archetypal psychology. In many of Hillman's works, he addresses the notion of the imaginal ego, seeking to espouse an approach to psychology that enlivens it with archetypal personifications. Thus we find him expressing the current understanding of psychology towards the psyche, adopting its habitual dualism about “reality”:

First, the word means the totality of existing material objects or the sum of conditions of the external world. Reality is public, objective, social, and usually physical. Second there is a psychic reality, not extended in space, the realm of private experience that is interior, wishful, imaginal. Having divided psychic reality from hard or external reality, psychology elaborates various theories to connect the two orders together, since the division is worrisome indeed. It means that psychic reality is conceived to be

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neither public, objective, nor physical, while external reality, the sum of existing material objects and conditions, is conceived to be utterly devoid of soul. As the soul is without world, so the world is without soul.¹²

To pursue mysticism in an isolated environment, in an ascetic milieu, serves to separate this ecstatic living with a socially lived existence. Interior experience; this is what mysticism has been thought to be about. But it is more than this, it is about life as lived in the exterior world and a means of realizing that exterior and interior are illusory concepts to the psyche. The psyche experiences, using outer and inner faculties and processes. An embodied mysticism, a return of soul to the world, and our hearts to the world of soul, is Hillman's passionate quest. He would not call it mysticism, however, for it is psychology to him. Psychology, as a "science of the soul", where soul is translated from the Greek *psyche*, is Hillman's journey, and was that of Jung. While Jung approached psychology from a trans-national, trans-cultural and trans-historical stance, Hillman does also, but finds his roots most deeply nourished by Corbin's hermeneutics of Sufi thought, as well as Greek mythology. Our world is ill because we have lost our roots. As Shoghi Effendi remarked: we cannot separate the human heart from the environment around it.¹³ When we begin to contemplate how it is that mysticism is a practical endeavor, to be embodied and socialized through action balanced with contemplation, then we strip it of its ascetic heritage and return soul to the world by infusing the world with new ideas about soul. In so doing, we are enabled to overcome the concept of inner and outer experience and realize most profoundly that it is the soul that experiences. If our thoughts are turned towards the body and material reality, or if they are turned towards the heights of spiritual contemplation, the attention differs, but it is the soul that experiences in both. Inner and outer become adjectival terms describing the focus of conscious attention.

None of this is new, none of it unique. The problem with a psychological approach to mysticism has been due to its being primarily a "science without soul," a psychophysiology that examines the minutiae of physiological, neurological, cognitive, behavioristic expressions of the psyche. And most often the psyche is conceived to be a mere epiphenomenon of brain functioning. This is all very understandable given psychology's young heritage and being compelled into an empirical stance by the currents of the time. But the currents have changed, and it is no coincidence that psychology began burgeoning with the Advent of the Revelation of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh.

It is our *ideas* about mysticism that are being called into question, that need re-visioning. Implied in this is the power of the idea, and anyone who knows Greek philosophical heritage knows the significance of the Ideas in Plato, the *Eidos*. Ideas exist before our visioning, are what we see with, how we see, and what we see. If we change our ideas about something, we change not only how we see, but also what we can see. There is, however, no firm *proof* of the existence of these Platonic Ideas, and even Aristotle is known to have questioned their ontological existence. Let an example suffice: oppression. This is an idea we observe with. We see human interactions and people striving to discern truth. In some interactions we see events, and these events we define as oppressive. Events are events, the idea of oppression gives us a different interpretation of the event. As Bahá'u'lláh says, "What 'oppression' is more grievous than that a soul seeking the truth, and wishing to attain unto the knowledge of God, should know not where to go for it and from whom to seek it?"¹⁴ Being unable to find truth is not often considered as oppressive, but we are given to know that it is a grievous oppression. Oppression is first an idea, it enables us to see life's events differently; when we see an idea anew, we see with new ideas and see new realities that our old ideas could not embrace.

Mysticism is such an idea. In the Bahá'í corpus, the notion of *wahdat al-wujúd* is *complex, and varies with the context*. Thus an idea supporting a monistic view, in the "realm of the attributes" is presented, while it is clear that any idea of existential monism, and union with the Essence of God, as has been asserted by many mystics, is not supported. The complexity of the subject and the length of this article does not permit a fuller discussion. In the *Seven Valleys* we learn that in the "Valley of True Poverty and Absolute Nothingness" "...the wayfarer leaveth behind him the stages of the 'oneness of Being and Manifestation' and reacheth a oneness that is sanctified above these two stations."¹⁵ Moojan Momen wrote about such a dichotomy in an article "Relativism: A Basis for Bahá'í Metaphysics," but his view was not psychological¹⁶ What we are delineating here is. As such, in keeping with the demands of the

psyche (and remember that psyche is used as soul, but in its psychological sense), we are seeking experiences and ways of understanding experiences. Psyche exists for experiences, and these sometimes are not in the heights of ecstasy, but the valleys; there are seven, and four more. Spirit pulls psyche up towards the disembodied heights of its domain, seeking its reflection in the fiery Sun; psyche yearns to wallow in the waters, seeking its reflection in what is below; and we are both. Psyche is intimately connected with the body and earth. The Manifestation brings teachings and ideas that assist the spirit in transforming the psyche from its propensity to stay in the “depths” to a comfort in the “heights.” Let us not construe this literally.

If we strip mysticism of its exclusive metaphysical overtones, and its abstruse ontological and epistemological assertions, we are left with a different sort of mystery. And indeed, “mystery minded” mysticism is accessible to us all, illuminating our hearts and minds with a cosmos that is full of the Light of Glory and the Glory of God. In this mystery we discern that all existence is a reflection of this Light, that each aspect of creation is a “sign”; every Name of God portends mysteries that generate, sustain and animate creation.¹⁷ The soul is such a sign.¹⁸ The logos of the soul, psychology, lost its way on the path of exploring psyche because it took psyche to be the mind, since the “science of mental processes” was more amenable to its developmental milieu than a science of the soul. We can look to Galileo as one source of the beginnings of this loss, and his mathematization of nature that reverberated throughout the West and captivated the minds of many; though these were mostly men. Women likely would have never excluded the body and world. Descartes, Locke, Mill, Hume. These names have a history and impacted history in a way that perpetuated the empirical exploration of the world, that fostered the division between psyche and physics and compelled psychology to become psychophysics.¹⁹ Soul became reduced, minimized, exiled; a mere epiphenomenon of the machine universe. Our ideas became more concretely divided between inner and outer reality; we have yet to fully learn that “the world of existence is a single world, although its stations are various and distinct.”²⁰ Soul also became minimized thorough time and the burgeoning development of individual ego awareness: *my* soul, and *your* soul; possessive, personal, a pauper in the cosmos. No longer a microcosm within the macrocosm even.

This has changed, and quantum ideas have instigated a revolution on many fronts. We know now of multiverses and many Big Bangs, not just one anymore. We know that on the quantum level matter is spirit, that the physical universe is in continual flux, coming into and going out of existence; the *illusion* is that it is a stable concrete existence. But soul, ever patient with human folly, bides its time. It exists as it always has, it is our ideas that have gone astray. Yet, this is part of soul’s unfolding, let us not forget this. A song once sang “You don’t know what you have till it’s gone,” and our loss of soul is sadly noticed in our lives; its loss has prompted us to approach it in new ways. It is not soul that was lost, but our awareness and embodied acceptance of it.

Psychology, from the heart and findings of Carl Jung, proffers to us a manner of approaching psyche again, but in a more mature manner; and in a manner that imbues it with mystery. The mystery that Jung delineated is succinctly captured in two dominant psychological attitude types, the extravert and the introvert. Briefly, the extravert is characterized by being: object oriented; nominalistic; prone to sensation and affectivity; empathic; concrete; focused on the individual element—particulars; pluralistic; empirically guided; “romantic.” The introvert is characterized by being idea oriented; realistic; logical; idealistic; focused on ideas and similarities—universals; monistic; dogmatic; “classic.”²¹ No one exists as a “pure” type, but there is frequently one type that dominates. If we use these two types to investigate many of the claims of mystics of all ages we will immediately notice why it is that there has existed the persistence of such debates and harangues as have characterized most such assertions of mystic union with God.

On the one hand, we know of the *wahḍat al-wujūd* and of *wahḍat ash-shuḍūd*. Moojan Momen expresses it thusly: “This is the controversy between two positions concerning the nature of the relationship between God and His creation. These two positions existed from the earliest days of Islam and eventually became known as *Wahḍat al-Wujūd* (existential unity, oneness of being) and *Wahḍat ash-Shuḍūd* (unity in appearance only). The former was the position taken by the followers of Ibn al-‘Arabí (d. 638 A.H./1240) and was more common among those inclined towards Sufism and mystical philosophy. The

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latter was the position commonly taken by jurists and was given its name by Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindí (971 A.H./1563–1034 A.H.—1034/1624–5) in the 17th century.”²² The former sees and interprets mystic experience and theosophical speculative thought in an introverted manner, and the latter in an extraverted one. Likewise, we note that there exists a debate as to the ontological reality of the “realm” of *‘alam-al-mithal*, with the followers of Ibn ‘Arabí seeing it as an ontologically existent realm, while Sirhindí and his followers viewed it as a realm of “seeing” not being.²³ With these two typologies, the felt need for argumentation about who is “correct” is undermined. It is even as Bahá’u’lláh expresses in many Tablets, notably the “Tablet of the Uncompounded Reality,” as well as “Commentary on a Verse of Rumi (for Salman),” that both are right, and both are wrong. This is the position taken by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as well in His “Commentary on the Islamic Tradition: I was a Hidden Treasure” where He expresses:

*Thus some of the mystic knowers who have ascended to the Heaven of meanings have recognised forms, realities and potentialities as pre-existent and unoriginated. And some of those informed of the path of knowledge and wisdom consider quiddities and realities to be originated and created. And this servant has given the expositions and evidences of both parties in the clearest possible manner in this treatise. But to this servant all these expositions and questions, stations and states are complete in their own station without defect or flaw. For although the object being viewed is the same, nevertheless the viewpoints and stations of these mystic knowers is different. Each viewpoint, with respect to the person who is in that station is perfect and complete. Know thou, O lover of the All-Glorious Beauty, that differences between the statements of the saints is on account of differences in the effulgences of the Names of the Absolute and variations in Their places of manifestation.*²⁴

This theme of viewpoints being dependent upon the wayfarer is stated in the *Seven Valleys* as well, and is what we find in our opening passages of meditation. Thus it can be seen how Jung enables us to discern this clearly as an essential component of one’s psychological makeup. A recognition of these typologies permits us to henceforth dispense with any such argumentations and harangues, and instead begin to approach the profound mystery of the God-image created in the soul, by the soul, and in accordance with individual psychological orientations. This is a very simplified presentation of this complex issue from a psychological approach, given briefly here to indicate one manner of seeing this lengthy historical debate. As an introductory work, we cannot delve deeper.

Indeed, the mystery of the soul’s creations is what mysticism is about. Since we have been guided by Bahá’í teachings to accept humbly and deeply the limitations imposed upon us as created realities, limitations that free us in manners that we are only beginning to understand, perhaps it is time that we take seriously the fact that the soul creates and that one can “never transcend that which is the creature of their own conceptions and the product of their own thoughts...” This is a profound mystery, worthy of our pursuit and embodiment. The Guardian characterized the potentialities thusly: “Who can visualize the realms which the human spirit, vitalized by the outpouring light of Baha’u’llah, shining in the plenitude of its glory, will discover?”²⁵ These realms lay enfolded within us, attested by Bahá’u’lláh’s affirmation, “Some have described him as the ‘lesser world,’ when, in reality, he should be regarded as the ‘greater world.’ 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 in this promised Day of God.”²⁶ And

*Likewise, reflect upon the perfection of man’s creation, and that all these planes and states are folded up and hidden away within him. Dost thou reckon thyself only a puny form When within thee the universe is folded?*²⁷

We know that full knowledge of the Self, individually speaking, is impossible, and it is no great jump to realize the impossibility of knowing the Self of God, the Manifestation, or the “names and attributes.” If we persist, as witnessed in all previous religious dispensations, with argumentations about the “correct” understanding of the relationship with God to creation, we not only fail to understand the clear admonitions of the Faith, but also fail to grasp the power of the soul. On the former, we come to learn in Bahá’í thought that all we can even refer to refers to the Manifestations of God, and not to the

Unknowable Essence. This is expressed clearly in the Tablets mentioned above, as well as in *Some Answered Questions*, a passage cited previously also. Yet, even this, we are given to comprehend, is reflected in our being.

*But we ask God to acquaint the people with their own selves, so that they might avoid trespassing beyond their bounds and their station, and might speak of God by means of this most great mention and might aid God with all their limbs and members. Thus might they become standards streaming between the heavens and the earth. Dwell, O people, in the shadow of God, then persevere in your seats of honor by means of the mysterious peace of God and his serene dignity. Hold firm to the cord of servitude.*²⁸

The station of the Manifestation is beyond our capability to fathom, thus we need to focus on the human psyche and heart, therein seeing these reflections. We need to comprehend and embody the implications of clearly demarcated stations in existence. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá mentions three such stations, referring to them as conditions, as being limited to “servitude, prophethood and Deity”²⁹ The clear admonitions enjoining us to refrain from such debates is expressed in many places, and we note in the “Commentary on a Verse of Rumi” Bahá’u’lláh stating:

*But, Salman, the pen of the All-Merciful says, ‘Today, those who affirm and those who deny these utterances are on the same level.’ For the sun of reality is itself resplendent and is shining from the horizon of the heavens. All those who busy themselves with such sayings are, of course, deprived of mystical insight into the beauty of the Compassionate. The prime time for investigating illusions is the time when no divine guidance is present. Today is the springtime of unveiling and attainment. Roam, O people, in the garden of revealment and disclosure, and forsake illusions. Thus are you commanded by the pen of God, the Guardian, the Eternal. All branches of knowledge were set forth only for the sake of establishing that which is valid. Now, praise be to God that the sun of the object of knowledge has dawned above the horizon of the sky of eternity, and the moon of validity is shining in the heavens of command. Sanctify your heart from all allusions and gaze with your outward eyes toward the daystar of meanings in the holy and spiritual firmament. Note well His effulgence of names and attributes in what is other than He, so that you might attain to all knowledge, and to its origin, mine, and wellspring.*³⁰

This is also what we find in His “Tablet of the Uncompounded Reality,” and the Master’s “Commentary.” “Hold firm to the cord of servitude,” impels us and emboldens us to explore the mystery of the soul.

By taking a psychological perspective, that adumbrated by Carl Jung and his “psychology with the psyche,” we are enabled to begin an approach to the profound mystery of the soul and our relationship to our Self, and the mysterious workings of creative libidinal energies.³¹ In so doing, we shall begin an exploration as promoted by the Bahá’í Writings, and according to the station of being human, that of servitude. This exploration will be to the manifestations and creations of the psyche, the soul, and the mystery of such a reality. In this way, we may come to grasp one intent behind this injunction: “To transgress the limits of one’s own rank and station is, in no wise, permissible. The integrity of every rank and station must needs be preserved. By this is meant that every created thing should be viewed in the light of the station it hath been ordained to occupy.”³² Every created thing, and this includes the creations of the psyche; “To whatever heights the mind of the most exalted of men may soar, however great the depths which the detached and understanding heart can penetrate, such mind and heart can never transcend that which is the creature of their own conceptions and the product of their own thoughts.” What a profound mystery! What a suitable endeavor for mysticism!

In closing, let us ponder some passages from Bahá’u’lláh, looking anew at them, seeing in them profound psychological assertions of the most serious import. By asserting they are psychological statements implies only that they are *at least* psychological, and psychology puts them within the grasp of every person’s experience:

As a token of His mercy, however, and as a proof of His loving-kindness, He hath manifested

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unto men the Day Stars of His divine guidance, the Symbols of His divine unity, and hath ordained the knowledge of these sanctified Beings to be identical with the knowledge of His own Self. Whoso recognizeth them hath recognized God. Whoso hearkeneth to their call, hath hearkened to the Voice of God, and whoso testifieth to the truth of their Revelation, hath testified to the truth of God Himself.³³

Whatever duty Thou hast prescribed unto Thy servants of extolling to the utmost Thy majesty and glory is but a token of Thy grace unto them, that they may be enabled to ascend unto the station conferred upon their own inmost being, the station of the knowledge of their own selves.³⁴

O My servants! Could ye apprehend with what wonders of My munificence and bounty I have willed to entrust your souls, ye would, of a truth, rid yourselves of attachment to all created things, and would gain a true knowledge of your own selves—a knowledge which is the same as the comprehension of Mine own Being. Ye would find yourselves independent of all else but Me, and would perceive, with your inner and outer eye, and as manifest as the revelation of My effulgent Name, the seas of My loving-kindness and bounty moving within you.³⁵

To whatever extent they who seek to rise to the highest stations of mystic knowledge may ascend or to whatever high station in the degrees of certitude they that hold fast to the Divine unity may climb, they are only reading the letters of the book of their souls (cf. Qur'an 17:14), only attaining the sign that is refulgent, deposited, incorporated, and concealed within the realities of their own inner being and only revolving around the centres of the circles of their own essential natures. And as for the stages that are above their worlds and beyond their attainment, they are not able to seek information about them nor to understand them.³⁶

Surely, if we ponder Clement of Alexandria's statement that "when a man knows himself he knows God," we realize the profound importance of self-knowledge, no matter how limited. We are a limited creation, and yet this limitation is vast and expansive. Indeed, the "firm cord of servitude" is what we observe in the embodied life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Bahá'í Exemplar.

Notes

- 1) 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, rev. ed. (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1977), p. 48; p. 18.
- 2) Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys (SV)*, trans. Gail, M. rev. ed. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1952), p. 18.
- 3) 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablet to August Forel*, original text published in Persian in 1992, this text from REFER program, p. 15, it is taken from *The Bahá'í World*, Vol. XV, pp. 37-43.
- 4) Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, trans. Effendi, S., 2nd rev. ed., (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976), pp. 317-318.
- 5) *ibid.*, p. 178.
- 6) Bahá'u'lláh's Commentary on "He who Knows Himself Knows His Lord," prov. trans. by J.R. Cole, from *Bahá'u'lláh, Majmú'ih-yi Matbu'ih-yi Alvah-i Mubarakih*, ed. Muhyi'd-Din Sabri, (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1978), pp. 346-361.
- 7) Cited in Jung, Carl, *Aion, Collected Works 9ii*, (CW) eds. Read, Sir H., Fordham, M., Adler, G., McGuire, Wm., trans. Hull, R. F. C. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, Bollingen Series XX); par. 347.
- 8) Jung, CW 5, par. 129.
- 9) 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, (SAQ), trans. Laura Clifford-Barney. 3rd ed., (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust), 1981, p. 149.
- 10) Bahá'u'lláh's "Commentary on a Verse of Rumi," provisional translation by J. Cole.
- 11) 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablet to August Forel*, p. 25.
- 12) Hillman, James. *Anima Mundi: The Return of the Soul to the World*, (Texas: Spring Publications, 1992), p. 95.
- 13) This is found in the compilation on the Environment. Due to my location, I do not have access to this document, thus this may not be verbatim.
- 14) Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán: The Book of Certitude*, trans. Effendi, S., 2nd ed., (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1970), p. 31.
- 15) SV, op. cit., p. 39.

- 16) Momen, M. "Relativism: A Basis for Bahá'í Metaphysics," in *Studies in the Bábi and Bahá'í Religions Vol. 5*, (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press), 1988, pp. 185-217.
- 17) See *Gleanings*, section LXXXIV.
- 18) *Gleanings*, section LXXXII.
- 19) This is discussed in the author's work, *Summoning the Courage: Jungian Psychology, Spiritual Psychology and the Bahá'í Teachings*, written as a thesis for the Graduate Fellowship Diploma at Landegg Academy; unpublished.
- 20) 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, trans., Gail, M. (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre), 1978, p. 193.
- 21) These have been developed further in the author's other works as it impinges upon epistemologies. The romantic-vs.-classic, as well as nominalist-vs.-realist are philosophical and cultural orientations. For a fuller discussion of these in the works of Jung, see his Psychological Types, in the *Collected Works* Vol. 6; see also Cope, T., *Re-Thinking, Re-Visioning, Re-Placing: From Plotinus to Bahá'u'lláh in a Jung Way*, forthcoming, February 2001, UK: George Ronald Press.
- 22) Introduction to Bahá'u'lláh's "Tablet of the Uncompounded Reality" (Lawḥ Basít al-Haqíqa); prov. trans. by M. Momen of text found in *Iqtidárát*, no date, no place of publication, pp. 105-116; 1999.
- 23) This is discussed by F. Rahman in his article, "Dream, Imagination, and 'Alam al'mithal," in Von Grunebaum, G. E., and Caillois, R. eds., *The Dream and Human Societies*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966), pp. 409-416.
- 24) "'Abdu'l-Bahá's Commentary on the Islamic Tradition: 'I was a Hidden Treasure,'" in *Bahá'í Studies Bulletin*, Vol. 3:4, (Dec. 1985), trans. Momen, M., pp. 4-64, emphasis added.
- 25) Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, Selected Letters*, (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1955), p. 206.
- 26) *Gleanings*, p. 340.
- 27) *SV*, p. 34.
- 28) Bahá'u'lláh's "Commentary on a Verse of Rumi," provisional translation by J. Cole. This can be found on the World Wide Web at: <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~jrcole/>
- 29) *SAQ*, p. 230.
- 30) see fn. 28.
- 31) It is vital to understand that the Jungian and Freudian use of "libido" are dissimilar. Jung uses it in the manner of an "energetic concept" not restricted like Freud was wont to do. See Jung, "The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche," *CW* 8, pars. 1-130.
- 32) *Gleanings*, p. 188.
- 33) *ibid.*, pp. 49-50.
- 34) *ibid.*, pp. 3-4.
- 35) *ibid.*, pp. 326-327.
- 36) 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Makátib 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, Vol. 1, pp. 62-102, provisional trans. Momen, M., 2000.

The Human Intellect: A Bahá'í-inspired Perspective

by Adrian John Davis

“Through this faculty man enters into the very Kingdom of God.”¹

Introduction

The term *intellect* has been used very loosely in psychology, from being equivalent to everything rational to being a generic term covering cognitive processes as a whole. Even in everyday language we hear the term used in a loose cognitive way to denote people who are intelligent, such as, “He has a fine intellect.” In this article, however, I wish to show that the term *intellect* denotes two faculties of the human being. For instance, in the Bahá'í writings, while the term *intellect* is also used in connection with the rational power of Man, it also denotes a spiritual faculty, which transcends such mental faculties. Thus, in general usage, the term has two different meanings although unfortunately they are frequently interchanged, with the second denotation being subsumed and lost under the first meaning, causing a blurring and veiling of the Intellect's higher exalted nature.

In this article then, after an historical account of references to *Intellect*² in Greek, Jewish, and Islamic philosophy and theology, together with an explanation of the link between *Intellect* and the prophetic ability of the Manifestations of God, I shall present an account of *Intellect* from a Bahá'í perspective, and from that conclude that there are two sources of knowledge. I shall then explain what the purpose of having such a faculty should be, and outline the two essential conditions for its use. Finally, I shall try to indicate how the *Intellect* is to be used via meditation and the employment of the imagination in guided imagery.

Intellect as Reason and as a Spiritual Faculty

There are many descriptions of Man's intellect as equivalent to reason, such as that found in the following passage by Bahá'u'lláh where *intellect* is grouped with comprehension, “We beg them not to depend upon their intellect, their comprehension and learning, nor to contend with the Revealer of celestial and infinite knowledge.”³ However, the origin of this type of *intellect* is also acknowledged and described as having a spiritual cause, making it a supernatural or metaphysical phenomenon rather than a physical one, as ‘Abdu'l-Bahá states, “...without the Holy Spirit he would have no intellect....”⁴ and “All the powers and attributes of man are human and hereditary in origin—outcomes of nature's processes—except the intellect, which is supernatural.”⁵ And in a remarkable passage, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá gives us further insight into the spiritual reality of *Intellect* where he talks of three realities in the human being, namely, physical, rational, and spiritual, the physical reality being in common with animals, the rational reality being responsible for observing the mysteries of science, and the third reality of Man being inspired by the Holy Spirit and allowing vision across time to occur, as well as being that which bestows eternal life, “Man is endowed with an outer or physical reality. It belongs to the material realm, the animal kingdom, because it has sprung from the material world. This animalistic reality of man he shares in common with the animals. The human body is like animals subject to nature's laws. But man is endowed with

a second reality, the rational or intellectual reality; and the intellectual reality of man predominates over nature. All these sciences which we enjoy were the hidden and recondite secrets of nature, unknowable to nature, but man was enabled to discover these mysteries, and out of the plane of the unseen he brought them into the plane of the seen. Yet there is a third reality in man, the spiritual reality. Through its medium one discovers spiritual revelations, a celestial faculty which is infinite as regards the intellectual as well as physical realms. That power is conferred upon man through the breath of the Holy Spirit. It is an eternal reality, an indestructible reality, a reality belonging to the divine, supernatural kingdom; a reality whereby the world is illumined, a reality which grants unto man eternal life. This third, spiritual reality it is which discovers past events and looks along the vistas of the future. It is the ray of the Sun of Reality. The spiritual world is enlightened through it, the whole of the Kingdom is being illumined by it. It enjoys the world of beatitude, a world which had not beginning and which shall have no end.”⁶ It is this third spiritual reality of Man which refers to the second use of *Intellect* above.

The History of Intellect

In the history of philosophy, the doctrine of *intellect* has a distinguished pedigree. In chapter 5 of Book III of the *De Anima* (1986), Aristotle (384-322 BC) drew a two-tier distinction between *active* and *passive intellect*, of which the commentator Lawson-Tancred says, “...the passive intellect seems to embrace those aspects of thinking which...seem most connected with mortality and the active intellect to embrace the remainder” (p. 93). Of this latter division, Aristotle described it as “intellect from without” and “self-creating thinking” (ibid, p. 95), and that to participate in this God-like activity, Lawson-Tancred observes, was “to somehow come to participate in its immortality” (ibid, p. 96). Indeed, in Book Lambda of the “Metaphysics,” Aristotle says that the noblest activity is contemplation, an activity of *intellect*, which God is doing continuously, while in the “Nichomachean Ethics,” Aristotle argues that the highest happiness for Man is this contemplative life.⁷

The Jewish scholar Moses Maimonides (1135-1204) devotes several chapters of his *Guide for the Perplexed* to an examination of the faculty of *Intellect*. He describes such a faculty as unique to Man, distinguishing him from the animals by giving him access to a source of knowledge beyond the senses and making him akin to God, “As man’s distinction consists in a property which no other creature on earth possesses, viz., intellectual perception, in the exercise of which he does not employ his senses, nor move his hand or his foot, this perception has been compared...to the Divine perception, which requires no corporeal organ. On this account...he is said to have been made in the form and likeness of the Almighty...” (Ch. 1, p.14). This property is not a physical one, “...it is not a power inherent in the body, but a power which is absolutely separate from the body, and is from without brought into contact with the body” (Ch. 72, p.119). Furthermore, it is this divine influence “...which enables us to think, and gives us the various degrees of intelligence” (Ch. 37, p. 227). For instance, in a person in whom the divine influence reaches their the logical but not the imaginative faculty one sees “the condition of wise men or philosophers”; if it reaches both the logical and imaginative faculties then “this is the case with prophets”; and if it reaches the imaginative but not the rational faculty then one has “statesman, law-givers...” (ibid, p. 228).

Muslim scholars such as Al-Farabi (878-950 AD) and Avicenna (Ibn-Sinna, 980-1037 AD) also wrote of *Intellect*. In an illuminating book by Rahman (1958), we learn that Al-Farabi also described Man as possessing a two-tier intellectual structure, namely, the *human intellect* and the *active intelligence*. The first of these is divided into *potential intellect* which can become *actual intellect* when the knowledge of Forms (as taught by Plato) has started to actualize (p. 11) in it, and *acquired intellect*, when the *actual intellect* contemplates itself as a Form (p. 12); the second division comprises the *Holy Ghost*, and the *transcendental intelligence* (p. 14). Of this second division Al-Farabi, like Maimonides, also said that *Intellect* “comes into us from outside and is not a part of our mind” (p. 13).

As for Avicenna, he regards the *Intellect* as a faculty “which is already ‘informed’ with the forms of actual universal intelligibles...” (p. 33); he also sees it as a “self-knowledge” of the soul (p. 15). Like Al-Farabi, Avicenna also regards the beginning of *intellect* as *potential intellect*, which is “an immaterial and immortal substance” and that its actualization also occurs when “man conceives the primary gener-

al truths” (p. 14). Avicenna believes that this process marks the beginning of *actual intellect* (p. 15), although unlike Al-Farabi’s view, this conceiving is not an abstraction but a result of the direct emanations of the Active Intelligence (p. 15). Now when the *potential intellect* is able to operate fully without any sensory input we then have the *acquired intellect* (pp. 14–15). Avicenna also describes the *acquired intellect* as a creative faculty, which is a manifestation of the *Active Intelligence* (p. 19). After *acquired intellect* the *prophetic intellect* is reached, which is directly informed by the *Active Intelligence* (p. 20).

The Active Intellect of the Prophet

Maimonides has contributed significantly to the elucidation of the relationship of *intellect* to the occurrence of prophecy. He, like Avicenna, describes prophecy as an “emanation” from God via the medium of the Active Intellect, “in the first instance to man’s rational faculty, and then to his imaginative faculty; it is the highest degree and greatest perfection man can attain; it consists in the most perfect development of the imaginative faculty” (Ch. 36, p. 225).

Regarding this *prophetic intellect*, which ordinary mortals do not possess, Rahman says of the prophet that He is “... a person of extraordinary intellectual endowment such that, by means of it, he is able to know all things by himself without help of instruction by an external source” (p. 30). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá also tells us that the Manifestations of God permanently possess a higher faculty in addition to the rational soul: this faculty is a “universal divine mind,” which is “a conscious power, not a power of investigation and of research,” and that such a power “is the special attribute of the Holy Manifestations and of the Dawning-Places of Prophethood; a ray of this light falls upon the mirrors of the hearts of the righteous.”⁸ Thus, we as ordinary human beings, although not Manifestations of God, are capable of receiving rays of this divine light and being illuminated with knowledge of a higher degree, given certain conditions (see below), although for most people most of the time consciousness is “receptive, not creative” (Rahman, p. 35).

The Bahá’í View of Intellect

The Bahá’í writings view the human being as an essentially rational rather than physical being, this fact making him superior to the physical creation, “The reality of man is his thought, not his material body. The thought force and the animal force are partners. Although man is part of the animal creation, he possesses a power of thought superior to all other created beings.”⁹ In the Bahá’í writings this “power” of thought is the *mind*, which is regarded as a composite of four powers viz. imagination, thought, comprehension, and memory: “Man has...spiritual powers: imagination, which conceives things; thought, which reflects upon realities; comprehension, which comprehends realities; memory, which retains whatever man imagines, thinks and comprehends.”¹⁰ Of these, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says that, “God’s greatest gift to man is that of intellect, or understanding.”¹¹

But Man possesses more than *mind*—he also has the latent capacity of *intellect*, the third reality given above. Let us look at this capacity more closely. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says of this third reality, “This is a power which encompasses all things, comprehends their realities, discovers all the hidden mysteries of beings, and through this knowledge controls them: it even perceives things which do not exist outwardly; that is to say, intellectual realities which are not sensible, and which have no outward existence, because they are invisible; so it comprehends the mind, the spirit, the qualities, the characters, the love and sorrow of man, which are intellectual realities.”¹² ‘Abdu’l-Bahá also continues that the capacity of the mind for scientific, artistic, legal, and inventive endeavours all ultimately derive from this third reality: “Moreover, these existing sciences, arts, laws, and endless inventions of man at one time were invisible, mysterious, and hidden secrets; it is only the all-encompassing human power which has discovered and brought them out from the plane of the invisible to the plane of the visible.”¹³ This *Intellect* is thus a kind of “inner perception or insight”¹⁴ providing “intuitive knowledge”¹⁵ including a “knowledge of being,”¹⁶ that is, God “...has given us...inner vision by which we may perceive the glory of God...and the inner hearing wherewith we may hear the voice of our Creator.”¹⁷

Two Sources of Knowledge

The possibility of “inner perception” or “intuitive knowledge” means that two sources of knowledge are available to Man, that is, it is possible for the mind to know and understand things both with and without the help of the senses, as in dreams, “...this immortal human soul is endowed with two means of perception: One is effected through instrumentality; the other, independently. For instance, the soul sees through the instrumentality of the eye, hears with the ear, smells through the nostrils and grasps objects with the hands. These are the actions or operations of the soul through instruments. But in the world of dreams the soul sees when the eyes are closed. The man is seemingly dead, lies there as dead; the ears do not hear, yet he hears. The body lies there, but he—that is, the soul—travels, sees, observes. All the instruments of the body are inactive, all the functions seemingly useless. Notwithstanding this, there is an immediate and vivid perception by the soul. Exhilaration is experienced. The soul journeys, perceives, senses.”¹⁸ Thus the soul knows things in two ways, “through instruments and organs” and without them.¹⁹ These instruments are on the one hand the senses and the brain, that is, “sense perception,” and “reasonable perception” or “intellection,” respectively,²⁰ while on the other hand the non-instrumental way of knowing is by “insight, the power of inner perception,”²¹ or “intuitive knowledge.”²² I believe that the second reality of *Intellect* explains the existence of the source of knowledge without instruments and organs.

The Purpose of Intellect

What is the purpose of the *Intellect*? Why should Man possess such a faculty? There are two related reasons for the bestowal of this capacity to Man:

- (a) for the “awakening of the conscious soul of man to perceive the reality of Divinity”²³ and
- (b) the means to “the attainment unto His unfailing guidance.”²⁴

‘Abdu’l-Bahá has given us a clear historical example of the use of the *Intellect* with regard to the above purposes, that is, of providing evidence both for the “reality of Divinity” and “unfailing guidance,” which I shall quote in full since it is so fascinating: “About one thousand years ago a society was formed in Persia called the Society of the Friends, who gathered together for silent communion with the Almighty. They divided Divine philosophy into two parts: one kind is that of which the knowledge can be acquired through lectures and study in schools and colleges. The second kind of philosophy was that of the Illuminati, or followers of the inner light. The schools of this philosophy were held in silence. Meditating, and turning their faces to the Source of Light, from that central Light the mysteries of the Kingdom were reflected in the hearts of these people. All the Divine problems were solved by this power of illumination. This Society of Friends increased greatly in Persia, and up to the present time their societies exist. Many books and epistles were written by their leaders. When they assemble in their meeting-house they sit silently and contemplate; their leader opens with a certain proposition, and says to the assembly ‘You must meditate on this problem.’ Then, freeing their minds from everything else, they sit and reflect, and before long the answer is revealed to them. Many abstruse divine questions are solved by this illumination. Some of the great questions unfolding from the rays of the Sun of Reality upon the mind of man are: the problem of the reality of the spirit of man; of the birth of the spirit; of its birth from this world into the world of God; the question of the inner life of the spirit and of its fate after its ascension from the body. They also meditate upon the scientific questions of the day, and these are likewise solved. These people, who are called ‘Followers of the inner light,’ attain to a superlative degree of power, and are entirely freed from blind dogmas and imitations. Men rely on the statements of these people: by themselves—within themselves—they solve all mysteries. If they find a solution with the assistance of the inner light, they accept it, and afterwards they declare it: otherwise they would consider it a matter of blind imitation. They go so far as to reflect upon the essential nature of the Divinity, of the Divine revelation, of the manifestation of the Deity in this world. All the divine and scientific questions are solved by them through the power of the spirit.”²⁵

Conditions for the Use of Intellect

Two essential conditions are necessary when wishing to employ the *Intellect*:

- (i) “Purity of heart,” which then leads to knowledge and understanding, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá makes clear, “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.”²⁶ Indeed, the spiritual path has always required purity of heart so that further progress in knowledge and understanding may occur.
- (ii) Faith in God’s Manifestation in order to receive “the breaths of the Holy Spirit”²⁷ with which to polish the mirror of the heart, “...the human spirit, unless assisted by the spirit of faith, does not become acquainted with 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.”²⁸ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains the reason for this tendency of Man to be avaricious and gives hope that there is a means to overcome it, “Man possesses two kinds of susceptibilities: the natural emotions, which are like dust upon the mirror, and spiritual susceptibilities, which are merciful and heavenly characteristics. There is a power which purifies the mirror from dust and transforms its reflection into intense brilliancy and radiance so that spiritual susceptibilities may chasten the hearts and heavenly bestowals sanctify them. What is the dust which obscures the mirror? It is attachment to the world, avarice, envy, love of luxury and comfort, haughtiness and self-desire; this is the dust which prevents reflection of the rays of the Sun of Reality in the mirror. The natural emotions are blameworthy and are like rust which deprives the heart of the bounties of God.”²⁹

Now since “By faith is meant, first, conscious knowledge, and second, the practice of good deeds,”³⁰ to acquire faith one must know and believe in the Manifestation of God.³¹ Therefore, one must know that Bahá’u’lláh is that Manifestation for this time and is therefore essential for accessing the *Intellect*, Who is “the Source of Light” at this time in human history.

Meditation and Intellect

Now how does one practice using the *Intellect*? The answer is meditation, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explained above, and here, “Through the faculty of meditation man attains to eternal life; through it he receives the breath of the Holy Spirit—the bestowal of the Spirit is given in reflection and meditation. The spirit of man is itself informed and strengthened during meditation; through it affairs of which man knew nothing are unfolded before his view. Through it he receives Divine inspiration, through it he receives heavenly food. Meditation is the key for opening the doors of mysteries.”³²

But how should one meditate? Shoghi Effendi has said, “As to meditation: This also is a field in which the individual is free. There are no set forms of meditation prescribed in the teachings, no plan as such, for inner development...the manner of doing the latter is left entirely to the individual,”³³ although he also said, “...they should guard against superstitions or foolish ideas creeping into it.”³⁴

However, from what ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has said, we can give some guidelines on how to meditate effectively. At the outset we must be clear that as the *Intellect* and *mind* are both different and so they cannot both function simultaneously, “...the sign of the intellect is contemplation and the sign of contemplation is silence, because it is impossible for a man to do two things at one time—he cannot both speak and meditate. It is an axiomatic fact that while you meditate you are speaking with your own spirit.”³⁵ In this regard, a person who meditates must abstract himself from the outside world, “In that state man abstracts himself: in that state man withdraws himself from all outside objects; in that subjective mood he is immersed in the ocean of spiritual life and can unfold the secrets of things-in-themselves. To illustrate this, think of man as endowed with two kinds of sight; when the power of insight is being used the outward power of vision does not see. This faculty of meditation frees man from the animal nature, discerns the reality of things, puts man in touch with God.”³⁶

Furthermore, knowing that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says “...every great Cause in this world of existence findeth visible expression through three means: first, intention; second, confirmation; third, action,”³⁷ when embarking upon the use of *Intellect* one must first check one’s motives. This is because one’s motives will influence what one endeavors to investigate, with the heart reflecting accordingly what one is interested in, “... if the faculty of meditation is bathed in the inner light and characterized with divine attributes,

the results will be confirmed. The meditative faculty is akin to the mirror; if you put it before earthly objects it will reflect them. Therefore if the spirit of man is contemplating earthly subjects he will be informed of these. But if you turn the mirror of your spirits heavenwards, the heavenly constellations and the rays of the Sun of Reality will be reflected in your hearts, and the virtues of the Kingdom will be obtained. Therefore let us keep this faculty rightly directed—turning it to the heavenly Sun and not to earthly objects—so that we may discover the secrets of the Kingdom, and comprehend the allegories of the Bible and the mysteries of the spirit. May we indeed become mirrors reflecting the heavenly realities, and may we become so pure as to reflect the stars of heaven.”³⁸

Secondly, one should begin (and end) with the “confirmation” of a prayer, which ensures one’s guidance and protection. In this regard, one must connect with the living Manifestation of God in the living religion, which in this day is Bahá’u’lláh, as Shoghi Effendi indicated, “Through meditation doors of deeper knowledge and inspiration may be opened. Naturally, if one meditates as a Bahá’í he is connected with the Source...”³⁹ Thus one should use the prayers of Bahá’u’lláh.

And thirdly, one should put into action what one has learned from one’s inner insight if one wants to achieve anything, for as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says, “The attainment of any object is conditioned upon knowledge, volition and action.”⁴⁰

Finally, I believe that to use the *Intellect* we must employ one of the powers of the mind, namely, the faculty of imagination, as a vehicle, so to speak, to travel to the spiritual world.⁴¹ Bahá’u’lláh tells us that, “...keenness of understanding is due to keenness of vision,”⁴² that is, to develop one’s power of vision is the same as developing one’s power of imagination. My justification for this is illustrated by Rahman’s (op. cit.) research on the process of revelation which showed that “The central principle on which the Muslim philosophers found their explanation of the inner, psychological processes of technical revelation is that the imaginative faculty represents in the form of particular, sensible images and verbal modes, the universal simple truth grasped by the prophet’s intellect” (p. 36). Rahman also cites Avicenna who said that the *Intellect* functions in terms of symbols, “It is not impossible that when a man’s imaginative power reaches extreme perfection so that he receives in his waking life from the Active Intelligence a knowledge of present and future facts or of their sensible symbols and also receives the symbols of immaterial intelligibles and of the higher material existents and, indeed, sees all these—it is not impossible that he becomes a prophet giving news of the Divine Realm, thanks to the intelligibles he has received. This is the highest degree of perfection a man can reach with his imaginative powers” (pp. 37–38).

Indeed, Aristotle in Book III of *De Anima* compares the use of *Intellect* to that of perception, with images playing “the part of percepts” (Ch. 7), and that “whenever one is contemplating, it is some image that one is contemplating; for the images are like the sense data without matter” (ibid., Ch. 8)⁴³ Thus Maimonides (op. cit.) said that while “Part of the functions of the imaginative faculty is...to retain impressions by the senses.... The principal and highest function is performed when the senses are at rest...for then it receives, to some extent, divine inspiration in the measure it is predisposed for this influence...such a person will undoubtedly perceive nothing but things very extraordinary and divine, and see nothing but God and His angels. His knowledge will only include that which is real knowledge, and his thought will only be directed to such general principles as would tend to improve the social relations between man and man” (Ch. 36, pp. 225–226).

Thus, if the prophet has to use the imaginative faculty to bring spiritual truths to this world, then we can reverse the process and use the same imaginative faculty to return to the spiritual world. Now how does the imaginative faculty work in practice? This is to be achieved through *guided imagery*, which works by using meditative scripts and appropriate symbols which visualize journeys to the inner world where answers are found to questions that are put to the Intellect, as the members of the Illuminati did as related above, that is, “In that state of mind you put certain questions to your spirit and the spirit answers: the light breaks forth and the reality is revealed.”⁴⁴ The results are evidently very powerful, as Avicenna indicates, “Verily! God has overwhelming majesty and greatness; what I have witnessed is something wonderful not to be found in the entire range of existence” (Rahman, p. 37).

Conclusion

In this article I have tried to demonstrate that in addition to a logical employment, the concept of *Intellect* admits of a nobler endeavor, namely spiritual perception. I have tried to prove this by reference to several distinguished historical sources and by arguments found in the newest of the world's faiths, the Bahá'í religion. Furthermore, this intellectual perception is to be used to perceive divinity and receive guidance—the highest expression of this being prophecy—the conditions for such use being an exalted standard of personal morality and faith in God's Manifestation. Finally, I have introduced the reader to some preliminary remarks about the techniques of meditation and guided imagery when using the noble faculty of the *Intellect*.

Notes

- 1) *Paris Talks*, p. 175.
- 2) In this article I shall refer to the rational faculty as intellect and to the spiritual faculty as *Intellect*.
- 3) The *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 248; hear also *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 40, p. 254, p. 352, p. 356, p. 358, and p. 422.
- 4) *Paris Talks*, p. 59. *Intellect* is also compared to a light, the source of which is divine, "This light of the intellect is the highest light that exists, for it is born of the Light Divine." *Paris Talks*, p. 69; hear also p. 25.
- 5) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 49, hear also *The Reality of Man*, p. 46, and *Paris Talks*, p. 71. This is why "... growth and development depend on one's powers of intellect and reason, not on one's age or length of days." *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 142.
- 6) *Foundations of World Unity*, p. 51. One is strongly reminded of Plato's Theory of Forms in this passage. Hear also *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, pp. 63-4.
- 7) The third Century Roman neo-Platonist, Plotinus, also discourses in detail on *Intellect* in 'The Enneads'.
- 8) *Some Answered Questions*, p. 208, p. 151, and p. 218 respectively; hear also Maimonides (*ibid.*, Ch. 38, p. 230). Savi (1989) has pointed out that the importance of the Manifestation in this regard is that Their direct access to divine knowledge is a protection for Man so that, "he may not be deceived by his own mind, in its proposing objects of love." (p. 165).
- 9) *Paris Talks*, p. 17.
- 10) *Some Answered Questions*, p. 210.
- 11) *Some Answered Questions*, p. 210.
- 12) *Bahá'í World Faith*, p. 304.
- 13) *Bahá'í World Faith*, p. 304. This ability to draw out truths from invisible realms we usually ascribe to people of genius.
- 14) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 325.
- 15) *Some Answered Questions*, p. 208.
- 16) *Some Answered Questions*, p. 157.
- 17) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 90.
- 18) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 416; this is so since God "...has given us material gifts and spiritual graces, outer sight to view the lights of the sun and inner vision by which we may perceive the glory of God." *Bahá'í World Faith*, p. 267. This resolves the traditional dichotomy that has long existed between Empiricism and Rationalism as the two sources of knowledge. Hear also *The Seven Valleys*, pp. 32-33, where dreams are signs "so that philosophers may not deny the mysteries of the life beyond..." as well as the *Katha Upanishad*, Part 2. Thus it appears that during sleep, when the mind is dormant and resting from its practical needs, and all sensory impressions have stopped, the *Intellect* is yet fully active, as Rahman quotes from Avicenna, "When...in sleep, the soul withdraws from the sensible world and no longer performs this function for the mind, it assumes its proper function freely." (p. 37).
- 19) *Some Answered Questions*, p. 227.
- 20) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 357 and p. 417.
- 21) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 325.
- 22) *Some Answered Questions*, p. 157.
- 23) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 142.
- 24) *Bahá'í Education*, p. 12.
- 25) *Paris Talks*, pp. 173-4.
- 26) *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 211; hear also *The Hidden Words*, Arabic 1, and Maimonides, Ch. 34, p. 47, as well as Ch. 36, pp. 226-227.
- 27) *Ibid.*, p. 142.
- 28) *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 208-209.
- 29) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 244; hear also p. 329, and *Bahá'í World Faith*, p. 367.
- 30) *Bahá'í World Faith*, p. 383; hear also *The Hidden Words*, Persian 1, as well as *Some Answered Questions*, p. 130 and pp. 144-145.

