

Introduction^{*}

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Shoghi Effendi[†] tells in *God Passes By* how Bahá'u'lláh[‡] in the year 1858 was inspired with the “gemlike utterances” which compose this book as he paced, wrapped in meditation, the banks of the Tigris. Shoghi Effendi indicates that the work is to be identified with the Hidden Book of Fáṭimih, which was believed to have been revealed by the Angel Gabriel through the Imám ‘Alí for the consolation of Muḥammad’s grief-stricken daughter after the Prophet’s death, but which has remained hidden from the world’s knowledge till now made known. He describes it as “dynamic spiritual leaven cast into the life of the world for the reorientation of the minds of men, the edification of their souls and the rectification of their conduct,” and ranks it as pre-eminent among the Author’s ethical works.

It presents in sententious form the sum and inwardness of all the Revelations of the past. As according to prophecy all the Messengers and Prophets, including the Qá’im, are gathered together beneath the shadow of the sacred standard which the Promised One has raised; so here beneath that standard is gathered their Teaching in its essence. The *Hidden Words* is not a digest, nor an ordered statement. It is a new creation. It is a distillation of Sacred Fragrances. It is a focus in which all the Great Lights of the past are joined into one Light, and all God’s Yesterdays become Today.

It is given us as a single spiritual force, instinct with the presence of all the Spiritual Monarchs of the past,

^{*} Introduction by George Townshend to *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh*, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Illinois, Wilmette. 1954. Omitted from many copies.

[†] Shoghi Effendi, the great grandson of Bahá'u'lláh, was appointed Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Who had been designated by His Father, Bahá'u'lláh, as the Interpreter of His Word and the Leader of His Faith.

[‡] Bahá'u'lláh (1817–1892) Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, proclaimed that He was the World Messiah promised in the prophecies of all religions.

active, urgent, expansive, set now deep in the heart of man's life to effect the destined regeneration of the race.

The book appears in two parts, the first of which was originally written in Arabic, the second in Persian. The reader soon perceives that though the subject of the two sections and the manner in which the material is arranged are the same yet there are other distinctions than that of language. The Arabic part is shorter than the Persian, 19 pages as against 33; it is more simple, direct, definite, ethical, the other more personal, appealing, mystical, poetical. The Arabic verses are all addressed to 'Son' or 'Child'; the Persian addresses are greatly varied, as "*O Fleeting Shadow*", "*O Ye Dwellers in the Highest Paradise*", "*O Essence of Desire*", "*O Companions of My Throne*", "*O Ye Rich Ones on Earth*", "*O Ye Peoples of the World*", "*O Oppressors on Earth*", "*O Emigrants*", "*O Weed that springeth out of Dust*", and many such contrasted phrases. The Arabic verses are directed to individuals, with the exception of numbers 66, 68, 69; the Persian section has thirty-three directions to groups. The approach, the tone of the Author, is different in the two parts: the writer in Arabic is a loving teacher, the writer in Persian a teaching lover. The Persian refers more often to the Manifestation as such—e.g. in verses 15, 16, 17, 23, 24, 29, 34, 35, 45, 46, 52; and to historical events of the present period, as verses 19, 63, 71. Yet the Prologue to the Arabic portion, describing the nature of the work: "*[t]his is that which hath descended from the realm of glory uttered by the tongue of power and might and revealed unto the Prophets of old ...*" applies equally to the Persian portion. And the Epilogue at the end of the Persian, applies likewise to the Arabic. And all the stanzas that make up the work, one hundred and fifty and three, are in their meaning and substance so closely interwoven and interdependent that they form one integrated whole.

The *Hidden Words* is conspicuously one of those works that can only be interpreted through personal, and indeed, communal, experience. We of the spiritual twilight, who stand yet on that twilight's darker edge, we who inherit a general tradition of doubt and mammon-worship, cannot pierce the deeper meaning of these *Hidden Words* nor attain that outlook on life and the universe which it enjoins. Years and generations must pass before man can shake off the fetters he has bound upon his soul and regain that keenness of insight which he has lost through long disuse.