- 31) Bahá'u'lláh has told us that the knowledge of God is identical with the knowledge of the Manifestation, “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.” *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXXXIX, p. 303; hear also II, p. 5, *the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 142, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 156, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 77, pp. 82-83, p. 86, pp. 88-89, and p. 158, and *Some Answered Questions*, p. 222.
- 32) *Paris Talks*, p. 175. In the same passage it is also said that “You cannot apply the name ‘man’ to any being void of this faculty of meditation; without it he would be a mere animal, lower than the beasts.... Furthermore, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says of the benefits of meditation, “This faculty brings forth from the invisible plane the sciences and arts. Through the meditative faculty inventions are made possible, colossal undertakings are carried out; through it governments can run smoothly. Through this faculty man enters into the very Kingdom of God.” *Paris Talks*, p. 175.
- 33) *Directives from the Guardian*, p. 35.
- 34) *Directives from the Guardian*, p. 47.
- 35) *Paris Talks*, p. 174.
- 36) *Paris Talks*, p. 175.
- 37) Quoted in *Peace*, p. 13.
- 38) *Paris Talks*, pp. 175-176. Her one is strongly reminded of Plato’s use of dialectic to perceive and study the Forms, as found in *Phaedrus*, 276, and *Protagoras*, 323.
- 39) *Directives from the Guardian*, p. 47. An interesting procedure for the use of prayer for solving problems is given in *A Selection: Bahá’i Prayers*, pp. 126-7, in which the prayers of the Manifestation are to be used since “they have the greatest power.”
- 40) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 157.
- 41) Such as the concept of the *Merkabah* or the Chariot employed in Kabbalah’s meditations.
- 42) *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 35.
- 43) However, Aristotle continues that the thoughts of the *Intellect* are not the same as images, “Is it not better to say that neither they nor the others are images, but that they cannot occur without images?” (ibid)
- 44) *Paris Talks*, pp. 174-175. Such scripts can be designed incorporating appropriate plots and symbols.

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The Perfect Man and the Manifestation of God

by Y.A. Ioannesyan

‘A bdū’l-Bahá mentions a Perfect Man several times. In his “Commentary on the 11th Chapter of the Revelation of St. John” He says, “In the beginning of the eleventh chapter of the Revelation of St. John it is said: ‘And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein. But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months.’” Then ‘Abdu’l-Bahá goes on to explain: “This reed is a Perfect Man Who is likened to a reed, and the manner of its likeness is this: when the interior of a reed is empty and free from all matter, it will produce beautiful melodies; and as the sound and melodies do not come from the reed, but from the flute player who blows upon it, so the sanctified heart of that blessed Being is free and emptied from all save God, pure and exempt from the attachments of all human conditions, and is the companion of the Divine Spirit. Whatever He utters is not from Himself, but from the real flute player, and it is a divine inspiration. That is why He is likened to a reed; and that reed is like a rod—that is to say, it is the helper of every impotent one, and the support of human beings. It is the rod of the Divine Shepherd by which He guards His flock and leads them about the pastures of the Kingdom” [‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *Some Answered Questions*, p. 45].¹ “Therefore, it cannot be said there was a time when man was not. All that we can say is that this terrestrial globe at one time did not exist, and at its beginning man did not appear upon it. But from the beginning which has to beginning, to the end which has no end, a Perfect Manifestation always exists. This Man of Whom we speak is not every man; we mean the Perfect Man [ibid, 196]. In another instance ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’ mentions the Perfect Man in *Paris Talks*: “To man is given the special gift of the intellect by which he is able to receive a larger share of the light Divine. The Perfect Man is as a polished mirror reflecting the Sun of Truth, manifesting the attributes of God” [*Paris Talks*, p.13].²

These, along with other occasions,³ have caused me to reflect upon the nature of the “Perfect Man” in Sufism where this concept originated in order to trace some of the analogies and essential differences between the concept of the “Perfect Man” (“Pole”) in Sufism and the Bahá’í notion of the Manifestation of God. What underlies both these notions is the idea that at all times the Divine Will manifests Itself to humanity through or in a certain Person, whose purpose is to be a shepherd, guardian and educator of humankind, directing it towards the good and keeping it from what is wrong. This idea can be traced to the Qur’án: “He directeth the ordinance from the heaven unto the earth; then it ascendeth unto Him in a Day, whereof the measure is a thousand years of that ye reckon” [32:4].⁴

That the Divine Command needs an expression in the form of a Divine Vicegerent and Educator for the education of humankind, is clearly stated by Sufi philosophers. Sufism, as we are aware, does not have a singular nor uniform teaching. Every individual writer may have a slightly different view on a particular issue. Here we may neglect these minor differences between Sufi thinkers and talk about Sufism as a whole. Let us now consider some quotations from Sufi works, paying close attention to the highlighted terms and expressions (highlighted by author):

“For God chooses Messengers from among the angels and people, so that these may direct humans towards what profits them in this world and the next, and remind them of the Days of the Lord, the Exalted, and of the things, which they have forgotten, in order to occupy them with [their] development... He teaches them the Book, wisdom and ..., in which (Book) the commands and prescriptions about administration, purity and worship are clearly stated.... There of necessity exists for humankind,

diminished by [its human] nature,...a Governor, confirmed by God, so that he may visibly or invisibly overpower souls, which resist the Truth and are subject to their passions. But for him order would never be established in their earthly existence.... If there were no one to restrain them through [his] overpowering might and force, both inwardly and outwardly or in one of these [two ways], their submission and resignation to His decrees and commandments would be impossible.... But for the restrictions imposed on the subjects, the world would never be in order.... Necessarily, at all times there is an Educator, as a vicegerent of the true Prophet, who turns the creation towards the Truth. The vicegerent of necessity possesses divine confirmation, so that he may subdue people [who seek] learning and profit those who can draw benefit [from it]" [Alá-al-Dawla Simnání.⁵ *إتحاف العرب* - Al-Tirmizí, Khatm... (Appendix), p. 488 (all translations are the author's unless otherwise stated)].

"Since this vicegerency is a necessity, established by God in the world... , consequently the appearance of a vicegerent at all times is needed for... attaining unto perfection, which is worthy of each human being" [Qaysarí. *إشرح فصوص الحكيم*, lithography, p. 34].⁶

"The Divine Command/Cause needs an expression, in order to administer Justice,... [and] guard the order in this world and the next. That this [expression] should rule in Its Lord, Who is the Lord of Hosts, in heaven also, executing Justice. So that each of them (images) may attain unto its perfection, both outward and inward. He is the Prophet, the True Pole, eternal and ever abiding, the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden. And He is the Muḥammadan Essence/Reality" [Qaysarí. *إشرح فصوص الحكيم* - Al-Tirmizí, Khatm... Appendix), p. 490].

We come here to the important notion of the "Muḥammadan Essence" or "Muḥammadan Light" (analogous to the "Logos" of Neoplatonians and the "Word" of the Christians), the first emanation from God, also going by the name of the "Primal Intellect." This is the Image of God in its undifferentiated (undivided) unity. It is by and from this Essence, Which preexisted all things in creation (not in time, for time and space are peculiar properties of the physical realm, but as a cause, which preexists its effect), that all things were created. The "Muḥammadan Essence" is successively realized in Adam, the Prophets and the Poles each of whom is "The Perfect Man of the age."

The philosophic development of this issue in the form of a doctrine is associated with the name of the great Sufi philosopher from Andalusia (Southern Spain) Ibn al-'Arabí (1165-1240), though clear allusions to the same idea can be traced in the work of an earlier Sufi writer - Al-Tirmizí (IX c.).

This is how the origin of the "Muḥammadan Essence" is explained by Ibn al-'Arabí and Dáud Qaysarí:

"There was God, and there was none other than Him (lit.: nothing with Him)... When He desired the existence of the world, He initiated its origin within the bounds of what He knew of it by His knowledge in Himself (*بدمه على حد ما علمه بطه بنفسه*). Out of this holy volition, by a flash of shining light there appeared a separation of the universal substance/reality (*العلوية الكلية*), called the "Primal Dust" (*البراءة*). This is analogous to a sculptor molding the gypsum or plaster of Paris, so that patterns and forms, which he desires, may be revealed in it. This is the first of all existing things.... Then the All-Glorious shone forth with His light through the Dust. This is called by thinkers the "Primal/Universal Matter" (*البيولي الكلي*). The whole world (*العالم*) is [contained] in it in a potential and ideal form. And each thing in this Dust received from this [Light] to the extent of its power and capacity, like the corners of a house receive the light from the lamp to the extent of their proximity to this light, which (proximity) accordingly contributes to their share of illumination and receptivity. As He, the Exalted, has said: "Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The similitude of His light is as a niche wherein is a lamp" (Qur'án. 24: 35). Thus He has likened His Light to a lamp. And there is nothing in that Primal Dust nearer to this [Light] to receive it, than the Muḥammadan Essence/Reality, called the "Primal Intellect." It became the Lord of the world in its entirety and it is the first to appear in the [realm] of being. Thus, its origin is from this divine Light, the Primary Dust and the Universal Substance/Reality" [Ibn al-'Arabí. *توحفات المكينة* (the passage is quoted by Ámulí in his *أجمع الأسرار و منبع الأنوار*, p. 410)].⁷

“In explanation of the ‘Vicegerency’ of the Muḥammadan Essence, Which is the ‘Pole of Poles.’ According to what has been established, for each of the Divine Names there is an image (صورة) in God’s Knowledge, called the ‘true self (الحقيقية) or the ‘archetype/primal image’ (عين القابضة)’. All of them have outward forms, called the ‘expressions’ (مظهر) and ‘manifest beings’ (موجودات) (الشيئية). These Names are the masters (أرباب) of these expressions, who are their subjects (مربوبها). You have learnt that the Muḥammadan Essence is the [ideal] image of God’s general Name (صورة الاسم الجامع الربى), which is implied by it. All other names emanate and proceed from this [Name] (الفيض والاستمداد على جميع الاسماء). Know that the [Muḥammadan] Essence governs all the other images of the world (universe) by the Lord, expressed in them, Who is the Lord of Hosts, for It is the manifestation (المظاهرة) in (through) those expressions, as has been stated. Thus, by Its outward image, [one of those], related to the images of the Universe, which (the image) is the expression of the divine Name ‘The Manifest’ It (the Muḥammadan Essence) governs (تربى) the [outward] forms of the Universe, and by Its inner [reality] It governs the inner [reality] of the Universe, for It is the possessor of the Greatest Name” (الحب الاسم الاعظم) [Qaysarí. تروح قصص من الحكم , lithography, p. 33].

The situation can be presented in the following table:



The above quotations may be summarized in the following manner:

1. God chooses people (and angels).
2. These Chosen Ones of God direct humans towards what is good for them.
3. They teach people spiritual principles, laws and whatever is related to the next world.
4. Humanity is never left without an Educator.
5. He has divine confirmation.
6. He brings order into existence.
7. His Purpose is to perfect the human race.
8. He is the Ruler, enjoying indisputable Authority.
9. He executes Justice.

How does, then, according to Sufi thinkers, the Muḥammadan Essence/Reality make itself manifest? Let us again turn to the texts:

“[Muḥammad/Muḥammadan Essence] is the manifestation of God’s general Name (Alláh). He is forever and ever God’s Vicegerent in the world. The other Poles and Perfect [Men] are His vicegerents in His community... Whoever of the dwellers of the ‘Jabarút’, ‘Malakút’ and the physical realm (‘Mulk’) exists in the world does not receive [anything] but from Him. Their perfection is from Him, as well as His Vicegerency is through them.... This Vicegerent does not govern the dwellers of the earth but in accordance with the requirements of the Divine Command (lit.: except that what the Divine Command requires) and the Essential Will (الشيئة الذاتية) .

And He bestows [His bounties] upon the archetypes to the extent of their readiness in eternity” [Qaysarí. *المصدر المتقدم* -Al-Tirmizí, Khatm... (Appendix), p. 497].

“The Muḥammadan Spirit (الروح المحتدى) has a manifestation in the world. The most perfect of His manifestations is in the ‘Pole of the time’...” [Ibn al-‘Arabí. *إتروحات الكيفية*] (quoted by Ámulí in his *إجامع الاسرار و منبع النوار*], p. 418 (see endnote 7)).

“The one, who has inherited vicegerency from his Father, Adam, as legacy, is the the one, who truly receives the property. For He is God’s Vicegerent and He is also the Perfect [Man] of [His] time and the Pole of Poles” [Al-Tilimsani (quoted by Ámulí in his *إجامع الاسرار و منبع النوار*], p. 505)].⁸

“The manifestation (ظهور) of this Muḥammadan Essence is through special (separate) manifestations (lit.: is through the special manifestations of each of them) to the extent suitable to the people of a given epoch and time, depending on what the name of the given age (اسم الزمان) requires at that moment of the manifestation of perfection. These (manifestations) are in the forms of Prophets, may peace be upon them!

“Considered from the standpoint of their individualization and personification, and the principles of plurality and creation, governing this realm, which (principles) account for the difference and differentiation between them in things unrelated to the Muḥammadan Essence, which is common to all the names, the manifestation of each One of them occurs under a certain name and [is] characterized by certain qualities. If you consider them from the standpoint of their Reality and relation to the level of Unity (lit.: the presence of Unity), and the principle of oneness that governs it, you will grasp the mystery behind the union between them and the unity of things of God’s religion which they brought with them... Therefore, the Pole, who is the axis of the fundamental principles of the world and the Center around which existence revolves from the eternity past to the eternity future, is one, though considered from the angle of plurality, It is plural” [Qaysarí. *شرح نصير الحكيم*, lithography, p. 34].

From the above quotations we learn the following:

1. The Muḥammadan Essence, which incorporates in itself [the principles of] the Divine Command and the Divine Will, is God’s Vicegerent in the world;
2. It manifests Itself to the creatures;
3. It manifests Itself through separate manifestations;
4. Such manifestations are His (Its) vicegerents on earth (in the physical world);
5. These manifestations are in the form of God’s chosen Ones—a category, which includes also Prophets;
6. Though each of these manifestations personifies the same Reality, it occurs under a certain name and is characterized by certain qualities;
7. They all demonstrate the principle of the Essential Unity on one level, and the principle of plurality, which is inherent in the realm of creation, on the other (in things unrelated to the Muḥammadan Essence);
8. The most perfect of His manifestations is in the ‘Pole of the time’, who is also the Perfect [Man] of [His] time and “Pole of Poles”;
9. Each manifestation of the Muḥammadan Essence occurs to the extent, which is suitable to the people of a given epoch and time.

For all this there are analogies in the Bahá’í teaching about the Manifestation of God. In the Writings we find the following passages:

“God leaves not His children comfortless, but, when the darkness of winter overshadows them, then again He sends His Messengers, the Prophets, with a renewal of the blessed spring. The Sun of Truth appears again on the horizon of the world shining into the eyes of those who sleep, awaking them to behold the glory of a new dawn. Then again will the tree of humanity blossom and bring forth the fruit of righteousness for the healing of nations” [*Paris Talks*, p. 22]. (emphasis added)

The Perfect Man

“All the Manifestations of God came with the same purpose, and they have all sought to lead men into the paths of virtue” [ibid., p. 121]. (emphasis added)

“...the Source of infinite grace... 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” [Bahá'u'lláh. *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, 99].⁹

“These Countenances are the recipients of the Divine Command, and the day-springs of His Revelation” [ibid., p. 153]. (emphasis added)

“Through their appearance the Revelation of God is made manifest, and by their countenance the Beauty of God is revealed” [ibid., 177-178].

“Furthermore, it is evident to thee that the Bearers of the trust of God are made manifest unto the peoples of the earth as the Exponents of a new Cause and the Bearers of a new Message. Inasmuch as these Birds of the Celestial Throne are all sent down from the heaven of the Will of God, and as they all arise to proclaim His irresistible Faith, they therefore are regarded as one soul and the same person” [ibid., p. 152].

“These Manifestations of God have each a twofold station. One is the station of pure abstraction and essential unity. In this respect, if thou callest them all by one name, and dost ascribe to them the same attribute, thou hast not erred from the truth.... For they one and all summon the people of the earth to acknowledge the Unity of God, and herald unto them the Kawthar of an infinite bounty. They are all invested with the robe of Prophethood, and honoured with the mantle of glory.... Sayings such as this, which indicate the essential unity of those Exponents of Oneness, have also emanated from the Channels of God's immortal utterances, and the Treasuries of the gems of divine knowledge, and have been recorded in the scriptures. These Countenances are the recipients of the Divine Command, and the day-springs of His Revelation. This Revelation is exalted above the veils of plurality and the exigencies of number... Inasmuch as the Cause is one and the same, the Exponents thereof also must needs be one and the same... It is clear and evident to thee that all Prophets are the Temples of the Cause of God, who have appeared clothed in diverse attire. If thou wilt observe with discriminating eyes, thou wilt behold them all abiding in the same tabernacle, soaring in the same heaven, seated upon the same throne, uttering the same speech, and proclaiming the same Faith. Such is the unity of those Essences of being, those Luminaries of infinite and immeasurable splendor” [ibid., 152-154]. (emphasis added)

“Purge thy sight, therefore, from all earthly limitations, that thou mayest behold them all as the bearers of one Name, the exponents of one Cause, the manifestations of one Self, and the revealers of one Truth...” [ibid., 159]. (emphasis added)

“We have already in the foregoing pages assigned two stations unto each of the Luminaries arising from the Daysprings of eternal holiness. One of these stations, the station of essential unity, We have already explained.... The other is the station of distinction, and pertaineth to the world of creation and to the limitations thereof. In this respect, each Manifestation of God hath a distinct individuality, a definitely prescribed mission, a predestined Revelation, and specially designated limitations. Each one of them is known by a different name, is characterized by a special attribute, fulfils a definite Mission and is entrusted with a particular Revelation. Even as He saith: ‘Some of the Apostles We have caused to excel the others.... It is because of this difference in their station and mission that the words and utterances flowing from these Wellsprings of divine knowledge appear to diverge and differ. Otherwise, in the eyes of them that are initiated into the mysteries of divine wisdom, all their utterances are in reality but the expressions of one Truth’ [ibid., 176-177]. (emphasis added)

“Thus, viewed from the standpoint of their oneness and sublime detachment, the attributes of Godhead, Divinity, Supreme Singleness, and Inmost Essence, have been and are applicable to those Essences of being.... Viewed in the light of their second station—the station of distinction, differentiation, temporal limitations, characteristics and standards—they manifest absolute servitude, utter destitution and complete self-effacement. Even as He saith: ‘I am the servant of God. I am but a man like you’” [ibid., 177-178]. (emphasis added)

This last quotation merits special notice. It has direct parallels in the Sufi description of the “Perfect Man”:

“Except for the [attribute of] ‘self-subsistence’ (الرجوب الذاتي) all the divine attributes of necessity should be applicable to the vicegerent, who truly exemplifies all His names.... We make this [distinction] except for ‘self-subsistence,’ because it is by this [attribute] that the [One Who is] Self-Subsisting is distinguished from him (vicegerent)... Because he (vicegerent) incorporates all the divine mysteries, manifesting God’s general Name (Alláh). Consequently, the vicegerent is a servant to God and is the Lord to the world owing to his ‘Lordship’” [Qaysarí. المصدر المتكلم - Al-Tirmizí, Khatm... (Appendix), p. 497].

“This Lordship is from the standpoint of his Reality and not from the standpoint of his humanity. For in the latter aspect [he is] a governed servant (عبد الربوب), who is in need of his Lord” [Qaysarí. شرح نصوص الحكم], lithography, p. 33].

The first sentence of the first paragraph also has a direct parallel in Bahá’í Writings:

“Therefore, all that the human reality knows, discovers and understands of the names, the attributes and the perfections of God refer to these Holy Manifestations” [‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *Some Answered Questions*, p. 148].

Thus, if we compare the definition of the Manifestation of God in the Bahá’í literature with the Sufi description of the Perfect Man we can hardly escape noticing the similarities of the characteristics applied to the Manifestation of God and the Perfect Man, especially those which are related to their purpose, function and stations. To make this comparison easier we highlighted the most obvious phrasal analogies in the quoted texts. Let us now consider other terms, which bear the same meaning as or are used in the context of the Perfect Man:

“The Perfect Man is one, who leads by his essence (in his essence?)...to his Lord. None other than the Perfect Man is the crown of the physical world (ملك). He is the one who [is referred to] in His (God’s) saying: ‘God created Adam in His own image’ and ‘He is the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden.’ He is the one, who combines nature and intelligence. As regards his nature, in him there is the crudest and the most refined composition. In him there is an abstraction from the materials and the power, which dominate the bodies. No other created being possesses this [quality]. It is for this reason that he is uniquely marked with the knowledge of all the names and the Word in its entirety. God does not reveal [to us] that He has bestowed this [quality] upon anyone but the Perfect Man.... It is by the Perfect Man that the Divine Decree (حكم) about the reward and punishment becomes manifest in the world (العالم), and by him order is established and destroyed, in him it is fulfilled, introduced and administered” [Ibn al-‘Arabí. اقترحات النكبة - Al-Tirmizí, Khatm... (Appendix), p. 275-276].

“‘Perfect’ is a man, who has attained unto the level of perfecting [others], who is perfect in the knowledge of the religious law (الشريعة), the mystical Path (الطريقة) and its true experience. Because the attainment unto [this] position is necessary that he may perfect others” [Ámulí. كتاب نصوص التصوف - Al-Tirmizí, Khatm... (Appendix), p. 505].

“A Prophet is a Perfect Man, who is sent down from God to His creation, for him to summon them (people) to Him, and for their salvation from darkness and ignorance” [ibid, 504].

The Perfect Man

“A Messenger is a Perfect Man, who combines these stations - [that of] a Prophet and [that of] a chosen One, and [accumulates] all the properties of these two, related to knowledge, gnosis, apostleship and the communication [of the message] **(تعليم)**” [ibid, 504].

“Therefore it is said: ‘The Absolute Man **(الإنسان المطلق)** is the Prophet of the time (lit.: of his time)’” [Ámulí. **جامع الاسرار و منبع الانوار** , p. 378].

From the former of the above quotations it is clear that a Prophet and a Messenger are included into the category of the Perfect Man. In the latter “the Prophet of the time” is identified with the “Absolute Man,” which suggests that the Absolute Man is but another term to designate the Perfect Man. That other terms, namely “the True Man” and “the Pole,” are also applied to the Perfect Man, follows from the passages below:

“Know that what is implied by the ‘True Man’ is the Primal light, which is the first Emanation (lit.: the light to be the first to emanate - **(التور الصادر الاول)** , the Intellect, the Holy Spirit” [ibid, 518, see endnote 5].

“For he (‘Alí) is like a point in relation to the first Individualization **(التعين الاول)**, which is the Essential Muḥammadan Light **(التور الحقيقي المسمى)**” [ibid, 563].

“The Pole is one. It is him, on whom God’s gaze is forever focused” [Ámulí. **(كتاب نحن التصوف)** . - Al- Tirmizí, Khatm... (Appendix), p. 504].

“The Pole is the means, whereby the inhabitants of the world attain unto a true life. He is the one, on whom the gaze of Him, [Who is] the Exalted, is focused, when He contemplates creatures, manifest and hidden. ‘The Greatest Polarity’ **(التلبية الكبرى)** is the station of the ‘Pole of Poles’ **(قطب القطاب)**, which is the inner reality **(الباطن)** of Muḥammad’s Prophethood.... It is but by heritage **(الوراثة)**, which is exclusively **(الاختصاصه)** and altogether **(بالاكليية)** his (Muḥammad’s), that this [station] is conferred upon” [ibid, 504].

It is evident from these statements that the relation of the ‘True Man’ and the ‘Pole (Pole of Poles)’ to the Muḥammadan Essence (or the Muḥammadan Essential Light), which is clearly defined as the first Emanation and Individualization, is the same as that of the Perfect Man. That the ‘Pole’ is but a Perfect Man becomes ever more obvious from the following passage:

“The Perfect Man of necessity is diffused in all creatures like the flow of the Truth in them.... As the Shaykh (Ibn al-‘Arabí)...stated in his ‘Futuhat’ in the chapter ‘about the position of the Pole’: ‘The Perfect Man is the one, whom God has desired to be the Pole of the world and God’s vicegerent therein.... It is necessary for him to watch all human beings, who until the Day of Judgment are going (lit.: willing) to enter the [realm of] being’” [Qaysarí. **شرح نصير الحكيم** , lithography (section 8), p. 33].

It is clear from the considered quotations, that according to the Sufis, the “Perfect Man,” who is the expression of God’s Will, is not applied solely to Prophets. This conclusion is confirmed by another passage from Sufi works:

“The Prophethood and Sainthood **(الولاية)** have a twofold meaning—the absolute and restricted, in other words: general and particular, legislative **(التشريع)** and non-legislative.... As regards to ‘the absolute,’ it is the basic **(اصليية)** , real **(حقيقي)** Prophethood, which is acquired in pre-eternity and is preserved forever.... The real, basic Prophethood consists in the knowledge of the Prophet, who is endowed with it (Prophethood), concerning the capacities of all the creatures from the standpoint of their essences **(بحسب ذواتها)** , their correspondence to their ideal models/archetypes **(حالاتها)** and [in knowledge about] their [innermost] realities **(ماهياتها)** . [It also includes] administering justice to all who deserve it in a language, in which they (people) are capable [of receiving] a message about the essential [reality], and [capable of receiving] a teaching, [which is] true and eternal, **(التعليم الحقيقي الازلي)**, about what is known to be the ‘Highest Lordship’ and ‘Supreme Authority.’ The possessor of this station is named the ‘Greatest Vicegerent,’ ‘Pole of Poles,’ ‘Macrocosm,’ ‘True Adam (Man),’ defined as the ‘Supreme Pen,’ ‘Primal Intellect,’

‘Greatest Spirit’ etc.... This is referred to by the initiated (محققین) in their utterances about the likeness between God and the world: ‘The Perfect Man is like God, who (the Perfect Man) is the true Great Connecting Link (البرزخية الكبرى). For God, the Exalted, gazes upon the world by his gaze and graciously bestows existence upon it (the world)...’ [Ámulí. اجلس الأسرار و منبع الآثار, p. 380].

This passage is highly remarkable, for it highlights at one time a point of considerable difference from and a point of obvious similarity with the Bahá’í teaching. One Difference consists in the fact, that in the Bahá’í teaching the Manifestation of God or God’s Will is identified only with the Prophet-founders of religions. They are the sole channels for the Divine Will to manifest Itself to creation:

“The splendors of the perfections, bounties and attributes of God shine forth and radiate from the reality of the Perfect Man—that is to say, the Unique One, the supreme Manifestation of God. Other beings receive only one ray, but the supreme Manifestation is the mirror for this Sun, which appears and becomes manifest in it, with all its perfections, attributes, signs and wonders. The knowledge of the Reality of the Divinity is impossible and unattainable, but the knowledge of the Manifestations of God is the knowledge of God, for the bounties, splendors and divine attributes are apparent in Them. Therefore, if man attains to the knowledge of the Manifestations of God, he will attain to the knowledge of God...” [‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *Some Answered Questions*, p. 222].

“The Manifestation—that is, the Holy Lawgiver—unless He is aware of the realities of beings, will not comprehend the essential connection which proceeds from the realities of things, and He will certainly not be able to establish a religion conformable to the facts and suited to the conditions. The Prophets of God, the supreme Manifestations, are like skilled physicians, and contingent world is like the body of man: the divine laws are the remedy and treatment” [ibid, 158].

“The Manifestations of universal Prophethood Who appeared independently are, for example, Abraham, Moses, Christ, Muḥammad, the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh. But the others who are followers and promoters are like Solomon, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. For the independent Prophets are founders; They establish a new religion and make new creatures of men...” [ibid, 164-165]. (emphasis added)

“From this it is certain and evident that if we imagine a Divine Reality outside of the Holy Manifestations, it is pure imagination...” [ibid, 149].

That the Muḥammadan Essence—the Sufi analogue of the Divine Will can, according to the Sufi thinkers, be manifested through channels, other than the Prophets, namely classed under the category of the ‘Chosen’ or ‘Saints’, is explicitly stated by the Sufi authors (we will consider this in more detail later). As for the point of obvious similarity, it consists in the definition of the function of the Prophets, their purpose and mission. The idea, that the Prophet possesses knowledge of the essences of things and bases his relationship with humanity upon this essential knowledge (see above) is also part of the Baha’i teaching, which can be illustrated by the following quotations from ‘Abdu’l Bahá:

“Briefly, the supreme Manifestations of God are aware of the reality of the mysteries of beings. Therefore, they establish laws which are suitable and adapted to the state of the world of man, for religion is the essential connection which proceeds from the realities of things. The Manifestation—that is, the Holy Lawgiver—unless He is aware of the realities of beings, will not comprehend the essential connection which proceeds from the realities of things, and He will certainly not be able to establish a religion conformable to the facts and suited to the conditions. The Prophets of God, the supreme Manifestations, are like skilled physicians, and the contingent world is like the body of man...” [‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *Some Answered Questions*, p. 158]. (emphasis added)

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“Religion, then, is the necessary connection which emanates from the reality of things; and as the supreme Manifestations of God are aware of the mysteries of beings, therefore, They understand this essential connection and by this knowledge establish the Law of God.” [ibid, 159].

One of the most striking analogies is between the Bahá'í teaching about the role of a Manifestation in bringing humans to the knowledge of God and the Sufi doctrine concerning the similar role of a Prophet:

“Know that reunion with God, the Exalted, is not possible except by following the Prophets and [God's] chosen Ones, peace be upon them.... There is no way for him (man) to [attain unto] the knowledge of the True [God] but that he would contemplate the creation (lit.: creations) and become assured by it of its Creator, who is the True [God], may He be glorified and His dominion be ever exalted ! And [man will become assured of] His uniqueness (وحده) and self-subsistence, His knowledge and His might. [Man] will not learn beyond this measure from His attributes, [defined by] analogy (اصناف التشبيهية), while from the attributes related to His holiness he will know [only] that He is not corporeal, not temporal, not spatial. All this is nothing other than logical conclusions made from behind a veil. Guidance unto Him, however, is possible, but in no other way than by His informing [His creation] about His Essence, His attributes and names or through His revelation to His servants (بتجليه لعباده) and His testimony to them about Himself. Exalted is He, Who is the true Master, above [all, in] that the religious law should be revealed [not] to everybody, and that it should be communicated [not] except in succession (lit.: one after another) by them who are the Prophets and His chosen Ones.... These are the choicest of the inhabitants of [the realm of] being (اهل الوجود). It is incumbent upon the seeker of Truth to follow them and be guided by them. To the extent of his following the Prophets and His chosen Ones the rays of the divine light and God's mysteries will be revealed to him....

“Prophethood is God's gift. There is no way to obtain it. A Prophet is sent from God, the Exalted, for the direction of the people (الارشاد الخلق) and their guidance (مدلتهم). He is one, who informs them of His (God's) Essence, His attributes, His deeds and the recent commands (احكام الآخرة).... The Prophethood has an inner reality, which is Saintship (الولاية). Thus, the Prophet draws by his Saintship the spiritual truths, corresponding to the degree of his perfection (التي بها كمال مرتبته) as God's chosen, from [God], the Exalted, or from an angel, while by his Prophethood he communicates to [God's] servants what he has received from God, the Exalted, through mediation or without mediation. He utters this to them. This is not possible except through a religious law.... As a book, which has the outer and the inner aspect, degrees and levels to it.... The outer is what can be understood from the words and be grasped by the mind. While the inner [consists in] the meaning behind the notions, which are necessary for the consideration of the former. This marks the boundary, where minds and brains become powerless.... The former, that is the outer, is for both – common people and special. While the meanings, which are necessary for its [understanding], is for the special. Common people have no access to it. This is the level of the perfect. This rank is for the choicest of all (الخلاصة اخص الخواص), like the greatest of [God's] chosen Ones (الكابر الاوليا) ” [Qaysarí. شرح مفصلة العقيدة الكبرى – Al-Tirmizi, Khatm... (Appendix), p. 491-493].

“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. These sanctified Mirrors, these Day-springs of ancient glory are one and all the Exponents on earth of Him Who is the central Orb of the universe, its Essence and ultimate Purpose. From Him proceed their knowledge and power; from Him is derived their sovereignty. The beauty of their countenance is but a reflection of His

image, and their revelation a sign of His deathless glory. They are the Treasuries of divine knowledge, and the Repositories of celestial wisdom. Through them is transmitted a grace that is infinite, and by them is revealed the light that can never fade” [Bahá’u’lláh. *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 99-100]. (emphasis added)

“Know that the Reality of Divinity or the substance of the Essence of Oneness is pure sanctity and absolute holiness—that is to say, it is sanctified and exempt from all praise. The whole of the supreme attributes of the degrees of existence, in reference to this plane, are only imaginations. It is invisible, incomprehensible, inaccessible, a pure essence which cannot be described, for the Divine Essence surrounds all things... However far mind may progress, though it may reach to the final degree of comprehension, the limit of understanding, it beholds the divine signs and attributes in the world of creation and not in the world of God. For the essence and the attributes of the Lord of Unity are in the heights of sanctity, and for the minds and understandings there is no way to approach that position. ‘The way is closed, and seeking is forbidden’... Therefore, the Reality of the Divinity is hidden from all comprehension, and concealed from the minds of all men. It is absolutely impossible to ascend to that plane. We see that everything which is lower is powerless to comprehend the reality of that which is higher... Therefore, how can man, the created, understand the reality of the pure Essence of the Creator? This plane is unapproachable by the understanding; ...Minds are powerless to comprehend God, and the souls become bewildered in explaining Him...” [‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *Some Answered Questions*, p. 146, 147]. (emphasis added)

“But for this Essence of the essences, the Truths of truths, this Mystery of mysteries, there are reflections, auroras, appearances and resplendencies in the world of existence. The dawning-place of these splendors, the place of these reflections, and the appearance of these manifestations are the Holy Dawning-places, the Universal Realities and the Divine Beings, Who are the true mirrors of the sanctified Essence of God. All the perfections, the bounties, the splendors which come from God are visible and evident in the Reality of the Holy Manifestations like the sun which is resplendent in a clear polished mirror with all its perfections and bounties... Therefore, all that the human reality knows, discovers and understands of the names, the attributes and the perfections of God refer to these Holy Manifestations. There is no access to anything else...” [ibid, 147-148]. (emphasis added)

“...His Essence is above all comprehension” [ibid, 148].

“This is why it is said: ‘All that you have distinguished through the illusion of your imagination in your subtle mental images is but a creation like unto yourself, and returns to you’... It is clear that if we wish to imagine the Reality of Divinity, this imagination is the surrounded, and we are the surrounding one; and it is sure that that the one who surrounds is greater than the surrounded. From this it is certain and evident that if we imagine a Divine Reality outside of the Holy Manifestations, it is pure imagination, for there is no way to approach the Reality of Divinity which is not cut off to us, and all that we imagine is mere supposition” [ibid, 149]. (emphasis added)

“God sent His Prophets into the world to teach and enlighten man, to explain to him the mystery of the Power of the Holy Spirit, to enable him to reflect the light, and so in his turn, to be the source of guidance to others. The Heavenly Books, the Bible, the Qur’án, and the other Holy Writings have been given by God as guides into the paths of Divine virtue, love, justice and peace” [Paris Talks, 57]. (emphasis added)

These passages speak for themselves, highlighting the similarities between the Bahá’í teaching on the role of a Manifestation in bringing to humankind knowledge about God, incomprehensible in His hidden Essence, and the Sufi view on the same role of a Prophet. His role in the spiritual education of man is also described in very similar terms:

“In like manner, the Holy Manifestations of God are the centers of the light of reality, of the source of mysteries, and of the bounties of love. They are resplendent in the world of hearts and thoughts, and shower eternal graces upon the world of spirits; They give spiritual life and are shining with the light of realities and meanings. The enlightenment of the world of thought comes from these centers of light and sources of mysteries. Without the bounty of the splendor and the instructions of these Holy Beings the world of souls and thoughts would be opaque darkness. Without the irrefutable teachings of those sources of mysteries the human world would become the pasture of animal appetites and qualities, the existence of everything would be unreal, and there would be no true life” [Abdu’l-Bahá. *Some Answered Questions*, p. 162].

“But for the ordinances of the religious Law, which come down from the Divine Presence, encompassing the good of the both worlds, the actions of each one of them (people), when seized by lust, would [consist in] the desire to oppress his brother, and in claiming what is forbidden for the gratification of their basest instincts. Order would never prevail in this world and the next.... Therefore God, the Exalted, chooses in His wisdom angels, that these may be mediators (المستظنين الاخيار) between Him and the elect from among the most excellent [people] (المستظنين واسطة). They (angels) inspire these with the God breathed [word], so that they may be Messengers unto the high and low” [Alá-al-Dawla Simnání. *كتاب العروة*, - Al-Tirmizí, Khatm... (Appendix), p. 489].

The Bahá’í teaching about Divine Manifestations includes the notion of cycles:

“Each of the Divine Manifestations has likewise a cycle, and during the cycle His laws and commandments prevail and are performed. When His cycle is completed by the appearance of a new Manifestation, a new cycle begins. In this way cycles begin, end and are renewed, until a universal cycle is completed in the world, when important events and great occurrences will take place which entirely efface every trace and every record of the past; then a new universal cycle begins in the world, for this universe has no beginning...Briefly, we say a universal cycle in the world of existence signifies a long duration of time, and innumerable and incalculable periods and epochs. In such a cycle the Manifestations appear with splendor in the realm of the visible until a great and supreme Manifestation makes the world the center of His radiance. His appearance causes the world to attain to maturity, and the extension of His cycle is very great. Afterward, other Manifestations will arise under His shadow, Who according to the needs of the time will renew certain commandments relating to material questions and affairs, while remaining under His shadow” [Abdu’l-Bahá. *Some Answered Questions*, p. 160-161].

A similar idea is expressed in the Sufi writings:

“For the Prophets...are the manifestations of God’s Essence from the standpoint of Its Lordship over the manifest beings and Its Justice among them (مظاهر الذات الالهية من حيث ربوبيتها المظاهر و عدالتها بينها). Consequently, the Prophethood refers exclusively to the outer. All of them (Prophets) participate in summoning, guiding and governing the people, and in the other things, which of necessity are related to Prophethood. Each one of them differs from another in degree: [Prophets] of an entire extent of powers (الحيطة التامة), like the independent Messengers..., and those with a limited extent, like the prophets of the people of Israel... Thus, the Prophethood of a full cycle consists of cycles, which are separate and different in magnitude (الكلية دايرة تامة، شتملة) (على ادوار - اية ر متقلبة في الحيطة (الولاية)”). You have already learnt that the outer does not obtain assistance, strength, might, the power to govern, knowledge and everything, which proceeds out of the Truth, Who is the Exalted, except by the inner. This is the station of a chosen One (الولاية)” [Qaysarí. *شرح فصوص الحكم*, - Al-Tirmizí, Khatm... (Appendix), p. 490-491].

That the Manifestations of God differ in degree is also part of the Bahá’í teaching:

“Know that the attributes of perfection, the splendor of the divine bounties, and the lights of inspiration are visible and evident in all the Holy Manifestations; but the glorious Word of God, Christ, and the Greatest Name, Bahá’u’lláh, are manifestations and evidences which are beyond

imagination, for They possess all the perfections of the former Manifestations; and more than that, They possess some perfections which make the other Manifestations dependent upon Them” [‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *Some Answered Questions*, p. 149-150].

Until now we have been focusing mostly on the parallels between the Bahá’í religion and Sufism. Now it is time to consider the most essential differences between them. As has been already pointed out, unlike the Bahá’í teaching, according to which the Divine Will is manifested solely through the Prophets founders of religions, called the Manifestations of God, the Muḥammadan Essence—the Sufi analogue of the Divine Will can, according to the Sufi thinkers, be manifested through channels, other than the Prophets, namely classed under the category of the “Chosen” or “Saints.” Let us consider this aspect more closely. The Manifestations of God as they are described in Bahá’í Writings, are a special category of created Beings.

“Briefly, The Holy Manifestations have ever been, and ever will be, Luminous Realities; no change or variation takes place in Their essence. Before declaring Their manifestation, They are silent and quiet like a sleeper, and after Their manifestation, They speak and are illuminated, like one who is awake” [‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *Some Answered Questions*, p. 85-86].

“The dawning-place of these splendors, the place of these reflections, and the appearance of these manifestations are the Holy Dawning-places, the Universal Realities and the Divine Beings, Who are the true mirrors of the sanctified Essence of God” [ibid, 147].

“Know that the Holy Manifestations, though They have the degrees of endless perfections, yet, speaking generally, have only three stations. The first station is the physical; the second station is the human, which is that of the rational soul; the third is that of the divine appearance and the heavenly splendor.... The second is the station of the rational soul, which is the human reality. This also is phenomenal, and the Holy Manifestations share it with all mankind.... Therefore, the reality of prophethood, which is the Word of God and the perfect state of manifestation, did not have any beginning and will not have any end; its rising is different from all others.... Then it is evident that the Manifestations possess three conditions: the physical condition, the condition of the rational soul, and the condition of the divine appearance and heavenly splendor” [ibid, 151-152]. (emphasis added)

“We said that the Manifestations have three planes. First, the physical reality, which depends upon the body; second, the individual reality, that is to say, the rational soul; third the divine appearance, which is the divine perfections, the cause of the life of existence, of the education of souls, of the guidance of people, and of the enlightenment of the contingent world.... But the individual reality of the Manifestations of God is a holy reality, and for that reason it is sanctified and, in that which concerns its nature and quality, is distinguished from all other things. It is like the sun.... So other human realities are those souls who, like the moon, take light from the sun; but that Holy Reality is luminous in Himself... We have mentioned, that the Holy Manifestations have three planes. The physical condition, the individual reality, and the center of the appearance of perfection.... Other individuals have the physical plane, the plane of the rational soul—the spirit and the mind....” [ibid, 154, 155]. (emphasis added)

“For these Holy Souls are pure from every sin and sanctified from faults.... These Holy Beings are lights, and light does not unite itself with darkness. They are life, and life and death are not confounded. They are for guidance, and guidance and error cannot be together. They are the essence of obedience, and obedience cannot exist with rebellion” [ibid, 170].

“Verily, from the beginning that Holy Reality...is conscious of the secret of existence, and from the age of childhood signs of greatness appear and visible in Him” [ibid, 155].

“Know that infallibility is of two kinds: essential infallibility and acquired infallibility. In such manner there is essential knowledge and acquired knowledge.... Essential infallibility is peculiar

to the supreme Manifestation.... To epitomize: essential infallibility belongs especially to the supreme Manifestations, and acquired infallibility is granted to every holy soul.... Briefly, it is said that the ‘Dayspring of Revelation’ is the manifestation of these words, ‘He doeth whatsoever He willeth; this condition is peculiar to that Holy Being, and others have no share of this essential perfection...for the Manifestation arises with perfect wisdom...’ [ibid, 171, 172, 173].¹⁰

Though the Sufis describe the “Prophethood” as a special gift from God, they do not attribute to the Prophets a special category among the created beings, a category, which is distinct from that of humans, and emphasize their human aspect:

“Do not think that this is peculiar to the Prophets (Messengers). For the quintessence of all humans (الكل من الإنسانية) in [their] innate nature (أصل قوتهم) is worthy of it (أينست شايسته).... A Prophet is also a human—‘Say: I am only a mortal like you’ [Qur’án 18:110]. Everyone, for whom this way has opened, were he to be shown what is to the advantage of humanity as a whole and were he to summon [the people] to what he has been shown, this would be called a religious law, and himself—a Prophet, while his condition [will be called] ‘mu’jiza’ (prophetic miracle). Were he not to apply himself to the exhortation of people, he would be called ‘a chosen One’, and his condition—‘karámát’ (miracles). It is not necessary, that to whomsoever this state has been revealed, should occupy himself with the admonition of the people. For it is within the power of God, the Exalted, not to occupy him with it, either because the religious law of the given time is still new and there is no need for new exhortations, or because the conditions are not suitable for an exhortation...” [Al-Ghazáli.¹¹ كيمياى سادات. Lithography, p. 14].¹²

“Therefore God, the Exalted, chooses in His wisdom angels, that these may be mediators (المستقلين الاخيار) between Him and the elect from among the most excellent [people] (الايكوتوا واسطة). They (angels) inspire these with the God breathed [word], so that they may be Messengers unto the high and low.... And everyone, who receives confirmation from God, so that he may overpower the people outwardly and [overwhelm] the believers in Him inwardly and be independent in himself of a human like himself (استقيا بنفسه . . . عن بشر مثله) in receiving [a revelation] from His Lord, is a Prophet exclusively, which is not applicable except for the human (او لا يخلق الا على البشر). And every Prophet is an Apostle, and every Apostle is a Prophet” [‘Alá-al-Dawla Simnání. كتاب العروة - Al-Tirmizí, Khatm... (Appendix), p. 489].

“Perfect’ is a man, who has attained unto the level of perfecting [others] (و الكامل هو الانسان البالغ الى) (التكامل), who is perfect in the knowledge of the religious law (الشريعة) the mystical Path (الطريقة) and its true experience. Because the attainment unto [this] position is necessary that he may perfect others. As Junayd has stated: ‘The end is the return to the first principles/origin (الابدائيات): As regards ‘the return to the first principles,’ it has two meanings. The first [consists in] his (mystic’s) return to the basic starting point (المبدأ الاصلى) and the real abode (الوطن الصلي), [where] with the eye of insight he contemplates the beginning and the return (المعاد) and becomes perfect in Sainthood (as God’s chosen One) or Prophethood and Apostleship, or in all of these (و يصير كاملاً) (فى الرتبة او النبوة و الرسالة او النبوة), and in the contemplation of the True [God], the Exalted, in His manifestations. The second meaning [consists in] his return to whatever exists of the pillars of the religious Law and the mystical Path, to [promote] the growth of the people (lit.: creations), so that these may contemplate the Truth through the prism (lit.: eye) of the nura)itv. linherent in] the creation (فى عين الكثرة الخلقية), as has been pointed out” [Ámulí. كتاب نغم التصوص - Al-Tirmizí, Khatm... (Appendix), p. 505].

It is worth noting, that ‘becoming perfect in the Prophethood’ is explicitly stated in the passage. The latter demonstrates that for the illustrious Sufi thinkers (Ámulí here quotes the great Junayd Baghdádí)¹³ the Prophethood implied an act of attaining to a certain level of perfection, which suggests that this perfection is not innate.

According to the Bahá’í teaching, the Manifestations of God/founders of religions, have always been and will continue to be sent to humanity at a definite interval, which is about a thousand years:

“...the Manifestations of His Beauty no beginning hath beheld, and they will continue to the ‘End that knoweth no end” [Bahá’u’lláh. *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 167].

“They that valiantly labour in quest of God’s will, when once they renounced all else but Him, will be so attached and wedded to that City that a moment’s separation from it would to them be unthinkable. They will hearken unto infallible proofs from the Hyacinth of that assembly, and receive the surest testimonies from the beauty of its Rose and the melody of its Nightingale. Once in about a thousand years shall this City be renewed and re-adorned...That city is non other than the Word of God revealed in every age and dispensation. In the days of Moses it was the Pentateuch; in the days of Jesus the Gospel; in the days of Muḥammad the Messenger of God the Our’án; in this day the Bayán; and in the dispensation of Him Whom God will make manifest His own Book—the Book unto which all the Books of former Dispensations must needs be referred, the Book which standeth amongst them all transcendent and supreme” [ibid, 198–200]. (emphasis added)

The Sufi view on this matter, which is no different from the traditional Moslem view, is based on the concept of the Prophet Muḥammad being the “Seal of the Prophets,” which is understood as Muḥammad being the last Prophet. This interpretation of the expression “Seal of the Prophets” originated in Islam quite early. To consider it here is not our point. The founder of the Bahá’í Faith, Bahá’u’lláh, treats this subject in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*. Suffice it to say that, according to the Sufi thinkers, after the Prophet Muḥammad and the discontinuation of the cycle of Prophets, the Divine Command is expressed solely through God’s chosen Ones (Saints). These, called the “men of the hidden” (**رجال القيب**), govern the universe through an uninterrupted invisible hierarchy with the Pole (Quèb) or *Ghauth* at the top. It is uninterrupted, because whenever one of the men in the hierarchy departs from his position, his place is taken by someone from the level below. This is believed to continue until the rise of the Mahdí, the coming of the Hour and the Day of Resurrection. The particular details related to that hierarchy vary from author to author, but the general idea is the same. Let us consider some extracts from the texts, which illustrate it.

“With the termination of the Prophethood, which is—bringing the religious Law, and the conclusion of its cycle and the appearance of the inner Saintship, the position of the Pole was altogether transferred to (الولي) God’s chosen Ones . Thus without interruption one of these is in this position (of the Pole) in order to guard this order and state of things.... The Saintship will be terminated with the manifestation of the ‘Seal of Saintship’, who is the One sealing the ‘absolute Saintship.’ Thus, when this cycle (Saintship) is also finished, the coming of the Hour will become necessary...” [Qaysarí. **شرح قصص الحكم**, p. 34].

“The Seal of the Prophets’ is the One by whom God, the Exalted, sealed the Prophethood. He is none other than the One, namely—our Prophet.... Likewise is the ‘Seal of the Saints.’ He is the One by whom the welfare of this world and the next reaches its top perfection, and the order of the universe will be destroyed by His death. He is the Mahdí, promised [to appear] at the end of time” [Ámulí. **اجمع الاسرار و منبع الاثرار**, p. 384].

“...God has saints (awliyá) whom He has specially distinguished by His friendship and whom He has chosen to be the governors of His kingdom and has marked out to manifest His actions and has peculiarly favoured with diverse kinds of miracles (karámát) and has purged of natural corruptions and has delivered from subjection to their lower soul and passions, so that all their thoughts are of Him and their intimacy is with Him alone. Such have been in past ages and are now, and shall be hereafter until the Day of Resurrection, because God has exalted this (Moslem) community above all others and has promised to preserve the religion of Muḥammad. Inasmuch as the traditional and intellectual proofs of this religion are to be found among the divines (ulamá), it follows that the visible proof is to be found among the saints and the elect of God.... God, then, has caused the prophetic evidence (burhán-i nabawí) to remain down to the present day, and has made the saints the means whereby it is manifested, in order that the signs of the

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Truth, and the proof of Muḥammad's veracity may continue to be closely seen. He has made the Saints the governors of the universe; they have... become entirely devoted to His business, and have ceased to follow their sensual affections. Through the blessing of their advent the rain falls from heaven, and through the purity of their lives plants spring up from the earth, and through the purity of their spiritual influence the Moslems gain victories over the unbelievers. Among them there are four thousand, who are concealed and do not know one another and are not aware of the excellence of their state, but in all circumstances are hidden from themselves and from mankind... But of those who have power to loose and to bind and are officers of the Divine court there are three hundred called Akhyár, and forty called Abdal, and seven called Abrár, and four, called Awtád, and three, called Nuqabá, and one, called Quèb or Ghauth. All these know one another and cannot act save by mutual consent" [Hujwírí. *Kashf al-Mahjúb*, p. 212-214].¹⁴

The idea of the invisible hierarchy of saints, governing the world, as well as that of this body of saints, acting as a collective manifestation of God's Command on earth, is not found in the Bahá'í Writings. On the other hand, though this is not part of the Bahá'í teaching, it would be too strong to assume that it goes altogether against the Bahá'í teachings either. For, this hierarchy, according to the Sufi authors, exists only till the appearance of the Mahdí, who is identified with the Pole (or Pole of Poles). Sufi writers also describe the Mahdí as the "Seal of the Saint" (see above), Who terminates by His manifestation the circle of Saintship. According to the Bahá'í teaching, the prophecies about the Mahdí were fulfilled in the Báb. I do not know of any authoritative Bahá'í interpretation of this subject, but in my own opinion, one way to interpret this from the Bahá'í standpoint, would be to assume that the Báb, Who is the Mahdí and, therefore, in Sufi terminology, is the "Seal of the Saints," sealed or ended by His manifestation the circle of Saintship.

In conclusion we will try to sum up the main similarities and differences between the concept of the "Perfect Man" ("Pole") in Sufism and the Bahá'í notion of the Manifestation of God. The basic analogies can be traced down to the following ideas:

God's Will/Command needs an expression. This Will/Command consists in the education and guidance of humankind and the governing of the world upon spiritual principles. This Will/Command is expressed through a person/persons, who act as representatives/vicegerents of God on earth. The world is never left without divine guidance. These divine representatives on earth are both servants in relation to God and Lords in relation to the world. Viewed from the standpoint of their essential unity they all manifest the same Reality, but from the standpoint of their individuality each of them appears under a certain name and is characterized by certain qualities. All the divine attributes are applicable to these Representatives of God and they play a major role in bringing humanity to the knowledge of God.

The differences between the teachings can be summarized as follows:

a) In the Bahá'í teaching these divine representatives, called the Manifestations of God (God's Will), are considered a special category of created beings, who are superior to humankind in the hierarchy of creation and are endowed with innate perfection. While the Sufis lay strong emphasis on the human aspect of the Prophets and God's chosen Ones (see below), who, in their view, attain to the spiritual level, which enables them to perfect others and promote their spiritual growth; b) in the Bahá'í teaching the Manifestations of God are limited to the Prophets—founders of religions, who are sent down to humanity at set intervals. In Sufism the Prophets are but a group within a broader class, called the Elect of God or God's chosen Ones (Saints), all of whom (and not just the Prophets) serve as channels for the manifestation of the Will of God (God's Command); c) in the Bahá'í teaching the Manifestations of God/the Prophets will forever continue to be sent down to humankind, while the Sufis hold the view that their can be no Prophet after Muḥammad, Who completed the cycle of Prophethood, to be succeeded by the cycle of Saintship. From that point onward until the end of time the role of the channels for the operation of the Divine Will passed from the Prophets to the Elect of God. These, acting within the Muḥammadan Law and His dispensation, govern the world through an invisible hierarchy.

Notes

- 1) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *Some Answered Questions*. Collected and translated from the Persian by L. C. Barney. First pocket-size edition 1984/Reprinted 1994. Bahá’í Publishing Trust. Wilmette, Illinois.
- 2) *Paris Talks*. Addresses Given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in 1911. London (Printed by The Cromwell Press, Broughton Gifford, Melksham, Wiltshire), 1995.
- 3) A reference to the Perfect Man can be seen in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, in which Bahá’u’lláh says: **کتاب ایقان را اینست ملام انا هو . در هر لثا که در حدیث مذکور است** . — *Kitáb-i-Íqán* (Book of Certitude). Reprinted from the original edition, Egypt, 1934. Printed with the permission of the Universal House of Justice (19 June 1997) p. 75], which is in English translation as follows: “This is the significance of the tradition: I am He, Himself, and He is I, myself” [Bahá’u’lláh. *Kitáb-i-Íqán. The Book of Certitude*. Translated by Shoghi Effendi. First pocket-size edition 1983. Bahá’í Publishing Trust. Wilmette, Illinois, p. 100].
A.E. Khavari in the ‘*Qamus-i-Iqan*’ explaining this issue points out that what is implied here is the Perfect Man: **این چه در حدیث قدسی وارد شده که حق تعالی فرموده است انسان سیر و لثا سیره لثا هو و هر لثا . . . و مقصود از انسان در این** [A.E. Khavari. *Qamus-i-Iqan*, Vol. I, p. 166; A. E. Khavari. *Concordance to the Book of Certitude*. Abridged by H. Vaezi. Published by Century Press Pty. Ltd. Bundoora, Australia p. 85].
- 4) *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur’án*. Text and explanatory translation by M. Pickthall. Vol. II. Hyderabad-Deccan (India), 1938.
- 5) ‘Alá-al-Dawla Simnání (659/1261–736/1336)—a famous mystic of the Il-khanid period. He turned more and more toward mainstream Sufism and a moderate kind of Sufism.
This and some other quotations are translated from the original sources (Arabic texts), published in the appendix to the *Kitáb Khatm al-Awliyá* by al-Tirmizí—Al-Tirmidí. *Kitáb Khatm al-Awliyá*. Édité par Othman I. Yahya. Recherches publiées sous la direction de L’Institut De Lettres Orientales De Beyrouth. Tome XIX. Imprimerie Catholique, Beyrouth.
- 6) Da’ud al-Qaysarí, a follower of Ibn al-‘Arabí and a brilliant expounder of his teaching, was a prolific writer. Very little is known about his life, except that he lived in Asia Minor. From the fact that he is often quoted by S.H. Ámulí (see endnote 7) it can be inferred that he lived between the time of the great Sufi from Andalousia and the time of Ámulí.
The reference here is made to the Lithographic edition from the collection of the Oriental Institute of St. Petersburg (Russia)—**شرح لصریح الحكم للشيخ سحن الدين ابن عباد بن محمد ابن علي السمرقندي بابن عربي الطائفة الغنوية لأخيه الشيخ بلال بن منصور القيسري**. Publisher: Mirza Mohamed Shirazi. Bombay, 1300 H. (the library call number: Hd III 22.)
- 7) Sayyed Haydar Amolí (VIII/XIV siècle). *La Philosophie Shi’ite*. 1. Somme des doctrine ésotériques (Jâmi’ al-asrâr) 2. Traité de la connaissance de l’être (Fi ma’rifat al-wujûd). Textes publiés avec une double introduction et index par H. Corbin et O. Yahia. Teheran-Paris, 1969.
S. H. Ámulí, early representative of Imamite theosophy (born in 720/1320), a prolific writer. He was an early proponent of the thesis that Imamite Shi’ism is identical with Sufism. Ámulí was an early example of a long line of Imamite thinkers who incorporated the thought of Ibn al-‘Arabí and his follows into their writings.
- 8) ‘Afif al-Dín Sulaimán b. ‘Alí b. ‘Abd Alláh b. ‘Alí b. Yásín Tilimsání, born at T(i)limsán in 616/1219, a Sufi author of a number of works who lived in Syria and Asia Minor.
- 9) See endnote 3 for the full reference.
- 10) For a more detailed explanation of the Bahá’í teaching on the inherent distinction between ordinary human beings and the Manifestation, see John S. Hatcher, “The Doctrine of the ‘Most Great Infallibility’ in Relation to the ‘Station of Distinction,’” *The Law of Love Enshrined*. Selected Essays by John Hatcher & William Hatcher. George Ronald. Oxford, 1996, p. 59-100.
- 11) Abú Hámíd Muḥammad b. Muhammad al-Vúsí al-Ghazálí (450/1058–505/1111), outstanding theologian, jurist, original thinker, mystic and religious reformer.
- 12) The reference here is made to the Lithographic edition from the collection of the Oriental Institute of St. Petersburg (Russia)—**کتابیات سادات**. Second edition [Lakchnau]. Publisher: Naval Kishor (the library call number: P 35). For information about the given lithography, refer to O.P. Shcheglova. Katalog litografirovannykh knig na Persidskom iazyke v sobranii Leningradskogo otdeleniia Instituta vostokovedeniia. AN SSSR, c. II, Moskva, 1975, p. 453. See also a big portion of this passage in M. Takeshita’s translation. Masataka Takeshita. Ibn ‘Arabí’s *Theory of the Perfect Man and its Place in the History of Islamic Thought Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa*. Studia Culturae Islamica 32. Tokyo, 1987, p. 152-153.
- 13) Abú-l-Qásim al-Junayd al-Khazzáz al-Baghdádí (died in 298/910), the leading figure of the Baghdad school of Sufism in IX-X centuries, the highest authority in mysticism, who left behind a great number of prominent disciples; author of many treatises on Sufism.
- 14) ‘Alí B. ‘Uthmán al-Jullábí al-Hujwírí, an eminent Sufi, born at Ghazní (died in 465/1072 A.D.), author of many books of which the *Kashf Al-Maujúb*—a work treating the lives, teachings and observances of the Sufis—is the most widely known and read.
The passage is quoted in R.A. Nicholson’s translation (highlighted by us)—*The Kashf Al-Maujúb*. The oldest Persian Treatise on Lúfiism by ‘Alí B. ‘Uthmán al-Jullábí al-Hujwírí. Translated by R.A. Nicholson. “E. J. W. Gibb Memorial.” Vol. XVII. Leyden: E. J. Brill, Imprimerie Orientale. London: Luzac & Co, 1911.

The Mystic Cup: The Essential Mystical Nature of the Bahá'í Faith

by LeRoy Jones

Verily, verily, the dawn of a new Day has broken. The promised One is enthroned in the hearts of men. In His hand He holds the mystic cup, the chalice of immortality. Blessed are they who drink therefrom!
—The Báb to Mullá Ḥusayn and Mullá 'Alí

After years of waiting and searching for the Promised One, Mullá Ḥusayn found his heart's desire—a young merchant who called Himself the Báb. In their first meeting the Báb invited Mullá Ḥusayn to His residence and revealed His mission with proofs and testimonies, which Mullá Ḥusayn painstakingly scrutinized. But there was more. Mullá Ḥusayn described his encounter with the Báb:

I sat spellbound by His utterance, oblivious of time and of those who awaited me...the call of the Mu'adhhdh-in, summoning the faithful to their morning prayer, awakened me from the state of ecstasy into which I seemed to have fallen. All the delight, all the ineffable glories, which the Almighty has recounted in His Book as the priceless possessions of the people of Paradise—these I seemed to be experiencing that night.²

Hence, Mullá Ḥusayn depicted his state of captivated mystical ecstasy. Within days of this initial meeting Mullá Ḥusayn and fellow seeker Mullá 'Alí returned to the house of the Báb, wherein the Báb disclosed His mission to Mullá 'Alí who became His second follower. However, this second meeting was different. According to Nabil, "...all argument had been set aside and nothing but the spirit of intense adoration and ardent fellowship prevailed."³ The words from the opening quote were revealed at this time in an atmosphere that was "vitalized by that celestial potency which emanated from His inspired utterance. Everything in that room seemed to be vibrating with this testimony."⁴ Enthralled, these two chosen apostles responded to this divine summons to partake of the "mystic cup."

Likewise fifteen more souls after Mullá Ḥusayn and Mullá 'Alí attained the presence of the Báb and were declared "Letters of the Living." One more remained to complete the number of these first faithful followers. The soon-to-be eighteenth Letter of the Living, Quddus, approached Mullá Ḥusayn and pleaded to attain the presence of the Báb. Mullá Ḥusayn restrained him, telling Quddus the time was not right. Hastening to the Báb, Mullá Ḥusayn described Quddus' persistence. The Báb replied, "Marvel not at his strange behaviour. We have in the world of the spirit been communing with that youth. We know him already."⁵ Nabil asked, "...had not the mystic bond of the spirit linked their souls together?"⁶ Shortly thereafter Nabil observed the Báb in prayer before the rising sun, "He seemed to be addressing, in mystic language, that shining luminary, and to be entrusting it with His message of yearning and love to His concealed Beloved."⁷ Thus we see the intensely mystical nature of the opening days of the Bábi Faith.

Over much of the last twenty-five years as a Bahá'í, I have read passages such as the above account of the first Bábis and wondered, "What has happened? Why do we now seem so far removed from these deeply spiritual roots?" Admittedly, these first followers were exposed to a tremendous release of spiritual power. However, after discovering more and more of the Bahá'í writings that involve the mystical, I became convinced that this is a greatly overlooked area of the Bahá'í Faith. This issue becomes particularly poignant when we consider that the Bahá'í Faith has, in this writer's estimation, one of the most powerfully moving and exquisitely beautiful bodies of mystical works ever produced. Bahá'u'lláh, in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* repeatedly pulses into beautiful and poetic revelations of mystic reality. In the *Hidden*

Words spiritual nugget after spiritual nugget mightily reveals the previously hidden “mystic and wondrous Bride.”⁸ The ardent seeker quickly feels the magnificence and charm of *The Seven Valleys*. Even the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* alludes to the mystic nature of divine law as it unseals the “choice Wine with the fingers of might and power.”⁹

The purpose of this paper is twofold. First, it seeks to clarify from Bahá’í scripture what constitutes the fundamentals of the mystical experience and, second, to show that an overt, systematic focus on mysticism within this Bahá’í context is essential if the Bahá’í Faith is to make significant progress with personal transformation as well as moving toward the goal of a spiritually unified world. This is not an attempt to compare commonly held views of mysticism to the Bahá’í Faith, nor is it in any manner an endeavor to define what might be considered a comprehensive theology of Bahá’í mysticism. Rather this paper focuses on the mystical experience itself. This experience is best described as spiritual communion with the Manifestation of God and this communion is at the heart of the transformation process. I will attempt to use the Bahá’í writings to paint in broad brushstrokes a general picture of the mystical experience and the implications this raises regarding the future of the Bahá’í Faith. This discussion offers a fundamental understanding of the mystical experience in the hope that increasing numbers of Bahá’ís will engage in a more detailed and serious pursuit of what is involved in mystical endeavor. Even though this paper will raise many more questions regarding the mystical experience and its relation to Bahá’í theology and community life than it answers, one of its major purposes is to raise those very questions.

A brief clarification of a few of the ways that we encounter the word *mystic* in the Bahá’í writings may be prudent. We often see the word *mystic* used, but the words *mystical* and *mysticism* are rarely used. We must always keep in mind that the very nature of this subject defies definition—that which is mystic is mysterious, difficult to understand, ineffable. The Guardian uses the term “mystic feeling” and describes it as the experience “that unites man with God” and that this “spiritual communion” is the “core of religion” and is “best achieved through prayer.”¹⁰ I use this as the main point of reference for all other uses of the word. Most of us can relate to the sense of unity and connectedness, wonder and awe that occurs during prayer. Even though this feeling varies in intensity it is common and nearly universal. Since this experience is the core of religion it makes sense to use this passage as a sort of touchstone for other uses and understandings of the word.

When Shoghi Effendi writes of a mystic Source, he notes a Source that is mysterious.¹¹ We cannot understand the nature of this Source, but it may be that since the word is capitalized it signifies Bahá’u’lláh in one of His forms and we might assume that this is the spiritual Source with which we commune through prayer. Bahá’u’lláh writes of a “mystic transformation.”¹² This transformation leads to an ecstasy and a yearning for God, which once again suggests deep spiritual communion with the Manifestation. However, this level of communion can lead to a mystic awareness or “true knowledge”¹³ that brings us to a variation in meaning but is likely linked to the spiritual communion of which the Guardian wrote. These shades of meaning will hopefully become clearer through the course of this paper. Of course, it would be best to examine the original Persian and Arabic words, but that is perhaps beyond the scope of this paper and is certainly beyond the author’s current knowledge. It is worth noting, however, that when writing in English the Guardian used the word in various ways, which are helpful to us in elucidating its meanings.

One should also keep in mind that communion with the Manifestation is one of the ways we come to know God. Bahá’u’lláh says, “The supreme cause for creating the world and all that is therein is for man to know God.”¹⁴ A letter written on behalf of the Guardian relates this to the mystical, “There is, therefore, only one way to God and that is through the realization of his Manifestation or Prophet in that age.... The mystic path that the traveler should follow is therefore to the Prophet. By coming in contact with Him will he obtain peace.”¹⁵ In another letter he relates this to communion, “He [Manifestation]...is all we can ever know of...God. Therefore, we address ourselves in prayer and thought to Him, or through Him to that Infinite Essence behind and beyond Him.”¹⁶

Since this paper is written by a Westerner to a Western audience, any statements made regarding Bahá’ís only applies to the West, and the United States in particular. Even though the multiplicity of per-

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spectives within the Bahá'í Faith precludes simple generalization, there is a tendency among Bahá'ís in the U.S. to have little understanding of the subject. This propensity is coupled with the misappropriation of the word in general society, which tends to look upon the mystical as some mysterious or paranormal phenomenon with no necessary connection to religion. Also, some Bahá'ís dismiss mysticism as risky, psychic tinkering with the spiritual realm or as a dangerous pursuit of an elite and exclusive knowledge. In addition, among Bahá'ís there is some tendency to associate the word *mysticism* to the many schools of eastern mysticism. Even though there are some similarities, there is a significant difference between what the Bahá'í scriptures portray and what these many mystical disciplines depict as mystical endeavor. These differences would make fascinating and important studies, however, such work is beyond the reach of this paper. All of these issues are justifiable concerns and they raise important questions. However, it may be that we are allowing excessive caution in these areas to paralyze important efforts within the arena of legitimate mystical endeavor.

Consequently, among western Bahá'ís we see a general lack of awareness and little intuitive sense for what constitutes the mystical. Even though the situation has improved in recent years, even many deepened Bahá'ís have little idea what the word means. A comprehension of the terminology is not necessary for a mystical connection with Bahá'u'lláh. However, the problem is more complex. Seena Fazel, in his article, *Interreligious Dialogue and the Bahá'í Faith*, argues that the Bahá'ís could learn much from the mystical intensity of other religions. Mr. Fazel quotes a non-Bahá'í anthropologist who, after observing a service at the Bahá'í House of Worship in Wilmette noted:

What was read from each text destroyed the particularity of the tradition from which it was drawn, leaving, seemingly, but banal platitudes.¹⁷

There are many deeply spiritual devotions in the Bahá'í Faith, however, we should not ignore this perception particularly when noting another observation of Mr. Fazel's regarding Bahá'í scholar Jacques Chouleur, who is concerned that Bahá'ís in the West are reticent in regard to the mystical and community aspects, while preferring a focus on the social teachings.¹⁸ Mr. Chouleur notes those Bahá'ís who are working primarily for the social teachings:

The transfiguration of the earthly world by the implementation of the Bahá'í principles may be for them a doubtless exhilarating objective, but quite incomplete, insufficient if it is deprived of mysticism and contemplation.¹⁹

Complementing this emphasis on social concerns, the Universal House of Justice noted the infiltration of secular tendencies in our community in its May 19, 1994 letter to the U.S. National Spiritual Assembly.²⁰ Although the Universal House of Justice discussed the secular nature of Bahá'í administration in its relationship to the general Bahá'í community, it is likely these tendencies filter into all areas of Bahá'í life. Promoting social change as well as many other Bahá'í goals can easily become mostly secular enterprises. The Universal House of Justice quoted the Guardian in the May 19th letter as follows:

The friends must never mistake the Bahá'í administration for an end in itself. It is merely the instrument of the *spirit of the Faith*. This Cause...is designed to benefit the entire human race, and the only way it can do this is to reform the community life of mankind, as well as seeking to regenerate the individual.²¹ [emphasis mine]

Aligning our personal lives as well as our social and administrative efforts with this "spirit of the Faith" should be the paramount goal of all Bahá'ís. In our excessively materialistic society it is difficult to maintain a constant focus on the spiritual, which makes it easy to get caught up in the trends and tendencies of the broad culture. To overcome these effects a deep mystical relationship with Bahá'u'lláh is essential. This paper will show that the mystical is inextricably linked to this "spirit of the Faith" and that the Bahá'í Faith is first and foremost mystical. The success of our efforts in teaching, administration, community building, and social issues are contingent on developing the mystic feeling. The spiritual energy needed for personal and global transformation is dependent on both an individual and collective mystical connection to Bahá'u'lláh.

The analogy of the mystic cup, the chalice of immortality of which the Báb spoke, is a fine thread woven through the writings of Bahá’u’lláh.²² In the *Hidden Words*, Bahá’u’lláh incites, “Take...the chalice of immortal life...that thou mayest hearken unto the mystic voice,”²³ and “sweet is the holy ecstasy if thou drinkest of the mystic chalice.”²⁴ In the *Tablet of Carmel*, even Carmel is instructed, “Seize thou the Chalice of Immortality...and give thanks unto Him, inasmuch as He...transmuted thy grief into blissful joy.”²⁵ Pronouncements regarding the cup of certitude, the mystic wine, the celestial draught, and the draught of love are sprinkled throughout the sacred texts. These and many other similar phrases underlie the importance of this symbolic and mystical action—partaking of the wine of certitude that “transmutheth the souls of men.”

Bahá’u’lláh in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, in describing the early followers of a previous Manifestation, is likely speaking of the same mystic cup as was the Báb, which endowed its partakers “with the grace of a new life”:

*These same people, though wrapt in...veils of limitation...as soon as they drank the immortal draught, from the cup of certitude, at the hand of the Manifestation of the All-Glorious, were so transformed that they would renounce for His sake their kindred, their substance, their lives, their beliefs, yea, all else save God! So overpowering was their yearning for God, so uplifting their transports of ecstatic delight, that the world and all that is therein faded before their eyes into nothingness.*²⁶

Drinking of the mystic cup, the cup of certitude, wrought a dramatic transformation in the lives of these early believers. Bahá’u’lláh calls it a “mystic transformation” as He continues:

*It is evident that nothing short of this mystic transformation could cause such spirit and behaviour, so utterly unlike their previous habits and manners, to be made manifest in the world of being. For their agitation was turned into peace, their doubt into certitude, their timidity into courage. Such is the potency of the Divine Elixir, which, swift as the twinkling of an eye, transmutheth the souls of men!*²⁷

The Divine Elixir, this mystical draught, effected a radical transformation—an overpowering yearning for God and a dramatic change in their “habits and manners.” Can we in today’s world also partake of the heavenly elixir? Or was it only available to followers at the time of the Manifestation—people who associated with Him while He was on earth—a period when great feats and strong endeavor was essential?

Perhaps the potency of the mystic draught was stronger at the time of the Báb’s and Bahá’u’lláh’s physical presence. However, Shoghi Effendi makes clear that this mystic power is always available:

That the cause associated with the name of Bahá’u’lláh feeds itself upon those hidden springs of celestial strength which no force of human personality, whatever its glamour, can replace; that its reliance is *solely upon that mystic Source with which no worldly advantage, be it wealth, fame or learning can compare*; that it propagates itself by ways mysterious and utterly at variance with the standards accepted by the generality of mankind, will, if not already apparent, *become increasingly manifest* as it forges ahead towards fresh conquests in its struggle for the spiritual regeneration of mankind. [emphasis mine]²⁸

Not only are these hidden springs of mystic power always available, but, their effects will “become increasingly manifest.” Apparently this mystical force, or at least its effects, will intensify with time and not diminish with Bahá’u’lláh’s physical departure. Most importantly, the Guardian informs us that the Cause relies “solely upon that mystic Source.”

Even the Universal House of Justice has encouraged Bahá’ís to develop the “mystic feeling” as recently as the Ridván 150 letter to the Bahá’ís of the World:

No less essential to nourishing this vitality [of faith] is the cultivation of a sense of spirituality, that mystic feeling which unites the individual with God and is achieved through meditation and prayer.²⁹

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The Universal House of Justice calls the mystic feeling “a sense of spirituality”—something we experience. They use the word cultivate as though it is something we must care for, nurture and develop.

In the following letter to an individual believer, the Guardian placed these same ideas in the context of a materialistic society.

...[t]he spirit of the age, taken on the whole, is irreligious. Man’s outlook upon life is too crude and materialistic to enable him to elevate himself into the higher realms of spirit. It is this condition, so sadly morbid, into which society has fallen, that religion seeks to improve and transform. For the core of religious faith is that mystic feeling which unites man with God.³⁰

In the above quote the Guardian stated that the cause relies “solely on that Mystic source”³¹ and here he says the mystic feeling is the “core of religious faith.” Apparently there is nothing more fundamental and important than developing the mystical. This importance is underscored by Shoghi Effendi’s assertion that the way we can overcome the materialistic condition of society is through religion. Religion seeks to “transform” this condition. Since the core of religion is the “mystic feeling” we must assume that the mystic feeling is at the heart of the transforming process and that transformation is in some way an elevation to a higher spiritual level, “the higher realms of spirit” that our present crudeness prohibits us from experiencing. Shoghi Effendi proceeds by giving some evidence as to what the mystic feeling is.

This state of spiritual communion can be brought about and maintained by means of meditation and prayer. And this is the reason why Bahá’u’lláh has so much stressed the importance of worship. It is not sufficient for a believer to merely accept and observe the teachings. He should, in addition, cultivate the sense of spirituality, which he can acquire chiefly by means of prayer.³²

The Guardian depicts the mystic feeling as “spiritual communion” and as “a sense of spirituality” and perhaps as “worship.” After describing the mystic feeling as the core of religion Shoghi Effendi now explains that, “It is not sufficient for a believer to merely accept and observe the teachings.” Belief and action are not enough. Bahá’u’lláh reinforces this concept in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* by noting, “One hour’s reflection is preferable to seventy years of pious worship.”³³ One must be in touch with the mystical core through “spiritual communion” and by cultivating a “sense of spirituality.”

Adib Taherzadeh, during a talk at the Bahá’í House of Worship in Wilmette, Illinois, said, “Teaching is not the problem. The problem is that we must develop a love for Bahá’u’lláh.”³⁴ What is a love for Bahá’u’lláh? The following portion of a letter advising a Local Spiritual Assembly, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, helps to clarify this:

[He]...should study more deeply the teachings, and meditate on what he studies. We liken God to the Sun, which gives us all our life. So the Spirit of God reaches us through the Souls of the Manifestations. We must learn to commune with Their Souls, and this is what the Martyrs seemed to have done, and what brought them such ecstasy of joy that life became nothing. *This is the true mysticism, and the secret, inner meaning of life which humanity has at present, drifted so far from.*³⁵ [emphasis mine]

‘Abdu’l-Bahá ties this communion with the souls of the manifestations to love”:

*...drink deep of the mystic cup of heavenly love and know the rapture of being drawn ever closer unto the Realm of the All-Glorious.*³⁶ [emphasis mine]

Through this true mysticism, communing with the soul of the Manifestation, we drink deeply of heavenly love, which draws us closer and closer to our Beloved. Mr. Taherzadeh also said that once we establish this love for Bahá’u’lláh, teaching will be no problem—we would be unable to keep our mouths shut.³⁷ Likewise, effective administration, strong communities and all other Bahá’í goals will be more attainable. Returning to the previous letter of Shoghi Effendi we see this idea reinforced:

The Bahá’í Faith, like all other Divine religions, is thus fundamentally mystic in character. Its chief goal is the development of the individual and society, through the acquisition of spiritual virtues and powers. It is the soul of man that has first to be fed. And this spiritual nourishment

prayer can best provide. Laws and institutions, as viewed by Bahá’u’lláh, can become really effective only when our inner spiritual life has been perfected and transformed. Otherwise religion will degenerate into a mere organization, and become a dead thing.³⁸

To avoid lifeless religion we must develop its mystic character. Transformation attained through the nourishment of spiritual communion generates spiritual virtues and powers. Our inner life, our mystic life, must be perfected and transformed. Above, Bahá’u’lláh noted a “mystic transformation.” The Universal House of Justice further discusses this concept of transformation:

It is not enough to proclaim the Bahá’í message, essential as that is. It is not enough to expand the rolls of Bahá’í membership, vital as that is. Souls must be transformed, communities thereby consolidated, new models of life thus attained. *Transformation is the essential purpose of the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh*, but it lies in the will and effort of the individual to achieve it in obedience to the Covenant.³⁹ [emphasis mine]

What an intriguing relationship which exists between the “mystic feeling” and transformation! As the mystic feeling is the core of religious faith we see that transformation is “the essential purpose of the Cause.” One is described as the core, the other as the “essential purpose.” Previously we saw the Guardian note that religion seeks to transform our materialistic condition through its mystic core.⁴⁰ Transformation through the “true mysticism”—communing with the souls of the manifestations by dwelling in the love of God—is our real goal. How important for us to further our understanding of the relationship between these two fundamentals—mysticism and transformation!

‘Abdu’l-Bahá sheds further light on the relationship between Bahá’í mysticism and regeneration:

*I beg of God to strengthen these spiritual bonds as day followeth day, and make this mystic oneness to shine ever more brightly, until at last all shall be as troops marshaled together beneath the banner of the Covenant within the sheltering shade of the Word of God; that they may strive with all their might until universal fellowship, close and warm, and unalloyed love, and spiritual relationships, will connect all the hearts of the world. Then will all humankind, because of this fresh and dazzling bounty, be gathered in a single homeland. Then will conflict and dissension vanish from the face of the earth, then will mankind be cradled in love for the beauty of the All-Glorious.*⁴¹ [emphasis mine]

Notice that the Master explains that “spiritual bonds” will strengthen to make a mystic oneness shine. Also, fellowship, love, and spiritual relationships will connect all the hearts of the world. Only after all the hearts are connected with spiritual bonds that lead to a *mystic oneness* will humankind attain to true peace and harmony. Clearly, the spiritual heart is tied to the mystical. A deeper understanding of what is meant by “heart” will enhance our understanding of the mystical process.

Bahá’u’lláh is unmistakable on the importance of the heart. He says, “*My first counsel is this: Possess a pure, kindly and radiant heart...*”⁴² Likewise, in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* when Bahá’u’lláh addresses the true seeker, who “must, before all else, cleanse and purify his heart.”⁴³

Before all priorities we must focus on the heart. After requesting that we cleanse our heart Bahá’u’lláh refers to the heart as, “the seat of the revelation of the inner mysteries of God.” He then urges us to purge the breast [heart], “which is the sanctuary of the abiding love of the beloved” and then to “sanctify” one’s soul.”⁴⁴

The spiritual heart is the seat of the revelation of inner mysteries—the place we gain true spiritual vision. It is the sanctuary of love and if not identical to the soul is inextricably linked to it—the locus of the soul—the point where true spiritual insight and the love of God can abide. The heart is the channel⁴⁵ between the spiritual and material world. The tarnished heart, therefore, cannot reflect the glory of God.

After admonishing us to cleanse our hearts, Bahá’u’lláh describes the results of a pure heart. When we have truly kindled a spirit of search through intense striving and devotion and reached a state of “fer-

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vid love, of rapture, and ecstasy” within the heart, we will attain a new level of awareness. Then will “the darkness of error be dispelled, the mists of doubts and misgivings be dissipated, and the lights of knowledge and certitude envelop his being. At that hour will the mystic Herald, bearing the joyful tidings of the Spirit, shine forth from the City of God resplendent as the morn, and, through the trumpetblast of knowledge, will awaken the heart, the soul, and the spirit from the slumber of negligence. Then will the manifold favours 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.”⁴⁶

The cleansing process leads to an awakening. Bahá’u’lláh as the mystic Herald gives us “a new eye, a new ear, a new heart and a new mind.” What are these new faculties? Returning to the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*:

*It is incumbent upon thee, by the permission of God, to cleanse the eye of thine heart from the things of the world, that thou mayest realize the infinitude of divine knowledge, and mayest behold Truth so clearly that thou wilt need no proof to demonstrate His reality, nor any evidence to bear witness unto His testimony.*⁴⁷

In the opening words of the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* it says we must sanctify and cleanse our eyes.⁴⁸ In this passage Bahá’u’lláh speaks of cleansing the eye of “thine heart”—cleanse the spiritual eye and then with that “new eye” we will behold Truth clearly. So clearly that one will need no proof or evidence—our spiritual sight will be so acute that it will pass beyond the realm of words and logic—we will simply see.

In fact, at another place in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* Bahá’u’lláh notes:

*When the stream of utterance reached this stage, We beheld, and lo! the sweet savours of God were being wafted from the dayspring of Revelation, and the morning breeze was blowing out of the Sheba of the Eternal. Its tidings rejoiced anew the heart, and imparted immeasurable gladness to the soul. It made all things new, and brought unnumbered and inestimable gifts from the unknowable Friend. The robe of human praise can never hope to match Its noble stature, and Its shining figure the mantle of utterance can never fit. Without word It unfoldeth the inner mysteries, and without speech It revealeth the secrets of the divine sayings.*⁴⁹

More than likely the stream of utterance is the never ending Word of God that is continually renewed. This “stream of utterance” is able to unfold the mysteries without words and reveal the divine sayings without speech. “Human praise” cannot describe this stream of Revelation, nor can utterance fit its stature. Without Words what inner mysteries or divine sayings can be revealed? What does this mean? What kind of utterance describes without utterance? What words are revealed without words? At first glance it appears as some kind of circular gibberish. What is Bahá’u’lláh saying?

To help answer these questions let us examine another tablet wherein Bahá’u’lláh, instead of referring to a stream of utterance, refers to a stream of words:

*When the stream of words reached this stage, the sweet savours of true knowledge were shed abroad and the day-star of divine unity shone forth above the horizon of His holy utterance. Blessed is he whom His Call hath attracted to the summit of glory, who hath drawn nigh to the ultimate Purpose, and who hath recognized through the shrill voice of My Pen of Glory that which the Lord of this world and of the next hath willed. Whoso faileth to quaff the choice wine which We have unsealed through the potency of Our Name, the All-Compelling, shall be unable to discern the splendours of the light of divine unity or to grasp the essential purpose underlying the Scriptures of God, the Lord of heaven and earth.*⁵⁰

When this “stream of words” reaches a certain point, “true knowledge” is dispensed. What is this “true knowledge?” Rather than directly referring to a message beyond words we see “the shrill voice” of the Pen of Glory, which the attracted ones can hear. Next Bahá’u’lláh mentions those who “quaff the choice wine.” They will discern the “purpose underlying the Scriptures of God.” Notice, these are not the people who understand the words of the Scriptures, but those who discern the design “underlying” them; a purpose not within the Scriptures but fundamental to them—supporting and holding them. Once again

we see the idea of a message or purpose that transcends words and utterance. In fact it appears that this purpose is primary and that the actual written Book is somehow subsumed by this “essential purpose.” Could this be the “true knowledge?”⁵¹

‘Abdu’l-Bahá sheds more light:

*It is my hope that you may put forth your most earnest endeavor to accomplish this end, that you may investigate and study the Holy Scriptures word by word so that you may attain knowledge of the mysteries hidden therein. Be not satisfied with words, but seek to understand the spiritual meanings hidden in the heart of the words.*⁵²

We are reminded of this notion when Bahá’u’lláh says, “Immerse yourselves in the ocean of My words, that ye may unravel its secrets, and discover all the pearls of wisdom that lie hid in its depths.”⁵³ These hidden pearls of wisdom are likely the same as the mysteries noted in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, “Thus will these mysteries be unravelled, not by the aid of acquired learning, but solely through the assistance of God and the outpourings of His grace.”⁵⁴ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá reinforces the concept that the learning of words and ideas is incomplete. “The Jews read the Old Testament night and day, memorizing its words and texts yet without comprehending a single meaning or inner significance, for had they understood the real meanings of the Old Testament, they would have become believers in Christ, inasmuch as the Old Testament was revealed to prepare His coming.”⁵⁵ If we cannot gain true knowledge through learning what can we do? Bahá’u’lláh notes, “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.”⁵⁶

As noted above, another important feature of the “mystic cup” is that its contents are frequently referred to as a choice wine. Bahá’u’lláh makes repeated references to a symbolic wine that leads one who partakes to true knowledge and understanding.⁵⁷ Furthermore, the concept that true knowledge involves an experience that goes beyond words is reinforced as Bahá’u’lláh makes reference to this wine’s inebriating effect.

*Were We to reveal the hidden secrets of that Day, all they that dwell on earth and in the heavens would swoon away and die, except such as will be preserved by God, the Almighty, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. Such is the inebriating effect of the words of God upon Him Who is the Revealer of His undoubted proofs, that His Pen can move no longer.*⁵⁸

Bahá’u’lláh, while describing hidden secrets that would cause humankind to swoon and die, seems to say that those same hidden secrets would have such an inebriating effect on Him that it would stop the divine Pen. This would certainly tie in with the experiential nature of the mystical and would set forth the possibility that God’s word can instill a sort of altered consciousness in somewhat the same manner as alcohol or other mind altering drugs. In crude terms, what would be an overdose for a normal human was only inebriating for Bahá’u’lláh. Does this “inebriating effect” come in weaker doses? Examine the following excerpts from a prayer revealed by Bahá’u’lláh for the Bahá’í Fast:

For Thine ardent lovers Thou hast, according to Thy decree, reserved at each daybreak, the cup of Thy remembrance, O Thou who art the ruler of rulers! These are they who have been so inebriated with the wine of Thy manifold wisdom that they forsake their couches in their longing to celebrate Thy praise and extol Thy virtues....

*These are the ones, O my God, whom Thou hast graciously enabled to have fellowship with Thee and to commune with Him who is the Revealer of Thyself.*⁵⁹

Notice that these inebriated lovers arise to “commune” with Bahá’u’lláh. The spiritual addict flees his couch to experience the regenerating power of the love of God. As Bahá’u’lláh states in another passage, “by the fire of Thy love which drove sleep from the eyes of Thy chosen ones and Thy loved one.”⁶⁰

Further reinforcing the experiential nature, often in the words of Bahá’u’lláh we see references to achieving states of rapture and ecstasy. This Hidden Word reveals, “sweet is the holy ecstasy if thou

drinkest of the mystic chalice from the hands of the celestial Youth. Shouldst thou attain this station, thou wouldst be freed from destruction and death, from toil and sin.”⁶¹ In the Kitáb-i-Íqán Bahá’u’lláh says of the true seeker, “Only when the lamp of search, of earnest striving, of longing desire, of passionate devotion, of fervid love, of rapture, and ecstasy, is kindled within the seeker’s heart, and the breeze of His loving-kindness is wafted upon his soul...and the lights of knowledge and certitude envelop his being.” We attain knowledge and certitude after reaching a state of ecstasy and rapture. Then the mystic Herald sounds the trumpet blast of knowledge which endows one with a new eye, a new ear, a new heart and a new mind.”⁶² Is this a knowledge of words and argument? Or, does this mystic Herald impart a certitude reserved for mystic knowers that transcends words?

Consider this picture: There are powerful hidden secrets within the word of God which have the potential to not only completely overcome humans, but which can also effect a kind of inebriation in the Manifestation. These hidden secrets are connected to the “wine of thy manifold wisdom,” which is likely similar to the wine of true understanding, and these “wines” cause this state of inebriation. When these hidden secrets are more modest in strength or kind their wine has a similar impact on people. These humans are “ardent lovers” who have somehow uncovered the “hidden secrets” which lead to this inebriation. And as the Guardian noted in the letter regarding the true mysticism, these lovers have been enabled to “commune with Him,” bringing them to a state of rapture and ecstasy. This mystical state of communion is experiential, lies beyond words and utterance, and is at the heart of a spiritual transformation, which imparts a measure of true understanding and certitude to the ardent lovers.

Even more compelling, the Guardian makes clear that mystic transformation is also essential to the evolution of society as a whole.

That mystic, all-pervasive, yet indefinable change, which we associate with the stage of maturity inevitable in the life of the individual and the development of the fruit must, if we would correctly apprehend the utterances of Bahá’u’lláh, have its counterpart in the evolution of the organization of human society. A similar stage must sooner or later be attained in the collective life of mankind, producing an even more striking phenomenon in world relations, and endowing the whole human race with such potentialities of well-being as shall provide, throughout the succeeding ages, the chief incentive required for the eventual fulfillment of its high destiny.⁶³

Consider the implications of this paragraph. Not only is there an indefinable or mystic change that occurs in the individual, in effect, the Guardian is also saying that the Golden Age will occur only after society as a whole undergoes some kind of mystical metamorphosis.⁶⁴ Apparently this mystical connection is not simply for the individual but can somehow permeate an entire society in a spontaneous organic manner. Shoghi Effendi refers to this collective “mystic change” as the stage of maturity, which will provide the “chief incentive” for the eventual realization of humanity’s high destiny. Exactly what that means is can likely be grasped only after we better understand the mystic change of the individual. Regardless, if we consider this global renewal and liken it to the profound and pervasive “mystic transformation” which Bahá’u’lláh described in the individual,⁶⁵ one can only speculate on the wonders before humanity. Not to mention, even now, the Bahá’ís as a group expecting global transformation can ill afford to ignore a process that appears to be intimately connected to that change.