In its opening verse *Hidden Words* states the true and supreme aim of man's life on earth and sets forth the means by which it is to be fulfilled—the right discipline of the will and the emotions. The same goal and end were referred to by Christ in the Parable of the Talents, when the Lord said to His dutiful servant, “Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things”.¹ Elsewhere in *Hidden Words*,² man's aim and hope is said to be: “to attain God's everlasting dominion and become worthy of His invisible gifts”; “to clothe the soul with that divine unity and eternity which God has made for men and thus to be for all eternity the revelation of His everlasting being”; “to recognize that man is made for God; that is, his tongue for the mention of God, his heart for God's descent upon it, his spirit to be the place of God's revelation”; “to love God that God's love may reach him;”³ that God may name his name and fill his soul with the spirit of life”; “and to enter without delay the Paradise of God's love, the heavenly home of reunion with Him”. All of these goals are inward, spiritual, consisting of a particular relationship to God, and once

¹ Matthew 25:21.

² Arabic 2, 16, 46, 68. Persian 56, 71.

³ Arabic 1, 4, 6, 64. Persian 29, 66.

reached they are secure, certain, inalienable, eternal. The place which a man thus wins is ‘ancient’; it is a part of the system of the universe and was implied in man’s creation—he has at last come by effort to his own. It is in no wise material and therefore it is not subject to dissolution. It is, in the Prophet’s sense, real, and therefore permanent; and nothing that is not permanent is in the teaching of the Hidden Words, worth an intelligent man’s pursuit.

Nor is the objective less definite because it is expressed and explained largely through figurative language. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá when asked why Messengers speak in this manner is reported to have replied that “the revelations of the prophets can never be adequately translated owing to the poverty and imperfection of our language. Their thought is so lofty that human minds do not grasp it. Hence the use of allegories. Parables make men ponder and pray for enlightenment that they may understand the hidden meaning. Search for truth deepens man’s capacity, clarifies his vision without engendering intellectual pride.”

With great power and in a hundred images of great beauty The *Hidden Words* shows that this Sovereignty, Dominion, Reunion, Unity, Life, were part of the original creational Design of God; as in the Arabic verses, 3, 4, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 19, 32, 64, 65, and in the Persian verses 23, 27, 28, 29, 30, 34.

Telling what man is, and how he came to be, it reveals that God, while still a hidden treasure, veiled in His immemorial being and in the ancient eternity of His essence, knew His love for man, therefore He created man. Thus it was not directly His love but rather His knowledge of that love that moved God to His creative task. Which deep mystical truth finds a parallel in the direction, “*My love is in thee, know it*”,[§] and is more remotely reflected in the traditional ranking of the nine

§ Arabic 10.

orders of “angels”, the Seraphim holding the highest place as angels of knowledge and wisdom, the Cherubim, angels of love, the second place.

This love is man’s stronghold; when he knows it and enters therein he is secure from error and from death and forever safe. He is God’s lamp, made to shed the light of God Himself. He is moulded out of the clay of love and is given being out of the essence of knowledge. He is the dominion of God and will not perish; the light of God which will never be put out. God has made him to appear out of the wastes of nothingness and has ordained for his training every atom in existence and the essence of all created things. There is no peace nor rest for him save in submission before God; no cause for sorrow save distance from God nor for joy save nearness to Him. Till he loves God he remains separated from Him, far from Paradise, unsatisfied, unresting, beyond the reach of God’s love. For God’s home is the true believer’s heart; and man’s home is Reunion with God.

Bahá’u’lláh tells of the endowment and opportunities of man and calls him to action. God has made him rich and noble; He has hung upon the tree of glory for man’s use the choicest fruits. God hails him with tidings of light and reunion; strengthens him with the spirit of power; leads him with the light of His countenance; summons him to the eternal; bids him magnify God’s cause that God may reveal to him His greatness and that men on earth may obtain the victory; tells him man’s heart is given to him as a garden where he is to plant naught but the rose tree of love on which the nightingale of longing shall chant its song of rapture. He reveals that Death is a messenger of joy; and challenges him in the name of justice to be ready to forsake a thousand lives for the sake of his Great Beloved.

The soul's path to Reunion lies through love, love so all-abandoning, so complete, that it means hatred of all else save God; it means severance, detachment, purity. Christ taught that the pure in heart would have the blessedness of seeing God. The first counsel of *Hidden Words* is to possess a pure heart. Man to love God must turn away from himself; to seek God's pleasure he must not regard his own. He must glory not in his own name but in God's, must trust not in himself but in God. He will find no peace save by self-renunciation and by turning to God. Renouncing all save God he must turn his face to God's face and forgetting all save God hold communion with God. He is to seek no helper other than God; no other will ever suffice him. Nor in all the expanse of space and of heaven will he find rest anywhere save in humbleness and submission before God. The proof of true love is fortitude and patience, and the true lover yearns for tribulation as the rebel for forgiveness and the sinful for mercy. Indeed, so well content with God's good pleasure, so thankful for whatsoever God ordains, must man be that he will give up all and seek a martyr's death.⁴