Shoghi Effendi goes on to say that this mystic change will eventually produce a striking phenomenon in society.⁶⁶ In a previous quote, after stating that the cause relies “solely on that mystic Source with which no worldly advantage can compare,”⁶⁷ he said, “that it propagates itself by ways mysterious and utterly at variance with the standards accepted by mankind.”⁶⁸ The Guardian emphasizes that Bahá’u’lláh has called into being “a new race of men.”⁶⁹ The Blessed Beauty in another passage proclaimed, “The world’s equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this New World Order. Mankind’s ordered life hath been revolutionized by the agency of this unique, this wondrous system—the like of which mortal eyes hath never witnessed.”⁷⁰

Is there an integral connection between the uniqueness of Bahá’u’lláh’s system and the mystical? After saying that we are solely reliant on the mystic Source, Shoghi Effendi says that the cause propagates itself in a manner that is not only mysterious but completely at variance with the norm.⁷¹ Complete reliance on a mystic Source would be very different from accepted processes of social development. The

Guardian’s phrase “a new race of men”⁷² leads one to consider the “mystic transformation”⁷³ that established totally new habits in the devout followers. Elsewhere, Bahá’u’lláh declares “a system the like of which mortal eyes hath never witnessed,”⁷⁴ then immediately broadcasts one of the more mystical concepts in His Revelation, “Immerse yourselves in the ocean of my words, that ye may uncover all the pearls of wisdom that lie hid in its depths.”⁷⁵

Undoubtedly there is a reliance on the mystical in the Bahá’í Faith, but how often do we consider the possibility that this reliance is of such magnitude that it dwarfs all other forces? Perhaps the uniqueness of Bahá’u’lláh’s system is that it will use this mystic Source far more than in any other dispensation. Perhaps in everything we do, whether it is teaching, administration, or working for social justice—the primary driving force, perhaps the only effective driving force, is our mystical connection to Bahá’u’lláh. Assuming this unique system depends completely on the mystical, is it too bold to ask, that without a connection to this mystic Source, do we have anything that other non-Bahá’í segments of society cannot provide? Recognizing that these prophecies of “new models of life,”⁷⁶ “a new race of men,”⁷⁷ and a system “the like of which mortal eyes hath never witnessed,”⁷⁸ are more likely connected to a mystic transformation than they are to the social principles of the Bahá’í Faith suggests that this mystic Source and the transformation it inspires is the undeniable foundation upholding the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh.

The theme of the mystic cup and its heavenly draught is interspersed through the Bahá’í sacred writings. Not only do we see the Báb, Bahá’u’lláh, and ‘Abdu’l-Báha enjoining seekers to partake of a mystic cup or cup of certitude, but, there are numerous references to an immortal draught. Such a glorious picture unfolds as we ponder the promise the Báb offered to His followers, “Blessed are they who drink therefrom!”

After the first believers in our Faith were entranced by an invitation to drink of the mystic cup, Nabíl observed the Báb engaged in mystic communion with his Beloved and spoke of His use of a mystic language with Quddus who was far away. Bahá’u’lláh points to the early believers of another age who after imbibing from the “cup of certitude” underwent a “mystic transformation” in which “their agitation was turned into peace, their doubt into certitude, their timidity into courage.” Shoghi Effendi asserts that “the core of religious faith is the mystic feeling which unites man with God,” and that we are totally reliant on that “mystic Source.” The Universal House of Justice encourages us to cultivate the mystic feeling. ‘Abdu’l-Báha directs us to drink of the mystic cup of heavenly love so we can partake of the love engendered by the true mysticism. Even more interesting the Guardian writes of that “mystic, all-pervasive, yet indefinable change,” which is associated with the maturity of the individual and which will have its counterpart in the transformation and coming of age of the entire human race. And this coming of age is underscored by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s projection of world unity engendered by an ever brighter “mystic oneness.”

The queries this discussion raises are manifold. Precisely where does mysticism fit in as we develop “new models of life?” What connection does this mystic feeling have to Bahá’í administration, community building and teaching? How can we expand our understanding of such things as mystic transformation, mystic language, mystic Source and all forms of spiritual communion? What can we do to cultivate this “mystic feeling” as the Universal House of Justice has encouraged? How does Bahá’u’lláh teach mysticism and what is involved in mystical endeavor as a Bahá’í? Complete answers to these and other questions are likely impossible at this early stage of Bahá’í development. However, if humankind is ever to get the solutions, we must now begin a serious investigation at all levels—as institutions and as individuals. The fruits inspired by a search through the mystical ocean of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation could provide crucial assistance with elusive goals like spiritual transformation, building strong communities, the perfecting of Bahá’í institutions, and for the ultimate goal of sweeping global change.

Furthermore, Bahá’u’lláh says,

*The purpose of the one true God, exalted be His glory, hath been to bring forth the Mystic Gems out of the mine of man—they Who are the Dawning-Places of His Cause and the repositories of the pearls of His knowledge.*⁷⁹

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These Mystic Gems, the manifestations of God, are our mystic teachers. We have many opportunities for material knowledge but the mystic knowledge comes only from Bahá'u'lláh. The Guardian noted that the mystic feeling is central to developing spiritual virtues and powers.⁸⁰ With these powers we will change the material world—not the other way around.

In a religion whose watchword is *unity* this is the ultimate unity. Shoghi Effendi described it as that “mystic feeling which unites man with God.”⁸¹ From this mystical unity all other unity flows. This unity teaches all unity.⁸² For it there is no substitute. Let us revisit ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s prediction regarding this mystic oneness:

*I beg of God to strengthen these spiritual bonds as day followeth day, and make this mystic oneness to shine ever more brightly, until at last...spiritual relationships, will connect all the hearts of the world. Then will all humankind, because of this fresh and dazzling bounty, be gathered in a single homeland. Then will conflict and dissension vanish from the face of the earth, then will mankind be cradled in love for the beauty of the All-Glorious.*⁸³ [emphasis mine]

Peace be upon him that inclineth his ear unto the melody of the Mystic Bird calling from the Sadrat’l-Muntaha! Glorified be our Lord the Most High.

—Bahá'u'lláh⁸⁴

Notes

- 1) Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers*, trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá’i Publishing Trust, 1974) p. 69.
- 2) *Ibid.*, p. 62.
- 3) *Ibid.*, p. 69.
- 4) *Ibid.*
- 5) *Ibid.*, p. 70.
- 6) *Ibid.*
- 7) *Ibid.*, p. 78.
- 8) *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi, (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá’i Publishing Trust, Reprint 1979), p. 82.
- 9) *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, (Haifa: The Bahá’i World Center, 1992), p. 21.
- 10) Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá’i News* 102, August 1936, p. 3 in *Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. 2, pp. 237, 238.
- 11) *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters from Shoghi Effendi* (Wilmette, Illinois, Bahá’i Publishing Trust, 1974) pp. 51, 52.
- 12) *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, trans. Shoghi Effendi, 6th ed. (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá’i Publishing Trust, 1974), p. 155.
- 13) *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, trans. Adib Taherzadeh, 1st ed. (Great Britain: W & J Mackay Limited, 1978), p. 105.
- 14) *Ibid.*, p. 268.
- 15) Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance* (India, 1994), p. 511, MARS for Windows by Crimson Publications.
- 16) *Ibid.*, p. 472.
- 17) “International Dialogue and the Bahá’i Faith: Some Preliminary Observations,” in *Revisioning the Sacred: New Perspectives on a Bahá’i Theology*, ed. Jack McLean (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1997), pp. 147, 148.
- 18) *Ibid.*
- 19) *Ibid.*
- 20) Universal House of Justice, Letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’is of the United States dated May 19, 1994, paragraphs 27, 28.
- 21) *Ibid.*, par. 32.
- 22) References to a mystic cup and Chalice of Immortality: “No sooner had her voice reached that most exalted Spot than We made reply: “Render thanks unto thy Lord, O Carmel. The fire of thy separation from Me was fast consuming thee, when the ocean of My presence surged before thy face, cheering thine eyes and those of all creation, and filling with delight all things visible and invisible. ...Seize thou the Chalice of Immortality in the name of thy Lord, the All-Glorious, and give thanks unto Him, inasmuch as He, in token of His mercy unto thee, hath turned thy sorrow into gladness, and transmuted thy grief into blissful joy.” (Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings*, pp. 15-16) “The Celestial Youth hath, in this Day, raised above the heads of men the glorious Chalice of Immortality, and is standing expectant upon His seat, wondering what eye will recognize His glory, and what arm will, unhesitatingly, be stretched forth to seize the Cup from His snow-white Hand and drain it.” (Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 107) “Emerge from behind the veil, by the leave of thy Lord, the All-Glorious, the Most Powerful, and seize, before the eyes of those who are in the heavens and those who are on the earth, the Chalice of Immortality..The moment thou touchest the Cup with thy lips, the Concourse on high will acclaim thee saying, ‘Drink with healthy relish, O man that hast truly believed in God!’ and the inhabitants of the Cities of Immortality will cry out, ‘Joy be to thee, O thou that hast drained the Cup of His love!’” (Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings*, pp.148-149)

Lights of ‘Irfán

- 23) *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh*, Persian Hidden Word no. 62
- 24) *Ibid.*, Persian Hidden Word no. 70
- 25) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi, (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, fifth printing, 1971), pp. 15-16
- 26) *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 155.
- 27) *Ibid.*, pp. 156, 157.
- 28) *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters from Shoghi Effendi* (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), pp. 51, 52.
- 29) *Message of the Universal House of Justice: Introducing the Three Year Plan* in *The Three Year Plan* prepared by the National Teaching Committee of the Bahá'ís of the United States (Wilmette, Ill: 1993), p. 5.
- 30) Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í News* 102, August 1936, p. 3 in *Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. 2, pp. 237, 238.
- 31) *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 51, 52.
- 32) *Bahá'í News* 102, p. 237.
- 33) *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 238.
- 34) Speech by Adib Taherzadeh, Member of the Universal House of Justice, at the Bahá'í House of Worship, Wilmette, Illinois, Sept. 1997.
- 35) Shoghi Effendi, *Unfolding Destiny*, (United Kingdom, 1981) p. 406.
- 36) *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*. (Trans. Committee at the Bahá'í World Center. [Chatham, Great Britain: W & J Mackay, 1978] pp. 149, 150.
- 37) Speech at the Bahá'í House of Worship, Wilmette, Illinois, Sept. 1997.
- 38) *Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. 2, p. 238.
- 39) Universal House of Justice, *Ridván Message*, 1992
- 40) *Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. 2, p. 238.
- 41) *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, pp. 19, 20.
- 42) *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh*, Arabic Hidden Word no. 1.
- 43) *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 192.
- 44) *Ibid.*
- 45) *Ibid.*, p. 197.
- 46) *Ibid.*, p. 196.
- 47) *Ibid.*, p. 91.
- 48) *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- 49) *Ibid.*, p. 59.
- 50) *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 105.
- 51) *Word* in this sense is similar to the use of *logos* in John Chapter 1 of the Bible. Here the Word or *logos* first resides in the heaven and then becomes flesh as Christ. We see hints of this in Bahá'í Scripture when Bahá'u'lláh speaks of the Manifest and Luminous Point. This Point is sent forth from the "horizon of His Will.... This Point is the focal center of the circle of Names and marketh the culmination of the manifestations of Letters in the world of creation. Through it have appeared indications of the impenetrable Mystery, the adorned Symbol, He Who standeth revealed in the Most Great Name—a Name which is recorded in the luminous Tablet and is inscribed in the holy, the blessed, the snow-white Scroll. And when the Point was joined to the second Letter (l) which appeareth in the beginning of the Mathani,(l) it traversed the heavens of exposition and utterance. Then the eternal Light of God shed its radiance, flared up in the mid-most heart of the firmament of testimony and produced two Luminaries." (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 101-102) Also, upon examining the first verse describing the "stream of utterance" it is not clear if Bahá'u'lláh is referring to the "stream" as causing this marvelous renewal or if it is the "sweet savours" coming from the Revelation. In the second passage it appears more likely that the stream of words reaches a certain stage and then the sweet savours of true knowledge powers this regeneration. Actually it makes little difference, the stream of utterance and the sweet savours may be exactly the same and if not they arise from the same source. However, when trying to unravel how utterance can reveal without words it likely makes more sense to have the sweet savours of the Revelation of true understanding disclosing a purpose that goes beyond words.
- 52) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, compiled by Howard MacNutt, (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), p. 459.
- 53) *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 85.
- 54) *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 192.
- 55) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 459.
- 56) *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 211.
- 57) Some references to this wine: "...those that have quaffed the wine of knowledge and certitude..." (Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, pp. 161-162). "...drink the incorruptible waters of the river of knowledge, and to taste the wine of the mysteries of divine Unity" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 200) "It will...cause you to behold the things from which ye have been withheld, and will enable you to quaff His sparkling Wine." (Bahá'u'lláh, *Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 78) "...nourish me with the wine of Thy knowledge..." (Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations*, p. 78)

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- 58) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 35.
- 59) *Bahá'í Prayers*, U.S. 1991 edition, pp. 247, 249.
- 60) *Prayers and Meditations*, trans. Shoghi Effendi, (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, sixth printing 1974), p. 292.
- 61) *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh*, Persian No. 70.
- 62) *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, pp. 195-196.
- 63) *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 163, 164.
- 64) *God Passes By*, Shoghi Effendi, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, sixth printing, 1970), p. 324.
- 65) *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 155.
- 66) *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 164.
- 67) *Ibid.*, p. 51.
- 68) *Ibid.*
- 69) *The Advent of Divine Justice*, Shoghi Effendi, (United States, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990), p. 16.
- 70) *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, K. 181.
- 71) *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 51, 52.
- 72) *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 16.
- 73) *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 151.
- 74) *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, K. 181, 182.
- 75) *Ibid.*
- 76) *Unfolding Destiny*, p. 406.
- 77) *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 16.
- 78) *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, K. 181, 182.
- 79) *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, Trans. Shoghi Effendi. (Wilmette, Ill: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971) p. 13.
- 80) *Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. 2, pp. 237, 238.
- 81) *Ibid.*
- 82) If, as the Guardian states, the mystic feeling is what unites man with God it is logical to assume that this unity with God is the essence of unity and that it is the ultimate foundation for any unity that we aspire to between humans.
- 83) *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, pp. 19, 20.
- 84) *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 257.

A Short Poem by “Darvish” Muhammad, Bahá’u’lláh:
Sáqí az ghayb-i baqá burqa‘ bar afkan az ‘idhár

An Introduction and Three Versions of Provisional English Translations

by Franklin D. Lewis

The corpus of Bahá’u’lláh’s writings, all of which Bahá’ís regard as scripture, consists overwhelmingly of prose. These prose works assume a variety of forms and genres, often explicitly indicated by formal terms appearing in the titles given to the individual works, such as tablet (*lawh*, *súrih*), epistle (*risálih*), book (*kitáb*), etc. In the Arabic and Persian tradition, prose (*nathr*) can be simple (mursal) or adorned (*marsú‘*), the most common type of adornment being *saj‘*; collocations of parallel phrasings which observe rhyme. Many of the prayers and other writings of Bahá’u’lláh rely heavily upon *saj‘*; and indeed, some of his compositions, such as “Halih, halih yá bishárát,”¹ observe some, but not all, of the rules of classical metrics and prosody. As such, they transcend the category of rhymed prose (*nathr-i musajjáf*) and exhibit litany-like features that might be classed as a form of versification (*nazm*) or quasi-verse.

In addition to these prose works, there are also a number of poems (*shí‘r*), which meet the classical conventions of Persian and Arabic verse, including meter and rhyme. Among these poems by Bahá’u’lláh, both the “Qasídiy-i Varqá’íyyih” (The Dove Ode) and “Rashh-i ‘amá” (The Sprinkling of the Divine Cloud), were mentioned by Shoghi Effendi, and discussed by Adib Taherzadeh.² In recent decades, provisional translations of these two poems have appeared.³ The longer “Mathnavíy-i Mubárák,” first discussed by Adib Taherzadeh, has now also appeared in a provisional translation.⁴

In addition to the above, Bahá’u’lláh composed a number of shorter poems which he signed in the last or penultimate line with the nom de plume, or *takhallus*, of “Darvish” (the Dervish). These shorter poems, which were apparently composed in the mountains of Sulaymáníyyih in Iraqi Kurdistan in the mid-1850s, conform to the traditional Persian verse forms of the *qasídh* (a longer ode) and *ghazal* (a shorter, sonnet-like, lyrical form), observing mono-rhyme, the conventional meters and other prosodic rules. Though they have been published at least once in the original,⁵ they have not yet been studied, and remain as yet untranslated to English.

Many of the themes that appear in Bahá’u’lláh’s longest poem, the *Mathnavíy-i mubárák*, which was evidently composed over a period of time, beginning perhaps as early as his retreat to Iraqi Kurdistan, and certainly by his time in Baghdad, but completed only after his arrival in Istanbul,⁶ are already in evidence in these shorter poems of “Darvish” (the Dervish) which apparently date from his retreat in the mountains of Iraqi Kurdistan. Bahá’u’lláh left Iran for Baghdad in the first half of the month of Rabí’úth-thání, 1269 A.H., or more precisely on the first of Bahman,⁷ corresponding to 21 January 1854. Very shortly after his arrival in Baghdad, it became clear that the dissensions and confusion within the Bábí community in the wake of the execution of the Báb, and the apparent appointment of Mírzá Yahyá as successor, threatened to fracture the community. Bahá’u’lláh, whose presence and eminence apparently constituted a threat to Yahyá, therefore decided to withdraw.

Shoghi Effendi tells us that on 12 Rajab 1270 A.H. (10 April 1854) Bahá’u’lláh set out on his own, leaving his family behind in Baghdad, accompanied only by a Muslim servant, Abu’l-Qásim of

Hamadan, who was soon killed by thieves. After this Bahá’u’lláh lived in seclusion in “the garb of a traveler;” since he was carrying a *kashkúl*, or alms-bowl, and had assumed the name Darvish Muhammad,⁸ he must have been living the life and wearing the clothes of a mendicant dervish or pious recluse, that is to say, a Sufi. As his son, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, describes it:

During this period Bahá’u’lláh lived in poverty. His garments were those of the poor and needy. His food was that of the indigent and lowly...⁹

Shoghi Effendi tells us that Bahá’u’lláh first lived on a mountain called Sar-Galú in a crude stone structure, and sometimes even in a cave. According to Bahá’u’lláh’s own testimony in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, he often went without food or rest. During this period he composed many prose and verse “prayers and soliloquies” in both Arabic and Persian.¹⁰ Subsequently, he was invited by Shaykh Ismá’il of the Khálidíyyih Order, to reside in their Dervish Lodge (*takyih* or Turkish *tekke*) in Sulaymáníyyih; in addition, Bahá’u’lláh made personal contact with leaders of other Sufi orders, specifically Shaykh ‘Uthmán of the Naqshbandí Order and Shaykh ‘Abdu’r-Rahmán of the Qádirí order (to whom Bahá’u’lláh later addressed *The Four Valleys*).

The information in *God Passes By* seems to suggest that these poems signed “Dervish” date to the earlier phase of Bahá’u’lláh’s residence at Sar-Galú, probably some time between the Spring of 1854 and the Winter of 1854–55. However, we cannot yet completely rule out the possibility that they were composed later, while at the Khálidí lodge in Sulaymáníyyih, or perhaps even in the period shortly after his return to Baghdad. The *Kitáb-i-Íqán* addresses itself to specific matters of Shiite and Bábí theology and represents a break with the Sufi and gnostic vocabulary of Bahá’u’lláh’s earlier poems and of his *Seven Valleys* and *Four Valleys*. Though it dates to a period prior to Bahá’u’lláh’s announcement of his claim to be the advent of “Him whom God will make manifest,” the *Íqán* strongly suggests its status as divine revelation and explicitly claims authorship for Bahá’u’lláh.¹¹

By contrast, the poems of “Dervish Muhammad” do not speak openly with the voice of Bahá’u’lláh, and do not explicitly lay claim to revelation. Although they do broach messianic themes which, viewed in the light of Bahá’u’lláh’s later claims, can be seen as veiled allusions to the eventual public proclamation of his claims in April 1863, the context of Sufi poetry would have made it quite easy to discount any implication that Bahá’u’lláh was laying claim to a special station.

As to the authorial voice in the early poems of Bahá’u’lláh, they were composed under a sobriquet, “Darvish,” or Dervish. The conventions of the ghazal and, to a lesser extent, the *qasídih*, called for the author to adopt a poetic persona, which is evoked by name (*takhallus*) in the body of the poem (e.g., “O Háfez...”). The *takhallus* is the poet’s adopted stage name, by which he is generally known (Sádi, ‘Attâr, Saná’i, etc.). In a ghazal, an apostrophe to his stage persona usually occurs in the last line, sometimes in the penultimate, or more rarely in the first line of the poem. In the particular case of Bahá’u’lláh, “Dervish” apparently served not only a poetic pen name, but also as the name he assumed, “Dervish Muhammad,” while living incognito in Sulaymáníyyih. This moniker “Dervish” appears as the *takhallus* in the final line of at least eight poems of Bahá’u’lláh.¹²

The first poem of Bahá’u’lláh, dating to his incarceration in the Siyáh Chál and known by its opening words as “Rashh-i ‘amá,” employs “Bahá” as *takhallus* in the penultimate line:

ranniy-i ná’í bín k-az kilk-i Bahá mí-rízád.

*See how the lamentations of the reed piper
pour forth through the reed pen of Bahá¹³*

Bahá’u’lláh also alludes to himself with the pen name “Bahá” in his *Mathnaví*, which was apparently the last formal poem he composed. In the poem translated below, there is also a reference to Bahá, though it does not appear in the position of the *takhallus*. If composed or circulated among Naqshbandí or Khalidí Sufis,¹⁴ in whose company Bahá’u’lláh was known as Dervish Muhammad, the word *Bahá* would not have been understood as an allusion to himself. Most probably, it would have been understood as an homage to the eponymous founder of the Naqshbandí order, Bahá al-Din Naqshband (717-791 A.H./

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1317-1389 A.D.). However, “Dervish,” which occurs in the final line, the traditional place for the poet’s *takhallus*, would have been understood as the “signature” of the poet, in this case, “Dervish Muhammad,” if he shared any of these Persian poems with the people in Sulaymáníyyih, and it seems likely that he did, since he composed the “Qasídiy-i Varqá’iyyih” at the request of the Sufis he met there.

The meter of the poem, like the “Mathnaví-yi Mubárák,” is *Ramal*, though the measure here is octameter *Ramal* (*ramal-i muthamman*), as opposed to the shorter hexameter *Ramal* (*ramal-i musaddas*) of the Mathnaví. The *Ramal* meter is based upon a repetition of the basic four-syllable foot | - 4 - - | (where [-] represents a long syllable and [◻] a short syllable), according to quantitative (not accentual) measure. One line, or stich (*bayt*), of octameter *Ramal* consists of eight such feet, divided into two equal and symmetrical hemistichs (*misrá‘*) divided by a caesura. In this particular poem, the fourth and eighth foot of each line are truncated to three syllables | - ◻ - |, and described prosodically as catalectic (*mahdhúf*). The full pattern of one line of catalectic octameter *Ramal*, or *Ramal-i muthamman-i mahdhúf*, would therefore look like this:

Foot: 1 2 3 4 a 5 6 7 8 a
 | - ◻ - - | - ◻ - - | - ◻ - - | - ◻ - - || - ◻ - - | - ◻ - - | - ◻ - - | - ◻ - - |

In the first line of a ghazal or qasídi, the final syllable before the caesura and the final syllable of the line rhyme with one another. Thereafter throughout the poem this same mono-rhyme repeats as the final syllable of each line, in the pattern *aabacada*, etc.¹⁵

Interestingly, the hemistich (*misrá‘*) in which the *takhallus* “Dervish” appears in this particular poem (the first half of line 15) does not follow the same meter as the rest of the poem. Rather this half-line conforms to an entirely different meter, pentameter *Hazaj-i akhrab-i makfúf*, which happens to contain three more syllables than the rest of the lines, as follows:

- - ◻ | ◻ - - ◻ | ◻ - - ◻ | ◻ - - ◻ | ◻ - - ||

This is a violation of traditional metrics, as a poem should follow the same meter throughout. This isolated variation here might suggest that this hemistich has been quoted from another poem and embedded here (*tadmín*), or perhaps added at another time as an after-thought. However, this is not the only instance in which the meters appear to change within a given poem of Bahá’u’lláh. For example, the poem *mastand bulbulán zi naghmiy-i Yá Hú-yi ú* begins in the first line with a meter not conventionally recognized as prosodically acceptable (*mustaf‘ilun mafá‘ilun fáilátun fáal: - - ◻ - ◻ - ◻ ◻ - - ◻ -*), but shifts after that to *Ramal*.¹⁶

Several of the poems signed “Dervish” utilize the conventional wine imagery of classical Persian poetry, involving a call to the Sáqí, or cupbearer, to pour out a round of wine. In some settings, such as the royal wine poem, the scene is one of merry carousal and wassailing. In other settings, wine is drunk as a palliative to drown out the sorrows of the world. In yet other contexts, wine is symbolic of the intoxication brought about when in the presence of the numinous, or of the *mysterium tremendum*; it can also symbolize the overriding of rational perception that the gnostic feels in his overpowering love for God. Clearly, the wine in Bahá’u’lláh’s poems stands in this tradition of mystical inebriation, as is made clear in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. This symbolism also appears in the Seven Valleys, to which the poem we are presently considering bears a certain resemblance in enumerating some of the stages along the path of the spiritual quest (see line 4-5, where the stages of Love and Poverty are alluded to, and lines 5 and 8, which explicitly speak of the path).

Here then is a provisional prose translation of one of the ghazals of Bahá’u’lláh, Sáqí az *ghayb-i-baqá*, which is signed in the voice of Dervish Muhammad.¹⁷ As has been argued elsewhere, because Shoghi Effendi never translated any of the formal poetry of Bahá’u’lláh, we have no authoritative models for the translation of the poems of Bahá’u’lláh. I have therefore attempted to render this poem in three different versions, to provide examples of the options available to us in translating scripture, which is originally in the form of verse.

Bahá’u’lláh’s poem *Sáqí az ghayb-e baqá burqá bar afkan az ‘idhár*

1. A Provisional Prose Translation

This translation seeks to state in clear idiomatic English, without, however, being overly literal and without explanatory interpolations, the meaning of the poem. Each hemistich of the original poem is translated on a separate line. This, then, is a lineated prose version of the poem; the lines are numbered for easy reference.

Cupbearer, from the cheeks of the unseen immortal realm cast aside the veil	a
That I may sip the eternal wine from the beauty of the Maker	1b
That which you have in the wine jugs will not break the bile ¹⁸ of love	2a
From that wine of inner meaning, Cupbearer, bring forth an ocean	2b
That this veiled, love-frenzied one ¹⁹ may begin to shout	3a
That this divinely drunk one may be roused from stupor	3b
Light up a fire of love, incinerate the entirety of existing things	4a
Then lift a foot and step into the precincts of the lovers ²⁰	4b
Until you are effaced of all attributes of creation, man of the path, ²¹	5a
How will you taste eternal wine from that Idol’s succulent ruby lips	5b
Set foot on the top of the realm, then enter Poverty’s sheltering shade— ²²	6a
and now you may see the Eternal realm on every side	6b
If the thought of life preoccupies your heart, do not come here	7a
If you have a heart and soul to scatter, come forth and proffer it	7b
This is the custom of the path, if you’ve a hope of joining with Bahá ²³	8a
If you are not the man for this path, be off and trouble me no more!	8b
If you wish to be apprised of the mysteries of love	9a
Open the eye of admonition, close the paths to pride ²⁴	9b
That you may see Moses’ Mountain circumambulate right here	10a
That you may see the spirit of Jesus restless in its love of him ²⁵	10b
That you may find the tablet ²⁶ affirming the Divine Unity	
in the two braids of the Friend	11a
That you may read the scroll ²⁷ sanctifying God’s Essence ²⁸	
in the two cheeks of the Beloved	11b
Here, quaff the wine of joy from the vivifying fount of love	12a
That you may victoriously cast your head at the feet of the Friend	12b
In this assemblage they are dead in the path of the Friend	13a
O Messiah of the age, inspire us with a warm reviving breath	13b
That the birds of existence may soar beyond the body’s prison	14a
Unto the placeless atmosphere beneath the sheltering shade of	
He Who holds Power	14b
Dervish! The world’s consumed by the divine, soul-incinerating flame ²⁹	15a
It’s time for you to bring it to life with this melodious lament	15b

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2. A Provisional Free Verse Version

In the English version that follows, I have attempted to give a more literary form to the poem. Unlike the Persian, it is in free verse, with no pre-determined meter and no effort to rhyme. I have also allowed for greater freedom in rendering the English, breaking the lines to create rhythmic phrasing or to highlight the meaning. Those who have translated literary works will recognize that the translator is often compelled to make an idea or metaphor or phrase that was suggestive or ambiguous in the original language, more determined in translation, because ambiguity and suggestive language cannot always be transferred. Where the original metaphors seemed vague or suggestive, I have allowed some leeway in searching for a poetic equivalent in this translation; these divergences will be apparent by comparison with the previous translation. The line numbers are included to facilitate comparison between the two versions.

You,
who tend and pour the wine!
Let the veil slip off the cheeks
 that have been cloaked
 in the Unseen immortal realm 1a
Let me sip that everlasting vintage
 of the Beauty
 of the Fashioner 1b
The stuff you keep in wine jugs
Could never break love’s debilitating bile 2a
so pour out an ocean’s measure
of the wine of inner meaning 2b
Make this veiled and frenzied one begin to shout 3a
Rouse this Lordly drunkard from intoxicated stupor 3b
Light up a fire of love
incinerate the entirety of every existence 4a
Come forward step by step onto the lovers’ turf. 4b
You who quest!
Until you are
 effaced
of all traces of the universe 5a
you can never sip the wine
of that Idol’s
succulent ruby lips 5b
Climb onto the apex of this realm
then enter Poverty’s sheltering shade 6a
from here your vantage all around
will be the Realm Eternal 6b
Do not tread here
 if your heart’s preoccupied with care for life 7a
but if you have a heart and soul to scatter,
come forward with your offering 7b
—such is the custom of the quest
 if you long for union with Bahá, 8a
 but if you are not man enough for such a path
be off and trouble me no more! 8b

Now, if you want to know the mysteries of mystic love	9a
open the eye of admonition and close the door to pride	9b
Then you may see the very Mount of Moses move and circumambulate around us here	10a
Then you may see the spirit of Jesus breathless in its love of him	10b
Then you may read the tablet affirming God's Unicity in the two braids of the Friend	11a
Then you may read the scroll sanctifying God's Essence in the two cheeks of the Beloved	11b
Here!	
quaff the wine of bliss from the vivifying fount of love	12a
that you may cast your head in victory at the feet of the Friend	12b
They are dead in this assemblage in the path of the Friend	13a
O Messiah of the age! Inspire us, quick, with your warm reviving breath	13b
That the birds of existence may soar beyond the body's prison	14a
in the placeless space above to the shelter of Him	14b
who holds the power in His hands	14b
Dervish!	
The flames of this divine soul-conflagration have consumed the world	15a
It's now time for you to bring it back to life with this melodious lament	15b

3. An experimental version in Double-Sonnet Form

In translating, if one submits to the constraints of meter and rhyme, one must inevitably sacrifice some degree of precision of the meaning. Whether or not the intangible benefits of sonorous and patterned speech will atone for the loss of literalness is in large part determined by the nature and objectives of the original text. In the various translations of the poetry of Rumi,³⁰ who is said to be the best-selling poet in North America, one may observe two rather contrasting paradigms: those whose aim it is to preserve the precise meaning of what Jalálu'd-Dín is teaching in his verse, and those who feel that the poetry of how those ideas are expressed is of equal importance to the content of what is being said.

What follows is a rendition of the poem into an adaptation of a traditional English verse form, the sonnet, a stanza of fourteen pentameter lines observing a rhyme pattern of ababcdcdefef gg and a meter that is roughly iambic. Bahá'u'lláh's poem in the original Persian has fifteen lines of thirty syllables, or

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about 450 syllables. An English pentameter sonnet consists of fourteen lines of approximately ten syllables each, for a total of roughly 140 syllables. Obviously, therefore, a single sonnet cannot convey the entire line-by-line meaning of this poem. Although Shoghi Effendi has, in some cases, chosen to leave out parts of tablets he translated (for example, the final sentences of the Tablet of Ahmad, which give instructions to convey greetings to various individuals, and do not really contribute to the meaning of the prayer), it seemed to me that this poem should be translated without altering its narrative progression or excising any of the matters it covers.

I have attempted to do so in the sonnet doublet that follows: two sonnets joined together by a final couplet, for a total of thirty lines. A more capable poet might produce better results, but this will at least provide the reader with a comparand for the two preceding versions, to illustrate by example what might be gained, as well as what is lost, in choosing to translate a traditional Persian verse form into a traditional English verse form.

Cupbearer, rend the Ever Unseen's veil—
and let me quaff the Maker's wine celestial
With what you keep in kegs, love's bile won't heal
pour out a sea of Spirit's vintage special
to make this frenzied but concealed one stir,
to rouse him from divine inebriation!
Light up a blaze of love, burn up the world
then enter in the lovers' habitation.
You must first die to attributes this-worldly
to taste that Idol's wine-drenched ruby lips.
Pass earthly realms and enter Poverty
whose refuge over realms eternal looks.
If your heart loves dear life, step no farther;
But come on if you've life and heart to offer!

Such is the custom of the path that joins
Bahá; be off if you can't take the pain.
But if to learn Love's secrets your heart pines
—turn back from pride with eyes to wisdom open
then you may see Mount Sinai circling round
and feel Christ's spirit spiring for the Friend
whose tresses spell God's Unity as found
on cheeks like pages sanctified from sin
From love's life-giving spring drink blissful wine
And cast your head in victory at his feet
Inspire these folk, Messiah of the Time,
who tread so lifeless down the Friend's own street ,
with living breath, to break the body's cage
and soar like birds to God's abiding place

Dervish, divine fire's scorched all souls, burnt worlds!
Revive them now with this lament of yours...

Notes

- 1) A provisional translation of “Halih, halih yá bishárát” was offered by Stephen Lambden in *Bahá’i Studies Bulletin* 2:3 (December 1983): 105-112. A revised version of this now appears at www.bahai-library.org/provisionals/hallelujah.html, along with another (more metrical) version by Sen McGlinn. Most of Bahá’u’lláh’s prayers observe some degree of rhymed prose (*sa’j*), but he also authored a number of heavily cadenced, rhyming, litany-like prayers, such as “The Tablet of the Holy Mariner,” the Long Healing Prayer (*‘Anta’l-Káfi Anta’sh-Sháfi*), or “Bulbul al-firáq” (which has been translated by Juan Cole as “Nightingale of Separation” at <http://www.bahai-library.org/provisionals/nightingale.separation.html>).

- “Halih, halih yá bishárát” seems a closer approximation than these of what would traditionally have been categorized as verse (*nazm*). We might even choose to see it as an example of experimentation with the traditional verse foot, similar in some respects to the *mustazád* form, to the *tasníf*s of the Constitutional period, or even to the mixed and truncated meters of Nimá Yúshij, who is usually credited as the father of the modern free verse forms which have developed since the 1920s.
- 2) Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1944), pp. 123 and 121, respectively. See also Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh: Baghdad, 1853-63*, vol. 1, 3rd rev. ed., (Oxford: George Ronald, 1976), pp. 45-6 (*Rashh-i-Ámá*), and 62-64 (*Qasídih*).
 - 3) A provisional rhyming translation of the “Qasídiy-i Varqá’iyyih” has been undertaken by Juan R. Cole (see <http://bahai-library.org/provisionals/ode.dove.html>); Brian Miller offers an unrhymed free verse translation in his Ph.D. dissertation (U.C. Berkeley, 2000). “Rashh-i-ámá” was translated by Stephen Lambden in *Bahá’í Studies Bulletin* 3:2 (1984).
 - 4) Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh: Adrianople, 1863-68*, vol. 2 (Oxford: George Ronald, 1977), pp. 29-54. A provisional blank verse translation with annotations of Bahá’u’lláh’s *Mathnaví-yi mubárák* appears in *Bahá’í Studies Review* 9 (1999-2000): 126-157.
 - 5) In the multi-volume anthology of the writings of the “Central Figures” of the Bahá’í Faith *Má’idiy-i ásmání*, ed., ‘Abd al-Hamid Ishráq-Khávari ([Tehran]: Muássisiy-i Milliy-i Matbú’át-i Amrí, 129 B.E. / 1972 A.D), v. 4, pp. 176-211. Excerpts from the *Mathnaví-yi Mubárák* and other poems of Bahá’u’lláh are given by Fadil Mazandarani in his *Zuhúr al-Haqq*, v. 4, pp. 139-43, which is available in facsimile on the web at <http://www2.h-net.msu.edu/~bahai/arabic/vol2/tzh4/tzh4.htm> (I am grateful to Juan Cole for pointing out this reference in response to a query I posted on the Tarjuman discussion list).
 - 6) See my introduction to and provisional verse translation of Bahá’u’lláh’s *Mathnaví-yi Mubárák* in “Poetry as Revelation” in *Bahá’í Studies Review* 9 (1999-2000): 101-157. Mazandarani in *Zuhúr al-Haqq*, (op. cit.), v. 4, pp. 139-41, apparently dates the *Mathnaví* to the Sulaymáníyyih period.
 - 7) Mazandarani, *Zuhúr al-Haqq*, (op. cit.), 4:117.
 - 8) *God Passes By*, 120.
 - 9) *God Passes By*, 124. It might be pointed out that etymologically, the word *darvish* means “poor person.”
 - 10) *God Passes By*, 120.
 - 11) The colophon, which appears to have been added when the book was originally composed, uses the terms *nuzzila* and *manzúl*, Koranic terms for revelation “sent down” by God. It also states that it was revealed by the Bá and Há, an allusion to the letters of Bahá. The introductory paragraph in Arabic to the *Hidden Words (Kalimát-i mahnúnih)*, also uses this Koranic vocabulary of revelation (*nuzzila*, what was sent down of old).
 - 12) Ishráq-Khávari, ed., *Má’idiy-i ásmání*, 4: 178, 180, 184, 187, 192, 194, 196 and 210.
 - 13) This motif of Bahá’u’lláh as the flutist blowing through the reed pipe is developed more fully later towards the end of his *Mathnaví-yi Mubárák*, where it alludes to the opening lines of Jalál al-Dín Rúmí’s *Mathnaví-yi Mánavi*. The pen in pre-modern times was also cut from bamboo reed, like the flute, and carved on one end into a nib, which was dipped in ink. Hence, the pen and the pipe are both made of a hollow reed.
 - 14) For further information about these Sufi orders in Iraq, see my “Bahá’u’lláh’s *Mathnaví-yi Mubárák*: introduction and provisional verse translation” in *Bahá’í Studies Review* 9 (1999/2000), 109-110, which in turn draws upon Juan R. Cole, “Bahá’u’lláh and the Naqshbandi Sufis in Iraq, 1854-56 in J. Cole and Moojan Momen, eds., *From Iran East and West: Studies in Bábi and Bahá’í History*, vol. 2 (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1984), pp 1-28, and the articles “Bahá al-Dín Naqshband” and “Baghdadi, Mawlâná Khálid Ziá al-Dín” by Hamid Algar in *Encyclopædia Iranica*.
 - 15) In poems with a refrain (*radíf*), the rhyme appears as the final syllable in each line just prior to the repeated refrain.
 - 16) *Má’idiy-i ásmání*, 4:194-6. This first line would appear to be a combination of feet from the *muḍarí’* and *mujtathth* (or possibly *sarí’*) meters, but does not conform to one of the accepted meters.
 - 17) The text comes from *Má’idiy-i ásmání*, 4: 209-10.
 - 18) *Safrá’*, or yellow bile, is one the four humors in traditional Galenic medicine. Love sickness was believed to result in an excess of this bile, which would turn the pining lover’s face pale or jaundiced. One of the other humors, *sawdá’*, or black bile, is also associated with the melancholia of love sickness.
 - 19) *Mastúr-i shaydá’i* might be understood as one veiled/hidden and mad (with love), or it might be understood as one veiled by the madness of love.
 - 20) The theme and wording of this line is similar to the sentence in which the wayfarer enters into the Valley of Love in Bahá’u’lláh’s *Seven Valleys*. *Fawran bi vādíy-i ‘ishq qadam gudhárád va az nár-i ‘ishq bi-gudázad*, and a bit further on, *nár-i ‘ishq bar afrúzád*, which in the translation of Marzieh Gail and Ali Kuli Khan, *The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1945), p. 8, reads, “...he shall straightaway step into the valley of Love and be dissolved in the fire of love,” and “the fire of love is ablaze.”
 - 21) *Mard-i ráh* suggests a traveler on the Sufi path, one on the spiritual or even mystic quest.
 - 22) *Faqr* (poverty—being poor in the things of the self and of this world) is a station along the Sufi path; Bahá’u’lláh includes it as the seventh and final station in his *Seven Valleys*, as *Faqr-i haqíqí va faná-yi aslí*, “True Poverty and Absolute Nothingness” in the Gail and Khan translation, *Seven Valleys*, p. 36. Line five alludes to the need to become *fání*, usually translated in western works on Sufism as “annihilated,” but which Gail/Khan rendered in its noun form *faná* as “nothingness.” It may be more accurate to describe this state as effacement of the individual personality in the Godhead.
 - 23) The word Bahá here would probably have been taken in Sulaymáníyyih as an allusion to Bahá al-Dín Naqshband, as

A Short Poem by “Darvish” Muhammad

- noted above, since Bahá'u'lláh was living there incognito as “Dervish Muhammad.” However, when shared with a Bábi audience, as they later must have been in Baghdad, this would certainly have been seen as a reference to Bahá'u'lláh.
- 24) See the similar theme of opening one eye and closing the other in the *Hidden Words*, Persian #12.
- 25) “Him” would appear to allude to the divine “Friend,” who has until now been veiled in the Unseen Realm.
- 26) *Daftar* means an album or small book, but seems to suggest a sacred writing here, hence “Tablet,” though the words usually so translated by Shoghi Effendi are *lawh* or *súrih*.
- 27) *Mushaf* is actually a codex, or a manuscript book, but it has a particular association with the Koran or sacred scripture, and is not the typical word for book (*kitáb*). In English, scroll seems to better suggest the sacred book (through its association with the Torah).
- 28) Bahá'u'lláh here juxtaposes two terms from Islamic theology, *tawhíd* (the affirmation of the absolute unity of God; here translated as “affirming the Divine Unity”), and *tajríd* (sanctification of God from all attributes, and contemplation of the abstract divine essence; here translated as “God’s sanctified Essence”). Bahá'u'lláh pairs these two words in the rhyming position in line 63 of his *Mathnaví-y-i Mubáarak*.
- 29) In this hemistich, the meter of the poem changes to | - - | | - - | | - - | | - - | |. As noted above, the classical rules of prosody do not allow for this variation.
- 30) Caveat lector: Many, perhaps even most, of those who have published “translations” of Rumi actually know no Persian; they rework the translations already done by others into a particular vision and version of what is poetically successful. It stands to reason that those who, out of ignorance, do not feel the constraints and ambiguities of the original language are less apt to feel this tension between fidelity and poetic beauty.

The Tablet of Unity (Lawḥ-i Ittiḥád) –A Provisional Translation

by Moojan Momen

The Tablet of Unity is a tablet of Bahá'u'lláh dealing with the subject of unity and describing various types of unity that may be attained.

It is usually considered that this tablet belongs to the 'Akká period.¹ The tablet is stated to have been addressed to Sayyid Asadu'lláh of Rasht, the fourth of five brothers known as Sádát-i Khams. If this attribution is correct, and it seems to be well supported in that it is given in several sources,² this would place the tablet firmly in the 'Akká period since the five brothers were only converted by 'Alí Ashraf Láhijání, known as 'Andalíb, in Rasht in about 1296 (c. 1879).³

At first, it may appear confusing that there are several addresses to the “people of the Bayán” where one would expect, in a tablet of the 'Akká period, the “people of Bahá” to be addressed. It must be remembered, however, that Sayyid Asadu'lláh of Rasht was particularly affected by Azalí activities in Qazvin. Samandar has described in his narrative how, shortly after his conversion, Sayyid Asadu'lláh moved to Qazvin. Here, the Azalís discovered that he was a Bahá'í and attempted to shake his faith. One of them sent his son to be a servant in Sayyid Asadu'lláh's house and thus obtained an entrance to the house. They then began to speak to Sayyid Asadu'lláh until they had caused severe doubts to arise in his mind. Samandar became aware of the situation and asked to be present on an occasion when the Azalís were at Sayyid Asadu'lláh's house. Samandar then proceeded to answer them point by point from the text of the Bayán. As a consequence, Sayyid Asadu'lláh's faith was restored.⁴

The five brothers were merchants and had obtained Russian protection. When Sayyid Asadu'lláh returned to Rasht, he was able, together with one of his brothers, to negotiate a contract with the holder of the Imperial concession for the surfaced road between Anzali and Tehran for the provision of traveller's services along the route—rest-houses, food, accommodation, etc. As a result of this he became very rich.⁵

In this tablet, Bahá'u'lláh deals with six types of unity. The word used for type is “rutbah” in some places and “maqám” in others.

A. Unity of Religion. Bahá'u'lláh says that when the believers are united, this leads to the victory of the cause of God. Furthermore, he asserts that if all of the people in a country are united in religion, the government of that country need interfere very little in the social affairs of that country.

B. Unity of Words. Bahá'u'lláh appears to require that the Bahá'ís be united in their public position. In other words, the message is that they should be one in the message that they give. He states that what is said should be with wisdom and gives the example that he also uses in the Lawḥ-i Maqṣúd of giving milk to babes. But ultimately, Bahá'u'lláh asserts that in this dispensation, it is deeds rather than words that will bring triumph to the Cause of God

C. Unity of Ritual Acts. Although it is tempting and possible to translate this as oneness of deeds or actions, it would appear, from the examples that he gives, that Bahá'u'lláh has the specific meaning of ritual acts in mind when he writes of ittiḥád-i ámál. He states that in Islam, different ways of doing the rituals, such as the obligatory prayer, have led to differences arising among the believers and ultimately to disunity.

D. Unity of Rank or Station. By this Bahá'u'lláh means that the Bahá'ís should regard themselves as all equal in rank. He states that it is the fact that some have regarded themselves superior to others that has led to the weakening and downfall of other religions. In particular, he condemns the religious leaders.

E. Unity of Wealth, and

F. Unity of Souls. Bahá’u’lláh considers these two unities together. He says that the mere sharing of what one has is not sufficient, one should prefer others over oneself. This is the way towards that unity of souls, which is the ultimate aim. A situation which Bahá’u’lláh characterises as being one where “all should gather around and cling to the Love of God and the Word of God.”

Issues Raised

A number of important issues are raised by this tablet, issues that are foundational to the Bahá’í Faith. It is of interest to see the way that the themes initiated by Bahá’u’lláh in this tablet were later developed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi.

1. Unity as a value. The first issue raised is the question of the value assigned to unity. One of the distinctive features of the Bahá’í religion is the fact that a higher value is placed on unity than on other values and principles that have had great importance in religious and secular history. When one is wanting to make decisions and seeking guidance in the scriptures of a religion, either as an individual or as a community, one frequently finds oneself in a situation where one value leads one to contemplate one course of action, while a different value leads one to propose a different course of action. In such situations, it is necessary to set one’s values in a hierarchy.

In this tablet, Bahá’u’lláh gives an evaluation of unity as a higher value than the freedom to speak one’s mind and put forth one’s view. This latter freedom is accorded the very highest position in the hierarchy of values of the Western liberal Tradition. Thus in this tablet Bahá’u’lláh sets himself decisively apart from that Tradition. There are passages in the authoritative Bahá’í texts that assert the right of the individual to express his or her views, passages summarised by Shoghi Effendi thus:

Let us also remember that at the very root of the Cause lies the principle of the undoubted right of the individual to self-expression, his freedom to declare his conscience and set forth his views. (Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá’í Administration*, pp. 63-4)

In this tablet, however, Bahá’u’lláh appears to be saying that this right of the individual is a secondary right and should be subservient to the higher principle of the need to maintain unity in the community. In other words that one is free to express one’s view as long as it is in a situation and under circumstances where the exercise of that right does not threaten the unity of the community. Otherwise one must exercise prudence (*hikmat*).⁶

We see this clearly set forth in this tablet but also in other tablets of Bahá’u’lláh. It is followed up by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá when he speaks of the fact that “If they agree upon a subject, even though it be wrong, it is better than to disagree and be in the right, for this difference will produce the demolition of the divine foundation.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í World Faith*, pp. 411-412). From this principle in the writings of Bahá’u’lláh, from this idea of the need for unity in speech, we can also discern the roots of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s ruling that all Bahá’í writings should be subject to review as a temporary measure—this being again a matter of ensuring unity of speech in the community.

2. Station, Rank and Leadership of the Community. The second issue that is raised in this tablet is that of station and rank. In this tablet, perhaps more clearly than any other tablet, Bahá’u’lláh emphasises two interrelated teachings that are very distinctive to his religion. The first is the prohibition on any religious professionals in the Bahá’í Faith. The second is absence of any ranking or stations in the Bahá’í community. In this tablet Bahá’u’lláh emphasises that every Bahá’í is to be regarded as being of equal rank to every other Bahá’í. More importantly, Bahá’u’lláh urges the individual Bahá’í not to consider himself or herself superior in any way to fellow-believers. No one should consider themselves to be “more learned, more favoured, more accomplished, more righteous or more exalted” than any other Bahá’í.

An extension of this teaching of the equality of rank of every Bahá’í is the prohibition that Bahá’u’lláh makes more clearly in other writings on any form of priesthood, monasticism, or other forms of religious leadership. Rank and station inevitably lead to pride and arrogance, and this pride blinds one to the truth. Hence it is that the *ulama* of Iran have persecuted the followers of the religion of God. Shoghi

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Effendi develops this theme when he writes that those who are elected to administer the affairs of the Bahá'í community should:

They should never be led to suppose that they are the central ornaments of the body of the Cause, intrinsically superior to others in capacity or merit, and sole promoters of its teachings and principles. They should approach their task with extreme humility, and endeavour by their open-mindedness, their high sense of justice and duty, their candour, their modesty, their entire devotion to the welfare and interests of the friends, the Cause, and humanity, to win not only the confidence and the genuine support and respect of those whom they should serve, but also their esteem and real affection. (Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 64)

3. The Covenant. The third issue that is touched upon tangentially in this tablet is that of the Covenant. Although the tablet does not refer directly to the issue of the Covenant, we can see how Bahá'u'lláh's concern for unity would raise the question of what was to be the focal point of unity and loyalty in the new religion. Christianity was based around intellectual loyalty to theological and doctrinal formulations, which were summarised in creeds. Islam was based around a more practical loyalty focussed on a way of life formulated around the Sharí'ah. What was to be the basis of the unity of Bahá'u'lláh's religion?

There is also the matter of the third type of unity that Bahá'u'lláh mentions—unity of ritual acts. If such a unity is to be achieved and yet the Bahá'í community is not to have the equivalent of priests or *mujtahids* that can rule on such matters, then the question of religious authority needs to be settled.

These questions were answered by Bahá'u'lláh through the establishment of the Covenant appointing 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the focal point towards which all Bahá'ís should turn. Bahá'u'lláh saw this as the way of achieving the last unity that he described in this tablet—the unity of souls.

Text used: Adíyyah Ḥaḍrat-i Maḥbúb (original edition: Faraju'lláh al-Kurdí, Egypt, 76 B.E./1920; reprint Germany 1980), pp. 388–406. Text also to be found in Mihrábkhání, *Kháندان Sádát-i Khams*, pp. 89–93 (calligraphy of Amanu'llah Muqín).

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He is God! Exalted be He in Wisdom and Exposition!

A letter has been received by this Wronged One from one of the Sayyids⁷ who have turned towards God, have listened and responded to their Lord, the Compassionate, the All-Bountiful. All [of them] have been remembered in the presence of this Resplendent Beauty and I ask God (*Ḥaqq*) to confirm [them] all in that which will cause them to be remembered for ever.

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. [p. 389]

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.⁸ Each person who is attentive attains to the knowledge of God, except those who are utterly distant from the Mercy of God. They indeed are fully deserving of anger and vehement opposition. Such persons are, in any case, forbidden and barred.

And another kind of unity is unity in speech. And this is very necessary. For example, consider that if two of the chosen ones [p. 390] of God should come to a town and should speak about the same matter and disagree, this would be the cause of disunity. It would cause them and those around them to be deprived and debarred from the bounties of unity which have been revealed by the Pen of the Lord of Being. That which aids the One True God has always been and is words (*bayán*), but in this most mighty dispensation, deeds and a goodly character are the hosts of the one True God and are responsible for the

triumph of the Cause. If words are used to a due extent, they can be Divine mercy, but if they exceeds that, they become the cause of devastation. In our tablets, we have exhorted all with words within which is concealed the effect of [p. 391] milk, such that it may educate the children of the world and cause them to reach maturity. Words, in every station, have an evident state and a clear effect, and there emanates from them the fragrance of either good or evil.

And in another respect unity in [ritual] acts is intended. For any difference in these is the cause of disunity. When this wronged one was being exiled from Zawrá (Baghdad) to Edirne, we entered a mosque, on the way, where we saw different forms of the obligatory prayer being performed. Although all were agreed on the words of the prayer, yet each was different from the other for some reason. If the people of the Qur’án [p. 392] had truly acted in accordance with what was revealed in the Qur’án, then everyone on earth would have attained to the honour of becoming a believer. But differences in [ritual] acts resulted in differences in the cause, and this weakened the Cause. One group prays with hands closed and another with hands open; one group gives greetings while saying the shahádah, while another says “as-salám.” And besides this, one group dances and says this is remembrance of God. We take refuge in God! God is sanctified and detached from any such remembrance.

The Holy Law (*Sharí‘ah*) of the Messenger of God may be likened to an ocean [p. 393] from which innumerable gulfs branch out. And this is the cause of the weakness of the Sharí‘ah of God among the peoples. Until now no one, not kings nor subjects nor the indigent have understood the reason for this, nor have they appreciated how to regain that power that has vanished and the learning that has fallen away. Thus one gulf is Shí‘a, one gulf is Sunni, one Shaykhi, another Shah Ni‘matulláhi, one Naqshbandi, another Malámatí, one Jalálí, another Rifá‘í, and yet another Khárábátí. Thus are multiplied the innumerable pathways [p. 394] to hell. Thus do the stones weep and the Pen of the All-High laments. Seest thou what has befallen a Shari‘ah whose light illumined the world and whose fire, that is to say the fire of its love, was the guide of its peoples. Well is it with those who ponder upon these matters and investigate then and are fair in their judgement. Thus did this difference in rituals become the cause of the shaking of the foundations of the Cause of God.

O people of the Bayán! Listen to the call of this Wronged One. Do not afflict yourselves with the like of what has happened to previous religions. Verily doth He reveal the evidence and make clear the straight path. Beware of disputing about what has been revealed from the heaven of the Will of Thy Lord, the All-Powerful, [p. 395] the Almighty.

By the Eternal God! If a single person could be seen who spoke the truth or an upright person could be found, this servant would not have spoken a word—in other words the One True God would not have delivered him over to this people, that is to say the people of the Bayán. Let those possessed of insight take warning!

Purify and sanctify your hearts and your inner beings with the living waters that flow forth from the pen of the All-Merciful. And busy yourselves with assisting the Cause with the hosts of good deeds, a pleasing character, and holy words. Such is the advice of the One True God, exalted be His Majesty, which hath flowed forth from Pen of the All-High and been revealed in tablets.

[p. 396] Another type is the unity of rank or station. This results in the rising up of the Cause and its elevation among the peoples. But if ranking and preference of one over another comes into its midst, the world falls into ruin and desolation may be witnessed. Those souls who have drunk from the sea of the utterance of the All-Merciful and are turning towards the All-High Horizon should see themselves as being of one rank and one station. Should this injunction be firmly established and be realised through the power and might of God, the world would be seen as the Abhá paradise. Verily human beings are exalted, as can be found in every Divine scripture; but to consider oneself as more learned, more favoured, [p. 397] more accomplished, more righteous or more exalted is a mighty error and sin. Well is it with those souls who are adorned with the ornament of this unity and are accepted before God. Look at the ‘ulamá of Iran. If they had not considered themselves the most exalted and most accomplished of all beings, they would not have caused those wretched followers of theirs to curse and blaspheme against the Desire of the Worlds. All humanity is dismayed, nay the entire world is bewildered, at these false and

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neglectful souls. The fire of pride and vainglory has burnt them all, but they are not aware of it and do not understand. They have not drunk a drop of the ocean of knowledge and understanding. Woe unto them [p. 398] and unto what their tongues have uttered and unto what their hands have wrought on the day of retribution and on this day when the people have arisen for the Lord of the Worlds.

If the Pen of the All-High were to wish to describe the types of unity in every way and in every affair completely, it would be occupied for years. Another example is the unity of souls and of wealth and with this example we will end our discourse on unity as a command from us, and We are the All-Powerful, the Unconstrained. This unity is a unity which is the source of joy, happiness and delight, were they to know and understand. Let the neglectful clerics [p. 399] not ask: "To whom does this apply?" It applies to all.

From this unity beneficence arises. And this beneficence has been and is beloved in all of the holy books of the past and future. This beneficence is in terms of wealth, not anything either more or less than this. "And they prefer [others] over themselves, even though poverty become their lot. And they who are saved from the avarice of their own souls, verily, those are the ones who have attained [unto Thee]. (Cf. Qur'ān 59:9)"

This station goes beyond just equality. Equality is where a human being does not debar his fellow creatures from that which the One True God, exalted be His Glory, hath graciously given him. He himself doth live at ease [p. 400] and he doth cause those like himself to live at ease. Such a station is indeed well loved since all will thus partake of ease and receive their share of the ocean of grace. But those that prefer others over themselves have a station that, in truth, is above this station, as has already been mentioned and what the All-Merciful has revealed in the Qur'ān is proof and evidence of this.

O people of God! The most exalted Pen doth weep unto itself over what hath occurred in this contingent world. Matters have reached such a pass that a stagnant pool claims to be the ocean and a lizard doth claim to be an eagle.¹⁰ What hath occurred? What smoke hath encompassed the world? [p. 401] Hath not the fragrance of this revelation been diffused and distinguished itself from aught else? Cannot the straight path be discerned from the pathways of evil? No! By my life! The truth with all of its attributes and actions is and always has been distinguishable from aught else and those who are possessed of insight have not and will not be mistaken over this.

The meaning of the unity of souls is that all should gather around and cling to the Love of God and the Word of God. Anyone possessed of wisdom and insight will affirm the truth of that which hath flowed forth from the most exalted Pen.

These unities that We have mentioned are each an army among the hosts of God, [p.402] a part of the party of God, and a command that is part of the Decree of God. The unity of souls, from the beginning of creation until now, hath been and shall be that which doth assist and bring victory to the Truth—that is to say that unity that is established according to the Decree of God and His Law. In this station, unity does not exceed this degree.

Therefore, take heed, O people of insight! The most exalted Pen, at this moment, doth exhort Its chosen ones, one and all, to unity and harmony that, through this, may be manifested the Decree of God, the Help-in-Peril, the Self-Subsisting. Similarly with wisdom; some of the friends of God have not observed wisdom and have [p. 403] neglected its importance. In some lands they have become the cause of upheaval. Listen to the call of this Wronged One and act according to what has been revealed in the tablets. For as long as thou hast not found a listener, do not open thy mouth. And if thou dost not see a good and blessed soil, do not deposit the seed of wisdom. The word of God should only be cast when the ear and the insight is ready to receive it and similarly the soil [of the heart]. Some have, at times, spoken words that damage the root of the tree.

Say: O people! Follow God and do not be of those who do evil. [p. 404] Fear God and do not be of those who are ignorant! Barren ground is not suitable for growing vegetation and the ear of infidelity is not worthy of hearing word of the Unity of God.

O People of God! From the most exalted Pen hath flowed forth that which is the cause of the life of the world. Everyone must meditate upon God and in particular upon the Unity of God. Let it not be

that, like unto the peoples before you who spoke the words but remained bereft of their meaning, being worshippers of names and devotees of idols. Despite this, they accounted themselves as being among the upholders of the Unity of God and among the people of certitude. The One True God hath decreed that what was hidden [p. 405] of the actions and rewards of these people on the day of return should be revealed; that their elevation, their rank, their station and the extent of their belief in the Oneness of God should all become clear and manifest to the people of the world.

O my name! Convey to the friends of God the greetings of this Wronged One and counsel them according to what God hath exhorted in scriptures and tablets. Well is it with those who have emigrated in the path of God until they entered this most might Prison. They have accepted all for the sake of God and have turned themselves toward God. Their reward is with Him who hath formed them and created them, hath provided for them, assisted them, taught them and hath caused them to speak forth in mention and praise of Him. Verily, He [p. 406] hath power over all things. May the glory shining forth from the Horizon of the heaven of My Mercy be upon them whom God hath enabled to act in accordance with that which hath been revealed in His firm and unshakable Book.

Praise be to God, the Lord of the Worlds! We ask Him, exalted be He, at the end of this tablet, to confirm them, assist them and reinforce them with the hosts of the Unseen and of the seen and to give them victory in His Cause. Verily, He is Powerful to do what He willeth and in His grasp are the reins of all things. There is none other God but He, the One, the Mighty, the All-Informed.

Notes

- 1) Taherzadeh, *Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, vol. 4, p. 191
- 2) Taherzadeh, *Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, vol. 4, p. 191. Mazandarání, *Zuhúr al-Haqq*, vol. 6, p. 941
- 3) Rúhu'lláh Mihrábkháni, *Khándán Sádát-i Khams* (Germany: ‘Aṣr-i Jadíd, 1994) p. 13
- 4) Samandar, *Tárikh Samandar* (Tehran, 131 B.E./1974), pp. 250-51
- 5) Mazandarání, *Zuhúr al-Haqq*, vol. 6, p. 940-41. Mihrábkháni, *Khándán Sádát-i Khams*, p. 43-7
- 6) This matter is expounded on at greater length in several other tablets, including the Lawḥ-i Ḥikmat, see *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 143
- 7) This tablet was addressed to Sayyid Asadu'lláh of Rasht, the fourth of five brothers known as Sádát-i Khams.
- 8) There are two ways of reading this sentence. One way would be to read this sentence as saying that, if the majority of a nation became Bahá'ís, then the Bahá'í teachings can be implemented by the government. The second way to read the sentence leads to the idea that once the people were following the path laid down by God, they would be able to steer their own path and would need little control and guidance from the center. If this second reading is correct, it was taken further by Shoghi Effendi when he laid down the principle that the Bahá'í community should, as far as possible operate in a decentralized manner. This principle has been put into effect by the Universal House of Justice 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.
- 9) Qur'án 59:9 is identical except the last word is *mufliḥún* (successful) in the Qur'án and *fá'izún* (those who have attained) in this text.
- 10) It is possible that the text here is corrupt since the usual expression is a gnat (*dhabb*) rather than a lizard (*dabb*) in comparison to an eagle.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Commentary on the Qur’anic Verses Concerning the Overthrow of the Byzantines: The Stages of the Soul

by Moojan Momen

Abstract

This paper is a translation and commentary upon a work of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in which he give a mystical commentary upon the first few words of the thirtieth Súrah of the Qur’án, the Súrah of Rúm. These words refer to the overthrow of the Byzantines. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá gives the standard Muslim commentary upon these verses. Despite the fact that these verses have an obvious outward meaning, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá goes on to give nine esoteric or mystical interpretations of the word “al-Rúm” and of the phrase “The Byzantines have been overthrown.” In the last of these interpretations, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá delineates the different types of soul: mineral, vegetable, animal, human and the Soul of Láhút, the realm of the Primal Manifestation. With regard to the human soul, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá also lists the nine stages in its ascent. These consist of the commanding soul, the blaming soul, the inspired soul, the assured soul, the accepting soul, the accepted soul, the perfect soul, the soul of the Kingdom of God (Malakút) and the soul of the Realm of Divine Command (Jabarút). This last is the ultimate goal in the world of creation. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá describes these stages in the ascent of the human soul and how progress may be made from one to the other. This work of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá thus performs two functions. It establishes the principle that the Word of God has many meanings some of which are external and obvious while others are hidden and mystical. It is also a manual or guide to Bahá’í mysticism in that lays out the pathway or stages for the ascent of the soul from its lowest state of abasement and preoccupation with the things of the world to its highest state where the human qualities are effaced and only the divine attributes are manifest in the individual, the state where it becomes aware of the secrets of hidden and invisible realities.

Commentary

The work that is the subject of this paper is a lengthy tablet of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in which he gives an extensive commentary on the opening words of the thirtieth Súrah of the Qur’án, the Súrah of Rúm. Indeed most of the tablet is taken up with various interpretations of a single word in this Súrah, the word that also forms the title of the Súrah: ar-Rúm. While the word is obviously derived from the word Rome, in the context of the Arabia of the time of the Prophet Muḥammad, “Rome” meant the new Rome established by the Emperor Constantine on the Bosphorus, the city that he made his capital and which at this time was prospering even as the old Rome on the Tiber was struggling for survival under wave after wave of the barbarian tribes that had brought the Dark Ages to Europe. Thus the word “ar-Rúm” is best translated as “Byzantium” or “the Byzantines.”

The opening two verses and one phrase upon which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá comments in this tablet begin immediately after the disconnected letters “Alif Lam Mim”:

2. The Byzantines have been overthrown

Ghulibat ar-Rúm

3. In a land close by; but they (even) after (this) defeat of theirs will be victorious

Fí adná al-‘árd. Wa-hum min bádi ghalabihim sa-yaghlibún

4. Within a few years...

Fi biḍ‘ sinín

These verses refer to certain historical events that occurred during the ministry of Muhammad. In about the year 614, the Persian King Khusraw (Chosroes) Parviz attacked the Byzantines in Syria and took Damascus. By 616, he had occupied Egypt and most of Asia Minor. He even besieged Constantinople for a time. News of these events reached Mecca where Muḥammad was under great pressure from his adversaries, the idolators of Mecca. What then occurred is recounted in Islamic Traditions thus:

The Muslims were wanting the Byzantines, because they were people of the Book, to defeat the Persians and the unbelievers were wanting the Persians, because they were idol-worshippers, to defeat the Byzantines.¹

It is related that, after the revelation of this verse, Abu Bakr even laid a bet with the unbelievers that the Persians would in turn be defeated, but he said that it would be in five years. When this did not occur, he questioned the Prophet about this and Muhammad replied that the word “*biḍ‘*” means between three and ten. A few years later in 622 the victory of the Byzantines occurred.

Similarly, a Shi‘i account gives the same story:

The Persians overthrew the Byzantines and were victorious over them in the time of the Messenger of God (PBUH). The unbelievers of Mecca were happy at this in that the Persians were not people of the Book; and the Muslims were unhappy about this. Jerusalem was for the Byzantines like Mecca is for Muslims and the Persians had driven them back from it.²

The tablet can be dated to the period before the passing of Bahá’u’lláh, since Bahá’u’lláh mentions it in a tablet dating from the ‘Akká period, and addressed to a certain ‘Abd al-Ghaní. Bahá’u’lláh states that a question about these verses had been asked and that although a commentary on these verses had already been revealed by the Báb, Bahá’u’lláh commanded ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to answer the questioner.³

It is not however certain from reading the tablet that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s correspondent was a Bahá’í. He may well have been from among Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s wide circle of Muslim acquaintances. There are no overt references to the Bahá’í Faith or the Bahá’í teachings in the tablet. Although there are a few references to the greatness of “this day,” these are vague enough that they could well have been written to a Muslim correspondent without occasioning comment. If this speculation is correct, then it is also possible to say that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s correspondent was probably a Sunni, rather than a Shi‘i, and therefore also probably non-Iranian. This is clear from the lack of the usual Shi‘i references and honorifics that would otherwise have been within the text if it had been written to a Shi‘i. Thus, in summary, it is possible that this tablet belongs along with *A Traveller’s Narrative* and *The Secret of Divine Civilization* among those tablets written by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá during Bahá’u’lláh’s lifetime and intended primarily for a non-Bahá’í audience, and in this case, a Sunni audience.

In this tablet, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá gives some ten meanings in all for the word “al-Rúm” and for the phrase “Ghulibat ar-Rúm” (the Byzantines have been overthrown), while in a few of these ten meanings, he extends the commentary to the remaining words: “in a land close by; but they (even) after (this) defeat of theirs will be victorious within a few years.”

As most people are aware, the Qur’án itself lays down the parameters for the writing of commentaries upon it. It states that the text of the Qur’án is divided into two parts, those verses that are clear in meaning and those about which there is doubt.

He it is that hath sent down unto thee the Book. In it are verses with firm meaning (*muḥkamát*)—they are the foundation of the Book (literally the Mother of the Book, umm l-kitáb)—and other verses that are of uncertain meaning (*mutashábihát*). Those in whose hearts there is a crookedness follow that part which is uncertain seeking to cause dissension and trying to explain it. But none knows its explanation except God and those who are firmly grounded in knowledge. (Qur’án 3:7)

Of course the identity of “those who are firmly grounded in knowledge” has been a matter of debate. For Shi’is, it is the Imams who fill this role,⁴ while for Sufis it is usually their shaykh who is regarded in this light.

It is of some considerable interest that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has chosen to write a highly mystical commentary on a text which refers to a clear historical event. In other words, it is not a verse that would ordinarily be regarded as one of the verses that are of uncertain meaning (*mutashábihát*), but rather as one of the verses with firm meaning (*muḥkamát*). Although some doubt has been expressed about the voice of the verb in 30:2 (see below), this is expressed as a minority view and there is, in any case no doubt that the verse refers to a specific historical event.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá then gives ten interpretations of these verses, the first being the outward historical circumstances as described above. The next nine are esoteric or mystical interpretations. Esoteric interpretations of this text are not unknown. The following, for example, is from the Tafsír of ‘Abd al-Razzáq al-Káshání (which is often attributed to Ibn al-‘Arabi):

The Primal Essence with the attributes of knowledge and primacy, just as He hath said. It requires that the “Rúm” of spiritual power be overthrown in the nearest of places to the earth of the soul (*nafs*), which is the breast (*ṣadr*), for the outpourings (*fayḍ*) of the Primal Source necessitates the appearance of the creation, and through this conceals the Absolute Reality. And all that is closest to the Absolute is overthrown by that which is closest to the creation. And this is the effect of the name of the Originator in the manifestation of the origins [of creation] and the effulgences of the All-High upon it, and also of His name the Manifest (*záhir*) and of His name the Creator, and, in summary, of whatever names are in His Primal Presence. And “they will afterwards”—after their being overthrown, “they will overthrow” the Persians of the human, veiled, foreign powers by returning to God and manifesting victory.⁵

Although there are such examples of mystical commentary on this passage, the present author is not aware of any mystical commentary of the length and depth of this work of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá has nine mystical or esoteric interpretation of these verses. The following is a summary of these:

1. “Rúm” signifies the existent realities and those veils which issue forth as a result of the specifications of existence. “Overthrown” refers to the overcoming and vanishing of these with the coming of the Manifestation of God.
2. “Rúm” signifies the forces of self and passion and the peoples of ignorance and blindness which, however, assist the Manifestation of God when he appears and, in doing this are “overthrown” and overwhelmed, which then becomes the source of their spiritual growth.
3. “Rúm” signifies those souls who turn their faces seeking enlightenment when the Manifestation of God appears. They purify the mirrors of their hearts and draw near to the rays of that noble light. They look to their Lord with radiant snow-white rejoicing countenances (for the Byzantines were considered by the Arabs to have white complexions and reddish hair). “Overthrown” refers to the fact that God send them trials and difficulties at the hands of the enemies of God. They in turn will overcome these tests and difficulties.
4. “Rúm” signifies the Divine ordinances, laws and decrees. In the days of the interval between Messengers of God, the people tend to cast the laws of God aside and establish a rule of ignorance. Thus are the holy and divine laws “overthrown” among the people. But after a time, a new Manifestation of God appears and the law of God is re-established.
5. “Rúm” signifies the realities of things and their essences (*máhiyyát*) and the capacity of created things and their potentialities. And the meaning of “overthrown” is that the Divine outpourings and effulgences pervaded these realities, filled them, and surrounded them from all directions, both inwardly and outwardly, on the Day when the Manifestation of God appears. For on that day, God does not look at the capacity of souls and their preparedness. Rather, He pours forth upon them His Grace and Beneficence even if they have no capacity.

6. "Rúm" signifies speculative opinion and logical proofs, which in the days prior to the appearance of the Manifestation of God are the only proofs available to people for the existence of God. When, however, the Manifestation of God appears, the veils of such speculative thought and reasoning are rent asunder and the banners of proofs and intimations are unfurled. "Al-Rúm was defeated": that is to say the drops of the waters of speculative opinion and reasoning vanished in the face of the billowing oceans of the revelations and testimonies of the Manifestation of God himself.

7. "Rúm" signifies the bodily stages and realities of this earthly realm, together with their accidents and specifications. And: "Al-Rúm was overthrown" means that the bodily stages pass away with the manifestation of Word of God. Thus are the bodily things overthrown and dominion belongs to the things of the spirit.

8. "Rúm" signifies the idle fancies and vain imaginings in the hearts of ordinary people for these have supreme sovereignty among the people during the days of the absence of the Manifestation of God. When the Manifestation comes, however, he cause the darkness of idle fancies and vain imaginings to disappear.

9. "Rúm" signifies the stages of the soul and the states thereof, its degrees, its elevation and diminution, its ascent and its fall.

These stages are described by 'Abdu'l-Bahá as consisting of the following:

I. Mineral soul—which is static in nature and does not develop.

II. Vegetative Soul—the features of which are that it grows and develops.

III. Animal Soul—which senses its environment.

IV. Human Soul—the rational soul within which arise the powers of the human being, the outer and inner senses, knowledge, sciences, arts, and wisdom. It is also the place where dark passions and earthly failings appear. The human soul has the following stages:

a. the commanding soul—the soul that commands to evil—is preoccupied with the trivialities of this world, and is infatuated with evil and ephemeral desires.

b. the blaming soul—which becomes aware of the depths of its degradation and of its remoteness from its true goal. It awakes to a perception of its state, is filled with regret and blames itself for the depths of perversity and error to which it has sunk.

c. the inspired soul—as it rises from its lowly condition, the soul comes to understand those things that kept it abased and those thing which will lead to its elevation. It becomes averse to those things that perish and to incline towards those things that endure. It is termed the inspired soul for it is inspired as to that which on the one hand leads to depravation and on the other to righteousness.

d. the assured soul—this is the stage at which the soul is in remembrance of its Lord and sees the signs of God in the creation. As a result it is assured in its faith, its turmoil and unrest is calmed, it has quenched its thirst, soothed its torment; it has changed its darkness to light and unloaded its burdens.

e. the accepting soul—reaches a station of submission and contentment, leaving behind its searching and neediness. It entrusts its affairs to God and is content with whatever God may decree for it. This is a happiness that is not followed by sadness. There remains no will, no rest, no motion, no destiny nor any fate except in God.

f. the accepted soul—in this state all-encompassing blessings and mercy reach it. Insofar as it has risen and left behind its passions and accepted the decree of its Lord, it becomes accepted in the sight of God, and in its state of nothingness, it is approved by its Creator.

g. the perfect soul—here it is characterized by divine perfections and comprised of godly attributes. It thus becomes the focal point of inspiration and the dawning-place for the Divine effulgences.

h. the soul of the Kingdom of God (Malakút)—here the soul confirms in its reality the profession of Divine Unity and establishes in its essence the sign of detachment. It attains to everlasting life and eternal living. It takes pleasure from delights the like of which no eye has seen nor any ear heard.

i. the soul of the Realm of Divine Command (Jabarút)—this is a station far above the understanding of the minds of men, for this station is created out of the elements of power, authority, sovereignty, omnipotence, and freedom and nothing that has limitations or pluralities has any resemblance to it. Here the soul becomes aware of the secrets of hidden and invisible realities. This is the ultimate goal in the world of creation.

V. Divine Soul—the soul of the realm of Primal Manifestation (Láhut)—it is the Universal Reality which brings together all of the revealed Divine realities, the Primal Point from which appear all things and to which they revert. From it there appears plurality through manifestation and illumination, and it becomes divided, dispersed and manifold, and radiates. This station and this soul are completely and forever beyond the reach of human beings.

In relation to his commentary on the overthrow of “Rúm,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says that it means, in this context, that as the human soul ascends stage by stage, it overthrows the conditions of the lower stage in order to attain the higher stage.

It can thus be seen that not only has ‘Abdu’l-Bahá given nine spiritual or esoteric interpretations of this sentence of the Qur’án but he has done so in relation to only one event in spiritual reality—the coming of the Manifestation of God. Presumably ‘Abdu’l-Bahá could have given further interpretations of this verse relating to other aspects of spiritual reality.

With regard to the stages of the human soul, the first three or four (the commanding soul, the blaming soul, the inspired soul and the assured soul) are fairly commonly repeated among Sufi authors and those in the tradition of mystical philosophy in Islam.⁶ The remaining ones are rarely found although not unknown.⁷

At the end of this tablet, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá refers to an alternative reading of this Qur’anic passage that would put the first verb into the active voice and the second verb into the passive. The passage would then read:

The Byzantines have been victorious (have overthrown [the Persians]), but they, after this victory (overthrow) of theirs, will be defeated within a few years.

The commentaries give this as an alternative reading and state that the circumstances in which this reading would have occurred refer to the time of the Battle of Badr when referring to the victory that had by then occurred of the Romans over Persians, the Qur’án predicts that the Romans too will be defeated by the Muslim armies within a few years.

The text of the tablet that has been used for this translation is to be found in *Makátíb ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, vol. 1, pp. 62-102.

Provisional Translation

He is the All-Glorious!

Praise be to Thee, O Lord! O my God! Out of Thy Bounty and Mercy, Thou hast caused the waters of existence to descend from the heaven of Thy Oneness and Thou hast caused the showers of Thine Eternal Bounties to rain down from the clouds of the heaven of Thy Mighty Oneness until, through this most mighty Beneficence, the rivers of Thy most wondrous Grace flowed forth upon the soil of all possible

existent realities in Thine act of Creation. All lands and regions were watered by these streaming, heavenly rivers. Every hill and city was inundated by these torrential celestial floods. And then there shone forth [63] upon them the sun of Thy Mercy from the horizon of Thy holy Might. And the grains, O my God, of Thine Exalted Word and Thy Most Mighty Verses were sown in the earth of human capacity by Thy great Grace and Favour.

These existent realities, however, became differentiated and diverged through the effulgences of the Sun of Thy most great Name. Some of them, O my God, just as Thou hast reckoned according to Thy secret knowledge, are pure and refined hearts upon which that Sun imprinted its signs and from which there appeared traces of its effulgence. It hath stirred up and fertilised their soil and there hath grown forth from them the myrtles of love and knowledge of Thee. They have been adorned by the sacred blossoms of yearning for and attraction towards Thee as like a blessed and fertile land. Some, however, O my God, were soiled hearts obscured by the rust of their vain imaginings, veiled from their Lord by the veils of darkness. No trace appears among them of the effulgences of that sun nor of the signs of the One Who hath created and ordained it. Upon their soil, the grain of the mention of their Lord is as upon desolate and barren land. Thou art not, however, O my God, neglectful in Thine effulgences upon the creation and the appearance of Thy signs among existent realities, as Thou hast said, and Thy word is the truth: "No fault canst thou see in the creation of the All-Merciful (67:3)" and "Your creation and your resurrection is but as a single soul (31:28).

At this time, I ask of Thee by Thy Name, which were it to be cast upon the mountains, they would crumble into dust and flow away [64], were it to be scattered upon the seas, they would overflow, were it to be thrown upon shrivelled branches, they would turn green and flower, and upon the blind, they would see, and upon the dumb, they would speak, and upon the deaf, they would hear, and upon the dead, they would arise, that Thou mayest lift the veils which intervene between Thee and Thy creatures and which prevent them from entering into the wellspring of Thy Mercy, from setting out on the pathway of Thy mighty Oneness, from hearkening to the melodies of the birds of Thy throne, and from drinking from the chalice of Thy love and knowledge of Thee. Verily, they are the lowly at Thy gate and the needy before the manifestation of Thy wealth. For themselves they seek to acquire neither benefit nor harm, neither life nor resurrection. Raise then, O my God, these pure souls to Thee and cause them to ascend with the wings of Divine Unity into the clouds of the highest heaven (*'amá'*) of the glory (*bahá*) of Thy Singleness. Shine forth upon them at every instant with what Thou wishest to bestow upon these compounded realities and these sacred hearts, for there is neither beginning nor end to signs of Thee, nor a first or last to Tokens of Thee. Wert Thou to shed Thy splendour upon the sincere ones among Thy creatures at every instant in all of Thy manifold ways, no reduction would there be in Thine Ancient Riches, nor any diminution in Thy Hidden Treasures.

And so, O my God, be merciful to Thy needy servants. Cause them to be seated beneath the tree of [p. 65] Thy Mercy and feed them from the table that Thou hast sent down from the heaven of Thy glorious Oneness. For verily Thou art the True Giver and Thou art the Forgiving, the Merciful.

Thou knowest, O my God, that this servant is the neediest of all the servants in Thy realm and is the lowliest of Thy creatures in Thy lands. How then, with such absolute poverty, is it possible for me to explain the incorporated and hidden meanings within the realities of Thy words and the secrets which Thou hast hidden from the eyes of the mystic knowers behind the tabernacle of Thy word. Since, however, Thou hast commanded me, I take up my pen trusting in Thee and relying upon Thy Bounty and Mercy. For Thou hast willed, O my God, that there flow forth from this ephemeral pen the seas of Thy Knowledge and the oceans of Thy secrets. Thou dost not wish that the tongue of the Supreme Pen be silent amidst the concourse of Thy creatures nor that the outflowing bounties of the Ancient Beauty be cut off from the peoples. The command is Thine. Thou doest as Thou desirest and Thou ordaineth what Thou pleaseth and the limit Thou hast set is: No God is there but Thee, the Powerful, the Mighty, the All-Bountiful.

O distinguished and excellent questioner! Know thou that from within every one of the Words of God, there surge forth oceans of hidden meanings, without number, and that from within every letter of the verses of thy Lord, there shine forth the suns of secrets, heavenly signs and truths, that none can

number except God, thy Lord and the Lord of thy fathers before you. [p. 66] That being the case how is it possible for ink to flow forth with these hidden meanings, even were there to be oceans of it, and how would sheets of paper suffice, even were they to be as extensive as the horizon? There is no end to this most great gift and no beginning to this most great mercy for it to be exhausted. Just as [God] says, and His word is the truth: “Were the ocean to be ink for the words of my Lord, verily that ink would be exhausted ere the words of my Lord were exhausted, even were a similar amount of ink added to it” (Qur’án 18:109). However, even if all of it cannot be mentioned, all of it need not be left out either. Therefore I can mention some of the hidden and secret meanings streaming from the torrents of the words of your Lord, the Exalted, the Mighty.

Know thou that these holy verses and heavenly sounds having meanings that are outer (*zâhir*) and inner (*bâtin*) and also the inner of the inner (*bâtin al-bâtin*) and so forth endlessly. For the words of God are mirrors encompassing (*muhîṭah*) the forms (*suwar*) of all things. Thus is it that [God] says: “There is nothing dry nor wet but that it is [inscribed] in a perspicuous Book.” (Qur’án 6:59)

1] And as for the outer meaning, God hath announced [in this surah] the destruction of the might of the Persians and the victory and triumph of Byzantium [Rome], after the Byzantines had been defeated and brought to naught at the hands of the Persians—their unity had been sundered and their alliances dispersed. The explanation of this is that in the days when the sun of Divine Oneness was shining from the Muḥammadan point and the banners of guidance were raised over the notables of Yathrib (Medina) and Baṭḥa (Mecca), the dove was warbling upon the twigs of the Sadrat al-Muntaha [p. 67] and the peacock singing in the heavenly sanctuary, the idolaters said that Khusraw (Chroeses) the king of the Persians, who were not people of the book, had defeated and was victorious over the Emperor of Byzantium, who was of the people of the book. Similarly, they said, we will destroy the might (*kalima*) of Muḥammad the Messenger of God on account of his being of the people of the book as is the emperor of Byzantium and we are not people of the book as is the king of the Persians. And so God caused these heavenly (*lâhútiyya*) verses to descend and announced that Byzantium would defeat its enemy the Persians within a few (*biḍ’*) years. And a few (*biḍ’*) means between three and nine. And after seven of those years, God caused to appear that which had been announced by His most mighty Companion (Muḥammad). The Byzantines were victorious over the Persians and their ascendancy was established. Thus was it confirmed to the sincere ones that the knowledge of God precedes all things and embraces all that is in existence, whether of the seen or unseen.

This is that which the hearts of those who write the commentaries hath sung in the gardens of the mighty Qur’án. But other than this they have not penetrated to the secrets deposited therein nor to the stored and hidden mysteries flowing within the streams of the words of Thy Lord the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. And with this they cannot satisfy those who are sore athirst for the living waters (Kawthar) of the spirit from the hands of Grace and Beneficence. And this is nothing for those whom God has endowed with a penetrating vision and has taught them the meaning of His word [p. 68] and has informed them of the true interpretation of His verses. It is therefore necessary that I mention some of the things that God has intended by these hidden verses, these heavenly songs.

2] I say that Rome signifies that station which refers to and relates to the existent realities, to pure being (*ṣarf an-ániyyah*) and to the concealing veils and the woes which issue forth from the specifications of existence. And these are overcome and vanish with the rise of the rays shining forth from the Sun of Truth. And so when the cycle of the spirit has come to an end and the lamps of guidance have been extinguished, and the breezes of righteousness have been stilled, and the winds of faithfulness have died down, and the voices of the nightingales of Oneness in the gardens of faithfulness have become fatigued, and the heaven of wealth and the garden of victories has been transformed into a barren wasteland and the owl hoots balefully from the Tree of Zaqqum (Qur’án 37:62, 44:43, 56:52), then does the breeze of the spring-time of the All-Merciful waft from the Valley of Ayman⁸ the blessed spot, and the Sun of Divine Oneness rise from the dawning-place of the Will of Thy Lord the All-Merciful, the Compassionate, and the clouds of Divine Bounty arise and pour out upon the hearts, souls and the inner realities, causing the soils of capacity and receptivity to become verdant and the earth of knowledge to sprout forth. Then does the blessed tree become verdant from which can be heard the call: [p. 69] “O

Moses! Thou art in the holy vale of Tuwa” (Qur’án 20:11-12) and the fire of reality appears in that “olive tree which is neither of the east nor of the west. And its oil almost catches fire even though no fire has touched it. It is light upon light. God guides to His light whomsoever He wills” (Qur’án 24:35). Then doth the nightingale of inner meaning (*ma’áni*) sing upon the branches with the most lofty melodies.

And it says “The Romans have been defeated in the nearest of lands.” What land is nearer than the realities of things and their specifications? Then the tongue of the Ancient of Days announces, and it is indeed a mighty word, that the King of the Living the Eternal has decreed that every affair should have a prescribed and fixed term. And so at the end of this cycle, there will come days when this shining sun will set and be followed by billowing clouds, and this spiritual spring-time will be ended by darksome autumn, and this lofty garden will be transformed and its trees uprooted, and its leaves scattered, and its breezes will be stilled, and its rivers interrupted and their limpidity (clarity) destroyed. “This is the way of God and thou wilt not find any change or alteration in His way” (cf. Qur’án 48:23 and 17:77)

And so O questioner! See thou with an insight which God created after your outer vision. Is any just person able to say that all of the meanings of the words of God exist with those who cannot distinguish their left hands from their right? No! By the one whom the dove doth mention when it doth speak forth between [p. 70] heaven and earth. On the contrary, it is certain that the meanings will inspire those hearts that are pure and turned towards the Kingdom. Were God to desire it, He would cause one of His lovers to arise and stand upon the center of guidance amidst the concourse of creation and to commenate, with His assistance and power, upon the realities within His verses, giving such meanings as are known only to God and to those who are firmly established in His knowledge (cf. Qur’án 3:7). Approach thou then Thy Lord with radiant face and seeing eye and say:

O Lord! Make firm my steps in Thy Cause and teach me Thy hidden knowledge and Thy treasured secrets and raise me up to Thy lofty Kingdom and Thy most glorious Companion (*rafíqika'l-abhá*). Cause me to understand the meanings of Thy verses so that I may shine forth upon the horizon of Thy Will with Thy knowledge, like unto the morning star, and may show unto the people Thine eternal path and Thy straight way, which whosoever doth tread upon it will reach the Orient of Thy signs and the Dawning-place of Lights. For this is that which will favour me as I contemplate Thy most great verses and gaze upon the signs of Thine exalted effulgences. O Lord! Favour me with this most great gift and this most mighty mercy. For this what I hope from Thee and it is my goal and my desire. O my king and my desire at every stage, and the joy of my heart and the solace of my soul in the daytime and in the night season. Thou art the Giver, the Generous, the Compassionate, the Merciful.

3] And in the station of [p. 71] Souls, thou seest that these Divine verses have holy and heavenly meanings. Among these are that God has intended by the word “Byzantium” the forces of self and passion and the peoples of ignorance and blindness in that it (Byzantium = forces of self, etc.) assisted, at the appearance of His Friend (Muḥammad), the forces of reason and intelligence, with great power until it saw the signs of its Mighty Lord and heard the most sweet Call from the lofty horizon and drank the sealed wine from the hand of the faithful cup-bearer. The sweetness of the wine of the mention of its Lord the All-High captivated it to the extent that it became drowned in the oceans of the Love of God. At this time the reality of self and passion passed away with its conditions and powers at the appearance of the signs of the Absolute Divine Reality and it was defeated and vanished before the authority of the verses of its Creator. However, its state of defeat was the very source of its power, its ability, its loftiness and its might. For it grew and found reassurance in the remembrance of its Lord and through this it was enabled to overcome everything and to encompass, through the power of its Creator and Origin, the realities of the Kingdom in accordance with its capacity and to understand the secrets of its Creator and Fashioner. And what conquest could be greater than this, were people able to see with the eye of God? Indeed were they able to able to soar with the wings of the spirit in the heavens of knowledge they would bear witness that this is the conquering power and the overwhelming might and the triumphant sovereignty. However, [p. 72] when they are concealed behind the veils of neglectfulness and have forgotten what they used to bring to mind, God doth smite their eyes with a veil and their ears with heaviness.

Rise then with power, O revered questioner, and mention Thy Lord among the concourse of the earth and say: “How long will you be satisfied with a brackish and malodorous drop from the All-Mighty, All-

Glorious Ocean which billows forth from His Essence to His Essence and from a sprinkling (*rashh*) of which God hath created all existence, living and enduring, just as He hath said, and His word is the Truth: ‘And We made from water every living thing’ (Qur’án 21:30)?

4] And on one level, God intended by the word “Rúm” those souls who turn their faces seeking enlightenment when the Sun of the Ancient of Days doth shine forth from the Dawning-Place of the Greatest Name. They purify the mirrors of their hearts and draw near to the rays of that noble light. For the noun “Rúm” according to linguistic usage is connected with fine white (complexions) and people of reddish (hair) and pure souls who look to their Lord with radiant snow-white rejoicing countenances. In this is the comparison and the relevance (of the metaphor).

And as for the meaning of His Words, magnified be He: “The Byzantines were overcome,” that is to say that those blameless souls who have effaced their designations and limitations at the appearance of their Revealer so that they have become designated by the attributes of the All-Merciful and they have appeared with heavenly signs—they are overcome in the physical world. God has sent them the winds of tests and difficulties and has thrown them into the clutches of those who have repudiated His Truth, [p. 73], those who have not inhaled the breezes of life, have renounced their intellect and clung to their passions. But when they [those blameless souls] have overcome with respect to the spirit, they will similarly physically overcome their enemies through the power of their Creator. For God has assigned all good for His loved ones in every one of His worlds, even the world of body and memory. Thou dost witness that mention of them dost fill the horizons and their name raises the standards of harmony and through them the world is set aflame and the potentialities of all things is illuminated by the light of existence emerging from nothingness. Through them the stones have been shattered, days have dawned and the oceans billowed; through them the holy laws have been established, the waters have become clear, the outspread tables have been sent down (cf. Qur’án 5:113), the diseases remedied, the dead brought to life, the earth has been made to shake, the heavens have been cleft asunder, the mountains split in two, paradise has been brought close, the trees have given forth fruit, the secret things have been made known, the veils rent asunder, the lights have shone forth, and the signs (*al-áthár*) have been made known.

Then, say: Praise be to God, the Creator of these burning meteors, these brilliant stars, these consummate words, these lofty souls, these singular minds, and these spirits enraptured by God their Lord.

And say: O Lord! Cause me to enter under the shade of the Tree of Thy Mercy. Immerse me in the deep ocean of the Might of Thy Oneness. Sanctify me from all else save Thee. Deliver me from [p. 74] the floods of self and passion so that I may arise just as Thou hast caused them to arise in service of Thee and may stand ready to obey Thy command by Thy Might and Power. Verily Thou art the Giver to whomsoever Thou willest by Thy gracious hand and Thou art powerful over all things.