For man, by his constitution, has an ego, a lower self within; has a Satan, as well as an angel. Elsewhere Bahá'u'lláh speaks of him as the Essence of Error. Here in *Hidden Words* He calls man, on the one side, "*O Essence of Negligence*", "*O Bond slave of the World*", "*O Quintessence of Passion*", "*O Weed that Springeth out of Dust*"; and on the other, "*O My Brother*", "*O Companion of My Throne*". This ego is as incompatible with the higher self as fire and water; it allies itself with God's enemy; through it man may wander away and be lost; may remain remote from God; for it drugs men to a sleep

⁴ Arabic 1, 7, 8, 15, 16, 17, 40, 45, 46, 47.

of heedlessness, or calls him on a vain quest setting up a rival to God.⁵

So far has the evil principle in man hitherto prevailed over the Good that looking down the vista of the Prophetic Cycle now gone by, Bahá'u'lláh sees man by his own choice and act, impoverished and abased, busy with his own empty fancies and idle imaginings, distrusting and rebelling against God and thus destroying his hope, choosing boundless shame, binding himself in the fetters of this world and in the prison of self, bartering Paradise for the dust heap of a mortal world.⁶

Throughout the whole of the book, the subtle destructive power of the lower self is exposed and man is warned of the need of ceaseless uncompromising struggle against it in all its forms. He is bidden “*turn away from thyself*”, “there is no peace for thee save by renouncing thyself; it behoveth thee to put thy trust in Me and not in thyself.” “*Turn thy face unto Mine and renounce all save Me.*” “*Forget all save Me.*”⁷

He who would have God, he is assured, must seek no other; he who would gaze on God's beauty must be blind to all the world. God's will and the will of another cannot dwell in one heart.⁸ While the heart is defiled with desire and passion, none can commune with God. If man seeks to drink the wine of immortal life from the well-spring of detachment he must cleanse himself from the defilement of riches.⁹ If the seed of divine wisdom is to spring up and grow in him, the soil of the heart in which it is planted must be pure and the seed must be watered with waters of assurance and certainty.¹⁰ Man is warned that if in this

⁵ Arabic 5, 23; Persian 16, 29, 30, 31, 33, 44, 50.

⁶ Arabic 13, 14, 15, 22; Persian 21, 74.

⁷ Arabic 7, 8 (paraphrased), 15, 16.

⁸ Persian 31.

⁹ Persian 55.

¹⁰ Persian 36.

Age of Justice unprecedented rewards may be gained by the truly faithful, the standards by which faith is judged are likewise heightened and the believer is bidden to strive that his deeds may be cleansed from the dust of self and hypocrisy and find favor at the court of glory, since the Assayers of Mankind will now in the holy presence of the Adored One accept naught but absolute virtue and deeds of stainless purity.

The quelling of this ego, the severance from selfish desires is indeed the essential task that confronts the aspiring soul. The final challenge to the faithful with which Bahá'u'lláh closes this ethical work is: “*Let it now be seen what your endeavors in the path of detachment will reveal.*”** The Creator has left this imperfection in man’s constitution and given him freedom of will to strive against it in order that man may, through his own endeavor, “become worthy to meet Me (God) and to mirror forth My Beauty.”†† Were not the ego there man could not earn praise and reward; he might be spared test and trial but he would be a mere automaton. This demand for effort, this privilege of free choice, may make this planet a place of torment but it makes earth-life a field of possible victory, an arena where moral attainment is really a man’s own deed, won under the beneficent law of justice by his own knowledge, determination, and action. In the “next world” this opportunity for achieving worthiness is not given. Man, for his advancement there depends not on self-effort and justice but on God’s mercy. Therefore Bahá'u'lláh counsels man to seize the opportunity here and now, for it will come to him no more. The fires of hell, it is explained elsewhere, are the sense of priceless opportunities thrown away and now lost forever.

The *Hidden Words* stands as a sign of God’s victoand of the fulfillment of His ancient purpose for mankind. No book radiant with such intensity of light has ever been

** Persian 82.

†† Paraphrase of Arabic 36.

given or could have been given to mankind before. It contains the whole sum of all Revelations rounding to their completeness, renewed in power, and brought to the perfection of unity by the crowning words of Bahá'u'lláh. It is the Badge of the oneness of the Prophets of the East and West from the beginning until now; the Badge of that Universal Faith on which shall be built the Most Great Peace.

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