5] And in another sense, God has intended by this word of the Qur’án, the Divine ordinances (*shará’i’*) and prescriptions (*sunan*) and the laws (*hudúd*) of God and His decrees (*hukm*). For the people, in the days of the interval [between Messengers of God] have cast the laws of God behind their backs. They have forgotten the decrees of God to such an extent that they replaced them and established a rule of ignorance (*siyásatan jahaliyyatan*) and made laws according to custom. They raised the banner of arbitrary and tyrannical decrees to such an extent that they forsook all [spiritual] knowledge and guidance and clung instead to the basest of fancies and passions. They fell from the heaven of reason and [divine] prohibitions and took up their residence in the abyss of error and blindness. They chose the highway of the corrupt and imagined it to be a straight path (*sirátun mustaqímun*). They applied themselves to the idols of luxurious living and did not know the corrupt from the wholesome. Thus were the lamps of justice and fairness extinguished and the storms of error intensified. The sign of tyranny seized power and the traces of illumination were obliterated. The people were afflicted by disasters by night and by predators during the day to such an extent that they forsook the commands and prescriptions of God and abrogated the Divine decrees and laws. Thus were the holy and divine laws overthrown (*ghalabat*) [p. 75] among the people.

Through the power and might of God, however, at the time of the dawning of the Morn of Guidance from the horizon of eternity, the clouds of doubt and error were dispersed and the heaven of knowledge

and righteousness restored. The wondrous light shone forth and the gloomy darkness vanished. The Straight Path was manifested and the Scales set. The Sure Handle, which cannot be rent, was extended and the pollens of the spring of justice and wisdom wafted from the direction of the Bounty of the Preexistent Lord. The trees of the human form became clothed with the leaves of knowledge and Divine wisdom and the Goodly Tree, the roots of which are firmly in the earth and the branches of which are in heaven, was planted. Its fruit came in every season, its twigs and branches stretched forth as far as the horizons. The birds of faithfulness sought refuge and built their nests within the tree. The nightingales of awareness sang upon it the songs of the Friend and the doves of love cry out from its twigs with the psalms of the House of David to such an extent that spirits trembled, hearts were rent asunder, eyes were consoled, souls were rejoiced and this existence became the garden of paradise.

However, thou dost see that there appeared a wild and evil people and an ignorant and detestable group among the people; their ignorance was so great that they were unable to distinguish right from left and they wrote upon sheets of water. They performed every [p. 76] abomination and committed that which even the animals eschew, and so how can they be called human beings. But when there appeared among them the Most Great Friend (Muḥammad), the most magnificent Light, the sign of the Ancient of Days, the most joyful morn, they took refuge in the cave of His teaching for a certain number of days and years until this ignorant people ascended from the depths of ignorance to the summit of knowledge and wisdom and became proficient in the arts and sciences and outstripped the most noted scholars and learned men. They became famous among God's creatures for the specific qualities of humanity and for their divine attributes such that they became a mine of perfections and knowledge and the pivot of the circle of praiseworthy deeds and beneficence. Thus were they victorious as far as the horizons and gained sovereignty over every tribe and people in creation. And so people began to come from every direction to their lands in order to learn knowledge and wisdom. They became adorned with the vestments of excellence and perfections. And all this was only out of the Grace and Mercy of God who sent to be among them the best of creatures with a power which no creature possesses.

6] And in another sense, God intended by the word "al-Rúm" the existent realities, which are revealed by the Divine Names and Attributes, are warmed by the flame of Oneness, are kindled in the blessed spot within the delights of paradise, appear and are seen upon [p. 77] four ancient pillars,⁹ are established through the divine and heavenly scriptures, and arise out of the essence of Singleness.

O would that the All-Merciful would break open from the mouth of this servant the seals of caution and concealment so that I could explain to you, O friend, the stations of the Fire of Oneness and the Blessed Tree and its branches and leaves and the state of the place of Paradise which God has concealed from the eyes of all save those who soar with the wings of victory in the atmosphere which brings joy to the souls. And so inhale the fragrance of faithfulness from the shirt of Bahá which hath been smattered with bright-red blood on account of what the idolaters have done to His effulgent, illumined Beauty—and this after God hath established a Covenant with them in every holy book, scripture and psalm that at the time of each effulgence of one of His Lights and the Dawning of each Sun upon His horizons, they would recognize His Power and Sovereignty and prostrate themselves to Him on the Day when He comes to them in shadow of His clouds and that they should sacrifice themselves at the time of His appearance in order to attain His Presence. What a pity and what a cause of regret for them that they have neglected nearness to God. And so there will come to them an announcement of what they have neglected. Then will their skins shiver, their livers bleed, their hearts melt, their souls mourn and their innermost selves lament. And they will bite their finger-tips out of grief and remorse at what they have done and that they have barred themselves from the table [p. 78] of life sent down from the heaven of the Mercy of their Lord, the Mighty, the Forgiving.

We will now return to what we were mentioning in explanation of the word "Rúm." We said that its meaning was the realities of things and their essences (*máhiyyát*) and the capacity of created things and their potentialities. And the meaning of "were overcome" is that the outpourings of the All-Merciful and the eternal effulgences pervaded the potential realities pouring forth from the pre-existent light, filled them, overcame (*ghalabat*) them, and surrounded them from all directions, both inwardly and outwardly, on the Day when the Sun of the Ancient of Days shone forth from the horizon. For on such a blessed

and promised day, God does not look at the capacity of existent realities and their preparedness. No, He pours forth upon them from the oceans of His Grace and Beneficence even if they have not the capacity for a single drop of its rivers such that you will see the poor man clothed in the robe of His wealth and the destitute beggar wearing the garments of His Might and Loftiness. Just as He hath said, and His word is the truth: “We desire to show favour unto the weak upon the earth, and We make them leaders and inheritors” (Qur’án 28:5).

O Thou who art soaring in the atmosphere of the love of God and travelling upon the sea of Bounty. Arise from the torpor of idle fancies and open your eyes to witness how the Ancient Beauty doth shine forth upon you and upon the whole of creation from the horizon of Bounty. [p. 79] His Countenance doth shine forth between earth and heaven. You will observe the comprehensiveness of the Bounty of Your Lord and the generality of His Beneficence towards those who draw nigh unto Him. You will see how the ocean of His Most Great Mercy billows forth out of the right hand of His Will and you will experience the fragrance of His Most Mighty Mercy wafting from the direction of His Providence so that you will know that, in this day, should a gnat desire to become an eagle or a drop to become an ocean in the shadow of this Beauty, then it would be able to, with the assistance of God and His Power. He hath said, and His word is the Truth: ‘Were an ant to desire to have full mastery over the Qur’án and its inner meaning and the inner meaning of the inner meaning (*fí hukmi sawád ‘ayni há*), it will undoubtedly be able to do so for the secrets of eternity vibrate within the realities of all created things.¹⁰ Therefore say: Blessed be He who causeth His Might, His Sovereignty, His Mercy and His Beneficence to appear in these days within all created things.

And as for His saying, exalted be He: “And they will afterwards overturn their defeat.” That is to say that there will come a day in which the Sun of Divine Oneness will set in the Occident of Eternity, the winds of the spirit blowing from the direction of Faithfulness will be stilled, the lamp of love in the breasts of those possessed of understanding will be put out, the fires of longing in the hearts of the wise will be extinguished, the table of Divine Knowledge that hath descended from heaven of certitude will be withdrawn, the clouds of holiness will be prevented from yielding rains and the seas of Divine Oneness from surrendering the pearls of mysteries. Thus doth this most abundant favour and most great bounty come to an end [p. 90] and this day of lights is turned into darksome night. And if you should find the creation in such a state, then be certain that the morn of certitude is nigh and the day-break of the All-Merciful from the Dawning-Place of Creation and the coming of Your Lord in the shadow of clouds approaches. Then raise your hands towards your Lord and say:

Unto Thee be praise and gratitude, O my most glorious Lord, in that Thou hast created me and sent me forth in this day when Thy Countenance doth shine forth, Thy Beauty hath appeared, Thy Visage shineth forth, Thy Mercy hath preceded all things, Thy Bounty is abundant, Thy Power doth encompass all, Thy signs appear (Thy verses are revealed), Thy Word is exalted and Thy proof is established. By Thy Might! Were I to praise Thee for as long as Thy sovereignty endures, I would not be able to produce a single word in praise of Thee. However, on account of what I have seen of the universality of Thy Bounty and greatness of Thy Generosity, a drop from among Thy servants would be enabled to approach the station of oceans and an atom would be equivalent to the station of suns. Therefore have I stepped before Thee offering my thanks, which are as the buzzing of mosquitoes in the valley or the crawling of an ant along a chain. Verily Thou art the Forgiving, the All-Merciful.

7] And among the meanings intended by God in this Qur’anic word is the station of opinion (speculative thought) and reasoning and the setting up of decisive evidences and logical proofs of the Oneness, the Singleness, the Might, the Power and the Sovereignty of God [p. 81] just as thou hast seen and observed in the days prior to the appearance of the Most Mighty Light from the Dawning-Place of His Name the Generous, to such an extent that no-one had any pathway or any guide to Him except the appearance of those signs and evidences which the intellect and opinion (speculative thought) indicated. And the people inferred from these His existence and steered clear of anything other than this. When, however, the sun of the horizons dawned from the Dawning-Place of the Ancient of Days in the most noble of forms and all existence was illumined by the rays radiating out over all creation, the veils of speculative thought and reasoning were rent asunder and the banners of proofs and intimations were

unfurled and the standards of revelations (*mukáshafát*) and testimonies were raised over the signs of hearts and perceptions. Then were the pure souls (*aḥrár*) able to enter into the presence of their Lord on the day when the earth shook and mountains were cleaved.

Then say: Blessed be God, the King, the Mighty, the Omnipotent who hath annihilated the darkness with light with a Mighty Sovereignty.

“Al-Rúm was defeated”: that is to say the drops of the waters of speculative opinion and reasoning vanished in the face of the billowing oceans of the revelations (*mukáshafát*) and testimonies of He who is a coolness on the brow of those who seek Him with ardor and is sweet water for their thirst and healing for their ill. He destroyed and brought to naught that which is nothing but idle fancies, vain thoughts, false inferences and empty speculations—for the likeness of these proofs before the face of Thy Lord is as the likeness of shadow before the dawning of the sun. For even were there to be logical proofs for It (the sun) [p. 82], they cannot be held to exist in the face of Its effulgences, nor can they be said to endure before Its radiating rays. Indeed, they are veiled from It even were they to be given proof of It. In the opinion of them who have drunk a draught of sealed wine from the hands of the Bounty of His Name the Eternal, the most mighty of the veils of His servants is that they rely on the ephemeral shadow for knowledge of the Sun of the Ancient of Days and depend upon mere traces and seek to give proofs in this way for that which is the origin of all lights. And despite this, they consider that they have reached the center of guidance and are proceeding upon the celestial spheres of the mind. On the contrary, they are plunged in the depths of idle fancies and are wandering lost in the wildernesses of vain imaginings.

Arise then with power from God and strength from His Sovereignty call out to the negligent: How long will you gallop in the deserts of ignorance? The flashes of inner meanings lighten the heaven of the spirit and ignite the horizons with the fire of God which hath appeared from the Sinaitic Tree upon the Mount of Eternity. Verily, O Concourse of Lovers, draw near to it so that you may be warmed by it, be guided by it, be ignited by a glowing brand from it and may hear its sighing.

Say: The eyes of all things have been consoled by entering into the Presence of their Lord while you do not perceive. All created things have been aroused while you remain negligent. All existence has arisen while you slumber upon the cushions of negligence. The tongues of all things are speaking forth in mention of the King of Heaven [p. 83] while you are silent.

If you do not turn towards this Beauty, then to which beauty will you look? If you are not aroused by this call, then by what call will you be aroused? If you are not stirred by this Spirit, by what spirit will you be stirred? Do you count yourselves as being alive? Nay, ye are among the companions of the graves. Do you maintain that you are among those that perceive and hear? Deaf are ye and blind, neither do ye understand. Has the Mercy [of God] not anticipated [all], the Bounty not abounded, the proof not been spoken, the evidences not made clear, the verses not descended or the word not been completed? Have the doves of paradise not sung and has heaven not been brought near? Has the blessed Tree not given fruit and the oceans of mystery billowed forth? Nay, the most mighty battle (*wáqī‘ah*) has occurred and the most great calamity (*támah*) has appeared and all things have been gathered (resurrected, *ḥashara*) in the presence of God, the Protector, the Everlasting, even as the unbelievers are wandering astray in their drunkenness.

8] And among the things that God has intended by these consummate words are the bodily stages and physical (*násútiyyah*) realities, together with their accidents and specifications in their realm and domain. And the meaning of His words, may His station be exalted: “Al-Rúm was overcome” is that the bodily stages pass away with the manifestation of the spiritual verses and the rivers of reality inundate the earths of the pure hearts when the All-Merciful is mounted upon His Most Mighty Throne in the midst of all beings. For [p. 84] the armies of the spirit fall upon and attack the troops upon the Day of the Return with the power of the Lord of Lords. Thus are the bodily things overthrown and dominion belongs to the things of the spirit. And in this are signs for those who discern.

9] And among what God has intended by these firm and enduring words is concerning the idle fancies and vain imaginings in the hearts of ordinary people. For during the days when the Sun of Knowledge

and Wisdom has set, thou dost witness that idle fancies and vain imaginings have supreme sovereignty among the concourse of created things. Thou dost observe that all are depending upon idle fancies for knowledge and to solve problems, even for matters of the holy law and ordinances. They have no capacity to swim in the oceans of knowledge nor to plunge the depths of wisdom. When the Sun of Certitude doth shine forth from the clear horizon, however, the rays of the Divine Beauty doth cause the darkness of idle fancies and vain imaginings to disappear. Then doth the tongue of creation speak forth saying: the Truth hath come and Error hath disappeared. Verily Error was bound to vanish.

O Friend! speak forth with a wondrous tongue: Thine is the bounty, the grace, the mercy, and the beneficence upon this servant who is not worthy of anything in Thy Kingdom in that Thou hast saved me from the wilderness of idle fancies and hast caused me to seek shelter amidst the twigs of the tree of knowledge. O Lord! Cause me to be firm in Thy Love and to arise to assist Thy Cause and to establish Thy Rule. Make me [p. 85] one of Thy banners among Thy servants that I may be a focal point for Thine inspiration and may be assisted by Thy signs. Verily, Thou art powerful over all things by Thy Might and sovereignty, O Thou Beloved of the worlds.

9] And among what God has intended by these comprehensive words are the stages of the soul and the states thereof, its degrees, its elevation and diminution, its ascent and its fall, out of the bounty of its Creator, the generosity of its Originator and the power of its Source. Know thou that the soul has various stages and innumerable degrees. But its totality in the stages of existence is confined and limited to: the static (non-developing) mineral soul, the growing vegetative soul, the sensing animal soul, the earthly (*násútiyyah*) human soul, the commanding soul, the blaming soul, the inspired soul, the contented soul, the accepting soul, the accepted soul,¹¹ the perfect soul, the angelic (*malakútiyyah*) soul [of the Kingdom of God], the soul of the realm of Command (*jabarútiyyah*) and the soul of the sanctified realm of the Primal Manifestation (*láhútiyyah*).

As for “the mineral soul” (*an-nafs al-má’daniyyah*), it consists of intrinsic matter in the form of minerals and this is its perfection, its purity and the effects that appear from it. And so observe the precious stones that are mined; how they are heated within the bowels of the earth until they reach their perfection and beauty through the appearance of this soul within them and the emergence of their essential qualities through this process.

And as for “the growing vegetable soul” (*an-nafs an-námiyyah an-nabátiyyah*) [p. 86], it consists of an essence within which arises the vegetative power through which seeds, leaves, branches and trees grow and develop in that it takes matter and elements and gives these to the trees and plants so that they grow and mature. They grow and extend their branches and give forth their fruits, their flowers and their leaves.

And as for “the animal soul” (*an-nafs al-ḥaywániyyah*), it consists of an essence within which arises the powers of sensing those physical things that can be sensed.

And as for “the human soul” (*an-nafs al-insániyyah*), it consists of the rational soul that is to say an essence within which arises the powers of the human being, the outer and inner senses, the divine perfections and knowledge, the heavenly sciences, the eternal arts, and the hidden wisdom. Likewise, it is the place where dark passions and earthly (*násútiyyah*) failings appear.

Praise be to God for this astonishing sign, this mighty matter, this comprehensive word on the scroll of existence. For thou dost observe that it has various stations, diverse stages of ascent and manifold degrees to which there is no end. It has the capacity to be the mirror for the manifestation of the realities of the realm of the Primal Will (*láhútiyyah*) and the place wherein the divine and perfect attributes are revealed and appear. It also capable of descending into existential darkness, where it is veiled with thick veils arising from [p. 87] its limitations and its specific qualities which prevent it from attaining to its origin and point of return and hide from it the signs of its Creator which have been deposited with in it through the grace of its Maker.

On account of its progression to the stages of nearness and reunion and its descent into the regions of perdition and error, it is clothed in each stage and station in clothes that are different from the pre-

vious. Therefore it is known in each stage by a particular term. For example, in its descent into the lowest stations of animal passions, its preoccupation with the trivialities of this vile world, its infatuation with evil and ephemeral desires, its congealment from the coldness of the contingent world, its extinguishing of the heat of the love of its Lord, the Mighty, the Generous, its fall and its descent into the turmoil of error and its excessive preoccupation with reprehensible and brutish actions, it is known as “the commanding soul” (*nafsín amáratín*, the soul that commands to evil) as He hath said, and His word is the truth: “Verily, the soul commands to evil unless My Lord hath mercy upon I” (Qur’án 12:53).¹²

Then it progresses from this dire state and this base level to a station wherein there comes to it from time to time an awareness of the depths of its embroilment in danger, of its descent into the abyss of heedlessness, its treading such pathways, its self-concealment from its Lord God, its neglect of its Creator, its bewilderment in the wilderness of error and passion, and its forgetfulness of the mention of God the King, the Mighty, the All-High. On occasions, there passes over it the breeze of the perception of its state [p. 88] and it is awoken to a slight extent. It then blames itself for the depths that it perceives of its immersion in the tribulations of heedlessness and transgression and reproaches itself when it sees itself bewildered in the deserts of perversity and error. It regrets its baseness and its vile state in the lowest degrees of error and ruinous passions and its concealment behind the accumulated veils which prevent it from ascending to lofty spiritual stations and distract it from the remembrance of God through the evil whisperings of Satan. And so on account of its regret and remorse concerning its station and its blaming itself it is called “the blaming soul” (*an-nafs al-lámi’ah*)—as He hath said, may His name be magnified: “No, I will swear by the blaming soul” (Qur’án 75:2).¹³

And when the soul progressed from this lowly, brutish and abased state and ascended to a more noble, more fortunate, nearer, concealed location, it was assisted by the confirmations of God and inspired by the contents of its own book—as it is said: “Read thou thy book, sufficient is it for thy soul as an account against thee on this day” (Qur’án 17:14). Then there came to it the signs of inspiration and the reality of day became apparent to it from that of night and it was summoned to the shore of the ocean of knowledge (*’irfán*), was sustained by holy foods from the gardens of paradise, harvested the fruits of the tree of beneficence, drank from the streams of bounty and grace, benefited from the eternal bounty, [p. 89] and tasted the sweetness of blessings. It came to understand the cause of its elevation and degradation, its ascent and descent, and its rising and setting as it ought to be. It reflected upon its state, its plight became clear to it, and this led it to become averse to those things that perish (*fániyyát*) and to incline towards those things that endure (*al-báqiyyát*). It closes its eyes to those things that exist and turns instead to the court of the Almighty, the All-Compelling. It anticipates the call of the Concourse on High and turns its attention to those things that will cause it to ascend until it reaches the throne of assurance and the seat of gratitude. It becomes the focal point of inspiration among humanity. It discovers as a result of its efforts and strivings those beneficial things which will lead it to its purpose and goal. Then it is termed the “the inspired soul” (*an-nafs al-mulhamah*) for it is inspired as to that which leads it to depravation or to righteousness—as He hath said, blessed and glorified be He: “By the soul and what is like unto it, He inspired it as to that which leads it to depravation or to righteousness” (Qur’án 91:7-8).

And in a station which awakens it to the mention of its Lord and arouses it to the call of its Creator from the slumber of vain imaginings and brings its attention to the remembrance of God, the Almighty the All-Knowing, to its arising and ascent to the stations of love and assurance, its immersion in the ocean of certitude, its recognition of the signs of God in the dawning-places of contingent being, the horizons of existence and the breaths of the All-Merciful, the appearance of the evidence of Divine Oneness from the dayspring of heaven, its entrance into and remaining in the heart of paradise, its simmering in [p. 90] the heat of the love of its Lord, the Almighty, the Beneficent, its pathway and passage to God the All-Powerful, the Ruler of Paradise, its setting on the throne of calmness and repose, and its drinking from the chalice of firmness and constancy at all times. Then it is termed “the assured soul” (*an-nafs al-muṭmá’innah*) because it is assured in its faith, its turmoil and unrest is calmed, it has quenched its thirst, soothed its torment, it has thinned and removed its veils, it has changed its darkness to light, it has ended its futility, its shortcomings have turned to perfection, it has pierced its veils, torn

its coverings, revealed its secrets, shaken its foundations and unloaded its burdens. It has reported the tidings that your Lord has revealed to it. Exalted is God, its guide and its saviour, the One Who illumines it and forms it, above all that the ignorant have said.¹⁴

And when it has reached this most mighty and perfect station, this most pleasant, most pure, most sweet destination, and has drunk from these clear spring waters of Sabá,¹⁵ it will attain to the station of submission and contentment, it will leave behind its searching and neediness and will entrust its affairs to God, the Mighty and Eternal King. It will rely upon Him and recline against the cushion of His bounty and beneficence. It will not see in this station anything that is inconsistent with its contentment (*riḍá*) and it does not prefer the greatest ease to the most mighty calamity. Indeed it is content with (accepts, *ráḍiyyah*) whatever God may decree for it [p. 91] and thou wilt observe it joyful and happy when troubles descend and grateful and thankful when the oceans of misfortunes and disaster billow forth. Even were the arrows of misfortune and grief to issue forth from the clouds of destiny and the rains of sorrow and adversity to descend upon it, thou wouldst observe it wetting its tongue with praise of its Lord, the Help-in-Peril, and eloquently expounding in mention of the Generous King.

This is a station which, wert thou to attain unto it, thou wouldst arrive at a happiness which would not be followed by sadness, a joy which is not succeeded by grief, an ease and comfort that does not end in distress and hardship, a prosperity that does not turn to destitution and misfortune, for the might of thy Lord has grasped firmly the reins of affairs. “The earth is His handful on the Day of Resurrection, while the heavens will be rolled up in His right hand. Praised be to Him and Exalted is He above everything that they ascribe as partner unto Him” (Qur’án 39:67). Thus is it that not a leaf stirs upon a tree nor does a fruit fall except by the will of Thy Lord, the Merciful, the Compassionate.

For the seeker in this exalted station there remains no will, no rest, no motion, no destiny nor any fate except in God. Indeed, his essence, his attributes, his being, his very sense of self all fade away overwhelmed by the signs of Divine Oneness, just as the shadows disappear when the pre-existent sun shines forth.

And when his will has faded away and vanished in the Will of the True God, and his will has become identical to His Will, and his pleasure is the same as His pleasure, and the veils have been lifted, the coverings have disappeared, and idolatry (*shirk*) has vanished from the reality of his heart [p. 92], then does there appear in the soul the sign of acceptance. Then on account of its acceptance of the decree of its Creator and its submission to the command of its Maker, it is known as “an accepting soul” (*nafs in ráḍiyyatin*).

Insofar as all-encompassing blessings and mercy reach it [the soul], bounties and favours encompass it, a covering of grace and beneficence enclose it, and God clothes it in the robe of obedience and His favour, the Supreme Concourse addresses it, saying: “Well is it with thee in that thou hast traversed the path and covered the way until thou didst enter into the spring of faithfulness and didst obtain the clear waters of submission and contentment (*riḍá*). Thou hast left behind thy passions and accepted the decree of Thy Lord. Thou hast expended what is thine and sacrificed thy spirit, thy heart and thine inner self upon the path to thy Lord. This then is thy consolation—thus hast thou attained unto this most exalted station and this most glorious company. Thus hast thou become accepted (*marḍiyyah*) and approved in the sight of God, thy Lord, and hast sought the shelter of the bounty of thy Lord, trembling with joy and happiness at His Bounty and Beneficence. Verily, His Grace towards His sincere servants is mighty!”

And on account of its [the soul’s] rising by means of its acceptance (*riḍá*) into the heights of being accepted by God (*al-mir’áj al-marḍiyyah ‘ind alláh*), its Lord, and its being approved in its state of nothingness (*faná’*) by its Creator, it is known as “the accepted soul” (*an-nafs al-marḍiyyah*).

And when it (the soul) soared on the wings of holiness into the atmosphere of this paradise and tasted of the sweetness of the stations of reunion in the gardens of heaven, these illumined and lofty stations were collected within it (the soul) [p. 93] and it arose to this elevated and spiritual degree and there gushed forth from the lofty heights of its reality the springs of the wisdom of eternity (*samadániyyah*). It became the focal point of inspiration and the dawning-place for the radiance of the lights of this effulgence and became content with the remembrance of God the Gracious Sovereign. It has become accept-

ing (*ráđiyyatan*) of His decree and accepted (*marđiyyatan*) in nothingness (*faná’*) at His gate, therefore it is known as “the perfect soul” (*an-nafs al-kámilah*) on account of its being characterized by these spiritual and divine perfections and being comprised of these essential (*al-jawhariyyah*) and godly attributes.

Then is it (the soul) worthy and prepared for entry into the heaven of the Kingdom of God (*malakút*), which is the paradise of the righteous and the refuge of the free whose faces have been illumined by the glad-tidings of God. In it appears the beauty of the All-Merciful and the sign of the Beneficent One. To these stations do His words, may his Grandeur be magnified, refer: “O thou assured (*muṭma’innah*) soul, return to thy Lord, accepting (*ráđiyyatan*) and accepted (*marđiyyatan*). Enter among my servants! Enter my paradise!” (Qur’án 89:27-30). For the garden of refuge, the meads of splendour, the exalted heaven and the all-high paradise are the pastures of the Kingdom of God. In this Day, the doors [of this Kingdom] are open, its land stretches out, its lights shine forth, its fruits ripen, its blossoms open out, its streams flow, its oceans billow, its springs gush forth, its breezes are gentle, its surface is delicate, its doves sing out [p. 94], its mouths smile, its sorrows are made joyous, its lightnings flash, its dawns are filled with light, its birds warble, its palaces are adorned and its joys draw near. Therefore, rise and with the loudest voice proclaim: “Hasten, O ye lovers, to the dawning-place of this most ancient light that shines forth and glistens and head towards this lofty and sublime refuge.”

The soul, when it has entered this exalted heaven, this eternal paradise, has sought the dawn of this most luminous day, has entered this most pleasant, most pure place, has taken on perfections, acquired the illumination of the essence (*jawahir*) of names and attributes, has drunk from this “cup tempered at the camphor fountain (Qur’án 76:5),” has roamed throughout these lands, plunged the depths of these seas, and has been guided to this fire kindled and aflame on the Paran of love, confirms in its reality the profession of Divine Unity (*kalimat at-tawhíd*) and establishes in its essence the sign of detachment (*ayat at-tajríd*). It attains to everlasting life and eternal living. It takes pleasure from delights the like of which no eye has seen nor any ear heard. It drinks from the clear springs which flow from the right hand of the Throne of Reality and tastes of the fruit of the tree growing in the midst of Paradise, stirred by the breezes coming from the direction of the Beauteous One [p. 95], through which the hearts of those who believe in the Divine Unity have been revived and the leaves on the branches of the hearts of the sincere ones have been set in motion. It attains unto the seat (*markaz*) of eternal life (*baqá’*) in the shadow of the countenance of its Most Exalted Lord, such that not the slightest trace of the ephemeral (*faná’*) should be hidden within it nor the misfortune of evanescence or annihilation befall it—just as He hath said, and His word is the truth: “All that are thereon (upon the earth) shall perish (*fána*) and there remaineth but the countenance of thy Lord, full of Glory and Honour” (Qur’án 55:27-8).

And when the soul hath unfolded the wings of the spirit, been attracted by the Joy of God, hath soared to the most exalted horizon, hath sought the most glorious Companion (*rafíq al-abha*), it doth ascend to the divine station of Jabarút (the realm of Command) and is assisted by an overwhelming and all-conquering power and by the intricate and ancient secret and by the noble and mighty mystery. It becomes aware of the secrets of hidden and invisible realities which consumes in envy the hearts of the mystic knowers. It is imprinted by the rays shining forth from the Sun of Truth and by its effects and comes to resemble its appearance and its light in every state and condition. It ascends to a station that God hath made to be far above the understanding of the minds of men, for this station is created out of the elements of power, strength, might, authority, sovereignty, omnipotence, protection, and freedom and nothing that has limitations or pluralities has any resemblance to it. On the contrary it is the very essence (*jawhar*) of unity, the substance of singleness and abstraction, the light [p. 96] of lights, the mystery of mysteries, the furthest tree (*Sidrat al-Muntahá*), the exalted rank, the all-highest station, the Masjid al-Aqsá (the remotest mosque), and the ultimate goal in the world of creation even though perfections have no beginning nor end to them and are beyond all limitations. Well is it with the one who has entered this holy, noble and mighty station.

And as for “the Divine Soul” (*an-nafs al-iláhiyyah*), it consists of the Universal Reality which brings together all of the Divine realities of the realm of Primal Manifestation (*láhútiyyah*) and the eternal secrets, the outer aspect of which is the ancient light and the inner aspect is the most mighty and sub-

lime mystery, the Primal Point from which appear all things and to which they revert, from which they originate and to which they return. Thus is it the Primal Oneness (*al-aḥadiyyah*) in its essence and the derived Oneness (*al-wáḥidiyyah*) in its attributes. And from it there appears plurality through manifestation [is manifested plurality, *zuhúr*] and illumination, and it becomes divided, dispersed and manifold, and radiates . And so the horizons and souls become filled and illumined by it on the Day of the Covenant, and on account of it the tabernacles of unity tremble and are set in motion. From it there grow the branches of the tree of oneness and by it they are clothed in the primal garment and the most perfect light. And from a single sign (*ayah*) from it there appear all of the (Divine) names to which human realities can attain and from a mark (*simah*) from it there grow forth all of the true hidden (Divine) attributes. And so it is the center of the circle of existence through the manifestation (*zuhúr*) of “There is no god but God” and the axis of the sphere of eternity, around which circles [p. 97] the star of oneness and unity, such that all of the hidden realities circle around this point of oneness in the realm of Primal Manifestation (*an-nuqtah al-aḥadiyyah al-láhútiyyah*) and all of the subtle luminous essences (*kaynúnát*) derive from this flame which is kindled, ablaze and speaking forth in the tree of humanity saying: “There is no god but He, the Mighty, the Powerful, the Eternal.”

This Soul consists of the reality of the sanctified persons and true thrones—the horsemen of human intelligence can never gallop in this pasture nor can the birds of the minds of creatures travel in this land. Only the sincere ones among them receive the great bounty of the rays of this most luminous light in their haste and progress towards the state of nothingness (*faná’*) at the gate of the Mighty King. Wretched and condemned are the people who imagine that they have attained unto their highest station when they have not even circled around their inner sanctuary. How can the gnats of ephemeral being (*faná’*) vie with the phoenix of the dawning-place of eternity (*baqá’*). Why is it that for a putrid, salty, bitter drop, they reject the sweet, clear and billowing sea.

To whatever extent they who seek to rise to the highest stations of mystic knowledge may ascend or to whatever high station in the degrees of certitude they that hold fast to the Divine unity may climb, they are only reading the letters of the book of their souls (cf. Qur’án 17:14), only attaining the sign that is refulgent, deposited, incorporated, and concealed within the realities of their own inner being (*kaynúnátiḥim*) and only revolving around the centres of the circles of their own essential natures (*dhátiyyátiḥim*) [p. 98]. And as for the stages that are above their worlds and beyond their attainment, they are not able to seek information about them nor to understand them.

Observe with the eye of reality physical (*khárijíyyah*), created things. You will see that everything else is not able to understand what is above it even were it to progress in its station to the highest degree of [its] existence, even as thou dost witness that the mineral however much it may progress and ascend to the summit of perfection is unable to know or to understand the station of the vegetable. And similarly, however much the plant may increase in splendour and growth, it can never become aware of the reality of the animal. And in the same way, the animal however much it may improve its goodness, splendour and proportions, it will never possess knowledge of the essence (*huwiyyat*) of humanity nor of its realities, states and attributes.

Know thou therefore that, in the variety of their stages, degrees and stations, souls are bound by this condition—that none of them are able to transgress their limits or station. No bird is able to fly above the upper limit of its flight. And if matters are thus among these created, contingent, physical (*khárijíyyah*) beings which share pertinent and similar aspects, then how much more so between the stations of contingent reality and those of the realities of Primal Manifestation, which the human intellect fails to understand, souls become confused in trying to know [p. 99], tongues are powerless to explain and the wings of the birds of hearts and minds are too feeble to fly to the heights of elucidating it.

Let us now return to our theme of the stations of the soul and its degree and conditions, its elevation and decline and its exaltation. We have stated that this most great sign in one station confirms the soul and its degrees and is transformed from stage to stage and from station to station. For in each degree it leaves behind its limitations and its condition. It seizes possession through its efforts of the signs of the degree that is above it and it leaves behind [its former] condition through tests which purify it, refine it, cleanse it and make it detached from whatsoever it not worthy in it in the path of its Creator. And

when it is released and saved from all of the lower degrees and ascends with the help of its Originator and Fashioner to a high degree, it gains a victory over the power of the lower degrees and vanquishes the hosts of the realities of the base states.

Then understand what He, glorified be He, hath said: “The Byzantines were overthrown”—that is to say it [the soul] has overthrown and caused to diminish and fade away “the commanding soul” through the misfortune of the thunderbolts that fell upon it from the realms of the Kingdom and the flaming fire that entered upon it from the repositories of Might and Command (*Jabarút*). Then was it aided by the hosts of guidance and victory and assisted by the angels of spirit and righteousness. It was awakened from its slumber and its negligence and it ended [p. 100] its immersion, its decline and abasement and bore witness to its fall and its lowly condition. Then it called to mind its condition, refined its vision, purified its sight until it came to know its state and what it was that veiled it and hindered it and became a cause for its remoteness, denial, negligence and inebriation. Then it grasped hold of the hem of Grace and Mercy and supplicated God and took refuge in His Presence, until it ascended and was saved from that station and stage and entered the loftiest station. Thus was it transformed in its stations and degrees and was victorious over and over again until it went back to its origin and returned to its center and was clothed in the robe of its perfection and entered the shadow of its Lord, the Seat of Truth in the presence of the Mighty King.

O thou who art kindled and aglow with the fire of the love of God! Know thou that were this servant to wish to interpret this Divine (*láhútiyyah*) verse in all of the hidden stations and Divine realities and in the stations of *Jabarút* and *Malakút*, the existent realities, the seen and unseen worlds, the manifestations of Primal Oneness and the states of conditioned Oneness, the spiritual essences (*kaynúná*t), the foundations of the heart, the stations (*mashá'ir*) of reality and of the soul and that which pertains and is supplementary to this with the most complete exposition and the most perfect explanation, he would be able with the help of God, and His Power and Grace and confirmation. But souls are not able nor do they have the capacity [p. 101] to hear it and understand it. Therefore do we hold the pen back from exposition and movement and give to you these keys of elucidation. Therefore open by the power of your Lord all of the doors that have been shut in your face so that you may be aware of the hidden and concealed mysteries of God, may witness and reveal the preserved and guarded secret, may travel in that spacious and mighty Kingdom, plunge into that swelling and billowing sea and that mighty and rolling ocean, glean from the bright stars of light by the Grace of the King of Manifestation.

By the Lord of forgiveness and the well-known beauty of gratitude! Were one of the sincere ones to turn to God in this most great Day and see with the purest vision, he would understand all of the realities and meanings of every word of the verses of God, the Eternal Protector—nay indeed, every letter and every dot. For realities and meanings in their entirety flow forth within their inner aspects and streams burst forth from them and oceans billow within them. Well is it with those who attain thereunto!

These meanings which we have set forth appear and are made manifest from this blessed verse when we read “the Byzantines are overthrown”—that is to say in the passive form but if we read it in the active form, there appear from it other meanings which there is no opportunity today to explain and make clear and to uncover its mysteries and secrets. We leave that for another time.

We trust in God [p. 102] in all matters and we seek help from the cord of His Mercy and Grace. Verily He gives answers to the questioner and wealth to the needy.

Notes

- 1) Aṭ-Ṭabarí, Abu Jāfar Muḥammad, *Jāmi' al-Bayán fi Tafsír al-Qur'án*, 30 vols., *Matbāah al-Maymaniyyah*, Cairo, 1321/1903, vol. 21, p. 11. Cf. similar accounts in *ibid.*, pp. 10-14 and in Ibn Kathír, *Tafsír al-Qur'án al-'Azím*, 4 vols. *Dār at-Turáth al-'Arabí*, Cairo, 1385/1965, vol. 3, p. 422-7.
- 2) Faḍl ibn Ḥasan aṭ-Ṭabarsí, *Majma' al-Bayán* (Qumm: Manshúrat Maktabah Ayat Allah al-Uzmá al-Mar'ashí al-Najafí, 1403, 5 vols.), vol. 4, p. 295.
- 3) *Athár Qalam A'lá*, vol. 5, p. 47. I am grateful to Dr. Khazeh Fananapazir for this reference.
- 4) *Tafsír of al-Qummí* quoted in Majlisí, *Bihár al-Anwár* 23:191, No. 12, see Momen, *Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, p. 151-2.

- 5) Tafsír al-Qur’án, *Dár al-Yaqaza*, Beirut, 1387/1968, vol. 2, p. 255–6.
- 6) See for example the definitions of three of these from ‘Abd ar-Razzáq al-Qáshání given in footnotes 12–14 below.
- 7) Massignon, for example, gives a similar list of seven stages, which he states is to be found in the Tafsír of al-Qáshání (presumably the *Táwílát al-Qur’án*). This list is the same except that it ends after *an-nafs al-mardiyya* with *an-nafs aš-šáfiyyah* (the pure soul). See Louis Massignon, *The Passion of al-Halláj*, (trans. Herbert Mason), vol. 2 (Bollingen series 98, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 277 and n.
- 8) The valley of the right-hand side, the place from which the Burning Bush called out to Moses, Qur’án 28:30
- 9) This may be a reference to the four pillars or supports upon which religion is based. The Shi’is believed in five pillars (see Momen, *Introduction to Shi’i Islam*, pp. 176–8) but the Shaykhis reduced this to four (ibid, p. 226). The Báb also refers to four pillars: *Tawhíd* (Divine Unity), *Nubuwwa* (Prophethood), *Walaya* (Guardianship), and the *Shi’a* (see the Báb’s *Risála as-Sulúk*—provisional translation by Todd Lawson).
- 10) Statement made by the Báb is quoted by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in several places. See quotation in Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 46 and *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, pp. 126–7.
- 11) Shoghi Effendi translates these last six terms in a passage from the writings of Bahá’u’lláh thus: “Much hath been written in the books of old concerning the various stages in the development of the soul, such as concupiscence, irascibility, inspiration, benevolence, contentment, Divine good-pleasure, and the like; the Pen of the Most High, however, is disinclined to dwell upon them.” (*Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, no. 82, p. 159).
- 12) An example of the standard Sufi description of the commanding soul can be found in ‘Abd ar-Razzáq al-Qáshání, *Istilahat as-Sufiyyah* (trans. Nabil Safwat, London: Octagon Press), no. 245, p. 56: “The Self which inclines towards bodily nature, and commands one to sensual delights and lusts, pulling the Heart downwards. Thus it is the abode of evil, the fountainhead of reprehensible morals and wicked deeds.”
- 13) al-Qáshání’s description of this state of soul is (no. 246, p. 56): “The Self which has been illuminated by the light of the Heart, to the extent that it becomes aware of its habitual heedlessness. Thus it awakens and begins to improve its condition, vacillating between Godliness and its natural state; so that whenever a misdeed occurs through its natural propensity towards evil, it is corrected by the divine admonitory light, and it starts to blame itself and turn in repentance to the door of the Forgiving, the Merciful.”
- 14) Al-Qáshání describes this state of the self thus (no. 247, p. 56): “The Self whose enlightenment has been completed by the light of the Heart, so that it has divested itself of base qualities and has been moulded by laudable moral conduct and orientated toward the way of the Heart, generally following it closely and progressively rising to the sacred world- free from sin, assiduous in its devotions, rising step by step...”
- 15) *Aš-Šabá*, the East Wind. According to al-Qáshání (*Iztilahát as-Sufiyyah* no. 242): “It is the breezes of the All-Merciful coming from the direction of the East of Spirituality and summoning and rousing one to the good.”

“What I Want to Say is Wordless”:
Mystical Language, Revelation and Scholarship

by Ismael Velasco

It is customary for general works on mysticism to begin by a definition of the term “mysticism.”¹ In all of these discussions mysticism emerges, above all, as a form of personal experience, more precisely, as a form of religious experience of extraordinary intensity, culminating in a profound sense of union and identity with the transcendent or immanent Absolute. The experience of mystical union is thus the cardinal pole of mystical experience, giving to the mystic’s quest its meaning, purpose and fulfilment.

In Christian mystical writings the concept of mystical union appears to extend to two kinds of experience: first, the momentary rapture in which all sense of self is lost in God and all the powers of the soul are temporarily stilled in wordless ecstasy—an experience which, according to William James in his now classic and still influential Gifford Lectures, cannot last much more than half an hour, and at most an hour or two.² Secondly, the concept of mystical union is also applied to a less transient and not at all disabling sense of deep union with God which usually follows, or is punctuated by, such raptures, in which the human will is said to become one with the divine Will, and all actions, thoughts, affections, are described as flowing from and tending towards God, resulting in a saintly life characterized by goodly deeds and an abiding sense of God’s presence in oneself and in all else. The technical term sometimes used for the second of these two states of mystical union is “the unitive life.”³

It should be said that although Christian mystics often make clear the distinction, equally often this distinction is blurred in the similarities of language used to refer to both kinds of experience. What is clear, however, is that both states are intimately linked, and, phenomenologically at least, are often considered as different aspects or phases of an ultimately unique experience of union with God.

Bearing in mind the interrelatedness of these two states, we will focus in this essay on the second kind of unitive experience, an experience which we may describe as “abiding” union with God—the quotidian experience of union with God to put it another way—as opposed to the ecstatic flight of union often linked with stirring visions, which is said to herald, usher in, or recur in the course of, the unitive life. More precisely, we will focus on how this experience of abiding union is articulated by a number of important Christian mystics affiliated to the Franciscan and Dominican mendicant orders.⁴ In exploring this theme we will pay attention to the manner in which their formulation of an inescapably personal experience sought to bridge the gap of ineffability to reach an audience physically close, yet to all appearances still too far from their state to share or even conceive the preciousness of their sense of realization.⁵ We will frame this discussion in an exploration of Bahá’u’lláh’s mystical teaching.

While mysticism has often been seen as on the margins of “official” religion, in the Bahá’í Faith mystical experience is seen as fundamental not only to the Bahá’í religion, but to religion itself, universalised and aligned with religious faith. In a well-known passage, Shoghi Effendi writes that “*the core of religious faith is that mystic feeling which unites Man with God.... The Bahá’í Faith, like all other Divine Religions, is thus fundamentally mystic in character.*”⁶ That mystic feeling has given rise in the great world religions to mystical traditions which, in turn, have engendered a rich vein of mystical writing and indeed mystical literature. The Bahá’í Faith, although by far the youngest world religion, has already made significant contributions to the literary corpus of world mysticism, beginning by the great mystical treatises and visionary poems of the Faith’s Founder, Bahá’u’lláh. These works, regarded by Bahá’ís as divine Revelation, have already had a profound impact on the outlook and perspective of the Bahá’í community.

Bahá'u'lláh's major mystical works were revealed in the earliest period of His ministry, shaping in a fundamental way the attitudes and aspirations of the first believers, and through them successive generations of Bahá'ís. Bahá'u'lláh's mystical masterpiece, *The Seven Valleys*, as well as the mystical aphorisms that crown his ethical teaching, *The Hidden Words*, were among the earliest works to be translated into Western languages, both by individual believers and by the Guardian of the Cause himself. It is no accident that from the time of Bahá'u'lláh the genre of mystical literature had already germinated within the nascent Bahá'í community, in the shape of beautiful and intense poetry and prose from Bahá'ís such as Nabíl, Na'im, Varqa, and other early believers. The roots of this poetry, beside Bahá'u'lláh's inspiration and example, lay in large measure in the Persian Sufi tradition and above all in the scripture and poetry of the Bábí religion. Likewise the earliest years of the Cause in the West saw examples of Bahá'í inspired mystical literature among a number of Bahá'ís, most notably in the writings and poetry of the Hand of the Cause of God and former ecclesiastic of Ireland, George Townshend.

At the heart of mystical literature lies an ineradicable paradox: the assertion of ineffability, of the impossibility of description in relation to mystical experience side by side with pages upon pages of precisely such description. Why, if language is utterly inadequate, write treatises of mystical guidance? Why, if the descriptions of mystics fail, do mystics cite each other for validation and illustration?

This paradox, pervasive in mystical literature East and West, is closely related to a similar paradox underpinning the Bahá'í concept of Revelation: the absolute transcendence, the categorical unknowability and indescribability of God-given expression in volume upon volume of revealed words about His exalted reality, will and purpose. Language is simultaneously held to be incapable of hinting at the reality of God, the Most Hidden of the hidden, while being consistently offered, in the words of the Prophets, as a ladder of ascent unto His Reality, the Most Manifest of the manifest.

This paradox, in both mysticism and revelation, finds sublime expression in a tablet revealed by Bahá'u'lláh to Áqá Muḥammad Ḥasan, and chosen by Shoghi Effendi to be the opening passage of *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, the volume of his chosen translations of Bahá'u'lláh's words:

Lauded and glorified art Thou, O Lord, my God! How can I make mention of Thee, assured as I am that no tongue, however deep its wisdom, can befittingly magnify Thy name, nor can the bird of the human heart, however great its longing, ever hope to ascend into the heaven of Thy majesty and knowledge.

..The loftiest sentiments which the holiest of saints can express in praise of Thee, and the deepest wisdom which the most learned of men can utter in their attempts to comprehend Thy nature, all revolve around that Center Which is wholly subjected to Thy sovereignty, Which adoreth Thy Beauty, and is propelled through the movement of Thy Pen.

Nay, forbid it, O my God, that I should have uttered such words as must of necessity imply the existence of any direct relationship between the Pen of Thy Revelation and the essence of all created things... All comparisons and likenesses fail to do justice to the Tree of Thy Revelation, and every way is barred to the comprehension of the Manifestation of Thy Self and the Day Spring of Thy Beauty.

...Whatever duty Thou hast prescribed unto Thy servants of extolling to the utmost Thy majesty and glory is but a token of Thy grace unto them, that they may be enabled to ascend unto the station conferred upon their own inmost being, the station of the knowledge of their own selves.

...Unsearchable and high above the praise of men wilt Thou remain for ever. There is none other God but Thee, the Inaccessible, the Omnipotent, the Omniscient, the Holy of Holies.⁷

Thus not even the words of the Prophets or, in Bahá'í terminology, the Manifestations of God, can hint at God's reality or that of His Messengers. At the most, they can lead to attainment to the true knowledge of one's innermost self. In this context Bahá'u'lláh declares in the Hidden Words: "*Turn thy sight unto thyself, that thou mayest find Me within thee, Mighty, Powerful and Self-Subsistent.*"⁸ The cir-

cularity of the process becomes apparent. Our praise of and contemplation on God leads to a recognition of the poverty of our very words and insights in relation to His exalted Reality, leading in the process to a clearer insight into our own souls—wherein God is manifest. It seems then that the purpose of our inadequate praise of God is, as echoed by the Guardian in the citation above, to attain the mystical experience of union with God within our souls. Language, however, as is made clear earlier in this quote, even from saints, remains a broken yet seemingly indispensable vessel to carry the mystic waters.

The tablet to Áqá Muḥammad Ḥasan makes clear that the paradoxical nature of language as both ladder to and veil from God applies not only to sacred scripture but to mystical literature also—in relation to the “*sentiments of the holiest of saints*” and the “*deepest wisdom*” of “*the most learned of men*.”

This paper will explore in more detail the nature of this paradox by exploring in detail the way in which mystics within one religious tradition use language to describe mystical experience, how that endeavour is shaped by the mystics’ environment and background, and how that process illuminates our understanding of Bahá’í mysticism and of Bahá’í scripture. We conclude with reflections on implications of this linguistic paradox to the conduct and direction of Bahá’í scholarship.

We have chosen to take a very narrow focus on medieval mendicant Christian mystics. The intention is that, by rooting our discussion in a relatively homogenous context, the dynamics giving rise to differences in mystical description may be more readily perceived, and the relationship between mystical expression and social context may be more clearly located. As we explore the experience of these mystics, we shall draw links and comparisons to Bahá’u’lláh’s mystical works.

We begin with general remarks regarding the nature of the experience of abiding union as intimated by the writings of the mystics under review, noting aspects common to all of them before proceeding to discuss some aspects upon which they differ, in order to attempt some conclusions regarding the concept of mystical union and its formulation and discussion by our mystics. As a point of departure, a brief description of the sensations attending the experience in the mystics’ own words seems in order.

Suso writes of intoxication, quiet and freedom: “when the good and faithful servant enters the joy of his Lord, he becomes intoxicated with the immeasurable abundance of the Divine House. For in an ineffable manner it happens to him as to a drunk man, who forgets himself, is no longer himself. He is quite dead to Himself, and is entirely lost in God, has passed into Him, and has become one spirit with Him in all respects, just as a little drop of water that is poured into a large quantity of wine.” “A man’s will fades away as regards volition, in the sense of wanting to do this or that from self-will. He has no activity of such a will in this sinful sense...his life and will and activity are a quiet, untouched freedom, which is certainly, beyond all doubt, his support.”⁹

Jacopone da Todi writes: “In God the spiritual faculties come to their desired end, lose all sense of self and self-consciousness, and are swept away. The soul, made new again, marvelling to find itself in that immensity, drowns. How this comes about it does not know.... The soul that possesses You remains forever pure, does not wound or sully itself with sin. On a height and in peace it looks down on the world below steeped in sin. The sense of self disappears, for it can never rise to this level, where the infinite charity of God engulfs all.... So it is with the soul: Love drinks it in, it is united with Truth, its old nature fades away, it is no longer master of itself. The soul wills and yet does not will: its will belongs to Another. It has eyes only for this Beauty.”¹⁰

Angela di Foligno describes the experience thus: “He is presented intimately to my soul, and when I understand Him to be present, I then understand how He is present in all nature, how in all things He has being.... And God presents Himself with great illumination and truth and divine grace. So that the soul, seeing Him thus, can in no wise offend.... And although I can experience sadness and joy exteriorly, I cannot interiorly; for in my soul is a room into which no joy or sadness, nor pleasure of any kind, neither virtue nor anything else, can enter. But into that room enters the All-Good...there remains continually with me a Divine unction, which is a supreme unction, and which I may have at all times of the day.”¹¹

We could add quotes from our remaining authors, but it is hoped that these excerpts, characteristic of the genre as a whole, will suffice to indicate the tenor of their descriptions.¹²

Bahá'u'lláh's *The Seven Valleys* echo these descriptions of the unitive life:

Whensoever the light of Manifestation of the King of Oneness settlenth upon the throne of the heart and soul, His shining becometh visible in every limb and member. At that time the mystery of the famed tradition gleameth out of the darkness: "A servant is drawn unto Me in prayer until I answer him; and when I have answered him, I become the ear wherewith he heareth..." For thus the Master of the house hath appeared within His home, and all the pillars of the dwelling are ashine with His light. And the action and effect of the light are from the Light-Giver; so it is that all move through Him and arise by His will. And this is that spring whereof the near ones drink, as it is said: "A fount whereof the near unto God shall drink".... For when the true lover and devoted friend reacheth to the presence of the Beloved, the sparkling beauty of the Loved One and the fire of the lover's heart will kindle a blaze and burn away all veils and wrappings. Yea, all he hath, from heart to skin, will be set aflame, so that nothing will remain save the Friend.¹³

As a starting point for a more detailed examination, it may be useful to turn to William James' simple yet useful model of the mystical experience. For William James four characteristics may be said to mark an experience as mystical: ineffability; noetic quality; transiency; and passivity.¹⁴ Of these four marks of mystical states noted by James, the only one that does not apply to the kind of experience we are examining is, evidently, transiency. Indeed, William James is focusing on the visionary and rapturous experiences we mentioned earlier, rather than on the sense of abiding union or unitive life we are discussing here. The other three characteristics, on the other hand, certainly appear to be present in our mystics' discussions.

Let us begin with passivity, a word which may at first mislead, since, as it relates to our subject, it does not refer to the abandonment of human effort but rather to the incapacity of human effort, of itself, to bring about the longed for union, and the consequent ascription of this union and of the effects of this union to the activity of God rather than to the strivings of man. To this insufficiency of human effort all of our mystics testify, asserting the necessity of grace, defined as a "supernatural" bestowal originating in God Himself through Christ Jesus. Human effort then, according to each and all the mystics under review, is secondary—necessary but not sufficient to attain reunion. Bonaventura summarizes this position as follows:

But we cannot rise above ourselves unless a higher power lift us up. No matter how much our interior progress is ordered, nothing will come of it unless accompanied by divine aid. Divine aid is available to those who seek it from their hearts, humbly and devoutly; and this means to sigh for it in this valley of tears, through fervent prayer. Prayer, then, is the mother and source of the ascent... First, therefore, I invite the reader to the groans of prayer through Christ crucified...so that he not believe that reading is sufficient without unction, speculation without devotion, investigation without wonder, observation without joy, work without piety, knowledge without love, understanding without humility, endeavour without grace, reflection...without divinely inspired wisdom.¹⁵

Bahá'u'lláh echoes this in many passages of which we will cite but one from the Book of Certitude:

Thus will these mysteries be unravelled, not by the aid of acquired learning, but solely through the assistance of God and the outpourings of His grace.... Only when the lamp of search, of earnest striving, of longing desire, of passionate devotion, of fervid love, of rapture, and ecstasy, is kindled within the seeker's heart, and the breeze of His loving-kindness is wafted upon his soul, will the darkness of error be dispelled, the mists of doubts and misgivings be dissipated, and the lights of knowledge and certitude envelop his being. At that hour will the mystic Herald, bearing the joyful tidings of the Spirit, shine forth from the City of God resplendent as the morn, and, through the trumpet-blast of knowledge, will awaken the heart, the soul, and the spirit from the slumber of negligence.¹⁶

Here the balance is struck between spiritual preparation on the part of the seeker and ultimate dependence upon divine assistance, in the form of “*the breeze of His loving kindness*,” and “*the mystic Herald, bearing the joyful tidings of the Spirit*.” The link between mystical feeling and mystical knowledge is likewise clearly drawn in the passage. Of the noetic quality of mystical experience, James writes: “Although so similar to states of feeling, mystical states seem to those who experience them to be also states of knowledge. They are states of insight into depths unplumbed by the discursive intellect.”¹⁷ This, again, is clearly reflected in every one of our mystics. Again, we will turn to one of them, Catherine of Siena, to speak for the rest:

O Abyss! O eternal Godhead! O deep sea! What more could you have given me than the gift of your very self? You are a fire always burning but never consuming; you are a fire consuming in your heat all the soul’s selfish love; you are a fire lifting all chill and giving light. In your light you have made me know your truth: You are that light beyond all light who gives the mind’s eye supernatural light in such fullness and perfection that you bring clarity even to the light of faith. In that faith I see that my soul has life, and in that light receives you who are Light.¹⁸

We now arrive at the ineffability of union, the unutterable nature of what is felt and apprehended in the privacy of the mystic’s communion. In *The Seven Valleys*, having described the experience in words such as those cited above, Bahá’u’lláh adds the paradoxical disclaimer:

*The pen steppeth not into this region, the ink leaveth only a blot. In these planes, the nightingale of the heart hath other songs and secrets, which make the heart to stir and the soul to clamor, but this mystery of inner meaning may be whispered only from heart to heart, confided only from breast to breast.*¹⁹

“No one grasps this,” explains Bonaventura, “except him who receives, since it is more a matter of affective experience than rational consideration.”²⁰ And Tauler asserts, “But this reaches far above all knowledge and understanding; far beyond all powers, even unto a fathomless abyss. As weak eyes cannot bear the brightness of the sun, so a thousand times less can nature endure this condition in her weakness. All that we can say of this is that however well we may be able to comprehend it with our minds, express it in words, or grasp it with the understanding, still it is all as utterly unlike the reality as it would be were I to say of a piece of black coal: ‘Look, here is the bright sun which lightens all the world.’”²¹ And in Dionysian fashion Suso refers to God as the Nothing, and says, “in point of fact, it is as far and farther from the Nothing as it would be to say ‘chopping block’ instead of ‘fine pearl.’”²² Angela di Foligno finds language so inadequate as to feel that her descriptions approach blasphemy²³ (although doctrinally they could not be more orthodox) and asserts, “Of these divine operations of the manifestation of God in the soul not one word can be spoken, and of them no man can babble.”²⁴ Catherine of Siena, as if it were God Himself speaking, writes, “Your tongue could never tell, nor your ears hear, nor your eyes see the joy they have who travel on this road”;²⁵ and Jacopone da Todì exclaims despairingly, “Oh, the futility of seeking to convey with images and feelings that which surpasses all measure!”²⁶

Notwithstanding the sense of futility attending their attempts however, “seeking to convey with images and feelings that which surpasses all measure” is precisely what we find these mystics doing. It is this paradox which alerts us to the peculiarity of the mystic’s use of language, which attempts, by means of “images and feelings” to bring, Prometheus like, the hidden fire of mystical experience from unapprehended heights to the lowly ground of human utterance, not for the sake of those who, like themselves, have experienced the summits of reunion first hand—what need have they of words to do injustice to their ravishings?—but rather for the sake of those who have not yet attained the peak of mystical experience but who are receptive enough to be brought closer to their goal by the mystics’ melodies.

Thus we find Catherine of Siena thanking God for her revelations not only on her own behalf, but on behalf also “of others who might see themselves mirrored here.”²⁷ Clearly the mystic’s path, although an intensely personal one, is not a lonely one, but one understood as shared by a multitude of souls. Bonaventura is still more explicit and precise. He writes his book for “those, therefore, predisposed by

grace, the humble and the pious, the contrite and the devout, those anointed with the oil of gladness, the lovers of divine wisdom, and those inflamed with a desire for it...those wishing to give themselves to glorifying, wondering at and even savouring God.”²⁸ Those “wishing to,” “lovers of,” “inflamed with desire for”: those, in other words, who want to arrive at the promised goal and are actively endeavouring to reach it, but who are not yet there. This target audience for mystical texts resonates with the target audience designated by Bahá'u'lláh in the opening paragraphs of the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*: “*They that tread the path of faith, they that thirst for the wine of certitude*” who have the insight to seek “*the shores of the ocean of true understanding*” (‘irfán) but have yet to attain the ultimate goal of reunion.²⁹

From the above may be gathered therefore that in attempting to describe the indescribable, the mystic’s purpose is allusive rather than descriptive, and is aimed at those held to have the capacity to profit from the guidance, namely, those with mystical calling even if as yet lacking in mystical attainment. And if words and concepts, including the concept of mystical union, are held to be descriptively inadequate or even altogether blasphemous in judging the reality of God by merely human yardsticks; yet are held to be at the same time didactically useful before a particularly receptive audience, then clearly their purpose is not description, but rather to carry the intended audience to a point beyond description; to use language not so much to nullify as to transcend itself, so that words are possible but inescapably inadequate, yet capable of triggering within the reader a mystical experience of the text.

Mystical language and terminology then, in purpose, is not descriptive but allusive and evocative, and it is by evocation and allusion that they convey meaning beyond words to those receptive to their images by reason of what Bahá'u'lláh describes as their “*purity of heart, chastity of soul, and freedom of spirit*.”³⁰ Evocation and allusion together form the bridge that connects the intelligible with the ineffable and makes mystical teaching possible. It is a bridge built by vivid images, used metaphorically and paradoxically to convey what is regarded as unutterable truth.

Here is where we discover the social dimension of mystical language. To be effectively allusive or evocative language must at the outset be intelligible; and to be intelligible it must use images and concepts that its audience is equipped to understand. Further, the language used by an author will be shaped by his or her intellectual and cultural background, and, for the mystics under review, will additionally be limited by a desire to remain within the bounds of Catholic orthodoxy. We thus find our mystics’ discussion profoundly influenced by, yet not reducible to, their social context. Their treatises may in this light be seen as a conversation between the individual’s deeply subjective, indescribable, yet not incommunicable experience, and society’s mores and aspirations. Time and space constraints prevent our dealing with each of our mystics individually, to see how their particular context influenced their writing. What we can attempt to identify is general ways in which the language of all of these mystics is affected by their environment, with particular reference to the concept of mystical union.

We mentioned that the intellectual and cultural background of the mystics would affect their writings. In this respect it would be natural to expect that (male) university-trained mystics would present differences from the (female) non-academically trained mystics in our list. Indeed, this appears to be the case. The four university trained mystics—Bonaventura, Jacopone da Todi, Suso, and Tauler—all reflect a similar intellectual heritage that differs somewhat from the two female mystics. In style if not always in content, moreover, Bonaventura, Suso and Tauler, the theologians, are set apart from Jacopone, the erstwhile lawyer, the former using, unlike the latter, prose rather than verse, and being far more prone to cite, explicitly or without acknowledgement, the voice of scholarly authority. In sharp contrast, the writing of our women mystics is comparatively devoid of references, other than to the Bible and to popularly accessible devotional stories, and is both less philosophical and more intimate in character.

A look at the three theologians, although separated by many miles and decades, reveals them to share, as was mentioned before, a common intellectual heritage with Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius and Aristotle, representing the major wellsprings of their thought, if not of their inspiration, which derives rather from the gospel and the lives of saints, most significantly St. Francis.³¹ The same intellectual influences are present in Jacopone da Todi, although less emphatically and less distinctly. By contrast, the influence of these three authors on Catherine of Siena, although noticeable, appears negligible, and the same is the case with Angela di Foligno. This is most clearly reflected in the relation between the

concept of mystical union with God and the ideas of Pseudo-Dionysius.³² Pseudo-Dionysius' apophatic theology (seeing God in negative terms—as a Darkness, as a Nothing, etc.—by reason of His utter transcendence) is one of the principal non-scriptural, explicit references in Bonaventura's "Journey of the Soul," and is even more ubiquitous in Tauler and Suso. Dionysian thought becomes less noticeable though still clearly apparent in Jacopone da Todi, and even less evident in Catherine of Siena and Angela di Foligno. It would thus seem that the apophatic image of union with God was mediated by the universities and popularized in the sermons and counsels of such as Tauler and other mystically inclined preachers and confessors through whom it would have reached most laypersons aware of such teaching. This suggestion that the apophatic images of mystical union were transmitted by the schools rather than drawn naturally from experience is all the more plausible since, as Butler noted, earlier mystics like Augustine, Gregory, and Bernard of Clairvaux, were predominantly affirmative, which is equivalent to saying non-Dionysian (or as he puts it pre-Dionysian) in their mysticism.³³ Indeed, the thought of Pseudo-Dionysius was first translated into Latin by John Scotus in the ninth century, but did not become popular until the twelfth century. It was subsequently commented on by great schoolmen such as Hugh of St. Victor, Thomas Aquinas, Eckhart and, as we have seen, Bonaventura. It is thus no surprise that the closer we get to the universities, and the more we advance in time, the more apophatic our mystics become. Similarly, it is logical to believe that the friars, trained in the universities yet preaching to the masses, would have been a prime channel for the diffusion of such thought among the people, particularly among lay members of the mendicant orders such as Jacopone da Todi, Angela di Foligno and Catherine of Siena.³⁴

In the case of Bahá'u'lláh, a theologically informed Bahá'í perspective assessing the influence of Bahá'u'lláh's environment on the shape of His Revelation faces the tensions between illuminating the meaning of His message, and giving expression to "*such words as must of necessity imply the existence of any direct relationship between the Pen of Thy Revelation and the essence of all created things.*" A beginning however may be made from Bahá'u'lláh's own utterances. To take the example of the Seven Valleys, the book is clearly influenced in its formal structure by Attar's Conference of Birds and Sadi's...³⁵ both of which use the structure of seven stages to the eventual destination of mystic union. Within the Seven Valleys, mystical poets such as Rumi, Hafiz, etc., are cited very frequently, in a way that does not recur in other genres within Bahá'u'lláh's corpus of Revelation. The descriptions of mystical union, emphasising the notion of Poverty and Absolute Nothingness likewise echo a specifically Sufi mystical tradition.

However the key influence in the literary shape of the Seven Valleys is likely to be the recipient and intended audience of the work, rather than Bahá'u'lláh's own previous education, as in the case of the mendicant mystics. Thus Bahá'u'lláh explicitly states in the Seven Valleys: "*so much as We have quoted here is out of deference to the wont of men and after the manner of the friends.*"³⁶ In this as in so many aspects the Bahá'í Faith from its very roots is a uniquely a self-conscious religion, as described by the founder of World Theology, William Cantwell-Smith. The suggestion that the key factor in shaping the form of the Seven Valleys is its intended audience may be strengthened by noting that the prevalence of poetic quotes so striking in the Seven Valleys is not characteristic of a roughly contemporary work dealing in part with very similar themes, the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*. There the supporting quotes are drawn primarily from hadith (traditions) and, as is common throughout His writings, the Qur'án. In the *Íqán* as well, Bahá'u'lláh expresses His consistent approach to citation of authority: "*Although We did not intend to make mention of the traditions of a bygone age, yet, because of Our love for thee, We will cite a few which are applicable to Our argument.*"³⁷ Towards the end of His ministry in *His Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, Bahá'u'lláh clarified the purpose behind this variety of styles, of languages of Revelation:

*So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth.... At one time We spoke in the language of the lawgiver; at another in that of the truth-seeker and the mystic, and yet Our supreme purpose and highest wish hath always been to disclose the glory and sublimity of this station.*³⁸

This passage intimates that Bahá'u'lláh's styles were intentionally adopted to speak to different audiences the underlying message of unity which forms the leitmotif of His Revelation, and that the principle of adopting styles and images that maximise the evocative power of the texts to their intended audience.

The need to tailor language to audience was shared by the mendicant mystics under review as well. We find, by way of illustration, that German mystics use terminology not employed by the more numerous Italians on our list. A case in point is the term “ground” to signify the essence of the soul where the image of God is found, the place of “hypostasis” where the union of the soul with God takes place. The idea goes back to Pseudo-Dionysius and before that to Plotinus, and was influentially used in German circles by Meister Eckhart himself.³⁹ The term was also used, it seems, by George Fox and Julian of Norwich among others in England, but does not appear in our Italian mystics' vocabulary, even though, as we have explained, Bonaventura at least, and likely also Jacopone da Todi, had direct knowledge of Pseudo-Dionysius. The root of the difference therefore very possibly lies in the differing audiences. In whichever way it became common in Germany as a mystical term, the word “ground” was clearly a familiar feature of mystical discourse by the time John Tauler was using it in his sermons to various congregations of nuns who could not have been expected to have acquired knowledge of Dionysius at university. The image of the ground of the soul is ubiquitous in Tauler and is almost as common in Suso, yet is wholly absent in all other mystics under review. In Italy, where the rest of our mystics originate, the term was clearly not current, so that even if Bonaventura and Jacopone da Todi were familiar with this term, and even if they had found it descriptively very useful, being largely unknown to their intended audiences, it would have been didactically useless.

We also mentioned the desire for orthodoxy as a significant factor in the way language is used by our mystics. We may see this most clearly in the discussions of mystical union with God by Henry Suso. In his *Little Book of Truth*, written against the background of the condemnation of Meister Eckhart – Suso's teacher—for heresy (on the grounds of pantheistic use of language in dealing with the concept of mystical union),⁴⁰ Suso goes out of his way to state that the collapse of distinctions between man and God in the divine union is one of perception rather than of substance.⁴¹ Man remains man and God remains God, except that man ceases to think in terms of this dichotomy. Ontologically however, the gap between Divinity and humanity is unbridgeable, except in Christ, and in Christ alone.⁴² So emphatic is he on this point that he holds a realization of the truth of this ineradicable distinction between man and God to be an essential prerequisite of attainment to mystical union.⁴³ Although, with varying degrees of emphasis, all our writers appear to agree on this point, none is so explicit nor so insistent as Suso, nor is the context for such discussion so poignant or relevant as it is in his case.

In the writings of Bahá'u'lláh is the same theological self-consciousness, the same explicit effort to bind spiritual experience within a theological understanding that preserved the distinction between the divine and the merely human, the finite and the infinite. In the Seven Valleys, having described the experience of mystic union in the Valley of Unity, Bahá'u'lláh declares:

*However, let none construe these utterances to be anthropomorphism, nor see in them the descent of the worlds of God into the grades of the creatures; nor should they lead thine Eminence to such assumptions. For God is, in His Essence, holy above ascent and descent, entrance and exit; He hath through all eternity been free of the attributes of human creatures, and ever will remain so. No man hath ever known Him; no soul hath ever found the pathway to His Being. Every mystic knower hath wandered far astray in the valley of the knowledge of Him; every saint hath lost his way in seeking to comprehend His Essence.*⁴⁴

To conclude, phenomenologically, the formulation of the concept of mystical union appears to find roots in a distinctive kind of mystical experience: personal, illuminating, transcendent and climactic—passive, noetic, ineffable, in the words of William James. An experience or state far above any and all words to describe, if not to hint at. Indeed, the concept of “mystical union” appears to have been conceived not so much to describe the feeling or experience of the mystic—a forlorn hope—as to hint at its nature; to evoke an intuition of it in the receptive heart by means of vivid metaphorical and often para-

doxical imagery. Receptivity to this imagery was said by these mystics to depend on a subtle combination of effort and grace in the quest for this same “mystical union.” The concept of “mystical union” thus stands out as didactic in purpose even if descriptive or speculative in form, aiming at imparting non-discursive knowledge to receptive audiences, in order to facilitate or add momentum to these audiences’ ongoing mystical journey towards “reunion” with God. Images and descriptions are useful to our mystics only insofar as they are able to evoke such non-discursive apprehension, or rather intimation, of a state experienced first hand by them and uniformly stated to lie beyond the capacity of language to depict, yet evidently not beyond its power to allude (which in a certain way is a capacity to lead towards).

It would seem that, at the individual level at least, Bahá’u’lláh takes a similar approach to Revelation. Its main purpose is not to inform but to transform, and the depths of meaning that lie within the Sacred Word can be plumbed only by the spiritually prepared, that is, the spiritually thirsty. In the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, Bahá’u’lláh emphatically states: “*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.*”⁴⁵ By understanding, Bahá’u’lláh clearly means something deeper than the purely linguistic or even intellectual comprehension available to all alike—the accepted standards of learning. Rather it is suggested that he means a transformational experience of the text leading to an essentially mystical experience. Like the mystics, Bahá’u’lláh writes primarily not to expound but to transform.

This fundamental intention necessitates that the language used be intelligible, indeed evocative to the intended audience. This, together with a desire to keep mystical language within the bounds of doctrinal clarity, and, particularly in relation to the mystics, life experience, make the use of mystical imagery and language heavily influenced by the social environment. Thus the cultural and intellectual make-up of the intended audience will be a factor in the choice of imagery used to evoke intuitions of the mystics’ ineffable experience. The concern for doctrinal clarity will act as a constraint on mystical discourse, influencing, among other things, the degree of emphasis and elaboration devoted to various aspects of mystical experience in order to justify, if necessary, the use of images of great evocative potential but of doctrinal ambiguity. The intellectual background of the mystic will affect both his style and his choice of imagery with which he attempts to articulate his insights. In the case of Revelation, the intellectual environment of the Prophet clearly influences, at the very least, the language of scripture, the questions He is asked, the audiences He engages with, and the literary and philosophical heritage He draws on. This accounts to a considerable degree for the differences between mystical writers even within the same religious and even monastic tradition. It underlies the pivotal principle of Bahá’í theology—progressive revelation.

In a way that resonates with the Bahá’í notion of the fundamental oneness of religion, there appears to be at the heart of mysticism a fundamental oneness or convergence of religious experience. In the religious accounts of the mystics, notwithstanding the varieties of expression, the rhetorical effect of the various images used seems to coincide to a remarkable degree in evoking a shared sense of climax, of ineffability, of illumination, of encounter, and of moral development. This suggests that the experience alluded to by the concept of “mystical union,” although irreducibly subjective in character, has an objective nature which allows it to be experienced by a multitude of mystics—which assumption underlies the very attempt of our mystics at communicating something of their insights and experiences. It is this that enables mystics to quote liberally from each other to illustrate their experiences. The link between such mystical experience and Revelation is most compellingly illustrated by Bahá’u’lláh’s use of mystics’ writings to validate His own Revelation. This suggests that the mystics’ description of his or her journey towards God potentially holds insights that can help illuminate our experience of the Word of God.

Although the state alluded to by the concept of mystical union is affirmed by the mystics we have reviewed to be indescribable, it is indeed considered communicable, at least partially, to kindred souls, even if to those not mystically inclined the mystic’s words might appear not so much paradoxical as merely contradictory—not so much ineffable as hopelessly incongruous. Mystical language is thus in a way exclusive in its functioning, even if not by design, insofar as its proper understanding is explicitly

held to be conditioned on the sincere desire for, and actively pursuit of, the mystic’s goal. It is considered to elude intrinsically the comprehension of others who, though remote from the mystic’s own inmost aspirations, care nonetheless to eavesdrop on his conversation. To such as these the mystics we have considered do not address themselves nor do they expect to be properly understood by such (to the mystics) worldly ears. If the mystics speak to them at all it is unintentionally, one might almost say against their will. In this light, the concept of mystical union, as far as the mystic is concerned, takes on the character, not of an explanation but of a riddle—a guide to the devout and mystically inclined and an obstruction to the worldly and the unspiritual—to be unravelled only by loving, yearning effort, assisted by grace, guided by a desire to attain to that experience which in the mystics’ eyes, as Bonaventura wrote, “is mystical and most secret, which no one knows, except him who receives it, no one receives except him who desires it, and no one desires except him who is inflamed by the fire of the Holy Spirit which Christ sent into the world.”⁴⁶

“But if you want to know how these things come about, ask grace not instruction, desire not understanding, the groaning of prayer not diligent reading, the Spouse not the teacher, God not man, darkness not clarity, not light but the fire that totally inflames and carries us into God by ecstatic unctious and burning affections.”⁴⁷

The words of Bahá’u’lláh show a fundamental harmony between mystical hermeneutics as expounded above and scriptural hermeneutics as propounded in the Bahá’í writings. In the Bahá’í writings, too, understanding of the sacred Word is held to be conditioned on a spiritual orientation, and the pursuit of knowledge is framed in a paradigm of spiritual beliefs, attitudes and skills that are said to mediate true learning:

*Know verily that Knowledge is of two kinds: Divine and Satanic. The one welletth out from the fountain of divine inspiration; the other is but a reflection of vain and obscure thoughts. The source of the former is God Himself; the motive-force of the latter the whisperings of selfish desire. The one is guided by the principle: “Fear ye God; God will teach you”; the other is but a confirmation of the truth: “Knowledge is the most grievous veil between man and his Creator.” The former bringeth forth the fruit of patience, of longing desire, of true understanding, and love; whilst the latter can yield naught but arrogance, vainglory and conceit.... 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.*⁴⁸

The key distinction here appears to center not so much around a different methodology in purely technical terms, but around a distinctive orientation with its accompanying effect. For instance, in relation to scripture, a reading of the sacred Word whose “motive-force” is “*the whisperings of selfish desire*” is likely to lead in the scholar to “*arrogance, vainglory and conceit*” and be in danger of acting as a “*most grievous veil between man and his Creator.*” The conclusions drawn will, it appears, be “*but a reflection of vain and obscure thoughts.*” On the other hand, a reading that is informed by a personal quest for divine inspiration and conscious effort to cleanse and sanctify one’s motivation and perspective, will make the heart receptive to divine inspiration and knowledge—that is, spiritually informed insight. The measure of success in this endeavour is again attitudinal at heart: yielding “*the fruit of patience, of longing desire, of true understanding, and love.*” The same may be said of any branch of knowledge, although perhaps none more so than scriptural study.

The implication seems to be that Bahá’u’lláh regards all knowledge potentially as a bridge towards that supra-discursive knowledge which the mystics strive for. He thus links the pursuit of knowledge to the mystic’s quest and the practice of worship, which, as Shoghi Effendi adumbrated, has at its heart “*that mystic feeling which unites Man with God.*” Hence, the famous sentence cited by Bahá’u’lláh in the Book of Certitude among other places, “*Knowledge is one point, which the foolish have multiplied.*”⁴⁹ From this perspective true knowledge is a spiritual, mystical state of communion with God (the “*single point*”) that may be triggered by, but not contained in human learning. When human learning is earnestly pursued in a spirit of worship and mystical quest, the process of scholarship becomes a process of reunion

with God. When human learning is on the other hand divorced from spiritual questing, and particularly when it is driven by egotistical or selfish motivations, it acts as a dissociative process separating the scholar's soul from his Beloved, and impeding the flow of that "*mystic feeling*" of the presence of God within the soul, which Bahá'u'lláh, no less than the mystics under review, equates with true understanding.

What if any are the methodological implications of such an orientation? Clearly, the above perspective is not methodologically prescriptive in a technical way. Two scholars could look at the same passage of scripture with identical methodologies and even possibly reach identical conclusions, even if their spiritual orientation was diametrically opposite. What would certainly differ would be the effect of the process upon each scholar's soul, with one reaping the fruit of vainglory, and the other the fruit of love. But in addition, the likelihood is that the process of investigation, the tone of their writings, and the relationship to existing scholarship will also differ. These are the key areas where a mystical orientation to scholarship as described above would have a bearing.

For instance, a mystically oriented scholarship could include in the process of investigation the cultivation of prayer, and, within a Bahá'í paradigm, possibly consultation as well. The tone of one's utterance might seek consciously to be consensus building and constructive, and strenuously avoid controversy and intemperate criticism of differing views. Existing scholarship would be reviewed in a spirit of impartiality, humility, and great courtesy, using, particularly when offering constructive criticism, "*words as mild as milk*."⁵⁰ This does not mean that only spiritually informed scholarship would be adorned with these virtues, as those potentialities are open to all scholars to a greater or lesser degree. But a spiritual orientation to scholarship is likely to generate the motive power to make this process increasingly refined, penetrating, and profound.

Within the Bahá'í community the possibility exists to evolve a distinctive culture of scholarship, whose ultimate object could be to lead oneself and one's audience to a closer relationship with the Divine. In such a culture the language of scholarship would be likely to develop gradually over decades and centuries into a vehicle of spiritual evocation as well as technical description. Whether this perspective is valid or not, Bahá'í scholarship over the coming decades face the challenge of experimenting with diverse approaches to bringing spirituality and faith to bear on the scholarly endeavour. Some will be inclined towards a minimalist approach that keeps religion as far as possible implicit rather than explicit in methodologies and outcomes. Others are likely to make bold to bring faith to bear in a more explicit fashion in their scholarship, while still others are likely to experiment with both approaches in accordance with the different audiences for their scholarly endeavour. As has been the case in previous religious traditions it seems plausible to expect that the fruit of the present ferment of scholarly effort in the Bahá'í community will eventually be a distinctively Bahá'í paradigm of scholarship within which a number of methodologies coexist. As with previous faith traditions, this paradigm is likely in due course to integrate a devotional, even mystical orientation, which has at its heart a consciousness of the ineffability and transformative influence of true knowledge. The voice of Henry Suso might well come in due course to resonate with the deep voice of Bahá'í scholarship:

What I experience is bottomless; what I love is endless; and therefore, what I want to say is wordless.

Appendix: Biographical Information

On the Franciscan side, the first of our mystics is St. Bonaventura (c.1217-1274), described at times as the Franciscan Order's second founder. Born at a time when the Franciscan order was reaching its peak, he was to become one of its foremost scholars and mystics. Although from the moment he joined the Franciscans (1243), and especially after he became Minister General of the Order, Bonaventura lived a life of intense activity, scholarly and administrative, his mystical writings and widely acknowledged saintliness testify to the unmistakable richness of his inner life. Of his many writings dedicated to the mystical life, we have chosen to focus on his *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum* (translated as "The Soul's

Journey into God”), widely recognized as his masterpiece. The book was widely read in the Middle Ages and is today the most popular of his many works. Contemplative rather than lyrical in tone, it brought together and correlated existing traditions of spirituality centered on nature, on the soul and on God and integrated them in the form of a meditation on St. Francis' climactic vision of a six winged Seraph, where each wing became a mode of contemplating and reaching unto God.

There follows Jacopone da Todi (c.1230-1306). Born from an aristocratic Umbrian family, Jacopone became, after studying in Bologna, the medieval academic stronghold of the legal profession, a *notaio*, a position mixing the roles of lawyer and accountant. On the death of his wife, “for reasons that are more or less plausibly conjectural” (Hughes, p. xix), he turned his back on his previous life and embarked on a life of extreme penitence. After ten years privations, in his late forties, he joined the Franciscan order. At this time (1278), the friars minor were undergoing great convulsions that would before long lead to an open schism between the Spirituals, overridingly committed to Francis' ideal of poverty, which had been watered down by the Papacy, and the Conventuals, also committed to poverty, but equally committed to Francis' ideal of obedience to ecclesiastical authority, which demanded a measure of compromise in observing the rule of poverty. Jacopone, predictably, sided prominently with the Spirituals, and was lead into direct conflict with Pope Boniface VIII, resulting in his excommunication and imprisonment, commuted only on the death of Boniface the VIII by his successor, Benedict XI. Less contemplative and more lyrical than Bonaventura's mystical writings, Jacopone's Lauds are said to represent the best Italian poetry before Dante. Full of fervour and passion, they are informed by a philosophical element that makes his mysticism at once deep and stirring. Interestingly, Sufi influence has been traced in his poems, from the incantatory repetition of particular words in a manner reminiscent of Dhikr, through the concept of self-annihilation as the means of attainment and the personification of this self-annihilation and of other virtues in the form of a maiden, to the use of the Qur'anic image of man as created from a sorry germ.

Roughly contemporary to Jacopone da Todi, Angela di Foligno (c.1248-c.1309) was also born in the region of Umbria of prosperous parents. She did not have formal schooling, but is said to have been able to read and possibly to write. She married at twenty, leading a very active social life until, troubled by a sin, possibly of a sexual nature, she went to confession, but, too ashamed to tell the whole story, received Communion conscious of her transgression. The resulting struggle with her conscience precipitated her conversion, which she describes in eighteen steps, leading to her experiencing a profound “sentiment of God” in prayer. Thereafter we follow her progress in a series of temptations and a multitude of ecstatic, rapturous visions that stimulate contemplation on the nature of God, the sufferings of Christ, and the Trinity. An ecstatic through and through, her attitudes strike one oftentimes as extreme, yet her experiences, at a deeper level, appear as both ardent and profound, and invariably exalted. Unlike Jacopone, there is no sign that she engaged in any way in the controversies that were pulling the Franciscans apart during her life time.

Turning now to the Dominicans, we may begin by Henry Suso (c.1300-1365). Born in the region of Swabia to a noble family, Suso joined the Dominicans in his early teens. From that early age he experienced for some years, usually twice a day, ecstatic states and manifold visions of Christ, of the Virgin, of Eternal Wisdom, and of the Saints. His early life was characterized by a rigorous asceticism, which, however, became less extreme as his sense of realization increased. He studied at Cologne where he would have heard Eckhart preach, and in his *Little Book of Truth* speaks of him as “the master.” Although sympathetic, Suso was an independent thinker, as Davies remarked. Suso's *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom* was one of the most popular mystical books of the Middle Ages, both for its readability (Suso puts the dialogue form to very good use in the form of a discussion between a disciple and Eternal Wisdom), and for its depth, clarity and spiritual uplift. His *Little Book of Truth* deals primarily with the concept of mystical union, and contains, in addition, a defense of Eckhart and a description of the process of self-abandonment by which we reach unto God.

John Tauler (c.1300-1361), another leading Rhineland mystic and a contemporary of Suso's, was born in Strasbourg from a respectable citizen family. Like Suso, he joined the Dominicans in his early teens and, after two years' novitiate and eight years of study in Strasbourg, was sent to Cologne for higher

studies. It is highly probable that he heard Eckhart's preaching at both Strasburg and Cologne. By age 25 he was an ordained priest and is said to have adopted already the mystical path. Tauler's legacy is his sermons, which he preached from then until his death. Other works ascribed to him appear to be spurious. His sermons may be divided, typically, into those of the year and those devoted to Holy Days. It is the latter of these that we have studied in translation. The sermons are prominent in Marian devotion, Dionysian theology and Eckartian mysticism, and are generally sober and cautious, yet uplifting and illuminating. To Jacopone da Todi's self-annihilation and Suso's self-abandonment, Tauler posits the dying life as the path of perfection. His discussion of the angelic hierarchies as relating to the various areas or levels of the self is fascinating.

Finally we arrive at Catherine of Siena (1347-1380), the only woman besides St. Theresa of Avila to have been granted the title of Doctor of the Roman Catholic Church, for which she had to wait nearly six hundred years after her death. Born in Siena in the period of the Black Death, she was, for a change, the child of a lower-class family. She is said to have vowed her virginity to God from age seven, and from youth to have received visions and other mystical experiences. At age twenty she had a profound experience of mystical marriage to Christ, after which she gave herself wholly to Him. She practiced, like Angela di Foligno, great charity, caring for the sick and the poor. Her reputation as a spiritual counselor grew unstoppably, aided by the support and devotion of her confessor and disciple, Raymond of Capua. She became involved in contemporary politics in the conflict between city-states and papacy, and exercised considerable influence on the papacy and on the Italian cities. In her last years she wrote the *Dialogue*, her crowning work, in the form of a dialogue between herself and God where God responds to her requests for illumination on various aspects of the mystical life. Although intricate, the book is extremely rich in wisdom and spirituality, and is often very beautiful indeed.

Notes

- 1) See for example Butler, pp.1-4; James, pp. 299-300; Migne, pp. 9-12; Underhill, pp. 3-29; Waite, pp. 1-28. We have found Waite's etymological study of the word "mysticism" a particularly useful survey of early definitions, although it should be balanced against Butler's discussion of the concept of "contemplation," which Butler regards as a term equivalent to "mysticism," as used by early Western mystical writers. More recent scholarship on mysticism centers around the writings of such scholars as Walter Stace, R.C. Zaehner, and Steven Katz (see Pike, pp. 87-115, 154-159 and 177-214, for a thorough and succinct discussion of their thought).
- 2) James, p. 300. For a thorough analysis and discussion of this first, momentary kind of mystical union see Pike, *passim*. Additionally, all our primary sources contain descriptions of such experiences. William James' treatment of the topic, although old and in some respects dated, is still useful and always stimulating.
- 3) Most contemporary academic discussion of the concept of mystical union appears to have centered on the first, transient and rapturous, state of mystical union. A very good discussion of the unitive life may be found in Evelyn Underhill's very influential book, *Mysticism*, pp. 494-530.
- 4) We have chosen to focus on the works of John Tauler (c.1300-1361), Henry Suso (c.1300-1365) and Catherine of Siena (1347-1380) on the Dominican side, and Bonaventura (1221-1274), Jacopone da Todi (c.1230-1306), and Angela di Foligno (1248-1309) on the Franciscan side. These mystics may be said, with some additions, to represent the flowering of the mysticism associated with the Franciscan and Dominican orders respectively. The geographical and temporal span distancing them from one another makes similarities, by virtue of the extremes they bridge across, all the more telling and compelling.
- 5) For the purposes of this essay we will adopt a phenomenological approach, seeking to explore our mystics' self-understanding without assessing the genuineness of their experience. Rather than debating the validity of their descriptions we will seek to find their rationale, and relate it to the wider context of their lives and of their world.
- 6) Shoghi Effendi, p. 88.
- 7) Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p.1.
- 8) Bahá'u'lláh, *Arabic Hidden Words*, #13.
- 9) Suso, pp. 185, 198.
- 10) Todi, pp. 266, 270, 271.
- 11) Foligno, pp. 154, 158-159.
- 12) For references regarding our remaining authors' experiences and sensations see Bonaventura, pp.109-113; Tauler, p.124; Siena, p. 364-365.
- 13) Bahá'u'lláh, *Seven Valleys*, p. 22, p.136.
- 14) See James, pp. 299-300.
- 15) Bonaventura, pp. 59-60, 56. For similar statements in our other sources see Tauler, pp. 95, 97; Suso, p. 200, Siena, p. 307; Todi, pp. 268-269; Foligno, p.124.

- 16) Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, pp.195-196.
- 17) James, p. 300.
- 18) Siena, p. 365. Cf. Bonaventura, p. 114; Foligno, p.59; Suso, p.195; Tauler, p. 80, Todi, p. 266.
- 19) Bahá'u'lláh, *Seven Valleys*, p. 30.
- 20) Bonaventura, p. 89.
- 21) Tauler, p.124.
- 22) Suso, p.192.
- 23) Foligno, pp.155, 159.
- 24) Ibid. p.156.
- 25) Siena, p. 68.
- 26) Todi, p. 268.
- 27) Siena, p. 366.
- 28) Bonaventura, p. 56.
- 29) Cf. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p.1.
- 30) Cf. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 211.
- 31) As far as the quoting of authorities goes we find the German Dominican mystics referring to Aquinas as an equally crucial intellectual authority, which we do not find even vaguely in Jacopone da Todi, much less in Bonaventura who was Aquinas' contemporary. On the other hand, we find Catherine of Siena, a Dominican tertiary, using St. Francis as an exemplar repeatedly and with evident devotion, suggesting that the lines between the two orders, at least as far as mysticism is concerned, were less sectarian at the popular than at the academic level.
- 32) A good discussion of Pseudo-Dionysius' thoughts on the concept of mystical union and his subsequent influence on Christianity may be found in Waite, chapter III, esp. pp. 45-54. His relation to Neoplatonism is discussed by Armstrong, pp. 367-371.
- 33) Butler, pp.179-182. Waite devotes some pages (pp.57-59) to asserting that Augustine could not be called properly a mystic mainly by reason of this absence of Dionysian language; but Butler's arguments for inclusion of Augustine among the great Christian mystics seems to us the more persuasive.
- 34) A good and succinct overview of the friars may be found in C.H. Lawrence's *The Friars*. Of relevance to our discussion may be mentioned chapters 6, 7 and 10 of that book, dealing with the links between the friars and the universities, the towns and the Pope, under whose authority they served as (often itinerant) preachers and confessors, and in some measure as popularizers of contemporary theological thought.
- 35) For a more in depth discussion of Sufi motifs in the *Seven Valleys* see Michael McCarron *The Ineffable In Context*.
- 36) Bahá'u'lláh, *Seven Valleys*, p. 26.
- 37) Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 237.
- 38) Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p.14-15.
- 39) See Tauler, p. 94, footnote 3.
- 40) On the relation between Suso and Eckhart see Davies' excellent and comprehensive study of Meister Eckhart, chapter 10. The same chapter also deals with the relation of Eckhart's thought to Tauler's. On Eckhart's condemnation for heresy, see Davies, pp. 26-45, 195-20.
- 41) Suso, p.192.
- 42) Suso, p. 202.
- 43) Suso p.184. Cf. Ibid. pp. 185.
- 44) Bahá'u'lláh, *Seven Valleys*, p. 23.
- 45) Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 211.
- 46) Bonaventura, p. 113.
- 47) Ibid., p. 115.
- 48) Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p.69-70.
- 49) Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p.184.
- 50) Cf. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p.173.

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Keys to the Proper Understanding of Islám
in *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh*¹

by Brian A. Wittman

Abstract

The *Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Shoghi Effendi's concise statement of the fundamental verities of Bahá'í belief, contains a number of important keys which lead Bahá'ís to a more complete understanding of Islám.

The Dispensation makes direct reference to other Bahá'í writings that shed light on Islám, including the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* (which quotes extensively from the Qur'án) and *Nabíl's Narrative. God Passes By*, a later work by Shoghi Effendi, foreshadowed in *The Dispensation*, traces the death-knell of the law of Islám back to the trumpet-blast sounded by Táhirih at the conference of Badasht and predicts the universal recognition and acceptance of Bahá'u'lláh by the Muslim world. In *The Promised Day is Come*, the Guardian analyzes the impact on Islám of its refusal to accept the Message of Bahá'u'lláh, including the collapse of the Caliphate, the abolition of the Sultanate, and the annulment of Sharí'ah canonical law.

The Dispensation upholds Islám as an independent religion and confirms the Imáms as the legitimate Successors of Muḥammad. 'Alí's appointment by Muḥammad as His Successor was made verbally, and is not to be found in the Qur'án. The split of Islám into Sunní and Shí'ah branches, a schism which the Guardian has characterized as "permanent and catastrophic," can be traced to the lack of a written document from Muḥammad establishing 'Alí as His Successor.

Misunderstandings that have crept into Islám are due to two sources: misinterpretation of the Qur'án (which is authentic) and the use of Ḥadīth, which are the reported sayings of Muḥammad and the Imáms. Several misunderstandings addressed in *The Dispensation* include the finality of Revelation (since Muḥammad is the "Seal of the Prophets" His Revelation is final), and the non-belief in the crucifixion of Christ. *The Dispensation* confirms that the process of Revelation is ongoing and eternal, and that Christ was crucified, as attested to by Bahá'u'lláh Himself.

The Bahá'í Faith, being the latest Revelation from God, provides for religious and administrative features not found in earlier religions, including Islám. These include the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, which establishes in written documents the Succession, the unique station of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and the Bahá'í Administrative Order. The Bahá'í Administrative Order includes the Guardianship, the Universal House of Justice, a system of elected administrative bodies, a series of appointed positions, and a comprehensive and authoritative body of administrative principles and guidelines laid down by Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi. The Qur'án, while laying down the basic laws and ordinances of Islám, is silent on the questions of succession and administration. There exists no provision in Islám, such as the Universal House of Justice, to provide for ongoing authoritative legislation.

Finally, *The Dispensation* clarifies that the Bahá'í Faith seeks not to undermine Islám, but to restore and reinvigorate it and to assist in the realization of its highest aspirations. To be true to the Message of Bahá'u'lláh, we must view Islám and the Bahá'í Faith as essentially different stages of one and the same religion. "This is the changeless Faith of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future."

Introduction

The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh is Shoghi Effendi's masterful and concise statement of Bahá'í theological principles, or fundamental verities as he calls them:

My chief concern at this challenging period of Bahá'í history is rather to call the attention of those who are destined to be the champion-builders of the Administrative Order of Bahá'u'lláh to certain fundamental verities the elucidation of which must tremendously assist them in the effective prosecution of their mighty enterprise.²

One generally overlooked aspect of this wonderful letter is the way it helps us to develop a correct understanding and perspective on Islám, the religion which gave birth to both the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths. This is especially important to Bahá'ís from a Western background because information on Islám is often highly distorted, difficult to obtain, or not stated in terms that are readily comprehensible to the Western mind. Charles Le Gai Eaton has described this problem in his thoughtful book, *Islam and the Destiny of Man*:

Most Muslim scholars seem to agree, at least in private, that there has been a singular failure to communicate across the cultural frontier. The actual means of communication—the way in which religion needs to be presented nowadays—have been forged, not out of Islamic materials, but in the West. The Muslim writer finds himself obliged to work with instruments which do not fit comfortably in his hand. Moreover, traditional Muslims, who have escaped the influence of 'modern,' that is to say, occidental education have no understanding of the occidental mind, which is as strange to them as it would be to a Christian of the Middle Ages...

The traditional Muslim writes with authority and conviction, but he does not know how to answer the questions which dominate Western thought in the religious context.³

While *The Dispensation* does not devote a very large percentage of its pages to Islám, and certainly cannot be called a treatise on the subject, it does provide a number of significant keys that help Bahá'ís, especially Western Bahá'ís, understand Islám and put it into a proper perspective. Shoghi Effendi is uniquely qualified to this task, combining as he does the qualities of authorized interpreter and spiritual successor of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Western-trained scholar, and a singular genius for historical analysis. However, Shoghi Effendi's highly condensed exposition is a mix of the explicit and implicit. Some important elements are contained in fleeting allusions. Vast theological vistas are often only briefly hinted at, and the reader is left wanting more than the Guardian can possibly convey in a 60-page letter. This being the case, the "keys" to Islám contained in *The Dispensation* can and should be amplified by a careful study of other Bahá'í texts, including Shoghi Effendi's other letters and messages.

In brief, *The Dispensation* provides the following "keys" to help us understand Islám from a Bahá'í perspective. Each one of these will be explored in detail in a later section of this paper:

1. *The Dispensation* makes reference to Bahá'í Scriptures and other writings, including the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, *God Passes By*, *The Promised Day is Come*, and *Nabíl's Narrative*, which together with the brief but definitive passages in *The Dispensation* shed light on Islám and give us a fuller understanding of the Bahá'í perspective on several fundamental questions.

2. *The Dispensation* upholds Islám as an independent religion and confirms the Imáms as the legitimate successors of Muḥammad.

3. *The Dispensation* both explicitly and implicitly corrects misunderstandings that have crept into Islám.

4. *The Dispensation* identifies new features of the Bahá'í Dispensation for which there are no parallels within Islám.

5. *The Dispensation* establishes the goals of the Bahá'í Revelation in relation to Islám.

Kitáb-i-Íqán

The Dispensation quotes extensively from the Writings of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. A number of quotations are from the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, Bahá'u'lláh's masterful treatise on the nature of religion. *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* itself makes numerous references to the Qur'án, as well as to sayings of 'Alí, Ḥusayn, and Sádiq (first, third, and sixth Imáms, respectively). Not only is the Western reader of the *Íqán* exposed to the rhythm and tone of the Qur'anic verses (in Shoghi Effendi's beautiful English translation), but a later Manifestation of God Himself (Bahá'u'lláh) uses these verses to support His religious arguments in support of the Báb's Revelation. While not offering a comprehensive study of the Qur'án, Bahá'u'lláh's references to the Qur'án in the *Íqán* and in His other works such as *Í* provide Bahá'ís a compelling and dramatic exposure to the sacred book of Islám.

And a dramatic exposure to the Qur'án for non-Arabic speaking Westerners is no small feat, as evidenced by the following quotations from *Muhammad*, a biography by Karen Armstrong:

In the case of the Qur'án there is also the problem of translation. ...There is something about Arabic which is incommunicable in another idiom: even the speeches of Arab politicians sound stilted, artificial and alien in an English translation. If this is true of ordinary Arabic, of mundane utterance or conventional literature, it is doubly true of the Qur'án which is written in highly complex, dense and allusive language....

This does not mean that we should dismiss the Qur'án arrogantly. It is not meant to be read like other books. If approached in the right way, believers claim, it yields a sense of divine presence. This is difficult for somebody who has been brought up in the Christian tradition to understand because Christians do not have a sacred language, as Sanskrit, Hebrew, and Arabic are sacred to Hindus, Jews, and Muslims.

...Western people tend to find the Qur'án tediously repetitive, because it seems to go over the same ground again and again, but the book was not designed for private perusal but for liturgical recitation. When Muslims listen to a sura in the mosque, they are reminded of the central tenets of the faith in a single recitation.⁴

Shoghi Effendi describes the problem facing Western Bahá'ís in this way:

It is certainly most difficult to thoroughly grasp all the Súrihs of the Qur'án, as it requires a detailed knowledge of the social, religious and historical background of Arabia at the time of the appearance of the Prophet. ...For the present, the Guardian agrees, that it would be easier and more helpful to study the Book according to subjects, and not verse by verse and also in the light of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's interpretation which throw such floods of light on the whole of the Qur'án.⁵

In addition to referencing the Qur'án itself, the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, and those of the Báb and 'Abdu'l-Bahá introduce us to and familiarize us with Islamic terminology and concepts. In fact, any Bahá'í who makes a serious study of Islám will be amazed to find very many phrases and terms, which he thought previously to be Bahá'í-specific, that actually originate in Islám. The beauty of this situation is that Bahá'ís who read the Writings of the Central Figures are automatically taken to the spiritual heart of Islám.

God Passes By

The Dispensation actually foreshadows later works by the Guardian in the following passage:

It is not my purpose, as I look back upon these crowded years of heroic deeds, to attempt even a cursory review of the mighty events that have transpired since 1844 until the present day. Nor have I any intention to undertake an analysis of the forces that have precipitated them, or to evaluate their influence upon peoples and institutions in almost every continent of the globe.⁶

These works are none other than *God Passes By* (written in 1944), and *The Promised Day is Come* (written in 1941). Speaking of a future time of conversion to the Faith by Muslims, *God Passes By* describes in several places a truly remarkable prophecy of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's that the "banner of Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá...must float from the pinnacles of the foremost seat of learning in the Islamic world."⁷ The reference here is to Al-Azhar University in Cairo, the most famous Islamic university and seminary.

In another amazing passage in this same book, the Guardian traces the extinction of Islamic law, the decline and secularization of Islám, and the ultimate conversion of all Muslim peoples to the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, to the trumpet-blast of the New Dispensation sounded by Táhiriḥ at the Conference of Badashṭ:

A little over four years had elapsed since the birth of the Báb's Revelation when the trumpet-blast announcing the formal extinction of the old, and the inauguration of the new Dispensation was sounded.... The arena was a tiny hamlet in the plain of Badashṭ on the border of Mázindarán. The trumpeter was a lone woman, the noblest of her sex in that Dispensation, whom even some of her co-religionists pronounced a heretic. The call she sounded was the death-knell of the twelve hundred year old law of Islám.

Accelerated, twenty years later, by another trumpet-blast, announcing the formulation of the laws of yet another Dispensation, this process of disintegration, associated with the declining fortunes of a superannuated, though divinely revealed Law, gathered further momentum, precipitated, in a later age, the annulment of the Shari'ah canonical Law in Turkey, led to the virtual abandonment of that Law in Shi'ah Persia, has, more recently, been responsible for the dissociation of the System envisaged in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* from the Sunní ecclesiastical Law in Egypt, has paved the way for the recognition of that System in the Holy Land itself, and is destined to culminate in the secularization of the Muslim states, and in the universal recognition of the Law of Bahá'u'lláh by all the nations, and its enthronement in the hearts of all the peoples, of the Muslim world.⁸

This passage leaves us absolutely breathless, combining as it does prophecy, historical analysis undreamt of by secular historians, and a dramatic recounting of the facts.

The Promised Day is Come

In *The Promised Day is Come*, Shoghi Effendi analyzes the impact of the world's refusal to accept the Message of Bahá'u'lláh and devotes more pages to these themes. It is beyond the scope of this paper to adequately describe the Guardian's analysis, but some of the topics related to Islám include the following:

1. The general decline of Religious Orthodoxy (pp. 76-80).
2. The Báb and Bahá'u'lláh's castigation of the Muslim religious divines, who have been responsible for the people's rejection of the New Dispensation (pp. 87-93).
3. A description of the decline of the *Shi'ah* ecclesiastical order (pp. 93-98).
4. The collapse of the Caliphate (pp. 98-99).
5. The abolition of the Sultanate (pp. 99-100).
6. The annulment of the Shari'ah canonical Law and the promulgation of a civil code in its place (p. 101).
7. The de-arabization and de-Islamification of Turkey (p. 101).

Writing of the fortunes of Sunní Islám in the twentieth century, Shoghi Effendi describes the Caliphate as an institution that "vanished like a smoke," leaving more than 200 million Muslims without a leader:

Strange, incredibly strange, must appear the position of this most powerful branch of the Islamic Faith, with no outward and visible head to voice its sentiments and convictions, its unity

irretrievably shattered, its radiance obscured, its law undermined, its institutions thrown into hopeless confusion. This institution that had challenged the inalienable, divinely appointed rights of the Imáms of the Faith of Muḥammad, had, after the revolution of thirteen centuries, vanished like a smoke, an institution which had dealt such merciless blows to a Faith Whose Herald was Himself a descendant of the Imáms, the lawful successors of the Apostle of God.⁹

Lest we misinterpret these harsh descriptions, dire prophesies, stern rebukes and warnings to be a general rejection or disparagement of Muḥammad, the Qur’án, or Islám, the Guardian reminds us again of the fundamental verities of our Faith:

As to Muḥammad, the Apostle of God, let none among His followers who read these pages, think for a moment that either Islám, or its Prophet, or His Book, or His appointed Successors, or any of His authentic teachings, have been, or are to be in any way, or to however slight a degree, disparaged. The lineage of the Báb, the descendant of the Imám Ḥusayn; the divers and striking evidences, in Nabíl’s Narrative, of the attitude of the Herald of our Faith towards the Founder, the Imáms, and the Book of Islám; the glowing tributes paid by Bahá’u’lláh in the Kitáb-i-Íqán to Muḥammad and His lawful Successors, and particularly to the “peerless and incomparable” Imám Ḥusayn; the arguments adduced, forcibly, fearlessly, and publicly by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in churches and synagogues, to demonstrate the validity of the Message of the Arabian Prophet; and last but not least the written testimonial of the Queen of Rumania, who, born in the Anglican faith and notwithstanding the close alliance of her government with the Greek Orthodox Church, the state religion of her adopted country, has, largely as a result of the perusal of these public discourses of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, been prompted to proclaim her recognition of the prophetic function of Muḥammad—all proclaim, in no uncertain terms, the true attitude of the Bahá’í Faith towards its parent religion.¹⁰

Nabíl’s Narrative

Finally, *Nabíl’s Narrative*, which Shoghi Effendi translated and edited two years before he wrote *The Dispensation*, offers “striking evidences” “of the attitude of the Herald of our Faith (the Báb) towards the Founder, the Imáms, and the Book of Islám.”¹¹ This book also serves to introduce us to the culture of Shí’ah Islám, as it existed in nineteenth-century Persia, and helps us to understand the ferocity of the attacks launched against the Bábi and Bahá’í Faiths in the land of their birth. Shoghi Effendi makes several references to *Nabíl’s Narrative* in *The Dispensation*.

Islám as an Independent Religion and the Imáms as the Legitimate Successors of Muḥammad

In discussing the Master’s explanation of an ancient Zoroastrian prophecy, Shoghi Effendi makes the following statement in *The Dispensation*:

From the text of this explicit and authoritative interpretation of so ancient a prophecy it is evident how necessary it is for every faithful follower of the Faith to accept the divine origin and uphold the independent status of the Muḥammadan Dispensation. The validity of the Imamate is, moreover, implicitly recognized in these same passages—that divinely-appointed institution of whose most distinguished member the Báb Himself was a lineal descendant, and which continued for a period of no less than two hundred and sixty years to be the chosen recipient of the guidance of the Almighty and the repository of one of the two most precious legacies of Islám.¹²

This passage confirms the divine origin and independent status of Islám and upholds the validity of the Imamate. The legitimacy of the Imáms is also upheld in the previously quoted passage from *The Promised Day is Come*.

Amazingly, some writers dispute these statements proclaiming the Imáms to be the legitimate successors of Muḥammad. Instead, they claim the Faith’s stance on the Imáms is part of a general “Shí’ah bias” that exists because the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh came out of a Shí’ah Islamic background. In *The Dispensation* Shoghi Effendi clearly refutes such a view.

A central problem for Islám is that ‘Alí’s appointment as Muḥammad’s successor was not put into writing and is not contained in the Qur’án:

Can any passage of the Qur’án, which in respect to its legal code, its administrative and devotional ordinances marks already a notable advance over previous and more corrupted Revelations, be construed as placing upon an unassailable basis the undoubted authority with which Muḥammad had, verbally and on several occasions, invested His successor?¹³

This statement by the Guardian confirms that ‘Alí was verbally appointed by Muḥammad on several occasions, but as history reports, after Muḥammad’s passing he was passed over in favor of Abú-Bakr.¹⁴ ‘Alí finally became the fourth Caliph after the death of ‘Uthmán, but Islám’s unity had by that time been irreparably shattered and the seeds sown for the division into Sunní and Shí‘ah sects. After ‘Alí’s assassination by His enemies, the leadership of Islám was seized by Mu‘áwiyah, the son of Muḥammad’s principle Meccan enemy, Abú-Sufyán. Thus began the period of the Umayyad Caliphs. A minority of Muslims who followed ‘Alí and his descendents, the Imáms, became known as the Shí‘ahs.

The Shí‘ah accounts of Muḥammad’s last pilgrimage to Mecca describe His appointment of ‘Alí as His successor:

Shí‘ah tradition has it that on the way back to Medina, at urgent bidding received from God, Muḥammad made, all of a sudden, a forced halt by the pool of *Khum*, a most inconvenient place; had a pulpit raised with saddles, and from this announced ‘Alí as His successor, requiring the large body of Muslims who were with Him to pledge their loyalty to ‘Alí.¹⁵

Another episode concerns Muḥammad’s death-bed request for writing materials in order to leave a will—a request which was refused by ‘Umar who reportedly said: “The Book of God is sufficient unto us.” We know this actually happened because ‘Abdu’l-Bahá describes the awful consequences of these words in the *Lawḥ-i-Hizár Baytí* (Tablet of One Thousand Verses). Here is Taherzadeh’s summary and commentary on this Tablet:

‘Abdu’l-Bahá states that it was this very statement which caused the foundation of the religion of God in the Islamic Dispensation to be shattered and the ignoble worshippers of self and passion to rule over the righteous souls. It became a deadly weapon with which the Imám ‘Alí himself was martyred, which caused great divisions within the nation of Islám, and which changed the loving spirit of that nation to that of warriors armed with sword and weapon. As a result of this statement, the head of Imám Ḥusayn, the most illustrious of the Imáms, was decapitated on the plain of Karbilá, the other holy Imáms were inflicted with great sufferings, imprisonment and death, and the blood of countless innocent souls was shed for well nigh twelve hundred years.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá further affirms that this statement uttered by ‘Umar was transformed into the hundreds of bullets centuries later which pierced the breast of the Báb in Tabríz, that this statement became the chains which were placed around the blessed neck of Bahá’u’lláh, and brought about the untold sufferings inflicted upon Him in the course of His successive exiles.¹⁶

Much, much more can be said on this topic. However, as confirmed by the above quotations and many others as well:

It is a fundamental belief of the Bahá’ís that Imám ‘Alí was the lawful successor of the Prophet of Islám. After him his lineal male descendents known as the ‘holy Imáms’ led the Shí‘ah community until the year 260 AH. Bahá’u’lláh regarded the Imáms as the legitimate successors of the Prophet, acknowledged the value of their work in the elucidation of the Qur’án, confirmed many of their sayings as recorded in the books of ‘*Aḥádíth*’ (traditions), quoted several of these in His Writings, interpreted their words, extolled their station (especially that of Ḥusayn, the third Imám) in glowing terms, and referred to them as ‘those unquenchable lights of divine guidance’ and ‘those lamps of certitude’.¹⁷

Misunderstandings that Have Crept into Islám

Sources of Misunderstandings in Islám

As with each religion, Islám has over time departed from the pristine purity of its original teachings. Religious misunderstandings and erroneous interpretations have crept into the religion and are now accepted as orthodox teaching. This process is well described in the Bahá'í Scriptures, especially in the talks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and constitutes the main reason why a new Revelation is needed every thousand years or so. The new Manifestation restates the eternal truths, brings new teachings for the people of His Day, and clears away misunderstandings from previous religions.

In the case of Islám, we know the text of the Qur'án is authentic, which is an advancement over the older Faiths:

We cannot be sure of the authenticity, word for word, of any of the past Holy Scriptures except the Qur'án, as they were either not written down during the Prophet's lifetime or have been changed in the course of time and the originals lost;¹⁸

...the Qur'án which, apart from the sacred scriptures of the Bábi and Bahá'í Revelations, constitutes the only Book which can be regarded as an absolutely authenticated Repository of the Word of God.¹⁹

Thus, the two main sources of religious error in Islám are misinterpretation of the Qur'án (the words are authentic but their meaning is lost or misconstrued), and *Ḥadīth* (reported sayings of Muḥammad and the Imáms). It is interesting to note how both of these sources of error are dealt with in the Bahá'í Faith: Bahá'u'lláh has forbidden oral tradition as a basis for His religion and misinterpretation of the scriptures is prevented by the institution of the Covenant (see next section of this paper for a fuller discussion).

Several Islamic misunderstandings are explicitly or implicitly addressed in *The Dispensation*:

1. The claim of finality of Revelation (Muḥammad is the 'seal of the Prophets')
2. The Crucifixion of Christ

Finality of Revelation

The first issue is addressed in the following passage from *The Dispensation*:

Indeed, the categorical rejection by the followers of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh of the claim to finality which any religious system inaugurated by the Prophets of the past may advance is as clear and emphatic as their own refusal to claim that same finality for the Revelation with which they stand identified. *"To believe that all revelation is ended, that the portals of Divine mercy are closed, that from the daysprings 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 the Messengers of God have ceased to be made manifest"* must constitute in the eyes of every follower of the Faith a grave, an inexcusable departure from one of its most cherished and fundamental principles.²⁰

The quotation in italics is from the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*. In that same book, Bahá'u'lláh forcefully challenges the Muslim view that since Muḥammad is the "Seal of the Prophets," a later Revelation from God is not possible.²¹ Not only does Bahá'u'lláh affirm the Báb's Revelation as the next valid religious Dispensation after Islám, but He also emphatically states that the process of Divine Revelation will continue indefinitely.

Crucifixion of Christ

The crucifixion of Christ is an important topic, since it demonstrates a clear example of a misinterpretation of the Qur'anic verses. To virtually every Christian denomination and sect, Christ's crucifixion represents the pivotal event of His ministry in which He died on the cross to atone for the sins of all humanity. And yet, the majority of Muslims rejects the historical fact of the Crucifixion of Christ:

The Quranic teaching is that Christ was not crucified nor killed by the Jews, notwithstanding certain apparent circumstances which produced that illusion in the minds of some of his enemies; that disputations, doubts, and conjectures on such matters are vain; and that he was taken up to God.²²

The following quotations are two different translations of the Qur'anic verses which have led Muslims to this conclusion (4:157-158):

That they said (in boast),
“We killed Christ Jesus
The son of Mary,
The Apostle of God”;—But they killed him not,
Nor crucified him,
But so it was made
To appear to them,
And those who differ
Therein are full of doubts,
With no (certain) knowledge,
But only conjecture to follow,
For of a surety
They killed him not;—
Nay, God raised him up
Unto Himself; and God
Is Exalted in Power, Wise;—²³

...and for their saying, ‘We slew the Messiah,
Jesus son of Mary, the Messenger of God’—
yet they did not slay him, neither crucified him,
only a likeness of that was shown to them.
Those who are at variance concerning him surely
are in doubt regarding him; they have no knowledge
of him, except the following of surmise;
and they slew him not of a certainty—
no indeed; God raised him up to Him; God is
All-mighty, All-wise.²⁴

Bahá'u'lláh refutes this interpretation in several places in His Writings. In *The Dispensation*, a prayer of Bahá'u'lláh is quoted in which He says: “*Again I was crucified for having unveiled to men's eyes the hidden gems of Thy glorious unity, for having revealed to them the wondrous signs of Thy sovereign and everlasting power.*”²⁵ In this prayer He identifies Himself with the sufferings experienced by past Prophets and Holy Ones, including Noah, Moses, Jesus, and the Imám Ḥusayn.

An even more pointed confirmation of Christ's crucifixion is made in the following quotation from *Gleanings*:

*O Jews! If ye be intent on crucifying once again Jesus, the Spirit of God, put Me to death, for He hath once more, in My person, been made manifest unto you.*²⁶

Other Misunderstandings Not Addressed in *The Dispensation*

There are numerous other misunderstandings or errors that have entered Islám, such as attitudes towards women,²⁷ certain Ḥadīth that encourage the execution of apostates,²⁸ etc. These and others are dealt with in other places in the Bahá'í Revelation, but are not covered in the *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh*.

New Features of the Bahá'í Dispensation Not Found in Islám

The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh

We have already discussed in Section III the lack of a written will appointing 'Alí as Muḥammad's successor, and the resulting schism into Sunní and Shí'ah branches—a schism which the Guardian has characterized as “permanent and catastrophic.”²⁹

Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant, as documented in the *Kitáb-i-'Ahd* and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's *Will and Testament*, has resolutely resolved the question of succession, and has conferred the mantle of authority, interpretation, and infallibility on both 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. This is unprecedented in the history of religion:

Nowhere in the sacred scriptures of any of the world's religious systems, nor even in the writings of the Inaugurator of the Bábí Dispensation, do we find any provisions establishing a covenant or providing for an administrative order that can compare in scope and authority with those that lie at the very basis of the Bahá'í Dispensation. Has either Christianity or Islám, to take as an instance two of the most widely diffused and outstanding among the world's recognized religions, anything to offer that can measure with, or be regarded as equivalent to, either the Book of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant or to the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá? Does the text of either the Gospel or the Qur'án confer sufficient authority upon those leaders and councils that have claimed the right and assumed the function of interpreting the provisions of their sacred scriptures and of administering the affairs of their respective communities? Could Peter, the admitted chief of the Apostles, or the Imám 'Alí, the cousin and legitimate successor of the Prophet, produce in support of the primacy with which both had been invested written and explicit affirmations from Christ and Muḥammad that could have silenced those who either among their contemporaries or in a later age have repudiated their authority and, by their action, precipitated the schisms that persist until the present day?³⁰

Bahá'u'lláh Himself testifies to the power of His Covenant in the following words: “*So firm and mighty is this Covenant that from the beginning of time until the present day no religious Dispensation hath produced its like.*”³¹ One may wonder why this is true—why have past religions, including Islám, suffered catastrophic schisms for lack of a firm and documented Covenant? One possible explanation has been offered in Taherzadeh's monumental work, *The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh*:

In past Dispensations the Prophets did not establish a firm and unequivocal Covenant with their followers concerning their successors, nor did they leave behind clear guidance as to how to conduct the affairs of the community after their departure from this world. Consequently, religions became divided into many sects resulting in conflicts and disunity among the followers. But the non-existence of a clear Covenant and lack of guidance should not be construed as a failure on the part of the Founders of religions. To attribute to the Manifestations of God a lack of understanding, of vision and knowledge, is tantamount to attributing shortcomings and imperfections to God Himself...

A careful study of the history of religions will enable us to realize that the Manifestations of old, those embodiments of God's attributes, did not make an unequivocal written Covenant with their followers because of the immaturity of the people of the age, who could not have sustained the rigours, the tests and the strict discipline which the observance of such a Covenant would inevitably have required.³²

The Uniqueness of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

As stated in *The Dispensation*, 'Abdu'l-Bahá fulfills a unique function for which there is no equivalent in past religions, including Islám:

One Who, not only in the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh but in the entire field of religious history, fulfills a unique function. Though moving in a sphere of His own and holding a rank radically different from that of the Author and the Forerunner of the Bahá'í Revelation, He, by virtue of the station ordained for Him through the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, forms together with them what may be termed the Three Central Figures of a Faith that stands unapproached in the world's spiritual history.³³

A glimpse of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's uniqueness is offered by the Guardian's summary description of His many qualities and titles:

He is, and should for all time be regarded, first and foremost, as the Center and Pivot of Bahá'u'lláh's peerless and all-enfolding Covenant, His most exalted handiwork, the stainless Mirror of His light, the perfect Exemplar of His teachings, the unerring Interpreter of His Word, the embodiment of every Bahá'í ideal, the incarnation of every Bahá'í virtue, the Most Mighty Branch sprung from the Ancient Root, the Limb of the Law of God, the Being "round Whom all names revolve," the Mainspring of the Oneness of Humanity, the Ensign of the Most Great Peace, the Moon of the Central Orb of this most holy Dispensation - styles and titles that are implicit and find their truest, their highest and fairest expression in the magic name 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He is, above and beyond these appellations, the "Mystery of God"—an expression by which Bahá'u'lláh Himself has chosen to designate Him, and which, while it does not by any means justify us to assign to Him the station of Prophethood, indicates how in the person of 'Abdu'l-Bahá the incompatible characteristics of a human nature and superhuman knowledge and perfection have been blended and are completely harmonized.³⁴

It is interesting to note that Shoghi Effendi does not claim a similar uniqueness of station for the Guardianship. In fact, in his discussion of the Guardianship in *The Dispensation* he mentions "the hereditary principle and the law of primogeniture as having been upheld by the Prophets of the past."³⁵ From this, one could infer a correspondence in function between the Imáms of Islám, and the Guardian. The Imáms, like the succession of Guardians envisioned in *The Will and Testament*, passed the mantle of authority and succession from father to son. Both the Guardian and the Imáms provided interpretation of the scriptures and spiritual leadership and guidance.³⁶

Administrative Order

The Bahá'í Administrative Order, the provisions of which have been laid down in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, is absolutely unique in religious history:

The Bahá'í Commonwealth of the future, of which this vast Administrative Order is the sole framework, is, both in theory and practice, not only unique in the entire history of political institutions, but can find no parallel in the annals of any of the world's recognized religious systems.³⁷

In rough outline, the Bahá'í Administrative Order contains the following elements:

1. A written Covenant, which specifies succession. Bahá'u'lláh was succeeded by His eldest Son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the *Mystery of God*, Whom He appointed in His Book of the Covenant (*Kitáb-i-'Ahd*). 'Abdu'l-Bahá fulfills a unique role in religious history as appointed successor, infallible interpreter, Center of the Covenant, and perfect exemplar of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings. 'Abdu'l-Bahá was succeeded by His grandson, Shoghi Effendi, whom He appointed in His *Will and Testament* to be the Guardian, vested with the roles of head of the Faith and infallible interpreter.

2. A series of elected bodies to administer the Faith (Local and National Spiritual Assemblies, and the Universal House of Justice). The local believers elect the Local Assembly annually through plurality vote;

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the National Assembly is elected annually through a National Convention; the Universal House of Justice is elected every five years by a plurality vote of the members of all National Assemblies. In 1998 the Universal House of Justice introduced Regional Bahá'í Councils that operate between the local and national levels in those countries where the complexity of issues facing National Spiritual Assemblies requires a new measure of decentralization.

3. A series of appointed positions including Hands of the Cause, Continental Counselors, Auxiliary Board Members and their assistants. These individuals inspire and educate the believers, and focus on activities to propagate and protect the Faith. They work hand in hand with the elected institutions, but have no real power of their own.

4. A series of Administrative principles and guidelines which are enshrined in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi. These principles cover such topics as consultation, elections, community life, the spirit of Bahá'í administration, guidance on the application of Bahá'í Law, and the qualifications for service.

5. Explicit infallibility conveyed upon the Center of the Covenant ('Abdu'l-Bahá), the Guardian, and the Universal House of Justice.

6. Explicit and exclusive right of interpretation conveyed to both the Center of the Covenant and the Guardian.

7. Ability for the House of Justice to legislate in areas not covered by Bahá'u'lláh's Writings.

8. Sphere of legislation of the Universal House of Justice defined by the Guardianship.

9. A specified provision for the excommunication of those who attack the head of the Faith and attempt to undermine the firmly established Covenant. These individuals are called "Covenant Breakers."

We have seen in the previous sections of this paper that Islám lacked a written Covenant resulting in a split into Sunní and Shí'ah sects. The Qur'án, while providing laws and ordinances and the basis for a legal code, is silent on the question of how the religion is to be maintained and administered after the Prophet's passing. The Shí'ah and Sunní sects took different paths as explained by this passage from Moojan Momen's excellent book, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*:

The Sunni concept of leadership of the Muslim community after the death of the Prophet, the Caliphate, is essentially a temporal leadership. The Caliph is the first among equals, elected ideally by consensus, although later the hereditary principle became the norm. To others, the theologians and experts in jurisprudence, is given the task of expounding upon religious questions.

To the Shi'is, however, the succession to the Prophet is a matter of the designation by the Prophet of an individual ('Alí) as Imam. Each Imam designates his successor during his lifetime. The authority of the Imam derives from his designation by his predecessor to a spiritual station and is independent of his temporal standing, i.e. it makes no difference to the Imam's station whether he is acknowledged by the generality of Muslims or not, whereas this quite clearly does not apply to a Sunni Caliph whose station is totally dependent on such acknowledgement.

The Sunnis and Shi'is are basically in agreement with each other over the nature and function of prophethood. The two main functions of the Prophet are to reveal God's law to men and to guide men towards God. Of these two functions, the Sunnis believe that both ended with the death of Muhammad, while the Shi'is believe that whereas legislation ended, the function of guiding men and preserving and explaining the Divine Law continued through the line of Imams.³⁸

In addition to the Caliphs and the Imáms, both Islamic branches developed an additional body of literature called *Hadíth*, which represent the reported sayings of Muḥammad (Sunnís), and which for the Shí'ahs also include the reported sayings of the Imáms. Each branch also developed its own form of Islamic jurisprudence as well their own system of clergy and theological training.

It is important to realize that no matter how much these elements have contributed to the richness of Islamic history, culture, and religious thought, absolutely none of it can be traced back to the explicit text of the Qur'án, a book that is universally accepted as the Word of God by all Muslims. Thus, 'Alí's appointment as Muḥammad's successor is not to be found in the Qur'án, neither is any text that might form the justification for the Caliphate. There is disagreement among Muslims as to which *Ḥadīth* are authentic and which are not (plus the Shí'ahs have *Ḥadīth* for the Imáms which of course are not accepted by the Sunnís). The various schools of Islamic jurisprudence and the various religious clergy have all been developed in response to the needs of the religion to deal with questions and situations not found in the Qur'án, to ensure training and education of the people, and to provide for the ongoing administration of the religion. An almost identical situation exists in Christianity: the Bible contains almost no information about how to administer the religion after the departure of Christ.

Neither Christianity nor Islám contains a mechanism for ongoing authoritative legislation, which can be traced back to the Holy Book, such as exists with the Universal House of Justice.

Goals of the Bahá'í Dispensation in Relation to Islám

Bahá'u'lláh says: "This is the changeless Faith of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future. Let him that seeketh, attain it."³⁹ As a befitting close to this paper, the following quotation from *The Dispensation* seeks to establish the proper relationship between Islám and the Bahá'í Revelation:

Nor does the Bahá'í Revelation, claiming as it does to be the culmination of a prophetic cycle and the fulfillment of the promise of all ages, attempt, under any circumstances, to invalidate those first and everlasting principles that animate and underlie the religions that have preceded it. The God-given authority, vested in each one of them, it admits and establishes as its firmest and ultimate basis. It regards them in no other light except as different stages in the eternal history and constant evolution of one religion, Divine and indivisible, of which it itself forms but an integral part. It neither seeks to obscure their Divine origin, nor to dwarf the admitted magnitude of their colossal achievements. It can countenance no attempt that seeks to distort their features or to stultify the truths which they instill. Its teachings do not deviate a hairbreadth from the verities they enshrine, nor does the weight of its message detract one jot or one tittle from the influence they exert or the loyalty they inspire. Far from aiming at the overthrow of the spiritual foundation of the world's religious systems, its avowed, its unalterable purpose is to widen their basis, to restate their fundamentals, to reconcile their aims, to reinvigorate their life, to demonstrate their oneness, to restore the pristine purity of their teachings, to coordinate their functions and to assist in the realization of their highest aspirations. These divinely-revealed religions, as a close observer has graphically expressed it, "are doomed not to die, but to be reborn...."⁴⁰

The Bahá'í Revelation seeks not to undermine Islám (or any other religion), but to restore and reinvigorate it. To be true to the truths revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, we must view Islám and the Bahá'í Faith as essentially different stages of one and the same religion.

The Dispensation thus protects the Bahá'í community from slipping into the "Islám-bashing" so common in the West today. *The Dispensation* requires that Bahá'ís, despite having suffered enormously at the hands of Muslims, give due and just regard to Islám as a Divinely-revealed religion, revere the Prophet Muḥammad and His Successors the Imáms, accept the Qur'án as the Word of God, and acknowledge the many valuable contributions which Islám has made to the advancement of civilization. Finally, this all-important letter of the Guardian holds out the promise of the ultimate regeneration of Islám - a regeneration that will be realized during the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh.

Notes

- 1) This paper was originally written to fulfill the course requirements for the Wilmette Institute distance-learning course on *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh*. It was presented at the 'Irfán Colloquium in October 2000. The author is indebted to Dr. Geoff Marks, whose comments and suggestions for improvement have been incorporated into this version of the paper.

Keys to the Proper Understanding of Islám

- 2) Shoghi Effendi, 1969. *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh*. paragraph 5. This letter is in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, (WOB) (Wilmette: Bahá'i Publishing Trust), pp. 95-157.
- 3) Charles Le Gai Eaton, 1985. *Islam and the Destiny of Man*. New York: State University of New York Press, The Islamic Texts Society. p.11. Le Gai Eaton is a Western Muslim.
- 4) Karen Armstrong, 1992. *Muhammad, A Biography of the Prophet*, (San Francisco: Harper), pp. 49-50.
- 5) Shoghi Effendi. *Directives From the Guardian*, (New Delhi: Bahá'i Publishing Trust), p. 59.
- 6) *Dispensation*, paragraph 5, (WOB, p. 98).
- 7) Shoghi Effendi, 1974. *God Passes By*, (Wilmette: Bahá'i Publishing Trust), p. 411. Also, see other references to this prophecy on pages 302 and 315.
- 8) *Ibid*, pp. 33-34.
- 9) Shoghi Effendi, 1967. *The Promised Day is Come*, (Wilmette: Bahá'i Publishing Trust), p. 100.
- 10) *Ibid.*, p. 112-113.
- 11) *Ibid.*, p. 112.
- 12) *Dispensation*, paragraph 14, (WOB, p. 102).
- 13) *Ibid*, paragraph 96, (WOB, p. 145).
- 14) A discussion of Muḥammad's passing and the succession can be found in *Muḥammad and the Course of Islám*, by H.M. Balyuzi, chapter 19, and in *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, by Moojan Momen, chapter 2.
- 15) H.M. Balyuzi, 1976. *Muḥammad and the Course of Islám*, (Oxford: George Ronald Press), pp. 149-150. Some Sunni sources also describe this event. See, for example, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, p. 15, which quotes an account from Ibn Ḥanbal, a Sunni collection of *Ḥadīth*.
- 16) Adib Taherzadeh, 1992. *The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh*, (Oxford: George Ronald Press), pp. 157-158.
- 17) *Ibid.*, p. 157.
- 18) Shoghi Effendi. *Buddha, Krisna, Zoroaster*, compilation from the letters and writings of Shoghi Effendi, p.21. The authenticity of the Qur'án is not explicitly described in *The Dispensation*, but is somewhat implied in paragraph 96: "Can any passage of the Qur'án, which...marks already a notable advance over previous and more corrupted Revelations..."
- 19) Shoghi Effendi, 1969. *The Advent of Divine Justice*, (Wilmette: Bahá'i Publishing Trust), p. 41.
- 20) *Dispensation*, paragraph 44, (WOB, pp. 115-116).
- 21) See for example, the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, pages 40, 162-163, 166, 169, 170, 174, 179, 213, 233, and 244.
- 22) A. Yusuf Ali (translator), 1983. *The Holy Qur'án, Text, Translation and Commentary*, (Brentwood: Amana Corp), note 663, p. 230.
- 23) *Ibid.*, p. 230.
- 24) A.J. Arberry (translator), 1955. *The Koran Interpreted*, (New York: Macmillan), p. 123.
- 25) *Dispensation*, paragraph 52, (WOB, p. 118).
- 26) Bahá'u'lláh, 1976. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, (Wilmette: Bahá'i Publishing Trust), p. 101.
- 27) For example, the relegation of women to the back of the mosque occurred over time. Women worshipped in the mosque side by side with men in Muḥammad's day. The use of a chador or "head to toe" shroud for women is not mandated by Muḥammad or the Qur'án, other than general exhortations for modesty in dress.
- 28) Bukhari 88:1 states: "Whoever changes his religion, kill him." Bukhari 87:6 also states that the life of a Muslim may be taken in three cases, one of which is that "he forsakes his religion and separates himself from his community." Bukhari is one of the well-known compilations of Islamic *Ḥadīth*. These traditions are not accepted by all Muslims, especially the more liberal. See, for example, *The Religion of Islam*, Maulana Muhammad Ali, S. Chand & Company, New Delhi, pp. 591-599, for a discussion of Apostasy. The Qur'án states: "Let there be no compulsion in religion" (2:256).
- 29) *Dispensation*, paragraph 96, (WOB, p. 146).
- 30) *Ibid.*, (WOB, p. 145).
- 31) *Ibid.*, paragraph 98, (WOB, p. 146).
- 32) *The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 158-159.
- 33) *Dispensation*, paragraph 69, (WOB, pp. 131-132).
- 34) *Ibid.*, paragraph 75, (WOB, p. 134).
- 35) *Ibid.*, paragraph 101, (WOB, p. 147).
- 36) The line of Guardians ended with Shoghi Effendi, since he had no heirs and none of his male relatives met the qualifications in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's *Will and Testament*. This situation created a theological test for the Bahá'i community, since a line of Guardians is clearly envisioned in the *Will and Testament*, which also describes the Guardian as the permanent head of the Universal House of Justice, which had not yet come into existence at the time of Shoghi Effendi's passing in 1957. Much has been written on this topic elsewhere, and so a more detailed treatment is beyond the scope of this paper. Briefly, the Universal House of Justice was first elected in 1963, at the successful conclusion of Shoghi Effendi's ten-year global campaign to expand the Bahá'i Faith to all parts of the world. The House of Justice, when elected, resolved the theological dilemma by legislating that future Guardians were not possible. The Supreme Institution did explain that the institution of the Guardianship continues to operate through the vast and authoritative body of writings left by Shoghi Effendi. Although there was only one Guardian in the person of Shoghi Effendi, the "hereditary principle" mentioned in *The Dispensation* is fulfilled in the sense that Bahá'u'lláh appointed His son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who in turn appointed His grandson, Shoghi Effendi.

37) *Ibid.*, paragraph 118, (WOB, p. 152).

38) Moojan Momen, 1985. *An Introduction to Shi'i Islám*, (Oxford: George Ronald Press), p. 147.

39) *Gleanings*, p. 136.

40) *Dispensation*, paragraph 42, (WOB, p. 114).

ELUCIDATIONS

“Point” and “Letter” in the Writings of the Báb

by Muhammad Afnan

The use of the terms “Point” and “Letter” in the Writings of the Báb traces its origin to a hadíth attributed to Imám ‘Alí, in which he says, “All that is in the Torah, the Evangel and the Psalms is in the Qur’án; and all that is in the Qur’án is in the opening súrih; and all that is in the opening súrih is in [the phrase] Bismi’lláh [Bismi’llahir-Rahmanir-Rahim]; and all that is in Bismi’lláh is in [the letter] Bá; and all that is in Bá’ is in its point” (provisional translation).

The Báb uses this hadíth, which is often quoted in the Sacred Writings of the Faith, to elucidate two novel themes. The first is that the Point of Truth is the source of all existence in both the spiritual and the material world. In other words, in the material or physical world, all lines and letters begin from a single dot or point. All shapes and patterns in existence are formed through variations of lines, which in turn begin with the point. Similarly, human speech, which is what distinguishes humankind from other creatures, is based on words and letters, which also have their origin in a single point. So, too, in the spiritual world, the source of all existence is compared to a Point and all the spiritual truths that are latent within the human reality emanate from that single and unconstrained Point.

The second theme explained by the Báb is the spiritual meaning and significance of letters. Letters—and of course, words—which are derived from and subordinate to the point, can be said to have moved from the station of abstraction peculiar to the point to the station of contingency and variation that belongs to creation. Each has its own form and characteristics, distinct from others. Since each letter is in itself independent and possesses distinctive features, which, in combination with other letters, form words with special and distinct meanings, it can be said that each letter has its own spirit and character. Letters are thus similar in a sense to human beings, who have individual souls and possess distinctive powers of understanding.

Perhaps on this basis, human individuals are called “Letters” in the Bayán. For instance, believers and deniers are distinguished from one another as “Sublime Letters” and “Other than Sublime Letters.”¹ The Bayán seems to indicate that this distinction will continue until the appearance of Him Whom God shall make manifest, but there is no mention of what will take place after that. Probably for this reason the Báb revealed nineteen Tablets addressed to Himself and the eighteen Letters of the Living and adorned them with the addition of another Tablet addressed to Him Whom God shall make manifest. It seems that in this way, the Báb has envisioned the return of the Letters of the Living at the time of the revelation of Him Whom God shall make manifest and indicated Himself and these Letters as the first to believe in the Promised One of the Bayán when He appears.

Facsimiles of these Tablets are published at the beginning of *The Dawn-Breakers* at the direction of Shoghi Effendi. However, it must be noted that the nineteenth Tablet, designated “Majmáu’l-Hayákil” (Union of Temples (?)) is addressed to the Báb Himself, and not to the nineteenth Letter of the Living, since there are only eighteen Letters of the Living. However, it is correct to consider it to be addressed to the nineteenth Letter of the first Váhid (in the abjad system, “váhid” is equivalent to the number 19). This is a point that should be mentioned in future editions of *The Dawn-Breakers*.

Based on the hadíth quoted in the beginning, all spiritual truths are contained within the phrase “Bismi’lláhir-Rahmánir-Rahím” and within the letter “Bá” and within the point of the letter. In Arabic, there are nineteen letters in the aforementioned phrase and the word “Váhid” is also equivalent to the

number 19 in the abjad system. Considering the importance of the number 19 in the Qur'án,² the Báb has created an order that may be compared to a pyramid, at whose pinnacle is the Point of the Bayán, below him the eighteen Letters of the Living, and below each Letter another eighteen Letters, and so on ad infinitum.³ The extension of this pattern to the second power, i.e., 19 times 19 which equals 361, is specified in the Bayán and designated as “Kull-i-Shay” (All Things), which is the numerical equivalent of 361. However, the Báb explains that Kull-i-Shay' is in fact infinite, and that it includes an infinite number of váhids.⁴

In conclusion, it should be mentioned that although the Báb's system—because it deals with letters and words—may be confused with the beliefs of the “Hurúfí” and Nuqtaví” sects, this is by no means the case. These sects attributed magical qualities and powers to the letters of the alphabet and associated letters to supernatural worlds, which they believed influenced the human world. It is evident from all the Writings of the Báb, however, that his description of points and letters bears no allusion to such occult sciences. The principles of the system created by the Báb are simply reflections of an order inherent and manifest in all degrees and conditions of the world of existence, and they suggest that the foundations and governing laws of creation are one, whether in the abstract world of points, lines and letters, or in the highest stations of the realms of the spirit.

Notes

- 1) Persian Bayán, II. 4.
- 2) Islamic scholars have discovered, using computers, that the composition of the Qur'án is based on the number 19 and consider this as one of the miracles of the Qur'án. The fact that there are nineteen letters in the phrase “Bismi'lláhir-Rahmánir-Rahím” also confirms the authenticity of the above-mentioned hadith.
- 3) Persian Bayán, VII. 8.
- 4) Persian Bayán, khutbih

